Frege and Russell
The Gray’s Elegy Argument

Richard L. Mendelsohn
Lehman College and the Graduate School, CUNY
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There are two fundamental assumptions that inform my interpretation of the Gray's Elegy section of “On Denoting.”

The first is that it does constitute a criticism of Frege’s sense/reference theory. Russell explicitly says so, and other things being equal, I take him at his word. But the literate philosophical public has for the most part thought otherwise. As a matter of fact, I am unable to find anyone who things so other than Searle, whose view, by the way, is that Russell has totally misrepresented Frege. This view is unbelievable. But no one else has made the case that it is Frege who Russell is after. In fact, many hold that Russell was so _____ that he was criticizing his own theory of denoting concepts. In the style of Mad Libs, the reader is to fill the blank with an adjective—stupid, cockeyed, mischievous, deceptive, wrong—and then write a dissertation philosophically defending the canard.

The second is that, unlike his criticism of Meinong, which clearly constitutes a refutation, Russell’s (1905a) conclusion is that to enter the sense/reference theory is to enter a swamp in which one is never able to gain firm footing. The morass he describes, with all its confusions are not—I repeat, are not—of his own making; they are confusions and problems with Frege’s theory. Russell just couldn’t make sense of the theory. Now, readers have apparently come to believe that the confusions Russell found in Frege’s theory meant that he was confused about the theory; but that is a mistake. The confusions he uncovered were confusions in the theory; he thought the theory was fundamentally unsalvageable. It is the failure to observe this second point that has prompted readers to fail on the first point.

The point here is important. Russell rejected Frege’s sense/reference theory. What was it that he rejected? What was wrong with it? How did his theory differ from Frege’s in crucial respects? Russell himself,
I submit, was unable to say with any clarity what the difference was because he was genuinely unclear about the fundamental error in Frege’s theory. He only could identify that it was totally confused.

Is it not clear that Frege was totally confused himself? Consider the following list of errors in his theory:

- Frege held that in indirect discourse, e.g., in the sentence “Frege believed that Kant had misrepresented arithmetic,” we are speaking about the sense or meaning of the word “Kant”, not the man himself. This is nonsense: surely it is the man Frege thought to be wrong, Kant himself. Nonetheless, there are careful readers who thing otherwise. Forbes (1987: 4) says:

  In connection with the simplest kind of belief attribution, there are good reasons to conclude that words used in specifying the belief refer to their customary senses, not their customary references.

  I believe this is the simplest kind of belief attribution, and it seems to me that there is no good reason for thinking that I am speaking about the sense of “Kant” and not Kant.

- Frege held that in oratio recta, e.g., “Frege said, ‘I am hungry’,” one designates Frege’s words and says something about them. This too is nonsense. I am not naming Frege’s words in uttering this sentence, but reproducing them.

  Because of these errors, there has been serious misrepresentation of Frege’s views, and of the difference between Frege and Russell. Once again, Forbes (1987: 5-6) who makes a crucial error in identifying what he takes to be the basic Fregean position:

  I will take the neo-Fregean position that a (first-level, one-place) predicate’s customary reference is a property, while its customary sense is a way of thinking of that property, and an ordinary name’s customary reference is an ordinary object, and its customary sense a way of thinking of, or mode of presentation of, that object.

  This is not Frege’s position. It is critically important to recognize that Frege did not take a predicate’s customary reference to be a property—certainly not in the sense of attribute. That’s Russell’s view. It is one of the critical points of contention between the two.
The years 1903 through 1905 found Russell’s thoughts about the semantics of singular terms in ferment. In the main body of *The Principles of Mathematics*, he defended an ill-conceived doctrine of propositions, underpinned by a Meinongian ontology. Singular terms were regarded all as directly referential. The term denoted in each case was a constituent of the proposition expressed. The meaningfulness of the singular term was guaranteed by the corresponding term in the proposition. But the sympathetic appendix on “The Logical and Arithmetic Doctrines of Frege” belied the new directions of his thinking. No longer would all singular terms be regarded as directly referential. For those that are directly referential, there must be a referent, and the item referred to will itself be a constituent of the proposition expressed. But for those terms that are not directly referential, the properties that purport to uniquely identify the object will be constituents of the proposition, but the object the proposition is about, if there is such an object, will not.

Russell shuffled the pieces of this story around to preserve the outlines of an overarching coherent picture. But there was always a loose end somewhere.† This brief chapter in the development of Russell’s semantic theory has come to light as the result of some excellent work by Cartwright (1987) and Hylton (1990). Cartwright (1987), in particular, calls our attention to a number of unpublished manuscripts from the Russell Archives‡ in which Russell struggles with the distinction be-

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† His fundamental problem was to identify the ontological status of an object with its epistemological status. That is, a propositional content was, by its very nature, something that drew immediate acquaintance and so it could only be introduced that way.

‡ Russell (1905d), Russell (1905e), Russell (1905f), and Russell (1905c). The last, which is dated June of 1905, abandons the sense/reference distinction midstride and outlines the new theory of denoting expressions; the others are all earlier, most
tween meaning and denotation. Eventually Russell came to believe his attempt in this direction foundered. And in the celebrated theory of denoting expressions, which replaced it, he jettisoned completely the idea that indirectly referential terms played the role of logical subjects.

Russell’s transitional theory of meaning and denotation never saw the light of publication. In fact, when Russell (1905a) announces the new theory, there is no mention whatsoever of his own distinction of this name. Instead, we find the new theory pitted against two famous Realist precursors: Meinong and Frege. The criticism of Meinong is clear and cogent. But not that of Frege. In these, perhaps the most puzzling and frustrating passages in the corpus of modern analytic philosophy, Russell becomes difficult and obscure.

Church (1943) finds the relevant paragraphs hopelessly confused by careless use/mention errors. Searle (1957) finds Russell to have misinterpreted or misunderstood Frege. Hylton (1990) finds Russell pinning Frege’s name on his own theory he had been developing. To be sure, there are important differences to be found in these different readers, and it is hardly likely they would all conceive of themselves in the same camp. But there is this common thread: all deny that Russell is doing there what he says he is doing, viz. presenting a clear, coherent and telling criticism of Frege’s sense/reference distinction. We call this The Orthodox View.

We believe this Orthodox view to be wholly incorrect. Building on our analysis in Mendelsohn (2005) of Frege’s account of indirect reference, we will propose an interpretation of that notoriously difficult passage in Russell (1905a) on which (i) it is clearly a criticism of Frege’s distinction, (ii) it is a coherent criticism of Frege’s distinction made with full understanding of that theory, and (iii) it is a very telling criticism of Frege’s distinction. In addition, on this interpretation, we will be able to identify the new theory presented in Russell (1905a) as a direct reaction to the problems identified with the sense/reference theory. In the next chapter, we will give a short illustration of the virulence of this interpretation by demonstrating that recent efforts to construct Russell’s scope distinction within the Fregean apparatus by Forbes (1990), are ill-conceived.

likely from the beginning of that same year. Subsequent to Cartwright’s (1987) essay, these manuscripts have been published in Urquhart (1994).

† Similar views have been argued recently by Kremer (1994) and Noonan (1996).
What is of interest to me is Forbes’s (1987) attempt to forge a de re/de dicto distinction in this neo-Fregean semantic structure. We will suggest here that he is wrong.

Forbes (1987) asks us to consider the sentences†

Ralph believes Marilyn Monroe was murdered. (3.1)
Ralph believes the shortest spy is a spy. (3.2)

“If we use corner quotes around an English word or phrase to form a name of its sense,” says Forbes (1987: 7), (3.1) is represented logically as

\[ B(Ralph, "Marilyn Monroe was murdered") \] (3.3)

We have been using our \( \Theta \) operator as doing this work, so we will represent (3.1) as

\[ B(Ralph, \Theta(Marilyn Monroe was murdered)) \] (3.4)

Similarly,

\[ B(Ralph, \"the shortest spy is a spy\") \] (3.5)

or

\[ B(Ralph, \Theta(\text{the shortest spy is a spy})) \] (3.6)

represents the claim (3.2).

Now, (3.4) and (3.6) are, Forbes (1987: 7) says,

† In what follows, we will insert our numbering of the relevant sentences when quoting Forbes.
wholly specific about the content of the propositions that Ralph is being said to believe. But often we want to attribute beliefs about an object x to a subject although we do not know what expressions that subject has in his repertoire for referring to x, and which particular ways of thinking of x the subject has employed in his thoughts. In such a case we have to hedge about the exact content of the proposition the subject believes. If we want to attribute beliefs about Marilyn Monroe or about the shortest spy to Ralph, but do not know how Ralph would express ways of thinking of these people or which ways these would be, ... it is not (3.4) or (3.6) that we mean to express.

Forbes (1987) suggests

Marilyn Monroe is someone whom Ralph believes to have been murdered (3.7)

and

The shortest spy is someone whom Ralph believes to be a spy. (3.8)

as the appropriate locutions. Forbes (1987: 7-8) continues:

Intuitively, both (3.7) and (3.8) attribute beliefs about an object x to Ralph, but they do not specify the whole content of the beliefs. The gist of (3.7) and (3.8) is merely that Ralph believes a proposition about so-and-so to the effect that he/she is such-and-such. In Fregean terminology as I employ it, a proposition is about an object x only if it has some way of thinking (mode of presentation) of x as a constituent; so (3.7), for instance, has the import that Ralph believes a proposition with a mode of presentation of Marilyn Monroe as a constituent, to the effect that she was murdered. Thus we arrive at the following Fregean analyses of (3.7) and (3.8), in which “Pxy” means “x is a mode of presentation of y” and “⌜⌜⌜” stands for the manner of combination of senses in which they form a complex sense

\[(∃α)(P(α,MM) & B(Ralph, α ^⌜⌜ was murdered ⌜⌜)) \quad (3.9)\]

\[(∃α)(P(α,(ιx)SX) & B(Ralph, α ^⌜⌜ is a spy ⌜⌜)) \quad (3.10)\]

Although it is a bit different, we will translate this into our Θ notation

\[(∃α)(P(α,MM) & Θ(Ralph, θ(α was murdered)) \quad (3.11)\]

\[(∃α)(P(α,(ιx)SX) & Θ(Ralph, θ(α is a spy)) \quad (3.12)\]

Now, for some claims about these regimentation:

The regimentations reveal that the difference between the members of the pairs (3.1) and (3.7), and (3.2) and (3.8), is no mere scope distinction. Forbes (1987: 9)
I will use the labels “internal occurrence” and “external occurrence” for the contrasting positions of terms in the two kinds of belief attribution just regimented . . . , and “internal form” and “external form” for attributions themselves when it is only with respect to the position of a single term that they differ. Forbes (1987: 9)

It is natural to mark this distinction with the usual terminology “de re/de dicto,” since a classical education would lead one to say that a de re belief is a belief which is about a thing. I accept this, but I note that it has the consequence that the internal occurrence/external occurrence distinction does not reflect the de re/de dictodistinction for attitudes: if a de re belief is one which is about some object \( x \), then (3.1), (3.3), and (3.7) through (3.10), all attribute de re beliefs on the assumptions I have outlined, only (3.2) and and (3.5) being de dicto; but “Marilyn Monroe” is internal in (3.1)and external in (3.7). So I think that Burge is not generally correct when he says that such regimentations as (3.9) and (3.10) represent attempts to reduce de re belief to de dicto . . . ;(3.9) and (3.10), on my analysis, also attribute de re beliefs—it is just that they are unspecific about the way of thinking of the res in question involved in the belief.

There is a bit of a terminological problem going on here, largely Forbes’s fault. But, his de re/de dicto distinction is Donnellan’s distinction between referential and attributive use. My interest, however, is with the usual de re/de dicto distinction now used in modal logic. What we know is that Russell’s scope distinction provides a wonderful way of modelling this classic distinction.

Let us move from the relatively obscure domain of belief to the much more carefully worked out domain of necessity. Let us consider how the de re/de dicto distinction is going to be reproduced in this framework. The well-known example

\[
\square \left( \text{The number of planets} > 7 \right) \quad (3.13)
\]

admits of two different readings. The one reading, the de dicto reading, takes sentence (3.13) to advance the necessity of the proposition; the de re reading, on the other hand, takes sentence (3.13) to advance the attribution of an essential property to an object. We would represent this as a scope distinction. The matter is the scope of the \( \square \), which is to say, are we allowing subject and predicate to vary in tandem through all possible worlds (de dicto) or, on the other hand, are we keeping subject constant and only allowing the predicate to vary through all possible worlds (de re).

Forbes presents two distinct readings of (3.13). there is an internal
reading, as he calls it,

□Ω(\text{the number of planets} > 7) \tag{3.14}

On this reading, we are saying that a certain proposition is necessary, and we are explicitly giving the proposition. Frege would take this literally to be \textit{de dicto}. For, we are speaking about the proposition, not what the proposition is about, and we are saying of the proposition that it has a certain property. That the sense of “the number of planets” is included does not make it about that number. That is classic Frege. So, we have here a problem understanding what Forbes could possibly mean when he says that this has a \textit{de re} understanding.

Actually, what he is running into is the problem for Russell about the proposition that the F is G. It is not clear that there is any such proposition. For, when we say

\begin{align*}
\text{John believes the proposition that the F is G} \tag{3.15}
\end{align*}

we could mean

\begin{align*}
\text{The F is such that John believes the proposition that he is G} \tag{3.16}
\end{align*}

or we could mean

\begin{align*}
\text{John believes this proposition: that the F is G}. \tag{3.17}
\end{align*}

This is the distinction Forbes is relying on. It is a scope distinction, although he does not realize it.

mode of presentation of that number as the number that numbers the planets. The proposition thus constructed is claimed to be necessary, and that is false. On the \textit{de re} reading, however, it is claimed that there is a mode of presentation of the number which constructs a proposition that is necessarily true. Put another way, there is a mode of presentation such that in every possible world it is a mode of presentation of that object. This is not necessarily true. The claim is that there is a rigid designator! We can have \textit{de re} necessity without that. If it is not a rigid designator, then we have the case of a necessary truth that is not \textit{de re}.

It has been claimed by Forbes (1987) that the \textit{de re/de dicto} distinction that is handled by Russell’s account of descriptions is reproducible in Frege’s semantic system. Consider, for example, the claim

\begin{align*}
\text{John believes that Marilyn Monroe is beautiful} \tag{3.18}
\end{align*}

On the one hand, the mode of presentation with which Marilyn Monroe is picked out is explicit. This is the \textit{de dicto} reading. On the other
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hand, it is inexplicit. We know that there is a mode of presentation under which John believes Marilyn Monroe is beautiful, but we are not told which. This is the way in which Forbes reproduces the distinction in Frege’s terms. It is a matter of being explicit or being inexplicit about the mode of presentation. This underscores two differences between the approaches that merit investigation:

- Russell, unlike Frege, admits there are times when a term occurring in a *that*-clause is serving, nonetheless, to stand for what it ordinarily denotes.
- Frege, unlike Russell, provides machinery for connecting up the occurrence of the expression inside a *that*-clause with one outside: one refers in an indirect context to the mode of determination of the object customarily referred to.

Is there any connection between these two points? At the end of Chapter 10, we noted two ways in which we could understand the hierarchy of senses and references, corresponding to the interpretations depicted in Figures 7.2 and 9.8, respectively. Let us adopt the following terminology. For the configuration in Figure 7.2, we shall say that the term $\eta$ has *primary* occurrence. For the configuration in Figure 9.8, we shall say that the term $\eta$ has *secondary* occurrence. The choice of terminology is no accident. The reader will have no doubt already surmised that we take this to be precisely Russell’s (1905a) primary/secondary distinction.

We urged earlier that the key to Russell’s famous Theory of Definite Descriptions is to be found in the scope distinction, of which the primary/secondary distinction is the antecedent. The argument at the end of the last chapter bears that out. For a term to have primary occurrence, it must be a context free occurrence. The reference of the term does not vary, no matter what context it is embedded in. This is the story Frege has been telling about *Eigennamen*: they are *selbständig*. This is the story Russell has been telling about his logically proper names: they have meaning in isolation. When a term has secondary occurrence, however, reference is context sensitive, and the contextual reference is, once again, the sense, but in this case, it is going to be the attribute. Note that only when a term is *selbständig* is the thing denoted what it is about. This is just Russell’s distinction. The predicative character of a description goes along with its purely contextual denotation of things. If a term has primary occurrence, the distinction collapses and the meaning is the reference, just as logical constants are supposed to work. If the term has secondary occurrence, it refers
only in context, and this is the “usual” role a meaningful expression—a
description—occupies. This, we argue, is the story Russell (1905a) is
telling.

The Principle of Acquaintance† might be playing a role here some-
where in the argument‡—but if so, the role is exceedingly subtle. Russell
(1905a) never mentions it. Russell (1905a) never gives any indication
that it plays a role in the argument.§ This to be pretty good evidence
that it plays no role in the argument. In any event, our reconstruction
of the argument makes no appeal to it. Russell’s (1905a) argument is
a dilemma. Either there is a vicious hierarchy of indirect senses, which
is impossible because, as he says, there is no backward road from deno-
tation to meaning. That road is blocked. Or there is a point at which
we have direct acquaintance with a sense. To be sure, Russell believed
in direct acquaintance, but as has become abundantly clear from our
discussion of Frege’s account of indirect reference in the chapters im-
mediately preceding this, Frege also had some such notion at work. At
any rate, if there is immediate acquaintance anywhere in the hierarchy,
then the distinction of sense and reference collapses. It is a problem
for Frege if the distinction between sense and reference collapses any-
where. It is not a problem for Russell, for, of course, he is rejecting the
sense/reference account.

But this makes it look as though he is defending a sense/reference
distinction. He is, of course: the two are distinct notions. But the
rejection looks like this. For a genuine proper name, the sense/reference
distinction collapses: the sense of a proper name is its sense. For a
description, the sense/reference distinction fades a bit because we have
no genuine reference for descriptions, but only reference in context. The
default is secondary occurrence.

† “[I]n every proposition that we can apprehend (i.e. not only in those whose truth or
falsehood we can judge of, but in all that we can think about), all the constituents
are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance.”Russell (1905a: 493).
‡ See the discussions in Hylton (1990), Kremer (1994), Levine (1998) and Noonan
(1996).
§ In this, we side with Noonan (1996) as against Hylton (1990) and Kremer (1994).
4
The Text

4.1 A

The relation of the meaning to the denotation† involves certain rather curious difficulties,‡ which seem in themselves sufficient to prove that the theory which leads to such difficulties must be wrong.§

Russell identifies the problem he will hone in on, namely, “the relation of the meaning to the denotation” of an expression. The relation involves some “curious difficulties”. Spelling out these difficulties will doom the theory.

Let us set up some terminology. Let $W$ be the set of words or phrases, i.e., linguistic expressions. Let $O$ be the set of objects. Let $S$ be the set of senses. We say that a singular term refers to an individual. This is the $r$ for reference relation: $r : W \rightarrow O$. $r$ is a function from words to objects. Along with a singular term is its meaning or sense, which the term expresses. This is the $e$ relation: $e : W \rightarrow S$. That is, it maps words into senses. Lastly, we define a function from senses to objects, which we term the denoting relation. $d : S \rightarrow O$. This, I believe, is the relation that is supposed to have curious difficulties.

† Russell speaks of the relation of “the meaning to the denotation,” not of the meaning of a word to its denotation. This is a relation, with no mediation, between senses and their denotation.
‡ strange,odd,bizarre problems. Not inconsistencies.
§ The chess grandmaster sees that a line that gets into such bizarre situations is doomed. It is not a knock-down drag-out argument.
When we wish to speak about the meaning of a denoting phrase, as opposed to its denotation, the natural mode of doing so is by inverted commas. Thus we say:

The centre of mass of the solar system is a point, not a denoting complex; ‘The centre of mass of the solar system’ is a denoting complex, not a point.†

Or again,

The first line of Gray’s Elegy states a proposition. ‘The first line of Gray’s Elegy’ does not state a proposition.‡

Thus taking any denoting phrase, say C, we wish to consider the relation between C and ‘C’, where the difference of the two is of the kind exemplified in the above two instances.

Russell introduces his special use of quotation marks to yield meanings. He says that he will place “inverted commas” around a phrase so that the whole refers to the meaning of the phrase. The use of quotation marks in this way will surely lead to confusion. Kaplan (n.d.) introduced his meaning quotes to do the very same work Russell used his “inverted commas” for, and it is his device we will use in the commentary.

So,

\[ m \text{ Bill Clinton}^m = \text{the sense of ‘Bill Clinton’} = e(‘Bill Clinton’) \] (4.1)

There are problems we find with Russell’s use of the expression C that we will detail below. We also suppose that italicization creates a name for the italicized expression. With this proviso, the section makes completely good sense.

There is some difficulty making consistent the use of the variable C to parallel the case Russell has been talking about above. There are different possibilities to consider:

† In the example, we have a point, the center of mass of the solar system, and then a denoting complex that denotes that point. Note that Russell’s use of “inverted commas” is entirely appropriate. For of course, what we have is something that stands for i.e., refers to a meaning or denoting complex—I take these to be interchangeable.

‡ In the example, we have a sentence that states a proposition and a denoting complex that denotes the sentence that states a proposition.
(i) C is a metalinguistic variable ranging over expressions: it is to be replaced either by a quotation-name of an expression or by an ordinary name of an expression, like ‘the first line of Gray’s Elegy’. In this case, the passage reads

Thus taking any denoting phrase, say the first line of Gray’s Elegy, we wish to consider the relation between the first line of Gray’s Elegy and ‘the first line of Gray’s Elegy’, where the difference of the two is of the kind exemplified in the above two instances.

This is exactly the example in the text. We had italicized C, assuming that the expression being talked about is being exhibited, and the italicization is supposed to clarify this use. But perhaps we are wrong in this. Perhaps what he has in mind is that the expression being talked about is not exhibited at all, but named. This makes more sense with regard to the examples given: what Russell is interested in is the relation between the denotation of an expression and the meaning of the expression that yields this denotation.†

(ii) If we follow this reading, we get the following when we plug in the example

Thus taking any denoting phrase, say ‘the centre of mass of the solar system’, we wish to consider the relation between ‘the centre of mass of the solar system’ and \( m \) ‘the centre of mass of the solar system’\(^m \) where the difference of the two is of the kind exemplified in the above two instances.

This makes sense. And it seems a correct instantiation of the examples Russell is interested in. But it is not the case in the text. To get that, we would need the following:

Thus taking any denoting phrase, say the centre of mass of the solar system, we wish to consider the relation between the centre of mass of the solar system and \( m \) the centre of mass of the solar system\(^m \) where the difference of the two is of the kind exemplified in the above two instances.

But the centre of mass of the solar system is not a denoting phrase, so it makes the particular passage unintelligible. It is not clear to me whether there is a problem here for Russell.

† Note too that if we read the variable in the first way, then it would seem that Russell has shifted the problem he is not worried about the denotation relation, but about the relation between an expression and its sense. Kremer also suggests this reading.
4.3 C

We say, to begin with, that when \( C \) occurs it is the *denotation* that we are speaking about; but when ‘\( C \)’ occurs, it is the *meaning.*

Now the relation of meaning and denotation is not merely linguistic through the phrase: there must be a logical relation involved, which we express by saying that the meaning denotes the denotation. But the difficulty which confronts us is that we cannot succeed in *both* preserving the connexion of meaning and denotation *and* preventing them from being one and the same; also that the meaning cannot be got at except by means of denoting phrases. This happens as follows.

Russell says that if there is a relation between meaning and denotation, it should be direct and not mediated by any phrases. And, of course, the difficulty in stating the relation between meaning and denotation is posed:

- we cannot succeed in both preserving the connexion of meaning and denotation and preventing them from being one and the same
- the meaning cannot be got at except by means of a denoting phrase

The first problem can be put in the form of two conditionals:

\[
\text{If the connection between meaning and denotation is preserved, then the distinction collapses and meaning and denotation are one and the same} \quad (4.2)
\]

\[
\text{If meaning and denotation are distinct, then the connection between meaning and denotation cannot be preserved.} \quad (4.3)
\]

The second problem is that meanings cannot be directly referred to. In order to speak about meaning, we must have, in the proposition, a denoting complex that denotes the meaning. That is,

\[
\text{There is no direct reference of meanings.} \quad (4.4)
\]

Russell connects up the relations previously identified with what a sentence is about. When an expression occurs inside the sentence, we wish to speak about its reference. So, when \( C \) occurs inside a sentence, \( t \) is \( r' \) the sentence is speaking about; and when \( m \) \( C^m \) occurs in a sentence, it is \( r^{(m \ C^m)} \) the sentence is speaking about.†

† This is not quite right use/mention wise. We shall have to come back to it.
But there is another interpretation of this passage, if we let our variables be taken in a slightly different way. Consider the two sentences

\[\text{The first line of Gray’s Elegy is alliterative} \quad (4.5)\]

and

\[\text{“The first line of Gray’s Elegy” is alliterative} \quad (4.6)\]

(4.5) is about the first line of Gray’s elegy, i.e., “the curfew tolls the knell of parting day,” and it also claims that (4.6) is about the meaning of ‘the first line of Gray’s Elegy’. (4.5) is about the reference of the expression and (4.6) is about the meaning of the expression. Put another way, (4.5) is about \(r(\text{‘the first line of Gray’s elegy’})\) and (4.6) is about \(e(\text{‘the first line of Gray’s Elegy’})\).

4.4 D

The one phrase \(C\) was to have both meaning and denotation. But if we speak of ‘the meaning of \(C\)’, that gives us the meaning (if any) of the denotation. ‘The meaning of the first line of Gray’s Elegy’ is the same as ‘The meaning of “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day”’, and is not the same as ‘The meaning of “The first line of Gray’s Elegy”’. Thus in order to get the meaning we want, we must speak not of ‘the meaning of \(C\)’, but of ‘the meaning of “\(C\)”’, which is the same as ‘\(C\)’ by itself. Similarly ‘the denotation of \(C\)’ does not mean the denotation we want, but means something which, if it denotes at all, denotes what is denoted by the denotation we want. For example, let ‘\(C\)’ be ‘the denoting complex occurring in the second of the above instances’. Then

\[C = \text{‘the first line of Gray’s Elegy’}, \quad \text{and} \quad \text{the denotation of } C = \text{The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.}\]

But what we meant to have as the denotation was ‘the first line of Gray’s Elegy’. Thus we have failed to get what we wanted.

Here is at last an argument. This is a very important paragraph, and yet its meaning is extremely elusive; there is quite a bit of difficulty interpreting the role of the variables.

Once again we run in the problem of figuring out whether the letter \(c\) is used or mentioned.
(i) If used, we have the following example

The one phrase, the first line of Gray’s elegy, was to have both meaning and denotation.

This is okay, but then it requires that we take the passage to mean

But if we speak of ‘the meaning of the first line of Gray’s Elegy’, that gives us the meaning (if any) of the denotation.

What he means, then, is that we are speaking of the meaning of “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day” for this is the denotation of ‘the first line of Gray’s Elegy’.† This is what he goes on to say in the next sentence:

‘The meaning of the first line of Gray’s elegy’ is the same as ‘The meaning of “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day”’, and is not the same as ‘The meaning of “the first line of Gray’s Elegy”’.†

This, I take it, is what ‘we wanted’ but ‘failed to get,’ namely

The meaning of ‘the first line of Gray’s elegy’

(ii) Note that if I maintained the italic reading of the first passage, I would note that Russell was engaged in a little use/mention error. For the passage is marred by an improper use of the devices previously identified for using and mentioning expressions. The first sentence is correct (but that is because I have italicized ‘C’). But the next sentence uses the italicized expression instead of the expression itself. Let us correct it:

But if we speak of ‘the meaning of C’, that gives us the meaning (if any) of the denotation.

This is correct. Suppose our expression were ‘Bill Clinton’. Then we can paraphrase the passage as:

The one phrase ‘Bill Clinton’ was to have both meaning and denota-

† Note that I regard the single quotes here as some kind of scare quotes, but certainly not the meaning quotes he had discussed earlier. This is born out by the next sentence, which agrees with my reading.
tion. But if we speak of ‘the meaning of Bill Clinton’, that gives us the meaning (if any) of the denotation.

This makes perfectly good sense. The only problem is that we speak of the meaning of a thing, Bill Clinton, not the meaning of an expression. But otherwise the passage makes sense with this emendation.

(iii) Why did he put single quotes around this expression? I am not sure, but that means that we have two distinct readings for this section. Here is the first reading, on which the single quotes are ignored:

The meaning of the first line of Gray’s Elegy = the meaning of “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day” \( (4.12) \)

But he also says

The meaning of the first line of Gray’s Elegy \( \neq \) the meaning of ‘the first line of Gray’s Elegy’ \( (4.13) \)

Sentence (4.12) is correct. Now

the first line of Gray’s Elegy = ‘The curfew tolls the knell of parting day’ \( (4.14) \)

So it follows that the reference of the expression on the left of the identity sign is the very same as the reference of the expression on the right hand side. That is

\[ r(‘the first line of Gray’s elegy’) = r(‘The curfew tolls the knell of parting day’) \] \( (4.15) \)

I will suggest the following problem here: Russell is interested in the locutions ‘the meaning of X’ and ‘the denotation of X’. And it looks to him as though, even though X is to have both meaning and denotation, in these locutions it is the meaning that we are dealing with. There is more to be said with this example.

(iv) The issue now is whether we take the single quote marks literally as the inverted commas Russell said would be used as meaning quotes. We shall now suppose this is so and see whether we can make sense of the passage.

I take it that he is using his single quotes here. If we speak of \( n \) the meaning of \( C^n \), this denotes the meaning of this expression
—‘the meaning of C’. Now this meaning has a denotation. What is it? Presumably this will be the very same as the denotation of the expression. That is

\[ d(\text{‘the meaning of C’}) = r(\text{‘the meaning of C’}) \]  
(4.16)

So, on this reading the story is correct.

I will assume throughout that the single quotes are as before and the double quotes are actual quotation marks. So, the first sentence claims that

\[ \text{‘The meaning of the first line of Gray’s Elegy’} = \text{‘The meaning of “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day”’} \]  
(4.17)

Is this so? He is assuming that we can substitute codenotational terms here and preserve denotation. For he is simply doing the following substitution:

the first line of Gray’s Elegy = “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day”

(4.18)

The claim then that would seem to be at issue is this

In whatever construction we find a variable, it is invariably the denotation that we are concerned with so that substitution of codenotational terms preserves the reference of the whole.

This seems to be the right story. OK our reduction assumes this principle, and it is clear that it will not work in these contexts. So, a contradiction is in the offing.

At any rate, continuing the story, the next half of the claim is this:

\[ \text{‘The meaning of the first line of Gray’s Elegy’} \neq \text{‘The meaning of “the first line of Gray’s Elegy”’} \]  
(4.19)

This is exactly correct. In particular, the substitution is not reference preserving.

Here again we have a claim, viz

\[ \text{‘the meaning of “C”’} = \text{‘C’} \]  
(4.20)

But this is a collapsing of the hierarchy in some way. Is this right?

Now it is surprising here but what he wants is ‘the denotation of
C\textsuperscript{m}. So, we find, in this paragraph is a uniformity. He is asking after the meanings of each of the following expressions: first, ‘the meaning of C’, and second, ‘the denotation of C’. He is interested in the meaning of these expressions.

