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# Departing from Frege

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Essays in the philosophy of language

R. M. Sainsbury



London and New York

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Gottlob Frege is now regarded as one of the world's greatest philosophers, and the founder of modern logic. In addition to his work on the foundations of mathematics, his writing on sense and reference remains deeply influential.

*Departing From Frege* takes Frege's work as a point of departure, but argues that we must depart considerably from Frege's own views if we are to work towards an adequate conception of natural language. Mark Sainsbury suggests that the two aspects that are most important to retain in Frege's work are the distinction between sense and reference, and the possibility of sense without a referent. Many philosophers today take the equation of sense with "mode of presentation of an object" or "way of thinking of an object" as definitive of Fregeanism. Although some of Frege's words do suggest this view, Sainsbury argues that it is not required for the distinction between sense and reference. Moreover, it makes it difficult to accommodate sense without a referent, and impossible to do justice to Frege's clear commitment to sense as the common property of all who speak a language.

In this selection of essays, Mark Sainsbury brings a new position into view. It shares with current "direct reference" theories the rejection of descriptivist accounts, but differs from them in its requirement that some expressions with the same referent be given different semantic descriptions, and it allows for sense without a referent. *Departing From Frege* is an outstanding contribution to philosophy of language and logic and will be invaluable to all those interested in Frege and the philosophy of language.

**Mark Sainsbury** is Susan Stebbing Professor of Philosophy at King's College London. He is author of *Russell* (Routledge, 1985), *Paradoxes* (1995) and *Logical Forms* (2000). He is also a former editor of *Mind*.

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II “Evans on reference”. Originally published as R. M. Sainsbury, “*Critical Notice: The Varieties of Reference* by Gareth Evans”, *Mind* **94**, 1985: 120–42. Reprinted by kind permission of the Mind Association.

III “Concepts without boundaries”. London: King’s College London, 1990. This is the text of the philosophical part of my inaugural lecture as Susan Stebbing Professor of Philosophy at King’s College London, delivered on 6 November 1990; hence the absence of references and footnotes. It was reprinted in Rosanna Keefe and Peter Smith (eds) *Vagueness: A Reader*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996: 251–64.

IV “Russell on names and communication”. In Andrew Irvine and Gary Wedeking (eds) *Russell and Analytic Philosophy*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993: 3–21. Reprinted with permission of University of Toronto Press. The volume collects papers presented at a conference on Russell held at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, in 1992.

V “How can some thing say something?”. In Ray Monk and Anthony Palmer (eds) *Bertrand Russell and the Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, Bristol: Thoemmes, 1996: 137–53. Reprinted by permission of Thoemmes Press. The volume collects papers from a conference on Russell held at the University of Southampton in July 1995, which included a symposium between Stuart Candlish and myself. Without informing me, the editors published my paper under a title of their choosing (“How can we mean something?”).

VI “Easy possibilities”. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **57**, 1997: 907–19. Copyright © International Phenomenology Society 1997. Reprinted with permission.

VII “Fregean sense”. In Timothy Childers, Petr Kolář and Vladimír Svoboda (eds) *Logica '96*, Prague: Filosofia, 1997: 261–76. The volume collects papers presented at the annual Logica conference held at Liblice Castle in the Czech Republic, June 1996.

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IX “Names, fictional names and ‘really’”. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* **73**, 1999: 243–69. Reprinted by courtesy of the Editor of the Aristotelian Society: © 1999. This comes from a symposium at the July 1999 Joint Session of the Mind Association and the Aristotelian Society. David Wiggins was my co-symposiast: hence the invitation at the end of my paper for him to expand his views.

X “Knowing meanings and knowing entities”. First published in Uwe Meixner and Peter Simons (eds) *Metaphysics in the Post-Metaphysical Age: Proceedings of the 22nd International Wittgenstein Symposium, 1999*, Vienna, 2001: 106–15. Copyright © öbvahpt Verlagsgesellschaft, Vienna, 2001. Reprinted with permission.

XI “Two ways to smoke a cigarette”. *Ratio* **14**, 2001: 386–406. Reprinted with the permission of Blackwell Publishing. The original version of this paper was published alongside two papers on compositionality, one by Paul Horwich (2001) and one jointly by Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore (2001), and contained a discussion of their disagreement. The present reprinting excises that material and makes some consequential adjustments.

