

The Pragmatic Fallacy

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THE PRAGMATIC FALLACY*

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I present here a contribution to the continuing debate over the alleged semantic significance of Keith Donnellan's referential-attributive distinction, especially in connection with so-called incomplete definite descriptions, i.e., improper definite descriptions like 'the table' that, on a given occasion of use, refer to a specific object underspecified by the description itself. My broader purpose, however, is to highlight a fallacious form of reasoning that has led many a language theorist to erroneous conclusions.

I

First the background to the particular issue under dispute: Jones, acting alone, killed Smith in cold blood. A few of the townsfolk rightly suspected Jones of the crime, but most erroneously suspected Johnson. A few even began referring to the unfortunate Johnson behind his back as 'Smith's murderer', or sometimes simply as 'the murderer'. Keith Donnellan was understood to offer the following hypothesis:¹

Whereas the description 'Smith's murderer' may refer with respect to a context in which the speaker uses the description *attributively* (without the specific intention to refer to some particular individual, believing that individual to be Smith's lone killer) to whomever acted alone in murdering Smith, the same description refers with respect to a context in which the speaker uses the description *referentially* (intending to refer specifically to a particular individual that the speaker has in mind, believing that individual to be Smith's lone killer) to the individual the speaker intends — even if that individual did not kill Smith.

While the police scratched their heads, other philosophers objected that it is implausible to regard the phrase 'Smith's murderer' as referring to someone who did not actually kill Smith. It is far more plausible, they argued, to suppose that the phrase refers to ("denotes,"

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“designates,” etc.) whoever murdered Smith, even as used by a speaker who intends someone else.² Saul Kripke supported this intuition by distinguishing between *speaker’s reference* and *semantic reference*. The first is whomever or whatever the speaker refers to, or intends to refer to, assuming the speaker has some particular person or thing in mind. The second is whomever or whatever the speaker’s words refer to as a matter of the semantic rules governing the language, irrespective of whomever or whatever the speaker has in mind.³ Donnellan presented a compelling case that speakers can use ‘Smith’s murderer’ to refer to someone who did not actually kill Smith, but, Kripke argued, this pragmatic phenomenon does not refute the semantically natural thesis that the words ‘Smith’s murderer’ semantically refer to Smith’s actual killer. The very same phenomena of misdescription and misinformed speaker’s reference would arise regardless of the words’ semantic reference (and indeed, even if Russell’s theory is correct and such phrases are not semantic units at all, and hence do not have semantic reference).⁴

Kripke demurred, however, when it came to incomplete descriptions. Donnellan had objected to the idea that the context supplies implicit descriptive content to complete an “incomplete” description, arguing that, whereas this seems plausible with respect to attributive uses, it is much less so with respect to descriptions that fit a great many individuals. Such incomplete descriptions, Donnellan pointed out, are commonly used referentially:

Asked to make his description more precise, [the speaker] 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? 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 (“Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again” *The Philosophical Review*, 77 (1968), pp. 203–215, at p. 204*n*).

In a similar spirit Kripke (*op. cit.*, pp. 6–7, 22) suggested that an incomplete description might be assimilated to the corresponding demonstrative phrase (‘that table’). Subsequently, Michael Devitt, Howard Wettstein, and others argued that the assimilation of incom-

plete descriptions to demonstratives is correct.⁵ Although Wettstein does not share Donnellan's view that a description refers with respect to a referential-use context to the intended individual even when the description does not fit that individual (*op. cit.*, p. 255n9), he argued that one can maintain that the referential-attributive distinction is semantically significant without maintaining this controversial aspect of Donnellan's view. Even if the literal referent is always answerable to the description, on Wettstein's view it remains that whenever an incomplete definite description is used referentially the proposition expressed will not incorporate the descriptive content (what little there is) of the description.

