

# “THE REFERENTIAL” AND “THE ATTRIBUTIVE”: TWO DISTINCTIONS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE<sup>1</sup>

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There are two sorts of singular terms for which we have difficulty applying Donnellan’s referential/attributional distinction: complex definite descriptions, and proper names. With respect to the uses of such terms in certain contexts we seem to have conflicting intuitions as to whether they should be classified as referential or attributional. The problem concerning how to apply Donnellan’s distinction to the uses of certain complex definite descriptions has never been debated in the literature. On the other hand there have been attempts to extend Donnellan’s distinction to the uses of proper names, the most popular one being due to Kripke. However the argument Kripke gives to this end in his ‘Speaker’s Reference and Semantic Reference’ seems to be inconsistent with the position he takes in *Naming and Necessity*. I suggest that the reason we seem to have conflicting intuitions with respect to the uses of such terms, is because there is not one but two separate distinctions inherent in Donnellan’s examples; a pragmatic distinction based on the speaker’s intentions in using a term (captured by Kripke), and an epistemic one based on the notion of *having an object in mind*. In the light of this, I argue that the issue of whether there are attributional uses of proper names, in the latter sense, relates to the epistemic problem of whether a speaker can have *de re* attitudes toward an object that he does not have in mind. On this epistemic issue Kripke and Donnellan are on opposite sides as revealed by their debate over the issue of whether there are contingent *a priori* propositions.

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## I. Donnellan’s Distinction and Kripke’s Argument

In his classic article “Reference and Definite Descriptions”, Keith Donnellan distinguished between two different ways in which a definite description may be used by a speaker, a “referential” use and an “attributional” use, and claimed that the distinction poses problems for both Russell’s and Strawson’s semantic theories. Let us first remember Donnellan’s own formulation of the distinction early in the article:

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<sup>1</sup> I owe my gratitude to Nathan Salmon who first introduced me to this topic in a seminar I took with him in 1992. In the years to follow there have been many occasions on which I got the chance to discuss these issues with him, which led to very fruitful and interesting exchanges of ideas. I would also like to Tomis Kapitan for his extremely useful feedback on an earlier draft which led me to seriously restructure the paper.

A speaker who uses a definite description attributively in an assertion states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so. A speaker who uses a definite description referentially in an assertion, on the other hand, uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing. In the first case the definite description might be said to occur essentially, for the speaker wishes to assert something about whatever or whoever fits that description; but in the referential use the definite description is merely one tool for doing a certain job—calling attention to a person or thing—and in general any other device for doing the same job, another description or a name, would do as well. In the attributive use, the attribute of being the so-and-so is all important, while it is not in the referential use. (1966, pp. 146 - 147)

In order to explicate the distinction further Donnellan gives the following example:

... suppose that Jones has been charged with Smith's murder and has been placed on trial. Imagine that there is a discussion of Jones' odd behavior at his trial. We might sum up our impression of his behavior by saying "Smith's murderer is insane." If someone asks to whom we are referring, by using this description ["Smith's murderer"], the answer here is "Jones." This, I shall say, is a referential use of the definite description... Suppose [now] that we come upon poor Smith being foully murdered. From the brutal manner of the killing... we might exclaim, "Smith's murderer is insane."... This, I shall say, is an attributive use of the description. (1966, p. 147)

Almost every philosopher who has written on the topic has agreed with Donnellan about the significance of this distinction, and its popularity in years has even gone beyond philosophy. Most, if not all, of the literature on the topic has concentrated on the issue of whether this important linguistic phenomenon has any *semantic* significance, as Donnellan claims. In what follows I will put this issue aside, and concentrate on how the referential/attributive distinction applies to the uses of complex descriptions (i.e. definite descriptions that have one or more singular terms embedded within them) and the uses of proper names. As we will see the uses of such singular terms is specifically problematic in that we seem to have conflicting intuitions about whether they fall on the referential or the attributive side. The discussion will reveal that there are two separate distinctions to be drawn from Donnellan's examples, which in effect will explain why we seem to have conflicting intuitions in such cases. And then I will argue that the question of whether there are attributive uses of proper names acquires great epistemic value, when the question is taken in a certain way.

The first to argue against the semantic significance of the distinction was Saul Kripke. One of Kripke’s arguments makes use of an extension of the distinction to the use of proper names. The argument is simple and appears to be very striking. Most authors on the topic later have taken for granted, or at least did not question, the claim that there can be both a referential and an attributive use of a proper name.<sup>2</sup>

In arguing against Donnellan, Kripke making use of Grice’s work distinguishes between the *semantic referent* of a term and the *speaker’s referent* in using that term in a context:

In a given idiolect, the semantic referent of a designator (without indexicals) is given by a general intention of the speaker to refer to a certain object whenever the designator is used. The speaker’s referent is given by a specific intention, on a given occasion, to refer to a certain object... My hypothesis is that Donnellan’s referential-attributive distinction should be generalized in this light... In one case (the “simple” case), his specific intention is simply to refer to the semantic referent; that is, his specific intention is simply his general semantic intention... Alternatively – the “complex” case – he has a specific intention, which is distinct from his general intention, but which he believes, as a matter of fact, to determine the same object as the one determined by his general intention.<sup>3</sup> (1979, pp. 173 – 74)

Kripke then goes on to argue that such a linguistic phenomenon, though it genuinely exists in natural languages, cannot be used to refute Russell’s (or any other semantic) theory. To claim that it does, on Kripke’s view, is to hold that the two uses of definite descriptions lead to a semantic ambiguity; Russell’s theory provides a semantic analysis of a sentence with a definite description in it, and according to Kripke, to claim that such a sentence “has two distinct analyses is to attribute a semantic... ambiguity” to it.<sup>4</sup>

In order to show that the two uses of definite descriptions do *not* lead to a semantic ambiguity, Kripke argues that the distinction applies to the use of proper names as well where it is easier to see how implausible this

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<sup>2</sup> Within the wide literature on Donnellan’s distinction there is very little discussion on this issue. Some have simply repeated Kripke’s argument and took it for granted that the distinction applies to the use of proper names. See Soames (1994) and Geurts (1997).

