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REFERENTIAL/ATTRIBUTIVE: A CONTEXTUALIST
PROPOSAL

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the last twenty years, dozens of papers have been published on the distinction between two uses of definite descriptions, referential and attributive. There are, I believe, three main reasons why this has been so. First, the distinction is not just a theoretical artefact; it corresponds to something in reality — there really *are* two different “readings” of the definite description “the F” in a sentence “The F is G”. Indirect evidence in favor of the reality of the distinction is provided by the fact that it has been made independently by different authors, some of them with widely different philosophical backgrounds.¹ Second, the difference between the two readings of sentences with a definite description as subject-term resembles another difference, of great concern to the philosophy of language, namely the difference between the type of proposition expressed by sentences with a quantifier expression as subject-term (“general” propositions) and the type of proposition expressed by means of sentences with a proper name or a demonstrative expression as subject-term (“singular” propositions). People interested in the semantics of proper names, demonstrative expressions and other genuine singular terms (as opposed to quantifier expressions) were thus naturally interested in the distinction between the two uses of definite descriptions. Third, the referential/attribution distinction raises an interesting methodological issue, that of the division of labor between semantics and pragmatics in the explanation of *prima facie* ambiguities. When should a multiplicity of readings be accounted for in terms of semantic ambiguity proper, and when should it be accounted for in terms of properties of the pragmatic context? Many philosophers who have written about the referential/attribution distinction were primarily concerned with this methodological issue (see e.g. Kripke,

1977). These philosophers I will henceforth refer to as “methodologists”.

In this paper, I will be primarily concerned with the methodological issue; I will myself be a methodologist. But I will not side with other methodologists. Methodologists generally argue against what I will call the “Naive Theory” — a theory more or less explicitly adhered to by Donnellan, Kaplan, Stalnaker, Wettstein, and Barwise and Perry, to mention only a few. According to this theory, a sentence “The F is G” expresses a general proposition when the description is used attributively, and a singular proposition when the description is used referentially. Methodologists point out that the evidence in favor of this theory is considerably weakened when a certain methodological principle is taken into consideration. I will try to show that this is not so: acceptance of the methodological principle — Grice’s “Modified Occam’s Razor”, basically — does not weaken the Naive Theory, contrary to what has often been claimed. Grice’s principle is *misapplied* by those who use it as a weapon against the Naive Theory. In the last sections of the paper, I will go beyond purely methodological matters and present, in some detail, a version of the Naive Theory consistent with Grice’s principle. I hope this theory — the “Contextual Theory” — proves to be the correct one, but even if decisive arguments against it were to be found, its mere existence as a possible theory would suffice to show that methodologists are wrong in their attack against the Naive Theory.

2. NAIVE THEORY vs. IMPLICATURE THEORY

When the definite description in a sentence “The F is G” is used attributively, what is said is true if and only if there is a unique F and it is G. The Naive Theory holds that the truth-condition of the utterance is different when the description is used referentially. Suppose a certain object, *a*, happens to be the unique F. Then what is said by means of “The F is G”, when the description is used referentially, is true if and only if *a* is G. *a*’s being or not being F is irrelevant to the truth-condition of the utterance on that reading, according to the Naive Theory. *a*’s property of being the unique F is mentioned only to enable the hearer to identify the object, *a*, such that the utterance is true if and

only if it is G. *a*'s being F is no more part of the truth-condition of what is said than my being the speaker is part of the truth-condition of what I say when I utter the sentence "I am G".

This theory is said to be naive because it jumps from the observation that, intuitively, two different things can be meant by uttering the sentence "the F is G", to the idea that there are, indeed, two different propositions expressed on these two readings. But an intuitive difference in what is meant does not necessarily correspond to a difference in what is said. As is well known, what is meant involves not only what is said, but also various contextual implications of the utterance. So there is the theoretical possibility that what is strictly and literally said is the same on the two readings of "The F is G", the difference between the two readings being a difference in pragmatically "conveyed" meaning rather than a difference in literal truth-condition.

The pragmatic literature is full of examples in which one and the same sentence, expressing one and the same proposition, can be used in different contexts to communicate different pieces of information. In one context, "John has three children" means that he has exactly three children (no more and no less), but in another context the utterance means that he has at least three children, i.e. no less, but perhaps more. (Cf. "If someone has three children, he pays reduced rate. Does John have three children? — Yes, he does; he has six".) As many authors pointed out, we need not say that "three" is ambiguous between these two readings. We may decide that "three" always means "no less than three", and explain the reading "exactly three" by invoking a pragmatic implication which, in some contexts, combines with what is strictly and literally said. On this account, what is said by "John has three children" does not vary from one context to the other — in both cases, what is said is that John has no less than three children, and this is consistent with his having six, nine or twenty; but in one of the two readings there is also the pragmatic implication that John has no more than three children. This pragmatic implication is easily accounted for using Grice's "maxim of quantity", according to which the speaker is supposed to provide as much information as may be relevant (Grice, 1975: 45). By virtue of this maxim, if John had more children than three, if he had, say, five children, the speaker should have said so, instead of providing only the weaker information that John has (no less than)

three children. The maxim of quantity is respected only if the latter information is the strongest the speaker was in a position to give. It follows that, by saying that John has (no less than) three children, the speaker implies that this is the strongest information he is in a position to give; this in turn implies — if the speaker is known to be well-informed about the number of children John has — that John has no more than three children. This pragmatic implication gets added to what is strictly and literally said (namely, that John has no less than three children), and their combination yields what is communicated, namely that John has exactly three children — no more and no less. By contrast, in a context in which the exact number of children is irrelevant (as in the dialogue above), or in which the speaker is not supposed to know the exact number of children, the pragmatic implication that John has no more than three children will be absent; only the weaker reading, “no less than three”, will then be communicated.

It is possible to account for the referential/attributive duality along similar lines. Instead of saying that “The F is G” does not have the same truth-condition when the description is used attributively and when it is used referentially, we may say that on both readings the utterance is true if and only if there is a unique F and it is G. The difference between the two readings would then be that on the referential reading, a pragmatic implication combines with what is said, thereby adding to the overall meaning of the utterance. What is said, on both readings, is that whoever (whatever) is uniquely F is G. Now, suppose a context in which it is known that *a* is the F; in this context, “The F is G” contextually implies that *a* is G. Suppose further that the information literally expressed by “The F is G”, viz. the information that whoever is the F is G, is not relevant per se, but only in so far as it contextually implies something which *is* relevant, namely that *a* is G. Clearly, in such a context, the utterance “The F is G”, even if it is construed as literally expressing the general proposition that whoever is the F is G, will be understood as conveying the singular proposition that *a* is G. For the speaker claims to be communicating something relevant, and it is manifest that his utterance achieves relevance only if one of its contextual implications is understood as part of what is being communicated. A referential use of a definite description, on this account, is simply a case in which, by saying that the F is G, the speaker means

that a certain object, *a*, is G. The speaker communicates not only the general proposition which is literally expressed, but also the singular proposition which is contextually implied and which gives the utterance its point.

