

Philosophy 147z: Sense and Reference Spring 2003

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General Remarks About the Course

In this course, we shall be concerned with philosophical questions about proper names—more precisely, about the relation between names and their bearers, which relation we call ‘reference’. This kind of interest in language is a widely known, oft-criticized, and misunderstood feature of ‘analytic’ philosophy, so it may well be worth saying a few words by way of motivating an interest in such arcane matters. One might reasonably deny, by the way, that any *special* justification of philosophers’ attention to proper names is needed. Reflection on our use of them raises characteristically philosophical puzzles, for example, how there can be significantly different names of one and the same object (e.g., “Samuel Clemens” and “Mark Twain”); how there can be such a thing as a name of an object that does not exist; and what is it for a speaker to understand an utterance of a name.

But the interest questions about language have excited among ‘analytic’ philosophers is not to be explained entirely in terms of their intrinsic interest. Philosophers’ interest in language is a consequence of an interest in general questions about the nature of our thought about the world around us. In many areas of philosophy, we presuppose that we are able to have *thoughts* or *beliefs* about an ‘external’ world. Thus, in epistemology, one leading question is under what circumstances the belief that so-and-so is the case counts as knowledge. Surely we also want to ask exactly how beliefs come to be *about* things: What makes a belief, say, the belief that snow is white, rather than the belief that three plus four is twenty-two? One suspects that other parts of philosophy presuppose answers to these questions, that their answers might influence the answers given to more familiar philosophical questions. Some such questions can be formulated especially clearly in connection with language.

Some philosophers have held that the study of the representational features of thought can proceed only *via* a study of language. But one need not hold such a strong view to think that the study of language will contribute to the study of thought. Any reasonable theory of representation has to address language, for it is undeniable that thoughts are expressed in language.

It is for such reasons that analytic philosophers spend so much time thinking about language: It is not about language that they take themselves to be thinking but one way in which our thought comes into contact with the world outside us. This also explains why philosophers’ interest in language is, in certain peculiar ways, *limited*: Analytic philosophers tend to worry less about poetic imagery, metaphor, and the like, than some might like; we will say almost nothing about such aspects of language here.

The problems we shall be discussing in this course are *basic* to many debates in philosophy today. One can not begin to understand current discussions in the philosophy of mind, for example, without some grasp of issues concerning reference. Anyone with a serious interest in philosophy therefore *must* take a course like this one.

Prerequisites

Contemporary analytic philosophy began with certain discoveries in formal logic, and much of the work we shall be reading is informed in one way or another by logic: Arguments, premises, and conclusions are often stated using the concepts of formal logic. A working understanding of basic logic, such as one would acquire in QR22, is thus almost essential for this course. A course in logic is

not a formal prerequisite, but those who have had absolutely no exposure to logic should consult the instructor before registering.

Prior exposure to philosophy *is* essential: Much of the material we will be reading is difficult. As usual with 100-level courses, then, one prior course in philosophy is a formal prerequisite for the course. Students who have not had such a course may appeal to the instructor.

Organization of Course

The course will meet for lecture every Monday and Wednesday at 1pm in Emerson 307. There will be a section for the course, which will meet Fridays at 1pm in the same room, starting 7 February. The section will be taught by a teaching fellow, should enrollment warrant the assignment of one; otherwise, the instructor will teach it himself. The section is open *only* to those enrolled in the class, specifically, to undergraduates and to graduate students *not* in philosophy. There will be a graduate section, the meeting-time for which will be arranged during the second week of the course. It will open to graduate students in philosophy who are enrolled in the course—and probably to auditors, though we shall have to wait to see how many people are enrolled before making that decision.

Course Requirements

Every student in the course will be required to submit one short (3-5 page) paper, chosen from a list of topics, to be due 21 March, the Friday before Spring Break. For undergraduates, and graduates from departments other than Philosophy, I hope to be able to offer a choice, between writing a longer term paper, of 15-20 pages, and writing a second short paper (5-8 pages) while also taking a final examination. (I have been able to get the dean's approval to do so in the past, but must get it again.) The point of offering the choice is this: Those intending to do further serious work in philosophy, such as philosophy concentrators, will benefit from spending some time thinking hard about a single, specific problem; those who are taking the course as an elective, or who are just looking for a general familiarity with the area, would probably benefit more from reviewing the material as a whole, as would be required for a final exam. (Graduate students in the philosophy department will be required to write a term paper of 20-25 pages.) Long papers are due on Wednesday, 14 May, the last day of Reading Period; shorter ones on Friday, 2 May, the last day of classes.

Readings

There is one text for the course: Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, which is available at the Harvard University Press Display Room, in Holyoke Arcade.

