A LESSON FROM REFERENTIAL USES OF DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS

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In this paper it will be shown that a substantial conception of semantics, one that does not regard semantic phenomena as subsumed under pragmatic ones, is necessary to account for what cries out for an explanation regarding the old problem of the semantic relevance of the referential/attributive distinction, as applied to singular definite descriptions. I consider some alternative proposals to deal with the data, showing why they are wrong, and I finish by establishing that some arguments that allegedly derive the conclusion that some substantial conception of semantics is basically wrong, simply beg the question against their opponents, assuming a form of the very conclusion they want to vindicate.

A proposition containing a description is not identical with what that proposition becomes when a name is substituted, even if the name names the same object as the description describes. (*IMP*, p. 174)

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I want to address the old problem of referential uses of definite descriptions, showing that its solution implies important consequences for the way semantics should be conceived by all of us. My view is not at all widespread since it involves a traditional conception of semantics that many reject nowadays. Nevertheless, it is defended by some philosophers,[1] and I hope that with what follows I can strengthen our point. I have, then, two main objectives in this essay, a modest one and a bold one. The first is to establish (again!) the semantic[2] irrele-

[1] For example, by Soames 2001 and by Salmon 2004a.

[2] I understand the word *semantic* in the phrase "semantic relevance" to cover both lexical ambiguity and indexicality. On my view, not only are definite descriptions not

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vance[3] of the referential/attributive distinction, relative to definite descriptions;[4] the second is to derive consequences for our way of conceiving what semantics is, on the basis of the previous point.

Before starting, let me just say, as a general remark, that although it is true that the problem of referential descriptions—i.e. of its semantic relevance or lack of it—is quite independent from the problem of misdescription—i.e. of whether the description correctly applies to the object about which the speaker wants to assert something (see Wettstein 1981)—while dealing with the former we must not ignore the latter. In particular, if our account must cover all cases of referential uses of descriptions, it must cover those where misdescription takes place. The reason for that is a very simple one: it happens all the time in linguistic communication that people succeed in conveying information about a certain object even though they misdescribe the object they are talking about. This is an undeniable datum that we must face. People who defend the semantic relevance of the distinction at hand tend to be very uncomfortable with cases of misdescription, and actually tend to ignore those cases (notably, Devitt 2004 and Wettstein 1981), precisely because they resist adopting the only model which enables us to fully understand misdescription in particular and, more generally, everything which is involved in referential uses of definite descriptions. These ideas will be developed in section 11.

ambiguous in the first sense, but also they are not like indexical terms (terms that, even though not ambiguous, are capable of generating sentences which express different propositions, relative to different contexts of use); in short, they are not indexicals. See Recanati 1993. Salmon 2004b, p. 233 n. 5, reports that the second view was the one Donnellan acknowledged he always had in mind while discussing the referential/attributive distinction, as far as definite descriptions are concerned.

[3] The contrast between the two main positions relative to this problem is sometimes labelled as a contrast between "the Unitarian School" and "the Ambiguity School" (by Neale 2004, pp. 68–9), at other times as "the pragmatic proposal" vs. "the semantic proposal" (by Lepore 2004, p. 43). The first designations of each pair mention what I'm calling the semantic irrelevance of the distinction at issue, the second ones, its semantic relevance. The same sort of contrast is made while dealing with the problem of incomplete (or indefinite) definite descriptions (more on this below, n. 5).

[4] The referential/attributive distinction is, after Kripke 1980, sometimes generalized to other kinds of terms. I'm not going to address these generalizations here.

I

Many people think that referential uses of definite descriptions are the main problem Russell's theory has to face,[5] since apparently, when a definite description is used referentially, the proposition communicated by the sentence containing it is a singular or object-dependent one. This seems to explicitly deny the main idea Russell wanted the theory to establish, namely that whenever a definite description is used in a sentence, a general, object-independent proposition is expressed by it. I think that it is possible to avoid the clash between these two views. Accordingly, one must have a theory of *what is said* in light of which one accommodates both (i) Russell's insight and (ii) the strong intuition that in referential uses of definite descriptions singular propositions are actually communicated. This kind of theory would allow me to conclude that referential uses of definite descriptions are not a problem for Russell's original idea.

In what follows, I start by assuming a conceptual framework based on François Recanati's distinction between (at least) three levels of meaning: *sentence meaning*, *what is said* and *what is communicated*.[6] Then I try to show that it is necessary to have a four-level theory of meaning in order to account for the behaviour of referential descriptions. Recanati argues in general for a modest form of contextualism and does not address, in his *Literal Meaning*, the problem of referential uses of definite descriptions. What I do is apply his literalist, contextualist and hybrid models, as he sees them, to this specific problem.

On my view, both the (pure) minimalist and the contextualist approaches—both based on a model with three meaning-levels—are insufficient to account for all the data that need to be accounted for with respect to Donnellan's cases.[7] I first want to show that the pure minimalist, or literalist, programme (defended by P. Grice and S. Kripke, among many others), although it is basically correct, does not provide an explan-

[5] The other alleged big problem is the so-called "incompleteness problem" or "indefinite definite descriptions problem". I'm not going to address it here, but I think it can be solved along the lines I'm about to develop. Wettstein 1981 establishes interesting connections between the two problems that remain beyond the scope of this essay.

[6] In his book *Literal Meaning* (2004), and also in an earlier paper (see Recanati 2001).

