

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Bertrand Russell's Theory of Definite Descriptions: an Examination

by

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## Abstract

Despite its enormous popularity, Russell's theory of definite descriptions has received various criticisms. Two of the most important objections against this theory are those arising from the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction. According to the former although a speaker may say something true by assertively uttering a sentence containing an incomplete description, on the Russellian analysis such a sentence expresses a false proposition; so, Russell's theory cannot adequately deal with such sentences. According to the latter objection a descriptive sentence is actually ambiguous—it expresses a general proposition when the description contained in it is used attributively, and a singular proposition when the description in question is used referentially; Russell's theory is inadequate as it fails to capture this ambiguity and offers an analysis according to which a descriptive sentence expresses only a general proposition. These objections are examined in the present dissertation. It is shown here that these objections arise from: (i) ignoring the distinction between the meaning of a sentence and the assertions made by using it, (ii) the failure to distinguish between the semantic meaning of a sentence and the pragmatic meaning with which it is used on a particular occasion. To make the distinction mentioned in (i), a significant part of Scott Soames' theory concerning meaning and assertions has been adopted in this dissertation; and, to make the distinction mentioned in (ii), a test, namely the cancellability test, and two Distinguishing Criteria, namely *DC-1* and *DC-2*, have been developed here. It has been argued here that if we properly make the relevant distinctions, then we will find that: (a) the phenomenon cited by the Argument from Incompleteness can be well explained keeping the Russellian analysis of descriptive sentences intact, (b) the phenomenon arising from the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction raises an issue of pragmatics and is irrelevant to Russell's semantic analysis of descriptive sentences. So, none of the above criticisms poses a genuine threat to Russell's theory of definite descriptions; his theory actually provides, to a large extent, a correct semantic analysis of descriptive sentences.

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I attempt to express my gratitude to my wife **Tasmin Irfan Keya**; but I find that my language is so limited that it cannot express what is to be expressed. Keya allowed me—and, in fact, encouraged me—to come here in Canada for my higher study taking all family-problems and responsibilities (responsibilities that include the responsibility of protecting and upbringing our autistic son) on her shoulder. I think the only reason why she encouraged me to come here was that she could read my mind and wanted me to do what I wanted to do. She has always been so supportive that I am compelled to say that there may be no possible world in which I exist and have a partner who is more supportive than she is in the actual world.

By my absence from my family I have badly deprived our only child **Raiyan M. Mansur** of the company of his father. Let me say “sorry” to him here, although saying “sorry” is not enough for me to be excused.

During my research I have lost both of my parents. They encouraged me a lot to come to Canada and pursue my PhD study here; they wanted to see me to have a PhD Degree. Unfortunately, they are no more to see that I have completed writing my dissertation for PhD Degree. **I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my parents.**

## **Dedication**

To the memory of my parents

**Mansur-Ur-Rahaman**

(1930-2011)

**Rabeya Akhtar**

(1936-2008)

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### Concise List of Sentences Used in Examples

- (1) The present queen of England is a scholar
- (2) The present king of France is bald.
- (2a) The present king of France is not bald.
- (2b) The king of France in 1905 is bald.
- (3) The round square is a round square.
- (4) The existent round square is an existent round square.
- (5) Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep.
- (6) The round square does not exist
- (7) George IV wishes to know whether Scott is the author of *Waverley*.
- (8) Scott is the author of *Waverley*.
- (9) George IV wishes to know whether Scott is Scott.
- (10) The word “Cicero” begins with the third letter of English alphabet.
- (11) Cicero is identical with Tully.
- (12) The word “Tully” begins with the third letter of English alphabet.
- (13) The teacher of Alexander is Aristotle.
- (13a) The teacher of Alexander is such that it is true of him that he is Aristotle.
- (14) The author of *Principia Mathematica* is such that it is true of him that he is Bertrand Russell.
- (14a) The author of *Principia Mathematica* is Bertrand Russell.
- (15) It is true of the author of *Waverley* that George IV wishes to know whether Scott is him.
- (16) It is true of Scott that George IV wishes to know whether Scott is him.
- (17)  $\sim G(\iota x)Fx$
- (18)  $\sim\sim G(\iota x)Fx$
- (19) The father of Charles II was executed.
- (19a) Exactly one person begat Charles II, and whoever begat Charles II was executed.
- (19b)  $(\exists x)[(x \text{ begat Charles II} \wedge (\forall y)(y \text{ begat Charles II} \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ was executed}]$
- (20) The father of Charles II was not executed.

- (20a) Exactly one person begat Charles II, and whoever begat Charles II was not executed.
- (20b)  $(\exists x)[(x \text{ begat Charles II} \wedge (\forall y)(y \text{ begat Charles II} \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ was not executed}]$
- (20c) It is not the case that exactly one person begat Charles II, and whoever begat Charles II was executed.
- (20d)  $\sim(\exists x)[(x \text{ begat Charles II} \wedge (\forall y)(y \text{ begat Charles II} \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ was executed}]$
- (21) The present president of the United States is an African-American male person.
- (22) I believe that the tallest spy is a spy.
- (22a) It is true of the tallest spy that I believe him to be a spy.
- (23) Aristotle was fond of dogs.
- (23a) The last great philosopher of antiquity was fond of dogs.
- (24) The murderer of President John F. Kennedy was killed by Jack Ruby
- (25) The table is covered with books.
- (25a) The table *near the window of this room* is covered with books.
- (25b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table &  $x$  is over there]  $x$  is covered with books.
- (25c) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table &  $x$  is owned by me]  $x$  is covered with books.
- (25d) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table &  $x$  was bought last month by me]  $x$  is covered with books.
- (25e) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table]  $x$  is covered with book.
- (26) The king of France is wise.
- (27) Smith's murderer is insane.
- (27a) [the  $x$ :  $x$  murdered Smith]  $x$  is insane.
- (27b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  murdered Smith &  $x = \text{Jones}$ ]  $x$  is insane
- (27c) Jones is insane.
- (27d) [the  $x$ :  $x$  murdered Smith]  $x = \text{Jones}$ .
- (28) The student whom I do not know has sent me a mail.
- (29) The thief has stolen my dictionary.
- (30) The cat is hungry.

- (31) All students are attending Professor Kripke's lecture today.
- (32) Everyone likes her.
- (33) The Russian has voted for the Russian.
- (33a) The Russian *judge of today's match* has voted for the Russian *boxer of today's match*.
- (33b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a Russian]  $x$  voted for the Russian.
- (33c) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a Russian &  $x$  is a judge of today's match here] {[the  $y$ : (( $y$  is a Russian &  $y$  is a boxer of today's match here) & ( $y \neq x$ ))] ( $x$  voted for  $y$ )}
- (34) The librarian is very busy today.
- (35) The man in a red vest is a fool.
- (36) The murderer is insane.
- (36a) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a murderer]  $x$  is insane.
- (36b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a murderer of  $v$ ]  $x$  is insane.
- (36c) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a murderer &  $x = m$ ]  $m$  is insane.
- (36d)  $m$  is insane.
- (36e) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a murderer of  $v$  &  $x = m$ ]  $x$  is insane
- (37) The cook is more experienced than the cook who prepared the main course.
- (38) "Hesperus" referred to a heavenly body<sub>i</sub> and "Phosphorus" referred to it<sub>i</sub>.
- (39) Her husband is kind to her.
- (40) *A man* came to the office today. *He* tried to sell me an encyclopedia.
- (40a) *A man* came to the office today. *The man* tried to sell me an encyclopedia.
- (40b) *A man* came to the office today. *The man who came to the office today* tried to sell me an encyclopedia.
- (41) *A man* came to the office today. *A man* tried to sell me an encyclopedia.
- (42) A said that *a man* came to the office today. A also said that *he (the man)* tried to sell her an encyclopedia.
- (42a) B asserted that A said that *a man* came to the office today. B also asserted that A said that *he (the man)* tried to sell her an encyclopedia.
- (43) There is some man such that *B* asserted (of that man) that A said that he tried to sell her an encyclopedia.
- (43a) B asserted that A said that you tried to sell her an encyclopedia.

- (44) Ralph believes that Otrcutt is a spy.
- (44a) Otrcutt is such that Ralph believes him to be a spy.
- (45) Ralph believes that the shortest spy is a spy.
- (45a) The shortest spy is such that Ralph believes him to be a spy.
- (46) Ralph believes that Smith's murderer is insane.
- (47) She ate rice and fish in her lunch yesterday.
- (47a) She ate both, rice and fish, in her lunch yesterday.
- (47b) She ate rice in her lunch yesterday.
- (47c) She ate fish in her lunch yesterday.
- (48) I met Tendulkar. [*A sentence*]
- (48a) I met Tendulkar. [*The semantic content of (48)*]
- (48b) I met the genius cricketer Tendulkar.
- (49) The man is talking with another man.
- (49a) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a man]  $x$  is talking with another man.
- (49b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a man &  $x$  is sitting on the seat numbered 30 in the room SS 1252 of the University of Calgary at 11 a.m. of 14<sup>th</sup> September]  $x$  is talking with another man.
- (50) The dinner party was nice.
- (50a) [the  $x$ : ( $x$  was a dinner party &  $x$  was held last night in River Cafe) & Jones and Black, among others, attended in  $x$ ]  $x$  was nice.
- (50b) [the  $x$ : ( $x$  was a dinner party &  $x$  was held on the night of 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2012 in River Cafe) & Jones and Black, among others, attended in  $x$ ]  $x$  was nice.
- (50c) [the  $x$ : ( $x$  was a dinner party &  $x$  was held last Friday night in River Cafe) & Jones and Black, among others, attended in  $x$ ]  $x$  was nice.
- (51) Every student must attend tomorrow's seminar.
- (51a) [Every  $x$ :  $x$  is a student]  $x$  must attend tomorrow's seminar.
- (51b) [Every  $x$ :  $x$  is a student &  $x$  takes the course PHIL 501 taught by Mr. Y]  $x$  must attend the seminar to be held tomorrow in the room SS 1252 of the University of Calgary.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Russell's Theory of Definite Descriptions: the Theory and Its Use

Normally, descriptive sentences of the form “The *F* is *G*” are taken as meaningful and are supposed to have truth-values. For example, the sentence:

(1) The present queen of England is a scholar

is a meaningful sentence; a competent user of English is expected to understand it. This sentence is supposed to have a truth-value: if the unique object designated by the subject term has the property that is attributed to it by the predicate term, then the sentence is true; and if the unique object designated by the subject term lacks the property that is attributed to it, then the sentence is false. It is also supposed that in a case of a true or a false sentence of this sort there must be a particular object designated by its subject term to which a property is attributed (or denied of) by the predicate term of the sentence in question—if there were no such object, then there would be nothing to have or lack a property. There seems nothing problematic with this idea when we deal with a descriptive sentence whose description is satisfied by a unique object. But we face a problem with this idea when we deal with descriptive sentences that contain empty descriptions<sup>1</sup>, e.g. “the present king of France”, “the golden mountain”, “the round square”, etc. For example, consider the following sentence:

(2) The present king of France is bald.

Since there is no king of France now, it seems that the definite description “the present king of France” does not designate anything (which could have or lack the property of being bald). If this is so, then how can the sentence (2) be either true or false? To address this problem, Alexius Meinong, an Austrian philosopher, introduces the idea of *subsistence*. Subsistence, according to Meinong, is a special mode of being which belongs to objects that do not exist but about which something can be thought (“an object that exists “in my thought of it” [“in meiner Vorstellung”]”<sup>2</sup>) and to whom references can be made. Meinong says:

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<sup>1</sup> A description is an empty description if nothing satisfies that description.

<sup>2</sup> Alexius Meinong, *Über Annahmen*, (Leipzig: Barth, 1910), ed. & trans. James Heanue as *On Assumption* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983; henceforth referred to as Meinong (1910/1983)), p. 49.

“That  $A$  exists,” or again, “that it does not exist” is something that “subsists” if the judgment made immediately apprehending it might have been correctly made; but it does not exist once over, as it were. And needless to say, much the same thing would have to be asserted of any objective that had subsistents as its own material: “that 3 is greater than 2”, or again, “that crooked is not straight”—this likewise can subsist, but not exist.<sup>3</sup>

So, it seems that for Meinong although an empty description, such as “the present king of France”, does not refer to an existent object, it refers to a subsistent object.

Meinong’s account seems to be based on two claims—(i) every object of thought has some sort of being, and (ii) every sentence of the form “The  $F$  is [an]  $F$ ” expresses a true proposition. For example, consider the following sentence:

(3) The round square is a round square.

Now, according to Meinongian account, although there is no round square, the object designated by the definite description “the round square” has some sort of being (the object designated by “the round square” does subsist); and the sentence is true as it has the form “The  $F$  is [an]  $F$ ”. Bertrand Russell disagrees with both of these claims, although like Meinong he believes that sentences containing empty descriptions are meaningful and have truth-values of their own. Against Meinong’s first claim, Russell says that Meinong’s concept of non-existent but subsistent objects is a highly implausible concept which is not supported by the sciences. He emphasizes that there is only one world—the real world—that is studied by various sciences. And logic is not something totally different from other sciences in that it studies the same world studied by other sciences.<sup>4</sup> So, there is no reason to think that in logic the so-called subsistence of non-existent objects are admitted. Against Meinong’s second claim, Russell objects that Meinong’s position involves a violation of the law of contradiction. He argues that if Meinong is correct in claiming that every sentence of the form “The  $F$  is [an]  $F$ ” is true, then the following sentence is true:

(4) The existent round square is an existent round square.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1919), p. 169.

And, if the sentence (4) is true, then something round and square exists. But anything round and square is impossible, and hence, does not exist.<sup>5</sup> In this way Meinong's position leads us to a violation of the law of contradiction. Russell anticipates that in response to this criticism Meinong may claim that the law of contradiction is applicable to actual and possible objects but not to impossible objects.<sup>6</sup> But this reply, according to Russell, won't work because "it is of propositions, not of subjects, that the law of contradiction is asserted"<sup>7</sup>; and there is no good reason for assuming that the law of contradiction does not hold in cases of sentences that involve impossible objects if there were any such object.<sup>8</sup> Meinong, in reply to Russell's criticism, claims that the existent round square is existent but does not exist. But, according to Russell, this reply does not make sense. He says:

I must confess that I see no difference between existing and being existent; and beyond this I have no more to say on this head.<sup>9</sup>

At any rate, according to Russell, Meinong's position deserves to be rejected on the ground that it involves a violation of the law of contradiction.

Gottlob Frege offers an alternative to Meinong's position. He distinguishes between the sense and the reference of a name. By the sense of a name Frege means the mode of presentation of its reference<sup>10</sup>; and by the reference of a name he means the object the name designates or applies to.<sup>11</sup> For example, the sense of the name "Hesperus" may be *the brightest celestial object regularly seen in the eastern horizon after the sunset*;

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 534.

<sup>6</sup> Bertrand Russell, review of *Über die Stellung der Gegenstandstheorie im System der Wissenschaften*, by Von A. Meinong, *Mind* 16, no. 63 (1907), p. 439.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 439.

<sup>8</sup> Actually Russell does not admit the possibility of impossible objects. In his review of Meinong's *Über die Stellung* he clearly states that he does not see any reason to admit that there are impossible objects. (See: Russell (1907), p. 439.).

<sup>9</sup> Russell (1907), p. 439.

<sup>10</sup> Frege says that sense is the manner in which a reference is presented. (Gottlob Frege, "Über Sinn and Bedeutung" *Zeitschrift für Philosophie. und Philosophische Kritik* 100 (1892), pp. 25-50.; trans. and reprinted with the title "On Sense and Reference" in *The Philosophical Review* 57, no. 3 (1948), pp. 209-230. (Henceforth referred to as: Frege (1892/1948)), Frege (1892/1948), p. 210.

<sup>11</sup> Frege (1892/1948), p. 214.

and the reference of that name is the planet Venus. In Frege's account descriptions like "the present king of France", "the heavenly body which has the greatest distance from the earth", etc., are treated as names. Now, according to Frege it is not the case that every name (or every description) which has a sense must have a reference; there are names which have senses but do not have references at all. Frege gives the example that the description "the heavenly body which has the greatest distance from the earth" has a sense but does not have a reference. According to Frege it is the sense of a term that makes the term meaningful. So, a description which has a sense is meaningful even if it does not have a reference; and a sentence containing such a description (meaningful but without reference) may be meaningful. Frege holds the view that sentences containing empty names (empty descriptions) lack references although they may be meaningful. He says:

Is it possible that a sentence as a whole has only a sense, but no referent?

At any rate, one might expect that such sentences occur, just as there are parts of sentences having sense but no referent. And sentences which contain names without referents will be of this kind.<sup>12</sup>

Frege's example of a sentence that, as a whole, has a meaning but does not have a reference is the following:

(5) Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep.

According to Frege (5) has a sense, but "Odysseus" does not have a reference, and consequently, the whole sentence does not have a reference either.<sup>13</sup> Sentences of this sort, *i.e.* sentences containing names that are devoid of references, are, according to Frege, neither true nor false; the question of truth-value does not arise for this sort of sentences.<sup>14</sup> Since in Frege's account descriptions are names, what is said above about

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>13</sup> Frege holds the view that the reference of a complex expression is a function of its constituents. So, references of constituents of a complex expression yield the reference of the complex. Thus, a sentence which has a constituent that is devoid of any reference does not, as a whole, have a reference. This view is called the *compositionality principle* for reference. (See: Kenneth Taylor, *Truth and Meaning: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*, (Oxford, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 11-12; and Michael Morris, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 25-26, 36-40.

<sup>14</sup> Frege (1892/1948), pp. 215-16; and Gottlob Frege "Comments on Sense and Meaning" (1892-95), trans. P. Long and R. White, *Posthumous Writings*, eds. H. Hermes, F. Kambartel and F. Kaulbach (Oxford:

names is true of descriptions too. That is, for Frege, a sentence containing an empty description, *e.g.* the sentence (2), may be meaningful, but does not have a truth-value.

So, we see, Frege accounts for the meaningfulness of sentences containing empty descriptions at the cost of their truth-values. Russell disagrees with Frege's view because, he believes, sentences containing empty descriptions, *e.g.* "The present king of France is bald", "The round square is round and square", etc., not only do have meanings but also are either true or false. So, Russell rejects Frege's theory on the ground that Frege's theory cannot account for the truth-values of sentences containing empty descriptions.

After rejecting Meinong and Frege's proposals Russell is faced with the problems of how a meaningful sentence containing an empty description, *e.g.* the sentence (2), expresses a proposition that is either true or false; and how a true negative existential sentence like:

(6) The round square does not exist

can be asserted without committing a self-contradiction. The first problem concerns a puzzle which is described as *the puzzle about the law of excluded middle in the context of empty descriptions*, and the second problem concerns another puzzle which is described as *the puzzle about self-contradiction in the context of true negative existential sentences*. Russell describes the puzzle about the law of excluded middle in the context of empty descriptions in the following way:

By the law of the excluded middle, either "A is B" or "A is not B" must be true. Hence either "the present King of France is bald" or "the present King of France is not bald" must be true. Yet if we enumerated the things that are bald, and then the things that are not bald, we should not find the present King of France in either list. Hegelians, who love a synthesis, will probably conclude that he wears a wig.<sup>15</sup>

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Blackwell, 1979; henceforth referred to as Frege (1892-95/1979)), p. 122.; Frege thinks that this sort of sentences, *i.e.* sentences that are devoid of reference, and consequently are neither true nor false, should be eliminated from sciences, logic and mathematics as those disciplines are interested in what is true. (See: Frege (1892/1948), pp. 222-23., and Frege (1892-95/1979), p. 122.)

<sup>15</sup> Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting", *Mind* 14, no. 56 (1905), p. 485.

The way Russell puts the law of excluded middle can be expressed in the following way:

LEM: For any sentence  $\phi$ , either  $\phi$  or the denial of  $\phi$ , *i.e.*  $\sim\phi$ , is true.

Normally, there is no problem with this law. But we face a trouble with this law when we deal with sentences containing empty descriptions. For example, consider again the sentence (2):

(2) The present king of France is bald.

The denial of (2) is:

(2a) The present king of France is not bald.

Now, according to LEM either the sentence (2) or the sentence (2a) is true. But the problem is that there is no king of France now to whom the property of being bald or the property of being not bald can be attributed. So, it seems that neither the sentence (2) nor the sentence (2a) is true. Here, then, we observe a counterexample to LEM. So, it seems that the law of excluded middle is false. But Russell believes that the law of excluded middle is a true law of logic. So, for Russell, empty descriptions pose a puzzle about the truth of the law of excluded middle.

Russell, then, describes the puzzle about self-contradiction in the context of true negative existential sentences in the following way:

Consider the proposition “*A* differs from *B*.” If this is true, there is a difference between *A* and *B*, which fact may be expressed in the form “the difference between *A* and *B* subsists.” But if it is false that *A* differs from *B*, then there is no difference between *A* and *B*, which fact may be expressed in the form “the difference between *A* and *B* does not subsist.” But how can a non-entity be the subject of a proposition? `... it would appear, it must always be self-contradictory to deny the being of anything ...<sup>16</sup>

The problem Russell indicates here is this: in a case of a true subject-predicate form of sentence the object designated by the subject term has the property which is attributed to it by the predicate term of the sentence. So, it seems that in a case of a true sentence of this sort there must exist an object (designated by the subject term of the sentence in

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 485.

question) to have the property attributed to it by the predicate term of the sentence. But if the property in question is the property of non-existence, then the relevant sentence appears to be self-contradictory as in that case the existence of the object designated by the subject term is first admitted and then denied in the same sentence. That is why Russell says that it appears to be always self-contradictory to deny the being of anything.<sup>17</sup> Yet, we actually can do this, *i.e.* we can make true negative existential sentences like “The round square does not exist”, “The present king of France does not exist”, etc., without committing any self-contradiction. There is, thus, a puzzle about how we can make true negative existential sentences without committing self-contradiction.

Besides the above described two puzzles, Russell chooses to deal with another puzzle. He describes this puzzle in the following way:

If *a* is identical with *b*, whatever is true of the one is true of the other, and either may be substituted for the other in any proposition without altering the truth or falsehood of that proposition. Now George IV wished to know whether Scott was the author of *Waverley*; and in fact Scott *was* the author of *Waverley*. Hence we may substitute *Scott* for *the author of 'Waverley'*, and thereby prove that George IV wished to know whether Scott was Scott. Yet an interest in the law of identity can hardly be attributed to the first gentleman of Europe.<sup>18</sup>

The argument that represents the puzzle in the above paragraph can be expressed in the following way:

- (7) George IV wishes to know whether Scott is the author of *Waverley*.
- (8) Scott is the author of *Waverley*.
- (9) Therefore, George IV wishes to know whether Scott is Scott.

Now, this puzzle concerning George IV’s curiosity can be interpreted in two ways. In its first interpretation, this is a puzzle about the law of substitution of terms. According to this interpretation, the following law, *i.e.* the law of substitution of terms, is true:

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 485.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 485.

For any term  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , if  $\lceil \alpha = \beta \rceil$  is true, and a sentence  $S$  contains an occurrence of  $\alpha$ , and the sentence  $S^*$  is obtained by replacing that occurrence of  $\alpha$  with  $\beta$ , then  $S$  and  $S^*$  have the same truth-value.

Now, we see, in the above argument concerning George IV's curiosity the first premise, *i.e.* (7), is assumed to be true; and the second premise, *i.e.* (8), is true because Scott really is the author of *Waverley*. The conclusion, *i.e.* (9), is derivable from (7) and (8) by the law of substitution of terms which (in this interpretation of the puzzle) is taken as a true law of logic. Now, since the premises of the above argument are true, its conclusion must be true if the law of substitution of terms is a true law of logic. But the conclusion of the above argument, according to Russell, actually is not true because, as he mentions, it is not the case that George IV is wondering whether Scott is Scott; rather, what George IV wishes to know is whether Scott is the person who wrote *Waverley*.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it seems that the law of substitution of terms is false. But, as we have seen, the law of substitution of terms is taken as a true law of logic (in this interpretation). Hence, there is a puzzle about this law.

But the above interpretation of the puzzle is not satisfactory because the law of substitution of terms—which is taken as a true law of logic in the above interpretation of the puzzle—is itself a problematic law. To see why it has been claimed that the law of substitution of terms is a problematic law, consider the following argument:

- (10) The word “Cicero” begins with the third letter of English alphabet [S]
- (11) Cicero is identical with Tully [Cicero = Tully]
- (12) Therefore, the word “Tully” begins with the third letter of English alphabet [S\*]

Here, the first premise, *i.e.* (10), is true because the word “Cicero” really begins with the third letter of English alphabet. The second premise, *i.e.* (11), is true because “Cicero” and “Tully” are two names of the one and the same person. The conclusion, *i.e.* (12), is derivable from the premises (10) and (11) by the law of substitution of terms. But the conclusion is false since the word “Tully” does not begin with the third letter of English alphabet. That is, here we observe: “Cicero = Tully” is true, and  $S$  contains an occurrence

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 489.

of “Cicero”, and  $S^*$  is obtained by replacing that occurrence of “Cicero” with “Tully”, but  $S$  and  $S^*$  do not have the same truth-value;  $S$  is true, but  $S^*$  is false. Thus, here we have a counterexample to the law of substitution of terms. So, the law of substitution of terms is false. Now, since the law of substitution of terms is false, there is nothing to be puzzled if the argument concerning George IV’s curiosity violates the law of substitution of terms. So, it seems that the puzzle Russell is concerned with is not a puzzle about the law of substitution of terms. Hence, the above interpretation is not the correct interpretation of the puzzle Russell is concerned with.

There is, however, a different interpretation of the puzzle concerning George IV’s curiosity. Under this interpretation this puzzle is not a puzzle about the controversial law of substitution of terms but a puzzle about the uncontroversial law of identity. The law of identity is distinct from the law of substitution of terms—the law of substitution of terms is a law about language but the law of identity is a law about objects. According to the law of identity:

For anything  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $x = y$ , then whatever is true of  $x$  is true of  $y$ , and  
*vice-versa*.

Besides, this second interpretation of the puzzle takes two laws, namely the *law of exportation* and the *law of importation*, as true laws. Since these laws play a central role in the second interpretation of the puzzle, an illumination on them is required. Take, for example, the following sentence:

(13) The teacher of Alexander is Aristotle.

Now, it seems that if (13) is true, the following is also true: concerning the teacher of Alexander, it is true of him that he is Aristotle. If that is the case, then from the sentence (13) the following sentence, *i.e.* (13a), can validly be inferred:

(13a) The teacher of Alexander is such that it is true of him that he is  
Aristotle.

In (13a) the phrase “the teacher of Alexander” has been *exported* from the clause succeeding the phrase “it is true of him that”. The law that allows to infer (13a) from (13) is called the law of exportation. Again, consider the following sentence:

(14) The author of *Principia Mathematica* is such that it is true of him that he is Bertrand Russell.

Now, if (14) is true, then it seems that the following is also true: concerning the author of *Principia Mathematica*, it is true of him that he is Bertrand Russell. If that is the case, then from (14) the following sentence, *i.e.* (14a), can validly be inferred:

(14a) The author of *Principia Mathematica* is Bertrand Russell.

Here, (14a) is inferred from (14) by *importing* “the author of *Principia Mathematica*” into the clause succeeding the phrase “it is true of him that”. The law that allows to infer (14a) from (14) is called the law of importation.

Now, the second interpretation of the puzzle runs in this way: by the exportation of “the author of *Waverley*” from the context of propositional attitude:

From

(7) George IV wishes to know whether Scott is the author of *Waverley*

we find

(15) It is true of the author of *Waverley* that George IV wishes to know whether Scott is him.

The sentence (8) expresses an identity relation between Scott and the author of *Waverley*, *i.e.* Scott = the author of *Waverley*. Now, according to the law of identity, whatever is true of Scott is true of the author of *Waverley*. The sentence (15) expresses that it is true of the author of *Waverley* that George IV wishes to know whether Scott is him. So, if (15) is true, and if Scott = the author of *Waverley*, *i.e.* if (8) is true, then by the law of identity, we find:

(16) It is true of Scott that George IV wishes to know whether Scott is him.

Now, by the importation of “Scott” in the context of propositional attitude: from (16) we find:

George IV wishes to know whether Scott is Scott  
(*i.e.* the sentence (9))

So, we see:

(A) If (7) is true, then (15) is true. [Exportation]

(B) If (15) is true, and (8) is true, then (16) is true. [Law of Identity]

(C) If (16) is true, then (9) is true. [Importation]

(D) Therefore, if (7) is true, and (8) is true, then (9) is true [From (A)-(C)]

That is, if (7) and (8) are true, and if the law of identity is a true law of logic, then (9) must be true. But as we have seen earlier, (9) is false even though (7) and (8) are true. So, it seems that the law of identity is not a true law of logic. But actually the law of identity is a true law of logic. There is, thus, a puzzle that concerns the law of identity. This puzzle may be called as *the puzzle about the law of identity in the context of propositional attitudes*. It should be noted here that this second interpretation of the puzzle seems to be a more plausible interpretation of it as this interpretation concerns the uncontroversial law of identity instead of the controversial law of substitution of terms. So, we take it, *i.e.* the second interpretation of the puzzle, as the correct interpretation of the puzzle in question.

From the above discussion we see that the challenge that Russell takes is to provide a theory that is non-Meinongian and non-Fregean, but which (i) can account for the meaningfulness of sentences containing empty descriptions without postulating the idea of non-existent but subsistent objects (unlike Meinong), (ii) can account for the truth-value of propositions expressed by such sentences (unlike Frege), and (iii) has the capacity of successfully dealing with the above mentioned puzzles. Russell believes that his theory of definite descriptions is a theory that can satisfy all of these requirements.

Russell's theory of definite descriptions appears in many of his papers and books. In his *Principia Mathematica* we observe what Stephen Neale calls *the formal characterization of the theory of descriptions*,<sup>20</sup> and in others of Russell's books and papers we observe the informal characterization of the theory. In this chapter I will first describe the formal characterization of the theory of definite descriptions for, as Neale mentions, "only through its formal statement can the full domain of application of the Theory of Descriptions be made explicit".<sup>21</sup> And, then, I will describe the informal

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen Neale, "Descriptions", *The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (London and New York: Routledge, 2005a), pp. 192-93. and Stephen Neale, *Descriptions* (Massachusetts: The MIT press, 1990), pp. 28-33.

<sup>21</sup> Neale (1990), p. 28.

characterization of the theory which will be helpful in understanding the application of the theory in natural language and how Russell solves the puzzles he wishes to solve by this theory.

**(a) The formal characterization of the theory of definite descriptions:** In \*14 of *Principia Mathematica* (Part I, Section B) a formal characterization of the theory of definite descriptions is presented. Here Russell introduces a new symbol for definite descriptions. This new symbol, the iota-operator ( $\iota x$ ), is a variable binding device for forming a term from a formula. Like universal and existential quantifiers, the iota-operator operates on open sentences. But there is an important difference between the iota-operator and universal and existential quantifiers: the iota-operator is a term forming operator whereas universal and existential quantifiers are sentence forming operators. For example, by prefixing universal and existential quantifiers to open sentences  $Fx$ ,  $Rxx$  and  $Rxy$  we form expressions,  $(\forall x)Fx$ ,  $(\forall x)Rxx$ ,  $(\forall x)Rxy$ ,  $(\exists x)Fx$ ,  $(\exists x)Rxx$ ,  $(\exists x)Rxy$ , etc., all of which are sentences. But by prefixing the iota-operator to those open sentences we form expressions,  $(\iota x)Rx$ ,  $(\iota x)Rxx$ ,  $(\iota x)Rxy$ , etc., all of which are terms rather than sentences.

A term or a sentence may contain more than one occurrence of the iota-operator. Let us see how we can form terms and sentences that contain more than one occurrence of the iota-operator: suppose  $G$  is a predicate symbol. Now, by prefixing  $G$  to the term  $(\iota x)Rxy$  we can form the sentence  $G(\iota x)Rxy$ . Here,  $G(\iota x)Rxy$  is an open sentence since it has a free occurrence of the variable  $y$ . So, the iota-operator is applicable to it. Now, by prefixing another iota-operator, e.g.  $(\iota y)$ , to the open sentence  $G(\iota x)Rxy$  we can form the expression  $(\iota y)G(\iota x)Rxy$  which is a term. So, here we have a term that contains more than one occurrence of the iota-operator. Again, by prefixing another predicate symbol, e.g.  $F$ , to the term  $(\iota y)G(\iota x)Rxy$  we can form a sentence  $F(\iota y)G(\iota x)Rxy$  which contains more than one occurrence of the iota-operator.

In his *Principia Mathematica* Russell does not provide a definition for definite descriptions because, according to him, a definite description is an *incomplete symbol* which does not have any meaning in isolation; it can only be defined in a certain

context.<sup>22</sup> That is why instead of providing a stipulative or explicative definition for a definite description Russell provides what he calls a *contextual definition* for a sentence in which the definite description in question occurs. The method of giving a contextual definition used in *Principia Mathematica* is something like this: to define an expression  $\Omega$  contextually, we provide a procedure for converting a sentence that contains one or more occurrences of  $\Omega$  into an equivalent sentence which is free from any occurrence of  $\Omega$ . So, in order to provide a contextual definition for a definite description what we need is just to convert the sentence that contains the definite description in question into an equivalent sentence which does not contain that definite description. That is why instead of defining the definite description  $(\iota x)\phi x$  Russell proposes to provide a contextual definition for a sentence, *e.g.*  $\psi(\iota x)\phi x$ , which contains an occurrence of that definite description. The sentence  $\psi(\iota x)\phi x$  which contains an occurrence of  $(\iota x)\phi x$  can be analyzed as:

$$(\exists x)[(\phi x \wedge (\forall y)(\phi y \supset y = x)) \wedge \psi x]$$

Here,  $(\exists x)[(\phi x \wedge (\forall y)(\phi y \supset y = x)) \wedge \psi x]$  is equivalent to  $\psi(\iota x)\phi x$ , and has no occurrence of the definite description  $(\iota x)\phi x$ . But still the following:

$$(\exists x)[(\phi x \wedge (\forall y)(\phi y \supset y = x)) \wedge \psi x]$$

cannot be counted as a general schema following which one can always give a contextual definition of a sentence containing a definite description. For, there may be an occurrence of a definite description in a sentence which has another sentence as a part of it. In that case there may be a sort of confusion about whether the definite description is applied to the larger sentence or to the smaller sentence.<sup>23</sup> The sentence (the larger one or the smaller one) to which the definite description is applied is called the *scope* of the definite description.<sup>24</sup> When the larger sentence is the scope of the relevant definite description, the occurrence of the definite description in question is called the *primary occurrence* of it; and when the smaller sentence is the scope of the relevant definite description, the

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<sup>22</sup> Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, *Principia Mathematica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

occurrence of the definite description in question is called the *secondary occurrence* of it. This idea of scope distinction can be understood by the following example: consider the sentence:

$$(17) \sim G(\iota x)Fx$$

Now, when  $(\iota x)Fx$  has its primary occurrence in (17), the larger sentence (which includes the negation) is the scope of  $(\iota x)Fx$ . In that case the sentence (17) is analyzed as:

$$(\exists x)[(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim Gx]$$

And, when  $(\iota x)Fx$  has its secondary occurrence in (17), the smaller sentence (which excludes the negation) is the scope of  $(\iota x)Fx$ . In that case the sentence (17) is analyzed as:

$$\sim (\exists x)[(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x)) \wedge Gx]$$

Now, according to Russell, to avoid the ambiguity concerning the scope of the relevant definite description, the scope of the definite description should be mentioned in the sentence that contains the definite description in question. So, he proposes to use left and right brackets, '[' and ']', to indicate the scope at the beginning of the scope followed by required parentheses to extend to the end of the scope.<sup>25</sup> Thus, according to Russell, instead of writing  $\sim G(\iota x)Fx$ , we should write  $[(\iota x)Fx](\sim G(\iota x)Fx)$  when  $(\iota x)Fx$  has its primary occurrence in (17); and we should write  $\sim \{[(\iota x)Fx](G(\iota x)Fx)\}$  when  $(\iota x)Fx$  has its secondary occurrence in (17). Now, on the basis of his idea of the scope distinction and his proposal to mention the scope in the sentence that contains a definite description, Russell proposes the following contextual definition for a sentence that contains an occurrence of the definite description  $(\iota x)\phi x$ :

$$*14.01 \quad [(\iota x)\phi x](\psi(\iota x)\phi x) \equiv (\exists x)[(\phi x \wedge (\forall y)(\phi y \supset y = x)) \wedge \psi x] \text{ Df.}^{26}$$

It should be mentioned here that when a definite description occurs in a sentence that contains two or more smaller sentences as its parts, the relevant definite description may involve two or more secondary occurrences of it. For example, consider the following sentence:

$$(18) \sim \sim G(\iota x)Fx$$

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 173. (Whitehead and Russell actually use dots instead of parenthesis.)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

Now, when the definite description  $(\iota x)Fx$  has its primary occurrence in (18), the larger sentence  $\sim\sim G(\iota x)Fx$  is the scope of the definite description; and following the Russellian technique the sentence, then, can be written as  $[(\iota x)Fx](\sim\sim G(\iota x)Fx)$ . And, in accordance of \*14.01, we have the following analysis of  $[(\iota x)Fx](\sim\sim G(\iota x)Fx)$ :

$$[(\iota x)Fx](\sim\sim G(\iota x)Fx) \equiv (\exists x)[(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim\sim Gx]$$

And, when the smaller sentence  $\sim G(\iota x)Fx$  is the scope of the definite description, the definite description  $(\iota x)Fx$  has *a* secondary occurrence in (18); and following the Russellian technique the sentence, then, can be written as  $\sim \{[(\iota x)Fx](\sim G(\iota x)Fx)\}$ . Now, according to \*14.01, we have the following analysis of  $\sim \{[(\iota x)Fx](\sim G(\iota x)Fx)\}$ :

$$\sim \{[(\iota x)Fx](\sim G(\iota x)Fx)\} \equiv \sim (\exists x)[(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim Gx]$$

Again, when the smallest sentence  $G(\iota x)Fx$  is the scope of the definite description, the description  $(\iota x)Fx$  has *another* secondary occurrence in (18); and the sentence  $\sim\sim G(\iota x)Fx$ , then, can be written as  $\sim \{ \sim \{[(\iota x)Fx](G(\iota x)Fx)\} \}$ . And, according to \*14.01, we have the following analysis of  $\sim \{ \sim \{[(\iota x)Fx](G(\iota x)Fx)\} \}$ :

$$\sim \{ \sim \{[(\iota x)Fx](\sim G(\iota x)Fx)\} \} \equiv \sim\sim (\exists x)[(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x)) \wedge Gx]$$

In this way, it is possible to form sentences that have indefinite number of secondary occurrences of their relevant definite descriptions.

It is worth noting here that  $(\exists x)[(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim\sim Gx]$  which is the reading of (18) when  $(\iota x)Fx$  has its largest scope in (18) (*i.e.* when  $(\iota x)Fx$  has its primary occurrence in (18)), and  $\sim\sim(\exists x)[(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x)) \wedge Gx]$  which is the reading of (18) when  $(\iota x)Fx$  has its narrowest scope in (18) (*i.e.* when  $(\iota x)Fx$  has (one of) its secondary occurrence in (18)) are equivalent; they have the same truth-conditions—both of them are false if  $(\exists x)(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x))$ , or  $Gx$ , or the both are false; and both of them are true if  $(\exists x)(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x))$  and  $Gx$  are true. So, we see, two different outputs of different occurrences of a definite description may have the same truth condition. This phenomenon indicates that scope distinction is not basically a semantic issue. Rather, the scope distinction is basically a syntactical issue—the scope of a definite description requires to be mentioned in the relevant sentence in order to avoid the possible ambiguity concerning the occurrence (primary or secondary) of the definite description involved.

In the language of *Principia Mathematica* there is no predicate symbol that stands for “exists” because, according to Russell, “exists” is not something that can be attributed to the (grammatical) subject of a sentence. It is rather something that is always presupposed of (grammatical) subjects that have any property.<sup>27</sup> That means that if  $(\iota x)\phi x$  has any property whatever, it must exist.<sup>28</sup> This view leads Russell not to provide a predicate symbol for “exists”. But, Russell observes that we can make sense of sentences of the form “ $\phi$  does not exist”. To make sense of such sentences Russell introduces the symbol  $E!$  ( $E$  shriek) that occupies the position in a sentence often occupied by its predicate term.  $E!$  may be combined with a definite description to create a formula with existential import:

$$* 14.02 \quad E!(\iota x)\phi x \equiv (\exists x)[\phi x \wedge (\forall y)(\phi y \supset y = x)] \quad \text{Df.}^{29}$$

Here, we see,  $E!(\iota x)\phi x$  has a reading which is on the one hand description-free, and on the other hand, free of any occurrence of  $E!$ . These features allow a plausible treatment of true negative existential sentences. For example, consider the negative existential sentence “The  $F$  does not exist”. Suppose that this sentence is true. Now, by using  $E!$  the sentence “The  $F$  does not exist” can be expressed in the following way:

$$\sim E!(\iota x)Fx$$

In this way the introduction of  $E!$  in the theory of definite descriptions helps us to make sense of true negative existential sentences.

**(b) The informal characterization of the theory of definite descriptions:**

Besides *Principia Mathematica*, Russell presents his theory of definite descriptions in his *Problems of Philosophy*, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* and “On Denoting”. In these books and paper we observe an account of descriptions that imitates what I have called *the formal characterization of the theory of definite descriptions*, but is more related to the use of definite descriptions in ordinary English. In ordinary English descriptions are phrases of the forms “a so-and-so” and “the so-and-so”. “A man” is an

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 174-75.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

example of the former form of descriptions; and “the man” is an example of the latter form of descriptions. Descriptions of the former form are called indefinite descriptions; and descriptions of the latter form are called definite descriptions. According to Russell indefinite descriptions are ambiguous in the sense that they may be satisfied by more than one object; but definite descriptions are unambiguous in the sense that a definite description can be satisfied by at most one object. That is, a definite description always involves uniqueness, but an indefinite description does not necessarily involve uniqueness. This property of uniqueness plays a central role in Russell’s treatment of definite descriptions.

In his “On Denoting” Russell offers an ingenious technique of translating sentences containing definite descriptions. Here, Russell treats a sentence containing a definite description as a conjunction of three sentences none of which involves the definite description in question. For example, Russell analyzes the sentence:

(19) The father of Charles II was executed

as the conjunction of the following three sentences:

- (i) At least one person begat Charles II.
- (ii) At most one person begat Charles II.
- (iii) Whoever begat Charles II was executed.

Here, (i) and (ii) together confirm the uniqueness condition of the definite description “the father of Charles II”; and (iii) associates the relevant predicate to the definite description in question. It is worth noting here that none of (i)-(iii) includes the definite description “the father of Charles II”. Now, on the basis of the above analysis, the sentence (19) can be translated into ordinary language in the following way:

(19a) Exactly one person begat Charles II, and whoever begat Charles II was executed.

(19a) can be translated into the language of first order symbolic logic in the following way:

(19b)  $(\exists x)[(x \text{ begat Charles II} \wedge (\forall y)(y \text{ begat Charles II} \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ was executed}]$

Here, we see, (19b) is an existential generalization of a conjunction that contains three conjuncts. So, (19b) is true if all of its conjuncts are true. Thus, it can be said that (19b) gives an account of conditions under which the sentence (19) is true.

The issue of the scope distinction discussed in the formal characterization of the theory of definite descriptions is relevant here. For example, consider the following sentence:

(20) The father of Charles II was not executed.

Now, when the definite description “the father of Charles II” has its primary occurrence in (20), then (20) gets the following analysis:

(20a) Exactly one person begat Charles II, and whoever begat Charles II was not executed.

In symbols:

(20b)  $(\exists x)[(x \text{ begat Charles II} \wedge (\forall y)(y \text{ begat Charles II} \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ was not executed}]$

Again, when the definite description “the father of Charles II” has its secondary occurrence in (20), then (20) gets the following analysis:

(20c) It is not the case that exactly one person begat Charles II, and whoever begat Charles II was executed.

In symbol:

(20d)  $\sim(\exists x)[(x \text{ begat Charles II} \wedge (\forall y)(y \text{ begat Charles II} \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ was executed}]$

Here, we see, when “Whoever begat Charles II was not executed” is true, both (20b) and (20d) are true provided that Charles II was begotten by one and only one person. Again, when “Whoever begat Charles II was not executed” is false, both (20b) and (20d) are false provided that Charles II was begotten by one and only one person. These phenomena conform to the idea (discussed in the formal characterization of the theory of definite descriptions) that the scope distinction may not matter to the truth-value of a descriptive sentence.

In the above analysis, we see that instead of analyzing definite descriptions Russell analyzes sentences containing them. In his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* Russell notes:

The definition to be sought (of the phrase “the so-and-so”) is a definition of proposition in which this phrase occurs, not a definition of the phrase itself in isolation.<sup>30</sup>

Again, in his “On Denoting” he says:

This is the principle of the theory of denoting I wish to advocate: the denoting phrases never have any meaning in themselves, but that every proposition in whose verbal expression they occur has a meaning. The difficulties concerning denoting are, I believe, all the result of a wrong analysis of propositions whose verbal expressions contain a denoting phrase.<sup>31</sup>

And that is why Russell provides analyses of sentences containing definite descriptions instead of providing analyses of definite descriptions *per se*. This procedure is what Russell calls the procedure of providing contextual definitions.<sup>32</sup> When a sentence containing a definite description is analyzed in the way Russell suggests, as we have already seen, the descriptive phrase ultimately disappears. For example, in the analysis of (19) we have seen that the descriptive phrase “the father of Charles II” has disappeared when the sentence (19) has been analyzed in the Russellian way. That is, when a sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*” is analyzed in the Russellian way, the descriptive phrase of the form “the *F*” disappears. The following is the Russellian analysis of a sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*”:

Exactly one thing is an *F*, and whoever or whatever is an *F* is *G*.

And, as Neale mentions, where we have just a thought to the effect that the unique satisfier of some definite description, whoever or whatever it may be, has *G*, we are talking about a purely general sentence in which the satisfier of the definite description (if there is any) is not a constituent part.<sup>33</sup> And, as we have seen in the above discussion, this is the way Russell’s theory of definite descriptions treats sentences containing definite

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<sup>30</sup> Russell (1919), p. 172.

<sup>31</sup> Russell (1905), p. 480.

<sup>32</sup> The procedure of providing contextual definitions has been discussed in details in the section of the formal characterization of the theory of definite descriptions.

