

CHAPTER - 4

Russell's Critique of Meinong and Frege

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Section – I

Overview

The main project of this dissertation has been to give a critical exposition of one of Russell's most celebrated theories, **The Theory of Descriptions**. Although the theory of Descriptions impinges on semantics, logic, metaphysics and theory of knowledge, it is essentially a technical device for exposing the logical character of certain basic expressions in our language.

This theory is perhaps the most praised and influential philosophical idea of Russell. F. P. Ramsey called it a 'paradigm of philosophy'. G.E. Moore gave enthusiastic assent to this compliment. Wittgenstein acknowledged his debt to the theory of descriptions. Many hailed it as marking the beginning of analytical philosophy.¹

Russell devised the theory of descriptions in order to solve the problems of reference and certain puzzles arising out of it, i.e., the puzzles arising in the context of reference. These puzzles require to be solved in order to proceed in philosophical analysis. No honest philosopher can afford to remain indifferent to them. Russell said, "A logical theory may be tested by its capacity for dealing

with puzzles.”² There have been attempts on the part of philosophers, each in his own distinctive way, to solve these puzzles. But only two theories, other than Russell’s own, have confronted the puzzles, and are considered by Russell as alternatives to his theory of descriptions; these are Meinong’s theory of objects and Frege’s theory of sense and reference. In the previous chapters (chapters 2 and 3) we have discussed the three puzzles of reference and the aforesaid theories as put forward by their exponents. In this chapter, we will see why, according to Russell, these theories have not been fully able to come to grips with the puzzles; we will also discuss Russell’s reason for criticising these theories in the light of the new theory he proposes – the theory of descriptions. Last we shall assess how far Russell was justified in his claim.

In the 1905 volume of *Mind* was published an outstanding essay by Russell, namely, “On Denoting”. Here he first brought to notice the errors committed by Meinong and Frege in their doctrines. Besides, it is an excellent refutation of Russell’s own earlier theory of denotation stated first in *The Principles of Mathematics* and papers written around 1904. In this essay Russell very systematically proceeded by first breaking the theories of his predecessors and then explaining what he meant by “descriptions”. He then went on to establish the tenability of his own theory, “I shall begin by stating the theory I intend to advocate; I shall then discuss the theories of Frege and Meinong, showing why

neither of them satisfies me; then I shall give the ground in favour of my theory."³

Section –II

Rejection of Meinong's Theory

Before we discuss what Russell has to say about Meinong's theory, it will be useful to recapitulate briefly the prime contentions of the **theory of objects**. The subject matter of Meinong's theory of objects is the 'totality of objects'. Totality of objects encompasses not only the totality of what exists, what has existed or what will exist, but something more than that. By an "object" Meinong means anything toward which a psychological act or attitude may be directed. Meinong's thesis about objects is divided into two parts. Firstly, there is the being of "ideal objects" and secondly he proposes the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein*.

In his first theory Meinong introduces a new term, "Objectives" in connection with the 'objects, which may not exist'. Meinong's use of the term 'objective' is somewhat similar to the use of the term proposition. According to Meinong, the being of an object is itself an object which subsists rather than exists and is called an 'Objective'. The conception will be clear with the help of an example. Suppose someone judges that there are white crows. If the judgement is true

then it follows that there are white crows. But the object which makes the judgement true is not itself a white crow; in fact, Meinong contends, it is the being of the white crows. This being of white crows is also an object --- Meinong calls this an Objective. Similarly if the judgement had been false, the objective of non-being of white crows would have been responsible. Chisholm writes:

Again if I judge that the round square does not exist, my judgement is true, not in virtue of the round square (for there is no round square), but in virtue of the non-being of the round square; this objective -- the non-being of the round square - also subsists.⁴

Meinong says that the Objective is an object of higher order and has as its objects the acts of believing, assuming, knowing etc. We believe, assume, know that a certain Objective subsists or does not subsist. An Objective, for example, 'the being of Golden mountain' has golden mountain as its constituent. The relation of an Objective to its constituents is different from that of whole to parts. If a whole has being, then its parts must also exist. Therefore, 'Golden mountain' as a constituent of the subsisting Objective must also have some sort of being. But Meinong rejects this principle and assumes that something can be constituent of a fact even if it has no being at all. Thus it follows that the non-existing, non-subsisting golden mountain is a constituent of that subsisting objective which is the non-being of the golden mountain.

