Wojciech Rostworowski

Rigid Designation and Definite Descriptions

INTRODUCTION

The notion of "rigid designation" is usually associated with the thesis that names are rigid designators while definite descriptions are generally not. As Saul Kripke, the man who coined the term, writes:

> My view is that "Aristotle" in "Aristotle was fond of dogs" is rigid, but "the last great philosopher of antiquity" in "the last great philosopher of antiquity was fond of dogs" is not. [Kripke 1980, p. 12]

Obviously, there are some examples of definite descriptions, like "the successor of 2", which designate the same entity in all possible worlds. However, these are specific cases and Kripke calls such descriptions rigid *de facto* and contrasts them with names which are rigid *de iure*. We may also consider "rigidified" descriptions, these ones which are rigid by stipulation, like "the number of planets in world *a*" which always designates the number of planets in distinguished world *a*. This may be an example of *de iure* rigid description.

Is there something more we can say about definite descriptions in the aspect of rigidity? An interesting issue was raised in literature which deals with the question of whether referentially used definite descriptions require a different semantic analysis than the ones used attributively.[1] A defender of the thesis that a different semantic account for referential descriptions is needed (let me abbreviate this thesis as "SS"), Howard Wettstein, argued that a proposition expressed by a referential utterance of "The *F* is *G*" is true in all worlds in which the object referred to is *G* (even in the

---

[1] When speaking of „attributive" and "referential" use of a definite description, I have in mind, of course, the well-known distinction of Keith Donnellan [Donnellan 1966].

worlds in which this object is not *F*.) Such an account implies that a referentially used definite description is a rigid designator. On the other hand, Nathan Salmon acknowledges a possibility that a definite description may designate something that does not satisfy it as very counterintuitive. Based on this intuition, he builds his own argument against the SS thesis. His reasoning is as follows: if this thesis is correct, then referentially used descriptions would be rigid designators; since, obviously, it is not true — the thesis in question is incorrect. On the other hand, Salmon's argumentation was criticized by Michael Devitt who claimed that referentially used descriptions are not rigid, but are "weakly" rigid in a specific sense he explained.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the aforementioned idea that referentially used definite descriptions are rigid. My first aim is to present the discussion on the issue in question which took place in the literature. The second aim is to show that none of the presented SS-positions can provide an effective argument for the claim that referentially used definite descriptions are rigid / weakly rigid. The arguments they provide lack force from the viewpoint of anti-SS-positions. Finally, I will observe that if we consider modal construction in which definite descriptions are embedded, we encounter a phenomenon which is very hard to explain for the opponent of SS without the presumption that referentially used definite descriptions have a kind of rigidity. On the other hand, the opponent of SS can accept this kind of rigidity, since it does not conflict with his main belief that definite descriptions have unified semantic interpretation.

1. ARE REFERENTIAL DESCRIPTIONS RIGID?

A. Rigidity with Respect to Given Context

Let me start with some remarks on what it means to speak of rigid designation as far as referential descriptions are concerned.[2] According to the characterization of the notion, a rigid designator designates the same object in all possible worlds in which that object exists and never designates anything else.[3] This is what we have in mind when we attribute rigidity to names, natural kind terms or some specific definite descriptions like "the successor of 2."

However, as far as indexicals are concerned, we may still maintain that they are rigid, although they obviously designate different objects on different possible occa-

---

[2] For brevity, I use a term "descriptions" for "definite descriptions," a term "referential/attributive descriptions" for "definite descriptions used referentially/attributively" and finally a term "a referential/attributive utterance" for "an utterance of a sentence with a definite description in which the description is used referentially/attributively."

[3] Some philosophers consider a stronger notion of rigidity, according to which a rigid term designates the same object in *all* possible worlds, even in those worlds in which the object in question does not exist.

sions. What we mean here is that a token-indexical used in a particular context designates the same entity under different counterfactual assumptions. As Kaplan puts it:

> We should beware of certain confusion in interpreting the phrase 'designates the same object in all circumstances'. We do not mean that the expression *could not have been used* to designate a different object. We mean rather that given a *use* of the expression, we may ask of *what has been said* whether it would have been true or false in various counterfactual circumstances, and in such counterfactual circumstances, which are the individuals relevant to determining truth-value. Thus we must distinguish possible occasions of *use* — which I call *contexts* — from possible circumstances of *evaluation* of what was said on a given occasion of use. Possible circumstances of evaluation I call circumstances or, sometimes, just *counterfactual situations*. A directly referential term may designate different objects when used in different *contexts*. But when evaluating what was said in a given context, only a single object will be relevant to the evaluation in all circumstances. [Kaplan 1989, pp. 493-494]

The difference between designating the same object *on various occasions* and *in various counterfactual situations* is a key for understanding the question of whether referential descriptions are rigid. A description like "the murderer" may be used to refer to different people in different situations and this is not contested by any philosopher. What is the subject of the debate is whether a description which is used to refer to x in a given context C designates x in various counterfactual states of affairs (in particular, whether the description designates x in the worlds in which its descriptive content does not apply to x.) Hence, if we are talking of referential descriptions, we ask whether they are rigid in the sense in which indexicals may be rigid: namely, whether they are rigid designators with respect to particular contexts.