<sup>33</sup> Neale (1990), p. 17.

descriptions. Hence, it can be said that a descriptive sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*” actually expresses a general proposition.

Since a descriptive sentence expresses a general proposition, such a sentence actually does not refer to any particular object. More precisely, in a descriptive sentence the relevant definite description, even if it is satisfied by a unique object, does not actually refer to the particular object described. And, one can understand such a descriptive sentence without knowing who or what is denoted by the relevant definite description. For example, one can understand the sentence “The candidate who has gotten the most votes has become the president of the United States” without knowing who actually has gotten the most votes. That means that a definite description is not actually a referring term which refers to a particular object. Again, since a definite description is not a referring term that refers to a particular object, even when it is satisfied by a unique object, it is not necessary that in order for a descriptive sentence to have a truth-value there must be an object that satisfies the definite description it contains. Here, it is worth noting that even when a definite description denotes a unique object, it may be the case that the object denoted does not enter into the specification of truth-conditions of the relevant descriptive sentence. For example, consider the following sentence:

(21) The present president of the United States is an African-American male person.

The sentence (21), given the way things really are, is true. And, it is tempting to say that it is true in virtue of the facts concerning Barak Obama. But such a temptation may mislead us. For example, suppose, counterfactually, it is not Barak Obama but, say, Mike Tyson who is the present president of the United States. Since Mike Tyson is an African-American male person, the sentence (21) would still be true. But it is plain that there is now no sense in which the truth-conditions of the sentence (21) depend on how things are with Barak Obama as he is not (in the counterfactual circumstance) the present president of the United States.<sup>34</sup> And, Mike Tyson does not enter into the specification of truth-

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<sup>34</sup> Of course, this is not to say that the *truth* of the sentence (21), in the actual world, does not depend on how things are with Barak Obama. It does, since *he* is the president of the United States in the actual world. What I mean to say here is that *he* is not a part of the *truth-conditions* of the sentence (21).

conditions of (21) either as he is not the present president of the United States in actual circumstances; and hence, in actual circumstances the truth of (21) do not depend on how things are with Mike Tyson. In short, the unique object (if there is any) denoted by a definite description does not enter into the specification of truth-conditions of the descriptive sentence of which the definite description in question is a constituent part.

So, from the above discussion we find:

(D1) A descriptive sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*” expresses a general proposition.

(D2) A descriptive sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*” may be well understood by a person who does not know who or what is denoted by the definite description of the form “the *F*” (even if nothing satisfies the definite description of the form “the *F*”, and even if a person knows that nothing satisfies the definite description of the form “the *F*”, the person may well understand the sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*”).

(D3) A descriptive sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*” may have a truth-value even when the definite description of the form “the *F*” which is involved in the sentence in question does not denote anything.

(D4) Even when the definite description of the form “the *F*” denotes an object *o*, it may be the case that *o* does not enter into the specification of truth-conditions of the relevant sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*”.

(D1)-(D4) represent the main features of Russell’s theory of definite descriptions.

Russell strongly believes that his theory of definite descriptions has the capability of solving each of the puzzles discussed earlier. To solve the puzzle about the law of excluded middle in the context of empty descriptions Russell appeals to his device of the three-clause analysis of descriptive sentences and his idea of the scope distinction. His solution to this puzzle runs in this way: according to the three-clause analysis of descriptive sentences, the sentence:

(2) The present king of France is bald

is equivalent to the following sentence:

Exactly one person is a king of France now, and whoever is a king of France now is bald.

In symbols:  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge Bx]$

Now, we see,  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge Bx]$  is an existential generalization of a conjunction that contains three conjuncts. Now, the first conjunct of  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge Bx]$  is false since there is no king of France now. Thus,  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge Bx]$  is false. Since  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge Bx]$  is equivalent to (2), the sentence (2) is false.

Now, according to Russell's idea of the scope distinction, the sentence:

(2a) The present king of France is not bald

has two different analyses. When the definite description "the present king of France" has its primary occurrence in (2a), the sentence (2a) gets the following analysis:

Exactly one person is a king of France now, and whoever is a king of France now is not bald.

In symbols:  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim Bx]$

Since the first of the conjuncts of  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim Bx]$  is false due to the fact that there is no king of France now, the whole conjunction, *i.e.*  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim Bx]$ , is false. Again, since  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim Bx]$  is equivalent to (2a), the sentence (2a) is false. In short, (2a) is false when the definite description "the present king of France" has its primary occurrence in it. But when the definite description "the present king of France" has its secondary occurrence in (2a), the sentence (2a) gets the following analysis:

It is not the case that exactly one person is a king of France now, and whoever is a king of France now is bald.

In symbols:  $\sim(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge Bx]$

Now, as we have seen earlier,  $(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge Bx]$  is false. So, its negation, *i.e.*  $\sim(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge Bx]$ , is true. Since  $\sim(\exists x)[(Kx \wedge (\forall y)(Ky \supset y = x)) \wedge Bx]$  is equivalent to (2a), the sentence (2a) is true. In short, (2a) is

true when the definite description “the present king of France” has its secondary occurrence in it. Russell mentions these phenomena in the following way:

That is, “the king of France is not bald” is false if the occurrence of “the king of France” is *primary*, and true if it is *secondary*. Thus all propositions in which “the king of France” has a primary occurrence are false; the denial of such propositions are true, but in them “the king of France” has a secondary occurrence.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, we see, the sentence (2) is false, and its denial, *i.e.* (2a), is true when the definite description “the present king of France” has its secondary occurrence in (2a). This conforms to the law of excluded middle. Hence, the puzzle about the law of excluded middle in the context of empty descriptions is solved.

Of course, it is a fact that the sentence (2a) is true when the relevant definite description has its primary occurrence in it. In that case both (2) and (2a) are false. But that is not a violation of the law of excluded middle. Indeed, (2a) is not the denial of (2) when the relevant definite description has its primary occurrence in the sentence (2a). So, the law of excluded middle is not relevant here. Actually, (2a) is counted as the denial of (2) only when the definite description contained in (2a) has its secondary occurrence in the sentence in question. The following analogue may be of some help in understanding this point: the denial of the sentence “A is B” is not “A is not B”, but “It is not the case that A is B”. The logical relation between sentences “A is B” and “A is not B” is what logicians call the *contrary* relation, not the *contradictory* relation. A sentence is the denial of the other, if they have the contradictory, not the contrary, relation to each other. Similarly, (2) and (2a) have contrary, not contradictory, relation to each other when the relevant definite description in (2a) has its primary occurrence in (2a). Hence, (2a) is not the denial of (2) when the definite description in (2a) has its primary occurrence in it. Thus, the law of excluded middle is irrelevant in that case. It should be noted here that two contrary sentences *may* both be false, but *cannot* both be true. So, when (2) and (2a) have contrary relation to each other, *i.e.* when the relevant definite description has its

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<sup>35</sup> Russell (1905), p. 490.

primary occurrence in (2a), there is nothing wrong if both of them are false. No logical law is violated and the puzzle about the law of excluded middle does not re-emerge in such a case.

Now, let us see how by his theory of definite descriptions Russell solves the puzzle about the self-contradiction in the context of true negative existential sentences. Before we enter into the details of his solution it is important to note that a negative existential sentence may contain a proper name in its subject's position<sup>36</sup>, *e.g.* "Socrates does not exist", or it may contain a definite description in its subject's position, *e.g.* "The round square does not exist". We are here concerned with negative existential sentences that contain definite descriptions in their subjects' position, *i.e.* sentences of the form "The *F* does not exist". When a negative existential sentence of the form "The *F* does not exist" is true, there is nothing that satisfies the definite description contained in the sentence in question. But that does not pose a problem for Russell's theory as according to (D2) and (D3) of his theory a sentence containing a definite description of the form "the *F*" can perfectly be well-understood even when nothing satisfies the definite description of the form "the *F*"; and such a sentence may have a truth-value of its own. So, there can be true, as well as false, negative existential sentences (our concern here is *true* negative existential sentences). Furthermore, according to Russell's theory a sentence containing a definite description of the form "the *F*" expresses a general proposition, and hence, such a sentence actually does not refer to a particular object. (D1) of Russell's theory indicates this feature of such sentences. And, according to (D4) of his theory the unique object (if there is any) that satisfies a definite description of the form "the *F*" does not enter into the specification of truth-conditions of the sentence that contains the definite description in question. Now, if (D1) and (D4) are true, and Russell thinks them to be true, then there is no need to presuppose the existence of an object

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<sup>36</sup> In his *Principia Mathematica* Russell says: "Whenever the grammatical subject of a proposition can be supposed not to exist without rendering the proposition meaningless, it is plain that the grammatical subject is not a proper name, *i.e.* not a name directly representing some object" (Russell (1910), p. 66.). That indicates that in Russell's view a sentence like "Sherlock Holmes does not exist" which apparently contains a name in the (grammatical) subject's position does not actually contain a name. In short, according to Russell the expression "Sherlock Holmes" in the sentence "Sherlock Holmes does not exist" is not a name.

when one makes a negative existential sentence containing a definite description (in the sentence's subject's position) which fails to designate any existent object. In other words, one can make negative existential sentences taking definite descriptions like “the present king of France”, “the golden mountain”, “the round square” and so on, in the relevant sentences' subjects' position without presupposing the existence of the present king of France, the golden mountain, the round square etc. So, the sentence “The present king of France is bald” does not involve a presupposition of the existence of the king of France now. Rather, such a sentence expresses a general proposition that does not refer to any particular object. So, there is no self-contradiction involved in a negative existential sentence of the form “The  $F$  does not exist” when there is no existent object that satisfies the definite description of the form “the  $F$ ”. And, as we have seen earlier, such a sentence may express a true or a false proposition. When a sentence of the form “The  $F$  does not exist” expresses a true proposition, we have a true negative existential sentence. So, there may be true negative existential sentences that do not involve any self-contradiction. Hence, the puzzle about the self-contradiction in the context of true negative existential sentences is solved.

Besides, following \*14.02 of *Principia Mathematica* the puzzle about the self-contradiction in the context of true negative existential sentences can be resolved. According to \*14.02 of *Principia Mathematica*, when we analyze a sentence of the form “The  $F$  exists”, the expression “exists” actually disappears; and no constituent corresponding to “exists” takes place in the analysis of the sentence in question. The same is true of a negative existential sentence too. To have a clearer idea about this point, let us repeat the negative existential sentence (6):

(6) The round square does not exist.

Now, following \*14.02 of *Principia Mathematica* the sentence (6) is analyzed as:

$$\sim (\exists x)[Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)]$$

Here, we see, in  $\sim (\exists x)[Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)]$  there is no predicate symbol for “exists”—the expression “exists” disappears, and no constituent of  $\sim (\exists x)[Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)]$  corresponds to “exists”. This happens so because in the Russellian

analysis existence is not treated as a predicate.<sup>37</sup> That is why, instead of a three-clause analysis, here we observe a two-clause analysis of the sentence (6):

It is not the case that—

- (i) At least one thing is a round square.
- (ii) At most one thing is a round square.

In ordinary English this two-clause analysis of (6) can be expressed as: it is not the case that exactly one thing is a round square. But, there is no round square. So, “Exactly one thing is a round square”, *i.e.*  $(\exists x)[Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)]$ , is false. Hence,  $\sim (\exists x)[Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)]$  is true. That is, the sentence (6) is a true negative existential sentence. Here, the phenomenon that  $\sim (\exists x)[Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)]$  does not contain the expression “exists” or any constituent that corresponds to “exists” indicates that the sentence (6) involves no presupposition of the existence of a unique object, namely a unique round square. This, in turn, indicates that a true negative existential sentence like the sentence (6) does not involve any self-contradiction. Hence, the puzzle about the self-contradiction in the context of true negative existential sentences is resolved.

Of course, one may argue that in the above discussion what has been analyzed is a case in which a definite description of the form “the  $F$ ” has its secondary occurrence in the sentence of the form “The  $F$  does not exist”; but a case in which a definite description of the form “the  $F$ ” has its primary occurrence in a sentence of the form “The  $F$  does not exist” may lead us to the self-contradiction. She may accuse that such a case, *i.e.* a case in which a definite description of the form “the  $F$ ” contained in a sentence of the form “The  $F$  does not exist” has its primary occurrence in the sentence in question, has not been addressed yet, and hence, the puzzle about the self-contradiction in the context of true

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<sup>37</sup> In *Principia Mathematica* Russell notes: “When, in ordinary language or in philosophy, something is said to “exist”, it is always something *described*, *i.e.* it is not something immediately presented ... It would seem that the word “existence” cannot be significantly applied to subject immediately given; *i.e.* not only does our definition give no meaning to “ $E!x$ ”, but there is no reason, in philosophy, to suppose that a meaning of existence could be found which would be applicable to immediately given subjects.” (Russell (1910), pp. 174-75.). This leads us to think that in Russell’s theory “exists” is not considered as a predicate; for a predicate is something that can be applied to its immediately given subject, but, as we see, according to Russell “exists” cannot be significantly applied to immediately given subjects.

negative existential sentence has not yet been solved. In response to this accusation it can be said that in Russell's theory of definite descriptions existential sentences of the form "The  $F$  exists" (or "The  $F$  does not exist") are characteristically different from other descriptive sentences of the form "The  $F$  is  $G$ " (or "The  $F$  is not  $G$ "). A descriptive sentence of the form "The  $F$  is  $G$ " (or "The  $F$  is not  $G$ ") has a predicate in its predicate's position. But, an existential sentence of the form "The  $F$  exists" (or "The  $F$  does not exist") does not have a predicate in its predicate's position; it has the expression "exists" in its predicate's position which is not a predicate in Russell's analysis. This difference, in turn, causes another difference between them: a definite description of the form "the  $F$ " has only one sort of occurrence in a negative existential sentence of the form "The  $F$  does not exist". This occurrence is similar to what Russell calls a secondary occurrence of a definite description. But, in any other negative sentence of the form "The  $F$  is not  $G$ " the definite description of the form "the  $F$ " has a primary as well as one or more secondary occurrences of it in the sentence in question. Hence, the question of considering the primary occurrence of a definite description in a negative existential sentence of the form "The  $F$  does not exist" does not arise.

There are, however, many philosophers and logicians who treat "exists" as a predicate. If "exists" is treated as a predicate, then the sentence (6) can be analyzed as  $(\exists x)[(Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim x \text{ exists}]$  when the relevant definite description has its primary occurrence in (6); and when the relevant definite description has its secondary occurrence in (6), the sentence (6) can be analyzed as  $\sim (\exists x)[(Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ exists}]$ .<sup>38</sup> Now, since there is no round square,  $(\exists x)[(Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x))]$  is false. Hence,  $(\exists x)[(Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)) \wedge \sim x \text{ exists}]$  is false. That is, the sentence (6) is false when the definite description involved in (6) has its primary occurrence in (6). Of course, it may seem odd to claim that the sentence (6) is false. This seeming oddity actually is caused by the misguidance of the grammatical structure of the sentence (6). But once we begin to consider the logical structure of (6) instead of its superficial

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<sup>38</sup> If we treat "exists" as a predicate, then a description of the form "the  $F$ " will have both a primary and a secondary occurrence in the sentence of the form "The  $F$  does not exist".

grammatical structure, we realize that the sentence in question is not about an actual object; it, rather, is a sentence involving quantifiers. More precisely, the sentence (6) is a general sentence involving quantifiers which does not presuppose the actual existence of a round square. Thus, the seeming oddity vanishes; and the puzzle does not re-emerge.

Again, as we have seen earlier, the sentence (6) can be analyzed as  $\sim (\exists x)[(Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ exists}]$  when the relevant definite description has its secondary occurrence in (6), and when “exists” is treated as a predicate. Now, since there is no round square,  $(\exists x)[(Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x))]$  is false, and consequently,  $(\exists x)[(Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ exists}]$  is also false. So,  $\sim (\exists x)[(Rx \wedge (\forall y)(Ry \supset y = x)) \wedge x \text{ exists}]$  is true. Thus, here, again, we have a true negative existential sentence that does not involve any self-contradiction. That shows that even if existence is treated as a predicate, still the puzzle about the self-contradiction in the context of true negative existential sentences can be solved by Russell’s theory of definite descriptions.

To solve the puzzle concerning George IV’s curiosity when it is taken as a *puzzle about the law of substitution of terms* one may appeal to Russell’s idea of definite descriptions as non-referring terms and his three-clause analysis of descriptive sentences. In Russell’s theory a definite description like “the author of *Waverley*” is not a proper name; it, rather, is a general term that does not refer to any particular object. Were it a proper name, it could be replaced by a co-referring term without changing the proposition expressed by the sentence that contains the definite description in question. For example, “Scott” is a proper name which refers to a particular person Scott; and “Walter” is another proper name which refers to the same particular person Scott. Now, since “Scott” and “Walter” are proper names that co-refer to the same particular person, one may substitute “Walter” with “Scott” in a sentence without changing the proposition expressed by that sentence.<sup>39</sup> But, things are different when we deal with a definite description like “the author of *Waverley*”. Since the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” does not refer to any particular object, there cannot be any term that co-refers with it. Thus, the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” cannot be substituted with another so-called co-referring term like “Scott”. That means that we cannot legitimately

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<sup>39</sup> Russell (1919), p. 174.

form a sentence like “Scott is Scott” by substituting the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” with the term “Scott” in the sentence “Scott is the author of *Waverley*”.

To show that the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” cannot be substituted with the term “Scott” in the sentence “Scott is the author of *Waverley*” one may appeal to Russell’s three-clause analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions. According to this analysis the sentence “Scott is the author of *Waverley*” can be expressed in its logical form in the following way:

Exactly one person wrote *Waverley*, and whoever wrote *Waverley* is Scott.

In symbols:  $(\exists x)[(x \text{ wrote } Waverley \wedge (\forall y)(y \text{ wrote } Waverley \supset y = x)) \wedge x = Scott]$

Thus, the whole argument concerning George IV’s curiosity can be expressed symbolically in the following way:

*Geroge IV wishes to know whether*  $(\exists x)[(x \text{ wrote } Waverley \wedge (\forall y)(y \text{ wrote } Waverley \supset y = x)) \wedge x = Scott]$

$(\exists x)[(x \text{ wrote } Waverley \wedge (\forall y)(y \text{ wrote } Waverley \supset y = x)) \wedge x = Scott]$

$\therefore$  *Geroge IV wishes to know whether*  $Scott = Scott$

Now, we see, the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” with which one could wish to substitute the term “Scott” actually disappears. Hence, there remains no legitimate way of replacing the term “the author of *Waverley*” with the term “Scott” to deduce the concluding sentence “George IV wishes to know whether  $Scott = Scott$ ”. The following words from Russell’s “On Denoting” seem to support this analysis:

The puzzle about George IV’s curiosity is now seen to have a very simple solution. The proposition “Scott was the author of *Waverley*” which was written out in its unabbreviated form (in the preceding paragraph), does not contain any constituent “the author of *Waverley*” for which we could substitute “Scott”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Russell (1905), pp. 488-89.

Hence, the above argument concerning George IV's curiosity is invalid, and the puzzle seems to be solved when it is taken as a puzzle about the law of substitution of terms. But, as we have argued earlier, the puzzle Russell describes may not be a puzzle about the controversial law of substitution of terms but a puzzle about the uncontroversial law of identity. So, it is important to focus on how Russell's theory contributes in solving the puzzle when it is taken as a puzzle about the law of identity in the context of propositional attitudes.

To solve the puzzle when it is taken as *a puzzle about the law of identity in the context of propositional attitudes* one needs to focus on the premise (A) of the reformulated argument:

(A) If (7) is true, then (15) is true; where,

(7) George IV wishes to know whether Scott is the author of  
*Waverley*;

(15) It is true of the author of *Waverley* that George IV wishes to  
know whether Scott is him.

In (A), the consequent is inferred from its antecedent by the law of exportation. But the law of exportation actually does not work when it is used in the context of propositional attitudes. Or, we may say, the law of exportation is false in the context of propositional attitudes. The following example proves that the law of exportation is false in the context of propositional attitudes. Consider the sentence:

(22) I believe that the tallest spy is a spy.

The sentence (22) is true. Now, by applying the law of exportation (*i.e.* by exporting “the tallest spy” from the context of propositional attitudes) we infer:

(22a) It is true of the tallest spy that I believe him to be a spy.<sup>41</sup>

But (22a) may be false even when (22) is true—I may believe that the tallest spy is a spy, but I may not know who the tallest spy is, and hence, I may not believe of him (the person who actually is the tallest spy) that he is the tallest spy or he is a spy at all. This shows that the law of exportation is false in the context of propositional attitudes.

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<sup>41</sup> Note that in (22) the description “the tallest spy” has its secondary occurrence as in this case only the narrowest part (the smallest sentence) of (22), *i.e.* “The tallest spy is a spy”, belongs to the scope of the description; but in (22a) the description “the tallest spy” has its primary occurrence as in this case the largest part (the whole sentence) belongs to the scope of the description.

Now, return to the premise (A) of the reformulated argument. As we have seen, in (A) the consequent is inferred from the antecedent by the law of exportation in the context of propositional attitudes. But, it has been lately proved that the law of exportation is false in the context of propositional attitudes. So, (A) may be false. That is, it may be the case that (7) is true (and it is actually true) but (15) is false. That means that the truth of (7) does not guarantee the truth of (15). But if the truth of (15) is not guaranteed, then the law of identity is not applicable in the argument because, according to (B), the law of identity can be applied in the argument only if both (15) and (8) are true. And for the same reason the truth of (16) is not guaranteed. Again, since the truth of (16) is not guaranteed, the truth of (9) in (C) is not guaranteed either. So, we see, the truths of (7) and (8) do not guarantee the truth of (9). Hence, (D) is false—it may be the case that (7) and (8) are true, but (9) is false. That is what happens in the original argument concerning George IV’s curiosity—the premises of the original argument, *i.e.* (7) and (8), are true, but the conclusion, *i.e.* (9), is false. Hence, the original argument concerning George IV’s curiosity is invalid. But, the invalidity of the original argument does not pose a problem for the law of identity as we have seen in the reformulated argument that it is not the law of identity but the law of exportation that causes the problem; the law of identity cannot be applied—and so, it is not applied—in the argument. So, the invalidity of the original argument does not block the truth of the law of identity. Thus the puzzle about the law of identity in the context of propositional attitudes is solved. Of course, the law of exportation is questioned here, but, as we have seen earlier, the law of exportation is not a true law in the context of propositional attitudes.

So far the first premise, *i.e.* (7), of the argument concerning George IV’s curiosity has been considered in a way that the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” has its secondary occurrence in (7). But, there is another analysis of (7) in which the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” has its primary occurrence in (7). In that case the sentence (7) gets the following analysis:

Exactly one person wrote *Waverley*, and George IV wishes to know whether Scott is him.

*i.e.*  $[(\iota x)Ax]$  George IV wishes to know whether Scott is  $(\iota x)Ax$

And, then, the argument about George IV's curiosity can be expressed in the following way:

$[(\iota x)Ax]$  George IV wishes to know whether Scott is  $(\iota x)Ax$

$(\iota x)Ax = Scott$

$\therefore$  George IV wishes to know whether Scott is Scott

Russell thinks that when the argument about George IV's curiosity is expressed in the above mentioned way, *i.e.* when the definite description "the author of *Waverley*" is considered to have its primary occurrence in the sentence "George IV wishes to know whether Scott is the author of *Waverley*", the verbal substitution of "Scott" for "the author of *Waverley*" is allowable. So, he treats the above argument as a valid argument. He says:

This does not interfere with the truth of inference resulting from making what is *verbally* the substitution of "Scott" for "the author of *Waverley*" so long as "the author of *Waverley*" has what I call a *primary* occurrence in the proposition considered.<sup>42</sup>

So, we see, when the definite description "the author of *Waverley*" contained in the first premise, *i.e.* "George IV wishes to know whether Scott is the author of *Waverley*", of the argument concerning George IV's curiosity has its primary occurrence in the sentence in question, the argument concerning George IV's curiosity is a valid argument. Here, the argument involves the law of identity as in the second premise, *i.e.*  $(\iota x)Ax = Scott$ , the identity between the author of *Waverley* and Scott has been claimed. But, since the argument is valid, the law of identity does not face any trouble here. So, the puzzle about the law of identity in the context of propositional attitudes does not re-emerge.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Russell (1905), p. 489.

<sup>43</sup> Of course, the following observation can be made here. As Russell talks about the *verbal substitution* of "Scott" for "the author of *Waverley*" (when "the author of *Waverley*" is taken to have its primary occurrence in the relevant sentence), it may be thought that some version of the law of substitution of terms is at work here (of course, in that case there may be an issue about Russell's version the law of substitution

From the discussion so far made in this chapter, it appears that Russell's theory of definite descriptions makes available a class of propositions to serve as meanings of sentences containing definite descriptions whether or not those definite descriptions are satisfied by particular objects. It does so in a non-Meinongian and non-Fregean way. In addition to serve this purpose Russell's theory of definite descriptions seems to solve the puzzles he wishes to solve. These apparent capabilities of his theory of definite descriptions give Russell an impression that his theory of definite descriptions is a correct theory of language. That is why although he has changed many of his views in various topics, his theory of definite descriptions has remained something of lasting value to him.

Finally, before ending this chapter two other points may be made about Russell's Theory of definite descriptions. First, in his theory a definite description is treated as an incomplete symbol which is not supposed to have any meaning in isolation.<sup>44</sup> In his *Principia Mathematica*<sup>45</sup>, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*<sup>46</sup>, *My Philosophical Development*<sup>47</sup> Russell argues for his idea that definite descriptions are incomplete symbols. His argument may be understood in the following simple way: suppose, the

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of terms, but the puzzle about the law of identity in the context of propositional attitudes does not re-emerge). However, in my discussion of the puzzle it has been shown that the common version of the law of substitution of terms (*i.e.* For any term  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , if  $\ulcorner\alpha=\beta\urcorner$  is true, and a sentence  $S$  contains an occurrence of  $\alpha$ , and the sentence  $S^*$  is obtained by replacing that occurrence of  $\alpha$  with  $\beta$ , then  $S$  and  $S^*$  have the same truth-value) is false. So, Russell may have a different and more restricted version of the law of substitution of terms in his mind. For the sake of argument, let us call it the law of substitution\*. Now, the situation is this: when the description "the author of *Waverley*" has its primary occurrence in the first premise and the conclusion is drawn by the law of substitution\*, the argument is valid and the conclusion is true. In that case no puzzle about the law of substitution\* arises. There would be a puzzle about the law of substitution\*, if the conclusion was false and the premises were true (and the conclusion was drawn by the law of substitution\*). So, the question of puzzle is irrelevant here. Actually, when we admit that the conclusion of the original argument, *i.e.* "George IV wishes to know whether Scott is Scott", is true, no question of a puzzle (whether it is a puzzle about the law of identity, or about the law of substitution of terms, or about the law of substitution\*) arises; the question of a puzzle arises when we observe that the conclusion of the argument is false despite the fact that the premises are true and the conclusion is derivable by a true (apparently) law. So, it seems that when Russell talks about the argument (concerning George IV's curiosity) in which the first premise involves the primary occurrence of the description in question, he actually is not thinking about any puzzle.

<sup>44</sup> Russell (1910), p. 67.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>46</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (London, New York: Routledge, 1918 (reprinted in 2010)), pp. 80-83.

<sup>47</sup> Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., Unwin Books edition, 1959 (reprinted in 1975)), pp. 63-65.

sentence “Scott is the author of *Waverley*” expresses a true proposition (and it, in fact, expresses a true proposition). Now, the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” cannot mean what is meant by “Scott” (“Scott” means the person Scott); for, if it meant so, then the proposition expressed by the sentence “Scott is the author of *Waverley*” would be the same as the proposition expressed by the sentence “Scott is Scott”. But the proposition expressed by the sentence “Scott is the author of *Waverley*” cannot be the same as the proposition expressed by the sentence “Scott is Scott” because the former is an informative sentence that expresses a proposition that could be false (though as a matter of fact the proposition expressed by it is true) whereas the latter is an uninformative sentence that expresses a trivially true proposition which could not be false. Again, the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” cannot mean anything other than what is meant by “Scott”; for, if it meant anything other than what is meant by “Scott” (namely the person Scott), then the proposition expressed by the sentence “Scott is the author of *Waverley*” would be false. But actually the proposition expressed by the sentence “Scott is the author of *Waverley*” is true. That is, the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” cannot mean what is meant by “Scott”, and at the same time, it cannot mean anything other than what is meant by “Scott”. So, it cannot mean anything. Russell describes this in the following way:

... in the case of descriptions, there is precise proof: If ‘the author of *Waverley*’ meant anything other than ‘Scott’, ‘Scott is the author of *Waverley*’ would be false, which it is not. If the ‘author of *Waverley*’ meant ‘Scott’, ‘Scott is the author of *Waverley*’ would be a tautology, which it is not. Therefore, ‘the author of *Waverley*’ means neither ‘Scott’ nor anything else—i.e. ‘the author of *Waverley*’ means nothing, Q.E.D.<sup>48</sup>

But, as we have seen, Russell agrees that although the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” does not have a meaning in isolation, it has a meaning in use. Now, Russell has his own definition of incomplete symbols. His definition of incomplete symbols, roughly, is the following: if a symbol is not supposed to have any meaning in isolation but is only defined in certain contexts, then that symbol is an incomplete symbol.<sup>49</sup> That

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<sup>48</sup> Russell (1959), pp. 64-65.

<sup>49</sup> Russell (1910), p. 66.

is, although an incomplete symbol does not have a meaning in isolation, it has a meaning when it is used in a sentence (in a context). Thus, according to the definition of incomplete symbols, the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” is an incomplete symbol. And, the same is true of all definite descriptions, *i.e.* all definite descriptions are incomplete symbols which have no meaning in isolation.

However, it seems to me that although Russell has quite successfully shown that the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” cannot mean the same as what is meant by the proper name “Scott”, his claim that a definite description is an incomplete symbol which has no meaning in isolation is controversial. For, although he has proved that the definite description “the author of *Waverley*” cannot mean the same as what is meant by “Scott”, he has provided no satisfactory proof for his claim that “the author of *Waverley*” does not mean anything at all in isolation. Rather, it seems that “the author of *Waverley*” has a meaning when it is not used in a sentence. If it had no meaning in isolation, then one would not know that “the author of *Waverley*” and “the author of *Rob Roy*” suggested different imports about the same individual before they were used in sentences. But, it is a simple fact that one may know that “the author of *Waverley*” and “the author of *Rob Roy*” suggest different imports about the same individual; and one may know this before they are used in a sentential context. Moreover, one may know the suggested imports of these definite descriptions without knowing anything about whom or what (if there is any) satisfies these definite descriptions. That is, one may be aware of the suggested imports of these definite descriptions even when one is not in a position to construct sentences like ‘ $n$  is the author of *Waverley*’, or ‘ $n$  is the author of *Rob Roy*’. So, the imports that these definite descriptions suggest are contained by them independently of any sentential context. All these simple facts indicate that “the author of *Waverley*”, “the author of *Rob Roy*” and all other definite descriptions of the form “the *F*” have meanings of their own before being used in sentences. In other words, definite descriptions do have meanings in isolation. Observing such simple facts, Alan White comments:

Indeed, anyone with a slight knowledge of English literature and of the English language knows that “the author of *Waverley*” does mean

something, both in the sense that it refers to somebody, a well-known literary figure, and in the sense that it has a use or sense.<sup>50</sup>

Actually, one can properly use a definite description in a sentential context only when one knows the *meaning* of that definite description. Or, it can be said, on the basis of the meaning of a definite description one identifies who or what (if there is any) satisfies that definite description.<sup>51</sup> So, it seems reasonable to allow definite descriptions of the form “the *F*” as expressions that have meanings in isolation. If it is so, then definite descriptions are not incomplete symbols as according to the definition of incomplete symbol provided by Russell an incomplete symbol is a symbol that does not have any meaning *in isolation* though it has a meaning *in use*. Hence, Russell’s claim that definite descriptions are incomplete symbols is incorrect.

It should be noted here that many defenders of Russell’s theory of definite descriptions agree that definite descriptions are not incomplete symbols although Russell thinks them to be so. For example, Scott Soames, a defender of Russell’s theory, treats a definite description of the form “the *F*” as an expression having an independent meaning of its own which expresses *the property of being instantiated by whatever uniquely instantiates the property expressed by “F”*.<sup>52</sup> That is, definite descriptions of the form “the *F*”, in Soames analysis, are included in the category of generalized quantifiers such as “every *F*”, “some *F*s”, “most *F*s”. So, according to Soames, a descriptive sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*” gets the following analysis:

[*the x: Fx*]Gx

The content of [*the x: Fx*]Gx is given in the following proposition:

Being *G* is instantiated by whatever uniquely instantiates the property of being *F*.

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<sup>50</sup> Alan R. White, “The ‘Meaning’ of Russell’s Theory of Descriptions”, *Analysis* 20, no. 1 (1959), p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> That is, one has a prior knowledge about the meaning of a description, *e.g.* “the author of *Waverley*”, before one identifies the reference (if there is any), *e.g.* Scott, and construct a sentence involving that description, *e.g.* “Scott is the author of *Waverley*”.

<sup>52</sup> Scott Soames, “Why Incomplete Definite Descriptions do not Defeat Russell’s Theory of Descriptions”, *Teorema* XXIV, no. 3 (2005), p. 8. [Following Soames, we can say that “the author of *Waverley*” has the following meaning: the property of being instantiated by whatever uniquely instantiates the property expressed by “author of *Waverley*”.]

And, Stephen Neale, another defender of Russell’s theory of definite descriptions, maintains a similar view regarding the quantificational treatment of definite descriptions. He says that “the” can be treated as combining with a formula to form a restricted quantifier of the form [*the*  $x:Fx$ ]. He also mentions that [*the*  $x:Fx$ ] $Gx$  is definitionally equivalent to  $(\exists x)[(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset y = x)) \wedge Gx]$  which, again, is definitionally equivalent to  $G(\iota x)Fx$ .<sup>53</sup> So, Neale thinks that the quantificational treatment of definite descriptions is not something that is an alternative to Russell’s analysis. It, rather, is just to find a more congenial method of stating it.<sup>54</sup> Soames also thinks that the quantificational treatment of definite descriptions does not result in any significant loss to Russell’s theory. Rather, it allows us to preserve all of the interesting and important features of Russell’s theory along with a welcome gain in generality.<sup>55</sup>

Second, in his *The problems of Philosophy* Russell claims that proper names such as “Plato”, “Aristotle”, “Bismarck”, “Obama”, and so on really are definite descriptions in disguise. By replacing definite descriptions for such names we can unmask their real structure. Of course, different people, or the same person in different times, may associate different definite descriptions to a name; but as long as the object to which the name applies remains constant, the particular definite description associated usually makes no difference to the truth or falsity of the proposition expressed by the relevant sentence.<sup>56</sup> Thus, one may associate the definite description “the first Chancellor of German Empire” to “Bismarck”, “the last great philosopher of antiquity” to “Aristotle”; and then, one may replace these names with their definite descriptions in sentences where these names occur. When names are replaced by their relevant definite descriptions, concerned sentences will have the form “The  $F$  is  $G$ ”. And, then, the analysis of definite descriptions, including (D1)-(D4), should be applicable to them. But Saul Aaron Kripke claims that proper names actually do not satisfy (D4). This is how one can show that

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<sup>53</sup> Neale (1990), p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> Soames (2005), p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Home University Library, 1912 (reprinted by Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1959/1970 (in this dissertation page numbers of Russell’s *The Problems of Philosophy* are given from OUP (1970) edition), p. 32.

proper names do not satisfy (D4): consider the following sentence which involves a proper name “Aristotle”:

(23) Aristotle was fond of dogs.

Now, let “the last great philosopher of antiquity” as the definite description associated to the name “Aristotle”. Thus, the sentence (23) turns into:

(23a) The last great philosopher of antiquity was fond of dogs.

Now, suppose, in a counterfactual situation Aristotle was not the last great philosopher of antiquity. In that case, the truth of the sentence (23a) would depend on facts about whoever was the last great philosopher of antiquity in that counterfactual situation. But the truth of the sentence (23) which contains the proper name “Aristotle” would depend, as it does in the actual situation, on whether the very person Aristotle was fond of dogs in the counterfactual situation in question. That is, the individual satisfier of the name “Aristotle” enters into the specification of truth-conditions of the sentence (23) in both, *i.e.* in the actual and in the counterfactual, situations. Hence, a correct analysis of proper names shows that proper names do not satisfy the condition stated in (D4) since according to (D4) the unique satisfier of a definite description does not enter into the specification of truth-conditions of the sentence containing that definite description (either in the actual or in the counterfactual situation). That is, if (D4) represents an essential property of definite descriptions (and according to Russell’s theory of definite descriptions it does), then proper names are not definite descriptions. Hence, Russell is wrong when he treats proper names as disguised definite descriptions. But, this should not be considered as a flaw of Russell’s theory of definite descriptions *per se* for, as Neale mentions, endorsing the theory of definite descriptions does not commit one to a treatment of proper names as disguised descriptions.<sup>57</sup> In short, the phenomenon that proper names are not disguised definite descriptions—though it puts a question mark to Russell’s theory of names—does not undermine Russell’s theory of definite descriptions as his theory of definite descriptions concerns the analysis of the meaning of descriptive sentences, not the analysis of proper names.

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<sup>57</sup> Neale (1990), p. 24.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Two Major Objections: the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction

Despite its enormous popularity, Russell's theory of definite descriptions has received various objections from different angles. It is extremely difficult to address all or most of these objections in a single research project like the present one. So, instead of trying to address all or most of these objections I will focus on two of them (which I take to be the most important objections against Russell's theory). These are those arising from:

- (a) The Argument from Incompleteness
- (b) The Argument from Donnellan's Distinction

In the present chapter I wish to describe these objections and determine their importance. I will examine and evaluate them in later chapters.

**(a) The Argument from Incompleteness:** According to Russell's theory of definite descriptions, a descriptive sentence of the form "The  $F$  is  $G$ " expresses a proposition like the following: exactly one thing is an  $F$ , and whatever is an  $F$  is  $G$ . This indicates that on the Russellian picture a simple sentence containing a definite description entails the unique existence of an object denoted by the definite description in question. This feature of definite descriptions is often called the *uniqueness condition* of definite descriptions. Now, according to Russell's theory, if a definite description fails to satisfy the uniqueness condition, *i.e.* if there are several objects that fit the definite description in question, or if there is no object that fits that definite description, then the proposition expressed by the sentence containing that definite description must be false. For example, according to Russell's theory, the sentence:

- (24) The murderer of President John F. Kennedy was killed by Jack  
Ruby

expresses the following proposition: exactly one person murdered President John F. Kennedy, and who murdered President John F. Kennedy was killed by Jack Ruby. Here, we see, the existence of one and only one murderer of President John F. Kennedy is implied. If there were several murderers of President John F. Kennedy, or if President

John F. Kennedy was not murdered at all, then the proposition expressed by the sentence (24) would be false because in that case the uniqueness condition would not be satisfied by the definite description “the murderer of President John F. Kennedy”. And, if exactly one person murdered President John F. Kennedy, and if that person was killed by Jack Ruby, then the proposition expressed by the sentence (24) is true. This analysis of descriptive sentences conforms to our everyday use of this sort of sentences. So, one may be tempted to claim that Russell’s treatment of descriptive sentences is uncontroversially correct and the uniqueness condition he proposes is unproblematic.

But not all philosophers are convinced that Russell’s treatment of descriptive sentences is correct. There are many philosophers who challenge Russell’s view. P. F. Strawson is among those who think that Russell’s uniqueness condition of definite descriptions is problematic. In his “On Referring” Strawson claims that it is obviously false that a descriptive sentence always entails the existence of one and only one object that satisfies the definite description contained in that sentence. He says:

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”.<sup>58</sup>

That is, according to Strawson if Russell was correct in claiming that a definite description like “the table” used in the following sentence:

(25) The table is covered with books

implied the unique existence of one and only one table, then by uttering the sentence (25) on any present-day occasion the speaker would say something false because of the

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<sup>58</sup> P. F. Strawson, “On Referring”, *Mind* 59, no. 235 (1950), p. 332.

existence of several tables in the world at the time of her utterance. But, according to Strawson that is not how ordinary speakers normally use the sentence (25) on various occasions; ordinary speakers often use the sentence (25) on various present-day occasions to say something true. Strawson thinks that a speaker can say something true by uttering the sentence (25) on a present-day occasion because when she uses the sentence (25) on an occasion she does not imply that there is one and only one table in existence; rather, what she does by uttering (25) on an occasion is to refer to some one particular table on the given occasion. Now, if the table, which is uniquely referred to by the speaker, is covered with books on that given occasion, then the speaker has said something true by her utterance of the sentence (25) on that occasion. This explains how on various present-day occasions ordinary speakers often succeed in saying something true by using the sentence (25). Strawson thinks that the picture he is offering here is correct as it conforms to the normal uses of descriptive sentences such as the sentence (25) and the like; and the picture drawn by Russell is incorrect as it fails to explain how a speaker can say something true by using a sentence like the sentence (25) on various present-day occasions.

The gist of Strawson's above mentioned criticism is the following:

Russell's uniqueness condition of definite descriptions is wrong as there are descriptive sentences containing such definite descriptions which fail to satisfy his uniqueness condition even though they—contrary to what Russell's theory says about them (according to Strawson)—can be used to say something true.

It should be noted here that a definite description of the form "the *F*" may fail to satisfy the uniqueness condition for two reasons: (i) there may be no object that fits the "*F*" of "the *F*", or (ii) there may be several objects that fit the "*F*" of "the *F*". If several objects fit the "*F*" of "the *F*", then the relevant definite description of the form "the *F*" is called an incomplete definite description.<sup>59</sup> So, the problem Strawson mentions is actually a

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<sup>59</sup> So, it seems that all incomplete definite descriptions fail to satisfy the uniqueness condition; but not all definite descriptions that fail to satisfy the uniqueness condition are incomplete.

problem related to incomplete definite descriptions. Hence, Strawson's criticism may now be summarized in the following way:

Russell's theory cannot properly handle sentences containing incomplete definite descriptions as those sentences may often be used to say something true whereas according to Russell's theory they express false propositions.

Strawson not only mentions the problem of incompleteness in Russell's theory, he also investigates the root of Russell's alleged mistake. Strawson seems to think that on the Russellian picture the truth-value is a property of a sentence which is determined by the syntax of the sentence in question and by the meanings of the constituent parts of that sentence independently of the context in which the sentence is uttered. According to Strawson since Russell believes that the truth-value of a sentence is determined independently of the context in which the sentence is uttered, he (Russell) thinks that the truth-value of a descriptive sentence like the sentence (2), *i.e.* "The present king of France is bald", is the same (false, in this case) on every occasion of its use. Strawson, then, explains why he disagrees with this Russellian view. To explain his points of disagreement with Russell, Strawson distinguishes between (i) a sentence and (ii) a use of a sentence.<sup>60</sup> Strawson says that a sentence may be uttered at different times on different occasions to make different assertions. Each of these utterances of a particular sentence at a particular time on a particular occasion is what Strawson calls a use of a sentence. Strawson, then, claims that the same sentence may be used on different occasions to make different assertions about different objects. In particular, the same sentence may be used to make a true assertion about an object on one occasion and to make a false assertion about another object on another occasion. He says:

... we cannot talk of *the sentence* being true or false, but only of its being used to make a true or false assertion or (if this is preferred) to express a

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<sup>60</sup> Strawson (1950), p. 325.; actually Strawson makes distinctions between (i) a sentence (ii) a use of a sentence (iii) an utterance of a sentence, and between (i\*) an expression (ii\*) a use of an expression (iii\*) an utterance of an expression. For the sake of simplicity, I consider only the distinction between (i) and (ii). But my putting the other distinctions aside in no way indicates that they do not play any significant role in Strawson's theory. I just put them aside because the distinction between (i) and (ii) is enough to serve the present purpose.

true or false proposition. And equally obviously we cannot talk of *the sentence* being *about* a particular person, for the same sentence may be used at different times to talk about quite different particular persons, but only of *a use* of the sentence to talk about a particular person.<sup>61</sup>

To support his point, Strawson gives the example of the following sentence (he substituted the following sentence for Russell's example of "The present king of France is bald"):

(26) The king of France is wise.

The above sentence, (26), might be used in 1550 by a person and in 1660 by another person. Now, according to Strawson, these two different uses of the same sentence might involve two different assertions about two different persons; and it might be the case that one, say the person who used the sentence (26) in 1550, used it to make a true assertion about a unique king of France in 1550; and the other person, say the person who used the same sentence in 1660, used it to make a false assertion about the one and only one unwise king of France in 1660. On the basis of such considerations Strawson claims that a sentence is neither true nor false, but may be used to make a true assertion (on one occasion) or a false assertion (on another occasion).

From the above discussion, we see, Strawson emphasizes two points of disagreement between him and Russell. These are:

- (A) According to Strawson, a descriptive sentence may be used to make different assertions that involve different truth-values on different occasions. He thinks that Russell's theory cannot capture this phenomenon; rather it renders a descriptive sentence to have a truth-value that remains the same on every occasion of its use.
- (B) According to Strawson, a sentence does not have a truth-value; rather, a speaker may use it to make a true or a false assertion. Strawson claims that since Russell fails to observe the difference between a sentence and a use of a sentence, he (Russell) wrongly thinks that it is the sentence, not a use of it, which has a truth-value.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 326

Upon investigation it appears that the claim Strawson makes, in (A), about Russell is not justified. Russell is not committed to the view that a truth-value of a descriptive sentence remains the same on every occasion on which it is used. He, rather, allows that a descriptive sentence may involve different truth-values on different occasions. It happens when the sentence in question has an *egocentric word*. In his *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* Russell offers a list of egocentric words:

Among obviously egocentric words are “near” and “far”, “past”, “present” and “future”, “was”, “is” and “will be”, and generally all forms of verbs involving tense. “This” and “that” are obviously egocentric; in fact, “this” might be taken as the only egocentric word not having a nominal definition.<sup>62</sup>

In the same passage Russell includes “I”, “you”, “here”, “there”, “now” in his list of egocentric words.<sup>63</sup> Then, in the same book Russell mentions that when a sentence involves an egocentric word, it may denote different objects on different occasions of its use. He says:

“This” denotes whatever, at the moment when the word is used, occupies the centre of attention. With words which are not egocentric what is constant is something about the object indicated, but “this” denotes a different object on each occasion of its use: what is constant is not the object denoted, but its relation to the particular use of the word. Whenever the word is used, the person using it is attending to something, and the word indicates this something. When a word is not egocentric, there is no need to distinguish between different occasions when it is used, but we must make this distinction with egocentric words, since what they indicate is something having a given relation to the particular use of the word.<sup>64</sup>

So, it is plain that Russell acknowledges the fact that a descriptive sentence containing an egocentric word may involve different truth-values on different occasions of its use as he

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<sup>62</sup> Bertrand Russell (1948), *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1948), p. 80.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

admits that an egocentric word may denote different object on each occasion of its use. Now, the word “present” in the definite description “the present king of France” is one of the egocentric words listed by Russell. So, the definite description “the present king of France” may denote different persons on different occasions of its use, and consequently the sentence “The present king of France is bald” may involve different truth-values on different occasions of its use. Russell does not deny it; rather, he allows it, and offers a theory to account for this phenomenon in his *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*<sup>65</sup> and in *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*.<sup>66</sup> Of course, Russell has not dealt with the issue of egocentric words in his “On Denoting” as he thinks that the problem of definite descriptions and the problem of egocentricity are different problems and should be dealt differently.<sup>67</sup> This, according to Russell, enables Strawson to think that he (Russell) has completely overlooked the problem of egocentricity and has proposed a theory of definite descriptions in which a truth-value of the sentence “The present king of France is bald” remains the same on every occasion of its use. But, as it has been mentioned above, Russell neither overlooks the problem of egocentricity nor does he propose such a theory in which the sentence “The present king of France is bald” has a constant truth-value independently of occasions of its use.

