ON PROPER NAMES

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Abstract:

    The main goal of this paper is to show that in Speech Acts, two of John Searle's arguments fail to establish his thesis that proper names have sense, or descriptive content. It is argued, by considering counterexamples, that Searle's test for the analyticity of statements is inadequate, that the argument from the "principle of identification" is therefore mistaken, and that, because of lack of attention to the distinction between meaning and sense (descriptive content), the argument from identity statements fails to establish the conclusion. Hence the arguments based on identification and identity statements are unsuccessful.

On Proper Names

I.

In Speech Acts (Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 162), John R. Searle takes up the question whether proper names have sense, or meaning. And he gives an argument (p. 167) for the view that, in a weak sense, they do. This means, according to Searle, that there are statements of the form, Ψα, which are analytic - that is, they are analytic if one succeeds in referring to something in uttering the proper name, α. An alternative formulation of this thesis is that for any proper name, there is some general term that is analytically tied to it. (This formulation is stronger than that above, but this is not of much importance here.) I shall examine this argument in some detail, since I think that it is unsuccessful. In his words, the argument is this:

> It is characteristic of a proper name that it is used to refer to the same object on different occasions. The use of the same name at different times in the history of the object presupposes that the object is the same: a necessary condition of identity of reference is identity of the object referred to. But to presuppose that the object is the same in turn presupposes a criterion of identity: that is, it presupposes an ability on the part of the speaker to answer the question, "In virtue of what is the object at time t.1, referred to by name N, identical with the object at time t.2, referred to by the same name?" or, put more simply, "The object at time t.1 is the same what as the object at time t.2?" and the gap indicated by "what" is to be filled by a descriptive general term; it is the same mountain, the same person, the same river, the general term providing in each case a temporal criterion of identity. This gives us an affirmative answer to the weaker question. Some general term is analytically tied to any proper name: ...

Two points are not emphasized by Searle, but they are fairly clear and important. First, it is the speaker who must have a criterion of identity, that is, the speaker must be able to answer the two formulations of the question,"What (type of) object are you referring to?" Secondly, it is the speaker's answer to this question which must be considered by us to be his criterion of identity. That is, the general

term which the speaker provides in answering the question
is the general term which is analytically tied to the
proper name. Giving the speaker his due, then, and simpli-
fying the argument by stipulating that the speaker did
refer on two occasions, we may restate the above argument,
fairly, I think, in this way:
(i)   Let a speaker, S, refer to an object on two different
        occasions by uttering the proper name, α.
(ii)   This presupposes that the object referred to on these
        two occasions, is the same object.
(iii)   Hence S has a criterion of identity of the object,
        that is, S is able to answer the question,"The object
        at time t.1 is the same <u>what</u> as the object at time
        t.2?"
(iv)   The term, Ψ, which S is prepared to substitute for
        "what" in the above question, is a descriptive general
        term.
Therefore,
(v)   The term, Ψ, is analytically tied to α.

It is clear that the conclusion does not follow from
the premises. Formally, Searle needs the added premise:
(P)   If S is prepared to substitute Ψ as an answer to
        the question in (iii), then Ψ is analytically tied
        to α.
But (P) is false. For consider the man who uses the proper
name "Hesperus" to refer, on different occasions, to what
he mistakenly thinks is a star. He is prepared to say,
"The object at t.1 is the same <u>star</u> as the object at t.2."
If (P) were correct, then "star" would be analytically tied
to "Hesperus", that is
(1) Hesperus is a star,
would be true by definition, if it has a truth-value. But
in fact, (1) is false; our "Hesperus"-utterer may very well
be referring to something, even Hesperus, but he <u>mistakenly</u>
thinks it is a star. Therefore, (P) is false.

Now in reply to this objection, it may be said that (P)
is not required, but only this:
(Q)   If S is prepared to substitute Ψ as an answer to the
        question in (iii), then Ψ is analytically tied <u>for</u>
        <u>S</u> to α.

The following argument shows that (Q) is false. As before,
let S use the proper name "Hesperus" to refer on different
occasions to what he mistakenly thinks is a star. He is
prepared to say, "The object at t.1 is the same <u>star</u> as the
object at t.2." If (Q) were correct, then "star" would be
analytically tied <u>for</u> S to "Hesperus". Thus (1) would be
true for S by definition, if it has a truth-value. But
what is it for a statement to be true <u>for</u> someone? Perhaps
we should say that (1) is true by S's definition, or in S's
idiolect, if it has a truth-value. Now suppose that S
actually utters the words, "Hesperus is a star," and in so
doing, refers to something, x, and says of it that it is a
star. Since in S's idiolect his statement is true by defini-

tion, if it has a truth-value, and since Hesperus is not a star, it follows that S did not refer to Hesperus, i.e. x≠Hesperus. (I here assume that "star" means in S's idiolect what it does in English.) The other alternative has been excluded, for by hypothesis S referred to something (successfully).

But it seems evident to me that S could use "Hesperus" to refer to Hesperus even if he thought that what he was referring to was a star. I conclude that (Q) is false.

More simply the argument is this: If we suppose that (Q) is true and let "S" be Ralph", ψ be "star" and α be "Hesperus", it follows that if Ralph refers to something by uttering "Hesperus", then what he refers to is a star. But it seems to me obvious that Ralph could refer to something by uttering "Hesperus", even if what he referred to is not a star. Hence either (Q) is false or Ralph is not prepared to substitute "star" as an answer to the question, "The object at t.1 is the same what as the object at t.2?" But we simply stipulated that Ralph was prepared to answer in this way, in order to test (Q). (Q) has not passed the test.

It should be noted that even if (Q) were true, (v) would not (immediately) follow. What would follow is this:
(vi)   ψ is analytically tied for S to α.
But it would be easy to derive (v) in this manner:
(vii)   A general term, ψ, is analytically tied to a proper name, α, if and only if ψ is analytically tied, for all or most speakers who use α, to α.

Both (P) and (Q) have been shown to be wrong simply because the speaker, whom Searle claims must have a criterion of identity in order to refer to one thing on two occasions (by uttering a proper name), could well be mistaken in answering the question in (iii). Searle says (to quote again from Speech Acts, p. 167),"But to presuppose that the object is the same in turn presupposes a criterion of identity: that is, it presupposes an ability on the part of the speaker to answer the question ..."The object at time t.1 is the same what as the object at time t.2?" and the gap indicated by "what" is to be filled by a descriptive general term ..." The trouble with this, then, is that there is no assurance that the speaker will correctly answer the question. And there is no assurance that a whole community of speakers will answer it correctly. The Hesperus example used above is just such a case; another would be this: suppose everyone in a certain village (including Samantha) were willing to claim that the object, at t.1 and t.2, referred to by the name, "Samantha" was the same witch. They would not (at least in this example) be correct. But it does not follow, nor is it true, that if they refer to someone by that name, then the person they refer to is a witch.

