

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY: RUSSELL ON NAMES

MICHAEL LISTON

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

ABSTRACT

Russell's views about the proper logical and epistemological treatment of names conspired to lead him to set aside considerations that support the claim that names are not definite descriptions. Though he appreciated those considerations, he famously argued that ordinary names are truncated definite descriptions. Nevertheless, his appreciation of the distinctive semantic behavior of ordinary names combined with his view that acquaintance comes in degrees led him to attempt to secure a semantically privileged status for ordinary names: only special kinds of descriptions can go proxy for ordinary names "used as names". The paper attempts to tell this story, filling in gaps where Russell doesn't provide sufficient elaboration, and to draw some general conclusions about acquaintance-based approaches to names and singular thoughts.

Key words: Russell, names, definite descriptions, denoting, acquaintance, singular/*de re* propositions

It is common to associate descriptivist accounts of names with Frege and Russell, an association encouraged by (Kripke 1980). In Russell's case the association is not straightforward.¹ On the contrary, Russell's views about names are quite subtle and complicated. Russell held three distinct theses about names: (N1) a genuine name contributes its semantic value directly (without the help of representational intermediaries) to propositions expressed by sentences in which the name occurs; (N2) ordinary names are not genuine names but definite descriptions; (N3) only rather special descriptions are eligible to go proxy for ordinary names. N1 and N2 will come as no surprise to anyone; N3 is almost ignored in the literature. Moreover, the connection between N1 and N2 isn't always well understood.

¹ In (1980, p. 27, fn. 4) Kripke is careful to distinguish Russell's actual views from what he reports as Russell's views: "In reporting Russell's views, we thus deviate from him in two respects. First, we stipulate that names shall be names as ordinarily conceived, not Russell's 'logically proper names'; second, we regard descriptions, and their abbreviations, as having sense." These deviations turn out to be important.

There's evidence that Russell appreciated the kinds of persuasive semantic considerations that contemporary direct reference theorists present in favor of the claim that names are not definite descriptions. Nevertheless he chose to ignore them and adopt N2. Why? It is common to attribute Russell's error to his *epistemology*: his impossibly restrictive semantic empiricism (whereby N1 amounts to the claim that we can only genuinely name objects with which we're acquainted in a very strict way) led to N2 (since ordinary names do not fulfill the requirements of strict acquaintance). This is only partly correct. It ignores Russell's logical and metaphysical reasons and the convoluted path that gradually led from N1 to N2 in his thinking. And it cannot be merely Russell's restrictive empiricism that leads to N2, because in his writings can be found a more liberal version of acquaintance that admits of gradations but still leads to N2 for most ordinary names and for the reasons Russell gives. However, his appreciation of the distinctive behavior of ordinary names combined with his view that acquaintance comes in degrees lead him to attempt to secure a semantically privileged status for ordinary names (N3): only descriptions that express relations to particulars with which we're acquainted can go proxy for ordinary names. This is the story I hope to tell.

The story is complicated by two factors that will arise during the course of the telling. First, we need to distinguish three Russellian tasks: (A) to account for our understanding of our own thoughts; (B) to account for their ability to have content that is independent of us; (C) to account for logical inference. Each task imposes constraints, which I'll refer to as the understanding constraint (UC), the truth-conditional constraint (TC), and the logical constraint (LC), respectively. The constraints are difficult to meet jointly and push Russell to adopt some strained, though understandable, positions concerning names. Russell's early rejection of idealism in the late 1890s seems to have depended on a naïve, though very natural, view that thought (and language as its transparent expression) mirrors a mind-independent world, a view that automatically meets both (UC) and (TC). We are directly acquainted with, and can name, objects and properties that are directly presented to us. When a child is presented with samples of a color, he names the property they share 'white'; when presented with a new pet cat, he names it 'Tabitha'. Once directly acquainted with Tabitha and *being white*, he can entertain (and in virtue of the naming ceremonies express) thoughts that are directly about them: he can directly apprehend the structured proposition $\langle\langle\text{Tabitha}\rangle, \text{being white}\rangle$, partly by being acquainted with the mind-independent objects that are its constituents.² Propositions are mind-independent, objective, structured entities, whose structured constituents are similarly objective. In opposition to idealism Russell construed mind-world connections in such a way that the mind places no constitutive constraints on the world of propositions; the mind simply apprehends the propositions whose constituents it is acquainted with, their properties of being true or false, and the logical relations be-

² A necessary condition for apprehending a proposition is the mind's being in direct contact with its constituents; clearly the condition is not sufficient because the constituents must be composed in the right way. Here I ignore Russell's struggles with logical form and our cognitive access to it.

tween them. On this naïve view: (TC) is fulfilled by the claim that propositions are mind-independent and are directly about their mind-independent constituents; (UC) is fulfilled by the claim that we understand propositions by the mind's being in direct contact with their constituents. Moreover, (LC) insofar as it concerns the logical behavior of names automatically falls out: since 'Tabitha' has a self-guaranteeing content, the child will endorse inferences to the effect that what's true of everything is true of Tabitha (UI) and what's true of Tabitha is true of something (EG).³

Second, Russell's thought between the late 1890s and the mid-1910s developed like the voyage of a ship buffeted in different directions by different storms. Although the naïve, natural framework of propositions and acquaintance remained a steady fixture, his early flight from idealism, his logicism, and his later empiricism caused him to emphasize different features of propositions and our acquaintance with them. As his philosophical attachments shifted, so did his attempts to find a kind of content that will do the triple-duty work needed to fulfill (UC), (TC), and (LC); the different constraints pushed in different, though complementary, ways toward an account of genuine names as guaranteeing the existence of their bearers. Since N1 imposed this self-guaranteeing requirement on genuine names and most ordinary names did not meet it, this led to N2 and, more generally, to an account whereby much of our thought about reality becomes increasingly indirect and "verbal": language, when its descriptive functions are properly understood, allows us to entertain thoughts that are indirectly about mind-independent objects about which we are not in a position to have direct, self-guaranteeing thoughts. Nevertheless, the realism embodied in (TC) influenced Russell to think that, while they are not self-guaranteeing, ordinary names enjoy a special relationship to the objects they name (N3).

I hope the story will show that Russell's account of names is more sensible than we might have thought and will have some morals for contemporary treatments of direct reference and singular thoughts. Friends of direct reference and singular propositions complain about Russell's impossibly restrictive notion of acquaintance yet uncritically accept a liberal view of acquaintance and Russell's general framework. Russell was strongly motivated to make acquaintance a pivotal notion in his philosophical thought, because it did a lot of heavy lifting in the performance of a variety of tasks. The real problem with Russell's framework, I will suggest, is not merely that his notion of acquaintance is implausibly strong. It is rather that it is not well-suited to bear the burdens Russell expects of it but, once we weaken the notion of acquaintance or reduce its burdens, we risk ending up with an empty constraint or an unmotivated framework. Once we weaken the notion to require "some degree of cognitive contact" between our thoughts and their objects or "an appropriate causal or historical connection" between

³ Throughout I use 'EI', 'UI', 'EG', and 'UG' to abbreviate 'existential instantiation', 'universal instantiation', 'existential generalization', and 'universal generalization' respectively.

names and their bearers, we run the risk of ending up with a notion that has lost its Russellian moorings because it is too weak to constrain solutions to any problem.

In §1 I will look at a strikingly Kripke-style argument Russell gives for the thesis that proper names *are not* definite descriptions. This leads to a puzzle: why then did Russell conclude N2 – that ordinary proper names are disguised definite descriptions? In §2 and §3 I review Russell's reasons for concluding N2 despite his recognition of considerations for the opposite conclusion. §2 will briefly review how Russell came to see the difficulty in finding a notion of content that would do the double-duty work of being directly understandable (and thus fulfill (UC)) and expressing mind-independent truth conditions (and thus fulfill (TC)). The discussion here covers the transition to the need for denoting concepts in (Russell 1903). In §3 I argue that a principal advantage of the transition from the 1903 theory of denoting concepts to the 1905 theory of definite descriptions was the ability of the latter to distinguish perspicuously the logical behavior of genuine names (as guaranteeing the existence of their bearers) from that of other apparently designating devices like definite descriptions; in other words, the transition was promoted by an interest in fulfilling the logical constraint, (LC). From there, I argue in §4, it is a short step to N2 – *via* the claim that, since we are not acquainted with the bearers of most ordinary names, they cannot be genuine names that guarantee the existence of their bearers. In §5 I distinguish two versions of Russell's principle of acquaintance – an austere empiricist version and a more liberal version that admits of gradations, is close to the kinds of cognitive contact presupposed by contemporary supporters of direct reference or singular thought, and still yields N2 concerning many ordinary names. In §6 I explore Russell's special treatment of ordinary names (N3). Finally, in §7 I draw some morals for our understanding of names and *de re* thoughts.

1. Ordinary names are not definite descriptions: a Russellian argument

One of Kripke's classic arguments against descriptivist accounts of names is the following (Kripke 1980, pp. 83-85). The meaning of the name 'Gödel' should not be given by a description like 'the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic'. If the meaning of 'Gödel' were 'the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic', then 'Gödel = x if and only if x = the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic' would be true as a matter of semantics. But we can imagine someone else, Schmidt, having discovered the incompleteness result and Gödel having taken credit for it, so that the description is not true of Gödel. Schmidt's having proven the result together with his distinctness from Gödel shows that descriptive fit is not sufficient for being the referent of the name. Similarly, Gödel's not having proven the result and his distinctness from Schmidt shows that descriptive fit is not necessary for being the referent of 'Gödel'. Rather than being true as a matter of semantics, 'Gödel = x if and only if x = the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic' would be false as a matter of fact. So 'Gödel' cannot mean 'the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic'.

Although Kripke does not belabor the point, his remarks (Kripke 1980, pp. 87-89) about confused attributions of the axioms of arithmetic to Peano rather than Dedekind and the implausibility of giving the meaning of ‘Gödel’ in terms of a description like ‘the individual commonly believed to be the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic’ suggest that he would be sympathetic toward the following discussion and consider it as being in the spirit of his counterexamples to descriptivist theories of names. Suppose there is a regularity whereby everyone refers to Gödel as ‘the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic’ so that

(REG) Gödel = x if and only if x is called ‘the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic’

Suppose some philosopher construes (REG) as a semantic convention that ‘Gödel’ and ‘the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic’ refer to the same individual. On such a construal

(CON) Gödel = the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic

would be true as a matter of semantic convention. (REG) + (CON) yield:

(1) x is called ‘the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic’ iff x = the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic

But we can imagine that Schmidt proved the theorem and Gödel took credit for it so that Gödel came to be the individual called ‘the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic.’ In the imagined circumstances Gödel is called ‘the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic’; so Gödel = the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic (by (1)). But that cannot be, since by hypothesis Schmidt proved the theorem – (1) does not express a necessary condition. On the other hand, we can imagine that Gödel proved the theorem but kept it a secret (and even that someone else took the credit) – (1) does not express a sufficient condition. This seems to indicate that no matter how uniform or universal the regularity (REG) is, it cannot be a semantic regularity that could generate a semantic convention like (CON).

Now consider the following argument that Russell provides in 1913:

It might be suggested that “Scott is the author of Waverly” asserts that “Scott” and “the author of Waverly” are two names for the same object. But a little reflection will show that this would be a mistake. For if that were the meaning of “Scott is the author of Waverly”, what would be required for its truth would be that Scott should have been *called* the author of Waverly: if he had been so called, the proposition would be true, even if someone else had written Waverly; while if no one had called him so, the proposition would be false, even if he had written Waverly. But in fact he was the author of Waverly at a time when no one called him so, and he would not have been the author of Waverly if everyone had called him so but someone else had written Waverly. Thus the proposition “Scott is the author of Waverly” is not a proposition about names, like “Napoleon is

Bonaparte”; and this illustrates the sense in which “the author of Waverly” differs from a true proper name.

