DO INCOMPLETE DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS REFUTE RUSSELL'S THEORY OF DESCRIPTIONS?

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Thesis Abstract

Işık Pelin Ataman, "Do Incomplete Definite Descriptions Refute Russell's Theory of Descriptions?"

The aim of this study is to formulate a Russellian solution to the problem of *incomplete definite descriptions*, and thereby defend Russell's Theory of Descriptions. To this end, I argue that the proper way to approach the problem is to treat the Theory of Descriptions not merely as a semantic theory, but to view it in light of Russell's epistemology and theory of thought. I discuss several solutions proposed in the literature that either deny Russell's semantics altogether, or ignore his epistemological framework while trying to save his semantics. I reject those solutions as unsuitable for explaining the use of incomplete definite descriptions in ordinary discourse.

Russell's distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* an object is set as the main axis of this thesis. In conformity with Russell's theory of thought, I claim that all kinds of singular terms, including incomplete definite descriptions, are to be treated similarly, because in each case a speaker using a singular term intends to express her *thought about* an external object. Thus, the alleged problems with respect to the use of incomplete definite descriptions are to be found in all kinds of singular terms. As a result of these observations, I employ a version of Searle's Cluster Theory for proper names in order to give a full account of the proposition expressed by a sentence containing an incomplete definite description, and I resolve the problem of incomplete definite descriptions within Russell's Theory of Descriptions.

Tez Özeti

Işık Pelin Ataman, "Eksik Tekil Betimlemeler Russell'ın Betimlemeler Kuramı'nı Çürütür mü?"

Bu tezin amacı, *eksik tekil betimlemeler* sorununa Russellcı bir çözüm tasarlamak ve bu yolla Russell'ın Betimlemeler Kuramı'nı savunmaktır. Amaca yönelik olarak, Betimlemeler Kuramı'nı yalnız semantik açıdan değerlendirmek yerine, onu Russell'ın bilgi ve düşünce kuramları ışığında ele almanın soruna doğru yaklaşım biçimi olacağını savunuyorum. Literatürde önerilen, Russell'ın semantik kuramını tamamen reddeden veya semantik kuramını kurtarmaya çalışırken bilgi kuramını göz ardı eden çeşitli çözümleri tezimde tartışıyorum ve bunların günlük dildeki eksik tekil betimlemelerin kullanımlarını açıklamaya uygun olmadıkları savunuyorum.

Russell'ın bir nesne ile *tanışık olma* ve bir nesne *hakkında bilgi sahibi olma* arasında yaptığı ayrım, bu tezin temel eksenini oluşturmaktadır. Russell'ın düşünce kuramı kapsamında, her tekil terim kullanımında konuşmacı bir nesne *hakkındaki düşüncesini* ifade etmeyi hedeflediğinden, eksik tekil betimlemeler dahil her çeşit tekil terimin benzer şekilde incelenmesi gerektiğini iddia ediyorum. Bu nedenle, eksik tekil betimlemelerin kullanımlarına yönelik öne sürülen sorunlar, aynı zamanda tüm tekil terim çeşitleri için geçerlidir. Bu gözlemler sonunda, eksik tekil betimleme içeren bir tümcenin ifade ettiği önermenin tam bir açıklamasını verebilmek adına, Searle'ün özel adlar için önerdiği Tutam Kuramı'nın farklı bir uyarlamasından yararlanarak, eksik tekil betimlemeler sorununa Russell'ın Betimlemeler Kuramı çerçevesinde bir çözüm getiriyorum.

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

In his paper "On Denoting", published in the Mind journal in October 1905, Bertrand Russell proposes a new, radical theory of denoting.[1] In the paper, he presents a rather unorthodox semantic picture in giving an account of the proposition expressed by sentences containing denoting phrases.[2] Descriptions, or denoting phrases as Russell calls them, play a fundamental role in his epistemology as well as in his semantics, because the main point of his theory is that they are the essential devices used in making contact with the external world. Specifically, the only means available to us in constructing our thoughts about external objects are descriptions. The revolutionary account of descriptions given by Russell in "On Denoting" is called the Theory of Descriptions in the literature.

Critics of the Theory of Descriptions point to the use of incomplete definite descriptions in ordinary discourse as a specific objection to Russell's semantics. An incomplete definite description, such as 'the table', is one which is lacking in literal descriptive content so as to pick out a unique object. Since there are many tables existent in the universe, 'the table' is not uniquely denoting. Critics claim that Russell's uniquely existential analysis of propositions expressed by sentences

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[1] Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting", *Mind* 14, No. 56 (Oct., 1905), pp. 479-493.

[2] *Mind*'s October 2005 issue was published as a commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Russell's "On Denoting", where Stephen Neale wrote the introductory essay "A Century Later" (Stephen Neale, "A Century Later", *Mind* 114, No. 456 (Oct., 2005), pp. 809-871.). Here he notes (p. 809) that G. F. Stout, the editor of *Mind* at the time Russell wrote "On Denoting", initially objected to the theory presented in the paper. Russell mentions this in *My Philosophical Development* (1959), "This doctrine struck the then-editor as so preposterous that he begged me to reconsider it and not to demand its publication as it stood. I, however, was persuaded of its soundness and refused to give way. It was afterwards generally accepted, and came to be thought my most important contribution to logic." (Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 63). Neale also writes (pp.809-810) that although Russell was known as changing his mind often, he never gave up his Theory of Descriptions. One indication of this is the fact that Russell was still defending his theory in "Mr. Strawson on Referring" (1957), at the age of eighty-five, against P. F. Strawson's attacks in "On Referring" (1950), both published in the *Mind* journal.

containing definite descriptions cannot be an adequate account when the definite description used is incomplete. On the other hand, defenders of Russell's Theory employ a strategy called *the explicit approach*, where they claim that the context of utterance will provide the necessary means to complete an incomplete definite description, so that it becomes uniquely denoting as Russell's Theory requires, and hence the uniquely existential analysis of Russell will not be impeded. With this approach, they reason that incomplete definite descriptions do not create a problem for Russell's semantics. However, solutions provided in the literature to save Russell's Theory of Descriptions put aside his epistemology and treat the Theory of Descriptions solely in the semantic dimension. The main point I wish to make in my thesis is that, any solution that does not take into consideration Russell's epistemology and theory of thought, and in particular, his distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge/thought about* an external object, will not do justice to the Theory of Descriptions, and any such solution will not be able to fully account for the problem of incomplete definite descriptions. I must highlight the point that in this study, I do not question the validity of Russell's epistemology, but set it as the background in constructing a solution to the problem of incomplete definite descriptions. I believe that we can eliminate threats to Russell's Theory of Descriptions based on incomplete definite descriptions and save his semantics only if we work within his epistemological framework.

Russell's Theory of Descriptions will be my main concern in the first part of Chapter 1. I will focus on his views on denoting phrases, and in particular on those beginning with the definite article 'the', namely definite descriptions. Actually, a definite description need not begin with 'the', but any description that purports to denote a unique object can be turned into a definite description starting with 'the',

e.g. ‘my mother’ can be turned into ‘the mother of me’. The second part of Chapter 1 contains Russell’s epistemology, specifically an elucidation of his notions of *knowledge by acquaintance* and *knowledge by description*, and how his conception of proper names relates to these notions. In Chapter 2 of my thesis, I present incomplete definite descriptions as a possible objection to Russell’s Theory of Descriptions, and discuss several instances from objections based on incomplete definite descriptions. In Chapter 3, I will focus on the explicit approach to incomplete definite descriptions, because I believe that a purely Russellian solution to the problem of incomplete definite descriptions can be constructed by making use of a modification of the explicit strategy. I will discuss possible semi-Russellian and non-Russellian solutions to the problem, and set out my objections to these solutions. My own solution, which will constitute Chapter 4, will be a reply to the critics who attack the Theory of Descriptions based on incomplete definite descriptions. It will be purely Russellian, since its core will not only be compatible with Russell’s Theory of Descriptions, but also with his epistemology and his theory of thought, in particular with his distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge/thought about* an external object.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: RUSSELL'S SEMANTICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Russell's Semantics: the Theory of Descriptions

As Russell begins his paper "On Denoting" (1905), he does not immediately provide a definition of a *denoting phrase*. He starts instead by giving several examples in order to articulate what he means by a denoting phrase: "a man, some man, any man, every man, all men, the present King of England, the present King of France, the center of mass of the Solar System at the first instant of the twentieth century, the revolution of the earth around the sun, the revolution of the sun around the earth."[1] Hence, a phrase is called a denoting phrase "solely in virtue of its *form.*"[2] He divides denoting phrases into three kinds: (1) denoting phrases that purport to denote a definite unique object, but do not denote anything in reality, e.g. 'the present King of France'. (2) denoting phrases that denote one definite object, e.g. 'the present King of England' (At the time Russell wrote this paper, England had a king). (3) denoting phrases that denote an indefinite object, e.g. 'a man'.[3]

The gist of Russell's theory in "On Denoting" is that denoting phrases do not have any meaning when isolated from the sentence in which they reside, but a meaning belongs to every sentence in which those denoting phrases occur. Russell claims that a denoting phrase is part of the sentence in which it lies, and has no

[1] Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting", *Mind* 14, No. 56 (Oct., 1905), p. 479.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid. As a note, I should remark here that Russell does not mention phrases like 'all men' (and 'every man') as making up a distinct fourth kind of denoting phrase.

meaning when taken by itself, apart from its home sentence. Actually, Russell always uses the phrase "proposition" instead of "sentence", and writes that a denoting phrase is part of the proposition in which it occurs. However, in accordance with the present literature on this subject, we should interpret him as saying that a denoting phrase is part of the sentence in which it occurs. It has no meaning when isolated from its home sentence, but a meaning belongs to every sentence containing that denoting phrase, and this meaning is the proposition expressed by that sentence. Russell contends that a wrong analysis of propositions expressed by sentences that contain denoting phrases leads to confusions, which he claims to have solved with his new theory.

Russell puts forward the proper interpretation of "C(x)" as the basis of his theory. But what is "C(x)"? He first writes that "C(x)" is "a proposition in which the variable x is a constituent, and it is taken to be essentially and wholly undetermined."[4] But then he writes in the footnote to that comment, that "more exactly, it is a propositional function."[5] Here, Russell does not explain what he means exactly by a propositional function, or what exactly the distinction is between a proposition and a propositional function. It is necessary here to mention Russell's book *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (1919).[6] Here, he elucidates more on some of his views with respect to propositional functions, descriptions, and denoting phrases, and so helps us to a better understanding of "On Denoting".

In Chapter XV of *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, Russell writes "We mean by a "proposition" primarily a form of words which expresses what is

[4] Russell, "On Denoting", p. 480.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993).

either true or false."[7] He says "primarily" because a proposition may consist not only of verbal symbols, but of any kind of symbols, and "even mere thoughts" can be characterized as propositions, as long as they have a symbolic form and they give rise to truth or falsehood.[8] He defines a propositional function as follows: it is "an expression containing one or more undetermined constituents, such that, when values are assigned to these constituents, the expression becomes a proposition."[9] He gives an example for distinguishing the two notions: He contends that the statement "Whatever numbers a and b may be, $(a+b)^2 = a^2+2ab+b^2$" is a proposition, whereas the formula "$(a+b)^2 = a^2+2ab+b^2$" alone is not a proposition, but it is a propositional function since in the second case nothing definite is asserted unless we are further told what values the variables can get.[10]

Let us continue with "On Denoting". Russell gives the interpretation of the propositional function "C(x)" for the values *everything, nothing,* and *something,* which are the most primitive denoting phrases, as follows:

"C(everything)" means "C(x) is always true",

"C(nothing)" means " 'C(x) is false' is always true",

"C(something)" means "It is false that 'C(x) is false' is always true", or equivalently, "C(x) is sometimes true", or equivalently, "C(x) is not always false".[11] Here, the notion "C(x) is always true" is taken by Russell as indefinable and ultimate, with the other propositions being defined in terms of it. *everything, nothing,*

[7] Russell, *Introduction,* p. 155.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 155-156.

[10] Ibid., p. 155.

[11] Russell, "On Denoting", p. 480.

and *something* are denoting phrases, so when taken out of the sentence in which they stand, they do not have meanings on their own. However, every sentence which contains any one of them has a meaning as formulated above. We should make a small point here: Russell's use of the words "C(x) is always true" and "C(x) is sometimes true" may suggest that he is speaking of times, but we know from our modern understanding of logic that what he really means is "C(x) is true for all values of x", and "C(x) is true for some values of x".

Russell tries further to explain the proper analysis of propositions expressed by sentences which contain denoting phrases with three examples[12]:

(1) The first example is 'I met a man'. Russell contends that we must consider it to mean not a definite man, but an ambiguous man, so we can think of it as 'I met some man'. Taking "C(x)" as "I met x" now, where x is wholly undetermined, "C(some man)" means " 'C(x) and x is human' is true for some x". This way, every proposition expressed by sentences in which the denoting phrase 'a man' occurs is reduced to another proposition in which it does not occur. Hence, 'a man' when taken on its own is without any meaning, while every sentence containing 'a man' has a meaning, namely "C(a man)".

(2) The second example is 'all men are mortal'. Russell indicates that the proposition expressed by this sentence is hypothetical, and it states that if anything is a man, then it is mortal. "C(x)" must be taken as "x is mortal". Now, "C(all men)" means " 'If x is human, then C(x)' is true for all x". "C(every man)" is equivalent to "C(all men)". "C(no men)" means " 'If x is human, then C(x) is false' is true for all x". "C(some man)" and "C(a man)" are equivalent, and they mean " 'C(x) and x is human' is true for some x".

[12] Russell, "On Denoting", pp. 481-482.

(3) The third example is 'the father of Charles II. was executed'. Russell says that "phrases containing *the* are by far the most interesting and difficult of denoting phrases."[13] 'the' indicates uniqueness, thus, "x is the father of Charles II." is analysed as "x begat Charles II. and 'if y begat Charles II., then y is identical with x' is true for all y", in order to insure uniqueness. Now, taking "C(x)" to be "x was executed", "C(the father of Charles II.)" becomes "It is true for some x that x begat Charles II., and that C(x), and that 'if y begat Charles II., then y is identical to x' is true for all y". In fact, this analysis of "C(the father of Charles II.)" not only stands for the proposition expressed by 'the father of Charles II. was executed', but for the proposition expressed by any sentence in which 'the father of Charles II.' occurs. There is a crucial point here which will help us understand denoting phrases that purport to denote a definite object, but fail to do so. According to the above analysis, "C(the father of Charles II.)" implies "It is true for some x that x begat Charles II., and that 'if y begat Charles II., then y is identical to x' is true for all y". In other words, the proposition expressed by 'the father of Charles II. was executed' would imply that there is a unique entity who begat Charles II, namely, that "Charles II. had one father and no more". Consequently, if there is no such uniquely existent entity, or if there are more than one such entity, then that would mean the uniqueness condition has failed. Thus every proposition of the form "C(the present King of France)" (where the definite description has a primary occurence) is false if the implication that there is a unique King of France is false.

There is a subtle point that should not be missed here, where Russell discusses denoting phrases containing 'the' in "On Denoting". In his theory, Russell takes into consideration only definite descriptions where the phrase 'the' is used in

[13] Russell, "On Denoting", p. 481.

the "strict" sense, so we must ask what this strict sense of 'the' means. He says, "Now *the,* when it is strictly used, involves uniqueness; we do, it is true, speak of "*the* son of So-and-so" even when So-and-so has several sons, but it would be more correct to say "a son of So-and-so". Thus for our purposes we take *the* as involving uniqueness."[14] We can infer from this passage right at the beginning of his discussion of the phrase 'the', that the uniqueness condition is an assumption in his theory. In other words, he initiates his semantic picture of definite descriptions by saying that he will only consider cases in which 'the' is used by a speaker in the strict sense. I interpret this passage from Russell as saying that conventions of the English language ascribe a uniqueness condition to the semantics of the phrase 'the', so a sincere speaker using a definite description uses it to speak of a unique object. We should keep this point in mind because it will be important later in Chapter 4 as we discuss the issue of uniqueness more deeply.

The analyses of propositions Russell gives in "On Denoting" are quite complex, although I tried to accommodate them to our modern understanding of logic. We can see that he treats the definite article 'the' as a quantifier, just like the quantifiers 'all', 'every', 'a', 'some', and 'no'.[15] Indeed, he confirms this in the "Descriptions" chapter (Ch. XVI) of *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy.* He contends that a proposition of the form "the F is G" is tantamount to saying that (1)

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[14] Russell, "On Denoting", p. 481.