Note the talk of ‘denoting complexes’. That is correct, because invariably, we are talking of meanings in here. So, the claim is

\[ mC^m = \text{the denoting complex occurring in the second of the above instances} \]  

(4.21)

I don’t understand this. (A possibility is that there is a type in here: it could be that the items on the left hand side of the identity sing in each case were to appear in single quotes. I think this makes sense of the passage.)

**4.5 E**

The difficulty in speaking of the meaning of a denoting complex may be stated thus: The moment we put the complex in a proposition the proposition is about the denotation; and if we make a proposition in which the subject is ‘the meaning of C’, then the subject is the meaning (if any) of the denotation, which was not intended. This leads us to say that, when we distinguish meaning and denotation, we must be dealing with the meaning: the meaning has denotation and is a complex, and there is not something other than the meaning, which can be called the complex, and be said to have both meaning and denotation. The right phrase, on the view in question, is that that some meanings have denotations.

The problem appears to have shifted. We are not speaking of the meaning of an expression, but the meaning of a denoting complex. Where did this shift come from? If one had ignored the use of inverted commas, one would be surprised. But if one had taken them literally, this is perfectly in line with the story up till now. Kremer says that Russell shifts to talking about complexes in F, but the shift is already apparent here in E: the difference is that he later takes C to be standing directly for the complex. The point is that all along Russell has been worrying about the meaning of a denoting complex. This is the problem: speaking of the meaning of a denoting complex, I think, the problem is indirect sense tout court.

Note that this is the sort of passage that makes it look as though Russell has confused his own theory with Frege’s. Not so. The first
sentence is true on Frege’s view. If the sense is in the proposition, the proposition is about what the sense is of. The next clause is the difficult one. Suppose we have a proposition containing \(m\) the meaning of C \(m\), i.e., the sense of the expression. Then it will be about the meaning of C. So, he is exactly correct.

I do not clearly understand the rest of the passage. The moral seems to be that the variable is not working right there.

4.6 F

But this only makes out difficulty in speaking of meanings more evicent. For suppose C is our complex; then we are to say that C is the meaning of the complex. Nevertheless, whenever C occurs without inverted commas, what is said is not true of the meaning, but only of the denotation, as when we say: The centre of mass of the solar system is a point. Thus to speak of C itself, i.e., to make a proposition about the meaning, our subject must not be C, but something which denotes C. this ‘C’, which is what we use when we want to speak of the meaning, must be not the meaning, but something which denotes the meaning. And C must not be a constituent of this complex (as it is of ‘the meaning of C’); or if C occurs in the complex, it will be its denotation, not its meaning, that will occur, and there is no backward road from denotations to meanings, because every object can be denoted by an infinite number of different denoting phrases.

This is a difficult section.

He had been assuming that it was not a complex. I don’t quite know what is going on here. It could be that he thinks we are talking about complexes now (instead of ordinary things). It could be that we are letting C stand directly for the meanings he wants.

This has been decided in the previous section. This is a playing out of the conclusions of the last paragraph.

I suppose we need to be clear when Russell speaks of “the meaning” and specifically “the meaning of what?” I cannot yet fathom this.

I am OK with this with the first part. “This” refers back to “something which denotes C”, and it is \(m\)’s meaning, but something which denotes the meaning. Yes.

This is an interesting sentence. Why does he say that C is not a constituent of this complex? That is, that it is not a constituent of
It is, however, a constituent of \( m \text{the meaning of } C \). So, these are claims that will need to be evaluated:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{C is a constituent of } & m \text{the meaning of } C \\
\text{C is not a constituent of } & mC
\end{align*}
\]

Thus it would seem that ‘C’ and C are different entities, such that ‘C’ denotes C; but this cannot be an explanation, because the relation of ‘C’ to C remains wholly mysterious; and where are we to find the denoting complex ‘C’ which is to denote C? Moreover, when C occurs in a proposition, it is not only the dentation that occurs (as we shall see in the next paragraph); yet, on the view in question, C is only the denotation, the meaning being wholly relegated to ‘C’. This is an inextricable tangle, and seems to prove that the whole distinction of meaning and denotation has been wrongly conceived.

That the meaning is relevant when a denoting phrase occurs in a proposition is formally proved by the puzzle about the author of *Waverley*. The proposition ‘Scott was the author of *Waverley*’ has a property not possessed by ‘Scott was Scott’, namely the property that George IV wished to know whether it was true. Thus the two are not identical propositions; hence the meaning of ‘the author of *Waverley*’ must be relevant as well as the denotation, if we adhere to the point of view to which this distinction belongs. Yet, as we have seen, so long as we adhere to this point of view, we are compelled to hold that only the denotation can be relevant. Thus the point of view in question must be abandoned.

Russell introduces the fact of indirect contexts directly here. He does not bring in Frege’s story of indirect reference. His point is that “the meaning is relevant when a denoting phrase occurs in a proposition.” His example is

\[
\text{the proposition } m\text{Scott was the author of *Waverley*} \quad (4.24)
\]
which he distinguishes very carefully from

\[ "\text{Scott was Scott} \] (4.25)

No one would deny this. He concludes that

\[ "\text{the author of Waverley} \] (4.26)

“must be relevant as well as the denotation…” but, he continues, “so long as we adhere to this point of view, we are compelled to hold that only the denotation can be relevant. Thus the point of view in question must be abandoned.”
In paragraph A, Russell states why he has difficulties with Frege’s distinction between meaning and denotation.

In paragraph B, Russell introduces meaning quotes. Note that there is a difference between Kaplan’s meaning quotes and Frege’s Θ operator: the difference shows itself when we take up the case of iterated quotes. That is, we need to distinguish ΘΘC and mCmm. The difference between these two will come up when we look to the problem of iterated indirect senses.

Note that the distinction Russell draws is between C and mC all the way through. There are difficulties when the expression talked about does not denote (as, for example, when it is a sentence). We will take care of these below.

There is further stage setting in paragraph C. The point is how we can speak of meanings and denotation. The important point is that when an expression occurs in a sentence, it is serving there to stand for its denotation.

When Russell says that ‘the relation of meaning and denotation is not merely linguistic through the phrase: there must a logical relation involved, which we express by saying that the meaning denotes the denotation,’’ I take this to explain his use of inverted commas around the phrase ‘the meaning of C’. That is, he wishes to talk of the denotation of the meaning of that expression. This is a point of contention between my reading and Kremer’s.

In paragraph D at last we have an argument. The problem, so far as I can tell, is that we cannot get what we want via the distinction between meaning and denoting Frege provides. Our problem is to identify what it is that we want. Let us examine the various claims made in this
‘the meaning of C’ gives us the meaning (if any) of the denotation

The left-most expression is encased in meaning quotes. So, we need to rephrase it using those meaning quotes

\[ \text{"the meaning of } C \text{" gives us the meaning (if any) of the denotation.} \]

The expression on the left hand side of the sentence stands for the meaning of the expression encased, viz. “the meaning of C.” The meaning of that expression stands for something (the relation of meaning to denotation is not merely linguistic through the phrase—it is the meaning that denotes). So, the meaning of that expression stands for the meaning of C. That is, we have

\[ \text{"the meaning of } C \text{" stands for the meaning of } C \]

That is, it stands for the meaning of the denotation of ‘C’. that is what he means by saying that it stands for the meaning of the denotation. To give an instantiation,

\[ \text{"the meaning of the first line of Gray’s Elegy" stands for the meaning of the first line of Gray’s Elegy.} \]

And since

\[ \text{The first line of Gray’s Elegy = “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day”} \]

then, by substitution, we get

\[ \text{"the meaning of the first line of Gray’s Elegy" stands for the meaning of “the curfew tollsthe knell of parting day.”} \]

This is not the meaning he wants. The meaning he wants, I take it, is this:

\[ \text{the meaning of “the first line of Gray’s elegy”} \]

By which I mean, he wants to get a meaning that denotes this. The solution is simple. We enclose that expression in inverted commas, or, as I will do, meaning quotes:

\[ \text{"the meaning of “the first line of Gray’s Elegy”"} \]
Summary

and this, he says, is the very same thing as

\[ \text{"the first line of Gray's Elegy"} \] \hspace{1cm} (5.9)

Is this so? And is this a problem? Note, that we have a question here:
Can we substitute inside meaning quotes?

As to the first question, I would have thought that (5.9) is the same
as (5.7). So, (5.9) would seem to give him the meaning he wants. Why
is he going through hoops to get something he can get very easily? This
needs to be explained.

As to the second question, he appears to assume that the iterations
collapse. For, in order to say that (5.8) is the same as (5.9), he must
assume something like this:

\[ \text{The meaning of ‘the meaning of “the first line of Gray's Elegy”’ = the meaning of “the first line of Gray's elegy”} \] \hspace{1cm} (5.10)

That is, he is assuming that iterated meanings collapse.

“Similarly”: so there is the same type of problem when we speak
of ‘the denotation of C’. Yes and No. He has placed inverted commas
around the expression. So, he is troubled about the expression

\[ \text{"the denotation of C"} \] \hspace{1cm} (5.11)

This, of course, assumes my reading of the text, viz., that his use of
inverted commas is consistent. Now, this is the meaning of the phrase
‘the denotation of C’. This denotes the denotation of C. Is this “the
denotation of the denotation” we want? If so, then the denotation we
want is the meaning of “C”. But, don’t we have the devices to do this?
Presumably we do, but those devices do not do the job. At least, that
seems to be the argument. The argument is that we cannot get at these
things using the devices Frege gives us.

Now to paragraph E. Note how he speaks of the difficulty of speak-
ing of “the meaning of a denoting complex.” that is the problem is is
troubled about. The denoting complex is going to be the meaning of
C. His problem is finding the meaning of that. That is why he includes
the phrase inside inverted commas. That is the correct reading of the
various sections previous to this one.

He says, “the moment we put the complex in a proposition, the propo-
sition is about the denotation.” This is quite right and reflects no con-
fusion on his part of the distinct views of propositions put forward by
himself and Frege. For, indeed, if the complex is part of an F propo-


tion, the proposition is about what the complex denotes. That is pure Frege.

He continues, “if we make a proposition in which the subject is "the meaning of C^m, then the subject is the meaning (if any) of the denotation, which was not intended.” This is the crucial point. If the proposition includes the complex, then the proposition is about the denotation of the complex. And if the proposition contains "the meaning of C^m, then the proposition is about the wrong thing. This was the point of the previous paragraph. Can we put this all together?

He then says: “this leads us to say that, when we distinguish meaning and denotation, we must be dealing with the meaning: the meaning has denotation and is a complex...” It is here that he collapses the denoting complex with its meaning. This is the collapsing of the hierarchy.

So the upshot of paragraph E is that we need to collapse the hierarchy.

In paragraph F, he claims that if we collapse the hierarchy, this only makes our difficulties more difficult.

He identifies the complex with its meaning. now, to speak of the meaning, we need something in the proposition that denotes it. This is mC^m. And here he says something very important. “And C must not be a constituent of this complex (as it is of "the meaning of C^m"); for if C occurs in the complex, it will be its denotation, not its meaning, that will occur, and there is no backward road from denotation to meaning...”

This is our clue to what is going on. But I do not have it as yet.

5.1 Finale

The keys to these passages are paragraphs D through F. In D, we have the collapse of the hierarchy. What is being argued is

\[ m \text{the meaning of } C^m = mC^m \]  

But since

\[ \text{the meaning of } "C" = mC^m \]  

by definition (see B) we have

\[ \text{This is what is proved in D. And if this is so, then the hierarchy collapses, and so does the distinction between sense and reference. Paragraph E kind of summarizes the problem of what happens when we wish to speak about denoting complexes. Perhaps, he says, what is happening in these} \]
contexts is that it is not the denotation that the expression is after, but the meaning. And this is followed out in paragraph F, at which place he argues the relation runs out entirely mysterious. Okay.
I will try in this essay to make sense of the notoriously difficult, some say “incomprehensible” passage in Russell (1905a) in which he sets forth his criticism of Frege’s sense/reference distinction. The Orthodox Reading of this passage, which derives from Searle’s (1957) important article is highly problematic, and it has had a very deleterious effect on our understanding of the passage. Searle takes Russell to have insinuated his own directly referential conception of names into Frege’s indirectly referential conception, betraying a misconception on his part, compounded by an idiosyncratic use of quotation devices that has all the earmarks of use/mention confusion. I urge that although Russell did believe that some terms were directly referential, he was not confused about Frege’s view on this matter. To the contrary, his criticism is that Frege’s theory founders on an analysis of sentences in which propositions and more generally senses are themselves talked about. Searle’s criticism of Russell has convinced many that Frege is not Russell’s (1905a) target. Only Blackburn and Code (1978) and Blackburn and Code (1979) have maintained that he is. A Revised Orthodox View has recently been gaining adherents, among them Geach (1959, 1978, 1979), Kaplan (1989), Cartwright (1987), Hylton (1990), and Kremer (1994), according to which Russell’s criticism is understood to be directed at his own theory of the same name, not Frege’s. I agree with the Revised Orthodox view that Russell’s is a criticism of his own view of the same name; but I disagree with the Revised Orthodox view because I believe that Russell’s target in the passage is Frege’s theory. Whether Russell had identified all the particulars of the argument I fill out is highly questionable: he claims that the theory has “curious difficulties” and that trying to fathom the relation between meaning and denotation leads to an an “inextricable tangle.” Unlike the criticism of Meinong, whose theory
he argues leads to inconsistencies, the criticism of Frege has a different flavor. Like a grandmaster who senses with brilliance and experience that a line will fall, Russell looses an attack on Frege’s position which leaves it in such a sorry state of affairs that he believes it is doomed. Detailing the errors Russell surmised in this stroke requires speculation and interpolation on the part of a patzer like me.

The Orthodox View and The Revised Orthodox View both deny that Russell is doing there what he says he is doing, viz. presenting a clear, coherent and telling criticism of Frege’s sense/reference distinction. In this essay, I shall argue otherwise. Building on recent studies of Frege’s account of indirect reference,† I will propose an interpretation of that notoriously difficulty passage in Russell (1905a) on which (i) it is clearly a criticism of Frege’s distinction, (ii) it is a coherent criticism of Frege’s distinction made with full understanding of that theory, and (iii) it is a very telling criticism of Frege’s distinction. In addition, on my interpretation, I will be able to identify the new theory presented in Russell (1905a) as a direct reaction to the problems he had identified with the sense/reference theory. And I will focus our attention on the fact that the heart of Russell’s solution to the puzzle involves a rejection of Compositionality.

6.1 A Little History

6.1.1 Introduction

The years 1903 through 1905 found Russell’s thoughts about the semantics of singular terms in ferment. In the main body of The Principles of Mathematics, he defended an ill-conceived doctrine of propositions, underpinned by a Meinongian ontology. (Call this Russell’s M Theory). Singular terms are regarded all as directly referential. The meaning of a singular term is the object denoted. This object is a constituent of the proposition expressed, and the meaningfulness of the singular term is guaranteed by the corresponding constituent of the proposition. But I he sympathetic appendix on “The Logical and Arithmetic Doctrines of Gottlob Frege” belled the new directions of his thinking. No longer will all singular terms be regarded as directly referential. For those that are, the object denoted remains a constituent of the proposition expressed; but for those that are not, it is the meaning of the term (the denoting

complex) that is a constituent of the proposition, not the object referred to. (Call this Russell’s F Theory.)

Russell shuffled the pieces of this story around to preserve the outlines of an overarching coherent picture. But there was always a loose end somewhere. This brief chapter in the development of Russell’s semantic theory has come to light as the result of some excellent philosophical sleuthing by Richard Cartwright (1987)† through the Russell Archives,‡ bringing to light a number of unpublished manuscripts in which Russell struggles with a distinction between meaning and denotation. Eventually Russell came to believe his attempt in this direction foundered. And, in its place, he put forward his celebrated theory of denoting expressions. (Call this Russell’s D Theory.) As a result of this research, we now understand that Russell’s development of a semantic theory proceeded in stages:

- The M Theory of The Principles of Mathematics (1903)
- The F theory in the unpublished mss. (1903-1905)
- The D Theory of "On Denoting" through Principia (1905-1910)

Russell’s transitional theory of meaning and denotation never appeared in print. Not even in “On Denoting,” where Russell announces The D Theory, is there any exposition of his own distinction of this name. Instead, we find the new theory contrasted with those of two famous rivals, Meinong and Frege. The criticism of Meinong is clear and cogent. But not that of Frege. In these, perhaps the most puzzling and frustrating passages in the corpus of modern analytic philosophy, Russell becomes difficult and obscure. Russell had never accepted in toto Meinong’s views any more than he had accepted Frege’s views. In each case, he had adopted crucial devices of their theories to his own ends. The pieces adopted fail, he now pointedly details, and so the theories based on them. But the failure of the devices in each case are endemic to the theories of Meinong and Frege: they are not the result alone of interaction with his addenda. On my reading of the text, the criticism of Meinong rehearses his reasons for rejecting the specifically Meinonian elements of his M theory: to the extent that these impact his M Theory, they are also reasons for rejecting it. Similarly, the criticism of Frege rehearses his rejecting the specifically Fregean elements of his F Theory; again, to the extent that these impact his F Theory, they are also

† Also Peter Hylton (1990).
‡ See Russell (1905d,e,f,c) which now appear in Urquhart (1994).
reasons for rejecting it. This will be the burden of my argument in this paper.

6.1.2 The M Theory

Russell was a Realist. He had been converted from Idealism by Moore†, and his Realism strongly influenced the development of his semantic theory. It is no accident that he turned first to Meinong and then to Frege for ideas. The Revolt against Idealism had begun earlier on the Continent, and Russell turned to the most powerful of the new Realists to help pave the way. Russell had great respect for these men. He devoted an appendix to The Principles on Frege’s work, and published a number of articles on Meinong in Mind.‡

In The Principles, Russell held the crudest Realist view and a Direct Reference semantics: what one is speaking about invariably is real. There are no intermediaries—no ideas, no modes of presentation—between the individual and the thing spoken about. No, those very things themselves, the things meant, are constituents of the proposition expressed. Among these constituents are not just things like people, trees, animals, and the like, but also redness and numbers. But this should not be entirely surprising: it only means that Russell was a Realist with regards to properties and certain abstract objects. Now, it is one thing to be moved to an ontology of particulars and universals, as Russell had been. It is a rather larger step to adopt the Meinongian ontology of Being, and the huge ontological baggage that goes along with it. Huge, by the way, is not merely a matter of numbers. After all, Russell was committed to the existence of integers—even to reals. He was well aware of Cantor’s result that there were more reals than rationals, each already being infinite in number. No, the issue is not how many things one is committed to. Nor is it in any simple way a matter of the kind of entity one is committed to. It is that Meinong’s view of Reality leads to contradictions.

Meinong held the following principle:

\[(A) \text{ Every singular term, if it is to be meaningful, must refer to an object.} \]
\[\text{The object need not exist, but it must have being} \]

This is the principle Russell abandoned. His reasons are quite clear: there are meaningful singular terms, like ‘the round square’, which are

† See Russell (1917).
‡ These have been reprinted in Lackey (1973).
such that if we supposed them to refer to objects, we would be forced into inconsistencies. For we should have to hold that the round square is both round and, since square, not round. The principle Russell held at the time is slightly different:

(B) The meaning of a singular term is the object for which it stands

Each meaningful phrase corresponds to a Being because that Being is the meaning of the phrase. The very same grounds that lead to his rejecting of (A) lead him to reject (B). But (B) is not a principle Meinong held. Meinong’s theory was a good deal more complicated. In particular, he held that, corresponding to a singular term, there is not only an object, but also a content. It was Russell who identified the meaning of the term with the object referred to, not the content it went along with. Now, Meinong is not a philosopher who has commanded the interest and philosophical respect of subsequent commentators (in anything like the way Frege has). And it is (B) that has come down to us in the literature as the Meinongian position. But now that we know more clearly Meinong’s view, we realize that it is (A) he held, not (B). How, then, do we interpret the relevant passages of Russell (1905a)? Do we say that Russell misinterpreted, misrepresented, or misconstrued Meinong? Do we say, instead, that Russell’s target was not Meinong but his own M Theory? Neither of these seems the appropriate reaction. No, Meinong is his target, and his criticism is of the specifically Meinongian element of his M Theory.

6.1.3 The F Theory

Russell’s Realism centered his philosophical journey from 1903 to 1905. The Fregean distinction between sense and reference, helped him regain his robust sense of reality,† and eliminate the inconsistencies the M theory fell into. Russell rejected (B), and in its place, he held the following two principles:

(C) The meaning of a logically proper name is the object for which it stands

(D) The meaning of a description is a denoting complex

So, according to this transitional theory, Russell, like Frege, holds that

† Note, however, that there was a related distinction to be found in Meinong between object and content, that Russell no doubt saw as kindred, and which also influenced the move.
Bill Clinton is happy (6.1) and Hilary Clinton’s husband is happy (6.2) have the same logical form: $F\alpha$. They are both atomic sentences. Unlike Frege, however, Russell assigns the two sentences distinct semantic interpretations. The proper name ‘Bill Clinton’ is directly referential, so the proposition expressed by (6.1) contains the object the proper name denotes, namely, Bill Clinton. But ‘Hilary Clinton’s husband’ is semantically complex and not directly referential: the proposition expressed by (6.2) contains the meaning of the description. Unlike in the previous case, the denotation of the term, i.e., Bill Clinton, is not a constituent of the proposition at all. The denoting complex is a constituent of the proposition, but the proposition is about Bill Clinton, i.e., the object denoted by the denoting complex.

This theory is inherently unstable, because logical form and semantic interpretation are out of synch. I will go through these problems in the next section. Russell eventually came to understand this, thus reaching the third stage, his celebrated D Theory. In ‘On Denoting,’ Russell argues that (6.1) and (6.2) have not merely different semantic interpretations, but, different logical forms as well: although (6.1) is of the form $F\alpha$, (6.2) is not. Since, on this theory, there is no ambiguity associated with the logical form $F\alpha$, the meaning/denotation distinction is no longer doing any work, and it so it is dropped. So, as I read this history, there is a quite straightforward problem with the F Theory, a matter of syntax and semantics being in lockstep, that is corrected in the D Theory.

If Russell had said this in Russell (1905a), then I would be the first to admit that it is his own F Theory, and not Frege’s of the same name, that he is criticizing there. It would be an open and shut case. And if the various adherents of the Revised Orthodox view could show that this is the story underlying the tortured passages of Russell (1905a), once again, I would be very much swayed by their efforts. But they do not do so.† Russell differed from Frege very clearly in his account of propositions. Although both assigned the same logical form to (6.1) and (6.2), Frege assigned the same semantical interpretation to the two

† Kaplan is a notable exception. But he takes the passage to be a rejection of the 1903 theory, i.e., the M Theory. IS THIS SO?
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while Russell attributed different semantical interpretations to the two. A commentator who seeks to advance the Revised Orthodox needs to pin his case on this difference: he needs to show that Russell’s criticism of the meaning/denoting distinction in Russell (1905a) depends upon that feature of Russell’s account that differentiates it from Frege’s.

There is, however, at the same time, another issue that concerned Russell (as well as his later commentators), involving the discrepancies between his meaning/denotation distinction and Frege’s. Just as Russell had started out with a crude Direct Reference semantics, so had Frege. Such was the semantic story he had told in *Begriffsschrift*, and from which he was recoiling in Frege (1892a).† Frege’s rejection of direct reference was the more radical: Objects are not ever parts of thoughts; whatever one is speaking about is presented in the thought via a sense. Russell never accepted Frege’s radical rejection of direct reference. This is clear in the case of proper names. But even descriptions, he held, if they are to be useful, must contain some reference to a particular (i.e., must contain a directly referential expression); they cannot be “purely qualitative.”‡ Kripke has charged that an essential component of ‘The Frege/Russell Description Theory of Names’ is that a proper name be replaceable by a purely qualitative description that uniquely picks out the object. Whatever Frege held, there is absolutely no reason to think Russell believed this. To the contrary, one can see in Russell (1917) that Russell specifically rejected this idea. On the contrary, his view was that either something was picked out directly, or, if by description, in relation to something that was picked out directly. The role of the description for Russell, then, is entirely different from that which it is supposed to play for Frege. Lumping them together, as many have done, fails to do justice to either.

During the transition period, Russell gave prominence to The Principle Acquaintance, “the fundamental epistemological principle in the analysis of propositions containing descriptions”:

(E) Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted.§

And he expands a bit on the following page:

Thus the principle which I enunciated may be restated as follows: Whenever a relation of supposing or judging occurs, the terms to which the supposing or

† See Mendelsohn (2005) for the story.
‡ See Russell (1917).
§ Russell (1917: 23).
judging mind is related by the relation of supposing or judging must be terms with which the mind in question is acquainted. This is merely to say that we cannot make a judgment or a supposition without knowing what it is that we are making our judgment or supposition about. Russell (1917: 49)

The point is that one can have knowledge by description of an object and so talk about it coherently, even if one does not have knowledge by acquaintance of it. Still, the constituents of the proposition will all be things the speaker is acquainted with: for, to have knowledge by description means to have the denoting complex as part of the proposition, and one can have acquaintance with this its well as with ordinary objects.

But Russell’s resistance to Frege’s picture of propositions does not appear to stand on the Principle of Acquaintance alone.† If it did, then he would not require any direct reference to individuals. After all, Platonism is a kind of Realism. And Russell was deep into Platonism, at least to the extent that he admitted universals like redness and abstract objects like numbers. What is not clear, however, is whether Russell was a Platonist about meanings to the extent that we could have acquaintance with them. Frege held both that meanings were mind-independent immaterial things and also that we “grasped” them. Russell was pointedly unhappy with Frege’s position, but the exact way in which he was unhappy with it is not entirely clear to me.

Propositions are supposed to be the objects of thought. On the Fregean view, one never thinks of that very man there, in flesh and blood, Bill Clinton, for the element of the proposition is going to be, not Bill Clinton, but a mode of presentation of him. That is, one never has direct access to Reality on the Fregean view via propositions: and this is just the distance within which Idealism can wreck its havoc. Frege’s late essay, “The Thought” is interesting in this regard. It was published in an Idealist journal, and the heart of that essay is a defense of the Reality, i.e. mind-independence, of thoughts as well as of the Reality, i.e., mind-independence of what those thoughts are of. Frege had good reason to be worried about this aspect of his philosophizing. For, despite his insistence that a word like “Bill Clinton” refers to the man himself—not someone’s idea of Bill Clinton, and not a mode of presentation of Bill Clinton—it is only by means of an intermediary mode of presentation that one thinks of him (if Frege would even allow one to speak like this of a de re belief). Russell, certainly, was unhappy with this feature of Frege’s theory. Russell wants us to be able to think of that very

† Or at least more is packed into the notion of acquaintance than one might otherwise think.
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man. That man is trapped inside the proposition. So, we recall Russell’s letter to Frege, avowing that it is Mont Blanc, not some idea of Mont Blanc or a mode of presentation of Mont Blanc, that is a constituent of the proposition that Mont Blanc is more than 2000 meters high. If Mont Blanc is a proper name, and not a disguised description, then the thing itself must be part of the proposition. Now, it does not appear in any straightforward way that the disagreement with Frege concerns the mind-independent reality of the sense of ‘Mont Blanc’: to this extent, if the sense were part of the proposition, it is not unreasonable to say that the constituents of the proposition are all items with which we have acquaintance. So, I do not see that it is (E) that leads him to reject the Fregean proposition. But there remain deep qualms, no doubt, about the Fregean picture, for what is unspecified is how the sense is connected with the object, how we get from the sense to the object. This, I submit, is the source of the “curious difficulties” concerning the relation of the meaning to the denotation he talks of in Russell (1905a). The details of Frege’s theory make this relation unfathomable: following principles Frege himself would accept, either the distinction collapses or it is unstatable.

So, the reading I propose is that Russell is criticizing Frege in Russell (1905a), not the F Theory he had been working on. He is pretty much silent about this theory in Russell (1905a). Although, as one reads through the unpublished manuscripts, it is fairly clear that the problem he was finding with the F Theory were coming closer and closer to this problem of the relation of meaning to denotation. In any event, it is this very central notion, a notion that lies at the heart of Frege’s theory and which he had imported into his own, that he takes to be mistaken. The rejection of Frege’s account, however, is to be made on logical grounds, not philosophical disagreements: the claim is that the sort of Realism Frege wishes to maintain falls on logical grounds. It is not that it is not sufficiently naturalistic, or something of the sort. No, the theory collapses. This is the reading I propose.

6.1.4 Problems With The F Theory

On the Transitional Theory, ostensibly subject/predicate sentences, where the subject expression is either a proper name or a definite description, are both given the same analysis, viz., both are assigned the form \(Fa\) — despite the fact that they receive different semantical analyses. In the case of a proper name, the object stood for is part of the proposition.
expressed and, furthermore the sentence is about that object. In the case of a definite description, on the other hand, it is not the object stood for that is part of the proposition expressed, but the meaning of the definite description; nonetheless, the sentence is not about the meaning, but about the object stood for. So, although both sentences are assigned the same logical form, the semantical analyses diverge dramatically. This is the essential instability of the Transitional Theory.

Problems come to a head in the following two sorts of cases:

- First, in sentences involving propositional attitude constructions (and, more generally, that-clauses) there are problems of substitution even for proper names;
- Second, in sentences that are about denoting complexes, paradoxes emerge when the denoting complex occurring in the proposition is the very object stood for by the expression.

The two kinds of cases are entirely similar: after all, the prevailing attitude of sentences involving propositional attitude constructions is that the sentence is about the proposition expressed by the subordinate clause, so the sentence is about meanings. These problems bedeviled Russell until he said that he could see no way of keeping the whole edifice together and he decided to abandon the idea that both types of sentences have the same logical form.

The clearest statement of the problem with Russell’s theory is to be found in footnote 23 of David Kaplan’s “Demonstratives”:

There is a difficulty in Russell’s 1903 picture that has some historical interest. Consider the proposition expressed by the sentence, ‘The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point’. Call the proposition, ‘P’. P has in its subject place a certain complex, expressed by the definite description. Call the complex, ‘Plexy’. We can describe Plexy as “the complex expressed by ‘the centre of mass of the solar system’.” Can we produce a directly referential term which designates Plexy? Leaving aside for the moment the controversial question of whether ‘Plexy’ is such a term, let us imagine, as Russell believed, that we can directly refer to Plexy by affixing a kind of meaning marks (on the analogy of quotation marks) to the description itself. Now consider the sentence “the center of mass of the solar system” is a point’. Because the subject of this sentence is directly referential and refers to Plexy, the proposition the sentence expresses will have as its subject constituent Plexy itself. A moment’s reflection will reveal that this proposition is simply P again. But this is absurd since the two sentences speak about radically different objects.

Let us look at these comments.