The two competing theories can be summed up as follows:

- (1) According to the Naive Theory, the referential/attributive distinction is a distinction between two types of proposition literally expressed by "The F is G". On the referential reading, a certain object is said to be G, and the utterance is true if and only if this object is G; on the attributive reading, what is said is that there is an object which is both uniquely F and G, and the utterance is true if and only if there is such an object.
- (2) According to the Implicature Theory, one and the same proposition is expressed on both readings, viz. the general proposition that there is an *x* such that *x* is uniquely F and *x* is G. The description is said to be used "referentially" when this general proposition owes its relevance to its contextually implying a singular proposition to the effect that a certain object, *a*, is G; on the attributive reading, the general proposition literally expressed is relevant independently of any such contextually implied singular proposition. It follows that the referential/attributive distinction is pragmatic, not semantic; it relates to what the *speaker* means, i.e. communicates, by his utterance, not to what *his words* literally mean. It is true that, on one reading, a singular proposition is communicated, whereas on the other reading only a general proposition is communicated; but what is expressed in both cases is the general proposition that there is an *x* such that *x* is uniquely F and *x* is G.

It is important to note that the Naive Theory and the Implicature Theory agree on the data: sometimes a singular proposition is communicated by means of a sentence "The F is G" (referential reading), and sometimes not (attributive reading). The question is whether this distinction is reflected at the level of what is said: does the utterance have the same truth-condition on both readings (Implicature Theory), or does it sometimes express a singular and sometimes a general proposition (Naive Theory)?

This question should not be confused with another one. Suppose the definite description “the F” in an utterance “The F is G” is used to refer to a certain object *a*. The speaker makes an assertion about *a*, to the effect that it is G; in the terminology of Russell and Kaplan, he communicates a singular proposition consisting of that object and the property of being G. The question, as I said, is whether this singular proposition is literally expressed or whether it is only communicated. But there is another question, concerning the object which is a “constituent” of the singular proposition: which object is it? There are two candidates: the “semantic referent” of the description, i.e. the object which happens to be the F, or the speaker’s intended referent, i.e. the object which the speaker “has in mind” when he uses the definite description referentially. In many cases the semantic referent and the intended referent do coincide, but when they do not — when, for example, the speaker mistakenly believes that *a* is the F, and intends to refer to *a* by means of the description “the F” — the question arises, Does the singular proposition communicated include the semantic referent or the speaker’s intended referent as a constituent? Donnellan’s answer to this question is that the singular proposition includes the speaker’s intended referent. This I will call the Subjective Reference View.

Donnellan accepts both the Subjective Reference View and the Naive Theory. It follows that, for him, the speaker literally *says* that *a* is G, or, rather, says of *a* that it is G, when he utters “The F is G” using “the F” to refer to *a* in a context in which *a* is not actually the F. But many philosophers are reluctant to accept *both* the Subjective Reference View and the Naive Theory. They think that, if the singular proposition which is communicated includes the speaker’s intended referent rather than the semantic referent, then that proposition cannot be the proposition literally expressed by the utterance, but only the proposition which the speaker intends to communicate. Be that as it may, I will not be concerned with the Subjective Reference View in this paper. I will consider only cases in which the semantic referent and the speaker’s intended referent are identical.² In such cases, there is no problem as to which object is a constituent of the singular proposition communicated, and we may concentrate on the debate between the Implicature Theory and the Naive Theory.

3. AN ARGUMENT FOR THE IMPLICATURE THEORY

Methodologists think they have an argument to the effect that the Implicature Theory is preferable to the Naive Theory. In this section, I will present the argument, and show that it does not work.

The argument starts with the following premiss which, as it stands, seems hardly controversial:

- (P) When a sentence *S* can be used to mean two different things, the intuitive difference in meaning can be accounted for either at the semantic level, by positing two different literal meanings corresponding to what is superficially the same sentence, or at the pragmatic level, by positing a conversational implicature which in some contexts combines with what is literally said, thereby modifying the utterance's overall meaning.

Consider, as an example, the following sentence:

- (1) You will go home

Sentence (1) can be used to tell the hearer to go home (imperative reading) or simply to state that the hearer will go home (assertive reading). More than twenty years ago, Katz and Postal explained what they took to be a genuine ambiguity by assigning (1) two different underlying phrase markers, one containing a phonologically null Imperative morpheme and one which does not (Katz and Postal, 1964: §4.2.3.). But most philosophers and linguists nowadays consider that (1) is *not* ambiguous; the assertive reading is the only literal reading of this sentence, they hold. On this view, the so-called imperative reading is purely pragmatic: it corresponds to something which *the speaker* means when he utters (1) in a certain context, but it is not part of the meaning of (1) itself. In the same way, by saying "It's cold in here" it is possible to mean "You should close the window", but this does not make "You should close the window" one of the literal senses of the sentence "It's cold in here" (Gordon and Lakoff, 1971; Searle, 1975).

The second part of the argument is a methodological principle put forward by Grice in his William James lectures (Grice, 1978: 118–120). This principle — "Modified Occam's Razor" — implies that, when

a pragmatic solution is available, it is to be preferred to a solution in terms of semantic ambiguity. Of course, a pragmatic explanation is not always available; but when it is — when, for example, it can be shown that uttering a sentence expressing one of the two meanings at issue would enable one to convey the other by conversational implicature — then this explanation is to be preferred. This is so for the following reason: a pragmatic explanation costs nothing, since the principles and assumptions it appeals to are independently motivated; by contrast, positing a semantic ambiguity is an *ad hoc*, costly move — a move which the possibility of a pragmatic analysis makes entirely superfluous. Grice's methodological principle is a principle of theoretical economy, akin to Occam's Razor: like theoretical entities in general, *senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity*. Now it is unnecessary to assign a special sense to an expression in order to account for its use to convey a meaning different from its standard sense, if a pragmatic explanation of why this meaning is conveyed is available. It follows that a pragmatic explanation, when available, is to be preferred to an explanation in terms of semantic ambiguity.

In all the examples I have mentioned — the two readings of “John has three children”, the referential/attributive distinction, and the alleged ambiguity of sentence (1) — a pragmatic explanation *is* available. According to Modified Occam's Razor, this explanation is to be preferred. As far as referential descriptions are concerned, then, the Implicature Theory wins, and the Naive Theory loses.

As I said at the beginning of this section, this argument does not work. I accept Modified Occam's Razor, but I do not think it follows from Modified Occam's Razor that the Implicature Theory of referential descriptions is to be preferred to the Naive Theory. What Grice's principle implies is that the Implicature Theory is to be preferred to an account in terms of semantic ambiguity. To conclude that the Naive Theory must be rejected, we have to construe the Naive Theory as an account in terms of semantic ambiguity. This construal is manifest throughout the philosophical literature against the Naive Theory. Typical in this respect is Salmon's presentation of the Naive Theory as “the thesis that sentences involving definite descriptions are semantically ambiguous, in the sense that the proposition expressed is either singular or general” (Salmon, 1982: 38) — as if it were not possible for a

sentence to express different propositions in different contexts without being semantically ambiguous. As a result of their construing the Naive Theory in this way, methodologists are puzzled when a Naive Theorist such as Donnellan rejects the thesis that the sentence “The F is G” is semantically ambiguous. This position they take to be more or less inconsistent, and it is said that Donnellan “hedges”. But, of course, there is an inconsistency here only if the Naive Theory is construed as an account in terms of semantic ambiguity.

The argument against the Naive Theory rests on a mistaken identification of the Naive Theory with what I will henceforth refer to as the Ambiguity Theory. The Ambiguity Theory consists of three theses:

- (a) The sentence at issue is semantically ambiguous, i.e. it has two different literal meanings.
- (b) The (literal) truth-conditions of an utterance of this sentence are different on the two readings.
- (c) What is strictly and literally said is different on the two readings.