Russell observes that Strawson’s criticism against his theory is founded on the egocentric word “present” of his example of the sentence “The present king of France”. He, then, claims that if that egocentric word is replaced by a non-egocentric word, *e.g.* “in 1905”, Strawson’s criticism won’t be applicable to his theory anymore. Thus, in his “Mr. Strawson on Referring” Russell claims:

As regards “the present King of France”, he fastens upon the egocentric word “present” and does not seem able to grasp that, if for the word “present” I had substituted the words “in 1905”, the whole of his argument would have collapsed.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-87.

<sup>66</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1940), pp. 108-15.

<sup>67</sup> Bertrand Russell, “Mr. Strawson on Referring”, *Mind* 66, no. 263 (1957), p. 385.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 385.

Here, we can test whether or not Russell is correct in claiming that if the egocentric word “present” is replaced by the non-egocentric words “in 1905” in the sentence (2), *i.e.* “The present king of France is bald”, then Strawson’s argument regarding Russell’s example of the sentence (2) collapses. After replacing the word “present” by the words “in 1905” in the sentence (2), we get the following sentence:

(2b) The king of France in 1905 is bald.

Now, according to Russell’s theory of definite descriptions, on any occasion on which the sentence (2b) is used, the proposition expressed by it must be false simply because there was no king of France in 1905, *i.e.* the proposition expressed by the sentence (2b) is false because of its failure of satisfying the uniqueness condition. That means that the truth-value of the sentence (2b) remains the same on every occasion of its use. So, Russell seems to be correct in claiming that when the word “present” contained in (2) is replaced by the words “in 1905”, Strawson’s criticism, particularly about Russell’s example of the sentence (2), collapses.

A remark about Strawson’s above mentioned criticism may be made here. Although by replacing the word “present” by the words “in 1905” Russell’s particular example of the sentence (2) can avoid the problem Strawson mentioned, Strawson’s general claim that a descriptive sentence may be used to make different assertions involving different truth-values seems to be true. But a Russellian does not need to deny it as we have already seen that Russell allows this phenomenon and discusses it in different papers (but not in his “On Denoting”). In short, Russell’s theory is not inconsistent with the phenomenon that a descriptive sentence may involve different truth-values on different occasions of its use.<sup>69</sup>

However, even though Russell’s theory is compatible with the fact that a descriptive sentence (containing an egocentric word in it) may involve different truth-

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<sup>69</sup> About the second point of disagreement between Russell and Strawson, which has been mentioned in (B) above, I am not going to make any comment in the present chapter; but, concerning this point, something may be said in the fifth chapter where I wish to address the distinction between meaning and assertion. (see: the footnote-306 of this dissertation)

values on different occasions of its use, and even if Russell's view that the truth-value is a property of a sentence is taken to be a correct view, still his theory faces serious difficulties in dealing with descriptive sentences containing incomplete definite descriptions. As has been stated earlier, according to Russell's theory a simple descriptive sentence containing an incomplete definite description expresses a false proposition on every occasion of its use because of its failure to satisfy the uniqueness condition. But, it cannot also be denied that a speaker may say something true on various occasions by a descriptive sentence, *e.g.* "The table is covered with books", which contains an incomplete definite description. This phenomenon leads many to think that Russell's theory in the way it is originally proposed cannot properly deal with the problem of incompleteness. Nothing of what Russell says in his reply to Strawson seems to succeed in resolving the problem of incompleteness. The problem of incompleteness still looks like a serious problem for the defenders of Russell's theory.

**(b) The Argument from Donnellan's Distinction:** Keith Donnellan claims that there are actually two different sorts of use of definite descriptions—the *attributive use* and the *referential use*. In his "Reference and Definite Descriptions" Donnellan first defines the attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions, and then offers a detail exposition of the distinction between them. In the same paper he discusses the implication of that distinction for Russell's theory of definite descriptions. He observes that Russell's theory actually is inadequate because it fails to capture the distinction between the attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions.<sup>70</sup>

According to Donnellan, a definite description is said to be used attributively when the proposition expressed by the sentence containing it states something about *whoever or whatever* is the so-and-so; on the other hand, a definite description is said to be used referentially when by using the sentence containing it the speaker states something about a *particular object she has in mind* and wants her audiences to pick out whom or what she is talking about. In Donnellan's own words:

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<sup>70</sup> Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions", *The Philosophical Review* 75, no. 3 (1966), pp. 292-93, 297.

I will call the two uses of definite descriptions I have in mind the attributive use and the referential use. A speaker who uses a definite description attributively in an assertion states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so. A speaker who uses a definite description referentially in an assertion, on the other hand, uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing.<sup>71</sup>

Donnellan's distinction can be illustrated with the following example:

(27) Smith's murderer is insane.

Now consider the following Scenarios:<sup>72</sup>

**The Scenario-1:** A speaker who does not know who murdered Smith utters the sentence (27) observing the brutal manner of the killing. If one asks the utterer whom she is referring to, the utterer may reply that she is not referring to any particular person; she is just saying that whoever had done such a brutal deed must be insane.

**The Scenario-2:** Jones has been arrested and charged for the brutal murder of Smith. A speaker who is attending Jones' trial utters the sentence (27) observing Jones' odd behavioral pattern at his trial. Here, if one asks her whom she is referring to, she will reply that she is referring to Jones.

Now, we see, in the Scenario-1 the speaker does not have any particular person in mind as the murderer of Smith when she utters the sentence (27). According to the Russellian view, here, the proposition expressed by the sentence the speaker utters is: exactly one person murdered Smith, and whoever murdered Smith is insane. That is, when a definite description is used in the above mentioned way, *the sentence containing it expresses a general proposition*. Donnellan calls this sort of use of a definite description the attributive use of it. He seems to agree that Russell's views (*i.e.* Russell's theses which have been codified as (D1)-(D4), the three-clause analysis of descriptive sentences, etc.) may be applicable to descriptive sentences of the form "The *F* is *G*" when the definite description of the form "the *F*" is used attributively.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 285-86.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

But the case is different in the Scenario-2. Here, the speaker, when she utters the sentence (27) has a particular person, namely Jones, in mind, and she uses the definite description intending to enable her audiences to pick out the person, *i.e.* Jones, whom she intends to refer to. That is, in this case, the definite description is used to pick out the intended individual so that a property may be predicated of it regardless of whether or not the definite description actually fits the individual in question. By using (27) in the Scenario-2, the speaker actually says something about Jones, namely that he is insane, and she successfully says so, even if Jones is not the murderer of Smith, *i.e.* even if the definite description does not fit the person Jones. So, it seems that when a definite description is used in the way mentioned above, the descriptive phrase acts like a referential term, and *the sentence that contains it expresses a singular proposition*.<sup>74</sup> This sort of use of a definite description is what Donnellan calls the referential use of a definite description. Donnellan, then, claims that Russell's theory is inadequate because it overlooks the referential use of definite descriptions. Russell's theory, according to Donnellan, deals with definite descriptions in a way as if all definite descriptions are used attributively.<sup>75</sup> According to Russell's theory, a sentence of the form "The *F* is *G*" invariably expresses a general proposition of the following sort: exactly one thing is an *F*, and whatever is an *F* is *G*. But that is not always the case, according to Donnellan. He seems to think that there are cases of the referential use of definite descriptions in which a sentence of the form "The *F* is *G*" is used to express a singular proposition of the following sort: *o* (described as "the *F*") is *G*. So, here, Donnellan thinks, Russell's theory fails; and that thought about Russell's theory leads him to think that the existence of the referential use of definite descriptions proves that Russell's theory is inadequate.

In his paper Donnellan identifies important differences between an attributive use of a definite description and a referential use of it. Some of those are worth mentioning here. One of these differences is the following: in the case of an attributive use of a definite description, the speaker in some sense presupposes (in the Strawsonian analysis)

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<sup>74</sup> Although Donnellan does not exactly say so, but it seems that what he has in mind is that the sentence (27) in such a case expresses a singular proposition like: *Jones is insane*, or *That man, Jones, is insane*, or *That man over there is insane* (if the speaker does not know the name of the accused person).

<sup>75</sup> Donnellan (1966), pp. 281-82, 293, 297.

or implies (in the Russellian analysis) that there is a unique object that satisfies the definite description in question; but no particular object is intended.<sup>76</sup> For example, when the sentence (27) is used in the Scenario-1, no particular person (Jones or any other) is intended. Since in the case of an attributive use of a definite description no particular object is intended, there is no scope of misdescribing an object in such a case.<sup>77</sup> For example, if someone disputes that a particular person, say Jones, is not the murderer of Smith, the speaker of (27) in the Scenario-1 may reply that she is not talking about Jones. On the other hand, when a definite description is used referentially, a particular object is intended as the referent of the definite description in question.<sup>78</sup> For example, when the sentence (27) is used in the Scenario-2, Jones is referred to with the definite description “Smith’s murderer”. So, here the sentence (27) is a sentence about a particular person, namely Jones, who is intended to be referred to. In such a case a misdescription may occur. It may be the case that Jones is not the unique murderer of Smith although he is described as the unique murderer of Smith. Here, if someone disputes that Jones is not the unique murderer of Smith, the speaker of the sentence may reply that what she actually means is this: that man, Jones, is insane. And, according to Donnellan, this is a perfectly good answer when the speaker referentially uses the definite description in question.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 286, 289.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>78</sup> Donnellan thinks that a person can use a definite description referentially to refer to her intended referent even when she does not believe that her referent actually fits the definite description used. He says: “Suppose the throne is occupied by a man I firmly believe to be not the king, but a usurper. Imagine also that his followers as firmly believe that he is the king. Suppose I wish to see this man. I might say to his minions, “Is the king in his countinghouse?” I succeed in referring to the man I wish to refer to without myself believing that he fits the definite description. It is not even necessary, moreover, to suppose that his followers believe him to be the king. If they are cynical about the whole thing, know he is not the king, I may still succeed in referring to the man I wish to refer to.” [pp. 290-91]. And, it is also possible that a speaker can use a definite description attributively even though the speaker believes that a certain object or person actually satisfies the definite description she uses. Donnellan gives the following example to support this claim: “... suppose that Jones is on trial for the murder and I and everyone else believe him guilty. Suppose that I comment that the murderer of Smith is insane, but instead of backing this up ... by citing Jones's behavior in the dock, I go on to outline reasons for thinking that anyone who murdered poor Smith in that particularly horrible way must be insane. If now it turns out that Jones was not the murderer after all, but someone else was, I think I can claim to have been right if the true murderer is after all insane. Here, I think, I would be using the definite description attributively, even though I believe that a particular person fits the definite description.” [Ibid., p. 290.]

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 286, 289, 301.

According to Donnellan, in the case of an attributive use of a definite description, a definite description is *essential* in the sense that the speaker fails to express a *true proposition* if nothing fits the definite description contained in the sentence she uses. But, in the case of a referential use of a definite description the speaker may succeed in saying something *true of the object* she refers to even if nothing fits the definite description contained in the sentence she uses. For, using the definite description in such a case is just one of the possible ways of making it clear which object is referred to; and the speaker may successfully do it even when the definite description she uses is not satisfied by anything. For example, in the Scenario-1, as we have already seen, if nothing satisfies the definite description “Smith’s murderer”, then the proposition expressed by the sentence “Smith’s murderer is insane” is false (and the speaker fails to say something true by using the sentence in question). But, in the Scenario-2, if nothing satisfies the definite description “Smith’s murderer”, still the speaker succeeds in saying something true of the person she refers to, *i.e.* Jones, provided that Jones is actually insane. That is why Donnellan thinks that definite descriptions are *not essential* when they are used referentially. Donnellan describes this point in the following way:

In the first case [the attributive use of description] the definite description might be said to occur essentially, for the speaker wishes to assert something about whatever or whoever fits the description; but in the referential use the definite description is merely one tool for doing a certain job—calling attention to a person or thing—and in general any other device for doing the same job, another description or name would do as well.<sup>80</sup>

Donnellan thinks that although it is possible that by using a definite description attributively a speaker may fail to refer to anything, the speaker cannot fail to refer to an object when she uses a definite description referentially except in some extreme cases. For example, if someone describes a rock as “the man carrying a walking stick” and asks “Is the man carrying a walking stick the professor of history?”, she does not fail to refer to anything; rather, she refers to something, namely the thing over there which happens to be a rock but which she takes to be a man carrying a walking stick.<sup>81</sup> Of course,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

Donnellan agrees that there may be some unusual and extreme cases in which a speaker may fail to refer to anything by using a definite description referentially. For example, suppose that there is nothing—no man, no rock—but the speaker asks “Is the man carrying a walking stick the professor of history?” due to a trick of light that makes her think that there is a man carrying a walking stick. In this case, the speaker really fails to refer to anything by using the definite description referentially.<sup>82</sup> But that requires a radically unusual circumstance; and the reason why the speaker fails to refer to anything in such a case involves other issues. Donnellan says:

This failure of reference, however, requires circumstances much more radical than the mere nonexistence of anything fitting the description used. It requires that there be nothing of which it can be said, “That is what he was referring to”. Now perhaps also in such cases, if the speaker has asserted something, he fails to say anything true or false if there is nothing that can be identified as that to which he referred. But if so, the failure of reference and truth values does not come about merely because nothing fits the description he used.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, the distinction between the attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions may be summarized as follows:

In the case of the attributive use of a definite description:

- (A1): It is presupposed or implied that something fits the definite description; but no particular object is intended.
- (A2): In no way does the speaker misdescribe an object, although she may fail to refer to any object at all.
- (A3): The definite description occurs essentially in the sense that if nothing satisfies the definite description, then the sentence containing it fails to express a *true* proposition [Russell], or the speaker fails to express a proposition that is *either true or false* [Strawson].

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 296.; but, is it true that she fails to refer to anything? Doesn't she refer to the visual image that is caused by the trick of light? Given what is said by Donnellan about the referential use of definite descriptions, it seems to me that even in such an extreme case the speaker succeeds to refer to something, namely the visual image that makes her to think that there is a man carrying a walking stick.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

In the case of the referential use of a definite description:

(R1): It is not always the case that the speaker presupposes or implies that something fits the definite description she uses; but a particular object is intended when she uses the definite description in question. Here, the speaker uses the definite description intending her audiences to be able to pick out (on the basis of the definite description used) whom or what she is talking about.

(R2): The speaker may misdescribe an object by the definite description she uses; but even in that case the speaker succeeds in referring to something. Here, it is not possible to fail to refer to something except in some radically extreme cases.

(R3): The definite description does not occur essentially in the sense that even if nothing satisfies the definite description, still the speaker, by using a sentence containing it, may say *something true of the object* she refers to.

Now, according to Donnellan's view, Russell's theory cannot capture the phenomena described in (R1) to (R3). In the Russellian analysis, a descriptive sentence expresses a general proposition that does not refer to any particular object; so, no particular object is intended by a definite description. Hence, (R1) is not satisfied by Russell's theory. Again, Russell's theory does not allow that a speaker may misdescribe an object by the definite description she uses. So, Russell's theory does not conform to (R2). And, in Russell's theory, a definite description is essential in the sense that if nothing satisfies a definite description, then the proposition expressed by the sentence containing it must be false. Hence, Russell's theory does not conform to (R3). Thus, Donnellan contends, the fact that there really is the referential use of definite descriptions and that Russell's theory cannot capture this use of definite descriptions show that Russell's theory is inadequate.

Donnellan maintains that generally a definite description, *e.g.* "Smith's murderer", contained in a sentence, *e.g.* the sentence (27), can be used in both ways, *i.e.* attributively and referentially (on different occasions); but there may be sentences in

which a definite description can be used only attributively or only referentially.<sup>84</sup> For example, the definite description “The student whom I do not know” in the following sentences can be used only attributively:

(28) The student whom I do not know has sent me a mail.

Although Donnellan presents an example of a sentence in which the relevant definite description can be used only attributively (he gives the example of the following sentence: “Point out the man who is drinking my martini”), he is “not so certain that any can be found in which the definite description can be used only referentially.”<sup>85</sup> He claims that even if such examples are found, they won’t spoil the point that there are many sentences containing definite descriptions that can be used either way—attributively or referentially (on different occasions, of course).<sup>86</sup> In short, according to Donnellan, normally a definite description of the form “the *F*” contained in a sentence of the form “The *F* is *G*” can be used attributively (on one occasion) or referentially (on another occasion); and this phenomenon proves that Russell’s theory is incorrect as Russell’s theory treats definite descriptions in a way as if they can only be used attributively. Hence, Donnellan concludes:

I conclude, then, that neither Russell’s nor Strawson’s theory represents a correct account of the use of definite descriptions—Russell’s because it ignores altogether the referential use ...<sup>87</sup>

A question may be raised here: how is it determined whether or not a particular use of a definite description is attributive or referential? In his paper, Donnellan mentions that it is the speaker’s intention on a particular occasion which determines whether a definite description is used attributively or referentially. Donnellan says:

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 297.; it may be noted here that according to Donnellan, Strawson’s theory is inadequate too because it overlooks the attributive use of definite descriptions. He thinks that Strawson’s theory deals with definite descriptions as if all definite descriptions are used referentially. Actually, there is an ambiguity, according to Donnellan, which is acknowledged neither by Russell nor by Strawson. Thus, both Russell and Strawson are mistaken in thinking that definite descriptions always work in one way.

In general, whether or not a definite description is used referentially or attributively is a function of the speaker's intention in a particular case.<sup>88</sup>

Now, a Russellian can argue that the difference between an attributive and a referential use of a definite description mentioned by Donnellan is a kind of difference that is based on the speaker's intention on a particular occasion (on which the relevant definite description is used). But Russell's theory is a theory of meaning that deals with an expression's semantic properties—properties that are independent of the speaker's particular intention on a particular occasion (on which the speaker uses the definite description in question). Russell explicitly mentions that his theory does not concern the speaker's intention when she (the speaker) uses a descriptive sentence. In his "Mr. Strawson on Referring" Russell makes his position clear:

My theory of descriptions was never intended as an analysis of the state of mind of those who utter sentences containing descriptions.<sup>89</sup>

Now, in the study of the philosophy of language there is a notion of *pragmatics* which concerns the speaker's particular intention to communicate something to her audiences by her use of words/phrases/sentences on a particular occasion. While semantics deals with the relation between words and things independently of the speaker's particular intention on a particular occasion, pragmatics deals with words, things and the speaker's particular intention of communicating something to her audiences on a particular occasion. Charles Morris who first coined the term "pragmatics" puts this point in the following way:

... semantics deals with the relation of signs to designata ... "pragmatics" is designated as the science of the relation of signs to their interpreter.<sup>90</sup>

The Russellian now may claim that the distinction between an attributive and a referential use of a definite description shown by Donnellan is actually related to the speaker's intention and how she interprets it on a particular occasion. In other words, the Russellian may claim that the distinction between an attributive and a referential use of a definite

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>89</sup> Russell (1957), p. 388.

<sup>90</sup> Charles W. Morris, "Foundations of the Theory of Signs", *Writings on the General Theory of Signs* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 35, 43.

description concerns the relations of signs to their interpreter. So, the Russellian may conclude that the distinction shown by Donnellan is an issue of pragmatics, and not an issue of semantics. If that is the case, *i.e.* if it is true that the distinction shown by Donnellan is an issue of pragmatics rather than an issue of semantics, then Donnellan's distinction actually fails to undermine Russell's theory since his theory, as has already been mentioned, is a theory of meaning that deals with issues of semantics, and not with issues of pragmatics.

So, in order to weigh the import of Donnellan's distinction for Russell's theory it is important to examine whether the distinction he presents is an issue of semantics or an issue of pragmatics. Donnellan's distinction is interpreted in two ways. In one of its interpretations, it is said that Donnellan's distinction involves the claim that definite descriptions are semantically ambiguous. Let us call it the *Semantic Interpretation*. According to this interpretation what Donnellan actually suggests is the following: the descriptive sentence "Smith's murderer is insane" has two meanings—(i) exactly one person murdered Smith, and whoever murdered Smith is insane, and (ii) Jones (or Black, or Robinson, or any other particular person who is described as "Smith's murderer") is insane. Here, in its first meaning the descriptive sentence "Smith's murderer is insane" expresses a general proposition; and in its second meaning the same sentence expresses a singular proposition (a proposition about a particular person, namely Jones). Now, when the descriptive sentence is used in its first meaning (as has been used in the Scenario-1), the definite description contained in it is said to be used attributively; and when it is used in its second meaning (as has been used in the Scenario-2), the definite description contained in it is said to be used referentially. According to the Semantic Interpretation of Donnellan's distinction, both meanings of the descriptive sentence mentioned in (i) and (ii) above are semantically significant meanings of the sentence in question. Thus, following the Semantic Interpretation of Donnellan's distinction, it may be said that what Donnellan actually suggests by distinguishing between the attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions is the following: a descriptive sentence is actually semantically ambiguous in the sense that it has two types of semantically significant meanings one of

which is salient when the definite description contained in it is used attributively, and the other is salient when the definite description contained in it is used referentially. Now, if it is true that a descriptive sentence is actually semantically ambiguous, then this phenomenon severely undermines Russell's theory of definite descriptions since in this case one can reasonably claim that Russell's theory of definite descriptions fails to accommodate the semantic ambiguity involved in descriptive sentences. Commentators who interpret Donnellan's distinction in the above mentioned way argue that unless Donnellan had this sort of interpretation in his mind about the distinction between the attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions, he would not so explicitly and confidently claim that Russell's theory is incorrect.<sup>91</sup>

According to the other interpretation of Donnellan's distinction what he suggests by making the distinction between the attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions is the following: by using a definite description attributively the speaker of that descriptive sentence intends to express a general proposition; and by using a definite description referentially the speaker intends to refer to a particular object she already has in mind. So, the distinction between the attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions involves the speaker's intention. But speaker's intention, as has already been mentioned, is an issue of pragmatics; and hence, Donnellan's distinction, which is actually based on speaker's intention, is a distinction related to pragmatics, and not to semantics. Let us call this interpretation of Donnellan's distinction the *Pragmatic Interpretation*. A defender of this interpretation of Donnellan's distinction may cite the following words from Donnellan's paper in order to support her position:

It does not appear plausible to account for this [two different uses (the attributive and referential uses) of definite descriptions], either, as an ambiguity in sentences. The grammatical structure of the sentence seems to me be the same whether the description is used referentially or attributively: that is, it is not syntactically ambiguous. Nor does it seem at

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<sup>91</sup> Donnellan not only says that Russell's theory is inadequate, he explicitly says that Russell's theory is incorrect (see: Donnellan (1966), pp. 292, 297.)

all attractive to suppose an ambiguity in meaning of the words; it does not appear to be semantically ambiguous (perhaps we could say that the sentence is pragmatically ambiguous: the distinction between roles that the description plays is a function of the speaker's intention.)<sup>92</sup>

Besides, it is interesting to observe that Donnellan has never claimed that an utterance of the sentence (27), *i.e.* "Smith's murderer is insane", in the Scenario-2 (in which the definite description "Smith's murderer" is used referentially) expresses a *true proposition* when the person accused for Smith's murder is not the murderer of Smith but actually is insane. Rather, he just says that in such a case the speaker may still say something (*e.g.* "is insane") *true of the person* referred. We observe it in the following words from Donnellan's paper:

But where the definite description is used referentially, something true may well have been said. It is possible that something true was said of the person referred.<sup>93</sup>

Saul Kripke, in his "Speakers Reference and Semantic Reference", has made a similar observation about Donnellan's thought and commented that Donnellan would hedge if he were asked whether or not the statement the speaker made by using the sentence (27) in the Scenario-2 was true, if the person charged was not really the murderer of Smith.<sup>94</sup> From these observations, it seems that what Donnellan has actually suggested is the following: even when a sentence containing a definite description *expresses a false proposition*, the speaker of that sentence may succeed in saying something *true of her intended referent* by using that sentence.<sup>95</sup> But saying something *true of an object* is different from using an *expression which is true*. The former precisely is a property of communication and is related to pragmatics whereas the latter precisely is a property of linguistic expression and is related to semantics. So, it may be thought that by making the

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<sup>92</sup> Donnellan (1966), p. 297.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>94</sup> Saul Kripke, "Speakers Reference and Semantic Reference", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy II*. (1977), p. 261.; of course, Kripke does not favor the *Pragmatic Interpretation* of Donnellan's distinction.

<sup>95</sup> Of course, Donnellan does not explicitly say that such a sentence expresses a false proposition. Had he said so, the pragmatic interpretation of his distinction would certainly be the correct interpretation of his distinction.

distinction between two different uses of definite descriptions Donnellan actually wants to raise an issue related to pragmatics.

So, it seems that although the supposition of a semantic ambiguity would seriously conflict with Russell's theory of definite descriptions, it cannot be ascribed with certainty to Donnellan. However, Kripke observes that Donnellan's apparent disclaiming of the ambiguity in definite descriptions runs against the grain of the most part of his paper. Donnellan spends so many words against Russell's theory and explicitly concludes that Russell's theory is incorrect; and now if it turns out that he does not want to claim ambiguity in definite descriptions, then he actually says nothing against Russell's theory; for, as Kripke mentions:

If the sentence [containing a description, *e.g.* (27)] is *not* (syntactically or) semantically ambiguous, it has *one* analysis; to say that it has two distinct analyses is to attribute a syntactical or semantic ambiguity to it.<sup>96</sup>

So, Kripke thinks that the disclaimer quoted from Donnellan's paper may be a mistake on Donnellan's part. That is why Kripke ignores the disclaimer and takes Donnellan to be arguing for the semantic ambiguity in definite descriptions.

How, then, should Donnellan's position be understood? Should one go with the Semantic Interpretation of his distinction? Or, is it the Pragmatic Interpretation that reflects the suggestions originally made by Donnellan? For my part, I am inclined to go with Kripke in this regard. I think that to examine whether or not Donnellan's distinction undermines Russell's theory of definite descriptions it is better to take Donnellan's position to be arguing for ambiguity in definite descriptions (the Semantic Interpretation) because it is the position that can (if true) severely undermine Russell's theory.<sup>97</sup>

However, in this chapter two very important objections against Russell's theory of definite descriptions have been observed. If any of these objections is correct, then

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<sup>96</sup> Kripke (1977), p. 262.

<sup>97</sup> When Donnellan is developing his point that the same definite description on different occasion may be used either way—attributively and referentially—he says: "... there are many sentences, *apparently* not ambiguous either syntactically or semantically, containing definite descriptions that can be used either way." (Donnellan (1966), p. 298.; my italic). Here, Donnellan's use of the word "apparently" gives me the impression that he does not suspend the possibility that definite descriptions are somehow ambiguous.

Russell's theory is false (or, at least, inadequate). So, detailed examinations of these objections are required. In the following two chapters I wish to examine these objections in detail. But before I end the present chapter, I think, a point regarding the relationship between the referential use of definite descriptions and the incompleteness of definite descriptions may be mentioned. In most cases incomplete definite descriptions are used referentially. So, it may lead one to think that the incompleteness of a definite description is either a *necessary* or a *sufficient condition* for the referential use of it. But that is not true; rather, the fact is that the incompleteness of a definite description is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the referential use of that definite description. A definite description may be used referentially even though it is not incomplete. For instance, consider Donnellan's example of the sentence (27), *i.e.* "Smith's murderer is insane", used in the Scenario-2. Here, the definite description "Smith's murderer" is plainly a complete definite description which is supposed to be satisfied (if any object satisfies the definite description in question at all) by a unique murderer of Smith. But the definite description "Smith's murderer" on the given occasion is used referentially as by using it on the given occasion the speaker intends to refer to a particular person, namely Jones, she already has in mind. That is, here, the incompleteness of a definite description is absent, but the definite description is used referentially. Hence, it is proved that the incompleteness of a definite description is not a necessary condition for the referential use of that definite description. Again, it may happen that a definite description is not used referentially (rather, it is used attributively) even though the definite description in question is incomplete. For example, a professor who has just found that her dictionary has been stolen says:

(29) The thief has stolen my dictionary.

Here, the definite description "the thief" is obviously incomplete as there are many persons in the world who fit the definite description "the thief". But on the above mentioned occasion the definite description "the thief" contained in the sentence (29) is used attributively as the professor does not refer to any particular person she has in mind as the referent of the definite description she uses. That is, here, the incompleteness of a

definite description is present, but the definite description is not used referentially. Hence, it is proved that the incompleteness of a definite description is not a sufficient condition for the referential use of that definite description. That is, the incompleteness of a definite description is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the referential use of it. To say this is not the same as to say that there is no relationship between them. There is a significant relationship between them; and we will observe this relationship later.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Responses to the Argument from Incompleteness

In the previous chapter I have discussed two objections against Russell's theory of definite descriptions. These are: the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction. In the present chapter I will examine two pro-Russellian responses to the Argument from Incompleteness. According to the first of these pro-Russellian responses, a definite description such as "the table" may be understood as a short form of a fuller description such as "the table over there", or "the table in front of me", etc.; or it may be understood with respect to a restricted domain over which the definite description ranges. This approach is called the *Elliptical Approach*. According to the other response, what is required by the definite description "the table" is not that there be a unique table in the whole world but only that there be a unique table in the relevant contextually determined situation. I call it the *Situation Semantics Approach*. I will examine first the Elliptical Approach and then the Situation Semantics Approach.

**1. The Elliptical Approach:** According to the Elliptical Approach a sentence of the form "The *F* is *G*" in which the definite description of the form "the *F*" is incomplete does not require that there is a unique *F* in the whole universe; for, the definite description of the form "the *F*" in such a case is either a short form of a fuller description of the form "the *F* which is *H*", or it is limited to a certain context which determines the domain of discourse relevant to the definite description in question. That is, the following two options are open here: a speaker who utters a sentence containing an incomplete definite description may—if needed—explicitly add the unsaid part of the definite description and thereby complete the definite description in question; or the sentence should be understood in the following way: the speaker and her audiences are aware of the context that implicitly determines the objects that belong to the domain of the definite description in question. Following Stephen Neale<sup>98</sup> we can call them the *Explicit*

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<sup>98</sup> Neale (1990), p. 95.; Neale (2005a), pp. 193-94.; Stephen Neale, "A Century Later" *Mind* 114, no. 456 (2005b; special issue on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Bertrand Russell's "On Denoting"), pp.

*Approach* and the *Implicit Approach*, respectively. Now, let us see how these approaches deal with the Argument from Incompleteness.

**(a) The Explicit Approach:** The proponents of the Explicit Approach remark that there are many cases in which what a speaker says on a given occasion is determined by two factors—(i) the sentence the speaker uses, and (ii) the context in which the sentence in question is used. Here, (i) is uncontroversially true and easily understandable; (ii) is also true, but requires elucidation as this is the factor on which the Explicit Approach is founded. In order to show how the context in which a sentence is used contributes in determining what a speaker says on a given occasion R. M. Sainsbury, one of the proponents of the Explicit Approach, offers the following example<sup>99</sup>: suppose in the middle of her lecture a professor exclaims “There’s no more chalk” (when she is about to write something on the blackboard). Now, it is plain that her audiences won’t take her to be claiming that there is no more chalk in the world. Rather, they will naturally take her to be claiming that there is no more chalk in the classroom in which she is giving her lecture. Here, it is the context (in which the professor uses the sentence in question) that determines (along with the factor (i)) what proposition is actually expressed by the sentence uttered by the professor. And, it can also be said that the sentence “There’s no more chalk” used on the given occasion actually is incomplete which may be completed in the following way: “There’s no more chalk *in this classroom now.*” Now, according to Sainsbury, what is said above about an ordinary sentence like “There’s no more chalk” is also true of any sentence that contains an incomplete definite description. For example, suppose on a given occasion on which a cat is sitting on a person’s lap a speaker says:

(30) The cat is hungry.

According to Sainsbury, in the above case the audiences of the speaker naturally won’t take her to be claiming the existence of a unique cat in the world; rather, they will take

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847-51.; Peter Ludlow and Stephen Neale, “Descriptions”, *Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Language*, eds. Michael Devitt and Richard Hanley (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), pp. 301.

<sup>99</sup> R. M. Sainsbury, *Russell* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 115. (the example is slightly modified to fit my purpose)

her to have used an incomplete definite description that may be completed as “the cat on her lap”; and thereby the sentence may be completed as “The cat *on her lap* is hungry”.<sup>100</sup> Here, the incomplete definite description “the cat” may be understood as elliptical for the fuller description “the cat on her lap”.

Besides Sainsbury, Sellars<sup>101</sup>, Peter Ludlow and Stephen Neale<sup>102</sup> are among others who endorse the Explicit Approach to defend Russell’s theory of definite descriptions against the objection arising from the Argument from Incompleteness. Ludlow and Neale argue that on an occasion when a speaker utters a sentence like the sentence (25), *i.e.* “The table is covered with books”, her audiences generally know which table is meant on that occasion—it may be the only table that is visible on that occasion, or it may be the only table in front of the speaker on that occasion, or it may be the only table located near the window of a certain room on that occasion, etc. In such a case, the definite description “the table” is just a short form of a fuller description which is claimed to be uniquely satisfied. Ludlow and Neale claim that by making the relevant fuller descriptions explicit one can solve the problem concerning incomplete definite descriptions. They argue that a descriptive sentence like (25) may be converted, for example, into the following sentence by making the fuller description explicit:

(25a) The table *near the window of this room* is covered with books.

Now, it is plain that on some occasions (25a) can be used to say something true. Here, according to the proponents of the Explicit Approach the sentence (25) is just a short form of (25a). So, according to them it is reasonable to say that on some occasions (25) may be used to say something true. Hence, they think, it is not true of Russell’s theory that his theory renders sentences containing incomplete definite descriptions as sentences that express false propositions on every present-day occasion. So, the problem concerning incomplete definite descriptions is solved, according to the proponents of the Explicit Approach.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>101</sup> Wilfrid. Sellars, “Presupposing”, *Philosophical Review* 63, no.2 (1954), pp. 197-201.

<sup>102</sup> Neale (1990), pp. 93-102; Neale (2005a), pp. 193-94; Neale (2005b), pp. 847-54; Ludlow and Neale (2006), pp. 301-03.

**(b) The Implicit Approach:** According to the philosophers who endorse the Implicit Approach to defend Russell's theory of definite descriptions against the objection arising from the Argument from Incompleteness the context of utterance of a sentence containing an incomplete definite description determines the domain of quantification relevant to the definite description in question. William G. Lycan,<sup>103</sup> Peter Ludlow and Stephen Neale are among those who endorse this approach to defend Russell's theory. Although each of them has his own specific theory regarding the matter, all of them endorse the following general line of thought: a definite description of the form "the *F*" is a quantifier like "all *F*s", "some *F*s", "most *F*s" etc.; and for a sentence containing a definite description, the domain over which the relevant quantifier ranges does not need to be a universal one; rather, the domain over which the quantifier ranges is a particular class roughly presupposed in the relevant context, *e.g.* the class of all and only objects in the *immediately shared perceptual environment* of the speaker of the sentence and her audiences.<sup>104</sup> That means that when a descriptive sentence is analyzed in the way Russell suggests, it is not the case that the quantifier involved in it is unrestricted; rather, the domain of the quantifier is fixed or restricted by the interest of the speaker (and/or her audiences as well) or by a contextual feature supplied by the context of utterance.<sup>105</sup> Now, keeping this notion of quantifier-restriction in mind, a defender of the Implicit Approach may argue that in the case of a descriptive sentence like the sentence (25) the domain of the relevant quantifier is implicitly fixed in an appropriate way so that the sentence can entail that there is exactly one table that belongs to the restricted domain of discourse, *e.g.* a certain table near the window of a particular room at a particular time. In this way—the defender of the Implicit Approach may claim—one can avoid the demand that on the Russellian analysis the sentence (25) entails that there is exactly one table in the whole universe. So, according to the proponents of the Explicit

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<sup>103</sup> William G. Lycan, *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2008), pp. 21-23.

<sup>104</sup> Neale (1990), p. 95.

<sup>105</sup> Since this approach is based on the idea of delimiting the quantifier relevant to a definite description, it is sometimes called Restricted Quantification Approach. (See: Lycan (2008), p. 22.)

Approach it may be the case that the sentence (25) expresses a true proposition on an occasion, if on that occasion there is exactly one table that belongs to the restricted domain of discourse and that table is covered with books (on that occasion). If the above analysis is correct, then here we have got an explanation of how a sentence containing an incomplete definite description may express a true proposition on some occasions. And, this explanation, according to the defenders of Russell's theory, conforms to Russell's theory of definite descriptions.

Stephen Neale, one of the most prominent defenders of Russell's theory of definite descriptions, is confident that the Implicit Approach described above can deal with the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness. He observes that like the case of definite descriptions the phenomenon of domain-restriction is true of all other quantifiers too.<sup>106</sup> For example, consider the following sentences containing universal quantifiers:

(31) All students are attending Professor Kripke's lecture today.

(32) Everyone likes her.

Now, it seems that the sentence (31) does not entail that all students of all levels in the world are attending Professor Kripke's lecture today (or, at least, the sentence is not used to imply something like that); rather, the domain of the universal quantifier "all" actually is somehow fixed by some sort of contextual elements, *e.g.* all students of the philosophy department of Princeton University, or all students who have registered for a particular course taught by Professor Kripke, or both, etc. Similarly, (32) appears not to entail that everyone in the world likes the particular person referred to. The domain of the relevant quantifier is somehow unrestricted. All these examples show that the domain-restriction is a common feature of all sorts of quantifier. That is why Neale claims that if the domain-restriction is something problematic, then that problem is a general problem of all sorts of quantifier which poses no special objection to Russell's theory of definite descriptions.<sup>107</sup>

Ludlow and Neale mention that the Explicit Approach differs from the Implicit Approach in that the former approach focuses more on *language* whereas the latter

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<sup>106</sup> Neale (1990), pp. 95, 98.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95; Neale (2005a), p. 194.

approach focuses more on the *world*. The former approach, as we have seen, looks for linguistic elements, *e.g.* words and phrases, to complete an incomplete definite description; and the latter approach limits a part of the world as the domain of discourse. Neale and Ludlow describe this difference in the following way:

The difference between the explicit and implicit replies corresponds to a difference in focus and in the attitude taken to the two major parts of ‘the  $\Phi$ ’ Where we have incompleteness we have *slippage* between language and the world. There are only two things we can do about this slippage: tinker with language, or tinker with the world. When we tinker with *language*: we do something about the *matrix*  $\Phi$ , availing ourselves of the *explicit* reply. When we tinker with the *world*, we do something about the *objects* that (potentially) satisfy the matrix, and hence restrict the range of either the unrestricted quantifier ‘the’ or the restricted quantifier ‘the  $\Phi$ ,’ availing ourselves of the *implicit* reply.<sup>108</sup>

Although Ludlow and Neale think that either one of the two forms of the Elliptical Approach, *i.e.* the Explicit Approach and the Implicit Approach, enables a Russellian to deal with the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness, they agree that the Implicit Approach faces a serious problem when it deals with a sentence that contains two superficially identical definite descriptions. Ludlow and Neale give the following example<sup>109</sup> to show this problem: suppose, two friends have watched a boxing match between a Russian and a Swede. Both of them know that one of the eleven judges of the match is a Russian; and that no participating boxer is a member of the panel of judges. Now, upon hearing the announcement that the panel of judges has declared the Swede the winner by ten votes to one, one utters the following sentence:

(33) The Russian has voted for the Russian.

Here, what the utterer wants to say is that the Russian Judge has voted for the Russian boxer. And, it may be the case that the proposition expressed by (33) is true. This fact can easily be captured by the Explicit Approach. But the Implicit Approach cannot easily deal with

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<sup>108</sup> Ludlow and Neale (2006), p. 302.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

this fact as there can be no domain of discourse containing exactly one Russian with respect to which (33) can be evaluated and come out to be true.<sup>110</sup> This, however, is not an unsolvable problem, according to Ludlow and Neale. They think that the Implicit Approach can overcome this problem by mimicking what the Explicit Approach would do in such a case. The Explicit Approach would solve the problem by explicitly mentioning the fuller descriptions for both occurrences of the definite description “the Russian”. That is, according to the Explicit Approach, the sentence (33) would be completed in the following way:

(33a) The Russian *judge of today’s match* has voted for the Russian  
*boxer of today’s match*.

So, the suggestion that Ludlow and Neale offers here is this: the Implicit Approach can overcome the problem mentioned above by allowing domains of the quantifier (actually *two* superficially identical quantifiers) be changed on the basis of two different occurrences of it in the single sentence. Ludlow and Neale say:

If the implicit approach is to be saved, it will have to mirror what the explicit approach does by allowing different completions for superficially identical descriptions, and this means allowing the domain over which quantifiers range to shift *within* a sentence.<sup>111</sup>

That is, on the picture suggested by Ludlow and Neale, the domain of the first occurrence of the definite description “the Russian” ranges over all members of the panel of judges of the particular boxing match; and the domain of the second occurrence of the definite description “the Russian” ranges over all boxers participating in that particular boxing match.<sup>112</sup> And, in this way, according to Ludlow and Neale, the problem arising from two superficially identical definite descriptions occurring in a single sentence can be solved.

At any rate, according to the defenders of the Elliptical Approach the Argument from Incompleteness poses no genuine problem for Russell’s theory of definite descriptions. What a Russellian needs when she deals with the Argument from

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>112</sup> Similar phenomenon may be seen in cases of other quantifiers. For example, consider the sentence “Every policeman salutes every policeman”. This sentence may be completed in this way: “Every policeman *standing here* salutes every policeman *standing there*.”

Incompleteness is precision. And, according to the defenders of the Elliptical approach the needed precision can be achieved through either one of the two ways: by explicitly mentioning the fuller description that is abbreviated in the descriptive phrase in question (the Explicit Approach), or by implicitly fixing the domain—on the basis of the features supplied by the context of utterance of the descriptive sentence in question—over which the relevant quantifier ranges (the Implicit Approach). But the Elliptical Approach still faces some problems. These are: how a speaker manages to get away with so much incompleteness; exactly what can be counted as the correct fuller description of an incomplete definite description and how it is determined; how a quantifier gets restricted in a context; what determines the exact restricted domain of discourse; and, how the speaker's audiences manage to identify the right fuller description or the right domain of discourse so quickly and apparently so effortlessly. The proponents of the Elliptical Approach, however, treat the above mentioned problems as general problems of language which, according to them, do not pose a special problem for Russell's theory of definite descriptions.<sup>113</sup>

Although the defenders of the Elliptical Approach confidently claim that either of the two ways mentioned above (*i.e.* the Explicit Approach and the Implicit Approach) succeeds in solving the problem arising from the incompleteness of definite descriptions, upon examination it appears that none of the proposed ways actually solves the problem. Let us begin by looking at the Explicit Approach. According to this approach an incomplete definite description can be completed by making the relevant fuller description explicit, and thereby the problem of incompleteness can be solved. But that actually does not solve the problem. For, on an occasion an incomplete definite description may be completed by many different non-synonymous and non-equivalent fuller descriptions. So, each time one replaces the incomplete definite description in question with a different fuller description, one obtains an expression that expresses a different proposition which may be non-synonymous and non-equivalent to other relevant propositions that could be found by completing the incomplete definite description in

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<sup>113</sup> Neale (1990), p. 102.

question with other possible fuller descriptions. But no defender of the Explicit Approach has yet developed an account of how one of the many possible fuller descriptions can be selected as the correct one to complete an incomplete definite description on a particular occasion. To me, it seems that it is not only the case that no defender of the Explicit Approach has yet developed an account of how one can select the correct fuller description from a number of possible fuller descriptions to complete an incomplete definite description on a particular occasion, it is actually impossible to find a principled way of doing this simply because there is no such principled way at all. For, a defender of the Explicit Approach might expect that either the context of utterance or the intention of the speaker who utters a sentence containing an incomplete definite description would determine one from many possible fuller descriptions as the correct one that could complete the incomplete definite description on a given occasion. But, upon examination, it appears that neither the context of utterance nor the intention of the speaker provides a principled way of selecting one from many possible fuller descriptions as the correct one on a particular occasion. Howard K. Wettstein, a well-known critic of the Elliptical Approach, shows that the context of utterance of a sentence containing an incomplete definite description may fail to indicate which one of the possible non-synonymous and non-equivalent fuller descriptions is the correct one that can replace the relevant incomplete definite description and thereby complete the definite description in question. To show this Wettstein offers the following example<sup>114</sup>: in a particular context in which the sentence (25) is uttered the incomplete definite description “the table” may be completed as ‘the table in room 2009 of Camden Hall at  $t^1$ ’, or as ‘the table at which the author of *The Persistence of Objects* is sitting at  $t^1$ ’, etc. Clearly, they are non-synonymous and often non-equivalent; and hence, they lead the sentence (25) to express different propositions (on the basis of which fuller description is used to complete the definite description in question). Now, the question is: how can one select one of these fuller descriptions as the correct one on a particular occasion? It is plain that an appeal to the context of utterance won’t help to answer this question as all of these possible fuller descriptions involve the same context. This is why Wettstein says:

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<sup>114</sup> Howard K. Wettstein, “Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions”, *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 40, no.2 (1981), p. 246.

