Chapter III

CHAPTER III

Russell's Theory of Proper Name

Russell's theory of proper names is sometimes said to be a development of some of the basic ideas of John Stuart Mill. It is not surprising that Russell was influenced in this respect, like his political thinking, by his godfather. It is not to say that Russell's theory is a development of Mill's, because his theory differs from Mill's in some crucial respects. Thus, Russell agrees with Mill in maintaining, in his own way, that proper names are devoid of connotation, but differs from him in maintaining that the expressions which Mill, following ordinary usage, regarded as proper names are not proper names at all, they are only truncated descriptions.

In order to understands Russell's theory of proper name we have to contrast it with theory of descriptions. The theory of descriptions is essentially a technical device for exposing the logical character of certain basic expressions. In fact, as Russell worked it out, the theory impinges on semantics, logic, metaphysics, and theory of knowledge. Although the theory lies on a simple idea, it embodies a through going suspicion of ordinary language as potentially misleading and a very firm reliance upon the clarifying power of logical uniformity.

The theory of descriptions destroyed the inhibitions of Russell's early realism about recasting the forms of language to fit the forms of facts. Russell was convinced that the ultimate forms of the worldly facts would be exposed by the logical forms of propositions. In some way these ideas are as old as Aristotle, but Russell and Wittgenstein with their new theory of logic, took them more seriously than any one before

them, and treated them as the very foundation of sound philosophizing. They implemented what others before them had only speculated about, viz, the treating of grammatical data as mere variations on an underlying logical idea from any possible language, for any possible fact. Russell writes in his *Logic and Knowledge*: "The purpose of the... discussion of an ideal logical language is... to suggest, by enquiry what logic requires of a language,... what sort of structure we may reasonably be suppose the world to have".[1] To understand this claim we must begin with ordinary things and work toward the theory of proper names. In appropriate context, the expressions such as "The man next door", "the last wife of George Bush" single out an object, but always as qualified in a certain way. We may say that an object is both picked out and partially described. This suggests that there is, or might be, another way of making language engage reality, i.e., picking out without describing at all. This is just what proper names are for. Whereas "The Indian prime minister who was killed by his security guard" picks out and partially described a certain historical personage, "Indira Gandhi" picks out the same woman with no description attached. Describing and naming thus seem radically different ways of linking language and reality. The distinction is further blurred by movements in the other direction as well. Russell says that many names, including ordinary proper names are really "truncated or telescoped descriptions". "Tagore" for example really amounts to the "The author of Gitanjali". Russell's idea is that when proper names are used they are often shorthand for a more detailed meaning. Which descriptive phrase is really attached to a given use of an ordinary proper name depends upon the user and the circumstances.

Russell's point is that the logical ideal underline the original distinction between descriptions and names is discernable even if it is not often approximated by ordinary proper names of person, places, and things. Thus he came to speak of logically proper names — names which were to pick out their denotation without any clinging descriptions

whatever. Such names, in Mill's well-established terminology, would denote without connoting, name without describing. They only point out object, telling nothing about them. Ideally they would not be defined in terms of any other words. They have no definitions. Such names can have no complexity in their meaning, for the complexity would suggest something descriptive. They will have to be names innocent of any possible descriptive meaning, which means that they are simple in a very radical sense.

Russell offers some arguments for his view. One of these, repeated still in 1959, in *My Philosophical Development* is this: "It is obvious that, since words can only be defined by means of other words, there must be words that we understand otherwise than by means of definitions"[2]. But critics are not at one with Russell here. They opine that words undefinable in one context may be definable in another.

A second way of presenting this theory goes like this. We can say that a name is whatever can be put in the subject place of the sentence such that negating the sentence and negating the predicate amount to the same thing. "Carl is married" is equivalently negated by "it is not the case that Curl is married" and "Curl is not married". The underlying idea here is that a name has no meaning that could effect the meaning of the sentence other than the fact that it merely refers to its object. Any other subject term, for example, a definite description or a class term has a more complicated meaning and hence the sentence in which it occurs may have several nonequivalent negations. To substitute for the name "Curl" the description " The chairman of the Board" would enable us to negate by negating the predicate (thus admitting that he exists but denying that he is married) or by negating the proposition (thus either denying that he exists or denying that he is married). In the latter case Russell distinguishes between the primary and secondary occurrences of definite descriptions. Now it is only a minor extension of this idea that

a name, if it is the same name and not a homonym, always names the same thing. Thus Russell comes to the conclusion that unless the name actually succeed in naming something, the name contribute no meaning to the proposition and the proposition itself than become meaningless.