Kaplan claims that “Russell believed ... that we can directly refer to
Plexy by affixing a kind of meaning marks (on the analogy of quotation marks) to the description itself." The story is that Russell believed that we should be able to refer directly to Plexy; and the inability to do so poses a problem.† Kaplan’s is a reconstruction of the argument to this inability: we can read Kaplan’s as a reductio of the claim that we can have directly referential terms for meanings. The answer is that we cannot. Here’s the argument:

Consider the two sentences,

\[
\text{The center of mass of the solar system is a point} \quad (6.3)
\]

and

\text{"The center of mass of the solar system" is a point} \quad (6.4)

On the surface, these two appear to be quite different, because (6.3) speaks about a space-time point while (6.4) speaks about a meaning. (6.3) is plausibly true, but not (6.4). Now, on Russell’s F Theory, (6.3) expresses a proposition in which the denoting complex expressed by "the center of mass of the solar system" occurs, but, although the complex occurs there, the proposition is about what the denoting complex denotes. Had the center of mass of the solar system been introduced by a directly referential expression, one which had denotation but no meaning, the constituent of the proposition would have been, not a denoting complex (because there is none in the case of a proper name), but the thing itself. So, if 'Centro' were a proper name for the center of mass of the solar system,

\[
\text{Centro is a point} \quad (6.5)
\]

would have the same truth value as (6.3), but (6.5) would express a different proposition, one which contained an item the denoting complex in the proposition expressed by (6.3) would denote. In the case of (6.4), however, where a meaning is directly referred to, the thing denoted is the thing occurring the proposition. Stripping away the sentences, now, the proposition expressed by (6.3) is indistinguishable from the proposition expressed by (6.4), having in each case the same constituents combined in exactly the same way, and so the theory would be unable to distinguish what (6.3) says from what (6.4) says.†

† We should be able to refer to them directly because, if they are to be ingredients of the proposition, we should be able to have acquaintance with them.

† Hence the collapse of the sense/reference distinction when senses themselves are talked about.
What solution does Kaplan offer? He says that one can solve the problem by introducing a device for distinguishing positions of occurrence. So, he continues the above quotation:

The solution to the difficulty is simple. Regard the 'object' places of a singular proposition as marked by some operation which cannot mark a complex. (There will always be such an operation.) For example, suppose that no complex is (represented by) a set containing a single member. Then we need only add \{ ... \} to mark the places in a singular proposition which correspond to directly referential terms. We no longer need worry about confusing a complex with a propositional constituent corresponding to a directly referring term because no complex will have the form \( Ix \{ x \} \). In particular, Plexy \( \neq \{ \text{Plexy} \} \). This technique can also be used to resolve another confusion in Russell. He argued that a sentence containing a nondenoting directly referential term (he would have called it a nondenoting 'logically proper name') would be meaningless, presumably because the purported singular proposition would be incomplete. But the braces themselves can fill out the singular proposition, and if they contain nothing, no more anomalies need result than what the development of Free Logic has already inured us to.

But, of course, Kaplan’s suggested solution to the problem is premised on supposing that we can directly refer to denoting complexes. If Russell were willing to reject direct reference of denoting complexes, he would not have these difficulties with the F Theory. This point cannot be underscored enough. He is unwilling to abandon direct reference of denoting complexes. His commitment to (E) requires that the constituents of a proposition be things of which we have direct acquaintance. If senses cannot be directly referred to, we cannot have direct acquaintance of them, and so, they cannot be constituents of propositions. And if we are unable to have direct reference of senses, items we have direct acquaintance with, then the idea that we directly refer to things like Mont Blanc, an item we have direct acquaintance with, is also called into question.

A solution like the one Kaplan suggests was in the works in the unpublished manuscripts. Cartwright [6] calls our attention to passages in "On Fundamentals" [53] in which he distinguishes between something’s having meaning position and its having entity position in order to handle the difficulties mentioned. At the beginning of [53], as Cartwright says, “the apparatus available in The Principals for philosophical analysis of propositions is thus retained,” ([6], p.119) but eventually, this is just the distinction announced in the second part of [53] in which the celebrated D Theory emerges. The main idea in The D Theory is that (1) and (2) have distinct logical forms: (1) is of the form \( Fa \) but (2) is not. This
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seems to me to be the fundamental change in Russell’s position. Taking sentences involving descriptions to be quantified sentences is very clearly a working out of the idea that we need two types of positions to handle, the problem. This is the heart of the rejection of the F Theory. Once the full import of having different positions of occurrence was brought home to him, he made the distinction in syntax. But, and this is the important point I wish the reader to bear in mind, no mention of this is to be found in Russell (1905a). That’s not what he talks about there.† My point, then, is that the Russell’s reasons for rejecting the F Theory are never really aired in Russell (1905a), and the move from the F Theory to the D Theory have been incorrectly understood. His rejection of the F Theory seems very clearly understood as the marking in syntax of a distinction he wished to make in semantics. His criticism in Russell (1905a), on the other hand, is very clearly one that does not depend upon direct reference of senses (as I shall demonstrate), not upon some principle he and not Frege maintained, like (E) or Hylton’s Principle of Truth Dependence, but thrusts directly into the heart of Frege’s distinction and the rotation between sense and reference he maintains.

† Note: We need to say more about this, especially since he retains the notions of primary and secondary occurrence in On Denoting. Perhaps the full import of the problem had not as yet occurred to him.
7

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7.1 My Interpretational Strategy

I should like to pursue here the interpretation that Russell’s is a criticism of Frege. Russell (1905a: 45) does, after all, introduce the distinction between “meaning” and “denotation” explicitly as Frege’s distinction. His own distinction of the same name had not appeared in suitable form in published articles; and it is not laid out in ”On Denoting” for his readers to see. Only Frege’s account is described—accurately—there. The F Theory never saw the light of day, so Russell could hardly have believed is readers knew of the theory, and knew enough to understand that he was there attacking the F Theory. If he were to give his reasons for abandoning the distinction, then, within the framework of the article, they would have to be understood as reasons for abandoning Frege’s distinction. This means that the problems he saw with the distinction were not peculiar to his own development of it, and especially did not depend upon his own belief in names that lacked meaning. The evidence that he was rejecting his own distinction of the same name is overwhelming, especially after seeing the discussion in his unpublished papers. But, if I am right, he believes he has uncovered problems for the distinction itself, and so for Frege. I take issue, then, not with the view that Russell, in ”On Denoting”, is criticizing Russell. This seems to be a correct view. What I take issue with is the view that lie is criticizing Russell and not Frege. To the contrary, he had come to I he realization that the distinction between meaning and denotation was a dead end—Frege’s theory as well as his own. My task, then, will be to translate the passage into Frege’s language, so to speak, so that the connection can be inside.

So many who have read the relevant passage in ”On Denoting” have
been overwhelmed by what appears to be use/mention confusion: first, there is the business of distinguishing meaning quotes from ordinary quotes, second, there are errors in his exposition as to whether he means the words or what the words mean, and third, there is the assumption of direct reference, so that what is referred to can appear as part of the proposition. Anyone who reads this passage unsympathetic to direct reference and unsure of the distinctions needed to make the points he wants to make, will come away with the belief that Russell is hopelessly confused. My own view is that Russell was extraordinarily prescient about what was going on in Frege’s theory, and that, although there were lapses in his expressing of these problems, they did not cause confusion on his part about what Frege was up to. On my reading of Russell, then, he was not confused about use and mention at all; to the contrary, he had uncovered a problem with quotation devices the solution of which still eludes us today.

7.2 Russell’s Problem with Frege’s Theory

Russell is primarily concerned in that passage with how we can talk about meanings. The key to understanding Russell’s discussion is the special quotes he introduces for speaking about senses. Why does he need these meaning-quotes when he has at hand such perfectly good locutions as "the sense of x?" And why does he focus his criticism on the device of meaning-quotes, which, after all, appears to be a device of his own making? Searle’s answer is that this is a stipulation of Russell’s that reflects his own assumption "that if an object is referred to by a proposition then that object occurs as part of that proposition." ([58], p. 343) But, of course, Russell did not assume this at all; and even if he had, it would not explain why Russell introduces and focuses on the meaning-quotes device and not on the more usual "the meaning of x."

Of course, Russell did believe this of directly referring expressions. If an object is referred to directly, using a logically proper name, then that object is itself a part of the proposition. Here Russell parted company with Frege, to be sure; for Frege held that all proper names had sense and some had reference. For Frege, direct reference was impossible. But, and this is where Russell makes his entry point, direct reference seems to be at work for Frege or, perhaps, must be at work for Frege—in some circumstances when senses themselves are being referred to. My suggestion is that Russell is concerned with the issue of whether meanings can be introduced by directly referential expressions or only
by "denoting phrases." That they can only be introduced by "denoting phrases" is one of his announced problems with the theory, from which I conclude that he would like to be able to get at meanings directly. But why? And is there anything in Frege that might lead him down this line, for, as we know, the phenomenon of direct reference—that is, of words that had denotation but no meaning—was antithetical to his account?

Michael Kremer [32] reminds us that Russell claims that he has proved The Principle of Acquaintance in "On Denoting". Kremer, in his reconstruction, finds no such proof; and so he glosses this claim of Russell’s as meaning that his D Theory is in accordance with the principle. I think Kremer is wrong. I think that the issue he is after is precisely the proof. That is, he thinks Frege is wrong to eliminate direct reference entirely; that the Fregean picture fails, either because it requires direct reference of senses, and so collapses under the weight of the problems of the F Theory, or it makes the notion of sense, and of the relation between sense and reference, wholly mysterious. The need for direct reference of senses requires the distinction between entity and meaning position, which he now codifies in the D Theory, in syntax. There is a larger philosophical issue, then, in what is going on in here, that reflects just the problems and reasons Russell has for rejecting Frege’s theory.

### 7.2.1 Indirect Reference

Russell’s focusing on the expression 'the meaning of C', and his introduction of meaning quotes to refer to meanings does have its roots in Frege’s discussion of sense and reference. We find Frege talking of the sense of a given expression while saying very little about who this type of expression is supposed to work. He does, however, say something quite provocative and relevant about the role of expressions inside that clauses. His use of 'that' is remarkably like the meaning quotes Russell introduces: the important divergences will emerge when we consider iterating these operators. Let us look at some of the problems Frege has with that clauses.

Frege distinguished sentences like

\[ \text{John said "snow is white"}, \] (7.1)

so-called oratio recta constructions, in which a relation is expressed between John and a sentence, and sentences like

\[ \text{John said that snow is white}, \] (7.2)
so-called oratio obliqua constructions, in which a relation is expressed between John and a proposition. In this latter case, Frege held that the words inside the "that" clause shifted their reference to their ordinary senses. Russell, as I understand him, is concerned with this type of construction. The immediate question he had was how "that p" works. Is it directly referential, or is it a complex designator whose reference is a function of the reference of its parts as Frege thought? And if it is a complex designator whose reference is not a function of the reference of the parts, then the very reason Frege needed the device, namely, to preserve compositionality for reference, has been undercut.

There are two possible readings of Frege’s that operator. On the one, that attaches to the verb of propositional attitude, so one "believes-that," "says-that," etc. On the other, it attaches to the sentence commanded by "that," so the expression following the propositional attitude verb is a detachable term that designates a thought. Russell, I believe, takes the second reading. So, for example, he would regard as a legitimate inference within the framework Frege erects about substitution and indirect reference:

John believes that every integer can be expressed as the sum of two primes.
that every integer can be expressed as the sum of two primes = Goldbach’s conjecture.
SO. John believes Goldbach’s conjecture.

But Russell’s meaning-quotes extend Frege’s "that" operator. Frege only used "that" in front of a sentence; Russell appears to be able to place his meaning-quotes around any expression whatsoever to designate the meaning of that expression. Can we find any basis in Frege’s theory for such an extension?

We can find some reason to allow "that" to operate on expressions other than declarative sentences. Frege held that declarative sentences fall into the same syntactic category as proper names and definite descriptions: all are Eigennamen. So, if "that snow is white" is coherent, it would seem, on theoretical grounds, expressions like "that the present King of France" and "that Bertrand Russell" should also be coherent. In each case, the expression following "that" shifts its reference to its ordinary sense. I can point to no text in which Frege uses "that" in this manner. I can also point to no text in which Frege explicitly prohibits such a use. We cannot rely on intuitions about grammaticality to decide the issue. For, there are good theoretical grounds for supposing it to be meaningful, and, as we all know, Frege frequently allowed
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Theoretical pressures to prevail over common sense. So, this extension of Frege’s "that" operator is not implausible, and it gives it something of the flavor of a quotation-type device.

But there are deeper reasons why Russell might treat “that” as a quotation-type device. Frege held that when a sentence occurs inside a that-clause, the sentence shifts its reference so that it refers, not to its customary reference, but to its customary sense. Let us use "\(r_i\)" for "Indirect reference" and "\(\Theta\)" for "that". Frege characterizes the indirect reference of an expression as that which the expression refers to inside a that-clause.

\[ r_i(t) = \Theta(t) \]  

He holds that indirect reference is compositional, i.e., that the indirect reference of the whole is the result of applying the indirect reference of the embedded function-expression to the indirect reference of the embedded argument-expression, i.e.,

\[ r_i(Fa) = [r_i(F)](r_i(a)) \]  

He regarded the parts of a that-clause as detachable, subject to substitution, and so, in Russell’s terminology, as designating their senses “in isolation.” So, it is natural to impute to him the following principle:

\[ \Theta(Fa) = [\Theta(F)](\Theta(a)) \]  

What I have just suggested is not the only way to understand Frege’s treatment of indirect reference and that-clauses. But it is a perfectly appropriate way of doing so. Indeed, Terry Parsons,\[42\] an informed reader of Frege, includes these among the principles in his formal reconstruction of Frege’s account of indirect, reference.

† We have found, then, a device in Frege’s own theory, that seems to do the work Russell’s meaning-quotes are intended to do. "That" attaches to an expression to form a term that designates the sense of that expression.‡ Presumably, such expressions can replace ordinary names for propositions, as we replaced "Goldbach’s conjecture" by "that every number can be replaced by the sum of two primes" in the structure "John believes \(\eta\). And just as we can say that a sense is not a point in

† Tyler Burge admits similar principles.
‡ There is a possible complication for Frege that I mention just to set it aside. When "that" attaches to a function-expression, it would seem to create a designator for a sense-function. And this means that the designator would have to be something other than an Eigenname. It is not clear whether Russell would go along with this. I don’t think we need face this issue here.
space, we can specify that the sense of the expression "the centre of mass of the Solar System" is not a point, or use our that-operator to say that that (the centre of mass of the Solar System) is not a point. We have also found in Frege a construction that requires us to introduce senses in a seemingly direct way. That is, each of the following designates the same proposition, but each does so in a different way:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{the proposition that the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point} & \quad (7.6) \\
\text{the proposition expressed by the sentence "The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point"} & \quad (7.7) \\
\text{the proposition expressed by sentence (3) above} & \quad (7.8)
\end{align*}
\]

The first is a rigid designator for the proposition, as opposed to the least, which is clearly nonrigid. But it also differs from the second in that it does not pick it out as having a property, that of being expressed by a certain sentence, which is clearly contingent. It appears to refer to the proposition rather directly, in the sense in which Kaplan has used the term. The demand for this directly referential introduction of senses is not something Russell has imposed on Frege for reasons internal to Russell's peculiar theory: it is a demand set by Frege himself. And the tension is this requirement is immediate: for direct reference is not something Frege cottons to. We have also connected this particular way of introducing senses with Frege's critical view that that-clauses are compositionally constructed. It is the rejection of this principle, I believe, that is the goal of Russell's attack.

### 7.2.2 That

I have mentioned that the Θ operator differs in important respects from meaning quotes when we iterate the operator. Here I wish to say something about the iteration of operators.

This means that we were assuming

\[
\text{the sense of 'the sense of t' = the sense of t} \quad (7.9)
\]

Now (7.9) is not a straightforward iteration of the function 'the sense of'. Moreover, (7.9) is seriously objectionable. For, what (7.9) says is that t and 'the sense of t' have the same sense. But how can this be? If they had the same sense, they would have the same reference. But, let t be 'Giorgione was so-called because of his size'. The reference of t is a truth
value; the reference of 'the sense of t' is a proposition. So, (7.9) does not appear to be the right way of understanding the collapse of the hierarchy argued for in the previous section; and therefore, our reconstruction of Russell’s argument, which depends on (7.9) is unacceptable.

It is perhaps worth noting at this point that

\[ \text{the sense of the sense of } t = \text{the sense of } t \]  

also fails to capture correctly the collapse of the hierarchy argued for in the previous section. To be sure, we have here a straightforward iteration of senses. But, as we remarked earlier, a sense can have more than one sense. Let \( t \) be 'Giorgione was so-called because of his size'. Now, the sense of \( t \) will be a proposition, the proposition that Giorgione was so-called because of his size. But there is no unique object that is the sense of this (i.e., the sense of the sense of \( t \)): this is why (36) and (37) differ in cognitive value. (28) is just what Dummett seeks to avoid in his collapse of the hierarchy.

But Russell did not couch his argument using standard philosophical quotation marks. He supposed that when an expression was enclosed in quotation marks, one referred, not to the expression, but to its meaning. So, Russell’s use of quotation marks is closer to Kaplan’s meaning quotes. Without going into details about this interpretation of Russell, I will simply propose Frege’s reference shifter that as the device to do Russell’s work of referring to meanings or senses.

Now say something about meaning quotes

### 7.2.3 Direct Reference?

Explicitly citing Russell’s (1905a) admonition that "there is no backward road from denotations to meanings," (p. 50) Michael Dummett has urged that Frege’s semantic theory be reshaped so that there is no indirect sense distinct from the customary sense:

According to Frege, a word does not have a reference on its own, ‘considered in isolation’: it has a reference only in the context of a sentence. It is fully harmonious with this view to hold that, while a word or expression by itself has a sense, it does not by itself have a reference at all: only a particular occurrence of a word or expression in a sentence has a reference, and this reference is determined jointly by the sense of the word and the kind of context in which it occurs. The sense of a word may thus be such as to determine it to stand for one thing in one kind of context, and for a different thing in some other kind of context. We may therefore regard an expression occurring in an
opaque context as having the same sense as in a transparent context, though a different reference . . . .

With this emendation, there is no such thing as the indirect sense of a word: there is just its sense, which determines it to have in transparent contexts a reference distinct from this sense, and in opaque contexts a referent which coincides with its sense. There is therefore no reason to think that an expression occurring in double oratio obliqua has a sense or a reference different from that which it has in single oratio obliqua: its referent in double oratio obliqua will be the sense which it has in single oratio obliqua, which is the same as the sense it has in ordinary contexts, which is the same as its referent in single oratio obliqua. This is intuitively reasonable: the replacements of an expression in double oratio obliqua which will leave the truth-value of the whole sentence unaltered are—just as in single oratio obliqua—those which have the same sense. ([11], pp. 268-9)

Dummett’s view, as I understand it, comes to this. The indirect sense of a word just is its customary sense. In ordinary contexts, the word stands for its customary reference, but in indirect contexts (at whatever level of indirectness), the word stands for its customary sense.

A nominalization like

\[
\text{the proposition that Giorgione was so-called because of his size} \quad (7.11)
\]

appears to be a rigid designator: it designates the same object, a particular proposition, in every possible world. By contrast,

\[
\text{the proposition that is expressed by sentence (2) in Quine’s ‘Reference and Modality.’} \quad (7.12)
\]

is clearly not a rigid designator: it is only a contingent fact that that proposition is expressed by that sentence. But (29) does not embody a rigid description of the proposition; to the contrary, it seems to be directly referential in Kaplan’s sense. [30] This means that the proposition is presented to us without mediation, without any intervening sense: it is self-presenting. To be sure, then, although a proposition can be presented in different ways, when a sentence occurs in a that-clause, there is no further mode of presentation of the proposition expressed that identify as the indirect sense, but only the proposition itself: the indirect sense just is the customary sense. This is Dummett’s idea.

So, Dummett’s reaction to Russell’s position is to admit of the direct reference of senses inside that clauses. What happens if we adopt this tack?
7.2.4 The Problem Again

Frege's "Θ" operator has two peculiarities. First, it attaches to an expression, not to a name of an expression. Second, it is iterable in the object language (unlike the way the philosopher's single quotes are supposed to iterate: we can attach "Θ" to Θ(t)" to get "Θ(Θ(t))". The importance of this will become apparent below. In any event, where Russell uses his meaning-quotes, I will use "Θ". Russell introduces his meaning-quotes by contrasting the following two sentences:

The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point, not a denoting complex

Θ(The centre of mass of the Solar System) is a denoting complex, not a point.

(This latter sentence corresponds to the one earlier using meaning quotes.) Both of these are supposed to be true, from which it follows that the two sentences,

The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point.

and

Θ(The centre of mass of the Solar System) is a point.

must express different propositions.

Could the meaning of "Θ(H)" be the same as the meaning of "C"? In Frege's terms, could the indirect sense be the same as the customary sense? No, for then the distinction would collapse. Russell does not argue for this point, though I strongly suspect that he believes that it does, for this would constitute the answer to one of the alternatives he sets out at the beginning of the passage. And, although Russell does not supply an argument here, we can construct one rather readily. The assumption that the indirect sense is the same as the customary sense is expressed by the following principle:

Θ(Θ(t)) = Θ(t)

We can now show that (5) and (24) express the very same proposition. I take the following to be a truism:

"The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point" expresses Θ (the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point).
7.2 Russell’s Problem with Frege’s Theory

The following is also a truism:

“Θ (the centre of mass of the Solar System) is a point” expresses Θ(Θ((the centre of mass of the Solar System) is a point)).

From (G), we have

Θ(the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point) = Θ(centre of mass of the Solar System)Θ(is a point) (7.20)

From which it follows, substituting in (26),

“The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point” expresses Θ(centre of mass of the Solar System)Θ(is a point).

Now, also by (G), we have

Θ(Θ(The centre of mass of the Solar System) is a point) = Θ(Θ(The centre of mass of the Solar System))Θ(is a point). (7.22)

And, by (1), we know

Θ(Θ(the centre of mass of the Solar System)) = Θ(centre of mass of the Solar System) (7.23)

Substituting in (34), we get

Θ(Θ(the centre of mass of the Solar System) is a point) = Θ(centre of mass of the Solar System)Θ(is a point). (7.24)

And, substituting in (31), we get

”Θ(Θ(the centre of mass of the Solar System) is a point)” expresses Θ (the centre of mass of the Solar System)Θ(is a point). (7.25)

From (33) and (37), it is evident that (5) and (24) express the very proposition.

The full collapse of the distinction drops out rather quickly. From (1), we have that

Θ(Θ(the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point)) = Θ(centre of mass of the Solar System)Θ(is a point). (7.26)

It follows, on Frege’s account of oblique contexts, that

the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point (7.27)
and

\[ \Theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point}) \quad (7.28) \]

must have the same customary sense; and since they have the same customary sense, they must also have the same customary reference. But the customary reference of (39) is a truth value and the customary reference of (40) is a thought.

\section*{7.2.5 Complications}

We have reached a truly disastrous result for Dummett and for Frege. Let me close by trying to see if I can explain what has happened.

Let’s simplify Figure 4, where we introduced the relation between, \( E_i \), the sequence of senses, and \( R_i \), the sequence of references, for a term \( t \). Let’s suppose that we have only two items in each sequence, the customary and the indirect sense or reference: Now, as we look at

\[
\begin{array}{c}
S_t < s_0(t) \quad s_1(t) > \\
R_t < r_0(t) \quad r_1(t) > \\
\end{array}
\]

Fig. 7.1.

Figure 7.1, we see that reference crops up twice, once in the sequence \( R_t \), and once again in the relation between the items in the sequence \( S_t \) and the items in the sequence \( R_t \) that we represented by the downward arrow. Furthermore we see a relativized notion in the sequence \( R_t \), and an unrelativized notion represented by the arrows. Figure 7.1 is obviously misleading. The two referring relations must be reduced to one. There are two ways of doing this.

One way is to take the indirect reference of \( t, r_1(t) \), to be the customary reference of the indirect sense of \( t, r_0(s_1(t)) \). This reduces the two referring relations to the arrow, as shown in Figure 7.2. The other is to

\[
\begin{array}{c}
S_t < s_0(t) \quad s_1(t) > \\
R_t < r_0(s_0(t)) \quad r_0(s_1(t)) > \\
\end{array}
\]

Fig. 7.2.
reduce the two referring relations to the items in the lower sequence, as shown in Figure 7.3. On the first view, that given in Figure 7.2, we are

\[
\begin{align*}
S_t & \prec s_0(t) \quad s_0(t) > \\
R_t & \prec r_0(s_0(t)) \quad r_1(s_0(t)) >
\end{align*}
\]

supposing that the customary reference of the indirect sense of \( t \) is the indirect reference. The sense, speaking loosely, incorporates the context of occurrence. But, then, the customary sense and the indirect sense of \( t \) must be distinct so that the customary reference and the indirect reference of \( t \) are distinct. This seems to be the picture Frege had in mind in the passage we examined earlier. This is the Orthodox picture, the one that leads to infinitely many distinct senses. It is this context-free reference pictured in Figure 7.2 that Dummett is rejecting with his suggestion.

In Figure 7.3, on the other hand, the indirect reference of \( t \) is not the customary reference of the indirect sense of \( t \). It is the indirect reference of \( t \), i.e., what \( t \) refers to in a certain context.† \( r_1(s_0(t)) \) refers to the indirect reference only in an indirect context. Indirect reference simply sets up a context in which a word’s function has been shifted. We cannot say what the sense determines in an indirect context. We can only use it in that context. So, Figure 7.3 depicts a context relative reference, and this is the one Dummett favors.

If we could refer to the indirect reference in a nonembedded context, then

\[
r_1(s_0(t)) = r_0(s_1(t))
\]

would be true and the distinction between sense and reference collapses. And that is exactly what Principle G permits us to do. This is how we collapsed the distinction in the previous section. Dummett was arguing for the second of the two readings, but, in doing so, he required speaking of these senses as if the first of the two readings were available. In opting for the picture in Figure 7.3, Dummett is opting for the view that the way in which the item is picked out is intimately connected with what it

† Note the irrelevance of \( e_i(t) \) in the sequence, and presumably of \( e_i(t) \), for \( i \not\equiv 1 \), if we were to extend the sequence indefinitely. This is what enables Parsons to say that Dummett’s semantic analysis is the same as that given by any rigid hierarchy.
is that one is picking out: the sense of an expression is being picked out indirectly. But, the argument that he used to identity customary and indirect sense required that he be able to identify the indirect sense from outside the indirect context. Each option is coherent on its own. What generates the problem is when both are chosen. A more drastic overhaul of the theory is needed, either to prevent the sense of $\eta$ from being seen as a function, or, alternatively, from understanding the expressions inside the context from referring to something.

Did we do something unfair? I don’t think so. Dummett’s argument against the nonrigid hierarchy required that he make judgements about the indirect reference (i.e., customary sense) of an expression in a nonembedded context (as, for example, with ??-??). But sentences of the form,

$$\text{the indirect reference of } t = \text{the indirect reference of } w,$$

are extremely problematic for Dummett since they require that we speak of the indirect reference of an expression in nonembedded contexts. The following also turns out to be problematic,

that Glorgione was so-called because of his size = Quine’s favorite proposition,

because one and the same sense is being introduced in an embedded context on the left-hand side of the equals-sign and in a nonembedded context on the right-hand side of the equals-sign. So, there are serious questions about Dummett’s position: the picture argued for is that in Figure 9, but the arguments given assume the picture given in Figure 8. Finally, Frege requires that we be able to refer to the indirect reference in a nonembedded context in order to make sense of the relativized substitution principle ???. So, Dummett’s way out for Frege would work only if Frege abandoned ??–which is the heart of Frege’s story about oblique contexts.

### 7.2.6 A Further Problem

Clearly, then, (1) must be rejected: the meaning of "$\Theta(t)$" must be distinct from its denotation. But, then, what is the meaning of "$\Theta(t)$"? If we tried to regard $\Theta(\Theta(t))$, as a complex expression, whose denotation

† “Thus,” Russell says, “it would seem that ‘C’ and C are different entities, such that ‘C’ denotes C.” (p. 50)
7.2 Russell's Problem with Frege's Theory

is a function of the denotation of its parts, then we have evident difficulties. How can we be assured that it is a functional relation? After all, there is, as Russell tells us, "no backward road from denotations to meanings"; and yet it is just such a road we are trying to pave. Indeed, if we suppose that, inside the scope of the "Φ" operator, a term is standing for its meaning, then since "Φ(t)" stands for the same thing, then the "Φ" operator would seem to be the identity function, and we get (1) again, collapsing the distinction.‡ If it’s not the identity operator, then it would seem that "t" is not standing for its meaning in "Φ(t)", then it is standing for its denotation, and we have already seen the difficulties this leads to. Finally, if it is standing for the denotation, and we regard this as a functional relation, then we shall be forced into a backward road from denotations to senses, which runs contrary to the picture Frege held of the relation. What can the indirect sense be? It is a mystery what to say about this. Although it must be different, Frege has given us no machinery to make any sense out of this difference. So, Russell concludes

This is an inextricable tangle, and seems to prove that the whole distinction of meaning and denotation has been wrongly conceived.

This seems to me to be just the right sort, of criticism of Frege’s treatment of indirect reference. It is just the type of criticism many have subsequently leveled, opting for various types of emendations of the theory that would avoid these terrible alternatives. Russell apparently holds out no hope for a successful outcome: he thinks its is an "inextricable tangle" and will have none, of it. His response is to give up Frege’s two-tier solution to the puzzle about identity, which defends compositionality at the level of reference and the level of sense. Frege cannot defend compositionality at the level of sense. Principles (G) and (H) must be rejected. A denoting complex does not occupy a replaceable part of the proposition, and a denoting phrase does not occupy a replaceable part of the sentence in which it occurs. "According to the view which I advocate," Russell says, "a denoting phrase is essentially part of a sentence, and does not, like most, single words, have any significance on its own." (p.51)†

The problem, he says, is, taking any denoting phrase, "C", to clarify the relation between C and O(C), i.e., to clarify the relation between

‡ See [6] pp. 127-8 and [45]

† It is perhaps worth remarking that this idea of having meaning in context is an essential part of Dummett’s own emendation of Frege’s theory. I discuss his emendation at length in [36].
the denotation of the term and the meaning of the term. And Russell then puts forth the following challenge:

Now the relation of meaning and denotation is not merely linguistic through the phrase: there must be a logical relation involved, which we express by saying that the meaning denotes the denotation. But the difficulty which confronts us is that we cannot succeed in both preserving the connexion of meaning and denotation and preventing them from being one and the same. ... (Russell, 1905a: 49)

Here is how I translate the challenge. How does "Θ(t)" denote the meaning of "t"? Is it directly referential, i.e., does it have denotation but no meaning? Frege, as we all know, rules this out.† Then it must have a meaning and a denotation. What is the meaning of this expression? Is it a logically complex expression such that the meaning of the whole is a function of the part? If there is no such a logical connection, he claims, the distinction between meaning and denotation collapses. If there is no such logical connection, then the compositional story Frege tells about the connection between the meaning of the whole and the meaning of the part is false. In either event, the theory that leads to such constructions must be rejected. It is the attempts to get out of this fatal dilemma, as I understand him, that lead to the "inextricable tangle." The obvious point of rejection is the compositional account of indirect reference.

Let's pick up the text at this point. The problem is to say something intelligent about "Θ(H)." How are we to understand this construction where the expression 'C' itself occurs? When "C" itself occurs in a phrase, the phrase is about its denotation. So, the expression "the meaning of C" designates the meaning, if anything, of the denotation of "C". It cannot be, then, that "C" can be understood to be operating in this fashion in "Θ(H)". "Θ(H)" presumably denotes the same thing as "The meaning of 'C'". But, although they denote the same thing, they cannot have the same meaning, for the reasons we outlined above.‡

Suppose we had a similar device "δ" which attached to an expression so that the whole designated the denotation of the expression. How would we understand "δ(H)? If we understood this as 'the denotation of C', then, since 'C' is occurring in that expression, and so standing for its denotation, 'the denotation of C' would designate the denotation

† "Or, as Russell (1905a: 49) says, "the meaning cannot be got at except by means of denoting phrases."
‡ This, I think, is what he means by saying that "the relation of meaning and denotation is not merely linguistic through the phrase."
of the denotation of 'C'. Rather, "δ(H)" denotes the same thing as 'the denotation of 'C". But, as before, these two expressions must differ in meaning.

