NON-DECLARATIVE SENTENCES
AND THE THEORY OF DESCRIPTIONS

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Abstract

This paper shows that Russell's theory of descriptions gives the wrong semantics for definite descriptions occurring in questions and imperatives. Depending on how that theory is applied, it either assigns nonsense to perfectly meaningful questions and assertions or it assigns meanings that diverge from the actual semantics of such sentences, even after all pragmatic and contextual variables are allowed for. Given that Russell's theory is wrong for questions and assertions, it must be wrong for assertoric statements; for the semantics of 'the phi' obviously doesn't vary depending on whether it occurs in a question or an assertion or a command.

This essay will attempt to discredit Russell's so-called 'theory of descriptions' by showing that it provides a faulty analysis of definite descriptions [1] occurring in non-declarative sentences—specifically, in questions and imperatives.

Let us refer to sentences containing *definite descriptions* as 'D-sentences'. And let us refer to assertions containing definite descriptions as 'D-assertions', to imperatives containing definite descriptions as 'D-imperatives', and so on. Russell's Theory of Descriptions purports to give the *semantics* of such sentences; i.e. it purports to give their *literal meanings*. The Theory of Descriptions is essentially this. Given a sentence of the form:

(i) '….the phi….' that sentence has its literal meaning
(ii) *There is exactly one object x having phi and…x…* or, more perspicuously,

(ii$_F$)[2] *For some x, x has phi and given any y, y has phi iff x=y and…x…* So, according to Russell's theory, the sentence

(iii) 'The king of France is bald' has as its literal meaning the proposition

(iv) *There is exactly one king of France and that person is bald.* Or, more perspicuously,

(iv$_F$) *For some x, x is a king of France and for any y, y=x iff y is a king of France, and x is bald.*

In this essay the distinction between sentences and propositions will be important. Given this, I should make a point that might seem trivial, but that will serve us well later on. (iv) is not a *sentence*: it is a *proposition.*[3] But uncontroversially

(v) 'There is exactly one king of France and that person is bald' is *a* sentence that has (iv) as its literal meaning. So Russell's theory, in effect, predicts that (iii) and (v) are synonymous sentences. Let us say that (v) is a 'Russellian paraphrase' of (iii). So the term 'Russellian paraphrase' will be used to refer to *sentences*, not to propositions. (iv) is not a Russellian paraphrase of (iii)—for (iv) is a proposition, not a sentence. (v) is not the only Russellian paraphrase of (iii). Indeed,

(v$_F$) 'For some x, x is a king of France and for any y, y=x iff y is a king of France, and x is bald' is a more perspicuous paraphrase of (iii) than is (v), i.e. (v$_F$) presumably gives a more fine-grained representation of the proposition that, if Russell's theory is correct, is the literal meaning of (iii). The distinction between (v) and (v$_F$)—between, in general, the more and the less formal ways of paraphrasing D-sentences—will play an important part in our inquiry: and that is why I am making such heavy weather of this seemingly trivial distinction.

Though Russell's theory is not as popular as it used to be, it still has no shortage of distinguished proponents[4]; and the merits of this theory continue to be bitterly debated. But the debate is concerned almost

exclusively with the question whether D-*assertions* conform to Russell's theory: D-*questions* and *D-imperatives* are seldom discussed.[5]

In this paper I wish to show that Russell's theory does not give the semantics of D-questions and D-imperatives; more specifically, that it does not give the semantics of definite descriptions that occur in questions and imperatives. If this is correct, it follows, I submit, that Russell's theory does not give the semantics of definite descriptions occurring in *any* sentence. Why does this follow? Presumably the expression 'the king of France' has the same semantics in 'the king of France is going to the store' that it has in 'is the king of France going to the store?' and 'make the king of France go to the store'. So *if* indeed Russell's does not provide the semantics for 'the king of France' as it occurs in questions or imperatives containing that expression, then it seems unlikely that Russell's theory provides the semantics for that expression as it occurs in any sentential context.

I will give two arguments for my contention that Russell's theory doesn't provide the right semantics for definite descriptions occurring in questions and imperatives. First, when we look at the behavior of D-questions and D-imperatives—specifically, when we look at what is communicated (asked and ordered) by them—we find that *even after non-semantic factors have been taken into account* these sentences deviate from their Russellian counterparts.

Second, Russell's theory assigns nonsense to questions and imperatives that, quite obviously, make perfectly good sense.

First of all, we must note a fact about D-sentences generally. Whenever a definite description occurs within the scope of any kind of operator, Russell's theory recognizes *two* distinct paraphrases of it. Consider the sentence (Russell's own example):

(*) George IV wanted to know whether Scott was the author of Waverly.

This sentence (as Russell himself stated clearly) is given two different readings by the Theory of Descriptions:

(**) There is some x such that x uniquely wrote Waverly and George
    IV wanted to know whether x was Scott

and

(***) George IV wanted to know whether exactly one person x wrote
    Waverly and x was Scott.

   (**) gives the definite description 'wide-scope' and (***) gives it
'narrow' scope. All questions (and imperatives) containing definite de-
scriptions are capable of both narrow- and wide-scope readings.
   In general, whenever a definite description occurs within the scope
of an operator, the sentence is, according to Russell's theory, ambigu-
ous between 'wide-scope' and 'narrow-scope' readings.
   Given this, consider the question:

(i) Does your neighbor drink?

   As I just pointed out, there are two different Russellian paraphrases
of (i). The narrow-scope reading is:

(ii) Is it the case that you have exactly one neighbor and that he/she
    drinks?

Formally, it is:

(ii$_F$)[6] Is it the case that there is some x such that, for any y, y=x iff y is
    a neighbor of yours, and x drinks?

The wide-scope reading of (i) is (very informally):

(iii) You have exactly one neighbor: does that person drink?

Expressed (more) formally, (iii) becomes:

(iii$_F$) There is some x, such that given any y, y is a neighbor of yours iff
    y=x, and does x drink?

At this point, two questions must be asked. The first concerns
(iii$_F$): Does this sentence make any sense? Is it well-formed?
Uncontroversially, *(iii)* is well-formed. So it might seem that (iii$_F$) must
be well-formed and that, so far, Russell's theory is fairing perfectly well.
But this is not the case. For (iii) 'you have exactly one neighbor: does
that person drink?' is not *strictly* speaking the Russellian paraphrase of
(i) 'does your neighbor drink?' Rather, it is a kind of vernacular gloss of
the real Russellian paraphrase. (iii) captures the *macro*-features of the
wide-scope Russellian reading of (i). So, in that attenuated sense, it is
a wide-scope Russellian paraphrase (i). But (iii) is not a perspicuous
representation of the *micro*-structure of wide-scope Russellian reading
of (i). It is *(iii$_F$)* that perspicuously represents this microstructure.

So, granted that (iii) is well-formed, if indeed (iii$_F$) is *ill*-formed, this
would be a problem for Russell's theory: it would be a problem because
the sentence it paraphrases ('does your neighbor drink?') is obviously
well-formed: and with regard to any theory that regards a well-formed,
meaningful, sentence as synonymous with an ill-formed, and thus
meaningless sentence, any such theory is obviously false.