What we have discussed uptil now may be considered as Russell's view during the period of his essays from "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" [1911] to his lectures on "The Philosophy of Logical Atomis". The preceding discussion exhibits something original — independent lines of thought converge and are together script into the orbit of a logical theory, in the present case the theory of descriptions. The resultant acceleration of thought than threatens to idealise all the initial data, as the original peculiarities of proper names become the virtues of logically proper names. His view that in our language only "this" and "that" qualify as logically proper names has given rise to apprehensions about the whole programme. Ronald Jager doubts whether 'this' sometimes — or any word ever — get its meaning and contribute that meaning to its propositions solely by living up to the standards of being a logically proper name. The fact remains, Russell can say, that 'this' does its job in a unique way — in rudimentary causes it introduces its data without characterizing it introduces its data without characterizing it at all. It contributes its meaning to a proposition through the fact that it is silent and successful in what it sets out to do.

It might be said that 'this' contributes only its particular use, through its capacity to be used to make its unique introduction. It is doubtful whether Russell would make the distinction between uses and capacities. He could say that logically proper names have no meaning and they always have a reference or denotation. But he was usually more incline to follow Wittgenstein and hold that for names, common,

proper, or logically proper, the meaning just was the object named, denoted or referred to.

A name functions logically here somewhat as the earlier notion of a *term* of his early stage had functioned metaphysically. To put it more precisely the logically proper name is essentially a linguistic recasting of the *term* of *Principles of Mathematics.* The shift is one in view point from ontology to logic, but within the same sort of framework. The old idea that every meaningful expression indicated some *being* became the new idea that every logically proper name really names something that *exists.* This implies that for a bit of language to be a name is now a function of its use. Russell did not point out this continuity nor this further implications. Logic is the 'essence of philosophy' is Russell's new maxim, and it is valueable to see the resulting new shape of the old problem. Whereas the earlier question had been how shall timeless terms be conceived of as integrated and related to other term? This question now recedes before its linguistic replacement, namely, how shall the logical form of proposition be conceived in the face of such indespensible nobilities as proper names and quantifiers. Thus there is a shift from metaphysics to logic. The most consequential feature of the above shift is that we are to get a novel answer from Wittgenstein as well as from Russell, to its old questions of what accounts for the unity and the final analysis of the proposition. This question left unanswered in *Principles of Mathematics* is going to be outlined by a doctrine of picturing, and by the notion of logical form. For what became known as the picture theory of meaning was Wittgenstein's answer to Russell's questions. The contrasts between names and descriptions is the first step in constructing that answer. When Wittgenstein said in the *Tractatus* "It was Russell who perform the service or showing that the apparent logical form of a proposition need not be its real one"[3] he was not making a causal remark. He was taking over from Russell not merely technicalities of the theory of descriptions but also the added

idea that the contrast of uniquely referring names and descriptions was essential for thinking through the idea of logical form.

Let us now see the ontological implication of Russell's theory. In *Human Knowledge*: *Its scope and Limit* Russell says "proper names are ghosts of substances".[4] Russell now calls the bearers of logically proper names particulars. His particulars are simple, in just the way their proper names are. In *Logic and Knowledge* he writes "Those objects which it is impossible to symbolize otherwise than by simple symbol may be called 'simple'".[5] The question may be asked: why a logically proper name does not name what is complex. We can see some of the forces that molded Russell's this conception.

Russell is describing a streamlined idealized programme, deliberately ignoring friction in order to discern underlying structure. Another motive for postulating ontological simples is that there would have to be a kind of structural similarity between language and whatever reality it corresponded with. This notion of Russell's philosophy took different forms at different times. But simple names for simple objects always seemed an obvious idea to him ever since he had started thinking of logical indefinable. But it was only after Wittgenstein having taken our the project from Russell, had made it explicit in his doctrine that language was a picture of reality that propositions depicted facts by being structurally isomorphic with facts, that Russell too said plainly that there would have to be an identity of structure between facts and two propositions. It is for this reason Russell thinks that a simple symbol can name only, in the system, a simple particular.