Thus all phrases (other than propositions) containing the word *the* (in the singular) are incomplete symbols: they have a meaning in use, but not in isolation. For “the author of Waverly” cannot mean the same as “Scott”, or “Scott is the author of Waverly” would mean the same as “Scott is Scott”, which it plainly does not; nor can “the author of Waverly” mean anything other than “Scott”, or “Scott is the author of Waverly” would be false. Hence “the author of Waverly” means nothing. (Whitehead & Russell 1913, p. 67)

If we ignore use-mention infelicities and the condensed presentation, this seems to run exactly parallel to the Kripke-style argument just given. If ‘Scott’ and ‘the author of Waverly’ are understood to be two names of the same object, then

(1’) Scott is called ‘the author of Waverly’ iff Scott is the author of Waverly

will be true as a matter of semantics. But we can imagine someone else, MacIver, having written Waverly and Scott having taken credit for it, so that Scott, though he didn’t author Waverly, was called by everyone ‘the author of Waverly’. In the imagined circumstances MacIver authored Waverly even though Scott is called ‘the author of Waverly’; so ‘Scott is the author of Waverly’ is not entailed by ‘Scott is called ‘the author of Waverly’’. Thus (1’) does not express a necessary condition. Conversely, we can imagine Scott having authored Waverly yet not having been called ‘the author of Waverly’ by anyone, because he kept Waverly hidden (as he in fact did for some time as Russell points out); so ‘Scott is the author of Waverly’ does not entail ‘Scott is called ‘the author of Waverly’’. Thus (1’) does not express a sufficient condition. Rather than being true as a matter of semantics, (1’) would be false as a matter of fact. So, ‘Scott’ cannot mean anything like ‘the individual called ‘the author of Waverly’’.⁴

Having shown that no definite description has the same semantic properties as a name, Russell draws on N1 (the meaning of a name is its bearer) and goes on to argue that definite descriptions “mean nothing” or have no meaning “in isolation”. If a definite description (‘the author of Waverly’) contributes the unique object that satisfies it (Scott) to the proposition expressed by a sentence in which the description occurs (‘Scott is the author of Waverly’), then the sentence will express the same proposition as that expressed by ‘Scott is Scott’, “which it plainly does not”. If, on the other hand, it contributes any other object *x* to the proposition expressed by ‘Scott is the author of Waverly’, then the (true) sentence will express the falsehood that *x* (\neq Scott) is the author of

⁴ Moreover, the same argument will go through against any metalinguistic account of names (e.g., Bach 1987) whereby ‘Scott’ means ‘the bearer of ‘Scott’’. (It seems very similar to Frege’s cryptic argument against metalinguistic solutions to Frege puzzles in (Frege 1892).) We can imagine Scott having written Waverly yet not having been called ‘Scott’ – had he been kidnapped before his baptism and given another name by his kidnappers. And we can imagine McIver having written Waverly and been given Scott’s name (perhaps as the result of an arbitrary edict of George III made during one of his spells of insanity). So it cannot be the case as a matter of semantics that Scott wrote Waverly if and only if the bearer of ‘Scott’ wrote Waverly.

Waverly. So a definite description does not contribute any object to a proposition; i.e., it has no meaning in isolation.⁵

The issue between classical and direct theories of names concerns N2: should ordinary names properly count as genuine names? Contemporary direct reference theorists answer “yes, for the most part”; classical theorists (including Russell) answer “no”. But the argument Russell gives here indicates that he appreciated the general semantic considerations that contemporary philosophers offer in support of the thesis that ordinary English names do not have their meaning in virtue of descriptive fit. For any given proper name, there seems to be no choice of description that will be undeniably semantically equivalent to it. Underlying this semantic point is a metaphysical stance we would expect of anyone who takes (TC) seriously – that mind-independent objects have a life that is independent of how we think and talk about them. Calling someone ‘Scott’ or ‘the author of *Waverly*’ doesn’t make him be what he is or do what he does. It is interesting to note that, even when the dominant themes are epistemology and acquaintance, and even when Russell explicitly claims that an ordinary name ‘*NN*’ is a truncated description of form ‘the individual called ‘*NN*’’, he offers a similar, though less explicit argument: “A man’s name is what he is called, but however much Scott had been called the author of *Waverly*, that would not have made him be the author; it was necessary for him actually to write *Waverly*, which was a fact having nothing to do with names” (Russell 1917, p. 226). And again in (Russell 1918, pp. 111-116) we find the same argument together with the claim “You cannot settle by any choice of nomenclature whether [Scott] is or is not to be the author of *Waverly*, because in actual fact he chose to write it and you cannot help yourself” (p. 113).

But if Russell appreciated the semantic considerations that virtually demand that ordinary names are *not* definite descriptions, why then did he conclude N2 – that ordinary names *are* disguised definite descriptions?⁶ The short answer is that Russell had other concerns – developing an account of meaning that would also satisfy (UC) and (LC) – that overrode the conclusion (TC) seemed to demand. In §§2-3 I sketch the longer answer.

⁵ There are descriptions that can be substituted for names and that aren’t susceptible to these kinds of counter-examples: haecceitic or rigidified descriptions that use rather than mention the name such as ‘the individual who is Scott’. There are no imaginable circumstances in which ‘Scott is the individual who is Scott’ breaks down. I believe Russell would have agreed with this. First, such a sentence, even if given a theory of descriptions analysis [as $(\exists!x)x = s$] would still express a proposition in which Scott himself occurs as a constituent. Second, Russell held that ‘Napoleon is Bonaparte’ and ‘Scott = Sir Walter’ (very similar to ‘the individual who is Scott = the individual who is Sir Walter’) express trivial logical truths if the names are “used as names”.

⁶ It is odd that this argument is rarely noticed. The only philosopher to make much of it whom I’m aware of is Pears in his introduction to (Russell 1918, pp. 21-28). Pears correctly argues that Russell gets himself into the odd position of appreciating yet ignoring the semantic considerations against treating ordinary names as descriptions “by asking too much of logically proper names”. Pears puts the blame on Russell’s requiring that logically proper names both attach directly to their bearers and be unanalyzable (apply only to simple particulars). I think this is wrong – the unanalyzability condition is merely a feature of the particular program Russell was pursuing in Logical Atomism rather than a feature of Russell’s general semantic framework. The correct diagnosis of why Russell got himself in the odd position is to be given (along the lines sketched in this paper) in terms of features of his general framework. Moreover, as I argue below, Russell’s position is not as odd as it might seem. (See *infra* footnote 27.)

2. From direct reference to indirect denotation

On Russell's initial naive view of (UC), we understand propositions by apprehending them, and a necessary condition for apprehending them is the mind's being in direct contact with their constituents. Thus the mind-independent proposition expressed by 'Russell met Ottoline' can be understood as $\langle\langle$ Russell, Ottoline $\rangle, met\rangle$, whose constituents are Russell, Ottoline, and the relation x met y . The naïve view claims that understanding of this proposition requires acquaintance with those constituents. As Russell famously claims, "Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted" (Russell 1917, p. 219). (Henceforth, I'll refer to this claim as 'RP', Russell's principle.) RP is a fairly commonplace presupposition that the content of its own thoughts are typically in some sense transparent to the mind that has them.⁷ It is also a fairly natural presupposition – as Russell declares, "The chief reason for supposing [it] true is that it seems scarcely possible to believe that we can make a judgement or entertain a supposition without knowing what it is we are judging or supposing about" (Russell 1917, p. 219).

Commonplace and natural though it may be, it quickly leads to problems. It is not at all clear how to characterize the notions of content and transparency so that we obtain a satisfactory formulation of RP.⁸ The fundamental problem is that we seem to be able to understand thoughts whose contents are in some sense *about* items with which we are not in any sense acquainted. In the terminology introduced earlier, the kind of truth conditional content that (TC) requires seems to outstrip the kind of understandable content that (UC) requires.⁹ Assuming (with Locke and Russell) that we must be acquainted with the constituents of propositions we understand, and assuming that the propositions we understand are sometimes about objects with which we are not acquainted, there needs to be way of getting from direct objects of thought to those latter objects.

Russell was clearly aware of the problem in his 1903 *Principles of Mathematics*. In order to show that the reduction of mathematics to logic undermines the idealist view that mathematics is conditioned by human sensibility, Russell needed to show that logic is unconditioned in the sense of being absolutely general. Taking language as his guide, Russell believed this required him to show the absolute generality of concepts expressed

⁷ Similarly, Locke's claim that "Words in their primary or immediate signification, stand for the Ideas in the mind of him that has them" (Locke 1975, III. ii. 2) and his semantic representationalism presuppose that the primary bearers of meaning and content are our ideas, objects to which we have immediate and transparent access.

⁸ Much of (Evans 1982) is an attempt to do just that.

⁹ We apprehend propositions that seem to be about objects of infinite complexity (infinite classes, for example), spatiotemporally remote objects, and about material objects as well as the unobservable posits of theoretical science, yet at different stages of his career Russell denied that we are acquainted with any of these objects. Similarly, for Locke some of our ideas represent the objects which are their causes, but we do not have immediate and transparent access to those objects.

by denoting phrases such as ‘a term’ that he took to be constituents of propositions.¹⁰ In turn this led to his investigation of denoting concepts like *all F*, *every F*, *any F*, *an F*, *some F*, *the F*. For Russell, just as Ottoline herself is a constituent of the proposition expressed by ‘Russell met Ottoline’, so the concept *a man* is a constituent of the proposition expressed by ‘Russell met a man’. However, if *a man* is an indefinitely complex concept and *a term* is an infinitely complex concept (analyzable into an infinite number of parts), then the mind, in order to apprehend such propositions, would have to be capable of performing operations of possibly infinite complexity, and this Russell rejects. Instead, he argues, *a term* and *a man* are denoting concepts that have (at most) finite complexity (and thus can be grasped by human minds); they are constituents of propositions; but they logically denote objects that are not constituents of those propositions. Thus, whereas the proposition expressed by ‘Russell met Ottoline’ both contains and is directly about Ottoline (with whom Ottoline’s friends are acquainted), the proposition expressed by ‘Russell met a man’ contains the denoting concept *a man* (with which we’re acquainted), but it is not about that concept, but about what Russell calls a “variable disjunction” (a term-like object: [a_1 is human \vee a_2 is human \vee ...] for each term a_i) which the concept logically denotes. “[T]he inmost secret of our power to deal with infinity”, Russell claims, lies in the fact that “infinite collections, owing to the notion of denoting, can be manipulated without introducing any concepts of infinite complexity” (Russell, 1903, §72).

Similarly, though the proposition expressed by ‘Russell met Ottoline’ has Russell and Ottoline as constituents and is directly about Russell and Ottoline, with whom Russell and his friends were acquainted, the proposition expressed by the grammatically similar and extensionally equivalent sentence ‘Russell met the lady of Garsington Manor’ has as constituents Russell and the denoting concept *the lady of Garsington Manor*, with each of which we are acquainted. Because *the lady of Garsington Manor* logically denotes Ottoline, the proposition is indirectly about her by its containing the denoting concept. Thus the proposition that is understood (in accordance with (UC) in its RP form) is something like $\langle\langle$ Russell, *the lady of Garsington Manor* $\rangle\rangle$, *met* \rangle , while the proposition that is true (in accordance with (TC)) is $\langle\langle$ Russell, Ottoline $\rangle\rangle$, *met* \rangle – one may understand the one without understanding the other depending on what one’s acquaintances are – but they are extensionally equivalent because of the denoting relation.¹¹

As Hylton (1990) points out, neither epistemology (understanding) nor language is prominent or explicit in the 1903 *Principles*. They hover in the background. But they

¹⁰ Russell’s thinking about the problem (where the account of *any term* is intended to explain the complete generality of the mathematical variable) is explained in (Hylton 1990, ch. 5), to which I am indebted for several insights regarding the historical development of Russell’s views.

¹¹ Only if I’m acquainted with Ottoline (and Russell and *met*) can I apprehend $\langle\langle$ Russell, Ottoline $\rangle\rangle$, *met* \rangle , but if I’m unacquainted with her, I can still apprehend propositions like $\langle\langle$ Russell, *the lady of Garsington Manor* $\rangle\rangle$, *met* \rangle that are indirectly about her.

cast a long shadow. While language hovers in the background as the medium that allows Russell to express propositions, it provides an especially transparent guide to their structure and constituents, a guide that enables Russell to draw some extremely fine-grained distinctions between propositions and between denoting concepts.¹² Understanding hovers in the background, but what Russell says about it makes it clear he's wed to RP and a perceptual model of acquaintance. "The discussion of indefinables ... is the endeavor to see clearly ... the entities concerned, in order that the mind may have that kind of acquaintance with them which it has with redness or the taste of a pineapple" (Russell 1903, Preface, xv), and "the mind ... is as purely receptive in inference as common sense supposes it to be in perception of sensible objects" (Russell 1903, §37). As we have just seen, these hovering presuppositions make themselves felt. The 1903 theory of denoting concepts is a response to the problem of reconciling propositions that have (TC)-content independent of our thinking with the view that we must be acquainted with the (UC)-contents of our thoughts, given the epistemological implausibility of the idea that we are acquainted with objects of infinite complexity.