[15] Russell's views with respect to denoting in *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903) were different from his views in "On Denoting" (1905). In his book *My Philosophical Development* (1959), after quoting some paragraphs from *The Principles of Mathematics,* Russell writes, "There is much in this paragraph that I came later to think erroneous. I was led to alter my views by the theory of descriptions and the doctrine of types. The theory of descriptions persuaded me that a word may contribute to the significance of a sentence without having any meaning in isolation. I had thought that the word 'the', for example, denotes some curious kind of object which the virtuous logician may hope to meet in the Platonic heaven. Such hopes the theory of descriptions caused me to abandon." (p.119).

There is at least one F, and (2) There is at most one F, and (3) Whatever is an F is G. He says, "The only thing that distinguishes "the so-and-so" from "a so-and-so" is the implication of uniqueness."[16] The example he gives here helps us to better understand the quantificational analysis of 'the':

> The proposition "the author of Waverly was Scotch" implies (1) at least one person wrote Waverly; (2) at most one person wrote Waverly; (3) whoever wrote Waverly was Scotch. Conversely, these three propositions together (but no two of them) imply "the author of Waverly was Scotch". Hence the three together may be taken as defining what is meant by the proposition "the author of Waverly was Skotch".[17]

Remember that in the proposition expressed by 'all men are mortal', the denotation of 'all men' is not the logical subject, since once the proposition is analysed 'all men' dissolves into quantifiers and predicates. Similarly, Russell claims that although a definite description in a sentence can take the subject position grammatically, its denotation cannot be the logical subject of the proposition expressed by that sentence because the definite description also dissolves into quantifiers and predicates.

Russell's Epistemology: Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description - Proper Names and Definite Descriptions

In "On Denoting", Russell hints at his epistemological views at the very beginning of his paper. Later in my thesis, I will argue for the claim that his theory of knowledge and his theory of thought lie at the base of his semantics, so we have to take a close look at his epistemic theory. He says in "On Denoting" that the subject of denoting is

[16] Russell, *Introduction,* p. 176.

[17] Ibid., p. 177.

immensely important not only in logic and mathematics, but also in epistemology. He writes:

> The distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* is the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases […] In perception we have acquaintance with the objects of perception, and in thought we have acquaintance with objects of a more abstract logical character; but we do not necessarily have acquaintance with the objects denoted by phrases composed of words with whose meanings we are acquainted […] All thinking has to start from acquaintance; but it succeeds in thinking *about* many things with which we have no acquaintance.[18]

Although Russell's Theory of Descriptions is usually conceived of as a semantic theory, the fact that he indicates in this paragraph at the very start of presenting his theory the significance of denoting in epistemology and in a theory of thought is certainly a sign that his epistemology, his theory of thought and his semantics cannot be separated. Russell's book *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912)[19], and especially the chapter "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" gives us a further and more extended idea of his epistemology.

Russell contends that there are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of things and knowledge of truths. With respect to knowledge of things, he makes a distinction between *knowledge of things by acquaintance* and *knowledge of things by description*. He writes, "We shall say that we have *acquaintance* with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths."[20] So, being acquainted with something means that we have an immediate and direct epistemic contact with that thing, our consciousness of that

[18] Russell, "On Denoting", pp. 479-480.

[19] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1912).

[20] Ibid., p. 46.

thing does not depend on any inferences or on our knowledge of any other truths. The example Russell gives in explaining knowledge by acquaintance is his contact with certain sense-data while experiencing his table. While he sees and touches his table, he is acquainted with "the sense-data making up the appearance of his table – its color, shape, hardness, smoothness, etc."[21] As opposed to the knowledge of sense-data corresponding to the table, consider now the knowledge of the table as an external, physical object. Russell maintains that knowing the table itself as a whole external object is not immediate but inferential knowledge, which is based on acquaintance with the sense-data making up its appearance, which is direct. Knowing that "such-and-such sense-data are caused by a physical object" is knowledge of a truth, and it is preliminary to knowing anything at all about the table. Describing the table by means of the sense-data, we can say that the table is 'the physical object which causes such-and-such sense-data'.[22] Knowledge of the table as a physical object then consists entirely of knowledge of truths that binds it to things with which we have acquaintance. Russell says that in the case of external objects, we know a description, and we know that there is exactly one object that this description truly applies to, but we have no direct knowledge of that object. He writes "the actual thing which is the table is not, strictly speaking, known to us at all."[23] I think he says this because he considers knowledge by acquaintance as the primary, or strict kind of knowledge, which forms the basis of all other knowledge. Since we can never be directly acquainted with external objects but can only know them by description, knowledge of external objects is indirect, inferential, and secondary in a sense. That

[21] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 46.

[22] Ibid., p. 47.

[23] Ibid.

is the reason why Russell may interpret knowledge by description as, strictly speaking, no knowledge at all. He sums up the things with which we have acquaintance as follows:

> We have acquaintance in sensation with the data of the outer senses, and in introspection with the data of what may be called the inner sense – thoughts, feelings, desires, etc.; we have acquaintance in memory with things which have been data either of the outer senses or of the inner sense. Further, it is probable, though not certain, that we have acquaintance with Self, as that which is aware of things or has desires towards things. In addition to our acquaintance with particular existing things, we also have acquaintance with what we shall call *universals,* that is to say, general ideas, such as *whiteness, diversity, brotherhood,* and so on.[24]

He also indicates that some universals are known by acquaintance while some are only known by description, and knowledge by description of a universal can also be reduced to knowledge by acquaintance.

Physical objects and other people's minds, on the other hand, cannot be known by acquaintance, but they can only be known by description. There are two kinds of descriptions: The first one is indefinite descriptions. These are in the form 'a so-and-so', one example being 'a man'. The second kind is definite descriptions, which are in the form 'the so-and-so' (in the singular), an example being 'the present king of England'. Indefinite descriptions correspond to denoting phrases that denote an indefinite object, and definite descriptions correspond to denoting phrases that purport to denote one definite object. While elaborating on knowledge by description, Russell's main concern is with definite descriptions, because he is interested in how we can reach single external objects through language in the thinking process, how we can think, talk about, and know about external objects. According to Russell, the only way we can reach a singular external object is through

[24] Russell, *The Problems,* pp. 51-52.

a definite description. An object is *known by description* "when we know that it is 'the so-and-so', i.e. when we know that there is one object, and no more, having a certain property; …"[25] On this issue, we also have to expound on Russell's views on proper names, because proper names are closely related to definite descriptions in his semantic/epistemic framework and theory of thought. Russell makes a distinction between *ordinary proper names* and *logically proper names*. Ordinary proper names are names that we use in ordinary language, like names of people, places, and objects. On the other hand, logically proper names can only be used to name things that we are acquainted with, that we are directly aware of. Normally we would think that proper names are singular terms, that we use proper names to refer directly to single external objects. However, Russell goes against our intuitions about what the thought expressed by our utterance including a proper name would be. The proposition expressed by uttering a sentence containing a proper name is not at all what an ordinary speaker of the language would guess. Russell maintains that ordinary proper names are in fact abbreviated descriptions. He writes, "Common words, even proper names, are usually really descriptions. That is to say, the thought in the mind of a person using a proper name correctly can generally only be expressed explicitly if we replace the proper name by a description."[26] Thus, the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence of the form 'A is G', where 'A' is a proper name of the object we mean to talk about, is actually the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence of the form 'the F is G', where 'the F' is a description in our mind of the object we wish to talk about, namely the object called 'A'. So, the proposition "A is G" is analysed as "the F is G", which in turn must be

[25] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 53.

[26] Ibid., p. 54.

analysed in accordance with Russell's Theory of Descriptions as "there is exactly one F, and whatever is an F is G". Hence, what is counter-intuitive in Russell's conception of proper names is that the thought expressed by our utterance including a proper name, in fact, happens to be a uniquely existential statement. He also indicates that although in everyday discourse we use an ordinary proper name with the purpose of expressing a statement containing the proper name itself (and not a description of the object in question), this is never the case:

> It would seem that, when we make a statement about something only known by description, we often *intend* to make our statement, not in the form involving the description, but about the actual thing described. That is to say, when we say anything about Bismarck, we should like, if we could, to make the judgement which Bismarck alone can make, namely, the judgement of which he himself is a constituent. In this we are necessarily defeated, since the actual Bismarck is unknown to us.[27]

So what does Russell mean by this paragraph? In order to understand, we have to examine his Principle of Acquaintance, because I think the basis of his views with respect to proper names and definite descriptions is this principle. Acquaintance plays an integral role in Russell's epistemology, his theory of thought, and in his picture of the relationship between language, mind, and the world. He writes, "The fundamental principle in the analysis of propositions containing descriptions is this: *Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted.*"[28] Now, considering the paragraph quoted above about Bismarck in the light of the Principle of Acquaintance, Russell means to say that whenever we make a statement about Bismarck, if we claim we understand that statement, then it must be the case that Bismarck, the man himself, is not really a constituent of the statement (i.e. the proposition expressed) because we cannot be

[27] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 57.

[28] Ibid., p. 58.

acquainted with him. Actually, for us to be able to ever entertain any thoughts about the man called 'Bismarck', the proper name 'Bismarck' used by us on that occasion must be a disguised definite description. Since we can never have direct epistemic access to external objects, since we cannot know them by acquaintance, the fact that we can ever entertain any thoughts about an external object is possible only if we have in our mind a definite description corresponding to it. Only Bismarck himself can use the name 'Bismarck' as a logically proper name, in which case he would be directly referring to himself, he would be a constituent of the proposition expressed, and the proposition could only be understood by himself (assuming that people are acquainted with themselves). The name 'Bismarck' functions as an ordinary proper name in all uses of it by other people.

Russell contends that there are five levels in terms of closeness to acquaintance with particulars.[29] I wish to present Russell's views with respect to those, and also examine them more closely and add my own ideas as well:

(1) First there is Bismarck making a statement about himself. Assuming that he is acquainted with himself (it was mentioned before that Russell considered acquaintance with the Self as probable, but not certain), Bismarck can make a statement about himself using his own name as directly denoting himself, where he would be a constituent of the proposition expressed. So, 'Bismarck' is not in this case, as it is most of the time, a disguised description, but it becomes a logically proper name, because it denotes something that the speaker is acquainted with, namely himself. "Here the proper name has the direct use which it always wishes to

[29] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 57-58.

have, as simply standing for a certain object, and not for a description of the object."[30]

(2) Secondly, we may consider a person who lived in the times of Bismarck and knew him personally. Of course here "knew" him personally is not used in Russell's technical use of the verb, but means "to know someone" as we use it in everyday discourse. In this case, the speaker[31] is acquainted with sense-data making up the appearance of the man named 'Bismarck'. Thus, the speaker knows Bismarck by description, which is based on her acquaintance with sense-data corresponding to Bismarck's appearance. Compared to level (1), level (2) is further removed from direct epistemic contact with particulars related to the external object, in this case Bismarck, but Russell writes that it "comes as near to acquaintance as is possible in regard to another person".[32]

(3) The third level of closeness to acquaintance with particulars would be the knowledge of someone who did not know Bismarck personally, but knows him only through historical knowledge, through what she has read or heard about him from other sources, such as books or people. Based on the information she has gained from those other sources, namely, based on the particulars she became acquainted with such as testimony she has read or heard, let's say that the speaker thinks of Bismarck as 'the first Chancellor of the German Empire'. Russell contends that all the words of the description represent universals except 'German', which must be a disguised description also. Indeed, slightly differentiating from Russell's view, I

[30] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 54.

[31] Or the thinker we may say, because thinking of a judgement on the one hand, and uttering a sentence to make that judgement, to express that proposition, can be considered as simultaneous processes I would say. I will expound on the theory of thought aspect of Russell's theory later in Chapter 4 of my thesis.

[32] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 58.

would say that 'the German Empire' must be taken as a whole. In my view, it is an ordinary proper name that denotes a unique entity, so it must be evaluated as a whole, as abbreviating a definite description. Thus, an utterance of 'Bismarck was an astute diplomatist' would in fact express a statement like "the first Chancellor of the German Empire was an astute diplomatist" where 'the German Empire' also must be replaced by a uniquely denoting phrase. It is knowledge by description of the man named 'Bismarck', which is based on the speaker's acquaintance with particulars such as testimony she has heard or read, and is further away from acquaintance with particulars related to Bismarck compared to level (2). It is true that the speaker's knowledge here seems like second-hand access to the man in question, but usually the testimony heard or read by the speaker are rooted in other people's first-hand access to the man. In other words, the source of the information heard or read by the speaker about Bismarck is people who had level (2) closeness to acquaintance with particulars related to Bismarck.

(4) The description to be considered as an instance of the fourth level of closeness to acquaintance with particulars is 'the man with the iron mask'. Russell claims that a speaker uttering a sentence containing this description "does not know who the man with the iron mask was, though he can know many propositions about him which are not logically deducible from the fact that he wore an iron mask."[33] This case should be contrasted with the previous case, where Russell says that "the speaker shall still be said to know who Bismarck was."[34] I think the intuition Russell has here is that, the unique man denoted by the phrase 'the man with the iron mask', as a part of seventeenth century French history, is someone about whom relatively less

[33] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 58.

[34] Ibid.

information (than say cases like Bismarck on level (3) above) has been accessible both to people who were living at the time and to those who have lived since. For instance, in the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, after providing several important names and dates with respect to the life of the man in the iron mask, it says, "The possible identity of this man has been thoroughly discussed and has been the subject of many books [and films], because no one ever saw his face, which was hidden by a mask of black velvet cloth."[35] Similar to level (3), the source of testimony heard or read about this man may be people who had level (2) closeness to acquaintance with particulars related to him. But somehow we feel that the epistemic access to the man in the iron mask is not as close or as direct as it was to Bismarck in level (3), because given the less explicit identity of the man in the iron mask compared to Bismarck, even first-hand access of people, which should be taken as the basis for the second-hand access of the speaker at this level (the testimony she heard or read), seems less reliable than in level (3).

(5) The last and furthest from acquaintance with particulars would be a speaker making a statement about the longest-lived of men. Russell says that apart from not knowing who the man described as 'the longest-lived of men' is, the speaker also cannot be said to know anything beyond what she can logically deduce from the description. The description 'the longest-lived of men' consists only of universals, and I would say that most probably there are absolutely no particulars that the speaker is acquainted with, related to the object in question. Russell writes, "in some way or other, a description known to be applicable to a particular must involve some

[35] Available [online]: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man_in_the_Iron_Mask

reference to a particular with which we are acquainted, if our knowledge about the thing described is not to be merely what follows *logically* from the description."[36]

[36] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 56.

CHAPTER 2

INCOMPLETE DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS INTRODUCED AS A POSSIBLE PROBLEM

One of the most prominent attacks upon Russell's Theory of Descriptions in the literature is the problem of *incomplete definite descriptions.* They may also be called *improper*, *imperfect*, or *indefinite* definite descriptions. An incomplete definite description in English is a description which starts with the definite article 'the', so that it seems at first sight like a definite description, but in which the descriptive condition given in the expression lacks sufficient content to pick out a unique object. Hence, the phrase does not uniquely denote. In other words, there is more than one object satisfying the literal descriptive content of the expression. Some examples are 'the table', 'the murderer', 'the film', 'the guy', 'the door', 'the next President', … There is obviously more than one table, more than one murderer, more than one film, etc… existent in the world. That is why the critics of Russell's theory maintain that the descriptions in question do not determine unique objects of reference. Yet, we should be careful here. Roughly speaking, in an utterance of the form 'the F is G' where 'the F' is incomplete, since there is more than one object *existent in the world* having the property F, opponents of Russell maintain that the description does not determine a unique object. They see this as a problem for Russell's semantics. However, I will later argue in Chapter 4 that a proper interpretation of Russell's theory must take into account speaker intentions and contextual factors. Those are the aspects that determine the more complex (in a way, complete) content of the literally uttered property F that must be implicit in the speaker's mind. Thus, we

should look and see how many objects there are *existent in the context of utterance* having that implicit more complex property, not *existent in the world*. But more on this issue later.

What is wrong, or problematic, with uttering incomplete definite descriptions, besides the opponents' claim that they cannot determine unique objects of reference? Those philosophers who object to Russell's theory on the basis of incomplete definite descriptions, like Howard Wettstein and Marga Reimer, maintain that the proposition expressed by an utterance of the sentence 'The table is covered with books' would be on a Russellian analysis, "There is exactly one table, and whatever is a table is covered with books". Since it is clearly false that there is exactly one table on the face of earth, they conclude that the proposition expressed would be false on Russellian grounds because its first conjunct is false. However, in everyday discourse, most of the time we use such incomplete definite descriptions to make true assertions. As in the case given above, it may be true that the table which we are talking about is really covered with books, so that a true assertion is made. The opponents argue that Russell's Theory of Descriptions is unable to account for this ordinary discourse phenomenon.

