I. Administrative

A. Announcements: Reading Essay #1 due on Thursday

B. General Questions?

II. The Nature of Language -- review

A. What is language?

B. What is a language?

C. How does a language become the language for a particular group of speakers?

III. Reference as Meaning

A. RTM: The Idea

1. If you take meanings to be representational, then you will look for what it is they represent. In many cases, that would appear to be non-linguistic parts of the world. E.g., names represent things named, and adjectives would appear to correspond to ways of being in the world.

2. There are many different technical relations that bind language to the world: naming, designation, denotation, connotation, … Reference stands out as pre-eminent among them because it is exemplified by names and other terms used to get at the world. As such, it is an obvious candidate for inclusion into an analysis of meaning.

3. One Starting Point: since representational meaning is clearly on display in referential relations between language and the world, take this to be the paradigmatic type of meaning and use this to analyze all other meaning relations as more or less central.

   a. This is the Referential Theory of Meaning (RTM).

   b. On RTM, meaning is reference, so if you have anything that is meaningful, it must refer to something, and if
anything has a referent, it’s meaningful.

4. Argument for RTM:

P1. Meaning is representation.

P2. Representation consists of one thing (viz., the representation) standing for another thing (viz., the represented).

P3. Reference is the relation that makes representation so understood possible.

P4. Thus, reference makes meaning possible (P1, P3).

C. Therefore, meaning must be analyzed in terms of reference.

B. Developing RTM

1. In the RTM, certain types of terms are going to be prototype cases. These are the singular terms, i.e., things like names, pronouns, and definite descriptions that refer to particular things.

2. If RTM is to succeed as a general ToM, it surely must in the first instance work at home in its prototype cases.

3. This is why definite descriptions have been such a battleground for semanticists over the years. These are included as prototype cases, but there are good reasons to believe that these do not function as referring terms.

4. Thus, much of semantics over the past 120 years or so has focused on making sense out of this category of term, since success here could ramify into success everywhere. (Even if you don’t have these aspirations, it would still seem to be the case that reference is going to be important to a ToM even if the ToM isn’t an instance of RTM, but even this is threatened by the critique of definite descriptions.)

C. Debating RTM

1. Methodological Matters

a. One can make direct arguments for a semantic proposal by serving up reasons that establish the theoretical virtues of
the proposal *simpliciter*. One way to do this by starting with data and then extracting necessary and sufficient conditions from that data that support an explanatory hypothesis about how those data work.

b. One can also make *indirect* arguments by establishing that if the proposal is true, then certain other problems or challenges that bear directly on the data would be solved.

c. In the history of philosophical semantics, indirect arguments have been the primary order of business, setting the agenda and motivating theoretical maneuvers.

2. While no one really stands out as having developed RTM in its full glory (early Frege being a possible exception), it has been the stalking horse of many within the philosophy of language.

3. Most arguments against it are driven by semantic problems that critics claim it cannot surmount.

4. The nature of the debate has proceeded in this fashion: pose problem, recommend modification to RTM that gets past problem, critique modification, respond, etc.

IV. Problems for RTM

A. *Reference is not necessary*

1. Not all words name or refer to something (e.g., ‘a’, ‘sake’). [3-5]

2. Words that would appear to be referential can be meaningful without there existing anything to which they refer (e.g., Moriarty). [10]

3. Sentences can be meaningful that deny reference, either explicitly or implicitly. [11]

B. *Reference is not sufficient*

1. If reference were sufficient, you should be able to line up the referents, *Gulliver’s Travels*-style, and get sentential meanings. But that underspecifies such meanings, since there are many things such a collection could mean. Something more is needed. [5]
2. Identity statements can be significant (e.g., “Cicero is Tully”), but if the meaning of a name is simply its referent, this cannot be explained. “Cicero is Tully” would be identical in meaning on this account to “Cicero is Cicero”. [11-12]

3. If meaning were just reference, then phenomena involving substitution in opaque contexts would have no explanation. For example, if RTM is true, then there should be no problem substituting co-referring names in belief contexts, but clearly there is. [12]

V. Modifying RTM, I: Russell

A. What look like referring terms really aren’t referring terms at all.

1. The locus classicus for this move is “On Denoting”, in which Russell argues that linguistic appearances can be misleading, and that the “logical form” of meaningful sentences involving apparent referring terms can reveal a very different reality.

2. In particular, definite descriptions—once taken to be a hallmark singular referring term—do not even exist at the level of logical form! They are analyzed away into conditions that are fully general and quantificational. (E.g., …)

3. Beyond this, Russell recommends a version of the “Name Claim”, according to which the appearance/reality confusion extends to proper names. They are taken to be equivalent in meaning to definite descriptions, and so do not exist at logical form either.

B. What results isn’t really a version of RTM, although it is clearly influenced by it. The theory as such can avoid the various problems, especially when supplemented by the Name Claim.

C. Problems:

1. Russell’s theory implies falsehood where there should be failure of truth value altogether, e.g., in the non-referential cases like “The present King of France is bald.”

2. Russell’s theory does not take into consideration context, and so cannot be extended to cover indefinite definite descriptions.
3. Russell gets the *attributive* use correct, but cannot handle the *referential* use of definite descriptions.

4. The view struggles to capture data involving anaphora, plural definite descriptions, or generic uses of definite descriptions.

5. The Name Claim fails in various ways to do justice to our practice of name use. (More on this next week.)