In contrast, what *was* at the forefront of Russell's concerns in (Russell 1903) – the characterization of propositional content in accordance with (LC) that would underwrite the principles of logical inference needed to carry out his logicist program – is not adequately handled by his theory of denoting concepts. That theory made the relation of denotation between a denoting concept and its denotation a primitive *logical* relation. Despite their structural similarity, it is a logically primitive matter that some denoting concepts like *the king of France in 1905* determine no denotation while others like *the lady of Garsington Manor* denote something (Ottoline). But then it is also a logically primitive matter that, on the one hand, 'The king of France in 1905 is aristocratic' is neither implied by 'All kings are aristocratic' nor implies 'Some king is aristocratic', while, on the other hand, 'The lady of Garsington Manor is aristocratic' is both implied by 'All ladies are aristocratic' and implies 'Some lady is aristocratic'.¹³ The terms *all F*, *some F*, *the F* are structurally related in a way that underwrites inferential connections. But the theory of denoting concepts offered in the *Principles* fails to capture

¹² Russell distinguishes between the mutually implying propositions expressed by 'Socrates is human', 'Socrates has humanity', and 'Socrates is a human' (a predication of one term to another, a relation between two terms, and a relation between a term and an object denoted by a denoting concept (Russell 1903, §57), and he distinguishes various denoting concepts (*all F*, *every F*, *any F*) largely on the basis of grammatical differences.

¹³ Of course if "empty" denoting concepts (like *the present king of France*) denote a non-existent object that has Meinongian being, then they will automatically accept UI and EG just as *the lady of Garsington Manor* does. However, I assume here that Russell accepted that there are empty denoting concepts since (a) he explicitly states that there are such concepts (Russell 1903, §73) and (b) they are required to make sense of his demands that mathematics needs existence proofs of entities like $\sqrt{2}$ (1903, §§267-268) (whose being would be guaranteed by their definition if all denoting concepts denoted). Hylton (1990, chaps. 5, 6) claims that Russell is unclear about this, citing (Russell 1903, §427) as counterevidence, and argues that Russell worked it out only after reading Meinong. I think (Landini 1998, p. 58) is correct in claiming that §427 does not reflect any tension with the explicit acknowledgement of denotationless denoting concepts in §73, since it concerns logically proper names, not denoting concepts, and what Russell came to recognize is that some symbols that looked like proper names (e.g., 'Apollo') behave more like (empty) denoting concepts and ultimately definite descriptions.

these structural relationships: under the denoting concept analysis, nothing about the propositions expressed by the sentences ‘The king of France in 1905 is aristocratic’ and ‘The lady of Garsington Manor is aristocratic’ reveals them. This is but an instance of a more general systematic weakness of the theory of denoting concepts – the lack of a quantificational treatment of generality.¹⁴

3. *From denotation to the theory of descriptions*

By his 1905 “On Denoting” Russell had come to change his mind about denoting concepts. The essay begins by emphasizing the importance of denoting, not only in logic and mathematics, but also in theory of knowledge (Russell 1905, p. 479). In discussions of Russell’s views on names and descriptions it is easy to focus on theory of knowledge and forget about Russell’s primary interests at this stage of his career – the development of a framework for his logicism (LC).¹⁵ By 1905 his own reflections had led him to conclude that there cannot be propositions about denoting concepts. The notorious Gray’s Elegy argument explains why.¹⁶ Moreover, the quantificational theory of generality and of denoting phrases provided in “On Denoting” to replace the 1903 theory of denoting concepts makes significant progress on the problem of characterizing principles of logical inference for definite descriptions. In particular, the new theory of descriptions provides the missing connection between denoting phrases and their denotata that underwrites the inferential principles governing these phrases in a uniform, systematic way. It is no longer a logically primitive matter that some denoting phrases like ‘the king of France in 1905’ determine no denotation while others like ‘the lady of Garsington Manor’ denote something. No such phrase has any meaning in isolation. We can loosely say ‘ x is the denotation of ‘*the F*’ if there happens to be exactly one entity x such that Fx , but it is in general no longer a merely logical matter whether such a condition is satisfied.¹⁷ It is a contingent matter whether the world provides such an

¹⁴ Russell in §§59 – 60 provides explications of *all F*, *every F*, *any F*, *an F*, and *some F* and, on their basis, in §61 tells us what kind of object the corresponding denoting concepts denote. The remainder of §61 provides 36 class-theoretic principles that govern the logical behavior of these terms, but those principles apply directly to the strange conjunctive and disjunctive properties of the entities that the concepts denote. They do not apply to the denoting concepts themselves, and it is no easy matter to determine how the inferential principles can be generated from Russell’s explicative remarks about denoting concepts. See (Hylton 1990, ch. 5 and 6) for discussion. (Dau 1986) attempts to defend Russell’s efforts to generate logical and class-theoretic principles from his theory of denoting concepts, but the defense seems strained.

¹⁵ We’ll return to (UC) theory of knowledge questions in §5. For now I merely emphasize that Russell devoted over a decade of his career to (LC)-related endeavors needed to carry out his logicist program.

¹⁶ Roughly: for there to be a proposition, P , about a denoting concept, C , either C would have to be a constituent of P or P would have to contain another denoting concept, C^* , that denoted C . If the former, then P would be about the denotation of C , not about C itself; if the latter, then P would presuppose a further proposition, P^* (C^* denotes C), and we would be in the same predicament with respect to P^* and C^* as we were in with respect to P and C – we would be launched into a problematic regress.

¹⁷ Henceforth, when I talk about a definite description “denoting” an object, I intend it to be read not in the designating sense, but in this loose Russellian sense.

object. Similarly, it is no longer a logically primitive matter that, on the one hand, ‘The king of France in 1905 is aristocratic’ is neither implied by ‘All kings are aristocratic’ nor implies ‘Some king is aristocratic’, while, on the other hand, ‘The lady of Garsington Manor is aristocratic’ is both implied by ‘All ladies are aristocratic’ and implies ‘Some lady is aristocratic’. Unlike the 1903 theory, the 1905 theory of descriptions reveals the structural relationships between the various denoting phrases ‘all F ’, ‘some F ’, and ‘the F ’ so that logically there is no difference between ‘The king of France in 1905’ and ‘the lady of Garsington Manor’. By explicit rendering of descriptions’ existential presuppositions, the quantificational paraphrase the 1905 theory provides for *any* sentence of form $G(\text{the } F)$ renders transparent both the inferential road from it to the sentence of form $G(\text{some } F)$ and the inferential road to it from the sentence of form $G(\text{all } F)$.¹⁸ Russell doesn’t explicitly announce this advantage of his 1905 theory of descriptions over his 1903 theory of denoting concepts. However, he clearly recognized the logical advances his new theory provided. His dismissal of Frege’s and Meinong’s approaches to empty definite descriptions occurs in the context of discussing conditionals with embedded descriptions (‘If u is a unit class, then the u is a u ’ and ‘If Ferdinand is not drowned, then Ferdinand is my only son’). He rejects Frege’s approach (assign them denotations conventionally) because of its artificiality and its failure to give “an exact analysis of the matter” – which I construe to be a failure to render transparent the kind of inferential connections in question. He rejects Meinong’s approach (assign them objects that do not obey the law of non-contradiction) because of the need to avoid contradiction whenever possible. The quantificational theory of denoting phrases Russell proposes in “On Denoting” handles at one fell swoop several problems of a logical nature: it enables him to do the work that denoting concepts had performed, to resolve Frege puzzles involving what proposition is the object of George IV’s question when he wondered whether the author of Waverly was present, and to avoid contradictory objects.

Russell’s view of names and definite descriptions is best seen as developing in this background context of developing principles of logical inference governing them in accordance with (LC) – beginning in (Russell 1903), improved in (Russell 1905), and delivered in the 1910 *Principia* and in improved form in (Whitehead & Russell 1913). The introduction to the 1910 *Principia* tells us that one of three primary aims of Part I is at “effecting the greatest possible analysis of the ideas with which it deals and of the processes by which it conducts demonstrations” (Whitehead & Russell 1913, p. 1). It goes on to mention *14 and *30 dealing with descriptions and descriptive functions respectively as examples of analyses that are complicated in order to achieve correctness. They are complicated because of the need to distinguish the logical behavior of genuine names (individual constants and free variables) from that of definite descriptions and to impose restrictions on the logical behavior of the latter.

This is also the context for the strikingly Kripke-like 1913 argument discussed above in §1. The argument is set out in the introduction to *Principia* and is intended to distin-

¹⁸ See also Hylton 1990, pp. 256-264.

guish the logical behaviors of individual constants and variables from definite descriptions and thereby motivate the contextual definitions later provided in *14. In particular the definitions in *14 governing the use of definite descriptions impose restrictions: principles governing free variables (the theses introduced in *9-*13 governing UI, UG, EG, identity, and quantifier scope) must be restricted in definite description contexts.¹⁹ UI to, and EG from, a sentence in which a definite is instantiated requires an explicit unique-existential hypothesis; the principle of self-identity (with a definite flanking the identity sign) requires the same restriction; and (because definites have quantificational structure when eliminated) description scope must be explicit for proper disambiguation. Without such restrictions – i.e. if existence or uniqueness fails – reasoning will not be valid. A well worn example due to De Morgan shows how inferential use of ‘the result of dividing n by 0’ if unrestricted (by an existence hypothesis) leads to problems. Let $x = 1$. Then $x^2 = x$. Then $x^2 - 1 = x - 1$. So, by factoring and dividing both sides by $x - 1$, $x + 1 = 1$; i.e., $2 = 1$.²⁰ The logical point is that, whereas names accept UI, EG, and substitution without restrictions and do not suffer scope ambiguities, definite descriptions lack all these properties. Genuine names and definite descriptions fall into different logical categories. Russell never makes any of this very explicit, but clearly it’s behind the thinking that leads from (Russell 1903) to (Russell 1905) and eventually to *Principia*.

4. Ordinary names are definite descriptions: another Russellian argument

Let us briefly take stock. In §1 I argued that Russell appreciated many of the semantical considerations that contemporary philosophers offer in support of the thesis that ordinary names are not definite descriptions. In §§2 and 3 I sketched Russell’s journey from a naive view of referring expressions to his theory of descriptions. On the naïve view

¹⁹ A couple of points need noting. First, since *Principia* deals with propositions of logic, no constants appear, but they will behave in non-logical propositions as the free variables of *Principia* behave. Second, Russell does not provide a fully satisfactory treatment of UG. In the 1910 *Principia* UG is introduced as primitive proposition *9.13, symbolized as ‘ $\vdash : [\Phi y] . \supset . (x) . \Phi x$ ’, the brackets around the hypothesis indicating that the proposition is to be read as “If Φy is true however y may be chosen, then $(x) . \Phi x$ is true”. On the one hand, he understands that UG requires care: he distinguishes *9.13 from what the proposition would read without the brackets (‘However y may be chosen Φy implies $(x) . \Phi x$ ’), a proposition he says correctly “is generally false”; and he re-expresses *9.13 as an inference principle (rather than a primitive proposition): “In any assertion containing a real variable (a free variable – ML), this real variable may be turned into an apparent variable of which all possible values are asserted to satisfy the function in question (it may be bound by a universal quantifier – ML)”. On the other hand, he doesn’t explicitly provide the needed restrictions that will ensure that UG operates soundly: the distinction between real and apparent variables is dropped in the move from the 1910 to the 1913 *Principia* – to convert from real to apparent variables simply take the universal closures of all assertions with real variables – yet no mention is made of the need to restrict the UG variable.

