

Guide to Chapter Two of Gareth Evans' *The Varieties of Reference*

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2.0 Chapter Two Overview

My overview for Chapter 2 is longer than for any other chapter in the book, and this is because I think it is potentially helpful to frame the material in sections 2.1 and 2.2 in a slightly different way from how Evans frames them. In particular, to bring out more clearly the similarities to, and departures from, Frege's account. Here is an overview. Looking at the things that could play the role of a subject in an atomic sentence, Frege distinguished *singular terms* from *quantifiers*. Indeed, developing the logic of quantifiers was one of Frege's chief accomplishments. The division seemed intuitive, for singular terms pick out a

single object (“Obama”, “that tree”, “I”), whereas quantifiers essentially pick out a quantity of objects (“everything”, “some things”, “nothing”). The distinction was marked by overt grammatical form: quantifiers used words like “all”, “some” or “no”; and singular terms included things like proper names (“Frege”), demonstratives and indexicals (*that cat, I, here*) and phrases like “the least rapidly converging series”. And this seems to line up with the intuitive idea that quantifiers are about how many *F*s are *G*, (*some animals are mammals, all mammals are animals*) whereas **names singular terms** are ~~saying something~~ about a specific thing (*Frege was a philosopher, I am thirsty, the tallest spy is German*).

And given that singular terms concern one object, analyzing their semantic value as determined by that single object, the *referent*, is natural. If we define a singular term to be an expression that picks out a single object, and if we define a referring expression as an expression whose semantic value is whatever object it picks out (its referent), then for Frege all singular terms were referring expressions.

As Evans discusses in Section 2.1, Russell agreed that one kind of semantic category was a referring expression, meaning a type of expression that did its semantic work by being attached to one particular object -- its *referent*. But whereas Frege adopted this as an official position for all singular terms and then tried to fudge cases where the singular term had no referent but still seemed to be meaningful, Russell used this as a test for a singular term’s membership in the semantic category of *referring expression* (Evans calls this test ***Russell’s Criterion***). Any singular term that secured its meaning by being connected to some object, would have to be meaningless if there were no object. So if the singular term could be meaningful even if empty, then it couldn’t really be a referring expression. So the test was: can the singular term be meaningful if it is

empty? If the answer was 'yes', then this meant that the singular term couldn't actually be a referring expression.

If such a singular term was not a referring expression, then what could it be? How could it be meaningful? Recall that the two kinds of things that Frege recognized as suitable to play the role of subject in an atomic sentence were quantifiers and singular terms. Russell's theory of descriptions was essentially an account of how some singular terms — definite descriptions — could be analyzed as quantifiers.

Russell's official position was that one could not tell from the surface form of a singular term whether it was, semantically, a definite description or a referring expression. Indeed, this is why Russell's Criterion is needed. But it will be useful to explain the theory using as examples singular terms that have the overt form of definite descriptions. These are singular terms of the form "the ϕ " where ϕ is a description (e.g. "the tallest spy", "the present king of France"). Russell provides a reconstruction of such expressions in terms of predicates, quantifiers and the identity operator, in effect showing how the ϕ can be re-expressed as "i) there is some (at least one) object x , such that x is ϕ , and ii) for any object y , if y is ϕ , then $y=x$ ". The (i) part is saying that *at least one* thing fits the description, and the (ii) part is saying that *at most one* thing fits the description. A definite description therefore manages to isolate exactly *one* thing, without there being any part of the description that functions to refer. (I discuss this more in 2.D1.)

Notice that there is a perfectly simple explanation for the informativeness of identity statements for definite descriptions. It is obviously true that someone can understand two descriptions but not know that they are both true of the same object (I might not realize that "the tallest spy" is "the person who won the

most on 'The Price is Right'). And also note that there is no problem with the meaning of a definite description if it is empty. The meaning of the DD is spelled out without mentioning any objects at all, let alone the object, if any, that uniquely satisfies the description. The meaning is the particular way the descriptive material is constructed and assessed, which allows someone to understand precisely the conditions under which a sentence employing it as subject would be true.

Notice that almost all singular terms are apparently meaningful even if empty, and so very few will pass Russell's Criterion and qualify as referring expressions. For Russell, the only actual referring expressions — what he calls *logically proper names* — are mental demonstratives pointing to sense **impressions data**. This is the one case where, if there is no object, it is obvious there is no object and hence no impression of meaningfulness. All other singular terms, meaning almost all, were for Russell covert **definite** descriptions.

I gestured at how for definite descriptions informativeness of identity statements and emptiness posed no special problems. The same is true, for Russell, for logically proper names (referring expressions). They are meaningless if empty, but since in all such cases it is obvious they are empty, there is never a mistaken impression of their being meaningful. And the nature of the referents (sense impressions) is such that there is no problem of informativeness of identity statements. Russell's Cartesian picture of the mind and its contents was such that one could not be aware of a single sense impression in such a way that it was not obvious that there was only one object there.

So Russell's theory solves, in its way, the problem of apparently significant empty singular terms as well as the problem of informative identity statements.

The downside is that in order to get this payoff one has to buy into the Cartesian epistemology, and limit *reference* to only private mental items like sense impressions.

