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WHAT PROPOSITIONS COULD NOT BE.

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1976

WHAT PROPOSITIONS COULD NOT BE

by

HOWARD KENNETH WETTSTEIN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

WHAT PROPOSITIONS COULD NOT BE

by

Howard Kenneth Wettstein

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We habitually operate, intuitively, with a notion of that which, by means of an assertoric sentence, may be asserted to be true ... this object of assertion ... being taken as invariant under linguistic transformations, within a language or across languages ... ¹

Thus Michael Dummett in Frege: Philosophy of Language characterizes the notion of "that which may be asserted." This essay is a study of the concept of thing asserted with which, as Dummett says, we operate habitually and intuitively. An attempt will be made here to elucidate this notion, to see whether things asserted, or as they have been called, propositions may be identified with, for example, sentences or with the meanings of sentences.

This essay is, of course, not the first study of these questions. Richard Cartwright's influential paper "Propositions" consists in just such a study. Indeed, Cartwright's paper is an extremely

¹Michael Dummett, Frege: Philosophy of Language, (London: Duckworth, 1973), p. 364.

careful and thorough attempt to demonstrate the very conclusions argued for here, namely that what someone asserts cannot be identified with a sentence nor with the meaning of a sentence (nor with a number of other kinds of entities, for example sentence tokens and speech acts). But as I attempt to show, while Cartwright's conclusions are correct, his arguments are not entirely satisfactory.

The central focus of Part I of the present study is the question of whether what someone asserts may be identified with a sentence (type). I will argue that Cartwright fails in his attempt to show that what is asserted is not identical to a sentence and I will provide what I take to be a conclusive argument for the same conclusion, utilizing a line of reasoning which derives from Paul Benacerraf's "What Numbers Could Not Be."² (Part I contains, in addition, related arguments to the effect that propositions are not identical to sentence tokens, speech acts or sets of various kinds.)

In Part II the question of the identification of propositions with sentential meanings or senses comes to the fore. As in Part I my conclusion here is not a novel one: contrary to Frege, what one asserts is not identical to the sense of a sentence. My argument for this conclusion proceeds, however, along rather different lines than are usual. Considerations concerning what I will call "the referential use" of singular terms yield, or so I will argue, the conclusion that what is asserted could not be the sense of a sentence. Part II consists, accordingly, in an examination of the relevant notion of referential use, in particular with respect to indexical

²Philosophical Review 74 (1965): 47-73.

expressions and definite descriptions. In connection with the latter, a version of Donnellan's distinction between the referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions³ is defended.

The results obtained in this essay are in one way purely negative; propositions are not identical to any of the kinds of entities mentioned above. If my remarks on the referential use of singular terms are well taken, however, then positive light will have been shed upon the notion of thing asserted. Such positive remarks on referential use do not, of course, provide us with a positive account of propositions. Such an account would necessitate the discussion of issues, both semantical and metaphysical, which range far beyond those considered here.

This essay, then is an attempt to provide the beginnings of an account of the concept of thing asserted, first by completing Cartwright's task, that is, establishing what propositions could not be, and second, by making a contribution to our understanding of the referential use of singular terms.

³See Keith S. Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions," Philosophical Review 75 (1966): 281-304, reprinted in Readings in the Philosophy of Language, pp. 195-211, eds. Jay F. Rosenberg and Charles Travis (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971).

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INTRODUCTION

What is susceptible of truth and falsity? In spite of the attention given to it this question can hardly be said to have been settled ... the current fashion among logicians of taking sentences to be the bearers of truth and falsity indicates less an agreement on philosophical theory than a desire for rigour and smoothness in calculative practice. Thus there is ample reason for re-opening the issue.¹

Thus Richard Cartwright begins his influential paper, "Propositions." Cartwright's own view of the matter is that with respect to an assertive utterance what can properly be said to be true or false is what is asserted by a speaker.

For what could be more obvious than that something asserted--something put forth as true, can properly be said to be true.²

The question to which Cartwright is responding, namely, "What are the bearers of truth?", is however not itself beyond suspicion for it presupposes a controversial view of the use of the predicates "is true" and "is false." The question assumes, that is, that these grammatical predicates are 'genuine' predicates; that in saying, for example, "That is true" (in response to a statement), we are referring to something or other and predicating truth. It may be

¹Richard Cartwright, "Propositions," in Analytical Philosophy (First Series), ed. R.J. Butler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), pp. 81-103.

²Ibid., p. 103.

urged that, on the contrary, in uttering³ sentences such as "That is true," we are doing no such thing; we are not referring and predicating but are performing some other speech act, e.g. confirming, agreeing with, conceding, ... what someone has said. But if such a 'performative theory' of truth is correct then there are no bearers of truth and thus no question about whether the bearers of truth are the things we assert or anything else.⁴

This criticism is not, however, as damaging to the position defended in Cartwright's paper as it might at first appear to be, for except for a few remarks at the beginning and end of his paper, Cartwright barely mentions truth or falsity. His concern is rather with the nature of the things that we assert; with elucidating the concept of thing asserted. Can what someone asserts be identified, for example, with the sentence he utters in performing the act of assertion or, alternatively, with the meaning of such a sentence? In what sense are such identifications possible and if they are not possible, why not? Cartwright's inquiry, then, seems to be a valuable one whether or not the things that we assert are the bearers of truth and falsity.

It might be added that although one maintaining a performative theory of truth need not answer the question of what it is that is either true or false, he does need to answer the question of what

³Only assertive utterances will be considered here.

⁴For a general discussion of the performative theory see The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Performative Theory of Truth," by Gertrude Ezorsky.

it is that we are confirming (agreeing with, conceding, and so on). The answer would seem to be that in saying "That is true," we are confirming what was asserted. If so, the performative theory is as much in need of the kind of analysis which Cartwright tries to provide as is one who takes truth to be a property.

It may be urged that I have been unfair to the performative theorist. For there are, I think, versions of a performative account which do not seem to necessitate talk of things asserted. Although P.F. Strawson, for one, often talks of using sentences such as "That's true," in order to e.g., confirm what was said,⁵ perhaps this is just a manner of speaking and perhaps his intention might be better realized along the following lines. In responding "That's true" to someone's statement that X is Y, I am, as Strawson says in one place, asserting that X is Y " ... in the way of corroboration, agreement, granting, etc. ..." ⁶ That is, perhaps we should analyze someone's use of such sentences not as 'corroborating' what was asserted, but as asserting that X is Y by way of corroboration.

Now if such a version of the performative theory could be successfully maintained it might be thought that the need for things asserted would have been averted. It seems to me, however, that no

⁵See, for example, Peter F. Strawson's remark in "Truth," Analysis 8 (1948), reprinted in Philosophy and Analysis, ed. Margaret Macdonald (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), pp. 160-277. "I am not talking about what you said (the noise you made, or the sentence you spoke, or the proposition you expressed). I am agreeing with, endorsing, underwriting what you said ..." (Emphasis added) (p. 269).

⁶The quotation is from Strawson's second paper entitled "Truth," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume (1950), reprinted in P.F. Strawson, Logico-Linguistic Papers (London: Methuen, 1971), see p. 205.

such conclusion would be warranted. For, at most, what would then have been shown is that the performative theorist is not committed to things asserted in virtue of his 'theory of truth.' Whether we can do without things asserted is another matter. Indeed, if it makes sense to distinguish between someone's act of asserting and what he asserts (and there certainly seems to be a distinction to be made here), then independently of the dispute between 'performative' and 'descriptivist' theories of truth, we are in need of an account of things asserted.

This essay, like Cartwright's paper, is intended, at least in large measure, as a study of the concept of thing asserted. I begin in Chapter I with the question of what can properly be said to be true or false, not because this question occupies the central position in the present study but rather because discussions of the nature of things asserted, as we will see, often arise in the literature in the course of discussions of questions about the bearers of truth. In order to make clear both the aims and the limitations of the present study, it will be useful to note some remarks of Michael Dummett and W.V. Quine. Michael Dummett states:

We habitually operate, intuitively, with a notion of that which, by means of an assertoric sentence, may be asserted to be true ... this object of assertion ... being taken as invariant under linguistic transformations, within a language or across languages, which leave the sense unchanged ... ⁷

It seems to me important, for reasons which will become apparent,

⁷Michael Dummett, Frege: Philosophy of Language, (London: Duckworth, 1973), p. 364.

that Dummett speaks of the notion of "that which may be asserted" as one with which we operate habitually and intuitively. Our notion, says Dummett, of thing asserted is of an entity "which remains invariant under linguistic transformations within a language or across languages." In short, we habitually and intuitively take for granted that the same thing which is asserted by one speaker may be asserted by another using different words, indeed even words of a different language.

W.V. Quine in Word and Object distinguishes between intuitive philosophical semantics and his own semantical enterprise.

By an intuitive account I mean one in which terms are used in habitual ways, without reflecting on how they might be defined or on what presuppositions they might conceal.⁸

Quine's own enterprise consists, in part, in a kind of reconstruction of the concepts of intuitive semantics (e.g., "meaning," "synonymy," "analyticity") along the lines of what he calls "explication." 'Explication' is for Quine paradigmatic of philosophical analysis. In the section of Word and Object entitled "The Ordered Pair as Philosophical Paradigm," Quine provides us with an explanation

... of what we are most typically up to when in a philosophical spirit we offer an "analysis" or "explication" of some hitherto inadequately formulated "idea" or expression. We do not claim synonymy. We do not claim to make clear and explicit what the users of the unclear expression had unconsciously in mind all along. We do not expose hidden meanings, as the words 'analysis' and 'explication' would suggest; we supply lacks. We fix on the particular functions of the unclear expression that make it worth troubling about, and then devise a substitute, clear and couched in terms to our liking,

⁸W.V.O. Quine, Word and Object (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1964), p. 36n.

that fills those functions. Beyond these conditions of partial agreement, dictated by our interests and purposes, any traits of the explicans come under the head of "don't-cares" (section 38).⁹

Quine further specifies the contexts in which explication is in order:

We have, to begin with, an expression or form of expression, that is somehow troublesome. It behaves partly like a term but not enough so, or it is vague in ways that bother us, or it puts kinks in a theory or encourages one or another confusion. But it also serves certain purposes that are not to be abandoned. Then we find a way of accomplishing these same purposes through other channels, using other and less troublesome forms of expression.¹⁰

Thus, for Quine, explication is to be utilized in a host of different kinds of situations. The 'concept' to be explicated may be vague, or confused, or in some other way 'defective.' Examples of such explications are "ordered pair" (as explicated by, e.g., Wiener), "singular description" (as explicated by Russell), and the indicative conditional (as explicated in terms of a truth function). Nor is explication limited to cases in which the concept is 'defective.' The motive for an explication may be that of ontological economy. For example, in the case of the concept of natural number, the point of explication is not to render clear what was unclear but to " ... skip the natural numbers and get by with what we may for the moment call Frege classes and von Neumann classes."¹¹

Since Quine finds the concepts of intuitive semantics defective, what he offers us in the way of semantical theory is a reconstruction of those concepts. In place of "meaning," "synonymy," "analyticity,"

⁹Ibid., pp. 258-59. ¹⁰Ibid., p. 260.

¹¹W.V. Quine, The Ways of Paradox (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 200.

we get "stimulus meaning," "stimulus synonymy," and "stimulus analyticity." Admittedly, the fit is rather loose. After noting that on his account the sentence "There have been black dogs" will be stimulus analytic, Quine notes "Let us face it: our socialized stimulus synonymy and stimulus analyticity are still not behavioristic reconstructions of intuitive semantics, but only a behavioristic ersatz."¹²

The approach taken in this essay is a rather different one; the concepts of what Quine calls "intuitive semantics," in particular that of thing asserted, will be taken quite seriously. This concept, as characterized, e.g., by Dummett, is one which many philosophers at least, have operated with, even if only "habitually and intuitively." No attempt will be made here to 'explicate' this concept in other terms more 'scientifically' acceptable. My interest, as was Cartwright's, is rather in elucidating the concept of thing asserted; in seeing whether (and in what sense) things asserted might be identified with say, sentences, or sentence tokens, or meanings of sentences.

There are, it seems to me, limitations to the approach taken here. It may be that the concepts of 'intuitive semantics' are indeed defective. A broader view than that taken here might yield difficulties which render our habitual assumptions untenable. My justification is, however, this: even if there are no things asserted or even if the concept is in some sense defective or incoherent, it would seem to be of value to elucidate this concept, which has after all played an important role in the philosophical tradition. It would seem valuable, that is, to find out what things asserted or, as they have been called,

¹²Quine, Word and Object, p. 66.

propositions would be if there were any.

The conclusions for which I will argue in this essay, that propositions are not identical to sentence types, or tokens, or speech acts, or sets, or meanings, are by no means novel ones. Cartwright's "Propositions" is, it seems to me, the most thorough and careful attempt to demonstrate these conclusions to date. But for reasons which will become evident, I find Cartwright's arguments less than entirely conclusive.

In Part I, when, after some preliminaries, we turn our attention to the question of whether and in what sense we can identify what someone asserts with a sentence (type), I will criticize Cartwright's attempt to show that what is asserted is not identical to a sentence and attempt to provide what I take to be a conclusive argument for the same conclusion. (Part I contains, in addition, related arguments to the effect that what is asserted is not identical to a sentence token, speech act, or set.)

In Part II I turn my attention to the question of whether propositions may be identified with sentential meanings or senses. Again, my conclusion is not a novel one: contrary to Frege, what one asserts is not identical to the sense of a sentence. My argument for this conclusion, however, proceeds along rather different lines than are usual. To anticipate the results of Part II, Frege's error derives, at least in part, from a deeper mistake, the failure to recognize a genuinely referential use of singular terms. In Part II, accordingly, I examine the notion of the referential use of singular terms. In Chapter III I discuss the referential use of so-called indexical

expressions. In Chapters IV and V the analysis is extended to what we may call, following Donnellan,¹³ the referential use of definite descriptions. What I wish to show, as will become evident in the concluding chapter, is that considerations concerning the referential use of singular terms yield the conclusion that what is asserted could not be the sense of a sentence.

The results obtained in this essay are in one way purely negative -- thus the title. Propositions are not identical to any of the kinds of entities mentioned above. If I am correct in what I have to say about the referential use of singular terms, however, then some positive light will be shed upon the notion of thing asserted. My positive remarks concerning the notion of referential use do not, of course, in themselves provide a positive account of the concept of thing asserted. Such an account would necessitate the discussion of a number of further issues, both semantical and metaphysical, which involve considerations that range far beyond those manageable in a study such as the present one. To go further would involve an account of predication and, moreover, of general propositions, for example, universally quantified ones. And certainly, the important metaphysical questions that arise concerning propositions would require treatment.

This essay, then, is an attempt to complete the task which, as we shall see, was Strawson's and which Cartwright continued. In addition, it is an attempt to make a contribution to our understanding of the

¹³Keith S. Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions," Philosophical Review, 75 (1966): 281-304, reprinted in Readings in the Philosophy of Language, ed. Jay F. Rosenberg and Charles Travis (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971), pp. 195-211.

referential use of singular terms and thus, I hope, to provide at least part of a positive account of the concept of thing asserted.

PART I

SENTENCES AND PROPOSITIONS

CHAPTER I

SENTENCES ARE NOT THE TRUTH-BEARERS:

TWO ARGUMENTS OF STRAWSON

In "A Problem About Truth," G.J. Warnock states that he, Austin, and Strawson all agree that "what can properly be said to be true or false is not a sentence itself, but rather what is, on this occasion or that, asserted, stated, said by one who utters a sentence--not the sentence he utters, but the statement he makes."¹ Warnock states that this was taken to be fairly obvious by Strawson and Austin "at least when the use of a natural language is in question."²

Why is it obvious that "what can properly be said to be true or false" is not the sentence uttered but rather the statement made? Indeed, how obvious is it that these are different entities?³ In this chapter I will set out two distinct lines of argument each of which might be thought to yield the conclusion taken to be obvious by Austin and Strawson. Since each of these arguments is attributable to Strawson,

¹George Pitcher, ed., Truth (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 55.

²Ibid.

³Another question raised by Warnock's remarks is this: If it is obvious that sentences are not the things "which can properly be said to be true or false," then why the qualification "... at least when the use of a natural language is in question"? That is, if the supposition that English sentences are things which are either true or false is obviously false, why is the supposition that the sentences of some artificial language not equally unacceptable? In the concluding section of Chapter II I will argue that indeed this latter supposition is equally unacceptable.

I will begin by considering his views.

Strawson discusses the question of why it would be wrong to take sentences as the things which are true or false in Section II of "On Referring."⁴ In this section, Strawson introduces a number of distinctions in order to show that Russell's theory of definite descriptions is incorrect. For our purposes we can ignore the question of what relevance Strawson's analysis has to the problems generated by definite descriptions. I will confine my attention to Strawson's argument that sentences are not the things which are either true or false.

Strawson begins by drawing our attention to a threefold distinction between (1) a sentence, e.g. "The king of France is wise" (I will refer to this sentence as S_1), (2) a use of a sentence, and (3) an utterance of a sentence. By (1), a sentence, Strawson means a sentence type as opposed to, e.g., a particular inscription. "It is in the sense in which it would be correct to speak of one and the same sentence being uttered on ... various occasions that I want to use the expression ... 'a sentence'."⁵ Strawson never explicitly tells us what he means by (2), a use of a sentence, but rather tries to explain this phrase by giving examples of two speakers making "the same use" of a sentence and of two speakers "making different uses" of the same sentence. Consider someone, who, during the reign of Louis XIV utters the sentence S_1 , referring to the person who was then king of France, namely Louis XIV. Consider a second individual who, during the reign of Louis XV, utters the same sentence, referring however to Louis XV. It is clear

⁴Mind 59 N.S. (1950), reprinted in P.F. Strawson, Logico-Linguistic Papers (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 1-27.

⁵Ibid., p. 7.

that it might be the case that the assertion made by the first was true while that made by the second was false. Strawson characterizes these two speakers as having "made different uses" of the same sentence. What is meant by "making the same use" of a sentence is illustrated by two people who both utter the sentence S_1 during the reign of Louis XIV, both referring to Louis XIV. In such a case " ... they must either both have made a true assertion or both have made a false assertion."⁶

With respect to (3), an utterance of a sentence, Strawson states " ... it will make sufficiently clear what I mean by an utterance of a sentence if I say that the two men who simultaneously uttered the sentence in the reign of Louis XIV made two different utterances of the same sentence."⁷ It seems to me that what Strawson means by an utterance of a sentence is someone's uttering that sentence. It is possible, on the contrary, that what Strawson has in mind is not someone's uttering the sentence but rather the sentence token uttered. In either case, it would seem that although two people can utter the same sentence (in the sense of "sentence" here under discussion), their 'utterances' (whether utterings or tokens produced) must necessarily be distinct.

It is the second item, i.e. a use of a sentence, mentioned in Strawson's threefold distinction which is of importance with respect to the problem here under discussion. After giving examples of speakers making different 'uses' of the same sentence Strawson states "Obviously in the case of this sentence, and equally obviously in the case of many others, we cannot talk of the sentence being true or false, but only of its being used to make a true or false assertion, or (if this is preferred)

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 8.

to express a true or false proposition."⁸ Strawson seems to be arguing that from the fact that a sentence can have 'different uses' (in the sense of "different uses" Strawson has tried to elucidate) it follows that the sentence (type) itself cannot be the thing which is either true or false. Some other entity, namely the assertion made or the proposition expressed, is what is either true or false.

Before proceeding to analyze Strawson's argument the following point ought to be noted. Strawson, in effect, has added a fourth item to what was before a trichotomy. That is, in addition to distinguishing (1) the sentence (type) S_1 , (2) the various 'uses' of S_1 , and (3) various utterances of S_1 , Strawson now introduces (4) the assertion made or proposition expressed. I say that Strawson has introduced a fourth item for although truth and falsity are, on Strawson's view, in some sense more intimately related to the 'use' of sentences than to the sentences themselves or the utterance of sentences, still what is true or false is not the 'use' of a sentence but the assertion made or the proposition expressed by the 'use' of a sentence.⁹

To return to Strawson's argument, granted that there can be different 'uses' of, e.g., S_1 , how does it follow from this that S_1 is

⁸Ibid., p. 7.

⁹The quotation from "On Referring" cited on the bottom of page 14 above bears out the point here made—that it is the proposition and not the use of the sentence which is true or false. Other remarks of Strawson bear this out as well, e.g. in "Meaning and Truth," also reprinted in Logico-Linguistic Papers, on page 179 Strawson says " ... it is not the invariant type-sentences themselves that are naturally said to be true or false, but rather the systematically varying things that people say, the propositions they express when they utter those sentences on different particular occasions." (Underlining mine.) However, Strawson is not always this circumspect and at times reverts to speaking of truth and falsity as "characteristics of the use of sentences." (See page 8 of "On Referring.")

not the thing that is either true or false? It seems to me that Strawson has not expressed himself very clearly as to what his argument is on this point. In what follows I will consider two different possibilities of what Strawson's argument may be.

The first possibility is strongly suggested by much of what Strawson says in Section II of "On Referring": As noted above, after Strawson illustrates what he means by "two people making different uses of the same sentence" he states "Obviously in the case of this sentence, and equally obviously in the case of many others, we cannot talk of the sentence being true or false, but only of its being used to make a true or false assertion, or (if this is preferred) to express a true or false proposition."¹⁰ Immediately following this remark Strawson adds the following: "And equally obviously we cannot talk of the sentence being about a particular person for the same sentence may be used at different times to talk about quite different particular persons, but only of a use of the sentence to talk about a particular person."¹¹ Both of these quotations consist in attempts to show that what we may call 'semantic features', e.g. truth, being 'about' Louis XIV, etc., are not really features of sentences. One difference between these two remarks is that only in the second does Strawson explicitly tell us why he thinks the semantic feature in question is not a feature of the sentence. The sentence S₁ can't be about some particular person " ... for the same sentence may be used at different times to

¹⁰"On Referring," p. 7. The sentence to which Strawson is referring is S₁.

¹¹Ibid.

talk about quite different particular persons ... " In Strawson's first remark (i.e. concerning the semantic features of truth and falsity) there is no corresponding explanation of why these can't be features of the sentence. But the following might be reasonably attributed to Strawson. The reason why it is wrong to take truth and falsity to be features of sentences is exactly parallel to the reason why it is wrong to take 'being about Louis XIV' to be a feature of S_1 . The reason is that the same sentence, depending on the context of its utterance, will sometimes elicit a response of "True" and sometimes "False". In other words, uttering the same sentence one person may speak truly and another falsely. Thus it follows, or so Strawson thinks, that the one sentence which they both uttered cannot be the thing that is true or false.

E.J. Lemmon in "Sentences, Statements and Propositions"¹² interprets Strawson along these lines and remarks that " ... this is, in fact, an unsatisfactory argument. It is as though one were to say that we cannot speak of a gate as having a definite colour, because the same gate may have different colours at different times. The proper consequence ... is that, if we wish to speak of sentences as true or false, then this talk must be relative to a context of utterance, just as talk of the colour of a gate is relative to date."¹³

On the interpretation of Strawson's argument under discussion, Lemmon's point seems well taken. Given Strawson's description of

¹²In British Analytical Philosophy, ed. B. Williams and A. Montifiore, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1966), reprinted in Readings in the Philosophy of Language, ed. J.F. Rosenberg and C. Travis (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971), pp. 233-249.

¹³Ibid., p. 236.

two people making different 'uses' of S_1 , one of which 'uses' issues in something true and the other issues in something false, it does not follow that it is not the sentence S_1 which is true or false. Perhaps the sentence S_1 is true when uttered during the reign of Louis XIV and false when uttered during the reign of Louis XV. Similarly, Strawson's argument that the sentence isn't about any particular person is invalid. The fact that S_1 can be used to talk about different individuals doesn't imply that we can't speak of the sentence S_1 being about a particular individual. Perhaps, when uttered during the reign of Louis XIV, the sentence S_1 is about Louis XIV and when uttered during the reign of Louis XV, S_1 is about the latter.

