The Role of the Ascribee's Representations in Belief Ascriptions

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Context and the Attitudes (*Meaning in Context, Volume I*), by MARK RICHARD, OXFORD, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013, pp. 290, £37.50.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 80s, Mark Richard has supported a neo-Russellian semantics for propositional attitude ascriptions. This volume gives us the chance to see how Richard developed his view through the years. It is the first of two volumes that compile Richard's philosophical work, this one focusing on the relation between context and propositional attitudes, the other one on the nature of propositions. Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 13 account for the narrative just sketched. As we will see later, they are successive, refined statements of Richard's proposal. Chapters 3, 8, 11, and 14 cover complementary topics. Particularly, in chapter 3, Richard argues that a language can have objectual quantification even if it fails to meet Leibniz's Law. In chapter 8, he assesses different approaches to propositional quantification that do not require positing intensional entities. Chapter 11 addresses the semantics of intensional transitives — verbs, such as "seek" or "worship", that contribute to sentences like "Mary seeks a tattooed dog", which are ambiguous regarding whether what Mary seeks is a specific dog or any tattooed dog. Chapter 14, finally, is about Kripke's puzzle. I will not consider these four chapters here, but focus on the rest, including chapter 1. With this chapter, the volume becomes specially interesting not only for those who want to put Richard's proposal in perspective, but also for those

willing to know which balance Richard himself currently makes of it. In fact, in this introduction he even updates his view on the meaning of attitude ascriptions by revising previous commitments.

In this critical notice, I will review how Richard's position evolves through the years and highlight a tension that I think can be found between its different stages. It is the one concerning the semantic role that the ascribee's representations play in propositional attitude ascriptions. Sometimes it seems like they have an impact on the truth value of the ascription, sometimes it seems like they do not. It is my aim here to make Richard's commitments clear at each point. However, even if Richard's position on this aspect changes through the years, he seems to consistently hold that the ascribee's representations are not part of the proposition expressed. So, at some points at least, Richard claims that the ascription's truth value depends on something that is not part of the proposition. Hence, my aim will also be to spell out how this can be. To do so, I will make use of tools that can be found elsewhere in Richard's work.

The chapters I will focus on in pursuing these aims, as I said before, are chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 13. Chapters 2 and 4 are early attempts to argue for a neo-Russellian semantics for propositional attitude ascriptions. Richard's classic presentation of his view can be found in chapter 5. Chapter 6's effort to differentiate Richard's view from that of Crimmins and Perry (1989) helps us to see its main tenets more clearly. And in this chapter, and chapters 7 and 13, Richard replies to some of his critics, such as Crimmins and Perry (1989), Sider (1995), and Soames (1995), (2002). In chapter 9, he gives some additional arguments against Fregean approaches to the semantics of propositional attitude ascriptions, and, in chapter 10, finally, he rejects another alternative — that of Crimmins (1998).

The outline of this critical notice will be as follows. First, I will motivate and present Richard's proposal (as stated in chapter 5) as a solution to the classical Fregean puzzle (section 2). In section 3, I will try to reconstruct how the papers compiled in this volume contribute to the development of Richard's view on propositional attitude ascription. Finally, in section 4 I will try to shed some light on the somewhat obscure role that the ascribee's representations play in Richard's semantics, along the lines suggested above.

II. RICHARD'S PROPOSAL

In this section, I will present the puzzle that Richard's proposal aims at solving. I will explain why Richard rejects Fregean solutions of it

and sketch the solution he himself gives. To do so, I will use chapter 5 as a basis. However, even though chapter 5 features the most classical exposition of Richard's proposal, the version of this view it contains is not definitive. Consequently, in the next section I will review how it evolves through the years.