XII “Sense without reference”. In A. Newen, U. Nortmann and R. Stuhlmann-Laeisz (eds), *Building on Frege*, 2001: 211–30. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications, 2001. Copyright © 2001 by CSLI Publications. Used with permission of CSLI Publications. The volume collects papers delivered at a conference on Frege in Bonn in October 1998.

# Departing from Frege

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For most philosophers who write about natural language and meaning, Frege's work has served as a point of departure: a place to start, and an origin from which to measure divergence along a variety of axes. At least until his very last work, Frege was officially not concerned with the semantics of natural languages, and the majority of his writing relates to the foundations of mathematics. Even so, much of the theorizing about meaning in the last fifty or more years could be described as a series of responses to Frege's views about sense and reference. Probably nobody would now defend precisely the position Frege developed, but many locate their own views in terms of the respects in which, and the motivations for which, they depart from Frege. Even those who take themselves to be wholly opposed to Frege regard it as compulsory to address the data, or supposed data, that Frege adduced in support of his distinction between sense and reference and related doctrines. At the centre of concern have been singular terms, and in particular the question of how distinct coreferring ones can, apparently, behave differently, and how they behave in ascriptions of propositional attitude.

The essays reprinted here fit this general picture. Frege is taken as the point of departure, and many of the essays, implicitly or explicitly, explore what can be rejected while retaining what I take to be the crucial elements: that some coreferring singular terms make different semantic contributions, and so require different semantic accounts; and that a singular term may be perfectly intelligible yet lack a referent. In the first part of this introduction I develop the general theme of paring down Frege. In the second part I comment on the individual essays.

## I Paring down Frege

Frege's doctrine of sense and reference starts from the idea that some public and shared differences among things known cannot be attributed to the referents of the words involved in the expression of the knowledge. Though this

starting point has been challenged, I take it as given.<sup>1</sup> It is one thing to know that Hesperus is Hesperus and another to know that it is Phosphorus, one thing to know that Hesperus is visible, another to know that Phosphorus is. These are different items of knowledge, each item is potentially accessible to anyone, and so is the fact that the items are distinct. This I shall call “Frege’s datum”. When we move from things known to the words that express them, it seems that an adequate semantic description should capture a difference between words which, though having the same referent, can contribute differently to the expression of knowledge. The adequacy condition for a semantic description of words is not merely that they be assigned their actual referent. If this were correct, it would be adequate to use just the same semantic description of both “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus”, in which case the semantic description would miss whatever the difference is which enables them to make different contributions to the expression of knowledge. The needed difference in an adequate semantic description marks a difference of sense. This line of thought is what I regard as one constituent of the core of Fregeanism; the other is his recognition of the possibility of sense without reference. Much of the material which surrounds these core constituents must, I think, be set aside, including some aspects, like modes of presentation, which have often been taken to be inseparable from the core.

### ***1.1 Modes of presentation***

Frege initially characterized the sense of a singular term as the mode of presentation of its referent, and introduced the notion of a mode of presentation by a more or less perceptual example: a point where lines *A*, *B* and *C* intersect may be presented as the point of intersection of *A* and *B* or as the point of intersection of *B* and *C*. Similarly, the planet Venus may be presented in different ways, as the first heavenly body to appear at dusk or as the last to fade at dawn. Whatever value modes of presentation may have as a quick intuitive indicator of what sense is supposed to be, they are damaging in many ways, and are to be dropped from the kind of pared down Fregeanism I wish to support (on modes of presentation, see especially essays VII: “Fregean sense” and VIII: “Indexicals and reported speech”). The following are among the reasons for this rejection:

- 1 If sense is the mode of presentation of an object, it is hard to see how sense without reference is possible.
- 2 Modes of presentation are supposed to be typically available independently of language, so that one would expect that the sense of an

<sup>1</sup> Sainsbury (1983) indicates briefly how it might be challenged. The challenge is given theoretical depth by Salmon (1986).

expression can typically be stated without making use of that expression. This imports a reductionist dynamic into many Fregean and post-Fregean positions, which I regard as unwelcome.

- 3 As Frege's doctrine developed, senses became abstract inhabitants of the third world (the world composed neither of things, perceivable by the senses, nor of ideas, which require an owner in order to exist: Frege 1918: 360–2). In that case, a story needs to be told about how we recognize them, and how we know how many senses are involved when we engage in more than one act of reference in thought. If Frege's datum is not to arise again for senses, they need to be objects concerning which we have infallible recognitional powers, and no one nowadays would take such objects seriously. Moreover, if senses are entities, understanding is naturally construed as knowledge of entities, a view that I argue against in essay X ("Knowing meanings and knowing entities").
- 4 As Frege was aware, his view of sense as mode of presentation made it hard to find public senses, and so hard to regard sense as something which should feature in a semantic description of expressions in a public language.

