HAVING IN MIND

The Philosophy of Keith Donnellan

Edited by

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CONTENTS

Having in Mind

CHAPTER 1

Donnellan at Cornell

JOHN PERRY

From 1964 until 1968 I was a graduate student in the Philosophy Department—that is, in the Sage School of Philosophy—at Cornell University, where Keith Donnellan was a professor. I had gone to Cornell mainly because Max Black and Norman Malcolm were there, and I thought it was the best place to learn more about the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, whom I had come to admire as an undergraduate. Black and Malcolm were indeed wonderful teachers and gifted and accomplished philosophers, and I learned a lot about philosophy and about Wittgenstein from them. After a year or so, like most Cornell graduate students of that era, I could carry on a lengthy philosophical conversation about Wittgenstein that proceeded mostly by section numbers from his *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*. Nevertheless by the time I left Cornell, my head was more full of Keith Donnellan and Sydney Shoemaker than Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Donnellan was an extraordinarily nice person and an effective and encouraging teacher. He also became a good friend. Still, although he was young then, he was a professor and an important philosopher already, and so, in my mind, in spite of himself, an August Person. By my third year at Cornell my wife, Frenchie, and I often played bridge with Donnellan, whom I called "Professor Donnellan." During one bridge game he said, "For crying out loud, don't call me 'Professor Donnellan,' call me 'Keith.'" I was incapable of calling a professor by his first name, but I dared not completely ignore his request. So for the last year or so I always referred to him as "you"

or, when that would not work, by saying something inaudible while making my intended referent clear. Thus though Donnellan wasn't thinking too much about indexicals and demonstratives then, perhaps he got me to thinking about them.

In seminars these days I assign a lot of Donnellan and talk a lot about Donnellan. Some of the time I say "Donn'ellan," the preferred pronunciation, as I now know. But a good bit of the time I slip up and say "Donnell'an." This confuses students, who ask which is the right pronunciation. The explanation is that until he moved to UCLA in 1970, everyone in philosophy called Donnellan "Donell'an." The reason for this, I think, is as follows. When Donnellan arrived as a graduate student at Cornell, Max Black called him "Donnell'an." Donnellan was too shy to correct him, so that pronunciation stuck for his graduate career. After getting his PhD he taught for a couple of years at the Air Force Academy, and then returned to Cornell as an assistant professor. It was an opportune time to correct the pronunciation, but he was still too much in awe of Max Black, and so he was "Donell'an" again as he climbed through the professorial ranks at Cornell, and that's how graduate students of my era learned to say his name. When he came to UCLA, however, he set everyone straight. (I couldn't keep the new pronunciation straight, so I finally started calling him "Keith.") Maybe that's not the right story, but I like it, because it suggests that he was in awe of August Persons too. I'm sticking to it until he tells me a better one.

My first semester at Cornell no Wittgenstein was taught. Malcolm was visiting UCLA. Black taught a seminar on J. L. Austin's work on speech acts. H. P. Grice was visiting and gave as a seminar the material that later became "Logic and Conversation." Donnellan taught logic. We whipped through Quine's *Methods of Logic* and then studied P. F. Strawson's *An Introduction to Logical Theory*. Grice's seminar had no textbook, but his main stalking horses were A. J. Ayer, Malcolm, Austin, and Strawson, all of whom he thought had made philosophical claims that depended on confusing what is strictly said or implied and what is conversationally implicated. I practically memorized Austin's works, poured over Strawson, J. L. Urmson, and Geoffrey Warnock, and hung on Grice's every word. So, before Malcolm returned and Wittgenstein studies began in earnest the second semester, I had been inoculated to a certain extent by immersion in the Oxford philosophy of the time.

All of this changed in my third year, 1966–67. Both Wittgenstein and Oxford were eclipsed as I was introduced to something I suppose we might call "American referential realism." Donnellan had just published "Reference and Definite Descriptions." In his seminar he worked out some of the ideas and arguments that were to appear in "Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions," the main point of which is that contrary to what Frege and

Russell and Searle and particularly Strawson had claimed, you don't need a backing of descriptions that identifies the bearer of the name in order to use the name to refer to its bearer. He talked a lot about what he called "genuine reference." He talked about descriptions and names and demonstratives; he talked about Russellian propositions; he talked about how historical chains seemed to play a role that somehow seemed to preclude the necessity for identifying descriptions; he talked about thinking and talking about things and having things in mind. He put not only the arguments but also all of the problems for his emerging view right up front. He seemed to be buying into Russell's idea of acquaintance. This idea had led Russell to the conclusion that we couldn't really strictly think about ordinary things, but only sort of one-dimensional things, like one's own sense-data. Donnellan wanted the concept of "thinking about," and maybe some condition on it like acquaintance, but not the slide into sense-data as the only knowables. What to do about modes of presentation, identity statements, nonexistence—all of the things that motivated the need for identifying descriptions? Well, he didn't claim to know, but tried out different ideas. What about belief-reports? He had some ideas. But he didn't know for sure.