The puzzle that Richard faces is the following. Let "*A*" and "*B*" be two different names for a single object, and let *S* be a subject who is not aware of the identity between *A* and *B*. There is a predicate *P* that *S* thinks that applies to *A* but not to *B*, so that "*S* believes that *A* is *P*" is true, while "*S* believes that *B* is *P*" is false. But how can this be? If two sentences differ only in co-referential terms, they should have the same truth value. To put it in less abstract terms: Lois Lane does not know that Clark Kent is Superman. She believes that Superman can fly. However, she does not believe that Clark Kent can fly. How is it that (1) "Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly" can be true while (2) "Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly" is false? If "Superman" and "Clark Kent" are co-referential, no pair of sentences differing only in these names should vary in truth value.

A classic solution to this puzzle is the Fregean one. According to it, when embedded under a belief operator, names do not refer to their bearer, but to their sense [see McKay & Nelson (2010), section 2]. This enables "Superman" and "Clark Kent" to refer to different things in (1) and (2), which in turn makes it possible for (1) and (2) to have different truth values. However, this solution does not satisfy Richard, because it is not at all clear what it is this sense that names under belief operators refer to [Richard (2013), p. 66]. Is it their sense for the person using them? Is it the one for the person to whom the attitude is ascribed? Do names under belief operators work as variables for senses? Richard reviews all these responses and discards all of them for different reasons [Richard (2013), pp. 66-72].

The solution that Richard favours is provided by his account of belief ascriptions. Belief ascription semantics can be divided into two groups: Fregean and Russellian semantics. Fregean semantics, as said before, is one in which names under the scope of a belief operator do not refer to their bearers but to their senses. In Russellian semantics, on the other hand, names keep their reference constant whether under the scope of a belief operator or not. Richard's semantics is a Russellian one. However, Richard tries to escape one of the most salient Russellian consequences: the fact that no two belief ascriptions differing only in one co-referential name can have different truth values. Standard Russellian so-

lutions [such as that of Salmon (1986)] bite the bullet and put the differences in what the two belief ascriptions implicate, not in their truth conditions. Richard's neo-Russellian proposal aims at avoiding this: for him, names do always refer to their bearers, but substituting co-referential names under the scope of a belief operator can change the truth value of the ascription. How this can be, is what this critical notice focuses on. But there is in fact a tension between the two extremes, as I will acknowledge later.

According to Richard's account, "believes" is *indexical* just like "I" or "now" are, so that the truth of sentences containing it varies across contexts, which does not necessarily mean that "believes" changes its meaning on the way [Richard (2013), p. 84]. And the context-sensitive element that changes the truth value of belief ascriptions is what translations of the sentences that the ascribee accepts count as acceptable, or, in other words, what translation or correlation functions are acceptable [Richard (2013), p. 84]. Let us make this a little more technical. Richard calls structures consisting of pairings of a sentence's constituents and their Russellian interpretations RAMs (for "Russellian Annotated Matrices"). So,

> (t)aken in a context, call it c, an ascription of the form of "a believes that S" is true if and only if the RAM determined (in c) by S represents a RAM in the representational system of what a names (in c), under a correlation which obeys all the restrictions operative in c [Richard (2013), pp. 85-86].

Hence, in ascribing a belief we are not only describing a relation between the ascribee and the Russellian proposition; we are also conveying, in a sense,[1] that the words we have used in "p" correctly translate S's way of representing the constituents of the Russellian proposition. For instance, one of Lois Lane's RAMs could be <<"can fly", the ability to fly>, <"Superman", Superman>>. When we say (1), we not only say that Lois Lane believes the Russellian proposition <the ability to fly, Superman>: we also convey that our "Superman" correctly translates Lois', and the same goes for our "can fly". And, when we say (2), we convey that our "Clark Kent" correctly translates Lois' "Superman", or at least one representation she has for Superman. What translation is an acceptable one varies across contexts, and that is the role that context plays in making "believes" an indexical. Particularly, our context blocks "Clark Kent" as an acceptable translation for Lois' representation of Superman.