B. Wettstein's Demonstrative Reference

We are now ready to present the discussion between Wettstein and Salmon. If we look at their articles, we rarely encounter a term "rigid designation." At least, Wettstein prefers to speak of evaluations of a given proposition with respect to various possible worlds instead of rigidity. However, I think that his account implies that a referential description is a rigid designator with respect to a given context.

The core of Wettstein's view is an idea that referential descriptions have the same semantic function as demonstratives: they *point to* the object rather than *describe* it [Wettstein 1981, p. 241]. One can say, along Kaplan's lines, that this former model of singular reference assumes *eo ipso* rigidity with respect to a certain context. Roughly, a description (used referentially) "points to" a given object no matter what the counterfactual state of this object we consider. However, Wettstein makes a certain remark (on truth-conditions of propositions expressed by referential utterances) which seems to entail directly the thesis that referential descriptions are rigid. What I have in mind is the following passage from "Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions":

> Consider the proposition asserted by a referential utterance of 'Smith's murderer is insane', in which Jones, on the witness stand, is demonstrated. Jones, we shall assume, is both guilty and crazy. The proposition in question is then true since Jones, the item demonstrated, satisfies the predicate. Now consider a counter-factual situation in which (a) Jones is insane but (b) Jones is not Smith's murderer and indeed (c) Smith's murderer is quite sane. With respect to such a counter-factual situation, the proposition we have been considering, namely the proposition that that one, Jones, is insane, is again true. That is, the proposition expressed by the actual-world utterance would have been true had things turned out as described by (a), (b), and (c). [Wettstein 1981, pp. 249-250]

Wettstein seems to assign the following truth-conditions to the proposition expressed by a referential utterance of "The *F* is *G*":

(*)   The proposition expressed by a referential utterance of "The *F* is *G*" is true iff *x*, the object demonstrated in the context of the utterance, is *G*.

Now, (*) assumes that "the *F*" rigidly designates *x* with respect to the context of the utterance. In other words, the assumption that "the *F*" is *not* rigid contradicts (*). A brief explanation is as follows: suppose that there is a world *w* in which "the *F*" designates *y*, a different object than *x*; as "the *F*" designates *y*, the proposition expressed by "The *F* is *G*" states something about *y* in this world *w*. Consequently, the truth of this proposition depends in *w* on the condition of *y* and not of *x*. Obviously, this contradicts (*), since (*) requires that the truth of the proposition expressed depends on the condition of *x* in any world.

   In sum, Wettstein's account implies rigidity of referential descriptions. It is not unexpected, indeed, as this philosopher puts descriptions in the same semantic category as demonstratives.

C. Salmon's Argument from Possible-Worlds Semantics

   Salmon, on the opposite side, claims that the sentence "the murderer is insane", as used to refer to Jones, is *clearly not* true in a world in which Jones is not a murderer (and the murderer of Smith is quite sane), or in worlds in which there are no murderers at all. In other words, Salmon states that descriptions are not rigid designators. [Salmon 1982, pp. 42-43; Salmon 1991, p. 92-93] This claim is, in fact, a premise on which he builds his argument against the SS thesis. Suggested by Salmon's own formulation, we can call his reasoning the "argument from possible-worlds semantics" (in short, APS). It can be reconstructed as follows:

   (i) If SS is correct, then referentially used descriptions are rigid.
   (ii) Referentially used descriptions are *not* rigid.

Hence,

   (iii) SS is incorrect.

This argument was criticized by some philosophers and some of the critics dealt somehow with the question whether referential descriptions are rigid.

Firstly, Wettstein himself addresses APS and claims that it is based on some confusion: Salmon mistakenly ascribes truth to *sentences as used on given occasions* instead of *propositions* [Wettstein 1983, p. 191]. First of all, there may be some obstacles to evaluating a sentence as used on a given actual-world occasion in a counterfactual-world occasion. Secondly, Salmon's position leads to the denial that even pronouns — directly referring expressions — are not rigid, which conflicts with the most prominent theories of indexicals. Wettstein's objections to APS are supported by an example of a sentence with the pronoun "she." He argues that the sentence, as used on an actual-world occasion, cannot be evaluated in a world where there are no females and the object referred to has a different gender than it actually does. On the other hand, Salmon must consequently judge such a sentence as false in such a world, as there is nothing in this world that "she" applies to. As Wettstein emphasizes, the problem is avoided, if we evaluate not sentences, but propositions with respect to possible worlds. The singular proposition *that x is so-and-so*, expressed by a sentence "she is so-and-so", is true in all worlds in which *x* exists and *x* is so-and-so.