The last difficulty is familiar, and Frege in effect drew attention to it in the famous footnote about "Aristotle" in "On sense and reference" (1892a). By the time of "Thoughts" (1918), his position on this matter was close to a *reductio ad absurdum*. He writes:

with a proper name, it is a matter of the way that the object so designated is presented. This may happen in different ways, and *to every such way there corresponds a special sense* of a sentence containing the proper name. So we must really stipulate that for every proper name there shall be just one associated manner of presentation of the object so designated.  
(Frege 1918: 359, my emphasis)

In the first two sentences of the quotation, Frege recognizes that the doctrine of sense as mode of presentation leads to the unpalatable conclusion that each proper name, even in its use for a single referent, has no public sense, in contradiction to his declared opinion that "the sense of a proper name is grasped by everybody who is sufficiently familiar with the language" (Frege 1892a: 158). The second part of the quotation constitutes a hasty attempt to modify the original theory: though each proper name is associated with many modes of presentation, it is a semantic stipulation that only one such mode constitutes its sense. Completing the theory would require that for each name, some stipulation singles out the favoured mode of presentation. But Frege himself evinces no confidence that this is so, and Saul Kripke's examples have convinced almost everyone that it is not (Kripke 1972).

## 1.2 Specifying senses

So long as modes of presentation are offered as what constitutes senses, it is natural to suppose that specifying a sense would involve some revealing specification of the relevant mode of presentation. Frege himself was ambivalent. As discussed, the mode of presentation story sometimes led him to regard specifying a sense as making a substantive claim about modes of presentation. But one pronouncement is more modest:

In order to speak of the sense of an expression “A” one may simply use the phrase “the sense of the expression ‘A’”. (Frege 1892a: 159)

Here Frege commits firmly to a unique sense, and eschews any attempt at a revealing specification of a mode of presentation. This seems to me the right approach, though this is not everyone’s view about what makes for a “Fregean” specification of sense. For example, Michael Dummett has suggested that sense would constitute an epistemic route to the referent; and many philosophers have supposed that the Fregean sense of a proper name can be given by a definite description.

Frege and Russell have been lumped together as “description theorists” with respect to what we ordinarily count as proper names. The attribution to Frege is based largely on the footnote about Aristotle in “On sense and reference”, and that to Russell on too hasty a reading of various remarks about names being abbreviated or truncated descriptions. Russell’s position stands in interesting contrast to Frege’s: for Russell, definite descriptions do indeed have a part to play in characterizing the use of proper names (ordinarily so-called), for we must use a definite description if we are to give explicit expression to

the thought in the mind of a person using a proper name correctly . . . Moreover the description required to express the thought will vary for different people, or for the same person at different times. (Russell 1912: 29)

The variability shows that Russell did not suppose that the definite descriptions could be used to specify a constant public sense. This opens up for Russell the possibility of a two-level account, which I describe in essay IV (“Russell on names and communication”): at one level there is thought, which is largely descriptive; at another, there is what is communicated, which may feature an object, even though it is not one which we can name (because we cannot be acquainted with it). As Russell put it: “we can . . . describe the proposition we should like to affirm”, which is one of which an unknown object is a constituent (that is, an object with which we are not acquainted). Russell thus feels under no compulsion to move from a descriptive account of thought to a descriptive account of the unit of communication.

Something very like Russell's position is argued for by Evans (1982), as discussed in more detail in essay II below. Evans accused Frege of running together two ideas: that of what is conventionally communicated by the utterance of a sentence, and that of what is going on in the mind of the utterer. Any reasonable view must allow that a full description of an utterer's mental state will contain more than just the public content of the utterance; Frege's "associated idea" marks the position for such additional material within his theory. However, Russell's position is instructive, as it represents one internally consistent way of incorporating something like modes of presentation. Russell's idiosyncratic and changing associated descriptions could well be described as modes of presentation or ways of thinking of their object, but plainly do not correspond to anything public and shared between speakers. The object itself is shared, but is not appropriate to an account of what is happening in the mind of the speaker. There is no room within Frege's system for such a split between the unit of thought and the unit of communication, though Frege struggles with the resulting problems in his discussion of "I"-thoughts, comparing the subject's point of view with the interpreter's. If modes of presentation are accorded the central place which most Fregeans accord them, then there is a natural tendency to see Frege as committed at least to something similar to a descriptivist view of thought. If the mode of presentation is implicit in the proper name, then presumably it should be theoretically possible to make it explicit, and it is hard to imagine how this could be done without using a definite description. Even if Dummett is right to say that "there is nothing in what he [Frege] says to warrant the conclusion that the sense of a proper name is always the sense of some complex description" (Dummett 1973: 97–8), it remains that a Fregean who takes modes of presentation as central will find it hard to avoid commitment to the descriptivist conclusion which Dummett disavows.