When I utter (1), my context determines a restriction under which any name co-referential with "Superman" correctly translates it. (1)

would be true iff my RAM <<"can fly", the ability to fly>, <"Superman", Superman>> represented Lois' RAM <<"can fly", the ability to fly>, <"Superman", Superman>>, as it certainly does. So, (1) is true. But if I now utter (2), the restriction that my context now determines allows "Superman" only to be translated to some names, and "Clark Kent" is not one of them. (2) would be true iff my RAM <<"can fly", the ability to fly>, <"Clark Kent", Superman>> represented Lois' RAM <<"can fly", the ability to fly>, <"Clark Kent", Superman>>, which it does not. So, (2) is false even though it differs from (1) only in a co-referential name. This is how Richard's 1989 view solves our puzzle.

Richard's view has evolved through his career. It took him some years to take it to its 1989 form, and he continued sharpening it in discussing with his critics in the subsequent decades. This is what we will see in the next section.

III. Richard's View Through the Years

As I said in the previous section, the view stated in chapter 5 is not definitive. It is an improvement on some previous statements from the 80s and it is sharpened in the 90s and 2000s. In this section, I will reconstruct the development of Richard's view from 1983 (when the first of the papers collected here was published) to this volume's release. I will use chapters 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 13, as well as the introduction to the volume, as a basis.

Chapter 2 ("Direct Reference and Ascriptions of Belief", first published in 1983) features the first presentation of Richard's neo-Russellian semantics for belief ascriptions, which he builds upon Kaplan (1979), (1989) and Perry's (1979) triadic view of belief. According to this view, belief is a triadic relation among a person, a proposition, and a sentential meaning, so that to believe a proposition is to do so under a sentential meaning. If we extend this to the linguistic realm, we will have it that ascriptions of belief imply not only that a person believes a proposition, but that she believes it in a certain way [Richard (2013), p. 27]. Richard's purpose in this chapter is to show that the thesis of direct reference is compatible with failures of intersubstitutability across belief contexts, and he does so by presenting a semantics compatible with the thesis of direct reference and which, at the same time, explains those failures. This is the neo-Russellian semantics built upon Kaplan and Perry's triadic view of belief mentioned above.

Chapter 2's Richard considers that the proposition being believed in one or another way has an impact on the ascription's truth value. So, "*S* believes that *p*" can be true if *p* is believed by *S* in a certain way, false if the same proposition is believed in another way. If that is Richard's position, he had undoubtedly dropped it four years later, in 1987's "Attitude Ascriptions, Semantic Theory, and Pragmatic Evidence" (chapter 4). In this second attempt of sketching a neo-Russellian semantics for belief ascriptions, aimed at showing that Russellianism can be extended to answer several other Fregean objections having to do with pragmatic evidence, the proposition being believed in one way or another does not determine the ascription's truth conditions [Richard (2013), p. 66]. This is so even if, in the introduction to the volume, Richard claims that his position does not change between chapters 2 and 4. There, he assumes that in chapters 2 through 4 "the truth of a belief (…) ascription (…) is a matter not only of x believing the (Russellian/Millian/referential) proposition determined by S, but of x's attitude involving a representation that has various properties systematically determined by the meaning of S" [Richard (2013), p. 7].

Be it as it may, by 1989's "How I Say What You Think" (chapter 5) Richard has returned to his 1983's position, even though in a more sophisticated fashion. Richard's view at this point is developed in more detail in the coetaneous *Propositional Attitudes*, published in 1990. We reviewed Richard's 1989 proposal in section 2, where we saw that, again, the truth of the belief ascription does not only involve the Russellian proposition, but also the believer's way of believing it — and how well our ascription translates that way.