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But perhaps Searle simply assumes that the question above
will be answered correctly. We may then qualify (P) in such
a way that wrong answers to the question do not count. Thus
modify (P) to
(P1)   If S is prepared to substitute Ψ as an answer to the
       question in (iii) and he would be correct in making
       this substitution, then Ψ is analytically tied to α.

Now what is needed to refute (P1) is simply a case in
which a person uses a proper name, and is not mistaken in
supplying a general term to fill the place of "what", and
yet the statement, Ψα, is not analytically true, even though
it is true. To refute (P) and (Q), examples were used in
which Ψα is false. And, of course, if a statement is false,
then it is not the case that it is analytically true,
if it has a truth-value. There is, therefore, a qualitative
difference in the way one must go about showing (or attempting
to show) that (P) and (Q) are false, and the way one must
go about showing that (P1) is false. The difference is
this: we need not decide, in any particular case, the question,
"Analytic or not?" in the course of attempting to refute
(P) and (Q), but we do need to decide this to refute (P1).

But (P1) as well as (P) and (Q) have this defect: certain
general terms substitutable for Ψ cannot correctly be taken
to be included in the meaning of α. Searle gives, as
examples of α-terms and Ψ-terms, these: "Everest" -"mountain";
"the Mississippi" - "river"; "de Gaulle" - "person." But
what of the following: "J.S. Bach" - "musician", "composer",
"husband", "organist": "de Gaulle" - "monarch"; "Henrietta
Smith" - "nice girl", "homely-looking person", "friend of Ralph."?

Suppose Ralph uses "J.S. Bach" to refer to someone on
different occasions and answers our question with "musician."
Thus by (P1), since his answer is correct, "musician" is
analytically tied to "J.S. Bach." It follows that we,
and Ralph, cannot use the expression "J.S. Bach" to refer
to anyone who was not a musician. But J.S. Bach, at age 1,
was not a musician.

It will be said, perhaps, that this is mere quibbling.
For what is wanted is a term which will provide a criterion
of identity throughout the history of the object. That is,
a Ψ-term will be analytically tied to an α-term only if
(in fact?) α always was a Ψ. And while Bach was a musician,
he was not always one.

Well J.S. Bach was a man, or at least a human being,
throughout his life. Everyone who uses the name "J.S.
Bach", and probably some who do not, can tell you that.
According to (P1), then, "human being" is analytically

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tied to "J.S. Bach." But suppose that someone put forward
the following fantastic hypothesis, and in these words:
(a) "It is almost universally thought that J.S. Bach was
a human being, but in fact I have discovered that all
documents which support this are fake. My hypothesis is
that there was a secret organization of 17th century
scientists who, unknown to the world until today, build
a computer and used it to compose music. J.S. Bach was
a computer." Unless he came up with some awfully convincing
evidence, the man who put forward this suggestion would be
ignored or ridiculed. But if (P1) were correct, (a) would
be unintelligible in exactly the same way that this is
unintelligible: (b) "I have discovered that the almost
universal belief that all bachelors are unmarried, is
false. In fact, not only are there married bachelors, there
are female bachelors." But (a) is perfectly intelligible,
without supposing that any of the words used have anything
but their standard meaning, while (b) is not.[1]

In reply to this, the objection might come, (a) is un-
intelligible only if we suppose that "J.S. Bach" means
something like "that which composed the St. Mathew Passion,
The Magnificat,etc." So there is still some general term,
perhaps "composer" which is analytically tied to the proper
name "J.S. Bach". My rejoinder is this: I am not <u>here</u>
arguing that the conclusion of Searle's argument is false;
rather that the argument is invalid and the premises which
make it valid (at least those that I can think up) are false.
That is, I have here argued that (P1) is false, because
if it were true, (a) would be unintelligible, senseless,
just as (b) is. "Composer" may be analytically tied to
"J.S. Bach" (though I believe it is not, since Bach was
not, at age 1, a composer), but "human being" is not so tied.
Therefore, (P1) is false. (A slight modification will
produce a counterexample to a modified premise using
"analytically tied for S" instead of "analytically tied".)

II.

I think that Searle's argument does not work because the
test he gives for determining what general term is analytically
tied to a given proper name, is a poor test. The speaker's
answer to the question,"The object at time t.1 is the same

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1. I do not wish to deny that there may be some sense in
   which the denial of an analytic truth is intelligible.
   (There are, it seems, degrees of intelligibility. Cf.,
   for example, "Some bachelors are married," "Frogs pink
   porridge," and "Togs plink greely.") I claim here only
   that the denial of an analytic truth is (in some, presumably
   weak sense) not perfectly intelligible.

what as the object at time t.2?" gives the wrong results,
even when the speaker answers the question correctly.

But it seems that Searle gives another test for determining
what general term is analytically tied to a proper name. The
passage quoted above continues (p. 167 of Speech Acts):

> Some general term is analytically tied to any proper
> name: Everest is a mountain, the Mississippi is a river,
> de Gaulle is a person. Anything which was not a
> mountain could not be Everest, etc., for to secure
> continuity of reference we need a criterion of
> identity, and the general term associated with the
> name provides the criterion. Even for those people
> who would want to assert that de Gaulle could turn
> into a tree or horse and still be de Gaulle, there
> must be some identity criterion. De Gaulle could
> not turn into anything whatever, e.g. a prime number,
> and still remain de Gaulle, and to say this is to
> say that some term or range of terms is analytically
> tied to the name "de Gaulle."

Perhaps Searle is suggesting one of the following:
(R) If α is a Ψ, and could not be a non-Ψ, then the
     statements, "α is a Ψ" and "α is not a non-Ψ" are
     analytic, if they have a truth-value.
(S) If certain people are willing to assert that α is
     a Ψ and could not turn into a non-Ψ (while remaining
     α), then the statements, "α is a Ψ" and "α is not a
     non-Ψ" are analytic for those people, if they have a
     truth-value.
But (R) and (S) are both false, I think, Consider (R) first.
The antecedent expresses the view that a certain object is
such-and-such and could not be a non-such-and-such. The
consequent expresses the view that certain statements are
analytic, i.e. that there are analytical connections in a
certain language between certain words. Let us assume that
de Gaulle was a man and could not have been a non-man, or that
Everest is a mountain and could not be a non-mountain. These
are reasonable claims I think. If (R) were true, "De Gaulle
is a man," would be analytic, as would, "De Gaulle is not a
non-man," if they have a truth-value. But note: it would
still be the case that de Gaulle was a man and could not have
been a non-man, even if (a) there was no English language;
(b) there was no proper name of de Gaulle; (c) everyone who
used the name "de Gaulle" to refer to de Gaulle believed,
mistakenly, that de Gaulle could have been a non-man, although
he was a man. I think that this is sufficient to show that
(R) is false, i.e. that it is not generally the case (to
paraphrase (R)) that if a certain object is a such-and-such,
and could not be a non-such-and-such, then there is an analytical
connection in a certain language between the proper name of
that object and some general term.

