

Book Review

John Perry, Frege's Detour: An Essay on Meaning, Reference, and Truth, Oxford University Press, 2019, xii + 148 pp.

In 1872 Frege wrote an essay titled "On sense and reference" where he presented his sense and reference theory of meaning. Since then, the essay has gained a canonical status in the philosophy of language literature, and philosophy students all over the world have the essay as a reading assignment in the philosophy of language classes. The noted philosopher of language John Perry does not share this sentiment. On the contrary, he thinks that "this essay put philosophy on detour" (1). In the ten chapters that this book consists of, Perry explains what that detour is and gives his solution to how we can get back on track while simultaneously keep what Frege got right about meaning.

The first chapter is introductory. There Perry lays out Frege's detour. It was the doctrine of indirect reference, his solution to a difficulty for his sense and reference theory. The difficulty is created by indirect discourse and attitude report sentences where the principle that the reference of a complex expression like a sentence is determined by the reference of its parts does not seem to hold. A corollary of the principle is that a part of a complex expression can be replaced by another one that is co-referring without affecting the reference of the complex expression. Indirect discourse and attitude reports, however, do not permit that. To use Perry's example, the sentence "Smith believes that Berkeley is west of Santa Cruz" according to the principle and its corollary, keeps its reference, the truth value True, when the embedded part that stands for Smith's true belief is replaced by another true sentence, that Mogadishu is the main capital of Somalia, despite Smith not believing in this. Frege's solution is that sentences when embedded in an indirect discourse or an attitude reports do not refer to their truth value but they refer either to what they quote or their usual sense, the Thought they express. So the substitution is not permitted in such sentences while the compositionality principle is preserved. Perry rejects the doctrine of indirect reference because it did not, contrary to Frege, give a solution and because it has helped to spread and legitimize two theses about truth and cognition that are in Perry's opinion false: (A) that there is a unique proposition that captures the sentence's content, its truth-conditions, which carries its cognitive significance in the sense that it is what the speaker of the sentence means and believes and it is the

reference of embedded sentences in indirect discourse and attitude report, and that (B) attitudes such as beliefs are a relation between an agent and a proposition. An alternative way, says Perry, that can help us stay from the detour and the faulty assumptions is found in Frege's earlier major work *Begriffsschrift* where he had a different theory of meaning that he later abandoned for the sense and reference theory.

In the second chapter, Perry lays out the semantic theory in *Begriffsschrift* that Frege had abandoned for the sense and reference theory. The theory of conceptual content was the theory of meaning under which Frege operated while writing *Begriffsschrift*. It acted as the semantic framework within which Frege developed first and second-order logic. Perry highlights that it was largely implicit, so what he says is his interpretation of Frege's ideas in *Begriffsschrift*. According to the theory, as it names says, what language expressions refer to is conceptual content. The conceptual content of a sentence is circumstance (*Umstand*). It possesses truth-value and if true is also a fact. Perry tells us that Frege never elaborates in *Begriffsschrift* what circumstances are. He just states several times that sentences refer to them. Here Perry goes into interpretive mode. He attributes to Frege the view of circumstances as potential facts and complexes made up of objects, properties, and relations that objects have either with other objects or properties. Perry justifies this reading of Frege's circumstances by explaining that non-idealist philosophers in the 19th century took a realist stance of relations and designated them as the third component, next to objects and properties, that make up a fact. Frege here also held to the compositionality principle. The conceptual content of an expression is determined by the conceptual content of its parts. He bifurcates sentences into names and predicates. The conceptual content of names are objects and of predicates properties. Another crucial aspect of the theory that Perry mentions is that sentences with the same conceptual content have the same logical consequences.