[7] Donnellan 1966. It is fair to note that the first person to mention referential uses of definite descriptions was Strawson in "On Referring" (1950), the first attack on Russell's theory of definite descriptions.

ation for some data that need to be accounted for. Although the Grice–Kripke model of explanation of Donnellan's cases is illuminating, it does not take care of all the data. Then I turn to the contextualist programme (defended by S. Schiffer,[8] M. Devitt, F. Recanati, H. Wettstein and others), and I try to show that although it offers a good explanation for the phenomena not accounted for by the minimalist programme, it does not take care of the remaining data. Both theories are insufficient to account for *all* the data. In more precise terms, as we will soon see, the Grice–Kripke model does not explain that what is said by an utterance of a sentence of the form "the *F* is *G*", in a referential use of the description, *must be immediately available* to the speaker and therefore cannot be explained in terms of typical Gricean conversational implicatures. On the other hand, the contextualist programme, offering a good explanation for the immediate availability of what is said, does not at all account for the fact that what is said, in that very same utterance of a sentence of the form "the *F* is *G*", *may be corrigible at any time*, in the sense that it may be corrected at any time in the conversation.

What one needs instead is a hybrid model of explanation, one that requires four meaning-levels, something that Recanati calls "the syncretic view" (a view he thinks is basically mistaken). But embracing this kind of model actually implies endorsing a minimalist view, although a moderate one, and therefore in the end it amounts to rejecting the contextualist programme. The upshot is that the alleged insurmountable problem for Russell's theory of definite descriptions vanishes, provided that one accepts that this theory holds at the level of sentence-types. In other words, if one accepts the theory of definite descriptions for sentence-types, then I see no reason to reject it for sentence-tokens.[9] As I said at the beginning, the hybrid theory of *what is said*, being a kind of literalist model, accommodates Russell's insight and, on the other hand, accommodates as well the strong intuition that in referential uses of definite descriptions singular propositions are actually communicated.

There is an important point to clarify at the beginning. I take it as beyond dispute that there are genuinely referential uses of definite de-

[8] As to Schiffer 2005, p. 49, he says he tends to think that definite descriptions are ambiguous *if* the attributive meaning is correctly characterized by Russell. But he is not sure if it is correct at all (there is always the Fregean alternative treatment of definite descriptions as singular terms).

[9] Whether or not the theory is correct for sentence-types is another story. I think, though, that it is actually correct.

scriptions; everybody accepts that. In addition, I take it as beyond dispute that at least some among those referential uses involve misdescription; not everybody agrees with that (e.g., Wettstein 1981 and Devitt 2004 explicitly disagree). My point is not that all uses of this kind (referential uses of definite descriptions) involve misdescription, but that some do. Both phenomena must be explained since they simply occur all the time in normal linguistic communication. The theory that will explain referential uses of definite descriptions must accommodate cases of misdescription as well.

1.*a* Literalists tend to construe *what is said* by a certain utterance of a sentence as a direct consequence of the literal meanings of the words in the sentence. The distance between the linguistic meaning of a sentence-type and the propositions expressed by each of its tokens is minimal, and the only features of the context that are taken into account in order to determine what is said by a certain utterance of a sentence are those without which nothing is actually said by that token. Typically, those features are forthcoming when—and only when—an indexical term (pure or impure)[10] is used. So, on the literalist side, Donnellan's referential/attributive distinction is to be explained as follows. I am using a version of a very well-known example.

DIAGRAM 1
Literalist Model

I. Sentence meaning:
"*the man drinking champagne is happy tonight and is talking to her*"
↓
Saturation: character of "her" + context
↓
II. What is said (*minimalist*):
"*the man drinking champagne is happy tonight and is talking to Maria*"
[Proposition *P*: object-independent proposition,[11] about whoever is

[10] See Kaplan 1989 for the distinction between pure and impure indexical terms. This distinction is sometimes brought to light under a different terminology: "automatic" and "non-automatic" indexicals, respectively (used by J. Perry). Recanati works with a similar difference: "narrow"/"wide" context, a terminology borrowed from K. Bach. Roughly speaking, pure indexical terms are those relative to which their characters, or linguistic meanings, are enough for sentences containing them to express a proposition in context. Impure indexical terms are those for which speakers' intentions are also required to the same effect.

[11] Strictly speaking, *P* is object-dependent because the indexical "her" in the original

drinking champagne, which is literally expressed.]

↓

Optional Processes

↓

III. What is communicated (conversationally implied):
"*Peter is happy tonight and is talking to Maria*"
[Proposition *Q*: object-dependent proposition, about Peter, which is pragmatically implied. (Peter = the man who is not drinking champagne but whom the speaker believes is drinking champagne.)]

When a sentence of the form "the *F* is *G*" is uttered by someone, it *always* expresses an object-independent proposition about whoever happens to be the individual fitting the description "the *F*" (the proposition *P* is available at the second level). Now, when the description is being used attributively, what the speaker wants to communicate entirely coincides with what he actually says (*P*); but when the description is being used referentially, it doesn't, because although the speaker says *P*, he actually communicates proposition *Q*, an object-dependent proposition (*Q* is available at the third level). *P* and *Q* may, obviously, have different truth-values. As is well known, in the case above, *P* is false and *Q* is true. In the classical example, it turns out that *P* is false, because the man that fits the descriptions is miserable that night, and *Q* is true, because the person whom the speaker wants to talk about is happy that night. When the description is being used attributively it is *P* that is semantically expressed by a token of the sentence at issue; but when the very same description is being used referentially, *P* continues to be semantically expressed by that other token of the same sentence. The difference between the referential and the attributive cases consists in the fact that in the referential case the sentence-token, besides expressing *P*, conveys the proposition *Q*, whereas that, obviously, is not so in the attributive case. *P* is semantically expressed in both cases; *Q* is pragmatically implied only when a referential use of the definite description is taking place, as Kripke 1979 claims.

