Reviews

IN THE REALM OF SENSE

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It is now widely acknowledged that Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* conflated many aspects of Russell's and Frege's views on reference and proper names. Indeed, a central theme of that great work is the inadequacy of the "Frege–Russell Theory"—a theory in fact held by neither philosopher but one which nonetheless provided a convenient foil for Kripke's arguments. Subsequent scholarship has done much to discourage an easy assimilation of one philosopher's views to those of the other. Indeed, the idea that Frege and Russell share a common theory of reference, niceties aside, is decidedly a minority view. Now, in a timely and richly detailed study, Gideon Makin reminds us that there is much to be gained by a careful, extended comparison of the two figures. It should be noted, however, that Makin's study does not concern itself exclusively with proper names—the focus of Kripke's lectures—but ranges over a broad number of topics treated by both philosophers.

The Metaphysicians of Meaning is divided into three sections: Part I is devoted to Russell on denoting, Part II to Frege on sense and reference; Part III provides a detailed comparison of the two figures. Due to limitations of space, and bearing in mind the focus of this journal, I will concern myself primarily with Parts I and III, mentioning the discussion of Frege only in passing.

Robert Sleigh has distinguished between what he labels "exegetical history"—the attempt at the faithful reconstruction of a historical figure's philosophical views—and "philosophical history"—the use of a historical figure's work as a context in which to grapple with philosophical problems.[1] The distinction, as Sleigh acknowledges, is not absolute; most historical studies will

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[1] *Leibniz and Arnauld: a Study of their Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1990), pp. 2–6.

russell: the Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies
The Bertrand Russell Research Centre, McMaster U.

n.s. 21 (winter 2000–01): 167–88
issn 0036-01631

contain a blending of both tendencies. Nonetheless, the distinction is an important one, since a blindness to it fosters the illusion that historical studies are all equally concerned with historical truth. An important feature of *The Metaphysicians of Meaning* is its attempt to provide a historically accurate reconstruction of the views of Russell and Frege. As Makin observes, it would make little sense to attribute an understanding of the theory of types to someone who possessed no knowledge of Russell's Paradox, or to attribute an understanding of Tarski's theory of truth to someone unfamiliar with the Liar Paradox. What is missing, although no part of the theory itself, is "the theory's context, its author's rationale of putting it forth; we might even say, the theory's whole point" (p. 1).[2] According to Makin, the standard readings of Frege's theory of sense and reference and of Russell's theory of descriptions are based on a misunderstanding of their respective origins, of the problems they were developed to address. If Makin is correct, philosophers of language have by and large misunderstood these theories.

Makin's suggestion is not based solely on the fact that there has been a lack of attention to the relevant texts. If our assumptions about Frege and Russell were roughly on target, the value of detailed exegesis would be indisputable, but hardly of revolutionary significance. Makin's avowedly revisionist reading shows something rather more surprising: that our assumptions were fundamentally mistaken. Far from inaugurating a linguistic turn, Russell and Frege were only incidentally concerned with language; their more fundamental interest was to provide a metaphysical foundation for their respective logical systems. In brief, *The Metaphysicians of Meaning*'s unifying theme is that in response to (unforeseen) difficulties in their separate attempts to work out the logicist enterprise both figures became metaphysicians. The difficulties centred, for Russell, on *The Principles of Mathematics* theory of denoting concepts, and for Frege, on the *Begriffsschrift* theory of identity contexts. As Makin writes:

What initially seemed like rather marginal problems in an essentially technical pursuit drove each to devise his respective 'first' solution. This, in turn, led to replacing each of the first theories with their respective ultimate solutions, and those moves eventually affected the nature of the whole enterprise they were engaged in.   (P. 198)

The ultimate solutions were, for Russell, the theory of descriptions and, for Frege, the theory of sense and reference.

