

Donnellan's Distinction¹

MICHAEL DEVITT

Keith Donnellan has distinguished two uses of definite descriptions, "referential" and "attributive" (1966 and 1968). I take this to be a distinction between two *conventions*: descriptions are *ambiguous*; the truth conditions of statements containing descriptions vary according as the description is used referentially or attributively. So I take it that, if Donnellan is right, he has discovered a semantically significant distinction.

Donnellan's own view of the significance of his distinction is more equivocal, as Saul Kripke has pointed out (1979, pp. 7, 12-13; see also Donnellan 1979, pp. 41-42).² It will be convenient to overlook this here, interpreting Donnellan as claimer for the distinction what I have just claimed for it.

Kripke (1979)³ has recently cast doubt on this claim: he doubts that descriptions are ambiguous and hence that Donnellan has discovered a semantically significant distinction. Kripke's main concern is not with this substantive question of the significance of the distinction; it is methodological. Donnellan's papers are partly a criticism of Russell's theory according to which, in Donnellan's terminology, descriptions can only be used attributively. Kripke's methodological conclusion is that "the considerations in Donnellan's paper, *by themselves*, do not refute Russell's theory" (p. 6). I agree (1974, pp. 193-94; 1981a, sec. 2.7). However, it is easy to think that the considerations in Kripke's paper undermine, even if they do not refute, the view that descriptions are ambiguous. Kripke himself encourages this thought on the substantive question: in his view the considerations in his paper make it "overwhelmingly probable" that the phenomena that interested Donnellan are not to be explained by an ambiguity in descriptions (pp. 21-22).

My aim in this paper is to describe a certain theoretical perspective which gives semantic significance to Donnellan's distinction and to show that, from this perspective, the above thought on the substantive question is mistaken: Kripke's paper should cast no serious doubt on the significance of Donnellan's distinction.

Ironically enough, this perspective was stimulated by Kripke's earlier suggestion of "causal" theories of reference (1972).

Aside from its criticisms of Donnellan, Kripke's paper contains some brief suggestions for an alternative account of Donnellan's phenomena from the point of view of a theory of speech acts (p. 15). John Searle has also offered an alternative along those lines, in much more detail, and including a criticism of Kripke's (1979). I shall not be concerned here with refuting these alternatives. However, my defense of Donnellan implies a criticism of them.

My procedure will be to abstract from Kripke's methodological discussion what Kripke seems to regard as arguments against Donnellan on the substantive issue, or what might reasonably be so regarded. I shall set out my theoretical perspective in the course of considering the first of these arguments.

1. KRIPKE ARGUMENT I: SMITH AND JONES

Kripke gives an example of the sort that suggested the distinction to Donnellan.

Someone sees a woman with a man. Taking the man to be her husband, and observing his attitude to her, he says, "Her husband is kind to her." . . . Suppose the man is not her husband. Suppose he is her lover, to whom she has been driven precisely by her husband's cruelty (p. 7).

Consider the remark,

- (1) Her husband is kind to her.

According to Donnellan (as we are interpreting him), 'her husband' in (1) is a referential use of the description and refers to the lover. Provided the lover is kind to the woman, (1) is true. According to Russell, of course, (1) is false. However successful Russell's theory is with attributive uses, Donnellan thinks it fails with these referential ones. Russell missed the fact that descriptions are ambiguous.

Kripke is struck by the similarity between this example and another involving names.

Two people see Smith in the distance and mistake him for Jones. They have a brief colloquy: "What is Jones doing?" "Raking the leaves" (p. 14).

Let us suppose, for convenience, that the final remark here were

- (2) Jones is raking the leaves.

The first argument on the substantive question that I abstract from Kripke's discussion (pp. 15-18) goes as follows. First, since we are not tempted to posit a special semantic ambiguity to explain 'Jones' in (2), why should we posit one to explain 'her husband' in (1)? Second, Kripke introduces a Gricean distinction between "speaker's reference" and "semantic reference" which he uses to explain both cases without any mention of Donnellan's distinction. Such a general explanation, postulating no ambiguity, is surely to be preferred to Donnellan's, applicable only to (1) and postulating an ambiguity.

