

**RUSSELL'S THEORY OF MEANING**

**A Thesis submitted to the University of Manchester  
for the degree of Ph.D in the Faculty of Arts**

**1993**

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

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### ABSTRACT

This thesis primarily explores Russell's motivation to develop a theory of meaning in logic and language. It consists of five Parts, each Part of which surveys in detail Russell's interests and the development of his thought in this area, along with some comments on the rights and wrongs of his account.

Part One deals with some historical background to Russell's thought but concentrates mainly on his lectures on the "Philosophy of Logical Atomism". Since his philosophy is a complex account of logic, language, metaphysics, and epistemology the discussion is focused on his repudiation of the prevailing nineteenth century metaphysics, while showing at the same time how his thought nevertheless retained an adherence to traditional metaphysics and epistemology.

Russell's theory of meaning was certainly influenced by Frege's early account of 'Bedeutung'. Part Two attempts to outline both Frege's early account of 'Bedeutung' and the later account associated with his idea of 'Sinn'. Russell accepted Frege's earlier account but raised a sharp criticism against Frege's later account of 'Sinn'. His rejection of Frege's 'Sinn' though accepted by some philosophers, nevertheless is also criticised by some others. I attempt to adjudicate between these opposed views.

Part Three deals with Russell's theory of names, that is with his central account of meaning in general. His obsession with the naming relation leads him towards a traditional empiricism in which the basic names signify sense-data. It leads him also to a metaphysical view about what really exists. It also creates difficulties for him in accounting for natural language, for example in identifying the basic names and also in accounting for the meaning of a whole proposition.

Part Four examines the views of some recent writers such as Kripke who argues that Russell's identification of ordinary proper names as abbreviated descriptions is wrong. He suggests that ordinary proper names and descriptions are two different types of expressions. Other commentators such as Sainsbury, Evans, and Peacocke though remaining critical of Russell's views, nevertheless think that Russell's account of meaning can be rescued if some objectionable aspects of his account are discarded.

Russell's theory of meaning, however, raises some important, general questions about the role of expressions like names and descriptions in natural language. Part Five examines some of the crucial questions raised by recent writers like Evans, Millican, and McCulloch in this context. They are particularly concerned with the contrast between a semantic and a pragmatic aspect of language.

Finally, the concluding chapter in Part Six summarises Russell's overall account and attempts to show that his account of a 'perfect' language, considered in a certain way, has nevertheless some implications for understanding the analysis of expressions in natural language.

**No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.**

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>A&amp;R</i>	<i>Appearance and Reality</i>
<i>AM</i>	<i>The Analysis of Mind</i>
<i>BD</i>	Backward-looking descriptions (see, McCulloch, <i>The Game of the Name</i> )
<i>OD</i>	Outward-looking descriptions (ibid.)
<i>ETL</i>	Empiricist theory of language (see, Harrison, <i>Meaning and Structure</i> )
<i>FA</i>	<i>Foundations of Arithmetic</i>
<i>FPL</i>	<i>Frege: Philosophy of Language</i>
<i>HK</i>	<i>Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits</i>
<i>IMP</i>	<i>Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy</i>
<i>IMT</i>	<i>Inquiry into Meaning and Truth</i>
<i>LA</i>	Logical Atomism
<i>LP</i>	Logically proper
<i>OP</i>	Ordinary proper
<i>MTT</i>	"The Monistic Theory of Truth"
<i>OD</i>	"On Denoting"
<i>OR</i>	"On Referring"
<i>OKEW</i>	<i>Our Knowledge of the External World</i>
<i>PLA</i>	"The Philosophy of Logical Atomism"
<i>PofM</i>	<i>Principles of Mathematics</i>
<i>PM</i>	<i>Principia Mathematica</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>The Problems of Philosophy</i>
<i>PI</i>	<i>Philosophical Investigations</i>
<i>Phil of Leibniz</i>	<i>A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz</i>
<i>PN</i>	Proper Name
<i>TT</i>	<i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i>

## PREFACE

It may be worth while to say something of the motives which have led to my interest in Russell, and to the treatment of Russell's account of meaning provided in the thesis. Russell's philosophy has been of considerable interest to philosophers in Bangladesh for some time, but an account of recent developments in that philosophy, and particularly Russell's account of language and meaning will help them to develop their interest. Historically, after a period before the second world war when Russell was generally accepted as making one of the most important twentieth century contributions to logic and language study, his work was criticised by Strawson and his reputation declined. More recently, however, a number of philosophers have claimed to revive some of Russell's central ideas, for example his account of naming and, although they remain critical of his views, they have nevertheless argued that those ideas contain some still important truths about language and meaning. I have wanted, therefore, to provide an account of some of those developments partly in order to survey those lines of thought, but partly also to test their adequacy.

In Russell's philosophy there can now no longer be any serious doubt that his account of meaning and of language takes the central, pivotal, role. It is not, therefore, at all surprising that many of the recent developments in discussing Russell have been essentially concerned with that aspect of his philosophy. For that reason I have chosen to focus on that central area of his thought, but there are two provisos that need to be made about my discussion of that area.

First Russell's philosophical career spanned a considerable period and embraced a wide variety of philosophical views and topics. It was not my wish to deal with all the

phases of his career, or all the aspects of his philosophical development. Instead it seemed appropriate to concentrate primarily on the work Russell published under the general title of "Philosophy of Logical Atomism". This covers the period from the publication of *PofM* (1903) to the lectures which he gave under the title of "Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918) and the subsequent article on that topic (see, Marsh (ed.) *Logic and Knowledge*)). Now it is, of course, true that Russell's thought in this period cannot be totally divorced from his earlier work in *PofM* or *PP* (1912), or even in *PM* (1910) itself, any more than it can be totally divorced from his later work in epistemology and philosophy of language in, for example *HK* and *IMT*. However these works wrapped round the central doctrines of PLA are to some extent peripheral to Russell's central theory and later commentators have also tended to take that view. I shall, therefore, note some of the ideas in these earlier and later works where they cast some light, or shadows, on the doctrines of PLA themselves, but I shall not examine those works in detail. It is also true that many of Russell's philosophical interests, for example his very early interest in Bradley or his interest in social and political theories between the wars, have scarcely any relevance to the central topics of PLA. Although I shall refer to some of the historical origins of, and background to, Russell's thought in PLA it is not my intention to provide a chronological survey of his development. I have made some such references to the background where it seemed necessary in helping to understand Russell's views in PLA, or where it seemed useful to add material which was not much discussed in the literature.

Those latter points, however, point to the second proviso. Russell's views on meaning and language in PLA were not, even in that restricted context, a 'pure' theory of language. At that time philosophy had not become so strongly compartmentalised into separate branches labelled 'philosophy of language', or 'semantic theory', or 'philosophy of psychology', or 'epistemology' as it was later to become. It is not possible, even in PLA, to disregard the complex mixture of epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of language, and philosophical psychology which actually constitutes Russell's thought. It is for that reason, too, that I have spent some time outlining the antecedent ideas in those wider areas of

epistemology and metaphysics which influenced Russell in PLA. In that work Russell's philosophy of language and his account of meaning form an integral part of a complex philosophy which has links with his thought throughout the whole of the period from, say, 1900 to 1918.

Two additional points might be made. The first is that the historical background to Russell's thought has been already quite well documented. It is for that reason that I have treated it selectively and dealt mainly with issues which have perhaps not received so much attention. The second is that it has come to be the orthodox view of Russell that his philosophy in PLA suffers from considerable handicaps of two related kinds. More generally his account of language has been thought to suffer from an often obscure entanglement with a set of complex background ideas in epistemology and metaphysics which at the time Russell thought essential to his views. More specifically it has often been claimed that a further handicap arises not only from his adherence to certain traditional doctrines in philosophy, such as empiricism or dualism, but also from his commitment to the traditional problems for which these doctrines were the purported solutions. In that respect, despite Russell's status as a revolutionary who moved philosophy away from its traditional issues and postures, he nevertheless appears firmly locked into a traditional way of looking at philosophy. In the history of philosophy the 'linguistic' revolution which Russell helped to initiate with his work in PLA has led to a sharper awareness than he had that philosophical problems about meaning can be usefully separated from the traditional philosophy in which they arose. It is a further irony, given Russell's own commitment to that philosophical tradition, that his own work has led later philosophers to the view that the traditional problems actually depend upon accounts of language and meaning, rather than the other way round. Many later philosophers, for example Dummett, take the view that the traditional problems could be resolved, or dissolved, only when an adequate theory of meaning has already been provided.

I do not want to dissent from such views, for example that Russell does handicap himself by a too close adherence to traditional philosophy, or even that his wish to connect

language, logic and metaphysics is over-ambitious. I have however thought it necessary nevertheless to consider Russell's account of meaning, in the central context of PLA, in its relation to the background issues of epistemology and metaphysics in which, rightly or wrongly, Russell embedded it. The thesis, therefore, does not confine itself to the 'pure' issues of language and meaning which are nevertheless the focus of attention. Rather it seeks, critically, to locate those issues in the wider philosophical context in which Russell presented them.

Russell's account of meaning raises inevitably crucial questions about the role of certain types of word or expression in natural language. It is for this reason that I have also sought to consider Russell's central account in relation to the implications it has for the understanding and analysis of such expressions as names and descriptions. If Russell's theory still has useful lessons to teach, then it must be in relation to those specific topics.

**PART ONE**  
**THE BACKGROUND TO RUSSELL**

## A SKETCH OF RUSSELL'S PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

Russell's interest in philosophy began, as he recounts in his *Autobiography*, with his wish to resolve his questions about the truth of mathematics. He explains how his brother introduced him to Euclidean geometry at the age of eleven and showed how its theorems depended for their truth on the truths of the axioms. Russell was dissatisfied with the idea that the truth of the axioms must be taken on trust. He wrote:

The doubt as to the premises of mathematics which I feel at that moment remained with me, and determined the course of my subsequent work.<sup>1</sup>

In 1900 when visiting a philosophical congress in Paris, he met the Italian logician and mathematician Peano. Once Russell had studied and mastered Peano's system he came to the fundamental conviction that mathematics is a more highly developed form of logic, and that logic and mathematics are essentially the same. He thought not only that a logical symbolism should enable us to formulate all mathematical propositions precisely, but also that such an analysis would help to explain the ways in which we learn and use mathematics. These general views had been also canvassed by Frege in 1884 in his *Grundlagen*, though Russell learned of Frege's work only some time later. Russell wrote:

The definition of numbers ... had been formulated by Frege sixteen years earlier, but I did not know this until a year or so after I had re-discovered it.<sup>2</sup>

Russell's early interests in mathematics and logic led to his two important works, the *Principles of Mathematics* (*PofM*) and *Principia Mathematica* (*PM*) in which he collaborated with A.N. Whitehead. In *PofM* he attempted to show that all pure

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<sup>1</sup>The *Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 1872-1914, Vol.1 (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967), p.36.

<sup>2</sup>see, Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959), p.54.

mathematics follows from purely logical premises and uses only concepts which are definable in logical terms. At that time Russell, in examining Cantor's work, discovered the contradiction which is now generally known as Russell's paradox.<sup>3</sup> He thus discovered a serious flaw in Frege's account of sets and wrote to Frege, who at once recognised the seriousness of the problem. Russell wrote of Frege's reaction:

Frege was so disturbed by this contradiction that he gave up the attempt to deduce arithmetic to logic to which, until then, his life had been mainly devoted.<sup>4</sup>

Russell himself published his *PofM* in 1903 without a full solution of the paradox, although he proposed a solution at the end involving the ramified theory of types. This theory was developed and embodied in *PM*, which came out in three massive volumes between 1910 and 1913. In that work both philosophical and technical mathematical, or symbolic, problems are addressed, and broadly Russell dealt with the former while Whitehead dealt with the latter. But, as Russell himself wrote subsequently,

... this only applies to first drafts. ... There is hardly a line in all the three volumes which is not a joint product.<sup>5</sup>

Russell provided a simpler and less technical account of his work in the *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy (IMP)*, which he wrote while he was in prison (1918) and published in the following year (1919).

Before he developed this dominant interest in logic and the foundations of mathematics Russell had been interested in, and influenced by, the current orthodoxy of monistic Idealism. He came to think that such a philosophy, associated above all with Bradley, rested upon erroneous assumptions, one of which was that all propositions are of subject-predicate form. He attacked this assumption strongly in his *A Critical Exposition of The Philosophy of Leibniz (1900) (Phil of Leibniz)*, and there canvassed the view that

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<sup>3</sup>Russell's paradox involves the idea that the class of classes which are not members of themselves leads to a contradiction.

<sup>4</sup>op.cit. Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, p.70.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.74

Leibniz's earlier efforts to link mathematics and logic had foundered on this error. He came to the conclusion that:

... many of his most characteristic opinions were due to the purely logical doctrine that every proposition has a subject and a predicate. This doctrine is one which Leibniz shares with Spinoza, Hegel, and Mr. Bradley; it seemed to me that, if it is rejected, the whole foundation for the metaphysics of all these philosophers is shattered.<sup>6</sup>

But Russell came also to reject the Bradleyan metaphysics of monism which was built on this assumption. Bradley held that relations were unreal, and could be proved to be so. He drew the conclusion that the common sense world with its plurality of objects and relations between them, was also unreal; and that the only true reality was an all-embracing monistic whole which, however, was inaccessible to us. Russell thought that the rejection of relations made any adequate philosophy of mathematics impossible, and he came to think that our common sense beliefs in a plurality of objects and their relations were philosophically better grounded than any proof of their unreality. In this view he was influenced and encouraged by G.E. Moore who advocated robust common sense views against the Idealist metaphysicians.

Moore in his autobiography stated that among all his teachers in Cambridge, he was influenced by McTaggart. But at the same time Moore nevertheless attacked the Idealistic view of which McTaggart, with Bradley, was the leading English representative. McTaggart in the course of conversation on one occasion, expressed his well-known view that Time is unreal.<sup>7</sup> But as Moore wrote:

This must have seemed to me then (as it still does) a perfectly monstrous proposition, and I did my best to argue against it.<sup>8</sup>

McTaggart's argument points towards an unclarity in our view of events in time.

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<sup>6</sup>Russell, "Logical Atomism" in *Logic and Knowledge* (ed.) R.C. Marsh (Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1956, paper-back 1988), p.324.

<sup>7</sup>see, "An Autobiography of G.E. Moore" in Schilpp (ed.) *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore* (The Library of Living Philosophers Inc. Open Court, London, 3rd edition 1968, Vol.2), pp. 13-14.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

On one side we think of such events as each having a unique place in the time series, and yet we also think of each of them as related to other events as earlier than, or later than, them. McTaggart believed that the ascriptions of these apparently incompatible properties showed that time itself was unreal. To Moore such a conclusion seemed strange and ill-motivated. Moore thought by contrast that such a conflict between a philosophical, and sceptical, conclusion and our common sense reflected badly on philosophy rather than on common sense.

Moore's subsequent appeal to the common sense view of the world is expressed by his belief that

... there are in the Universe enormous numbers of material objects, of one kind or another.<sup>9</sup>

Moore at this stage did not define what he took common sense to mean, but he provided as examples: beliefs about human bodies, animals, plants, minerals, chairs and tables, the earth itself and other planets as well as stars. He also included in the common sense view of the world acts of consciousness and knowledge. He conceived the belief that every material object and act of consciousness exists in *time*. What he meant by 'time' is that

... there are such things as the past, the present and the future, and that there is a great difference between the three.<sup>10</sup>

In another essay 'Is Time Real' Moore wanted to distinguish two prevailing views about time. One is that there is no such thing as time and nothing exists *in* time; the other is that there is a thing as time but time itself is mere appearance, nothing exists in time. Moore ascribed the second view to Bradley but he was not explicit in ascribing the first view to McTaggart whose view it is supposed to be.<sup>11</sup> He regarded both these views as wrong. The first one, he argued, contradicts our ordinary beliefs because we *constantly*

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<sup>9</sup>Moore.G.E., "What is Philosophy" in *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953), p.2.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. p.11.

<sup>11</sup> Moore talked about McTaggart's idea in his *Autobiography*, but very strangely he did not mention McTaggart's name in this essay.

believe that things do happen in the past and present. It is the second view that Moore thought more important and worth attention. Moore explained that what basically is wrong with Bradley is that he (Bradley) seemed to maintain that the words 'being' and 'real' mean the same. Due to his not distinguishing these two, Bradley was led to the view that Time indubitably *is* and yet is not *real*. Such a view would lead us also to say that Centaurs indubitably *are* but yet they certainly are not *real*. The chief difficulty, Moore argued, lies in the fact that whereas, on the one hand we admit that imaginary things *are* or *have being* in our imagination, on the other hand it is quite clear that they are *not real*. Once we make a distinction between 'being' and 'reality', the doubt then disappears. Moore wrote:

... we *must* admit that in one sense, there *are* such things as Centaurs, while also we must maintain in another there are *not*. And the important thing, ... is ... to distinguish quite clearly the two different notions involved. It is comparatively unimportant what words we use to express them.<sup>12</sup>

Moore surely wanted to defend such non-technical distinctions and considered technical terminology as often being harmful. His commonsense view is open to query but his hostility to Idealism nevertheless influenced Russell. As Russell wrote:

He took the lead in rebellion, and I followed, with a sense of emancipation.<sup>13</sup>

These influences led Russell firmly to reject the style and doctrines of Hegelian or Bradleyan metaphysics, and so to adopt some form of realism and pluralism. He wrote:

For some years I was a disciple of Mr. Bradley, but about 1898 I changed my views, ... I could no longer believe that knowing makes any difference to what is known. Also I found myself driven to pluralism.<sup>14</sup>

In 1905, he published his famous theory of descriptions in "On Denoting" (OD) in *Mind*. In *PofM* he held the view that whatever can be mentioned is considered to be a

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<sup>12</sup> Moore, "Is Time Real" in op.cit. *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, p.214.

<sup>13</sup> Russell, "My Mental Development" in Schilpp (ed.) *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (The Library of Living Philosophers, Inc. New York 3rd edition 1962), p.12.

<sup>14</sup> Russell, op.cit. "Logical Atomism", p.324.

term and that every expression of language corresponds to some element of reality. In OD he changed his mind and held that phrases like "golden mountain" do not have to refer to some item in reality, even though they are perfectly significant units of language. Russell was led to consider that their linguistic significance could be explained in terms of the special way in which they contributed to the meaning of sentences in which they occur, without any commitment to the existence of corresponding items in reality.

Moore and Russell were not the only philosophers to react against nineteenth century Idealist metaphysics. The American Pragmatists, especially Peirce and James, had followed a similar path. Russell had been influenced especially by William James and wrote a number of articles about his pragmatism and neutral monism. He made extensive reference to James, too, in the lectures on Logical Atomism (LA). Although Russell shared with James a common reaction against monistic metaphysics, nevertheless he disagreed with many of James's more positive views. Probably the most considerable disagreement lay in Russell's criticisms of the Pragmatist theory of truth,<sup>16</sup> but underlying that conflict was a deeper point about meaning. For Russell, like Frege but unlike James, had the advantage of an extensive knowledge of the new logical model languages which provided a framework for the understanding of meaning.

It is true James had considered problems about meaning, and his 'pragmatic method' was designed to resolve them. He had a 'functional' view of concepts and a lively method of tackling philosophical issues by insisting on clarifying what he called the "cash value" of obscure philosophical terms. As has often been noted, James himself had no refined theory of meaning to offer, and seemed content to rely on a vague and general slogan which he derived from Peirce. It was C.S. Peirce who first introduced the term 'pragmatism' in 1878. He conceived the idea that the significance of a thought lies in its future effects. If two different beliefs exist regarding the same matter, then the acceptance of one belief or other should result in the corresponding behaviour. He argued that there

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<sup>16</sup> Russell, "Pragmatism" in *Philosophical Essays* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1910, Revised edition 1966), pp. 79-111.

would be no effective difference in the two beliefs if there were no differences in future conduct. Peirce's doctrine however, did not come out forcefully until it was taken up twenty years later by William James who gave it a more sweeping significance while retaining the word 'pragmatism'.

James gave an account of meaning which is very unclear and vague. However, his account suggests links to later doctrines, namely Wittgenstein on the one side and the Logical Positivists' on the other. Wittgenstein's view associated the meaning of expressions with the specific *uses* that are made in a particular context which comes close to the pragmatic account. The Logical Positivists' and Quine's view is that the meaning of an expression is related with the way in which we might carry out verification in the future or the past, and the difference it will make in our experience if certain things turn out to be true. Although James's account of meaning can be associated with the later views of Wittgenstein, as well as those of the Logical Positivists and Quine, nevertheless his vague account in this respect is open to the criticism that Russell expressed in an obituary notice when he said:

... the actual system (or denial of system) with which Professor James later associated his name was of the insufficient sort that it was.<sup>16</sup>

Those deficiencies, which Russell complained of in Pragmatist philosophy, were not present in the work of Frege, which Russell, as we saw, became acquainted with around 1900. Frege's own account of semantics, especially his later paper "Über Sinn und Bedeutung"<sup>17</sup> was highly sophisticated, detailed and technical. Once Russell knew of Frege's work in formal logic and semantics it is difficult to see it as anything other than a constant stimulus to Russell's own development in these areas. It culminated in Russell's criticism and rejection in OD of Frege's distinction between "Sinn"(sense) and "Bedeutung"(reference). This step in Russell's development is of such importance that the background

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<sup>16</sup>cf. Bird, G., *William James* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London & New York, 1986), p.182.

<sup>17</sup> "On Sense and Meaning" in Geach & Black (ed.) *Translations From The Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 3rd edition 1980, Reprinted 1985, 1988), pp. 56-78.

Fregean doctrine, and Russell's arguments against it, must be reserved for later detailed scrutiny (in Pt.2).

In 1912, Russell published a short book called *The Problems of Philosophy (PP)* in which he gave a lucid and brief account of traditional problems of knowledge, such as our knowledge of the external world and of universals. One important feature of this book is his distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, which is also significant in later work on Logical Atomism. Russell argued that our common sense beliefs about our knowledge of the external world are justified by the fact that they explain the course of our experience. According to him, our knowledge of the world is derived from our sense-perception and that what are immediately known in sensation are not straightforwardly identifiable with the physical objects perceived. In *PP* he used the term 'sense-data', examples of which he gave as colours, smells, hardness, roughness etc. He then distinguished sense-data from sensations, because for him sensations are the experiences of being immediately aware of sense-data.<sup>18</sup> Thus he argued that what we are

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<sup>18</sup>Later, in *PLA*, Russell no longer insisted on this terminological distinction and I shall speak of 'experiences', 'sense-experiences', and 'sense-data' without differentiating between them (see Pt.3, ch.6, sec.6.4, footnote 20, p.131).

In the following quotations it is clear that Russell used a variety of terms to identify the basic objects of acquaintance, that is, the basic objects which *LP* names name. He spoke of 'sense-data', and 'appearances', as well as of 'experiences'. He thought of these basic objects as 'fleeting', and restricted to each individual percipient. And he sometimes spoke puzzlingly of the appearances of the sense-data themselves (quote (4)). This confusion can be depicted from the following passages quoted from Russell's lectures in *PLA*.

(1) What I can know is that there are a certain series of appearances linked together, and the series of those appearances I shall define as being a desk. In that way the desk is reduced to being a logical fiction, because a series is a logical fiction. In that way all the ordinary objects of daily life are extruded from the world of what there is, and in their place as what there is you find a number of passing particulars of the kind that one is immediately conscious of in sense. (p.273)

(2) Phantoms and hallucinations, considered in themselves, are, ... on exactly the same level as ordinary sense-data. They differ from ordinary sense-data only in the fact that they do not have the usual correlations with other things. ... They are part of the ultimate constituents of the world, just as the fleeting sense-data are. ... The things that are really real last a very short time. ... The things that we call real, like tables and chairs, are systems, series of classes of particulars, and the particulars are the real things, the particulars being sense-data when they happen to be given to you. A table or chair will be a series of classes of particulars, and therefore a logical fiction. (p.274)

(3) I ought to explain in what sense a chair is a series of classes. A chair presents at each moment a number of different appearances. All the appearances that it is presenting at a given moment make up a certain class. All those sets of appearances vary from time to time. ... So you get a series in time of different sets of appearances, and that is what I mean by saying that a chair is a series of classes. (p.275)

(4) ... if one takes sense-data and arranges together all those sense-data that appear to different people at a given moment and are such as we should ordinarily say are appearances of the same physical object, then that class of sense-data will give you something that belong to physics, namely, the chair at this moment. On the other hand, if instead of taking all the appearances that that chair presents to all of us at this moment, I take all the appearances that the different chairs in this room present to me at this moment, I get quite another group of particulars. All the different appearances that different chairs present to me now will give you something belonging to psychology, because that will give you my experiences at the present moment. Broadly speaking, according to what one may take as an expansion of William James,

acquainted with in the presence of a table is its colour, shape, hardness, smoothness, and so on and these are the sense-data which make up the appearance of the table. The question which was of primary interest to Russell was not the relation of sense-data to the subjects who are aware of them, but their relation to the physical objects with which they are in some way associated. Giving the familiar example of a table, Russell argued that the knowledge of the table as a physical object is not direct knowledge. The argument is based on the fact that the table can be presented in a different way to different observers and even the existence of the table can be doubted. But what makes up the appearance of the table is obtained through acquaintance with the sense-data and sense-data are beyond any doubt. Russell contended that the knowledge of the table is knowledge by description because the table is a physical object which causes such and such sense-data and this means that the table is being *described* by means of sense-data. The table as a physical object is not directly known to us, but our knowledge of the object to which the description applies is, however, knowledge by description. Apart from acquaintance with particular existing things, Russell also considered that we have acquaintance with *memories*, *introspection*, *self-consciousness* and also *universals*, i.e. general ideas, such as whiteness,

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that should be the definition of the difference between physics and psychology. (p.278)

(5) We commonly assume that there is a phenomenon which we call seeing the chair, but what I call seeing the chair according to neutral monism is merely the existence of a certain particular, namely the particular which is the sense-datum of that chair at that moment. And I and the chair are both logical fictions, both being in fact a series of classes of particulars, of which one will be that particular which we call my seeing the chair. That actual appearance that the chair is presenting to me now is a member of me and a member of the chair, I and the chair being logical fictions. ... I ought to proceed to tell you that I have discovered whether neutral monism is true or not, ... But I do not profess to know whether it is true or not. I feel more and more inclined to think that it may be true. (pp. 278-79)

(6) It has a very odd property for a proper name, namely that it seldom means the same thing two moments running and does not mean the same thing to the speaker and to the hearer. It is an *ambiguous* proper name, but it is really a proper name all the same, and it is almost the only thing I can think of that is used properly and logically in the sense that I was talking of for a proper name. ... Particulars ... [have] that sort of self-subsistence that used to belong to substance, except that it usually only persists through a very short time, so far as our experience goes. (pp. 201-02)

(7) A logically perfect language, if it could be constructed, would not only be intolerably prolix, but, as regards its vocabulary, would be very largely private to one speaker. That is to say, all the names that it would use would be private to that speaker and could not enter into the language of another speaker. (p.198)

Although these quotations point to a diverse and unclear terminology nevertheless two points seem to stand out. The first is that Russell no longer insisted on the distinction he drew in *PP* between sense-data and (sense-) experiences. The second is that his account of sense-data, in which they are 'private', 'fleeting', 'last only for a short time', and have the same status as phantoms and hallucinations, suggests strongly that he thought of these as fragmentary, personal, sense-experiences. As I shall indicate later (Pt.4, ch.9, sec. 9.2, pp.197-99) some of the problems arising from this view can be mitigated by appealing to Sainsbury's distinction between sense-datum tokens and sense-datum types.

brotherhood, etc. Russell held that knowledge by description enables us to go beyond the limits of our own private experience. He wrote:

In spite of the fact that we can only know truths which are wholly composed of terms which we have experienced in acquaintance, we can yet have knowledge by description of things which we have never experienced.<sup>19</sup>

The question that arises is how Russell envisaged this distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. In recent times there has been some controversy about the way in which one might justify or support philosophical views about common sense and its explanation. One view holds the idea that we should go for views which provide the "best explanation for some phenomenon". Thus, for example, if we had two different theories of perception, the suggestion might be that one of these theories gives a better explanation of the phenomenon than the other. But this view is in contrast with another idea that philosophy needs to be distinguished from ordinary or scientific explanation. This view is very clearly stated in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigation (PI)*. There he said that philosophy is not in the business of explanation or theory construction. Its function is not indeed like science. Science actually does need explanation, philosophy does not. Now if Russell was arguing that the views he was canvassing in philosophy can be supported because they provide us with the best explanation in the course of our ordinary thinking, then in some way he seems to be anticipating the former view. If we draw a distinction, following Wittgenstein, between explanation and justification, and if we associate philosophy with the latter rather than the former, then Russell's position will seem unclear.

In 1918, before imprisonment, Russell gave a series of lectures with the title 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism' (PLA) where he introduced his doctrine of logical atomism. He effectively summarised his philosophical views at this stage in this brief but important work. It would not be too much to say that in this work Russell outlined not only his views on logic and meaning, but also the implications of those views for epistemology,

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<sup>19</sup> Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Home University Library. Oxford University Press, 1912), p.59.

metaphysics and ontology. The doctrine of LA can be seen as a kind of centre of gravity of Russell's development, about which his earlier and later works revolve. In this work Russell used his insights into the new logic to provide the outlines of a better epistemology and metaphysics than those he had rejected in his post-idealist phase. The work therefore contains a philosophy of logic and of language, an account of the philosophy of mathematics, as well as references to epistemology, to metaphysics and above all to ontology. For Russell at this stage clearly thought that the best, or only, way to arrive to an account of 'what there is' was precisely through the accounts of logic which he derived from his earlier technical work with Whitehead. It is for these reasons that PLA will be regarded in this thesis as the central point of reference for the discussion of Russell. The discussion will not confine itself to PLA, but it will, for these reasons, concentrate more on that work than any of Russell's other single earlier or later writings.

Russell's version of logical atomism developed in conjunction with the work of his former pupil, Wittgenstein. In Russell's own words:

The following ... course of eight lectures delivered in ... London, in the first months of 1918, ... are very largely concerned with explaining certain ideas which I learnt from my friend and former pupil Ludwig Wittgenstein.<sup>20</sup>

Although Russell's and Wittgenstein's versions of logical atomism have a good deal in common, they also diverge on certain points. Both Russell's PLA and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (*TT*) give the same priority of facts over things, and both treat their enquiry into language as the only way of analysing facts and reaching ontological conclusions. Wittgenstein, for example, like Russell, believed that complex propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions, and used this as a fundamental step in an argument to ontological conclusions.

The essential feature of Wittgenstein's 'picture-theory' as revealed in his *TT*, explains that atomic propositions get their sense through being correlated with atomic facts so that the former 'picture' the latter; and that the atomic names in a similar way get their

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<sup>20</sup>cf. Russell, "PLA" in op.cit. *Logic and Knowledge*, p.177.

meaning by being correlated with elementary objects. Russell's terminology is different from Wittgenstein's, but his idea of a one-one correlation between elements in the atomic propositions and their corresponding facts is the same. For Russell:

... all atomic proposition assert relations of varying orders. Atomic facts contain, besides the relation, the terms of the relation ... These 'terms' which come into atomic facts I define as 'particulars'.<sup>21</sup>

There is one immediate difference between their views about language: Russell used only the notion of meaning both for names and for propositions, while Wittgenstein sharply distinguished names from propositions, and talked only of the meaning (*Bedeutung*) of names and the sense (*Sinn*) of propositions. In this context Wittgenstein returned to the terminology of Frege, although he used the terms in a different way from Frege. There is one other respect in which Russell's treatment of atomism differs markedly from Wittgenstein's. For Russell apart from arguing that there are atomic propositions, also attempted to identify those propositions in terms of personal sense-data. He was therefore, willing to extend his logical and ontological enquiry into epistemology. We have seen already that queries can be raised about this, and to do so by appealing to the ideas of traditional epistemology outlined earlier in the discussion of *PP*. But Wittgenstein firmly rejected even any attempt to extend his thesis into epistemology in this way.

About ontological matters, too, Wittgenstein differed from Russell. Russell considered his ontological conclusions straightforwardly as an advance on traditional metaphysics. Although by this time Russell had abandoned the Idealist metaphysics of Bradley, he now attempted to provide a metaphysics of his own which is better grounded on the basis of logic than any such traditional account. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, suggested a number of important provisos about this ontological project. He described the relation between the linguistic premises and the ontological conclusions as an 'internal' and not an 'external' relation. Though there is some doubt about what this means, nevertheless it seems to reject the idea of a simple, straightforward, correlation of language and reality,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.199.

as though the two items could be separately identified. This view is undoubtedly related to Wittgenstein's claim that philosophical propositions, for example those relating language to reality, are in some way "nonsensical". He wrote,

Most propositions and questions, that have been written about philosophical matters, are not false, but senseless.<sup>22</sup>

The suggestion is that such propositions wish to say what *cannot* be said, even though they *show* the unrealisable motive behind philosophical enquiry. Russell in his introduction to the *TT* has been thought to express an inadequate understanding of Wittgenstein when he wrote:

What causes hesitation is the fact that, after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, ...<sup>23</sup>

If Russell maintained this view, then such a misunderstanding marks a difference between his and Wittgenstein's idea. It shows, very clearly, a difference in their attitudes towards a philosophical ontology.

After the first world war Russell's philosophical output markedly declined, as did his general interest in philosophy. He wrote in his *Autobiography*:

The war of 1914-18 changed everything for me. I ceased to be academic and took to writing a new kind of book. I changed my whole conception of human nature. ... I lost old friends and made new ones.<sup>24</sup>

In 1921 he published *The Analysis of Mind (AM)* where he talked about 'neutral monism' and thus revived his earlier interest in James's Pragmatism. In 1927 his *Analysis of Matter* moved away from the idea that physical objects are logical constructions to the earlier view of *PP* that they are largely unknown causes of experience. In 1940 he gave the William James lectures at Harvard, and these were published under the title *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth (IMT)* in the same year. These lectures contain some of his previous

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<sup>22</sup> see, Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., first published 1922, sixth impression 1955), p.63.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.22.

<sup>24</sup> *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1914-1944*, Vol.2 (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1968), pp.38-39.

ideas, but also fresh and original views on egocentric particulars: the idea that the reference of the words like 'I' and 'this' depend on the context of utterance. His last major philosophical work *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits (HK)* published in 1948 contains an extended treatment of the problem of induction, a vital problem for knowledge which he had discussed briefly in *PP*.

Russell's views had great influence during the thirties and his theory of descriptions was regarded by Ramsey as a 'paradigm of philosophy'.<sup>25</sup> His logical work became superseded by developments such as Quine's reworking of Russellian systems, Lewis's interest in new logical systems (modal systems), and new radical work by Gödel and others on meta-logical methods, consistency, completeness, etc. With the development of Wittgenstein's second phase of philosophy the climate changed and drew attention away from Russell. Wittgenstein developed a new understanding of linguistic analysis and rejected his earlier *TT* emphasis on artificial languages for the resolution of philosophical problems. He still maintained his earlier position in *TT* that metaphysical problems are not real problems, and concentrated his attention primarily upon the analysis of the forms of ordinary discourse. Russell had by this time lost touch with Wittgenstein and criticised linguistic philosophy for its narrow focus on ordinary language. He wrote:

The linguistic philosophy, which cares only about language, and not about the world, is like the boy who preferred the clock without the pendulum because, although it no longer told the time, it went more easily than before and at a more exhilarating pace.<sup>26</sup>

Russell thought that Wittgenstein's view of philosophy was mistaken in attending exclusively to the meaning of ordinary words. He believed that the central task of philosophy was to clarify the concepts employed in technical subjects such as mathematics and science. It was an important part of Russell's philosophy to link it very closely to the sciences and he believed that Wittgenstein's later philosophy distracted attention from that central task.

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<sup>25</sup> see, Footnote 1 of the paper "Philosophy" in Ramsey, F.P. *Philosophical Papers* (ed.) D.H.Mellor (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990), p.1.

<sup>26</sup> see, "Introduction" by Russell in Gellner, E., *Words and Things* (London, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1959), p.15.



Despite Wittgenstein's great influence in philosophy after the second world war, some philosophers retained a strong, though critical, interest in Russell. Among them were Strawson who in 1950 raised a sharp criticism of Russell's use of logic in analysing definite descriptions. Strawson's notion of 'presupposition' and his apparatus for distinguishing sentences and uses of sentences brings in a large discussion about pragmatic features of language and especially about the right way to draw a boundary line between semantic and pragmatic aspects of language. Interest in Russell's philosophy revived alongside a revival of interest in Frege. Since the publication of Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language (FPL)*, the extraordinary fertility of Frege's work has come to be recognised. I shall be bringing out some aspects of Frege's work, especially his theory of meaning and the notion of sense, which are relevant to the discussion of Russell's theory.

It has been made clear already that Russell's PLA is a complex mixture of logic, semantics, epistemology and ontology. Nevertheless the revival of interest in Russell has at best sought to concentrate on his semantic theory and positively to reject many of the epistemological and ontological views which Russell attached to it. One major distinction within linguistic analysis has revealed some still unresolved problems in Russell's theories. The distinction between a *semantic* dimension of analysis in language, and a contrasted *pragmatic* dimension of analysis has sometimes been used to criticise Russell and sometimes to defend him. Commentators such as Donnellan, Dummett, Kripke, Evans, Sainsbury, McCulloch, and others have implicitly or explicitly pointed to such a distinction and the implications it has for a Russellian theory. In future chapters I shall examine some of these comments on Russell and later make some more general observations on that distinction.

## EMPIRICISM, RATIONALISM, IDEALISM

### 2.1 *Descartes and Hume*

Russell's philosophy, from the beginning to the end, made reference to traditional philosophy. In his early period, as we saw, he was influenced by Bradley who in turn developed his views from Hegel and the nineteenth century German Idealists. When Russell reacted against this influence he nevertheless retained a strong link with traditional empiricism. In his epistemology in *PP* and later in *PLA* he not only addressed standard empiricist questions but also often gave standard empiricist answers to them. *PLA* contains a complex mixture of philosophical logic, epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of language, and these links with traditional philosophy cannot be overlooked. In this section the aim is to map some of these links, and first to look at Russell's *PLA* in connection with empiricism and rationalism.

Two representatives of these traditions stand to Russell in a special relationship, namely Descartes and Hume. The former influences Russell both in his general framework of sceptical doubt and also in his dualist conception of the mind. The two doctrines are not accidentally connected, for Cartesian dualism naturally encourages the sceptical problems about our knowledge of the external world of physical objects which, as we saw, Russell sought to resolve at many points in his career, e.g. *PP* and *Our Knowledge of the External World (OKEW)*. In *PLA* that Cartesian dualism is given a typically linguistic twist by Russell. Just as Descartes encouraged the idea that our private mental experience is primary, so Russell held the view that the primary words in our language refer to private sense-data. Just as Descartes required that any other knowledge had to be built on the basis of that immediate mental experience, so Russell held the view that more complex elements of language have themselves to be constructed on the basis of those primary

expressions in the language. We shall see later how this Russellian conception of a private, but perfect, language fits into his overall argument in PLA.

If Russell is indebted to views associated here with a specific rationalist philosopher, it should not be thought that his general attitude, in PLA for example, is typically rationalist. Although in some works, e.g. *PP*, Russell got close to rationalist doctrines in his Platonist account of universals and mathematics, for the most part he preferred alliance with traditional empiricists such as Hume. It is a commonplace that even traditional empiricists, like Locke and Hume, were heavily influenced by Cartesian dualism even though they rejected Cartesian rationalism. The same is true of Russell, at least as far as PLA is concerned. There, although he accepted a traditional dualist view of the relation between mind and body, he nevertheless also adopted empiricist attitudes of analysis, seeking to reduce complex claims into simpler forms of language. In part such analyses have a purely linguistic motivation, for Russell, like Wittgenstein, believed that complex propositions would all analyse into truth functional compounds of atomic propositions. In part Russell also had an epistemological motivation, since he believed, with Hume, that all complex knowledge has ultimately to be expressed in terms of individual sense experiences.

The two motivations are clearly distinct, but in Russell's PLA they plainly go together. A clear example of this is given in Russell's famous analysis of 'Piccadilly' into a series of classes of sense-data.<sup>27</sup> The two motives involve on one side a doctrine of logical analysis or logical construction which does not involve any phenomenalist or epistemological account, and on the other a doctrine which is based on epistemological features, that is sense-data analysis. In one respect the phenomenalist analysis of physical objects, for example, testifies to Russell's background Cartesianism. Any such phenomenalist analysis rests ultimately on a sharp division between mental and physical items, and so on some form of dualism. In another respect it testifies much more to his Humean empiricism, for he believed, like Hume, that the only adequate analysis to be

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<sup>27</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", pp.191, 195-96.

given of such objects lies in the provision of logical constructions out of the basic sense-data which form the starting point of any knowledge. Russell did not pursue the detail of such phenomenalist analysis very far in PLA; he seems simply to assume that such an analysis must be correct. Consequently he did not in PLA consider seriously whether such analyses will preserve everything we commonly understand in our physical object claims, or whether they will result in some inevitable modification of our common understanding of those claims. The latter view will be in some respect '*revisionary*', that is, it will offer a different version of the meaning of those common physical object claims. Russell did not shrink from the prospect of revision in other areas, for example, in the theory of descriptions. There he proposed to replace our untidy ordinary language by the more precise and more economical language of logic, in which his own analysis was formulated.

The central point in Russell where these traditional links converge is in his Principle of Acquaintance. That principle is motivated in part by the thought that the items with which we are directly acquainted are, or may be, incorrigible for us, that is, that we cannot be mistaken about them. They provide in this conception a bedrock of certainty which responds on one side to the traditional problem of scepticism in knowledge and on the other side to the dualist idea that certainty lies initially in the mental rather than the physical realm. Once those Cartesian thoughts are linked with a Humean empiricist insistence on sense experience, then the combination of Humean and Cartesian traditions already canvassed stands out clearly.

Russell also expressed his principle of acquaintance in different terms. In *PP* for example he said:

Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted.<sup>28</sup>

Such an account does not commit itself to any particular traditional or dualist account of the objects of acquaintance, and instead concentrates on relations of meaning and

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<sup>28</sup> op.cit. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p.58.

understanding. It points also to an analysis of complex propositions in which the ultimate constituents may have no direct or obvious link with the expressions in the initial proposition itself. This way of appealing to the principle of acquaintance has also a parallel in Hume. According to Hume, there are two different types of idea, namely simple and complex. Hume himself sometimes also expressed this relationship in terms of the meanings of the complex items, for he used this analytic relationship as a means of disclosing the meaning of any contentious term, especially in philosophy. For him:

Complex ideas may, perhaps, be well known by definition, which is nothing but an enumeration of those parts or simple ideas, that compose them. But when we have pushed up definition to the most simple ideas, and find still some ambiguity and obscurity; what resource are we then possessed of? ... Produce the impression or original sentiments, from which the ideas are copied.<sup>29</sup>

So far Hume's account and Russell's are in parallel. The important structural similarity between the two is expressed neatly by David Pears:

When no further analysis is possible because the ideas or symbols are indefinable, Hume has recourse to impressions, the original input of the mind, and Russell has recourse to acquaintance, the basic relation between the mind and its objects.<sup>30</sup>

Hume is vulnerable to the traditional objection that his account of external objects leaves us no way of knowing them. He held that although objects equipped with properties produce impressions in our mind, they themselves cannot be perceived because they lie beyond the screen of the impressions they produce. He claimed:

Whoever would explain the origin of the *common* opinion concerning the continu'd and distinct existence of body, must take the mind in its *common* situation, and must proceed upon the supposition, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they are not perceiv'd.<sup>31</sup>

Despite his disclaimer that he is providing only an analysis, which *assumes* the existence of such objects, the analysis itself has sometimes seemed to cast doubt on that assumption.

One way of showing this would be to suppose that in the account we are acquainted only

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<sup>29</sup>cf. Hume, D., *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (ed.) L.A.Selby-Bigge (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2nd edition), sec.7, pt.1, p.62.

<sup>30</sup>see, "Introduction" by D.F.Pears in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (ed.) Pears (Open Court, La Salle Illinois), p.9.

<sup>31</sup>cf. Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature* (ed.) L.A.Selby-Bigge (Oxford, Clarendon Press), Bk.1, Pt.4, Sec.2, p.213.

with the properties of an object and not with the object itself. It will then be difficult to explain how, on such a basis, we can ever have knowledge beyond those properties. Another way of achieving the same result would be to insist on the distinction between the objects, and their properties, on one side, and the related sense-data on the other. Again it would be easy to conclude from such an account that we are acquainted only with our sense-data and not with the objects or properties they are supposed to represent. It will be difficult to explain how we ever have knowledge beyond our sense-data. In both cases the inference to the existence of the external objects themselves is problematic. We have seen already that Russell is engaged in these problems, but at least it is clear that his own account differs significantly from Hume's in two respects.

First Russell, unlike Hume, was talking explicitly of the analysis of propositions and not just of complex ideas. We shall see later that Russell accepted a basic priority of propositions over facts, and of facts over things. It is a fundamental principle of his new metaphysics that we arrive at an understanding of the ultimate objects in reality only through an analysis of the facts in which they participate; and that we can analyse facts only through an analysis of the propositions in which they are expressed. These priorities have been accepted, in some form or other, by theorists such as Frege, Wittgenstein, and Quine for example through the doctrine that "A name has meaning only in the context of a proposition." Quine's account suggests that a word can have its proper use in the context of its use in sentences or systems of sentences. The idea is that the meaning of a word can be established in relation to its use in the whole language.<sup>32</sup> This view was introduced by Frege in his *Foundations of Arithmetic (FA)* in the form of a 'Context Principle' which suggests that the meaning of a word or a concept, for example the concept of number, can be determined only in the context of a proposition. Frege in his *FA* suggested that mathematical numbers are self-subsistent, objective but non-sensible objects. He suggested that the meaning of the proper name 'the number 1' is determined by the significance of

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<sup>32</sup>vide, Quine, W.V., "Five Milestones of Empiricism" in *Theories and Things* (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts and England, 1981), pp.67-72.

the propositions in which it occurs. The contribution it makes can be accounted for by adding a semantic value to the whole proposition which, when it is fitted into the propositions, gives an output value — truth and falsity. (I shall explain more about it in Pt.2). He believed that the truths of arithmetic are analytic and that the basic laws of arithmetic can be derived from logical principles with the help of suitable definitions and not from any ideas or psychological entities. He argued that the best way to analyse the concept number is not by pure reflection on the concept itself, but by a consideration of the propositions in which the concept occurs.

Although Frege never stated his Context Principle after 1884, later philosophers like Wittgenstein and Russell were influenced by his principle. Russell accepted a similar view in terms of his noted priorities of propositions over names, and this marks a significant difference from, and improvement on, Hume. The point can be illustrated by one important feature of analysis in his theory of descriptions namely that it provided a "definition in use" of the descriptive phrases. Indeed, Russell did not just define the phrase but rather offered a general prescription for its analysis *when it occurs* in a proposition. The descriptive phrases, therefore, can have meaning only in the context of a proposition, because the analysis produced comprises the whole sentences in which the descriptive phrase occurs. It is a deficiency of Hume's theory that the distinction between a whole proposition and a sub-propositional constituent, such as a name or description, is concealed behind the blanket category 'idea'. As Pears says of Hume's account of analysis,

... to put the same point linguistically, it did not allow for sentences, but only for phrases. It was non-propositional.<sup>33</sup>

Second because Hume expressed his views even about meaning and understanding in terms of the psychological idiom of 'ideas' and 'impressions' his doctrine fits naturally into a psychological interpretation. Russell, by contrast, for all his strong links with the empiricist tradition, based his own ideas of analysis more firmly on the techniques of logic.

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<sup>33</sup> vide, Pears, D.F., *Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition in Philosophy* (Collins/Fontana, 1967, 2nd edition 1972), p.31.

For Russell, as for Frege, analysis had a *logical* significance which needed to be kept clearly distinct from psychology. In this respect, too, Russell's empiricism differs from Hume, and might therefore hope to avoid some of the pitfalls of the earlier tradition.

It would be wrong to think that Russell's account has no connection with psychology at all. To speak, as he did, of such basic items as sense-data; and to talk, as he did, of propositional attitudes in psychological terms is, admittedly, to introduce a psychological dimension into his theory. Just as PLA contains philosophy of logic and of language, epistemology, and metaphysics, so similarly Russell was well aware that his views had implications for psychology, and he was anxious to bring them to light. Some critics would say that this mixture of items in the overall account is a confusion, but Russell can be defended. For one thing when he moved from one area to another, say from semantics to psychology, he often explicitly marked the change. For another he often explicitly marked the boundaries between these disciplines, even though he was willing to cross them. Finally his attitude here can be seen not just as an accidental confusion, but as an integral part of his view of philosophy and its relation to other disciplines, such as logic or psychology. The point was made in general in the earlier discussion of differences between Russell and Wittgenstein (see ch.1, pp. 22-24). Russell seems also to have thought that ultimately meaning cannot be totally divorced from psychology. He wrote:

... the notion of meaning is always more or less psychological, and ... it is not possible to get a pure logical theory of meaning, nor therefore of symbolism.<sup>34</sup>

Once again although Russell remained firmly in the empiricist tradition of Hume he expressed his own position with a greater degree of sophistication and self-consciousness than Hume did.

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<sup>34</sup>op.cit. "PLA", p.186.

## 2.2 Realism, Idealism, Pluralism

Although Russell had strong links with traditional philosophy he was also, as we have seen, influenced by his near contemporaries, and especially Bradley. That influence is important paradoxically because in eventually rejecting a Bradleyan metaphysics Russell prepared the way for his pluralist and realist philosophy in PLA. There is another reason for outlining a central theme in the debate between Russell and Bradley. Although Russell offered strong grounds for rejecting Bradley's monistic conception of metaphysics, one of the central pillars of that metaphysics continued to give Russell difficulties.

The point can be put in this way. Bradley's central argument for a monistic conception of truth and reality, in his *Appearance and Reality (A&R)* rested on a conception of judgements or propositions. He assumed that all propositions are of subject-predicate form, or are based on this form, and then argued that such a basic form contains an incoherence or contradiction. From that alleged incoherence Bradley wished to infer that truth and reality must be indivisibly one. As we have suggested already Russell wanted in any case to reject the assumption that all propositions either are, or are based on, subject-predicate propositions. Nevertheless he remained puzzled about the peculiar nature of propositions themselves, and this gave rise to two problems which he considered over a long period. One was a problem about the reality of propositions<sup>35</sup> themselves. Another was a problem about what Russell came to call the "Unity of the proposition".<sup>36</sup> For the present we need to indicate some of the origins of those issues.

According to Bradley, our attempt to talk about anything inevitably forces us to conclude that everything that there is constitutes a simple, immediate unity of consciousness. He explained that wherever a relation between *x* and *y* is demonstrated, both *x* and *y* are involved in the nature of the other. If every single object is related to all others in some way, it follows that every object is involved in the nature of a given object.

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<sup>35</sup> see, "PLA" and "On Proposition" in op.cit. *Logic & Knowledge*.

<sup>36</sup> This difficulty will be examined in more details later in relation to Sainsbury's *Russell* and Palmer's *Concept and Object*.

This suggests that a given object cannot have any single, independent, relation with any other separate object. He considered, for example, the sentence "Sugar is sweet". If the object and its quality are united here by the word 'is', we do not mean that sugar is *identical* with sweetness, because sugar has also other qualities like hardness, whiteness, and others which suggests that sugar cannot be identical with each and every quality that it has. Again, if sugar is described as a mere conjunction of its diverse qualities, that would be to ignore its unity. On the other hand, if it is described as 'something else' — a substance for example — that would make it impossible to construct an intelligible account of this 'something else'. If it is supposed that sugar *is* its various qualities together with some unifying relation between these qualities then, Bradley argued, how would the relation be able to unify the qualities. Surely these qualities cannot be predicated of one another because whiteness is not hard nor is sweetness white.

According to Bradley relations must link qualities because nothing can be wholly constructed by relations alone. Conversely, the terms in a relation do have qualities of their own which are distinct from the relation itself. To qualify is itself to distinguish, that is to relate. Thus the same quality both supports and is supported by a relation; there is no relation without quality and equally there can be no quality without relation. Now if qualities involve this dual reference then, Bradley argued, we must be able to associate the qualities A and B with a relation C. According to him, just as it is impossible to show how a lump of sugar can be both white and sweet, so equally there is no intelligible way in which A can be linked with B. We remain still in the position of being unable to clear ourselves from the old dilemma. Because

If we predicate what is different, we ascribe to the subject what it is *not*; and if we predicate what is *not* different, we say nothing at all.<sup>37</sup>

Sugar and sweetness are not predicated of each other, and now if they are linked by a further relation C, there will be the same problem in linking C with A and B as there was

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<sup>37</sup> cf. Bradley, F.H. *Appearance and Reality* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., First edition 1893, seventh impression 1920), p.20.

in linking A and B. If the relation is shown by ascribing another relation D, then there would have the same difficulty in linking D with C and also with A and B. Bradley concluded that we are committed to an infinite regress which brings us no solution to our original problem, but ends in incoherence. He wrote:

The attempt to resolve the thing into properties, each a real thing, taken somehow together with independent relations, has proved an obvious failure.<sup>38</sup>

Bradley believed that these arguments led us importantly to a conception of "The Absolute" incorporating an ultimate monistic reality which our own thought and language could only partially represent. Russell, however, violently attacked this form of idealism in 1898 (see ch.1, pp.13-14). According to him,

It was towards the end of 1898 that Moore and I rebelled against ... Hegel. Moore was most concerned with the rejection of idealism, while I was most interested in the rejection of monism. The two were, however, clearly connected. They were connected through the doctrine as to relations, which Bradley had distilled out of the philosophy of Hegel. I called this 'the doctrine of internal relations', and I called my view 'the doctrine of external relations'.<sup>39</sup>

Bradley's monistic theory, Russell thought, results from what he called the *axiom of internal relations* which he explained thus: "Every relation is grounded in the natures of the related terms". According to this axiom, if two objects have a certain relation then it implies that there is some complexity in each of the two objects, some *intrinsic* property or something in the natures of the two objects in virtue of which they are related. Russell, on the other hand, suggested that the fact that two objects are certainly related to one another cannot be inferred from any fact about one single object together with a fact about the other object only. He argued that their relations do not imply any kind of complexity or have any *intrinsic* property distinguishing them from the two objects which do not have the said relation. Russell claimed that the axiom of internal relations is equivalent to the assumption that every proposition has one subject and one predicate which suggests that

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. pp.21-22.

<sup>39</sup> op.cit. Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, p.54.

The one final and complete truth must consist of a proposition with one subject, namely the whole, and one predicate.<sup>40</sup>

Russell here was critical of Bradley's idea about the nature of Reality. He argued that Bradley was wrong to suppose that plurality involves relations which led him (Bradley) to say that the ultimate reality is One, the Absolute.

Russell, in his essay "The Monistic Theory of Truth" (MTT), raised the following three objections against Bradley's theory, and against the axiom.

(1) The first argument is about the difficulty of reducing all relations to intrinsic properties, to subject-predicate form of propositions. Bradley's theory, Russell suggested, claims that all relations are based on, or are reducible to intrinsic properties of objects (terms). The case of asymmetric relations brings out the problem in its clearest form. In our attempt to reduce relations like 'greater than' to adjectives of the related terms, we will find it impossible to distinguish the relation from its converse. It follows then that we fail to give any sense or direction to the relation. For example, if "... is the father of ..." is to be reducible to some predicative form, we seem to have to find a predicate which can be simply ascribed to both A and B, as subjects of the proposition. Now supposing we write "A and B are father related". Since the relation is asymmetric, the two possibilities of A's being the father of B or B's of A are incompatible. It seems that any attempt to reduce this relation to predicates belonging to these two terms will in this way simply leave out what Russell calls the 'direction' in which the relation goes. On the other hand, if we want to account for the relation of 'father of' between A and B by a further relationship between A, B and C, then that will produce an infinite regress, and leave us with irreducible relations. Hence, as Russell wrote:

... we cannot without an endless regress, refuse to admit that sooner or later we come to a relation not reducible to adjectives of the related terms. This argument applies especially to all *asymmetrical* relations, ...<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Russell, "The Monistic Theory of Truth" in op.cit. *Philosophical Essays*, p.142.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid. p.144.

(2) Russell constructed his second argument in terms of the question of difference or sameness between a term and its 'nature'. If they are different, then the Axiom of Internal Relations requires that those must be somehow related. Russell argued that such a relation of difference will involve the infinite regress of (1) above, and thus he rejected difference in favour of sameness. If these are the same, then Russell used the old Leibnizian point that this will make every subject-predicate proposition analytic. If the subject is the whole nature and the predicate is a part of what is meant by that whole, then the predicate will be already included in the subject. He argued that on Bradley's view the question "Is S P?" amounts to no more than the question: "Is the set  $(p_1, p_2, \dots p_n)$  one which includes  $p_n$ ?" This could be answered just by inspection of the set, i.e. of what we mean by "S". Clearly not all such questions can be answered in that simply analytic way. We want to distinguish between subject-predicate propositions which are analytically true and those which are not. So that result seems counter-intuitive and unacceptable.

For Russell, if subjects are *just* collections of predicates, then any collection will form a subject which again seems counter-intuitive. To rule out this arbitrariness he suggested a relation of coherence between such predicates, which actually belong to just one term and constitute its nature. One important point, for Russell, is to say that to appeal to such a relation of coherence between predicates is to invoke a reduction of predicates to relations, where Bradley's Axiom proposed exactly the *opposite* reduction of relations to predicates. Since Russell insisted that we have to invoke some special relationship between the predicates which somehow binds them together as predicates constituting the nature of the term he thought that this conflicted with the monistic theory of truth, which is supposed to go precisely in the opposite direction. We are explaining a subject-predicate proposition by invoking an irreducible relation, whereas in the monistic theory it is done the other way round. Russell explained:

We cannot attempt to introduce a relation of *coherence* between predicates, in virtue of which they may be called predicates of one subject; for this would base predication upon a relation, instead of reducing relations to

predications. Thus we get into equal difficulties whether we affirm or deny that a subject is other than its 'nature'.<sup>42</sup>

(3) According to Russell, the axiom is incoherent on its own ground. Its basic proposition "There is only one subject and its predicate" cannot be considered to be true, because it marks a distinction, rather than an identity, between the predicate and the subject. But the idealist assertion of absolute identity in reality is incompatible with such an identity in difference. As Russell put it:

The difficulty is that 'identity in difference' is impossible, if we adhere to strict monism. For identity in difference involves many partial truths, which combine ... into the one whole of truth. But the partial truths, in a strict monism, are not merely not quite true: they do not subsist at all. If there were such a proposition ... that would give plurality. In short, the whole conception of 'identity in difference' is incompatible with the axiom of internal relations; yet within this conception monism can give no access to the world, ... I conclude that the axiom is false, and that those parts of idealism which depend upon it are therefore groundless.<sup>43</sup>

Bradley had suggested that the ultimate subject-predicate monistic true proposition is supposed in some way to be the aggregate of the partial truths of all the non-ultimate subject-predicate propositions. Russell argued against this in two ways: first, the ultimate truth can't amount to anything since the partial truths are 'nothing' and an aggregate of nothings will also be a nothing. If, for Bradley, all the partial truths are strictly false and really incoherent, then of course adding an infinite number of incoherent truths is not going to give anything which is ultimately true and coherent. Second, if Bradley admits that the partial truths are something after all, and so *can* be aggregated into a final ultimate truth, then Russell claimed that they indicate not a monistic reality but a pluralistic one. What Russell was attacking is Bradley's basic idea that there is something fundamentally wrong about any subject-predicate proposition as a partial truth and as exhibiting a relation between subject and predicate. If that is so, then what becomes of the idea that the final summary truth about monistic reality suffers from exactly the same defects?

