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Review of "Departing From Frege: Essays in the Philosophy of Language"

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Departing From Frege: Essays in the Philosophy of Language, by R. M. Sainsbury. London: Routledge, 2002 $96.95 Pp. x + 234, (Bibliography and Index), ISBN 0-415-27255-6 (Hardback)

This welcome book collects together twelve of Sainsbury's articles on the philosophy of language from 1979 to 2001 (plus additional notes on many of them), combined with a short but very helpful introduction that puts the articles into the context of a currently evolving, neo-Fregean (hence the title) framework. For convenience and future reference, the substantive chapters of the book comprise the following articles (with minor modifications). [1] "Understanding and Theories of Reference" (1979), [2] "Evans on Reference" (1985) originally "Critical Notice: *The Varieties of Reference* by G. Evans, [3] "Concepts without Boundaries" (1990), [4] Russell on Names and Communication" (1993), [5] "How Can Some Thing Say Something?" (1996), [6] "Easy Possibilities" (1997), [7] "Fregean Sense" (1997), [8] "Indexicals and Reported Speech" (1998), [9] "Names, Fictional Names, and 'Really'" (1999), [10] Knowing Meanings and Knowing Entities" (2001), [11] "Two Ways to Smoke a Cigarette" (2001), (with commentary on co-symposiasts removed), [12] "Sense Without Reference" (2001). These chapters are almost universally characterized by a close and honest reading of original text, philosophical common sense, and circumspection regarding possible objections. It is impossible to do them justice here, so I will limit myself to discussing the framework in general terms, mentioning articles that are especially important to developing that framework. Given Sainsbury's excellent previous book on Russell, we might hope that the future might bring an equally excellent book on Frege, or at least Pared Down Fregeanism.

Fregeanism and Pared Down Fregeanism. Sainsbury sees two lines of thought as the core of "Fregeanism" (nb not Frege: "Probably nobody would now defend precisely the position Frege developed" (1)). First (i) that "some public and shared differences among things known cannot be attributed to the referents of words involved in the expression of knowledge ... [and so] an adequate semantic description should capture a difference between words which, though having the same referent, can contribute differently to the expression of knowledge." (ii) Second, the "recognition of the possibility of sense without reference" (2). Sainsbury's view of Frege's contributions, even the bit we can be sympathetic with today, seems a bit narrow, if "Fregeanism" is our guide. Much of contemporary formal semantics borrows explicitly from Frege's work on quantifiers, connectives, and compositionality (more about this later). Even pragmatics, especially speech act theory, but also implicature theory, has historical antecedents in Frege. Frege, like Searle (1969), Bach and Harnish (1979), Alston (2000) and others, divided sentences into "force" indicators and "(propositional) content" indicators, and even gave a proto-Gricean analysis of assertoric force (see Dummett, 1973/1981). And Frege, like Grice, tried to identify systematic ways in which what is conveyed by an utterance goes beyond the thought(s) expressed by the sentence (see Neale 1999 and Harnish 2003).

Sainsbury offers us a framework, "Pared Down Fregeanism" (PDF), characterized by general doctrinal departures from Frege, rather than a theory worked out in detail. PDF takes the above two doctrines as its points of departure, especially the first. It finds four broad areas of disagreement with Frege's notion of sense: (i) senses are not modes of presentation (mops) of some object of reference, because words can have sense and no reference, (ii) senses are not independent of language, because that introduces an unwelcome "reductionist dynamic" (this worry is obscure), (iii) senses are not abstract entities, because there is no way they could then be grasped --surely not by means of other senses (ad infinitum), and no account is given of how we can know when one expression has the same sense as another, (iv) senses as mops cannot vary across speakers and times (even while claiming that such senses are "grasped by everybody who is sufficiently familiar with the language"), because this makes it hard to find senses in the semantics of a public language (2-3). And perhaps a fifth: (v) the sense-reference distinction applies to "expression tokens rather than expression types", because a single sense cannot determine the same reference for a type if the references of tokens of the type vary from context to context (125).

Finally, before turning to (i)-(v) in more detail, let's note at least three Fregean doctrines not included explicitly here in PDF: (A) sense determines reference, (B) a sense of a complex expression is a function of (just) the senses of its constituents and their structural relations, (C) senses are the objects of indirect speech reports and propositional attitudes. Their status in PDF will need to be clarified, though each of these is taken up in chapters of the book.

