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RUSSELL WAS RIGHT (ALMOST)

Nobody's perfect. Take Bertrand Russell. He showed that despite grammatical appearances, definite descriptions are not really logical-subject expressions, but disguised quantifier phrases instead. Russell's theory has met with a thirty-year barrage of misdirected barbs, based on such notions as presupposition, referential use, and context dependence. In each case, I believe, semantics has been confused with pragmatics, and not a single fact marshaled against Russell has shown anything more than that a theory of use is not a theory of meaning. But as I said, nobody's perfect. Russell contrasted names with descriptions and thought that a genuine name serves "merely to indicate what we are speaking about" (1919, 175). Only logically proper names can occur as subjects of sentences which are genuinely (not merely grammatically) of the subject-predicate form, and these sentences express singular propositions. Individuals denoted by logically proper names are themselves (rather than individual concepts) constituents of such propositions. Since Russell construed propositions as contents of thoughts, not as set- or model-theoretic fictions, his conception of genuine names as introducing individuals into propositions backed him up against the wall. For ordinary names could not qualify as logically proper names, since ordinary individuals cannot belong to the contents of thoughts. So he believed that only such terms as "this" (referring to sense-data) and "I" could qualify as names. The trouble is that "this" and "I" aren't names at all, but pronouns.

So why did Russell insist on calling "this" and "I" logically proper names? Aside from his reasons for denying that ordinary names are logically proper names, there was the consideration that particulars literally can be constituents of propositions, singular propositions, that is. Unfortunately, although Russell recognized the difference between a proposition and its "verbal expression" (1918, 251–2), he tended to neglect this distinction. Indeed, he often spoke of expressions – whether names, descriptions, or pronouns – as being "used as names" (e.g., 1918, 246) and by this he meant that they are used

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"merely to indicate what we are speaking about." An expression is used as a name just in case it is being used to refer, and surely it doesn't have to be a name to be so used. Thus, to give verbal expression to a singular proposition, one can use a referring expression of any sort to mention the particular that is the subject of the proposition. If we couple this point with the fact that a sentence containing indexicals can be used to express innumerably many distinct singular propositions in different contexts, we see that it was silly of Russell to regard "this" and "I" as logically proper names, even if only by default. Obviously their *meanings* do not vary from context to context. For this reason Strawson offers the following diagnosis:

> Because Russell confused meaning with mentioning, he thought that if there were any expressions having a uniquely referring use, which were what they seemed (i.e. logical subjects) and not something else in disguise, their meaning must *be* the particular object which they were used to refer to. Hence the troublesome mythology of the logically proper name. (1950, 181–2)

But Strawson's diagnosis is incomplete. He forgets to mention that Russell assumed that there *are* logically proper names. If Russell hadn't made that mistake, he could have reached the correct conclusion that there are no logically proper names. That is, every referring expression is to be analyzed as either a truncated description or an indexical, implicitly containing an unbound variable. Then instead of developing his own mythology of logically proper names, Russell could have reduced to absurdity the mythology of names – that they denote directly – which Mill originally promulgated and which Kripke has lately resuscitated and embellished.