Now, one has to notice two important things: first, the literalist-minimalist perspective allows for context to be relevant in the determina-

sentence contributes "Maria" to the proposition expressed, *P*. Nevertheless, concerning the problem at issue, the descriptive term does not contribute an object but the relevant predicates instead. This is the point Russell wanted to stress by his theory of definite descriptions.

tion of what is said only if the linguistic meanings of the words in the sentence are not enough to express a proposition in context (saturation processes have to take place, as in the case of demonstratives and other indexical terms). In my example, "Maria" is substituted for the indexical "her" at the second level.

Second, the problem with this model is that it does not seem to be the case that proposition *Q*, in the case at issue, is conversationally implied at all, according to the Gricean way of characterizing it (see Grice 1975). A conversational implicature is something that is not immediately available to the speaker. Typically, it is forthcoming when there is a clash between what the speaker says and the presumption that he is cooperative in the conversation; in these circumstances, the audience has to find out what the speaker actually wants to communicate, besides what he actually said, so that the presumption that he is being cooperative in the conversation is correct. Now, proposition *Q*, about Peter, doesn't seem to be determined by this kind of process at all. For the audience to identify what is being said—in the sense of what is asserted—by the speaker, in a referential use of the definite description, it seems that a much more direct process is required (as I think Recanati has successfully argued for).

1.*b* Let's turn to the contextualist model of explanation of what is going on in referential uses of definite descriptions. I proceed with the same example. In what follows, for the sake of the discussion, I am giving all the credit to my opponents. Contextualists tend to think that *what is said* by a certain utterance of a sentence very often cannot be determined only by the literal meanings of the words in the sentence. Different features of the context have to be taken into account to bring to light what is said by a certain token of a sentence-type. Those features are not only those that are needed for saturation to take place, but include several features connected with the speaker's intentions. From the contextualist perspective, besides saturation, processes of "free enrichment" are often (if not always) required in order for a determinate proposition to be expressed at all by a certain utterance of a sentence. Let's make the following clear: the difference between literalists and contextualists rests upon to what extent we need speakers' intentions to semantically determine a proposition in context, whenever a sentence is used. The former don't need them often; the latter need them almost always.

So, on the contextualist side, Donnellan's referential/attributive distinction is to be explained as follows:

DIAGRAM 2
Contextualist Model

I. Sentence meaning:
"*the man drinking champagne is happy tonight and is talking to her*"
↓
Primary pragmatic processes
(Saturation *and* optional processes such as free enrichment)
Case 1: attributive use of the description (character of "her" + context)
Case 2: referential use of the description (character of "her" + context + speaker's intentions)
↓
II. What is said (*pragmatic*) may be proposition *P* or *Q*:
Case 1 (*P*): "*the man drinking champagne is happy tonight and is talking to Maria*"
Case 2 (*Q*): "*Peter is happy tonight and is talking to Maria*"
[Peter = the man who is not drinking champagne but whom the speaker believes is drinking champagne.]
↓
Secondary pragmatic processes
↓
III. What is communicated (conversationally implied)

A token of our sentence may express at least two different propositions: a proposition *P*, which is forthcoming when someone uses the definite description "the man drinking champagne" attributively, and a proposition *Q*, which is forthcoming when the definite description "the man drinking champagne" is used referentially. But *Q* does not depend on *P* (as in the previous model). On the contrary, both propositions are available at the second level, the level of what is said, since "what is said" is understood in a different perspective from the literalist one—it is pragmatically understood. As can be easily seen, this model does not identify what is said in referential uses of definite descriptions with a Gricean conversational implicature, thereby solving what was the main problem for the literalist side. Proposition *Q*, the object-dependent proposition about Peter, is immediately available, since it is already at the second level; conversational implicatures are available on the third level, and they are entirely optional.

But, in my view, one has to pay too high a price for this. This model does not account for the fact that someone may say, at any time, about what is said in the referential use of the definite description (case 2 in diagram 2): "Look, Peter is happy tonight but you are saying something

false because he is not the man drinking champagne." In other words, how is the contextualist model going to explain the fact that what is said in the referential use of the definite description is actually corrigible at any time in conversation? The contextualist model has no resources to provide such an explanation, since *Q* is independent of *P*. In my view, this consequence of the contextualist approach is very inconvenient, and it has to be avoided. Actually, in order for a correction to take place, there must, in any case, be a level of what is said that captures what is literally being said (at the semantic level, which coincides with the proposition expressed by the sentence).

1.*c* On my view, the only way to achieve a complete explanation of all data is by endorsing a hybrid model, which, in fact, is a version of the minimalist programme (that is why Recanati rejects it). As I said above, the hybrid model works with four meaning-levels. Here a diagram illustrates how we must deal with the case at issue:

DIAGRAM 3
Hybrid Model

I. Sentence meaning:
"*the man drinking champagne is happy tonight and is talking to her*"
|
Saturation—character of "her" + context
↓
II. What is said (*min.*):
"*the man drinking champagne is happy tonight and is talking to Maria*"
[Proposition *P*: object-independent proposition, about whoever is drinking champagne, which is literally expressed; an attributive use of the description.]
|
Other primary pragmatic processes—speaker's intentions
↓
III. What is said (*prag.*):
"*Peter is happy tonight and is talking to Maria*"
[Proposition *P*: object-dependent proposition, about Peter; a referential use of the description. (Peter = the man who is not drinking champagne but whom the speaker believes is drinking champagne.)]
|
Secondary pragmatic processes
↓
IV. What is communicated (conversationally implied)