In Section 2.2 Evans points out that for Russell it is not accidental that there are these two kinds of semantic job. Russell held that a requirement, for anyone to think about something *a*, is that the subject know which thing *a* is. That is, that the subject be able to distinguish *a* from all other things. Evans calls this *Russell's Principle*,¹ and it will figure significantly in the remainder of the book. For Russell, there were two ways to distinguish an object from all others: first, one might be acquainted with the object, meaning that one was currently perceiving or experiencing the object; second, one might think of the object as the object that uniquely satisfies some description. The acquaintance relation was officially limited, for Russell, to one's own private sense data.

In Section 2.3 Evans discusses descriptive names (e.g. "Julius" discussed in Section 1.7), and argues that they have the interesting features that on the one hand, they are referring expressions, but on the other, they are not Russellian, meaning that they are meaningful even if empty. (Descriptive names are not highly important for the main points Evans wants to make in the book. If it turned out that Evans' analysis of descriptive names was completely wrong, this wouldn't impact any of his other points. Though they are interesting from a taxonomic standpoint.)

¹ Evans uses Russell's name for several technical terms, and these need to be kept in mind despite all confusingly employing a variant of "Russell". *Russell's Criterion* is a test: is a sentence using a singular term meaningless if that term is empty? If the answer is *yes*, then the singular term is a *Russellian Singular Term*. *Russell's Principle* expresses a requirement on thought to the effect that in order to think about *a*, a subject must know which thing *a* is, in the sense that the subject must be able to distinguish *a* from all other things.

In Section 2.4 Evans argues that definite descriptions are not referring expressions, but in fact quantifiers. As with the discussion of descriptive names, this is not crucial for the rest of the book.

Section 2.5 discusses the issue of whether it is possible for a referring expression to support a Fregean sense. For Russell they did not, since for Russell, genuine reference was to private mental items which were just manifestly present to the mind in a way that foreclosed different ways of being presented. It was either there or it wasn't. Evans will want to argue that in fact demonstratives are Russellian referring expressions that support Fregean sense. (I will discuss this more in the discussion section 2.D.)

2.1 Introductory: Russell's Criterion

In this section Evans points out that Russell like Frege recognized a semantic category of names — expressions that did their semantic job by referring, that is, by being connected to a particular thing. But he differed from Frege in two respects. First, he made no provision for anything corresponding to Sense. And second, he took seriously the consequence that if a name was empty, it should be meaningless. Evans coins the technical phrase Russellian Singular Term to mean an expression whose meaningfulness depends on its having a referent. And in fact Russell used this as a test for whether something was a name (that is, for whether it did its semantic work by referring): if an atomic sentence using the expression as subject was meaningless if the expression was empty, then the expression was (really) a name. But if the sentence could be meaningful, the thing that looked on the surface like a name was really a definite description — a type of quantifier

expression. In fact, almost all expressions in natural language that seemed on the surface to be names were, according to Russell, covert definite descriptions.

Russell agreed with Frege that the function of a name (what Frege just called 'names') is to be attached to an object such that if this object satisfies the predicate of the sentence the sentence is true, and if it does not satisfy the predicate, then the sentence is false (Evans discusses this in the context of Frege in Section 1.3). That is, there is nothing that a name has going for it other than its connection to that object. But this raises the problem we saw in Chapter 1: empty singular terms. If this is how a name works, then any name that is empty should be meaningless. For Frege as well as Russell (and Evans), being 'meaningless' is cashed out as the claim that such a sentence expresses no thought. And yet in many such cases they don't seem meaningless at all — one seems to be able to grasp a thought that is expressed by such sentences.

Frege tried to finesse this conclusion by claiming that in such cases it was merely *as if* the sentence expressed a thought. Russell goes another route. He fully embraces the conclusion that atomic sentences with empty names express no thought. And so if it seems like² a thought is being expressed, the subject of the sentence can't really be a name (even if it appears, grammatically, to be a name). This can be expressed as a test for whether something is actually a name, what Evans calls 'Russell's Criterion':

The grammatical subject of an atomic sentence is a logically proper name (i.e., a referring expression) only if its failing to have a referent would render the sentence meaningless.

² For Russell, it couldn't seem like one was grasping a thought if one was not. One was infallible as to whether one was grasping a thought or not. This will be discussed shortly.

The apparent, or *surface*, form of the expression was not critical for Russell, in that many singular terms that look like names were not actually names by this test. So any expression that could be meaningful if empty must do its semantic job in some way other than the way names work.

Hence the theory of descriptions. The other kind of expression recognized by Frege and Russell were quantifiers — expressions using *all*, *some*, *no*, as in *all people are mortal*, *some people are wise*, *no people are lizards*. And Russell's theory of descriptions ~~was—showing~~ demonstrated how one could analyze definite descriptions, expressions of the form 'the ϕ ', such as *the tallest spy*, *the least rapidly converging series*, as types of **quantifiers** **quantificational phrases**.

A description, such as 'the red table' is not attached to any particular object, but rather it might *fit* one or more -- or no -- objects (and which it fits might change as objects' features change, for instance). Russell called this relation *denoting*, as opposed to *referring*. If a description denotes nothing, a sentence employing it in subject position can still be meaningful because the description specifies the truth conditions for the sentence. So the description *the present king of France* allows someone to know the conditions that would need to obtain for a sentence like *the present king of France is bald* to be true, but this is not because the expression is connected to an object. (For more detail on the distinction between referring and denoting, see section 2.D1 of this guide at the end of the chapter).