Some observations

In the previous sections we have outlined the sense theory of name and the non-sense theory of name. But the controversy seems to

be never ending. Russell had shown that referential theory of meaning is false for descriptions because descriptions are not singular terms. But the referential theory of meaning, for Russell, holds good for proper names because, as he says, names are just names. They have their meanings simply by designating the particular things they designate and introducing those designate into discourse. Such a view is sometime compared with Millian name, since Mill seemed to defend the view that proper names are merely levels for individual persons or objects and contribute no more than those individuals themselves to the meanings of sentences in which they occur.

But the problem in that Russell's theory does not escape the puzzles that occurred about descriptions. This puzzles arise just as insistently for proper names as well. Let us delineate some such puzzles. We may recall the puzzle of Frege.

Samuel Longhorne Clemens = Mark Twain.

This sentence contains two proper names, both of which pick out or denote the same person or thing. If the names are Millian the statement should be trivially true. But in fact the sentence seems to be informative and contingent.

The sentence "Pegasus does not exist" seems to be true and seems to be about 'Pegasus'. But if the statement is true it can not be about Pegasus. The statement in not only meaningful despite Pegasus non-existence but actually and importantly true. This is the problem of negative existential.

Let us consider the statement "Albert believes that Samuel Longhorne Clemens had a pretty funny middle name". In this statement by substituting "Mark Twain" for "Samuel Longhorn Clemens" we can

produce a falsehood as the singular term position governed by "believes that" is referentially opaque. If the names are Millian and contributed nothing to meaning besides the introduction of their referents into discourse the substitution should make no difference at all and the position would be transparent.

So it seem that Russell's theory of descriptions seems to have contributed very little. Its solutions are parochial to just highly distinctive sub class of singular terms.

Russell's response to this objection is very brilliant. He now makes a turn around and offers a new thesis which is sometimes called "Name Claim". He claims that everyday proper names are not really names, at least not genuine Millian names. They look like names , but they are not names at the level of logical properties when they are laid bare. They are equivalent to definite descriptions.

Thus Russell introduces a second semantic appearance-reality distinction. Just as definite description are singular terms only in the sense of surface grammar, the name is true of ordinary proper names. Here of course the difference is more dramatic. If we look at definite description without referentialist bias, we can see that it has got some conceptual structure to it, in the form of independently meaningful word occurring in it that seem to contribute to its own overall meaning. So it is not a big surprise to be heed that underlying the misleadingly simple appearance of the word "the" there is a quantificational material, but how we are told the same about a kind of expression that looks conceptually simple.

If the name claim is true than Russell's solution to the puzzle thus generalize after all, because we just replace the name by the definite

descriptions they express. Thus names have what Frege thought of senses.

It is important to see that the Name Claim is entirely independent of the theory of descriptions itself. One might accept either doctrine while rejecting the other. In support the theory of descriptions Russell gave a direct argument. He showed the power in solving puzzles. He makes a similar explanation case for the name claim. This theory of proper name has the same power to solve puzzles. Apart from this he also gives at least one direct argument.

Just as he argued in the case of definite descriptions (his theory captures the intuitive logic of sentences containing definite descriptions) that is, such a sentence does intuitively entail each of the three clauses that make up analysis of it and the three clauses jointly entail the sentence so he argues that the same is true of proper names. Take one of the toughest cases of all a negative existential "Pegasus does not exist" is actually true. What than could it mean? It does not pick out an existing thing and assert falsely that the thing is non-existent. Rather it assures us that in fact there was no such winged horse. Similarly "Sherlock Holmes never existed" means that there never actually was a legendary English detective who lived at ... and so on.

Another argument can be extracted from his writings. It calls attention to a kind of clarificsatory questions. Suppose we hear someone using a name, say "Lili Boulanger", and we do not know who the speaker is talking about. We ask who that is? The speaker replies, the first women, ever to own the *Prix de* Rome in 1913. That is a proper answer. We asked because we do not understand the name we heard. In order to come to understand it we had to ask a "who" questions as a kind of testing, which might be called the spot check test. Suppose someone used the name "Wilfrid Sellars" and we ask "who is that?"

Then comes the reply the famous philosopher ... etc. In general when asked "Who (or what) do you mean?" After one had just used a name one immediately and instinctively comes up with a descriptions as an explanations of what one meant?

John Searle made similar appeal to learning and teaching. How do we teach a new proper name to a child and how do we learn the referent of a particular name from someone else? In the first case we produce one or more descriptions in the latter, we illicit them.