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly Kripke’s formulation leaves out the condition of “having an object in mind” altogether. It was Nathan Salmon who first pointed this out to me. See his (2004) for an extensive discussion of this point.

<sup>4</sup> I agree with Kripke that Donnellan’s argument does not threaten any semantic theory. Both Kripke and Salmon have given very convincing arguments to this effect.

ambiguity-claim is. To explicate this, Kripke gives the following example: Two friends are having a conversation about someone they see at a distance, whom they both take to be their friend Jones, when in fact it is their other friend Smith. One of them asks, "what is Jones doing?" and the other responds "raking the leaves." Kripke notes: "'Jones,' in the common language of both, is a name of Jones; it never names Smith." (p. 173) Kripke claims that in the idiolect of both speakers the semantic referent of the name "Jones" is Jones, but they have referred to Smith on this particular occasion by using the name. Thus we have a case where the speaker's reference diverges from the semantic reference, i.e. a "complex" case, thus a referential use. From this observation, Kripke concludes that Donnellan's distinction applies to the use of proper names. However, it is not at all clear that Donnellan would be convinced by Kripke's argument. For all that Kripke has shown is that a name can be misapplied, which is indicative of a referential use. It is not at all obvious that if the two friends had not misapplied the name, and had intended to refer to Jones by their use of the name "Jones", then we would get an attributive use, on Donnellan's view. The phenomenon that Kripke cites does not seem to differ from two uses of definite descriptions, both of which are referential. The fact that the speaker's referent and the semantic referent overlap on a particular use of a term, is not sufficient to conclude that the use of the term is attributive, for such may also be the case in the referential uses. In Donnellan's example of the referential use, the speaker uses the description "Smith's murderer" intending to refer to Jones (who is acting oddly in trial), and whether Jones is or is not the actual murderer is irrelevant here: in either case we get a referential use. Similarly Donnellan may claim that if the two friends in Kripke's example had not been mistaken about the identity of the person whom they wished to talk about, we would not get an attributive use of a name, but we would again get a referential use, though this time applied correctly.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This confusion is also reflected in the literature. Geurts (1997) assumes with no argument that Kripke was able to extend Donnellan's distinction to the uses of proper names. In response, Abbott (2002) claims that the "referential use...is the only kind of use proper names would have on Kripke's nondescriptonal analysis." (p. 196). I agree with Abbott that it is not obvious that Kripke's leaf-raker case does provide us with an attributive use of a proper name as Geurts takes for granted, but I do not agree with her that that was not Kripke's intention and that a proper name can only be used referentially on Kripke's view.

Ordinary uses of proper names, on Donnellan's account, seem to fall on the referential side rather than the attributive side, for in normal cases a speaker uses a proper name "... to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about..." (Donnellan, 1966, p. 146) It does look as if Kripke holds the opposite view, and takes ordinary uses of proper names to be attributive uses in his "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference". However in *Naming and Necessity* he seems to hold exactly the opposite. In challenging the Frege-Russell view that ordinary proper names have descriptive content, Kripke argues that the name "Gödel" cannot be synonymous with the description "the man who proved the incompleteness theorem". If Gödel had been a fraud, says Kripke, and someone else named "Schmidt" had actually proved the theorem, we would still be referring to Gödel and not Schmidt in using the name "Gödel". Later he admits that there may be some exceptional cases:

But, if we say, 'Gödel relied on a diagonal argument in this step of the proof,' don't we here, perhaps, refer to whoever proved the theorem?... By analogy to Donnellan's usage for descriptions, *this might be called an "attributive" use of proper names.* (1972, p. 85, fn. 36, italics mine)

Now one would have expected Kripke to say just the opposite, for given Kripke's own formulation, the use of the name "Gödel" in such a context would seem to fall under his complex case and not his simple case, and thus should be an example of a referential use. The speaker intends to refer to whoever proved the incompleteness theorem even if it turns out not to be Gödel, which indicates that his "specific intention" to refer to the person who proved the theorem *is distinct* from his "general intention" to refer to Gödel. In fact within the hypothetical scenario that Kripke considers, the two intentions determine different people, for if it is Schmidt and not Gödel who has proved the theorem, the speaker's primary intention in using the name "Gödel" is not to refer to Gödel. Nevertheless the semantic referent of the name "Gödel" is still Gödel, even in the hypothetical scenario, and that is exactly what the argument is supposed to show. The speaker's referent (who is Schmidt, i.e. the man who proved the theorem) and the semantic referent (who is Gödel) do not coincide, so we have a case in which the specific intention to refer to the speaker's referent diverges from the general intention to refer to the semantic referent. This clearly looks like Kripke's complex case, and thus should be a referential use on his account.

Now we should not immediately charge Kripke of inconsistency here. As I will argue later, there is not one but two separate distinctions to be drawn from Donnellan's examples, and Kripke appealed to one of them in his (1972) and the other one in his (1979).