There are two basic strategies that Russellians have used to defend themselves against the problem of incomplete definite descriptions. The first strategy is the explicit approach, and the second the implicit approach. These counter arguments originate from the proposed solutions to the general problem of incompleteness in quantifiers. Since Russell interprets definite descriptions as quantifiers, Russellians make use of those two approaches in order to ward off

criticisms. Stephen Neale, explains them quite clearly in *Descriptions* (1990).[37] He writes, "According to the explicit approach, incomplete quantifiers are *elliptical* for proper quantifiers […] According to the implicit approach, the context of utterance delimits the domain of quantification and leaves the descriptive content untouched."[38] The explicit approach is the view that the context of utterance supplies the missing descriptive content in order to complete the incomplete definite description so that it becomes uniquely denoting. In other words, the descriptive material needed to make the incomplete definite description into a uniquely denoting one is extracted from the context of utterance. The incomplete definite description then is elliptical for its completed uniquely denoting definite description. I will leave aside the implicit approach and focus only on the explicit strategy in my thesis, because I believe that the explicit approach is adequate to give a reasonable explanation, in a Russellian spirit, to the use of incomplete definite descriptions in natural language.

The particular example 'The table is covered with books' was first proposed by P. F. Strawson in his paper "On Referring" (1950)[39], and it became one of the most famous attacking points on Russell. Strawson gave 'The table is covered with books' as a counterexample to Russell's views in *Principia Mathematica* about the definite article 'the'. Strawson quotes from Russell's book that "the definite article is used strictly, so as to imply uniqueness".[40] Strawson finds this criterion of usage of the definite article too strict, because he thinks in natural language most of the time

[37] Stephen Neale, *Descriptions* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

[38] Ibid., p. 95.

[39] Peter F. Strawson, "On Referring", *Mind* 59, No. 235 (July 1950), pp. 320-344.

[40] Ibid., p. 332.

'the' is not thus used. Also, Russell's view 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, seems most implausible to Strawson, based on the example 'The table is covered with books'. He writes:

> 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". It is indeed tautologically true that, in such a use, the phrase will have an application only in the event of there being one table and no more *which is being referred to,* and that it will be understood to have an application only in the event of there being one table and no more which it is understood as being used to refer to. To use the sentence is not to assert, but it is (in the special sense discussed) to imply, that there is only one thing which is *both* of the kind specified (i.e. a table) *and is being referred to* by the speaker. It is obviously not to assert this.[41]

Here, Strawson is rejecting Russell's view that the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence of the form 'the F is G' logically implies that "there is exactly one F". The reason he gives is that he thinks a speaker cannot be said to have *asserted (or stated)* that "there is exactly one F" when uttering 'the F is G'. He maintains that the uniquely existential statement is implied in a special sense, which is not logical implication or assertion at all. However he doesn't enlighten us much on what this "special sense of implication" is. His alternative view on the definite article 'the' is that "one of its conventional functions is to act as a *signal* that a unique reference is being made."[42]

Saul Kripke, in his paper "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference" (1977)[43] contends that although he does not see Keith Donnellan's criticisms of

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[41] Strawson, "On Referring", pp. 332-333.

[42] Ibid., p. 331.

[43] Saul A. Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, II* (1977), pp. 255-276.

Russell's theory about the referential use as a threat to Russell's semantic picture of definite descriptions, in the last count, the theory most probably will be refuted by some instances of daily discourse. He writes:

> […] although his theory does a far better job of handling ordinary discourse than many have thought, and although many popular arguments against it are inconclusive, probably it ultimately fails. The considerations I have in mind have to do with the existence of "improper" definite descriptions, such as "the table", where uniquely specifying conditions are not contained in the description itself. Contrary to the Russellian picture, I doubt that such descriptions can always be regarded as elliptical with some uniquely specifying conditions added. And it may even be the case that a true picture will resemble various aspects of Donnellan's in important respects.[44]

In this paper, Kripke makes a distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference. He says:

> If a speaker has a designator in his idiolect, certain conventions of his idiolect (given various facts about the world) determine the referent in the idiolect: that I call the *semantic referent* of the designator. (If the designator is ambiguous, or contains indexicals, demonstratives, or the like, we must speak of the semantic referent on a given occasion. The referent will be determined by the conventions of the language plus the speaker's intentions and various contextual features.)[45]

He defines the *speaker's referent* of a designator to be "that object which the speaker wishes to talk about, on a given occasion, and believes fulfills the conditions for being the semantic referent of the designator […] 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."[46] Kripke states that the problems Donnellan sees with respect to Russell's theory can be resolved by applying to this distinction, so that those criticisms do not pose any danger to Russell. Why then would Kripke interpret

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[44] Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference", pp. 255-256.

[45] Ibid., p. 263.

[46] Ibid., p. 264.

the use of incomplete definite descriptions in ordinary discourse as a problem? Above, I quoted from Kripke that in the case of a designator that is ambiguous (or which contains indexicals or demonstratives), "the semantic referent on a given occasion" must be considered. He notes that speaker's intentions, contextual factors, and conventions of the language will together settle the semantic referent on that occasion.[47] Similarly, couldn't the problem of incompleteness be solved by interpreting an incomplete definite description as a designator that is literally ambiguous? Why doesn't Kripke appeal to the notion of "the semantic referent on a given occasion" to be determined from speaker intentions and the contextual factors?

In his "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference", Kripke does not go into why he sees incomplete definite descriptions as a threat to Russell, but he does briefly talk about it in the John Locke Lectures for 1973 (unpublished).[48] Those lectures concentrate on the notions of reference and existence. In the 6th lecture, Kripke says that Russell's Theory of Descriptions may face a problem in "the way transmission of speaker's reference can come in to the use of a definite description."[49] He constructs a scenario in which a speaker heard one of her friends talk about a certain logician, by calling him 'the logician'. In order to avoid confusion, I will call the subjects of this scenario 'the speaker' and 'the friend' respectively. The friend had a particular logician in mind, whom the friend referred to with the incomplete definite description 'the logician'. Later, the speaker wishes to talk about the same logician that the friend had talked about. If the speaker uses the phrase 'the logician', Kripke says, then it must be the *speaker's referent* of the friend

[47] Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference", p. 263.

[48] Saul Kripke, *Reference and Existence, the John Locke Lectures for 1973.*

[49] Ibid., Lecture 6, p. 8.

that is being transferred from the friend to the speaker, via the transmission of the phrase 'the logician'. Kripke says the speaker can complete the incomplete phrase 'the logician' so as to be 'the logician that so-and-so referred to'. He maintains that even if the speaker later forgets from whom she heard about that logician, she may still say 'the logician referred to by the person from whom I got it ["it" being here the name 'the logician']'.[50] Kripke then switches the example from 'the logician' to 'the table' and says:

> But such an additional predicate is very much against the spirit of the Russellian analysis. For what would the Russellian analysis be? One would say 'There is an x such that x is the table being referred to by the phrase 'the table' by the person from whom I heard of it'. This is very much outside the spirit of Russell which was not to take such phrases as 'the table' as referring expressions at all. Even though only a speaker's reference might be in question here, it would still be very much out of the spirit of the enterprise […] to allow this as the kind of predicate which is going to determine one's reference, since it involves the notion of the reference of the phrase 'the table'.[51]

Now, although in Chapter 4 I will present a thorough reply to this criticism by Kripke, here I will give my preliminary views about it and point out some of my concerns:

First of all, we can see that Kripke regards the description 'the logician' as semantically incomplete (against this view, I will argue in Chapter 4 that although 'the logician' is incomplete literally, there is also a sense in which it must be complete), which would imply that there is no semantic referent of the phrase 'the logician' independent of the speaker's intentions. That seems to be the reason why he

[50] Kripke, *Reference and Existence,* Lecture 6, p. 9.

[51] Ibid.

indicates that "it is the speaker's reference that is being carried over."[52] in this context, which appears to Kripke to be unsolvable by Russell's theory.

Secondly, here Kripke is presenting a criticism of the explicit approach. His argument is built on the assumption that advocates of the explicit approach will reply to him by claiming that the speaker has to have some other predicates in mind to supplement 'the logician'. He seems to find 'the logician' problematic because he seems to think that the most probable (or maybe the one that comes to mind first?) completion for it would be 'the logician being referred to by the phrase 'the logician' by the person from whom I heard of it [the phrase 'the logician']'.[53] He argues that this completion would be against Russell's own conception of denoting phrases, which was that they are not genuine referring expressions. I should make a small remark at this point: In his first version of the example, Kripke's suggested completion is 'the logician that so-and-so referred to', or if the speaker does not remember who the friend was, the completion would be 'the logician referred to by the person from whom I got it [the name 'the logician']'. Those completions do not contain the notion of *the reference of the phrase* 'the logician', but instead they rely on *the speaker referring to* an object. If Kripke accepts that what is concerned in this example is the transmission of the anonymous friend's *(speaker's) referent*, then why does he feel the need to put in the notion of *the reference of the phrase* 'the logician' in his later formulation? He even says at one point:

> If someone was called 'the logician' and this was transferred from one person to another, with a particular logician in the first person's mind, but I, the hearer, just intend to be talking about the same logician that

[52] Kripke, *Reference and Existence,* Lecture 6, p. 9.

[53] Ibid. Kripke actually uses 'the table' instead of 'the logician' in this example.

> the person I got the name from was talking about, I can add on such a qualification as '(the logician) that so and so referred to'.[54]

As this passage implies, the speaker may complete 'the logician' to be 'the same logician that the person I got the name from was talking about', because that's exactly the person that the speaker wishes to talk about. This completion does not contain the notion of the reference of the phrase 'the logician', which Kripke thinks would cause a problem for Russell's theory. In Chapter 4, I will give a Russellian account of *thinking/talking about an object*, *having an object in mind*, and a *speaker's (mental) reference* to an object. I would say that those notions are in fact inherent in Kripke's own formulation of 'the logician' example, as the above discussion shows, so they will help us clarify the issue about Kripke's discomfort.

The last remark I wish to make is that Kripke admits this example may not be a conclusive counter-example to Russell's Theory of Descriptions. He says:

> But it seems very much out of the spirit of the Russellian enterprise to allow this as the kind of predicate which is going to determine one's reference, since it involves the notion of the reference of the phrase 'the table'. Perhaps one can defend this as really being within the spirit of the Russellian enterprise: it isn't quite an out and out counter-example. But it does perhaps, on the other hand, show that the matter is subject to some kind of doubt.[55]

Does this imply that Kripke's whole concern is that the notion of *the reference of the phrase* 'the logician' cannot be avoided in cases like these, and that it cannot be accounted for by Russell's theory? It seems to me that this cannot be the only problem. Those lectures were given in 1973, and Kripke still wrote in his 1977 paper "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference" that he saw incomplete definite descriptions as a point that may refute Russell. This shows perhaps that although he sees the speaker's reference/semantic reference distinction as a way to save Russell's

[54] Kripke, *Reference and Existence,* Lecture 6, p. 9.

[55] Ibid.

Theory of Descriptions from Donnellan's criticisms (about the referential/attributive uses), he does not think the same distinction can solve the problem of incompleteness. Maybe there is something more to Kripke's being bothered by incomplete definite descriptions than I could infer from his unpublished lectures.

CHAPTER 3

SEMI-RUSSELLIAN AND NON-RUSSELLIAN SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF INCOMPLETE DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS

The Explicit Approach to Incomplete Definite Descriptions

The explicit approach is the view that the context of utterance supplies the missing descriptive content in order to complete an incomplete definite description so that it becomes uniquely denoting. In other words, the descriptive material needed to make the incomplete definite description into a uniquely denoting one is extracted from the context of utterance. The incomplete definite description then is elliptical for its completed uniquely denoting definite description. Stephen Neale actually borrows the idea of "ellipsis" from Wilfrid Sellars, who expresses his views on incompleteness, context-dependence, and the correlation between them in his paper "Presupposing" (1954).[56]

Sellars' paper is indeed a reply to the criticisms Strawson advances against Russell's theory in his "On Referring". In order to explain incomplete utterances, Sellars begins with considering two dialogues between two mathematicians. The dialogues go like this:

> Jones: Seven is divisible by three.
> Smith: Seven is not divisible by three.
> Jones: Seven is.
> ……

[56] Wilfrid Sellars, "Presupposing", *The Philosophical Review* 63, No. 2 (Apr., 1954), pp. 197-215.

(later) Jones: Seven is divisible by four.
Smith: Seven is not divisible by four.
Jones: Seven is.[57]

Sellars distinguishes the utterances of 'Seven is' in the above two cases, from other contextually-dependent utterances, such as utterances of 'This is red'. He rightly points out that utterances of 'This is red' are context-dependent, because of the indexical phrase 'this' (Sellars calls it ego-centric), but such utterances are *complete* as they are. As opposed to this, the propositions expressed by the above utterances of 'Seven is' are *incomplete* as such, and can only be made complete according to the context of utterance. Namely, in the first instance above, the proposition expressed by the utterance of 'Seven is' is completed by the context to become "Seven is divisible by three", and in the second case it is completed to become "Seven is divisible by four". So, the context-dependency of "This is red" is quite different from that of "Seven is". Sellars writes about the context dependence of elliptical statements:

> That the context serves in this way to complete them is as much a matter of linguistic convention as is the role of ego-centric expressions. Let us call this type of ambiguity *ellipsis* and say that in ellipsis the context completes the utterance and enables it to say something which it otherwise would not, different contexts enabling it to say different things.[58]

Thus, Sellars concedes that ego-centricity and ellipsis are distinct "types of ambiguity".[59] Sellars applies these opinions with respect to incompleteness and context-dependence to incomplete definite descriptions. He argues that if it is clearly understood that there is a distinction between ego-centricity and ellipsis, then it will be seen that a particular utterance of the sentence 'The table is large' has both kinds

[57] Sellars, "Presupposing", p. 199.

[58] Ibid., p. 200.

[59] Ibid., pp. 198-200.

of ambiguity. In other words, on the one hand 'The table is large' would be elliptical for, say, 'The table *over here* is large', and on the other hand, "it is ego-centrically ambiguous (a) in that it contains the verb "is"; and (b) in that, utterances of it are ellipses for statements involving ego-centric expressions ("over here", "beside me", etc.)."[60] Sellars also writes that although it is obvious that in an utterance of 'The table is large', it is the context of utterance which enables the phrase 'the table' to specify the table it does, it is also true that "the context functions to give the statement the force, for example, of "The table *over here* is large"".[61]

Stephen Neale's definition of an incomplete definite description is, "a description 'the F' that appears to have a legitimate application even if there is more than one F".[62] In his defence of Russell against the problem of incomplete definite descriptions, Neale is inspired by Sellars' idea of ellipsis. He takes again Strawson's example 'The table is covered with books' in building up his argument, but before that, he first quotes the passage from Strawson where he says, "[…] 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"."[63] This is a passage from Strawson's "On Referring" (1950) which I also quoted in Chapter 2. About this passage, Neale writes:

> There is an important truth in this passage. A speaker may use a definite description when, strictly speaking, it is quite clear that there is no object that uniquely satisfies it. And, on the face of it, this seems to pose a problem for Russell. If I say to you right now 'The table is covered with books', I would not normally be understood as committing myself to the existence of one and only one table. But a

[60] Sellars, "Presupposing", p. 200.

[61] Ibid., p. 201.

[62] Stephen Neale, *Descriptions* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), p. 94.

[63] Ibid., p. 93.

> naive application of the Theory of Descriptions appears to have precisely this unwelcome consequence.[64]

How can we explain this "naivety"? By a naive application of the theory, I think Neale means to say that it is an understanding of Russell's theory which does not regard the context of utterance as an important part of the issue. I interpret Neale as saying that even though at first sight it may seem that incomplete definite descriptions cause a complication for Russell's Theory of Descriptions, this is only because a proper understanding of the theory and a sophisticated application of it which takes into account the context of utterance are absent. However, how Neale thinks he can have a sophisticated application of the theory even as he splits Russell's epistemology from his semantics and disregards it in formulating a Russellian semantics for incomplete definite descriptions is a question that seems to lack an answer in Neale, and which I think needs to be discussed later. Also, another important feature of Neale's assessment of the notion of reference in natural language that is in opposition to Russell, is that he regards ordinary proper names, demonstratives, and (some occurences of) pronouns as "genuine referring expressions" (or "genuine singular terms").[65] Russell, on the other hand, treats ordinary proper names, demonstratives and pronouns as abbreviated definite descriptions.

