

On Referring and Not Referring

KENT BACH

Referring is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do.

P. F. Strawson (1950)

Even though it's based on a bad argument, there's something to Strawson's dictum. He might have likened 'referring expression' to phrases like 'eating utensil' and 'dining room': just as utensils don't eat and dining rooms don't dine, so, he might have argued, expressions don't refer. Actually, that wasn't his argument, though it does make you wonder. Rather, Strawson exploited the fact that almost any referring expression, whether an indexical, demonstrative, proper name, or definite description, can be used to refer to different things in different contexts. This fact, he argued, is enough to show that what refers are speakers, not expressions. Here he didn't take seriously the perfectly coherent view that an expression's reference can vary with context. So, he concluded, what varies from context to context is not what a given expression refers to but what a speaker uses it to refer to. Strawson went on to suggest that there are several dimensions of difference between various sorts of referring expressions: degree of dependence on context, degree of "descriptive meaning," and being governed by a general vs. an expression-specific convention. But despite these differences, he insisted that regardless of kind, referring expressions don't themselves refer — speakers use them to refer.

Strawson's dictum flies in the face of common philosophical lore. It is generally assumed, and occasionally argued, that there is indeed a class of referring expressions — indexicals, demonstratives, and proper names — and that they aren't just eminently capable of being used to refer, which nobody can deny, but that they themselves refer, albeit relative to contexts. There is general consensus that at least some referring expressions do this, but there is considerable dispute about which ones. It is rare to find a philosopher who includes indefinite descriptions among referring expressions, but some are liberal enough to include definite descriptions. Some reject definites but include demonstrative descriptions (complex demonstratives) on their list. Some balk at descriptions of any kind referring but have no qualms about proper names. Some have doubts about proper names referring, but readily include indexicals and simple demonstratives. Anyhow, I can't recall anyone actually responding to Strawson's argument. Instead, what I've observed is that philosophers slide down a verbal slippery slope something like this:

Slippery slide

Madonna (referring to Britney Spears): "She is ambitious."

Madonna is using 'she' to refer to Britney.

Madonna's use (or utterance) of 'she' refers to Britney.

The token of 'she' produced by Madonna refers to Britney.

'She', as used by Madonna, refers to Britney.

‘She’ (relative to the context of its use by Madonna) refers to Britney.

Notice the key intermediate phase of this slide, where Madonna’s use of ‘she’ is said to refer. Uses don’t refer.

With this slippery slide in mind, from now on (except when discussing others’ views) instead of using ‘referring expression’ I’ll use the marginally better phrase ‘singular term’ for expressions that can be used to refer. This phrase is only marginally better because there is also a tradition to use ‘singular term’ for the natural-language counterparts of individual constants in logic. This tradition excludes definite descriptions from counting as singular terms, at least from the perspective of anyone who has learned the lesson of Russell’s (1905) theory of descriptions (however problematic the details of his formulation of it). But using ‘singular term’ at least has the advantage that I won’t have to say that some referring expressions don’t refer. By ‘reference’ I will mean singular reference only (I will not be considering whether general terms refer and, if so, to what), and when I describe a use as nonreferential, I will not mean that reference fails but that there is no attempt to refer.¹

In this paper, I will be making a number of points about reference, both speaker reference and linguistic (or semantic) reference. The bottom line is simple: reference ain’t easy — at least not as easy as commonly supposed. Or so it seems to me. Much of what speakers do that passes for reference is really something else, and much of what passes for linguistic reference is really nothing more than speaker reference. But here’s a running disclaimer: I do not pretend that the data, observations, or even the arguments presented here are conclusive. I do think they support what might fairly be regarded as default hypotheses about speaker reference and linguistic reference. So if you think these hypotheses are wrong, you need to show that. You need to argue against them and to find a way to accommodate or explain away the data and the observations.

We’ll take up speaker reference first. Referring is one of the basic things we do with words, and it would be a good idea to understand what that involves and requires before worrying about the linguistic means by which this is done. Then we’ll focus on expressions that are used to refer. Considering what speakers do when they refer and why, as well as the linguistic resources available to them when they do it, provides a more realistic and, if I may exploit a convenient ambiguity here, a more pragmatic way of appreciating the use of singular terms to refer. It also permits a fresh look on their semantics, one that does not unduly rely on intuitions that are uncritically assumed to be responsive to semantic facts. So, for example, we won’t just assume that because, as Mill observed, a proper name is an “unmeaning mark which we connect in our minds with the idea of the object, in order that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts, we may think of that individual object” (1872: 22), the semantic value or propositional

¹ Although our topic is singular reference, there is a broad sense in which every expression refers (or at least every expression that has a semantic value that contributes to the propositional content of sentences in which it occurs). There is also the question of which expressions have such semantic values or, to put it differently, which syntactic units are semantic units. The most famous instance of this question concerns definite descriptions. Russell’s answer was that they are not semantic units. Although he granted that definite descriptions have denotations of sorts, according to his theory of descriptions they “disappear on analysis” and are therefore semantically inert. This does not follow from the fact (or alleged fact, if Delia Graff (2001) is correct) that they are quantifier phrases, because quantifier phrases can be, and nowadays often are, treated as semantic units whose semantic values are properties of properties (with the determiners they contain having two-place relations between properties as their semantic values). In any case, the phrase ‘referring expression’ is ordinarily limited to any expression whose propositional contribution is its referent (if it has one).

contribution of a proper name is that which it names. We won't jump to Mill's conclusion that the semantic function of proper names is "to enable individuals to be made the subject of discourse" and that names are 'attached to the objects themselves, and are not dependent on ... any attribute of the object'." Similar restraint is in order for indexicals and demonstratives.

Philosophers who write on singular terms generally start with intuitions about the semantic values or propositional contributions of various singular term and proceed from there. I'm going to start with common uses of singular terms and, by the time we get from speaker reference to linguistic reference, raise questions about the semantics of singular terms with these common uses in mind. Here are the main points to be made:

Speaker reference

- S0 Speaker reference is a four-place relation, between a speaker, an expression, an audience, and a referent: you use an expression to refer someone to something.
- S1 To be in a position to refer to something (or to understand a reference to it) requires being able to have singular thoughts about it, and that requires perceiving it, being informed of it, or (having perceived or been informed of it) remembering it.
- S2 To refer an audience to something involves expressing a singular proposition about it.
- S3 To succeed in referring to something in using a certain expression requires getting them to think of it (and generally to grasp a singular proposition about it) via identifying it as what you intend them to think of by virtue of your using that expression.
- S4 We generally choose the least informative sort of expression whose use will enable the hearer to identify the individual we wish to refer to, but this is not a matter of convention.
- S5 Often the only way to refer to something is by using a definite description.
- S6 Just as an object can be described without being referred to, so a singular proposition can be described without being grasped.
- S7 Descriptive 'reference', or singling out, is not genuine reference.
- S8 With a specific use of an indefinite description, one is not referring but merely alluding to something.
- S9 So-called discourse "reference" is not genuine reference.
- S10 Fictional "reference" is pseudo-reference.

Linguistic (semantic) reference and singular terms

- L0 If an expression refers, it does so directly, by introducing its referent into the proposition semantically expressed by sentences in which it occurs (so 'direct reference' is redundant).
- L1 So-called singular terms or referring expressions — indexicals, demonstratives (both simple and complex), proper names, and definite descriptions — can all be used in nonreferential ways too.
- L2 A given singular term seems to mean the same thing whether it is used referentially or not, and an adequate semantic theory should explain this or else explain it away.
- L3 In general, "context" does not fix reference when meaning doesn't.
- L4 The speaker's referential intention determines speaker reference, but it does not determine semantic reference, except in a pickwickian way.

- L5 There is no such thing as descriptive “reference-fixing” (not because something isn’t fixed, but because it isn’t reference).
- L6 Pragmatic arguments of the same sort used to defeat objections against Millianism (such as those based on fictional and empty names and on occurrences of names in attitude contexts) can also be used against Millianism itself.

1. Speaker Reference

Here’s a platitude for you. We commonly talk about particular persons, places, or things. We refer to them and ascribe properties to them. In so doing, we are able to accommodate the fact that an individual can change over time (as to properties, relations, and parts), that our conception of it can also change over time, that we can be mistaken in our conception of it, and that different people’s conceptions of the same individual can differ. This suggests something less platitudinous: the feat it describes is possible because in thinking of and in referring to an individual we are not constrained to represent it as that which has certain properties. This may smack of direct reference but, as we will see shortly, it is really indicative of something else. First we need to consider what it is to refer to something.

S0 Speaker reference is a four-place relation, between a speaker, an expression, an audience, and a referent: you use an expression to refer someone to something.

What referring is depends on whether expressions do it or speakers do it. The reference relation between singular terms and individuals (objects, persons, times, places, etc.) is a two-place relation.² However complicated the explanation for what makes it the case that a certain term refers to a certain thing, the relation itself is between the term and the thing. If ‘Mt. Everest’ refers to Mt. Everest, this is a simple relation between a linguistic expression and a thing, regardless of what explains the fact that this relation obtains. On the other hand, when a speaker uses an expression to refer, the relation in question is at least a three-place relation, between the speaker, the expression, and the referent. Indeed, in the context of communication it is a four-place relation: a *speaker* uses an *expression* to refer his *audience* to an *individual*. Communication is essentially interpersonal affair, and reference by a speaker is part and parcel of an act of communication.³ So whereas expressions just refer to things, speakers don’t just refer but use expressions to refer audiences to things.

² One could argue that linguistic reference is not really a two-place relation, in that (i) (some) expressions, namely indexicals and demonstratives, refer only relative to a context, so that the same expression can have different referents in different contexts, and (ii) it is only as belonging to a particular language that an expression refers, so that the same expression could have different referents in different languages. In reply one could argue, first, that even if linguistic reference is context-relative, this shows only the relation that obtains between an expression and its referent is context-bound, not that it is really a three-term relation, and, second, that the same expression cannot literally occur in more than one language (that expressions are individuated partly by the languages they belong to). I don’t know that any substantive hinges on what strikes me here as merely a terminological dispute.

³ The view I am alluding to, inspired largely by Austin (1962), Strawson (1964), and Grice (in the papers on meaning and conversation collected in his 1989 volume), was expounded and defended in Bach and Harnish 1979 and is sketched in Bach 2004.

S1 To be in a position to refer to something (or to understand a reference to it) requires being able to have singular thoughts about it, and that requires perceiving it, being informed of it, or (having perceived or been informed of it) remembering it.

Obviously you can't refer to something unless you're in a position to refer to it. So what does that involve? Here I will sketch but not defend a view on singular thought, according to which we have singular thoughts about objects we are perceiving, have perceived, or have been informed of (Bach 1987/1994: ch. 1). We do so by means of non-descriptive, '*de re* modes of presentation', which connect us, whether immediately or remotely, to an object. The connection is causal-historical, but the connection involves a chain of representations originating with a perception of the object. Which object one is thinking of is determined relationally, not satisfactionally. That is, the object one's thought is about is a matter not of satisfying a certain description but of being in a certain relation to that very thought (token). We cannot form a singular thought about an individual we can "think of" only under a description. So, for example, we cannot think of the first child born in the 22nd century because we are not suitably connected to that individual (see Point S7). We cannot think of *it* but merely that there will exist a unique individual of a certain sort. Our thought "about" that child is general in content, not singular. We cannot think of the first child born in the fourth century BC either. However, we can think of Aristotle, because we are connected to him through a long chain of communication. We can think of him even though we could not have recognized him, just as I can think of the bird that just flew by my window. Being able to think of an individual does not require being able to identify that individual by means of a uniquely characterizing description.⁴

So on my conception of singular thought, there must be a representational connection, however remote and many-linked, between thought and object. A more restrictive view, though not nearly as restrictive as Russell's (1917, 1918), limits this connection to personal acquaintance (via perception and perception-based memory), and disallows singular thoughts about unfamiliar objects. A more liberal view, though one I contest, allows singular thought via uniquely identifying descriptions of special sorts. In any case, although I am assuming the above conception of singular thought, the questions to be asked and the distinctions to be drawn, such as the distinction between referring to something and merely alluding to or merely singling out something, do not essentially depend on that conception (of course, how one uses these distinctions to divide cases does depend on one's conception). I'll mainly rely on the assumption that one can have singular thoughts about at least some objects one has not perceived and that only certain relations one can bear to an object put one in a position to have singular thoughts about it.

