Russell's Descriptivism about Proper Names and Indexicals: Reconstruction and Defense

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ABSTRACT. In his lectures on logical atomism Russell maintains that (i) the proper names of natural language are really definite descriptions, and (ii) indexicals are also definite descriptions, to the extent that they are used to refer to ordinary objects. In spite of the dominant referentialist trend championed by Kripke and Kaplan, there are good reasons to still think that Russell is right in holding these views. However, Russell's descriptivist account of proper names and demonstratives makes their meanings unpalatably idiosyncratic or subjective. I shall discuss and compare some ways in which this subjectivism can be avoided.

1.   *Introduction*

Since at least the time of "On Denoting," and then throughout his whole philosophical career, Russell endorsed a form of *descriptivism* about *ordinary* proper names and indexicals, i.e., the proper names and indexicals that we normally use to communicate in natural language, by means of which we typically refer to ordinary objects.[1] That is, roughly speaking, he took the meanings of such singular terms to be expressible by definite descriptions, and thus characterizable, we may say, as *descriptive contents*. In particular, Russell upholds these ideas in his 1918 lectures on the philosophy of logical atomism (*PLA*, hereafter).[2] This is interesting, since it shows that this semantic aspect of Russell's thought remains constant in spite of the significant changes in ontological perspective that we find in PLA: Russell now thinks that ordinary objects are reconstructable in terms of classes of sense data and ends up endorsing the neutral monism that he had seriously considered, but ultimately rejected, in his 1913 *Monist* paper on acquaintance (Russell 1913).

In contrast with Russell's loyalty to descriptivism, the current scene in the philosophy of language is hostile to it. Since at least the Seventies of last century, in the light of important works by Donnellan, Kripke and Kaplan, *Referentialism* about proper names and indexicals has become dominant. According to this view, these singular terms are *directly referential*, i.e., their meanings are not descriptive contents, but simply their referents. Despite the triumph of referentialism, I think that Russell was right in endorsing descriptivism, since the arguments in favour of referentialism can be rebutted and those in favour of descriptivism are not easily accommodated by referentialism (see Orilia 2010, *SR* hereafter). Russell's form of descriptivism is however *subjectivist* in a sense that I shall clarify below, and when descriptivism is combined with this subjectivism there are indeed problems and some of the anti-

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[1] As we shall see, Russell also acknowledges logically proper names and indexical terms that work as logically proper names, understood as directly referential expressions. In the following, by "proper name" and "indexical" I shall mean ordinary proper names and indexicals, unless otherwise indicated. In the category of indexicals I include both deictic terms such as "I" and "here" and demonstratives such as "this" or "that."

[2] Page references will be to Russell 1985.

descriptivist pro-referentialist arguments are successful. What we need do then is to amend Russell's descriptivism from subjectivism. In this paper I wish to show how this can be done.

I shall proceed as follows. In §2, I shall review how Russell presents and motivate descriptivism in PLA, and clarify why his version of this doctrine is subjectivist. In §3, I shall consider the referentialist arguments that are effective against descriptivism cum subjectivism. Finally, in §4, I shall first consider the way in which in SR I proposed to free descriptivism form subjectivism and then illustrate an alternative way, which I think improves on my earlier proposal.

2.   Russell's descriptivism and its motivations

Russell puts forward descriptivism about ordinary proper names by telling us that any such name is an "abbreviation" of a definite description, say "the F," wherein "F" is a predicate expressing a contingent property, which in typical cases is commonly attributed to the bearer of the name. We may put this as follows: the meaning of the name, in *one way* of interpreting this name (since one name can be used for different individuals, as "John Smith," paradigmatically witnesses) is provided by a definite description of that sort, which can thus be considered as synonymous with the name. At the same time, Russell admits that there are, as he characteristically says, *logically* proper names, whose meanings are particulars with which the speaker is acquainted. These names, we may say in current terminology, directly refer to their referents (and thus Russell is, as regards them, a referentialist). In PLA (p. 62), Russell presents these ideas as follows:

> The names that we commonly use, like "Socrates", are really abbreviations for descriptions; not only that, but what they describe are not particulars but complicated systems of classes or series. A name, in the narrow logical sense of a word whose meaning is a particular, can only be applied to a particular with which the speaker is acquainted. You remember, when Adam named the beasts, they came before him one by one, and he became acquainted with them and named them. We are not acquainted with Socrates, and therefore cannot name him. When we use the word "Socrates", we are really using a description. Our thought may be rendered by some such phrase as, "The Master of Plato", or "The philosopher who drank the hemlock", or "The person whom logicians assert to be mortal", but we certainly do not use the name as a name in the proper sense of the word.

The beginning of this passage hints at Russell's view of ordinary objects as "systems of classes or series," which we may set aside for present purposes. Moreover, the part about Adam[3] seems to tell us that we can be acquainted with ordinary objects and tag them with logically proper names, but this is a misleading suggestion that we should also set aside, since Russell really thinks that the only particulars with which we can be acquainted are private mental occurrences, sense data, or the like.[4] I'd rather like to focus on another aspect of Russell's descriptivism about proper names, which the above passage well illustrates: for a typical proper name, there are various very different descriptions with equal claims to provide the meaning of the name in question; for this meaning is captured, depending on what a given speaker has in mind, by an idiosyncratic recourse to a *hook* property, as we may call it: a property that (if

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[3] As well as other passages at pp. 61-62.
[4] See Pears's introduction in Russell 1985.

all goes well) contingently identifies the alleged referent, but has typically[5] nothing to do with bearing the name in question: being the master of Plato (where of course "Plato" should in turn be understood in terms of some definite description), being a philosopher who drank the hemlock, and the like. This identification occurs, if it does, because it so happens that the referent is unique in having the hook property in question. Thus, the meaning of a proper name is not objectively, or intersubjectively, fixed by the *Langue* of a certain linguistic community; it rather varies from speaker to speaker, or perhaps even for the same speaker at different times. We may thus say that Russell's descriptivism is *subjectivist*.[6] Let us grant, although Russell would not put things in this way, that the meaning of a definite description, "the F," is a certain *descriptive content*, [the F],[7] within which we can distinguish a component corresponding to the definite article, and a *property* component, i.e., the property, F, expressed by the predicate "F." We can then say that Russell (i) is descriptivist about proper names in that, for him the meaning of a proper name is a descriptive content, and (ii) endorses a subjectivist brand of descriptivism, since the property component of the descriptive content is a hook property that varies from speaker to speaker.

In talking about meaning, however, we need be a bit more precise. As I propose in SR, it is in fact appropriate to distinguish between (i) a *semantic* meaning of a certain expression type, (ii) the *contextualized* (semantic) meaning of a certain token of that type, uttered in a certain specific context, and (iii) the *pragmatic* meaning of the token in question. Various semantic meanings are attributable *a priori*, so to speak, to the expression type on the basis of its being part of the lexicon of a given language. One of them is attributable *a posteriori*, so to speak, qua contextualized meaning, to the expression token, given the context in which it is used. Moreover, thanks to the information provided by the context, this contextualized meaning is typically "enriched" and thus turned into a pragmatic meaning (it is no ruled out that no enrichment is needed, so that contextualized and pragmatic meanings coincide). These distinctions are easily illustrated with so-called incomplete descriptions. Consider "the bank." From the point of view of semantic meaning "bank" could mean bank qua river bank, say *bank1*, or bank qua building hosting a financial institution, say *bank2*. Thus "the bank" has a least two semantic meanings, expressible by "the bank1" and "the bank2," respectively. In a context in which it is clear that the latter is to be privileged, a certain token of "the bank" takes [the bank2 as its contextualized meaning. This meaning is a descriptive content that fails to pick up one specific object, for there are many objects with the property bank2. But in the context in question it may well be clear that a more specific property, bank2 & P, should be invoked, which actually identifies a certain object (P is, let us imagine for concreteness, being located in Elm street, Austin, TX, but we need not care here about how P is actually determined). Hence, the pragmatic meaning of the token in question is: [the bank2 & P].