Russell speaks aggressively of names "abbreviating" descriptions, as if they were merely short for the descriptions. This thesis seems too strong. All Russell actually need for his analytical purposes is the weaker contention that names are somewhat equivalent in meaning to descriptions. Even this theory has come under attack. Let us see some of the flaws of this theory.

Searle complained that if proper names are equivalent to descriptions, then for each name there must be some particular description that it is equivalent to. Let us take one instance "Wilfried Sellars was an honest man". In this statement what I am saying?, Searle tries out a couple of candidate description type and finds them wanting. We might suppose that "Wilfred Sellers" is for me equivalent to "The one and only one thing X such that X in F and X is G and ...", where "F", "G" and the rest are all the predicates which I would apply to the man in question. Searle thinks that this would have the nasty consequence for the above statement entails:

There in at least one philosopher with whom I had a fairly violent argument in 1979.

But the above statement does not entail the present one.

Now, the Spot-Check Test ought to supply a more local answer for each use of a name and it is plausible to think that a speaker can normally give a fairly specific description when prodded. But it is unclear that this is always because the description was one the speaker already had determinately in mind. If somebody ask me. "who is Sellers?", I might make any number of answer that come to my mind, depending on what sort of information I think the questioner may want about him. But it hardly follows that the answer I do produce is the precise description that my use of "Sellers" antecedently expressed.

To make it more precise we may say that the complaint in not merely that it would be hard to find out which description a speaker had in mind in uttering some name. It is the stronger thesis that at least in many cases there is no single determinate description that the speaker has in mind either consciously or subconsciously. There is little reason for thinking that there is a fact of the matter as to whether "Wilfrid Sellars" is used an equivalent to "The author of *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man"* or "The inventor of the theory of mental terms" etc. I need have none of this in particular in mind when I unreflectly uttered " Wilfrid Sellars was an honest man".

There is no gainsaying that different people know different thing about other people. In some cases X's knowledge about Z and Y's knowledge about Z many not even overlap. It follows from the Name Claim that the same name will have different senses for different people. For if names are equivalent to descriptions, they are equivalent to different definite descriptions in different people" mouths, and for that matter to different descriptions in the same persons mouth at different time. Suppose now that I am thinking of Wilfrid Sellars as "the author of *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of man"*, and suppose somebody else is thinking of Sellars as "Pittsburgh's most famous philosopher".

Then we would be curiously unable to disagree about Sellars. If I were to say, "Sellars used to tie his shoes with one hand", and somebody says "That's ridiculous, Sellars did no such things," we would, on Russell's view, not be contradicting one another. For the sentence I have uttered would be a generalization.

> One and only one person wrote *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*, and whoever wrote *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man* used to tie his shoes with one hand,

While other statement would be just a different generalization

> One and only one person was a Philosopher more famous than any other in Pittsburgh, and whoever was a Philosopher more famous than any other in Pittsburgh did no such thing as tie his shoes with one hand.

The two statement would be entirely compatible from a logical point of view. What looked like a spirited dispute is now no real dispute at all. But that seems quite wrong.

In the light of the above objection to Russell's version of the description theory John Searle offered a looser and more sophisticated version. He suggested that a name is associated, not with any particular descriptions but with a vague cluster of descriptions. As he puts it, the force of "This is N", where 'N' is replaced by a proper name, is to assert that a sufficient but so for unspecified number of standard identifying statements associated with the name are true of the object demonstrated by "this". That is the name refers to whatever objects satisfies a sufficient but vague and unspecified number of the descriptions generally associated with it.

The vagueness is important. Searle says, it is precisely what distinguishes names from descriptions. Searle insist that, rather than being equivalent to a single description, a name functions as a "Peg ... on which to hang description" and that is what enables us to get a linguistic handle on the world in the first place.[6]

This cluster theory of Searle allows him to obviate the three objections that were raised for Russell's view. Objection one is mooted because Searle has abandoned the commitment that for each name, there must be some one particular description that it expresses. The name is tied semantically just to a loose cluster of description. Objection to is blunted by the fact that different people can have different subclusters of descriptive material in mind, yet each have a tool of identifying description and thereby succeed in referring to the same individual.

Thus Searle try to mitigate the opening objection to Russell's theory by offering his looser cluster version of the description approach. This version seems to qualify as a sensible middle way between Russell's view and the Millian conception of names. But building on some important ideas of Ruth Barcan Marcus, Saul Kripke went on to subject Russell's name claim and Searle's Cluster Theory together to a more sustained critique. They argue that Searle had not backed far enough from Russell's, for Searle's view inherits problems of much the same kinds. For them, the whole descriptivist picture of proper names is misguided.