Neale contends that as a result of the incompleteness problem raised by a naive application of Russell's theory, Russellians are forced to give an account of what the proposition expressed would be by an utterance of a sentence of the form 'the F is G', where 'the F' is incomplete. I deem it helpful to reconsider Sellars' definition of ellipsis again at this point in determining what the proposition expressed

[64] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 93-94.

[65] Ibid., p. 15.

would be by uttering that sentence. Sellars says, "in ellipsis the context completes the utterance and enables it to say something which it otherwise would not, different contexts enabling it to say different things."[66] This definition shows us that Sellars thinks the context helps the utterance in such an essential way that the utterance of a sentence of the form 'the F is G', where 'the F' is incomplete, without the completing role of the context, would not be able to express the proposition it does by supplementation of the context. Other than that, Sellars also stresses the fundamental role of the context in determining the content of the utterance by saying that "different contexts enable it to say different things." So, we must definitely attend to the context in defining the proposition expressed.

Neale is inspired by Sellars' ideas about context because Sellars' views are valid for all problems of incompleteness in natural language, and in particular for incomplete quantifiers. Since Russell's theory reduces definite descriptions to quantifiers, Neale thinks an analogy can be made between quantifiers in general and definite descriptions. He writes, "Whenever we find some phenomenon associated with the use of definite descriptions, we should look for corresponding phenomena associated with the uses of other quantifiers."[67] Thus, he argues that if a similar problem of incompleteness can be detected in cases of other quantifiers, then this means that incompleteness cannot be presented as a problem peculiar to definite descriptions *per se.* Then, anyone who claims that incompleteness creates a problem for definite descriptions – hence for Russell's theory – would have to provide a solution to the problem of incomplete quantifiers in general. The test case for Neale is the incomplete quantifier 'everyone'. He says:

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[66] Sellars, "Presupposing", p. 200.

[67] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 94.

> Suppose I had a dinner party last night. In response to a question as to how it went, I say to you 'Everyone was sick'. Clearly, I do not mean to be asserting that everyone in existence was sick, just that everyone *at the dinner party I had last night* was. In some fashion or other, this is discernible from the context of utterance. Similar examples can be constructed using 'no', 'most', 'just one', 'exactly eight', and of course, 'the' (as it occurs with both singular and plural complements). Indeed, the problem of incompleteness has nothing to do with the use of definite descriptions *per se*; it is a quite general fact about the use of quantifiers in natural language.[68]

To build up the analogy immediately at this point on behalf of Neale, let us suppose a speaker utters the sentence 'The table is covered with books'. It is obvious that the speaker cannot be said to be asserting that "There is exactly one table in existence, and whatever is a table in existence is covered with books". Just as 'everyone' is elliptical for 'everyone *at the dinner party I had last night*', Neale writes that "a particular utterance of 'the table' might be elliptical for 'the table *over there*'."[69], as Sellars would say. Neale calls this "the explicit approach".[70] His remark "in some fashion or other, this is discernible from the context of utterance." is and must be the most crucial part of his Russell defence, but I do not think he places enough emphasis to it. The question we have to deal with is; in what fashion is the completion discernible from the context? In my opinion, this is the main question that needs answering if we are to present a true interpretation of Russell's theory. The discussion of how the context of utterance affects the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence of the form 'the F is G', where 'the F' is incomplete, is the part where Russell's epistemology must come into the picture, yet Neale disregards the epistemological dimension of the issue. By Russell's epistemology, I mean his theory of knowledge and theory of thought based on the notions of acquaintance and

[68] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 95.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

description. Neale's indifference to Russell's epistemology is the reason why I would call Neale's explicit approach semi-Russellian. In other words, even though Neale accepts and defends Russell's quantificational analysis of definite descriptions as a semantic theory, he does not think that Russell's "sense-datum epistemology", as he calls it, is indispensable in understanding or defending the Theory of Descriptions. He talks of "having detached Russell from his sense-datum epistemology"[71] and writes:

> Although the initial discussion will, of necessity, have a definite exegetical character, I shall not shy away from rejecting what I perceive to be inessential features of Russell's overall proposal. For example, his sense-datum epistemology and his consequent desire to treat ordinary proper names as disguised descriptions, his talk of objects as constituents of singular propositions, and his use of the formalism of *Principia Mathematica,* even if they are not objectionable in themselves, seem to me to be features that can be dispensed with without compromising either the general appeal of the Theory of Descriptions or the distinction between object-dependent and object-independent propositions that lies behind it.[72]

He also writes, "The Theory of Descriptions is logically independent of Russell's sense-datum epistemology. Hence one can endorse the theory *qua* theory of *descriptions* without being committed to the restricted notion of acquaintance Russell finally adopts."[73] I disagree with him on these contentions. Neale feels content in simply saying that, taking the explicit approach, namely, by considering incomplete definite descriptions as elliptical for complete uniquely denoting ones, Russell's Theory of Descriptions is protected against criticisms. However, he does not give us many clues as to how exactly the explicit approach works, viz. he does not answer the question as to why a speaker must have in mind a uniquely denoting phrase

[71] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 18.

[72] Ibid., p. 14-15.

[73] Ibid., p. 48.

(complete definite description) that denotes the object in question. He does not clarify how the context is a factor in the completion of incomplete definite descriptions. I think Russell's notions of knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description are just what we need in explaining the exact role played by the context of utterance in the explicit approach. Russell's epistemology is fundamental in providing a purely Russellian solution to the problem of incomplete definite descriptions, so it must be set in the background. This will be the topic of my next chapter, where I will present a version of the explicit approach as a solution to the problem of incomplete definite descriptions, and my solution will be based solely on Russell's epistemology.

Arguments Against the Explicit Approach

Many attacks on the explicit approach come from several philosophers, so at this point we must take a look at them. I will focus on Howard Wettstein's and Marga Reimer's arguments against the explicit approach, and also on Neale's counter-arguments. Wettstein provides a non-Russellian solution to the problem of incomplete definite descriptions, as he denies Russell's semantics. Reimer reaches at a tentative conclusion that definite descriptions probably cannot be treated as quantifier expressions, as Russell proposes. I will discuss both of their arguments against the explicit approach.

Howard Wettstein concedes in his paper "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions" (1981)[74] that the use of incomplete definite descriptions cannot be justified by Russell's Theory of Descriptions. Consequently, he infers that

[74] Howard K. Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", *Philosophical Studies* 40, (Sept., 1981), pp. 241-257.

Russell's theory is not an adequate account of the use of definite descriptions in natural language, because in ordinary discourse, incomplete definite descriptions are used very commonly. As a rough summary, his argument goes like this: He maintains that in many cases of incomplete definite descriptions, contextual completion will not be possible. Thus, supposing that the applicability of Russell's Theory of Descriptions calls for a complete (i.e. uniquely denoting) definite description in the utterance, and also supposing that a perfectly determinate proposition is expressed even if the definite description uttered is incomplete, incomplete definite descriptions cannot be analysed like quantifiers as Russell's theory dictates. Some other explanation is needed. An incomplete definite description must either have been used referentially so that it functions just like a genuine referring expression, or else, even if used attributively, the notion of demonstrative reference (which Wettstein characterizes as *implicit* reference) must play a role in that utterance. Hence, contrary to Russell, the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence of the form 'The F is G', where 'the F' is incomplete, cannot be the general proposition "There is exactly one F, and whatever is an F is G", but must be a "singular proposition". Wettstein borrows this term from David Kaplan and defines it as "the proposition asserted when a description is used referentially (in, e.g. the subject position of a subject-predicate assertion)".[75] In the last part of his paper, Wettstein uses this argument to establish a semantically distinct account for referential uses of all definite descriptions (i.e. not only of incomplete definite descriptions), as opposed to the semantics of the attributive use. However, the semantic significance of the referential/attributive use distinction is a subject that may be discussed wholly on its own, so I will not go into it here. In this part of my

[75] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 249.

thesis, I will first concentrate more deeply on Wettstein's argument that adequate contextual completion is not possible for incomplete definite descriptions. After that, I will expound on his positive thesis that incomplete definite descriptions must be genuine referring expressions.

Wettstein's Argument Against the Theory of Descriptions

Wettstein begins by considering an utterance of 'The table is covered with books', in which the description 'the table' is incomplete. He claims that, according to Russell's analysis, the proposition expressed by this utterance would be "one and only one thing is a table and it is covered with books", which is clearly false, since there are more than one table in the universe.[76] While Wettstein assumes that Russell's theory requires there to be a uniquely denoting description in the speech act, as a possible defense of Russell, he suggests that maybe Russell's theory does not require the description *actually uttered* to be uniquely denoting. Rather, the incomplete definite description 'the table' as uttered in a particular context might be elliptical for a uniquely denoting description still present in the speech act.[77] To wit, "'the table', as uttered in a particular context, may be elliptical for the uniquely denoting complete description 'the (only) table in room 209 of Camden Hall at t_1.'"[78] This would be the explicit approach. However, Wettstein quickly dispenses with this retort, because he advocates that there are a number of non-equivalent (i.e. non-synonymous) uniquely denoting descriptions that can be extracted from the context to describe the object

[76] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 246.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

intended by the speaker. Some examples of completion would be, 'the table in room 209 of Camden Hall at t_1', or 'the table at which the author of *The Persistence of Objects* is sitting at t_1', etc…[79] The crucial point to be noticed here, according to Wettstein, is that since these different completed descriptions are not synonymous, according to Russell's theory each completion will give us a different proposition, and hence a different Russellian analysis. The first question that needs to be answered as a result of this observation is; "which of these more complete (or Russellian) descriptions (or conjunction of such descriptions) is *the correct one?*"[80], i.e. which one is the one that the speaker has in mind when using the incomplete definite description 'the table'? Wettstein claims that the context of utterance can in no way determine one unique completion as the right one, the one which will show us what the speaker has in mind, from the bunch of non-equivalent descriptions. Also, and more importantly, he argues that there is no sense in saying that there actually is one correct completion for the uttered incomplete definite description, because, most of the time, the speaker has no one determinately intended full description in mind. The speaker, when asked, cannot choose any particular description from the bunch as opposed to another. Neither can the speaker say that she meant to refer to the table "*as* the table in room 209 of Camden Hall at t_1 *and* the table at which the author of *The Persistence of Objects* is sitting at t_1, as opposed to, say, just *as* the table in room 209 of Camden Hall at t_1".[81] As a result of these meditations and the observation that we most commonly use incomplete definite descriptions like 'the table' in ordinary discourse, Wettstein concludes that Russell's

[79] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 246.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., p. 247.

theory fails to give a general account of definite descriptions, since it cannot provide a solution to incomplete definite descriptions. This problem raises a second crucial question that Wettstein claims to have solved with his own approach: The question is, how can we explain that an utterance in which an incomplete definite description is used expresses a definite determinate proposition? Wettstein considers an incomplete definite description as lacking a complete sense, thus the utterance of 'The table is covered with books' seems semantically incomplete. So, how can we justify the fact that a determinate, definite assertion is made by this semantically indeterminate utterance? By uttering this sentence, "the speaker predicates the property of being covered with books of not just any table,"[82] but of a particular table that she has in mind. This fact is hard to account for with Russell's theory "if the incomplete definite description 'the table' is not a surrogate for a description which applies only to the table in question." Wettstein argues.[83] Thus, since Russell's theory requires a uniquely denoting description in the speech act, and since we cannot find such a definite description as the correct uniquely denoting one even by applying to the contextual factors or the intentions of the speaker, Wettstein concludes that we cannot, via Russell's theory, legitimize the determinateness of the proposition expressed by such an utterance.

Despite the above discussion, Wettstein contemplates that intuitively, we would like to say that a non-defective speech act is performed by uttering 'The table is covered with books'. We still want to maintain that a determinate proposition is asserted by such an utterance, and Wettstein claims Russell's theory is inadequate to

[82] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 248.

[83] Ibid.

justify this determinateness. Wettstein proposes his solution to the problem with the following paragraph:

> The question is: how are we to characterize the contribution of the circumstances of utterance? My answer is that the circumstances of utterance do help to provide us with an identification of the referent but not by providing a more complete descriptive characterization of it. When one says, 'The table is covered with books' for example, in the conspicuous presence of a single table, the context fails to reveal some Russellian description as lurking behind the utterance of 'the table'; the context does reveal, however, *which* item is in question.[84]

Wettstein claims that the incomplete definite description 'the table', which applies to many things, is in fact used by the speaker to make a determinate, demonstrative reference to a particularly intended object, thus making the proposition expressed determinate, too.[85] Hence, Wettstein deliberates that 'the table' in fact must have been used referentially. That is to say, 'the table' must be operating just like a genuine referring expression, which is exactly what Russell rejects in his Theory of Descriptions. So, according to Wettstein, in the referential use of the incomplete definite description 'the table', the context of utterance supplies the hearers directly with the object the speaker referred to by that phrase, not with a more complete descriptive characterization of it. When an incomplete definite description is used referentially, it semantically functions like a demonstrative phrase, like 'this' or 'that', as a referring expression. Consequently, the proposition expressed is singular, or "object-dependent rather than descriptive"[86], as Neale mentions in his discussion of Wettstein's argument. Neale writes, "On this account, then, the description takes as its semantical value the object the speaker intended to communicate something

[84] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 248.

[85] Ibid., p. 248-249.

[86] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 97.

about."[87] He calls the above-mentioned argument by Wettstein against Russell's Theory of Descriptions, *the argument from incompleteness*.[88] Next, I will elaborate on the notions of *singular proposition* and *object-dependence*, and how they are related to each other. Also to be discussed is the difference between a *descriptive proposition* and a singular one.

Notions of Singular Proposition, Object-dependence, Descriptive Proposition

Wettstein illustrates the nature of a singular proposition by stressing that the object referred to, or the item demonstrated, has a special duty in the singular proposition asserted by an utterance in which the definite description is used referentially. He points out that the special role played by the referent can better be understood by looking at counterfactual situations and how the truth conditions of the proposition expressed are determined by the item demonstrated. Wettstein examines Keith Donnellan's example 'Smith's murderer is insane' ('Smith's murderer' is equivalent to 'the murderer of Smith'). In this case, 'Smith's murderer' purports to denote a unique object so it is not an incomplete definite description, and thus I will modify it to be 'the murderer' which is incomplete. This example will display what a singular proposition is and how it is different from a Russellian descriptive (general) proposition dictated by the Theory of Descriptions. The scenario we should study is such that in the actual world, Jones is the actual murderer, and he is in the trial room showing insane behavior. The speaker utters the sentence 'The murderer is insane', using 'the murderer' referentially, intending to refer to Jones. It is used as a device

[87] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 97.

[88] Ibid., p. 98.

for referring to, or demonstrating Jones, and thus Wettstein claims this utterance expresses the proposition "that one, Jones, is insane", which is true in the assumed scenario. What is controversial is the truth value of the proposition expressed in a counterfactual situation, where (a) Jones is not Smith's murderer, (b) Smith's murderer is quite sane, but nevertheless (c) Jones is insane. Wettstein claims that the proposition expressed by the actual-world utterance, namely "that one, Jones, is insane" is still true in this counterfactual case. So, according to Wettstein, the truth conditions of the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence of the form 'the F is G', where 'the F' is incomplete and used referentially, are determined solely by the actual-world-referent of 'the F'. Namely, the proposition expressed by a sentence of the form 'the F is G' where 'the F' is incomplete is true if and only if the object referred to in the actual world by 'the F' is really G in that particular context of utterance. Wettstein claims that these views with respect to the nature of singular propositions expressed by sentences containing incomplete definite descriptions are equally valid when the uttered description is complete. The nature of a singular proposition is what Neal describes in his book as "object-dependent". He explains object-dependence by writing, "An utterance of a sentence '*b* is *G*', where '*b*' is a referring expression and '__ is *G*' is a monadic predicate phrase, expresses an *object-dependent* (or singular) proposition, the identity of which is dependent upon the identity of *b*. And this proposition is *true* if and only if *b* is *G*."[89] We should keep in mind that Neale counts ordinary proper names, demonstrative phrases and (some occurences of) pronouns as genuine referring expressions.[90] In the footnote to his definition of an object-dependent proposition, Neale writes also that in the case of a

[89] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 15.

