

BEN CAPLAN

AGAINST WIDESCOPISM

ABSTRACT. *Descriptivists* say that every name is synonymous with some definite description, and *Descriptivists* who are *Widescopers* say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to *modal adverbs* such as “necessarily”. In this paper, I argue against *Widescopism*. *Widescopers* should be *Super Widescopers*: that is, they should say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to *complementizers* such as “that”. *Super Widescopers* should be *Super Duper Widescopers*: that is, they should say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to *quotation marks*. And *Super Duper Widescopers* should be *Ultra Super Duper Widescopers*: that is, they should say that, when the definite description that a name is synonymous with itself contains a name, the definite description that *that* name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to modal adverbs, complementizers, and quotation marks. But *Descriptivists* should not be *Ultra Super Duper Widescopers*. So *Descriptivists* should not be *Widescopers* either.

1. INTRODUCTION

Descriptivists say that every name is synonymous with some definite description, and *Descriptivists* who are *Widescopers* say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to *modal adverbs* such as “necessarily”.¹ In this paper, I argue against *Widescopism*. In Section 2, I present *Widescopism*. In Section 3, I argue that *Widescopers* should be *Super Widescopers*: that is, they should say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to *complementizers* such as “that”. In Section 4, I argue that *Super Widescopers* should be *Super Duper Widescopers*: that is, they should say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with

must take wide scope with respect to *quotation marks*. And, in Section 5, I argue that Super Duper Widescopers should be *Ultra Super Duper Widescopers*: that is, they should say that, when the definite description that a name is synonymous with itself contains a name, the definite description that *that* name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to modal adverbs, complementizers, and quotation marks. But, I argue in Section 6, Descriptivists should not be Ultra Super Duper Widescopers. So Descriptivists should not be Widescopers either. The arguments that I present are somewhat technical and do not address deeper reasons (for example, those that have to do with providing an account of the necessary *a posteriori* or of the contingent *a priori*) that have led some philosophers to adopt some form or other of Descriptivism.² Still, I think that the arguments tell against Widescopism.

2. WIDESCOPISM

To help fix ideas, suppose that, according to Descriptivism, “Aristotle” is synonymous with “the teacher of Alexander”. So, according to Descriptivism,

(1) **Aristotle** taught Alexander.

is synonymous with

(1D) **The teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.

(“D” is for “definite description”. Throughout, the relevant names and definite descriptions in displayed sentences are in boldface.) Now consider

(1A) Necessarily, **Aristotle** taught Alexander.

and

(1AD) Necessarily, **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.

(“A” is for “modal adverb”. Throughout, modal adverbs and complementizers in displayed sentences are underlined. It might sound odd to describe “necessarily” as an *adverb*, since it

combines with sentences rather than verbs. But some adverbs – for example, “obviously” as in “Obviously, you haven’t understood a word I’ve said” – combine with sentences to form sentences; and “necessarily” is one of them.) Anti-Descriptivists might offer the following argument against Descriptivism.

- (P1) (1A) is false.
- (P2) (1AD) is true.
- (C1) So (1A) and (1AD) differ in truth-value. (From (P1) & (P2))
- (P3) If (1A) and (1AD) are synonymous, then (1A) and (1AD) agree in truth-value.
- (C2) So (1A) and (1AD) aren’t synonymous. (From (C1) & (P3))
- (P4) If Descriptivism is true, then (1A) and (1AD) are synonymous.
- (C3) So Descriptivism is false. (From (C2) & (P4))

Let’s call this *The First Argument from Truth-Value*.³

Descriptivists can reply to The First Argument from Truth-Value by denying (P2). (1AD) is true if and only if the proposition actually expressed by (1D) is true in every possible world. But that proposition isn’t true in a possible world w in which there isn’t a unique teacher of Alexander (either because no one taught Alexander in w , or because many people did). So (1AD) is false.

But anti-Descriptivists can offer another argument against Descriptivism. Consider

- (2A) Necessarily, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander.

and

- (2AD) Necessarily, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.

Here's the argument.