Evans also discusses how this lines up with Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and by description, but I will discuss this in the next section, since it fits more naturally there.

2.2 Radical Reference Failure

In this section Evans points out that a major sticking point between Frege and Russell concerned this issue of apparent thoughts. Frege seemed willing to accept that in some cases one could think a sentence was meaningful because one was under the impression that one grasped the thought it expressed, even though in fact there was no thought to grasp. According to Evans, Russell's Cartesian epistemology prevented him from accepting the idea that someone could be mistaken about whether they were in fact grasping a thought: if you were grasping a thought, you'd know it; and if you weren't, you'd know that too. Combining this with the account of reference meant that the only things that could be genuine names were expressions referring to things about whose existence the subject could not be wrong, and these, for Russell, were private mental items. Evans points out that he will want to extend the domain of Russellian singular terms to regular physical objects, but then this means it will be necessary to give some account of what it means for someone to be mistaken about whether they are grasping a thought.

Applying Russell's Criterion requires someone to consider a sentence and determine whether it is meaningful or meaningless. It invites the subject to try to understand the sentence, to grasp the thought it tries to express, and assess whether they are successful. Russell felt that one's assessment of success or failure couldn't be wrong. If one was grasping a thought, one would know; and if one wasn't, one would know that too. This has the consequence that the only possible referents of referring expressions must be items about whose existence the subject cannot be mistaken. For any situation in which the subject thought the referring expression had a referent though it in fact lacked one would result

in a situation in which one was mistaken about their grasping of the thought. And for Russell the only items about whose existence the subject could not be mistaken would be private mental particulars, such as sense impressions. So the only actual referring expressions are those that refer to private mental particulars. These are understood as something like mental demonstratives such as *that impression of red* . All other singular terms — those that might be meaningful even if empty — were covert descriptions.

Evans points out that this result is consistent with another of Russell's doctrines, what Evans will call *Russell's Principle*. This principle holds that in order for someone to think about some object, the person must know which object they are trying to think about. And the 'know which' means something like 'distinguish that object from all others'. Russell thought there were two ways that someone could distinguish an object from all others. One could either be *acquainted* with the object in the sense of having present experience of it, or one could know distinguishing features of it, that is, a set of features such that only one object in the universe had that set of features. The consistency mentioned above consists in the fact that the only things, according to Russell, with which one could be acquainted were mental particulars. And any distinguishing features that an object would have would be expressible as a definite description. And so the two legitimate epistemological relations one could have with any putative object of thought (acquaintance and knowledge of distinguishing features) corresponded to the two semantic categories of singular terms (referring expressions and definite descriptions).

To summarize, for Russell one is acquainted with one's own mental particulars, such as sense data. And since being acquainted with such an item allows one to distinguish it from all others (as required by Russell's Principle), one will be in a position to think about it. Because one has infallible knowledge

as to whether these items exist or not, they are suitable referents for expressions that do their semantic work by referring, since such expressions will pass Russell's Criterion. Anything else one might try to think about might, unbeknownst to the thinker, fail to exist, and so could not be a suitable referent of a genuine referring expression. The thinker's only viable way to attempt to think of such non-mental objects would be by description, since that is the only other way one can have distinguishing knowledge of an object of thought.

The issue Evans discusses from the middle two paragraphs of page 45 are not crucial for understanding Evans' broader project, and so while interesting, I will skip discussion of it here.

Evans will adopt a good deal of Russellian doctrine in what follows, though he will reject the Cartesianism. He will accept something like Russell's Criterion as a way of distinguishing what he will call Russellian singular terms (expressions whose meaningfulness depends on their having a referent), and he will take this to be an important semantic category. And Evans will subscribe to Russell's Principle, which states that in order to think about an object, one must have distinguishing knowledge of that object.

Where Evans will depart from Russell is the Cartesian underpinnings. One way this comes out is that while Evans will maintain that something like acquaintance and description are two ways of satisfying Russell's Principle, the acquaintance relation is not one limited to private mental items, but rather is prototypically a perceptual relation between a subject and physical objects. Relatedly, Evans will accept that subjects are not infallible as to whether or not they are grasping a thought. That is, Evans is committed to the idea that a subject can be mistaken about whether she is entertaining a thought of a certain kind on a given occasion. Importantly, though, Evans points out,

It is not part of this proposal that his mind is wholly vacant; images and words may clearly pass through it, and various ancillary thoughts may even occur to him. (pp. 45-6)

Evans probably should have put this differently. Since this is an important point that is often misunderstood, it is worth unpacking. Strictly speaking whatever is going on in the mind of the subject in such cases might be precisely the same as when the subject actually is successfully entertaining the thought. The difference is not a matter of anything different happening in a narrow psychological sense. The point rather is that in some contexts this psychological/mental stuff qualifies as a thought, and in other contexts this same psychological/mental stuff might not qualify as a thought. This will have to be explained and defended, of course, but this is how the proposal should be understood.

Evans, in the last two paragraphs, closes by rebutting an argument by A.N. Prior aimed at supporting Russell's view. Evans will be arguing that Russell is wrong, that a person may believe they are thinking a thought when in fact they are not. And Evans correctly anticipates that some of the resistance to his view will be based on considerations similar to those Prior voices, so it is worth taking Prior on at this point. Prior's argument is that the thought '*a* is *F*' is a component of the self-ascribing thought 'I am thinking that *a* is *F*'. So if one lacks the capacity to grasp the thought '*a* is *F*', then one will not be able to think 'I am thinking *a* is *F*'. Therefore, if one in fact is thinking 'I am thinking that *a* is *F*', one must also grasp the thought '*a* is *F*' — that is, one must be correct.