And (iii$_F$) *does* seem to be ill-formed: at the level of literal meaning,
it is *both* a question and an assertion. And it is by no means clear
whether a single sentence can, at the level of literal meaning, be both
of these things. Obviously a sentence that is *pragmatically* an impera-
tive may be *semantically* an assertion: 'I'd like a vodka tonic', when
spoken to a waiter, is semantically declarative and pragmatically im-
perative. And a sentence that is semantically a question can pragmati-
cally be an assertion. This is the case with rhetorical questions ('Is it so
wrong to have compassion for a foe?') But (iii$_F$) is in a completely dif-
ferent category. For (iii$_F$) is *semantically* both a question and an asser-
tion. I will argue (iii$_F$) is indeed ill-formed, the reason being that no
well-formed sentence can, at the level of literal meaning, be *both* a
question and an assertion.

Now *if* the wide-scope paraphrases of D-questions and D-
imperatives are indeed ill-formed, then Russell's theory is in trouble;

for if that is the case, then Russell's theory renders 'did the king of France go to the store' capable of a reading whereby it is synonymous with an *ill-formed* sentence. Now an *ill-formed* sentence is one that fails to semantically encode *any* proposition. So, of course, if a sentence S is synonymous with a sentence S' that is ill-formed, and that consequently does not encode *any* proposition, then S itself fails to encode any proposition, i.e. S itself is non-sensical. But 'did the king of France go the store?' seems very much *not* to be synonymous, on any legitimate disambiguation, with an ill-formed sentence; that question seems to be a significant and well-formed on any legitimate reading of it.

The second question is to be understood in terms of the first one. I pointed out that *if* Russell's theory makes D-questions and D-imperatives be ambiguous between well-formed propositions and nonsense, then Russell's theory is, to that extent, in quite a bit of trouble. But let us suppose, in deference to Russell's theory, that the wide-scope paraphrases of D-questions and D-imperatives *are* well-formed. Now supposing that they are well-formed, it is clear enough what propositions are to be associated with them. The wide-scope paraphrase of. 'did the king of France go to the store?' is 'for some x, given any y, y=x iff y is a king of France and did x go the store?' Now *supposing* that sentence to be well-formed, it is clear what proposition would be associated with it, namely: *someone is uniquely a king of France: did that person go to the store?* Of course, the narrow-scope paraphrase of 'did the king of France go to the store?' is (essentially) 'is it the case that there is exactly one person x that is a king of France and that went to the store?' So (assuming that Russellian wide-scope paraphrase of D-questions are well-formed) if Russell's theory is correct, then when one asks 'did the king of France go the store?' one is either asking (inter alia) whether there is exactly one king of France or one is asserting (inter alia) that there is exactly one king of France.

But it surely *seems* that when you ask someone 'does your neighbor drink' you are neither asking whether they have exactly one neighbor nor *asserting* that they have exactly one neighbor.

An exactly similar point applies to D-imperatives. The wide-scope of paraphrase of e.g. 'tell my maid to come on Tuesday' is 'for some x, given any y, y=x iff y is a maid of mind, and tell x to come on Tues-

day.' Now *supposing* that this sentence is well-formed, it is clear enough what proposition it encodes, namely: *there is someone who is uniquely my maid: tell that person to come on Tuesday.* Of course, the Russellian narrow-scope paraphrase is 'make it the case that I have exactly one maid x and that x come on Tuesday.' So if Russell's theory is correct when one says e.g. 'tell our maid to come on Tuesday' one is either *ordering* that one's objector make it the case that one has exactly one maid' or one is asserting that one has exactly one maid.

But it surely *seems* that when you say 'tell the maid to come on Tuesday' you are neither ordering your interlocutor to make it the case that you have exactly one maid, nor asserting that you have exactly one maid.

In section II, I will argue that, indeed, when one asks 'does your neighbor drink?' one is, at the level of literal meaning, neither asking whether one's auditor has exactly one neighbor nor *asserting* this; and that consequently Russell's theory doesn't capture the semantics of D-questions.

In section III, I will argue that, in fact, Russellian wide-scope readings of D-questions are *ill*-formed: they are semantic nonsense, even though the sentences they paraphrase are plainly not nonsense on any legitimate reading of them.

In section IV, I will show that everything so far said about D-questions applies to D-imperatives.

The argument set forth in this paper might be seen as having the form 'either P or not P': either the wide-scope paraphrases of D-questions and D-imperatives are well-formed or they are not. If they are well-formed, then Russell's theory is false (for, if well-formed, they encode the wrong propositions). If they are not well-formed, then Russell's theory is false (for, if ill-formed, they are, ambiguous between non-sense and significance, whereas the sentences they paraphrase are not correspondingly ambiguous). Therefore Russell's theory is false.

II

In this section, I will assume that Russellian wide-scope paraphrases of D-questions are well-formed and that, consequently, the wide-scope reading of 'does the king of France drink?' is *there is exactly one king of France: does he drink?* But I'd like to start by making a point about pragmatics that has to do with D-sentences generally, and not just with D-questions.

Consider the sentence

(i) John is searching for the fountain of youth.

From the standpoint of the Theory of Descriptions, this sentence is capable of both a wide-scope and a narrow-scope reading. The wide-scope reading is:

(ii) For some x, x is uniquely a fountain of youth, and John is searching for x.

The narrow-scope reading is a little harder to generate, but there can be no doubt that it is at least roughly this:

(iii) John believes that, for some x, x is a uniquely a fountain of youth, and John is trying to make it the case that, for any fountain of youth y, John find y.

Given this, consider the following sequence of sentences:

(a) "There is no fountain of youth. Therefore the proposition ***John is searching for the fountain of youth*** is false."

If the Theory of Descriptions is correct, the boldfaced part is ambiguous between a proposition that will make (a) express a valid argument and a proposition that will make (a) express an invalid argument. (If the boldfaced part is assigned (ii) as its meaning, the argument will be valid. If it is assigned (iii) as its meaning, the argument

will be invalid.) So, if Russell's theory is right, then (a) as a is *ambiguous* between a good argument and a bad argument.

But obviously (a) is unambiguously a *bad* argument. It is a paradigm case of a bad argument; no logic teacher would ever give it a passing grade. Its unambiguously bad nature becomes clear when it is contrasted with a sequence of sentences that is clearly ambiguous between good and bad[7] arguments.

(b) "Bob is a compulsive gambler. That is why **Bob cannot stop gambling**."

The boldfaced part is ambiguous between (c) *Bob cannot cease to gamble* and (d) *Bob cannot prevent people in general from gambling.* Someone reading (b) would inevitably assign meaning (c) to the boldfaced part: for (b) makes a lot of sense if read in this way. And one would not assign meaning (d) to the boldfaced part: for (b) makes little sense if read in *this* way. Basically, when someone competent is confronted with a sentence S that is ambiguous between two propositions, one of which does the fit the context while the other does not, one strongly tends to give S the reading that will make it best fit the context.

To take another example, suppose someone says:

(e) "**Visiting relatives can be a nuisance**.[8] That is why I don't allow my relatives to visit me."

The boldfaced part is ambiguous between (f) *it can be a nuisance for one to visit one's relatives* and (g) *it can be a nuisance for one to receive visitors who are one's relatives.* If the boldfaced part is assigned meaning (g), then (e) makes sense. If the boldfaced part is assigned meaning (f), (e) makes no sense. Not surprisingly, one would have a strong inclination to assign meaning (g) to the boldfaced part. [9]

To sum up, if a sentence-token S is ambiguous between a proposition P1 that would be wildly out of context, and a proposition P2 that would fit context well, we tend to assign proposition P2 to S. [10] Let us refer to this as the *principle of charitable disambiguation* (PCD).