The study of the writings of a great historical figure is often complicated by the determination, in Hector Castañeda's words, of "what counts as an appro-

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[2] All page references are to *The Metaphysicians of Meaning* unless otherwise indicated.

priate exegetical unit."[3] This is especially so in the case of a Leibniz or a Russell, whose writings on a given topic over a particular period can tend to blend gradually and almost imperceptibly into writings that, although thematically continuous, conceal subtle doctrinal shifts. In the case of Russell's work on denoting, the relevant exegetical unit has typically been taken to be his publications and letters from the period spanning the *Principles* to the publication of *Principia Mathematica*. Makin's discussion of the development of Russell's views on denoting departs boldly from previous studies by reconceiving the relevant time frame. The standard approach is certainly a natural choice for a study of the development of Russell's logicism; it is less illuminating (and possibly misleading) when our focus is the analysis of denoting phrases. As Makin indicates, the crucial period is rather the one spanning the *Principles* to no later than 1910.[4] Certainly by 1905 we have a thorough reworking of the *Principles* theory of denoting, with the idea of denoting *concepts* dropped altogether. The subsequent development of the 1905 theory in the writings up to and including *Principia* do not modify it in any essential way; more significantly, these writings provide no further illumination regarding the motivations behind the *Principles* theory or regarding Russell's ultimate dissatisfaction with that theory. For insight into these matters, the writings from 1900 to 1905, including the manuscripts recently collected in *Papers* 4, are essential.[5] In contrast, the writings from 1910 onward reflect a more linguistic-oriented outlook, issuing in, for example, the multiple-relation theory of judgment. This theory, in abandoning propositions altogether, marks a full break with the semantical framework of the *Principles*. Conceiving the relevant period as including such writings could give the false impression that Russell's concerns circa 1905 were more linguistically oriented than in fact they were.

Makin's discussion of Russell commences with an overview of the *Principles* theory of denoting concepts. For Russell, a denoting concept, such as the one expressed by the denoting phrase "the curator", has the following three central characteristics:

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[3] Quoted in Sleigh, p. 4.

[4] In fact the cut-off point for Makin's study of Russell is, effectively, the publication of "On Denoting" in late 1905; a cursory look at his citations suggests that the 1905–10 writings are referred to with no more frequency than the writings post-1910. The reason for his 1910 cut-off appears to be that this is when Russell's views take on a decidedly linguistic and anti-metaphysical turn.

[5] In fact, as Nicholas Griffin points out ("*The* Denoting Reader", *Russell*, n.s. 20 [2000]: 77–82, at 79n.), a letter to Philip Jourdain dated 13 January 1906 contains the first statement of the theory of descriptions in more or less its official form—*more or less*: the scope-indicating devices of *Principia* are missing (although, as Griffin observes, scope distinctions have already been made in "On Denoting"). For Russell's letter, see I. Grattan-Guinness, *Dear Russell—Dear Jourdain* (New York: Columbia U. P., 1977), p. 70.

- *A denoting concept is an aboutness-shifter.* For Russell circa the *Principles*, the proposition that Jones speaks English contains Jones as a constituent; the proposition is *about* Jones in virtue of its containing Jones. Yet, when we replace Jones with the denoting concept *the curator* (yielding the proposition that *the curator* speaks English) we get something not about the denoting concept, but about its denotation. This phenomenon Makin labels "aboutness-shifting".
- *A denoting phrase corresponds to its denotation many-one.* Although each denoting concept has a unique denotation,[6] each denotation is denoted by a multiplicity of denoting concepts. This is parallel to Frege's claim that there is "no backward road" from reference to sense.
- *A denoting phrase logically determines its denotation.* The relation between a denoting concept and its denotation is logical and, famously, "not merely linguistic through the phrase". The denoting concept denotes what it does *not* because of any facts attaching to the denoting *phrase* that expresses it, but because of something intrinsic to the denoting concept itself. Makin's quotation from Russell's "On Meaning and Denoting" is instructive here: "But both designating and expressing have to do with language: the logically important matter is the relation between what is expressed and what is designated…. This relation I shall call *denoting*." (Quoted on pp. 18–19; *Papers* 4: 317–18)

The central question driving Part 1 of *The Metaphysicians of Meaning* is why Russell abandoned the *Principles* theory of denoting concepts in favour of the theory proposed in "On Denoting". There is a great deal of mythology surrounding this transition: the myth typically involves an anti-Meinongian epiphany, a desperate attempt to provide a semantics for vacuous terms, and a pressing need to explain informative identities. Makin exposes each strand as a myth, paving the way for a serious answer.[7] The answer is the centrepiece of Part 1: it involves a careful reading of both the Grey's Elegy Argument (GEA) from "On

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[6] Pending further clarification of what it means to speak of the denotation of denoting concepts such as *some curators* or *each senator*, this claim is intelligible only with respect to definite descriptions; but this should suffice for the present discussion.