In the beginning Russell was convinced by Meinong's arguments and his early writings (*The Principles of Mathematics*, 1903) reflected a support of the theory of objects. His article, "Meinong's theory of Complexes and Assumptions" in *Mind* (1904), was also written in partial support of Meinong's theory. During this period Russell embraced the doctrine that every conceivable term had being in some sense. Russell's theory was that, numbers, Homeric gods, chimeras, round squares, all have being, for otherwise, we could not make any assertions about them. But later Russell rejected this view describing it as 'intolerable'. Russell's Meinong is one who abandoned his sense of reality when faced with difficulties. The generous ontology of Meinong became unacceptable to Russell. In his theory of descriptions, Russell finds a way out of Meinong's problems.

He thought that the main achievement of his own theory was that it provided an acceptable alternative to what he regarded as the excesses of Meinong.⁵

In opposition to Meinong's view Russell claims that objects without being can never be part of objectives. The golden mountain is not a constituent of the fact that golden mountain does not exist. According to Russell entities without being are not present in the corresponding states of affairs. They contain only what certain definite descriptions represent. The definite description 'The Golden mountain' is actually a complex expression whose constituent expressions do not contain any golden mountain. The states of affairs only

represent the referents of these constituent expressions, e.g., the property of being golden, the property of being mountain, etc.

Subsection – (i)

How far is Russell Justified?

Though Russell was a great admirer of Meinong, according to some philosophers, he (Russell) misunderstood him (Meinong). The doctrines, which he attributed to Meinong, were actually creations of his own misunderstanding. So, it remains to be seen, if the Russellean argument against Meinong is tenable. Apparently it is successful in avoiding Meinong's conclusion. But as Reinhardt Grossman shows, if Meinong's theory is put forward in a different way, then the theory of descriptions fails to affect it in any way. Talking of false propositions or non-existent states of affairs, if the states of affairs are complex, the question arises :

How a complex state of affair could possibly subsist, if one or more of its constituent states of affairs has no being at all ?
For example, consider the disjunction 'P or Q' and assume that while P subsists, Q does not. How can the whole 'P or Q' have a part without any mode of being ?⁶

Grossman claims that Russell's theory of descriptions does not provide an answer to the above question. It of course solves problems other than the states of affairs. Since there are such entities as, and, or etc., there are complex states

of affairs. Then the inevitable conclusion is that these complex states of affairs can exist, though some of their constituent parts do not. Therefore, we must reject the principle that a complex entity may have being only if all its parts have being.

Meinong also is not in agreement with Russell's analysis of the problems concerning objects like Golden Mountain and round square. Let us consider, for example, the true judgment, 'Ghosts do not exist'. Russellean analysis of this judgment yields the sentence: 'It is not the case that there are individual things which are ghosts'. Now, provided that the individual things are existent, the sentence may be expressed as : 'No existing individual thing is a ghost'. A similar analysis can be made of a statement like 'the golden mountain does not exist'. Meinong dismisses this type of analysis saying that :

If on one occasion someone thinks about ghosts and denies their existence and on another occasion thinks about something actual, whether this be vaguely or precisely determined and recognizes that such an object is not a ghost, he in each case is thinking two totally different thoughts.⁷

The sentence, 'No existing individual is a ghost', actually means something like, some actual thing or thing is not a ghost, whereas the original sentence, 'Ghosts do not exist' expresses a different thought.

The above point becomes the issue between Meinong and Russell. Meinong commits a mistake in confusing the thought that no existing individual is a ghost with the thought 'about something actual' for which one recognizes that it is not a ghost. Let us say, for example, that someone thinks that the people in this room are not ghosts. Now this thought is not identical with the thought that there are no ghosts. But it is never said here that the thought that there are no ghosts is different from the thought that no existing thing is a ghost. Meinong however wrongly thinks likewise. He equates the thought that no existing thing is a ghost with the thought of something actual, which is vaguely determined.

So, Russell's criticisms against Meinong's theory of ideal objects may be defended on two grounds. In the first place, it has to be accepted that the Russelian analysis of the judgment, 'Ghosts do not exist' is more clearly and justly expressed by the sentence, 'No existing thing is a ghost'. Secondly, we support the view that thinking of something actual and recognizing that it is not a ghost is not the same as thinking that no existing things are ghosts.

We will now turn our attention to the other part of the theory of objects, which Meinong calls the theory of *Aussersein* or the independence of being from so-being. We have seen that the theory of objects is widest in its range; it encompasses not only existents and subsistents, but also objects, which have no

being at all. It has as its subject matter absurd entities like round square. Meinong holds that though the round square does not exist, and it will be logically contradictory to say that round square exists, yet we can make true assertions about it. It can be said for example that I am thinking of round square. Again, there are objects, which have never been thought of. But even if no one had ever thought of round square, 'the round square does not exist' would still be true of round square. Meinong's theory claims that knowledge about such contradictory entities is possible because of the principle of independence of so-being from being. "The pure object is *ausserseiend* standing, beyond being and non-being (*jenseits von Sein und Nichtsein*)."⁸

According to Meinong the pure object is *ausserseiend*, it is not affected by being or non-being. The *Sosein* or so-being of an object is the object's having certain characteristics, for example, the *Sosein* of a round square is the object's having roundness and squareness. What Meinong wants to say is that although there is no round square, the fact remains that it is both round and square. We can of course make true or false assertions about every object; that object may or may not exist, but the essence of that object, its so-being does not depend on its existence or non-existence.