S2 To refer an audience to something involves expressing a singular proposition about it.

If the expression (normally a noun phrase) one uses to refer to something itself refers to that thing, that expression must introduce an object into what is semantically expressed by the

⁴ There is the further question of whether a singular proposition can comprise the complete content of a singular thought. Schiffer (1978) argued that it cannot. In my view, *de re* modes of presentation are also involved (Bach 1987/1994: ch. 1). Moreover, I have argued that a belief ascription whose 'that'-clause expresses a singular proposition does not fully individuate the belief being ascribed (Bach 1997, 2000). I point out, for example, that the one 'that'-clause (assuming it expresses a singular proposition) in the two ascriptions, 'Peter believes that Paderewski had musical talent' and 'Peter disbelieves that Paderewski had musical talent', does not fully characterize something that Peter both believes and disbelieves. And, as I say, every case is potentially a Paderewski case.

sentence in which it occurs. If that sentence semantically expresses a proposition (it might not — see Bach 1994), it expresses a singular proposition with respect to that object.⁵ The referent of that expression is a constituent of that proposition. But whether or not that expression itself refers, when a speaker uses it to refer, he uses it to indicate which thing he is speaking about. If he is making an assertive utterance, he is asserting a singular proposition about that object.

What does it take to refer to an individual?⁶ In particular, can you refer to something if, as Russell would say, you “know it *only* by description”? Suppose you use a description and believe there to be a unique individual that satisfies the description, but you are not in a position to think of that individual. Can you refer to that individual anyway? If descriptions are quantificational and the propositions semantically expressed by sentences containing them are general, it would seem that you cannot use such a sentence to convey a singular proposition involving whichever individual satisfies the description (see Point S7). For example, if you said, “The Sultan of Brunei is fabulously wealthy,” and had no idea who is the sultan of Brunei, you would be stating a general proposition, albeit one that is made true by a fact about a particular individual (to wit, Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu’izzaddin Waddaulah). Of course, your audience, if they were in a position to think of that individual and thought that you were too, might mistakenly take you to be conveying a singular proposition, but that’s another matter. Here’s a different situation. Suppose you are in a position to think of a certain individual, but you do not wish to indicate which individual that is. You might say, for example, “A special person is coming to visit.” You intend your audience to realize that you have a certain individual in mind, but you do not intend them to figure out who it is. Indeed, you intend them not to. You are not referring but merely *alluding* to that individual (see Point S8). However, in my view, merely singling something out descriptively or even alluding to it do not count as referring to it. Neither alluding to an individual nor singling one out descriptively counts as referring to it — you are not expressing a singular proposition about it.

S3 To succeed in referring to something in using a certain expression requires getting them to think of it (and generally to grasp a singular proposition about it) via identifying it as what you intend them to think of by virtue of your using that expression.

In using a noun phrase to refer to a certain individual, you aim to get your audience to think of that individual by way of identifying that individual as the one you are thinking of, hence referring to. How referring works and what it involves depends on whether the referent is already an object of the audience’s attention, is at least capable of being called immediately to their attention, is at least familiar to them, or is not even familiar to them. Which is the case affects what sort of singular term you need to use to focus or keep their attention on the object you’re referring to. Also, what it takes to refer your audience to something depends on whether it has a name and whether you and they know its name. Reference succeeds only if your audience identifies the individual you are talking about *as* the individual you intend to be talking about. Your audience must think of the right thing in the right way, of the individual intended in the way intended. If your audience identifies the individual in some other way, that’s a matter of luck, not of successful communication. It is rather like having a justified true belief that *p* without knowing that *p*.

There are different respects in which a speaker can fail to refer. In the case just considered, there is a certain thing he intends to refer to, but he can fail communicatively to refer to it in that his

⁵ Note that a proposition, e.g., the proposition that I eat anchovies, can be singular with respect to one argument place and general with respect to another.

⁶ Our discussion here is limited to reference to spatio-temporal things.

listener does not identify the intended individual (in the intended way). More interesting is the case in which the speaker intends to refer to something but there is no such thing. In that case there is no singular proposition about that individual to be expressed or conveyed. The speaker can have a referential intention, and his audience can recognize that he has such an intention, but nothing counts as getting it right. The speaker's referential intention cannot be fulfilled, and full communication cannot be achieved. Since there is nothing for the hearer to identify, and no singular proposition for her to entertain, the best the hearer can do is recognize that the speaker intends to convey a singular proposition of a certain sort. The speaker has the right sort of intention, to be speaking of some particular thing, but there is no thing for him to succeed in referring to.

A different situation would arise if the speaker merely made as if to refer to something, perhaps to deceive the hearer ("See that spider over there?") or perhaps to play along with the hearer's mistaken belief in the existence of something ("Bigfoot was seen in Montana last night"). In this case, although the speaker does not intend to refer to something, he does intend to be taken to be. He can succeed in that if he is taken to be referring to the individual the hearer mistakenly believes in. But since there is no such thing, there is no singular proposition to be grasped.

S4 We generally choose the least informative sort of expression whose use will enable the hearer to identify the individual we wish to refer to, but this is not a matter of convention.

Suppose you want to refer to your boss. In some circumstances, it may be enough to use the pronoun 'she' (or 'he', as the case may be). The only semantic constraint on what 'she' can be used to refer to is that the referent be female (ships and countries excepted). So its use provides only the information that the intended referent is female. If it is to be used successfully to refer the hearer to a certain female, there must be some female that your audience can reasonably suppose you intend to be referring to. If out of the blue you said, "She is insufferable," intending with 'she' to refer to your boss, you could not reasonably expect to be taken to be referring to her. However, if she were already salient, say by being visually prominent or by having just been mentioned, or you made her salient in some way, say by pointing to her office or to a picture of her, then using 'she' would suffice. In other circumstances, you would have to use some more elaborate expression. For example, to distinguish her from other women in a group you could use 'that woman', with stress on 'that' and an accompanying demonstration. Or, assuming your audience knows her by name, you could refer to her by name. Otherwise, you would have to use a definite description, say 'my boss'.

This example suggests that a speaker, in choosing an expression to use to refer the hearer to the individual he has in mind, is in effect answering the following question: given the circumstances of utterance, the history and direction of the conversation, and the mutual knowledge between me and my audience, how informative an expression do I need to use to enable them to identify the individual I have in mind? Note that informativeness here can depend not only the semantic information encoded by the expression but on the information carried by the fact that *it* is being used.

Some linguists have suggested that which sort of expression is most appropriately used depends, as a matter of convention, on the degree of "givenness" (or "familiarity" or "accessibility") of the intended referent. For example, Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski (1993) distinguish being in focus (being the unique item under discussion or current center of mutual attention), being activated (being an item under discussion or otherwise being an object of mutual awareness), being familiar (being mutually known), and being uniquely identifiable (satisfying a

definite description). They suggest that different degrees of givenness are not merely associated with but, as a matter of linguistic convention, are encoded by different types of singular terms. Perhaps they suggest this because, taking their accessibility scale to concern the cognitive status of representations in the mind of the hearer, they think this status has to be linguistically marked if it is to play a cognitive role in communication. As I see it, however, this scale concerns the mutual (between speaker and hearer) cognitive status of the intended referent. After all, in using an expression to refer the speaker aims to ensure that the hearer thinks of the very object the speaker is thinking of, and what matters is that the expression used to refer, and the fact that the speaker is using it, provide the hearer with enough information to figure out what he is intended to take the speaker to be thinking of, hence to think of it himself. The parsimonious alternative to Gundel et al.'s conventionalist view is that the different degrees of givenness associated with different types of singular terms are not encoded at all; rather, the correlation is a by-product of the interaction between semantic information that *is* encoded by these expressions and general facts about rational communication. On this, the null hypothesis, it is *because* different expressions are more or less informative that the things they can be used to refer to are less or more given or accessible. That is, the more accessible the referent is, the less information needs to be carried by the expression used to refer to it to enable the hearer to identify it.

Notice that not only is it enough to use the least informative sort of expression needed to enable your audience to identify the individual you have in mind, it is normally misleading to use a more informative one (or at least odd, as when Michael Jordan used to refer to himself as “Michael Jordan”). So, in general, when you can use indexical to refer to something, you should. And when you can use a short definite or demonstrative description to refer to something rather than a long one, you should. For example, in talking to a student, normally you would refer to yourself with ‘I’. Only if your capacity as, say, his adviser needed to be stressed, would you use ‘your adviser’ to refer to yourself. Normally you would only use it to refer to someone else. Similarly, you wouldn’t refer to the previous day by its date or even as ‘last Monday’ when you could use ‘yesterday’. To refer to something that has just been mentioned, you would use ‘it’ if nothing else is also salient. Otherwise, you would use a definite description, say ‘the car’, but not ‘the car that Jones rented last week to drive to Lake Tahoe’, even if, indeed especially if, it had just been said that Jones rented a car the previous week to drive to Lake Tahoe. In telling a story about a particular person, it is always sufficient, once the individual is introduced, to use a personal pronoun — provided, of course, that no other individual of the same gender has been introduced in the meantime. There are stylistic or other literary reasons to use their name or a definite description every so often, but unless it is obvious that this is the name or a description of the individual in question, it would be inferred that reference is being made to some other individual. This inference would be made on the charitable assumption that one is not being needlessly informative (and violating Grice’s (1989: 26) second maxim of quantity).

The basic point here is that to refer to something you need to use an available singular term that is as informative as necessary but no more.

S5 Often the only way to refer to something is by using a definite description.

If Russell’s theory of descriptions is basically right, which I think it is (see Bach, forthcoming-a), then definite descriptions are the paradigm of singular terms that can be used to refer but are not linguistically (semantically) referential.⁷ So we should not be overly impressed by the fact that a given class of singular terms is commonly used referentially.

⁷ It is odd that Kripke (1977), in defending Russell’s theory against the claim that Donnellan’s (1966) distinction has semantic significance, contrasts “speaker’s reference” with a definite

Suppose you want to refer to some thing (or someone). Suppose it is not perceptually present, has not just come up in the conversation, and is not otherwise salient. Suppose that it does not have a name or that you are unaware of its name or think your audience is unaware. Then you cannot use an indexical, a demonstrative (pronoun or phrase), or a proper name to refer to it. If you want to refer to it, what are you going to do? Unless you can find it or a picture or some other nonlinguistic representation of it to point to, you need to use a linguistic expression, some sort of singular noun phrase (what else?), to call it to your audience's attention. You must choose one that will provide your audience with enough information to figure out, partly on the supposition that you intend them to figure out, which object you're talking about. Your only recourse is to use a definite description.

This raises the question, when you use a description, how does your audience know that you are referring to something and expressing a singular proposition, rather than making a general statement and expressing an existential or a uniqueness proposition? Although the presence of a description does not signal that you are referring — semantically, descriptions are not referring expressions — what you are saying might not be the sort of thing that you could assert on general grounds, that is, as not based on knowledge of some particular individual (see Ludlow and Neale 1991). This will certainly be true whenever it is mutually evident which individual satisfies the description in question and what is being said regarding the individual that satisfies the description can only be supposed to be based on evidence about that individual. For example, if Claire says to me, “The decanter is broken,” I can't not take her to be talking about the actual decanter of ours. On the other hand, if before we decided on a decanter she said, “The decanter had better not cost more than \$100,” clearly she would be making a general statement pertaining to whichever decanter we buy (notice that the corresponding demonstrative description, ‘that decanter’, is usable only in the latter, non-referential case). Also, its being mutually evident which individual satisfies a description will generally be sufficient for a referential use, since there will usually be no reason for the hearer not to be taken as making a singular statement about that individual. This applies especially to descriptions of occupiers of social positions or practical roles, such as ‘the boss’ or ‘the freezer’. Moreover, if the description is incomplete, as in these cases, and there is no mutually salient or obviously distinctive completion in sight, then the hearer, at least if he is mutually familiar with the boss or freezer in question, can only take the description to be used referentially.⁸ But if ‘the F’ is incomplete and it is obvious that the hearer is unfamiliar with the relevant F, then a (referential) use of ‘the F’ must be preceded by an introduction of the relevant F.