Thus given the formulation of Strawson's arguments we have been considering, those arguments are invalid. For the fact that the semantic features under discussion vary with the context of utterance, does not imply that those features are not features of sentences. It is not hard, however, to imagine a reply on behalf of Strawson. While the color of a particular gate may of course vary from time to time it is not at all clear that the property of being true is one that may be possessed by an entity, say a sentence, at one time and not at another (or, more generally, in relation to one context of utterance but not in relation to another). Truth bearers, it might be urged, possess their truth values 'eternally.' Although Strawson does not defend such a claim nor indeed even make such a claim in the article under discussion it is not implausible to assume that his argument is enthymematic and that such an assumption is indeed at work.¹⁴ Given

¹⁴How might such a claim be defended? In Chapter III a defense of this claim along Fregean lines is discussed.

such an assumption it would follow that in the case of an utterance of S_1 , what is true or false is surely not S_1 . Thus Strawson concludes that what is true or false is not a sentence but is a statement or proposition which eternally possesses its truth-value.¹⁵

As a preliminary to formulating a second interpretation of Strawson's argument it will be helpful to further clarify Strawson's use of some of the key expressions. The expressions "assertion," "statement," "proposition," "making the same use of a sentence," and "making different uses of the same sentence" all figure prominently in Strawson's discussion. The first two, "assertion" and "statement," are, Strawson states in "Truth,"¹⁶ ambiguous. In speaking of someone's statement or assertion we may be referring to his act of stating (asserting) something as in (to quote Strawson) "His vehement assertion was followed by a startled silence."¹⁷ Alternatively, we may be referring not to his act of stating (asserting) but to what he stated (asserted) as in "The statement made by John was repeated by Henry." Strawson states that when we declare statements or assertions to be true or false, we are using these words in the latter sense, i.e. we are using these words to refer to what was stated or asserted.¹⁸

People's acts of stating are neither true nor false. What is true or

¹⁵It might be thought that Strawson's conclusion is a bit hasty. For even on the added assumption all that follows is that sentences like S_1 cannot be true or false. Perhaps there are other sentences which possess truth values eternally and which might plausibly be thought to be the things which are true or false. This will receive attention in the concluding section of Chapter II.

¹⁶Logico-Linguistic Papers, p. 190.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

false is what is stated or asserted by performing such acts.¹⁹

The term "proposition", at least as it is used by Strawson in "On Referring", is apparently just an alternative for "statement" or "assertion" in the sense of what is stated or asserted. Thus Strawson says " ... we cannot talk of the sentence being true or false, but only of its being used to make a true or false assertion, or (if this is preferred) to express a true or false proposition."²⁰ Thus when we wish to speak of what someone asserted (stated), we can do so by speaking of the statement or assertion he made or of the proposition he expressed.

The last two of the expressions mentioned above were "making the same use of a sentence" and "making different uses of the same sentence." What contrast does Strawson have in mind when he distinguishes making "the same use" of a sentence from making "different uses" of it? One contrast suggested by these expressions is the following. Imagine two speakers uttering S_1 , one in order to assert that Louis XIV is wise and the other in order to give an example of an English sentence. It would certainly be appropriate to say that these speakers are making different uses of the same sentence.

While the above is one contrast that could be noted by the expressions "the same use" and "different uses", it is clear that this

¹⁹The points noted about the terms "statement" and "assertion" are not explicitly stated by Strawson in "On Referring" (although these points are explicit in "Truth"). However, it seems reasonable to assume that the two articles, both published in 1950, represent closely related, if not identical, points of view. Accordingly, we can assume that Strawson is aware, in "On Referring," of the ambiguity of the terms "statement" and "assertion" and, further, that when he speaks of statements and assertions as true or false in "On Referring," he uses these terms to refer to what is stated or asserted (as opposed to acts of stating or asserting).

²⁰"On Referring," p. 7, emphasis added.

is not the contrast Strawson has in mind. In Strawson's example of two speakers making different uses of the same sentence, both speakers use the sentence S_1 assertively. The different uses derive from the fact that in uttering S_1 one speaker refers to Louis XIV while the second refers to Louis XV. In Strawson's example of two speakers making the same use of a sentence, both speakers refer to Louis XIV by their utterance of S_1 .

How then should we formulate the contrast to which Strawson is trying to draw our attention; the contrast between making the same use of a sentence and making different uses of a sentence? Let us here note a passing comment of Strawson's. In discussing the sentence "I am hot" he says " ... it is logically impossible for two different people to make the same use of this sentence: or, if this is preferred, to use it to express the same proposition."²¹ Here I believe we have the answer to our question. The contrast to which Strawson wishes to draw our attention with the expressions "the same use" and "different uses" can be more clearly expressed as the contrast between (1) two speakers uttering a single sentence and, in doing so, asserting the same proposition, and, (2) two speakers uttering a single sentence and, in doing so, asserting different propositions. Bearing in mind the use of "proposition" explicated above this can be put as follows. Strawson wishes to distinguish the case in which two speakers utter the same sentence and, in doing so, assert the same thing from the case in which two speakers utter the same sentence but, in doing so, assert different

²¹Ibid., p. 8.

things.²² Thus two speakers may make 'the same use' of a sentence as when both simultaneously utter S_1 , both asserting that Louis XIV is wise. On the other hand, two speakers may make 'different uses' of the same sentence as when one speaker utters S_1 during the reign of Louis XIV and, in doing so, asserts that Louis XIV is wise while the second speaker utters S_1 during the reign of Louis XV and, in doing so, asserts that Louis XV is wise.

Let us return to Strawson's argument in "On Referring." In our first interpretation of Strawson's argument, we assumed that the premise from which he deduces that sentences are not the bearers of truth was the fact that given different contexts of the utterance of the same sentence, variation of truth value might occur. But from this fact alone, we saw, it does not follow that sentences are not the bearers of truth. Now Strawson's discussion does strongly suggest that a premise of his is that one sentence can have different 'uses'. But, I wish to suggest, we may have been mistaken in assuming that the significance of the fact that a sentence can have different 'uses' consisted in the possible variation of truth values. Perhaps this possible truth value variation was not that from which Strawson thought it followed that sentences are not the bearers of truth. From what, then, did Strawson think that this followed? The answer which I would now like to propose is that Strawson thought that this followed simply from the fact that the same sentence may be 'used' in two or more

²²In the latter case, different things are asserted since reference was made to different items. The general topic of the connection between the identity (or difference) of the entities referred to and the identity (or difference) of things asserted will be treated in Part II.

different ways, that is that the same sentence can be used to assert different things.

How does this imply that sentences are not the bearers of truth? In order to answer this question, the following preliminary is necessary. I would like to suggest that Strawson takes it to be established, independently of the argument under discussion, that statements (propositions, assertions) are the bearers of truth. Strawson holds, as does Cartwright, that when someone asserts something what is asserted is what is either true or false.²³

But, it might be asked, if it is already established that statements are the bearers of truth, what is the point of Strawson's argument? In particular, if statements (propositions, assertions) are the things which are either true or false, doesn't it follow that sentences are not truth bearers? The answer is that although it is clear that someone's statement is what is either true or false, what is not clear is whether we can identify someone's statement with the sentence uttered in making that statement. That is, perhaps what one asserts is nothing other than the sentence he utters. Thus the point of Strawson's argument is to show that we cannot make such an identification, i.e. that what one asserts (his statement, assertion, proposition) is not identical to the sentence one utters.

We are now in a position to deal with the question left unanswered above, namely granted that two speakers can make different 'uses' of S_1 , how does this imply that S_1 is not the thing that is either true or false?

²³See the remarks of Cartwright quoted on p. 1 above. Also see James Thompson, "Truth-Bearers and the Trouble About Propositions," The Journal of Philosophy, 66 (1969): 737-738.

Rephrasing the question, how does the fact that two speakers can make different 'uses' of S_1 imply that S_1 is not identical to the statement (which is the bearer of truth) made by each of them. In order to answer this question we must keep in mind our analysis of "making different uses" of a sentence. To say that each speaker made a different use of S_1 is to say that they asserted different things; what one asserted is not identical to what the other asserted. To return to our question, Strawson's answer, or so I am suggesting, is that since each speaker made a different use of S_1 , i.e. since they made different statements by the use of the same sentence, it follows that the (one) sentence which they both uttered cannot be identical to both statements (for the statements are not identical to each other). Hence we cannot identify the statements made with the sentence uttered. Statements are not sentences. Accordingly, sentences are not the bearers of truth.

We may usefully distinguish two arguments here. What I will call "argument II" runs as follows:²⁴ Since (1) what someone asserts is the thing which is true or false and (2) what someone asserts is not identical to the sentence uttered, it follows that (3) the sentence uttered is not the truth bearer. What I will call "argument IIa" consists in Strawson's attempt to substantiate the second premise of argument II, i.e. the premise that what someone asserts is not identical to the sentence uttered. Argument IIa runs as follows: Different

²⁴The argument from truth value variation will be referred to as Argument I.

speakers may utter a single sentence and, in doing so, assert different things, i.e. make different statements. Since they all uttered the identical sentence but what each asserted is, ex hypothesi, not identical to what any of the others asserted, it follows that the sentence uttered is not identical to any of the statements made.

Does the analysis just presented indeed capture what Strawson has in mind? In my account of argument II, I have attributed to Strawson two premises: (1) that what is true or false is what is asserted, and (2) that two speakers may make different 'uses' of a sentence, i.e. that although both utter the same sentence, what one asserts is not identical to what the other asserts. Now (2) is, as we have seen, explicit²⁵ in "On Referring." What of (1)? In the passage in "Truth" in which Strawson distinguishes between acts of stating (asserting) and what is stated (asserted), Strawson takes, as we have seen, the latter to be the thing which is either true or false.²⁶ And although in "On Referring" Strawson never specifies (1) as an additional premise, I believe that (1) is implicit in Strawson's characterizations of two people making the same 'use' of a sentence and two people making different 'uses' of the same sentence. For in those characterizations Strawson speaks of the fact that when two different 'uses' are made of the sentence, then it is possible that one speaker "... made a true assertion ..." while the second "... made a false assertion" whereas if both made the same use of the sentence

²⁵At least the claim that two speakers can make 'different uses' of a sentence is explicit. That different uses is to be analyzed as suggested is not explicit, at least in "On Referring."

²⁶Logico-Linguistic Papers, p. 190.

" ... they must either both have made a true assertion or both have made a false assertion."²⁷ Thus in Strawson's formulations in "On Referring" it is the assertion made which is either true or false. But this is just to say that what is asserted is what is true or false.²⁸ Hence (1) is implicit in "On Referring."²⁹

However, despite the fact that both (1) and (2) can reasonably be attributed to Strawson in "On Referring," it still seems to me problematic to construe Strawson's argument along the lines I have been suggesting. This seems to me to be so for two reasons. First, the pivotal point in the argument I have been developing is that while there is only one sentence uttered, there are two different statements made (and thus the two statements can't be identical to the one sentence). Now if the argument here presented was indeed Strawson's, we would expect him to stress this crucial fact of there being two different statements made. In fact, he nowhere (in "On Referring") refers to two distinct statements or assertions made but instead stresses the fact that while there was only one sentence uttered, on one occasion of the utterance of this sentence the assertion made

²⁷"On Referring," p. 7.

²⁸I am assuming, as noted before, that Strawson's use of the word "assertion" in "On Referring" is in accordance with what he says in "Truth," namely that when we speak of a statement or assertion as true we are using the words "statement" and "assertion" to refer to what is stated or asserted.

²⁹It should be noted that the passages just quoted in which Strawson takes the assertion to be the bearer of truth occur before Strawson has concluded that sentences are not the things which are true or false. In other words, implicit in his formulation of the premise (i.e. that two speakers can make different uses of the same sentence) from which he will conclude that sentences are not truth bearers, is the assumption that assertions (or statements) are truth bearers. This conforms to the account of Strawson's argument here presented.

may be true while on another occasion the assertion will be false.³⁰ Thus the crucial point in Strawson's argument seems to be not the numerical distinctness of the statements made but rather the possibility of truth value variation from one utterance occasion to another.

A second reason for scepticism as to whether the argument here developed is what Strawson had in mind is the following. As noted before, in "On Referring" Strawson never explicitly tells us why it is that sentences can't be the bearers of truth. But Strawson appears to draw an analogy between the reason sentences can't be true and the reason sentences can't be 'about' particular persons. And he does explicitly supply us with the reason for the latter. Sentences can't be about particular persons because " ... the same sentence may be used at different times to talk about quite different particular persons ..."³¹ Now if Strawson's reason for denying that sentences are truth bearers is that one utterance of that sentence may issue in a true assertion while another may issue in a false assertion, then the analogy is preserved. In both cases, the semantic feature in question cannot be a feature of the sentence for there are utterances of this same sentence with respect to which the semantic feature is not present. This analogy fails to hold, however, if Strawson's reason for denying that sentences are the truth bearers is that the same sentence can be used to make two distinct statements.

³⁰I do not mean to imply that anything Strawson says commits him to the denial of the claim that in such a situation two different statements are made. My point is only that Strawson never even mentions the point that there are two numerically distinct statements made and further that he emphasizes only the possible truth value variation.

³¹"On Referring," p. 7.

In conclusion, the nature of Strawson's argument in "On Referring" is not clear. Perhaps he has in mind the argument I have been developing and simply has not expressed himself very clearly. Or perhaps, and I believe this to be more likely, the argument suggested in my first interpretation is closer to what Strawson had in mind. In any case the argument I have been developing is clearly presented by Strawson in Chapter I of Introduction to Logical Theory.³² He there explicitly states that it is the statement one makes which is either true or false and proceeds to question whether we can identify a statement with the sentence uttered in making that statement. His answer is " ... that we cannot identify that which is true or false (the statement) with the sentence used in making it for the same sentence may be used to make quite different statements, some of them true and some of them false."^{33, 34}

³²(London: Methuen, 1952), pp. 3-4.

³³Ibid., underlining mine.

³⁴In claiming Strawson's argument in Introduction to Logical Theory is the argument I have been developing, I am assuming that the last clause in the quotation from the work, i.e. " ... some of them true and some of them false," is incidental to Strawson's argument. In any case, he does explicitly draw attention to the fact that different statements are made by the use of the same sentence. And it does seem quite clear that this is the pivotal point in his argument, at least in Introduction to Logical Theory.

CHAPTER II

CAN PROPOSITIONS BE IDENTIFIED WITH SENTENCES?

In this chapter I will consider the question of whether what someone asserts might be identified with a number of different kinds of entities. My primary concern will be with argument IIa, Strawson's argument to the effect that we cannot identify what someone asserts with a sentence.¹ Second, and more briefly, I will take up the possibility of identifying propositions with sentence tokens, speech (or judgemental) acts, or any of a number of different kinds of sets. I will conclude with some brief remarks on arguments I and II.²

i

How does Strawson defend the claim that what someone asserts is not a sentence? Argument IIa, it will be remembered, runs as follows:

Different speakers may utter a single sentence and, in doing so, assert different things, i.e. make different statements. Since they all uttered the identical sentence but what each asserted is, ex hypothesi, not identical to what any of the others asserted, it follows that the sentence uttered is not identical to any of the statements made. This argument was criticized by Richard Cartwright³ who pointed out that as it stands it is invalid. Cartwright's

¹Strawson's argument, which will be evaluated here, is that what is asserted is not the sentence type one utters. Whether we can identify a proposition with a sentence token will be taken up subsequently.

²For an account of Arguments I and II see pages 16-25 above.

³See his "Propositions," pp. 88-90.

criticism is that granted that each speaker made a different statement while they all uttered the identical sentence, it does not follow that the sentence uttered is not identical to any of the statements made. What does follow is that the sentence cannot be identical to any more than one of the statements made. The logical point is that while it is true that a single entity (in this case the sentence) cannot be identical to each of two or more non-identical entities (the statements), the one entity can be identical to one of two or more non-identical entities.

As a matter of logic Cartwright's point is well taken. But its significance should not be overemphasized. For even granted Cartwright's point, argument IIa is still successful in that it has shown that, in general, it is wrong to identify what someone asserts with the sentence he utters. In the case of at most one of the statements made by utterances of a particular sentence is it even possible for that statement to be identical to the sentence. Our statements are, by and large, not the sentences we utter. Accordingly, the view that we can, in general, identify what someone asserts with the sentence he utters has been refuted.

The question now arises as to whether we can ever identify what someone asserts with the sentence he utters. To suppose that we can ever make such an identification seems, prima facie, implausible (to say the least). For suppose that, for example, five people uttered S_1 and in doing so asserted different propositions (e.g. each referring to a different King of France). We have seen (via argument IIa) that at least four of these did not assert S_1 . And it seems bizarre to

suppose that one of these speakers, say the one who referred to Louis XIV, asserted the sentence S_1 while the other four did not.

The problem now is to try to explain our intuition; that is to supplement argument IIa by giving reasons why it could not be the case that one and only one of the statements made by the use of a single sentence is identical to that sentence. In the article mentioned above, Cartwright attempts to show that this could not be the case, but as his remarks are directed at a slightly different argument than argument IIa, it will be useful at this point to consider the argument with which he is concerned (I will refer to this new argument as argument IIb).⁴ In any case argument IIb is worth considering in its own right as an alternative attempt to show that what we assert are not the sentences we utter.

Whereas argument IIa proceeded by first noting that the same sentence can be used to make different statements, our new argument (IIb) begins by noting that different sentences can be used to make the same statement. For example, not only S_1 ("the King of France is wise") but also such sentences as "The king is wise," "He is wise," as well as the various translations of these into, e.g., French and German may all have been used to say that Louis XIV was wise. Our present argument proceeds thus: Since the identical proposition can be asserted by utterances of different sentences, it follows that we cannot identify the statement made with any of the sentences uttered in making the statement. The logical point is identical to that of

⁴Cartwright assumes that his remarks concerning argument IIb apply equally well to IIa.

argument IIa: a single entity (in this case the statement made by all) cannot be identical to a number of things (in this case the sentences uttered) which are not identical to each other.

Again Cartwright points out the fallacy. All that follows is that of all the sentences which can be used to assert a given proposition, not more than one of those can be identical to the proposition. Underlying Cartwright's criticism of both IIa and IIb is the point that while one entity can't be identical to more than one of a number of non-identical entities, it can be identical to one of them. Thus argument IIb (as did IIa) on the one hand succeeds in showing that it is in general wrong to identify what someone asserts with the sentence he utters but, on the other, fails to establish that we never assert what we utter.

After noting the fallacy Cartwright proceeds to rehabilitate the argument; he tries to supply grounds for showing that in the case of many speakers asserting the same thing by uttering different sentences it could not be the case that one of the speakers asserted what he uttered. Cartwright argues that if it were the case that one of the speakers (call him A) asserted what he uttered, then since all the speakers asserted the same thing, it follows that each speaker asserted what A asserted, which is, ex hypothesi, A's sentence. Thus a number of speakers all asserted A's sentence but only A uttered it. Thus on the hypothesis that one of the speakers asserted the sentence that he uttered we get the consequence that each of the other speakers asserted a sentence which he did not even utter. And this consequence, claims Cartwright, is absurd.

Cartwright concludes that no one ever asserts the sentence he utters. And, states Cartwright, we can deduce the further consequence that no one ever asserts any sentence--for since argument IIB (as supplemented) shows that no one asserts what he utters, then one can assert a sentence only if it is a sentence other than the one he utters. But this is just what has been claimed to be absurd.⁵

Let us now examine what I will refer to as "the absurdity claim," i.e. Cartwright's claim that it is absurd to suppose that one could assert a sentence without uttering it. Cartwright defends his claim in the following passage (in which Cartwright refers to two speakers, A and the Russian, both of whom assert the same thing while uttering different sentences):

... even if it be granted that there is nothing intrinsically absurd in supposing that what is asserted is a sentence, it surely is absurd to suppose that one might assert a sentence without even uttering it. Consider A and the Russian. Whatever plausibility there is in saying that A asserted the words he uttered derives from the fact that he did, after all, utter them. But even this plausibility, minimal as it is, in any case, is missing when we consider the Russian; for on the assumption that it is A who asserts what he utters, the Russian asserts A's words only if he asserts

⁵Cartwright seems to think that along such lines argument IIA could also be supplemented so as to prove that we never assert what we utter. But it is not, at least prima facie, easy to see how his claim that "it is absurd to suppose that one could assert a sentence without uttering it" would function as a supplement to IIA. For in IIA we were considering a case in which the same sentence was used to assert different propositions and if we assume that one speaker (A') asserted what he uttered we do not get the consequence that other speakers asserted the sentence uttered by A'. We do get the consequence that each speaker uttered the sentence asserted by A' but this has not been claimed to be absurd. Actually I believe that Cartwright's absurdity claim can be utilized to supplement IIA but it is not obvious how this is to be done and Cartwright never works it out. As it will not be important for what follows, I omit an account of it here.

them without uttering them. A said (i.e. asserted) that Botvinnik uses the French Defense; and in so saying he said (i.e. spoke) the words 'Botvinnik uses it.' Perhaps it is tempting to capitalize on the ambiguity by concluding that A asserted the words he spoke. But there is not even the excuse of ambiguity for saying that the Russian asserted those words. For he did not say them.⁶

In that portion of the passage in which Cartwright presents an argument (as opposed to a diagnosis) he seems to be saying the following: It is, *prima facie*, highly implausible to take sentences as the things asserted. But this intuitive implausibility, by itself, might not appear to be decisive against the claim that what someone asserts is the sentence he utters. This implausibility might not appear to be decisive for the fact that the speaker uttered that sentence in making the assertion would (somehow) make it at least possible to suppose that the sentence was the thing asserted. But if the speaker did not even utter that sentence, then the supposition that he asserted that sentence has no plausibility whatever.

Contra Cartwright the following might be urged. Even if we agree (perhaps on the basis of arguments IIa and IIb) that in general it would be wrong to identify what someone asserts with what he utters, still it might be maintained that (1) some of the time we assert what we utter and (2) even when we do not assert what we utter, what we assert is a sentence other than the one uttered. For it might be held that while what we utter are, for the most part, non-eternal sentences what we assert are the 'eternal sentence counterparts'⁷ of the uttered sentences.

⁶"Propositions," p. 91.

⁷By such expressions as "eternal sentence counterpart," "corresponding eternal sentence," "eternal sentence expansion" I mean the result of replacing any indexical elements in the original sentence, using

Thus when we happen to utter an eternal sentence, e.g. "2 + 2 = 4," what we assert may indeed be identified with what we utter. And when we utter a non-eternal sentence what we assert is a sentence other than the one uttered, i.e. we assert the corresponding eternal sentence.

Nor is such a view in any obvious way counterintuitive. For given some utterance of a non-eternal sentence, e.g., "I am tired," the 'eternal sentence expansion,' in this case "Howard Wettstein is tired on Monday afternoon, December 30, 1974" more completely formulates or makes explicit what was asserted when I uttered "I am tired." Thus it seems plausible to take that eternal sentence as the thing asserted by my utterance of the non-eternal sentence.

Accordingly, in opposition to Cartwright it seems at least possible to maintain what one asserts can be identified with a sentence--we do assert sentences--although not, in general, the sentences we utter.

The introduction of eternal sentences into our discussion seems to have accomplished two ends. First, we now have a counterexample to Cartwright's claim that it is absurd to suppose that one could assert a sentence without uttering it.⁸ Thus Cartwright's claim to have rehabilitated argument IIb fails. But more importantly, and this is the second end apparently⁹ accomplished by the introduction of eternal

tenseless verbs and indicating time explicitly, etc. so as to render the resulting sentence true or false 'eternally.' See Quine, Word and Object, Section 40.

⁸And this is so, even if, as I will argue in Part II of this essay, it is false that, in general, given an utterance of a non-eternal sentence, there is an eternal sentence which precisely formulates what was asserted. While this view, I will argue, is false it is not obviously false and it is, accordingly, not absurd to suppose that in uttering a non-eternal sentence what is asserted is some eternal sentence.

⁹But see pages 36-38 below.

sentences into our discussion, it now begins to look as if it may indeed be the case that one (and, of course, only one) of the sentences which could be used to assert a given proposition is identical to that proposition. Indeed we now have a plausible candidate for the sentence which is the one asserted, namely, the eternal sentence.

Unfortunately, in our discussion of eternal sentences we have overlooked the following. For any proposition there is more than one eternal sentence which can be used to assert that proposition. First of all, given some utterance of a non-eternal sentence there is not one 'eternal sentence expansion' but many. In forming an eternal sentence from a non-eternal¹⁰ one we can add the information (to be made explicit) at the beginning of the sentence, the end, and so on. But clearly each different ordering yields a different sentence. Secondly, given some non-eternal sentence we can form an eternal sentence which can be used to assert the same thing but which is not obtained by 'expanding' the original but which has a different grammatical structure, e.g. passive instead of active. Third, there can be eternal sentences of different languages, the utterance of which issue in the assertion of the same proposition.

It now begins to seem clear there are real difficulties with the view that we, in general, assert the eternal sentence expansions of the non-eternal sentences which we utter. One difficulty is that there is no unique eternal sentence expansion for a given utterance of a

¹⁰More accurately, "... from a non-eternal given some utterance occasion." The point is that the same non-eternal sentence will get different eternal sentence expansions depending on various features of the context of utterance. For brevity, I will often omit mention of the utterance occasion.

non-eternal sentence. Whether this difficulty is fatal will not be discussed at present.¹¹ A second difficulty, clearly fatal, is the following. It is clear that two or more speakers may assert the same thing while uttering different non-eternal sentences, each of which when 'expanded' necessarily yields a different eternal sentence. For example, the eternal sentence expansion of "the King of France is wise" (S_1) will be a different sentence than the eternal sentence expansion of the French translation of S_1 . But, to follow the reasoning of argument IIb, it could not be that both the speaker who utters S_1 and the speaker who utters the French translation of S_1 assert the eternal sentence expansions of the sentences they respectively uttered. This could not be because the eternal sentence expansions are different while what they uttered is a single proposition.

I stated before that the introduction of eternal sentences into our discussion apparently had two consequences: (1) Cartwright's attempt to rehabilitate IIb failed because it no longer appeared intuitively obvious that one cannot assert a sentence which one did not utter and (2) it no longer appeared bizarre to suppose that indeed one sentence is identical to each proposition.