Now consider (S). There may be some confusion in (S)
which ought to be cleared up. It is of course false that
if a speaker, S, is willing to claim that de Gaulle is a
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person and could not turn into a non-person (while remaining de Gaulle), then there is an analytic connection for S between "person" and "de Gaulle"; for S might not speak English, or, even if he did, he might never have heard, or uttered, the name "de Gaulle". For example, S might point to de Gaulle (might have pointed), and say, "That man is a person, and could not turn into a non-person." But it would be absurd to suggest that there is for S - who by hypothesis, never heard nor uttered the name "de Gaulle" - an analytical connection between any word and "de Gaulle." These confusions are perhaps possible only because I have taken the above quote out of context. For Searle is only considering here those people who have in fact used "de Gaulle" to refer to one person on two different occasions. Let us revise (S), then, to:
(S1) If certain people are willing to assert (in these words), "α is a Ψ and could not be a non-Ψ (and still remain α)", then there is an analytical connection for those people between Ψ and α.

(S1) is much more plausible than either (R) or (S), but still it is false. For suppose that certain speakers are willing to assert some such thing, but someone else says, "α is a Ψ, but he could turn into a non-Ψ (while remaining α)." If (S1) were true, the speaker, S, will understand this remark as well as we understand, "Some bachelors are married." We find serious disputes over whether there could be a bachelor which was married to be silly: it depends on what you mean. But (S1) turns all disputes over whether the bearer of a name could or could not turn into a non-Ψ, into purely verbal ones. It depends on what you mean by α. (Here, what one <u>should</u> mean by α becomes curiously substantive.) And if someone changes his mind about whether, say, de Gaulle could or could not be such-and-such, then the meaning of "de Gaulle" has changed for him. Worse yet, consider this case: assume that twenty years ago, no one in a certain community, C, would be willing to say that a man could become a woman: thus everyone in C would be willing to say, (2) "α is a man and could not be a non-man and still remain α" where α is a proper name which those in C use to refer to a man. Now assume that it becomes well known, or is believed by those in C, that men can be changed into women by surgery, hormones, etc. They are now willing to assert, (3) "α is a man, but could become a non-man and still remain α." If (S1) were correct, the meaning of α will have changed (though not completely of course) for those in C. That is, the meaning of every proper name used by the people in C to refer to a man, will have changed. But this is difficult to believe. It is plausible to hold that the introduction of new surgical techniques will ultimately result in the change of the meaning of some words (perhaps), but it is implausible, and I think wrong, to maintain that the meaning of the proper names of men will change upon the discovery

that men can be turned into women. It seems to me, then,
for these reasons, that (S1) is false.[2]

III.

It is not surprising that Searle's argument for the
view that proper names have sense, or that "some general term
is analytically tied to any proper name," makes use of a
distinction between necessary and contingent properties of
the bearer of the name. (Just how the argument makes use of
this distinction is not entirely clear, however.) For if one
says that the general term which is analytically tied to the
proper name, is a term which is merely at some time true of
the object, or believed by users of the name to be true of
the object, then counterexamples abound - what if the users
of the name made a mistake? What if at some other time the
general term is not true of the object? The general term
must be one which is always true of, or correctly believed
to be always true of, the object in question. But even this
is not enough. For a general term might just happen to be
always true of an object, and then we get cases where it
makes sense at least to suppose that the object, referred to
by the name, could have been non-Ψ, even though in fact it
was not. And if it makes sense to suppose this, while referring
to the object by uttering the name of it, then it is hard to
see how the general term which is in fact true of the object,
could be analytically tied to the proper name. In the case of
general terms, if the meaning of the term Ψ includes the
meaning of the term Φ, then it doesn't make sense to say
(using those terms) that something could be Ψ but not Φ.
Similarly, in the case of proper names and general terms, if
the meaning of the proper name α includes the meaning of the
term Ψ, then it doesn't make sense (again using the terms)
to say that although α is Ψ, it might not have been (while
remaining α), or that, if such-and-such had been the case,
α would not have been Ψ (while yet existing). For it is
by definition Ψ. So it seems that in the end the view that
proper names have sense (as understood by Mill and, in its
weaker form, by Searle) must ultimately be defended by
distinguishing necessary and contingent properties of the
object. The general term which is analytically tied to
the proper name must, it seems, be one which is necessarily
true of the bearer of the name; or: the property connoted by
the proper name must be an essential, or necessary property of
the object.

This point can be seen as well by considering an argument
given by Mill. In his A System of Logic (Longmans, Green, &

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2. The alternative, that Ψ in (S1) cannot be "man" in the
    sense "adult male human," does not seem plausible. For
    why couldn't people be willing to assert,"Smith is a man
    and could not be a non-man and still remain Smith"?

Co., 1956), Mill argues that proper names have no connotation, or sense. That is, in his words, they "do not indicate or imply any attributes as belonging to" the bearers of the names. His best argument (p. 20) and perhaps his only one, is that if a name did imply an attribute, then, on discovering that the bearer of the name no longer had the attribute, we would no longer use the name. Suppose, for example, that a certain man has the name "Alfred", and that this name implies or connotes the attribute of being a bachelor. Now the man gets married. We should not say, "Alfred is married," for that expands into something like, "Alfred, who (by definition) is a bachelor, is married." As Mill says, "no one would any longer think of applying the name," if these events took place (and were known to have taken place). But it is obvious that we would continue to use the same name. Therefore the name "Alfred" does not connote or imply the attribute of being a bachelor.

Mill's argument seems to show that no proper name connotes an attribute. Now it might be suggested (perhaps Searle does) that underlying the argument is the assumption that there are no necessary or essential attributes of an object. In the example given above (and in those which Mill gives) a contingent property is taken as the one which is connoted by the proper name. It is then argued that if the object ceased to have that property (or even if we believed that the object ceased to have it), we would not refrain from using the name. Q.E.D. But this argument will not work if we take, as the connoted property of the name, a necessary property, i.e. one without which the object will not exist. Suppose, for example, that a man has the name "Alfred" and that this implies the attribute of being a human being. And let this attribute (by stipulation here) be an essential one. Now it does not make any sense to suppose that the man, Alfred, could turn into something other than a human being. If Alfred is essentially a human being, he could not turn into something else and continue to exist; and so Mill's argument does not work here.