In sum, Wettstein seems to argue that Salmon's grounds for premise (ii) are too strong in a sense that they challenge the standard view on the modal profile of indexicals. Wettstein's objection can be thus interpreted as a rejection of premise (ii).[4]

Salmon replies to the aforementioned objection: firstly, he notes that there is nothing improper in ascribing truth-values to sentences with respect to possible situations; secondly, and more importantly, he sustains APS and attempts to show that premise (ii) *should be* accepted by his opponent. Salmon turns our attention to the fact that the thesis of rigidity of referential descriptions allows a possibility that a description "the *F*" refers to an object which is not *F*. This possibility, accepted by Donnellan, is something that — on the other hand — Wettstein declares to be unessential to the SS-position. The strength of APS's comes down to demonstrating that one cannot get rid of Donnellan's claim, holding SS at the same time. As Salmon sees it, the argument is a stronger — modal-semantically extended — objection to Donnellan's "controversial" and "counterintuitive" thesis. In sum, Salmon aims to show that APS is based on a premise which his opponent is obliged to accept, since he shares "the widely shared semantic intuition that 'the such-and-such' never refers to something that is not such-and-such" [Salmon 1991, p. 92].

APS was also criticized by Michael Nelson [Nelson 1999, pp. 577-581]. Indeed, he recognizes some errors made by Wettstein in his objection to APS. However, Nelson aims to make an independent critique of APS, setting aside the discussion of

---

[4] On the other hand, Michael Nelson interprets Wettstein's objection as a rejection of "something like" premise (i) [Nelson 1999, p. 578]. I am not sure about Wettstein's attitude to (i), but certainly an acceptance of (ii) would be impossible on his account, since, as I have demonstrated, this account implies rigidity of referential descriptions.

Wettstein and Salmon on truth-bearers. His reconstruction of APS is made in terms of truth of a proposition encoded by "The F is G" with respect to F-less worlds (worlds in which predicate F is not instantiated). He accepts premise (i), but argues that premise (ii) (in his words, this premise says that a proposition encoded by "The F is G" is not true in F-less worlds) is unjustified.

As Nelson notes, the premise in question is based on Salmon's intuition, according to which, a proposition expressed by a sentence "The F is G" is such that it can only be true in worlds where there is (a unique) F and it is G. There are two problems connected with this support from the intuition. Firstly, intuitions cannot establish what is *the semantic content* of a given sentence, namely, what proposition is semantically encoded by the sentence. What intuitions can say is what propositions speakers associate with utterances of "The F is G", but they are unable to determine whether these propositions have pragmatic or semantic relations to sentences. On the other hand, as Nelson subsequently argues, Salmon's intuitions implicitly contain the presumption that referential descriptions have just Russellian semantics and not the semantics of demonstratives. Thus, APS seems to be an incorrect argument, since it is already based on a denial of the thesis against which it was built.

Nelson does not reveal his own opinion on rigidity of referential descriptions, however, he claims that premise (i) is correct. That means that he adheres to the position that the thesis of referential descriptions' rigidity is a consequence of SS.

D. Devitt's Weak Rigidity

The last critic of APS whom I want to discuss separately is Michael Devitt, a firm proponent of SS. Unlike Nelson, Devitt criticizes premise (i). He claims that referentially used descriptions are not rigid, instead, they are *weakly* rigid, and this makes them different from the attributively used ones. Devitt's definition of "weak rigidity" differs slightly with respect to what contribution, we may think, the descriptive part makes to a definite "the F":

> Firstly, it ["murderer"] might play a role in determining the reference of "the murderer." Then, in the actual world, "the murderer" designates Jones, the person the speaker has in mind, only if he is a murderer. And just the same should surely go for any other possible world […] RD [SS] does not require that a referential definite be rigid […] but rather "weakly rigid" according to the following definition: *e* is weakly rigid iff it designates the same object in every possible world in which that object exists *and any descriptive element of e applies to that object.* The other two ways "murderer" might contribute take "the murderer" to contain an implicit demonstrative that operates independently of "murderer" […] Once again […] "the murderer" is not rigid. But it is "weakly rigid" according to the following definition: *e* is weakly rigid iff it contains, implicitly or explicitly, an element that designates the same object in every possible world in which that object exists and *any sentence containing e is true only if any descriptive element of e applies to that object in that world.* [Devitt 2004, p. 296]

We see that Devitt's notion of weak rigidity conforms to Salmon's intuitions, as it requires that a given description refers to the object demonstrated by the speaker only in these worlds in which the referent satisfies the description. In other words, Devitt agrees with Salmon that a description "the *F*" cannot refer to an object which is not *F*. However, contrary to Salmon, he maintains that there is still a difference in the modal profile of two uses of descriptions. Devitt's claim is that referentially used "the *F*" in "The *F* is *G*" is weakly rigid while attributively used "the *F*" is not. However, he does not explain it in details. Let me do this for him.