These arguments led Russell to abandon monism in favour of pluralism, just as

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid. p.145.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid. p.146.

James had done. We can see the influence of this in PLA quite directly, since Russell virtually began by saying that he admits a plurality of facts, and their constituents. He wrote:

The logic which I shall advocate is atomistic, as opposed to the monistic logic of the people who more or less follow Hegel. When I say that my logic is atomistic, I mean that I share the common-sense belief that there are many separate things; I do not regard the apparent multiplicity of the world as consisting merely in phases and unreal divisions of a single indivisible Reality.<sup>44</sup>

Russell's release from Idealism came to him as a great achievement which then led him to accept as objectively real a very wide range of items which would have been queried by a monist.

Russell's view tends in this way to link pluralism with realism. This contrasts with Bradley's Idealistic view that the only one ultimately real thing is the Absolute which links his Idealism with monism. Although this form of Idealism regards the nature of the Absolute as spiritual and places reality outside the human mind, it nevertheless generates the argument that appearances are merely contradictory and only a partial aspect of the reality lying behind them. As we have seen Russell thought it essential to argue against and reject such doctrines.

### ***2.3 Bradley's Monism and Meinong's Pluralism***

Russell's realistic or pluralist view, emphasizes the existence or role of things such as physical objects in the actual world and also of relations and facts. He also accepted at some points, with some hesitation, the existence of propositions. Once Russell had abandoned the monist's excessively limited view of reality he was, however, tempted by an excessively rich ontology, such as that of Meinong. He was well aware of Meinong's famous doctrine of an unbounded realm of objects which are non-existent, and wrote an essay

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<sup>44</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.178.

(*Mind*, 1904) which partially defends Meinong's theory in order to express his own view.

He wrote in that essay:

That every presentation and every belief must have an object other than itself and, except in certain cases where mental existents happen to be concerned, extra-mental; ... that the object of a thought, even when this object does not exist, has a Being which is in no way dependent upon its being an object of thought: all those are theses which, though generally rejected, can nevertheless be supported by arguments which deserve at least a refutation. ... In what follows, I shall have the double purpose of expounding his opinions and of advocating my own; the points of agreement are so numerous and important that the two can be easily combined.<sup>45</sup>

Meinong's idea that the realm of *objects* is far wider than the world of actual *existents* produces a paradoxical thesis in philosophy. He believed that the realm of possible objects is undoubtedly rich in comparison to the realm of objects. He maintained that our general interests in favour of the actual objects make us ignore the unreal and treat it as nothing. Apart from actual objects that exist, there are certain entities like facts, relations, numbers, etc. which help to build up the real world. Although it would be absurd to say that they exist, nevertheless these entities, Meinong held, do *subsist*. But apart from the idea of existent and subsistent objects, there is the possibility of a different kind of objects which do not exist in any one of these ways, but still do have some sort of existence which Meinong calls *AuBerssein* or *extraexistence*.

Meinong emphasised that we are capable of thinking about objects which do not exist. We can have the ideas of a golden mountain or a round square which are outside our experience and can even make true statements about them. According to him, although the 'golden mountain' or the 'round square' do not exist, it is undeniably a fact that the 'golden mountain' is both golden and mountainous, and the 'round square' is both round and square. To identify such definite properties and a definite nature *without* an object, he thought, is a ridiculous idea. Meinong admitted that his account is difficult to grasp, but he was inclined to the view that a fact however trivial or practically unimportant, does not make it less of a fact. He advocated three arguments in favour of his view of extraexistence (*AuBerssein*).

The first is that there are facts about non-existence. For Meinong, even if it is a

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<sup>45</sup>Russell, B., "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions(1)" in *Mind*, Vol.13 (1904), p.204.

fact that there is no existent golden mountain, this is as real as any other fact, even though about an object which has no existence. This suggests that it would be absurd to treat non-existence as a mere nothing.

The second is that facts about non-existence concern non-existent objects. According to Meinong, our reference to a non-existent object is grounded on our supposition, though not on a belief, that such an entity exists. He gave the instance of our reading a novel, in which we identify different characters and objects which we pretend to be existent and real in order to be able to think about them. Meinong, however, did not explain why we need to pretend their existence in order to have them before our thought even when they are supposed to be genuine but non-existent objects. He nevertheless did not accept the view that the fact that there is no golden mountain is literally *made up* out of a golden mountain, existence, and negativity. He believed that since the nature of the entities mentioned is different from the fact itself, it would be unjustifiable to say that the objects concerned in the fact have the same sort of existence as that of the fact. He argued that facts about non-existent objects do not imply that the objects concerned are *existent* even though they have *extraexistence*. Nor would it be consistent of him to accept any such implication.

The third argument holds that non-existent objects have a being independently of the mind. Meinong's positive doctrine is based on the postulation of a *pure object* which is beyond both being and non-being. The being or the non-being of the object makes no difference to *what* the object is. The pure object is said to have *extraexistence* which lies 'outside' being. The essence of the object consists in a number of determinations which are genuinely possessed by the object whether it exists or not. Just as the object 'elephant' is determined to be such an animal by virtue of having a trunk or a thick skin which does not affect the existence of the elephant, so the roundness of the 'round square' is determined by a character which is not affected by the object's non-existence. Meinong's view that (pure) objects are *beyond* being and non-being was not intended to exempt any objects from these features. He was careful to note that the law of excluded middle entails

that every object necessarily stands in a fact of existence or in a fact of non-existence; but this has nothing to do with the *object* as such or the object with all its characteristics or qualities.<sup>46</sup>

Russell was influenced by the referential theory of meaning of Meinong, and it reinforced his view that for any linguistic expression to have meaning, there must *be* something that it means, i.e. something to which it refers. In 1903, Russell expressed his realistic view in *PofM*:

... every term has being, i.e. *is* in some sense. A man, a moment, a number, a class, a relation, a chimaera, or anything else that can be mentioned, is sure to be a term; and to deny that such and such a thing is a term must always be false.<sup>47</sup>

In *PofM*, Russell used the word 'term' to express what a word indicates or stands for. He, therefore, suggested that every word expresses a term and that terms *are* in the world.<sup>48</sup> Russell's liberal view about terms suggests that any term can be the logical subject of a proposition and thus can be named. It then follows that reference can not only be ascribed to names for particulars but also to abstract entities of all sorts; to non-existent things like the present King of France, to mythological entities like Odysseus, etc.

In addition to this, Russell also held that separate objects are denoted by expressions like 'all men', 'every man', 'any man', 'a man' and 'some men'. For him, 'all men', 'every man', 'any man' are supposed to refer respectively to (a) the collective *membership* of the class of men, (b) the *members* of the same class of men, and (c) to the different *particular* members of that class. He argued that none of these expressions is identical with expressions for any particular man; nor are the objects referred by any of these expressions identical with the abstract object denoted by the word 'humanity'. For him,

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<sup>46</sup> All the three arguments are discussed in *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values* by Findlay, J.N. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, 2nd edition), pp.42-50.

<sup>47</sup> see, Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, vol.I (Cambridge University Press, 1903), p.43.

<sup>48</sup> I shall say more about the use of the word 'term' later in Pt.III.

... whether there are different ways of denoting or not, the objects denoted by *all men*, *every man*, etc. are certainly distinct. ... what is denoted (in these cases) is essentially not each separate man, but a kind of combination of all men. ... There is, then, a definite something, different in each of the five cases, which must, in a sense, be an object, but is characterized as a set of terms combined in a certain way, which something is denoted by *all men*, *every man*, *any man*, *a man* or *some man*; and it is with this very paradoxical object that propositions are concerned in which the corresponding concept is used as denoting.<sup>49</sup>

An objective 'isness' or 'being' seems to be too much for Russell's self-declared robust sense of reality, and certainly reality, so conceived, becomes intolerably overcrowded. He realized that terms like 'the', 'is', or 'on' which actually belong to the logical framework of propositions, can perform this function without being associated with certain extralinguistic referents. He found it difficult in *OD* to hold any more than 'all men', 'any man' refer to separate objects. He also ceased to believe in the doctrine of the existence/subsistence of logically impossible entities — which he had shared with Meinong — because it had the serious difficulty of falling into contradiction. In *PM* he illustrated the contradiction involved in the proposition "The round square does not exist".

... we cannot regard it as denying the existence of a certain object called 'the round square'. For if there were such an object, it would exist; we cannot first assume that there is a certain object, and then proceed to deny that there is such an object.<sup>50</sup>

Russell, later in *IMP*, commented that his earlier theory of meaning fails to show the feeling for reality which needs to be preserved even in the most abstract studies. He held

Logic ... must no more admit a unicorn than zoology can; ... The sense of reality is vital in logic, and whoever juggles with it by pretending that Hamlet has another kind of reality is doing a disservice to thought. A robust sense of reality is very necessary in framing a correct analysis of propositions about unicorns, golden mountains, round squares, and other such pseudo-objects.<sup>51</sup>

Russell's decisive move from the extreme realism of *PofM* emerged along with his development of logical constructionism. Russell's notion of a logical construction depends on the idea that certain basic meanings are given directly while others can be derived from

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<sup>49</sup>op.cit. Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, pp.61-2.

<sup>50</sup> cf. Morris Weitz, "The Unity of Russell's Philosophy" in op.cit. Schilpp (ed.) *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, p.93.

<sup>51</sup> see, Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1919, 2nd edition 1920), pp.169-70.

them in a purely logical way. One metaphysical aspect of logical constructionism was presented in Russell's set of lectures in PLA. In these lectures, Russell introduced his idea of a 'logically perfect' or 'ideal' language where he made explicit the principle that there must be a similarity between the structure of an ideal language and the structure of reality.

One important requirement for an ideal language is formulated in the 'Principle of Acquaintance'. Any linguistic expression can, according to this principle, be understood only if it either refers to something experienced, or is defined by other expressions which are so used. Russell believed that he had correctly formulated a necessary condition for any language to be meaningful, namely that its complex expressions rest ultimately on an analysis in terms of simple, unanalysable, expressions whose meanings themselves are to be provided by a direct contact with the objects they stand for. That general conclusion is admittedly drawn by Russell in terms of an ideal language which would match the standard of his own formal logic. He expressed his notion of an ideal language and its requirements in the following passage:

In a logically perfect language, there will be one word and no more for every simple object, and everything that is not simple will be expressed by a combination of words, by a combination derived, of course, from the words for the simple things that enter in, one word for each simple component.<sup>52</sup>

In this way, Russell offered formal logic as an ideal, or idealised, picture of the way in which natural language functions. It is important to recognize two limitations which Russell placed on this conception of an ideal language.<sup>53</sup> The first is that Russell admitted that his formal logic is ideal only in respect of its *syntax*, so that it would need to be supplemented by a vocabulary to function as a genuine medium of communication. Second, Russell may also have thought of his language as 'perfect' or 'ideal' in the way in which scientists sometimes speak of theories as 'idealisations' of some natural phenomenon: that is, as neat and simple formulations of the phenomenon abstracted from the complicating

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<sup>52</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.197.

<sup>53</sup>Russell did not actually use the term 'ideal', but instead 'perfect'. But we might treat what he called 'perfect' as an 'ideal'.

circumstances of its natural occurrence. If this account is stressed, then he is not simply comparing a 'perfect' logic with a flawed and imperfect natural language, but rather offering an abstracted and idealised model for natural language in order to throw light on its most general features.

#### **2.4 Meinong and Frege**

Russell's release from Bradleyan Idealism, we have seen, led him towards Meinong's wide variety of realism, although his Meinongian response did not persist. His reaction against Meinong's idea of logically impossible entities was also influenced by Frege's account of empty names, which eventually led him to reject both Meinong's and Frege's theories. Meinong's theory and Frege's problem have a common root in the question: How is it possible for us to refer to non-existent things? Russell, as we have suggested, was greatly influenced by Frege's logic, and Frege's *Begriffsschrift* contains essentially the features we associate with modern propositional and predicate logic. With the introduction of the new system of logic, semantic questions concerning the issue of 'meaning' were immediately thrown up by Frege's work, which he attempted to answer. Frege's theory has great merits, but it immediately faced one problem, namely that of empty names. His theory, which will be outlined in more detail later, clearly requires that names should have a reference as well as a sense if they are to have a full semantic function. A name which lacks reference will then raise a query about its semantic value. In his later theory, Frege admitted the existence of names which had a sense but no reference, in the particular context of fiction. For example, the name "Odysseus" certainly functions meaningfully in Homer's poem, and yet we would be inclined to say that there is no such person as Odysseus. The name was always the name of a fictional character. A similar problem arises in the quite different context of mathematics, where a descriptive expression, for example, appears to be meaningful even though there is nothing which

corresponds to it. An expression such as "The least rapidly converging series", for example, seems to express a sense, and yet, since there is no such series, also to lack a reference. The consequence is that without some adjustment in Frege's theory, sentences containing such empty names will themselves lack a reference, and so have no determinate truth-value.

Frege did not seem especially concerned with the fictional cases, since he took the view that in those contexts the question of truth, or of a truth value, seemed to have little significance. We do not expect literary fiction to express truth, and do not read it for the purpose of acquiring any truths which it describes, so that the lack of a truth value might not seem important. In mathematics the position is plainly very different, since in that context the question of a truth value for its sentences is of paramount importance. This was a serious problem for Frege because his semantic theory, with sense and reference, has a primary application in the area of formal languages, such as logic and mathematics. In this context Frege solved the problem in what appears to be a quite arbitrary way, that is, by stipulating that expressions which ostensibly lack reference are given a reference, namely to the null class. In that way compound expressions in which these simpler expressions occur can be given a truth value. It has often been thought that such a solution is unsatisfactory, and I shall show later that one of Evans's central criticisms of Frege's theory goes to the root of this difficulty. Evans believes that Frege was wrong simply to allow, within his theory, expressions which have sense but lack any reference. That criticism is connected also with Evans's disagreement with Dummett over the interpretation of the terms 'sense' and 'reference'.

Russell in *OD* and also later in *PLA* claimed that he could solve the puzzle that disturbed both Frege and Meinong. Russell's abandonment of his earlier position in *Po/M*, where he followed Meinong, brings him to a different analysis of propositions containing symbols for unreal and self-contradictory objects. Russell wished to preserve, however, a "robust sense of reality" which yet allowed us to talk about these 'pseudo-objects' significantly. His view about Meinong's theory is:

This theory regards any grammatically correct denoting phrase as standing for an *object*. ... It is admitted that such objects do not *subsist*, but nevertheless they are supposed to be objects. ... the chief objection is that such objects, admittedly, are apt to infringe the law of contradiction. ... But this is intolerable; ...<sup>54</sup>

Russell's view suggests that if it is admitted that the 'round square' is really both round and square, then the principles of logic will be subverted. Meinong, however, dismissed Russell's claim on the ground that logical principles apply only to things which are either actual or are possible. In that case if logical principles are applied to the realm of impossible objects, that would be an exception to logical principles which *cannot* be an important limitation of these principles. Russell's view also suggests that if the 'round square' is really round, then the idea that a 'round square' really exists would also be true. Thus the demonstration of the existence of an impossible object is possible by purely analytical necessity which would be another application of the ontological proof. Meinong's argument, as we have seen, suggests that a pure object is *independent* of any being or non-being and does not take *existence* as part of the nature of an object.

Indeed it is clear that Meinong and Russell did not mean the same thing by the word 'subsistence'. It is also quite clear that Meinong did not attribute subsistence to unicorns or chimeras. Although Russell conceded that Meinong did not think of fictions as 'subsistent' his claim that for Meinong 'they are supposed to be objects' conflicts to some degree with that concession. Meinong, as we have seen, considered the existence of such objects as *AuBerssein* or *extraexistence*, whereas the realm of 'subsistence' is confined to objects like facts and relations which make a contribution to the actual world. Russell's 'robust sense of reality' prevents him from seeing the real difference between 'subsistence' and 'extraexistence', so that he provided what might be regarded as a misinterpretation of Meinong's view.<sup>55</sup> Meinong's theory, even on a charitable interpretation, remains highly complex and obscure. However, one sympathetic commentator on Meinong has written:

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<sup>54</sup>Russell, "On Denoting" in op.cit. *Logic & Knowledge*, p.45.

<sup>55</sup>see, op.cit. Findlay, *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values*.

... his doctrine of *AuBerssein* has performed an act of incomparable merit; he has prevented the realistic, first-order interests dominant in science and extensional logic from misrepresenting the higher order structures of experience, which their purposes tend to exclude, and whose residual propositions they throw into queer, false relief.<sup>56</sup>

It is clear that Russell did not appreciate those supposed merits, and the issue that worried him most was the issue of accepting logically impossible entities.

Russell was, of course, influenced by many other philosophers, but those mentioned here have a clear and direct link with his principal claims about meaning. Traditional empiricists, such as Hume, encouraged an atomism which Russell applied to meaning. Russell, like Hume, never sharply separated a linguistic atomism from traditional epistemology, and in that latter context he adopted some of the dualist assumptions of Descartes. Bradley's philosophy provided a foil against which he reacted in two ways. First that reaction led Russell towards an ontological pluralism; second it led Russell to base his own metaphysics on a more adequate logic. Nevertheless, despite Russell's rejection of a Bradleyan Idealism certain of Bradley's ideas continued to haunt him. In particular, although Russell firmly rejected the Bradleyan assumption of a primacy for subject-predicate propositions, he remained puzzled about the nature of propositions themselves and about the 'unity' in which they combine their constituents.

Once Russell had rejected Bradley's limited ontology he was tempted by the extreme and rich ontology of Meinong and, though he eventually rejected Meinong's view, he inherited from him an underlying puzzle about reference to non-existent items. That puzzle reappeared in a more linguistic, and less ontological, form in Frege's semantics and Russell plainly had to come to terms with that issue. Indeed it is an essential part of Russell's semantic theory from OD to PLA that Frege's semantic theory of sense and reference, and with it Frege's account of empty reference, is rejected by Russell.

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid. p.339.

## PHILOSOPHY OF LOGICAL ATOMISM

### 3.1 Summary account of PLA

Russell explained the origins of LA at the beginning of his lecture series, when he said:

The kind of philosophy that I wish to advocate, which I call Logical Atomism, is one which has forced itself upon me in the course of thinking about the philosophy of mathematics, ... I shall try to set forth ... a certain kind of logical doctrine, and on the basis of this a certain kind of metaphysic.<sup>57</sup>

Russell here explicitly indicated that his intention was not to reject metaphysics but to construct a better grounded metaphysics than Bradley's on the firmer basis of his work in formal logic.

Urmson comments on Russell's theory,

The shortest account of logical atomism that can be given is that the world has the structure of Russell's mathematical logic.<sup>58</sup>

This comment indicates, correctly, that Russell wished to canvass an inference from the structure of logic to the structure of the world. He makes it plain that in this inference what he calls "Ockham's Razor" must play a part, but we will have to examine that central inference in more detail later.

What emerges in general from these remarks is that Russell believed that his programme of deriving mathematics from a small number of logical axioms can be used to guide philosophy towards more metaphysical conclusions. These conclusions, however, are not derived *within* that logical programme; rather they follow from certain meta-logical

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<sup>57</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.178.

<sup>58</sup>cf. Urmson, J.O., *Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956), p.6.

considerations about that whole programme. In a similar way the text of PLA, unlike *PofM* or *PM*, does not attempt to carry out any of the necessary steps towards the derivation of mathematics from logic, but instead comments on the nature of the system in which such a derivation might be carried out. PLA is an exercise in the philosophy of logic, not in formal logic itself. It is, as we have seen, also much more than that. It attempts to construct both an epistemology and an ontology which will be in line with those meta-logical reflections.

Russell named his doctrine Logical Atomism because he believed that the world consists of many single objects which are separated and independent of each other (see his view of pluralism in ch. 2 above). His atoms are not physical atoms but logical atoms which can be arrived at through logical analysis. The atoms which remain after complete logical analysis are names of particular sense-data, or demonstrative items like 'this' which is momentary, or again are predicates or relations like 'red'. This expresses Russell's 'atomist' principles which reveal a structure in which every complex element must be reduced to basic, simple elements which cannot be further analysed. In order to make knowledge indubitable he followed Descartes' method that everything could be stated in relation to entities given in immediate experience. He wrote:

... I think on the whole that the sort of method adopted by Descartes is right: that you should set to work to doubt things and retain only what you cannot doubt because of its clearness and distinctness, ...<sup>59</sup>

However, we shall see later that Russell's Cartesian view of the transparency of mind seems to create serious difficulties for his doctrine.

Russell's atomism, as we have seen, gives a priority of facts over things, and also a priority of propositions over facts. Unlike traditional metaphysicians, Russell believed that we must look for the nature of reality in *facts* rather than things, and that in analysing facts we must look to language, and hence to the analysis of propositions. According to him, the world contains both *facts* and *beliefs*. Facts belong to the objective

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<sup>59</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.181.

world and are not created by men's thoughts and beliefs. Because facts are part of the real world, an account of the facts must be given in order to make our knowledge complete. Facts can be classified into particular and general facts as well as positive and negative facts.

Facts themselves cannot be true or false; but the propositions expressing the facts have the dual property of truth and falsehood. A proposition is a complex symbol because it is composed of parts which are also symbols. Russell now attempted to show that the relation among different kinds of symbols and what is symbolized is different, and that this, if not properly recognised and formulated, can give rise to fallacies. It is, for example, obvious that propositions have a dual relation with a fact: the one being true to the fact, and the other being false to the fact. A name can just name a particular and thus has only one relation to what is named. But

... if it does not, it is not a name at all, it is a noise.<sup>60</sup>

According to Russell, a name ceases to be a name if it has not that particular relation of naming with a certain thing, whereas a proposition does not cease to be so if it is a false proposition. Thus the correct symbol for a person or a thing is a name, and for a fact is a sentence or a proposition.

By a symbol Russell meant something which 'means' something else. But the notion of 'meaning' itself is obscure and dubious. Russell conceded this when he said,

... as to what I mean by 'meaning' I am not prepared to tell you.<sup>61</sup>

The notion of meaning, for him, is more or less a psychological one and thus a pure logical theory of meaning and therefore symbolism is impossible to attain (see ch.2, note 34, p.33).

He said:

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid. p.187.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid. p.186.

... I am pretty clear that the theory of symbolism and the use of symbolism is not a thing that can be explained in pure logic without taking account of the various cognitive relations that you may have to things.<sup>62</sup>

Russell made it clear in these remarks that any account of meaning must have both logical and psychological aspects. It was, no doubt, partly for this reason that he felt obliged to include an epistemology in his Logical Atomism. We shall see that the forms of traditional epistemology, from Descartes and the empiricists, which he favoured, made his theory vulnerable to criticism.

Russell argued that a fact can never be named, since what makes a proposition true or false cannot be placed in the position of a logical subject. This Russellian view contrasts with Frege, because whereas for Frege a sentence refers to a truth-value, Russell did not identify any *one* object for the sentence or proposition to refer to. He (unlike Frege) did not give any answer to this question, because of his uncertainty about 'propositions'. He attempted to find out the nature of facts expressed by propositions which, he believed, will enable us to distinguish different forms of proposition that constitute the structure of language as a whole. He believed that such analysis would enable us to draw a sound inference to the nature of reality.

According to Russell, since facts contain relations between things and their properties, they could not be easily explained away like proper names. He attempted to explain whether the objects appearing as logically complex entities are really complex. For him, all kind of objects usually called by proper names such as 'Socrates', 'Piccadilly', can be regarded as complex. Thus when a proper name like 'Piccadilly' occurring in a proposition is properly analysed, it is found that the proposition does not contain any constituent named by the term 'Piccadilly'. Although any statement about Piccadilly could be significant, Piccadilly itself is nothing but a series of classes of sense-data. Russell believed that logic provides a structure of language, or reality, and can show that certain elements in our language do not represent genuine constituents of reality. His suggestion was that logic can analyse away the apparent constituents, so that in a fully analysed

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

proposition no reference to such an entity is explicitly made. He used the term 'logically proper name' in a technical way to signify those names which stand for the basic elements. An ordinary proper (OP) name like 'Piccadilly' is not a logically proper (LP) name of that basic kind at all, but rather an abbreviation for some set of descriptive terms.

For Russell, the components of a fact are the *meanings* of the symbols in the corresponding proposition. This expresses his theory of meaning in which the central idea is that words mean what they stand for. The characteristic feature of understanding a proposition by means of understanding its component words (i.e. if the grammar of language or the words of a proposition is known beforehand to someone) is not the same in the case of propositions whose component words are simple. Russell here gave the example of 'red' which stands for a particular shade of colour. The meaning of this word occurring in a proposition like 'This is red' cannot be grasped without being acquainted with red things. Thus the word 'red' is a simple symbol which could not be analysed further and is intelligible only in terms of direct acquaintance.

Russell thought that the meanings of words in ordinary language are full of ambiguities, since different people attach different meanings to words related to objects with which they have direct acquaintance. He thought that language becomes impossible and useless if different people meant the same thing by their words. As he wrote:

It would be absolutely fatal if people meant the same things by their words. It would make all intercourse impossible, and language the most hopeless and useless thing imaginable, because the meaning you attach to your words must depend on the nature of objects you are acquainted with, and since different people are acquainted with different objects, they would not be able to talk to each other unless they attached quite different meanings to their words.<sup>63</sup>

Russell thus produced a conception of a logically perfect language where each simple word in a proposition (excluding propositional connectives) would correspond with the components of corresponding fact. He argued that such a language will be completely private and would not even include even such proper names as 'Socrates' or 'Piccadilly' for these are complex expressions. Although such a perfect language will not be usable in

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid. p.195.

ordinary life, he thought it would be able to reveal the logical structure of the facts or reality that are asserted or denied. He was insistent on the fact that natural language *ought*, ideally, to function in the way such a logical (or formal) language does.

Russell's logically perfect language however, contains both atomic and molecular propositions. Propositions for whose understanding we need an immediate acquaintance with the objects named are called *atomic propositions*, and the corresponding facts are called atomic facts. Atomic relational propositions also contain the terms of the relation — and these 'terms' are what Russell defines as 'particulars'. The only way to talk about a particular is to use a proper name. Since general words are used in cases of description and atomic propositions only name particulars without describing them, it is obvious that only a proper name can stand for particulars. OP names are, for Russell, complex and should be treated as abbreviated descriptions. A particular, strictly, can be named and understood only when the speaker is acquainted with that particular. For Russell, a LP name stands for an actual object of sense identified by such words as 'This' or 'That'. He was cautious in canvassing this distinction between ordinary and logically proper names. He said, for example,

The importance of proper names, in the sense of which I am talking, is in the sense of logic, not of daily life.<sup>64</sup>

Russell next moves on to examine the nature of *molecular propositions*. By molecular propositions he meant propositions which are composed of atomic propositions and such words as 'or', 'if', 'and', 'then' and so forth. Propositions like "If it rains, I shall bring my umbrella" have the form of molecular propositions. Another type of molecular proposition expresses psychological attitudes. Whereas an atomic proposition contains a single verb, such molecular propositions contain two or more verbs. For example, "I believe Socrates is mortal" contain two verbs.

Every true atomic proposition corresponds to a single fact but again there are two propositions associated with every fact, the one true and the other false. Molecular

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid. p.201.

propositions involving conjunctive or disjunctive propositions like 'p or q' have two different facts corresponding to p and q which are relevant in determining the truth and falsehood of the proposition 'p or q'. It is not plausible to say that the truth and falsehood of 'p or q' depends upon a single objective fact which is disjunctive. It is more plausible to say that such truth or falsity depends on two facts, namely those associated separately with 'p' and with 'q'. Russell spoke of truth functional propositions where the truth-value of the molecular proposition is determined by the truth or falsehood of the constituent propositions.

Russell admitted that there are negative facts and correspondingly that there are negative propositions. He argued that negative propositions are somehow related to the negation of a positive proposition. He also did not believe that negative propositions mean a certain positive proposition which is incompatible with the negative one. Russell argued that if a negative proposition is explained in terms of incompatibility *holding between proposition* as opposed to facts, then this implies that propositions are something real. But Russell was not inclined to accept that propositions are real. This indicates a tension in his idea of a proposition, which will be discussed later. At the moment his inclination to accept negative facts and propositions as real is an attempt to explain false positive propositions, like "Socrates is alive" which, he thought, were false because of a certain fact in the actual world. He argued that unless we admit negative facts, we cannot talk at all about positive assertions which are false. He said,

A thing cannot be false except because of a fact, so that you find it extremely difficult to say what exactly happens when you make a positive assertion that is false, unless you are going to admit negative facts.<sup>66</sup>

Since, for Russell, propositional connectives generally had no meaning whatsoever, that is, stand for no objects, any negative proposition is equivalent in its meaning to a positive proposition. Although he can talk about negative facts which are in the real world, his view about negative propositions is handicapped by his own view of propositional connectives.

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid. p.214

Russell next attempted to show that propositions containing verbs like *belief* should be treated as a different 'form of fact' rather than just as a molecular proposition itself. We shall see in the next chapter how he dealt with this issue. Besides belief-sentences, Russell also talked about general propositions corresponding to general facts, that is, propositions with existential or universal quantifiers. General propositions, as we know, express general facts involving words such as 'all'. According to Russell, since general propositions do not talk about any definite object, what are actually asserted in these propositions are propositional functions. He defined a propositional function as an expression whose constituents are not fixed, for example 'x is a man' or 'x is a number'. Such expressions could become a proposition only when their constituents are determined. What also makes propositions different from propositional functions is that whereas propositions can only be either true or false, propositional functions have three possibilities of being either always true, or sometimes true, or never true. In fact, the truth-value of *all* members of a class associated with a propositional function is what is asserted in general propositions, and propositional functions are, therefore, involved in the study of general propositions. However, he found problems in analysing the truth-value of general propositions on the assumption that they are simply truth-functions of simple unquantified propositions.

Russell in PLA wanted to find out the nature of the facts which reality consists of and how they are constituted and interrelated. In this context he made a distinction between names and definite descriptions. A name like 'Scott' is a simple symbol which has no other parts that are symbols and designates only a definite particular. Definite descriptions like 'the author of *Waverley*' are what he calls incomplete symbols which are complex and unlike names, contain parts that *are* symbols. The meaning of these phrases is not something arbitrary but is determined by the meaning of their constituent parts, whereas the meaning of a name can be known directly in terms of what the name stands for. Russell argued that the assumption that definite descriptions are names must be abandoned and this entails that they have no meaning independently on their own. But does it mean that propositions containing them are meaningless? Russell's answer to this

is negative and here we enter into the heart of his theory of descriptions.

According to Russell, the traditional logicians had been mistaken in construing propositions of the form "The so and so in B" as subject-predicate propositions. A proposition like "The present King of France is bald" may have the grammatical appearance of a subject-predicate proposition, such as "This man is bald", but Russell claimed that this appearance is seriously misleading. For him, a genuine subject-predicate proposition with a simple, atomic name as its subject term cannot be meaningful if the subject term is empty. He was reluctant to believe that the proposition "The present King of France is bald" has no meaning when the subject term is empty and drew the conclusion that in this case the subject term is not a genuine proper name. Consequently, he produced an analysis of this proposition which is designed to reveal a different logical structure. In that analysis the proposition appears as a conjunction of a number of quantified expressions. Informally, the proposition "The present King of France is bald" should be read as:

- (1) at least one person is the present King of France
- (2) at most one person is the present King of France
- (3) that person has the property baldness.

Thus the proposition is presented as a conjunction of three interlocking quantified expressions, whose formal representation is:

$$(\exists x) (Kx \ \& \ Bx \ \& \ (y) (Ky \longrightarrow x=y))$$

In such an analysis the emptiness of the subject term simply results in the proposition's being false, since the existential clause (1) will be false. In that case then, the proposition is not meaningless and indeed a definite truth value, falsity, can clearly be ascribed to it.

Russell's analysis of descriptive phrases in terms of quantifiers helps him to solve the problem about our ability to refer to queer entities like a unicorn (see about non-existent items in sec.2.3 and 2.4). His analysis of definite descriptions which are empty provides him with a partial solution to the problem of referring to non-existent items. It shows how this type of expression can be used meaningfully even if it is empty. Since he

believed that complex expressions or definite descriptions are constructed out of atomic ones and the constituents of atomic propositions are related to our sense-experience, he concluded that atomic names are ultimately the names of simple sense data which are essentially private. Now Russell faced the same objection raised against traditional empiricism in explaining how a public, common and shared language can be constructed out of names for private sense-data.

### **3.2 Central view of PLA and possible queries**

Russell in PLA proposed certain criteria of meaning from which the characteristic features of his doctrine are derived. These are:

- (1) There is a class of propositions which are atomic in the sense that they are not constituted out of other propositions.
- (2) The sentences that express atomic propositions are composed of proper names and predicates or relations.
- (3) The meaning of a proper name is to be identified with the object it refers to. A proper name is meaningless if it fails to refer to anything.
- (4) The only things that can be strictly named are one's own sense-data which, however, can be known only by acquaintance.
- (5) Things which cannot be known only by acquaintance can nevertheless be known by description. Descriptions eventually relate the thing in question to things with which one is acquainted.

The central points of his theory are:

- (1) Atomic propositions consist of *names*.
- (2) Proper names mean (stand for) particulars.
- (3) Atomic propositions, however, have subjects and predicates (relations and related terms).

(4) We cannot say that names of properties, that is predicates, *name particulars*, and in *PP* Russell seems to hold the view that they name *universals*, not particulars. This seems to be a quite worrying aspect of Russell's LA view, but in this section I am not going to pursue it further and leave it for later discussion.

There is one important restriction regarding the form of basic, atomic sentences. An atomic proposition will be one containing one or more than one name and a single predicate or relational term which then asserts that the object(s) named has (have) the said property, for example, "This is red"; or that the object(s) named has (have) that certain indicated relation, for example, "This is before that". If a proposition has these three features: (1) has the given form; (2) contains only expressions that cannot be analyzed further into any simpler expressions; and (3) involves expressions which get their meaning through direct relation to immediate sense-data, then such a proposition is considered by Russell as atomic. Russell believed that his theory of LA would enable us to state all knowledge in terms of atomic propositions and their truth-functional compounds. In those atomic propositions the names correlate one-one with genuine objects in reality. That one-one correlation depicts Russell's version of a 'picture' theory of meaning which is more associated with Wittgenstein's version of logical atomism.

Both Russell and Wittgenstein, in this period, think that in the end an atomic proposition will consist of atomic names and that these can have meaning only if they are associated with some object. What Russell called LP names are accounted for by the two ideas that he canvassed. One of these is that the meaning of every basic expression in language can be accounted for in terms of its standing for some object. The other is the principle of acquaintance according to which our understanding of basic expressions is determined by our acquaintance with the object which those expressions mean. Both ideas are necessary to Russell's atomic account of meaning, though the former is a purely semantic account and the latter adds an epistemic feature to it. The two ideas nevertheless complement each other.

The first is associated with general account of the way in which complex

propositions have their meanings determined by their simpler constituents. It does this, for example, by claiming that all complex propositions are truth-functional compounds of atomic propositions, and all atomic propositions gain their meaning from a direct relation between their names and corresponding objects. The second explains how in principle we can come to understand the atomic propositions and their constituent names through direct epistemic acquaintance with the object they mean. At various times Russell offered natural language expressions which either were, or were close to, the LP names in his theory. In *PLA*, he identified the demonstrative words 'This' and 'That' as the closest that natural language gets to the production of LP names. Later, in *IMT*, he also explicitly included in the category words for simple sensory qualities, such as 'red' and 'hot'.

Russell reserved a different treatment for what we would call OP names such as 'Piccadilly' or 'Socrates'. These are rather abbreviated descriptions which need an analysis to relate them to the ultimately simple names. This indicates a more general contrast that Russell drew between a LP name and any descriptive expression.

Russell's principle of acquaintance is clearly influenced by his underlying empiricism in epistemology. The suggestion is that a complex phrase must be given a meaning in terms of some analysis in which ultimately only LP names occur. The objects which those LP names stand for give a meaning to the complex expression, even though the complex expression does not name anything on its own. The principle of acquaintance however, directs such an analysis towards an account of the ultimate sense-experiences, the sense-data, which give meaning to the LP names. Russell thus indicated that an object like Piccadilly is really a construction twice removed from the basic reality of the sense-data themselves. His stress on sense-data comes out also in his distinction between 'Knowledge by acquaintance' and 'Knowledge by description' in *PP*. This idea of sense-data is also characteristic of a traditional empiricist analysis in Hume for example, as we have seen.

Russell's treatment of LA has these three aspects:

(a) Logical analysis: An analysis of propositions provides a model in which every complex

proposition can be analysed down to the level of basic, atomic propositions. An atomic proposition consists of a particular (object) possessing a certain quality. Such a particular and quality are basic constituents that cannot be analysed further.

(b) Metaphysical implications of that logic: Logical analysis yields an apparatus which can reveal the structure of knowledge, or of reality. This analysis requires complex propositions to be truth-functional connectives of atomic propositions where the meaning of atomic names can be accounted for in terms of their standing for genuine objects in reality. Russell argued that his logic is adequate enough to express our claims about reality. He thought that consequently the world contains the same structure as that of logic and that certain conclusions can be drawn about the nature of reality from his logical analysis.

(c) The basic aspects of logic can be fitted onto both language and consciousness. In this way Russell's logical analysis, and his metaphysical aims, can be in principle related both to our natural language, and to the way our cognitive abilities enable us to learn and use language. It is for these reasons that his logic and metaphysics come to be supplemented with an epistemology and even a psychological account of consciousness.

### 3.3 Conclusion

Russell's doctrine of logical atomism obviously raises some questions, and I note some of these. For example, his idea of identifying demonstratives as atomic names can be shown to be derived from certain features of predicate logic. In predicate logic, name variables are distinguished from predicate variables (the *x*'s from the *F*'s) and Russell's logically perfect language can be considered as an extension of this sharp distinction. A logically proper name must be one like the *x*'s and the *y*'s in logic which does not have any *descriptive* role. Even demonstrative terms in natural language have *some* minimal descriptive features. 'This', for example, differs from 'That' in referring to objects nearer to the speaker in time or space. Critics hold that Russell's logical atomism is too strictly

based on logic and that this provides him with a model that hardly fits natural language. Russell himself recognised this to some extent, as we have seen (see pp. 54-55) in the provisos he made about the 'perfect' language.

The theory of logical atomism claims that all complex propositions can be analysed into truth-functional compounds of atomic propositions. Difficulties arise when certain types of complex propositions cannot be so analysed. Two problems arise especially in cases of belief sentences and general propositions. As we shall see later Russell faced real problems in providing an analysis of these two types of propositions.

Logical atomism trades heavily on traditional empiricism. As we have seen before, Russell's commitment to such an empiricism appears in an even more committed way when he came to identify the basic atoms as sense-data, that is as the simple ideas or impressions that the empiricists traditionally invoked as the foundation of our experience.

LP names are ultimately the names of fleeting fragments of individual's sense-data and are, in his terminology, "essentially private" (see footnote 18 in pp.19-20). The traditional empiricists had well known difficulties in explaining how our common, public knowledge could be constructed on such a private basis; and notoriously Russell's parallel account faces exactly the same problem. Russell here met the standard problem of traditional empiricism which leads to scepticism about our ordinary beliefs.

Russell's view leads to a worse situation when scepticism is generated about *meaning*, which entails that a Russellian perfect language would be useless for communication (see Pt.3, ch.6, p.136). It might be thought that such a consequence even casts a doubt on Russell's attempt to give an account of meaning. Russell accepted the consequences of such a language that it is private to only one speaker, but he also claimed that his language is logically perfect only as far as its *syntax* goes. Wittgenstein later in his *PI* was critical of the very notion of a private language and held that such a language, as required by Russell, is completely incoherent. However Russell can be defended here to some extent. He aimed to eliminate the vagueness, ambiguity and redundancy of language in his systematic theory of meaning and then to account for language in terms of such a

systematic theory. He wanted to account for natural language by using a similar model drawn from his own logically perfect language. In this way his model can be regarded not as another viable language, but rather as an idealised and abstract theory of language.

The central part of Russell's philosophy of logic is concerned with the conception of what there is, or what there can rationally be thought to be. We have seen how modern readers may find it perplexing that his ontology is similar to traditional speculative metaphysics which is contrary to Russell's own hostile attitude to speculative metaphysics of any kind after his revolt against Bradleyan metaphysics. Despite his rejection of speculative metaphysics, we shall see how his method of analysis provides definitions which reduce unnecessary ontological commitments.

Following the explanation of Russell's logical atomism, I shall be discussing some items more specifically later an outline of which I give here. Russell's theory is open to a number of difficulties. I want now to identify five related problems which will be considered in later sections. These have to do with his emphasis on naming, his hesitant attitude to propositions, the epistemic links with semantics in his *Principle of Acquaintance*, and his analysis of definite descriptions.

Russell constructed a theory of meaning which is more like Frege's early theory than the latter's account of sense and reference. Russell rejected Frege's appeal to sense and placed all the emphasis on a notion of referring or naming. This attitude raises the question whether Russell was justified in rejecting the notion of sense, and his arguments in favour of this in OD will be examined in detail later. Russell's view also brings difficulties in accounting for two of the central semantic units in language. Any semantic theory which places all the weight on naming will be expected to provide an adequate account of linguistic expressions which are themselves names. For this reason any such theory will expect to have difficulties in accounting for those expressions which we do not ordinarily think of as names at all. In Russell's case this difficulty emerges clearly in his attempt to discriminate between names and *predicates*, and also in his attempt to account for the meaning and nature of whole *propositions*.

It was suggested earlier that Russell's LP names are bound to be hard to identify in natural language because they are supposed, like the name variables in predicate logic, to contain no descriptive content at all. This difficulty could be mitigated, as was suggested above, by treating the category of LP names as an idealised model with no direct application to natural language. The other side of the coin is the difficulty of fitting descriptive predicates into the framework of a naming semantics. Russell certainly held that properties and relations cannot be reduced to particulars, but this still leaves a question about the way in which predicates exercise their naming function. One way of dealing with this is to regard predicates as the names of universals, and in *PP* Russell had advocated such a view. But such a Platonic solution is open to two problems. First a question might be raised about the nature and existence of universals; and such a question will be especially difficult for an empiricist like Russell. Second even if we accept that predicates name universals a question can also be raised about the way in which a proposition can be simply composed of names. We do not normally think of propositions as just lists or combinations of names, but to regard predicates as names encourages such a view. Russell recognised this difficulty and sought to deal with it under the title of the 'unity of the proposition'. His thought was that to be a genuine proposition, and not just a list of names, was to have some special unity. But his difficulty was to explain what that unity consisted in, on the assumption that all the constituents of the proposition were simply names. The difficulty was compounded for Russell by his anxieties about the bare existence of propositions and about the kind of meaning which could be attached to them, which were noted above (see p.64).

It has also been pointed out that Russell's semantic theory was effectively inseparable from his epistemological, and metaphysical, convictions. In particular as we have seen, his Principle of Acquaintance might be construed either in a purely semantic or in an epistemological way, though there is no doubt that Russell himself certainly insisted on the latter. Nevertheless, later commentators, such as Sainsbury, have thought that Russell handicapped himself unnecessarily by mixing together these different aspects

in one principle. Such commentators have therefore attempted to separate the two ingredients and to find some formulation for the Principle of Acquaintance which was not vulnerable to the epistemological criticisms. For Russell is open not only to the objection that he confused semantic and epistemic aspects in the one principle, but also to the criticism that his epistemology committed the errors of a Cartesian dualism with its emphasis on a transparent view of the mind. Something must be said later of these efforts to purify Russell's theory of these unwelcome features.

Even the semantic details of Russell's theory have been criticised. Although his analysis of definite descriptions has been regarded as a paradigm of philosophical analysis, nevertheless questions have been raised about it by later commentators. One such set of questions has focussed on the distinction Russell drew between such descriptions and names. One of the motives behind Russell's theory of descriptions arose precisely from his belief that such expressions could not be treated as genuine names, where a genuine name is one which requires the existence of a bearer of the name in order to give the expression a meaning. Some later commentators have raised the question whether this division, between expressions which require some object for which they stand and others which do not have such a requirement, is quite so sharp as Russell implied. It has been suggested that some descriptions also have the feature of being 'entity-invoking', and so function as referring expressions or as names.

A more radical objection to the theory of descriptions was raised by Strawson in his paper "On Referring"<sup>66</sup>, and has been followed by a long list of further commentators such as Donnellan, Kripke, McCulloch and Millican. Some of these have followed Strawson in the view that Russell's theory is fundamentally flawed, but others have attempted to defend Russell against such a charge. It seems fair to say that despite the interest which such an issue has aroused, and continues to arouse, it is by no means yet clearly settled. One reason for this, which will be noted later, is that the issue raises one of the largest

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<sup>66</sup>Strawson, "On Referring" (1960), Reprinted in Klemke (ed.) *Essays on Bertrand Russell* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago, and London), 1970.

problems in the field of linguistics, namely where the line is to be drawn between strictly semantic and pragmatic aspects of language, or of language use. No doubt this issue cannot be settled here, but at least it needs to be noted. Russell's own theory of descriptions is often defended as a theory of the basic semantic content of definite descriptive phrases. From this perspective many of the criticisms can be viewed as additional aspects of the pragmatic use of such phrases, but irrelevant to the basic semantic content. Something will be said of this aspect of the debate.

**PART TWO**  
**FREGE AND RUSSELL**

## FREGE'S ACCOUNT OF SEMANTICS

### 4.1 *Sinn and Bedeutung*

It was noted earlier that Russell had been influenced by Frege's work in logic and in semantics. During the period before the first world war and up to PLA Russell had to come to terms with Frege's account of semantics, and in particular the latter's distinction between 'sense' (Sinn) and 'reference' (Bedeutung).<sup>1</sup> In this part I want to give an outline of Frege's account of semantics and to assess the force of Russell's critical arguments against Frege's distinction between sense and reference. It is natural to see Russell's own views in PLA as decisively influenced by that rejection of Frege's complex terminology. Beyond that I note that some recent writers have taken opposed views about the success of Russell's critique of Frege. Searle<sup>2</sup> strongly defends Frege against Russell, but Blackburn and Code<sup>3</sup> believe that Russell has a substantial point to make. Finally I shall consider a difficulty in comparing Frege with Russell, namely that Frege's own semantic theory is open to divergent interpretations.

It is not my intention here to give a detailed, or historical, survey of Frege's thought. I shall indicate only the two phases of Frege's semantics which are commonly distinguished.<sup>4</sup> In the first phase Frege placed an exclusive emphasis on the notion of 'Bedeutung'. In the second phase, and following his classic paper "Über Sinn und

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<sup>1</sup>There are some difficulties in translating the term 'Bedeutung' into English, but I shall use the term 'reference' for this purpose. When Frege's writings were initially translated into English by Geach and Black, that was the preferred translation. But more recently 'Bedeutung' has been translated rather than as 'meaning' in order to bring out some of the distinctive aspects of this notion, some of which I shall be considering later in the chapter.

<sup>2</sup>Searle, J., "Russell's Objection to Frege's Theory of Sense And Reference" in *Analysis* (Vol.18, 1957-58), pp.137-143.

<sup>3</sup>Blackburn, S. and Code, A., "The Power of Russell's Criticism of Frege: 'On Denoting' pp.48-50" in *Analysis*, (Vol.38, 1978), pp.65-77.

<sup>4</sup>see, Evans, G., *The Varieties of Reference*, (Clarendon Press.Oxford,1982), Ch.I "Frege", pp.7-38.

Bedeutung", the early theory is complicated by the addition of the new notion of 'Sinn'.<sup>5</sup>

For Evans, however, Frege's account of semantics is not radically changed by his introduction of the notion of Sinn. Indeed Frege in addition to his notion of Bedeutung needed something more which suggests that

In later works, Frege was grafting on to this enduring semantic theory his new conception of sense.<sup>6</sup>

It is not difficult to outline a central motivation for the early theory. Frege gave an account of the significance of names, predicates, and whole sentences in which the referents of each expression make a contribution to the meaning of the larger expressions of which they form a part. In his early theory of meaning Frege employed only the notion of Bedeutung in order to give an account of the way in which complex expressions have their references determined by the references of their simpler constituents. For complex descriptive expressions, for example, the reference of the whole expression was treated as a function of the references of its constituent expressions. In the case of whole sentences the references of the constituents were held to determine the truth-value of the sentences themselves, so that for Frege the truth-values, the *true* and the *false*, simply constitute the references of sentences. In this way Frege thought that the semantics of expressions in any language could be accounted for in terms of this principle of compositionality. Frege's idea shows that sentences get their reference from the reference of their constituent words; and accordingly, complex molecular expressions get their reference, that is their truth-value, from the related reference (truth-value) of the constituent expressions. Thus, for example, "Cheese contains fat", "Sugar contains energy" are each assigned a value, either true or false. And when they are conjoined by the conjunction 'and' to make a complex proposition like "Cheese contains fat and Sugar contains energy" the complex proposition, too, will be assigned the truth-value, true if the conjoined propositions are both true, and otherwise

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<sup>5</sup>I shall be using Frege's term 'Bedeutung' and 'Sinn' only in talking about Frege's account. However, outside Frege's account I shall be using the term 'reference' and 'sense' to replace those two Fregean terms respectively.

<sup>6</sup>op.cit. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, p.8.

will be assigned the truth-value falsity. Other logical words like 'if', 'or', 'not' can be treated in an analogous way. For Frege the functional analysis of propositional connectives like 'and', for example, can be demonstrated by the common pattern of "... and ---". This pattern Frege named a functor which represents a *function* from certain truth-values to some other truth-values. The underlying feature is:

In each case we have a basic stock or domain of objects, signified by certain expressions (simple or complex), and a selection of functions, which are signified by functors (discernible patterns in the complex expressions), and which take objects of the domain as arguments, and yield values.<sup>7</sup>

Frege's 'principle of compositionality' however, can be further illustrated, as Frege showed, by using a formal analogue from mathematics.

We can consider, for example, numerical signs in mathematics, such as '1', '2', '3', ... , and signs for elementary mathematical operations like '+', '-', 'x', '÷'. We consider that these two kinds of signs can be combined to help making complex mathematical expressions, such as '4+5', '13-9', '30x4' etc. For Frege, however, numbers are objects, though abstract non-material, and complex expressions like '4+5' also represent numbers, for example, the number nine. Frege next moved on to give a semantic account of operator symbols '+', '-', etc. by exhibiting them in a pattern which can be written as

" ... + --- "

with the gaps '...' and '---' marking the gaps where numerals can be inserted to help form a complex mathematical expression. These can be called functions and as we have seen a function takes *arguments* and results in *values*. This function can be described as a mechanism which takes an *input* and delivers an *output*, where the relation between each input and corresponding output is that the latter is just the result of applying the operation to the former. Frege characterized arguments by calling them 'unsaturated' or 'incomplete' where the idea is that a value results once a function is 'complete' or 'saturated'. For him expressions which designate functions, e.g. predicates like "... is red" are 'unsaturated' because they need to be completed by an argument in order to provide

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<sup>7</sup>see, McCulloch, G., *The Game of the Name* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989), p.11.

a definite truth value. By contrast proper names are 'saturated'.

Frege's theory of *functions* gives a precise sense to the idea that concepts are 'functions', and that meaning in general, is a functional phenomenon. Frege, however, extended this model to similar expressions in natural language. The expression 'The father of x', for example, can also be regarded as a functional mechanism which delivers an output, some person, once we apply an appropriate person as its input. Thus, for example, if we input Mark Thatcher in place of 'x', we get the output Dennis Thatcher as his father. Or it can be expressed in another way by saying that if we input an expression standing for Mark Thatcher, we get an expression standing for Dennis Thatcher.

Frege also intended the mechanism to cover whole propositions. Just as sub-sentential expressions of the form 'The father of x' can be regarded as an input-output mechanism, so also whole propositions can be seen in this way. Thus when we replace the variable appropriately in such an expression as "x is red" we get a whole proposition where the output is the truth-value. Frege's 'functional' treatment of linguistic expressions is so far an extensional account which is designed to elucidate their meaning.

In this theory no particular distinction is drawn between the roles of strict names e.g. "Aristotle", or descriptive phrases e.g. "The philosopher who wrote *The Categories*", in determining the significance, or semantic value of a whole sentence in which they figure. Frege treated all such expressions as what he calls "proper names" ("Eigennahmen"), that is what would nowadays be called a 'singular referring expression'. Although complex descriptions owe their semantic value to their constituents, nevertheless the contribution that the whole complex makes to the semantic value of the sentence in which they occur is the same as that of ordinary names. Even in his later theory of 'Sense and Reference' Frege did not draw any such distinction, and called both kinds of expression "proper names" ("Eigennahmen").

Frege's earlier theory of *Bedeutung* has three fundamental features:

(1) As applied to proper names (singular terms), *Bedeutung* is used for the bearer of the name, i.e. for the object which we use the name to talk about. For Frege,

Places, infants, sentences of time, logically considered, are objects; hence the linguistic designation of a definite place, a definite instant, a stretch of time, is to be regarded as a proper name.<sup>8</sup>

It is thus plain that he not only wished to explain proper names in terms of their relation to objects, he also treated as proper names expressions designating abstract objects, such as directions, shapes and numbers. For him, numbers are not merely concepts or ideas in people's minds, they are to be regarded as real though non-material objects. For instance, the numerals '1' and '2' represent one and two respectively in the domain of numbers, which are abstract objects. Russell, in PLA, criticised a Fregean view of numbers as objects:

... all numbers are what I call logical fictions. ... therefore, you do not have, as part of the ultimate constituents, these queer entities that you are inclined to call numbers.<sup>9</sup>

Frege's commitment to abstract objects is regarded as some sort of realism, or even as platonism. And this is true of sense as well in his later theory, and we shall see later how Frege insisted on the objectivity of Sinn. Such a view is vulnerable to the objection that one cannot understand the realistic conceptions of these items.

(2) That the Bedeutung of a sentence is its truth value, i.e. the semantic value of a sentence consists simply in its being true or being false. Frege recognised that the objects which were designated by different types of expressions would also be of different types, ranging from physical objects, to abstract objects, and to truth values for whole propositions. Frege, however, was adamant that if some word or expression in a sentence is replaced by another having the same Bedeutung the Bedeutung or the truth-value of the whole sentence will remain unchanged.

(3) If one of the constituents of a sentence lacks Bedeutung, then it is lacking throughout the whole sentence, which is devoid of truth-value. We have seen before how Frege faced this problem, but nevertheless attempted to fill the gap by ascribing the

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<sup>8</sup>cf. Frege, G., "On sense and meaning" in Geach and Black (ed.) *Translation from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, First published 1952, 3rd edition 1980, Reprinted 1985, 1988), p.71.

<sup>9</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.270.

Bedeutung of such expressions to the null class. Frege acknowledged this defect of natural language, but regarded it as an unsatisfactory state of affairs. He was convinced that the defect arose only because of the muddle of natural language in which no coherent semantics is possible to determine the truth conditions of every sentence in the language. This view of Frege differs from Strawson who criticised Russell's theory of descriptions. As Dummett writes:

Strawson agreed with Frege that sentences containing a name without a reference might still be meaningful (i.e. express a sense), but that they could not be used to make a statement, true or false: but unlike Frege, he saw nothing at all amiss with this state of affairs.<sup>10</sup>

As is well known now, in his classic paper of "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" (1892) (see pp.69-70), Frege amended his early theory to accommodate the concept of Sinn, which he considered as another necessary ingredient in the account of meaning. What motivates Frege to invoke the notion of sense is the informative claim involved in the notion of identity sentences like 'a=b'. On one side, it expresses a relation; and yet if a claim of identity is true, the relation holds for just one object. After some discussion, he concluded that the identity claim asserts an identity of reference, but presents the object referred to in different modes. The suggestion is that informative identity statements rely on a difference in the mode of presentation, and that new information can be obtained even if the two names 'a' and 'b' stand for one and the same object. The mode of presentation of any such object was then identified by Frege as the Sinn of the relevant expression. He gave as an illustration that the planet 'Venus' can be referred to by two different names, viz. 'the morning star', and 'the evening star'.

The same issue of identity, or equality, was raised by Frege in Section 8 of his *Begriffsschrift* (1879), but in this earlier work his resolution of the issue is less clear and does not introduce any new notion of sense to add to his apparatus of reference. In that section he said:

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<sup>10</sup>cf. Dummett, *Frege* (Duckworth, London, 1973), p.167.

Elsewhere signs are mere proxies for their content, and thus any phrase they occur in just expresses a relation between their various contents.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear in this extract that the content or meaning of a name is provided by the object for which the name stands proxy. The only alternative to this which Frege considered in this early account is that the names might stand for themselves. He wrote:

... the same symbol stands now for their content, now for themselves.<sup>12</sup>

So it appears at this stage that he thought the special context of identity statements meant that the claims referred to the names themselves, rather than to their content and this is an option he explicitly rejected in the later paper. But his discussion of the problem at this stage concealed some of the difficulties, because he chose as an illustration a geometrical case in which two identified points on the circumference of a circle coincide, and become identical, only in one special case. So, although he was closer to his later formulation of the notion of sense when he said of the illustration:

... the same content can fully be determined in different ways.<sup>13</sup>

he focused principally on the fact that since the points do not always coincide, the identity claim whether true or false, will be 'synthetic'. He acknowledged here that some such identity statements can be informative, but he did not pursue the matter, and specifically did not recognise any need for a change in his technical semantic apparatus. Consequently he restricted himself to the notion of *Bedeutung* and did not yet invoke the notion of *Sinn*.