Suppose Brown, who rightly suspects Jones, utters the sentence

S: The murderer is insane,

using the incomplete description 'the murderer' referentially to refer to Jones. Let us call the context of Brown's utterance 'C'. Then the following is an instance of the *semantic ambiguity hypothesis*:⁶

With respect to any context in which the speaker uses the description 'the murderer' attributively, sentence *S* expresses as its semantic content some proposition to the effect that the such-and-such murderer is insane, where supposedly one murderer and no one else is a such-and-such murderer. With respect to any context in which the speaker instead uses the description referentially to refer to the individual who in fact murdered Smith, the sentence expresses the singular proposition about Smith's murderer that *he* or *she* is insane.

The critical component of this claim is an instance of what I call the *thesis of the semantic significance of the referential use*:

ST: Sentence *S* expresses the singular proposition about Jones that he is insane as its semantic content with respect to Brown's context *C*.

Wettstein argued in favor of thesis *ST*; I argued against it.

II

Wettstein's central argument for *ST* is the following:

PI: For any proposition to the effect that the such-and-such murderer is insane, where Jones and no one else is a such-

and-such murderer, there are other such propositions that accord equally well with Brown's intentions in uttering *S* in *C*, and none of these is precisely intended as such, to the exclusion of the others, by Brown in his utterance.

P2: In uttering *S* in *C*, Brown does not assert each of, or somehow indeterminately assert any one of, a loose cluster of propositions; he determinately asserts one single proposition making reference to Jones and attributing insanity to him.

Therefore,

C1: In uttering *S* in *C*, Brown does not assert any proposition to the effect that the such-and-such murderer is insane.

Therefore,

C2: In uttering *S* in *C*, Brown asserts the singular proposition about Jones that he is insane.

Perhaps there are additional, tacit premises. In any event, the argument need not be regarded as deductive.

My own view is that the sub-conclusion *C1* of this argument is straightforwardly false.⁷ While premise *P1* is true by hypothesis, I maintain that the second conjunct of *P2* is false. My criticism of the argument for *C2*, however, was not that it relies on a false premise. It was that, taken as an argument for *ST*, it is simply a *non sequitur*. I also maintain that the main conclusion *C2* is straightforwardly true (even though the argument for it from *C1* is unsound). Still *ST* does not follow. To think otherwise is to equate *C2* with *ST*, or to assimilate *C2* with *ST*, or at least, to make an implicit inference from *C2* to *ST*. This move is based on a confusion between what I call *speaker assertion* and *semantic content*.

In his reply to my criticism, Wettstein protests that his argument focuses on speaker assertion to the exclusion of semantic content.⁸ Yet even in his restatement of his argument, Wettstein says that "speakers often manage to assert *truths* despite the fact that the descriptions they utter fail to uniquely denote [in Russell's sense]." He asks "How then does the speaker refer and assert a determinate proposition?" and "How are we to account for the fact that in such

cases determinate references are made and determinate propositions asserted?" (p. 189). His answer, in the case of Brown: "what was asserted was that *that one, Jones, is insane*, a singular proposition" (p. 190). Thus even in Wettstein's response, the argument is aimed at *C2*. Moreover, Wettstein's reconstruction of my criticism (p. 193) is stated entirely in terms of 'convey', rather than 'assert', despite my explicit objection that the notion of speaker *assertion* is irrelevant. All of this suggests that Westtstein was so firmly convinced of the obvious legitimacy of inferring semantic content from speaker assertion that he misunderstood me to be objecting instead that *C2* does not follow from

C2': In uttering *S* in *C*, Brown conveys the singular proposition about Jones that he is insane⁹

My criticism that *ST* does not follow from *C2* targets a different fallacy, that of inferring semantic content from speaker assertion. Roughly speaking, someone's uttering a sentence (in appropriate circumstances) whose semantic content (with respect to the context of utterance) is *p* typically entails the speaker's asserting *p*, but not *vice-versa*. Likewise, asserting *p* typically entails conveying *p*, but not *vice-versa*.