Now it is clear that the point recently made about a multiplicity of eternal sentences for each proposition affects (2) above. Once we note that there are a number of eternal sentences 'corresponding to' each proposition, we no longer have a single sentence which is a natural

¹¹I believe that it is fatal but to show that is another matter. Beginning on page 39 what is essentially the same issue will be discussed in detail.

candidate for the thing asserted. Thus, it again appears bizarre to suppose that of all the sentences usable to assert a given proposition there is one which is identical to that proposition.

What shall we say of (1) above? Does our recent recognition that there are a number of eternal sentences 'corresponding' to each proposition affect (1)? I wish to argue that it does not; Cartwright's attempt to rehabilitate argument IIB still fails. While there are, as we have seen, difficulties with the view that the eternal sentences expansions of the non-eternal sentences uttered are what we assert, those difficulties and not Cartwright's absurdity claim are what prove fatal. To expand on this, if Cartwright was correct in his claim that it is absurd to suppose that someone could assert a sentence without uttering it, then it should have seemed obviously unacceptable to suppose that in uttering a non-eternal sentence, what one asserts is an eternal sentence. And this should have seemed obviously unacceptable simply because the sentence uttered was not the eternal sentence supposedly asserted. In fact, contra Cartwright, it seemed acceptable to suppose that in uttering a non-eternal sentence what is asserted is the eternal sentence which, as I put it before, more fully formulates what was incompletely formulated by the non-eternal sentence.

If the foregoing is correct, that is, if Cartwright's approach is inadequate then we need to find an alternative approach to rehabilitating IIB or else find a way to make intuitively satisfying the idea that of all the sentences corresponding to a given proposition, one and only one of those sentences is identical to the proposition.

It seems to me to be intuitively obvious that of all the sentences

usable to assert a single proposition, it could not be the case that one and only one of them is identical to that proposition. Indeed, it is more than intuitively obvious, it is (after a fashion) demonstrable. In the following I will attempt to make good on this claim. If I succeed then I will have rehabilitated argument IIb.

Consider the hypothesis that one of the sentences corresponding to a single proposition is identical to that proposition.¹² If this were true then the single sentence which is identical to the proposition would presumably have to have something about it which distinguishes it from all the other sentences which would be used to assert that proposition. Furthermore, the distinguishing feature(s) in question would have to be such that the possession of this feature by the sentence in question gives us a reason to take this sentence and not some other to be the thing asserted. Of course, it is logically possible that there is no such distinguishing feature of any sentence (the possession of which would give us grounds for singling out that sentence as identical to the proposition) and that nevertheless one of the sentences is, as a matter of brute fact, identical to the proposition. But, if anything is absurd, surely it is absurd to suppose that of all the sentences which could be used to assert that, e.g., Washington was the first President, one of these sentences is, as a matter of fact, the thing asserted by all the speakers who make that assertion but there is nothing about this sentence which would supply us with a

¹²The argument about to be presented here is, in part, an application of a line of reasoning used by Paul Benacerraf, in "What Numbers Could Not Be," Philosophical Review 74 (1965): 47-73.

reason for thinking that it and not one of the other sentences is the thing asserted. I do not have an argument to show that this logical possibility may be discounted. But it seems obvious that if one of the sentences really is the thing asserted, there must be some reason for its being so privileged.

To recapitulate, for the hypothesis under consideration to be correct, then for each proposition there must be some feature(s) possessed by one and only one of the sentences which can be used to assert that proposition and such that the possession of this feature supplies us with grounds for singling out this sentence as the thing asserted. Now what would such a feature be like? At one point during our previous discussion, it might have been urged that eternal sentences are likely candidates for things asserted since they have the relevant feature of being complete formulations. But as we have seen there is always more than one eternal sentence for a given proposition. Hence, completeness of formulation, although an intuitively plausible candidate for discriminating feature, will not suffice.

Now that we have seen that the feature of completeness of formulation will not supply us with the criterion we have been looking for, it begins to appear as if there is no such criterion. For it is difficult to see how the other ways in which (eternal)¹³ sentences differ from one another could possibly be grounds for picking one of them as the thing

¹³I assume for the present that the feature of completeness of formulation would be included in any attempt to provide the discriminating features we have been speaking of. Hence the sentences from which we try to select one (per proposition) would presumably be eternal sentences.

asserted. Consider some of the ways in which all of the eternal sentences corresponding to some proposition differ from one another. Some will be in English, some in French, and some will have an active construction, some passive and so on. It certainly appears to be the case that these kinds of differences are irrelevant for the purposes considered here. Accordingly, Cartwright, although (for reasons to be discussed later) he does not think that the line of reasoning which I am employing is conclusive, states that "... if we sought to identify the statement made with one of these complete sentences,¹⁴ we should have absolutely no reason for picking one of them rather than any other. None is in any way a more natural or reasonable choice than any other."¹⁵

Moreover, even if it were possible to find other features which seemed to be plausible candidates for distinguishing features, still it could not be the case that exactly one sentence per proposition had such features. Let us imagine that we discover some feature (F) of certain sentences, which feature seems to us to be a plausible candidate. Let us further imagine that for each proposition, only one of the currently available formulations has the property F. Even so, for each sentence which has F we could always formulate another sentence which had F but which differed only in vocabulary from the currently available one. (The idea here is that the relevant property could not be the

¹⁴"Complete sentence" is Cartwright's term for eternal sentence. When, in the passage quoted, Cartwright speaks of "these complete sentences," he means those eternal sentences which can be used to assert the proposition in question.

¹⁵"Propositions," p. 99.

particular words used. So we could always invent a new sentence which contained different words--new ones--but which had the same relevant feature.)

I conclude that there are no such features possessed by exactly one sentence per proposition, the possession of which would make it plausible to single out that sentence as the thing asserted. But if one of those sentences really was the thing asserted then as stated before, there would be something about it which would give us grounds for singling it out as the thing asserted. It follows that none of the eternal (or, for that matter, non-eternal) sentences which can be used to assert a proposition is identical to that proposition.

If the foregoing is correct then argument IIB has been successfully supplemented. We must distinguish, in every act of assertion, between the sentence uttered and what is asserted; what is asserted is in no case the sentence uttered. Furthermore, we can now arrive at the (stronger) conclusion that what one asserts is not any sentence (neither the one uttered nor any other). For we have seen that what someone asserts could not be identical to any of the sentences which could be used to assert it. It follows that what one asserts could be a sentence only if it were a sentence which could not be used to assert it. But surely this is absurd. What is asserted surely is not identical to a sentence which could not be used to make that assertion.

Cartwright was aware of the line of reasoning I have employed as an alternative to his:

... if we sought to identify the statement made with one of these complete sentences, we should have absolutely no reason for picking one of them rather than any

other. I take it that this consideration by itself will appear to some to be sufficient reason for refusing to identify the statement made with any of the (complete) sentences which can be used to assert it. It cannot be a perfectly arbitrary matter, they will say, which, if any, of a number of distinct things is identical to some one thing.

This move is one of a kind which is familiar in philosophy and with which I feel a good deal of sympathy. Yet, I doubt whether by themselves arguments of this sort ever accomplish much ...¹⁶

Cartwright explains why he takes the argument to be inconclusive via an analogy between the natural numbers and statements.

Peano's axioms evidently do embody at least some of the features of the natural numbers; and they are in addition categorical, that is, any two models are isomorphic. Some have accordingly been led to say that the concept of a natural number is adequately represented by those axioms; and they have gone on to conclude that that concept is insufficiently determinate to permit a reasonable identification of the system of natural numbers with one rather than another of the various distinct (but isomorphic) models. Each, they say, may quite legitimately be 'taken as' the system of natural numbers. The concept of a natural number might, on this view, be said to be open, in the sense that distinct sets of things may equally legitimately be identified as the set of natural numbers. Now anyone who proposed to identify statements with some set of representative sentences is presumably prepared to say that the concept of statement is, similarly, open.¹⁷

Cartwright's point is that someone may argue that

- (1) We can formulate a set of conditions which play a role with respect to the concept of thing asserted analogous to the role of Peano's axioms with respect to the concept of natural number.
- (2) Sentences do satisfy those conditions; that is, such conditions do not exclude sentences as things asserted.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 100.

and (3) Those conditions are not such as to specify which particular sentence is the thing asserted for any particular assertive utterance.

Given (1), (2) and (3) it would be reasonable to select one eternal sentence for each thing asserted and 'take that as' the thing asserted. Yet ex hypothesi, there is nothing that dictates which eternal sentence we are to choose (for each thing asserted). Indeed, any number of sets of eternal sentences may legitimately be 'taken as' the things asserted.

Cartwright does not claim, however, that the concept of thing asserted is 'open.' Rather his point is that before one can disqualify eternal sentences as things asserted one must first show that the concept of thing asserted is not open. I have not shown this, hence I have, according to Cartwright, begged a crucial question. If this is Cartwright's objection, then I do not think he is correct for I think that my line of reasoning is entirely neutral with respect to the question of whether the concept is open.

In order to see that this is so let us take a somewhat closer look at the notion of an 'open' concept. When the claim is made that a concept is open, the point being made is that although the term in question, e.g., "the natural numbers," "what is asserted," 'purports' to designate some unique entity (set of entities), when necessary and sufficient conditions for a correct account of the entity in question are specified, it turns out that there is not one but several (sometimes infinitely many) different accounts, each of which satisfies the conditions specified.

For example, Cartwright makes reference to the view that the

concept of natural number is open since that concept is (1) "adequately represented" by Peano's axioms, i.e., satisfaction of the axioms by the entities specified in an account is a necessary and sufficient condition for a correct account, and yet (2) there exist different sets each of which satisfies the axioms.

Paul Benacerraf, in "What Numbers Could Not Be,"¹⁸ agrees that the concept of natural number is open but presents a different 'analysis' of the concept. Benacerraf argues that the following conditions are necessary and sufficient for any correct account of the natural numbers: (1) definitions of "1," "number," and "successor," as well as "+," "x," and so on must be provided on the basis of which the laws of arithmetic could be derived and (2) an explanation of the 'extra-mathematical' uses of number, e.g. in counting and in measurement, must be provided. Benacerraf points out that even given such conditions infinitely many different set-theoretic accounts may be given, each of which satisfies these conditions. Furthermore, these accounts are not even extensionally equivalent for each takes the natural number series to be a different set of sets.

Now assuming that the conditions stated by, e.g. Benacerraf, are really necessary and sufficient for a correct account of the natural numbers, what ought we to say about the correctness of any of the competing set-theoretic accounts of the numbers? It seems clear that if the conditions stated really are sufficient, then every one of the contending accounts has as much claim to being considered the correct account as every other. However, not more than one of these accounts

¹⁸pp. 47-73.

can be uniquely correct. That is, not more than one of these can correctly specify which set of sets the numbers really are. For, as Benacerraf points out, "... if the number 3 is in fact some particular set b , it cannot be that two correct accounts of the meaning of '3'-- and therefore also of its reference--assign two different sets to 3. For if it is true that for some set b , $3 = b$, then it cannot be true that for some set c , different from b , $3 = c$."¹⁹

At this point the following question might be raised. Is it possible that one of these accounts is, in fact, the uniquely correct one but there is no argument which could show it to be that? In other words, is it possible that the numbers are really some particular set of sets but no reason could ever be given for singling out that set as the set of natural numbers? Benacerraf rejects such a possibility as absurd (and I concur).²⁰ If the numbers are really one particular set of sets then it must be that there is something about that particular set which distinguishes it from the other contenders and which would give us grounds to single it out as the set of natural numbers.

We have seen that at most one of the accounts can be the correct one and further that if one is the correct one then there must be some reason for singling it out. But if the conditions stated really are sufficient for a correct account, then it cannot be that even one of the accounts is the correct one. For if one were uniquely correct,

¹⁹Ibid., p. 56.

²⁰Benacerraf's position here seems to me to be intuitively obvious. However, I don't have an argument to show that it is correct. It is not clear to me that Benacerraf has an argument, either. That is, it is not clear that he is doing more than appealing to intuition. See "What Numbers Could Not Be," pp. 57, 58.

then that set of sets (specified in the correct account) would have had some distinguishing feature which would have furnished us with a reason for selecting that set as the set of natural numbers. But that distinguishing feature would then necessarily find itself in our list of conditions which are sufficient for any correct account of the natural numbers. Thus if our conditions, e.g. those stated by Benacerraf, were sufficient, it follows that there is no such discriminating feature. In short, none of the accounts are uniquely correct. That is, none specify that set of sets which is, in fact, identical to the natural numbers.²¹

If the preceding line of reasoning is correct, then it would seem that if a concept is open there will always be competing accounts all of which satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a correct account, but none of which is the uniquely correct account. That is, none of the accounts specify that entity which is, as a matter of fact, the referent of the term in question. Thus anyone claiming that one of these accounts is the correct one would be not only unwarranted, i.e. unjustified in making such a claim, but wrong.²²

I argued previously that what someone asserts could not be identical with any of the sentences which could be used to assert it. Cartwright would counter (apparently) that my argument presupposed that the concept of thing asserted was not open. That is, if the concept was open in such a way that among the contending accounts of the thing asserted by

²¹The line of reasoning used here has been for the most part that of Benacerraf.

²²That is, such a claim is always false (according to Benacerraf, senseless). See page 64 of his article.

someone were accounts, each of which specified a different eternal sentence, then my argument would fail. But if the concept of thing asserted is open in the respect in question, then surely each of these competing accounts is not uniquely correct. It follows that what someone asserts is not identical to any of the sentences in question.

To recapitulate, it seems to me that the line of reasoning by which I attempted to show that what someone asserts could not be identical with any sentence was entirely neutral with respect to the question of whether the concept of thing asserted is open. I surely did not assume it was open in the argument I originally presented. But if it turns out that the concept is an open one, the same conclusion follows.

In the foregoing I have (somewhat hesitatingly) assumed that Cartwright's objection to my line of reasoning was that my argument presupposed that the concept of thing asserted was not open. It seems to me, however, that Cartwright did not express his objection as clearly as he might have and I would like to suggest that he, in fact, had something slightly different in mind. I will now explore an alternative (and, I believe, correct) account of what Cartwright's objection really was and try to see whether there is, in the end, any disagreement between his point and what I have been arguing for.

It should be clear that one who takes the concept of, e.g. natural number, to be open and goes on " ... to conclude that the concept is insufficiently determinate to permit a reasonable identification of the system of natural numbers with one rather than another of the various distinct (but isomorphic) models,"²³ is not one who is likely

²³Cartwright, "Propositions," p. 100.

(to say the least) to claim to have discovered which set is really the set of natural numbers. Accordingly,²⁴ when such a philosopher chooses to 'identify' the numbers with one particular model, he is not claiming to have discovered which set the numbers were really all along. Similarly, when such a philosopher claims that each of the models "... may quite legitimately be 'taken as' the system of natural numbers"²⁵ he is not making the (absurd) claim that each of the models is identical to the natural numbers.²⁶

What such philosophers have in mind are explications of the concept of natural number. To 'identify' the numbers with some particular set of sets is to take that particular set of sets as 'natural number surrogates' for some particular purpose. Indeed one may 'identify' the numbers with different sets of sets for different purposes. Without giving any precise account of explication, it is clear that to explicate, e.g. the natural number series, in terms of some particular set is not to claim that the numbers are identical to that set.

Accordingly, we should clearly distinguish two similar sounding but radically different claims: (1) the natural numbers are identical to some particular set of sets (or what someone asserts is identical to some particular sentence) and (2) the natural numbers may be identified with (i.e. explicated in terms of) some particular set of sets (or what someone asserts may be identified with some particular sen-

²⁴As Benacerraf points out (p. 68).

²⁵Cartwright, "Propositions," p. 100.

²⁶This is absurd for it would imply that, e.g., the number 3 is identical to many non-identical sets.

tence).²⁷

To return to Cartwright's discussion of the openness of concepts, if the concept of thing asserted is indeed open then things asserted are in the same boat as natural numbers (on the view of natural numbers we have been considering) and various explications might be expected.²⁸ Accordingly, if one were to believe the concept of proposition to be open and were to proceed to identify propositions with "representative eternal sentences" he would not be claiming to have discovered which sentence was really the one asserted or even that what we really assert are sentences. Thus, if the concept of thing asserted is open, we may end up after all with arbitrarily chosen 'representative eternal sentences' as 'things asserted' (more accurately, as proposition surrogates) and thus as truth bearers.

I take it that Cartwright's point was not that my argument doesn't show that things asserted are not identical to sentences. His point was that since I haven't argued that the concept is not open, my argument was not sufficient to show that in the end we don't end up with eternal sentences as proposition surrogates (and thus as truth bearers). If this

²⁷Indeed, in the interest of clarity we might do better to restrict our talk of identifying X with Y to contexts in which X and Y are identical. Accordingly, in formulating the second of these claims we would not speak of identification at all. However, in light of the fact that such terminology has become fairly standard (see, e.g. Benacerraf "What Numbers Could Not Be," 67-68, and Quine, Word and Object, Sections 53 and 54) no harm is done if we adhere to such usage.

²⁸When I say that various explications might be expected, I don't mean to imply that in the case of an open concept, philosophical analysis necessarily consists in 'explication' (in the sense in which I have been using that term). For example, Benacerraf, who takes the concept of natural number to be open goes on not to offer an explication, i.e. to identify the numbers with some particular set, but rather to advance a sophisticated kind of formalism.

is his point, I fully agree. My claim was only that what someone asserts is never identical with a sentence. And this point, or so it seems, is correct whether or not the concept is open. Of course, if the concept is open, explication is a natural move and then it may be that we would want to identify what someone asserts with some eternal sentence. But that is another matter.

This concludes the analysis of argument IIb. It should be clear that the line of reasoning employed to rehabilitate argument IIb applies as well to IIa (Strawson's original attempt to show that what is asserted is not identical to what is uttered ²⁹). For the premises of argument IIa do show that at most one of the propositions asserted by the use of a single sentence is identical to that sentence. And we may supplement IIa (so as to show that not even one of those propositions is identical to the sentence uttered) by pointing out that unless there are grounds on the basis of which one of these propositions could be chosen as identical to the sentence uttered, we will be justified in concluding that the sentence uttered is not identical to any of the propositions which it can be used to assert. Now it seems clear that in the kind of case under consideration in argument IIa there could be no such grounds. That is, with respect to argument IIb where we were considering several sentences which could be used to assert a single

²⁹That argument began by noting that the same sentence can be used to assert many different propositions and concluded that such a sentence could not be identical to any of the propositions which it could be used to assert. A difference between arguments IIa and IIb is that only the latter presupposes that two or more speakers may by the use of different sentences, assert the numerically identical item. Accordingly, if questions were to be raised about this assumption, argument IIa would not be (at least directly) affected.

proposition, it, at first, seemed possible that one of these sentences might have some feature, e.g. completeness of formulation, which would make it reasonable to single it out as the thing asserted. But with respect to IIa, where we are considering the case of a single sentence which could be used to assert several propositions, it seems that none of the differences among the things asserted would make it at all reasonable to single out one of them as identical to the sentence uttered. For example, consider the sentence "I am tired" as assertively uttered by Smith and later by Jones. An example of the kind of difference we might find between what Smith asserted and what Jones asserted is that in making his assertion Smith made reference to himself (Smith) while in making his assertion Jones made reference to himself (Jones). Now isn't it obvious that this kind of difference would never supply us with an argument for the claim that only in the case of, e.g., Smith's utterance was what he asserted identical to the sentence uttered? I conclude, then, that argument IIa has been supplemented so as to show that none of the speakers who utter, e.g., "I am tired," assert the sentence which they utter.

The conclusion just reached seems to leave open the possibility that for each speaker who utters "I am tired" there is some sentence other than "I am tired" which is what he asserts.³⁰ (Obviously, each speaker would assert a different sentence than every other speaker since,

³⁰Argument IIb, as noted before, did not leave open such a possibility for IIb (as supplemented) showed that what one asserts could not be identical to any of the sentences which could be used to assert it. It follows that what one asserts could be a sentence only if it were a sentence which could not be used to make that assertion. But this is absurd--what is asserted obviously is not identical to a sentence which could not be used to assert it.

ex hypothesi, they all asserted different things.) But a variation on the theme by now overplayed will remedy this. For consider one of the speakers who utters "I am tired," say Smith. How will we discover the sentence which is, in fact, the one which he asserts? Clearly some sentences might be ruled out immediately. For example, we might want to say that a sentence must be an eternal sentence just to be a contender. But, again, there will be nothing we could discover which would be grounds for claiming that some one (eternal) sentence is what he asserted.³¹ If this is so, we may conclude that he did not assert any sentence. Hence, we reach the general conclusion that IIa (as supplemented) shows that what is asserted by someone is not identical to any sentence.

In the foregoing, I have spoken as if arguments IIa and IIb are quite general; that their applicability is not restricted to utterances of any particular kind of sentences nor to assertions of any particular kinds of propositions. In the case of argument IIb this is surely correct for any proposition asserted by an utterance of a certain sentence can always be asserted by the use of a different sentence. As Cartwright notes "No statement ... is so 'tied to' a given sentence that it cannot be made by uttering some other sentence."³² In the case of argument IIa, however, it might be supposed that there is a question

³¹Furthermore, even if, as seems hard to imagine, we were to discover such grounds, i.e. we could find something about one of the sentences on the basis of which we could claim that sentence to be the thing asserted, still we could invent a new sentence differing only in vocabulary. See page 41 for a more complete statement of this point.

³²"Propositions," p. 97.

about its generality for it is not clear that every declarative sentence can be used to assert more than one proposition. IIA surely does apply to utterances of non-eternal sentences--but what of eternal sentences? Now in Part II of this essay I will argue that even eternal sentences (at least some of them) can be used to assert different propositions. But we need not rely on this in order to account for the generality of argument IIA. For even if IIA is applicable only to utterances of non-eternal sentences, it does yield the conclusion that at least for such utterances what is asserted is not a sentence. But surely it is not the case that what we assert are sometimes sentences and sometimes not. Hence we can conclude on the basis of argument IIA that what is asserted is in no case a sentence.

ii

We have seen that propositions are not identical with sentences, that is, sentence types. What about sentence tokens, speech or judgmental acts, sets (of sentences, sentence tokens, speech acts, possible worlds)? Might it be the case that what someone asserts is identical to say, the sentence token he utters or the speech act he performs? In trying to answer these questions, let us keep in mind that what is of interest to us is whether or not propositions are identical to any of these kinds of entities. Whether or not propositions may be identified with (i.e., explicated in terms of) any of these (or, for that matter, with sentence types) is another question.

Let us begin with sentence tokens. (By a sentence token I here mean the particular inscription or sound produced.) It seems clear

that it would be wrong to identify what someone asserts with the sentence token he produces in making that assertion. For one thing, argument IIB clearly applies here. With respect to every proposition, two speakers can produce different tokens and in doing so assert the same proposition. Accordingly, the proposition can be identical to, at most, one of the tokens which could be produced in asserting that proposition. But, since there are no features of any one of the tokens which would give us grounds to single it out as the thing asserted, we may conclude that the thing asserted is identical to no sentence token.³³

It may be that argument IIA furnishes us with another proof that what is asserted is in no case a sentence token. At first glance it might appear that argument IIA is not applicable here, for the application that argument would seem to require that two instances of a single sentence token be utilized in asserting different proposition. And, of course, there can never be more than one instance of a sentence token. Indeed the terms "sentence type" and "sentence token" are introduced to distinguish between that sense of the word "sentence" according to which two people can utter the same sentence and that sense of the word sentence in which two utterances of, e.g. "I am tired, " count as utterances of different sentences.

I would like to suggest, however that argument IIA is applicable here. For although there cannot be two instances of a single sentence

³³In this application of argument IIB, it is obvious that there could be no such discriminating feature (which would be a feature of exactly one token). Any conceivable candidate for such a feature would presumably be possessed by all tokens of the same sentence type.

token, a single token could be utilized in the assertion of many different propositions. I do not mean to suggest that a single token can be produced and re-produced,³⁴ but rather that a token which is utilized in the assertion of one proposition could have been utilized in the assertion of a host of others. Accordingly, one might argue (utilizing the reasoning of IIa) that a given token could not be identical with more than one of the propositions it could be used³⁵ to assert. This much, I believe, is shown by argument IIa.

The interesting question is whether we can now prove the stronger conclusion, namely, that a given token could not be identical to even one of the propositions which it could be used to assert. The stronger conclusion could be proven if it were the case that we could give no reason for identifying the token with any of the propositions in question. But, or so it seems, in this case we can give such a reason. For that token was, in fact, used to assert only one proposition. Thus it might be argued that one of the propositions in question does have a feature in virtue of which it would be reasonable to take that proposition as identical to the token produced, i.e. the feature of being the only proposition actually asserted by the use of that token. Accordingly, it seems as if argument IIa cannot be used to show that what someone asserts is not a sentence token.

³⁴It seems outlandish to suggest that a token can be produced and re-produced. But see two paragraphs below for a similar idea--not, I hope, outlandish.