The seminar was incredible. Most of the next twenty-five years in the philosophy of language, at least in that part of the philosophy of language that has been my home, were foreshadowed in one way or another. A lesser philosopher than Donnellan would perhaps have been more quick to try to develop a general theory and lost track of the essence of the ideas with which he had been blessed. But for Donnellan, it was clear, philosophy was not a matter of getting together a comprehensive theory, but of getting straight as one possibly could about what certain examples, certain distinctions, certain ideas that flew in the face of orthodox consensus really came to. It was also supposed to be enjoyable, and to involve a common search for truth rather than mutual destruction of views and egos. I don't mean to suggest that Donnellan told us to operate that way; he simply exemplified it. When Donnellan had to destroy a view, he did it gently, if possible pointing to insights that underlay it. To me Donnellan seemed to combine the brilliance of Black, the doggedness and sense of philosophical problems of Malcolm, Shoemaker's attention to detail and willingness to go after hard problems, and Grice's solid philosophical intuitions and eye for examples. In that seminar he rose above these other heroes and became my Ideal.

I remember being impressed at Donnellan's teaching style, in his seminar and in other classes of his that I attended, and for which I sometimes was a teaching assistant. He would pace, often smoking, which was allowed. (In fact it was almost required of philosophy teachers in those days.) I don't remember much in the way of written notes, except for the logic course. He seemed to just be up there thinking, philosophizing, mulling things over in a

public way. The students were honored that he would actually philosophize with them, rather than merely read from old notes.

When I've tried to imitate Donnellan, to live up to my Ideal, it hasn't always gone so well. The students mostly suggest I should prepare my lectures better, rather than appreciate the fact that I am trying to actually do philosophy. But Donnellan could make it work. I'm very grateful that I was there forty-five years ago to witness it, to benefit from his teaching and absorb his ideas, as best I could.

CHAPTER 2

The Ground Zero of Semantics

ANTONIO CAPUANO

This paper compares two different conceptions of and foundations for semantics. Ultimately the two conceptions and foundations go back to ideas of Frege and Russell. To put it in a nutshell: for Frege, at the ground zero of semantics there is *denotation*; for Russell, instead, at the ground zero of semantics there is *reference*. *Reference* and *denotation* are two distinct semantic relations that one should not confuse. The first, that of reference, is grounded in *natural-historical* processes flowing from objects; the other, that of denotation, is grounded in the *logical* relations of *truth* and *satisfaction*.

The question of what is at the ground zero of semantics is interesting on its own. However, I'd like to suggest that by reflecting on the differences between Frege and Russell on what lies at the bottom of semantics one can also shed some light on a certain dispute between Kripke and Donnellan. In "Reference and Definite Descriptions," Keith Donnellan pointed out that in ordinary English definite descriptions can sometimes be used referentially. Namely, they can be used to talk about a certain object a speaker has in mind. At a party, I glance at a man holding a martini glass and I ask my interlocutor: "Who is the man drinking a martini?" I have asked a question about him whether the individual I have in mind is actually drinking a martini or whether his glass is filled only with water. At other times definite descriptions can be used attributively. Roughly, they can be used to talk about whatever object *satisfies* a certain descriptive condition contained in the definite description. In "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference," Saul Kripke suggests that Donnellan's distinction between

referential and attributive uses of a definite description has little to do with semantics or truth-conditions and introduces his own theoretical apparatus of semantic reference and speaker's reference to account for Donnellan's distinction.[1]

In the past thirty years, most philosophers of language have agreed with Kripke against Donnellan. The prevailing view has been that Donnellan's distinction between referential and attributive uses of a definite description belongs to pragmatics. Semantics, in fact, deals only with conventional rules of denotation.[2] I'd like to suggest that one can look at what Donnellan is doing from a different perspective. Instead of pursuing Frege's denotation-based semantic project, as Kripke in the end seems to do, Donnellan—distinguishing between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions—is reviving Russell's approach to semantics.