The third chapter Perry devotes to the reason why Frege rejected the conceptual content theory and which led him to develop his more famous theory, the reason being that he concluded that circumstances do not provide the truth-conditions of sentences which carry their cognitive significance. What led Frege to this conclusion, explains Perry, is the general issue of identity that his *Begriffsschrift* theory was unable to solve. Frege's dealings with identity started out with two identity problems that were implicitly in the background of Section 8 of *Begriffsschrift* and culminated in a general identity problem found in his later article "Concept and function". Perry gives a detailed account of the identity problem and Frege's solution to them. For good measure he adds an identity statement problem formulated by the philosopher George Wilson. The two identity problems in *Begriffsschrift*, which Perry dubs the Name problem and the Co-instantiation problem, are about identity statements between names. The identity statements with the same circumstance, "Hesperus = Hesperus" and "Hesperus = Phosphorus", must have the same logical consequence but they do not. The first one is trivial, the second informative, and from the second one can infer that Hesperus and Phosphorus refer to the same thing. This is the Name problem. When an additional premise is added to those sentences, e.g. that

the reference of “Hesperus” is determined by pointing to the first planet that appears in the evening sky and saying, “That is Hesperus” and that the reference of “Phosphorus” is determined by pointing out the last planet that appears in the morning sky and saying “That is Phosphorus”, the same information must be inferred as they have the same logical consequence, but it is not. The second sentence and the additional premise together entail that the first planet that appears on the sky and the last planet to disappear from the morning sky are the same, but not the first one. This is the Co-instantiation problem. In Section 8, Frege, next to identity, a relation between objects, introduces a new kind of identity relation that he calls the identity of content, which is a relation between names that have the same conceptual content. To distinguish it symbolically from identity, he uses the \equiv symbol to represent it. Perry notes that this is the only place in *Begriffsschrift* that the distinction and the \equiv symbol appear. He interprets the introduction of this distinction and the writing of Section 8 as only making sense if Frege had the Name and the Co-instantiation problem at the back of his mind. The solution is that the identity statements are actual identity of content statements, “Hesperus \equiv Hesperus” and “Hesperus \equiv Phosphorus”. Since they have different contents, they have different logical consequences. Here is where it becomes problematic for the conceptual content theory. The Wilson problem is the problem of reflexive relations other than identity, e.g. if we know there is a planet “Hesperus”, we can infer that “Hesperus is the same size as Hesperus” is a true sentence, but without more information, we are unable to know that “Hesperus is the same size as Phosphorus”. Frege’s solution cannot solve this problem. Neither can it be used to solve the General problem of identity, which is that sentences that refer to the same circumstances do not have the same consequences although they should if circumstances are their conceptual content. This problem finally convinced Frege to give up on circumstances and the conceptual content theory. Perry thinks that the rejection was premature.

In the fourth chapter, Perry talks about the sense and reference theory as it was presented in a series of articles written during the 1890s and the accompanying problems. In contrast to the conceptual content theory, in the sense and reference theory, reference is now done indirectly through senses who pinpoint the referent. They perform the function of carrying cognitive significance of expression that objects, predicates, and circumstances failed in Frege’s earlier theory. The sense of a proper name is a property of the object it refers to. Names contribute with their senses to the sense of a sentence, a Thought, which gives its truth-condition that tells if it is true or false. Perry says that there is a continuity between the two theories, for senses are property structures with better articulated descriptions. The 1890s works shows that Frege had a sense for predicates, but he never said explicitly what it is. Perry, on the basis of Frege’s later works, suggests that the sense of predicates is similar to the sense of names. It is the detailed description of the property it refers to. Perry also derives the consequence that a Thought has two existential quantifiers, one that affirms there is a unique object and one that affirms a unique property. A more problematic part of his theory are concepts and extensions, which even baffles experts on Frege. In Frege’s time extension was an intuitive concept with no clear definition.

He considered them to be a special case of what he calls course of values (*Werthverläufe*). What Perry makes of it is that a course of value is a set of arguments and values determined by a function, so extensions are courses of values for concepts. They are a set of arguments and values with values being True or False. So concept is to be understood as an unsaturated function, and the extension is what turns it into a saturated function, and only those concepts that are extensionally individuated can be a reference of predicates, i.e they are properties. The problems for the sense and reference theory are the Regress problem, the problem that emerges because since Thoughts do not have objects, neither must the senses of names, but because sense of names often have them, a regress emerges finding a sense of a name not containing objects, Kerry's problem, the problem of names, who refer to objects, saturated entities, referring to properties, which are unsaturated entities, and the problem of accommodating properties that share the same extension. Some of these problem Perry tackles in eight chapter.