It is sufficiently clear, I think, that Mill would be pleased by this objection. "Of course," he might say,"I am here assuming that the bearer of the name has no necessary properties. No other view is defensible." For Mill held, as we might put it, that there is no distinction between necessary and analytic truths. "An essential proposition, then, is one which is purely verbal; which asserts of a thing under a particular name only what is asserted of it in the fact of calling it by that name." (p. 75) Thus Mill might grant that there are necessary properties of an object under a certain name (or description), but he would certainly deny that there are necessary properties of an object simpliciter. These necessary properties of an object under a certain name or description are those connoted by the expression used to refer to the object. Thus, he might hold, a certain object is necessarily

a man, only if we refer to the object as "that man" (or
something of the sort). But, since a proper name connotes
no properties, it connotes no necessary properties. "When
the schoolmen talked of the essence of an individual, they
did not mean the properties implied in its name, for the
names of individuals imply no properties. They regarded as
of the essence of an individual whatever was of the essence
of the species in which they were accustomed to place that
individual." (p. 73) And, "The essences of individuals
were an unmeaning figment arising from a misapprehension
of the essences of classes." (p. 74)

Now given this view of necessary properties, and essences
of individuals, the objection (stated ablve) to Mill's
argument is without force. That objection was that Mill
failed to distinguish necessary from contingent properties
of an object. But if Mill is right, there is no distinction
to be made. And so his argument is perfectly sound. Proper
names do not have sense, that is they connote no properties
of the bearer of the name.

What is Searle's view on the matter? This indeed is a
difficult question. I shall not answer it except to say
that _if_ he thinks that there is no distinction between
"α is necessarily Ψ" and "'Ψ' is analytically tied to the
proper name 'α'", then it will not do to argue against Mill
that proper names have sense on the grounds that some
statements of the form "α is necessarily Ψ" are true. For
this argument is nothing but a statement to the contrary.

But suppose, as against Mill, that we take a realist's
view of necessity. Mill's argument, as presented above,
will then be deficient. It leaves open the possibility
that a proper name connotes a necessary property of the
bearer of the name. But I have already argued (in section II)
that it is not a sufficient condition for a general term, Ψ ,
to be analytically tied to the proper name, α , that the
bearer of the name be necessarily Ψ. For an analytical con-
nection is between terms of a language, while an object (the
realist claims) has necessary properties independently of
the existence of any language, and independently of anyone's
belief or knowledge that the object has necessary properties.
This is, of course, a controversial thesis. I shall pretend,
for the moment, that the reasons I have given for holding it,
are sufficient.

Granting, then, the realist's view of necessary properties
(at least for the sake of argument), what more is needed to
show that there are analytical connections (in a certain
language) between a general term , Ψ, and a proper name, α?
Quite clearly, I think, what is needed is that the speakers
of the language would be baffled by the suggestion that "α is
not Ψ" or "α might not have been Ψ" or "If such-and-such had
occurred, α would not have been Ψ." That is, the serious and

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literal suggestion that the bearer of the name could possibly have been (b) other than Ψ, when using the proper name to refer to that object, would be met with a lack of understanding, not merely with the belief that what was said was false. A statement such as "α could have been non-Ψ" would be considered by the speakers of the language as senseless, rather than false. Searle says (p. 167 of Speech Acts), "De Gaulle could not turn into anything whatever, e.g. a prime number, and still remain de Gaulle, and to say this is to say that some term or range of terms is analytically tied to the name "de Gaulle"." But this is wrong. For if someone asserted, "De Gaulle could turn into a prime number," and meant it, I, for one, would understand him. I might say, "How could he? It's impossible." I, and most English speaking people (I speculate) , think that, or know that, "De Gaulle could not turn into a prime number," is true. But if some term or range of terms (which exclude "prime number") were analytically tied to the name "de Gaulle," English speaking people would fail to understand the statement to the contrary, not merely fail to see how it is possible.

Now I have not shown that there are no analytical ties between general terms and proper names in a natural language, but I think that I have shown that Searle's arguments are radically wrong. The question whether there are such analytical connections, is not answered by discovering what the bearer of the name is, nor what it could or could not be. Nor is it answered by discovering what the speakers of the language believe the bearer of the name to be, nor what they believe it could or could not be. Instead, one must answer it by discovering whether or not it makes sense, or is intelligible to the speakers to say such things as "α is not Ψ", or "α could have been something other than Ψ." In a similar way, one does not answer the question whether there are analytical connections between the general terms "Φ" and "Ψ" by discovering that all Φ's are Ψ's, nor by discovering what the speakers of the language believe the answers to these questions are. One answers it by discovering whether it makes sense to the speakers of the language to say such things as "Some Φ's are not "Ψ" etc.

IV.

It seems to me, and probably to many, that Searle imports more difficulties than are needed when he rephrases the question,"Do proper names have sense?" in terms of the analyticity of statements (pp. 166-7 of Speech Acts). For it has long been recognized, at least by many, that the concept on analyticity (as so far developed) neither very clear nor of much philosophical use. And Searle agrees, saying

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(p. 10 of Speech Acts): "the notions of analyticity and synonymy are not very useful philosophical tools" and "In the case of analyticity ... there are ... too many unanswered questions ... for the term to be other than a very blunt tool of philosophical analysis." So Searle might not be too averse to dispensing with talk of analyticity in asking, and answering, the question,"Do proper names have sense?"

But the question remains: what does the question, "Do proper names have sense?" mean? In part, Searle means by this, "Do proper names stand for in the same way that definite descriptions stand for?" (I omit his scare quotes, p. 162).

It must be conceded, and Searle does concede, that the most intuitive, or commonsensical answer is "no". In support of this, it may be noted that most proper names are not formed from antecedently meaningful English words, while definite descriptions, of course, are. Thus "Socrates" is not made up of English words ("so" and "crates"?), while "the first man to climb Mt. Everest" is. The exceptions to this seem merely to support the view. "Charlemagne" is formed, on the face of it, from "Charles le magne" or, in English "Charles the great", and "Charles" means, or originally meant, "full grown". Again "Abraham" means literally (in Hebrew) "father of many", and "Abram" means "father is exalted." Proper names have what might be called "etymological meaning"; but it should be granted that those antecedently meaningful words from which proper names are derived are usually words in a language other than English, and that those words lose their meaning when they are taken as, or used as, proper names. For people are named, and called, "Charles" before they are full grown, "Abraham" before they are fathers, etc. (This is a version of Mill's argument, p. 20, A System of Logic.)

As against this several difficulties are raised by Searle concerning identification. (I temporarily ignore the problem with identity statements.) The first difficulty goes something like this (and this is very rough): a definite description can be used to refer to something because it contains, among other expressions, a descriptive general term, e.g. "the man over there" contains the expression "man". Thus the connection between the referring expression and the referent is (in part, and for normal cases) clear - the expression contains a general term which is true of the referent. But how could proper names be used to refer to anything if they did not have a sense, or 'descriptive content'?