The Naive Theory consists of theses (b) and (c); it says that the proposition expressed by “the F is G” is not the same when the description is used referentially and when it is used attributively. Grice’s Modified Occam’s Razor implies that the Implicature Theory is to be preferred to the Ambiguity Theory, but it does not imply that the Implicature Theory is to be preferred to a weaker theory embodying theses (b) and (c) but not thesis (a). *It is thesis (a) which “multiplies senses beyond necessity” and is therefore unwelcome by Gricean standards.* So the question is: is it possible to hold (b) and (c) without holding (a)? Is it possible to be a Naive Theorist without being an Ambiguity Theorist? To this question, I answer positively. A Naive Theorist is not necessarily an Ambiguity Theorist, contrary to what methodologists have always assumed.

At the beginning of this section, I said of premiss (P) that it seemed hardly controversial as it stood. (P) says that there are two possible theories, the Implicature Theory and the Ambiguity Theory. Interpreted at face value, this is hardly controversial. But the argument against the Naive Theory rests on a *special* interpretation of (P). On this special, restrictive interpretation, (P) says that there are two, *and only two*,

possible theories, the Implicature Theory and the Ambiguity Theory. From (P) thus interpreted, together with Modified Occam's Razor, it does follow that the Implicature Theory, when available, is the correct theory. But I deny (P) on this interpretation. I believe there are more theories than just the Ambiguity Theory and the Implicature Theory. It may be, therefore, that the Implicature Theory is not the correct one, even if it is preferable to the Ambiguity Theory.

4. THREE LEVELS OF MEANING AND THREE TYPES OF THEORY

There are many sentences which in different contexts express different propositions even though they are not semantically ambiguous. Indexical sentences such as "I am hungry" are obvious examples. In a context *C* this sentence will express the proposition that Tom is hungry at time *t*; in another context *C** it will express the proposition that Bill is hungry at time *t'*. As far as such examples are concerned, theses (b) and (c) hold, but not thesis (a).

What indexical sentences show is that there are three basic levels to be considered. There is, firstly, the level of sentence meaning. At this level, we are concerned only with sentence-types and their linguistic meaning. The phenomenon of ambiguity is located at this level: an ambiguous sentence is a sentence-type to which two different linguistic meanings are assigned by the semantic conventions of the language. Secondly, there is the level of what is said literally by uttering (a token of) the sentence. In the case of indexical and other context-sensitive sentences, what is said depends on the context of utterance and not just on the linguistic meaning of the sentence-type. Thirdly, there is what is communicated by uttering the sentence. What is communicated may be identical with what is said, but it is also possible to communicate more than, or something different from, what is strictly and literally said.

To illustrate the three levels, consider the sentence "It is cold". The sentence-type has a certain meaning, but this meaning is not a fully determinate proposition. As Forgyson put it, the meaning of the sentence is something determinable; by contrast, the meaning of the utterance — what is said — is determinate (Forgyson, 1973: 163–164). To go from the sentence's determinable meaning to the utterance's determinate meaning the interpreter must rely on the context of

utterance. Depending on the context, the sentence "It is cold" will express either the proposition that the pie is cold at time t or the proposition that the temperature in the room is low at time t' , or whatever proposition falls under the semantic potential of the sentence. Although it depends on the context, the determinate meaning of the utterance is literal, in the sense that it is nothing but an enrichment, a determination of the sentence's determinable meaning. But the utterance may also convey something different from a mere determination of sentence meaning. For example, by saying that it is cold in the room the speaker may implicate that the hearer is to close the window. This implicature is part of what the utterance communicates, but it is not part of the utterance's (literal) meaning, let alone of the linguistic meaning of the sentence-type.

When a sentence can be used to communicate two different things in two different contexts or classes of contexts, the difference may be treated in *three* different ways, corresponding to the three different levels of meaning. It may be treated as a superficial, pragmatic difference at the third level only. On this view, what is communicated, but neither what is said nor the linguistic meaning of the sentence, varies from one context to the other. The difference between the referential and the attributive uses of descriptions is such a superficial difference according to the Implicature Theory, whereas the Ambiguity Theory ascribes the difference between the two readings to the deepest level: it considers it as a difference between two senses of the sentence-type. Principle (P) in its restrictive interpretation suggests that these are the only two possibilities, but there is also a third one: *to ascribe the difference to the second level, by considering it as a difference between the propositions literally expressed, without rooting this difference in a genuine ambiguity at the first level.* It is such a version of the Naive Theory, immune to Grice's methodological principle, which I want to put forward in this paper.

Before proceeding, let me give a couple of examples in order to illustrate my general point about the three types of theory.

Consider sentence (1) again:

(1) You will go home

This sentence can be used to tell the hearer to go home, or to state that he will do so. Katz and Postal believed that (1) was ambiguous and had

two literal meanings — assertive and imperative — corresponding to two distinct underlying structures. As I said, philosophers and linguists nowadays reject the Ambiguity Theory as far as sentence (1) is concerned; they accept the Implicature Theory and consider that one of the two readings of (1), viz. the assertive reading, is the literal reading of this sentence, while the imperative reading results from a conversational implicature. On this view, the speaker who commands the hearer to go home by uttering (1) performs this illocutionary act “indirectly”, by implication, as the speaker of “It’s cold in here” hints that the hearer is to close the window. In both cases, the speaker is taken to have stated something (that the hearer will go home, or that the temperature is low in the room), and, by means of this literal statement, to have conveyed a directive to the hearer.

But there is another possibility: to consider that in the case of (1) the directive is literally expressed and belongs to the second level, i.e. that of the contextually determinate meaning of the utterance, distinct both from the determinable meaning of the sentence-type and from the conversational implicatures which combine with what is literally said.

At the second level, the linguistic meaning of the sentence is enriched and determined to yield a complete proposition. This process of contextual enrichment involves not only the determination of a complete proposition, but also the determination of the illocutionary force of the utterance. Even when the illocutionary force of the utterance is linguistically indicated by means of a specific marker such as the imperative mood, the context is needed to go beyond the rough indication thereby provided at the level of sentence meaning; this is a fortiori so when no indication is provided at the level of sentence meaning. Now, it is generally believed that declarative sentences convey an indication of assertive illocutionary force. This is why the assertive reading of (1) is identified with the utterance’s literal meaning, the imperative meaning being ascribed to the third level as a conversational implicature. But there are reasons to believe that declarative sentences are in fact “neutral” or “unmarked” with respect to illocutionary force, contrary to imperative or interrogative sentences (see Recanati, 1982 and Recanati, 1987b: §40). If this is right, the literal meaning of (1) considered as a sentence-type conveys no indication as to the potential illocutionary force of the utterance. When the sentence is uttered, the

context is used to determine the illocutionary force of the utterance, in the same way as it is used to determine its complete propositional content. The output of this process of contextual determination is the utterance's literal meaning, which consists both of a certain illocutionary force and a certain propositional content. In the same way as the sentence can express different propositions in different contexts (owing to the presence of indexicals like "you" and the future tense), it can express different illocutionary forces in different contexts (owing to the indeterminacy of illocutionary force at the level of sentence meaning). On this account, the assertive and the imperative readings of (1) are both contextual but nevertheless fully literal interpretations of the utterance.