Saul Kripke raises the following objections against the Descriptivist Theory of proper names. Suppose that Richard Nixon" is equivalent to "the winner of the 1968 U.S. Presidential election". Now let us consider a modal question about possibility : Could Richard Nixon have lost the 1968 election? The answer seems to be "Yes", assuming

that "Could" here expresses merely theoretical, logical or metaphysical possibility rather than something about the state of our knowledge. But according to the Description theory, our question means the same as

> Is it possible that: one and only one person won the 1968 election and whoever won the 1968 election lost the 1960 election?

the answer to which is clearly 'No'.

Searle's cluster theory may seem to offer an improvement, because it is possible that who satisfies a sufficient but vague and unspecified number [SBVAUN] of the description cluster associated with "Richard Nixon" none the less does not satisfy the particular description "winner of the 1968 election". But, Kripke points out, human possibility extends further than that: Nixon, the individual person might not have done any of the things generally associated with him. He might have apprenticed himself at age 12 to a sandal maker and gone on to make sandals all his life, never going anywhere near politics. Yet obviously it is not possible that a person who satisfy are SBVAUN of the description cluster associated with "Richard Nixon" nonetheless does not satisfy any at all of the descriptions in that cluster. On Searle's view, the character who went into sandal making would not have been the referent of Richard Nixon and for that matter would not have been "Richard Nixon". And that seems wrong.

Michel Dummett[7] has protested that the above objection is simply invalid as it stands. It rests on a hidden assumption which is false. We may infer that our modal question is synonymous With "one and only person won the 1968 election and whoever won the 1968 election lost the 1960 election" only by assuming that of Richard Nixon is equivalent to a description at all, it is equivalent to one that has narrow scope (that is, a secondary occurrence with respect to "it is possible that"). What if

the relevant description have wide scope? Than our original question is synonymous not with the above statement, but with One and only one person won the 1968 election, and, concerning whoever won the 1968 election, is it possible that person lost. It simply means that one and only one person won the election and whoever won it is such that he could have lost.

Kripke offers an (utterly fictional) example regarding Godel's Incompleteness Theorem, a famous meta-mathematical result. In Kripke's fiction, the theorem was proved in the 1920s by a man named Schmidt, who died mysteriously without publishing it. Kurt Godel came along, appropriated the manuscript, and scurrilously published it under his own name. Now, most people know Godel, if at all, as the man who proved the Incompleteness Theorem. Yet it seems clear that when even those who know nothing else about Godel utter the name "Godel", they do refer to Godel rather than to the entirely unknown Schmidt. For example, when they say "Godel proved the incompleteness Theorem", they are speaking falsely, however well justified they may be in their belief.

This objection too goes against Searle's Cluster Theory as well as against the classical Russellian view. Suppose no one in fact proved the Incompleteness Theorem; Schmidt's alleged proof was irreparably flawed, or perhaps there was not even any Schmidt, but "the proof simply materialized by a random scattering of atoms on a piece of paper". Here it is even more obviously true that most people's uses of " Godel" refer to Godel rather than to anyone else at all; yet those uses are not even backed by any Searlean cluster. Let us consider next the sentence:

Some people are unaware that Cicero is Tully.

This statement in ostensively true, but if the Name-Claim is correct, the statement is hard to interpret, for there is no single proposition denoted by the 'that' clause, that the community of normal English speaker expresses by "Cicero is Tully". Since "Cicero" and "Tully" are equivalent to different description for different people there is no single fact of which the above statement says some people are unaware. Now if we assert the above sentence, presumably its complement clause express what "Cicero is Tully" means in my speech. But since we know that Cicero is Tully, we associate the same set of description, whatever that might be, with both names. Suppose that, like most philosopher, we associate both "Cicero" and "Tully" with "The famous Roman orator". Than the above statement is equivalent to

> Some people are unaware that one and only person was famous Roman Orator and one and only one person was a famous Roman Orator and whoever was a famous Roman Orator was a Famous Roman Orator.

That massively redundant sentence is equivalent to

> Some people are unaware that one and only one Person was a famous Roman Orato.

No doubt the present statement is true, but surely does not express what the previous statement means. It is far from clear how Searle might handle this objection. In order to obviate the above objection Kripke and others propound a new theory that we shall discuss in the next chapter.

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