Now according to Russell's theory, a sentence of the form ‘The F is G’ semantically expresses a general (uniqueness) proposition. Then if you utter such a sentence but use the description referentially, what you *say* is a general proposition but what you *mean* is a singular one.⁹ But how and why does the hearer take you to be doing that? So, for example, if you

description's “semantic reference.” But by this he can only mean the description's denotation, the individual that uniquely satisfies it. See Point L0 below.

⁸ Why *mutually* salient or familiar? Obviously it is not enough for the intended referent to be salient or familiar merely to the speaker, if it is not salient or familiar to the audience and if this is not evident to the speaker (etc.). So, in general, when I say that something is salient or familiar, I will mean that it is mutually so.

⁹ Here and throughout I am assuming a distinction between saying and meaning or stating, a distinction which I have tried elsewhere to vindicate (Bach 2001). It corresponds to Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. This distinction is often blurred, e.g., by Donnellan (1966), whenever he suggests that in using a description referentially rather than

uttered, ‘The plumber is pernicious’, I would take you to be asserting not a general proposition but a singular one, about the plumber. Why would I do that? Well, I am acquainted with the plumber and presumably so are you. Besides, that a certain individual is a plumber has nothing to do with his being pernicious. To suppose that it does would be to take you to be stating something for which you have no evidence (you would be violating Grice’s (1989: 27) second maxim of quality). So I have no reason to suppose, as if you were unfamiliar with the plumber, that you are making a general statement, the content of which is independent of who is the plumber. So I have positive reason to think that you have in mind, and intend me to think you have in mind, a certain individual who satisfies the description you are using.

If you are using the description to refer and I am taking you to be doing so, we must have ways of thinking of the individual in question, the plumber, in some other way than as the plumber. Presumably we both remember him by way of a memory image derived from seeing him. In thinking of him via that image, you take him to be the plumber and use the description ‘the plumber’ to identify him for me, which triggers my memory of him. We both think of him, via our respective memories of him, as being the plumber. This fits with how Mill describes the functioning of a proper name in thought as an “unmeaning mark which we connect in our minds with the idea of the object, in order that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts, we may think of that individual object” (1872: 22). Though not “unmeaning,” a definite description can play a similar role. In using a description referentially, you are using it in lieu of a sign for the object.

S6 Just as an object can be described without being referred to, so a singular proposition can be described without being grasped.

It is one thing to entertain a singular proposition and another thing merely to know that there exists a certain such proposition. Russell’s famous discussion of Bismarck illustrates how this can be. He operates with a notoriously restrictive notion of acquaintance, but this is not really essential to the distinction he is drawing. I agree with Russell that we cannot have singular thoughts about individuals we “know only by description,” but I will not assume that the ones we can have singular thoughts about are limited to those with which we are acquainted in his highly restrictive sense. They include individuals we are perceiving, have perceived, or have been informed of and remember. So although Russell’s choice of example (Bismarck) would have to be changed to be made consistent with a much more liberal notion of acquaintance, I will use it to illustrate his distinction.

Russell contrasts the situation of Bismarck himself, who “might have used the name [‘Bismarck’] directly to designate [himself] ... to ma[k]e a judgment about himself” having himself as a constituent (1917: 209), with *our* situation in respect to him:

when we make a statement about something known only by description, we often intend to make our statement, not in the form involving the description, but about the actual thing described. That is, when we say anything about Bismarck, we should like, if we could, to make the judgment which Bismarck alone can make, namely, the judgment of which he himself is a constituent. [But] in this we are necessarily defeated. ...What enables us to communicate in spite of the varying descriptions we employ is that we know there is a true proposition concerning the actual Bismarck and that, however we may vary the description (as long as the description is correct), the proposition described is still the same. This proposition, which is described and is known to be true, is what interests us; but we are not acquainted with the proposition itself, and do not know it, though we know it is true. (1917: 210-11)

attributively, one is *saying* something different, allegedly because the content of the description does not enter into what is said.

The proposition that “interests us” is a singular proposition, but we cannot actually entertain it — we can know it only by description, that is, by entertaining a general (uniqueness) proposition which, if true, is made true by a fact involving Bismarck. But this general proposition does not itself involve Bismarck, and would be thinkable even if Bismarck never existed.¹⁰

S7 Descriptive ‘reference’, or singling out, is not genuine reference.

David Kaplan suggests that one can use a description to refer to something even if one is not in a position to have a singular thought about it or, as he would say, even if one is not “en rapport” with it. He asks rhetorically, “If pointing can be taken as a form of describing, why not take describing as a form of pointing?” (1979: 392). Well, there’s a reason why not.

First consider the following example of Kaplan’s “liberality with respect to the introduction of directly referring terms by means of ‘dthat’,” which “allow[s] an arbitrary definite description to give us the object” (1989a: 560).¹¹

(1) Dthat [the first child to be born in the 22nd century] will be bald.

‘Dthat’ is a directly referential term and, as Kaplan explains, “the content of the associated description is no part of the content of the dthat-term” (1989b: 579); it is “off the record (i.e., off the *content* record)” (1989b: 581). So ‘dthat’ is not merely a rigidifier (like ‘actual’) but a device of direct reference.¹² What gets into the proposition is the actual object (if there is one) that uniquely satisfies the description, not the description itself (i.e., the property expressed by its matrix).¹³

Not only does Kaplan’s “liberality” impose no constraint on the definite description to which ‘dthat’ can be applied to yield a “directly referential” term, it imposes no epistemological

¹⁰ The difference in type of proposition is clear from Russell’s observations about the use of the indefinite description ‘a man’:

What do I really assert when I assert “I met a man”? Let us assume, for the moment, that my assertion is true, and that in fact I met Jones. It is clear that what I assert is *not* “I met Jones.” I may say “I met a man, but it was not Jones”; in that case, though I lie, I do not contradict myself, as I should do if when I say I met a man I really mean that I met Jones. It is clear also that the person to whom I am speaking can understand what I say, even if he is a foreigner and has never heard of Jones. But we may go further: not only Jones, but no actual man, enters into my statement. This becomes obvious when the statement is false, since there is no more reason why Jones should be supposed to enter into the statement than why anyone else should. Indeed, the statement would remain significant, though it could not possibly be true, even if there were no man at all. (1919: 167-8)

¹¹ Since I am discussing Kaplan, I will here use his term ‘direct’ to modify ‘reference’, although, it is redundant (see Point S0). An expression, like a definite description, that merely denotes an object does not *refer* to that object, in the sense that the object is not a constituent of propositions expressed by sentences in which the expression occurs.

¹² As Kaplan explains (1989b: 579-82), certain things he had previously said, and even his formal system (in Kaplan 1989a), could have suggested that ‘dthat’ is an operator on definite descriptions, with the content of the associated description included in the content of the whole phrase. This would make ‘dthat’ a ‘rigidifier’ rather than a device of direct reference.

¹³ To stipulate that any phrase of the form ‘dthat [the F]’ refers ‘directly’ does not, of course, mean that it is guaranteed a referent. It means only that the referent, if there is one, is a constituent of the singular proposition (if there is one) expressed by a sentence in which the phrase occurs.

constraint on what one can “directly refer” to. As Kaplan puts it, “Ignorance of the referent does not defeat the directly referential character of indexicals,” from which he infers, “a special form of knowledge of an object is neither required nor presupposed in order that a person may entertain as object of thought a singular proposition involving that object” (1989a, 536). However, even if we concede that any definite description can be turned into a directly referential term, so that a sentence containing the ‘dthat’ phrase expresses a singular proposition about the actual object (if there is one) that uniquely satisfies the description, it is far from obvious that the user of such a phrase can thereby refer to, and form singular thoughts about, that object. Kaplan seems to think this ability can be created with the stroke of a pen.

Consider, for example, whether one can refer to the first child born in the 22nd century. Assume that nearly one hundred years from now, this description will be satisfied (uniquely). Then there is a singular proposition involving that individual, as expressed by (1).¹⁴ Without ‘dthat’ (and the brackets), (1) would express a general (uniqueness) proposition, the one expressed by (1’),

(1’) The first child to be born in the 22nd century will be bald.

Now can one use the description ‘the first child to be born in the 22nd century’ referentially, to refer to that child? Kaplan thinks there is nothing to prevent this, that it is a perfectly good example of pointing by means of describing. However, what enables one to form an intention to refer to the individual who happens to satisfy that description? If one is prepared to utter (1’) assertively, surely one is prepared to do so without regard to who the actual such child will be — one’s grounds are general, not singular. For example, one might believe that the first child born in the 22nd century is likely to be born in China and that Chinese children born around then will all be bald, thanks to China’s unrestrained use of nuclear power. But this only goes to show that one’s use of the description is likely to be taken to be attributive. Unless one were known to be a powerful clairvoyant, one could not plausibly be supposed to have singular grounds for making the statement. Nevertheless, Kaplan thinks that one could intend to use the description referentially anyway, as if putting the description in brackets and preceding it with ‘dthat’ could not only yield a term that refers to whoever actually will be the first child born in the 22nd century but could enable a speaker to refer to that child. It seems, though, that one is in the same predicament as the one Russell thought anyone other than Bismarck would be in if he wanted to refer to Bismarck.

Would it help to have the tacit modal intention of using the description rigidly, or even to insert the word ‘actual’ in the description? Referring to something involves expressing a singular proposition about it, but rigidifying the description or including the word ‘actual’ would not make its use referential. Even though the only individual whose properties are relevant to the truth or falsity of the proposition being expressed (even if that proposition is modal) is the actual F (if it exists), still that proposition is general, not singular. This proposition may in some sense be object-dependent, but it is not object-involving. The property of being the actual F may enter into the proposition, but the actual F does not.

The fact that there is something that satisfies a certain definite description does not mean that one can refer to it. One can use a description to describe or, as I will say, *single out* something without actually *referring* to it. For if a different individual satisfied the description or you were describing a hypothetical situation in which that would be the case, you would have singled out

¹⁴ A singular proposition is not only object-involving but object-dependent, in that it would not exist if its object-constituent did not exist (at some time or other). So a singular proposition exists contingently. This does not imply that it exists only when its object-constituent exists. Existing contingently does not make singular propositions temporal.

that individual instead. Nevertheless, you could use the description just as though you were introducing the thing that satisfies it into the discourse. You could, for example, use pronouns to “refer” back to it. You could say, “The first child to be born in the 22nd century will be bald. It will be too poor to use Rogaine.” Giving it a name won’t help. You could dub this child ‘Newman 2’ (just as Kaplan dubbed the first child to be born in the twenty-first century ‘Newman 1’), but this would not enable you to refer to it or to entertain singular propositions involving it. In this, as Russell would have said, “we are necessarily defeated.” Even though (1’) does not express a singular proposition, the proposition which “interests us” but which we cannot entertain, one can still use the sentence to describe that proposition.

It might be objected that in characterizing descriptive “reference” as singling out rather than referring to an object, I am not making a substantive claim but am merely engaging in terminological legislation. I would reply that anyone who insists on calling this *reference* should either show that a singular proposition is expressed or explain why, when one conveys a general, object-independent proposition, one should count as referring. One possible reason is taxonomic: if we are to maintain that indexicals and demonstratives are inherently referring expressions and not merely expressions that are often used to refer, allowances must be made for the fact that we sometimes use them to do what I would describe as merely singling out an object, that is, an object that the speaker is not in a position to have singular thoughts about. For example, one could use ‘he’ or ‘that child’ to single out the first child born in the 22nd century. But the question is whether this counts as genuine reference. Indeed, one can use such expressions without even singling out an individual, as in, “If a child eats a radioactive Mars bar, he/that child will be bald.” The mere fact that some philosophers are in the habit of calling indexicals and demonstratives “referring expressions” does not justify cultivating this habit.