Consider another example, sentence (2):

(2) Everybody's going to die tomorrow

This sentence expresses different propositions in different contexts, since the reference of "tomorrow" depends upon the time of utterance. But even if the reference of "tomorrow" is fixed, the sentence can still be used to say (or at least to communicate) very different things: this is so because "everybody" can be variously interpreted. In some contexts the sentence will be used to mean that everybody *in the world* is going to die tomorrow; this I will call the "universal" interpretation. There is another type of interpretation, in which what the sentence is used to mean is that everybody *in some group* (e.g., everybody in the room) is going to die tomorrow. This I will call the "restricted" interpretation. Apparently the truth-conditions of the utterance are not the same on the restricted and the universal interpretation. How are we to account for this difference? Here again there are three possibilities:

(1) *Ambiguity Theory* — Even though superficially we have a single sentence, at a deeper level there are two distinct sentences, (2a) and (2b):

(2a) Everybody is going to die tomorrow

(2b) Everybody in the room is going to die tomorrow

The surface sentence (2) corresponds either to sentence (2a) or to sentence (2b). If the former, (2) is a complete sentence; if the latter, it is

only an elliptical sentence, i.e. an abbreviated version of (2b). Being structurally ambiguous the surface sentence (2) really has two distinct literal meanings: the restricted interpretation is the literal meaning corresponding to (2b), the universal interpretation the literal meaning corresponding to (2a).

(2) *Implicature Theory* — On both the restricted and the universal interpretation what the speaker of (2) strictly and literally says is that everybody, i.e. everybody in the world, is going to die tomorrow. On the restricted interpretation, however, the context makes it obvious that this can't be what the speaker means to communicate. There is nothing unusual about such a situation. Quite often, we mean something other than what we say. When I utter "It will take some time to repair your watch" what I strictly and literally say is so obviously true that it would not be worth saying if by saying that I did not mean to convey something else — for example, that it will take a *long* time to repair your watch.³ In typical cases of irony, what is said is so obviously false that there is no temptation to identify it with what is communicated. The same thing happens in some contexts when I utter "Everybody is going to die tomorrow": what I strictly and literally say — viz. that everybody in the world is going to die tomorrow — is so obviously false that what is communicated must be something different — for example, that everybody in the room is going to die tomorrow (because the mushrooms were poisonous). Of course, much more needs to be said about the relation between what is strictly and literally said and what is communicated in such cases, but the general idea is clear, and it straightforwardly applies to examples such as (2).

(3) *Contextual Theory* — All quantification is relative to a domain. This domain can be explicitly specified, as in (2b), but it can also be left implicit, as in (2). When the domain of quantification is not explicit, the context is needed to understand what is said by uttering the sentence. (2) means that everybody in some domain x is going to die tomorrow. The context is required to instantiate the domain-variable x in the same way as it is required to fix the reference of "tomorrow". Thus, in some contexts, (2) expresses the proposition that everybody in the world will die the day after the day of utterance, while in other contexts it expresses the proposition that everybody in the room will die the day

after the day of utterance. Both propositions are literally expressed by the sentence with respect to these contexts, but the sentence itself is not ambiguous.

The third type of theory, which I have just called the "Contextual Theory" in the case of (2), has something in common both with the Ambiguity Theory and with the Implicature Theory. Like the Implicature Theory, and contrary to the Ambiguity Theory, it is consistent with Grice's methodological principle, since it posits no ambiguity; like the Ambiguity Theory, and contrary to the Implicature Theory, it is a version of the Naive Theory, since it considers what is strictly and literally said as different on the two readings. But methodologists have constantly overlooked the possibility of theories of the third type. Why? Why have they so often given a restrictive interpretation of Principle (P), as if there were only two theories worth considering, the Implicature Theory and the Ambiguity Theory? These are the questions I will now address. In the last sections of the paper, I will try to construct an account of the referential/attributive distinction along the lines just indicated.

5. ALLEGED ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CONTEXTUAL THEORY

Everybody knows that, in many cases at least, a sentence may express different propositions with respect to different contexts, even though it is not ambiguous.⁴ Let's call the sentences which have this property "context-sensitive". I have emphasized that, besides the Ambiguity Theory and the Implicature Theory, there is a third type of theory by which we can hope to account for the referential/attributive distinction, viz. the Contextual Theory:

Contextual Theory: A sentence "The F is G" is context-sensitive and expresses either a singular proposition or a general proposition depending on the context of utterance.

Clearly, methodologists have not considered this possibility worth mentioning, and there must be some reason for thus ignoring the Contextual Theory.

In fact, I believe there is a variety of reasons for not considering the Contextual Theory. In this section I will discuss three of them; a fourth one will be mentioned at the end of the paper.

The first argument for not considering the Contextual Theory runs as follows:

- (A) A sentence is context-sensitive only if it includes an indexical component. Now, in the case of “The F is G”, we may remove all sources of indexicality from this type of sentence by assigning non-indexical predicates as values of the predicate-letters “F” and “G” and fixing the temporal value of the present tense. However, if we do this, it will still be possible to interpret the sentence in two different ways, as expressing either a singular or a general proposition. It follows that the duality of readings cannot be a matter of context-sensitivity; it must be something else. Therefore the Contextual Theory is ruled out.

Is it really possible to remove all sources of indexicality from “The F is G” in the manner indicated? It is hard to tell. We do not have at our disposal a finite list of expressions known to be indexical, such that a sentence including no expression on this list is automatically non-indexical. Which expressions are indexical is an open question. For example, we might discover that definite descriptions *qua* definite descriptions — whether or not the predicate they contain is itself indexical — introduce an indexical component in the sentences in which they occur. However, let’s assume that we *can* remove all sources of indexicality from “The F is G”. Still, the argument does not work, because indexicality is not the only form of context-sensitivity. Consider, for example, the sentence “I saw John’s book in the room”. This sentence expresses a complete proposition only with respect to a context of utterance. This is so not only because it contains indexical elements (e.g. the pronoun “I” or the past tense), but also because it contains expressions whose semantic value is fundamentally indeterminate at the linguistic level. Thus the expression “John’s book” can be used to mean *the book written by John, the book edited by John, the book published by John, the book stolen by John, the book bought by John, the book sought by John*, or whatever. This is indeterminacy

rather than indexicality. In the same way, the incomplete definite description “the room” introduces an element of context-sensitivity in the sentence without being indexical in the proper sense (Recanati, 1987a: 60–61). A number of similar cases have been described in the literature (see e.g. Kay and Zimmer, 1976; Cohen, 1986). They show that context-sensitivity comes in various forms and extends far beyond strict indexicality. Now, the Contextual Theory claims that the referential/attributive distinction reveals a special form of context-sensitivity in sentences such as “The F is G”. This possibility must be seriously considered and cannot be ruled out a priori.

The second argument is no better than the first:

- (B) A sentence, whether context-sensitive or not, has a certain logical form in virtue of its meaning, independently of the context. What the context does, when the sentence is context-sensitive, is to fix the semantic value of some expressions which play the role of free variables, but the logical form of the sentence, and therefore the type of proposition expressed, is independent of the particular values assigned to those expressions.⁵ For this reason the referential/attributive distinction cannot be a matter of context-sensitivity; for what changes from one reading to the other precisely is the logical form — the type of proposition expressed.

This argument begs the question. The Contextual Theory says that the referential/attributive distinction is not a matter of ambiguity, nor of implicature, but of context-sensitivity. The difference with an ordinary case of context-sensitivity is that not only the particular proposition expressed but also the *type* of proposition expressed (singular or general) is affected by the context. To assume that the logical form of the utterance cannot be context-dependent in this way is just to beg the question against the Contextual Theory. (To avoid begging the question, one might want to draw a distinction between the logical form of the sentence, whatever that is, and the logical form of the utterance, i.e. the type of proposition expressed.)

