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Chapter 14

Context and Communication Stephen Neale

14.1 Introductory Remarks

As we saw in . . . Chapter 2 [of *Descriptions*], *prima facie* there is a case to be made for the view that descriptions may, on occasion, function more like referring expressions than quantifiers. Consequently, if Russell's theory is to serve as a *general* account of the semantics of descriptive phrases, an explanation of what is going on in such cases must be provided. And this means taking into account the powerful effects of *context* on the interpretation of utterances.

This breaks down into two distinct tasks. First, we need to graft onto the framework . . . an account of context-sensitive expressions like indexicals and demonstratives, if only for the reason that definite descriptions—indeed quantifiers quite generally—may contain such expressions as *constituents*. Second, we need, at least in broad outline, a general framework within which to discuss the relationship between the genuinely semantical features of an expression ζ and those features of the use of ζ that issue, at least in part, from nonsemantical facts about the context of utterance and from constraints governing rational discourse. In particular, we need a framework within which we can provide a reasonably clear and precise characterization of the intuitive Gricean distinction between the *proposition expressed* by an utterance and the proposition (or propositions) the speaker seeks to communicate by it, what we might call *the proposition(s) meant* by the speaker.

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In 14.2, I shall make some preliminary remarks about the history and nature of the referential challenge to the Theory of Descriptions. In 14.3, I begin the examination of the effects of context on the interpretation of descriptions with the aid of a standard theory of indexicality. Section 14.4 is primarily an exegetical discussion of various strands of Grice's work on meaning and implicature, which will be put to use in 14.5... (Grice's own machinery and terminology will be modified slightly to suit the present discussion, but this section can still be skipped by those familiar with Grice's program.) In 14.5, I attempt to spell out the details of the Gricean response to the referential challenge. In 14.6, I turn to the problems apparently raised by so-called incomplete descriptions like "the table."

14.2 The Referential Challenge

In the 1960s, several philosophers published papers in which they pointed to apparently *referential* "uses" or "functions" of definite descriptions. Marcus (1961), for example, noted a namelike use of descriptions. As she puts it, over a period of time a description may come to be used rather like a proper name (as "an identifying tag") its descriptive meaning "lost or ignored." Marcus suggests that "the evening star" and "the Prince of Denmark" are examples of this sort. Similarly, Mitchell (1962) distinguished between two "functions" of descriptions, one of which is to *identify* an individual in much the same way as a name does.¹ And Rundle (1965) argued for a genuinely referential interpretation of descriptions that could be put to use in modal contexts. According to Rundle, the *prima facie* ambiguity in a sentence like

(1) The first person in space might not have been Gagarin

should be seen as the product of an ambiguity in the definite article: the definite description "the first man in space" is ambiguous between Russellian and referential interpretations.²

In 1966, Keith Donnellan published an influential paper in which he distinguished between what he called *attributive* and *referential* uses of descriptions; he then argued that Russell's theory did not provide an accurate account of sentences containing descriptions used referentially. To illustrate his distinction, Donnellan asks us to consider a sentence like

(2) Smith's murderer is insane

as used in the following two scenarios:

(i) A detective discovers Smith's mutilated body and has no idea who has killed him. Looking at the body, the detective exclaims, "Smith's murderer is insane."

(ii) Jones is on trial for Smith's murder, and you and I are convinced of his guilt. Seeing Jones rant and rave in court, I say to you, "Smith's murderer is insane."

On Donnellan's account, in case (i) the description "Smith's murderer" is being used attributively; in case (ii) it is being used referentially. In the attributive case, Russell's analysis may well provide an accurate account of the proposition expressed. That is, in this situation the detective plausibly expresses the descriptive proposition that whoever it was that uniquely murdered Smith is insane. But in the referential case, Donnellan urges, the description functions like a referring expression not a quantifier phrase, and the proposition expressed is not faithfully captured by Russell's quantificational analysis. According to Donnellan, I will, by my use of "Smith's murderer," be *referring to* Jones, and hence I will be saying something *about him*, viz., that he (Jones, that man in the dock) is insane.³

Grice (1969) noted a similar distinction:

(1) A group of men is discussing the situation arising from the death of a business acquaintance, of whose private life they know nothing, except that (as they think) he lived extravagantly, with a household staff that included a butler. One of them says "Well, Jones' butler will be seeking a new position."

(2) Earlier, another group has just attended a party at Jones' house, at which their hats and coats were looked after by a dignified individual in dark clothes with a wing-collar, a portly man with protruding ears, whom they heard Jones addressing as "Old Boy," and who at one point was discussing with an old lady the cultivation of vegetable marrows. One of the group says "Jones' butler got the hats and coats mixed up." (This volume, p. 197)

Grice points to two important features of case (2) that are not shared by case (1). First, only in case (2) has some particular individual been "described as,' referred to as,' or 'called,' Jones' butler by the speaker" (p. 197). Second, in case (2), someone who knew that Jones had no butler and who knew that the man with the protruding ears, etc. was actually Jones' gardener "would also be in a position to claim that the speaker had *misdescribed* that individual as Jones' butler" (p. 198).⁴ As a preliminary convenience, let us take the first of these features to be characteristic of *referential* usage (a more useful and precise characterization will be provided in 14.5).

Unlike Donnellan, Grice did *not* feel that there was a problem for Russell here. On Grice's account, the intuitive distinction between case (1) and case (2) is quite consistent with the view that "descriptive phrases have no relevant systematic duplicity of meaning; their meaning is given by a Russellian account" (1969, p. 199). If one is to understand what is going on in case (2), Grice suggests, one needs to invoke an independently motivated distinction between what a speaker *says* (in a certain technical sense) and what he or she *means* (also in a technical sense)—or, as I shall put it in 14.4 and 14.5, between the *proposition expressed* and the *proposition(s) meant*.⁵

Those influenced by Donnellan have tended to see things rather differently. Despite some early equivocation, in the 1970s a very simple and exact claim emerged:

(A1) If a speaker *S* uses a definite description "the *F*" referentially in an utterance *u* of "the *F* is *G*," then "the *F*" functions as a referring expression and the proposition expressed by *u* is *object-dependent* (rather than descriptive).⁶

As I mentioned in Chapter 2 [of *Descriptions*], I shall take this claim (or pair of claims) to entail the view that there is a semantically distinct referential interpretation of definite descriptions. On this view, descriptions are *semantically ambiguous* between Russellian and "referential" interpretations, i.e., the definite article is lexically ambiguous.⁷ One of the main aims of the present chapter is to compare the view that definite descriptions are ambiguous with the Gricean view that referential usage is a nonsemantical phenomenon.

For convenience, let us continue with the policy . . . of treating as interchangeable the locutions (a) "the proposition expressed by *S*'s utterance *u* of ϕ ," (b) "the proposition *S* expressed by *S*'s utterance *u* of ϕ ," and (c) "the proposition *S* expressed by uttering ϕ ," where *S* is the speaker, *u* is a particular dated utterance, and ϕ is a sentence of English. Let's now define what we might call a *basic case* of a referential use of a definite description "the *F*" as it occurs in a particular utterance *u* of "the *F* is *G*" made by a sincere speaker *S*. In the basic case four conditions obtain:

- (a) There is an object *b* such that *S* knows that *b* is uniquely *F*;
- (b) It is *b* that *S* wishes to communicate something about;
- (c) "The *F*" occurs in an extensional context;⁸
- (d) There are no pronouns anaphoric on this occurrence of "the *F*."

According to the "referentialist," if these four conditions are satisfied, the proposition expressed by *u* is true if and only if *b* is *G*. Thus the proposition expressed by *u* will be true on the referential interpretation if and only if it is true on the Russellian interpretation. So unless the referentialist can provide an argument that demonstrates beyond any doubt that one must entertain an object-dependent proposition about *b* in order to grasp the proposition expressed by *u*, he or she is forced to move away from the basic case in order to provide a convincing case for an ambiguity. (There is still, of course, an onus on the Russellian to explain how a referential use of a description can arise from general pragmatic principles.)

To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever provided the requisite argument for an ambiguity in the basic case. However, there are, in the literature, four quite distinct arguments for a non-Russellian interpretation that involve departing from the basic case in one way or another. The first such argument I shall call the "Argument from Misdescription." This argument involves toying around with conditions (a) and (b) in order to produce cases in which the Russellian and referential analyses yield propositions that differ in truth-value. The referentialist then urges that our ordinary intuitions favor the referential interpretation.

The second argument for a non-Russellian interpretation I shall call the "Argument from Incompleteness." This involves relaxing condition (a) in order that "the *F*" may be an "incomplete" definite description like "the table," which seems to resist Russell's analysis on account of not being uniquely-denoting. Again, an interpretation of such descriptions as referring expressions is supposed to get things right.

The third type of argument involves dispensing with condition (c) in order to examine sentences in which definite descriptions occur in nonextensional contexts, such as those created by modal and temporal operators and psychological verbs. Here a variety of interconnected considerations about scope, variable-binding, and opacity seem to have convinced some philosophers that the postulation of a referential (or otherwise non-Russellian) interpretation of descriptions will circumvent technical difficulties that arise for a unitary quantificational analysis. For example, it is sometimes claimed that so-called *de re* readings of sentences containing definite descriptions and nonextensional operators either lie beyond (or else stretch the plausibility of) Russell's theory because of semantical or syntactical constraints on quantification into nonextensional contexts.

Arguments that are based on such considerations I shall call versions of the "Argument from Opacity."

The fourth type of argument for an ambiguity involves dispensing with condition (d) in order to allow for pronouns that are anaphoric on "the *F*." It is then argued that certain anaphoric relations cannot be accounted for if the description is analyzed in accordance with Russell's theory. This argument comes in several different forms, some of which interact in interesting ways with versions of some of the other arguments. I shall call the general form of the argument the "Argument from Anaphora."

In this chapter, I shall address only the Arguments from Misdescription and Incompleteness. The Arguments from Opacity and Anaphora bring up questions about necessity, opacity, quantifier scope, syntactical structure, and variable-binding that we will not have the machinery to address [here].⁹ Before looking at *any* of the arguments, however, we need to say a little about the role of context in the interpretation of utterances.

14.3 Context and the Propositions Expressed

Russell rarely invokes the intuitive distinction between sentences and *utterances* of sentences. However, we saw [in 2.2 of *Descriptions*] that once the philosophical underpinnings of the Theory of Descriptions are in focus, it is clear that Russell is concerned with the propositions expressed by particular utterances of sentences containing descriptive phrases; he is *not* primarily concerned with the more abstract notion of the linguistic meaning of sentence-*types*.

To facilitate discussion, let's distinguish between what we can call *meaning* and *value*; that is, between the *linguistic meaning of an expression* ζ , and the *semantical value of a particular dated utterance* u of ζ . Expressions have meanings; utterances of expressions have values. . . .¹⁰ [T]he semantical value of an utterance of a sentence ϕ is a *proposition*. The semantical value of an utterance of a subsentential expression α is whatever the utterance of α contributes to the identity of the proposition expressed by the utterance of the sentence ϕ of which α is a constituent. For the purposes of this chapter, it will be convenient to adopt Russell's talk of object-dependent propositions containing their "subjects" as constituents. (The reason is that this way of characterizing object-dependent propositions is utilized by several philosophers who have argued for a semantically distinct referential interpretation of definite descriptions. I will be addressing two of their official arguments later in this chapter, and work-

ing with the same conception of a proposition will make it easier to focus on the relevant issues and avoid orthogonal engagements. My use of this notion of a proposition should not be confused with any sort of commitment to its overall philosophical utility.)

On this account, the semantical value of an utterance of a *referring* expression is just the expression's *referent*. The characteristic property of an utterance of an *indexical* expression is that its semantical value depends, in a systematic way, upon the *context of utterance*. Thus the characteristic property of an utterance of an *indexical referring* expression is that its referent depends, in a systematic way, upon the context of utterance.

Consider the first person singular pronoun "I," as it occurs in the sentence "I am cold." If I utter this sentence right now, I will be the referent of my utterance of "I." But if you utter the very same sentence right now, you will be the referent of your utterance of "I." It is clear, then, that distinct utterances of "I" may receive distinct individuals as their respective semantical values. But this does not mean that the *linguistic meaning* of the expression-type "I" changes from occasion to occasion, or person to person. To know the linguistic meaning of the word "I" is to know something constant across utterances, roughly that the referent is the individual using the word. Similarly for "you": the referent is the addressee (or addressees).

The same distinction needs to be made for demonstrative noun phrases such as "this," "that," "that man," etc. Although different utterances of such expressions may have different *semantical values*, we are not forced to conclude that they have variable *linguistic meanings*. This is something that Russell apparently saw:

The word "this" appears to have the character of a proper name, in the sense that it merely designates an object without in any degree describing it . . . the word "this" is one word, which has, *in some sense*, a constant meaning. But if we treat it as a mere name, it cannot have in any sense a constant meaning, for a name means merely what it designates, and the designatum of "this" is continually changing. . . . (Russell 1948, pp. 103–104)

Although Russell was close to distinguishing between meaning and value here, he does not seem to be guided by any general considerations reflecting the distinction between expression-types and particular utterances of expressions. Rather, he is concerned with the fact that demonstratives seem to be a bit like ordinary names (they refer without describing) and a bit like descriptions (they may be associated with different individuals on different occasions of utterance), but are really neither.¹¹ However, from

the perspective I am adopting, the distinction should be seen as a reflex of the distinction between expression-types and particular utterances of expressions.

In simple formal languages like the first-order predicate calculus, there is neither room nor need to distinguish between meaning and value. Not until we introduce context-dependent expressions does the relevant gap open up. Following Strawson (1950), we might say that mastery of the linguistic meaning of an indexical referring expression consists in the mastery of some sort of *rule* or *recipe for referring* that takes into account the situation of utterance. The linguistic meaning of such an expression might be *identified* with this rule. For instance, since the referent of an utterance of “I” is simply whoever is speaking, the rule for “I” might be characterized as: *the referent is the individual speaking*. (To characterize the linguistic meaning of “I” in this way is not, of course, to say that “I” and “the individual speaking” have the same linguistic meaning.) And since the referent of an utterance of “you” is whoever is being addressed by the speaker, the rule for “you” might say something like: *the referent is whoever is being addressed*.