A corollary of PCD is this. If we encounter a sentence-token S in a certain context C, and we have absolutely *no* tendency to assign a meaning to S that would make it fit C, that means that S does not have that meaning.

In addition to being an argument in its own right against the theory of descriptions, this line of thought gives us a way to show that Russell's theory gives the wrong analysis of questions and imperatives. Consider the question.

(i) Does your neighbor drink?'

According to Russell's theory, this is ambiguous between meanings that are at least *roughly* (that is, in terms of their macro-structures)

(ii) *You have exactly one neighbor: does that person drink?*

and

(iii) *Is it the case that you have exactly one neighbor, and that person drinks?*

Now consider the following dialogue (suppose that B is a well-known billionaire, and that A is a nosy sociologist who is trying to prove a strange theory):

A: I'm a sociologist, and I'm doing research on people's drinking habits. More specifically, I'm interested in the drinking habits of neighbors of billionaires. I believe that any neighbor of a billionaire is a heavy drinker.

B: My dear Sir. Permit me to interrupt you right there. I have a rather peculiar form of amnesia. I have forgotten how many neighbors I have. But once you give me this information, I will remember everything about them, and I will be able to answer all your questions about any neighbors I might have.

A: ***Does your neighbor drink?**[11]

The first point to make is that A's response to B is decidedly odd. But given PCD, if the Theory of Descriptions were correct, A's response *wouldn't* be odd. According to theory of descriptions, 'does your neighbor drink?' has as one of its meanings *you have exactly one neighbor: does that person drink?* In the context in question, *if* 'does your neighbor drink?' could be read as meaning 'you have exactly one neighbor: does that person drink?', it *would* be read that way. For reading it that *would* make A's response fit the context. But no competent speaker of English does read A's response in a way that makes it fit the context.

A similar argument shows that the Russellian wide-scope paraphrase of 'does your neighbor drink?' is probably not among the meanings actually borne by that sentence. Consider the following dialogue (again suppose that A is a nosy sociologist with a strange theory):

A: I know you to be an intelligent person, and I believe that all intelligent people have exactly one neighbor and that he/she drinks. But I don't know if you have exactly one neighbor.

B: Unfortunately, because of illness, I never leave my house. So I don't know how many neighbors I have.

A: Neither do I. So if it isn't too much trouble, I'd like you to find the answer to the following question: ***Does your neighbor drink?**

First of all, in the context in question, the boldfaced part sounds very strange; it is obviously not appropriate of A to use that sentence here. (For it sounds as though he is *presupposing* that B has exactly one neighbor when, by his own admission, this is just what he wants to know.) But if Russell's theory were correct, then given PCD, the boldfaced sentence would be appropriate. But it isn't appropriate; so Russell's theory is wrong.

III

In this section, I will set forth another argument to the effect that Russell's theory does not provide the right semantics for D-questions. But some review of what I've said so far may be necessary to put this argument in its proper dialectical context.

So far we have operated on the assumption that the wide-scope paraphrases of D-questions are well-formed; and we have been assigning them the meanings that *if they were* well-formed, they would bear. To make this point concrete: the wide-scope paraphrase of (e.g.) 'did the king of France go to Spain?' is (essentially)

(*) 'there is exactly one king of France x, and did x go to Spain?'

So far we have assumed that (*) is *not* nonsense. Accordingly, we supposed the meaning of (*) to be that proposition that, *given* the aforementioned assumption, is most plausibly seen as being the meaning of (*). So we have supposed the meaning of (*) to be

(**) *There is exactly one king of France: did that individual go to Spain?*

We have seen that *if we operate* within the framework just described, Russell's theory is not viable, as it mis-predicts what D-questions in fact communicate. In other words, *if* the wide-scope paraphrases of D-questions *are* well-formed, then Russell's theory is false.

On the other hand, if the wide-scope paraphrases of D-questions are *not* well-formed, then Russell's theory is false. There are two reasons for this. First, there is no reason to believe that all D-questions and D-imperatives are, on any legitimate reading of them, synonymous with ill-formed sentences: they unambiguously make good sense.

Second, as we saw in the last section, the narrow-scope paraphrases of D-questions *clearly* do not give the right meanings of those sentences, at least in many contexts. So if the narrow-scope paraphrases give the only well-formed paraphrases of such sentences, then Russell's theory simply doesn't assign the right meanings to those sentences. In

other words, if Russell's theory is to be correct, then the wide-scope paraphrase of D-questions must be well-formed.

But the wide-scope paraphrases of D-questions are *not* well-formed. This is what I will now show.

Let us revisit the facts that formed our point of departure. Consider the sentence:

(i) Does your neighbor drink?

Russell's theory assigns two readings to this question: a wide-scope and a narrow-scope reading. The narrow-scope reading is:

(ii$_F$) Is it the case that there is some x such that, for any y, y=x iff y is a
    neighbor of yours, and x drinks?

The wide-scope reading is:

(iii$_F$) There is some x, such that given any y, y is a neighbor of yours iff
    y=x, and does x drink?

(ii$_F$) is unquestionably well-formed; and we will say nothing more about it. But is (iii$_F$) well-formed? No.

First of all, what is (iii$_F$)? Is it a question or an assertion? It is some kind of a combination of both. (But it is not a *conjunction* of an assertion and a question, since the main connective is the existential operator.)

Uncontroversially, a single sentence can *at one level* be an assertion and *at another level* be a question. Rhetorical questions are semantically questions, while pragmatically they are assertions. But (iii$_F$) is on quite another level: it is *semantically* both a question and an assertion. Does (iii$_F$) make sense? [12]

It does not. Consider the sentence

(i) For some x, x is such that x is uniquely a king of France and did x
    go the store.

This sentence is both assertoric and interrogative. The interrogative part is 'did x go to the store?' But notice that this is *not* really a question; for it contains a free variable. So (i) contains *no* question, and thus doesn't ask *anything*. But according to Russell's theory, (i) is the paraphrase of 'did the king of France go the store?', which obviously *does* ask something. So (i) doesn't capture the meaning of 'did the king of France go the store?', contrary to what Russell's theory predicts.

Before proceeding, I should address an objection:

> Admittedly, it would be meaningless to ask 'did x go to the store?' *simpliciter*. But it would not be meaningless to ask 'did x go to the store' *for some value of x.* (A comparison: it would be meaningless to say 'necessarily x is even' *simpliciter*. But it would not be meaningless to say 'x is even' *for some value of x*.) And this appears to be just what (i) is doing. (i) expresses the question '*for some value of x*, did x go to the store?'[13]

Let us be quite clear on what the objector is saying. According to the objection, (i) embodies the question

(ii) 'for some x, did x go the store?'

First of all, we must note that (ii) is not the same question that is asked by

(iii) 'is it the case that, for some x, x went to the store?'