... it is quite clearly wrong to suppose that, in many such cases, the circumstances of utterance put the listener in a position to select some one of these non-equivalent descriptions as the correct one, the one that actually captures what the speaker intended.<sup>115</sup>

The other option for a defender of the Explicit Approach is to claim that it is not the context of utterance but the speaker's intention that determines which one of the various possible fuller descriptions is the correct one on a particular occasion. Wettstein addresses and then refutes this claim too. He shows that in many cases the speaker does not have any such determinate intention at all when she utters a sentence containing an incomplete definite description; if the speaker is asked which of the possible fuller descriptions she has in mind as the completer of the incomplete definite description she uses, she may fail to select one as opposed to another. For example, in the case of "the table" discussed in the previous paragraph, the speaker may say:

'Although I meant to refer to that table' ... '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.'<sup>116</sup>

Here, as Marga Reimer mentions, the speaker fails to select one fuller description as opposed to another (as the correct fuller description) not because she does not know which complete description she has in mind, but because she has no such determinate fuller description at all in her mind.<sup>117</sup> And, if the speaker herself—at least in some cases—fails to select one of the many possible fuller descriptions as the correct one that completes the incomplete definite description she uses, then, as Wettstein says, it is implausible in the extreme to suppose that one of these actually is the correct completer of the relevant incomplete definite description.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp. 246-47.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>117</sup> Marga Reimer, "Incomplete Descriptions", *Erkenntnis* 37 (1992), p. 350.

<sup>118</sup> Wettstein (1981), p. 247.

So, we see, neither the context of utterance nor the speaker's intention helps in selecting one of the possible fuller descriptions as the correct one by which the relevant incomplete definite description can be completed. So, it seems reasonable to claim that there is no principled way of deciding which one of the many possible fuller descriptions is the correct one that can complete the relevant incomplete definite description. The lack of any such principled way should be regarded as a serious problem for the Explicit Approach because it indicates that the Explicit Approach is, in fact, unfounded or, at least, unworkable. But Ludlow and Neale do not take it as a serious problem for the Explicit Approach and for Russell's theory of definite descriptions as well. They observe that there is no principled way of selecting one of many possible completers as the correct one when one deals with other quantifiers such as "all", "some", "many" etc. For example, consider the sentence "All students must attend today's lecture" uttered by a professor. The quantifier involved in this sentence may be completed in many different ways: "all students registered for the course Phil-4001", "all students of the Department of Philosophy", "all students who are majoring in philosophy" etc. And, it may be the case that there is actually no principled way of selecting one of these as the correct one to complete the quantifier. This, according to them, indicates that the above mentioned problem, *i.e.* the problem arising due to the lack of any principled way of selecting one from a number of possible completers of a *determiner phrase* (DP)<sup>119</sup>, is a general problem of language which does not pose any special problem for the Explicit Approach. They say:

Some philosophers have objected to the explicit approach on the grounds that there fails to be a principled basis for determining the content of completions. ... If there is a genuine complaint here it is one that carries over to the interpretation of incomplete descriptions used attributively and, indeed, to quantified DPs quite generally, which suggests very

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<sup>119</sup> Expressions like "some table", "every table", "a table", "the table" etc. are called *Determiner Phrases* (DPs) to reflect the idea that they are projected from determiners like "some", "every", "a", "the" etc. (Stephen Neale, "Pronouns and Anaphora", *Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Language* eds. Michael Devitt and Richard Hanley (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), p. 343.)

strongly that the requirement of a principled basis is too strong a condition to impose on any account of interpretation.<sup>120</sup>

But the above answer does not seem to be a convincing answer to the problem arising from the incompleteness of definite descriptions. After all, Ludlow and Neale are proposing a theory, *i.e.* the Explicit Approach, according to which the problem of incompleteness can be solved by explicitly mentioning the correct fuller description in the place of the incomplete definite description in question. Such a theory is required to explain how a fuller description is chosen as the correct fuller description that can replace the relevant incomplete definite description and why a particular fuller description—not another of the other possible fuller descriptions—is counted as the correct one. And, now if Ludlow and Neal say that their theory cannot explain these, then one may reasonably claim that their theory actually does nothing to solve the problem arising from the incompleteness of definite descriptions.

Of course, the above is not the only answer to the critics of the Explicit Approach on Neale's part. In his *Descriptions* Neale objects to Wettstein's criticisms against the Explicit Approach on the ground that Wettstein fails to consider the possibility of completing incomplete definite descriptions using *referring expressions* or *indexicals*. Following Scott Soames<sup>121</sup>, Neale suggests that it is very natural for incomplete definite descriptions such as "the mayor", and "the murderer" that they can be completed by fuller descriptions 「the mayor of *a*」 and 「the murderer of *b*」, respectively, where "*a*" is replaced by the name of the relevant town and "*b*" is replaced by the name of the murdered victim.<sup>122</sup> So, the incomplete definite description "the mayor" may be completed as "the mayor of Calgary" and the incomplete definite description "the murderer" may be completed as "the murderer of Smith". Although in both cases the fuller descriptions involve referential expressions, according to Neale, that does not pose a problem for a Russellian because to say that a definite description contains a referential expression is different from saying that

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<sup>120</sup> Ludlow and Neale (2006), p. 302.

<sup>121</sup> Scott Soames, "Incomplete Definite Descriptions", *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 27, no. 3 (1986), pp. 349-75.

<sup>122</sup> Neale (1990), p. 101.

that definite description requires to be interpreted referentially.<sup>123</sup> At any rate, the completers of the above mentioned incomplete definite descriptions are found so easily because for each of them “an additional argument place [designated by “of *a*” and “of *b*”, respectively] can be made available for a particular individual specified by the context of utterance.”<sup>124</sup> Neale, then, admits that with respect to a definite description like “the table”, “there is no natural argument position to be made available.”<sup>125</sup> This sort of definite descriptions, according to Neale, can be dealt with following Sellars. According to Sellars a definite description like “the table” can be thought as elliptical for “the table over here” or “the table over there”.<sup>126</sup> Both of these completers contain *indexicals* sensitive to what Neale calls “the spatial coordinates” of utterance.<sup>127</sup> And, Neale seems to agree with Sellars’ position as he explicitly claims that although in the above examples incomplete definite descriptions are completed using referential expressions or indexicals, there is nothing wrong in it because:

The semanticist who regards (utterance 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.<sup>128</sup>

Neale seems to think that if incomplete definite descriptions are allowed to be completed with referential expressions and indexicals, then the problem of selecting one from a number of possible non-synonymous and non-equivalent fuller descriptions can be avoided because in that case there won’t be many possible fuller descriptions on a particular occasion. The basis of this assumption about Neale’s position is his idea that by completing incomplete definite descriptions using referring expressions and indexicals one can avoid “the problem raised by nonequivalent codenoting descriptions.”<sup>129</sup> Marga Reimer has a similar observation about Neale’s account. Reimer says:

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>126</sup> Sellars (1954), p. 200.

<sup>127</sup> Neale (1990), p. 101.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

[Perhaps, Neale thinks that] by adhering to such a stipulation [the stipulation that incomplete descriptions can be completed with referring expressions and indexicals], the number of possible completions of an incomplete description will be narrowed down to just one. In this way, the problem of having to *choose* from among a *variety* of complete descriptions is eliminated.<sup>130</sup>

But it seems that even if, following Neale, one allows incomplete definite descriptions to be completed with indexicals and referring expressions, the problem of incompleteness does not go away. For, it is not always true that by allowing an incomplete definite description to be completed with an indexical or referential expression the number of possible completers can be narrowed down to just one. For example, consider the sentence (25) again. Suppose we agree that the incomplete definite description involved in this sentence is allowed to be completed with an indexical or referring expression. Still, there may be more than one possible completers of the definite description in question. It may be completed as “the table *I own*” or as “the table *over there*”. The former completer picks out a person, namely the speaker, whereas the latter completer picks out a location to complete the incomplete definite description “the table”. These possible completers of the incomplete definite description “the table” are clearly non-synonymous. Each of these possible completers seems to be a good candidate for being counted as the correct completer of the incomplete definite description in question; and neither of them seems to be a better candidate for being counted as the correct completer than the other. So, it seems reasonable to think that there are at least two equally strong possible completers of the incomplete definite description “the table” even when it is allowed to be completed with an indexical or referring expression. Hence, Neale’s proposal does not help to narrow down the number of possible completers of an incomplete definite description to just one.

Furthermore, it is plain that not every incomplete definite description can be completed with an indexical or a referential expression. The incomplete definite description

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<sup>130</sup> Reimer (1992), p. 352.

“the man” cannot always be completed as “the man over there” or as “the man over here” (with indexicals); sometimes it may require to be completed as “the man wearing a red hat” or as “the man who loves driving” (with descriptive expressions). Now, it seems to be an arbitrary matter when and what incomplete definite description is to be completed with an indexical or referring expression and when and what incomplete definite description is to be completed with a descriptive expression. An appeal to the context of utterance or to the speaker’s intention won’t provide a good ground on the basis of which one could decide that such and such incomplete definite descriptions might be completed with indexicals or referential expressions and such and such incomplete definite descriptions might be completed with descriptive expressions (as we have already seen that an appeal to the context of utterance as well as an appeal to the speaker’s intention do not, in fact, provide an adequate way of selecting the correct fuller description for an incomplete definite description). Neale does not suggest any principled way either by which one can know which incomplete definite description should be completed with an indexical or referring expression and which should be completed with a descriptive expression. And, there seems to be no such principled way at all. Hence, this proposal makes no progress in solving the problem. So, it seems reasonable to reject the Explicit Approach.

Now, let us examine the Implicit Approach. Against the Implicit Approach a critic may be tempted to argue that the notion of domain fixation is not workable when one deals with a descriptive sentence that contains more than one occurrence of the same incomplete definite description. But such a criticism won’t be a justified one as we have seen that Ludlow and Neale (in their “The Russian has voted for the Russian” example) have already addressed and then solved this problem allowing that the domain of the quantifier be changed on the basis of the different occurrences of the same definite description in a single sentence. So, I won’t advance with this criticism. Rather, I prefer to advance my examination by asking how the domain of the quantifier of a descriptive sentence containing an incomplete definite description is fixed. While defending the Implicit Approach Neale suggests that the *context* of a particular utterance of a

descriptive sentence fixes the domain of the relevant quantifier.<sup>131</sup> And, according to him, the context of utterance,  $C$ , might be understood as a quadruple  $\langle s, a, t, p \rangle$ <sup>132</sup> where:

$s$  = the speaker

$a$  = the addressee

$t$  = the time of utterance

$p$  = the place of utterance

Suppose, for the sake of argument, we grant Neale's position that the domain of the quantifier contained in a descriptive sentence is determined by the context of the utterance of the sentence in question. Now, consider the following situation: Jones and Black are at a library. The library has two librarians; one works on the check-out desk located at the exit point in the basement, and the other works on the check-out desk located at the exit point on the main floor. Jones and Black are waiting on the main floor to check out a book. Now Jones says to Black (seeing the long queue toward the check-out desk):

(34) The librarian is very busy today.

Clearly, the definite description "the librarian" in the sentence (34) is an incomplete definite description as there are many librarians in the world (even the library in which Jones and Black are waiting to check out a book has two librarians). So, the domain of the quantifier involved in the sentence (34) uttered by Jones requires to be fixed. Suppose, following the suggestion made by Neale we consider the context of Jones' utterance in order to fix the domain of the quantifier involved in the sentence in question. The context of Jones' uttering the sentence (34) is the following:

$s$  = Jones

$a$  = Black

$t$  = 11 a.m. (February 10, 2012)

$p$  = the main floor of the library  $x$

*i.e.*  $C = \langle \text{Jones, Black, 11 a.m. (February 10, 2012), the main floor of the library } x \rangle$

Now, according to Neale's position the domain of the quantifier involved in the sentence (34) requires to be fixed on the basis of  $C$ . Here, it is interesting to note that in the above

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<sup>131</sup> Neale (1990), p. 95.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

analysis of the context, *C*, there is no mentioning about the existence of a particular librarian. But, that does not pose a problem for Neale's analysis.<sup>133</sup> Neale may say that the sentence (34) expresses a true proposition if there is one and only one librarian in the *immediately shared perceptual environment of the speaker and her addressee* in *C* and that librarian is busy in *C*. So, Neale may claim, here we have got an explanation of how one can say something true by using a sentence containing an incomplete definite description. Up to now Neale's explanation seems to be satisfactory. But, suppose we modify the scenario in the following way: Jones and Black are on the third floor of the library. They both know that whenever any of them checks out a book from the library, he checks it out through the check-out desk located at the exit point of the main floor. For, they may know of only one check-out desk of the library, or the check-out desk located on the main floor is the most convenient location for them to check out their books. Now, Jones utters the sentence (34). Here, the immediately shared perceptual environment of the speaker and her addressee in *C\** (*C\** = <Jones, Black, 11 a.m. (February 10, 2012), the third floor of the library *x*>) does not help to show how Jones may say something true by using the sentence (34) in *C\**. For, there is no librarian at all in the immediately shared perceptual environment of Jones and Black in *C\**. But still, in *C\** Jones may say something true by using the sentence (34). This problem may be solved by appealing to the knowledge (relevant to the matter) shared by Jones and Black as both of them know that they usually check out books through the check-out desk located at the exit point of the main floor and that there is exactly one librarian working there (and that both of them know that they are talking about that librarian). That is, it may be said here that the sentence (34) expresses a true proposition if there is exactly one

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<sup>133</sup> It is understandable why there is no mentioning of a particular librarian in the analysis of *C*. According to the Russellian analysis a definite description is not a referring term; so, even if a particular object as a matter of fact fits a definite description, still that particular object is not a component of the definite description in question. Hence, the one and only librarian visible to the immediately shared perceptual environment of Jones and Black is not a component of Jones' utterance. Furthermore, Neale does not claim that the context of utterance by itself contains the denoted object if something actually fits the definite description in question; what he in fact claims is the following: the context of utterance fixes the domain of the quantifier against which the sentence in question requires to be evaluated. The domain of a quantifier involved in a sentence is not the same as the context of utterance of that sentence, although the context of utterance plays a significant role in identifying the domain of the sentence in question.

librarian in the shared knowledge (relevant to the matter) of Jones and Black in  $C^*$ , and if that librarian is busy in  $C^*$ . So, it appears that the context of utterance of a sentence containing an incomplete definite description does not automatically fix the domain of the quantifier involved in the sentence in question; rather, one or more of the various contextual supplementations, *e.g. the immediately shared perceptual environment of the speaker and her addressees*, or *the knowledge (relevant to the matter) shared by the speaker and her addressees*, etc., play a significant role in fixing the domain of the quantifier involved in the sentence in question. And, it may happen that on an occasion two or more of such contextual supplementations are equally relevant; but they—when they are taken as domain fixers—may result in different non-equivalent propositions. So, what is needed here is a principled way of selecting one contextual supplementation from a number of possible contextual supplementations as the one that can be used to fix the domain of the quantifier involved in the sentence in question. Neale or any other defender of the Implicit Approach has not yet proposed any such principled way. And, actually there seems to be no such principled way at all by which one can select the correct domain fixer from a number of relevant contextual supplementations. That is, just like the Explicit Approach, the Implicit Approach lacks a principled way by which one can select a particular contextual supplementation as the one that fixes the domain of the quantifier in question. Indeed, the lack of any such principled way is a big flaw of the Implicit Approach which actually makes this approach implausible.

Of course, a defender of the Implicit Approach may claim—differing from what Neale says about domain-fixation—that it is not the context but the speaker's intention (on an occasion) that determines the domain of the quantifier involved in the sentence in question. So, she may argue that in both of the above mentioned cases the domain of the quantifier involved in (34) requires to be fixed by the intention of Jones when he utters the sentence (34). And, in both cases Jones actually intends to say something about exactly one and only one librarian working at the check-out desk located in the exit point of the main floor. So, if the librarian working there is really busy at the time when (34) is uttered by Jones, then the sentence (34) expresses a true proposition. This solution seems

to appeal to the referential use of definite descriptions as it allows that by using the definite description “the librarian” Jones (the speaker) intends to say something about a particular object he already has in mind and wants Black (his addressee) to pick out the object he intends to refer to. But that is not a problem for a Russellian as a Russellian does not need to deny that a descriptive sentence may be used referentially; what a Russellian must deny is the claim that a descriptive sentence has two types of meaning—one is its attributive meaning and the other is its referential meaning. Still the above mentioned solution is problematic. Marga Reimer mentions various problems for this solution. She argues<sup>134</sup>: first, it is not clear that a speaker of a sentence containing an incomplete definite description always has a domain of quantifier in mind against which the proposition expressed can be evaluated; second, the appeal to the intention of the speaker involves what the speaker means by her sentence, not necessarily what is expressed (proposition) by the sentence uttered. And, it is a well-known fact that *what is meant by the speaker* and *what is expressed by the sentence* the speaker utters often diverge. So, the appeal to the intention of the speaker is prone to conflate what is expressed by a sentence and what is meant by the speaker who uses that sentence on an occasion. One further problem—not mentioned by Reimer—may be pointed out here: the appeal to the speaker’s intention in the above mentioned case seems to suggest a non-Russellian approach. Russell’s theory is a theory of meaning that deals with an expression’s semantic properties—properties that are independent of the speaker’s particular intention on a particular occasion (on which the speaker uses the descriptive sentence in question). Russell clearly states that his theory does not concern the speaker’s intention when she (the speaker) utters a descriptive sentence.<sup>135</sup> So, although a Russellian does not need to deny the fact that a speaker may intend to refer to something when she uses a sentence containing a definite description, a Russellian analysis of a descriptive sentence should not appeal to such intention as Russell’s theory precisely is a theory about the meaning of a descriptive sentence, and not

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<sup>134</sup> Reimer (1992), pp. 357-58.

<sup>135</sup> Russell (1957), p. 388.

about ‘the state of mind’ of the speaker of that sentence.<sup>136</sup> So, the appeal to the speaker’s intention may lead the defender of the Implicit Approach to a non-Russellian position. But the Implicit Approach is developed to defend Russell’s theory against the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness. Hence, like the previous one, this option is not a viable option for the defender of the Implicit Approach who actually is a Russellian too.

So, it appears that the Explicit Approach is not workable to defend Russell’s theory against the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness. And the Implicit Approach does no better. That is, both forms of the Elliptical Approach fail to save Russell’s theory from the problem arising from incompleteness of incomplete definite descriptions. Hence, both approaches, *i.e.* the Explicit Approach and the Implicit Approach, deserve the same treatment: rejection.

**2. The Situation Semantics Approach:** Jon Barwise and John Perry developed their own theory of meaning in their paper “Situations and Attitudes” published in 1981, and in their book *Situations and Attitudes* published in 1983. In these publications they have designed a framework in which the treatment of definite descriptions is built on the concept of situation semantics. According to the concept of situation semantics the meaning of a descriptive sentence has to be understood on the basis of the situations in which the sentence is uttered—the meaning of a sentence is, roughly, a relation between the utterance of that sentence and the situations relevant to that utterance. Suppose, for example<sup>137</sup>, in a room full of people—some of whom are sleeping and some of whom are awake—one says: “No one is sleeping”. Now, what is meant by the speaker’s utterance of the above sentence is to be understood on the basis of what situation the speaker is describing. If the speaker describes the whole situation including all the people in the room, then what she has said is false. But, suppose, the speaker actually is an assistant of an experiment and is

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<sup>136</sup> Remember Russell’s words quoted in the previous chapter from his “Mr. Strawson on Referring”. There Russell explicitly mentions that his theory is not meant to give an analysis of speakers’ intention when they utter a descriptive sentence. He says: “My theory of descriptions was not intended as an analysis of the state of mind of those who utter sentences containing descriptions.” (Russell (1957), p. 388.)

<sup>137</sup> Jon Barwise and John Perry, *Situations and Attitudes* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1983), p. 160. (The example is used here with some modifications.)

responsible to see whether or not other assistants who are supposed to monitor the sleeping people are awake. And, suppose, she utters the above mentioned sentence in response to the question: “Are you guys working?” Here, the speaker actually describes not the whole situation that includes everyone in the room but a part of the situation that includes only the assistants of the experiment. So, the meaning of her utterance is to be understood not on the basis of the whole situation of the room but on the basis of the partial situation described. In that case, what she has said may be true. Since according to Barwise and Perry’s framework the meaning of a sentence is to be understood as a relation between the utterance of that sentence and the situation described, their theory is often called the *Relation Theory of Meaning*.

At the heart of Barwise and Perry’s Relation Theory of Meaning is their idea of situations. Situations are complexes of objects, properties that are had by the objects, relations between the objects and their properties, and the spatiotemporal locations at which they (the objects, their properties and relations between the objects and their properties) are instantiated. According to Barwise and Perry situations construct the parts, and consequently, the whole of reality. Barwise and Perry describe situations in the following way:

Reality consists of situations—individuals having properties and standing in relations at various spatiotemporal locations. We are always in situations; we see them, cause them to come about, and have attitudes toward them. ... We begin by pulling out of real situations the basic building blocks of the theory; individuals, properties and relations, and locations.<sup>138</sup>

Now, following Barwise and Perry, a situation can be defined in the following way:

Situation (*s*): a situation relevant to an utterance is a set of certain sort that includes spatiotemporal locations, objects referred to by the utterance, properties and relations attributed to those objects.

So, if Molly barks at a spatiotemporal location *l*, then this situation *s* can be represented as:

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8.

in *s*: at *l*: barks, Molly; yes

(where, barks = property attributed to the object referred to; Molly = the object referred to; *l* = location (the time and place) at which the object having the property attributed is instantiated; yes = claimed to be true)

It should be noted here that many situations can be of the same type. To capture the fact that two or more situations can be of the same type Barwise and Perry emphasize the internal structure of situations—*situation-types*—in terms of their spatiotemporal location.<sup>139</sup> As mentioned earlier, a spatiotemporal location of an utterance is the times and places where the objects referred to and the properties and relations attributed to them are instantiated. So, if Molly barked at one's backyard day before yesterday at 10 a.m., and she barked at the same backyard at 11 a.m. yesterday, then though the place where the object and its properties were instantiated was the same, times of the instantiation of the object and its properties were different. That is why Barwise and Perry mention that locations may overlap in time and space, or that they may be years and miles apart.<sup>140</sup>

A situation-type in which an utterance is claimed to be instantiated is called the described situation. In Barwise and Perry's framework, the described situation relevant to an utterance of a sentence is the *interpretation* of that sentence on the relevant occasion. Barwise and Perry say:

The leading idea of situation semantics is that the meaning of a simple declarative sentence is a relation between utterances and described situations. The interpretation of a statement made with such a sentence on a specific occasion is the described situation.<sup>141</sup>

Here, by "statement" Barwise and Perry mean the utterance of an indicative sentence.<sup>142</sup> So, following Barwise and Perry, it can be said that in a given context the interpretation of a statement made with a sentence in that context is the situation-type in which the statement is claimed to be instantiated. And, as has been stated earlier, the meaning of a

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<sup>139</sup> Jon Barwise and John Perry (1981), "Situations and Attitudes", *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, no. 11 (1981), pp. 668-69.; Barwise and Perry (1983), pp. 7-9, 53-55.

<sup>140</sup> Barwise and Perry (1983), pp. 9, 51.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

sentence in Barwise and Perry's analysis is the relation between the utterance of that sentence and the described situation. So, the meaning of a sentence now may be defined as a relation between the statement made with that sentence in a context and the interpretation of the statement made.

So far we have understood situations as real situations. But there are sentences that are not uttered yet. So, there are no real situations relevant to them with respect to which they can be evaluated. But those sentences are meaningful. An adequate theory of meaning requires to account for the meaningfulness of those sentences too. Furthermore, it happens that the same object and its properties may appear again and again in different locations.<sup>143</sup> To account for these phenomena Barwise and Perry present a set theoretical model called *abstract situations* to play the role of potential situations. Abstract situations are not presented as things that oppose real situations; rather, real situations are elements of abstract situations. In other words, some of these abstract situations correspond to real situations, though others do not.<sup>144</sup> In Barwise and Perry's framework, an abstract situation is built from the location and situation-type relevant to an utterance.<sup>145</sup> For example, consider a potential situation in which Molly barks at 10 a.m. on February 15, 2012 at Jones' backyard, and Jackie does not bark on that spatiotemporal location. Now, this potential situation can be understood as the following abstract situation:

in *s*: at 10 a.m. on February 15, 2012 at Jones' backyard: barks, Molly; yes  
at 10 a.m. on February 15, 2012 at Jones' backyard: barks, Jackie; no

Now, if this abstract situation corresponds to some real situation, then it is said to be a *factual situation*. It should be noted here that a factual situation is a correct but not necessarily a complete representation of the real situation.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>146</sup> Barwise and Perry divide situations into three categories: *actual*, *factual* and *non-factual* situations. An actual situation is a situation that corresponds to the real situation. A factual situation is a situation that classifies the real situation though not represents the whole real situation; it is a part of the actual situation. So, in general there are lots of factual situations (there will always be as many factual situations as there are

Given that abstract situations play the role of potential situations, the meaning of a sentence, *S*, is then seen as a relation between the abstract situation representing the potential context of utterance and a *set of abstract situations* at least one member of which represents a situation in which the utterance is claimed to be instantiated.<sup>147</sup> This latter sort of set of abstract situations is what Barwise and Perry have called the interpretation of a sentence in a context. So, it can now be said that:

A sentence *S* uttered in a context *C* is true iff the interpretation *I* of the sentence contains at least one abstract situation in which the statement made with the utterance of the sentence *S* is instantiated. In other words, *S* in *C* is true iff at least one member of *I* of *S* in *C* is factual (*i.e.* at least one of the abstract situations is factual).

Now, Barwise and Perry think that the above analysis can account for the phenomenon that a sentence like 'The *F* is *G*' containing an incomplete definite description 'the *F*' can express a true statement, even though the definite description 'the *F*', in such a case, does not determine a unique referent when evaluated in the whole of reality. For example, consider the following sentence that contains an incomplete definite description "the man in a red vest":

(35) The man in a red vest is a fool.

On Barwise and Perry's analysis this sentence can be used referentially to express the statement that Lee is a fool, even though the definite description "the man in a red vest" is incomplete and for that reason cannot determine a unique referent, namely Lee, when evaluated in the whole of reality. But the truth of the statement made by the utterance of (35) can now be accounted for in the following way: there is a potential situation in which Lee is the only person wearing a red vest and he has the property of foolishness in a spatiotemporal location (*l*). This spatiotemporal location may consist of (i) the *spatial location* where the utterance is made (*e.g.* the location where Lee is appeared in front of

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parts of actual situations) though there may be only one actual situation. And, a non-factual situation is a situation that does not correspond to any factual situation. [Barwise and Perry (1983), pp. 50, 55, 60-61.]

<sup>147</sup> Note that a set of abstract situations is a set of sets since each abstract situation is itself a set containing the location and situation-type as its members.

the speaker and her audiences' immediately shared perceptual environment), and (ii) the *temporal location*, *i.e.* the time of utterance. Now, this potential situation can be represented by the following set theoretical model of abstract situations:

- (a) in *s*: at *l*: only man wearing a red vest, Lee; yes  
at *l*: foolishness, Lee; yes

Now, when Lee appears wearing a red vest (not necessarily the only man in the world wearing a red vest at that time) and has the property of foolishness, then the abstract situation (a) is factual as it corresponds to some real situation (though not the real situation as a whole). That is, the interpretation *I* of the sentence (35) in the given context *C* contains a set of abstract situations at least one member of which, *i.e.* (a), represents a situation in which the statement made by an utterance of (35) is instantiated.<sup>148</sup> In other words, the utterance of (35) in *C* expresses a true statement because at least one member of *I* of the statement made by (35), *i.e.* (a), is factual.

So, we see, Barwise and Perry account for the phenomenon that a speaker can referentially use the sentence 'The *F* is *G*' containing an incomplete definite description 'the *F*' to express a true statement even though the definite description 'the *F*' contained in the sentence in question fails to determine a unique object when evaluated *in the whole of reality*. They have done it by replacing the idea that 'the *F*' is used to talk about a unique *F* in the reality as a whole with the idea that 'the *F*' is used to talk about a unique *F* in some part of the reality. They think that their idea that 'the *F*' is used to talk about a unique *F* in some part of the reality—not in the reality as a whole—is significant because it explains how speakers can use sentences containing incomplete definite descriptions to express true statements. They say:

It is an advantage of our approach that we can naturally explain the fact that definite descriptions manage to pick out individuals without finding describing conditions that are uniquely satisfied in the whole world.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> According to Barwise and Perry in Russell's theory of descriptions the describing condition, but not the described object, is put into the interpretation; on the other hand, in Strawson's theory the described object, but not the describing condition, is a constituent of the interpretation. (Barwise and Perry (1983), p. 146.)

<sup>149</sup> Barwise and Perry (1983), p. 153.

And, to mention the implausibility of the idea that 'the  $F$ ' is used to talk about a unique  $F$  in the reality as a whole, they say:

... if we required that the world [the reality as a whole] were in the interpretation of an utterance, then neither of the true examples above [examples like "The  $F$  is  $G$ ", "No  $F$  is  $G$ ", "Every  $F$  is  $G$ ", "I am the cook" etc. which can be used to express true statements] would count as true.<sup>150</sup>

So, apparently Barwise and Perry have proposed a solution to the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness. However, the examples Barwise and Perry so far deal with are examples of referential uses of incomplete definite descriptions.<sup>151</sup> But incomplete definite descriptions can also be used attributively. For example, after entering in her office and looking at her bookshelf a professor utters the sentence (29), *i.e.* "The thief has stolen my dictionary". Here, the professor uses the incomplete definite description "the thief" attributively having no particular person in her mind as the referent of the definite description she uses. An adequate account of incomplete definite description must be capable of handling this type of cases too. So, the following question is relevant here: can Barwise and Perry's account handle the cases in which incomplete definite descriptions are used attributively? Initially, Barwise and Perry's account faces difficulties when it deals with incomplete definite descriptions used attributively. It appears that in their framework a statement made with an utterance of a sentence  $S$  in a context  $C$  is true iff the interpretation  $I$  of the sentence uttered in the context contains at least one abstract situation which is factual. That is, Barwise and Perry's truth-characterization (T) of a sentence  $S$  is as follow:

(T)  $S$  is true relative to  $C$  iff some members of the interpretation of  $S$  is factual.

Here, we see, according to (T), the truth-conditions of the sentence 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' in which 'the  $F$ ' is used attributively is the same as the truth-condition of the sentence 'An  $F$  is

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>151</sup> Barwise and Perry originally use the following examples up to this point of their discussion: "The President of the U.S. is sneezing", "The dog growled at the rabbit that sneezed", "The man in a red vest is a fool", etc., all of which are supposed to be used referentially.

$G$ ]; 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' is true if any of many  $F$ s is  $G$  because in that case the interpretation of 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' will contain a factual situation whose unique  $F$  is  $G$ , and the same is true of the truth condition of the sentence 'An  $F$  is  $G$ '. But this result is not acceptable—the uniqueness claim associated with the definite article “the” must be semantically incorporated and the definite article should involve different truth-conditions than those of indefinite articles. Barwise and Perry recognizes this problem. They describe this problem in the following way:

Consider the interpretation  $P$  of my utterance of 'I am the cook'.

$$P = \{e \setminus d, c \text{ [[I AM THE COOK]] } e\}$$

If  $e \in P$ , then  $e$  will have just one person (me) doing the cooking at the relevant location  $l = c$  (COOK). But any such  $e$  will be part of other  $e'$  which have more than one person cooking there. Such  $e'$  will not belong to  $P$  because there will be no person who is *the* cook. So  $P$  is not persistent. This raises a problem for our account of truth in the following way. Suppose my wife and I collaborate on cooking for a party. And suppose at a certain point in the party I say, "I am the cook," referring to  $l$ . Is what I have said true or not?

The answer is, "It depends on which situation I am describing." First, suppose someone comes up to me and says, "The food at this party is delicious! Who is the cook?" If I say, "I am the cook," I have clearly not described things accurately. I have claimed to be *the* person who did the cooking for the party. But suppose instead someone comes up to me eating a piece of my famous cheesecake pastry and says, "Who made this?" Then I may truly say that I am the cook.

The first case shows that the account we gave of truth for persistent statements does not work for nonpersistent statements. For in that case there is a factual situation, part of the situation referred to by the guest, where I am the unique cook. So there will be a factual (maybe even an actual c.o.e. [situation]) in  $P$ , and on our earlier account of truth, my statement would be true, whereas in fact it isn't. But surely nonpersistent statements can be true, for in the second case, what I said was true. A

theory that did not allow this would be unfair to me. So we need an account of truth that can be applied to nonpersistent statements.<sup>152</sup>

Two terms are needed to be clarified here—*persistent statements* and *nonpersistent statements* (remember that, for Barwise and Perry, a statement is an utterance of a sentence in a context):

# Persistent Statements: a persistent statement is one whose interpretation  $I$  is such that for every  $s \in I$ , if  $s$  is a part of a larger situation  $s^*$ , then  $s^* \in I$ . That is, a persistent statement is such that if it is true in a part of the reality, it is true in all larger parts of the reality.<sup>153</sup> In other words, a persistent statement is such that if it is true in a part of the reality, it is true in the reality as a whole. “The author of *Waverley* is  $G$ ”, “The first child born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is  $G$ ”, etc. are examples of sentences that express persistent statements.

# Nonpersistent Statements: a nonpersistent statement is one whose interpretation contains at least one abstract situation which is factual, but not all members of its interpretation, *i.e.* not all abstract situations contained by the statement’s interpretation, are factual. That is, a nonpersistent statement is such that it is true in one or more parts of the reality, but not true in the reality as a whole. “The murderer is insane”, “I am the cook” are examples of sentences that express nonpersistent statements. Both, persistence and nonpersistence are properties of statements, not of sentences.<sup>154</sup>

Now, it seems that Barwise and Perry have found a truth-characterization that provides the truth-conditions (different from that which is appropriate for indefinite descriptions) that is specific to sentences containing incomplete definite descriptions. They adopt a position according to which “the context of utterance provides not only the basis for an interpretation of the sentence uttered, but also a situation that the speaker is using the sentence to refer to or talk about.”<sup>155</sup> They claim that the position they have taken is founded on a view of J. L. Austin. They say:

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<sup>152</sup> Barwise and Perry (1983), pp. 159-60.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>155</sup> Soames (1986), p. 354.

The crucial insight needed goes back to Austin. As Austin put it, a statement is true when the actual situation to which it refers is of the type described by statement.<sup>156</sup>

However, according to the position that Barwise and Perry defend referring to Austin a sentence  $S$  is true in a context  $C$  iff the interpretation  $I$  of  $S$  in  $C$  contains the actual situation that the speaker is talking about. So, the following truth-characterization seems to be appropriate for nonpersistent statements:

(T\*): a nonpersistent statement  $S$  is true relative to a context  $C$  iff there is an actual situation  $r$  such that the agent of  $C$  is using  $S$  to refer to  $r$ , and  $r$  is a member of the interpretation of  $S$  in  $C$ .

Now, as mentioned earlier, a descriptive sentence containing a complete definite description expresses a persistent statement, and hence, when it is true, it is true in the whole of reality; but a descriptive sentence containing an incomplete definite description expresses a nonpersistent statement, and hence, when it is true, its truth is a nonpersistent truth which is relative to the context of utterance and the relevant interpretation. So, (T\*) is the truth-characterization that is applicable to sentences containing incomplete definite descriptions. (T\*) accounts for the phenomenon that a sentence containing an incomplete definite description may, on some occasions, express true statement provided that the agent who uses the sentence in a context refers to an actual situation and that actual situation is a member of the interpretation of the sentence in that context. Furthermore, the truth-conditions provided by (T\*) does not grant that the sentence 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' expresses a true statement iff any of many  $F$ s is  $G$ , as according to (T\*) a statement is true if the agent uses the sentence that expresses the statement in question to refer to an actual situation, and if that actual situation is a member of the interpretation of the statement in the relevant context. So, if any one of many  $F$ s is  $G$ , but the agent does not refer to the situation in which that  $F$  is instantiated (along with its property  $G$ ), then that particular real situation in which that  $F$  (along with its property  $G$ ) is instantiated won't be a member of the interpretation of the sentence 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' used by the agent. In such a case, although

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<sup>156</sup> Barwise and Perry (1983), p. 160.

the sentence 'An *F* is *G*' will express a true statement (and its truth can be accounted by (T)), but the sentence 'The *F* is *G*' may not express a true statement because of its failure to satisfy the conditions mentioned in (T\*). In this way by adopting (T\*) in order to analyze sentences containing incomplete definite descriptions Barwise and Perry's account can avoid the criticism that their account assimilates the truth-conditions of sentences containing a definite descriptions to sentences containing indefinite descriptions. And, one more advantage of (T\*) is that it is equally applicable to both sort of use of incomplete definite descriptions, namely the referential and the attributive use of incomplete definite descriptions. Hence, it seems that Barwise and Perry have provided a general<sup>157</sup> solution to the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness.

It may be noted here that Barwise and Perry's proposed solution to the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness is different from the solution offered by the proponents of the Explicit Approach. The proponents of the Explicit Approach adopt the strategy of supplying the linguistic supplementation to the incomplete definite description 'the *F*' to complete it. So, a proponent of the Explicit Approach may argue to complete the definite description "the thief" used attributively in the sentence "The thief has stolen my dictionary" as "the thief who entered my room last night", "the thief who entered my room in my absence" (without knowing who the thief was) etc. But Barwise and Perry leave the definite description 'the *F*' unsupplemented; they, rather, adopt a strategy in which the sentence 'The *F* is *G*' as a whole gets contextually supplemented, as the whole sentence, in their framework, carries an implicit reference to a contextually determined situation.<sup>158</sup> Observing this one may be tempted to treat Barwise and Perry's account as another version of the Implicit Approach. But I think that is not the case. The Proponents of the Implicit Approach adopt a strategy of delimiting the domain of the *definite description* in question. And, this domain-fixation is done on the basis of elements supplied by the

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<sup>157</sup> This solution is (apparently) general in the sense that the solution is supposed to work to solve the problem related to both sorts use of incomplete definite descriptions, namely the referential use and the attributive use of definite descriptions.

<sup>158</sup> Barwise and Perry (1983), p. 354.

context of the utterance of the sentence in question. So, it may be said that according to the Implicit Approach contextual supplementations work at the level of descriptions which are constituents of relevant sentences; but according to the framework that Barwise and Perry develop contextual supplementation, as we have seen, work at the level of *sentences as a whole*. So, Barwise and Perry's account is different from the Implicit Approach, though it seems to be closer to the Implicit Approach than it is to the Explicit Approach.

However, Barwise and Perry's solution to the problem of incompleteness is not satisfactory. Scott Soames shows some of the difficulties with their solution. According to Soames the most obvious difficulty with Barwise and Perry's account is that it fails to incorporate the results of contextual supplementation into a theory of propositional contents.<sup>159</sup> We have seen that the truth of a statement in Barwise and Perry's account is made dependent on certain features of the relevant context. If it is so, then, according to Soames, what is *asserted* by uttering a sentence like the following:

(36) The murderer is insane

should also be made dependent on features of the context in which it is uttered.<sup>160</sup> But Barwise and Perry's account does not do it. Soames illustrates his point by the following example:

*x* upon discovering Smith's foully murdered body attributively utters the sentence (1) [(36)], *i.e.* "The murderer is insane"; and *x* does not know who the murderer is. Again, *y* upon discovering Brown's foully murdered body attributive utters the sentence (1) [(36)]; and *y* does not know who the murderer is. Suppose, the utterances are made referring to distinct situations *s* and *s'*, respectively.<sup>161</sup>

Now, in their book *Situations and Attitudes* Barwise and Perry adopt a position according to which the objects of assertions are the semantic interpretations of utterances.<sup>162</sup> But this gives us an unacceptable result in the above case, according to Soames. The problem is like

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<sup>159</sup> Soames (1986), p. 355.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355. (in the present dissertation the sentence "The murder is insane" is numbered (36)).

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

this: both of the utterances (made by  $x$  and  $y$ ) have the same interpretation: the utterance of (36), in each case, is instantiated in a situation, namely in the following situation:

in  $s$ : at  $l$ : only murderer, insanity; yes

Here, Barwise and Perry's account does not allow the definite description "the murderer" to be supplemented by contextual element *the victim Smith* (when (36) is uttered by  $x$ ), or by contextual element *the victim Brown* (when (36) is uttered by  $y$ ). So, the utterance of (36) made by  $x$ , and the utterance of (36) made by  $y$  have the same interpretation, and hence, in Barwise and Perry's account both of the utterances result the same assertion. But utterances of (36) may involve different truth-values, *e.g.* when the murderer of Smith is not insane the utterance of (36) by  $x$  results a false assertion, and when the murderer of Brown is insane the utterance of (36) by  $y$  results a true assertion (and, Barwise and Perry's account accounts for this difference in truth-values). Thus, we get the unacceptable result that utterances of (36) made by  $x$  and  $y$  differ in truth-values while saying the same thing.<sup>163</sup> Hence, this account is unsatisfactory.

Besides, Barwise and Perry's idea that contextual supplementations work at the level of sentences themselves—and not at the level of their sub-sentential constituents (*e.g.* definite descriptions)—involves serious difficulty. Soames explains this problem by using several examples. We can mention here one of his examples<sup>164</sup>: consider the following sentence:

(37) The cook is more experienced than the cook who prepared the main course.

The sentence (37) can be used attributively to express a truth in an appropriate context. But this does not fit with Barwise and Perry's analysis. According to Barwise and Perry's analysis, the interpretation of (37) in the context is the type-of-situation that

- (i) there is exactly one individual,  $o$ , who is a cook (at the relevant spatiotemporal location) in  $s$ ;
- (ii) there is exactly one individual,  $o'$ , who is a cook who prepared the main course (at the same spatiotemporal location) in  $s$ ; and
- (iii)  $o$  is more experienced than  $o'$  in  $s$ .

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 357.

Here, as Soames shows, the spatiotemporal location of the cook in (i) and the spatiotemporal location of the cook in (ii) are the same. Hence,  $o$  must be identical with  $o'$ . But that is impossible because no individual can be more experienced than himself or herself.<sup>165</sup> Thus, Barwise and Perry's account leads us to decide that the sentence (37) must express a false statement. But that is a wrong result. It is wrong because the sentence (37) can be, and often is, used to express true statements in appropriate contexts.

According to Soames the lesson we learn from the above observation is the fact that contextual supplementations work at the level of constituents of sentences rather than at the level of sentences themselves.<sup>166</sup> If contexts supplement the contents of constituents of sentences (*e.g.* definite descriptions), then the interpretation of "the cook" in (37) will be something like *a unique individual who cooked the dessert*, or *a unique individual standing here who cooked cheesecake*, etc. Similarly, the interpretation of "the murderer" in (36) will be something like *a unique murderer of Smith*, or *a unique murderer of Brown*, or *a unique murderer of him*, etc., if contexts supplement the contents of constituents of sentences. And, when one accepts this idea that contexts supplement the contents of constituents of sentences, one can account for the truths expressed by sentences like (36) and (37) in various contexts. Since Barwise and Perry's framework offered in *Situations and Attitudes* fails to account for the truths of the assertions made by using sentences like (36) and (37), it deserves to be rejected, according to Soames.

In a paper titled "Shifting Situations and Shaken Attitudes",<sup>167</sup> based on Barwise and Perry's interview, Barwise and Perry have made some changes in their framework. One of the changes they have made in their framework is types-of-situations are no longer identified with set theoretical model of abstract situations. They have made this change because of some set-theoretic problems associated with the set theoretical model of abstract situations.<sup>168</sup> In their modified framework types-of-situations are regarded as

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 357.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 357.

<sup>167</sup> Jon Barwise and John Perry, "Shifting Situations and Shaken Attitudes", *Linguistics and Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (1985), pp. 105-61

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

theoretical primitives to be thought of, roughly, as properties of real situations.<sup>169</sup> And, a new concept—the concept of types-of-things—is introduced. Barwise says about their concept of types-of-things:

We also have a notation for types of things that might be useful later on. Just as one uses “ $\{x \mid \dots x \dots\}$ ” to denote the set of things that satisfy the condition  $\dots x \dots$ , we will use the notations “[ $x \mid \dots x \dots$ ]” to denote the type of thing that satisfies the condition. This works out neatly with a new notation for roles: write “ $x \mid \dots x \dots$ ” to denote the role of being an  $x$  such that  $\dots x \dots$ . Then for any role  $x$  we can form the type  $[x]$  of thing that can play that role.<sup>170</sup>

Besides, Barwise and Perry’s conception of propositions is introduced in this new framework. Here, propositions are given non-set-theoretic structure. Barwise and Perry claim that their conception of propositions actually is not introduced in their “Shifting Situations and Shaken Attitudes”; they had talked about propositions in their *Situations and Attitudes* though there propositions were given a set theoretical structure which they now want to avoid. Barwise says in response to a comment of the interviewer:

**I** [interviewer]: *I thought you guys didn't believe in propositions.*

**B** [Barwise]: What ever makes you think that? In our papers, we tried to model propositions with collections of abstract situations, but this got us into set-theoretic hot water. But, once you get away from trying to build everything up from a fixed stock of primitives in set theory, and see the task as that of understanding the relations between all that is, it frees you from having to construct propositions.<sup>171</sup>

While a type-of-situations is not a sort of thing that is either true or false, a proposition is either true or false.

Barwise and Perry then explain the new framework they introduced in their “Shifting Situations and Shaken Attitudes” with the following example:<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Soames (1986), p. 359.

<sup>170</sup> Barwise and Perry (1985), pp. 127-28.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, pp. 125-26.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

(38) “Hesperus” referred to a heavenly body<sub>i</sub> and “Phosphorus” referred to it<sub>i</sub>.