I propose that we set modes of presentation aside, and use Frege's modest suggestion recently quoted: we can specify the sense of an expression, "A", by using the phrase "the sense of expression 'A'". A general point in favour of this more modest approach to sense specification is that we would expect a typical word in a language to differ in sense not only from other words, but also from other phrases. At any event, we could certainly imagine a language which totally lacked this kind of redundancy. In such a redundancy-free language, no word would have the same sense as any other word or phrase. A semantic theory for this language couched in the language itself, and which aimed to specify the sense of each word in the language, could but reuse the target word in the specification of that word's sense. The semantic theory would gravitate towards "homophonic" specifications. Logicians are used to this in model-theoretic clauses for logical constants; it should be regarded as normal across the board, departures being justified by special features of language, like indexicality (see §1.4 below, and essay VIII: "Indexicals and reported speech").



Such an approach has been championed by John McDowell, using Donald Davidson's truth theoretic framework. Davidson suggested that a semantic description of a language could take the form of a truth-theory selected for its potential to contribute to the task of radical interpretation. The strategy is to shed light on the nature of meaning in general by considering how a formalized theory (a set of sentences closed under deduction), fit to somehow state or fix the meanings of the sentences of some specific language, can be constructed and empirically justified. In the terminology of essay I ("Understanding and theories of meaning"), the strategy is to use general reflections on the nature of theories<sub>1</sub> of meaning in the service of building a theory<sub>2</sub> of meaning.

A theory<sub>1</sub> of meaning will not say anything of interest about the meaning of words, and will make no contribution to their analysis; homophony will be the rule. An axiom for "green" will be based on something like: "'green' is true just of green things", and one for "Hesperus" on something like "'Hesperus' stands for Hesperus". One merit of Davidson's approach is that it refocuses attention from the unprofitable attempt to "give the meaning of a word" to two other matters with which one can reasonably hope for more progress: getting a theoretical grip on the combinatory devices of language, those which give rise to its compositionality; and exploring the way in which the norms of linguistic interpretation connect with facts about what its speakers use language to do.

The distinction between sense and reference should give rise to no expectation that homophony will be other than the norm; the general considerations recently mentioned, concerning how one might hope to specify the sense of words in a language free of redundancy, still apply: McDowell (1977) argues on Frege's behalf that it is quite in keeping with the distinction between sense and reference to specify the sense of an expression by reusing it in an axiom of the kind just described: "Hesperus" stands for Hesperus. Natural reactions are that, since this merely specifies a referent, it cannot in addition specify a sense; and that since Hesperus is Phosphorus, the approach will ascribe to "Hesperus" just what it ascribes to "Phosphorus", and so will miss the sense/reference distinction. McDowell has shown that these responses are misguided. An axiom of the envisaged homophonic kind will lead to theorems which can be used in good interpretations of speech. But a theory with the axiom "'Hesperus' stands for Phosphorus" will lead to bad interpretations. For example, it will lead to an interpretation of an utterance like "Hesperus is visible but Phosphorus is not" as a manifest contradiction, which it does not seem to be. The sense/reference distinction is marked within the Davidsonian framework by the selection of the right way to specify the referent: a correct axiom will state the reference, and thereby show the sense.

McDowell's point that a Fregean can handle sense and difference of sense without departing from homophonic specifications of sense is crucial to the success of the pared down Fregeanism which I envisage. However, in the

same article, McDowell also suggests that these senses are object-involving or *de re*: they essentially require a referent in order to be intelligible. This sets aside Frege's favourable opinion about the possibility of sense without reference, is logically quite independent of McDowell's arguments for homophonic specifications, and leads to a semantics that is at variance with the facts. These issues are taken up in §1.5 below and in essay XII ("Sense without reference").