In Russell's account, there is no explicit distinction between these three levels of meaning, let alone between the semantic meaning of a proper name type and the contextualized and pragmatic meanings of a proper name token. But the subjectivism that Russell proposes is most obviously interpretable as a *semantic* subjectivism, which regards the level of contextualized semantic meaning. To begin with, we could attribute to Russell the idea that the idiolects of different speakers of one language

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[5] Russell occasionally considers properties such as being called *N*, where *N* is a certain proper name.

[6] As is well-known Frege holds a similarly subjectivist form of descriptivism.

[7] Descriptive contents can be viewed as certain kinds of denoting concepts, which Russell accepted in *The Principles of Mathematics*, but rejected in "On Denoting" (see Cocchiarella 1982). As in SR, I take descriptive contents to be denoting concepts understood pretty much in Cocchiarella's sense, i.e., as properties of properties.

such as English, or even of the same speakers at different times, differ idiosyncratically as to the meaning of proper name types in such a way that there is no truth of the matter as to which idiolect is right in this respect. In what we attribute to Russell we should make room of course for the idea that a proper name is ambiguous for a certain speaker in the sense that we can illustrate with this example: "Aristotle," qua type, is ambiguously associated, for a certain speaker, to the descriptive content [the husband of Jacklyn], and also to the descriptive content [the Greek philosopher born in Stagira]. However, in a given context, e.g. one in which we are discussing philosophy, for this speaker the contextualized meaning of a token of "Aristotle" would be the latter content, rather than the former. Yet, for a different speaker in the same context the very same token could be associated, say, to the descriptive content [the teacher of Alexander the Great]. In this way of seeing the matter, the contextualized meaning typically coincides with the pragmatic meaning: [8] we can hardly differentiate between them, since the definite descriptions that in Russell's view provide the meanings of proper names are not incomplete in the sense in which "the bank" is, and, as we saw above in relation to definite descriptions, the need to differentiate the pragmatic from the contextualized meaning precisely arises with the incomplete descriptions.

Could we take Russell's subjectivism to be a *pragmatic* subjectivism, which regards only the level of pragmatic meaning? Perhaps we can do it, by stretching a bit what we actually find in PLA and other Russell's texts. How would it work? Roughly, along these lines. We view a proper name "N" as an incomplete definite description, whose semantic meaning is a descriptive content, [the N*], whose property component, N*, is a *nominal* property exemplified by an individual by virtue of this: it has been named "N" in a baptism and possibly called with that name on other occasions after the baptism.[9] This is of course a very generic property that many individuals may share and thus N* does not succeed in identifying a certain individual. However, in a specific context, depending on the speaker, a token of "N" has as pragmatic meaning another descriptive content, [the N* & F], whose property component succeeds in identifying a certain individual (at least in typical cases); for example, for a certain speaker, F might be a property such as being a philosopher who drank the hemlock, but for another it might the property of being the master of Plato.[10]

There are two main reasons that Russell has in mind in favour of the view that a proper name takes as meaning a descriptive content, rather than its referent: the *co-reference* and the *no reference problems*.[11]

We can illustrate the former problem with this example. If the meanings of a token of "George Eliot" and a token of "Mary Anne Evans" were simply their referents, a token of "George Eliot is a poet" and a token of "Mary Anne Evans is a poet" should express the same proposition, but this runs contrary to the fact that Tom, who who does not know that George Eliot is Mary Anne Evans, may assent to the former, but not to the latter. We need two propositions, one believed and the other disbelieved by Tom; and we get them if the two proper name tokens are different descriptive contents.

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[8] This is the view that I attribute to Russell in SR, § 3.7.

[9] I am assuming that "N" is a phonological word in the sense of Lyons 1968, p. 69. In this sense of the word a token of "Aristotle" used to refer to the philosopher, and another token used to refer to the husband of Jackie Kennedy, are tokens of the same word. Similarly, a token of "take" used as a noun and a token of "take" used as a verb are tokens of the same word.