In his later paper, when he had introduced explicitly the notion of *Sinn*, he insisted that every significant expression of language has both a sense and a reference; and that the sense as well as reference of complex expressions is a function respectively of the senses and references of their constituents. According to him,

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<sup>11</sup>The section is translated in op.cit. Geach and Black (ed.) *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, pp.10-12.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p.11.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

A proper name (word, sign, sign combination, expression) *expresses* its sense, *means* or *designates* its meaning [Bedeutung]. By employing a sign we express its sense and designate its meaning.<sup>14</sup>

We have noted earlier that, for Frege, there will be no effect on the reference or the truth-value of a proposition if one of its words is replaced by another with the same reference. However the *thought* that is expressed may alter, so that "The evening star is a body illuminated by the sun" expresses a different thought from "The morning star is a body illuminated by the sun". If the morning star is the same body as the evening star then the two propositions cannot have different truth-values. Frege therefore retained his view that the reference of a proposition is a truth value, but believed that the thoughts expressed in it correspond not to the *reference* but to the *sense* of the expressions. He underlined this point by emphasising the motive, which leads us to move from the sense of proposition to its reference, the truth-value. He said,

It is the striving for the truth that drives us always to advance from the sense to the thing meant (the reference) [Bedeutung].<sup>15</sup>

Here a nominal ambiguity in Frege's account of reference (Bedeutung) arises, because that term might itself be construed in at least three different ways. 'Reference' might be used to indicate either (a) the relation between an expression and what it designates, for example, between a sentence and a truth-value, or (b) the act of referring to some item, or (c) the actual object which is referred to, that is, what might be called the referent.<sup>16</sup>

For Frege the realm of reference is reality, for example the external world. He regarded the ontological status of sense and of other objects as different from that of either physical or mental particulars. He used the notion of a thought in conformity with his earlier separation of psychology and logic or semantics, so that a thought is an objectively identifiable item, and not just something purely subjective like an idea. For him, one's act

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<sup>14</sup>op.cit. "Sense and Meaning" in *Translations*, p.61.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. p.63.

<sup>16</sup>Confusion between these can be avoided, and I shall use 'reference' for the first of these, (a), and 'referent' for the third, (c).

of grasping a sense or a thought, may be an inner mental act; but what is being grasped, the thought itself, is objective and not the mere movement of one's subjective consciousness.

This insistence on the objective character of sense is part of a more general campaign which Frege waged against psychologism in logic. However, there is one aspect of Frege's account of Sinn which encourages a return to a psychological account. For he gave the impression in a footnote that opinions as to the sense of ordinary proper names like 'Aristotle' may differ, and he gave instances of different descriptive phrases which are true of Aristotle that might be associated with the name by different people. He wrote,

In the case of an actual proper name such as 'Aristotle' opinions as to the sense may differ. It might, for instance, be taken to be the following: the pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. Anybody who does this will attach another sense to the sentence 'Aristotle was born in Stagira' than will a man who takes as the sense of the name: the teacher of Alexander the Great who was born in Stagira. So long as the thing meant remains the same, such variations of sense may be tolerated, although they are to be avoided in the theoretical structure of a demonstrative science and ought not to occur in a perfect language.<sup>17</sup>

Frege considered here the possibility that ordinary proper names may themselves derive their *sense* from complex descriptions true of the object referred to. But the question is: Which of these descriptions, which set or sub-set of them, is to be counted as the sense of the name? Frege is in danger here of inducing the belief that such senses are, after all, 'subjective'; though we have seen that this was the last thing he intended to do. For him, logic provided an objective discipline, equal to mathematics. He clearly wished to extend this view to the field of semantics, and to the notion of sense. For him sense belongs to what he described as a "third realm". Although Frege left open further questions about the nature of objects in the 'third realm' such as senses, some commentators have defended him at this point. Dummett, for example says,

... that the objectivity of sense is sufficiently guaranteed by its being expressed within the common language: it was not necessary for Frege, in order to safeguard that objectivity, to view it as having an existence independently even of the means of expressing it.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>op.cit. Frege, "Sense and Meaning" in *Translations*, p.58.

<sup>18</sup>op.cit. Dummett, *Frege*, p.680.

Frege's notion of sense has been interpreted in different ways by different commentators. Dummett's account interprets the Fregean notion of sense as a method or procedure through which we might identify the object referred to (the referent). He writes:

In grasping the sense of a proper name we are not merely aware that the name is associated with a particular object as its referent, but we connect the name with a particular way of identifying an object as the referent of the name.<sup>19</sup>

He therefore argues that two names or senses referring to the same object, are just different routes to the identification of the object in question. This epistemic interpretation of the sense-reference relation contrasts with an account offered by Evans in *The Varieties of Reference*. Evans insists on a logical rather than epistemic interpretation of the relation, in which the only essential feature is that the relation is "many-one", that is, that there are many different ways of presenting one and the same reference, or referent.

Evans illustrates this by treating the name 'Aphla' as a referring expression, the referent of which is also named by the name 'Ateb'. His suggestion is that both of the following claims will be true:

(1) The referent of "Aphla" = Aphla

(2) The referent of "Aphla" = Ateb

But although both (1) and (2) are equally true, only (1) is a suitable axiom for use in a truth-conditional semantics which includes the notion of the *sense* of "Aphla". As Evans says:

... only (1) identifies the semantic value of the name in a way which *shows or displays* its sense.<sup>20</sup>

Because Evans accepts the existence of different names referring to the same object, and wants to understand "sense" in terms of a "many-one" relation between expressions and objects, he wishes to make room for such a notion of sense in a truth-conditional theory which will discriminate claims such as (1) and (2).

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid. p.95.

<sup>20</sup>op.cit. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, p.26.

Frege's account of the sense/reference distinction also contains some uncertainty about the notion of reference itself. A question can be raised, for example, as to whether reference as Frege understood it, should be regarded as an 'ingredient' of meaning. To translate Frege's term *Bedeutung* as 'meaning' rather than 'reference' would be to suggest that this is so, but Dummett in his account strongly denies such a view. According to him, if the reference of a sentence were an ingredient of meaning, then the reference would determine the sense of expression. This seems independently unacceptable and also at odds with Frege's own view. Dummett, for example, writes:

... reference is *not* an ingredient of meaning, and so sense can still be explained as constituting that part of the meaning of a word or expression which needs to be grasped in order to decide the truth-values of sentences containing it; and this means: that part of its meaning which determines its reference.<sup>21</sup>

This interpretation conflicts with Evans's view of reference in which the term is identified as the 'semantic power' or 'semantic value' of some expression. Evans says of this semantic power that

... it is natural to think of this as the power to affect the truth value of the expression in which it occurs.<sup>22</sup>

The immediate consequence of such a difference is that Evans places more weight on the notion of 'reference' as a component in the theory of meaning than does Dummett. His suggestion would be that our ordinary conception of the 'meaning' of an expression is captured at least as much by the notion of *reference* as by that of *sense*. He further suggests that in putting more weight on the notion of sense, Dummett has exaggerated the difference to Frege's theory made by the addition of the notion of sense to the original term 'reference'. Evans thinks that even in Frege's later more developed theory with sense as well as reference, the role of reference does not significantly change. Since in the earlier theory the notion of reference carried the weight of a theory of meaning on its own, it seems that even in the later theory it must still retain its earlier importance.

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<sup>21</sup>op.cit. Dummett, *Frege*, p.91.

<sup>22</sup>op.cit Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, p.8.

Evans's account of reference underlines his criticisms of Frege's belief that expressions can have sense but lack reference. His criticism of this Fregean view comes in *two* strengths. One is that if Frege identifies his notion of sense in terms of a mode of presentation of an object and there is no object, then it seems at best odd to talk of presenting an *object* in a different mode.

But the second vital point is that if the referent of an expression is so closely tied to the expression's semantic value, then in the absence of a referent the expression will lack this semantic value. In such a case it would be impossible to speak of an expression's *having sense* without any reference at all. The idea is that the ascription of sense can be admitted only where there is a referent for the expression. In that context the introduction of sense has a value; but where that condition of the existence of a referent is not fulfilled, the idea of ascribing any sense seems to be impossible. Thus given the basic features of Frege's theory, Evans argues:

I have been objecting to Frege's attempt to discern sense where there is no semantic value, essentially on the ground that it deprives a theory of semantic value of any obvious place in the general theory of language.<sup>23</sup>

Russell was deeply influenced by Frege's theory and makes essential use of Frege's notion of reference, although rejecting the Fregean idea of sense. He was critical of Fregean sense and claimed to solve the related problem of empty names in a way different from Frege without the use of Fregean sense. Evans however examines the possibility of attaching the Fregean notion of sense to Russell's theory of meaning. He attempts to attach Fregean sense to Russell's theory and thinks that it would be a valuable supplement to Russell's theory, just as it was to Frege's initial theory of *Bedeutung*. Evans believes that a better theory can be attained by isolating those parts of both Frege's and Russell's theories which survive criticism, in order to provide an eclectic theory which combines the best elements in both.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid. p.25.

## 4.2 *Belief sentences*

Both Russell and Frege faced a problem in dealing with belief sentences. Although they approach the problem in quite different ways, nevertheless there is a common difficulty which both Russell and Frege tried to cope with. Russell hoped to treat the belief sentences as truth functions which suggests an extensional account. The question however arises: How can we represent belief sentences as truth-functions of their constituents? One answer would be, where we have got a sentence of the form "X believes that ...", the whole sentence is simply a truth-function of the embedded sentence. Frege's account is non-extensional and is different from Russell's. He introduced the notion of sense and used it in order to resolve this problem of belief. Russell, because of his extensional truth-functional requirement, had another problem dealing with general propositions. I shall concentrate on the case of belief sentences, since it is there that the clearest difference arises between Russell and Frege.

Frege's introduction of the notion of sense shows that he moved on to a non-extensional account of language. For the difficulty that crops up over 'belief sentences' arises because the internal constituents, the embedded sentences, do not provide extensional, truth-functional conditions for the truth-value of the whole sentence. Whereas his earlier theory of meaning treated semantics in an extensional way, his later theory of 'sense and reference' allowed him to deal with the intensional contexts of belief sentences.

Frege argued that if a name occurring within the subordinate clause of a belief sentence is replaced by another name with the same reference, then the truth-value of the whole sentence will not necessarily remain the same. Such a sentence does not have a truth-value as its reference but a thought. For example, the sentence "John believes that Venus is the Morning Star" may be true, whereas the sentence "John believes that Venus is the Evening Star" may not be true, because in the second case John might have the misapprehension that Venus is not the evening star. 'That' clauses of this type provide what Quine has called 'opaque contexts', a context in which if a substitution is made for one name by another, the truth-value of *the whole sentence* will not necessarily remain the

same even if two names refer to the same thing. Blackburn comments:

So the embedded sentences are not merely contributing their extension (truth-value) as their part in the overall process of arriving at a truth-value for the total sentence.<sup>24</sup>

Following Frege, Russell also recognized the context of 'belief sentences' as a real problem which ought to have a solution. He therefore aimed to give an account of belief sentences which can have a parallel treatment in the systems of formal logic. But whereas Frege made logic completely extensional and left intensional contexts for special treatment, Russell's rejection of the sense/reference distinction did not require him to set aside intensional contexts for separate treatment. As Linsky explains this Russellian position:

... one *can* both insist on a policy of extensionality in logic and reject the sense/reference distinction. But only, it would seem, by turning one's back on the phenomenon of intensionality altogether.<sup>25</sup>

We have seen before that for Russell facts belong to the objective world, and are not created by people's thought and beliefs. He thought propositions containing verbs like *belief* should be dealt with as a different 'form of fact' from molecular propositions. These propositions also differ from atomic propositions containing a single verb. Although the proposition "I believe that Socrates is mortal" appears to be a relation between the believer and the proposition, this is not what Russell was inclined to accept. Such a fact (belief) is only one single fact which cannot be analysed into two separate parts, namely,

I believe / Socrates is mortal

The questions that need to be considered here are whether such facts can be reduced to other facts or are irreducible, or can be analyzed via Russell's extensional logic.

Russell insisted that the object of belief is not just a single thing which may or may not exist, but is a relation between things or things having qualities which can be better expressed by a proposition than by a single word. He argued that it is propositions, rather than facts, which can be said to be believed. What is asserted in a belief sentence

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<sup>24</sup>cf. Blackburn, S., *Spreading the Word* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p.288.

<sup>25</sup>cf. Linsky, L., *Oblique Contexts* (The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.43.

is not just the relation between the believing subject and the fact, because the logical form of a given proposition remains the same whether the proposition believed is true or false. Belief, therefore, does not contain the single embedded proposition as a constituent, but rather the constituents of the proposition. Russell's view gives the impression that he had some worries about the nature of propositions, and I shall be discussing this tension regarding propositions in Part 3.

Russell tried to examine the logical form of a belief, by examining the relation between the two verbs occurring in such a proposition. He thought that in the proposition "Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio", the verb 'belief' cannot relate an individual to a certain fact (and hence to a proposition) because the verb 'love' appearing to relate Desdemona to Cassio is, in fact, not true. Thus the subordinate verb (the verb other than believing), although functioning as a verb and apparently relating two terms, does not actually function as such when the judgement that results is false. Russell thus marked two important features in cases of belief sentences:

The *first* is the impossibility of treating the proposition believed as an independent entity, entering as a unit into the occurrence of the belief, and the *other* is the impossibility of putting the subordinate verb on a level with its terms as an object term in the belief.<sup>26</sup>

Russell, however, thought that the issue of the 'belief propositions' cannot be solved easily, and admitted his inability to provide a correct solution. He wrote,

... one has to be content on many points at present with pointing out difficulties rather than laying down quite clear solutions.<sup>27</sup>

Russell, in an earlier account, argued that judgement is not a dual relation of the mind to the single objective, rather it is a multiple relation in which the mind stands to various other terms being asserted in the judgement. For him, a judgement is a many-termed relation between one's mental element on the one hand and various universal and particular elements on the other. For example, in "Fred judges that a is taller than b", the

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<sup>26</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.226.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. p.227.

terms of the judging relation would be (1) the mental element of Fred, (2) the object *a*; (3) the relation *taller than*; (4) the object *b*. This relation can be symbolized by "*J(f, a, taller than, b)*". According to Russell, the meaning of a sentence expressing Fred's judgement cannot be a complex object, i.e. a 'fact' with which Fred has a cognitive relation or is acquainted. He strongly denied this view on the ground that it is plausible only in the case of judgements which are true, so that what is being judged corresponds to an actual event. But since nothing corresponds to false judgements, the idea of relating judging to facts is then untenable.

Geach in his *Mental Acts* agrees with Russell that judging is a many-termed relation between the judger and the various constituents of the judgement. But he nevertheless thinks that Russell's theory of judgement is inadequate. Geach's objection is that Russell treated the relation *itself*, for example the relation *taller than*, as one of the constituents between which the judging relation obtains. This idea of a relation being *itself* one among the constituents that are related, is unsatisfactory and obscure.<sup>28</sup> Geach argues that a relative term "taller than" is incomplete, and needs to be filled up with the two blanks it carries with it ("... is taller than ..."). These blanks can be filled up with singular terms or proper names or again with variables, explicitly or implicitly; for example, "*taller than* is converse to *shorter than*" which can be expressed as "for any *x* and any *y*, *x* is taller than *y* if and only if *y* is shorter than *x*". With regard to the ordered constituents of the judgement, Russell distinguished between two "senses" of a relation according as to whether it goes from *a* to *b* or from *b* to *a*. He wrote:

... the relation must not be abstractly before the mind, but must be before it as proceeding from *A* to *B* rather than from *B* to *A*. ... We may distinguish two "senses" of a relation according as it goes from *A* to *B* or from *B* to *A*. Then the relation as it enters into the judgement must have a "sense", ... . Then the judgement that two terms have a certain relation *R* is a relation of the mind to the two terms and the relation *R* with the appropriate sense:  
...<sup>29</sup>

Geach argues that Russell's view that the relation *R* is before the mind suggests

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<sup>28</sup>It is similar to Bradley's view that a relation is a term.

<sup>29</sup> Russell, "On The Nature Of Truth" in op.cit. *Philosophical Essays*, p.158.

that the relation *R* does not relate *a* and *b*, but acts as a *term* of judging relation between the mind, *a*, the relation *R*, and *b*. Now if Russell's view is granted, then the relation *R* cannot be shown as 'proceeding' from *a* to *b* rather than from *b* to *a*. If a relation is considered as one of the terms related by another relation and not occurring as relating things, then its direction or 'sense' in one or the other way looks dubious. Here Geach raises the crucial objection of whether the relation can be considered as a separate element of judgement, or as a separate object of thought. He argues that when we make a judgement about a relation which has a converse, both the relation and its converse have to be involved in the judgement. To judge that *a* stands in relation *R* to *b* is to deny that *a* stands in the converse relation *R'* to *b*. Thus to judge that *a* stands in a relation to *b*, is the same as judging that *b* bears the converse relation to *a*. Thus

... both relations of a pair of converses, or, in Russell's language, the relation *R* in both its 'senses', must enter into the act of judgement equally and simultaneously; his solution then collapses, and indeed the problem looks intractable.<sup>30</sup>

Geach's suggestion is that if relation is considered not as a relational term but as one of the constituents related by another relation, then Russell's solution really looks vulnerable. Geach's view suggests that if Russell considered a relation not as a relational term, but as one of the terms to be related then the solution of the problem will always be remote. This is related to the issue about how Russell conceived the difference between say names and predicates or names and relational expressions. There is a very strong tendency in Russell to say that all his expressions are just names — some are proper names, some are predicative names or relational names — but they are all names. The difficulty that arises is that if they are all names then that does not give an appropriate picture of the different ways in which they function. It suggests that these different kinds of expression all function in just the same way, that is, to name objects. If we just label them as names that does not make any allowance for the possibility that they have to combine with other expressions in a special way in order to produce a genuine proposition. This is the point

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<sup>30</sup>cf. Geach, P., *Mental Acts* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London), p.52.

at which there is no difference between a genuine proposition with constituents A, B, C, and a mere list, a catalogue of constituents A, B, C.

However, Russell's earlier view contradicts his later position, because in PLA Russell held the view that a relation or predicate can never be reduced to a subject. This suggests that he was aware of the problem just noted, but he did not seem to take it too seriously and remained attached to his strict version of names. For that reason Russell's problem in dealing with belief in his earlier account of judgement remains almost the same in his later account of belief sentences in PLA.

Wittgenstein, however, in his atomistic view of *TT'*, claimed that he has a solution of the problem over propositional attitudes such as belief. It might be expected that propositions of the form (1) "Mark believes that P" are truth-functions of the elementary constituents, that is, P. But this won't work because (1)'s truth and falsity is quite independent of the truth and falsity of P itself. Some propositional attitudes 'knows that ...' for example, can have a partial truth-functional link with their constituent propositions. For (2) "X knows that P" cannot be true unless P is true. But the truth of P, in this case, is only necessary and not sufficient for the truth of (2).

For Wittgenstein the logical form of propositions like (1) is misleading. He suggested that propositions like "A thinks p" are really of the form " 'p' says p" where there is no reference either to the believer A, or to the relation of belief. He explained this by saying that such propositions should not be understood as (a) a correlation of fact and object, but (b) as a correlation of facts by means of a correlation of their objects. The suggestion is that, for Wittgenstein, it is wrong to think of propositions like (1) as relating a constituent fact to an object, namely the believer. On the contrary, his own analysis of (1) namely (3) " 'p' says p", dispenses with the believer and also with the believing relation, so that the relation appears to relate the objects in the proposition 'p' to the fact p. The difficulty arises here whether and how (3) can be a satisfactory analysis of (1). (3) seems to express an internal 'semantic relation' between some proposition and some 'fact', which it asserts or expresses, but this relation could hold independently of any one's believing p

or not. This effectively means that the 'analysis' (3) seems to abandon any reference to belief. Wittgenstein's solution to the problem of belief sentences, therefore seems to make the problem worse, whereas Russell at least acknowledges his inability to give a solution. Russell's difficulties in this area will be considered later in terms of what he called "the unity of the proposition".

## FREGE CRITICISED

### 5.1 *Russell's argument against Fregean Sense*

Russell's 1905 paper OD contains, among other things, a strong criticism of Frege's notion of Sinn and a famous analysis of definite descriptions. It contains also criticism of Meinong's distinction between 'existence' (Sein) and 'subsistence' (Subsistenz), but in this section I shall consider only the former. The criticism of Frege's theory is important because in rejecting the notion of Sinn, Russell committed himself to an account of semantics which placed all the emphasis on the idea of a naming or referring relation between linguistic expressions and items in the world. That account might be correct, or well grounded, even if Russell's criticism of Fregean Sinn were unfounded. However, since Russell represented that rejection as a part of the route to his own theory, it is important to consider the success of the argument against Frege. That view can be reinforced by considering that Russell's argument has sometimes been thought to be mistaken.

In OD Russell criticised Fregean sense which, he thought, involves an 'inextricable tangle'. He translated Frege's "Sinn" and "Bedeutung" as 'meaning' and 'denotation' respectively, and claims that such a distinction is untenable.

Indeed the notion of sense according to Russell is vulnerable to a problem about identifying, or referring to, the sense of some expression. Russell outlined that problem in relation to a specific expression, namely "The first line of Gray's Elegy", and he suggested two possible ways of trying to identify, or refer to, its sense. The two ways are:

- (a) The sense of the first line of Gray's Elegy.
- (b) The sense of "The first line of Gray's Elegy".

The fundamental problem that Russell claimed to find here is that whichever choice we make is going to fail. He thought that neither of these ways can succeed in

making an adequate reference to the required sense.

Russell considered first option (a) in that if we try to refer to the required sense by using the same expression without quotation marks, that would refer to the *sense* of the first line of Gray's Elegy which, of course, is: "The curfew tolls the knell of the parting day". So what we actually get is the sense of the expression "The curfew tolls the knell of the parting day" and *not* the sense of the expression "The first line of gray's Elegy". The expression "The curfew tolls the knell of the parting day" is, however, the referent of the expression "The first line of Gray's Elegy", and it is for this reason that option (a) identifies the sense of that referent. If therefore, we choose the option (a), it fails to identify the sense of the given expression, but succeeds only in identifying the sense of the referent of the original expression. This result is achieved in this special case, just because the referent of "The first line ..." is itself a sentence and so can have both a sense and a reference assigned to it, at least in principle. If the referent were *not* a linguistic expression, then it might be simply nonsensical to speak of its sense at all. The failure in this case might be explained in terms of the distinction between the 'use' and 'mention' of linguistic expressions. In (a) the expression "The first line of Gray's Elegy" is *used* to refer to that line, while in (b) the expression is put in quotation marks and so *mentioned* rather than used.

If we choose option (b) and put the expression in quotes as in "The first line of gray's Elegy", then we *mention* that expression rather than use it. In this way we avoid the difficulty found in the first case. According to Russell, however we do not succeed either, because (b) provides us with a sense which is 'merely linguistic through the phrase', as Russell said, and so does not show any 'logical' relation between the reference and the required sense. Russell argued,

... the difficulty which confronts us is that we cannot succeed in *both* preserving the connexion of meaning [Fregean Sinn] and denotation [Fregean Bedeutung] *and* preventing them from being one and the same; ... <sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>op.cit. Russell, "On Denoting", p.49.

Russell is quite right to treat the *identification* of meaning (sense) and denotation (reference) as a decisive objection to Frege's view. The question is, though: What kind of relation between sense and reference does Russell require? There seem to be two points here: One is that Russell believed, wrongly, that Frege wished to claim that sense *itself* has reference, and this point will be noted later (see p.91). The other is that to identify a sense seems to require us to identify a verbal expression in quotation marks which, according to Russell, is not itself a sense but only something that *refers* to a sense. Thus when we mention the expression within quotation marks and want to talk about sense,

... it must be not the meaning, but something which denotes the meaning.<sup>32</sup>

The option (b), therefore, does not work either, since

... there is no backward road from denotations to meanings, because every object can be denoted by an infinite number of different denoting phrases.<sup>33</sup>

For Russell, the occurrence of the expression in (a) gives us the *reference*, not the sense; and in (b) it gives us only an expression *which refers to a sense* and so not the sense itself. These concessions, Russell held, cannot be accepted because then the relation of sense to reference is totally mysterious. He thus rejected the Fregean notion of Sinn and effectively returned to the earlier theory of Frege in which the notion of Sinn plays no part.

Even with this amount of clarification Russell's position remains unclear, and three potential queries arise :

(1) We would need to be satisfied that the argument was quite general, and did not, for example, arise simply from Russell's choice of a special case, (e.g. one in which the expression in question refers to another expression which *could* itself have a sense and a reference).

(2) We would need to be satisfied that Russell has given a fair account of Frege's

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid. p.50.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

distinction, and there are already preliminary indications that he has not done this which we shall also see in Searle's account.

(3) We would need to be satisfied that the crucial objection, which claims that there is 'no logical connection between sense and reference', is clear. So far it seems quite obscure and dubious. However, all these points come up in the discussions of the issue raised by Searle, and Blackburn and Code (ref. ch.4, p.69), so it is to their accounts that we must turn.

## ***5.2 Rights and Wrongs of Russell's argument***

It was suggested earlier that Russell's argument might hinge on special features of his own example, and some of Searle's criticisms address this point. One criticism concerns Russell's use of quotation marks. Searle's view is that that use violates the distinction between use and mention.

Searle thinks that Russell's use of quotation marks is unfair to Frege. Russell assumed that when we enclose an expression in quotation marks then we should, according to Frege, immediately identify the sense of that expression. But, as Searle says,

... there is [not] any context at all in ordinary speech where enclosing an expression in inverted commas is by itself sufficient to indicate that the resultant expression is being used to refer to its customary sense.<sup>34</sup>

The suggestion is that Frege could not have supposed that the use of quotation marks was sufficient by itself to identify the sense of an expression.

Searle also claims that Russell gave an inaccurate account of Frege's distinction. According to him, Russell attributed the view to Frege that it is the *sense* of some expression that refers to the reference of the object (see p.90). But as we saw earlier (see ch.4, p.76), Frege's view is formulated in a different way. For Frege an expression (proper

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<sup>34</sup>op.cit. Searle, "Russell's objection to Frege's Theory of Sense and Reference", p.138.

name etc.) *expresses* a sense and *designates* its referent. Hence there is no suggestion in Frege's view, contrary to Russell's claim, that the sense itself refers to the reference.

According to Russell, when a reference is made to some object in a proposition, what is being referred to *occurs as a part of a proposition*. For example, in the proposition "The teacher of Alexander is a great philosopher", the man referred to as "The teacher of Alexander" will be a constituent of the proposition. But, although we shall see later that this account of Russell's can be defended nevertheless ostensibly it violates an intuitive category restriction.<sup>36</sup> We would not normally say that actual objects are constituents of

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<sup>36</sup>Russell's unclarity over the naming or meaning of proposition creates a difficulty about how he understood or explained his conception of the constituents of propositions. The problem is: Are the constituents of propositions actual entities (objects) or are they symbols? If we examine carefully Russell's account in PLA the answer is unclear. We shall consider some specific quotations from Russell in OD (1905) and PLA (1919) which reflects this unclear position very obviously.

(1) You must observe that the name does not occur in that which you assert when you use the name. The name is merely that which is a means of expressing what it is you are trying to assert, and when I say 'Scott wrote *Waverly*', the name does not occur in the thing I am asserting. The thing I am asserting is about the person, not about the name. So if I say 'Scott is Sir Walter', using these two names *as* names, neither 'Scott' nor 'Sir Walter' occurs in what I am asserting, but only the person who has these names, and thus what I am asserting is a pure tautology. (PLA, p.246)

(2) When I say 'the author of *Waverly* exists', I mean that there is an entity *c* such that '*x* wrote *Waverly*' is true when *x* is *c*, and is false when *x* is not *c*. 'The author of *Waverly*' as a constituent has quite disappeared there, ... You have instead this elaborate to-do with propositional functions, ... It would not be possible if 'the author of *Waverly*' were a constituent of propositions in whose verbal expressions this descriptive phrase occurs. (PLA, p.250)

In (2) Russell seems clearly to assume that it is *expressions* which are constituents of propositions. The only proviso that might be made is that in the final sentence the quotation marks around 'the author of *Waverly*' might be deleted, so that Russell is claiming that that person is not a constituent. However, in (1) the opposite view seems equally strong. For this final sentence implies that what occurs in the proposition, that is, in what is asserted, is the person and not just the expressions referring to that person. Both quotations might, however, be construed in other ways.

But Russell's view shows some inconsistency when he said,

(3) (a) That the components of a proposition are the symbols we must understand in order to understand the proposition;

(b) That the components of the fact which makes a proposition true or false, as the case may be, are the *meanings* of the symbols which we must understand in order to understand the proposition. (PLA, p.196)

Russell here in (a) and (b) made a distinction between the understanding of the components (constituents) of a proposition and the components of the fact which is expressed in the proposition. In (a) he clearly suggested that the constituents of a proposition are 'expressions' or 'symbols' which is similar to what he meant in (2). But when Russell in (b) defined *objects* (components of the fact) as the *meanings* of those symbols expressed in a proposition then his view is no longer clear. For if *objects* are defined as the *meanings* of expressions or symbols then those *objects* can be regarded as 'occurring in' a proposition. Here a distinction can be drawn between propositions and sentences in that expressions (symbols) really are constituents of *sentences*, but propositions are thought to be different from sentences precisely because propositions are regarded as the *meanings* of sentences.

However, Russell's tendency to talk about constituents of propositions as real entities can also be seen in his earlier account when he drew the conclusion in OD by saying,

(4) One interesting result of the above theory of denoting is this: when there is anything with which we do not have immediate acquaintance, but only definition by denoting phrases, then the propositions in which this thing is introduced by means of a denoting phrase do not really contain this thing as a constituent, but contain instead the constituents expressed by the several words of the denoting phrase. Thus in every proposition we can apprehend ... , all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance. Now such things as matter ... and the minds of other people are known to us only by denoting phrases, i.e. we are not *acquainted* with them, but we know them as what has such and

such properties. In such a case, we know the properties of a thing without having acquaintance with the thing itself, and without, consequently, knowing any single proposition of which the thing itself is a constituent. (OD, pp.55-6)

Here it is *quite* clear that Russell meant 'constituent of proposition' to signify actual entities which might be denoted by expressions (symbols) occurring in the corresponding *sentence*. A similar view is also expressed by him in the following passages:

(5) If you take such a proposition as 'Romulus existed', probably most of us think that Romulus did not exist. ... If Romulus himself entered into our statement, it would be plain that the statement that he did not exist would be nonsense, because you cannot have a constituent of a proposition which is nothing at all. Every constituent has got to be there as one of the things in the world, and therefore if Romulus himself entered into the propositions that he existed or that he did not exist, both these propositions could not only not be true, but could not be even significant, unless he existed. That is obviously not the case, and the first conclusion one draws is that, although it *looks* as if Romulus were a constituent of that proposition, that is really a mistake. Romulus does not occur in the proposition 'Romulus did not exist'. (PLA, p.242)

(6) Now the next point that I want to make clear is that when a description ... occurs in a proposition, there is no constituent of that proposition corresponding to that description as a whole. In the true analysis of the proposition, the description is broken up and disappears. That is to say, when I say 'Scott is the author of *Waverly*' it is a wrong analysis of that to suppose that you have there three constituents, 'Scott', 'is', and 'the author of *Waverly*'. ... 'The author of *Waverly*' is not a constituent of the proposition at all. ... you can have significant propositions denying the existence of 'the so-and-so'. 'The unicorn does not exist'. ... Propositions of that sort are perfectly significant, ... true, decent propositions, and that could not possibly be the case if the unicorn were a constituent of the proposition, because plainly it could not be a constituent as long as there were not any unicorns. Because the constituents of propositions, of course, are the same as the constituents of the corresponding facts, and since it is a fact that the unicorn does not exist, it is perfectly clear that the unicorn is not a constituent of that fact, because if there were any fact of which the unicorn was a constituent, there would be a unicorn, and it would not be true, that it did not exist. That applies in this case of descriptions particularly. (PLA, pp. 247-48)

In both of these extended quotations Russell's view amounts to the suggestion that both OP names and descriptive phrases, after being properly analysed, do not designate any constituent of the proposition. This is clear in (6) which captures two essential features of Russell's account: (i) OP names are not LP names; (ii) where an expression can be analysed away, as in OP names, then that expression does not signify any 'constituent of the proposition' or does not 'enter into' the proposition.

The same idea is presented when Russell said in one place,

(7) But 'the author of *Waverly*' is not a name, and does not all by itself mean anything at all, because when it is rightly used in propositions, those propositions do not contain any constituent corresponding to it. (PLA, p.253)

Here again, Russell implied that expressions are constituents of *sentences* while the objects denoted are, or may be, constituents of the *proposition*. Russell's view, however, seems confusing when he wrote,

(8) I cannot emphasize sufficiently how important this point is, and how much error you get into metaphysics if you do not realize that when I say 'The author of *Waverly* is human' that is not a proposition of the same form as 'Scott is human'. It does not contain a constituent 'the author of *Waverly*'. (PLA, p.252)

This terminology of Russell is different from the ones expressed in (5), (6) and (7). Here his view seems to be ambiguous because it suggests two distinct ideas. If we take seriously the quotation marks around the descriptive phrase 'the author of *Waverly*' in (8) then it matches the account expressed in (2) which is that constituents of propositions are *expressions* or *symbols*. But if the quotation marks in (8) are not taken seriously then it seems to be in line with the views suggested in (5), (6), (7) and (4) which is that constituents of propositions are actual entities. Here it is worth noting that Russell's terminology slips from one usage to the other which suggests that either he (or his terminology) is confused or not consistent.

Russell's text shows clearly that he used *both* terminologies. One view suggests that constituents of propositions are symbols and that names or expressions should definitely be distinguished from the objects they stand for. But his other idea that constituents of propositions are actual entities (objects) is also clearly present in the text and indeed is expressed more often than the other. This latter view therefore cannot be ignored or disregarded, because his account of LP names is linked very directly with his belief that in their cases relevant propositions really do contain the corresponding objects. Such a view is explicit in (4) and (5) above, and implicit in such a claim as:

(9) An atomic proposition is one which does mention actual particulars, not merely describe them but actually name them, and you can only name them by means of names. (PLA, p.200)

This view of Russell is of considerable importance in the account of later philosophers like Evans, Peacocke, and Sainsbury when they talk about 'object-involving' or 'entity-involving' expressions. Although they criticise Russell's account

propositions, even where those objects are referred to by the relevant expressions. We would normally speak of the constituents of a proposition as concepts, or as the meanings of certain expressions, just as we would naturally speak of the expressions themselves as constituents of the relevant sentences. It is true that this way of speaking raises a question about the nature of propositions as opposed to sentences, and we have already noted that Russell admitted some difficulties over such a question (see Pt.1, ch.3, pp.64, 65). Russell's own formulation, however, clearly needs some further explanation, and Searle is surely correct to point out this underlying problem.

Because Searle finds Russell's notion of what "occurs in a proposition" unacceptable he proposes an alternative account of this notion. He says that "occurring in a proposition" is

... equivalent to Frege's notion of what is expressed in a proposition. To say that a sense occurs in a proposition is to say that the sense is expressed in the proposition.<sup>36</sup>

This proposal, however, should be queried. For Searle's suggestion, although it fits Russell's terminology into a Fregean framework, nevertheless is quite at odds with the view that Russell actually held. Searle regards the constituents occurring in a proposition as Fregean senses, so that it is the sense of "The teacher of Alexander" that occurs in the proposition "The teacher of Alexander is a great philosopher". As we have seen, such legislation answers in one way to our natural intuitions about propositions and their constituents, but it is clear that Russell could not have accepted such a view, since he did not wish to employ the idea of a Fregean sense at all. Searle's proposal might consequently be regarded as begging the question against Russell, since it tacitly licences the

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of actual objects occurring in the proposition, nevertheless they take up his account in a somewhat different way. It could be said that they believe that Russell's terminology, although open to objection, nevertheless points to an important insight about names. Their efforts are then directed towards the attempt to clarify what that Russellian terminology properly means. According to them some definite object is required to give meaning to certain expressions, i.e. names occurring in a sentence, and then the corresponding object can be regarded in some sense as a 'constituent of the proposition' (see Pt.3, ch.7, pp.140 ff., Pt.4, ch.9). This theory of the later philosophers, therefore, suggests that Russell's account of actual objects occurring in the proposition is not a loose way of expressing his view but rather bears a considerable significance in the theory of names. (There are many other passages in PLA where we equally get an ambiguous picture of what Russell actually meant by 'constituents of propositions'. Such passages can be found, for example, in pp. 223, 231, 239, 269-70, 197-8.)

<sup>36</sup>op.cit. Searle, "Russell's objection to Frege's Theory of Sense and Reference", p.142.

introduction of Fregean senses when this is precisely what Russell wished to avoid. It could be said, on the other hand, that Russell's own preferred terminology is not only at odds with those noted intuitions, but also begs the question against Frege by refusing to allow any concessions to Fregean sense from the start. For the present it is enough merely to note these dangers. Whether they affect the outcome of the argument will be considered later.

A further preliminary point arises also from another suggestion of Searle's. He wants again to clear up Russell's terminology by holding that:

... the sense of an expression *occurs* in (to use Russell's expression) a proposition, and in virtue of that sense the proposition refers to the referent. The referent *does not occur* in the proposition.<sup>37</sup>

This proposal is itself misleading with respect to Frege's own ideas. Searle seems to suggest that when a singular term is used in a proposition, that proposition then refers to the object corresponding to the singular term. As we have already seen, this is not Frege's view at all. Frege's view is that the reference (or referent) of a proposition is a truth value, the true or the false, and not any specific object which is the referent of a constituent expression in the proposition.

Searle argues that once the appropriate amendments have been made to Russell's account, then his argument fails to justify the rejection of Frege's terminology of 'sense'. We might ask whether these mistakes in Russell's account of Frege are sufficient to reject Russell's criticisms. If, for Frege, an expression has both a sense and a reference, then sense presumably is in some way related to that reference in some form or other. Even though Searle is sometimes quite correct in rejecting Russell's terminology, an issue of substance may still remain. For in whatever terms Russell expressed his point, it is clear that he thought Frege's account of the relationship between sense and reference is grossly unclear. There are two issues here. The crucial issue is whether Russell's *argument* demonstrates that unclarity. As we shall see, there might be grounds for complaining of

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

some unclarity in Frege's theory independently of Russell's specific argument.

Basically, there are two ways that Russell seems to argue. One is that Frege's theory is incomplete because it shows the relationship between sense and reference as arbitrary. The other is that when we look at the way in which Frege talked about the relationship, it involves a regress. Thus it is not only arbitrary, it is also incoherent. There are two possible lines of argument although Russell was considering primarily the former. Russell, however, was wrong to think that Frege expressed no relationship between sense and reference. For Frege, they are related by the relationship of 'mode of presentation'. But the question is: Is that sufficient to answer Russell's problem?

To illustrate one way in which these points of Russell's might be pursued we can consider again (see ch.4, pp.78-79) the different interpretations of Frege offered by Dummett and Evans. Dummett explains the relationship between sense and reference so that the understanding of sense provides a route to the referent. So in a way Dummett is conceding Russell's point by saying that Russell is wrong to state that the sense refers to the reference, but he (Russell) is right in saying that the sense nevertheless has got to be related in some way to the reference. Evans's more austere interpretation which just insists on a 'many-one' relationship between sense and reference, by contrast, does not spell out that relationship any further. If, therefore, we identify the relationship that Russell is asking about in any one of these ways (prescribed by Dummett and Evans), then the question still remains: Is Frege's account still vulnerable to Russell's two objections, i.e. does it involve *incompleteness*, or does it involve a *regress*?

Russell's position has been strongly defended by Blackburn and Code<sup>38</sup>. According to them,

... Russell has discovered a dilemma of sorts.<sup>39</sup>

They thus indicate that such objections as Searle's have missed the point, and that Russell

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<sup>38</sup>I shall refer only to Blackburn as the author.

<sup>39</sup>op.cit. Blackburn and Code, "The Power of Russell's Criticism of Frege: 'On Denoting', pp. 48-50", p.72.

had a more substantial objection to make. In attempting to explain that further point of Russell's, they reconsider the problem of identifying Fregean senses of expressions. They hold that Russell is right to say that there are basically two such ways: Either sense is simply identified with reference which is incompatible with Frege's distinction, or these two are distinguished in some quite arbitrary way, so that there is no 'logical' connection between sense and reference.<sup>40</sup> Russell believed that the absence of any 'logical' connection between these two yields an account of sense which is utterly arbitrary and quite unmotivated.

Since the identification of sense with reference would destroy Frege's theory, the argument really turns on Russell's notion of "linguistic through the phrase", and on the consequent charge of arbitrariness. Blackburn's suggestion is that if sense is specified simply by mentioning an expression for example in "The sense of 'Aristotle'", then the relation is merely "linguistic through the phrase" and so arbitrary. The point he illustrates by considering a pair of propositions, for example,

- (1) Aristotle, the magnate, married Mrs. Kennedy.
- (2) Aristotle, the philosopher, wrote books.

where the relation between sense and reference of the name in the two sentences is quite arbitrary.

The case is different when the same name 'Aristotle' is examined in another pair of propositions, for example,

- (3) Aristotle taught philosophy
- (4) Jones believes that Aristotle taught philosophy

where, Blackburn believes, the reference of 'Aristotle' in both cases is the same. He argues that there must be a logical connection involved between the reference of 'Aristotle, in (3) and (4) which will then enable the subject Jones to believe what is being said about the reference. Hence there must be a logical link between sense and reference and therefore, sense cannot be defined merely linguistically. This is similar to Russell's claim that the

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<sup>40</sup>see Russell's view in my discussion p.89.

"the meaning denotes the denotation" (p.49,OD). So according to Blackburn,

... what we need is a definition of either 'the sense of "Aristotle"' or some other phrase which we may suppose to refer to the sense of 'Aristotle'.<sup>41</sup>

However none of these alternatives, according to him, do work.

According to Blackburn, the first pair of propositions (1) and (2) are not co-referential in that they have two transparent references and have referred to two different people. In the other pair of occurrences, the issue is complicated by the fact that the name 'Aristotle' in (3) and (4) is not necessarily co-referential and *can* refer to different people. He thinks that (3) and (4) should yield a valid inference to the conclusion "Jones believes something true". Since (4) contains an opaque reference, this inference cannot be validated because Frege's theory is that in belief propositions the term 'Aristotle' does not have its customary reference, it has an 'indirect reference', namely to the sense of 'Aristotle'. So the expression 'Aristotle' has two different references in (3) and (4): one to the man, and the other to the sense of the expression 'Aristotle'. Blackburn thinks that Frege's way of dealing with opaque contexts makes it impossible to give an account of the validity of the relevant inference.

Blackburn's view suggests that a necessary condition for the validity of the required inference is that the expression 'Aristotle' should refer to the same object in both cases. The crucial argument that Blackburn raises is that the inference rests on two different uses of names, one of which is transparent and the other is opaque. And he assumes that Frege's treatment of names in opaque contexts excludes the possibility of making the same reference as the reference in transparent context which implies that they *cannot* refer to the same object.

Blackburn thinks it crucial that the notion of reference and the notion of sameness of sense have to be built in in order to safeguard the inference. This reinforces Russell's claim that either the link between sense and reference is arbitrary, or the two items

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<sup>41</sup>op.cit. Blackburn, "The Power of Russell's criticism of Frege", p.73.

become identical. He is effectively asking that Frege should license the inference precisely by spelling out in some non-arbitrary way the required link between sense and reference which will guarantee the inference, and also avoid the identity of sense and reference.

Blackburn, however, is disinclined just to accept Russell's criticism that the relation of sense to reference is "linguistic through the phrase", and attempts to interpret this in his own way. His view is that the second option (b) (see p.88) does succeed both in identifying, and referring to, sense, but he agrees with Russell that this is then achieved in an arbitrary and unsatisfactory way. He therefore constructs an argument to make some independent contribution to the further regress objection he raises. He considers the following three expressions:

(E<sub>1</sub>) "The first line of Gray's Elegy"

(E<sub>2</sub>) "The sense of "The first line of Gray's Elegy" "

(E<sub>3</sub>) "The sense of "E<sub>2</sub>" "

According to Blackburn (and perhaps to Russell) the introduction of sense needs *some* denoting phrase, such as E<sub>2</sub>, which we understand and can grasp. It might be thought that the sense thus introduced becomes identical with a reference, because the reference of E<sub>2</sub> is the sense of the expression "The first line of Gray's Elegy". This is not an objection, however, since according to Frege, that expression, i.e. E<sub>2</sub> itself has both a sense and a reference. Now since we know what the *reference* of E<sub>2</sub> is, namely the sense of the expression "The first line of Gray's Elegy", then the question arises: what will be the *sense* of the whole expression (E<sub>2</sub>)? Here Blackburn considers two responses: Either we don't offer any further means of identifying the sense, and just accept it; or we introduce some other denoting phrase like E<sub>3</sub>, which refers to E<sub>2</sub> and which we grasp in turn. So what we get at the end is the interpretation of a further sense for the whole expression, and an infinite regress is generated. Therefore, the required Fregean sense is simply not available in a satisfactory way. According to him

The regress can be stopped, but only if we pay the cost of saying that there is some level at which we do not need

an understood description or a definition, but we can rest content with an outright recognition of sense.<sup>42</sup>

Blackburn's argument shows that he wants to *specify* the sense by writing some expression like  $E_2$ , but where on specifying the sense of  $E_2$ , he then constructs another nominal expression  $E_3$  which will require a further such construction and so on indefinitely. The question now is: Does Blackburn succeed in making clear what Russell meant by his expression 'linguistic through the phrase' or by his demand for a 'logical connection' between sense and reference, and once he makes it clear, does his argument stand? In the next section his argument will be examined more closely.

### 5.3 *Is Frege rightly criticised?*

Russell's own text, and Blackburn's version of the argument, turn on a question about identifying, or referring to, the sense of some expression. Some of these difficulties clearly depend upon a consistent and satisfactory use of quotation marks with which to identify expressions. For example, if no discrimination between mention and use is made, then option (a) (see p.88) might be open for Frege and yet leads to quite the wrong result for him. It seems, however, in that case that only a natural use of quotation marks is needed to avoid the problem. Beyond that, as Searle, surely rightly indicates, Russell's own use of quotation marks is highly questionable, and cannot be used without further elucidation to criticise Frege.

However, neither Russell's central point criticising option (b) nor Blackburn's version of the argument turns on quotation, but involves an alleged difficulty in identifying or referring to a sense even when the use of quotation marks has been agreed. In this case however, something further needs to be said about the requirements for identification, or reference, in the case of sense. One point that needs to be made initially is simply that

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid. p.74.

Frege himself offered guidance in identifying senses. We need to ask why that guidance is inadequate. Frege's strategy is primarily to distinguish sense, as the mode of presentation of a referent, from reference itself; and he did this in general by demonstrating cases where, with respect to some given expressions, the referent may be the same, though the sense differs. If such a demonstration is accepted, then it *shows* that sense and reference can be distinguished, even though it remains open exactly how we further explain the intimate relationship between them. For one thing it would be impossible to have expressions with the same sense but a different referent if the very notion of a sense is defined in terms of the mode of presentation of a *specific* referent. According to such a view sameness of referent is a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for sameness of sense. Later we shall link this with Evans's interpretation of Frege.

In that way Frege had provided an adequate ground for identifying sense and distinguishing it from reference, at least if the basic cases are accepted at all. However it might still be said that this falls short of what Russell and Blackburn require. Even if Frege succeeded in differentiating sense from reference in this way, questions may still be raised about the nature and identification of sense itself. The initial cases might be queried, not perhaps on the ground that they have no intuitive plausibility for that would be hard to sustain, but on the ground that we do not yet know *enough* about sense to be able clearly to discriminate one sense from another, or clearly to give a full account of any specific sense.

Criticisms along these lines have been levelled at Frege often enough. As is well known Frege attached to his conception of sense an 'ontological' commitment in which senses, along with numbers and other abstract items, had real existence in a 'third realm' different from the realms of the physical and the mental. Frege's so-called Platonism attaches a strong metaphysical doctrine to his semantic theory, and can be questioned, doubted, and even rejected. Russell's criticism is quite different from this. He, on the contrary, insisted that if we try to identify sense with the complement of 'the sense of', still

that is not adequate enough for an identification of sense. It gives only a nominal identification of sense for Russell, but for him this is not enough and he made a further demand for a right account of the senses of expressions. This is to query the semantic theory and not its supposed ontological commitments.

The situation remains complex and obscure, however, for several reasons. For one thing, when Russell talked about identifying the sense of some expression, he seems sometimes to want to identify some object which *is* that sense. He seems, that is, to treat the sense of expressions as though it was just like another reference, and so to 'reify' Frege's notion. To take such a view would be not only objectionable but also in serious danger of begging the question against Frege. For it might be simply to assume that Russell's account of denoting or naming was the only legitimate semantic apparatus, and to require that Frege's notion of sense be fitted into that framework.

Even if that problem is evaded Russell's central argument has some ambiguity in its account of the requirements for identification, or specification, or explanation of sense. It is clear that Russell canvassed a problem about the identification of sense, and, as has been suggested, this may be in danger of begging the question. But Russell's principal argument is one about the nominal specification of sense, that is, one in which when we refer to "the sense of 'the first line of Gray's Elegy'" we offer a specification of that sense which is 'arbitrary' and 'only linguistic through the phrase'. One way of interpreting this point would be to say that Russell believed the notion of sense to require further explanation, or elucidation, which Frege did not provide, but this is far too charitable to Russell. For there can scarcely be any doubt that Frege left room for further explanation of his concept, and this could not constitute a decisive ground for rejecting that concept. Russell's intention, and his argument, are certainly designed to make a more specific and decisive criticism of sense and its relation to reference. It is that more specific argument which Blackburn attempts to provide in the interpretation of Russell.

That there is a need for further explanation of 'sense', however, is clearly shown in the criterion that Evans uses as a means of specifying sense. Evans wants to consider

expressions as having different senses if, for example, it would be possible for one and the same person to have a belief towards a certain object/person expressed in one way, and at the same time not to have that belief towards the same object/person when expressed in another way. For example, John believes that the queen is sixty years old, and in English the expression 'queen' carries the same sense as the expression 'female monarch'. According to Evans, it is impossible for John to believe that the queen is sixty years old, and at the same time not to believe that the female monarch is sixty years old.

Evans wants to use this test to determine that the two expressions 'queen' and 'female monarch' actually have the same sense. On the other hand, if the queen is the colonel of highland regiment, and the expressions 'queen' and 'the colonel of the highland regiment' refer to the same person, it would be perfectly reasonable and not inconsistent, Evans thinks, for Jones to believe that the queen is sixty years old and not to believe that the colonel of the highland regiment is sixty years old, simply because in that case Jones might not know that the two expressions refer to the same person. Evans here is using what he calls the 'Intuitive Criterion of Difference' in order to discriminate what counts as the same sense or as a different sense.

Frege did not give us any good criterion for identifying the specific sense of particular expressions. He of course used several examples, but he did not mention any clear-cut, straightforward criterion. Evans attempts to supplement Frege's account by using this Intuitive Criterion as a way of discriminating between same senses and different senses.<sup>43</sup> Important though that point also clearly is on the semantic level, it is by no means obvious that this is the problem which Russell and Blackburn claim to see in Frege's account. Their problem has to do with a certain 'arbitrariness'— 'purely linguistic through the phrase'— which is supposed to afflict the identification of, or reference to, sense. We therefore have to consider other ways of understanding their difficulty.

One difficulty that Blackburn raises is the lack of co-reference with the same sense in opaque context. Clearly there are ways of defending Frege depending on how we actually

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<sup>43</sup>op.cit. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, pp. 18-22.

interpret Frege's own account of sense and reference. Under Evans's interpretation, the sense is the 'mode of presentation of a referent' which means that we cannot have same sense without same referent. This suggests that sameness of referent is a necessary condition for sameness of sense. If this view of Evans's is accepted, then the two expressions 'Aristotle' in (3) and (4) can be shown to refer to the same object having the same sense. In the transparent context 'Aristotle' has its direct sense, and *that sense* is the mode of presentation of the object. In the opaque context the sense comes in as 'indirect reference', that is, indicated indirectly but still the two occurrences have the *same* reference. If this interpretation is correct, then, on this account, the two expressions must also have the same reference, directly or indirectly, obliquely or non-obliquely. So on this account Frege can be strongly defended to validate the inference on the assumption of sameness of sense which then also preserves the assumption of co-reference.

However if we do not accept Evans's interpretation, we can provide an alternative interpretation. We can show that it is possible that we have two expressions with the same sense, but with different reference. For example, the expression 'The King of France' has the same sense when it refers to Louis XIV or to Louis XVI. It is true then sameness of sense of the expression 'Aristotle' in (3) and (4) does not guarantee co-reference. The crucial question is: Does it *exclude* it? We know that the expression in an opaque context has an indirect reference to the sense of the expression, while in a transparent context the expression has a direct sense and also refers directly to 'Aristotle'. Nothing in the definition of sense guarantees that the expressions might have also the same reference, but it leaves the possibility open to preserve the validity of inference, that we associate the same reference to the expression in two cases. That is, we say, in the opaque case the expression refers, indirectly, to its customary sense, and through that sense to a specific referent, namely Aristotle, and that this is the same referent as that involved in the non-opaque occurrence. In fact, all we need to do here is to make a further assumption that the two expressions with an identical sense can also have the same reference.

Blackburn might not accept this argument on the ground of arbitrariness. But we

have seen that there is bound to be some arbitrariness in the preservation of the inference. Blackburn himself says that the use of the same name does not guarantee co-reference, so if the inference is to be licenced at all, it must be on the further assumption that the two occurrences of 'Aristotle' are co-referential. Even on a Russellian theory that further assumption is, in a way, itself arbitrary, for to preserve the validity of the inference we still have to suppose that the two occurrences are co-referential. So Frege's 'arbitrariness' is in no worse a position than Russell or Blackburn in their attempt to validate the inference.

In these arguments Frege is represented as claiming that in the opaque occurrence the expression 'Aristotle' has both a reference to a sense, and a reference to the man. It may be thought that this does not match what Frege actually said, for he may be thought to be saying that in the opaque occurrence there is just one reference, namely to the sense of 'Aristotle', and *not* to the man. This is probably how Blackburn comes to think of the indirect reference as excluding any other reference; that is, how the indirect reference to sense *excludes* any reference to the man. In the first interpretation we saw that this conflicts with the requirement that sameness of sense entails sameness of referent. This undoubtedly shows that Frege has some further explaining to do, but it also shows how he could escape the criticism. The same problem will afflict the second interpretation, too, though the conflict will be less strict, since Frege is not then building sameness of reference into his conception of 'same sense'. Therefore if we allow the possibility of a further premiss of co-reference to validate the inference, then the premiss will not involve any comparable difficulty. Such inferences and the additional premisses needed to validate them might still be thought to deserve more investigation. If these lines of argument against Blackburn are correct, then his view cannot be said to make any independent contribution to the argument about an infinite regress. We, therefore, move on to examine his other argument about an infinite regress.

The argument about an infinite regress is given in the above examples (E<sub>1</sub>)-(E<sub>3</sub>), so let us consider them. (E<sub>1</sub>) *mentions* an expression which, if used, would refer to the line

"The curfew tolls the knell of the parting day". ( $E_2$ ) takes that quoted, mentioned, expression ( $E_1$ ), and nominally identifies its sense (by prefixing it with 'the sense of'), and then mentions that whole nominal identification by putting the expression in quotation marks. Again, if we were *using* ( $E_2$ ), and not mentioning it, we would refer to the sense of ( $E_1$ ). Blackburn supposes that an infinite regress can now be generated, because if we wish to raise a question about, or further specify, ( $E_2$ ), then we are forced to construct a further expression, ( $E_3$ ), which if used, would refer to the sense of ( $E_2$ ). Therefore, now the suggestion seems to be, ( $E_3$ ) has exactly the same form as ( $E_2$ ), and if we wish to raise a question about, or further specify, ( $E_3$ ), then we will be similarly forced to construct a further expression ( $E_4$ ) and so on.

It is not at all clear, however, that this is a strict infinite regress, or if it is, that it is also any obstacle to Frege's theory. Suppose, for example, that we identify some man, say Russell, and then raise a question about his immediate ancestry. We may then form the expression "The parents of Russell". If we now wish further to raise the same question about the new items referred to we can go on to form the further expression "The parents of the parents of Russell" and perhaps can continue indefinitely. Such a possibility does not cast any serious doubt on the very first step in the process where we speak of an enquiry into Russell's parents, or on our ability to identify Russell's parents.

The situation is not much changed if we speak of linguistic objects. Suppose we use the phrase "The translation of ..." to indicate a translation into a specific language. If we now start with a phrase like (1) "The first line of Gray's Elegy" we can ask for (2) "The translation of '(1)'" and, if we wish, ask further for (3) "The translation of '(2)'". In a similar way if we wish to raise such further questions there need be no end to such a series, but this would not cast serious doubt on the initial notion of a translation for (1), or for any other expression. It is true here that in most languages there will soon be a formula for specifying further translations. In most languages the iterated occurrences of "The translation of ..." will be the same whatever the complement may be. However a language might follow a different rule and have different expressions for "The translation

of ..." when it occurs as the second, third, or fourth iteration.

If these cases were exact parallels of Blackburn's examples, then it is hard to see what his objection to Frege could be. Of course, it remains true, as Blackburn says, that to continue the iteration will not throw any more light on the phrase "The sense of ..." than was already present in the first use at ( $E_0$ ). All that this shows is that to follow such an iteration is patently not the right way to offer any further elucidation of that Fregean phrase. This reinforces the point made earlier in distinguishing a *specification* of sense from an *explanation* of it. To continue an objection to Frege it would have to be shown that to follow such a path is either forced, or else is required in order to offer that further explanation of sense. We saw earlier that alternative accounts can be followed, and have been canvassed. We might, as Frege did, specify more precisely the conditions under which we have sameness or difference of sense along with sameness and difference of reference. We might, as Evans suggested, offer a test like his Intuitive Criterion, in order to separate Fregean sense and reference. Nothing in Blackburn's, or on that interpretation of Russell's, regress argument constitutes an obstacle to these strategies.

It still remains true that Frege's notion of sense needs more elucidation than Frege himself offered, but that was not in any case the substance of Blackburn's or Russell's criticism in terms of the regress argument. We know that Blackburn has talked about the straightforward recognition of sense to stop the regress. Therefore the question is: If we can provide an adequate account of sense by relating sameness (difference) of sense to sameness (difference) of reference why should anything else be required? This issue is also related to Dummett's discussion where he is actually concerned to interpret Fregean sense. He agrees that there is an alleged difficulty in giving an arbitrary recognition of sense, but he believes that

The notion of sense is ... not a mere theoretical tool to be used in giving an account of a language; it is one which, in an inchoate fashion, we constantly appeal to or make use in our actual practice (as, for instance, when we challenge someone to make precise the sense in which he is using some expression).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>op.cit. Dummett, *Frege*, p.107.

What Dummett wants to say is that Frege's notion of sense is not just a fancy theoretical apparatus with no obvious connection with our linguistic practice. He thinks that sense has to have a very clear anchorage in our ordinary linguistic practices. This point of Dummett can be tied in very clearly to the issue that Blackburn raises where in discussing the regress, he (Blackburn) says that the only way to get out of the regress is to stop it arbitrarily at some point and then just to accept sense. According to Dummett there is not any reason why that should be arbitrary because the notion of sense is not an arbitrary theoretical apparatus, but can be understood perfectly well through ordinary linguistic practice.