## II. The Near and Wild Misses

Donnellan initially characterizes an attributive use of a definite description as a use in which the speaker "wishes to assert something about whatever or whoever fits that description." (1966, p. 146) No doubt, this is good textual evidence for Kripke's formulation. However, it is not at all clear that Donnellan wished to be as strict about this criterion as Kripke has taken him to be. In reply to one of his critics, Donnellan does talk about possible attributive uses where the speaker does not have the intention to talk about exactly whatever or whoever fits that description, and thus does not have the intention to talk about the semantic referent:

In one example of the attributive use in my paper, a person upon finding the body of his friend Smith exclaims, "Smith's murderer is insane." In the example, the speaker had no particular person in mind as Smith's murderer... suppose that while Smith did die of natural causes, he has indeed been assaulted before death and that the evidence that led the speaker to attribute insanity to "Smith's murderer" is still good evidence that his assailant is insane. In a sense the speaker has scored a "near miss"... A near miss occurs with an attributive use when nothing exactly fits the description used, but some individual or other does fit a description in some sense close in meaning to the one used... Only in the referential use can a speaker have "missed by a mile," because only that use involves a particular entity that the description either fits neatly, just misses, or wildly misses. Once this is seen, taking near misses into account does not blur the distinction. If anything, it helps one to see what the distinction is. (1968, p. 210)

As the passage clearly indicates, the so-called "near misses" can occur in the attributive use, and only in the case of a referential use can one "miss wildly". I believe it is exactly here that we run into problems, for there are cases of "wild misses" that could not be classified as referential uses and have strong attributive flavor. The least important of such cases is when the speaker has a slip of the tongue: given the tragic situation the speaker says "Sam's murderer is insane", intending to refer to Smith's murderer (attributively) and not Sam's. Given that this is definitely a wild miss it cannot be the attributive use, if we take the above

quoted passage seriously. On Kripke's formulation though, it turns out to be a complex case and thus a referential use. So a simple slip of the tongue is good enough to turn a genuine attributive use into a referential use on Kripke's account.

There are other more important cases that seem to be problematic, for example the use of complex descriptions, i.e. definite descriptions that have singular terms i.e. proper names, pronouns, or other definite descriptions embedded in them. Consider this extended version of Donnellan's Smith case: Jones, who is actually innocent, is on trial for the murder of Smith. One day as he is being brought to court, someone in the crowd opens fire and kills Jones. The murderer (of Jones) manages to escape. After the ballistic report reveals that Jones was shot by a Smith and Wesson gun, the prosecutor says: "The gun that killed Smith's murderer was a Smith and Wesson, but the police have not been able to find the weapon yet." The use of the complex description "the gun that killed Smith's murderer" by the prosecutor seems to be attributive. Though Jones was not Smith's murderer, by using the embedded description "Smith's murderer" the prosecutor had the intention to refer to Jones. In using the larger description "the gun that killed Smith's murderer" the prosecutor's primary intention was to talk about the gun that killed Jones, and not whatever fits the description. If we take the use of the larger description to be attributive, then it would be wrong to hold that only in the referential use can the speaker "miss by a mile". If we generalize this case, we may say that a complex definite description of the form "the F which is the G" can be used by a speaker in such a way that while the outermost descriptonal function "the F which is \_\_\_" is used attributively, the embedded description "the G" is used referentially (or vice versa). Furthermore we can get even more complicated cases if we consider definite descriptions that have more than one singular term embedded in them. In such cases speakers may have various kinds of intentions regarding the use of each embedded definite description. If the speaker, in using such a complex definite description, intends to refer to a particular object that he has "in mind", then no matter how long the definite description is, we can easily say that such a use is referential; however if there is no such intention, and the outermost descriptonal function is used attributively, then it is not clear what we should say. In fact even Donnellan's own example, with a slight modification, will pose the same kind of difficulty. Suppose that the speaker misidentifies the

person whose dead body he comes across when he says “Smith’s murderer is insane”, and it is actually Brown, and not Smith whose body that the speaker sees. If the speaker’s primary intention is to attribute insanity to the murderer of the person whose dead body he has observed, then clearly he wishes to talk about Brown’s murderer, and it is irrelevant whether Smith has also been murdered. Thus the use of the description “Smith’s murderer” in this particular case is not a referential use since the speaker has no particular murderer in mind. But the speaker also does not intend to refer to whoever fits the description. Again the use of the description does seem to have a very strong attributive flavor, but the speaker has missed by a mile.

If we take what Donnellan says at face value, then we would have to claim that such uses are neither referential nor attributive. *Prima facie* this may not seem to be a problem, for as Kripke points out, the distinction is not supposed to be exhaustive. There are, no doubt, certain contexts in which a speaker, in using a definite description in an utterance, may have no intention to refer, and even believe that the description has no referent. One who believes, for instance, that there is no tenth planet, could assert “some scientists wrongly believe that the tenth planet has been discovered”. In such a case, it could perhaps be said that the speaker uses the description “the tenth planet” neither referentially nor attributively.<sup>6</sup> But clearly the cases that are given above are cases in which the speaker does use the singular term as a designator, in its Fregean customary mode, so saying that they are neither referential nor attributive seems to be problematic. It is not clear what we should do with such examples, and it does not seem that Donnellan’s texts are of great help. What is worse is that complex definite descriptions are not a rare variety in language. In fact apart from the use of the so-called incomplete descriptions, almost all definite descriptions used in languages are complex, so leaving them out of the picture would considerably limit the application of Donnellan’s distinction, thus reducing its theoretical significance.

I suggest that the reason we seem to have conflicting intuitions about whether the use of “Smith’s murderer” is referential or attributive when

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<sup>6</sup> Following Frege, it may also be argued that the speaker uses the description intending to refer not its customary referent but its indirect referent, namely its sense. Whether that would allow us to extend Donnellan’s distinction so that it applies to such contexts of use is an issue to be explored.

the speaker intends to talk about Sam's murderer and does not have any particular murderer in mind, is that there are two separate distinctions to be made between the so-called "referential" and "attributive" uses based on different criteria. This will also explain why Kripke made seemingly contradictory statements about "the attributive use of proper names", for there is a plausible reading of Donnellan which suggests that ordinary uses of proper names (as well other singular terms such as demonstratives and personal pronouns) are attributive and another equally plausible reading in which they turn out to be referential.