- (P1*) (2A) is false.
- (P2*) (2AD) is true.
- (C1*) So (2A) and (2AD) differ in truth-value. (From (P1*) & (P2*))
- (P3*) If (2A) and (2AD) are synonymous, then (2A) and (2AD) agree in truth-value.
- (C2*) So (2A) and (2AD) aren't synonymous. (From (C1*) & (P3*))
- (P4*) If Descriptivism is true, then (2A) and (2AD) are synonymous.
- (C3) So Descriptivism is false. (From (C2*) & (P4*))

Let's call this *The Second Argument from Truth-Value*.

Descriptivists cannot reply to The Second Argument from Truth-Value simply by saying that considering a possible world w in which there is no unique teacher of Alexander shows that (P2*) is false. For it seems that (2AD) is true if and only if the proposition actually expressed by

- (2D) If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.

is true in every possible world; and that proposition is trivially true in w .

But Descriptivists can say that there is a scope ambiguity in (2AD) and that, as a result, there is reading of (2AD) on which it is false even if the proposition actually expressed by (2D) is true in every possible world. On one reading, the definite description in (2AD) takes narrow scope with respect to "necessarily"; whereas, on another reading, the definite description takes wide scope with respect to "necessarily". On the narrow scope reading, (2AD) is synonymous with

- (2ADN) Necessarily, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.

(“N” is for “narrow scope”). (2ADN) is true, since it is true if and only if the proposition actually expressed by (2D) is true in every possible world; and that proposition is true in every possible world. By contrast, on the wide scope reading, (2AD) is synonymous with

(2ADW) **The teacher of Alexander**_{*i*} is such that, necessarily, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he**_{*i*} taught Alexander.

(“W” is for “wide scope”, and the subscripts indicate that “he” is bound by “the teacher of Alexander”). (2ADW) is false, since it is true if and only if the proposition actually expressed by

(2V) If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then *x* taught Alexander.

relative to an assignment of Aristotle to the variable “*x*” is true in every possible world; and it is not the case that that proposition is true in every possible world. (“V” is for “variable”).

By itself, Descriptivism says nothing about how the definite description that a name is synonymous with interacts with modal adverbs such as “necessarily”. There are three possibilities.

Wide with respect to Modal Adverbs: If a name *n* is synonymous with a definite description *d*, then a sentence *S* that contains one or more occurrences of *n* is synonymous with a sentence *S**, where *S** is obtained from *S* as follows: (i) for every occurrence of *n* in *S*, replace *n* with *d*; and (ii) for every occurrence of *d* that was introduced in (i), ensure that *d* takes *wide scope* with respect to modal adverbs such as “necessarily”.

Narrow with respect to Modal Adverbs: If a name *n* is synonymous with a definite description *d*, then a sentence *S* that contains one or more occurrences of *n* is synonymous with a sentence *S**, where *S** is obtained from *S* as follows: (i) for every occurrence of *n* in *S*, replace *n* with *d*; and (ii) for every occurrence of *d* that was introduced in (i), ensure that *d* takes *narrow scope* with respect to modal adverbs such as “necessarily”.

Choice with respect to Modal Adverbs: If a name n is synonymous with a definite description d , then a sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n in S , replace n with d ; and (ii) for every occurrence of d that was introduced in (i), allow d to take either wide scope or narrow scope with respect to modal adverbs such as “necessarily”.

Here’s a reason for thinking that Descriptivism should be combined with Wide with respect to Modal Adverbs rather than Narrow with respect to Modal Adverbs or Choice with respect to Modal Adverbs. (2A) is unambiguously false. Combining Descriptivism with either Narrow with respect to Modal Adverbs or Choice with respect to Modal Adverbs would yield the wrong result: there would a reading of (2A) – namely, one on which (2A) is synonymous with (2ADN) – on which (2A) is true. By contrast, combining Descriptivism with Wide with respect to Modal Adverbs yields the right result: there is only one reading of (2A) – namely, one on which (2A) is synonymous with (2ADW) – and, on that reading, (2A) is false. Let’s call the combination of Descriptivism and Wide with respect to Modal Adverbs *Widescopism*.⁴

Widescopism allows Descriptivists to reply to The Second Argument from Truth-Value. According to Widescopism, (2A) is synonymous with (2ADW), which is false. So (2A) and (2ADW) don’t differ in truth-value. In other words, (P4*) is true only if (2AD) is interpreted as (2ADW); but, in that case, (P2*) is false. So The Second Argument from Truth-Value isn’t sound.