Evans grants that '*a* is *F*' is a component of 'I am thinking that *a* is *F*'. Evans' response to Prior, however, is that when one is deceived about one's thought, the thought that is in error is not 'I am thinking that *a* is *F*' but instead

about a thought of the form 'I am thinking a thought of type τ ' (where ' a is F ', had it been successful, would have been a thought of type τ). So if ' a ' is empty, then ' a is F ' may be meaningless, and perhaps any thought of the form 'I am thinking that a is F ' would be ill-formed. But this is consistent with there being a fully legitimate and graspable (and in this case, false) thought 'I am thinking a thought of type τ '. See discussion section 2.D2 of this guide for more on this topic.

2.3 Russellian singular terms and descriptive names

In this section, we get Evans' argument (the conclusion of which he has alluded to multiple times) that there are in fact expressions which are non-Russellian (meaningful even if empty), yet are genuinely referring expressions (unlike descriptions). The point is to show that the class of singular terms includes some referring expressions which are not Russellian (and thus that 'referring expression' and 'Russellian singular term' aren't two ways of saying the same thing).

Evans credits Russell with being the first to recognize more than one semantic kind within the intuitive category of singular term. But Evans doesn't think Russell got the semantic categories exactly right. Russell recognized (logically proper) names -- which were Russellian in Evans' sense -- and descriptions, which were non-Russellian. And that's it. Evans will agree that there are descriptions, and they aren't Russellian. That's the topic of Section 2.4. And he will agree that there are Russellian referring expressions, for example demonstratives (the topic of Chapter 6). But he is going to argue in this section

that there is also a category of expression that is a referring expression, but is not Russellian.

The example is descriptive names (discussed previously in 1.7 and 1.8), though Evans thinks that there are other members of this semantic subcategory. Descriptive names are names introduced by some reference-fixing description. Evans provides a few examples, including Kripke's example 'Neptune'. At one point disturbances were observed in the orbit of Uranus, and it was hypothesized that these disturbances were the result of gravitational forces by some not-yet-discovered large planet outside the orbit of Uranus. So, for a time at least, 'Neptune' was a descriptive name, stipulated to refer to the large planet whose gravity was responsible for certain observed disturbances in the path of Uranus.

I'll divide the remaining discussion into two parts. First, I'll cover Evans' own discussion. Then, I'll try to re-express the same idea in a more intuitive way.

The first part of Evans' argument is to provide an account of what it means for a singular term to refer, and then argue that descriptive names refer given that understanding. Evans claims that a simple way of defining reference is in terms of truth (and satisfaction) according to the following principle:

(P) If S is an atomic sentence in which the n-place concept-expression R is combined with n singular terms t_1, \dots, t_n , then S is true iff \langle the referent of t_1, \dots the referent of $t_n\rangle$ satisfies R.

Evans thus uses *P* to determine whether an expression is a referring expression. As Evans puts it:

...it seems to me to be correct to regard as a referring expression any expression whose contribution to the truth-conditions of sentences containing it is stated exclusively by means of the relation of reference which is found in (*P*). (p. 49)

Thus, 'referring expression' is a semantic category, and its members are discerned by the kind of semantic analysis appropriate for them. The point of this is that *P* is telling us that the only thing the referring expression is providing, in terms of determining truth conditions for the sentence, is the referent. This contrasts with definite descriptions, which are providing descriptive material that, even in absence of a referent, would allow one to specify conditions under which the sentence would be true. It might be thought that descriptive names are providing such descriptive material, but Evans' point is that they are not, at least ~~in terms~~ **as far as** of determining the truth of the sentence goes. The descriptive material is used to establish a referent, but once the referent is established, the descriptive material drops out. This is why it makes sense to say "Julius might not have invented the zip" (had he died in infancy, for instance).

Truth theoretic clauses of the form

(1) The referent of 'Aphla' = Aphla

when used to state the contribution of an expression to sentences in which the expression occurs, as in truth theoretic semantics, do so in a way that satisfies *P*.

Evans argues, though, that truth-theoretic clauses for descriptive names will also be in accord with P. He points out that clauses like

(2) (x)(the referent of 'Julius' = x iff x uniquely invented the zip)

(3) (x) (the referent of 'Julius' = x iff [Julius] x = Julius)

can be used to determine the truth conditions for sentences such as (4), in accordance with (P):

(4) 'Julius is F' is true iff the inventor of the zip is F;

(5) 'Julius is F' is true iff [Julius] Julius is F.

In one sense the argument is straightforward. Given axioms such as (2) and (3), which were introduced in the last chapter, we can trivially see that theorems such as (4) and (5) can be derived, and these theorems accord with (P) above.

Now here is a more intuitive way to understand it. Very roughly (see my discussion in 2.D1 for more detail), the relation between a description and whatever object it fits is one that is variable, in that as the features of objects change, over time, or in different possible worlds. As the world changes, which object is denoted by the definite description *the largest table in this room* might change. It denotes one table on Monday, but another on Tuesday (if the one denoted on Monday is taken away, for example). But reference is a 'direct' relation to an object — a name is just attached to its referent like a leash. However, with descriptive names, there is a two-stage process. In the first stage, a description is used to find an object — the one that fits the description. In the second stage, the reference fixing stipulation attaches the name to this object. And the sense of 'attach' here is the same sense as with other referring

expressions. Once this is done, the name *refers to* the object that was *denoted by* the reference-fixing description.