³⁵I speak, throughout this section of the use of sentence tokens. If talk of the use of a token seems troublesome, then the same points might be made by speaking of the production of tokens, or the utilization of tokens.

However, there is another way in which we might try to apply IIa. It is clear that a sentence token cannot have two or more instances. And it seems almost equally clear that a token cannot be used and re-used (or produced and re-produced). But if a token is, e.g., the group of ink marks inscribed on a certain page, then it is not clear that such a token cannot be re-used to assert something else. One might, for example, cut the page up and re-use the token in another context in order to assert something different. It is perhaps impossible for this to occur with regard to a spoken sentence token but if it is possible with regard to some sentence tokens then argument IIa is applicable, at least, to them.

Written sentence tokens are, then, at least in one crucial respect, on a par with sentence types; the same written token can actually occur in more than one assertive act. If this is correct, then clearly argument IIa can be applied to (written) sentence tokens and, moreover, we can show not only that such a token can not be identical to more than one of the propositions it can be used to assert, but also that the token cannot be identical to even one of these propositions. This stronger conclusion follows for we can no longer give a reason why one of these propositions ought to be singled out as identical to the token. The fact that a given proposition was actually asserted by the production of a certain token no longer seems like a reason to take that proposition to be identical to the token once we realize that the token may, at some future time, be used to assert some other proposition.

It seems then that we can show (along the lines of IIa) that with respect to written sentence tokens, the token produced is not identical

with the proposition asserted, nor, indeed, with any of the propositions it could be used to assert. Put differently, in such cases, what someone asserts is not identical to the token he produces. And along lines spelled out in detail above we can reach the further conclusion that in such cases what is asserted is not any sentence token.³⁶ Furthermore, if indeed what one asserts by the production of a written token is not a token, then we can conclude that we never assert tokens for (presumably) it is not the case that we sometimes assert sentence tokens and sometimes assert other kinds of entities. Hence, an argument along the lines of argument IIA--if, indeed, another argument was needed.

What someone asserts is, then, not identical either to the sentence type he utters (nor, for that matter, to any other sentence type) nor to the sentence token he produces (nor to any sentence token.) What shall we say of speech acts as candidates for things asserted? It seems clear that what someone asserts is not identical with his act of asserting it.³⁷ As Strawson points out,³⁸ what someone asserts has no date while his act of assertion is datable. And, if indeed more needs to be said, Cartwright argues that what someone asserts cannot be identical to his asserting it "for the latter is a case of asserting whatever he asserted while what he asserted is clearly not."³⁹ Surely then, what someone asserts is not identical to ones act of asserting it.

³⁶For if it were some token, there would have to be grounds for singling out some particular token as the one asserted, etc.

³⁷I.e., with the illocutionary act of asserting it. Nor is what someone asserts identical with his locutionary act. I will consider here only the illocutionary act. What I say holds, I believe, for any speech act or utterance event.

³⁸"Truth," p. 193.

³⁹"Propositions," p. 85.

The last of the candidates for things asserted to be considered are sets (sets of sentences,⁴⁰ sets of speech or judgemental acts, sets of possible worlds,⁴¹ etc.). It seems to me that these may be disposed of as follows. Let us remind ourselves of the distinction previously made between the claims (1) that what someone asserts is identical to X and (2) that what someone asserts may be identified with (or explicated in terms of) X. Now it is a distinctive characteristic of claims of type (1) that a philosopher making such a claim is claiming to have discovered what things asserted really are. One making a claim of type (2) is doing no such thing.

Now when a philosopher takes things asserted to be one of the kinds of sets mentioned above, how are we to understand him? I want to suggest that all such views ought to be construed not as identity claims [(1) above] but as proposed explications. That is, I think that philosophers maintaining such views are not claiming to have discovered what things asserted really are but are advocating that we dispose of talk of 'things asserted' in favor of talk of the items in question.

I would like to be more bold; that is, I would like to be able

⁴⁰We have already seen that what is asserted is in no case a single sentence type (or token, for that matter). The question here is whether what someone asserted may be a set whose members are different types, e.g., the set of sentences synonymous with the type he uttered or alternatively, the set of sentences which could be used to assert what he asserted.

⁴¹See David Lewis, "Causation," Journal of Philosophy 70 (1973): n. 3, 556,: "I identify a proposition, as is becoming usual, with a set of possible worlds in which it is true. It is not a linguistic entity. Truth-functional operations on propositions are the appropriate Boolean operations or sets of worlds; logical relations among propositions are relations of inclusion, overlap, etc. among sets ... "

to show that what someone asserts could not be any of the sets mentioned about. But it is not clear how this could be established. We can establish that what someone asserts is not, e.g. the set of sentences synonymous with the sentence he uttered. This can be shown by an argument along the lines of argument Iib. Consider the case of two speakers asserting the same thing by utterance of non-synonymous sentences, e.g. "He is happy" and "John is happy." If what each asserted was the set of sentences synonymous with the sentence he uttered, then they asserted two different sets. So if, as we are assuming, two speakers can assert the same thing by utterances of non-synonymous sentences, then it follows that it cannot be that what each asserts is the set of sentences synonymous with his sentence.

So far, so good. But a little reflection shows that the same argument cannot be used against such views as (1) what is asserted is the set of sentences all of which can be used to assert what the speaker asserted or (2) the set of possible worlds in which what he asserted was true. Perhaps an argument along the following lines will work. Following the line of reasoning suggested by Benacerraf, it might be pointed out that if one of these kinds of sets, e.g. sets of assertively equivalent sentences,⁴² were to be the kind of thing which we, in fact, assert, then there must be some distinguishing feature of that kind of set which would give us a reason for thinking that it, rather than, say sets of possible worlds are what we assert. But it is hard to imagine what grounds could be given to privilege one of these kinds of sets

⁴²Equivalent, that is, in that each set consists of all those sentences which can be used to assert the same thing.

over another. And if it turns out that there are no such grounds, we could then conclude that things asserted are not identical to any of the aforementioned kinds of sets.

If this argument works then it follows that propositions are not identical to sets (of the kind here discussed). But in any case, it seems clear that someone who says that propositions are, e.g., sets of possible worlds, is not making a claim about what kinds of entities people, in fact, assert but is rather proposing an explication or rational reconstruction of the concept of thing asserted.

iii

Propositions are not identical with sentence types, nor with tokens, nor with speech acts nor with any of the various kinds of sets we have considered. We can conclude that if there are bearers of truth and if we can assume, as seems quite plausible, that with respect to an assertive utterance what is asserted is what is true or false, then sentences (tokens, speech acts, etc.) are not the truth bearers. Strawson's argument II, (see page 24) is, in other words, sound.

In the preceding paragraph I have endorsed the view of Cartwright and Strawson (among others), that with respect to an assertive utterance, what can properly be said to be true or false is what is asserted. Now insofar as one works within the framework of what I have, following Quine, called "intuitive semantics," and distinguishes, as we have done, between what the speaker asserts and the sentence (type) uttered, the sentence token produced, and so on it seems hard to deny that the former, i.e., what the speaker asserts, is what is true or false. As Michael Dummett notes:

The issue of what can properly be said to be true or false has been a contentious one only where it has been thought possible to avoid recognizing the existence of any rival claimants, besides sentences, for the role of arguments for the predicates 'is true' and 'is false'; no one has maintained that there really are two candidates, the thought and the sentence, but that, of these two, the sentence is the successful one.⁴³

The view that what is asserted is what is true or false is sometimes qualified by restricting it to utterances of sentences of a natural language. As we noted at the beginning of Chapter I, Warnock tells us that this view was taken to be fairly obvious "at least when the use of a natural language is in question."⁴⁴ But if the arguments employed here have been correct, it could seem unnecessary to so qualify the claim that things asserted are the truth bearers. Even if the language in question is an (interpreted) calculus whose sentences are all eternal, even if each sentence of the language is such that one and only one proposition can be asserted by its means, still whatever is asserted by an utterance of one of these sentences can, presumably, be asserted by the utterance of some other sentence (either of the same language or, if not, of some other). If so, argument IIb is applicable here and, accordingly, we can conclude that even in uttering the sentences of some artificial language, what is asserted and thus, what is true or false, is not a sentence.⁴⁵

Let us now turn our attention to Strawson's other attempt to

⁴³Dummett, Frege: Philosophy of Language, p. 371.

⁴⁴G.J. Warnock, "A Problem About Truth," in Truth, ed. George Pitcher (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 55.

⁴⁵This argument is applicable to sentence tokens as well.

show that sentences are not the truth bearers, the argument from truth value variation (argument I). It was pointed out in Chapter I that argument I was, at least as formulated, invalid. It was suggested that the argument was enthymematic and that Strawson implicitly assumes that whatever is true or false must be so 'eternally.' It would then follow, it was pointed out, that the sentence uttered is not, in general, the thing which is true or false.⁴⁶

It should be pointed out that argument I (even as supplemented) does not show that no sentence is true or false. What it certainly does show is that when one utters a sentence, which, to use Strawson's language, has different uses than what he utters is not the thing which is either true or false. However if there are sentences which could plausibly be held to possess truth values eternally, e.g., eternal sentences, then argument I would not apply to utterances of such sentences. Moreover, even in the case of one uttering a sentence which has 'different uses,' argument I only shows that what is true or false is not the sentence uttered. It still remains possible that in such a case what is true or false is a 'corresponding' eternal sentence.

At this point familiar questions begin to arise. For example, granted that argument I does not by itself preclude the possibility that for each assertive utterance some eternal sentence may always be the thing which can properly be said to be true or false, still given some utterance of a non-eternal sentence, how are we to decide which eternal

⁴⁶It would appear that this argument would apply to sentence tokens as well as to types, at least if I was correct above in my claim that written tokens are on a par with types. See page 57.

sentence 'expansion' is to be considered the bearer of truth or falsity? And following the line of reasoning employed above, if we cannot discriminate among eternal sentences so as to discover that one really is the truth bearer, we ought to conclude that what is either true or false is not an eternal sentence.

Thus in the case of utterances of non-eternal sentences, what is either true or false is not a sentence (at least if we assume that what is true or false is so 'eternally.')

And since it is implausible, to say the least, that only in the case of certain utterances, e.g., utterances of eternal sentences, are sentences the things that are either true or false, we can conclude, on the basis of argument I that even in the case of utterances of eternal sentences, the sentence is not the bearer of truth.

PART II

REFERENCE, MEANING, AND PROPOSITIONS

CHAPTER III

INDEXICAL REFERENCE AND ETERNAL SENTENCES

Conspicuously absent from Part I of this essay was a discussion of whether what someone asserts might be identified with the meaning or sense of a sentence. In this chapter and the following two I will lay the groundwork for an argument to be presented in the concluding chapter to the effect that what is asserted is not the meaning or sense of a sentence. Essential to that argument is the notion of referential use discussed in the present chapter with respect to 'indexical expressions.' In the next two chapters the analysis will be extended to the 'referential use' of definite descriptions.

In Chapter II, I made use of a widely accepted view concerning the relation between eternal and non-eternal sentences: given an utterance of a non-eternal sentence an eternal sentence can always be formulated which makes explicit or completely formulates what was asserted by the utterance of the non-eternal sentence. This thesis is, I wish to argue, mistaken;¹ it rests on an incorrect view of indexical reference. I will introduce the account of indexical reference which I wish to defend by way of a criticism of this opposing account. I begin with a discussion of those considerations which make this incorrect view an attractive one.

¹It should be noted that my own argument for the claim that what is asserted is in no case a sentence did not rest on the thesis which I here dispute. I did make use of this thesis in my argument that Cartwright was mistaken in his absurdity claim. My criticism of Cartwright does not, however, ultimately rest on the truth of the thesis in question. See footnote 8, Chapter II above.

Consider the following passage from "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry" in which Frege discusses utterances of non-eternal sentences:

... The mere wording, which can be grasped by writing or the gramophone, does not suffice for the expression of the thought. The present tense is used in two ways: first, in order to give a date, second in order to eliminate any temporal restriction where timelessness or eternity is part of the thought. Think, for instance, of the laws of mathematics. Which of the two cases occurs is not expressed but must be guessed. If a time indication is needed by the present tense one must know when the sentence was uttered to apprehend the thought correctly. Therefore, the time of utterance is part of the expression of the thought. If someone wants to say the same today as he expressed yesterday using the word "today," he must replace this word with "yesterday." Although the thought is the same its verbal expression must be different so that the sense, which would otherwise be affected by the differing times of utterance, is readjusted. The case is the same with words like "here" and "there." In all such cases the mere wording, as it is given in writing, is not the complete expression of the thought, but the knowledge of certain accompanying conditions of utterance, which are used as means of expressing the thought are needed for its correct apprehension. The pointing of fingers, hand movements, glances, may belong here too. The same utterance containing the word "I" will express different thoughts in the mouths of different men, of which some may be true, others false.²

In this passage Frege points out a number of ways in which a (non-eternal) sentence is not "the complete expression of the thought," i.e. it fails to make explicit what is asserted by its utterance:

(1) The present tense can be used in order to indicate that something presently is the case. But it can also be used " ... in order to eliminate any temporal restriction where timelessness or eternity is part of the thought." The sentence, per se, does not indicate in which way the present tense is being utilized. Hence, such sentences would seem to fail to completely formulate the thought. (Although Frege does not

²Gottlob Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry," *Mind* 65 (1956): 289-311, reprinted in *Essays on Frege*, ed. E.D. Klemke (Urbana: University of Illinois Press; Illini Books, 1968), pp. 516-517.

say so, it seems to me that such sentences are not really ambiguous. An ambiguous sentence, e.g. "Kennedy is running," is one that possesses more than a single meaning. It is not at all clear that "Two and two are four" is ambiguous in this sense; perhaps the verb "to be" and its forms are ambiguous. Accordingly, I will refer to the phenomenon here noted by Frege as "quasi-ambiguity.")

(2) Where the present tense (indeed, this holds for any tense) is used to indicate time, then there is a second respect in which the thought is not captured by the sentence, i.e. there is no notice of what time indication is 'contained in' the thought.

(3) The third factor contributing to the failure of non-eternal sentences to completely capture the thought is the presence of what are called indicator words, indexical expressions, or egocentric particulars, e.g. "I," "you," "here," "now," "today," "yesterday." Frege also makes note of these; since different thoughts may be expressed by the use of a single sentence containing an indexical expression, the sentence, per se, does not completely formulate the thought.

Now eternal sentences, a la Quine, at least unambiguous ones, apparently do not suffer from any of these failures; they are complete formulations. Spatio-temporal references, for example, are explicitly indicated. Indexical expressions are eliminated in favor of (what Quine refers to as) objective indications of times, places, and persons. Also lacking from eternal sentences is the 'quasi-ambiguity' noted by Frege which results from the fact that one cannot 'read off' from a grammatically present tense sentence whether the tense is actually present or is

(to use Frege's term³) a tense of timelessness. This quasi-ambiguity is lacking, for eternal sentences are stipulated to be tenseless.

Thus, in Chapter II, it seemed reasonable at least for a time, to take eternal sentences to be identical to the things asserted. The assumption implicit in thinking that eternal sentences were plausible candidates was that while the sentence uttered may be ambiguous (in Frege's example 'quasi-ambiguous' or ambiguous in a more straightforward sense) or may 'incompletely' formulate the thought (due to the presence of indexical elements,) the 'thought' expressed, that is, what is asserted, is neither ambiguous nor incomplete. While one cannot read off from a present tense sentence whether it is being used so as to indicate time or not, it surely is being used one way or the other. Thus what I have referred to as a quasi-ambiguity noted by Frege is not a feature of what is asserted. Similarly for more straightforward cases of ambiguity. The ambiguity of the sentence, "Kennedy is running," (jogging, running for office) does not extend to what is asserted by some particular utterance of it. Similarly for 'genuinely' tensed sentences, i.e. sentences in which tensed verbs are used to make a temporal reference, while one cannot 'read off' the temporal reference from the sentence, it is surely a feature of what was asserted; one who understands what was asserted necessarily grasps the temporal reference. And similarly for indexical expressions. Given some utterance of a sentence, e.g., "he is happy," although the person referred to is not indicated by the sentence, surely someone was referred to; what was asserted was that some specific person is happy. And one who understands

³Ibid., p. 533.

the assertion knows which person it is. Things asserted, then, as opposed to the sentences which are often used to assert them, are complete in the relevant respects and unambiguous.

It is, as we noted in our discussion of argument I, often taken for granted that a necessary condition for being a bearer of truth and falsity is that the truth bearer possess truth values eternally. This feature of the bearers of truth is, I think, related to the feature I have been discussing: Truth bearers are thought to possess truth values eternally in virtue of the kind of completeness they possess. Frege, who speaks of thoughts where I have spoken of things asserted states:

Now is the thought changeable or is it timeless? The thought we express by the Pythagorean theorem is surely timeless, eternal, unchangeable. But are there not thoughts which are true today but false in six months time? The thought, for example, that the tree is covered with green leaves, will surely be false in six months time. No, for it is not the same thought at all. The words 'this tree is covered with green leaves' are not sufficient by themselves for the utterance, the time of utterance is involved as well. Without the time-indication this gives we have no complete thought, i.e. no thought at all. Only a sentence supplemented by a time indication and complete in every respect expresses a thought.⁴ But this (the thought expressed)⁵, if it is true, is true not only today or tomorrow but timelessly. Thus the present tense in "is true" does not refer to the speaker's present but is, if the expression be permitted, a tense of timelessness.⁶

Along similar lines Cohen and Nagel state, "The present governor of Connecticut is Dr. Cross seems to be a proposition true for certain years, but surely not always. This, however, is an inadequate

⁴Emphasis added. ⁵Parenthetical remark added.

⁶Frege, "The Thought," p. 533.

analysis. For the phrase 'the present governor' clearly presupposes a date⁷; and as we complete our expression including explicitly the date, we obtain expressions for different propositions, some of which are true and some false."⁸

According to Frege and Cohen and Nagel (among others), we are tempted to think that something can possess one truth value now and another later because we fail to note that every thought (proposition) is necessarily a complete thought. While the sentence uttered may or may not be 'complete,' whatever is required for the thought to be a complete one, e.g. a time indication, the identification of some individual, etc., must be supplied either by the sentence or in some other way, most notably by the context of utterance, in order for an act of assertion to have been performed at all.⁹

Taking things asserted to be complete and eternal sentences to be complete formulations would seem to lead naturally to just the view which I wish to dispute: When a non-eternal sentence is uttered what is asserted can, in every case, be conveyed by an eternal sentence. We know, given our discussion in Chapter II, that in no case does some

⁷Emphasis added.

⁸An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1934), p. 30.

⁹There are cases of utterances of sentences where what is asserted depends not only on the sentence uttered and the 'context' but also on the intention of the speaker. Ambiguous sentences, e.g., "Kennedy is running," furnish one kind of example. It is easy to imagine circumstances in which there is nothing in the context of utterance which determines what was asserted. What may be another kind of example is an utterance of "It is raining" where what the speaker means is that it is raining in Chicago (the speaker, in New York, had been thinking of Chicago). But such cases do not create difficulties for the view that what is asserted must be complete and unambiguous.

single eternal sentence uniquely fill the bill; given some utterance of a non-eternal sentence there will always be more than one 'corresponding' eternal sentence. But in any case there will be at least one eternal sentence which, for every assertive utterance of a non-eternal sentence, will completely capture what was asserted. The idea here is that the information conveyed by the utterance of a non-eternal sentence is a function of the sentence uttered and various features of the context of utterance (plus perhaps the intention of the speaker). But this information can always be explicitly put into words; that is, it can be expressed by a sentence whose assertive utterance in any context, by anyone speaking the language in question, is the assertion of the proposition in question. The proposition asserted by the utterance of such a sentence is thus a function only of the sentence uttered (and, of course, the language spoken). Such sentences are, of course, the eternal ones we have been speaking of.

Accordingly, Quine, in Word and Object, says that if we want to identify a proposition by explicit elaboration rather than by leaving the matter to circumstances of utterance we can formulate an eternal sentence.¹⁰ Jerrold J. Katz, in Semantic Theory,¹¹ endorses what he refers to as "Quine's idea"

... that a sentence expressing a...proposition that makes a statement in a given context can be expanded on the basis of the information in the context to provide another sentence that expresses a proposition that always makes the statement in question, no matter what the context of the

¹⁰See Quine, Word and Object, p. 193-4.

¹¹Jerrold J. Katz, Semantic Theory (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 126.

utterance. The expansion consists of replacing each indexical element by an expression that has the same reference as the indexical element it replaces but whose referent stays fixed with variations in time, place, speaker, etc. The usual indexical tense indicator will be replaced by such a referentially unique time designation, devised with respect to some appropriate calendar and clock; indexical nominal elements like "I," "he," "it," and "John" will be replaced by precise specifications of the individuals or objects that include whatever information about their vital statistics is required to make the specifications resist changes in reference; and so forth.

Katz concludes that "the only alternative to the conception of statementhood we are considering is thus a form of mysticism that claims that some things to which we can refer by the use of indexical elements are, in principle, beyond the range of unique description."¹²

Contra Quine and Katz (among others), there are, or so I shall argue, serious difficulties with this perhaps seemingly unproblematic view. First, it may be the case that someone asserts something by the utterance of a non-eternal sentence but is not in a position to replace the indexical elements and/or tensed verbs in his sentence with more 'objective' terms. Perhaps our speaker is a captive on a ship and is ignorant of its location as well as of the date. Upon noticing the rain he says "It is raining." Now an eternal sentence counterpart for his utterance would have explicit indications of the date and location, say Tuesday, January 5, 1975, on Bimini, of the rainy weather. But in light of the speaker's ignorance of, e.g., the date and location, does it make any sense to say that what he asserted is fully captured or formulated by "It is raining"¹³ on

¹²Ibid., p. 127.

¹³The verb is to be understood tenselessly.

Bimini, Tuesday, January 5, 1975?"¹⁴ Indeed, it would seem at least prima facie, that one uttering this latter sentence would be asserting something different from what the captive asserted since this latter sentence makes explicit information not even known to the captive. Accordingly, it would seem mistaken to claim that in general, what is asserted by an utterance of a non-eternal sentence can always be asserted by an utterance of some corresponding eternal sentence. At least in some cases, what is asserted cannot be captured by an eternal sentence.

Now imagine a second speaker, talking to the first, who unlike the first knows the date, location, etc. Imagine the second speaker to utter, by way of agreement, "It is raining." Does he assert a different proposition than the first speaker? It certainly does not seem obvious that he does. But if he asserts the same thing, then even in the case of a speaker who can replace all the indexical items in his sentence with 'objective terms,' it is questionable whether what he asserts is precisely captured by some 'eternal sentence counterpart.'

To make my case forceful I have begun with an example of a speaker who is ignorant of the information the possession of which would allow him to eternalize his sentence. Next I considered another speaker who is not, in that respect, ignorant but who apparently

¹⁴It might be supposed, mistakenly I think, that the problem to which I am drawing attention might be circumvented by taking something like the following sentence to be the one which formulates what he asserted. "It is raining in the vicinity of John Smith at the time John Smith is uttering this sentence" (Where John Smith is the captive to whom we have been referring). It seems to me that no such move will work even if the fact that the speaker refers to his present utterance presents no problems. The reason that no such move will work is that the speaker may not even know his own identity. Presumably one suffering from amnesia can notice and remark on the weather.

asserts the same thing. My aim in presenting these examples has been, however, quite general: I am trying to cast doubt on the idea that when someone utters a sentence with indexical elements, tensed verbs, etc. that what he asserts is precisely captured by some eternal sentence.

I will now try to generate a related problem for the thesis that eternal sentences 'capture' what we assert. The direction of this attack will be somewhat different. Given some utterance of a non-eternal sentence consider how we would go about formulating a corresponding eternal sentence.¹⁵ One crucial step is the replacement of indexical expressions. Now whatever item is picked out by an indexical expression can also be picked out by various non-synonymous, non-indexical expressions. Accordingly, in replacing indexical expressions with non-indexical ones, we seem to have, in every case, various options. For example, given some utterance of "It is covered with books," made in reference to some table, we can replace the indexical "it" with any of several non-synonymous descriptions, each of which denotes the table in question, e.g., "the table Jones is sitting at at t_1 ," "the table in room 209 of Camden Hall at t_1 " and so on. Now each of these replacements will yield an eternal sentence which presumably formulates a different proposition. Accordingly, given some utterance of a non-eternal sentence, to give a genuine eternal sentence counterpart would seem to require that we find the appropriate eternal sentence: the one that actually formulates what the speaker asserted. And this in

¹⁵For simplicity, let us assume that there is only one corresponding eternal sentence for each utterance of a non-eternal sentence. Let us, that is, ignore the fact that any sentence synonymous with some corresponding eternal sentence will also be a corresponding eternal sentence.

turn requires that for each indexical expression we substitute the appropriate non-indexical one. But is there clearly one of the set of non-synonymous eternal sentences mentioned above which, as opposed to the other members of the set, actually formulates what was asserted?