Such proposals have been implemented by taking the linguistic meaning of an indexical expression to be a function from contexts to semantical values.¹² On this account, a context C can be represented as an ordered n -tuple, the elements of which are features of the situation of utterance relevant to determining semantical value. For example, on a simple model, C might be represented as a quadruple $\langle s, a, t, p \rangle$, where s = the speaker, a = the addressee, t = the time of utterance, and p = the place of utterance. Following Lewis (1972), let's call the particular features that make up C “contextual coordinates.” Using $[[\zeta]]$ to represent the function that is the linguistic meaning of an expression ζ , we can formulate some elementary rules:

$$[[I]](\langle s, a, t, p \rangle) = s$$

$$[[you]](\langle s, a, t, p \rangle) = a$$

$$[[now]](\langle s, a, t, p \rangle) = t$$

$$[[here]](\langle s, a, t, p \rangle) = p.$$

In contrast to these “pure indexicals,” Kaplan (1977) has suggested that genuinely demonstrative uses of the demonstrative pronouns “this” and “that,” the personal pronouns “he,” “she,” “him,” “his,” and “her,” and demonstrative descriptions like “this man,” and “that woman,” require

accompanying “demonstrations,” and that the rule for a genuine demonstrative specify that *the referent is the object of that demonstration*. To capture this we can construe a context as an ordered quintuple

$$\langle s, a, \langle d_1, \dots, d_n \rangle, t, p \rangle$$

where d_1, \dots, d_n are the objects of any demonstrations $\delta_1, \dots, \delta_n$ in the utterance.¹³

It is important to see that indexical pronouns like “I” and “you,” demonstrative expressions like “this,” “that,” “this vase,” and “that man,” and demonstrative occurrences of personal pronouns like “he” and “she” are genuine referring expressions and hence subject to (R3), a fact that is sometimes overlooked because of their context-sensitivity. As Kaplan (1977) has emphasized, once we distinguish the situation of utterance from the actual or counterfactual situation at which the proposition expressed is to be evaluated for truth or falsity, the intrinsically rigid nature of demonstratives is plain to see. Suppose I point to someone and say to you

(1) That man is a spy.

The referent of my utterance of the demonstrative “that man” is the person I am demonstrating in the situation of utterance. However, we do not want to say that the definite description “the man I am demonstrating” determines the referent of (this particular utterance of) “that man.” The proposition expressed by my (actual) utterance of (1) is true at some worlds in which I fail to point during my lifetime. And descriptions such as “the man I am talking about” or “the man I have in mind” will not do because the proposition expressed by my (actual) utterance of (1) is true at some worlds in which (e.g.) I never utter a word or think about anyone. It is clear, then, that a sentence of the form “that F is G ” is semantically very different from a sentence of the form “the F is G .” An utterance of the former expresses an object-dependent proposition; an utterance of the latter expresses an object-independent proposition.

Under certain reasonable assumptions to do with compositionality, a corollary of the distinction between the meaning of a referring expression b and the value (i.e., referent) of a particular utterance of b is a distinction between the meaning of a sentence “ b is G ” and the value of (i.e., the proposition expressed by) an utterance of “ b is G .” This comes out clearly when we turn to *understanding*. Suppose I have a room in which I keep nothing but a private vase collection. One day, I let a friend into the room and leave him there to browse. After a few minutes he calls out to me

(2) This vase is broken.

There is a clear sense in which I cannot grasp the proposition expressed by his utterance unless I establish the referent of “this vase.” (This, of course follows from (R1), on the assumption that the demonstrative phrase “this vase” is a genuine referring expression; see above.) But there is an equally clear sense in which I know the *meaning* of the sentence uttered, simply by virtue of my knowledge of English—that is, by virtue of my knowledge of the meanings of the words of which the sentence is composed, and my ability to project the meanings of phrases on the basis of the meanings of their parts and their syntactical organization. We might say that although I do not know *which* proposition my friend has expressed, I know the *sort of* proposition he has expressed. He has said *of* some particular vase or other—which I have yet to identify—that it is broken. Another way of putting this is to say that although I do not come to entertain an object-dependent proposition concerning any particular vase, I come to entertain an object-independent proposition to the effect that one of my vases is broken.

(Consider the following nonlinguistic analogy. My friend says nothing while he is in the room, but after a few minutes I hear a crash. I deduce that he has broken one of my vases. It is in virtue of the fact that some particular vase broke that I heard what I heard, and that I came to believe what I came to believe. However, I only came to have an object-independent belief to the effect that one of my vases was broken, not an object-dependent belief concerning any particular vase.)

Precisely the same considerations apply in the case of pure indexicals. Suppose I return home at 7:30 P.M. and find the following message on my answering machine: “Guess what? I just flew in from London and I want to take you out for dinner tonight. I’ll pick you up at eight.” The voice is female and sounds familiar, but owing to the poor quality of the machine I cannot recognize it. Since I fail to establish the referent of “I,” I fail to establish the proposition expressed. But I know the *sort of* proposition expressed: that’s why I take a shower rather than start cooking.

It is important to see that quantifiers, including descriptions, may contain indexical expressions as constituents:

every *currently* registered Democrat
the *present* king of France
the first person *I* saw this morning
a woman who came to see *you*

the men who delivered *your* sofa
the girl who made *this* vase
most philosophers *I* have met
my mother
that woman’s car.

Now it would be quite inappropriate to object to the Theory of Descriptions on the grounds that the implication of uniqueness is not honored by a sentence containing an indexical description. It is worth running through an example just to see how an indexical description like “my mother” works. . . . [F]or Russell the semantical value—what he would call the “meaning”—of an utterance of a referring expression “*b*” is just its referent; and the semantical value of an utterance of a sentence “*b* is *G*” is an object-dependent proposition. An utterance of a definite description, by contrast, will not take an object as its semantical value, because a description is a quantifier not a referring expression. The semantical value of an utterance of “the *F* is *G*” is a descriptive proposition to the effect that there is one and only one thing that is *F* and that one thing is *G*. There is no object for which the grammatical subject “the *F*” stands that is a genuine constituent of that proposition. Before looking at “my mother,” let’s look at “Stephen Neale’s mother.” An utterance of

(3) Stephen Neale’s mother is English

expresses the proposition we can represent as

(4) [the *x*: *x* mother-of Stephen Neale] (*x* is English)

which invokes the relational property *being mother of Stephen Neale*, i.e., $(\lambda x)(x \text{ mother-of Stephen Neale})$.¹⁴ But what property gets into the proposition expressed by an utterance of

(5) My mother is English

made by me? The same relational property. This does not mean that the relational description “Stephen Neale’s mother,” and the indexical description “my mother,” have the same linguistic meaning. On the contrary, they have quite different rules of use. Only *I* can use the latter to invoke the property of being mother of *me*. However, you may use “My mother” to invoke the property of being mother of *you*. The fact that the denotation of “my mother” changes from speaker to speaker poses no threat to the Russellian implication of uniqueness. When I utter “My mother is English,” unique motherhood is relative to *me*; when you utter it, it is relative to *you*.¹⁵

It is not, then, the *sentence* “the *F* is *G*” that carries any *particular* implication of uniqueness, but particular dated utterances of that sentence. The linguistic meaning of the sentence is just a rule for use that, among other things, specifies that the description is being used correctly only if there is, relative to the particular context $\langle s, a, \langle d_1, \dots, d_n \rangle, t, p \rangle$, just one object satisfying the description in question. It is clear, then, that the Theory of Descriptions is not threatened by the existence of descriptions containing indexical components. Rather, this gives the Theory of Descriptions yet more expressive power (the importance of indexical descriptions will come out in 14.5 and 14.7).

In this section, I have made the common assumption that the proposition expressed by an utterance *u* of a sentence ϕ bears a tight relationship to the linguistic meaning of ϕ . To the extent that this relationship *is* tight, there is also a tight connection between understanding ϕ and understanding an utterance *u* of ϕ . But as we saw, there are several respects in which the linguistic meaning of ϕ may underdetermine the proposition expressed by *u* because of the various parameters left open by indexical expressions, parameters that must be pinned down by *u*'s contextual coordinates.

Notice that knowledge of the language to which ϕ belongs together with knowledge of the relevant contextual coordinates will not necessarily put a hearer *H* in position to grasp the proposition expressed by *u*. The existence of lexical and structural ambiguity means that a particular string of sounds may satisfy the phonological criteria for being a tokening of sentence ϕ or of sentence ϕ^* (“Visiting relatives can be a nuisance”). Then there are the interpretive problems raised by (e.g.) names and pronouns. Consider an utterance of

(6) Nicola thinks she should become a banker.

H will need to assign referents to “Nicola” and to the pronoun “she,” which may or may not be anaphoric on “Nicola.”¹⁶ *H* is surely seeking the reading that *S* intended. Indeed, if *H* assigns to “Nicola” a referent other than the one *S* had in mind, it is clear that *H* has not grasped the proposition expressed.¹⁷

For a referring expression “*b*” and a monadic predicate “—is *G*,” the identity of the proposition expressed by a particular utterance of “*b* is *G*” is dependent upon the identity of the object *b* referred to by “*b*.” The utterance expresses a true proposition just in case *b* is *G*. The proposition in question is object-dependent in the sense that it simply could not be expressed, or even entertained, if *b* did not exist.

The connection with contemporary talk of *truth conditions* can be made explicit by focusing on what it means to understand a proposition. To understand an object-dependent proposition, one must have identifying knowledge of the thing the proposition is about. In addition, one must know what property is being ascribed to that object. Thus we reach the position advanced by Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, that understanding a proposition involves knowing what is the case if it is true.¹⁸ And by extension we might therefore say that understanding an utterance (of a sentence) involves knowing its truth conditions—indeed its truth conditions in actual and counterfactual situations—and that a specification of the semantical value of an utterance (of a sentence) consists, at least in part, in a specification of its truth-conditions.

14.4 Propositions Expressed and Proposition Meant

It is clear that a hearer *H* may gather a lot more from an utterance than the proposition it expresses. Quite different thoughts may come to *H*'s mind. Let's begin with some trivial examples of the sort we shall *not* be concerned with. I am in a restaurant in San Francisco; the waitress asks me if I'd like an aperitif and I reply,

(1) I'd like a gin and tonic, please.

On the basis of certain acoustic properties of my utterance, the waitress may come to believe that I am English, or that I have a cold or hay fever. Such propositions are irrelevant to the communicative act performed, as are other propositions that are, in some sense, *made available* by my speech act but that may not spring immediately to mind, such as the proposition that I can speak English or the proposition that I am not dead.

Of considerably more importance for current concerns is the fact, emphasized by Grice (1961, 1967), that there are speech acts involving, in some communicatively *relevant* way, propositions other than the proposition strictly and literally expressed. A speaker may express a *particular* proposition by means of an utterance yet at the same time *communicate* something beyond this. Consider the following example due to Grice (1961). You are writing a letter of recommendation for one of your students who has applied for a position teaching philosophy at another institution. You write

(2) Jones has beautiful handwriting and is always very punctual.

The people who read this letter will surely conclude that you do not rate Jones very highly as a philosopher. And if so, you have succeeded in communicating a proposition to that effect. There is an intuitive distinction here between the proposition you expressed by the utterance and the proposition (or propositions) you sought to convey by it, what we might call the *proposition(s) meant*.

There is no temptation to say that the proposition that you do not rate Jones very highly as a philosopher is (or is a consequence of) the proposition expressed by your utterance. There is no specifiable method of correlating this proposition with the proposition determined by the linguistic meaning of (2) together with the contextual coordinates of the utterance. The sentence has a clear linguistic meaning based on the meanings of its parts and their syntactical arrangement, a meaning that has nothing to do with your assessment of Jones' philosophical abilities, even when the relevant contextual coordinates are plugged in. On the other hand, we might say that *you mean*, by your utterance of (2), that you do not rate Jones very highly. This is something that *you* have implied or suggested by uttering (2) in this particular context.

It is clear, then, that there may, on occasion, be a divergence between the proposition (or propositions) strictly and literally expressed by an utterance and the proposition(s) meant. (In the case we just considered, they might well be disjoint; in other case they might not be; see below.) Indeed, there seems little doubt that any plausible account of the way language works in communication will have to appeal to a distinction of this sort.

We have reached the familiar Gricean view, then, that at least three different notions need to be distinguished when talking about the "meaning" of a sentence ϕ as uttered by a speaker S on a given occasion: (i) the linguistic meaning of the sentence ϕ ; (ii) the semantical value of ϕ relative to the context of utterance (the proposition expressed); and (iii) what S meant by uttering ϕ (the proposition(s) meant). But we need to get a lot clearer about the notion in (iii) and its relation to the notion in (ii) before we can use either with any confidence in our investigation.

In the simplest cases we might say that the proposition *expressed* is meant, and that in many such cases the proposition expressed *exhausts* the proposition(s) meant. But, of course, in Grice's letter of recommendation example this is not the case at all. How, then, might we characterize when a proposition is meant? One constraint that comes to mind is the following: For a particular utterance u of ϕ made by a speaker S to a

hearer H , a proposition p is meant only if, on the basis of uttering ϕ , S intends H to entertain p . But we can go further than this. Borrowing from Grice's (1957, 1967) seminal work in this area, we might impose the following constraint on what it is for S to mean that p by uttering ϕ :

- (G1) By uttering ϕ , S means that p only if for some audience H , S utters ϕ intending:
1. H to actively entertain the thought that p , and
 2. H to recognize that S intends (1).

Consider the restaurant scene again, where the waitress learns from certain acoustic properties of my utterance of

(1) I'd like a gin and tonic, please

that I am English (or that I have a cold or hay fever). All *I mean* by my utterance is that I'd like a gin and tonic; I do *not* mean that I am English (or that I have a cold or hay fever). The first intention mentioned in (1) prevents such communicatively irrelevant propositions from being classed as part of what I mean because I do not *intend* the waitress to entertain the thought that I am English (or the thought that I have a cold or hay fever).

A modification of the same example will explain the role of the intention mentioned in (2). Suppose I do actually intend the waitress to realize that I have a cold (in order to get sympathy), or to realize that I am English (because I think I will get better service as a tourist), but I don't want her to realize that this is my intention. Intuitively, we don't want to say that *I mean* that I have a cold (or that I am English). The intention in (1) allows these propositions through. But I do not intend the waitress to *realize* that I intend her to think that I have a cold (or that I am English), so the intention in (2) prevents these propositions from being classed as a part of what I mean by my utterance.¹⁹

With the aid of this tentative constraint on when a proposition is meant, let's now turn to Grice's theory of *conversational implicature*. As Kripke (1977) and others have emphasized, several of Grice's proposals have a direct bearing on how we might characterize the uses of descriptions in various types of communicative settings. I shall therefore spend a little time going over certain features of Grice's general picture before putting it to use in the area of main interest.

On Grice's (1967) account, conversation is a characteristically purposeful and cooperative enterprise governed by what he calls the *Cooperative Principle*:

(CP) Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

Subsumed under this general principle, Grice distinguishes four categories of more specific maxims and submaxims enjoining truthfulness, informativeness, relevance, and clarity.

Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true. Specifically: Do not say what you believe to be false; do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous. Specifically: Be brief and orderly; avoid ambiguity and obscurity.

