

**Phil/Ling 375: *Meaning and Mind*
[Handout #18]**

John Searle: Proper Names (1958)

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*** Note:** Logical language (Frege, Russell) vs. Natural language (Strawson, Donnellan, Searle) approach

[Questions]:

(1) Are proper names used to describe or specify characteristics of objects?

Answer: “no”.

(2) Do proper names have senses? (Are proper names logically connected with characteristics of the object to which they refer?)

Answer: yes, it’s a loose set of definite descriptions.

(3) Why do we use proper names at all?

Answer: To talk about the object without being forced to agree on what characteristics that constitutes the identity of the object.

(4) How does proper names function in our language?

Answer: To refer to objects.

§ On Frege

Consider, for example, statements made with the following sentences:

(a) “Tully = Tully” is analytic.

But is

(b) “Tully = Cicero” synthetic?

If so, then each name must have a different sense, which seems at first sight most implausible, for we do not ordinarily think of proper names as having a sense at all in the way that predicates do; we do not, e.g. give definitions of proper names.

[Note]:

*** “Analytic statements”**

___ A statement is analytic if and only if it is true in virtue of linguistic rules alone, without any recourse to empirical investigation.

vs.

“Synthetic statements”

___ A statement that is not analytic.

*** “Necessary truth” (or “necessary falsehood”)**

___ A statement that would be true in all possible worlds.

Vs.

“Contingent truth” (or “contingent falsehood”)

___ A statement that happens to be true in our world, but could have been otherwise.

*** “A Priori”:**

___ A mode of knowledge that is obtained by reason alone, with no reliance on empirical investigation.

___ A mode of knowledge that is independent of experience other than our understanding of the concepts involved. (e.g. Analytic truths such as ‘All bachelors are unmarried, or conceptual truths such as ‘All bodies are extended.’)

Vs.

“A Posteriori”:

___ A mode of knowledge that relies on specific information derived from the empirical world.

§ Searle’s Analysis of Sense**I. the sense ≠ a complete description of the object:****[Searle’s Argument]**

___ If we try to present a complete description of the object as the sense of a proper name:

[Problem 1] Any true statement about the object using the name as subject would be analytic.

[Problem 2] Any false statement about the object using the name as subject would be contradictory

[Problem 3] The meaning of the name (and perhaps the identity of the object) would change every time there was any change at all in the object,

[Problem 4] The name would have different meanings for different people.

II. the sense ≠ a statement or set of statements asserting the characteristics which constitute the identity of the object (the object must be identical with the object originally christened by this name)

e.g. the sense of “This is Aristotle” = “This object is spatio-temporally continuous with the object originally named ‘Aristotle’”

[Searle’s Argument]

___ The force of “Aristotle” is greater than the force of “identical with an object named ‘Aristotle’,” for not just any object named “Aristotle” will do. “Aristotle” here refers to a particular object named “Aristotle,” not to any.

___ “Named ‘Aristotle’ is a universal term, but “Aristotle” is a proper name.

___ “This is named ‘Aristotle’” is at best a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the truth of “This is Aristotle”.

III. the sense = a cluster of descriptions***Searle's cluster theory**

- ___ (1) Suppose we ask the users of the name “Aristotle” to state what they regard as certain essential and established facts about him.
- ___ (2) The answer would be a set of uniquely referring descriptive statements.
- ___ (3) The descriptive force of “This is Aristotle” is to assert that a sufficient but *so far unspecified* number of these statements are true of this object.
- ___ (4) Therefore, referring uses of “Aristotle” presuppose the existence of an object of whom a sufficient but so far unspecified number of these statements are true.

We are now in a position to explain how it is that "Aristotle" has a reference but does not describe, and yet the statement "Aristotle never existed" says more than that "Aristotle" was never used to refer to any object.

___ The statement asserts that a sufficient number of the conventional presuppositions, descriptive statements, of referring uses of "Aristotle" are false. Precisely which statements are asserted to be false is not yet clear, for what precise conditions constitute the criteria for applying "Aristotle" is not yet laid down by the language.

*** Q: How does it come about that we are able to refer to a particular object by using its name?**

___ **How, for example, do we learn and teach the use of proper names?**

§ Two Competing Views:

(A) Proper names have essentially a reference but not a sense — proper names denote but do not connote. — Mill

(B) Proper names have essentially a sense and only contingently a reference — they refer only on the condition that one and only one object satisfies their sense. — Frege

The issues:

- (1) How in the utterance of a name does the speaker succeed in referring to an object?
- (2) Do proper names refer by setting **internal** conditions of satisfaction in a way that is consistent with the general account of Intentionality that I have been providing, or do proper names refer in virtue of some **external** causal relations?

[The Causal Theory of Names]:

___ There exists some sort of external causal connection between the utterance of a name and the object.

[The Description Theory of Names]:

___ The object satisfies or fits the descriptive Intentional content that is associated with the name in the minds of speakers.

Searle:

___ If it is asserted that every proper name has a sense, it must be legitimate to demand of any name, “What is its sense?” If it is asserted that a proper name is a

kind of shorthand description then we ought to be able to present the description in place of the proper name. But how are we to proceed with this?

§ Searle's Description Theory of Proper Names (expanded)

- I. Proper names function not as descriptions, but as pegs on which to hang descriptions. Thus the loose criteria for proper names is a necessary condition for isolating the referring function from the describing function of language. (e.g. "the Holy Roman Empire" vs. "the tallest person in class")
- II. Definite descriptions refer by telling us what the object is. But proper names refer without so far raising the issue of what the object is.
- III. What precise conditions constitute the criteria for applying "Aristotle" is not yet laid down by the language.
- IV. The descriptions loosely associated with a name are often the speaker's mental representations of the named object.
- V. The necessary condition of reference:
 ___ In order that someone can give a name to a certain object, or know that a name is the name of that object, he has to give some *other* representation of that object independently of just having the name.
 e.g. A child's using the name 'George W. Bush'
- VI. These mental representations:
 = the intentional content, definite descriptions, indexicals, proper names
- VII. Linguistic reference (what the name denotes) depends on, or is, a form of mental reference (what the speaker denotes).
- VIII. Intentional content
 ___ Background: how others use the name (the practice of name-using has been set up).
 ___ Network: the network of the speaker's Intentional content; a system of representations, a cluster of descriptions

[Note] (from Searle's *Intentionality*)

1. [Network]: Intentional states with a direction of fit have contents which determine their conditions of satisfaction. But they do not function in an independent or atomistic fashion. Each intentional state is located in a Network of other beliefs and desires, plus other subsidiary intentions as well as hopes and fears, anxieties and anticipation, feelings of frustration and satisfaction, etc. The entire holistic network is called simply the "Network."
2. [Background]: Intentional states are underlain by nonrepresentational, pre-intentional capacities. The Background is a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place. Intentional states only have the conditions of satisfaction that they do against a Background of abilities that are not themselves Intentional states.
 - A. **[Deep Background]:** All those Background capacities that are common to all normal human beings in virtue of their biological makeup (walking, eating, grasping, perceiving, recognizing...)

- B. **[Local Background]:** All those Background practices of the local cultural communities (drinking beer from the bottle, the pre-intentional stance that we take toward things such as cars, refrigerators, money, etc.

§ Back to the Identity Statement

“Tully = Cicero”

A statement made using this sentence would be analytic for most people; the same descriptive presuppositions are associated with each name.

But of course if the descriptive presuppositions were different, it might be used to make a synthetic statement; it might even advance a historical discovery of the first importance.