

Referential Zero Point

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Perhaps the most important controversy in which ordinary language philosophy was involved is that of definite descriptions, presenting referential act as a community involving communication-intention endeavor, thereby opposing the direct acquaintance based and logical proper names inspired reference aimed at securing truth conditions of referential expression. The problem of reference is that of obtaining access to the matters in the world. This access may be forthcoming through the senses, or through descriptions. A review of how the problem of reference is handled shows though that one main practice is to indulge into relations of acquaintance supporting logical proper names, demonstratives, indexicals and causal or historical chains. This testifies that problem of reference involves the zero point, and with it phenomenology of intentionality. Communication-intention is but one dimension of rich phenomenology that is constituting an agent's experiential space, his experiential world. Zero point is another constitutive aspect of phenomenology involved into the referential relation. Realizing that problem of reference is phenomenology based opens a new perspective upon the contribution of analytical philosophy in this area, reconciling it with continental approach, and demonstrating variations of the impossibility related to the real. Chromatic illumination from the cognitive background empowers referential act, in the best tradition of ordinary language philosophy.

Keywords: reference, zero point, ordinary language philosophy, phenomenology, the real as impossible, chromatic illumination.

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Definite descriptions controversy

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Ordinary language philosophy promoted, just like its name indicates, the virtues of language such as speakers use it, in opposition to the trials to assess language by means of logical calculus. The project of *mastering* language has its roots in Leibnizian tradition. The problem that was tackled was that of disambiguating language. A background metaphor that was used was that of the blossoming tree of science (Raymond Lullus), as opposed to obnoxious weeds in one's garden which are better rooted out. The mastering was supposed to

succeed through rational calculus, and through alphabetical encyclopedic ordering of the abundant material, so that one would obtain the needed oversight. Frege continued this tradition, proposing the calculus of conceptually ordered writing (*Begriffsschrift*), which according to him, would get rid of ambiguities. The calculus that he first wrote consisted of clearly delineated paths of reasoning upon a two dimensional surface, on a page. Reasoning has a start, marked by a sign of |- . Right after | (indicating assertive force of the ensuing trail), what is now known as quantifier is inserted upon the line -, telling us whether the ensuing reasoning will be existential or universal (such an indication may appear further on in complex cases). After this, propositional variables such as p , q , r appear upon the line of reasoning. Joining quantifiers and propositions results in predicate calculus, different though from what Frege considered to be wrongful language form infested subject-predicate schemas of reasoning in the aristotelian tradition. Frege's project now forms the basis of an abundance of logical calculi. Similarly as Lullus and Leibniz, Frege was up to propose an *artificial language*, such as it is appropriate for *science*, which better gets rid of ambiguities. So Frege is not against the richness of everyday and poetic language; he just aims to expel it from scientific endeavors, as he explicitly says. Anyway, Frege established the language of logical calculus that is in the basis of several philosophical projects. One of these is that of Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions (*On denoting* 1905), which exercised an undisputed position as a guide for analytic philosophy for almost half a century, until the appearance of P.F. Strawson's paper *On referring* (1950). At that moment what is now known as the *controversy of definite descriptions* entered the scene. What was the controversy about? Russell's take was in the tradition of disambiguating language, which according to him obfuscates logical commitments under misleading grammatical form. So his bet was on the precise logical calculus rendering of ordinary language. Strawson, on the other hand, argued that language is first of all a tool of communication, in which people's aim is not to deliver logically impeccable messages. Rather, by talking to each other people use linguistic expressions, such as names and predicates as kind of tokens, in order to pragmatically let know their intentions, by engaging in presuppositions such as these appear in conversation. For Russell, mentioning a guy such as the present king of France should be clear as to the exact logically supported commitment. For Strawson on the other hand, communication-intention is in the foreground. Did the one mentioning the king try to entertain me, or again perhaps to bore me? In this manner, Strawson was a part of tradition which put the stress not upon the descriptive but upon *performative* function of language. *How to do things with words* is the title of Austin's book in which he stressed just this, namely that language is something that exercises its effect upon people as they enter into social setting. Normative pragmatic preconditions of success for one's communication-intention are studied. Russell tried to base his logical analysis of linguistic strings such as sentences upon securing what he called logical proper names, via epistemic direct acquaintance. Strawson on the other hand rather targeted referential act as a community involving communication-intention endeavor. Whereas Russell insisted to provide clearly delineated truth conditions (either truth or falsity) to each sentence, Strawson allowed for *neither truth or falsity* of these expressions in some disputed cases. So much for a quick introduction of the *definite descriptions controversy*. The *problem of reference* was its central point at which we will take a brief look now. Notice that Strawson's ordinary language approach did put truth conditions determining in the second plan, while this was a *sine qua*

non for Russell's project. Tarski's project provided truth conditions basis for artificial languages. Only later Davidson tried to use his proposals for what he called natural language.