The interpretation of (38) is the type-of-situation  $s$  such that:

in  $s$ : at  $p$ ; co-instantiated,  $[x]$ ,  $[y]$ ; yes

where  $p$  is a location temporarily precedes the location of utterance; and  $[x]$  is the type-of-thing  $x$  such that:

in  $s$ : at  $p$ : heavenly body,  $x$ ; yes

and  $[y]$  is the type-of-thing  $y$  such that

in  $s$ : at  $p$ : refers to, “Hesperus”,  $y$ ; yes

in  $s$ : at  $p$ : refers to, “Phosphorus”,  $y$ ; yes

Thus, (38) is true, if there is a real situation in which  $[x]$  and  $[y]$  are co-instantiated.<sup>173</sup>

Although Barwise and Perry do not apply this new framework to their treatment of definite descriptions, Soames applies it to the analysis of definite descriptions in order to determine whether or not Barwise and Perry’s new framework—if it is applied to the analysis of definite descriptions—can provide correct results about the use of definite descriptions. To observe how Soames applies it, we can consider the sentence ‘The  $F$  is  $G$ ’ again. In Barwise and Perry’s new framework, the interpretation of this sentence is the type-of-situation  $s$  such that:

[ $S$ / in  $s$ : at  $l$ ; co-instantiated,  $[x]$ ,  $[y]$ ; yes

uniquely instantiated,  $[x]$ ; yes]

where  $l$  is the spatiotemporal location of utterance; and  $[x]$  and  $[y]$  are:

[ $x$ / in  $s$ : at  $l$ ; being  $F$ ,  $x$ ; yes]

[ $y$ / in  $s$ : at  $l$ ; being  $G$ ,  $y$ ; yes]

Now, let us consider the attributive use of the sentence (36), *i.e.* “The murderer is insane” in which the definite description used is an incomplete definite description. In Barwise and Perry’s new framework the interpretation of (36) is the type-of-situation  $s$  such that:

[ $S$ / in  $s$ : at  $l$ ; co-instantiated,  $[x]$ ,  $[y]$ ; yes

uniquely instantiated,  $[x]$ ; yes]

where  $l$  is the spatiotemporal location of utterance; and  $[x]$  and  $[y]$  are:

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., pp. 156. (Barwise’s proof takes place in the page 156, and a similar proof from Perry’s part appears in the page 157)

[x/ in s: at l; murderer, x; yes]

[y/ in s: at l; insanity, y; yes]

Now, as Soames shows, if we grant Barwise and Perry's new framework to be correct, then in order for (36) to be true the property of being murderer (of the victim) and the property of being insane must be uniquely instantiated in a real situation to which the speaker refers. That is, in Barwise and Perry's new framework, the sentence (36) is true if the unique murderer (who is also insane) is somehow included in the interpretation of (36).<sup>174</sup> But this is problematic. For, when the sentence (36) is used attributively, the speaker of (36) may not know who the murderer is. Hence, as Soames mentions, although the victim may correctly be considered as a constituent of what the speaker says when she utters (36), the unique murderer cannot be considered as a constituent of what the speaker says when she utters (36).<sup>175</sup> So, the unique murderer cannot be included in the interpretation of (36). But the speaker of the sentence (36) may use it attributively to say something true. Hence, it can be said that Barwise and Perry's new framework fails to account for the phenomenon that a speaker can attributively use a descriptive sentence like the sentence (36) to say something true on some occasions even though the unique referent of the definite description contained in the sentence in question is not included in the interpretation of that sentence. This point can be made clearer by the following example: suppose, Jones is the unique murderer of the victim and is insane. Then, the speaker's utterance of (36) is true even though she may not know that it is Jones who murdered the victim. Again, suppose, the victim was murdered by a unique individual who was insane but was not Jones. In such a case, the speaker's utterance of (36) is still

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<sup>174</sup> Note that in Barwise and Perry's new framework the interpretation of (36) includes [x] which in turn includes the murderer (of the victim). It may also be noted here that if the interpretation of a descriptive sentence includes the referent of the definite description (*e.g.* the unique murderer of the victim in the case of (36)), then we cannot actually capture the distinction between an attributive use of a definite description and a referential use of it. For, when a definite description is used attributively, the unique object that fits that definite description (if there is any such object at all) is irrelevant to the content of what is said; on the other hand, when a definite description is used referentially the unique object which is referred to belongs to the content of what is said. It seems that Barwise and Perry's new framework fails to capture this distinction although they were aware of the distinction between an attributive and a referential use of a definite description.

<sup>175</sup> Soames (1986), p. 362.

true as the speaker attributes the property of insanity not particularly to Jones but to a unique person *whoever murdered the victim*. This confirms that the utterance of (36), when the definite description contained in it is used attributively, does not contain Jones (or any other particular person as the murderer of the victim) as a constituent of it. So, again, it is proved that the unique murderer of the victim cannot be included in the interpretation of (36). But, as has been mentioned earlier, Barwise and Perry's new framework includes the unique murderer of the victim in the interpretation of (36) when (36) expresses a true statement. Hence, their new framework, like the framework they proposed earlier in their *Situations and Attitudes*, is wrong.

So, we see, although Barwise and Perry's idea of partial reality initially appears as a very attractive view with seeming capability of solving the problem of incompleteness of definite descriptions, after examination it appears that their idea of partial reality is founded on a wrong framework and is actually incapable to deal with many of descriptive sentences containing incomplete definite descriptions, especially when they are used attributively. Hence, like the Elliptical Approach, Barwise and Perry's Situation Semantics Approach deserves to be rejected as a solution to the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness.

Hence, it turns out that none of the above strategies succeeds in solving the problem emerging from the incompleteness of definite descriptions. The strategies discussed above are *semantic* as the main aim of all of those strategies is to show that a sentence containing an incomplete definite description can, on some occasions, express propositions that are true. So, it may be said that all prominent semantic strategies to solve the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness fail. But that is not the only thing that can be said about the matter; there may be other *non-semantic strategy* which is able to deal with this problem. In the chapter next to the following I will return to the issue again to see whether there is any such non-semantic strategy that can help us to solve the problem.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Responses to the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction

In the previous chapter I have examined various responses to one of the two main objections against Russell's theory of definite descriptions. In the present chapter I will examine various responses to the other objection, namely the objection arises from the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction. According to the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction the sentence 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' has two meanings: (i) exactly one thing is an  $F$ , and whatever is an  $F$  is  $G$ , and (ii)  $o$  (where  $o$  is a particular object which is described by 'the  $F$ ') is  $G$ . Now, when the definite description 'the  $F$ ' is used attributively, the sentence 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' is used in its first meaning (and the proposition expressed by it is a general proposition); and when 'the  $F$ ' is used referentially, the sentence 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' is used in its second meaning (and the proposition expressed by it is a singular proposition which refers to a particular object, say  $o$ ). Some philosophers, Michael Devitt for example, call the former meaning of 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' the *attributive meaning* of 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ', and the latter meaning the *referential meaning* of it.<sup>176</sup> Both of these meanings of 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ', according to them, are semantically significant meanings of the descriptive sentence in question. On the basis of this idea those philosophers claim that a descriptive sentence is actually semantically ambiguous; it has two semantically significant meanings one of which is salient when the definite description involved in it is used attributively, and the other is salient when the definite description involved in it is used referentially. But in its analysis of descriptive sentences Russell's theory of definite descriptions fails to accommodate the above mentioned ambiguity. So, the defenders of the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction claim that Russell's theory is inadequate.

Philosophers who defend Russell's theory of definite descriptions against the objection arising from the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction do not generally deny the existence of the referential/attributional distinction; they agree that a definite description

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<sup>176</sup> Michael Devitt, "The Case for Referential Descriptions", *Descriptions and Beyond*, eds. Marga Reimer and Anne Bezuidenhout (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 280-81.

contained in a descriptive sentence may be used referentially as well as attributively. What they deny is the claim that descriptive sentences have two different types of semantic meanings. They, rather, claim that descriptive sentences have *one type of semantic meaning*, and that meaning is correctly analyzed by Russell's theory; whether a definite description involved in a sentence is used attributively or referentially, the meaning of the sentence containing the definite description in question is equivalent to what the defenders of the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction call the attributive meaning of it; so, descriptive sentences actually are not semantically ambiguous. Those defenders of Russell's theory generally maintain that the so-called referential meaning of descriptive sentences arising from Donnellan's distinction raises an issue relevant to pragmatics and can well be accounted for by a theory of pragmatics; but since Russell's theory is a theory of semantics, and not of pragmatics, this issue is irrelevant to Russell's theory. Hence, according to them, Donnellan's distinction fails to undermine Russell's theory. This sort of defense of Russell's theory may be called the Pragmatic Defense of his theory. The most significant Pragmatic Defense of Russell's theory is that of Kripke to which I now turn.

In his "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference"<sup>177</sup> Kripke argues that Donnellan's distinction between the referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions can be accounted for by a general pragmatic theory of speech acts;<sup>178</sup> and so, it shows nothing against Russell's theory as Russell's theory is a theory of semantics and not of pragmatics. Kripke takes H. P. Grice's distinction between utterer's meaning and sentence-meaning as a basic apparatus in his way of defending Russell's theory. Grice, in his paper "Meaning",<sup>179</sup> published in 1957, indicates that in addition to the literal meaning that a word or a sentence has there is also a sense in which *the speaker* of that word or sentence may mean something. Grice, then, extends and revises this view in his "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning, and Word-Meaning"<sup>180</sup> and "Utterer's Meaning

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<sup>177</sup> Saul Kripke (1977), pp. 255-76.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 267, 271.

<sup>179</sup> H. P. Grice, "Meaning", *The Philosophical Review* 66, no. 3 (1957), pp. 377-88.

<sup>180</sup> H. P. Grice, "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning, and Word-Meaning", *Foundations of Language* 4, no. 3 (1968), pp. 225-42.

and Intention”<sup>181</sup> published in 1968 and 1969, respectively. The view Grice offers in these papers, roughly, is: what a speaker means by uttering a sentence on an occasion may be different from the sentence’s own meaning. For example<sup>182</sup>, suppose a speaker says to her listener “You are the cream in my coffee.” Here, what the speaker’s sentence means is: the listener is a fatty substance of milk existing in the speaker’s beverage consisting of an infusion of ground coffee beans (and the proposition expressed by the speaker’s sentence is false since the listener is a person, not a fatty substance of milk existing in the speaker’s beverage). But that is not what the speaker really means by using her sentence. What the speaker means by her sentence may be this: the listener is the speaker’s source of pride and joy (and it may be the case that what the speaker means by her sentence is *true of the listener*). So, here we observe a divergence between what a sentence means (sentence-meaning) and what the utterer means (utterer’s meaning) by that sentence. But how does a speaker succeed to mean something (in the sense of utterer’s meaning) by uttering a sentence when what she means is different from the meaning of the sentence (sentence-meaning) she utters? Grice initially analyzes this phenomenon in the following way: a speaker succeeds in meaning something, *e.g.* that *p*, by uttering a sentence, *e.g.* *x*, if by uttering *x* she intends to induce the belief that *p* in her audiences, and her audiences form the belief that *p* on the basis of the sentence uttered by her.<sup>183</sup> But Grice then finds that his above mentioned initial analysis does not work as it fails to capture the difference between *telling* someone something and *deliberately and openly letting her know* something.<sup>184</sup> For, in an instance of genuine telling, it is not

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<sup>181</sup> H. P. Grice, “Utterer’s Meaning and Intention”, *The Philosophical Review* 78, no. 2 (1969a), pp. 147-77.

<sup>182</sup> The example is taken from: H. P. Grice, “Logic and Conversation”, *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*, eds. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 41-58.; this paper is reappeared in: H. P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 22-40; all references to this paper will be made from Grice (1989); henceforth this paper will be referred to as: Grice (1975/1989)), p. 34; the Gricean analysis of the example is mine.

<sup>183</sup> Grice (1957), p. 381.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382.; The difference between *telling someone something* and *deliberately and openly letting her know something* may be understood by means of the following example given by Grice: suppose, someone intentionally leaves a photograph on Mr. X’s table pretending that she has left it accidentally. The photograph displays the undue familiarity between Mrs. X and Mr. Y. The photograph shower actually intends to let Mr. X know the undue familiarity between them. According to Grice the above example does not illustrate an

enough that the utterer intends her audiences to believe something, *e.g.* to believe that *p*; rather, to be a genuine act of telling it must be the case that the utterer intends her audiences to come to believe that *p* at least in part because of their recognition of the fact that that *p* is what she (the utterer) intends them to come to believe. So, for a successful act of meaning something (in the sense of utterer's meaning) it is important that the utterer's audiences recognize her intention to mean what she wants to mean. Grice says:

Perhaps we may sum up what is necessary for *A* to mean something by *x* as follows. *A* must intend to induce by *x* a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognized as so intended. But these intentions are not independent; the recognition is intended by *A* to play its part in inducing the belief, and if it does not do so something will have gone wrong with the fulfillment of *A*'s intention.<sup>185</sup>

So, Grice's revised account of utterer's meaning may be formulated in the following way:

*A* means (in the sense of utterer's meaning) that *p* by her utterance of *x* iff *A* utters *x* with the intention of getting her audiences to believe that *p* by recognizing her (*A*'s) intention of getting them (her audiences) to believe that *p*.

On the other hand, what a sentence means—when it is used on an occasion—depends on various linguistic conventions and procedures of the language (that contains the sentence in question) used by the concerned linguistic group. Grice defines, roughly, sentence-meaning in the following way: for a linguistic group *G*, a sentence *x* means that *p* iff (i) at least some (actually many) members of *G* have, in their repertoires, the procedure of uttering *x* if, for some audiences *A* (*A* belong to the group *G*), they want *A* to believe that they believe that *p*, and (ii) they will continue to retain this procedure in their repertoires

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instance of act of telling. For, although the photograph shower *deliberately lets Mr. X know* what she intends him to know, Mr. X may know it without recognizing the photograph shower's intention that she wants him to know the matter and that she wants him to know that she has such intention. [Grice (1957), pp. 382-83.]. On the other hand, if in reply to Mr. X's question "What do you know about the relationship between my wife and Mr. Y?" the photograph shower shows the photograph, then it will be a *genuine act of telling* as, in this case, she not only intends that Mr. X knows about the matter, she also (i) intends that Mr. X recognizes her intention, and (ii) intends that Mr. X recognizes that she intends that he recognizes her intention.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 383-84.

only if some members of  $G$  have and had have the same procedure in their repertoires.<sup>186</sup> For example, suppose a user of English utters the following sentence: “Russell is a brilliant philosopher”. Now, the sentence she uttered means (in the sense of sentence-meaning) that Russell is a brilliant philosopher, because: (i\*) the competent users of English have in their idiolect the procedure of uttering the same sentence if they want their audiences to believe that Russell is a brilliant philosopher, and (ii\*) competent users of English will continue to retain this procedure in their idiolect as users of English have and have had the same procedure in their repertoires. So, Grice’s notion of sentence-meaning may be expressed in the following simplified way:

In a language  $E$  a sentence  $x$  means that  $p$  iff the users of  $E$ , in their idiolect, have (and have had) a standard procedure of using  $x$  to induce the belief that  $p$  in her audiences.

So, we see, even if a sentence  $x$ , in a language, means (in the sense of sentence-meaning) that  $p$ , a speaker of that language may, on some occasions, mean  $q$  by uttering  $x$  iff she utters  $x$  with the intention of getting her audiences to believe that  $q$  by recognizing her (the speaker’s) intention of getting them (the speaker’s audiences) to believe that  $q$ . In short, according to Grice, it may be the case that although the sentence  $x$  means (in the sense of sentence-meaning)  $p$  in a given language, a speaker of that language may, on some occasions, mean  $q$  by uttering  $x$ . So, what we learn from Grice’s distinction between utterer’s meaning and sentence-meaning is that by uttering a sentence, on an occasion, a speaker may mean something which is different from the sentence’s own meaning.

Inspired by Grice’s above mentioned distinction between utterer’s meaning and sentence-meaning, Kripke distinguishes between semantic reference and speaker’s reference (of an expression). He describes his distinction between speaker’s reference and semantic reference in the following way:

Let us now speak of speaker’s reference and semantic reference ... If a speaker has a designator in his idiolect, certain conventions of his idiolect (given various facts about the world) determine the referent in

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<sup>186</sup> Grice (1968), p. 233.

the idiolect: that I call the *semantic referent* of the designator. ... In a given idiolect, the semantic referent of a designator (without indexicals) is given by a *general* intention of the speaker to refer to a certain object whenever the designator is used. The speaker's referent is given by a *specific* intention, on a given occasion, to refer to a certain object.<sup>187</sup>

That is, according to Kripke, the semantic referent of an expression is the object determined by the linguistic meaning of the expression whereas the speaker's referent of an expression is the object about which the speaker means to be talking by using that expression on a given occasion. And, the speaker's referent of an expression may, on an occasion, differ from its semantic referent. Kripke says:

The speaker's referent is the thing the speaker referred to by the designator, though it may not be the referent of the designator, in his idiolect.<sup>188</sup>

To make his distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference clearer and to account for Donnellan's referential/attributional distinction in terms of speaker's reference and semantic reference, Kripke offers the following example<sup>189</sup>:

(39) Her husband is kind to her.

Now, in the case of (39), the semantic referent of the definite description "her husband" is the person who is married to her. This referent is determined by the general linguistic conventions of use of English. But, on a particular occasion, the speaker may use it, though mistakenly, to refer to someone who is not her husband but, for example, her lover or friend. And, by uttering the sentence (39), on that occasion, the speaker may well succeed to refer to the person she intends to refer. In such a case, the particular person whom the speaker refers to is the speaker's referent of the definite description "her husband" on that particular occasion. Here, the referent is determined not by the semantic meaning of the words the speaker used but by her specific intention, on the given occasion, to refer to a certain person. The semantic referent of the definite description "her husband" used in (39), even on the above mentioned occasion, is the person (if there is any) who is married to her.

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<sup>187</sup> Kripke (1977), pp. 263-64.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p.256.

So, the semantic reference of an expression remains unchanged even when the speaker's reference of that expression is different from its semantic reference. Now, Donnellan's example of Smith's murderer (discussed in the second chapter) can be analyzed in terms of speaker's reference and semantic reference. According to the Kripkean analysis the semantic referent of the definite description "Smith's murderer", *i.e.* the unique person who murdered Smith, contained in the sentence (27), is the same object in both of the Scenarios presented by Donnellan. So, it seems that no semantic ambiguity is actually established by Donnellan's example of Smith's murderer. According to Kripke since Donnellan's referential/attribution distinction (which is illustrated by the example of Smith's murderer) fails to prove that there is a semantic ambiguity in sentences containing definite descriptions, it fails to undermine Russell's theory because, as Kripke mentions, if a descriptive sentence does not involve a semantic ambiguity, then it has only one analysis which is given by Russell.<sup>190</sup>

In support of his view that the phenomenon arising from Donnellan's distinction fails to undermine Russell's theory Kripke, then, shows that the fact that a definite description can be used in two different ways (*i.e.* attributively and referentially) does not constitute a genuine counterexample to Russell's analysis of descriptive sentences. Furthermore, he claims that there are many methodological considerations that favor a unitary hypothesis, like Russell's, over an ambiguity hypothesis, like Donnellan's. In addition to these, according to Kripke, there is what he calls a *specialized and localized phenomenon*<sup>191</sup>—different from methodological considerations—that favors the Russellian analysis of descriptive sentences. To show that the phenomenon that definite descriptions can be used in two different ways cannot be counted as a counterexample to Russell's analysis of descriptive sentences, Kripke designs a test in which he (i) stipulates

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<sup>190</sup> Kripke (1977), p. 262. In his "Vacuous Names" Grice makes a similar comment. He says, descriptive sentences do not involve any systematic (semantic) duplicity (ambiguity) of meaning; they have one sort of meaning and that meaning is given by the Russellian analysis. (Grice, "Vacuous Names", *Words and Objections: Essays on the Work of W. V. Quine*, eds. Donald Davidson and Jaakko Hintikka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, (1969b) p. 143)

<sup>191</sup> Kripke (1977), p. 270.

that Russell's theory is correct for some hypothetical language, and (ii) endorses the following principle: *if the phenomenon in question would still arise in a community that spoke such hypothetical language (which may not be English), then the fact that it arises in English cannot disprove the hypothesis that the analysis is correct for English.*<sup>192</sup> Now, Kripke imagines three different languages<sup>193</sup>:

- (1) The weak Russell language: This is a language which is similar to English except that in this language the truth-conditions of sentences containing definite descriptions are *stipulated to coincide* with the truth-conditions assigned to them by Russell's theory. For example, in this language the sentence "The present king of France is bald" expresses a true proposition iff exactly one man at present is a king of France and whoever at present is a king of France is bald.
- (2) The intermediate Russell language: This is a language which is similar to the weak Russell language with the additional assumption that in this language sentences containing definite descriptions *have the same meanings* as those posited by Russell's theory. For example, in this language the sentence "The present king of France is bald" means that exactly one man at present is a king of France and whoever at present is a king of France is bald.
- (3) The strong Russell language: In this language the use of definite descriptions is banned and the Russellian paraphrases are used in their places. For example, instead of saying "Her husband is kind to her", speakers of this language say "Exactly one man is married to her, and who is married to her is kind to her".

Now, Kripke considers the following questions<sup>194</sup>:

- (i) Can we expect that the phenomenon Donnellan mentions will arise in communities that speak these languages?
- (ii) Can we not say that users of these languages may, on some occasions, say something *true of the objects* they refer to by using

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., pp. 265-66.

descriptive sentences or their Russellian paraphrases (in cases of the strong Russell language) even when their intended referents are actually misdescribed by the definite descriptions contained in the relevant descriptive sentences or by their Russellian paraphrases?

Kripke thinks that the answers to both of these questions must be affirmative.<sup>195</sup> Speakers of the weak Russell language can find themselves in a party and mistakenly think of a man that he is the husband of the woman with whom he is talking; and one of them may utter the sentence “Her husband is kind to her”, although the man is not her husband but a friend or lover. In this case, the person who utters this sentence thinks, though mistakenly, that the definite description she used is appropriate to refer to her intended referent and the proposition expressed by her sentence satisfies the *Russellian truth-conditions*. In spite of this mistake the speaker of the above mentioned sentence may say *something true of the man referred to* by her utterance of the sentence in question provided that the man who is referred to is kind to the woman with whom he is talking in the party. So, the answers to the above mentioned two questions seem to be affirmative in the case of weak Russell language. The same is true of the intermediate Russell language too. A speaker of the intermediate Russell language may utter the above mentioned sentence in a party to mean that exactly one man is married to her (the topical woman) and who is married to her is kind to her, but refer to her lover or friend by the definite description “her husband”. And, again, what the speaker says may be *true of the man referred to by her*. So, we see, the answers to the above mentioned questions are affirmative in the case of the intermediate Russell language too. Kripke claims that even in the strong Russell language, in which the explicit use of definite descriptions is banned, the same phenomenon can occur.<sup>196</sup> Instead of saying “Her husband is kind to her”, a speaker of this language will say “Exactly one man is married to her, and who is married to her is kind to her”. But she may, though mistakenly, refer to the woman’s friend or lover, not her husband. And, she may succeed to refer to her intended referent

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

and say *something true of her referent*. At this point Kripke offers an example<sup>197</sup> of such a use (in natural English) of what may be called a Russellian paraphrase of a descriptive sentence. A speaker of English may use a sentence like “Exactly one person is drinking champagne in that corner, and I hear he is romantically linked with Jane Smith” to refer to a particular person she has in mind. In such a case the speaker may well succeed to refer to the person she intends to refer to even if he (the speaker’s referent) is drinking sparkling water, not champagne. Of course, the use of the above sort of sentences is rare in natural English, but it is not the case that there is no such use. Speakers use this sort of sentences when they wish to achieve a prissy and arch effect. Kripke claims that although this kind of “arch” use of the above sort of sentences is extremely rare in natural English, it will be very common in the strong Russell English because the use of definite descriptions is banned there.<sup>198</sup> That means that the phenomenon mentioned by Donnellan will arise in the case of the strong Russell language too; and a speaker (who speaks the strong Russell language) of this sentence may well succeed to refer to a particular object she has in mind by using a Russellian paraphrase of a descriptive sentence even when her intended referent is misdescribed by the sentence she uses. So, in the case of the strong Russell language, like the cases of the weak and intermediate Russell languages, the answers to the questions (i) and (ii) are affirmative.

So, we see, the phenomenon mentioned by Donnellan arises in all Russell languages; and, as Donnellan shows and Kripke agrees, it is a fact that the same phenomenon arises in English. Thus, by the principle endorsed in Kripke’s test, it can be said that the fact that definite descriptions can be used in two different ways (attributively and referentially) in English does not provide any argument for the claim that English is not a Russell language, *i.e.* one cannot claim that Russell’s analysis is not correct for English.<sup>199</sup>

Kripke, then, advances to show the methodological considerations which favor Russell’s unitary hypothesis in the face of Donnellan’s ambiguity hypothesis. Here,

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

Kripke stipulates another set of hypothetical languages that he calls *D-languages*.<sup>200</sup> He stipulates that in D-languages it is accepted that the attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions have different semantic meanings that affect their truth-conditions. The *unambiguous D-language* contains two distinct words, “the” and “ze”, to capture these two different meanings. The descriptive phrase ‘the *F*’ is used to capture the definite description’s so-called attributive meaning; and the descriptive phrase ‘ze *F*’ is used to capture its so-called referential meaning. The *ambiguous D-language* is like the unambiguous D-language except that ‘the *F*’, ambiguously, can be interpreted as to mean either what is meant by ‘the *F*’, or what is meant by ‘ze *F*’. Now, according to Kripke, what Donnellan is arguing for in his paper is that English is the ambiguous D-language.<sup>201</sup> If English is the ambiguous D-language, then in English the definite description ‘the *F*’ has two meanings: (i) a meaning which is captured by the phrase ‘the *F*’ in unambiguous D-language, and (ii) a meaning which is captured by the phrase ‘ze *F*’ in unambiguous D-language. That means that if English is the ambiguous D-language, then English is not a Russell language as a Russell language does not accommodate these two different meanings of ‘the *F*’. In this way Kripke lays down two rival hypotheses about English only one of which may be correct for English. These rival hypotheses are: (i) English is a Russell language (unitary hypothesis), and (ii) English is the ambiguous D-language (ambiguity hypothesis).<sup>202</sup> Now, the question that arises here is whether we have any reason to favor the unitary hypothesis over the ambiguity hypothesis. Kripke thinks that there are at least three methodological considerations that favor the unitary hypothesis over the ambiguity hypothesis. These are: **(1)** the unitary hypothesis, e.g. Russell’s, can deal with Donnellan’s referential/attribution distinction by the apparatus like the Gricean notions of sentence-meaning (as well as Kripke’s notion of semantic reference) and utterer’s meaning (as well as Kripke’s notion of speakers’ reference)

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 266.; Kripke uses the term D-language in which he actually uses “D” for Donnellan. But he does not explicitly call it Donnellan language as we cannot say with certainty that Donnellan argues for ambiguity in definite descriptions.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

without postulating any semantic ambiguity in a descriptive phrase. Besides, some of the apparatus can be applied to solve various other problems, such as a specific problem about proper names shown by Kripke (we will see it below), without postulating any ambiguity. On the other hand, the ambiguity hypothesis, *e.g.* Donnellan's, tries to deal with such problems by postulating ambiguity in expressions/sentences in question. According to Kripke, when we face trouble in accounting for the meaning of an expression/sentence, it is not a good way to posit ambiguity in that expression/sentence when we have other ways to account for the meaning of that expression/sentence. He thinks that positing ambiguities when in trouble is a lazy man's approach in philosophy which should be avoided whenever there is a way of avoiding it. He says:

It is very much the lazy man's approach in philosophy to posit ambiguities when in trouble. If we face a putative counterexample to our favorite philosophical thesis, it is always open to us to protest that some key term is being used in a special sense, different from its use in the thesis. We may be right, but the ease of the move should counsel a *policy of caution*: Do not posit an ambiguity unless you are really forced to, unless there are really compelling theoretical or intuitive grounds to suppose that an ambiguity really is present.<sup>203</sup>

Kripke wants to keep himself faithful to the Policy of Caution he mentioned above. That is why he endorses a principle of economy which is the same as what Grice calls Modified Occam's Razor: *senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity*.<sup>204</sup> On the basis of this principle of economy Russell's unitary hypothesis deserves to be favored over Donnellan's ambiguity hypothesis as Russell's unitary hypothesis does not postulate ambiguity when there is apparatus (*e.g.* the distinction between utterer's meaning and sentence-meaning, the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference as well as a pragmatic explanation of the referential/attributive distinction) that can be used to deal with the problem arising from the referential/attributive distinction. (2) In order to

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 268. (my italics)

<sup>204</sup> H. P. Grice, "Further Notes on Logic and Conversation", *Syntax and Semantics 9: Pragmatics*, ed. Peter Cole (New York San Francisco and London: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 118-19. ; Kripke (1977), p. 269.

account for all attributive and referential phenomena a defender of the ambiguity hypothesis would have to posit ambiguities in such cases where positing an ambiguity is not at all plausible, *e.g.* the case of proper names. Kripke shows this with an interesting example. His example, roughly, is as follows<sup>205</sup>: suppose two men, A and B, see Smith at a distance and have the following colloquy:

A: What is Jones doing?

B: Raking the leaves.

Here, in the common language of A and B the proper name “Jones” is the name of the person Jones, and it never names the person Smith. But still, B has said something true of Smith provided that the person referred to was raking the leaves. Kripke explains this in the following way:

Yet, in some sense, on this occasion, clearly both participants in the dialogue have referred to Smith, and the second participant has said something true about the man referred to if and only if Smith was raking the leaves (whether or not Jones was).<sup>206</sup>

Now, how can this phenomenon be accounted for? If we grant ambiguity hypothesis, then we need to grant that the name “Jones” is ambiguous—it may (attributively) mean Jones; and it may also (referentially) mean Smith. But it will be ridiculous to claim that a proper name like “Jones” is an ambiguous term. A unitary hypothesis can account for this phenomenon simply by using apparatus like speaker’s reference and semantic reference. Here, the person Jones is the semantic reference of the name “Jones” used in the conversation and the person Smith is the speaker’s reference of that name. That is, a unitary hypothesis can deal with the phenomenon arising from Smith/Jones example without postulating an ambiguity. Now, according to Kripke, the phenomenon arising from Donnellan’s referential/attribution distinction is similar to the phenomenon arising from Smith/Jones example, and hence, like the phenomenon arising from Smith/Jones example, Donnellan’s referential/attribution distinction can be explained in terms of speaker’s reference and semantic reference.<sup>207</sup> For

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<sup>205</sup> Kripke (1977), p. 263

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

example, the semantic reference of the definite description “Smith’s murderer” in the sentence “Smith’s murderer is insane” (when the definite description in question is used referentially to refer to Jones, the person the speaker has in mind) is the unique person who murdered Smith (if there is any); and the speaker’s reference is Jones. So, no semantic ambiguity is needed to be postulated. That is, we see, the metalinguistic apparatus invoked in the unitary hypothesis can deal with Donnellan’s referential/attributional distinction as well as many other cases, such as proper names. On the other hand, the ambiguity invoked in the ambiguity hypothesis is unnecessary—if it is absent, we can explain everything (by means of the apparatus mentioned above) we wish to explain. So, Kripke thinks that the so-called separate referential meaning of a definite description (when it is used referentially) postulated by ambiguity hypothesis is just an idle wheel that does no work.<sup>208</sup> Hence, according to Kripke, the unitary hypothesis should be preferred over the ambiguity hypothesis. **(3)** For a term which is ambiguous in one language, say in English, we expect that that term is disambiguated by separate and unrelated terms in some other languages. For example, the word “bank” in English is ambiguous—it may mean a riverside; and it may mean a financial institution. Now, according to Kripke it is expected that there are languages in which two different words are used to capture the two different meanings of the word “bank” in English.<sup>209</sup> Were “the” an ambiguous word, we would similarly expect that in some languages other than English there would be two different words for “the” (in English) to capture the alleged two different meanings of that word. But, as Kripke mentions, it will be surprising if we find a language, say Eskimo’s, in which two different words, say “the” and “ze”, are used in order to capture the alleged two different meanings of “the” (in English).<sup>210</sup> Two different points are made here. First, our expectation for having a language in which the alleged ambiguous word is disambiguated indicates that our linguistic intuitions are really intuitions of a unitary concept.<sup>211</sup> Second,

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 268.; And, it is an empirical fact that some other languages, *e.g.* Bangla, have different words that capture the two different meanings of the word “bank” in English. That is, it is an empirical fact, as is expected by Kripke, that the ambiguous word “bank” is disambiguated in some other languages.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

the empirical fact that there is no language in which we observe two different words for “the” (in English) indicates that “the” (in English) actually is not an ambiguous word.<sup>212</sup> These points, according to Kripke, provide additional reasons to favor the unitary hypothesis, *e.g.* Russell’s, over the ambiguity hypothesis, *e.g.* Donnellan’s.<sup>213</sup>

Besides the above mentioned methodological considerations which favors Russell’s unitary hypothesis over Donnellan’s ambiguity hypothesis, Kripke searches for possible direct evidence that favors Russell’s unitary hypothesis. He claims that he has found a piece of direct evidence that actually favors Russell’s unitary hypothesis. Kripke describes this alleged direct evidence in the following way: there are cases in which the ambiguity hypothesis cannot make sense of some terms but the unitary hypothesis can do it properly. For example, consider the following dialogue<sup>214</sup>:

Dialogue-I: A: “Her husband is kind to her.”

B: “No, he isn’t. The man you’re referring to isn’t her husband.”

Dialogue-II: A: “Her husband is kind to her.”

B: “He is kind to her, but he isn’t her husband.”

Both of the above dialogues are plainly proper. Russell’s unitary hypothesis can easily explain the properness of these in the following way: in both of the dialogues the sentence “Her husband is kind to her” (uttered by A) semantically means that a unique person who is married to her is kind to her; and a unique person who is married to her (if there is any) fits the definite description “her husband”. Now, in the Dialogue-I, the pronoun “he” (in the sentence uttered by B) refers to the person who uniquely fits the definite description “her husband”. And, in the Dialogue-II, both occurrences of the pronoun “he” refer not to the person who uniquely fits the definite description “her husband” but to the topical woman’s kind friend or lover. At any rate, who is referred to by the pronoun “he” in each of the dialogues is clear; both of the dialogues are proper. On the other hand, Donnellan’s ambiguity hypothesis cannot account for the properness of

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

the Dialogue-I, although it can account for the properness of the Dialogue-II. If we grant the ambiguity hypothesis, then we need to grant that in both of the dialogues the definite description “her husband” is used referentially which semantically refers to the topical woman’s kind friend or lover. Here, both of the occurrences of the pronoun “he” (in the sentence uttered by B) in the Dialogue-II refers to the topical woman’s kind friend or lover. But who is referred to by the pronoun “he” (in the sentence uttered by B) in the Dialogue-I? Clearly, here “he” does not refer to the topical woman’s kind friend or lover; for, it is plain from the Dialogue-I that B is not saying here that the topical woman’s friend or lover is not kind to her. But, here, “he” cannot refer to the topical woman’s actual husband (*i.e.* a unique person who is married to her) either as according to the ambiguity hypothesis the topical woman’s actual husband is irrelevant when the definite description “her husband” is used referentially. This shows that Donnellan’s ambiguity hypothesis cannot account for the properness of the Dialogue-I. But the Dialogue-I, just like the Dialogue-II, is proper. So, there is something seriously wrong in Donnellan’s ambiguity hypothesis. Kripke explains the above mentioned problem, *i.e.* the inability of accounting for the properness of the Dialogue-I, of Donnellan’s ambiguity hypothesis in terms of his apparatus like speaker’s reference and semantic reference. His explanation of the above problem runs in the following way: when Russell’s unitary hypothesis is granted, it can be said then that in the Dialogue-I the pronoun “he” (in the sentence uttered by B) refers to the semantic referent (*i.e.* a unique person who is married to her) of the definite description “her husband”; and, in the Dialogue-II both occurrences of “he” (in the sentence uttered by B) refer to the speaker’s referent (*i.e.* the topical woman’s kind friend or lover) of the definite description “her husband”. On the other hand, when we grant Donnellan’s ambiguity hypothesis, both the semantic referent and the speaker’s referent<sup>215</sup> of the definite description “her husband” is the topical woman’s kind friend or lover in both of the dialogues, provided that the definite description “her

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<sup>215</sup> Kripke says that if ambiguity hypothesis is granted then for a referentially used definite description the semantic reference of the definite description automatically coincides with its speaker’s reference. Still, according to him, the notions, *i.e.* the notion of semantic reference and the notion of speaker’s reference, are general notions that are applicable here, too.

husband” is used referentially in the Dialogue-I as well as in the Dialogue-II. Now, in the Dialogue-II, both occurrences of the pronoun “he” refer to the speaker’s referent of the definite description “her husband” (*i.e.* the topical woman’s kind friend or lover). But, in the case of the Dialogue-I, the pronoun “he” (in the sentence uttered by B) neither refers to the semantic referent of the definite description “her husband” nor to the speaker’s referent of the definite description in question. Here, the pronoun “he” does not refer to the semantic referent of the definite description “her husband” because the semantic referent of the definite description “her husband”, when it is used referentially, is irrelevant (according to the ambiguity hypothesis); it does not refer to the speaker’s referent of the definite description “her husband” either because it is plain from the Dialogue-I that B is not suggesting that the topical woman’s friend or lover is not kind to her. That means that if Donnellan’s ambiguity hypothesis is true, then the use of the pronoun “he” (in the sentence uttered by B) in the Dialogue-I does not make any sense—it is an improper use of the pronoun “he”, and, thus, the Dialogue-I is improper. But, as Kripke correctly mentioned, the Dialogue-I is proper, and the use of the pronoun “he” (in the sentence uttered by B) in the Dialogue-I is a proper use of that pronoun. So, Kripke claims that the ambiguity hypothesis is wrong as it is incapable to account for the properness of the proper use of the pronoun “he” in the Dialogue-I. Kripke’s above mentioned observation can be expressed in the following way:

If the Dialogue-I is proper, then the ambiguity hypothesis is wrong.

The Dialogue-I is proper.

Therefore, the ambiguity hypothesis is wrong.

Kripke considers the above argument as direct evidence that favors Russell’s theory of definite descriptions over Donnellan’s theory.

So, we see, according to Kripke Donnellan’s distinction cannot establish any semantic ambiguity in definite descriptions; the phenomenon that definite descriptions can be used in two different ways, *i.e.* attributively and referentially, cannot be counted as a counterexample to Russell’s theory. Furthermore, Kripke has shown some methodological considerations that provide reasons to favor Russell’s theory over

Donnellan's. In addition to these, he has provided what he calls direct evidence which seems to show that Russell theory is more plausible than Donnellan's theory. Kripke, however, admits that Donnellan's distinction has raised an important issue in the study of philosophy of language: a speaker may use a definite description referentially to refer to a particular object (whether or not it fits the definite description in question) she has in mind. But this issue can be dealt with using the notion of speaker's reference. Speaker's reference actually is an issue of pragmatics, not of semantics. So, the issue Donnellan has raised is relevant to pragmatics and can be accounted "by a general pragmatic theory of speech acts, applicable to a very wide range of languages".<sup>216</sup> Kripke claims:

They [his arguments and the primary lessons we learn therefrom] show in the present case that the argument Donnellan actually presents in his original paper shows nothing against a Russellian or other unitary account, and they make it highly probable to me that the problem Donnellan handles by semantic ambiguity should instead be treated by a general theory of speech acts.<sup>217</sup>

So, it may be concluded here that despite its importance in the study of philosophy of language, Donnellan's referential/attributive distinction is irrelevant to Russell's theory of definite descriptions as Russell's theory of definite descriptions is a theory of semantics and not of pragmatics. In short, the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction does not pose a real threat to Russell's theory.

Now, if it is the case that the phenomenon mentioned by Donnellan actually raises an issue of pragmatics, not an issue of semantics, then Kripke's conclusion that Donnellan's argument shows nothing against Russell's theory is correct. So, it is important here to examine whether the phenomenon mentioned by Donnellan is actually relevant to pragmatics and not to semantics. In order to examine this, we need to make a clear distinction between semantics and pragmatics. Traditionally, the distinction between semantics and pragmatics is made in this way: semantics deals with the lexical

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

meanings of an expression/sentence and its constituent parts (*e.g.* words, phrases) whereas pragmatics deals with various contextual features (*e.g.* the speaker's particular intention to convey particular information by using an expression/sentence on a particular occasion, etc.) of the occasion on which an expression/sentence is used; the semantic meaning of an expression/sentence is determined by the lexical meanings of its constituent parts and syntactic structure whereas what a speaker means by an expression/sentence on a particular occasion (the pragmatic meaning with which the expression/sentence is used by the speaker on a particular occasion) is determined by various contextual features of the occasion on which the expression/sentence in question is used. Against this distinction it may be argued that the semantic meaning of a sentence does not depend only on the lexical meanings of its constituent parts and syntactic structure; it, at least partly, depends on some contextual features, *e.g.* who uses the sentence in question and where and when she uses it. For example, what proposition<sup>218</sup> is expressed by the sentence "I am tired" and the truth or falsity of the proposition expressed by it depend not only on the lexical meanings of "I" and "am tired" and the syntactic structure of the sentence in question but also on various contextual features like who utters it and when she utters it. When the sentence in question is uttered by, for example, Jones, then the proposition expressed by the sentence in question is that Jones is tired, and it may be found true; when the same sentence is uttered by, for example, Black, then the proposition expressed by it is that Black is tired, and it may be found false. Again, it may be the case that the proposition expressed by the sentence "I am tired" is true when the sentence is uttered by Jones at 3 pm (on a particular day) and false when uttered by the same person Jones at 9 pm (on that particular day). That means that the same sentence may have different semantic meanings based on different contextual features related to the use of the sentence in question. So, it may be claimed that various contextual features related to an utterance of a sentence contribute to the semantic meaning of that sentence and enter into the specification of truth-conditions of the proposition expressed by the sentence in question. But, this observation is not true of all

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<sup>218</sup> Traditionally, it is thought that the semantic meaning of a sentence is the proposition expressed by it.

sentences. For example, the proposition expressed by the sentence “The only even prime number is less than 7” does not depend on who, where and when utters that sentence. Rather, what proposition is expressed by the above sentence depends on how users of English regularly use the expressions “the only even prime number” and “is less than 7” (and the proposition expressed by the above sentence is true independently of contextual features of the occasion on which the sentence in question is uttered). That means that the semantic meaning of the above sentence is independent of any contextual feature of the particular occasion on which the sentence in question is uttered. Rather, here the semantic meaning of the sentence in question is determined on the basis of some linguistic regularities existing in the language in question (English). So, the concept of linguistic regularity is important here. If one takes a closer look at the example of “I am tired”, one will find that even when various contextual features contribute in determining the semantic meaning and truth or falsity of the proposition expressed by that sentence, they do this without violating the linguistic regularities related to how users of English regularly use expressions “I” and “am tired” on various occasions of their use. Users of English regularly use the expression “I” to mean *the speaker (Jones, or Black, or whoever utters the expression “I”)* and “am tired” to mean *is being in the state of tiredness*. These linguistic regularities are not violated even though some contextual features related to the occasion on which the sentence “I am tired” is uttered contribute in determining the semantic meaning of the sentence in question. From this observation it may be said that:

A semantic meaning of an expression/sentence in a language is determined by the linguistic regularities of how, in that language, the expression/sentence is used to mean something on different occasions of its use; various contextual features may or may not contribute in determining such a meaning.

This sort of meaning of an expression/sentence may be called the conventional meaning of that expression/sentence. And, it is the conventional meaning of an expression/sentence which is a subject of semantics.

Now, let us turn to a purely pragmatic consideration. Suppose, by the sentence “I am tired” a speaker, on a particular occasion, means that *she is willing to resign from her*

*post* which plainly is not the semantic meaning of the sentence she utters. Suppose, again, that the speaker's audiences, on the given occasion, know what the speaker intends to mean by her utterance of "I am tired". So, by uttering the above sentence on the given occasion the speaker succeeds in communicating that she is willing to resign from her post. Here, we see, the speaker's meaning of the sentence "I am tired" is different from the semantic meaning of that sentence. And, it is pragmatics that deals with the speaker's meaning of an expression/sentence. So, the above example gives us a way of setting a criterion for distinguishing between semantics and pragmatics. We see, in the above example, that the semantic meaning of the sentence "I am tired" is determined by the conventional meanings of the constituent parts of the sentence in question whereas, on the given occasion, the pragmatic meaning (if this term is preferred) with which the sentence "I am tired" is used by the speaker is not determined by the conventional meanings of the sentence's constituent parts but by various contextual features related to the particular occasion on which the sentence is uttered by the speaker. So, it can be said that on an occasion a pragmatic meaning with which an expression/sentence is used by a speaker may be different from the conventional meaning of that expression/sentence. On the basis of this observation the distinction between semantics and pragmatics may be made in the following way:

Semantics deals with the conventional meaning (or meanings, if the expression/sentence in question has more than one conventional meaning in the given language) of an expression/sentence, whereas pragmatics deals with the sort of meaning with which the expression/sentence in question is used by a speaker on a particular occasion; the meanings with which pragmatics deals are non-conventional meanings with which the relevant expressions/sentences are used by speakers on particular occasions and which are determined not by linguistic regularities existing in the relevant language but by various contextual properties related to the particular occasions on which the expressions/sentences are used.

But, still, there is a problem. So far I have treated the conventional meaning of an expression/sentence in the following way:

That  $p$  is a conventional meaning of the expression/sentence  $e$  in a language  $L$  if there is a linguistic regularity of using  $e$ , in  $L$ , to mean that  $p$  on various occasions on which  $e$  is used; and various contextual properties related to the occasions on which  $e$  is used may or may not contribute in determining the meaning of  $e$  in  $L$ ; and even if they contribute in determining the meaning of  $e$  on various occasions, they do it without violating the linguistic regularity associated with the use of  $e$  on various occasion.

A conventional meaning (of the above sort) of an expression/sentence, as has been claimed, is a semantic meaning of that expression/sentence. Now, the problem is: there are some clear cases in which a linguistic regularity of using an expression/sentence to mean something (in that language) does not actually determine a semantic meaning of that expression/sentence in the language in question. For example, consider the following conversation:

A: What is Jane doing?

B: She is in the kitchen.