Wettstein objects (*op. cit.*, p. 195n12) that my distinction between speaker assertion and semantic content "rides roughshod" over H. P. Grice's distinction between saying and implicating. I must emphasize, therefore, that I am entirely sympathetic to Grice's distinction. I am drawing a different distinction, between two different notions. The Gricean terminology for his distinction between "saying" and "implicating" or "meaning" is to some extent technical — as Grice himself would doubtless have conceded, or even have insisted. He writes: "In the sense in which I am using the word 'say', I intend what someone has said to be closely related to the conventional meanings of the words (the sentence) which he has uttered" ("Logic and Conversation," in D. Davidson and G. Harman, eds., *The Logic of Grammar*, Encino, Ca.: Diskenson, 1975, pp. 64–75, at p. 66). One may choose to use the words 'say' or 'assert' (we here use the two interchangeably) roughly in the sense of the phrase 'utter some expression that has as its literal semantic content, in the speaker's context, . . . This is a

perfectly acceptable use of these words, and it may be one on which the inference from *C2* to *ST* is valid — by the very definition of ‘assert’. We might call this *literally saying*, or (following Bishop Joseph Butler) saying or asserting *in the strict and philosophical sense*. If so, then this use of ‘say’ and ‘assert’ has no claim to correspond exactly with the use of ‘say’ or ‘assert’ in English — with saying *in the loose and popular sense*. My distinction between speaker assertion and semantic content is concerned entirely with saying in the latter sense — the concept expressed in ordinary English by ‘say’ or ‘assert’, in their use to give not the actual words used by a speaker (what in the Fregean tradition is called *direct discourse*) nor even the semantic content of those words, but the — or I should say *a* — content of the speaker’s speech act.¹⁰

Nor is it my view that English speakers use the words ‘say’ and ‘assert’ in a very wide sense that covers both literally saying and “implicating” in Grice’s technical sense. (I suspect that the English words ‘say’ and ‘assert’ are somewhat narrower than that, yet rather wider than Grice’s special use.) It is my considered view that, as ‘say’ and ‘assert’ are used in English, for any individual *x*, if *x* is the such-and-such and someone utters a sentence whose semantic content is that the such-and-such is thus-and-so, then it is typically correct to report the speaker as having said (asserted) that *x* is thus-and-so. This is not because we often use ‘say’ when we mean *implicate*, in Grice’s sense; it is because it is typically correct to report the speaker as having said *of* the such-and-such that it (he, she) is thus-and-so — even when the description was used attributively — and on my view, saying of *x*, *de re*, that it is thus-and-so just *is* asserting the singular proposition that *x* is thus-and-so.¹¹ In the case at hand, it certainly would seem to be allowable in English to report Brown as having said of Jones that he is insane. To use the contemporary jargon, a version of *latitudinarianism* with regard to exportation seems to be correct for assertion, even if latitudinarianism for belief and other propositional attitudes has been fairly thoroughly refuted (by the shortest spy, et al.)¹²

In any event *C2*, taken in its usual sense in English, does not logically entail *ST*. Indeed, I believe *C2* is true and *ST* false. Conversely, if ‘assert’ is used in a special sense according to which the

inference from *C2* to *ST* is trivially valid (Wettstein says that he is so using the term), it is also used in a sense according to which the prior sub-conclusion *C1* (on which *C2* is based) means, in effect, that sentence *S* does not express, as its literal semantic content with respect to *C*, any proposition to the effect that the such-and-such murderer is insane. This conclusion certainly does not follow from *P1* and *P2*, construing 'assert' so that the latter premise is true. The inference presupposes that where one's explicit words in a given utterance are incomplete, the semantic content of the sentence uttered is strongly governed by one's intentions, to the peculiar extent that in order for such a sentence to contain, unambiguously, the descriptive proposition that the such-and-such is thus-and-so, the speaker must consciously intend precisely that proposition to the exclusion of all others, even though such finely discriminating intentions are not required in order for the sentence to contain unambiguously the singular proposition *about* the such-and-such that *it* (he or she) is thus-and-so. Why should discriminating intentions be required in one case but not the other? I submit that *C2* derives whatever plausibility it may have from the ordinary sense of 'assert', or perhaps from equivocation between two (or more?) senses.