In the fifth chapter, Perry takes under the loop Frege's sense and reference theory how he presents it in the article "On Sense and Reference". Senses give the necessary and sufficient conditions that an object must fulfill for it to be the reference of an expression, but where commentators get it wrong according to Perry is identifying senses with modes of representation. They are a part of sense but not identical to them. He characterizes modes as functions. Their arguments are presenters, and their values are presented objects. Sense contains modes and the sense of presenters but not objects. Another thing that commentators assume is true is that Frege treated proper names as hidden descriptions, when there is no evidence for this. Frege actually tells very little about the senses of proper names, but where he does mention something what is crucial is his distinction between a perfect language that is used for scientific research where only one sense is attached to an expression and imperfect languages that are used for everyday communication where an expression has multiple senses. The purpose of sense and reference theory is to give an account of the perfect language. Frege then applies this theory also to imperfect languages whose deficiencies are tolerable in a nonscientific discourse because successful communication is possible despite of them. Here Perry says there is a place for circumstance in a semantic theory. People successfully communicate and exchange information about a thing they attach different Thoughts to because they agree about the circumstance. Thoughts exemplify truth conditions and cognitive significance, but they are poor carriers of information. This also gives a good reason why circumstances are a good candidate for being the reference of sentences, but Frege does not go in this direction. He designates truth values as the things that sentences refer to, but he does not give a good reason for this.

In the sixth chapter, Perry shows how Frege's conceptual content theory from *Begriffsschrift* can solve the identity problems that he presented in chapter two. What prevented Frege from realizing it was his adherence to the doctrine of unique content, though he came near it in Section 8 of *Begriffsschrift* where he introduces the distinction between identity and identity of the content. The basic idea is that expressions not only convey information about the things they stand for but also information about themselves,

which is often the point of using them. It also shows that the doctrine of unique content is false, for it means that an expression's truth-conditions about the objects it refers to, the usual content it conveys, are not the only truth conditions a sentence has. Perry distinguishes three truth-conditions found in *Begriffsschrift*: (1) reflexive truth-conditions under which a sentence is true, e.g. the sentence "Bratman is taller than Lawlor." is true iff there are objects x and y and a relation Ψ such that x and y are the objects to which "Bratman" and "Lawlor" refer and Ψ is the relation to which "is taller than" refers and that the circumstance that x has Ψ to y is a fact, (2) referential truth-conditions that specify how the sentence could satisfy the reflexive truth-conditions; the referential truth-condition of "Bratman is taller than Lawlor." is that the circumstance that Bratman is taller than Lawlor is a fact, and (3) hybrid truth-conditions, the conditions for some expressions that make up the sentence. Perry uses this Reflexive-referential theory as he calls it to solve the identity problems. In the Name problem, the identity sentences "Hesperus = Hesperus" and "Hesperus = Phosphorus" have the same referential truth-condition, namely that the circumstance that Venus is identical to Venus is a fact, but differ in their reflexive and hybrid truth-conditions. The reflexive and hybrid truth-conditions of "Hesperus = Phosphorus" proscribe the existence of two objects, x and y , to which names Hesperus and Phosphorus refer, while the reflexive and hybrid truth-conditions of "Hesperus = Hesperus" proscribes the existence of two objects, x and y , to which the name Hesperus refers. Because of that difference, the identity statements differ in their logical properties and convey different information. In the Wilson problem and the General problem, the difference between sentences lie in their respective hybrid truth-conditions. The hybrid truth-condition of the sentence "Phosphorus is the same size as Hesperus" is that both names refer to the same sized object, which is not the hybrid truth-condition of "Hesperus is the same size as Hesperus". The hybrid truth-condition of "Hesperus is moonless" is that "Hesperus" refers to an object that is moonless, while the hybrid truth-condition of "Phosphorus is moonless" is that "Phosphorus" refers to an object that is moonless.