But — and this is what separates descriptive names from normal names — because the name is introduced in such a way that there is a public stipulation connecting the name and the description, there is a perfectly determinate content that is graspable even if the name is empty, namely, the same content as that was carried by the description itself. The description can serve to specify the conditions under which the sentence would have been true even if the name is empty.

One final remark on something that can cause confusion, and will point ahead to topics that will be central in much of the book. Evans says:

In saying that the thought expressed by 'Julius is F' may equivalently be expressed by 'The inventor of the zip is F', I think I am conforming to common sense. Someone who understands and accepts the one sentence as true gets himself into exactly the same belief state as someone who accepts the other. Belief states are distinguished by the evidence which gives rise to them, and the expectations, behaviour, and further beliefs which may be derived from them (in conjunction with other beliefs); and in all these respects, the belief states associated with the two sentences are indistinguishable. (p. 50)

This might seem an odd thing to say, especially since Evans has just given us an argument to the effect that these names aren't, semantically, descriptions. To see what is happening here a distinction must be drawn that so far hasn't been drawn. On the one hand, there are considerations concerning expressions in public language – words, predicates, names, and so forth. A semantic account of such linguistic expressions is an investigation into public things and the

public norms that govern their use. On the other hand, there are the thoughts and other mental or psychological entities that one might have when understanding sentences. The point here is that descriptive names, *as a type of public linguistic object*, work in a certain sort of way -- a way that differs from how descriptions work. As a semantic type in a public language, they function like referring expressions. It is consistent with this that the thought grasped by someone who understands a sentence using such a name might be the same thought that is grasped by someone who understands a sentence using the corresponding description. The argument to the effect that descriptive names are referring expressions is an argument concerning how the names, as parts of a public language, function. The argument to the effect that they are meaningful when empty is an argument to the effect that, even if nothing answers to the name, the descriptive content required to understand the name is sufficient to provide content for a thought the grasp of which constitutes understanding the sentence. And not just any content, but precisely the content that would be grasped by someone had the name had a referent.

One final note of clarification. The section opens with the following sentence: "By labelling singular terms whose sense depends upon their having a referent 'Russellian', I have given Russell credit for the recognition of the possibility that such terms might exist." This is not worded in the clearest way, since it might suggest that on Evans' account all Russellian singular terms have a Sense. And this is not the case. On Evans' view, some categories of Russellian singular terms have a sense (e.g. demonstratives) and some do not (e.g. normal proper names). This sentence would have perhaps been more clearly worded in this way: "By labelling singular terms whose *ability to be a subject in meaningful atomic sentences* depends upon their having a referent 'Russellian', I have given Russell credit for the recognition of the possibility that such terms might exist."

Here I have replaced 'sense' with the italicized phrase. And this interpretive angle is also in play when Evans continues a little later: "Of course many modifications have to be made to Russell's original conception of genuine singular terms before anything viable emerges: notably the ascription of sense to such terms, understood as Frege understood it ..." This should be read as stating that it must be allowable that some kinds of Russellian (i.e. genuine) singular terms have a Fregean Sense (e.g. demonstratives), not that all kinds do (proper names).

So though Evans employs the term 'sense' a number of times in this section, in my discussion in this section I have removed discussion of anything like Fregean sense, and pitched the discussion rather in terms of descriptive names being meaningful (in the sense of being able to be the subject in meaningful atomic sentences when empty). I'll relate this to the issue of Sense when I get to my discussion of Section 2.5.

2.4 Definite descriptions

In this section, Evans argues that definite descriptions (DDs) are not referring expressions (REs), but rather quantifiers. The strategy is to run through three of Russell's own arguments to the effect that DDs are not REs. Evans argues that none of Russell's arguments is adequate. Evans then gives two arguments of his own against the claim that DDs are REs. The first is negative — if you try to treat them as REs, you end up with a clumsy and needlessly inelegant theory with some unexplained loose ends. The second is

positive — if you treat DDs as quantifiers, then everything works just fine. This section, while interesting, is not required to understand Evans' main contributions in the book.

Note that this section is not crucial for understanding the main themes of the book. It is safely skippable. Evans rehearses three of Russell's arguments against treating DDs as amenable to the same semantic analyses as REs. The first is that one can fail to know that two DDs have the same referent (one might not know that *the tallest spy* is also *the winner of last week's lotto*). This argument depends on the assumption that referring expressions are such as to render knowledge of coreference obligatory. Evans claims that it is not. If Evans' arguments in the prior section are good, then descriptive names would be an example. One might be surprised to learn that Julius was Deethroat, for example. Evans will later (Chapter 6) give examples of demonstratives that have this property (one may not realize that *this* is the same thing as *that*).

The second of Russell's arguments is this:

1. Suppose that 'The ϕ ' is an RE.
2. For any RE, the negation of 'RE is F ' is 'RE is not F '
3. If 'The ϕ ' is an RE, then the negation of the corresponding sentence must be 'the ϕ is not F '.
4. Disjoining the two gives us 'The ϕ is F or the ϕ is not F '.
5. By the law of the excluded middle, one of these disjuncts must be true.
6. Each disjunct entails that 'The ϕ ' refers.
7. But 'The ϕ ' may clearly fail to refer. (DDs often fail to refer).
8. Therefore, (1) must be rejected.

