

Lectures 12: Central Themes

s.butterfill@warwick.ac.uk

‘entities such as meanings ... are not of independent interest’ (Davidson 1984, p. 154)

1. Sense and Reference

‘What is stated in the proposition ‘Charly is Samantha’ is certainly not the same thing as the content of the proposition ‘Charly is Charly’. Now if what corresponded to the name ‘Samantha’ as part of the thought was the reference of the name and hence the woman herself, then this would be the same in both thoughts. The thought expressed in ‘Charly is Samantha’ would have to coincide with the one in ‘Charly is Charly’, which is far from being the case’ (Frege 1993, p. 44).

‘Someone who takes the latter to be true need not ... take the former to be true. An object can be determined in different ways, and every one of these ways of determining it can give rise to a special name, and these different names have different senses’ (Frege 1993, p. 44).

‘Frege’s idea was that to understand an expression, one must not merely think of the reference that it is the reference, but that one must, in so thinking, think of the reference in a particular way. The way in which one must think of the reference of an expression in order to understand it is that expression’s sense’ (Evans 1985,

p. 294).

References

- Davidson, D. (1974 [1984]). Belief and the basis of meaning. In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (pp. 141–154). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, G. (1985). *Collected Papers*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Frege, G. (1892 [1993]). On sense and reference. In A. W. Moore (Ed.), *Meaning and Reference* (pp. 23–42). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

II

LETTER TO JOURDAIN

GOTTLOB FREGE

I do not believe that we can dispense with the sense of a name in logic; for a proposition must have a sense if it is to be useful. But a proposition consists of parts which must somehow contribute to the expression of the sense of the proposition; so they themselves must somehow have a sense. Take the proposition 'Etna is higher than Vesuvius'. This contains the name 'Etna', which occurs also in other propositions, e.g., in the proposition 'Etna is in Sicily'. The possibility of our understanding propositions which we have never heard before rests evidently on this, that we construct the sense of a proposition out of parts that correspond to the words. If we find the same word in two propositions, e.g., 'Etna', then we also recognize something common to the corresponding thoughts, something corresponding to this word. Without this, language in the proper sense would be impossible. We could indeed adopt the convention that certain signs were to express certain thoughts, like railway signals ('The track is clear'); but in this way we would always be restricted to a very narrow area, and we could not form a completely new proposition, one which would be understood by another person even though no special convention had been adopted beforehand for this case. Now that part of the thought which corresponds to the name 'Etna' cannot be Mount Etna itself; it cannot be the reference¹ of this name. For each individual piece of frozen, solidified lava which is part of Mount Etna would then also be part of the thought that Etna is higher than Vesuvius. But it seems to me absurd that pieces of lava, even pieces of which I had no knowledge, should be parts of my thought. Thus both things seem to me necessary: (1) the reference of a name, which is that

An extract from an undated letter, published in *Frege's Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*, ed. Gottfried Gabriel, Hans Hermes, Friedrich Kanbartel, Christian Thiel, and Albert Veraart, abridged for the English edn. by Brian McGuinness, and trans. Hans Kaal (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980). Reprinted by permission of Blackwell Publishers.

¹ Ed. note: Kaal's translation originally had 'meaning' here. 'Reference', however, brings the translation into line with the rest of this volume, including Frege's other essay, Essay I above. (The German word is '*Bedeutung*', which is usually rendered 'meaning', but which Frege is using in a technical way.) I have taken the liberty of replacing 'meaning', each time it occurs in Kaal's translation, by 'reference'.

about which something is being said, and (2) the sense of the name, which is part of the thought. Without reference, we could indeed have a thought, but only a mythological or literary thought, not a thought that could further scientific knowledge. Without a sense, we would have no thought, and hence also nothing that we could recognize as true.

To this can be added the following. Let us suppose an explorer travelling in an unexplored country sees a high snow-capped mountain on the northern horizon. By making inquiries among the natives he learns that its name is 'Aphla'. By sighting it from different points he determines its position as exactly as possible, enters it in a map, and writes in his diary: 'Aphla is at least 5000 metres high.' Another explorer sees a snow-capped mountain on the southern horizon and learns that it is called Ateb. He enters it in his map under this name. Later comparison shows that both explorers saw the same mountain. Now the content of the proposition 'Ateb is Aphla' is far from being a mere consequence of the principle of identity, but contains a valuable piece of geographical knowledge. What is stated in the proposition 'Ateb is Aphla' is certainly not the same thing as the content of the proposition 'Ateb is Ateb'. Now if what corresponded to the name 'Aphla' as part of the thought was the reference of the name and hence the mountain itself, then this would be the same in both thoughts. The thought expressed in the proposition 'Ateb is Aphla' would have to coincide with the one in 'Ateb is Ateb', which is far from being the case. What corresponds to the name 'Ateb' as part of the thought must therefore be different from what corresponds to the name 'Aphla' as part of the thought. This cannot therefore be the reference which is the same for both names, but must be something which is different in the two cases, and I say accordingly that the sense of the name 'Ateb' is different from the sense of the name 'Aphla'. Accordingly, the sense of the proposition 'Ateb is at least 5000 metres high' is also different from the sense of the proposition 'Aphla is at least 5000 metres high'. Someone who takes the latter to be true need not therefore take the former to be true. An object can be determined in different ways, and every one of these ways of determining it can give rise to a special name, and these different names then have different senses; for it is not self-evident that it is the same object which is being determined in different ways. We find this in astronomy in the case of planetoids and comets. Now if the sense of a name was something subjective, then the sense of the proposition in which the name occurs, and hence the thought, would also be something subjective, and the thought one man connects with this proposition would be different from the thought another man connects with it; a

common store of thoughts, a common science would be impossible. It would be impossible for something one man said to contradict what another man said, because the two would not express the same thought at all, but each his own.

For these reasons I believe that the sense of a name is not something subjective [~~crossed out: in one's mental life~~], that it does not therefore belong to psychology, and that it is indispensable.