Some philosophers are not in agreement with Meinong's view that totality of objects is wider than totality of existents or real objects. But if Meinong's theory

of *Aussersein* is false then there can be no truths about objects without being — either they are not truths at all or else they do not refer to non-existent objects. In some cases as 'Unicorns do not exist' or 'Round squares are both round and square', there does not arise any problem. The former may be said to assert of things that *do* exist that none has the property of being a unicorn; the latter says of those things that exist that if it *were* both round and square then it would be round and square.

The usefulness of Meinong's theory comes into view in case of propositions having singular subject terms, e.g., "*The* round square is round and square". Meinong's position is also strong in case of propositions having intentional objects, e.g., "The thing that Peter is thinking of is a golden mountain." The golden mountain is an intentional object of the mind. If it has no properties, as is popularly assumed, then there cannot be any informative truths about it. So, it would be better to go along with Meinong and agree that the golden mountain has properties which has no bearing upon the golden mountain's existence or non-existence and that is why we can have knowledge about it.

Russell claims that his theory of denoting provides a way out of the above-mentioned problems. His theory reduces the propositions containing denoting phrases into those in which no such phrases occur.⁹ Now, why does Russell

maintain such a theory and how is it better than Meinong's or Frege's theory, we will see subsequently.

First of all, Russell says, Meinong's view is in itself a difficult view. According to Russell problems arise if the denoting phrases present in a statement are considered to be the genuine constituents of the corresponding proposition. In his own theory Russell shows that these denoting phrases are in fact descriptions and we shall come back to it later. Meinong's theory commits exactly this mistake by treating any grammatically correct denoting phrases as names of objects. And so, non-existing entities like the round square, the Golden Mountain etc. are given the status of object. Meinong's theory claims that although such objects do not exist, they are real or pure objects and have some kind of being. This theory, which we have discussed earlier, has 'intolerable' consequences for Russell. He puts forward various arguments to prove that descriptions are not names. We will state below these arguments and show that they fail to establish the requisite distinction.

Sub-section - (ii)

Distinction between Names and Descriptions

i) Russell's first argument is that names are simple symbols, descriptions are not, and therefore, descriptions are not names. In support of his arguments Russell wrote :

If you understand the English language, you would understand the phrase, 'The author of *Waverley*' if you had never heard it before, whereas you would not understand the meaning of 'Scott' if you had never heard it before because to know the meaning of a name is to know who it is applied to.¹⁰

In other words, the meaning of 'the author of *Waverley*', which is a descriptive phrase, can be brought out by analyzing its parts. So it is a complex expression. The word 'Scott' is used as an example of logically proper name here; if it is simple, its meaning cannot be worked out by knowing the meanings of its parts. In the above passage Russell says that being simple means having the naming function, i.e., to know the reference of the name. But it would be wiser to point out that Russell's simple/complex distinction does not turn into naming function/describing function distinction because he also held that ordinary proper names, instead of functioning as names, function as descriptions.

This argument also does not claim that if an expression has naming functions then it is simple for, pronouns like 'this' or complex demonstratives like 'that man' indeed have naming function. Peacocke¹¹ has shown that even descriptions occasionally function as names. Therefore it cannot be held that complex expressions always have describing functions. So this argument only establishes that names being simple are different from descriptions.

ii) Russell contends that if a true identity statement has names on both sides then that statement must be tautologous, whereas if one of the terms of an identity statement is a description and if that statement is true then it would give us some knowledge. Hence, names and descriptions have different meanings; therefore, they are different. But, this argument, though otherwise valid has an inherent problem. It is not true that names, which name the same, always mean the same and therefore are tautologous. 'A may believe that 'Tully' names Tully without believing that 'Tully', names Cicero, for he may not realize that Tully = Cicero.'¹²

iii) Descriptions are not names because existence can only be predicated of descriptions; it is not a property of individuals. Statements like, '--- exists or --- does not exist' become meaningless if they are filled in by names. But that is not the case with descriptions.

The fact that you can discuss the proposition 'God exists' is a proof that 'God' as used in that proposition, is a description and not a name. If 'God' were a name, no question as to existence could arise.¹³

Russell arrived at this conclusion in the following way; any meaningful sentence is meaningful if it is either true or false. So, if 'a exists' is taken to be meaningful (where 'a' is a name) then it should be meaningful, even if it is false.