[10] This is the view that I proposed in the Orilia 2000.

[11] We may add of course other reasons, e.g., anti-essentialist motivations (see Landini 2011, pp. 211 ff.), but we have no room to consider them here.

Following Russell's subjectivism, they could be, say, [the author of *Middlemarch*] and [the woman who was vice-director of the *Westminster Review* in 1951] (perhaps Tom ran into an old 1951 issue of this journal and found there the name "Mary Anne Evans.")

As for the no-reference problem, consider this. If, as many experts believe, it was somehow invented that a single poet called "Homer" wrote both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, a token of "Homer did not exist," should express a true proposition. Yet, if the meaning of a proper name token would simply be its referent, it would not be clear which proposition, if any, is expressed by the sentence token in question, unless we assume, *à la* Meinong, that the referent is a non-existent object. In contrast, if the meaning of the token is a descriptive content, we get the proposition we need. Following Russell's subjectivism, the descriptive content could be, e.g., [the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*].

As regards indexicals, in PLA we find Russell's view in this passage:

> One can use "this" as a name to stand for a particular with which one is acquainted at the moment. We say "This is white". If you agree that "This is white", meaning the "this" that you see, you are using "this" as a proper name. But if you try to apprehend the proposition that I am expressing when I say "This is white", you cannot do it. If you mean this piece of chalk as a physical object, then you are not using a proper name. It is only when you use "this" quite strictly, to stand for an actual object of sense, that it is really a proper name.

Apart from asserting that indexicals can be used as logically proper names that directly refer to sense data or the like, this passage suggests that "this," used as an ordinary indexical in order to refer to an ordinary object, since not "a proper name," is a definite description. We may thus take Russell as telling us that a token of an ordinary indexical such as "this" has a descriptive content as pragmatic meaning. But which one? Looking at what Russell has written on these topics before and after PLA, we can attribute to him, in PLA as well, a descriptivism about indexicals that is even more subjectivist than his descriptivism about proper names: the descriptive contents working as pragmatic meanings of indexical tokens subjectively and idiosyncratically depend on private mental occurrences. For example, if you and I look at a statue and I tell you "I like this," for me the pragmatic meaning of the token of "this" that I have used is something like [the object causing this1], where this1 is a certain sense datum,[12] which happens to be in my visual field as a result of the fact that I am looking at the table. But for you it is something like [the object causing this2], where this2 is a sense datum in your visual field; it is a different sense datum, though caused by the same object. Moreover, the token of "I" that I have uttered has for me a pragmatic meaning along these lines: [the individual attending to this1], whereas for you it has a quite different pragmatic meaning, something like this: [the individual causing this3], where this3 is a sense datum in your mind caused by my presence in front of you (see, e.g., the third part of Russell 1913).

The idea that indexicals have descriptive contents as meanings can also be motivated by the co-reference and no reference problems[13] and presumably Russell had these motivations in mind, although I cannot find clear statements of this.

3.   *Criticisms to descriptivism and the current scene*

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[12] This sense datum can be taken to be directly referred to by the token in question.

[13] See SR, §3.3.

In the second half of the last centuries various philosophers of language, Donnellan, Kripke and Kaplan in particular, mounted an attack against descriptivism about proper names and indexicals. It is typically believed that this led to a demise of descriptivism and to the affirmation of referentialism. Soames 2010 is paradigmatic in this respect, since it is meant to be a textbook that presents the state of the art in the philosophy of language and takes descriptivism to be unredeemably superseded by referentialism.[14] There are indeed important arguments that have been provided against descriptivism and it is typically taken for granted that they cannot be answered and that accordingly a referentialist turn is necessary. However, once we accept referentialism, to deal with the co-reference and no-reference problems becomes very difficult and these two problems are then either ignored or tackled with various epicycles that make referentialism much less palatable that it might seem at first sight (see SR, §8.13). In particular, the no reference problem, as noted above, may take us back to Meinongianism, if we endorse referentialiasm. It is thus not surprising that Soames (2010, p. 128) acknowledges non-existent objects, even though he does not cite Meinong.