3. SUPER WIDESCOPISM

Consider the argument from the premises

- (3C) The proposition that, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander = the proposition that , if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander

and

(2CDN) The proposition that, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander is a necessary truth.

to the conclusion

(2C) The proposition that, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander is a necessary truth.

(“C” is for “complementizer”. In (3C), (2CDN), and (2C), the relevant complementizer is “that”.) Let’s call the argument from (3C) and (2CDN) to (2C) ‘ α ’. Consider the following argument against Widescopism.

- (P5) If Widescopism is true, then the premise (3C) is true.
- (P6) If Widescopism is true, then the premise (2CDN) is true.
- (P7) If Widescopism is true, then the conclusion (2C) is false.
- (C4) So, if Widescopism is true, then the premises (3C) and (2CDN) are true and the conclusion (2C) is false. (From (P5)–(P7))
- (P8) If the premises (3C) and (2CDN) are true and the conclusion (2C) is false, then α is invalid.
- (C5) So, if Widescopism is true, then α is invalid. (From (C4) & (P8))
- (P9) α is valid.
- (C6) So Widescopism is false. (From (C5) & (P9))

Let’s call this *The First Argument from Validity*.⁵

By itself, Widescopism doesn’t say anything about how the definite description that a name is synonymous with interacts with complementizers such as “that”. As before, there are three possibilities.

Wide with respect to Complementizers: If a name n is synonymous with a definite description d , then a sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n in S , replace n with d ; and (ii) for every

occurrence of d that was introduced in (i), ensure that d takes *wide scope* with respect to complementizers such as “that”.

Narrow with respect to Complementizers: If a name n is synonymous with a definite description d , then a sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n in S , replace n with d ; and (ii) for every occurrence of d that was introduced in (i), ensure that d takes *narrow scope* with respect to complementizers such as “that”.

Choice with respect to Complementizers: If a name n is synonymous with a definite description d , then a sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n in S , replace n with d ; and (ii) for every occurrence of d that was introduced in (i), allow d to take *either wide scope or narrow scope* with respect to complementizers such as “that”.

If Descriptivism should be combined with Wide with respect to Modal Adverbs rather than Narrow with respect to Modal Adverbs or Choice with respect to Modal Adverbs (see Section 2), then Widescopism should be combined with Wide with respect to Complementizers rather than Narrow with respect to Complementizers or Choice with respect to Complementizers. (2C) is unambiguously false. Combining Widescopism with either Narrow with respect to Complementizers or Choice with respect to Complementizers would yield the wrong result. For there would be a reading of (2C) on which it is synonymous with (2CDN). And (2CDN) is true, since the descriptive content of “the teacher of Alexander” is part of the consequent of the proposition that is said to be a necessary truth. By contrast, combining Widescopism with Wide with respect to Complementizers yields the right result. For there is only one reading of (2C); on that reading, (2C) is synonymous with

- (2CDW) **The teacher of Alexander** _{i} is such that the proposition that, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he** _{i} taught Alexander is a necessary truth.

And (2CDW) is false, since the descriptive content of “the teacher of Alexander” is not part of the consequent of the proposition that is said to be a necessary truth.

Widescopers might want to deny that (2C) is unambiguously false.⁶ But, if they deny that, then they should also deny that

- (2A) Necessarily, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander.

is unambiguously false. And, if they deny that (2A) is unambiguously false, then there is no reason for them to insist that names are synonymous with definite descriptions that *must* take wide scope with respect to modal adverbs such as “necessarily”, in which case there is no reason for them to be Widescopers. So, if their view is to be motivated, Widescopers should accept that (2C) is unambiguously false. So Widescopers should accept Wide with respect to Complementizers. Let’s call the combination of Widescopism and Wide with respect to Complementizers *Super Widescopism*.