What is Kripke's general explanation? He claims that the *semantic* referent of 'her husband' is the woman's husband and that of 'Jones' is Jones, so that *both (1) and (2) are false*. On the other hand, the *speaker's* referent with 'her husband' is the lover and that with 'Jones' is Smith, with the result that *what both speakers mean is true*. Each singular term has only one possible semantic referent (in the context): there is no (relevant) ambiguity. A speaker can mean something by a term other than its semantic referent, but that is a matter of "pragmatics," not "semantics"; and it arises as much for names as for descriptions.

To assess this explanation we need to look closely at the Gricean distinction and its application to (2). The notion of semantic reference is clear enough: it is *conventional* reference (p. 14). Further, it seems clear that Jones is the semantic referent of 'Jones', just as Kripke claims. And I have no doubt that in theorizing about language we need another notion, distinct from semantic reference, and along the lines of Kripke's notion of speaker's reference. The general problem is knowing precisely what notion we need. The particular problem here is understanding Kripke's notion.

In explaining his notion, Kripke first makes gestures toward Grice (pp. 13-15) and "a general pragmatic theory of speech acts" (p. 18). These gestures are insufficient for our purposes, however, because Griceans have had nothing to say about cases of confusion like (2). Second, Kripke offers, "tentatively," a definition:

the speaker's referent of a designator [is] that object which the speaker wishes to talk about, on a given occasion, and believes fulfills the conditions for being the semantic referent of the designator (p. 15).

So Smith is the speaker's referent of 'Jones' in (2) because the speaker wishes to talk about him and believes he fulfills the conditions of being the semantic referent of 'Jones'.

One objectionable feature of this definition is that it requires a speaker to have a fairly sophisticated semantic theory before he can refer. How many people have given *any* thought to the conditions on reference? Set that aside.

The definition cries out for further explanation. In virtue of what is it *Smith* that the speaker of (2) "wishes to talk about" and has this semantic belief *of*? Kripke does not tell us. His general explanation, hence much of the force of his argument against Donnellan, *rests simply on the intuition* that it is Smith, an intuition that he expresses using a range of locutions: aside from those already mentioned he thinks, for example, that the speaker "meant" Smith and "intended to refer to" him. In the absence of an answer to our question, talk of Smith being the "speaker's referent" is just another way of putting ordinary intuitions about what the speaker "meant," and so on.

It is partly by seeking an explanation of these intuitions that I hope to save Donnellan's distinction from Kripke's argument. Nevertheless, as a point against Donnellan himself, the argument may seem fair enough as it stands. For, Donnellan's view that 'her husband' is a referential use picking out the lover rests ultimately on similar intuitions about what the speaker "meant," "had in mind," and so on.

Donnellan offered no theory to support this. So Kripke's point is that we have similar intuitions about 'Jones' and yet there is no ambiguity there.

I shall claim first that Kripke's intuitions about what the speaker of (2) meant are dubious; certainly they are insufficient to *settle* the matter against Donnellan (section 2). Second, I shall argue that when we seek an explanation of our intuitions about speaker's reference (section 3), and other related ones (section 4), Kripke's argument collapses (section 5).

2. INTUITIONS ABOUT SPEAKER'S REFERENCE

My intuitions about what the speaker of (2) meant are as follows. He did not straightforwardly mean Smith, as Kripke claims he did, but neither did he straightforwardly mean Jones. The belief the speaker expressed by (2) comes with two others, the true one that that man (pointing to Smith) is raking the leaves, and the false one that that man (pointing to Smith) is Jones. *The speaker is confusing two people*. As a result, we have no clear intuition that he meant one and not the other. There is no determinate matter of fact which he meant to refer to.

If this is right and yet the speaker of (1) meant the lover, as everyone seems to agree he did, then the two examples are not alike at the level of speaker's reference. Kripke's general explanation breaks down. (At one point, p. 25, note 26, Kripke seems to recognize this difference between the two cases, but he takes no account of its consequences for his argument.)