DENOTATION GROUND-ZERO SEMANTICS: FREGE

The two fundamental semantic notions Frege introduces in "On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*" are that of *Sinn* and that of *Bedeutung*.[3] Frege applies the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* to singular terms as well as to predicates and sentences. For our purposes, however, we will focus only on Frege's treatment of singular terms.[4]

When Frege talks of singular terms he means both proper names such as "Aristotle" and "Hesperus" and definite descriptions such as "the teacher of Alexander the Great" or "the point of intersection of *a* and *b*." Although both proper names and definite descriptions count as singular terms, Frege clearly targets definite descriptions as his paradigm in understanding how singular terms work. He thinks of proper names on the model of definite descriptions, not the other way around. I think that Frege's inclination to target definite descriptions instead of proper names as his paradigm is due to some of his views about cognition.

Frege's starting and fundamental idea is that when human beings stand in a cognitive relation with an object, a representation of that object is essentially involved.[5] On his view, it is inconceivable that a human mind stands in a *direct, not mediated by a representation,* cognitive relation with an object.[6] In particular for Frege, a *Sinn,* that is a particular way of identifying an object, must mediate our cognition. On Frege's view, *Sinne* are definite-description-like in structure.[7]

It should be clear why, when he comes to language, Frege targets definite descriptions instead of proper names. Definite descriptions have built into them a descriptive condition that gives us a way of identifying an object. In "the teacher of Alexander the Great" Aristotle is identified as *the unique*

teacher of Alexander the Great. On the contrary, at least on the surface, proper names do not have built into them any descriptive condition. The name "Aristotle" doesn't seem to have any descriptive condition like *the unique teacher of Alexander the Great* built into it. However, given what Frege thinks about cognition, if proper names can be used to talk about objects, a *Sinn* must be associated with them.[8] No expression can stand in a *direct* relation with an object.

As a result, "a proper name (word, sign, sign combination, expression) *expresses* its sense [*Sinn*], *means* or *designates* its meaning [*Bedeutung*]. By employing a sign we express its sense [*Sinn*] and designate its meaning [*Bedeutung*]" (Frege 1892: 61). By a proper name Frege means to say a singular term, that is, a proper name or a definite description. Strictly speaking, it isn't the singular term—which is a linguistic entity—that primarily designates the object, what Frege calls its *Bedeutung.* It is the associated *Sinn*—which is an abstract entity in the third realm—that designates it. It is only in virtue of this fact that the singular term designates it. That is, it is only because the *Sinn* expressed by "Aristotle" designates Aristotle that the name "Aristotle" designates him. The fundamental *semantic* relation—the one in virtue of which linguistic expressions designate their *Bedeutungen*—is the one that holds between a *Sinn* and a *Bedeutung.*

This brings us to the question, What is the relation that holds between the *Sinn* of a singular term and its *Bedeutung*? In virtue of what does a certain *Sinn* designate a *Bedeutung*? For instance, why does "the teacher of Alexander the Great" designate Aristotle instead of Plato? Because it *is true* that Aristotle is the teacher of Alexander the Great, whereas it is false that Plato is the teacher of Alexander the Great. The descriptive condition *being the teacher of Alexander the Great* is *satisfied* by Aristotle since *being the teacher of Alexander the Great* is *true of* Aristotle and of no one else. That is, the *Sinn* expressed by "the teacher of Alexander the Great" *denotes* Aristotle, and the relation that holds between a *Sinn* and a *Bedeutung* is that of *denotation.*[9]

Denotation, in fact, is a *logical* relation based on *truth.* A *Sinn denotes* a *Bedeutung* if and only if the *Sinn* is a *true description* of the *Bedeutung.* Of course, what's true depends on facts of the world, and what depends on facts of the world, on many understandings of logic, cannot be logical. That "the teacher of Alexander the Great" designates Aristotle depends on the empirical fact that Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander the Great. I do not dispute that. However, denotation is logical in that the *Sinn* expressed by "the teacher of Alexander the Great" denotes Aristotle independently of anyone being in some relation with the *Sinn* expressed by the "teacher of Alexander the Great" and independently of any natural historical process involving information transfer from objects to speakers.