If Super Widescopism is true, then the premise

- (3C) The proposition that, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander = the proposition that, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.

is synonymous with

- (3CDW) **The teacher of Alexander**_{*i*} is such that the proposition that, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he**_{*i*} taught Alexander = the proposition that, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.

In (3CDW), the second occurrence of “the teacher of Alexander” can take narrow scope with respect to the second underlined occurrence of “that”. (This is consistent with Super Widescopism. Although Super Widescopism requires that some occurrences of definite descriptions take wide scope with respect to complementizers, Super Widescopism is restricted

to occurrences of definite descriptions that replace occurrences of names that they are synonymous with; it is not a claim about *all* occurrences of definite descriptions.) And, if the second occurrence of “the teacher of Alexander” takes narrow scope with respect to the second underlined occurrence of “that”, then (3CDW) is false. For in that case the descriptive content of “the teacher of Alexander” is part of the consequent of the proposition mentioned on the right-hand side of the identity sign, but that content is not part of the consequent of the proposition mentioned on the left-hand side of the identity sign. So (P5) is false: even if Widescopism is true, (3C) need not be true.⁷ So The First Argument from Validity is unsound.

4. SUPER DUPER WIDESCOPISM

Consider the argument from the premises

- (3Q) The proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander” = the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander”.

and

- (2QDN) The proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander” is a necessary truth.

to the conclusion

- (2Q) The proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander” is a necessary truth.

(“Q” is for “quotation”.) Let’s call the argument from (3Q) and (2QDN) to (2Q) “ β ”. Now consider the following argument against Super Widescopism.

- (P5*) If Super Widescopism is true, then the premise (3Q) is true.
- (P6*) If Super Widescopism is true, then the premise (2QDN) is true.
- (P7*) If Super Widescopism is true, then the conclusion (2Q) is false.
- (C4*) So, if Super Widescopism is true, then the premises (3Q) and (2QDN) are true and the conclusion (2Q) is false. (From (P5*)–(P7*))
- (P8*) If the premises (3Q) and (2QDN) are true and the conclusion (2Q) is false, then β is invalid.
- (C5*) So, if Super Widescopism is true, then β is invalid. (From (C4*) & (P8*))
- (P9*) β is valid.
- (C6*) So Super Widescopism is false. (From (C5*) & (P9*))

Let's call this *The Second Argument from Validity*.⁸

By itself, Super Widescopism doesn't say anything about how the definite description that a name is synonymous with interacts with quotation marks.⁹ As usual, there are three possibilities.

Wide with respect to Quotation Marks: If a name n is synonymous with a definite description d , then a sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n in S , replace n with d ; and (ii) for every occurrence of d that was introduced in (i), ensure that d takes *wide scope* with respect to quotation marks.

Narrow with respect to Quotation Marks: If a name n is synonymous with a definite description d , then a sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n in S , replace n with d ; and (ii) for every occurrence of d that was introduced in (i), ensure that d takes *narrow scope* with respect to quotation marks.

Choice with respect to Quotation Marks: If a name n is synonymous with a definite description d , then a sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n in S , replace n with d ; and (ii) for every occurrence of d that was introduced in (i), allow d to take *either wide scope or narrow scope* with respect to quotation marks.

If Widescopism should be combined with Wide with respect to Complementizers rather than Narrow with respect to Complementizers or Choice with respect to Complementizers (see Section 3), then Super Widescopism should be combined with Wide with respect to Quotation Marks rather than Narrow with respect to Quotation Marks or Choice with respect to Quotation Marks. (2Q) is unambiguously false. Combining Super Widescopism with either Narrow with respect to Quotation Marks or Choice with respect to Quotation Marks would yield the wrong result. For there would be a reading of (2Q) on which it is synonymous with (2QDN). And (2QDN) is true. By contrast, combining Widescopism with Wide with respect to Quotation Marks yields the right result. For there is only one reading of (2Q); on that reading, (2Q) is synonymous with

(2QDW) **The teacher of Alexander** _{i} is such that the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he** _{i} taught Alexander” is a necessary truth.

