

## HANS AND THE GHOST IN HIS ATTIC

*Andrei MOLDOVAN*  
Universidad de Salamanca  
[mandreius@usal.es](mailto:mandreius@usal.es)

**Abstract:**

The Russellian theory of definite descriptions has been heavily criticized on a number of accounts. One of the most popular criticisms of this proposal relies on data from complex sentence that result from embedding definite descriptions in the scope of non-doxastic propositional attitude verbs, such as ‘hopes’ or ‘wonders’. This argument is proposed in Heim (1991) and developed in Kripke (2005), Elbourne (2005; 2013), and Schoubye (2013). Neale (2005) and Kripke (2005) reply that the argument is based on a logical mistake. More recently, Elbourne (2013) offers a rebuttal to this reply. In this paper, I distinguish two arguments against the Russellian theory based on the data mentioned and which have been conflated in the discussion. I call them Argument-P (which focuses on the presuppositional content of sentences containing definite descriptions) and Argument-A (which focuses on the contribution of the description to the asserted content). I further argue that the Neale-Kripke objection only affects Argument-A, but not Argument-P. Next, I argue that Elbourne’s rebuttal fails in the form in which he presents it, and I offer a modified version of Argument-A (called Argument-A\*) that is free from the Neale-Kripke objection. I conclude that together Argument-P and Argument-A\* offer a strong refutation of the Russellian theory of descriptions, as well as to certain varieties of it.

**Keywords:** semantics; definite descriptions; Russell; presupposition; non-doxastic propositional attitudes.

## 1. The argument<sup>11</sup>

In what follows I discuss an objection to the Russellian theory of definite descriptions (DDs, henceforth). According to this theory, as it is standardly formulated in a language of first order logic with identity an utterance of a sentence of the form ‘The *F* is *G*’ has the following truth-conditions:

$$T \text{ iff } \exists x (Fx \wedge \forall y (Fy \rightarrow x=y) \wedge Gx)$$

The objection discussed here purports to show that the Russellian theory is incorrect, as DDs do not contribute to the truth-conditions of sentences in which they occur an existential condition and a uniqueness conditions. This objection was first proposed by Heim (1991, 493–4) and developed by Kripke (2005, 1023), Elbourne (2005, 109–112; 2010; 2013, 150-171), and Schoubye (2013).

The plan of the paper is the following: first, I present the criticism aimed at the Russellian theory, such as it can be found in the literature. Second, I offer my own reconstruction of it, distinguishing *two* anti-Russellian arguments. I call them Argument-P (which focuses on the presuppositional content of sentences containing definite descriptions) and Argument-A (which focuses on the contribution of the description to the asserted content). Third, I present Neale’s (2005) and Kaplan’s (2005) defense of the Russellian theory, and Elbourne’s (2013) rejection of this defense. I further argue that the Neale-Kripke objection only affects Argument-A, but not Argument-P. Forth, I argue that Elbourne’s attempt to reinforce the argument in order to avoid the Neale-Kaplan objection fails, and that the failure has to do with the fact that he does not distinguish the two anti-Russellian arguments. Fifth, and finally, I present my own reconstruction of the

---

<sup>11</sup> Previous versions of this paper have been presented at the VII Congress of the Spanish Society for Analytic Philosophy (SEFA 2013), 11-14/09/2013, Universidad Carlos III, Madrid, Spain, and at the Eighth International Congress of Analytic Philosophy (ECAP 8), 28/08/2014, University of Bucharest, Romania. I wish to thank those present in the audience for their helpful remarks. I also wish to thank two anonymous reviewers for their detailed and helpful comments.

Argument-A that manages to strengthen it and to avoid once and for all the Neale-Kaplan objection.

Let me start with the presentation of the relevant data. Consider the following sentences, where a sentence containing a DD in subject position is embedded in a propositional attitude report. The propositional attitude verbs used are non-doxastic (i.e. they do not express believing, expecting, assuming, knowing, or similar attitudes that involve the endorsement of a claim).