(iii) *is* a perfectly good question. But it is not the same question as (ii). The difference is that, in (ii), the existence-operator has a *wider scope* than it has in (iii). (ii) is what results when part of (i) is deleted—when the clause 'x is such that it is uniquely a king of France' is removed. Otherwise (ii) is just like (i). Now the existence operator ('for some x') in (i) and (ii) has assertoric force; so it does not have interrogative force . So the existence operator in (i), and therefore in (ii), does not fall within the scope of an 'interrogative operator' (in any case, this is one way of thinking of the matter). Indeed, the 'interroga-

tive operator' in (i) and (ii) falls within the scope of the existence-operator, not *vice versa.* So the existence-operator has a wider scope than the interrogative operator in (i) and (ii).

In (iii), on the other hand, the existence-operator plainly has interrogative force. So the existence operator falls *within* the scope of an interrogative operator: the former has narrower scope than the latter.

Because the existence-operator has wider-scope in (i) and (ii) than the interrogative operator, it follows that (ii)—in so far as it is well-formed and asks *any* question—asks a question that is in effect *de re* about somebody, i.e. that is about some *particular* individual. In other words, (ii) says 'for some particular x, did x go to the store'. (iii), on the other hand, does not ask that sort of question; it does not ask a question about any *particular* person.

Now that we've taken care of these preliminaries, we can see *why* (i) and (ii) are ill-formed. (i) is but a notational variant of

(iv) There is some x such that x is uniquely a king of France and did x go the store.

And (ii) is but a notational variant of

(v) There is some x such that did x go the store?

(v) is quite obviously ill-formed.[14] This fact alone is telling. It is significant that (v)[15] should be so blatantly ill-formed while the sentence that they paraphrase—'did the king of France go to the store?'—is so obviously well-formed; it is odd—and also discrepant with Russell's theory—that two supposedly synonymous sentences should deviate so wildly from each other in respect of how well-formed they seem to be.

If a sentence sounds 'funny', as (v) does, that fact is much more likely to alarm linguists than philosophers. Many philosophers will dismiss the 'funniness' of (v) as some relatively unimportant fact about the peculiarities of English grammar, and as not being indicative of any incoherence in Russell's position.

I maintain that (v) sounds strange not (merely) because it is ungrammatical, but because it embodies an incoherence. Given that my

appeal to bare linguistic intuitions will not convince many, I must now have recourse to more theoretical considerations to make my case.

For a sentence to have a complete semantics, it is not enough that it encode a proposition: it must also have a *force*. (The sentences 'did John go the store?' and 'John went to the store' are associated with exactly the same proposition. But those sentences are semantically different; for they have different forces.) A force-less sentence would surely be quite incomplete in respect of meaning and would thus be semantically incomplete. So if (ii) is to have a complete semantics, then it must have a force.

What is the force of (ii)? Let's approach this question indirectly. (ii) is just like (i), except that (i) contains the clause 'x is uniquely a king of France', whereas (ii) does not. With that one qualification, (i) and (ii) are exactly the same. So, in particular, the force borne by the existence-operator (*there is some x such that*) is the same in both (i) and (ii). What force does that operator bear in (i)? Certainly not *interrogative* force. (i) does not mean *is there is some x such that…?* It means *there is some x such that…* So, since the existence-operator plays the same role in (ii) that it does in (i), (ii) means *there is some x such that…* (not *is there some x such that…?*) So, in (ii), the existence operator has *assertoric* force.

What follows it, however, has interrogative force. But the thing that has interrogative force is not a proposition but merely a propositional *function* (*did x go the store?*[16]). And the thing that is assigned assertoric force (*there is some x such that*) is not a proposition (or even a propositional *function*) of any kind. So nothing has been asserted: for one cannot assert *there is some x such that*. And nothing has been asked: for one cannot ask *did x go to the store?*

Of course, *if* someone were to come up to me and ask/state (i), I would know well enough what they meant, namely *there is someone who is uniquely a king of France, and I wish to know whether that person went to the store*. But it doesn't follow, and it isn't the case, that this is what is *semantically encoded* in (i).

But you have yet to respond *squarely* to my original point. So I renew it. One can certainly ask 'did x go the store' for some *value* of 'x'.

Mightn't this be what is going on with (i) and (ii)? A comparison might help. Consider the sentence

(iv) 'for some x, necessarily x is even.'

This is meaningful (for it is true). Here what is being asserted is not 'necessarily x is even' *simpliciter* (that couldn't be asserted, since it contains a free-variable). What is being asserted is 'necessarily x is even' *for some value of x.:* and the result is that (iv) is meaningful. So, by analogy, what falls within the scope of the question-operator in (i) and (ii) is an open sentence; but the sentence as a whole is well-formed. Basically, I don't see why you can't quantify through a force-operator.[17]

Force-operators (supposing that such things exist) are not on the same level as modal operators or tense-operators or any other paradigmatic operators. The difference is basically this. Verbiage can fall *outside* the scope of a tense-operator, a modal operator, an epistemic operator, and so on, and *still be meaningful.* But this is *not* true of force-operators.

Every meaningful sentence has a scope-operator and therefore has a *widest* scope operator (one that takes wider scope than all the others): and plainly nothing can fall *outside* the scope of that operator. Everything in a meaningful sentence must be part of an assertion, a question, and so on, and anything that fell *outside* the scope of a sentence's widest scope operator would *ipso facto* not be a part an assertion or a question…and so wouldn't have a complete semantics.

Given this we can substantiate our intuition that 'there is some x such that did x go to the store' is ill-formed. Let **A** be the assertion-operator and **Q** be the question-operator. The objector wishes to say that (ii) 'there is some x such that did x go the store'—or, using our new symbolism, 'there is some x such that **Q** x went to the store'—is strictly analogous to (iv) 'there is some such that necessarily x is even'. But there is a difference. In (iv) there is no difficulty giving a semantics to the verbiage lying outside the scope of the necessity operator; for verbiage doesn't have to fall within the scope of such an operator to be meaningful. But there *is* difficulty giving meaning to the verbiage lying outside the scope of the question-operator in (ii): it must within

the scope of *some* operator, lest it not have a complete semantics. The only operator that could conceivably do the trick is the assertion-operator. So we end up with

(v) **A**[there is some x such that] **Q** [x went to the store].

But (v) is patent nonsense. 'There is some x such that' cannot *by itself* fall within the scope of a force-operator. This fragment cannot be asserted at all: it cannot be asserted *for* some value of 'x' and it cannot be asserted *simpliciter*. (v) is semantic garbage, and the objector's point misfires.

To close the present argument: (v) makes no sense; but plainly the question whose meaning it is supposed, by Russell's theory, to give *does* make sense. So (v) doesn't give the right meaning.

There is an additional reason to regard as meaningless the sentence 'there is some x, such that x is uniquely a king of France and did x go the store.' Although this sentence is not itself a conjunction, it is meaningful only if conjunctions of assertions and questions are meaningful.

Consider the open formula 'x is uniquely a king of France and did x go the store?'. If (iii$_F$) is meaningful, then it must be possible to replace both occurrences of 'x' with a singular term, and thus to have a meaningful conjunction of an assertion and a question (e.g. 'Bob is uniquely a neighbor of yours and does Bob drink?').

Obviously (to use a different example)

(ii) Bob went to the store. Did Bob buy some cheese?

is meaningful. But it isn't clear whether these two sentences can be fused into anything that is meaningful and deserves to be regarded as a *single* well-formed sentence. Of course we can put an 'and' between them. But in so doing, have we really fused them into a *single* well-formed sentence that is a question and an assertion?