In summing up his account of the referential-attributive distinction, Donnellan concedes that there is a kind of reference, reference in a “very weak sense,” associated with the attributive use of a definite description (1966: 304). Since he is contrasting that use with the referential use, this is something of a token concession. Reference in this very weak sense is too weak to count as genuine reference, for one is “referring” to whatever happens to satisfy the description, and one would be “referring” to something else were it to have satisfied the description instead. This is clear in modal contexts, such as in (2):

(2) The next president, though probably a man, could be a woman.

The speaker is not asserting of some one possible president that he or she will probably be a man but could be a woman, say if he had a sex-change operation before her inauguration. In this context, the description is understood to fall within the scope of ‘could’. The speaker is allowing for different possible presidents, some male, some female, only one of whom will actually be the next president. Surely this is not reference, not even in a very weak sense.

S8 With a specific use of an indefinite description, one is not referring but merely alluding to something.

Indefinite descriptions can be used nonspecifically, referentially, or specifically.¹⁵ In the very common nonspecific (or purely quantificational) use, there is no indication that the speaker has

¹⁵ They can also be used predicatively, as when one refers to an object in one way and then describes it as a such-and-such, as when you say of the thing in your hand, ‘This is a pomegranate’. It is arguable that this is not really a quantificational use but a distinctively predicative use, no different in kind from saying, ‘This is red’. It is merely because phrases containing singular common nouns require (in English) an article that one cannot say, ‘This is pomegranate’ (one could say the equivalent of this in Russian). Graff (2001) has argued that *all*

any particular thing in mind; one is expressing a general proposition. With the referential use, which is relatively rare, as it is with quantificational phrases generally, one does express a singular proposition (see Ludlow and Neale 1991: 176-180), but this is about an individual that is already the focus of mutual attention. Here I will consider the specific use of indefinite descriptions.

What is distinctive about the *specific* use is that the speaker communicates that he has a certain individual in mind, but he is not communicating which individual that is — he doesn't intend you to identify it. Suppose a man says to his wife,

(3) An old girlfriend will call today.

Unless he thinks this is the sort of day for a call from an old girlfriend, presumably he has a particular one in mind. He could have made this clear by including the word 'certain' (or 'particular'), as in "A certain old girlfriend will call today."¹⁶ He could even elaborate on why he is not specifying which old girlfriend it is by continuing "A old girlfriend will call today" with "but I can't tell you who" or "but only to discuss Russell."

In a specific use, the speaker indicates that he is in a position to refer to a certain individual, but is not actually doing so. He is not identifying or trying to enable the hearer to identify that individual — he is merely *alluding* to her. He has a certain a singular proposition in mind but is not trying to convey it. So what must the hearer do in order to understand the utterance? It would seem that she must merely recognize that the speaker has some singular proposition in mind, about a certain individual of the mentioned sort, in this case an old girlfriend.

It might be objected that a specific use of an indefinite description is a limiting case of a referential use, not mere allusion but what might be called 'unspecified' reference. After all, can't the hearer, recognizing that the speaker has some individual in mind, at least think of that individual under the description 'the individual the speaker has in mind'? But, as we have already seen, descriptive 'reference' is not genuine reference. Besides, the speaker is not really referring the hearer to that individual and, in particular, does not intend her to think of the individual he has in mind under the description 'the individual you (the speaker) have in mind' or in any similar way. He is merely indicating that he has a certain unspecified individual in mind. That is, he is not referring but merely alluding to that individual.

To appreciate why this is, consider a situation in which the speaker has in mind one F among many and proceeds to say something not true of that individual. Suppose a group of unsavory men crash a party late at night and start a fight. Later an elderly partygoer utters (4) to the police,

(4) A big hoodlum had a concealed weapon.

She has a particular hoodlum in mind when she says this, but does not specify which one. Obviously the words 'a big hoodlum' do not refer to the hoodlum she had in mind, for if some big hoodlum had a concealed weapon but she was mistaken about which one, (4) would still be true.

uses of indefinite descriptions are actually predicative, and boldly extends her arguments to definite descriptions. Her account also covers generic uses of definite and indefinite descriptions, as in 'The tiger has stripes' and 'A philosopher is not in it for the money'.

¹⁶ I do not mean to suggest that 'a certain F' is always used to indicate that the speaker has a particular unspecified individual in mind. He might have in mind merely some unexpressed restriction on 'F'. For example, one might say, 'A certain contestant will go home happy', without specifying that whoever wins the contest in question will go home happy. Similarly, an utterance of the quantified 'Every author loves a certain book' could be made true if every author loves, say, the first book he wrote.

So (4) semantically expresses a general proposition. Even so, since the elderly partygoer does have a certain hoodlum in mind, is she using this indefinite description to refer to that hoodlum? Even if what she said is a general proposition, is what she meant a singular proposition, about the hoodlum she had in mind? No, because the police could understand her perfectly well without having any idea which hoodlum she has in mind. They understand merely that she has a certain hoodlum in mind, the one she is alluding to.

S9 So-called discourse “reference” is not genuine reference.

It is well-known that unbound pronouns, as well as definite descriptions, can be used anaphorically on indefinite descriptions, as in these examples:

- (5) Russell met a man today. He/The man was bald.
- (6) A woman bought a lottery ticket yesterday, and she/the woman won \$1,000,000.
- (7) If there were a mermaid there, Merlin would have seen her/the mermaid.
- (8) Every farmer owns a donkey. He feeds it/the donkey popcorn.

In (5) and (6), the pronoun (and the definite description) can be used to refer. If the speaker is using ‘a man’ specifically in uttering (5), he could even use ‘he’ (or ‘the man’) to refer to the man he thinks Russell met that day, although success at that would require his audience knowing who that was. If, on the other hand, the speaker is not in a position to refer to such a man, he can only use ‘a man’ nonspecifically and could not use ‘he’ (or ‘the man’) referentially; the most he could intend to convey is the general proposition that Russell met a man that day who was bald (for an plausible account of such examples see King 1987). Similar points apply to (6). However, it seems that the pronouns and the definite descriptions in (7) and (8) cannot be used to refer at all. In (7) ‘her’ (or ‘the mermaid’) is not being used to refer to an unspecified (and presumably nonexistent) mermaid, and in (8) ‘it’ (or ‘the donkey’) functions quantificationally, ranging over the different donkeys owned by the different farmers.

Despite the fact that the pronouns and the definite descriptions in cases like (5) and (6) need not, and in cases like (7) and (8) cannot, be used to refer, many semanticists have attributed ‘discourse referents’ to them. I am not suggesting that these semanticists seriously believe that discourse referents are real referents, but this only makes it puzzling why they use this locution. Here is how Karttunen (1976) introduced the phrase:

Let us say that the appearance of an indefinite noun phrase establishes a *discourse referent* just in case it justifies the occurrence of a coreferential pronoun or a definite noun phrase later in the text. ... We maintain that the problem of coreference within a discourse is a linguistic problem and can be studied independently of any general theory of extra-linguistic reference. (Karttunen 1976, 366; my emphasis)

I agree, except that what Karttunen regards as *coreference* need not be reference at all. He goes on to explain,

In simple sentences that do not contain certain quantifier-like expressions,¹⁷ an indefinite NP establishes a discourse referent just in case the sentence is an affirmative assertion. By ‘establishes a discourse referent’ we meant that there may be a coreferential pronoun or definite noun phrase later in the discourse.¹⁸ Indefinite NPs in Yes-No questions and commands do not establish referents. (383)

¹⁷ Karttunen is excluding negative quantificational phrases like ‘no donkey’ and negative cases like ‘Bill didn’t see a unicorn. *It/The unicorn had a gold mane’.

¹⁸ In other words, each link in an ‘anaphoric chain’ (Chastain 1975) is treated as having a discourse referent, even if intuitively it does not refer. It should not be supposed, as Chastain

So the “coreferential pronoun or definite noun phrase later in the discourse” can, thanks to the discourse referent “established” by the indefinite NP, have a discourse referent even if, as in our examples, it is not used to refer.

The notion of discourse referent has inspired a great deal of theorizing in semantics, including discourse representation theory (DRT) and so-called dynamic semantics. However, as is implicitly conceded by Karttunen’s definition (“[it] can be studied independently of any general theory of extra-linguistic reference”), discourse reference is no more reference than the relation we bear to our perceptual experiences (as opposed to objects perceived) is perception. The basic problem is simply this: a chain of “reference” isn’t a chain of *reference* unless it is anchored in an actual (“extra-linguistic”) referent.

Despite the widespread use of the phrase ‘discourse referent’ in some semantic circles, so-called discourse referents are not literally referents. The pronouns in the examples like those we’ve just considered are not used as referential terms. They are used as surrogates for definite descriptions, descriptions which if present in place of the pronouns would not be referential. These pronouns are what Neale (1990: ch. 5) calls ‘D-type pronouns’. The basic idea is that the pronoun is used elliptically for a definite description recoverable from the matrix of the antecedent indefinite description (see Bach 1987/1994, 258-61). Neale develops a detailed account of how D-type pronouns work in a wide variety of cases. It is essential to this account that the descriptions implicit in the use of D-type pronouns not be construed as referential, even when they are used referentially.

To see the significance of looking at such pronouns in this way, let us return to two of our examples. Consider (6) again:

(6) A woman bought a lottery ticket yesterday, and she/the woman won \$1,000,000.

Suppose that the speaker merely heard that a woman had bought a lottery ticket the day before. Then he does not have any particular woman in mind and is not using ‘a woman’ specifically. Even so, it might be thought that ‘she’ refers to a certain unspecified woman (the ‘discourse referent’) who bought a lottery ticket the day before. But how could this be? The first clause of (6) semantically expresses a general proposition, but what about the second clause? Does it express a singular proposition about a certain woman who bought a lottery ticket the day before? Suppose this clause is not true, hence that no woman who bought a lottery ticket the day before won \$1,000,000. Then which woman would the second clause of (6) be about, and what singular proposition would it express? Answer: no woman, and no proposition. On the view that ‘she’ is referential in the second sentence of (6), that sentence would express a singular proposition if and only if it is true! Surely which proposition a sentence semantically expresses, or that it expresses any, cannot depend on whether or not it is true.

The situation is similar with a quantified sentence, as in (8),

(8) Every farmer owns a donkey. He feeds it popcorn.

Suppose there are farmers who own more than one donkey. In that case, what does it take for the second sentence in (8) to be true? Its truth does not require every farmer to feed popcorn to every donkey that he owns, but also it doesn’t require merely that every farmer feed popcorn to one donkey that he owns. So it is not clear what it would take for the second sentence in (8) to be true when there are farmers who own more than one donkey. However, DRT and dynamic semantics have been motivated by the thought that this is clear (not that theorists agree on what it takes for

(1975) and many others have, that when the links in the chain (the expressions anaphoric on the indefinite description) are used to refer, the indefinite description itself refers.

such a sentence to be true), and they have tried to make sense of sentences like the second one in (8) in terms of the notion of discourse referent.

If an indefinite description is used to introduce a so-called “discourse referent” into a conversation and repeated back “reference” is made to this item, that doesn’t mean that the item is actually being referred to. It (the F that the speaker has in mind if indeed he has any in mind) wasn’t referred to when it was introduced, and repeated use of pronouns or definite descriptions to “refer” back to it doesn’t make any of what is going on count as reference. This is no more reference than if you used a formula with an unbound variable and then conjoined more and more atomic formulas with the same unbound variable. Pronouncing the succeeding occurrences of the variable as ‘she’ or ‘it’ doesn’t make them referential pronouns.

S10 Fictional “reference” is pseudo-reference.

This is far too big a topic to take up in any detail here. Any serious discussion has to distinguish fictional reference (reference in a fiction) and reference (outside the fiction) to fictional entities. Reference in a fiction does not count as genuine reference, at least if it is to fictional persons, places, and things (in a fiction, there can be genuine reference to real persons, places, and things). If Salmon (1998) is right in claiming that fictional entities are real, albeit abstract entities, then *we* can genuinely refer to them. Otherwise, we can only pretend to. In my view, both fictional reference and reference to fictional entities involve special sorts of speech acts, but there is nothing special about fictional language itself (Bach 1987/1994, 214-18).

