



کارگاه یک‌روزه

# Centred Referentialism

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## Abstract:

My general aim is to advertise and to explore an original thesis, which I call *centred referentialism* (*CR*, for short). According to CR, referential utterances and singular thoughts of the form *a is F* do two distinct things: (i) they causally *refer* to some specific situation of evaluation corresponding to a centred world, i.e. an individual at a time in the world of speech or thought, (ii) they express a content that *describes* the relevant situation. Thus on that view, an utterance in 2019 in the actual world of “Martha Argerich is a pianist” will be true iff the centred world (Martha Argerich, 2019, the actual world  $w@$ ) belongs to the property or set of centred worlds  $\{(x, t, w): \text{the individual } x \text{ is a pianist at time } t \text{ in world } w\}$ . One intended benefit of CR is that it allow us, via the recognition of a division of labour between situation of reference and descriptive content, to reconcile descriptivism (understood as a thesis about contents, where a content is never truth-evaluable or complete in itself) with referentialism (taken as a thesis about complete truth-conditions).

The talk has three parts. (I) I start by reviewing two classic arguments pulling in opposite directions: one supporting descriptivism (*Frege’s puzzle*), and the other supporting referentialism (*Putnam’s puzzle*). I argue that the conflict between the lessons of those arguments arises only given a tacit commitment to propositionalism, the doctrine that the contents of utterances and thoughts are propositions, i.e. contents having at most one truth-value relative to each possible world. (II) In the second part, I show how CR is compatible with the lessons of Putnam’s puzzle regarding complete truth-conditions. I compare CR to propositional referentialism (the view that the contents of some utterances and thoughts are singular propositions) and to David Lewis’s property view (according to which the contents of all utterances and thoughts are properties that the subject self-ascribes). Against propositional referentialism I argue that, if we want to retain the Fregean assumption that the cognitive values of utterances and thoughts are to be explained in terms of truth-conditional contents (descriptivism about modes

of presentation), CR has advantages over rival accounts invoking singular propositions. I highlight that, unlike Lewis's egocentric version, CR as I construe it does not have the unpalatable consequence that complete truth-conditions can never be shared in communication. (III) In the third part, I indicate how CR can be developed to yield a new solution to Frege's puzzle. I borrow from Robert Stalnaker his notion of context defined in terms of pragmatic presuppositions, but I add centred worlds to his propositionalist picture. In predicative statements of the form *a is F*, informativeness is explained in terms of two contents: the content asserted (here, the property of being F) and the content presupposed. For instance, in a context where it is presupposed of Olga (in 2019 in the actual world) that she is a Russian pianist—which presupposition is true iff  $(\text{Olga}, 2019, w_{@}) \in \{(w, t, x): x \text{ is a Russian pianist at } t \text{ in } w\}$ —the assertion "Olga smokes" (i) is true iff  $(\text{Olga}, 2019, w_{@}) \in \{(w, t, x): x \text{ smokes at } t \text{ in } w\}$ , and (ii) is informative iff  $\{(w, t, x): x \text{ is a Russian pianist at } t \text{ in } w\} \cap \{(w, t, x): x \text{ smokes at } t \text{ in } w\} \neq \{(w, t, x): x \text{ is a Russian pianist at } t \text{ in } w\} \neq \emptyset$ . To specify the way in which an assertion is informative in a given context is then to indicate which centred worlds it rules out from that context. Now, identity statements are limiting cases, on this view, in which no *content* is asserted (although the statements do have complete truth-conditions). In those cases, informativeness is explained solely in terms of presupposed contents. For example, an assertion of "Hesperus is Phosphorus" (in the actual world) is true iff  $(\text{Venus}, w_{@}) = (\text{Venus}, w_{@})$ , i.e. iff the particular situations referred to by 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' are identical, which they are. Still, the assertion can be informative if intersecting the set of centred worlds that were compatible with what was presupposed of the referent of 'Hesperus' (say, the property of being the evening star) and the set of centred worlds that were compatible with what was presupposed of the referent of 'Phosphorus' (say, the property of being the morning star) eliminates some centred world from the set of centred worlds that are compatible with what is presupposed of what comes to be regarded as a common referent of 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus'. The new information provided by the identity statement relative to this context corresponds to the centred worlds that belong to one of the original two sets but not to their intersection: viz., the ones relative to which the property of being *both* the evening star and the morning star is false.

زمان: شنبه ۳۱ فروردین ماه ۹۸،

جلسه اول: ساعت ۱۰-۱۲

جلسه دوم: ساعت ۱۵-۱۷

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