But that is not so for in that case 'a' would not find a bearer. So 'a exists' is meaningless, be it true or false.

This argument also rests on a false premise. From the truth that any meaningful sentence has a meaningful negation, it cannot be inferred that any meaningful sentence is one, which would be meaningful even if it were false. For example, a meaningful sentence like 'some sentences are meaningful' would become meaningless if it were false.

iv) Names are scope-insensitive, but descriptions are not, so the two should not be confused. But nothing much can be attained from this argument as it can only prove the scope sensitivity of some descriptions. Moreover, scope insensitivity is not an essential property of names. Some names could also be scope sensitive.

v) The most important point of distinction between names and descriptions is that there are no empty names but descriptions can be empty. To say more elaborate, one can understand the meaning of a description without knowing if it has any bearer or even if it has one, who it belongs to. But we cannot understand a name without knowing whom it applies to. Denotation-less descriptions are still meaningful, as the expression, 'the King of France is bald' shows. It has a meaning though it is false. But names without reference are meaningless. So, not only that empty descriptions are different from names but

also there is a 'contrast of semantic function between descriptions and names'.¹⁴ Sometimes Russell tries to establish the meaningfulness of empty descriptions by its function, (this we have already discussed in the first argument). This is confusing because Russell himself holds that ordinary proper names can also be empty yet meaningful. Further there are also instances where denotation-less descriptions are not meaningful.

It will not be irrelevant here to talk briefly about one of Russell's views which he held in this connection that there must be a uniform account of both empty or other descriptions in accordance with their similarity in form; that is, expressions similar in form should be analyzed similarly. But this view is dangerous as it may result from this that there are no genuine names. If ordinary proper names are abbreviated descriptions then by parity of form all simple singular terms are so.

Thus we observe that none of the above arguments conclusively establishes the distinction between names and descriptions. But Russell's theory of descriptions does not depend on the theory that descriptions are not names. However, we must accept that names function differently from descriptions and Russell holds that Meinong's theory commits the fallacy of confusing between the two. Hence, Russell's distinction cannot be used as an apparatus against Meinong's theory.

The chief objection against Meinong's theory is that it violates the law of contradiction. Meinong contends that impossible objects like round square, though they do not exist, still have the properties like roundness and squareness. But how can a thing be both round and square? It is impossible to be both round and square. Such objects, Russell says, infringe the law of contradiction. This objection of violation of the law of contradiction was raised by Russell in the review essay of "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions" published in *Mind* as also in "On Denoting", also published in *Mind* for the first time. In the latter he says,

... the round square etc. are supposed to be genuine objects....
But the chief objection is that such objects are apt to infringe the law of contradiction. It is contended, for example, that the existent present king of France exists, and also does not exist; that the round square is round and also not round etc. But this is intolerable; and if any theory can be found to avoid this result, it is surely to be preferred.¹⁵

Sub-section – (iii)

Meinong Replies to Russell

To Russell's first objection, Meinong replied that though Russell's argument is sound it does not hold good of his theory. Contradictory things in order to be contradictory must disobey the law of contradiction. It holds only of those objects, which are actual or possible and cannot be applied to the impossible

objects he was considering. To make the point clear, nothing that exists can be both round and square, and the law of contradiction can hardly be expected to hold of such non-existent things as round square. Everybody knows that the laws of logic hold only in reality and non-existent objects like the round square are unreal.

Russell's second objection relates to Meinong's contention that the existent round square exists. It is more troublesome for Meinong. Russell says that if the round square is really round and square, then the existent round square must be round, square and existent which means to accept that there *is* a round square --- and this is absurd. Meinong tries to escape by saying that though the existent round square is existent it does not really exist. He goes on to distinguish between ordinary existence and the 'existential determination' to be existent. The existential determination of an object behaves like its other ordinary properties. So, just as the golden mountain has the property of being golden, the existent golden mountain has the existential determination of being existent. So it can be said that the existent golden mountain is existent, but it does not exist. Russell found this view hard to accept and in a letter to Meinong he wrote that he could not see how one can distinguish between 'to exist' and 'to be existent'.

Meinong had also tried another way out of this. He said that "is existent" and "exists" are not predicates. Existence is not a property like roundness or squareness. Nothing is added to the *Sosein* of an object when we call it existent. So, "the round square" has the properties of roundness and squareness but "the existent round square" does not have the additional property of existence. In his review article on Meinong, cited above, Russell contended that he could see no difference between existing and being existent and concluded that he had nothing more to say beyond this.