### III. The Pragmatic and the Epistemic Distinction

For those who are more interested in the issues of pragmatics concerning how one may refer to an object even when his words do not, we could distinguish between referential and attributive uses of terms by using Kripke's distinction between *speaker's reference* and *semantic reference* as he has suggested. Let us call such uses "referential<sub>1</sub>" and "attributive<sub>1</sub>". However if we are more involved with epistemic issues, then we must put aside Kripke's formulation, and try to make another distinction in terms of *having an object in mind* in some qualified epistemic sense. Such a distinction is motivated by Donnellan's examples: in all the cases he gives for "the referential use" of a term the speaker has an object in mind that he wishes to talk about, whereas in all the cases he gives for "the attributive use" the speaker has *no* object in mind in using the term. This suggests another way to make the distinction between "the referential and the attributive uses of terms": if a speaker in using a term (in its customary mode) has an object in mind that he wishes to refer to, then that use of the term is "referential<sub>2</sub>"; if the speaker in using a term (in its customary mode) has no object in mind that he wishes to refer to, then that use of the term is "attributive<sub>2</sub>".

Now we may raise the crucial question: are there attributive<sub>2</sub> uses of proper names? The answer to this question, partially depends on what the conditions are for one to have an object in mind, but before trying to clarify those conditions, let us look at Boer's example of a use of a proper name that would seem to be attributive<sub>2</sub>:

Let us suppose that the police are attempting to destroy a certain drug-ring. They have some evidence that the ring is headed by a single man but have as yet been unable to discover his identity. In the course of their investigations, the police are apt to say things like: *the leader of the drug-ring* has high political

connections. The italicized description... is most naturally construed as attributive... Imagine further that the police, after interrogating a minor member of the ring, learn that low-ranking affiliates of the syndicate, who do not know the identity of their leader, call him 'Mr. Heroin'. Since 'Mr. Heroin' is a conveniently short expression, the police themselves adopt it... Now I would argue that the name 'Mr. Heroin', as used by the police... is merely convenient shorthand for the attributive description [*the leader of the drug-ring*]... (1978, p. 179)

The fact that Boer gives such an example of an "attributive" use of a proper name, is surely a good sign that he takes ordinary uses of proper names as being "referential", which suggests that he takes Donnellan's distinction to be between the referential<sub>2</sub> and the attributive<sub>2</sub> uses of terms (and not between the referential<sub>1</sub> and the attributive<sub>1</sub>). It is because the police are using the name 'Mr. Heroin' without having anyone in mind that makes the use of the name attributive<sub>2</sub>.<sup>7</sup> However this would not be sufficient for Donnellan to accept such a use as a genuine case in which a proper name is used attributively<sub>2</sub>, for given his commitment to the Direct Reference Theory any use of a proper name as a shorthand for a description is really not a use of it as a genuine proper name at all. So at most what such examples would show is that a name in certain contexts may abbreviate a definite description used attributively<sub>2</sub>.

In arguing against the so-called Descriptive Theory of Proper Names, Kripke claims that even when a proper name is introduced into a language by description (and not by ostension) the name does not become synonymous with the description: the description fixes the reference but not the meaning of the name. Kripke argues that the proper name introduced in such a way becomes a rigid designator though the reference-fixing description may not be. So following Kripke, the only way in which it seems possible to get such an attributive<sub>2</sub> use of a proper name would be by introducing a name by fixing its referent with an attributive<sub>2</sub> use of a definite description that refers to an object that the reference-fixer does not have in mind. Though we may perhaps use Boer's example with some modification, another case that Donnellan and Kripke have debated over concerns the name "Neptune" as it may have been

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<sup>7</sup> An example of a possible attributive use of a proper name was given even earlier by Martinich (1977): if the chairman of a raffle committee draws the name of a certain Jane Smith as the winner of the grand prize and declares 'Jane Smith has won the grand prize', and he does not know anything about this person, then the use of the name by the chairman could perhaps be attributive.

introduced by Leverrier and Adams before the planet was discovered. At the time the description "the planet causing the perturbations in the orbit of Uranus" or something close to it may have been used by Leverrier and Adams attributively<sub>2</sub>. They of course intended to talk about that planet, whichever it is, that is responsible for those perturbations, and there is a sense in which they did not have any particular heavenly body in mind which they believed to be this planet. So, following Kripke, if we hold that a genuine name can be introduced into our language by description, then we do get possible attributive<sub>2</sub> uses of proper names.

Making use of the Neptune case, Kripke not only claims that the name cannot be simply a shorthand for the description, but also, that this gives rise to the possibility of contingent truths that are *a priori*. He claims that Leverrier could have introduced the name "Neptune" by fixing its referent by the description "the planet causing the perturbations in the orbit of Uranus", and by this act of linguistic stipulation, he thereby could have known without appealing to experience that if there is such a planet, then it is Neptune. What is peculiar is that Donnellan, in arguing against Kripke on the possibility of having contingent *a priori* truths, rules out such attributive<sub>2</sub> uses of proper names altogether without mentioning his own distinction. He argues that even if Leverrier introduced a name as a rigid designator in such a way, it does not follow that he could have known the target proposition for he could not have "used the name". Similarly, argues Donnellan, if we introduce the name "Newman 1" as the name of the first baby to be born at the turn of the century, we would not thereby know, without any further experience, that Newman 1 will be the first baby to be born at the turn of the century. Again, the name "Newman 1", on Donnellan's view, can not be *used* by the reference-fixer, at least not as a genuine proper name. That is presumably because the reference-fixer has no particular person in mind in attempting to use the name "Newman 1", though Donnellan never explicitly states this. On his account it seems to follow that the epistemic condition for a speaker to use a name as a genuine name is that he or she must have an object in mind. Kripke, on the other hand, seems to deny this. Neither Donnellan nor Kripke mention the referential/attribution distinction in their debate, but it is clear that the possibility of using a proper name in a genuine way, and not as a disguised description, without having an object in mind is ruled out by Donnellan and assumed (with no argument) by Kripke.