Of central concern to us is Grice's claim that there is a systematic correspondence between the assumptions required in order to preserve the supposition that the Cooperative Principle and attendant maxims are being observed and a certain class of propositions meant, what Grice calls *conversational implicatures*. The letter of recommendation case discussed earlier is a good example of a case that seems to involve a deliberate and flagrant violation of the Cooperative Principle, or at least one or more of the maxims. On Grice's account, by writing "Jones has wonderful handwriting and is always very punctual," (in this context) you appear to have violated the maxim enjoining relevance—since Jones is one of your students, you must know more of relevance than *this*. Furthermore, you know that more information than this is required in this particular context. Not surprisingly, the reader is naturally led to believe that you are attempting to convey something else, perhaps something you are reluctant to express explicitly. This supposition is plausible only on the assumption that you think Jones is no good at philosophy. And this is what you have *con conversationally implicated*. In general, a speaker *S* conversationally implicates that which *S* must be assumed to believe in order to preserve the assumption that *S* is adhering to the CP and maxims.²⁰

Grice contrasts this case with one in which there is supposed to be "no obvious violation" of the Cooperative Principle. Suppose *H* is standing

by an obviously immobilized car and is approached by *S*. *H* says to *S*, "Where can I buy some gas?" *S* replies, "There is a gas station around the next corner." If *S* did not think, or think it possible, that the gas station was open and had gas for sale, his remark would not be properly relevant; thus he may be said to conversationally *implicate* that it is open and has gas for sale. That is, *S* implicates that which he must be assumed to believe in order to preserve the assumption that he is adhering to the CP, in particular, the maxim enjoining relevance.

On Grice's account, a necessary condition for an implication to count as a conversational implicature is that it be *cancellable*, either explicitly or contextually, without literal contradiction, or at least without linguistic transgression.²¹ For instance, in the letter case you might have continued with "Moreover, in my opinion he is the brightest student we have ever had here." This addition might be odd, but it would not give rise to any literal contradiction. Notice that it might well be the case that in this example only what is implicated is meant (i.e., backed by your communicative intentions). You may have no idea what Jones' handwriting is like because he has only shown you typed manuscripts of his work (or because he has never shown you anything), and you may have no opinion as to whether or not he is punctual. Here the proposition implicated *supplants* the proposition expressed with respect to being meant.²² The truth-values of the proposition expressed and the proposition(s) implicated may of course differ. Jones may have quite atrocious handwriting, and you may know this; but given the relevance of the proposition implicated, you may care very little whether the proposition expressed is true. That is, the primary message (what you *meant*) may not be calculable at the level of the proposition expressed but only at the level of the proposition implicated, in the sense that it is the latter that has the backing of your communicative intentions. (In the stranded motorist case, the propositions implicated seem to *supplement* (rather than supplant) the proposition expressed.)

Although cancellability is taken by Grice to be a necessary condition of an implication's being classed as a conversational implicature, rather more importance is attached to derivability.²³

... the final test for the presence of a conversational implicature ha[s] to be, as far as I [can] see, a derivation of it. One has to produce an account of how it could have arisen and why it is there. And I am very much opposed to any kind of sloppy use of this philosophical tool, in which one does not fulfil this condition. (Grice 1981, p. 187)

Let's call this the *Justification Requirement*. On Grice's account, whenever there is a conversational implicature, one should be able to reason somewhat as follows:

- (a) *S* has expressed the proposition that *p*.
- (b) There is no reason to suppose that *S* is not observing the CP and maxims.
- (c) *S* could not be doing this unless he thought that *q*.
- (d) *S* knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that he thinks the supposition that he thinks that *q* is required.
- (e) *S* has done nothing to stop me thinking that *q*.
- (f) *S* intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that *q*.
- (g) And so, *S* has implicated that *q*.

In each of the cases we have considered, it is possible to justify the existence of the implicature in question in this sort of way.²⁴

So far, we have only looked at cases involving what Grice calls *particularized* conversational implicature. The presence and content of a particularized conversational implicature depend in a very transparent way upon facts about the particular context of utterance. Of rather more philosophical interest are those implicatures the presence and general form of which seem to have very little to do with the particular details of a given context of utterance, so-called *generalized* conversational implicatures. It is tempting to characterize the syntactician as that philosopher of language whose job it is to provide a finite, systematic characterization of a proprietary body of intuitions concerning such things as syntactical well-formedness, i.e., grammaticality. Analogously, we might view the semanticist as that philosopher of language who does the same thing for intuitions of truth, falsity, entailment, contradiction, and so on. In effect, the semanticist's aim is to construct a theory that will, among other things, yield predictions in accord with these intuitions. But great care must be taken when appealing to semantical intuitions. An initial judgment of truth or falsity, or of entailment or contradiction, might have to be reevaluated in the light of further considerations or a little tutoring of one form or another. For instance, what at first sight may seem like a semantical entailment may, upon further reflection, turn out to be something quite different.²⁵

Grice (1961, 1967) argues that there has been a tendency among some linguistically oriented philosophers to overcharacterize the linguistic

meanings of certain linguistic expressions. Let ζ be such an expression. According to Grice, certain conversational implicatures that typically attach to uses of ζ have been treated, mistakenly, as part of ζ 's meaning. Semantical claims about certain "intentional" verbs (e.g., "seem," "try," "intend," "know," and "remember") and about the linguistic counterparts to some of the formal devices of quantification theory (e.g., "and," "or," "if ... then ...," "the," and "a") were some of Grice's philosophically important targets. Indeed, for Grice, conversational implicature is a powerful philosophical tool with which to investigate the logical forms of certain philosophical claims and also clarify the relationship between formulae of quantification theory and sentences of natural language.

For example, *pace* Strawson (1952, p. 79ff.), it is at least arguable that many of the apparently divergent implications that seem to be present when the English word "and" is used to conjoin sentences are not attributable to any sort of lexical ambiguity in the word but can be understood as conversational implicatures of one form or another, there being no difference in meaning between "and" and the $\&$ of classical logic.²⁶ Compare the following sentences:

- (1) The moon goes around the earth and the earth goes around the sun
- (2) Jack and Jill got married and Jill gave birth to twins
- (3) The President walked in and the troops jumped to attention.

One feature of $\&$ is that it is commutative ($p \& q$ is equivalent to $q \& p$). This does not seem to create a problem for the view that the occurrence of "and" in (1) has the force of $\&$. But in (2) the conjuncts describe events and, in the normal course of things, someone who uttered this sentence would be taken to imply that Jack and Jill got married *before* Jill gave birth to twins. Indeed, if the order of the conjuncts is reversed, so is the implication. And in (3) there seems to be an implication not just of temporal priority but of causal connection.

On the basis of facts like these, one might be led to the view that "and" is at least three ways ambiguous. Now the fact that the truth of " p and₍₃₎ q " guarantees the truth of " p and₍₂₎ q ," which guarantees the truth of " p and₍₁₎ q " might well make one wonder whether the postulation of such ambiguity is not a little extravagant. Indeed, on Grice's account, there is another, perhaps preferable avenue that might be explored. It is good methodological practice, Grice (1967) suggests, to subscribe to what he calls *Modified Occam's Razor*: *Senses are not to be multiplied beyond*

necessity. Given the viability of a broadly Gricean distinction between the proposition expressed and the proposition(s) meant, if a pragmatic explanation is available of why a particular expression appears to diverge in meaning in different linguistic environments (or in different conversational settings) then *ceteris paribus* the pragmatic explanation is preferable to the postulation of a semantical ambiguity.

As Grice observes, pragmatic explanations of what is going on in (2) and (3) do seem to be available. The implication of temporal sequence might be explicable in terms of the fact that each of the conjuncts describes an event (rather than a state) and the presumption that the speaker is observing the Maxim of Manner, in particular the submaxim enjoining an orderly delivery.²⁷ And the implication of causal connection in (3) might be explicable in terms of the presumption that the speaker is being relevant. Again the conjuncts describe events and it is natural to seek some sort of connection between them since the speaker has mentioned them both in the same breath. The idea, then, is that these implications are cases of *generalized* conversational implicature. I am not going to present a serious defense of the view that “and” *always* means & (even if restricted to cases where it conjoins pairs of sentences rather than pairs of noun phrases or pairs of verb phrases); I just want to outline the form a pragmatic explanation of the alleged ambiguity is supposed to take.²⁸

The reasons for preferring pragmatic explanations over the postulation of semantical ambiguities are, of course, economy and generality. A pragmatic explanation is, in some sense, *free*: the machinery that is appealed to is needed anyway. In any particular case, this may not in itself constitute an overwhelming objection to a theory that posits an ambiguity; but in the case of “and” the generality lost by positing several readings is considerable. Grice makes three relevant observations here. First, there is the fact that implications of (e.g.) temporal priority and causal connection attach to uses of the counterparts of “and” across unrelated languages. One could, of course, posit parallel ambiguities in these languages; but the phenomenon is more readily explained as the product of general pragmatic considerations. Second, it is not unreasonable to assume that implications of the same sorts would arise even for speakers of a language containing an explicitly truth-functional connective &. Third, the same implications that attach to a particular utterance of $p \& q$ would attach to an utterance of the two sentence sequence $p.q$. It seems clear, then, that on *methodological* grounds the pragmatic account of the temporal and causal implications in (2) and (3) is preferable to an account that makes essential

use of a semantical ambiguity. Of course, there may well be uses of the English word “and” that resist a truth-functional semantics, but I do not take myself to be arguing for the view that the word has just one meaning; my purpose is to illustrate Grice’s point that where semantical and pragmatic accounts handle *the same range of data*, the pragmatic account is preferable.

It will be convenient now to focus on an example of generalized conversational implicature that involves the use of the determiner “some.” (This will put us on course for a detailed discussion of the determiner “the” in the next section.) Suppose two journalists S and H are discussing a recent demonstration in a notoriously repressive country. There was some violence at the demonstration and several of the demonstrators were killed, allegedly by the police. S was present at the demonstration and he knows that some of the deaths were accidental because he saw two demonstrators accidentally run over by a car full of other demonstrators. H knows that S dislikes the repressive regime, but he also knows that S is a very honest reporter. When H quizzes S about the deaths, S says,

(4) Some of the deaths were accidental.

In this situation, S would very likely be taken to endorse the truth of, or at least entertain the possibility of the truth of (5):

(5) Some of the deaths were not accidental.

But we don’t want to say that “some F s are G s” entails “some F s are not G s,” or even that (4) entails (5). Nor do we want to say that “some” is ambiguous, that on one reading “some F s are G s” entails “some F s are not G s” and that on another it does not. At least, not if a pragmatic explanation is available of how (4) may be used to convey a proposition that differs from the proposition it would be taken to express on its standard quantificational reading.

And of course a pragmatic explanation *is* available. Intuitively, the proposition expressed by (4) is “weaker” than the one expressed by

(6) All of the deaths were accidental.

And since in a typical communicative setting it would be more appropriate (informative, straightforward, relevant) to make the stronger claim (if it were believed true), a speaker who makes the weaker claim (in such a setting) will, *ceteris paribus*, conversationally implicate that he or she does not subscribe to the stronger claim. Now if S does not subscribe to the

view that all of the deaths were accidental, *S* must be willing to entertain the possibility that some of the deaths were not accidental.²⁹ Using a Gricean justification schema,

- (a) *S* has expressed the proposition that some of the deaths were accidental.
- (b) There is no reason to suppose that *S* is not observing the CP and maxims.
- (c) *S* could not be doing this unless he were willing to entertain the possibility that some of the deaths were *not* accidental. (Gloss: On the assumption that *S* is adhering to the Maxim of Quantity, if he thought that *all* of the deaths were accidental he would have said so. Therefore *S* is willing to entertain the possibility that some of the deaths were not accidental. (On the assumption that *S* is adhering to the Maxim of Quality, he does not think that *none* of the deaths were accidental, since he has said that some of them *were*.)
- (d) *S* knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that he thinks the supposition that he is willing to entertain the possibility that some of the deaths were not accidental is required.
- (e) *S* has done nothing to stop me thinking that he is willing to entertain the possibility that some of the deaths were not accidental.
- (f) *S* intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that he is willing to entertain the possibility that some of the deaths were not accidental.
- (g) And so, *S* has implicated that he is willing to entertain the possibility that some of the deaths were not accidental.

It seems to me that we should resist the temptation to formulate *pragmatic rules* with which to derive certain standard cases of generalized conversational implicature. For instance, it might be suggested that a pragmatic theory contain a rule like the following:

- (7) [some $x: Fx$] (Gx) $\gg \Psi$ [some $x: Fx$] $\neg(Gx)$

where \gg stands for something like “conversationally implicates unless there is good evidence to the contrary,” and Ψ stands for something like “the speaker is willing to entertain the possibility that.” In one very important respect, nothing could be further from the spirit of Grice’s theory than the construction of such an avowedly singular pragmatic rule. For Grice, the conversational implicatures that attach to a particular utterance must be justifiable given the CP and maxims, construed as quite

general antecedent assumptions about the rational nature of conversational practice. It is important not to be misled by Grice’s intuitive distinction between particularized and generalized implicatures into thinking that instances of the latter do not have to satisfy the Justification Requirement. To label a certain range of implicatures “generalized” is not to bestow upon them some special status, it is simply to acknowledge the fact that the presence of the implicatures is relatively independent of the details of the particular conversational context.

We now have enough of a framework in place to begin addressing the issues raised by so-called referential uses of descriptions.

14.5 The Referential Challenge Revisited

As I mentioned in 14.2, we can, I believe, ascribe to those who see the need for a semantically distinct referential interpretation of definite descriptions the following thesis:

- (A1) If a speaker *S* uses a definite description “the *F*” referentially in an utterance *u* of “the *F* is *G*,” then “the *F*” functions as a referring expression and the proposition expressed by *u* is *object-dependent* (rather than descriptive).

But what does it mean to say that a definite description is being used *referentially* on a given occasion? (Or, to use the alternative terminology of Kripke (1977) and Donnellan (1979), what does it mean to say that a particular use of a definite description is *accompanied by speaker reference*?).

This question is addressed by Donnellan (1979). Consider *S*’s utterance *u* of the sentence “The strongest man in the world can lift at least 450lbs.” Donnellan claims, quite rightly in my opinion, that it is not enough for *S*’s use of “the strongest man in the world” to be classified as referential that there exist some object *b* such that *S* knows (or believes) that *b* is the strongest man in the world. On such an account, the referentialist would be committed to the fantastic view that whenever *S* knows (or thinks he or she knows) who or what satisfies some description or other, *S* can no longer use that description nonreferentially. This would, indeed, be a peculiar consequence: the existence or nonexistence of a particular semantical ambiguity in a speaker’s idiolect would be based solely on the speaker’s epistemological history.³⁰

Donnellan also claims, again correctly in my opinion, that it is not enough for *S*’s use of “the strongest man in the world” to be classified as

referential that there exist some object b such that the grounds for S 's utterance are furnished by the object-dependent belief that b is the strongest man in the world and the object-dependent belief that b can lift 450lbs.³¹ What is characteristic of a referential use, Donnellan suggests, is the nature of "the intentions of the speaker toward his audience" (p. 50).