Fortunately, the arguments against descriptivism can be tamed (see SR, Ch. 8). This is so, however, to the extent that the subjectivism that is part and parcel of Russell's descriptivism is somehow eliminated. Some of these criticisms in fact precisely undermine this aspect of Russell's descriptivism. Let us focus on them. I have in mind in particular the semantic argument (SR, §4.4), and the problems of choice, ignorance and error (SR, §4.11).

Suppose we incorporate semantic subjectivism into descriptivism. Then, if Tom uses a token g of "Goedel" in uttering

(1)   Goedel is Austrian,

both the contextualized semantic meaning and the pragmatic meaning of g would be, e.g., something like [the logician who discovered the incompleteness theorem] and the proposition expressed would accordingly be captured by this sentence:

(1a)   The logician who discovered the first incompleteness theorem is Austrian.

Here is the semantic argument. Imagine that, unbeknownst to us all, Goedel stole the proof of the theorem to an unknown German logician, Schmidt. In this case, we should admit, the token g still refers to Goedel, not to Schmidt, and (1a) is false, although (1) remains true. Yet, our theory wrongly predicts that g refers to Schmidt rather than to Goedel, since g has as meaning the descriptive content [the logician who discovered the incompleteness theorem] and Schmidt is the unique individual that exemplifies the property component of this content. Moreover, as a consequence of this, the theory also wrongly predicts that both (1) and (1a) are false, since the individual in question is German, rather than Austrian. We could avoid the result that g refers to Schmidt, if we assume the pragmatic subjectivism outlined above, and take the pragmatic meaning of g to be [the individual who is a Goedel and who discovered the first incompleteness theorem]. We avoid the result because Schmidt (let us assume) is not called "Goedel" and thus is not a Goedel. But we would still not succeed in securing that g refers to Goedel, since, by hypothesis, he did not discover the first incompleteness theorem.

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[14] Although Soames corrects in his own way the referentialist paradigm and recognizes an element of truth in descriptivism (see p. 171).

The problem of choice goes as follows. We might imagine that Tom has at his disposal various descriptive contents to associate to this token g of "Goedel." For example, in addition to the one we have already considered, there could also be this: [the logician who discovered the second incompleteness theorem]. If so, there is no principled reason to take one rather than the other as contextualized meaning, and as pragmatic meaning, of g. Yet, descriptivism cum semantic subjectivism predicts that one specific descriptive content should fulfil these roles. The picture does not change substantially, if we combine descriptivism with pragmatic subjectivism.

Move now to the problem of ignorance. Tom could be so ignorant about Goedel that there is at his disposal no appropriate descriptive content of the sort envisaged by descriptivism cum semantic subjectivism. Hence, he can attach to g no contextualized and no pragmatic meaning. Yet, the theory predicts that one descriptive content of this sort should fulfil these roles. Again, the picture does not change substantially, if we associate descriptivism to pragmatic subjectivism.

Let us turn to the problem of error. Assume descriptivism cum semantic subjectivism and suppose now that Tom's ignorance leads him to take, as contextualized semantic and pragmatic meaning of g, the following descriptive content: [the logician who discovered the undecidability of FOL]. The theory predicts that g refers Church and that (1) is false, but in fact g refers to Goedel and (6) is true. As for the semantic problem, the situation slightly improves if we rather assume descriptivism cum pragmatic subjectivism, but not in a decisive manner.

As we shall see in the next section, in order to answer these objections we need a form of descriptivism that avoids subjectivism. It is not obvious that these criticisms are effective against the Russellian account of indexicals. Nevertheless, we shall see that, once we avoid subjectivism about proper names, we'll have the elements for a more satisfactory but still descriptivist account of indexicals.