In particular, words in fictional discourse do not have special meanings, roles, or references just because they occur in fictional discourse. Obviously, writers of fiction can introduce special meanings for particular words, or even introduce new lexical items, as in Tolkien, or, indeed, a whole new language, such as Namsat in Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange*. But this is irrelevant to the question of whether fictional names and pronouns in fiction refer to anything and to whether an author who uses such singular terms is referring. So far as I can tell, the desire to maintain some sort of Millian view about proper names and direct-reference view about indexicals is the only motivation for maintaining that genuine referring is going on in fiction. In my opinion, which I won’t try to defend here, facts about language and language use provide little support for substantive metaphysical theses.

2. Linguistic (Semantic) Reference and Singular Terms

Strawson’s dictum was that expressions don’t refer, speakers do. The basis for it had nothing to do with Russell’s strange contention that the only “logically proper” names of ordinary language, of English in particular, are the demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that,’ but only as used to refer to one’s current sense-data, and the pronoun ‘I’ (1917: 216). Russell based this contention on his highly restrictive doctrine of acquaintance, according to which one can be acquainted only with one’s current sense-data and oneself. Everything else one can know only by description. Accordingly, Russell denied that ordinary proper names, like ‘Plato’ and ‘Pluto’, are logically proper names. That is, ordinary proper names cannot be understood on the model of individual constants of formal logic, which are Millian in the sense that their meanings are their references.

Combining Strawson’s dictum with Russell’s contention yields an extremely restrictive answer to the question of which expressions are capable of referring. I will defend this answer, but on different grounds than Strawson’s and Russell’s. Strawson’s grounds were that virtually any expression that can be used to refer to one thing in one context can be used to refer to something else in another context. Even if that is correct, it is not a good reason for denying that expressions refer. It’s a good reason only for denying that they refer independently of context.

Perhaps many expressions do refer, but do so relative to a context. So Strawson's dictum needs the support of a better argument. Here's a very simple one: almost any term that can be used to refer can also be used not to refer, and without any difference in meaning. This argument may seem too simple to be credible, but it does call into question philosophers' knee-jerk tendency to view singular terms on the model of individual constants of formal logic. As for Russell's contention, we don't need to accept his highly restrictive conception of acquaintance to insist that for an expression to refer to something it must introduce that thing into propositions semantically expressed by sentences in which it occurs. But what does it take for an expression to do that?

L0 If an expression refers, it does so directly, by introducing its referent into the proposition semantically expressed by sentences in which it occurs (so 'direct reference' is redundant).

Contrary to Frege, Russell insisted that the relation of a description to what it denotes is fundamentally different from the relation of a name to what it refers to. Whereas a genuine, "logically proper" name introduces its referent into the proposition, a description introduces a certain quantificational structure, not its denotation. The denotation of a description is thus semantically inert — the semantic role of a description does not depend on what, if anything, it denotes. But a genuine name "directly designat[es] an individual which is its meaning" (1919: 174). Notice here Russell's use of the adverb 'directly' in characterizing how names designate their objects, just as Kaplan (1989a) characterizes indexicals and demonstratives as "directly referential." However, given the distinction between denotation and reference, the occurrence of 'directly' in 'directly referential' is redundant, and 'indirectly referential' is an oxymoron. So if we distinguish reference from denotation as two different species of what Kripke calls "designation," then all expressions that (semantically) refer are rigid designators and all denoting expressions are non-rigid designators, except those, like 'the smallest prime', that are rigid *de facto*, i.e., for nonsemantic reasons (Kripke 1980: 21). This leaves open which expressions fall into which category.

L1 So-called singular terms or referring expressions — indexicals, demonstratives (both simple and complex), proper names, and definite descriptions — can all be used in nonreferential ways too.

To repeat the platitude from the beginning of part 1, we commonly talk about particular persons, places, or things, and in so doing we are able to accommodate the fact that they can change over time, that our conceptions of them can also change over time, that we can be mistaken about them, and that different people's conceptions of them can differ. Moreover, it seems that all this is possible if in thinking of and in referring to an individual we are not constrained to represent it as having certain properties. This was Mill's idea about proper names. In his view, their function is not to convey general information but "to enable individuals to be made the subject of discourse"; names are "attached to the objects themselves, and are not dependent on ... any attribute of the object" (1872: 20). Similarly, according to Russell, a proper name, at least when "used directly," serves "merely to indicate what we are speaking about; [the name] is no part of the fact asserted ... : it is merely part of the symbolism by which we express our thought" (1919: 175). In contrast, because the object a definite description describes "is not part of the proposition [expressed by a sentence] in which [the description] occurs" (170). Nevertheless, Russell allowed that proper names can not only be "used as names" but also "as descriptions," adding that "there is nothing in the phraseology to show whether they are being used in this way or as names" (175).

Interestingly, Russell's distinction regarding uses of names is much the same as Donnellan's famous distinction regarding uses of definite descriptions. If the property expressed by the

description's matrix (the 'F' in 'the F') enters "essentially" into the statement made, the description is used attributively;¹⁹ when a speaker uses a description referentially, the speaker uses it "to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing" (1966: 285). Donnellan's distinction clearly corresponds to Russell's. Whereas an attributive use of a definite description involves stating a general proposition, as with the use of a proper name "as a description," a referential use involves stating a singular proposition, just as when a proper name is used "as a name." And just as Russell comments that "there is nothing in the phraseology" to indicate in which way a name is being used, so Donnellan observes that "a definite description occurring in one and the same sentence may, on different occasions of its use, function in either way" (281).

If Russell and Donnellan are right, respectively, about proper names and definite descriptions, then expressions of both sorts can be used referentially (as a name, to indicate what we are speaking about) or attributively (as a description). This leaves open whether either sort of expression is semantically ambiguous (or maybe underdeterminate) or whether, in each case, one use corresponds to the semantics of the expression and the other use is accountable pragmatically from that use. For Russell a definite description, whichever way it is used, is inherently a quantifier phrase, whereas a "logically proper" name is a referring term.²⁰ Donnellan was evidently unsure whether to regard the referential-attributive distinction as indicating a semantic ambiguity or merely a pragmatic one.²¹ However, it seems highly implausible that a given description-containing sentence should be semantically ambiguous, expressing a singular or a general proposition depending on whether the description is being used referentially or attributively. And very few philosophers are so moved by the referential-attributive distinction as to defend this highly implausible ambiguity.²²

Proper Names

Philosophers have hardly noticed Russell's observation about the dual use of proper names. Like it or not, proper names do have non-referential uses, including attributive uses and predicative uses. Before discussing such uses and their significance for the Millian view of names, consider

¹⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, when discussing definite descriptions I will assume that the description occurs in a simple sentence of the form 'the F is G'. On Russell's theory, the type of general proposition is what Strawson called a "uniquely existential" or what I call simply a "uniqueness" proposition.

²⁰ Of course Russell held that ordinary proper names are 'disguised' or 'truncated' descriptions, in which case they too, contrary to appearances, are quantificational.

²¹ Recanati (1993: ch. 15) and Bezuidenhout (1997), deny that definite descriptions are semantically ambiguous. However, they are disinclined to treat one use as literal and to explain the other pragmatically, because intuitively they find referential uses to be no less literal than attributive ones. Accordingly, they suggest that the existence of both uses is symptomatic of semantic underdetermination or what Recanati calls, borrowing a phrase from Donnellan, "pragmatic ambiguity" (perhaps this is what Donnellan had in mind by that phrase). However, from this it implausibly follows that a sentence like 'The discoverer of X-rays was bald' does not express a determinate proposition. If we wish to maintain that such a sentence does express a determinate proposition, and does so univocally, the obvious choice is a general proposition, in which case the description functions as a quantifier phrase and only its attributive use is the strictly literal one.

²² For the latest defense of "referential descriptions," see Devitt forthcoming. I reply to his main arguments in the final section of Bach, forthcoming-a.

Russell's rationale for his very narrow view regarding which singular terms qualify as logically proper names. It is based on a highly restrictive conception of acquaintance — there can be no doubt about the existence of an object of one's acquaintance. Russell insisted that a logically proper name refer to an object of acquaintance in this highly restrictive sense. Although Russell is often ridiculed for his highly restrictive conception of acquaintance, it is interesting to note that he also had a more plausible, logical reason for his restrictive view of proper names. Consider that in standard, first-order logic the role of proper names is played by individual constants and existence is represented by the existential quantifier. So there is no direct way to use that notation to say that a certain object exists, say the one assigned the name 'n'. In standard logic, we can't straightforwardly say that n exists. We have to resort to using a formula like ' $\exists x (x = n)$ ', which is to say that there exists something identical to n. And, when there is no such thing as n, we can't use the negation of a formula of that form to express the truth that there is not anything to which n is identical, because standard first-order logic disallows empty names. Free logic allows this, but either it has to represent existence as a predicate or else invoke some dubious distinction, such as that between existence and being. Anyway, my only point here is that Russell had a logical motivation for insisting that a genuine name be one which is (epistemically) guaranteed to have a referent.

This is important because it eliminates the familiar problems for Millians discovered by Frege and by Russell. Millians who address these problems (Braun 1993, forthcoming, Salmon 1998, and Soames 2002: 89-95) have to use some fancy footwork to handle them in a way that comports with their Millianism.²³ I won't examine their treatments of these problems here but simply mention a few problems, some more familiar than others. First, there is problem of existential statements, both positive and negative, containing terms that semantically refer (this problem is related to Kant's famous contention, in connection with the ontological argument for the existence of God, that existence is not a property). Ordinarily, to ascribe a property to an object presupposes that it exists. To assert of something that it exists (exists at all, at some time) rather than not is not to presuppose that it exists. Indeed, it is rather odd to characterize this as asserting of something that it exists.

Even more problematic is the case of negative existentials, and the related problem of empty names. To assert, for example, that Hamlet does not exist is surely not to assert of Hamlet that he does not exist, much less to presuppose that he exists. It is possible to argue that Hamlet is a fictional character, specifically an abstract object created by Shakespeare (presumably), and that when one uses 'Hamlet does not exist' to deny that Hamlet exists one is not speaking literally and does not mean what one says but rather that Hamlet the fictional character is not a real person but only a character (Soames 2002: 94, endorsing Salmon 1998). This view seems less plausible with such names as 'Santa Claus', 'Bigfoot', and 'Vulcan'. However, a Millian who denies that such names refer altogether must deny that sentences containing such names are capable of expressing propositions. Yet it seems that, to take the most obvious example, the sentence 'Santa Claus (Bigfoot, Vulcan) does not exist' does express a proposition, indeed a true one.

Since Millianism entails that proper names contribute only their bearers to the semantic contents of sentences in which they occur, it has to deny that there is any semantic difference between co-designating proper names. This, of course, gives rise to Frege's problem (see Salmon 1986) about the informativeness of identity sentences like 'Marshall Mathers is Eminem' and to the further problem about substituting co-designating names in attitude ascriptions, as here:

(9) George believes that Eminem is a great musician.

²³ Soames is not a strict Millian, since he attributes additional descriptive content to proper names of certain sorts. I do not believe that this has any bearing on any points made here.

(10) George believes that Marshall Mathers is a great musician.

It seems to many that (9) could be true while (10) is false, hence that they have different semantic contents. That is because, so it seems, these two belief sentences ascribe to George belief in two different things. Millians must reject that, and explain away the appearance of substitution failure as based on some sort of pragmatic or psychological confusion (see Salmon 1986, Braun 1998, and Soames 2001), but many philosophers find such explanations, however ingenious, to be implausible.

There are also ascriptions like these to consider:

(11) Nimrod thinks that Michael Jackson is a great basketball player.

(12) Bozo thinks that Michael Jackson is Michael Jordan.

The contents of these ascriptions, in their most likely uses, obviously do not accord with Millianism. So, for example, in uttering (11) a speaker would probably not be attributing to Nimrod a belief about Michael Jackson but would still be using ‘Michael Jackson’ to refer to Michael Jackson. And it is unlikely that a speaker uttering (12) would be using ‘Michael Jordan’ to refer to Michael Jordan, much less to attribute to Bozo a belief in the false identity proposition which, according to Millianism, is semantically expressed by ‘Michael Jackson is Michael Jordan’. The Millian’s only way around these examples would be to argue that when used in the ways described, these sentence are not being used literally.

