

REFERENCE, ANAPHORA, AND SINGULAR QUANTITY

GEORGE ENGLEBRETSSEN

Recently Kripke¹ and Donnellan² have exchanged important views concerning (among other things) indefinite, definite, and pronominal reference. I certainly would not presume to make a final adjudication of the issue. But I do believe there are points to be made which might help cast light on it. The points are generally syntactic. Moreover, they are not mine. I merely put them together for the first time.

The question:

Sometimes definite descriptions occur in discourse *tout court*, with no antecedent references. Sometimes there are presupposed, or understood, antecedent references. Sometimes not. I take it that the former, like those which have explicit antecedents, are links in anaphoric chains, and are used referentially. The others are used attributively. Is there a syntactic indication of this distinction?

Sommers' first point:

Suppose I say, 'A boy is in my garden'. Here I have made a reference (contra Geach) to a boy. But which one? Had I said, 'Every boy is in my garden' I would have referred to every boy—Billy, Sam, Charlie, etc. Had I said, 'That boy is in my garden' (presumably pointing in some way) I would have referred to a boy. Which one? The one to whom I pointed. So which boy do I refer to when I say, 'A boy is in my garden'? Surely the boy who happens to be in my garden! And generally, 'Some/a ϕ is Ψ ' refers to a ϕ which is Ψ . Suppose I say, 'An A is B' and refer just

¹ S. Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference," *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*, ed. P. French, T. Uehling, jr., and H. Wettstein, Minneapolis, 1979.

² K. Donnellan, "Speaker's Reference, Descriptions, and Anaphora," in *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*.

to some A, though in fact that A is not B. Then what I said was not true. Thus, if in saying 'An A is B' what is referred to is just some A, then a truth-condition would be the B-ness of that A. But surely, reference is not just being made to some A. Reference here is to an A which is B. When I say, 'A boy is in my garden' my reference is not to a boy to whom I then attribute a property. I'm referring to just the boy who has that property. I wouldn't dream of using my sentence to make reference to any boy not in my garden. Notice that all that I say here holds for 'Some boys are in my garden' as well. To paraphrase Aristotle, I say what is true whenever I say of what is (thus-and-so) that it is (thus-and-so). So I speak the truth whenever I say of what is in my garden that it is in my garden. 'A boy is in my garden' says of what I refer to that it is in the garden. For it to be true, following Aristotle, what I refer to must be something in the garden. Thus my reference: a boy who is in my garden. The reference of a particular subject is, in part, determined by the predicate.³

Donnellan's point:

Suppose I say, 'The boy who trampled my peas is thoughtless'. If, for some reason, I know (or believe I know) who the boy who trampled my peas is, then I can be said to have used the descriptive phrase, 'The boy who trampled my peas', "referentially". I am referring to just that boy. I make a strong, definite reference. So the reference here depends upon what I know (or believe) and upon what I intend. Had I not known (indeed, had no idea) who the boy was, I could still have used my sentence. But in so doing I could not have intended to refer to any particular boy. In that case my use of the definite description might be thought of as elliptical for 'whoever the boy was' or 'any boy'. In such a case I would be using the descriptive phrase "attributively". Then I would be making no (or, at best, only a weak) reference. Notice that, given the attributive use here, I might speak the truth even if it turns out that what I called a boy was a girl. Thus, in such a case, we might say that what I said amounted to something like, 'Whoever I take to be a boy who trampled my peas is thoughtless'. Attributive reference is incorrigible. On the other hand, if my use of the descriptive phrase is referential, then if what I attempted to refer to was not a boy what I say cannot be true (it would be false — Russell, or truth-valueless — Strawson).⁴

³ See F. Sommers, *The Logical Syntax of Natural Language*, Oxford, 1982, especially chapter 3.

⁴ See K. Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions," *The Philosophical Review*, 75, (1966).

Vendler's point:

Suppose I say, 'The boy is in my garden again', and you ask 'Which boy?'. There are several ways I might answer. One way is by saying something like, 'The one I made reference to yesterday' (more naturally, 'The one I told you about yesterday'). Yesterday I said, 'A boy is in my garden'. I have made reference to a boy (viz. the one in my garden). Notice, I don't know (may never know) his name. Now I can make further references to that boy by the anaphoric use of a pronoun. I could say 'He's in my garden again'. To whom does 'he' refer here? Clearly to the boy to whom I have previously referred. Both 'the boy' and 'he' refer anaphorically. Each requires an antecedent reference by use of an indefinite description. And while the antecedent reference is indefinite, the anaphoric reference is definite, referring to a certain boy.⁵

Sommers' second point:

Suppose, after his repeated daily intrusions into my garden, I decide to name this thoughtless stranger. I say, 'He's at it again, the little demon! He should be called Little Sherman'. Notice that in naming him, I must first make a reference to him. Thus, generally, reference by name must be subsequent to an indefinite reference. Indeed, there must be an intervening pronominal link in this anaphoric chain. We all got our names this way. Thus: 'Here is a new babe. What shall we call him? Let's call him Frank'. Couldn't we just, upon the birth of a child, the completion of a bridge, the discovery of an island, etc. simply name it? Doesn't all reference require an initial baptismal or naming act? But what are we naming in such an act? We must pick-out what is being named. We must say something like: 'Let's name him Frank', or 'I dub this land America', or 'The bridge shall be called after its designer — Jones'. Names, just like pronouns and definite descriptions, are anaphoric, requiring prior reference by an indefinite description. Indeed, since names require prior pronominal reference, we might think of them as nothing more than special duty pronouns—pro-pronouns.