We shall also be reading a number of articles by different authors. Unfortunately, there is no good collection of articles on the topics we shall be discussing. I would like to be able to produce a course packet containing xeroxes of the articles, and then have these distributed, for the cost of the photocopying, in the department office. But current copyright law prohibits me from doing so, making no distinction between uses of copyrighted material for educational purposes and for commercial purposes, nor caring whether what is charged merely covers the costs of photocopying or exceeds it. I could still make a course packet, but I would have to obtain the permission of the holders of the copyrights and then charge you a royalty—which frequently exceeds 25¢ per page—which I would then forward to them. That adds up.

However, each of you is free to make a copy of the relevant reading materials, for your personal use. (Why it should be illegal for me to *make* the photocopies for you, after you've given me

the money to do so, is somewhat puzzling.) So, what we're going to do is this: I'll put copies of the various articles on reserve in Robbins Library; it will be up to each of you to make copies of the articles along the way, or to make a copy of the complete packet. *Please* make your copies from the copies on reserve, not from the original books and journals: This will save wear and tear on them.

If any of this bothers you, write your senator or representative.

Syllabus

The material in smaller letters attempts to indicate a few initial avenues of exploration, for those who find a particular topic especially interesting (or confusing). Please note that the syllabus is subject to change, especially toward the later parts of the course. The course meets Monday and Wednesday.

29 January	Introductory Meeting
31 January	No Meeting: Instructor Out of Town
3-5 February	Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Meaning", esp. pp. 157-63 Other relevant papers of Frege's are "On Concept and Object" and "Function and Concept", as well as Part I of his <i>Basic Laws of Arithmetic</i> . My own reading of Frege is heavily influenced by that of Michael Dummett, for which see his <i>Frege: Philosophy of Language</i> , chs. 5-6, and "Frege's Distinction Between Sense and Reference".
7 February	<i>First Meeting of Undergraduate Section</i>
10 February	Gottlob Frege, "Comments on Sense and Meaning"
12 February	Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting" An excellent resource for questions about descriptions is Stephen Neale, <i>Descriptions</i> , which covers an enormous amount of material.
17 February	No Meeting: Presidents' Day Holiday
19 February	Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" Russell also discusses these issues further in <i>Problems in Philosophy</i> and "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism"
21 February	P.F. Strawson, "On Referring", esp. pp. 1-17, and Bertrand Russell, "Mr. Strawson on Referring" There are general issues here about 'presupposition' and other pragmatic phenomena. There is a good collection of papers on these matter entitled <i>Pragmatics</i> .
	<i>Lecture instead of section due to Monday holiday</i>
24 February	Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions" There is now a large literature on the issues Donnellan raises here.
26 February	Saul Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference" See also the discussion in Neale's <i>Descriptions</i> .
3 March	John Searle, "Proper Names"
5 March	A Very Short Introduction to Modal Logic There are some good textbooks, e.g., Chellas's <i>Modal Logic</i> and Hughes and Creswell's <i>Introduction to Modal Logic</i> . See also the handout on the course web site.
10 & 12 March	Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture I For a review of the literature on rigidity, see Jason Stanley, "Names and Rigid Designation".
17 March	David Kaplan, "Dthat" See also Kaplan's seminal paper "Demonstratives".
19 March	Jason Stanley, "Modality and What Is Said" See also Gareth Evans, "Reference and Contingency", Michael Dummett, <i>Frege: Philosophy of Language</i> , Appendix to Ch.5, Jason Stanley, "Rigidity and Content", and Scott Soames,

	“Wide Scope and Rigid Designation”. For some formal considerations, see Martin Davies and Lloyd Humberstone, “Two Notions of Necessity”.
21 March	<i>Short Papers Due</i> <i>No Undergraduate Section</i>
24, 26 March	<i>Spring Break</i>
31 March & 2 April	Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture II You should read Lecture III at some point. We will not be discussing it in class, however.
7 April	Hilary Putnam, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’”, esp. pp. 215-41 See also Putnam’s “Is Semantics Possible?” and Michael Dummett, “The Social Character of Language”. A more recent reflection is Robert Stalnaker, “Twin Earth Revisited”.
9 April	Tyler Burge, “Individualism and the Mental” Many of Burge’s other papers are helpful here: See e.g. “Individualism and Psychology” and “Wherein Is Language Social?” For a response, see Gabriel Segal, “The Return of the Individual”.
14 April	[Gabriel Segal, “The Return of the Individual” or chapters from the book]
16 April	Michael Dummett, “Frege’s Distinction Between Sense and Reference”
21 April	John Perry, “Frege on Demonstratives” <i>The classic material on demonstratives is in David Kaplan’s “Demonstratives”.</i>
23 April	Gareth Evans, “Understanding Demonstratives” Evans’s view about demonstratives is further developed in <i>Varieties of Reference</i> . For a somewhat different sort of view, see Christopher Peacocke, <i>Sense and Content</i> and <i>Thoughts: An Essay on Content</i> . See also Richard Heck, “Do Demonstratives Have Senses?” for my own view.
28 April	Richard Heck, “Do Demonstratives Have Senses?”
30 April	...?