²⁰ Similar examples are easily constructed if we ignore the fact that ‘the square root of n ’ does not have a unique value. Compare Russell’s remarks on mathematical definition and ‘ $m - n$ ’ understood as ‘the number that, when added to n , yields m ’ paraphrased in terms of the theory of descriptions (Russell 1905, p. 492).

genuinely referring expressions contribute their semantic values directly to propositions expressed by sentences in which they occur, we must be directly acquainted with those semantic values when we grasp propositions that contain them, and the expressions guarantee their semantic values (so UI and EG are unproblematic). Russell, we have seen, was gradually forced to the view that definite descriptions possess none of these features and thus are not genuine referring expressions: they do not contribute any semantic value of their own to propositions expressed by sentences in which they occur, we don't need to be acquainted with what they may happen to denote to grasp propositions expressed by sentences in which they occur, and they do not guarantee their denotations. The naïve view, we saw, provides an apparently satisfying comprehensive means of meeting the dictates of (TC), (UC), and (LC). Russell came to see that his 1905 theory provided a better means of meeting all three constraints for definite descriptions. The mind-independent objects that wrongly appear to be the semantic values of definite descriptions exist or don't exist independently of us (in accordance with (TC)); even though we may not be acquainted with such objects, we can nevertheless apprehend propositions that are indirectly about them because sentences in which definite descriptions occur are understood to express propositions with existentially general quantificational structure in which universals with which we're acquainted replace, as constituents, those particular objects that falsely appear to be the semantic values of the descriptions (in accordance with (UC) and (RP)); finally the theory reveals the structural relationships between definite descriptions and other kinds of denoting phrases that underwrite the inferential behavior of definite descriptions (in accordance with (LC)). But then it is a short step – and one that depends on the very same kinds of considerations – to the view that ordinary names are more similar to definite descriptions than they are to genuine referring expressions; more strongly, it is a short step to N2: that ordinary names are disguised definite descriptions.

We have seen that Russell's 1905 theory provides a satisfactory treatment of the logical behavior of definite descriptions and resolves at one swoop a number of their logically puzzling features. It is well known that each of these puzzles can be reformulated for contexts in which only ordinary names occur. Take the following sentences:

- (1) Nina Simone = Nina Simone
- (2) Nina Simone = Eunice Wayman
- (3) Emmet believes (1)
- (4) Emmet believes (2)
- (5) Romulus did not exist

Although (1) and (2) express the same proposition if the names are directly referential, (3) is true, while (4) is likely to be false.²¹ But if (3) and (4) express a relation between Emmet and a proposition (as Russell in the early stages of his thinking held), yet have different truth values, then (1) and (2) cannot express the same proposition. Moreover, (5) seems both meaningful and – we have good reason to think – true. But its truth entails that it cannot express a singular proposition one of whose constituents is Romulus, while its meaningfulness entails that it expresses some proposition. By treating these (and all ordinary) names as Russellian definite descriptions (say ‘the individual named ‘Nina’, etc.), we resolve (again in one swoop) each of the puzzles. (1) and (2) then express different propositions (‘The individual named ‘Nina’ is the individual named ‘Nina’, ‘The individual named ‘Nina’ is the individual named ‘Eunice’). It is not surprising that Emmet should believe the former and fail to believe the latter. Furthermore, (5) expresses the meaningful and true proposition that there was no individual named ‘Romulus’.

In the case of empty names, it is indisputable that Russell’s thinking followed the path just taken. Virtually every occasion on which he claims that ordinary names should be properly treated as disguised descriptions is accompanied with remarks concerning the difficulties otherwise presented by empty names or names with doubtful reference: ‘Apollo’ (Russell 1905, p. 491 and Whitehead & Russell 1913, p. 31), ‘Romulus’ (Russell 1918, p. 110), ‘Homer’ (Russell 1918, p. 122 and 1919, pp. 178-79). Though Russell doesn’t frequently discuss the Frege puzzle cases in pure naming contexts, on the few occasions when he does, it is clear that he thinks a descriptivist treatment will handle them in exactly the same way that his theory of descriptions handles them in (1905). If one asserts ‘Scott is Sir Walter’ informatively, he claims, “the way one would mean it would be that one was using the names as descriptions. One would mean that the person called ‘Scott’ is the person called ‘Sir Walter’” (Russell 1918, p. 114).

The logical problem of the proper treatment of ordinary names is closely related to the problem with denoting concepts discussed above: some denoting concepts denote and others do not denote; some denoting concept inferences are correct while others, structurally identical, are not; – these are logically primitive matters. Similarly, if ordinary names are genuine names, it is simply a logically primitive matter that some of them like ‘Bismarck’ denote and accept UI and EG unrestrictedly, whereas others like ‘Apollo’ do not denote and will not accept UI and EG – because they will lack well-defined values for such contexts - without appropriate restrictions.²² Though they have

²¹ Unless Emmet has done some research on Nina, he may well believe the negation of (2).

²² Any sentence of form ‘*F*(*Apollo*)’ will fail to express a proposition and will thus be meaningless. Similarly, ambiguous names will lack well-defined values: any sentence of form ‘*F*(*Saint Patrick*)’ will also be meaningless unless treated in the way Russell suggests for ‘*F*(*the inhabitant of London*)’. [In 1942 the Celtic scholar, T. F. O’Rahilly, presented his “Two St. Patricks theory” and Schrödinger presented a lecture questioning the existence of a First Cause to the newly formed Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, prompting the Irish writer Brian O’Nolan (under his pseudonym “Myles na gCopaleen”) to quip in the *Irish Times* (Nov. 1942): “The first fruit of the Institute has been an effort to show that there are two Saint Patricks and no God”.]

the same simple syntactic structure, they must be assigned to different logical categories (individual constant and neutral constant). Just as the theory of descriptions solves these logical problems with denoting concepts, so too does it solve the similar logical problems with names. If we treat all ordinary names as truncated descriptions, there is no logical difference between ‘the individual called ‘Bismarck’ and ‘the individual called ‘Apollo’’. Genuine names are unlike definite descriptions in guaranteeing their semantic values and obeying unrestricted UI and EG, whereas ordinary names are like definite descriptions in frequently lacking a denotation and thereby requiring restrictions on UI and EG. Thus we can see why, for Russell, (LC) considerations weighed in favor of treating ordinary names as disguised definite descriptions. Moreover, even though (as we argued in §1) he was aware of the (TC) considerations that weighed in favor of treating them as directly referential devices, he could see how (TC) constraints could be alternatively handled by treating ordinary names as truncated descriptions: the mind-independent objects that wrongly appear to be the semantic values of ordinary names exist (or don’t exist) independently of us insofar as they happen to satisfy (or not satisfy) uniquely the definite descriptions that we associate with the name; the world and the behavior of objects take care of that independently of what we may think or say. Were other things equal, Russell might have been torn between the (TC) considerations favoring treating ordinary names as directly referential devices and the (TC) and (LC) considerations favoring treating them as descriptive devices. Though not forced upon him – there is more than one theoretical option open – Russell allowed the latter considerations to trump the former and concluded N2 – ordinary names are not genuine names but disguised definite descriptions.²³

Of course Russell was not very torn, precisely because the need to fulfill (UC) made other things not equal. Indeed (UC) in its RP form is almost tailor-made to support Russell’s views about the logical behavior of genuine names contrasted with that of definite descriptions (and ordinary names). Suppose I am directly acquainted with the bearer of the name ‘Mary Robinson’ (in the sense that I have met her, she was one of my professors, I can call her to mind, etc.). Then Robinson can occur as a constituent of propositions I understand and express by sentences of form ‘*F(Robinson)*’. I can think thoughts that are directly about Robinson (in the sense that they contain her) and are expressible using ‘Robinson’ as a genuine name. Part of what it is for ‘Robinson’ to be a genuine name (as used by me) is that the existence of its bearer is guaranteed because I am directly acquainted with the bearer. Because the name guarantees its semantic value, it will be a logically proper name (obeying unrestricted UI and EG, etc.) for me and can be assigned by me to the logical category of individual constant. But most ordinary

²³ Other options include (some combination of) replacing classical with free logic, treating empty and ambiguous names differently (perhaps as descriptive names) than directly referential names. It seems to me, however, that we cannot criticize Russell for having an implausible theory of names unless we situate the criticism in this larger context. Contemporary direct reference theorists have a plausible theory only to the extent that they ignore, or find alternative treatments of, the problem of dealing with empty and ambiguous names, Frege puzzles, etc. There are, of course, many such alternatives, but few have the unified elegance of Russell’s.

names I use lack this character. I am not directly acquainted, for example, with Douglas Hyde and know him only by means of descriptions such as ‘the man called ‘Douglas Hyde’ or ‘the first president of Ireland’. He does not occur as a constituent of propositions I understand and express by sentences of form ‘ $F(\text{Hyde})$ ’. I cannot think thoughts that are directly about him and are expressible using ‘Hyde’ as a genuine name. Though I may know he exists, his existence is not guaranteed by my being directly acquainted with him. Because the name does not guarantee its semantic value, its logical behavior is better seen as that of a truncated definite description (e.g., ‘the first president of Ireland’) rather than that of a genuine name.

5. Russell’s Principle of Acquaintance

The move to the quantificational treatment of denoting phrases in (Russell 1905) is accompanied by several important related ideas.²⁴ First, Russell explicitly distinguishes between things with which we are acquainted and things which we know only by description. Second, Russell’s thinking shifts between 1903 and 1905 from an attitude of “language is transparent” to one of “surface structure is not a good guide to deep structure”. Third, the replacement of the 1903 by the 1905 theory reflects a shift of emphasis from non-linguistic propositions to propositions that are linguistically encoded. The relation between the three is this: we can have an object-dependent thought about (and assign a genuine name to) an object (Robinson) when we are acquainted with it; when we are not acquainted with something (Hyde), we can nevertheless think about it under a description that it uniquely satisfies and abbreviate that description with an ordinary name. This means that language is not a good guide to the thoughts it is used to express. Though ‘ $F(\text{Hyde})$ ’ appears on the surface to express the same kind of proposition as ‘ $F(\text{Robinson})$ ’, when properly analyzed they express very different propositions: whereas the latter expresses an object-dependent proposition $\langle\langle\text{Robinson}\rangle, \text{being } F\rangle$ that is both directly about and contains Robinson as a constituent, the former expresses an existentially general proposition that contains Ireland and *being president of* (but not Hyde) and is only indirectly about Hyde to the extent that he uniquely satisfies ‘is the first president of Ireland’. Moreover, the very same sentence (-type) ‘ $F(\text{Hyde})$ ’ as used by those who are acquainted with Hyde and by those who are not acquainted with him expresses different thoughts. For those who knew Hyde personally, it expresses the proposition $\langle\langle\text{Hyde}\rangle, \text{being } F\rangle$. The rest of us cannot (*de facto*) apprehend *that* kind of proposition because we are not acquainted with Hyde. For us who are not acquainted with Hyde, the sentence ‘ $F(\text{Hyde})$ ’ expresses the kind of thought Δ that is more properly expressed by ‘ $F(\text{the first president of Ireland})$ ’, itself transformed by the theory of descriptions. ‘ $F(\text{Hyde})$ ’ as used by us linguistically encodes Δ , a very different thought

²⁴ These and other shifts of interest are noted in Hylton 1990, though Hylton’s discussion follows a different direction.

from that expressed by the sentence as used by Hyde's acquaintances. For us the general proposition Δ goes proxy for the proposition we are interested in expressing but are unable to express because of our lack of acquaintance.

In the penultimate paragraph of (Russell 1905, pp. 492-493) there occurs one further important shift in Russell's thinking – a shift to epistemological concerns of an austere empiricist nature that would dominate much of his later philosophizing about acquaintance: after stating RP, he goes on to say that we are not acquainted with such things as matter and other minds but can think of them only by means of denoting phrases. However, it is useful to distinguish two versions of acquaintance and, correspondingly, of RP: an austere empiricist version and a more liberal version. By the 1910s Russell's official position is that we are acquainted only with particular sense data, universals presented in sense data, and possibly our selves (though the last item loses its privileged relation to us as Russell came to think of it in Humean terms); the only singular propositions we can apprehend are those expressible by sentences of form '*this (that) is F*' (or '*I am F*' if we include ourselves as objects of acquaintance). Sentences like 'Robinson is a jurist' must be understood as expressing a general proposition – that some individual that uniquely instantiates a collection of properties (e.g., the property of being called 'Robinson') has the property of being a jurist. Ultimately that general proposition will have to be transformed by reduction of the properties mentioned to the austere acquaintance basis permitted by Russell's official position. The important point is that the sentence expresses a general proposition whose constituents are items defined from objects with which we are acquainted rather than a singular proposition that has Robinson as a constituent. Few philosophers nowadays – especially those sympathetic to direct reference and singular propositions – accept Russell's official view. If we have learned anything from philosophical exploration over the past half a century, we have learned that the world cannot be constructed from sense data and our acquaintance with sense data does not have the epistemic authority it was thought to have.