With 'assert' construed in Wettstein's strict sense, his conclusions *C1* and *C2* are at best highly suspect. Everyone is accustomed to using determiners like 'any', 'every', 'some', 'no', 'few', etc., with a restricted domain (just as the word 'everyone' is used in this very sentence). No one would argue that general or quantified propositions disappear as a result of the restrictions. The sentence 'Everyone is here' may express the proposition that everyone among *K* is here, where '*K*' refers to a relevantly restricted class of persons. (Notice that the class *K* itself would thus emerge as a constituent of the proposition expressed, so that the proposition, though "general" — that is to say quantificational — would be singular with respect to *K*.) Or it may express the proposition that everyone who generally attends this seminar is here, or that everyone who is supposed to be here is here, etc. It certainly does not express a conjunctive singular proposition lacking all semblance of quantification (*Tom is here and Dick is here and Harry is here and . . .*). The incomplete sentence contains a general proposition even if the speaker — and even if we — are unable

to decide among various candidate quantificational propositions. We should require extremely compelling evidence before we conclude that ‘the’ is not also used with suppressed or tacit restrictions. With respect to Brown’s context *C*, *S* may express the proposition that the murderer among *K* is insane, where ‘*K*’ directly refers to a highly restricted domain of salient individuals. (See note 7 above.) It does not seem to express, as its literal semantic content, a singular proposition completely lacking the generality contributed by the operator ‘the’.

It is ironic that Wettstein should cite Grice’s distinction between literally saying and merely implicating in defense of his version of Donnellan’s view that referential use of a definite description has semantic ramifications. Grice himself opposed the semantic-significance thesis (as Wettstein notes in his earlier discussion); in fact, he invoked his distinction in opposing the thesis. Brown did say of Jones in the loose and popular sense of ‘say’ that he is insane. In that sense, then, Jones is someone whom Brown said is insane. In the strict and philosophical sense, however, Jones is not someone Brown said is insane; Brown did not “say,” in that sense, that he is insane. Nor did Brown literally say that *Jones* is insane. What Brown literally said was that *the murderer* is insane.

Grice’s opposition to the semantic-significance thesis extended to cases involving incomplete definite descriptions.¹³ Discussing a case in which a referentially used description misdescribed the intended referent, he wrote:

If in [such a] case the speaker has used a descriptive phrase . . . which in fact has no application, then what the speaker has *said* will, strictly speaking, be false; the truth-conditions for a [statement involving a referential use of a definite description], no less than for [one involving an attributive use], can be thought of as being given by a Russellian account of definite descriptions (with suitable provision for unexpressed restrictions, to cover cases in which, for example, someone uses the phrase “the table” meaning thereby “the table in this room”). But though what, in such a case, a speaker has *said* may be false, what he *meant* may be true . . . (“Vacuous Names,” p. 142).

If what the speaker said in such a case is automatically false because nothing fits the description when it is taken literally — even allowing for suppressed or tacit restrictions — then the speaker did not assert the relevant singular proposition. To repeat, Grice is here using ‘say’ in a technical and artificially strict sense. He need not deny that in the

ordinary, everyday sense, the speaker not only meant (i.e. implicated), but even said, something true of the intended referent.

III

Wettstein's apparent inference of *ST* from *C2* may be seen as a special case of the following inference pattern:

Speaker *a*, in using expression *e* in context *c*, expresses concept κ .

Therefore, *e* expresses κ as its semantic content with respect to *c*.

The inference from what the speaker expresses to what his or her words express (as their semantic content) is closely related to the two following extensional variations on the theme:

Speaker *a*, in using expression *e* in context *c*, refers to β .