In the light of the discussions in 14.2 and 14.4, we might suggest that a speaker S uses a definite description "the F " referentially in an utterance u of "the F is G " if and only if there is some object b such that S means by u that b is G . But this is not quite strong enough. Suppose it is common knowledge between S and H that the tallest man in the world, whoever he is, is spending the weekend with Nicola. Suppose that there is no individual b such that either S or H believes of b that b is the tallest man in the world; however, it is common knowledge between S and H that the tallest man in the world (whoever he is) is very shy and that Nicola will take him with her wherever she goes this weekend. S and H are at a party on Saturday and it is a matter of some interest to S and H whether Nicola is present. S overhears a conversation during which someone says "The tallest man in the world is here." S goes over to H and says "The tallest man in the world is here" intending to communicate that *Nicola* is here. In this example there clearly is some object b (viz., Nicola) such that S means by u that b is here; but equally clearly, S 's utterance does not involve a referential use of "the tallest man in the world." We seem to need something more like this:

(A2) A speaker S uses a definite description "the F " referentially in an utterance u of "the F is G " iff there is some object b such that S means by u that b is the F and that b is G .³²

The debate between the Russellian-Gricean and the referentialist can now be summarized as follows. The referentialist endorses (A1) and (A2); the Russellian (to the extent that he or she believes that it is possible to provide a clear account of referential usage) endorses (A2) and (A3):

(A3) If a speaker S uses a definite description "the F " referentially in an utterance u of "the F is G ," "the F " still functions as a quantifier and the proposition expressed by u is the object-independent proposition given by [the $x: Fx$] (Gx).

In short, then, the Russellian-Gricean sees referential usage as an important fact about *communication* to be explained by general pragmatic principles, not something of *semantical* import. Let us now examine this position.

As Evans (1982) observes, there are two rather different cases of referential usage to take into account, according as the putative referential description is supposed to be functioning like a *name* or like a *demonstrative*. Suppose that you and I both know Harry Smith and it is common knowledge between us that Harry is the present Chairman of the Flat Earth Society. Harry calls me up and informs me that he will be arriving in San Francisco next Saturday. Later that day I see you in the street and I say,

(1) The Chairman of the Flat Earth Society is coming to San Francisco next Saturday

fully intending to communicate to you the object-dependent proposition that Harry Smith is coming to San Francisco next Saturday, rather than (or rather than *just*) a descriptive proposition concerning the unique satisfier of a certain descriptive condition. I utter (1) intending you (a) to actively entertain the (object-dependent) proposition that Harry Smith is coming to San Francisco next Saturday, and (b) to recognize that I intend you to actively entertain that proposition (see (G1)). And I feel confident that these intentions can be fulfilled because I believe (i) that you have identifying knowledge of Harry Smith, (ii) that you take Harry Smith to uniquely satisfy the description "the Chairman of the Flat Earth Society," and (iii) that you can infer from the fact that I have used this description that I wish to convey something to you about Harry Smith. There would appear to be no barrier, then, to saying that (part of) what *I mean* by my utterance of (1) is that Harry Smith is coming to San Francisco next Saturday; the object-dependent proposition that Harry Smith is coming to San Francisco next Saturday is (one of) the *proposition(s) meant*.

Now it is clear that I might have conveyed to you that Harry Smith is coming to San Francisco next Saturday by uttering (2) instead of (1):

(2) Harry Smith is coming to San Francisco next Saturday.

Consequently, one might consider interpreting the description (as it occurs in this utterance) as something akin to a proper name. Let's say that in this case the description is used *referentially_N* ("N" for "name").

Let's now turn to a rather different example of the sort exploited by Donnellan (1966). We are at a party together; in one corner of the room is a man, x , wearing a top hat; I notice that x is trying to attract your attention, so I say to you,

(3) The man wearing a top hat is trying to attract your attention

fully intending to communicate to you an object-dependent proposition (about x), rather than (or rather than *just*) a descriptive proposition concerning the unique satisfier of the descriptive condition. I utter (3) intending you (a) actively to entertain the (object-dependent) proposition that x is trying to attract your attention, and (b) to recognize that I intend you actively to entertain that proposition. And I feel confident that these intentions can be fulfilled because I believe (i) that you have identifying knowledge of x , (ii) that you take x to uniquely satisfy the description "the man wearing a top hat," and (iii) that you can infer from the fact that I have used this description that I wish to convey something to you about x . There would appear to be no barrier, then, to saying that (part of) what *I mean* by my utterance of (3) is that x is trying to attract your attention; the object-dependent proposition that x is trying to attract your attention is (one of) the *proposition(s) meant*.

Now it is clear that I might have conveyed to you the same object-dependent proposition by uttering

(4) That man is trying to attract your attention

accompanied by some sort of demonstration or gesture. Consequently, one might consider interpreting the description (as it occurs in this utterance) as something akin to a demonstrative. Let's call this a *referential_D* use of a description ("D" for "demonstrative").³³

The question for the semanticist here is whether we need semantically distinct non-Russellian interpretations of the descriptions in (1) and (3) in order to make sense of the scenarios just constructed.

There are good methodological reasons to resist a complication of the semantics of the definite article in this way. The first thing to remember is that the phenomenon of referential usage is not something peculiar to definite descriptions. Consider the following example adapted from Wilson (1978). You and I both see Harris lurking around at the party; we both know (and know that the other knows) that Harris is a convicted embezzler; later in the evening I see Harris flirting with your sister so I come up to you and say,

(5) A convicted embezzler is flirting with your sister

fully intending to communicate to you the object-dependent proposition that Harris is flirting with your sister. I utter (5) intending you (a) to actively entertain the (object-dependent) proposition that Harris is flirting with your sister, and (b) to recognize that I intend you to actively

entertain that proposition. There would appear to be no barrier, then, to saying that (part of) what *I mean* by my utterance of (5) is that Harris is flirting with your sister; the object-dependent proposition that Harris is flirting with your sister is (one of) the *proposition(s) meant*.

It is clear that I might have conveyed to you that Harris is flirting with your sister by uttering (6) instead of (5):

(6) Harris is flirting with your sister.

We appear to have here something approximating a referential_N use of an *indefinite description* (modifications to (A2) would capture this).

It is, of course, open to the referentialist to claim that indefinite descriptions are also ambiguous between Russellian and referential *interpretations*.³⁴ But the Gricean-Russellian will claim that some sort of important communicative generalization is being missed by proceeding in this way. Indeed, as Sainsbury (1979) emphasizes, the case for an ambiguity in the definite article weakens considerably once it is realized that sentences containing all sorts of quantifiers may be used to convey object-dependent propositions. Suppose it is common knowledge that Smith is the only person taking Jones' seminar. One evening, Jones throws a party and Smith is the only person who turns up. A despondent Jones, when asked the next morning whether his party was well attended, says,

(7) Well, everyone taking my seminar turned up

fully intending to inform me that only Smith attended. The possibility of such a scenario, would not lead us to complicate the semantics of "every" with an ambiguity; i.e., it would not lead us to posit semantically distinct quantificational and referential interpretations of "everyone taking my seminar."

We find a similar situation with plural quantifiers.³⁵ Suppose that Scott Soames, David Lewis, and I are the only three people in Lewis's office. Soames has never played cricket and knows that I know this. In addition, Soames wants to know whether Lewis and I have ever played cricket, so I say

(8) Most people in this room have played cricket

fully intending to communicate to Soames that Lewis and I have both played cricket. There is surely no temptation to complicate the semantics of "most" with an ambiguity, no temptation to posit a semantically distinct referential interpretation of "most people in this room." The natural thing to say is that given his background beliefs and given the

quantificational proposition expressed by my utterance in the context in question, Soames was able to *infer* the truth of a particular object-dependent proposition (or two object-dependent propositions). I was thus able to convey an object-dependent proposition by uttering a sentence of the form "most *F*s are *G*s". (Similar cases can be constructed using "all senators," "many Americans," "few Stanford women," "five of us," "a convicted embezzler," "some politicians," "the man wearing a top hat," "the women who work for Martha," and so on.)

Thus the Gricean-Russellian views the referential use of definite descriptions as an instance of a more general phenomenon associated with the use of quantified noun phrases. Of course, definite descriptions are particularly susceptible to referential usage because of their own particular semantics. As Klein (1980) points out, if *S* is observing the Maxim of Quality, *S* will typically believe that one and only one object satisfies the description used. (The complications introduced by so-called *incomplete* descriptions like "the table," "the cat" and so on are discussed in 14.7.) And quite often *S* will believe this because *S* knows of some particular object *b* that *b* is uniquely *F*. The beginnings of an explanation of the quite general phenomenon of communicating object-dependent propositions using quantified sentences surely lie in the fact that the grounds for a quantificational assertion are very often object-dependent beliefs of one form or another. (By (A1), object-dependent grounds do not suffice for referential usage, of course.) I know that some Britons are currently residing in the U.S.A. One reason I know this is that I know that I am British and that I am currently residing here, and I know that John McDowell is British and that he is currently residing here. Thus the grounds for my asserting

(9) Some Britons are currently residing in the U.S.A.

are furnished by object-dependent beliefs about John McDowell and about me. Similar remarks apply to the cricket case discussed a moment ago. Add to this the context of utterance, shared background assumptions, the sorts of inferential abilities we all possess, and the sorts of Gricean considerations that appear to govern rational discourse, and the way is open for a quite general explanation of how it is that we manage to convey object-dependent propositions using quantificational sentences, including, of course, sentences containing descriptions.

Consider the referential_N use of "the Chairman of the Flat Earth society" in (1) again. Echoing Grice, we might say that

- (a) *S* has expressed the proposition that [the $x: Fx$](Gx).
- (b) There is no reason to suppose that *S* is not observing the CP and maxims.
- (c) *S* could not be doing this unless he thought that *Gb* (where "b" is a name). Gloss: On the assumption that *S* is observing the Maxim of Relation, he must be attempting to convey something beyond the general proposition that whoever is uniquely *F* is *G*. On the assumption that *S* is adhering to the Maxim of Quality, he must have adequate evidence for thinking that the *F* is *G*. I know *S* knows that *b* is the *F*, therefore *S* thinks that *Gb*.
- (d) *S* knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I know that *b* is the *F*, that I know that *S* knows that *b* is the *F*, and that I can see that *S* thinks the supposition that he thinks that *Gb* is required.
- (e) *S* has done nothing to stop me thinking that *Gb*.
- (f) *S* intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that *Gb*.
- (g) And so, *S* has implicated that *Gb*.

On a referential_D use of "the *F*," (c) might be replaced by

- (c') *S* could not be doing this unless he thought that *Gb* (where "b" is a demonstrative.) Gloss: On the assumption that *S* is observing the Maxim of Relation, he must be attempting to convey something over and above the general proposition that whoever is uniquely *F* is *G*. On the assumption that *S* is adhering to the Maxim of Quality, he must have adequate evidence for thinking that the *F* is *G*. It is not plausible to suppose that he has just general grounds for this belief; therefore he must have object-dependent grounds. I can see that there is someone *b* in the perceptual environment who could be taken to satisfy the description "the *F*," and I can see that *S* can see this. Therefore the grounds for his assertion that the *F* is *G* are plausibly furnished by the belief that *Gb*.³⁶

Although a description "the *F*" does not itself refer to any individual, following Kripke (1977) let us say that in situations like those just discussed *the speaker S refers* to an individual, the individual *S* is interested in communicating a proposition about.

We have reached the situation, then, in which we appear to have a perfectly good explanation of referential uses of definite descriptions that does not appeal to any sort of semantical ambiguity. The Russellian and the ambiguity theorist agree that when a description is used referentially,

(one of) the proposition(s) *meant* is object-dependent; they just provide different explanations of this fact. The referentialist complicates the semantics of "the"; the Russellian appeals to antecedently motivated principles governing the nature of rational discourse and ordinary inference. As far as accounting for the data we have considered, a stalemate appears to have been reached.

But general methodological considerations lend support to the Russellian. Modified Occam's Razor enjoins us not to multiply senses beyond necessity, i.e., to opt for a theory that (*ceteris paribus*) does not have to appeal to a semantical ambiguity. The similarity with the case of "and" (discussed in 14.4) is striking. First, the phenomenon of referential usage is not something specific to English, nor even to Indo-European languages. Second, as already noted, the phenomenon is not even specific to definite descriptions, it arises with quantifiers quite generally. Third, as Kripke (1977) has pointed out, there is no good reason to suppose that speakers of a language who are taught explicitly Russellian truth conditions for sentences containing definite and indefinite descriptions would not come to use such phrases referentially. Furthermore, speakers of a version of first-order logic without descriptions might still succeed in referring to particular individuals by using existential quantifications of the form "there is exactly one *F* and whatever is *F* is *G*." Indeed, as Kripke (chapter 11, this volume, p. 241) observes, on occasion one can even get away with this sort of thing in English:

(10) Exactly one person is drinking champagne in that corner and I hear he is romantically linked with Jane Smith.

On methodological grounds, then, if attention is restricted to basic cases (14.2), a unitary Russellian theory seems to be preferable to a theory that posits a semantical ambiguity.³⁷

14.6 The Argument from Misdescription

Up to now, discussion of referential usage has been restricted to what I earlier called *basic cases*. I want now to turn to the first of several arguments that are often appealed to by some of those who reject (A3) in favor of (A1), the Argument from Misdescription. This argument comes in two forms. What I shall call the "standard" form of the argument is due to Donnellan (1966) and goes something like this. Consider a referential_D use of "Smith's murderer." Now suppose Smith was not in fact

murdered but died of natural causes. On Russell's account, the definite description "Smith's murderer" will be nondenoting, therefore the proposition expressed will be false (it is not the case that there exists some unique *x* such that *x* murdered Smith). But this, Donnellan claims, is just incorrect. For suppose the man *S* meant, viz., Jones, is insane. Then, surely *S* will have said something true of that man. The moral we are supposed to draw is that "... using a definite description referentially, a speaker may say something true even though the description applies to nothing" (p. 207). And the conclusion we are encouraged to accept is that when a description is used referentially, it is the object *S* wishes to convey something about rather than the descriptive condition used to get at this object that is of semantical relevance. The proposition expressed is therefore object-dependent rather than descriptive.³⁸

The problem with this argument is that it relies on the existence of a clear intuition that the proposition expressed is still true despite the fact that neither Jones nor anyone else satisfies the description "Smith's murderer." But this is simply not so. We feel an uneasy tension when we are presented with such cases. As several authors have noted, we want to say that *S* did something right but *also* that *S* did something *wrong*. After all, the description he used *failed to fit* the person *S* wanted to "talk about," and to that extent the speech act was defective.³⁹

The referentialist can say nothing useful here, but the Russellian can provide a theoretical explanation of the aforementioned tension: What has been left out by the referentialist is the Gricean distinction between the proposition expressed and the proposition(s) meant. Indeed, one of the earliest overt defenses of the Theory of Descriptions in the face of the Argument from Misdescription was the one sketched by Grice (1969) himself. According to Grice, "what, in such a case, a speaker has *said* may be false, what he *meant* may be true" (p. 199). The proposition expressed by an utterance of "the *F* is *G*" is still descriptive, but the speaker may exploit the fact that both speaker and hearer are willing to entertain the idea that some particular individual *b* is uniquely *F* in order to communicate an object-dependent proposition about *b*. Again, the proposition that *b* is *G* may well be part of what is *meant* but it is not the proposition expressed, nor is it implied by it.⁴⁰ Applied to Donnellan's example, the proposition expressed by my utterance of "Smith's murderer is insane" is false; but the proposition I intended to communicate is true (if Jones is indeed insane). Thus the Russellian-Gricean has, if only in a rudimentary way, an account of the conflicting pretheoretic intuitions we

typically have when presented with cases involving misdescription. The possibility of misdescription does not advance the case for a semantically referential interpretation in the least; indeed, the unitary Russellian analysis has the edge here.