Millians tend to neglect the fact that names can be used as predicates (Burge 1973, Lockwood 1975), as in these examples:

(13) Dan Quayle is no Jack Kennedy.

(14) Leningrad became St. Petersburg in 1991.

Indeed, names can be pluralized and combined with quantifiers as in (15) and (16),

(15) Many Kennedys have died tragically.

(16) There are hundreds of O’Learys in Dublin.

You could argue that in (13) and (15) the name ‘Kennedy’ is not being used literally (for example, as used in (15) it is used to mean member of the famous Kennedy family), but the other examples seem perfectly literal. So it is hard to see how the Millian treatment of proper names on the model of individual constants can handle such examples, which suggest that proper names are more like other nominals than is commonly supposed. In syntax, it is common to treat nominals, when they occur in sentences, as constituents of noun phrases (or determiner phrases, as contemporary linguists classify them), which include a position for a determiner as well, as in ‘a man’, ‘few tigers’, ‘all reptiles,’ and ‘some water’. And note that in some languages, such as Italian and German, singular proper names are often used with definite articles.

I could go into much greater detail, but these examples suffice to suggest that proper names can be used nonreferentially yet apparently literally.²⁴ At the very least, the Millian needs to show that these are not literal uses or else that proper names are systematically ambiguous as between referential and non-referential uses.

²⁴ In my view, which I defend in 2002, a proper name expresses the property of bearing that very name. Interestingly, although it was not part of his view that the property of bearing the name is semantically expressed by the name, Mill himself wrote, “When we refer to persons or things by name, we do not convey “any information about them, *except that those are their names*” (1872: 22; my emphasis).

A further complication is that proper names seem to be able to function as variable binders. Compare the following two sentences, in which the relation between the pronoun and the noun phrase that syntactically binds it seems to be the same:

(17) Bob₁ hates his₁ boss.

(18) Every employee₁ hates his₁ boss.

It might seem that the pronoun ‘his₁’ is a referentially dependent anaphor when bound by a singular term like a proper name and is a variable when bound by a quantificational phrase. However, it is difficult to see what the relevant difference could be. Notice further that there are readings of the following sentences in which the proper name occurs as part of a quantifier phrase that binds ‘his’:

(19) [Bob and every other employee]₁ hates his₁ boss.

(20) [Only Bob]₁ hates his₁ boss.

Against the suggestion that a proper name is a variable binder it could be argued, I suppose, that in (19) and (20) it is the phrase in which the proper name occurs that binds the pronoun, but consider the following example, involving verb-phrase ellipsis:

(21) Bob hates his boss, and so does every other employee.

If the pronoun is not a bound variable, then (21) could only mean that every other employee hates Bob’s boss. It could not have a reading on which it says that every other employee hates his respective boss.

Indexicals

We have already seen (in Point S9) that indexicals can be used nonreferentially but literally.²⁵ The most obvious example is when they are anaphoric on but not bound by an indefinite description or other quantifier phrase) and are used as short for a definite description recoverable from the nominal contained in that phrase. Descriptive uses of indexicals have been well documented by Geoff Nunberg (1993, forthcoming; see also Recanati 1993: ch. 16). And Jeff King (2001) has investigated in depth various nonreferential uses of complex demonstratives. Here I will simply give a few examples of descriptive and other quantificational uses of indexicals:

(22) Never put off to *tomorrow* what you can do *today*.

²⁵ As promised by his title, “The Multiple Uses of Indexicals,” Quentin Smith (1989) identifies various unorthodox ways in which indexicals can be used. Accordingly, he rejects the view, such as Kaplan’s theory of character, according to which reference is determined as a simple function of context. No simple rule can directly account for this variety of uses. However, he still thinks that each use is rule-governed and proposes that for each indexical there is a “meta-rule” that determines, as function of a context, which reference-determining rule is operative (at least in cases where the indexical is used to refer). Unfortunately, his statement of these meta-rules is too sketchy and schematic to be very helpful. Moreover, he makes no attempt to show that all the uses he identifies for a given indexical are literal uses. It seems that some are not, in which case there is no need for a rule of the sort he imagines to cover them. On the other hand, since indexicals can be used literally but nonreferringly, if there is such a meta-rule, it would have to take those uses into account, in which case it would not be limited to determining, as function of a context, which *reference*-determining rule is operative. However, it is not clear that there is any rule that determines semantic content as a function of context (see Point L3 below).

- (23) [Answering the phone after 10 rings] I thought *you* were a telemarketer.
- (24) *He* who hesitates is lost.
- (25) Any time *she* gives you her phone number, she's interested.
- (26) Everyone who survives a heart attack never forgets *that moment*.

Although these uses are not referential, they seem perfectly literal. So a semantic account of indexicals should, as King does for complex demonstratives, cover their non-referential uses.

What, then, should we make of the fact that descriptions, names, and indexicals all have nonreferential uses?

L2 A given singular term seems to mean the same thing whether it is used referentially or not, and an adequate semantic theory should explain this or else explain it away.

Philosophers may disagree about which particular sorts of expressions are capable of referring, but there is general consensus that at least some deserve the label 'referring expression'. For example, it is widely supposed that proper names, indexicals, and demonstratives are referring expressions, with allowances made for reference failure if not for nonreferential uses. It is almost as widely supposed that definite descriptions are not referring expressions, even though they can be used to refer, and are, rather, quantifier phrases. A more controversial case is that of complex demonstratives, which have the form of quantifier phrases but often seem to behave like referring expressions.²⁶ So what should we say about Strawson's dictum? Do some expressions, at least in some of their uses, qualify as referring expressions and not merely as expressions that can be used to refer? Or was he right to insist that referring is not something an expression does and is merely something that speakers can use expressions to do?

If Strawson was right, it was not for the right reasons. He relied heavily on the fact that an alleged referring expression can be used to refer to different things on different occasions and took that to be sufficient for his conclusion. He did not consider the possibility that, à la Kaplan, an expression can have different referents with respect to different contexts. So, for example, relative to a context 'I' would seem to refer to whoever uses it, and 'now' would seem to refer to the time at which it is used (but see Smith 1989 and Predelli 1998). Even so, the question remains, given that some expressions, notably definite descriptions, which are clearly not referring expressions can be used to refer, why suppose that expressions of *any* sort that can be used to refer can be so used only because they themselves (semantically) refer?

Here's an embarrassingly simple argument:

ESA

1. Virtually any expression that can be used to refer can also be used literally but not referentially.
2. No variation in meaning (semantic ambiguity or underspecification, indexicality, or vagueness) explains this fact.
3. So the meaning of such an expression is compatible with its being used nonreferentially.

²⁶ Being of the form 'that F', these may also be called 'demonstrative descriptions'. See Braun 1994 for a critical comparison of various referential and non-referential approaches and their respective accounts of the semantic role of the 'F' in 'that F'. See King 2001 for a thoroughgoing defense of the claim that complex demonstratives are quantifier phrases.

4. So virtually any expression that can be used to refer is not inherently referential.²⁷

It remains to be seen who this argument embarrasses. If it is a bad argument, even if put more rigorously than stated here, it should embarrass me. However, whether good or bad, it should embarrass anyone who endorses an account according to which expressions of a given type are referring expressions and who does not address the case of nonreferential uses of those expressions, much less reconcile their pet account with those uses. Referentialists about definite descriptions are the only ones who regularly face up to the fact that the expressions they're concerned with have non-referential uses. They may have to resort to the claim that definite descriptions are systematically ambiguous, indexical somehow, or semantically underspecified, but at least they confront the problem. Referentialists about indexicals, demonstratives, and proper names try to survive on a lean diet of examples and, to stay on their diet, keep non-referential uses out of sight. Direct-reference theorists about indexicals and demonstratives rarely consider descriptive uses of those expressions, and when they do treat of such uses, tend to engage in special pleading to avoid abandoning their referentialist predilections. Similarly, Millians, who think of proper names on the model of individual constants do not bother reckoning with predicative uses of proper names. They implicitly dismiss predicative uses as marginal cases. Long ago Tyler Burge (1973) described such an attitude, the "appeal to 'special' uses whenever proper names do not play the role of individual constants," as "flimsy and theoretically deficient" (1973/1997: 605). Much preferable is a unified account of names, one that handles their various uses instead of marginalizing those uses which, account to one's pet theory, count as deviant.

As the examples in the last section illustrate, Indexicals seem to have literal uses that do not fall into the referentialist paradigm. These uses do not seem to be explained by some special sort of semantic ambiguity or underspecification, and they do seem literal. So how can they be explained? It seems obvious that whatever their explanation, a purely referentialist account can't provide it, as suggested by ESA.

L3 In general, "context" does not fix reference when meaning doesn't.

At the outset I mentioned a verbal slippery slide that seems to lead philosophers from the trivial claim that singular terms can be used to refer to the conclusion that these terms are semantically referring expressions. Here's another verbal slippery slide I've noticed. It starts from the platitude that what an expression can be used refer to can vary from one context to another or, in the case of an ambiguous expression, that what an expression can be used to mean can so vary. People slide from contextual variability to context relativity to context sensitivity to context dependence to contextual determination. This leads people to conclude that context somehow manages to "provide" or "supply" semantic values to expressions, resolve ambiguities, and work other semantic miracles. That's why I call this an appeal to "context *ex machina*." Context does have a role to play in semantics, but its role is limited. There are a few expressions which really do refer

²⁷ Two qualifications here. First, to say that an expression is used to refer does not entail that it is successfully used to refer. For example, a use of the description 'the dagger I see before me' could count as referential even if there is no dagger before the speaker. Also, premise 1 in the ESA says 'virtually any expression' to allow for the case of 'I', 'today', and a few others ("pure" indexicals). 'You' might be added to that list, despite the fact that it has an impersonal use, for it is not generally true that the second-person pronoun has an impersonal use. For example, French has 'on' rather than an impersonal 'tu' or 'vous', and German has 'man' rather than an impersonal 'du' or 'sie'. Also, I wouldn't argue that 'he' and 'she' have non-referential uses because they are colloquially used as count nouns ("It's a she!").

as a function of context, but in general it's not the context that does the trick. Later (Point L4) I defend the obvious alternative, that the speaker's referential intention does the trick, and that it is a mistake to treat the speaker's intention as part of context, as just another contextual parameter.

Indexicals and demonstratives are often casually described as “context-sensitive” or “context-dependent.” Taken literally, this means that the reference of such a term is determined by its linguistic meaning as a function of a contextual variable (call this the *semantic* context). But is the reference of indexicals and demonstratives really context-dependent in this sense? It is not obvious that indexicals in general, including demonstratives, should be assimilated to the special case of “pure” indexicals. The reference of pure indexicals, such as ‘I’ and ‘today’, may be determined by their linguistic meanings as a function of specific contextual variables (this is context in the narrow, semantic sense), but other indexicals — and demonstratives — are different. John Perry describes their reference as “discretionary” rather than “automatic,” as depending on the speaker's intention, not just on “meaning and public contextual facts” (2001: 58-59). That is, the speaker's intention is not just another contextual variable, not just one more element of what Kaplan calls “character” (1989a: 505). If that is correct, then demonstrative and most indexicals suffer from a *character deficiency*.²⁸ Context does not determine reference, in the sense of *constituting* it, of making it the case that the reference is so-and-so; rather, it is something for the speaker to exploit to enable the listener to determine the intended reference, in the sense of *ascertaining* it. Accordingly, although it is often casually remarked that what a speaker says in uttering a given sentence “depends on context,” is “determined” or “provided” by context, or is otherwise a “matter of context,” this is not literally true.

What Perry describes as “public contextual facts” is not context in the narrow, semantic sense but context in a broad, cognitive or evidential sense. It is the mutually salient common ground, and includes the current state of the conversation (what has just been said, what has just been referred to, etc.), the physical setting (if the conversants are face-to-face), salient mutual knowledge between the conversants, and relevant common background knowledge. Its role is epistemic not constitutive, pragmatic not semantic. Because it can constrain what a hearer can reasonably take a speaker to mean in saying what he says, it can constrain what the speaker could reasonably mean in saying what he says. But it is incapable of determining what the speaker actually does mean. That is a matter of the speaker's referential intention and his communicative intention as a whole, however reasonable or unreasonable it may be.