Therefore, *e* semantically refers to (designates, denotes, stands for) β , with respect to *c*.

Speaker *a*, in using sentence *S* in context *c*, is correct (speaks the truth, says something true).

Therefore, *S* is semantically true with respect to *c*.

The general pattern exhibited in these inferences is invalid. I call it *the Pragmatic Fallacy*.¹⁴ The Pragmatic Fallacy embodies the idea that 'if the use of a particular expression fulfills a certain illocutionary purpose of the speaker's, then that purpose must also characterize the expression's semantic function with respect to the speaker's context. The purpose fulfilled by the use of an expression, of course, often indicates the expression's semantic function, but not invariably so. One should proceed with special caution in inferring purely semantic attributes from such illocutionary acts as asserting that such-and-such or making reference to so-and-so. Despite the efforts of Grice and others to guard us against various instances of the Pragmatic Fallacy, it remains pervasive in contemporary discussions in the theory of reference and meaning.'¹⁵

IV

I also proposed independent evidence, from possible-world semantics, against *ST*. If *ST* were true, then ‘the murderer’ would have to be a rigid designator (with respect to *C*). It would refer to Jones with respect to any possible world whatsoever (in which Jones exists) — even a world in which (Jones exists but) there are no murders. This, I submit, is every bit as counter-intuitive as Donnellan’s controversial view, which even Wettstein does not share, that the complete description ‘Smith’s murderer’ refers to poor Johnson with respect to contexts in which the speaker uses this description referentially with Johnson in mind.

Indeed, my point is precisely a modal-semantic extension of the original objection to Donnellan’s hypothesis that the semantic referent of a referentially used description is not answerable to the description — an objection that Wettstein attempts to accommodate in his effort to revive a semantically significant referential-attributive distinction. Whereas Wettstein is correct that Donnellan’s controversial hypothesis is not essential to the very idea of a semantically significant referential use, a modal variant of the hypothesis is virtually a consequence of the semantic-significance thesis. One cannot defend the semantic-significance thesis while fully accommodating the widely shared semantic intuition, which Wettstein evidently shares, that “the such-and-such” never refers to (denotes, designates) something that is not a such-and-such.¹⁶

Wettstein’s reply to this criticism (pp. 191–193) seems to betray a misunderstanding — or perhaps a deep mistrust — of the enterprise of possible-world semantics. I do not see how it can be a mistake to talk about the reference (denotation, designation, etc.) of a singular term *with respect to* a possible world, any more than it can be a mistake to talk about the truth value of a sentence with respect to a possible world, etc.¹⁷ But the argument can be made without doing so.

Consider the following, less formal formulation of the objection: Suppose that the police have been discussing various scenarios concerning Smith’s murder. On one of these scenarios, Johnson is perfectly sane and murdered Smith in cold blood while Jones is insane and had no part in the murder. In discussing this contrary-to-fact scenario, they say things like “Johnson committed the murder. The

murderer then washed his hands and returned to his desk at work. The murderer seemed perfectly sane to his co-workers," etc. Brown overhears some of the discussion — enough to realize that a potentially contrary-to-fact scenario is under discussion but not enough to know who was stipulated to be the murderer and whether he was stipulated to be sane or not. On the basis of some of the remarks made, Brown surmises, erroneously, that they are discussing a scenario on which Jones is both the murderer and insane. (For whatever it is worth, recall that in reality, Jones is the actual murderer.) Brown bursts into the discussion uttering sentence *S*, intended as a contribution to the discussion of the scenario in question. The semantic-significance thesis has the consequence that, in discourse about this Johnson-guilty scenario, the phrase 'the murderer' refers, with respect to Brown's context *C*, to Jones even though Jones is not a murderer on that scenario. But this is clearly wrong, and it goes against the very sorts of intuitions that Wettstein attempts to accommodate. In discourse about the Johnson-guilty scenario, 'the murderer' refers to Johnson, not Jones. The mere fact that the same phrase correctly applies to Jones in ordinary discourse about reality is completely irrelevant. Equally irrelevant is the fact that Brown intends Jones by his use of the phrase. Even if there is some sense in which Brown, in his state of partial ignorance, asserted something true about the scenario under discussion, and in so doing referred to Jones, the sentence he used makes no reference to Jones, and is clearly false, taken as a contribution to the operative discourse.