Clearly (2) is the crucial move, and it is what Evans will finger as the bad move. In effect, Evans' objection is that (2) is legitimate only for Russellian singular terms, and so Russell's argument assumes that all REs are Russellian.

This move is legitimate for Russellian singular terms because there are two ways to negate an atomic sentence such as '*a* is *F*'. One way it can be false is if there is an object *a* and is in fact not-*F*. The other is that *a* may not exist. But in the case of Russellian singular terms, this last option is not an option (because if there is no object *a*, then '*a* is *F*' is not meaningful at all, and hence can't even be negated). Therefore, 'Not-(*a* is *F*)' must be equivalent to '*a* is not-*F*' only if *a* is a Russellian singular term.

But as Evans points out, if there are any expressions that can be meaningful if empty (non-Russellian), then there is the possibility of a wide scope negation distinct from the narrow scope negation. So if there are any non-Russellian REs, Russell's argument fails. And again, descriptive names are an example. They are REs, according to Evans, but are not Russellian.

Russell's third argument is that if DDs are REs, then they would be meaningless if empty. They are not meaningless if empty, therefore, they cannot be REs. This argument also assumes an implicit equivalence between referring expressions and Russellian singular terms. Evans thus in effect is claiming that if the argument shows anything, it is that if DDs are REs, then they must be non-Russellian REs. Evans spells out how someone who thought that DDs were REs would make the case, and as can be seen by (14) in Evans' text, they would not be meaningless if empty on this account.³

³ Evans discusses Donellan, who argued that sentences such as 'the woman in the corner drinking a martini is a spy' are meaningful, and are about the person in

Though Evans has been criticizing Russell's arguments, he agrees with Russell's conclusion. So next he turns to his own argument that definite descriptions do not belong to the category of referring expressions (but instead to the category of quantifier expressions). In outline (which is sufficient for present purposes, since nothing in the remainder of the book hinges on this result) the argument is that treating DDs as referring expressions can be done, but only in a very theoretically inelegant and *ad hoc* way. Specifically, sentences that employ definite descriptions are often ambiguous, and admit of different interpretations. If DDs are REs, then in order to capture different interpretations of DDs, the relation of *reference* would have to be relativized to worlds, times, and name-assignments. Doing this would provide the needed resources to capture the different readings, since each different reading would result from a different reference relation in each possible world. This solution is *ad hoc*, because for other REs, the reference relation is not relativized in this way. They do not produce the sort of ambiguities produced by DDs. Moreover, the solution is inelegant, because treating DDs as being in the same category as quantifiers manages to yield all the various readings in a natural way.

The rest of the section is unnecessary for understanding anything in the rest of the book. Basically, Evans goes through a few different proposals for understanding quantification in natural language. But be advised that there is a typo on page 59. The sentence in the middle of the first full paragraph *should* read: "This is to regard 'The' not as an $S/((S/N), (S/N))$, but as a 'unary quantifier former' (an $(S/(S/N))/(S/N)$)." The first expression is more accurately expressed with an additional set of parentheses, and the second expression has the wrong number of parentheses in the text.

the corner, even if that person is a man drinking water. Evans will discuss such uses of definite descriptions at length in Section 9.3.

2.5 'Rigid designation' and Fregean sense

Evans has gone to such lengths concerning the semantics of descriptive names for two reasons. First, he thinks that, qua referring expressions that can be meaningful when empty, they are independently interesting. In particular, the meaning that they have when empty is, essentially, a Fregean Sense, in that in order to understand the name one must think of the referent in a particular way. The descriptive content associated with the name is a public feature of its meaning. Second, and relatedly, Evans will argue in later chapters that there are other kinds of singular term that are referring expressions and for which a notion of Fregean Sense is applicable, most notably demonstratives and indexicals. The problem is that at the time Evans was writing it was assumed that demonstratives and indexicals have no Fregean sense – in part precisely because they are referring expressions. Given that, it is rhetorically convenient for Evans to have already softened the defenses of the inference from 'referring expression' to 'no Fregean sense' with his account of descriptive names. In this section Evans tackles the inference (from referring expression to no Fregean Sense) head-on by arguing that the opposing view seems to be based on the assumption that Fregean senses must be something like a description or Carnapian intension (both of which can yield different objects in different possible worlds, but that this assumption is not justified.

Before getting into this section, a quick preliminary on 'rigid designation' will be helpful. The expression, due to Kripke, captures the idea that proper

names appear to behave in a certain way in modal contexts.⁴ Specifically, it seems to be the case that proper names refer to 'the same' individual regardless of what possible world is under consideration, and this means that the referent is not determined by any descriptive properties. So for example, consider Jimi Hendrix (Note, I am using a proper name in our language "Jimi Hendrix" to get you to think about a specific individual.) It is supposed to be obvious that this individual, while remaining that same individual person, might have had very different properties. Jimi Hendrix (in other possible worlds) might not have ever taken up playing the guitar, Jimi Hendrix might not have died at a young age; and so on. We can even see that there is a possible world in which Jimi Hendrix was not named "Jimi Hendrix" — his parents might have named him "Clyde." This isn't the place to defend or even get into the various nuances of the doctrine. I just want to get enough of the doctrine out so that sense can be made of what Evans says.