In the seventh chapter, Perry responds to Alonzo Church's Slingshot argument for truth-values as references of sentences. The argument states that sentences refer to truth-values because they are the only thing that remains preserved when we either substitute an expression in a sentence with a co-referring expression or when we redistribute parts of sentences, and what remains preserved in substantiation and redistribution is what sentences refer to. Perry counters the argument using the reflexive-referential theory he developed in the prior chapter. Truth values, contra Church, are not the only thing that remains preserved. In the case of substitution, referential truth-conditions are preserved; in the case of redistribution, hybrid truth-conditions are preserved. So the Slingshot argument gives us no reason to think that truth-values are the reference of sentences.

In the eighth chapter, Perry shows how the ideas from *Begriffsschrift* and the sense and reference theory can be combined into one single framework he calls the Integrative theory. It has three levels of meaning: sense, reference, and extension. The sense is the sense of the sense and reference

theory: the sense of names, predicates, and Thoughts. The reference is the reference from Frege's conceptual content theory: circumstances, objects, and properties. The extension is reference from the sense and reference theory: objects, courses of values, and truth-values. Perry enumerates many innovations of the theory. One innovation of this theory is that in indirect discourse and attitude reports embedded sentences behave the same as when they are unembedded, i.e. they refer to the same thing, a circumstance, which instantiates the Thought. So substitution of co-referring expressions in the embedded sentences preserves truth. There is no doctrine of indirect reference, and the Fregean sense is relieved of a burden. Another one is that, because the thesis of unique content is here abandoned, there is a variety of truth-conditions for sentences and expressions that make them up. Further, it gives a better account of predicates, properties, and extensions. What was reference in the sense and reference theory is now extension and, like sense, is unburdened. Perry then gives the truth-conditions of sentences. They are determined by their grammar and meaning. Given this, the reflexive truth-condition of a sentence is that (i) each expression has a sense, (ii) each sense determines a reference, (iii) each reference determines a denotation, and iv) further requirements imposed on these senses, reference, and denotations by the grammatical structure. The referential truth-condition is that there is a circumstance and that the circumstance is a fact. And finally, the truth value of the sentence with its denotations given is determined by the course of values which depending on the truth values of names attaches the same truth value as the extension of the sentence. Then, Perry deals with four potential problems for the Integrative theory that he has to solve since it does not appeal to the doctrine of indirect reference and instead assumes that embedded sentences in indirect and attitude reports refer the same way as when they are unembedded. At this point he still assumes the second thesis that (B) belief is a relation to a proposition. The first three problems he solves in this chapter. The fourth problem he solves in the ninth chapter where he replaces the propositional thesis with the episode thesis. The first problem is intensionality, the problem of explaining the case when substituting co-referring expressions does not preserve truth. The answer is that expressions cannot be substituted though they share the extension because they do not actually co-refer. If Elwood believes that humans are creatures with hearts but does not believe that humans are creatures with a kidney, the embedded sentences about humans do not co-stand for the same circumstance. The second problem is the opacity of descriptions, the problem that the substitution of co-referring description does not preserve truth. The answer is that the descriptions are not co-referring because they refer to different properties despite sharing the same extension. If Elwood knows that the author of Tom Sawyer was born in Missouri but does not know that the author of Huckleberry Finn is born there, then the descriptions do not co-refer. The third problem is the opacity of names and predicates, the problem of explaining the case when substituting co-referring names and predicates does not preserve truth. The answer is the same one for the first and second problem. They might have the same extension but they do not refer to the same thing. If Elwood on his exam marks the claim that Mark Twain wrote Huckleberry Finn as

true and marks the claim that Samuel Clemens wrote Huckleberry Finn as false, then this is the reflection of his beliefs. Lastly, Perry delves into the intersection between the Integrated theory and pragmatics. He explains that Integrated theory implicitly assumes that indirect discourse and attitude reports have appeared for two reasons – to pass along information about the agent and to provide an explanation of the agent’s actions. For this reason, we as speakers are reluctant to substitute a co-referring expression in such contexts as using this expression could be potentially misleading to a listener. One insight of Frege’s sense and reference theory is that the way the objects are presented through expressions that stand for them is of equally important as themselves are. The Integrated theory keeps that insight with the pragmatic explanation of why substitution of co-referring expression is in some situation not allowed.