I will consider the weak rigidity in the first sense (which requires that a description designates the same object only in these worlds in which its descriptive elements apply to that object). Recall Donnellan's example with the referential utterance of "The murderer is insane" at the trial of Jones who was accused of murdering Smith. Suppose that the facts are as follows: Jones did not murder Smith, but he did kill another person and the actual murderer of Smith is Brown. As I understand Devitt's proposal correctly, "the murderer" designates Jones in such a world, since descriptive content of "the murderer" applies to Jones (although he is not the murderer *of Smith*). Consider now the attributive utterance of "The murderer is insane" in the same circumstances. As the speaker does not intend to state a singular proposition about Jones, we do not have any basis for claiming that attributively used "the murderer" designates Jones. If it designates someone at all, it will be rather Brown who is the killer of Smith.

Thus, on Devitt's account, referential descriptions have the property of weak rigidity which the attributive ones seem not to have. Perhaps, this difference comes from the fact that while using a description attributively a speaker does not intend to state a singular proposition about a particular individual as it happens while a description is being used referentially. So to speak, in the referential use, the speaker "picks out" some individual, states something about it, and his (her) statement is true in all these worlds in which *that* individual has both properties (from the description and from the predicate). However, when the speaker uses a description attributively, he *does not* "pick out" any individual, so there is no object which we can consider as a candidate for a weakly rigid referent of the used expression.

2. A CONCLUSIVE ARGUMENT
FOR REFERENTIAL DESCRIPTIONS' RIGIDITY?

In the previous section, I have presented various views on the issue of rigidity of referential descriptions, the positive as well as the negative ones. Now, I want consider the question of whether the presented positive views can provide an effective argument for their claims about referential descriptions' rigidity (respectively, weak rigidity.) I will argue that none of these positions provide such an argument (and that counter-arguments are neither conclusive).

On Wettstein's account, the claim that referential descriptions are rigid is a corollary of the acceptance of the SS thesis. In short, according to Wettstein, referential descriptions are semantically equivalent to demonstratives — they refer directly to individuals — and this implies that they are rigid designators with respect to their contexts of use. Now, if we were to interpret such reasoning

(a) referential descriptions are referring expressions
(b) so, they are rigid designators

as an argument for the thesis in question, we would say that it is a quite weak argument. It is clear that the opponent of SS, like Salmon, does not have to accept such an argument, because it is based on the premise which he openly rejects. Moreover, he has many strong arguments for a rejection of this premise. Thus, someone who denies SS does not have to care about such an argument.

On the other hand, as Nelson correctly recognizes, the opponent of SS, namely Salmon, makes an analogous mistake. He denies the thesis of rigidity of referential descriptions, since he implicitly assumes that referentially used descriptions are semantically equivalent to the attributively used ones. Thus, we may state that — on the other hand — someone who holds the SS position has the right to ignore Salmon's APS argument, since it is *implicitly* based on the belief which the proponent of SS takes to be false.

Finally, we have Devitt who does not argue that referential descriptions are rigid designators, but nevertheless, he maintains that they are weakly rigid. Devitt's claim cannot be interpreted as a corollary of his SS-position, since the phenomena of weak rigidity are yet to provide an argument for SS. At first, it seems that the opponent of SS is more likely to accept Devitt's account than Wettstein's one. That is because Devitt accepts one of his opponent's basic assumptions — that "the so-and-so" can never refer to something which is not so-and-so. However, as Devitt himself admits, the opponent of SS may refuse to ascribe weak rigidity to referential descriptions. He can just state that referential utterances only *convey* "weakly rigid thoughts" [Devitt 2004, p. 297]. I think that Devitt is right. Namely, the opponent of SS has an easy way to reject the thesis that that referential descriptions are weakly rigid by appealing to pragmatic phenomena.

In sum, Devitt's considerations as well as Wettstein's ones do not provide a conclusive argument for referential descriptions' rigidity, respectively, weak rigidity.

3. MODAL CONTEXTS, SCOPE DISTINCTION, AND RIGIDITY

So far, the hypothesis that referential descriptions are rigid (or that they are rigid to some extent) lacks strong evidence from the viewpoint of someone who is not inclined to SS. In this section, I present my own argument for the thesis that in some specific contexts, referential descriptions become rigid designators (but in some re-

stricted sense, like Devitt's weak rigidity.) The strategy of my argumentation will be to demonstrate that such a thesis can be asserted on the grounds of the view which the opponent of SS is deeply committed to — that descriptions have unified Russellian analysis. My argument will rest on observations concerning modal constructions in which descriptions are embedded; in particular, it will concentrate on the interaction between the use of descriptions and the scope ambiguity phenomenon.