[7] For example, with respect to the first bit of mythology, he writes that "Russell's 'ontological exuberance' … in PoM was name-driven and not description driven" (p. 63). When Russell did hit upon the description theory of names (in "The Existential Import of Propositions", *Papers* 4: 486–9), he discovered a way of reconciling the apparent meaningfulness of vacuous names with the fact that they lack a denotation. But this discovery *predated*—and is logically independent of—his theory of descriptions. So even if Russell did have a change of heart around 1904–05—and, as Makin makes abundantly clear, it is far from obvious that he did—his developing the theory of descriptions was unnecessary, since it solved a problem that his view never faced.

Denoting" (conveniently reproduced as an appendix) and of a passage (§40) from the 1905 manuscript "On Fundamentals". The GEA begins by examining the relation between two kinds of occurrences of denoting complexes. Using angle brackets as meaning quotes, the occurrences are exemplified by the following:

(1)   The centre of mass of the Solar System is a point, not a denoting complex.
(2)   ⟨The centre of mass of the Solar System⟩ is a denoting complex, not a point.

The truth of (1) turns on what the denoting phrase denotes—whether or not it is a point; the truth of (2) turns on the *meaning* of the same phrase—whether or not it is a denoting complex. Yet, the GEA concludes that we cannot speak about, or in any way make reference to, the meaning of a denoting phrase C without ultimately either *collapsing* the difference between C and $\langle C \rangle$, or losing the connection between the two. Thus, although denoting phrases *have meaning*, these meanings cannot be spoken of or represented.[8]

The passage in "On Fundamentals" that Makin discusses is preceded by a sequence (§§36–9) that parallels the GEA; it ends with a statement—Russell's first—of the theory of descriptions. Makin examines the intervening text to see if it can shed light on Russell's reasons for introducing the theory of descriptions.[9] What he finds is as surprising as it is illuminating. Russell begins by introducing the "x denotes y" relation, which takes a denoting complex and an object, respectively, as its relata. As Makin notes, this strategy assumes the primacy of the meaning-giving use of a denoting phrase (as in (2) above), in contrast with Russell's procedure in "On Denoting" and in §§36–9, where the denotation-giving use is taken as primary (as in (1) above). That is, instead of attempting to get at the meaning of a phrase which, in ordinary contexts, is denotation-invoking (this is the strategy of "On Denoting"), we attempt to get at the *denotation* of a phrase ("C" or $\langle C \rangle$) which, in ordinary contexts, is *meaning*-invoking. The immediate problem facing this move is that, as Russell him-

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[8] As Makin points out, this result would be unwelcome for someone espousing a correspondence theory of truth, but not quite incoherent, since it is not in itself inconceivable that there are states of affairs that we cannot, for whatever reason, represent. For Russell, who denies such a correspondence account, the result is far more problematic, since "to concede the impossibility of propositions about some class of entities means there cannot even *be* anything true (or false) about them either" (pp. 22–3, emphasis in text; note omitted).

[9] The very same passage was examined by Richard Cartwright but curiously dismissed as "a page that raises more questions than it answers." See "The Origins of Russell's Theory of Descriptions" in his *Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P., 1987), pp. 128–9.

self observes, "we want to speak of what x denotes, and unfortunately 'what x denotes' is a denoting complex." He might have added: "and therefore takes us not to the desired denotation but to the meaning of *that* phrase." Thus, the strategy backfires.[10] However, Russell now sees that he can get the desired result (at least for unambiguously denoting phrases—i.e., definite descriptions[11]) by manipulating the relation. He defines "C unambiguously denotes y" as follows:

$$(\exists y) : C \text{ denotes } y : C \text{ denotes } z . \supset_z . z = y$$