Propositions *P* and *Q* are available at distinct levels, preserving the contrast of the literalist model, so that a correction of what the speaker says can always take place and, at the same time, what is said at the pragmatic level is different from what is communicated and is not to be understood as being a Gricean conversational implicature. Distinguishing between levels II and III is not an artificial manoeuvre since literalists and contextualists, as we have already seen, construe *what is said* in different ways. Literalists construe it as close as possible to literal meaning, while contextualists construe it as necessarily involving (in the majority of cases) features connected with speakers' intentions (and other features) while using sentences. It seems that with the hybrid model we keep the best and get rid of the worst of the previous models.[12]

Moreover, a distinction between levels II and III is not only possible but is needed to deal with these cases. On the one hand, consider the literalist model (model 1). It seems that there are too many different phenomena involved at level III, all mixed up, that should be distinguished from one another. This is the weak point of the Kripke–Grice-inspired model. There are several ways of conveying information besides what is semantically expressed by utterances of sentences of the natural language and what is conversationally implied by them.[13] In other words, processes of free enrichment are of a very different kind than processes of conversational implicature. But model 1 does not capture this point.

On the other hand, consider the contextualist model (model 2). Now, it seems that there are too many different phenomena involved at level II, all mixed up, that should be distinguished from one another. This is the weak point of the contextualist model, for it takes for granted that *what is said* is not a semantical notion at all (unless the word "semantics" is redefined so that it includes features traditionally conceived as belonging to pragmatics, in which case we end up talking about other problems, as we changed the conception of semantics). As we have seen, from this perspective, the rules of language and the linguistic meanings of the words we utter, alone, are normally not enough to determine a proposition relative to a context of use. But this is a huge mistake.

The hybrid model, distinguishing between levels II and III, is actually an implementation of the old Grice–Kripke idea, since it makes what is conveyed by a referential use of a definite description semantically irrel-

[12] This is noted by Recanati 2004, although he tries to show that this is false.

[13] For example, see Soames 2002 and Salmon 2004b.

evant; it is to be conceived as *what is asserted by the speaker* (as opposed to *what is semantically expressed by the sentence*), to use Salmon's terminology (see Salmon 1982 and also 1991).

At this moment and for subsequent use, it's important to realize that, if my view is correct, it implies the failure of what Salmon calls the Assertion–Content Principle ("AC principle"), according to which "if a speaker utters an English sentence *S* in an appropriate manner in a context *c*, then *S* expresses proposition *p* as its English semantic content with respect to *c* if and only if the speaker, in uttering *S* in *c*, asserts *p*."[14] At first sight, the principle seems plausible, but it is actually false. The idea is quite simple: with one and the same utterance of a certain sentence—which has one and only one semantic content—one might assert several different propositions, though only one of them is the one literally expressed by the speaker and semantically expressed by the sentence he or she is using. Roughly speaking, we can put it this way: there is no one-to-one correspondence between the content semantically expressed by a sentence, relative to a certain context of use, and the assertion(s) made by the speaker using that sentence in that very same context, as is naively assumed by the AC principle. Showing the failure of the AC principle requires that we sharply distinguish between two very different phenomena: what sentences may express and what speakers may express. Once we realize that "express" works differently in the two cases, it easily follows that the AC principle is false: although each sentence, relatively to each context of use, expresses one and only one proposition, speakers may express several propositions by a single utterance of that sentence. Hence, to see that the AC principle is false we must sharply distinguish two notions of "express" (or variants of the same concept):

(i) The first is the notion of "expressed by the speaker". This is a typically pragmatic notion.
(ii) The second is the notion of "expressed by the sentence". This is a properly semantic notion.

It is worth noting at this point that it is a confusion between these two utterly different senses of "express" that constitutes the problem of the

[14] See Salmon 2004b, p. 241. On his view, this principle is false. I agree. See his interesting discussion around alleged "pseudo *de re*" beliefs/assertions, which convincingly establishes his point: the AC principle is false (pp. 241–51); see Salmon 2004a, p. 323.

contextualist model above, in general, and the problem of referential uses of definite descriptions, in particular. On the basis that a speaker may express a singular proposition, while using a sentence containing a definite description, it is incorrectly inferred that the sentence itself, i.e. the very words the speaker utters, expresses that very same proposition.[15] The only way to avoid this fallacious reasoning is to distinguish between a level of what is said, semantically understood, and a level of what is said, pragmatically understood. That is, we are left with models 1 and 3. But, in virtue of the immediate availability of what is said, pragmatically understood, we can not identify it with a Gricean conversational implicature. Therefore, the hybrid model is the only one available to deal with the problem of the referential uses of definite descriptions.

II

I consider in this section the main argument for establishing the semantic relevance of referential uses of definite descriptions. This argument has been developed in many different ways in the literature and has its own history. I consider first a certain kind of case (based on the example developed in the last section), one where the description used is not satisfied by the object about which the speaker wants to say something. This is because I think that, as I've already said, an explanation must be provided in these cases as well as in cases where misdescription does not occur. The way in which we must deal with the problems raised in this section is by assuming the hybrid model I previously discussed. Then I turn to the initial formulation of the argument at issue, in Wettstein 1981. In his formulation, the analogy is developed between referential uses of definite descriptions and simple demonstratives, and he tries to strengthen Donnellan's point by avoiding taking into account cases where misdescription is involved.[16] I try to show what is wrong with his analysis and why his argument is not successful. I finish this section by confronting an alternative proposal for construing the singular proposition conveyed in referential uses of definite descriptions. This alternative is built upon the analogy between these uses and uses of complex demon-

[15] This fallacy is what Salmon 1991 calls "the pragmatic fallacy".

