

Notes et Discussions

An analysis of two accounts on the sense of singular terms*

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1. If frequency of citation bestows any stature on a work in philosophy, both Gottlob Frege's paper, "On sense and reference", and Bertrand Russell's paper, "On denoting", must rank high on the list of contributions in the philosophy of language. This stature, however, belies numerous difficulties critics have encountered in their attempts to understand either of these contributions. My paper is an attempt to address this problem. More specifically, through an analysis of Frege's arguments for the sense of linguistic expressions, particular singular terms, and an evaluation of Russell's major objection to Frege's views on the sense of singular terms, I shall attempt to throw some light on an issue that is central to both Frege's and Russell's philosophy of language. As I hope to demonstrate, Russell's attack on Frege is fundamentally flawed, based as it is on a convention for inverted commas that cannot adequately articulate Frege's suggestions on the sense of singular terms.

2. To begin with, let's consider Frege's view that signs, such as singular terms, have a sense. Briefly, what is his view, how did he arrive at it, and what is the linguistic convention he uses for talking about the entities he posits?

Section one: Frege's theory of sense, and the convention.

3. In his classic paper, "On sense and reference", Gottlob Frege made the bold suggestion that linguistic signs can be associated, or connected *both* with a reference and a sense¹.

* I thank Bill Schmitz, Dagfinn Føllesdal and an anonymous referee for their constructive responses to earlier versions of this paper.

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¹ I suggest that it is unclear whether or not Frege would allow a *non-linguistic* sign to have both a reference and a sense associated with it. He certainly allows for non-linguistic signs, as the middle section of the first paragraph of "On sense and reference" points out. But while he says these signs can have a *reference* — "Nobody can be forbidden to use any arbitrarily producible event or object as a sign for something" (Frege 57, my emphasis) — he says nothing, to my knowledge, about the possibility these signs have a *sense*. So while the sound of thunder, for instance, may be viewed as a sign of impending rain, it remains unclear whether or not the sound has a sense associated with it.

It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, letter), besides that to which the sign refers, which may be called the reference of the sign, also what I should like to call the *sense* of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained (Frege 57).

Now by 'sign' or 'name' Frege means (at least) any linguistic expression that is capable of referring to a specific object — where truth values are also viewed as objects. So for him, singular terms can be connected both with a reference — the definite object referred to by the singular term — and a sense — the mode of presentation of the reference through the sign.

4. However, Frege is not content with this. He goes further, and holds that it is by virtue of its sense that a singular term can refer to an object: "The sense of a proper name . . . serves to illuminate only a single aspect of the reference [of that proper name], supposing it to have one" (Frege, 58: my insert). Or as Russell later puts it, perhaps misleadingly for Frege, "the meaning [of a denoting phrase] denotes the denotation" (Russell 99)². Thus, for Frege, not only do singular terms possess sense, they depend on sense as the means for establishing a bond between language and (the objects in) the world. But how does Frege establish the existence of these (allegedly) important entities? Let's consider his arguments for the sense of singular terms.

5. Frege's justification for the thesis that singular terms have sense centers around the notion of equality or identity, and trades on certain problems that arise for two conceptions of identity sentences. To be more specific, as I understand it, Frege's argument for the sense of an expression proceeds along the following lines. Suppose that Sam asserts that Reagan is the president of the United States. This assertion raises a thorny philosophical question:

Q₁: How are we to view the sentence, "Reagan is the president of the United States" that Sam uses when making his assertion?

In "On sense and reference", Frege critically evaluates, and eventually rejects, two conceptions of identity sentences that could provide answers to this question. On the one hand, identity sentences can be viewed as expressions of a relationship 'between objects' (Frege 56). On the other hand, these sentences can be regarded as the means for proposing a relation 'between names or signs of objects' (Frege 56). For clarity of exposition, I shall refer to the first conception as the *object conception* of identity sentences, and call the second account of these sentences the *linguistic conception*. Consider Frege's response to the first view of identity sentences he dismisses: namely, the object conception. As we shall see, Frege views this as the less resilient of the two conceptions he evaluates.