A. Kripke's Semantics

Before I proceed to my considerations, let me make an important preliminary remark. In my analysis of modal sentences with descriptions, I will use the Kripkean semantics of possible worlds and accessibility relations. There are two motivations for such choice. First of all, Kripke's apparatus uses the framework of possible worlds and it may reveal some interesting properties of referential descriptions in their modal profile. Secondly, I think that Kripke's analysis is generally appropriate for natural language, in particular for sentences I am going to analyze.

Standard Kripke's models for propositional logic are triples $M = (W, R, V)$ where W is a non-empty set of "possible worlds", R is a binary relation on W ($R \subset W \times W$), and V is an evaluation function assigning given world w and given atomic proposition p value 1 or 0. This structure is to provide interpretations for formulas containing standard modal operators (marked by symbols "$\Box$" and "$\Diamond$") which are introduced to the language of propositional logic. Strictly speaking, "$\Box\varphi$" is true in a world w iff for each world s such that wRs, φ is true in s; "$\Diamond\varphi$" is true in w iff there exists world s such that wRs and φ is true in s. Roughly, "necessary/possible that p" means being true that p in all/some *accessible* worlds.

The concept of "accessible worlds" enables us to provide an adequate interpretation of our everyday uses of modal verbs (such as "must" and "can"). Let me illustrate this by a few examples.

(1)   Someone from the family *must* have killed Smith

(2)   The winner *must* be a Japanese.

(3)   A Canadian *can* win the competition.[5]

Imagine that (1) is uttered by a detective who discovered that when poor Smith was murdered, his house was locked and only his family members were inside. If we are to interpret it as "in all possible worlds, Smith is killed by his family member", it is certainly false. Since we can imagine a completely different circumstances in which

---

[5] One may note that in the examples of modal contexts I focus on, modal verbs are used in an epistemic sense (namely, "must" is more or less equivalent to "I know") rather than express a metaphysical necessity. However, this is not relevant to my analysis. Moreover, Kripke's apparatus can be used to represent an epistemic necessity as well the metaphysical one.

Smith was murdered (for example, he was knifed on the street by a stranger.) How-
ever, there are no doubts that one can evaluate (1) as "true". Kripke's analysis en-
ables us to explain how such an evaluation is possible. It is because the relation of
accessibility restricts the set of worlds with respect to given circumstances; namely,
we take into consideration only these scenarios which are compatible with data we
already have: Smith was killed in his house, the building was locked, family mem-
bers were inside etc. In all these scenarios, the murderer is a family member, thus (1)
is true.

Consider now (2). Imagine that before the competition, someone has learned that
all contenders who take part in the competition come from Japan and then he states
(2). By uttering it, he does not mean that we cannot imagine a completely different
state of this competition in which there are different contenders and the winner is not
from Japan. Rather, the speaker means that *given the circumstances* (such that all
contenders are Japanese), it is true that in all cases, the winner is a Japanese. On the
contrary, (3) may be judged as "false" as there was no Canadian among the contend-
ers. Again, Kripke's relation of accessibility is something which helps us explain
such a judgment.

B. Donnellan's Distinction and Scope Distinction

Having illustrated the fact that Kripke's apparatus can provide an adequate ac-
count of our use of modal verbs, I will turn back to my main issue. On the quantifi-
cational account of descriptions — which I declared earlier to accept — we face a
phenomenon of scope ambiguities as far as complex constructions are concerned.
Namely, a sentence of the form, let us say, "It is possible that the F is G" has two
logical interpretations:

(a) $\Diamond \exists x (F!(x) \ \& \ G(x))$

(b) $\exists x (F!(x) \ \& \ \Diamond G(x))$[6]

According to the standard terminology, let me call (a) "de dicto" reading (the widest
scope of the intensional operator) and (b) "de re" reading (the existential quantifier
has the widest scope.)[7] The crucial question for my analysis will be how the

---

[6] '$M!(x)$' abbreviates '$M(x) \ \& \ \forall y(M(y) \rightarrow x = y)$'.

[7] One may argue that if a modal verb is introduced by a clause like "it must be so that…", it has
the widest scope in the logical interpretation (analogically, when such a verb follows the descriptive
phrase it has a narrower scope in the logical interpretation). But I think that this suggestion would be
misleading: a grammatical structure does not always reflect the logical structure of sentences in the
natural language. We can only accept such an account as a certain *proposal* of how to *modify* the
natural way of speaking in order to make its logical analysis easier, but we cannot take it as a de-
scription *of how we actually* use sentences like "It must/can be so that the F is G" and "The F
must/can be G".