1. Hans wonders whether the ghost in his attic will be quiet tonight. (Elbourne 2010, 2)
2. Hans desires that the ghost in his attic will be quiet tonight.
3. Ponce de Leon hopes the fountain of youth is in Florida. (Elbourne 1990, 27)

The argument could be run for any of these sentences. I focus in what follows on sentence (1), as this is the one most discussed in the literature. Notice that (1) is ambiguous, as the DD may take either wide scope or narrow scope relative to the propositional attitude verb at the level of LF. The scope ambiguity results in two possible readings of the sentence, the *de re* reading, and the *de dicto* reading, respectively. The ambiguity results from raising the quantifier noun phrase ‘the ghost in his attic’ from its initial position in object clause of the attitude verb to the front of the sentence. The existence of the two readings can be proved by calculating the semantic value of the sentences in a compositional framework for natural language semantics, such as the one offered in Heim and Kratzer (1998) and von Stechow and Heim (2011). In the interest of space and accessibility, I skip this discussion, as it requires technical concepts and formal techniques that would take too much space of the paper to introduce. Moreover, the existence of the *de re* – *de dicto* ambiguity of sentences containing DDs in the scope of an intensional operator is generally accepted, and needs no special justification.

A precise analysis of the two readings requires a semantic analysis of the non-doxastic attitude verbs used in the above examples. This is a difficult issue that I do not address. Instead I use a simple analysis on the model of the standard semantics for ‘belief’ (see, for instance, Heim and Kratzer (1998, 306)):

S wonders that p iff  $p(w) = T$  for all worlds  $w$  compatible with what S wonders.

When one *believes* that p one holds that the actual world is a p-world. That is, the actual world is a doxastically accessible world. Wondering is a more sophisticated propositional attitude. When one wonders whether p one both *disbelieves* that p (does not hold p to be true) *and also aims to know* (or maybe to have justified belief) whether p is the case. The latter component of the equation (i.e., aiming to know) seems to be a second-order propositional attitude, an attitude concerning another attitude. For these reasons, the above semantic value for ‘wonders’ is strictly speaking incorrect. However, it suits the present purposes, as the following discussion of the *de re* – *de dicto* ambiguity is not affected.

The *de dicto* reading of sentence (1) corresponds to the following truth-conditions (expressed here in a semi-formal language):

$$(1.1) T \text{ iff } \forall w \in W: [\exists x ((Gx \text{ in } w) \wedge \forall y (Gy \rightarrow x=y \text{ in } w) \wedge (Qx \text{ in } w))]$$

Here  $W$  is the set of worlds  $w'$  compatible with what Hans wonder;  $G$  stands for *being a ghost in Hans's attic*<sup>12</sup> and  $Q$  stands for *being quiet tonight*. This is the *de dicto* reading of (1), according to which the utterance of the sentence is T iff for all  $w$  compatible with what Hans wonders: there is a unique individual  $x$  such that  $x$  is a ghost in Hans's attic, and  $x$  will be quiet tonight in  $w$ .

The *de re* reading of (1) corresponds to the following truth-conditions:

$$(1.2) T \text{ iff } [\exists x (Gx \wedge \forall y (Gy \rightarrow x=y)) \wedge \forall w \in W: [Qx \text{ in } w]]$$

This reads as follows: (1) is T iff there is a unique ghost in Hans's attic, and Hans wonders whether it will be quiet tonight.

Now, consider a scenario in (1) is uttered such that by hypothesis the speaker does not believe in ghosts. Therefore, of the two different readings of sentence (1), the one

---

<sup>12</sup> Sentence (1) introduces certain complications, given the occurrence of ‘his’ in the DD, which is context-dependent and, in particular, anaphoric on ‘Hans’. For this reason, it is more convenient to run the argument on, say, sentence (3). However, I use sentence (1) in what follows, as this is one of the sentences discussed in the relevant literature. I ignore here the complication mentioned, and treat ‘ghost in his attic’ as if it were a simple common noun.

that captures the intuitive truth-conditions cannot be the *de re* reading, for this entails that the speaker commits herself to the existence of ghosts, which in fact she doesn't. That is, (1) can be true and felicitous even if there are no ghosts. So, the disambiguation that captures the intuitive truth-conditions must be the *de dicto* reading.

