

## 2.1 Introductory\_Russel's criterion\_Evans

[1] [2]

- (Two types of singular terms: (genuine) referring expressions and definite descriptions)
- (names refer, descriptions denote)

### Referring expressions

- Russell's only model of genuine singular sentences: genuine referring expressions (42)
- "A genuine referring expression has as its sole function the identification of an object such that if it satisfies the predicate, the sentence is true, and if it fails to satisfy the predicate, the sentence is false." (42)
  - Significance relies on its referent
- Without identifying the object, the truth-evaluation cannot be started: uttering sentences that don't identify objects is equivalent to saying nothing at all (42)
- The only difference between Russell's and Frege's model after discovering sense: Russell's account makes no reference to sense (42)
  - If two names refer to the same thing, then one is making the same assertion using either name (insofar as the names are not descriptions) (43)

### Russell's criterion and Russell's principle

Test for determining if something is a proper name: [#Russells\\_Criterion](#)

Whenever the grammatical subject of a proposition can be supposed not to exist without rendering the proposition meaningless, it is plain that the grammatical subject is not a proper name, i.e., not a name directly representing some object (43).

- When the grammatical subject has no referent yet the sentence is still meaningful, the grammatical subject is not a proper name/referring expression (43)

### Definite descriptions

- *Definite descriptions* do not pass this test (43)
  - 'The  $\phi$  is F' is meaningful
  - The absence of the referent for 'the  $\phi$ ' doesn't prevent the sentence from expressing an proposition
- *Apparent singular terms in sentences apt for expressing thoughts about all physical objects* also don't pass the test (43-4) because they are disguised descriptions
  - Three things lead to this conclusion
    1. [#Russells\\_Principle](#) "it is not possible for a person to have a thought about something unless he knows which particular individual in the world he is thinking about" (44).
    2. Only two ways of knowing the particular one is thinking about: knowledge by acquaintance or by description (44)
    3. acquaintance is restricted to immediate sensory experience and sometimes private sensory experience of oneself --> thoughts about all physical objects are by description (44)

1. Russel: demonstratives (if it is not meaningful then one knows that because they only refer to sense-datum) and definite descriptions (their meaning is not given by their referent; depends on the concepts and predicates; we refer to everything by definite descriptions even when using demonstratives) ↔
2. descriptions refer to things in virtue of concepts which refer to properties that the external objects have; referring to things as mediated by concepts ↔

## 2.3 Russellian singular terms and descriptive names

### Russellian singular terms

- *Russellian singular terms* redefined: "singular terms whose sense depends on their having a referent" (46)
  - Compare: a singular term whose *significance* depends upon its having a referent (12; RG 28)
- Russell's conception of singular terms needs to be revised to be viable, but the result will still be distinctively Russellian (47)
  - This is because it will still incorporate the opposition between Russellian singular terms and any term whose denotation is determined by a description
  - (Russell recognizes referring expressions and definite descriptions, but left out a category of singular terms that refer but are significant even if empty (i.e., descriptive names))
- Russell denies the terms within the latter category are referring expression. Is he right? (47)

### Contrast between Russell and Evans

- Russell: either referring expressions (meaningless if empty) or definite descriptions (meaningful even if empty; denote, not refer) (RG 55)
- Evans will argue that there is a category of singular terms that refer yet are still significant even if empty (RG 55-6).
  - Rough idea: in cases like descriptive names, the description is used to isolate one object, and then the name is attached to the object in a way that is characteristic of reference (55)

### Argument for descriptive names as referring expressions

- (Saved definite description for §2.4)
- Descriptive names: "the sense of the name is such that an object is determined to be the referent of the name if and only if it satisfies a certain description" (48)
  - e.g., let's call the inventor of the zip "Julius"
- The association between a *description* and a name is more plausibly to be regarded as...
  - "constituting a bit of information, or misinformation, inherited from people who purported to use the name as an ordinary proper name" (48)
  - in contrast to description being regarded as semantically associated with the name (48)
- Can define the reference relation in terms of truth and satisfaction (49; RG 56)
- The principle used to determine whether an expression is a referring expression (key notion: truth):
  - (P) "If S is an atomic sentence in which the n-place concept-expression R is combined with n singular terms t1...tn, then S is true iff satisfies R" (49).
- Referring expression as "any expression whose contribution to the truth-conditions of sentences containing it is stated exclusively by means of the relation of reference which is found in (P)" (49).