The funny thing is that in his lecture on "Descriptions and Incomplete Symbols" (1918, 241–254), Russell not only operates with the very conception of names that runs from Mill to Kripke, but he also presents three insuperable challenges to the view that ordinary names are logically proper names, that is, the view that ordinary names denote directly rather than in virtue of having senses and that, unlike indexicals, their references are not dependent on their users or their contexts of use. These are the familiar Fregean difficulties of (a) existence sentences, (b) identity sentences, and (c) belief sentences containing names. (a) Russell argues that existence sentences containing names are nonsensical, if names are construed as denoting directly. One of his reasons is that existence is not a property, hence existence sentences do not have a subject-predicate logical form. Kripke and company have not addressed this issue, they've dodged it. (b) Concerning identity sentences with names on both sides of the identity sign, Russell says pretty much what Kripke says, namely, that they express the same proposition regardless of whether the name on the right is the same as the name on the left, provided that both denote the same thing. It's just that Russell recognizes that ordinary names don't denote directly, while Kripke thinks they do, and imagines that such sentences are, if true, necessarily true. It is easy to show (see Bach, 1981b) that Kripke has deformed the metaphysical triviality that an object is necessarily identical to itself into the semantic absurdity that names are rigid designators. Russell, at least, recognizes that if one asserts a sentence like "Scott is Sir Walter," one is asserting not that a certain individual is identical to himself but that "the person called 'Scott' is the person called 'Sir Walter,'" i.e., that the names are being used as descriptions (1918, 246). Also, Russell notes, "if one thing has two names, you make exactly the same assertion whichever of the two names you use, provided they are really names and not truncated descriptions" (1918, 245). But again, he does not regard ordinary names as genuine names. (c) Even if he did, he would not have regarded them as functioning as names in belief contexts, for he would have rejected the following counterpart of the passage just quoted: "If one thing has two names, you ascribe exactly the same belief whichever of the two names you use, provided they are really names and not truncated descriptions." That is, he would not have fallen for Kripke's (1979) pseudo-puzzle about belief. Suppose that an individual has two names, say "Tony Curtis" and "Bernie Schwartz," and that someone ignorant of this believes that Tony Curtis is a movie actor and that Bernie Schwartz is not. Kripke's doctrine about names implies that the person believes two propositions about the same individual that contradict each other. Kripke is faced with the problem of how to describe the person as not illogical but merely ignorant of the fact that Tony Curtis is Bernie Schwartz. Kripke can find no solution, but lately Tom McKay (1981) thinks *he* can. He bites the bullet and suggests that the person "does not recognize that the propositions he has accepted are directly contradictory to one another" (1981, 301) because he fails to realize that the two sentences he has accepted express contradictory propositions. Unfortunately, neither McKay nor Kripke explains how a minimally rational person could understand the two sentences (given that the names occurring in them denote directly, so that to understand the names is to know what they denote) without noticing that they express contradictory propositions. Nor have they explained how the person could entertain the two propositions without recognizing that they directly contradict one another. Of course, if one rejects the view that ordinary names are logically proper names, i.e., directly denoting expressions or rigid designators (call them what you will), this puzzle does not arise. And if one rejects the view that any name is a logically proper name, this puzzle never arises. Moreover, the problems with existence and identity sentences that contain names do not arise either.

You may have gathered that I hold in less than high esteem the prevailing view about names. Elsewhere (Bach, 1981b) I have detailed my reasons and, putting my money where my mouth is, have defended a descriptive theory of names. Here I am merely pointing out that Russell's rejection of the view that ordinary names are logically proper names is equally, in effect, a rejection of currently prevailing doctrine. For, his conception of logically proper names, which he recognized ordinary names could not satisfy, is essentially the conception of names as rigid designators (i.e., as denoting directly). So he wasn't so much devising a myth of his own about logically proper names, at least if we forgive him for what he says about "this" and "I," as he was exploding a myth that has been passed on, link by link, from Mill to the present day. Moreover, if we take Russell's use of the word "logically" seriously, we must admit that there is nothing idiosyncratic about his conception of logically proper names. In logic, after all, the counterparts of proper names are individual constants, and formulas of the form "*a* is *F*," where "*a*" is an individual constant, are thought to be the paradigm of subject-predicate sentences. Again, if we forgive and forget Russell's lapse about "this" and "I," we can regard him as having argued that despite grammatical appearances, there are no sentences in ordinary language of subject-predicate logical form.

Russell's recognition that the grammatical form of a sentence can be misleading as to its logical form led him – and leads us – to his theory of definite descriptions. In my view (Bach, 1981c), Russell's theory is in all essentials correct. Definite descriptions really are incomplete symbols in his sense and should be analyzed as disguised quantifier expressions. Here I wish to defend Russell's theory against three influential objections based on, respectively, (1) the notion of presupposition, (2) the referential/attributive distinction, and (3) the claim that descriptions are implicitly indexical.

(1) Strawson's paper 'On Referring' (1950) was the first in a series of onslaughts against Russell's theory of descriptions. Strawson appealed to a notion of presupposition and argued for truth-value gaps in assertions made with sentences whose constituent descriptions are unsatisfied. I won't review the details of Strawson's position. Rather, I will quote a couple of things he says about what he was up to.

> 'Mentioning', or referring', is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do. Mentioning, or referring to, something is a characteristic of a *use* of an expression, just as 'being about' something, and truth-or-falsity, are characteristics of a *use* of a sentence. (1950, 180)

As you might expect, I am highly sympathetic to what Strawson says here. Yes, people refer, expressions are used to refer. Yes, assertions are true or false, sentences are used to make true or false assertions. But nothing Strawson says militates against Russell's theory. Indeed, Strawson's own distinctions undermine his objections to Russell.