This leads directly to an analysis of contexts which he represents as $\phi`C$—contexts in which C and ϕ are, at surface grammar, subject and predicate, respectively:

$$(\exists y) : C \text{ denotes } y : C \text{ denotes } z . \supset_z . z = y : \phi`y.$$

Plugging in "the Author of *Waverley*" for C, he gets:

$$(\exists y) : \text{"the Author of } Waverley \text{" denotes } y : \text{"the Author of } Waverley \text{" denotes } z . \supset_z . z = y : \phi`y.$$

This is an analysis of: $\phi`$(the Author of *Waverley*). Russell thus achieves a way of speaking about the meaning of C *and* its denotation—at least where C is a definite description. He has, thus, "succeeded in preserving the connexion between meaning and denotation [while] preventing them from being one and the same"—overcoming precisely the difficulty that the GEA failed to resolve. And yet the proposal that accomplishes all this is not quite the theory of descriptions. As Makin notes, the *Principles* doctrine that denoting concepts are propositional constituents is still in force—a doctrine that the final theory, introduced a few lines later, abandons.

The transitional theory raises interesting questions. As Makin asks, "if the hybrid theory solves the problem he set out to solve, why did [Russell] ever proceed to [the theory of descriptions]? What led him to abolish denoting concepts … *after* he had in fact solved the problem?" (p. 50). The answer appears to be that the definite article in the above analysis is redundant. Moreover,

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[10] Russell's discussion here parallels the passage in "On Denoting" that shows how the use of "the meaning of C" as a device for referring to the *meaning* of C (where C is a denoting phrase) gives us, "the meaning, if any, of the denotation" (*Papers* 4: 421). Recall that, in "On Denoting", the denotation-giving use is primary.

[11] §34 equates "unambiguously denoting" with "denoting one definite entity".

if we detach the definite article from the class concept "Author of *Waverley*", then the proposal that naturally suggests itself replaces the relation of denotation with that of class membership (instead of "'the *u*' denotes *y*" we have "*y* ε *u*") and, accordingly, replaces the denoting concept with the relevant class concept. These modifications result in the theory as it appears in §40:

$$\phi`\iota`u . = : (\exists y) : y \,\varepsilon\, u : z \,\varepsilon\, u . \supset_z . z = y : \phi`y.$$

The formula on the left is an attempt to render in symbolic notation a sentence of the form "the *u* is φ", reflecting the constituent structure of the denoting phrase—something that the schematic letter *C*, for example, fails to do.[12]

Makin goes on to observe that "one can hardly avoid the impression that the move to [the above definition], with its substantial benefits, came as a stroke of luck, falling into Russell's lap with neither a struggle nor, so far as one can tell, any deliberate effort" (p. 51). I agree: Russell had an answer to the problem besetting his earlier view before the definition was arrived at; in eliminating a redundancy in the penultimate theory, the theory of descriptions seems to have appeared fully formed, requiring very little subsequent modification. (Of course, the remark shouldn't be taken to imply that anyone *else* could have glimpsed the lineaments of the new theory in the formulation of its predecessor.)

Part III of *The Metaphysicians of Meaning* is an extended comparison of Russell and Frege. A theme of this section is that, at an appropriate level of abstraction, Russell and Frege can be seen as sharing fundamental logico-semantic doctrines. For example, Makin argues convincingly that Russell's relation of acquaintance and the relation that, for Frege, holds between a mind and the sense it grasps ("grasping"), are one and the same (p. 146). Of course, Frege does not apply this relation to objects of "level 0"—objects themselves incapable of presenting objects—whereas Russell does. However, once it is observed that "the status of an entity as a sense or as a referent [is] relative" and that "the sense of one expression can be the referent of another" (p. 143), it is hard to be impressed with this difference. Makin's reading also identifies senses with denoting concepts—both, as he notes, are aboutness-shifters. These points of identification derive from a synoptic picture of Russell's and Frege's conception of content. Makin introduces the idea of a "generic proposition" to correspond to this shared conception: such propositions are "the primary bearers of truth, and accordingly the relata of logical relations such as implication, i.e. the entities we are concerned with in proof and inference" (pp. 139–40). Questions of vague-