Besides (A) and (B), which deny the very possibility of a Contextual

Theory of the referential/attributional distinction, there is another argument which grants this possibility but justifies ignoring it:

- (C) It is not enough just to *say* that the referential/attributional distinction is a matter of context-sensitivity rather than of ambiguity. Unless it is substantiated, such a claim is purely verbal. The same sort of empty claim could be made with respect to any ambiguous expression. For example, we might pretend that the word “bank” is not ambiguous but somehow “context-sensitive”, i.e. that it has only one linguistic meaning, by virtue of which in two different contexts it makes two different contributions to the proposition literally expressed. Such a theory is vacuous if we do not say what the literal meaning of “bank” actually is; and it will not do to say that the (single) meaning of “bank” is *ground near river or financial institution*, for this disjunctive meaning can obviously not count as a *single* sense, except in an entirely artificial way. Now, the situation seems to be exactly the same with respect to the referential/attributional distinction. According to the Contextual Theory, a sentence “The F is G” has a single meaning by virtue of which in different contexts it can express either a general or a singular proposition. This theory is empty unless the relevant meaning is clearly identified. The burden of proof, methodologists can therefore argue, lies with the Naive Theorist: he has to show, by actually delivering the goods, that the Contextual Theory — i.e. the version of the Naive Theory which is immune to Modified Occam’s Razor — does really exist. Until such a proof is given, the natural assumption to make is that there are only two theories available, the Ambiguity Theory and the Implicature Theory — the latter being preferable to the former by virtue of Modified Occam’s Razor.

This argument does not beg the question, and I think I agree with what it says. Since there are three levels of meaning and not just two, a Contextual Theory of the referential/attributional distinction is possible in principle; what argument (C) shows is only that this possibility can be safely ignored as long as it is not implemented. With this I have no quarrel. To implement the Contextual Theory is precisely what I intend

to do in the next section of this paper, and (C) provides no reason not to try to do so. (At the end of the paper I shall discuss the “Anti-Contextualist Strategy” which is supposed to provide a reason for not even trying to build up the Contextual Theory.)

6. THE FIRST LEVEL OF MEANING: DIAGONAL PROPOSITIONS

Since he claims that the sentence “The F is G” is not ambiguous yet expresses different propositions in different contexts, the Contextual Theorist must say what the constant meaning of this sentence is. This meaning must be such as to explain how the sentence comes to express a general proposition in certain contexts and a singular proposition in other contexts.

I take it that the meaning of a sentence partly consists in indications concerning the conditions under which an utterance of the sentence expresses a true proposition. These conditions are not to be confused with the truth-conditions of the utterance, i.e. the conditions under which the proposition actually expressed by the utterance is true. What the sentence indicates are the conditions under which *any* utterance of this sentence would express a true proposition — the conditions which must be satisfied in a world w for an utterance of the sentence in w to express a proposition true with respect to w . These conditions are invariant under contextual change, while the proposition expressed by the utterance, and therefore its truth-conditions, generally depend on the context.

The difference between the two sorts of conditions is closely related to a distinction made by Stalnaker between what is said and the “diagonal proposition” expressed by the utterance. Stalnaker defined the diagonal proposition expressed by an utterance E as the proposition which has the following property: for any world w , this proposition is true with respect to w if and only if E, uttered in w , would express a proposition true with respect to w (Stalnaker, 1978: 318). The diagonal proposition thus understood is *not* what is literally said by the utterance, let alone something which is conveyed without being actually said. It corresponds neither to the second level of meaning (what is said) nor to the third (what is conveyed) but to the first, that of linguistic meaning. The diagonal proposition is expressed by the utterance,

independently of the context, purely by virtue of its linguistic meaning. In fact, it is slightly misleading to speak of this proposition as being "expressed", since by "the proposition expressed" I generally mean "what is said". To prevent misunderstanding, I will say either that the diagonal proposition is "associated with" the utterance, or that it is "diagonally expressed" by the utterance.

Consider, by way of example, an utterance *T* of the sentence "I am French", uttered by Giscard d'Estaing in the actual world. If we abstract from the context in which *T* occurs, and rely only on the linguistic meaning of the sentence, we cannot say which proposition is expressed. Indeed, without a context, no proposition is expressed: the proposition expressed is essentially context-dependent. Once the context is taken into account, it turns out that *T* expresses the (true) proposition that Giscard d'Estaing is French, a proposition that can be described as the set of worlds in which Giscard d'Estaing is French. Now, consider the diagonal proposition associated with *T*: we need not know the context of utterance in order to identify this proposition. By virtue of its linguistic meaning alone, *T* tells us which conditions must be satisfied for it to express a true proposition; it tells us that it expresses a true proposition if and only if there is an *x* who utters *T* and who is French (at the time of utterance). The diagonal proposition is just that: the proposition that there is an *x* such that *x* utters *T* and *x* is French. This proposition is true with respect to a world *w* if and only if the proposition expressed by *T* in *w* is true with respect to *w*.

When a sentence is eternal, the proposition expressed and the diagonal proposition are identical. This is easy to prove. The diagonal proposition is the proposition which is true with respect to any world *w* if and only if the proposition expressed when the utterance occurs in *w* is true with respect to *w*. Now, an eternal sentence expresses the same proposition no matter in which world the utterance takes place. It follows that the diagonal proposition associated with an eternal sentence is true if and only if the proposition expressed by that sentence is true. The proposition expressed and the diagonal proposition therefore coincide. But when a sentence is context-sensitive, there is a difference between the proposition expressed and the diagonal proposition. For example, the diagonal proposition associated with *T* is clearly different from the proposition actually expressed by *T*. The

former can be described as the set of worlds in which someone utters T and is French, the latter as the set of worlds in which Giscard d'Estaing is French. Obviously, there are many possible worlds in which Giscard d'Estaing is French but no Frenchman utters T, or in which the utterer of T is French but Giscard d'Estaing is not.

Since there is this difference, for context-sensitive sentences, between the proposition expressed and the diagonal proposition, the Contextual Theorist need not be embarrassed by the question, "What is the meaning of 'The F is G'?" He may concede to the Implicature Theorist that the meaning of this sentence is or involves a general proposition, viz. the proposition that there is a unique F and that it is G, and insist that this proposition is not the proposition expressed, contrary to what the Implicature Theorist holds, but only the diagonal proposition.

If we assume that, at the first level, the sentence "The F is G" diagonally expresses the (general) proposition that there is a unique F and that it is G, it is easy to explain why, at the second level, this sentence can express either a general or a singular proposition. I propose the following account, reminiscent of Kaplan (1978: 233) and Stalnaker (1970: 285). The diagonal proposition globally indicates the conditions under which the utterance expresses a true proposition, but it does not tell us which of these conditions are contextual conditions, i.e. conditions which must be contextually satisfied for the sentence to express a definite proposition, and which are truth-conditions proper, i.e. conditions which must be satisfied for the proposition expressed to be true. (For example, in the case of "I am French", the condition that there be a person x who utters T is a contextual condition, and the condition that this person be French is a truth-condition.) The diagonal proposition associated with "The F is G" tells us that the utterance expresses a true proposition if and only if there is an x such that x is uniquely F and x is G, but it does not tell us whether the condition that there be an x such that x is uniquely F is a contextual condition or a truth-condition proper. It follows that there are two possible interpretations, according to the context: in one type of context, the condition that there be an x such that x is uniquely F will be interpreted as a contextual condition, and the proposition expressed will be a singular proposition, true if and only if a (the object which satisfies the con-

textual condition) is G. In another type of context, the condition that there be an x such that x is uniquely F will be considered as a full-blooded truth-condition, and the utterance will express the general proposition that there is an x such that x is uniquely F and x is G.

