USE OF THESES

PROPOSITIONS AND MEANING

A STUDY OF DENOTATIONIST THEORIES OF LOGICAL MEANING.

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Contents

This thesis is entirely original work of the
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Synopsis.

This thesis is partly an historical and partly a critical study of the philosophical view that propositions (argument components or logical meanings) are in some sense "objects" denoted by sentences. The author confines his attention to theories developed during a revolutionary period in the history of logic – between the publication of Mill's A System of Logic and that of Principia Mathematica by Russell and Whitehead. Starting from Mill, the author traces the development of denotationist theories in the writings of Brentano, Meinong, Frege, and early Moore and Russell. Broadly speaking, the views discussed represent two distinct theories of the proposition. Firstly, there is the theory that propositions, in the sense of meaning-objects denoted by sentences, are identical with or can be reduced to objects denoted by words and non-sentential phrases. This theory, the author argues, can be found in Mill and early Frege, and is most explicitly stated by Brentano. Secondly, there is the theory that the meaning-objects denoted by indicative sentences are fundamentally different from the objects denoted by words and phrases, and that propositions therefore form a distinctive class of denotata. This view is represented in the writings of later Frege, Meinong and early Russell.

In the first chapter, the author discusses theories of the proposition suggested by Mill and early Frege. Firstly, he tries to bring out the conflicting strands in Mill's thought, by contrasting Mill's "official" non-denotationist theory of propositions with other denotationist doctrines suggested in the Logic. Secondly, the author outlines Frege's early theory of meaning, and discusses some of the difficulties that lead Frege to modify his early denotationist assumptions.

The second chapter of the thesis begins with an exposition of Brentano's "intentional" theory of mental acts and objects, and then goes on to show how Brentano uses this theory in an attempt to explain the meaning of propositions "from the empirical standpoint". The author emphasises Brentano's debt to Mill, and his influence on Meinong.

In the third chapter, the author turns to consider the view that sentences have meaning by standing in some relation to non-empirical, metaphysical objects that are quite distinct from the objects denoted by names, words, referring expressions, etc. In the first part of the chapter he shows how Frege resorts to a metaphysical

theory of meaning-objects, having rejected psychologistic, empiricist, and formalist theories of meaning. The author's main point here is that Frege's theory of sense and, in particular, his theory of thoughts is really a tentative sketch of a metaphysical theory of meaning, and, as such, can be fruitfully compared with Meinong's theory of objects. In the second part of this chapter, the author shows how Meinong, starting from the Brentanian notion of mental intentionality, develops his elaborate and original Gegenstandstheorie, a general theory of non-empirical meaning-objects.

The author devotes the fourth chapter to a detailed study of Frege's sense and reference argument, and offers what he believes to be an original analysis and criticism of Frege's proof that referring expressions must have at least a sense, if not also a reference. Frege's argument is shown to be invalid, and its weaknesses located in denotationist assumptions that Frege retains from his early theory of meaning. In the final part of this chapter, the author attempts to restate the distinction between sense and reference in more defensible terms.

In the final chapter, the author traces the development of Russell's theory of Being in The Principles of

Mathematics, and then shows how Russell came to reject
the denotationist assumptions of this theory, and to
develop an alternative non-denotationist account of mean-
ing in the theory of incomplete symbols.