First of all 'Bob went to the store and did Bob buy some cheese' *sounds* strange.[18] Combination assertion-commands also sound bizarre; no one ever hears: 'I am hungry and get me some food.' What one

hears is: 'I am hungry, so you should get me some food'; or 'I am hungry. [Full stop] Get me some food.' This shows that we have some kind of pre-theoretical aversion to question-assertions (and command-assertions…); that we don't intuitively see them as well-formed.

This pre-theoretical intuition can be given some substance. *Part* of the meaning of a sentence (or sentence-token) is a proposition. So if 'Bob went to the store and did Bob buy some cheese' is a single sentence, then it has some proposition as part of its meaning. (Presumably that proposition is 'Bob went to the store and Bob bought some cheese.'[19]) However, associating a proposition with a sentence does not *by itself* give it a complete semantics: the sentence must also be associated with a *force*. 'Bob bought some cheese'' and 'did Bob buy some cheese?' are associated with the same proposition. But they are semantically very different; for they have different forces: one is a question and one is an assertion.[20] It is inconceivable that a well-formed sentence should be 'force-less'. If a sentence were 'force-less', then a literal usage of it would never be an assertion or a question of a command or an optative: in effect, such a usage, would not, semantically speaking, be *anything*. And if a sentence is such that a usage of it is never, literally, a question or an assertion…then it is hard to see how that sentence could be viewed as well-formed.

In light of all this, let us consider the sentence 'Bob went to the store and did Bob buy some cheese?' Obviously there is no difficulty associating a force with 'Bob went to the store' and with 'did Bob buy some cheese?' What is in question is whether these two sentences can be meaningfully *conjoined*; whether we can put an 'and' between them with the result that we have a *single* well-formed sentence. Given what we've just noted about force, this doesn't seem possible. First of all, if 'Bob went to the store and did Bob buy some cheese?' is well-formed, then the 'and' must be part of something which has a force. The 'and' must be a part of something a literal usage of which could be the making of an assertion or the asking of a question or the issuing of a command…

But there is no way to make the 'and' a part of anything that has a force. For 'Bob went to the store *and*' cannot, as a whole, be assigned a force. And '*and* Bob went to the store' cannot, as a whole, be assigned

a force.[21] (Obviously 'Bob went to the store' be assigned a force; and so can 'Bob went to the store and Bob bought some cheese'; but not '*and* Bob went to the store' or 'Bob went to the store *and*'.) The sentence as a whole cannot be assigned a force—it cannot be said to be an assertion or a command or a question or an optative.[22] So the 'and' cannot be made part of something that has a force—cannot be made a part of something that has a complete semantics. Thus the 'and' is uninterpretable. So the sentence in question ('Bob went to the store and did Bob buy some cheese?') contains a constituent that is not given a complete semantics; therefore that sentence itself does not have a complete semantics: it is not well-formed.

I should respond to another objection to this line of reasoning:

> You've argued that no-well formed sentence can simultaneously be an assertion and a question, or a command and an assertion. But this is probably false. Consider the sentence: 'if Mary comes home, should we go to the store?' or 'if Phil doesn't pay the money he owes, repossess his car.' The 'if' part of these sentences is indicative; but the second part is either interrogative or imperative.

This objection is very superficial. Consider the sentence:

(i) If Mary comes home, should we go to the store?

This really means:

(ii) Is it the case that [if Mary comes home we should go to the store]?

In other words, to ask (i) is to ask whether some conditional proposition is true. It is not to *conditionally* ask some *un*conditional proposition. If I say 'if Mary comes home, then should we go the store?' I am unconditionally succeeding in asking some question. It is not the case that *if* Mary *fails* to come home, I have *failed* to ask a question. My asking a question is not conditional on Mary's come home. But suppose Mary doesn't come home: it is not as though I will in that case have failed to ask a question. It is not the case that *if* Mary comes home, *then* I am asking whether we should go to the store. (So we should not

think of (i) as having the meaning: *Mary comes home → Is the following the case: we should go to the store)* Rather, I am asking if a certain conditional proposition is true; I am asking whether the following proposition is true: *if Mary comes home, we should go to the store.* So we might think of (i) as consisting of the proposition *if Mary comes home, we should go to the store* prefaced by a question-operator (some expressions like 'is the following the case…?')

An exactly similar point holds of apparent command-assertions. Consider the sentence,

(iii) If Bob comes home, then tell him to call me.

Suppose I utter (iii). It is not as though, if Bob *fails* to come home, then I have failed to issue any kind of a command. In uttering (iii) I have succeeded in issuing a command *regardless* of whether Bob comes home. So we must not think of (iii) as being of the form [*Bob comes home]→[make it the case that: Bob calls me].* The 'make it the case' operator has to be given 'wide-scope'. Otherwise we have the absurd result that, unless Bob homes home, I haven't commanded anything.

So we must think of (iii) as, in effect, meaning:

(iv) Make it the case that [if Bob comes home, then you tell him to call me].

So in uttering (iii), one is not 'conditionally' issuing a command; one is not issuing a command *only* on the condition that Bob makes it home. In uttering (iii) one is *unconditionally* issuing a command. But the proposition commanded is itself conditional in form: that proposition is *if Bob comes home, you will tell him to call me.* So (iii) can be thought of as a conditional proposition—*if Bob comes home, you will tell him to call me*—preceded by a command-forming operator: 'make it the case that the following proposition is true'. [23]

What we said about 'and' generalizes to all connectives; to (for example) 'if…then…' Suppose that

(iii) If Bob comes home, then tell him to call me

were a combination indicative-imperative sentence. In that case, by hypothesis, it wouldn't be possible to assign a force to (iii) as a whole. So to give (iii) a force, one would have to assign forces to its sentential components: to 'if Bob comes come' and to 'then tell him to call me'. But 'if Bob comes home' is not *by itself* well-formed and thus cannot be assigned a force; and 'then tell him to give me a call' is not well-formed and cannot be assigned a force. Now given a sentence of 'if-then' form, linguistic usage permits us to drop the 'then' from the consequent; we can say 'if Bob comes home, he will be happy'. But we must think of the 'then' as implicit in such cases. In any case, taken by itself, 'if Bob comes home' is ill-formed and thus cannot, by itself, be assigned a force. But of course, the 'if' must be a part of something that has a force. The only way to make the 'if' a part of something that has a force is to give the sentence *as a whole* a force (that of an imperative). So the sentence as a whole must be seen as a command to the effect that some conditional be made the case, and *not* as something that *will* be a command *provided* that some condition is met. (It makes no sense to suppose that whether I am issuing a command *now* depends on whether Bob comes home three days from now.)

In general, a connective can be made a part of something that has a force only if *both* sentences (or sentence-formulae) that are joined by that connective are assigned *the same* force. If this condition is not met, then the connective is left 'out in the cold': it is not a part of anything that has a force and is thus not given a complete semantics.

IV

At first Russell's theory *seems* not to do a very good job with imperatives. This has been noted many times.[24] In this section, I'd like to show that Russell's theory really *doesn't* do a good job with imperatives. What I say here will exactly parallel what I said in the last two sections about D-questions.