The problem, he says, is this. The moment we put 'C' into a complex expression, the expression is serving to stand for its denotation, and the sentence containing that complex expression will be about what 'C'denotes. So, if we put 'Θ(H)' into a sentence, the sentence will be about 'the meaning of C', which will be about the meaning, if anything, of the denotation of 'C'. So, he concludes, when we put 'Θ(H)' into a sentence, and so speak about the meaning of 'C', 'C' is not serving there to stand for its denotation, but for its meaning. And this, of course, is just what Frege says happens inside a that-clause.

When 'Θ(H)' occurs in a sentence, 'C' is standing for its meaning. As Russell puts it, "C is the meaning of the complex." (p. 50) Now this, Russell says, is all wrong. And here I quote:

Nevertheless, whenever C occurs without inverted commas, what is said is not true of the meaning, but only of the denotation, as when we say: The centre of mass of the solar system is a point. Thus to speak about C itself, i.e., to make a proposition about the meaning, our subject must not be C, but something which denotes C. (p. 50)

Correct. If we are to suppose that the expression inside the scope of "Θ" is standing for its meaning, then we shall need a meaning to designate it. This is straight Frege. He said that when an expression occurs inside a that-clause, it stands for its customary sense, but it expresses its indirect sense. Continuing:

Thus 'Θ(H)', which is what we use when we want to speak of the meaning, must be not the meaning, but something which denotes the meaning. And C must not be a constituent of this complex (as it is of 'the meaning of C'); for if C occurs in the complex, it will be its denotation, not its meaning, that will occur, and there is no backward road from denotations to meanings, because every object can be denoted by an infinite number of different denoting phrases. (p. 50)

Now this is obscure. Our problem is to construct an argument out of this clear expression of exasperation with Frege's distinction. Russell just can't put together what Frege is up to with that-clauses. This is what I will try now.

Let's suppose that Frege could regard "Θ(H)" as a complex expression whose reference is a function of the reference of its parts. Then we would have to take the occurrence of 'C' in that complex as designating its meaning (i.e., customary sense), But, if the sentence containing "Θ(H)"
is about the meaning of ‘C’, then the proposition expressed must contain a meaning that (in Frege’s word) presents that meaning. (Frege called this the indirect sense. What is that meaning?)

Note that if Russell were confused about Frege’s position, if he had failed to distinguish between a sense ”occurring in” a proposition and its being ”referred to” in a proposition—as Searle charges—Russell would never have asked this question. He is not confused at all on this point!

### 7.3 Is Russell’s Quarry Frege?

#### 7.3.1 Searle’s Interpretation

Most philosophers have apparently been persuaded by John Searle [58], that if we can get past the use/mention sloppiness (see Church [9]), the argument is a misrepresentation of Frege’s view at worst and question-begging at best:

Russell’s argument which purports to develop Frege’s thesis in fact develops the negation of that thesis, for Russell’s assumption that occurring in a proposition is the same as being referred to by that proposition is an equation of sense and reference, and the whole point of Frege’s theory is to assert a distinction between sense and reference. ([58], p. 344)

Searle’s reconstruction of the passage, however, is thoroughly implausible.

What are Searle’s reasons for attributing to Russell such an erroneous reading of Frege? The assumptions Searle attributes to Russell are not to be found in “On Denoting.” They are, in Searle’s words, ”inexplicit.” Searle imputes these assumptions to Russell, presumably to make sense of the passage: Russell must have assumed these in order for his argument to work. While I am sympathetic with this interpretive strategy, Searle has not carried it out appropriately. For he does not get the argument to work; he reduces it to question-begging foolishness.

Searle offers no explicit textual evidence to support his claim that Russell either misrepresented Frege or misunderstood him. On the other hand, there is much explicit textual evidence to support the view that Russell understood Frege’s views extremely well.

- First, there is the remarkably accurate and informed account of Frege’s views in the appendix to The Principles entitled ”On the Arithmetical and Logical Doctrines of G. Frege.” Nowhere in this appendix (do we find any of the confusions or misrepresentations Searle later saddles
7.3 Is Russell’s Quarry Frege?

him with. No, this is hardly the work of someone pictured by Searle who is incapable of getting Frege straight.

- Second, Frege and Russell had an informed, intelligent, extensive correspondence on just the issues addressed in "On Denoting." The nature of propositions is one of the chief concerns of the correspondence published in [19]. Russell understood Frege’s theory quite well, and he also understood the differences between Frege’s account of propositions and his own. Indeed, those differences are pointed out explicitly by both Frege and Russell. In [15], Frege had abandoned the directly referential view that he held in Begriffsschrift and now took all Eigennamen to have sense (and some also reference), but in any event, a sense distinct from the reference. Russell’s abandonment of the directly referential view of the M Theory was less radical: some expressions directly referred, and some did not. Such was the source of his disagreement with Frege over the constituents of the proposition expressed by "Mont Blanc is more than 1000 meters high."† Frege held that the constituent corresponding to "Mont Blanc" was a mode of presentation of the mountain; Russell believed that it was the mountain itself. This was no confusion on Russell’s part between what is expressed and what is referred to. No, he just believed that "Mont Blanc" is directly referential.‡

- Third, if the content of the letters does not suffice to convince you that this is so, take a gander at footnotes 2 and 3 in "On Denoting", wherein Russell explicitly lays these very features out for all to see. He distinguishes there very carefully between the proposition expressed by a sentence, and the denotation of the sentence, hardly the sort of thing someone would say if he failed to distinguish between something occurring in a proposition and something being referred to by a proposition.

- Fourth, it is difficult to understand why Russell would have made the assumption Searle imputes to him when he had distinguished the two rather clearly in his own view. As Richard Cartwright says, “I cannot accept John Searle’s suggestion ... that Russell inexplicably forgot his earlier distinction between the constituents of a proposition.

† See the letter dated . . . .
‡ Kremer [32] claims that in the correspondence Frege and Russell "talked past one another." I am not sure what he means by this. There is no evidence that each did not understand the views of the other, or that each ignored the views of the other. This much is true: each tried to make clear to the other the views held; neither attempted a refutation of the other’s view. To say that they "talked past one another" masks the very point under contention.
and the entities the proposition is about.” ([6], p. 133) Indeed, this is the very heart of the distinction in Russell’s F Theory. Russell proposed two distinct analyses of propositions expressed by sentences of the form Fa, depending upon whether a was directly referential (a “name in the narrow sense”) or complex, like a definite description: in the former case, the proposition contained the item denoted, and that was what the proposition was about; in the latter case, the proposition contained a denoting complex or meaning, and it was the item this denoting complex denoted (if it denoted anything) the proposition was about. So, built into The F Theory is a clear understanding of the distinct concepts being a constituent of the proposition and being the item the proposition is about.

This last is a point that merits particularly close attention in assessing the Revised Orthodox Theory. Adherents of this view frequently cite Searle when recoiling from reading Russell as attacking Frege.† Searle, I submit, has just got it all wrong, and the charges of misrepresentation are without merit. Whatever reason Searle has for attributing these errors to Russell stem from his own recreation of the relevant passages. His recreations are sheer fantasy. We will look at some in detail below.

### 7.3.2 Blackburn and Code’s Interpretation

#### 7.4 Is Russell’s Quarry Russell?

A number of philosophers have suggested that the passage in “On Denoting” is directed at Russell’s own distinction of the same name. In many cases, as I have already mentioned, Searle’s influential interpretation is at work. Douglas Lackey, for example, cites Searle approvingly and says:

> The discussion of Frege is tortuous, and it is generally believed that Russell did not state Frege’s theory correctly. On the other hand, the arguments of ‘On Denoting’ are an excellent refutation of one earlier theory of meaning, Russell’s own, stated first in the Principles of Mathematics and developed at length in papers probably written in late 1904. ([33], p. 96.)

The general belief Lackey refers to that Russell got Frege wrong reflects the deep impact Searle’s story has had. We already know Searle is mistaken about that. Granting that Searle’s representation of the passage is misinformed, no reason has been put forward to show that Russell has

† This is true even of Michael Kremer’s excellent essay [32].
got Frege wrong, and considerable reason has been put forward to make such a misreading of Frege highly dubious.

Lackey’s claim that we have there an “excellent refutation” of Russell’s own theory is a bit premature. It is also a bit puzzling. Why would Russell be refuting his own theory? And especially when he specifically identifies Frege in “On Denoting” as the one he is after? Is Russell that much of a blithf@ring idiot that he should take aim at Frege and mistakenly shoot himself? Or is Russell such a malicious creature that he should foist his own errors onto Frege and knowingly, falsely accuse him of perpetrating philosophical evildoings? Or is it just some sort of extraordinary accident of nature, something out of Hollywood, that it just turns out that Russell refutes his own theory in these passages? Such seems to me to be the options open to interpretations like Lackey’s, and the picture assumed of Russell is just outrageous.

Michael Kremer [32] also appeals to Searle’s interpretation in putting forward his own:

Now certainly, one who buys the conclusion of the GEA[Gray’s Elegy Argument] will reject both Frege’s theory and Russell’s own ”more limited” earlier view. But this does not show that the GEA as an argument works as well against Frege as it does against the Russell of P of M [The Principles of Mathematics]. Philosophical theses are not held as isolated beliefs, but have a theoretical context Russell’s theory in P of M was developed as part of the larger framework of Platonic Atomism. This framework already ruled out the possibility of applying the meaning-denotation distinction across the board; that’s why in arguing against applying the distinction in a more limited way he is arguing against applying it at all. But the GEA assumes the same framework as P of M; and this is a framework which Frege rejects. Reading the GEA as an attack on Frege leads to Searle’s conclusion that “Russell does not succeed in performing a reductio ad absurdum of Frege’s distinction but only of the conjunction of the distinction and its negation.” ([32], pp. 274-5)

Kremer’s approval of Searle’s interpretation is clearly misplaced and unjustified. So, I have argued, and will continue to argue, is his own interpretation,

Of course, one does not have to accept Searle’s criticism in order to see Russell’s quarry as being Russell. Kaplan, for example, says, with no mention of Searle in the sections we have previously cited that Russell rejected the picture of a proposition he (i.e. Kaplan) happens to like of The Principles, and, he continues

The picture needs some modification in order to avoid difficulties which Russell later noted—though he attributed them to Frege’s theory rather than his own earlier theory. ([301, p. 496)
We have already cited Cartwright’s misgivings about Searle’s interpretation. Nonetheless, Cartwright believes Russell’s quarry to have been Russell. Cartwright explores the unpublished manuscripts, revealing a rich, inventive Russell tackling difficulties with his distinction between meaning and denotation. Of particular interest is a manuscript entitled “On Fundamentals,” in which Russell, after 37 pages of discussion of propositions that are about meanings, abandons the theory and declares the rudiments of the theory to be espoused in “On Denoting.” The continuity between the issues discussed in those 37 pages and the relevant passage in “On Denoting,” is striking; it is difficult not to see the passage in “On Denoting” as a summary of the sorts of problems he uncovered and his reasons for abandoning the distinction between meaning and denotation. It is this textual evidence, I believe, that leads Cartwright to read the passage in “On Denoting” as a criticism of Russell’s own theory of meaning and denotation:

Russell had repudiated Homeric gods and the rest before he hit upon the theory of descriptions; the repudiation was grounded on a theory of denoting developed out of that presented in The Principles; and it was the "inextricable tangle" to which Russell soon came to think that theory led, and which he attempted to set out in "On Denoting," that immediately occasioned the theory of descriptions.([6]p. 95)

But Cartwright does not attempt a recreation of the passage from (Russell, 1905a). His interest is to try to "say what I can" about the unpublished manuscript “On Fundamentals,” the crucial passages of which, he says, "rival in obscurity the corresponding pages of "On Denoting"." ([6], p. 125) So, although Cartwright does, apparently believe that the relevant passages in "On Denoting" are directed at Russell’s own theory, he refrains from looking at them in any detail: as he puts it, he has enough difficulties working out what Russell was doing in the unpublished manuscripts.

Recent theorizing about the relevant passages take Russell (1905a) to have been unhappy with Frege’s notion of a proposition because it offended some Realist principle of his: Hylton (1990) calls upon what he calls The Principle of Truth Dependence and Kremer (1994) calls upon The Principle of Acquaintance. I find both of these defective for the following reasons:

(i) Frege never mentions these principles in the context of his argument against the sense/reference theory;
(ii) The attempts to reconstruct his argument there as essentially involving one or the other of these principles are defective in ways I have just sketched and will detail below;

(iii) This reading requires that we take Russell’s argument to consist of two very distinct parts: one, a purely logical one concerning the possibility of directly referring to senses, and two, an epistemological or metaphysical one concerning the constituents of a proposition. No such dichotomy is to be found in the text;

(iv) Russell’s entire argument concerns the locutions by means of which we speak about senses or meanings, namely, ‘the meaning of C’ and ‘mC’: he claims that these devices for speaking about meanings or senses cannot be coherently made out on the theory described.

I am inclined to believe that part of the reason for these alternative readings of Russell stems from a misconception that descriptions were to be “purely qualitative”† on his view. No, the point is clearly a logical one.

7.4.1 Hylton’s Interpretation

Peter Hylton (1990) (whose earlier work on Russell Cartwright cites with approval) has recently tried his hand at interpreting (Russell, 1905a) as Russell’s refutation of Russell. Hylton has achieved some limited success,‡ and it is worth while looking at the story he put together.

Hylton takes Russell to have been criticizing his F Theory. Hylton has come about as close as anyone to the interpretation I think to be the correct one, so it is worth our while setting it out in detail. Hylton says:

Why, then, does Russell reject the theory of denoting concepts? The most important consideration, I think, is one having to do with the relation of a denoting concept, or ‘meaning’, as Russell calls it, to the object which it denotes. (Hylton, 1990: 249)

Now this, of course, is precisely the issue Russell (1905a) raises. To make the case, then, just to remind the reader, Hylton must show that the relation is problematic for Russell, not for Frege.

Hylton notes that Russell has a problem saying something as simple

† “This reading of Russell is even maintained by so careful a historical reader as Neale [40],[41]
‡ Cite the reviewer in the JP on this
as that the denoting complex the teacher of Plato denotes Socrates.\footnote{Note that for Russell it is the meaning primarily that denotes its referent, and only secondarily the word. This follows Frege’s exposition. We shall raise no problems with this at this point.} So, consider

\[
\text{the proposition that the denoting concept the teacher of Plato denotes Socrates.}\tag{7.32}
\]

Hylton says:

But now consider this proposition. What are its constituents? We might suppose that its constituents would be: the denoting concept the teacher of Plato, the relation of denoting, and the man Socrates. But this cannot be correct, for the presence in a proposition of a denoting concept indicates that the proposition is not about the denoting concept but is about the denoted object (if any). So we cannot have a proposition which is about a denoting concept in virtue of containing that denoting concept. If we put a denoting concept into a proposition then the proposition is about the denoted object, not about the denoting concept. ([29], p. 249)

Now, the problem Hylton has identified here does not seem to me to be a problem of the relation between meaning and denotation at all. It is, of course, a problem with the F Theory, as we mentioned earlier. But, by the very same token, as we mentioned before, we find no direct textual evidence that this is the problem with the F Theory that he is raising. Hylton calls our attention to the following passage in conjunction with this remark, i.e., he takes this to be the message of the passage from Russell he quotes right here:

As Russell says: ‘The difficulty in speaking of the meaning of a denoting complex may be stated thus: The moment we put the complex in a proposition, the proposition is about the denotation.’ ([29] p. 249)

What is so amazing is that Hylton immediately thinks of Russell’s notion of a proposition here. But this very passage could just as well be taken to be about Frege. After all, although the sense of ‘Homer’ is a constituent of the \textit{Gedanke} that Homer wrote The Iliad, the proposition is about the denotation, i.e., Homer. And if that is not the reading, there might be some other reading consistent with Frege’s theory that is available to us. (I think there is. See below.) But this fragment gives us nothing at all, and in any event, as I said at the beginning of the paragraph, it does not show a problem for the relation between meaning and denotation.

But, of course, this would not be the natural assumption if we allowed denoting complexes to be directly referred to. Then, it could be that
that is what one is talking about, and the occurrence of a denoting complex inside a proposition could no longer invariably indicate that it is there standing for its denotation. As such, there would have to be some distinction drawn inside the proposition as to whether the complex is being referred to or expressed. As I mentioned earlier, we find Russell working with just such a distinction in the unpublished manuscripts: he distinguishes when a denoting complex has entity position and when it has meaning position. If this could be worked out, this problem would not appear to be fatal; certainly it would not be something that simply drops the F Theory cold, as Russell would have it. But, in connection with the interpretation of the passage, as I mention here, we find no acknowledgement that Russell had been aware of the problem and had been working on it. We find no indication that this distinction between meaning position and entity position leads to insuperable difficulties. Why didn’t Russell (1905a) bring this up? That is, he was aware of this problem (in the unpublished manuscripts) and he had sketched out a solution: Why does this solution fail? Why would Russell say the problem and fail to say or discuss the solution he had been toying with? If we have a genuine argument against the F Theory, this is what I would expect to see. Alternatively, it could be urged that denoting complexes cannot be referred to directly at all, so that an expression like 'the denoting complex the teacher of Plato' introduces into a proposition a denoting complex of that denoting complex. Hylton goes on to read Russell as following out this line, considering the possibility of meanings of meanings, thereby creating a hierarchy of these things. So, he looks to the text where Russell says "Thus it would seem that 'C' and C are different entities, such that 'C' denotes C; but this cannot be an explanation, because the relation of 'C' to C remains wholly mysterious." (Russell, 1905a)

Hylton offers the following gloss on this:

We began with the idea that the teacher of Plato denotes Socrates. A proposition which states this, we saw, cannot itself contain the denoting concept which it is about. If there is to be such a proposition, it must contain a further denoting concept, a second-level denoting concept, we might say, which denotes the denoting concept the teacher of Plato. But now it is clear that we are faced with an infinite hierarchy of denoting concepts. There must be a proposition which states that the second-level denoting concept denotes the first-level denoting concept, and in order to be about the second-level denoting concept, this proposition must presumably contain a third-level denoting concept. Since the third-level denoting concept must denote the second-level denoting concept, there must be a proposition which expresses this; in order to
The Argument Again in Scanned

be about the third-level denoting concept, that proposition must presumably contain a fourth-level denoting concept and so the hierarchy is launched. ([29], p. 2.50)

The first comment on this interpretation is this: how come we are given a gloss on the final cryptic sentences of the passage? There has been no development of the text that enables us to see this summary coming. What happened to all the text ahead of this?

How did this hierarchy come in? What possible reason do we have for supposing that "a proposition ... cannot itself contain the denoting concept it is about?" After all, Russell did not suppose this. Are there no alternatives? Isn't this going a bit roughshod?

Suppose we have the hierarchy. But why should this pose any kind of problem for Russell? After all, if there is nothing wrong with infinite sequences (and Russell was not particularly troubled with these), and if this sequence cannot be shown to be vicious, then why should Russell be troubled with this? Others had later been troubled about infinitely many senses; but is this what Russell is troubled about? It seems to be entirely unmotivated by Russell if that is what the problem is.

Hylton here calls upon Russell's "Principle of Truth-Value Dependence."

that the truth-value of a proposition containing a denoting concept depends upon the truth-value of the corresponding proposition with the denoted object replacing the denoting concept. ([29], p. 253)

But why is this coming in here? And who is to say Russell actually held this? The principle fails for propositional attitude constructions (as Hylton himself points out). So, what is the commitment here? Finally, I note that this principle reduces the problem of the hierarchy to the former problem in a very straight way. The distinction collapses immediately. Nowhere, for example, has Hylton explained the mystery of the relation that Russell feels.

We find ourselves somewhat disappointed with Hylton's reconstruction of the relevant passages from "On Denoting." Hylton's is not a line by line recreation: he picks and chooses bits and pieces of text from "On Denoting" without any attempt to recreate a concerted line of attack. As a result it is difficult to assess where Russell really has an argument going or when we have some free association of ideas, some of which are Russell's and some of which have become more common currency as the issues discussed have become, more widely known and understood. The unpublished manuscripts give us such a sketch of a theory, largely in
transit, largely unworked out, changing from manuscript to manuscript, that it is really most unsatisfying to be left in the position Hylton wishes us to. So, as I reread the passages in "On Denoting," I do not find Hylton has got me through them. There are hints and pregnant ideas about; but no convincing interpretation.

7.4.2 Kremer’s Interpretation

Michael Kremer (1994) has recently published an excellent paper on Russell’s argument in Russell (1905a) which also follows the strategy of Geach, Cartwright and Hylton of identifying the target of the GEA, as Kremer calls it, i.e., the argument involving the example of Gray’s Elegy, as Russell himself. I quote:

Peter Hylton, in Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy, correctly reads the GEA as attacking the theory of “denoting concepts” of Russell’s own Principles of Mathematics. But Hylton still fails to do the GEA justice; in particular he goes wrong by seeing its main point as metaphysical rather than epistemological. Simon Blackburn and Alan Code come closer to appreciating the point of the GEA; but they mistakenly view it as an attack on Frege, and are unable to reveal its true force. ([32], p. 249)

And, a little further down in the essay, Kremer expands on his reasons for taking the GEA as directed against Russell’s own theory:

Now certainly, one who buys the conclusion of the GEA will reject both Frege’s theory and Russell’s own ”more limited” earlier view. But this does not show that the GEA as an argument works as well against Frege as it does against the Russell of [The Principles of Mathematics]. Philosophical theses are not held as isolated beliefs, but have a theoretical context. Russell’s theory in [The Principles of Mathematics] was developed as part of the larger framework of Platonic Atomism. The framework already ruled out the possibility of applying the meaning-denotation distinction across the board; that’s why in arguing against applying the distinction in a more limited way he is arguing against applying it at all. But the GEA assumes the same framework as [The Principles of Mathematics]; and this is a framework which Frege rejects. Reading the GEA as an attack on Frege leads to Searle’s conclusion that "Russell does not succeed in performing a reductio ad absurdum of Frege’s own distinction but only of the conjunction of the distinction and its negation.” ([32], pp. 274-275)

It is precisely on this point that I find myself in disagreement with Kremer’s otherwise excellent recreation of the story, most of which I find intelligible and correct. But to suppose that Searle’s interpretation has any credibility here scents to me to be flat wrong. In order for Kremer to
make out his case, he must show that for the argument of the GEA to go through, Russell must be assuming both that the meaning/denotation holds and also that it does not hold, I don’t see how Kremer can possibly show this. Kremer says:

[Blackburn and Code] miss the significance of the second point, which they take to be that ”meaning can only be got at by means of, i.e. by mentioning, denoting phrases.” They take the point to be that we can ”get at” the denoting concept the teacher of Plato only by means of some such phrase as ‘the meaning of ’the teacher of Plato” in which the denoting phrase ‘the teacher of Plato’ is mentioned; but what Russell intends is that ’the teacher of Plato’ is itself a denoting phrase, and that we can ”get at” denoting concepts only by using such denoting phrases. (280)

So, Kremer has a claim:

We can get at denoting concepts only using phrases like 'C'  (7.33)

Here is the main thrust of Kremer’s argument:

... the P of A [Principle of Acquaintance] is central to Russell’s main argument for the OD, the GEA. The GEA shows that the attempt to use the theory of denoting concepts to handle apparent counterexamples to the PoA is ultimately self-defeating; for the theory of denoting concepts, turned on itself, undermines the PoA. The GEA argues that if the theory of denoting concepts is true, we can know this only by knowing propositions which cannot be composed only of constituents with which we are acquainted—propositions about denoting concepts themselves. Hence, if the theory of denoting concepts is known to be true, the PoA, which the theory was to protect, is false. On this reading of the GEA, Russell’s claim that the PoA follows from the theory of OD is highly relevant to the argument of OD if true, it provides confirmation for the theory. On the other hand, if questions can be raised about whether the PoA does follow from the theory of OD, the overall success of the paper will be cast into doubt. As we will see, this puts a new light on a problem which Hylton raises for the theory of OD. (Kremer, 1994: 268)

Two points about Kremer’s interpretation need to be identified. First, he has a story about the structure of Russell (1905a):

We can now understand the form of Russell’s argument for the theory of OD (III): first, (6) state three puzzles that any theory of denoting must, solve; second, (7) argue against one theory which solves the puzzles; third, (8) show how the theory of OD solves the puzzles. The theory under attack in 7 is not Freges’s theory but a related theory which Russell had thought could resolve the puzzles of 6: the theory of [The Principles of Mathematics] (Kremer, 1994: 277)

I have two problems with this interpretational strategy. The first is that the theory under attack had been modified for two years in the
unpublished manuscripts. He already knew that there were problems with the theory briefly stated in The Principles. So, first, he knew the earlier theory did not solve the puzzles, and second, if there were a reason for dropping the earlier theory, it would already have occurred in the unpublished manuscripts, but we don’t see this argument there. The more likely reading is that he is attacking the unpublished theory, but then how could he have understood his readers to know it? So, I don’t like this reading.

Next, his reading of the crucial sections involving the GEA.

As I see it, ...the argument moves through two main phases. In the first phase, the view under attack is that of [The Principles of Mathematics], according to which a complex denoting phrase has as its meaning a simple denoting concept; here the “denoting complex” is the phrase. The second phase is directed against the view that the denoting concept itself is complex; here the "denoting complex" is the concept, the meaning of the phrase. (Kremer, 1994: 279)

Two points need to be noted here about the reading. One, it takes an intrinsic, endemic ambiguity in the way in which Russell runs the word "denoting complex" sometimes he means the word for the complex, and sometimes the complex. This is not an implausible (before looking closely) story about what is going on. Russell is loose about use and mention in an uncomfortable way. The second point, however, is more substantial: Kremer sees as the essential story the relation between the notion denoting complex and denoting concept. The argument is supposed to go in two phases:

- The meaning of a definite description is not a simple denoting concept;
- A denoting concept cannot itself be complex

Kremer (1994) says the argument begins at D and E. But his discussion (p. 281) is hardly understandable. I suppose that part of what I find so distracting is that although he claims to follow the text, there is always some hidden issue several books away that he is really concerned with. The question I ask when I read D is: What is it that we wanted and failed to get? Kremer does not ask this or answer it. He lays great store on the issue of whether an expression is used or mentioned in the context ‘the meaning of ( )’. Now, this is an interesting question in general, but it is hardly the question that comes to mind when one looks at the text. He lays stress on the issue of "linguistic through the phrase.” But it doesn’t quite do it.
Kremer sees the first part of the argument as showing that the meaning/denoting relation can only be got at via phrases. What this means more clearly, I take it, is this:

meaning M denotes denotation D if and only if there is a denoting phrase P such that M is the meaning of P and D is the denotation of P. But this is for the relation of meaning to denotation to be "linguistic through the phrase," a mere matter of linguistic convention. (Kremer, 1994: 283)

I don’t see the conclusion. Look, we have expressions like

\[
\text{the meaning of 'the teacher of Plato' (7.34)}
\]

that denote meanings. And, this is usually the way in which we talk about meanings. Nowhere has it been claimed that these are the only expressions that we have for speaking about meanings. After all, I can assign a proper name to the description, 'Harry', and speak of the meaning of Harry. I can speak of the meaning you were thinking about, and so forth. The idea that we can only get at meanings by such expressions is really silly. After all, I could use the description to help you identify the meaning and then give it a name. The description fixes the reference of the name, and then I have a directly referential term for the meaning.

Now, what makes this something about language in a pernicious way? Why should we accept the biconditional in the quotation. Can I say that meaning M denotes denotation D if and only there is a language? That’s outrageous. That does not follow. Perhaps I cannot say what M denotes without language. But the independence of the relation is not attacked.

Also, what is the problem with the primitiveness of the relation? Isn’t redness primitive? Yet we are acquainted with redness. Kremer claims we have no acquaintance with these relations. Prove it. Here is an argument:

• We have no acquaintance with such relations;
• We can grasp these relations only through linguistic expressions;
• our ability to use these expressions must be explained in terms of our acquaintance with these denoting relations;
• So, we can have no knowledge of these things

Kremer (1994) takes this to be the conclusion of the first part of the argument.:

Linguistic conventions determine the phrase-meaning relation only, and the phrase-denotation relation is compounded out of this and the meaning-denotation relation: phrase P denotes D if and only if there is a meaning M such that
7.4 Is Russell’s Quarry Russell?

P means M and M denotes D. This is the conclusion of the first phase of the argument.

This is preposterous. The text gives no evidence for this at all.

Any constraints on what meanings and denotations we might as sign to various phrases would have to be established by independent meaning-denotation relations. But on the view adopted so far, such relations, if they exist, must be primitive relations. The problem is that we have no acquaintance with such relations and can grasp them only through linguistic expressions that "indicate" them; but our ability to use such expressions must itself be explained in terms of our acquaintance with denoting concepts and their relations to class-concepts and denoted objects, as we saw above.” (p. 283)

Consider the two biconditionals:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{meaning } & M \text{ denotes denotation } D \text{ if and only if there is a} & (7.35) \\
\text{denoting phrase } P \text{ such that } & M \text{ is the meaning of } P \text{ and } D \text{ is} & \\
\text{the denotation of } P \\
\text{phrase } P \text{ denotes } & D \text{ if and only if there is a meaning } M \text{ such} & (7.36) \\
\text{that } & P \text{ means } M \text{ and } M \text{ denotes } D
\end{align*}
\]

As for (7.35), Kremer (1994: 283) says "But this is for the relation of meaning of denotation to be "linguistic through the phrase,” a mere matter of linguistic convention.” As for (7.36), he says, "This is the conclusion of the first phase of the argument.” (283). That is, (7.35) is to be rejected and (7.36) is to be accepted. But this is very strange, because (7.36) truth functionally implies (7.35).† So how can (7.36) be good and (7.35) bad?

We now go to the second part of the argument.

Now, when we use the phrase ‘the teacher of Plato’ in a sentence, we express a proposition containing the teacher of Plato. this proposition is about Socrates, not the teacher of Plato. to express a proposition about the teacher of Plato, we use an expression like ‘the teacher of Plato’ Thus we might use ‘the teacher of Plato is a concept’ to expression the teacher of Plato is a concept. The teacher of Plato is not a constituent of this proposition; the teacher of Plato is a constituent of propositions about Socrates, not about itself”. So the teacher of Plato is a concept is about the teacher of Plato without containing it as a constituent. This can happen only if ‘the teacher of Plato’ is a denoting phrase, which denotes but does not mean, the teacher of Plato. As Russell had promised in (C), the meaning cannot be at except by using denoting phrases, (284)

† \( r \equiv (p \land q) \) implies \( p \equiv (q \land r) \)
Two points about this quotation. First, I see nothing in here that is not consistent with a Fregean reading of the proposition, and so an argument against Frege. It is just an argument for a hierarchy. Second, the conclusion should not be surprising, for what is built into the non-self-reference condition is that there can be no direct reference of denoting complexes. This is, of course, very Fregean. Note, further, that Russell had made room for the complex to be a constituent of the proposition but not in entity position whereas Frege had no such possibility. So, one might take this to be an argument against Frege, not Russell.