First, consider how Strawson represents, or rather, misrepresents, Russell's position. "According to Russell, anyone who *asserted S* ['The king of France is wise'] would be *asserting*" (1950, 178; my emphasis) that there is one and only one king of France and whoever is king of France is wise. But Russell says no such thing. Russell is talking about sentences, not assertions (nowhere does he speak of asserting sentences), and the propositions he takes to be the meanings of those sentences. Thus, his semantic analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions in no way commits him to the position Strawson ascribes to him. Although Russell does not formulate a distinction between speaker meaning and sentence meaning, he is surely not stuck with having to say that what a speaker means is precisely what the sentence means. Nothing Strawson says about the question of an assertion's truth or falsity not arising, about the difference between asserting and implying, or about speaker's reference adversely affects Russell's theory. Strawson's remarks raise no real objection to Russell's account of the meaning of sentences containing definite descriptions or to his account of the truth or falsity of the propositions they express. The notion of presupposition with which Strawson operates must be semantic if it is to affect Russell's theory, but it is actually pragmatic, being concerned with what a *speaker* implies (in Strawson's special sense).

What is the heart of Strawson's dispute with Russell? Russell held that "if there are any sentences which are genuinely of the subject-predicate form, then the very fact of their being significant, having a meaning, guarantees that there *is* something referred to by the logical (and grammatical) subject" (Strawson, 1950, 177). And Strawson adds,

> That view of the meaning of logical-subject-expressions which provides the whole incentive to the Theory of Descriptions at the same time precludes the possibility of Russell's ever finding any satisfactory substitutes for those expressions which, beginning with substantival phrases, he progressively degrades from the status of logical subjects. (1950, 186) Not even names come up to the impossible standard set. (187)

Thinking that Russell has confused what can be said of an expression with what can be said of uses of it, Strawson insists that expressions like descriptions, names, and pronouns *can* occur as "singular logical subjects" but adds, "to say this is to say that these expressions, togehter with context . . . , are what one uses to make unique references." So the expressions do not secure uniqueness of reference by themselves. "The actual unique reference made, if any, is a matter of the particular use in the particular context; the significance of the expression used is the set of rules or conventions which permit such references to be made" (1950, 187). Finally, Strawson has shown his cards. And surely he is right at least about indexicals: their semantics should say something about how they are to be used to refer. After all, they are referring expressions, but obviously what they mean is insufficient for them to secure reference by themselves. However, it does not help Strawson that the same is often true of names, which can have more than one bearer, and of definite descriptions, which are often not proper or complete in the sense of applying to a unique individual. For this hardly indicates that using names or descriptions to refer involves applying *semantic* rules governing those expressions, and our ensuing discussion of referential uses of definite descriptions, as well as of proper names, will show Strawson's appeal to semantic rules for reference to be unnecessary (except for indexicals). But even if he were correct, he would not have justified rejecting Russell's "impossible standard" for an expression's being a singular logical subject. Quite the contrary, he would have shown that since reference is context-dependent, it is not completely determined semantically, hence that sentences containing singular terms do not express, outside a context of utterance, singular propositions of the subject-predicate form. For Strawson is in effect conceding that no sentence has a subject-predicate proposition as its meaning. Russell's standard may be impossible, but Strawson has not shown it to be unreasonable. Instead, Strawson has conveniently chosen to call referring expressions "singular logical subjects" merely because they can be used to make unique references.

(2) Donnellan (1966) originally presented his distinction between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions as posing a difficulty for Russell's theory. Yet he denied that sentences in which descriptions occur are syntactically or semantically ambiguous. He held, rather, that "whether or not a definite description is used referentially or attributively is a function of the speaker's intentions in a particular case" (1966, 297). But then why does the referential/attributive distinction, if not semantic but pragmatic, pose any problem for Russell's theory? The quick answer is to say that it doesn't and to go on to the next question, but Donnellan's discussion deserves better.

It deserves better not merely because he was on to something but because what he was on to suggests a notion of reference that in turn suggests why reference has a limited place in semantics. Despite the fact that Donnellan characterizes the referential/attributive distinction in at least half a dozen different ways, none of which is adequate to the task – or so I have argued (Bach, 1981c) – he was on the right track, though he doesn't leave the station until the end of his paper. There he notes that for Russell

> Genuine proper names . . . would refer to something without ascribing any properties to it, . . . to the thing itself, not simply the thing in so far as it falls under a certain description. . . . [With descriptions] we introduce an element of generality which ought to be absent if what we are doing is referring to some particular thing. . . . If there is anything which might be identified as reference here, it is reference in a very weak sense – namely, reference to *whatever* is the one and only ϕ, if there is any such. . . . But this lack of particularity is absent from the referential use of definite descriptions precisely because the description is here merely a device for getting one's audience to pick out or think of the thing to be spoken about, a device which may serve its function even if the description is incorrect. More importantly perhaps, in the referential use as opposed to the attributive, there is a *right* thing to be picked out by the