More or less the same is true with what we can call the *inverted* form of the Argument from Misdescription, due to Hornsby (1977). Consider again a referential_D use of "Smith's murderer is insane." Now suppose that the man I *meant* was not insane, and moreover that he did not murder Smith. But suppose that the man who did murder Smith is insane. On Russell's account, the proposition expressed is true, since the unique individual who murdered Smith is insane. But according to Hornsby this is a mistake. I was talking about that man there in the dock, and since he is not insane my utterance cannot be true. We should conclude, Hornsby suggests, that on this occasion, "Smith's murderer" functions as a genuine referring expression.

The problem with this form of the argument is that it relies on the existence of a clear intuition that the proposition expressed is false, despite the fact that the unique individual that does in fact satisfy "Smith's murderer" is insane. But this is simply not so. As with the standard form of the argument, we feel an uneasy tension when we are presented with such cases, a tension the Russellian-Gricean can explain.⁴¹

I doubt these sorts of considerations can be worked up into knock-down arguments against a semantically distinct referential interpretation. However, as Salmon (1982) argues, related counterfactual considerations cast serious doubt on the viability of a referential interpretation. Occurrences of "Smith's murderer" that are semantically referential will be rigid designators. Consequently, if I utter the sentence "Smith's murderer is insane" in a context *C*, with the intention that "Smith's murderer" refer to Jones, then the proposition expressed by my utterance is true with respect to any counterfactual situation in which Jones is insane, even those in which Jones does not murder Smith, those in which Smith is not murdered, those in which Smith does not exist, and those in which there are no murders. And this, Salmon maintains, is quite unacceptable.

Salmon's argument can also be inverted. If I utter the sentence "Smith's murderer is insane" in a context *C*, with the intention that "Smith's murderer" refer to Jones, then the proposition expressed by my utterance is false with respect to any counterfactual situation in which Jones exists but is not insane, even those in which Smith is murdered and the person who murdered him is insane. I must admit I am sympathetic to Salmon's

reaction to such results, but I am not sure that it is possible to arrive at judgments of truth or falsity that are not to some extent shaped by either one's initial position on the debate or one's views about the bearers of truth or falsity.⁴² My own conclusion—a conclusion I am perfectly happy with—is that cases involving misdescription simply provide no evidence for a semantically referential interpretation of descriptions.

14.7 The Argument from Incompleteness

In 14.3, we established that the propositions expressed by utterances containing indexical descriptions like "my mother" or "the philosopher I most admire" are partially determined by context. But it is not just overtly indexical descriptions that are context-sensitive. This can be illustrated with the help of the following passage from Strawson's "On Referring":

Consider the sentence, "The table is covered with books." It is quite certain that in any normal use of this sentence, the expression "the table" would be used to make a unique reference, i.e. to refer to some one table. It is a quite strict use of the definite article, in the sense in which Russell talks on p. 30 of *Principia Mathematica*, of using the article "strictly, so as to imply uniqueness." On the same page Russell says that a phrase of the form "the so-and-so," used strictly, "will only have an application in the event of there being one so-and-so and no more." Now it is obviously quite false that the phrase "the table" in the sentence "the table is covered with books," used normally, will "only have an application in the event of there being one table and no more." (chapter 6, this volume, pp. 147–148)

There is an important truth in this passage. A speaker may use a definite description when, strictly speaking, it is quite clear that there is no object that uniquely satisfies it. And, on the face of it, this seems to pose a problem for Russell. If I say to you right now

(1) The table is covered with books

I would not normally be understood as committing myself to the existence of one and only one table. But a naïve application of the Theory of Descriptions appears to have precisely this unwelcome consequence. And since there does not seem to be any good reason for doubting that a determinate proposition is expressed by an utterance of (1), *prima facie* the Russellian is under some obligation to specify its content. By contrast, a theory that postulates a semantically distinct referential interpretation of descriptions seems to provide a natural account of what is going on in (1): the description functions as a referring expression.

Let's call a description "the *F*" that appears to have a legitimate application even if there is more than one *F* an *incomplete* or *improper* description.⁴³

The first thing to notice about incompleteness is that it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for referential usage, an observation made explicit by Peacocke. That incompleteness is not necessary:

If you and I visited the Casino at Monte Carlo yesterday, and saw a man break the bank . . . and it is common knowledge that this is so, then the description

"The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo yesterday"

as it occurs in a particular utterance *today* of

"The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo yesterday had holes in his shoes"

may well be satisfied by just one object in the universe, but it is here [referential]. (chapter 10, this volume, pp. 208–209)

That incompleteness is not sufficient:

[Suppose] two school inspectors [are] visiting an institution for the first time: one may say to the other, on the basis of the activities around him, "The headmaster doesn't have much control of the pupils." Here there is no object such that the school inspector has said of it that it doesn't have much control over the pupils. One cannot say that the headmaster is such an object, since what the inspector (*actually*) said would be true even if someone else were headmaster. (p. 209)⁴⁴

Whenever we find some phenomenon associated with the use of definite descriptions, we should look for corresponding phenomena associated with the uses of other quantifiers. This tactic served us well in 14.5 when we examined how someone might convey an object-dependent proposition while expressing (only) an object-independent proposition, and it serves us equally well here. Suppose I had a dinner party last night. In response to a question as to how it went, I say to you

(2) Everyone was sick.

Clearly I do not mean to be asserting that everyone in existence was sick, just that everyone *at the dinner party I had last night* was. In some fashion or other, this is discernible from the context of utterance.⁴⁵ Similar examples can be constructed using "no," "most," "just one," "exactly eight," and, of course, "the" (as it occurs with both singular and plural complements). Indeed, the problem of incompleteness has nothing to do with the use of definite descriptions *per se*; it is a quite general fact about the use of quantifiers in natural language.⁴⁶ What is needed, then, is not

just an account of incomplete descriptions, but a quite general account of incomplete quantifiers. It seems unlikely, therefore, that incompleteness raises any special problems for a quantificational analysis of descriptions that do not have to be faced in any event by quantificational analyses of other quantifiers.⁴⁷

There are two main approaches to incompleteness in the literature, what we might call the *explicit* and the *implicit* approaches. According to the explicit approach, incomplete quantifiers are *elliptical* for proper quantifiers. As Sellars puts it, the descriptive content is "completed" by context. According to the implicit approach, the context of utterance delimits the domain of quantification and leaves the descriptive content untouched.⁴⁸ Consider sentence (2) again. On the explicit approach, the quantifier "everybody" (as it is used on this occasion) is elliptical for "everybody at the dinner party I had last night," or some such "narrower" quantifier. On the implicit approach, the domain of quantification is understood as restricted to some favored class of individuals (or to some favored part of the world).⁴⁹

On the assumption that one (or both) of these approaches (or something very similar to one or other of them) will play a role in any complete theory of natural language quantification, any theory that treats definite descriptions as quantifiers is at liberty to appeal to either when incompleteness arises. Consider again Strawson's example

(1) The table is covered with books.

On the explicit approach (taken by, e.g., Sellars 1954), a particular utterance of "the table" might be elliptical for (e.g.) "the table *over there*."⁵⁰ On the implicit approach, the domain of quantification might be restricted to (e.g.) objects in the immediate shared perceptual environment. The mere fact that we find incomplete descriptions in discourse does not *by itself* then, give us any reason to abandon Russell's quantificational analysis of descriptions.⁵¹

Nonetheless, some philosophers have argued that there are intrinsic problems with one or other of these approaches to incompleteness, and that instead of being contextually completed, some occurrences of incomplete descriptions simply have to be provided with semantically referential interpretations.

Let's suppose that an incomplete description is elliptical for a proper (i.e., uniquely-denoting) description recoverable from the context of utterance. As a general account of incomplete descriptions, this type of

proposal has come under fire from Donnellan (1968), Hornsby (1977), Wettstein (1981), and Récanati (1986).⁵² In his brief discussion of incomplete descriptions, Donnellan is quite willing to accept the elliptical proposal for descriptions used nonreferentially:

Without considering the two uses of descriptions, the reply [to Strawson's comments cited above] one is inclined to make on Russell's behalf is that in the loose way of everyday speech the context is relied upon to supply further qualifications on the description to make it unique. This seems a plausible reply when considering attributive uses. Suppose someone says, "The next President will be a dove on Viet Nam," and the context easily supplies the implicit "of the United States" (1968, p. 204, note 5).

But Donnellan does not think that this will work for incomplete descriptions used referentially:

But where one has a very "indefinite" [i.e., incomplete] definite description, with many things in the world satisfying the actual description, the reply is not so plausible. There are commonly, I believe, referential uses. A speaker wants to refer to some object and uses an "indefinite" definite description. Asked to make his description more precise, he may have to think about how best to do it. Several further descriptions may come to mind, not all of which are actually correct. Which, then, shall we say is the full but implicit one? Once we see the function of a referential description, however, we need not suppose that there is any one description recoverable from the speech act that is supposed uniquely to apply to the object referred to. The audience may through the partial description and various clues and cues know to what the speaker refers without being in possession of a description that uniquely fits it and which was implicit all along in the speaker's speech act. (ibid.)

Donnellan is not, then, arguing *from* incompleteness *to* referentiality; rather he seems to be claiming that the method of contextual supplementation is implausible *if the description in question is being used referentially*. Wettstein (1981) suggests that we have here the basis of a knock-down argument for a semantically distinct referential interpretation of descriptions. For according to Wettstein, in many cases where an incomplete description is used there will simply be *no* adequate way of contextually deriving a complete description. And the only plausible way out, he suggests, is to concede that in such a case the description is functioning as a *demonstrative* referring expression and that consequently the proposition expressed is object-dependent rather than descriptive. On this account, then, the description takes as its semantical value the object the speaker intended to communicate something about (in the sense of 14.5).

To fix ideas, let's consider Wettstein's argument as applied to one of his own examples. Suppose, on a particular occasion of utterance, "the table" is taken to be elliptical for "the table in room 209 of Camden Hall at [time] t_1 ." According to Wettstein, this proposal is unworkable because there are a number of nonequivalent ways of filling out the descriptive condition to make it uniquely applicable and no principled way to choose between the resulting descriptions. For instance, "the table on which Wettstein carved his name at [time] t_2 " might well be satisfied by, and only by, the unique object that satisfies the descriptive condition "table in room 209 of Camden Hall at t_1 ." Since it is the descriptive condition rather than the denotation that makes it into the proposition expressed, on Russell's account the particular choice of uniquely-denoting description seems to be crucial: a different description means a different proposition. And this apparently leaves the Russellian with the embarrassing task of deciding which of these nonequivalent descriptions is the correct one.

According to Wettstein, it is "implausible in the extreme" to suppose that the situation of utterance somehow enables the hearer to recover the correctly completed description, viz., the one the speaker intended. In many cases, there will simply be no such indication. Moreover, in many cases it doesn't even make sense to ask which of a batch of nonequivalent, codenoting descriptions is *the correct one*. What criterion would one use in deciding which description is the correct one? The one that figures in the speaker's intentions?

In many cases ... the speaker will have no such determinate intention. If the speaker is asked which Russellian description(s) was implicit in his utterance of "the table" he will not ordinarily be able to answer. "Although I meant to refer to that table" our speaker may well reply, "I don't think I meant to refer to it *as* the table in room 209 of Camden Hall at t_1 as opposed to, say, *as* the table at which the author of *The Persistence of Objects* is sitting at t_1 . Nor did I intend to refer to it *as* the table in 209 *and* the table at which the author ... as opposed to, say, just *as* the table in 209." (chapter 12, this volume, p. 263)

If we can't, even by enlisting the help of the speaker, determine which complete description the incomplete description is elliptical for, Wettstein argues, it doesn't make sense to say that there *is* some such correct, complete description.

According to Wettstein, the entire problem can be sidestepped by endorsing the neo-Russellian conception of an object-dependent proposition and treating the description as a referring expression that contributes just

an object to the proposition expressed. In short, the description is to be viewed as a device of *demonstrative reference*. Embarrassing questions about the complete descriptive content are then circumvented, as it is the *object itself*, rather than any particular descriptive condition, that makes it into the proposition expressed. We can call this the Argument from Incompleteness for a referential interpretation of descriptions.

The first sign that something is amiss here is the fact that the argument seems to go through just as well with other quantifiers and with descriptions used *nonreferentially*. Consider again the sentence

(2) Everyone was sick

uttered in response to a question about last night's dinner party. On the explicit approach, the quantifier "everyone" (as it is used on this occasion) might be viewed as elliptical for "everyone at my dinner party last night," "everyone who ate at my house last night," or some other quantifier of the form "every *F*" that denotes everyone who came to the dinner party I had last night. Since the descriptive content is different in each case, the precise character of the proposition expressed depends upon which of these codenoting quantifiers is selected. It is clear, then, that Wettstein has put his finger on a very important fact about elliptical analyses of incomplete quantifiers (and perhaps ellipsis quite generally); but it is beginning to look as though no real support for a referential interpretation of descriptions is going to come out of this.

Ironically, this becomes much clearer when we take into account Wettstein's own remarks on incomplete descriptions used *nonreferentially*. Consider the case of the detective who comes across Smith's body and has no idea who killed him. Rather than uttering "Smith's murderer is insane" or "The man who murdered Smith is insane," the detective simply says,

(3) The murderer is insane.

According to Wettstein,

As in the cases of referential uses ... there will be any number of ways to fill out the description so as to yield a Russellian description (e.g., "Harry Smith's murderer," "the murderer of Joan Smith's husband," "the murderer of the junior senator from New Jersey in 1975") and in many cases there will be nothing about the circumstances of utterance or the intentions of the speaker which would indicate that any of these Russellian descriptions is the correct one. (ibid., p. 266-267)

As Wettstein observes, here he is in conflict with Donnellan, who suggests that the elliptical proposal *will* work for descriptions used nonreferentially. Indeed, Wettstein concedes, on Russellian grounds, that the objection he has raised cannot be overcome by treating *this* occurrence of "the murderer" as a device of demonstrative reference: "One fully understands the proposition without having any idea who murdered Smith" (p. 267). We seem to be stuck:

[1] "the murderer" is not elliptical for some Russellian description, and [2] no appeal to the referent of "the murderer" will account for propositional determinacy. (1981, p. 267)

Given his endorsement of [1], Wettstein then makes a very odd suggestion. Although this occurrence of the description "the murderer" is not referential, Wettstein suggests that demonstrative reference still plays a role in a proper characterization of its content:

For in uttering, "the murderer is insane" in the presence of the mutilated body, the speaker relies on the context to reveal *whose* murder is in question. The speaker, that is, makes an *implicit* reference to the victim. (ibid.)