7. TYPE-REFERENTIALITY AND TOKEN-REFERENTIALITY

The proposal I have just made in order to give substance to the Contextual Theory raises a few interesting questions, some of which are too general to be dealt with in this paper. I have in mind questions like the following: Why is it that only the descriptive condition associated with "The F", i.e. the condition that there be an x such that x is uniquely F, can be interpreted either as a contextual condition or as a truth-condition? Why don't we have the same two possibilities with respect to the second condition, i.e. the condition that the referent of the description be G? This question is very interesting, but it can't be tackled without going into very broad issues like that of the semantic difference between subject and predicate (on this issue, see Strawson, 1974). Here I will simply assume that, contrary to the descriptive condition associated with the subject-term, the descriptive condition associated with the predicate necessarily belongs to the truth-conditions of the utterance. Thus there is a semantic difference between "the F is G" and "a G is the F" even though the same information is globally conveyed in both cases, viz. the information that there is an x such that x is G and x is uniquely F. In the first case the descriptive condition associated with "the F" can be interpreted either as part of the truth-conditions or merely as a contextual condition; in the other case, it can only be interpreted as a truth-condition, and the referential reading of "the F" is ruled out.⁶

There is another question which, contrary to the first one, does not lie beyond the scope of this paper. It concerns the difference between two types of sentence, those with a description as subject-term and those with a proper name, a pronoun or a demonstrative expression as subject-term. Many philosophers think that there is a semantic difference between these two types of sentence — between, for example, "I am French" or "Giscard d'Estaing is French" on the one hand, and "The President of IBM is French" or "A good friend of mine is French"

on the other hand. A traditional way of accounting for this difference is to say that sentences with a name or a demonstrative express singular propositions, while sentences with a description are quantificational and express general propositions. Thus "A good friend of mine is French" is considered equivalent to "There is an x such that x is a good friend of mine and x is French", and "The president of IBM is French" to "There is one and only one x such that x is president of IBM, and x is French". The problem for this view is that sentences like "The F is G" may also be used to assert singular propositions. According to the Implicature Theorist, this is a purely pragmatic phenomenon: even when it is used to communicate a singular proposition, the proposition expressed by "The F is G" is the general proposition that there is a unique F and that it is G. The Contextual Theorist rejects this view, since he believes that a singular proposition is genuinely expressed by the utterance in the referential use. However, even from the standpoint of the Contextual Theorist, there is an element of generality which characterizes description-sentences as opposed to sentences of the other type. The description in the first type of sentence can be used attributively, to assert a general proposition; there is normally no such use for sentences of the other type. (I say "normally" because it has been claimed that proper names also, and even demonstratives, can be used attributively. I will not discuss these admittedly exceptional cases here.)

The Contextual Theorist admits that there is an element of generality in "The F is G", which he locates in the diagonal proposition associated with the utterance. But the generality of the diagonal proposition is not a feature which characterizes one type of sentence as opposed to the other. Both types of sentences diagonally express general propositions. So far, the Contextual Theory provides no account of the difference between the two types of sentence.

The problem appears in full light if we consider an utterance of "The F is G" in which the description is used referentially. Suppose Giscard d'Estaing utters "The present speaker is French", using the description referentially. According to the Contextual Theorist, this utterance expresses a singular proposition, namely the proposition that Giscard d'Estaing is French. How can we characterize the difference between this utterance and "I am French", also uttered by Giscard d'Estaing? The same singular proposition is expressed in both cases, according to

the Contextual Theorist. The difference, therefore, cannot be located at the level of what is said, since in both cases what is said is that Giscard d'Estaing is French. Apparently it can't be located at the level of sentence meaning either, for at this level each utterance indicates that it expresses a true proposition if and only if there is an x such that x is producing this very utterance and x is French. How, then, is the Contextual Theorist going to account for the semantic difference between the two sentences?

The difference between the two types of sentence is a difference in semantic potential: normally, only "The F is G" is capable of an attributive use. Now, it is hard to understand what a difference in semantic potential can be, if not a difference at the level of sentence meaning. The problem for the Contextual Theorist is that, on the one hand, he takes the meaning of a sentence to consist in indications concerning the conditions under which an utterance of this sentence expresses a true proposition, while on the other hand he believes that the conditions in question are the same for "The present speaker is French" and "I am French". It follows that these two sentences should have the same semantic potential. More generally, if, as the Contextual Theorist says, the duality of readings which characterizes sentences of the type "The F is G" arises from the underdetermination of propositional content at the level of sentence meaning, sentences such as "I am French" should also be capable of two readings, since no difference at the level of sentence meaning has been registered so far between the two types of sentence.

The solution to this problem is simple. We must allow that there is *more* to the meaning of a sentence than just the indications it gives concerning the conditions under which an utterance of this sentence expresses a true proposition. Consider, again, an utterance T of the sentence "I am French". By virtue of its linguistic meaning, T indicates that T is true if and only if someone utters T and is French; but this indication does not exhaust the linguistic meaning of T. *T also indicates that the first condition, namely: that there be an x who utters T, is a contextual condition and not a truth-condition proper.* This indication is conveyed by the pronoun "I", which belongs to the semantic category of "referential terms" (Recanati, 1988). It is this indication which is responsible for the difference between "I am French" and "The present speaker is French".

Referential terms have the following property: their meaning includes a special feature, which I dubbed “REF”, by virtue of which they indicate that there is an object, the referent of the term, such that the utterance in which they occur in subject-position is true if and only if this object satisfies the predicate. Referential terms therefore indicate that the utterance in which they occur expresses a singular proposition, with the referent of the referential term as a constituent. For example, the pronoun “I” in T indicates that there is an x such that T is true if and only if x is French. In most cases and perhaps all, the meaning of a referential term also includes a “mode of presentation”, i.e. a descriptive condition which the referent of the term must satisfy (in the case of “I”, this descriptive condition is: being the speaker); but the effect of REF is to present this condition as merely a contextual condition, external to the proposition expressed.⁷ As I said in my paper on referential terms: “The mode of presentation associated with the referential term makes a certain object contextually identifiable, and the utterance is presented as \langle true \rangle if and only if this object has the property expressed by the predicate in the sentence” (Recanati, 1988: 115). Thus, by virtue of its linguistic meaning, an utterance in which a referential term occurs indicates not only the conditions under which it expresses a true proposition, but also which condition is a contextual condition and which a truth-condition proper. Owing to this further indication, the indeterminacy which characterizes description-sentences and makes them capable of two readings does not transfer to sentences in which a referential term occurs instead of a description.

The semantic feature REF distinguishes referential from non-referential terms. By a “referential term”, I mean a term which is referential as an expression-type. A referential term is not the same thing as a term which is *used* referentially. A term t is referential (or “type-referential”) if and only if, for any sentence $S(t)$ in which it occurs, it is part of the meaning of the sentence that: *for any utterance of this sentence, there is an object x such that the utterance is true if and only if x satisfies $S()$.* This indication is what REF contributes to the meaning of the sentence. By contrast, a term t is used referentially in an utterance U of the sentence $S(t)$ if and only if it is part of the meaning of the *utterance* (but not necessarily of the sentence) that there is an object x such that the utterance is true if and only if x satisfies $S()$.⁸ Utterance meaning depends not only on the linguistic meaning of the sentence but also on

various contextual factors. When *t* is a referential term, the use of the sentence to express a singular proposition is marked at the level of sentence meaning via the feature REF; when *t* is not a referential term, it may still be used referentially, to express a singular proposition, but this use is not marked as such at the level of sentence meaning and it can be understood only on the basis of contextual factors.