As for the second part of the argument, Kremer (1994) says:

But if 'the teacher of Plato' is a denoting phrase, it must itself have, a meaning, say the teacher of Plato. We will then have

the teacher of Plato denotes the teacher of Plato

But, complains Russell, "this cannot be an explanation, because the relation of the teacher of Plato to the teacher of Plato remains wholly mysterious and where where are we to find the denoting complex the teacher of Plato which is to denote the teacher of Plato'?" (284)

What is the problem? Hylton claims we have a vicious regress. Kremer says it is infinite, but not vicious. What is the problem? Kremer says it violates the Principle of acquaintance. He says we are not acquainted with the teacher of Plato and we cannot construe it as derived from other things we are acquainted with.

Question: the Principle of Acquaintance says that everything in a proposition we are acquainted with. But, now there are two possibilities:

If we have direct acquaintance with an item, it must be (7.37)
possible for it to be directly referred to.

If it is possible to directly refer to something, then we have (7.38)
direct acquaintance with the item.

Now, neither of these seem to be entailed by the Principle of Acquaintance. But it is really strange that the Principle of Acquaintance should be involved here at all. The Principle says only that we should have acquaintance with everything in a proposition. So, in the case of a description, we should have acquaintance with the denoting complex. Now, we can have acquaintance with an object even though we refer to it via a description so that the complex is in the proposition. And, what happens when we refer to a denoting complex. We cannot refer to them directly, for the reasons Kaplan mentions. And if we refer to
them indirectly, we shall have to use a meaning of that complex in the proposition. What’s the problem? I mean, we just use a meaning, and that is that. All the elements of the proposition are things we have acquaintance with.

Now, there might be something more than just the principle of acquaintance. It must have to do with compositionality. Okay. Why doesn’t Kremer make that connection. The issue concerns simplicity and complexity.

A little down the road, Kremer (1994: 289) says,

Suppose that we could attain acquaintance with the teacher of Plato; then we ought to be able to name it, and use its name to speak about it. This is precisely what Russell has shown to be impossible: we cannot name the teacher of Plato, but can get at it only by means of denoting phrases. the teacher of Plato is not merely an item with which we are not acquainted, it is one with which we cannot be acquainted. Indeed, this argument applies not only to the teacher of Plato, but to the simpler case of the teacher of Plato. In spite of the initial plausibility of the idea that we are acquainted with this denoting concept, we cannot be acquainted with it—this is just a consequence of the “logic” of the theory of denoting concepts. Similarly, the relation of denoting is beyond all possible acquaintance. To attain acquaintance with it, we would need acquaintance with facts of the form “a denotes b”; this is just what we cannot have, since acquaintance with a relational fact involves acquaintance with the relata. Thus the problem is not, as Hylton would have it, that there cannot be facts of the form “a denotes b,” but rather that we cannot know any such facts.

Aha. But the point, so far as I can tell, is that the Principle of Acquaintance is so broad as not to be of any particular interest.

Look, when you see Kremer’s (1994) point put like that, it is immediately clear that Russell’s is a rejection of Frege’s account of the proposition. For it is of the essence of the idea that sense determines reference that the reference be introduced via a sense, so that facts of the form “a denotes b” invariably require a sense on the one side and its reference on the other. But since the whole thing is introduced via a sense, there is a veil of ignorance between us and the relation. Yes. We know that from the letter about Mont Blanc. That’s why he couldn’t go the whole way,

But what makes this an argument against Russell’s view and not Frege’s? The fact that Russell relies on the Principle of Acquaintance? How absurd. These are his reasons for rejecting the meaning/denoting distinction in toto. He thinks there is something inherently wrong with the meaning/denoting distinction. He does not think it depends upon
his peculiar notion of a proposition as opposed to Frege’s. As a matter of fact, as we go through Kremer’s (1994) argument, so much of it seems entirely artificial. For, of course, he ignores the meaning/entity position distinction Russell had been working on. If that distinction could be worked out, and I see no reason it could not, then he would be home free. The logical arguments are artificial.

7.5 Conclusion
Reflections on Russell

8.1 Introduction

For almost one hundred years, Russell’s Theory of Descriptions has been widely discussed and justly celebrated. It is therefore something of a surprise to find that there is an aspect of the theory that has not received its due appreciation. Nonetheless, I believe that this is so. For the philosophical community has been slow to understand the importance and centrality of the scope distinction to Russell’s theory. Admittedly, considerable ground has been made up by connecting the scope distinction and the modal operators.† But there has been almost no investigation into the connection between the scope distinction and the notion of a proposition. This will be the focus of my talk today.

Russell’s theory, I will argue, requires two distinct ways of unpacking expressions of the form “the proposition that the $F$ is $G$.” On one, the meaning of the description is included as part of the proposition expressed. On the other, it is not. This is a direct consequence of his syntactic treatment of definite descriptions—in particular, his employment of the scope distinction to solve the puzzle about George IV’s believing that Scott was the author of the *Waverley* novels. I doubt whether Russell clearly realized at that time the impact his account of descriptions had on his notion of a proposition. I will speak of this as Russell’s theory of propositions nonetheless. I am concerned to contrast Russell’s theory with Frege’s sense/reference theory of propositions. Frege famously held that only in the context of a proposition does a word have meaning: its meaning consists solely in its contribution to the propositions expressed using it. I am inclined to believe that it was this aspect of

† But grudgingly. It took almost 40 years before Smullyan (1948) clarified the role of descriptions in modal contexts; 15 years later, we find Quine (1961: 154, fn. 9) accusing him of altering Russell’s theory.
Frege’s sense/reference theory that Russell so severely criticized in “On Denoting,” but I will not argue this here.

Is there evidence to support Russell’s theory about propositions—not whether he held it, mind you, but whether the theory is true? I believe so. The philosophical community has had the evidence right in front of its collective nose, although it has not recognized it as such. I am referring, of course, to Keith Donnellan’s (1966) well-documented distinction between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions. This is genuinely surprising, because Donnellan originally thought his distinction uncovered an important failing of Russell’s semantics for definite descriptions. I think this is wrong. The view I will develop today is that Russell’s scope distinction provides just the grammatical mechanism for implementing the referential/attributive distinction.

However, Donnellan’s distinction does pose a direct challenge to Frege’s sense/reference theory. Frege held that the sense of a complex is a function of the senses of its parts. Let me make this a bit more precise. Let \( \alpha \) and \( \beta \) be singular terms, and let \( S\alpha/\beta \) result by replacing \( \alpha \) at one or more of its occurrences in \( S\alpha \) by \( \beta \). Frege’s two fundamental structural principles governing sense are as follows:

**Compositionality for Sense:** The proposition expressed by \( S\alpha \) is uniquely determined by the sense of \( S \) and the sense of \( \alpha \).

**Extensionality for Sense:** If \( \alpha \) and \( \beta \) have the same sense, then \( S\alpha \) and \( S\alpha/\beta \) express the same proposition.

The referential/attributive distinction, I believe, simply undercuts these widely-held principles. Donnellan challenges Frege’s theory, not, I argue, Russell’s theory, because, as I have just explained, Russell’s theory of propositions is also grounded on the rejection of these principles. Donnellan is one of the major defenders of the view that proper names lack

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† I have in mind the notorious Gray’s Elegy sequence. See Mendelsohn (2004) for further discussion of this issue.

‡ This is not a blanket defense of Russell’s account of descriptions. Like Kripke (1977), I acknowledge a problem with indefinite definite descriptions; others, e.g., Szabo (2000), have indicated other ways in which his theory fails to capture the linguistic behavior of descriptions. I do, however, believe he is right about the scope distinction and its application to definite descriptions. Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998a) and Mendelsohn (2004) argue that the scope distinction is the essential ingredient for solving the puzzles he set in “On Denoting.”

§ There is a further principle at work here:

**Frege’s Principle of Extensionality for Sense II:** If, for every \( S \), \( S\alpha \) and \( S\alpha/\beta \) express the same proposition, then \( \alpha \) and \( \beta \) have the same sense.
8.2 Russell’s Theory of Definite Descriptions

Frege-style meaning, and that they are actually devices of *direct reference*, which is to say that sentences involving proper names express Russellian *singular propositions*. But if the Russell-Donnellan rejection of these Fregean principles is correct, then it is a small step to recognize that the arguments in the literature that are designed to show that proper names lack meaning cannot possibly succeed. The reason, put succinctly, is that the arguments rely on these Fregean structural principles that connect the meaning of a singular term and the proposition expressed by a sentence containing it.

The Direct Reference theorist—and here I have David Kaplan in mind—holds that \( \alpha = \alpha \) and true \( \alpha = \beta \) express the same proposition when \( \alpha \) and \( \beta \) are both proper names. Kripke (1980), however, appears to have distinguished them: he holds that \( \alpha = \alpha \) is necessary *a priori* while \( \alpha = \beta \) is, if true, necessary *a posteriori*. The Direct Reference theorist takes a proper name to be rigid in every propositional attitude construction. Kripke, by contrast, adopts the more circumscribed position that a proper name is rigid relative to a particular modality. In the final section of my talk, I will argue that the Donnellan-Russell view of propositions, although inconsistent with the more sweeping view that proper names are vehicles of direct reference, lends support to this distinction Kripke draws.

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### 8.2 Russell’s Theory of Definite Descriptions

**Russell’s Transformation Rules**

Russell (1905a) proposed a rule to transform a sentence containing a definite description into a sentence containing none.†

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Russell’s Transformation Rule 1:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The F is G ( \Rightarrow (\exists x)((Fx \land (\forall y)(Fy \supset x = y)) \land Gx) )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A sentence like

The inventor of dynamite was a Swede, \( (8.1) \)

† See Kaplan (1989), Salmon (1986) for a description and defense of this view.

‡ For a fuller characterization of Russell’s distinction, see Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998a); Mendelsohn (2004).
Reflections on Russell

for example, is to be rewritten as a conjunction with three clauses:

\[ (\exists x) (\exists y) (Fx \land (\forall z)(Fz \supset z = y)) \land Gx, \quad \text{or} \]
\[ (\exists x)((Fx \land (\forall y)(Fy \supset x = y)) \land \Theta Gx), \quad \text{or} \]
\[ \Theta(\exists x)((Fx \land (\forall y)(Fy \supset x = y)) \land \Psi Gx). \]

Applying this transformation to sentence (8.1), Russell eliminated what appears to be a subject expression, “the inventor of dynamite,” and showed it to be operating just like a quantifier phrase.† Now, if sentence (8.1) were a subject/predicate sentence, that is, if it were what we would today call an “atomic sentence” of the form \( S_\alpha \), the semantic analysis would be that a particular object—namely, the individual who in fact invented dynamite—satisfies the propositional function \( x \text{ was a Swede} \).

A subject expression serves simply to stand for an object to which the predicate ascribes a property: a quantifier phrase, like \( \text{the F, an F, every F, no F} \), does not introduce an object but rather a property, \( \text{being F} \). A quantifier phrase lacks “meaning in isolation,” to use Russell’s phrase. Nonetheless, any sentence in which the phrase occurs is assigned a truth value. This is what makes Russell’s account of definite descriptions fundamentally contextual in nature.

Rule 1, although it is perhaps the most famous part of Russell’s account of definite descriptions, is far from the whole of the story. For it does not, by itself, provide for every sentence in which a description might occur. Only the most elementary of sentences that involve descriptions are taken care of. Russell needs to say more for the complex cases.

He does. When a sentence of the form \( \text{The F is G} \) is embedded in a complex sentence, there is an important distinction to be noted. Let \( \Psi \) be an operator that attaches to a sentence to form a more complex sentence, for example, \( \text{John knows that} \) or \( \text{It is necessary that} \). In that case, there are two distinct readings that need to be identified:‡

† For smooth exposition, I use “person” instead of “thing.”
‡ Russell drew an analogy between “the” and “a.” “An F is G” becomes “At least one thing is F and it is G.” By analogy, “The F is G” becomes “Exactly one thing is F and it is G.” Kaplan (1972) stresses this feature of Russell’s theory.
‡ The situation becomes even more complicated when a sentence of this form is itself embedded in a more complex sentence by an operator \( \Theta \):
Russell’s Transformation Rule 2:

\[ \Psi \text{ the } F \text{ is } G \Rightarrow \]

\[
\begin{cases}
(a) & \exists x ((Fx \land (\forall y (Fy \supset x = y))) \land \Psi Gx), \text{ or } \\
(b) & \Psi (\exists x ((Fx \land (\forall y (Fy \supset x = y))) \land Gx).
\end{cases}
\]

In (a), the description is said to have large or broad or wide scope; in
(b) it has small or narrow scope.

These two transformations taken together form the complete semantic
account of definite descriptions. They enable us to replace any sentence
containing a definite description by a sentence in which it does not occur.

But although these rules enable us to replace a definite description
from any sentence in which it might occur, they provide no explicit
guidance for interpreting the complex singular term

the proposition that the inventor of dynamite was a Swede, \( (8.3) \)

which purports to designate the proposition expressed by sentence \( (8.1) \).†

How is this construction to be handled on Russell’s theory?

The Proposition that the \( F \) is \( G \)

The notion of a proposition has seemed so clear to so many philoso-
phers, that this problem has been overlooked by just about everyone
in the literature.‡ Most of the philosophical public appears to believe
that Russell’s Transformation Rule 1 for eliminating definite descrip-
tions gives the whole semantic story of the description.§ The belief is
that \( (8.2) \) gives us the meaning of \( (8.1) \), or, in another vocabulary, that
it gives us the truth conditions of \( (8.1) \), so that \( (8.3) \) is none other than

the proposition that there is at least one thing that invented \( (8.4) \)
dynamite, and there is at most one thing that invented
dynamite, and that thing was a Swede.

This view is widely held and uncontested in the literature. Here are two
passages from Stephen Neale’s standard book on Descriptions:\¶

† Kent Bach (1997) has raised some problems with this technique, but I believe he
has been adequately answered by Jeffrey King (2002).
‡ There is a certain irony here. At the beginning of my philosophical career, talk of
propositions was for the most part eschewed. Wittgenstein, on the one hand, and
Quine, on the other, had raised such serious objections to the notion that it was
unusable in polite philosophical conversation.
§ This belief is especially prominent in the context of the issue whether Donnellan’s
referential/attributive distinction tells against Russell’s semantics for definite de-
scriptions.
¶ Lesser known lights repeat this. Marga Reimer (1998: 90) places this in a footnote:
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The semantical value of an utterance of ‘the F is G’ is a descriptive proposition to the effect that there is one and only one thing that is F and that one thing is G.” (Neale, 1990: 71-2)

On Russell’s account, if someone were to assert, ‘The king of France is bald’ right now, the fact that there is no king of France would be no barrier to understanding the speaker’s remark. A perfectly determinate proposition would be expressed, viz., the descriptive proposition that there is exactly one king of France, and that thing is bald. (Neale, 1990: 24)

But, of course, these only capture the first of Russell’s transformation rules and completely ignore the second. One cannot possibly give Russell’s complete semantic account without including something about the behavior of descriptions in more complex sentential constructions. Without the scope ambiguity, these so-called Russellian propositions look very much like Fregean propositions—indeed, independently existing, self-subsistent entities which are fed into more complex constructions as unified whole discrete units.† This is not Russell’s view.

Russell was pretty free with talk of propositions at the time of “On Denoting,” but his view was fundamentally unstable. The seeds of this instability were evident already some years earlier in the letters he interchanged with Frege.‡ Russell objected there to Frege’s regarding a sentence as a name—an Eigenname. He objected to Frege’s taking it as a name of a truth value; but his objection was to taking it as a name, and so he objected also to taking it as a name of a proposition [Gedanke]—or, as he preferred, a state of affairs or a fact. These comments begin to distance Russell from Frege’s analysis of propositional attitude constructions like A believes that p, as relating a person and a proposition. “On Denoting” itself contains a confused and confusing, but very definite rejection of Frege’s notion of sense in general, and the notion of

According to Russell (1905a), the proposition literally expressed by an utterance of the form The F is G is one to the effect that there is exactly one F and that whatever is F is G.

† The notable exception is David Kaplan (1972: 228-9), although we might note that Kaplan (1989) prefers the Frege-style semantics of denoting concepts Russell rejected in “On Denoting.”
‡ In a letter to Frege dated 2 February 1903, Russell (1903a: 155-6) says:

I have read your essay on sense and meaning, but I am still in doubt about your theory of truth-values, if only because it appears paradoxical to me. I believe that a judgment, or even a thought, is something so entirely peculiar that the theory of proper names has no application to it.
the sense of a sentence in particular.\textsuperscript{5} And, within a very short time, just five years later, we find Russell in his \textit{Philosophical Essays} explicitly saying what I think he should have been saying all along:

It seems evident that the phrase ‘that so and so’ has no complete meaning by itself, which would enable it to denote a definite object as (e.g.) the word ‘Socrates’ does. We feel that the phrase ‘that so and so’ is essentially incomplete, and only acquires full significance when words are added so as to express a judgment, e.g. ‘I believe that so and so’, ‘I deny that so and so’, ‘I hope that so and so’. Russell (1910: 151)

This is the view demanded by the syntactic analysis of descriptions he proposed.

\textbf{The Proposed Analysis}

I think that this quotation from Russell guides us correctly: the significance of the singular term “the proposition that the $F$ is $G$” must be understood within the context of the judgments in which it is essentially connected. Since a proposition is whatever it is that a sentence expresses, we have a natural way of locating a proposition in a sentential context:

The sentence “The $F$ is $G$” expresses the proposition that the $F$ is $G$ \hspace{1cm} (8.5)

Transformation Rule 2 tells us that this sentence (8.5) can be understood in two ways:

The sentence “The $F$ is $G$” expresses the proposition that one and only one thing is $F$ and is $G$ \hspace{1cm} (8.6)

and

One and only one thing is $F$ and the sentence “The $F$ is $G$” expresses the proposition that it is $G$. \hspace{1cm} (8.7)

If we try to extract the proposition—\textit{what the sentence expresses}—from these two constructions, then we have two ways of understanding the proposition expressed, depending upon whether we assign “the $F$” small scope or large scope. From (8.6), we get what I call the \textit{small-scope proposition}

the proposition that one and only one thing is $F$ and is $G$, \hspace{1cm} (8.8)

\textsuperscript{5} After all, Russell (1905a) charges that on Frege’s sense/reference theory, the proposition expressed by the sentence “The center of mass of the solar system” turns out to be identical with its reference.
and from (8.7), we get what I call the large-scope proposition

\[ \text{the proposition that it is } G, \]  

(8.9)
said of the \( F \). In the former case, the characterization of the object talked about is internal to the proposition, i.e., it is part of the proposition expressed. In the latter case it is not: rather, the object talked about is identified externally, and the value is passed to the variable position in the proposition.†

On Russell’s syntactic treatment of descriptions, then, there is good reason to believe that there are these two distinct notions of a proposition—what the sentence expresses—just as I said at the beginning of my talk. The next step in my argument is to show that there is good evidence that we do acknowledge these two distinct notions of a proposition.

8.3 The Referential/Attributive Distinction

Let me turn now to the referential/attributive distinction.

Keith Donnellan (1966: 54) identified two ways in which a definite description can be used: it can be used attributively and it can be used referentially.

A speaker who uses a definite description attributively in an assertion states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so. A speaker who uses a definite description referentially in an assertion, on the other hand, uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing. In the first case the definite description might be said to occur essentially, for the speaker wishes to assert something about whatever or whoever fits that description; but in the referential use the definite description is merely one tool for doing a certain job—calling attention to a person or thing—and in general any other device for doing the same job, another description or name, would do as well. In the attributive use, the attribute of being the so-and-so is all important, while it is not in the referential use.

On the referential use, the description is not merely inessential. “[W]here the definite description is simply a means of identifying the person we want to talk about,” Donnellan (1966: 54) continues, “it is quite possible for the correct identification to be made even though no one fits the description used.” On the referential use the description need not

† We borrow this terminology of internal and external from Forbes (1987). He, however, explicitly denies that the internal/external distinction is a scope distinction.
even correctly apply to the item identified. This raises the issue of mis-
descriptions, to which I will return shortly.

The distinction between the two uses is made largely on the basis of
examples. Donnellan’s (1966) well-known illustration of the distinction
involves utterances of the sentence

\[
\text{Smith’s murderer is insane:} \quad (8.10)
\]

There are two cases to consider:

**Case I (Attributive Use):** We come across Smith fouly murdered, and on
the basis of what we see, and not otherwise knowing who did it, we
utter (8.10).

**Case II (Referential Use):** At the trial, we see the man in the dock accused
of killing Smith acting strangely, and on the basis of his behavior, we
utter (8.10).

Donnellan believed that the proposition expressed in Case I is correctly
described by Russell (1905a)’s logical account of sentences of the form
*The F is G.* (8.10) is used to express

\[
\text{the proposition that one and only one thing murdered Smith} \quad (8.11)
\]

\[
\text{and that thing is insane.}
\]

The object denoted by *the F* is the object that satisfies the description
uniquely; and whoever it is that satisfies the description is the object
that is said to be insane.†

However, Donnellan expressed doubts that Russell’s theory correctly
characterized the proposition expressed in Case II. He expressed doubts
as well about Peter Strawson’s (1950) theory, where the notion and
analysis of a “uniquely referring use” of a description originated. “[N]eith-
er,” Donnellan (1966: 53) said, “fits the referential use.”

Donnellan (1966) focused on the issue of who or what was referred to
when a description is used referentially, and he had not as yet developed
a firm grasp about what proposition was expressed in that circumstance.
It was not until twelve years later that he took a clear position on this
issue. In 1978, Donnellan said that in Case II, (8.10) is used to express
a singular proposition,

\[
\text{the proposition that he is insane ,} \quad (8.12)
\]

speaking of the man in the dock, the man who is supposed to be Smith’s
murderer but who might in fact not be, and saying of him, because of

† (8.11) is what we called in the last section the small-scope proposition.
his behavior in the dock and not because of the killing itself, that he is insane.

The referential/attributive distinction has become a standard topic for students in philosophy of language. But the philosophical significance of the distinction is obscure. The question of concern in the literature has been: Does Donnellan’s distinction in fact challenge Russell’s theory of descriptions? In a famous paper, Kripke (1977) argued that Donnellan’s distinction did not by itself show that Russell’s semantic account of descriptions was wrong because the phenomena could be characterized pragmatically, i.e., as concerning the uses to which words can be put.† Kripke not only formulated the issue of subsequent discussion of the distinction, but he also formulated what has become the dominant view. But it is clear that this story merits reconsideration, because the Russellian analysis of “the proposition that the $F$ is $G$” presented earlier reveals it to be ambiguous in a way that very closely mirrors the distinction Donnellan sought to draw.

**Referential and Attributive Occurrences**

As Howard Wettstein (1981: 49) observes in his classic essay on Donnellan’s distinction:

Whether a description is indeed being used referentially or attributively is a matter of the intentions of the speaker.

How do we know what a speaker’s intentions are? The way Donnellan presented the distinction, we must divine the intentions of the speaker to know which use he is making of the description.‡ This generated a huge discussion in the literature about the criteria for figuring out whether an individual is using the description referentially or attributively. But why should the speaker’s intentions be a subject of guesswork? There is no reason to perpetuate this engine of miscommunication. The speaker can perfectly well explicitly signal his intentions, marking it in the language some way. We characterize them abstractly:

$$[\text{Smith’s murderer}]_A \text{ is insane} \quad (8.13)$$

† This has been defended by Neale (1990).
‡ There is a disagreement between Donnellan and Kaplan (1978) about the role of intentions in the demonstrative use. Kaplan believes one might not know who one is referring to, and so one could not intend to refer to him. I shall set this problem aside here.
for the attributive use, and

\[ \text{[Smith's murderer]}_R \text{ is insane} \quad (8.14) \]

for the referential use. As a matter of grammar, the speaker must declare
himself and make his intentions known.

I will suppose, further, that the distinction is to be drawn solely in
terms of the proposition expressed, just as Donnellan described it. Once
again, I turn to Howard Wettstein (1981: 44) for my authority:

Following David Kaplan, I shall call the (non-Fregean) proposition asserted
when a description is used referentially (for example, in the subject position
of a subject-predicate assertion) a ‘singular proposition’.

Stephen Neale (1990: 65) offers a similar characterization:†

If a speaker S uses a definite description ‘the F’ referentially in an utterance
\( u \) of ‘the F is G’, then ‘the F’ functions as a referring expression and the
proposition expressed by \( u \) is \textit{object-dependent} (rather than descriptive).

So, in (8.14) the characterization of the object spoken about using the
phrase “Smith’s murderer” is completely external to the proposition ex-
pressed, but the object itself is not. By contrast, in the case of (8.13), the
characterization of the object spoken about using the phrase “Smith’s
murderer” is fully given as part of the proposition expressed, but the
object itself is not.

Clearly, I can intend to use a description either referentially or at-
tributively. On the referential use, I intend to assert a singular pro-
position—or as I shall now also call it, a \textit{referential} proposition. On
the attributive use, I intend to assert, not a singular proposition, but
the Russellian, predicative proposition—or as I shall now also call it, an
\textit{attributive} proposition. So, the sentence containing the attributive oc-
currence of the description (8.13) expresses the predicative or attributive
proposition (8.11), and the sentence containing the referential occurrence
of the description (8.14) expresses the singular or referential proposition
(8.12).‡§ By adopting this grammatical proposal, the practical problem

† Note that Wettstein and Neale take opposing positions on the issue of whether
the referential/attributive distinction is semantic or pragmatic. Nonetheless, both
agree that on the referential use, it is a singular or object dependent proposition
that is expressed.

‡ There is an important observation to make here. As Wettstein (1981) argued, the
fact that we have a uniquely identifying description in subject position does not
by itself identify attributive use.

§ Since identifying this notion of attributive and referential occurrence, I have come
across a discussion of these issues that has much in common with mine by Reimer
that remains is not whether the expression in (8.14) is used referentially, but what it refers to.

(8.13) identifies a unique proposition. But (8.14) is a much more complicated story. Note that it cannot be a matter of what I assert which object is being referred to and (therefore) which proposition is expressed. The very way in which referential occurrence is characterized requires input from context. It is no part of what I say, what I assert, what I commit myself to, to provide a unique identification of the object I speak about. Although I utter those words, I do not utter them assertively, and so I do not commit myself to their truthful application. Donnellan tried to underline this point by insisting that, on the referential use, the object referred to might not even satisfy the description. This is how the issue of misdescriptions arises. Recall the case talked about when we started our discussion of the distinction. Donnellan originally thought that one might use “Smith’s murderer” referentially in (8.10) to pick out someone who is not Smith’s murderer at all. For, on the referential use, one has an individual in mind, and one uses the description to enable the listener to pick the individual out: whatever description does the job, even one that does not truthfully apply to the individual, will be used in this context. Donnellan gave as his example of referential use the situation in which one sees the strange behavior of the accused man in the dock and refers to him as “Smith’s murderer” to call attention to him—even though he might not actually have been the murderer. I am sympathetic to this aspect of referential occurrence, but it is a controversial aspect of Donnellan’s statement of the distinction, and I don’t want this distraction when I am trying to make my case.† Howard Wettstein (1981: 38) has observed

Donnellan does himself a disservice in claiming that the referential-attributive distinction can best be brought out by considering cases in which the description fits nothing. These cases are controversial, but to rule against Donnellan with respect to them is not to rule against the referential-attributive distinction. Donnellan’s making such cases central has, I think, diverted attention away from the heart of the thesis.

[D]efinite descriptions are ambiguous in the sense that they can be used (literally) in sentences of the form The F is G to express singular or general propositions, depending upon the communicative intent with which they are used.

She does not quite, however, see this as something that might be marked in syntax. † See Mackay (1968). Misdescriptions play a larger role in Donnellan’s criticism of Strawson (1950). Misdescriptions also play a very heavy role in making the pragmatic interpretation plausible.
8.3 The Referential/Attributive Distinction

I agree; and for the purposes of this talk, I will set these cases of misdescription aside.‡

The view that the particle “the” is ambiguous is absurd.† But the view that sentences involving “the”—as well as other variable binding operators—systematically exhibit two distinct interpretations is highly plausible, and, markable in grammar. In fact, as I said earlier, I believe that Russell’s theory of definite descriptions provides a concrete proposal for accommodating the distinction in syntax.

Applying Russell’s Distinction

It is very clear that Donnellan’s informal characterization of the referential/attributive distinction meshes very nicely with Russell’s logically-driven distinction between the two notions of a proposition. Let me just drive the point home.

For Donnellan, a sentence of the form *The F is G* can be understood in two distinct ways, depending upon how the description is used. I’ll use my subscript notation here. In the first case, we utter

\[ [\text{The } F]_A \text{ is } G. \] (8.15)

and use the description attributively. The characterization of the thing talked about—*the F*—is part of what is said. The proposition expressed, I submit, i.e., the predicative or attributive proposition, is just (8.8), Russell’s small-scope proposition. In the second case, we utter

\[ [\text{The } F]_R \text{ is } G. \] (8.16)

and use the description referentially to speak about *it*, which is supposed to be the one and only thing that is *F*. The characterization of the thing talked about—*the F*—is *not* part of what is said; rather, the characterization of the thing talked about belongs to a procedure external to the proposition expressed, and it is the output of that procedure, some object, that is passed to the open position in the proposition marked

‡ Of course, it is worth reminding the reader that if the correctness of application is irrelevant then the object referred to cannot possibly be semantically determined by the proposition expressed. But the fact that the semantic significance of an expression plays no part in the proposition expressed does not mean that it is of no semantic value at all. It is here, I believe, that important linguistic work needs to be done.

† Neale (1990) has unfortunately framed the debate in terms of an ambiguity in “the.” This distorts the issue and renders much of the subsequent discussion unfathomable.
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by the pronoun “it.” This produces for us the object-dependent or singular proposition. So what is said in this case is that it is G, and the object spoken about is supposed to be provided by the external procedure yielding the one and only one thing that is F. This, the referential proposition, I submit, is just Russell’s large-scope proposition (8.9).‡

It seems to me, then, that Russell and Donnellan have captured the very same phenomenon. Donnellan’s informal appeal to the way in which we talk has its logical form given by the large-scope and small-scope propositions identifiable under Russell’s theory.

Remarks

I have been arguing that the referential/attributive distinction very clearly tells against Frege’s semantic principles governing compositionality and extensionality of sense, the ones I mentioned at the beginning of this talk. If, for example, a description is used referentially, then the proposition expressed using it is not composed out of the meanings of the expressions making up the sentence. The extensionality principle is similarly compromised because there is no constraint in the statement of the principle that, in each case, the same structural connection is made between part and whole. If, for example, α has attributive occurrence in Sα but β does not in Sα/β, then the fact that different propositions are expressed does not lead to the conclusion that α and β individually differ in meaning. The reason, of course, is that Sα can express more than one proposition. We saw earlier that (8.13) and (8.14) express different propositions. Note that we do not thereby conclude that the expression “Smith’s murderer” has two different meanings.

My view is that the Russell-Donnellan distinction shows that sentence (8.1) is semantically ambiguous in the sense that it expresses two distinct propositions. The alternative view—which I take to be the currently prevailing view-sees the distinction as pragmatic: sentence (8.1) expresses only one proposition—what I have called the attributive proposition, but it can be used on a given occasion to express another one—the one I have called the referential proposition.