The next step in the argument is to notice that the Russellian assigns intuitively *incorrect* truth-conditions to (1), on the *de dicto* reading of it. Elbourne makes the following comment: when uttering (1), he writes,

we are not saying that Hans wonders, among other things, whether there is exactly one ghost in his attic; it sounds rather as if Hans is *assuming* that there is exactly one ghost in his attic and *wonders* only whether it will be quiet tonight. (Elbourne 2013, 151)

The Russellian *de dicto* interpretation of (1) fails to capture the intuitive reading. Given that the Russellian the *de re* reading also fails to capture the intuitive truth-conditions, and that (1.1) and (1.2) are the only available hypotheses for a Russellian concerning the logical form of (1), the Russellian theory makes incorrect predictions.

In order to evaluate this argument against the Russellian theory we must carefully identify the relevant data on which it is based. First, notice that Elbourne identifies in the above quote *two* intuitions concerning what the relevant utterance of (1) says or implies in the given scenario:

- i) the utterance of (1) *does not say* Hans wonders whether there is a unique ghost in his attic and
- ii) the utterance of (1) *says or implies* that Hans assumes that there is a unique ghost in his attic.

Based on these two pieces of data one could build *two* arguments to reject the Russellian theory of DDs: Argument-P (which focuses on a presupposition that (1) carries), and Argument-A (which focuses on the asserted content). Elbourne does not do so explicitly, so the arguments offered below are my own reconstruction.

## 2. Argument-P

If we look closer at the two pieces of data (i) and (ii), we notice that (i) concerns what the sentence *says* and *does not say*, i.e. the content of the assertion made by uttering the sentence (1). In contrast, Elbourne does specify whether (ii) concerns what is said *or* a felt implication of the utterance of the sentence. However, intuitively (1) does not *say* that Hans assumes (or believes) that there is a unique ghost in his attic, but rather *presupposes* this. Various tests for presuppositions provide evidence for this claim. One of them appeals to the fact that presuppositions project when embedded in certain linguistic contexts.<sup>13</sup> Thus, embedding (1) in a modal operator we obtain sentence (4), which also carries the implication that Hans assumes (or believes) that there is a unique ghost in his attic. This is to say that the implication projects, which is what we would expect if this is indeed a presupposition.

4. It is possible that Hans wonders whether the ghost in his attic will be quiet tonight.

Second, a presupposition is usually characterized in the literature as a felt implication of an utterance the main characteristic of which is that it is *taken for granted*, or backgrounded (in contrast to at-issue content).<sup>14</sup> Based on this observation von Stechow (2004, 316-7) proposes another test for presuppositions, which makes use of replies of the form ‘Hey, wait a minute, I did not know that ...’. von Stechow notes that it is felicitous to use remarks such as this one in order to point out to the speaker that she has taken for granted something that could not be so taken in the context. But this is not a felicitous remark if followed by a content the speaker has not taken for granted, but is asserting or arguing for. And indeed, we can reply to (1)/(5) with (6), but not with (7). speaker takes for granted, but an implication of the at-issue content.

---

<sup>13</sup> A fact noticed by Frege (1982, 40). See also Soames (1980, 554), and Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (1990, 281).

<sup>14</sup> See also Kadmon (2001, 10) and Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (1990, 281). Soames (1980, 553) also writes: “to presuppose something is to take it for granted in a way that contrasts with asserting it.”

5. Hans wonders whether the ghost in his attic will be quiet tonight.
6. Hey, wait a minute, I did not know that Hans believes that there is a unique ghost in his attic.
7. #Hey, wait a minute, I did not know that Hans wonders about something.