It may be objected that Kripke's intuitions about (2) are supported by the fact that the speaker would agree that he "referred to" *that man* (pointing to Smith). But, of course, he would also agree that he "referred to" Jones. If we have evidence of anything here it is that the speaker meant *more* than what he said,⁴ a view that supports my intuitions rather than Kripke's.

Support for Kripke's intuitions may also be sought in the behavior of the speaker should he learn that it was not Jones but Smith before his eyes. It will be claimed that he would withdraw (2), saying instead, "Smith is raking the leaves." What relevance has this to the issue? The speaker has just learned something new and significant which has led him to *change his views*. What bearing has this on what he meant by (2)? At most it shows what is not in contention: that the speaker did not *simply* mean Jones. If what the speaker would say is to support Kripke's intuition that the speaker meant Smith, then it should be something he would say before discovering his error.

In this respect it is important to note that in all the standard Gricean cases of a speaker meaning something other than what he says—metaphor, irony, indirect speech acts, speaker in a foreign country—*the speaker is in a position at the time of utterance to confirm what he is said to mean*. So the Gricean intuitions about what he meant are well supported in those cases. This feature is conspicuously lacking here. So also is another feature of the standard cases: *an explanation of why he did not say what he is said to mean that does not undermine the claim that he does mean that*.⁵

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the speaker of (2) might not make the above replacement if he were to discover his error. Perhaps if he were to realize that the person was Smith and not Jones he would not believe the person was raking the leaves: "I can't imagine a slovenly person like Smith ever raking leaves. He must be doing something else." "Observation statements" like (2) are theory-laden.

What follows from this journey among intuitions? I rest nothing simply upon the accuracy of mine. However, I do claim that this discussion should throw doubt on Kripke's. And insofar as his intuitions are dubious, so also is his Argument I. For, a great deal of the plausibility of that argument comes from the claimed similarity of (1) and (2) at the level of speaker's reference, a claim that rests on nothing but these intuitions. If (1) and (2) are not similar at that level, perhaps they are not similar at the level of semantic reference either. Perhaps Donnellan is right after all.

To show that Kripke Argument I against Donnellan is weak is not, of course, to show that Donnellan is right about the semantic referent of 'her husband'. To make any progress with that question we have to move beyond the low-level intuitions we have explored in this section. We must seek their explanation.

3. THE EXPLANATION OF SPEAKER'S REFERENCE

In virtue of what does a speaker mean Smith or Jones? What would make either person "the object of thought"? I suggest answers in terms of causal chains of a certain sort; I call them "d-chains," short for "designating-chains" (1981a).⁶

Consider a *straightforward paradigmatic* use of the name 'Jones' in Jones' absence. We would say that the speaker "meant," "intended to refer to," etc., Jones. In virtue of what? Underlying his use of the name is a causal network stretching back through other people's uses and ultimately "grounded in" Jones in a face-to-face perceptual situation. This underlying network is made up of d-chains. The reason that Jones seems to have *something* to do with the speaker's meaning in uttering (2) is that a network of d-chains grounded in Jones underlies that utterance too. That is why he used the name 'Jones'. The reason that Smith also seems to have something to do with his meaning is that this situation is a perceptual one of just the sort to ground a network in Smith. D-chain networks are grounded in their objects not only at a baptism; they are multiply grounded. Confusions like the present one lead to a network being grounded in more than one object. Because there are d-chains to both Jones and Smith, I would say that neither was the speaker's referent but each was his *partial* referent (using a notion borrowed from Field [1973]).

That is my explanation of the intuitions about (2). What about (1)? Kripke claims that the speaker's referent of 'her husband' is the lover. How could a speaker mean the lover in using a description that does not uniquely describe that person? Once again I call on d-chains to explain this: it was his perception of the lover that prompted the remark; the remark was "grounded in" the lover. But in this case, unlike the earlier one, the other object, which Kripke claims is the semantic referent,

is *not* causally linked to the utterance in an appropriate way. Here only one object, the lover, is a candidate for the speaker's referent (in my sense).