4.   *Descriptivism without subjectivism*

In SR I have proposed a form of descriptivism that avoids the subjectivism of Russell's approach by putting together causal descriptivism[15] and Reichenbach's token-reflexivity. It works as follows (setting aside details that need not detain us here). It is assumed that, by being baptized with the proper name "N," either ostensively or via a description, a given individual acquires the property of being an N, and that this very generic property is the property component of the descriptive content, [the N], which is the semantic meaning of "N," as well as the contextualized semantic meaning of any token of "N."[16] The causal theory of reference made popular by Kripke takes for granted that there is a causal chain that links a baptism based on a certain name to subsequent uses of the name, a *nominal-causal* chain, as we may call it. Granting this, we can say that, for any token n of "N" that is used, there is a property, being a source of a nominal causal chain leading to n, that is exemplified by a certain individual i, just in case i was baptized with "N" in a baptism linked by a nominal-causal chain to the circumstance in which n is used. This property, we may also grant, is a species of the more general property of being an N; that is, whatever has the former property by necessity has also the latter property. With all this is in place, it is then further proposed that the pragmatic meaning of a given

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[15] Causal descriptivism has been proposed by various authors. See Orilia 2010, n. 12, p. 155 for references.

[16] To the extent that "N" is viewed as a proper name. The theory also acknowledges that a proper name can function as a general term.

token n of "N" is simply the token-reflexive descriptive content [the source of the nominal-causal chain leading to n]. By virtue of what has just been explained, it should be clear that a descriptive content of this sort has a property component that in a typical case identifies one individual and that appropriately enriches the more generic property component of the semantic meaning of "N." Clearly, this approach eschews the semantic argument and the problems of choice, ignorance and error. Let us see how.

Tom, in using a certain token g of "Goedel," may well have in mind a descriptive content such as [the logician who discovered the first incompleteness theorem]. But this does not make it the pragmatic meaning of g. The pragmatic meaning is [the source of the nominal-causal chain leading to g], a descriptive content whose property component is exemplified just by Goedel. Thus, even if it turns out that it was Schmidt who actually discovered the first incompleteness theorem, the token g still refers to Goedel. Moreover, it does not matter that in using g Tom has in mind various descriptive contents, such as [the logician who discovered the first incompleteness theorem], or [the logician who discovered the second incompleteness theorem]. Or that Tom has in mind a descriptive content, such as [the logician who discovered the undecidability of FOL], whose property component happens not to be true of Goedel. All these descriptive contents are not meanings of g, the only thing that counts as meaning of g (at the pragmatic level) is [the source of the nominal-causal chain leading to g]. And this is true, even if Tom has not this descriptive content explicitly in mind, and indeed if no descriptive content is explicitly in his mind.

This approach has however some shortcomings. A token-reflexive meaning is ephemeral, for its existence is as short-lived as the very token that happens to be one of its constituents. This may be unappealing for those of us who think of propositions as both meanings of sentence tokens and eternal truth-bearers that are true or false independently of the sentence tokens that express them. Moreover, and more importantly, this approach introduces a new form of subjectivism, for it takes any two tokens of the same name to have two distinct pragmatic meanings. For example, suppose that Tom uses a token g of "Goedel" in saying

(2)   Goedel discovered the first incompleteness theorem,

and Mary uses another token g' in saying

(3)   Goedel discovered a theorem.

According to this token-reflexive approach, we are forced to say that g and g' have two distinct pragmatic meanings, namely [the source of the nominal-causal chain leading to g] and [the source of the nominal-causal chain leading to g']. And yet we may well have the intuition that they have precisely the same meaning. Moreover, we may think that the proposition expressed by Tom logically implies the proposition expressed by Mary. But this can't be true if g and g' stand for the two distinct descriptive contents in question, since from a purely logical point of view these two descriptive contents are not equivalent (similarly, that the husband of Michelle is a former US president does not logically imply that the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize winner is a former US president).