Meinong's introduction of the concept of existential determination confuses the issue even more. So, why does Meinong believe in such a thing? Actually this view is a result of Meinong's acceptance of the so-called principle of unlimited freedom of assumption. According to this principle we cannot only think of a round square, but can also think of an existing round square. The two being different present two different intentional cases. Meinong has to bring up the concept of existence to distinguish one from the other.

The question arises in our mind that in spite of so many difficulties why does Meinong believe that the golden mountain is golden? Meinong held that individual objects are complexes consisting of their properties. So the golden mountain must consist of, among other properties, the property of being golden. Since the complex has the property of being golden, it must be golden.

Meinong might have been misled by own theory, that every complex, though it may not exist or subsist, must have the properties, which constitute it. Meinong's theory has these obscurities and ambiguities, and yet there are many who have challenged the negative estimation of Meinong's theory of objects as misconceived. J. N. Findlay says, " It is strange ... that Meinong's object-theory should have been regarded by some as a bewildering and tangled 'jungle'; it resembles rather an old, formal garden containing some beautiful and difficult mazes ...".¹⁶ Further on, Findlay says, "Meinong's round square could be stitched, with complete seamlessness into the fabric of Carnap's *Meaning and Necessity* ."¹⁷ Indeed philosophical problems in logic, developed in contemporary philosophical logic, revealed the 'frank recognition' of objects that do not exist. Some of these non-existent objects are possible, and some, among what are called virtual objects, rather clearly resemble Meinong's impossible objects. I am curious to know what would have been Russell's reactions to such reconstruction of Meinong's doctrine of *Aussersein*. But such developments took place at a time when Russell had lost his interest in logic.

Section – III

Criticism of Frege's Theory

We will now examine the other theory of reference, namely, Frege's theory of sense and reference, which we discussed in the previous chapter. Russell criticized this view saying that it leads to 'an inextricable tangle'.¹⁸

But first we shall inspect Frege's theory; whether Frege's attempt to solve the logical puzzles can be justified. To do this would require us to look back into Frege's theory.

In short, Frege's theory was that there is a distinction between sense and reference of names. Frege was basically a mathematician and while dealing with the concept of identity he confronted some problems, which disturbed him. In order to solve these problems, Frege devised the above distinction. Identity is indeed a puzzling notion. The relation of identity holds between a thing and itself and not between two different things. But then are all identity statements tautologous and uninformative? Frege showed us that, that is not always the case. In the opening passages of his "On Sense and Reference" Frege asks about identity: Is it a relation? A relation between objects, or between names or signs of objects?¹⁹

Frege accepts the first alternative as true, i.e., identity is a relation between objects. The other alternative cannot be true because it would lead to arbitrary use of names or signs. Then $a = b$ would mean, name 'a' and name 'b' name the same thing resulting into the arbitrary agreement that 'a' is a name for a and 'b' is also a name for a. So, identity must be a relation between objects. Then the statement $a = b$ should mean, the same as $a = a$, if $a = b$ is true; $a = b$ is true means 'a' and 'b' are names for the same object and $a = b$ cannot give us any more information than $a = a$. But this view is incorrect because though statements like $a = a$, are tautologies and uninformative, statements of the form $a = b$ are sometimes highly informative. For example, everybody knows that morning star = morning star and evening star = evening star, but that morning star = evening star was a great astronomical discovery. According to Frege the reference of an expression is the object denoted by it and is distinct from the sense, which in other words is its meaning or 'mode of presentation'. It is because of this difference in sense that identity statements are informative. While the sense of a sign expresses a 'thought' or proposition its reference is its truth-value.

In Chapter 3 we saw that Frege had tried to solve the problems of identity, negative existentials and exclusive middle through his 'Sense and Reference' theory. What were the loopholes of this theory?

In the puzzle concerning George IV and the author of *Waverley* (Identity) the problem lies in the fact that the expression, 'the author of *Waverley*' is mistakenly substituted by 'Scott'. According to Frege the reference of a declarative sentence is its truth-value, which will remain unchanged if two signs having the same reference are replaced for each other. Since 'Scott' and 'the author of *Waverley*' have the same denotation, 'Scott' is replaced for 'the author of *Waverley*' and one concludes that 'George IV wished to know whether Scott was Scott'. It is important to remember here that the reference and sense of signs change with the referential context. In the sentence, 'George IV wished to know whether Scott was the author of *Waverley*', 'Scott' and 'the author of *Waverley*' do not have the same reference. So, they cannot be substituted for each other leading to the conclusion that 'George IV wished to know whether Scott was Scott.' Frege however says that 'the author of *Waverley*' can be substituted by any other sign having the same reference as it has in the sentence, 'George IV wished to know whether Scott was the author of *Waverley*' without changing the truth value of this sentence.