#### IV. Conditions for De Re Attitudes

On Donnellan's view introducing a name by description does not automatically put us in a privileged position to use the name as a rigid designator. In the Neptune case he holds that Leverrier could not have known that Neptune was the cause of certain perturbations before the planet was discovered, given that he could not have used the name "Neptune" as a rigid designator. Hence the refutation of the contingent *a priori*. In order to support this thesis he first considers the name "Newman 1" introduced to rigidly designate the first baby to be born at the turn of the century. Donnellan admits that the sentence "Newman 1 will be the first baby to be born at the turn of the century" may then in fact express a contingent truth. However, it does not follow, on Donnellan's account, that we would thereby be in a position to know the truth expressed by this sentence, let alone know it *a priori*. Let us consider his argument (rolling the time back to the 70s):

Let us now imagine that just after midnight on New Century's Eve a child is born who is firmly established to be the first born of the century. He is baptized "John", but those of us who are still around, remembering our stipulation, also call this child 'Newman 1.' Now it seems to me that it would be outrageous to say that some twenty-five years or so before his birth, we knew that John would be the first child born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Suppose one of us, living to a ripe old age, were to meet John after he has grown up a bit. Would it be true to say to John, "I call you 'Newman 1' and Newman 1, I knew some twenty-five years or so before your birth that you would be the first child born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century"? (1979, p. 53)

In this passage Donnellan is appealing to a certain intuition that most of us would seem to share, but whether that intuition alone (that it would be wrong to go up to John and say "I knew that you would be the first born child...") is sufficient to infer that there is no *de re* knowledge of Newman 1 (at the time) is not altogether clear. What we need is a general principle which Donnellan formulates as follows:

If one has a name for a person, say "N", and there is a bit of knowledge that one would express by saying "N is  $\phi$ ", then if one subsequently meets the person it will be true to say to him, using the second person pronoun, "I knew that you were  $\phi$ ." (1979, p. 55).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Some may wish to deny this principle and Donnellan does admit that there are certain exceptional cases. See fn. 22 in his (1979).

Let us put aside the issue of whether based on this principle Donnellan has succeeded in refuting Kripke's case for the contingent *a priori*. What is more relevant is that Donnellan not only holds that there is no knowledge expressed in such cases, but also that the reference-fixer cannot use the proper name as a device for reference:

... the fact that a name is introduced as a rigid designator does not by itself put a person in a position to have *de re* propositional attitudes toward the entity rigidly designated. For essentially the same considerations that were adduced for denying that there was knowledge of an entity just in virtue of the sort of stipulation that introduces a rigid designator by means of a description can be applied to the other propositional attitudes. It would, for example, seem to me just as incorrect to say to John..., "I believed about you some twenty-five years before your birth..." "I asserted about you some twenty-five years before your birth..." etc. (1979, pp. 56 - 57)

Though Donnellan does not explicitly say so, another *de re* attitude no doubt would be *to refer to* or *to talk about*, for, on the same grounds, it would equally be wrong to go up to John and say "I talked about you some twenty-five years ago...", "I referred to you some twenty-five years ago ..." as well. Such names are simply not "usable" according to Donnellan:

... we are in the somewhat odd position of possessing a mechanism for introducing a name that rigidly designates something, but a mechanism that is not powerful enough to allow us to use the name!" (1979, p. 57)

From all this can we conclude that there is no attributive<sub>2</sub> use of proper names for Donnellan? Not just yet, for Donnellan's account does not immediately rule out the possible attributive<sub>2</sub> uses of names of entities which are abbreviated *rigid* definite descriptions. If the name ' $\pi$ ', for instance, is merely a shorthand for the description "the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter", the name may be used as a rigid designator. Some may claim, on the other hand, that the name ' $\pi$ ' is a referential device we use to refer to a particular number which we have in mind, making our use referential<sub>2</sub>, arguing that we have some knowledge of that number, independent of what we can derive from the description. Though I am inclined not to hold such a position, there are other less controversial cases, in which we attempt to name a number that we do not have in mind in any sense. In fact Donnellan claims that his considerations regarding the "Neptune" and "Newman 1" cases apply to mathematical entities such as numbers as well, and gives the following example:

Although I know that the 98<sup>th</sup> prime number is not divisible by three, it does not follow that I know about the number which is the 98<sup>th</sup> prime number that it is not divisible by three. (1979, p. 54)

It is plausible to hold that one who does not know what the 98<sup>th</sup> prime number is, does not have a particular number in mind which he knows to be the 98<sup>th</sup> prime number. Suppose now that we introduce the name 'P98' as the name of the 98<sup>th</sup> prime number<sup>9</sup>, and use it in an utterance. If the name is merely a shorthand for the description, the name could be used attributively<sub>2</sub>, just as in Boer's example. But again the issue of whether there are attributive<sub>2</sub> uses of proper names would lose its epistemic significance then. Only when the name is used as a genuine name, and not as a disguised description, (regardless of whether it is a rigid designator) would Donnellan's epistemic claims make sense. In fact he does make this point:

I make the assumption that the knowledge, if we have it, would have to be *de re* not simply on the grounds that "Newman 1" is a rigid designator. It does not follow from the fact that a term is a rigid designator that when it enters into a statement of propositional attitude, the attitude ascribed must be *de re*... It is rather,... that as these stipulations introduce names they give the names no descriptive content that leads me to say that the knowledge, if there is any, must be *de re*... (1979, p. 54)

A genuine use of a proper name expresses *de re* attitudes of the speaker, not just because the name is used as a rigid designator, but also because it is used with no descriptive content. As I understand Donnellan, his position entails that there is no attributive<sub>2</sub> use of a proper name used in a genuine Russellian way, i.e. as a directly referential device with no descriptive content. On Donnellan's view a singular term used referentially<sub>2</sub> by a speaker expresses *de re* attitudes of the speaker about the object the speaker has in mind in using that term, whereas a singular term used attributively<sub>2</sub> in a sentence by a speaker expresses only *de dicto* attitudes of the speaker concerning the proposition expressed by that sentence. Furthermore, a proper name, on his account, cannot be used as a genuine name by a speaker unless the speaker has *de re* attitudes about the object he wishes to talk about in using that name. Therefore, it follows that a proper name according to Donnellan, cannot be used attributively<sub>2</sub>.