The most obvious answer to this question is that proper names can be used to refer to something, even though they have no sense, because proper names are the names of their bearers. That is, just as a definite description can be used
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to refer because it contains a general term that is true
of the object, so proper names can be used to refer because
the proper name is the name of the object. This answer is
thought by Searle to be inadequate. His objection is: how
could the connection ever be set up between a name and its
bearer unless the name has a sense? The question is raised
in Speech Acts, p. 162: "And how is the relation indicated
by "stands for" ever set up in the first place?" And in
"Proper names" (reprinted in Philosophical Logic, ed. by
P.F. Strawson, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 96), he
writes, "But as a proper name does not in general specify
any characteristics of the object referred to, how then does
it bring the reference off? How is the connection between
name and object ever set up? This, which seems the crucial
question, I want to answer by saying that though proper names
do not normally assert or specify any characteristics, their
referring uses nonetheless presuppose that the object to which
they purport to refer has certain characteristics." In
Speech Acts, the question is never answered, however, and in
the above quote from "Proper Names" it is not answered either.
For to say that a referring use of a proper name presupposes
but does not specify characteristics of the object to which
it purports to refer, is no answer to the question,"How is the
connection between proper names and their bearers ever set up?"
In fact, as is clear from the context, Searle is answering
not this question, but the question which is posed immediately
before, viz. since proper names do not specify characteristics
of the object, how does it refer to it? But which question is
said then to be crucial? Surely not the one not answered.

Well how is the connection between proper names and
their bearers set up? This I think can be answered simply
enough without supposing that proper names have sense. At
least in a great many cases, we give names to objects. We
christen ships and babies, and name planets and craters on
the moon, etc. This can hardly be denied, so there must
be something thought to be wrong with it. What? We might
try to extract an answer from Searle's remark above. Perhaps
we cannot give an object a name without presupposing that
the object has certain characteristics. But what does this
mean? That all the objects to which we give names must have
a certain characteristics? That to give this name to this
object, the object must have a certain characteristic? Surely
not, since we can give any name to any object which we can
distinguish. The objection seems to be then that we can
give a name to an object only if we presuppose that the object
has some characteristic or other. But we normally suppose this
anyway; more importantly, it seems that we can only name an
object if in fact we can distinguish that object from others.
Even if there are exceptions to this, why should it be
thought to be a difficulty for one who holds that proper names
have no sense? Perhaps our specification of which object we
are giving the name to, will as well be a specification of the

sense of the name. I do not think that this is so, but even if it is, it is not a difficulty with how we could name an object unless the name given has a sense. The most that this would show would be that when we name an object, we give the name a sense, but it would not show that the name had to have a sense in order to give it to an object.

Interestingly enough, it is difficult to see how a proper name could be given to an object if the name, antecedently to being given to the object, had a sense. For the sense of the name is supposed to be given by some descriptive general term which is true of the object. But general terms are true of the object before the object gets its name (except in the case of over-zealous parents, ship-builders, etc.). And it appears that no matter what name we give an object, the sense of that name (supposing for the moment that it has a sense), is going to be dependent upon the general terms true of the object (or believed to be true of the object). Thus a name need not have a sense in order to give the name to the object. Furthermore, an unmeaning sound, or mark, can be given to an object and thereby become a proper name. Certainly sounds and marks which are not words, do not have a sense in virtue of which they are given to objects. Suppose, for example, that the sound "Bobalf" has never been used as a proper name, nor as any other type of expression. Now Sarah has a baby and names it "Bobalf". Here is a clear case in which there is no difficulty in explaining how the connection between the word and the object is set up - but this is a complete mystery on the view that a proper name must have a sense in order to set up the connection between a name and its bearer. More than a mystery - it would be impossible on this view for Sarah to name her baby "Bobalf."

But perhaps no one has ever claimed that a name must have a sense in order to give it to an object, but only that when we give a name we must specify which object we are giving it to, and this specification of the object is also a specification of the sense of the name. This is a special case of the argument from Searle's principle of identification, and as such will be considered below.

My answer to the question,"How is the connection between proper names and their bearers ever set up?" is not complete, though it is the obvious answer. For example, when Aristotle was born, he was not given the name "Aristotle", but the name "Ἀριστοτέλης". These might be thought to be the same name, but with different spelling, alphabet, and pronunciation. In either case, there is no difficulty about how the form "Aristotle" came to be used as the name of Aristotle. For "Aristotle" is a translation, or transcription, of "Ἀριστοτέλης", At least there is no more of a problem about this than about how I can refer to someone I have never met, and who is no longer

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alive, by the name "Washington".

This is considered by Searle to be a problem, however, whose solution requires the attribution of sense to proper names. It is supposed to follow from what Searle calls the "principle of identification" that proper names have sense. In essence, the principle is correct, for it is no more, essentially, than the principle that if one refers to something, then one ought to be able to answer a question like, "Who (which one) are you talking about?" In referring to something, the speaker picks something out, or distinguishes something from other things. But this way of speaking is fairly vague, hardly meriting the name "principle", and in reaction, perhaps, Searle attempts to make it much more precise. I think that truth is sacrificed for detail in several places, but I am not sure how crucial the details are, and shall not argue against the principle. My objection is this: even if the principle of identification is wholly correct, it does not warrant the view that proper names have sense.

The principle itself can be found on p. 88 of Speech Acts (or one formulation can be found there): "A necessary condition for the successful performance of a definite reference in the utterance of an expression is that either the expression must be an identifying description or the speaker must be able to produce an identifying description on demand." It is supposed to follow from the principle (see p. 92) that proper names, and indeed, every referring expression, have a sense or "descriptive content." Before examining how it is supposed to follow, it should be said that an identifying description is either (a) an expression which contains descriptive general terms which are true of one and only one object or (b) a demonstrative or (c) a combination of demonstrative and descriptive terms.

How does the "sense-view" of proper names follow from the above principle? Purportedly in this way: from the principle it can be seen that reference "is in virtue of facts about the object that are known to the speaker, facts which hold uniquely of the object referred to" (p. 92). And, it is said, the referring expression must have a sense, in order for an utterance of the expression to communicate such a fact.

But the conclusion simply does not follow. This can be seen in the case of demonstratives in this way: suppose someone asks me to give them, or produce, an example of a magnolia. A magnolia being present, I point and say, "That's one," or "This is a magnolia." Here I have presumably communicated a fact in my utterance of "this" - perhaps, "There is something at place P at time T." The sense of a referring expression is not, Searle tells us (p. 92) the proposition expressed in the utterance of the expression, but must be, or be given by, a descriptive general term. What then is the

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sense, or descriptive content of "this"? The candidates,
I suppose, are "magnolia", "tree", "shrub", "flower", and
"object". The first four candidates are excluded because
the English "this" does not mean, or contain as part of its
meaning, "magnolia", "tree", etc. "object" might do except
that it does not seem to be a descriptive term (i.e. it
seems that it does not have "descriptive content"). And
Searle, I think, would agree. For if it were, we could
answer his question on p.167, namely, "The object at time
t.1 is the same what as the object at time t.2?" with the
word "object". If this were the only way that we could
answer the question, then his thesis that some general term
is analytically tied to any proper name, would be trivial.
So it appears that none of the five candidates for general
terms giving the sense of "this" is suitable.