Wettstein's stance might indicate a more general skepticism, perhaps a global rejection of all extensional formal semantics *a la* Tarski. The main idea may be something like the following (associated with Strawson and his followers): Singular terms do not refer; speakers *use* singular terms to refer. This is compatible with Wettstein's endorsement of *C2*. But it is difficult to understand how *ST* can be maintained if the phrase 'the murderer' is held not to refer to Jones with respect to *C*. It would be far more natural to follow this skeptical idea all the way and claim that *S* itself does not express any proposition with respect *C* as its semantic content; Brown *uses* *S* to make a statement. (Brown does so use *S*.) This would be to concede that *ST* is false.

A blanket rejection of extensional formal semantics is a radical

stance; Wettstein's arguments do not support such global semantic skepticism. Reasoning in accordance with the Pragmatic Fallacy is very often an indication of a misunderstanding concerning the nature of semantics generally, and especially concerning the contrast between pragmatics and matters that are properly semantic. It is no trivial task to set out criteria that differentiate semantics proper from pragmatics, and in the case of natural languages especially there are doubtless important connections between the two, but this should not blind us to the distinction.¹⁸

NOTES

* The present paper is based to some extent on letters written in 1988 to William K. Blackburn concerning his article "Wettstein on Definite Descriptions," *Philosophical Studies* 53 (1988), pp. 263–278.

¹ "Reference and Definite Descriptions," *The Philosophical Review* 75, 3 (1966), pp. 281–304.

² Cf. for example, H. P. Grice, "Vacuous Names," in D. Davidson and J. Hintikka, eds., *Words and Objections: Essays on the Work of W. V. Quine* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969), pp. 118–145, at p. 141–143; Michael Lockwood, "On Predicating Proper Names," *The Philosophical Review*, 84 (1975), pp. 471–498, at p. 485n21; David Wiggins, "Identity, Designation, Essentialism, and Physicalism," *Philosophia*, 5 (1975), pp. 1–30, at p. 28n9; R. M. Sainsbury, *Russell* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 126–133; and John Searle, "Referential and Attributive," *Monist*, 62 (1979) pp. 190–208.

³ When words are used by a speaker to a certain pragmatic end (e.g., to refer to something in particular), there may be an indirect nonsemantic relation that obtains between the words used and some (typically nonlinguistic) entity or entities — for example, the relation between expressions and objects of *being used by the speaker to refer to*. It would be incorrect to count the resulting feature of the words themselves as semantic rather than pragmatic.

⁴ "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference," in P. French, T. Uehling, and H. Wettstein, eds., *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp. 6–27.

⁵ Michael Devitt, "Donnellan's Distinction," in P. French, T. Uehling, and H. Wettstein, eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy VI: The Foundations of Analytic Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 511–524; Howard Wettstein, "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions," *Philosophical Studies*, 40 (1981), pp. 241–257.

Curiously, nearly every discussion since Russell's fails to take note of the fact that at the beginning of his discussion of 'the' in "On Denoting," Russell explicitly considers the case of incomplete definite descriptions and proposes an account for them other than (and perhaps even incompatible with) the ellipsis account often attributed to him. He suggests that an incomplete definite description "the such-and-such," where there is obviously more than one such-and-such in the world, is to be analyzed as a (complete) indefinite description "a such-and-such." Although this theory is not at all easy to disprove, it suffers from a defect that Russell in the same work attributed to Frege's rival account of 'the son of So-and-so' when So-and-so has

a fine family of ten: "This procedure, though it may not lead to actual logical error, is plainly artificial, and does not give an exact analysis of the matter."