6. There are two phases to Frege's objection to the view that an identity sentence is the expression of a relationship between objects. In the first place, Frege points out that not all identity sentences have the same cognitive value, to use his terminology. For instance, the assertion of the identity sentence,

S₁: "Reagan is the president of the United States",

for Frege, differs in its cognitive value from the following identity sentence,

S₂: "Reagan is Reagan".

² I say 'perhaps misleadingly' because it is not obvious that Frege would be happy with Russell's equivocation of meaning and Frege's sense.

While the second sentence is a trivial or empty sentence, the first is informative. In Frege's words,

... $a = a$ and $a = b$ are obviously statements of differing cognitive value; $a = a$ holds *a priori* and, according to Kant, is to be labelled analytic, while statements of the form $a = b$ often contain very valuable extensions of our knowledge, and cannot always be established *a priori* (Frege 56).

For convenience, I shall refer to this as 'the cognitive value thesis'. Now as Frege sees it, the first conception of identity sentences seems to violate this thesis. For the view that identity sentences express relations between objects, apparently entails that if a contingent identity sentence is true, there is no difference in cognitive value between that sentence and the other identity sentences that can be constructed wholly from either of the singular terms of the original sentence. As Frege sees it,

... if we were to regard equality as a relation between that which the names 'a' and 'b' designate, it would seem that $a = b$ could not differ from $a = a$ (i.e. provided $a = b$ is true) (Frege 56).

Thus suppose that the true contingent identity sentence in question is S_1 above. We can construct a few, syntactically different, identity sentences from this sentence. For instance, two identity sentences that can be constructed from the components of S_1 are the following:

S_2 : "Reagan is Reagan"

and

S_3 : "The president of the United States is the president of the United States".

Now sentence S_1 is true. In other words, the singular terms 'Reagan' and 'the president of the United States' do both refer to the same object. But if the object conception of identity sentences was true, there apparently would be no (presumably cognitive) difference between S_1 and the identity sentences S_2 and S_3 , because the components of these sentences would still have the same referent. But sentence S_1 differs in its cognitive value from sentences S_2 and S_3 . For while the first is contingent, and hence informative, sentences S_2 and S_3 are analytic i.e. *not* contingent, and thus necessarily different from S_1 in cognitive value. So the object conception of identity sentences does not appear to be sensitive to the fluctuations in the cognitive values of identity sentences when they undergo simple syntactic transmutations. This shortcoming, for Frege, constitutes a fundamental weakness of this conception of identity sentences. Does the second conception fare any better? Unfortunately not, thinks Frege. Let's consider his argument.

7. The alternative view of identity sentences that Frege evaluates — the linguistic conception, as I am calling it — focuses on the relationships that obtain between the (linguistic) components of identity sentences. On this view an identity sentence is to be regarded as a means for proposing a relationship 'between names or signs of objects' (Frege 56). For instance, when Sam asserts the sentence, "Reagan is the president of the United States", the linguistic conception of identity sentences deems this an assertion of a relationship between the singular terms 'Reagan' and 'the president of the United States'. That is to say, according to this account of identity sentences,

what is intended to be said by $a = b$ seems to be that the signs themselves would be under discussion; a relation between them would be asserted (Frege 56).

What then are the arguments for, and against this linguistic conception of identity sentences? Better, what has Frege to say on this view?

8. At the outset it must be stressed that Frege's objections to this conception are particularly condensed, and as I read them, even cryptic at times. So the interpretation that I shall present of his argument, at best, is only a tentative account of the discussion here. With this important preliminary remark behind us, as I see it, his argument appears to proceed as follows: suppose that the linguistic conception is true. In that case, assertions with identity sentences would be assertions about the (linguistic) relationships of the components of these sentences. But questions about these linguistic relationships arise only if the respective components of these sentences have references, suggests Frege. As he says,

this relation would hold between the names or signs only in so far as they named or designated something (Frege 56).