### 1.3 Senses and indirect speech

Frege needs senses as entities for his account of the semantics of propositional attitudes. He held that when, for example, we ascribe a belief to someone, we should aim to specify the thought which that person entertained. This led him to the view that the referent of the sentence following "that" in such an ascription is a thought; that is, in this context the referent of the sentence is what is customarily its sense. It also seemed to him that the supposition that, in general, expressions in these contexts refer to their customary senses would correctly predict truth preserving substitution conditions: the fact that, in these contexts, sameness of customary sense is a minimally sufficient condition for expressions to be exchanged without change of truth value would be simply a special case of the insensitivity of the referent of a whole to replacement of a component expression by another with (in the context) the same referent.

Frege himself held to the distinction between sense and reference even for indirect contexts, like those which occur in ascriptions of propositional attitudes. Dummett has argued that this leads to an indefinite hierarchy of senses, indirect senses, doubly indirect senses and so on, as sentences are embedded more and more deeply in the iterable idioms of indirect speech ("Jack believes that Jill believes that Jack believes that . . . etc"). He suggests a simplification which every Fregean should be pleased to adopt: the distinction between sense and reference lapses in indirect contexts, so that indirect sense equals indirect referent equals customary sense. This is a step forward, but it leaves a position which is still reliant upon senses as entities.

If senses pulled their weight as entities in an account of indirect discourse, we would have a reason to accept them as entities. But in fact they do not. Indeed, even the same sense relation does not do what it ought to do within the Fregean system, as Benson Mates (1950) has shown. Sameness of customary sense does not guarantee substitutivity *salva veritate* in every context. It cannot be ruled out *a priori* that a language should contain pairs of expressions with the same customary sense. Suppose that "Greek" and "Hellene" are such a pair. We may be confident that every pair of sentences like "Jack believes that Yannis is a Greek" and "Jack believes that Yannis is a Hellene" must have the same truth value; yet we must recognize that some people, perhaps philosophers in particular, are capable of doubting even what strike

most people as plain truths. These philosophers may hold that whereas there is no room to doubt whether everyone believes that all Greeks are Greeks, there is room to doubt whether everyone believes that all Greeks are Hellenes. To the extent that the story about these (hypothetical) philosophers is not manifestly contradictory, we have a demonstration that the substitution of expressions alike in sense does not always preserve truth value. The same sense relation cannot do all that is needed of an account of the semantics of attributions of propositional attitude. It cannot be denied that this detracts from the power and sweep of Frege's system.

The adoption of a Davidson-style paratactic account of the logical form of ascriptions of propositional attitudes is consistent with Frege's main tenets. In particular, it is consistent with the distinction between sense and reference, and with the possibility of sense without reference. When it comes to analysis of the first sentence in these paratactic logical forms, for example "Galileo said that.", Davidson invokes the samesaying relation. In essay VIII ("Indexicals and reported speech") I consider the idea that we can get a fix on sameness of sense in terms of the criteria we adopt for counting reports of speech as correct or incorrect: in short, in terms of samesaying. This is typical of the inversion of traditional Fregean priorities which I think is appropriate. Whereas, traditionally, the Fregean would "account for" or "explain" the correctness of reports of speech in terms of the same sense relation, I think that this places too much confidence in the antecedent availability of the notion of sense, and that a more modest aim is more appropriate because attainable: to take as data our judgements about the correctness of reports of speech, and use these to animate the conception of sense. The purported traditional explanation is useless, for two reasons: first, as we have seen, it leads to incorrect predictions in Mates-type cases; and secondly the notion of sense can neither be taken for granted as a primitive, nor defined by any single phenomenon. It is therefore best to see it as informed by a variety of matters, including how we count items of knowledge, what we regard as *manifestly* contradictory, our justification for treating equiform tokens as alike in reference (see essay VII "Fregean sense"), and our criteria for judging the correctness of reports of speech.

For Frege, and many subsequent writers, idioms of propositional attitude form a homogeneous class. On the present view this is not so. Whereas there is some plausibility in allowing judgements of sameness of sense to be guided by correctness of speech reports, there would be no plausibility in using correctness of belief reports as such a guide: these reports are too much at the mercy of a variety of pragmatic factors, and would give conflicting guidance depending upon contextually determined considerations. Moreover, there may not even be syntactic uniformity in the class (see essay X, note 5).

### 1.4 Indexicality

Frege's distinction between sense and reference does not apply straightforwardly to indexical expressions. Expressions with the same sense have the same referent. But different utterances of the same indexical expression, "that" for example, have different referents. Hence the expressions themselves, that is the expression types, do not have a Fregean sense.