Here Dummett is liable to a danger of begging the question, for he seems to imply that in order to get a clear picture of Fregean sense, we just need to appeal to our competence as native English speakers. This suggests that for Dummett to grasp the sense of some expression is no more than just understanding it, but this view of Dummett is overstated. The fact that ordinary people can somehow respond to Frege's notion of sense does not explain what sense *is*, because Frege defined sense in a rather technical way. Evans, for example, does not accept Dummett's view about sense, so there is even disagreement about that technical account.

There *is* an intuitive plausibility about Frege's examples and the way he introduced the notion of sense in terms of those examples by means of difference of sense and sameness of reference. These are the basic data in which any ordinary speakers can gain access to Fregean sense, and Dummett is right to that extent. However if this is not enough, then we have already moved from any kind of intuitive practical understanding of the examples to the question of semantic theory, and that theoretical issue cannot be resolved just by an appeal to our ordinary linguistic intuitions.

The question now arises, if it is not just an intuitive feature of those examples of language, then what is its theoretical importance? One answer is that Frege's notion of sense needs to apply to every significant linguistic unit. In his examples of names and descriptions, the intuition seems to be very clear. When it moves away from names to

predicates or from the whole sentence to other kinds of linguistic expressions like adverbs or prepositions, then the question of identifying difference(sameness) of sense and sameness(difference) of reference is more difficult. Indeed, what we need is simply some more elucidation of the way in which Fregean sense fits into an overall semantic theory, and that can no longer be dealt with simply by examples. Dummett's appeal to intuition, therefore, seems not to fit Fregean sense into an overall semantic theory. At this point his appeal needs instead a clear theoretical framework.

Dummett is using an ordinary, colloquial, understanding in order to reinforce his point that Frege's notion of sense is not just a piece of arbitrary theoretical apparatus that cannot be used in our everyday life. It may be that the ordinary use of 'sense' doesn't match a strict theoretical use, but that doesn't mean that it is totally divorced from our ordinary linguistic practice. It can be anchored to our standard linguistic practices and undoubtedly can be anchored to some of the colloquial ways in which we talk about the sense of this or that expression, even though these colloquial ways are not sufficiently characterised in the theory. Now if Dummett's point is said to be overstated then it seems to favour Blackburn's case, but if we accept a compromise position between Dummett's colloquial uses of sense and Frege's technical idea of sense, then Dummett does seem to have a point. For what the compromise conclusion shows is that if the technical notion of sense can be anchored in our ordinary linguistic practice, then there is nothing very wrong with our 'just accepting' the examples given of sameness (difference) of sense. In that case, however, one part of Blackburn's objection will be inadequate. For the point shows that there is nothing objectionable about our resting the elucidation of sense ultimately on some quite ordinary grasp of linguistic expressions. It may be that this is in any case inevitable.

What follows from the whole discussion is that Russell and also Blackburn keep returning to the quite general, and fair, point that Frege's sense does need more exposure and more explanation. However in the light of the discussion neither Russell's nor Blackburn's argument add anything decisive to reinforce that general complaint. On the contrary, the point they raise about identifying sense as a specific object is in danger of

'reifying' sense which is objectionable. Russell's argument shows that the connection between sense and reference is certainly very obscure, but Blackburn's interpretation of Russell seems not to resolve that obscurity or to add a decisive objection to Frege's apparatus. If that is so, then we have to conclude that Russell was not justified in rejecting Frege's notion of sense. The most that he achieved is to point to the need for more clarification of that notion.

**PART THREE**

**NAMES**

## RUSSELL'S ACCOUNT OF NAMES

Both Russell and Frege, as we saw, placed a significant emphasis on the idea of a 'naming' or 'referring' relation between words and sentences. It was also pointed out that Russell deployed an argument in OD to reject Frege's additional appeal to "Sinn".<sup>1</sup> But whether Russell gave adequate grounds for this rejection or not, at least it led him to formulate his own account of semantics in terms of a naming or a referring relation, and this is one of the central features of his Logical Atomism. It leads him to place a dominant emphasis on names in language as the most fundamental bearers of meaning, and to give a typically empiricist account of the way in which language rests on certain fundamental names. These semantic doctrines, however, cannot be divorced from Russell's epistemological interests, and it is often claimed nowadays that Russell's philosophy is handicapped by his failure to separate these interests.

In this part I want to examine those suggestions, but also to consider some other potential ambiguities which arise in his doctrine. Russell's emphasis on naming may, for example, distort his account of other linguistic functions, such as predicating. Even with an emphasis on names Russell is, of course, compelled to take into account a point on which Frege had insisted, that "names have meaning only in the context of a proposition". But Russell's account of propositions, and his related treatment of judgment, seem hesitant and unclear. At various points in his work he insisted on the need for propositions, but also regarded them as in some way unreal. In particular he recognised a problem which owes at least part of its origin to his earlier interest in Bradley, namely the problem which he called that of the "unity of the proposition". These problems will be

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<sup>1</sup>I have argued before that Russell's rejection of "Sinn" is not adequately supported by the arguments in OD.

explored with the aim of locating other issues about names which deserve a fuller discussion.

### 6.1 *An Initial Ambiguity in Russell's Account of Names*

Russell's adherence to a naming relation in semantics leads him to the recognition of two types of names which I have discussed in the first chapter. One is what he calls an LP name which is rooted in the theory of meaning, and the other is what we would regard as an OP name, which, for Russell, turns out to be an abbreviation for a disguised description. The simplest way of presenting the contrast between these two kinds of name is to say that a LP name gets its meaning solely through a name/bearer relation. An OP name, for example 'Piccadilly', does not stand for any such relation. Such a name, Russell thought, can be understood only via a description which, when properly analysed, actually corresponds to facts that do not contain any constituent, whether single or complex, of which 'Piccadilly' is the name. This Russellian account of OP names of course contrasts with Frege's account of *Bedeutung* because Frege had no conception of an LP name and therefore the notion of *Bedeutung* applies to any significant expression of language, that is proper names, predicates, and propositions. He identified the *Bedeutung* of a proper name with the bearer of the name and this matches Russell's account of the sub-class of LP names.

According to Russell an LP name can be significant only in terms of its standing for some definite object and would be meaningless in the absence of any such definite object. His view can be adequately specified by the semantic theory that the meaning of a name 'a' stands for its bearer. He said for example,

'Scott' taken as a name has a meaning all by itself. It stands for a certain person, and there it is.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.253.

This quote, however, indicates that Russell was not consistent in his account, since sometimes he restricted the account of meaning as naming to LP names, but sometimes extended this to OP names as well. Pears maintains that Russell allowed the possibility of treating OP names as if they were LP names. The reason for this is that he attributes to Russell the view that a person using an OP name sometimes

*... will be thinking of its actual denotation directly without the intervention of any descriptions: in his thought the denotation will not be split up into its elements.*<sup>3</sup>

According to Ayer<sup>4</sup> if Pears's view is granted then it runs counter to Russell's account of names, i.e. LP names. It would then be like saying that Russell abandoned his principle of acquaintance (see earlier discussion in Pt.1 ch.3). The suggestion is that the requirement for an LP name is rooted not only in the name/bearer relation, but also in the principle of acquaintance. In this context of naming 'Scott', although the condition of having a bearer of the name is fulfilled, Russell's further requirement of being acquainted with the bearer of the name is not met except perhaps by Scott himself. This suggests that an OP name, in a Russellian sense, cannot have a reference without the intervention of a description; and even if it has a reference, it cannot then be recognized as a LP name because one of the basic requirements of a LP name, namely being directly acquainted with the object named still needs to be fulfilled, for direct acquaintance concerns only sense-data. Ayer, however, defended Russell against this accusation by saying that Russell was *pretending* that 'Scott' is a LP name. The fact is that Russell, in this context, was giving a lecture and only trying to make clear to his audience the general distinction between names and descriptions, rather than explaining his special theory about names. Russell at this stage probably found it easier to explain this distinction informally without explaining his whole theory of LP names and their relation to sense-data. A better defence of Russell might be to say, as was suggested earlier (see Pt.1.ch.3, pp.63-64), that the strict theory

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<sup>3</sup> op. cit. Pears, *Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition in Philosophy*, p.49.

<sup>4</sup>see, Ayer, *Russell and Moore: The Analytical Heritage* (MacMillan, London, 1971).

of LP names should be treated as an idealisation of the naming relation which is only imperfectly realised in natural language.

We have seen that for Russell LP names gain their meaning via the object, and that this is not true of OP names which are reduced to descriptions. Since the naming relation makes the LP names meaningful OP names (see Pt.1, ch.3, pp.53-54, 61), get their meaning through the medium of analysis down to the level of LP names. Russell envisaged an analysis of all complex propositions into atomic propositions in which only atomic names occur. Such an analysis has two aspects (a) semantic and (b) epistemological, and this compounds the initial ambiguity. A purely semantic account of names, in which all names gain their meaning through a relation to some object, would suggest that even OP names gain their meaning in this way. Russell also held that OP names were not directly related to epistemically simple objects. He thought that such an 'object' as Piccadilly was a complex phenomenon constructed out of series of classes of sense-data. This provided him with one motive for distinguishing the class of LP names from that of OP names.

Those epistemological requirements for LP names, however, contrast with other logical, or semantic requirements, for example that LP names have to be logically independent of each other and exclude any descriptive material. For Russell, only proper names can stand for particulars and particulars are completely self-subsistent, that is, proper names "have meaning independently of the meanings of other words" (cf.note 8, p.118). It would be natural to associate this characteristic of proper names, that each is logically independent of the others, with the logical independence of atomic propositions. Sainsbury's view, however, is that these are quite different claims and that Russell did not hold the belief that atomic propositions were logically independent of each other.

Sainsbury attempts to show the relation between Russell's particulars and independence by explaining that

... the logical independence of particulars from one another means that none of them is a necessary existent.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>cf. Sainsbury, *Russell* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1979), p.51.

For him a necessary existent is one that exists in every possible world. His claim suggests that if A and B are logically independent of each other then in some possible world A exists and B does not, and in some possible world B exists and A does not. Sainsbury argues that we can talk about the logical independence of particulars without supposing that they are necessary existents at all. He claims that when Russell spoke of the logical independence of proper names, he was expressing his belief that no particular exists necessarily. It was this point that Russell was making, according to Sainsbury, when he (Russell) said

Each [particular] might have been the whole universe; ...<sup>6</sup>

Russell's view suggests very clearly that if there is only one particular that exists, and that particular doesn't tell us whether other particulars exist or not, then it means that *no* particular in the world is a necessary existent. Particulars are supposed to be mutually independent but not necessary existents. This idea of Russell contrasts with Wittgenstein's atomism, because for Wittgenstein objects necessarily exist and make up the substance of the world (*Tractatus*, 2.024, 2.027, 2.021).

Indeed, Sainsbury claims, the doctrine of independence, when extended to all atoms in PLA, does not apply to universals. The suggestion is that although Russell was not explicit about universals in PLA, he talked about universals as necessary existents in *PP*. But the kind of independence possessed by universals is incompatible with the sort of independence possessed by particulars. Sainsbury attributes the view to Russell in *PP* that universals are supposed to subsist and not exist, but the fact is

... a subsistent universal could not have failed to subsist.<sup>7</sup>

Sainsbury, therefore, accepts Wittgenstein's version of logical independence holding for elementary propositions, but denies any such independence for Russell's view of atomic propositions. An atomic proposition generally contains an unanalysable predicate linked

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<sup>6</sup> op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.202.

<sup>7</sup> op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.52.

with an unanalysable name, such as 'This is white', or 'This is red'. Now if the former predicate 'white', Sainsbury argues, is true of the object, then the latter predicate 'red' cannot be true of the object (as used on the same occasion, of the same object). This suggests that the two atomic propositions cannot both be true at a time, and therefore cannot be logically independent. Although Russell's account of the independence of particulars and atomic propositions is not wholly clear I shall accept this view of Sainsbury.

It is clear from these points that Russell's requirements for names cover epistemological, logical, and metaphysical aspects. His epistemological commitment to the principle of acquaintance and an empiricist theory has been widely noted and criticised. Those criticisms, for example of Evans, Sainsbury and others have sometimes focussed on the difficulty of connecting what is primarily a semantic classification with an underlying epistemology or metaphysics. However Russell's semantic account of names is also not free from difficulties, as we shall see.

## 6.2 *Names, Predicates and Acquaintance*

For Russell, the word in an atomic proposition expressing a quality is called a predicate, and the word expressing a relation would be called a verb. Apart from the predicate and the verb, the other words occurring in an atomic proposition may be called the subject, or subjects, of the proposition. For him, only *proper names* stand theoretically for particulars, and these will stand for such subjects.

He held that a particular can only be talked about by means of a proper name. Since general words are involved in the use of descriptions and LP names name only particulars without describing them, it follows obviously that only proper names can stand for particulars. He defined a proper name as follows:

... a name, ... is a simple symbol, directly designating an individual which is its meaning, and having this meaning

in its own right, independently of the meanings of all other words; ...<sup>8</sup>

This view of Russell shows some inconsistency in his own terminology as claiming that only LP names name particulars, but that names in general can name non-particulars, that is the universals he talks about in *PP*, which are required as the items for which predicates stand. One of the difficulties in Russell's account is how he dealt with predicates. Russell, as we shall see, found problems about the ways in which we express predicates. In particular he was puzzled by the fact that we seem able to express a predicative concept, ascribing a colour for example, either by talking of 'redness' or by talking of the expression '... is red'. For the present I note only that in relation to such a predicate Russell thought that it could be understood only through acquaintance with a corresponding universal. That view obviously raises metaphysical problems but raises also a difficulty about the nature of propositions. If, for example, both the subject and predicate in a proposition are names (or even LP names), then it is hard to see how a proposition gains its peculiar, assertive, unity. A list of names, characteristically, does not express a proposition, but merely provides a catalogue.

Russell himself, however, was not quite explicit in his account. Was he holding that predicates are LP names when they are atomic? Or was he holding that they are *names* but not LP names? His view suggests that he used the term 'LP names' just for particulars, and that it would be wrong to ascribe to him the idea that even atomic predicates are LP names. The suggestion is that in an atomic proposition we have got a LP name that refers to a particular, and we have got a predicate which is a name but not a LP name and refers to a universal, for example, 'redness'. He certainly was thinking of predicates as signifying universals in *PP*, although he was unclear about this in *PLA*. I shall take it that for Russell simple, atomic, predicates are names but not LP names.

Russell also made a distinction between understanding a name and understanding a predicate. Understanding a LP name requires acquaintance with the particular bearing

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<sup>8</sup>op.cit. Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, p.174.

the name. He held that acquaintance with a particular is necessary to understand a name of a particular. According to him,

... in order to understand a name for a particular, the only thing necessary is to be acquainted with that particular. When you are acquainted with that particular, you have a full, adequate, and complete understanding of the name, and no further information is required. No further information as to the facts that are true of that particular would enable you to have a fuller understanding of the meaning of the name.<sup>9</sup>

Russell's view raises the problem of whether acquaintance is to be considered as necessary and sufficient for understanding names, and I shall discuss this in the next section. When Russell said in the quotation that the *only* thing necessary is acquaintance he suggested that acquaintance is *both* necessary *and* sufficient. Acquaintance with simple particulars is certainly the basis for understanding complex ones, but it is not clear that acquaintance is all that is needed.

Understanding a predicate, on the other hand, is quite a different thing from understanding a LP name. Knowledge of properties like red, white, square, round, and so on is not knowledge about any particular object that 'This is red'. Rather it is to be understood in terms of what is meant by saying that something is red or what 'being red' is.

Russell's treatment of names indicates that the criterion for understanding a name is to be acquainted with the object named, and that a name is not further analysable. Thus 'red' is a name which cannot be analysed further, and to understand 'red' requires us to be acquainted with objects which are red. Russell's account of 'red' for example, both as a name and a predicate therefore creates problems.

The bottom line of Russell's theory are the logical atoms which form the basis of language. He added the empiricist view in his semantic theory that when analysis can proceed no further, we must appeal to acquaintance or direct experience. Russellian analysis indeed begins by way of definition of complex expressions and ends with indefinables or unanalysables, and it is at this stage that the notion of acquaintance is

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<sup>9</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.202.

introduced. So acquaintance and unanalyzability are two different ideas which, however, are presented together by Russell because of his traditional epistemology.

Sainsbury usefully discusses some of the ambiguities involved in Russell's notion of the basic atoms of language and their relation to the principle of acquaintance. For him, a singular or general term can be accounted for in two different ways: one involving acquaintance and the other involving analysis. The notion of acquaintance can be characterised simply in terms of knowing something directly, that is grasping the meaning of names standing for objects directly without the intervention of any other medium. Current writers like Evans or Peacocke consider acquaintance as used in ordinary language, for example in a context where we would employ demonstrative words. Russell by contrast used "acquaintance" in a more technical sense by holding that acquaintance is possible only in terms of sense-data. Acquaintance, however, is one way of understanding singular or general expressions.

Another way of understanding such expressions involves analysis. Analysis is different from acquaintance since it involves verbal definition, that is defining an expression by some other expressions whose combination is synonymous with the former. For example, the expression 'triangle' can be defined as "a plane figure whose three sides are straight lines" where the meaning of both the expression analysed and the analysis is the same. A complex expression can be analysed further down to the level of unanalysable ones in order to grasp the meaning of the complex expression in a more fundamental way. However neither the account of analysable or unanalysable expressions involves acquaintance necessarily as Russell claimed.

Sainsbury claims that Russell viewed analysis as dependent on acquaintance because analysis should be in terms whose meaning can be grasped only through direct epistemic contact. He thinks that Russell's analysis of complex expressions like 'Pegasus' in terms of acquaintance suggests that

... replacing the words in a sentence by words each of whose meaning is such that learning it involves

acquaintance is part of what is involved in 'analysing' the sentence.<sup>10</sup>

According to Sainsbury if analysis in semantic theory is made dependent on acquaintance in Russell's sense, then this requirement goes too far. Because the principle of acquaintance restricts the semantic theory only to expressions for sense-data, it leaves no room for the semantic theory to talk about the meaning relatum of complex expressions like 'Pegasus' and 'unicorn' and turns these expressions into logical fictions. Such a claim can be accepted for these fictional entities, but Russell's view entails that even words for physical objects do not name anything since they are analysable and do not stand for sense-data with which we can be directly acquainted.

Sainsbury argues plausibly that for Russell the principle of acquaintance and a realist conception of meaning are mutually dependent. The principle of acquaintance requires that there should be real objects, or 'meaning-relata' as Sainsbury calls them, to give meaning to the atoms of language. Conversely, such a realist conception of meaning requires that there should be some procedure, such as acquaintance, which enables the speaker of a language to learn the meaning of those linguistic atoms. As Sainsbury puts it:

Hence the realist theory in its post-*Po/M* form, restricted to unanalysable expressions, requires the principle of acquaintance, in terms of which unanalysability is characterized. Conversely, the principle of acquaintance requires the realist theory, for the entities with which acquaintance is required are meaning-relata, and the notion of meaning-relata has application only if the realist theory is at least partly true.<sup>11</sup>

A third term used of the linguistic atoms is 'indefinability'. However, for Russell, the definition of a phrase does *not* necessarily provide an analysis of it. For example, in PLA he held that although it would be correct to define 'red' as 'the colour with the greatest wave length', this definition cannot be considered as an analysis of the word. He argued that since the average person who uses the word 'red' has no idea about the physical theory of colour, a definition based on that theory cannot give the meaning that

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<sup>10</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.27

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. pp.36-37.

the word 'red' has for him. Russell's ideas of 'definability' and 'analysability' are both based on semantic operations but there are difficulties in drawing the distinction between those definitions which provide analysis and those which do not. For example, the meaning of the word 'pentagon' can be learnt through its definition "a plane figure with five straight sides". One need not be acquainted with pentagons themselves, as long as he is acquainted with the basic elements required for the definition of the word. This function of definition in his theory allows us to learn the meanings of complex words without being acquainted with the objects designated by them, but this definition of a complex word is different from the definition of a simple word. Thus the definition of the colour 'red', for example, fails to perform the function of helping us to recognize the colour without our direct contact with it.

Russell's account of logical atoms, then, makes use of these three different notions of 'acquaintance' (in Russell's technical sense), 'indefinability' and 'unanalysability'. We have seen that an atom named by 'red' might be definable but unanalysable; and it has been suggested that unanalysability cannot be equated with acquaintance, even though the two naturally go together. For unanalysability might be regarded as a purely semantic notion, while acquaintance is an epistemic idea. The former concerns meaning directly but the latter has more to do with *learning* the meanings of expressions.

Sainsbury indeed accepts these points but also wants to reject the principle of acquaintance. The problem that arises for Russell is on the assumption that Russell linked his account of unanalysability with the principle of acquaintance. Sainsbury raises the objection that Russell confused the *epistemic* content in the principle of acquaintance with a *semantic* content understood in terms of unanalysability. He rejects the principle of acquaintance and wants to resolve the problem by using the notion of unanalysability. He thinks basically that if we construct a semantic theory of meaning like Russell's by appealing to unanalysability linked to the principle of acquaintance, then the theory is going to collapse.

Sainsbury nevertheless thinks that Russell's semantic theory can be explained

independently of the principle of acquaintance, but that his principle can be replaced by another epistemic principle. In fact, there are crudely two different ways in which acquaintance can be employed. One is the rather technical traditional way that Russell wanted to employ which is that we are directly acquainted only with sense-data. Another way of understanding acquaintance is its use in everyday life where we allow direct acquaintance with such things as physical objects. This latter view suggests that the notion of acquaintance in an epistemic context can be retained without committing us to that traditional, restricted, sense-datum theory. This is what Sainsbury also considers in his *epistemic principle* which I shall discuss in the next Section.

Russell, however, made a distinction between complex (analysable) and simple (unanalysable) predicates as a parallel to his general distinction between complex and simple names. For him, an OP name like 'Piccadilly' is a complex expression, whereas an LP name like 'This' is a simple expression. Apart from names or subject terms, he talked of a parallel distinction between analysable predicates like 'honesty' or 'deciduousness' and unanalysable predicates like 'red'. This distinction between predicates brings again the old terminological problem which we have discussed and resolved earlier, for example whether to call predicates names. They cannot be called OP names, and cannot be considered as LP names either, but as was suggested earlier, we can still regard them as names of some other sort (see pp.118-19).

Beyond that terminological problem, there are other problems too. If we call predicates names, what is it that they name? Nominally 'universals', but if Russell is committed to giving meaning-relata<sup>12</sup> to them as entities, then clearly they are not entities in the way that particulars are. Russell was an empiricist but committed himself to the existence of universals quite explicitly in *PP*. In *PP* he criticized Berkeley and Hume for rejecting the notion of 'abstract ideas' simply because of their adherence to particulars

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<sup>12</sup>The expression 'meaning-relata' is used by Sainsbury as a technical term. We shall see later that Russell, in *PofM*, divided 'term' into two categories, things and concepts, or, according to his later terminology, particulars and universals. Sainsbury replaces Russell's 'term' by his own terminology 'meaning-relata' which, however, will cover the meanings of both particulars and universals. I will use this expression 'meaning-relata' in my text, and shall be using it as Sainsbury does.

only and wish to dispense altogether with *relations* as universals. Russell accepted *relation* as a universal and argued that if one universal is admitted, there is no good reason not to admit more. He defined a universal as

... anything which may be shared by many particulars, and has those characteristics which, ... distinguish justice and whiteness from just acts and white things.<sup>13</sup>

Universals, for Russell, are not mental and exist independently of the mind. This contrasts with a Humean doctrine which suggests that what exists are particulars, and any general ideas are constructed through mental processes. These problems lead to some indecision on Russell's part about the meaning-relata for predicates. If they are identified as particulars then the theory becomes inconsistent with Russell's ideas that "a relation can never occur as a subject", and this was the difficulty Russell identified in terms of the difference between, say 'redness' and '... is red'. On the other hand, if they are recognized as universals, then that sits uneasily with his empiricist theory for even if meaning-relata are associated with universals, they are not the sort of items that the empiricist finds easy to accommodate. This however raises an issue relating to Russell's rejection of Fregean Sinn.

Frege, as we have seen, was quite happy to talk about a 'third realm' of objects like senses, propositions, and numbers, and the issue about universals raises no special difficulty for him. He was not committed to empiricism as Russell was. Russell's rejection of Fregean sense as an entity (see Pt.2, ch.5, pp.88-90) emphasises his difficulty in explaining universals in PLA. One way that he can get out of the earlier dilemma would be to develop a commitment to universals in terms of some kind of nominalist doctrine like that of Locke, which does not actually claim that there are universals because it does not recognize any third realm. It however holds that there are universals in the sense that we can gain access to them through our understanding of predicates. Russell indeed could minimise his commitment to the existence of universals, but in PLA he did not really spend

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<sup>13</sup>op.cit. *The Problems of Philosophy*, p.93.

much time in explaining what he meant by universals or the meaning-relata of predicates. This general problem is connected to Russell's uneasiness about the notion of 'proposition'. For Frege, we have seen, propositions are inhabitants of a third realm. Russell was more ambiguous and hesitant about the nature and existence of propositions. We shall see later that although he accepted the notion of propositions he also thought that they do not really exist and are not real.

Russell's problem with respect to universals and particulars and the way in which we identify these two in language has two dimensions. One involves the difficulty of identifying or specifying the nature of universals. It is difficult to identify universals because although we can identify a particular object, for example, as 'red', this is only an instance of the universal and not the universal itself. The second point is related to the way in which linguistically we draw that distinction. The suggestion is that at least for certain very elementary forms of propositions in language, like subject-predicate propositions, we do draw some functional differences between the role of subjects as referring to particulars, and the role of predicates as referring to universals. Now although these two points are bound to be related, they are in fact distinct: one is metaphysical, that is how we understand the existence of universals; the other is linguistic, namely how can we account for that distinction between the role of subject and the role of predicate. In the next section I consider a related difference between Frege and Russell in their treatment of names and predicates.

### **6.3 *Russell and Frege on Names and Predicates***

Some of Frege's responses to the problems just outlined are really more purely linguistic, for example, the distinction he drew between names or subjects as saturated and predicates as unsaturated. On the other hand, his reference to a third realm seems again to be a contribution to the metaphysical issue. Russell, of course, did not make any explicit

distinction between saturated and unsaturated expressions. Frege's attitude to those problems is complicated by his view that predicates and relational expressions do not stand for (bedeuten) abstract objects, but for concepts and relations. Both of these then have to be sharply distinguished from objects. For Frege a concept and an object, however, fit together naturally, and it was part of his resolution of these problems to regard a concept only as a referent (Bedeutung) of a predicate, and a relation only as a referent of a relational expression.

Frege, throughout his entire work, explicitly held a radical distinction between concept and object. He expressed the distinction forcibly in the third basic principle at the end of the introduction to the *Grundlagen* in the following way:

...never to lose sight of the distinction between concept and object.<sup>14</sup>

We have seen earlier that by a proper name Frege meant what is generally called a singular term. Unlike Russell, he is disinclined to define a proper name as logically simple, and what Russell characterized as definite descriptions Frege included in his general category of proper names.

Frege examined two types of expressions in language showing that concept words are incomplete or unsaturated as opposed to object words which are saturated or complete. In the *Grundlagen*, he described object words by the terms 'bounded-off', 'self-sufficient', 'individual', 'standing by themselves' and 'unity'.<sup>15</sup> Since objects are the objective correlate of proper names and are what proper names stand for, proper names are regarded by Frege as *complete* expressions which can sensibly stand on their own. By contrast, a predicate like '... is wise', is an expression of a completely distinct type which cannot be correlated with an entity of the same sort as those related to proper names.

Although Frege's account looks more promising than Russell's, in its clear distinction between names and predicates, Frege nevertheless tangled himself in the

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<sup>14</sup>cf. Frege, G., *The Foundation of Arithmetic* (Translated in English by J.L. Austin, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1950), p.x.

<sup>15</sup>see, Walker, Jeremy D.B., *A Study of Frege* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1965), pp. 24-25.

notorious problem of explaining how the proposition "The concept 'horse' is not a concept" comes out true. This issue raises controversy and Dummett indicates some queries over his application of Sinn and Bedeutung to predicates and functions generally. Frege in his essay "Über Begriff und Gegenstand"<sup>16</sup> produced the illustration of the predicate, for example, "x is a horse". For him the function (predicate) "... is a horse" stands for a concept, and any expression that can properly replace x in "x is a horse" will stand for an object. If such a substitution for the variable is made, then the proposition asserts that some object falls under the concept 'horse'. For example, to say "Blue Peter is a horse" is to say of Blue Peter that it falls under the concept *horse*. Frege, however, in this essay wanted to point out that this explanation of a concept fails to say what is intended. For the suggestion is that the phrase 'the concept *horse*' is a proper name (singular term); and if it stands for anything, it must stand for an *object*. Thus we can say that the phrase 'the concept *horse*' does not stand for a concept but an object and therefore, we can say simply that "the concept *horse* is not a concept but an object". Frege's result here seems to be intolerable, and he sought to resolve the paradox in one of his unpublished papers<sup>17</sup> in which he examined again the notions of a 'concept', 'relation' and 'function'.

According to Frege it is impossible to truly fill the argument place of the predicate 'x is a concept' with an expression of the appropriate kind, that is a proper name. For the referent of a proper name will always be an object and not a concept. It is for this reason that to treat the expression "The concept 'horse'" as a proper name with its appropriate referent as a substitute for the variable in 'x is a concept' will always be false. We will be committed instead to the paradoxical alternative claim that "The concept 'horse' is not a concept".

One way of dealing with this, suggested by Dummett, is to reformulate the way in which we refer to concepts. Instead of "The concept 'horse'" we might talk of "What 'x is a horse' stands for". Such an expression will not belong to the first level, like 'x is a horse',

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<sup>16</sup>see, op.cit. Dummett, *Frege*, pp.211-12.

<sup>17</sup>see a footnote on Frege's unpublished paper in *ibid.* pp.212-13.

where a proper name can be substituted for the variable. Instead it will be a second-level expression, like a quantifier, and so cannot be treated just as a proper name. If we treat it in that way, then, the suggestion is, we are to write "What 'x is a horse' stands for is a concept" and the paradox is avoided. In such a claim Frege's account of a concept as the *Bedeutung* of a predicate is that of an extensional range of objects of which the predicate is true. It has obvious affinities with Russell's notion of a 'propositional function' where, as we shall see, similar difficulties arise.

For Dummett, the whole difficulty arises in interpreting the two ingredients of reference as applied to proper names: (a) the conception of reference as a semantic role; and (b) identifying the referent of a name with its bearer. According to Dummett,

The conception of reference as semantic role tells us to what purpose the notion of reference is to be put: ... The identification of the referent of a name with its bearer provides the matter of which the conception of reference as a semantic role is merely the form: it outlines the shape that is to be given to the account of the meanings of proper names.<sup>18</sup>

Dummett suggests that if reference is regarded as semantic role, then its ascription to any expression having a genuine logical unity does not create any problem. The ascription of reference to incomplete expressions produces controversy because we then conceive the reference of such expressions as having a relation to a referent analogous to that of a name to its bearer.

However, unlike Russell, Frege's characterisation of predicates does not lead him to a confusing situation of identifying names and predicates. He clearly defined a predicate as what is referred to by an expression with a gap which produces a complete sentence when the gap is filled by a proper name. A predicate has, therefore, a kind of *incompleteness* which is implicit in the sort of entity it stands for. Dummett explains:

The incompleteness of a predicate ... more particularly ... resides in the fact it is not, in general, a separate *piece* of the sentence but is, rather, a *feature* of the way in which the sentence is constructed. A predicate is thus something which cannot be exhibited separately.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid. p.210.

<sup>19</sup>cf., Dummett, *Truth And Other Enigmas* (Duckworth, 1978), p.101.

But Dummett's purpose is not quite clear here. One point he may be making is just to draw a distinction between classifying phrases/words in a sentence as opposed to classifying the meaning of the phrases/words in a proposition. There is an ambiguity in the term 'predicate' and we can disambiguate it by saying that in one way when we are talking about predicates, we are just talking about words. For example, in the sentence "Rust is red", the last two words *are* a separate *piece* of the whole expression, but to move to the *proposition*, which the sentence expresses/means does prevent us from talking of predicates as *pieces*. For it is odd to talk of the *meaning* of '... is red' as a *piece* of the *meaning* of "Rust is red". If we think of predicates in *that* way, then Dummett is right to claim that we would not normally think of sub-sentential meanings as *pieces* of a whole proposition. It seems likely that it is this point that Dummett is primarily concerned to make.

Dummett is certainly making two different points here. Firstly he is marking the important distinction between sentences and the propositions they express. Secondly he is offering a resolution of Frege's paradox about the concept 'horse' and in so doing explaining how Bedeutung can apply to predicates. Since, as we have seen, the Bedeutung of predicates, that is what Frege called a concept, is to be understood in terms of the range of objects for which the predicates hold, some of the difficulty of treating predicates as names is avoided. For Frege predicates have Bedeutung and to that extent are names, but their Bedeutung is of a different kind from that of proper names. With this apparatus and the distinction between saturated and unsaturated expressions Frege marked the difference between names and predicates in a better way than Russell. Though his account throws up its own problems in the paradox about the concept 'horse', it avoids some of the difficulties which we have seen that Russell faced in the same context.

Frege's account of object-words or naming words treats them as complete or saturated. Unlike Russell, he was not inclined to define proper names, or a sub-set of them, as logically simple. Frege's account of saturated terms perhaps has some affinities with Russell's account of LP names, for while Frege characterized saturated terms as 'individual' or 'standing by themselves', Russell's LP names name traditional substances,

which are 'self-subsistent'. One difference, however, is that Russell's LP names are defined in a very restricted sense for not all names are LP names, and they are analysed ultimately in terms of sense-data, while Frege's saturated terms are considered in a wider perspective without having any reference to empiricism at all or to any epistemic principle of acquaintance.

That latter point marks a clear, general, distinction between Frege's and Russell's theories, as does Frege's apparatus of sense and reference and of saturated and unsaturated expressions. At another point there is a close similarity between the two, in terms of Frege's principle noted earlier (see, Pt.1, ch.2, pp.31-32) that "words have meaning only in the context of a proposition" (*Grundlagen*). For Frege, the linguistic constitution of a proposition is made up by the contribution of the constituent words to the whole proposition, and therefore only in the context of a proposition does a word have meaning. Frege, as we have seen, was very anxious to detach psychology from logic and hence insisted that if a word is thought to have meaning in isolation, it might lead us to fix some mental image as its meaning. Frege, however, never spoke of this principle later probably because of his introduction of the notion of sense, but it is worth repeating that Frege's sense should not be considered as some mental or psychological element. Rather for Frege, it is to be understood as an objective element which is commonly shared by all competent speakers of the language. Russell rejected Frege's notion of sense but accepted that dictum of Frege's in his theory of descriptions. For Russell's claim that he was offering a definition *in use* of descriptions reflects the belief that a *description can have meaning only in the context of a proposition*. It might seem as though Russell did not apply this principle to LP names, since he thought that their meaning could be accounted for solely in terms of their reference to an object. Even here in Logical Atomism he modified that view with the claim that propositions have a priority over names. That priority can naturally be seen as a further implication of Frege's principle.

#### 6.4 Names, Acquaintance and Description

Russell discriminated a special class of singular terms and identified them as LP names. For him, if 'a' is a LP name then acquaintance with its reference is a necessary condition for understanding the name. The meaning of such a name is its denotation. He characterised such names as *logically independent of each other* and held that a complete understanding of these names is possible through being acquainted with the objects named. Now even if Russell's principle of acquaintance is allowed to be a necessary condition, there is a question whether his principle can provide a sufficient condition for understanding the meaning of a name (see p.119).

Here a prior question also arises: Can LP names be totally divorced from descriptions? Can such names be understood apart from descriptions? Russell's insistence on involving the principle of acquaintance as a requirement for understanding LP names creates troubles in identifying LP names like 'This'. Russell held that although we might regard the object referred to as, for example, a piece of chalk, nevertheless the speaker is not acquainted with that object, for it is not a particular and, therefore, cannot be named. He explained,

If you agree that 'This is white' meaning the 'this' that you see, you are using 'this' as a proper name. If you mean this piece of chalk as a physical object, then you are not using a proper name. It is only when you use 'this' quite strictly, to stand for an actual object of sense, that it is a really proper name.<sup>20</sup>

This Russellian idea thus makes it clear that only 'objects of sense' can be named. Russell himself found it very difficult to identify LP names which are related only to apprehended particulars. As he admitted:

That makes it very difficult to get any instance of a name at all in the very strict logical sense of the word.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.201.

It is not wholly clear what Russell meant by 'objects of sense'. What follows from his account in PLA is that the only objects we can be acquainted with are our own sense-data which are essentially private. In a similar way, LP names in Russell's account refer to private sense-data which, nevertheless, when expressed in natural language, refer to simple, atomic objects with which we can have immediate acquaintance (see footnote 18 in Pt.1).

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

Russell might have considered the inclusion of the names of physical objects, in addition to the object of sense, as examples of LP names and thus given a different treatment of such names. The suggestion is that demonstratives pointing to material objects do not refer just to sense-data and so cannot be regarded as strict LP names. In this way Russell evidently wished to fit his semantic theory into a more general *epistemological framework*. His principle of acquaintance, as we have seen, is clearly influenced by his underlying empiricist view. He formulated his principle of acquaintance in the following terms:

Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted.<sup>22</sup>

The principle of acquaintance, therefore, directs an analysis towards an account of the ultimate sense-data, which then provide a meaning for the *LP* names.

Ordinarily we speak of being acquainted with a wide range of items, such as physical objects, people, and so on, but Russell is clearly using his notion of 'acquaintance' in a technical and restricted sense. That restricted sense owes more to his underlying epistemology than to his semantic theory. For, as was suggested earlier, we might separate the *semantic* relation of name to object from the *epistemic* relation of the language speaker to his learning a language. It is one thing to ask how a name *has* its meaning, but another to ask how speakers of the language come to *learn* those meanings. Russell believed that he had correctly formulated a necessary condition for any language to be meaningful, namely that its complex expressions rest ultimately on an analysis in terms of LP names. However the question arises: is it also *sufficient* to enable us to understand the meaning of a name?

One might argue that Russell was actually committed to the view that acquaintance with the object is a sufficient condition of grasping the meaning of a name. If the object is the meaning of the name, then acquaintance with the object is a direct

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<sup>22</sup>op.cit. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p.58.

acquaintance with the meaning of the name. We saw earlier that Russell at one point implied that acquaintance *is* sufficient (see Russell's quote on p.119), but clearly there are different levels of acquaintance. A child may be acquainted directly with lots of sense-data before he comes to understand language. The suggestion then is that although he is acquainted with those objects, he is not acquainted with them *as* the meanings of any expressions because he has no knowledge of a language. In fact, what is important is that, not only do we experience a correlation between name and object but we have also some understanding of what it is for a sound to be a name in general. What this suggests is that there is something fundamentally wrong with Russell's conception of LP names. He is now committed to the idea of making a distinction between acquaintance with an object on the one side, which children can perhaps achieve, as opposed to acquaintance with those objects *as* the meanings of certain names, which children cannot achieve without some grasp of language. This is a difficulty for Russell because he sometimes gives the impression, perhaps in the grip of his empiricist way of thinking about language and reality, that the whole thing is a kind of natural phenomenon. All we need to do on this account is to become directly acquainted with the object and then the meaning of the name is revealed.

This is the view of what is called by Bernard Harrison an "empiricist theory of language" (ETL).<sup>23</sup> The suggestion is that children learn the basis of their natural language by being presented with the item in conjunction with the repetition of the word. The central feature of ETL is an associative-referential theory of meaning which has been criticised especially by Wittgenstein and Chomsky. For them, an associative-referential theory cannot account for an adult's use of language. Language cannot be treated just as a system of associations but must be regarded wholly, or in part, as a system of *rules*. Although they differ in what they mean by "a rule of language", nevertheless their view suggests a new and more complex account of language learning.

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<sup>23</sup>see, Harrison, Bernard., *Meaning and Structure: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Harper & Roe, New York, 1972), pt.I.

One of the related points that Wittgenstein made in his later philosophy is about the process of 'ostensive learning'. Basically this is the procedure in which a meaning can be given to a name, by pointing to an object and saying its name, but for Wittgenstein this definition can be understood in various ways. It can be understood as pointing to a certain *shape*, or to a certain pattern of *colour*, or to a member of a certain species. These possibilities seem endless. For Wittgenstein, no amount of presenting people with objects and various definitions is going to give by itself the correct interpretation of the word. He argued therefore that mere presentation of items is certainly *not* sufficient for learning a language; there has to be some pre-existing linguistic grasp before someone can make use of such ostensive presentation.

The point that we have raised is whether Russell is actually committed to the idea that acquaintance with the object is sufficient to enable us to understand the meaning of a name. Maybe what Russell suggested is that we can carry out all the operations that are required for a linguistic understanding simply in terms of our basic mental operations without any background of linguistic ability at all. But then the problem arises: How does language come into the picture in the first place? According to Wittgenstein there has to be a linguistic ability somehow in the background before our sense-experience enables us to make use of ostensive definition. He insisted that the radical ambiguity of pointing in an ostensive procedure involving acquaintance can never provide an adequate theory of language. It has to have something prior built into it. Wittgenstein explained this point in *PI* (1.29-30) in the following way:

Perhaps you say: two can only be ostensively defined in *this* way: This *number* is called "two". For the word 'number' here shows what place in language, in grammar, we assign to the word. ... So one might say: the ostensive definition explains the use — the meaning — of the word when the overall role of the word in language is clear.<sup>24</sup>

The quote suggests that, for Wittgenstein, once the overall idea of naming is understood, then the ostensive procedure can work perfectly well. We, therefore, have to have some pre-

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<sup>24</sup>see, Harrison, Brenard, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (The Mac Millan Press Ltd., London, 1979), p.19.

existing understanding in place before the principle of acquaintance can actually be used in such ostensive procedures.

Now if the principle of acquaintance is regarded only as necessary condition of understanding and the condition of sufficiency is dropped, then the point about pre-existing ability can be avoided. Then the principle is regarded only as necessary and other conditions like a pre-existing ability can be used to supplement it. There can then be independent reasons for asking whether it can be regarded as a necessary condition either, because one can be directed to some atomic object by using a complex descriptive phrase even though one is not acquainted with it. For example, the expression "the colour that comes between 'red' and 'orange' in the colour spectrum" may give one some idea about the colour, and therefore give access to the colour without being acquainted with it.

Russell's suggestion that the principle of acquaintance might be both necessary and sufficient to ground a fundamental grasp of language cannot be accepted in the light of these Wittgensteinian criticisms. Perhaps the nominal claim to sufficiency was, as Sainsbury suggests<sup>25</sup>, just a slip on Russell's part. Nevertheless a retreat to the claim about necessity leaves other problems. Even if it avoids the error of supposing that language learning, and linguistic features like meaning, are just a natural phenomenon, it still leaves a mystery about how language is learned on a Russellian basis. This is so not only because the claim for necessity simply leaves a gap in any explanation of language learning, but also for two more specific reasons, which I outline without extensive discussion.

First there is a difficulty which Russell faced over the separate learning of names and descriptions. For if the basic LP names have no descriptive content then it seems hard to understand how general terms could be abstracted from them. Russell both offered an answer to this point and indicated the problems in it when he said:

It is obvious ... that we are acquainted with such universals as white, red, black, sweet, sour, loud, hard, etc. i.e. with qualities which are exemplified in sense-data. When we see a white patch, we are acquainted, in the first

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<sup>25</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.37.

instance, with the particular patch; but by seeing many white patches, we easily learn to abstract the whiteness which they all have in common, and in learning to do this we are learning to be acquainted with whiteness.<sup>26</sup>

He made it plain that our basic acquaintance has somehow to be directed both towards particulars, the (white) patch, and towards an exemplified universal, whiteness, which can be abstracted from it. Not only is it unclear how such a procedure can be effected, but it seems also as though acquaintance presupposes a prior ability to distinguish particulars from properties. In that case, however, the notion of acquaintance seems to have no genuine role in explaining the acquisition of that basic linguistic discrimination.

Second is the more familiar point that for Russell, strictly, the language learning process is purely private. It is carried on by each language learner by attaching meaning to expressions which signify purely private sense experiences. It has become a common criticism of Russell, since Wittgenstein's argument against a private language<sup>27</sup>, that such a private operation cannot form an adequate basis for our ordinary, public, natural language. Whether Wittgenstein's argument is decisive or not, it shows at least that Russell needed further support for his view. It shows what was noted earlier (see Pt.1, ch.3, pp.63, 65-66) that Russell's empiricist epistemology made him vulnerable to the traditional complaint of a unbridgeable gap between private experience and public knowledge.

Because of Russellian restrictions on the class of strict LP names, that they contain no descriptive material and that they reflect a direct acquaintance with sense-data, it is difficult, even impossible, to find such names in natural language, but Russell has a defence against the charge that his semantic theory is thus totally unrealistic. For if he is giving an account of two *different* functions of language, naming on the one side and describing on the other, then that is compatible with saying that there are no words in language which function *purely* as names or *purely* as descriptions. The naming function and the describing function can then be treated without actually identifying anything as

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<sup>26</sup>op.cit. Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, p.101.

<sup>27</sup>see, Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations* (trans.) G.E.M. Anscombe (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1953).

a pure name or as a pure description. As Pears explains,

... there does not seem to be any such thing as pure acquaintance without the mediation of any description.<sup>28</sup>

Even if we found the difficulties of identifying LP names unacceptable, we can still give sense to Russell's account, for example as a sort of 'functional' account, not necessarily attaching to any specific terms, or class of terms in natural language.<sup>29</sup> The suggestion is that when Russell, for example, distinguished between names and descriptions, he was not using that distinction to pick out different grammatical words or phrases, but was using it in order to give a general account of certain semantic functions which language can perform. It may be that in practice those functions are always intermixed, that it is not possible to identify a *pure* name. Interpreted in this 'functional' way Russell's theory might tell us something important about those semantic roles in language, even if there are no linguistic expressions which perform either of the functions in a pure way. Although such a defence for Russell seems natural, he did not himself make it clear in his own discussion. Perhaps his treatment of a language of logic as 'ideal', though unrealistic in practice, is a suggestion along these lines. This would be to regard his 'ideal' language as a theoretical idealisation, not directly applicable to the phenomena of natural language (see Pt.1, ch.3, pp.63-64). It is in terms of such an account that later commentators like Evans and Sainsbury offer a revised version of Russell's semantic theory.

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<sup>28</sup>op.cit. Pears, D., *Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition in Philosophy*, p.94.

<sup>29</sup>This is the view that I have also explained in the First Part in relation to Russell's account of private language. See also Pt.4, ch.9, pp.204-05 and Pt.6, ch.12, pp.283-84.

## NAMES AND PROPOSITIONS

### 7.1 *Propositions and Meaning*

We have considered some ambiguities in Russell's account of the meaning of names (LP) and names (OP) but he faced a further problem in ascribing meaning to the larger units, propositions, of which names are the constituents. Frege's account of semantics insisted on ascribing Sinn and Bedeutung to all the significant units of language, that is, to names, predicates, and whole sentences. Russell clearly recognised that the meaning of names is inevitably linked to the meaning of the larger units of which they form a part. He spoke generally of 'propositions', but his view of propositions is hesitant and defensive. He recognised difficulties about identifying the meaning of propositions (and even at one point in PLA refused to say what meaning is) (see Pt.1, ch.3, p.52). In other texts he expressed doubts about the very existence of propositions, even though he recognised a need to use that terminology. He claimed to have learned from Wittgenstein that the meaning of propositions cannot be understood simply in terms of a naming relation, since false propositions do not have any facts corresponding to them which they might name. He also recognised a problem deriving in part from his Bradleyan background which he called the problem of the unity of the proposition. In this section I deal with the former issue, and reserve the final section for a discussion of the "unity of the proposition".

We have noted already that the primary notion of meaning Russell presented in PLA depends very strongly on the notion of 'naming'. While he talked about the reference of the constituents of a proposition, he did not talk about the reference of the whole proposition itself. Basically the notion of reference, for him, is simply the relation between names and objects. The question here arises whether and how he identified the notion of referring or denoting when it comes to linguistic units of propositional types. Even if he

used the notion of reference in relation to propositions, the question now will be what object a proposition is supposed to name. At one point in PLA he wrote:

A proposition is just a symbol.<sup>30</sup>

and at a later stage he said:

... obviously propositions are nothing ...<sup>31</sup>

He insisted that the world does contain non-linguistic things that are asserted by propositions, and called them 'facts'. He argued that the word 'reference' stands for a relationship between different referents for different expressions of language, and that the relation of a symbol to what is being symbolized is not of just one type. He said that in the proposition "Socrates is mortal", the word 'Socrates' refers to a certain man, the word 'mortal' refers to a certain quality, and the proposition itself refers to a certain fact. He believed,

A name would be a proper symbol to use for a person, a sentence (or a proposition) is the proper symbol for a fact.<sup>32</sup>

Russell, we have seen earlier, found difficulties when a proposition corresponding to some non-linguistic item called a fact turns out to be false. What he called a fact is what corresponds to a true proposition. When he said,

... facts belong to the objective world.<sup>33</sup>

and

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<sup>30</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.185.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid. p.223.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. p.187.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. p.183.

... when I speak of a fact I do not mean a particular existing thing ...<sup>34</sup>

he was discriminating between a fact and an object only as between different sorts of existents. He drew a parallel linguistic distinction between propositions and names, i.e. between propositions and the constituents of propositions.

It is worth mentioning here that Russell included in his account of names and propositions the claim discussed earlier (Pt.2, ch.5, p.92, see also footnote 35 in pp.92-4) that things are actual constituents of propositions. For example, the proposition "Berlin is in Germany" does not, according to Russell, contain the word 'Berlin' as a constituent, but the actual city. Such a claim might not seem too surprising given that Russell believed that Berlin is the meaning of 'Berlin' and that propositions are the meanings expressed by whole sentences. But those Russellian views might be questioned both because strictly 'Berlin' means Berlin only if the former is a LP name, and also because 'meaning' might have two senses when it applies to names and to propositions. This issue is also raised by Searle in his essay (see Pt.2, ch.5, pp.95-96) about the Russellian arguments against Fregean sense. We have seen there how Searle offers an account which was not what Russell actually intended. For Searle it is the *sense* of the expression which occurs in the proposition, that is, the sense of the expression can be regarded as the constituent of the proposition. Searle as we saw begs the question against Russell by involving the Fregean notion of sense. Historically, Searle seems to give a dubious account of what Russell meant by his theory.

It is later commentators like Evans, Peacocke, and Sainsbury who prefer to hold that in some sense objects are actual constituents of propositions. For them, if a proposition contains any expression which has an object-involving character, then the object can be regarded as a constituent of the proposition. This reflects Russell's account of atomic propositions containing LP names where the meaning of the name is the object. For Evans, if it is true that the semantic value of an expression is some object which the expression

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid. p.182.

refers to, then it can be said that the object is actually a constituent of the proposition in which that expression occurs. So if there are object-invoking expressions, the meaning-relata, that is the objects themselves are the meanings of these expressions; and if we are talking at the level of meaning, then the objects are part of the whole proposition. This holds only in relation to expressions, whether names or descriptions, which really do have the character of strictly invoking the corresponding object.

For Evans and Peacocke, in the case of object-invoking expressions, their meaning cannot be divorced from the existence of some corresponding object. So the meaning of the expression and the object are brought closer together. However their terminology is certainly different from Russell's. For Russell the object *is* the meaning, but for them, the object is required to give a meaning, or a semantic value, to certain 'object-invoking' expressions. This suggests less of a commitment than that of Russell.

Russell's idea that the meaning of an expression literally *is* the object it names is open to serious objections. As we saw earlier it encourages a naturalistic conception of language in which bare acquaintance with a particular is enough to know the meaning of the corresponding name. It has also been suggested by Ryle that such an identification is a category mistake. For the properties that belong to meanings often do not belong to the relevant objects, and vice versa. We can say that that cow gives milk, but not that the meaning of 'that cow' gives milk. We can say that the meaning of 'entropy' is hard to learn, but not that entropy is hard to learn. Beyond that, of course, Russell restricted this account of meaning to LP names and not to OP names. Evans's and Sainsbury's view suggests rather that an expression is 'entity-invoking' when if there is no corresponding object, then the expression lacks meaning. The object provides for the expression what Evans calls a 'semantic value'. It is also true that neither Evans nor Sainsbury wish to talk of LP names in the way that Russell did.

Apart from naming the constituents of propositions, Russell's treatment of facts as entities reflects his idea of associating reference with names. To satisfy the relation of naming, propositions have to stand for some sort of appropriate entity to make themselves

meaningful, and thus the introduction of facts as the reference of propositions, Russell thought, is required. Although they cannot exactly fulfil the reference of false propositions, nevertheless for each true or false proposition, Russell argued, there is a corresponding fact which makes them either true or false. Thus

This two-to-one variety of reference became for Russell even a central trait distinguishing sentences from names, and so facts from things.<sup>35</sup>

As opposed to a Fregean view, Russell's operation just with the notion of reference both for names and proposition also contrasts with the atomistic view of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein sharply distinguished names from propositions and talked only of names having reference (*Bedeutung*) and propositions having sense (*Sinn*) which, in a way, is a revival of, although different from, Frege's terminology. He was very critical of Frege's idea that both names and propositions can have reference because he considered it totally mistaken to treat propositions as names.

For Wittgenstein, the meaning of a name is the object it refers to, and a name can be understood in terms of knowing what objects it stands for. The essence of a name is that it can be combined with other names in a proposition, and has meaning only in that context. Wittgenstein thus echoed Frege's principle of context (see Pt.1, ch.2, pp.31-32), but he also argued that propositions can have sense only, and that sense is independent of truth-value. Understanding the sense of a proposition, for him, is knowing what *would* make it true or false, but the actual truth or falsity of propositions depends on the agreement, or disagreement of sense with reality. Following Frege's principle of compositionality, he held that the sense of a proposition is determined by the combination of its constituents. He therefore insisted on keeping apart the two related categories of name and proposition. He argued that propositions and names should *not* be assimilated for the reason that whereas names require objects to have meaning, propositions do not.

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<sup>35</sup>cf. Quine, W.V.O., "Russell's Ontological Development" in Klemke (ed.) *Essays on Bertrand Russell* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago and London, 1970), pp.12-13.

It would be implausible, he argued, to claim that a proposition has a fact as its meaning because in that case false propositions will become meaningless.

Russell, in his theory of meaning, explicitly ascribed reference to names, but he is not clear about the ascription of reference to propositions. Whereas both Frege and Wittgenstein, in the same area, made a sharp distinction between the constituents of a proposition on the one side, and the proposition itself on the other, Russell should also explicitly talk about propositions either having or failing to have reference. If Russell claims that the reference of a proposition is a fact, then that obviously creates the difficulty noted above. For it is simply incoherent to have meaningless propositions which are false. Although Russell recognised the dual relation between propositions and facts, the question of distinguishing between the truth-relation and a referring-relation is still left open by him.

Russell's idea about the reference of propositions suggests however some doubts about the notion of a proposition itself. For Russell, and indeed for Wittgenstein, one of the central themes of logical atomism is that facts are in a sense prior to the things of which they are composed. That priority still occurs in Russell's later essay "On Propositions" (1919) together with an uneasiness about what facts really are. By the same token he had a parallel uneasiness about what propositions really are and whether we should license them. In that essay he raised the question whether propositions really exist. His answer is that they do not.

Russell maintained this view partly because of his own general picture of analysis, but also partly because once again he was very strongly in the grip of an empiricist theory which suggests that the only things that exist are particulars. Propositions are not particulars but general things; they are like Fregean *senses*, or thoughts which are the senses of sentences. So when Russell gave up Frege's notion of sense, he also gave up that kind of realist ontology. The suggestion is that on the semantic side he wanted to get rid of Fregean sense because he considered Frege's account as inadequate. On the epistemological side, because of his background empiricism and because of the associated

analysis he gave in PLA, he also wanted to get rid of this Fregean third realm. He wanted to get rid of the idea that there are senses, propositions, or thoughts, or numbers, which are universals, and to offer a detailed analysis of them which would allow him to regard particulars only as the basic existents.

In contrast to his view in OD, however, Russell in *PP* was quite clear that there are universals and therefore, in a sense he was already committed to a third realm of a Fregean kind. Later in PLA, he really wanted to reject this view, or perhaps more plausibly wanted to reduce his commitment to universals. If Russell did not believe in the existence of propositions, then in a way that might not be a serious problem, but the difficulty is that he nevertheless used the notion of a proposition. He wanted to accept and analyse propositions even if he treated them as part of the world of logical fictions. This may not have struck Russell as particularly strange, given that he regarded even physical objects as logical fictions.

Russell's worry about propositions has also a link with his anxiety about the analysis of belief sentences which I discussed earlier (see Pt.2, ch.4, pp.82-87) He was disinclined to accept the common idea that in such cases the belief relates the believer to a particular *proposition*. For him, the relation is rather between the believer and the constituents of the proposition. Now if it turns out that these things are empty or the constituents do not relate to anything, then this will result in a meaningless proposition. If the constituents don't exist related to each other in the way that the belief claims them to be related, then of course it is going to produce a false belief, but will not necessarily produce a meaningless one.

According to Wittgenstein Russell's analysis of belief propositions is open to objection because his account makes no allowance for a meaningless set of constituents. Wittgenstein argued that Russell's attempt to analyse beliefs in terms of a believer and just the constituents is simply wrong. The suggestion is that we might have perfectly legitimate constituents but put together in such a way that they make no sense. Wittgenstein seems to have been thinking of the difference between, say, (a) believing (red,

prime numbers), that is "believing that prime numbers are red", and (b) believing (have no factors, prime numbers), i.e. "believing that prime numbers have no factors". Wittgenstein argued that Russell's account does not allow any discrimination between (a) and (b) and, therefore, makes no room for a meaningless set of constituents. For if believing is not related to a proposition, but only to the constituents of a proposition, then the only requirement for the significance of the belief is that the constituents should be separately meaningful. It seems that we must pick out the constituents as believed in an appropriate way, and that reintroduces the idea of a proposition.

This points to another difficulty about the 'order' of relations in a proposition, raised earlier in relation to Geach's criticisms of Russell. If a proposition is analysed into its constituents, then clearly the belief contains only constituents which can be related in any order. For example Othello's belief that "Desdemona loves Cassio" and "Cassio loves Desdemona" will seem to be identical because they both contain the same constituents. A relational proposition contains constituents which must be expressed in an ordered way. This point goes back to the earlier discussion (see Pt.1. ch.2) of Russell's attack on Bradley for attempting to reduce all relational propositions to subject-predicate form. This, however, brings us to the problem of the 'unity of the proposition' which I turn to in the next section.