For example, if we learn that the singular term 'Reagan' has no reference, we immediately lose interest in the assertion, "Reagan is the president of the United States", and thus see no need to pursue questions on the (linguistic) relationship between 'Reagan' and 'the president of the United States'. But this requirement, that the singular terms of asserted identity sentences have references, can lead to untenable problems. To illustrate the difficulties, Frege asks us to consider the case of non-linguistic signs, such as events or objects.

9. Now there certainly are occasions where we use non-linguistic signs. As Frege correctly points out, "[n]obody can be forbidden to use any arbitrarily producible event or object as a sign for something" (Frege 57). To give but one example. Suppose that a group of hikers is lost in a canyon, but that these hikers happen to come across a local inhabitant, Peter, who knows the area well. As it turns out, nobody in the party has a map of the area. Nevertheless, thanks to Peter's knowledge of the area, he is able to sketch a map of the terrain in the sand. Using stones to represent some of the prominent geological formations in the canyon, Peter is able to indicate to the lost group of hikers where the nearest water-hole can be found. When Peter selects a particular white stone, call it stone_3 , and places it on his sand-map to point out the location of that water-hole, stone_3 is being used to *represent* that water-hole: stone_3 is thus functioning as 'a sign for something', namely, a particular water-hole. Now Frege uses his observation on the legitimacy of non-linguistic signs to generate a problem for the linguistic conception of identity sentences, and derivatively, to establish his thesis on the sense of singular terms. We need to look carefully at this, the final stage of the argument for his thesis.

10. When Peter tells the group of lost hikers that stone_3 on his sand-map represents the nearest water-hole, the asserted identity sentence

S_p : "Stone₃ is the nearest water-hole",

for Frege, is strictly speaking neither about the water-hole, nor the stone. On his view, sentence S_p is about *a relationship* between stone_3 and the nearest water-hole. That is to say, Frege would maintain that sentence S_p is not about the references of the expressions 'stone₃' and 'the nearest water-hole', but about the way in which the references of these two singular terms are now related to each other: stone_3 has become a means for standing for, or representing the nearest water-hole. And as far as Frege is concer-

ned, sentences like S_p 'express no proper knowledge' (Frege 57), for these sentences are not (directly) about some reference, but about the way in which a reference relates to some other reference. To quote Frege:

Nobody can be forbidden to use any arbitrarily producible event or object as a sign for something. In that case the sentence $a = b$ would no longer refer to the subject matter, but only to its mode of designation; we would express no proper knowledge by its means (Frege 57).

But if identity sentences like S_p — that are about the 'mode of designation' of various references, and not the references themselves — 'express no proper knowledge', can we conclude that these sentences express no knowledge at all, and by implication, that these sentences are useless? "No", suggests Frege. There *are* occasions where we want to use these sentences: 'in many cases this is just what we want to do' (Frege 57)³. But unfortunately, intimates Frege, the linguistic conception of identity sentences is unable to accommodate sentences like S_p , that (allegedly) contain less than the so-called proper knowledge that other identity sentences can contain. What is the justification for this move by Frege?

11. The argument that Frege uses against this leg of the linguistic conception of identity sentences appears to be a *reductio ad absurdum*. Suppose that we relied on this conception of identity sentences to interpret sentences like S_p . In that case, the focal point of our attention is the relationship between the singular terms of the identity sentence. For as Frege sees it, according to this conception, the assertion of an identity sentence simply is the expression of a relation 'between names or signs of objects' (Frege 56). As a consequence, the singular terms or signs, between which this relationship holds, are of secondary, if any importance. Thus it appears, if I have understood Frege's explication correctly, that the linguistic conception of identity sentences suggests that as long as the relationship between the signs remains constant, the signs themselves can be changed with others at will. More specifically, this view holds that the signs of an identity sentence can be exchanged without altering the cognitive value of the sentence. But this is not the case, counters Frege: alterations to certain identity sentences *do* effect the cognitive value of these sentences. In particular, where the singular terms of an identity sentence assume a *symbolic role* — i.e. where they function as signs, and not merely as marks — their replacement by other signs result in sentences that differ in cognitive value from the original identity sentence⁴. Take my example. Sentence S_p can be rewritten as

S_4 : "Stone₃ is stone₃"

or

S_5 : "The nearest water-hole is the nearest water hole".