<sup>9</sup> As I have discussed in my (1997) this example also shows that the puzzle about the contingent *a priori* is not a puzzle merely about the contingent *a priori*, for very similar cases could occur in mathematics where nothing is contingent and all truths are *a priori*.

All of this, however, hinges upon what it takes for a speaker to have an object in mind, and Donnellan does not provide us with any account of this. That is presumably why Kaplan complained that "the notion of *having someone in mind* is not analyzed but used" (1978, p. 222). In fact Kaplan had already given his own criteria for having *de re* attitudes towards a certain object in his (1968). Donnellan addresses the issue in a brief passage.

In "Quantifying In," Kaplan held that in order to have *de re* propositional attitude toward an entity one must be, as he puts it, *en rapport* with it. And he thought that being *en rapport* involved three things: One must possess a name that (1) denoted the entity, (2) is for the user a "vivid" name and (3) in a technical sense, is a name for the speaker of the object... I am inclined to drop Kaplan's first two requirements and try to go with some variant of this third condition as being what is required for a name to be a name that a speaker can use to assert *de re* something about an entity. (1979, p. 58)

How does the notion of *having an object in mind* relate to the notion of *possessing a name that is the name of an object*? Would it be correct to say, for instance, that in order for a speaker to possess a name that is a name of an object, the speaker must have the object in mind? If so, we conclude, once again, that an attributive<sub>2</sub> use of a proper name is impossible on Donnellan's view. In any case the notion of *possessing a name that is the name of an object* is no clearer than the notion of *having an object in mind*, so analyzing the latter by appealing to the former is no progress.

## V. Causal Connection

In 'Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions' Donnellan argues that a speaker by using a proper name may refer to an object in virtue of a causal historical chain starting from the initial baptism of the object named and the particular use of the name by the speaker. This view, advocated by Kripke, Evans and others as well, is at times called the 'Causal Theory of Proper Names', though both Donnellan and Kripke have been reluctant to call the view a "theory" for various reasons. In any case what is relevant for our purposes is that a certain implication of this view, on Donnellan's account, is that a speaker need not always have an identifying description of the object he wishes to talk about. In one example in 'Speaking of Nothing' he argues that someone whose only belief about Thales is that he was a Greek philosopher who held that all is water, may in fact refer to Thales, even if it turns out that there was no

such philosopher who held such a view. For all we know, Thales may turn out to be a well digger, not a philosopher, who ironically remarked that he wished that all was water so that he wouldn't have to keep digging new wells. As the story was passed on from one generation to another, we came to believe that Thales in fact was a philosopher who held this weird theory. If we further suppose that unbeknownst to us, there was in fact a Greek philosopher who held such a view to whom we have no causal connection, we would still be referring to the well digger and not to the philosopher. It is a certain kind of historical causal chain, going back from the utterance of the name "Thales" to Thales himself, that accounts for the fact that the speaker could refer despite the fact that he has no identifying description of the man. In the mouth of this ignorant user the name "Thales" is a name *of* Thales. All this seems to be in the spirit of the direct reference theory that Donnellan advocated. However, given that Donnellan also endorses the thesis that in order for a speaker to refer to an object he must have the "object in mind", it would seem to follow that on Donnellan's view one can refer to an object he has in mind without having any identifying description of that object.

It seems to me that there is great tension here. How is it possible to have an object in mind without knowing any identifying properties of that object? After all if I do not possess any identifying descriptions of Thales, it may even turn out that all the beliefs I express by using the name "Thales" are false, save for some trivial analytic truths. Following Donnellan, it may turn out that Thales was not a philosopher, never wrote or even read philosophy, in fact was not named "Thales" in his lifetime etc. It may even turn out that Thales was not a male, but a female, or even perhaps an alien or a robot, indicating that we know nothing about Thales, save perhaps that it was an object of some sort that is the referent of the name. Even in such a case, still I could have him (her/it) in my mind, given Donnellan's views. Given that I have no correctly identifying description, nor a non-verbal form of representation of Thales, it is not at all clear what would explain the fact that I have him in my mind.

On the other hand, if all that it takes for a speaker to have an object in mind and have *de re* attitudes towards it, is for that speaker to have a causal connection to that object, then it is not at all clear why Leverrier did not have *de re* attitudes towards Neptune. After all a speaker who uses the name "Thales" without having any identifying description of

Thales would seem to have a more remote causal connection to Thales than the causal connection Leverrier had to Neptune. Clearly Leverrier's intention to refer to the undiscovered planet was partially caused by the observations he had made regarding the orbit of Uranus which was causally affected by Neptune.<sup>10</sup> No doubt he also needed Newton's theory as well to come to believe that there was an undiscovered planet, but even if Newton's theory was not totally correct it still was a fact that an undiscovered planet was perturbing Uranus.

It seems to me that it is one thing to have an object in mind, and quite another to have some causal connection to it. Whatever intuitive sense we attach to these locutions, the former would have to involve an internalist component, predominantly related to how a speaker represents the object in question in his mind, whereas the latter is a basically an externalist notion predominantly related to a series of causal events most of which take place outside the speaker's mind. There may be times when we know that we have a certain causal connection to some entity, without knowing what object that is or without having that object in mind. Leverrier, for instance, could have said truthfully that he had some causal connection to Neptune, but did not have any particular planet in mind that he knew to be Neptune. Similarly we know today that there is a cause why dinosaurs became extinct, but we do not know what that cause is. A speaker's use of the term "the cause of the extinction of dinosaurs", could be historically linked to a chain of events that go all the way back to the extinction of the dinosaurs, even if that speaker has no specific cause in mind that he knows to be responsible for the extinction of this animal. Again, when the police were using the name "Unabomber" they had no specific murderer in mind, though they did have a causal connection to him through his acts of violence. So I wish to conclude that having an identifying description of an object or even a causal connection to it is not sufficient to have the object in mind. Something more intimate is needed.