I take it that descriptions are not referential terms; they can be used either referentially or non-referentially, so as to express either a singular or a general proposition. On the other hand, demonstrative expressions and proper names are referential terms; they can only be used referentially, to express a singular proposition. This accounts for the difference between "I am French" and "The present speaker is French". Contrary to the description, whose referential use is a matter of fact, the pronoun "I" is linguistically marked as referential. In other words, while the pronoun is "type-referential", the description can only be "token-referential" (Recanati, 1988: 116n8).

8. CONCLUSION: THEORETICAL PARSIMONY vs. ANTI-CONTEXTUALIST PREJUDICE

On the view I have just sketched, proper names, pronouns and demonstrative expressions are type-referential and can only be used to express a singular proposition, whereas descriptions are semantically "neutral" and can be used to express either a singular or a general proposition. Contrary to referential terms, which are marked as referential, descriptions are "unmarked" and can be used either way. This view of non-(type-)referentiality as unmarkedness I will refer to as the "Neutral View". There is an alternative view, however, based on a different notion of what it is for a description to be non-(type-)referential. On the alternative view, there is a perfect symmetry between descriptions and referential terms. Referential terms convey a semantic feature, REF, by virtue of which they can only be used to express a singular proposition; likewise, descriptions convey a semantic feature, NONREF, by virtue of which they can only be used to express a general proposition, with the mode of presentation (i.e. the descriptive condition associated with the description) as a constituent. On this view, descriptions are marked as non-referential, rather than being "unmarked". This alternative view I will refer to as the "Polar View".

Since it holds that sentences of the type “The F is G” always express general propositions, the Polar View must appeal to the Implicature Theory to account for the referential use of descriptions. The Polar View entails the Implicature Theory, as the Neutral View entails the Contextual Theory. Now, I think it is obvious that the Neutral View is to be preferred to the Polar View. In §3, I tried to show that Modified Occam’s Razor cannot be appealed to in favor of the Implicature Theory as against the Contextual Theory. I wish now to argue that (a variant of) Modified Occam’s Razor *can* be appealed to in favor of the Neutral View — and, therefore, in favor of the Contextual Theory — as against the Polar View-cum-Implicature Theory.

The variant of Modified Occam’s Razor I have in mind says that *semantic features* are not to be multiplied without necessity. Now, the Polar View does posit unnecessary semantic features. It posits NONREF as a component of the meaning of definite descriptions, and by so doing implies that a general proposition is always expressed by a sentence of the type “The F is G”; then, to account for the referential use of definite descriptions, the Polar View has recourse to the Implicature Theory. But this is a useless *détour*, since it is possible to account for this use in the first place, simply by *not* positing NONREF and adopting the Neutral View. The Polar View-cum-Implicature Theory does not appeal to the pragmatic apparatus of Gricean implicatures for the sake of theoretical parsimony, but in order to compensate for unwelcome effects of useless theoretical expenses. The Neutral View accounts for the data — i.e. the two uses of definite descriptions — much more directly and economically than the Polar View-cum-Implicature Theory. It requires positing no special semantic feature NONREF; descriptions are simply taken to be unmarked, contrary to referential terms, and this straightforwardly implies that they can be used either referentially or attributively.

We find a similar opposition between a Polar View and a Neutral View, and a similar reason to prefer the Neutral View, in other cases which it may be illuminating to consider. I have already mentioned one such case: the semantics of declarative vs. imperative sentences. Imperative sentences are semantically “marked” for an imperative use; the imperative mood in these sentences indicates that they are being used to perform a certain type of speech act. What about declarative sentences like (1), which can be used either to assert or to perform the

same type of speech act as imperative sentences? On the Polar View, declarative sentences are marked for assertive use, in the same way as imperative sentences are marked for imperative use. It follows that, when a declarative sentence like (1) is used imperatively, this has to be explained on pragmatic grounds, as an indirect speech act. On the Neutral View, declarative sentences are unmarked with respect to illocutionary force — they are illocutionarily neutral, and can be used either way, depending on the context. Clearly, the Neutral View is more economical, since it accounts for the data without positing a special semantic feature by virtue of which declarative sentences indicate their alleged assertive illocutionary force. For this reason, I think that (*ceteris paribus*) the Neutral View is to be preferred to the Polar View, despite the popularity of the latter. The same thing holds in the case of definite descriptions.

Insofar as the explanandum is the dual use of definite descriptions, the Polar View-cum-Implicature Theory is undoubtedly less economical than the Neutral/Contextual Theory. What reason can there be for nevertheless adopting this complicated and uneconomical view? I think there are two basic reasons, which I will conclude this paper by discussing (and rejecting).

The first reason for adopting the Polar View-cum-Implicature Theory even though it is less parsimonious is that it makes it possible to maintain the Russellian analysis of description-sentences as expressing general propositions — an analysis which many philosophers favor and want to preserve as far as possible. This is a bad reason, for the Contextual Theory does not require giving up this analysis; it requires simply that we understand it as a statement of the diagonal proposition associated with “The F is G”, rather than as a statement of the proposition expressed by this sentence.

The second, and more important, reason is the attachment of many semanticists to what I will call the “Anti-Contextualist Strategy”. The Anti-Contextualist Strategy consists in *minimizing context-sensitivity and ascribing to a given sentence a fixed propositional content whenever possible*. As far as description-sentences are concerned, we can ascribe to them a fixed propositional content (*viz.* the “general”, Russellian proposition), and rely on the Implicature Theory to account for the other reading. According to the Anti-Contextualist Strategy, this

account is preferable to the Neutral/Contextual Theory, which assumes that "The F is G" does not express a fixed proposition independently of context.

The preference for eternal over context-sensitive sentences goes back to the philosophers of language of the first half of this century, who were more concerned with "ideal" or "logically perfect" languages than with natural languages. In an ideal language the mapping of sentences onto propositions is a function: to one sentence there corresponds one and only one proposition which it expresses; it is not even necessary to distinguish between "sentences" and "propositions", since a given sentence is eternally and indissociably tied to a given proposition. This mapping is still considered an ideal by contemporary philosophers of language, even though they are concerned with natural languages, of which context-sensitivity is a pervasive feature. The functional mapping of sentences on propositions is still an ideal in the practical sense that philosophers of language try to maximize context-independence by assigning to sentences a constant propositional content whenever possible, in accordance with the Anti-Contextualist Strategy.

What sort of justification can be adduced in favor of the Anti-Contextualist Strategy? The only one I can think of is that it is easier for the semanticist to handle eternal sentences than context-sensitive sentences. This claim, however, will not do as a justification. What it boils down to is the (correct) remark that many semanticists, working in a framework inherited from those early philosophers of language who were concerned with ideal languages, are more comfortable and at home with eternal or quasi-eternal sentences than with highly context-sensitive sentences. This certainly explains why they have recourse to the Anti-Contextualist Strategy, but does not justify it.