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[12] An equivalent form of this definition is given in the letter to Jourdain cited in note 5.

ness and ambiguity do not arise on this picture of content, since it is driven not by our intuitive conception of *what is said* by an utterance but by our account of logical consequence. Even truth is *sui generis*, questions as to its nature being settled not by antecedent conceptions of correspondence but by the role this property must play in the account of consequence. Of course, the fact that the logical systems Frege and Russell were devising were concerned exclusively with mathematical propositions is at work here as well: the shared idea of a realm of immutable, timeless entities, independent of language and human cognition, derives both from a role propositions are uniquely capable of (if not tailor-made for) playing, and from the subject-matter Frege and Russell were concerned to formalize.

In a related discussion, Makin argues that the view of proper names that falls out of the picture shared by Russell and Frege has little relation to names in natural language. The correlative notion of an object is, like that of a proposition, derived from its role in understanding inference and not from the referential properties of names in natural language.[13] To understand genuine names, we must understand the notion of object presupposed by the logical system. This notion, argues Makin, appears to be that of an "immutable and indestructible" (*PoM*, §47) entity, one which does not flout the principle that, for any F, either x is F or x is not F—i.e., does not exhibit vagueness or indeterminacy.

An interesting contrast between Frege and Russell on this score concerns their respective treatments of identity contexts. Unlike Frege, Russell appears never to have held that true "$a = b$" can be informative in cases where "a" and "b" are simple names (i.e., where neither abbreviates a definite description). For Russell, if "$a = b$" is to be informative at least one of the terms must be complex; that is, at least one of the terms must abbreviate a definite description. Yet, as Makin points out, almost all of Frege's examples of informativeness involve complex names, either explicitly or via a background story. The one apparent exception (the discussion of Ateb and Aphla in the draft of a letter to Jourdain) is equivocal, since a background story can in principle be gleaned from it, one from which suitable descriptions can be derived.

Setting aside for a moment Frege's own views, Makin raises the intriguing question, whether "we can find any pair of proper names which will give rise to the puzzle and which cannot be analyzed as complex" (p. 160).[14] The discus-

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[13] This point is less obvious for Frege than for Russell, as Makin notes. But he argues plausibly (pp. 182–3) that in both cases the use of ordinary proper names is for illustration and implies no commitment to the view that such names are genuine names.

[14] Makin considers Frege's claim in "The Thought", that everyone is presented to himself in a unique way. The senses involved in such thoughts, he concedes, may be simple; but Makin notes that one needs two such simple senses to give an affirmative answer to the question, and Frege

sion is philosophically interesting in its own right, quite apart from the exegetical question that generates it. Although Makin stops short of answering his question in the negative, he maintains that the burden of proof rests on those who, apparently like Frege, believe there can be such pairs. His provisional conclusion is worth repeating:

[A]lthough Frege's view must be considered consistent unless proved otherwise, Russell's more discriminatory position seems to have been guided by a more acute, even if unarticulated, vision of difficulties of which Frege seems to have been quite unaware. (P. 164)

There is much in Makin's book I have not touched on. I should mention, in particular, his discussion of Frege's *Begriffsschrift* theory of identity and its role in the opening pages of "Über Sinn und Bedeutung". This is the centrepiece of Part II. Once again, Makin corrects misreadings (and, in this case, mistranslations), providing a novel and compelling treatment of passages that had seemed incapable of receiving (or, for that matter, giving) further illumination.[15] Roughly two thirds of the book in length, Parts I and II are both penetrating and comprehensive studies that can be read independently, although they are best read in the service of Part III's extended comparison. Deftly organized, well paced, clearly written, *The Metaphysics of Meaning* is that rare thing—an exciting book of philosophy. In addition, it is, if bold in its claims, convincing and judicious in its argumentation. It will be read with profit by all serious students of analytic philosophy and its history.[16]

denied this possibility.

[15] Readers will want to compare Makin's discussion with a recent paper by Mike Thau and David Caplan, "What's Puzzling Gottlob Frege?" (*Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 31 [2001]: 159–200), who argue that the Frege of "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" never actually rejects the *Begriffsschrift* theory.