[16] Actually he says that "Donnellan does himself a disservice in claiming that the referential/attributive distinction can best be brought out by considering cases in which the description fits nothing"(Wettstein 1981, p. 260).

stratives, developed basically in Devitt 2004. This view involves some crucial mistakes that block the possibility of even making sense of it. I then briefly develop some consequences of this result.

11.*a* The hybrid model has the additional advantage of providing a way of clearly distinguishing what is going on in referential uses of definite descriptions from what is going on in uses of demonstratives and other indexical terms. This enables me to show how one of the main arguments for referential meanings, based on an analogy with demonstratives, does not succeed. The first version of the argument that I'm going to consider is the easiest to deal with from my point of view (it represents an extremely weak form of the argument from the analogy with demonstratives). Nevertheless, it is useful to consider the case, whose legitimacy is granted by the possibility of its occurrence in normal communication, since it shows something very important. Roughly speaking, the argument from the analogy with the demonstrative case runs as follows.[17] Since demonstratives can be substituted for definite descriptions used referentially "without apparent cost to our goal of communicating a singular thought" (Devitt 2004, p. 288), it follows that their linguistic behaviour must be similar. In other words, the argument is run from the contextualist perspective and may be illustrated by this diagram:

DIAGRAM 4
Argument from the analogy between the referential description case and the demonstrative case

1. Sentence meanings:
"*the man drinking champagne is happy tonight and is talking to her*"
and "*he is happy tonight and is talking to her*"
↓
Primary pragmatic processes
(Saturation *and* optional processes such as free enrichment)
Referential use of the description (character of "her" + context + speaker's intentions)
Demonstrative case (characters of "he" and "her" + context + speaker's intentions)
↓

[17] Devitt 2004. Note that Devitt would not accept this particular example, since he does not subscribe to the idea that referential uses of definite descriptions take place when misdescription occurs (as in the case at issue). Nevertheless, I don't agree with this (I've already explained why).

II. What is said (*prag.*):
"*Peter is happy tonight and is talking to Maria*"
[Peter = the man who is not drinking champagne but whom the speaker believes is drinking champagne.]
↓
Secondary pragmatic processes
↓
III. What is communicated (conversationally implied)

The main point of the argument is that regardless of whether we use one sentence or the other, the object-dependent proposition about Peter is conveyed in any case. Interestingly, in this case—where we are considering a referential use of a definite description that is not satisfied by the object about which the speaker wants to say something and a simple demonstrative—there is an obvious difference between the two cases that immediately blocks the alleged analogy. This is the important point I mentioned earlier, that this sort of example (where misdescription is actually involved) brings to light. Strictly speaking, in the referential description case there is at least a sense in which the speaker can be corrected since he said something false (as we saw in the previous section); in the demonstrative case, on the contrary, in no sense has the speaker said anything false at all, other things being equal (I mean, supposing Peter is actually happy tonight and is talking to Maria). The fact that diagram 4 does not capture this difference is a signal that something is going wrong with the argument we are dealing with.

It can easily be seen what the main problem with this argument is: as a consequence of not distinguishing two levels of *what is said* by a referential token of a definite description, it assumes that the object-dependent proposition *Q* is available at the same level in both cases (the demonstrative case and referential use of the description case). And this is wrong.

The hybrid model applied to the demonstrative case illustrates the point above; the object-dependent proposition about Peter in the demonstrative case, is available at the second level because the demonstrative "he" is being used, even if the role of its linguistic meaning (or character) is minimal. As contextualists typically say, it is enough to know that a singular proposition is going to be expressed by any token of a sentence containing it, contrary to what happens in the case of the definite description used referentially (compare diagram 5 with diagram 3). In the latter case, the singular proposition conveyed is not sem-

antically expressed at all; it is available only at the third level.

DIAGRAM 5
Hybrid Model

I. Sentence meaning:
"*he is happy tonight and is talking to her*"
|
Saturation—characters of "he" and "her" + context
↓
II. What is said (*min.*):
"*Peter is happy tonight and is talking to Maria*"
[Proposition *Q*: object-dependent proposition, about Peter.]
|
Other primary pragmatic processes—speaker's intentions
↓
III. What is said (*prag.*)
|
Secondary pragmatic processes
↓
IV. What is communicated (conversationally implied)

Using Salmon's terminology again will help to clarify this point. In the demonstrative case, proposition *Q* (the object-dependent one) is semantically expressed by the sentence, whereas in the referential use of the definite description case that very same proposition is merely asserted by the speaker. On the second level we have a semantic level; on the third, a pragmatic one. Obviously this explains very clearly, while highlighting the point about the difference between the truth values of what is said (literally), why the analogy simply does not run: in one case, the proposition semantically expressed is *P*, in the other it is *Q*.

Let's briefly consider a stronger form of the same argument, from the point of view of my opponents. The argument is strengthened if we consider an example that does not involve misdescription. In this kind of example, as correction is not going to take place, the temptation to assimilate both cases at issue is greater. Compare the sentences "the table is covered with books"[18] and "it is covered with books". Wettstein's defence is that the proposition expressed is the same regardless of the sentence we

[18] This example is used in Wettstein 1981, but it comes from Strawson 1950, p. 148. Wettstein treats it as an example of incomplete definite descriptions.

use (if one utters the description referentially in the definite description case).