## **7.2 *The Unity of the Proposition***

It was noted earlier (see Pt.1, ch.2, p.34) that Russell inherited from Bradley a problem, or set of problems, which he referred to as that of the "unity of the proposition". In Bradley's context the issue arose directly from his argument that in even a simple subject-predicate proposition there is a difficulty in understanding how the predicate can be *related* to the subject. Any attempt to relate predicate to subject, according to Bradley, leads to an infinite regress. That difficulty might be tackled initially by explaining the

different roles which subjects and predicates play in constructing a proposition, and Frege's contrast between saturated and unsaturated expressions points in this direction. The suggestion is that if we understand predicates not as self-standing expressions, like the terms in a relation, but as expressions whose role just is to combine with a name or subject to form a whole sentence, then the apparent puzzle which Bradley canvassed will disappear or else be changed into a different kind of problem.

Russell, however, made no use of this Fregean apparatus, and so at various stages found the problem difficult. In *PofM*, for example, the difficulty is related to his view that *all* the expressions in a proposition have a meaning which relates them to some object, so that the meaning of the whole proposition is simply a complex composed out of the meaning-relata of its constituents. We have seen earlier (see Pt.1, ch.2, p.43) that, on that view, even complex expressions like 'all men' or 'any man' get their meanings through referring to various objects. Russell later realised that he needed to modify this extended theory of meaning, and to restrict it in certain ways. Since he maintained a similar view in PLA for names in propositions, though not for all the constituents, he recognised a similar, though more restricted difficulty even in that later work. In characterizing the problem in *PofM*, he realised that a mere list of names can hardly give a proper account of what is essentially asserted in the proposition. What then emerges from the analysis of the proposition "A differs from B" is merely a list of terms : A, difference, and B. He explained:

Yet these constituents, thus placed side by side do not reconstitute the proposition. ... A proposition, in fact, is essentially a unity, and when analysis has destroyed the unity, no enumeration of constituents will restore the proposition.<sup>36</sup>

This initially raises the issue of distinguishing a proposition from a mere list, and in PLA Russell faced a similar difficulty, for atomic propositions are still combinations of names. This is similar to the point considered by him in analysing belief sentences where, as we have seen, the relation between the constituents of the proposition is required to be ordered in a specific way. It is also related to the problem of ascribing meaning to the whole

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<sup>36</sup>op.cit. Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, pp.49-50.

proposition, as opposed to ascribing meaning to its constituent names, which we have just discussed.

In *PofM* the problem also takes on a more specific form, in which Russell tried to account for the different ways in which we may identify predicates. One way of ascribing the property of humanity to Socrates is to say simply "Socrates is human". Here the predicate can be straightforwardly identified through the expression "... is human", and the property can be identified as the designation or meaning of that expression. We may also identify what that expression designates, and ascribe the same property to Socrates, by using, as I have done above the abstract noun "humanity". Indeed another way, apparently, of expressing the same proposition about Socrates would be to write "Socrates possesses (or instantiates) humanity". The immediate difficulty for Russell arises from his general view that the meanings of the constituents of such propositions have to be explained in terms of the items to which they relate, their meaning-relata. For it seems as though the two expressions "... is human" and "humanity" designate the same property, despite the fact that they clearly function linguistically in different ways. We can speak about the property of humanity by making that latter expression the subject of a proposition, but we could not do so by using the former expression as such a subject.

Russell, however argued against the suggestion that the two ways of identifying the property "humanity" should be assigned different meaning-relata, rather they must relate to the same meaning. He wrote,

It might be thought that a distinction ought to be made between a concept as such and a concept used as a term, between e.g., such pairs as *is* and *being*, human and *humanity*, *one* in such a proposition as "this is one" and 1 in "1 is a number". But inextricable difficulties will envelop us if we allow such a view. ... the difference lies solely in external relations, and not in the intrinsic nature of the terms. ... In short, if there were any adjectives which could not be made into substantives without change of meaning, all propositions concerning such adjectives (since they would necessarily turn them into substantives) would be false, and so would the proposition that all such propositions are false, since this itself turns the adjectives into substantives. But this state of things is self-contradictory.<sup>37</sup>

Russell's view suggests that this two-fold nature of terms would provide us with the means to overcome the regress generated in Bradley's argument by itemising these terms. Russell

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid. pp.45-46.

further held that although there is a difference between the predicative role and the substantive role of any such expression, no difference actually exists in terms of the meaning-relata of those expressions. He thus attempted to show that

The proposition "Humanity belongs to Socrates", which is equivalent to "Socrates is human" is an assertion about humanity; but it is a distinct proposition. In "Socrates is human", the notion expressed by *human* occurs in a different way from that in which it occurs when it is called *humanity*, the difference being that in the latter case, but not in the former, the proposition is *about* this notion. This indicates that humanity is a concept, not a thing.<sup>38</sup>

Russell's view suggests that no difference in reality exists between the reference of the subject and predicate terms although propositions containing these terms express different propositions. Russell faced difficulties here if he claims that the two propositions "Socrates is human" and "Humanity belongs to Socrates" are equivalent, but not synonymous. For the failure of synonymy in this case, coupled with Russell's requirement that meaning is to be explained through the meaning-relata of the expressions, seems to commit him to the view that the expressions which designate the property must designate something different. In *PofM* he held that 'is human' and 'humanity' denote precisely the same concept. There can be no doubt that Russell's view at this stage seems to be quite incoherent. This position is made worse by his concluding remark that humanity is a concept and not a thing.

This is an issue which Palmer has extensively discussed in his book *Concept and Object*.<sup>39</sup> The central features of Russell's problem, according to Palmer, are: (i) the notion of a term, as an item which is a logical subject (whether a concept or a thing), and (ii) the difficulty that a concept may appear both as a logical subject, for example, "Honesty is the best policy" and also as a predicate, for example, "Jones is honest". In the earlier period of *PofM*, the notion of a 'term' was defined by Russell as something which is related to a logical subject. Things as well as concepts may be regarded as terms because things in a way obviously are terms, but how can concepts be terms? This is one version of the worry,

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid. p.45.

<sup>39</sup>cf. Palmer, A., *Concept and Object* (Routledge, London, 1988).

according to Palmer, that Russell had about the unity of the proposition. Russell at this stage exhibited tension between saying on the one side that '... is honest' and 'honesty' are the same concept and yet that they function in a completely different way.

Russell in *Principia Mathematica* attempted to solve this problem by offering a suggestion about the way in which predicates function as 'denoting' terms, and not as logical subjects. The suggestion is that, for Russell, the nature of a predicate is twofold: There is a denoting concept and an object denoted. Logical subjects or terms are names, but they are not denoted. It is concept terms which denote objects when they occur in propositions other than as logical subjects, and in so doing assert a relation between term and object. Palmer offers an account which stresses the necessary similarity between predicates when they say the same thing of different items, that is attributing wisdom to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and also the extensional treatment of properties as, basically, classes of objects of which the predicate holds. Thus the term occurring as a logical subject in the proposition is part of the complex of terms, which includes the object denoted by a concept occurring as a predicate and not as a logical subject. This way of putting Russell's problem shows clearly how closely it is related to the idea that led Frege to distinguish saturated and unsaturated expressions. Indeed Russell's distinction between 'terms' (logical subjects) and 'denoting concepts' (not logical subjects) is, in a way, parallel to Frege's distinction. At least it is designed to mark a parallel distinction between names and predicates. The difficulty that Russell faced at this stage is to reconcile the fact that, for example, 'wisdom' and 'is wise' express the same concept and yet in one case it is a term, a logical subject, and in the other it is not.

Another difficulty in Russell's account of denoting concepts is that, such an extensional treatment of predicates is probably going to raise similar difficulties to the 'list of names' account; and we noticed one way in which the issue appears in the arguments against the monistic conception of truth that is, those arguments which seem to interpret a subject-predicate proposition as one in which a specific item (the property P) is included in the set of properties for which S stands (see Pt.1, ch.2, p.38). This ascription of a set of

properties to a subject term is different, however, from the extensional account of the set of objects having the same properties when, for example, we say "Socrates is a philosopher" is construed as "Socrates is a member of the class (Plato, Aristotle, and others)". Both treatments reflect an attempt to reduce subjects to predicates, or vice versa. Palmer makes implicitly the point that such an analysis of subject-predicate propositions is not likely to resolve the original problem, since we still have to have some reference to a relation, class membership, or class inclusion, in order to get a genuine proposition and not just a list of names. Palmer however thinks that Russell's proposals work here because his idea of denoting concepts and objects (complexes of objects), rescued the unity of the proposition from Bradley's regress. He explains that Bradley's regress cannot be avoided if terms have the capacity only of appearing in propositions as logical subjects. As he says,

The fact that some terms have a dual capacity is what saves a proposition on analysis from degenerating into a list; it guarantees the unity of the proposition.<sup>40</sup>

Palmer's point here is correct but expressed in an odd way. It is surely not the fact of the dual expression of concepts which resolves the problem, but rather that is where the problem originates. For what, as we have seen, puzzled Russell was precisely the difference between the dual expression 'humanity' and '... is human'. What resolves the problem is that *one* of those dual expressions, '... is wise', *is* different from the *other*, 'wisdom', and *does* allow the normal propositional form of expression. That is, as a bona fide *predicate* it has just the right form to enable us to construct a proposition out of it in conjunction with a name. Palmer of course identifies Russell's problem but this quote suggests that he believes the mere *recognition* of the duality is enough to resolve the problem, and this is not so. What is at stake is rather the explanation to be given of the difference between the two types of expression.

Palmer nevertheless points out that Russell, at this stage needed something to complete his account of denoting, something which will adequately express the denoting

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid. p.20.

function. That completed account makes essential use of the ideas of a propositional function and a variable and this is what Russell presented in *PofM*. These two things obviously go together because there cannot be a propositional function without the notion of a variable, since a propositional function is effectively a proposition with a variable in place of a genuine expression. On the other hand, it is only because of the occurrence of a variable that a proposition becomes a propositional function. These two notions however, according to Palmer, already carry within themselves the differentiation between a logical subject and a predicate which will allow for the distinctive features of a proposition, and differentiate it from just a list of names.

However, as Palmer explains, Russell remained worried about this solution since he saw difficulties both about the nature of a variable and that of a propositional function. On one side Russell thought that propositional functions could not be regarded just as propositions with a logical subject taken out. He wanted to explain them as denoting expressions themselves whose function is not merely to mark a gap, but to have a denoting role and to express a meaning. As Palmer says

The job of the variable is to show that the expression of which it is a part is not a logical subject but denotes.<sup>41</sup>

For all this Russell nevertheless characterised a variable as a blank which can be replaced by some genuine expression. For example in "x is red" Russell held that the variable acquires its function as a gap for other specific expressions. The variable 'x' does not have the same role as the expression 'Roses' in the proposition "Roses are red". It seems clear that Russell's position here is somewhat confused, and this can be outlined in the following way.

On one side Russell may still have wanted to claim that both variables and propositional functions do both denote. Despite the fact that he recognised differences between a variable and a propositional function, as well as between a variable and the expressions substitutable for it, he was still committed to the idea that all of them must

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid. p.22.

denote something. Such a commitment is bound to cause problems in identifying the 'objects' which are thus denoted by the different types of expression. If it is claimed that a variable denotes, then there will be a serious problem about identifying what is denoted, and I comment on this later. There will also be problems about what it is that is denoted by a propositional function for two reasons: first because such an expression is incomplete and does not naturally function as a name, as Frege saw, but also, second, because the temptation is to regard it as denoting a universal. As we have already seen Russell recognised this temptation but was also embarrassed and hesitant about it.

Later Russell cut through this tangle of problems by rejecting the full commitment to a denotation for all these different types of expression. By the time of OD the earlier technical account of denoting no longer survives. As Palmer points out, in OD Russell's use of 'denote' has changed and becomes much closer to an ordinary use of 'reference'. Moreover, he now offered a less complicated account of the role of variables and propositional functions, and seems prepared to accept that the same term may occur in a proposition in different ways as a subject or as a predicate. Russell wrote:

My theory, briefly, is as follows. I take the notion of the *variable* as fundamental; I use ' $C(x)$ ' to mean a proposition in which  $x$  is a constituent, where  $x$ , the variable, is essentially and wholly undetermined. Then we can consider the two notions ' $C(x)$  is always true' and ' $C(x)$  is sometimes true'.<sup>42</sup>

In general such a change gets Russell closer to Frege's distinction between saturated and unsaturated expressions. To mark a clear difference between a variable as a logical subject and a propositional function is already to move closer to that Fregean classification. It suggests a strong contrast between the names which can be substituted for the variable, and are complete in virtue of their naming some object, and the incomplete propositional functions which do not have that self-subsistent character.

Russell also suggested ways in which a property term, such as 'humanity', occurring as a logical subject can be analyzed in terms of its predicative form ' $\dots$  is human'. It is natural enough to suggest, for example, that such an abstract claim as "Humanity is

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<sup>42</sup>op.cit. Russell, "On Denoting", p.42.

precious" might be reformulated in less committed terms as "(x) (If x is human, then x is precious)". The apparatus of quantification which itself rests on the distinction between variables and propositional functions, can be deployed in this way to connect the two forms of expression, namely 'humanity' and '... is human'. The analysis provides a standard Russellian way of reducing an apparent commitment to some dubious entity by providing a paraphrase in which no reference is made to that supposed object. Such an analysis, however, has to provide a genuine paraphrase, if such an argument is to work. Palmer is prepared to accept such analyses of these abstract terms, but we shall see in a moment that Sainsbury is not.

Palmer however raises the question whether Russell gave an adequate account of variables. He quotes a comment from Frege which is about Russell's definition of a variable as "a symbol which is to have one of a certain set of values without its being decided which one" (Palmer, pp. 26-27). In this quote of Frege the issue raised is: Should we say that a variable (for a number) signifies a variable number? The problem is: What can be meant by 'a variable number'? If numbers are precise and distinct, how could we make sense of the idea of a number which is not a precise, distinct, specific number. To talk of a variable number seems to yield a contradiction in this way. However a different account can be provided by saying that a variable number is simply a gap or place, for some number or other, where any *actual* number of course has the precision and the distinctness we associate with numbers. Thus the phrase 'variable number' should not be understood along the lines of 'odd number'. An odd number is one with the property of not being even, or divisible by 2, but a variable number is not a number with the property of *varying* — numbers *don't* vary. So maybe it's more like the phrase 'mythical beast', which does not signify the inconsistent idea of an actual beast which, as mythical, is non-actual. Palmer does not elaborate the point in this way, but at a simple level this is the further final point he is making. He believes that the introduction of the propositional function and variable apparatus clears up the problem of the unity of the proposition. Then we require some other interpretation of variables and the way in which they function in order to explain

properly the notion of a propositional function. This will then help to resolve the background problems identified in relation to the Bradleyan problem of the unity of the proposition.

When the problem reappears in PLA Russell, however, gave a somewhat different account of it. At this stage the central problem arises from his atomist view that all complex propositions must be analysed ultimately into truth functional compounds of atomic propositions in which only names occur. By this time Russell had generally restricted his view that all expressions must be given a meaning through some objects (*relata*) which they designate. For in the case of logical expressions generally, and truth functional particles in particular, Russell now held that their meaning is not to be accounted for in terms of any *objects* which they designate. Even so the truth functional analyses connect only the constituent atomic propositions in which only names occur. Now the question arises here how it is possible for an atomic proposition, consisting of nothing but names, to be any more than a catalogue or list of the items designated by those names? Russell was still sensitive to the complaint that a bare list of names, as in a telephone directory, could not be regarded as the expression of a proposition. Moreover as we noted earlier (see Pt.1.,ch.3, pp.64, 65) Russell had independent reasons for casting doubt on the real existence of such things as propositions. This argument in one way reinforces those earlier doubts, but in this case Russell had an overwhelming reason to resist their doubts. For it is a requirement of his PLA view that the atomic elements in fully analysed truth functional compounds are really propositions and not just lists of names. Russell's problems are now expressed in the new terminology of PLA, but something of Bradley's original puzzle still survives.

With regard to the associated problem of the referents of predicates Russell, as we have seen, expressed a different view from that implicit in *PP*. There it was suggested that such predicative terms name universals, at least if they are simple, atomic predicates, but in PLA he drew a sharp distinction between what is required to understand a genuine name and what is required to understand a simple predicate. His view is that to

understand such a predicate is simply to understand "what is meant by saying that a thing is red" (see ch.6, p.119). In this informal way Russell made use of that crucial distinction between a variable and a propositional function. The question may still be raised whether such an account avoids all the traditional problems about the nature of universals, but at least Russell is no longer appealing directly to the idea that a simple predicate names directly a universal, rather than a presented instance of a universal. Moreover, as we have seen, Russell believed that the use of abstract subject terms, like 'humanity', no longer required them to name a universal, for they could be analysed in ways which made use only of the predicative form '... is human'. "Socrates possesses humanity" expresses nothing different from "Socrates is human"; "Humanity is precious" can be re-written in the non-committal quantified form. In his earlier phase Russell could not have accepted such views because he believed that though such propositions were equivalent, they could not be regarded as synonymous.

It was, however, pointed out earlier that the latter solution can be accepted only so long as the analyses are correct, and that some commentators, such as Sainsbury, have disputed that they are correct. It would not be possible to consider every use of such abstract forms, but it is worth asking why we might not accept the account of "Patience is a virtue" in terms of the expression " $(x)$  if  $x$  is patient, then  $x$  is virtuous". This is an example which Sainsbury gives.

It has to be conceded that such a translation cannot be offered without at least some additional provisos. For example, if we say that patience is a virtue it is not immediately obvious whether we are talking about patient people, or patient acts. One way of construing the abstract claim would be to restrict it to people, and then to write the analysis as: If anyone is patient, then they are virtuous. To the objection that this omits any reference to patient and so virtuous acts, it can easily be replied that there is no difficulty in providing a parallel analysis for that claim, so long as we then restrict the scope of the variables to acts rather than people. If we stick to the 'person' case, though, there is a further objection to be made. For it may be said that whereas "Patience is a

virtue" is true, it is *not* true that anyone who is patient is virtuous. Someone might be patient, but in other respects so immoral as to be vicious rather than virtuous. It has to be conceded also that the original claim cannot be understood as asserting that anyone who has the virtue of patience is virtuous in every other respect. One way of dealing with this would be to introduce the notion of a 'prima facie virtue', that is, one the possession of which makes a person so far virtuous, virtuous in that respect, but not necessarily virtuous in every other respect. If that can be accepted, then the original analysis can still go through in the form: "(x) if x is patient, then x is prima facie virtuous". Sainsbury does not explain why he is not prepared to accept the form of such analyses, and in particular does not mention any of these difficulties. It seems clear, so far, however, that these difficulties do not prevent Russell from accepting such analyses, and so accepting that aspect of his solution to the original problem. The concessions require us to modify the basic analysis, but do not require us to abandon it altogether.

In a related way Sainsbury is also critical of the way in which Russell's semantic apparatus is now supposed to deal with that problem of the unity of the proposition. He evidently thinks that any appeal to a naming theory of meaning for the constituents of propositions is bound to create problems in understanding the meaning of the propositions themselves. If every significant unit of some proposition has its meaning in terms of what Sainsbury calls 'meaning-relata', then it may be argued that the whole proposition cannot *avoid* being treated just as a list of names; and this is to deny that their combination really amounts to a proposition at all. Sainsbury puts Russell's point in the following way:

One could know that 'rust' has rust as its meaning-relatum, and that 'red' (or 'is red') has redness as its meaning-relatum, without knowing enough to know what 'Rust is red' says.<sup>43</sup>

At first sight such a claim seems questionable if we attach enough weight to the term 'meaning-relatum'. Consider how the claim would go if we just talk of 'meaning'. Is it plausible to say that if one knows what 'rust' means and what 'is red' means, one might

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<sup>43</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.24.

not know what "Rust is red" means? On the face of it this seems quite unpalatable. Perhaps what Russell meant is that one might know that the word 'rust' is related to one particular phenomenon, and 'is red' is equally related to a particular colour-phenomenon, but that all one has then learnt is that some sort of relation exists between words and objects which, however, does not imply that one *understands* these expressions either separately or put together in a proposition. This seems hardly compatible with knowing that this is the word's meaning-relatum. It might be said that part of what is involved in knowing that 'rust' has rust as its meaning-relatum is just that the relation is understood as a relation of 'meaning'. In that case Russell's difficulty seems to be unreal, even though Russell himself may not have been willing to understand the notion of a 'meaning-relatum' in that way. Sainsbury further explains that Russell tried to overcome this difficulty with the plausible claim that to understand a predicate, such as '... is red' we need to know what it is to say of something that it is red. In that case, as the earlier argument suggested, there is no gap between understanding the separate meaning-relata of the constituent words of a proposition and understanding the meaning of the whole proposition.

Russell's problem has at least the merit of drawing attention to two different ways of understanding his notion of 'meaning'. For it shows that there are two apparent requirements for meaning which potentially conflict. The first is: The meaning-relatum has got to be some *object* which can be referred to or identified. The second is: The meaning-relatum must cover all the aspects of the use of expressions which could be brought under the notion of *meaning*. For example, there are aspects of the use of 'redness' as opposed to '... is red' which are supposed to be associated with the meaning of the words and it is not clear how those aspects could be revealed by identifying any object. So the question arises: How did Russell actually envisage the notion of meaning-relata? If he regarded it as some sort of external object which does not tell us anything more about the object, then the problem of the unity of the proposition remains. How can two *objects* be put together to form a real proposition? This is the background assumption which Sainsbury's discussion of Russell brings out, namely that a meaning-relatum is nothing more than one object

among the whole range of objects. But if Russell is saying that the meaning-relatum of the predicate '... is red' is an object but an object appropriate to that predicative form, then the problem of the 'unity of the proposition' disappears.

This ambiguity in Russell's conception of a meaning-relatum is especially reflected in his account of the meaning of predicative expressions. On one side the relata have to be objects, on the other side they have to be predicative meanings. Sainsbury holds for these reasons that the fundamental error in Russell's earlier view in *PofM*

... arises from Russell's temptation to attempt the impossible task of providing a complete account of an expression's meaning in terms of its meaning-relatum.<sup>44</sup>

The basic problem is that Russell had not yet envisaged the possibility that all meaningful expressions have meaning-relata, but that the meaning-relata are of different types. One meaning-relatum associates with subjects, and another is associated with predicates. Once this differentiation is allowed, there cannot be any reason not to allow that they are both related to meaning-relata but that these may differ in nature. This is made clear by Sainsbury when he says of Russell's later view in *OD* that

... one must also state how the expression contributes to what is said by an arbitrary sentence in which it occurs.<sup>45</sup>

Russell's problems over the unity of the proposition have been shown to be quite complex, ranging over different but related issues. There are, for example, problems about the nature of propositions and their reality, problems about the relations between subjects and predicates, problems about abstract nouns and corresponding predicates, and problems arising from Russell's 'referential' account of meaning. There is, too, an ontological issue about Russell's commitment to the existence of universals. Probably the central underlying difficulty for Russell arose from his commitment to a 'referential' account of meaning. If Russell found these problems difficult to resolve it was partly because he did not seem

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid. p.25.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

adequately to grasp the complexity of the issues and the differing strategies needed for different versions of the problem.

There is, however, one final complexity in the issue which deserves to be noted. For another way of looking at Russell's final problem has to do with the difference between complex names and propositions. We can construct a complex name from any proposition — the process is sometimes called "nominalisation". So "Socrates is human" might become "Socrates's humanity". We might put Russell's point by asking what is the difference here? The answer is that it doesn't have much to do with meaning-relata, for the meaning-relata of the constituents of the two expressions will surely be the same.<sup>46</sup> What seems to cause the difference is the idea of assertion in the former case, and its lack in the latter. An expression like "Socrates's humanity" won't normally be taken to have *asserted* anything; and so part of the answer lies in the difference between actually *asserting* something and not doing so. Indeed there are several ways of not asserting, but uttering, expressions which are nevertheless whole sentences. For example, "Is Socrates human?", or "If Socrates is human, then Plato probably was too". Perhaps the complex description case is just another of these, one which is marked in syntax, that is which has the form of a description rather than a sentence. It is then easy to imagine a context in which the uttering of such a description is taken to have the meaning "Socrates's humanity obtains", which I take to be just another way of saying that he is human.

There is no clear evidence that Russell or Sainsbury notice this feature. It does however seem to be one further facet of the whole debate about the unity of the proposition that needs to be isolated and pointed out. The point about assertion seems to introduce a reference to pragmatic features of utterance. Russell's problem arises because if "The death of Socrates" has the same semantic content or meaning-relatum as "Socrates is dead", then how can we account for the evident difference between them? One way of looking at the problem is to say that there is no difference in *semantic* content; the difference exists only in the assertive force associated with the expressions. This idea comes more explicitly into

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<sup>46</sup>Russell held, after all, that particles like 'is' or 'if' do *not* have meaning-relata.

the discussion of later commentators who have used a semantic-pragmatic distinction to throw light on other aspects of Russell's theory. Some further reference to this distinction will be made in later chapters.

**PART FOUR**  
**LATER VIEWS ON NAMES**

## NAMES AND RIGID DESIGNATORS

### 8.1 *The Distinction between LP names and OP names*

In PLA Russell made a distinction between LP names and OP names. The meaning of a LP name is significant in terms of its standing for some definite object, whereas an OP name is an abbreviated description whose meaning can be determined under complete analysis down to the level of LP names. This sharp distinction between LP names and OP names can be assimilated to his distinction between names and definite descriptions. For Russell, a name like 'Scott' is a simple symbol which has no other parts that are symbols and designates only a definite particular. But descriptive phrases like 'The author of Waverley' are what he called incomplete symbols which are complex and unlike names contain parts that are themselves symbols. The meanings of such phrases are not something arbitrary, but are already determined by the meanings of their constituent parts. For example, the meaning of the descriptive phrase 'The author of Waverley' can be understood only by grasping the meaning of the constituent parts, whereas the meaning of the name 'Scott' can be known only in terms of what it stands for. We saw earlier that Russell sometimes illustrates the distinction between names and descriptions by citing OP names, like "Scott", even though the contrast applies strictly only to LP names.

Russell argued that it would be entirely wrong to regard descriptive phrases as names and thus to regard 'Scott' and 'the author of Waverley' as two names for the same person. Considered in that way, the proposition "Scott is the author of Waverley" would then be similar to "Scott is Sir Walter" which merely asserts an arbitrary identity between the objects so named. Russell presented the following argument to demonstrate that no description can be a true proper name.

Take, for example, the following proposition: "Scott is the author of Waverley." ... This proposition expresses an

identity; thus if "the author of Waverley" could be taken as a proper name, and supposed to stand for some object *c*, the proposition would be "Scott is *c*". But if *c* is any one except Scott, this proposition is false; while if *c* is Scott, the proposition is "Scott is Scott", which is trivial, and plainly different from "Scott is the author of Waverley."<sup>1</sup>

Russell's view suggests that because names simply stand for something and have no meaning apart from what they correspond to, any assertion about an object made by using any names for that object will be a strict tautology. Thus the proposition "Scott is *c*" is either false if the two names name different objects or tautologous if the two names name the same object, and is a different form of proposition from "Scott is the author of Waverley". His argument here clearly depends upon his rejection of Frege's notion of sense. For if names could have different senses while naming the same object, then there would be no reason to regard an identity expressed using two different names for the same object as a tautology. Russell inferred that such identities must be tautologous from his belief that names strictly have no other meaning than that given to them by the object they name.

These arguments make it plain that Russell's account of names raises a number of different issues. Some, such as the connection between names and acquaintance, or the identification of LP names, have been considered already. Now Russell committed himself to another contentious thesis, namely that OP names are not strict, or LP, names at all, and should be regarded as abbreviations for descriptions. Such a theory has been often accepted and has *prima facie* plausibility, for OP names are typically associated with descriptions which we believe to be true of the named object. Nevertheless the thesis has in recent times been attacked by Kripke, and it is his attack which I will outline in the next section. In the final section I will consider whether Quine's and Burge's arguments to defend Russell's thesis enable us to reinstate Russell's view despite Kripke's criticisms.

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<sup>1</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", pp.245-46.

## 8.2 Kripke's account of rigid designators

Russell's view that OP names should be treated as abbreviated descriptions commits him to the claim that such names and definite descriptions have the same logical behaviour. This Russellian view is opposed by various theorists, but probably the most severe criticism derives from Kripke. For Kripke, there is a clear general difference between the logical behaviour of names and descriptions, and he uses his classification of 'rigid designation' to mark this difference. His view is that while OP names *are* rigid designators, only some but not all descriptive phrases are such rigid designators. That classification relies upon a shift from classical extensional logic to that of quantified modal logic, together with the use of a possible worlds semantics for modality. The central proviso which Kripke wishes to make to this general claim is that he is prepared to admit that some descriptive phrases may also be rigid designators; and he draws a distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* rigid designation in order to express this proviso. He is prepared to say that where a description happens to hold of one and the same object in all possible worlds, then such an expression will be rigid *de facto*. He distinguishes this from rigidity *de jure* where the reference of a designator is stipulated to be the same in all possible worlds. For these reasons such an expression as 'the smallest prime' will, for Kripke, be rigid *de facto*, while a stipulative baptism of some item, as in the case of OP names or the designation of the standard metre, will yield a rigidity *de jure*. It is clear, however, that Kripke himself does not regard this proviso as affecting his central objection to Russell. He says, for example,

I assume Russell is right in that definite descriptions can at least *sometimes* be interpreted nonrigidly. ... some philosophers think that, in addition, there is a rigid sense of definite descriptions. ... I am not convinced of this, but if these philosophers are right, my principal thesis is not affected. It contrasts names with definite descriptions, as advocated by Russell.<sup>2</sup>

Some of Kripke's other distinctions and provisos, for example, his view of *de re* and *de dicto* modalities, his distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' rigidity, and the relation between

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<sup>2</sup>see, footnote 8 in Kripke, *S. Naming and Necessity* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1972, 1980), p.6.

rigidity and scope, will be considered later.

With those provisos, however, Kripke's objection to Russell is that the latter's account of OP names as abbreviated descriptions requires that the descriptions which OP names abbreviate should be just as much rigid designators as the names themselves. For Russell required that OP names and their associated descriptions should have the same meaning, whereas Kripke would want to deny such a claim. For him there is a crucial distinction to be drawn between 'fixing the meaning' of some expression and 'fixing its reference'. Kripke believes, with one further proviso, that descriptions may be used to fix the reference of some name, but he would deny that they can be generally used to fix its meaning. The proviso is that Kripke's own positive theory of OP names offers a standard way of fixing the reference of names even without using descriptive phrases. Kripke's standard example of this distinction is: Supposing we have a proposition like, "The stick S is one metre long". Now the stick was actually once defined in Paris to be one metre long and it was argued that because of the peculiar nature of the stick, that proposition comes out as an analytic or a logical truth. It is that claim that Kripke wants to reject. For him, even if it is true that the length of a metre is fixed by the stick S, nevertheless the stick S's one metre length is not part of the *meaning* of a certain length, a metre. So in defining a metre by stick S, we are not fixing the *meaning* of that expression, but simply fixing the *reference*. For Kripke,

... he's [a man] using this definition not to give *the meaning* of what he called the 'meter', but to *fix the reference*.  
... But ... even though he uses this to fix the reference of his standard of length, a meter, he can still say, 'if heat had been applied to this stick S at  $t_0$ , then at  $t_0$  stick S would not have been one meter long'.<sup>3</sup>

Kripke's view suggests that in some possible world the stick S might not be one metre long, that is might have been of a different length. But clearly he thinks that one metre, that length, has to be the same in all possible worlds which matches his notion of a rigid designator.

For Kripke, therefore, such a proposition is not simply an analytic necessity. The

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid. p.55.

suggestion is, if we *fix the reference* of 'one metre length' by the proposition "The stick S is one metre long" then we can say that there is some necessity (an epistemic necessity) in its being one metre long, but then that necessity is *not* part of the meaning. The necessity arises because we have fixed the reference in that way, not because that phrase which fixes the reference already includes that length as part of its meaning. He, therefore, regards the proposition as contingent, but a priori. It is contingent because the stick S might have been of a different length in another possible world. It is a priori because we can know the truth of the proposition, as fixing the reference of 'one metre', without any appeal to a posteriori evidence.

Kripke illustrates these points with reference to phrases such as 'Aristotle' and 'the teacher of Alexander'. If Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander then this description could be said to *fix the reference* of the name, but should not be thought to *fix the meaning*, or provide a strict definition, of the name. Kripke's intuitive idea that names function differently from descriptions can be supported by considering, as he does, the potential inconsistencies that may arise if we deny such a claim. As he explains:

If, ... we merely use the description to *fix the referent* then that man will be the referent of 'Aristotle' in all possible worlds. The only use of the description will have been to pick out to which man we mean to refer. But then we may say counterfactually 'Suppose Aristotle had never gone into philosophy at all', we need not mean 'Suppose a man who studied with Plato, and taught Alexander the Great, and wrote this and that, and so on, had never gone into philosophy at all', which might seem like a contradiction. We need only mean 'Suppose that *that man* had never gone into philosophy at all.'<sup>4</sup>

Kripke's argument is that if descriptions, for example,  $D_1$ ,  $D_2$ ,  $D_3$  fix the *meaning* of the name 'Aristotle' then to say "Aristotle might not have been a philosopher" must say the same as "The  $D_1$ ,  $D_2$ ,  $D_3$  might not have been a philosopher" and clearly if  $D_1$ - $D_3$  involve describing Aristotle as a philosopher, then this indeed *may* seem contradictory.

Incidentally it seems clear why Kripke does not say definitely that it *is* a contradiction, for it is not obviously contradictory to say "Philosopher X might not have been a philosopher". The reason why it *seems* contradictory is because we have no *other* means of identifying the person and no *other* means of elucidating the name, if  $D_1$ - $D_3$  really

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.57.

do fix not just the reference but also the meaning of 'Aristotle'.

As I have suggested Kripke's central point<sup>5</sup> against Russell has to be set against a number of provisos and further refinements which he makes to the idea of rigid designation. Kripke distinguishes, for example, not only between *de facto* and *de jure* rigidity, but also between strong and weak rigidity, and between *de re* and *de dicto* modalities. For Kripke,

Let's call something a *rigid designator* if in every possible world it designates the same object, a *nonrigid* or *accidental designator* if that is not the case. ... When we think of a property as essential to an object we usually mean that it is true of that object in any case where it would have existed. A rigid designator of a necessary existent can be called *strongly rigid*.<sup>6</sup>

A designator will thus be strongly rigid if such designation holds for a necessary existent, and weakly rigid if it does not hold for a necessary existent, that is, if it merely designates the same object in all possible worlds in which the object exists at all. Kripke also makes it plain that although the crucial test for rigid designation just noted involves counterfactual considerations which can themselves be expressed in modal propositions, nevertheless it is not his view that rigid designation occurs only in such modal propositions. For a similar reason Kripke accepts that although rigid designation can be associated with differences of scope, it would be wrong to think that rigidity just *reduces* to scope distinctions.<sup>7</sup>

However, to illustrate some of these points we can consider the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* modality. Kripke's primary interest in this distinction arises from certain philosophical views which have been canvassed in these terms, especially the idea that all modalities are *de dicto* and none of them are *de re*. A *de dicto* modality would be one in which the modal property is conceived as deriving from the current description of some object rather than attaching directly to the object itself, however it may be described. In

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<sup>5</sup>Kripke thus has two kinds of criticism of Russell's theory. One concerns generally the great difficulties in identifying *which* descriptions give the meaning of an OP name. What I have called the 'central' objection is one which points to the different behaviour of OP names and descriptions in counterfactual contexts.

<sup>6</sup>op.cit. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, p.48.

<sup>7</sup>see, footnote 15 in *ibid.* p.12

his text Kripke makes it clear that he would reject the claim that there are no *de re* modalities and so engages in the philosophical debate about an essentialism which requires the genuine existence of *de re* modalities. Nevertheless although that debate is not directly related to Kripke's criticism of Russell the *de re/de dicto* distinction can be used to illustrate the differences of scope, which, though not identical to the account of rigid designation, are closely related to it.

Such a distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* modalities, which points to the more important scope distinctions is illustrated by Hookway in the following way.<sup>8</sup> We might say that the number two is necessarily even, but only contingently the number of books on my desk. In that way the two propositions

(1) The number two is necessarily even

and

(2) The number of books on my desk is necessarily even

will differ in truth value. (1) will be true, but (2) will be false, even though the number of books on my desk is two. The necessity that is present in (1) and absent in (2) depends in this case on the way in which we refer to the number.

Whether we accept Hookway's distinction or not, the point does not by itself settle the question whether there are *de re* modalities.<sup>9</sup> But such a distinction points also to certain natural scope distinctions with respect to modal operators; and this connects directly with Kripke's point about names and descriptions. For example, the proposition

(3) The teacher of Alexander is a teacher.

might be construed as a necessary truth in two different ways. That necessity has an interpretation which says

(4) Necessarily, the teacher of Alexander is a teacher.

whose truth reflects the logical truth of the original proposition (3). But it has another

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<sup>8</sup>see, Hookway, Christopher, *Quine* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988), ch.7.

<sup>9</sup>Hookway's illustrative example may not be the only or even the best way of distinguishing *de re* and *de dicto* modalities. It is used here just because it points to the more relevant distinctions of scope.

interpretation which is

(5) The teacher of Alexander is necessarily a teacher.

which comes out false. For the teacher of Alexander might not have been a teacher in some other possible world. We might say that the scope of the operator in (4) is different from that in (5), and that this gives rise to the ambiguities already noted. Russell, similarly noticed such scope ambiguities in his account of definite descriptions in OD (see Pt.5, ch.10, Sec.10.1). If we apply a negation operator to a proposition containing a definite description in subject position we find a similar variability of interpretation. To deny

(6) The F is H

we might either admit the existence of an unique F but reject its having property H; or alternatively we might wish to deny that there is an F, or that it is unique. It would be natural to mark such an ambiguity by distinguishing the scope of the negation operator. Thus, for wide negation in which we admit the possibility of denying the object's existence or uniqueness, it would be natural to write

(7) It is not the case that (the F is H)

while for narrow negation, in which we admit the object's unique existence, but deny its having property H we might write

(8) The F is not H.

Kripke's point against Russell can be put in a similar way in relation to the scope ambiguities of modal operators. Suppose that we wish to use an expression like 'The first astronaut' and to consider the possibility that he might have been American. If we write

(9) The first astronaut might have been American<sup>10</sup>

then we obtain a similar ambiguity. For we can interpret this as claiming either that the first astronaut, that is, Gagarin, might have been American; or we can interpret it as claiming that although the first astronaut was the Russian Gagarin, nevertheless the Americans might have had an earlier astronaut, that is a quite different person from Gagarin. In the former fantasy, for example, it might be claimed that although Gagarin

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<sup>10</sup>see Evans's example in op.cit. *The Varieties of Reference*, p.55 (see also text Pt.5, ch.10, pp.216-17).

appeared to be Russian, in fact he was an American spy who was impersonating the real Soviet astronaut. As before we could mark these distinctions by writing the latter interpretation as involving a wide scope modality as in

(10) It is possible that (whoever was the first astronaut was an American),

and then interpreting the former by writing

(11) The first astronaut (i.e. Gagarin) was possibly American.

Kripke, however, believes that such ambiguities do not arise when we use OP names in place of such descriptive expressions. If we write

(12) Gagarin might have been American,

then the suggestion is that there is only one possibility here, namely that that man, Gagarin, might not have been Russian after all. (12) would not come out true under the conditions in which (10) comes out true, for (12) can be understood only in the terms of (11). If these points are correct then Kripke succeeds in demonstrating a clear distinction between the way in which OP names and non-rigid definite descriptions function, specifically in relation to counterfactual situations and so to modal propositions in which such expressions occur. With one proviso, which will be considered in a moment, such differences seem incompatible with Russell's suggestion that we should treat OP names *just as* abbreviated descriptions. Russell, of course, did not consider the role of such expressions in these counterfactual situations; but when these are brought into the picture, then striking differences between the behaviour of these types of expressions stand out.

Russell's semantic theory, however, reflects some part of Kripke's view just in respect of the role of LP names. Russell undoubtedly thought that such scope differences could not arise in the case of LP names, and so he drew a sharp distinction between definite descriptions and LP names. But it is clear that for Russell LP names and OP names were also to be sharply separated, and this precisely allowed him to hold the view which Kripke rejects, namely that OP names simply are abbreviated descriptions. Kripke expresses these points at various places in his *Naming and Necessity*. He says for example:

(a) ... such terms as 'the winner' and 'the loser' don't designate the same object in all possible worlds. On the other

hand, the term 'Nixon' is just a *name of this man*. When you ask whether it is necessary or contingent that Nixon won the election, you are asking ... whether ... *this man* would in fact have lost the election. (p.41)

(b) There is no reason why we cannot *stipulate* that, in talking about what would have happened to Nixon in a certain counterfactual situation, we are talking about what would have happened to *him*. (p.44)

What follows essentially from these remarks is that ordinary names and non-rigid descriptions seem to function in different ways. In the case of names the object can be directly known, so that the 'access' to the object in question is direct. The linguistic expression is given to us as a subject of discourse because the expression is simply a proxy for the object itself. This is indicated by Kripke's repeated emphasis on demonstratives as in the above quotations. Access to objects in the case of descriptions broadly is, however, through the medium of linguistic material, which nevertheless enables us to know which object, if any, the description applies to. The point seems close to Russell's contrast between knowledge by acquaintance and by description; it is also close, as I noted, to Russell's account of LP names.

Some differences between a name and a description can naturally be explained by associating the name directly with the object independent of descriptions, for example via a christening or baptising operation as Kripke calls it. The difference on the side of descriptions relates to the fact that we can, in some sense, 'identify' an object via a description, that is simply in terms of the object's connection with those features, without having any direct access to it at all. This can be coupled with the fact that non-rigid descriptions will not pick out the same object in every possible world, and this limits the scope for direct acquaintance, since direct acquaintance in one world is not enough to provide an understanding of the description in *other* possible worlds. These points make it clear that the comparison between Russell and Kripke might be conducted either on semantic or on related epistemological grounds. So far Kripke's semantic grounds for denying that OP names can be treated as having the same meaning as sets of non-rigid descriptions seems correct.

One final point, however, needs to be considered as a possible defence of Russell.

Even Kripke is prepared to accept that some descriptions may be rigid designators. He says nevertheless that his criticism of Russell is precisely directed towards the idea that the descriptions which abbreviate OP names are not rigid. Would it be possible to defend Russell's account by limiting those abbreviating descriptions to expressions which are rigid designators? The answer to this question seems to be that although this is a theoretical possibility, it is scarcely one which can be easily realised in practice. There are several reasons for this. One is that there is considerable doubt about *which* descriptions will qualify in this way, and this raises Kripke's other criticisms of Russell (see footnote 5 in p.167). If we follow Kripke's suggestions about *de facto* rigidity, then the required descriptions will have to reflect certain natural, or metaphysical, necessities, just as the arithmetical case ('the smallest prime') reflects certain mathematical necessities. But there is a difficulty about identifying the whole range of such rigid descriptions. It seems inevitable that such descriptions will be quite limited, and will reflect only certain non-contingent features of the relevant items. But then the difficulty will be that most people most of the time will be users of OP names in ignorance of many of those background non-contingent claims. It will then become quite difficult to explain how such users attach any meaning to those names, and even more difficult to explain how genuine communication can be carried on between speakers who use those names. This has been recognised as a problem for 'cluster' theories like that of Searle, in which, as with Russell, no restrictions whatever are placed on the descriptions which qualify as giving meaning to the name. Beyond that, of course, even such a restricted account fails to take into account two features which Kripke would still wish to insist on, namely the difference between fixing the meaning and fixing the reference, and the fact that Kripke offers an account of reference fixing in the case of names which dispenses with the use of descriptive resources. For these reasons, although Russell might be defended by an appeal to this point, it would not enable him to avoid all the difficulties in his account. It was perhaps this point that Kripke had in mind in quotation 2 on p.164. It is, in any case, related to the criticisms referred to in footnote 5 on p.167. It is perhaps worth saying, too, that of course Russell

himself made no suggestions about restricting the range of the abbreviating descriptions.

On the epistemological side a further comparison can be made between Kripke and Russell. While Russell wanted to talk about a necessary appeal to acquaintance with a certain kind of objects to get an understanding of them, his notion of understanding does not distinguish, as Kripke's does, between reference and meaning. His appeal to acquaintance is similar to Kripke's account of a christening or baptism in that Kripke's account also talks about immediate acquaintance in some sense. The comparison here works in two ways. One is Kripke's belief that we can *know* a priori that some name names some object through a baptism — and Russell would (rightly) query this. The other is that although *both* Russell and Kripke might be said to invoke acquaintance, their conception of this is *very* different. Kripke thinks of it as relating an ordinary percipient to ordinary objects to which we give names. Russell thought of it in the traditional terms of sense-data. Hence Russell's distinction between OP and LP names; and hence Kripke's criticism of that distinction, since Kripke thinks roughly that what Russell said of LP names is true of *names* (even OP names). The point might be put by saying that Russell's LP names *are* rigid designators. What differentiates Russell from Kripke is that Kripke does not think rigid designators are confined to names of sense-data, and more broadly he wants to dispense with that epistemic, traditional, background to semantics. In this respect Kripke is like Evans, Peacocke, Sainsbury, as we shall see.

Kripke argues that if we baptise a certain object and so fix the referent of a certain expression then that is something which can be known *a priori*. For him it does not need any kind of empirical evidence. This suggests that baptism is stipulative rather than descriptive; it *institutes* a naming procedure and does not merely use a name already introduced. In fact, Kripke wants to make a distinction between the operation of introducing a name as opposed to the operation of using a name later once it is introduced. He nevertheless believes that once the name is introduced, the question of evidence or experience to justify the use of the name will naturally be involved. But none of this is relevant at the stage of baptising, and so he draws the inference that naming can be a

*priori*.

Russell would not have been prepared to accept the view that a baptism enables us to know what a name names *a priori*. His empiricist background treats direct acquaintance as an *a posteriori* resource, and this at least raises a query about Kripke's view. For it is not obvious that we can know such a thing *a priori* on the basis of a baptism. It might be argued that even in a baptism certain *a posteriori* features of direct acquaintance are necessary. If it is further claimed that even so what makes our knowledge *a priori* is its *stipulative* character, we can raise the question whether stipulations do provide us with knowledge *a priori*. Even though Russell's epistemology was inevitably linked to his semantic theory in PLA nevertheless it is clear from Kripke's approach that these aspects of Russell's philosophy may conflict. This is apparent, for example, in the fact noticed already that some of Kripke's ideas about OP names are captured in Russell's account of LP names; but one problem for Russell is precisely that, as he admitted, LP names cannot be clearly exemplified in any aspects of natural language.

I have not considered the positive account of names which Kripke offers in place of Russell's theory. Essentially he combines an account of an initial baptism with a further causal account of the transmission of names through some linguistic community. Though such an account concerns Kripke's theories rather than those of Russell, nevertheless it is worth mentioning that such an account has also been elaborated by writers such as Evans in his 'consumers and producers' account<sup>11</sup>, and also by McCulloch in his account of 'backward and outward-looking' descriptions<sup>12</sup> which I shall reserve for future discussion.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid. pp.376 ff.

<sup>12</sup>op.cit. McCulloch, *The Game of the Name*, pp.247-53.

### 8.3 *Predicative view of names*

Kripke's modal arguments consider names and certain descriptions as rigid designators, but not descriptions in general. A different account is offered by Quine and Burge which might seem to counter Kripke's sharp distinction between names and descriptions. They attempt to defend Russell's theory of OP names as abbreviated descriptions. The debate surrounding the fact whether OP names refer to singular objects or not provides the key to the solution of this problem. OP names undoubtedly are intimately related to objects, but the question arises: How can their relation to objects be understood? For Kripke OP names can be regarded as singular terms which stand for a single object. Russell, as we have seen, regarded OP names as abbreviated descriptions and not as single terms. Quine and Burge offer grounds for thinking that names play the role of predicates, and so offer some defence for Russell.

The Kripkean objections raised against Russell's theory that names do not describe, and names play the semantic role of singular terms are accepted by Quine as relevant for understanding natural language. He thinks it irrelevant in case of his constructing a logical theory for the general understanding of natural science. For him, an OP name like 'Socrates' abbreviates a set of descriptive general terms, or abbreviates an artificial predicate like 'Socratizes'. Quine's claim is that if we restrict our discourse in this way then we can express all our ontological commitments and resolve the problem of accommodating proper names within a formal language of logic.

Burge's view, on the other hand, is directed more towards an understanding of natural language. He suggests that proper names do not abbreviate the role of predicates, but themselves play the role of predicates and demonstratives. He importantly makes the requirement that in giving a semantic analysis of expressions we should be influenced by the form of the expression and not by its use in a specific context. As we shall see this is an essential part of his attempt to treat OP names as predicates. For him OP names do not stand for any *single* object, and function similarly to predicates because the same name can refer to different objects at different times. He believes that OP names may also

represent demonstratives which stand for variables. Both Burge and Quine attempt to defend Russell's theory of descriptions though in different ways, and it is their view that I am now going to examine.

Quine's attempt to salvage Russell's theory suggests that a description can be constructed for any name. He thinks that the required description for the name 'Pegasus' is:  $(\iota x) (x = \text{Pegasus})$  or  $(\iota x) (x \text{ pegasizes})$ . His argument for the assimilation of all singular nouns to descriptions is:

In order thus to subsume a one-word name or alleged name such as 'Pegasus' under Russell's theory of descriptions, we must, of course, be able first to translate the word into a description. ... If the notion of Pegasus had been so obscure or so basic a one that no pat translation into a descriptive phrase had offered itself along familiar lines, we could still have availed ourselves of the following artificial and trivial-seeming device: we could have appealed to the *ex hypothesi* unanalysable, irreducible attribute of *being Pegasus*, adopting for its expression, the verb 'is-Pegasus' or 'pegasizes'. The name 'Pegasus' itself could then be treated as derivative, and identified after all with a description: 'the thing that is Pegasus', 'the thing that Pegasizes'.<sup>13</sup>

Quine thus introduces the predicate 'x pegasizes' for the purpose of formalizing OP names in an extensional logic. Quine's position can be made clear in the following quotation:

Names are, in fact, altogether immaterial to the ontological issue, for ... in connection with 'Pegasus' or 'pegasize', ... names can be converted to descriptions, and Russell has shown that descriptions can be eliminated.<sup>14</sup>

Quine therefore supports an extensional logic in which all singular terms can be eliminated and the primacy of predicates can be established, but he rejects the idea of quantification in modal logic and holds that descriptions can be eliminated via the medium of Russell's apparatus of contextual definition.

Quine evidently thinks that for some OP names a straightforward descriptive translation will be available, but we saw earlier that there are serious objections to this view. If Kripke is right, then however natural it may be to associate some OP name with a set of descriptions the translation can never be correct. In what follows I assume that Kripke is correct in this and so concentrate on Quine's alternative proposal that we treat

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<sup>13</sup> see, Quine, W.V.O., "On What There Is" in *From a Logical Point of View* (Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. p. 12.

OP names such as 'Pegasus' as predicates of the form '... pegasizes'.<sup>15</sup>

A similar, but different, view is presented by Tyler Burge in his essay "Reference and Proper Names" where he talks about the role of proper names in language. He approaches the problem as Russell and Quine have, by stressing the predicative role of proper names, but presents what he calls a modified predicative view of his own. Following the Russellian idea of regarding proper names as abbreviated descriptions, he argues that such abbreviation occurs in two ways:

One is that it abbreviates a string of descriptive general terms that the language user would employ — or abbreviates an artificial predicate like 'Aristotelizes'. The other is that a proper name abbreviates into one symbol the semantic roles of operator and predicate which, in definite descriptions, are usually represented separately by at least two symbols: the 'the' (or an analogous construction) and the general term.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike Russell and Quine, Burge claims that instead of *abbreviating* predicates, proper names *are themselves* predicates; they do not abbreviate the roles of predicates, but themselves play the roles of predicates and demonstratives. He argues that a predicate term is true of an object even if the predicate term is never used as the symbol of the object. For example, the predicate 'is a dog' is true of some object even if the word 'dog' is never used as a symbol of that object. Proper names, for him, contain a self-referential element and are predicates true of an object even if they have never been used of that object. He thinks

There is and need be no claim that a proper name abbreviates *another* predicate, even a roughly coextensive predicate such as 'is an entity called "PN"'. A proper name is a predicate in its own right.<sup>17</sup>

According to Burge, the failure to understand OP names as predicates originates from the idea of concentrating on singular uses of proper names, like "Russell studied in Cambridge". But OP names like 'Russell' can be true of numerous different objects. Such

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<sup>15</sup>Although Quine seeks to defend Russell's account of OP names there is another general respect in which his view is at odds with Russell. We have seen that Russell wished to assimilate all linguistic expressions to names, and wished to give a privileged position to the basic, atomic, LP names in language. Quine, however, is actually moving, in this context, in the opposite direction, that is, attempting to *eliminate* names in favour of predicates and bound or unbound variables.

<sup>16</sup>cf. Burge, Tyler., "Reference and Proper Names" in *The Journal of Philosophy* (Vol. 70, 1973), p.428.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, pp. 428-29.

names can be preceded by both definite and indefinite articles, for example,

(a) An Arthur Russell joined the club today.

(b) The Russell who joined the club today is an author.

OP names again can be represented in quantifiers, for example,

(c) Some Russells are philosophers; some are artists.

In these respects OP names in natural language function less like singular terms and more like general descriptions. Burge nevertheless agrees that our inclination to rely on context in our ordinary language leads us to the assumption that proper names stand for one unique object. Since, as we saw, his theory rejects the appeal to contexts in analysing truth-conditions, he argues that OP names in a singular form still abbreviate the role of a predicate because in general they stand for more than one object.

Burge now also claims that proper names can play the role of demonstratives. He thinks that a singular proper name like 'Jim' has the same semantical structure as the demonstrative phrase "That book". A speaker reference and a context is used in the case of a proper name to pick out a particular. It is for this reason, he thinks, that demonstratives are not generally attached explicitly to proper names, although they may be so attached. In general a modification of an OP name can be made where there is no need of a speaker reference to pick out a particular. Burge's proposal is that demonstratives represent a free variable which

... is not a device for referring to an extra linguistic object, but is a pronominal place marker whose antecedent is the definite description.<sup>18</sup>

He gives the example of a proper name which can be regarded as a demonstrative and can be represented as a free variable; "The shortest spy in the 21st century will be Caucasian. Call him 'Bertrand'. (That) Bertrand will also be bald." He further argues that a demonstrative can also act as a bound variable, for instance, "Someone cast the first stone. Whoever he was, call him 'Alfred'. (That) Alfred was a hypocrite". Burge claims that in

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp.435-36.

neither of these cases, is there any causal link between the user of the language and the named object.

Although Burge regards proper names as playing the role of predicates with a demonstrative element, it is important in his view that the demonstrative element can be fully interpreted only in a pragmatic context. For him a general semantic theory for proper names will express the truth conditions for the application of the (proper name) predicate, that is, roughly, that some object was given that name at some point. Such an account will make room for a variable demonstrative element which will be interpreted differently on different occasions of use. The semantic theory thus makes room for a contextually demonstrative element, but does not draw any distinction between different contexts of use. Burge, therefore, regards it as a merit in his account that those distinctive *contextual* elements do not need to be identified in a *general semantic* theory. Such a theory will simply express a general truth condition which holds for *anyone* who genuinely has that proper name.

The question can be raised whether Quine's and Burge's views can be used to defend Russell against Kripke's criticisms. In some ways both of them seem to adopt positions which are different from, and go beyond, Russell's own views. Basically what Quine offers is a syntactic way of rewriting sentences with OP names; and in such a way that the language we end up with contains no singular referring expressions at all. There is no sign in Russell that he wanted to eliminate names; on the contrary, he was claiming that names are the basic, elementary linguistic units. Although it is true that he wanted to eliminate OP names in favour of descriptions, nevertheless descriptions themselves rest on basic names, or LP names, so naming for him is absolutely fundamental. Quine's view is different from Russell's, because he wants to re-write OP names in terms of quantified expressions in some preferred logical system. It could be said that he is not denying any difference between names and descriptions; he is simply attempting to eliminate names through predicates. In this way it might be said that he is not so much analysing natural language as reforming it. We shall see, however, that Burge's position is significantly

different from that of Quine. Nevertheless I shall argue that their proposals do not adequately defend Russell.

This is clearer in the case of Quine, who has canvassed the idea of an elimination of such singular referring expressions in terms of the apparatus of predicate logic. For ordinary English that would mean replacing an ordinary name like 'Fred', with an existential quantifier coupled with various predicative expressions. Quine's suggestion is that even when an ordinary language like English contains ordinary proper names like 'Pegasus', we can translate them into first-order predicate logic by re-writing them, for example as 'pegasizes'. But Quine does not offer us any way of explaining how the name-predicates work, that is what are the truth conditions of 'pegasizing'. The proposition "Pegasus is a winged horse", in Quine's account, would come out as "Something is a horse, is winged, and pegasizes". If Quine is asked what it is to be a horse and a winged animal, then we are supposed to get a reasonable answer about a certain animal with certain characteristics. But if Quine is asked to explain the predicate 'pegasizes', then it is not clear what answer he would give. Indeed he might wish to avoid giving any answer if, for him, *all* we need to do is to re-write the name 'Pegasus' as the predicate 'pegasizes'. Two objections here can be raised against Quine's view.

One is that if 'pegasizes' *excludes* "being a horse with wings" then it is difficult to see what it might *include*. We generally think of 'Pegasus' as a winged horse and it is this utterly obvious predicate which would normally be required to elaborate the predicate 'pegasizes'. Now the suggestion is if the description 'winged horse' *is* needed to explain the predicate 'pegasizes', then the latter predicate will be redundant. It seems then that 'pegasizes' has to add something more; but then what is that additional feature? Not only does Quine not indicate any such additional features, but it is also true that the argument can be generalised to exclude every predicate that is true of Pegasus. But in that case the predicate 'pegasizes' will be empty and unintelligible. It is also worth noting that the introduction of 'pegasizes' was intended to be an *alternative* to the provision of other descriptions with which to replace the name. Now, it seems, that alternative remains

fundamentally obscure.

Second, if Quine is prepared to give an explanation of the name 'Pegasus' in terms of some set of descriptions like 'being a horse', 'being winged', and so on, then that way of elaborating Russell's view is going to be open to all the objections that Kripke raises. For these reasons Quine's purely formal proposal to re-write OP names offers no real defence of Russell against Kripke's criticisms.