Of course, Frege is not denying that some cognitive relation must take place between a speaker and a *Sinn* when a speaker is using a singular term. In particular, for Frege, the cognitive relation between a speaker and a *Sinn* is that of grasping. "Grasping" is, of course, a metaphor. However, it reveals how Frege conceives cognition. When thinking, a speaker reaches out to the *Sinn*, and in virtue of her grasping the *Sinn* she comes to think about an object. Though indispensable in accounting for the use of language by speakers, the investigation of such cognitive relations belongs within the domain of psychology, not within the domain of logic and semantics. Notoriously, Frege bans any intrusion of psychology into logic and semantics. Psychology is of no assistance in the foundations for semantics. The foundations for semantics are a purely logical matter. We can use a picture to represent Frege's view (see Figure 2.1).

Because a *Sinn* mediates all cognitions, and the relation between a *Sinn* and a *Bedeutung* doesn't involve any natural process, on Frege's view, there isn't any place for a *semantic* relation other than *denotation*. In particular, there isn't any place for the *semantic* relation of *reference*, that is, for a relation between singular terms and objects that isn't based on truth and involves natural-historical processes.

To sum up, Frege's foundation for semantics is constituted by three fundamental ideas:

1F. *Denotation by truth* is the ground zero of semantics.
2F. Cognitive relations between speakers and objects aren't constitutive of any *semantic* relation.
3F. There isn't any *semantic* relation like that of *reference*.

REFERENCE GROUND-ZERO SEMANTICS: RUSSELL

The views of Frege and Russell are often fused together.[10] However, far from holding the same view as Frege, Russell reverses him all the way down.[11] In

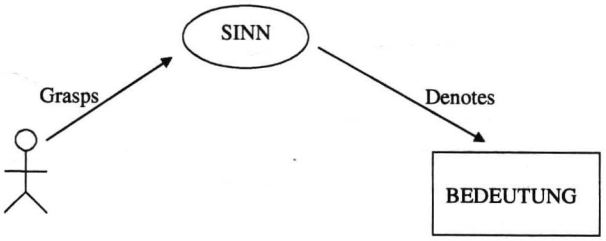

Figure 2.1

fact, Russell contrasts Frege's foundation for semantics with three opposite theses:

1R. *Reference*—not *denotation*—is the ground zero of semantics.
2R. Cognitive relations between speakers and objects are constitutive of the *semantic* relation of reference.
3R. *Denotation* is a derivative *semantic/logical* notion distinct from and irreducible to that of *reference*.

It shouldn't be a surprise that Russell doesn't elect *denotation* as the ground zero of semantics.[12] We saw that one of Frege's central ideas is that any singular term is associated with a *Sinn* that *denotes* a *Bedeutung*. However, Russell doubts that the idea of *Sinn* is meaningful.[13] On the contrary, he thinks that "the whole distinction of meaning [*Sinn*] and denotation [*Bedeutung*] has been wrongly conceived" (Russell 1905: 50). Thinking that the notion of *Sinn* is wrongly conceived, Russell cannot view *denotation by truth* as the ground zero of semantics.

Russell radically departs from Frege's thinking that human minds stand in direct cognitive relations with objects. As Russell writes back to Frege, "In spite of all its snowfields Mont Blanc itself is a component part of what is actually asserted in the proposition 'Mont Blanc is more than 4000 metres high'. . . . If we do not admit this, then we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mount Blanc" (McGuinness 1980: 169). Russell calls this direct cognitive relation with objects *acquaintance*. Acquaintance looks like a cognitive relation where objects hit the mind. Contrary to what happens when someone grasps a *Sinn*, it is Mount Blanc that makes it the case that a speaker is acquainted with it rather than the mind reaching out to Mount Blanc. Throughout his life, Russell changed his mind about the kinds of objects human minds are acquainted with. He started out thinking that minds are acquainted with external objects, like Mount Blanc, and ended up thinking that we are acquainted only with sense-data, universals, and, perhaps, the self. Whether Russell is right that we are acquainted only with a very thin range of objects isn't something that really matters here.[14] What matters instead is that—contrary to Frege—he thinks that there is a relation between human minds and objects that does not involve any representation of the object. At least in some cases our cognition of things is not mediated by *true* beliefs or *true* judgments.[15] One would expect that if Russell differs so radically from Frege on cognition, he differs from him on language too. In fact, he does.

Frege thinks that singular terms, predicates, and sentences express *Sinne*. Russell thinks that no linguistic expression expresses a *Sinn*.[16] Language's fundamental constituents are simple linguistic expressions that stand for worldly objects, that is, particulars and properties. Russell calls

linguistic expressions that stand for particulars *logically* proper names. They stand for particulars without describing them, without predicating anything true of them. Assuming that "Aristotle" is a *logically* proper name, it stands for Aristotle not in virtue of the fact that some descriptive condition is true of Aristotle but simply in virtue of the fact that "Aristotle" is a name for Aristotle.