I have been careful in these remarks not to commit myself to the view that the lover is the speaker's referent in this case. I think that he is *if anyone* is. And I claim to explain the intuition that he is. Whether he is depends on the theoretical significance we attach to the failure of 'her husband' to describe the lover *at all*: not only is he not her unique husband, he is not her husband at all. I shall return to this (section 5).

I have already found Kripke's argument somewhat flimsy at the intuitive level (section 2). If the above theory of speaker's reference is correct, the argument is further weakened. According to the theory, (1) and (2) are not alike in speaker's reference, and Kripke is wrong about (2).

Despite these errors about speaker's reference, an important aspect of Kripke's argument remains. It is the suggestion that, with the help of a Gricean distinction, we can see that the semantic referent of 'her husband' is the husband. Although Kripke may be wrong about speaker's reference, thus weakening his argument against Donnellan, this suggestion may still seem sound. Indeed I agree with Kripke that the mere consideration of cases of confusion like (1) does not establish the semantic significance of Donnellan's distinction (though such cases suggested the distinction to Donnellan in the first place). We must look elsewhere. When we do, Kripke's argument collapses.

4. AN ARGUMENT FOR DONNELLAN'S DISTINCTION

We are to consider the claim that there is a "referential" convention for definite descriptions as well as the uncontroversial, Russellian, "attributive" convention. When first confronted with this claim, we have, it seems to me, two grounds for skepticism. First, we wonder how there *could* be a conventional way of identifying an object with a description that does not uniquely apply to it, that does not, in my usage, "denote" it. How is it possible to so identify an object? Second, we wonder why we should need to posit a second convention. It seems that the descriptions we use typically apply uniquely, thus identifying an object; at least they typically seem to *purport* to do this. Thus one convention seems enough.

The discussion in the previous section suggests a response to the first ground for skepticism. We saw there that a speaker can "mean," etc., a certain object in virtue of being causally linked to that object by a d-chain. Perhaps then there is a convention making use of d-chains to identify objects. Perhaps the referential use of descriptions is made possible by d-chains.

One reason for being favorably disposed toward this suggestion would be the existence of such a convention for other terms. I think there is one. It is plausible to think that deictic (non-cross-referential, non-anaphoric) demonstratives and personal pronouns involve such a convention. Words like 'this' and 'he' seem to depend for their reference on d-chains: their use is prompted by a causal link from the speaker to the object, a link created by perception of the object; the term refers

to that object, and none other in the environment, because underlying it is a d-chain grounded in that object.

If we could now show that descriptions have a use that is like that of deictic demonstratives and pronouns, we would have a very good reason for believing in the suggested convention for descriptions. I think we can show this by considering "imperfect" definite descriptions like 'the table'.⁷

Kripke begins and ends his paper with the observation that these imperfect descriptions may favor Donnellan as against Russell (pp. 6, 22). I think they do. Kripke also mentions the temptation to assimilate such descriptions to the corresponding demonstratives, e.g., 'the table' to 'that table' (p. 22). We should give in to this temptation.

Imperfect descriptions are important because they *obviously* do not denote (apply uniquely to) an object. The Russellian response is to see them as elliptical. In my view it is more plausible to see them, in their normal use, as like demonstratives and personal pronouns. In that use, not only do they not denote, *they do not even purport to denote*. They are not uttered with the intention of applying uniquely, nor would their audience normally take them to have been uttered with that intention. *Denotation is irrelevant to determining their referent*.

We have here a response to the second ground for skepticism about there being a "referential" convention for definite descriptions. Contrary to what was supposed, many of the descriptions we use do not even purport to apply uniquely, for many of them are of the imperfect variety. So there may well be a need to posit a second convention to cope with these.