The "semantic rule" with which an indexical is associated, its "character" in Kaplan's sense, has to be regarded not as its Fregean sense, but as some sort of rule for determining the sense of an arbitrary use of it. This means that, where the difference matters, the sense-reference distinction belongs to expression tokens, not types. This has some far-reaching consequences, some of which are spelled out in essay VIII. One important issue is whether there are "indexical thoughts" in the sense of thoughts which, for some indexical expression, can only be specified by employing that expression. If "I"-thoughts are indexical in this sense, they are inaccessible to all save the thinker; and Frege has been read as committed to just this view. An alternative is that there are indexical thoughts only in the weaker sense of thoughts which, at the point at which they are available for guiding an action, will typically be expressed by the agent by means of an indexical. This is consistent with the very same thought being expressible without the use of an indexical, a thesis argued for in essay VIII. It may well be that the expression of such thoughts by those other than the agent must exploit anaphoric dependence upon something outside the content-giving part of the attribution. Anaphoric dependence and indexicality are related phenomena. The critical difference is that the former poses no threat to the public character of thought. Even if only Jack can use "I" to think the thought that he expresses by "I am now late", others can, I argue, think the same thought using other words: at such-and-such a time, Jack thought that he was late then.

### 1.5 Sense without a referent

Early in "On sense and reference", Frege admits in unequivocal terms that sense without a referent is possible:

The expression "the least rapidly convergent series" has a sense but demonstrably has no referent, since for every given convergent series, another convergent, but less rapidly convergent, series can be found.  
(Frege 1892a: 159)

Gareth Evans has pointed out that many of Frege's subsequent discussions of the issue quickly introduce fiction, poetry, or in general non-serious uses of language. This led Evans to qualify the natural view that for Frege sense without a referent is straightforwardly an open possibility. As Evans put it:

Frege's later [i.e. post "On sense and reference"] apparent willingness to ascribe sense to certain empty singular terms was equivocal, hedged around with qualifications, and dubiously consistent with the fundamentals of his philosophy of language. (Evans 1982: 38)

Evans in part justifies the last remark, about the consistency with Frege's fundamentals, by the observation that if sense is glossed as the way in which an object is thought about, it would seem that there could be no sense without an object thought about, and so no sense without a referent. I read this as a reason for not regarding way of thinking, or mode of presentation, as a Fregean fundamental.

In "On sense and reference", Frege's willingness to recognize sense without a referent does not seem equivocal or qualified. He uses "Eigenname" very widely to include definite descriptions and whole sentences, in other words, to include semantically complex expressions as well as semantically simple ones, and the issue about sense without a referent takes a different turn for complex and simple expressions. Given Frege's attachment to compositionality principles, the sense of any complex expression ought to be built up out of the senses of its parts.<sup>2</sup> If this associates the complex with a way of thinking about an object, well and good; but the sense of the complex is assured, on Fregean principles, by the senses of the parts and their manner of combination, whether or not the whole constitutes a way of thinking of an object. If we take way of thinking or mode of presentation as Frege's central sense-investing feature for simple expressions, then indeed we are owed an explanation of how there can be a way or a mode in the absence of an object. But I have argued that we should drop modes of presentation as serious contributors to an understanding of Fregean sense. Instead sense features in various issues, like propositional attitudes (more specifically, in samesaying), in guaranteed sameness of referent (see essay IV: "Fregean sense"), in counting items of knowledge, and in saying which contradictions are manifest. But Evans's claim about what Frege actually said remains to be answered.

Frege discusses a simple proper name, "Odysseus", in "On sense and reference", saying that it is doubtful whether it has a referent (1892a: 162). The aim of his discussion at this point is to persuade us that if a sentence has a referent it is a truth value. He observes that if we take seriously the question whether or not a sentence is true, we take it for granted that each proper name it contains has a referent. This special connection between the referents of the parts and the truth value of the whole suggests that truth value is what should be counted as the referent of the whole.

Frege says that if "Odysseus" lacks a referent, then whatever the referent of

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2 Frege takes various forms of compositionality for granted. But compositionality for natural language is quite a difficult issue, as argued in essay XI: "Two ways to smoke a cigarette".

a whole sentence containing it is will also be lacking, a remark which reveals his commitment to the compositionality of reference. So he asks what would be lacking in a sentence like “Odysseus was put ashore at Ithaca while still asleep” on the assumption that “Odysseus” lacks a referent, and answers that what would be lacking is a truth value. Hence the invitation to conclude that the sentence’s truth value, if any, is its referent, if any.