The ‘Hey, wait a minute’ remark is useful in identifying presuppositions, in as much as they are characterized as contents the speaker takes for granted. This is additional evidence that the implication *that Hans believes that there is a unique ghost in his attic* is a presupposition. On the basis of the evidence just mentioned we can safely conclude that an utterance of (1), when intended *de dicto*, presupposes that Hans believes that there is a unique ghost in his attic. Thus, one could run the following argument against the Russellian theory of DDs (call it ‘Argument-P’):

P1. The utterance of (1) interpreted *de dicto* carries the presupposition that *Hans believes there is a unique ghost in his attic*.

P2. The Russellian analysis of the *de dicto* reading of (1) is (1.1): T iff Hans *wonders whether there is a unique ghost in his attic and it is quiet tonight*.

P3. The *de dicto* Russellian analysis of (1) does not introduce a *semantic* presupposition (from P2).

P4. Furthermore, there is no *pragmatic* theory of presupposition available (or which the Russellian has offered) that, on top of the semantic Russellian analysis, might account for the data mentioned in P1.

C. The Russellian *de dicto* analysis of (1) is incorrect. (from P1, P3 and P4).

P4 is needed given that the presupposition mentioned in P1 might be *pragmatic*, in the sense that it is not the conventional meaning of the words in the sentence that trigger the presupposition. Intuitions about the implications and presuppositions of utterances of sentences are not to be accounted for exclusively in semantic terms. However, there seems to be no obvious way in which the Russellian could provide a pragmatic account of the data concerning the presupposition of (1). Although it cannot be *proved* that such a

pragmatic account is impossible to provide, no such account is currently available in the literature, as far as I can tell.

Notice that a similar argument could be run against other theories of DDs that introduce no semantic presupposition. For instance, various authors propose to eliminate the uniqueness constraint from the content of sentences containing DDs.<sup>15</sup> As a result, an utterance of a sentence of the form ‘The F is G’ is T *iff at least one F is G*.

In general, what Argument-P shows is that a theory of DDs that does not introduce a semantic presupposition of existence and uniqueness is in trouble when it comes to accounting for the data concerning the presupposition of sentences such as (1). In contrast, the Fregean theory introduces a semantic presupposition of existence and uniqueness. Heim and Kratzer (1998, 80) model this presupposition by taking the semantic value of the definite article to be a *partial function* from sets to individuals that is defined only for those sets that have a unique element.

The Fregean theory *per se* does not account for the data concerning the presupposition of sentences such as (1). However, Elbourne shows that there are pragmatic accounts that combine neatly with this theory and do account for such presuppositions. He appeals to Karttunen’s (1974) considerations concerning the projection patterns of presuppositions triggered by expressions embedded in propositional attitude verbs. Karttunen observes that propositional attitude verbs and speech act verbs are “opaque” with respect to the presuppositions of their complements. That is, they do not allow the presuppositions of the embedded sentences to project. However, propositional attitude reports do introduce a presupposition. Consider sentence (8):

8. Silvia stopped smoking.

This introduces the presupposition that Silvia used to smoke. Now, consider sentence (9), which results from embedding (8) in a propositional attitude report.

---

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Szabó (2000, 30) and Ludlow and Segal (2004, 421).



9. Mary believes that Silvia stopped smoking.

According to Karttunen (1974, 189), (9) presupposes that *Mary believes that Silvia used to smoke*. Also Karttunen (1974, 188) notes that any of the sentences that result by replacing 'believes' in (9) with "*fear, think, want* etc." have the same implication, i.e. that *Mary believes that Silvia used to smoke*.<sup>16</sup> Elbourne combines Karttunen's considerations with the Fregean theory, concluding that together they predict that an utterance of (1) carries the presupposition that *Hans believes that there is a unique ghost in his attic*. He comments:

Following Karttunen, then, we can postulate that the presupposition that there is exactly one ghost in Hans's attic, carried by the sentence embedded in [1]..., contributes to a presupposition carried by the whole sentence to the effect that Hans believes that there is exactly one ghost in his attic. This, again, seems to be in accordance with our intuitions. (Elbourne 2013, 158-159)

So, the Fregean theory can predict the data in (ii) above. But this is not due to the contribution that DDs make to asserted content on this theory, but because the semantic presupposition of existence and uniqueness they introduce.

