

PHIL 332: Philosophy of Language
Class 12: Modes of Presentation

1. Last time we looked at approaches to meaning according to which there are such things as meanings.
2. We looked at one general approach to what meanings are, which I called the *Russellian* approach.
3. According to this approach, the meaning of a name is a particular, the meaning of a predicate is a property, the meaning of a transitive verb is a 2-place relation, the meaning of a sentence is a proposition, and so on.
4. We have seen problems for this kind of view. Example:
 - a. Lois believes that **Superman** is strong.
 - b. Lois believes that **Clark Kent** is strong.

We get the same kind of problem for expressions other than names:

- c. Lois believes that Superman **eats** spinach.
 - d. Lois believes that Superman **shmeats** spinach.
5. This suggests that meanings cannot simply be particulars, properties, relations, or complexes thereof (e.g. propositions).
6. According to a second general approach, which I shall call the Fregean approach, meanings are *modes of presentations* of particulars, properties, and relations, and complexes of such modes of presentation.
 - a. The meaning of a name is a mode of presentation of a particular.
 - b. The meaning of a predicate is a mode of presentation of a property.
 - c. The meaning of a transitive verb is a mode of presentation of a 2-place relation.
 - d. The meaning of a sentence is a mode of presentation of a proposition.
7. This seems to solve the problems above: the meaning of 'Superman' is a mode of presentation of the guy, the meaning of 'Clark Kent' is a different mode of presentation of the guy. So too for 'eat' and 'shmeat'.

But does it solve the problem of empty names? Can there be a mode of presentation of nothing?

8. It is typically proposed that modes of presentation can have structure, being composed of other modes of presentation. And the structure of the mode of presentation mirrors the structure of that of which it is a mode of presentation:

MOP(<Superman, being strong>) = <MOP(Superman), MOP(being strong)>.

9. This leads to lack of uniformity in the use of ‘proposition’. Which of the following should we call a proposition: <Superman, being strong>, <MOP(Superman), MOP(being strong)>, or MOP(<Superman, being strong>)?
10. If ‘Superman’ means a mode of presentation, does that mean that when I assert ‘Superman is strong’ I am talking about a mode of presentation? That is counterintuitive. And does it mean that I am asserting a mode of presentation? If so, it seems that modes of presentation can be true or false. And does it mean that the objects of belief are modes of presentation?
11. One move the Fregean can make is to claim that what we talk about, what we assert, what we believe, etc, are those which are presented by modes of presentation.
12. An alternative is to stick with the Russellian approach to meaning, and use modes of presentation in some other way to solve the problem. Three methods:
 - a. By ‘Lois believes that Superman is strong’ we mean ‘Lois believes that Superman is strong via mop_1 ’; By ‘Lois believes that Clark Kent is strong’ we mean ‘Lois believes that Clark Kent is strong via mop_2 ’.
 - b. By ‘Lois believes that Superman is strong’ we mean ‘For some mop , Lois believes that Superman is strong via mop ’; By ‘Lois believes that Clark Kent is strong’ we mean ‘For some mop , Lois believes that Clark Kent is strong via mop ’. That makes it *true* that Lois believes that Clark Kent is strong, despite intuitions to the contrary.
 - c. If Lois believes that Superman is strong then it follows that Lois believes that Clark Kent is strong, because Superman is Clark Kent. It is just misleading to use ‘Clark Kent’ rather than ‘Superman’, because it implies (in the Gricean sense) that Lois thinks of the guy in a certain way while entertaining the belief.
13. Big question: What are modes of presentation? What is a mode of presentation of Superman? Some options:
 - a. A word (‘Superman’, ‘Clark Kent’)
 - b. A concept of Superman
 - c. A way of thinking about Superman
14. I argue that modes of presentation are *ways of thinking*, which are properties of thinking events. They vary in their degree of generality, just like ways of walking. At a high enough level of generality, perhaps we all think about Superman in the same way. And we can think in a certain way without there being anything about which we are thinking.