³ Frege uses a geometrical example to show that there are occasions where identity sentences about the mode of designation of signs 'contain actual knowledge', and hence are useful (Frege 57). My example, that rests on Sentence S_p , makes the same point. (Perhaps a better translation of the German might be 'actually contains knowledge'?)

⁴ However, this need not be the case. Consider my example. Suppose that Peter later asserted, of the stones in his sand-map,

S_6 : "The stone that has a crack on it is the nearest-water hole",

and stone₃ is the only stone that has a crack on it. The singular term 'the stone that has a crack on it', would here clearly have the *same* role as 'Stone₃' in sentence S_p : namely, it would also be about the mode of designation of stone₃. So the cognitive value of sentence S_p and that of sentence S_6 — a sentence that relies on the *different* singular term, 'the stone that has a crack on it' — could be the same.

Now these derivative identity sentences are not nearly as informative to the lost hikers as sentence S_p ! A loss of informative content, if I may talk like this, that for Frege, is due to the fact that neither S_4 nor S_5 replicate the symbolic role the singular term 'stone₃' plays in sentence S_p . As neither of the derivative analytic sentences capture this symbolic role, the cognitive values of the three sentences vary. So, if we relied on the linguistic conception of identity sentences to interpret sentences like S_p , we would fail to detect the variations in the cognitive values of these sentences as they underwent basic syntactic alterations. From this Frege concludes that the linguistic conception of identity sentences is unacceptable.

12. Now the demise of the linguistic conception of identity sentences, given the earlier rejection of the object conception, for Frege, heralds the introduction of a third, more embracing view of linguistic expressions — a conception that both posits the existence of sense and stresses its importance. For the rejection of these two conceptions of identity sentences suggests that we adopt a view of language that entails that signs have sense:

It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, letter), besides that to which the sign refers, which may be called the reference of the sign, also what I should like to call the *sense* of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained (Frege 57).

In short, an alternative conception is required, because both the linguistic conception of identity sentences and the object conception fail to capture all of the ingredients that can be associated with singular terms. For it can be shown — as I have done with my discussion of sentences S_1 and S_p — that the cognitive value of a sentence is neither totally determined by the reference nor the relations of the singular term in the sentence: the mode of designation, or sense of the sign is also a factor that must be taken into account. As Frege says elsewhere, in one of his letters to Russell, '[t]he cognitive value therefore does not depend only on the reference (*Bedeutung*); the sense is just as essential. Without the latter we should have no knowledge at all' (Frege_a 164/5).

13. This then constitutes Frege's rather involved argument for a view of language that explicitly acknowledges that linguistic expressions, especially singular terms, have a sense — a thesis that has had an enormous impact on the philosophy of language. With this behind us, we are now in the position to critically evaluate an influential response to this thesis — namely, that of Bertrand Russell, in his paper "On denoting". As I hope to demonstrate, Russell's objections to the suggestion that singular terms have a sense are unacceptable, based as they are on certain fundamental shortcomings in his depiction of Frege's position. However, before we explore Russell's arguments against Frege, I briefly want to draw attention to a linguistic convention Frege suggests we use, in order to distinguish between reference, sense and the linguistic expression itself. As I shall argue later, the failure to comply with this convention constitutes the Achilles heel of Russell's assessment of Frege's views on sense.

14. Can one talk about all of these entities that Frege has introduced into his ontology? For Frege we can. To begin with, he maintains that we can use language to talk about, or refer to the *reference* of an expression or a singular term — simply use the expressions from our language in their normal way:

If words are used in the ordinary way, what one intends to speak of is their reference (Frege 58).

