

VIII STRAWSON & DONNELLAN ON REFERRING & DENOTING

Strawson's Distinctions

- (i) a sentence (i.e. understood as a particular string of English terms)
- (ii) a use of a sentence (i.e. with all of its indexical expressions—whether implicit or explicit—assigned a reference)
- (iii) an utterance of a sentence (i.e. some particular concrete utterance).

Analogous distinctions are to be made for terms.

Meanings attach to sentences and expressions. They are akin to directions for use. But it is the use of a sentence that is either true or false, not a sentence itself; and it is the use of an expression that either does or does not refer.

What happens then in cases in which the use of a description fails to denote? The description has meaning, which is given by the descriptive content. But in using the description in subject position, the speaker does not assert that the description is instantiated. Rather she presupposes ('signals' 'implies') that it is. Where this presupposition is not met, the speaker's utterance lacks a truth value. (Or, perhaps, sometimes, the speaker fails to say anything: "This is a fine red one")

How much does Strawson end up disagreeing with Russell?

Donnellan

Two different uses of descriptions: referential and attributive.

(i) Attributive use: Smith's murderer is insane = Whoever murdered Smith is insane
Both Strawson's account and Russell's account apply primarily to this.

(ii) Referential use: Smith's murderer is insane = He is insane.