But we can avoid these problems by eliminating token-reflexivity as follows. We assume now that at a baptism done in a certain specific place p at a specific time t with the name "N," the baptizer *ipso facto* creates (or simply evokes) a property that one has by virtue of being baptized with "N" in p at t. Call a property of this sort a *specific nominal* property. This property is a species of, and thus entails, the

more generic nominal property of being an N, which one has simply by virtue of being baptized with the name "N" (a property shared by all individuals baptized with this name). Thus, "N," to the extent that it was ever used in a baptism (thereby counting as a proper name) has as semantic meaning the very generic property of being an N, but, ambiguously, it also has as semantic meaning, for any baptism celebrated at a certain time and place, a corresponding specific nominal property. Thus, given that several baptisms with the name "N" have taken place, there are corresponding properties N1, N2, N3, etc. Depending on which baptism is the source of the nominal-causal chain that leads to a given use of a token n of "N," one of these specific nominal properties, call it N*, happens to be privileged in that [the N*] is the contextualized linguistic meaning of the token n, and consequently also the pragmatic meaning of n.

It should be clear that this approach steers clear of the semantic objection and the problems of choice, ignorance and error, just like the previous token-reflexive approach. However, contrary to the former, it completely eliminates subjectivism from descriptivism about proper names. To see this, consider again our Goedelian example in which Tom uses a token g of "Goedel" in uttering (2) and Mary uses another token g' of "Goedel" in uttering (3). We can of course assume that both g and g' can be traced back to the same baptism and thus both have the same contextualized and pragmatic meaning, say [the G*]. Hence, we capture the intuition that the proposition expressed by Tom's sentence token logically implies the proposition expressed by Mary's sentence token. Moreover, for those who care, we make room for the idea that these propositions are not ephemeral like the tokens used by Tom and Mary, so that the former proposition keeps implying the latter independently of the tokens that express them.

In SR, I have also treated indexicals *à la* Reichenbach in a token-reflexive way, but we can provide for them an approach similar to the one that I have just urged here for proper names: an indexical word, qua type, has a very generic property as semantic meaning (similarly, Kaplan assumes that for any such word, there is a corresponding "character"), but, whenever a corresponding token t is used, we have, as it were, a new baptism, which generates (or evokes) a very specific property P, which typically identifies a certain individual, and is such that [the P] is the contextualized and pragmatic meaning of t. If we pick the first-person pronoun "I" and the demonstrative "this" as examples, the corresponding semantic properties can be roughly characterized as follows. For "I," the semantic meaning is the very generic property of being an I, a property which one acquires by virtue of simply uttering something in a given language (whether out loud or in silent thinking); for "this," the very generic property of being a this, a property that something acquires simply by virtue of being an item in an area in which utterances occur, which I call an *interdoxastic domain*.[17] Each such property P is a genus with respect to a very specific property, P*, which is generated, or evoked, whenever a token x of the indexical in question is used at a specific time and place, which we may call, respectively, the *contextual* time and place of x.[18] P* typically identifies a specific individual and the descriptive content [the P*] is the pragmatic meaning of x. If t and p are, respectively, the contextual time and place of the relevant token, then (roughly): if P is the property of being an I, P* is that property that one acquires simply by virtue of uttering something in p at t; if P is the property of being a this, P* is that property that something acquires simply by virtue of being an item that at time t is most salient among the items in the proximity of p.

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[17] See SR, p. 180, for a more precise characterization, which explains why this term is adopted.

[18] See SR, §2.10, for a more precise characterization of contextual times and places of tokens.

Suppose for example that at pastry shop, while pointing at a piece of cake, Tom uses a token i of "I," and a token t of "this" in saying

(4)   I want this.

Then, there is a property I* that Tom has, simply by virtue of having spoken at that particular time and place, and a property T* that the piece of cake has by virtue of the fact that Tom's pointing gesture makes it (let us suppose) more salient than anything else at that particular time and place. The descriptive content [the I*] is the pragmatic meaning of i, which, as expected, refers to Tom, since he is the only individual with the property I*. Similarly, the descriptive content [the T*] is the pragmatic meaning of t, which, as expected, refers to the piece of cake, since it is the only object with the property T*.

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