Burge's proposal is different from Quine's not only because he treats proper names as themselves predicates rather than constructing a new predicate from them, but also because he explicitly wishes to construct a formal semantic theory for propositions with proper names. Burge, therefore, is not merely offering a way of re-writing such propositions for the purposes of a theory of logic, but rather for the purpose of constructing a meta-linguistic semantic theory which will explain the semantic role of proper names. His proposal nevertheless does entail a reformulation of those propositions with proper names explicitly functioning as predicates. The suggestion is that any proper name like 'Smith' can be translated into such a predicate as "... is Smith", but here it may be claimed that this fails to discriminate between identity and predicative propositions. When we say "The murderer is Smith", it would normally be said that the latter claim is an identity claim, and not a predicative claim. Indeed, when we say "... is Smith", the question arises whether there is *any* usage in English where such an expression can be explained as a predication rather than as an identity. In this way Burge may seem to offer, like Quine, a formal analysis which, however, effectively fails to distinguish identity and predicative claims and so distorts those features of our natural language. Burge might reply to this that there is no evident distortion in construing a proposition such as "That man is Smith" as "That man is *a* Smith", where the new form marks a predicative use of a proper name. But ordinarily we would distinguish between "That man is Smith" and "That man is *a* Smith". He would, of course, also wish to insist, as has been noted, on the different requirements for a semantic theory of such proper names as opposed to a pragmatic account of their use in context. He says in one place

In a limited context, proper names may be — and often are — assumed to apply to a unique object.<sup>19</sup>

This suggests that OP names *can* refer to unique objects, though only in special cases. But if he accepts some cases of proper names standing for single objects then it is hard to see what ground there is to reject this in general. Burge's argument here rests on two claims. First is his view that the singular use of OP names is a special case of their generally predicative role. For him such singular uses are limiting cases of predicates which just happen to apply in the context to just one object. Second is his view that any semantic analysis must be restricted to the *form* of the relevant expressions and exclude any of the contextual considerations which arise from their actual use.

Both of these supports for Burge's position, however, are highly questionable. There is a value in noting the descriptive uses of OP names, and even in considering the possibility that their singular uses are limiting cases of those descriptive uses. But if we ask why we should accept such an account, rather than its opposite, then the case for Burge's position is weak. For it is just as valuable, and considerably more natural, to treat the descriptive uses of OP names as limiting cases of their singular uses. In such an account the use of OP names to pick out individuals will have a priority, and their descriptive use as in "... is a Smith" can be explained by means of such predicates as "... is called '—' ". This is not to treat such a predicate as an adequate analysis of *all* OP name uses, but only of those special uses with the indefinite article. There seems, so far, no good reason to prefer Burge's proposed order of priority over that latter order.

The argument distinguishing semantics from pragmatics is also weak and potentially question-begging. It is weak because any account of natural language and its functions must rest ultimately on the actual use of the language in particular contexts. It is true that Burge could accept such a view and still insist that a semantic theory should exclude specific contextual factors in favour of what he calls the 'form' of expressions. The difficulty here is to know how to draw the line between context and form in such a way

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid. p.430.

that it is not just arbitrary. It would be possible to draw that distinction in terms of the preferred apparatus of formal logic to be used in the semantics of natural language. But such a decision is in serious danger of arbitrarily excluding important aspects of natural language. It is also in serious danger of begging the question in favour of Burge's own proposal. For clearly if we disregard the specific contexts of discourse in which OP names are used we will be bound to play down the significance of the singular use of such names. Although these objections are not decisive against Burge's proposal they show that he needs to provide more argument to support it.

Finally, in so far as it is correct to say that Quine's or Burge's proposals offer to formalise propositions containing OP names in terms of the apparatus of predicate logic, then they provide a purely formal, syntactic, account of such propositions. Such a formal re-writing goes no way towards providing an analysis of OP names in terms of some specific set of descriptions. Yet it was that latter, substantive, analysis which was canvassed by both Russell and Frege and it was in such terms that Kripke objected to Russell's theory. For these reasons it seems that both Quine's and Burge's proposals do not touch the issues on which Kripke and Russell disagree, and consequently cannot serve to defend Russell from Kripke's criticisms. Even if we were to accept Quine's or Burge's proposals we would not have reinstated Russell's theory.

It may be suggested that Burge's proposal for a semantic theory could be defended as a theoretical idealisation of natural language, just as Russell's account of LP names might. But there are important differences between the two cases. Russell's account identifies certain names which he admitted are not exemplified in natural language at all. Although he believed that demonstrative terms approximate to LP names he nevertheless accepted that natural language demonstratives do not match LP names exactly. Russell also, unlike Burge, appealed to his logic as an alternative language, which can be described as 'perfect'. Even though he admitted that such a claim has to be made only with some qualifications, for example, that the language is perfect only with respect to its syntax, he nevertheless offered it as an ideal against which to measure natural language. Burge, by

contrast, does not speak of constructing an alternative language, but of constructing a semantic theory for a natural language. He does not appeal to Russell's conception of a 'perfect' language, and consciously presents his theory as an account of natural language. Of course it should be understood that Russell's account of *OP names* is not an idealisation either, and is also directed towards an account of those names in natural language. Russell's idealised theory, or the idealised part of his theory, concerns his account of LP names only, and is the basis for the later discussions of names in Kripke, Peacocke, Evans and Sainsbury, which will be considered later (see ch.9).

# ENTITY-INVOKING ACCOUNTS OF NAMES

Some later theorists, including Evans<sup>20</sup>, Peacocke<sup>21</sup>, and Sainsbury<sup>22</sup>, have followed Kripke in regarding names as rigid designators, although they have not always accepted the detail of Kripke's account, and they have not agreed amongst themselves about every aspect of their theories. What they all have in common, however, and what links them strongly to Russell, is the belief that there are certain uses of expressions in natural language which require the existence of a corresponding object in order to give strict meaning to the expressions. Among these later theorists such expressions have been called 'entity-invoking' expressions, though, as we shall see, they do not all give exactly the same criteria for this. Nevertheless in accepting generally that there are such entity-invoking expressions they demonstrate an affinity with Russell's account of names. For Russell evidently held that for genuine, LP, names it was a requirement for their having meaning that there should be an object corresponding to them. In the later terminology Russell's LP names are 'entity-invoking', so that both he and the later theorists share a commitment to the belief that such expressions exist. Indeed it is clear that these later writers have wished to insist on this Russellian idea in part because they thought that Russell's account held some elusive but ultimately correct view about the role of names in language. Their view generally is that although Russell's account is open to criticism, as we shall see, on a number of issues, nevertheless the central strand in that account which treats genuine names as 'entity-invoking' is correct and an important insight into the way

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<sup>20</sup>op.cit. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*.

<sup>21</sup>Peacocke, "Proper names, reference, and rigid designation" in Blackburn, S. (ed.) *Meaning, Reference and Necessity* (Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>22</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*.

names function in language.

It is important to map also the divergences between these later theorists and Russell's own account, not only to record their views accurately but also to underline the limitations of Russell's original theory. For the present I note just one of those central divergences of view, but later I will summarise the whole range of these differences. The central divergence is that while Russell regarded as 'entity-invoking' only those names which are LP, the later theorists have not wanted to separate any such sub-class of names. Two corollaries follow from this divergence. First the later theorists give an account of names in general which enables their theories to apply more directly to natural language than Russell's account did. Second in virtue of that first point they are relieved of Russell's embarrassment in finding it difficult to identify any entity-invoking, that is LP, names in natural language. We shall find that Russell's wish to identify the sub-class of LP names is open to other objections, for example in terms of the epistemological commitments which Russell added to that conception of names. But it remains probably the most important weakness in Russell's theory that his own account is so distant from the actual uses of natural language. In what follows I shall not attempt to outline the later theories in all their detail, but note the key points with a relevance to Russell's views. For that reason, since Sainsbury's version is directly linked to his exposition of Russell I shall pay more attention to him than to either Evans or Peacocke.

### **9.1 *Peacocke's account***

Peacocke's entity-invoking account has been suggested not only for names, but also for some special uses of definite descriptions. Broadly a name or an expression is said to be 'entity-invoking' if the existence of a specific object is required in some way to provide meaning for that name or expression. For example, under Russell's analysis the proposition "The Emperor of China was bald" would be perfectly meaningful even if there is no such

unique object as The Emperor of China, for in that case the proposition would come out false. In an entity-invoking account of such cases, the question of truth and falsity would not be considered, so long as there is no entity by which to determine whether the predicate is true or false. I shall be explaining Peacocke's entity-invoking account in a moment, but it is worth mentioning here that Evans's account is different from that of Peacocke's. For Evans, there cannot be any corresponding thought if the thought involving a *referring* expression lacks an object. In that case one is just deluding oneself into thinking that one is having that thought. Nevertheless, for both Evans and Peacocke, the notion of an entity-invoking expression is primarily attached to proper names and not to definite descriptions.

Peacocke believes that there are names, ordinary proper names in natural language, whose meaning requires that there should be some objects or bearers of those names. Such expressions, or uses, are called by Peacocke 'entity-invoking', so that the meaning of those expressions, or uses, can be understood only in terms of the actual entity named by the names. He accepts the Kripkean term 'rigid designator', but differs from Kripke about the precise definition of a rigid designator. Kripke, as we saw, on the basis of modal logic, argues that ordinary proper names are rigid designators, whereas descriptions generally are not. Peacocke avoids Kripke's sole use of modal concepts and expands his criterion of rigid designation to cover *every* operator, whether modal or non-modal. His definition of a term *t* as a rigid designator in language *L* is:

*t* is a rigid designator in *L* iff there is an object *x* such that for any sentence *G(t)* in which *t* occurs, the truth (falsity) condition for *G(t)* is that  $\langle x \rangle$  satisfy (respectively, fail to satisfy) *G*( ).<sup>23</sup>

Peacocke's criterion shows that in the proposition, for example, "Socrates is wise", there is an object *x* such that the truth condition of the sentence depends on the object having satisfied or failed to satisfy the predicate. Thus in the said proposition, there is an entity named 'Socrates' such that the truth condition for the whole proposition depends on

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<sup>23</sup>op.cit. Peacocke, C., "Proper names, reference, and rigid designation", p.110.

Socrates's satisfying (or failing to satisfy) the predicate 'is wise'. Peacocke's criterion also shows that if proper names are rigid designators, then they are scope insensitive for the reason that there is no difference in truth condition between two expressions containing a name considered either in wide-scope or narrow-scope. For instance, the truth condition of the two expressions

(a) Socrates might not have been wise.

and

(b) It might not be the case that Socrates is wise.

is the same, because in both (a) and (b), the truth-condition requires that there is an entity Socrates which might have failed to satisfy the condition of 'being wise'. This is similar to Kripke's idea that proper names are *de re* rigid designators which can have only one reading and are, therefore, scope-insensitive in these contexts.

Peacocke admits that proper names, treated as rigid designators, may not satisfy the criterion in all the propositions in language. This suggests that rigid designators should be treated cautiously especially when uttered in belief contexts. It may not be the case, for example, that for *every* sentence of the form 'G (Socrates)', its truth condition is that <Socrates> satisfy G ( ). Peacocke argues that if a belief proposition has a relational reading then the truth condition of the proposition depends on the entity which is designated in the belief. For example, "John believes that Cicero was bald" on a relational reading would be

<Cicero> satisfies "John believes ( ) was bald"

that is, of that person (designated by 'Cicero') John believes that he is bald.

The suggestion is that on a relational reading the belief ascribed is singular, and the name stands for the specific object. But a difficulty arises in the case of non-relational readings, where the object can be named by two distinct *expressions*. The question arises whether if 'Cicero' and 'Tully' are names of one and the same object, then the truth value of the two propositions "John believes that Cicero was bald" and "John believes that Tully was bald" is the same (see Pt.2, ch.5, pp.103-04). On a non-relational reading the two names,

although standing for the same object, may not be understood in that way by John.

For Peacocke belief propositions cannot be regarded as having the same form as G(Socrates). He insists that his criterion does not apply in that way to the surface structure of propositions, but only to those licenced as having the proper form in a truth theory for a language. His inclination is to follow Davidson's idea that a belief proposition can be explained in two stages. The first, on a certain occasion of utterance, contains a belief prefix with a demonstrative reference ("that"); the second contains the content of the belief ascribed. In this way "John believes that Cicero was bald" becomes "John believes that. Cicero was bald". According to Peacocke

Our problem now dissolves; "Cicero" occurs only in the sentence  
Cicero was bald.

We are committed to saying that the truth-condition for *this* sentence is that Cicero satisfy *El was bald*, but that is fine.<sup>24</sup>

Peacocke, therefore, wants to avoid the suggestion that names are not rigid designators. He attempts to show that the idea of a name as a rigid designator can still be retained even in belief propositions so long as we follow Davidson's analysis. Davidson's account, however, does not relieve Peacocke from the responsibility of excepting the non-relational cases from his criterion, that is still not treating such sentences as properly of the form "G ()".

According to Peacocke in a non-relational account of belief sentences objections can be raised that the name 'Cicero' is being mentioned rather than used. The suggestion is that since a non-relational account denies that two utterances *a* and *b* have the same truth-value, and  $\langle a \rangle$  satisfies the Davidsonian predicate John believes *x* iff  $\langle y \rangle$  does, then 'Cicero' will be *mentioned* and not *used* as a component of the relevant sentence that are input to the truth theory. Peacocke argues that this objection can be resisted and agrees here with Davidson that quotation marks themselves have a demonstrative force which is that the expressions occurring within quotation marks in a sentence contribute to what is

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.126.

strictly and literally said in an utterance of that sentence. This is done

... by being the referent of a demonstrative, not by occurring as a truth-significant part of the corresponding regimented sentence.<sup>25</sup>

Thus for Peacocke there cannot be any objection to the thesis that proper names are rigid designators and he is inclined to treat proper names as rigid designators. As we saw this has an affinity with Russell's conception of LP names.

Peacocke also supports Russell's selection of demonstrative words 'this' and 'that' as LP names which, he thinks, with some provisos, can be treated as rigid designators. But since demonstratives like 'this' and 'that' do not have the same reference on every occasion of their use, they can be considered as rigid designators only if the criterion is formulated as

... for any given historic occasion of utterance, there are objects (there is a sequence of objects) such that for any sentence ...<sup>26</sup>

This criterion, Peacocke argues, is related to the previous one:

Thus the two crucial and related features of the old criterion, its existential universal character and the idea that the truth condition for the (uttered) sentence concern certain objects directly are retained.<sup>27</sup>

Peacocke's reference to the truth condition's 'concerning certain objects directly' is an expression of what he strictly understands by the term 'entity-invoking'. He uses his criterion of entity-invocation to argue that demonstrative phrases function as names, but he certainly would not want to deny that they contain descriptive elements as well. He also claims that descriptions sometimes function as rigid designators. For example, what a speaker strictly and literally says in uttering the proposition "The pen is blue" is equivalent to what he says in an appropriate context in uttering "That pen is blue". It follows then that 'the pen' in the original proposition functions as a rigid designator, and

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid. p.128.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. pp. 118-19.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 119.

Peacocke recognizes this as an *entity-invoking* use of the description.

Both Peacocke and Kripke provide an account of OP names as rigid designators, and oppose Russell's treatment of OP names as abbreviated descriptions. Peacocke's account however contains the additional element of recognizing some uses of demonstratives as rigid designators under a modified criterion rather as Russell also did. Peacocke thinks that even some descriptions which are used in a demonstrative way may also be 'entity-invoking', and in this he differs radically from Russell. There are, in this way, both similarities and differences between Peacocke and Russell. Russell, too, restricted his LP names, that is, his 'entity-invoking' names to those naming sense-data and so brought in an epistemic aspect to his theory. Peacocke is prepared to accept something of Russell's conception of LP names in his own modified criteria for 'entity-invoking', but he is not prepared to analyse LP names in terms of sense-data and so does not need to commit himself to a Russellian epistemology. Peacocke evidently believes that this will yield an improvement in Russell's theory, both in its avoidance of a vulnerable epistemology, and in its direct application to natural language.

## 9.2 *Sainsbury's view*

Sainsbury also canvasses a specific view of Russell's account of names the general upshot of which is similar to views held by Evans and later on by Peacocke. His view is that there really are names in natural language which match the basic requirement of Russell's account. He calls such names 'genuine names' and holds, like Peacocke, that the epistemic connection that Russell made between LP names and sense-data is a needless handicap. In his discussion he unearths a number of divergences between his own view and that of Russell, while still preserving, as he thinks, the essential insight of Russell's account.

Sainsbury, following Peacocke, holds that a name genuinely stands for its bearer,

whereas a description does not. But Peacocke also holds that some descriptions are also rigid, so that those descriptions function like names. Sainsbury, like Peacocke, also considers the way in which names function in belief contexts. For Sainsbury a belief will be 'relational' if it is expressible as "A believes, concerning t, that it is  $\phi$ " and so long as from this, in conjunction with " $t=s$ ", we can infer "A believes, concerning s, that it is  $\phi$ ". Such a relational belief, however, attributes a singular belief in that the object named stands for a single person or a single entity. For him

Every sentence which attributes a relational belief is a sentence which attributes a singular belief.<sup>28</sup>

Sainsbury argues that although the belief ascribed is singular, the singular terms occurring in belief sentences are certainly not all transparent. This is clear since from the facts that, for example, "John believes concerning Tully that he is an orator", and that "Tully = Cicero", it does not follow that "John believes that Cicero is an orator". This raises the question whether Sainsbury thinks any beliefs are relational and can give examples of them.

According to Sainsbury, Russell's explanation of belief sentences in *PP* treats every belief as relational so that they express a relation between the believer and the meaning of the constituents of the believed sentence. For example, "A believes that Cassio loves Desdemona" is a belief relating A to Cassio, loving, and Desdemona, as we saw earlier on (see Pt.2, ch.4, p.82-3). Russell's analysis suggests that the names employed, Cassio and Desdemona, stand for single individuals, and therefore, attribute a singular belief. But his treatment also assumes that the names occurring in the belief sentences are referentially transparent. Sainsbury agrees with Russell that a proper name used in a belief sentence does assert a singular belief relating to the bearer of the name. But he disagrees that the names used always occur transparently because a name might have different interpretations which cannot be said to occur on every occasion of its use. Sainsbury allows, as we saw in the earlier example about Tully and Cicero, that a believer might not satisfy

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<sup>28</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.64.

the inferential requirements for a relational, or transparent, belief.

A name occurring in a proposition is *referentially transparent* if a name substituted by another name designating the same object does not affect the truth value of the whole proposition. For example, if 'Cicero' and 'Tully' refer to the same person then the propositions containing either of these names cannot differ in truth value in so far as the context is transparent. But since language contains opaque contexts, the truth value of some propositions containing these two names differ. Belief propositions typically provide such opaque contexts. Although it happens that the proposition attributing a relational belief entails a proposition attributing a singular belief, it does not follow that a singular belief entails a relational belief. But even non-relational occurrences of names provide singular propositions. That is if "John believes that Cicero is bald" is a non-relational use of 'Cicero', still the name is used as a singular expression.

Sainsbury points out that while a proper name occurring in a belief sentence does ascribe a singular belief this is not true in the case of descriptions. For example, "A believes concerning Edmund Hillary that he is bald" describes a singular belief about Edmund Hillary even though 'Edmund Hillary' does not occur transparently in the sentence. But the sentence "A believes that the first man to climb Everest is bald" ascribes a belief to some individual by using a description and this is different from a singular belief. This is clear from the fact that the description "The first man to climb Everest" is not relational and does not necessarily stand for one definite entity. This is the basis for Kripke's suggestion that the function of naming is distinct from the function of describing.

Sainsbury at a later stage argues that if the description uttered in a particular proposition means a certain object, then it ensures a singular belief about the object indicated. He gives an illustration that when the proposition "The woman over there is likely to be the next prime minister" is uttered, and the woman over there is actually Margaret Thatcher, then there is some temptation to suppose that the description uttered is true of the object named, and the belief ascribed is singular. This suggests that descriptions are sometimes used like demonstratives or names, which is similar to

Peacocke's idea that certain rigid descriptions function like names, or demonstratives.

Sainsbury thinks that when the same name is uttered in different contexts, this complexity leads Russell to the belief that names are abbreviated descriptions. Names, on the other hand, when first introduced, do not carry any descriptive element which may be somehow attached to them later on. He holds that although understanding a name sometimes involves descriptions, descriptions are not *synonymous* with names and do not always even apply to the same object in the way that a name does. In this, too, he follows Kripke.

According to Sainsbury what committed the description theorists to say that names are disguised descriptions is that if a description 'the F' is supposed to abbreviate a name 'a' and then afterwards the description fails to hold of the object named, it is concluded that the name 'a' is bearerless or meaningless. Sainsbury claims that the failure of the description to satisfy the object named does not prove the emptiness of the name. Because

... this phenomenon requires no analytic connection between the name and the predicates or descriptions, since the evidence, even the sum of the evidence, does not *entail* *a's* non-existence.<sup>29</sup>

Anyone who thinks that names are disguised descriptions and also that names are rigid descriptions is committed to the view that (some) descriptions are meaningless in the absence of a corresponding object. But as Sainsbury is right to say this is absurd or wrong. However Russell himself is not in this position, since he precisely separated LP and OP names in his way. So the objection does not apply to him, though it might apply to Peacocke, who does think that *some* descriptions *are* rigid (see also Kripke, p.172).

Sainsbury however thinks that OP names are indeed *names*, and the meaning of such names can be understood in terms of a relation to the bearer. He thus accepts the central view of Russell's account of naming, but rejects Russell's idea of regarding OP names as descriptions. He sharply criticises two of Russell's views about names, viz.,

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid. p. 93.

(1)...if one thing has two names, you make exactly the same assertion whichever of the two names you use,...<sup>30</sup>

(2) A true identity sentence in which the identity sign is flanked by names, "... will still be a tautology".<sup>31</sup>

According to Sainsbury, (1) involves two different theses about proper names, viz.,

(a) the meaning of a name is its bearer, and

(b) ... the meaning of a name 'a' consists in the fact that 'a' names *a*.<sup>32</sup>

He thinks that (a) encourages us to accept both (1) and (2), because in (1) if the meaning of the name just *is* the bearer, then the two names for the same object *must* have the same meaning. Similarly for (2), if the meaning of the name 'a' is the object *a* and the meaning of the name 'b' is the object *a* and we understand both of their meanings, and so understand  $a=b$ , then we must know that  $a=b$ . Sainsbury plausibly thinks that we should accept (b) and definitely reject (a), because from (b) neither (1) nor (2) follows. He argued that if the meaning of the name is captured by (b), then the identity proposition constructed from the two names for the same object can be shown to be meaningful and also informative both in ordinary and in belief contexts. He thinks that Russell's identification of the meaning of the name with the bearer of the name, as in (a), motivates him to treat OP names as abbreviated descriptions and creates unnecessary problems. If we do identify the bearer with the name's meaning, then we may be committed to the view that every name requires a necessary existent. So Sainsbury says:

Hence identifying the meaning of a name with its bearer does not require that the bearers of names should be necessary existents.<sup>33</sup>

In relation to Russell's epistemic commitments Sainsbury, as we have seen in the

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<sup>30</sup>op.cit. Russell, "PLA", p.245.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.77.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. p.58.

chapter 6, examines the possibility of explaining the reference of singular or general term in terms of (a) acquaintance, and (b) analysis. And we have also seen how he criticises the relation between the principle of acquaintance and the theory of meaning characterised in terms of analysis. The suggestion is that it is one thing to require that LP names should be understood only in terms of private sense-data with which an individual is acquainted. It is quite another thing to require that any complex proposition must be analysed into its truth-functional component propositions. Russell appealed to *both* types of reduction, but there is no general reason why either should entail the other. Such an account of a truth-functional analysis does not serve to identify atomic propositions. But even in their case there is still an important difference between claiming that their constituents, LP names, are unanalysable, and claiming that their meaning can be understood only through Russell's principle of acquaintance with its particular epistemic commitments.

Sainsbury raises the further question about the nature of Russell's analysis. On one side it might be said that it needs only to preserve the same truth-value as the original propositions, and then the two expressions will be equivalent. On the other side it may be required that the analysis not only has the same truth-value, but actually is *synonymous* with the original. This raises the general question whether it is an objection to any proposed analysis that ordinary speakers of the language are not aware of that analysis. The issue can be raised both about Russell's analysis of propositions containing definite descriptions and about his related analysis of OP names as abbreviated descriptions.

Sainsbury seems to believe the principle that

"Knowing the meaning of 'x'"  $\rightarrow$  "Knowing the analysis of 'x'"

For his argument against Russell canvasses the idea that if ordinary speakers do not know the analysis then the analysis cannot adequately capture the meaning of the original expression. If the analysis is correct and ordinary speakers know the meaning of the original, then they should, on this principle, know the analysis. However few people before Russell had thought of the analysis of definite descriptions, so it may seem to follow that Russell's analysis cannot be adequate. The argument is faulty, however, because the

principle is false. There is no reason why a speaker should not be said to know the meaning of an expression and yet not know its analysis. In a similar way there is no difficulty about a speaker knowing what is grammatically correct and yet not knowing how to provide a grammatical analysis. The issue about equivalence and synonymy still remains, but Russell can be defended against this particular argument.<sup>34</sup>

Sainsbury wants to reject Russell's principle of acquaintance and to replace it with his own epistemic principle. Part of the motive here is to avoid the handicaps to which Russell's traditional epistemology committed his principle of acquaintance. Among these handicaps are the reference to sense-data as the basic items with which we are acquainted, and the consequent belief that our grasp of natural language must be based on our private experiences. Sainsbury's epistemic principle is not restricted to sense-data, but covers the wide range of items which can be presented to us in ordinary, public, experience. Moreover he allows it an even wider scope by accepting as things with which we can be acquainted even those which can be causally related to our current experience.

Sainsbury also seeks to defend Russell from the standard objections to a private language, and makes it plain that his own epistemic principle avoids those objections. Russell's conception of a logically perfect language holds that as regards its vocabulary, it would be restricted to the speaker, i.e. the language used by one speaker is private to him. Wittgenstein in *PI* raised a strong objection against a private language in that Russell's perfect language makes our ordinary language communication impossible because it is restricted only to one's own use of language (see Pt.3, ch.6, p.136).

Sainsbury argues that Russell's official position does not need to commit him to privacy. According to him, when Russell talked officially about privacy he meant something

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<sup>34</sup>Sainsbury's argument contains a further potential fallacy in that from (i) our knowledge of the meaning of the original expression but not the analysis it does not follow that (ii) meaning is different from the analysis. The suggestion is that if we know something in one context under one description but do not know it in a different context under a different description, it does not follow that the thing under two distinct descriptions is different. For example, Oedipus knew his father under one description but not under another (and so murdered him), it does not follow that he did not know the person as his father, *nor* does it mean that it was a *different* person under two descriptions. In a parallel way if we know the meaning of some expression in English but do not know the analysis, it does not follow that the meaning and analysis are different.

which is contingent. Russell's argument in *OKEW* was that when two people are acquainted with the same object, there is a difference between their acquaintance, however slight it is. Two people acquainted with the same object are, contingently, not acquainted with the same sense-datum. What effectively follows is that Russell's official position about the impossibility of the same sense-data being experienced by two different minds can be regarded as a contingent truth which may be able to evade Wittgenstein's objection. For Sainsbury argues that Russell's notion of 'sense-datum' involves a type/token ambiguity and once that is clarified, Russell's official position is tenable.

Sainsbury explains that sense-datum *tokens* are never co-experienced, whereas sense-datum *types* can be. Every single sense-datum is distinct from another token experienced by the same people or by different people. But they may be of the same sense-datum type. This means that no sense-datum token can be experienced by two people. Sainsbury argues that because of this ambiguity Russell was wrong to hold that sense-data are never co-experienced. On the contrary, sense-datum *types* are, or may be, co-experienced, whereas sense-datum *tokens* necessarily are not. Because sense-datum types may be co-experienced, a language referring to them goes beyond singular knowledge and beyond private acquaintance. This provides the possibility of a public language which Sainsbury's epistemic principle also allows. For Sainsbury,

... the epistemic principle is consistent with the possibility of one's mastering another's names for his sense-data.<sup>36</sup>

Sainsbury's replacement of Russell's principle of acquaintance by his own epistemic principle is only one facet of understanding singular names. According to Sainsbury, as we have seen, Russell was wrong to identify the meaning of a name with its reference and wrong to tie the principle of acquaintance to private sense-data. Russell could have evaded some of the unwelcome consequences of his view if he had explicitly drawn the distinction between sense-datum types and tokens, but he did not clearly do so. Consequently

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<sup>36</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.40.

Sainsbury replaces Russell's narrow principle of acquaintance with his broader epistemic principle. In this way he, too, makes room for entity-invoking names for that broader class of objects.

### **9.3 *Evans's theory***

Evans, like Sainsbury, is also critical of Russell's principle of acquaintance which, he thinks, reflects the Cartesian theory of mind. He has a strategy, which though different from the account that Russell offers, still preserves the essential insight of Russell's theory. He attempts to provide a new principle which will capture the Russellian theory of names in an appropriate way. He believes that Russell's theory of names contains an important truth about the way some referring expressions function. Nevertheless, he also holds that Russell's conception of names is, in Russell's own treatment, surrounded by a number of confused and mistaken elements which he attempts to isolate and reject in order to demonstrate the important residual features in his theory.

Evans firmly rejects Russell's commitment to the Cartesian account of the mind which, he thinks, tempted Russell to regard the thinker as the only authoritative reporter of his thought so that no thinker could be mistaken about his own thought. Russell's linguistic account of such authoritative reporting is clearly related to Descartes' belief in the general incorrigibility of our beliefs about our own mental states. Evans raises objections against this Cartesian view for there are cases where a person's apparent thought is not genuine at all simply because of reference failure for some constituents of his thought. Russell's response to such a situation is to create a class of names, namely LP names which refer to immediate sense-data thereby ruling out the possibility of reference failure. Evans, by contrast, rejects the idea of identifying some expressions in terms of these Cartesian assumptions. He accepts Russell's commitment to the notion of a semantic value tied to the referents of some expressions in natural language. His view is that the

semantic value of some referring expressions in language requires that there should be some genuine objects to which they refer. In the absence of that condition the names themselves, and the larger expressions in which they figure, lack a semantic value. Evans examines carefully those expressions in language which he calls 'Russellian singular terms', but clearly rejects the idea of identifying those expressions simply by appealing to Cartesian assumptions.

Evans believes that a thought about a particular object can be grasped in different ways through perception, memory, and communication. He imposes a stronger requirement of thinking about an object than any one of these ways, which is that one must be able to identify the object or distinguish the object from all other objects. He suggests this idea following Russell's view that one must *know which* object is in question before making a judgement or thinking about an object. This view he calls Russell's Principle and of it he says, it is

... quite easy to get oneself into a frame of mind in which it seems that where this discriminatory conception does not reduce to a capacity to locate the object in one's vicinity, it must somehow or other rest upon knowledge of some distinguishing feature of the object concerned.<sup>36</sup>

For Evans, if names are to be a basic category in truth-conditional theories of meaning, then their semantic value has to be identified in some way. He meets this requirement in his principle of reference which he uses to connect reference to truth. He suggests

The most elementary form of the principle connecting reference with truth is:

(P) If *S* is an atomic sentence in which the *n*-place concept expression *R* is combined with *n* singular terms *t*<sub>1</sub> ... *t*<sub>*n*</sub>, then *S* is true iff <the referent of *t*<sub>1</sub> ... the referent of *t*<sub>*n*</sub>> satisfies *R*.<sup>37</sup>

In such a principle the referring expressions contribute a semantic value to the truth of the whole sentences through their identification of specific objects as the referents of those

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<sup>36</sup> op.cit. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p.49.

This is similar to Peacocke's definition of rigid designator (see p.187).

expressions. Evans introduces this principle as a test for the identification of genuinely referring expressions. If the principle can be employed in relation to the semantic value of some expressions, then those expressions can be treated as referring expressions.

Evans believes that at least some descriptive phrases could satisfy the criterion involved in principle (P), and so could be treated as referring expressions. He constructs a class of descriptive names in which the name, for example 'Julius' is introduced by a description, say "the man who invented the zip"; and argues that such a name can, for some purposes, be treated as a referring expression.<sup>38</sup> Evans admits that descriptions generally could not be treated as Russellian referring expressions, that is as expressions which lack meaning if they have no bearer or referent. He wishes to supplement Russell's theory with a Fregean notion of sense, construed in the logical way in which he interprets it; and he wishes to offer a more precise criterion for a referring expression than Russell had.<sup>39</sup> Finally, he accepts that Russell is right to distinguish the semantic role of descriptions and referring expressions, but insists that Russell arrives at the right conclusion on the basis of quite inadequate arguments.<sup>40</sup>

#### **9.4 Some Comments**

It has been made clear in the accounts of Evans, Peacocke, and Sainsbury that they believe some residual truth lies in Russell's account of entity-invoking or LP names. I want first to indicate what it is that needs to be rejected in Russell's account if an acceptable version of entity-invoking names is to be given; and then go on to consider the strength of that account.

The first, and most obvious, restriction to Russell's own theory arises from his

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. pp. 31, 36-38.

<sup>39</sup> see Evans's account of how he wants to include 'sense' as well as reference in my text, Pt.2, ch.4, p.80.

<sup>40</sup> see Evans's criticism against Russell's three arguments in descriptions in Pt.5, ch.10, pp.215-16.

commitments to a traditional epistemology, and this point has been made in general already. It is important to clarify the issue so that we can be quite certain which aspects of Russell's theory have to be rejected, and which can be retained, though perhaps in a modified form. It would, for example, be too drastic to require that *every* epistemological commitment should be abandoned in giving an account of language, or of names in language. Quite evidently our use of language depends in some way upon the cognitive powers with which we identify objects, give them names, and communicate with others. Even if Russell's specific commitments to a traditional epistemology need to be rejected, that still leaves room for an epistemological dimension in the revised theory; and Evans, for example in his 'consumers and producers' account of names, and Sainsbury in his revised 'epistemic principle of acquaintance', exploit that room. In that general respect Russell was surely right to require that some reference to epistemology should be made.

Two specific factors, arising from the discussion of Evans and Sainsbury, point to Russell's failings. These are first his empiricist commitment to private sense-data as the objects or bearers of entity-invoking names, and second his Cartesian commitment to a certain transparency of mind in which it must be immediately and incorrigibly obvious which items are named by some atomic expression, and so obvious what the meanings of those expressions are. It is not possible, or necessary, here to offer a full account of the faults in these traditional theories, but what can be done is to indicate the disadvantages which such commitments bring to a linguistic theory.

The first point, Russell's empiricist commitment to sense-data as the bearers of LP, or entity-invoking, names has been reviewed already (see pp.185-86) and its disadvantages made apparent. It leaves Russell with all the traditional problems about making a transition from a private experience to a public world. In the case of language, or meaning, where the very term 'communication' involves a reference to that public world, the commitment conflicts strongly with our basic beliefs about language. It leaves Russell's theory as a quite unrealistic account of the way in which natural language works, and inevitably encourages the strong criticisms which Wittgenstein later raised against that

traditional conception of a private language. (see Pt.3, ch.6, p.136). Sainsbury's distinction between sense-datum tokens and types offer one way of escaping from these difficulties, but it reinforces the need for such an escape route.

If those general points are accepted, then any principle of acquaintance will have to avoid that traditional Idealist epistemology. It will have to make use of acquaintance as a relation of an ordinary kind between the names of natural language, especially OP names, and objects to which we can be introduced. These will certainly include items such as material objects, persons, and generally features of the landscape which we can be directly presented with. Such a background is at odds with Russell's assumptions, for he positively denied that we could be acquainted directly with such things as material objects. But it has the advantage that it enables us to offer a realistic picture of the way that names function in natural language, because it endorses that conception of language and communication as public. Beyond that the suggestion is that such a realistic account of acquaintance will not only offer a better account of names, but also enable us to draw a clearer distinction between names and descriptive phrases. We have seen that Russell recognised this when he contrasted a name like 'Scott' with a description like 'the author of Waverley'. But his official epistemology prevented him from pursuing that line except through the dubious conception of LP names.

The second point is stressed more by Evans than by Sainsbury. It amounts to the claim that Russell's Cartesian presuppositions prevented him from recognising that ordinary objects might be constituents of the propositions in which they were named. He accepted that Cartesian view that the constituents of propositions had to be mental states with which we were directly acquainted. To take such a view is to avoid the apparent difficulties of claiming that non-mental objects might, in some sense, be constituents of propositions. To Russell, as to many later philosophers, such a claim would have seemed absurd, yet it is just such a claim that is made by Evans in his account of entity-invoking names. It is true that Evans would not want to use Russell's terminology of an object's being literally a constituent of a proposition in which it was named. Evans's view is

nevertheless that in such cases the object really is required to give meaning to the name, and if no such objects exist when a relevant proposition is expressed, then there can be no corresponding thought. To a Cartesian this is unacceptable, for it entails that a person, or consciousness, is not authoritative about his/her thoughts. A person may be genuinely mistaken about the existence of non-mental items, but cannot on Cartesian assumptions, be mistaken about the content of his/her consciousness. Hence, such a person cannot believe that they have a thought, P, and be in error simply because P contains a reference to an object that does not exist. For Evans, however, once we abandon the Cartesian assumptions this possibility arises and throws an important light on names and the aspect of entity-invoking. Evans, as we saw earlier (see Pt.2, ch.4, p.78), claims a further benefit for such an account, namely that it will allow us to consider the possibility that names for one object might yet differ in their Fregean senses. For Russell that is impossible, since the only meaning attaching to an LP name derives from the object named. It is hard to divorce that conviction of Russell's from the associated Cartesian belief that what is directly presented to consciousness is transparent and incorrigible.

A different way of looking at Russell's epistemological failings is to stress, as has been done before, the difference between ways of taking Russell's linguistic theory. In one way that theory might be held to give an account of an actual language, though admittedly a formal language. Even Russell admitted that construed in such a way his perfect language was strictly unusable. Yet he also sometimes gave the impression that his language was perfect in ways in which natural language was imperfect; and there is no doubt that he saw his own analyses as an improvement on the vagueness and uncertainty of ordinary speech. To construe Russell's theory in that way is, for reasons already given, highly disadvantageous. If he is outlining a model language in that way, then it soon becomes apparent that the model is seriously flawed. It is better to construe Russell's account as a model of another sort, that is not as an exemplar of perfection but rather as an idealised theory which does not represent a language itself but offers in an abstract, and strictly unrealisable, form a schematic diagram of language and its central functions.

It was suggested earlier that such a conception could provide us with an idealised model of naming, and so throw light on natural language naming, without committing itself to the real possibility of pure names with all the features that Russell ascribed to them.<sup>41</sup>

Viewed in that way Russell's theory of LP names is simply an abstract idealisation of the actual 'entity-invoking' names which exist and function in natural language. Although Evans and Sainsbury do not draw such a distinction themselves, nevertheless it throws light on their revision to Russell's theory. They are interested primarily in their entity-invoking names in natural language, and see LP names as a theoretical reflection of those expressions. Once Russell's theory is purified of its unwelcome epistemology and re-construed in this way, then it may be held to point to an important aspect of natural language. All that is then necessary to preserve some central truth in Russell's account is to change the focus of attention away from Russell's pure theory towards a closer examination of the relevant aspects of natural language. This is exactly what those later commentators on Russell have done. The twin effects of revising the principle of acquaintance and construing Russell's account as an idealised and abstract theory result precisely in that change of attention.

These advantages in revising Russell's theory depend essentially upon two requirements. First they depend upon the recognition that his traditional epistemology was faulty and can be detached from his linguistic theory. Second they depend upon the demonstration that the revised conception of entity-invoking names is correct, or fruitful. We have seen already that although the theorists considered share a certain general attitude to Russell in their preservation of a central part of his thesis, they also differ amongst themselves in certain aspects of their own accounts. Kripke's account of rigid designation is not exactly the same as Peacocke's. Evans's crucial principle for determining expressions is not exactly the same as Peacocke's. Peacocke and Sainsbury differ with respect to the identification of specific entity-invoking expressions in language. Peacocke

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<sup>41</sup>It is worth recalling here the point made earlier (Pt.1, ch.3, pp.63-64) that the motivation for treating Russell's theory as an idealisation arises specifically from his commitment to LP names. It does not arise in other contexts, such as his belief that OP names abbreviate descriptions (see also later in Pt.6, ch.12, pp.283-84).

believes that some definite descriptions are entity-invoking, while Sainsbury is either dubious about this or rejects such a claim. Such discrepancies among the various theories do not directly establish that some of them must be wrong. Nor do they necessarily cast doubt on the central belief in entity-invoking names. Nevertheless where the theorists' views conflict they cannot all be correct; and to assign a different significance to the very notion of 'entity-invocation' casts some doubt on our grasp of this supposed linguistic feature. In what follows I shall explore two of these variations; first the differing ways in which entity-invocation is characterised, and second the conflict between Peacocke and Sainsbury over descriptive expressions.

Kripke, Peacocke, and Evans all offer different formulae with which to determine which expressions are genuinely referring, or entity-invoking, or rigid designators. Some of these differences are perhaps not substantial, as when Kripke uses the apparatus of possible worlds, but neither Peacocke nor Evans do. But there is a difference between Peacocke's and Evans's criteria which plainly causes problems. The central difference between their formulae is that Evans restricts his to what he calls 'atomic sentences', while Peacocke makes no such restriction. For our purposes the crucial difference is that Evans sets aside the opaque contexts of belief sentences, at least if they cannot be regarded as atomic sentences; while Peacocke's formula draws no such division. However we have seen that Peacocke is forced then to claim that belief sentences, along presumably with other opaque contexts, cannot be treated as having the general form 'G( )', and so have to be excluded from the criterion. It is true that then the upshot of Peacocke's proviso has a similar effect to Evans's restriction to atomic sentences, but the difference still leaves Peacocke with the problem of explaining how that proviso can be properly articulated. Both Peacocke and Sainsbury suggest that even within belief sentences there are some transparent, or relational, uses of names; but it remains unclear how we separate these uses from others; and even if the separation is adequate it still leaves the opaque cases unaccounted for. Evans's formula seems to be preferable in its identification of a standard, transparent, context in which the criterion is used, but even that formula creates problems

if it turns out that there is no agreement about the cases in which it is satisfied. Presumably Peacocke, for example, thinks that the criterion will licence some descriptive phrases as entity-invoking, though Evans seems to deny this, and Sainsbury is at best dubious about it.

Essentially the case for including some descriptions among entity-invoking uses is that such expressions are sometimes used in a way close, if not equivalent, to demonstratives. As we have seen, provided that the criteria are relativised to particular contexts demonstrative uses will naturally meet the test. The difficulty which Sainsbury proposes is that it remains uncertain how we tell whether a particular descriptive phrase is used as a demonstrative. The heart of his objection is that although Peacocke appeals to a speaker's willingness to say "The X is Y" or "That X is Y" in the case indifferently, this will not be enough to establish that the strict criterion has been met. For a speaker may be willing to use either form indifferently not because they have the same semantic content, or are equivalent, but because in the circumstances what he wishes to convey will be conveyed by either form of words. It may be that ordinary discourse rarely requires a strict precision in discriminating between semantic contents, so that in practice either of two different forms of words will communicate adequately. It certainly does not follow from this that such indifference in communicative forms demonstrates the sameness of semantic content.

The point might be further illustrated by an example of a kind which Sainsbury does not cite. There is a difference between verbal forms such as 'procastinate' and 'put things off', which makes the former inappropriate in talking to a child. When talking to an adult it might be a matter of indifference which expression was actually used. If we think that the stated difference between these expressions, sometimes called a difference of 'register', is semantically important, then that indifference would not entitle us to assimilate the semantic content of the two verbs. Two caveats need to be made here. First I am not saying that difference of register *is* a difference in semantic content, but only that there is a problem here and that the problem shows clearly enough the failure of the

inference which Sainsbury rightly complains of. Second, it is true that Sainsbury's general complaint against Peacocke is a rather formal point. Like the illustration Sainsbury's claim does not establish that Peacocke is wrong, but only that more explanation is needed before we can accept that he is right.

These formal difficulties show that the strict criteria for entity-invoking expressions, or uses, could usefully be still further elaborated, but there are other less formal queries to raise about the notion. It was suggested earlier that neither Russell nor other more recent philosophers would be prepared to accept that non-mental items could be constituents of a proposition. Even if that terminology is not used many philosophers would still resist the idea that if a person expresses a thought, *P*, in which an entity-invoking expression occurs even though there is no object, then that person has really had no thought to express. It may be that in some cases an objectionable Cartesian background view of mental transparency leads to such a resistance, but it might be asked whether that is the only ground for such resistance. It may be that even without such a Cartesian view the resistance can be supported. It is not my intention here to resolve the issue; rather what I would like to do is to cast some doubt on the adequacy of our grasp of the entity-invoking character, and to do so without appeal to a Cartesian view. There remain non-formal ambiguities in the idea of entity-invocation, and it is some of these that I want to outline.

In summary entity-invocation covers at least the following aspects:

- (a) The idea that the meaning of an expression can be related to (learned from) a direct presentation with the relevant object. This would be a residual version of Russell's Principle of Acquaintance.
- (b) The idea that there is a sharp division in principle between the function of names and (that of) descriptive phrases. That division may be typically blurred in practice so that some names may involve descriptive elements, and some descriptions may on occasion function in a direct naming way. The division can, however, be well represented in the divergent use of such expressions in, for example, modal contexts.

(c) The idea that some expressions require a corresponding object to exist, so that without such an object the expression, and any larger propositional unit of which it is a part, will lack meaning. This idea is expressed by Evans and McCulloch in terms of a person's failure to have a thought in the case of an empty referring expression.

(d) The idea, stated perhaps more forcefully in Evans, that Frege's notion of *Bedeutung*, even when coupled with his notion of *Sinn*, provides the central, basic, apparatus for a theory of meaning. Evans puts this in terms of his claim that the *Bedeutung* of expressions provides the 'semantic value' of those expressions. Such an appeal brings with it a substantial commitment to a formal semantics of a Fregean kind which has been both successful and influential.

It is evident that these aspects of entity-invocation are distinct, though they are not always distinguished. This would not count as a criticism of the doctrine so long as the various aspects can be fitted together to form a unified theory, but I shall suggest that this requirement is not to be taken for granted.

I consider two types of query; one which involves (a), (b), and (c) and the relations between them, and a second which involves (d). The first can be introduced by noting an ambiguity arising over (a) and (c) of a kind which Sainsbury notes, and which has been considered above (see p.194). It is evidently one thing to offer (a) as an account of learning, and another to offer (a) as a statement of a meaning relation. The latter is required if, for example, (c) is to be accepted, for there the relation between the name and its bearer has to be a meaning relation. Sainsbury rightly separates the crude claim that "The meaning of a name is its bearer" from the more subtle "The meaning of a name 'a' consists in the fact that 'a' names a", but this already raises the central point that even the form of the required meaning relation cannot be taken for granted. Sainsbury's more subtle version might be queried on the ground that by using 'consists in' he is still too close to the crude identity which Russell canvassed.

That this is not just a trivial point can be shown in two ways. First we might ask whether the version could not be better expressed by writing "The meaning of a name 'a'

can be formulated in a meaning theory by writing "a' names a". This is not to say what the meaning 'consists in', as though the meaning could be *identified* with a fact. It is to say, rather, how operationally the meaning of names can be included in some semantic theory. That point can be emphasised by asking whether Sainsbury's version does not encourage the idea that knowing the meaning of a name 'a' amounts just to knowing that 'a' names a. To this it can naturally be objected that someone might know that 'a' names a without actually knowing the meaning of the name at all. It is trivial in general and also in particular cases to suppose that a name names the object designated by that name. So long as I have sufficient linguistic experience to know what names are, such a trivial claim can be accepted even in cases where I have no idea what the object named actually is. Sainsbury might object that his claim does not entitle us to infer any such conclusion about *knowing* the meaning, but the versions which speak of what the meaning is, or consists in, certainly encourage such a query. Finally it might be said that Sainsbury's preferred version actually requires an appeal back to the principle of acquaintance involved in (a), for it would be natural to require that the trivial claim should be supplemented by a direct presentation of the object named. But this seems to produce a circularity, since we began by attempting to clarify (a) by appealing to the different accounts of a meaning relation which Sainsbury discriminates.

Together (b) and (c) produce some doubts about the overall theory. If it is true that in practice the sharp distinction between names and descriptions is difficult to make out, then the attempt to identify strict entity-invoking expressions may have just the same problems as Russell's attempt to identify 'pure' names. The blurring of the distinction will have implications for (c), since one motive for querying that view is that even when a person expresses a thought with an empty name he/she often has some other, perhaps descriptive, way of attempting to identify the object. The person's thought in such a case might then not be regarded as unintelligible or meaningless. We might separate the thought *intended*, or some back-up thought, from the strict thought actually *expressed*, but this presupposes a precision both in the contrast between names and descriptions and in

the identification of a person's thoughts which is to some degree unrealistic. In such an argument the blurred line between a person's strict expression of a thought and his/her actual thought does not need to invoke any Cartesian assumptions.

As I have explained, those queries about aspects of the entity-invoking theory do not show that the theory is wrong. At most they show that the theory still needs clearer elaboration, and sometimes in the same direction as Russell's theory. The same proviso has to be made for queries that might be raised about (d). An appeal to a Fregean semantics of a kind which Evans endorses has been very influential. But we saw earlier that there were significant differences in the interpretation of Frege's theory between, for example, Evans and Dummett. There is also a general anxiety about the extent to which a formal semantics, which may function well for formal systems in logic and mathematics, can be directly applied to the more complex uses of natural language. Such an anxiety may have something to do with the resistance above to accepting (c). One of the primary motives for insisting on (c) just is the wish to find some extensional way of dealing with semantics which will then entail that an empty name can be given no semantic value at all. This is a quite general worry, and as such will be thought to be weak. In later chapters, however, something will be said of cases where in natural language it is difficult to measure what belongs strictly to semantics and what does not. In such contexts, where the dividing line is between a semantic and a pragmatic element in natural language, the more formal apparatus of logical semantics, however powerful, seems unable to resolve the issues.

**PART FIVE**  
**DESCRIPTIONS**

# RUSSELL AND STRAWSON

Russell's theory of descriptions, though regarded by Ramsey as a paradigm of philosophy, faces criticism from various quarters, and especially from Strawson in "On Referring" (*Mind*, 1950). Russell's theory was put forward as a contribution to the semantics of definite descriptions and may be accepted or criticised in those terms; but some criticisms of the theory turn on a contrast between a semantic and a pragmatic treatment of such expressions. This is true, for example, of Donnellan and even Strawson, among others. This however introduces a distinction, still not clearly understood or made, between a 'semantic' and 'pragmatic' dimension in the analysis and discussion of definite descriptions. These two aspects have been discussed extensively, and can be illustrated by two potentially different notions of reference, viz., 'speaker reference' and 'linguistic reference'. When a speaker uses a referring expression he/she may intend to refer to some object even though the linguistic device is inappropriate for that purpose. In such a case the *speaker* may be said to refer to the object intended, and may succeed in conveying this reference to an audience, even though the *expression* used, say a definite descriptive phrase, may not be true of that object.

Conventionally the area of semantics covers *linguistic types* such as truth, reference, syntax and synonymy. The area of pragmatics covers, by contrast, the act of producing tokens of those types in some communicative context and pointing to properties which belong to the utterances of the speaker and to what the speaker intends to say. The discussion about semantics and pragmatics and especially the attempt to draw a clear line of division between them is a big issue, but I shall try later to show how important the issue is.

### 10.1 *Three problems in Russell's theory of descriptions*

Russell, in OD, identified three problems related to reference which he believed could be solved by his account of descriptions. These problems are:

- (1) The problem of identity;
- (2) The problem of the law of excluded middle; and
- (3) The problem of the nature of empty reference.

Russell produced three arguments against considering definite descriptions as names or referring expressions and explained them under these three captions. All of these arguments have been discussed earlier in various contexts, but nevertheless a brief discussion of them will help to recapitulate the points.

(1) The problem of identity and the substitution of identical terms arises, for example, if we consider the effect of substituting an expression referring to the same object in a true proposition. In the proposition "Scott is the author of Waverley", if we substitute 'Scott' for 'The author of Waverley' then the proposition becomes a tautology "Scott is Scott". Now if the sole semantic value of these expressions is derived from their referring to their objects, then such substitutions should make no difference to any propositions in which they occur, but clearly the substitution does make a difference. We might draw the simple conclusion that names, such as 'Scott' do not function in the same way as descriptive phrases like 'The author of Waverley' even when they refer to one and the same object. Russell's difficulty arises initially because, unlike Frege's Sinn, Russell had *only* the notion of 'reference' to determine the semantic value of such expressions. Plainly it was necessary for him to resolve the problem and the theory of definite descriptions was designed to provide that resolution.

(2) In the case of propositions containing empty descriptions the law of excluded middle seems not to function, because neither "The King of France is bald" nor "The King of France is not bald" will be true. The idea is that if definite descriptions are to function as names then they are supposed to stand for some object. According to Russell empty descriptions clearly do not stand for any object and, therefore neither of these propositions

can turn out to be true. This seems to violate the law because one or other of the propositions, P and its negation, must be true according to the law. Russell attempted to solve the problem by discriminating two different ways of negating such propositions. Interpreted with narrow scope negation the proposition "The King of France is not bald" comes out false. The proposition can also be interpreted with wide scope negation as in "It is not the case that the King of France is bald", which then covers the two cases of (a) having a King of France who is not bald, and (b) there being no King of France. With wide scope the proposition comes out true. With narrow scope negation the law is saved because under Russell's translation "The King of France is not bald" is *not* the contradictory of "The King of France is bald". They are contraries, but not contradictories. With wide scope the position is simpler since the two opposed propositions "The King of France is bald" and "It is not the case that the King of France is bald" *are* contradictories under Russell's translation.

(3) There is, finally, the problem of supposing that if an expression occurs as a genuine meaningful constituent of some proposition, then there must be some item to which that expression refers. That supposition, as we have seen before, is liable to result in an unwelcome duplication of existents, of the sort found in Meinong, or even in Russell's earlier theories in *PofM* (see Pt.1, ch.2, p.43). Essentially Russell will say that any constituent expression which lacks a reference and yet is meaningful cannot be considered as a *name*. Any such expression will then have to be analysed in accordance with Russell's prescription, but in that analysis characteristically lack of a referent will result in the falsity of the proposition rather than its meaninglessness.

Russell produced these three arguments against considering definite descriptions as names or referring expressions. According to Evans, none of these three considerations, singly or together, support Russell's conclusion. The first is flawed because Russell failed to consider the possibility that someone might be ignorant of an identity where two different names for the same individual are related. It seems that the only ground for this exclusion would be Russell's rejection of the idea that there could be different names with

different meanings for the same object. But then it would be inadequate to argue that nothing more can be said about such names outside their referential function, for that simply begs the question against the introduction of the notion of sense. Evans, as we have discussed before, wishes to make room for the evident situation in natural language in which we do employ different names with different meanings for the same object. This view plainly favours Frege in its attempt to supplement Russell's theory with the notion of sense.

Russell's second argument fails in its limited account of the application of the law of excluded middle to sentences with descriptive phrases. For there is no decisive reason to reject an application of the use of wide-scope negation. In that case the application would result in the claim "Either (the A is B) or (it is not the case that the A is B)", and then there would be no ground to reject the truth of such a claim. On Russell's analysis such a claim will be a logical truth.

The third argument is objectionable because it allows no distinction between referring expressions generally identified and *Russellian* referring expressions. Referring expressions are not necessarily OP names but OP names are generally regarded as referring expressions in ordinary language. For Russell, on the contrary, OP names are not basic referring expressions and when he wanted to refer to fundamental referring expressions, he used the term 'LP name'. He believed strictly that only LP names are genuine referring expressions. Evans is consequently critical of Russell's arguments, even though he accepts that Russell's conclusion is correct.

Despite Evans's reservations about these arguments, he nevertheless believes that Russell is right to deny that descriptive expressions are referring expressions. He argues that there is one central difference between their function in specifically modal contexts. His suggestion is that in the case of descriptions, there are characteristically *two* readings of propositions like "The A might have been B". This is illustrated by the fact that, for example, in

(1) The first man in space might have been American

we can read (1) as claiming that some American astronaut might have gone into space before Yuri Gagarin; but we can also read (1) as claiming that the first man in space, namely Gagarin, might have turned out to be an American. This flexibility of descriptions is characteristically not available in the case of ordinary names. If we say simply that

(2) Gagarin might have been American

there is only one reading for (2), which fixes the reference of the name in relation to a particular person. This is similar to Kripke's idea that proper names are rigid designators, and can have only one reading, whereas descriptions generally are non-rigid and can have the two readings just cited.

Russell produced a formal analysis of definite descriptions and used that formal analysis to apply to natural language. His idea was that if natural language does not fit the analysis, then that would be a defect of natural language. Evans's attitude is quite different. Basically he is critical of the idea that if natural language does not match a formal analysis, then it must be natural language that is at fault. Although he is anxious to use formal devices in order to formulate linguistic theories, as in his appeal to principles of a truth-conditional semantics (see Pt.4, ch.9, p.200), he nevertheless requires that such formal theories should capture the essential features of natural language use. If Russell is willing to regiment, or change, natural language in favour of some formal theory, Evans seems to have a different priority.

## **10.2 Strawson's objection**

Apart from considering descriptions in terms of scope phenomena, Russell also considered how to ascribe truth-value to propositions containing descriptive phrases, for example,

(1) The present King of France is bald.

He suggests three options:

- (a) there is a unique present King of France who is bald;
- (b) there is a unique present King of France who is not bald;
- (c) there is no unique present King of France.

The suggestion is that if the description in (1) is treated as a name, then given (a) (1) is true, given (b) it is false, and given (c) it is absurd or meaningless. But Russell clearly identified (1) as meaningful even under option (c) and therefore wanted to give a semantic analysis of (1). But since the description in (1) has no denotation, he could not regard it as a name, and offered the complex analysis outlined earlier (Pt.1, ch.3, p.58). In that analysis the truth-value of (1) is false under condition (c). It was this type of argument that Strawson thinks mistaken. Strawson's view has been discussed very widely, but still it remains unclear despite very recent attempts to assess it by McCulloch.<sup>1</sup>

Strawson, in his essay "On Referring" (OR), claims that Russell's classification of propositions as "true, false, or meaningless" based on options (a)-(c) is a 'bogus trichotomy'.<sup>2</sup> He proposes an alternative classification in which a declarative sentence can have:

- (i) significance considered merely as a sentence;
- (ii) a truth-value which arises from the *use* of the sentence, i.e. from statements made in some context.

For example, the *sentence*

(2) The present Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is a Conservative  
can be regarded as a mere string of linguistic units that can be used to produce different statements at different times, some of which happen to be true and some false. For example, anyone using it in 1977 comes out with a false statement, while anyone using it in 1991 comes out with a true statement. According to Strawson, these two uses make two *distinct* statements: one a false statement about James Callaghan and the other a true one about John Major. But he thinks that both of these uses involve the same significant

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<sup>1</sup>op.cit. McCulloch, G. *The Game of the Name*.