It might be supposed that which of these sentences captures what was asserted by the utterance of the non-eternal sentence can, in general, be resolved by reference to the intention of the speaker. Surely the speaker, it might be supposed, knows which proposition he intended to express. This, however, will not do. For at least in many cases the speaker will have no such determinate intention. If asked which sentence formulates the proposition he meant to assert he will have no answer.

At this point two different routes might seem possible. First, we might insist that surely one of the several eternal sentences formulate what he asserts despite the fact that there is (even for the speaker) no way of deciding which. On the other hand, in light of the fact that there is absolutely no reason to think that any one of these (as opposed to any other) is the formulation of what he asserts, we might deny that any one of them formulates precisely the proposition he asserted. The first of these alternatives seems to me clearly unacceptable. It is (to say the least) reasonable to suppose that if a single one of these non-equivalent sentences were the correct one, that is if only it captured precisely what he asserted, there would be something about it which would give us a reason to select it over the others. It appears absurd to suppose that what the speaker asserted is in fact some unique proposition (made explicit by some single one

of these eternal sentences) but which proposition it is is an unknowable truth.¹⁶

We have noted two kinds of cases in which, it seems, no eternal sentence can plausibly be held to formulate what was asserted by utterances of non-eternal sentences. First, there are cases in which the speaker fails to have the requisite knowledge to eternalize his sentence and second, there are cases in which the context and intentions of the speaker are such that no reason can be given as to why one of a group of non-synonymous eternal sentences is the genuine corresponding eternal sentence.

There is still another kind of case in which it would seem that no eternal sentence can be held to formulate what is asserted. Imagine someone assertively uttering "It is now 5:00 p.m." It seems even more clear that no eternal sentence will do here. (Replacing now by an explicit time indication yields an eternal sentence but obviously not one that can be used to assert what was asserted by the original non-eternal sentence.)

Now these difficulties with respect to eternalizing uttered sentences seem to create difficulties for the notion of thing asserted (or at least with the Fregean idea that what a person asserts is in every case a proposition which is complete and determinate). For in case 1, our failure to eternalize his sentence with respect to, e.g., date and location seems to amount to an admission that what he asserted was not that it was raining on Bimini, January 5, 1975; i.e., that the spatial

¹⁶This argument is, of course, another application of Bennacerraf's in "What Numbers Could Not Be."

and temporal information was not part of what he asserted. But that this proposition was what was asserted seems to be just what a Fregean account would necessitate. Similarly, in the second kind of case, a Fregean account would seem to necessitate that one of those eternal sentences does formulate his thought. That is, if every 'thought' is a 'complete thought,' if every assertion is the assertion of a fully determinate proposition, then it would seem to be the case that the speaker uttering "It is covered with books" must have expressed what is formulated by one of the eternal sentences mentioned above (or some other similar eternal sentence). But this insistence counts against a Fregean account for, as we have seen, there is no reason to think that, in fact, one of these sentences formulates what was asserted. In the third case considered, i.e. the utterance of "It is now 5:00 p.m.," it is not at all clear that the term "now" (to paraphrase Cohen and Nagel) 'presupposes' a time. Indeed, in this case it is tempting to say that what is asserted (and not just the sentence uttered) is somehow inherently indexical.

I think, however, that it is not clear that cases of these kinds do create difficulties for an account that preserves much of what is essential in Frege's account. That is, I believe that the fact that no genuine eternal sentence counterpart can be found for an utterance of a given sentence is compatible with the fact that what was asserted is determinate in a way that guarantees, e.g., eternal possession of truth values.

Let us begin with case 1. Assuming that it would be misrepresenting the captive (who uttered "It is raining") to say that he asserted that

it was raining on Bimini, January 5, 1975 it may be that what he asserted still has the requisite determinateness. This is so because despite the fact that the speaker did not convey any spatial or temporal information, he nevertheless made a (kind of)¹⁷ spatial and temporal reference; thus what he asserted is determinate with respect to time and place. The making of a reference, spatial, temporal, or a reference to some individual item, does not require that we describe or name what it is that we are referring to. Indeed, we may not know how to verbally identify, in a non-trivial way,¹⁸ the object of reference.

The fact that what our first speaker asserted is determinate with respect to time and place can be seen from the fact that someone uttering those same words at a different time and/or place would be asserting something different. But it is a mistake to think that the fact that such a proposition would be different must be accounted for by thinking of some spatio-temporal description as part of what was asserted.

Similar remarks apply to the utterance of "It is covered with books" made in the kind of context described above. Granted that there is no eternal sentence which is the genuine corresponding eternal sentence, i.e. no eternal sentence captures precisely what was asserted

¹⁷I say he made a kind of spatio-temporal reference rather than simply saying that he made a spatio-temporal reference because he did not explicitly refer to time and place as he would have had he said "It is raining here and now." But, to consider the temporal reference first, however we analyze the way in which the use of tensed verbs accomplish temporal reference, surely such use does accomplish some kind of temporal reference. With respect to spatial reference, similarly there is obviously some kind of spatial reference involved in assertive utterances of, e.g., "It is raining."

¹⁸A 'trivial' way of verbally identifying the referent would be something like "the object to which I am referring."

by the original utterance, what was asserted is nevertheless determinate; by the utterance of "it" in the context in question, the speaker makes a definite reference. The fact that no descriptive phrase has priority over any other as a replacement for "it" ought not to make us think that there is anything indefinite or indeterminate about what was asserted.

Finally the same kind of approach seems natural with regard to utterances of sentences like "It is now 5:00 p.m." By the utterance of "now" the speaker makes a reference to something (an instant or an interval or whatever) and locates it temporally.

At this point in our analysis we might formulate what we have come to in the following way: Eternal sentences formulate 'complete thoughts,' but not all 'complete thoughts' are formulable via eternal sentences. In particular, many propositions asserted by the use of indexical expressions and tensed verbs, although they are 'determinate,' are not so formulable.

I stated above that the kind of determinateness possessed by propositions which are determinate although not formulable via eternal sentences is such as to satisfy much of what is essential to a Fregean account. I did not attribute to Frege the view that there are such propositions for I think that he would not agree. Although I will not argue for it here,¹⁹ I believe that Frege's view was that in using indexical expressions I communicate bits of descriptive information supplied by the context; when such information is made explicit the

¹⁹For an argument that this is Frege's view see the concluding chapter of this essay, "Propositions and Meanings."

result is an eternal sentence. Clearly the remarks of Quine and Katz mentioned above suggest just such a view. And along similar lines, Cohen and Nagel claim that with respect to utterances of "The present governor of Connecticut is Dr. Cross," "the phrase 'the present governor' clearly presupposes a date, and as we complete our expression by including explicitly the date we obtain expressions for different propositions..."²⁰

Such a view seems natural, I think, given the perspective which views the utterance of an eternal sentence as assertion, par excellence. Eternal sentences, it is often said, are the only kind needed for an adequate scientific account of the world. Thus Quine speaks of "purifying the language of science"²¹ by banishing indicator words, tense, etc. in favor of 'objective' indication of persons, places, times, etc. And Russell observes that "... no egocentric particulars occur in the language of physics. Physics views space-time impartially, as God might be supposed to view it."²² Of course, we do sometimes utter non-eternal sentences, e.g. ones with indexical items. But in the case of such utterances, the context of utterance can be thought of as 'taking up the slack'; we communicate information which cannot be gleaned from the sentence by relying on various features of the context

²⁰Cohen and Nagel, Introduction to Logic, p. 30.

²¹W.V. Quine, "The Scope and Language of Science," in Quine, The Ways of Paradox.

²²An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth (London: Allen and Unwin, 1940; Pelican Books, 1962), pp. 108-109.

of utterance.²³ Thus all utterances come to be thought of as 'amounting to' utterances of eternal sentences and it seems as if anything sayable is sayable via an eternal sentence.

It is undeniable that according to the view of the use of indexicals suggested by this perspective, we can account for some facts that need accounting for. For example, as Frege notes, "If someone wants to say the same today as he expressed yesterday using the word 'today,' he must replace this word with 'yesterday.' Although the thought is the same its verbal expression must be different so that the sense, which would otherwise be affected by the differing times of utterance, is readjusted." Now on the theory of indexicals we are considering two such speakers assert the same thing just because the first speaker's "today" and the second speaker's "yesterday" are, given the different contexts of utterance, different ways of specifying the date. Similarly, when I say "I am tired" and you say to me "You are tired," the contexts of utterance supply the information not explicit in the sentence. The fact that I uttered the word "I" in saying "I am tired" amounts to my specifying who it is that is tired in just the same way as uttering some eternal sentence in which "I" is replaced by an 'objective indication' of my identity.

But whatever the merits of the view in question, it will not do

²³Thus a view of this kind assimilates all indexicals, tensed verbs, etc. to pronouns in such sentences as "If the next Governor of New York were a Democrat, then he would be influential in the labor dispute." In sentences like this one, context, in this case the linguistic context, does 'take up the slack,' i.e. "he" in the consequent does seem to stand for (and thus has the force of) the phrase "the Governor of New York."

as an account of the actual use of indexical expressions, tensed verbs, etc. It seems highly implausible to suppose that in every case of the use of an indexical expression one conveys (with the 'help' of the context) the kind of information supposed to be conveyed. As we have seen, the speaker may not even possess knowledge of the relevant information. Moreover, there may be any number of alternative bits of information which would do as what is presumably conveyed and often there will be no good reason (possessed by us or the speaker) for thinking that one of those bits of information was the one conveyed by the utterance of an indexical expression. And further, there are cases where to substitute an 'objective indication' in place of an indexical results in a sentence which, obviously, does not formulate what was asserted, e.g. "It is now 5:00 p.m."

Moreover, the facts that this account of indexicals can account for, can be accounted for on the view of indexicals that I am advocating. Indeed, I think those facts can be accounted for more naturally. When I say "I am tired" and you say (to me) "You are tired" we assert the same thing not because by my using "I" and your uttering "you" we succeed in conveying the same identificatory information. We 'say the same thing' because given the context of utterance the reference of "I" and "you" is the same. We 'say the same thing' because we have said (predicated) the same thing of the same item.

Furthermore, the case of "It is now 5:00 p.m.," which seems to present an insuperable difficulty to the view I am disputing, presents no problem on my view. As noted above, when someone says "It is now 5:00 p.m." he refers, via his utterance of "now," to something (a time

interval or instant or whatever) and locates it temporally.

The view I have been arguing for suggests that when a determinate reference is made by, e.g. the use of indexicals under discussion here, that the same thing is asserted by two speakers when each refers to the same item and predicates the same thing of it. The following might be thought to present a problem for my account. Imagine a speaker (Smith) to say of some individual (Jones) who is standing before him but whom he does not know, "He is bald." (Case 1.) Imagine Smith to later see Jones in a different context and looking and not realizing that he is the same person as he (Smith) made reference to before, Smith now says "He is bald." (Case 2.) Or imagine Smith to see him (Jones) later in a different context and again, not realizing he is looking at the same person, he now says "He is not bald." (Case 3.) Now to compare cases 1 and 2 we are inclined to think that something different was asserted in each: For one thing, someone could believe what Smith asserted in case 1 and disbelieve what he asserted in case 2. For another, we assume that if Smith asserted the same thing in cases 1 and 2 then he (Smith) should know it. Similarly, we are inclined to believe that Smith did not contradict himself in cases 1 and 3 because not realizing that his referent was the same the 'thoughts' expressed are not in conflict.

Of course, on the view I have been endorsing the same thing is asserted in cases 1 and 2 for the same predication was made with respect to the same person. In defense of my view, we might insist that the same thing was asserted in cases 1 and 2 (and the contradictory thereof in case 3) and argue that indeed one might believe what was asserted in

case 1 and simultaneously deny what was asserted in 2 out of ignorance that the propositions are identical. Smith did assert the same thing (on my view, make the same predication of the same individual) in both cases. Smith did not know that his referent was the same; that, of course, is why he did not realize that he had asserted the same thing.

Consider analogs of cases 1 and 2 in which Smith knows, indeed it seems obvious to him, that the same person is in question. Perhaps Jones has been standing in view of Smith from the time of Smith's first statement until his second statement. In such a case it is surely plausible to suppose that the same thing was asserted twice. Now further imagine Smith to be addressing the same person in each case, a person who, unlike Smith, does not know that the referent is the same. Perhaps, unlike Smith, the listener has left the room and returned and now looks at Jones from a different angle. I think that in such a case we ought to say that: (1) the same thing was asserted by Smith on both occasions and (2) the listener 'understands' Smith, that is, he knows that in each case baldness is being predicated of the man before him, and yet (3) the listener does not know that the same thing is asserted (since he does not know that the man referred to is the same).

I want to suggest that Smith's original situation in cases 1 and 2 is similar to that of the listener just mentioned. Smith, in fact, asserts the same thing but does not know this since he is unaware of the identity of the referent. It may still be felt that Smith did not, in cases 1 and 2, 'express the same thought.' I am suggesting, however, that the difference between Smith's beliefs concerning the referent in cases 1 and 2, as real as they are, are irrelevant to what he asserted.

My account of things asserted by the use of indexical subject terms has similarities to J.S. Mill's account of things asserted by the use of subject-predicate sentences in which the subject term is a proper name. As is well known, proper names like "Socrates" are, according to Mill, "... not connotative; they denote the individuals who are called by them, but they do not indicate or imply any attribute as belonging to those individuals."²⁴ Mill says that when the subject term is a proper name (not connotative) and the predicate is connotative "the meaning ... is that the individual thing [*italics added*] denoted by the subject has the attributes connoted by the predicate."²⁵

Mill contrasts this case with what is asserted when the subject term is connotative. Singular terms, as Mill recognized, are often connotative: "... though we may give to an individual a name utterly unmeaning, unmeaningful which we call a proper name--a word which answers the purpose of showing what thing it is we are talking about, but not of telling anything about it; yet a name peculiar to an individual is not necessarily of this description. It may be significant of some attribute or some union of attributes which, being possessed by no object but one, determines the name exclusively to that individual."²⁶

²⁴John Stuart Mill, A System of Logic, abridged in John Stuart Mill's Philosophy of Scientific Method, ed. Ernest Nagel (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1950), p. 26.

²⁵Ibid., p. 71. My attention was drawn to this passage by Michael Lockwood's "On Predicating Proper Names," Philosophical Review 84 (1975): 471-498. That Mill does not intend the quoted remark to be understood metalinguistically can be seen by noting the immediately preceding sentence: "... by asserting the proposition, we wish to communicate information of that physical fact and are not thinking of the names, except as the necessary means of making that communication."

²⁶Ibid., p. 27.

When the subject term is connotative, Mill says that "the assertion is ... that whatever has the attributes connoted by the subject, has also those connoted by the predicate ... "27

Expressing Mill's view in other terms, when a non-connotative expression is used to make a reference, no descriptive identificatory information is conveyed concerning the referent. The function of such an expression (when it occurs in a subject-position) is exhaustively characterized by noting what individual it is being used to pick out. Similarly, on the view of indexicals defended here, to say "He is bald" of some man is to predicate baldness of some definite entity; the entity in question is picked out by my utterance of "he," but by my use of this term I do not affirm anything of the referent; what I assert is not that the thing having characteristics x, y, z is bald.

It might seem as if my thesis about indexicals amounts to the view that indexicals do not possess a sense or meaning; that they have no informational content. That, however, is not quite right; I do not wish to fully assimilate indexicals to Millian proper names. My point is that there is a similarity between proper names (on Mill's view) and indexicals. What I wish to maintain about indexicals is first, that their sense (or meaning or associated informational content) does not vary from context to context; that is, they do not pick up the force of say, various descriptions in different contexts of utterance, and second that whatever sense they possess does not play a 'propositional role.' That is, the sense of an indexical does not figure in what someone asserts by the use of the indexical. It may indeed be the case that

²⁷Ibid., p. 71.

indexicals do possess a sense and further that the sense of an indexical is what makes it an appropriate device for specifying the referent. For example, if I wish to assert of some man that he is bald, I may use the indexical "he"; "she," possessing a different sense, would not do.

CHAPTER IV

THE REFERENTIAL-ATTRIBUTIVE DISTINCTION - PART I

One could maintain consistently with the thesis defended in the last chapter that sometimes the sense of an expression used to make a reference does figure in what is asserted. References made by the use of definite or possessive descriptions furnish a plausible example. Thus it might be maintained that present utterances of

(1) The present President of the United States is a Republican
and (2) The 38th President of the United States is a Republican
would issue in different things asserted despite the fact that reference was made to the same individual and the same predication was made.

While it is consistent with my thesis to maintain that whenever a definite description is used to make a singular reference, the descriptive content figures in what was asserted, I think, nevertheless, that this latter thesis may be challenged. What cannot be challenged and is perfectly clear about cases in which a phrase with significant descriptive content is used to make a reference is that, as opposed to the use of indexicals discussed above, determinate reference is secured, in large part, by the descriptive content of the referring phrase. In the sentence "The present President of the United States is honest," the descriptive content of the phrase "The present President of the United States" is what in large part allows the listener to identify the referent; whereas in "He is honest," "he" does not play as great a

role in enabling the listener to make the identification. But even in cases like the former, from the fact that a determinate reference is secured largely via the descriptive content of the referring expression, it does not follow that this descriptive content constitutes any part of what was asserted.

Keith Donnellan's distinction between the referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions¹ suggests the possibility that, at least sometimes, the descriptive content of a definite description (used to make a reference) is not part of what is asserted. Donnellan's distinction is as follows. There are contexts in which a speaker wants to draw his audience's attention to some specific entity in order, for example, to go on and predicate something of it. Now what linguistic expression to use in order to perform this act of reference, will be, at least some of the time, irrelevant to the purposes of the speaker. More important is the specific entity to which the attention of the audience is to be drawn. Unimportant is how the attention of the audience is directed to the referent. In such contexts, pointing would do as well as some elaborate description or proper name. Which particular referring device will be used will depend upon which is handy. Such factors as (1) what the speaker knows about the referent, (2) what the speaker takes the audience to know about the referent, (3) what is in the visual field of both speaker and audience, and so on are the kinds of factors that determine which particular referring device will be utilized.

¹See his "Reference and Definite Descriptions."

Donnellan refers to the use I have just described as the referential use of a definite description. This use of definite descriptions is, according to Donnellan, to be distinguished from what he calls the attributive use. Whereas when a definite description is used referentially it is " ... merely one tool for doing a certain job--calling attention to a person or thing--and in general any other device for doing the same job, another description or a name, would do as well,"² when a description is used attributively, " ... the definite description might be said to occur essentially, for the speaker wishes to speak about whatever or whoever fits that description ... " (Italics added.)³

To illustrate this distinction, in the case of a single sentence, consider the sentence, "Smith's murderer is insane." Suppose first that we come upon poor Smith foully murdered. From the brutal manner of the killing and the fact that Smith was the most lovable person in the world, we might exclaim, "Smith's murderer is insane." I will assume, to make it a simpler case, that in a quite ordinary sense we do not know who murdered Smith (though this is not in the end essential to the case). This, I shall say, is an attributive use of the definite description.

The contrast with such a use of the sentence is one of those situations in which we expect and intend our audience to realize whom we have in mind when we speak of Smith's murderer and, most importantly, to know that it is this person about whom we are going to say something.

For example, suppose that Jones has been charged with Smith's murder and has been placed on trial. Imagine that there is a discussion of Jones' odd behavior at his trial. We might sum up our impression of his behavior by saying, "Smith's murderer is insane." If someone asks to whom we are referring, by using this description, the answer here is "Jones." This, I shall say, is a referential use of the definite description.⁴

The distinction may be further brought out by the following considerations:

²Ibid., p. 198.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

(1) Only with respect to uses of descriptions that Donnellan would classify as referential does it seem appropriate to say that some particular entity (namely, the intended referent) has been "described as," "referred to as," or "called" the so-and-so. These terms seem in order when, for example, Donnellan's courtroom observer, watching Jones' odd behavior, says "Smith's murderer is insane." By contrast, with respect to cases of attributive use (for example, the detective who, upon observing Smith's mutilated body, exclaims "Smith's murderer is insane") there is no particular individual who the detective has in mind⁵ and who he calls "Smith's murderer." Likewise in cases of referential use the speaker may misdescribe some entity (namely his intended referent). If the person behaving so oddly on the witness stand really did not kill Smith, then the witness has been misdescribed. But in the detective case, if Smith was not murdered but instead died of natural causes the detective cannot be said to have misdescribed anyone.⁶

⁵As is evident from my remarks here (as well as from the quotation from Donnellan above), central to the distinction between the referential and attributive uses of descriptions is the notion of a speaker "having a particular entity in mind"; only in cases of referential use, presumably, does a speaker have a particular item in mind to which he is referring. But how clear is it that in cases of attributive use, the speaker has no particular item in mind to which he is referring? And what is it exactly to "have a particular item in mind"? See pages 96-97 below for a discussion of this kind of criticism of the referential-attributive distinction.

⁶It is significant that the distinction is drawn in this fashion by, for example, H.P. Grice, who goes on to argue that the distinction is not of semantic significance. On Grice's view, the truth conditions for referential as well as attributive uses are given by Russell's theory of descriptions. Thus while the issue of the semantic significance of Donnellan's distinction is surely controversial, that there is some distinction to be drawn here is less so. See H.P. Grice, "Vacuous Names" in Words and Objections, ed. D. Davidson and J. Hintikka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969), p. 141.

(2) In cases which Donnellan would classify as attributive, the force of the utterance can be made explicit by paraphrasing the speaker's original sentence "The F is G" by "Whatever is the F is G," or by "Whatever it is that is the F is G." That such paraphrases are possible reflects the fact that there is a sense in which descriptions used attributively express general propositions. One virtue of Russell's theory of descriptions is, according to Donnellan, that it makes this element of generality explicit.

... Russell thought, I believe, that whenever we use descriptions, as opposed to proper names, we introduce an element of generality which ought to be absent if what we are doing is referring to some particular thing. This is clear from his analysis of sentences containing descriptions. One of the conclusions we are supposed to draw from that analysis is that such sentences express what are in reality completely general propositions: there is a \emptyset and only one such that \emptyset is ψ .⁷

Of course Russell makes no referential-attributive distinction and thus attributes this generality to all propositions asserted by the use of descriptions. Donnellan's point, in this quotation, is that the element of generality which is highlighted in Russell's account is characteristic of attributive (although, for Donnellan, not of referential) uses of descriptions.⁸

These remarks of Donnellan do not, however, commit him to Russell's theory even as an account of the attributive use of descriptions. For this element of generality can also be accounted for on a Strawsonian view. Strawson, in "On Referring," was, of course, not concerned with

⁷"Reference and Definite Descriptions," p. 211.

⁸Propositions asserted by the referential use of descriptions, possess, according to Donnellan, the kind of specificity which could only be achieved, according to Russell, by the use of (genuine) proper names.

accounting for such generality. (Indeed, Strawson shows no awareness that a description like "Smith's murderer" may be used in utterances of "Smith's murderer is insane," in anything but a "uniquely referring way.")

When we begin a sentence with 'the such-and-such,' the use of 'the' shows ... that we are, or intend to be, referring to one particular individual of the species 'such-and-such.' [preceding italics added] Which particular individual is a matter to be determined from context, time, place, and any other features of the situation of utterance ... when (one) uses the expression, 'the such-and-such,' in a uniquely referring way, the presumption is that he thinks both that there is some individual of that species, and that the context of use will sufficiently determine which one he has in mind. (Last italics added.)⁹

Although Strawson is explicitly concerned only with the referential use of descriptions, the account which he gives can be easily modified so as to reflect the generality characteristic of attributive uses. For what is central to a Strawson-type account and what differentiates it from a Russell-type account is the claim that in using a description, "the F," we are not asserting that something is an F but are merely presupposing this. We can state our Strawson-type account thus: when we use a description attributively, for example, when we exclaim "Smith's murderer is insane" upon seeing Smith's mutilated body, we presuppose that something or other is Smith's murderer. Whereas when we use the description referentially, as when we say "Smith's murderer is insane" while watching Jones' strange behavior at his trial, we presuppose not merely that something or other is Smith's murderer but in addition that Jones is Smith's murderer. Thus on a Strawson-type view, the presupposition in cases of attributive use is

⁹"On Referring," pp. 13-14.

a purely general one (something or other is Smith's murderer) whereas in cases of referential use the presupposition is not purely general (it is presupposed that Jones is Smith's murderer).¹⁰

(3) According to those (like Donnellan and myself and unlike Grice and, as we shall see, Kripke) who take the referential-attributive distinction to be of semantic significance, the distinction may be further classified by the following. When a description is used referentially, then it is a necessary (and, as we shall see, for Donnellan, a sufficient) condition for the truth of what is asserted that the particular item which the speaker has in mind has F (where F is predicated). When a description is used attributively, there is no such necessary condition. With respect to the attributive use, it is sufficient for the truth of what is asserted that something or other both fit the description (in our example, have murdered Smith) and be F (in our example, insane). Something or other's fitting the description and being F is clearly not a sufficient condition for truth when the description is used referentially.¹¹ As just noted, in order for the statement to be true the particular thing that the speaker had in mind (e.g. Jones) must be F.