⁶ As in "Assertion and Incomplete Definite Descriptions," in *Philosophical Studies*, 42 (1982), pp. 37–45, I here use the phrase 'semantic ambiguity' in an artificially broad sense, to cover both ordinary ambiguity and the distinct phenomenon of *indexicality*, in which the semantic content of an expression varies with context even when there is univocality of semantic meaning. I also use the term 'context' to cover not only those parameters with respect to which the content of an indexical expression may vary, but also those features of an utterance of an ambiguous sentence that serve to disambiguate, making only one reading operative. Francois Recanati, in "Referential/Attributive: A Contextualist Proposal," *Philosophical Studies*, 56 (1989), pp. 217–249, at 224–225 and *passim*, proposes that definite descriptions are properly seen as indexical, rather than strictly ambiguous, with their content in a given context depending on whether the phrase is used referentially or attributively. But this is almost certainly exactly what Donnellan proffered in his original discussion, which explicitly denies that descriptions are semantically ambiguous (*op. cit.*, p. 297). Donnellan's notion of *pragmatic ambiguity* (*ibid.*) has puzzled a number of philosophers. Cf. Kripke, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–13; John Searle, *op. cit.*, at p. 208n6; and Stephen Neale, *Descriptions* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), at pp. 104n7, 110–112n36. One natural construal of the notion, however, simply identifies it with indexicality (or perhaps with a special kind of indexicality).

⁷ In "Assertion and Incomplete Definite Descriptions," I suggested (p. 42) that Brown asserts the proposition that the murderer relevant to certain interests, or to a certain situation, is insane. Cf. my *Reference and Essence* (Princeton University Press, 1981), at p. 18n16. Another possibility, which I now favor, is the proposition that the murderer among *K* is insane, where '*K*' is a plural term (like 'them') directly referring to the members of the domain over which quantifiers (or quantifier-like operators such as 'everyone') range — or what comes (for most purposes) to the same thing, where '*K*' is a singular term referring to the domain in question.

⁸ "The Semantic Significance of the Referential-Attributive Distinction," *Philosophical Studies*, 44 (1983), pp. 187–196. The claim is made at p. 196n14.

⁹ Cf. also Wettstein, *op. cit.*, p. 195n12. I believe that Blackburn, *op. cit.*, pp. 277–278n1, and in correspondence, may be subject to the same, or similar, confusion.

¹⁰ In fact, it is not in the least clear that Grice's use of 'say' is as artificially strict as Wettstein's understanding of it. Grice amplifies his explanation of his special use of 'say' with the following remark: "This brief indication of my use of 'say' leaves it open whether a man who says (today) [i.e. in 1975] "Harold Wilson is a great man" and another who says (also today) "The British Prime Minister is a great man" would, if each knew that the two singular terms had the same reference, have said the same thing" (*loc. cit.*) If each knew that 'the British Prime Minister' (or better: 'the present Prime Minister of Great Britain') referred with respect to 1975 to Harold Wilson, then the description was (likely) used referentially rather than attributively. Although the semantic content ("conventional meaning") of 'The British Prime Minister is a great man' is evidently very different from that of 'Harold Wilson is a great man', Grice's use of 'say' (in 1975) evidently does not preclude the possibility that the man who used the former sentence nevertheless said (asserted the proposition) that Harold Wilson is a great man.

¹¹ I invoke the qualifier 'typically' because of certain cases in which we apparently would not report one's assertion in the manner described, e.g. if someone utters a sentence of the form 'The such-and-such is the such-and-such'. Cf. Searle, *op. cit.*, at p. 207.