However, there are occasions where it's not the reference we are after, but either the *sense* associated with that word, or even the *word* itself. For Frege, both tasks can be accomplished as long as we use the appropriate devices relied on by a convention that he refers to:

It can also happen, however, that one wishes to talk about the words themselves or their sense. This happens, for instance, when the words of another are quoted. One's own words then first designate words of the other speaker, and only the latter have their usual reference. We then have signs of signs. *In writing, the words are in this case enclosed in quotation marks.* Accordingly, a word standing between quotation marks must not be taken as having its ordinary reference.

In order to speak of the sense of an expression 'A' one may simply use the phrase 'the sense of the expression "A"' (Frege 58/9; my emphasis).

So this convention — I think it would be misleading to call it Frege's convention — clearly *has* a procedure for talking about *each* of the three items that Frege is interested in; namely, the reference of a linguistic expression, its sense, *and the linguistic expression itself*. This will prove an important point later on in my paper, because Russell will object, contrary to Frege, as we shall see, that it is not possible to both claim that sense and reference are to be distinguished, and to claim that it is possible to talk about the sense of linguistic expressions, such as singular terms.

Section two: Russell's major objection to Frege's theory.

15. Russell is clearly concerned about Frege's postulation of a sense associated with the singular term, and his article "On denoting", in part at least, in an attempt to refute Frege's suggestion. What is Russell's strategy? For instance, does he attempt to show that Frege's argument for his thesis on sense is invalid, or perhaps unsound? Or does he highlight the unclarities endemic to this notion, as spelt out by Frege, and thereby conclude that his postulation of sense is ill-advised? We might have expected either of these moves from Russell, given the complexity of Frege's argument, and the obscurities surrounding the notion of *sense*, even with Frege's attempts at elucidating the concept. No, Russell does not follow either of these tacks — his is a different route. Or to be more precise, Russell follows neither the 'invalidity and unsoundness route', nor the 'obscurity route', if I may call them this, but pursues different routes in his attack on Frege's view on sense. What are they?

16. This question has proved a notoriously difficult one to answer⁵. With the result that responses to Russell's criticisms are far from uniform. However, what *is* clear is Russell's overriding objection to Frege's suggestion on sense — for him, this suggestion generates problems for its user. As he says,

⁵ It is important to remember that Russell objects to *two* components of Frege's views on singular terms i.e. he has objections to both the suggestion that singular terms have a sense, *and* the suggestion that these signs must have a reference. Russell is of the opinion that Frege's account of the reference of singular terms that (initially) lack a reference is artificial, and while it 'may not lead to actual logical error', 'it does not give an exact analysis of the matter' (Russell 98). It is Russell's attack on Frege's views on the *sense* of singular terms that concerns us here, and not his rejection of Frege's views on the reference of these denotationless signs.

The relation of the meaning to the denotation involves certain rather curious difficulties, which seem in themselves to prove that the theory which leads to such difficulties must be wrong (Russell 99).

So Frege's thesis on the sense of singular terms (allegedly) leads to problems — to 'rather curious difficulties'. But these are not minor concerns, to be passed over lightly. No; the problems seem fatal for the theory i.e. they are of such a nature that they appear to be 'sufficient to prove that the theory which leads to such difficulties must be wrong' (Russell 99, my emphasis). What specifically are these (apparently) fatal problems for Frege's suggestion?

17. Once again, there is ample scope for debate. Having said this, however, what at least *is* clear, in my view, is that Russell believes that Frege's view is fundamentally flawed for the following reason:

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 99).

So as Russell sees it, Frege cannot have it both ways. Let us consider this specific objection in as sympathetic a light as possible. With this behind us, we shall be able to evaluate Russell's criticism of Frege's position. However, before doing so, we need to consider the convention that Russell uses in his assessment of Frege's views. For this convention, as I shall argue, plays more than a neutral role in Russell's evaluation of Frege's position.

Section three: Russell's account of the convention on inverted commas.