¹⁰Strawson's view as modified here is not the view that Donnellan accepts. For one thing Donnellan, I take it, is not certain that Russell is wrong with respect to attributive uses. For another, Donnellan thinks that Strawson is incorrect in thinking that when the presupposition is not fulfilled in cases of referential use that nothing true or false has been said. Donnellan's view on this last point will be discussed in more detail below.

¹¹Indeed, as we will see, Donnellan would argue that this is not even a necessary condition when the description is used referentially.

Before proceeding I wish to note what I think is a shortcoming of the account here given of the referential-attributive distinction. We have drawn the distinction by saying that in cases of referential use the speaker has some particular item in mind to which he is referring and of which he predicates something while in cases of attributive use this is not so; the speaker is talking about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so. Consider the following objection aimed at just this way of making the referential-attributive distinction:

... while we think we know what this is driving at, the phenomena evade this particular attempt to catch them. For one can say that on the attributive interpretation, the speaker is referring to whoever it was who killed Smith, and even that he had a particular person in mind, to wit, whoever it was who killed Smith.¹²

The point of the objection is that our characterization of the referential use seems applicable to the attributive use as well. When I say "Smith's murderer is insane" and use the description attributively, there seems to be a sense in which I refer to a particular item I have in mind, namely Smith's murderer (or whoever murdered Smith).

Taken as a denial of the referential-attributive distinction the objection is not very convincing. There certainly is a sense in which to have whoever killed Smith in mind is not to have some particular person in mind. And surely there is a sense in which to utter "Whoever killed Smith is insane" is not to refer to some particular person the speaker has in mind.

To specify precisely what is involved in having some particular thing in mind and in referring to some particular item the speaker has

¹²Dennis W. Stampe, "Attributives and Interrogatives," Semantics and Philosophy, ed. Milton K. Munitz and Peter K. Unger (New York: New York University Press, 1974), p. 189.

in mind is quite another matter. Thus if the objection is understood as offering a challenge to a defender of the referential-attributive distinction to produce such an analysis, it is very much in order.¹³ Clearly Donnellan provided us with no such analysis. Accordingly, although Donnellan has drawn our attention to a genuine distinction, his account of that distinction is, in this respect, incomplete.

Let us now inquire as to how the referential-attributive distinction has relevance to my previous discussion of indexical reference and how, in particular, it makes plausible the claim that the descriptive content of a description used referentially does not enter into what is asserted. In what follows I will state what I take to be the semantic significance

¹³Such an account would, I think, be exceedingly difficult to produce. What is it for a speaker to be referring by means of the description "the F" to a particular item he has in mind? It might with some plausibility be supposed that what is involved here is reference to that item the speaker believes (or knows) to be the so-and-so, e.g. to that person, Jones, who the speaker believes to be Smith's murderer. On the other hand, when a speaker uses a description attributively, while he believes that some item is the so-and-so, e.g. that someone murdered Smith, he does not have any beliefs about which one it is that is the so-and-so. In this latter case, he believes merely that there is some item which is the so-and-so but he fails to believe of some item that it is the so-and-so.

It is not clear that an analysis along these lines will do, for a speaker may use a description attributively and still have such a 'transparent' belief. The speaker may believe of Jones that he is Smith's murderer but may be using the description "Smith's murderer" not to refer to Jones but rather to speak of whoever murdered Smith. For example, suppose that only our speaker knows that Jones murdered Smith (indeed, he wishes to keep it a secret) and in a discussion of the extreme brutality of the murder he says "Smith's murderer must have been insane." Cf. Donnellan in "Reference and Definite Descriptions," p. 202 where Donnellan cites a case essentially similar in support of his view that the referential-attributive distinction is not to be made out in terms of the beliefs of the speaker. Donnellan's view is that such a 'transparent' belief is not even a necessary condition for the use to be referential. I am not at all sure that Donnellan is correct about this but I have not, as yet, been able to work out a satisfactory account in terms of the notion of belief.

of the referential-attributive distinction. In the next chapter I will argue that Donnellan's distinction (or at least a version of it) really has the semantic significance that I am here attributing to it.

In discussing what we might call "referential uses" of indexicals in the last chapter, it was argued that much of what Mill says about proper names seems genuinely applicable to indexicals. This is not to say, it was noted, that indexicals like Millian proper names have no sense (or meaning or associated informational content). The analogy pertains to the propositional roles played by proper names for Mill (at least when they occur as subjects in subject-predicate sentences) and by indexicals. For both Millian proper names and indexicals can be used simply to make certain items subjects of discourse. When they are so used their respective propositional roles can be exhaustively characterized by noting what item it is that they are being used to refer to. Of course in the case of indexical reference, the expression used often does have sense or associated informational content. The sense of an indexical is to be seen as, so to speak, failing to play a propositional role; it is merely that, the possession of which by a certain expression allows that expression to be used to specify the referent in question. And it is the referent of which the property is predicated--not, as we might say, the referent under a certain description.

Now if this is so for indexical expressions which have some associated descriptive content, for example "he," then could it not be the same for singular terms which have somewhat more descriptive content--in particular, descriptions? That is, isn't it possible to view the

informational content of a description not as, so to speak, a constituent of the proposition but rather as simply that in virtue of which a speaker can use a description to specify a particular referent. If we took such a view, it would follow that two speakers uttering sentences of the form "the F is G" might assert the same thing despite the fact that they utilized non-synonomous descriptions. They would assert the same thing in that each affirmed the property G of the same item.

This is, I think, precisely the significance of the referential-attributive distinction. When a description is used referentially, then its propositional role is the same as that of a proper name (on Mill's view) or an indexical. Thus substituting one description for a different, non-synonomous one (assuming both to be used referentially) not only preserves truth, it preserves propositional identity (assuming, of course, that the item referred to was the same). When, on the other hand, a description is used attributively, to speak of whoever or whatever is the so-and-so, then if a non-synonomous description is substituted, the import of the utterance would be different; different propositions would be asserted. If the detective says "Smith's murderer is insane" (paraphrase: Whoever murdered Smith is insane) and a co-worker of Jones (not aware of the fact that Jones wrote the incoherent report) says "The writer of the report is insane" (paraphrase: Whoever wrote the report is insane) then what they assert are different propositions despite the fact that Jones fits both descriptions. Here, it would seem, the informational content of the description figures in what was asserted.

It is a corollary of our characterization of referential use that

we can report what was asserted by the referential use of a description without specifying the referent in the same way that the speaker did.

... if a speaker says, "Her husband is kind to her," referring to the man he was just talking to, and if that man is Jones, we may report him of having said of Jones that he is kind to her. If Jones is also the president of the college, we may report the speaker as having said of the president of the college that he is kind to her. And finally if we are talking to Jones, we may say, referring to the original speaker "He said of you that you are kind to her."¹⁴

Perhaps we can formulate what Donnellan has in mind here as follows. When a speaker (S) says "Smith's murderer is insane" and uses the description referentially we can report what he asserted via:

- (1) $(\exists x)$ (S asserted that x is insane and x = Smith's murderer)¹⁵

and if Smith's murderer is Jones, and is also the husband of Alice we can also correctly report S's statement via

- (2) $(\exists x)$ (S asserted that x is insane and x = Alice's husband)

as well as via

- (3) $(\exists x)$ (S asserted that x is insane and x = Jones)

In placing the quantifier outside the assertion-context, as opposed to, say

- (4) S asserted that $(\exists x)$ (x is insane and x = Smith's murderer)

¹⁴Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions," p. 210.

¹⁵I omit here the consideration of questions concerning reference to fictional or mythological entities, e.g. the question of whether sentence (1) ought to be given a 'non-existential reading' and so be applicable even to such cases.

we make clear first, that there is some particular item of which S predicated insanity and second, that it is we who are characterizing that item as "Smith's murderer" in (1), as "Jones" in (3), and as "Alice's husband" in (2).¹⁶ Our report can be correct even though Smith did not characterize his referent in the way that we characterize it; indeed, Smith might not even agree with some of our characterizations of his referent.¹⁷

This way of reporting what a speaker asserts when he uses a description referentially is, I think, particularly apt since it explicitly fails to report what descriptive information, if any, the original speaker utilized in making his reference. All that can be gleaned from such a report is that the speaker referred to an individual who we are referring to as "Jones" and predicated of him that he is insane; how he referred to Jones is left, as it might as well be, unknown.

¹⁶In this connection it is important to note that if via (1) we are fully reporting what S asserted then (1) must specify the item of which S predicated insanity. Thus in (1) the description "Smith's murderer" must be used referentially. (1) ought therefore not to be construed as anything like an explicit analysis (of propositions asserted by the referential use of descriptions) which utilizes only the resources of quantification theory but rather as an attempt to use those resources in order to bring to light certain features of referential use.

¹⁷As we will see, Donnellan maintains that it is possible to refer to x by use of a description that does not fit x. Thus, on Donnellan's view S might refer to Jones as Smith's murderer even if, for example, unknown to S, Jones did not kill Smith. In such a case, S might utter "Smith's murderer is insane" and succeed in asserting that Jones is insane even though Jones is, in fact, not Smith's murderer. In such a case we, who presumably know that Jones is not Smith's murderer, would formulate S's assertion:

$$(\exists x) (S \text{ asserted that } x \text{ is insane and } x = \alpha)$$

where " α " stands in for some correct characterization of the person Smith referred to, e.g. we might fill in the last clause as "x = Jones."

Is there some kind of sentence which would provide us with a natural way of formulating what someone asserts by the attributive use? The answer to this will depend, for one thing, on whether we opt for a Russellian or Strawsonian account of attributive uses.¹⁸ If we take Russell's view then sentence (4) above, "S asserted that ($\exists x$) (x is insane and x = Smith's murderer)," suggests itself.¹⁹ On Strawson's view (4) will not do, since (4) attributes to S the explicit assertion that someone murdered Smith. On Strawson's view something like

(5) S asserted that whoever murdered Smith is insane
would seem to explicitly report S's speech act.

As opposed to (1) - (3) which explicitly fail to give any indication of what descriptive information, if any, S utilized in making his reference, both (4)²⁰ and (5) make explicit what descriptive content was utilized by the speaker. This is, of course, just what we would expect in a report of attributive use.

I stated above that (1) is particularly apt for formulating what someone asserts when he uses a description referentially. While this

¹⁸Donnellan takes no stand on whether we ought to adopt a Russellian or Strawsonian approach to cases of attributive use.

¹⁹In which case the description in (4) would be expanded a la Russell. It was suggested to me by Professor Charles Landesman that (4) would not do since to say "Whoever murdered Smith is insane" is apparently to assert a connection between the property of being Smith's murderer and the property of insanity. Accordingly, some conditional formulation would be required. Dennis W. Stampe, in "Attributives and Interrogatives" (cited above) takes up this idea of "connection of properties" but Stampe's view seems to be that the "connection of properties" is not asserted (in an attributive utterance) but is, in some sense, 'expressed.' (See especially p. 193)

²⁰As well as a conditionalized version of (4)--see preceding footnote.

is so, there is a sense in which the sentence (1) fails to be what we might call a perspicuous formulation of such a proposition. If (1) is to fully capture what was asserted by the referential use of a description, then in the last clause in (1), "x = Smith's murderer," the description must be used referentially. If we are to precisely formulate what the speaker asserted and if the speaker used a description referentially, then our report must reveal the particular item of which he was speaking and, accordingly, if in our report we make use of a description to reveal this item, the description must be used referentially.²¹ Since sentence (1) contains a description and since the sentence, of course, does not reveal how the description is being used, the sentence, per se, is not a perspicuous or unambiguous formulation.²²

²¹If the description is used attributively, then while I do not think that the report misrepresents S's assertion, it does fail to reveal in full what he asserted. Someone uttering (1) and using the description referentially

- a) tells us that S predicated insanity of some particular item and b) specifies for us which item it is.
- By contrast, someone uttering (1) and using the description attributively
- a) (as above) tells us that S predicated insanity of some particular item
 - but b) fails to specify the particular item--instead all that we are told is that it (S's referent) is identical to whatever it is that murdered Smith.

It should be noted that even in this latter case, since the 'identification' of S's referent occurs outside the assertion context, there is no attribution to S of any particular mode of reference to the item in question, in particular (1) does not say that S referred to the x as "Smith's murderer."

²²By contrast we can say that if (4) were correct, then sentence (4), per se, would be a perspicuous formulation, for we can analyze the description "Smith's murderer" a la Russell and have a sentence which is the explicit unambiguous formulation of what is asserted via the attributive use of a description.

Let us now imagine an utterance of sentence (1) in which the description "Smith's murderer" is used attributively. Could sentence (1) so understood be thought of as a formulation of what a speaker asserts by an attributive utterance "Smith's murderer is insane"? That is, can (1) so understood be thought of as a substitute for (4) or (5)? The answer is that it cannot. If an S utters "Smith's murderer is insane" and uses the description attributively, and if I report what he asserted via an utterance of (1) in which I make attributive use of the description in (1), then what my report comes to is this: S predicated insanity of some particular individual and that individual is, in fact, whoever it is that murdered Smith. This report fails to be an accurate report in two ways. First, it as opposed to, say, (4) represents S as having predicated insanity of some particular individual whereas what S said was that whoever it is that murdered Smith is insane. Second, in propositions asserted by the attributive use of descriptions, the informational content of the description is as we have seen an essential part of what is asserted. Thus in a report of what a speaker asserts when he uses a description attributively we ought to make explicit as did (4) and (5), the descriptive content of the speaker's description. But (1) fails to make this explicit. This was, as we saw, a virtue of (1) in formulating what a speaker asserts by the referential use of a description (since in that case knowing how the speaker referred to the item in question is not relevant to knowing what he asserted). But this alone disqualifies (1) as a sentence by the use of which we can give a complete report of what was asserted via the attributive use of a description. Of course, if the first problem with (1) to which I

drew attention above (namely that it suggests that the speaker predicated insanity of some particular item) was not a problem, that is if it made sense to speak of a particular item referred to (of which the speaker predicates a property) in cases of attributive use, then (1) could be used to give some information about what the speaker asserted. But that information would be incomplete since it would not include notice of the descriptive content of the description utilized by S.

Before proceeding to try to establish that the referential-attributive distinction has the semantical significance I have just claimed for it, I will first discuss what is often seen as a fatal difficulty in Donnellan's view. Donnellan states that the difference between the two uses of descriptions can be brought out clearly by considering the consequences of the assumption that the definite description used fits nothing. If one says "Smith's murderer is insane" and one is using the description attributively (the detective case) then, assuming that Smith was not murdered, depending on whether we adopt Russell's approach or that of Strawson, we will say either that the statement made was false or has no truth value.²³ (Surely the statement cannot be true for there is nothing for the predicate to be 'true of.')

Whereas, if I am using the description referentially (the courtroom case),

where the definite description is simply a means of identifying

²³As noted above, Donnellan takes no position on the question of whether when a description is used attributively and there is nothing that fits the description we ought to say (with Russell) that the statement made is false or rather that it has no truth-value. (The latter is what we might expect Strawson to say if, as was not the case in "On Referring," he recognized an attributive use.

the person we want to talk about, it is quite possible for a correct identification to be made even though no one fits the description used. We were speaking about Jones even though he is not in fact Smith's murderer and, in the circumstances imagined, it was his behavior we were commenting upon. Jones might, for example, accuse us of saying false things of him in calling him insane, and it would be no defense, I should think, that our description "the murderer of Smith," failed to fit him.²⁴

Thus, Donnellan's view is that "using a definite description referentially, a speaker may say something true [*italics added*] even though the description applies to nothing."²⁵

The response to this consequence of the referential-attributive distinction has not been overwhelmingly positive.²⁶ David Wiggins has argued that the referential-attributive distinction is flawed in that

... nobody has ever provided satisfactory distinct sets of truth-conditions for the two uses of definite descriptions ... Donnellan's ... attempt to differentiate the truth-conditions ... depends on the for me incredible idea that if I say "the man drinking champagne is F" and the man I mean, though drinking water, is F, then what I say is true. (To say that the idea is not credible is not to say that F is not true of the man I mean.)²⁷

What I take to be essentially the same point is made by Michael Lockwood:

The question here is whether a name or definite description is required actually to apply to an individual in order to serve as a means of making that individual a subject of assertion. Donnellan holds that it is not--that a speaker can be said to have made a statement about an object he has in mind, in uttering a referring expression, even if it fails to qualify as what Kripke

²⁴Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions," p. 199.

²⁵Ibid., p. 207.

²⁶Whether or not it is in fact a necessary consequence of distinguishing between referential and attributive uses will be discussed presently.

²⁷David Wiggins, "Identity, Designation, Essentialism, and Physicalism," Philosophia, 5 (1975): n.9, 28.

calls "the semantic referent"²⁸ of the term in question. But it seems to me that Donnellan is here quite unnecessarily riding roughshod over the common-sense distinction between what a speaker means and what he actually succeeds in saying ... genuine assertion (as opposed, say, to successful communication) calls, it seems to me, for a convergence between words and intention which, in the sort of case we are considering, is ex hypothesi lacking.²⁹

A possible response on the part of Donnellan would be to insist that if one were to say "the man drinking champagne is F" (using the description referentially) and if in fact the man the speaker had in mind was drinking water but was indeed F, then what the speaker said (that is, asserted) is true.³⁰ That this may seem incredible (as it does to Wiggins) stems, at least in part, from the fact that we, knowing that the man in question is drinking water, would not say, by way of agreement with the speaker "the man drinking champagne is F" or "It is true that the man drinking champagne is F." Our reluctance to use the speaker's sentence results, however, not from the fact that the utterance of this sentence would issue in a falsehood, but rather from the fact that were we to use the description "the man drinking champagne" to refer to the man who we know to be drinking water, we would imply that we believe him to be drinking champagne. In formulating

²⁸For Kripke, the semantic referent of a name or description "x" is x. Thus in the case of a name it is the object which bears the name and in the case of a uniquely denoting description it is the object which fits the description. See Saul Kripke, "Naming and Necessity," in *Semantics of Natural Language*, Second Edition, ed. Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972): n. 3, p. 343.

²⁹Michael Lockwood, "On Predicating Proper Names," pp. 485-6, footnote 21. For a similar objection and a reply by Donnellan see Alfred F. MacKay, "Mr. Donnellan and Humpty Dumpty on Referring" and Keith S. Donnellan, "Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again," *Philosophical Review*, 77 (1968): 197-202, 203-215.

³⁰This response on behalf of Donnellan is based on what he explicitly argues in "Reference and Definite Descriptions," pp. 209-210.

the truth which was asserted by the speaker in such a way as to give no false impressions about our beliefs, we choose a description which in our view fits the referent. In uttering our sentence, however, we would be asserting the same truth that the original speaker asserted, i.e. we would be predicating F of the same individual.

While I am not certain that this kind of response meets the challenge, what is clear and is much more important for our purposes is the fact that the dispute need not be decided in favor of Donnellan in order to preserve the referential-attributive distinction.³¹ It seems to me that there are two distinguishable issues here: First, can a description (or proper name, for that matter)³² be used to refer to an item which it does not apply to? If I say "Smith's murderer is insane" while observing Jones' odd behavior in the courtroom and if Jones is not Smith's murderer have I succeeded in asserting the true proposition that Jones is insane? Donnellan thinks that I have succeeded in asserting this proposition, Lockwood and Wiggins hold that a necessary condition for using an expression to refer to x is that x be a semantic referent of "x." A distinct question is this: Is there a distinction to be drawn between referential and attributive uses of descriptions? Let us assume that Wiggins and Lockwood are correct; a description (or name) cannot be used to refer to what it does not apply to. This

³¹This point was brought to my attention by Lockwood's "On Predicating Proper Names." The subsequent discussion owes a great deal to his paper.

³²In "Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions," in Semantics of Natural Language, Second Edition, ed. Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972), pp. 356-376, Donnellan makes the analogous claim for proper names.

surely does not preclude a referential-attributive distinction. For we can still distinguish between cases in which a description, say "Smith's murderer," is used to refer to some particular individual the speaker has in mind (and, in which case, speaker succeeds in so referring, according to Wiggins and Lockwood, only if the item is the murderer of Smith) and cases in which the description may be paraphrased as "Whoever murdered Smith." Thus even if Wiggins and Lockwood are correct as against Donnellan (on the question of the use of an expression to refer to an item to which it doesn't apply) nothing follows about the existence of a (semantically significant) referential-attributive distinction.³³

Donnellan does himself a disservice in claiming that the referential-attributive distinction can best be brought out by considering cases in which the description fits nothing (or fits something other than the intended referent). These cases are controversial but to rule against

³³To say that there are distinct issues here is not to say that these questions are unrelated. In making a distinction between referential and attributive uses (or at least in claiming that the distinction has semantic significance) Donnellan gives a more central role to the intentions of the speaker than would a defender of say, Russell's theory of descriptions. A defender of Russell's account would play down the role of the intentions of the speaker in determining what was asserted and would give a more central role to the conventional meaning of the expressions. But to go this far with Donnellan does not necessitate nor does it even suggest that we elevate the role of the speaker's intentions to the extent Donnellan does. Donnellan's idea is roughly that no matter what the conventional application of the expression, if in a given context I use the expression with the intention of referring to x (which intention involves, according to Donnellan, an expectation that my audience will, by means of my utterance, be able to pick out x), then I have referred to x. For more on the role of intention see the MacKay-Donnellan debate, "Mr. Donnellan and Humpty Dumpty on Referring" and "Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again."

Donnellan with respect to them is not to rule against the referential-attributive distinction. Donnellan's making such cases central has, I think, diverted attention away from the real question. Thus Castañeda writes of the referential-attributive distinction:

I think, to put it disrespectfully, that it is too much ado about practically nothing. The fact at the bottom of all that fuss has nothing to do with definite descriptions. It is the fact that one can succeed in making a hearer think of something α by means of expressions that do not in reality as the language goes correspond with α ... ³⁴

In what follows I take up what I think is the real issue concerning Donnellan's distinction, namely the question of the semantical significance of the distinction.

³⁴Hector-Neri Castañeda, "On Philosophical Foundations of the Theory of Communication," Midwest Studies in Philosophy, 2 (forthcoming, 1977): footnote 7.

CHAPTER V

THE REFERENTIAL-ATTRIBUTIVE DISTINCTION - PART II

In the last chapter mention was made of the question of whether the referential-attributive distinction is really of semantical significance or whether, on the contrary, its significance is restricted to the realm of pragmatics. One who maintains that its significance is merely pragmatic would agree that there are two uses of descriptions; they are sometimes used to call attention to some particular entity the speaker has in mind and sometimes used to allow us to speak of whatever it is that has certain properties. But although on such a view there are two uses of descriptions, a single semantical account is applied to both, e.g. a semantical treatment in accordance with Russell's theory of descriptions. However the description is used, a proponent of such a view would maintain, what is asserted is the same, namely (something of the form) there is one and only one F and it is G. To use Donnellan's examples, whether our speaker who is present at Jones' trial says "Smith's murderer is insane" in reaction to Jones' odd behavior (referential use) or whether he utters those words upon seeing Smith's brutally mutilated body, in which case he has no particular murderer in mind (attributive use), our speaker asserts the same thing, that there is one and only one murderer of Smith and he is insane. It is surely not obvious, it might be urged, that what the speaker asserted should depend on whether he has Jones in mind (as Smith's

murderer) or whether he has no idea who murdered Smith.

This may be what Saul Kripke has in mind when, in a footnote to "Naming and Necessity" he states "I am tentatively inclined to believe, in opposition to Donnellan, that his remarks about reference have little to do with semantics or truth-conditions though they may be relevant to a theory of speech acts."¹ Kripke admittedly does not go on to explain his remark nor to defend it but does add that on his view Donnellan's remarks require no modification of Russell's theory of descriptions. And H.P. Grice in "Vacuous Names"² explicitly distinguishes "two ... modes of employment" of descriptions, what he calls "the type (1) non-identificatory" (corresponding to attributive) and "the type (2) identificatory" (corresponding to referential). Grice goes on to say

... the truth conditions for a type (2) statement, no less than for a type (1) statement, can be thought of as being given by a Russellian account of descriptions.

Grice continues

It is important to bear in mind that I am not suggesting that the difference between these ... represents a difference in the meaning or sense which a descriptive phrase may have on different occasions; on the contrary, I am suggesting that descriptive phrases have no relevant systematic duplicity of meaning; their meaning is given by a Russellian account.³

In what follows I will consider the question of whether a single semantical account, in particular that of Russell, is adequate to both uses of descriptions. I will argue that Russell's theory of descriptions fails as a semantical account of descriptions as these are employed

¹P. 343, footnote 3.

²Pp. 141 ff.

³Ibid., p. 142-3.

in natural language. Moreover, the considerations appealed to will yield, I believe, a semantically significant referential-attributive distinction.

Consider an assertive utterance of "the table is covered with books." On Russell's account what is asserted is of the form one and only one thing is F and it is also G. In "On Referring" Strawson argues that utterances of sentences like "the table is covered with books" present difficulties for Russell's view since it is clear that it is not the case that one and only one thing is a table and it is covered with books.