Notice that definite descriptions don't work this way. A definite description will pick out different objects in different possible worlds. Definite descriptions are not, therefore, rigid designators. Evans points out that what he has described as the 'reference relation' (P in Section 2.4) is a rigid designation relation. Both are capturing the idea **that** if a singular term is a referring expression (aka rigid designator), this is because it is just attached to an object in such a way that the only contribution that that singular term makes to determining whether the sentence using it is true or false is to indicate that *that*

⁴ This should be understood as an empirical claim about how people actually use names, assessed through what sorts of sentences seem to native speakers to be felicitous or not. Because it is an empirical question, the extent to which it is true of English is a contingent matter, as is the extent to which it holds of other languages. Some philosophers have investigated this, and claimed that in other languages proper names seem not to have this feature.

object is the one whose satisfaction of the predicate is at issue. A definite description, by contrast, might bring different objects.

The issue is whether it is possible for a singular term to function this way semantically (reference/rigid designation) while also possessing a Fregean Sense. The intuition Evans is arguing against is that if a singular term has a Fregean Sense, this means that it is associated with some specific way of thinking of the thing the singular term specifies. And whatever this way of thinking is, it could latch on to different things in different contexts. The prototype is a definite description. Definite descriptions have a Fregean Sense in that in order to understand the description, one must think of the object in a particular way (as the unique satisfier of the description). Moreover, this way of thinking is one that, in different circumstances would yield different objects. So in the case of definite descriptions it is clear how possession of a Sense goes along with the description's not being a rigid designator (= referring expression).

And for Russell it was clear how being a referring expression ruled out having a Fregean Sense. Given the Cartesian background that made the referents of logically proper names completely incorrigibly known, there was no room for different ways of thinking of the referent, or presenting the referent in different ways.

Evans though wants to argue that possession of a Fregean Sense is not inconsistent with a singular term's being a referring expression. Descriptive names are an example. He will argue in the rest of the book that other kinds of singular term are also referring expressions and have a Fregean Sense. (See sections 2.D1 and 2.D2 for more on this.)

Evans uses David Kaplan as the proponent of the view he is opposing. Kaplan held that a singular term cannot possess a Fregean sense if it behaves as a

rigid designator. In the terminology that has been developed, the idea would be that being a referring expression is inconsistent with having a Sense. Kaplan draws a distinction between direct and indirect 'reference', and then assumes that any expression with a Fregean sense could not refer directly. And anything that did refer directly could not have any 'intermediary' such as a sense. The idea here seems to be that if there is a sense associated with a term, then this sense would be an intermediary between the thinker/language user and the object picked out by this intermediary. And given that, it would seem that this intermediary might latch onto different objects in different circumstances or possible worlds, in much the way that a description might be true of different objects in different possible worlds.

Evans claims that this is misguided for two reasons. First, Fregean senses need not be thought of as *mediating* between expressions and their referents. Recall that on Evans' reading, sense is just a way of thinking about a referent. 'Way' need not be cashed out as a description nor as anything else that would serve to mediate between an expression and a referent (though Evans thinks that descriptions are one kind of Fregean sense, ~~so to speak~~, they are not the only kind). Evans points out that the mere fact that an object is thought about *in a particular way* does not render the thinker's relation to the object indirect — just as if I gave you something in a particular way (with my left hand instead of the right) this does not make the giving indirect.⁵

⁵ Note that the sense of 'direct' as issue here is one that contrasts specifically with the sort of mediation that a description provides. It is not a part of Evans' proposal that one's thinking is unmediated in the way that a fan of Hegel or Sellars ("the myth of the given") might be concerned about. Also note that it is consistent with Evans' proposal that some ways of thinking of an object might be indirect, for example, if I think of an object as the object that uniquely satisfies some description. (There might be ways of giving something indirectly as well, e.g., giving it to a third party and instructing them to give it to the intended recipient.)

Evans diagnoses Kaplan's position as perhaps implicitly assuming that Fregean senses are basically Carnapian intensions — functions from possible worlds to extensions. Of course, if this is so, then such terms cannot be referring expressions, because they will, by definition, yield different objects in different possible worlds. But Evans is going to claim that this is not the only way to understand Senses.

2.D1 Discussion: referring, denoting, and descriptive names

Now for a bit more on referring vs. denoting. The basic idea is that to say that a singular term *refers* is to say that its semantic function is simply to be attached to a *particular* object like a label. It doesn't matter what properties the object has, or if the object changes properties, or whatever. The term is just attached to *that* object, and it stays attached to *that* object in modal contexts (different possible worlds). Descriptions don't work that way. What object(s) a description designates depends on the properties of the objects, and hence can change if the properties of objects change. And it might designate different objects in different possible worlds. This relation is called *denoting*.

Here a fanciful metaphor that might help. Take the sentence

NP is F

where NP is a noun phrase (we're leaving it open now whether NP is singular, or whether it is a referring expression). Now suppose you want to know whether that sentence is true. How do you go about finding out? Let's assume you have no problem assessing whether things are *F*, and so this leaves the half of the task

that is associated with the NP. You need to know which object(s) it is(/are) whose *F*-ness you need to assess. That's the NP's job.

