(1) Today we're going to talk about one of the two main approaches to singular terms: *descriptivism.* This name is slightly misleading, since it's not quite clear that the first version we will talk about should be understood in terms of descriptions. But Frege's view is often lumped together with Russell's and since they share many similarities we lack sufficient reasons to do otherwise here.

(2) So, the first theory we will be discussing today was outlined by Frege at the end of the 19th century. He is also the source of the four classic puzzles for singular terms which we talked about in relation to Russell's theory of definite descriptions.

(a) Frege's puzzle that only the latter of the following two sentences can be informative.

<div align="center">Lewis Carroll is Lewis Carroll.</div>

<div align="center">Lewis Carroll is Charles Dodgson.</div>

(b) The problem that it seems that Sherlock Holmes must exist in order for the following sentence to be meaningful.

<div align="center">Sherlock Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street.</div>

(c) That it seems both meaningful and true to say that

<div align="center">Pegasus does not exist.</div>

despite (because!) there is no such winged horse.

(d) The problem that the following sentences can have different truth values even though we think that truth values are preserved when we substitute names which have the same bearer.

<div align="center">Max believes that Lewis Carroll is a good author.</div>

<div align="center">Max believes that Charles Dodgson is a good author.</div>

(3) Frege attacks these problem by introducing a distinction between the *sense* of an expression and its reference. Sense should not quite be thought of as the meaning of the expression, since Frege thinks that meaning has two other components: force and tone.

(a) The sense of an expression is what you grasp when you understand it. It is a *mode of presentation* of its reference or rule for determining what the reference is. As such, it's something we have before the mind associated with the expression.

(b) Accordingly, we say that a singular term *expresses* its sense which in turn *determines* its reference.

(c) Frege also discusses sense and reference for complete sentences. The sense of a sentence is the complete thought or proposition it expresses. That in turn determines its reference, which Frege thinks is the truth value of the sentence.

(d) Predicates can also be understood to have senses which determine reference. To see what that would be, note that the reference of a complete sentence is its truth value and a singular term refers to some object. For a complete sentence on subject-predicate form what's missing, then, is something which provides a truth value from an object. As such, the sense of a predicate is a function which takes an object as input and outputs the value true if the object satisfies the predicate and false if it does not.

(4) Assigning sense and reference to all these grammatical types allows Frege to present two important *principles of compositionality*. These are a kind of rules for how information about a complex expression must relate to the constituent parts of that expression.

(a) The truth value of a sentence (its reference) is completely determined by the references of its constituent parts together with its grammatical structure.

(b) The thought which is expressed by a sentence (its sense) is completely determined by the senses of its constituent parts together with its grammatical structure.

In this way, we can understand the sense of a singular term as what it contributes to the thoughts which are expressed by the complete sentences where the term occurs.

(5) Frege then applies this theory to solve the four problems.

(a) Although the names 'Lewis Carroll' and 'Charles Dodgson' have the same reference, their senses are different. They are different presentations of the same person. As such, the sentences

<div align="center">Lewis Carroll is Lewis Carroll.</div>

<div align="center">Lewis Carroll is Charles Dodgson.</div>

express different thoughts and can provide different information even though the reference is the same.

(b) We can deal similarly with fictional characters. The name 'Sherlock Holmes' has a sense we can grasp and so can figure into sentences which express a thought. What the name lacks is reference. So, by drawing the distinction between sense and reference we separate thought-contents from things enough to avoid the Meinongian conclusion.

(c) The problem of non-existence is a little bit more difficult. We can still say that the sentence

<div align="center">Pegasus does not exist.</div>

is meaningful in because the name 'Pegasus' expresses a sense. But we also want to say that the sentence is true! The issue here is that the truth value of sentences (their reference) is supposed to be determined by the reference of their constituent parts and the name doesn't have any. Frege has an attempt to solve this issue, but it's quite technical. Essentially, it says that this kind of non-existence claims express that some concepts are not applicable rather than saying something about an object which doesn't exist.

(d) Frege's answer to the problem of non-transparent context is something I intend for you to discuss during the seminar.

(6) So, Frege has presented a powerful machinery to describe how language works. But it's still obscure how to understand what the sense of a term is. He has told us what role it's supposed to play for the theory, but not what kind of a thing it is.

(7) Sometimes, Frege alludes to the idea that the sense of a singular term is best understood as a definite description. The Evening Star is 'the most luminous star in the night sky', Lewis Carroll is 'the author of *Alice in Wonderland*'. For this reason, Frege's theory is often considered a kind of descriptivism about singular terms even though that isn't something which he explicitly says.

(8) Precisely the thought that we should understand names as definite descriptions in disguise is something which Russell wholeheartedly endorses. Although it may sound unintuitive, there are some reasons which speak in favour of this view. For instance, when we learn how to use a name or ask who someone is, descriptions are the explanation we're provided. When we encounter an unfamiliar name, we learn who it stands for by being provided with a definite description.

(9) Now, we do need to distinguish two main kinds of descriptivism.

    (a) *Fregean descriptivism* uses Frege's framework with the addition that we should understand the sense to a singular term to be a definite description.

    (b) *Russellian descriptivims* is the idea that singular terms are interchangeable with definite descriptions taken together with Russell's analysis of definite descriptions. That is, on Russell's view, the logical form of sentences which contain names should also be thought of as an existentially quantified statement which contains no singular term. As such, for Russell it's a mistake to think that proper names refer! If something happens to fulfil the description which the name abbreviates, then he says that this thing is *denoted* by the name. But it does not figure into the proper analysis of the sentence.