> audience and its being the right thing is not simply a function of its fitting the description. (1966, 303–4)

There are two different distinctions to be gleaned from this passage, which unfortunately Donnellan himself does not keep separate. First, he contrasts two ways in which *expressions* can refer to (i.e., denote) an object, namely, either directly or descriptively, and he ascribes to Russell the view that names denote directly. As we saw earlier, of course, this view of names is not peculiar to Russell but is the hallmark of the Mill–Kripke tradition. It's just that (disregarding demonstratives) Russell denies that there are any genuine names. Donnellan's second contrast is between *uses* of referring expressions, namely, "weak reference" with its "element of generality" and geniune reference with a particular object picked out. Here he contrasts two kinds of speaker intention: an intention to talk about an object that satisfies a certain description and an intention to talk about a certain object in particular. Clearly this second distinction is a pragmatic one. It can be drawn without being restricted to uses of definite descriptions and is thus independent of the semantics of definite descriptions. Once this distinction is properly drawn, we will be in a better position to see why it is harmless, at least for semantics, to deny that any singular term in natural language denotes directly. When Russell denies that ordinary names are logically proper names, he is not making a travesty of the notion of names but is unwittingly but effectively challenging the application to natural languages of the notions of individual constants and singular propositions in ordinary logic. For, to borrow Donnellan's words, there is always "an element of generality" in linguistic representation; "lack of particularity" is unavoidable. I'll explain why this is the case in due course, but first I should formulate the above distinction between two uses of expressions to refer and then, armed with that distinction, I'll take up the third objection to Russell's theory, based on the view that because the definite descriptions we commonly use are incomplete, they function as indexicals.

Let us call the two kinds of reference that Donnellan distinguishes at the end of his paper "descriptive reference" and "particular reference." Descriptive reference is reference in the weak sense and has the element of generality that Donnellan speaks of. When a speaker descriptively refers to something, the referential part of his communicative intention (see Bach and Harnish, 1979, 12–16, for an account of distinctively communicative intentions) is to intend to be talking about, and to be taken to be talking about, whichever object satisfies a certain description. It is not necessary that he use this or any description; what is necessary is that a certain description (or individual concept) determine the referent. The speaker's referential intention determines the description that determines the referent. On the other hand, in particular reference the speaker intends to be talking about, and to be taken to be talking about, a certain object. Whether the speaker is thinking of this object in some *de re* way, say perceptually (see Bach, 1981a, for a discussion of *de re* thought), or under some description, it is not part of his referential intention that his audience think of the object in that way. Rather, what he intends is that the audience think of the same object that he is thinking about – as the one he is intending to be talking about. Otherwise, how the audience thinks of the object is irrelevant to the fulfillment of the speaker's referential intention. Whereas a descriptive referential intention can be fulfilled even if there is no (unique) object answering to the description the speaker has in mind (the audience need merely identify that description), in the case of particular reference the speaker's intention can be fulfilled only if there is an (existent) object that he is thinking of. If his referential intention does not have the element of generality characteristic of descriptive reference, it cannot be fulfilled unless there is an object for the audience to identify as that object which he is talking about.

(3) Suppose a speaker uses a complete definite description (there is no more than one *F*) in using a sentence of the form "The *F* is *G*," say, "The discoverer of X-rays was bald." If he is descriptively referring to the discoverer of X-rays, he is using the description attributively in Donnellan's sense. But if his reference to the discoverer of X-rays is particular rather than descriptive, his use of the description is referential in Donnellan's sense. In that case, there must be some other way he is thinking of Roentgen than (merely) as the discoverer of X-rays, but it is irrelevant to the fulfillment of his referential intention that the audience think of Roentgen in this other way. Again, however, it is necessary that there be an individual which he is talking about and which the audience takes him to be talking about.

Consider now the case of improper or incomplete definite descriptions like "the table" or "the man." Do they pose any problems for Russell's theory? Kripke doubts "that such descriptions can always be regarded as elliptical with some uniquely specifying conditions added" (1977, 255) and finds it "tempting to assimilate such descriptions to the corresponding demonstratives (for example, 'that table')" (1977, 271). But Kripke's doubts and temptations do not constitute arguments, and like Kripke, I deplore "the lazy man's approach in philosophy to posit ambiguities when in trouble" (1977, 268). So I wonder why he seems to think that the semantics of a description should depend on whether it's satisfied by one or more than one object. Would the meaning of "the table" change if all but one of the tables in the universe were destroyed?

