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Smith's Murderer and Teetotaller Drinking Martini Half a Century Later – on Donnellan's Theory of Definite Descriptions

In the paper I discuss the legacy of Donnellan's famous theory of definite descriptions in which he distinguishes between attributive and referential uses of these expressions. On the one hand I sketch the philosophical context within which Donnellan developed his theory. I put emphasis on the innovatory aspect of the theory by comparing it to a slightly older account proposed by Strawson. On the other hand, I discuss one of the main debates that have their source in Donnellan's work. Namely, the debate between so called semanticists, who claim that the distinction between two uses of descriptions is of semantic nature, and so called pragmaticists, who believe that two ways of using descriptions is a pragmatic phenomenon while the semantic properties of descriptions have been analysed correctly in Russell's theory of descriptions.

Keywords:

definite descriptions, referential use, attributive use, reference, Donnellan's distinction, Donnellan, Strawson, Kripke, semantics, pragmatics