Consider the sentence, 'the table is covered with books.' It is quite certain that in any normal use of this sentence, the expression 'the table' would be used to make a unique reference, i.e. to refer to some one table. It is a quite strict use of the definite article, in the sense in which Russell talks on p. 30 of Principia Mathematica, of using the article 'strictly, so as to imply uniqueness.' On the same page Russell says that a phrase of the form 'the so-and-so,' used strictly, 'will only have application in the event of there being one so-and-so and no more.' Now it is obviously quite false that the phrase 'the table' in the sentence 'The table is covered with books,' used normally, will 'only have application in the event of there being one table and no more.'⁴

Donnellan, in defense of Russell, argues that what Strawson says is true in the case of utterances of sentences like the one in question but is not true generally. There are cases, thinks Donnellan, in which Russell's account cannot be ruled out (at least so easily). This is so because while Russell's account does require that there be a uniquely denoting⁵ description which figures in the speech act, it does

⁴Strawson, "On Referring," p. 185.

⁵"Uniquely denotes" is, as I wish to use these terms, redundant. Let us use "denote" as a technical term. Russell states in "On Denoting" Mind (1905), reprinted in Bertrand Russell, Logic and Knowledge,

not require that the description actually uttered by the speaker be uniquely denoting. There are cases, argues Donnellan, where it is clear that a uniquely denoting description does figure in the speech act, and yet the descriptive phrase actually uttered is not uniquely denoting. In such cases " ... the context is relied upon to supply further qualifications on the description to make it unique ... Someone says 'the next President will be a dove on Viet Nam,' and the context easily supplies the implicit 'of the United States.'"⁶ Donnellan's view is that such a move in defense of Russell will always be available in cases where the description is used attributively. His idea (apparently) is that when a description is used attributively, to speak of whatever is the so-and-so, then the attribute of being the so-and-so is all important and what the attribute in question is must be clear either from the description used (in case it is uniquely denoting) or from the context of utterance. So, in general, for attributive uses we can, as Donnellan puts it, "recover from the speech act" a unique description which uniquely denotes.⁷ For reasons which will soon become apparent,

ed. Robert C. Marsh (London: The Macmillan Company, 1964), pp. 39-56, that "if 'C' is a denoting phrase [e.g., a definite description], it may happen that there is one entity (there cannot be more than one) for which the proposition 'X is identical with C' is true ... We may then say that X is the denotation of C." (p. 51) We will say, then, that a description denotes (or, for emphasis, uniquely denotes) when there is one and only one item which fits it.

⁶Donnellan, "Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again," n. 5, p. 204.

⁷This is not, of course, to deny that a speaker may use a description attributively when, e.g., unbeknown to the speaker nothing fits the description. So it is not quite accurate to say that we can always fill out the description to make it uniquely denoting--it may in fact apply to nothing. The point is that even in the case of a description which fits nothing, if it is used attributively, it can be filled out so as to make explicit what the attribute in question is.

it is important to note that not only is the description uniquely denoting, i.e. it applies to one and only one entity, but also that the description is itself unique; that is, by examining the context of utterance we can discover the one and only one description which was implicit (if not explicit) in the speech act.⁸

When a description is used referentially, that is, when what is all-important is not the particular description used but rather the entity to which the attention of the audience is being directed, then Donnellan thinks that the reply to Strawson's criticism of Russell discussed above is not adequate. When someone says, for example, "the table is covered with books" there is no unique description implicit in the speech act. The table in question can be described in many ways, i.e. by the use of any number of non-synonymous descriptions each of which would denote the table in question. What reason do we have to think that any one of these descriptions as opposed to any other was implicit in the speech act? Moreover, in general, the intentions of the speaker will be of no help.

Asked to make his description more precise, he may have to think about how best to do it. Several further descriptions may come to mind, not all of which are actually correct. Which, then, shall we say is the full but implicit one?⁹

⁸It is not quite correct to say that there is some unique description. For if we can obtain one such description, we can obtain others, namely others synonymous with the first. Perhaps we should say that there is implicit in the speech act some unique descriptive content formulable via any one of the synonymous descriptions or alternatively that by considering the context we can obtain an equivalence class of descriptions (synonymous with one another) any one of which may be used in formulating what the speaker asserted.

⁹Donnellan, "Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again," n. 5, p. 204.

Donnellan's answer is, of course, that none is the "full but implicit one."

Once we see the function of a referential description, however, we need not suppose that there is any one description recoverable from the speech act that is supposed uniquely to apply to the object referred to. The audience may through the partial description and various clues and cues know to what the speaker refers without being in possession of a description that uniquely fits it and which was implicit all along in the speaker's speech act.¹⁰

Donnellan's argument to the effect that it is mistaken to look for some unique description (which denotes uniquely) parallels the argument given above to the effect that if it were the case that eternal sentences formulate completely and explicitly what we assert by utterances of sentences containing indexical subject-terms, then it ought to be the case that we (or at least the speaker) could decide which of several non-synonymous eternal sentences was the one which truly captures his assertion. Since, in many cases, there was no reason which could be given (by us or even by the speaker) for selecting one such eternal sentence, I concluded (with the help of an argument that derives from Benacerraf) that in fact none of the eternal sentences is the one which, as opposed to the others, fully formulates what was said. My proposal was that we view such uses of indexicals not as disguised ways of supplying identificatory information concerning the referent (and thus as making reference via supplying a descriptive characterization) but rather as ways of simply making determinate reference without the help of information which would uniquely fit the referent. Donnellan's point is a similar one; in the absence of any reason to select one particular description as (what we might call) the Russellian description

¹⁰Ibid.

implicit in the speech act, we ought to conclude that there is no such implicit description and further that we make determinate references by the use of non-uniquely denoting descriptions.

Donnellan has provided an argument, conclusive I believe, which shows that a Russellian analysis fails to correctly specify what a person asserts in cases which Donnellan would classify as cases of the referential use of descriptions. Put in terms of truth-conditions it is simply not a condition for the truth of what someone asserts by an utterance of a sentence like "the table is covered with books" that there is some entity which is denoted (i.e., uniquely) by a description which figures in the speech act (either explicitly or implicitly). This is so because often no Russellian description has any explicit or implicit role in the speech act.¹¹

It should be noted that Donnellan's argument against Russell does not assume (or need not assume) a referential-attributive distinction even at the level of pragmatics and certainly not a semantically significant distinction. Donnellan first establishes that there are cases of utterances of sentences containing descriptions for which a Russellian

¹¹If we were to attempt to reformulate the referential-attributive distinction so as to take into account the criticism of Wiggins and Lockwood, we might say that it is a necessary condition for the truth of statements made by the referential use of descriptions that the intended referent fits the description. I make a point of using the phrase "fits the description" instead of "is denoted by the description" simply because the descriptions we use (even if we allow ourselves to supplement them by what it is reasonable to take to be any additional descriptive information implicitly relied upon in the speech act) do not, by and large denote anything; they are not such that there is one and only one object that satisfies them. This does not, however, prevent us from saying that a condition for the truth of such statements is that the intended referent must fit the description.

account will not do. The referential-attributive distinction only enters the picture after this has been established. For once we see that a Russellian account will not do, i.e. that there is no implicit Russellian description, how are we to understand what was asserted in such a case? That is, if the (rather 'indefinite') description actually utilized, e.g. "the table," is not an 'abbreviated' Russellian description, how are we to understand how the utterance of this description, which, after all, applies to any number of things, allows the speaker to assert a determinate proposition? The answer is that we can use a description which fits many items and is thus 'indefinite' to make a determinate reference to one particular thing the speaker has in mind. Whereas, Donnellan thinks, there are cases in which the speaker has no particular item in mind as the so-and-so but there is an implicit Russellian description; these are cases of attributive use.

Thus the considerations appealed to in Donnellan's attempt to show that a Russellian account is not, in general, adequate, do not presuppose (but instead are suggestive of) a referential-attributive distinction. Moreover, these considerations are suggestive of a semantically significant referential-attributive distinction. To take referential uses first, if what makes for propositional determinateness is the fact that a determinate reference to some particular item was made, then clearly what was asserted will be true just in case the particular item referred to has the property in question. That is, despite the fact that the speaker uttered an 'indefinite' description, since he has referred to this determinate item he has asserted a proposition; hence what he says will be true just in case this item has the property in question. Something

or other's both fitting the description and having the property predicated is clearly not sufficient for the truth of the statement made. Whereas in cases of attributive use, when the speaker has no particular item in mind then what is asserted will be true just in case some item or other fits the description and has the property in question.

Donnellan has, I think established a referential-attributive distinction. His characterization of that distinction is, however, flawed. It was pointed out in the last chapter that his account of referential use is flawed in that he seems to make the existence of a referential use dependent on the controversial and distinct thesis that we can refer to α via an expression that is not conventionally applicable to α . It seems to me that his account of attributive use is also flawed. But before turning to questions concerning attributive use, I wish to again emphasize the continuity of Donnellan's view of the referential use of descriptions with my view of indexical reference. If I was correct with regard to indexical reference then the results just obtained should not be surprising. For if we often use terms with little or no descriptive content (e.g. "he," "this") to make determinate references and if the making of such references does not depend on the context of utterance supplying enough supplementary descriptive information to uniquely determine the referent, then it is not surprising that terms with somewhat more descriptive content, e.g. "the table," can be similarly used.

Let us turn our attention to cases of attributive use. In such cases, Donnellan tells us, we can reconstruct a unique description

(i.e. a single description) which was, in fact, implicit in the speech act. "Someone says 'The next President will be a dove on Viet Nam,' and the context easily supplies the implicit 'of the United States'."¹² Contrary to Donnellan, it seems to me that in many cases of attributive use we cannot recover such a unique description from the speech act. Let us modify Donnellan's example of attributive use in which someone comes upon Smith's badly mutilated body. Where Donnellan had the speaker utter "Smith's murderer is insane" (notice the Russellian description), let us imagine the speaker to utter a sentence with a less complete description, "The murderer is insane." In many cases of this kind there will be no way of discovering some unique Russellian description which was implicit in the speech act. If the speaker were asked to fill out his description so as to make it uniquely denoting he might not know how to respond; several descriptions might strike him, for example, "Smith's murderer," "The murderer of Joan's husband," "The murderer of the junior Senator from New York," "The murderer of this man." I think that we ought to conclude, just as we did in the case of referential use that none of the Russellian descriptions is, in fact, implicit in the speech act. As noted above, Donnellan apparently thought that since in the case of a description used attributively, the attribute of being the so-and-so is all important (and the speaker need have no idea who the so-and-so is), then it ought to be clear from the utterance (plus context) which attribute is in question. Hence we ought to be able to fill in the unique description¹³ implicit in

¹²Donnellan, "Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again," n. 5, p. 204.

¹³Or at least one of a set of synonymous descriptions each of which 'indicates' the same attribute.

the speech act. But as we have seen there can be, even in cases of attributive use, any number of non-equivalent (that is, non-synonymous) descriptions, none of which can be claimed to be uniquely recoverable from the speech act. That this is so raises an important question about the attributive use of descriptions, a question to which I will return after some final remarks on Russell's theory.

I think we can conclude that Russell's theory of descriptions fails to provide us with a correct account of what is asserted even in cases of attributive use of descriptions. It seems to me that whatever plausibility Russell's theory has, it has as an explication of and not as a literal specification of what is asserted by the use of descriptions. Russell's account has often been taken in this way. Quine, for example, sees Russell's theory of descriptions as a classic case of explication.

Mr. Strawson ... ably shows the failure of Russell's theory of descriptions as an analysis of the vernacular usage of the singular "the," but he shows no appreciation of the value of Russell's theory as a means of getting on in science without use of any real equivalent of the vernacular "the." Russell's " $(\exists x)$ " is to the vernacular "the x such that" as " \supset " is to the vernacular "if-then"; in neither case do we have a translation, but in both cases we have important means of avoidance for scientific purposes. And in both cases we therefore have solutions of philosophical problems, in one important sense of this phrase.¹⁴

On Quine's view Russell's theory is to be adopted not as an analysis of but rather as an alternative to our ordinary ways of talking. If we drop our use of definite descriptions in favor of certain uses of quantifiers, identity, etc. we will not encounter the "inconvenience of

¹⁴W.V.O. Quine, "Mr. Strawson on Logical Theory," *Mind* 62 (1953), reprinted in Quine, The Ways of Paradox, (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 149.

truth-value gaps and the paradoxes of talking of what does not exist."¹⁵
 (There is a sense in which, for Quine, Russell's paraphrase offers us an 'analysis.' Once we have adopted Quine's favored mode of discourse we can paraphrase sentences containing definite descriptions into their Russellian counterparts and take the latter to be the 'analysis' [in some very extended sense of "analysis'"] of the former.)¹⁶

Insofar as Quine is explicitly not interested in the analysis of what we assert by the use of sentences containing descriptions, his proposal is not immediately relevant to the issues with which we are concerned. More generally, the question of the adequacy of Russell's theory construed as an explication will not be pursued here; our interest is in the analysis of what a person asserts by the use of sentences containing descriptions.

Let us return to our discussion of the referential-attributive distinction. What we have seen is that with respect to many utterances of sentences containing descriptions, there is no implicit Russellian description which can reasonably be held to be involved in the speech act. And this is so not only (as Donnellan thought) for referential uses of descriptions but also for attributive uses.

That this is so raises the following question (already discussed with respect to referential uses). If a speaker utters an 'indefinite' definite description, e.g. "the table" or "the murderer," and if, in fact, there is no implicit Russellian description, i.e. one that

¹⁵Quine, Word and Object, p. 261.

¹⁶The notion of analysis at work here is something like the following. The paraphrase captures what is, to us, worth capturing in the original.

would fit only the object to which he is referring, then how are we to account for the fact that what he asserted is a complete and determinate proposition. If I utter "the table is covered with books" or "the murderer is insane" (and these descriptions are not surrogates for Russellian descriptions) then how can I have asserted something determinate since there are many tables (and murderers)? Put differently, when I say "the table is covered with books," I predicate the property (being covered with books) of not just any table but of the table in question.¹⁷ But it is hard to see how this can be so if the phrase "the table" (which, after all, applies to many tables) is not a surrogate for a description which picks out only the table in question. We have already answered this question for referential uses of descriptions. What accounts for propositional determinateness in cases of referential use is that the 'indefinite' description which applies to many items is used to make a determinate reference to one particular thing. Thus the analogy between the referential use of indexicals and the referential use of descriptions.

What of attributive uses of descriptions? It is immediately apparent that we cannot here account for propositional determinateness in the way just discussed. When a speaker utters "the murderer is insane" and uses the description attributively, he ordinarily has no belief about who it is that is the murderer. Thus he does not use

¹⁷Or to consider cases of attributive use, when I say (using the description attributively) "The murderer is insane" I am not merely saying that some murderer is insane or that there exists an insane murderer. I am predicating the property (being insane) of the murderer in question (whoever he may be), e.g. Smith's murderer or Kennedy's, etc.

the description to refer to some particular item as "the murderer." As noted before, there is no item which the speaker is characterizing as or describing as "the murderer." Accordingly there seems no item to which we can appeal to in an attempt to explain how what was asserted was determinate. Surely, no one would wish to appeal to the 'semantic referent' of the description in this connection. For to take the semantic referent as the item in terms of which we account for the determinateness of the proposition would entail that what proposition is asserted will depend on which item it is that happens to fit the description (which item it is that is the semantic referent). But what was asserted by the 'attributive' utterance of "the murderer is insane" does not, of course, depend on who the murderer is. One fully understands what was asserted without having any idea of who the murderer is. Nor would finding out that it was Jones rather than Brown reveal what really was asserted.

In cases of attributive use, the sense of the description, rather than the reference, apparently determines what it is that is asserted. If someone says "the murderer is insane" (let us assume that Jones is the murderer) and a fellow employee of Jones says "the person who made this suggestion was insane" (unknown to the speaker it was Jones who made the suggestion), their respective propositions are surely not identical despite the fact that Jones is the semantic referent in both cases.

Let us restate our problem. A speaker says "The murderer is insane" and uses the description attributively. We have seen that (1) "the murderer" is not a surrogate for some Russellian description,

and (2) no appeal to a referent seems to, in this case, help us account for propositional determinacy. How then are we to account for propositional determinacy? My idea is that the circumstances of utterance do provide something which makes for propositional determinacy, but what is provided is not supplementary descriptive information; what is implicit in the speech act is not a more 'definite' description, one that uniquely denotes. The context does supply an answer to the question, "The murderer of whom?", but this answer is given not by more fully describing the murderer but rather by providing us with the item murdered (which can, of course, be characterized in any number of ways). Thus in uttering "The murderer is insane" a determinate proposition is asserted since the description was uttered in the conspicuous presence of the item murdered (or in other circumstances which make clear whose murder it is that is in question). Accordingly, two different utterances of "The murderer is insane" made in connection with different murders yield two different propositions for in each case the circumstances of utterance provide different answers to the question "The murderer of whom?"

What this amounts to is the idea that there is something implicit in the speech act which renders the proposition a determinate one, but what is implicit occurs, so to speak, not at the level of sense, but at the level of reference. The speaker, that is, makes an implicit reference. But, and this is the important point, this reference is not to the so-called "semantic referent," i.e. the murderer. It is rather an implicit reference to, in this case, the item murdered. Such implicit reference is accomplished by uttering "the murderer is insane"

in, e.g., the presence of the body.

That this implicit reference is not to the semantic referent is, of course, just what we would expect. For since the description, "the murderer," is used attributively, there should be no indication of who the murderer is. But if the speaker is to assert a determinate proposition there should be some further indication of which murderer is under discussion, e.g. Smith's murderer, Kennedy's, etc. For after all what the speaker wishes to assert is not that some murderer is insane (there exists an insane murderer).

That there is a kind of implicit reference made in cases like the one under discussion may be seen by comparing utterances of

- (1) The murderer is insane
and (2) His murderer is insane.

When a speaker utters (2) what, at least in part, accounts for the fact that he has asserted a determinate proposition is that he has made an explicit reference by using the possessive pronoun "his," thus indicating which murderer is under discussion. But this same indication can be accomplished albeit implicitly by simply uttering "The murderer is insane" in the presence of the body.

Determinate references to particular items the speaker has in mind play a role then even in (at least) some cases of the attributive use of descriptions. In this connection let us compare utterances of (2),

- (3) The murderer of the man on the couch is insane
and (4) The murderer of Smith is insane.

Examples (2) - (4) bring out an important feature of the attributive use of descriptions which I will briefly explore. A description used

attributively may contain indexical elements, tensed verbs, proper names, and finally other descriptions. All of the latter (except proper names if some variant of a Russell-Frege view is correct as opposed to the view of Mill, Kripke, and Donnellan) may be used referentially in the course of an attributive utterance of a description which contains them. Thus in uttering (2), the speaker uses the indexical "his" referentially; that is, the semantical account of indexicals argued for above applies here. "His," in this context, does not pick up new descriptive content; it is not a surrogate for the possessive form of some Russellian description. Similarly in an utterance of (3) in which attributive use is made of "the murderer of the man on the couch," the contained description "the man lying on the couch" is used referentially. To see that these expressions are being used referentially we need only apply our by-now familiar argument once again: there is no uniquely correct way (and therefore no correct way)¹⁸ to fill out the description "the man lying on the couch" to make it uniquely denoting (and similarly no uniquely correct way of replacing "his" in "his murderer" with [the possessive form of] some uniquely denoting description), hence the description "the man on the couch" is not a surrogate for a Russellian description; as 'indefinite' a description as it is, it is nevertheless used, in this context, to make a determinate reference.

Thus determinate reference plays more of a role in the analysis of our use of descriptions than we might have thought. I have not argued (nor suggested) that all uses of descriptions involve such reference but, in any case, many cases of attributive use do involve

¹⁸For a full statement of the argument briefly summarized here see pages 76-77.

determinate references. A consequence of this is that it is not quite correct to say as I have, following Dornellan, that when a description is used attributively the description 'occurs essentially,' or as I have sometimes put it, the sense of the description plays a propositional role. These ways of characterizing attributive use imply that given the attributive use of "the F" in an utterance of "the F is G," if a description not synonymous with "the F" is substituted a different proposition results. But if, as we have seen, a description "the F" used attributively may contain, e.g., another description "the H" which is being used referentially, then substituting still another description "the I" for "the H" will not result in a different proposition (assuming that "the I" is being used to refer to the same item as was "the H"). Sentences (2) - (4) above, for example, may all be used to assert the same thing.

It is not accurate, then, to say that when a description is used attributively, the description occurs essentially or, alternatively that the sense of the description plays a propositional role. What we can say is (something like) when a description is used attributively some proper part of the description occurs essentially (or the sense of some proper part plays a propositional role--an alteration of the sense of this part would result in a different proposition). What I have in mind is that although we can make substitutions like those mentioned in the last paragraph without affecting propositional identity, we can only substitute for those phrases which are used referentially. Thus the entire description which is used attributively cannot be so substituted for, i.e. assuming Jones is the murderer and also the writer of the report

we cannot substitute for "the murderer of Smith," "the man who wrote the report" and still preserve propositional identity. Nor can we omit from (1) - (4) the description "the murderer" in favor of some non-synonymous description which contingently applies to the same person. Thus if in (3) we replace "the murderer" by "the wife" yielding

(5) The wife of the man on the couch is insane

then we have another proposition even if Smith's wife killed him.

Let us summarize our findings. First, we have seen that there is a semantically significant referential-attributive distinction; a single semantical account along the lines of Russell's theory of descriptions is not correct as an attempt to specify what is asserted by utterances of sentences of the form "the F is G." We have also seen that Donnellan's account of the referential-attributive distinction is doubly flawed. We saw in the last chapter that Donnellan's discussion of referential use is flawed in that his remarks lead one to believe, contrary to fact, that the existence of a referential-attributive distinction depends upon the idea that we can use a description "the F" to refer to something to which "the F" is not conventionally applicable. Donnellan's discussion of attributive use is flawed for an entirely different reason. Perhaps because he was less interested in attributive uses (he reminds us from time to time that it may be that Russell is correct here or perhaps Strawson) he somewhat hastily adopts, in the case of attributive uses, just the view that he rightly criticizes in cases of referential use, namely the view that in an utterance of a sentence containing a non-uniquely denoting description there is a

(single) uniquely denoting description which figures in the speech act.

In arguing for my account of indexical reference, I made use of assumptions which, given the conclusions reached concerning the referential-attributive distinction, are not acceptable. I will conclude my discussion of the referential-attributive distinction by trying to show that such assumptions are dispensable; they were made use of for ease of exposition.

The distinction between eternal and non-eternal sentences was, as we saw in Chapter III, recognized by Frege. Frege noted that a non-eternal sentence "is not the complete expression of the thought," i.e. it fails to reveal what is asserted by its utterance. We can now see that the same applies to many 'eternal' sentences. In particular a sentence with a description in the subject position fails to reveal what is asserted by its utterance, and this is so even if the description is uniquely denoting. This is so, of course, because the description may be used referentially or attributively and what is asserted will depend on how the description was used. Such sentences are not, then, formulations of unique propositions; each of them may be used to assert various propositions.

My arguments concerning indexical reference seem to assume, however, that each eternal sentence does formulate a unique proposition. When someone says "It is covered with books," I argued, what he asserts is not what any of the corresponding eternal sentences formulate. Thus I assumed that each of these non-synonymous eternal sentences formulates a unique proposition. And I proceeded to argue that what the speaker asserted was not one of these propositions. Reference to eternal

sentences was not, however, crucial to my argument (although it was, prior to any argument for the referential-attributive distinction, a natural way of formulating the arguments). For what I wished to show was that it is a mistake to think that, for example, by his use of the indexical "it" the speaker conveys (with the help of the context) some descriptive characterization of the referent. My argument, which can be stated without any mention of eternal sentences, was roughly this: we cannot suppose that some descriptive characterization does figure in what was asserted for if that were the case, then there would have to be grounds upon which it would be possible (at least for the speaker) to select that descriptive characterization of the referent which is, in fact, implicit in the speech act. But there are many cases in which there are simply no grounds for selecting one such descriptive characterization over others; there are any number of ways to describe the referent and no reason to think that some particular one of these was implicit in the speech act.

Another of my arguments proceeded as follows. If a captive, unaware both of his location and of the date (in fact, Bimini, January 5, 1975) were to utter "It is raining," surely what he asserts is not formulated by the eternal sentence "It is raining on Bimini, January 5, 1975." Anyone uttering this latter sentence asserts a different proposition than that asserted by the captive since this latter sentence makes explicit information not even known to the captive.