There is a perfectly straightforward way to defend Russell's theory against Kripke's complaint. Indeed, Kripke mentions it, even if he doesn't spell out his doubt about it. Rather than construe them as *semantically* different from complete descriptions, we can treat incomplete definite descriptions, when used attributively, as being *used* elliptically (unless the speaker believes the description to be complete) in place of some complete description like "the *F* in the vicinity," "the *F* previously mentioned," "the *F* I am pointing to," or something of the form "the *F* which is *G*." If the speaker is using an incomplete description in a sentence of the form "The *F* is *H*," the *sentence* still gets the usual Russellian analysis, but of course the *speaker* does not mean that the one and only *F* is *H*. Rather, if he is using the description attributively and is referring descriptively, he intends his audience to identify some completion of "the *F*," some description of the form "the *F* which is *G*," and to take him as stating that the unique *FG* is *H*. However, if he is using the incomplete description referentially, that is, if he is referring to some object in particular without believing it to be the only *F* (he need not even believe it to be *F* at all), his referential intention need not include some unique descriptive completion of "the *F*." Perhaps this is the source of Kripke's doubt about the ability of Russell's theory to handle incomplete descriptions. In any case, the doubt is unfounded, for Russell's analysis applies only to the sentence used, not to what the speaker means in using it. What he means is that the object he has in mind (and intends his audience to identify as that which he is using "the *F*" to refer to) is *H*. The two most common referential uses of an incomplete definite description like "the table" are the demonstrative and the anaphoric, where the speaker could just as well use a demonstrative description like "that table" or "this table," but this in no way goes to show that "the table" should be regarded as *semantically* equivalent to "that table" or "this table."[1]

So far we have seen that as long as Russell's theory of descriptions is recognized for what it is, a semantic analysis of sentences containing descriptions, not a pragmatic account of speakers' uses of descriptions, it is immune to the familiar complaints. Moreover, we saw that Russell's denial that ordinary names are logically proper names is due to an impossibly high, but not unreasonably high standard. For this blame logic, not Russell. Speakers, not names, do what in logic individual constants supposedly do (more on them shortly).

What *do* names do? In my view (Bach, 1981b) our treatment of incomplete definite descriptions can be applied directly to names. A name *N* is semantically equivalent to the description "the bearer of *N*," a description which mentions that very name. That is why, in calling the paper in which I defend this view "What's in a Name?," I had in mind the answer, "Itself." Here I won't rehearse the arguments for this view, which I dub the "Nominal Description Theory," but I'll mention a few main points. One virtue of this theory is that it explains the fact that when a person uses a name to refer to an individual, if he is using it literally he must intend to be referring to something that bears the name. Secondly, the fact that a name can have many bearers is no problem for this theory, in precisely the same way that the fact that there are many tables is no problem for Russell's analysis of a description like "the table." Third, the illusion of rigidity is readily explained by the fact that names, construed as nominal descriptions (usually incomplete ones at that), are ordinarily used referentially, not attributively. That's partly because they have so little descriptive content, so little in fact that some people think they do not describe at all but somehow denote directly.

Concerning the theory that names do denote directly, that they are rigid designators, there are two disastrous difficulties, aside from the familiar problems with existence, identity, and belief sentences containing names. First, as Schiffer has observed, this theory "has been cavalier in the way it has ignored the connection between semantics and psychology. Not one of these theorists has ventured a theory of the thought in the mind of a person using a singular term as a rigid designator" (1978, 174–5). This is no surprise, for it is hard to see how anything short of magic or miracles could guarantee that an element in the content of a thought (what Schiffer calls the "mode of presentation" of the object) should designate the same object (if any) in every possible world. Secondly, if the thesis that names are rigid designators is, as it purports to be, a claim about the semantics of names, the thesis implies that a name is (semantically) ambiguous in as many ways as it has bearers. But that is absurd, implying that knowing the meaning (i.e., all the meanings) of a name is knowing the identities of all of its bearers, as if not knowing them is to suffer from *linguistic* ignorance.

From what I have said, I cheerfully conclude that despite grammatical appearances, no sentence has as its semantic representation or logical form a singular proposition of the form "*a* is *F*" (where *a* is a particular). Every so-called singular term or referring expression either is a definite description (or semantically equivalent to one), in which case it is subject to Russell's quantificational analysis, or it is (or contains) an indexical. In the latter case the closest a sentence can come to having the form of a singular proposition is by having the form "*x* is *F*," where "*x*" is an unbound variable. Unless you count these, logically speaking there are no subject-predicate sentences (about particulars).