What could the Russellian do in these circumstances? One option for the Russellian is to concede that DDs introduce a presupposition of existence and uniqueness in order to account for the data. The result is a 'presuppositional Russellian theory', according to which an utterance of a sentence of the form 'The F is G' has the following truth-conditions:

T iff  $\exists x (Fx \wedge \forall y (Fy \rightarrow x=y)). \exists x (Fx \wedge \forall y (Fy \rightarrow x=y) \wedge Gx)$

The convention I use for distinguishing the representation of the semantic presupposition from semantic content is the following: what comes before ' ' is the presupposition (in this

---

<sup>16</sup> Stalnaker (1988, 156-157) makes similar observations concerning the projection patterns of presuppositions of sentences embedded in belief attributions, which he casts in his own pragmatic framework for discussing presupposition projection. Heim (1992, 184) subscribes to Karttunen's proposal and develops a pragmatic explanation of the projection pattern of such presuppositions.

case, the existence and uniqueness of an F), and what comes after the dot is the representation of the asserted truth-conditional content. Notice that existence and uniqueness is both asserted and presupposed.

As a historical comment, it might be pointed out that this amendment to the Russellian theory is not ad-hoc. According to David Kaplan, Russell held that a speaker could not use a DD properly in communication unless she knows that the DD is uniquely satisfied:

Once we *know* that there is exactly one so-and-so, we can freely use the definite description ‘the so-and-so’ to express propositions that are *about* (in Russell’s italicized way) the denotation of the descriptive phrase. If this is a correct reading of Russell, and I think it is, his notion of knowledge by description is a remarkable anticipation of the presuppositional analysis of definite descriptions, according to which the meaning of a sentence containing a definite description, ‘the so-and-so’, breaks into two parts, one of which is that there is exactly one so-and-so. (Kaplan 2005, 984)

This is not the traditional way in which the Russellian theory of DDs has been understood. Moreover, there are significant complications when it comes to identifying Russell’s exact view of the semantics of DDs, given the complex relation between his conception of thought, language, and what he calls the ‘logical form’ of sentences. I do not discuss them here as they lead us away from the present discussion. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that this version of the Russellian theory does account successfully for the data in (ii), in the same way as Elbourne has shown that the Fregean theory does. Nevertheless, the presuppositional Russellian theory will eventually turn out to be untenable for very different reasons to which I now turn.

### 3. Argument-A

The other kind of data that Elbourne mentions is (i): the utterance of (1) *does not say* Hans wonders whether there is a unique ghost in his attic. An argument against the Russellian theory based on (i) could be reconstructed on this basis (call it Argument-A, because it concerns the *asserted* content, rather than what is presupposed). As a consequence, notice that, instead of one, there are Hans arguments against the Russellian theory based on utterances of sentences such as (1): Argument-P and Argument-A. Distinguishing them, as I do here, will prove helpful in the forthcoming discussion.

Consider a scenario in which Hans *believes* that there is ghost in his attic, and, given his plan to spend the night studying, he *wonders whether* the ghost in the attic will be quiet tonight. In the scenario Hans *believes* that (and *does not wonder whether*) there is a unique ghost in his attic. Therefore, relative to this scenario we have:

P1'. It is not the case that Hans *wonders whether there is a unique ghost in his attic* (in the given scenario).

P2'. The Russellian analysis of the *de dicto* reading of (1): true iff *Hans wonders whether there is a unique ghost in his attic and it is quiet tonight*.

P3'. The Russellian analysis of the *de dicto* reading of (1) predicts: true only if *Hans wonders whether there is a unique ghost in his attic*. (from P2')

P4'. So, the Russellian analysis predicts that the *de dicto* reading of the utterance of (1) is false. (from P1' and P3')

P5'. However, the *de dicto* reading of (1) is intuitively true.

C'. Therefore, the Russellian *de dicto* analysis of (1) is incorrect. (from P4' and P5')

I come back to discuss the details of this argument after I introduce an objection and I propose a reformulation of the argument with the purpose of avoiding this objection.