As misdescription does not take place in such cases, and therefore a correction does not arise at all, the temptation of not distinguishing between levels II and III is very strong. If the object covered with books is actually a table, the truth conditions of the two sentences are the same: whenever one is true the other is true, and whenever one is false the other is false.

How, then, can we bring to light the difference between the two cases? Well, by "parity of form" (as Russell would say) we must treat the two cases in the same sort of way. The mere fact that a description may or not be fulfilled cannot change our analysis of the problem to hand. But, more importantly, we can use reported speech to notice the following. On the one hand, if someone reports what a certain person said by using "the table is covered with books", we have at least two possibilities: "he said that the table was covered with books" or "he said that the object he was looking at was covered with books". Typically, the first report takes place if the person who is reporting what someone said understood the utterance of his sentence as involving an attributive use of the incomplete definite description "the table", and the second report takes place once that person understood that utterance as involving a referential use of it. On the other hand, there are not two ways of reporting what is said by "it is covered with books". A report would always be something like "he said that the object he was looking at was covered with books". This contrast shows we cannot treat the two cases equally. We can then conclude that, whether or not misdescription occurs, the argument considered does not establish the intended analogy.

II.*b* There is still a way of apparently further strengthening the argument from the analogy with demonstratives. This is by using complex instead of simple demonstratives and cases of referential uses of definite descriptions where the predicate in the description applies to the object about which the speaker wants to say something. How does it strengthen my opponents' point? Complex demonstratives are noun phrases like "that *F*", where *F* is a simple or a complex predicate. As the properties semantically expressed by the predicate *F* play a role in determining what is said (literally) by the sentence containing it, the analogy with the referentially used "the *F*" case would run as follows. (i) In any case, where we use either "the *F*" (referentially) or "that *F*", a singular thought is conveyed. (ii) Yet it is generally accepted that the convention

of conveying that thought, for the demonstrative case, is a semantic one. (iii) Moreover, exactly as for the demonstrative case, where the predicates in *F*—working at the level of semantics—help to identify the object demonstrated by the speaker while using "that *F*", the predicates *F* in a referential use of "the *F*" do exactly the same job; and nobody doubts that they work at the level of semantics as well. An alternative proposal of understanding the singular proposition conveyed by sentences containing definite descriptions used referentially is then advanced (Devitt 2004; Wettstein 1981). When one uses a sentence "the *F* is *G*" where "the *F*" is used referentially, the singular proposition expressed contains not only the object—about which the speaker wants to say something or which is referred to by him—and the property *G* (as it is normally assumed); but, besides these two elements, it contains as well the property(ies) expressed by *F*. This would enable us, allegedly, to construe the singular proposition conveyed in cases of referential uses of definite description in slightly different terms from the terms in which it is normally construed, as it contains three elements: the object referred to by the speaker, the properties encoded in *F* and the properties encoded in *G*.

This is in fact a manoeuvre that takes the argument from the analogy with demonstratives apparently to its maximum point, for three reasons. (i) "the" in "the *F*" is seen as similar to "that" in "that *F*" in respect of the fact that they are somehow unsaturated (semantically speaking), thereby making it possible to conclude that descriptions are indexicals. (ii) The predicates in *F*, and obviously in *G*, express (semantically) properties which are true of the object about which the speaker wants to say something; they are seen as essential—or at least as playing an important role—in helping the phrases "the *F*" and "that *F*" to identify one object (remember Devitt does not consider misdescription). (iii) Finally, and above all, propositions expressed by sentences of both types contain the object itself as a constituent; they are singular propositions. If this does not establish Donnellan's thesis that, after all, definite descriptions are ambiguous (in the sense of being indexicals) and that, therefore, they have two possible senses or meanings—the attributive one, where a general proposition is expressed, and the referential one, where a singular proposition is expressed—what else could do the job?

This way of conceiving the singular proposition expressed by referential uses of definite descriptions is certainly attractive at first sight, and it would provide a good argument for the thesis according to which there

are referential meanings (and not only referential uses) of definite descriptions. But in my view it suffers from a deep problem, one which can be brought to light once we ask: *in which sense is the singular proposition (understood along the lines described above) expressed at all?* Is it expressed by the sentence or is it expressed by the speaker? Let me elaborate a little.

The problem is that to run the new proposal's argument, one must use the two different notions of "express" mentioned earlier (see p. 169). If one adopts the standard way of understanding the singular proposition (conveyed by referential uses of definite descriptions), this is typically a proposition pragmatically expressed (the first notion above). The speaker expresses a singular proposition. This is accomplished by him using the sentence *S* to convey a singular proposition, even when *S* might well express—semantically—a different proposition (as we saw in §1). But when one moves to the second, non-standard way of understanding the singular proposition, things turn out to be obscure. Why? Under this new conception of what a singular proposition might be, it includes the object referred to by the speaker and the property(ies) expressed by the predicate(s) in the description. But in which sense is this proposition *expressed* at all? As to the object referred to by the speaker, it seems that that object is "expressed" by him using the sentence (first notion); as to the properties expressed by the predicates in *F* and *G*, they are semantically expressed by the sentence (second notion). It follows that there is no consistent way of understanding how this proposition is expressed at all! For the predicates included in *F* are actually performing a *double function.*

One way of realizing the difficulty I have in mind is to use Recanati's diagram for the hybrid model, the one which enables us to distinguish between (i) the proposition expressed by the speaker, which typically appears at level III, and (ii) the proposition expressed by the sentence, which typically appears at level II. Where is the singular proposition, in the new way of understanding it, going to appear? The contribution of the descriptive content of "the *F*" (used referentially) is not clear, since it is working at two different levels of "what is said". This difficulty blocks the very possibility of making sense of this new proposal, since we don't even know in which sense this proposition is "expressed".