To appreciate what I mean, first consider an example involving ambiguity. Suppose a dinner host utters the ambiguous sentence ‘The chicken is ready to eat’. Presumably she is not saying and does not mean that a certain chicken (one of the guests!) is hungry. Even so, given the ambiguity of the sentence, she could, however bizarrely, say and mean that. Context doesn't make it the case that she does not. But, of course, she could not reasonably expect such a communicative intention to be recognized. Now consider an example involving demonstrative reference. Suppose you see a group of ducks sitting quietly by a pond and one duck starts quacking furiously. You say, “That duck is excited.” I naturally take you to be referring to the

²⁸ In the case of demonstratives, Kaplan points out the need for “completing demonstrations and recognizes some of the problems this poses for his framework of character and content. David Braun (1996) has made the best effort I know of to solve these problems broadly within that framework, but it requires an additional level of meaning and requires that demonstrations be explicitly represented. Leaving aside nonreferring uses of demonstratives, it is not clear to me how Braun's account can be extended to handle referring uses of demonstratives that do not involve demonstrations or cases in which what is referred to is not what is demonstrated, as in many of Nunberg's (1993) well-known examples (see also Borg 2001). Nunberg (forthcoming) now disavows describing these as cases of “deferred reference.”

duck that's quacking. But is it the context that makes it the case that this is the duck that you are referring to? Not at all. For all I know, and contrary to what I can reasonably suppose, you could be referring to a quiet duck that you recognize by its distinctive color. I won't identify which duck you're referring to, and you haven't done enough to enable me to, but still you could be referring to that duck, however ineffectually. So if 'that duck' refers (relative to this context), what does it refer to? The quacking duck or to the distinctively colored duck? Given the story I have just told, it is clear which duck you intend to be referring to (the distinctively colored one), which duck I take you to be referring to (the quacking one), but is there any determinate fact of the matter as to which duck 'that duck' refers to? I don't think so, and I don't think there is any reason to expect so.

So philosophers can casually describe context as "providing" or "supplying" the references of demonstratives and discretionary indexicals, but these expressions do not refer as a function of the contextual variables given by their meanings, i.e., narrow, semantic context. But broad, cognitive context does not determine reference either, in the sense of making it the case that the expression has a certain reference. It merely enables the audience to figure out the reference. That's why I say that demonstratives and discretionary indexicals suffer from a character deficiency — they do not refer as a function of context. It is only in an attenuated sense that these expressions can be called 'referring' expressions. Besides, as we have seen, they have clearly nonreferential but perfectly literal uses, e.g., as proxies for definite descriptions and as something like bound variables. That's why it's a real challenge to give a fully general account of the meaning of indexicals. I am not going to try to meet that challenge here and do anything like what Jeff King (2001) has done for complex demonstratives.

L4 The speaker's referential intention determines speaker reference, but it does not determine semantic reference, except in a pickwickian way.

The fact that the speaker's intention picks up the slack in determining reference might suggest that the specification of the meaning of a discretionary indexical or a demonstrative contains a parameter for the speaker's intention. However, I am unaware of any direct argument for that. There is talk about how the reference of indexicals and demonstratives is "determined by context" but no argument as to why the speaker's referential intention should count as part of the context. I think there's reason to think that it shouldn't. If context were defined so broadly as to include anything other than linguistic meaning that is relevant to determining what a speaker means, then of course the speaker's intention would be part of the context. But if the context is to play the explanatory role claimed of it, it must be something that is the same for the speaker as it is for his audience, and obviously the role of the speaker's intention is not the same for both. Context can constrain what the speaker can succeed in communicating given what he says, but it cannot constrain what he intends to communicate in choosing what to say. Of course, in implementing his intention, the speaker needs to select words whose utterance in the context will enable the hearer to figure out what he is trying to communicate, but that is a different matter.

To illustrate the role of speakers' intentions, let's look at some simple examples involving reference and anaphora (except for reflexives and reciprocals, I take anaphoric pronouns to be no different in kind from demonstratives or deictic indexicals). Compare (27a) and (27b):

- (27) a. A cop arrested a robber. He was wearing a badge.
b. A cop arrested a robber. He was wearing a mask.

It is natural to suppose that in (27a) 'he' refers to the cop and in (27b) to the robber. It is natural all right, but not inevitable. The speaker of (27a) could be using 'he' to refer to the robber, and the speaker of (27b) could be using it to refer to the cop. Such speakers would probably not be

understood correctly, at least not without enough stage setting to override commonsense knowledge about cops and robbers, but that would be a pragmatic mistake. Nevertheless, the fact that ‘he’ can be so used indicates that it is the speaker’s intention, not the context, which determines that in (27a) it refers to the cop and in (27b) to the robber. The same point applies to these examples with two anaphora:

- (28) a. A cop arrested a robber. He took away his gun.
b. A cop arrested a robber. He used his gun.
c. A cop arrested a robber. He dropped his gun.
d. A cop arrested a robber. He took away his gun and escaped.

In (28a), presumably ‘he’ would be used to refer to the cop and ‘his’ to the robber, whereas in (28b) both would be used to refer to the cop, in (28c) both would be used to refer to the robber, and in (28d) ‘he’ would be used to the robber and ‘his’ to the cop. However, given the different uses of the pronouns in what is essentially the same linguistic environment, clearly it is the speaker’s intention, not the context, that explains these differences in reference. It is a different, pragmatic matter how the audience resolves these anaphors and determines their references; the broad, communicative context does not determine them but merely provides the extralinguistic information that enables the audience to figure them out.

Similar points apply to demonstrative reference. Reference is not determined by acts of demonstration or any other features of the context of utterance. Rather, these features are exploited by the audience to ascertain the reference, partly on the basis of being so intended. Indeed, they are exploited by the speaker in choosing what expression to utter to carry out his referential intention, since, as part of his communicative intention, he intends his audience to take into account the fact that he intends them to recognize his intention. His referential intention determines the reference, but this is not to suggest that it succeeds by magic or is somehow self-fulfilling. You cannot utter any old thing and gesture in any old way and expect to be taken to be referring to whatever you have in mind. You do not say something and then, as though by an inner decree (an intention), determine what you are using the expression to refer to. You do not just have something ‘in mind’ and hope your audience is a good mind-reader. Rather, you decide to refer to something and try to select an expression whose utterance will enable your audience, under the circumstances, to identify that object (see Point S4). If you utter ‘that duck’ and the duck you intend to be referring to is the only one around or is maximally salient in some way, you won’t have to do anything more to enable your audience to identify it. Otherwise, you will need to point at it and make it salient, hence make it obviously the one you intend to be referring to.

Here are a few more examples. Suppose you point at a Ferrari and say, “That belongs to me.” Presumably you’re referring to that particular car. Suppose you say instead, “That’s my favorite color.” Presumably you’re referring to the color of that car. Suppose you say instead, “That’s my favorite sports car.” Presumably you’re referring to that type of car, Ferrari, or perhaps that particular model, say a Spider. In each case, what enables your audience to figure out what you’re referring to is the content of the predicate. In each case, that’s what you can expect them to take into account in figuring this out, and they can reasonably assume that this is what you expect. But nothing is to prevent you from intending to refer to something else. For example, you could be referring to that particular car when you say, “That’s my favorite sports car” (you might be have a big car collection that includes sports cars). And, you could be referring, however, incoherently, to that model of Ferrari when you say, “That’s my favorite color.” In this last case, you’d have to say something much more elaborate in order to succeed in communicating what you mean. With a personal pronoun or a complex demonstrative, more remote references are possible. You could say “He/That guy spends all his money on cars” and be referring to the owner of that Ferrari, or

you could say, “She/That woman is going to leave him” and be referring to his wife. In each of these cases, it is not literally the context but the speaker’s referential intention that determines the reference. And, as I suggested earlier, it’s only in an attenuated sense that the expression used to refer, whether a demonstrative or a personal pronoun, does the referring.

L5 There is no such thing as descriptive “reference-fixing” (not because something isn’t fixed, but because it isn’t reference).

This point is a corollary of a point made earlier, Point S7, that descriptive singling out does not count as genuine reference. Using a description like ‘the planet that is perturbing Uranus’ to “fix” the reference of ‘Neptune’ to a certain planet, or using a description like ‘the serial killer terrifying the people of London’ to “fix” the reference of ‘Jack the Ripper’, where the description is treated as rigidified (as “Dthat-ed”), is to do nothing more than to make the names equivalent to rigidified descriptions. It does not enable such a name to introduce the individual described into propositions semantically expressed by sentences in which the name occurs. I am not denying that, when the names ‘Neptune’ and ‘Jack the Ripper’ were introduced, there were singular propositions containing Neptune or Jack the Ripper. I am merely denying that sentences containing those names expressed such propositions. I am not denying that Neptune was given the name ‘Neptune’ or that Jack the Ripper, whoever he was, was given the name ‘Jack the Ripper’. In denying that so-called “descriptive reference-fixing” manages to fix reference, I am denying that these names functioned as referring terms.

As we saw earlier, Kaplan’s liberality about direct reference imposes no constraint, beyond the requirement of unique satisfaction, on the definite description to which ‘dthat’ can be applied to yield a “directly referential” term. As he wrote, “Ignorance of the referent does not defeat the directly referential character of indexicals” (1989a, 536). Evidently, thought Kaplan, this character can be created with the stroke of a pen. He thought it could be done not only with his ‘dthat’ operator but also with proper names, such as the name ‘Newman 2’ for the first child born in the 22nd century. I don’t deny that this child, assuming there will be one, can be given that name now. What I deny is this act of dubbing makes it the case that we can thereby form singular thoughts about Newman 2. Furthermore, we understand sentences containing that name, e.g., ‘Newman 2 will be bald’, and do so without having a singular thought about Newman 2. So the proposition that sentence expresses can’t be a singular proposition (about Newman 2).

The closest that “descriptive reference-fixing” comes to enabling a name to refer is that the description involved can be taken as rigidified. But this doesn’t mean that sentences containing such a name express singular propositions. Even though rigidifying the description (‘the actual F’) means that the only individual whose properties are relevant to the truth or falsity of the proposition being expressed (even if that proposition is modal) is the actual satisfier of the description (if should exist), still that proposition is general, not singular. This proposition may in some sense be object-dependent, but it is not object-involving. The property of being the actual F may enter into the proposition, but the actual F does not.

L6 Pragmatic arguments of the same sort used to defeat objections against Millianism (such as those based on fictional and empty names and on occurrences of names in attitude contexts) can also be used against Millianism itself.

There is an interesting irony about Millianism. To defend the claim that proper names semantically refer and that sentences containing them semantically express singular propositions about their bearers, Millians indulge in fancy footwork, typically of the pragmatic variety, to meet objections based on Frege’s and Russell’s puzzles. These efforts, which I won’t review here, are often charged with being counterintuitive, but Millians meet that charge by exploiting the

distinction the semantic content of a sentence (relative to a context) and what a speaker would normally convey in uttering the sentence. A typical strategy is to explain away this counterintuitiveness by claiming that the relevant intuitions pertain to the truth conditions of what people ordinarily use the sentences in question to convey. This is essentially the strategy which Kripke (1977) used to explain away the apparent semantic significance of the referential-attributive distinction regarding definite descriptions (he relied on a distinction between semantic reference and speaker's reference) and which two of the most prominent Millians, Salmon (1986) and Soames (1988, 2002) use to explain away the anti-substitution intuition about names in attitude contexts.²⁹ The irony is that Millians have not considered that the same strategy might be effective against Millianism itself, which, after all, is based mainly on what Kripke describes as "direct intuitions of the truth conditions of particular sentences" (Kripke 1980: 14).³⁰ Perhaps the intuitive basis for Millianism is not as strong as it seems.

I agree that our intuitions are often insensitive to the difference between the semantic content of sentences and what speakers normally use them to convey. There is a deep explanation for their insensitivity, which reflects the fact that for efficient and effective communication people rarely make fully explicit what they are trying to convey and rarely need to. Most sentences short enough to use in everyday conversation do not literally express things we are likely ever to mean, and most things we are likely ever to mean are not expressible by sentences we are likely ever to utter.³¹ Moreover, in the course of speaking and listening to one another, we generally do not need to make conscious intuitive judgments about the semantic contents of the sentences we utter or hear. We focus instead on what we are communicating or on what is being communicated to us. We do not need to be able to make accurate judgments about what information is semantic and what is not in order to have real-time access to semantic information. For this reason, seemingly semantic intuitions cannot be assumed to be driven by, or to be reliable about, what we take them to be about.