We have said that Richard's proposal is originally built upon Kaplan and Perry's triadic view of belief. Perry (and Crimmins) himself builds a semantics from such a position [Crimmins and Perry (1989)], and one could think that Richard's is nothing but a notational variant of it. In 1993's "Attitudes in Context" (chapter 6), Richard takes great care to draw a line between the two theories. The line as he draws it is this: while in Perry and Crimmins' view belief ascriptions involve tacit reference to the ascribee's representations, in Richard's there is no such reference [Richard (2013), p. 115-116]. What this means is obscure, but my interpretation, to which I will come back later, is that, for Richard, representations are not constituents of the proposition expressed (while in Perry and Crimmins' view they are).

Over the following years, Richard answers objections from his view's critics. Already in chapter 6 he confronts Crimmins' (1992) arguments that Perry and Crimmins' proposal is devoid of some problems

regarding names repeated through the ascription that Richard's has, and in chapters 7 and 13 he resists Sider's (1995) and Soames' (1995), (2002) attacks. Crimmins' arguments, reviewed in the introduction [Richard (2013), pp. 8-11], are these: if we follow Richard's account, any two instances of the same name under the scope of "believes" should involve the same representation. However, if this was so, "Cyril believes that John is John's father" would be equivalent to "Cyril believes that John is his own father". Still, one could find cases where Cyril believes that John is John's father without failing to be rational, but one could not find cases where Cyril believes that John is his own father without failing to be rational. Richard's (1993) answer is that any intuition we should have regarding the second sentence we should also have regarding the first one, and vice versa [Richard (2013), p. 104]. As Richard reviews this answer in the introduction, however, he comes to allow that sentences such as "Cyril believes that John is John's father" have readings in which John's representations are the same and also readings in which they are not [Richard (2013), pp. 8-9].

Sider's (1995) and Soames' (1995) objection to Richard's proposal is that it has the consequence that, when a belief ascriber is confused about the ascribee's identity, the clause under "believes" he utters does not translate anything. This is so, they claim, because a confused ascriber will place translation restrictions that cannot be obeyed at once. For instance, if I do not know that Odile is the woman in the corner and place contradictory translation restrictions for Odile's representations and those of the woman in the corner, no translation will obey both at the same time. Hence, no clause ascribed to Odile in an ascription will translate anything [Richard (2013), p. 122]. Richard replies that "believes" is as subject to accomodation as "tall". When we use "tall" regarding different comparison classes, we can come to agree in our use by a process of accomodation, even if at the start we are confused about each other's or our own use. The same happens with "believes", Richard says [Richard (2013), p. 123].

In 1998's "Sense, Necessity, and Belief" (chapter 9), Richard argues against what he takes to be "the best sustained contemporary defense of Frege's views in philosophical semantics", that of Forbes' (1987), (1989), (1990). Forbes argues for the importance of sense to the semantics of attitude ascriptions. He does so by proposing a view in which a proper name *A* under the scope of "believes" directs us to the believer's file labeled *A*. Richard, however, gives some examples that aim at showing that two terms can label the same file while still differing in sense, so that senses are still dispensable in Forbes' view [Richard (2013), pp. 167-168]. So, in giving

additional arguments against Fregean approaches to belief ascriptions, chapter 9 contributes to strengthen Richard's neo-Russellian position.

In 2000's "Semantic Pretense" (chapter 10), Richard addresses a view on belief ascriptions offered by Crimmins (1998) that is built upon the model of semantic pretense. According to this view, just as in saying "Only Ishmael survived the wreck of the *Pequod*" we pretend to refer to a man named "Ishmael" and a ship named "the *Pequod*" that belong to a work of fiction, in saying "Hammurabi believes that Hesperus is a star" we pretend that Hesperus and Phosphorus are different things [Richard (2013), pp. 172-173]. Richard, however, thinks that this account is not coherent with the truth conditions of some of the ascriptions that it aims at explaining.