I have given two independent reasons for thinking the referential/attributive distinction is a semantic distinction. First, I showed, very abstractly, that it is markable in grammar. Second, I showed very con-

‡ This way of putting the matter shows that Russell’s account of descriptions, far from being challenged by Strawson’s (1950) criticism, holds promise of actually providing a structure for understanding how presupposition works.
cretely that Russell’s scope distinction provides a grammatical implementation of the distinction. This connection with the scope distinction is significant. Let me draw an analogy with the *de re/de dicto* distinction in modal logic. This distinction is an important one in logic and philosophy, and has been recognized as such for centuries—although it is not that important in every-day life—we don’t, after all, talk about *de dicto* and *de re* necessity in the marketplace, and it is genuinely uncertain whether there is a clear conventional way of marking the distinction in a natural language like English.† But the distinction was marked in logic by a scope distinction, and it is this logical fact, not the actual conventions of any natural language nor any frequency of use, that led people to believe that it was semantic in nature. No doubt, it is an empirical issue whether, in a given language, the distinction is marked in syntax or not. But in philosophy it is the possibility of marking the distinction this way, not the actuality of the distinction that is at issue.

Now, I’ve just given positive reasons for thinking the referential/attributive distinction is semantic. But there are also strong reasons for thinking that the distinction is not pragmatic. There are a number of ways of drawing the semantic/pragmatic distinction, but I think that Grice’s (1989) idea of *cancellability* is central. If the referential/attributive distinction is a semantic distinction, then we understand a sentence to express two distinct propositions, which I will call *p* and *q*. But if it is pragmatic, then the sentence expresses only one of them, *p*, say. So *p* is what is usually called *the proposition expressed*; the other proposition *q* will be *the proposition meant*, that is, the one pragmatically implied on a given occasion of use. How do we tell which is the correct analysis? Do we have a semantic distinction, with two propositions expressed? Or do we have a pragmatic distinction, with one proposition expressed and the other proposition meant on a given occasion of use? Grice laid down a condition for pragmatic implication, namely, that the two propositions should be logically independent, that, in effect, the proposition *p* but *not q* should not issue in a contradiction. This is Grice’s cancellability test, one of the most trusted tests for conversational implicature.†

† I am particularly moved by remarks of Cartwright (1968), who denies a clear conventional way of expressing the distinction in natural language.

† Sadock (1978: 372) describes the test like this:

The test is based on the notion that conversational implicatures are not part of the conventional force of utterances but are figured out in context. It ought to be the case, therefore that a speaker may freely include, or append to his utterance, material that indicates that the implicature in question is not to be
will now argue that it cannot be the case that the attributive version is true and the referential version is false, and so the two are not logically independent in the way needed to pass Grice’s cancellability test.

Let us recall that I have set up the referential/attributive distinction without permitting misdescriptions. It is widely-accepted that the distinction is real and identifiable even without misdescriptions. Leaving them out, however, turns out to be quite important, because it is misdescriptions that tend to make the pragmatic view plausible. Once misunderstandings have been bracketed, although two propositions (8.15) and (8.16) are distinct propositions, it turns out that if if the one is true the other is. If the proposition *that* the inventor of dynamite was a Swede is true, then the proposition *that he was a Swede* will be true of the inventor of dynamite. Also, if the proposition *that he was a Swede* is true of the inventor of dynamite, then the proposition *that the inventor of dynamite was a Swede* will be true. This gives me all that I need: if I assert the attributive proposition and yet deny the referential proposition, then it cannot be (in a nonintentional situation) that I will have said something true in each case.† The two propositions are not logically independent.‡

Let me make a few brief comments on Kripke’s (1977) well-known drawings. Contradicting any part of the conventional meaning of an utterance, on the other hand, will amount to logical contradiction (in the case of semantic content) or to internal infelicity (in the case of nonsemantic content).

† I am assuming, for the purposes of this argument, that if there exists no inventor of dynamite, then both propositions are false. However, if there exists no inventor of dynamite who lived in Sweden, then one might wish to attribute different truth values to the two propositions. In the attributive case, one might say that the proposition is false; but in the referential case, where, in effect, one presupposes the existence of an inventor of dynamite, one might wish to withhold a truth value. Note, incidentally, how nicely the large-scope proposition makes the existence and uniqueness clauses look like a presupposition of the proposition.

‡ The distinction I want to make here is missed by Kripke:

Do Donnellan’s observations provide an argument against Russell’s theory? Do his *exem* contradict Russell’s? One might think that if Donnellan is right, Russell must be wrong, since Donnellan’s truth conditions for statements containing referential definite descriptions differ from Russell’s. Unfortunately, this is not so clear. consider the case of “Her husband is kind to her,” mistakenly said of the lover. If Donnellan had roundly asserted that the quoted statement is true if and only if the *lover* is kind to her, regardless of the kindness of the husband, the issue between him and Russell would be clearly joined...” Kripke (1977: 261)

Note the emphasis on misdescriptions. The truth conditions work for nonintentional contexts, however. And that is the point.
8.4 Rigidity and Direct Reference

Let me keep track of where we are on the philosophical trail. I have argued that Donnellan’s referential/attributive distinction is semantically significant. And I have argued that the distinction is well-characterized by applying the scope distinction to the notion of what a sentence expresses. Finally, I have argued that Donnellan’s distinction challenges Frege’s compositionality principles, not the attribution of sense or meaning to an individual expression or phrase. I want now to draw two important consequences of this feature of the Donnellan-Russell theory. The first is about the thesis of direct reference. The second is about Kripke’s distinction between metaphysical and epistemic necessity.

§ That is, that (8.4) gives us the meaning of (8.1).
† See the discussion of “schmidentity” in Kripke (1980).
¶ Actually, to be more precise, that it is either false or incomplete. My view is that Kripke’s characterization of Russell’s semantic account of definite descriptions is incomplete because it fails to include the scope distinction. That is the moral I draw from his argument. But I do not think the scope distinction is pragmatic, and this is the more serious disagreement I have with Kripke.
Direct Reference

The referential/attributive distinction is drawn almost invariably for definite descriptions. This raises a question: Can proper names be used attributively? If the Description Theory of Proper Names were correct, and if garden variety proper names were disguised descriptions, there would be no problem identifying an attributive use of proper names. But it is fairly widely believed that the Description Theory of Proper Names has severe shortcomings. Since my interest in this section is with direct reference and singular propositions, I will proceed on the supposition that the description replacement envisaged on that theory is wrong.

Nonetheless, and this is rather surprising, I submit that the Direct Reference theorist must admit that proper names have attributive occurrence. There has been considerable hesitancy in the literature to countenance an attributive use of proper names.† The main reason, I believe, is that the attributive use of a proper name is construed by just about every theorist as one on which the name is short for a description, and denotes whatever it is that fits the description. But if there were no attributive use of proper names, that is, if every use were referential, then the very arguments designed by the Direct Reference theorist to refute the Description Theory would fail.

Let me spell this out. Here is the general strategy of the Direct Reference arguments. Let α be a proper name, and let ιϕ be a description, the ϕ. The Direct Reference theorist argues that Sα and Sα/ιϕ express different propositions for any of the plausible candidate descriptions one might choose to replace the name by. Since the propositions differ, the contribution α makes to the proposition expressed must be different from the contribution made by any of the candidate descriptions.

In order for strategy to be successful, however, it is evident that α must be used attributively in Sα. For only on the attributive use does the name make a contribution to the proposition expressed. On the referential use, the name makes no contribution to the proposition expressed. So the fact that Sα and Sα/ιϕ express different propositions does not enable us to draw a conclusion about the meaning of α by itself. To draw the Millean conclusion—to show that the meaning of α is not

† Kripke (1977) explicitly accepts a referential/attributive distinction for proper names. To his way of thinking, this generalizing of the referential/attributive distinction to expressions other than descriptions is another indication that it would be wrong to suppose that “the” is ambiguous. Kaplan (1978) also appears to make this distinction.
8.4 Rigidity and Direct Reference

given by \( \nu \varphi \)—one needs to contrast the behavior of the proper name and the description when both are occurring attributively.‡

So, to make the inference

\[
S\alpha \text{ and } S\alpha/\nu \varphi \text{ express different propositions}
\]

\[
\text{SO, } \alpha \text{ and } \nu \varphi \text{ differ in meaning}
\]

the Direct Reference theorist must be assured that in \( S\alpha \) and also in \( S\alpha/\nu \varphi \) the terms are used attributively and not referentially. But, the Direct Reference theorist cannot, on his very own theory, ever have such assurance. The Direct Reference theorist believes that a proper name has no meaning. It serves simply to introduce the object it stands for into the proposition, producing thereby a singular proposition. The attributive proposition is therefore indistinguishable from the referential one,† rendering it impossible for the Direct Reference theorist to conclude anything other that it is is the very same proposition expressed in each case!‡ He is deprived therefore of the very premise he needs to make the argument.

Here is an example. For “Hesperus” to be directly referential there should be no difference in the two cases in the proposition John believes:

John believes the proposition that Hesperus is the evening star, (8.17)

and

John believes of Hesperus the proposition that it is the evening star. (8.18)

If John believes the proposition that it has a certain property, that very thing, then the way in which it is picked out is irrelevant. So, if he believes of it, namely Hesperus, that it is the evening star, then he believes of that thing, namely, Phosphorus, that it is the evening star. It makes no difference how we pick out the object in order for it to be true. In the context of these propositional attitude constructions, it is evident

‡ To be sure, the fact that proper names can only be used referentially—if it were a fact—while descriptions can be used either referentially or attributively would certainly distinguish the two. But for reasons I will soon outline, I doubt whether one can establish it in a non-question-begging way.

† Equally, a speaker cannot intend one and not the other, rendering his identification of the term as having attributive or referential occurrence moot.

‡ Kripke (1977) responds to a criticism of Katz in the same vein. But he relies very heavily on a specific view of the distinction according to which, on the referential use of an expression \( F \), even if \( F \) does not apply to the individual, the speaker believes it does. This is a bit odd. Kripke acknowledges that Donnellan does not hold this; and he does not offer other motivation to believe it.
how nicely the scope distinction captures the referential/attributive distinction. For, when given small scope, as in (8.17), the meaning of the description is internal to the proposition believed, but when given large scope, as in (8.18), its meaning is external to the proposition expressed.

More generally, by analogy with the definition of rigid designator, I am supposing that

**Definition 1** A term $a$ is directly referential iff

$$[a]_A \text{ is } G = [a]_R \text{ is } G.$$

That is,

the proposition that $a$ is $G$ = the proposition that *it* is $G$ \hspace{1cm} (8.19)

said of $a$. So, it is directly referential iff it makes no difference to the proposition expressed whether it is used referentially or whether it is used attributively. Quite clearly, on this definition, there is no way to distinguish the two propositions, and so no way to show that a term is directly referential.

**Rigidity**

The idea that proper names are directly referential is inconsistent with the view I have been developing. But the idea that they are rigid designators in some contexts but not in others, is more promising. I will now show that Kripke’s claim about the distinct way in which proper names operate in contexts of metaphysical and epistemic necessity flows nicely from the Russell-Donnellan view I have been developing.

I will use the predicate abstract notation of Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998a). For a singular term “$a$” and a predicate “$Gx$”

$$\langle \lambda x. \Box Gx \rangle(a), \hspace{1cm} (8.20)$$

$$\Box \langle \lambda x. Gx \rangle(a), \hspace{1cm} (8.21)$$

represent the *de re* modal claim and the *de dicto* modal claim respectively. With (8.20), we speak of $a$ and *say of* it that it has the $G$ property

† which I will come to shortly
8.4 Rigidity and Direct Reference

necessarily. With (8.21), we say it is necessary that \( a \) is \( G \).‡§ The scope analysis of modality is modelled on Russell’s (1905a) scope analysis of negation.

A rigid designator is a term that designates the same object in every possible world (in which the object exists). A rigid designator is therefore one for which scope does not matter. That is,

**Definition 2**  \( a \) is a rigid designator iff

\[
\Diamond (\lambda x. Gx)(a) \equiv (\lambda x. \Diamond Gx)(a).
\]

Of course, the fact that (8.20) and (8.21) are equivalent does not mean that they express the same proposition. On the contrary.†

Now, Kripke (1980) claims that, when \( \Diamond \) is understood to express metaphysical necessity, ordinary proper names are rigid designators, while ordinary definite descriptions are not.‡ To make the case, he must show that ordinary proper names behave logically in the way given by Definition 2; also that ordinary definite descriptions do not behave in that way. Given a modal sentence containing a proper name, he needs to be certain that he can distinguish the two propositions and argue that these two propositions nonetheless have the same truth value.§

It might be difficult to distinguish which of the two propositions is expressed on a given occasion, but I will side-step this problem. I will suppose there are these two propositions, the proposition expressing *de dicto* necessity,

the proposition that it is necessary that \( a \) is \( G \)  \hspace{1cm} (8.22)

‡ In a more traditional notation, we would have to eliminate all proper names as disguised descriptions in the way Quine (1961) suggested in order to draw a scope distinction for proper names. The ease with which we handle the scope distinction for names in predicate-abstract notation underscores that Quine’s is, as Kripke (1980) acknowledged, simply a syntactical maneuver, and carried no substantial commitment to a description theory of names of the sort he was objecting to.

§ It was Smullyan (1948) who originally showed how Russell & Whitehead’s (1910) scope distinction could be applied to modality. Smullyan took Russell’s treatment of negation as the paradigm.

† This is one important way in which the notion of rigid designation does not quite correspond to the notion of direct reference.

‡ Not that no definite descriptions are not rigid, but that the usual descriptions offered as unpacking for proper names are not.

§ To make his argument, he had to show that ordinary proper names fit the logical mold of rigid designators; and that means that he had to identify two distinct propositions of the form (8.20) and (8.21) that turned out to have the same truth value. So, a scope distinction must be available for proper names. To repeat, there must be a scope distinction for proper names, and the propositions expressed must be different—else we would not be able to distinguish the two formulations.
that is,

\[ \text{Nec}([a]_A \text{ is } G); \quad (8.23) \]

and the proposition expressing *de re* necessity,

the proposition that \( a \) is such that it is necessary that it is \( G \), \( (8.24) \)

that is,

\[ [a]_A \text{ is Nec } G. \quad (8.25) \]

Note that both are attributive propositions. The scope distinction that is used to mark the modal *de re/de dicto* distinction does not correspond to the referential/attributive distinction. That is an easy error to fall into. To argue that the name is a rigid designator, i.e., that it has the *same meaning in every possible world*—not merely that it designates the same object in every possible world—the proper name must be acting attributively on the *de re* as well as the *de dicto* reading.† The large-scope and small-scope reading of the name inside the modal operator must yield the same truth value. But Kripke wants to say something about the *meaning* of the name. To do so, the meaning of the name must be the same on the two readings even though the propositions expressed must be different, so that the difference in the proposition expressed is attributable to structure alone.

Can the same sort of argument be set out for the case of epistemic necessity? I think not. The scope distinction interacts very differently with a propositional attitude operator like *believes* than it does with a modal operator like *necessarily*. We had seen that when we run the scope distinction on (the box) \( \square \), as in the case of (8.20) and (8.21), both can be understood attributively. But this is not so for the case of *believes*. When the scope distinction is run for

\[ \text{John believes the proposition that the } F \text{ is } G, \quad (8.26) \]

we get the small-scope, i.e., attributive, proposition,

\[ \text{John believes the proposition that one and only one thing is } F \text{ and is } G, \quad (8.27) \]

† It is wrong to suggest that the attributive use corresponds to the *de dicto* reading and the referential use corresponds to the *de re* reading, for the *de re/de dicto* distinction can be reproduced on the attributive reading alone. The *de re* modal reading be understood referentially as well, but this need not trouble us here.
8.4 Rigidity and Direct Reference

and the large-scope, i.e., referential, proposition,

One and only one thing is \( F \) and John believes the proposition that it is \( G \).

In the case of the propositional attitudes, unlike the case of modality, the \textit{de re/de dicto} distinction corresponds to the referential/attributive distinction. We might represent (8.27) as

\[ \text{John believes } [\text{the } F]_A \text{ is } G, \]

but then (8.28) must be represented as

\[ \text{John believes } [\text{the } F]_R \text{ is } G. \]

What we cannot get, when we run the scope distinction is

\[ [\text{the } F]_A \text{ is believed by John to be } G. \]

We do not have, as we did for modality, an attributive use to assure us that the singular term has the same meaning in each case. So, there is no basis for identifying any singular term as being rigid inside an epistemic context.†  

Kripke’s distinction drops out very naturally as a structural distinction in the Russell-Donnellan framework; the issue of the meaning of proper names need not be seen as central to marking it.‡  

This, I believe, is a healthy modification of Kripke’s story.

† We have seen that a scope ambiguity can arise when a description has attributive occurrence. A referential use of a description yields a different result. If we apply the scope distinction to

\[ [\text{The inventor of dynamite}]_R \text{ was not a Swede}, \]

we get

the proposition that: \textit{It is not the case that he was a Swede},

and

the proposition that: \textit{He was not a Swede}

where, in each case, the \textit{he} spoken about is supposed to be the one and only one thing that husbands her. There does not, however, appear to be any distinction between these two. The reason is quite clear. The structure corresponding to the description has been extruded from the proposition, leaving only a variable: the designation of the object is not an operation that needs to be taken account of, and so the matter of priority of operation is sidestepped. But, this means that there is no scope distinction when the description is used referentially, not that the referential use corresponds to a wide-scope reading of the description.

‡ There is a glaring tension in Kripke’s (1980) treatment of Frege’s problem. On the one hand, he seeks to eliminate any semblance of descriptive backing for proper names, so that their rigidity in alethic—\textit{metaphysical necessity}—contexts is uncompromised and unqualifiedly evident. On the other hand, he says that proper names are clearly non-rigid within doxastic—\textit{epistemic necessity}—contexts. For these occurrences, the descriptive backing so carefully and surgically removed
8.5 Concluding Remarks

Frege’s 1892\textsubscript{b} solution to the Paradox of Identity was to identify an informative predicative element, a \textit{Sinn}, that attached to proper names and was cached inside the proposition so that the proposition expressed by $\alpha = \alpha$ differed from the proposition expressed by true $\alpha = \beta$. This contrasts with his 1879 \textit{Begriffsschrift} solution, which was to identify an informative predicative element attached to a name, which he called a \textit{Bestimmunsweise}, but which was cached outside the scope of the proposition.\textsuperscript{§} This is one of the central distinctions between Frege early and late: the late Frege permitted no semantic component outside the scope of a proposition.\textsuperscript{¶}

The Paradox of Identity arises for a direct reference semantics, one that Russell was partial to and one that Frege of the \textit{Begriffsschrift} was also partial to. The interesting point to note is how differently they responded to the Paradox. Frege gave up direct reference completely but held on to the idea that definite descriptions were proper names—\textit{Eigennamen}: he accounted for the difference in cognitive value entirely at the level of sense. Russell, on the other hand, clung to direct reference and replaced the view of definite descriptions as proper names with the idea that they were incomplete expressions.

Russell explicitly rejected Frege’s sense/reference account of propositions, but the reasons given in “On Denoting” have never been clear, and, the philosophical community has for the most part ignored this.

needs to be grafted back on. It’s not that Kripke’s possible world semantics is appropriate for \textit{metaphysical necessity} and Lewis’s (1968) counterpart semantics is appropriate for \textit{epistemic necessity}. Rather, the very story about proper names employed to explain metaphysical necessity is the very story about proper names that is denied to explain epistemic necessity.

In the case of identities, using two rigid designators, such as the Hesperus-Phosphorus case above, there is a simpler paradigm which is often usable to at least approximately the same effect. Let ‘$R_1$’ and ‘$R_2$’ be two rigid designators which flank the identity sign. Then ‘$R_1 = R_2$’ is necessary if true. The references of ‘$R_1$’ and ‘$R_2$’, respectively, may well be fixed by nonrigid designators ‘$D_1$’ and ‘$D_2$’, in the Hesperus and Phosphorus case these have the form ‘the heavenly body in such-and-such position in the sky in the evening (morning)’. Then although ‘$R_1 = R_2$’ is necessary, ‘$D_1$’ and ‘$D_2$’ may well be contingent, and this is often what leads to the erroneous view that ‘$R_1 = R_2$’ might have turned out otherwise. (Kripke, 1980: 143-4)

\textsuperscript{§} See Mendelsohn (2005) for further discussion.

\textsuperscript{¶} Most philosophers have followed Frege’s lead on this point and deemed any component that appears semantic but lies outside the proposition as being, not semantic in character, but pragmatic.
difference between the two. I do not pretend to understand the famous passages in “On Denoting.” I do not think that Russell himself understood clearly what he was arguing. But I do think that the theory of descriptions imposed on Russell’s semantics a rejection of Frege’s structural principles governing sense. I have tried to make that case by connecting Russell’s account with recent discussion of modal semantic matters that trade so heavily on the scope distinction. I have also tried to show how useful this can be in explaining certain problematic phenomena like Kripke’s epistemic/metaphysical distinction.

It is my hope that so armed, we will be able to go back to the texts and read them more intelligently. But I think that so-armed, Russell’s scope distinction will prove a useful tool for pursuing a non-sense/reference semantic framework in which part of the semantic information in an utterance gets cached into the proposition expressed, and part does not. To do so, however, we still need to be clearer about the notion of a proposition, something I have actually said very little about today.†

† Presented at LOGICA 2004, June 22-25, 2004, Hejnice, Czech Republic
9
Russell’s Theory of Descriptions

9.1 The Transition
The years 1903 through 1906 found Russell’s thoughts about the semantics of singular terms in ferment. Russell (1903b) defended an ill-conceived doctrine of propositions underpinned by a Meinongian ontology in the main body of the text. Singular terms were regarded all as directly referential.† The term denoted in each case was a constituent of the proposition expressed, and the meaningfulness of the singular term was guaranteed by the corresponding term in the proposition. But the sympathetic appendix on “The Logical and Arithmetic Doctrines of Frege” belied the new directions of his thinking. No longer would all singular terms be regarded as directly referential. For those that are directly referential, there must be a referent, and the item referred to will itself be a constituent of the proposition expressed; but for those terms that are not directly referential, the meaning (or denoting complex) will be a constituent of the proposition, but the item referred to (and, of course, there need be nothing referred to) will not.

Russell shuffled the pieces of this story around to preserve the outlines of an overarching coherent picture. But there was always a loose end somewhere. This brief chapter in the development of Russell’s semantic theory has come to light as the result of some excellent work by Cartwright (1987) and Hylton (1990). Cartwright, in particular, calls our attention to a number of unpublished manuscripts from the Russell Archives‡ in which Russell struggles with the distinction between meaning and denotation. Eventually Russell came to believe his attempt

† There are two terms floating around, reference and denotation. I will follow the terminology I set out in Mendelsohn (2005).
‡ Russell (1905d), Russell (1905e), Russell (1905f), and Russell (1905c). The last, which is dated June of 1905, abandons the sense/reference distinction midstride
Russell’s transitional theory of meaning and denotation never saw the light of publication. In fact, when Russell (1905b) announces the new theory, there is no mention whatsoever of his own distinction of this name. Instead, we find the new theory pitted against two famous rivals: that of Meinong and that of Frege. The criticism of Meinong is clear and cogent. But not that of Frege. In these, perhaps the most puzzling and frustrating passages in the corpus of modern analytic philosophy, Russell becomes difficult and obscure.

Church (1943) finds the passages hopelessly confused by careless use/mention errors. Searle (1957) finds Russell to have misinterpreted or misunderstood Frege. Some readers find Russell foisting on Frege the theory Russell had been developing in the relevant years. Hylton (1990) finds Russell pinning Frege’s name on his own theory he had been developing. All take their cue from Searle (1957)’s well known article on the topic. I shall call these the Orthodox View. To be sure, there are important differences to be found in these different readers, and it is hardly likely they would all conceive of themselves in the same camp. But they all deny that Russell is doing there what he says he is doing, viz. presenting a clear, coherent and telling criticism of Frege’s sense/reference distinction. In this essay, I shall unmask this Orthodox view to be a gross fabrication. Building on recent studies of Frege’s account of indirect reference,† I will propose an interpretation of that notoriously difficulty passage in Russell (1905b) on which (i) it is clearly a criticism of Frege’s distinction, (ii) it is a coherent criticism of Frege’s distinction made with full understanding of that theory, and (iii) it is a very telling criticism of Frege’s distinction. In addition, on my interpretation, I will be able to identify the new theory presented in Russell (1905b) as a direct reaction to the problems he had identified with the sense/reference theory.

9.2 Searle’s Interpretation

Russell (1905b)’s discussion of Frege’s distinction between meaning and

and outlines the new theory of denoting expressions; the others are all earlier, most likely from the beginning of that same year.

denotation\textsuperscript{‡} continues to challenge readers.\textsuperscript{§} Most philosophers have apparently been persuaded by Searle (1957), that if we can get past the use/mention sloppiness (see Church (1943)), the argument is a misrepresentation of Frege’s view at worst and question-begging at best:

Russell’s argument which purports to develop Frege’s thesis in fact develops the negation of that thesis, for Russell’s assumption that occurring in a proposition is the same as being referred to by that proposition is an equation of sense and reference, and the whole point of Frege’s theory is to assert a distinction between sense and reference. (Searle, 1957: p. 344)

Searle’s reconstruction of the passage, however, is thoroughly implausible.

To begin, Searle’s fundamental charge is that Russell misrepresented Frege, or misunderstood him. But Frege and Russell had an informed, intelligent, extensive correspondence on just the issues addressed in Russell (1905\textsuperscript{b}).\textsuperscript{†} Russell understood Frege’s theory quite well, and he also understood the differences between Frege’s account of propositions and his own. And if the content of the letters does not suffice to convince you that this is so, take a gander at footnotes 2 and 3, wherein Russell (1905\textsuperscript{b}) explicitly lays these very features out for all to see. He distinguishes there very carefully between the proposition expressed by a sentence, and the denotation of the sentence, hardly the sort of thing someone would say if he failed to distinguish between something occurring in a proposition and something being referred to by a proposition.

No, Russell describes Frege’s distinction with faithful accuracy.

What are Searle’s reasons for attributing to Russell such an erroneous reading of Frege? The assumptions Searle attributes to Russell are not to be found in “On Denoting.” They are, in Searle’s words, “inexplicit.” Searle imputes these assumptions to Russell, presumably to make sense of the passage: Russell must have assumed these in order for his argument to work. While I am sympathetic with this interpretive strategy, Searle has not carried it out appropriately. For he does not get the argument to work; he reduces it to question-begging foolishness.

Finally, it is difficult to understand why Russell would have made the assumption Searle imputes to him when he had distinguished the two rather clearly in his own view. As Richard Cartwright (1987: 133) says, “I cannot accept John Searle’s suggestion ... that Russell inexplably

\textsuperscript{‡} These are Russell’s terms for the more familiar sense and reference, respectively.
\textsuperscript{§} It would be wise here to cite some comments about that passage.
\textsuperscript{†} The nature of propositions is one of the chief concerns of the correspondence published in Frege (1980)
9.3 Was Russell’s Quarry Russell?

A number of philosophers have suggested that the passage in “On Denoting” is directed at Russell’s own distinction of the same name. In some cases, Searle’s influential interpretation is at work. Douglas Lackey (1973: 96), for example, cites Searle approvingly and says:

The discussion of Frege is tortuous, and it is generally believed that Russell did not state Frege’s theory correctly. On the other hand, the arguments of ‘On Denoting’ are an excellent refutation of one earlier theory of meaning, Russell’s own, stated first in the Principles of Mathematics and developed at length in papers probably written in late 1904.

The general belief Lackey appeals to just reflects the deep impact Searle’s story has had. We already know Searle is mistaken. Granting that

‡ The concepts are distinct. But for Russell, unlike Frege, there are occasions when the constituent of the proposition is what the proposition is about.
Searle's representation of the passage is misinformed, no reason has been put forward to show that Russell has got Frege wrong, and considerable reason has been put forward to render such a reading of Frege highly dubious.

Lackey's claim that we have there an "excellent refutation" of Russell's own theory is a bit premature. It is also a bit puzzling. Why would Russell be refuting his own theory? And especially when he specifically identifies Frege in "On Denoting" as the one he is after? Is Russell that much of a blithering idiot that he should take aim at Frege and mistakenly shoot himself? Or is Russell such a malicious creature that he should foist his own errors onto Frege and knowingly, falsely accuse him of perpetrating philosophical evildoings? Or is it just some sort of extraordinary accident of nature, something out of Hollywood, that it just turns out that Russell refutes his own theory in these passages? Such seems to me to be the options open to interpretations like Lackey's, and the picture assumed of Russell is just outrageous.

Finally, Russell's theory of the same name is significantly different from Frege's. How different? Let us look at some of the ways. First, Russell was committed to there being terms that have denotation but no meaning. This is completely contrary to Frege's view of the matter: he had given up the directly referential view that he held in *Begriffsschrift* and now took all *Eigennamen* to have sense (and some also reference), but in any event, a sense distinct from the reference. Such was the source of his disagreement with Frege over the constituents of the proposition expressed by "Mont Blanc is more than 1000 meters high."† Frege held that the constituent corresponding to "Mont Blanc" was a mode of presentation of the mountain; Russell believed that it was the mountain itself. This was no confusion on Russell's part between what is expressed and what is referred to. No, he just believed that "Mont Blanc" is (in modern parlance) *directly referential*. Second, Russell often had grave doubts that sentences denoted, but, in any event, he never accepted Frege's view that the denotation was a truth value: he, at times, drew a meaning/denotation distinction for sentences with the proposition expressed being the meaning and the fact it corresponded to being the denotation. This was an unstable feature of the interim theory, however: sometimes he was comfortable with the distinction, and other times he was not. Third, Frege quite clearly distinguished the sense/reference distinction from the concept/object distinction: so,

† See the letter dated ....
he drew the sense/reference distinction for *Eigennamen* and *Begriffsworter*. Russell, more in the tradition of Mill’s conotation/denotation distinction, ran them together. So, for example, we find him urging that ‘death’ denotes an item that ‘died’ expresses.‡ There is really little more than the names ‘meaning’ and ‘denotation’ to link the two theories together, so the idea that Russell either maliciously or ignorantly identified his own theory with Frege’s is absolutely unbelievable.

It is rather clear to me that it is wrong to think that Russell’s quarry is anyone other than Frege. If Russell should turn out to refute his own theory of the same name in the process, it will have to be as a result of the two theories sharing the same flaw. But there is little reason to suppose that in “On Denoting” his quarry is not Frege. To the contrary, he mentions Frege a number of times in that essay as the one he is discussing, and at no time does he mention his own theory. The reasons that have been proposed to set these disclaimers aside have been refuted. I think that they should be taken at face value.

### 9.4 Did Russell Refute Russell?

Although Lackey claims there is a refutation in these passages, I have seen no such refutation. And those who have looked deeply at the unpublished manuscripts have also failed to identify such a refutation.

Richard Cartwright explores the unpublished manuscripts, revealing a rich, inventive Russell tackling difficulties with his distinction between meaning and denotation. Of particular interest is a manuscript entitled “On Fundamentals,” in which Russell, after 37 pages of discussion of propositions that are about meanings, abandons the theory and declares the rudiments of the theory to be espoused in “On Denoting.” The continuity between the issues discussed in those 37 pages and the relevant passage in “On Denoting,” is striking; it is difficult not to see the passage in “On Denoting” as a summary of the sorts of problems he uncovered and his reasons for abandoning the distinction between meaning and denotation. It is this textual evidence, I believe, that leads Cartwright to read the passage in “On Denoting” as a criticism of Russell’s own theory of meaning and denotation:

Russell had repudiated Homeric gods and the rest before he hit upon the theory of descriptions; the repudiation was grounded on a theory of denoting developed out of that presented in *The Principles*; and it was the “inextricable

‡ Reference
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tangle” to which Russell soon came to think that theory led, and which he attempted to set out in “On Denoting,” that immediately occasioned the theory of descriptions. (Cartwright, 1987: p. 95)

But Cartwright does not attempt a recreation of the passage from Russell (1905b). His interest is to try to “say what I can” about the unpublished manuscript “On Fundamentals,” the crucial passages of which, he says, “rival in obscurity the corresponding pages of “On Denoting”.” (Cartwright, 1987: p. 125) So, although Cartright does, apparently believe that the relevant passages in “On Denoting” are directed at Russell’s own theory, he refrains from looking at them in any detail: as he puts it, he has enough difficulties working out what Russell was doing in the unpublished manuscripts.