In the ninth chapter, Perry deals with the fourth problem for the Integrative theory, the problem of logical operations on contents. Perry extends the Integrative theory by adding a mental component to it. Having a belief or other attitude, explains Perry, does not consist of only the relation to a proposition but includes a cognitive state or an “episode” made up of ideas that causes one to make an utterance. To incorporate this into the Integrative theory, he explores the relationship between a cognitive state’s content, the ideas that make it up, and the cognitive state’s causal role. He presents three insights: One, the content constrains the causal relation between cognitive states and actions. Two, the content has reflexive and referential truth-conditions. And three, the content that motivates action is not referential content, but reflexive content. Following this, he formulates a psychological principle that regulates the causal relation between cognitive states and actions, and so verbal actions, which he calls the fundamental principle of folk psychology and which relies on reflexive content: A desire and a belief will motivate an action of will have a tendency to do so if the belief is made true and the desire is satisfied by the object(s) the notion(s) are of instantiate the property or relation the idea is of, and if the execution of the action will guarantee or at least increase the likelihood that the conditions for satisfaction of the desire will be met if the truth-conditions of the belief are met. Perry then proceeds to apply this episode account on various topics in philosophy of language. He uses it to solve a logical manipulation puzzle, a type of puzzle where an entailment is drawn out from propositions that someone believes, and if he or she is rational, he or she must believe in that entailment. If the austere propositional account is assumed, the rational person must believe all logical consequences of the propositions she believes. But depending on the propositions, this makes the person irrational as the consequences of two or more propositions can be contradictory. This does not happen on the episode account. The entailed content that a rational person believes is limited to the reflexive content of its cognitive states and does not go beyond that. Perry also combines it with David Kaplan’s semantic theory of temporal indexicals like “here” and “now” to solve semantic problems with sentences that locate the events they refer in time and change their wording depending on time temporal location of their speakers. Kaplan holds that the meaning of indexicals are determined by characters, functions that bind contexts – agents, times, location,

and world, and contents. Perry reinterprets Kaplan's characters as function from utterances and cognitive episodes to contents with various parameters called roles, including agent, time, and location, that are determined by the properties of utterances and episodes. According to this account, what explains the cognitive difference between different sentences that refer to the same event are the episodes that speakers have about them, e.g. if I have the episode that § Now is the time to go to the polling places. § (Perry's notation for episodes), that with the desire to be a good citizen will move to go to the voting booth today unlike the sentence "November 6, 2018 is election" for which I do not have the corresponding episode. Finally, in the tenth chapter, Perry makes a short recapitulation of the theses he argued for in the book.

I highly recommend John Perry's *Frege's Detour*. The greatest strength of Perry's book is its originality. What Perry did was to take Frege's older, less known theory of meaning that even among Frege scholars was considered to be half-baked and immature, and at best, a stepping stone to his sense and reference theory that made Frege a towering giant in contemporary analytic philosophy of language, and use it to develop a new theory of meaning that is still Fregean in spirit. However, it rejects the basic assumption of Frege, the doctrine of unique content. It is a theory that shows that one can make a workable theory of meaning that does not rely on that postulate. Even if one does not agree with Perry in many points he makes in the book, one must admire the achievement. Another thing that makes the book of great interest is Perry's rereading of Frege's mature articles on sense and reference, which puts a new light on things. For example, he corrects the widely held assumption by Frege commentators that Frege identifies senses with modes of representation (58), and he notes that Frege did not give a valid reason to think that truth-values are reference of sentences (72-73). One caveat is that the book assumes a certain level of knowledge of Frege and general issues in the philosophy of language, so philosophy undergraduates and others with an introductory interest in the philosophy of language will have a harder time following the book. Because of its advanced themes, the readership that will most enjoy this book are philosophers specialized in philosophy of language and Frege scholars. All in all, *Frege's Detour* is a worthwhile book.

MATKO GJURAŠIN
Zagreb, Croatia