Returning to (i)-(v), let's begin with (i) and (iii). In both cases the 'because' clauses are largely justified by the texts, but the inference to the criticism is not so clear. For instance, regarding (i), Frege seems to introduce mops as mops *of objects* in order to give us an intuitive grasp of the idea of a unique or individuating characteristic or condition. Once that idea is fixed, and it is the condition that he is ultimately concerned with, he can then he kick the object away leaving the condition. Senses as mops are not really paradoxical if one appreciates the role of the object in the exposition of sense (see below for Frege's earlier and less misleading terminology). And regarding (iii), although Frege rarely says much about the "grasping" metaphor for senses, the few passages where he does suggest that grasping a sense is via understanding an expression that has or expresses that sense. This of course creates other problems relating to what languages can express on the one hand and nonlinguistic beings on the other. And as far as telling when two expressions have the same sense, Frege rarely raises this issue but when he does he seems to rest the decision solely upon one's intuition of sameness or difference while entertaining the two terms. As for their "abstractness", the argument for sense from identity suggest that Frege would have said something Quinean: we posit them, and they exist, if the best theory requires them.

Regarding (iv), the issue is more complex and part of Sainbury's complaint might be due to terminology. Although Frege's word 'Eigenname' can be correctly translated as 'proper name' (just as 'Bedeutung' can be correctly translated as 'meaning', 'Gedanke' as 'thought' etc.), Frege used these terms in such a special way, that these translations can be misleading for (English) readers. Sometimes it's best not to translate technical terms and to let the original (con)text provide understanding. But if one does translate, it is sometimes best to find the word in the target language that plays the same (or closest) role, has the best fit, to that in the home language. To take an uncontroversial example, in Hungarian 'villany-korte' is correctly translated, as to its linguistically encoded meaning, into English as, word for word, 'electric-pear', a puzzling expression at best until one learns that the word is used to refer to light bulbs. Then it makes some sense (think of its shape), and everyone is happy to "translate" it as 'light bulb'. Returning to 'Eigenname', although it can be translated as 'proper name', it is better to see how Frege uses it, and he

uses it in such a way that the best fit is 'singular term'. The upshot of this terminological shift is the appropriateness of speaking of a semantic variety of kinds of singular terms in a way that there is not a comparable variety of "proper names". Among the singular terms for Frege here are what we call a 'proper name' (what Frege occasionally, though not regularly, called an 'eigentlich Eigenname' --an 'actual proper name'). There are also definite descriptions, indexicals-demonstratives, and even (assertoric) sentences. Sainsbury notes all this (10), but does not explicitly note an important possible consequence for point (iv) --that these different categories of singular terms could have different sense properties (see Burge, 1979), and preclude any generalization of this nature. For instance, its seems clear that for Frege, the sense of (actual) proper names can vary from person to person, and/or time to time (see the 'Aristotle' footnote to 1892 and the 'Gustav Lauben' example in 1918). Turning to indexicals and demonstratives, Frege seems to hold not that their sense varies from person to person, so much as from occasion of use to occasion of use. And finally ("pure" i.e. indexical-demonstrative and proper name free) definite descriptions seem to have none of the above variations in sense in that their senses are neither person nor occasion relative. They are paradigms for Frege of Eigenname in a public language because they can have a sense which is grasped by everyone "sufficiently familiar with the language". The upshot of this for point (iv) is that for Frege there is no public for actual proper names, indexicals and demonstratives, and so it is no criticism of Frege that he does not accommodate such a semantics. An argument is required to show that Fregean senses are a part of the public semantics. Noting that linguistic "meaning" is a part of the public semantics will not do since senses only act like linguistic "meanings" in the case of pure descriptions, not proper names, indexicals and demonstratives.

Regarding (v), and as noted earlier, for Frege indexicals and demonstratives require context to express their (intended) senses and knowledge of context to grasp these. This makes it possible that two expressions with different linguistically encoded meaning can express the same sense in appropriately different contexts (or the same sentence and express different senses in appropriately different contexts). These seem to be the primary sorts of example Sainsbury has in mind (125-6). But does this force Frege or us to tokens? Not without further considerations, because given the recognition of the role not only world (for reference) but of context (for sense), Frege can "assign" senses for indexicals and demonstrative types relative to contexts, just as types are assigned reference relative to the world. This moves the theory in Kaplan's (1989) direction, a good thing (but see Salmon, 2002).