But there is another less austere version of acquaintance to be found in Russell's writings, especially in his discussion of examples illustrating the distinction between acquaintance and description, which continues to be highly influential and to take various contemporary guises that seem to be sufficiently similar to it that the differences do not greatly matter. In many of his discussions, even in the locus classicus (Russell 1912 and 1917), this liberal strand is intertwined with his official position: the distinction between objects with which we are acquainted and objects with which we are not acquainted shifts depending on whether he is expressing his official position or illustrating the distinction. On this more liberal reading, we begin by assuming we are acquainted with some objects in the ordinary sense that we encounter or have encountered them in everyday perceptual situations. Most of us are acquainted in this way with our family members, close friends and colleagues, ordinary physical objects in our close environs, and objects we have encountered that have left a memory trace that is sufficiently strong to enable us to recall them (as I recall Mary Robinson, for example).

We are assuming then that perceptual encounters and recollections of objects once encountered suffice for acquaintance.²⁵ We feel that in some sense we can have such objects “in mind”, express singular propositions about them, and have genuine names for them. We feel that we know who or what the individual is sufficiently well to be able to entertain thoughts that are directly about the individual. Those who knew Hyde personally could similarly have Hyde ‘in mind’, apprehend singular propositions in which he occurs as a constituent, and use ‘Hyde’ as a genuine name. However, I lack this kind of acquaintance with Hyde. If I am interested in the singular thought that Hyde was a Celtic scholar, I cannot apprehend it as a singular proposition that contains Hyde as a constituent or use ‘Hyde’ as a genuine name. The best I can do is entertain a general proposition to the effect that the first president of Ireland was a Celtic scholar (which I may express in abbreviated form as ‘Hyde was a Celtic scholar’).

Both the austere and liberal versions appear compatible with Russell’s general remarks about acquaintance and RP.²⁶ Both versions share the common structural feature that some of our thoughts are directly about their objects and others are indirectly about their objects and that, therefore, for the latter thoughts there is a semantic gap to be bridged between their constituents (with which we must be acquainted) and what they are about. And both versions share the common feature that only genuine names of objects with which we’re acquainted are “constants which could be substituted for [the logician’s] variables” (Russell 1948, p.74); names of other objects do not behave as genuine names. The primary difference between the two versions lies in what each takes to be the particulars with which we’re acquainted: sense data (on the austere version) and ordinary physical objects that intersect with our perceptual and cognitive apparatus so that they leave a cognitive mark (on the liberal version). We don’t have to be sense data theorists to recognize that we are *de facto* unacquainted with Hyde and with Newman 1 (the first person born in the twenty-second century); we can adopt the Russellian framework while rejecting its austere embodiment. Russell himself is sometimes quite liberal about these matters (especially when he discusses mathematics and logic) and seems to recognize that the austere version of the doctrine of acquaintance is not compulsory. He acknowledges, for example, that, at any given level of analysis, what seems to be a nameable individual may be capable of further analysis as a describable construction of some more basic individuals. In such a context, our nameable individu-

²⁵ As we’ll see, Russell admits a degree of acquaintance with objects “encountered” via our reading or hearing about them, but for the nonce we’ll stick with “close acquaintances”.

²⁶ In (Russell 1912) we find the most explicit characterizations of acquaintance: we are acquainted with particulars and universals (including relations) (1912, pp. 52-3); acquaintance is direct, unmediated access of the mind to the objects with which it’s acquainted; acquaintance with an object takes place without any intervening inference from known premises (1912, p. 46); acquaintance is the converse of presentation – I am acquainted with an object just in case that object is presented to my awareness (1912, p. 48); when I am acquainted with an object, I know it ‘perfectly and completely ... and no further knowledge of it itself is even theoretically possible’; it is known to me “just as [it is]” (1912, p. 47). Though contemporary proponents of more liberal versions of acquaintance will balk at the unmediatedness, indubitability, and completeness features of Russell’s characterization, I don’t think such remarks force the austere empiricist reading of acquaintance upon us.

als are merely relative individuals (that occur only as the subjects of propositions) and our names are relative names (Russell 1919, pp. 173-174). In a context where ordinary physical objects with which I'm acquainted are nameable individuals, 'Robinson' is a genuine name, whereas 'Hyde' and 'the first woman president of Ireland' aren't.²⁷

As part of this liberal version of RP, Russell explicitly acknowledges that there are degrees of lack of acquaintance: "It will be seen that there are various stages in the removal from acquaintance with particulars: there is Bismarck to people who knew him, Bismarck to people who only know of him through history, the man with the iron mask, the longest-lived of men" (Russell 1917, p. 219 and 1912, p. 57). He seems to have in mind a gradation of acquaintance from the premium case (Bismarck to those who knew him) to the most degraded case (the longest-living man). Only those who knew Bismarck by acquaintance in the premium sense can apprehend singular propositions that both contain and are directly about him or can use the name 'Bismarck' as a genuine name (one that epistemically guarantees its bearer and logically acts as an individual constant). In the other cases, our lack of acquaintance prevents us from apprehending any proposition that contains the individual or from having a genuine name for it. Consider the second and fourth cases of Russell's gradation: Bismarck to us who know him only through history and the longest-living man. In several ways they are similar. We know that Bismarck existed (from the historical record) and that the longest-living man exists or existed (on the basis of general reasoning from our general knowledge that long-living men exist and that a perfect longevity-tie is extremely unlikely). Bismarck's acquaintances were acquainted with the individual who was *in fact* Bismarck, just as the longest-living man's familiars are acquainted with the man who is *in fact* the longest-living man. However, no one today is acquainted with anyone whom he *knows to be* Bismarck (simply because Bismarck is too far removed from us in time), just as no one is likely acquainted with anyone whom he *knows to be* the longest-living man. As with the Hyde example, we cannot entertain propositions that are directly about, or have as constituents, either Bismarck or the longest-living man. We can only apprehend general propositions that are indirectly about Bismarck or the longest-living man in virtue of their uniquely satisfying some appropriate definite description that expresses a concept we're acquainted with. Thus even on this liberal version of acquaintance, in Russell's framework, N2 continues to hold for all names of individuals that are too spatiotemporally remote for us to be acquainted with them – when properly used, they are truncated descriptions.

²⁷ This is why Pears' diagnosis of Russell's failure to consider ordinary names as genuine names in terms of Russell's requirement that genuine names must name simple unanalyzable individuals doesn't seem right. Because I'm unacquainted with Hyde, I cannot name him – whether or not he's a simple unanalyzable particular. (See *supra* footnote 6.)

6. Ordinary names used as names

Nevertheless, Russell does acknowledge that ordinary names, even if they are not genuine names, are special (N3). Consider how we come to know what we know about Bismarck and how we think of him and reason about him. We are not acquainted with him and thus cannot use a genuine name to think directly about him or reason about him. Our knowledge of particulars like Bismarck crucially depends on “testimony heard or read” and such testimony in turn involves “something with which we are acquainted” (Russell 1917, p. 217). “[I]f we are to obtain a description which we know to be applicable, we shall be compelled, at some point, to bring in a reference to a particular with which we are acquainted. Such reference is involved in any mention of past, present, and future ..., or of here and there, or of what others have told us. Thus it would seem that ... a description known to be applicable to a particular must involve some reference to a particular with which we are acquainted, if our knowledge about the thing described is not to be merely what follows logically from the definition” (Russell 1917, p. 217). In order for us to think about Bismarck, we must apprehend a proposition that is expressed using a definite description. But not just any old Bismarck-denoting description will connect us with Bismarck in the way that interests us. In particular, a description ‘*The B*’ in terms of purely qualitative predicates (a thoroughgoing description in the terminology of (Salmon 1981)) will not do. Such a description may denote Bismarck just as ‘the longest-living man’ denotes the individual who is in fact the most aged man, but Russell seems to think that our Bismarck-directed thoughts relate to Bismarck differently than our longest-living-man-thoughts relate to the longest-living man. Moreover he tells us how: we must use a description that is composed of relational predicates, some of whose relata are objects with which we’re acquainted (a particular kind of relational description in the terminology of (Salmon 1981)).²⁸ ‘Bismarck’ should be replaced by a description of form ‘the x that bears relation R to t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n ’, where t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n are particulars with which we’re acquainted – particulars involved in “testimony heard or read”; for example, ‘the Iron Chancellor of *Germany*’, or ‘the man called ‘*Bismarck*’, or ‘the individual who performed the deeds and had the properties recorded in *this book*’ (where the italicized words refer to particulars with which I’m acquainted). Similarly, the kind of proposition that is expressed by ‘Bismarck is a diplomat’ and that captures the way in which I am related to Bismarck (given my lack of acquaintance with him) should be rendered as ‘ $(\exists x)((y)(Ryt_1t_2 \dots t_n \leftrightarrow x = y) \ \& \ Dx)$ ’. Our thoughts about historical objects that interest us (like Bismarck) originate in sensible contact with the world. We make discoveries about them. Those discoveries in turn consist either in our becoming acquainted with the object or, if the object is not available for presentation, via inference

²⁸ When Russell says, “All names of places ... similarly involve, when used, descriptions which start from some one or more particulars with which we are acquainted” (1917, p. 218), it is clear from the context (where he has been discussing Bismarck) that he intends not to restrict the thesis to place-names but to include all ordinary names.

from particulars that are presented to us – particular testimony read or heard – with which we are acquainted. Ultimately the content of our thoughts about particulars must be tied to our direct thoughts about some objects.²⁹

It is tempting to take Russell to be claiming that an ordinary proper name like ‘Bismarck’ should be replaced by a description of form ‘the x that is causally responsible for t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n ’, where t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n are particulars with which we’re acquainted – particulars involved in “testimony heard or read” that are somehow causally grounded in Bismarck. We might think, in other words, that Russell intends to be offering some kind of causal-descriptive theory: the denotation of an ordinary name (as given by the theory of descriptions paraphrase of a sentence in which it occurs) is the object that is the causal source of certain particulars with which the thinker is acquainted. But we should resist the temptation, I think, since such causal views are not Russellian in spirit. Moreover, they are rejected in (Russell 1913, pp. 27-28), where Russell criticizes James’s views, and by extension causal views, because of their “insufficiently critical attitude towards” the “extremely obscure” notion of causality, and because they cannot account for error. According to Russell “there must be a *logical* relation between what is believed in the earlier stages and what is experienced in the fulfillment” (Russell 1913, p. 27). Elsewhere Russell categorizes the causal connection between beliefs like ‘Bismarck is F ’ and the particulars involved in reading a report that Bismarck is F as psychological inferences and counts them legitimate “provided there is a valid logical connexion, and the person could become aware of this connexion by reflection” (Russell 1912, pp.133-135).

A clue to the kind of logical relation or connection Russell seems to have in mind is provided by the following passages:

It would seem that, when we make a statement about something known only by description, we often *intend* to make our statement, not in the form involving the description, but about the actual thing described. ... In this we are necessarily defeated, since the actual Bismarck is unknown to us. But we know that there is an object **B** called Bismarck and that **B** was an astute diplomatist. We can

²⁹ See also: “I think it will be found that every [ordinary] name applied to some portion of space-time can have a verbal definition in which the word “this”, or some equivalent [genuine name of an object we’re acquainted with], occurs. ... Let us take a person with whom we are not acquainted, say Socrates. We may define him as “the philosopher who drank the hemlock”, but such a definition does not assure us that Socrates existed, and if he did not exist, “Socrates” is not a name. What does assure us that Socrates existed? A variety of sentences heard or read. Each of these is a sensible occurrence in our own experience. Suppose we find in the encyclopedia the statement “Socrates was an Athenian philosopher”. The sentence, while we see it, is a *this* [i.e., a nameable particular], and our faith in the encyclopedia leads us to say, “This is true”. We can define “Socrates” as “the person described in the encyclopedia under the name ‘Socrates’”. Here the name “Socrates” is experienced. ... It would thus seem to follow that, apart from such words as “this” and “that” [apart from genuine names], every name is a description involving some *this* [some genuine name], and is only a name in virtue of the truth of some proposition” (Russell 1948, pp. 78-79, ellipses and bracketed elaborations added by me).

thus *describe* the proposition we should like to affirm, namely “**B** was an astute diplomatist”, where **B** is the object which was Bismarck. ... *This proposition, which is described and is known to be true, is what interests us; but we are not acquainted with the proposition itself, and we do not know it, though we know it is true.* (Russell 1917, p. 218; my italics)

and (in a context where the audience is acquainted with *a* but knows *b* only by the description ‘the object that bears *R* to *a*’):