Consider an analogy with proper names. The number or, rather, the numeral on an athlete's jersey is often used to refer to that player. In special cases, this can occur even outside of the context of a particular game. For example, Willie Mays was for decades referred to as '24' and,

²⁹ For example, if it is true that Hammurabi believed that Hesperus is visible only in the evening, then it is true that he believed that Phosphorus is visible only in the evening. We may prefer to *say* the former, because what we say is sensitive to a pragmatic "requirement that the reporter be maximally faithful to the words of the agent unless there is reason to deviate" (Soames 1988: 123). However, the anti-substitution intuition, insofar as it pertains to what the belief sentence itself says, betrays an implicit confusion between what the sentence says and what uttering it conveys, namely that the subject believes the proposition expressed by the 'that'-clause by taking that proposition in a way that is pragmatically associated with its wording. From a Millian point of view, any difference between two co-referring proper names cannot be semantic.

³⁰ I should cancel any implication that Kripke 1980 is a defense of Millianism. As Soames points out, "nowhere in *Naming and Necessity*, or anywhere else, does Kripke say what the semantic content of a name is" (2002: 5).

³¹ I develop this picture in Bach forthcoming-b. It is set against the background of the neo-Gricean framework presented in previous work (Bach and Harnish 1979 and Bach 1994, 2001, and 2002). Also, see Levinson 2000 for a comprehensive discussion of regularities in speaker meaning that go beyond linguistic meaning. His numerous examples illustrate the error of supposing that the semantic content of an indicative sentence is what it is mostly likely to be used to assert. Most utterances involve what I call "conversational implicature," in which what the speaker means is not made fully explicit.

more recently, Michael Jordan as '23' (now LeBron James may have something to say about that). Yet nobody would suggest these numbers themselves refer to those players. So why does it seem to most philosophers that proper names aren't merely used to refer to their bearers but do so themselves? When you use a name to refer, generally the property of bearing the name does not enter into what you are trying to convey. For example, if you say, "Aristotle was the greatest philosopher of antiquity," presumably you are not suggesting that having the name 'Aristotle' had anything to do with being a great philosopher. Rather, you intend the property of bearing that name merely to enable your audience to identify who you are talking about. In this respect proper names are like most definite descriptions, which are incomplete and are also generally used referentially.³² And when we use them to refer to specific individuals, the properties they express are incidental to what we are trying to convey.

Suppose that the property of bearing a certain name did matter. Suppose we cared about the proper names people had regardless of whose names they were. A employer might want to hire someone because his name was 'Cedric Scampini', a tourist might visit a city because its name was 'Cincinnati', and a diner might be tempted to try a restaurant called 'Colestra'. However frivolous such sentiments might be, people could attach great importance to names and come to regard bearing a certain name as a noteworthy property, regardless of who or what the name belongs to. In such a world, proper names would commonly have attributive uses.

The intuition of rigidity has the same source as the intuition of referentiality. According to Kripke, "We have a direct intuition of rigidity, exhibited in our understanding of the truth conditions of particular sentences. In addition, various secondary phenomena, about 'what we would say', ... give indirect evidence of rigidity." (1980: 14). However, he does not show that it is the truth conditions of sentences, rather than of what people try to convey in uttering them, that drive our intuitions. Of course, it is not true that *Aristotle* might not have been Aristotle. Obviously *he* could not have been somebody else. But it does not follow that sentence (29) semantically expresses this (false) singular proposition.

(29) Aristotle might not have been Aristotle.

If one takes this sentence to express that proposition, one takes both occurrences of the name 'Aristotle' to refer to a particular Greek philosopher. Then of course the sentence will seem false.

How could the sentence be true? Well, suppose that Aristotle's parents decided to name their first two sons 'Aristotle' and 'Aristocrates' but hadn't decided in which order. Then, when their first son was born, they made up their minds and named him 'Aristocrates', saving 'Aristotle' for their second son, the future student of Plato. They could have made the reverse decision. In this circumstance, sentence (29) is true: Aristotle might not have been Aristotle. On the (predicative) reading on which it is true, it does not mean that Aristotle might have been somebody else but merely that he might not have had the property of bearing 'Aristotle'. This reading is perfectly intuitive, at least to anyone not taken in by Millianism. On that reading, at least the second occurrence of 'Aristotle' does not refer to Aristotle.³³

³² An incomplete definite description is one whose matrix is satisfied by more than one individual. Most definite descriptions we use are incomplete. Usually we use 'the book' and 'the car', for example, to refer to a certain readily identifiable book or car.

³³ Similarly, it seems to me that sentence (a) has a reading such that on the above scenario, where Aristotle were his parents' first born, it would be true.

(a) Aristotle might have been Aristocrates.

3. The Bottom Line

Referring is not as easy as is commonly supposed. Much of what speakers do that passes for referring really isn't. And it is far from clear that, with a few exceptions, so-called referring expressions really refer, except in a pickwickian sense. But I must repeat my running disclaimer: I do not pretend that the data, observations, or even the arguments presented here, especially what I dubbed the "Embarrassing Simple Argument," are conclusive. I do think they support what might fairly be regarded as default hypotheses about speaker reference and linguistic reference. So if you think these hypotheses are wrong, you need to show that. You need to argue against them and to find a way to accommodate or explain away the data and observations. You can't just appeal to intuitions about truth or falsity of certain sentences unless you make a case that this is what the intuitions are really responsive to. And you can't make that slippery slide from speaker reference to linguistic or semantic reference by blindly attributing referential properties to uses of linguistic expressions or to tokens of them. It is one thing for a speaker, when using an expression in a certain way, to express a thought about a certain object and quite another for the expression to stand for that object, even relative to the context. The slide from one to the other is anything but automatic.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962), *How to do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bach, K. (1987/1994), *Thought and Reference*, pbk. ed., revised with postscript. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____ (1994), "Conversational Implicature," *Mind & Language* 9: 124-62.
- _____ (1999), "The Semantics-Pragmatics Distinction: What It Is and Why It Matters," in K. Turner (ed.), *The Semantics-Pragmatics Interface from Different Points of View*. Oxford: Elsevier, 65-84.
- _____ (2000), "A Puzzle about Belief Reports," in K. Jaszczolt, *The Pragmatics of Propositional Attitude Reports*. Oxford: Elsevier, 99-109.
- _____ (2001), "You Don't Say?," *Synthese* 128: 15-44.
- _____ (2002), "Giorgione Was So-called Because of His Name," *Philosophical Perspectives* 16: 73-103.
- _____ (2004), "Speech Acts and Pragmatics," in L. Horn and G. Ward (eds.), *The Handbook of Pragmatics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 463-487.

I am not committing the vulgar mistake of suggesting that (a) has a true reading because it could have semantically expressed a different proposition than the one it does express. This would indeed be to "confuse use and mention," which Kripke warns against. Kripke notes the difference between these three theses: "(i) that identical objects are necessarily identical, (ii) that true identity statements between rigid designators are necessary; (iii) that identity statements between what we call 'names' in actual language are necessary" (1980: 4). And, as he points out, thesis (iii) follows from (ii) only if ordinary names are rigid. However, he does not consider the possibility that a sentence like (29) has a reading on which it is not an identity statement at all, and involves the 'is' of predication rather than identity.

- _____ (forthcoming-a), "Descriptions: Points of Reference," in A. Bezuidenhout and M. Reimer (eds.), *Descriptions and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____ (forthcoming-b), "Context *ex Machina*," in Z. Szabó (ed.), *Semantics vs. Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bach, K. and Harnish, R. M. (1979), *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bezuidenhout, A. (1997), "Pragmatics, Semantic Underdetermination, and the Referential-Attributive Distinction," *Mind* 106: 375-410.
- Borg, E. (2002), "Pointing at Jack, Talking about Jill: Understanding Deferred Uses of Demonstratives and Pronouns," *Mind and Language* 17: 489-512.
- Braun, D. (1993), "Empty Names," *Noûs* 27: 449-69.
- _____ (1994), "Structured Characters and Complex Demonstratives," *Philosophical Studies* 74: 193-219.
- _____ (1996), "Demonstratives and Their Linguistic Meanings," *Noûs* 30: 145-73.
- _____ (1998), "Understanding Belief Reports," *Philosophical Review* 107: 555-95.
- _____ (forthcoming), "Empty Names, Fictional Names, and Mythical Names," *Noûs*.
- Burge, T. (1973), "Reference and Proper Names," *Journal of Philosophy* 70: 425-39; reprinted in Peter Ludlow (ed.), *Readings in The Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 593-608.
- Chastain, C. (1975), "Reference and Context," in K. Gunderson (ed.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 7, Language, Mind, and Knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 194-269.
- Devitt, M. (forthcoming), "The Case for Referential Descriptions," in A. Bezuidenhout and M. Reimer (eds.), *Descriptions and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Donnellan, K. (1966), "Reference and Definite Descriptions," *Philosophical Review* 75: 281-304.
- Graff, D. (2001), "Description as Predicates," *Philosophical Studies* 102: 1-42.
- Grice, H. P. (1989), *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gundel, J., Hedberg, N. and Zacharski R. (1993), "Cognitive Status and the Form of Referring Expressions in Discourse," *Language* 69: 274-307.
- Kaplan, D. (1979), "Dthat," in P. French, Theodore Uehling, and H. Wettstein (eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 383-400.
- _____ (1989a), "Demonstratives," in J. Almog, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 481-563.
- _____ (1989b), "Afterthoughts," in J. Almog, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 565-614.
- Karttunen, L. (1976), "Discourse Referents," in J. D. McCawley (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics 7*. New York: Academic Press, 363-86.
- King, J. (1987), "Pronouns, Descriptions, and the Semantics of Discourse," *Philosophical Studies* 51: 341-63.

- _____ (2001), *Complex Demonstratives: A Quantificational Account*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kripke, S. (1977), "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 2: 255-76.
- _____ (1980), *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Levinson, S. (2000), *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicatures*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ludlow, P. and Neale, S. (1991), "Indefinite Descriptions: In Defense of Russell," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 14: 171-202.
- Lockwood, M. (1975), "On Predicating Proper Names," *Philosophical Review* 84: 471-98.
- Mill, J. S. (1872), *A System of Logic*, definitive 8th edition. 1949 reprint. London: Longmans, Green and Company.
- Neale, S. (1990), *Descriptions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nunberg, G. (1993), "Indexicality and Deixis," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 16: 1-43.
- _____ (forthcoming), "Descriptive Indexicals and Indexical Descriptions," in A. Bezuidenhout and M. Reimer (eds.), *Descriptions and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Perry, J. (2001), *Reference and Reflexivity*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Predelli, S. (1998), "I am not here now," *Analysis* 58: 107-115.
- Recanati, F. (1993), *Direct Reference: From Language to Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Russell, B. (1905), "On Denoting," *Mind* 14: 479-93.
- _____ (1917/1957), "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," in *Mysticism and Logic*, paperback edition. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 202-24.
- _____ (1918/1956), "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," in *Logic and Knowledge*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 175-281.
- _____ (1919), "Descriptions," ch. 16 of *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 167-80.
- Salmon, N. (1986), *Frege's Puzzle*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- _____ (1998), "Nonexistence," *Noûs* 32: 277-319.
- Schiffer, S. (1977), "Naming and Knowing," *Midwest Studies* 2: 28-41.
- Smith, Q. (1989), "The Multiple Uses of Indexicals," *Synthese* 78: 167-91.
- Soames, S. (1988), "Substitutivity," in J. J. Thomson (ed.), *On Being and Saying: Essays in Honor of Richard Cartwright*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 99-132.
- _____ (2002), *Beyond Rigidity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Strawson, P. F. (1950), "On Referring," *Mind* 59: 320-44.
- _____ (1964), "Intention and convention in speech acts," *Philosophical Review* 73: 439-60.