Sense Without Modes of Presentation. In place of Fregeanism, PDF embraces a kind of deflationary or pleonastic theory of sense, where, on the one hand the sense of an expression e is given by 'the sense of e' (4-5), and on the other hand, explicitly following McDowell, "the sense/reference distinction is marked ... by the selection of the right way to specify the referent: a correct axiom will state reference, and thereby show sense", such as in the homophonic "Hesperus' stands for Hesperus' (6). (Compare here Schiffer, 2000). Sainsbury does not say how these two formats of sense specification are related --perhaps the homophonic sentences specify senses by showing them, and the pleonastic formula just picks up its reference from them. Nor does he say how the pleonastic format is related to compositionality of sense (as opposed to reference). One piece of evidence for PDF here, according to Sainsbury, is that "we would expect a typical word in a language to differ in sense not only from other words, but also from phrases" but then immediately adds "we could certainly imagine a ... redundancy-free language" (5). But how are we to evaluate this claim without knowing more about senses than PDF gives us? If sense is that which determines reference (if there is one), or it is linguistic meaning, as used to be popular to suppose, then there are many redundancies in language (and it is pointless to "imagine" one without them) --think of 'red book' - 'the book which is red', 'He believes it' - 'He believes it's true' and so on.

One main consideration behind relinquishing mops as senses (Frege 1892 "wherein the mode of presentation is *contained*" with no comment on what else might be there) is that "a Fregean who takes modes of presentation as central will find it hard to avoid commitment to the descriptivist conclusion which Dummett disavows" (5). And since "Kripke's examples have convinced almost everyone" (3) that descriptivism is false, mops should be rejected too, but see e.g. Kroon, 2004, for a survey of the resistance. It is worth noting that Kripke's epistemic arguments, insofar as they turn on proper names having a community-wide sense (see Kripke 1979) may have more limited application than is sometimes supposed without begging the question about the speaker-relativity of the sense of proper names --never mind Frege's (1918) contention that proper names are not really a part of the language. At the least, some proper names may have such community wide descriptive backing, others will not.

Finally, what exactly is the connection between being a mop and being a description? True, virtually every example Frege gives of a sense (of a singular term) is specified via a description, but this might be because the senses of (pure) descriptions are part of the language and so the only device available when writing for arbitrary audiences, without shared context (indexicals-demonstratives) or specific personal knowledge (proper names). In just one case, Frege (1879, section 8) deviates from this, describing a figure and asking the reader to fix attention on one point "immediately through intuition" (presumably in the Kantian sense: see Kitcher, 1979), and on another point answering to the description "the point B where the line is perpendicular to the diameter". Frege then continues "to each of these modes of determination there corresponds a separate name". Note that although this passage occurs twelve years before the first published announcement of the sense-reference distinction, it is the sense-reference distinction, without the word 'sense', and with the phrase 'mode of determination', which has the advantage of not implying nearly so strongly that there is something so determined (the mode of determining the winner may not actually yield a winner), as the later 'mode of presentation' does. One wonders if all this commotion about objectless senses would have been avoided if Frege had stuck to the earlier, more felicitous, phrase. Sainsbury suggests (23) that Frege's view on the role of e.g. times in the expression of senses might count against descriptivism ("whatever a time is, it is not a description"), but the time is not a constituent of the thought expressed (sense) it is a reference, so its non-descriptive character is marginal to the issue. Thus, there is some small wiggle-room for Dummett's non-descriptivism, though that might be over done. The fact that Frege explicitly endorses a conception of thoughts as conditions on a sentence referring to the True, plus the fact that these thoughts are composed out of the senses of singular and general terms, make it natural to suppose that these constituent senses are also conditions on reference (208), that compositionality is compositionality of conditions on reference --just the thing for a definite description to express (for predicates we will have to take Frege's (1891) "pinch of salt").