If imperfect descriptions are like demonstratives and pronouns, then, from my theoretical perspective, the crucial respect in which they are like them is in depending on d-chains for identifying reference. 'This' refers to an object in which the underlying d-chain is grounded; 'he' to a male in which the underlying d-chain is grounded; 'that table' to a table in which the underlying d-chain is grounded. Similarly (normally); 'the object', 'the male', and 'the table', respectively. (I am assuming for the moment that the semantic referent of 'that *F*' and 'the *F*' must be an *F* even though it need not be the one and only *F*; but see section 5). I suggest that this account is just as plausible for the descriptions as it is for the demonstratives and pronouns. And it is very plausible for the latter. All these terms share a mode of identifying reference that has nothing to do with denotation (unique application); call the mode "designation."

It is uncontroversial that "perfect" definite descriptions like 'her husband' (in our society) have a use depending on denotation for identifying reference, an "attributive" use. Presumably an imperfect description like 'the table' can have that use too. It would not *normally* be so used because it is *obvious* that it does not denote: only someone with crazy beliefs would so use it. So all descriptions have a use depending on denotation, and, I have just argued, imperfect ones have one depending on designation. Do perfect descriptions have that use too? If the imperfect ones do, it is hard to see a good reason for denying that the perfect ones do too. All descriptions lie on a spectrum of varying degrees of "descriptive content," with 'the object'

at one end and 'her husband' at the other. ("Perfect" and "imperfect" are simply vague terms marking off the extremes.) There seems no basis for drawing a line on this spectrum beyond which designation cannot be relevant to determining reference.

The earlier discussion (section 3) gives a very good reason for supposing there is no such line. In explaining intuitions about what the speaker meant by 'her husband', I called on d-chains, the very same sort of causal link that is involved in designation. Given that such links to an object can exist when any description is used (whether perfect or imperfect), and that there is a conventional use of imperfect ones depending on those links, it would be surprising indeed if there were not a conventional use of all descriptions depending on them (even, I suspect, superlatives, though these are not on our spectrum). This convention depending on designation is Donnellan's referential use.

Donnellan is right (as we are interpreting him). There are two conventional ways of using 'the *F*'. We might attempt to express its meaning in its attributive use as "whatever is alone in being *F*"; this use depends on denotation for identifying reference. We might attempt to express its meaning in its referential use as "an *F* in mind" or, using my terminology, "a designated *F*"; this use depends on designation for identifying reference.

(Objection. "This account cannot be right because it explains the meaning of a referentially used description in terms of d-chains, something about which the ordinary speaker who has grasped the meaning of descriptions knows nothing." In my view the linguistic competence of ordinary speakers is a *skill* and does not consist in semantic propositional knowledge; it does not consist in his knowing *that* an expression means such and such (1981a, secs. 4.5-5.5). What I have offered above is part of a semantic theory. Ordinary ignorance of it is beside the point.)

In summary, the key steps in the argument for a semantically significant Donnellan's distinction are as follows: (i) the view that the reference of demonstratives is determined by a certain sort of causal link to objects; (ii) the view that, in their normal use, some descriptions (the imperfect ones) are like demonstratives in this respect; (iii) the view that intuitions that the speaker "meant," etc., a certain object in cases of confusion like (1) (an intuition shared by Kripke and Donnellan) are explained by the existence of a causal link of the above sort to the object.

Finally, I should like to mention a further argument for the significance of Donnellan's distinction: its bearing on the semantics of statements attributing propositional attitudes. Quine has distinguished two sorts of context here, "opaque" and "transparent," and has suggested that the "exportation" of a singular term involved in the inference from opaque to transparent is in general implicative. However, this leads to difficulties (the problem of 'the shortest spy'). In my view, the solution is that only referential terms may be exported. This is not the place to argue this (but see 1981a, chapters 9 and 10, and 1981b, part 2).