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<sup>10</sup> I owe the idea that Leverrier had a causal connection to Neptune before the planet was discovered enabling him to have *de re* attitudes towards it, to Nathan Salmon. As I have argued in my (1997), if this is correct, it also undermines Donnellan's argument against Kripke on the possibility of having contingent *a priori* truths.

## V. Having an Object in Mind

No doubt the notion of *having an object in mind* is vague; but what is worse is that it also seems to be context-dependent. If detective Jones comes across the dead body of Smith and does not know who the murderer is, he could perhaps correctly say, that he has no one in mind whom he knows to be the murderer of Smith. But then suppose he has the following conversation with his detective friend Mark:

Jones: I am trying to catch a murderer and I need your help.

Mark: Do you want to catch any old murderer to get a promotion, or do you have a particular murderer in mind?

Jones: No, I am not after a promotion, I do have a particular one in mind, it's Smith's murderer.

So then it would seem that whether Jones has "anyone in mind" would depend on the interests of the conversing parties and other contextual features of the discourse, making the notion epistemically futile.<sup>11</sup> But clearly this would be doing injustice to Donnellan. On a more charitable reading, we could suggest that, on Donnellan's view, to have an object in mind one needs to have a certain form of *experience* of the object in question. The paradigm case is of course sense perception. It is clear that the medium sized objects which we perceive are objects of experience that we have in mind, as evidenced by the fact that all the examples that Donnellan gives for the referential use, are ones in which the speaker intends to refer to an object that he sees. But sense experience, is no doubt a very limited category, for there are many objects of which we have knowledge of, only through the testimony of others. If having a sense experience of an object had been a necessary condition to have that object in mind, then it would follow that I can not have Pluto, or China, or Socrates, in mind, given that I have never seen them. This would not be in line with Donnellan's intent, given that ordinary proper names are used referentially on his account. What is even more problematic are abstract entities such as numbers. What kind of experience is needed to have the number 3 in mind? Would seeing an instance of it, say three apples, and recognizing that they are three at a glance with no calculation be required? If so how could I have a larger number, say 17, in

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<sup>11</sup> On similar grounds Quine (1979) and Sosa (1975) concluded that the *de re/de dicto* distinction is a pragmatic distinction having no or little philosophical significance. I have argued in length against this conclusion in my (1997).

mind? I am not sure how we should go about answering these questions, but these are the kinds of questions that need to be addressed to give a useful epistemic account of the notion of having in mind.

Furthermore, the notion of *having an object in mind* is bound to be vague, if we are to give an account of it in terms of the notion of *experience*, for the latter is a relative notion that admits of degrees. There could be cases in which it will be indeterminate whether an object would be considered as an object of experience for an individual, and such indeterminacy would carry over to the notion of *having an object in mind* as well.

Presumably this is why neither Donnellan, nor anyone else in the literature has attempted to lay down the necessary and sufficient conditions for one to have an object in mind. Though I will not attempt to do so either, I believe that a further step can be taken in the right direction. What I will propose will not amount to strictly distinguishing criteria, but rather a *symptom* of what it takes to have an object in mind. In using a singular term in an assertion as a designator, we at times are curious as to what that term refers to, and yet at other times, we are not. When Holmes utters "Smith's murderer is insane", intending to talk about the unknown murderer, he is curious about the referent of "Smith's murderer", but when he asserts the same sentence in trial, intending to talk about Jones, whom he believes to be the murderer, he is not. In the former case, given his curiosity, we may say that Holmes has no murderer in mind, whereas in the latter case, given the absence of such a curiosity, we may say that he does. As a general rule of thumb, we may then say that if a speaker, in using a designator in an assertion (in its customary mode) is curious about what it is that he wishes to talk about by his use of that designator, then he has no object in mind which in effect makes the use of that designator in that assertion attributive<sub>2</sub>, if he is not, then he has an object in mind making the use referential<sub>2</sub>.

This, of course, only amounts to a symptom, not a strictly distinguishing criterion. It may well be the case that in certain contexts a speaker may use a definite description without having an object in mind, in some intuitive sense, yet not be curious as to what the description refers to. One may, for instance, assert that the shortest spy is a liar, without having any spy in mind, yet not be curious as to what the description "the shortest spy" refers to. Though, it could be argued that such a speaker, could bring himself to be curious if he sincerely reflects upon his epistemic link with the referent of his term. If one were to ask him, "do you

intend to talk about a particular spy whom you believe to be the shortest spy?" he would have to say "no" if he is sincere. So even if he is not curious about the referent of his term, he could be *brought to be curious*. Now of course it may be the case that we could be brought to be curious about the referent of any singular term, if we get into a skeptical attitude. Under normal conditions I am not curious as to what the term "the table in front of me" refers to, though if I can sincerely start doubting the existence of physical objects, I may perhaps bring myself to acquire such a curiosity. The situation about the shortest spy is different though; one could be brought to be curious about the referent of the term "the shortest spy" without the help of any Cartesian doubt.