Actually, I believe something even stronger: there are no singular propositions. Nothing of the form "*a* is *F*," where "*a*" is a logically proper name, can express the full content of a thought about a particular, for it omits the mode of presentation of the object the thought is about (see Schiffer, 1978 and Bach, 1981a). A thought about a particular must contain either a descriptive or an indexical element in virtue of which it is about a specific individual. If a thought contains merely a descriptive element that applies uniquely to some individual, its content is not a singular, subject-predicate proposition but a general proposition of the sort in terms of which Russell analyzes sentences containing definite descriptions (roughly, "There is one and only one *F* and every *F* is *G*"). Just as in an attributive use of a definite description there is reference only in a weak sense, so a descriptive thought is only weakly about a certain individual, whichever one uniquely satisfies the description in its content. Had something else been the unique *F*, the thought would have been (weakly) about it instead.

If a thought is about a particular in virtue of containing an indexical element, its total content is not a singular proposition, indeed not a (complete) proposition at all. As Burge (1977) has urged, a singular (or *de re*) thought is not propositional; considered in terms of its content alone it has no context-independent truth value, but must be contextually related to an object for a definite truth condition to be determined. That is, nothing in the content of the thought determines its object; as I have argued (Bach, 1981a), the content determines only the relation that something must bear to that very thought (token) to be its object. For particulars outside of oneself, the basic such relation is perceptual. A perceptual belief is directly about an object. In other cases, a thought is indirectly about its object, as in a memory of something previously perceived, or in an historical belief, involving a complex causal chain passing through many persons. Does this sound familiar? Yes, indeed I believe (Bach, 1981a) that the so-called causal theory of reference is really a misdirected theory of *de re* thought. It ought to be recast as such.

The main thing to realize here is that there is nothing in the content of a nondescriptive, *de re* thought that makes it about some object in particular. There are no logically proper names, no rigid designators, in the language of thought. There is no kind of thought symbol that must designate a certain object and no other. And, contrary to Russell, an object cannot represent itself in the content of a thought. Russell's big mistake, which led him to suppose that singular thoughts must literally contain their objects, hence that these objects cannot be material objects, was not his doctrine of acquaintance but his implicit assumption that the contents of thoughts must be propositions. However, the contents of *de re* thoughts are not propositions. When thought is propositional, it is general; when thought is singular, it is not propositional.

There is another way to put what I am saying in denying that there are singular propositions in thought. Mental representations are inherently either general or incomplete. There is no such thing as a representation of the particularity or haecceity of an object. Objects do not have individual essences, and any view of logic or language that requires this assumption rests on a mistake. Again, what makes a particular thought a thought about (not weakly about but *de re*) a particular object is not something in the thought that somehow captures the particularity of the object; rather, what makes the thought about that object is the unique causal relation that obtains between the two.

(If a thought is about an object by virtue of containing a descriptive element, an individual concept, it is but weakly about that object – if something else uniquely satisfied that concept, the thought would be about that object instead.) Notions like particularity, haecceity, and individual essence cannot explain what makes a thought about a certain object, for there is no way to represent that which makes an object the particular object that it is and thereby distinguishes it from anything else, actual or possible, that is qualitatively identical to it. Identity of Indiscernibles applies only to abstract entities, for they are, so to speak, each one of a kind. Since any particular can in principle be duplicated, what makes a thought about an object is not merely its content but its relation to that object.

Thus not only do I deny that any sentence in natural language has the logical form of a singular proposition (a subject-predicate proposition about a particular), I deny that there are any singular propositions. Of course this is on the traditional (Fregean) construal of propositions as contents of thoughts with context-independent truth values. Here it may be objected that I used a notion of singular proposition when I distinguished particular from descriptive reference (as in using a definite description referentially rather than attributively). For I said that a speaker's referential intention can be to talk about a certain object, regardless of how either he or his audience thinks of it. So if he is making a statement about a certain object, say that it is blue, seemingly he is expressing the singular proposition that this object is blue. That the object is blue is indeed the content of the statement, but it is not the content of any thought, actual or possible. Speaker and audience must each think of the object in some way or another, but as far as the content of the statement is concerned it doesn't matter how, provided they both think of the same object. Thus, the speaker's statement that the object is blue does not express a *proposition* to that effect. Rather, it abstracts from both the speaker's and the audience's ways of thinking about the object. It does not include the modes of presentation, whether descriptive or *de re*, under which either is thinking of the object.