And (2QDW) is false. Super Widescopers might want to deny that (2Q) is unambiguously false. But, if they deny that, then they should also deny that

(2C) The proposition that, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander is a necessary truth.

is unambiguously false, in which case Super Widescopism would be unmotivated (see Section 3). Let’s call the combination of Super Widescopism and Wide with respect to Quotation Marks *Super Duper Widescopism*.

Timid Super Widescopers might balk at Super Duper Widescopism. After all, according to Super Duper Widescopism, definite descriptions can take wide scope with respect to quotation marks, so we can quantify into quotation marks. (Super Duper Widescopers are, of course, not timid about this. David Sosa (2001, pp. 34–35 n. 7) quotes David Lewis (personal communication) as saying that, “if a description is eager enough for wide scope, its scope may cross sentence boundaries and also boundaries of quotation and disquotation.”) Timid Super Widescopers might concede that, *if* a name that occurs within quotation marks were synonymous with a definite description, then that definite description would have to take wide scope with respect to those quotation marks; but they might say that, when a name occurs within quotation marks, it should not be treated as if it were synonymous with some definite description, so the question of what scope that definite description takes with respect to those quotation marks doesn’t arise in the first place.

But there is a reason for Super Widescopers not to be timid and to endorse Super Duper Widescopism: namely, it allows them to reply to The Second Argument from Validity. If Super Duper Widescopism is true, then the premise

- (3Q) The proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander” = the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander”.

is synonymous with

- (3QDW) **The teacher of Alexander_i** is such that the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he_i** taught Alexander” = the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander**

In (3QDW), the second occurrence of “the teacher of Alexander” can take narrow scope with respect to the second pair of quotation marks. And, if it does, then (3QDW) is false. For in that case the descriptive content of “the teacher of Alexander” is part of the consequent of the proposition mentioned on the right-hand side of the identity sign, but that content is not part of the consequent of the proposition mentioned on the left-hand side of the identity sign. So (P5*) is false: even if Super Widescopism is true, (3Q) need not be true. So The Second Argument from Validity is unsound.

5. ULTRA SUPER DUPER WIDESCOPISM

Consider the following sentences.

- (2) If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander.

and

- (2D) If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.

Now consider the argument from the premises

- (3M) The proposition expressed by (2) = the proposition expressed by (2D).

and

- (2M) The proposition expressed by (2D) is a necessary truth.

to the conclusion

- (2M*) The proposition expressed by (2) is a necessary truth.

(“M” is for “mention”.) Let’s call the argument from (3M) and (2M) to (2M*) “ γ ”. Now consider the following argument against Super Duper Widescopism.

- (P5**) If Super Duper Widescopism is true, then the premise (3M) is true.
- (P6**) If Super Duper Widescopism is true, then the premise (2M) is true.
- (P7**) If Super Duper Widescopism is true, then the conclusion (2M*) is false.
- (C4**) So, if Super Duper Widescopism is true, then the premises (3M) and (2M) are true and the conclusion (2M*) is false. (From (P5**) – (P7**))
- (P8**) If the premises (3M) and (2M) are true and the conclusion (2M*) is false, then γ is invalid.
- (C5**) So, if Super Duper Widescopism is true, then γ is invalid. (From (C4**) & (P8**))
- (P9**) γ is valid.
- (C6**) So Super Duper Widescopism is false. (From (C5**) & (P9**)).

Let's call this *The Third Argument from Validity*.

(2M*) contains two names: namely, "(2)" and "(2D)". Suppose that, according to Super Duper Widescopism, "(2)" and "(2D)" are synonymous with the definite descriptions "the sentence 'If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then Aristotle taught Alexander' " and "the sentence 'If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander' ", respectively. The first definite description itself contains the name "Aristotle", which we have been supposing is synonymous with "the teacher of Alexander". By itself, Super Duper Widescopism doesn't say how the definite description d_2 that is synonymous with a name n_2 that occurs within another definite description d_1 that is synonymous with another name n_1 interacts with modal adverbs, complementizers, and quotation marks. If we assume that the definite description d_2 treats modal adverbs, complementizers, and quotation marks alike, there are three possibilities.