The semantic meaning of the sentence uttered by B is: Jane is in the space designated for cooking. This meaning of the above sentence conforms to the conventional meaning of its constituent part “is in the kitchen”. But, in English, there is a sort of linguistic regularity of using the sentence “She is in the kitchen” to mean that she is cooking. The latter sort of linguistic regularity, I think, does not determine a semantic meaning of the relevant expression/sentence. This sort of linguistic regularity should be excluded from those which I take to be the ones that determine conventional meanings of expressions/sentences. For, I intend to restrict the term conventional meaning in a way so that it includes only semantic meanings of expressions/sentences and excludes non-semantic meanings of them. That is why a qualification for the conventional meaning must be added. To add such a qualification for the conventional meaning of an expression/sentence I borrow an apparatus from H. P. Grice. The apparatus I borrow from Grice is his *cancellability test*. In order to fit this apparatus with my purpose, I will use it

in a slightly different way than the way Grice uses it. But I will keep Grice's original spirit intact (in devising this test).<sup>219</sup>

Now, let us consider how the cancellability test helps in setting qualifications for a meaning with which a sentence is used for being counted as a conventional meaning of that sentence. Suppose that in a language *L*, the sentence *e* is used to mean that *p*. Now, the cancellability test can be applied in the following way: if, in *L*, it is *coherent* to say: “*e* but [and] it is not the case that *p*”, then that *p* is a cancellable meaning with respect to *e* in *L*. And, if, in *L*, it is *incoherent* to say: “*e* but [and] it is not the case that *p*”, then that *p* is a non-cancellable meaning of *e* in *L*.<sup>220</sup> Now, if a meaning with which a sentence is used is a non-cancellable meaning of that sentence in a language, then that meaning is the semantic meaning of that sentence in the language in question. But what happens if a meaning with which a particular sentence is used is a cancellable meaning with respect to that sentence? It cannot plainly be said that if a meaning with which a particular sentence is used is cancellable with respect to that sentence, then that meaning is not a semantic

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<sup>219</sup> Grice devises this test to distinguish between conventional and conversational implicatures. An implicature generated by an utterance of a sentence is a proposition that is intentionally communicated by the utterance, but not a part of what is said by the sentence. A conventional implicature is generated by the conventional meaning of the words uttered. For example, someone asks: “Who are above forty?” And, one replies: “I am forty-five”. Here, the replier conventionally implicates that she is above forty. This implicature is generated by the conventional meaning of the word “forty”. So, it is a conventional implicature. On the other hand, a conversational implicature is generated by the conversational context although the conventional meaning of the words used may play some role in it. In my example of “She is in the kitchen” the utterance of “She is in the kitchen” conversationally implicates that she is cooking. Conversational implicatures are issues of pragmatics whereas conventional implicatures are issues relevant to semantics. It is important to note here that *conventional implicatures are not conventional meanings of the relevant expressions*. They may be the part of conventional meanings of the relevant expressions. According to Grice conversational implicatures are cancellable (and detachable), but conventional implicatures are not. (For details: H. P. Grice (1975/1989), pp. 22-40.

<sup>220</sup> Jerrold M. Sadock proposes a similar test. His test is known as the reinforceability test. The reinforceability test may be expressed in the following way: if, in *L*, it is not redundant to say: “*e*, and [in fact] *p*”, then that *p* is a reinforceable meaning of *e*; and if, in *L*, it is redundant to say: “*e*, and [in fact] *p*”, then that *p* is not a reinforceable meaning of *e*. According to Sadock conversational implicatures are reinforceable but conventional implicatures are not. (For details: Jerrold M. Sadock, “On Testing for Conversational Implicatures”, *Syntax and Semantics 9: Pragmatics*, ed. Peter Cole (New York, San Francisco and London: Academic Press, 1978) pp. 281-97). Sadock's reinforceability test could be used in the place of Grice's cancellability test. I think had I used it in the place of Grice's cancellability test, it would serve my purpose in the same way as does Grice's cancellability test.

meaning of that sentence in the language in question. For, there are cases in which a meaning of an expression/sentence is clearly a semantic meaning of the expression/sentence in question but is a cancellable meaning of that expression/sentence. Take, for example, the word “bank”. As mentioned earlier, in English the word “bank” is a word which has two semantic meanings—a riverside and a financial institution. Consequently, the sentence “I went to a bank yesterday” is ambiguous—it may mean that I went to a riverside yesterday; it may also mean that I went to a financial institution yesterday. Both of these meanings are plainly semantic meanings of the sentence in question. But both of them, individually, are cancellable meanings of the sentence on different particular occasions. For example, on a particular occasion (on which the speaker is talking about a financial institution) it is coherent to say: “I went to a bank yesterday, but it is not the case that I went to a riverside yesterday.” That is, that I went to a riverside yesterday is a cancellable meaning of the sentence “I went to a bank yesterday” on the given occasion though it is a semantic meaning of the sentence in question. Again, on another particular occasion (on which the speaker is talking about a riverside) it is coherent to say: “I went to a bank yesterday, but it is not the case that I went to a financial institution yesterday.” That is, that I went to a financial institution yesterday is a cancellable meaning of the sentence “I went to a bank yesterday” on the given occasion though it is a semantic meaning of the sentence in question. So, it may be said that:

If that  $p$  is a non-cancellable meaning of  $e$  in  $L$ , then that  $p$  is the semantic meaning of  $e$  in  $L$ ; and if that  $p$  is a cancellable meaning with respect to  $e$  in  $L$ , then that  $p$  may be a semantic meaning of  $e$  in  $L$  if  $e$  is ambiguous in  $L$ .

Now, return to my earlier example of the sentence “I am tired.” In that example, we see that the speaker, by using the sentence “I am tired”, succeeds in communicating that she is willing to resign from her post even though that is not what the sentence she has uttered semantically means. Although that she is willing to resign from her post is not the semantic meaning of the sentence the speaker uses, it is what the speaker intends to mean by uttering the sentence in question on the given occasion. It may also be added

here that on the given occasion the speaker expects that her audiences are capable of recognizing her intention to mean what she means by using the sentence in question. All these provide an interpretation of how that she is willing to resign from her post is counted as a pragmatic meaning with which the speaker uses the sentence “I am tired” on the given occasion. Call this interpretation the *pragmatic-interpretation*.<sup>221</sup> Now, when a sentence is used by a speaker with a pragmatic meaning on a particular occasion, it is natural that a pragmatic-interpretation of the above sort is available on the given occasion. Besides this, a pragmatic meaning with which a sentence is used by a speaker is always a cancellable meaning with respect to the sentence used. For example, that she is willing to resign from her post is a cancellable meaning with respect to the sentence the speaker uses on the given occasion as it is coherent to say: “I am tired but it is not the case that I am willing to resign from my post.” The same is true of any other pragmatic meaning with which a speaker uses a particular sentence on a particular occasion. So, we find:

When that  $p$  is a cancellable meaning with respect to  $e$  in  $L$  on an occasion, then—

either (A)  $e$  is ambiguous in  $L$ ,

or (B) there is a pragmatic-interpretation for that  $p$  on which it counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses  $e$  on the given occasion.

Now, following Grice’s Modified Occam’s Razor (*i.e.* senses [semantic meanings] are not to be multiplied beyond necessity) and Kripke’s Policy of Caution (*i.e.* do not posit ambiguity unless you are really forced to, unless there are really compelling theoretical and intuitive grounds to suppose that an ambiguity really is present) it can be claimed that when (B) is true, one should not go for an ambiguity hypothesis for  $p$  (where that  $p$  is a

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<sup>221</sup> In the second chapter of this dissertation the term “pragmatic interpretation” (without a hyphen between “pragmatic” and “interpretation”) has also been used. There it has been used to refer to a particular interpretation of Donnellan’s distinction, namely the pragmatic interpretation of Donnellan’s distinction. In the present chapter the term “pragmatic-interpretation” (with a hyphen between “pragmatic” and “interpretation”) is used to refer to various pragmatic features that constitute an interpretation on which a claimed meaning counts as a meaning (even though that meaning is cancellable with respect to the relevant expression/sentence) with which a speaker uses an expression/sentence on a particular occasion. So, the use of the term “pragmatic-interpretation” (of a claimed meaning) should not be mingled with the term “pragmatic interpretation” (of Donnellan’s distinction).

cancellable meaning with respect to  $e$  in  $L$ ). That is, a claimed meaning which is a cancellable meaning with respect to a relevant sentence and which has a pragmatic-interpretation on which it counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses the sentence in question is a pragmatic meaning with which the relevant sentence is used by a speaker on a particular occasion. So, in my “I am tired” example, that she is willing to resign from her post is a pragmatic meaning with which the speaker uses the sentence “I am tired” on the given occasion; for, as has been already shown, the claimed meaning is cancellable with respect to the sentence in question, and a pragmatic-interpretation is available on which it (that she is willing to resign from her post) counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses that sentence on the given occasion. Similarly, in the example of “She is in the kitchen”, that she is cooking is a cancellable meaning with respect to the sentence “She is in the kitchen”, and a pragmatic-interpretation is available on which it (that she is cooking) counts as meaning with which the speaker uses the sentence in question on the given occasion. So, it is also a pragmatic meaning with which the sentence in question is used by the speaker on the given occasion.

From the above discussion it appears that a semantic meaning of a sentence is either the non-cancellable meaning of that sentence, or (if it is cancellable with respect to the relevant sentence) a meaning that does not have a pragmatic-interpretation on which it counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses the sentence in question even though that is a meaning of that sentence (the speaker uses it with that meaning but without having a pragmatic-interpretation of the above sort). In the former case the sentence of which the claimed meaning is the semantic meaning is an unambiguous sentence; in the latter case the sentence of which the claimed meaning is a semantic meaning is an ambiguous sentence—in this case we are actually forced to posit an ambiguity as the claimed meaning of the sentence is a cancellable meaning with respect to the sentence in question but there is no pragmatic-interpretation of the required sort available on the occasion. What is said here about a sentence, its meaning(s) and possible pragmatic-interpretation is also true of an expression, its meaning(s) and possible pragmatic-interpretation.

Now, as I have mentioned earlier, I am inclined to restrict the term conventional meaning in a way so that it includes only semantic meanings of expressions/sentences. So, I adopt the above mentioned qualifications (of the semantic meaning) as qualificatory conditions for a meaning of an expression/sentence to be counted as a conventional meaning of that expression/sentence. By adding the above mentioned qualificatory conditions I now redefine the term conventional meaning in the following way:

That  $p$  is a conventional meaning of  $e$  in  $L$  iff (i) in  $L$  there is a linguistic regularity of using  $e$  to mean that  $p$  on various occasions, and (ii) either it is incoherent, in  $L$ , to say: “ $e$  but [and] it is not the case that  $p$ ”, or although that  $p$  is a meaning of  $e$  (*i.e.* (i) is satisfied by  $p$ ) and a speaker uses  $e$ —or can use it—to mean that  $p$  on various occasions, there is no pragmatic-interpretation on which that  $p$  counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses  $e$ —or can use it—on various occasions (*i.e.* the speaker uses  $e$ —or can use it—to mean that  $p$  when no pragmatic-interpretation is available to use it with that meaning).

If a meaning with which a speaker uses a particular expression/sentence on a particular occasion is not a conventional meaning of that expression/sentence, then that meaning is a non-conventional meaning with which the speaker uses the expression/sentence on the particular occasion.

Granting the above definition of conventional meaning I offer the following two distinguishing criteria (henceforth, *DC*) the first of which distinguishes between semantics and pragmatics and the second of which distinguishes between a semantic meaning of a sentence and a pragmatic meaning with which a sentence is used by a speaker on an occasion.

*DC-1:* Semantics deals with the conventional meanings of expressions/sentences in a language whereas pragmatics deals with—in addition to various contextual features of an occasion on which an expression/sentence is used—the non-conventional meanings with which expressions/sentences are used by speakers on particular occasions.

*DC-2*: A semantic meaning of an expression/sentence is either a non-cancellable meaning of that expression/sentence or (if the claimed meaning is cancellable with respect to the expression/sentence) a meaning that does not have any pragmatic-interpretation on which it would count as a meaning with which the speaker uses the expression/sentence in question even though that is a meaning of the expression/sentence in question (a speaker may use it with that meaning but without having a pragmatic-interpretation of the above sort). On the other hand, a pragmatic meaning with which an expression/sentence is used by a speaker on a particular occasion is a cancellable meaning with respect to the expression/sentence used and has a pragmatic-interpretation on which it counts as a meaning with which it is used by a speaker on the particular occasion.

Armed with *DC-1* and *DC-2* we can now reexamine Kripke's evaluation of Donnellan's distinction. It is easily observable that Kripke's semantic reference of an expression is determined by the conventional meaning of the relevant expression as (i) it is determined by the linguistic regularity of how users of English regularly use the expression in question on various occasions of its use, *i.e.* it satisfies the condition (i) of the conventional meaning, and (ii) it satisfies the condition (ii) of the conventional meaning as it passes the cancellability test. For example, the semantic reference of the phrase "her husband" in Kripke's example of the sentence "Her husband is kind to her" is fixed by taking *a unique person who is married to her* as the meaning of the definite description "her husband". This conforms to how users of English regularly use the definite description "her husband" on various occasions. So, it satisfies the condition (i) of the conventional meaning. Now, in English, it is incoherent to say: "Her husband is kind to her, but it is not the case that a unique person who is married to her is kind to her." So, by the definition of the conventional meaning proposed in this dissertation, *a unique person who is married to her* is the conventional meaning of the definite description "her husband". Hence, by *DC-1*, Kripke's semantic reference is an issue of semantics. On the other hand, Kripke's speaker's reference of an expression is not fixed

by the conventional meaning of the relevant expression as (i) it is not determined by the linguistic regularity of how users of English regularly use the expression in question on various occasions of its use, *i.e.* it fails to satisfy the condition (i) of the conventional meaning, and (ii) it fails to pass the cancellability test and has a pragmatic-interpretation on which it counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses the expression on a particular occasion, *i.e.* it fails to satisfy the condition (ii) of the conventional meaning. For example, the speaker's reference of the expression "her husband" in Kripke's example is the person Jones. But it is not the case that in English there is a regularity of using the phrase "her husband" to mean *Jones* (or any other particular person) on various occasions on which the phrase in question is used. So, it does not satisfy the condition (i) of the conventional meaning. Again, it does not pass the cancellability test as in English it is not incoherent to say: "Her husband is kind to her but it is not the case that Jones is kind to her"; and there is a pragmatic-interpretation on which it counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses the phrase "her husband" on the particular occasion. This pragmatic-interpretation includes, with other things, the speaker's specific intention to refer to the particular person Jones by her use of the expression "her husband" (contained in the sentence "Her husband is kind to her") on the given occasion, the speaker's expectation that her audiences are able to recognize her above mentioned intention, etc. At any rate, Kripke's speaker reference does not satisfy the condition (ii) of the conventional meaning; it, rather, is a non-conventional meaning with which the speaker uses the relevant expression on the given occasion. So, by *DC-1*, Kripke's speaker's reference is an issue of pragmatics. And, by *DC-2*, Kripke's semantic reference is the semantic meaning of the relevant phrase as his semantic reference is a non-cancellable meaning of the relevant phrase whereas his speaker's reference, again by *DC-2*, is a pragmatic meaning with which the speaker uses the relevant expression on the given occasion as it is a cancellable meaning with respect to the expression used by the speaker and a pragmatic-interpretation is available on which it counts as a meaning (with which the speaker uses the expression) on the given occasion (*i.e.* in this case we are not forced to posit a semantic ambiguity). Now, it is plain that the alleged different meaning (other

than the meaning specified by Russell) of a sentence containing a definite description (used referentially) arising from Donnellan's distinction concerns the speaker's reference of the definite description on a particular occasion. Hence, by *DC-1*, it is an issue of pragmatics, not of semantics; and, by *DC-2*, the alleged different meaning is a pragmatic meaning with which the speaker uses the sentence in question on the particular occasion—it is not the semantic meaning of the sentence used but the meaning with which the speaker uses the relevant sentence on the particular occasion. So, Donnellan's distinction does not establish any semantic ambiguity in sentences containing definite descriptions. What it does is to raise an issue of pragmatics. But Russell's theory, as mentioned earlier, is not a theory of pragmatics; hence, it does not need to address that issue. So, Donnellan's distinction seems to be irrelevant to Russell's theory; and that is why it fails to undermine Russell's theory. At any rate, Kripke's evaluation of Donnellan's distinction appears to be correct, and the argument from Donnellan's Distinction does not pose any real threat to Russell's theory.

The line of thought Kripke advances seems to me the correct way of evaluating the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction. I am actually inclined to conclude, agreeing with Kripke, that the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction poses no real threat to Russell's theory of definite descriptions. But it will be unjust if Donnellan's later defense of his distinction made in his 1978 paper titled "Speaker Reference, Descriptions, and Anaphora"<sup>222</sup> is not addressed before making a final statement about his distinction. In his 1978 paper Donnellan argues for the semantic significance of the referential/attributive distinction as, he believes, if this distinction does not have any semantic significance, then "it is not clear what importance we should attach to the distinction in the philosophy of language".<sup>223</sup> In order to show the semantic significance of the referential/attributive distinction Donnellan

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<sup>222</sup> Keith Donnellan, "Speaker Reference, Descriptions and Anaphora", *Syntax and Semantics 9: Pragmatics*, ed. Peter Cole (New York, San Francisco and London: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 47-68.; it is interesting to note here that many of the arguments Donnellan offers in this paper appear as if they are devised in reply to Kripke's arguments offered in his "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference" published in 1977. The title of Donnellan's paper makes this idea more probable. But, actually that is not the case. Rather, Donnellan had handed his paper to the publisher before Kripke published his paper.

<sup>223</sup> Donnellan (1978), p. 47.

offers arguments derived from a consideration of the phenomenon of anaphoric uses of definite descriptions (as well as pronouns). His main argument runs in the following way: consider the sentence (40) that contains two sentences in which, according to Donnellan, the initial sentence serves to introduce a particular person about whom the speaker wishes to make further assertions, and the subsequent sentence involves an anaphoric pronoun that refers to the person introduced in the initial sentence:<sup>224</sup>

(40) *A man* came to the office today. *He* tried to sell me an encyclopedia.

Here, according to Donnellan, the particular person who is introduced by the speaker's use of the initial sentence of (40) is not essentially the only person who came to the office on the given day.<sup>225</sup> However, the pronoun "he" contained in the second sentence of (40) is anaphoric and is linked with the phrase "a man" contained in the initial sentence of (40); they refer to the same person. If they referred to two different persons, then (40) would have the same reading as that of (41):

(41) *A man* came to the office today. *A man* tried to sell me an encyclopedia.

But it is natural to think that (41) has a different reading than that of (40); (41) says of two potentially distinct persons (one who came to the office on the given day, and another who tried to sell an encyclopedia to the speaker) whereas (40) says of one person (who came to the office and tried to sell an encyclopedia to the speaker).<sup>226</sup> Now, Donnellan seems to think that the proposition expressed by the initial sentence of (40) is true only if the particular person who is introduced by the (initial) sentence came to the office on the given day.<sup>227</sup> So, in Donnellan's analysis, the particular person introduced by the (initial) sentence is the semantic referent of the phrase "a man" (indefinite description) of the initial sentence of (40). Again, the truth of the proposition expressed by the second sentence (containing the pronoun "he") of (40) depends on whether or not the particular person who is the semantic referent of the phrase "a man" of the initial

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<sup>224</sup> This example is adopted from: Donnellan (1978), p. 57.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61.

sentence of (40) tried to sell an encyclopedia to the speaker. That is, the semantic referent of the phrase “a man” of the initial sentence of (40) is the semantic referent of the pronoun “he” of the second sentence of (40) too. In other words, the anaphoric pronoun (*i.e.* “he”) of the second sentence of (40) has as its semantic referent the person introduced by the initial sentence of (40). Here, it is important to note that according to Donnellan even if the particular person introduced in the first sentence of (40) does not have the property that is attributed to him (*e.g.* if the man referred to actually came to the office one day before the day indicated in the speaker’s utterance), the speaker may still succeed in introducing that particular person about whom she may make a true assertion in the latter sentence. Of course, in that case the initial sentence of (40) will express a false proposition.<sup>228</sup> At any rate, whether or not the initial sentence of (40) expresses a true proposition, the anaphoric pronoun “he” contained in the second sentence has the particular person introduced in the initial sentence of (40) as its semantic referent.

Now, consider the following sentences<sup>229</sup>:

(40a) *A man* came to the office today. *The man* tried to sell me an encyclopedia.

(40b) *A man* came to the office today. *The man who came to the office today* tried to sell me an encyclopedia.

According to Donnellan (40a) and (40b) are equivalent; the only difference between them is that (40b) contains an expansion of the definite description “the man” contained in (40a), and this difference does not affect their truth-conditions.<sup>230</sup> Donnellan claims that the sentences containing anaphoric descriptions, *i.e.* (40a) and (40b), are equivalent to the corresponding sentence containing anaphoric pronoun, *i.e.* (40). For, in each of (40a) and (40b), by substituting a definite description in the place of the pronoun “he” what is added in the relevant sentence is nothing but a simple repetition of the same information; this addition does not have a bearing on their truth-conditions. Donnellan says:

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>229</sup> These examples are adopted from: Donnellan (1978), p.58.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[These sort of] repetition of information makes the discourse sound like the awkward language of a children's first reader; the equivalence nevertheless hold.<sup>231</sup>

So, according to Donnellan (40) is equivalent to (40a) as well as to (40b). But, as Donnellan has argued, in the case of (40) the anaphoric pronoun "he" has the person introduced in the initial sentence of (40) as its semantic referent. Now, Donnellan seems to think, the phenomena that (40) is equivalent to (40a) and (40b), and that (40a) and (40b) are obtained just by substituting the anaphoric pronoun of (40), *i.e.* "he", by definite descriptions (that contain the same information), *i.e.* "the man" and "the man who came to the office today" respectively, indicate that the anaphoric definite descriptions used in (40a) and (40b) have as their semantic referent the particular person (who is the semantic referent of "he" in (40)) who is introduced in the initial sentence of (40). Again, Donnellan has argued that whether or not the particular person introduced in the initial sentence of (40) is the unique person in the relevant context, or whether or not that particular person satisfies the definite description in question at all, he remains as the semantic referent of the anaphoric pronoun.<sup>232</sup> This indicates that according to Donnellan in the cases of (40a) and (40b) the particular person introduced in their respective initial sentences remains the semantic referent of their subsequent sentences even if the person introduced fails to satisfy the uniqueness condition or if he fails to satisfy the definite description which is used to refer to him. That means that Donnellan regards anaphoric definite descriptions semantically referential.<sup>233</sup> Now, if anaphoric definite descriptions used in (40a) and (40b) are semantically referential, then each of the second sentences of (40a) and (40b) expresses a singular proposition that attributes to the particular person whom the speaker is referring to (the person who is introduced in the relevant initial sentence) the property of trying to sell the speaker an encyclopedia. In short, according to Donnellan, a sentence containing a referentially used anaphoric description semantically

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>233</sup> Soames' interpretation of Donnellan's arguments offered in Donnellan's 1978 paper; Scott Soames, "Donnellan's Referential/Attributive Distinction", *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 73, no. 2/3 (1994), p. 157.

expresses a singular proposition that attributes a property to the object (usually somehow introduced in the context of conversation) the speaker has in mind and wants to refer to by means of the definite description used.

After arguing for the claim that a sentence containing a referentially used anaphoric definite description semantically expresses a singular proposition that attributes a property to the particular object the speaker has in mind and wants to refer to by means of the definite description used, Donnellan claims that the difference between a referentially used anaphoric definite description and a referentially used non-anaphoric definite description is nothing but a matter of the speaker's intentions and expectations to her audiences. Donnellan says:

First let me say something about how I view these two constructions—the definite description introduced tout court and the definite description anaphorically linked. In referential contexts, those where speaker reference is present, the choice of which construction to use is, I believe, a matter of the speaker's expectations and intentions toward his audience: does he expect and intend that they will recognize who or what he has in mind? If he does, then he will use a definite description with no further introduction. If not, he will begin with an introduction via an indefinite description. What the latter does, so to speak, is to announce that the speaker intends to speak about a particular thing or particular things following under a certain description- for example he intends to speak of a particular king or a particular man or particular men who came to the office. There is no implication in most cases that he will speak of everything falling under the description. Having done this, he can then go on to use a definite description or a pronoun to refer to what he wants to talk about. Where the speaker intends and expects his audience to be able to recognize what he speaks about from the description used (plus attendant circumstances), such an introduction is otiose.<sup>234</sup>

That is, when a speaker intends and expects her audiences to be able to recognize the object she speaks about from the definite description she uses, she won't need to use an

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<sup>234</sup> Donnellan (1978), p. 64.

initial sentence to introduce the particular object she wants to talk about. In this case she uses the definite description non-anaphorically. But, if the speaker thinks that her audiences may not be able to recognize her intended referent from the definite description she wants to use, then she begins with an introduction (in the initial sentence) of her intended referent via an indefinite description. In that case she uses the definite description anaphorically. According to Donnellan this difference is not a significant difference as it does not have any import in the truth-conditions of the relevant sentences or in the determination of the semantic referent of the relevant definite descriptions. In short, according to Donnellan, there is no real difference between a referentially used anaphoric definite description and a referentially used non-anaphoric definite description with respect to the truth-conditions of the sentences containing them or with respect to the semantic referent they refer to.<sup>235</sup>

Now, since there is no real difference between a referentially used anaphoric definite description and a referentially used non-anaphoric definite description with respect to the truth-conditions of the sentences containing them or with respect to the semantic referent they refer to, a sentence containing a referentially used non-anaphoric definite description, just like the corresponding sentence containing a referentially used anaphoric definite description, semantically expresses a singular proposition that attributes a property to the particular object the speaker has in mind and wants to talk about. And, a sentence containing an attributively used definite description (anaphoric or non-anaphoric) semantically expresses a general proposition. So, the referential/attributional distinction bears semantic significance. This is how Donnellan, in his 1978 paper, argues for his views (i) that a sentence containing a referentially used definite description expresses a singular proposition, and (ii) that the referential/attributional distinction bears semantic significance.

In order to examine whether or not Donnellan's arguments really provide good grounds for his views stated in (i) and (ii) above, let us restate the whole of his arguments in the following way:

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

P1: If a referentially used anaphoric definite description semantically refers to a particular object the speaker (of the sentence containing that anaphoric definite description) has in mind and intends to talk about, then a sentence containing a referentially used anaphoric definite description semantically expresses a singular proposition about a particular object the speaker has in mind and intends to talk about.

P2: A referentially used anaphoric definite description semantically refers to a particular object the speaker (of the sentence containing that anaphoric definite description) has in mind and intends to talk about.

C1: Therefore, a sentence containing a referentially used anaphoric definite description semantically expresses a singular proposition about a particular object the speaker has in mind and intends to talk about.

P3: If C1, then a sentence containing a referentially used non-anaphoric definite description semantically expresses a singular proposition about a particular object the speaker has in mind and intends to talk about.<sup>236</sup>

P4: C1

C2: Therefore, a sentence containing a referentially used non-anaphoric definite description semantically expresses a singular proposition about a particular object the speaker has in mind and intends to talk about.

P5: If C2, then the referential/attributive distinction is semantically significant.<sup>237</sup>

P6: C2

C3: Therefore, the referential/attributive distinction is semantically significant.

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<sup>236</sup> The truth of P3 depends on the truth of Donnellan's claim that there is no significant difference between a referentially used anaphoric definite description and a referentially used non-anaphoric definite description, and hence, there is no significant difference between a sentence containing a referentially used anaphoric definite description and a referentially used non-anaphoric definite description. (see: Donnellan (1978), p. 64.). For the sake of argument I take Donnellan's claim as true.

<sup>237</sup> For, a sentence containing an attributively used definite description (anaphoric or non-anaphoric) semantically expresses a general proposition whereas, as it is claimed, a sentence containing a referentially used definite description semantically expresses a singular proposition.

Now, without questioning the validity of Donnellan's arguments it can be claimed that the truth of his conclusions, *i.e.* C1, C2 and C3, are not guaranteed; they are actually false. Let us consider first his first argument stated in P1-C1 above. The argument seems to be valid. But the argument does not establish the truth of its conclusion. In fact, the conclusion of this argument is false. To show that this argument fails to establish the truth of its conclusion, *i.e.* the truth of C1, what is needed is to show that at least one of its premises, *i.e.* P1 or P2, is false. My target here is P2. For, there are clear cases in which, we see, a speaker who referentially uses an anaphoric definite description (or an anaphoric pronoun) does not have a particular object in mind as the referent of the anaphoric definite description (or the anaphoric pronoun) she uses, and so no particular object is semantically referred to by her use of the anaphoric definite description (or the anaphoric pronoun). For example, consider the following conversation:

A: A thief entered my home yesterday while I was not at home. *The thief* stole my laptop, and I am afraid *he* will be back.

B: I think, you are right that *he* will come back. But *he* will come back to return your laptop. For, I believe that *he* is not a thief but one of your friends. *He* must be doing a practical joke with you. What do you think?

A: That is not impossible.

The above conversation is proper. And it is clear from the conversation that none of the participants of the conversation has a definite idea about who the intruder was; they are not actually talking about any particular person. A's last sentence, *i.e.* "That is not impossible", makes it clearer that she does not have any particular person in mind as the referent of her referentially used anaphoric definite description "the thief" or the anaphoric pronoun "he". The same is true of B's uses of the anaphoric pronoun "he". The phenomenon that they do not have any particular person in mind as the referent of their referentially used anaphoric definite description "the thief" and the anaphoric pronoun "he" does not prevent them from properly using these. So, it can reasonably be claimed that it is not true that a referentially used anaphoric definite description (or a referentially used anaphoric pronoun) always semantically refers to a particular object the speaker has in mind. Hence, P2 is false. So, the truth of C1 is not confirmed.

To show that C1 is actually false I borrow an example (with some modifications) from Soames' "Donnellan's Referential/Attributive Distinction"<sup>238</sup>:

Suppose that a speaker A assertively utters the sentence (40) or (40a) to her audience B. Suppose again that A realizes that B is not in a position to recognize the particular person she has in mind, and B actually does not recognize the particular person A has in mind.

Here, B—though she has no idea about the particular person that A has in mind—should be able to report what A has said (after hearing A's utterance of (40) or (40a)). That is, (42), as said by B, should be true:

(42) A said that *a man* came to the office today. A also said that *he (the man)* tried to sell her an encyclopedia.

And (42a) which reports B's assertion should also be true:

(42a) B asserted that A said that *a man* came to the office today. B also asserted that A said that *he (the man)* tried to sell her an encyclopedia.

Now, Soames contrasts the above observations with a case in which the speaker assertively utters a sentence containing a non-anaphoric pronoun (accompanied by an appropriate gesture pointing to the person she has in mind) attempting to assert a genuine singular proposition about the person she referred to even though her audience is not in a position to recognize the particular person the speaker refers to. Soames' description of the case, roughly, is as follows:<sup>239</sup>

A assertively utters the sentence "He is obnoxious", without any anaphoric linking, attempting to assert the singular proposition about the particular person *m* that *m* was obnoxious. Suppose, her audience B is not in a position to see, locate, or identify *m* in any way. That is, B cannot recognize the person A has in mind in uttering the above sentence which expresses the singular proposition that *m* is obnoxious.

Now, in the case just mentioned above A's audience B is not in a position to report the singular proposition A has asserted, namely the singular proposition that *m* is obnoxious.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Soames (1994), p. 160.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>240</sup> Even when B meets *m*, he is not in a position to report to *m* that "A says of you that you are obnoxious".

But the thing is different in the case involving A's use of (40) or (40a). In this case the audience B can successfully report A's assertion (*i.e.* (42)) even though she is unable to recognize the particular person about whom A *might have asserted a singular proposition*. This phenomenon suggests that in the case involving A's use of (40) or (40a) the proposition asserted by the speaker actually is not a singular proposition but rather a general one which is available to both—the speaker A and her audience B (otherwise B would not be able to report what A said by uttering (40) or (40a)). Here, (40a) involves a referentially used anaphoric definite description. So, it is proved that a sentence containing a referentially used anaphoric definite description may not express a singular proposition. To reconfirm this, *i.e.* that a sentence containing a referentially used anaphoric definite description may not express a singular proposition, consider again (42a) which reports B's assertion about what was said by A's utterance of (40) or (40a). If (42a) is true and the second sentence of (40) or (40a) expresses a singular proposition about a particular person A had in mind, then the following sentences are true<sup>241</sup>:

(43) There is some man such that B asserted (of that man) that A said that he tried to sell her an encyclopedia.

(43a) B asserted that A said that you tried to sell her an encyclopedia.

[Addressing the particular person A had in mind when she uttered (40) or (40a)]

But, since in the given scenario B had no idea about whom A was talking (other than the idea that the person about whom A was talking was a male person as A was using the anaphoric pronoun “he” or the anaphoric definite description “the man”), when she confronts with any person she won't agree that she asserted of that particular person that A said anything about him.<sup>242</sup> So, (43) is not true. The same will happen if B confronts with the person A had in mind when she uttered (40) or (40a); B won't agree that she asserted of him that A said something about him by uttering (40) or (40a). So, like (42), (43a) is also false. Since (43) and (43a) are false, either (42a) is false or the second sentence of (40) or (40a) does not express a singular proposition. But, as we have seen earlier, in the given

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<sup>241</sup> Soames (1994), p. 162.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

scenario (42a) is not false. Hence, the second sentence of (40) or (40a) does not express a singular proposition.<sup>243</sup> And, the second sentence of (40) or (40a) is the sentence that contains a referentially used anaphoric pronoun or an anaphoric definite description. So, again, it is proved that a sentence containing a referentially used anaphoric definite description may not express a singular proposition. Hence, C1 is false. Since C1 is false, the truth of the conclusion C2 of the argument stated in P3-C2 is not guaranteed as C1 is used as a premise (the premise P4) of the argument in question. Again, since the truth of C2 is not guaranteed, the truth of the conclusion C3 of the argument stated in P5-C3 is not guaranteed either as C2 is used as a premise (the premise P6) of the argument in question. So, we see, Donnellan's arguments offered in his 1978 paper neither establish the idea that a sentence containing a referentially used definite description expresses a singular proposition, nor does it establish the view that the referential/attributional distinction bears semantic significance. In short, Donnellan's arguments offered in his 1978 paper provide no real defense for his views.

Although Donnellan has failed to establish the views that a sentence containing a referentially used definite description may express a singular proposition and that his referential/attributional distinction bears semantic significance, there are other philosophers who have defended these ideas. Michael Devitt is one of the strong defenders of the above views. Devitt, in his "The Case for Referential Descriptions", argues for the semantic significance of what he calls referential descriptions (RD).<sup>244</sup> He observes that in English there is a regularity of using the definite description 'the *F*' in the sentence 'The *F* is *G*' to express a singular thought about a particular object the speaker has in mind; and her

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>244</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 281 & footnote-5.; Referential description (RD) is *not* just the referential use of definite descriptions. According to the notion of referential description (RD) it is a semantic—not a pragmatic—fact that a definite description, when it is used referentially by a speaker, refers to a particular object the speaker has in mind, and that the sentence containing the description in question depends for its truth on that reference. Other than Devitt, Howard K. Wettstein (Wettstein (1981), pp. 241-257. & Howard K. Wettstein, "The Semantic Significance of the Referential/Attributional Distinction", *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 44, no. 2 (1983), pp. 187-96.), Marga Reimer (Marga Reimer, "Donnellan's Distinction/Kripke's Test", *Analysis* 58, no. 2 (1998), pp. 89-100), Barbara Abbott (Barbara Abbott, *Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 140-57) and so on maintain that the notion of referential descriptions (RD)—not the notion that definite descriptions may sometimes be used referentially—gives the correct analysis of definite descriptions.

(the speaker's) audiences can understand immediately and directly which object she means to refer. Devitt claims that this sort of regularity of using a definite description like 'the  $F$ ' in a sentence like 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ' to express a singular thought about a particular object provides strong evidence for the idea that there is a convention of using a definite description to express a singular thought about a particular object.<sup>245</sup> So, in Devitt's analysis there are two sorts of convention regarding the use of 'the  $F$ ': (i) there is a convention of using 'the  $F$ '—with a certain sort of meaning—that concerns whatever (if there is any) uniquely fits the definite description 'the  $F$ '. This sort of use of definite descriptions is what is called attributive use of definite descriptions. And, (ii) there is a convention of using 'the  $F$ '—with a certain sort of meaning—that concerns a particular object the speaker already has in mind and intends to talk about. This sort of use of definite descriptions is what is called referential use of definite descriptions. Now, according to Devitt, if the first convention is semantic (and it is generally agreed that it is semantic), then there is no reason to deny that the second convention is also semantic. Devitt says:

When a person has a thought with a particular  $F$  object in mind, there is a regularity of using 'the  $F$ ' to express that thought. ... This regularity is strong evidence that there is a convention of using 'the  $F$ ' to express a thought about a particular  $F$ , that this is a standard use. This convention is semantic, as semantic as the one for an attributive use. In each case, there is a convention of using 'the  $F$ ' to express a thought with a certain sort of meaning/content.<sup>246</sup>

That means that, in Devitt's analysis, a definite description used in a sentence may have the following two sorts of meaning:

- (i) Attributive meaning: the attributive meaning of a definite description is salient when the definite description is used attributively in a sentence to express a general thought that concerns whatever (if there is any) uniquely fits the definite description in question. The attributive meaning of 'the  $F$ ' (when 'the  $F$ ' is used attributively in the sentence 'The  $F$  is  $G$ ') is: *whatever is alone in being  $F$ .*<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 283.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

(ii) Referential meaning: the referential meaning of a definite description is salient when the definite description is used referentially in a sentence to express a singular thought about a particular object the speaker has in mind and intends to talk about. The meaning of 'the *F*' (when 'the *F*' is used referentially in the sentence 'The *F* is *G*') is: *o* (where *o* is the particular object the speaker has in mind and intends to talk about).<sup>248</sup>

Devitt thinks that both of the above sorts of meaning of a definite description have the same status of semantic significance since both of them are products of linguistic conventions existing in the language in question.

Devitt anticipates that a critic of his view has two possible options: (1) she may respond by denying that definite descriptions are regularly used referentially. But this response will be implausible as Donnellan and many other philosophers have shown with lot of examples that we do regularly use sentences containing referentially used definite descriptions to express singular thoughts about particular objects. So, this option is not a good option for her. (2) She may accept that there is a regularity of using sentences containing referentially used definite descriptions to express singular thoughts, but she may claim that this phenomenon can be explained in the Gricean way. Grice, in his "Logic and Conversation", has shown that on an occasion a speaker may use a sentence to mean ("implicate" in the Gricean terminology) something which is not the literal meaning of that sentence. In such a case, the speaker's audiences may well understand that what is meant by the speaker is not the literal meaning of the sentence she utters but something else. They know it on the basis of: (i) the conventional meaning of the sentence the speaker utters (although what is meant by the speaker is different from the conventional meaning of the sentence she uses), (ii) some conversational maxims and cooperative principles, (iii) the context of utterance, (iv) various items of background knowledge, and (v) the fact that (i)-(iv) is available to the speaker and her audiences, and

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

that both parties know this fact.<sup>249</sup> Actually, by (i)-(v), the speaker's audiences make a derivation by which they get to know what is meant (implicated) by the speaker on the given occasion. Consider, for example<sup>250</sup>, the following conversation:

A: Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.

B: He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.

Here, what B's sentence literally means is that Smith has made a number of visits to New York in the recent past. But that is not what B means by his sentence. What B means by his sentence is that Smith has, or may have, girlfriend in New York. And, by (i)-(v), A gets to know it. Here, what is conversationally meant by B is called *conversational implicature* ("implicature" is the noun related to the verb "implicate").<sup>251</sup> It should be noted here that the generation of a conversational implicature is a kind of convention by which what a speaker implicates by using a sentence on an occasion is derived by her audiences. But, still, the generation of a conversational implicature is an issue of pragmatics as it deals with the sort of meaning which is derived from various contextual features (*e.g.* conversational maxims, cooperative principles, items of background knowledge, etc.) related to the occasion on which the relevant expression/sentence is used. Now, Devitt anticipates that armed with the Gricean ideas the critic of his view may argue that in the case of a referential use of a definite description a Gricean derivation may yield a conversational implicature, and thereby, what is implicated by the speaker, on the occasion on which she uses a sentence containing a referentially used definite description, can be derived from various factors mentioned in (i)-(v) above. And, as is mentioned above, the generation of conversational implicature is an issue of pragmatics, not of semantics. So, the critic may conclude in the following way: there is no need to see the convention of using definite descriptions referentially (to express a singular thought) as a semantic convention; rather, it can be seen as a derived pragmatic convention. Devitt, however, does not agree with this line of thought. He thinks that the above mentioned line of thought is based on the following view:

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<sup>249</sup> Grice (1975/1989), p. 31.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

... where an utterance has a conventional meaning and we can derive a speaker meaning (implicature) from this conventional meaning with the help of appropriate assumptions about the context and mind of the speaker, there is no need to suppose that this derived meaning is another conventional meaning.<sup>252</sup>

According to Devitt there is something deeply wrong with this view. To show that there is something wrong with this view Devitt gives examples of what he calls *dead metaphors*.<sup>253</sup> A metaphorical term has a speakers' meaning which is different from its literal meaning. The speakers' meaning that a metaphorical term has is derived from its conventional meaning which can be explained in terms of the generation of a Gricean implicature. But a metaphor may die in the sense that what was once a metaphorical (derived) meaning of an expression may, in time, become that expression's conventional meaning. Here, Devitt borrows the example of the verb "incense" from Marga Reimer.<sup>254</sup> The verb "incense" literally means *to make fragrant with incense*. Once this word was metaphorically used to mean *to make very angry*. A metaphorical meaning is not a literal but a sort of speakers' meaning. However, nowadays the verb "incense" is commonly used to mean *to make very angry*. That is, what once was the metaphorical meaning of the verb "incense" has become its conventional meaning now. On the basis of this observation Devitt claims that it is wrong to think that a meaning of an expression which is derived from a speakers' meaning cannot, in time, become another conventional meaning of that expression. But, according to Devitt the line of thought taken by his anticipated critic is founded on the above mentioned wrong view, *i.e.* the view that a derived meaning of an expression cannot, in time, become a conventional meaning of that expression. So, Devitt thinks that his critic's line of thought deserves to be rejected. Furthermore, although even now one can make a Gricean derivation to show that that *to make very angry* once was a speakers' meaning of the verb "incense", and then, in time, it has become a derived meaning of that expression, but, according to Devitt, that is not how speakers of English now grasp the verb "incense" as to mean *to make*

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<sup>252</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 284.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, p. 285.

<sup>254</sup> Reimer (1998), pp. 97-98.

*very angry*. Rather, according to Devitt, speakers of English now grasp the verb “incense” as to mean *to make very angry* immediately and directly because that is the meaning the verb “incense” now conventionally has. In the same way people, Devitt claims, grasp what a speaker means by a referentially used definite description (*i.e.* the alleged referential meaning of a referentially used definite description) immediately and directly without making a Gricean derivation. People grasp the referential meaning of a referentially used definite description immediately and directly because that is the meaning that a referentially used definite description conventionally has. And, Devitt sees no good reason to deny that this convention of using a definite description referentially with its referential meaning is not a semantic convention. Supporting Devitt’s position, Barbara Abbott argues that users of English have been using sentences containing referentially used definite descriptions to express singular thoughts about their intended particular referents for at least a thousand years. This phenomenon, she seems to think, confirms that referential descriptions (RD) have got a sort of semantic meaning which is different from the sort of meaning (attributive meaning) definite descriptions have when they are used attributively.<sup>255</sup> In a footnote in her *Reference* Abbott claims that historically the referential meaning of a definite description is the original meaning of it, and the attributive meaning is the newcomer.<sup>256</sup> At any rate, Devitt and Abbott think that the phenomenon that there is a sort of linguistic regularity of using sentences containing referentially used definite descriptions to express singular thoughts is strong evidence for the view that the alleged referential meaning of a referential description (RD) is a semantic meaning of it.

To provide a strong ground for his above mentioned view Devitt makes an analogy between the referential use of ‘the *F*’ and the use of a deictic (non-anaphoric) complex demonstrative like ‘that *F*’. He argues that if, for the demonstrative case, the convention of expressing a singular thought by a particular use of ‘That *F* is *G*’ is semantically significant, then, for the case of referential descriptions (RD), the convention of expressing a singular thought by the sentence ‘The *F* is *G*’ must also be

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<sup>255</sup> Abbott (2010), p. 152.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 152 (footnote-23).

semantically significant.<sup>257</sup> According to Devitt, they should be given the same treatment for two reasons: (i) the referential 'the *F*' and the deictic demonstrative 'that *F*' may be substituted one for the other without any cost with respect to the goal of communicating a singular thought. When a demonstration is performed, 'that *F*' seems to be appropriate; when no demonstration is performed, 'the *F*' seems to be appropriate. But in each case, Devitt claims, 'the *F*' for 'that *F*' and 'that *F*' for 'the *F*' usually do fine.<sup>258</sup> Now, it is generally agreed that the convention for demonstrative is not pragmatic but semantic. So, Devitt claims, the convention for referential descriptions (RD) must also be semantic as, according to him, it has the same—as the one that is had by the convention for demonstratives—conventional role behind it. And, (ii) the mechanism that determines which object is in the speaker's mind in the case of a referential description (RD) (*i.e.* the mechanism in virtue of what the speaker uses a particular definite description to refer to the object she has in mind) is similar to the mechanism that determines which object is in the speaker's mind in the case of deictic complex demonstrative. According to Devitt in the case of a referential description (RD) the speaker's use of a definite description must be based on some sort of perception (*e.g.* visual perception, having a particular belief about the object the speaker has in mind, etc.) of her intended referent in virtue of what she can use the definite description in question to refer to the object she has in mind.<sup>259</sup> If there is no such perception of the speaker's intended referent, then the speaker cannot appropriately use a particular definite description to refer to that object. Devitt says:

It would seem that, for a speaker to have the object in mind, his use of the description must be based on perception of it. Further, it is *preferable* that this perception be of the face-to-face variety. ... Suppose that, at the time we come upon Smith foully murdered, we see a man fleeing in the distance whom we talk to be the murderer. Many would doubt that this is sufficient for us to have a person in mind in using 'Smith's murderer'. We would not have a *sufficient* "fix" on the object. The indubitable cases

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<sup>257</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 289.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>259</sup> Michael Devitt, "Singular Terms", *The Journal of Philosophy* 71, no. 7 (1974), p.192 & Devitt (2004), p. 290.

of having an object in mind are based on face-to-face perception of it. It is, indeed, appropriate enough that having an object *in mind* should be based on face-to-face perception of it.<sup>260</sup>

Here, the perception (of the speaker's intended referent) Devitt mentions makes a *perceptual-causal link* between the object the speaker has in mind in using a particular definite description and the speaker's use of the particular definite description to refer to that object. For, according to Devitt, it is the object itself which leads (causes) the speaker to use a particular definite description to refer that object. Devitt claims:

It was *because of* our experiences of Jones during his trial, and our beliefs about him, that we used 'Smith's murderer' in that utterance ['Smith's murderer is insane']. ... In a sense, *the object itself* leads us to use the particular definite description in such cases.<sup>261</sup>

And, if a use of a definite description is not, in Devitt's words, *causally grounded in by perception* (i.e. if the required sort of perceptual-causal link is absent), then that definite description does not appropriately refer to the intended object.<sup>262</sup> It should be noted here that although, according to Devitt, in order for a speaker to properly use a definite description to refer to a particular object it is *preferable* that her perception of the object is of the face-to-face variety, it is *not necessary* that she perceives it directly. There may be a chain of the required sort of perceptual-causal link; and a speaker may perceive that *link* without directly perceiving the *object* by herself. Devitt explains this phenomenon in the following way:

There can be a causal link of the required kind even though the speaker has had no direct experience of the object: it will be a causal connection running through others back to speakers who did experience the object. Thus, someone who has heard about our cat from me, but has never met her, can have her in mind by 'the Devitt's cat'. And we can all have Aristotle in mind by 'the philosopher who taught Alexander the great'. One can "borrow" the ability to have something in mind.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Devitt (1974), p. 192. (Sentences within brackets are omitted; Devitt's italics)

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 191. (Devitt's italics)

<sup>262</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 292.