Recall that Wettstein's own account of descriptions used referentially is supposed to be immune to the problem of codenoting, nonequivalent descriptions that he has raised for the Russellian. The reason, of course, is that Wettstein explicitly endorses the neo-Russellian conception of an object-dependent proposition: it is the object itself (rather than any descriptive condition or sense) that gets into the proposition expressed. But on this conception of an object-dependent proposition, in the example we are considering there is simply no difference between saying that there is an "implicit reference" to the victim and saying that the incomplete description "the murderer" is elliptical for a uniquely denoting description, such as "the murderer of *that man*" (where "that man" refers to the victim), or "the murderer of *him*" (where "him" refers to the victim), or "*his* murderer" (where "his" refers to the victim), all of which contribute the same thing to the proposition expressed, viz., the descriptive condition *murderer-of-b* where *b* is the victim himself rather than some description of *b*. Wettstein is just mistaken in claiming that "the murderer" is "not elliptical for some Russellian description" (ibid.); the proposition expressed by (3) is given by (4):

(4) [the *x*: *x* murdered *b*] (*x* is insane).

It is unclear why Wettstein thinks the description in (4) is non-Russellian. One possibility is that he has conflated (a) the notion of a *referential description* (i.e., a description that is interpreted referentially), and (b) the notion of a *description containing a referential component*. An alternative diagnosis is that he is unwilling to countenance descriptions containing relational predicates like "murderer-of-*b*," where "*b*" is a referential term. But this is certainly not a constraint the Russellian is obliged to work under.⁵³ If "*R*" is a binary relational predicate, "*b*" is a name, and "*x*" is a variable, then "*Rbx*" is an open sentence, and "[the *x*: *Rbx*]" is a perfectly good definite description [see (2.6) of *Descriptions*]. Perhaps Wettstein is just unwilling to allow the Russellian access to descriptions containing context-sensitive elements such as demonstratives or indexicals. But again, there is no reason to constrain the Russellian in this way (14.3). (As Grice (1970) observes, one of Russell's (1905) own examples of a definite description is "my son.") To the extent that one countenances indexical and demonstrative referring expressions—and Wettstein certainly does—if "*b*" is an indexical or demonstrative, then "[the *x*: *Rbx*]" is a perfectly good Russellian description, albeit one with an indexical or demonstrative component. I submit, then, that if descriptions may contain overtly referential components (including indexical and demonstrative components), then there is nothing to prevent the ellipsed elements of incomplete descriptions from being referential. And this is very different from saying that the *description* is interpreted referentially.⁵⁴

The completion of incomplete descriptions with referential components is implicit in Evans' discussion of incompleteness:

... travelling in a car through the United States, I might pass through a town whose roads are particularly bumpy, and in consequence say "They ought to impeach the mayor." I do not intend my audience to identify the object spoken about as one of which he has information; I intend merely that he take me to be saying that the mayor of this town, through which we are passing, ought to be impeached, and this statement is adequately represented quantificationally. (1982, p. 324)

Evans is surely right to claim that in his example there is no intention to identify any individual—and hence no temptation to regard this particular utterance of the incomplete description "the mayor" as referential. Moreover, Evans suggests that he (the speaker) *would* be able to complete the description in a uniquely appropriate way, and supplies a plausible completion using referential rather than descriptive material. As the neo-

Russellian would put it, it is the *town itself* rather than some descriptive characterization of the town that gets into the descriptive condition and thereby into the proposition expressed.

There is no reason, of course, why descriptions used referentially should not also be completed using referential material, thus avoiding the problem raised by nonequivalent codenoting descriptions. As Soames (1986) remarks, this suggestion is very natural for descriptions such as "the Mayor" or "the murderer," where an additional argument place can be made available for a particular individual specified by the context of utterance. But with examples like "the table" (which Strawson originally used to attack Russell, and upon which Wettstein fastens in mounting his own attack) it is true that there is no natural argument position to be made available. However, the contextual coordinates (14.3) of an utterance provide further nondescriptive material. One way of construing Sellars's (1954) original proposal for dealing with "the table" is that reference is made to the spatial coordinate. On Sellars's account, an utterance of "the table" is treated as elliptical for (e.g.) "the table *over here*," or "the table *over there*," both which of course contain indexicals sensitive to the spatial coordinate *p* rather than additional descriptive material.⁵⁵ Wettstein's own list of complete descriptions for which "the table" might be viewed as elliptical includes only sentences containing descriptions completed with additional *descriptive* material ("the table in room 209 of Camden Hall at *t*₁," "the table at which the author of *The Persistence of Objects* is sitting at *t*₁," and so on). This is the weak point in his discussion. The semanticist who regards (utterances of) incomplete quantifiers—including incomplete descriptions—as elliptical for complete quantifiers is under no obligation to treat the ellipsed material as free of referring expressions and indexicals.

An account of how incomplete descriptions are to be treated is not required solely to ward off the Argument from Incompleteness. First, incompleteness affects descriptions used *nonreferentially*, so a general account of the phenomenon cannot be based on a referential interpretation. Second, incompleteness affects quantifiers more generally, not just definite descriptions. And to that extent, appeals to contextual coordinates and ellipsed material are independently required by any adequate theory of natural language quantification.⁵⁶

It should be noted that the problem of incompleteness can also emerge with descriptions used *anaphorically*, as in (5) and (6):

(5) I bought *a donkey* and a horse last week. For some reason *the donkey* will not eat anything.

(6) *Three women* and *a man* arrived in a large truck. *The women* got out and began dancing in the road while *the man* played the accordion.

In these cases, it is plausible to suppose (as Evans (1977) has argued) that the descriptions in question are completed using material from the clause containing their antecedents.

14.8 Concluding Remarks

We have seen in this chapter that the Theory of Descriptions is not threatened by the fact that context plays important and complex roles in the way sentences containing descriptions are understood. First, indexicality is a pervasive feature of natural language, and the fact that quantifiers, including definite descriptions, may contain indexical components does nothing to undermine either the schematic theory of quantification [presented in chapter 4, this volume, 4.2–4.6] or the place of the Theory of Descriptions within that theory. Second, the fact that a speaker may use a definite description to convey an object-dependent proposition poses no threat to this picture; in particular it provides no support for the view that descriptions are ambiguous between Russellian and referential interpretations. Again, the phenomenon is one that is not specific to descriptions but something we find with quantifiers quite generally. Once one takes into account (a) a very natural distinction between the proposition expressed and the proposition(s) meant, (b) the nature and role of context, (c) communicative aims or goals, and (d) our abilities to make certain elementary inferences, the general form of an explanation of this phenomenon comes clearly into view. Finally, no support for a referential interpretation of descriptions can be derived from the fact that quantifiers may be superficially incomplete.

Notes

1. Mitchell (1962, pp. 84–85) writes:

Definite descriptions occurring as the subjects of sentences, have at least two distinct functions, which may be illustrated by two sets of examples:

- (1) (a) "The Prime Minister presides at Cabinet meetings"
 (b) "The Sovereign of Great Britain is the head of the Commonwealth"
 (c) "The man who wrote this unsigned letter had a bad pen"

- (2) (a) "The Prime Minister has invited me to lunch"
 (b) "The Queen made a tour of the Commonwealth"
 (c) "The author of *Waverley* limped."

It is not difficult to see that the grammatical subjects of the sentences quoted in List 1 are not used—as proper names, for instance, are used—to refer uniquely. For "The Prime Minister" and "the Sovereign" we can substitute, without change of meaning, "Whoever is Prime Minister" and "Whoever is Sovereign."... With the sentences in List 2 the case is different. The subject phrases serve to identify individuals, and what is predicated in each case is predicated of the individuals so identified.

2. Construed as a general account of such readings, this position has been falsified by Cartwright (1968) and Kripke (1977), both of whom produce examples whose *de re* readings are not correctly captured by referential interpretations. For discussions, see 4.2 and 4.4 [of *Descriptions*].

3. It is tempting to think of Donnellan as simply labeling Mitchell's distinction (see, e.g., Davies, 1981). However, I do not think this is quite right. First, Mitchell seems to think that his two "functions" of descriptions are tied to the particular sentences used, whereas Donnellan argues that the same sentence may be used with either an attributive or a referential "reading" of the description it contains. Second, Mitchell's (1c)—see note 1—is very like the sorts of examples Donnellan uses to illustrate his attributive use in that the proposition expressed seems to be "about" an individual only under a description. However, (1a) and (1b) seem to be "about" a particular role or position that may be filled by different individuals on different occasions. Thus I am not much inclined to see Mitchell's non-identificatory function as a genuine precursor of Donnellan's attributive use. In particular, it seems to me that an utterance of (1b) could be true even if there were not, at the time of utterance, a Sovereign of Great Britain. Suppose the Queen dies and for various complex reasons a constitutional crisis ensues that somehow prevents Prince Charles or anyone else from taking the throne. A true utterance of (1b) might still be made.

François Récanati has pointed out to me that something very close to Donnellan's distinction can be found in the work of the seventeenth-century French philosopher Antoine Arnauld, author of the *Port-Royal Logic*. See Dominicy (1984), pp. 123–127.

4. Grice also echoes the point, made by Mitchell (1962) and Donnellan (1966), that in case (1), one may legitimately insert "whoever he may be" after the definite description. In view of certain worries pointed out by Searle (1979), I have not emphasized this characteristic of case (1).

5. This is also the view of Hampshire (1959), Geach (1962), Kripke (1972, 1977), Wiggins (1975, 1980), Castañeda (1977), Sainsbury (1979), Searle (1979), Klein (1980), Davies (1981), Evans (1982), Salmon (1982), Davidson (1986), and Soames (1986). There are important differences of detail in these proposals, but at the same time there is a consensus that the phenomenon of referential usage does not warrant the postulation of a semantical ambiguity in the definite article. (My indebtedness to the detailed discussions by Kripke, Sainsbury, Searle, and Davies will become clear as this chapter unfolds.)

6. This way of characterizing the alleged semantical significance of referential usage is explicit in (e.g.) Peacocke (1975), Hornsby (1977), and Kaplan (1978); it also seems to be what Donnellan (1978) has in mind. As both Kripke (1977) and Searle (1979) emphasize, for those who advocate a *semantical* distinction between Russellian and referential descriptions, there is still the problem of providing an account of *when*, exactly, a definite description *is* referential (see 14.5). The importance of this fact seems to be recognized by Donnellan (1978).

7. The argument implicit in this remark is unpacked in note 37. In places, Donnellan (1966) suggests that he is highlighting a “pragmatic” rather than a semantical ambiguity. But as Searle (1979) points out, it is unclear what a “pragmatic ambiguity” is supposed to be:

“I went to the bank” is semantically ambiguous. “Flying planes can be dangerous” is syntactically ambiguous. But what is a pragmatic ambiguity? Is “You are standing on my foot” supposed to be pragmatically ambiguous because in some contexts its utterance can be more than just a statement of fact? If so, then every sentence is indefinitely “pragmatically ambiguous.” If we had a notion of “pragmatic ambiguity” we would also have a notion of “pragmatic univocality” but in fact neither notion has any clear sense at all. (Searle, 1979, p. 150, note 3)

All things considered, it seems to me that the (semantical) ambiguity thesis is held by Rundle (1965), Donnellan (1966, 1968, 1979), Stalnaker (1972), Partee (1972), Peacocke (1975), Hornsby (1977), Kaplan (1978), Devitt (1981), Wettstein (1981, 1983), Récanati (1981, 1986, 1989), Fodor and Sag (1982), and Barwise and Perry (1983), among others. Récanati (1989) explicitly denies that his view entails a semantical ambiguity; I disagree. For discussion, see note 37.

A parallel semantical thesis for *indefinite* descriptions appears to be held by (e.g.) Partee (1972), Chastain (1975), Donnellan (1978), Wilson (1977), Fodor and Sag (1982), Barwise and Perry (1983), and Stich (1986), among others. For discussion, see King (1988) and Ludlow and Neale (1991).

8. An expression ζ occurs in a nonextensional context just in case ζ is within the scope of a nonextensional operator. . . . [A] unary, sentential, sentence-forming operator O is extensional just in case the truth-value of “ $O(\phi)$ ” depends only upon the truth-value of the embedded sentence ϕ . Thus, the contexts created by modal operators and attitude verb frames are nonextensional.

9. [See chaps. 4 and 5 of *Descriptions* for a fuller discussion of the latter two arguments. Ed.]

10. I was tempted to borrow Kaplan’s (1977) technical terms “character” and “content.” However, any suggestion of commitment to Kaplan’s intensional machinery is best avoided by using different terminology. I have, however, drawn on Kaplan’s informal remarks on indexicals and demonstratives in which his character/content distinction is introduced.

11. In the period with which I am primarily concerned (1905–1919) Russell came to view the class of genuine names as restricted to just (e.g.) “this” and “that,” which makes his (albeit later) talk of demonstratives as not “mere” names rather misleading in the present context.

12. See (e.g.) Montague (1968), Lewis (1975), and Kaplan (1977).

13. Further contextual coordinates may be required to capture other essential features of context. For discussion, see Lewis, (1975) p. 175.

14. $(\lambda X)\zeta$ represents a function from objects of the type over which X ranges to objects of the same type as ζ . The Russellian could take the semantical value of a description [the $x: Fx$] to be the function denoted by (λP) ([the $x: Fx$] (Px)), i.e., as a function from properties to propositions. See Montague (1970, 1973).

15. We can construct analogous cases for a description such as “your mother,” which contains an element sensitive to the addressee coordinate a ; “that man’s mother,” which is sensitive to the demonstration coordinate d ; “the current U.S. President,” sensitive to the temporal coordinate t ; and “the woman who was just sitting here,” sensitive to the temporal and spatial coordinates t and p .

16. It is open to argue that (6) is actually ambiguous according as the pronoun is to be given an anaphoric or nonanaphoric (e.g., demonstrative) reading (see Evans (1977, 1980) for discussion). The general form of the problem the hearer is faced with is the same.

17. As argued by Sperber and Wilson (1986), even if we anchor indexicals, assign referents, and fully disambiguate an utterance, very often H will *still* not be able to properly characterize the proposition expressed because of vagueness, ellipsis, and so on. As they put it, sentence meaning *radically* underdetermines the proposition expressed.

18. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.024.

19. Part of Grice’s project involves providing an analysis of meaning that does not presuppose any linguistic or otherwise semantical concepts, so (G1) is not a genuine Gricean condition because ϕ is implicitly understood to be a *sentence*. More appropriate would be the following:

(G2) By producing u , S means that p only if for some audience H ,

S produced u intending:

1. H actively to entertain the thought that p , and
2. H to recognize that S intends (1)

where u is any piece of behavior the production of which is a candidate for meaning something. For the purposes of this essay, (G1) will suffice because (a) I am not attempting any sort of reductive analysis, and (b) the examples I am most concerned with all involve linguistic utterances. In cases where u is an utterance of the sentence ϕ , I see no harm (for present purposes) in treating as interchangeable the locutions “by producing u , S means that p ” and “by uttering ϕ , S means that p .”