This argument seems to presuppose that whatever information is made explicit by a sentence is surely included in what is asserted by an utterance of the sentence. But as we now know, from the fact that

a sentence makes explicit certain information, it does not follow that this information is any part of what is asserted by an utterance of the sentence. This is so because the phrase which makes explicit the information may be used referentially. When someone says "Smith's murderer is insane" and uses the description referentially, the description does make explicit certain information about the referent, yet that information is no part of what is asserted. I want to suggest that the same considerations apply to an utterance of "It is raining on January 10, 1975." Whatever descriptive information is made explicit by the place-name "Bimini" (perhaps none if Mill is correct) and the temporal indicator "January 10, 1975," it does not follow that this information is part of what is asserted. In particular, if "Bimini" and "January 10, 1975" are being used referentially, as seems plausible, then what is asserted by the utterance of the eternal sentence is identical with what the captive asserted.¹⁹

Although my formulation of the argument incorporates the error in question, this does not affect the thesis concerning indexical reference which the captive case was supposed to support. My point concerning indexical reference was that since the captive was unaware of the relevant descriptive information, then it is a mistake to think of, e.g. his temporal reference as made possible by some temporally

¹⁹It should be stressed that in saying, as I have, that in the context in question the terms "Bimini" and "January 10, 1975" are being used referentially, I do not commit myself to the view that, e.g. "Bimini" has no sense (is non-connotative). The place name "Bimini" might have a sense (as do descriptions) and might nevertheless be used referentially. Similar considerations apply to the temporal indicator.

descriptive information implicit in his utterance. Hence, such information cannot be any part of what he asserts. If it turns out, as it now appears, that even the explicit occurrence of a non-indexical temporal indicator in the uttered sentence does not imply that the temporally descriptive information (associated with that expression) is any part of what is asserted, so much the better.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: PROPOSITIONS AND MEANINGS

Is what someone asserts identical with the meaning or sense of a sentence? Given some assertive utterance is what is either true or false a sentential meaning? In this concluding chapter I wish to draw out the consequences of my discussion of the referential use of indexicals and descriptions for these questions. The last three chapters, I wish to suggest, can be seen as an extended attack on the thesis that propositions are identical to sentential meanings.

The loci classici, at least in our period, of the view that propositions are identical with senses are Frege's papers "On Sense and Reference"¹ and "The Thought."² Let us begin, then, with a somewhat closer look at Frege's views on these matters than was attempted in the preceding chapters. (This will, in addition, afford us the opportunity to substantiate claims made in Chapter III concerning Frege's views on the semantics of indexicals.)

Where I have spoken of propositions or things asserted, Frege speaks of 'thoughts.' A thought is not, however, a private, mental entity.

By a thought I understand not the subjective performance of thinking

¹In Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege, ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), pp. 56-69.

²In Essays on Frege, ed. E.D. Klemke (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968; Illini Books, 1968), pp. 503-535.

but its objective content, which is capable of being the common property of many thinkers.³

For Frege thoughts are the bearers of truth and falsity.

Without wishing to give a definition, I call a thought something for which the question of truth arises.⁴

What are these items for which the question of truth arises?

... when we call a sentence true we really mean its sense is ... it is for the sense of a sentence that the question of truth arises in general.⁵

But not all sentential senses are susceptible of truth and falsity.

One does not wish to deny sense to an imperative sentence, but this sense is not such that the question of truth could arise for it. Therefore I shall not call the sense of an imperative sentence a thought ... Only those sentences in which we communicate or state something come into the question.⁶

A thought, then, is the sense of a declarative sentence.⁷

Before proceeding let us note one further feature of Frege's view. The sense of a sentence is a function of the senses of the sentential constituents so that, for example, any replacement of some constituent by another having a different sense results in a different sentential sense--in the case of declarative sentences, a different thought. As Frege notes

If we now replace one word of the sentence by another having the

³"On Sense and Reference," p. 62, footnote.

⁴"The Thought," p. 511.

⁵Ibid., p. 510.

⁶Ibid., p. 512.

⁷Frege distinguishes between the sense or content of such a sentence and the assertive force which "lies in the form of the indicative sentence." Thus, he thinks that certain non-declarative sentences can have the same sense as a declarative sentence, e.g. the kind of interrogative sentences he calls "sentence-questions," like "Is it the case that $2 + 2 = 4$?" For our purposes we can ignore this aspect of his view.

same reference, but a different sense, this can have no bearing upon the reference of the sentence. Yet we can see that in such a case the thought changes; since, e.g., the thought in the sentence 'The morning star is a body illuminated by the Sun' differs from that in the sentence 'The evening star is a body illuminated by the Sun.' Anybody who did not know that the evening star is the morning star might hold the one thought to be true, the other false.⁸

We must distinguish between sense and reference. '24' and '42' certainly have the same reference, i.e. they are proper names for the same number; but they have not the same sense; consequently, '24 = 42' and '4.4 = 42' have the same reference, but not the same sense (which means, in this case: they do not contain the same thought).⁹ (Paranetical remark Frege's.)

The account just sketched of the Fregean notion of thought is deficient in that one crucial consideration has been omitted. As we noted several chapters ago, for Frege every thought is a complete thought. The relevant notion of completeness can be seen particularly clearly in Frege's discussion of his thesis that thoughts possess truth values eternally.

... are there not thoughts which are true today but false in six months time? The thought, for example that the tree there is covered with green leaves, will surely be false in six months time. No, for it is not the same thought at all [that will be false in six months time--parenthetical remark added]. The words 'this tree is covered with green leaves' are not sufficient by themselves for the utterance, the time of utterance is involved as well. Without the time-indication this gives us have no complete thought, i.e. no thought at all. Only a sentence supplemented by a time-indication and complete in every respect expresses a thought. (Emphasis added.) But this, if it is true, is true not only today or tomorrow but timelessly. Thus the present tense in 'is true' does not refer to the speaker's present but is, if the expression be permitted, a tense of timelessness.¹⁰

As noted in our earlier discussion, Frege's point is that we are

⁸"On Sense and Reference," p. 62.

⁹Gottlob Frege, "Function and Concept," in Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege, ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), p. 29.

¹⁰"The Thought," p. 533.

tempted to think that something can possess one truth-value now and another later because we fail to note that every thought is a complete thought. While the sentence uttered may or may not be 'complete' (it may be, e.g., a 'non-eternal' sentence in which case it does not make explicit what is asserted by its utterance) whatever is required for the thought to be a complete one, e.g. a time indication or the identification of some individual, must be supplied either by the sentence or in some other way, most notably by the context of utterance, in order for an act of assertion to have been performed at all.

We have noted above that not all sentential senses are thoughts. Demanding, as Frege does, that every thought be a complete thought would seem to impose a further constraint on the kinds of sentences the senses of which are considered thoughts. In particular, if every thought is, in the required sense, a complete thought, then it is hard to see how the sense of a non-eternal sentence could be a thought. If however the sense of a non-eternal sentence is not a thought, then how is it that we perform acts of assertion by the utterance of non-eternal sentences? As we have seen,

In all such cases the mere wording, as it is given in writing, is not the complete expression of the thought, but the knowledge of certain accompanying conditions of utterance, which are used as means of expressing the thought, are needed for its correct apprehension.¹¹

When uttering a non-eternal sentence, the speaker relies on the circumstances of utterance to, so to speak, complete his thought. When one says for example "It is covered with books" one asserts of some

¹¹Ibid., p. 517.

particular item that it is covered with books; which item is not revealed by the sentence but rather by the circumstances of utterance. But how precisely are we to characterize the contribution of the context of utterance to the thought? Is it at the level of sense or of reference?

My own view, argued for above, is that the contribution of the context is clearly, at least in many cases, at the level of reference. The circumstances of utterance do not provide us with any particular descriptive characterization or as Frege would say "mode of presentation" of the referent but with the referent itself (which can, of course, be characterized in any number of ways). What is Frege's view? Although Frege does not devote a great deal of attention to the semantics of non-eternal sentences, still on the basis of his general views about 'thoughts' and his all too few remarks about non-eternal sentences, I think that it is clear what his view is: the contribution of the context is always at the level of sense. The circumstances of utterance together with the utterance of the indexical yield a 'mode of presentation' of the referent.

Frege is, in general, quite insistent that thoughts are senses (of certain kinds of sentences) and further that their constituents must be senses.¹² In his argument that the relationship of a thought to a truth value is not one of subject to predicate but rather of sense to reference he notes:

A truth value cannot be part of a thought, any more than, say, the Sun can, for it is not a sense but an object.¹³

¹²To say that a thought is a sense is, of course not to deny that it can be a referent. The referent of the phrase "the sense of the sentence '2 + 2 = 4'" is, for Frege, a thought, i.e. a sense.

¹³On "Sense and Reference," p. 64.

Whatever Frege's thesis is concerning truth-values as objects, it is clear that, e.g., the sun cannot be a constituent of a thought for it is not a sense but is rather an object; whereas the sense of the phrase "the sun" can be a constituent of a thought.

Thus, on Frege's view the referents of the expressions we utter in expressing thoughts are never constituents of the thoughts expressed; the senses of such expressions are the propositional constituents. If this is so, then it is hard to see how any contribution of the context of utterance at the level of reference could complete the thought. If the sense of the sentence is incomplete, it is hard to see how it can be turned into a complete sense by the context supplying a referent, say the sun or some table. Surely the sense can be completed only by the context supplying some 'mode of presentation' of the referent, i.e. the contribution would have to be at the level of sense.¹⁴

Before proceeding to further defend the claim that something like this is Frege's view, let us see what kind of contribution the context might make at the level of sense. When someone utters a non-eternal sentence, say, "He is bald" then, from the semantical point of view of Frege, what he has uttered would seem to be, in an important respect, like an open sentence, in this case like "x is bald." Of course, there are differences. "He," unlike "x," has a sense; it does supply some information regarding the referent. But it does not supply us with a 'route' to the referent; it does not uniquely determine the

¹⁴Unless, of course, not all thoughts are senses. That is, if Frege's view were that in uttering a non-eternal sentence what is expressed is not a complete sense, then he could hold that the contribution of the context is at the level of reference. I will discuss this possibility below.

referent. To use Frege's phrase, "he" does not supply us with a mode of presentation of a referent although it does supply us with part of one, i.e. it indicates, for example, that the referent is male. When the sentence "He is bald" is uttered, however, the circumstances of utterance can be viewed as supplementing the partial mode of presentation so as to yield a complete mode of presentation, one that uniquely fits some item. Thus the sentence "He is bald," uttered in a particular context, suffices for the expression of a (complete) thought, since its 'native' sense is supplemented so as to yield a complete sense.¹⁵ What this amounts to is that in uttering a non-eternal sentence what we assert is the sense of an eternal sentence.¹⁶

One virtue of this construal of Frege is that it yields a coherent, single account of the notion of a thought. A thought is in every case the sense of an eternal sentence. If Frege's view was that in uttering a non-eternal sentence, the context contributes at the level of reference, then no single treatment of thoughts would apparently be possible. Thoughts expressed by the utterances of non-eternal

¹⁵Although we can express this loosely by saying that the indexical picks up, in a context, descriptive information, this need not be construed as the thesis that the sense of the indexical expression is not fixed but rather varies systematically from context to context. We can say that, e.g. "he" has a fixed sense; it is not ambiguous. And similarly for "He is bald." The context can be thought of as supplementing the fixed but incomplete sense of the sentence so as to yield a complete sense, a thought. Compare Frege's remark on p. 519 of "The Thought" where he seems to imply that "he" has a fixed sense.

¹⁶Accordingly, in the chapter on indexical reference, I attributed to Frege the view that in uttering a non-eternal sentence what is asserted can, in every case, be formulated via an eternal sentence. The idea, of course, is that in uttering a non-eternal sentence I assert a thought, the sense of some eternal sentence. So I can use this eternal sentence to formulate the thought.

sentences would not be senses of sentences. If something like this were Frege's view, then the account of such thoughts would radically depart from the theory as he developed it for eternal sentences. Now it is true that the semantics of eternal sentences was Frege's real interest and that issues concerning non-eternal sentences are only discussed in Frege's late paper "The Thought" (and, indeed, even there only discussed briefly). But if consideration of thoughts expressed by utterances of non-eternal sentences necessitated such a radical departure from the theory, we would expect Frege to acknowledge that a central feature of his account was being modified. Nowhere in his discussion in "The Thought," however, does he give any indication that there is a distinction to be drawn between two kinds of thoughts. Indeed, one gets the opposite impression.

The results obtained in Part II of this essay consist, in part, in the repudiation of the thesis that I am attributing to Frege. What we assert are not the senses of sentences.

Let us first consider utterances of non-eternal sentences. One who wishes to maintain that we assert the senses of sentences is, as we saw in the case of Frege, not likely to hold that in uttering a non-eternal sentence a speaker asserts the sense possessed by the sentence he has uttered. For one thing, if in uttering a non-eternal sentence, say "I am tired," a speaker asserted the sense of this sentence, then it is hard to understand how another speaker could utter the same sentence (whose sense is unchanged) and assert a different proposition.¹⁷ It is likely that one who does wish to identify

¹⁷It could be maintained that the sense of the uttered sentence is what is asserted only if one took the view that non-eternal sentences

propositions with senses will maintain, with Frege, that they are identical with the senses of eternal sentences.

It is clear, however, at least if the arguments I have employed are correct, that it is a mistake to think of a speaker's use of an indexical item as amounting to (with the help of the context) a descriptive characterization of his referent; the contribution of the context is, I have argued, at the level of reference. But unless by the use of the indexical the speaker does convey such a descriptive characterization of the referent, it is hard to see how what is asserted can be the sense of some eternal sentence.¹⁸ Moreover, the view that in uttering a non-eternal sentence what one asserts is the sense of an eternal sentence is plausible, I should think, only if it is plausible to maintain that in uttering an eternal sentence what one asserts is the sense of the sentence. In other words, if it can be shown that even in cases of utterances of eternal sentences what is asserted is not the sense of an eternal sentence, then it will hardly be plausible that in uttering a non-eternal sentence what is asserted is the sense of an eternal one.

Let us turn our attention, then, to utterances of eternal sentences, in particular those in which a definite description is used referentially.

do not have fixed senses but instead, in particular contexts of utterance, acquire complete senses. The criticism I will lodge against Frege's view will apply to this variant as well.

¹⁸I am not sure what to say about the following question. If Mill (and company) are correct about proper names, what are we to say of the sense of an eternal sentence containing a proper name? When I say here that what we assert are not the senses of eternal sentences, I mean that at least on the assumption that names have descriptive content (a la Frege, Russell) what is asserted is not the sense of an eternal sentence.

Here too, the arguments I have employed yield the result that what is asserted is not the sense of an eternal sentence. For as we have seen when a description is used referentially the sense of the description does not enter into a determination of what is asserted; the same thing may, for example, be asserted by the referential use of two non-synonymous descriptions. Thus if A says "Smith's murderer is, at t_1 , insane" and B says "The husband of Anne Jones at t_1 is, at t_1 , insane" and if both use their respective descriptions referentially, in reference to Jones, then both have asserted the same thing. But if the sense of the description does not enter into a determination of what is asserted it is again hard to see how what is asserted can be the sense of the sentence (which is, after all, a function of the senses of the sentential constituents).

Moreover, these considerations suggest another application of the argument used in Part I to show that what is asserted is not a sentence. For with respect to the utterances of speakers A and B mentioned in the last paragraph, neither the sentences they utter nor the senses of their sentences are identical and yet both speakers assert the same thing. It follows that not both A and B assert the senses of their respective sentences. What a speaker asserts, then, is not, at least in general, identical with the sense of his sentence (and this is so even if his sentence is an eternal one).

A shade of Cartwright might point out that it does not follow that no one ever asserts the sense of his sentence, perhaps A does-- all that follows is that not both A and B assert the senses of their respective sentences. But a move along the lines utilized in Part I

will suffice again. If what is asserted by a number of speakers all of whom assert the same thing by the utterance of non-synonymous eternal sentences is indeed the sense of some single eternal sentence then that particular sense ought to have something about it which would distinguish it from the various competing senses and which would give us a reason to think that it is indeed this sense which is the proposition asserted by all of the speakers. Since there is (apparently) no such sense which could be privileged in this way, it follows that what is asserted by each of the speakers is not the sense of any sentence.

When a description is used attributively it may appear somewhat more tempting to view what is asserted as the sense of the sentence for in attributive uses, according to Donnellan, the description occurs 'essentially,' i.e. replacing it with another (attributively used) description, different in sense but contingently characterizing the same item, will yield a different proposition. If Donnellan were correct about this then the argument used in the last paragraph could not be applied here, for we could not generate a situation in which non-synonymous sentences could be used to assert the same thing. But, as I have argued,¹⁹ even in cases of attributive use the speaker often makes referential use of a proper part of the attributively used description. If this is correct then the argument used above applies here as well. There will be utterances of non-synonymous sentences (in which a description is used attributively) by means of which the same proposition is asserted.

We can conclude that in many cases of utterances of eternal

¹⁹For example see pp. 126-7 above.

sentences and a fortiori in cases of utterances of non-eternal sentences, what is asserted is not the sense of a sentence. Of course, I have not argued that in no case does anyone assert the sense of a sentence; my argument is inapplicable to utterances of, for example, many universally quantified sentences. Still since it presumably is not the case that we sometimes assert sentential senses and sometimes not, we can conclude that what is asserted is in no case the sense of a sentence.

In the foregoing I have taken Fregean talk of sense at face value. No attempt has been made to elucidate the notion of sense nor to discuss or evaluate various competing analyses of the concept of sentential meaning. On any account of sentential meaning, however, the sentences "Smith's murderer is, at t_1 , insane" and "The husband of Anne Jones at t_1 is, at t_1 , insane" will have different meanings. Of course, it may be that speakers uttering these sentences might mean the same thing. But that is not to the point. If it makes any sense to speak of the meanings of sentences, then the meanings of these two sentences (as opposed to what someone might mean [i.e. intend to assert] by uttering them) are surely not the same. But these sentences may be used to assert the same thing. Hence, by the argument above, what is asserted is not the meaning of a sentence.

What makes possible the application to the present case of the argument originally employed to distinguish propositions from sentences (the argument from the difference in their arithmetics)²⁰ is, of course,

²⁰The name is due to Cartwright. The argument, of course, is the one that proceeds from the premises that since X and Y are not identical (e.g. let X and Y be the sentences uttered) whereas \emptyset and ψ are identical (\emptyset and ψ are the propositions respectively asserted) then it follows that it can't be that both $X = \emptyset$ and $Y = \psi$ and so on.

the idea of the referential or, as we might say, the demonstrative use of singular terms. The expression "demonstrative use" seems particularly apt for it draws attention to the fact that indexicals, descriptions and (possibly) names may be used simply to demonstrate an item and not to attribute properties to anything.²¹ If not for the fact that there is a referential-attributive distinction, and indeed one of semantical significance, then an eternal sentence (insofar as it is seen as belonging to some particular language) would be the formulation of a unique proposition. If this were so, we would have no argument (or at least not the same argument) against identifying what someone asserts with the meaning of an eternal sentence; we could not generate a case in which non-synonymous eternal sentences are used to assert the same thing.

Cartwright, not in possession of the referential-attributive distinction (at least not at the time of the appearance of his paper)²² does utilize a version of this argument in order to show that what someone asserts is not a sentence. But in the case of the identification of propositions with meanings of eternal sentences he finds that the argument has no application. This is so for one might maintain, says Cartwright that

... for each statement that can be made by uttering some given incomplete [non-eternal] sentence, there is (or in theory could

²¹The term "demonstrative" has its own drawbacks for it might suggest that the entity demonstrated is in some sense, present, whereas we can, given the appropriate context, make referential use of an expression and, in doing so, refer to some long gone item.

²²In his later paper "Some Remarks on Essentialism," The Journal of Philosophy 65 (1968): 615-626, Cartwright remarks " ... that it is necessary to distinguish 'referential' from 'attributive' uses of definite descriptions has been persuasively argued of late by Donnellan."

be) a complete [eternal] sentence having that statement as its meaning.²³

... if a statement is the meaning of any sentence, it must be the meaning of some complete [eternal] sentence which can be used to assert it; and it is surely plausible to suppose that no two of these could differ in meaning. (Bracketed remarks and last emphasis added.)^{24, 25}

What we have seen, however, is that a number of even eternal sentences might differ in meaning and still be used to assert the same thing.

In the foregoing I have tried to show the relevance of Part II of the essay to the discussion which occurs in Part I. We have seen

²³"Propositions," p. 98.

²⁴Ibid., p. 101.

²⁵Accordingly, Cartwright resorts to an altogether different line of reasoning to show that propositions are not meanings.

If what someone asserts, on some occasion, is itself the meaning which the words he utters have ... then anything predicable of what he asserts must also be predicable of the meaning of his words. But it is obvious on very little reflection that ever so many things predicable of what he asserted cannot (on pain of nonsense) be predicated of the meaning of a sentence. And the fundamental point to be noticed in this connection is that although we may predicate of something asserted that it is (or was) asserted, this cannot be predicated of the meaning of a sentence. It simply makes no sense to say that someone asserted the meaning of his sentence--any more than it makes sense to say that he said it. ("Propositions," p. 101.)

Cartwright proceeds to mention many other things which can be affirmed of what is asserted but not of a sentential meaning, e.g. that it is true or false, that it may be verified, affirmed, contradicted, etc.

I find myself in sympathy with this argument but less than confident of its conclusiveness. For one thing the argument seems to baldly deny what others, for example, Frege, have asserted, that e.g., it makes sense to speak of a sense as true or false. I imagine that one inclined to hold that senses are true or false would dismiss Cartwright's argument as a kind of appeal to ordinary language; as canonizing what we are in fact accustomed to saying and as declaring nonsense what sounds odd. (Cartwright takes up this objection on page 102 of "Propositions.")

It is clear, however, that without coming to any decision as to the conclusiveness of Cartwright's argument, we can conclude on the basis provided above that what someone asserts is not the meaning of a sentence.

what propositions could not be. In order to emphasize the positive side of the present study, it will be useful to contrast the views of Frege and Russell on the notion of constituent of a proposition.

Compare Frege's remark

A truth value cannot be part of a thought, any more than, say the Sun can, for it is not a sense but an object.²⁶

with Russell's

The denotation, I believe, is not a constituent of the proposition, except in the case of proper names, i.e. of words which do not assign a property to an object, but merely and solely name it. And I should hold further that, in this sense, there are only two words which are strictly proper names of particulars, namely "I" and "this."²⁷

Russell made this remark in his paper "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" which was first published in 1910-11. By 1917 he felt that he had been too generous and declared in an added footnote "I should now exclude 'I' from proper names in the strict sense, and retain only 'this.'"²⁸ The point about the word "this" which, according to Russell, is why it is a genuine or logically proper name is that it is used "as a name," as "merely a means for pointing to the thing."²⁹

So if I say "Scott is Sir Walter," using these two names as names [which according to Russell is not our standard practice] ,

²⁶"On Sense and Reference," p. 64.

²⁷Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," in Bertrand Russell, Mysticism and Logic (London: n.p., 1918; Anchor Books, n.d.), p. 216.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Bertrand Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," in Bertrand Russell, Logic and Knowledge, p. 245.

neither "Scott" nor "Sir Walter" occurs in what I am asserting, but only the person who has these names, and thus what I am asserting is a pure tautology. (Paranthaletical remark added.)³⁰

As noted before Russell does recognize what I have called the referential use of language but thinks, contrary to the views I have expressed, that the only expressions ordinarily used referentially or (as Russell would put it) as names are singular terms which have no descriptive content, e.g. "this." What is of interest about these quotations is that Russell maintains that when an expression is used referentially, the item referred to is, in some sense, a constituent of the proposition; it "occurs in what I am asserting." This is, of course, in contrast to Frege who recognizes no category of referential use (as I am using this term); every singular term has, for Frege, a sense and the sense of the singular term and never the reference is a propositional constituent.

The view I have argued for in Part II of this essay has similarities to Russell's view as opposed to Frege's and can, I think, be expressed with the help of Russell's terminology. When an expression is used referentially, whether it is an indexical or an ordinary proper name (at least on Mill's view) or a definite description, we can say that the item referred to is a constituent of the proposition. In speaking this way I do not wish, however, to advance any metaphysical thesis, Russellian or otherwise, for example that persons may be, in some sense, parts of abstract entities, propositions, or constituents in facts.³¹

³⁰Ibid., p. 246.

³¹Thus in adopting Russell's terminology here, I am not endorsing his metaphysical views. The important point of similarity between Russell's view and the one argued for here is not metaphysical but is rather semantical.

What then is the point of speaking of say, persons as constituents of propositions? To speak this way is to suggest an alternative to the Fregean perspective according to which what someone asserts is a function of the senses of the sentential constituents. It is to stress, with Russell, the propositional role of the referent: when a singular term is used referentially, it is the referent and not the sense of the singular term that enters into a determination of what was asserted.

The positive outcome of this essay, then, may be expressed by saying that, in using singular terms referentially, the items to which we refer are, in the sense in question, propositional constituents. To say this is, of course, not to provide a positive account of the concept of thing asserted. As noted in the introduction to this essay, such a positive account would involve considerations that range far beyond those manageable here. A discussion of semantical issues concerning, for example, predication, and general propositions, e.g. universally quantified ones, would certainly be in order. Moreover, the important metaphysical questions concerning propositions remain to be answered. Indeed, formulating the positive side of this study in the Russellian idiom naturally prompts the question of whether there is a stronger and indeed metaphysical sense in which a referent can be a propositional constituent. To these further semantical and metaphysical questions I do not address myself here. I hope, however, that the positive conclusions reached concerning referential use will provide the beginning of a positive account of propositions.

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