On the other hand, Peter Hylton (1990) (whose earlier work on Russell Cartwright cites with approval) has recently tried his hand at interpreting “On Denoting” as Russell’s refutation of Russell. Hylton has achieved some limited success,† and it is worth while looking at the story he put together.

9.5 Hylton’s Interpretation

Peter Hylton sees the discussion in “On Denoting” as a criticism of Russell’s own theory of denoting complexes that he had abandoned in favor of the new theory outlined in “On Denoting.” Hylton has come about as close as anyone to the interpretation I think to be the correct one, so it is worth our while setting it out in detail.

Hylton (1990: p. 249) says:

Why, then, does Russell reject the theory of denoting concepts? The most important consideration, I think, is one having to do with the relation of a denoting concept, or ‘meaning’, as Russell calls it, to the object which it denotes.

And this, he says, is precisely the problem Russell identifies at the beginning of the famous section in “On Denoting” when he lights into Frege:

The relation of the meaning to the denotation involves certain rather curious difficulties, which seem in themselves sufficient to prove that the theory which leads to such difficulties must be wrong.

How does Hylton expand on this?

† Cite the reviewer in the JP on this
Hylton notes that Russell has a problem saying something as simple as that the denoting complex the teacher of Plato denotes Socrates.‡ For, of course, this is a proposition. So, consider

The proposition that the denoting concept the teacher of Plato denotes Socrates.

Hylton says:

But now consider this proposition. What are its constituents? We might suppose that its constituents would be: the denoting concept the teacher of Plato, the relation of denoting, and the man Socrates. But this cannot be correct, for the presence in a proposition of a denoting concept indicates that the proposition is not about the denoting concept but is about the denoted object (if any). So we cannot have a proposition which is about a denoting concept in virtue of containing that denoting concept. If we put a denoting concept into a proposition then the proposition is about the denoted object, not about the denoting concept.

(Hylton (1990), p. 249)† Now, the problem Hylton has identified here does not seem to me to be a problem of the relation between meaning and denotation at all. It does, however, raise a problem for someone who believes that one can refer to denoting complexes or meanings directly. Russell’s theory had been this: that when we had a directly referential expression, a, then the proposition expressed by Pa would contain the object itself; on the other hand, if a were not directly referential, then the proposition expressed would contain the meaning or a or the denoting concept associated with it, and the meaning or denoting concept would, in turn, stand for the referent. If, then, we were to find a denoting concept occurring as part of a proposition, it might be natural to assume that it is serving there to stand for its ordinary denotation. And such would be the natural assumption to draw if we found the denoting complex the teacher of Plato in the proposition.

But, of course, this would not be the natural assumption if we allowed denoting complexes to be directly referred to. Then, it could be that that is what one is talking about, and the occurrence of a denoting

‡ Note that for Russell it is the meaning primarily that denotes its referent, and only secondarily the word. This follows Frege’s exposition. We shall raise no problems with this at this point.

† Hylton takes this to be the message of the passage from Russell he quotes right here:

As Russell says: ‘The difficulty in speaking of the meaning of a denoting complex may be stated thus: The moment we put the complex in a proposition, the proposition is about the denotation.’ (Hylton, 1990: p. 249)
complex inside a proposition could no longer invariably indicate that it is there standing for its denotation. As such, there would have to be some distinction drawn inside the proposition as to whether the complex is being referred to or expressed. Alternatively, it could be urged that denoting complexes cannot be referred to directly at all, so that an expression like ‘the denoting complex the teacher of Plato’ introduces into a proposition a denoting complex of that denoting complex. These two solutions were both known to Russell.

Now, Hylton goes on to see Russell as considering the possibility of meanings of meanings, thereby creating a hierarchy of these things. So, he looks to the text where Russell says “Thus it would seem that ‘C’ and C are different entities, such that ‘C’ denotes C; but this cannot be an explanation, because the relation of ‘C’ to C remains wholly mysterious.” Russell (1905b) Hylton offers the following gloss on this:

We began with the idea that the teacher of Plato denotes Socrates. A proposition which states this, we saw, cannot itself contain the denoting concept which it is about. If there is to be such a proposition, it must contain a further denoting concept, a second-level denoting concept, we might say, which denotes the denoting concept the teacher of Plato. But now it is clear that we are faced with an infinite hierarchy of denoting concepts. There must be a proposition which states that the second-level denoting concept denotes the first-level denoting concept, and in order to be about the second-level denoting concept, this proposition must presumably contain a third-level denoting concept. Since the third-level denoting concept must denote the second-level denoting concept, there must be a proposition which expresses this; in order to be about the third-level denoting concept, that proposition must presumably contain a fourth-level denoting concept—and so the hierarchy is launched. (Hylton, 1990: p. 250)

The existence of the hierarchy is clear. But why should this pose any kind of problem for Russell? After all, if there is nothing wrong with infinite sequences (and Russell was not particularly troubled with these), and if this sequence cannot be shown to be vicious, then why should Russell be troubled with this? Others had later been troubled about infinitely many senses; but is this what Russell is troubled about? It seems to be entirely unmotivated by Russell if that is what the problem is.

Now we find Russell introducing what Hylton calls “The Principle of Truth-Value Dependence.”

Hylton introduces a little later on, the following that looks something like the principle of truth value dependence:
that the truth-value of a proposition containing a denoting concept depends
upon the truth-value of the corresponding proposition with the denoted object
replacing the denoting concept. (Hylton, 1990: p. 253)

But this dependence does not as yet appear to introduce a viciousness.
It also fails for propositional attitude constructions (as Hylton himself
points out). In fact, Hylton notes that Russell tries to handle failures of
the principle in “On Fundamentals,” the unpublished manuscript. But
this problem trails off as a problem about Russell’s theory. It appears
to be very technical and not to indicate anything deeply wrong about
the theory.

We find ourselves somewhat disappointed with Hylton’s reconstruc-
tion of the relevant passages from “On Denoting.” For one thing, there
is the overwhelming conviction on our part that the passage is clearly
directed at Frege. This makes it somewhat difficult for us to see it as
pointed at Russell only, the basic drift of Hylton’s interpretation, and it
colors our whole way of looking at Hylton’s work. But Hylton’s is not
a line by line recreation either: he picks and chooses bits and pieces of
text from “On Denoting” without any attempt to recreate a concerted
line of attack. As a result it is difficult to assess where Russell really has
an argument going or when we have some free association of ideas, some
of which are Russell’s and some of which have become more common
currency as the issues discussed have become more widely known and
understood. The unpublished manuscripts give us such a sketch of a the-
ory, largely in transit, largely unworked out, changing from manuscript
to manuscript, that it is really most unsatisfying to be left in the position
Hylton wishes us to. So, as I reread the passages in “On Denoting,” I
do not find Hylton has got me through them. Hints and pregnant ideas
about; but no convincing interpretation.

Whatever success Hylton has achieved here, I do not think that his
is the whole story. For it seems to me to be absolutely clear that he
regards his as a criticism of Frege’s theory. So, unless we revert to the
interpretation of Russell as blithering idiot, the problems he is posing
must be seen as problems for Frege’s theory.

**My Interpretational Strategy**

I should like to pursue here the interpretation that Russell’s is a criti-
cism of Frege. Russell does, after all, introduce the distinction between
“meaning” and “denotation” in “On Denoting” explicitly as *Frege’s dis-
tinction*. (p. 45) His own distinction of the same name had not appeared
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in suitable form in published articles; and it is not laid out in “On Denoting” for his readers to see. Only Frege’s account is described—accurately—there. If he were to give his reasons for abandoning the distinction, then, within the framework of the article, they would have to be understood as reasons for abandoning Frege’s distinction. This means that the problems he saw with the distinction were not peculiar to his own development of it, and especially did not depend upon his own belief in names that lacked meaning. The evidence that he was rejecting his own distinction of the same name is overwhelming, especially after seeing the discussion in his unpublished papers. But, if I am right, he sees the problems he has uncovered as problems for the distinction itself, and so for Frege too. I take issue, then, not with the view that Russell, in “On Denoting”, is criticizing Russell. This seems to be a correct view. What I take issue with is the view that he is criticizing Russell and not Frege. To the contrary, he had come to the realization that the distinction between meaning and denotation was a dead end—Frege’s theory as well as his own. My task, then, will be to translate the passage into Frege’s language, so to speak, so that the connection can be made.

Russell’s Problem with Frege’s Theory

Russell is primarily concerned in that passage with how we can talk about meanings. The key to understanding Russell’s discussion is the special quotes he introduces for speaking about senses. Why does he need these meaning-quotes when he has at hand such perfectly good locutions as “the sense of x?” And why does he focus his criticism on the device of meaning-quotes, which, after all, appears to be a device of his own making? Searle (1957: p. 343) answers that this is a stipulation of Russell’s that reflects his own assumption “that if an object is referred to by a proposition then that object occurs as part of that proposition.” But, of course, Russell did not assume this at all; and even if he had, it would not explain why Russell introduces and focuses on the meaning-quotes device and not on the more usual “the meaning of x.”

Of course, Russell did believe this of directly referring expressions, what he later called “logically proper names.” If an object is referred to directly, using a logically proper name, then that object is itself a part of the proposition. Here Russell parted company with Frege, to be sure; for Frege held that all proper names had sense and some had reference. For Frege, direct reference was impossible. But, and this is where Russell
makes his entry point, direct reference seems to be at work for Frege—or, perhaps, must be at work for Frege—in some circumstances when senses themselves are being referred to. My suggestion is that Russell is concerned with the issue of whether meanings can be introduced by directly referential expressions or only by “denoting phrases.” That they can only be introduced by “denoting phrases” is one of his announced problems with the theory, from which I conclude that he would like to be able to get at meanings directly. But why? And is there anything in Frege that might lead him down this line, for, as we know, the phenomenon of direct reference—that is, of words that had denotation but no meaning—was antithetical to his account?

I would like to suggest that Russell’s quarry is Frege, and, in particular, his story about indirect reference, the reference of expressions inside that-clauses. Frege distinguished sentences like

John said “snow is white”,

so-called oratio recta constructions, in which a relation is expressed between John and a sentence, and sentences like

John said that snow is white,

so-called oratio obliqua constructions, in which a relation is expressed between John and a proposition. In this latter case, Frege held that the words inside the “that” clause shifted their reference to their ordinary senses. Russell, as I understand him, is concerned with this type of construction which, although it gives the appearance of a directly referential introduction of a proposition, cannot, on Frege’s own grounds, be directly referential. The immediate question he had was how “that p” works. Is it directly referential, or is it a complex designator whose reference is a function of the reference of its parts as Frege thought? And if it is a complex designator whose reference is not a function of the reference of the parts, then the very reason Frege needed the device, namely, to preserve compositionality for reference, has been undercut.

The puzzle here is of a piece with the puzzles we have about the single-quote device we use today for speaking about words. On the one hand, we appear to be able to peer inside the quotes and see directly what is being referred to; on the other hand, logical semantics requires us to regard the quotation as an unanalyzable whole.

So many who have read the relevant passage in “On Denoting” have been overwhelmed by what appears to be use/mention confusion: first, there is the business of distinguishing meaning quotes from ordinary
quotes, second, there are errors in his exposition as to whether he means the words or what the words mean, and third, there is the assumption of direct reference, so that what is referred to can appear as part of the proposition. Anyone who reads this passage unsympathetic to direct reference and unsure of the distinctions needed to make the points he wants to make, will come away with the belief that Russell is hopelessly confused. My own view is that Russell was extraordinarily prescient about what was going on in Frege’s theory, and that, although there were lapses in his expressing of these problems, they did not cause confusion on his part about what Frege was up to. On my reading of Russell, then, he was not confused about use and mention at all; to the contrary, he had uncovered a problem with quotation devices the solution of which still eludes us today.

Two Precursors

Kaplan’s Footnote

At this point, it is perhaps appropriate to look at a footnote in David Kaplan’s “Demonstratives” Kaplan (1989), which, along with Michael Dummett’s discussion in Dummett (1973a), was instrumental in constructing my interpretation. In footnote 23, he says:

Here is a difficulty in Russell’s 1903 picture that has some historical interest. Consider the proposition expressed by the sentence, ‘The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point’. Call the proposition, ‘P’. P has in its subject place a certain complex, expressed by the definite description. Call the complex, ‘Plexy’. We can describe Plexy as “the complex expressed by ‘the centre of mass of the solar system’.” Can we produce a directly referential term which designates Plexy? Leaving aside for the moment the controversial question of whether ‘Plexy’ is such a term, let us imagine, as Russell believed, that we can directly refer to Plexy by affixing a kind of meaning marks (on the analogy of quotation marks) to the description itself. Now consider the sentence ‘“the center of mass of the solar system”’ is a point’. Because the subject of this sentence is directly referential and refers to Plexy, the proposition the sentence expresses will have as its subject constituent Plexy itself. A moment’s reflection will reveal that this proposition is simply P again. But this is absurd since the two sentences speak about radically different objects. (I believe the foregoing argument lies behind some of the largely incomprehensible arguments mounted by Russell against Frege in “On Denoting,” though there are certainly other difficulties in that argument. It is not surprising that Russell there confused Frege’s theory with his own of Principles of Mathematics. The first footnote of “On Denoting” asserts that the two theories are “very nearly the same.”)
Let us look at these comments, second paragraph first.

I clearly disagree with Kaplan’s suggestion that Russell had confused Frege’s theory with his own of *The Principles*. I have already given sufficient reasons why he was not confused. As to the footnote in which he says that the two theories are “very nearly the same,” I offer the following story. There are differences between the two theories; Russell was aware of them, as I mentioned before. Why should he say that the two theories are “very nearly the same?” Most likely, because the differences between the two theories are not as important for the purposes of the discussion in “On Denoting” as the similarities. It is also worth mentioning that there has recently developed a strong account of proper names, the directly referential account, to rival Frege’s sense account. As the dialectical interplay has unfolded, it has become difficult to distinguish the directly referential account from the Fregean account. And here, I have in mind the way in which Nathan Salmon incorporates modes of presentation into his directly referential account of names in *Frege’s Puzzle*, which certainly makes one wonder about the sharp distinction between the alternatives; and I think of Stephen Schiffer’s criticism of Salmon’s account which turns on problems with the way in which these modes of presentation are to operate in doubly indirect that-clauses. The “real” work in the theory is being done by modes of presentation, a distinctively Fregean device, and the problems the theory has is with the way in which modes of presentation are fit into compositionality requirements. This is a Fregean problem, and it does not seem to me to be untoward to say that from the perspective of considering the problem of fitting modes of presentation into multiply indirect that-clauses, the Fregean theory is not altogether different from Salmon’s directly referential theory: they are, so to speak, very nearly the same. It is in this way that I understand the footnote: from the perspective of the problems addressed in “On Denoting,” the differences between the theories are not as important as the similarities. They “are very nearly the same.”

Now for the first paragraph. Kaplan’s claim that “Russell believed ... that we can directly refer to Plexy by affixing a kind of meaning marks (on the analogy of quotation marks) to the description itself” is incorrect. His conclusion, recall, is that we can only refer to meanings by “denoting phrases.” Perhaps, then, the story is that Russell believed that we should be able to refer directly to Plexy; and the inability to do so poses a problem. Perhaps Russell believed that Frege should have held that we should be able to refer directly to Plexy. *Someone* thinks the
device is a plausible directly referential device, and Russell shows that, on reflection, it cannot be. Who is that someone? And why should that someone want the device? Kaplan gives no answer. But these are the sorts of questions that need to be raised about the passage to get clear on the interpretation.

At any rate, if we are to understand the story correctly, we can read Kaplan’s as a reductio of the claim that we can have directly referential terms for meanings. The answer is that we cannot. Here’s the argument:

Consider the two sentences,

The center of mass of the solar system is a point \( (9.2) \)

and

\["\text{The center of mass of the solar system}\] is a point \( (9.3) \)

On the surface, these two appear to be quite different, because \( (9.2) \) speaks about a space-time point while \( (9.3) \) speaks about a meaning. \( (9.2) \) is plausibly true, but not \( (9.3) \). Now, according to the theory Russell advocated, \( (9.2) \) expresses a proposition in which the denoting complex expressed by “the center of mass of the solar system” occurs, but, although the complex occurs there, the proposition is about what the denoting complex denotes. Had the center of mass of the solar system been introduced by a directly referential expression, one which had denotation but no meaning, the constituent of the proposition would have been, not a denoting complex (because there is none in the case of a proper name), but the thing itself. So, if ‘Centro’ were a proper name for the center of mass of the solar system,

Centro is a point \( (9.4) \)

would have the same truth value as \( (9.2) \), but \( (9.4) \) would express a different proposition, one which contained an item the denoting complex in the proposition expressed by \( (9.2) \) would denote. In the case of \( (9.3) \), however, where a meaning is directly referred to, the thing denoted is the thing occurring the proposition. Stripping away the sentences, now, the proposition expressed by \( (9.2) \) is indistinguishable from the proposition expressed by \( (9.3) \), having in each case the same constituents combined in exactly the same way, and so the theory would be unable to distinguish what \( (9.2) \) says from what \( (9.3) \) says.

This type of problem is precisely the problem Russell was grappling with in a number of the unpublished manuscripts he was working on in 1904 and 1905. Two sorts of solutions to the problem come to mind. One
is to deny that there are any directly referring expressions for meanings; another is to introduce a device for distinguishing positions of occurrence, e.g., as denoting, or as being denoted. Russell, in the unpublished manuscripts, was attempting to work out the latter road.† And, of course, he had the well-known distinction between customary and indirect reference, and customary and indirect sense, from Frege as a step in that direction.‡ As I understand Russell, the problems he was going through in “On Denoting” were problems he thought would entangle this distinction of Frege’s. What needs to be shown to make this more plausible is a way of understanding Frege’s use of “that” that more clearly dovetails with Russell’s meaning quotes.

There are two possible readings of Frege’s “that”. On the one, “that” attaches to the verb of propositional attitude, so one “believes-that,” ‘says-that,” etc.. On the other, it attaches to the sentence commanded by “that,” so the expression following the propositional attitude verb is a detachable term that designates a thought. Russell, I believe, takes the second reading. So, for example, he would regard as a legitimate inference within the framework Frege erects about substitution and indirect reference:

John believes that every integer can be expressed as the sum of two primes.

that every integer can be expressed as the sum of two primes = Goldbach’s conjecture.

SO, John believes Goldbach’s conjecture.

But Russell’s meaning-quotes extend Frege’s “that” operator. Frege only used “that” in front of a sentence; Russell appears to be able to place his meaning-quotes around any expression whatsoever to designate the meaning of that expression. Can we find any basis in Frege’s theory for such an extension?

We can find some reason to allow “that” to operate on expressions other than declarative sentences. Frege held that declarative sentences fall into the same syntactic category as proper names and definite descriptions: all are Eigennamen. So, if “that snow is white” is coherent, it would seem, on theoretical grounds, expressions like “that the present King of France” and “that Bertrand Russell” should also be coherent. In each case, the expression following “that” shifts its reference to its

† Kaplan also suggests this (no doubt independent of Russell) as the way to respond to the problem. See...
‡ In the manuscripts, Russell had drawn a similar distinction between ‘entity occurrence’ and ‘meaning occurrence’. It was not as elegant as Frege’s and he was having great difficulty with it. I should explain why he was having that difficulty.
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ordinary sense. I can point to no text in which Frege uses "that" in this manner. I can also point to no text in which Frege explicitly prohibits such a use. We cannot rely on intuitions about grammaticality to decide the issue. For, there are good theoretical grounds for supposing it to be meaningful, and, as we all know, Frege frequently allowed theoretical pressures to prevail over common sense. So, this extension of Frege's "that" operator is not implausible, and it gives it something of the flavor of a quotation-type device.

But there are deeper reasons why Russell might treat "that" as a quotation-type device. Frege held that when a sentence occurs inside a that-clause, the sentence shifts its reference so that it refers, not to its customary reference, but to its customary sense. Let us use \( r_i \) for "indirect reference" and \( \theta \) for "that". Frege characterizes the indirect reference of an expression as that which the expression refers to inside a that-clause.

**Principle 9.5.1** \( r_i(t) = \theta(t) \)

He holds that indirect reference is compositional, i.e., that the indirect reference of the whole is the result of applying the indirect reference of the embedded function-expression to the indirect reference of the embedded argument-expression, i.e.,

**Principle 9.5.2** \( r_i(Fa) = [r_i(F)](r_i(a)) \)

He regarded the parts of a that-clause as detachable, subject to substitution, and so, in Russell's terminology, as designating their senses "in isolation." So, it is natural to impute to him the following principle:

**Principle 9.5.3** \( \theta(Fa) = [\theta(F)](\theta(a)) \)

What I have just suggested is not the only way to understand Frege's treatment of indirect reference and that-clauses. But it is a perfectly appropriate way of doing so. Indeed, Terry Parsons (1991) an informed reader of Frege, includes (9.5.1)-(9.5.3) among the principles in his formal reconstruction of Frege's account of indirect reference.‡

We have found, then, a device in Frege's own theory, that seems to do the work Russell's meaning-quotes are intended to do. "That" attaches to an expression to form a term that designates the sense of that expression.‡ Presumably, such expressions can replace ordinary names

† Tyler Burge, too, admits similar principles in Burge (1979a).
‡ There is a possible complication for Frege that I mention just to set it aside. When "that" attaches to a function-expression, it would seem to create a designator for
for propositions, as we replaced “Goldbach’s conjecture” by “that every number can be replaced by the sum of two primes” in the structure “John believes $\eta$”. And just as we can say that a sense is not a point in space, we can specify that the sense of the expression “the centre of mass of the Solar System” is not a point, or use our that-operator to say that that(centre of mass of the Solar System) is not a point. We have also found in Frege a construction that requires us to introduce senses in a seemingly direct way. That is, each of the following designates the same proposition, but each does so in a different way:

- the proposition that the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point
  - expression: (9.5)

- the proposition expressed by the sentence “The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point”
  - expression: (9.6)

- the proposition expressed by sentence (9.2) above
  - expression: (9.7)

The first is a rigid designator for the proposition, as opposed to the last, which is clearly nonrigid. But it also differs from the second in that it does not pick it out as having a property, that of being expressed by a certain sentence, which is clearly contingent. It appears to refer to the proposition rather directly, in the sense in which Kaplan has used the term. The demand for this directly referential introduction of senses is not something Russell has imposed on Frege for reasons internal to Russell’s peculiar theory: it is a demand set by Frege himself. And the tension is this requirement is immediate: for direct reference is not something Frege cottons to. We have also connected this particular way of introducing senses with Frege’s critical view that that-clauses are compositionally constructed. It is the rejection of this principle, I believe, that is the goal of Russell’s attack.

**Dummett’s Emendation of Frege**

**The Text**

Frege’s “$\theta$” operator has two peculiarities. First, it attaches to an expression, not to a name of an expression. Second, it is iterable in the a sense-function. And this means that the designator would have to be something other than an *Eigenname*. It is not clear whether Russell would go along with this. I don’t think we need face this issue here.
object language (unlike the way the philosopher’s single quotes are supposed to iterate: we can attach “θ” to “θ(θ)” to get “θ(θ(θ(θ))))”. The importance of this will become apparent below. In any event, where Russell uses his meaning-quotes, I will use “θ”. Russell introduces his meaning-quotes by contrasting the following two sentences:

\[ \text{The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point, not a denoting complex} \]
\[ \text{θ(The centre of mass of the Solar System) is a denoting complex, not a point.} \]

(9.8)

(9.9)

(This latter sentence corresponds to the one earlier using meaning quotes.) Both of these are supposed to be true, from which it follows that the two sentences,

\[ \text{The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point.} \]
\[ \text{θ(The centre of mass of the Solar System) is a point.} \]

(9.10)

(9.11)

must express different propositions.

The problem, he says, is, taking any denoting phrase, “C”, to clarify the relation between C and θ(9.5.3), i.e., to clarify the relation between the denotation of the term and the meaning of the term. And Russell then puts forth the following challenge:

Now the relation of meaning and denotation is not merely linguistic through the phrase: there must be a logical relation involved, which we express by saying that the meaning denotes the denotation. But the difficulty which confronts us is that we cannot succeed in both preserving the connexion of meaning and denotation and preventing them from being one and the same . . . . (Russell (1905b), p. 49)

Here is how I translate the challenge. How does “θ(t)” denote the meaning of “t”? Is it directly referential, i.e., does it have denotation but no meaning? Frege, as we all know, rules this out.† Then it must have a meaning and a denotation. What is the meaning of this expression? Is it a logically complex expression such that the meaning of the whole is a function of the part? If there is such a logical connection, he claims,

† See Chapter 1, Section 4 of Quine (1951)
† Or, as Russell says, “the meaning cannot be got at except by means of denoting phrases.” (Russell (1905b), p. 49)
the distinction between meaning and denotation collapses. If there is no such logical connection, then the compositional story Frege tells about the connection between the meaning of the whole and the meaning of the part is false. In either event, the theory that leads to such constructions must be rejected. It is the attempts to get out of this fatal dilemma, as I understand him, that lead to the “inextricable tangle.” The obvious point of rejection is the compositional account of indirect reference.

Let’s pick up the text at this point. The problem is to say something intelligent about “θ(9.5.3).” How are we to understand this construction where the expression ‘C’ itself occurs? When “C” itself occurs in a phrase, the phrase is about its denotation. So, the expression “the meaning of C” designates the meaning, if anything, of the denotation of “C”. It cannot be, then, that “C” can be understood to be operating in this fashion in “θ(9.5.3)”.

† Suppose we had a similar device “δ” which attached to an expression so that the whole designated the denotation of the expression. How would we understand “δ(9.5.3)”?

† This, I think, is what he means by saying that “the relation of meaning and denotation is not merely linguistic through the phrase.”
Nevertheless, whenever $C$ occurs without inverted commas, what is said is not true of the meaning, but only of the denotation, as when we say: The centre of mass of the solar system is a point. Thus to speak about $C$ itself, i.e., to make a proposition about the meaning, our subject must not be $C$, but something which denotes $C$. (p. 50)

Correct. If we are to suppose that the expression inside the scope of “$\theta$” is standing for its meaning, then we shall need a meaning to designate it. This is straight Frege. He said that when an expression occurs inside a that-clause, it stands for its customary sense, but it expresses its indirect sense. Continuing:

Thus ‘$\theta(9.5.3)$’, which is what we use when we want to speak of the meaning, must be not the meaning, but something which denotes the meaning. And $C$ must not be a constituent of this complex (as it is of ‘the meaning of $C$’); for if $C$ occurs in the complex, it will be its denotation, not its meaning, that will occur, and there is no backward road from denotations to meanings, because every object can be denoted by an infinite number of different denoting phrases. (p. 50)

Now this is obscure. Our problem is to construct an argument out of this clear expression of exasperation with Frege’s distinction. Russell just can’t put together what Frege is up to with that-clauses. This is what I will try now.

Let’s suppose that Frege could regard “$\theta(9.5.3)$” as a complex expression whose reference is a function of the reference of its parts. Then we would have to take the occurrence of ‘$C$’ in that complex as designating its meaning (i.e., customary sense). But, if the sentence containing “$\theta(9.5.3)$” is about the meaning of ‘$C$’, then the proposition expressed must contain a meaning that (in Frege’s word) presents that meaning. (Frege called this the indirect sense. What is that meaning?)

Note that if Russell were confused about Frege’s position, if he had failed to distinguish between a sense “occurring in” a proposition and its being “referred to” in a proposition—as Searle charges—Russell would never have asked this question. He is not confused at all on this point!

Could the meaning of “$\theta(9.5.3)$” be the same as the meaning of “$C$”? In Frege’s terms, could the indirect sense be the same as the customary sense? No, for then the distinction would collapse. Russell does not argue for this point, though I strongly suspect that he believes that it does, for this would constitute the answer to one of the alternatives he sets out at the beginning of the passage. And, although Russell does not supply an argument here, we can construct one rather readily. The
9.5 Hylton’s Interpretation

assumption that the indirect sense is the same as the customary sense is expressed by the following principle:

**Principle 9.5.4** \( \theta(\theta(t)) = \theta(t) \)

We can now show that (9.4) and (9.5) express the very same proposition.

I take the following to be a truism:

“The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point” expresses (9.12)

\[ \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point}). \]

The following is also a truism:

“\( \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System}) \) is a point” expresses \( \theta \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System}) \) is a point). (9.13)

From (9.5.2), we have

\[ \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point}) = \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System}) \theta(\text{is a point}) \]

(9.14)

From which it follows, substituting in (9.7),

“The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point” expresses (9.15)

\[ \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System}) \theta(\text{is a point}). \]

Now, also by (9.5.2), we have

\[ \theta(\theta(\text{The centre of mass of the Solar System}) \text{ is a point}) = \theta(\theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System})) \theta(\text{is a point}). \]

(9.16)

And, by (9.5.4), we know

\[ \theta(\theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System})) = \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System}) \]

(9.17)

Substituting in (9.11), we get

\[ \theta(\theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System}) \text{ is a point}) = \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System}) \theta(\text{is a point}). \]

(9.18)

“\( \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System}) \) is a point” expresses \( \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System}) \theta(\text{is a point}). \)
Russell's Theory of Descriptions

From (9.10) and (9.14), it is evident that (9.4) and (9.5) express the very proposition. The full collapse of the distinction drops out rather quickly. From (9.5.4), we have that

\[
\theta(\theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point})) = \theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point}).
\]

It follows, on Frege’s account of oblique contexts, that

\[
\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point (9.21)}
\]

and

\[
\theta(\text{the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point}) (9.22)
\]

must have the same customary sense; and since they have the same customary sense, they must also have the same customary reference. But the customary reference of (9.16) is a truth value and the customary reference of (9.17) is a thought.

Clearly, then, (9.5.4) must be rejected: the meaning of “\(\theta(t)\)” must be distinct from its denotation.† But, then, what is the meaning of “\(\theta(t)\)”?

If we tried to regard \(\theta(\text{theta}(t))\)” as a complex expression, whose denotation is a function of the denotation of its parts, then we have evident difficulties. How can we be assured that it is a functional relation? After all, there is, as Russell tells us, “no backward road from denotations to meanings”; and yet it is just such a road we are trying to pave. Indeed, if we suppose that, inside the scope of the “\(\theta\)” operator, a term is standing for its meaning, then since “\(\theta(t)\)” stands for the same thing, then the “\(\theta\)” operator would seem to be the identify function, and we get (9.5.4) again, collapsing the distinction.‡ If it’s not the identity operator, then it would seem that “\(t\)” is not standing for its meaning in “\(\theta(t)\)”, then it is standing for its denotation, and we have already seen the difficulties this leads to. Finally, if it is standing for the denotation, and we regard this as a functional relation, then we shall be forced into a backward road from denotations to senses, which runs contrary to the picture Frege held of the relation. What can the indirect sense be? It is a mystery what to say about this. Although it must be different, Frege has given

† “Thus,” Russell says, “it would seem that ‘C’ and C are different entities, such that ‘C’ denotes C.” (p. 50)

us no machinery to make any sense out of this difference. So, Russell concludes

This is an inextricable tangle, and seems to prove that the whole distinction of meaning and denotation has been wrongly conceived.