A few years after his first critiques, Soames (2002) poses some more objections to Richard's view. These are the ones Richard answers to in chapter 13 ("Meaning and Attitude Ascriptions", first published in 2006). According to Soames, Richard fails to identify the source of our reluctance to substitute co-referential names inside the scope of "believes". Soames thinks that this reluctance is based on the fact that we take the ascriptions to attribute different beliefs. At the same time, he thinks that the commitments he takes Richard to ascribe to speakers — commitments to claims about the internal representations of the believers they speak about — are too strong [Soames (2002), p. 170]. Richard's response is that speakers do not speak *about* the ascribees' internal representations. This point, related to the one about the role of the ascribee's representations in the belief ascription alluded to above, is controversial, and I will say more about it later.

Richard does not alter his view in meeting Crimmins', Sider's, or Soames' objections. However, he does so when, in the volume's introduction, he reviews his proposal and tries to anticipate an objection that is not among the ones answered in the collected papers. It is this one: how can we ascribe beliefs to e.g. animals, if they do not have concepts and, therefore, cannot think Russellian contents? Richard's answer is that the ascribee does not have to have concepts — she just has to be in a mental state that can be correctly represented by our words, and it is not necessary for the mental state to have the same semantic properties as our words in order to be correctly represented by them [Richard (2013), pp. 14-16]. But this is not what Richard says in any of the collected papers, and he acknowledges this. Correspondingly, he modifies his proposal (taking chapter 5 as a basis) to allow this possibility. Now the ascribee does not have to be in a state with parts that represent the proposition ascribed

component by component. All she has to do is to be in some belief state that determines the proposition, possibly but not necessarily by representing each of its constituents [Richard (2013), pp. 21-22].

So, Richard makes a transition from his position in the early 80s to his present view — from a quasi-linguistic structure for mental representations to mental representations that do not necessarily have any structure. On the way, he sharpens the impact that these representations have on the truth conditions of the ascription, but he leaves it open whether they are part or not of the proposition expressed. That is what the final section of this critical notice will aim at making clear.

IV. REPRESENTATIONS AS CIRCUMSTANCES OF EVALUATION

We have seen that there is not a single view that can be considered Richard's proposal. Richard's view evolves through the years in several respects. In this final section, I will focus on a particular respect — that of the contribution (or lack thereof) that the ascribee's representations make to the truth value of the belief ascription. Richard is uncomfortable both with Fregean and naive Russellian semantics, and his aim is to find an alternative to both that avoids the problems they have. However, none of the alternatives he provides along the years can make him totally comfortable, for he always has to take a decision: are the ascribee's representations part of the proposition expressed, or are they not? If they are, then Richard's proposal is more Fregean than Russellian. If they are not, then he has to face the traditional problems of the Russellian position.

As we have seen, Richard always remains faithful to his Russellian spirit by taking the ascribee's representations out of the proposition. This he explicitly acknowledges in discussing the differences between his view and that of Crimmins and Perry [Richard (2013), pp. 115-116]. However, Richard claims, this does not mean that changing one representation by another has no impact on the truth conditions of the ascription. During most of his career, Richard holds that substituting representations does have that impact. The only exception to this can be found in chapter 4, where he holds that the ascription's truth conditions do not depend on the ascribee's representations having certain properties determined by the speaker's utterance [Richard (2013), p. 66].

The question here is, is it possible to hold both ideas at once? Can representations, while not being part of the proposition, have an impact on its truth value? Here I will argue that they can, and to do so I

will rely on mechanisms that Richard himself defends in works other than the ones compiled here. These mechanisms are the ones associated to *relativist* semantics[2].

It seems hard to see how the proposition, if it has its truth value *simpliciter*, can have it depending on something that is not part of it. It is easier to see how this could be possible if the proposition does not have its truth value *simpliciter*, but only regarding certain parameters — in this case, the ascribee's representations. So, the proposition expressed by a belief ascription is not true or false by itself, but only true or false regarding this or that representation. Presumably, each utterance will determine a set of representations (those that are correctly translated by the speaker's words), and hence, correctness conditions for each utterance can be given. It is not like any ascription will do — some will be correct, some will not.