Lack of truth value only matters if we are engaged in serious questions of truth and falsehood, and does not matter if our only concern is with “aesthetic delight”. In the latter case, we can engage with thoughts, without considering whether they are true or false, for “the thought remains the same whether ‘Odysseus’ has a referent or not” (Frege 1892a: 163; 1906b: 191). Whatever one may think of the overall argument for truth values as the referents of whole sentences, there seems no equivocation in this discussion (nor in the 1906 discussion) about whether or not there can be semantically simple names which lack a referent. Evans’s view requires different evidence.

He expresses the positive view he claims to find in Frege in the following terms:

we may gloss those passages in which Frege says that a sentence containing an empty singular term may express a thought as follows. Yes: a sentence containing an empty singular term may have a sense, in that it does not necessarily have to be likened to a sentence containing a nonsense-word. But no: it does not *really* have a sense of the kind possessed by ordinary atomic sentences, because it does not function properly, it is only *as if* it functions properly. (Evans 1982: 30)

Evans here accuses Frege of confusing a situation in which it is pretended that an expression has a sense and a referent, though it does not really have either, with a situation in which an expression genuinely has a sense but lacks a referent. The passage Evans principally cites in support of this accusation is the posthumously published “Logic” dated to 1897, in which Frege says:

Names which fail to fulfil the usual role of a proper name, which is to name something, may be called mock proper names. (Frege 1897: 130)

Frege adds that a fictional sentence expresses a “mock thought”, a Scheingedanke. According to my soundings with native speakers, a Schein-*F* is normally something intended to seem an *F* even though it is not an *F*. On this reading, Frege is saying that a fictional sentence does not really express a thought, the explanation being that it contains an expression which looks like a proper name but which, because it has no referent, is not really a proper name.

However, I think that in this context Frege uses “mock” (or rather “schein”) in such a way that a mock-*F* is an *F* which is not to be taken seriously. For example, he says that thoughts in fiction “are not to be taken

seriously as in the sciences: they are only mock thoughts”; here “not to be taken seriously” seems precisely to be a gloss on “mock”. Since an *F* which is not to be taken seriously is an *F*, on this reading a Schein-*F* is an *F*. Reverting to Frege’s claim that “although . . . ‘William Tell’ is a mock proper name, we cannot deny it a sense”, we should understand it as affirming that the name has a sense just as much as does a name with a referent, and it is a mock name only in that it does not have a serious use.

A defender of Evans’s position may ask us to focus on this sentence:

Assertions in fiction are not to be taken seriously: they are only mock assertions. (Frege 1897: 130)

What appear to be assertions in fiction are not really assertions, for something that is not to be taken seriously (in the way Frege envisages) is not an assertion at all. Given that the very next sentence is one already quoted

Even the thoughts are not to be taken seriously as in the sciences: they are only mock thoughts

perhaps we should read the remarks in parallel: just as mock assertions are not assertions, mock thoughts are not thoughts (and the fact that in both cases “assertions” and “thoughts” occur in a way which might seem to delimit the subject matter can be dismissed as an unfortunate manner of speaking).

While it is true that a mock assertion is not an assertion, this is not because a mock-*F* is in general not an *F*. Evans’s opponent can properly object that a mock assertion is not an assertion because assertions are essentially to be taken seriously. A mock assertion would be one not to be taken seriously, so it would not be an assertion at all. This springs from a special feature of assertion, not from a feature of “mock”, so the result cannot be extended to mock thoughts. A non-assertive saying can express a thought, regardless of whether or not it is to be taken seriously. In this context, what it is not to take a saying seriously is not to take seriously the thought expressed, not to take it as something to whose truth the speaker commits himself. I conclude that this passage does not support Evans’s reading of Frege.