You can then give a name to the object to which *a* has the relation *R*; let the name be ‘*b*’. ... It then becomes easy to forget that *b* is unknown to you although you may know a multitude of true sentences about *b*. But in fact, to speak correctly, you do *not* know sentences about *b*, you know sentences in which the name ‘*b*’ is replaced by the phrase ‘the object to which *a* has the relation *R*’. *You know also that there are sentences about the actual object *b* which are verbally identical with those that you know about the object to which *a* has the relation *R* – sentences pronounced by other people in which ‘*b*’ occurs as a name – but although you can describe these sentences and know (within common-sense limits) which are true and which false, you do not know the sentences themselves.* (Russell 1948, p. 87; my italics)

Suppose I read in some book written by someone who was acquainted with Bismarck: ‘Bismarck was an astute diplomat’. Suppose further I have good reasons to rely on the testimony provided by the author. In my unacquainted-with-Bismarck state I cannot associate the singular proposition <<Bismarck>, *astute diplomat*> with the sentence. But because I firmly believe on good grounds what the author claims, I believe that that there is such a proposition and that it’s true. I know, based on what I read, that the individual named ‘Bismarck’ existed as an object directly named ‘Bismarck’ by the author and thus as an object described by ‘the individual named ‘Bismarck’” for me. The sentence ‘Bismarck was an astute diplomat’ expresses a singular proposition for him (one that is directly about Bismarck). Since I trust the author, I know there is such a true singular proposition, and I can describe it as ‘the proposition that there is a unique individual who is called ‘Bismarck’ (in *this* book) and was an astute diplomat’. Since I know it is true, I can assert the described proposition, which is indirectly about Bismarck. What makes the description be indirectly about Bismarck is its denoting Bismarck – he and only he satisfies it. The trustworthiness of the source, a text with which I’m acquainted, provides me with a basis for reasoning to the claim that there was an original baptism of a particular object with a genuine name ‘Bismarck’. In turn, even though I can only associate with the sentence ‘Bismarck was an astute diplomat’ some proposition such as that expressed by the sentence ‘There’s a unique individual who is called ‘Bismarck’ in *this* book and was an astute diplomat’, my assurance that he existed gives me license to use his proper name as a name: even though it’s not a genuine name

for me, I can use it in my reasoning (in the manner sketched in the second paragraph below) *as if* it were a genuine name.

It should be noted that it is compatible with this account that my uses of ‘Bismarck’ as a name are causally related to an original baptism of Bismarck by the name. But it’s not the causal relation that matters but my ability to rely logically on the fact that there was a baptism of a particular object. To the extent (and only to the extent) that my evidence is trustworthy can I be sure that the descriptions involved are applicable to a particular. It is not accidental, I think, that Russell frequently uses the description ‘the individual called *NN*’ as proxy for the ordinary name ‘*NN*’. We know that such an individual existed because of what we read and hear. We know, because this is how successful naming works, that, if Bismarck existed, the individual named ‘Bismarck’ existed as a nameable object for those acquainted with him and as an object described by ‘the individual named ‘Bismarck’ for those of us who are not acquainted with him. The relation of *calling* or *naming* between an object and an experienced name-token of that object, if I know it obtains, is such that it provides me with a canonical logical route, albeit indirect, to the object, since I know there was an original baptism. However, any definite description, such as ‘the mother of Mrs. A’ (assuming acquaintance with Mrs. A), that we know to be denoting by its being logically anchored in particulars with which we are directly acquainted will work. The trustworthiness of the logical relation between what I experience and my belief that there exists a unique object satisfying some of its descriptive content is what matters, not the particular description itself. Russell repeatedly emphasizes this: “[T]he description ... is accidental. The essential point is that he knows that the various descriptions all apply to the same entity, in spite of not being acquainted with the entity in question” (Russell 1917, pp. 216-217); “however we may vary the description (so long as the description is correct), the proposition described is still the same” (Russell 1917, p. 218). Thus I may use ‘Bismarck’ “as a name” to abbreviate ‘the individual called ‘Bismarck’’, ‘the Iron Chancellor of Germany’, ‘the Duke of Lauenberg’, etc.; what matters is that when I say ‘Bismarck is a diplomat’, the testimony I rely upon gives me reason to believe there is an individual who is a diplomat and is denoted by the description; I know the individual described was available for genuine naming.

Russell distinguishes between using ordinary names “as names” and using them “as descriptions” and claims “there will, as a rule, be nothing in the phraseology to show whether they are being used [*as descriptions*] or *as names*” (Russell 1919, pp. 174-175). What distinguishes the two uses is the user’s relationship to the object named. Those who are acquainted with Bismarck are in a position to use ‘Bismarck’ as a genuine name; I, who know him only by description, cannot use ‘Bismarck’ as a genuine name. However, provided I am warranted in believing (on the basis of what I hear and read) that a given definite description (‘the man called ‘Bismarck’ or ‘the Iron Chancellor of Germany’) denotes a particular individual, then I can abbreviate that definite description (as ‘Bismarck’) and use the abbreviation “as a name”. In using ‘Bismarck’

as a name, I am letting it act *as if* it were a genuine name of something I'm acquainted with. I consider the sentence 'Bismarck is a diplomat' *as if* it expressed the singular thought we represent in first order notation as ' Db '; i.e., *as if* it logically entails 'Some diplomat exists' and is entailed by 'Everything is a diplomat'; *as if* it were an individual constant. But of course in reality it is and does none of those things. Instead it expresses the general thought we represent as ' $(\exists x)((y)(By \leftrightarrow x = y) \& Dx)$ ', where B is the individual concept expressed by the truncated description. 'Bismarck is a diplomat' is just an abbreviated way of expressing the general thought and providing inferential shortcuts. The use of ordinary names (of objects we're unacquainted with) "as names" in this way exemplifies the fact that language allows us to construct elegant shortcuts for the expression of thoughts and inferences that are analytically complicated. In standard natural deduction treatments, the inference from the Russellian 'Something uniquely Bismarckizes and is a diplomat' to 'Something is a diplomat' is run as follows: (1) Something uniquely Bismarckizes and is a diplomat; (2) Call that object (whatever it is) 'Bismarck', so Bismarck uniquely Bismarckizes and is a diplomat [by EI on 1]; (3) So, Bismarck is a diplomat [by Simp on 2]; (4) So, something is a diplomat [by EG on 3].³⁰ The claim is that, *provided I can be confident that 'Bismarckizes' is uniquely true of something*, I can call that object 'Bismarck' and run the inference in shortcut form as: Bismarck is a diplomat; so something is a diplomat. (Obviously, similar shortcuts, subject to the same *proviso*, will be available for UI inferences.) Thus, when I say 'Bismarck is a diplomat' I cannot think what William I thought when he uttered the same sentence, and when I go on to infer 'Diplomats exist', I cannot run the inference by EG on the genuine name 'Bismarck', as William I could. Nevertheless, provided my knowledge that there is a unique individual named 'Bismarck' who is a diplomat is reliably based on testimony, I can linguistically mimic William I's thinking and reasoning. Even though I cannot think and reason directly about the same propositions that William thought and reasoned about, I can do so indirectly and thus deal with them logically. I can, we might say, logically traffic in sentences that do not express propositions I know; sentences that have the same form as those directly expressing propositions for someone in the know, but that for me are merely shorthand for more complicated descriptive thoughts.

While Russell does not explicitly put forward the view of the previous paragraph, he clearly has the resources to do so. Moreover, there is evidence that Russell did think along these lines, where a recurring theme is that language allows me to express thoughts that are indirectly about mind-independent objects (that I am not in a position to have direct, self-guaranteeing thoughts about) and to mimic inferential patterns instantiated by direct thoughts. As we saw, the primary reason motivating the 1903

³⁰ Russell's logic in *Principia* does not have anything that closely represents natural deduction EI – derivations from existential hypotheses are run by more roundabout methods – my suggestion here is only that inferences to and from sentences containing Russellian descriptions can be mimicked by replacing the description with a constant, provided we know the description denotes.

theory of denoting concepts was its ability to enable us to think and reason about objects that are too complex for us to apprehend. In the case of definite denoting concepts, once we have defined an object as ‘*the Φ* ’ and provided an existence and uniqueness result: “In the moment of discovery, the definition is seen to be *true* ... but as part of our reasoning it is not true, but merely symbolic, since what the reasoning requires is not that it should deal with *that* object, but merely that it should deal with the object denoted by the definition” (Russell 1903, §63). Clearly the 1905 theory of descriptions provides us with the same reasoning tool. Immediately after proving *14.18 (the Φ has any property Ψ that everything has, *provided* the Φ exists) in *Principia* Russell remarks that it shows that, provided $(ix)(\Phi x)$ exists, “it has (speaking formally) *all the logical properties of symbols which directly represent objects*. Hence when $(ix)(\Phi x)$ exists, *the fact that it is an incomplete symbol becomes irrelevant to the truth-value of logical propositions in which it occurs*” (Whitehead & Russell 1913, p. 180; my emphasis). Similarly, I am arguing, in empirical contexts, the theory of descriptions enables us to think and reason (indirectly) about objects with which we are unacquainted. I cannot think directly about Bismarck or use his name as a genuine name. But once I know there is a unique object called ‘Bismarck’ – once I know ‘the individual called ‘Bismarck’ “is applicable to a particular” – I can think indirectly about Bismarck using the theory of descriptions expansion of ‘ $F(\textit{Bismarck})$ ’ and I can treat ‘Bismarck’ as a symbol that logically behaves “as a genuine name” in the manner suggested above.

In later writings Russell emphasizes “the autonomy” of language, its taking on a life of its own and making it possible for us to express thoughts we could not express without it:

Language serves not only to express thoughts, but to make possible thoughts which could not exist without it. ... Language, once evolved, acquires a kind of autonomy: we can know, especially in mathematics, that a sentence asserts something true, although what it asserts is too complex to be apprehended by the best minds.

In mathematics, we start from rather simple sentences which we believe ourselves capable of understanding, and proceed, by rules of inference which we also believe ourselves to understand, to build up more and more complicated symbolic statements, which, if our initial assumptions are true, must be true whatever they may mean. As a rule it is unnecessary to know what they “mean”, if their “meaning” is taken to be a thought in a superhuman mathematical genius. But there is another kind of “meaning”, which gives occasion for pragmatism and instrumentalism. According to ... this view of “meaning”, what a complicated mathematical sentence does is to give a rule for practical procedure. ... The autonomy of language enables you to forgo [the] tedious process of interpretation except at crucial moments. (Russell 1948, pp. 60-61)

A straightforward extension from mathematical to empirical contexts supports the claim that we can know (on the basis of testimony) that the sentence ‘Bismarck is a diplomat’ asserts something true, although the content it asserts is too remote to be apprehended by minds unacquainted with that content. Nevertheless, language allows us to substitute another sentence ‘There’s a unique individual called ‘Bismarck’ who is a diplomat’ that goes proxy for the original sentence that gives “a rule for practical procedure” and allows us to reason about Bismarck without knowing him by acquaintance. Once we know the proxy sentence is true, we can go ahead and reason with ‘Bismarck’ as if it were a genuine name in practical contexts. In a context where I am acquainted with Mrs. A. but not with her mother, Mrs. B, “[i]f I say, “Mrs. B. is rich,” I *intend* to say something about Mrs. B. herself, but what I actually assert is that Mrs. A. has a rich mother. ... *This does not matter in practice*, as the things we ... say about Mrs. A.’s mother ... would be true of Mrs. B. if only we could say them” (Russell 1948, pp. 87-88; my italics). But though it does not matter in practice, it does matter for a proper understanding of how thought and language relate to the world. Russell repeatedly cautions that we should not forget that our uses of ‘Bismarck’, ‘Napoleon’, etc. “as names” rely on substituting for them relational descriptions involving acquainted-with-particulars:

What I call “verbal” thought is characterized by using the name of an object as a means of describing it. When we mean to think about Napoleon, we substitute the description “the man whose name was ‘Napoleon’”. We can experience the name “Napoleon” and often we are unconscious of having used “the man called ‘Napoleon’” as a substitute for “Napoleon”. Owing to the unconscious substitution we never realize that about Napoleon himself we know literally nothing, since we are not acquainted with him. (Russell 1948, p., 89)³¹

This emphasis on “verbal” thought and the elaborate reconstrual of propositions that we can deal with linguistically but not think directly seems to involve Russell in greatly modifying the transparency of thought thesis that, I argued in §2, he shares with Locke. Not only is language not transparent to us, but the propositional contents of our thoughts need not be transparent to us. It becomes easy to forget that we do not know Bismarck and incorrectly think that we are expressing a singular proposition Σ when we utter ‘*F(Bismarck)*’ when we are really expressing a thought Δ (‘There’s a unique individual called ‘Bismarck’ who is *F*’). Moreover, it took Russell himself several years to figure out that Δ is what the sentence expresses. But then it can hardly be transparent to us that Δ is what the sentence expresses. RP still holds (propositions we understand must contain only constituents with which we’re acquainted), and we cannot entertain thoughts without knowing what it is we are thinking about.³² But we may incorrectly

³¹ The same caution occurs also in the second long quotation above on p. 213.