Problem of reference

The problem of reference is that of obtaining access to the matters in the world. This access may be forthcoming through the senses, or through descriptions.

Problem of reference was in the center of the controversy involving definite descriptions. At least this is the case for the approach of *On denoting*. Russell actually tried to refute philosophical ways to go allowing for the existence of non-existent or even impossible objects. Meinong in his so called theory of objects namely subscribed to Brentano's intentionality thesis, according to which in each thought something is thought about, and in each desire something is desired. Other people, such as Husserl, thought that intentional relation is directed at *content*, whereas Meinong held it that we have to do with *objects*. And these objects for him exist, in a kind of platonic realm; but they are real indeed. Russell smelled confusion here which he proposed to solve by *tracing* the mentioned *entities in the objective material world*. If it turns out that there is no such entity in the world, the expression containing it will be *false*, and otherwise it will be true. As a key case, Russell proposed the following sentence

(K). The actual king of France is bald.

Following its grammatical form, (K) implies that there now exists a king of France, and that he is bald. The analysis (A) that Russell proposes of (K) reveals three constituents of the sentence:

(A). (a) There exists an actual king of France & (b) There exists exactly one such king (as it is indicated by the word "the", making the phrase a definite description) & (c) This king is bald.

Now Russell proposes to take a look at the world. Once we do our search, we discover that there is no such entity there now. This refutes the first conjunct (a) of (A). And of course with this (b) is dismissed as well, as is the predicate involving conjunct (c). It is actually sufficient to realize that the conjunct (a) of (A) is *false*, and so we can attribute a *determinate truth value* of falsity to (A) in its entirety. Analysis (A) has revealed that misleading reference to the actual king of France as suggested by the grammatical form of (K) needs to be straightened out through a verification of whether the referred entity actually exists in the world.

This is what Russell tries to solidify through his further move, which actually comes down to finding a support for truth of definite descriptions in what he calls *logical proper name* (as we already mentioned). Logical proper name is an *epistemic* path that leads through our empirical matters gathering senses towards the searched-for reality in the world. The just described relation is called by Russell the one of *acquaintance*. It is a *direct* epistemic relation to the world indeed, which actually gets rid of descriptions (all in trying to logically support them). This relation of *acquaintance* succeeds for Russell in a *direct contact* with the world, so that the *linguistic richness gets reduced*, to a relation of a *demonstrative*. The demonstrative ("this", in the case if one would find in the world the entity searched for in the analysis such as (A) and point to it) does away with the additional grammatical form. "The king of France", "an

important monarch" and several other descriptions would be just ready to confuse logical commitments for grammatical ones. In fact, a *demonstrative* such as "This!" as one points at the entity that one finds in the world is a *logical proper name*, without any possibly confusing linguistic baggage.

I have singled out this curiosity in Russell's dealing with language (definite descriptions) up to the point to dismiss linguistic form via *demonstratives* involving direct relation to the world via acquaintance. What I propose now is to take a look at the problem of reference as it was forthcoming later on *from the point of view of the one engaging into referential relation*. The relation of *acquaintance* namely involves the *direct point of view* of the one engaging into it, his or her *phenomenology* and *zero point* going along with it. If this is the case -- as I will argue -- then the problem of reference is not so much an objective relation to the external world, but rather phenomenological zero point perspective of the one involved into *acquaintance* and search for logical proper name along this path, in a curious trial to be master of language. Demonstrative, indexical and other matters that appear in the discussions involving the problem of reference, show that this one should be promoted as a *zero point* phenomenological endeavor. The reason people did not notice this obvious matter is that they stuck to the presupposition that *reference* is something objective in the world. Reference is an encounter with the world indeed, but an encounter of *impossibility*. Descriptions or Fregean senses are dismissed in profit of the *subjective phenomenological zero point* as the real referential engagement. Reference is still an encounter with the world, as finding something *relevant* in it, along the quality of what may be called *beautiful pattern*.