5. VERDICT ON THE HUSBAND AND LOVER

My verdict on the case of Jones and Smith is clear. Jones is the semantic referent of 'Jones' (section 1), and so (2) (in its semantic meaning) is false. However, what the

speaker meant by 'Jones' was partially Smith and partially Jones (section 3), and so what the speaker meant is partially true and partially false.⁸

Part of the verdict on the case of the husband and lover is now also clear. The speaker of (1) was using the referential convention for the description 'her husband', and so whether, and what, the description denotes is irrelevant: no question of denotation arises for a referential description in determining either its semantic referent or its speaker's referent (section 4). So the properties of the husband have nothing to do with the truth value of (1) nor of what the speaker meant by (1). The only object whose properties *could* bear on truth values, and the only object that the speaker *could* mean, is the lover. And that is the explanation of Kripke's intuition that the speaker did mean the lover (section 3). *Did* the speaker mean the lover? *Does* the kindness of the lover make (1) true (in its semantic meaning)? More needs to be said on these questions.

In section 4 I assumed, in effect, that the lover was *not* the semantic referent of 'her husband'. The assumption in question was that the semantic referent of 'the *F*' used referentially must be *an F*.⁹ If this is right, then whether '*F*' applies to *x* is relevant to whether *x* is the semantic referent of 'the *F*' (referential). What my stand on Donnellan's distinction rules as irrelevant to this question is whether '*F*' applies *uniquely* to, denotes, *x*. According to this assumption, then, the lover is not the semantic referent of 'her husband', even though he is linked to it by a d-chain, because he is not *a* husband of the woman. A successful referential use requires application as well as designation.

Is the assumption right? I am far from sure, though I tend to think it is. Our intuitions about these cases of mistake and confusion are not clear. Perhaps there is no determinate answer to the question. If our best theory explains such intuitions as we do have about these cases, I suspect we should be happy to let it settle the answer to the question at will.

Kripke mentions an example (pp. 7-8) that may seem to cast doubt on the assumption. A religious narrative refers to its main protagonist as "The Messiah." Whether or not that person was a messiah does not seem to affect the success of the term in referring to him. However, we can save the assumption in a plausible enough way by deeming the term here to be a *name*; in my view (with some qualifications that need not concern us) application is irrelevant to the reference of names. What this example does suggest is that there is no sharp line between referential descriptions, depending on application and designation, and names, depending only on designation. What starts as a description may turn into a name.

I am even less confident about speaker's reference. Certainly we can explain the intuition that the speaker of (1) meant the lover (in terms of d-chains). But whether this justifies introducing into our theory a notion that would make the lover "the speaker's referent" of 'her husband' is much less clear. We seem to need notions of speaker meaning that enable us to explain conventional meaning. It seems that conventional meaning must be built up in some way from common speaker meanings. Suppose my tentative assumption that application is relevant to the referential convention for 'the *F*' is right. How could that convention have

become established if application were irrelevant to the term's speaker's reference?

Despite the uncertainties of this account of (1), I am firm on what matters to Kripke's argument. The idea that descriptions have a referential use *does* have a semantically significant role in explaining reference for (1): the woman's husband is irrelevant to the truth conditions of that sentence. It is appropriate to see descriptions as ambiguous despite the comparison of (1) with (2). Sensitivity to Gricean distinctions does not undermine the significance of Donnellan's distinction. Quite the contrary. Kripke's argument collapses.

6. KRIPKE ARGUMENT II: THE SPEAKER OF RUSSELL ENGLISH

The second argument we can abstract from Kripke's paper runs as follows. It is surely *possible* that people should speak a language in which the descriptions are used only in the Russellian attributive way. Let us then *stipulate* that a group of people do speak such a language based on English, "Russell English." The same phenomena that impressed Donnellan in speakers of English will also arise for this group. The group will be indistinguishable from English speakers. This makes plausible the suggestion that English is Russell English (pp. 16-17).

Suppose a speaker of Russell English is at a party and mistakenly thinks that someone is drinking champagne who is actually drinking sparkling water. The speaker wants to remark that the man is happy. According to Kripke he might say, "The man in the corner drinking champagne is happy tonight," and we would say that he was referring to the teetotaler. So we have the same sort of intuition about this case as we have about Donnellan's cases. Yet we have *stipulated* that this person speaks Russell English. Perhaps then the people in Donnellan's case speak Russell English after all.