<sup>263</sup> Devitt (1974), p. 191.

That is, in order for a speaker to use a definite description to refer to an object she has in mind, the speaker does not need to perceive the object by herself; those who perceived it may pass on the relevant perceptual-causal link (or the ability of having a certain object in mind, or the experience of the object intended to refer to) to the speaker and to others as well. What is needed here is that there must be a sort of perceptual-causal link (based on the speaker's direct perception or borrowed from others) between the speaker and her intended referent in virtue of what the speaker can properly use a particular definite description to refer to her intended referent. Devitt calls this phenomenon, *i.e.* the phenomenon that there is a sort of perceptual-causal link between the speaker and her intended referent when she referentially uses a definite description, *the mechanism that determines which object the speaker has in mind* when she referentially uses a definite description (what Devitt actually means here is that it is the above mentioned mechanism that determines which definite description is to be used by the speaker in order for her to refer to the object she has in mind).<sup>264</sup> Now, according to Devitt in the case of a deictic complex demonstrative it is plain that there is a sort of perceptual-causal link between the speaker and the object demonstrated in virtue of what the speaker uses a complex demonstrative to refer to her intended referent. But it is not necessary that the speaker perceives the object when she uses a demonstrative to refer to that object; it may be that she has perceived the object before she uses a demonstrative to refer to that object.<sup>265</sup> To Devitt, it is not important when the speaker perceives the object she intends to refer to, and how she perceives it; the important matter is that there is a perceptual-causal link between the speaker and her intended referent in virtue of what she uses the demonstrative to refer to that referent. This perceptual-causal link is important because, according to Devitt, this link is the mechanism that determines which object the speaker has in mind when she uses a deictic complex demonstrative. So, it seems that the mechanism that determines which object the speaker has in mind in the case of a referential description (RD) and the

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<sup>264</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 289.; Devitt thinks that this mechanism not only explains which object is in the speaker's mind, it also explains in virtue of what the speaker has the particular object in mind (in using a particular definite description) or in virtue of what that particular object is the intended one. [See: Devitt (2004), p. 290]

<sup>265</sup> Devitt (1974), pp. 196-97.

mechanism that determines which object is in the speaker's mind in the case of a deictic complex demonstrative is the same—a perceptual-causal link between the speaker and the object she intends to refer to.<sup>266</sup> Showing this similarity between referential descriptions (RD) and deictic complex demonstratives, Devitt claims that, like demonstratives, referential descriptions (RD) are semantically significant.

To construct a proof for his thesis that referential descriptions (RD) bear semantic significance Devitt appeals to the law of exportation. He argues that exportation from the opaque context is appropriate only when the believer is *en rapport*<sup>267</sup> with the object of belief. That is, according to Devitt, exportation from the opaque context is in order if the exported term is referential. For example<sup>268</sup>, the following exportation seems to be in order:

(44) Ralph believes that Ortcutt is a spy.

to (44a) Ortcutt is such that Ralph believes him to be a spy.

But the following exportation seems to be *not* in order:

(45) Ralph believes that the shortest spy is a spy.

to (45a) The shortest spy is such that Ralph believes him to be a spy.

According to Devitt the inference from (44) to (44a) is in order because the name “Ortcutt” is referential; and the inference from (45) to (45a) is not in order because “the shortest spy” is not referential but attributive. On the basis of this idea, Devitt then addresses Donnellan's example of Smith's murderer:

(46) Ralph believes that Smith's murderer is insane.

Devitt, then, mentions that when (46) is uttered on the basis of Ralph's comments made at the disgusting scene of crime (*i.e.* when Ralph does not have anyone in mind as a unique murderer of Smith), then the use of the definite description “Smith's murderer” is an attributive use of it (*i.e.* “Smith's murderer” is an attributive description), and it cannot be exported within (46); but when (46) is uttered on the basis of Ralph's comments made at the courtroom where Jones, the accused unique murderer of Smith, is showing unusual behavioral pattern, then the definite description “Smith's murderer” is used referentially

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<sup>266</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 289.

<sup>267</sup> Rapport with an object is explained by the perceptual-causal link to it. (Devitt (2004), p. 304.)

<sup>268</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 303-04.

(*i.e.* “Smith’s murderer” is a referential description (RD)), and it can be exported within (46). Devitt believes that this phenomenon, *i.e.* the phenomenon that in the case of an attributive description the exportation of the definite description within the relevant sentence is not in order whereas in the case of referential description (RD) the exportation of the definite description within the relevant sentence is in order, confirms that a referentially used definite description contributes in the specification of truth-conditions of the relevant sentence in a way which is different from how an attributively used definite description contributes in the specification of truth-conditions of the relevant sentence. So, Devitt thinks, the referential-attributive distinction bears on the truth-conditions of the relevant sentence, and thus, the semantic significance of referential descriptions (RD) is confirmed.<sup>269</sup>

Now, if Devitt’s analysis of referential descriptions (RD) and his arguments for their semantic significance are correct, then the ambiguity hypothesis about sentences containing definite descriptions is true; for, according to Devitt’s analysis and arguments a sentence containing a definite description may have two semantic meanings: one meaning is salient when the definite description contained in it is used attributively (*i.e.* when the relevant definite description has an attributive meaning), and the other meaning is salient when the definite description contained in it is used referentially (*i.e.* when the relevant definite description has a referential meaning). The former sort of meaning may be called the attributive meaning of the descriptive sentence (and, in the case of a definite description, the attributive meaning of the definite description), and the latter sort of meaning may be called the referential meaning of the descriptive sentence (and, in the case of a definite description, the referential meaning of the definite description).<sup>270</sup> So, if Devitt is right,

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>270</sup> The terms attributive meaning and referential meaning of a descriptive sentence may be understood in the following way: when ‘the *F*’ is used attributively in the sentence ‘The *F* is *G*’ with the meaning that *whatever is alone in being F* (or, *exactly one thing is an F*), then the sentence containing it has the attributive meaning (the attributive meaning of the sentence ‘The *F* is *G*’ is: *whatever is alone in being F is G* or *exactly one thing is an F, and whatever is an F is G*). And, when ‘the *F*’ is used referentially in the sentence ‘The *F* is *G*’ with the meaning that *o* (where *o* is the particular object the speaker has in mind and intends

then Russell's theory of definite descriptions should be treated as an inadequate analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions because it can be said then that Russell's theory ignores one sort of meaning, namely the referential meaning, of sentences containing definite descriptions. So, Devitt's analysis requires to be examined carefully.

At the beginning of my examination of Devitt's arguments I want to focus on an interesting point of Devitt's analysis of definite descriptions. According to his analysis in the case of the definite description 'the *F*' the nominal '*F*' contributes to the meaning of 'the *F*'.<sup>271</sup> He argues that the phenomenon that the sentence 'The *F* is not an *F*' is contradictory proves that the nominal '*F*' contributes to the meaning of 'the *F*'. According to Devitt if it is not granted that the nominal '*F*' contributes to the meaning of 'the *F*', then it is hard to see why 'The *F* is not an *F*' is contradictory.<sup>272</sup> Now, the question is: how does the nominal '*F*' contribute to the meaning of 'the *F*' when it is used referentially? Devitt answers this question when he responds to Nathan Salmon's claim that the sentence "The murderer is insane" is not true with respect to a world where no murder is committed by anyone even though a speaker, in such a world, may refer to a particular person, say Jones, by referentially using the definite description "the murderer".<sup>273</sup> In his "The Case for Referential Descriptions" Devitt says:

[There are] three ways in which 'murderer' might contribute [to the meaning of 'the murderer']. First, it might play a role in determining the reference of 'the murderer'. Then, in the actual world, 'the murderer' will designate Jones, the person the speaker has in mind, *only if he is a*

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*to talk about*), then the sentence containing it has a referential meaning (the referential meaning of the sentence 'The *F* is *G*' is: *o is G*).

<sup>271</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 291.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>273</sup> Nathan Salmon, "Assertion and Incomplete Definite Descriptions", *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 42, no. 1 (1982), pp. 41-42.; Devitt agrees with Salmon's claim that in a world where no murder is committed by anyone, the sentence "The murderer is insane" is not true even though a speaker, in that world, may succeed to refer to a particular person, say Jones, by referentially using the definite description "the murderer" in the sentence "The murderer is insane". But, Devitt thinks that that phenomenon cannot be used as a criticism of his notion of RD as, according to him, his notion of RD captures the above intuition about the falsity of the sentence "The murderer is insane" in the world where no murder is committed by anyone. (See: Devitt (2004), pp. 295-96.)

*murderer. And just the same should surely go for any other possible world. The referential 'the murderer' can no more refer in any possible world to the person who is not a murderer. ...*<sup>274</sup>

In a different section of the same paper Devitt clearly states that according to the view he favors 'the *F*' designates an object to which the '*F*' is applicable and '*the F*' is *causally grounded in by perception*.<sup>275</sup> Now, it appears that if one grants the view favored by Devitt, then one needs to accept that the definite description "Smith's murderer", used referentially in the sentence "Smith's murderer is insane", cannot properly refer to Jones when Jones is not a murderer even though he may be insane and may be the person whom the speaker has in mind in using the definite description "Smith's murderer" in the sentence in question (the case of misdescribing the intended object). It happens so because of the following reasons:

- (i) According to Devitt's notion Jones can be designated by the definite description "Smith's murderer" *only if he is a murderer*. But in the above case he is not a murderer. So, the definite description "Smith's murderer" *can no more refer, in any possible world, to Jones who is not a murderer*.
- (ii) If Jones has not murdered anyone, then there cannot be any perceptual-causal link in virtue of which a speaker can properly use the definite description "Smith's murderer" to refer to Jones. But, according to Devitt's view in order for a definite description to refer to a certain object it is required that the definite description in question *is causally grounded in by perception, i.e.* it is required that the speaker perceives the link between the object and her use of the definite description in question (note that according to Devitt, it is the object itself that leads the speaker to use a particular definite description to refer to it). Due to the lack of the required sort of perceptual-causal link, the definite description "Smith's murderer" cannot refer to Jones if Jones has not murdered anyone.

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<sup>274</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 296. (my italics)

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p. 292.; by "'the *F*' is causally grounded in by perception" Devitt seems to mean that the speaker who uses 'the *F*' referentially in a sentence perceives the link between the object she has in mind and her use of the definite description 'the *F*' to refer to that object.

But, as Donnellan has correctly shown, in many circumstances a speaker may use the definite description “Smith’s murderer” in the sentence “Smith’s murderer is insane” to refer to Jones even though Jones has not murdered anyone.<sup>276</sup> Devitt grants that there are referential uses of definite descriptions which are of the above sort (cases of misdescribing the intended objects). Now, the question is: what is the truth-value of the proposition expressed by the sentence which contains a referentially used definite description that misdescribes the intended referent? The same question may be put in the following concrete way: what is the truth-value of the proposition expressed by the sentence “Smith’s murderer is insane” when Jones, the person who is intended to be referred to by the speaker in using the definite description “Smith’s murderer” in the above sentence, has not murdered anyone but is actually insane? To answer this question, Devitt says that in such a case the speaker does something right and something wrong.<sup>277</sup> He seems to think that in such a case the speaker does something right as she succeeds in saying (that her referent is insane) something true of her intended referent; and she does something wrong as to refer to her intended referent she uses such a definite description which does not properly describe her intended referent (to refer to her intended referent the speaker wrongly uses a definite description which actually does not apply to her intended referent). On the basis of this view Devitt claims that in the above mentioned case the proposition expressed by the sentence “Smith’s murderer is insane” is partly true and partly false.<sup>278</sup> He thinks that although what he suggests here sounds paradoxical, it is the right thing to say in the above mentioned case.<sup>279</sup> At any rate, according to Devitt the sentence “Smith’s murderer is insane” does not express a true proposition when by “Smith’s murderer” the speaker intends to refer to Jones who is insane but not a murderer. But that is not what Donnellan suggests

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<sup>276</sup> Donnellan thinks that a speaker may referentially use a definite description and succeed to refer to her intended referent even when the speaker does not believe that her intended referent fits the definite description used to refer to it. (See: Donnellan (1966), pp. 290-91.)

<sup>277</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 292. (Footnote-25)

<sup>278</sup> Devitt (1974), p. 194.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.; I, however, do not agree with Devitt in this regard. I think, when, to handle the phenomenon arising from Donnellan’s distinction, one has an available pragmatic analysis, *e.g.* Kripke’s analysis, which does not lead one to a paradoxical view about the truth-value of descriptive sentences, there is no need for one to adopt a complicated idea, *e.g.* Devitt’s partial truth and partial falsity, which leads one to a paradoxical outcome.

about the truth-value of the proposition expressed by the sentence “Smith’s murderer is insane” in the above mentioned case. He, rather, holds the view that in such a case the speaker *says something true of Jones*. And, many philosophers, including Devitt, take him to be claiming that in such a case the sentence in question expresses a true proposition.<sup>280</sup> Thus, it appears that Devitt’s analysis of definite descriptions and his specification of truth-conditions of sentences containing referentially used definite descriptions do not conform to Donnellan’s specification of truth-conditions of such sentences.

Of course, Devitt may reply to the above observation by saying that he is not arguing for Donnellan’s specification of truth-conditions of a descriptive sentence in which the relevant definite description is used referentially; rather, what he is arguing for is the claim that the alleged referential meaning of a definite description arising from Donnellan’s distinction is a semantically significant meaning of the definite description in question. That is, Devitt may claim that he is arguing just for the ambiguity hypothesis about sentences containing definite descriptions, not for Donnellan’s truth-conditions for them. But on inspection it appears that Devitt’s arguments for the ambiguity hypothesis are flawed. In his first argument, *i.e.* in his argument about the regularity of using definite descriptions to express singular thoughts, Devitt seems to maintain that:

If there is a regularity of using an expression *e* to mean that *p* in a language *L*, then that *p* must be a semantic meaning of *e* in *L*.

But this idea is not correct. It is not the case that any regularity of using an expression to mean something in a language confirms that that meaning is a semantic meaning of that expression in the language in question. As we have seen earlier, if *p* is a cancellable

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<sup>280</sup> Of course, it is not actually clear whether Donnellan intends to claim that in such a case the proposition expressed by the sentence “Smith’s murderer is insane” is true. He, rather, says that by using a definite description referentially a speaker may say something *true of the object* referred to by it even if the definite description she uses does not fit the object she refers to. But he does not claim, or at least avoids to claim, that the proposition expressed by such a sentence (which contains a referentially used definite description that does not fit the object the speaker intends to refer to) may, sometimes, be true. Devitt, however, thinks that what Donnellan actually intends to claim is that when a referentially used definite description misdescribes the object referred to by it, the sentence containing it expresses a true proposition if the object referred to by it has the property that is predicated to it. And, Devitt thinks, there Donnellan does a mistake, as, according to him, the correct thing to say here is the following: the proposition expressed by such a sentence is partly true and partly false.

meaning with respect to  $e$  in  $L$  and if there is a pragmatic-interpretation on which  $p$  counts as a meaning with which a speaker uses  $e$  on an occasion, then, by *DC-2*, that  $p$  is not a semantic meaning of  $e$  in  $L$  even though there may be a regularity of using  $e$  to mean that  $p$  by the speakers of  $L$ ; rather, in such a case, that  $p$  is a pragmatic meaning with which  $e$  is used by the speakers on particular occasions. Now, consider Donnellan-Devitt's example of "Smith's murderer". It is true that there is a regularity of using a definite description like "Smith's murderer" to mean an individual person, like Jones (or Black, or any other unique person who is described by the definite description "Smith's murderer"), the speaker has in mind. But such a meaning is a cancellable meaning with respect to the expression in question. For, although it is true that a speaker, on an occasion, may use the definite description "Smith's murderer" to mean Jones, Jones is a cancellable meaning with respect to "Smith's murderer" as it is coherent to say: "Smith's murderer is insane, but it is not the case that Jones is insane". Furthermore, in Donnellan-Devitt's example, we see, there is a pragmatic-interpretation on which Jones counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses the definite description "Smith's murderer". This pragmatic-interpretation consists of—with other things—the phenomena that Jones is accused for the murder of Smith, that he is standing on the dock, that the speaker expects that her audiences can recognize that Jones is intended to be referred to by her use of the definite description in question, etc. So, we see, Jones is a cancellable meaning with respect to the expression "Smith's murderer" even though the speaker uses that expression to mean Jones, and there is a pragmatic-interpretation on which Jones counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses the definite description "Smith's murderer" on the given occasion. So, by *DC-2*, Jones is not a semantic meaning of the definite description "Smith's murderer"; it, rather, is a pragmatic meaning with which the definite description in question is used by the speaker on the given occasion. That is, no semantic ambiguity is established here. In short, Devitt is wrong in arguing for the ambiguity hypothesis when he argues for it on the basis of a sort of linguistic regularity of using sentences containing referentially used definite descriptions to express singular thoughts.

Devitt's example of dead metaphors is interesting. It is true that a metaphor may die and that what was once a metaphorical meaning of an expression may, in time, become its conventional meaning. So is happened in the case of the verb "incense". This phenomenon indicates that what is a speaker's reference of an expression at a time may turn into the semantic reference of that expression in the course of time. Even Kripke allows it. Toward the very end of his paper "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference" Kripke says:

... I find it plausible that a diachronic account of the evaluation of language is likely to suggest that what was originally a mere speaker's reference may, if it becomes habitual in community, evolve into a semantic reference.<sup>281</sup>

Still, this phenomenon does not provide strong evidence for Devitt's view that referential descriptions (RD) have got—because of the existing linguistic regularity of using them in descriptive sentences to express singular thoughts—semantically significant referential meanings. For, the case of dead metaphors and the case of referentially used definite descriptions are different. A competent user of a language may immediately and directly understand the now-semantic meaning of a dead metaphor without knowing its literal meaning or without having a grasp of its past-metaphorical character. For example, competent users of English may immediately and directly understand the verb "incense" as to mean *to make very angry* without knowing that once it was used to mean *to make fragrant with incense* or that once it metaphorically meant *to make very angry*. But, in the case of a definite description a user of a language cannot understand its so-called referential meaning without knowing the literal (attributive) meaning of the definite description in question. For example, a user of English won't understand (even in Donnellan's courtroom in the Scenario-2) that *Jones* (the alleged referential meaning) is meant by "Smith's murderer" in the sentence "Smith's murderer is insane" if he does not know that the definite description "Smith's murderer" literally means *a unique murderer of Smith* or, following Devitt's style, *whatever is alone in being murderer of Smith*

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<sup>281</sup> Kripke (1977), p. 271.

(attributive meaning). Kent Bach describes this difference between dead metaphors and referentially used definite descriptions in the following way:

... if you hear an utterance of ‘Kirk kicked the bucket’, you can understand the idiom ‘kick the bucket’ to mean die, without having a clue about the once-living metaphor (whatever that was) from which it was derived. In contrast ... one cannot understand a referential use of a definite description without grasping its literal, quantificational meaning.<sup>282</sup>

To undermine Bach’s claim Devitt needs to show that the literal meaning (attributive meaning) of a definite description does not play a role in determining the meaning of it when it is used referentially. But that would contradict Devitt’s own idea about the referential meaning of a referentially used definite description. For, as we have seen earlier, according to Devitt’s idea of referential meaning the “murderer” contributes to the referentially used definite description “the murderer”, and “the murderer” will designate a particular person, say Jones, only if he is a murderer. Here, by saying that the referentially used definite description “the murderer” designates a particular person Jones only if Jones is a murderer, Devitt actually agrees that the literal meaning of “murderer”, which is a part of the definite description “the murderer”, plays a role in determining the referential meaning of “the murderer”. At any rate, according to Devitt’s view the literal meaning of a definite description (or the literal meaning of a part of it) plays a role in determining the referential meaning of the definite description in question. That is why Devitt cannot deny Bach’s claim mentioned above without being inconsistent with his own view.

Besides, the now-semantic meaning of a dead metaphor passes the cancellability test. For example, in the case of “incense”, it is incoherent to say: “The boy knows how to incense his mother, but he does not know how to make her very angry”. That means that *to make very angry* is now a non-cancellable meaning of the verb “incense”. So, *to make very angry* is a semantic meaning of “incense”. But, as we have seen earlier, the

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<sup>282</sup> Kent Bach, “Descriptions: Points of Reference” *Descriptions and Beyond*, eds. Marga Reimer and Anne Bezuidenhout (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 226.

alleged referential meaning of a definite description does not pass the cancellability test and involves a pragmatic-interpretation on which it counts as a meaning. So, the issue of dead metaphors is different from the issue of referentially used definite descriptions. Hence, the example of a dead metaphor's getting a semantic meaning does not provide a strong ground for Devitt's view that the alleged referential meaning of a definite description is also a semantic meaning of that definite description. And, about Abbott's claim concerning the historical originality of the referential use of definite descriptions, it can be said that to defend Russell's unitary hypothesis it is not necessary to show that the attributive use of definite descriptions has come prior to their referential use. To defend Russell's unitary hypothesis what is needed is to show that a descriptive sentence like 'The *F* is *G*' has one and only one semantic meaning, and that meaning is: exactly one thing is an *F*, and whatever is an *F* is *G*. This meaning of 'The *F* is *G*' may be called the attributive meaning of 'The *F* is *G*'. The defenders of Russell's theory have been arguing for the claim that the attributive meaning is the only semantic meaning of a sentence containing a definite description; they do not (and need not) argue for the historical originality of the attributive use of definite descriptions. Bach clearly states this point:

To endorse the Russellian claim that definite descriptions are quantifier phrases, not referring terms, and that their attributive use is their *only strictly literal use*, does not commit one to the view that their attributive use came first and their referential use somehow developed later. It does not require the supposition that there was a time when definite descriptions were not used referentially.<sup>283</sup>

So, Abbott's remark about the historical originality of the referential use of definite descriptions does not pose a threat to the Russellian analysis of definite descriptions; it does not add a point that can strengthen the ambiguity hypothesis; what it does is just to make a controversial claim about a historical-linguistic fact.

Devitt's analogy between the referential use of 'the *F*' and the use of the deictic complex demonstrative 'that *F*' (on the basis of what he argues that, like 'that *F*', the

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

convention for 'the *F*' is semantically significant) is founded on his observation that the referential 'the *F*' and the deictic complex demonstrative 'that *F*' may be substituted one for the other without any cost with respect to the goal of communicating a singular thought—in a sentence 'the *F*' for 'that *F*' and 'that *F*' for 'the *F*' usually do fine.<sup>284</sup> But this observation is not always correct. There are cases in which 'the *F*' for 'that *F*' or 'that *F*' for 'the *F*' cannot be substituted in a sentence keeping the overall meaning of the sentence in question unchanged. Kent Bach offers an example<sup>285</sup> of such a case: suppose that several physicists have been mentioned successively in a conversation. Then, by uttering the sentence "That physicist is a genius" the speaker refers to the last physicist mentioned. But if the speaker uttered the sentence "The physicist is a genius" instead of uttering the sentence "That physicist is genius" in this case, then it would be unclear who was referred to by the speaker in uttering the sentence "The physicist is genius". That means that in the above case "That physicist" cannot be substituted by "The physicist" without any cost with respect to the goal of communicating a particular thought by the relevant sentence. So, it appears that Devitt's observation on which his analogy between the referential use of 'the *F*' and the use of deictic complex demonstrative 'that *F*' is founded is wrong; we have counterexamples to his observation. Since Devitt's above mentioned analogy is founded on a wrong observation, it cannot provide a strong support for his thesis that the convention for 'the *F*', like the convention for 'that *F*', is semantically significant. In sum, Devitt's claim that referential descriptions (RD), just like demonstratives, involve a semantically significant meaning (which is different from their attributive meaning) is unfounded.

Finally, Devitt's argument based on the law of exportation also fails to establish his thesis. What it succeeds to show is only that when a speaker uses the definite description "Smith's murderer" referentially to mean *Jones*, then it (with its speaker's meaning) can be exported within *what the speaker says* by the sentence "Ralph believes that Smith's murderer is insane", although when the speaker uses the same definite description, in the same sentence, attributively to mean, in Devitt's words, *whoever is alone in being the murderer*

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<sup>284</sup> Devitt (2004), p. 289.

<sup>285</sup> Bach (2004), p. 228.

of *Smith*, then it (with its semantic meaning) cannot be exported within *what the speaker's sentence says*. That is, the phenomenon Devitt mentions does not prove that a referentially used definite description, or following Devitt's term, a referential description (RD), has another semantic meaning other than its attributive meaning (which is uncontroversially a semantic meaning of the definite description in question); rather, it shows that a speaker may use a definite description, on an occasion, to mean something different from what is meant by the definite description she uses. Let me illuminate further on Devitt's argument based on the law of exportation in order to show that it really fails to establish his thesis. What Devitt claims in his argument is that when the definite description "Smith's murderer" is used referentially to refer to an individual, say Jones, in the following sentence:

(46) Ralph believes that Smith's murderer is insane,

then the following sentence, *i.e.* (46a), can validly be inferred from (46) by exporting "Smith's murderer" within (46):

(46a) Smith's murderer is such that Ralph believes of him that he is  
insane.

But when the definite description "Smith's murderer" is used attributively in (46), it cannot be exported within (46), and hence, (46a) cannot validly be inferred from (46). Now, Devitt finds that the only difference between the first case and the second case is that in the first case the definite description "Smith's murderer" is used referentially whereas in the second case it is used attributively. So, Devitt thinks that that difference is responsible for the phenomenon that in the first case the definite description "Smith's murderer" can be exported within (46) and that (46a) can be inferred from (46) whereas in the second case "Smith's murderer" cannot be exported within (46) and that (46a) cannot validly be inferred from (46). This, thus, leads Devitt to claim that the referential use of the definite description "Smith's murderer" in (46) and the attributive use of it in the same sentence involve two different semantic meanings (*i.e. Jones and whoever is alone in being Smith's murderer*, respectively) for what in one case the exportation of "Smith's murderer" within (46) is in order and the inference of (46a) from (46) is valid, and in the other case the exportation of "Smith's murderer" within (46) is not in order and the

inference of (46a) from (46) is not valid. Then, on the basis of this finding, Devitt claims that definite descriptions are semantically ambiguous.

I, however, think—contrary to what Devitt says—that the above phenomenon (regarding the claimed exportation of “Smith’s murderer” within (46)) can be well explained without positing any semantic ambiguity in the definite description in question. The explanation I have in mind is of the following line: when the sentence (46) is uttered on the basis of Ralph’s comments made at the courtroom where Jones, the accused unique murderer of Smith, is showing unusual behavioral pattern (*i.e.* when “Smith’s murderer” is used referentially), the speaker uses the definite description “Smith’s murderer” to mean *Jones*. Here, the definite description “Smith’s murderer” can be exported *within what the speaker says* by uttering (46). On the other hand, when (46) is uttered on the basis of Ralph’s comments made at the disgusting scene of crime (*i.e.* when “Smith’s murderer” is used attributively), the definite description “Smith’s murderer” is used to mean *a unique person who murdered Smith* or, following Devitt, *whoever is alone in being Smith’s murderer*. This meaning is *the meaning of the definite description* in question, not merely *what is meant by the speaker in using that definite description*. When the definite description is used in this way (*i.e.* with its own meaning), we see, it cannot be exported within (46), and hence, (46a) cannot validly be inferred from (46). So, what is responsible for the phenomenon that in one case the exportation of “Smith’s murderer” within (46) seems to be in order and in the other cases such an exportation is not in order is that in the former case we are concerned about *what the speaker says by using (46)* and in the latter case we are concerned about *what the sentence (46) says*. If in the former case we were concerned about what the sentence (46) says, instead of being concerned about what the speaker says by using (46), we would find that “Smith’s murderer” could not be exported within (46) even in the courtroom scenario (the former case). But, as has been mentioned earlier, what the speaker says by using an expression/sentence, *i.e.* the speaker’s meaning, is a pragmatic meaning with which the speaker uses the expression/sentence on a particular occasion whereas what the expression/sentence says (means) on various occasion on which it is used, *i.e.* the expression/sentence’s meaning, is a semantic meaning of that expression/sentence

(although in some cases the speaker's meaning may coincide with the expression/sentence's meaning). So, it can be said now that what is responsible for the phenomenon Devitt mentions is that in the first case (the case in which the exportation of "Smith's murderer" within (46) seems to be in order) the definite description "Smith's murderer" is used with a pragmatic meaning, the meaning with which the sentence is used by the speaker on the given occasion, whereas in the second case (the case in which the exportation of "Smith's murderer" within (46) is not in order) it is used with its semantic meaning, the meaning of the definite description. *DC-2* can be used to confirm that the first case involves a pragmatic meaning whereas the second case involves the semantic meaning. Here, *DC-2* can be applied in the following way: in the first case in which the speaker means *Jones* by her use of the definite description "Smith's murderer", *Jones* is a pragmatic meaning with which the definite description in question is used by the speaker on the given occasion as (i) it is a cancellable meaning with respect to the definite description "Smith's murderer", for it is coherent to say: "Ralph believes that Smith's murderer is insane but it is not the case that Ralph believes that Jones is insane", and (ii) it has a pragmatic-interpretation on which it counts as a meaning with which the speaker uses it on the given occasion; the features of the courtroom scenario, *e.g.* that Jones is accused for the murder, that he is standing on the dock, that he is showing unusual behavioral pattern, etc.—with other things—are included in the pragmatic-interpretation.<sup>286</sup> On the other hand, in the second case in which *a unique person who murdered Smith* (or *whoever is alone in being Smith's murderer*) is meant by the definite description "Smith's murderer", *a unique person who murdered Smith* (or *whoever is alone in being Smith's murderer*) is the semantic meaning of the definite description in question as it is the non-cancellable meaning of the that definite description, for it is incoherent to say: "Ralph believes that Smith's murderer is insane but it is not the case that Ralph believes that a unique murderer who murdered Smith is insane." At any rate, the phenomenon Devitt mentions does not prove that there is a semantic ambiguity in definite descriptions; it only shows that a speaker may use a sentence containing a definite

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<sup>286</sup> Similar the pragmatic-interpretation involved in Donnellan-Devitt's example of "Smith's murderer" mentioned earlier.

description in two different ways in one of which the definite description in question can be exported within what the speaker says by using that sentence, and in the other of which the definite description cannot be exported within the sentence used.

On the basis of the line of thought explained above I now propose the following idea that accounts for the phenomenon Devitt mentions: when a speaker uses a sentence containing a definite description (used referentially) with a pragmatic meaning with which she uses it, the definite description *can be exported within what the speaker says* by the sentence she uses; but when a sentence containing a definite description (used attributively) is used with its semantic meaning (including the semantic meaning of the definite description contained in it), the definite description *cannot be exported within the sentence* used. This idea, as has been shown in the above paragraphs, accounts for the phenomenon Devitt mentions without positing another semantic meaning for a referentially used definite description in addition to the semantic meaning (the attributive meaning) it already has. Now from the perspectives of Grice's Modified Occam's Razor and Kripke's Policy of Caution, the idea I have just proposed is more preferable than the idea which Devitt advances because the idea I have proposed accounts for the above mentioned phenomenon without multiplying the semantic meaning of the definite description beyond necessity (Modified Occam's Razor) and without positing a semantic ambiguity in the definite description as there are no really compelling theoretical and intuitive grounds that force one to posit a semantic ambiguity in it (Policy of Caution). On the other hand, Devitt's idea attempts to account for the same phenomenon by unnecessarily postulating a sort of semantic ambiguity in the definite description in question. So, it is not unreasonable to claim that Devitt's argument based on the law of exportation does not establish his thesis. And, as has been shown earlier, Devitt's other arguments fail to establish that a referentially used definite description (as well as the sentence containing it) has a sort of referential meaning which is semantically significant and is different from the attributive meaning (which is uncontroversially a semantic meaning) it already has. So, the ambiguity hypothesis proposed and supported by Devitt and others fails.

From the above discussion it appears that the unitary hypothesis, *e.g.* Russell's analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions, is more plausible than the ambiguity hypothesis, *e.g.* Donnellan's analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions. So, it seems reasonable to return to Kripke's position that the phenomenon arising from Donnellan's distinction does not posit a semantic ambiguity in sentences containing definite descriptions, and that the alleged referential meaning of a definite description (as well as the so-called referential meaning of a sentence containing a referentially used definite description) is an issue of pragmatics and not of semantics (hence, the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction does not pose a real threat to Russell's theory). But Kripke, himself, seems to treat his defense of Russell's theory from the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction as tentative.<sup>287</sup> There seems to be at least two reasons for why Kripke treats his defense of Russell as tentative: first, the considerations that form the basis of his defense of Russell's unitary hypothesis are, as he mentions, primarily methodological. However, Kripke claims, there is one piece of direct evidence that favors Russell's unitary hypothesis. Second, according to him although Russell's theory of definite descriptions provides a better analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions than that provided by many other competing theories, ultimately Russell's theory fails because, in Kripke's opinion, it cannot properly handle the issue arising from the Argument from Incompleteness.<sup>288</sup> Kripke's above remarks are important. We have already seen, in the third chapter of the present dissertation, that all prominent strategies to solve the problems posed by the Argument from Incompleteness end up with a failure. Furthermore, although the cancellability test and the Distinguishing Criteria, namely *DC-1* and *DC-2*, proposed and defended in the present dissertation succeed in showing that the so-called referential meaning with which a speaker uses a sentence containing a referentially used definite description is not a semantic but a pragmatic meaning (and hence, the existence of the so-called referential meaning does not make the relevant descriptive sentence semantically ambiguous), they (*i.e.* the

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<sup>287</sup> Kripke (1977), p. 255.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

cancellability test, *DC-1* and *DC-2*) do not provide a theoretical explanation of *how*<sup>289</sup> a speaker, on some occasions, manages to say something true of her intended referent by uttering a descriptive sentence containing a referentially used definite description even though, on the Russellian analysis, the proposition expressed by the sentence she utters is false. For that reason it may be said that the cancellability test, *DC-1* and *DC-2* are—like Kripke’s apparatus—primarily methodological considerations. So, the challenge for one, if one wants to defend Russell’s theory (not merely defending it from methodological grounds but also from purely theoretical and conceptual grounds), is to provide a *theory* that can (i) account for, in favor of Russell’s theory, the issue arising from the incompleteness of incomplete definite descriptions, and (ii) give a theoretical and conceptual ground for the claim that the issue arising from Donnellan’s Distinction is an issue of pragmatics, and not of semantics. The aim of the next chapter is to determine whether any such theory is available or not.

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<sup>289</sup> It may be said that the cancellability test, *DC-1* and *DC-2* show *what* happens; but they do not explain *how* that happens.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Meaning and Assertion

In order to find a *theory* that satisfies the two requirements mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, let us have a quick look again at the problems posed by the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction:

- The problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness: according to the Russellian analysis the meaning (semantic content) of, or the proposition semantically expressed by, the sentence “The table is covered with books”—a sentence that contains the incomplete definite description “the table”—is the following: exactly one thing is a table, and whatever is a table is covered with books. So, on every present-day occasion of its use the sentence is false as there is more than one table in the world now. But still, speakers may assert something true by assertively uttering the above sentence on many present-day occasions. So, the problem for a Russellian is the following: how does a speaker, on some occasions, succeed in asserting something true by uttering a sentence *containing an incomplete definite description* which, on the Russellian analysis, expresses a false proposition?
- The problem posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction: according to the Russellian analysis the proposition semantically expressed by a sentence containing a definite description (it does not matter whether the definite description in question is used attributively or referentially) is a *general proposition*. But still, as we have already seen in the example of “Smith's murderer is insane”<sup>290</sup>, a speaker may, on some occasions, assert a *singular proposition* about a particular object she intends to talk about by using a sentence containing a referentially used definite description. So, one problem for a Russellian is to explain how a speaker asserts a singular proposition by uttering a sentence containing a referentially used definite description even

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<sup>290</sup> See: the second and fourth chapter of the present dissertation.

though the proposition semantically expressed by that sentence is a general proposition. Furthermore, in the example of “Smith’s murderer is insane” we have also seen that a speaker may say something true of her intended referent, say Jones, by using the above sentence (containing the referentially used definite description “Smith’s murderer”) when neither Jones nor even anyone else fits the definite description “Smith’s murderer”. But, according to the Russellian analysis the proposition expressed by the above sentence is false. So, here again, the problem for a Russellian is the following: how does a speaker assert something true by uttering a *sentence containing a referentially used definite description* which, on the Russellian analysis, expresses a false proposition?

So, we see, at the heart of the problems posed by these arguments, *i.e.* the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan’s Distinction, lies the issue of how on some occasions a speaker, by uttering a sentence containing a definite description, asserts something (true) which is not what is semantically expressed by the sentence she utters. Traditionally, it is thought that by using a sentence (literally and non-metaphorically) what the speaker of that sentence asserts is the meaning or the semantic content of (or the proposition semantically expressed by) the sentence uttered. Scott Soames, in his “The Gap Between Meaning and Assertion: Why What We Literally Say Often Differs from What Our Words Literally Mean”, describes this connection between meaning and assertion in the following way:

A sincere, reflective, competent speaker who assertively utters S (speaking literally, nonironically, nonmetaphorically, and without conversational implicatures cancelling the normal force of the remark) in a context C says (or asserts), perhaps among other things, what S “says” in C (also known as *the semantic content of S in C*).<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Scott Soames, “The Gap between Meaning and Assertion: Why What We Literally Say Often Differs from What Our Words Literally Mean”, *Philosophical Essays: Volume 1, Natural language : what it means and how we use it* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009a), p. 278., and Soames (2005), p. 10

The above principle that describes the traditionally believed connection between the assertions a speaker makes by uttering a sentence and the meaning or the semantic content of the sentence she utters may be called, following Soames, the Traditional Connection between Meaning and Assertion, or simply, the *Traditional Picture*. On this picture, pragmatics enters after identifying what the speaker has asserted by uttering the sentence *S*. Soames describes this point in the following way:

After identifying what the speaker has said, conversational maxims and other principles are used to generate further implicatures, presuppositions, or suggestions carried by the utterance.<sup>292</sup>

If that is the case, then pragmatics does not contribute to what is asserted by a speaker by her utterance of *S*. Rather, what the speaker asserts by uttering *S* is the semantic content of *S*. And, pragmatics enters at the next stage taking the semantic content of *S* (which is what is asserted by the speaker by uttering *S* in a context) as its input.<sup>293</sup> At any rate, according to the Traditional Picture by uttering a sentence literally and non-metaphorically what a speaker asserts is the semantic content of the sentence in question. In short, on the Traditional Picture what is asserted by a speaker by uttering a sentence (literally and non-metaphorically) is identical with the semantic content of that sentence.

The Traditional Picture seems to be applicable in many cases. It is true that on many occasions by literally uttering a sentence what the speaker says is what the sentence she uses *says*. For example, in many cases by literally and non-metaphorically uttering the sentence “I ate rice in my lunch yesterday” what the speaker asserts is what is *said* (the semantic content) by the sentence in question. Still, the Traditional Picture is not quite right. For, there are cases in which what is asserted by a speaker by literally and non-metaphorically uttering a sentence is not identical with the semantic content of the sentence uttered. For example, suppose in reply to the question “What did she eat in her lunch yesterday?” asked about one of my friends whom I invited for a lunch yesterday, I utter the following sentence:

(47) She ate rice and fish in her lunch yesterday.

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<sup>292</sup> Soames (2009a), p. 279

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

The semantic content of (47) is the following proposition: she ate both, rice and fish, in her lunch yesterday. Now, by uttering (47) I have asserted, among other things, that she ate rice in her yesterday's lunch; I have also asserted that she ate fish in her yesterday's lunch. And, another assertion that has been made by me by uttering (47) is that she ate both, rice and fish, in her lunch yesterday. That is, by literally and non-metaphorically uttering (47) I have asserted at least the following three propositions:

(47a) She ate both, rice and fish, in her lunch yesterday.

(47b) She ate rice in her lunch yesterday.

(47c) She ate fish in her lunch yesterday.

Now, it is plain that (47a), (47b) and (47c) are not identical; they involve different truth-conditions. Here, (47a) is identical with the semantic content of (47); but, (47b) and (47c), which have also been asserted by me by uttering (47), are not identical with the semantic content of the sentence (47).<sup>294</sup> So, we see, it is not always the case that what is asserted by a speaker by uttering a sentence (literally and non-metaphorically) is identical with the semantic content of the sentence uttered. Hence, the Traditional Picture is wrong as it holds the view that what is asserted by a speaker by uttering a sentence (literally and non-metaphorically) is the semantic content of the sentence uttered. A further point should be noted here. In the above example, we see, what has been asserted by me by uttering the sentence (47) is either the semantic content of the sentence (47) or one or the other part of its semantic content. This phenomenon, however, should not lead one to think that by uttering a sentence (literally and non-metaphorically) a speaker asserts the semantic content of the sentence and/or a part of the sentence's semantic content. For, there are cases in which by uttering a sentence (literally and non-metaphorically) a speaker asserts a proposition which is neither identical with the semantic content of the sentence uttered nor a mere part of its semantic content, but is *richer* than the semantic content of the sentence in question. We will see such a case in the next paragraph.

At this point it is reasonable to inquire why the above mentioned phenomenon—*i.e.* the phenomenon that by uttering a sentence (literally and non-metaphorically) a speaker

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<sup>294</sup> They, *i.e.* (47b) and (47c), are not identical with each other either.

may assert something which is not identical with the semantic content of the sentence the speaker utters in a context—sometimes arises. According to Soames the above mentioned phenomenon sometimes arises due to, what he calls, the *gap* between the meaning or semantic content of a sentence and the assertions a speaker makes by using that sentence in a context. He observes that the Traditional Picture fails to identify the above mentioned gap and sets up an overly tight connection between the meaning or semantic content of a sentence and the assertions a speaker makes by using that sentence.<sup>295</sup> To explain the nature of the above mentioned gap Soames says that although the meaning or semantic content of a sentence is often a complete proposition, and hence, a proper candidate for being asserted by the speaker of the relevant sentence, in many cases the meaning of a sentence interacts with information that is presupposed to generate a *pragmatically enriched proposition* which is the speaker’s primary intention to assert by uttering the sentence in question.<sup>296</sup> Soames calls such pragmatically enriched propositions (what the speaker of a sentence intends to assert by using the sentence in question) the *primary assertions* (made by the speaker). Now, a primary assertion made by a speaker by uttering a sentence may not be identical with the semantic content of the sentence the speaker utters, as a primary assertion made by the speaker is pragmatically enriched by elements supplied by the context in which the sentence is uttered whereas the semantic content of the sentence is not pragmatically enriched by contextual supplementations. Hence, there is a gap between the primary assertions made by a speaker by uttering a sentence and the semantic content of that sentence. An example may make the point clearer. Suppose, in response to the question “Have you ever met a cricket genius?” I utter the following sentence:

(48) I met Tendulkar.

Here, the semantic content of the sentence I have uttered is that:

(48a) I met Tendulkar.

But, in the given context what I have primarily intended to assert is not merely that I met Tendulkar but that:

(48b) I met the genius cricketer Tendulkar.

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<sup>295</sup> Soames (2009a), p. 279.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

This shows that the primary assertion I have made by uttering the sentence (48) in the given context is built by pragmatically enriching (with contextual supplementations) the semantic content of the sentence in question. Here, the primary assertion made by me is neither identical with the semantic content of the sentence I have uttered nor is it a mere part of the semantic content of the sentence in question. Rather, the primary assertion that has been made by me by uttering (48) is richer than the semantic content of the sentence I have uttered. So, it should not be thought that by uttering a sentence (literally and non-metaphorically) a speaker asserts the semantic content of the sentence and/or a part of the sentence's semantic content.

Soames claims that a primary assertion which is made by a speaker by uttering a sentence in a particular context is always built on the pragmatic enrichments of the semantic content of the sentence uttered; and the other propositions that are counted as asserted are only those which are relevant, unmistakable, necessary and a priori consequences of the primary assertions.<sup>297</sup> For instance, in the case of the sentence (48) the proposition stated in (48a)—which, as a matter of fact, is the semantic content of the sentence uttered—is counted as asserted because it is a relevant, unmistakable, necessary and a priori consequence of the primary assertion stated in (48b). Of course, there may be cases in which what a speaker primarily intends to assert by using a sentence does not involve any pragmatic enrichment. Soames does not rule out such possibility. He, rather, proposes that in a case like that the semantic content of the relevant sentence should be counted as the proper pragmatic enrichment of itself,<sup>298</sup> and hence it should be counted as the speaker's primary assertion.

At this point the following question deserves to be answered: what is the role of the semantic content of a sentence in determining the assertions the speaker makes by using that sentence? Soames maintains that the semantic content of a sentence does not directly determine the assertions made by the speaker by uttering that sentence. Rather, as we have already seen in the case of the sentence (48), the primary assertions made by a

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 280.; Soames (2005), p. 19.

<sup>298</sup> Soames (2009a), p. 281. (footnote-4); (Soames has not given any example of such a case).

speaker by uttering a sentence are contributed (pragmatically enriched) by elements supplemented by the context of utterance of the sentence the speaker utters; and the other assertions, as mentioned above, are determined by the primary assertions made. But that does not mean that there is no connection between the semantic content of a sentence and the assertions the speaker makes by using that sentence. Rather, the semantic content of a sentence interacts with what is supplied by the context of utterance of that sentence to generate pragmatically enriched propositions which the speaker primarily intends to assert, *i.e.* the primary assertions. That is why Soames takes it for granted that the semantic content of a sentence constrains, though not determines, the assertions the speaker makes by using that sentence. He says:

[T]he semantic content of S in a context *constrains* what S is used to assert, without always *determining* what is asserted, even when S is used with its normal literal meaning.<sup>299</sup>

In another section of the same paper Soames confirms his inclination to the idea that the semantic content of a sentence does not determine but constrains the assertions the speaker makes by that sentence:

[T]his [his idea that the knowledge of meaning *does* play a central role in interpreting utterances] leads me to a different conception of semantics – one in which contexts are real, conversationally given, circumstances of utterance, and the meanings of expressions *constrain*, but do not always *determine*, the contributions made by occurrences of them to assertions made in these contexts.<sup>300</sup>

Actually, it is the semantic content of a sentence that is pragmatically enriched by elements supplied by the context in which the sentence in question is uttered, and thus, the primary assertions are made. But that does not mean that a competent speaker must first identify the semantic content of the sentence she utters and, then, with the help of contextual elements (the pragmatic enrichments), she makes her primary assertions.