18. In order to establish his first, and in my view the major objection to Frege's theory of the sense of singular terms, Russell outlines a convention for talking about the meaning of a denoting phrase. This convention, or better, Russell's understanding of this convention plays a central role in his argument against Frege. For it is used by him to generate the 'rather curious difficulties' complained of earlier. And as we are about to discover, Russell's account of this convention is the source of a good deal of the difficulties he experiences with Frege's views on the sense of singular terms. Given the significance of this convention, I think it is advisable to consider Russell's account of it in some detail. But before we do so, two finer points of clarification are required — otherwise the thrust of my argument will be misunderstood.

19. In the first place, we must note that when Frege developed his views on sense and reference in "On sense and reference", he also relied on a convention to help him articulate his views, as I have pointed out. In "On denoting", Russell also resorts to a convention — I call it 'Cr' — to help him articulate Frege's views. But the convention that Russell relies on, does not appear to be the same as that used by Frege. In particular, with Frege's convention of inverted commas there is a device for referring to linguistic expressions, while with Cr, as Russell uses it, there apparently is no device for referring to the linguistic expression itself, as opposed to its reference or sense. Secondly, it is important to distinguish between the conventions that either Russell or Frege rely on, and their respective theories, or views on singular terms. I shall argue that Russell simply uses convention Cr in his attempt to generate problems for Frege's

views. Nowhere does he either defend Cr, or criticise Frege's convention. So it is Frege's views on sense that Russell will directly challenge, and not the standing of his convention.

20. As Russell's account of the convention is brief, I shall state it *verbatim*:

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 sentences.

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* (Russell 99).

21. With Cr, if the denoting phrase occurs with double inverted commas, (e.g. "The centre of mass of the Solar System"), we are speaking about the *meaning* of the denoting phrase. On the other hand, with Cr, if we are after the *denotation* of the phrase, *no* inverted commas are used — hence Russell's example that the centre of mass of the Solar System is a point, not a denoting complex, or phrase. However, *notice that Cr says nothing about speaking about the denoting phrase itself*. This omission is the source of much confusion in Russell's discussion, and as we shall see, lies at the heart of his difficulties with Frege's view on singular terms. That is to say, with convention Cr, Russell *himself* ends up with 'certain rather curious difficulties', as he might reluctantly put it. Let me substantiate this objection of mine to Russell's convention Cr.

22. After illustrating the convention with four sentences, Russell makes this claim (call it X₁):

X₁: *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 99, my emphasis).*

Suppose we accept Russell's suggestion that when an expression occurs with double inverted commas, it is the *meaning* of the expression we are speaking about. If we then go along with his further suggestion made in X₁, and view C as the denoting phrase, we encounter difficulties. For *we do not wish to consider the relation between C and "C"* — as Russell is suggesting — if it is Frege's theory we are attempting to elucidate. For in considering the relation between C and "C", we would be considering the relation between a *denoting phrase* and its *meaning*, which is clearly *not* what Russell is after in this section of his paper. How then can we explain Russell's slip here? Why has he, with Cr, misrepresented the nature of the relationship between the meaning of a denoting phrase and the denotation of this phrase?

23. My suggestion is this. The failure to account for those occasions where it is the denoting phrase itself we are speaking about, as opposed to its denotation or meaning, is the source of Russell's mistake here. For there are clearly *three* items that Frege would like to refer to:

- i) the denoting *phrase* itself
- ii) the *denotation* of the denoting phrase
- iii) the *meaning* (or sense) of the denoting phrase

And if we work with a convention, like Russell's Cr, that only relies on *two* devices to speak about these three items, we are bound to obfuscate the issues — as Russell does. So it comes as no surprise to find, that after stating X_1 in his convention Cr, Russell goes on to suggest, and unfortunately, appears to confuse matters by asserting that,

X_2 : When C occurs it is the *denotation* that we are speaking about; but when "C" occurs, it is the *meaning* (Russell 99).

