Formal Semantics: Lecture 6

Some case studies

# Names vs descriptions

## Case 1

From an intuitive point of view, do these mean the same thing?

* Plato didn’t like rain.
* The most famous Greek philosopher didn’t like rain.
* The author of *The Republic* didn’t like rain.

Is there a necessary connection between the name *Plato* and the description *the author of the Republic*?

## Case 2

If your intuitive reply to Case 1 was “yes”, then do you also consider these sentences to be synonymous?

* Plato is the most famous Greek philosopher.
* Plato is Plato.
* The most famous Greek philosopher is the most famous Greek philosopher.

## Case 3

Irrespective of whether Plato is indeed the author of *The Republic* (not a difficult one to imagine...), consider:

* Plato sleeps.
* The author of *The Republic* sleeps.

Notice that we have a predicate (*sleep*) and either a name or a description. Given that predicates are of type <e,t>, what does this tell us about the composition of:

* The name with the predicate
* The description with the predicate

# Pronouns

Consider the following three sets of examples. Can you detect any difference in the interpretation of the pronouns? In each case, ask yourself, what kind of information would I need to be able to satisfactorily identify the referent of the pronoun?)

## Case 1

* **She**’s really junior.

[Spoken by a member of parliament in the corridor, to a colleague, about a lady who’s just walked by.]

## Case 2

* Only Jenny serves **her** constituents.

## Case 3

* Few people admire Obama and **they’re** naive.