"attributive/referential" distinction interacts with the "de re/de dicto" one. In particular, can referential and attributive utterances of modal (in general, intensional) sentences have "de re" interpretations as well as "de dicto" ones?

I will now consider this question and my answer to it will be generally positive: both referential and attributive utterances allow the scope ambiguity in a sense that they can be interpreted "de re" or "de dicto" (the fact which reading is more suitable depends on the sentence and the context). Before I show appropriate examples, I want to note that the positive answer is something that the opponent of SS should be committed to.

In general, the SS-opponent's idea is that Donnellan's distinction is merely a pragmatic one: the attributive and the referential use of a description are the matters of speaker's intentions and do not have any semantic relevance. Now, if one of the uses of descriptions were to eliminate one of the possible readings of scopes, it would uncover clearly its semantic relevance. In other words, it would be surprising that a purely pragmatic phenomenon affects the syntactic and semantic properties of a sentence by disambiguating it to the some extent. So, the opponent of SS should hold that the two aforementioned distinctions are from different levels (Donnellan's one is pragmatic, the scope distinction is syntactic and semantic) and a use of a description cannot influence the rank of scope ambiguity.

Let me turn now to the appropriate examples. Firstly, we can have "de re" interpretations of referential utterances. This is the least controversial possibility. It can be illustrated by such an utterance:

(4)   It is possible that Jones knows the man who is drinking a martini.

Assume that (4) is uttered by someone pointing to the gentleman with a martini glass. In this case, the interpretation "there is x (x is the man drinking a martini and it is possible that Jones knows x)" seems to be much more natural than the reading with the widest scope of the modal operator: "*it is possible* that there is x (x is the man drinking a martini and Jones knows x)".

Secondly, the attributive utterances seem to allow "de re" interpretations too. An example of an attributive use of "de re" construction was given by Kripke:

> Suppose I have no idea how many planets there are, but (for some reason) astronomical theory dictates that that number must be odd. If I say, "the number of planets (whatever it may be) is odd," my description is used attributively. If I am an essentialist, I will also say, "The number of planets (whatever it may be) is necessarily odd," on the grounds that all odd numbers are necessarily odd; and my usage is just as attributive as in the first case. [Kripke 1977, p. 258][8]

---

[8] In this article, Kripke briefly comments on the issue of rigidity of definite descriptions (p. 260). However, his aim is merely to demonstrate that descriptions which are rigid by stipulation are not to be identified with Donnellan's referential descriptions. I did not include Kripke's remarks in my presentation, since, as I stated at the beginning of my article, my interest is focused on the "natural" rigidity of descriptions (with respect to the particular contexts of use).

Indeed, in the context described by Kripke, the sentence "The number of planets (whatever it may be) is necessarily odd" is to be interpreted as a sentence with a wider scope of the existential quantifier over the modal operator.

Let's move our attention to "de dicto" interpretations. These are more controversial ones. It is worth noting that in some evidently "de dicto" constructions, the description seems to be neither referential, nor attributive. To illustrate this, we can use another of Kripke's examples:

(5)   John believes that the richest debutante in Dubuque will marry him.

When interpreted "de dicto," assertion (5) does not presuppose that there exists the richest debutante in Dubuque (actually, the speaker may believe that there are *no* debutantes in Dubuque). In this case, as Kripke concludes, the speaker is "in no way talking about the richest debutante, even 'attributively'".

On the other hand, we can have attributive utterances which allow "de dicto" interpretation.[9] Let me use the example from A. Bernt:

(6)   Jones believes that the person who stole his bike is red-haired.

In order to have full illustration, assume that Jones and Smith have found out that Jones's bike was stolen and that Jones has gained a belief that the thief — whoever he is — is red-haired. Later, Smith deliberates with his friend who might have stolen Jones's bike and states (6). His utterance is to be interpreted "de dicto" rather than "de re" (as there is no particular x such that Jones believes that x is red-haired), and the speaker clearly uses the description attributively (since he intends to report accurately Jones's belief that *whoever* stole the bike is red-haired.)

Another illustration of "de dicto" attributive utterance can be provided by Donnellan's classical example. Suppose that after examining Smith's brutally mutilated body, a detective exclaims:

(7)   I *believe* that the murderer of Smith is insane.

