

California Semantics Meets the Great Fact

STEVEN J. WAGNER*

1 Introduction I call a semantic theory extensional if it makes the meaning of a sentence a function of the referents of its semantically primitive (unstructured) parts. I provisionally assume that meanings are the objects of belief and that a 'that'-clause in a belief attribution identifies a belief by providing a sentence whose meaning is believed. Thus, 'John believes that Hesperus has risen' says that John believes the meaning of 'Hesperus has risen'. These assumptions, I think, are at best roughly accurate, but they allow a convenient statement of the main problem of extensional semantics. On the extensional viewpoint, the sole contribution of a name n to the meaning of a sentence is n 's bearer. The substitution of any coreferring m for n preserves meaning because meaning is a function of part-reference and (ordinary) names are semantically primitive. Hence, coreferring names are intersubstitutable in belief contexts, indeed in propositional attitude contexts generally. If John believes that Hesperus has risen, then he believes that Phosphorus has risen. This can seem obviously wrong, as it did to Frege. The main problem of extensional semantics is whether it is, nonetheless, true.

Russell's semantics was extensional: the meaning of a sentence was a complex of the objects, properties, and relations denoted by its terms.¹ But his approach fell into disfavor under the influence first of Carnap and other Fregean theorists, more recently of sententialist views of belief like Quine's and Fodor's. It is now back in fashion. One cause is simple theoretical convenience. Frege's views led him to his notoriously underspecified senses, and his followers have inherited his difficulties. If one holds that the semantic contribution of

*This paper evolved from comments on an APA paper of David Austin's given in Chicago, April 1985. I am grateful for Austin's stimulation and thank him and Robert Stalnaker for showing me various manuscripts. I am very grateful to Nathan Salmon for a letter that deflated my rhetoric and forced a much more thorough presentation. (Some of the polemics remain, but I hope extensionalists will take them as friendly provocations.) Tim McCarthy's contributions are noted below.

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