Kripke's example shows vividly the need to seek an explanation of intuitions about what a person is referring to. What could be the basis for our view that the speaker was referring to the teetotaler? Kripke does not say. According to me, we must think that this is a referential use, arising out of perception of the object and relying on designation for identification. But then our view would be inconsistent with the stipulation that the speaker is using Russell English.

Russell English differs from English in that definite descriptions are not devices in it for the designational mode of identifying reference. However, other devices for that mode remain: demonstratives, pronouns, even names. So if the speaker has a particular object in mind (the teetotaler) and means to refer to him, he will use one of those devices, not a definite description like 'the man in the corner drinking champagne'. Speakers of Russell English will behave differently from speakers of English. Donnellan's phenomena could not arise in Russell English. Kripke's claim to the contrary can seem obvious only if we tacitly treat the speaker as if he were like us, able to use descriptions referentially; i.e., as if he spoke English.

7. KRIPKE ARGUMENT III: EXPECTATIONS OF AN UNAMBIGUOUS LANGUAGE

Kripke claims that if descriptions were really ambiguous in the way Donnellan claims, we would expect to find some languages that removed the ambiguity. Yet not only do we not know of any such language, we would be very surprised to find one (p. 19). This suggests that English is not ambiguous in that way.

I shall point out below why the ambiguity causes us little trouble in practice. If it does not cause much trouble, *should* we expect to find an unambiguous language? It seems likely that scope ambiguities are more irksome, yet would we expect to find a language that removed them? Further, it is not obvious to me that we *would* be surprised to find such an unambiguous language. I doubt that much can be built on our intuitions here.

The ambiguity causes little trouble in practice for the following reasons. First, most of the descriptions we use can be placed easily into one of two groups, "imperfect" and "perfect." Imperfect descriptions are ones that are unsuitable for attributive use because only someone with crazy beliefs would so use them: it is obvious that they do not denote. Perfect descriptions, on the other hand, are suitable for attributive use. They will almost always be complex, including a name or similar device; e.g., they will be of the form 'the *F* of *a*'. It is hard to denote otherwise. Second, when a description is used referentially, there is often an obvious candidate for being an object in mind, whereas when a description is used attributively there is often no such obvious candidate. Put these two reasons together and we can see why, for the vast majority of actual description tokens, it is obvious whether they are referential or attributive.

We would expect difficulty in two sorts of cases: (i) a perfect (or near perfect) description is used attributively where there is an obvious candidate for being an object the speaker has in mind; (ii) such a description is used referentially where there is no such candidate. In both these sorts of cases there are conversational practices that remove the difficulty.

Consider an example of (i). Suppose it is well known in a group that Tom suspects a certain person of Smith's murder. Tom's investigation of the crime has led him to the quite general belief, suspicions aside, that *whoever* murdered Smith must be insane. Should he wish to express this belief to the group there is an obligation on him not to say simply "Smith's murderer is insane," but something along the lines of "Smith's murderer, whoever he may be, is insane" or, better, "Whoever murdered Smith is insane." The first remark would be taken to "con conversationally imply" that he was talking about his suspect in particular, i.e., using the description referentially.

Consider next an example of (ii). Suppose that, unbeknownst to a group, Tom has a suspect for Smith's murder with the name of 'Jones'. Tom is aware that there is speculation in the group that whoever murdered Smith is insane. Tom's observations of Jones and the murder scene have led him to the belief that Jones is insane. Should he wish to express this belief to the group, there is once again an

obligation on him not to say simply, "Smith's murderer is insane," but something along the lines of, "The man I suspect of Smith's murder is insane." The first remark would be taken to "conversationally imply" that he was talking of whoever murdered Smith, i.e., using the description attributively.

In sum, for most descriptions in most contexts there is no danger of confusing referential and attributive uses. Where there is danger there are conversational practices to prevent confusion.