In his earlier claim, X_1 , Russell said that C was a *denoting phrase*. But now, in the next breath, he tells us that C is the *denotation*. Thus it appears that C doubles as a symbol both for the denotation of the denoting phrase and for the phrase itself. When we realize that C has this double application, we understand why Russell maintains *both* that the relation between denotation and meaning is that between C and "C", *and* that C is a denoting phrase. We can now turn to Russell's major criticism against Frege's view of sense, and see why he thinks Frege's view leads to 'an inextricable tangle' (Russell 100).

Section four: Russell against Frege: a *reductio ad absurdum*?

24. Russell's charges that Frege's view of the relationship between the meaning and denotation of a denoting phrase is untenable in that it entails an absurd position. More specifically, it appears that for Russell, Frege's view ultimately results in the denial of the existence of denoting phrases that have meaning and denotation! As Russell puts it, Frege's view

leads us to say that, when we distinguish meaning and denotation, we must be dealing with 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* (Russell 100, my italics).

So, while he doesn't put it like this, it appears that for Russell, Frege's view of sense is self-contradictory: if we must distinguish between the meaning and denotation of a denoting phrase, (apparently) no denoting phrase will have both a meaning and denotation, for it is only the meaning of a denoting phrase that could possibly have both meaning and denotation. How does Russell establish this charge of absurdity?

25. As I understand it, the argument has *three* phases, and proceeds as follows: suppose that a denoting phrase has both meaning and denotation. *Phase one*: When we attempt to speak about the *meaning* of this phrase, we end up talking about 'the meaning (if any) of the denotation' of that phrase (Russell 99). Suppose C is the denoting phrase in question. The expression "the meaning of C", unfortunately, according

to Russell, is not about the meaning of *the denoting phrase* — as we want — but about the meaning of *the denotation* (if any) of that phrase. *Phase two*: By the same token, we encounter problems when attempting to speak about the *denotation* of the denoting phrase. If C is the denoting phrase, the expression “the denotation of C”, for Russell, is about the denotation of *denotation* of the denoting phrase C. And this certainly not what we originally wanted, which was the (direct) denotation of the denoting phrase. *Phase three*: So in *both* instances we cannot get what we want: neither is the meaning nor the denotation of a denoting phrase can be got at by (another) denoting phrase. So the view that denoting phrases have both meaning and a denotation proves idle: all that we can get at through denoting phrases is only either *the meaning of the denotation* of the denoting phrase, or *something that is denoted by the denotation* of the denoting phrase. Given this untenable state of affairs, Russell concludes that the (Fregean) attempt to distinguish between the meaning and denotation of a denoting phrase ‘has been wrongly conceived’ (Russell 100).

26. There is a good deal one could say about this argument from Russell, and a more thorough assessment of the debate than this would need to do so. Nevertheless, there is one issue that can be dealt with here: the role of Russell’s convention Cr in his argument against Frege. In my analysis of his account of the convention, I showed that Cr makes no provision for speaking about a linguistic expression, such as a denoting phrase. This shortcoming now manifests itself in the attack on Frege. For we find Russell making claims like the following;

- a) ‘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’ (Russell 99).

But if C is a phrase, as Russell maintains early in the sentence, the expression “the meaning of C” must, on pain of consistency, be equivalent to the expression “the meaning of *the phrase C*” — which is *not* equivalent to the expression “the meaning of the denotation of the phrase C”, as Russell suggests here. So the second statement in (a) above is true *only if (phrase) C and its denotation can be conflated*. But Russell thinks that the statement is true. Consequently, he *must* be conflating phrase C with its denotation. But if absurdities arise as a result of this conflation, as they do in Russell’s case in ‘On denoting’, the source of this conflation must be held suspect. And I have shown how Cr leads Russell to conflate the denoting phrase with its denotation. Therefore, the evidence suggests that it is *Russell’s Cr convention* that is the likely culprit for the ‘inextricable tangle’ that Russell complains of in his attack on Frege’s view on singular terms. And if this is the case, it *still* remains to be shown that Frege’s distinction of meaning and reference is flawed.

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