### 4. The Neale-Kaplan objection

Several authors have objected to Heim's (1991) (and later, Elbourne's 2005; 2013) attempt to reject the Russellian theory based on the data in (i) and (ii). The rebuttal consists in

claiming that the argument is based on a logical mistake. For instance, Stephen Neale writes:

The following objection to Russell's theory (which one hears with alarming frequency) involves a logical mistake: On Russell's account, 'the author of Waverley is present' is equivalent to 'exactly one thing authored Waverley and that person is present'; so if George IV wonders (and asks) whether the author of Waverley was present, he wonders (and asks) whether exactly one person authored Waverley and that person is present'; but (the objection goes), the analysis is incorrect because George IV is not wondering (or asking) whether exactly one person authored Waverley! The mistake is this: 'George IV wonders whether p and q' does not entail 'George IV wonders whether p'. (Neale 2005, 846)

Indeed, sentences expressing propositional attitudes do not support entailments of this kind. Kaplan (2005, 985) uses the following examples to illustrate the mistake, in this case, that of inferring (11) from (10).

10. Diogenes wished to know whether there were honest men.

11. Diogenes wished to know whether there were men.

Kaplan's example shows that, for two sentences p and q such that p entails q, it is not the case that 'Silvia W that/whether p' entails 'Silvia W that/whether q', where 'W' expresses a non-doxastic propositional attitude verb. As a general rule, this inference is not valid. Moreover, it shows this for the particular case in which p and q are existential quantifier sentences, as are sentences containing DD on the Russellian analysis. So, the inference from (12) to (13), when read *de dicto*, is invalid:

12. Hans wonders whether there is a unique ghost in his attic and it will be quiet tonight.

13. Hans wonders whether there is a unique ghost in his attic.

And indeed, Argument-A, as I reconstructed it above, does commit this logical mistake in inferring P3' from P2'.

Now, it is important to notice that the Neale-Kaplan objection does not affect the discussion of the data from (ii). That is, it affects the argument concerning the asserted content (i.e. Argument-A), but it leaves untouched the force of the argument to the effect that DDs introduce a presupposition of existence (i.e. Argument-P). The latter is sufficient to reject the Russellian theory of DDs, as we have seen. Neither Neale nor Kaplan seem to be aware of this, as they do not distinguish the two arguments.

In reply to the Neale-Kaplan objection Elbourne (2013) proposes a reformulation of the initial argument (still not distinguishing Argument-A and Argument-P). Consider the following sentences:

14. I am unsure whether there is a ghost in my attic.
15. I am wondering whether there is an entity such that it is a ghost in my attic and nothing else is a ghost in my attic and it is being noisy.
16. I am wondering whether the ghost in my attic is being noisy.

Consider Hans's utterance of (14). As Elbourne (2013, 155) notes, "Native speakers judge that Hans's propositional attitudes are consistent if he continues with [15] above, but inconsistent if he continues with [16]." So, the utterances of (15) and the *de dicto* reading of (16) cannot have the same truth-conditions. But on the Russellian theory, they do have the same truth-conditions. Therefore, the Russellian analysis fails.

However, Elbourne's attempt to reformulate the Hans argument so as to avoid the Neale-Kaplan objection fails. That is because, once more, Elbourne fails to distinguish the two arguments, Argument-A and Argument-P. The two need to be separated, as they concern different dimensions of meaning. Argument-A is about asserted content, and it is to this argument that the Neale-Kaplan objection applies. Argument-P aims to support the conclusion that DDs introduce a presupposition of existence, and is not affected by the Neale-Kaplan objection. But if this Argument-P goes through – and it does so, independently of the Neale-Kaplan objection – then an utterance of (16), on its *de dicto* reading, presupposes that *I believe that there is a unique ghost in my attic*. This presupposition is inconsistent with the asserted content of an utterance of (14). This

explains why (14) and (16) are inconsistent, while (14) and (15) are not! So, the facts that Elbourne draws our attention to are not relevant to the evaluation of Argument-A at all. Elbourne's argument based on the inconsistency judgements does not manage to refute the Neale-Kaplan objection to Argument-A, or to offer independent support for the conclusion of the argument. Given that the objection manages to cut the support that Argument-A offers to its conclusion, the question becomes whether the argument could be restored so as to avoid the Neale-Kaplan objection.<sup>17</sup>