[90] Ibid.

singular proposition "*b* is G", the existence of the proposition depends upon the existence of the object *b*.[91] What essentially differentiates a singular (object-dependent) thought from a descriptive one is that the former's existence is contingent upon a particular individual's existence, whereas the latter is object-independent.[92]

Wettstein's Further Arguments, Neale's Objections, My Objections

Neale has several objections to Wettstein's argument from incompleteness. With respect to Wettstein's criticisms of the Theory of Descriptions, Neale again presents his thesis that if similar problems occur in the case of other quantifiers, then those problems would not pertain to definite description *per se,* but would be general problems regarding quantifiers, and so a general solution would be needed. He again considers the example 'Everyone was sick' uttered as a reply to a question as to how the dinner party last night went. He rightly points out that there are a number of possible non-synonymous completions for this incomplete quantifier 'everyone'; such as 'everyone at my dinner party last night', or 'everyone who ate at my house last night', or some other completion of the form 'every F' that denotes the same group of people who attended the party last night. Since the descriptive content is different in each possible completion, according to Wettstein's contentions there corresponds a different proposition expressed to each such completion. Neale writes, "It is clear, then, that Wettstein has put his finger on a very important fact about elliptical analyses of incomplete quantifiers (and perhaps ellipsis quite generally);

[91] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 49.

[92] Ibid., p. 48.

but it is beginning to look as though no real support for a referential interpretation of descriptions is going to come out of this."[93]

Neale has a second objection to Wettstein's views. This objection is about Wettstein's account of incomplete definite descriptions that are used attributively. Let me first give Wettstein's argument, and then the points where Neale disagrees with him. Wettstein maintains that, at first sight, it might be thought that Russell's quantificational analysis of definite descriptions is applicable to attributively used definite descriptions. However, he again challenges Russell's Theory of Descriptions by incomplete definite descriptions, but this time attributively used ones. Wettstein claims that in fact, his argument from incompleteness that Russell's theory cannot give a suitable explanation for referential uses of definite descriptions "applies *mutatis mutandis* to cases of attributive use."[94] Wettstein discusses a modification of Donnellan's example – a speaker utters upon seeing the disfigured dead body of Smith, 'The murderer is insane!'. I gave the same example above, where 'the murderer' was used referentially, demonstrating Jones as the murderer, but here 'the murderer' is used attributively since the speaker is not talking about a specific person that she recognizes or knows as having murdered Smith, but is talking about the murderer of Smith, whoever he is. In my opinion, the crucial point to be noted here is that the speaker utters the sentence on the basis of the horrible crime scene in front of her which is associated with the murder incident; she is not uttering it intending to talk of a particular person whom she considers as being the murderer, as in the referential case. Also, we should note that she could have used 'the murderer' attributively even if she knew who the murderer was, as long as she is talking about

[93] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 98.

[94] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 250.

the particular object having the attribute of being a murderer of Smith uniquely in that context, whatever (whoever) it is. Wettstein says many instances of attributive uses of definite descriptions in natural language are incomplete. As in the argument for referential use, he maintains that we can say 'the murderer' can be completed by a lot of different ways so as to be uniquely denoting. Some completions would be 'Harry Smith's murderer', 'the murderer of Joan Smith's husband', or 'the murderer of the junior senator from New Jersey in 1975'.[95] The context of utterance and the intentions of the speaker do not allow the audience to pick out any one of these many completions as the correct one, Wettstein claims. Since the description 'the murderer' is semantically incomplete (i.e. not uniquely denoting), and since there cannot be found only one correct uniquely denoting description implicit in the speech act, there is again the problem of explaining how the proposition expressed by this utterance is semantically determinate. But this time, propositional determinacy cannot be based on demonstrative reference because in the attributive use, there is no such determinate demonstration of the (semantic) referent of that incomplete definite description.[96] Namely, the individual that in fact satisfies the description is not demonstrated by the speaker, as in the referential case. Also, if we try to justify the determinacy of the proposition expressed by the determinacy of the semantic referent, it would mean that the proposition expressed would be dependent on whom

[95] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 250.

[96] Wettstein (1981) comments on what the semantic referent of that attributively used incomplete definite description would be, at note #17 on p. 256. He says that if 'the murderer' is taken as isolated from the context of utterance, then it is true that there is no semantic referent since it is incomplete. He writes, "Nevertheless, we can speak here of a semantic referent: it is (roughly) the item that fits this description *as used on this occasion.* To anticipate, since in the context in question, the force of 'the murderer' is (something like) 'the murderer of that one', the semantic referent is that individual (if there is one) who in fact murdered that person. (Cf. Kripke's mention of the semantic reference *on a given occasion* of ambiguous expressions, indexicals, etc. in his "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference", p. 236.)".

the murderer is, and this, Wettstein alleges, would be against the object-independent nature of the proposition expressed by an attributive use. We describe the proposition expressed by uttering 'The murderer is insane' where 'the murderer' is used attributively, as object-independent because it is not dependent upon whom the murderer is in reality.

> One fully understands the proposition without having any idea who murdered Smith. Were we to mistakenly take the murderer to be Brown and later discover it to be Jones, we would not thereby correct a mistaken impression of what was asserted by the utterance. Indeed, if understanding such a proposition required knowledge of which item was the murderer, the speaker himself would, at least in many cases, not understand his own utterance, for in attributive cases the speaker often has no belief about who the murderer is.[97]

Thus, demonstrative reference cannot be given as the reason for propositional determinacy in attributive cases. Instead, Wettstein proposes the notion of *implicit reference* to account for the determinacy of the proposition expressed by this utterance. He counts implicit reference as a form of demonstrative reference, in which the supplementation of the context of utterance is at work. He writes, "For in uttering 'The murderer is insane', in the presence of the mutilated body, the speaker relies on the context to reveal *whose* murder is in question. The speaker, that is, makes an *implicit* reference to the victim."[98] So Wettstein claims, by the help of the context, an *implicit* demonstrative reference to the victim (Smith) is made by the speaker uttering 'The murderer is insane', and thus the proposition expressed is determinate.

As I said at the beginning of the previous paragraph, Neale's second objection to Wettstein concerns this argument based on implicit reference. Assuming that

[97] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 251.

[98] Ibid.

Wettstein thinks the incomplete definite description is not elliptical for a uniquely denoting Russellian description, Neale regards Wettstein's notion of implicit reference as "very odd".[99] Neale contends that Wettstein's idea of an implicit reference to the victim plainly amounts to saying that 'the murderer' is elliptical for the completed (uniquely denoting) Russellian definite description 'the murderer of *him*' (where 'him' refers to the victim), or 'the murderer of *that man*' (where 'that man' refers to the victim), or '*his* murderer' (where 'his' refers to the victim). I must indicate that this idea of the close relationship between 'the murderer' and 'his murderer' is something that Wettstein actually agrees with in his argument, but I need to elaborate on this comment: Wettstein compares the utterances of 'The murderer is insane' and 'His murderer is insane', and says that in the second case there is an explicit reference to the victim by the phrase 'his', which explains the determinacy of the proposition expressed; whereas reference to the victim is implicit in the first case, which has the victim himself in the context of utterance. So we can see that Wettstein considers the use of 'the murderer', in implicitly referring to the victim, and the use of 'his murderer', in explicitly referring to the victim, as amounting to the same description. He even considers attributive uses of such expressions as 'the murderer of Smith' and 'the murderer of the man on the couch', and says that attributive uses of definite descriptions "may contain indexical expressions, proper names, and finally other descriptions. Each of these kinds of singular terms may be used *referentially* in the course of an attributive utterance of a description which contains them."[100] So, 'Smith' and 'the man on the couch' are used referentially within those attributively used definite descriptions so as to refer to the

[99] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 99.

[100] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 252.

victim, just as 'his' is within 'his murderer', and this resolves the problem of explaining how a determinate proposition is expressed. Thus, Wettstein and Neale seem to agree so far that 'The murderer is insane' and 'His murderer is insane' express the same proposition within the same context of utterance (i.e. in the scenario previously drawn). Where they diverge is on the issue of whether '*his* murderer', 'the murderer of *him*', and 'the murderer of *that man*' (which all amount to the same description) are Russellian descriptions or not. Neale cannot understand why Wettstein does not seem to treat these definite descriptions as Russellian – which would allow a quantificational analysis – because Neale thinks they serve to justify the determinacy of the proposition expressed by 'The murderer is insane' (where 'the murderer' is used attributively), which is exactly what Wettstein wishes to do. Instead of saying that there is an implicit reference to the victim in uttering 'The murderer is insane', Neale says 'the murderer' is elliptical for 'the murderer of *him*', or 'the murderer of *that man*', or '*his* murderer', which are all Russellian descriptions to be treated quantificationally. As Neale argues, each of these completed descriptions "contribute the same thing to the proposition expressed, viz., the descriptive condition *murderer-of-b*, where *b* is the victim himself rather than some description of *b*. Wettstein is just mistaken in claiming that 'the murderer' is "not elliptical for some Russellian description"".[101] Thus, according to Neale, our original utterance of 'The murderer is insane' expresses the determinate proposition "The murderer of *b* is insane", where '*b*' refers to the victim, and the proposition is determinate exactly because '*b*' is a referential term that uniquely denotes an individual object. Neale calls this approach "the neo-Russellian conception of an object-dependent proposition: it is the object itself (rather than any descriptive

[101] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 99.

condition or sense) that gets into the proposition expressed."[102] I should note here that this "neo-Russellian conception of an object-dependent proposition" is the reason why I call Neale's approach semi-Russellian. Russell would deny the idea that in uttering 'the murderer of him is insane' where 'him' is used to refer to the victim, the victim himself enters into the proposition expressed. He would say that the phrase 'him' must also be a disguised definite description in order to capture the true content of the proposition. To sum up, Neale's objection to Wettstein here is that Wettstein does not take into account the possibility of completing the incomplete definite description with a referential component rather than descriptive elements. Neale contends that descriptive completion may lead to the problem of finding a bunch of non-synonymous co-denoting descriptions, so it may not be able to account for propositional determinacy; whereas determinacy of the proposition can be accounted for by completing the incomplete definite description with a referential component. He also quotes an example from Gareth Evans[103], which would help us grasp Neale's exact opposition to Wettstein: Evans describes a scenario where he travels through a town whose roads are bumpy, so he utters the sentence 'They ought to impeach the mayor'. Evans says that by this utterance, he does not want his audience to pick out a particular individual that he knows or recognizes as the mayor, but he wishes to talk about "the mayor of *this town,* through which they are passing", whoever he is, so 'the mayor' is used attributively. Neale indicates that by this example, Evans also suggests that a speaker can complete an incomplete definite descriptions in a uniquely plausible way by using purely referential material instead of descriptive material. So, in this case, 'the mayor' is completed to be 'the mayor of

[102] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 99.

[103] Ibid., p. 100.

this town' and "as the neo-Russellian would put it, it is the *town* itself rather than some descriptive characterization of the town that gets into the descriptive condition and thereby into the proposition expressed."[104]. Besides attributively used incomplete definite descriptions, Neale also adds that referentially used ones can be completed by referential elements as well. He writes:

> Wettstein's own list of complete descriptions for which 'the table' might be viewed as elliptical includes only sentences containing descriptions completed with additional *descriptive* material ('the table in room 209 of Camden Hall at t_1', 'the table at which the author of *The Persistence of Objects* is sitting at t_1', and so on). This is the weak point in his discussion. The semanticist who regards (utterances of) incomplete quantifiers – including incomplete descriptions – as elliptical for complete quantifiers is under no obligation to treat the ellipsed material as free of referring expressions and indexicals.[105]

Apart from (but related to) Neale's criticisms to Wettstein, I would say that Wettstein's argument with respect to attributively used incomplete definite descriptions has another weak point. As in the quote from him above, Wettstein accepts that an attributively used definite description may contain as a part of itself indexical expressions, proper names, and other descriptions, which are to be interpreted referentially.[106] But then, his first assertion (which is the basis of his argument against Russell) that it is impossible to complete the attributively used 'the murderer' in only one correct way based on the context and the intentions of the speaker so as to be uniquely denoting, is unfounded. Since Wettstein admits that an attributively used definite description may contain referentially used inner phrases such as indexical expressions, proper names, and other descriptions, we can say that the proper name 'Harry Smith' within the completion 'Harry Smith's murderer'; the

[104] Neale, *Descriptions,* p. 100-101.

[105] Ibid., p. 101.

[106] Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions", p. 252.

description ‘Joan Smith’s husband’ within the completion ‘the murderer of Joan Smith’s husband’; and the description ‘the junior senator from New Jersey in 1975’ within the completion ‘the murderer of the junior senator from New Jersey in 1975’, may all be used referentially to refer uniquely to the victim Smith. Hence, in fact all those descriptions come down to the same definite description that correctly applies to the murderer in question, namely, ‘the murderer of Harry Smith’. That means, according to Wettstein’s reasoning, we would not have the problem of finding a bunch of non-synonymous co-denoting descriptions in the first place, because all the descriptions ‘Harry Smith’s murderer’, ‘the murderer of Joan Smith’s husband’, and ‘the murderer of the junior senator from New Jersey in 1975’ would be counted as synonymous if ‘Harry Smith’, ‘Joan Smith’s husband’, and ‘the junior senator from New Jersey in 1975’ were interpreted referentially within their respective descriptions.

Reimer’s Arguments Against the Theory of Descriptions

Marga Reimer, in her paper “Incomplete Descriptions” (1992)[107], goes over Wettstein’s criticisms of the explicit approach, and says that “her sympathies are with Howard Wettstein’s general view on the matter.”[108] Firstly, assuming that there are a bunch of possible uniquely denoting descriptions for the object the speaker wishes to talk about, Reimer questions how the audience can decide, by looking at the context of utterance, which complete (uniquely denoting) definite description is the correct completion. Secondly, if the context does not help the audience decide

[107] Marga Reimer, “Incomplete Descriptions”, *Erkenntnis* 37, No. 3 (Nov., 1992), pp. 347-363.

[108] Ibid., p. 349.

which one is the correct one, then Reimer suggests it might be thought that the speaker can provide the correct completion when asked, but she says that, most of the time, the speaker has no such correct complete description in mind. Repeating Wettstein's conclusion from these two observations, Reimer maintains then that it makes no sense to say there is a correct completion to be extracted from the context of utterance. In addition to these objections, she supplies a third which is not mentioned by Wettstein: She writes that it is problematic trying to reach the proposition expressed by calling upon the intentions of the speaker. She contends that considering the intentions of the speaker, in a situation where supposedly the context is not able to give us the correct completion, would only help us, if at all, to determine the proposition *meant* by the speaker, and not the proposition *actually expressed* by that utterance.[109]

Reimer also attends to Neale's proposal that incomplete definite descriptions be completed with purely referential elements instead of descriptive elements, so that the problem of finding a bunch of non-synonymous co-denoting definite descriptions can be solved. Reimer asserts that she has two objections to Neale:

1) Reimer finds Neale's solution *ad hoc.*[110] She claims that Neale's only incentive for suggesting the completion to be made solely by referential materials instead of descriptive content is the problem Wettstein puts forward – the problem of finding many possible non-equivalent complete definite descriptions for the object in question and having to decide on a correct completion from this bunch – and therefore his suggestion is *ad hoc.* Reimer says Neale has an implicit belief in his reasoning, that by requiring the completion to be made with referential materials

[109] Reimer, "Incomplete Descriptions", p. 351.

[110] Ibid., p. 352.

only, the possible number of completions will reduce to one, which will solve the issue. (She will be opposing this implicit belief of Neale's in her second objection.) Reimer maintains that although Neale is right in indicating that the semanticist who takes the explicit approach to incompleteness is not obliged to use nonreferential (descriptive) materials only, Neale's proposal that the semanticist use referential or indexical materials in the completion is not obligatory either. She says that Neale may defend himself against Reimer's criticisms by arguing that completing incomplete definite descriptions with purely referential materials is more intuitive. She writes:

> He might accordingly argue that he is not actually *stipulating* that the completions be non-descriptive in nature. Rather, he is drawing attention to the fact that such completions are somehow more *natural* than descriptive ones, and hence more likely to be "correct": that is, more likely to contribute to the proposition expressed by utterances containing incomplete descriptions.[111]

Reimer also gives a reply to this possible defence: She agrees that referential completions may every so often be more intuitive than descriptive completions, but this cannot be a universal claim. She supports her point with a counter example[112]: She construes a scenario where she is driving a car with a friend and all of a sudden they hit a dog on the road. They take the poor dog to the veterinarian. Some time later, the vet calls her to let her know that the dog is healing and is going to be better. She calls her friend to give him the happy news, so she utters the sentence 'The dog is going to be OK'. Now, Reimer maintains that for an advocate of the explicit approach, the most intuitive and straightforward way of completing 'the dog' would be 'the dog *I hit this afternoon*'. This definite description contains referential and

[111] Reimer, "Incomplete Descriptions", p. 352.