Ultra Wide: If a name n_1 is synonymous with a definite description d_1 and if d_1 contains a further name n_2 and if n_2 is synonymous with a further definite description d_2 , then a

sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n_1 is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n_1 in S , replace n_1 with d_1 ; (ii) for every occurrence of n_2 that occurs within an occurrence of d_1 that was introduced in (i), replace n_2 with d_2 ; and (iii) for every occurrence of d_2 that was introduced in (ii), ensure that d_2 takes *wide scope* with respect to modal adverbs, complementizers, and quotation marks.

Ultra Narrow: If a name n_1 is synonymous with a definite description d_1 and if d_1 contains a further name n_2 and if n_2 is synonymous with a further definite description d_2 , then a sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n_1 is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n_1 in S , replace n_1 with d_1 ; (ii) for every occurrence of n_2 that occurs within an occurrence of d_1 that was introduced in (i), replace n_2 with d_2 ; and (iii) for every occurrence of d_2 that was introduced in (ii), ensure that d_2 takes *narrow scope* with respect to modal adverbs, complementizers, and quotation marks.

Ultra Choice: If a name n_1 is synonymous with a definite description d_1 and if d_1 contains a further name n_2 and if n_2 is synonymous with a further definite description d_2 , then a sentence S that contains one or more occurrences of n_1 is synonymous with a sentence S^* , where S^* is obtained from S as follows: (i) for every occurrence of n_1 in S , replace n_1 with d_1 ; (ii) for every occurrence of n_2 that occurs within an occurrence of d_1 that was introduced in (i), replace n_2 with d_2 ; and (iii) for every occurrence of d_2 that was introduced in (ii), allow d_2 to take *either wide scope or narrow scope* with respect to modal adverbs, complementizers, and quotation marks.

If Super Widescopism should be combined with Wide with respect to Quotation Marks rather than Narrow with respect to Quotation Marks or Choice with respect to Quotation Marks (see Section 4), then Super Duper Widescopism should be combined with Ultra Wide rather than Ultra Narrow or Ultra Choice. (2M) is unambiguously false. Combining Super Duper Widescopism with either Ultra Narrow or Ultra Choice would

yield the wrong result. For there would be a reading of (2M) on which it is synonymous with

(2MDN) The proposition expressed by **the sentence “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander”** is a necessary truth.

(Throughout, definite descriptions that replace names that occur within definite descriptions are double underlined, as are the pronouns that they bind.) And (2MDN) is true. By contrast, combining Widescopism with Ultra Wide yields the right result. For there is only one reading of (2M); on that reading, (2M) is synonymous with

(2MDW) The teacher of Alexander, is such that the proposition expressed by **the sentence “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then he, taught Alexander”** is a necessary truth.¹⁰

And (2MDW) is false. Super Duper Widescopers might want to deny that (2M) is unambiguously false. But, if they deny that, then they should also deny that

(2Q) The proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander” is a necessary truth.

is unambiguously false, in which case Super Duper Widescopism would be unmotivated (see Section 4). Let’s call the combination of Super Duper Widescopism and Ultra Wide *Ultra Super Duper Widescopism*.

Timid Super Duper Widescopers might balk at Ultra Super Duper Widescopism. After all, according to Ultra Super Duper Widescopism, definite descriptions that are synonymous with names that occur in definite descriptions that are synonymous with other names themselves take scope. Timid Super Duper Widescopers might concede that, *if* a name n_2 that occurs within a definite description d_1 that is synonymous with another name n_1 were itself synonymous with a definite description d_2 , then d_2 would have to take wide scope with respect to modal

adverbs, complementizers, and quotation marks; but they might say that, when a name n_2 that occurs within a definite description d_1 that is synonymous with another name n_1 , n_2 should not be treated as if it were synonymous with some other definite description d_2 , so the question of what scope d_2 takes with respect to other expressions doesn't arise in the first place.