I propose in what follows an argument based on different inconsistency judgements, which is able to support the conclusion of Argument-A without committing the logical mistake that Neale and Kaplan identify. Consider a speaker who utters (17) and then goes on to utter (18), or alternatively, (19).

17. Hans believes that there is a unique ghost in his attic.

18. Hans wonders whether the ghost in his attic will be quiet tonight.

19. Hans wonders whether there is a unique ghost in his attic and it is quiet tonight.

Uttering (17) and then (19) is intuitively inconsistent. In particular, if (17) is judged to be true, (19) cannot be judged true. However, uttering (17) and then (18) does not trigger an intuition of inconsistency. But notice that this difference cannot be explained by appealing to presuppositions. If (18) indeed introduces the presupposition that *Hans believes there is a unique ghost in his attic*, this presupposition is satisfied in the context, given that (17) is already part of the common ground of the conversation when (18) or (19) are uttered. So it must be that the difference between (18) and (19) concerns the asserted content. This is an important point, one which marks the difference between Elbourne's argument

---

<sup>17</sup> In discussing the Neale-Kaplan objection, Schoubye (2013, 511) relies on Elbourne's argument from inconsistency judgements. But this reply does not prove satisfactory in itself, as I have argued. Schoubye (2013, 512) also writes that "even if we assume that propositional attitude verbs are not closed under classical consequence, this cannot explain why the *truth conditions* predicted by Russell's analysis for sentences such as [(1)] are intuitively incorrect." That is, the Russellian analysis of the asserted content of (1) is intuitively incorrect independently of the invalidity of the inference that Neale and Kaplan reject. But Neale's and Kaplan's point is precisely that the intuitive judgement in question relies implicitly on making the invalid inference from 'Hans desires there to be a ghost in his attic and it to be quiet tonight' to 'Hans desires there to be a ghost in his attic.'

based on inconsistency judgements and mine: uttering (19) after (17) triggers an inconsistency judgment that cannot be explained if we attend merely to the presuppositional effects of (18). Instead, this shows that the asserted contents of (18) and (19) cannot be the same. Given that the truth-conditions of (19) are the same as the Russellian *de dicto* truth-conditions of (18), the truth-conditions of (18) are *not* the Russellian *de dicto* ones. Hence, the Russellian theory fails to provide the correct analysis of the asserted content of sentences such as (18). This is the same conclusion that Argument-A was aimed to support, but failed to do so. But this new argument (call it Argument-A\*) supports the conclusion without committing the fallacy Neale and Kaplan draw our attention to. Step by step, Argument-A\* could be formulated as follows:

P1'': The sequence of sentences (17) + (18) is consistent, but (17) + (19) is not.

P2'': (19) does not carry a presupposition that could explain the inconsistency of (17) + (19).

P3'': Therefore, the asserted content of (19) explains the inconsistency with (17).  
(from P2'')

P4'': On the Russellian *de dicto* analysis of (18), (18) and (19) have the same asserted content.

P5'': The presuppositions of (18), if any, are satisfied in the context by hypothesis.

P6'': Therefore, (17) + (18) must also be inconsistent. (from P3'', P4'' and P5'')

P7'': But it is not.