³² In (Russell 1948, p. 87), we get a version of RP applied to words (and especially names) that supports this: “For every word that you can understand must either have a nominal definition in terms of words having ostensive

believe we are thinking about Bismarck directly when we are only thinking about him indirectly under some description like ‘the individual called ‘Bismarck’.

In general terms, then, Russell handles ordinary proper names as follows. A particular object gets to be called ‘*NN*’ by people who are acquainted with it.³³ Those predications get recorded and become available as testimony (heard or read) to people who do not know *NN* by acquaintance. Such testimony, if it is trustworthy, enables the latter to know that (a) there exists (or existed) a particular individual which (b) is a constituent of some singular propositions and was nameable by a genuine name. In turn, those who do not know *NN* by acquaintance nevertheless know that there exists an individual that uniquely satisfies definite descriptions involved in the testimony: they know that descriptions like ‘the individual called ‘*NN*’ or ‘the individual who performed the deeds and had the properties recorded in *this* book’ is applicable to a particular. This knowledge in turn gives them license to use ‘*NN*’ as a truncation of those descriptions. We thus arrive at N3: only special descriptions – relational descriptions that contain references to particulars with which we’re acquainted – are eligible to go proxy for ordinary names.³⁴

Thus far we have restricted our attention to the first two items in Russell’s gradation of acquaintance – Bismarck to those who knew him and Bismarck to those who know him only through history – to items for which we either have genuine names or can have ordinary names used as names. I now turn to the last item on Russell’s gradation: the longest-living man, an object denoted (in Russell’s sense) by the description ‘the

definitions, or must itself have an ostensive definition; and ostensive definitions ... are only possible in relation to events that have occurred to you.”

³³ Because we are thinking of ‘*NN*’ as a “public” name, baptism is more complicated than it first appears. I can be acquainted with *NN* without knowing that he is the individual named ‘*NN*’, and I can know there’s such an individual without being acquainted with him. I think the general principle connecting genuine names with singular thoughts is: *S* can have a singular thought about *x* just in case *S* can have a genuine name for *x* just in case *S* is acquainted with *x*. Whoever baptized *NN* had to be acquainted with him, and the baptismal act itself gives the name its self-guaranteeing property. Others of his later acquaintances could have baptized him, but more likely they discovered that *he* is called ‘*NN*’ – either (i) by being introduced to him, or (ii) by being told his name subsequent to meeting him, or (iii) by meeting him subsequent to knowing him under the description ‘the individual called ‘*NN*’’. In cases (i) and (ii) they come to know a true singular proposition <<*he*, ‘*NN*’>, *being named*>, with whose constituent particulars they become acquainted at or after encountering *NN*; because of their acquaintance with the particulars and the relation of naming, the introduction puts them in the position to know the singular proposition <<*he*, *NN*>, = >, to make predications that are directly about *NN*, and to use ‘*NN*’ as a genuine name. In case (iii), their situation is initially the same as ours – they rely on trustworthy testimony to know there’s a unique individual called ‘*NN*’ – but unlike us they subsequently become acquainted with *NN* and come to know the true proposition (which is both general and singular) that the individual called ‘*NN*’ is *NN*; whatever predications hold of the individual called ‘*NN*’ automatically hold also of *NN*; again their meeting him puts them in the position to make predications that are directly about *NN* and to use ‘*NN*’ as a genuine name.

³⁴ Pears is therefore wrong when he claims in his introduction to (Russell 1918, p. 16): “In the case of ordinary proper names [Russell] seems to have been unaware of the need to put any restriction on the kind of definite description used in their analysis”. On the contrary, Russell held a special thesis (N3) about ordinary names: ordinary names retain a semantically privileged position in Russell’s account – they are truncated definite descriptions, but only relational descriptions some of whose relata are particulars with which we’re acquainted will suffice to provide us with thoughts about the bearer of the name.

longest-living man' I can be reasonably confident that there are no perfect longevity-ties and thus that 'the longest-living man' denotes some unique object. Clearly there are some similarities between 'Bismarck' and 'the longest-living man': we lack direct semantic access by acquaintance to both Bismarck and the longest-living man; we have semantic access to each of them only indirectly or verbally by descriptions that denote them. The primary difference between the two lies in the nature of our logical route to the denotation, a route that is represented in the form of the description. In (Russell 1918, p. 63), Russell distinguishes between "particular" particulars and "general" particulars. Bismarck is a "particular" particular: we intend our thoughts about him to be about the particular individual we read about in *this* reliable account; he interests us as an object whose properties and doings go beyond what can be deduced from general knowledge. Though Russell doesn't say so, his discussion suggests that our knowledge of particular particulars named by ordinary names like 'Bismarck' is indefinitely extendible. As we see, read, and hear more, we find other definite descriptions (e.g., 'the Iron Chancellor of Germany', 'the First Chancellor of the Second German Empire', 'the man called 'the Duke of Lauenburg'") that we are justified in substituting for x in identifications such as 'the individual named 'Bismarck' is x ', and we find an indefinite list of new properties we can substitute for F in 'the individual named 'Bismarck' is F '.³⁵ In the case of particular particulars, as we have seen, Russell argues, "a description known to be applicable to a particular must involve some reference to a particular with which we are acquainted", and he adds, "*if our knowledge about the thing described is not to be merely what follows logically from the definition*" (Russell 1917, p. 217, my emphasis). The longest-living man is a "general" particular: we intend our thoughts about him to be about whatever individual satisfies the uniquely denoting description; he interests us only as a position in a structure of conceptual relations in virtue of its satisfying conceptual conditions that some object or other is known to satisfy uniquely. We have merely knowledge of him under the description 'the longest-living man'; we know nothing about him beyond what is logically deducible from the description (Russell 1912, p. 58). The description "must apply to some man, but we can make no judgements concerning this man which involve knowledge about him beyond what the description gives" (Russell 1917, p. 218). We know only that he's a man, he has lived longer than any other man, and various other things about him that logically follow.³⁶

³⁵ In (Russell 1913, pp. 27-28) Russell asks us to suppose I am unacquainted with Memorial Hall and to consider the proposition expressed by 'The building called 'Memorial Hall' is the building which is reached by taking the first turning on the right [*from here*] and the second on the left, and then going on for 200 yards'. In order to discover whether this proposition is true, either (i) I can search for another description of Memorial Hall such as 'the tallest building which is 2 blocks west of *here* and 2 blocks north' and use it to triangulate a comparison with the original descriptions, or (ii) I can become acquainted with the object that satisfies one description and see if it also satisfies the other. Similarly, to discover the truth of the proposition expressed by 'Bismarck is the Iron Chancellor of Germany', given that there are physical obstacles to our any longer becoming acquainted with Bismarck, we must take the former route – find other descriptions and triangulate.

³⁶ Russell, I believe, misspeaks when he says we know nothing of him beyond what is logically deducible from the description – I doubt that he would have objected to our knowing that the most aged man is older than 20 years

In summary, ordinary names must be backed by descriptions that contain an indexical component, and thoughts about particulars with which we're not acquainted and which are expressed by sentences in which ordinary names occur must be grounded in particulars with which we're acquainted. The difference between our 'longest-living man'-thoughts and our 'Bismarck'-thoughts, we might say, is that, whereas the former are indirectly about the longest-living man *qua* position in a structure, the latter are indirectly about Bismarck *qua* position in a structure that is anchored in acquaintance with particulars. Acquaintance with some particulars is required to connect the general concepts (employed in a description that goes proxy for an ordinary name) to the individual denoted by the description; only such a connection will make possible the empirical basis of the thought. Those objects that are important enough to us to have received names must be connectible in thought with our experience by being related to acquainted-with particulars.³⁷

A natural consequence of Russell's discussion of degrees of acquaintance is that related notions like knowing who, ability to identify, and even *de re* also come in degrees. At the premium end of the spectrum, those who are acquainted with Bismarck can have Bismarck-dependent thoughts that are directly about him, they know who he is, they can identify him, etc. Not only are their thoughts about Bismarck *de re*, they are in a position to attribute *de re* propositional attitudes to others who are also acquainted with Bismarck. At the most inferior end, none of us is in a position to be confident that we are acquainted with the longest-living man. There seems to be little sense in which we can apprehend thoughts that are directly about him, or know who he is, or can identify

– what he intends is that we know about the most aged man only what is deducible from the description together with other general knowledge.

³⁷ To my knowledge Wettstein provides the only extended discussion of this feature of Russell's thought about ordinary names. In an insightful paper he claims: "There is, Russell seems to be saying, a certain sort of knowledge about the denotation of a purely qualitative description that is, in principle, unattainable. So, if ordinary names abbreviated such descriptions, we could not have this sort of knowledge of their denotations. Russell holds, however, that in the case of ordinary names, we surely do have this kind of knowledge." (Wettstein 1990, p. 121), and he proposes that, for Russell, "*The use of ordinary names, no less than genuine ones, requires identifying knowledge on the part of the competent speaker*" (Wettstein 1990, pp. 124-125). Unfortunately, Wettstein seems to misunderstand Russell on two counts. First, he takes Russell to claim: (a) we cannot know that a purely qualitative description is applicable to a particular individual; (b) we cannot know anything about the denotation of a purely qualitative description other than what follows from the description itself. Russell holds neither position. He is quite explicit that we can know an object both by acquaintance and by description. I can know that the candidate who gets most votes will be elected and I can also be acquainted with the candidate, *a*, who in fact will get the most votes, without knowing that *a* will be elected. But this does not prevent me from coming to know that *a* is the candidate who will get the most votes. There need be nothing especially inaccessible about the denotations of purely qualitative descriptions that prevents us coming to know that the descriptions are applicable to a particular individual, contrary to (a). Moreover, if I become acquainted with the particular individual denoted by a purely qualitative description (or even with an ordinary name that denotes it) I will then be in a position to come to know things about it over and above what follows from the purely qualitative description, contrary to (b). Second, Wettstein takes Russell to claim that competent use of an ordinary name requires that the name be associated with a description that enables the thinker to identify the denotation – to know who or what the denotation is – and only a relational description grounded in acquainted-with particulars will enable the thinker to do this. The requirement that the speaker have identifying knowledge seems too strong, unless understood in the graduated manner below.

him.³⁸ Nor is any of us in a position (insofar as we know merely that there's something that uniquely fits the description) either to have *de re* thoughts about him or to attribute to others *de re* attitudes about him. In particular we cannot inferentially move from 'Ralph believes the longest-living man is more than twenty years old' to 'there's someone who is the longest-living man and Ralph believes *he* is more than twenty years old'. Just as the FBI would have no interest in questioning Quine's Ralph simply because he believes there's a shortest spy, the Guinness Book folks would have no interest in our thoughts or beliefs that there is a longest-living man.

The tricky cases fall between these two extremes. None of us now living is acquainted with Bismarck, knows who he is, or is able to identify him in the way some of his contemporaries could do all of these things. Our 'Bismarck'-thoughts are not *de re* about him in the premium way, nor are we in a position to attribute *de re* attitudes involving Bismarck to others. Nevertheless, it seems right to credit some of us with each of these abilities, and Russell's account has potential resources for explaining how some of us know who Bismarck is, can identify him, and entertain thoughts that are *de re* about him *in some weaker sense*. One possibility for a quasi-*de re* construal of the *de re* 'Ralph believes, of Bismarck, that *he* was an astute diplomat' is to follow a modification of (Kaplan 1968): 'there's an ordinary Russellian name 'Bismarck*' that Ralph uses "as a name" of Bismarck and Ralph believes 「Bismarck* was an astute diplomat」'. Then we can quasi-export to a version of 'There's someone of whom Ralph believes that he was an astute diplomat': 'There's an x and an ordinary Russellian name 'Bismarck*' that Ralph uses "as a name" of x and Ralph believes 「Bismarck* was an astute diplomat」'. Because 'Bismarck*' is an ordinary Russellian name, it must be understood as a truncation of a definite description that denotes Bismarck and that contains a relation to particulars with which Ralph is acquainted; because Ralph uses it as a name, he must have a reliable belief that the description denotes. Since 'the longest-living man' fails these conditions, we cannot give a similar quasi-*de re* construal of 'Ralph believes that the longest-living man is more than twenty years old'.³⁹

³⁸ This is not an impossibility in principle or even in fact; it simply amounts to the claim that, given our current state, we are unable to do these things; but nothing prevents some of us becoming acquainted with him and coming to know that he satisfies the description. See footnote 37.