¹² The matter remains highly controversial. Cf. my *Frege's Puzzle* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press/Bradford Books, 1986), at pp. 179–180n19, and "How to Measure the

Standard Metre," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, 88 (1987/1988), pp. 193–217, especially at p. 199n8. Some sort of latitudinarianism with regard to *de re* assertion has the bonus feature that the otherwise puzzling phenomenon that Kaplan calls the *pseudo de re* is fully explicable. Kaplan's example (from his "Demonstratives," in J. Almog, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein, eds., *Themes from Kaplan* (Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 481–563, at p. 555n71) is the following angry report of John's claim when he utters the words 'The man I sent to you yesterday is honest': *John says that the lying S.O.B. who took my car is honest*. Kaplan evidently believes that such reports are straightforwardly false, and that they pose no theoretically interesting issues. By contrast, Wettstein argues ("Has Semantics Rested on a Mistake?" *Journal of Philosophy*, 83, 4 (April 1986), pp. 185–209, at pp. 205–208) from the phenomenon of the *pseudo de re* to the dramatic conclusion that propositional-attitude predicates of the form ' ∇ 's that S ' (e.g., 'believes that Smith's murderer is insane') do not attribute the attitude expressed by the attitude verb V to the proposition content of the complement sentence S . Far more plausible than either of Kaplan's or Wettstein's diametrically opposed conclusions is the view, strongly supported by ordinary assertion reports, that the so-called *pseudo de re* is not *pseudo* at all; it is genuine *de re*. (Kaplan sketches an argument that *psuedo de re* substitutions license completely unacceptable assertion reports. But the argument assumes that such assertion reports are *de dicto*, so that the substitutions are made within the scope of a nonextensional phrase ' ∇ a says that!'.) The speaker in Kaplan's example is evidently reporting, correctly, that John says *of* the lying S.O.B. in question that he is honest.

¹³ And even when he evidently used the word 'say' in Wettstein's artificially narrow sense on which Brown did not "say" (but merely implicated) of Jones that he is insane (so that C_2 , so understood, is false). See not 10 above.

¹⁴ This is evidently not exactly the same fallacy that Wettstein calls by the same name (in "The Semantic Significance of the Referential-Attributive Distinction," at p. 194).

¹⁵ One classic example is Charles Chastain, "Reference and Context," in K. Gunderson, ed., *Language, Mind, and Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), pp. 194–269. Although I cannot argue the case here, I would cite as two recent examples in which erroneous, or at least highly suspect, conclusions seem to be supported through some form or other of the Pragmatic Fallacy: David Kaplan's intriguing (and in other respects insightful) discussion of Donnellan's example of 'the man drinking champagne', in Kaplan's "Afterthoughts," to his "Demonstratives," *op. cit.* at pp. 583–584; and Mark Crimmins's and John Perry's motivating remarks for the theory proffered in their "The Prince and the Phone Booth: Reporting Puzzling Beliefs," *Journal of Philosophy*, 86, 12 (December 1989): pp. 685–711.

¹⁶ Neale says (*op. cit.*, at pp. 92–93) that he is sympathetic to my modal argument against Wettstein's defense of the thesis of semantic significance, but doubts that the principal premise — that sentence S , as used by Brown in context C , is not true with respect to a possible world in which no murderer is insane (say, because there are no murders) — will be accepted by an advocate of the thesis it aims to debunk. This is very likely correct, but it is a feature shared by most philosophical arguments against controversial doctrines. The point here is that Wettstein concedes that "the such-and-such" never semantically refers to something that is not a such-and-such; but it is this very intuition that defeats the semantic-significance thesis.

¹⁷ A parallel argument can be made using time in place of modality. Unlike the name 'Jones', the phrase 'the murderer', even when used referentially, does not semantically refer to Jones, or to anyone else, with respect to times before Jones committed murder. This is one respect in which incomplete definite descriptions differ also from most occurrences of pronouns, other than pronouns of laziness and perhaps so-called E-type anaphoric pronouns, which are not c-commanded by their antecedents. (When

Wettstein showed me the typescript of his reply, I informed him that, contrary to his claim on p. 192, I regard most pronoun occurrences as directly referential.)

¹⁸ Cf. *Frege's Puzzle*, pp. 12–13, 58–59, 78–79.

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