Think of the NP as an errand boy whose job it is to go out to the universe, and bring you back one (or maybe more) objects and hand them to you. At that point you use your capacity to assess *F*-ness on it/them, and then you know whether the sentence is true or false. There are two ways this errand boy might do his job, think of this as two types of errand boy:

Type-A. This errand boy is handcuffed to a *particular* object. That's how he works. That's his M.O. So when you (or anyone else) invokes this errand boy's assistance, he just brings you the object he's handcuffed to. Of course how this attachment gets (non-metaphorically) effected between a word and an object is an interesting question. But one way or another, that connection is there. Doesn't matter what the properties of the object are, or if the properties change. The Type-A errand boy doesn't look at properties or anything like that. He just brings back the object he's cuffed to. And once the object is brought back, you can assess that object's *F*-ness.

Type-B. This errand boy has a filter — think of this as a description that he uses to pick out objects. Maybe it's a verbal description, or maybe a police sketch. But he goes out compares all objects to the description, and all objects that match it he brings back to you. At that point you can assess its/their *F*-ness.

These are very different job descriptions. Type-A errand boys cannot do their job – they can't function – if they aren't handcuffed to anything. The job of bringing back whatever object he is cuffed to requires him being handcuffed to an object. And if there isn't any object he's cuffed to, then there's no job. He just looks at you and shrugs his shoulders. Type-B errand boys have a job

regardless. Their job is to go out and compare objects to a description and bring any matches back to you. This is a job that can still be done even if there are no objects — *bringing back no objects is one way to successfully do their job*, they are telling you that no objects fit the description.

One way to think of a definite description is a Type-B errand boy with a uniqueness stipulation. This errand boy brings back anything that *uniquely* fits the description. If nothing passes it, he brings nothing back; if exactly one thing passes, he brings that thing back; if two or more things pass, he brings nothing back. His *overt* behavior will resemble that of a Type-A errand boy in that he will never bring back more than one thing. But this cap of one is not established by handcuffing (as with the Type-A errand boy), but rather by comparing objects to a filter and (in effect) counting. But unlike the Type-A errand boy, he still has a job to do, even without handcuffs.

Kripke's notion of rigid designation is just the idea that the handcuffs (Type-A errand boys) stay on the same object in different possible worlds; but for Type-B errand boys, the description might match different objects in different possible worlds. "Obama" always brings back Obama. But "The 44th President of the US" brings back John McCain in some possible worlds.

So that's the idea. Of course there are a lot of tricky cases. For example Donnellan cases:

The woman in the corner drinking a martini is a spy
said at a party where the only person in the corner is a man drinking water from a martini glass, and this is who the speaker is looking at when making the utterance. It looks on the surface like the NP is a definite description. But since it also looks like the NP is bringing back someone who doesn't fit the description, some philosophers have argued that the causal contact between the object and

speaker is handcuffing the NP to that object (aka, the “referential use” of definite descriptions). Evans will discuss such cases in Section 9.3.

One way to think of descriptive names is as employing a complex job description. You have two errand boys. The first (Type B) implements a definite description: he brings back the one object (if any) that uniquely fits the description. Then, if there is an object the Type-B errand boy brings back, this object is handcuffed to the second (Type-A) errand boy's wrist. (You might think of this as a Kripkean baptism by remote.⁶) That's why “Julius might not have invented the zip” is perfectly meaningful, whereas “the inventor of the zip might not have invented the zip” doesn't make sense.

⁶ I owe this description to Nate Greely.

2.D2 A taxonomy of singular terms

It might help to map out a taxonomy of semantic categories of singular terms for Frege, Russell and Evans. Table 1 represents Frege's account. As can be seen, there is only one column (because the account was monolithic).

Table 1: Frege

	Names
Does job by referring?	Yes
Meaningless if empty?	No, and yes. Sort of.
Informative Identity Statements	Yes
Fregean Sense applicable?	Yes

As The "No, and yes. Sort of" in the "Meaningless if empty?" row is registering the fact that Frege was not entirely consistent on this. Russell distinguished two kinds of singular terms, as in Table 2:

Table 2: Russell

	(Logically Proper) Names	Definite Descriptions
Does job by referring?	Yes	No
Meaningless if empty	Yes	No
Informative Identity Statements	No	Yes
Fregean Sense applicable?	No	Yes

So for Russell there were two categories: (logically proper) names, and definite descriptions. The former worked by referring, were meaningless if empty, would never result in informative identity statements, and had no room for a notion of Fregean Sense. Definite Descriptions had the opposite pattern.

Evans has no beef with the definite description column of Table 2. But he thinks that the 'names' side actually has different semantic categories that can be distinguished by these three features (see Table 3).

Table 3: Evans

	NAMES			Definite Descriptions
	Demonstratives /Indexicals	Proper Names	Descriptive Names	
Does job by referring?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Meaningless if empty	Yes	Yes	No	No
Informative Identity Statement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fregean Sense Applicable?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Section 2.3 is where Evans discusses descriptive names, and argues that they have the column of features described in Table 3. Evans does not explicitly

discuss informative identity statements in the context of descriptive names, but clearly it can be informative to learn that Julius is Deepthroat.

Chapter 11 is where Evans will discuss Proper Names. Demonstratives and indexicals are discussed in Chapter 9 (with preliminary discussion of the thoughts required to understand them in Chapters 6 and 7).