³⁹ I have ignored the third example in Russell's gradation of acquaintance – the man in the iron mask. It appears to be intended to constitute some form of acquaintance that is intermediate between 'Bismarck' and 'the most aged man', both as used by us. Let us fancifully suppose (as I think Russell was supposing) that no one knew who he was after his imprisonment. Then, on the one hand, those who encountered him absent the mask would not have been able to pick him out in a line-up (in the sense in which Bismarck's acquaintances would have been able to pick Bismarck out). On the other hand, his unfortunate jailors and fellow residents in the Bastille were acquainted with an individual who in fact was the man in the iron mask and upon whom they could have bestowed a name like 'Henri Masque-de-Fer'. (Indeed, 'the-Man-in-the-Iron-Mask' does function like a name, since the historical record indicates he wore a black velvet mask.) If acquaintance requires only that the object be presented so that someone can bestow a name upon it, then there is little difference between our connections with Bismarck and with the man in the iron mask. In either case, the connections between us and him seem better grounded than those between us and the most aged man. *No one* can either pick out the latter or bestow a name upon *him* (other than a purely descriptive name: 'Oldman 1' means 'the (actual) longest-lived man whoever he is').

7. Concluding remarks

A commonly held view is that Russell was just wrong about proper names – ordinary names contribute their semantic values directly to propositions expressed by sentences in which they occur; this is a feature of the naming practices associated with the natural language of which they are part: the semantics of names depends on appropriate causal or historical connections (not on satisfactional conditions) – ‘*NN*’ is a name of *NN* only if uses of ‘*NN*’ are appropriately connected with *NN*. Similarly, Russell was wrong to hold that we cannot have object-dependent thoughts about objects we know about merely through the testimonial communications of others – we can have such thoughts provided the communication provides us with a sufficient degree of cognitive relation to those objects. Such complaints are often made while acknowledging that Russell’s general approach was correct: some appropriate connection there must be to sustain successful use of names and singular thoughts. The complaint is that such a connection requires nothing as strong as Russellian acquaintance.

I do not claim that Russell provides a satisfactory account of our uses of ordinary names or our thoughts about Bismarck. But to be fair to Russell, his thinking about these problems is a lot more subtle than such complaints credit him. He has a theory that (at least on its liberal version) accommodates in a unified and elegant way the various constraints, (TC), (UC), and (LC), he imposes on any theory of language and thought. Moreover, his account appears to have the resources to handle various data (the distinctions between ordinary names and descriptions, between *de re* and *de dicto* thoughts, and between referential and attributive uses of descriptions, etc.)⁴⁰ and to reply to standard objections that direct reference theorists of proper names make against descriptivist theories.⁴¹ Admittedly, Russell’s treatment of degrees of acquaintance is less than

⁴⁰ Though I lack space to go into it, Russell seems to have the resources to distinguish between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions. If I am acquainted with Jones (= Smith’s murderer) and utter ‘Smith’s murderer is insane’ I am in a position to use a genuine name, and we can (though we needn’t) construe the description referentially as a genuine name. If I’m unacquainted with him, my utterance must be construed attributively in the standard Russellian way, though (provided I am acquainted with Smith and know a single person murdered him) I can introduce a name to truncate the description and use it or the description itself as a name. It should be noted that this is often what we seem to do in practice: ‘Son of Sam’, ‘The Boston Strangler’, ‘The Zodiac Killer’, ‘Jack the Ripper’ all seem to function as ordinary names whether or not they have the form of a description.

⁴¹ To the objection that speakers routinely employ proper names without associating any uniquely identifying description with the name, it can be answered that if one uses a proper name ‘*NN*’ as a name, then one automatically has a metalinguistic description – ‘the individual called ‘*NN*’ – that will perform the task. Since my ability to use ‘*NN*’ as a name is only as trustworthy as my belief that there was an individual called ‘*NN*’, any doubts about the latter will equally affect my ability to use ‘*NN*’ as a name (one on which I’m licensed to perform UI and EG, for example). Furthermore, Russell’s account does not fall prey to violating the putative non-circularity condition (that a descriptivist theory of names should not presuppose some ineliminable notion of reference) simply because, as (Kripke 1980, p. 97, fn 44) explicitly recognizes, Russell’s view rejects such a condition. For Russell, genuine names simply refer to their bearers and ordinary names used as names presuppose that their backing descriptions contain genuine names of some particular with which the user is acquainted. So there is no attempt to get rid of reference. The account can also respond to Gödel-Schmidt objections: were we to discover that Schmidt, not Gödel, is the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic, we would not thereby conclude that Gödel was Schmidt or that he didn’t exist. If we are confident that both individuals exist (on the basis of

clear, and I have attempted to draw on various texts to supply some ideas on how he might have thought about it. But he cannot be blamed too much for not adequately explaining the notion given how much later literature has been devoted to these topics and how much controversy continues to surround them.

Developing the notion of a requisite causal/cognitive connection is a delicate operation that requires navigating between two extremes: substantive accounts that do real work tend to be implausible; plausible accounts turn out to be too schematic to do any real work (Daly 2007). Russell's austere version of acquaintance lies at the former extreme. Contemporary reliance on causal/cognitive connections lie at the latter extreme: we can use names for, or have singular thoughts about, those objects with which we're connected to a sufficient degree. And which objects are those? – the ones we can use names for or have singular thoughts about.⁴² Russell's liberal version of acquaintance may be seen as an attempt to steer between the two extremes. It is substantive enough to do real work in the following sense. In order to use 'NN' as a name of x and in order to have singular thoughts about x , I myself must be acquainted with x . It is not enough for me to know (on the basis of what I read or hear) that x exists. This divides objects I talk and think about into two classes – those I have genuine names for (or could have genuine names for (like the critter I saw yesterday but have difficulty describing)) and about which I can have singular *de re* thoughts, and all other objects which I can have neither genuine names for nor singular thoughts about. Contemporary views find even this implausibly restrictive. Many agree with Russell that 'Newman I' is not a genuine name and that we cannot have singular thoughts about its bearer. But many think that 'Bismarck' is a genuine name for us and that we can have singular thoughts about Bismarck (via information transmission). As we saw, Russell has the resources to provide

testimony seen or heard), then in the imagined scenario we would withdraw 'the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic' as a description that could be substituted for 'the individual called 'Gödel'', simply because we would have discovered that 'the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic' is applicable to Schmidt, not Gödel. As long as we are confident that there was an individual available for naming, we can retain our belief that such an individual exists even in the face of discovering that any given description, believed to denote him, fails to do so. However, were to discover that most or all of the descriptions that we believe to be applicable to Gödel were satisfied by Schmidt, this would cast doubt on our belief that Gödel and Schmidt are distinct, and similarly were we to discover that most or all of the descriptions that we believe to be applicable to Gödel were satisfied by no one individual, this would cast doubt on our belief that Gödel existed and on our entitlement to use 'Gödel' as a name. Finally, even though Russell does not consider modal contexts, he has the resources to handle various modal objections to descriptivism about ordinary names. Consider, for example, how Russell treats the claim that if Scott = Sir Walter, then necessarily Scott = Sir Walter (Russell 1919, pp. 174-175). So long as we are using 'Scott' and 'Sir Walter' as names, he maintains, 'Scott = Sir Walter' expresses the same trivial proposition (a logical truth) as 'Scott = Scott'. For those acquainted with Scott, 'Scott = Sir Walter' simply expresses the logical truth $\langle\langle\text{Scott}, \text{Scott}\rangle, = \rangle$. But 'the individual called 'Scott' = the individual called 'Sir Walter'' clearly does not express a logical truth: there might be no such individuals, and even if there are, they need not coincide. However, if one knows that such individuals exist and knows they are identical, then one can still use the names as names and treat the identity claim as if it expressed a logical truth.

⁴² I run the two together here, connected by the principle: S can have a singular thought about x just in case x is nameable by someone S' who is appropriately related to S . In the case of objects that S perceives or remembers, S just is S' ; in the case of objects that S becomes related to *via* communication, S' perceives x , can name x (and names x if he is interested enough), and is the original source of the information that transmits to S .

an answer to this, an answer that may be wrong but is not clearly implausible. Provided I can believe confidently that Bismarck exists (on the basis of what I hear and read) and I possess a description that expresses a relation to particulars I am acquainted with ('the man called 'Bismarck' or 'the Iron Chancellor of Germany') and that denotes Bismarck, then I can use 'Bismarck' "as a name". In using 'Bismarck' as a name, I am letting it act *as if* it were a genuine name. But it isn't. The use of ordinary names "as names" in this way exemplifies the fact that language allows us to construct elegant shortcuts for the expression of thoughts and inferences that are analytically complicated.

As we saw in §6, thoughts, insofar as they are expressed in the medium of language, come to have an increasingly non-transparent character for Russell. The trouble with this lack of transparency is that we can mistakenly believe that what is merely *as if* is the real thing. We can mistakenly think we're entertaining a singular thought about Bismarck. We forget that 'Bismarck' as used by us is not a name that guarantees its bearer's existence (only genuine names do that). We forget that our semantic confidence that 'Bismarck' can be used semantically and logically as a name is only as good as our confidence that there existed some unique individual, whom we call 'Bismarck', and whose properties are largely independent of anything we say, think, or believe about him. Our thoughts and language see the world through a glass darkly; names don't wear their bearers on their sleeves. Symbols that behave syntactically or semantically or logically like names may turn out not to be best considered as names – as the phenomenon of empty and ambiguous names shows.⁴³ Our intuitions about these matters are similarly likely to result from seeing through a glass darkly and to point to different theoretical resolutions. While he took linguistic and intuitive data seriously, Russell was quite happy to adopt thoroughly revisionist theoretical resolutions, in part because he cared less about describing the phenomena than about supplying correctives to poor ways of thinking and talking that lead to poor philosophy.⁴⁴

Russell's mistake was not his overly restrictive notion of acquaintance; it was rather the central place he gave to acquaintance in his thinking.⁴⁵ Any liberal notion of acquaintance that takes (TC) seriously will be forced to surrender the (LC) desideratum that names of ordinary objects we're acquainted with guarantee their bearer's existence – the guarantee is no better than our ordinary perceptual or memory-based belief that the object exists. As Russell's thinking developed toward the austere version of acquaintance, more and more of our thoughts became indirect, more and more names became

⁴³ Conversely, symbols that don't look like names may be names – e.g., 'the man in the iron mask', 'the Holy Roman Empire' – though Russell ignored this: "a *name* ... is a simple symbol, directly designating an individual which is its meaning, and having this meaning in its own right, independently of the meanings of all other words" (Russell 1919, p. 174).

⁴⁴ I think there is a deep difference between current approaches to such questions and Russell's. Contemporary investigations seek to discover the semantics of natural language; Russell, while he does not neglect such questions, is far more interested in straightening out natural language so that we can avoid problems to which we are led by uncritically accepted views about how language works.

⁴⁵ Our misplaced confidence in our acquaintance with concepts is demonstrated in great detail in (Wilson 2006).

truncated descriptions, more and more ordinary objects became logical fictions. But he continued to hold steadfastly that some (demonstrative) thoughts must be directly about their objects and some (demonstrative) symbols must be genuine names that guarantee their bearers' existence.⁴⁶ For this to hold, the objects in question must be sense data or something similar: even demonstrative thoughts may fail to designate an ordinary physical object wrongly believed to be present; even demonstratives don't guarantee their bearers. If this is conceded – as it seems to be by proponents of singular thought or direct reference – it becomes unclear why we should assign acquaintance, cognitive connection, and allied notions a central role. The world we're acquainted with no less than the world we know by description is seen through a glass darkly.⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ How steadfastly is charmingly rendered by: "You can keep 'this' going for about a minute or two. I made that dot and talked about it for some little time. I mean it varies often. If you argue quickly, you can get some little way before it is finished. I think things last for a finite time, a matter of some seconds or minutes or whatever it may happen to be" (Russell 1918, p. 65)

⁴⁷ Thanks to John Koethe, Robert Schwartz, and Mark Wilson for helpful discussions.

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Michael Liston
Department of Philosophy
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, PO Box 413,
Milwaukee, WI 53201, USA
mnliston@uwm.edu