Sense Without Reference. Sainsbury is surely right, contra Evans (1982), that for Frege, singular terms can (and some do) have a sense but no reference, and that Frege's embrace of vacuous names was not in the least "equivocal, hedged around with qualifications" (10). Frege gives proper names, definite descriptions and sentences as examples of kinds of Eigenname that can be vacuous. (One need only find an indexical-demonstrative to complete the list.) Sainsbury is also right that Evans misinterprets Frege's (1897) conception of "mock" ('schein') proper names, thoughts and assertions as somehow not really proper names etc. But the text supports another interpretation, which seems to be compatible with Sainsbury's (but see 12) in which 'mock' basically modifies 'assertion' (the manifestation of a judgmental recognition that the thought expressed determines the True). 'Mock' assertions express mock thoughts and contain mock proper names, not because they are not really assertions etc., but because they do not *aim*

at truth, they do not have the *requisite seriousness*, they are not in the spirit of *science*. Frege's choice of language here, and the fact that he often characterizes these as "fiction" (even in the case of dramatic pretense) clearly reveals a bias in the value of different uses of language. In the face of vacuous singular terms, Sainsbury, following Burge (1974), advocates a "negative free logic" wherein "the sense of a name is to be given through a specification ... of the conditions under which it has a reference." For instance "for all x, 'Vulcan' refers to x iff x is Vulcan" (14). Perhaps in some attenuated sense '= Vulcan' gives "a condition under which ['Vulcan'] has a reference" or even refers to Vulcan, but isn't this really giving up on senses --what are "they" doing for the theory?

Sense Determines Reference. According to PDF, that sense determines reference can amount to no more than the claim that expressions with the same sense have the same referent (17), thereby rejecting Dummett's and Evans' stronger "recognitional" conception of determination (15). But is this a notion of determination at all? Sainsbury feels this lacuna, insisting that "More elucidation of what this knowledge [of determination] 'consists in' receives only an externalist answer ... Attention shifts, accordingly, to the notion of a name-using practice" (15-16). In this way "the senses of names [are] individuated by name-using practices" (18) and "name-using practices are individuated by their sources" (28). (Sainsbury does not mention Perry in the regard, but compare 2001, chapters 6-8) for a related project). Thus do senses determine references. But again, how general is this proposal? Does it extend beyond proper names to other singular terms, such as indexical-demonstratives or pure descriptions? These do not seem to be associated with any "practice" individuated by a "source", even "sources" possibly devoid of objects named, as in Sainsbury's account where baptisms, not the baptized, are "sources" (210-222). Is this again a doctrine just about proper names (a linguistically marginal phenomena, on Frege's view)?

Compositionality. Sainsbury refers to "Frege's attachment to compositionality principles" while noting that "compositionality for natural language is quite a difficult issue" (10). It is made more difficult too if one runs compositionality together with reference failure or substitution ("... whatever the referent a whole sentence containing it is will also be lacking, a remark which reveals his commitment to the compositionality of reference" (10-11). Compositionality is perhaps the best explanation for reference failure (and substitution), but without additional premises, reference failure does not entail it (see Pelletier, 2001). Sainsbury is tempted to get compositionality by incorporating into PDF a modified Davisonian framework for "a semantic description of a language ... to ... state and fix the meanings of sentences" (6). That framework is of course a moving target, and part of chapter [1] is devoted to elaborating it. Given that framework's commitment to a language as a set of sentences, what Chomsky (1986, 2000) calls 'E-language', it would have been interesting if Sainsbury had devoted some space to Chomsky's critique of that notion (see Stone and Davies, 2002). But the variety of singular terms, as well as other views Frege holds about sense, should give pause here that a Fregean PDF really is dealing in meaning. Recall that for Frege, entities in general have numerous senses, they are like characteristics. Some of these senses are expressed by pieces of language. Some senses expressed by pieces of language are not relative to the speaker, and are not relative to the occasion of utterance. Concerning these it is at least not misleading to say that they are "had" by the expression, and may approximate linguistic meaning. But even that leaves out force, which is an intuitive part of meaning. No one would say that '2 is an even prime.' and 'Is 2 an even prime?' have the same (intuitive, linguistic) meaning. Frege (1892, 1918) held that force ('Kraft') is "contained" in sentences --in the above case one force is assertive and the other erotetic. When faced with force, Sainsbury advises us to "abstract from force by pretending that all utterances are sayings" (31). Unfortunately, this does not abstract far enough to leave remnants of force behind: contrast 'He said that P' with 'He said that she is to do A' (see Bach and Harnish 1979