[112] Ibid., pp. 352-353.

indexical components also, such as 'I' and 'this afternoon', but it does not consist solely of referential elements, as Neale's argument requires, since the verb "to hit" is descriptive in nature. Reimer writes:

> Moreover, there seems to be no natural way of completing the description with *purely* referential or indexical elements. Thus, Neale's proposal that incomplete descriptions be completed with description-free material does indeed seem to be *ad hoc.* For in at least some cases, the most natural completions of such expressions contain some descriptive material.[113]

One other interesting comment Reimer makes is, by Neale's proposal that incomplete definite descriptions be completed with purely referential elements, those completion possibilities are added to descriptive completions, so that the problem of trying to decide between non-synonymous co-denoting descriptions seems to have gotten worse.

2) Reimer's second objection to Neale is that, even if we accept Neale's suggestion that incomplete descriptions be completed with solely non-descriptive elements, there will be cases where the completion can be made in the manner proposed in more than one way that will be co-denoting and yet non-equivalent. For one such case Reimer wants us to consider Donnellan's trial room scenario, where Jones is on trial, having been charged with the murder of Smith. Jones is indeed the murderer, and in the court room he is acting like an insane person. A speaker who knows these facts utters the sentence 'The murderer is insane', meaning to refer to Jones. Assuming that the proposition expressed is determinate, and taking the explicit approach, Reimer argues that there will be at least two plausible non-synonymous completions for 'the murderer' with entirely non-descriptive elements (i.e. referential or indexical phrases, as Neale suggests) that can be extracted from the context, and

[113] Reimer, "Incomplete Descriptions", p. 353.

yet they will be co-denoting Jones. Those two possible ways would be, 'the murderer of *Smith*', and 'the murderer *over there*'. These two descriptions are not synonymous because in the first one the purely referential part 'Smith' contributes the man named Smith to the proposition expressed, while in the second description the indexical part 'over there' contributes the location of Jones.[114] By this counterexample, Reimer asserts that "Neale's proposed *ad hoc* solution to the problem of adjudicating between non-equivalent, co-denoting descriptions, thus fails. For while these two descriptions are co-denoting, they are non-equivalent as well. And Neale does not tell us how to choose between them."[115] As a result of these arguments, Reimer concludes that the explicit approach advocated by Neale cannot provide a solution to the problem of incomplete definite descriptions.

[114] Reimer, "Incomplete Descriptions", p. 353.

[115] Ibid., pp. 353-354.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: THE PROBLEM OF INCOMPLETE DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS RESOLVED

Criticisms of Russell's Theory of Descriptions based on the problem of incomplete definite descriptions are usually expressed along the following lines:
A) The Wettstein/Reimer party argues against the explicit approach, stating that in the case of an incomplete definite description, too many completions may be found based on the context of utterance to serve as an identifying description of the object being referred to by the speaker. Furthermore, it is impossible to choose any one of them as correct, as opposed to another, to capture what the speaker has in mind when uttering that incomplete definite description. They claim that this prevents the philosopher of language from giving an account of the proposition expressed in those cases, because according to Russell's theory, having too many non-equivalent completions would imply that there are many non-synonymous propositions expressed, and thus the proposition expressed would be indeterminate. The objectors assert that it is impossible to provide a solution to the problem of incomplete definite descriptions within a Russellian framework. I have set out in detail the arguments they presented in Chapter 3.

However, there is a second line of objection, not much discussed in the literature. Originally, this second criticism, by Donnellan and Kripke, targetted Russell's descriptivist theory of proper names, but another version of it is presented

against incomplete definite descriptions in Kripke's unpublished lectures *Reference and Existence* (1973)[116]:

B) The Kripke/Donnellan party claims that in some proper names instances, a speaker may be said to have successfully referred to an object, even though it is not possible for her to give any identifying descriptions for the object referred to by her utterance of that name. Analogously, in his unpublished lectures Kripke claims that in some cases of incomplete definite descriptions, it is not possible for the speaker to give any completions, compatible with the Russellian spirit, to serve as a uniquely denoting description of the object in question, i.e. the speaker cannot find any identifying descriptions for the object she means to talk about, to capture what she has in mind, based on the context of utterance.

In order to give a proper Russellian account of incomplete definite descriptions and resolve the problem, both criticisms must be answered within the Russellian framework. Now, the questions surrounding this problematic issue are: What is the proposition expressed by the utterance of a sentence in the form 'the F is G', where 'the F' is an incomplete definite description? Is a determinate proposition expressed at all? If it is claimed that the proposition expressed is a determinate one, what are its truth-conditions? These questions need to be answered in order to provide a Russellian solution to the problem, and I will deal with them in this chapter.

I should emphasize that solutions provided by the explicit approach in the literature, like Sellars' and Neale's, cannot give a satisfactory reply to the criticisms, because they cannot answer the question as to why and how an incomplete definite description can be completed. Why does a speaker uttering an incomplete definite

[116] Saul Kripke, *Reference and Existence, the John Locke Lectures for 1973.*

description have to have in mind a complete description for the object she means to talk about? And how is it that she can provide such a uniquely denoting phrase for the object she wishes to refer to? What is the role of the speaker's intentions and the context of utterance in necessitating that there be a complete definite description in the speaker's mind? Semi-Russellian solutions such as Neale's, which disregard Russell's epistemology and theory of thought, taking the Theory of Descriptions solely as a semantic theory, cannot answer the questions listed above. The answers to those questions are related to Russell's notions of *acquaintance* and *knowledge/thought about an external object.* It has to do with how a speaker intending to talk about an external object has to have in mind certain properties that she is acquainted with, based on the context of utterance, related to the object in question. The solution I will suggest here to the problem of incomplete definite descriptions, will answer the question as to why there must be a complete, uniquely denoting phrase present in the speaker's mind, for the process to be characterized as *thinking about an external object*. Opponents of the Theory of Descriptions claim that the Russellian semantic framework cannot adequately explain the use of incomplete definite descriptions in ordinary language. However, I argue that the framework needs to be enlarged to encompass Russell's epistemology and level of thought, that the semantics level will not be sufficient in explaining the issue at hand. Thus, I should stress that my aim in this thesis is not to question the validity of Russell's epistemology, but to accept it as the basis and try to formulate a solution to an alleged problem about his semantics. I believe that only within a Russellian epistemological framework that also takes into account his theory of thought can the issue about incomplete definite descriptions be resolved.

Uniqueness Condition Imposed by the Definite Article

In Chapter 1, I mentioned that Russell formulated his Theory of Descriptions to apply only in cases where 'the' is used in the strict sense, namely, where 'the' involves uniqueness. He indicates this in the passage "Now *the,* when it is strictly used, involves uniqueness; we do, it is true, speak of "*the* son of So-and-so" even when So-and-so has several sons, but it would be more correct to say "a son of So-and-so". Thus for our purposes we take *the* as involving uniqueness."[117] Keeping this point in mind, there are two paths we could take:

(a) We can say that Russell's theory applies only to cases where 'the F' is a complete definite description that purports to denote one definite object. So, by this approach, we could say of an incomplete definite description of the form 'the F' that it is not used in the strict sense as Russell requires, since 'the F' considered on its own, when pulled out of the context in which it is used, cannot denote a unique object. On the face of it, the descriptive condition given in the incomplete definite description is not sufficient to pick out a unique object by that utterance. Thus, we may say that Russell's theory does not apply to such cases in the first place, and hence it is no counterexample to Russell. This would be an easy way out for discarding anti-Russellian criticisms.

However, the use of incomplete definite descriptions is so common in daily discourse, and we have the intuition that in such cases the speaker has a unique object in mind that she wishes to talk about. She manages to make true or false judgements about the unique object she has in mind even though the description she utters seems semantically incomplete. Thus, our desire to relate language and mind

[117] Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting", *Mind* 14, No. 56 (Oct., 1905), p. 481.

to the world and to the way we can *think* and *know about* the world wins over. Thus, we have to choose a harder task by taking a second route:

(b) We need to try providing a *purely Russellian* explanation to incomplete definite descriptions, placing his epistemology and his theory of thought as the background, taking into account his distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, and accommodating incomplete definite descriptions to his semantics. This is what I am going to do.

Along this second route, I will try to show that there is some kind of uniqueness involved, even in the case of incomplete definite descriptions, because of the *speaker's intention* to *think* and *talk about a unique object*, so that Russell's Theory of Descriptions still applies. I use the term *purely Russellian*, because as I discussed in the previous chapters, in the literature there have been attempts by certain philosophers, like Stephen Neale, to save Russell by separating Russell's epistemology from his semantics, rejecting his epistemology in the name of rescuing his semantics. Such philosophers tried to beat back criticisms without any appeal to Russell's notion of *thinking about external objects,* or to his distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about*. That is why, in Chapter 3 of this thesis, I called Neale's solution to the problem of incompleteness *semi-Russellian*. I believe that it is impossible to split Russell's theory of thought and epistemology from his semantics. In fact, the very foundation of his semantics is his views with respect to the former two. The notions of acquaintance and denoting phrases are of central importance in his theory of thought, epistemology and philosophy of language, so these three areas must be taken as complements of a whole, supplementing each other. I will also employ Russell's ideas with respect to proper names in order to solve the problem of

incomplete definite descriptions, because I claim that all devices of singular mental reference are to be treated likewise by Russell.

Thinking About External Objects – The Russellian Perspective of Having an Object in Mind

I interpret Russell's words "Now *the,* when it is strictly used, involves uniqueness…" as saying that a sincere speaker, when she utters a sentence of the form 'the F is G', uses the definite description 'the F' as a means of *thinking about,* or *speaking about a single definite external object*. In this thought process, the speaker *has in mind a unique object that she mentally refers to, that she intends to talk about* by that utterance. I will explain what these notions mean later, but for now, we can think of *the unique object that she thinks about, that she mentally refers to,* as Kripke's notion of *speaker's referent*. Russell makes an essential distinction at the very beginning of "On Denoting": "The distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* is the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases."[118] Essentially then, we do not have presentations of the objects in the second category, so we need denoting phrases in order to think about them. External objects and other people's minds fall into this category. Those objects are such that we can only reach them by means of denoting phrases because we do not have direct epistemic access to them, because we cannot have presentations of them that would let us get acquainted with them. Accordingly, when a speaker uses an incomplete definite description of the form 'the F', it is used as a means of thinking about an external object. This thought process is about what

[118] Russell, "On Denoting", p. 479.

Russell construes as a thing we only reach by means of a denoting phrase. Russell contends that we can think about, talk about, and know about external objects (and other people's minds) only through denoting phrases. He writes, "Now such things as matter (in the sense in which matter occurs in physics) and the minds of other people are known to us only by denoting phrases, i.e. we are not *acquainted* with them, but we know them as what has such and such properties."[119] Thus, Russell contends that when we make judgements about external objects, what we really express by those judgements is that certain propositional functions, namely certain properties, are satisfied by certain external objects. Since we can never have direct epistemic access to external objects, that is to say, since we cannot know external objects by acquaintance, the fact that we can ever reach them, and entertain any thoughts about them, is possible only if we have in our minds denoting phrases. In particular, the only way we can reach a single definite external object through language is by having in mind a uniquely denoting phrase of the form 'the F' for that object (i.e. a definite description that truely applies to it). The actual content of the thought a speaker entertains about a single definite external object denoted by his having in mind a definite description of the form 'the F', is the uniquely existential statement, "there is exactly one F, and whatever is an F is G". The speaker expresses by that judgement that the propositional function F(x) (the property of being an F) is instantiated by a unique object. Russell writes, "We shall say that an object is 'known by description' when we know that it is 'the so-and-so', i.e. when we know that there is one object, and no more, having a certain property."[120] So, when a speaker utters a sentence of the form 'the F is G', where 'the F' is uniquely denoting,

[119] Russell, "On Denoting", p. 492-493.

[120] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1912), p. 53.

the speaker is said to know the denoted object in question by description, and what she really knows is that there is exactly one object having the property F. This view of Russell is closely related to his Principle of Acquaintance, which says "every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted."[121] That means, whenever we make a statement about an external object, if we claim that we understand that statement, then the object itself cannot be a constituent of the statement (since we cannot be acquainted with it), but the proposition must be constituted of other components that we are acquainted with. Russell says:

> When there is anything with which we do not have immediate acquaintance, but only definition by denoting phrases, then the propositions in which this thing is introduced by means of a denoting phrase do not really contain this thing as a constituent, but contain instead the constituents expressed by the several words of the denoting phrase. Thus in every proposition that we can apprehend (i.e. not only in those whose truth or falsehood we can judge of, but in all that we can think about), all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance.[122]

He also writes, "All thinking has to start from acquaintance; but it succeeds in thinking *about* many things with which we have no acquaintance."[123] We can see from these passages that for us to be able to ever entertain any *thoughts about external objects* (in particular, about single external objects), let alone understand any propositions about them, it is necessary that there are properties with which we get acquainted first, through which we construct denoting phrases to think about those objects. In the case of thinking about a single external object, the denoting phrase in mind must be a uniquely denoting one, which thus denotes the object in

[121] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 58.

[122] Russell, "On Denoting", p. 492.

[123] Ibid., p. 480.

question, and the actual content of the thought entertained is a uniquely existential statement.

So from this Russellian perspective, what does it mean *to have a single definite object in mind?* From now on, whenever I mean *a single definite object,* I will simply write *an object*. And equivalently, what does it mean *to think about an object,* or *to mentally refer to an object?* It means *to have in mind a uniquely denoting phrase* which denotes the desired external object. Even if the literally uttered phrase is an incomplete definite description (that seems semantically incapable of denoting uniquely), it is necessary that the speaker has in mind a uniquely denoting phrase for that object, if she can be said *to have an object in mind, to have mentally referred to an object,* and if the process is to be characterized as *thinking about an object.* The object the speaker intends to think/talk about is not necessarily a concrete one, like "the only table in my room"; it may also be an abstract object, such as "the discussion I attended yesterday". The object may be one with which the speaker has some epistemic contact, like "the table over here which has such-and-such appearance" (i.e. she may be acquainted with sense-data corresponding to the table), or it may be an external object that she has relatively less, or perhaps no epistemic contact with, such as "the oldest philosopher in the world", or "the longest lived of men" (Russell's example, 1912) (assuming she does not know who that person is, in our daily understanding of the verb "to know"). The speaker knows "the oldest philosopher in the world" by description if and only if she knows that there is one object, and no more, having the property of being an oldest philosopher in the world. If there are no particulars that she is acquainted with related to that object, such as sense-data or things she has heard or read about it, then that means she has no epistemic relation to the oldest philosopher in the world, i.e. she

does not know who that person is, in our daily usage of the verb. In that case, even though she is still said to know that object by description, she cannot make any judgements about it that can go beyond what the description logically entails, such as that it is a person, that it is a philosopher, that it is older than any other philosopher in the world, and that it is older than the speaker herself if she is also a philosopher, (and other implications of being a person, a philosopher,…) etc... Also, she cannot use 'the oldest philosopher in the world' referentially if she has no epistemic contact with that object, she can only use it attributively. We may call the object that the speaker has in mind, namely, what she is talking about (in this case, the object which uniquely satisfies the property of being an oldest philosopher in the world), as *the object of her thinking process*. So, *the object of her thinking process* is *the object she has in mind* as she is making that utterance, namely, *the object she wants to talk about.* In Kripke's sense, *the semantic referent of the uniquely denoting phrase that the speaker has in mind* is that object, i.e. *the speaker's referent*. It is important to notice that, assuming there is such a distinction as the attributive/referential uses of a definite description, my claim that there is a unique object of the speaker's thinking process applies to attributive uses as well as to referential uses, as can be seen from the examples I gave. 'the table over here which has such-and-such appearance' is used referentially in an utterance of the sentence 'the table over here which has such-and-such appearance is white', and the object of the speaker's thinking process is that object which uniquely satisfies the property of being a table over here which has such-and-such appearance. On the other hand, a speaker may use 'the oldest philosopher in the world' attributively in an utterance of 'the oldest philosopher in the world is older than me', and in that case, assuming that such a person exists (i.e. if unique denotation is successful), the object of her thinking process is that object,

whatever it is, that uniquely satisfies the property of being an oldest philosopher in the world. I note here that there is an essential difference, with respect to the notion of *having an object in mind,* between my claim and the views presented about the traditional referential/attributive use distinction of definite descriptions. In Keith Donnellan's traditional distinction, when a speaker uses a definite description referentially, it is vital that she has in mind an object, and she uses that description with the intention of enabling the audience pick out the specific object she has in mind. On the other hand, when a speaker uses a definite description attributively, she need not have in mind a specific object (though she may have one), and her primary intention is to talk not about a specific object that she has in mind but about whatever object that satisfies the definite description used. Donnellan writes:

> […] This, I shall say, is an attributive use of the definite description. The contrast with such a use of the sentence is one of those situations in which we expect and intend our audience to realize whom we have in mind when we speak of Smith's murderer and, most importantly, to know that it is this person about whom we are going to say something.[124]