Grice’s attempts to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for utterer’s meaning make use of a third intention designed to rule out cases where some feature of the utterance in question makes it completely obvious that p . Grice was worried by cases like the following: (i) Herod presents Salome with the head of St. John the Baptist on a charger; (ii) in response to an invitation to play squash, Bill displays his bandaged leg. According to Grice, we do not want to say that Herod *meant* that St. John the Baptist was dead. Nor do we want to say that Bill *meant*

that his leg was bandaged. (We may well want to say that he meant that he could not play squash, or even that he had a bad leg, but not that his leg was bandaged.) Thus Grice suggests the addition of a third clause, the rough import of which is that *S* intend *H*'s recognition of *S*'s first intention to function as a reason for *H* to actively entertain the thought that *p*. Candidate conditions of the form of (G2) are therefore superseded by conditions of the form of (G3):

- (G3) By producing *u*, *S* means that *p* only if for some audience *H*,
S produced *u* intending:
1. *H* to actively entertain the thought that *p*,
 2. *H* to recognize that *S* intends (1), and
 3. *H*'s recognition that *S* intends (1) to function, at least in part, as a reason for (1).

It is not clear to me that the additional constraint in (3) is necessary. The same degree of manifestness seems to be present in certain cases involving properly linguistic utterances. Consider an utterance of, e.g., "I can speak English," or an utterance of "I can speak in squeaky voice" said in a squeaky voice (I owe this example to Neil Smith), or an utterance of "I am over here" bawled across a crowded room at someone known to be looking for the utterer (this example is due to Schiffer (1972)). In none of these cases is there a temptation to say that the speaker did not *mean* what he or she said. As I have stated it, I am not sure whether clause (3) really blocks such cases, but in any event, in the light of the similarities between these cases and those that worried Grice, I do not feel the need for an additional constraint on utterer's meaning, such as (3), that is supposed to prevent (e.g.) Herod from meaning that St. John the Baptist was dead, or Bill from meaning that his leg was bandaged. On this matter, see also Schiffer (1972) and Sperber and Wilson (1986).

20. Grice's wording suggests that a particular maxim or submaxim concerns only what is said (e.g., "Do not say what you believe to be false") while another concerns, perhaps, what is *meant* (e.g., "Be relevant"). (I owe this observation to Deirdre Wilson.) However, except for those submaxims under Manner (perhaps) that apply only to what is said, I think we must interpret Grice as allowing a violation of a maxim at the level of what is said to be over-ridden by adherence to that maxim at the level of what is implicated. This seems to me to be the only way to make sense of his account of flouting; i.e., blatantly violating a maxim at the level of what is said but adhering to it at the level of what is implicated does not involve a violation of the CP.

A variety of complications for Grice's theory are discussed by Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1986) and Wilson and Sperber (1981, 1986), who utilize some of Grice's insights in their *relevance*-based approach to utterance interpretation. Since writing the body of this chapter, I have come to believe (mostly through conversations with Dan Sperber) that my own discussion might well have been facilitated had I made use of Sperber and Wilson's theory rather than Grice's.

21. Consider an utterance of "She is poor and she is honest. Moreover, I don't think she's honest." The linguistic transgression here is not of the order of an outright contradiction; rather it is more like an instance of Moore's paradox. Nor

will contradiction ensue in cases involving an attempted cancellation of what Grice calls *conventional* implicature. Unlike conversational implicatures, conventional implicatures arise regardless of context and are (at least in part) attributable to linguistic convention. To borrow one of Grice's (1961) examples, there is no truth-conditional difference between "She is poor and honest" and "She is poor but honest," but we are still inclined to say that these sentences differ in meaning. On Grice's account, an assertion of the latter would involve an additional "non-central" speech act indicating the speaker's (or perhaps someone else's) attitude towards the propositional content of the central speech act (i.e., the assertion that she is poor and honest), an attitude of unexpectedness or contrast. This Grice calls a *conventional* implicature.

There are complex issues involved in spelling out Grice's remarks on this topic, in particular the extent to which the precise content of a given conventional implicature is conversationally determined, i.e., established by recourse to the maxims of conversation and not just to linguistic meaning. As Grice (1961, p. 127) observes, in the example just discussed there is no prospect of characterizing the conventional implicature as a "presupposition" in any interesting sense of this much-abused term: even if the implicature were false, i.e., even if there were no reason on Earth to suppose that poverty and honesty contrasted in any way, what is asserted could still be false, say if she were *rich* and honest. I am here indebted to discussion with Paul Grice.

22. In such a case, Grice would say that you "made as if to say" that *p*, and implicated that *q*, as long as you had no intention of inducing (or activating) in your interlocutor the thought that *p*.

23. Cancellability cannot be a sufficient condition because of ambiguity. Consider the following exchange. *A* and *B* meet in the street:

A: Where are you going?

B: I am going down to the bank to get some money.

A: Who do you bank with?

B: I'm sorry, I don't understand.

A: You said you were going down to the bank to get some money.

B: And so I am; I keep my money buried in a chest down by the river.

One might be tempted to argue that *B*'s first utterance carries with it the implication that *B* is about to visit some sort of financial institution, and that his third utterance succeeds in cancelling this implication. Of course, no one would be tempted to argue that "bank" is unambiguous in English; but since Grice wanted to account for certain alleged ambiguities of philosophical importance in terms of conversational implicature rather than lexical (or syntactical) ambiguity, he cannot (and does not) take cancellability as a sufficient condition for implicature.

24. As pointed out by (e.g.) Sperber and Wilson (1986), since *q* is simply introduced without explanation in step (c), this schema cannot be construed as a characterization of any sort of method for actually *calculating* implicatures, but only as a method for establishing whether or not a particular implication qualifies as a conversational implicature.

25. As Chomsky has emphasized, the syntactician is in a very similar position with respect to intuitions concerning well-formedness (grammaticality). And as Rawls (1971) has pointed out, more or less the same considerations carry over from syntax to ethics. ⁴

26. I shall restrict attention to cases where "and" conjoins sentences for the simple reason that it seems unlikely, to me at least, that all occurrences of "and" that conjoin (e.g.) noun phrases can be analysed in terms of logical conjunction. While a sentence like

(i) Russell and Whitehead lived in Cambridge

might be analysable in terms of the conjunction of (ii) and (iii),

(ii) Russell lived in Cambridge

(iii) Whitehead lived in Cambridge

such a proposal is quite unsuitable for

(iv) Russell and Whitehead wrote *Principia Mathematica*.

We have here yet another problem raised by sentences involving plural noun phrases that admit of collective readings.

27. The results of some psycholinguistic experiments suggest that an "order-of-mention" strategy is applied fairly blindly in the earlier stages of language acquisition by children confronted with utterances containing the words "before" and "after." In particular, children appear to grasp "A before B" and "After A, B" before they grasp "Before B, A" and "B after A." See Clark (1971) and Johnson (1975).

28. Even if it is possible to treat the temporal and causal implications that attach to utterances in which "and" is conjoining sentences in terms of conversational implicature, Carston (1988) points out that it is not at all clear how to extend the proposal to sentences like

(i) Tell me a secret and I'll tell you one

(ii) Shout at me again and I'll quit

in which "and" seems to have the force of "if ... then."

Carston proposes a way of holding onto the idea that "and" is unambiguous while at the same time allowing for a difference between the proposition expressed by "*p* and *q*" and "*p* & *q*" on the grounds that linguistic meaning underdetermines the proposition expressed. Carston's approach may well inherit the positive characteristics of Grice's approach without inheriting many of its problems.

29. According to (e.g.) Gazdar (1979), an utterance of a sentence of the form "some *Fs* are *Gs*" gives rise to a generalized conversational implicature to the effect that the speaker knows that some *Fs* are not *Gs*. But as Soames (1982, pp. 533–537) points out, it is more plausible to suppose that the generalized implicature is really that the speaker does not know whether all *Fs* are *Gs*, an additionally particularized implicature to the effect that the speaker knows (or believes) that some *Fs* are not *Gs*, arising if the speaker can be presumed to know

whether or not all *Fs* are *Gs*. In order to avoid getting immersed in the details of this type of example, I have deliberately refrained from saying that the speaker conversationally implicates that some of the deaths were not accidental, or that the speaker believes (or knows) that some of the deaths were not accidental, opting instead for talk of the speaker implicating that he or she is willing to entertain the possibility that some *Fs* are not *Gs*.

30. Furthermore, as Martin Davies has pointed out to me, parity of reasoning would require that if *S* knew of *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, and *e* that they were all of the *Fs* in existence, *S* could not use "all *Fs*" as a quantifier. The real force of this point will emerge once we turn to referential uses of other quantifiers.

31. The existence of certain object-dependent beliefs on the part of the speaker is sometimes taken to suffice for a "referential" or "specific" use of an *indefinite* description in the literature on this topic (see, e.g., Fodor and Sag (1982)). In my opinion, this leads to considerable confusion. For discussion, see Ludlow and Neale (1991).

32. Although there are counterexamples to (A2), I shall ignore them in what follows. The type of patching that is required would take us too far astray, and after all, I am only trying to provide the referentialist with a workable account of referential usage that can be utilized in conjunction with (A1), I am not trying to present a watertight conceptual analysis. The conjunction of (A1) and (A2) provides the referentialist with a *far more plausible position* than does the conjunction of (A1) with any alternative characterization of referential usage I have seen. (As Kripke (1977) and Searle (1979) observe, Donnellan's (1966) positive characterizations of referential and attributive usage lead to a classification that is neither exclusive nor exhaustive and problematic borderline cases can easily be constructed (on this point, see also Davies, 1981). No doubt the sorts of considerations that Kripke and Searle adduce could also be used to undermine (A2), but it still seems to me to provide the referentialist with the most reasonable position available.)

33. In conversation, it has more than once been suggested that the distinction between referential_D and referential_N uses is pedantic since the claim made by the referentialist is just the broad claim that descriptions used referentially function as referring expressions. But the distinction can only seem pedantic to those who presuppose a neo-Russellian conception of an object-dependent proposition. To someone who is as sensitive as Evans to the important differences between names and demonstratives, the distinction between referential_D and referential_N uses of descriptions will be vital if a semantically distinct referential interpretation turns out to be necessary. I do not want to presuppose any particular account of object-dependence; my reasons for adhering to the distinction concern satisfaction of the Justification Requirement.

34. Such an ambiguity is argued for by Chastain (1975), Wilson (1978), Donnellan (1979), Fodor and Sag (1982), Barwise and Perry (1983), and Stich (1986). For problems with this view, see King (1988) and Ludlow and Neale (1991). As Kripke (1977) points out, many of the considerations that favor a unitary Russellian account of definite descriptions carry over *mutatis mutandis* to indefinite descriptions.

35. This point is made by Sainsbury (1979), Davies (1981), and Blackburn (1984). The example I have used is based on an example due to Davies.

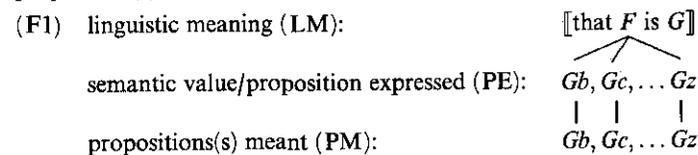
36. To the extent that such schemata seem to be adequate for many cases involving referential uses of descriptions, and to the extent that purely descriptive grounds for an assertion that the *F* is *G* are the exception rather than the rule, we might view such schemata as having the status of interpretive heuristics. More or less this suggestion is made by Klein (1980), though he does not distinguish between referential_N and referential_D uses.

37. This view has been contested by Récanati (1989) on the grounds that one can endorse (A1) and (A2) without being committed to an ambiguity in the definite article. I am baffled by this claim. Récanati explicitly assumes something akin to a three-way Gricean distinction between (a) the linguistic meaning of a sentence ϕ , (b) the proposition expressed by a particular utterance u of ϕ by a speaker S , and (c) the proposition(s) S meant by u . By analogy with the semantics of indexical and demonstrative referring expressions, Récanati suggests that a difference in the proposition expressed by distinct utterances of “the *F* is *G*” does not correspond to distinct linguistic meanings of this sentence (or two linguistic meanings of the description “the *F*” or two linguistic meanings of the definite article “the”).

To fix ideas, let's return to the semantics of demonstratives. If I point to Récanati and say

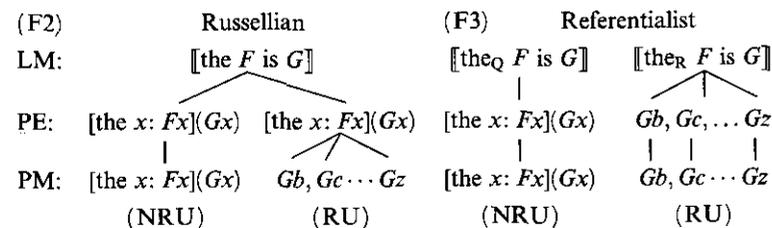
(i) That man is French

I express a true object-dependent proposition about Récanati. If I point to David Lewis and utter (i) I express a false object-dependent proposition about Lewis. Of course, we do not have to say that (i) is ambiguous. It has a unique linguistic meaning; but because it contains an indexical component sensitive to a contextual coordinate, it may be used on different occasions to express different object-dependent propositions. In cases in which the proposition expressed exhausts the proposition(s) meant, we get the following picture (F1):



where each chain represents a distinct utterance of “that *F* is *G*.”

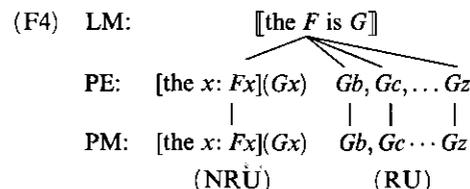
I have assumed until now that the referential use of a description “the *F*” may be captured in one of two ways, which might be pictured as follows:



where “NRU” and “RU” signify nonreferential and referential usage, respectively. For the Russellian “the *F* is *G*” has one linguistic meaning, represented as $[[\text{the } F \text{ is } G]]$; for the referentialist it has two linguistic meanings, represented as $[[\text{the}_Q F \text{ is } G]]$ and $[[\text{the}_R F \text{ is } G]]$.

Underlying the picture of the referentialist's position given in (F3) is the following argument: (i) if a particular utterance u of “the *F* is *G*” expresses the object-independent proposition that whoever or whatever is uniquely *F* is also *G*, and a distinct utterance u^* of “the *F* is *G*” expresses the object-dependent proposition that b is *G*, then the sentence “the *F* is *G*” is semantically ambiguous, i.e., the sentence has two (or more) linguistic meanings (in the sense of 14.3); (ii) if the sentence “the *F* is *G*” is ambiguous and the predicate “is *G*” is unambiguous, then the definite description “the *F*” is ambiguous, i.e., the description has two (or more) linguistic meanings; (iii) if the description “the *F*” is ambiguous and the predicate “*F*” is unambiguous, then the definite article “the” is ambiguous, i.e., the article has two (or more) linguistic meanings.