As Russell points out, "The importance of proper names, in the sense in which I am talking, is in the sense of logic not of daily life" (1918–19: 201). Logic needs *logically* proper names. If complex expressions denote by truth—that is, they designate an object in virtue of the satisfaction of some descriptive condition—at the bottom some expressions must be such that they do not denote by truth, or satisfaction. If not, the language wouldn't be well founded and one couldn't write the basic clause in an inductive definition. So far—introducing logically proper names—Russell is just making a logical point. Far from grounding semantics, denotation by truth is grounded in something else. This is already a difference with Frege's *denotation* semantics. However, Russell goes further away from Frege. The critical question is, What is the fabric of the semantic relation between the simple expressions of the language and the objects they stand for? Is it the satisfaction of some logical condition—"axiom"—or is it something else, a natural relation involving an information link? On my understanding, logically proper names would not be referential devices unless the fabric of the semantic relation involves some natural relation.

Now what makes it the case that a *logically* proper name is attached to a particular? On Russell's view, that *semantic* relation is not grounded in logic, in the satisfaction of some "axiom" like "'Aristotle' refers to Aristotle." It is instead grounded in the *cognitive* relation of *acquaintance*. It is because a speaker is acquainted with an object that by using a proper name she refers to that object.

For Russell, whether a speaker is in the position of using a proper name to *refer* to an individual or she is in the position to use the name only to *denote* an individual depends on her cognitive state. One can see this by looking at the case of "Bismarck."

> Suppose some statement made about Bismarck. Assuming that there is such a thing as direct acquaintance with oneself, Bismarck himself might have used his name directly to designate the particular person with whom he was acquainted. In this case, if he made a judgment about himself, he himself might be a constituent of the judgment. Here the proper name has the direct use which it always wishes to have, as simply standing for a certain object, and not for a description of the object. But if a person who knew Bismarck made a judgment about him, the case is different. What this person was acquainted with were certain sense-data which he connected (rightly, we suppose) with Bismarck's body. That is, they were known by description. (Russell 1912: 37)

Russell might be wrong about the name "Bismarck." In particular, he might be wrong that someone other than Bismarck can use "Bismarck" only to denote him. However, the point I wish to emphasize is that Russell thinks that, depending on the cognitive state of the speaker, the name can be used in different ways. Frege thought that cognitive relations play no role in semantics. But for Russell, psychology—understood as the study of cognitive relations between human minds and objects—cannot be expelled from semantics. As long as we deal with natural language, Russell believes that "it is of the very essence of the explanation of what you mean by a symbol to take account of such things as knowing, of cognitive relations, and probably also of association. At any rate I am pretty clear that the theory of symbolism and the use of symbolism is not a thing that can be explained in pure logic without taking account of the various cognitive relations that you may have to things" (1918–19: 186). On Russell's view, semantics cannot set cognition aside. Part of having a correct semantics for natural language is to have a correct account of how our cognition works. This is because *reference*, which is at the basis of semantics, is grounded in *cognition*. It is because human beings can stand in certain cognitive relations with objects that they can use proper names to *refer* to objects. Again we can use a picture to represent Russell's view (see Figure 2.2).

To sum up: Russell thinks that at the bottom of semantics there is not truth by denotation but a relation prior to and independent of truth and denotation that is *reference*. Reference is an unmediated *semantic* relation between linguistic expressions and objects and is grounded in a direct cognitive relation between minds and objects, that is, acquaintance. It is because we can think about particulars that in using a proper name we *refer to* instead of *denoting* an object.

I hope I made clear where I believe the fundamental difference between Frege and Russell lies. Is there an analogous difference between Kripke and Donnellan?

KRIPKE'S RIGID *DENOTATION* AND DONNELLAN'S *REFERENTIAL* USES

In "Naming and Necessity" Kripke argues that ordinary proper names are not definite descriptions in disguise and distinguishes between a proper name like "Aristotle" and a definite description like "the teacher of Alexander

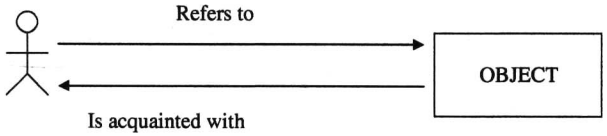

Figure 2.2