USE OF THESES

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LOGICAL SUBJECTS

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Master of Arts (Philosophy)
at the

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September 1968
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INTRODUCTION

The major concern of this essay is the subject/predicate analysis of propositions.

When I say "the subject/predicate analysis" I do not assume (what is false) that there is just one such analysis; rather, I assume that there is one version of this analysis widely current in contemporary philosophy. It is the analysis of singular propositions into referring components and non-referring components. This conception of the subject/predicate distinction is exceptionally imprecise, but is not completely uninformative. We do have a rough idea of what it is to refer to something and an intuitive conception of which propositional components we use as devices of reference and which ones we do not. And this gives us an embryonic conception of what the subject/predicate analysis looks like.

For the most part I will be working from this intuitive starting point (which does not, of course, rule out the drawing of counter-intuitive conclusions). And since this conception of the analysis is the received one in contemporary philosophy, my argument may be said to have a built-in conservative bias (which will make any radical conclusions all the more interesting). My major concern will be with singular propositions, that is, with those propositions to which the above conception seems to apply fairly straightforwardly. I share the common assumption that it is in terms of an analysis of singular propositions that we must turn to the analysis of general propositions, i.e. that the former are logically or analytically prior to the latter.

My first chapter will be concerned with Frege, and forms an exception to the above statement of methodological stance. For, while generally I assume that the notion of reference and the notion of a logical subject go together, this assumption would clearly be out of place in a discussion of Frege, who argued or assumed that the notion of reference applies equally to the two
components of his analysis. And, since his analysis (into 'proper name' and 'concept expression') is clearly in the same line of business as the subject/predicate analysis with which I am concerned, Chapter I is a convenient place to consider, and, hopefully, to reject, his alternative conception of that analysis.

In the following chapters I deal with definite descriptions (roughly, expressions of the form "the so and so"), proper names, and indexical expressions, all of which are, on an intuitive conception, 'referring expressions' and thus prima facie candidates for the role of logical subjects of those propositions in which they occur. It will not, I think, spoil any surprise endings if I say now that definite descriptions fail, and proper names and indexical expressions pass, the tests for successful candidature. The notion of identity raises its head in the chapter on proper names, and some of the issues are discussed in the next chapter which is devoted solely to that topic. In the final chapter, I combine a consideration of indexical reference with an attempt to draw some conclusions from what has gone before. I do not, however, place very much importance on these conclusions. What is more important is the question of how one (or I) would continue the line of argument and inquiry which forms the body of this thesis (into, e.g., the analysis of general propositions, the notion of quantification, etc.). Conclusions stated at the stage which I reach in this essay can only be promissory notes uttered in very uncertain times, and of negligible cash value.

Of the indefinitely large number of caveats which I might offer at this stage, one stands out. I have talked and will talk about the subject/predicate analysis of propositions. There is a difficulty here in that if one conceives of propositions

1. Except in the immediately following chapter, where I am discussing Frege. Since his terminology is important, I here pay lip-service to his view that notions of truth and falsity attach to the sentence via the 'Thought'.
(i.e. those items of which truth and falsity can be predicated) as non-linguistic items, it is hard to defend the practice by which one gives linguistic items (e.g. referring expressions) as their components. In fact, I have in this essay adopted the practice without defending it; I simply assume that the sentence/proposition relationship is such that one can talk of parts of sentences as if they were propositional components. How one could justify this procedure (without adopting the view - which I think to be false - that propositions are sentences) I do not know.