Another way of realizing the same problem is the following. It seems that the fact that the predicates in *F* are performing a double function leads to an explosive situation, so to speak, in the sense that there may easily occur a "clash" within the singular proposition conveyed by ref-

erential uses of definite descriptions, understood under this new proposal. Let me explain. Imagine a situation where, as we previously considered, misdescription is involved;[19] accordingly, let's take the example of the sentence "the man drinking champagne is happy tonight" (in the usual way of understanding it). On the one hand, if the predicate "being a man drinking champagne" introduces Peter in the proposition *expressed* by our sentence, it's granted that it does so because it introduces the object *about which the speaker wants to say* that he is happy at a certain moment. On the other, if our predicate introduces in the proposition *expressed* the property of being a man drinking champagne, it does so because the property *is semantically expressed* by the predicate. But now we have a proposition whose constituents, i.e. the object (Peter) and the property expressed by *F* (being a man drinking champagne), are mutually incompatible. This is simply nonsense.

Again "by parity of form", we must treat consistently every case where a referential use of a definite description takes place, regardless of whether it involves misdescription. If it does not involve misdescription, it is pretty clear that if we add the object to the proposition expressed, we don't need to have the property *F*, and conversely, if we add the property to the proposition expressed, we don't need the object (since the properties do the job of identifying the object).

It is important to note that the difficulty we've just considered does not arise with the complex demonstrative case. There is a consensus[20] that the proposition expressed by "that *F* is *G*" is a singular one, semantically expressed, if anything is expressed at all. Therefore the analogy does not work.

Moreover, I think that there is a more basic unpleasant feature about the argument from the analogy with demonstratives, when complex demonstratives are at issue. The mere fact that, given the appropriate circumstances, we can always get rid of the predicate *F* in "that *F* is *G*" and we can never get rid of the same predicate in "the *F* is *G*" (used referentially or attributively) blocks the analogy, in this specific case where complex demonstratives are at issue. "That table is covered with books"

[19] What I'm about to say explains why Devitt explicitly does not consider cases of misdescription. It would destroy his proposal.

[20] There are some exceptions: See King 2001 and Lepore 2004, p. 42 n. 2: "… since expressions of the form 'that *F*' are themselves not singular terms but rather restricted quantifier expressions".

and "the table is covered with books" are completely non-analogous cases once we realize that any utterance of the first sentence can be easily substituted for "that is covered with books" although no utterance of the second can be replaced by "the is covered with books". The last succession of words is not even a sentence. It's simply nonsense. What is going on here?

The diagnosis, on my view, is quite simple. In virtue of its character, or linguistic meaning, any sentence containing a demonstrative (simple or complex), like "that", expresses semantically a singular proposition. If we make the necessary arrangements, namely those that are needed to clarify which object the speaker is demonstrating while using "that" in "that *F* is *G*", we can easily drop *F*. If we turn to "the *F* is *G*" case, just because "the" is not an indexical term, and certainly not a directly referential term, the same kind of situation does not occur at all. As Russell showed us a hundred years ago, definite descriptions are never genuine proper names (or directly referential terms in current terminology), even if there is one and only one object that fits the predicate *F* in the description, i.e. even if they denote. They may "denote" one and only one object, but they never "refer" to that object. Therefore, to identify what is semantically expressed by any sentence of the form "the *F* is *G*", it is essential to know which properties are expressed by the predicates in *F* and *G*, and thus not dispensable.[21]

The following objection may be made to this last point. "Look!" someone may say. "You are considering a difference between the two cases at the level of syntax; but we are considering semantics. What you're saying is simply irrelevant." I don't think this is a good objection. Just as semantics and pragmatics are different territories (though it's sometimes difficult to completely isolate one from another), but with important connections between them; so, in a similar way, syntax and semantics are different territories, nevertheless with important connections between them, too. The difference at the level of syntax that I was emphasizing carries inevitable consequences for semantic considerations. As was shown long ago by Carnap, syntax determines semantics, which, in turn, determines pragmatics.

[21] If we apply the reported speech test that we applied in the preceding case to the present one, we can get straight to the point I am highlighting. See above, p. 173. The case is similar, so I'm not going to develop it again.

III

General arguments against the hybrid model were developed by Recanati, independently from the definite descriptions problems we are discussing. Given this, an objection may be raised in the following terms: if these arguments establish their point, then there is no reason whatsoever to use a model of explanation that is fundamentally mistaken only to solve a very specific problem. My response is in two parts: (i) if we have a model to explain what is said (at its different levels), then the model ought to explain all and every situation in linguistic communication. Thus it must explain what is going on in referential uses of definite descriptions. Then, even if it weren't for anything else (which is not the case), the mere fact that the hybrid model is what is needed here establishes that it has to be implemented. (ii) The hybrid model is not fundamentally mistaken. On the contrary, the arguments that are used to show this actually beg the question, and therefore, are not convincing. I will elaborate on the second point.