I have denied that there are any singular propositions, either as contents of thoughts or as meanings (or logical forms) of sentences in natural languages. *Every* sentence of subject-predicate grammatical form is, I maintain, misleading as to its logical form. That is, no sentence has the logical form, "*a* is *F*," where "*a*" is an individual constant, a logically proper name by Russell's impossibly but not unreasonably high standard (*contra* Strawson). Yet it might be objected that Russell's standard is not impossibly high after all. If individual constants are logically proper names in logic, then surely natural languages *could* contain counterparts of individual constants, even if in fact they do not.

In standard first-order logic, individual constants are supposed to denote one individual apiece, whereby they can replace or be replaced by variables (as in universal instantiation and existential generalization) while forestalling equivocation. Now the assignment of individuals to constants belongs not to the formal system proper but to its so-called semantic interpretation. For formal purposes what matters is not truth but validity. It is enough that an arbitrary assignment be made, regardless of how. Hence it often suffices to interpret constants with (and to let variables range over) abstract entities like numbers or, more austerely, the null set and sets defined recursively in terms of the null set. But what I have said in this paper about names, sentences, and singular propositions pertains to particulars, not to abstract entities. So our discussion of individual constants must do likewise. Then we can consider the question of whether, even if ordinary names do not in fact function as logically proper names, natural languages could contain counterparts of individual constants which denote particulars directly rather than by way of expressing individual concepts.

Notice first that it wouldn't be sufficient to adopt a rule prohibiting use of the same name for more than one individual. Even if such a rule could be obeyed (never mind the insuperable difficulty of *everyone's* making sure that no name be given to more than one individual), all it could guarantee is that each term "*d*" that it applies to denotes no more than one individual. But rather than enable singular terms to denote directly, it would merely ensure that each such term expresses an individual concept, i.e., that each description of the form "the bearer of '*d*' " is complete, satisfies by no more than one individual.

In considering whether natural languages could contain counterparts of logically proper names, obviously we can ignore the difference in shape between ordinary words and individual constants in logic, such as letters or letters with subscripts. The real question is whether individual constants themselves, when assigned particulars, genuinely do denote directly, as is commonly taken for granted. Direct denotation is denotation without the mediation of concepts, and presumably any term that denotes directly has its denotatum as its meaning.[2] In a formal system that is "semantically" interpreted, the meaning of an individual constant is given by its assignment to a certain individual. But how is this assignment made? Outside the system, since the system itself is formal. Metalinguistic sentences must be used, sentences of the form "'*a*' denotes *d*," where "*d*" is some other denoting expression being used to refer to some individual. For such an assignment to be effected, the meaning of "*d*" and its use to refer must be understood independently of the meaning of "*a*" (an assignment of the form "'*a*' denotes *a*" would not exactly be informative).

Let us assume that "*d*" does not itself denote directly (otherwise, we would have to consider *its* "semantic" interpretation) and that it is not intended to be synonymous with "*a*." Rather, in "'*a*' denotes *d*" it is being used to make a particular reference (in the sense defined earlier) in order to fix the denotation of "*a*." But is "*a*" really being given a *denotation*? By this I mean a semantic, hence context-independent (see Burge, 1977, 351) relation between an expression *type* and an object (or set of objects). If the relation between "*a*" and *d* is not of this sort, it is not the semantic relation of denotation but the pragmatic relation of reference, whereby a token of "*a*" is used to refer to *d* (I take it that tokens denote only insofar as their types denote and refer only insofar as they are used to refer). Moreover, the putatively denotative relation between "*a*" and *d* is supposed to give the meaning of "*a*." Now it is not the *sentence* "'*a*' denotes *d*" that gives the supposed denotative meaning of "*a*," for then if "*d*" had denoted some other particular than *d* (it can, since *ex hypothesi* it does not directly denote but is uniquely satisfied by *d*), then so would "*a*." So the sentence "'*a*' denotes *d*" cannot by itself fix the denotation of "*a*." Rather, it is the *use* of the sentence, in which "*d*" is being used to make a particular reference to (the actual) *d*, that fixes the denotation of "*a*." But this only goes to show that "*a*" does not really *denote d* at all. Instead, "*a*" is functioning as an anaphoric pronoun being used to refer to *d*. Sentences of the form "*a* is *F*" do not express complete propositions (a mode of presentation of the object is not included), though of course they can be used to make statements that *a* is *F*.[3]