8. KRIPKE ARGUMENT IV: ANAPHORA

Consider the following dialogue:

A. "Her husband is kind to her."

B. "No he isn't. The man you're referring to isn't her husband."

Now, according to Donnellan, A's use of 'her husband' is referential, referring, if at all (see section 5 above), to the lover. Kripke claims that B's use of 'he' is anaphoric, depending for its reference on 'her husband'. Yet 'he' clearly refers to the husband. So 'her husband' must refer to the husband too; Donnellan is wrong (p. 21).

Kripke suggests one way out which he goes on to dismiss straightaway:

it might be suggested that B uses 'he' as a pronoun of laziness for A's 'her husband', taken in the supposed referential sense. This move seems to be excluded, since B may well be in no position to use 'her husband' referentially. He may merely have heard that she is married to a cruel man (p. 27, note 34).

However, there is a further possibility which Kripke does not consider: that B's use of 'he' might be a pronoun of laziness for 'her husband' taken attributively, even though A's use of 'her husband' is referential. If this is possible, then of course Donnellan can explain the dialogue.

I know of no reason for denying this possibility out of hand. However it is hard to be confident it should be accepted. We need to know more about pronouns in general to be confident; we need to know more about anaphora and more about how much laziness is generally acceptable. Meanwhile I think it must be allowed that Kripke has pointed to something that may be an anomaly for Donnellan's account.

CONCLUSION

Aside from this possible anomaly, I have found nothing in Kripke's paper that should cast doubt on the semantic significance of Donnellan's distinction. I have indicated that Donnellan's distinction fits into a general theory of singular terms, a theory that has a place for Gricean distinctions of the sort Kripke thinks important. This is not the place to attempt to show that this theory can accommodate a wide range of phenomena, but I do claim that it can. An advantage of the theory's emphasis on causal chains grounded in objects is that it promises an answer to the old question, "How is language linked to the world?"

Notes

1. A draft of this paper was delivered at the University of Melbourne in July 1980. I am grateful for the comments it generated on that occasion and also indebted to David Armstrong, Keith Campbell, Greg Curry, and Kim Sterelny.
2. I was insensitive to this equivocation in my 1974 paper (pp. 190-96). So Bertolet is quite right to criticize that paper's interpretation of Donnellan (Bertolet, 1980, pp. 281-83).
3. All page reference to Kripke are to this 1979 paper.
4. So I think Searle has some intuitive support for his claim that cases like this should be seen as cases of indirect speech acts (1979, pp. 194-95). However, his treatment of such cases does not conform to this view. He thinks there is one "referential aspect" other than the one that the speaker employed (e.g., in this case *that man* and not *Jones*), which the speaker would fall back on, which he meant, and which determines the truth conditions of his statement (pp. 195-97). So the speaker does not mean something *more than*, but something *different from*, what he says.
5. Similar criticisms apply to Searle's similar claims about speaker meaning (1979, pp. 194-97).
6. The theory in this and the next two sections, part of a "causal" theory of names and other related terms, is set out in more detail in my recent book (1981a, particularly secs. 2.5-2.7, 5.4). An inadequate and partly mistaken version of the theory is to be found in my 1974 article. I have preferred the term 'designational' to Donnellan's 'referential' in these other writings.
7. Finding a suitable term for these descriptions is difficult. I prefer the term 'imperfect' to Kripke's 'improper' because such a definite description does not describe its referent perfectly, whereas there is nothing in the least improper about its use (or so I shall argue). 'Indefinite definite description' is infelicitous to say the least, and 'indefinite description' is reserved for the likes of 'a table'. We should be reluctant to call on 'incomplete' to help us out because of the role given it by Frege.
8. Note that (2) grounds 'Jones' in Smith (section 3) and so could be the start of a *new* convention (though it is unlikely it would be in this case); it could be the start of a reference change (Devitt, 1981a, sec. 5.4).
9. This assumption goes against what Searle (and doubtless many others) sees as a "crucial feature" of Donnellan's distinction (1979, p. 190). I do not think the feature is crucial, but if it is we must simply conclude that what I am here contemplating is the dropping of Donnellan's distinction in favor of a closely related one. I shall continue to write as if the feature were not crucial.

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