Indexical treatments of reference

A review of how the problem of reference is handled shows that one main practice is to indulge into relations of acquaintance supporting logical proper names, demonstratives, indexicals and causal or historical chains.

In the following, my aim is to present a real quick overview of the problem of reference, such as it appears in analytic tradition of philosophy of language. This overview will just single out the most important points. The final accent in this tackling of the problem of reference will be upon the zero point, the perspective of the one performing the referential act. This path may be made easier by the fact that the the overview I rely on is by an author who stresses the importance of subjective view and phenomenology of intentionality, Colin McGinn (Philosophy of Language: The classics Explained, MIT 2015). Nevertheless, it is an objective presentation of the area. As just said, my attention will be at the salient points only. Frege started the tradition with the distinction between sense and reference, dealing with singular terms first and then extending the exercise to secondary cases. Kripke went with names as rigid designators, with causal chains supporting them. Yet this support as well involves direct relation of the baptism providing practice in the actual world. Rigid designation and causal chain thus originate in a primary relation involving referential act. We already mentioned Russell's acquaintance supporting logical proper names in the trial to straighten up definite descriptions according to the language disambiguation project. Donnellan distinguishes between referential and attributive uses, between denoting and referring acts, all in allowing for truth value gaps. Kaplan stressed the importance of demonstratives, indexicals, and of their contexts of use. Evans further developed an approach to demonstratives and indexicals, providing theory of sense and reference for indexicals. Putnam with his semantic externalism argued that

meanings are not in the head, using Twin Earth thought experiments to underline his point. In this, he stuck to the direct relation to what supports the referential act. Tarski's theory of truth again started with relation of direct correspondence. Davidson tried to apply that approach to the *meaning* such as it appears in natural languages. Grice puts the stress upon speaker's meaning, as opposed to non-natural meaning which nevertheless kind of sticks to the speaker involving act of direct acquaintance.

These quick indications show that problem of reference, along the whole tradition dealing with it, was handled by relations of acquaintance with the purported original situation of referential act. Speaker is involved here either in a direct manner, or through a causal or similar mechanisms, again showing the importance of his founding presence for referential relation.

Notice again that logical proper name comes to the fore through the relation of direct acquaintance featuring the speaker. Demonstratives involve a direct contact between the speaker and between the reality that he points out, actually obfuscating any additional use of language. Indexicals are expressions which change the meaning with the context of their use. Causal and historical chains base their referential insurance through sometimes mythically presented relation of the speaker's original involvement.

Zero point

This testifies that problem of reference involves the zero point, and with it phenomenology of intentionality.

One of the strategies to secure referential relation introduces indexicals. We just said that these are expression that systematically change reference according to the circumstances in which they are announced. The indexical "I" varies its reference in respect to its utterer: the I which I announce will have a different reference from the I that you utter. "Here" again varies according to direct involvement of the agent into spatial circumstances, and "now" changes its reference according to the moment of enunciation. Among these various forms of indexicals, people also distinguish the case of *essential indexical*. Perry tells us about his chasing somebody he noticed leaves a trail of sugar in their path at the local supermarket. After turning around the line of stacks he then discovers that the person making mess is actually *he himself*. Previously he was thinking about "that person" in an objectivist perspective, but now he realizes that it is he himself who is concerned. (*Tua res agitur.*) The third person point of view is quite different in its consequences for agency from the first person point of view. This may be illustrated by the example of you receiving the message that a bear in the wood threatens a hiker. Your reaction will be quite more dramatic once as you realize that the hiker in question is *you yourself*.

Essential indexical involves your own perspective, the zero point. Mach illustrated this by a picture presenting what he sees as he is seated in his reclining chair: the surrounding room and the equipment in it, his body, but not his eyes and face. This is because there is where the source of the visual perception is located. That's the zero point. Wittgenstein illustrates it with a sphere featuring a point at one of its corners, where the acquaintance with the world has its origin. Notice that things in the surrounding can be presented and represented without that zero point itself would be represented. That's just impossible.