I am not sure how satisfactory all of this is, though we could at least say that curiosity about the referent of a term used in an assertion, is a good symptom that the term is being used attributively<sub>2</sub>. Now let us look at the two problematic cases discussed earlier, namely the use of complex definite descriptions, and the use of proper names. Suppose that when Holmes utters "the gun that killed Smith's murderer is a Smith and Wesson, but we haven't found it yet", he uses the embedded description "Smith's murderer" to talk about Jones whom he wrongly believes to be the murderer of Smith. There is a good sense in which he is not curious about whom he is referring to by the use of this term, however, in using the larger description "the gun that killed Smith's murderer", he is. As I indicated earlier, on Kripke's account the use of the larger description turns out to be a complex case, making it referential<sub>1</sub>. But on the account now given it turns out to be attributive<sub>2</sub>. Now one may object to this by arguing that what Holmes is curious about is not the referent of the term "the gun that killed Smith's murderer", but rather, the referent of "the gun that killed Jones", and given that in the scenario we are considering Jones is not Smith's murderer, the two are not the same kind of curiosity. The objector may go on to argue that if we were to point out to Holmes that Jones is not Smith's murderer, he would withdraw his description and use the correct one in its place, and conclude, from this, that Holmes was not in fact curious about the referent of the term "the gun that killed Smith's murderer". We may perhaps meet this objection by claiming that curiosity is closed under known implication. If Holmes is curious about the referent of "the gun that killed Jones", and believes that Jones's is Smith's murderer, then by doing the simple inference, he would thereby be curious about the referent of "the

gun that killed Smith's murderer." After he is corrected, he would no longer be curious about the referent of the latter, of course, but that is only after he is corrected, not when he makes his assertion. As I said earlier the uses of complex definite descriptions as such seem to have a strong "attributive flavor", and now we have a way to give an account of this intuition. In contrast with Kripke's account, a complex definite description may be used attributively<sub>2</sub> even when an embedded singular term within that description is used referentially<sub>2</sub>.

In the light of this, we could say that our uses of ordinary proper names are referential<sub>2</sub>, for our uses of proper names such as "Pluto" or "Socrates", are usually not accompanied by a curiosity about what they refer to. However when the investigators, the media, and the concerned public were using the proper name "Unabomber", there was, no doubt, a curiosity as to whom the name refers to. This I take to be a good sign showing that in using an ordinary proper name, we have an object in mind that we wish to refer to, but in using an unusual name such as "Unabomber" we don't. Similarly there is a good contrast between the use of the name "Neptune" before and after the planet was discovered, given that we could hold, plausibly I think, that Leverrier was curious about the referent of the name, but a competent speaker these days, who knows a bit astronomy, is not.

Once the referential/attributive distinction is formulated in this light, then the question of whether there are genuine attributive<sub>2</sub> uses of proper names would seem to acquire great epistemic value. In the light of the above discussion, we may reformulate the question in this way: can a speaker use a proper name as a genuine name in an assertion, while being curious as to what that name refers to? If this is at all possible, it would follow that we may have *de re* curiosity about an object which we do not have in mind. As I have suggested Kripke is too generous and Donnellan is too restrictive with respect to their answers to this question. On Kripke's position any proper name whose reference is fixed by a definite description could be used by the reference fixer to express *de re* knowledge of the object, assuming that the object exists. That is the main premise of his argument for the contingent *a priori*. Donnellan, on the other hand, claims that such a name is simply not usable by the reference fixer and therefore no knowledge or any other *de re* propositional attitude may be expressed by the use of such a name. It seems to me that both positions are extreme. No doubt that common sense sides with

Donnellan when he says that merely having an identifying description of an object is not sufficient to acquire *de re* attitudes about that object. Even if we knew for certain that there will be a unique first baby born at the turn of the century, that alone would not be sufficient for us to acquire *de re* attitudes about such a person. Similarly the fact that we know that there must be a spy who is shorter than all other spies does not imply that we can have *de re* attitudes about the shortest spy. However, it also seems to me that Kripke is right when he claims that Leverrier may have had *de re* knowledge of Neptune before the planet was discovered. After all Leverrier not only had a description of the planet, but he had also made many careful observations of the orbit of Uranus which was perturbed by Neptune. Or taking Donnellan's own example of an attributive use, when the detective observes the dead body and exclaims "Smith's murderer is insane" he has more than a description at hand. Such cases are significantly different from the previous ones. In attempting to talk about the shortest spy all one may have in hand is a description and perhaps some background knowledge of spies, but in attempting to talk about Smith's murderer the detective not only has a description and some background knowledge of murderers, but also a dead body right before him. Epistemically speaking that should make a whole lot of difference. Similarly proper names such as "Jack the Ripper", "Unabomber", "Sniper" were, I believe, used attributively<sub>2</sub> to express *de re* attitudes toward certain unknown murderers. Again, if the hypothesis that our sun is a part of a binary star system is correct (given the excessive iridium found in the fossils), it may in fact be true that scientists have been expressing *de re* beliefs about this star when they used the name "Nemesis". Assuming that the objects in question do in fact exist, speakers who use such names have more than a simple description at hand: they have access to empirical facts that are caused by the object in question. That is why I hold that in such cases an attributive<sub>2</sub> use of a proper name could express *de re* attitudes of the speaker.

## VI. Concluding Remarks

I have argued that there is not *one* but *two* different distinctions inherent in Donnellan's discussion of the "referential" and "attributive" uses. One of them is captured by appealing to Kripke's distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference, which is purely pragmatic in its

nature; whereas the other one is captured by appealing to the notion of "having an object in mind" which is predominantly an epistemic one.

As I have suggested the two distinctions give opposite results in the cases of the uses of certain complex descriptions and proper names. A complex description one of whose embedded singular terms is used referentially<sub>1</sub> automatically turns out to be a referential<sub>1</sub> use, whereas the same complex description turns out to be an attributive<sub>2</sub> use if the speaker has no object in mind that he wishes to refer to in using that description.

On the other hand most ordinary uses of proper names turn out to be attributive<sub>1</sub> given that in using a proper name we normally intend to refer to the semantic referent of the name, whereas perhaps all uses of ordinary proper names turn out to be referential<sub>2</sub>, given that in using a proper name we normally wish to refer to an object we have in mind which in most cases is nothing but the semantic referent of the name. Now which of the two distinctions captures Donnellan's intent? Perhaps neither. That is for Donnellan to clarify, though as a point of speculation I would suggest that he went back and forth between the two distinctions, never clearly separating them.

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