Frege's solution raises the question as to how can we know whether two names have the same reference in an oblique context or, when do two names have the same customary sense? Actually most of the intentional objects like properties, attributes, senses, etc. do not have clear identity conditions and therefore we do not have any clear conception about these objects.

Frege's solution also has an undesirable consequence to the effect that a pronoun within the scope of a verb of prepositional attitude cannot pick up reference of an outlying antecedent outside that scope. Let us take for example 'Scott was the author of *Waverley*, although George IV did not know that he was the author of *Waverley*'. Now if the pronoun 'he' is substituted for any word, its reference becomes oblique here, though its antecedent (Scott) has ordinary reference. This difficulty concerns the operations of bound variables whose antecedent quantifiers lie outside the scope of these verbs; that is, from 'Scott was the author of *Waverley*, although George IV did not know that Scott was the author of *Waverley*' it cannot be deduced that ' $(\exists x)$ (x was the author of *Waverley* although George IV did not know that x was the author of *Waverley*)'. The existential generalization cannot be applied here if Frege's views about pronouns having different references within and without the scope of irregular verbs are true. The quantified form cannot be inferred, though it claims no more than 'Someone was the author of *Waverley* although George IV did not know who that person was', which is in correspondence with historical facts. It seems ironical that though Frege invented both the semantics of sense and reference and quantification theory, he did not realize that there remained a problem involving the two working together.

Frege too held that in a certain context, expressions, which have oblique reference – have an oblique sense. But he has neither specified nor illustrated with the help of examples this obliqueness of sense. The ordinary sense of an expression like ‘the author of *Waverley* is its meaning. Is the oblique sense of this expression another meaning? These points are not clear from Frege’s theory.

Frege tries to solve the problem of negative existentials by saying that sentences of fiction, myth etc. may have sense though not having any reference (truth value) because they contained fictitious characters like ‘Odysseus’ etc. which do not have denotation. But this is not a satisfactory answer. Problems arise if we hold that the sentences of a novel do not have truth-values. To state the example given by Linsky, “When Homer says that the home of Ulysses is in Greece, what he says is neither true nor false. But when we say that it was in Italy, what we say is false.”²⁰

Further, sentences like ‘Pegasus does not exist’ are surely true, i.e., contrary to Frege’s theory it has truth-value even while containing a reference less name ‘Pegasus’. To avoid this Frege says that in a well-constructed language referenceless names are not to be allowed. It has to be concluded then that Frege’s theory is unable to solve the puzzles satisfactorily. But there are reasons other than these for Russell to reject Frege’s theory. Frege had distinguished

between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, which are otherwise called 'sense' and 'reference' by most philosophers, but Russell had used the terms 'meaning' and 'denotation' to refer to them. Russell admits that Frege avoids the breach of law of contradiction that is committed by Meinong. Frege's theory was that meaning and denotation are properties of expressions. Explaining Frege's theory, Russell cites the following example:

The Centre of mass of solar system at the beginning of the twentieth century is highly complex in meaning, but its denotation is a certain point which is simple. The solar system, the twentieth century, etc. are constituents of meaning; but the denotation has no constituents at all.²¹

Subsection – (iv)

Is Frege's Theory Totally Unacceptable ?

Russell also admires Frege's theory; he accepts its advantages, saying that the theory shows why the relation of identity is so important. The difference in sense is the reason for statements of identity like 'Scott is the author of *Waverley*' being informative. But Russell's problem regarding Frege's theory begins with the cases, which lack denotation. Following Frege's theory, reference of a term is its truth-value; therefore if a sentence is denotation less, then it is meaningless. But this conflicts with Russellean account of descriptive sentences,

which lack denotation, as Russell takes them to be false. Russell holds that when we say 'the King of England is bald' we are uttering a statement about the actual man denoted by the expression. By parity of form, so must be the case with 'the King of France is bald'. But, though this phrase it has a meaning it lacks denotation. However, that does not make the statement nonsense, it is plainly false.

We can understand Russell's position with the help of another example given by him: 'If u is a class which has only one member, then that one member is a member of u ' or 'If u is a unit class *the* u is a u '. This proposition should always be true, since the conclusion is true, whenever the hypothesis is true. Now, if u is not a unit class, then the proposition seems to be nonsense. But Russell says, these types of propositions do not become meaningless because their hypotheses are false. He cites cases where statements containing denoting phrases, which have no denotation, yet they are true because the hypothesis is false. So Russell concludes that :

We must either provide a denotation in cases in which it is at first sight absent or we must abandon the view that the denotation is what is concerned in propositions which contain denoting phrases.²²

Russell chooses the second alternative. The first one is followed by both Meinong and Frege. Meinong's course is undesirable as it admits of things that

do not subsist and infringes the law of contradiction. Frege, on the other hand, takes a path, which though logically sound, is artificial. Frege provides purely conventional denotation for otherwise denotationless term; for example 'the King of France' he says denotes the null class; thus if it is accepted that denoting phrases have meaning and denotation, we face difficulties where there is no denotation.