(10) When we discussed Russell's solutions to the four problems last time, he only dealt with the case of definite descriptions and not any other singular terms. But, now that he has made the claim that proper names are interchangeable with singular terms, that solutions extends immediately.

(11) Naturally, there are some new problems which arise for descriptivism. Most immediately, the descriptivist needs an answer to the question of *which* definite description a particular name is interchangeable with.

    (a) When someone asks 'Who is Russell?', there are many possible descriptions to choose from, each of which predicates different information about him. When we answer we base our choice on who's asking and why, but there is no reason to expect that each of my previous uses of his name expressed that particular description. Worse yet, what could even determine which description was meant when I used the name?

    (b) This leads to our next problem. Different speakers of a language possess very different information about what we're talking about. As such, we presumably ascribe very different descriptive content to, for example, the name 'Bertrand Russell'. But, then, how do we understand each other? For a Fregean descriptivism this would mean that we disagree about the sense of the name, and hence would express very different thoughts when we utter the very same sentences. For Russellian descriptivism it means that the logical form resulting from analysis of a single sentence uttered by different speakers could contain entirely different predicates. We would simply be talking past each other.

(c) This issue gets even worse. If two people associate different descriptions the name 'Niklas' and utter the respective sentences,

<div align="center">Niklas is not nice.</div>

<div align="center">Niklas is nice.</div>

then they haven't contradicted each other. What the sentences express, either the Fregean thought or the Russellian logical form, contain different descriptive content associated with the name, so there is no logical conflict between them.

(d) The simplest way to avoid these problems would be to assume that every speaker associates the same sense or description to every name. But this doesn't seem coherent with our pre-theoretic intuition that we all know, and prioritise, different information about each other.

(12) (a) One move to harden descriptivism against these kind of criticisms comes from John Searle (1958). He argues that names aren't interchangeable with any single definite description but rather with some collection or cluster of them. He uses the metaphor that a name is like a hook which we can hang descriptions upon.

(b) The reference of a name is then the object which satisfies *sufficiently* many of the associated descriptions.

(c) We understand and explain a name by knowing or conveying *sufficiently* many of the associated descriptions.

(d) What would count as sufficiently many is far from obvious and Searle doesn't provide much to go on beyond saying that it should be a majority. But at least the solutions points out a direction for avoiding the problem of determining which description.

(13) This all leads to the major and debate-changing criticism which emerges in Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1972), which builds on previous work by Ruth Barcan Marcus (1961). Kripke presents several arguments, but since you will be discussing an excerpt from the text at the seminar, I will only present the three most discussed.

(14) The most important of Kripke's points is what's often called his *modal* argument, since it concerns claims about what is *possible* or *necessary*.

(a) He asks us to consider a sentence like the following.

<div align="center">It's possible that Nixon lost the 1968 presidential election.</div>

Most of us don't believe that history is entirely predetermined and so would like say that this sentence is true. That is, Nixon could possibly have lost.

(b) But according to descriptivism, the name 'Nixon' is interchangeable with some definite description. So, the sentence should be understood like

<div align="center">It's possible that the winner of the 1968 presidential election lost the 1968 presidential election.</div>

which seems obviously false!

(c) It also doesn't help to say that we've chosen the wrong definite description or assuming Searle's cluster theory. According to Kripke, we can make the same move with any description we might have chosen to stand for the name. There is no true description of a person or object which couldn't possibly be false. But it would be absurd to say that a description F is false about the unique object which satisfies F.

(15) Another counterexample shows that the refernt of a name doesn't even have to satisfy its descriptive content. Kripke takes the example of the logician Kurt Gödel.

   (a) The only thing most people know about Gödel (if they even know of him) is that he proved the incompleteness theorems. But in any case it seems that they refer to him when they use his name.

   (b) Kripke asks us to consider the following fictional scenario. Imagine that it wasn't actually Gödel who proved the incompleteness theorems. It was some other logician named Schmidt. But Gödel murdered Schmidt, stole his manuscript, and published it under his own name.

   (c) According to descriptivism the name Gödel, which is interchangeable with the description 'the man who proved the incompleteness theorems', actually refer to Schmidt, since he is the unique person who satisfies that description. But that would be absurd. Even if this story were true, Gödel's name would still refer to himself.

(16) Finally, Kripke gives us an example to show that it doesn't seem to be necessary to know any definite description to successfully refer with a name.

   (a) There are a lot of people we talk about without knowing enough about them to provide a definite description which they uniquely satisfy. For example, consider the name 'Marie Curie'.

   (b) Most of us don't know very much about her. Say that we know that she was a physicist and chemist, that she worked during the first half of the 20th century, and that she was a pioneer in nuclear physics.

   (c) When we use her name it's clear that it's her we're talking about. But all that descriptive information we just noted is also satisfied by Lise Meitner, another contemporary scientist. But although the descriptive content we associate with the name 'Marie Curie' is insufficient to determine a unique bearer, we do manage to refer to her with that name.

   (e) Donnellan (1970) provides a version of this example where we manage to refer without knowing any descriptive information at all about the person. Imagine a child who wakes at night and sleepily says hi to Tom, who is a guest of her parents. When the child wakes the morning after and says,

   Tom seemed nice.

   she refers to Tom, even though the name is the only thing she can remember about him.