The very quick overview of trials to pinpoint the referential relation in the analytic philosophy of language have shown that it involves *zero point*, essential indexical, once as

things come to their basis. So referential relation in the trials to determine it reveals itself as the zero point matter. But now, zero point is a *phenomenological* matter: there is the what-it's-like qualitative feeling for you to operate from your zero point and there is a similar phenomenology for me as I engage into the world from my zero point perspective. The power of zero point *illuminates* the perspective, and this seems to be the key to get what is involved into referential relation through these indexicals, demonstratives and historical or causal chains.

Along with referential zero point comes *phenomenology of intentionality* as a constitutive mater. Phenomenology determines intentionality and thereby the referential relation, narrowly forthcoming in one's experiential world.

Dimensions of rich phenomenology

Communication-intention is but one dimension of rich phenomenology that is constituting an agent's experiential space, his experiential world. Zero point is another constitutive aspect of phenomenology involved into the referential relation.

Phenomenology is very rich indeed. It constitutes an agent's experiential space. One thing that it includes are conceptual direct involvements in perception. I do not just perceive borders and shapes, but I perceive my keyboard. Similarly, I perceive people and cars. This is a kind of achievement indeed. Now, community or social world is as well a part of my experiential space, actually of my experiential world. So we can take a look at the communication-intention project such as it is characteristic for ordinary language philosophy approach to the referential act as just one additional dimension of phenomenology. And zero point, through its demonstratives, indexicals and the rest is another phenomenological dimension constituting the experiential world and thereby the referential relation.

Phenomenology tackling of the impossible

Realizing that problem of reference is phenomenology based opens a new perspective upon the contribution of analytical philosophy in this area, reconciling it with continental approach, and demonstrating variations of the impossibility related to the real.

It is interesting that the *zero point reference* in its phenomenological constituency was not recognized. This seems to be the consequence of the fact that people stucked to the presupposition that referential relation catches an independently existing world. This may be true indeed, but its way of reaching the world is phenomenologically constituted, and its succeeds through *beautiful patterns* providing the *relevance* in encounter with the world. From this point of view, the problem of reference is *aesthetic*, keeping faith to the etymology of this expression.

As the problem of reference is one cornerstone of analytic philosophy, and now it reveals itself to be *phenomenologically* constituted, this opens the window of opportunity to reconcile the positions of so called analytic and continental traditions in philosophy. Notice that problem of reference is linked to the impossibility to get an independent, third person point of view at the world. This is shown by all these demonstratives, senses and indexicals involved into tackling it in the analytic tradition. There are variations of impossibility in our relation to the real. But these impossibilities still have their aesthetic relevance.

Chromatic illumination

Chromatic illumination from the cognitive background empowers referential act, in the best tradition of ordinary language philosophy.

A very important point is that referential act, through the *zero point reference* perspective, gets enabled through the existence of a *rich cognitive background*, existing in that experiential world.

In art, *illumination* is one of basic matters. The point of illumination is that the sources providing the quality to the scene are mostly outside of that scene itself, and in this manner they effectively exercise their impact upon the presented whole. Such illumination can come from unexpected angles, such as political allusions and circumstances which prompted that work of art to be fabricated, or from intention to use the mentioned work of art in direction of transforming society. A more everyday illustration of the *chromatic illumination* effect comes from the painting *Au Moulin Rouge* by Toulouse-Lautrec, which is displayed in art institute in Chicago. In that picture, one can see people seated around a table in the Moulin Rouge bar, several sources of light outside the scene illuminating the depicted situation. One source of light illuminates the center of the table, being outside of it in a certain reddish nuance, shedding attention at the group seated there. Another greenish source of light illuminates a woman figure in the foreground in the right down corner of the picture. And there are *reflections of illumination* in the left up corner of the painting, in the mirror wall. All these sources of illumination are not directly present in the scene, but they provide the quality to it from the outside.

Another example of chromatic illumination can be provided by the process of joke-getting. At the moment you are getting the joke which somebody tells you, you do not laugh in an indeterminate manner. To the contrary, you grasp numerous dimensions that are all involved into the joke setting in a single moment. This may be demonstrated by the questions you are able to answer as they are related to that setting. It turns out that all these concerns *chromatically illuminate* your understanding in that single moment and underpin your joke-getting.

Chromatic illumination is the way in which the sources that exercise their effect from outside the scene are impinging upon that very scene, providing its relevant quality.

Notice that aesthetic impact from the painting and humorous getting of the joke demand your participation. We react to the scene which is presented to us, and that we indulge into from our engaged zero point relevant beautiful patterns involving referential perspective.

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