However, according to Sainsbury, it is not on these grounds that Russell attacks Frege's position. In fact Russell's objections against Frege, are discussed somewhat obscurely in "On Denoting":

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."²³

Russell outlined this problem in relation to a specific expression, namely, 'The first line of Gray's Elegy', and he suggested two ways of trying to identify its sense. They are :

- (a) The sense of the first line of Gray's Elegy .
- (b) The sense of 'the first line of Gray's Elegy'.

The fundamental point is that whichever alternative we avail of, it fails in making adequate reference to the required sense.

According to Russell, if we take the first option (a) to refer to the required sense by using the expression without quotation marks that would refer to the *sense* of the first line of Gray's *Elegy*, which is 'The curfew tolls the knell of the parting day'. So, what we actually get is the sense of 'The curfew tolls the knell of the parting day' and *not* the sense of the expression, 'The first line of Gray's *Elegy*'. It is for this reason that (a) fails to identify the sense of the given expression and succeeds in identifying the sense of the referent of the given expression.

If we take the second option, i.e., (b), putting the expression in quotes as in 'The first line of Gray's *Elegy*', we can avoid the difficulty that arose in the first case, but this manoeuvre also does not succeed. For (b) provides us with a sense, which is 'merely linguistic through the phrase' and does not show any 'logical relation' between the reference and the required sense. Russell argued:

...The difficulty which confronts us is that we cannot succeed in both preserving the connexion of meaning [Fregean Sinn] and denotation [Fregean Bedeutung] and preventing them from being one and the same ...²⁴

The upshot of the objection is that for Russell, the occurrence of the expression in (a) gives us the *reference*, not the *sense*; and in (b) it gives us only an expression, which *refers to a sense* and so not the sense itself. The relation between sense and reference remains totally unintelligible.

However, some questions arise with regard to Russell's position. First, does Russell's argument depend on special features of the example chosen by him, or is it quite general? Second, we would need to be satisfied whether Russell has given a fair account of Frege's distinction. Third, whether Russell's own claim that 'there is no logical connection between sense and reference' is itself clear.

As to the first, Searle observes that Russell's use of quotation marks which violates the distinction between use and mention is unfair to Frege. Russell assumed that putting an expression within quotation marks, according to Frege, immediately identifies the sense of that expression. But, as Searle observes, there is no context at all, "in ordinary speech where enclosing in inverted commas is by itself sufficient to indicate that the resultant expression is being used to refer to its customary sense".²⁵

As to the second, Searle also claims that Russell's account of Frege's distinction is inaccurate. Russell attributed the view to Frege that it is the sense of some expressions that refer to the reference of the object. Frege's view is formulated in a different way. For him, "A proper name (word, sign, sign combination, expression) *expresses* its sense, means or designates its meaning. By employing a sign, we express its sense and designate its meaning."²⁶

Russell's objection that there is 'no logical connection between sense and reference' is also not a fair one. They are related by the relation of 'mode of presentation'. Sense, says Frege, is the mode of presentation of the object, which is the reference of the expression whose sense it is. If we speak of Aristotle, the Greek ship-magnate and Aristotle, the author of *Nicomachean Ethics*, the relation between the sense and reference in the two sentences is quite arbitrary. But in the case of another pair of propositions, Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander the Great and Aristotle was the student of Plato, there is a logical relation between sense and reference of the two expressions, which enables us to understand what is being said about the reference. It is not clear what Russell means by the lack of logical connection between sense and reference.

Russell's above criticisms arise out of confusion. Frege indeed held that the meaning and denotation of an expression are distinct, but he never denied that a meaning could be a denotation. Frege had said that what is the denotation of an expression in a special circumstance, is its meaning in ordinary circumstance. Thus what Russell objects to does not hold. The Frege-Russell controversy is of considerable importance in the account of later philosophers like Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), Peacocke, "Proper Names, Reference and Rigid Designation" in S. Blackburn (ed.), *Meaning, Reference and Necessity* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), S. Black and A. Code, 'The Power of Russell's Criticism of Frege': "On Denoting",

Analysis, Vol. 38, 1978, pp. 65 – 77, and Sainsbury, *Russell*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979. This reveals the interest the controversy has created and it can hardly be described as 'dying'. At least it has changed the character of analytic philosophy.