<sup>2</sup>see, Strawson, P.F. *Introduction to Logical Theory* (Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1952, Reprinted 1971), p.184.

sentence (2). He holds that the present-day utterance of the sentence (1) neither produces a true statement nor a false one because there is no corresponding object, namely 'The present King of France' to make (1) a true or false statement. He comments:

Now suppose someone were in fact to say to you with a perfectly serious air: 'The present King of France is wise'. ... Suppose he went on to *ask* you whether you thought that what he had just said was true, or was false; ... I think you would be inclined, ... to say ... that the question of whether his statement was true or false simply *did not arise*, because there was no such person as the King of France.<sup>3</sup>

We thus arrive at an immediate disagreement over whether (1), with a failed description, is to be regarded as false, following Russell, or as *not* having any truth-value at all, following Strawson. Both Russell and Strawson would agree that (1) is a significant sentence, but their notion of significance differs. For Strawson, the significance of a sentence does not depend upon the question of what given object is to be assigned to the description; that question rather depends upon the *use* made of the sentence in some context. The term 'use' has some ambiguity. It might signify simply an utterance, occasion of the production of the sentence, or it might signify the speech act type, as statement, question, or request which characterises the production. Strawson believes

... the question of whether a sentence or expression *is significant or not* has nothing whatever to do with the question of whether the sentence, uttered *on a particular occasion*, is, on that occasion, being used to make a true or false assertion or not, or of whether the expression is, on that occasion, being used to refer to, or mention, anything at all.<sup>4</sup>

Strawson's account admits the existence of truth-value gaps but in Russell's analysis there is no need to admit truth-value gaps. Under Russell's analysis the elementary constituents of a proposition with a definite description can be given a semantic value via the assignment of objects to the name variables in the constituent quantified clauses and truth-values can then be given to the whole proposition. Since the logician or semantic theorist is concerned with the semantic account of language in making serious assertions Russell's treatment of (1), from a logical point of view, results undoubtedly in

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<sup>3</sup>op.cit. Strawson, "On Referring", p.157.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. p.155.

a perfectly natural production of a false proposition in the present situation. But does it mean that Strawson is wrong *not* to assign any truth-value to such sentences?

Strawson's rejection of Russell's semantic treatment of (1) can be interpreted in either of these two ways:

- (a) that a use of a description sentence *makes* a statement, but a statement without any truth-value, i.e. which is neither true nor false;
- (b) that a use of a sentence whose description is empty makes *no* statement, that is, the question of truth or falsity simply does not arise.

The ambiguity between (a) and (b) has led some critics of Strawson to complain that his view is ill-defined. It is true that in failing explicitly to note, and resolve, this ambiguity Strawson provided some ammunition for his critics, but it is not at all clear how much turns on the choice between (a) and (b). I shall simply represent Strawson's position in terms of (b) rather than (a). One reason for this is that some unclarity arises over the notion of a statement if, as Strawson claims, it is statements which have a truth-value and a genuine statement *is* made even when the description used in the utterance is empty. Perhaps (b), too, has some hidden drawbacks, but for the present I accept it as Strawson's primary view.

Strawson provides the formulae that could be used to give the schematic explanations of the types of statements that are made:

- (a) to give *general directions* [for the use of expressions containing descriptions] to refer to or mention a particular object or person;
- (b) to give *general directions* [for the use of sentences containing descriptions] in making true or false statements.<sup>5</sup>

These 'general directions' of Strawson might contain features like

- (a) an unique object G (if any) is to be assigned to the expression of the form 'the G';
- (b) a true or false statement is made if the function *H*.. in a formula of the form 'The G is H' yields T or F for

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid. p.155.

the object referred to by 'the G'.<sup>6</sup>

These features of the Strawsonian formulae are relevant only in so far as the description is true or false of the object. What would happen to descriptions which correspond to *no* unique object? Strawson solves this problem by his doctrine of *presupposition*:

We are to imagine every rule of the logical system, when expressed in terms of truth and falsity, is preceded by the phrase 'Assuming that the statements concerned are either true or false, then ...'.<sup>7</sup>

According to Strawson, such a statement *presupposes* the existence (and uniqueness) of the object claimed by the failed description. By this he does not mean that the *sentence* is true or false if the presupposition holds, for he thinks that there is no question of ascribing a truth-value to sentences. He nevertheless believes that if the presupposition holds, then the statement made in using the sentence can be said to be true or false. But

... this only goes to show that presupposition is not a (semantic) property of sentences.<sup>8</sup>

This general account of Strawson's, whatever its merits as a report about natural language usage, may be thought to be open to the criticism that it conflicts with formal logic. Such a view might be illustrated in the following way<sup>9</sup>. In standard predicate logic we accept the rule,

1. From  $H_a$  infer  $(\exists x) Hx$ .

If we apply this to expressions of the form

2. The G is H

then the rule allows us to infer validly from

3. The G is H

to

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<sup>6</sup>op.cit. McCulloch, *The Game of the Name*, p.92.

<sup>7</sup>op.cit. Strawson, *Introduction to Logical Theory*, p.176.

<sup>8</sup>cf. Bach, K., *Thought and Reference*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987), p.98.

<sup>9</sup>op.cit. McCulloch, *The Game of the Name*, p.93.

#### 4. There is an H.

This means that in relation to the truth-values of such propositions the conclusion will always be true when the premiss is true. What would happen where the description fails and the premiss does not receive a truth-value? Frege thought it a *fault* in natural language where there are cases of failed descriptions, and thus cases of truth-value gaps and, as we have seen earlier, he tried to remedy this fault (see Pt.1, ch.2, pp.46-47). This Fregean view impinges on Strawson's notion of *presupposition* where statements with failed descriptions cannot be given a truth-value and raises the question whether Strawson's account can cope with such inferences. But the validity of such inferences can still be assessed, because

... even if one or more formulae of the reasoning fails to receive a semantic treatment it can still be said that *had* the necessary presupposition of the reasoning been met, then it *would have* been valid or otherwise, depending on whether it conformed to a valid rule.<sup>10</sup>

We need to ask the question whether Strawson's account of such valid inferences is acceptable.

Strawson's view is that any statement corresponding to the premiss (3) presupposes rather than directly entails the conclusion (4). This is compatible with his also holding that such a statement as (4) can be validly inferred from (3), since it is true for him that whenever (3) has the truth value T (4) will also have that truth value. So it is true both for Russell and for Strawson, though in different ways, that the existence of the relevant object is a condition for the truth of the premiss. Now if Strawson accepts that the premiss can be true only when that condition is met, then he too can quite happily accept the validity of the original inference. For him when the premiss is true there has to be an object (the presupposition condition), and so the premiss cannot be true when the conclusion is false. This really turns on the recognition that the validity of inferences is in any case a hypothetical matter, i.e. it says, *If* premiss A is true, then conclusion B will (necessarily) be true. This requirement is met in Strawson's account.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid. p.94.

The crucial issue here is: Is this account of Strawson's a satisfactory account of these inferences in predicate logic? McCulloch's anxiety seems to derive from the belief that Russell can license these inferences while Strawson cannot. We have to ask whether this is so. For Russell, if the definite descriptive premiss contains an empty description, then the premiss is false. So any inference drawn from it will not exemplify the invalidity of an inference going from a true premiss to a false conclusion. Strawson, on the other hand, is not saying that the premiss is false in that case; all he is saying is that the premiss is neither true nor false, and so has no truth-value. So even in Strawson's case we are not able to get to a false conclusion via a valid inference from a true premiss. The validity of the inference will be in exactly the same position as it is for Russell. So in neither Russell's nor Strawson's position do we get a case where there is a true premiss followed by a false conclusion which would enable us to invalidate the inference.

If McCulloch is complaining that Strawson's account cannot deal with the validity of such inferences where Russell's can, then he seems to be wrong. If he is inclined to say that there is a difference between Russell and Strawson, it is not a difference in terms of licensing inferences in one case which are valid and in other case which are invalid; they both turn out with exactly the same result in the end. What is true is that Strawson has to give a different, meta-logical, account of the inference from Russell, because Strawson explains it in terms of 'presupposition' and Russell explains it in terms of 'entailment'. Again Strawson is talking of such inferences in terms of statements, while Russell was talking of them in terms of propositions. All these differences are part of the meta-logical apparatus of logic and there may be good reasons for preferring one such apparatus to another, but in this case, the alternatives do not seem to result in any differences in the licensed inferences.

In fact, there are two basic requirements which McCulloch quite reasonably puts forward in order to construct a sensible theory of definite descriptions. The first one is that we need to give an account of definite descriptions which would enable us to determine which inferences are valid, and which inferences are not. This is basically a requirement

of logic. The second is that apart from that logical requirement, we may also want to give an account which is semantically correct or matches our own understanding of the use of definite descriptions in natural language.

There is no a priori reason to think that these two requirements are the same or that they are bound to fit together. The requirement of logic enables us to discriminate between valid and invalid inferences. It is simply a way of determining validity and does not necessarily tell us anything about the underlying semantic theory. The two requirements should ideally go together because the question of validity brings up the question of truth-values, and questions of semantics are also related to questions of truth-conditions or perhaps verification. So truth comes in to both sides, and this may lead some to assume that the two tasks are basically one and the same. But the requirements of logic are different from, and narrower than, those of natural language semantics.

McCulloch considers these *two* issues. One is, whether there is any preference to be given to either Russell's or Strawson's version in terms of the logical task, that is the task of distinguishing valid from invalid inferences. That was considered earlier. The other is, whether Russell's or Strawson's account of definite descriptions, as we use and understand them in natural language, is the better? The latter is the point he raises in his account of outward looking (*OD*) and backward looking (*BD*) descriptions which I shall be examining next.

There is indeed a difference between Russell's and Strawson's account in terms of the background apparatus they use. Russell's account is basically an entailment account, an account of the content of the sentences or propositions involved. In Strawson's account the content is different from the presupposition. It is this distinction between entailment and presupposition which makes the significant difference between their accounts. Although each of them gives a different account of the way in which the components of the relevant propositions are related, they do not differ significantly in terms of the components themselves. *Both* Russell and Strawson recognise that in such a proposition as "The X is Y" the components will be, informally, (i) X's existence, (ii) X's uniqueness, and

(iii) Y's belonging to X. The difference between them is that while Russell treated the proposition simply as a conjunction of (i) and (ii) and (iii), Strawson regards (i) and (ii) as presupposed by, and not part of, the remaining content (iii). For Russell the conjunction of (i), (ii), and (iii) is simply an expression of the content of the proposition. For Strawson the content is confined simply to the third component, (iii).

McCulloch therefore represents Strawson as holding that when a description is empty the relevant proposition will have no semantic value. To draw this conclusion is to accept Evans's Fregean account of *Bedeutung* as a required semantic value for descriptions and for the propositions containing them. There *are* clear parallels between Strawson and Frege over the notion of presupposition, but Strawson's original paper does not deploy a Fregean theory. His view, as he stated it, is not that propositions with empty descriptions lack a semantic value but rather that the utterances made by using or uttering those sentences lack a *truth-value*. McCulloch appears to be attaching a Fregean significance to Strawson's claim that Strawson did not envisage, but I will say more of this later in discussing McCulloch's distinction between *OD* and *BD* cases.

### 10.3 *McCulloch's debate*

McCulloch characterises two different ways of looking at the analysis of definite descriptions. One way which he calls a 'proper name' approach is to say that definite descriptive phrases function in relation to semantics as if they were names of particular objects and in a way he associates this with Frege. The alternative, which he ascribes to Russell, is to treat definite descriptions as complex quantificational expressions, as in Russell's analysis. He tends to classify Strawson's view as a proper name theory. It was suggested in the previous section that a 'proper name' approach like that of Frege's is not quite the same as Strawson's account. McCulloch does not mark any such difference and we will have to consider whether that is fair to Strawson. Beyond that the difficulty

suggests also that McCulloch's classification of such theories is over-simple. If there is a difference between Strawson and Frege, then we have at least three distinguishable theories to choose from, namely, Strawson's, Frege's, or Russell's.

It is true in a way that Strawson is treating descriptions as proper names, because the only occasion he wishes to give a truth-value to propositions which contain definite descriptions is where the existential presupposition is satisfied. If the existential presupposition is satisfied, then there is no objection to treating the definite description as if it named some object. What McCulloch is failing to take into account is the fact that Strawson's theory has to be understood within the background framework of Strawson's notion of presupposition, which means that it is not a simple proper name account at all because the content of the proposition for Strawson is to be distinguished from the presupposition, and it is in the presupposition that the descriptive phrase is used to make an existence claim. One natural way of understanding Strawson's account is to say that the strict content of the proposition amounts only to such a claim as "If (That  $x$ ) is  $Y$ ", where the pronoun or demonstrative refers back to the descriptive material in the presupposition. If such pronominal, or demonstrative, references are different from those associated with proper names, then it will be at best misleading to class Strawson's account as a 'proper name' theory along Frege's lines.

There is another issue that McCulloch raises of how well Russell's and Strawson's accounts deal with our ordinary language uses of descriptions. There is no doubt, and McCulloch would not deny, that both Strawson and Russell have got to make some evasive moves, some adjustments in their theories in order to deal with ordinary uses of descriptions. McCulloch deals first quite generally with a Russellian response to 'underspecification'. The claim is that we have to make appropriate adjustments in order to identify the thing referred to by the definite descriptive expression. For example, on a Russellian analysis "The table is brown" appears to assert that there is just one unique table in the universe. The suggestion is that what is literally said is actually false, but although it is false we make appropriate adjustments in the context to understand which

table the speaker intends to refer to and which, we suppose, yields a claim that is true. That is to involve a pragmatic account of contextual features of ordinary discourse. McCulloch himself finds it a dubious and rather artificial way of preserving a Russellian analysis, for it seems strange to start with something which we know to be totally false, and then make appropriate adjustments to what we know to be false in order to identify something true. McCulloch then goes on to seek an alternative line where we need to build into the description some further specification for the object in question which will pin it down to a unique object, and so will enable us to write a Russellian analysis which will then come out true.

He considers the case where, for example, instead of saying just "The table is brown" one can say

(1) The table *in the kitchen* is brown

which specifies more fully the particular table in one's particular kitchen. The point that McCulloch wants to make is that the specification is itself a further descriptive phrase which provides another candidate expression to be analysed. Bringing in more and more specific descriptions is not going to solve the problem and leaves unanswered the question: How do we analyse definite descriptive expressions? It is therefore obvious that although there are moves that Russellians can make, the moves themselves are not definitely ones that we should immediately accept.

McCulloch is right to say that bringing in more and more specific descriptions in order to analyse definite descriptions will generate an infinite regress. So that is clearly objectionable. We can now push his argument further by saying that even if we do not bring in more definite descriptive phrases, we may be able to supplement the original description by further descriptive adjectives, for example, 'the round wooden table', 'the round, wooden kitchen table', etc. Here it is not formally hopeless because we are no longer using more definite descriptions, but only more qualifying adjectives. One objection could be that though it is not formally a regress it seems to be so open ended as to be incompletable. In practice it works because one *can* identify the table, but it is not clear

how we succeed merely by adding more such descriptive material. Strawson, of course, would argue here that

... however extensive the speaker's knowledge, and however extensive the hearer's, neither can know that the former's identifying description in fact applies uniquely.<sup>11</sup>

This suggests that however much material we add we still are not going to be able to specify some object which is unique in the universe.<sup>12</sup>

Strawson in *Individuals* thinks it impossible for us to add further descriptive material to *guarantee* that the description is matched by just one object in the universe. It could be said, however, that this requirement, which we may call 'uniqueness in principle' is unrealistically strong. In ordinary life we do not need to apply this principle because there is no way in which we could meet the requirement. All we require is to get the hearer to identify the right object in the right context, and for that purpose we need to offer more descriptive resources where this does not require a *complete* description.

Here we can raise the question of what counts as a *complete* description. If by 'complete' is meant something which describes *every* characteristic of the relevant object then we can say that there is no limit to those characteristics. This is a point that has often been made in terms of the 'formal' character of what we call a property. It seems that we cannot count all the properties of an object any more than we could count all the objects in a room. Second, if by 'complete' we mean that it identifies an object *uniquely* in the universe then if Strawson is right, there cannot be any guarantee of our identifying an unique object in this sense. So the notion of completeness seems to have no realistic application.

McCulloch wants to draw a distinction between 'expressing' and 'entertaining' thoughts. The general distinction, for him, is

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<sup>11</sup>cf. Strawson, P.F., *Individuals* (London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1959), p.20

<sup>12</sup>Another way of dealing with the problem involves the spatio-temporal location. But this is open to the same difficulties as before. If the spatio-temporal location involves definite descriptions then it yields a regress. If it merely involves providing more descriptive properties, then there will be a similar difficulty over the completeness or uniqueness of the specification.

... between (i) using an expression to *express* or *convey* a thought, and (ii) *grasping* or *entertaining* the thought thus conveyed or expressed.<sup>13</sup>

McCulloch claims that if we draw the distinction between the characteristics of thoughts as opposed to the characteristics of expressions then the fundamental philosophical question has to be about the characteristics of *thought* rather than about the characteristics of expressions. He then seeks to put the Strawson/Russell debate in the context of the characteristics of descriptive expressions in thought. The characteristics of the semantic properties of what one has literally said are fixed by the semantic principles mapped onto a particular language. The principal reason McCulloch gives for focussing on descriptive *thoughts* rather than descriptive *expressions* is that questions involving the latter are what he calls 'empirical, linguistic, or anthropological' questions, and so not properly philosophical. His formulation of the central question, whether we can have singular descriptive thoughts, is intended to mark the peculiarly philosophical aspect of the issue. That distinction between an anthropological and a philosophical question might be seriously queried, but it is in those terms that he introduces his crucial distinction between 'outward-looking descriptions' (*OD*) and 'backward-looking descriptions' (*BD*), to which I now turn.

McCulloch's distinction is similar to Donnellan's contrast between referential and attributive uses of descriptions (see Donnellan's distinction in ch.11, sec.11.1). His *OD* can be linked to Donnellan's attributive uses, and *BD* to Donnellan's referential uses. McCulloch raises the question: Is there any way of discriminating between Russell's or Strawson's treatment of *OD* or *BD* cases? The answer he gives is that there is a difference between Russell's and Strawson's treatment which in the end results in a preference for Russell's account. It is that argument that we need to assess.

McCulloch defines *BD* cases as concerned with singular thoughts about specific objects. The idea is that we think and react by means of descriptions of singular objects demonstratively presented. *BD* cases may also involve remote objects which are causally

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<sup>13</sup>op. cit. McCulloch, *The Game of the Name*, p. 239.

related to us and presented via descriptions. McCulloch's uses of descriptions in *BD* cases are *object-indicating* in the sense that our thoughts reflect either present encounters, or our memories of past demonstrative encounters. When, for example, we speak of "The man she spoke of yesterday" we reflect a memory of a past event causally related to our present reference. These uses of descriptions involve entertaining genuine singular thoughts as McCulloch says:

... there is a good deal of plausibility in claiming that *these* uses of descriptions, arising as they do from straightforward encounters with the described objects, are object indicating.<sup>14</sup>

McCulloch's expression 'object-indicating' suggests that there has to be some definite object involved in *BD* cases. And there is also a causal link which can be traced between the object and the descriptive use. This is different from Donnellan's referential uses, as we shall see, because there is no mention of a causal link in Donnellan's account.

McCulloch argues that Russell can cope with *BD* cases because

... uses of backward-looking descriptions, grounded as they are in previous demonstrative encounters with objects, provide plausible examples of cases where singular thoughts are entertained, and so offer one way in which our technical notion of acquaintance can be stretched to cover cases other than thoughts involving face-to-face demonstrative encounters.<sup>15</sup>

This suggests that the object-indication involved in *BD* cases is based on the broad idea of acquaintance. McCulloch, like Sainsbury, is rejecting Russell's restrictive notion of acquaintance in favour of a broader and more conventional use of the term. Used in this sense we can know ordinary objects, and not just sense-data through description based on memory and testimony.

The *OD* cases have a different structure according to McCulloch. They are not 'object-indicating' at all, and characteristically, though not necessarily, indicate items which may or may not exist in the future. If I speak of 'The proposed power station' or 'The outcome under option A' then since these 'objects' do not now exist, and may never exist,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid. p.249.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. p.253.

they are not, for McCulloch, "thoughts about objects (as object-indicating)". He believes they are "merely descriptive, or general, and so cry out for characterisation in something like a quantificational manner". Although McCulloch clearly associates that quantificational account with Russell's analysis, he leaves open the possibility that there might be alternative quantificational accounts. He indicates in that way that Russell's may not be the only quantificational account, though he offers no specific alternatives to it, and I shall therefore treat his references to a quantificational analysis as a reference to Russell's account. McCulloch regards *OD* cases as not object-indicating and emphasises, rightly, that such uses play a vital role in our language, in planning and in action. He says they importantly "engage with the world" and cannot seriously be represented either as "linguistic malfunctions" or as a "sort of make-believe, not really of central concern to the logician/semanticist".<sup>16</sup> These attempts to disparage their role can be set aside, but once that is agreed, then McCulloch wants to insist on the close link between such uses and a Russellian quantificational account.

Once that basic distinction between *BD* and *OD* cases, is made, McCulloch's central argument is simple. It goes like this: A Russellian quantificational approach seems better suited to the *OD* cases, while Strawson's proper name (PN) approach seems better suited to the *BD* cases. On this basis so far there seems no ground for preferring either theory to the other. The crucial question will be whether Russell can accommodate the *BD* cases better than Strawson can accommodate the *OD* cases. If it turns out that Russell's account can apply perfectly well to the *BD* cases, but Strawson has serious difficulties in giving an account of the *OD* cases, then there will be an asymmetry between the two theories. It will in that case be an asymmetry which favours Russell over Strawson. There is some *prima facie* ground to expect some such outcome. For a PN approach, which is 'object-indicating', might expect to have serious problems in dealing with *OD* cases, where there is no object, and where there may never be an object. By contrast it might be expected that Russell's account could deal with the *BD* cases since, although it is not a PN approach, nevertheless

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<sup>16</sup>ibid. p.250.

it offers an analysis which will come out true so long as the object exists, is unique, and has the ascribed property. In brief this is exactly the view that McCulloch takes. He argues that just such an asymmetry forces us to prefer Russell's account to Strawson's.

I shall suggest a number of grounds for disputing McCulloch's argument. The first raises the question whether he is entirely fair to Strawson in characterising the latter's theory as a Fregean PN account. The second raises some puzzles about McCulloch's contrast between *BD* and *OD* cases. And the third casts doubt on the strength of the basic argument for the asymmetry between the two theories. Of course, if there is no adequate ground for that asymmetry, then the basis for preferring Russell to Strawson vanishes.

In calling Strawson's a PN account, and in assimilating such an account to Frege's semantics, McCulloch can be accused of distorting Strawson's view. The emphasis on the Fregean notion of 'Bedeutung' construed as the 'semantic value' for some expression, which is implicit in McCulloch's assimilation of Strawson's theory to what he calls a "Frege-Strawson PN theory" is only dubiously linked to Strawson's original theory. Historically it is an anachronism to ascribe such an account to Strawson. When Strawson wrote his original paper even Dummett's work on Frege had not been published, and Evans's interpretation was far in the future. It is unrealistic to suppose that Strawson was anticipating those much later developments in the understanding of Frege, and indeed of formal semantic theories generally. The point might also be made that Strawson, as a representative of an 'ordinary language' school of philosophers, was in some respects quite opposed to a formal treatment of the complexities of natural language. It was just this anxiety about Russell's theory in general which he underlines in his alternative account of natural language definite descriptions.

Such an historical argument might seem to be weak unless it can be backed up with a specific account of the differences between Strawson, Frege and Russell; but this is not difficult to provide. The central divergence between Strawson and Russell lies, as we have seen, in the difference between 'entailment' and 'presupposition'. The point was made earlier that the three components in a proposition with a definite description are not

significantly different in Strawson and Russell. In both there are an existence claim, an uniqueness claim, and a property ascription claim. The crucial difference between the two is that whereas Russell included all these in the semantic content of the proposition Strawson regards the first, and probably the second, as not so included in that content. For Strawson they are presuppositions required to be in place for the semantic content of the property ascription. If the presuppositions hold, then that property ascription amounts to the claim that a central item, already identified in the presuppositions has a further property. In order to assimilate such an account to a Fregean theory, and in order to classify it properly as a PN theory, we would have to suppose that it is already committed to a Fregean semantics, and that the property ascription claim is one in which a property is associated with a proper name. Both suppositions are wrong. Strawson's conception of 'meaning' is not explicitly Fregean at all, and depends crucially on the distinction between sentences and statements. The property ascription claim moreover makes no special commitment to a proper name account. On the contrary it would be far more natural to treat it, in Strawson's account, as like that of an anaphoric pronoun, which refers back to the items already identified in the presuppositions. Whether it is more natural or not at least the point demonstrates that there are alternatives for Strawson to treating the property ascription content simply as the ascription of a property via a proper name. It may be argued that nevertheless Strawson does require that there should be an object in order to licence expressions using definite descriptions. In reply we can say that for Strawson that licence has to do strictly with our being unable to give a specific truth value to the utterance, while the sentence uttered may be perfectly meaningful. Frege has no such distinction between sentences and their use; and the 'object-indicating' account of proper names requires that such expressions should strictly have no meaning. Such an exchange merely serves to underline the differences between Strawson and Frege. It also indicates a weakness in McCulloch's assumption that there are just two alternative theories here, namely the 'Frege-Strawson PN theory' and 'Russell's quantificational theory'.

A number of criticisms can be made of McCulloch's contrast between *BD* and *OD* cases, and I restrict the discussion here to two. The first indicates an unclarity in the characterisation of *BD* cases; the second a problem about the *OD* cases.

McCulloch's *BD* cases are supposed to be 'object-involving' in a way which requires the existence of the object and a possible causal link between the speaker and the object. Here the question arises whether some encounter with the object is necessary or sufficient for a *BD* case. That it is not necessary for McCulloch emerges from his claim

We know that people have parents, and so are happy to speak of Barbara's mother ... even though ... we do not know who ... [that person] ... [is] ... the defender of singular descriptive Thoughts ... can make sense of the idea that those who formulate the descriptions can or could be ascribed descriptive singular thoughts about the objects concerned.<sup>17</sup>

Here we have a case where we have not encountered Barbara's mother and yet we can have a singular descriptive thought about her. If this is what McCulloch intends, then it seems that such encounters, whether direct or causally indirect, are not strictly necessary for a *BD* use of the relevant description. Equally clearly such encounters cannot be sufficient for a *BD* use of a description. Suppose that I speak of 'Barbara's Latin teacher' intending merely to make a point about his inadequacies in the light of Barbara's appalling Latin. This might naturally be taken to be an *OD* use; but it would surely not be turned into a *BD* case if it turned out that I had encountered that teacher, although I had no idea who he was. It might be said that in such a case there is no link between the encounter and my utterance. Yet there must *be* a causal chain connecting the encounter with my current existence, and one linking my current existence with my utterance. It seems that a mere appeal to any such causal link will still not be enough. The point, too, raises a general worry which McCulloch himself notices. For, suppose, as in a Donnellan attributive case, I say of the supposed murderer "The murderer must be insane". Here, too, it is natural to class this as an *OD* case, and yet again there is already a causal link between the murderer and my utterance, even though I have never encountered the murderer. For

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid. p.248.

there is a causal link in the case between the murderer and the dead body, and between the dead body and my utterance about the murderer. At least *BD* cases seem to require more careful explanation, and McCulloch seems partly to admit this.

Something similar can be said of the *OD* cases. I note just one point here. For McCulloch the *OD* cases involve what he calls "failed descriptions"; and of these he says that they cannot be regarded as a "sort of make-believe, not of serious concern to the logician/semanticist". There is no doubt that they have to be of serious concern to any linguist; but are they "failed descriptions", and can they not be regarded as a "sort of make-believe"?

Suppose that I speak of "The proposed power station in East Anglia" and say that it is likely to pollute the area. Should we say that I use a "failed description"? At the least we should surely allow that if the proposal goes ahead, then there will be eventually a corresponding real power station, and that might incline us not to speak of a failed description. Such a description will not necessarily fail. McCulloch is probably insisting only on the claim that whether the proposal goes ahead or not, still at the time of utterance there is no such power station, and so in that way the description fails. This line of thought is unconvincing, however, for the failure of the description "the proposed power station" is surely not determined by the non-existence of any actual power station. What should determine the failure of such a description is the existence, or non-existence, of any *proposed* power station. If I make such a reference and it turns out that no such proposal has ever been made or considered, then the description fails. There is no proposed power station. If such a proposal has been made, then the description succeeds, whether or not the proposal goes ahead eventually or not. If this is right, then McCulloch is simply applying the wrong test in such cases, though two provisos need to be made. The first is that it would evidently be wrong to equate the two descriptions 'the proposed power station' and 'the proposal to build a power station'. We can perfectly well claim that the proposed power station will pollute East Anglia; but this is not to say that the proposal to build a power station will pollute that region. The proposal is a necessary and sufficient

condition for the existence of the proposed power station, but the two expressions are not the same. The second proviso is that to talk of the existence, or non-existence, of proposed power stations may raise the question of the kind of existence such things have. Plainly they do not have the same kind of existence as actual power stations, or the same kind of existence as proposals to build power stations. Some may find it then objectionable to talk about their existence, or non-existence, at all. I shall take it that this further question does not need to be answered in order to accept the suggestions already outlined.

These points indicate weaknesses in McCulloch's classification of *OD* and *BD* cases, but we need finally to consider his central claim that there is an asymmetry in the two cases, which yields an advantage for Russell's theory. First it should be noted that if there is a serious unclarity in the basic distinction, then this will be bound to affect any claim for such an asymmetry, but I want to adduce other reasons for disputing McCulloch's view. The crucial claim is that while Russell can deal adequately with both *OD* and *BD* cases, Strawson cannot deal adequately with the *OD* cases. The central issue, then, is whether Strawson's account does fail in that kind of case. McCulloch rests his case on the earlier claim that in *OD* uses the expressions all 'fail', so that Strawson's presupposition fails, and then the utterances cannot be regarded as genuine statements having a specific truth-value. Now what has been said so far indicates that McCulloch is bound to exaggerate Strawson's difficulty here. If the descriptions fail, and Strawson is committed to a Fregean theory which allows no semantic value at all, no meaning, to the resulting utterances then his theory results in the unpalatable claim that all *OD* uses lack meaning in that way. If that really were Strawson's theory, then he would be open to such an objection; but we have already seen good reason to deny that this is a fair statement of Strawson's view. His account was not 'object-indicating' in that Fregean sense, and the defect he wanted to associate with failed descriptions was that of lacking a truth-value, and not lacking a semantic value. Moreover, as we have just seen, there is no good reason to regard all *OD* cases as failed descriptions in any case, and Strawson might easily avoid this as was suggested. So far it seems that McCulloch's argument breaks down just in terms of the

weaknesses noted earlier in his account of Strawson and in his own classification of *BD* and *OD* cases.

One final point might be made. McCulloch might reply that the case against him would be more convincing if we could offer a Strawsonian account of the *OD* cases. His view seems to be that once we accept the criticism already made, then Strawson has to have recourse to the idea that such *OD* uses are "make-believe", and that this is a *reductio ad absurdum* of Strawson's view. But Strawson's view can be defended even against this claim. For there *is* good reason to think of such *OD* cases as a sort of 'make-believe'. Though many of them will be serious, and not fictional, yet such things as plans, proposals, hypotheses about the future are a certain kind of speculation, or make-believe in that sense. McCulloch implies that if we are driven to call such cases 'make-believe', then they will be of no serious interest to the semanticist; but there is no good reason to draw such a conclusion. After all, even fictional make-believe deserves the serious attention of the semanticist, so that there is no reason to deny this of plans or proposals.

McCulloch might still wish to pursue the idea that Strawson needs to give a more positive account of such *OD* cases. What has already been said, however, offers a clear answer to such a request. For *OD* cases are characteristically hypotheses about what might or might not happen. Moreover the core of such a hypothesis will be something of the form "If such a proposal is implemented ...", or "If such an outcome really arises ...", and this reflects precisely the Strawsonian presupposition that occurs if we make *OD* claims about such objects. If I say of the power station which I suppose to have been just built in East Anglia "The power station will pollute the whole region", then the Strawsonian presupposition will be about the existence of such a power station. If I say of a *proposal* to build such a power station, "The proposed power station will pollute East Anglia", then the presupposition in this case will reflect the truth of the antecedent in such a hypothetical as "If the proposal is implemented, then the resulting power station will pollute East Anglia". Put in other words, then, Strawson's account can be made to fit the *OD* cases rather well. We make plans, and speak descriptively of the items involved in

them, on the supposition that they may come to exist. This fits Strawson's basic theory, and demonstrates again the obvious link between what McCulloch disparages as 'make-believe' and the speculative operation involved in plans and in speaking descriptively of them.

If these points are correct, then McCulloch's preference for Russell's theory rests on no adequate basis. The arguments offered in favour of his preference depend upon doubtful interpretations of Strawson, and on doubtful claims particularly about the nature of the *OD* cases. Though it seems unfortunately inconclusive the upshot is that we have, so far, no decisive reason to prefer Russell to Strawson, or Strawson to Russell.

#### 10.4 *The issue of context-relativity*

Another related issue that has arisen in the disagreement between Russell and Strawson concerns the question of the context-relativity of our interpretation of definite descriptions. As we shall see this issue is related to the earlier discussion of the scope of the uniqueness claim in Russell's analysis. But Sainsbury makes some additional points worth noting. This question arises immediately from the earlier discussion because for Strawson any *statement* made by using a definite descriptive phrase will itself be locatable in a context of utterance. Moreover Strawson claims that Russell's analysis of definite description is incorrect because he fails to take into account the issue of context-relativity. He complains of Russell's analysis that it implies the uniqueness of the object referred to by the use of definite descriptive expressions. His own illustration is that the use of sentence "The table is covered with books" *implies* (in a special sense) that there is a *particular* table, but makes no strong claim that there are no other tables than this one. The local uniqueness of a particular object can be achieved when the sentence is used in particular context, and this is something for which Russell's logical analysis makes no initial provision. Strawson insists that

The actual unique reference made, if any, is a matter of the particular use in the particular context; the significance of the expression used in the set of rules or conventions which permit such references to be made.<sup>18</sup>

Strawson thinks that Russell's analysis fits nevertheless in certain cases where the issue of context-relativity does not need to come into the picture. For example, definite descriptions in mathematical contexts like "The even prime number is a successor of the number one" refers to just one unique number which is independent of context.<sup>19</sup> But the use of descriptions in ordinary discourse *is* context-relative. The requirement of uniqueness implied by utterances in context-relative cases is not reflected adequately in a Russellian analysis. Strawson wants to give a certain account of context-dependency, and he builds this into his analysis in rejecting Russell's account.

Sainsbury attempts to defend Russell against Strawson and his defence consists of arguing that Strawson has been unfair to Russell. He agrees that Strawson is right to draw the distinction between context-dependence and context-independence of utterances, but he diverges from Strawson in the conclusion he draws from this. He thinks that even granted that distinction, Russell's notion of uniqueness and his analysis can still accommodate the framework of context-dependence. Strawson claims that Russell's analysis can't fulfil the requirement of uniqueness simply because it disregards the issue of context-relativity. Sainsbury argues that Strawson's notion of uniqueness is wrong because it talks about context relativity in the original expression, but *not* in the case of a Russellian analysis. He thinks that Russell's notion of uniqueness can be rescued even when explained in the context relative background. In order to do this he examines the case whether a given expression and its Russellian analysis is necessarily equivalent or not in terms of evaluating their truth-value. His own illustration is:

- (1) The cat is hungry.
- (2) There exists exactly one cat and it is hungry.

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<sup>18</sup>op.cit. Strawson, "On Referring", p.162.

<sup>19</sup>This idea is considered by Kripke, as we have seen, that certain descriptions, for example, "the smallest prime" can be regarded as a rigid designator (though rigid *de facto*) which stands for the same object in all possible worlds.

According to the critic, (1) and (2) are not necessarily equivalent and may have different truth-values. Their difference is explicitly shown when (1), being uttered in certain circumstances is true when referring to the cat on my lap which is really hungry; but (2) is simply false because there is *not* exactly one cat in the universe. Now if the truth value of (1) and (2) differs, then it can be proved that Russell's analysis is not necessarily equivalent to the original expression.

Sainsbury tries to overcome this criticism against Russell by taking into account the notion of context-dependence. If the utterance of (1) is supposed to refer to a limited area where there is a unique cat which is hungry, that will fix a background in which, let us suppose, the utterance would come out true. When falsity is ascribed to (2), then the question arises whether we are talking of the *same* background context. If the context is the same as before, then it would not be wrong to suppose that the cat in a particular area is the only relevant cat in that context. If the Russellian analysis is interpreted in a context *independent* way, then that ascribes falsity to (2) as well as to (1). Sainsbury claims that Strawson's argument is really inconsistent in that it applies a certain standard in one case and then changes the standard in the other. Apart from the objection of applying different standards, Strawson's view can also be criticised for yielding different truth-values for the same proposition. We have to determine the truth-value only in accordance with the same context. If we fix the context in terms of a specific local situation, then we have to do it in the same way for both (1) and (2). But then (1) and (2) will have the same truth-value in that context. In a similar way if we do not fix the context at all but allow the claims to range over the whole universe, then we also have to make the same assumptions for both (1) and (2). In that case, too, both (1) and (2) will have the same truth-value. So, as Sainsbury rightly claims,

Whichever policy we follow, we have no divergence of truth value between (1) and (2), and thus no objection to the necessary equivalence of Russell's analysis with its analysandum.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.116.

Sainsbury tries also to deal with Strawson's further claim that we would never say that an utterance with a failed description is false. We know that for Strawson a sentence containing a failed description cannot be used to make a statement and therefore does not have any truth-value. Sainsbury argues that there are certain uses of descriptions where a sentence containing a failed description can be used to make a false statement. In uttering such a sentence the speaker intends somehow to form a certain belief in the hearer's mind that something is being said. Once this belief is established, the description, even if it fails to refer to something in the envisaged circumstances, will be part of a statement we may regard as false. For example, on a certain occasion a man may utter the sentence "My office secretary helps me in doing my work smoothly". If it turns out that the man works on his own and has no office secretary, still the utterance may be regarded as a perfectly meaningful statement which is false. Sainsbury suggests three conditions on the basis of which the utterance is said to be meaningful, but false. These are:

- (a) The speaker intends to form a certain belief in the hearer by the utterance of the words, even if the utterance is not about anybody or anything.
- (b) The hearer may believe what is being said and therefore the utterance, in that case, is supposed to be about something.
- (c) The hearer knows the conditions of the utterance's being true, namely that there is one and only one object which fits the description.

In the envisaged circumstance when it turns out that what is being said is false, then the hearer may describe the speaker as having lied. Sainsbury argues that once it is agreed that something is being said, then there cannot be any disagreement that what is being said is totally false. Thus Strawson's argument that the description sentence whose description fails and its Russellian analysis are not necessarily equivalent can't be established. Sainsbury claims that

... the case of empty descriptions does not itself tell against Russell's analysis, for this case does not as such establish a failure of necessary equivalence between description sentences and their Russellian analysis.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid. pp.121-22.

Sainsbury's argument against Strawson in this case is, however, open to objection. He tries to spell out some of the conditions under which he thinks that we might say that the utterance is actually false, but he seems to be relying on a certain intuition here and argues on that basis that the utterance is false. How strongly does his argument actually support his own intuition? He assumes in the condition (c) that the hearer actually knows the condition of the utterance's being true, i.e. there is one and only one object which fits the description. We can say that since there is not any office secretary the requirement is not satisfied, i.e. there is not one and only one object which fits the description. The conclusion from this is that if we accept the assumption (c) then we can say that the utterance is not true. But Sainsbury requires more than that: he is not saying just that the utterance is not true, for Strawson is also saying that. He is actually saying in addition that the utterance is false, but of course Strawson would then disagree. It is not easy to see how we could resolve a dispute of this kind, between Sainsbury and Strawson. If Sainsbury's intuition is that in the given circumstances the speaker makes a false statement; while Strawson's intuition is that no true or false statement is made at all, then we have a dispute between intuitions. Neither can rely on this just to support their own case, for this would be in serious danger of begging the question. It remains unclear what could resolve the dispute. Unlike the earlier argument about context dependence in which Sainsbury demonstrates a flaw in Strawson's position, this new argument does not succeed.

A somewhat different argument is produced by Linsky against Strawson's view about the presupposition of existence. He attempts to show that certain statements interpreted as identical, cannot be interpreted as such. For example, from  $a=b$  it follows that  $b=a$ , but from "Charles de Gaulle is *not* the King of France" it does not follow that "The King of France is *not* Charles de Gaulle" according to Strawson's account. This happens because the first statement is true while the second is neither true nor false.

Linsky agrees with Strawson that statements containing empty descriptions cannot be ascribed any truth-value and thus cannot be said to be either true or false. He disagrees with Strawson in that some reference to some object can still be made in such statements

because the speaker might intend to refer and succeed even through the failed descriptions.

He illustrates the case that to say of

... a spinster that "Her husband is kind to her" is neither true nor false. But a speaker might very well be referring to someone in using these words, for he may think that someone is the husband of the lady (who is in fact a spinster). Still, the statement is neither true nor false, for it presupposes that the lady has a husband, which she has not. This last refutes Strawson's thesis that if the presupposition of existence is not satisfied, the speaker has failed to refer.<sup>22</sup>

Linsky wants to point out that we can refer to somebody by the use of definite descriptions even when the description fails to identify the described person. This is similar to Donnellan's referential account which I shall be considering later. Linsky's criticism against Strawson of 'failing to refer' echoes the pragmatic notion of 'referring' where the speaker intends to refer and succeeds even if the description used is not appropriate. It echoes the distinction, noted at the start of the chapter, between 'speaker-reference' and 'linguistic reference'.

Strawson's notion of presupposition, like Linsky's account is often regarded as pointing to a contextual or pragmatic rather than a semantic feature of utterance. The suggestion is that there may be both underlying semantic factors, but also pragmatic factors, which need to come into the analysis of our use of definite descriptions. Strawson would be inclined to say that those pragmatic or contextual features ought to be taken into account in relation to an adequate semantic analysis. His main objection is that Russell's semantic analysis fails to take into account the issue of context relativity, or more widely, those pragmatic features. It is the pragmatic factor, context-dependence which Sainsbury thinks can be added to Russell's semantic theory. If Sainsbury is right then Russell's semantic analysis might be vindicated. However, the general issue of the relationship between semantic and contextual or pragmatic features of utterance deserves to be further considered, and I examine it in the next chapter.

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<sup>22</sup>cf. Linsky, L. "Reference and Referents" in E.D. Klemke (ed.) op.cit. *Essays on Bertrand Russell*, p.226.

## DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS

11.1 *Donnellan's account of the referential/attributive distinction*

Donnellan in his famous article "Reference and Definite Description" holds that both Russell and Strawson are mistaken in principle. He proposes that there are two different *uses* of definite descriptions, namely the *referential* and the *attributive*. His distinction between referential and attributive uses is originally presented as an objection to Russell's theory of descriptions. He thinks that there are two distinct types of assertion in a description sentence, depending upon how the speaker is using the description. For him,

A speaker who uses a definite description attributively in an assertion states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so. A speaker who uses a definite description referentially in an assertion, on the other hand, uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing.<sup>23</sup>

Donnellan further argues:

Using a definite description referentially, a speaker may say something true even though the description correctly applies to nothing.<sup>24</sup>

Donnellan's view suggests that there are two different sides involved in the use of the description sentence: one side is concerned with the aspect of the speaker's intentions to qualify the description used as being referential or attributive; the other side is concerned with the truth conditions of what the speaker said.

Donnellan argues that Strawson's theory is concerned with the relation of presupposition rather than entailment with respect to the existence of the relevant object;

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<sup>23</sup>cf. Donnellan, K.S. "Reference and Definite Descriptions" in *The Philosophical Review* (vol. 75, 1966), p.228.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. p.298.

Russell's view, by contrast, involves the claim that the relevant propositions *entail* the *unique existence* of the related item. He believes that both Russell's and Strawson's theories give a uniform account of definite descriptions, but do not allow for any variation of uses. He claims that either Russell's or Strawson's account could fit the non-referential or attributive use of descriptions, but that neither of their views fits the referential use. Although the outcome of Strawson's account is that failure of reference prevents the making of a genuine statement, this is not true of Donnellan's referential use of definite descriptions. Strawson does mention the non-referential use of descriptions, but such a use for him depends on the function of the kind of sentence in which it occurs. For Donnellan, there can be two possible uses of definite descriptions in the same sentence depending on the speaker's intention, which will then determine whether the description sentence uttered has either a referential or an attributive use.

Donnellan illustrates this distinction in the case of one observing the horrible conditions of Smith's mutilated body, who exclaims

(1) Smith's murderer is insane.

He uses the description in this case non-referentially. The reason for this is that in the envisaged circumstance he cannot *identify* any object when he utters (1). The utterance of (1) clearly does not refer to anyone in the vicinity, but only of "Smith's murderer — whoever it might turn out to be". Donnellan would identify this case as an attributive use of a description.

At the trial for murdering Smith in the courtroom, and on the basis of Jones's strange behaviour in the witness box, the utterance of (1) will be referential. The speaker is then referring to Jones, the man in the witness box, as guilty of murdering Smith. If it turns out that Jones is not the murderer of Smith, so that the description is not true of him, still in the envisaged circumstance the speaker is referring to Jones and the audience clearly understands this. Even if the description does not fit Jones, the speaker is still prepared to assert about Jones on the basis of his behaviour that he is insane. Donnellan claims that when a description is used referentially, the speaker can successfully refer to

something even if the description is not true of the intended object.

On the side of truth conditions, Donnellan gives the illustration of the cocktail party, where the speaker says

(2) The man with the vodka is our host.

It is clear that the speaker intends to pick out that man and does so, even if it turns out that the man is really drinking water. The central point is that in the referential use a description is employed to pick out the right item for the audience, where it is not of prime importance whether the description is true of the item. If the description is not true of the man in (2), then under a Russellian analysis (2) will come out false. What Donnellan claims is that despite the fact that the descriptive phrase does not really fit the man, nevertheless the referential function may be entirely successful in identifying the correct man to the audience, and thus (2) can be used to make a true statement. If there is no unique object satisfying the description in the attributive use, then (2) turns out to be an utterance which is neither true nor false. For Donnellan,

... this is a likely view to hold if the definite description is being used *attributively*.<sup>25</sup>

Donnellan also considers the case whether a statement containing a failed description can have any truth-value. He agrees with Linsky that the statement "Her husband is kind to her" (see ch.10, p.243) cannot be ascribed any truth value, that is it is neither true nor false when the utterance is used *attributively*. Following Linsky, he thinks that if it happens that the woman is not married and does not have any husband, then the statement is neither true nor false. Under a Russellian analysis the statement is simply false if the description is not satisfied. Donnellan, however, differs from Linsky in the case when the statement is being used *referentially*. Here he finds a difficulty with what is meant by 'the statement'. For Linsky such statements still have no truth-value but nevertheless succeed in referring to some definite object. For Donnellan in a referential use if the speaker intends to refer to somebody even if the description fails, (in this case it may

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid. p.302.

be the woman's lover and not her husband to whom the speaker is referring), the speaker may still have said something true or false of the object. This is the point where Kripke raises objections against Donnellan which we shall consider later. Donnellan argues that if a statement is identified in this way then Linsky's view is wrong in the case of a referential use. Donnellan holds,

... if we do not identify the statement in this way, what is the statement that the speaker made? ... we have to decide whether in using the definite description here in the identification of the statement, we are using it attributively or referentially. If the former, then we misrepresent the linguistic performance of the speaker; if the latter then we are ourselves referring to someone and reporting the speaker to have said something of that person, in which case we are back to the possibility that he did say something true or false of that person.<sup>26</sup>

Donnellan claims that if his ascription of a truth-value to referential uses of description is right, then Russell's theory can be proved to be incorrect, so that the description sentence and its Russellian analysis are not necessarily equivalent. Sainsbury agrees with Donnellan that there are referential uses of descriptions, but raises questions about Donnellan's account of the truth conditions. The suggestion is that there are certain cases where though the utterances are literally incorrect, they nevertheless fulfil their function perfectly well or are pragmatically successful in communication. For example, when Mrs Malaprop says "That is a nice derangement of epitaphs", she actually wants to say "That is a nice arrangement of epigrams". But if the utterance is literally incorrect, it presumably should not form part of the semantic analysis of what is actually said. Because Mrs. Malaprop has made semantic mistakes we would not use her utterance to claim that "That is a nice derangement of epitaphs" *means* "That is a nice arrangement of epigrams". What Sainsbury is suggesting is that Donnellan's account is of a *pragmatic* kind which marks successful communication in a particular context. Russell's theory, on the other hand, offers a *semantic* analysis and, therefore, pragmatic factors should be irrelevant to, and not be counted against, a Russellian analysis. Hence the pragmatic (or intentional) factor cannot force an amendment to Russell's semantic analysis.

Sainsbury examines Donnellan's view and holds that Donnellan's account of

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid. p. 302.

referential and attributive uses suggests a contrast between entity-invoking (referential) and other (attributive) uses of descriptions. Indeed his central criticisms of Donnellan turn on the characterisation of Donnellan's distinction in terms of 'entity-invoking' uses of descriptions. The idea is that Donnellan's referential use suggests an entity-invoking account, because it seems to involve the presence of some object and can be reported as saying something of that particular thing. The attributive use seems to be a species of entity-invoking use, too, because for Donnellan, when a description is used attributively then something is asserted *about* whoever or whatever is 'the so-and-so', which suggests that the reference made to some entity enters into the truth conditions of what is being asserted. This is clear from the contrast made between empty and non-empty descriptions in attributive uses because in the case of empty descriptions nothing has been said, by an utterance of 'The *F* is *G*', to be *G*. For Sainsbury this is similar to the entity-invoking uses of descriptions because in such a case if no entity is invoked then no assertion is made.

Donnellan's accounts can be explained in two distinct ways: one is in terms of intentions, the other is in terms of truth conditions. Sainsbury explains these two aspects with respect to referential uses, in the following formal way:

(i) A speaker *S* uses a description referentially, in uttering the sentence 'The *F* is *G*' only if there is a unique object *x* such that *S* intends that, through *S*'s utterance of the sentence, his audience will come to believe, concerning *x*, that it is *G*.

(ii) If *S* uses 'The *F* is *G*' referentially, then the unique object *x* such that *S* intends that, through *S*'s utterance of the sentence his audience will come to believe, concerning *x* that it is *G*, is such that *S* speaks truly iff *x* is *G*.<sup>27</sup>

Sainsbury insists that his interpretation in (i) coheres with Donnellan's referential use because in the 'Smith's murderer' case we refer to a particular man 'Jones'. This would reveal the communicative intention required by the referential use. He further claims that his interpretation in (ii) fits Donnellan's argument about truth-conditions because *S* speaks truly of the man 'Jones', observing his behaviour to be insane. This fits Donnellan's

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<sup>27</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.123.

condition because it does not require the man 'Jones' to satisfy the description 'The F' but nevertheless fulfils S's intention to communicate to his audience that the object involved, namely Jones, is G.

Sainsbury's view in (i) and (ii) therefore suggests that in a referential use a certain object *x* is required for successful communication in a particular context in order to fulfil the speaker's intention to enable his hearer to pick out that particular object. Once this condition is fulfilled, the speaker says something true about the object which will then satisfy the truth conditions of the utterance involved. Sainsbury insists that referential uses fit into the entity-invoking account because they express particular, singular, propositions and express something about the object. This corresponds to Donnellan's claim that

... when a definite description is used referentially, a speaker can be reported as having said something of something.<sup>28</sup>

According to Sainsbury, Donnellan's view is that there are attributive uses of descriptions and that such attributive uses are not only non-referential but are also a species of entity-invoking uses. Sainsbury characterises this in the following way:

(i) *S* uses a description attributively in uttering the sentence 'The *F* is *G*' only if (a) there is no object such that *S* intends *H* to form a belief concerning it; and (b) *S* intends that, through *S*'s utterance of the sentence, *H* will come to believe, concerning whatever object is in fact uniquely *F*, that it is *G*.

(ii) If *S* uses 'The *F* is *G*' attributively, then, if some object *x* is uniquely *F*, then *S* speaks truly iff *x* is *G*, otherwise *S* says nothing.<sup>29</sup>

Sainsbury argues that his interpretation of Donnellan's attributive use in (i) and (ii) fits the entity-invoking account in that the speaker's intention to communicate to the hearer is accomplished by some object whatever the object is. Now if there is some unique object then what the speaker intends to say is true, and in the absence of any unique object the

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<sup>28</sup>op.cit. Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions", p.303.

<sup>29</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.125.

speaker says nothing. This interpretation of attributive uses, according to Sainsbury, fits the entity-invoking account in that where there is no entity to be invoked there is no content, that is the utterance fails to say anything. This characterisation shows that both referential and attributive uses are entity-invoking but, for Sainsbury, this is inconsistent with Donnellan's own idea that all non-referential uses are attributive. Sainsbury thinks that there are also non entity-invoking uses of descriptions, especially in the case of false existentials. This point was discussed earlier where Sainsbury argues from the example "My office secretary helps me in my work", that if there is no office secretary, no entity is invoked, still the utterance can be considered false (see ch.10, p.241).

Sainsbury's ascription of an entity-invoking account to Donnellan's attributive use seems to be strained because Donnellan's attributive use considers the object as *whatever* or *whoever* fits the description. In a strict entity-invoking account a definite entity is required to match the description. We saw earlier that for Peacocke, a description can be regarded as entity-invoking if

... in an utterance of "the F is G", what is strictly and literally said would equally and appropriately be said by an utterance of "that F is G", ...<sup>30</sup>

Peacocke's idea is that a description can be used as an entity-invoking expression only when it can be used as a demonstrative expression, such as 'that'. This suggests that the definite description, uttered in that particular context, talks about a definite entity. For example, the utterance "The first man to climb Everest is bald" can be regarded as entity-invoking uttered in a particular context iff the description refers to 'Edmund Hillary' and the predicate is true of the man. If the description refers to *whoever* is the man and not to Edmund Hillary then it cannot be regarded as entity-invoking and, therefore, that object cannot enter into the truth-conditions of what is asserted. In such a case Sainsbury's ascription of an entity-invoking account to Donnellan is flawed (see criticisms of Peacocke in Pt.4, ch.9, pp.207-08). Donnellan's attributive account can then be rescued because the

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<sup>30</sup>op.cit. Peacocke, "Proper names, reference, and rigid designation", p.117.

speaker can still intend to communicate to his audience a claim about some object, *whatever or whoever* it is, which fits the description.

In the context of Donnellan's view, Sainsbury examines whether description sentences are necessarily equivalent to their Russellian analysis. He thinks,

(1) If Donnellan's ascription of truth conditions to referential uses of descriptions is correct, then Russell's theory is wrong.

(2) Even if such referential uses of description along with their truth conditions are not accepted, Russell's theory may still be incorrect because there are other entity-invoking truth conditions which may be ascribed to description sentences. For example, the attributive use is a species of an entity invoking use.

(3) The referential use of descriptions might not be denied, but the associated truth conditions are questionable. Thus when S utters 'There is at least one F and at most one F and whatever is F is G', S intends that through his utterance his audience will come to believe that there is an unique object x such that it is G. Sainsbury would not wish to infer from this that S speaks truly iff the intended object is G. Because S surely and literally says about an unique object x, that it is G and that object may be different from the one intended by the speaker. Sainsbury finally argues that

Donnellan rather baldly states one way in which facts about speaker's intentions might interlock with facts about what they state.<sup>31</sup>

This distinction is similar to Grice's where he distinguishes generally between what a *sentence means* in a particular utterance and what the *speaker means* in uttering the sentence. Sainsbury does not pursue the issue of the semantic/pragmatic distinction proposed by Grice. He is right to say that there is throughout Donnellan's essay a systematic appeal to intentionalism. But we need to be careful in making such an assertion. For Donnellan wants also to identify the truth conditions of propositions with such descriptions. Although he puts considerable emphasis on the speaker's intentions in

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<sup>31</sup>op.cit. Sainsbury, *Russell*, p.126.

the referential uses, nevertheless even there, and also in the attributive uses, he tries to formulate the relevant truth conditions.

Donnellan's implicit account of a semantic/pragmatic distinction was described earlier by Grice. He illustrated the point in suggesting that when a wife says

(3) The dinner will get cold

in a context where she wants her husband to come in at once for their meal we can distinguish what she literally says from some further intention. For what she literally says is not newsworthy, namely that (hot, served) dinners do get (gradually) cold. What she further intends is that her husband should stop tinkering with the car and eat the meal. According to Grice, what the sentence means belongs to semantics and this is determined by the linguistic conventions. He thinks

Given a knowledge of the English language, but no knowledge of the circumstances of the utterance, one would know something about what the speaker has said, on the assumption that he was speaking standard English, and speaking literally.<sup>32</sup>

But a speaker says more in the utterance of (3) about some particular x so that

... for a full identification of what the speaker has said, one would need to know (a) the identity of x, (b) the time of utterance, and (c) the meaning, on a particular occasion of utterance, ...<sup>33</sup>

Thus what the speaker means by a particular utterance, on a given occasion, is derived from further special intentions of the speaker along with various general principles which are not determined solely by the conventions of language. There are two distinguishing features here: (a) the contextual specification of 'the x'; (b) the further 'implications' of what is said. Clearly (a) and (b) are different. We can use Wilson and Sperber's distinction between 'explicature' and 'implicature' to mark the contrast.<sup>34</sup> Thus it will be part of the explicature of (3) that the wife is saying that the dinner is hot, that it has been served, and

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<sup>32</sup>cf. Grice, H.P. "Logic and Conversation" in P. Cole and J.L. Morgan (ed.) *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 3 (Academic Press, New York, 1975.), p.44.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>see, Sperber, D. and Wilson, D., *Relevance* (Basil Blackwell), 1986.

that it will now start to get cold. It will be part of the implicature of (3) that her husband should stop tinkering with the car and eat the meal.

Grice however appeals to certain pragmatic principles or maxims of conversation to show how a single utterance can have different uses. He formulates his general principle of conversational maxims as follows:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.<sup>35</sup>

A standard use of a sentence which corresponds to the literal meaning can be associated with a non-literal use with the help of a conversational principle. For example, the *literal* meaning of the sentence

(4) I have twenty cows.

is that the speaker has 'at least' twenty cows. For (4) will certainly come out true even if the speaker has forty cows. But it would be interpreted in the *conversational* context in response to the question "How many cows do you have" as claiming that he has *only* or *exactly* twenty cows. So there are two dimensions involved in the utterance of (4). One dimension gives the literal meaning of the sentence which is that the speaker has 'at least' twenty cows and this will determine the truth conditions for (4). The other dimension involves the context of a conversational exchange which interprets (4) as claiming that the speaker has 'only' (exactly) twenty cows. This additional element of understanding belongs to the non-literal or pragmatic aspects of utterance and will not be reflected in the strict truth-conditions of the utterance. This may suggest that (4) is an ambiguous sentence, but a more recent commentator, Kent Bach, is disinclined to regard the sentence as ambiguous. He argues that

However, that (2) [4] has two uses hardly justifies deeming it ambiguous, with an 'exactly' as well as an 'at least' sense. It is better regarded as univocal, possessing only the logically weaker 'at least' sense. That a speaker can mean 'exactly' without saying it does not begin to show that (2)[4] has an 'exactly' sense as well.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>op.cit. Grice, *Logic and Conversation*, p.45.

