DESCRIPTION THEORY:
CRITICAL DEFENSE OF A RUSSELLIAN APPROACH

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1 Scope of the Present Study The present paper contains a systematic discussion of a standard version of Russell's theory of descriptions (this is not another historical study on Russell or descriptions). More specifically, we will briefly present a formal version of the theory which will be argued to be both formally and materially adequate. In the latter respect, we will be concerned with showing that the theory is flexible enough in applications to ordinary discourse to accommodate alternative methods of paraphrase.

The adequacy of Russell's theory has repeatedly been challenged at both the formal and the applied levels. In the present account the core of Russell's well-known method of contextual definition for descriptions will be retained. At the formal level, we will show that the method suffices to justify a law of *Substitutivity of Identity* for descriptions; this law in turn allows us to extend standard quantification rules to description containing contexts in general. At the applied level, we will indicate how the adroit use of certain special contexts of descriptions (called *primary* contexts) can secure maximum flexibility in formalization.

2 The Basic Theory Quine has in effect proposed the following law

$$(y)((x)(Fx \equiv x = y) \equiv (\imath x)Fx = y)$$

as a fundamental condition of adequacy for any theory of descriptions.[1] In addition to the above, I would like to mention also the following as equally basic:

$$((y)Fy \cdot (\exists y)((\imath x)Gx = y)) \supset F(\imath x)Gx \qquad \text{RUI}$$
$$(F(\imath x)Gx \cdot (\exists y)((\imath x)Gx = y)) \supset (\exists y)Fy \qquad \text{REG}$$

As their names indicate, RUI and REG are *restricted* analogues of standard universal instantiation and existential generalization, respectively. They differ from the standard laws only in containing the additional clause: '$(\exists y)((\imath x)Gx = y)$'. This well-known method for formalizing claims of the form 'The so-and-so exists' goes back to Russell. To see that it does