   Now it might be replied to this that it is not the
English word, "this" which must have descriptive content,
but only the token uttered by me when I said, "This is a
magnolia." Thus, in that utterance, but not in the English
language, "this" means, say, "this tree" or "this shrub".
But now, if "this" is not used metaphorically or in some
other non-standard way, as it is not in this case, then it
would appear that "this tree" is one of the standard meanings
of "this" in the English language. If so, there is nothing
to prevent drawing the conclusion that "this" is indefinitely
ambiguous, considered as an English word, as between any
general term which you choose. And again, what does "this"
mean when it occurs in "this tree"? Does it again mean
"this tree"? That would have the consequence that "this
tree" means "this tree tree" and so on ad infinitum. While
the regress may be stopped, still, it is not a virtue of
a theory that it has the consequence that "this" and other
demonstratives indefinitely ambiguous. Of course, one does
not show a word to be meaningless by showing that it is
ambiguous, but one goes a good part of the way toward showing
that it has no descriptive content, by showing that it is
ambiguous as between every general term in the language.

   Thus I am inclined to think that "this" has no descriptive
content. This is in contrast to "he" and "she", which seem
to have at least part of their sense given by "male" and
"female" respectively. But I have not given a conclusive
argument here. The view that demonstratives have as part
of their sense, the sense of some descriptive general term
seems to convert demonstrative pronouns into demonstrative
adjectives (or what is perhaps the same, the view is that
or entails that,"this" is not really a referring expression
(by itself)). All demonstratives, it might be said, are
either implicit or explicit adjectives. This view might be
made out, in opposition to the lexicographers, but I do not
know how to go about it, and Searle seems unaware of the
difficulty. It is, however, a genuine difficulty for the
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view that all referring expressions have descriptive content.

But what of proper names? I shall not here say anything directly about them, but only about the argument which is supposed to show that all referring expressions have sense (descriptive content). Let me clarify my objection.

The principle of identification states that if a speaker refers to something in the utterance of an expression,then that expression must be an identifying description or else the speaker must be able to substitute an identifying description. And an identifying description must be either an expression which contains a descriptive general term, or in the case of demonstratives, the speaker must be able to supplement the demonstrative with a descriptive general term. So, in the end, a referring expression must either contain a general term or the speaker must be able to substitute an expression which does contain a descriptive general term. Now it is easy to see how one might infer from this that a descriptive general term gives the sense of a referring expression, or that every referring expression must have a sense, i.e. descriptive content, given by the general term. In the case of most identifying descriptions the general term is part of the expression, and so that expression has a sense. And in the case of those identifying descriptions which do not contain a general term, and in the case of all other referring expressions, the speaker must be able to substitute an expression which does contain a descriptive general term. But of course it is in general false that if a speaker can substitute (correctly) referring expression "r", for another, "e", then "e" means "r". And furthermore it is false that if the speaker can (correctly) substitute "r" for "e", then the descriptive general term contained in "r" is part of the sense of "e". For example let "r" be "that man over there" and "e" be "he". The descriptive general term "man" is not part of the sense, and does not give the sense, of "he". For "he" is not ambiguous and it can correctly be used to refer to male animals of any type, not just human beings.

But the move made from "the speaker can substitute the expression "r" which contains the descriptive general term "d", for "e" which does not contain a descriptive general term" to "" "e" has a sense given by the general term "d" " is crucial to Searle's argument. It is the main part of the argument, and it is, in general, an illigitimate step. This is the same defect which I attempted to show was present in another of Searle's arguments. On page 2 of this paper I represented Searle's argument as one which requires some move from premise (iv) to (v). No linking premise was found which had the virtue of being true. And this is just the difficulty with Searle's general argument from the principle of identification.

There is much more to be said about the principle of identification, and the arguments on pages 167-9 of Speech Acts, which make use of the principle. But I shall not consider any further in this paper Searle's argument from the truth of the principle. For one thing, the paper is too long as it is, and for another, I do not think that very much more needs to be said about this type of argument. There remain two obstacles to the view that proper names have no sense. (I am considering myself to have shown that we are not required to attribute sense to proper names because of the difficulties Searle raises concerning identification.) The first obstacle concerns informative identity statements and the second concerns existential statements. In the final section of this paper I will concern myself only with the former.

V.

Identity statements are made using proper names. If proper names have no sense, how can there be any informative identity statements. That is, if "A" and "B" are proper names which have no sense, how can the statement "A=B" be any more informative than "A=A"?

The difficulty is not completely transparent, nor, in consequence, is it clear how the proposed solution solves the difficulty. At least one point should be noted. The trouble, prima facie (though it may turn out otherwise later), is not simply that the sentence, "A=B" does not mean the same as "A=A". For if this were the whole trouble, there would be no special difficulty about identity statements. We might as well argue that "Aristotle lived in Paris" and "Aristotle lived in Athens" differ in meaning, thereby showing that "Paris" and "Athens" differ in meaning. And if two words differ in meaning, they presumably have meaning. Or, just as effectively, we might argue that "John went to the zoo." is an English sentence which has meaning, and so "John" has meaning. But while this may show that proper names have meaning, it does not show that they have the right kind of meaning, viz. "descriptive meaning". Syncategorematic terms might by this argument be shown to have meaning, but not that they have descriptive content.[3]

The difficulty is much more intimately bound up with what we do with the sentences "A=B" and "A=A", or with the words in those sentences. Thus Searle writes, " ... the sentence, "Everest is Chomolungma" can be used to make an assertion which has geographical and not merely lexicographical import. Yet if proper names were without senses, then the assertion

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3. For some clarification of the distinction between meaning and descriptive meaning (descriptive content or sense), see pages 24-25.

could convey no more information than does an assertion
made with the sentence, "Everest is Everest." Thus it
seems that proper names must have descriptive content, they
must have a sense. This is substantially Frege's argument
that proper names have senses." But the crucial question
remains: why is it that if proper names have no sense,
then the statement "Everest is Chomolungma" could, roughly,
convey no more information than "Everest is Everest"? What
is the argument for this claim?

In "On Sense and Reference" (in Translations from the
Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege, Trans. P.T. Geach
and M. Black; Blackwell, Oxford, 1952), Frege gives an
argument which makes it seem problematic how there could
be any identity statements which are both true and informative.
And his solution to the puzzle presented by this argument is
that the referring expressions which are used in making the
statement must have sense (presumably "descriptive meaning").
The "crucial question" above will be answered by examining
Frege's argument and seeing how the conclusion, that there
are no true, informative identity statements, can best be
avoided by attributing sense to the expressions used in
making the statement. For it is obvious that there are
identity statements that are both truth and informative.

The argument with which I am concerned occurs on page 56
of the Translations from the Philosophical Writings, where
Frege asserts, "Now if we were to regard equality as a
relation between that which the names 'a' and 'b' designate,
it would seem that a=b could not differ from a=a (i.e. provided
a=b is true). A relation would thereby be expressed of a
thing to itself, and indeed one in which each thing stands to
itself but to no other thing." Frege is here pointing out a
(or an apparent) difficulty with the view that identity is a
relation between objects referred to, rather than a relation
between our referring expressions. His argument seems to
be this: assume that identity is a relation between objects,
i.e. a relation which obtains between an object and itself,
rather than a relation between two referring expressions.
Now someone who says, "A is B" and someone who says, "A is A"
are both "expressing a relation" of identity; in the first
case, between A and B, and in the second between A and itself.
So, if A is B, there is no difference between the relation
of identity between A and B and the relation of identity
between A and itself. So, if A is B, one who says, "A is
B," and one who says, "A is A" are expressing the same relation
about the same things - i.e. they are saying the same thing.
Both are saying that A is identical with itself. So it
seems that "A is B," when true, is no more informative than
"A is A."