The detective's utterance is just as attributive as in the original Donnellan's example. It can be paraphrased as "I believe that *whoever* murdered Smith is insane". Obviously, the above assertion can be interpreted "de dicto", strictly speaking, as "I believe that there exists x such that x is the unique murderer of Smith and x is insane." In my opinion, this interpretation is much more suitable than the one with the widest scope of the existential quantifier: "there is x such that x is the unique murderer of Smith and I believe that x is insane." "De re" interpretation seems to be inadequate

---

[9] It is worth noting that Kripke seems to deny the possibility of using a description attributively in "de dicto" intensional construction [Kripke 1977, s. 258]. Such a position implies that if we have an evidently attributive utterance of an intensional sentence, it can be interpreted only "de re." I think that this is wrong. All the subsequent examples (6)-(8) falsify this claim.

for the reason that the detective has no idea who murdered Smith, so he does not believe that any particular x is insane.

Let me make one more illustration of an attributive utterance expressing a "de dicto" proposition. Imagine that three players took part in a Scrabble game and I observed that each of them wore red shoes. Now suppose that I did not realize who had won, but what I know for sure is that

(8)   The winner must have worn red shoes.

Definitely, my utterance is to be understood "de dicto", roughly, as "it must be so that there is x such that x is a unique winner and x has red shoes". Moreover, my use of description is attributive, since it conforms to Donnellan's characteristic of attributive uses. Firstly, it can be naturally paraphrased as "the winner — whoever he was — must have worn red shoes," which signalizes the adequateness of the attributive reading. Secondly, my utterance carries a presupposition that there is actually a unique winner (an existential presupposition is characteristic for both uses [see: Donnellan 1966, p. 291]). The presupposition comes from the fact that my utterance states (in Kripke's terms) "in all accessible worlds, *there is* a unique winner with red shoes", so it implies that *actually* there is a unique winner.[10] Consequently, it implies that the actual winner wears red shoes.[11]

Finally, let me consider the combination of the referential use with "de dicto" interpretation. This seems problematic for sentences with operators such as "must" or "necessarily." The reason is as follows. When we use a description referentially, we have an intention to talk about a particular object and the descriptive content of the used phrase has only to enable our audience to realize which object is the particular one we wish to talk about. Hence, the attribute expressed in the description is generally not essential to our claim about this particular object [compare: Donnellan 1966, p. 285]. On the other hand, "de dicto" statements of "the F must be G" seem to convey that there is some essential connection between being F and being G. Simply, the connection is such that in all (accessible) worlds, the object being F is G. Thus, the

---

[10] I make a natural assumption that the accessibility relation is reflexive here (namely, that among accessible worlds there is the actual world).

[11] Kripke's objection to the possibility of expressing a „de dicto" claim (with using a description attributively at the same time) was based on an Fregean observation that in "de dicto" construction "we do not talk about the object described" in any way (hence, as Kripke concludes, neither "referentially", nor "attributively".) It is worth asking, however, in what sense do we "talk about the object described" while using a description attributively? According to Donnellan, if a speaker uses a description "the F" attributively, he (or she) presupposes (or implicates) that there exists something which actually satisfies "the F" and expresses a general claim that whatever is F, it has a certain property [Donnellan 1966, pp. 291, 303]. However, the example (8) (as well as (7) and (6)) clearly satisfies this condition: the speaker implicates that there exists a unique satisfier of the description and he expresses a respective general proposition. In sum, contrary to Kripke's line of arguing, the sense in which the speaker "talks about the object described" in the attributive use does not exclude a possibility of using a description attributively in a "de dicto" construction.

referential use seems to be incompatible with "de dicto" statement, as far as sentences of the form "the *F* must be / is necessarily *G*" are concerned.

The conclusion that referential utterances of modal sentences with descriptions have only "de re" readings — while attributive ones are ambiguous between "de dicto" and "de re" interpretations — is something that the opponent of SS cannot easily accept. As I have suggested earlier, this conclusion means that the referential use is semantically significant; so to speak, the referential use "disambiguates" the logical structure of the sentence, making "de dicto" readings impossible. Hence, if Donnellan's distinction is merely pragmatic, the opponent of SS must agree that if attributive utterances allow "de dicto" interpretations (and, as I have illustrated, they obviously do so), so do the referential utterances.

C. Rigidity of Referential Descriptions in "de dicto" contexts

After demonstrating that referential and attributive utterances allow both "de re" and "de dicto" readings (at least, that the opponent of SS should agree that they do so), I will proceed to present evidence of referential descriptions' rigidity. It will examine "de dicto" readings of referential utterances.

In a referential utterance of "the *F* must/can be *G*", understood "de dicto", the speaker expresses the proposition interpreted as "in all/some accessible worlds, the object being *F* is *G*." However, this makes sense only if we assume that in all accessible worlds description "the *F*" designates always the same object, namely, the particular one the speaker refers to. I will elaborate on this point below.