But there is a reason for Super Duper Widescopers not to be timid and to endorse Ultra Super Duper Widescopism: namely, it allows them to reply to The Third Argument from Validity. If Ultra Super Duper Widescopism is true, then the premise

- (3M) The proposition expressed by (2) = the proposition expressed by (2D).

is synonymous with

- (3MDW) The teacher of Alexander, is such that the proposition expressed by the sentence “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then he taught Alexander” = the proposition expressed by the sentence “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander”.

In (3MDW), the second underlined occurrence of “the teacher of Alexander” can take narrow scope with respect to the second pair of quotation marks. And, if it does, then (3MDW) is false. So (P5**) is false: even if Super Duper Widescopism is true, (3M) need not be true. So The Third Argument from Validity is unsound.

6. AGAINST ULTRA SUPER DUPER WIDESCOPISM

If Descriptivism is true, then

- (1) **Aristotle** taught Alexander.

is synonymous with

- (1D) **The teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.

So one might expect that, if Descriptivism is true, then

(4M) (1) is synonymous with (1D).

is unambiguously true. But, if Ultra Super Duper Widescopism is true, then (4M) is synonymous with

(4MDW) The teacher of Alexander_i is such that the sentence “He_i taught Alexander” is synonymous with the sentence “Whoever is the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander”.

In (4MDW), the second occurrence of “the teacher of Alexander” can take narrow scope with respect to the second pair of quotation marks. And, if it does, then (4MDW) is false. For in that case an expression – namely, “the teacher of Alexander” – that occurs in the second sentence mentioned in (4MDW) has a certain descriptive content, but no expression that occurs in the first sentence mentioned in (4MDW) has that descriptive content. The occurrence of the pronoun “he” in the first sentence mentioned in (4MDW) is bound by “the teacher of Alexander”; but “he” does not inherit the descriptive content of “the teacher of Alexander” when the definite description binds the pronoun. Otherwise,

(2ADW) The teacher of Alexander_i is such that, necessarily, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then he_i taught Alexander.

would be true, since it would be equivalent to

(2ADN) Necessarily, if there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander.

So, if Super Duper Widescopism is true, then (4M) is not unambiguously true.

Ultra Super Duper Widescopers might say that there is still a reading of (4M) on which it is true: namely,

(4MDWW) The teacher of Alexander_i and the teacher of Alexander_j are such that the sentence “He_i taught Alexander” is synonymous with the sentence “He_j taught Alexander”.

(4MDWW) is true, but it does not capture what Descriptivists want to say. Descriptivists want to say that (1) has a descriptive content: in

particular, it is synonymous with (1D), which has a descriptive content. But neither sentence mentioned in (4MDWW) has a descriptive content. Both contain occurrences of the pronoun “he” that are bound by definite descriptions; and, as we have seen, such pronouns do not have descriptive contents. (If Descriptivism is true, then “Alexander” is synonymous with some definite description. But, if Ultra Super Duper Widescopism is true, then that definite description, too, must take wide scope with respect to quotation marks. So the occurrences of “Alexander” are not sources of descriptive content either.) Consider anti-Descriptivists about definite descriptions who say that “the teacher of Alexander” is synonymous with “Aristotle”, which has no descriptive content, and hence that (1D) is synonymous with (1), which has no descriptive content either. Such anti-Descriptivists about definite descriptions and Descriptivists about names agree that (1) is synonymous with (1D). So they agree that (4M) is true. (4MDWW) might capture what anti-Descriptivists about definite descriptions want to say; but (4MDWW) does not capture what Descriptivists about names want to say.

So, if Ultra Super Duper Widescopism is true, then there is no true reading of (4M) that captures what Descriptivists want to say. This is surprising. Ultra Super Duper Widescopers might say that the cost is not insuperable, since some other sentence – for example,

(4Q) The sentence “**Aristotle** taught Alexander” is synonymous with the sentence “**The teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander”.

– has a true reading that captures what Descriptivists want to say. But, if Ultra Super Duper Widescopism is true, then there are two readings of (4Q): namely,

(4QDW) **The teacher of Alexander**_{*i*} is such that the sentence “**He**_{*i*} taught Alexander” is synonymous with the sentence “Whoever **is the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander”.

and

(4QDWW) **The teacher of Alexander_i** and **the teacher of Alexander_j** are such that the sentence “**He_i** taught Alexander” is synonymous with the sentence “**He_j** taught Alexander”.