So, in the traditional view, the notion of having an object in mind is given as a necessary feature of the referential use, not the attributive one, whereas I am saying that it must be something to do with both uses, because having an object in mind *is* exactly what it means to have successfully entertained a thought about an object, which is equally relevant to both uses. In my view, the speaker has an object in mind in both uses, if mental reference is successful. Rather than the notion of having an object in mind, the distinction Donnellan wishes to point out between the two uses must be captured by Russell's notion of "closeness to acquaintance with particulars related to an external object", i.e. by how close a speaker can get to an external

[124] Keith S. Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions", *The Philosophical Review* 75, No. 3 (July 1966), p. 286.

object in terms of epistemic contact. The distinction between the two uses comes out on the issue of whether a speaker has the necessary means (acquainted particulars related to the object) that will let her use a definite description referentially. The speaker's epistemic closeness to the object in question will determine whether she can use a definite description referentially. I claim that any case of thinking/talking about an external object, whether the definite description is used referentially or attributively, can be understood in terms of Russell's notion of "closeness to acquaintance with particulars related to an external object". The notion is demonstrated on his 5-level schema of epistemic proximity to external objects, which I introduced in Chapter 1. I expect that any use of definite descriptions can be placed in Russell's schema, and as an implication of the Theory of Descriptions, figuring out the role of epistemic nearness to external objects in a speaker's ability to use a definite description referentially or attributively might be a subject of further study,

Content of Thought

Apart from being a semantic theory, the primary aim of Russell's Theory of Descriptions is, in my opinion, to give an account of the content of the thought entertained by a speaker when she utters a sentence of the form 'the F is G'. This is done by revealing the true logical form of the proposition expressed by uttering the sentence in question. The important point is that the issue is intrinsically an issue of philosophy of mind and epistemology, besides its relation to semantics. We can understand that this is the case not only by examining sentences of the form 'the F is G', but also by looking at Russell's treatment of sentences containing the other forms of denoting phrases, namely sentences of the form 'all F's are G's', and 'some F is

G'. Those other forms of denoting phrases were examined by Russell to a great extent in "On Denoting". Consider what sort of thought must have been entertained by a speaker uttering a sentence of the form 'all F's are G's', and also what it means to understand such a sentence. Russell writes in "On Denoting" that we have presentations of things with which we have acquaintance. Since we cannot be acquainted with external objects, we cannot be said to have a presentation of the objects having the property F, but we can be said to have a presentation of the propositional function F(x), namely the property of being an F. We are acquainted with the property of being an F, but we are not acquainted with the objects that are F, as they are external objects. Thus, according to Russell's Principle of Acquaintance, "all F's" cannot be a constituent of the proposition expressed. Consecutively, the true logical form of the proposition must be something other than the subject-predicate form, i.e. "all F's" (as a unity) cannot be the logical subject of the proposition expressed. Exhibiting the true logical form of the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence of the form 'all F's are G's' leads us to the content of the thought entertained in that utterance. The thought entertained is, "the propositional function 'F(x) implies G(x)' is satisfied by every object". In other words, "Anything that has the property F, also has the property G" (equivalently, "Whatever satisfies the propositional function F(x), also satisfies the propositional function G(x)"). Analogously, the true logical form of the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence of the form 'the F is G', where 'the F' is a uniquely denoting phrase, must be something other than the subject-predicate form, i.e. "the F" (as a unity) cannot be the logical subject of the proposition expressed. According to Russell's Theory of Descriptions, the true logical form must be a conjunction of three statements: "the propositional function F(x) is instantiated by at least one object, and if two objects

instantiate F(x) then they must be identical, and the propositional funcion 'F(x) implies G(x)' is instantiated by every object". In other words, the thought entertained is the uniquely existential statement "there is exactly one F, and whatever is an F is G" (equivalently, "the propositional function F(x) is instantiated by exactly one object, and whatever instantiates F(x) also instantiates G(x)"), in which we are in fact not acquainted with the object in question, but we are acquainted with certain properties related to that object, captured by the propositional function F(x). So, Russell claims to have presented the true picture about the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence of the form 'the F is G'. But more important than that, he in fact displays the true content of the thought entertained by a speaker uttering a sentence of the form 'the F is G'.

Proper Names/Pronouns/Demonstratives and Definite Descriptions Compared

It is important to realize that it makes no difference within Russellian framework whether a speaker uses a proper name, a pronoun, a demonstrative (that is, unless the demonstrative is naming sense-data that the speaker is acquainted with), a complete definite description (a denoting phrase that purports to denote a unique object), or an incomplete definite description, because in all cases the speaker intends to think/talk about a single definite external object. As I indicated above, according to Russell's theory of denoting, we can only do this if we have a uniquely denoting phrase in mind. He maintains that ordinary proper names, pronouns, and demonstratives are all disguised definite descriptions. What does he mean by this? He explains it in "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description": "Common words, even proper names, are usually really [definite] descriptions. That is to say, the

thought in the mind of a person using a proper name correctly can generally only be expressed explicitly if we replace the proper name by a [definite] description."[125] Here, what Russell means is that in order to give a legitimate account of the thought a speaker entertains when using a proper name, it is necessary to bring out the definite description(s) she has in mind of that particular object she wishes to talk about. We can see that proper names, pronouns, demonstratives, and definite descriptions, whether complete (it may either be a seemingly uniquely denoting phrase that actually denotes nothing, or it may actually be a uniquely denoting one) or incomplete, will be treated the same way in Russell's theory of thought. We can think of proper names and demonstratives as devices of singular reference that contain no descriptive elements, personal pronouns 'she' and 'he' as devices of singular reference with one descriptive element added, namely the property of being a female or a male, and incomplete definite descriptions of the form 'the F' as again devices of singular reference with one descriptive aspect added, namely the property of being an F. Here, what I mean by saying that those phrases are devices of singular reference is not that they are genuine referring expressions, but that *a speaker* mentally refers to a single external object by using those expressions. In other words, the speaker has a single definite object in mind, i.e. she thinks/talks about an object. Within a Russellian framework, we cannot say that those expressions are genuine referring expressions, because only the things with which we are acquainted can be thus directly referred to by linguistic expressions. Those expressions that directly refer can only be logically proper names. So, the problem posited with respect to incomplete definite descriptions is not unique to them. If incomplete definite descriptions are seen as a problem threatening Russell's Theory of Descriptions, then

[125] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 54. I added "definite" in brackets because Russell indicates in the text that he means "definite descriptions" whenever he simply writes "descriptions".

the same source of discomfort may be present in the use of proper names, pronouns, and demonstratives, because all devices of singular mental reference are to be treated in the same manner by Russell. He claims those phrases are all abbreviated definite descriptions, and we can say that just as in the case of an incomplete definite description, it may be possible to find many non-synonymous definite descriptions in place of a proper name, pronoun, or demonstrative. So, the Wettstein/Reimer party's objection to Russell based on a multiplicity of definite descriptions is equally valid for other devices of singular reference. Similarly, I mentioned earlier that the Kripke/Donnellan party's objection to Russell based on a lack of definite descriptions were initially directed against the use of proper names.

Russellian Explanation of Misdescription

An important question we have to answer is, how can a Russellian account be given for the fact that it is possible for a speaker to literally misdescribe an external object, and still be said to have entertained a significant thought about it, even be considered to have said something true about the object she has in mind? Understanding this will also help us solve the problem of incomplete definite descriptions. Answering this question is important because it will show us that it is essential for a speaker to have a uniquely denoting phrase in mind (even if not explicitly uttered), if she is successful in mentally referring to an external object, and in entertaining a determinate thought about it, even though she may have misdescribed it literally. In other words, there may be cases where a speaker's literal utterance contains a wrong description of the object she wishes to talk about, or it may be the case that some of the descriptions she has in mind of the object she thinks about are in fact wrong, but

still she can be said to have entertained a thought about it. Let's give a classic example at this point: Consider a speaker uttering 'the man in the corner drinking champagne is happy tonight'. Suppose there is a particular man whom the speaker is thinking about, but he may not be drinking champagne in reality, so in that case the speaker has literally misdescribed the object she is mentally referring to. It may either be the case that there is only one man in the corner, who is not drinking champagne, who is happy, and who is the one the speaker has in mind; or there may be say two men in the corner, one of which is drinking champagne and is miserable but is not the one the speaker has in mind, and the other one is as described on the former case. Strictly speaking, the literally uttered definite description may either be not denoting anything, or it may denote a different object than the one the speaker has in mind. In both cases, since the object of her thinking (the man she thinks about) really is happy, we can say that she has said something true about the object she is thinking about, and the proposition expressed by her utterance is true. This is only possible if the speaker has in mind a uniquely denoting phrase which denotes the man she is talking about, even if the phrase is not literally uttered, but merely present implicitly. Such an implicit uniquely denoting phrase can be, 'the man in the corner who has such-and-such appearance, who is standing at such-and-such location, who has such-and-such other properties'. The fact that literal misdescription is possible in ordinary discourse can only be explained in Russell's theory of thought by saying that there must definitely be some other properties in the speaker's mind that come together to uniquely denote the object she is thinking/talking about, that is if the process is to be characterized as a significant determinate process of thinking about an object. The reason for that is, as I discussed above, having a thought about a single definite external object *is* exactly having such a uniquely denoting phrase in

mind. In the case of misdescription, although the semantic referent of the literally uttered phrase diverges from the speaker's referent, properties implicit in the speaker's mind collectively form a uniquely denoting phrase, whose semantic referent gives the speaker's referent. Thus, mental reference is not achieved through the literally uttered phrase, but by the implicit collection of properties that manages the unique denotation. The same principle applies to all cases of proper names, pronouns, demonstratives, and incomplete definite descriptions, without any exceptions. Analogous to the misdescription case, even though an uttered incomplete definite description seems semantically incapable of picking out a unique object of reference because it is literally not uniquely denoting, if there is a significant determinate thought entertained by the speaker about an object, then there must definitely be some other properties in the speaker's mind that will come together to collectively uniquely denote the object in question.

Why is a Disjunctive Theory for Definite Descriptions Needed?

In his paper "Proper Names" (1958)[126] and in the "Proper Names" section of his book *Speech Acts* (1969)[127], John Searle wishes to answer the question of whether proper names have senses, and he examines the significance of proper names as devices of singular reference in comparison to definite descriptions. He writes:

> Suppose we ask the users of the name "Aristotle" to state what they regard as certain essential and established facts about him. Their answers would be a set of uniquely referring descriptive statements. Now what I am arguing is that the descriptive force of "This is

[126] John R. Searle, "Proper Names", *Mind* 67, No. 266 (Apr., 1958), pp. 166-173.

[127] John R. Searle, *Speech Acts, An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1969), pp. 162-174.

> Aristotle" is to assert that a sufficient but so far unspecified number of these statements are true of this object […] Suppose we agree to drop "Aristotle" and use, say, "the teacher of Alexander", then it is a necessary truth that the man referred to is Alexander's teacher – but it is a contingent fact that Aristotle ever went into pedagogy (though I am suggesting it is a necessary fact that Aristotle has the logical sum, inclusive disjunction, of properties commonly attributed to him: any individual not having at least some of these properties could not be Aristotle)[128]

So, he presents a disjunctive theory for proper names (the Cluster Theory), where he argues that for any proper name, by applying to the users of that name, a set of identifying descriptions for the object to which the name purports to refer can be gained. This set will consist of uniquely denoting definite descriptions. Any object which satisfies enough of those (although there is not a definite number that can be given) will be the referent of that name, and any object which does not satisfy enough, or the most essential ones, cannot be counted as the referent.

Inspired by Searle's disjunctive idea about proper names, I wish to argue that for an incomplete definite description that a speaker utters, the possible completions that she can provide for it based on the context of utterance will form a set of identifying descriptions for the object she intends to talk about. If the utterance is to be counted as *thinking about an object,* the speaker must have implicit in mind certain properties that she is acquainted with, the inclusive disjunction of which will be uniquely denoting the object she wishes to talk about. The speaker gains those properties of acquaintance through the context of utterance. The significance of disjunction, as opposed to conjunction, of properties is that all the descriptions in her mind need not be true of the object in question for unique denotation to occur, i.e. for successful mental reference. Rather, a sufficient number of the implicit descriptions in the speaker's mind must do the job of unique denotation. As well as the issue of

[128] Searle, "Proper Names", p. 171-172.

misdescription, objections to the explicit approach that I discussed in Chapter 3 will be overcome by the disjunctive theory. Now, I agree with Wettstein and Reimer that there are certainly many non-equivalent (non-synonymous) ways of completing an incomplete definite description that can be obtained from the same context of utterance, to denote the object intended by the speaker. The elements of this set of descriptions are determined according to the contextual factors, which include speaker intentions and the properties of the object in question as perceived/conceived by the speaker. I also agree with Wettstein that a speaker, most of the time, may not have in mind one certain description from the set as opposed to another, as she utters that sentence. My objection to Wettstein and Reimer at this stage is that I see no point in stipulating that there must be only one correct completion to be extracted from the context of utterance, since the disjunctive theory will be able to accomodate all possible completions into the proposition expressed. Why do Wettstein and Reimer insist on choosing only one of the descriptions from the set as "correct" in order to determine the proposition expressed? The reason is that, for the proposition expressed to be a determinate one, they presume that there must also be a determinate uniquely denoting description for the intended object. My proposal is that, in accordance with Searle's disjunctive theory for proper names, we take all of the descriptions in the set for an incomplete definite description together as determining the proposition expressed. Considering Wettstein's example where a speaker utters 'the table is covered with books', the possible non-synonymous completions 'the (only) table in room 209 of Camden Hall at t_1.' and 'the table at which the author of *The Persistence of Objects* is sitting at t_1' will work together to determine the proposition expressed. The question we have to answer at this point is,

how can we define the proposition expressed by the utterance of a sentence of the form 'the F is G', so that it will be compatible with the disjunctive idea?

The Disjunctive Theory for Definite Descriptions

Based on Russell's theory of thought and his contention that external objects can only be reached via denoting phrases, I claim that a version of Searle's disjunctive theory for proper names can be applied to all uses of definite descriptions. Assuming that there is a referential/attributive use distinction, uses of definite descriptions can be divided into four categories: referentially used incomplete ones, attributively used incomplete ones, referentially used complete ones, and attributively used complete ones. All descriptions of the different categories will be analysed according to the disjunctive idea. Thus, the proposition expressed by uttering a sentence of the form 'the F is G' will be:

1) where 'the F' is incomplete: Only within the theory of thought aspect of Russell's philosophy can we give an account of how a significant determinate proposition is expressed by a speaker uttering such a sentence, even though the literally uttered description is incomplete. We have to apply to Russell's notion of acquaintance: Because we can never be acquainted with external objects, the thought entertained by a speaker uttering a sentence of the form 'the F is G' (where 'the F' is incomplete) or 'A is G' (where 'A' is an ordinary proper name) is, "there is exactly one object which is (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …), and whatever is an (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …) is G". Now, the F_i's are all the properties the speaker is acquainted with, and those F_i's come together to collectively give a unique denotation of the object the speaker wishes to talk about. Confirming these views, Russell writes:

> When we make a statement about Julius Caesar, it is plain that Julius Caesar himself is not before our minds, since we are not acquainted with him. We have in mind some *description* of Julius Caesar: 'the man who was assassinated on the Ides of March', 'the founder of the Roman Empire', or perhaps, merely 'the man whose name was *Julius Caesar*'. (In this last description, *Julius Caesar* is a noise or shape with which we are acquainted.).[129]

In this passage, Russell uses the connective "or" in order to indicate that a speaker may have in mind one description for replacing Julius Caesar "or" another one. His use of "or" can be interpreted as positing that one speaker at one instance of using a certain name may have one of the different descriptions in mind, at a distinct instance of use of the same name may have in mind another one of the different descriptions. Alternatively, the passage can be interpreted to mean that one speaker, at the same instance of her use of a name, may have in mind this description or that one. I will take the latter approach, because I believe that an inclusive disjunction of all those descriptions that a speaker has in mind in the same instance of her use of a proper name gives the unique denotation of the object she intends to talk about. The disjunction is necessary for successful mental reference to an object in the Russellian theory of thought and epistemology. Among the properties (F_i's) the speaker is acquainted with, some of them may be wrong of the object in question, i.e. the speaker may have some descriptions in mind that are wrong of the object. But the important point is, there must be enough F_i's coming together collectively to give a unique identification of the object the speaker thinks/talks about, or mentally refers to. As Searle would say, "the logical sum, or inclusive disjunction"[130] of those F_i's uniquely identify the object the speaker has in mind. The properties (F_i's) are installed into the speaker's mind in the first place through the speaker becoming

[129] Russell, *The Problems,* p. 59.