The other side of this objection is that if meaning can only be denoted by denoting phrases then Frege's theory involves an infinite regress. Let us take for example a sentence like 'Scott is the author of *Waverley*.'

Here the denoting phrase is 'the author of *Waverley*', and the meaning of this phrase does the denoting. If the meaning of the phrase be 'M', then the original sentence may be analyzed into 'Scott is the denotation of M'. But in that case we are not proceeding anywhere for we are merely explaining the proposition with the help of a similar form. But this argument is inconclusive because it is not clear what sort of explanation Russell aims at and why he calls the theory to have vicious circularity. Contrary to what Russell thinks, Frege held that it is not the meaning, but expressions that denote.

Examining Russell's objections to Frege's theory, Sainsbury comes to the conclusion that the true source of Russell's complain was in his supposition that the meaning of an expression could be relevant to the identity of the proposition expressed by a sentence only if the meaning is denoted. This assumption of Russell makes Frege's theory fallacious. Writing on this topic

Walting pointed out that there could be really three possibilities: (i) that denotation alone is relevant, (ii) that denotation and meaning are both relevant and (iii) that meaning alone is relevant. The last alternative is put forward by Frege, which Russell tries to refute. Russell's theory, in which he brings in the existence of denotation less description, does not let the first two possibilities stand. But his argument against Frege's theory is not fully tenable.

Let us suppose 'c' to be a descriptive phrase and let us also suppose that *c* denotes the meaning of 'c'. Russell's argument is that the denotation of 'the meaning of c' is not *c* but the meaning (if any), of the denotation of 'c'. Denotation of '*c*' may be denoted by the expression 'the meaning of "c" '. This means that when 'c' occurs unquoted in a sentence, *c* does not occur in it, and is thus irrelevant in determining the identity of the proposition expressed by the sentence, and also that when *c* does occur in a proposition and determines its identity, the sentence does not contain 'c', it contains only an expression whose denotation is *c*. So the meaning of 'c' is irrelevant to the proposition expressed by a sentence containing 'c' which was not intended.²⁷

The argument is not sound because it leans on the presupposition that only a denotation is relevant to the identity of the proposition. This presupposition is opposed to Frege's view that only meaning is relevant to the identity of the proposition. But Frege's theory cannot be ruled out just because it stands in

opposition to Russell's view. Thus we have to conclude that Russell's criticism against Frege's theory do not fully disprove it. On the contrary, Russell's objections make the general and fair point that Frege's sense theory does need more exposure and more explanation. In the next chapter we will discuss Russell's theory more elaborately.

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Notes & References on Chapter 4:

1. R. Jager, *The Development of Bertrand Russell's Philosophy*, London : George Allen and Unwin, 1972, p. 226.
2. B. Russell, "On Denoting", *Mind*, Vol. 14,1905, pp. 479-93, reprinted in *Logic And Knowledge*, R.C. Marsh (ed.), London : Routledge, 1994, p. 47.
3. *Ibid*, p.42.
4. *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, R.M. Chisholm (ed.), Free Press of Glencoe, 1960.
5. L. Linsky, *Referring*, London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, p. XV.
6. R. Grossman, *Meinong*, London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p. 115.
7. *Ibid*.
8. *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology* ed. R.M. Chisholm, *op.cit.*, p. 8.
9. "On Denoting", *Logic and Knowledge*, *op.cit.*, p. 45.
10. B. Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" in *Logic and Knowledge*, *op.cit.*, p. 244.
11. "Proper Names, Reference and Rigid Designation", in S. Blackburn (ed.), *Meaning, Reference and Necessity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
12. R.M. Sainsbury, *Russell*, in *Arguments of the Philosophers* series, T. Honderich (ed.), London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 77.
13. "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", *Logic and Knowledge*, *op.cit.*, p. 252.
14. *Russell*, *op.cit.*, p. 102.
15. "On Denoting", *Logic and Knowledge*, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

16. *Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values*, New York: Oxford, 1963, p. XI.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
18. *Russell, op.cit.*, p. 100.
19. "On Sense and Reference" in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, M. Black and P.T. Geach (eds.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952. All quotations of Frege are from this source unless otherwise specified.
20. *Referring, op.cit.*, p. 28.
21. "On Denoting", *Logic and Knowledge, op.cit.*, pp. 45 - 46.
22. *Ibid*, p. 47.
23. *Ibid*, p. 48.
24. *Ibid*, p. 49.
25. "Russell's Objection to Frege's Theory of Sense and Reference", *Analysis*, Vol.18, 1957 - 58, p.138.
26. " On Sense and Reference", *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege, op.cit*, p. 61.
27. This argument and example is suggested by Sainsbury in *Russell, op cit*, p. 106, cf. "On Denoting" by Russell, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

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