Let us remember the truth conditions Richard gives for a belief ascription in chapter 5:

> (t)aken in a context, call it *c*, an ascription of the form of "*a* believes that *S*" is true if and only if the RAM determined (in *c*) by *S* represents a RAM in the representational system of what *a* names (in *c*), under a correlation which obeys all the restrictions operative in *c* [pp. 85-86].

S determines a RAM, which in turn determines a representation. We can substitute another representation for this by changing some of the words in *S*. The new RAM could, or could not, represent *a*'s representation as the former one did. If it does not, then we have changed the belief ascription's truth value by changing the representations involved. Hence, varying representations has an impact on the ascription's truth value.

When I say "*a* believes that *S*", I express the proposition that *a* bears the belief relation to the Russellian proposition determined by *S*. I do not express anything about *a*'s representational system or the RAM determined by *S*. However, the proposition I express is not true or false *simpliciter*, for agents do not bear the belief relation to Russellian propositions *simpliciter*. They do so by means of RAMs. So, the proposition that *a* bears the belief relation to the Russellian proposition determined by *S* is true or false relative to RAMs — it can be true relative to one, false relative to another. That Lois Lane believes the Russellian proposition <the ability to fly, Superman> will be true relative to Lois' RAM corresponding to our "Superman" (call it *A*) and false relative to the one corresponding to our "Clark Kent" (call it *B*). These RAMs are not part of the proposition ex-

pressed, but, as we have insisted, they have an impact on the ascription's truth value. We can treat them as part of the *circumstances of evaluation*. So, even if a speaker does not express anything about RAMs in ascribing a belief, she determines some circumstances for the proposition she expresses to be assessed — and these include RAMs. The ascription will be true if the proposition expressed is true relative to the RAM determined by the ascription, false if it is not. This is how representations are both not part of the proposition expressed, and truth-determining.

In fact, this compromise is not alien to Richard's philosophy. It is the kind of explanation he gives for other cases in his 2008's *When Truth Gives Out*, even if with different terminology. Richard calls his 2008 view "truth relativism", and he explains it by means of an example. Consider the sentence "It is wrong to cheat". According to truth relativism, different uses of this sentence express the same proposition. However, the proposition the sentence expresses is not true or false absolutely, but only relative to something else — a moral norm, say [Richard (2008), p. 89]. Why not say that propositions expressed by sentences such as "Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly" are not absolutely true or false either, but only relative to something else? Here, that other thing would be representations. So, Richard himself has the tools to bring coherence and added potency to his position.

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NOTES

[1] Making it clear what this sense is constitutes one of the main aims of this critical notice. I will do this in section 4.

² In fact, even though Richard [(2008), pp. 89-92] himself calls his position "relativism", it is closer to what has lately been called "non-indexical contextualism" than to current forms of relativism [see MacFarlane (2014), chapter 3].

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RESUMEN
    En esta nota crítica reseño *Context and the Attitudes* (*Meaning in Context*, Volume I), una recopilación de los artículos de Mark Richard sobre la relación entre el contexto y la adscripción de actitudes proposicionales. En la mayoría de ellos, las representaciones del sujeto de la adscripción tienen un impacto en las condiciones de verdad de esta sin ser parte de la proposición expresada. Para resolver la tensión que creo que esto involucra, propongo recurrir al relativismo del propio Richard (2008).

PALABRAS CLAVE: *contexto, adscripción de actitudes proposicionales, representación, proposición, relativismo.*

ABSTRACT
    In this critical notice I review *Context and the Attitudes* (*Meaning in Context*, Volume I), a compilation of Mark Richard's papers on the relation between context and proposi-

tional attitudes. In most of the papers, the ascribee's representations have an impact on the truth conditions of the ascription without being part of the proposition expressed. I highlight a tension that I think this involves and propose to look at Richard's (2008) own relativism to find a solution to that tension.