chapter 2 for more discussion). None of this detracts from the Davidson framework, it just highlights the degree that aligning PDF with that framework departs from Frege and Fregeanism. Another worry for PDF from this perspective is that if the above points about the variety of singular terms is generally right, then what will the compositionally determined sense (and reference) of a single sentence containing this variety amount to? Recall, we get the senses of (pure) descriptions from the language, of proper names from the (social) naming practice, and of indexicals-demonstratives from context. How would one state compositionality principles over these, and what would the "sense" of a sentence as an integrated whole look like? This is one danger of an eclectic notion of sense, one which "features in various issues like ... samesaying, in guaranteed sameness of reference, ... in counting items of knowledge, and in saying which characteristics are manifest" (10). Frege took the hard line and postulated something to play all theses roles, and that something, sense, could then compose appropriately. This resulted in an amazingly powerful, elegant (and, yes, sometimes weird) theory. One chips away at the occupier of such roles, leaving only the roles, at a price, and compositionality may reveal that the price is very high.

Final Comments. In article/chapter [10] Sainsbury wants to argue that "meanings are not entities" or more cautiously that "the hypothesis that meanings are entities can make no contribution to an understanding of meaning". In doing so he assumes that "meaning and understanding are correlative: meaning is whatever must be accessed in understanding" (181). But he does not say understanding which meaning --speaker meaning, sentence meaning, or any of the full variety of types of 'meaning' uncovered by Grice (see 1989). This is important in so far as the results are supposed to shed light on PDF by being critical of "Fregeanism", because Frege was concerning with understanding, but does not seem to have had the category of 'linguistic meaning' (the word, at least, being used up for reference) --though for some expressions, we have suggested, sense plays something like the role of meaning (see above). Frege did want to explain understanding linguistic items via grasping their sense(s), and senses are for Frege entities (objects and functions) that can be referred to (e.g. in indirect speech), counted, and quantified over. After critically surveying a number of attempts to put meanings as entities to use in explicating understanding, Sainsbury concludes "This does not show that there is anything amiss with the supposition that meanings are entities; only that such entities have not yet been found a role in an account of understanding" (188). And it is clear that Sainsbury has Frege in his sights "The argument ... applies straightforwardly to Fregean senses" (183). However, none of the rejected roles are the one that (apparently) primarily motivated Frege, that senses as (abstract) entities helped guarantee the possibility of a common understanding, and common dispute, of passing on information from generation to generation, and the general objectivity of the content of judgment, assertion etc. It may well be that PDF can also explain these, or explain their appearance away, but for the moment the Fregean option is still alive.

In Chapter [11] Sainsbury reaffirms his concern to keep as much Fregean compositionality as is compatible with the facts "The issue of the extent to which our language is compositional is not to be decided by general a priori reasoning, but by detailed examination of specific cases ..." (204). In particular, he is concerned to show that when faced with apparent noncompositionality (which idioms demonstrate to be actual), not only does the theoretician have the "covert indexicality" option, but also has the "unspecific meaning" option, which he thinks has been given "insufficient attention" (196). After reviewing standard cases of adjectival modification, genitives, compound nouns and transitive-intransitive verbs, he takes up Travis' more radical denial of compositionality. Sainsbury, plausibly to my mind, argues that in all but one case the "unspecific meaning" option is live. However, he seems to grant Travis one case in which, says Sainsbury "I find myself compelled to agree that 'The ball is round' is

made both true and false by the same ball in the same condition, depending on context" (203). I don't feel so compelled, because in one context I deny that "the same ball" is being referred to at all. Try your intuition: "A first time spectator at a squash game asks if *the ball* is round. He wants to know whether squash resembles soccer, in being played with a round ball, or rugger, in being played with a ball which is not round" (202 emphasis added). It seems to me that a possible description of the situation is that the questioner is using 'the ball' primarily in a generic way, just as 'soccer' is being used to refer to the generic game, not the game in progress, and that the reference to the ball on the field, if there is one, is secondary. Notice that the very same question and answer could have occurred at the clubhouse bar, with no particular ball in the conversational offing.

In conclusion, perhaps Quine was right: we need to compare whole theories, not just constituent doctrines. Taken as a whole, Frege's edifice of language, epistemology and metaphysics is unified and truly imposing, warts and all. I suspect that it will only be replaced by another more imposing edifice, and the jury is still out on what that will look like, though Sainsbury has offered a promising outline. My complaints are small for such a large project, though they do perhaps indicate that I for one am more reluctant to pare down Frege to the extent Sainsbury is.

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