P8'': Therefore, (18) and (19) do not have the same asserted content. (from P6'' and P7'')

C'': Therefore, the Russellian analysis of (18) is incorrect. (from P4'' and P8'')

The conclusion of Argument-A\*, in general terms, is the following: utterances of sentences of the form 'The F is G' *do not* have the following truth-conditions (where  $\Omega$  is the

presupposition that such sentences carry, if any):<sup>18</sup>

$$\Omega. \exists x (Fx \wedge \forall y (Fy \rightarrow x=y) \wedge Gx)$$

The same argument proves that the presuppositional Russellian theory (i.e. the Russellian theory modified by introducing a semantic presupposition of existence and uniqueness) is untenable. In fact, no theory that takes DDs to contribute to the asserted content an existential quantifier is adequate for the data considered. Of course, this is merely a negative result, but it does pave the way for other candidates, such as the Fregean theory of DDs, which takes existence and uniqueness to be presupposed but not asserted. As a result, the Fregean theory is immune to arguments of the form of Argument-P and Argument-A\* drawn from data such as (i) and (ii).

## References

- Chierchia, Gennaro and McConnell-Ginet, Sally (1990), *Meaning and Grammar*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Elbourne, Paul (2010), 'The existence entailments of definite descriptions'. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 1–10.
- Elbourne, Paul (2013), *Definite Descriptions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Fintel, Kai von (2004), 'Would you believe it? The King of France is back! (Presuppositions and truth-value intuitions)', in: Reimer, Marga and Bezuidenhout, Anna (Eds.), *Descriptions and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 315–341.
- Fintel, Kai von and Heim, Irene (2011), *Intensional Semantics*, retrieved from <http://web.mit.edu/fintel/fintel-heim-intensional.pdf>.

---

<sup>18</sup> While finishing this paper I realized that Schoubye (2013, 514-515) uses a similar example to make the same point, a few pages after his discussion of the Heim-Elbourne argument. However, I am confident that the discussion is advanced by the present analysis, at least in as much as it distinguishes Argument-P and Argument-A, and clarifies the dialectics of the debate.



- Frege, Gottlob (1984), 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung', in: *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, C, 25–50. Trans.: On Sense and Meaning. In: McGuinness, Brian (Ed.). *Frege: collected works*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 157–177. 'A
- Heim, Irene (1991), 'Artikel und Definitheit', in: von Stechow, Arnim and Wunderlich, Dieter (Eds.). *Handbuch der Semantik*. Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 478-535.
- Heim, Irene (1992), 'Presupposition Projection and the Semantics of Attitude Verbs', *Journal of Semantics*, vol. 9, pp. 183–22.
- Heim, Irene and Kratzer, Angelika (1998), *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kadmon, Nirit (2001), *Formal Pragmatics: Semantics, Pragmatics, Presupposition, and Focus*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kaplan, David (2005), 'Reading 'On Denoting' on its Centenary', *Mind*, vol. 114, pp. 934–1003.
- Karttunen, Lauri (1974), 'Presuppositions and Linguistic Context', *Theoretical Linguistics* 1, pp. 181–194.
- Kripke, Saul (2005), 'Russell's Notion of Scope', *Mind*, vol. 114, pp. 1005–1037.
- Ludlow, Peter and Segal, Gabriel (2004), 'On a unitary semantical analysis for definite and indefinite descriptions', in: Reimer, Marga and Bezuidenhout, Anna (Eds.). *Descriptions and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 420-436.
- Neale, Stephen (1990), *Descriptions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Neale, Stephen (2005), 'A Century Later', *Mind*, vol. 114, pp. 809-871.
- Schoubye, Anders (2013), 'Ghosts, Murderers, and the Semantics of Descriptions', *Noûs* vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 496-533.
- Soames, Scott (1989), 'Presupposition', in: Gabbay, Dov and Guenther, Franz (Eds.). *Handbook of Philosophical Logic*. Dordrecht: Reidel, vol. IV, pp. 553–616.
- Stalnaker, Robert (1999), 'Belief attribution and context', in: Grimm, Robert H. and Merrill, Daniel D. (Eds.). *Contents of Thought*. Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1988, pp. 140–156. Reprinted in: Stalnaker, Robert. (1999), *Context and Content: Essays on Intentionality*

*in Speech and Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 150-166.

Szabó, Zoltan G. (2000), 'Descriptions and uniqueness', *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 101, no. 1, pp. 29-57.