<sup>36</sup>op.cit. Bach, K. *Thought and Reference*, p.78.

A similar view is also suggested by Levinson<sup>37</sup> where he holds that a large number of utterances might have to be treated as ambiguous. For example,

(5) The flag is white.

(6) The flag is white, red and blue.

have been considered as ambiguous in the two ways: One is, that there are two different senses of the word 'white' which is thus simply ambiguous; the other is, that the meaning of words like 'white' is, in general, vague and influenced by collocational environments. Levinson argues that if the first of these views is accepted, then it will produce an endless creation of senses of such simple words. It may be argued that 'white' is ambiguous in the two cases, because in (5) it seems to mean 'only' or 'wholly white', while in (6) it can only mean 'partially white'. The first view has the consequence that the word 'white' has many different senses in such different uses, and this is counter intuitive and theoretically unwelcome. Other things being equal it would be better to avoid such a conclusion. Levinson argues that the notion of implicature suggests an escape from this, because

... it allows one to claim that natural language expressions do tend to have simple, stable and unitary senses (in many cases anyway), but that this stable semantic core often has an unstable, context-specific pragmatic overlay — namely a set of implicatures.<sup>38</sup>

Both Levinson's and Bach's views suggest that what Donnellan is trying to pick out is precisely a pragmatic factor in description sentences which is not part of their literal semantic significance. This pragmatic story, however, is not quite clear or explicit in Donnellan's account.

Donnellan explicitly takes the view that

... whether or not a definite description is used referentially or attributively is a function of the speaker's intentions in a particular case.<sup>39</sup>

Donnellan's idea that the referential and attributive distinction is a function of the

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<sup>37</sup>see, Levinson, S.C., *Pragmatics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge), 1983.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid. p.99.

<sup>39</sup>op.cit. Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions", p.297.

speaker's intentions is compatible with saying that the speaker's intentions *alone* determine the distinction. Two objections can be brought against such a view. The first is implicit in Sainsbury's account of the distinction, for that indicates that part of the contrast can be explained in terms of the truth conditions of the different uses. Indeed one of the clauses in Sainsbury's account (see p.249) uses as a truth condition of an attributive use the requirement that the utterance is true iff some object *x* is uniquely *F*, where no reference at all is made to the speaker's intentions.

The point can be elaborated further. Suppose that a speaker, in the 'Smith's murderer' case, intends to say attributively that the murderer is insane, not realising that the murderer has been found and convicted, and not realising that his audience knows all this. In such a case the audience is likely, or even bound, to treat the utterance as referential, and as referring to the person he knows is guilty of the murder. No doubt ways can be found to accommodate such a conflict between the speaker's intentions and the audience's grasp of what has been said; but the suggestion is that, again, it is not obvious that the characterisation of the utterance as referential or attributive is wholly within the control of the speaker and his intentions. A similar difficulty seems to affect even Sainsbury's formulation of the distinction. For there is a *prima facie* conflict between two clauses in his characterisation of the attributive use. In one the requirement is that "there is no object such that *S* intends *H* to form a belief about it"; in the other the requirement is that "*S* intends, through his utterance, that *H* will come to believe concerning whatever is uniquely *F* that it is *G*". It remains unclear how *S* can intend *H* to come to hold a belief about the uniquely *F* object (whatever it is) without there being an object such that *S* intends *H* to form a belief about it. It is true that Sainsbury wishes to capture the idea that *S* cannot actually identify the object, except through the description he uses, but it is by no means obvious that his formulation achieves this. The point is intended less as a comment on Sainsbury than as an indication of a deep unclarity in Donnellan's original account of the distinction.

It is clear that Donnellan's account is open to a number of objections. For the

present that conclusion has to be accepted, but it is worth also saying that the basic phenomena to which he draws attention are unquestionable and deserve *some* adequate treatment in a linguistic theory. What is open to query in Donnellan's view is not so much the existence of these linguistic phenomena as the appropriate way to classify them, or the best way in which to build them into some linguistic theory. If this is correct two further points might be made. The first is that such a contrast, between the basic phenomena and a theory which accommodates them, was inevitably blurred by Donnellan's initial wish to represent the phenomena as ways of falsifying Russell's analysis. It might almost be said, of a commentator like Sainsbury for example, that his anxiety to defend Russell's theory leads him to pay less attention to the basic phenomena than they deserve. The second is that other critics, like Kripke, have wanted to argue that all the correct theoretical background for Donnellan's phenomena is not in semantics at all, but in some other area of pragmatic theory. Such a view offers clearly a further defence of Russell, and it is to that view that I now turn.

### 11.2 *Kripke's objection against Donnellan*

Donnellan, in his account, explains the distinction between referential and attributive uses of descriptions in a number of ways. His account suggests the distinction between two *uses* of definite descriptions, and we have seen that they might not generate any *semantic* ambiguity. With regard to any description sentence, he writes:

The grammatical structure of the sentence seems to me to be the same whether the description is used referentially or attributively: that is, it is not syntactically ambiguous. Nor does it seem at all attractive to suppose an ambiguity in the meaning of the words; it does not appear to be semantically ambiguous. (Perhaps we could say that the sentence is pragmatically ambiguous; the distinction between roles that the description plays is a function of the speaker's intentions.)<sup>40</sup>

Kripke argues that this view of Donnellan's is inconsistent with the view that the

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

Russellian analysis matches the attributive use but not the referential use. For Kripke,

If the sentence is *not* (syntactically or) semantically ambiguous, it has only *one* analysis; to say that it has two distinct analyses is to attribute a syntactic or semantic ambiguity to it.<sup>41</sup>

Kripke further argues that if Donnellan thinks that the distinction is not a semantic but a pragmatic one, then it is supposed to be a distinction between speech acts. We might reconsider the earlier case in which someone says of a woman "Her husband is kind to her", when the man with her is not her husband. Even if Donnellan's view is accepted in the envisaged circumstance where the speaker succeeds in referring to the presented man who *is* kind to the woman, nevertheless

... it is hard for us to say that when he uttered "Her husband is kind to her", it expressed a truth, if we believe that her husband is unkind to her.<sup>42</sup>

Kripke's position is open to objection. In the first quote he is probably right, because he is talking quite specifically about the analysis of *sentences* and not, for example, about the *uses* of sentences. What seems questionable is to say that at the stage of analysing a sentence, there are only two possibilities of an alternative analysis, namely syntactic or semantic. According to Kripke all the other factors about a pragmatic use or utterance of the sentence are to be separated from that. This is in danger of being circular, even if we are talking of sentences and of how to analyse them. We might either analyse them semantically in terms of the definite description's being true of some particular object, or analyse them pragmatically in terms of their use on some particular occasion to identify a particular object whether the description is true of the object or not. In response to that claim of Donnellan's, Kripke's point is in danger of saying that Donnellan is wrong simply because there are only two possible kinds of ambiguity and analysis, namely syntactic or semantic. To make this assumption would be to beg the question against Donnellan, and would be like saying that we cannot talk about a pragmatic analysis

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<sup>41</sup>see, Kripke, S., "Speaker Reference and Semantic Reference" in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol.2, p.262.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

because analysis just *means* semantic or syntactic analysis.

Even if we are talking about semantics or syntax, the question can still be raised: Is there a vital link between the way in which these expressions are actually used in discourse among the speakers in a community and their semantic and syntactic properties? Kripke seems to put too much weight on the idea that the only kind of ambiguity one can associate with the given linguistic units is their semantic or syntactic ambiguity. Of course, Kripke might insist that if we are talking exclusively of *sentences*, then only a syntactic or semantic analysis is appropriate. This too is open to the objection that even sentences cannot be totally divorced from the use that is made of them. It is plausible, after all, to say that the semantic properties of a sentence are ultimately derived from the way in which that sentence is used. Why should not pragmatic features of that use also be ascribed to the sentence?

A further point is that Kripke seems to *identify* pragmatics with speech act theory. This does not beg any question perhaps but it is far too restrictive an account of pragmatics. Speech acts are concerned with the various acts, such as stating or asking or ordering, which we can perform by using sentences in a context. Pragmatics is concerned with a wide variety of other functions which arise from the use of language in a specific context. According to Levinson,

... despite much use of the terms *speech act* and *performative*, ... recent work on language acquisition does not really support the importance of the concept of speech act at all; rather it emphasises the essential roles that communicative intention, utterance function and the interactive context play in the acquisition of language.<sup>43</sup>

So it appears that Kripke has a distorted picture of the scope of pragmatic features of language in respect of both uses of sentences and identifying pragmatics with speech act theory.

Kripke's second quote claims that when one says "Her husband is kind to her" under the cited circumstances, it is hard to say that the sentence expresses a truth. If it fits Donnellan's referential account, then the description may be true of the man referred

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<sup>43</sup>op.cit. Levinson, *Pragmatics*, p.282.

to, but it is not true of the husband. According to Kripke, what the man literally says cannot express a truth about the woman's husband, because the husband is really unkind to her. His line of argument depends upon the strict view that what the sentence literally expresses is a claim about the husband. Kripke is right to hold that in the case of the *statement* literally expressed on this occasion, by using that sentence, it would be plausible to say that that literal statement is false. Donnellan nevertheless has a point about the statement intended by the speaker as opposed to the statement literally expressed. Kripke talks only about what is literally expressed but, unlike Donnellan, he is disinclined to talk about the properties that we should assign to the utterance, or perhaps to what the *speaker* meant as opposed to what the *sentence* meant.

Both of Kripke's quotations express a very determined, rather rigid, view about sentences, expressions, and the linguistic properties that are appropriate to them. In the first argument Kripke does seem to be in danger of begging the question against Donnellan and seems also to have an unduly restrictive view of pragmatics and of the inter-play between semantics and pragmatics. In the second argument though Kripke is undoubtedly right about the literal truth-value of the statement expressed, he is still not taking sufficiently into account the 'intentional' pragmatic features that Donnellan wants to mark. Kripke makes a distinction between the semantic referent and the speaker referent. For him,

The semantic referent of a definite description is given by the conditions ... in ... that the referent is the unique object satisfying the descriptive conditions. The speaker reference, on the other hand, is determined by a general theory of speech acts ... it is the object to which the speaker wishes to refer, and which he believes fulfils the Russellian conditions for being the semantic referent.<sup>44</sup>

Kripke is basically saying that we cannot connect the semantic and pragmatic use of sentences. In a way, he concedes enough to Donnellan to allow us to raise the question of

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<sup>44</sup>op.cit. Kripke, "Speaker Reference and Semantic Reference", p.266.

Kripke's second condition, though commonly fulfilled, does not need to be met, in order to produce a Donnellan referential use with a false description. For suppose, at the famous party, the speaker S knows that his audience has never heard of Vodka, and wants to point out the host as the man drinking that clear liquid. Even though S does not believe that the host is drinking water he might think that the best way to identify the host in the circumstances is to gesture towards him as "The man drinking the glass of water".

how we accommodate these two different types of phenomenon. He then suggests an absolutely clear-cut distinction between semantics and pragmatics. He considers Russell's account as a semantic analysis of sentences, and fits Donnellan's theory into the pragmatic use of the semantically analysed sentences. Kripke's view is similar to Sainsbury's in that Sainsbury also accepts Russell's account as a semantic analysis. He thinks that we can build, if required, some additional pragmatic, context-dependent, features into the semantic account but that this does not mean the pragmatic factors are necessarily relevant to a Russellian semantic analysis (see ch.10, pp.238-43).

Kripke argues that if speaker's reference is recognised, then Donnellan's referential and attributive distinction is a pragmatic view which reveals no semantic ambiguity. Since Donnellan's account puts the emphasis on the pragmatic features, it fails to establish the criticism of Russell's *semantic* analysis of definite descriptions. Kripke goes on to support his argument by constructing a language experiment which reinforces the claim that the underlying feature of Donnellan's view is a pragmatic one. He writes,

If someone alleges that a certain linguistic phenomenon in English is a counterexample to a given analysis, consider a hypothetical language which (as much as possible) is like English except that the analysis is stipulated to be correct. Imagine such a hypothetical language introduced by a community and spoken by it. If the phenomenon in question would still arise in a community that spoke such a hypothetical language (which may not be English), then the fact that it arises in English cannot disprove the hypothesis that the analysis is correct for English.<sup>45</sup>

Kripke's test goes like this: We have analysis A of English expression E, in which there is a *prima facie* problem, that is some aspect of the use of E which may count against the analysis, A. For example, suppose E is the English use of definite descriptions, and A is Russell's analysis, and that A seems vulnerable to the contextual restrictions in which E is conventionally used. The fact that we use E in contexts where we do not understand it to signify that there is one unique X in the whole universe might then seem to count against A. Kripke says that if we imagine a language, L, like English which uses A rather than E, and now in which the same phenomenon (context-relativity) arises, then this phenomenon cannot count as a 'disproof' of the analysis A.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid. p.265.

Kripke attempts to defend Russell's analysis of definite descriptions as a perfectly adequate semantic representation of definite descriptions in English. He thinks, as we saw, that pragmatic elements do not effect the semantic analysis. His test is designed to say that someone might come along with a counter example that definite descriptions in English do not seem to follow Russell's pattern in every particular, and to put this as an objection to Russell's analysis. Kripke then considers the test of supposing that instead of English definite descriptions we now use Russell language. If the same phenomenon arises then the suggestion is, clearly, that it cannot demonstrate any semantic defect in the new language, and so cannot demonstrate any defect in Russell's semantic analysis. For example, instead of saying "The King of France is bald" suppose we say "There is one and only one King of France and he is bald". Kripke's argument is that if we use this form of Russell English still exactly the same phenomenon of context-relativity arises. Because it is just false that there is one and only one King of France we will then use Russell's form of words in a context-relative way. This is supposed to show that the issue of context is an additional one to the semantic analysis. Kripke admits context-relativity but he attempts to show that context-relativity arises for Russell English as well as for ordinary English. If this is the case then, according to Kripke, we can go back to ordinary English and say that the contextual features that are raised against Russell do not actually count as a criticism of his theory's being an adequate semantic analysis.

Kripke further argues that if the speaker of the hypothetical language, Russell English, recognises the referential/attributive distinction, then it can be concluded that Donnellan's distinction is irrelevant to Russell's semantic analysis. He insists,

The Russell language theory, or any other unitary account (that is any account that postulates no semantic ambiguity), accounts for Donnellan's referential-attributive phenomenon by a general pragmatic theory of speech acts, applicable to a very wide range of languages; the D-language hypothesis accounts for these same phenomena by positing a semantic ambiguity.<sup>46</sup>

Kripke assumes that Donnellan wants to treat his account as part of *semantics*, and this

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid. p.267.

seems to be right if Donnellan wants to claim that Russell's analysis is incorrect as a semantic analysis. Donnellan also is aware of the pragmatic dimension and then his objection to Russell would be *not* that his semantic analysis was wrong, although he might also think that, but that it fails to give the full picture which a pragmatic supplementation suggests. This suggests that Donnellan's position is more complicated than Kripke thinks.

Kripke seems to be right to suppose that Russell's analysis is concerned with truth-values, and so can be regarded as a straight-forward semantic account. By the same token Donnellan's account can be said not to be concerned so much with the *truth-value*, as with the communicative *success* of utterances. This is compatible with saying that Russell's semantic account needs further pragmatic supplementation. But Kripke's criterion for distinguishing semantics from pragmatics is questionable, as we have seen in the earlier discussion.

Kripke's language experiment also can be queried, and I offer three objections to his argument. First, to be fair to him, he is probably right to say that Donnellan's criticism of 'context-relativity' is an attempt to 'disprove' Russell's analysis, and this is a very strong claim. But it might be said that in the description case the phenomenon (context-relativity) is not intended as a *disproof* but only as a *prima facie* difficulty for, or objection to, the analysis. Even if it is not a decisive objection to Russell, it nevertheless adds some weight to our disinclination to accept Russell's analysis. To that weaker point Kripke has no defence. His defence of Russell against the very strong claim leads him to represent this phenomenon of context-relativity as intended to be a quite serious, or decisive, objection to Russell even though it could be understood in a weaker way. Kripke also manages to suggest that if his argument in the thought experiment goes through, then Russell's analysis A is shown to be correct. This, too, is wrong. All he is really entitled to say on the basis of his argument is that, if we draw a distinction between semantic and pragmatic factors, then pragmatic factors may come into the picture in some way but do not establish, or prove, that Russell's analysis is incorrect. All that has been shown is that the difficulty,

raised by Donnellan's pragmatic factors, is not yet *decisive* against it. Indeed, even if we were to accept Kripke's procedure we could conclude only that we do not know *yet* whether Russell's analysis is correct or not.

Second, if context-relativity arises for both ordinary English and Russell English, then it might be argued that this shows Russell English actually to be an *incomplete* analysis of ordinary English. This may seem odd in the light of the experiment, but suppose that the point of analysis is to make *explicit* what is *implicit* in the use of a certain expression. Now from that point of view, even if we are speaking Russell English, it may be that because of the context-relativity phenomenon we should say that a thoroughly adequate semantic analysis of Russell English should have built into it some element of context-relativity. Of course, in Russell's original analysis no such concession to context-relativity *is* made; but this argument suggests that we have to build it in. Even Sainsbury, as we saw (see ch.10, p.239), admits this. The phenomenon of context-relativity might be held to show that even Russell English has not made properly *explicit* all the relevant features of ordinary English. This reinforces the first argument, for it shows that Kripke's argument establishes only that the outcome is still open; that is, we might accept Russell English as an analysis of English definite descriptions, or we might still reject it in part for this reason.

Third, Kripke might reject that second objection on the ground that it is absurd to suppose that Russell's semantic analysis cannot be a correct analysis of Russell English, so that there is no way that context-relativity could be used to cast doubt on the validity of that semantic analysis. What this reveals is that Kripke is, or may be including in the notion of 'analysis' just what is to count as a 'semantic' explication. In other words his notion of 'analysis' may be said to smuggle in an implicit restriction on what is to count as belonging to semantics, rather than to pragmatics. This suggests that his notion of 'analysis' begs the question against his opponents, since it tacitly imports just the distinction between semantics and pragmatics which is needed to justify his claim that a semantic analysis is a correct analysis of ordinary English.

These criticisms of Kripke's argument, and of his thought experiment, show that the argument is not yet decisive. If the criticisms have weight, then they point to a general conclusion of some importance. I have suggested, at various points in the discussion, that Kripke is in danger of begging the question, because he already *assumes* a sharp, perhaps unrealistic, division between what belongs to semantics and what belongs to pragmatics. Certainly the use he makes of such a distinction is favourable to his own view. The criticisms offered of Kripke suggest that we cannot properly resolve the issue he raises without some *independent*, properly supported, distinction between semantic and pragmatic considerations. The argument, and the thought-experiment, gesture towards a distinction between what belongs to semantics and what belongs to pragmatics, but fail to be conclusive precisely because they need support from such a distinction established on other, independent, grounds. Without that general background support Kripke's position, and the associated problem with Russell's analysis, will remain inconclusive and unresolved. If that general point is correct, then it is not surprising that the thought-experiment achieves less than Kripke thought.

More recently Kripke's view has been queried by Millican who also attempts to provide an account of definite descriptions where the semantic and pragmatic features of language fit together. It is his view which I shall be discussing next.

### 11.3 *Millican's notion of 'salience'*

Millican raises certain objections against Kripke's language experiment. He thinks that Kripke's argument from the language experiment does not provide us with any additional argument to support his position. He believes that Kripke is wrong in suggesting that the meaning of any linguistic expression in the hypothetical language is unaffected by the pragmatic factors because the analysis is stipulated. If it turns out that the speakers of this hypothetical language use some expressions which have been *replaced*

by some other stipulatively defined words, then it does not show that the new replacements express the true meaning of the original expression. On the contrary

... it indicates that such a stipulation is powerless by itself to determine the meaning even of the stipulated replacement, since the meaning of an expression in natural language cannot be divorced from its use, and use is determined not purely by stipulation, but also largely by pragmatic considerations.<sup>47</sup>

Millican raises the objection against Kripke's 'stipulating' that we have a form of Russell English, and stipulating that everything explicit in that form covers an adequate semantic analysis of it. When he objects that Kripke's 'stipulation' is not enough to determine the 'true meaning' of ordinary English expression, he seems to point to the fact that this rests on some prior account of the 'true meaning', on a tacit restriction on what is to count as a semantic explication of ordinary English expressions. If this is right, then his objections echo the third objection just raised against Kripke (see p.263). The suggestion is that Kripke is tacitly drawing a line between semantics and pragmatics really by stipulation. Millican argues that Kripke is not allowed to make a stipulation and then to draw a line because we cannot assume that this arbitrary *stipulation* does fix the 'true meaning' of the ordinary English expression. Millican's point can be reinforced by saying that if it is the job of semantic analysis to make explicit what is implicit in some expression and its uses, then perhaps Russell English requires some additional contextual elements in its semantic analysis. What Kripke is doing is just 'stipulating', and if he does so then he is simply begging the question. So far Millican's objections match those made above.

Now if we accept Millican's view the issue is still quite inconclusive. Kripke has shown only that context-relativity does not 'disprove' a Russellian analysis, and that this *leaves open* the possibility that a Russellian analysis may be wrong. By the same token Millican shows only that Kripke's argument is not decisive., but he does not show that a Russellian analysis is definitely *not* a correct analysis. The issue remains open. The issue might be settled if some *independent* account of the crucial distinction between semantics

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<sup>47</sup>see, Millican, P. "Context, Thought and Definite Descriptions" in *The Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* (64, 1990), p.174.

and pragmatics can be provided, and this point, too, was made earlier. The debate usefully points to this big problem, but neither contributor so far settles it.

In his discussion of semantics and pragmatics one central point that Millican mentions is that the general use of descriptions does not involve the notion of uniqueness, even if we take into account the *context of utterance*. Millican proposes his own account of 'salience' and attempts to produce an account of the way in which the semantic and pragmatic features of definite descriptions are supposed to fit together.

The question that Millican raises can be considered in relation to the utterance in context of

(1) The door is open.

The suggestion is that what is said, according to Russell, in (1) is that there is one and only one door in the universe and it happens to be open. The crucial issue raised by Millican is that in an utterance like (1), the immediate and natural response of the hearer, if interpreted under the Russellian analysis, is to regard the utterance as something straightforwardly false, because there is not only one door in the universe. If it is interpreted in this way, then the Russellian analysis of (1) clearly cannot be accepted. For Millican, what is meant by (1) is that the speaker must have meant one *salient* door and that door is open. The speaker in (1) is not saying that there is only one door in the universe, but that there is one unique door relevant to this particular context. This reinforces the earlier suggestion that Russell's analysis has to be modified to deal with the notion of a particular context. It amounts to Sainsbury's suggestion for dealing with Strawson's objection by relativizing the Russellian analysis of definite descriptions to a particular context. But Millican also offers a more decisive test to see how a *type* of context relativity can be built into Russell's semantic analysis. His argument is intended to cast some doubt on whether Russell's analysis can be rescued by this means.

Millican basically offers three arguments to support his view about 'salience'. First, *salience* itself is inadequate since there are degrees of salience. One has to judge which object is *more* salient than others in a context and this certainly is complicated. Second,

to achieve uniqueness one needs to make an appeal to the *most salient* item in the context. Third, even if the *most salient* item is identified, there is something fundamentally wrong with the Russellian analysis of uniqueness. For the notion of *the most salient* reduces Russell's account to triviality and builds into it a kind of uniqueness which is logically guaranteed. This would be a blow to Russell's theory because a Russellian account requires a uniqueness which is *not* logically guaranteed. Millican argues in the following way:

... if the theory must interpret 'The F is G' as meaning 'There is one and only one *most salient* F, and it is G', then its initial bold claim of uniqueness has already been diluted to the point of non-existence. It is now no longer claiming that there is one and only one F, or indeed one and only one of any type of thing, even in the domain of discussion, since the property of being a *most salient* F is not one which *could* be possessed by more than one thing. Thus the most central feature of the Russellian analysis, namely its claim that 'The F is G' asserts the unique satisfaction of some predicate, is completely cancelled: no substantial assertion of uniqueness is left at all.<sup>48</sup>

The argument suggests that if we interpret (1) as saying that "The most salient door in the context is open", then under Russell's amended analysis this becomes "There is one and only one most salient door and it is open". Millican thinks that this makes the uniqueness claim trivial on the ground that uniqueness is already built into the phrase 'most salient'. So the amended analysis will have a tautological, logically true, component, and he argues that this is at odds with what Russell needs by way of an appeal to uniqueness. For it will turn all the contingent truths expressed by means of definite descriptions into necessary truths.

If Russell's analysis is amended in Millican's terms then it will produce an analysis which would imply that there cannot be more than one object of the same type. Since it is something logically guaranteed, it does not cohere with the requirements of a Russellian analysis. Millican therefore concludes that Russell's analysis cannot be rescued by this device of *salience*. In fact, Millican himself wants to take into account the pragmatic factors which, he thinks, are required in interpreting utterances; and thus the notion of *salience* is introduced. 'Salience' seems to be a kind of pragmatic trigger because when an utterance is made at a particular context, it triggers the appropriate reference which enables one to

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid. pp.178-79.

identify the right object regarded to be unique. In the light of his argument he believes that a required reference to salience cannot be reconciled with a Russellian analysis.

Millican's argument has some weaknesses. He is claiming that there will be a tautological component in the complex conjunction of an amended Russellian analysis. The tautology here is only that of a redundant element in the second component, that is of uniqueness. If this is true that will not make the *whole* analysis logically true, since it has the first component which talks about existence and the third component which says something about the relevant item. *These* two components certainly will not be logically true. Millican puts the analysis of a certain description as

(2) There is one and only one most salient  $\phi$  and it is  $\psi$ .

Now we can construe this analysis in three components:

(a) There is a  $\phi$ ;

(b) There is only one most salient  $\phi$ ;

(c) It is  $\psi$ .

Now (a) and (c) are not vacuous. The only vacuous component, on Millican's argument, is (b). It is already clear that if Millican's attempt does not lead to total vacuity but only to a vacuous component in a three-part analysis, then obviously we cannot say that the whole expression is vacuous. All we can say is that one component of the analysis is vacuous. Construed in this way his argument is vulnerable to the point that only the (b) component is reduced to a tautology.

The general principle operating here is this. Suppose we have a conjunction of a proposition  $Q$  and a logically true proposition  $(P \vee \neg P)$ . Now even if

(3)  $(P \vee \neg P) \ \& \ Q$

contains a logically true component it does not make (3) logically true. On the contrary the truth-value of (3) is equivalent to that of  $Q$  without the redundant element. This suggests that to avoid the peculiarity in (2) is to get rid of (b). Even if (b) is not vacuous in the strict sense, it is true that it contains a redundant element. But we can easily delete the redundant element and then it no longer is vacuous. The position would be like that in

which someone might assert "He is a male bachelor". Though the adjective 'male' is redundant, that does not render the whole statement vacuous. The suggestion is that we do not need the expression 'only one' with the expression 'most salient' and then can easily delete the redundant expression 'only one'. Once we delete the redundant expressions we are not left with any vacuous expression as Millican suggests, and Russell's analysis may still be defended.

Millican's view suggests that he accepts a Russellian semantic analysis as it stands, but then he holds that when we want to apply it in particular contextual cases we have to invoke the notions of context and salience, which are part of the pragmatic application of the analysis. Broadly that fits in with the suggestion that Sainsbury, Kripke, Levinson, and others, make which is that Russell's semantic analysis needs to be supplemented by further pragmatic considerations. According to Millican, if we attempt to adjust the semantic analysis to deal with this issue of context then we would simply reach a dead end. The suggestion is that we do not bring the notion of 'salience' directly into the semantic analysis, but treat it as part of the additional pragmatic factors which would enable us to interpret definite descriptive phrases in their appropriate conversational contexts. This would work if we make a fundamental distinction between the role of semantic principles and the role of pragmatic principles. Millican's view suggests that the semantic principles go into a formal logical analysis, and the pragmatic ones operate on a different level. According to Millican we have to use additional pragmatic principles in order to make Russell's semantic analysis fit the ordinary conversational interpretation. But then, the suggestion is that there is some value in not bringing these principles directly into the semantic analysis, because they have a different kind of interpretation and different kind of role, and operate on a different theoretical level. A similar view is also produced by Bach.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>I have argued against Millican's position on the basis of the interpretation of his article assumed in the text. That interpretation seems consistent with what Millican says in his article, and it is not at all clear what other interpretation might be given. However, it is possible that he wanted to make a different point about the redundancy involved in speaking of 'the most salient' item corresponding to a descriptive phrase. It may be that he would be prepared to accept that that redundancy does not render the whole Russellian analysis tautological, but that it does vitiate the attempt to solve the problem of uniqueness within the framework of Russell's semantic analysis. That is, Millican's view may be that even the

#### 11.4 *Bach's distinction between semantics and pragmatics*

Kent Bach also attempts to make a sharp distinction between semantics and pragmatics. He agrees with Kripke that Donnellan's view cannot be considered as a criticism of Russell's description theory. Bach, in his attempt to defend Russell is critical of Kripke's idea of incomplete descriptions. According to Kripke in the sentence

(1) The table is covered with dust.

the uniqueness claim in the context is not captured by the description itself, and Russell's theory is threatened by the idea of incomplete descriptions. Kripke says,

Contrary to the Russellian picture, I doubt that such description can always be regarded as elliptical with some uniquely satisfying conditions added.<sup>50</sup>

He thinks that incomplete definite descriptions like 'the table' in (1) create a difficulty for the Russellian analysis and he finds it

... somewhat tempting to assimilate such descriptions to the corresponding demonstratives (for example, "that table") ...<sup>51</sup>

Kripke's view suggests that the utterance of an incomplete description, under a Russellian analysis, is to be interpreted at the level of what the speaker means in terms of some complete, or more complete, description. He is anxious to assimilate such descriptions to corresponding demonstratives, because they are also typically in need of some additional material to complete the reference. This is similar to Peacocke's claim that definite descriptions sometimes can be said to be rigid designators when they function as

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redundancy of the uniqueness component is enough to show that Russell's analysis cannot be rescued by further semantic analysis, but needs a further appeal to pragmatic principles of the kind noted above. On this account Millican's conclusion that there is a pragmatic element in the use of definite descriptions seems plausible, and even uncontentious. What is contentious is the proper dividing line between a semantic and a pragmatic account, and the adequacy of Millican's argument construed in this new way. I make two points quite summarily. First nothing in Millican's argument points to any clear, well grounded, distinction between semantic and pragmatic considerations. What it does is only to gesture in that direction. Second the argument formally depends upon a demonstration that no other semantic analysis of the uniqueness condition is available, and this requirement is not met by Millican either. What emerges from his careful survey of the use of definite descriptions is only a plausible appeal to the semantic and pragmatic distinction, rather than a clear demonstration that Russell's analysis *cannot* accommodate any reference to salience.

<sup>50</sup>op.cit. Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference", p.255.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid. p.271.

demonstrative expressions in a certain context.

Bach argues that Kripke's criticism of incomplete descriptions does not fit into Russell's analysis of descriptions, because what the *speaker* means is different from what the *sentence* means. In a Russellian analysis (1) is true just in case there is one and only one table and it is covered with dust. According to Bach an utterance like (1) is standardly used non-literally so that the speaker means something different from the sentence's literal meaning. He argues,

Russell's theory is concerned with the meaning of such sentences, not their use, and surely it is not a *semantic* fact that there is more than one table in the universe.<sup>52</sup>

Bach insists that the semantic significance of the sentence does not depend upon the completeness or incompleteness of the definite description itself. If the speaker's utterance is assessed in terms of its complete or incomplete description, then it is being assessed in a way that goes beyond literal significance. He concludes that Kripke's criticism points to a specifically *pragmatic* factor which is irrelevant to Russell's *semantic* analysis.

There are however two related points in Bach's quote that seem odd. One is the notion of a 'semantic fact' which is not quite clear. We might draw a distinction between what belongs to semantics which is to do with the meaning, and what belongs to fact which is not determined by meaning. So the idea of a semantic fact seems to bring these two things together. This may, however, be just a terminological defect. What Bach has in mind is evidently that it is not a matter of semantics, or language, that the universe contains more than one table. It is not obvious that this is enough to defend Russell's analysis.

The other related point is to reconsider the strength of this objection to Russell. It is true that it is not a matter of language that the universe contains only one table, but the objection to Russell's analysis is that it claims that the semantic content of (1) comes out blatantly false. Indeed almost all non-mathematical propositions with definite descriptions will come out similarly false. The objection to Russell is that his analysis

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<sup>52</sup>op. cit. Bach, *Thought and Reference*, p.103.

commits him to the view that most utterances with definite descriptions are plainly false, and it might be said that this is a clearly distorted account of the truth-conditions we normally associate with those utterances. In a similar way if someone proposes that "... is deciduous" means "... is not coniferous" then this semantic analysis confronts the botanical fact that there are trees which are both coniferous and deciduous. Bach's argument is, therefore, weak but we have in any case seen good reason, from Sainsbury and Millican, to consider the implied suggestion that Russell's analysis needs to be supplemented with a pragmatic, contextual, account.

Bach believes Donnellan's account of the referential/attributive distinction is ambiguous, and that the distinction considers the description sentence only at the level of *use*. For all these reasons Bach therefore thinks that the distinction is irrelevant to Russell's semantic account. Donnellan's idea that a description sentence is not ambiguous but can be used in two different ways suggests, according to Bach, that both of these uses are literal. At a preliminary stage Bach claims that only the attributive use can be counted as literal where the speaker asserts a uniqueness proposition about whatever fits uniquely the description used. He further claims that referential uses also involve attributive uses so that the two uses do not exclude each other. In that case the referential use can also be used non-literally. The suggestion is that the speaker not only asserts a singular proposition about the object referred to in the referential use but he also asserts a uniqueness proposition about whatever or whoever fits the description. Bach argues that when the speaker asserts "Smith's murderer is insane" in the referential use the speaker refers to a certain man, for example, 'Jones' even if the description is not true of the man. Later in the trial room if Jones is not found guilty of murdering Smith, still observing his strange behaviour, the speaker may assert that he is insane. The speaker now will be withdrawing his earlier description 'Smith's murderer' as true of Jones, but then this

... does not show that when he uttered ...[Smith's murderer is insane] he did not mean that whoever murdered Smith is insane. Quite the contrary, he is now taking back ... [Smith's murderer is insane] because he *did* mean

that.<sup>53</sup>

Donnellan, in his account argues that in the attributive case if

... nothing is the  $\phi$  then nothing has been said to be  $\psi$ . In the second [referential case], the fact that nothing is the  $\phi$  does not have this consequence.<sup>54</sup>

Donnellan's view suggests that in the attributive use if nothing fits the description then nothing has been said; whereas in the referential case even if the description does not fit, yet a reference is being made to the intended object. For Bach, in the attributive use *something is still being said* even if the description fails to satisfy any object, which then shows that Donnellan's literal use of attributive description can be used non-literally. He considers a case where a spy is asked by his boss to deliver a message at a party to "the man drinking martini", that is to whoever has that property. Now the boss may use this expression attributively and successfully even where he knows that the man in question is not actually drinking martini but is drinking a martini-coloured liquid in a martini glass. He may reason that it is better for the spy to use the false description, attributively, for the purposes of identification than to get involved in the complexities of the true circumstances. For Bach such a case shows that even attributive uses do not 'say nothing' when the description is false, and so also have a non-literal communicative role.<sup>55</sup>

Bach also claims that Donnellan's referential use can be explained non-literally when it asserts a general claim like that involved in attributive use. For Donnellan, in the 'Smith's murderer' example, even if the man in the dock is not guilty of murdering Smith, the speaker may succeed in identifying that man as insane. The speaker may also be taken to be referring, in that case, not to the man in the dock but to the real murderer, whoever he happens to be. On his account it is clear that we may interpret the utterance in either way, whatever the speaker's intention may have been. Bach uses this point to introduce

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid. p.102.

<sup>54</sup>op.cit. Donnellan, "Reference And Definite Descriptions", p.287.

<sup>55</sup>The case is similar to one outlined earlier in the discussion of Kripke (see note 44, p.259).

his distinction between 'saying' and 'asserting'. He holds that,

... the courtroom observer is not *saying* that the man in the dock is insane but that Smith's murderer is insane. However, he is *asserting* that the man in the dock is insane, for that is who he is referring to.<sup>56</sup>

This rests on a clear distinction between *saying* something about an object and stating or *asserting* something about an object. One suggestion is that 'saying' may be regarded as a 'literal' use and 'asserting' as a 'non-literal' use.

Bach nevertheless agrees that Donnellan is right to claim that the speaker is not saying *that* the man in the dock is insane, but is saying *of* the man in the dock that he is insane. What Bach wishes to insist on is that what the speaker *says* is, or may be, different from what the speaker *states* or *asserts*. He trades on Austin's distinction between 'locutionary' and 'illocutionary' acts and argues,

... stating is an illocutionary act, and referring is a component of illocutionary acts. Saying is a locutionary act and does not include the speaker's act of referring. At that level expressions refer, i.e. denote, and in ... [this] case ... 'Smith's murderer' refers to the individual who murdered Smith.<sup>57</sup>

This suggests that Bach draws a clear distinction between semantics and pragmatics and fits Donnellan's account into the latter. He admits that Donnellan does not use the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts, but then Donnellan's account does not succeed in drawing the referential and attributive distinction without that apparatus. Donnellan's referential use is just another way of showing that a *speaker* can refer to some object even if the *description* is not true of the object. We have seen before that commentators, like Kripke, have wanted to draw a distinction between *semantic* and *speaker* reference. Bach accepts this and wants to support it with his distinction between 'saying' and 'asserting', and his appeal to Austin's contrast between locutionary and illocutionary acts. He consequently wants to draw the conclusion that Donnellan's distinction does not belong to semantics and was intended to contribute to the pragmatic use of definite descriptions. He says, for example,

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<sup>56</sup>op.cit. Bach, *Thought and Reference*, p.113.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid. p.113.

... Donnellan has given no reason to think that description sentences are ambiguous and can be used to say (in the strict, locutionary sense) two different things.<sup>58</sup>

Donnellan ... himself presents the distinction as between two *uses* of definite descriptions and explicitly doubts that it generates any semantic ambiguity.<sup>59</sup>

In these passages Bach makes make it clear that Donnellan does not succeed in demonstrating a strict *ambiguity* in definite descriptions, but in any case wished only to point to the other features of their pragmatic use. In this way although Bach sides with Kripke and Sainsbury in wanting to defend Russell's analysis as a semantic theory he is also prepared to defend Donnellan against the charge that he blurred the distinction between a semantic and a pragmatic account. It is also true that Bach's view offers a defence of the claim that definite descriptions should be given a *uniform* semantic analysis. In this way he also offers further support to McCulloch's view that we should avoid an account which allows definite descriptions to have mixed, or different, analyses.

We saw earlier that McCulloch's arguments for that claim were open to criticism. It was suggested there that McCulloch's preference for a uniform analysis along Russellian, rather Strawsonian, lines was by no means conclusive. The question arises: Does Bach's contribution add substantial support to that uniformity view? Two grounds can be offered for thinking that he does not provide such substantial support. Both have to do with his crucial distinction between 'saying' and 'stating' or 'asserting'.

The first point raises the question whether Bach's own account of this distinction is quite clear. If we consider his central case, where the speaker refers to the man in the dock as Smith's murderer, even though the description is not true of him, it remains uncertain how we should separate what was 'said' from what was 'stated' or 'asserted'. We might claim, against Bach, that what was *stated* was that Smith's murderer is insane, and that what was *said* was that the man in the dock was insane. This might seem perverse, but the point is that our intuitions simply do not point in one direction unequivocally. The

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid. p.114.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. p.108.

distinction between 'saying' and 'stating' needs some independent support if it is to carry the weight of Bach's conclusion.

That independent support is evidently intended to be given by Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. However valuable that distinction was in initiating a pragmatic theory of speech acts, it cannot be denied that the distinction has been heavily criticised.<sup>60</sup> It is perhaps, part of a continuing effort to draw a clear distinction between what belongs to semantics and what belongs to pragmatics, but it could not be said to have settled the issue. It would be too much at this stage to consider these criticisms, but I outline one central difficulty which Austin's theory faces.

Austin's distinction between locutions and illocutions placed what he calls 'sense and reference'<sup>61</sup> under the former and speech acts, such as stating or asserting, under the latter. The idea was that sense and reference would fix the semantic content of some utterance, while a speech act verb would indicate the type of use made of that content. Such a distinction fails to match Bach's division on both sides. It is clear that under reference we need to distinguish between 'semantic' reference and 'pragmatic' speaker reference. The notion of reference already contains a division between semantics and pragmatics; it cannot by itself be used to ground that distinction. The position is no better on the other side. There is no clear distinction in Austin between a semantic 'saying' and a pragmatic 'stating' or 'asserting'. When Austin comes to draw a distinction between what he calls 'uttering a rheme' and performing a speech act, notoriously, he blurs the distinction between them.<sup>62</sup> Once again the contrast on which Bach relies needs clarification itself. As it stands it does not serve to clarify the distinctions to be made between aspects of the use of definite descriptions.

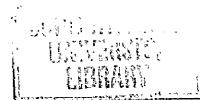
What emerges from this examination of critics and defenders of Russell's analysis

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<sup>60</sup>for Austin's criticisms see, Searle, J. *Speech Acts* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969).

<sup>61</sup>Austin's use of this Fregean terminology was quite different from Frege's.

<sup>62</sup>see, Austin, J.L. *How To Do Things With Words* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1962, 2nd edition 1975).  
see also op.cit. Searle, *Speech Acts*.



of definite descriptions is that the issue remains largely unresolved. It is true that the main weaknesses in that analysis have by now been extensively discussed. It is also clear that Russell can be defended, even though some of the defences have been criticised above. Those defences depend heavily upon a distinction between a semantic *content* and a pragmatic *use* of expressions. Those distinctions emerge very naturally from the discussion of Russell's theory, but they need independent clarification and support. For one thing the semantic/pragmatic distinction, natural though it is, involves all expressions in language and not just definite descriptions. To base such a distinction just on definite descriptions, and primarily for the purpose of defending Russell, gets things the wrong way round. To determine adequately whether Russell can be defended requires an independent account of the semantic/pragmatic distinction.

**PART SIX**  
**CONCLUDING SUMMARY**

### SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

The thesis has now surveyed the central aspects of Russell's theory of meaning as he presented it in PLA. It is clear that Russell's theory, however, is not simply a contribution to semantics. On the contrary it covers epistemology, psychology, logic, philosophy of logic, and metaphysics and ontology as well. In the more specific context of language and meaning the thesis has examined Russell's theory in its application to names and descriptions. At various stages in the survey, and sometimes following other commentators, it has been shown that the complexities with which Russell surrounded his account of meaning make it vulnerable to criticism. For the most part I have not been able to defend Russell from these criticisms, and have been content to indicate how his theory might still preserve value if the background commitments, for example in epistemology, are rejected. This is, broadly, the attitude which some recent commentators have adopted in partially defending Russell. I have noted those defences and tried to indicate where there is still room for further exploration of the resulting positions. Now it is time to pull some of the central threads together to summarise the overall implications of the survey.

One partial gap in the treatment of Russell's position might be mentioned here, if only for the sake of completeness. Although Russell in PLA clearly wished to construct an adequate metaphysics, or ontology, on the basis of his logic and semantics, little has been said of this direction of his interest. There is some reason for this neglect of what was nevertheless for Russell a central part of his enterprise in that work. For unlike some aspects of the epistemology which Russell brought to bear on his account of meaning, the ontology was primarily a consequence of that account rather than a factor contributing to it. There are other, less creditable, reasons for such a neglect. The attempt to reconstruct an ontology, like a traditional metaphysics but based on the superior apparatus of the

Russell-Frege logic, fits rather uneasily onto Russell's hostile attitude to traditional metaphysics as it is exemplified in his break from a Bradleyan philosophy. It must have been tempting for him not merely to give up that traditional activity, but rather to carry it out for the first time with the proper rigour and an adequate basis of the kind he thought his logic would provide.

It remains uncertain, though, whether he would not have done better to renounce the tradition and to have confined himself to semantics and logic in something closer to the way that Frege had done. Such a view is reinforced by considering the weakness of the inference Russell wished to draw from his account of language to claims about what really exists. Essentially Russell's view was that all complex elements in our language must be analysable into their constituent atoms, atomic propositions and the elementary names of which they are composed. All that was needed to reconstruct the complexities of language on this basis was the apparatus of truth functional logic. Now even Russell recognised, for example in the case of belief sentences and general claims, that such a truth functional analysis had not been provided by him and remained a puzzle. There is another reason for querying his ontological conclusions even if such a truth functional programme is accepted. The idea that we could 'read off' a list of real existents from the list of elementary names which make up atomic propositions is open to at least two objections. Firstly, as Russell himself recognised, such an inference requires an additional premiss of the form of what he called 'Ockham's razor', namely the principle that we should avoid multiplying entities beyond necessity. Secondly that principle still scarcely justifies the inferences Russell wished to draw from it. Ockham's razor expresses a natural human desire for economy and simplicity in our own view of reality. It does not follow from this that reality itself has to follow the same principle. That we do not need to postulate anything other than certain basic atoms in order to reconstruct the complexity of our language does not establish that reality consists of nothing but those atoms. Russell can, no doubt, be defended against such a criticism, but it still demonstrates the need for a further explanation of the ontological side of his philosophy.

In one respect, however, Russell's ontology, or rather his common sense view of what exists, had a direct connection with his semantics. For in PLA, as in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, one of Russell's central ideas was that the logical constants do not name any corresponding objects. This belief must have come as a considerable relief to Russell for two reasons. First because as the earlier discussion has shown (see Pt.1, ch.1 and 2) Russell oscillated at various times between a very parsimonious Bradleyan ontology and an excessively rich Meinongean metaphysics. To be able at least to exclude from reality most of the logical scaffolding needed to construct a complex language must have been a welcome metaphysical simplification. The welcome must have been all the more sincere since it enabled Russell plausibly to retain his simple overall account of meaning which focusses on the relation between names and objects. If Russell had had no reason to deny that logical particles were also names, then he might have been led to wonder whether his accounts of meaning and naming could be correct.

Russell, of course, faced other reasons for doubting the correctness of his basic semantic apparatus, and here we find the first of Russell's dubious steps in semantics. For to cling to a referential theory of meaning required him to reject Frege's more complicated semantics, and in particular to reject Frege's notion of 'Sinn': or at least he thought so. In examining that rejection, however, I have suggested that Russell's arguments were either inadequate or still obscure, and that this is true even of the more recent attempts to defend him by reconstructing the argument. Even those, like Evans, who have wanted to defend some of Russell's principal claims have nevertheless argued that he could, and should, have added the dimension of sense to his basic notion of reference or naming. As Evans shows to take such a step is not only compatible with an appeal to naming, but it is also compatible with placing much of the weight of a theory of meaning on that notion. For, as we have seen, Evans's account of Frege's theory still places more weight on the notion of 'Bedeutung' than on that of 'Sinn'. I have offered no reason to dissent from Evans's view that with that Fregean apparatus Russell would have been able to put sufficient weight on the notion of naming, but would also have avoided handicapping himself as a result of

making no room for the further notion of sense.

It was suggested above that Russell might have done better to avoid commitment to any traditional metaphysics, and the same might be said of his commitment to traditional epistemology. For it has been widely held that Russell's adherence to a traditional empiricism, as well as to a residual Cartesianism, was responsible for some of the least plausible aspects of his semantic theory. This appears, as the thesis has suggested, most clearly over the interpretation of Russell's Principle of Acquaintance, which led him to think that the basic atoms of language must be names of private sense-data, and so led him into the traditional trap of supposing that a public language could be based solely on such private sense-data together with the apparatus of a sophisticated logic. The criticisms of this commitment seem entirely right, and encourage the view that he would have been better off without that unquestioned commitment to the tradition. Russell, as I have suggested, was at least right in insisting that any adequate semantic theory must have an epistemological, even a psychological, dimension. It was not this belief that causes the problems, but rather the special nature of the traditional epistemology that he inherited and accepted.

It should be made clear, however, that I have offered no reasons for rejecting the traditional epistemology which Russell endorsed, and have not attempted to demonstrate its falsity. Rather the point is that such an association with a theory of semantics tends to make the latter theory unpalatable or unworkable. The objection is that the traditional commitment led Russell's account in a direction away from the actual circumstances of natural language and its features. Whether those traditional views are in the end right or wrong, at least Russell might have queried them, and might have altered his conception of language if he had done so. It is ironic that a philosopher like Kant, whom Russell thought a disaster to philosophy, nevertheless sought to query the same tradition which Russell endorsed and which led him astray in his account of meaning and language. I have noted that some later commentators, like Sainsbury and Evans have sought to improve Russell's position by revising it in a framework in which those traditional commitments

are rejected. There can be no doubt that this is the better way to approach Russell, and to throw light on the role of natural language.

A commitment to traditional epistemology was not the only motive which led Russell away from natural language. As has been often noted, for example by Strawson, Russell was led in the same direction by his wish to employ the technical apparatus of logic in accounting for natural language. Russell was clearly prepared to accept that where natural language and formal logic diverged the latter was to be preferred. Two aspects of Russell's theory bring this out clearly. The first has to do with his references to logic as a perfect, or perhaps 'ideal' language; and the second has to do with the account Russell gave of LP names.

The first of these aspects of Russell's theory has been stressed at various points in the thesis. It has been suggested that there are two different ways of construing Russell's view, one which is open to serious objections and another which avoids these objections. It is by no means obvious how Russell himself conceived of his logic as a perfect language, for his own response is ambiguous. Sometimes he spoke in this way as if logic provides a rival to natural language, and a rival which remedies the imperfections of natural language. Yet on other occasions he was plainly aware of the oddity of comparing a formal system like logic to natural language. For he admitted that his 'perfect' language is unusable, and is 'perfect' only so far as its syntax is concerned. For all this ambiguity, however, the two views present quite different pictures both of logic and indeed of natural language too. In the first view a full interpretation of logic with its perfect syntax supplemented with a strict vocabulary of atomic names represents a genuine language superior to any natural language. As is well known, such an account is open to serious objections. For one thing, coupled with the handicap of a traditional epistemology, such a language has the greatest difficulty in identifying the basic atoms and in explaining how such a basis could be used for genuine communication. For another, as Russell himself realised, the requirement that LP names should have no descriptive content also made it just as difficult to identify those basic atoms.

The second perspective, however, offers more hope. In that second view Russell's perfect language is not intended as a rival to natural language, but rather as an abstract theory which idealises the central aspects of natural language, such as naming. In that view it is no more of an objection to the notion of a LP name that we cannot exemplify any such names in natural language than it is to the notion of a 'perfect' gas that we cannot find such a gas in nature. In both cases, however, the conception of a 'perfect' name, or that of a 'perfect' gas, may have a valuable role to play in constructing an idealised theory of language or physics. In that case Russell's LP names are not real names, still less perfect names; rather they are theoretical devices used to mark the abstract function of naming. It was pointed out in the earlier discussion of names and descriptions, for example, that we might have difficulties in finding pure names in natural language which involved no reference to descriptive material. This is so not only because we often construct names from descriptions, but also for the deeper reason, to which Russell responded, that even arbitrary, non-descriptive, names are learned, introduced, and used in contexts where the bearers can be identified through descriptive resources. Perhaps this led Russell to exaggerate the connection by supposing that all OP names are abbreviated descriptions, though he had other motives for such a view. For present purposes it is necessary only to point out this link, however formulated, between names and descriptions. However, even if it is true that we cannot totally separate actual names from description, we still want to claim that naming and describing are distinct aspects of language. The suggestion is that it is this abstract separation which Russell intended when he spoke of LP names and distinguished them from descriptions. To view his theory in this way is to avoid the earlier objections to the alternative view, and helps to understand the attempts of commentators like Evans to find some residual value in Russell's theory. Although these commentators have not expressed their aim in this way I have been inclined in the thesis to account for their efforts in a similar fashion.

Another, very large, issue which Russell's theory raises, and which I have noted, is the division within a linguistic theory between those aspects which belong to semantics

and those which belong to pragmatics. As I have noted that issue arises most obviously in the context of Russell's famous theory of descriptions and of the extensive discussion which has resulted from it. Many criticisms of that theory have focused, as Strawson's or Donnellan's criticisms have, on the distance between Russell's formal theory and the actual use of definite descriptions in natural language. Such criticisms raise again the earlier points about Russell's preference for formal over natural language. They also raise the additional question about how a linguistic theory is to delimit the scope of semantics from a pragmatic dimension. If the arguments given are correct then this general issue cannot be resolved just by appealing to the use of definite descriptions. The division between semantic content and pragmatic use will arise for all linguistic expressions. It is not one confined just to descriptions, but will affect names, predicates, and other expressions such as logical particles.<sup>1</sup> There is a second reason, too. It was pointed out that there is serious danger of question-begging if an account of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics is held to depend on acceptance or rejection of Russell's theory of descriptions. It seems that the better way would be to have good independent grounds for drawing that distinction in order, then, to make some evaluation of the success or failure of Russell's theory. Although such a procedure seems correct, nevertheless it has to be admitted that there is currently no clear, adequate, distinction to be drawn on independent grounds between semantic content and pragmatic use. I finally, therefore, offer a sketch of some of the difficulties inherent in attempting to draw such a distinction.

There is a variety of terms and distinctions which have been used to mark a division between semantic and pragmatic features of language.<sup>2</sup> Among these the most natural, but inadequate, markers have been the general distinction between language and

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<sup>1</sup>Grice's explicit account of pragmatics originated in his recognition that logical particles have a core, semantic, truth functional, meaning but also additional contextual, interpretative features. To say "They got married and had a child" is different from saying "They had a child and got married", but for Grice the difference occurs at the pragmatic level and not at the semantic. For Grice the two sentences share a common semantic content defined by the truth functional account of conjunction.

<sup>2</sup>op.cit. Levinson, *Pragmatics*, ch.I, pp.1-53. Levinson attempts to give a definition of pragmatics by showing a contrast with semantics. In this regard he examines a set of possible definitions of pragmatics and finally thinks that it is really difficult to provide a clear definition of pragmatics because it involves some elements of semantics.

speech or discourse, the contrast between a context-independent and a context-dependent feature, and the notion of a given, semantic, language content contrasted with that of the 'use' of that content. Behind all these attempts lies a general distinction between, for example, sentences and statements, or sentences and utterances, or even sentences and propositions. All of these inter-related aspects point intuitively to the kind of distinction required, but every one of them needs careful and extensive elucidation if it is to mark that distinction properly.

The contrast between language and speech goes naturally with a contrast between sentences, and their semantic, linguistic, content on one side and the use or utterance of such contents on the other. These general distinctions, however, run against the general difficulty that the properties we ascribe to semantic content are ultimately based on features of language use. If it is true that our ascription of a strict meaning to an expression depends upon the ways in which that expression is used in a linguistic community, then these ways of marking the required distinction need additional support. For then the contrast between a semantic property, ascribed on the basis of use, and a pragmatic property also ascribed on the basis of use, cannot draw on the simple notion of 'use' itself. Such a lesson has been well learned since Wittgenstein encouraged an account of meaning in terms of 'use',<sup>3</sup> and it became clear that the concept of 'use' was simply not discriminating enough to provide an account of meaning on its own.

The same difficulty arises over the idea of 'context'. Even strictly semantic aspects, such as that of semantic reference, cannot be divorced from the context in which the expressions are used. Despite the fact that demonstratives rely upon context to fix their reference this does not prevent them from being treated within the framework of semantics. On the contrary, as we have seen, versions of semantic theory have become 'contextualised' in order to accommodate such expressions. Just as it is difficult, if not impossible, totally to separate semantic content from use, so the idea of a *wholly* 'context-

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<sup>3</sup>For Wittgenstein, "the meaning of a word is its use in the language". see, op.cit. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p.20<sup>6</sup>

independent' feature of language is difficult to accept. The point here is not that these terms and distinctions have no value in marking the general contrast between semantics and pragmatics; on the contrary, they seem all to be entirely natural resources. The difficulty is rather that they do not mark the distinction adequately without considerable further elucidation. The appeal to intuition in this context is inadequate.

More technical appeals to intention, as in Grice's 'communication-intention' account of meaning<sup>4</sup>, or to the notion of a truth-condition, look more promising, but remain still inadequate. With regard to the former it should be remembered that in Grice's theory intention was designed to explain the phenomena of *semantic* content, and of the linguistic conventions which institute such a content. In other words his concept of 'intention' was not designed to draw a distinction between semantics and pragmatics, but was intended to be the basis from which both aspects of language use derived. In a different way we have seen at various stages the need for a distinction between what a speaker intended by his utterance and what the expression uttered meant. The discussion of Sainsbury and Donnellan in the context of definite descriptions clearly exemplified this distinction. Although such a contrast can be usefully drawn it evidently already relies upon some grasp of what it is that an expression means, as opposed to what it is that the speaker may have meant in uttering it. We have an intuitive grasp of such a distinction, but we need more than that. Even the notion of a truth-condition does not meet the requirement without question. We saw earlier, for example, that Donnellan at least was willing to attach truth values to what a speaker said precisely on the basis of what was meant rather than on the basis of what the expressions meant. It would be wrong to exaggerate the shortcomings of the notion of a truth-condition in this context. In some ways Gazdar's formula that pragmatics is meaning minus truth-conditions has considerable appeal.<sup>5</sup> But that it too is inadequate can be seen from the fact that it deploys in its definition a so far unelucidated notion of 'meaning' which contains both semantic and pragmatic aspects.

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<sup>4</sup>see, Grice, H.P., "Meaning" in *The Philosophical Review*, LXVI, 1957.

<sup>5</sup>op.cit. Levinson, *Pragmatics*, p.12.

Even if it were clear how the notion of a truth-condition marked out an area of strict semantics it would still remain unclear how far Gazdar's wider notion of 'meaning' ranges. Of course, we have seen already that the notion of a truth-condition itself faces problems in relation to contextualisation, but the wider range of meaning remains problematic. That Gazdar uses the very notion of 'meaning' to mark this wider range indicates the extent of the problem.

It is not the intention of this thesis to resolve that general issue. It is mentioned in order to show how at a crucial point Russell's theory of meaning points to a serious problem rather than to a ready-made solution. Nor is it the intention to complain that Russell himself did not resolve the problem. It seems likely that Russell was at best half aware of the difficulty, and certain that he never faced the issue as directly as his successors. There are, as the thesis has indicated, and as other commentators have made clear, many real weaknesses and faults in Russell's own explicit account of his theory. Even the later commentators who have sought to rescue some aspects of Russell's thought have so far not been able to resolve the general difficulty of separating semantics from pragmatics. It would be unfair to criticise Russell for his failure to resolve it in the light of our lack of a resolution many years after Russell had constructed his theory. On the contrary it is a merit in Russell that his theory should throw up in such a stark form the need for such a resolution.

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