For referential utterances, it is typical that speakers base them on singular grounds (I would even say that it is *essential* to them, since by referential utterances, the speaker conveys singular propositions). Namely, a person bases her claim made in a referential utterance on an observation, information, etc. about particular *x* to which she refers to. Obviously, the same goes for "de dicto" claims. In particular, a "de dicto" claim "the *F* must/can be *G*", namely, "in all/some accessible worlds, the object being *F* is *G*" is based on some data about particular *x*. This means that the speaker considers only these possible cases in which the *F* is *x*. In other words, the set of all worlds which the speaker finds "accessible" are such that "the *F*" always designates *x*.

The fact which I have noted is rather intuitive. I can illustrate it by an example. Suppose someone states that:

(9)   The murderer of Smith *could* have got a death sentence.

Imagine that the speaker is commenting on the verdict according to which Jones will not be sentenced to death, although he has committed many crimes. Let us stipulate that the speaker expresses a "de dicto" claim, namely, that in some accessible worlds, the murderer gets a death penalty. Since he bases his claim on the information about

Jones (Jones has committed many crimes), he talks only about this cases in which Jones is the murderer. In contrast, an attributive utterance of (9) seems to be essentially different in this respect. When the speaker's intention is to state something about whoever satisfies the description "the murderer of Smith", he obviously does not take into consideration only these possibilities in which Jones is the killer. It turns out that the relation of accessibility seems to be differently determined as far as referential and attributive utterances are concerned.[12]

SUMMARY

At the beginning, I have presented various views of several philosophers whose considerations concern the issue of whether referentially used descriptions are in some sense rigid. I have concluded that I do not see any convincing evidence for referential descriptions' rigidity in the literature. Then I have turned my attention to the fact that, as far as we allow "de dicto" interpretations of referential utterances of modal sentences, we must presume that a description used in such a construction is in some sense rigid. Namely, in all accessible worlds — that is, in all relevant cases which the speaker takes into consideration — the object described is the one the speaker actually refers to. In contrast, the same cannot be definitely stated about attributive utterances interpreted "de dicto". In this case, the speaker intends to talk about *whatever would fit* the description "the *F*", hence, the spectrum of all relevant cases is not restricted to the set in which one particular object always satisfies the given description.

At the same time, I have tried to show that my reasoning ought to be accepted by a philosopher who rejects any semantic significance of Donnellan's distinction (in particular, he should agree that referential utterances in which descriptions are embedded can be interpreted "de dicto"). Nevertheless, he does not need to worry that my reasoning questions his basic view in any way. As I emphasized, the whole reasoning was based on the presumption that descriptions have a unified quantificational analysis.

On the other hand, I believe that the proponent of SS would be satisfied with my result too. It is because he may interpret it as an indirect evidence for his position. Namely, my argument shows that even if we assume the unified quantificational analysis of descriptions, some differences between the modal profile of referential and attributive utterances emerge. It means that the significance of referential use is

---

[12] The logical analysis of (9) would be as follows: "in some accessible worlds, there is a unique murderer of Smith and he is insane". Since all cases which the speaker takes into consideration are such that there is a murderer, and he is identical to Jones, the first conjunct within the existential statement is satisfied. Hence, the truth of the whole claim depends on the fact whether in some accessible worlds the murderer, Jones, gets a death penalty.

very deep and, perhaps, it should characterized by a different theory than the unified quantificational analysis.

REFERENCES

Bernth A. (1990), *Treatment of Anaphoric Problems in Referentially Opaque Contexts*, [in:] *Lecture Notes in Artificial Intelligence. Natural Language and Logic*, ed. Studer R., Berlin, Springer-Verlag, pp. 1-25.

Devitt M. (2004), *The Case for Referential Descriptions*, [in:] *Descriptions and Beyond*, ed. Reimer M., Bezuidenhout A., New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 280-305.

Donnellan K. (1966), *Reference and Definite Descriptions*, *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 75 no. 3, pp. 281-304.

Kaplan D. (1989), *Demonstratives. An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and Other Indexicals*, [in:] Themes from Kaplan, ed. Almog J., Perry J., Wettstein H., New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 481-563.

Kripke, S. (1977), *Speaker Reference and Semantic Reference*, [in:] *Midwest Studies in Philosophy II: Studies in the Philosophy of Language*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 255-276.

Kripke S. (1980), *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Nelson M. (1999), *Wettstein's Incompleteness, Salmon's Intuitions*, *Nous*, Vol. 33 no. 4, pp. 573-589.

Salmon N. (1982), *Assertion and Incomplete Descriptions*, *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 42 no. 1, pp. 37-45.

Salmon N. (1991), *The Pragmatic Fallacy*, *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 63 no. 1, pp. 83-97.

Wettstein H. (1981), *Demonstrative Reference and Definite Descriptions*, *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 241-257.

Wettstein H. (1983), *The Semantic Significance of the Referential-Attributive Distinction*, "Philosophical Studies", Vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 187-196.