Now Wiggins ("Identity-statements" in Analytical Philosophy,
second series, ed. by R.J. Butler, Blackwell, Oxford, 1968) uses

essentially the same argument as Frege's, and draws the
conclusion that identity is not a relation, or a property
at all, and that identity statements are not relational or
predicative in form. One statement of the argument is this
(pp.47-8): "A man who asserts that a=b thereby commits himself
to there being only one thing he is referring to by 'a' and
'b'. So when it is asked what is ascribed to the logical
subject of the utterance, the upholder of the predicative
analysis cannot refuse to allow that it is identity. Nor
can he refuse to allow that this comes down to self-identity."

But it seems that there are at least two constraints on
an adequate answer to the question,"What did the speaker say
about the object(s) to which he referred?"   (1) The answer
should be independent of the truth of what is said. For
example, if someone says, "Harry is angry," the same answer
should be given to the question,"What did he say about Harry?"
when the statement is true, as when it is false. (2) The
answer should provide an answer to the question, "What would
someone be denying about the object(s) referred to, if
he were to disagree with the original speaker?" (The
disagreement is not here over whether the speaker succeeded
in referring, or whether there is a referent of the expressions
used to refer.) In the above example, if someone were to
object, "No he's not," or "Harry is not angry," then what the
original speaker said about Harry, this speaker has denied
about him.

But the answer, "that it is self-identical, if what the
speaker said is true," given to the question "What did the
speaker say about A in saying "A=B"?" violates (1). And
the answer, "that it is self-identical", violates both (1)
and (2). Suppose that a speaker says, "Everest is Chomolungma."
If the speaker is ascribing self-identity to Everest, that is,
saying about Everest that it is self-identical, then, by (1),
this should be so independently of the truth of his statement.
But this is not so. For if his statement is false, then he is
not saying about Everest that it is self-identical. Again,
if the speaker is ascribing self-identity to Everest, then,
by (2), one who disagrees, saying, "Everest is not Chomolungma,"
ought to be denying self-identity to Everest. But he is not.

In the arguments given by Frege and Wiggins, it is assumed
that the statement "A=B" is true, before the answer to the
question, "What did the speaker say about the object(s) referred
to" is considered. For Frege writes, in part, " ... it would
seem that a=b could not differ from a=a (i.e. provided a=b is
true)." And Wiggins writes, "A man who asserts that a=b thereby
commits himself to there being only one thing he is referring
to by 'a' and 'b'." But it is not thought to be problematic,
apparently, that the answer to the above question in this case,

varies with the truth of the statement.

Again, Kripke, in "Naming and Necessity" (in The Semantics of Natural Language, edited by G. Harmon and D. Davidson, Dordrecht, 1972) seems to me to suggest very strongly, though he does not actually say it, that in making a statement of the form, "A=B", we are ascribing self-identity to the object referred to. He does not, it seems, see any particular difficulty about this. He writes (p. 193): "Some philosophers have found the relation ((identity)) so confusing that they change it. It is for example thought that if you have two names like 'Cicero' and 'Tully' and say that Cicero is Tully, you can't really be saying of the object which is both Cicero and Tully that it is identical with itself." Now I have no inclination to change the relation of identity, but it seems untenable to hold that if one says, "Cicero is Tully," or that Cicero is Tully, then one really is saying of the object which is both Cicero and Tully that it is identical with itself. For what would someone be saying if he said, "Cicero is not Tully"? On the above view, the answer seems to be (since Cicero is Tully): one is saying of the object which is both Cicero and Tully that it is not identical with itself. But surely this is wrong.

It seems to me, then, that there are insuperable difficulties with the view that in saying, "A is B" one is saying of A, or B, that it is self-identical, or that it is self-identical, given that the statement is true. Both Wiggins and Frege reject the answer, but not for the best of reasons. For they thought that the trouble with the answer is that, if it is correct, then there are no identity statements which are both true and informative. This of course, would be a problem, given the answer, "one is saying of A (or B) that it is self-identical, if A=B." And the fact that there are true, informative identity statements would be enough to justify rejecting the answer. But it seems to me that a much more important reason for rejecting the suggested answer is that it violates condition (1); we could not know what the speaker had said about the objects referred to, until we had determined whether what he said was true. But then how could we determine whether what he said is true, before we know what he had said, or what he had said about the objects referred to? On the other hand, if we hold that in saying "A is B", the speaker is saying of A just that it is identical with itself, then there are no false identity statements (granting the existence of A). And this is more problematic than being forced to hold that there are no identity statements that are both true and informative.

So much, then, for the conclusion of the argument. What is wrong with the argument? In terms, not of "saying of ... that ...", but of "saying that," the argument is: the speaker,

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in saying,"Everest is Chomolungma" said that Everest
is Chomolungma. Now if Everest is Chomolungma, the speaker
said that Everest is Everest. Or, schematically,
(i)   S. said that A is B.
(ii)   A is B.
Therefore,
(iii) S. said that A is A.
This difficulty is familiar (thanks in large measure to Frege),
even if no good solution is in sight. "Saying that" is
opaque, i.e. substitutions of coreferential and coextensive
terms, and of sentences (statements) equivalent in truth-value,
do not always preserve truth. Or, in other words, if
someone asks me to tell them what S. said, it will not do
simply to say, "S. said that ..." and utter something which
has the same truth-value as S's utterance. There are more
restrictions than this on adequate paraphrasing. And it
is not always easy to decide whether a given report in
indirect discourse, is false, or only misleading.

    Now in terms of "saying of ... that ...," the argument
runs into the same trouble. If Smythe says, "Everest is
Chomolungma," and I am asked "What did he say about Everest?"
a correct, but in some cases unhelpful answer would be, "He
said about Everest that it is identical with Chomolungma."
Now do I mislead, or do I say something false, in responding,
"He said of it that it is identical with itself"? I have
already argued above that to respond in this way would be
to say something false. Surely, in saying,"Everest is
identical with Chomolungma," the speaker has not said about
Everest that it is self-identical, any more than in saying,
"Everest is not Chomolungma," the speaker has said about
Everest that it is not identical with itself.   If this is
right, then "S. said of A that it is self-identical (or
that it is A)" does not follow from "S said of A that it is
B," even when A=B.