It appears to be Récanati's view that descriptions can be treated on the model of indexicals and demonstratives, i.e., on the model of (F1) rather than (F3). That is, the sentence “the *F* is *G*” does *not* have two linguistic meanings; rather, it is “indexical” and expresses either an object-dependent or an object-independent proposition according as the description is used referentially or nonreferentially. Récanati is, then, advocating the following picture:



I find this proposal puzzling. The word “I” is unambiguous because it always refers to the speaker; a simple sentence of the form “I am *G*” is unambiguous because it always expresses an *object-dependent* proposition about the speaker. The demonstrative expression “that *F*” is unambiguous because it always refers to the object of the speaker's demonstration and a simple sentence of the form “that *F* is *G*” is unambiguous because it always expresses an *object-dependent* proposition about the object of the speaker's demonstration. On Récanati's proposal, not only may different utterances of “the *F* is *G*” express different *object-dependent* propositions, but other utterances of this same sentence may express the *object-independent* proposition that whatever is uniquely *F* is *G*. It all depends on whether the description is used referentially or nonreferentially.

It seems to me highly artificial to say that “the *F* is *G*,” “the *F*” and “the” are “unambiguous” on this proposal. On some occasions of use “the *F*” refers (or is supposed to refer) to some contextually determined individual and the proposition expressed by “the *F* is *G*” is object-dependent, whereas on other occasions of use “the *F*” does *not* refer (and is not even intended to refer), and the proposition expressed is a complex quantificational affair. Since two utterly distinct *types* of

proposition may be expressed, I fail to see how a theory with such flexibility can fail to be a theory that is postulating a semantical ambiguity. Despite Récanati's remarks to the contrary, it seems to me that his claim that "the *F*" is unambiguous within his theory is close to being on a par with the claim that the noun "bank" is unambiguous: on some occasions it is used for ground alongside a river and on others it is used for a type of financial institution.

Of course, even if Récanati is right that one can endorse (A1) and (A2) without postulating a genuine lexical ambiguity, a unitary Russellian theory of descriptions is still simpler than a theory that allows the proposition expressed to be either object-independent or object-dependent depending upon the context of utterance. Furthermore, the putative coherence of such a theory would not demonstrate that (A1) is true and (A3) is false. (There are also problems internal to Récanati's own positive proposal that I shall not address here.)

38. The general observation that one may succeed in conveying something about an individual by using a description that the individual does not satisfy is due to Hampshire (1959), p. 203. (See also Geach, 1962, and Linsky, 1963, 1966.) Indeed, Hampshire's brief discussion of descriptions (pp. 201–204) appears to anticipate quite a lot of subsequent discussion that appeals to misdescription and the distinction between the proposition expressed and the proposition(s) meant.

39. See (e.g.) Kripke (1977), Sainsbury (1979), Searle (1979), Davies (1981), Evans (1982), and Blackburn (1984). As pointed out by Kripke and Searle, we find a similar tension in cases where a proper name is misapplied. To borrow Kripke's example, suppose two people *A* and *B* see Smith in the distance but mistake him for Jones. *A* says "Jones is up early." *B* replies "Yes, he's hard at work too." Devitt (1981) points out some further troubling features of this sort of example that suggest that the distinction between the proposition expressed and the proposition(s) meant will not clear up all of its complexities.

40. Responses to the Argument from Misdescription in the same vein are also presented by Wiggins (1975), and in rather more detail by Kripke (1977), Sainsbury (1979), Searle (1979), and Davies (1981). For remarks that anticipate the Gricean response to the Argument from Misdescription, see Hampshire (1959), pp. 201–204, and Geach (1962), p. 8.

41. Up to now, I have considered only cases in which the speaker is genuinely mistaken about who or what satisfies the description that is being employed. But as Donnellan (1966) points out, one might perfectly well use a description "the *F*" referentially without being sure that the individual one has in mind is the *F*; indeed, as Hampshire (1959), Donnellan (1966), Grice (1981), and others have pointed out, conceivably one might use the description "the *F*" while being quite sure that it does *not* apply to the individual one has in mind, or to any individual at all. The possibility of such cases does not force us to alter the general picture that has emerged so far, though it certainly adds interesting complications in providing an exact specification of when a description is being used referentially.

If the hearer is intended to reason as before, then such cases are no different from the ones we have been considering, except that [the $x: Fx \mid (x = b)$], and very likely [the $x: Fx \mid (Gx)$], will no longer furnish the speaker's grounds for his or her

utterance. On the other hand, the speaker may be well aware that the hearer does not believe that *b* is the *F*, yet still think it possible to communicate a singular proposition to the effect that *b* is *G* by uttering "the *F* is *G*." (For example, Donnellan considers a case in which both speaker and hearer are aware that the description "the king" does not strictly apply to the individual being referred to because that individual is a usurper; but they continue to use this description because they are fearful of reprisals. Another example: it may become the practice of the members of a certain group of individuals to use the description "the *F*" when they wish to say something about a certain individual. Of course, at a certain point one might well be inclined to treat this description as a name on a par with "The Holy Roman Empire" or "The Evening Star.") A variety of interesting cases can be constructed by tinkering with speakers' and hearers' beliefs about the satisfiers of descriptions and with beliefs about each others' beliefs, but the complexities involved do not seem to provide any insurmountable problems for the Russellian. Indeed, as Kripke (this volume, p. 251, note 22) points out, if anything, the fact that many of these cases—for instance, Donnellan's king/usurper case—look a lot like cases involving irony or "inverted commas" seems to actually *weaken* the case for a semantical ambiguity. After all, we want a pragmatic account of irony, not an account that appeals to distinct literal and ironical meanings of expressions. (Once again, these considerations seem to carry over *mutatis mutandis* to other quantifiers, especially indefinite descriptions. On this matter, see Ludlow and Neale (1991).)

42. Wettstein (1984) suggests that Salmon's argument turns on the mistaken assumption that a sentence relativized to a context of utterance *C* can be evaluated for truth or falsity at a possible world *w*, when in fact truth or falsity are properly predicated of the proposition expressed. But if Salmon is assuming a standard possible worlds semantics, it is unclear to me what technical or philosophical error Wettstein claims to have discovered in Salmon's discussion.

43. There seems to be no generally agreed upon label. Such phrases are known variously as *incomplete*, *improper*, *imperfect*, or *indefinite* definite descriptions.

44. According to Devitt (1981), incomplete descriptions "... are ones that are unsuitable for attributive use because only someone with crazy beliefs would use them: it is obvious that they do not denote" (p. 521). Peacocke's example is a clear counterexample to Devitt's claim, as are the examples from Donnellan (1968) and Evans (1982) quoted below.

45. This point is made by Quine (1940), Sellars (1954), Sainsbury (1979), Davies (1981), and Blackburn (1984).

46. Following Barwise and Cooper (1981), let's say that a quantifier [$Dx: Fx$] is *persistent* just in case the following is a valid inference:

$$\frac{[Dx: Fx](Gx)}{[\text{every } x: Fx](Hx)} \\ [Dx: Hx](Gx)$$

for arbitrary *G* and *H*. Strictly speaking, the particular problem concerning incompleteness that I am addressing surfaces only with nonpersistent quantifiers,

though a derivative problem surfaces for persistent quantifiers. A precise generalization does not seem to be possible here because of complex issues to do with predication, but very roughly we can say the following. For nonpersistent quantifiers the problem is that $[Dx: Fx](Gx)$ might be false while $[Dx: Fx \& Hx](Gx)$ is true; for persistent quantifiers the problem is that $[Dx: Fx](Gx)$ might be true while $[Dx: Fx \& Hx](Gx)$ is false.

47. There seems to be an even more general issue here. As (e.g.) Sellars (1954) and Sperber and Wilson (1986) have stressed, in many cases the linguistic meaning of a sentence—or sentence fragment—radically underdetermines the proposition it is used to express on a given occasion. We have already considered the sort of contextual supplementation that is required where an utterance contains overtly indexical or demonstrative components; but context-sensitivity does not end there. Suppose I ask *S* how old he is and he replies, “Twenty-five.” We want to say that *S* has expressed the proposition that he is twenty-five years old. Or take the sentence “This cup is mine.” Here there is no obvious ellipsis, but depending upon the context of utterance I might use this sentence to express the proposition that (e.g.) this cup is owned by me, or that it is being drunk from by me, or that it is being used by me, or that it has been assigned to me.

48. One could, of course, maintain that incompleteness is of no consequence once one takes into account the distinction between the proposition expressed and the proposition(s) meant. The idea here would be that my utterance of “everybody was sick” expresses the manifestly false proposition that everybody was sick, but in the particular conversational setting it is very clear that I am attempting to convey the proposition that everybody who came to the dinner party I had last night was sick (standard forms of Gricean reasoning explaining the leap from the proposition expressed to the proposition meant). I know of no knock-down argument against this approach to incompleteness, but in view of the fact that context-dependence is such a ubiquitous feature of the use of natural language, it seems likely that the explicit and implicit methods yield predictions more in accordance with our intuitive ascriptions of truth and falsity.

49. When all is said and done, the explicit and implicit methods might turn out to be notational variants of one another. For remarks that suggest otherwise, see Davies (1981) and Soames (1986).

50. For similar suggestions, see also Quine (1940), Vendler (1967), Lewis (1973), Cresswell (1973), and Grice (1981).

51. As noted at the outset, the problem of incompleteness affects plural as well as singular descriptions. In what follows, I shall restrict attention to singular descriptions, though nearly everything I shall have to say ought to carry over *mutatis mutandis* to plurals.

52. Even Kripke (1977) and Evans (1982), both of whom are very sympathetic to a unitary Russellian interpretation of descriptions, suggest that incompleteness may be just enough of a problem for the Russellian to warrant the postulation of a referential interpretation.

53. This has been noted by, e.g., Sellars (1954), Grice (1970, 1981), Evans (1982), Salmon (1982), and Soames (1986). After the bulk of the present chapter was completed, Nathan Salmon drew my attention to a recent paper by Blackburn (1988) in which the same point is made in the context of a discussion of Wettstein's argument.

54. To be more precise, saying that a Russellian description “[the $x: Rbx$]” may contain a referential component “ b ” is very different from saying that the description is referential (in the intended sense) *as long as R is not the identity relation*. A phrase of the form “[the $x: x = b$]” is technically a Russellian definite description; but the claim that referential uses of descriptions do not require distinctive non-Russellian interpretations would indeed be hollow if the Russellian position could be maintained only by employing the identity relation to concoct descriptions of this form (e.g., “[the $x: x = \text{that}$]”). There is nothing in the present work to suggest that descriptions of this form are required to account for referential usage. I am here indebted to Martin Davies.

55. The coordinates of a simple context $\langle s, a, \langle d_1, \dots, d_n \rangle, t, p \rangle$ will not systematically supply a correct completion. Consider the incomplete description “the President.” Suppose we are in the middle of a conversation right now somewhere in the U.S.A. and I say to you

(i) The President is very ill.

The fact that the utterance takes place in the U.S.A. does not guarantee that the description “the President” is elliptical for “the U.S. President.” For suppose our entire conversation has been about the health of French politicians and I was in fact “talking about” the French President.

It may, at this stage, be tempting to add further coordinates to the formal notion of a context to cover such things as the *topic of discourse* and so on (see, e.g., Lewis, 1975). Husserl (1913, p. 85) suggests that “When a contemporary German speaks of “the Emperor,” he means the present German Emperor.” A literal reading of this remark suggests that one's nationality is the relevant coordinate! In 14.4, I argued that we should not expect to be able to provide a formal specification of those features of context that play a role in the calculation of (e.g.) conversational implicatures. (This is not to say, of course, that one cannot attempt to provide a specification of the sorts of principles hearers bring to bear on the interpretation process.) For essentially the same reason, I think it quite unlikely that an expansion of the formal notion of a context will be of much help in pinning down those factors that, on a given occasion of utterance, may play a role in the full specification of the content of an incomplete description. The important point to note here is that there is absolutely no requirement that a semantical theory be able to provide an account of which contextual features will be drawn upon in order to complete an incomplete description in any given scenario. It is enough if a semantical theory provide the general mechanisms with the aid of which actual complete contents can be specified.

56. In addition to the referential use of descriptions, it is possible to isolate several others.

Appositive Use. Searle (1979), and Barwise and Perry (1983) observe that descriptions may be used *appositively*, as in

(i) John Smith, the man who threw strawberry ice cream at the Pope, was today sentenced to 50 years hard labor.

This example does not seem to present any sort of additional problem for Russell that will not have to be faced in any event by a semantical theory of apposition. One approach to (i) that might be explored is an analysis in terms of the conjunction of (ii) and (iii):

(ii) John Smith was today sentenced to 50 years hard labor

(iii) John Smith was the man who threw strawberry ice cream at the Pope.

Another approach that might be explored is to treat the subject of (i) as a complex definite description "[the x : x = John Smith & x threw ice cream at the Pope]." Of course, these suggestions need to be investigated in detail before we can feel comfortable with either of them. Unlike the former proposal, the latter seems to carry over naturally to an example like

(iv) The sculptor John Smith died today.

Predicative Use. No new problems are presented by an example like

(v) John Smith is the man who threw strawberry ice cream at the Pope.

Indefinite Use. Tom Wasow has noted examples such as

(vi) Look it up in the dictionary!

(vii) Let's go to the beach.

These examples are (perhaps) best seen as idiomatic.

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Chapter 15

Descriptions, Indexicals,
and Belief Reports: Some
Dilemmas (But Not the
Ones You Expect)

Stephen Schiffer

1 Introduction

I am going to state what I take to be a couple of dilemmas for certain theorists. The first is a dilemma for theorists who hold both that certain sentences containing pronouns or demonstratives express object-dependent propositions and that a certain version of Russell’s theory of descriptions can account for all uses of definite descriptions.¹ The second is a dilemma for a certain view about the semantics of belief reports which is common among those who hold that sentences containing certain kinds of singular terms express object-dependent propositions, and this dilemma is generated by a partial solution to the first dilemma.

So my dialectic involves the following players. To begin, there are three theses which, for reasons that will become clear, I shall call *the hidden-indexical theory of belief reports*, *the hidden-indexical theory of descriptions*, and *the direct-reference theory of indexicals*. Next, there is a dilemma for one who holds the direct-reference theory of indexicals in conjunction with the hidden-indexical theory of descriptions. After that comes a partial resolution of that dilemma, and that partial resolution is used to create a dilemma for one who holds the hidden-indexical theory of belief reports. Finally, I speculate fleetingly, but with much hand waving, about the complete resolution of these dilemmas. I begin by setting up the three theses.

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