I have not argued that a natural language cannot contain counterparts of (interpreted) individual constants but that if an individual constant is assigned a particular it has not been given a *semantic* interpretation and thus does not function as a logically proper name.[4] Individual constants, when assigned particulars, merely *seem* to function as directly denoting terms, perhaps because how they acquire their so-called denotations is conveniently forgotten. To see what I mean imagine that English had a convention of adding numerical subscripts to pronouns, yielding an endless supply of pronouns, so that no pronoun would ever be used to refer to more than one individual. Instead of exploiting contextual factors when using "she" to refer to a certain female not previously referred to with "she," speakers use the indexed "she$_n$" to refer to the nth female referred to with a "she$_i$." How each new "she$_i$" is used to refer may be determined demonstratively or descriptively, so long as the same "she$_i$" is never used to refer to more than one female. Unfortunately, such a scheme would be ludicrously pointless and impracticable, since people could not keep their indices straight. Worse, it would *not* show that a natural language could contain logically proper names. It would merely reinforce the point that the individual constants of logic, at least when interpreted to "denote" particulars, really function not as names but as anaphoric pronouns. Thus, a sentence of the form "a is F" in a formal system, where "a" is assigned a particular, represents no *sentence* in a natural language and does not express any (singular) proposition that a is F. Rather, it represents a use of a sentence to make the *statement* that a is F. Thus, it can serve the purposes of formal pragmatics but not formal semantics. The assignment of a particular to a constant "a" does not give "a" a *semantic* interpretation. In omitting the context-dependent aspect of the assignment, all it gives is what Merrill Provence Hintikka has aptly described as an "immaculate interpretation."

Russell was right to deny that ordinary names are logically proper names. Indeed, even the individual constants of logic are logically proper names only when assigned abstract entities. Russell was right also about definite descriptions. His theory concerned their meaning, not their use, whereas the latter-day objections to it confuse meaning with use. Indeed, despite his quantificational analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions, Russell recognized that descriptions can be "used as names," i.e., "to indicate what we are speaking about" or, in my terminology, to make particular as opposed to descriptive references. Now Russell held that only constituents of propositions could bear logically proper names, that only objects of acquaintance could be objects of direct denotation. The trouble was that the only particulars (dubious ones at that) which could qualify are best referred to with pronouns, and here Russell lapsed into thinking these pronouns to be logically proper names. But pronouns do not denote at all, and sentences containing them do not express propositions. So to outrussell Russell, I have maintained that there are no logically proper names at all, at least for particulars, and that no sentence expresses a singular proposition. A sentence with a singular term either expresses a general, descriptive proposition or no proposition at all. But that's no problem: since there are no singular propositions, there's no need for sentences to express them. Singular thoughts (*de re* thoughts about particulars) are not propositional. Sentences used to express them do so incompletely, because they do not represent their objects. Their objects are determined relationally, not representationally.

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NOTES

[1] If "the table" used referentially meant the same as "that table," then a speaker would make the same statement whether he uttered, while pointing to a certain object, "The table is brown" or "That table is brown." But this isn't necessarily so. If he is using it referentially, he could use "the table" to refer to a table-like object and make a true statement of that object that it is brown, whereas a statement made with "That table is brown" would not be true since the object is not a table. For further discussion of referential uses see Bach, 1981c.

[2] Recently Michael Devitt (1981) has proposed a theory in which the causal chain from object to (token of a) name is included in the meaning of the name. This approach has the virtue of explaining the informativeness of statements made with sentences of the form "$a = b$." However, though advertised as semantic, the theory cannot be semantic if it concerns tokens of names rather than name types unless, contrary to his word Devitt were claiming that names are not rigid designators but indexicals. In my opinion, Devitt's notion of grounded causal chains, though used for his purported semantic purposes, properly belongs to the theory of *de re* thought, where it could play a central role.

[3] These same points apply to attempts to introduce directly denoting terms by means of "dThat"-ing or "rigidifying" a definite description. Again denotation is a semantic

notion and must therefore be context-independent; besides, there are no singular propositions.

[4] Perhaps we should take note of free logic, in which names and their formal counterparts are not assumed to denote. The nice thing about this approach is that it does not build the requirement of having a (unique) denotation into the notion of a name or individual constant. But treating vacuous names like other names has problems of its own, at least if names are still to be regarded as logically proper. We certainly don't want to resort to Meinongian objects for vacuous names to denote, but then what is the meaning of a vacuous name? We can always say, as I do, that a name "*a*" means "the bearer of '*a*'," but that is not to treat it as a logically proper name. Moreover, the free logician's method of representing the fact that an individual constant does denote is but a cheap formal trick. To constrain universal instantiation and existential generalization so that they don't produce Meinongian or other unsavory results, a free logician must invoke a premise of the form "$(Ex)(x = a)$." But what is this supposed to mean? Some sense must be made of the predicate (or whatever it is) "$= a$," but as far as I can tell, the only way to introduce such a predicate is by defining it as "is identical to the bearer of '*a*'," and that is to concede that individual constants are not logically proper names.

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