Consider the following imperative:

(i) Incarcerate the man who wants to kill me.

There are two possible Russellian paraphrases of this sentence, depending on whether we given the definite description wide or narrow scope. The narrow scope reading is:

(ii) Make it the case that exactly one person wants to kill me, and incarcerate that person.

More formally:

(ii$_F$) Make it the case that there is some x such that for any y, y=x iff y wants to kill me, and incarcerate x.

The wide-scope paraphrase is this:

(iii) There is exactly one person who wants to kill me: incarcerate that person.

Formally, it is:

(iii$_F$) There is some x such that given any y, y=x iff y wants to kill me, and incarcerate x.

Two issues arise. First, it is clear that if Russell's theory is right, then (assuming that the wide-scope paraphrases of D-imperatives are well-formed), when you utter (i), you are either *ordering* that exactly one person want to murder you or you are *asking* whether exactly one person wants to murder you. But intuitively this does not seem to be the case. In a moment I will try to show that this intuitive misgiving is in fact correct

Second, it must be asked whether (iii$_F$) is meaningful at all. Of course (iii) is meaningful. But (iii) is only a rough paraphrase of (i); it gives the macro-structure, not the micro-structure, of the Russellian reading of (i). It is (iii$_F$) that gives the micro-structure of (i), and is thus the real Russellian paraphrase of that sentence. Now (iii$_F$) is peculiar: at the level of literal meaning, it is both an order and an asser-

tion. I will try to show that such combination order-assertions are semantic monstrosities—they are nonsense.

Consider the sentence:

(i) 'Incarcerate Smith's murderer.'

Russell's theory recognizes two paraphrases of this sentence: wide-scope and narrow-scope. For now, let us assume that the wide-scope paraphrase of this sentence *is* well-formed, and let us assign it the proposition that, given this assumption, it is most plausibly seen as bearing (namely *exactly one person murdered Smith: incarcerate that person.*) Given this assumption, (i) is ambiguous, according to Russell's theory, between:

(ii) *Make it the case that exactly one person x murdered Smith and that you incarcerate x.*

and

(iii) *Exactly one person murdered Smith: incarcerate that person. [Exactly one person x murdered Smith: incarcerate x.]*

But neither (ii) nor (iii) is a meaning borne by (i). Imagine the following. Smith has been murdered. It isn't generally known how many people murdered Smith. A is the detective in charge of bringing Smith's murderer(s) to justice. B knows how many people murdered Smith and, being a friend of Smith, B wants Smith's murderer brought to justice. A knows both of these facts about B, but A does not himself know how many people murdered Smith. Given these facts, consider the following dialogue:

A: Exactly how many people murdered Smith?

B: ***Incarcerate Smith's murderer.**

First of all, B's response is obviously odd. But if Russell's theory were correct, then given PCD, B's response wouldn't be odd. According to Russell's theory, the boldfaced part has as one of its meanings *exactly one person murdered Smith: incarcerate that person.* In the context in question, *if* the boldfaced part *could* be read as having that meaning, it *would* be so read (this is what PCD tells us). And if B's response were read that way, then it wouldn't be odd. But it is odd. So it doesn't have as one of its meanings: *exactly one person murdered Smith: incarcerate that person.* This is inconsistent with Russell's theory. So Russell's theory is wrong.

According to Russell's theory, 'incarcerate Smith's murderer' has as one of its meanings: *make it the case that exactly one person x murdered Smith and that you incarcerate x.* By an argument similar to that just given, it can be shown that Russell's theory is wrong to assign this proposition to that sentence. Suppose A is a corrupt police-chief and B is his henchman.

A: I really hate Smith. So I want someone to kill him. But I want no more than *one* person to kill Smith; for I cannot spare more than one hit man at the present moment. Also, after Smith is murdered, I want you to incarcerate the person who killed him: that way we will get credit for doing good police work.

B: I have a feeble mind. So could you briefly recap all those instructions, to impress it upon my memory?

A: Very simply: ***Incarcerate Smith's murderer.***

A's response is obviously very odd. If Russell's theory were correct, then given PCD, A's response *wouldn't* be odd. If the boldfaced part did have as one of its meanings *make it the case that exactly one person murders Smith and incarcerate that person,* then competent speakers would read it that way. For reading it that way would completely normalize A's response. But no one *does* read A's response that way. So A's response isn't capable of such a reading. This is contrary to what Russell's theory says. So that theory is wrong.

Now I'd like to show that Russell's theory assigns nonsense to perfectly meaningful imperatives. Once again, consider the sentence

(i) Incarcerate the person who wants to kill me.

The *true* (fine-grained) wide-scope Russellian paraphrase is

(iii$_F$) There is some person x such that given any man y, y=x iff y wants to kill me, and incarcerate x.

So far we have been operating on the assumption that (iii$_F$) is well-formed. But (iii$_F$) is *ill*-formed. What we said about Russellian wide-scope paraphrases of D-questions applies squarely to wide-scope Russellian paraphrases of D-imperatives.

'There is some person x such that x uniquely wants to kill me, and incarcerate x' is not itself a conjunction. But if it is meaningful, then conjunctions consisting of an imperative and an indicative must be meaningful. (This is because 'x uniquely wants to kill me and incarcerate x' is formed by taking some singular sentence—like 'Bob uniquely wants to kill me and incarcerate Bob'—and replacing one of the nouns in it with a variable.) But such conjunctions are demonstrably meaningless: the conjunction 'Bob uniquely wants to kill me and incarcerate Bob' is meaningless.

It is not hard to see why. If that sentence were meaningful, it would be possible to assign it, not only a proposition, but also a force. The sentence as a whole cannot be assigned a force; for, as a whole, it isn't an assertion or a command or a question or an optative. Moreover 'Bob wants to kill me and' cannot be assigned a force, and neither can 'and incarcerate Bob'. So the 'and' cannot be made a part of anything that has a force or, therefore, of anything that can be given a complete semantics.

Let us sum up. Either the Russellian wide-scope paraphrase of a D-imperative is well-formed or not well-formed. We've seen that, if that paraphrase is well-formed, then Russell's theory is wrong. And we've seen that, if it is not well-formed, then Russell's theory is wrong. So Russell's theory is wrong.

I would like to end this paper by considering a couple of objections that might be made to its logical structure. Earlier I gave the following argument. "The king of France" has the same semantics in both

(*) "the king of France went to the store"

and

(**) "did the king of France go to the store?"

Therefore, if Russell's theory gives the wrong semantics for "the king of France" in (**), then it gives the wrong semantics for "the king of France" in (*), and is thus false *tout court.*

Here is an objection to that argument.