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

Rather, a competent speaker may assert something by uttering a sentence without identifying what the sentence she uses semantically means. Soames says:

... sentence meaning is a notion with its own theoretical interest. However, it is not obvious that it is something individual speakers need to separate out in order to reliably identify what is asserted and conveyed.<sup>301</sup>

According to Soames, a competent speaker who understands the sentence 'I have  $n$   $F$ s' is a reliable judge of what she asserts as well as what others may assert by it in a particular context. But she may not have a reliable intuition about whether the semantic meaning of the sentence 'I have  $n$   $F$ s' is: *I have at least  $n$   $F$ s*, or *I have exactly  $n$   $F$ s*, or *I have up to  $n$   $F$ s*, or something else.<sup>302</sup> A competent speaker, Soames claims, may not have a reliable and clear grasp of the semantic content of a sentence she uses in a particular context even though she knows what she asserts by her utterance of that sentence because the semantic content of a sentence is a theory-laden conception which may not be psychologically available to the speaker simply by virtue of her linguistic ability.<sup>303</sup> In short, a competent speaker may know what she asserts by uttering a sentence without knowing the semantic meaning of that sentence even though the semantic meaning of that sentence constrains the assertions the speaker makes by using that sentence in a context.

At any rate, the above explained ideas—*i.e.* the idea concerning the *pragmatic enrichment* of the semantic content of a sentence by elements supplemented by the context of utterance of the sentence in question, the idea of the *primary assertions* made by a speaker (by using a sentence) as pragmatically enriched propositions that the speaker primarily intends to assert in a context, and the idea of *assertions* (not the primary ones) made by a speaker as relevant, unmistakable, necessary and a priori consequences of the primary assertions—provide Soames a way to put forward the following principle in which,

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<sup>301</sup> Scott Soames, "Drawing the Line Between Meaning and Implicature—and Relating Both to Assertion", *Philosophical Essays: Volume 1, Natural language : what it means and how we use it* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009b), p. 324

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p. 322

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, pp. 322-23

unlike the erroneous Traditional Picture, the connection between meaning and assertion is not overly tight, and the gap between them is properly addressed:

If M is a meaning (or semantic content) of an indexical-free sentence S, then normal, literal uses of S (without conversational implicatures that force reinterpretation of the utterance) result in assertions of propositions that are proper pragmatic enrichments of M. When M is a complete proposition, it counts as asserted only if M is an obvious, relevant, necessary and a priori consequence of enriched propositions asserted in uttering S, together with salient shared presuppositions in the conversation.<sup>304</sup>

The above principle which provides an alternative (to the Traditional Picture) idea concerning the relationship between the meaning or semantic content of a sentence and the assertions a speaker makes by using that sentence may be called Soames' Alternative Conception of the Connection between Meaning and Assertion, or simply, the *Alternative Picture*. One virtue of the Alternative Picture is that it allows the idea that when a speaker assertively, literally and non-metaphorically utters a sentence S, the meaning or semantic content of S may not be asserted by the speaker by uttering that sentence, even though the semantic content of S may be a complete proposition.<sup>305</sup> This idea is important as—we will see it soon—it helps one in defending Russell's theory of definite descriptions by resolving the problems posed by the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction. But, it shouldn't be thought that the Alternative Picture is an *ad hoc* proposal which is adopted to defend specifically Russell's theory. Rather, the Alternative Picture is actually a *theory* about language which, in addition to solving the above mentioned problems (*i.e.* the problems posed by the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction), solves many other problems that cannot not be properly handled by the Traditional Picture. For example, the case of the sentence (47), *i.e.* "She ate rice and fish in her lunch yesterday", can properly be explained by means of the Alternative

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<sup>304</sup> Soames (2009a), p. 281.; the principle is restated in Soames (2005), p. 19., without any significant modification.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

Picture. One can now argue that although the proposition stated in (47b), *i.e.* she ate rice in her lunch yesterday, and (47c), *i.e.* she ate fish in her lunch yesterday, are not identical with the semantic content of the sentence (47), still they are considered as asserted by me as they are relevant, unmistakable, necessary and a priori consequences of the primary assertion, namely the assertion that she ate both, rice and fish, in her lunch yesterday (stated in (47a)), that has been made by me by uttering (47) in the given context. So, by using the Alternative Picture here we have got an explanation of how a speaker may *say* (assert) something by using a sentence that is not *said* (the semantic content) by the sentence she uses.<sup>306</sup>

Now I turn to my main concern: how the Alternative Picture deals with the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction, and, thus, helps in defending Russell's theory of definite descriptions. Soames claims that the implicit reliance on the incorrect traditional conception (the Traditional Picture) about the relationship between the meaning of a sentence and the assertions a speaker makes by using that sentence is the main culprit that causes the problem of incomplete definite descriptions.<sup>307</sup> And, the same is true of the problems posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction. Once we replace the Traditional Picture by the Alternative Picture, we see that the problems posed by the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction can be well-answered by a Russellian. In the next two sections we will see how these problems can be dealt with by endorsing the Alternative Picture.

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<sup>306</sup> By using the Alternative Picture an answer to the second point of disagreement between Russell and Strawson, stated in (B) in the second chapter, may be given now (recall also the footnote-69 of this dissertation). It may be said now that Strawson is right in claiming that it is the speaker of a sentence who *uses* the sentence to make *true or false assertions*; but Russell is also right in indicating that it is the *sentence* that expresses a *true or false proposition* on various occasions of its use. In the study of meaning, more generally in the study of semantics, the focus is given on the truth-value of the proposition expressed by a sentence on various occasions of its use; and in the study of assertions, more generally in the study of pragmatics, the focus is given on the assertions made by a speaker by using a sentence in a context. That is, the distinction between the meaning and assertion (as well as the distinction between semantics and pragmatics) made by the Alternative Picture provides a satisfactory solution to the problem concerning the second point of disagreement between Russell and Strawson.

<sup>307</sup> Soames (2009a), p. 293.

• **Dealing with the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness by endorsing the Alternative Picture:** as has been mentioned at the beginning of the present chapter, the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness is the following:

How does a speaker assert *something true* by uttering a sentence containing an incomplete definite description which, on the Russellian analysis, expresses a false proposition?

The answer to the problem is simple: the proposition semantically expressed by a sentence (*i.e.* the semantic content of a sentence) may not be asserted by the speaker of that sentence; this allows a speaker to assert something true by uttering a sentence containing an incomplete definite description which semantically expresses a false proposition. For example, consider again the sentence (36) which contains an incomplete definite description “the murderer”:

(36) The murderer is insane.

The (Russellian) semantic content of (36) is the following:

(36a) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a murderer]  $x$  is insane.

(36a) is *false* since there is more than one murderer in the world. Now, suppose (36) is uttered by a speaker after coming across the body of the victim  $v$ ; and suppose also that the speaker, in uttering (36), uses the incomplete definite description “the murderer” attributively. Here, the semantic content of his utterance is what is expressed in (36a); but, in the given context, the pragmatically enriched proposition the speaker primarily intends to assert by uttering (36), *i.e.* the primary assertion the speaker makes by uttering (36), is:

(36b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a murderer of  $v$ ]  $x$  is insane.

Here, we see, (36a) is not a necessary or a priori consequence of the primary assertion (36b). So, the false proposition (36a) should not be counted as asserted. Hence, if the murderer of  $v$  is insane, then the speaker has asserted something true even though there is more than one murderer in the world. So, the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness is well-answered, and Russell’s theory is saved.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Soames (2009a), p. 293.; Soames (2005), p. 24.

Again, suppose, the incomplete definite description “the murderer” contained in (36) is used referentially. In that case the speaker has a particular person, say  $m$ , in mind who is described as “the murderer”; and the speaker intends to make a statement about  $m$ . In such a case the pragmatically enriched proposition (supposing that the victim is not identified by the speaker) the speaker primarily intends to assert is:

(36c) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a murderer &  $x = m$ ]  $m$  is insane.

And, like before, the semantic content of (36) is what is expressed in (36a). Here, again, we see, (36a) is not a necessary or a priori consequence of the primary assertion (36c). Hence, the *false* proposition (36a) should not be counted as asserted. But the following proposition:

(36d)  $m$  is insane

should be counted as asserted as (36d) is a necessary and a priori consequence of the primary assertion (36c). (36d) is true, if the person referred to, *i.e.* the person  $m$ , is really insane. So, by uttering (36), in this context, the speaker has asserted (*i.e.*  $m$  is insane) something true provided that  $m$  is insane, even though there are more than one murderer in the world. Hence, again, the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness is properly answered without sacrificing Russell’s analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions.

In a context in which the victim  $v$  is identified by the speaker and she, the speaker, uses the incomplete definite description referentially when she utters (36), we get the same result. In such a case, the primary proposition that the speaker asserts by uttering (36) is the following:

(36e) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a murderer of  $v$  &  $x = m$ ]  $x$  is insane.

Here, again, we see, the semantic content of (36), *i.e.* (36a), is not a necessary or a priori consequence of (36e). So, it should not be counted as asserted; but, in this case too (36d) should be counted as asserted as it is a necessary and a priori consequence of (36e). And hence, although there is more than one murderer in the world, by uttering (36) in the above mentioned context the speaker has asserted (*i.e.*  $m$  is insane) something true, if it is true that  $m$  is insane. So, the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness is solved and Russell’s analysis of descriptive sentences is kept intact.

Now, let us recall the more complicated descriptive sentence—addressed in the third chapter of the present dissertation—which contains two identical incomplete definite descriptions:

(33) The Russian has voted for the Russian.

The above sentence is uttered during a boxing match between a Russian and a Swede; and the speaker and her audiences know that one of the judges is a Russian and that no participating boxer is a member of the panel of judges. The (Russellian) semantic content of (33) is expressed by the following proposition:

(33b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a Russian]  $x$  voted for the Russian.

Obviously, (33b) is false as there is more than one Russian (in the world or in the domain of discourse). But, still, by uttering (33) in the above context the speaker has asserted something true. This can now be explained in the following way: in the given context the pragmatically enriched proposition the speaker primarily intends to assert is the following:

(33c) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a Russian &  $x$  is a judge of today's match here] {[the  $y$ :  
(( $y$  is a Russian &  $y$  is a boxer of today's match here) & ( $y \neq x$ ))] ( $x$   
voted for  $y$ )}

In the given context (33c) is true provided that the Russian judge (of the above mentioned match) really voted for the Russian boxer (of the above mentioned match). Here, the false proposition (33b) which is the semantic content of (33) should not be counted as asserted as it is not a necessary or a priori consequence of the speaker's primary assertion (33c). So, in the above case, by uttering the sentence (33), which contains two apparently identical incomplete definite descriptions, the speaker has asserted something true when it is true that the Russian judge really voted for the Russian boxer. Soames' example of the sentence (37), *i.e.* "The cook is more experienced than the cook who prepared the main course", by which he has shown that Barwise and Perry's framework cannot solve the problem pose by the Argument from Incompleteness (discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation), can now be explained in a similar way. Briefly, in the given scenario by uttering (37) what the speaker primarily asserts is the following pragmatically enriched proposition: [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a cook &  $x$  is responsible for the desert of tonight's dinner here] {[the  $y$ : ( $y$  is a cook and  $y$  is responsible for the main course of tonight's dinner here) & ( $x \neq y$ )] ( $x$  is more

experienced than  $y$ }). This pragmatically enriched proposition may be true even though the semantic content of (37), *i.e.* [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a cook] {[the  $y$ : ( $y$  is a cook and  $y$  is responsible for the main course) & ( $x \neq y$ )] ( $x$  is more experienced than  $y$ )}, is false (because there is more than one cook in the domain of discourse or in the world). But the semantic content of (37) cannot be counted as asserted as it is not a necessary or a priori consequence of the primary assertion made by the speaker by uttering (37). Hence, by uttering (37) in the given scenario the speaker has asserted something true. At any rate, by endorsing the Alternative Picture in the place of the Traditional Picture, the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness can be well-answered without sacrificing anything of Russell's analysis of descriptive sentences.

- **Dealing with the problem posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction by endorsing the Alternative Picture:** as has been mentioned at the beginning of the present chapter, the problems posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction are the following:

How does a speaker assert a *singular proposition* by uttering a sentence containing a referentially used definite description even though the proposition semantically expressed by the sentence the speaker utters is a *general proposition*?

And,

How does a speaker succeed in asserting *something true* by uttering a sentence containing a referentially used definite description which, on the Russellian analysis, expresses a false proposition?

By endorsing the Alternative Picture both of the above problems can be well-answered without harming the Russellian analysis of descriptive sentences. For instance, consider again Donnellan's example of the sentence (27) uttered in the Scenario-1:

(27) Smith's murderer is insane.

In the given scenario the speaker, when she utters (27), uses the complete definite description "Smith's murderer" referentially having a particular person, Jones, in mind as the referent of the definite description in question. The (Russellian) semantic content of (27) is the following:

(27a) [the  $x$ :  $x$  murdered Smith]  $x$  is insane

Now, in the given context in which Jones is the particular person the speaker has in mind as her intended referent what the speaker primarily asserts by her utterance of (27) is the following pragmatically enriched proposition:

(27b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  murdered Smith &  $x = \text{Jones}$ ]  $x$  is insane.

Here, the following proposition:

(27c) Jones is insane

should be counted as asserted since it is a necessary and a priori consequence of the speaker's primary assertion (27b).<sup>309</sup> (27c) expresses a singular proposition. That means that in the given scenario the speaker has *asserted a singular proposition* by uttering a descriptive sentence, containing a referentially used complete definite description, which *semantically expresses a general proposition*. Russell's theory does not have any problem to accept this phenomenon. So, here, we have got a satisfactory answer to the first problem mentioned above.

Of course, following Soames,<sup>310</sup> it can also be shown that the semantic content of the sentence (27), in the above context, may be counted as asserted if the following proposition in which Jones is identified as a unique murderer of Smith is taken as the background presupposition of the conversation:

(27d) [the  $x$ :  $x$  murdered Smith]  $x = \text{Jones}$ .

That is, although the semantic content of (27), *i.e.* (27a), is not a necessary and a priori consequence of the primary assertion (27b), it is a necessary and a priori consequence of (27b) *plus* (27d); and for that reason it can be counted as asserted. This does not indicate a deviation from Russell's analysis of descriptive sentences as Russell's analysis is conformable with the idea that by uttering a *semantically non-ambiguous* sentence a speaker may *assert* more than one proposition.

Now, we turn to the second problem posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction. Suppose that there is more than one person who murdered Smith (both the speaker and her audience know it) but it is contextually obvious that the speaker is talking

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<sup>309</sup> Of course, in the above case the following proposition should also be counted as asserted since it, also, is a necessary and a priori consequence of (27b): *Jones is a murderer & Jones murdered Smith*.

<sup>310</sup> Soames (2009a), pp. 286-87. & Soames (2005), pp. 21-23. (Soames addresses Donnellan's example of the sentence "The man in the corner drinking champagne is a famous philosopher")

about Jones (because Jones is standing on the dock) who appears to be insane. In that case the speaker's primary assertion, *i.e.* (27b), and the other assertion, *i.e.* (27c), arising from the primary assertion are true; but the semantic content of (27), *i.e.* (27a), is false. But this is not a problem because, as Soames shows,<sup>311</sup> in such a case (27d) is not counted as a background presupposition, and hence, (27a) should not be counted as asserted. That means that in the case just mentioned the speaker may assert something true even though the descriptive sentence she utters, which contains a referentially used definite description, semantically expresses (on the Russellian analysis) a false proposition.

Again, if Jones, the accused murderer of Smith, actually has not murdered him (the case of misdescription), then (27a), (27b) and (27d) are false. Still, the speaker, in such a case, says something true as (27c), which is also counted as asserted by the speaker by her utterance of (27), is true. Does the speaker, in the case just mentioned, assert something true and something false? A negative answer to this question may be given. How? One of the lessons learned from the Gricean maxims is that when several pragmatically enriched propositions are otherwise feasible (for being counted as asserted), then the one which is the strongest, most informative, most relevant, and for which the speaker has adequate evidence should be counted as the one which is asserted by the speaker. Following this lesson it may be claimed that in the above case it is the proposition expressed in (27c)—which is the strongest, most informative, most relevant, and the one for which the speaker has adequate evidence in the given context—which should be counted as asserted by the speaker in the above mentioned situation. So, in the given context by uttering (27) the speaker asserts something true. However, even if it is granted that in the above case the speaker also asserts something false, *e.g.* (27b), that won't be a big problem as, in this case, the true assertion, *i.e.* (27c), is conversationally more important than the false assertion, *i.e.* (27b). Soames says:

[T]he fact that [in such a case] the speaker has, strictly speaking, asserted one or more falsehoods, will matter less than his having asserted an important truth.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Soames (2009a), p. 287. & Soames (2005), p. 23.

<sup>312</sup> Soames (2009a), p. 287 & Soames (2005), p. 23

So, there is no need to amend the Alternative Picture or Russell's theory to mitigate the above problem. The important thing is that, like the previous cases, in the above case the speaker says something true by uttering a sentence containing a referentially used definite description even though the sentence semantically expresses a false proposition. Hence, this case also supplies a satisfactory answer to the second problem posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction.

The example I have dealt with in this section, *i.e.* the example concerning the sentence "Smith's murderer is insane", is an example of referentially used *complete* definite description. There are referentially used *incomplete* definite descriptions too. For example, the sentence (36), *i.e.* "The murderer is insane", which contains the incomplete definite description "the murderer" may be, in some contexts, used referentially. In the previous section it has already been shown how a speaker by uttering this sentence (and by referentially using the incomplete definite description contained in it) may say something true even though the semantic content of the sentence in question is false. For the sake of brevity I am not repeating here that analysis. At any rate, from the discussion and examples analyzed in this section it has become clear that both of the problems posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction can be well-answered by endorsing the Alternative Picture in the place of the Traditional Picture. And, there is no need to amend Russell's theory in order to deal with these. So, none of the above problems really undermines Russell's theory.

A critic of the above defense of Russell's theory may claim that although the above defense of Russell's theory seems promising, there is still a problem. She may argue against the defense of Russell's theory in the following way: in the above defense the conception of primary assertion, the conceptions of assertions (other than primary assertions) and semantic content as well as the conception of the difference between them play important roles. But, there may be cases in which two or more complete propositions are equally strong candidates for being the speaker's primary assertion in the context of utterance of a sentence. Now, the critic may raise the following question: in a context in which two or more complete propositions are proper candidates for being the speaker's primary assertion, which one of them should be counted as the speaker's primary assertion? One way of

answering this question may be that in such a case, *i.e.* in a case in which two or more complete propositions are proper candidates for being the speaker's primary assertion, the Gricean maxims of conversational implicature play a role in deciding which one of the candidates is the primary assertion made by the speaker in the relevant context. For example, consider the following scenario: today is 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2012; a philosophy-talk is running on in the room SS 1252 of the University of Calgary. During the talk, at 11 a.m., a person who is very attentively attending the talk hears a little noise, and then, observes that a man sitting on the seat numbered 30 is talking with another man sitting at a distance. Seeing her frowning, another person who is sitting beside her asks if she can tell him what makes her annoyed. She, then, utters (with appropriate gesture) the following sentence:

(49) The man is talking with another man.

The semantic content of (49) can be stated in the following way:

(49a) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a man]  $x$  is talking with another man.

Here, (49a) is a complete proposition and may be considered as pragmatically enriched by itself.<sup>313</sup> So, (49a) is a proper candidate for being counted as the speaker's primary assertion. But in the given scenario the following pragmatically enriched proposition is also a proper candidate for being counted as the speaker's primary assertion:

(49b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a man &  $x$  is sitting on the seat numbered 30 in the room SS 1252 of the University of Calgary at 11 a.m. of 14<sup>th</sup> September]  $x$  is talking with another man.

The Gricean maxims, then, enter into the picture: it is natural to think that the speaker and her audience in the above mentioned conversation know that there is more than one man (in the world or in the domain of discourse), and hence, they know that (49a) is obviously false; since it is clear to everyone in the conversation that (49a) is false, it cannot be what the speaker is inviting her audience to believe as there is no reason to think that in the given context the speaker is not obeying the following Gricean maxim of quality:

Do not say what you believe to be false.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Note that according to Soames in some cases the semantic contents of sentences may be counted as pragmatically enriched by themselves.

<sup>314</sup> Grice (1975/1989), p. 27.

So, (49a) is ruled out from the list of the candidates of being the speaker's primary assertion. But, the pragmatically enriched proposition (49b) does not violate any of the Gricean maxims of conversational implicatures. So, if there is no other candidate for being counted as the speaker's primary assertion, then (49b) is the primary assertion made by the speaker by uttering (49) in the given context. So, in reply to the question raised by the critic a defender of the above discussed defense of Russell's theory may claim that when there are two or more proper candidates for being the speaker's primary assertion (made by uttering a sentence), the Gricean maxims of conversational implicatures may be used to decide which one of the two or more proper candidates is the primary assertion made by the speaker by uttering the sentence in the given context. In this way the defender of the above defense of Russell's theory may claim that the problem raised by the critic of the above defense is solved.

But the above solution to the problem of deciding one from many candidates as the speaker's primary assertion may not satisfy the critic. She may claim that although the Gricean maxims work in some cases, there are many other cases in which the Gricean maxims cannot contribute in deciding which one of many proper candidates is the speaker's primary assertion. For example, suppose a speaker utters the sentence (25), *i.e.* "The table is covered with books", in a context in which one of the speaker's friends wonders (looking at the speaker's empty bookshelf) whether he has many books or not. Suppose again that (i) there is actually a table covered with books at a small distance from the speaker, (ii) the table is the only table owned by the speaker, (iii) the speaker bought that table last month, and (iv) the speaker and her audience know and are aware of the information stated in (i)-(iii). Now, in the given context, there are, at least, three pragmatically enriched propositions which are proper candidates for being counted as the speaker's primary assertion. These are:

(25b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table &  $x$  is over there]  $x$  is covered with books.

(25c) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table &  $x$  is owned by me]  $x$  is covered with books.

(25d) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table &  $x$  was bought last month by me]  $x$  is covered with books.

In the given context, (25b), (25c) and (25d) seem to be equally strong candidates for being counted as the speaker's primary assertion. But, they are not equivalent; the first one, *i.e.* (25b), picks out a location (by "over there"), the second one, *i.e.* (25c), picks out a person, namely the speaker (by "owned by me"), and the last one, *i.e.* (25d), picks out a time (by "bought last month"). All of them involve different truth-conditions; in one circumstance it may be the case that (25b) is true but the other two are false, in another circumstance it may be the case that (25c) is true and the other two are false and so on. Now, it seems that the Gricean maxims are unable to decide which of (25b)-(25d) is the primary assertion made by the speaker by uttering (25) in the given context as all of the candidates are equally enriched by elements supplemented by the context (the context of utterance supplies the information that the *table over there* is covered with books; it equally strongly supplies the information that the only *table owned by the speaker* is covered with books, and it supplies, no less strongly, the information that the *table which was bought last month* is covered with books) in which the sentence (25) is uttered. And, the Alternative Picture as well as the defense of Russell's theory made by means of the Alternative Picture provide no principled way by which one of the competing pragmatically enriched propositions can be selected as the primary assertion made by the speaker by uttering the sentence in the given context. At this point a defender of the Alternative Picture may claim that it is not necessary to single out *one* pragmatically enriched proposition from a number of competing candidates as the primary assertion made by the speaker by uttering a sentence. For, it is plain that by uttering a non-ambiguous sentence a speaker may make more than one *assertion*; and there is nothing wrong in allowing that sometimes the speaker may also make more than one *primary assertion* by uttering a non-ambiguous sentence. Soames seems to take the matter in this way.<sup>315</sup> But this defense of the Alternative Picture may not satisfy the critic either. Here,

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<sup>315</sup> Recall Soames' formulation of the Alternative Picture: "If M is a meaning (or semantic content) of an indexical-free sentence S, then normal, literal uses of S (without conversational implicatures that force reinterpretation of the utterance) result in assertions of propositions that are proper pragmatic enrichments of M. ..." (Soames (2009a), p. 281. (my emphases)). Here, Soames' uses of the words "assertions" and "propositions" in plural indicate that he allows the idea that a speaker may make two or more primary assertions by uttering a non-ambiguous sentence in a context.

she may attract our attention to the fact that one of the reasons for why the Elliptical Approach—which has been proposed to defend Russell’s theory—has been rejected (discussed in the third chapter of the present dissertation) is the phenomenon that there is no principled way of selecting one of the possible fuller descriptions (*e.g.* “the table *I own*”, “the table *over there*”) as the genuine completer of the incomplete definite description “the table” contained in the sentence “The table is covered with books”. Now, by parity of reasoning, the critic may claim that the above defense of Russell’s theory made by means of the Alternative Picture, just like the previously proposed defense of Russell’s theory made by the Explicit Approach, should be rejected.

In order to evaluate the points made by the critic of the Alternative Picture I prefer to distinguish between two views that are proposed by the Alternative Picture. The first view proposed by the Alternative Picture consists of two claims, namely that there is a gap between the meaning (or semantic content) of a sentence and the assertions the speaker makes by using that sentence, and that what is meant by a sentence may be different from what is asserted by the speaker by using that sentence. And, like the first view, the second view proposed by the Alternative picture consists of two claims, namely that the primary assertions made by a speaker by using a sentence are built by pragmatically enriching (with contextual supplementations) the semantic content of the sentence in question, and that other propositions that are counted as asserted are obvious, relevant, necessary and a priori consequences of the primary assertions made by the speaker by uttering the sentence. About the second view, I agree with the critic that neither the Alternative Picture nor the Gricean maxims provide a principled way by which *one* pragmatically enriched proposition from a number of candidates can be singled out as the speaker’s primary assertion. The thought that it is not needed to single out one pragmatically enriched proposition from a number of candidates as the speaker may make more than one primary assertion by using a non-ambiguous sentence cannot be given a blank check. For, it is plain that in a given context there may be some pragmatically enriched propositions which are true and relevant but are *not eligible* to be counted as primary assertions made by a speaker by uttering a sentence in that context.

For example, suppose a person, say Jones, attended a dinner party last night, held in River Café, with some of his friends. Suppose again that yesterday it was Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2012 and that Jones' friends were aware of it. Jones, though he knew the date, was not aware about the day. Now, today, one of Jones' friends, say Black, who attended the dinner last night with Jones asks "How was the dinner party?" and Jones replies by uttering the following sentence:

(50) The dinner party was nice.

Now, we see, in the given context, the following are some pragmatically enriched propositions which are built by pragmatically enriching the semantic content of (50) by elements supplemented by the context:

(50a) [the  $x$ : ( $x$  was a dinner party &  $x$  was held last night in River Café) & Jones and Black, among others, attended in  $x$ ]  $x$  was nice.

(50b) [the  $x$ : ( $x$  was a dinner party &  $x$  was held on the night of 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2012 in River Café) & Jones and Black, among others, attended in  $x$ ]  $x$  was nice.

(50c) [the  $x$ : ( $x$  was a dinner party &  $x$  was held last Friday night in River Café) & Jones and Black, among others, attended in  $x$ ]  $x$  was nice.

Here, all, *i.e.* (50a), (50b) and (50c), are complete propositions and are seemingly equally strong candidates for being the primary assertion made by the speaker by uttering (50). I agree with the thought that in some cases more than one proposition may be counted as the primary assertions made by the speaker by uttering a sentence. From that point of view I agree that both of (50a) and (50b) may be counted as the speaker's primary assertions made by uttering (50) in the given context. But about (50c), I think, although it is true and like (50a) and (50b) it is built by enriching the semantic content of (50) by elements supplemented by the context of utterance of (50), it cannot be counted as one of the primary assertions *made by the speaker* by uttering (50) in the given context. For, a person cannot (primarily) assert a proposition without knowing (or without being aware of) that she is asserting that proposition.<sup>316</sup> So, Jones, by uttering the sentence (50), has

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<sup>316</sup> Assertions are *made by speakers*. So, if a speaker does not know (or is not aware of) a proposition, then she does not assert that proposition. A speaker may use a sentence to assert something even without

not asserted (50c) as he is not aware of the fact that the day on which the party was held was Friday. Two lessons are learned from the above example: (i) not all relevant pragmatically enriched propositions can be counted as the speaker's primary assertion made by uttering a sentence in a context, and (ii) either a *principled way of selecting* which of many candidates are the primary assertions made by the speaker by uttering a sentence in a context or a *principled way of eliminating* some of the candidates of being the speaker's primary assertions is required. The second view proposed by the Alternative Picture—*i.e.* the view concerning the claims that the primary assertions made by a speaker by using a sentence are built by pragmatically enriching (with contextual supplementations) the semantic content of the sentence in question, and that other propositions that are counted as asserted are obvious, relevant, necessary and a priori consequences of the primary assertions made by the speaker by uttering the sentence—is not unconformable to (i); but the lack of a principled way of selecting which ones of many candidates are the primary assertions made by the speaker or the lack of a principled way of eliminating some of the candidates of being the speaker's primary assertions makes the view incomplete and open for criticism.

However, the incompleteness of the second view proposed by the Alternative Picture does not affect the first view—*i.e.* the view concerning the claims that there is a gap between the meaning (or semantic content) of a sentence and the assertions made by the speaker by using that sentence, and that what is meant by a sentence may be different from what is asserted by the speaker by using that sentence—proposed by the Alternative Picture. Although it is true that we do not have a principled way of selecting one or more propositions (or eliminating one or more propositions) from a number of candidates for being counted as the speaker's primary assertions made by uttering a sentence in a context, it cannot be denied that the primary assertions (and the other assertions as well) made by a speaker by uttering a sentence in a context may differ from the semantic

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knowing the (semantic) meaning of the sentence used; but she cannot use a sentence to assert something without knowing what *she* asserts by using the sentence in question. An assertion involves the knowledge of (or the awareness of) what is asserted.

content of the sentence uttered. There is clear evidence that favor this claim. Recall the examples of the sentences (25), (27), (33), (36), (47)-(50) discussed in this chapter. In each of these examples it has been observed that a speaker may assert something which differs from the semantic content of the sentence she uttered. These examples involve either sentences containing definite descriptions or singular sentences. But these examples must not lead us to the thought that the first view proposed by the Alternative Picture is true only when the concerned sentence is either a singular sentence or a sentence containing a definite description. Rather, it is true of other sort of sentences too. For example, suppose, Mr. Y, a professor of Philosophy working in the University of Calgary, teaches the course titled PHIL 501. Today, in his lecture, he talks about a seminar to be held tomorrow in the room SS 1252 of the University of Calgary. He wants that all of his students attend the seminar. Having that in mind, he utters the following sentence:

(51) Every student must attend tomorrow's seminar.

Here, (51) is not a singular but a general sentence containing the quantifier "every student". The semantic content of (51) is the following:

(51a) [Every  $x$ :  $x$  is a student]  $x$  must attend tomorrow's seminar.

But, obviously, by uttering (51) Mr. Y is not asserting that anyone in the world who is a student must attend the seminar he mentioned. Rather, what he asserts by uttering (51) is that any student who takes the course PHIL 501, taught by him, must attend the seminar he mentioned. That is, by uttering (51) in the given context, Mr. Y actually asserts the following proposition:

(51b) [Every  $x$ :  $x$  is a student &  $x$  takes the course PHIL 501 taught by Mr. Y]  $x$  must attend the seminar to be held tomorrow in the room SS 1252 of the University of Calgary.

It is plain that (51b) is not identical with (51a). So, the claims that there is a gap between the semantic content of a sentence and the primary assertions (and the other assertions as well) made by the speaker by using that sentence, and that the speaker may assert something by uttering a sentence which is different from the semantic content of the sentence used are true not only of singular sentences and sentences containing definite

descriptions but also of other sort of sentences. In short, the first view proposed by the Alternative Picture is a theory about language in general which is not specific to singular sentences and descriptive sentences.

Now, in order to defend Russell's theory by means of the Alternative Picture (henceforth the Alternative Picture Defense) a defender of Russell's theory does not need to be concerned about how one or more propositions from a number of candidates can be selected as the speaker's assertions made by uttering a sentence in a context. That is, the issue concerning whether or not there is a principled way of selecting (or eliminating) some of the candidates for being counted as asserted by the speaker is irrelevant to the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory. For, Russell's theory is a theory about the semantic content of a descriptive sentence which has nothing to do with the assertions made by a speaker by uttering a descriptive sentence in a particular context. So, to constitute the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory what one needs is just to make it clear that the semantic content of a descriptive sentence may differ from the assertions a speaker makes by uttering it in a particular context. And, the first view proposed by the Alternative Picture does it quite properly.

A question may be raised here: does the problem faced by the second view proposed by the Alternative Picture—*i.e.* the problem that there is no principled way of selecting (or eliminating) one or more propositions from a number of candidates for being counted as asserted by a speaker by uttering a sentence in a context—somehow affect the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory? A critic of the Alternative Picture Defense may claim that it does. As we have seen earlier, the critic may attract our attention to one of the reasons—namely the phenomenon that there is no principled way of selecting one of the possible fuller descriptions as the genuine completer of a sentence containing an incomplete definite description—for why the Explicit Approach (henceforth the Explicit Approach Defense of Russell's theory) has been rejected; and then, by parity of reasoning she may claim that the Alternative Picture Defense should be rejected for its failure of providing a principled way of selecting (or eliminating) one or more candidates for being counted as asserted by a speaker by uttering a sentence in a particular context. I have two

observations about this claim: first, the critic misses the point that the second view proposed by the Alternative Picture is not a part of the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory. One may reject the second view proposed by the Alternative Picture, and still, proceed to defend Russell's theory by means of the first view proposed by the Alternative Picture.<sup>317</sup> Second, the issue concerning the lack of any principled way of selecting one of many possible fuller descriptions as the genuine completer of a sentence containing an incomplete definite description (*i.e.* the issue raised against the Explicit Approach Defense of Russell's theory) and the issue concerning the lack of any principled way of selecting (or eliminating) one or more propositions from a number of candidates for being counted as the speaker's primary assertions (*i.e.* the issue raised against the Alternative Defense of Russell's theory)—though apparently similar—are significantly different. The former involves the semantic content or the meaning of the relevant sentence whereas the latter involves not the semantic content or meaning of the relevant sentence but the assertions made by the speaker of the sentence in question. In the former case, the lack of any principled way of selecting one of many possible fuller descriptions as the genuine completer of a sentence containing an incomplete definite description makes the Explicit Approach Defense incapable of defending Russell's theory. For, if there is no such principled way, then it seems that either we have to accept that none of the possible fuller descriptions is the genuine completer of the relevant incomplete definite description or we have to accept that all of them are genuine completers of the relevant incomplete definite description. If none of the possible fuller descriptions is the genuine completer of

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<sup>317</sup> One may endorse the idea that by uttering a sentence a speaker makes one primary assertion and that is why a principled way of selecting the primary assertion from two or more proper candidates is required, and due to the lack of any such principled way the Alternative Picture is not a plausible theory about the speaker's assertion. Still she may endorse the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's semantic analysis of descriptive sentences by granting the first view proposed by the Alternative Picture. Again, one may endorse the idea that by uttering a sentence a speaker may make more than one primary assertion and that no principled way of selecting (or eliminating) one (or few) from many proper candidates of primary assertions is required, and hence the lack of any such principled way does not undermine the second view proposed by the Alternative Picture as a *theory about the speaker's assertion*. And, she may endorse the Alternative Picture to defend Russell's semantic analysis of descriptive sentences. So, what position one takes about the second view proposed by the Alternative Picture does not affect the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's *theory about the semantic meaning* of sentences containing definite descriptions.

the relevant incomplete definite description, then the problem of incompleteness remains and hence Russell's theory is not defended. Again, if all of the possible fuller descriptions are treated as genuine completers of the relevant incomplete definite description, then a sentence containing an incomplete definite description becomes an ambiguous sentence. For example, if in a context, both "the table over there" and "the table I own" are genuine completers of the incomplete definite description "the table", then in the relevant context both of the following propositions:

(25b) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table &  $x$  is over there]  $x$  is covered with books

(25c) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table &  $x$  is owned by me]  $x$  is covered with books

are semantic contents or meanings of the sentence "The table is covered with books". This, thus, makes the sentence semantically ambiguous. But, according to Russell's theory a sentence containing a definite description has exactly one meaning—it is not semantically ambiguous. So, Russell's theory cannot be defended by taking all of the possible fuller descriptions as genuine completers of the relevant incomplete definite description. At any rate, due to the lack of a principled way of selecting one of many possible fuller descriptions as the genuine completer of a sentence containing an incomplete definite description, the Explicit Approach Defense fails to defend Russell's theory. But the lack of any principled way of selecting one of many possible pragmatically enriched propositions as the speaker's primary assertion does not undermine the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory as, in this case, the lack of any such principled way involves the assertions made by a speaker by uttering a sentence, not the semantic content of the sentence uttered. For example, in the above context in which the sentence (25) is uttered the Alternative Picture treats the propositions (25b) and (25c) as pragmatically enriched propositions which may be counted as the speaker's primary assertions. If both of the pragmatically enriched propositions are counted as the speaker's primary assertions in the given context, that won't make the sentence semantically ambiguous. For, in this case, the following proposition:

(25e) [the  $x$ :  $x$  is a table]  $x$  is covered with book

is the only proposition which is counted as the semantic content of the sentence (25). This outcome conforms to Russell's analysis of descriptive sentence according to which the

sentence (25) has exactly one meaning and that meaning is identical with (25e). In short, the problem faced by the second view proposed by the Alternative Picture does not affect the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory as the second view proposed by the Alternative Picture is not a part of the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory; even if it had a bearing on the Alternative Picture Defense, that would not be something inconsistent with the defense (of Russell's theory) made by the Alternative Picture Defense.

Concerning the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory, it is interesting to note that the problems posed by the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction have been accounted for by the same theory of language, namely the Alternative Picture. But this phenomenon should not lead one to think that the relationship between an incomplete definite description of the form "the *F*" and a referentially used definite description of the form "the *F*" is very *tight*, *e.g.* the incompleteness of a definite description is either a sufficient or a necessary condition for the referential use of that definite description. The relationship between an incomplete definite description and a referential use of it is not actually that tight. As has been shown in the second chapter of this dissertation, there are incomplete definite descriptions (*e.g.* "the thief" in the sentence "The thief has stolen my dictionary", when the speaker does not have any idea about who the thief is) which are used attributively; there are complete definite descriptions (*e.g.* "Smith's murderer" in the sentence "Smith's murderer is insane" uttered in Donnellan's Scenario-2) which are used referentially. That is, a definite description may be used referentially even though it is not incomplete (so, the incompleteness of a definite description is not a necessary condition for its referential use); again, an incomplete definite description may be used non-referentially, *i.e.* attributively (so, the incompleteness of a definite description is not a sufficient condition for its referential use). Hence, the incompleteness of a definite description is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for its referential use, and so, their relationship should not be counted as a very tight relationship. In the same chapter it has been claimed that although the relationship between them is not that tight, it should not be thought that there is no significant relationship between them. There is a significant relationship between them. And we now see that relationship: by uttering a sentence containing an incomplete definite description or a sentence containing a

referentially used definite description the speaker, in the relevant context, normally asserts a proposition(s) which is pragmatically richer (pragmatically enriched) than the semantic content of the sentence in question (the semantic content of the sentence in question may or may not belong to the assertions the speaker makes by uttering such a sentence). That is, in both cases the speaker's assertions may be different from the semantic contents of the relevant sentences. This is a sort of relationship between them. And I take it as a significant relationship because it is relevant to the problems posed by the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction. At the heart of the problems posed by both of the arguments is the incorrect conception that what is *said by a sentence* (i.e. the semantic content of the sentence) is also what is *said by the speaker* (i.e. the assertions made by the speaker) of that sentence. Since, the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness and the problems posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction both are rooted into the same incorrect conception (the Traditional Picture), they can be accounted for by the same theory, namely the Alternative Picture.

At any rate, from the whole discussion and examinations made in this dissertation we have found:

1. The descriptive sentence 'The *F* is *G*' semantically expresses the following general proposition: exactly one thing is an *F*, and whatever is an *F* is *G*.<sup>318</sup>
2. When 'the *F*', used in the sentence 'The *F* is *G*', is an incomplete definite description, a speaker may use the sentence 'The *F* is *G*' to say something true even though, on the Russellian analysis, in such a case 'The *F* is *G*' may semantically express a false proposition (due to the failure of satisfying the uniqueness condition). How it happens has become a problematic issue for the Russellian analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions.<sup>319</sup>
3. When 'the *F*', in the sentence 'The *F* is *G*', is used referentially, a speaker may assert a singular proposition, e.g. *o* is *G*, by uttering 'The *F* is *G*' even though, on the Russellian analysis, 'The *F* is *G*'

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<sup>318</sup> Discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>319</sup> Discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

expresses a general proposition. Besides, a speaker may use the sentence 'The *F* is *G*', in which 'the *F*' is used referentially, to say something true of her intended referent even when her intended referent does not fit the referentially used definite description 'the *F*'. These phenomena pose problems for the Russellian analysis of descriptive sentences.<sup>320</sup>

4. Although the problem mentioned in (2) does not prove that sentences containing definite descriptions are semantically ambiguous, most of the attempts that are taken to solve the problem end up with a failure.<sup>321</sup>
5. The problem mentioned in (3) indicates that some descriptive sentences which contain referentially used definite descriptions may have referential meanings in addition to their (attributive) meanings indicated by Russell's theory. But Russell's theory does not allow any ambiguity in descriptive sentence. In that case the issue of how the so-called referential meaning with which a referentially used definite is used by a speaker on a particular occasion can be accounted for has become a problematic issue for Russell's theory.<sup>322</sup>

Here, (2) and (4) indicate what I have called the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness; (3) and (5) indicate what I have called the problem posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction. However, we also have the following two things:

- (a) A *test*<sup>323</sup>, namely the cancellability test, which, along with the Distinguishing Criteria, namely *DC-1* and *DC-2*, shows that the phenomenon arising from Donnellan's distinction actually raises an issue of pragmatics, not of semantics. More precisely, the cancellability test and *DC-2* show that the so-called referential meaning arising from Donnellan's distinction is a *pragmatic meaning* with which the relevant descriptive sentence is used by a speaker on a particular occasion; it is *not a semantic meaning* of the relevant sentence, although the speaker may use the relevant sentence with that meaning

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<sup>320</sup> Discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>321</sup> Discussed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>322</sup> Discussed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>323</sup> Proposed and defended in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

on a particular occasion. So, no question of semantic ambiguity arises here. Hence, the problems indicated by (3) and (5), *i.e.* the problems posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction, are gone.

- (b) A *theory* of language, namely the Alternative Picture, which concerns the relationship between the meaning of a sentence and the assertions made by the speaker of that sentence.<sup>324</sup> This theory consists of two views the first one of which accounts for the phenomenon arising from (2) and (4), *i.e.* the problem posed by the Argument from Incompleteness, keeping Russell's analysis of descriptive sentence intact. Besides, it accounts for the phenomenon arising from (3) and (5), *i.e.* the problems posed by the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction, too without harming the Russellian analysis of descriptive sentences. The defense of Russell's theory made by means of the first view proposed by the Alternative Picture has been called, in this dissertation, the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory.

So, we see, neither the Argument from Incompleteness nor the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction poses a genuine threat to Russell's theory of definite descriptions. When we apply the test and the criterion mentioned above, we find that the apparent problems posed by the two arguments are not even relevant to Russell's semantic theory concerning the semantic meaning of descriptive sentences; they are rather relevant to pragmatics and are required to be addressed by a pragmatic theory of language. As a semantic theory of language Russell's theory does not need to address the issues they raise. And when we endorse the first view proposed by the Alternative Picture and, then, go with the Alternative Picture Defense of Russell's theory, we find that the phenomena arising from the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction can easily be accounted for. So, the problems they pose are not genuine but pseudo problems for Russell's theory; the phenomena arising from them can easily be accounted for by Russell's theory of definite descriptions without harming the semantic analysis of descriptive sentences it gives. In simple words, the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan's Distinction fail to undermine Russell's theory of definite descriptions.

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<sup>324</sup> Endorsed from Soames (2009a), p. 281 and Soames (2005), p. 19, and discussed and defended in the present chapter of this dissertation.

Finally, in his theory of definite descriptions Bertrand Russell offers a semantic analysis of descriptive sentences of the form “The *F* is *G*”. His aim is to explain what a *sentence* of the form “The *F* is *G*” *means* in various contexts of its use, not what the *speaker asserts* by using that sentence in particular contexts. What a sentence means (the sentence-meaning) and what a speaker asserts (the speaker’s assertion) by that sentence in a particular context are different things and are, often, diverged—the sentence-meaning may not belong to what is asserted by the speaker of the relevant sentence, and what is asserted by the speaker may differ from the sentence-meaning of the sentence in question. The pseudo problems posed by the Argument from Incompleteness and the Argument from Donnellan’s Distinction are rooted in our ignorance of the distinction between these two concepts, *i.e.* the sentence-meaning and the speaker’s assertion, which leads us unwarrantedly mixing them together. Once we get rid of this ignorance and avoid mixing the sentence-meaning and the speaker’s meaning, we see that Russell’s theory of definite descriptions is, to a large extent, correct. Because of its correctness Russell’s theory of definite descriptions—more than a century after its introduction—continues to be the most dominant theory concerning the semantic analysis of descriptive sentences in the study of philosophy of language. In 1929 F. P. Ramsey, in a footnote in the section “Philosophy” of his “Last Papers”, described Russell’s theory of definite descriptions as a *paradigm* of philosophy.<sup>325</sup> Today, more than eighty years after that pronouncement, it may safely be said that Russell’s theory of definite descriptions is a paradigm in the study of philosophy of language that has not shifted yet.



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<sup>325</sup> F. P. Ramsey, “Last Papers” *The Foundation of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, ed. Richard Bevan Braithwaite, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.(1931; reprinted in 2000 and 2001; the paper was written in 1929), p. 263.

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