This seems to me to be just the right sort of criticism of Frege’s treatment of indirect reference. It is just the type of criticism many have subsequently levelled, opting for various types of emendations of the theory that would avoid these terrible alternatives. Russell apparently holds out no hope for a successful outcome: he thinks its is an “inextricable tangle” and will have none of it. His response is to give up Frege’s two-tier solution to the puzzle about identity, which defends compositionality at the level of reference and the level of sense. Frege cannot defend compositionality at the level of sense. Principles (9.5.2) and (9.5.3) must be rejected. A denoting complex does not occupy a replaceable part of the proposition, and a denoting phrase does not occupy a replaceable part of the sentence in which it occurs. “According to the view which I advocate,” Russell says, “a denoting phrase is essentially part of a sentence, and does not, like most single words, have any significance on its own.” (p.51)

Conclusion
I have tried in this essay to make sense of the notoriously difficult, some say ‘incomprehensible’, passage in “On Denoting” in which Russell sets forth his criticism of Frege’s Sense/Reference Distinction. The orthodox reading of this passage has been highly problematic. It takes Russell to have insinuated his own directly referential conception of names into Frege’s own indirectly referential conception, indicating a confusion on his part, and confirmed by his problematic use of quotation devices symptomatic of use/mention confusion. I have urged that although Russell did believe that some terms were directly referential, he was not confused one iota about Frege’s view on this matter. His view, however, is that Frege’s theory foundered on an analysis of sentences in which senses—and more generally propositions—were themselves talked about, and he posed for Frege a dilemma: either the terms are not directly referential, in which case there is either an infinite hierarchy

† It is perhaps worth remarking that this idea of having meaning in context is an essential part of Dummett’s own emendation of Frege’s theory. I discuss his emendation at length in Mendelsohn (1996).
making the whole thing mysterious, or there is a functional relation, in
which case the distinction collapses, or the terms are directly referential,
in which case the distinction collapses. So, the theory either collapses,
or leaves the relation between sense to reference a mystery in the crucial
situation where senses are themselves referred to. His own theory of
descriptions, with the issue of primary and secondary occurrence now
being given much greater prominence, is offered in its stead. Whether
Russell had identified all the particulars of the argument I have filled out
is highly questionable. But he did believe there was a problem here—
and inextricable tangle—and I have tried merely to identify the various
strands of the tangle. So, like a grandmaster who sees with brilliance
and experience that a line will fail, Russell attacks Frege; I am just a
patzer, detailing the errors Russell saw in a stroke.

9.6 Russell’s Theory of Denoting Expressions

9.7 Existence Claims

Singular existence claims pose a significant problem for the view that
‘exists’ is a first order predicate. For the view is widely believed to entail
that ‘Neptune exists’, if meaningful at all, expresses a necessary truth,
or perhaps a trivial truth, but certainly not a substantial astronomical
discovery. Frege thought so. Russell did too. This belief, however, seems
to me to be incorrect, and Russell’s strategy of analyzing an apparent
subject expression as a deep structure predicate construction can be
extended to show this. The view that ‘exists’ is a legitimate first order
predicate can be maintained, so long as we deny that the ‘grammatical’
subject of an informative singular existence claim is also its ‘logical’
subject. Free Logic seems to challenge this position, for it purports to
treat a singular existential claim as a subject/predicate structure of the
form $F_a$. This treatment is only an illusion, however, and I will show
how the Russellian analysis can be extended further to show it to be a
notational illusion.

Quine on Existence

Recall Quine’s well-known opening paragraph in ‘On What There Is’:
A curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity. It can be
put in three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: ‘What is there?’ It can be answered,
moreover, in a word—‘Everything’—and everyone will accept this answer as true.
However, this is merely to say that there is what there is. There remains
This passage is puzzling because Quine provides for no intelligible utterance of the incontestable

Everything exists.  \( (9.23) \)

There is not the slightest hint that ‘exists’ is a first order predicate. To the contrary, Quine apparently embraces Russell’s view that existence is expressed by the quantifiers: to say that Fs exists is to say there are Fs. And, since the quantifier must translate the indefinite pronoun ‘everything’ in \( (9.23) \), there appears to be no viable way of capturing ‘exists’.

The intelligibility of \( (9.23) \) demands that ‘exists’ be treated as a first order predicate. Let’s do so. Let’s introduce the existence predicate into first order logic along with an axiom assuring us that everything exists:

\[
(\forall x) \Sigma x \tag{9.24}
\]

‘\( \Sigma x \)’ is the universal predicate, true of each and every element of the domain; its extension is, therefore, the domain itself. \( (9.24) \) is our symbolic translation of \( (9.23) \), and the vacuity of \( (9.23) \) is reproduced in \( (9.24) \)’s being a logical truth.†

The disagreement over cases is handled as Quine always did, with a little extra added for our new predicate. General existence claims are handled easily. ‘Achaeans exist’ goes in as ‘\( (\exists x)(Ax \land \Sigma x) \)’ or, in the logically equivalent but more usual, ‘\( (\exists x)Ax \)’. ‘Achaeans do not exist’ goes in as ‘\( \neg(\exists x)(Ax \land \Sigma x) \)’, or just ‘\( \neg(\exists x)Ax \)’. To be sure, we have the resources to handle such assertions without the additional existence predicate; nonetheless, the incorporation of the existence predicate leads to no logical incoherence, as has been widely supposed.

Singular existence claims are handled in an analogous way. The standard way of saying that Achaeans exist is to say that there are such things as Achaeans; saying that Odysseus exists is to say that there is such a thing as Odysseus. This is, of course, Quine’s procedure in analyzing proper names as Russellian descriptions. He takes

\[
\text{Odysseus exists} \tag{9.25}
\]


† Note that this would be true even in the empty domain.
Russell's Theory of Descriptions

to be \( (\exists x)(\forall y)(x = y \supset ox) \). We need only a minimal modification of Quine’s analysis to include the predicate ‘\( \Sigma x \)’.

Russell treated a statement of the form *The \( \phi \) is \( \psi \) as a conjunction:* (a) there exists something that is \( \phi \) and (b) there exists at most one thing that is \( \phi \) and (c) whatever is \( \phi \) is \( \psi \). Since he believed that existence is not a first order property, existence claims were handled differently. Clause (c) was dropped, so *The \( \phi \) exists* becomes: (a) There exists something that is \( \phi \) and (b) there exists at most one thing that is \( \phi \). ‘The present King of France exists’ be comes ‘One and only one thing is presently King of France’; and, by analogy, (9.25) becomes ‘One and only one thing is Odysseus’. There is no need, however, to treat existence claims differently. They too can be analyzed to be of the form *The \( \phi \) is \( \psi \).* (9.25) can go in as ‘One and only one thing is Odysseus and exists’.

‘Odysseus does not exist’, like other complex constructions containing descriptive phrases, exhibits a *scope* ambiguity. With the name given large scope, we have the (logically) false

\[
\text{One and only one thing is Odysseus and does not exist; } \quad (9.26)
\]

with the name given small scope, we have the (as a matter of fact) true,

\[
\text{It is not the case both that one and only one thing is Odysseus and exists. } \quad (9.27)
\]

The latter provides for our ability to ‘deny the existence of individuals.’

So, with only a minor modification in Quine’s thesis, we can treat ‘exists’ as a first order predicate without encountering the problems usually thought to stand in the way. We find that the existence predicate is redundant in all but indefinite existence claims—everything exists, something exists, nothing exists—i.e., existence claims which require the quantifier to translate the indefinite pronoun.

### Why ‘Exists’ Is Not a Predicate

Why have philosophers been so blind to the obvious construction we have just given? Perhaps the most serious philosophical obstacle to the view that existence is a property of objects is a problem we have alluded to already, namely, the ancient *Paradox of NonBeing*. The upshot of the puzzle is this. Since we can only refer to things that exist, if we take singular existential claims to be of subject/predicate form—where the
subject stands for something and the predicate says something about that which the subject stands—then all positive claims of existence turn out to be trivially true (if meaningful) and all negative claims of existence turn out to be trivially false (if meaningful). The modern Deflationist response, which we associate most closely with the ideas of Russell and Frege, is to treat the argument as a reductio of the claim that existential claims are of subject/predicate form: there is nothing that fails to exist, and so there is nothing to refer to in so claiming.

The Deflationist reductio entitles us to conclude that it cannot be the case both that ‘Odysseus’ is the subject of the assertion and that ‘exists’ is the predicate. The received view, however, infers something stronger, namely, that ‘Odysseus’ is not the subject and ‘exists’ is not the predicate. This conclusion is unwarranted: from \(\neg(P \land Q)\) we cannot infer \(\neg P \land \neg Q\). Let us look at the four possible analyses of (9.25):

(a) ‘Odysseus’ is subject; ‘exists’ is predicate.
(b) ‘Odysseus’ is subject; ‘exists’ is not predicate.
(c) ‘Odysseus’ is not subject; ‘exists’ is predicate.
(d) ‘Odysseus’ is not subject; ‘exists’ is not predicate.

The reductio only eliminates (a). (b) has no plausibility, so it too can be eliminated. This leaves (c) and (d). So, ‘Odysseus’ cannot be the subject of (9.25), whether it is true or false that ‘exists’ is the predicate. If there is some reason for rejecting ‘exists’ as a predicate, it must be found elsewhere.

The Paradox of NonBeing therefore does not speak directly to the issue of whether ‘exists’ is a predicate, and to that extent, it actually gives us little guidance on this controversial issue. Unfortunately, philosophers have constructed a confusing synergy between The Paradox of NonBeing and the Ontological Argument for God’s Existence. There is a widely entrenched belief that, to avoid the result of the Ontological Argument, one must deny that existence is a property of objects. The Paradox of NonBeing has been viewed as confirming the logical correctness of this view and taking it one step further. Indeed, it has become standard to argue that ‘Odysseus’ cannot be the subject of (9.25) because ‘exists’ is not the predicate. Here is Ryle in ‘Systematically Misleading Expressions’ making precisely this connection:

Since Kant, we have, most of us, paid lip service to the doctrine that ‘existence is not a quality’ and so we have rejected the pseudo-implication of the ontological argument: ‘God is perfect, being perfect entails being existent,
God exists.’ For if existence is not a quality, it is not the sort of thing that can be entailed by a quality.

But until fairly recently it was not noticed that if in ‘God exists’ ‘exists’ is not a predicate (save in grammar), then in the same statement ‘God’ cannot be (save in grammar) the subject of predication. The realization of this came from examining negative existential propositions like ‘Satan does not exist’ or ‘Unicorns are non-existent’. If there is no Satan, then the statement ‘Satan does not exist’ cannot be about Satan in the way in which ‘I am sleepy’ is about me. Despite appearances the word ‘Satan’ cannot be signifying a subject of attributes.

Accordingly, as the view that ‘exists’ is not a predicate was slowly eroded, and since this was perceived as being the reason for denying that the ostensible subject of an existential claim was the real or logical subject of the claim, so it appeared to some that no philosophical reason stood in the way of holding that (9.25), although false, could be conceived of as a straightforward subject/predicate statement. This is explicitly Jaakko Hintikka’s motivation for the development of Free Logic:

It may be objected that any such formalization [of ‘a exists’] will involve the illicit assumption that ‘existence is not a predicate’. Fortunately, in a recent note by Salmon and Nakhnikian the standard prima facie objections to treating ‘existence as a predicate’ have been effectively disposed of. Whether deeper interpretational objections are forthcoming or not, none have been put forward so far; and I doubt very much whether they would at all affect the substance of what we are saying here.

... Thus there can be no objection to an attempt to find a formal counterpart to the phrase ‘a exists’.

The shakiness of Hintikka’s philosophical underpinnings for Free Logic are evident. He has focused on the wrong philosophical problem: the classical argument itself requires that ‘Odysseus’ not be the subject of (9.25), and this must be so independent of the standard Deflationist view that ‘exists’ is not the predicate.

There is a second way in which the Deflationists have muddied the waters. Again, I quote from Ryle:

Take now an apparently singular subject as in ‘God exists’ or ‘Satan does not exist’. If the former analysis was right, then here too ‘God’ and ‘Satan’ are in fact, despite grammatical appearances, predicative expressions. That is to say, they are that element in the assertion that something has or lacks a specified character or set of characters by which the subject is being asserted to be characterized. ‘God exists’ must mean what is meant by ‘something, and one thing only, is omniscient, omnipotent and infinitely good’ (or whatever else are the characters summed in the compound character of being a god and the
only god). And ‘Satan does not exist’ must mean what is meant by ‘nothing is both devilish and alone in being devilish’, or perhaps ‘nothing is both devilish and called “Satan”’, or even ‘“Satan” is not the proper name of anything’. To put it roughly, ‘x exists’ and ‘x does not exist’ do not assert or deny that a given subject of attributes x has the attribute of existing, but assert or deny the attribute of being x-ish or being an x of something not named in the statement.

Ryle here gives expression to a deep-rooted prejudice that stems from some pronouncements of Frege and Russell to the effect that proper names—genuine proper names—cannot be predicates. For Ryle, such ostensible subjects as ‘God’ and ‘Satan’ are disguised descriptions, explained away via paraphrase. It is to this particular analysis of existential claims that Hintikka poses Free Logic as an alternative:

Hence such sentences as ‘Homer does not exist’ can be translated into our symbolism without any questionable interpretation of the proper name ‘Homer’ as a hidden description. If anybody should set up a chain of arguments in order to show the nonexistence of Homer, we could hope to translate it into our symbolism without too many clumsy circumlocutions. In this sense, the use of an expression for existence is not only possible but serves a purpose.

Now, Hintikka is certainly correct in questioning the procedure Russell had advocated, i.e., of regarding a proper name like ‘Odysseus’ as a disguised or truncated description. His skepticism about this treatment of names could be viewed as anticipating recent attacks on the ‘Frege/Russell Description Theory of Names.’ But this criticism of Russell’s treatment does not touch Quine’s. On Quine’s analysis, x is Odysseus is as much a predicate as is x is an Achaean, in the Fregean sense of an expression with a hole in it that can be filled by a proper name to form a sentence. Quine differs from Russell in that Russell holds that the name must be regarded as a complex, definable predicate while Quine does not. Russell thought that the name, since it is predicative, must connote a set of properties that picks out the individual uniquely; but this plays no part in Quine’s thinking. I actually prefer Quine’s view, since his highlights that the burden of the uniqueness of the denotation of a proper name is carried by one of the clauses in the formal logical analysis. At any rate, we have determined that there is no philosophical nor any logical problem in taking ‘exists’ as a first order predicate. The next step is to see what is going on in Free Logic.
9.8 Descriptions

Frege (1879) recognized the importance of proving identities in mathematics. He justified including the identity sign among his logical connectives for just this purpose. However, Frege (1879) proposed no machinery for proving these interesting identities. And none was included when Frege (1892) presented and defended the sense/reference distinction. We had to wait for Frege (1893) to introduce a definite description operator.

Frege (1893) adopted the following constraints:

**Law of Excluded Middle**  Every proposition is either true or false

and

**Law of Negation**  A proposition \( p \) and its negation \( \neg p \) have different truth values

And his account of truth looks like this:\*†

**Frege’s Account of Truth**  A sentence of the form \( \varphi(\alpha) \) is true iff the object denoted by the *Eigenname* \( \alpha \) falls under the concept denoted by the *Funktionsname* \( \varphi(x) \)

An *Eigenname*—literally, proper name—is any singular term that denotes an object. Frege acknowledged that a proper name might have a sense and no denotation, and in that case, he argued, a declarative sentence containing that name would express a thought but lack a truth value. But this occurs mostly in artistic endeavors. But when scientific investigation is involved, truth value is essential, and declarative sentences that lack truth values were banned from Frege (1893). Given the connection between the denotation of the sentence and the denotation of the parts, that required, from his point of view, that every *Eigenname* in his system denote.

Now, if one and only one thing is \( F \), then clearly “the \( F \)” denotes that thing; and “\( G(\text{the } F) \)” will be true iff that thing falls under the concept denoted by “\( G(x) \)”. But what happens otherwise? What happens if nothing is \( F \) or if more than one thing is \( F \)? We have seen that Frege (1893) required that every *Eigenname* denoted, and so if he permitted the construction of a complex *Eigenname* like “the \( F \)”, he had to be assured that it denoted something. So, in the case that nothing is \( F \), he arbitrarily assigned the description a denotation:

**Frege’s Definite Description Operator**

† Obviously, more needs to be added for a more complete account of truth.
9.8 Descriptions

Case I: “The $F$” denotes $x$ if $x$ is the sole element of the set $\{x|Fx\}$;

Case II: “The $F$” denotes the set $\{x|Fx\}$ if $\{x|Fx\}$ contains no elements or more than one element.

It is instructive to contrast Frege’s views with the famous theory of descriptions put forward by Russell (1905b).

Russell (1905b) was committed to the same two principles mentioned above that Frege was committed to: *The Law of Excluded Middle* and *The Law of Negation*. And he also wanted an account of truth roughly in line with the one Frege held. Now, if there is one and only one thing that is $F$, Russell (1905b), like Frege, held that “the $F$” denotes that object,† and a sentence containing the description, e.g., “$G(\text{the } F)$”, will be true iff the object denoted by “the $F$” falls under the concept denoted by “$G(x)$”. So far, then, Russell is following Frege’s analysis rather closely.

The difference in the two accounts lies with the second case. Unlike Frege, who arbitrarily assigned an object as the denotation, Russell (1905b) held that the description failed to denote:

**Russell’s Definite Description Operator**

Case I: “The $F$” denotes $x$ if $x$ is the sole element of the set $\{x|Fx\}$;

Case II: “The $F$” does not denote anything otherwise.

Russell’s definite description operator, then, creates expressions for which the denotation (or interpretation) function is a *partially defined* function. But, remember, he required that every sentence containing a description—and that included cases where the description failed to denote—must have a truth value. Unlike Frege, then, who thought that compositionality required that a sentence lacked a reference (its truth value) when one of its parts lacked a reference, Russell wanted to hold that a sentence can have a truth value even when one of its parts lacked a reference. So he had to say something special in his account of truth to accommodate those cases when a part of the sentence lacked a truth value.

† This is not widely recognized. Indeed, we find frequent claims to the contrary. So I quote at length:

Thus if ‘$C$’ is a denoting phrase, it may happen that there is one entity $x$ (there cannot be more than one) for which the proposition ‘$x$ is identical with $C$’ is true, this proposition being interpreted as above. We may then say that the entity $x$ is the denotation of the phrase ‘$C$’. Thus Scott is the denotation of ‘the author of *Waverley*’. (Russell, 1905b: p. 51)
Let us introduce predicate-abstract notation from Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998b):

\( \langle \lambda x. \varphi(x) \rangle(a) \)

says that \( a \) has the property of being \( \varphi \), or alternatively, that it has the being \( \varphi \) property. The virtue of the notation is that it readily enables us to distinguish

\[
\langle \lambda x. \neg \varphi(x) \rangle(a) \quad (9.28)
\]

\[
\neg \langle \lambda x. \varphi(x) \rangle(a) \quad (9.29)
\]

(9.32) says of \( a \) that it has the being \( \neg \varphi \) property. (9.33), on the other hand, says that the proposition that \( a \) has the \( \varphi \) property is not so. These two will not differ (in a classical, i.e., nonmodal, context) unless \( a \) fails to denote. For if it denotes nothing, then it will not denote anything that has the \( \varphi \) property, and so (9.33) is true. But, again, if it denotes nothing, then it will not denote anything that has the property of not being \( \varphi \), so (9.32) is false. Adapting language from modal logic, we might speak of (9.32) as a de re attribution of a property to \( a \).

Then, keeping the Fregean terminology as much as possible to highlight the similarities and differences in the views, we can characterize Russell’s story about truth as follows:

**Russell’s Account of Truth**

- If an Eigenname \( \alpha \) denotes, then a sentence of the form \( \varphi(\alpha) \) is true iff the object denoted by the Eigenname \( \alpha \) falls under the concept denoted by the Funktionsname \( \varphi(x) \);
- if the Eigenname \( \alpha \) fails to denote, then every de re attribution of a property to what \( \alpha \) denotes is false.

It is not clear to me which of the two treatments of definite descriptions, Frege’s or Russell’s, better captures our ordinary intuitions about definite descriptions. Consider, for example, the following two sentences:

\[
G. \text{Washington’s eldest son} = W. \text{Clinton’s eldest son} \quad (9.30)
\]

\[
G. \text{Washington’s eldest son} = G. \text{Washington’s eldest son} \quad (9.31)
\]

My own belief is that (9.34) is false and that (9.35) is true. Frege and Russell come out with different evaluations because of the different way in which they handle nondonating singular terms. On Frege’s account, every nondonating singular term arbitrarily designates the empty set, so (9.34) and (9.35) are both true. On Russell’s account, every de re
attribution involving a non-designating singular term is false, so (9.34) and (9.35) are both false. In evaluating the two approaches, I don’t put much store on which one more accurately predicts linguistic usage. This was not the spirit nor the theoretical framework in which the two accounts were put forward.

However, I do find Russell’s theory a good deal more intriguing, and largely because of the introduction of the scope distinction which has proved so fruitful in understanding other logical phenomena, especially, in recent times, the role of singular terms in modal contexts. It is important to recognize that the scope distinction is a vital and intrinsic component of the theory, not an afterthought. For the critical difference between Russell and Frege, both of whom sought to maintain the classical logic principles that every proposition is either true or false, and that a proposition is true iff its negation is false. Frege preserved these principles by arbitrarily assigning a denotation when none satisfied the description. By allowing singular terms only partial denotation, Russell preserved these principles by manipulating compositionality via the scope distinction.

The scope distinction is a marvelous technical solution to the problem. Of course, by presenting the Russell solution in this manner, I have undercut much of the rhetoric about the theory that we find in the literature. In particular, and most strikingly, the well-known view that Russell did not regard definite descriptions as genuine singular terms but more in the way of quantifiers. And, as a corollary, that grammatical structure is not a good guide to logical structure. Neither of these seem particularly well-founded. I am aware of the rhetoric, Russell’s and others, but basically, on the Russell treatment seem to act pretty much like other singular terms. Or again, there is the well-known view that, according to Russell, definite descriptions, unlike proper names, lacked meaning in isolation. This is his so-called contextual definition of definite descriptions. Neither of these claims has anything to do with logic. Finally, there is the matter about sentences involving proper names expressing object dependent thoughts and sentences involving definite descriptions expressing object independent thoughts. I find this to be quite incoherent. But, the message I want to bring forward to you right now is that Russell’s is a marvelous technical solution to a technical problem, introducing us to the wonders of scope distinctions. The great philosophical wonders of the account are extraneous, and, as you might begin to suspect, nonexistent. But hose are the ones I want to explore. They are really independent of what we have discussed so far.
9.9 Names

In this section, we would like to take another look at one of the larger issues that occupied philosophers in the century, and that is the connection between names and descriptions. Quine has shown that names are eliminable in favor of descriptions. We don’t need them. Instead of saying \( F_a \), we say \((\exists x)(ax \land (\forall y)(ay \supset x = y) \land Fx)\). In this way, names are replaced by descriptions with artificially constructed predicates. We still have a distinction for names, as we did for descriptions in general:

1. “The pegasizer flies” expresses the proposition that one and only one thing pegasizes and it flies.

2. One and only one thing pegasizes and “the pegasizer flies” expresses the proposition that it flies.

It is quite clear that (1) and (2) are distinct, for, in particular, if it is false that one and only one thing pegasizes (2) must be false, but (1) need not. This difference is dictated by whether the existence and uniqueness claims are part of the proposition expressed or not. And that remains whether we have a name or a description.

But suppose that it exists. Then there might still be a difference. The issue is whether “pegasizer” varies from circumstance to circumstance.

Some notes. It seems to me that many of the examples Kripke uses in NN depend on the fact that a name is “in play” already, like Feinman, Gellman. The assumption is that it is a name, and one uses it to refer to whoever, even though one cannot pick it out. One needs to know it is a name, and so assigned to an individual. Of course, the assignment takes place within some framework of being able to identify the object named. So, a way of understanding the difference is that, de re, one assumes the name is set, or sets it for the circumstance; de dicto, whoever it is. Note that this “whoever it is” is ambiguous. This takes care of Kripke and Kaplan. What about Mill? The issue is what relation any of this has to do with meaning? Answer, nothing. That is the story to tell.

Look, the point is this: the two schemes are different. In the one scheme, we are referring to something that was identified outside the proposition; in the other scheme, the information for identifying the individual is inside the proposition. The claim is that the individual itself exhausts the information conveyed by the word, so any other name for the same individual will do.

But the idea that the individual exhausts the information conveyed is not so. Think of the individual itself. How old is that individual? Etc. The answer is that it cannot be the individual itself, as we know
it, but some logical construction. One way of taking it is as a function from worlds to things, and, the things in the worlds are different but the function is the same. That is the difference one gets.

9.10 Strawson’s Attack on Russell

Strawson (1950) fired the opening salvo in a battle between the friends of formalism and the friends of ordinary language. Russell missed the way in which we ordinarily use definite descriptions in everyday life. This is the charge that Strawson hurled.

There are three interlocking distinctions Strawson drew. First, he distinguished between a sentence and the statement it is used to make. Second, he urged that it we (individuals) who refer, not words. Third, he claimed that the existence of a referent for a definite description is presupposed, not entailed.

Strawson claimed that it is we who refer, not our words. This became something of a mantra: ?, for example, said that it is odd to even suppose that words refer. “The present King of France,” Strawson urged, does not itself refer to anything; but at various times in the past, people have used the expression to refer to various individuals. But this example, along with all the others Strawson exhibited, turned on indexical components. So, if these indices were bound by features of context, then there is no reason to suggest that it is we rather than our words that refer. Although catchy, this is a nonissue.

But the sentence/statement distinction is most important. For, with the notion of a statement we have a context in which to embed the sentence. And this presents us with a reading on which “the statement that the F is G” presupposes the existence of an F, but does not entail it. This matches the wide scope reading that we identified as Scheme (A): the identification of the referent is not part of the proposition expressed but is carried out anterior to the proposition itself. The pronoun in the proposition carries the reference back to an anteriorly identified object, and if that object does not exist, i.e., if there is no antecedent for the pronoun to pick up, then there is no interest in continuing with the statement.

What is so nice about the Scheme (A) reading is that it so closely captures Strawson’s observations.
Russell’s Theory of Descriptions

9.11 Introduction

Frege (1879) recognized the importance of proving identities in mathematics. He justified including the identity sign among his logical connectives for just this purpose. However, Frege (1879) proposed no machinery for proving these interesting identities. And none was included when Frege (1893) presented and defended the sense/reference distinction. We had to wait for Frege (1893) to introduce a definite description operator.

Frege (1893) adopted the following constraints:

**Law of Excluded Middle** Every proposition is either true or false

and

**Law of Negation** A proposition \( p \) and its negation \( \neg p \) have different truth values

And his account of truth looks like this:

Frege’s Account of Truth

A sentence of the form \( \varphi(\alpha) \) is true iff the object denoted by the *Eigenname* \( \alpha \) falls under the concept denoted by the *Funktionsname* \( \varphi(x) \)

An *Eigenname*—literally, proper name—is any singular term that denotes an object. Frege acknowledged that a proper name might have a sense and no denotation, and in that case, he argued, a declarative sentence containing that name would express a thought but lack a truth value. But this occurs mostly in artistic endeavors. But when scientific investigation is involved, truth value is essential, and declarative sentences that lack truth values were banned from Frege (1893). Given the connection between the denotation of the sentence and the denotation of the parts, that required, from his point of view, that every *Eigenname* in his system denote.

Now, if one and only one thing is \( F \), then clearly “the \( F \)” denotes that thing; and “\( G \) (the \( F \))” will be true iff that thing falls under the concept denoted by “\( G(x) \)”. But what happens otherwise? What happens if nothing is \( F \) or if more than one thing is \( F \). We have seen that Frege (1893) required that every *Eigenname* denoted, and so if he permitted the construction of a complex *Eigenname* like “the \( F \)”’, he had to be assured that it denoted something. So, in the case that nothing is \( F \), he arbitrarily assigned the description a denotation:

Frege’s Definite Description Operator

† Obviously, more needs to be added for a more complete account of truth.
9.11 Introduction

Case I: “The $F$” denotes $x$ if $x$ is the sole element of the set $\{x | Fx\}$;
Case II: “The $F$” denotes the set $\{x | Fx\}$ if $\{x | Fx\}$ contains no elements or more than one element.

It is instructive to contrast Frege’s views with the famous theory of descriptions put forward by Russell (1905b).

Russell (1905b) was committed to the same two principles mentioned above that Frege was committed to: The Law of Excluded Middle and The Law of Negation. And he also wanted an account of truth roughly in line with the one Frege held. Now, if there is one and only one thing that is $F$, Russell (1905b), like Frege, held that “the $F$” denotes that object,† and a sentence containing the description, e.g., “$G($the $F$)”, will be true iff the object denoted by “the $F$” falls under the concept denoted by “$G(x)$”. So far, then, Russell is following Frege’s analysis rather closely.

The difference in the two accounts lies with the second case. Unlike Frege, who arbitrarily assigned an object as the denotation, Russell (1905b) held that the description failed to denote:

Russell’s Definite Description Operator

Case I: “The $F$” denotes $x$ if $x$ is the sole element of the set $\{x | Fx\}$;
Case II: “The $F$” does not denote anything otherwise .

Russell’s definite description operator, then, creates expressions for which the denotation (or interpretation) function is a partially defined function. But, remember, he required that every sentence containing a description—and that included cases where the description failed to denote—must have a truth value. Unlike Frege, then, who thought that compositionality required that a sentence lacked a reference (its truth value) when one of its parts lacked a reference, Russell wanted to hold that a sentence can have a truth value even when one of its parts lacked a reference. So he had to say something special in his account of truth to accommodate those cases when a part of the sentence lacked a truth value.

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(9.32) says of \( a \) that it has the being \( \neg \varphi \) property. (9.33), on the other hand, says that the proposition that \( a \) has the \( \varphi \) property is not so. These two will not differ (in a classical, i.e., nonmodal, context) unless \( a \) fails to denote. For if it denotes nothing, then it will not denote anything that has the \( \varphi \) property, and so (9.33) is true. But, again, if it denotes nothing, then it will not denote anything that has the property of not being \( \varphi \), so (9.32) is false. Adapting language from modal logic, we might speak of (9.32) as a de re attribution of a property to \( a \).

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It is not clear to me which of the two treatments of definite descriptions, Frege’s or Russell’s, better captures our ordinary intuitions about definite descriptions. Consider, for example, the following two sentences:

G. Washington’s eldest son = W. Clinton’s eldest son \hspace{1cm} (9.34)

G. Washington’s eldest son = G. Washington’s eldest son \hspace{1cm} (9.35)

My own belief is that (9.34) is false and that (9.35) is true. Frege and Russell come out with different evaluations because of the different way in which they handle nondesignating singular terms. On Frege’s account, every nondesignating singular term arbitrarily designates the empty set, so (9.34) and (9.35) are both true. On Russell’s account, every de re attribution involving a nondesignating singular term is false, so (9.34)
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