In the fifties the Anti-Contextualist Strategy met with serious opposition. Ordinary language philosophers were contextualists; as against ideal language philosophers, they stressed the role of the pragmatic context in communication and made a careful distinction between the sentence, which has a meaning, and the proposition which an utterance of the sentence may express. Without a context of utterance, they argued, no proposition is expressed; eternal sentences are a myth. Evidence for their point of view was provided, *inter alia*, by the number of different things which it is possible to mean by uttering a single

sentence (whatever it is) in different contexts; for example, a sentence "P and Q" may be used either to state that P and *then* Q, or to state that P and *therefore* Q, or to state that P & Q *simpliciter* . . . This was supposed to show that the statement made depends on the context and not only on the meaning of the sentence: the sentence itself has no definite truth-conditions.⁹

In the late sixties, Paul Grice launched a decisive attack on this doctrine. He convincingly argued that a sentence may well have definite truth-conditions even though by uttering this sentence it is possible to mean many different things; this is so because what is meant goes beyond what is strictly and literally said and includes a contextually variable component, the conversational implicatures. Thus we can maintain that the sentence "P and Q" expresses the proposition that P & Q, and account for the other readings by adding to this proposition various conversational implicatures.

Grice's attack precipitated the fall of ordinary language philosophy and contextualism. But it is important to realize that Grice's arguments do not justify the Anti-Contextualist Strategy. What they show is just this: the mere fact that different things can be meant by uttering the same sentence in different contexts does not imply that different things are *said* by uttering this sentence in these contexts. Perhaps the same thing is said in all cases, and the difference occurs only at the level of implicatures. It follows that the theorist *can* ascribe to the sentence a fixed propositional content, if he wishes; but it does not follow that he *must* do so, as the Anti-Contextualist Strategy has it.

On the whole, the Anti-Contextualist Strategy has been useful since it has provided an incentive to develop and elaborate the Implicature Theory, which has become a powerful tool. But we should not let this tool become *too* powerful and hinder further advances in the field of pragmatics. Recent work in this field has considerably widened the gap between what the sentence means and the proposition it is used to express; it is now clear that, to get anything like a determinate truth-condition, much more contextual enrichment of sentence meaning is needed than was traditionally granted.¹⁰ A fascinating domain of investigation is thus offered to students of natural language. It would be a serious mistake to block all progress in this area by blindly sticking to the Anti-Contextualist Strategy.*

NOTES

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¹ The referential/attributive distinction had come into notice even before Donnellan wrote his seminal paper (Donnellan 1966); see, for example, Mitchell, 1962: 84–85. As far as I know, the first explicit statement of the distinction is to be found in the theological writings of the seventeenth-century French philosopher Antoine Arnauld, author of the *Port-Royal Logic* (see Dominicy, 1984: 124–126).

² As may people pointed out, two different distinctions are mixed in Donnellan's paper. There is, on the one hand, the distinction between the "identifying" (or "entity-invoking") and the "non-identifying" (or "generalizing") use of definite descriptions; on the other hand, there is the distinction between "speaker's reference" and "semantic reference". Let us call "improper" a use of a description such that the latter distinction applies, i.e. such that there is a divergence between what the speaker refers to and what the description denotes. Even though paradigm referential uses, as illustrated by Donnellan's examples, are both improper and identifying, the two distinctions are mutually independent. First, we find the identifying/non-identifying distinction even if we concentrate upon proper uses of descriptions; second, and less obviously, even a non-identifying use can be improper (see the "robber-vandal case" in Recanati, 1981).

I take it that the important distinction in Donnellan's paper — what really deserves to be called the referential/attributive distinction — is the distinction between identifying and non-identifying uses. Donnellan brought improper uses into the picture only to emphasize that the mode of presentation of the referent — the individual concept expressed by the description — is not intrinsic to what is said when the description is used referentially (i.e. identifyingly); his claim, that what is said may be true even though the description is improper, was subservient to his main point, to the effect that the referent's fitting or not fitting the description is irrelevant to the truth-condition of the utterance on the referential use. Kripke is therefore particularly wide of the mark when he insists on reducing Donnellan's distinction to the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference (Kripke, 1977).

³ I borrow this example from Sperber and Wilson (1986: 189). They do not, however, analyze it as a case of divergence between what the speaker means and what his words mean.

⁴ By "context" here I do not mean a small set of parameters such as the time and place of utterance, the speaker and hearer, and the like, but a rich pragmatic notion involving beliefs and intentions.

⁵ The argument so far corresponds to what Boer and Lycan (1980: 431) call "assumption B":

English sentences have logical forms, at least in the sense that they can be associated in a principled way with formulas of a perspicuous logical theory, which formulas codify their truth-conditions relative to an assignment of values to their indexical terms and other free variables. A theory that assigns logical forms to sentences of English in this way is called a "semantics for" English. As against this, it is the job of a "pragmatics" to determine the assignment of values to indexical terms relative to occasions of their use.

⁶ The situation is, perhaps, a bit more complicated. It has been argued that the indefinite description "a G" in "A G is the F" is no less subject to the referential/attributive "ambiguity" than the definite description "the F" in "The F is G" (see Chastain, 1975: 206–214 and Wilson, 1978). Suppose this is true. Then the difference between "The F is G" and "A G is the F" is as follows: in the first case the condition of

being uniquely F, but not the condition of being G, can be construed merely as a contextual condition, while in the other case it is the other way round.

The putative existence of referential uses of indefinite descriptions gives prima facie support to the Implicature Theory, since it is taken as obvious that sentences like "An F is G" do express general propositions. But perhaps the general proposition in this case also is the diagonal proposition associated with the utterance rather than the proposition expressed. Nothing prevents the Contextual Theory from being extended to indefinite descriptions (as well as to explicitly quantificational sentences such as "There is an F which is G"). If really there is a referential use of indefinite descriptions (which I doubt), then a sentence "An F is G" *can* be used to express a singular proposition even though the proposition this sentence *diagonally* expresses is clearly general.

⁷ In Kaplan's terminology (Kaplan, 1977), the mode of presentation associated with a referential term is its "character", not its "content"; the content of a referential term, i.e. what it contributes to the proposition expressed by the utterance where it occurs, is its referent. REF does the same job as Kaplan's DTHAT-operator, since DTHAT turns the individual concept expressed by a singular term into a mere "character". The difference between REF and DTHAT is that REF is a semantic feature in natural language while DTHAT is an operator in an artificial language. *Qua* semantic feature, REF is part of the meaning of some expressions-types, viz. referential expressions (proper names, demonstratives, and the like). Since definite descriptions, as expression-types, are not referential, REF is not part of their meaning, even though they can be *used* referentially (see below). But nothing prevents a referential token of a description "The F" from being represented as "DTHAT (The F)" in Kaplanese. (Any description can be prefixed with DTHAT in Kaplanese, even if, like "the first baby to be born in the 21th century" (Kaplan, 1978: 241), it could hardly be used referentially.)

⁸ These definitions do not reduce referentiality to rigidity. A term *t* is rigid in an utterance *S(t)* if and only if there is an object *x* such that the utterance is true if and only if *x* satisfies *S()*. To be (type- or token-) referential, a term *t* must not only be rigid, but also signify its own rigidity: it must be part of the meaning of the sentence (for type-referentiality) or of the utterance (for token-referentiality) that there is an object such that the utterance is true if and only if that object satisfies the predicate. See Recanati, 1988.

⁹ For this interpretation of ordinary language philosophy I am indebted to Travis, 1985.

¹⁰ See e.g. Fauconnier, 1985; Travis, 1985; Sperber and Wilson, 1986.

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