Recanati defends the view that typically the conventional meanings our words may have are not in general enough to determine, or express, a proposition, relative to a certain context of use of a certain sentence.[22] He says: "The problem with the 'minimal proposition' is that it results from, and presupposes, the process of saturation (that is, the contextual assignments of semantic values to indexicals and other context-sensitive expressions)—a process that, in most cases, is impossible without appealing to the speaker's meaning."[23] This is the premiss that enables him to conclude that semantics alone can't normally do the job of determining what is said, even at the minimal level, by utterances of sentences. The crucial point here, then, is to analyse what processes of saturation in fact amount to, as this seems to be the main concept used in the premiss of his argument. To elucidate this, Recanati uses a distinction we've already mentioned (see note 10), the distinction between pure and impure indexical terms.[24] As Kaplan taught us, for some indexical terms, their

[22] See above, p. 165. Detailed arguments, that I'm about to consider, are given, for instance, in Recanati 2004.

[23] Recanati 2004, p. 61. This is the main reason why Recanati defends what Salmon would call "a speech act centred conception of semantics" (Salmon 2004a).

[24] On Kaplan's view (1989), pure indexical terms are impure demonstratives and impure ones correspond basically to pure demonstratives. The idea is that a pure demonstrative requires necessarily a demonstration on the part of the speaker.

characters seem to be enough for a sentence containing them to express a proposition in context (the pure ones); and for others that is not the case at all (the impure ones). The variant of this distinction Recanati actually uses is one that works with the contrast between "narrow" and "wide" context. Narrow context is any context of use relative to which the linguistic meanings of the terms in the sentence, alone, turn out to be capable of determining a proposition in that context. But sometimes we have to assume a wide context for this to be possible; the wide context typically involves, besides the linguistic meanings of the words, the speaker's intentions while using those words.

Now, one has to notice that the difference above between the two pairs of concepts is not merely terminological. There is—contrary to first appearances—a huge disanalogy that we must identify. In the case of Kaplan's distinction, regardless of pure or impure indexical terms, the devices required by them to identify objects, relatively to contexts of use, are seen as semantic devices (Kaplan 1989). But as Bach and Recanati see the contrast between narrow and wide context, only the former context is a semantic one; wide context is seen as pragmatic in nature (Recanati 2004, p. 56).

The way we see saturation processes is therefore determined by which pair of concepts we favour. If we favour Kaplan's contrast, every saturation process is semantic in nature; if we follow Bach's and Recanati's, at least at a certain level, saturation is seen as requiring pragmatic processes in order to be accomplished. What does all this mean? Above all, it means that Recanati's argument to establish his main point against the hybrid model—showing that its second level either gives something gappy or otherwise is successful only if we run the pragmatic interpretation first (Recanati 2004, p. 58)—succeeds only if we use a pair of concepts which is to be proven to be the correct one, and above all, a pair of concepts that represents the view Recanati is trying to argue for. Hence, we have in fact a circular argument, assuming—at least in part—the very conclusion that is to be established.

I turn now to face a problem that follows from the perspective I favour. If the referential descriptions problem is to be solved along the lines indicated above (that is, if we must run the hybrid model in order to solve it), then, since some indexical terms are not pure and require very often the speaker's intentions in order to determine what is literally said by a certain use of a sentence containing them (or what is semantically expressed by that sentence), we have to be able to tell which inten-

tions are semantically relevant. And it will certainly not be an easy task. I think that a criterion for *what is said*, semantically understood, must be provided, for it seems to be the crucial point at issue, and that criterion demands that we face the problem of the speaker's intentions.

In short the question is: how are we to distinguish semantically relevant intentions from those that are not so? Perhaps the distinction at issue might be illuminated, not by some internal property (so to speak) that semantically relevant intentions may have and the others can't have, but by one external or relational property, one that enables us to draw the boundary—something along the following lines:

An intention *I* is semantically relevant in a given context of use if and only if *I* is connected with a token of a sentence *S* whose linguistic meaning is not enough to determine a proposition *p* relative to that context of use.

This would guarantee that (i) any intention I associated with a certain token of *S* whose linguistic meaning is in fact enough to determine *p* relative to a context, would be semantically irrelevant and that, conversely, (ii) semantically irrelevant intentions apply in contexts where the sentence meaning is enough to express a proposition relative to the appropriate context of use. In this light, we could easily explain the contrast between the role intentions play in the cases of "the *F*" (used referentially) and of "that *F*". In the former case, *I* is semantically irrelevant—since no intention whatsoever is required for "the *F* is *G*" to express a proposition in context—and, in the latter, *I* is semantically relevant—since identifying the relevant intention is required for "that *F* is *G*" to express a proposition in context.

The problem I might anticipate with this characterization of different kinds of intentions is that it is not very substantial. All in all, it is actually the other side of the coin, if we consider the agreed definition of what an impure indexical term is.[25] But I am very sceptical regarding the possibility of giving a more substantial characterization of the two different types of intentions, in the terms that seem to be required here.[26]

[25] See note 17 and the discussion of Recanati's arguments against the hybrid model that I've just finished.

[26] Kripke 1980 and Salmon 2004b, for instance, try to offer some ways of doing this. I see these tentative ways of drawing the distinction as fragile and capable of generating several counterexamples, since distinguishing between intentions is a tricky matter. This topic requires an independent discussion that is outside the scope of this essay.

To conclude, a lesson follows from the above. A level of *what is said*, in the minimalist sense, or of what is semantically expressed by sentences, is required to cope with the problem of referential descriptions. This means that it cannot be the case that all—or even some—semantics is going to be included in pragmatics. This idea gets matters confused, when they can be clear. Therefore, I hope I have provided an additional argument in favour of an "expression centred conception of semantics"[27] (which was my bold aim), besides having shown that referential uses of definite descriptions, being semantically irrelevant, are not a problem for Russell's theory of definite descriptions (my modest aim).[28]

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[27] Salmon 2004a: the "expression centred conception of semantics" is opposed to the "speech-act centred" one.

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