It may be that other passages are more on Evans’s side.<sup>3</sup> I will not attempt an overall assessment, but will discuss one passage which I find specially

3 There are some isolated remarks, for example: “The sentence ‘Leo Sachse is a man’ is the expression of a thought only if ‘Leo Sachse’ designates something” (Frege 1906c: 174). The Editors give reason for doubting their tentative attribution of the date 1906 to this fragment, and suggest that it may have been written in around 1880, well before “On sense and reference” (1892a). Certainly the text does not mention the sense–reference distinction explicitly. It would therefore be rash to count this as evidence for any vacillation on Frege’s part concerning sense without a referent.

interesting, and which introduces some fresh material: the comparison between empty names and “empty” predicates. By the time of his discussion of Schröder’s *Lectures on the Algebra of Logic* (Frege 1895), Frege has made it plain (as he did not in “On sense and reference”) that the referent of a concept-word (a predicate) is a concept. This makes room for the possibility that there are no intelligible predicates without referents, though there are predicates under which nothing falls. Frege reports that it is easy to confuse the two cases. However:

a proper name that designates nothing has no logical justification, since in logic we are concerned with truth in the strictest sense of the word; it may on the other hand still be used in fiction and fable. For concepts that do not comprehend anything under them it is quite different: they are entirely legitimate. (Frege 1895: 226)

If at this time Frege really had doubts about whether there could be sense without a referent, this would have been the place to air them. In fact, the point he is making is different: there is no place for empty names within logic, or more generally within any discipline concerned with truth (a science), for truth requires that names be non-empty.<sup>4</sup>

Even if the passage confirms Frege’s commitment to the possibility of sense without a referent, we can still explore the supposed difference between a name lacking a bearer and a predicate lacking satisfiers. Frege hints at more than one explanation. The first, though elliptical, seems to suggest that whereas there is normally a commitment on the part of one using a name to its having a referent, there is no parallel commitment on the part of one using a predicate to its having a satisfier. Put thus, the point about predicates seems incorrect. An assertive utterance of “John is happy” commits me to the truth of John being happy, and so as much commits me to “happy” having a satisfier as to “John” having a referent. We can use a predicate with no satisfiers to state serious truths, like that there is no round square (Frege 1895: 227), but the same goes for names: there is no such heavenly body as Vulcan. Frege moves to a second explanation: in using a name, its referent is normally something I think about, and wish to say something about; but it is not the case that in using a predicate its satisfiers are things I think about, or wish to say something about:

If I utter a sentence with the grammatical subject “all men” I do *not* wish

4 An exception to this rule which Frege notes, that an empty proper name may be used in a true ascription of a thought to another, again makes plain his firm commitment to the possibility of sense without a referent. No doubt he would not have regarded psychology (construed as including a systematic study of beliefs and other contentful mental states) as a science.



to say something about some Central African chief wholly unknown to me. (Frege 1895: 227)

This point, though still rather vague, seems to me correct, and to mark a contrast with proper names (as we use that term).

The possibility of sense without a referent seems to make the demand for some reductive account of sense more urgent. What can the sense of an empty name be? Not an object, since the name is empty; to say that it is given by a definite description takes us in a barren direction, one repudiated in §1.2 above. The view I favour is that the sense of a name is to be given through a specification, which will typically reuse the name in question, of the conditions under which it has a referent, for example: for all  $x$ , “Hesperus” refers to  $x$  iff  $x$  is Hesperus”. In contrast to McDowell, it is essential to the position I favour that such sense-revealing axioms do not commit the theorist to the existence of a referent. This means a departure from classical logic to a negative free logic, following a suggestion by Tyler Burge (1974). A biconditional axiom like “for all  $x$ , ‘Vulcan’ refers to  $x$  iff  $x$  is Vulcan” will have a right hand side (“ $x$  is Vulcan”) false of each object, and so will properly yield the result that “Vulcan” refers to nothing. The details are sketched in a little more detail in essay XII (“Sense without reference”).

It is not good enough just to put one’s foot down and insist upon homophonic specifications of sense within a free logic. There are at least two further tasks. One is to make a connection with the use of language, and this is attempted in essay XII. The other is to examine arguments directly favouring the view that sense without a referent is impossible, undertaken in essay IX (“Names, fictional names, and ‘really’”). There the target is Evans’s arguments in favour of what he calls the Russellian nature of typical proper names, where a Russellian name is one which owes its intelligibility to having a referent. If our ordinary names were Russellian, it would not be appropriate to describe them in terms of a semantic theory which made room for sense without a referent; but I suggest that Evans’s arguments in favour of the view that ordinary names are Russellian are unpersuasive. The points apply with equal force to the essentially Russellian position which Evans ascribes to Frege.

### ***1.6 The determination of reference, sharp boundaries, saturation***

Sense determines referent at least in that expressions with the same sense have the same referent. Some have thought that Frege was interested in a stronger relation of determination. For example, Dummett moves swiftly from the point that, for Frege, sense must be something more than reference, to the claim that, at least in an initial simple model, the sense of a name corresponds to a distinctive way of recognizing an object as the referent of the