    But what, if anything, was thought by Frege and Wiggins
to be wrong with the argument? Frege initially thought that
the assumption that identity is a relation between an object
and itself must be wrong. And Wiggins thought, and perhaps
still thinks, that the assumption that identity is a relation
or property must be wrong. He also writes that the difficulty
arising from the argument, and five others, "must be traced
to the assumption that identity statements assert something
(which then has to be the relation or predicate of self-identity)
of the references of their noun phrases" (p. 50 of Analytic
Philosophy). Thus it seems that both authors thought (at
least at one time) that nothing was wrong with the argument.
It shows that identity is not a relation, or a certain sort
of relation, or that identity statements are not relational
or predicative in form.

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But in "On Sense and Reference," Frege put forth the
view that all singular terms, as well as general terms,
and sentences, have sense. And he uses this to solve the
puzzle originally raised by him about identity. He writes
(p. 78 of Translations from the Philosophical Writings):
"When we found 'a=a' and 'a=b' to have different cognitive
values, the explanation is that for the purpose of knowledge,
the sense of the sentence, viz. the thought expressed by it,
is no less relevant than its reference, i.e. its truth-value.
If now a=b, then indeed the reference of 'b' is the same
as 'a', and hence the truth value of 'a=b' is the same as
that of 'a=a'. In spite of this, the sense of 'b' may differ
from that of 'a', and thereby the thought expressed in 'a=b'
differs from that of 'a=a'. In that case the two sentences
do not have the same cognitive value." Frege would explain
the invalidity of the inference from (i) and (ii) to (iii)
(see page 22), by saying that the sentence "A=B" differs in
meaning from "A=A", and the meaning, or sense, of these
sentences is what is being referred to in (i) and (iii)
respectively. The reference of a sentence in indirect
discourse is the sense of the sentence, or the thought
expressed by it, when normally used. (Thus "said that" is
not really opaque.) So only if the sentences "A=B" and "A=A"
had the same sense, could we infer (iii) from (i) (while (ii)
in this case would be irrelevant).

Frege says, "for the purpose of knowledge, the sense of
the sentence, viz., the thought expressed by it, is no less
relevant than its reference, ..." We might make this point
by saying this: the identity statement "A=B" can be
informative, while the statement "A=A" is not informative,
because the hearer surely knows that (if A exists) A=A,
but it might well be that he does not know that A=B (even
if he does know that A exists and that B exists). But now,
for there to be a difference in the truth-value of
(I) H. knows that A is B,
and
(II) H. knows that A is A,
(where "H" refers to the same person), there must be a
different reference of "A is B" and A is A", when they
occur in (I) and (II) . But the reference of these (not
being a truth-value), in (I) and (II), is their own sense.
Therefore, there must be a difference in the sense of "A=B"
and "A=A", and again a difference in the sense of "A" and
"B", if "A=B" is to be informative.

Now it appears that what has been established by this
argument is that if there are identity statements which are
true and informative, then the referring expressions used
to make the statement, must have a different sense. And so,
if proper names are used in making true and informative
identity statements, then they must have a different sense.
Ergo, proper names have sense.

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But what has this got to do with "descriptive content"?
How is the argument different from "The sentence "A is B"
does not mean the same as the sentence "A is A", and
so "A" does not mean the same as "B"; ergo "A" and "B" have
meaning? And again, how is the argument different from
""Everest is Everest" has meaning; therefore "Everest"
has meaning"? (Perhaps the difference is this: Frege's
argument gives us good reason to think that "A is A" does
differ in meaning from "A is B". But wasn't that already
known?)

It seems to me that identity statements are not really
essential to the argument, even if my skeptical remarks
above are wrong. For consider the two-place predicate
"is to the left of". Nothing, presumably, is to the left
of itself. So the problem might now be: how could the
cognitive value of "A is to the left of B" differ from that
of "A is to the left of A," provided that A=B? Suppose
that we say that one who says, "A is to the left of B"
is not saying of A that it is to the left of itself, even
when A is B, but that one who says, "A is to the left of A,"
is saying of A that it is to the left of itself. So
it certainly seems that "A" must not mean the same as "B",
since what we say about A in the above case depends on
whether we use the expression "A" or "B". Now what prevents
drawing the conclusion that "A" and "B" have descriptive
content?

Or again: consider "Everest is higher than Chomolungma."
Someone who asserts this presumably thinks that Everest is not
Chomolungma. On being informed to the contrary, he will no
doubt retract his statement. But did the speaker say that
Everest is higher than itself? Surely not. But now, unless
proper names have descriptive content, how could "A is higher
than A" differ in cognitive content from "A is higher than B,"
provided that A=B?

The argument, therefore, is defective in that it assumes,
wrongly, that a difference in meaning requires a difference
in sense. The expressions "sense", and its synonym, "descriptive
content", are part of Searle' technical vocabulary, and,
though Searle never explicitly defines these terms, it may be
gathered from pages 162-174 of Speech Acts, that for an
expression to have sense is for it to have, as part of its
meaning, the meaning of some general term which is true or
false of objects. In representing Mill's view, for example,
Searle states, using his own technical term, "a proper name
predicates nothing, and consequently does not have a sense."
(p. 163 , Speech Acts) But of course there are meaningful
expressions which predicate nothing. Among them (and including
'syncategorematic' terms) are: "and", "if", "not", " some", "all",

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"almost", "necessarily", "perhaps", "what", "why", "except", "as", "in addition to", and so on. These words are meaningful, yet they do not contain, as a part, the meaning of any general term or predicate.

Now the argument from identity statements (and I think from existential statements as well) is a non sequitur, because, while it establishes that proper names have meaning, it fails to establish the further conclusion that their meaning is properly characterized as "descriptive meaning" or "sense". (I here assume that the distinction between meaning and sense, which Searle's thesis seems to require, is clear enough for present purposes. A full characterization of the difference, and the development of an adequate theory of meaning (including answers to questions about how meaning is to be classified) is outside the scope of this paper.)

It also seems that, in doubtful cases, one ought not to postulate descriptive meaning, over and above meaning, unless there is some work to be done by such descriptive meaning. In this case, what work would be done? Searle has an answer to this: he says (page 171 of Speech Acts), " "Everest is Chomolungma" states that the descriptive backing of both names is true of the same object. If the descriptive backing of the two names, for the person making the assertion, is the same, or if one contains the other, the statement is analytic; if not, synthetic." There are some difficulties with this, however. Taken as an analysis of what someone is saying, when he says, "Everest is Chomolungma," it is clearly wrong. Surely one is not saying, or stating that the descriptive content of the name "Everest" is true of the same thing as that of which the descriptive content of the name "Chomolungma" is true. (One is not stating anything about names.) But taken as an explanation of how "Everest is Chomolungma" can be analytic, it is one possible view. (Note that it is not the only one, since the meaning (not sense) of "A" and "B" might turn out to be such that "A is B" is analytic. Alternatively, one might hold that all statements of the form "A is A" are analytic, while all statements of the form "A is B" are synthetic.

In conclusion of this section, then, it seems to me that Frege's argument concerning identity (and Searle's use of it) does establish that proper names have meaning, but that it does not establish that they have sense, or descriptive content.

Charles E. Jarrett
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