> Non-declarative sentences can always be translated into declarative sentences. Thus definite descriptions occurring in non-declarative sentences are, in effect, equivalent to definite descriptions occurring in declarative sentences. "Is the king of France bald" is equivalent to "I wish to know whether the king of France is bald." And "make the king of France go to the store" is equivalent to "I order you to make the king of France go to the store." If this is right, then for Russell's theory to be correct, all that is necessary is that definite descriptions in *declarative* sentences be amenable to Russell's analysis. And if *this* point, in turn, is right, then the argument of yours that you just out-lined loses its force.[25]

The point just considered is based on a fallacy. It is true that, in certain contexts, "did the king of France go the store?" is *pragmatically* equivalent to "I wish to know whether the king of France went to the store." In general, it is true that, at least in some contexts, a question (or an imperative) is *pragmatically* interchangeable with an assertion. But no question is *synonymous* with an assertion. If I say "I wish to know whether the king of France went to the store," I am *saying* something, at the level of literal meaning, about my own mind; I am making an autobiographical statement. But if I say "did the king of France go to the store?", I am clearly not *saying* anything about my own mental

state. It is true, of course, that by asking that question, I am *showing* you something about my mental state—I am showing you that I wish to know whether the king of France went to the store. But showing is not saying. When I speak English to you, I am *showing* that I speak English, but I am not *saying* it (except in the special case where I actually *say* "I can speak English"). So there is definitely no synonymy—no *semantic* equivalence—between "I wish to know whether the king of France went to the store" and "did the king of France go the store?", even though those sentences have a certain pragmatic equivalence.[26]

This point can be substantiated. At the level of *semantics* the following sentence expresses a valid argument:

(*) "I would like to know whether the President of France has read Bentham; therefore, there is something I would like to know."

By contrast, the following does *not* express a valid argument, at least not at the level of semantics:

(**) "Has the President of France read Bentham? Therefore there is something I would like to know."

(*) makes perfect sense. (**) is nonsense. Good sense cannot be turned into nonsense by replacing synonyms with synonyms. Therefore "I would like to know whether the President of France has read Bentham" is not synonymous with "Has the President of France read Bentham?"—even though, as we pointed out earlier, those two sentences are pragmatically equivalent in a narrow range of contexts.

There is one other objection I should respond to.[27] I have said that, if Russell's theory gives the wrong semantics for definite descriptions occurring in non-declarative sentences, then it gives the wrong semantics *tout court* for definite descriptions. But

> Why should the supposed failure of Russell's theory to give the meaning of definite descriptions in imperatives and questions imply that there is a problem for definite descriptions in assertions? Couldn't the reverse argument that if the definite descriptions in assertions are satisfactorily explained by the theory of descriptions, then the same should hold of

those contained in imperatives and questions? Why reason from the failure of the theory to treat d-questions and not the other way around, especially given that many theories have problems with questions and imperatives? [28]

It would be deeply arbitrary to suggest that "the king of France" has different meanings in "is the king of France bald?", "the king of France is bald," "make it be the case that the king of France is bald," and so on. Surely we want "the king of France" to have a semantics that is uniform across all these contexts. Now if it can be shown that in *one* of these contexts "the king of France" doesn't conform to Russell's theory, then given the point just made, it follows that Russell's theory doesn't give the semantics of this expression as it occurs in *any* of these contexts.

The following might clarify things. It would be deeply arbitrary to suggest that physical objects moving at moderate speeds obey one set of laws while those moving at speeds close to that of light obey a totally different set of laws. Now we know that Newtonian physics gives more or less the right results for bodies moving at moderate velocities. We also know that it gives the wrong results for bodies moving at speeds close to, or coincident with, that of light. The right response to this situation is *not*: "well, since Newtonian physics gives the right results for bodies whose speed is negligible compared to that of light, it must give the right results *tout court*." No—the right response is: "since Newtonian physics gives the wrong results for bodies moving at speeds approaching that of light, and since bodies moving at high speeds obey the same laws as those moving at slow speeds, we must conclude that Newtonian gives the *wrong* laws (even though it is *approximately* correct within certain contexts)." Similarly, given that definite descriptions have a semantics that is uniform across different contexts, and given that Russell's theory gives the wrong analysis in interrogative contexts, the appropriate conclusion is: Russell's theory gives the wrong analysis *tout court*.

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Keywords

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Resumo

Este artigo mostra que a teoria das descrições de Russell confere uma semântica errada para as descrições definidas que ocorrem em sentenças interrogativas e imperativas. Dependendo de como essa teoria é aplicada, ou ela declara sem significado questões e asserções perfeitamente significativas, ou ela lhes atribui significados que divergem da semântica real de tais sentenças, mesmo depois que são admitidas todas as variáveis pragmáticas e contextuais. Dado que a teoria de Russell está errada quanto a questões e asserções, ela deve também estar errada quanto a enunciados assertórios, pois a semântica de 'o phi', obviamente, não varia dependendo se isso ocorre em uma questão, ou em uma asserção, ou em uma ordem.

Palavras-chave

Descrições definidas, questões, asserções, operadores de força, escopo-amplo/escopo-restrito.

Notes

[1] Examples of definite descriptions are 'the king of France', 'the table', and 'my neighbor'. A definite description might be defined as one that is *either* (i) of the form 'the phi' (where this expression is in the singular, not the plural, case) *or* (ii) as one that is synonymous with such an expression. So 'the king

of France' is a definite description by (i). And 'my neighbor' is a definite description by (ii); for 'my neighbor' is surely synonymous with 'the person who is my neighbor.' The expression 'the people over there' is not a definite description, since it is in the plural case.

2 The subscript stands for 'formal'.

3 In this paper, by "proposition" I mean simply "sentence meaning." I am not using the term to denote some specific *conception* of what a proposition. Everybody agrees that a proposition is the meaning of a sentence. Where people disagree is as to what sort of a thing a sentence-meaning is. Russell thought that such things are complexes of objects and properties. Others think that they are sets of possible worlds or functions from worlds to truth-values. My use of the word "proposition" is neutral with respect to these different *theories* as to what a proposition is; I am, to repeat, using the term to mean "sentence meaning," not to denote this or that particular theory as to what sort of a thing a sentence-meaning is.

4 See Neale (1990) and Lambert (1998). Also, Gareth Evans advocates Russell's theory in *The Varieties of Reference*. See Evans (1982: 51-60). Blackburn (1984) defends the Theory of Descriptions in *Spreading the Word.*

5 Stephen Neale (1990: chapters 5-6) published a brilliant defense of Russell's theory. But the topic of D-questions and D-imperatives and D-optatives—of D-sentences that are not assertoric—is not mentioned even once, let alone discussed. And Blackburn (1984) wrote a brilliant exposition and defense of Russell's theory, which masterfully showed how a Russellian could deal with the fact that e.g. 'the man in the corner is bald' might be *de re* about a certain man (which *prima facie* favors the view that 'the man in the corner' is functioning as a referring expression and not *pace* Russell as a kind of quantifier) and with the fact that, if we heard 'the king of France is bald' we would be unlikely to reply 'that's false' (which *prima facie* suggests that 'the King of France is bald' does not, *pace* Russell, *assert* that there is a king of France.) But Blackburn completely ignores the question whether the theory of descriptions applies to definite descriptions occurring in non-assertoric contexts. Kent Bach published an extended defense of the Theory of Descriptions, in which he ably challenged a number of traditional attacks on it. But he does not even a single time discuss D-questions or D-imperatives. In the anthologies on definite descriptions that I have read through, the only D-sentences discussed are D-assertions. There is not a single mention of—let alone discussion of—the question whether Russell's theory is viable so far as definite descriptions occurring in non-assertoric contexts are concerned. For some rea-

son, contemporary discussions of the viability of Russell's theory tend to concern anaphora (See e.g. Neale [1]) and the apparently referential function performed by (some uses of) definite descriptions, e.g. 'the man in the corner is an economist', 'the table is covered with books.' (See Kripke (1991), Grice (1989a), and Bach (1987).)