The Scholastic point:

In any given sentence a term is either distributed or undistributed. A distributed term is one occurring in a referring phrase which refers to all of the supposition, denotation, of that term. Thus, in 'All men are

⁵ See Z. Vendler, *Linguistics in Philosophy*, Ithaca, 1967, chapter 2. A similar point is made by C. Chastain in "Reference and Context," *Language, Mind, and Knowledge*, ed. K. Gunderson, Minneapolis, 1975; and Sommers in *The Logical Syntax of Natural Language*.

⁶ Sommers, *op. cit.*, chapters 3-5.

mortal', 'men' is distributed because 'all men' refers to the entire denotation of 'men'. An undistributed term is one occurring in a referring phrase which refers to some undetermined part (perhaps all) of the denotation of that term. Thus, in 'Some philosophers are scientists', the term 'philosophers' is undistributed since 'some philosophers' refers to part of the denotation of 'philosopher'. In other words, a term is distributed just when its reference in a referring phrase corresponds in extension to its denotation. Universal reference is distributive. Particular reference is nondistributive. Reference is always to all or part of the denotation of a term. Referring phrases are always logically quantified terms. What of singular referring terms like 'Aristotle' and 'The boy in my garden'? They were usually taken to be implicitly universal in quantity. So reference by such terms was most often taken to be distributive.

Leibniz's point:

Universal affirmations are not simply convertible. Thus 'All Aristotle is a teacher of Alexander' cannot convert simply to 'A teacher of Alexander is Aristotle'. Nevertheless, if Aristotle is a teacher of Alexander then a teacher of Alexander is Aristotle. It seems that 'Aristotle' must have an implicit particular quantity here. For particular affirmations *are* simply convertible. Thus: if some Aristotle is a teacher of Alexander then a teacher of Alexander is Aristotle. And surely when I refer to Aristotle I refer to some man. Singular referring terms seem to have an implicit particular quantity in addition to their implicit universal quantity.

This suggests that for singular referring terms there is no logical difference between their universal and particular quantifications. The reference in each case is just the denotation of the term. For example, 'the Apostle Peter' denotes the Apostle Peter. 'All Apostle Peter' refers to the entire denotation of 'the Apostle Peter' (viz. just the Apostle Peter). 'Some Apostle Peter' refers to a part of the denotation of 'the Apostle Peter', which, having but one part, is, again, just the Apostle Peter. Generally, then, if 'N' is a singular referring phrase: 'all N'='some N'='N'. We can, indeed natural language does, ignore the implicit quantity on singulars since it makes no difference. We might even think of 'the' in definite descriptions as abbreviating 'arbitrarily either all or some'. It is this indifference to quantity which syntactically separates singular from general terms.⁷

⁷ See G.H.R. Parkinson, *Leibniz: Logical Papers*, Oxford, 1966, p. 115. The point is made more fully by Sommers in several places. See especially "Do We Need Identity?" *Philosophical Studies*, 66 (1969).

Sommers' third point:

Anaphoric reference is back reference. We have seen that definite descriptions, pronouns, and even names are used anaphorically. Their antecedents are indefinite descriptions. Terms, *per se*, do not refer, they merely denote. Reference is achieved by quantified terms (though the quantity is often, for a variety of reasons, only implicit). The denotation of an anaphoric term is always the entire reference of its antecedent. An anaphoric term always has universal quantity. It is distributed over its entire denotation (= the reference of its antecedent). Suppose I say, 'All men are mortal. They will die'. 'They' denotes what was referred to by 'all men', and refers to all of that denotation, so it has an implicit universal quantity. Thus: 'All men are mortal. They (= all of what was referred to just now) will die', or: "All men are mortal. They(= all of all men) will die'.

When the antecedent of an anaphoric term is particular (i.e. an indefinite description) the anaphoric term, in addition to referring to all of its denotation (= the reference of its antecedent), refers as well to a part of it. Thus, in such cases it has an additional particular quantity. Suppose I say 'A boy is in my garden. He is thoughtless'. Here 'he' denotes all of what 'a boy' refers to, so it has an implicit universal quantity. It also has a particular quantity since it is used to make reference to a definite boy (viz. the one referred to in the antecedent—the boy who is in my garden). In effect, then, anaphoric terms with indefinite descriptions as antecedents behave logically like singulars having an implicit indifferent (universal or particular) logical quantity.⁸

The conclusion:

It seems reasonable to conclude that the attributive use of a definite description is to make a weak anaphoric reference with universal antecedent. Such reference is logically distributive. Likewise it seems reasonable to think that the referential use of a definite description is to make a strong, definite reference. Such reference is anaphoric with an indefinite antecedent. Terms which are used to make this kind of anaphoric reference are singular (i.e. have implicit, indifferent logical quantity). Names are the paradigms of singular referring terms. Thus, phrases used to make singular reference are given a privileged place in logic over those which make just universal or just particular reference. And so the tendency to think of the attributive use of definite descriptions as not referential (or, at best, only weakly referential). Yet we have seen that singular referring terms, names and definite des-

⁸ See F. Sommers, "Frege or Leibniz", *Studies on Frege III*, ed. M. Schirn, Stuttgart, 1976.

criptions, are logically secondary to non-singular referring phrases.

Singular terms used attributively are anaphoric with universal antecedents. When used referentially they are anaphoric with particular, indefinite, antecedents. This difference accounts for the former having themselves universal quantity and the latter having indifferent quantity. This difference in logical quantity is a syntactic mark of the attributive/referential distinction. But it can only be recognized once the implicit logical quantities of anaphoric terms in general is recognized. And that recognition depends upon the acceptance of points made by Sommers, Vendler, Leibniz, and many Scholastic logicians.

Bishop's University