[130] Searle, "Proper Names", p. 172.

acquainted with particulars related to the object in question, such as sense-data making up its appearance, or testimony she has heard or read about the object.

2) where 'the F' is complete: 'the F' purports to denote a definite object, i.e 'the F' is seemingly uniquely denoting, so it is possible though not certain that the property of being an F is instantiated by a unique object:

(a) if 'the F' is used attributively: Then the proposition expressed (and the thought entertained) is, "there is exactly one object which is F, and whatever is an F is G". The object the speaker is thinking about, namely the object she has in mind, is the object that uniquely satisfies the property of being an F. In other words, the semantic referent, in Kripke's sense, of the uttered phrase 'the F' is the speaker's referent. This proposition is true if and only if there really is a unique object satisfying the property of being an F, and it is G. The proposition is false if there is no unique object satisfying F (i.e. if either there is no object satisfying F, or if there are more than one), or if there is a unique object satisfying F but it does not satisfy the property G. If the uniqueness condition is not satisfied, then mental reference has failed and the speaker cannot be said to have entertained a thought about any objects. Then, we can say that the speaker did not have an object in mind after all, because the phrase in her mind could not denote any objects uniquely, and so there is a proposition expressed that is false, but no objects about which a thought is entertained.

Now, what happens if the uttered property F is such that it contains other referentially used components? For instance, consider a speaker uttering 'the murderer of Smith must be insane', or 'the murderer of the man lying on the ground in front of me must be insane', where 'the murderer of …' is used attributively. She utters the sentence based on seeing the brutally-attacked body of the victim who lies dead on the ground. The inner phrase 'Smith' (or 'the man lying on the ground in

front of me') is referential, so the implicit denoting phrase in the speaker's mind in this case will be 'the murderer of the object which is (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …)', where the speaker must have other properties (F_i's) in mind to uniquely denote Smith (or the man lying on the ground in front of her). Therefore, the proposition expressed would be, "there is exactly one object which is a murderer of the object which is (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …), and whatever is a murderer of the object which is (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …) must be insane".

(b) if 'the F' is used referentially: Then the proposition expressed, as well as the thought entertained is, "there is exactly one object which is (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …), and whatever is an (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …) is G". The object the speaker is thinking about is the object that uniquely satisfies the property of being an (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …). In other words, the semantic referent of the uniquely denoting phrase 'the object which is (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …)' that must be implicit in the speaker's mind is the speaker's referent.

At this point, let us take a few examples and clarify the issue:

Some Examples

1- A speaker utters the sentence 'the table is covered with books'. 'the table' in this case is an *incomplete, referentially used* definite description. So, the thought entertained by the speaker uttering this sentence, and the proposition expressed by this utterance would be, "there is exactly one object which is a (table, or causing such-and-such sense-data, or has a white table cloth on it, or has a purple cup of coffee on it, or has a copy of *Republic* on it, or is in room TB135 right now, or is

over here, or is by the left wall of the room, or has so-and-so other locational properties, or has such-and-such other properties, or …), and whatever is a (table, or causing such-and-such sense-data, or has so-and-so locational properties, or has such-and-such other properties, or …) is covered with books". The speaker could have given many more descriptions based on the particulars with which she is acquainted related to that object. She has direct epistemic contact with sense-data making up the appearance of that object, so the properties which come together to collectively uniquely denote the object in question are installed into her mind based on these particulars with which she is acquainted. Which elements (which of the F_i's) in terms of sense-data making up the table's appearance or determining its location are necessary for the successful unique denotation of the object in question? Also, how many of the F_i's must be true of the object in order to say that there is successful mental reference to it by the speaker? How about its locational properties? The answers to these questions are not certain, but consider that some of the descriptions she has in mind are in fact wrong of the object she is thinking about; suppose that the liquid in the cup is not coffee but tea, or the cup is in fact brown but because of the light conditions she sees it as purple, or the book on the table which she thinks is *Republic* is in fact *Politics.* Still, the inclusive disjunction of those descriptions given in the analysis may give a unique identification of the object she mentally refers to, if there are enough properties in her mind that will come together to uniquely denote the object in question. Now, consider what would happen if the object the speaker was talking about was not a table after all, but it was a professionally-cut rectangular block of rock which seemed like a table because it was covered with a white table cloth. In that case, the speaker's mental reference to that object is successful as long as the inclusive disjunction of the properties she has in mind uniquely denote that

object. There must be a sufficient number of descriptions that truely apply to the object in question and thus uniquely identify it. The proposition expressed will still be true, if the object the speaker is talking about is really covered with books. Under what conditions will the proposition expressed be false? The proposition will be false if there is no object there whatsoever. Suppose that because of the light conditions, or because the speaker is on drugs, that she thinks there is a table there, but it is all an illusion. In that case, mental reference fails, the properties in the speaker's mind are not sufficient to uniquely denote any objects, thus we can say that she could not think about any objects. The proposition expressed will also be false if the speaker's mental reference is successful (i.e. unique denotation goes through) although the object she is talking about is not covered with books.

2- Next, let's study an *incomplete, attributively used* definite description. Again, consider a classic example, where a speaker utters 'the murderer must be insane' upon seeing the brutally-damaged body lying dead in front of her. Or it may be the case that the speaker is discussing with a detective the death of some person, say Smith, who is not present physically in that environment. Even if the speaker suspects someone, or even knows someone to be the murderer, she may use 'the murderer' attributively, because in the first case, the speaker wishes to talk about whomever uniquely satisfies the property of having murdered the person lying in front of her, and in the second case, she is talking about whomever uniquely satisfies the property of having murdered Smith. So, the implicit definite description in the speaker's mind can be 'the murderer of the man lying in front of me' (or 'the murderer of Smith'). Notice that the completion contains a referentially used component, namely the inner phrase 'the man lying in front of me' (or 'Smith'). The speaker must have other properties (F_i's) in mind to uniquely denote the man lying in

front of her (or Smith). Thus, the actual implicit denoting phrase in the speaker's mind may be, 'the murderer of the object which is a (person, or man, or lying in front of me, or has so-and-so location, or has such-and-such appearance, or has such-and-such other properties, or…)'. In the Smith case, the speaker may have other descriptions in mind relevant to Smith, so the implicit uniquely denoting phrase for the murderer may be 'the murderer of the object which is a (person, or man, or whose name is Harry Smith, or has such-and-such appearance, or has so-and-so other properties, or ...)'. Hence, the thought entertained by a speaker uttering the sentence 'the murderer of the man lying in front of me must be insane', and the proposition expressed by that utterance would be, "there is exactly one object which is a murderer of the object which is a (person, or man, or lying in front of me, or has so-and-so location, or has such-and-such appearance, or has such-and-such other properties, or …), and whatever is a murderer of the object which is a (person, or man, or lying in front of me, or has so-and-so location, or has such-and-such appearance, or has such-and-such other properties, or …) must be insane". The proposition expressed will be true if and only if there is a unique murderer of the object denoted by the inner phrase, and that murderer is insane. If the object denoted by the inner phrase is not murdered, or if there are more than one murderer, then the proposition expressed will be false. It will also be false if there is a unique murderer of the object denoted by the inner phrase who is not insane.

3- Let's look at one more example. Consider again a speaker uttering 'the man in the corner drinking champagne is happy tonight', where the definite description is *complete, referentially used.* The proposition expressed by this utterance would be, "there is exactly one object which is a (person, or man, or has such-and-such appearance, or is in the corner, or is standing at such-and-such location, or is

drinking champagne, or has such-and-such other properties, or …) and whatever is a (person, or man, or has such-and-such appearance, or …) is happy tonight". We can say that there is successful mental reference by the speaker only if there are sufficient implicit properties in her mind, such as the description of the man's appearance and location, that enable unique denotation of the object to go through. The fact that the man does not really drink champagne would not prevent the speaker from being able to metally refer to it. What if the person the speaker means to talk about is not really a man but a woman? Suppose that her back was turned, and she had short hair, so the speaker has mistaken her for a man. Even so, successful mental reference may go through because the speaker may have other properties in mind relevant to her. The proposition expressed thus may be, "there is exactly one object which is a (person, or man, or is in the corner, or is standing at such-and-such location, or whose back is turned, or has short black hair, or has such-and-such appearance, or is drinking champagne, or has such-and-such other properties, or…), and whatever is a (person, or man, or is in the corner, or is standing at such-and-such location, or whose back is turned, or has short black hair, or…) is happy tonight". When can we say that the proposition expressed is false? The proposition will be false if there is no object there whatsoever, say the speaker is so drunk that she thinks there is a man in the corner but it is all an illusion. In that case, mental reference fails, the properties in the speaker's mind cannot denote any objects, and hence we can say that she could not think about any objects. The proposition expressed by that utterance will also be false if there is unique denotation, but the object the speaker has in mind, i.e. the person in the corner whom she is talking about, is not happy. What happens if the object she is talking about is neither a man, nor a woman? So, it is not a person after all, but say it is a man-shaped statue? Even so, the sense-data the speaker becomes

acquainted with related to that object, about its appearance and location, may be sufficient for unique denotation of the object in question, even though the properties of being a person or a man are false of it. Thus, although there is successful mental reference, because an inanimate object cannot be said to be happy, the proposition expressed will be false. Additionally, imagine that the property predicated of the object is not applicable only to humans, but it is a predicate related to the spatiality of a physical object? Say, the sentence uttered is 'the man in the corner drinking champagne is standing very still, not moving an inch', and the implicit uniquely denoting phrase in the speaker's mind may be 'the object which is a (person, or man, or is in the corner, or is standing at such-and-such location, or has such-and-such height, or whose back is turned, or has short black hair, or has such-and-such appearance, or is drinking champagne, or has such-and-such other properties, or…)'. Then, mental reference is still successful if the inclusive disjunction can uniquely denote. The speaker must have in mind a sufficient number of properties that truely apply to the object in question. The proposition expressed is, "there is exactly one object which is a (person, or man, or is standing at such-and-such location, or has such-and-such height, or has such-and-such other properties, or…), and whatever is a (person, or man, or is standing at such-and-such location, or has such-and-such height, or has such-and-such other properties, or…) is standing very still, not moving an inch". It will be true just in case unique denotation of the man-shaped statue goes through, and it is standing very still, not moving an inch.

4- At this point, it is worth mentioning a slight disagreement with Russell. Let's consider again his remark in "On Denoting" that if there are more than one son of So-and-so, then it is more correct to say 'a son of So-and-so' instead of 'the son of

So-and-so'.[131] I do not agree with this comment, because, as I have been arguing in this chapter, if there is a particular son of So-and-so that the speaker means to talk about, even if So-and-so has several sons and she knows this fact, she can still legitimately use the phrase 'the son of So-and-so' to think about the particular son that she has in mind. That is, she will be using the description referentially in that case (i.e. 'the son of So-and-so' is *complete, referentially used*), and she will have in mind other relevant properties supplementing the literally uttered phrase 'the son of So-and-so', all of whose inclusive disjunction will uniquely denote the son in question. Only this way can the speaker be said to have entertained any thoughts about that particular son. Or, consider this scenario: Suppose So-and-so is a very old man, and the speaker believes there is only one son of So-and-so. She may know So-and-so's son personally, or she may have no epistemic contact with anyone that she recognizes as So-and-so's son. For the sake of argument, assume that it is the latter case, that the speaker does not know anyone to be the son of So-and-so. Based on So-and-so's good health conditions, the speaker utters the sentence 'the son of So-and-so takes very good care of him'. Then, she has used the description attributively, because she is talking about the object that uniquely satisfies the property of being So-and-so's son, whoever he may be, and she makes a judgement about him. 'the son of So-and-so' is a *complete, attributively used* definite description in this scenario. The proposition expressed by that utterance is "there is exactly one son of So-and-so, and whatever is a son of So-and-so takes very good care of him". Because 'So-and-so' is an ordinary proper name, the speaker must have in mind certain properties (F_i's) related to So-and-so, whose inclusive disjunction will uniquely denote the man in question. Thus, the proposition actually expressed is, "there is exactly one son of

[131] Russell, "On Denoting", p. 481.

the object which is (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …), and whatever is a son of the object which is (F_1 or F_2 or F_3 or F_4 or …) takes very good care of him". If So-and-so has no sons in reality, or if he has more than one, then the proposition expressed will be false. It will also be false if there is a unique son of So-and-so, but the son does not take very good care of him, i.e. it is not the son that takes good care of So-and-so, but his daughter, for example.

5- Lastly, I would like to examine Kripke's alleged counterexample to Russell's Theory of Descriptions, viz. 'the logician' that I introduced in Chapter 2. In his unpublished lectures (1973)[132], Kripke thinks of a case where a speaker (I will call her 'the speaker' throughout the rest of the text) hears a friend (I will call him 'the friend') talk about a particular logician that he has in mind, by referring to him with the name 'the logician'. Later, the speaker wishes to talk about that same logician the friend (whom the speaker does not remember anymore) talked about, so she uses the name 'the logician' for that purpose in uttering the sentence, say, 'the logician was a genius'. Kripke is concerned that the completion of 'the logician' cannot be done by the speaker without including the notion of *the reference of the phrase* 'the logician'. He thinks any such completion containing this notion would be against the Russellian spirit, because Russell only takes logically proper names as genuine referring expressions and all other singular terms are in fact disguised definite descriptions that ultimately dissolve into predicates in his theory. It can be a matter of further study whether we can justly give an account for the notion of the reference of a definite description on Russellian grounds, but I would say that in Kripke's example, the completion of 'the logician' need not involve that notion. 'the logician' must be considered as an *incomplete, attributively used* definite description. One

[132] Saul Kripke, *Reference and Existence, the John Locke Lectures for 1973.*

possible completion that does not contain the notion of the reference of the phrase 'the logician' would be, 'the logician mentally referred to by the friend who used *the logician* in the past discussion, with whom I discussed some time ago, whom I don't remember right now'. In this case, *the logician* would be a noise which the speaker is acquainted with, as Russell would put it. The speaker is acquainted with that noise because she heard the friend call the logician by that particular phrase in their past discussion. Notice that the completion does not contain the notion of the reference of the phrase 'the logician', but instead it contains the notion of a *speaker mentally referring* to an object (i.e. the friend mentally referred to the logician in the past discussion). So, for the mental reference of the speaker to the logician to be successful in the present time, it is necessary that the friend's mental reference to the logician was successful in the past discussion. That is to say, the friend must have had a uniquely denoting phrase in mind that denoted the logician. The analysis according to the disjunctive theory I proposed will be a little bit complicated because the complete definite description I offered contains other embedded referential components that in turn have to be analysed disjunctively. So, according to the disjunctive analysis, the proposition expressed by uttering 'the logician was a genius' – where the implicit uniquely denoting phrase in the speaker's mind is 'the logician mentally referred to by the friend who used *the logician* in the past discussion, with whom I discussed some time ago, whom I don't remember right now' – would be, "there is exactly one object which is a logician mentally referred to by the object which is a (person, or friend, or who mentally referred by using *the logician* in the past discussion, or with whom I discussed some time ago, or whom I don't remember right now, or…), and whatever is a logician mentally referred to by the object which is a (person, or friend, or who mentally referred by using *the logician* in the past

discussion, or…) was a genius". The speaker might add some more relevant information that she remembers about the content of that particular past discussion, which will secure the unique denotation of the discussion in question, i.e. it would secure her successful mental reference to that particular discussion. This would further secure the denotation of the friend with whom she discussed, i.e. it would secure her successful mental reference to the friend in question. Those successful mental references would in turn secure the unique denotation of the logician discussed. In fact, I claim that to secure references, the speaker must definitely be able to add relevant information from her memory about the past discussion, if her thought is to be characterized as a significant, determinate thought about any objects that were called by the name 'the logician' in the past. Otherwise, we cannot say that her mental references to the past discussion, to the person with whom she discussed, and to the logician that they discussed were successful.

Significance of the Disjunctive Theory for Definite Descriptions

The disjunctive theory I proposed in my thesis for definite descriptions originates from an alleged problem for Russell's semantics, namely incomplete definite descriptions. However, in accordance with his theory of thought, Russell treats all singular terms similarly, so, the disjunctive theory in fact gives a Russellian account for the use of all definite descriptions in natural language. It serves to give an explicit account of the thought entertained by a speaker as she thinks about an external object. A speaker can be considered as successful in her mental reference to an external object only if the inclusive disjunction of the properties installed into her mind uniquely denotes the object in question. The examples studied above indicate

that almost all uses of singular terms, in particular incomplete definite descriptions, can be analysed according to the disjunctive theory, and hence objections to Russell's Theory of Descriptions based on incomplete definite descriptions can be discarded.

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