[6] The F-subscript stands for 'formal'.

[7] In this connection, I am using 'good' to mean 'reasonable' (not necessarily 'valid' in the technical sense—for (b) is probably not technically valid), and 'bad' to mean 'unreasonable'.

[8] This is, ironically, Neale's own example of an ambiguous sentence.

[9] Notice that, if you disambiguate a sentence *un*charitably, there is a feeling of strangeness or discomfort. Consider the following sequence: 'Bob has no self-control. He can't strop drinking. He can't stop smoking. **He can't stop gambling.**' Now force yourself to disambiguate the boldfaced sentence *un*charitably (i.e. read it to mean *he can't prevent people in general from gambling*). As long as you force yourself to read it that way, there is a feeling of discomfort. But once you disambiguate charitably—once you read it to mean *he cannot resist his own compulsion to gamble*—the sentence falls into place, and your feeling of discomfort vanishes. But now consider the following sequence: 'Bob has no self-control. He can't strop drinking. He can't stop smoking. **He can't prevent gambling.**' The last sentence is *not* ambiguous between a meaning that is appropriate and one that is inappropriate. It is *incorrigibly* or *irremediably* out of place; and this is manifested by an ineradicable feeling of oddness (as opposed to the eradicable oddness borne by 'He can't stop gambling' in (b).

[10] I think that this point goes back to Grice (though I do not know whether he makes it in exactly this form). See Grice (1989b)

[11] One might object: "Suppose A said 'Does your *one* neighbor drink?' Wouldn't that normalize his response? " I have two points to make in response. We've already seen (section II) several reasons not to think that this tactic is available to the Russellian. For example, A's question seems to be a *strict* use of a definite description, if there ever was one (it is 'proper'). But even if we leave that aside, the objector's point is doubtful. To my ear the following dialogue *still* sounds markedly strange even if we replace A's response with 'does your *one* neighbor drink?' And the most obvious diagnosis of why it sounds strange is the one we've given all along: that B is required, not to *presuppose*, but to *assert* the uniqueness and existence of A's neighbor, and that

by using a definite description—even one with 'one' added—he has really only presupposed this.

[12] Dummett (1981: 316) makes some remarks that might be seen as responsive to this question.

[13] This point was made to me, in response to an earlier draft of the present paper, by Nathan Salmon.

[14] (ii) is also ill-formed, but for some reason, the use of 'for some x' instead of 'there is some x such that' seems to have an ameliorative effect; it to *some* extent—though, to my ear, by no means completely—disguises the fact that (ii) is ill-formed.

[15] And also (ii).

[16] It will be noticed that here I am talking as though force operators are applied *not* to bits of verbiage but to the *meanings* (propositions or fragments thereof) borne by bits of verbiage. This is indeed how I wish to be understood. Force-operators *do not apply to sentences*; they *apply to propositions*. Any (well-formed) sentence, by virtue of its *grammatical* properties, *necessarily* embodies a force. 'Bob went to the store' *already* embodies a force; and so do 'did Bob go to the store' and 'make Bob go to the store.' So force-operators cannot significantly be applied to *sentences*—doing so would be redundant. However *propositions* are initially force-less. The sentences 'did Bob go the store' and Bob went to the store' and 'would that Bob went to the store' all encode the same *proposition* (*Bob went to the store*). But by virtue of their *grammatical* properties, these sentence embody the application of *different* force-operators to that same proposition. Basically the application of a force operator is expressed in natural language by such things as word order (in English the order of subject and verb is inverted in questions) and inflection (the tone of a question tends to be a rising one, whereas that of an assertion tends not to do this); in short, the application of a force operator is, in natural language, 'written into' the grammar of a sentence (and is not usually indicated by the application of a single character). To sum up, it is *propositions* that are assigned forces, not sentences. Sentences come into existence *already having* force: a well-formed sentence is *ipso facto* something that has a force. Not so of a proposition.

[17] This point was made to me, in private discussion, by both Francis Dauer and Nathan Salmon.

[18] I would conjecture that this is not a peculiarity of the English language; that it is universal.

[19] Notice I am not saying that the proposition in question would be *Bob went to the store and* **did Bob buy some cheese.** I am taking it for granted that 'Bob bought some cheese' and 'did Bob buy some cheese' are associated with the same *proposition* (*Bob bought some cheese*) but have different *forces*. I think it's a good idea *not* to try to assimilate force to propositional content: we want to be able to say that one can assert, ask, command one and the same proposition (at different times). If we reduce forces to components of propositions, then a given proposition will be capable *only* of being (say) asserted, not of being asked or commanded; and this is probably not the case.

[20] See the last footnote.

[21] Of course, oftentimes in writing, we encounter sentences that begin with 'And': e.g. 'people are mean. And they are greedy too.' But we shouldn't be misled by orthography here. 'And they are greedy' cannot *by itself* be assigned a force. Obviously what is assigned a force is that sentence in conjunction with the preceding one. To make this clear, suppose someone came up to you out of the blue and said: '*And* people are greedy'. You could obviously make sense of 'people are greedy', but not of the 'and'. You would assume, I think, that *either* you were hearing the second conjunct of some conjunction *or* that you were hearing something that wasn't quite well-formed.

[22] Technically, there is the option of saying that some sentences are, as wholes, to be assigned 'mixed forces' -are e.g. both questions and assertions— but (ii) that those sentences contain no well-formed assertoric part and/or no well-formed interrogative part. So 'Bob went to the store and did Bob buy some cheese' is *irreducibly* a question-assertion: as a whole, it is a question-assertion, but it cannot be neatly divided into a part that is a question and a part that is an assertion. It would take us too far astray to argue against this. But surely I am not alone in feeling that such a proposal stretches the limits of the intelligible. In any case, it is *ad hoc.*

[23] It may initially seem strange to say that, in saying (iii), I have commanded you to make a *conditional proposition* be true when we consider some related locutions, e.g.:

　　(v) I want the following to be the case: if Bob comes home, then you will tell him to call me.

There is nothing strange about (v) (except that it is long-winded and pedantic). Consider a close-cousin of (v):

　　(vi) I order that the following be the case: if Bob comes home, then you will tell him to call me.

　　(vi) is not strange. And (vi) is the assertoric analogue of:

(vii) Make the following be the case: if Bob comes home, then you will tell him to call me.

(vii) of course is just a long-winded, but otherwise normal, way of saying

(viii) Make the case that [if Bob comes home, then you will tell him to call me]
or, more simply,

(ix) If Bob comes home, then tell him to call me.

[24] See Grice (1989a: 270).

[25] This objection was made by an anonymous reviewer at *Principia.*

[26] Suppose I say: "I wish to know whether the king of France went to the store; therefore there is something I wish to know." At the level of literal meaning, those words express a valid argument. But the following does not express a valid argument, at least at the level of literal meaning: "Did the king of France go to the store? Therefore there is something I wish to know." That is nonsense. It is hard to see how replacing a synonymous sentence with a synonymous sentence could turn good sense into nonsense. So surely "I wish to know whether the king of France went to the store" is not synonymous with "did the king of France go the store?"

[27] This objection is due to an anonymous reviewer at *Principia.*

[28] These are the exact words of the reviewer mentioned in the last footnote.