In both (4QDW) and (4QDWW), the first occurrence of “the teacher of Alexander” takes wide scope with respect to the first pair of quotation marks. In (4QDW), the second occurrence of “the teacher of Alexander” takes narrow scope with respect to the second pair of quotation marks; whereas, in (4QDWW), the second occurrence of “the teacher of Alexander” takes wide scope with respect to the second pair of quotation marks. (4QDW) is false, since an expression – namely, “the teacher of Alexander” – that occurs in the second sentence mentioned in (4QDW) has a certain descriptive content, but no expression that occurs in the first sentence mentioned in (4QDW) has that descriptive content. And (4QDWW) does not capture what Descriptivists want to say, since neither sentence mentioned in (4QDWW) has a descriptive content. So, if Ultra Super Duper Widescopism is true, then there is no true reading of (4Q) either that captures what Descriptivists want to say.¹¹

Ultra Super Duper Widescopism ends up stripping descriptive content out of all sorts of linguistic contexts. This is what allows Ultra Super Duper Widescopers to avoid arguments against Descriptivism that are based on the presence of descriptive content in those linguistic contexts. But, in the end, it is also why Descriptivists should not be Ultra Super Duper Widescopers: the absence of descriptive content in those linguistic contexts prevents Descriptivists from saying what descriptive contents sentences that contain names have.

6. CONCLUSION

Widescopers should be Super Widescopers; Super Widescopers should be Super Duper Widescopers; and Super Duper Widescopers should be Ultra Super Duper Widescopers. But

Descriptivists shouldn't be Ultra Super Duper Widescopers. So Descriptivists shouldn't be Widescopers either.

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NOTES

- ¹ For a more careful statement of Descriptivism, see Hunter (2004).
- ² For more on these deeper reasons, see Soames (forthcoming).
- ³ See Kripke (1972).
- ⁴ See Dummett (1981a, pp. 110–151; 1981b, pp. 182–185, 557–603), Sosa (2001), and Hunter (2004).
- ⁵ See Soames (1998, pp. 5–7; 2002, pp. 29–30).
- ⁶ See Hunter (2004).
- ⁷ See Hunter (2004).
- ⁸ See Everett (forthcoming).
- ⁹ Perhaps quotation marks are complementizers, in which case Super Widescopism might already entail that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to quotation marks. But perhaps quotation marks and “that” are different kinds of complementizer (see Pietroski, 1996, pp. 358–360), in which case Super Widescopism might entail that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to complementizers such as “that” without entailing that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to complementizers such as quotation marks. At any rate, I argue that Super Widescopers *should* say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to quotation marks; so it doesn't matter whether they're already committed to saying this.
- ¹⁰ The expression “the proposition expressed by ...” might contain a hidden relative pronoun and hence might share a structure with “the proposition that is expressed by ...”. And there are reasons for thinking that the relative pronoun “that” is a complementizer (see Radford, 1997, pp. 305–307). Given Wide with respect to Complementizers, (2MDW) would be

(2MDWW) **The teacher of Alexander_i** is such that **the sentence “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then he_i taught Alexander_j” is such that the proposition (that is) expressed by it_j is a necessary truth.**

But (2MDWW) is equivalent to (2MDW). So I ignore this complication in the text.

¹¹ It is also true that, if Super Duper Widescopism is true, then there is no true reading of (4Q) that captures what Descriptivists want to say. This is surprising. But Super Duper Widescopers can say that this cost is not insuperable, since some other sentence – for example, (4M) – has a true reading that captures what Descriptivists want to say. And, unlike Ultra Super Duper Widescopism, Super Duper Widescopism does not entail that there is no true reading of (4M) that captures what Descriptivists want to say. In this respect, Super Duper Widescopers are better off than Ultra Super Duper Widescopers. For this reason, the argument in this section is directed specifically against Ultra Super Duper Widescopers.

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*468 University College
Department of Philosophy
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
E-mail: ben_caplan@umanitoba.ca*