- *The only thing* that a referring expression contributes to the truth condition of the sentence is the *object (referent)* (RG 56)
- In contrast to definite descriptions which contribute to the truth conditions by supplying *descriptive materials* (RG 56)

## Descriptive names: referring but non-Russellian expressions

- This principle entails that descriptive names refer (50-1) <sup>[1]</sup>
- Yet descriptive names are not Russellian (i.e., are meaningful even if empty) (RG 57)
  - Key notion: understanding
  - Descriptive names are introduced in such a way that there is a public known stipulation connecting the name and description --> a sentence using the empty descriptive names can therefore be understood
  - The relation between understanding/thought and descriptive names is made in: "The thought expressed by 'Julius is F' may equivalently be expressed by 'the inventor of the zip is F'" (50)

1. ? ↩

## 2.5 'Rigid designation' and Fregean sense

### Part 1: Descriptive names as rigid designators

- Rigid designation: refers to the same individual regardless of what possible world is under consideration (RG 59-60)
  - Names holding this property are rigid designators.
  - Descriptive names are referring expressions or rigid designators
  - Definite descriptions are not
- Reference relation is a rigid designation relation: "both are capturing a kind of relation between a [singular term] and an object, such that the only contribution that [a singular term] makes to the truth conditions of the sentence is to indicate the object whose satisfaction of the predicate is at issue" (RG 60)

### Part 2: referring expressions as having senses

A preliminary account for that rigid designators can have a sense

- 1. descriptive names are referring expressions that have senses (RG 61)
  - The senses come from definite descriptions that are used to fix the names' referents
  - Also supports informative identity statements, so need attribution of senses to explain their behavior
- 2. Singular terms can refer directly while still having a sense (RG 61-2)
  - Kaplan: being a rigid designator is incompatible with having a sense (61-2)
    - Any expression with a sense refer mediately through its sense rather than directly
  - Evans' objection: senses as ways of thinking (62)
    - A way of thinking needs not be descriptions (though the descriptions are one kind of Fregean sense)
    - e.g., giving something through right or left hand does not make the giving indirect (RG 61-2)

## 2.2 Radical reference-failure\_Evans

### Russell's reason for restricting the objects of acquaintance

- Solution to the empty terms problem:
  - 1. Definite descriptions: their significance does not come from the denoted objects, but from the capacity of the descriptive material to contribute to a specification of truth conditions for the sentence
  - 2. Referring expressions: there can be no empty names
- Russell restricts the object of acquaintance to Cartesian Properties
  - ...because he finds it incoherent that one can think they has or expresses a thought about an object while failing to do so (44-5)
  - "it would not make sense for a subject to be in error as to whether or not he satisfied the mental predicate 'S is thinking about something'" (45)
- Wants to decompose sentences in the form 'S knows that P' - e.g., 'S is thinking that Bismarck is F' - into:
  - A mental component: A is thinking that the  $\phi$  is F.
  - A non-mental component: Bismarck is  $\phi$ .
- However not everything can be thought by description (45)
  - ...because of the possibility of massive reduplication (in Strawson's sense) that prevents a one-on-one mapping between descriptions and the object of descriptions (45)
  - But "his Cartesian theory of mind...ensured that the anchorage for the whole system of descriptive identification was to objects for which this falling into the abyss was not a possibility" <sup>[1]</sup> (45)

### Evans

- There is no incoherence to Evans in saying that one might fail to have the thought one suppose themselves to have when no object is given (45-6) (it is not as though the subject has no thoughts (46))
  - In this case, we are aiming to have a thought (typically in the form of 'G is F'), but there is no such thought to be had because of the absence of the relevant objects (46)
  - This proposal is to be argued for; the main point is just that Russell's reason isn't a good reason (46)
- An argument from incoherence by A.N. Prior: if a subject can think that he has the thought that a is F, he must have the thought that a is F (46)
  - Cannot think that one has the thought while one does not really have the thought
  - Entertaining the thought that a is F part of what is involved in having the compound thought "I am thinking that a is F"
- Evans:
  - When one is mistaken about one's thought, the thought in error is not "I am thinking that a is F"
  - Rather, it is "I am thinking a thought of type  $\beta$ "

But Prior was quite unjustified in assuming that those who hold that a person may wrongly think he has a thought of the form 'a<sup>[2]</sup> is F' need be committed to the view that such a subject has a thought of the form 'I am thinking that a is F'.

All that is being credited to such a subject is the intention of thinking a thought of a particular kind, and the belief that he is thinking such a thought. Obviously if there is no thought of the appropriate kind available, then there is no possibility, either for the subject or for anyone else, of giving the content of the thought he wishes, but fails, to entertain (46).

1. ? ↩
2. a proper name ↩

## 2.4 Definite descriptions

Definite descriptions as quantifiers rather than referring expressions.

### Russel's three arguments against definite descriptions as referring expressions

#### Argument 1: one can fail to know two definite descriptions have the same referent

- Assumption: referring expressions are such as to render knowledge of coreference obligatory (RG 57)
- Evans denies this assumption and claims that referring expressions (even Russellian referring ones) can have different senses despite having the same referent (51)

#### Argument 2: narrow-scope negations

##### The argument (RG 58)

- 1. Suppose 'the  $\varphi$ ' is a referring expression (RE).
- 2. For any REs, the negation of 'RE is F' is 'RE is not F'
- 3. If 'the  $\varphi$ ' is RE, then its corresponding negated sentence would be 'the  $\varphi$  is not F'
- 4. Disjoining the two sentences gives 'the  $\varphi$  is F' or 'the  $\varphi$  is not F'
- 5. By law of the excluded middle, one of the disjuncts must be true
- 6. Either disjunct entails that 'the  $\varphi$ ' refers
- 7. But 'the  $\varphi$ ' may clearly fail to refer (for many definite descriptions often fail to refer)
- 8. So, must reject 1

##### Evans' analysis: the argument assumes Russellian singular terms

The negation of 'the  $\varphi$  is F' as 'the  $\varphi$  is not-F' is legitimate only for Russellian singular terms (so rejects 2 as a bad move)

- Why? (RG 58)
  - Two ways to negate 'the a is F': either a is not-F, or a does not exist
  - if the  $\varphi$  does not exist, then 'the  $\varphi$  is F' cannot be negated because it is meaningless
  - So, the only way it can be negated is through 'the  $\varphi$  is not-F'
- If there are empty terms which yet don't render the sentence meaningless, the wide-scope negation will be available. So, if referring expressions can be non-Russellian, then Russel's argument fails. Because descriptive names exist, Russel's argument fails (RG 58).

#### Argument 3: definite descriptions would be meaningless if empty

if we treat definite descriptions as referring expressions, then we shall be obliged to conclude that, in the absence of a referent, sentences containing them would not be meaningful - i.e., would fail to express a thought (52).

- Also equates referring expressions with Russellian singular terms
- Only shows that definite descriptions are not Russellian, but can still be non-Russellian referring expressions which retains meaning even if they have no referents (53)

## Evans' view

In short, Russel's arguments fail, but Evans agree with the conclusion that definite descriptions are not referring but quantified expressions (53).

- (Skipped most materials from p.53 to p.60)
- Treating definite descriptions as referring expressions will have to be done in a theoretically inelegant or ad hoc way: the relation of reference would have to be relativized to worlds, times, and name-assignments (55-7)
  - ad hoc: the reference relation of other referring expressions is not relativized in this way (57)
  - Less elegant than the alternative: treating definite descriptions as quantifiers will yield different readings in different possible worlds in a natural way (53-7)
- Then went through a couple of proposals in understanding quantification in natural language (57-60)