

FREGE
Making Sense

Michael Beaney



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Preface

This book is concerned with the origins, development and coherence of Frege's conception of sense. The centrality of this conception to Frege's philosophy has entailed discussion of most of the main elements of Frege's thought – his logic, philosophy of mathematics, and ideas in the philosophy of logic and language and in epistemology and metaphysics; and in writing this book, I have also tried to present a balanced and accessible account of Frege's philosophy as a whole. On many topics (logicism, Platonism, vagueness, indexicality, for example), I cannot claim to have provided more than an exposition of Frege's ideas and to have identified some of the problems raised; but I hope that this in itself will encourage a deeper appreciation, even amongst those who are familiar with his ideas, of the organic unity and dynamic development of Frege's philosophy. The emergence of Frege's distinction between sense and reference marks the transition from Frege's early to his later work, and is fundamental to an understanding of the origins of analytic philosophy, yet the distinction is too frequently discussed outside the context of Frege's creation of modern logic, his attempts to think through its philosophical implications, and his overriding aim to demonstrate the logicist thesis – that arithmetic is reducible to logic. The different demands that Frege made on his notion of sense, and the resulting tensions in his philosophy, have also been insufficiently appreciated. What is located at the heart of the account offered here is an issue that has been relatively underexplored in relation to Frege's philosophy – the nature of analysis. For it was the problem of the status of Frege's logical and logicist analyses that motivated the distinction between sense and reference, and the tensions that remained in his philosophy are a result of failing to provide a satisfactory answer to the problem.

Writing about Frege is a hazardous undertaking. At least since Michael Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, first published in 1973, and despite the hopes of creating a consensus that he expressed in the preface to its second edition, the interpretation of Frege's philosophy has become highly controversial. Part of the reason for this is Frege's status as one of the founders of analytic philosophy. Analytic philosophers not only use his ideas, but claim his authority for developing them in certain directions. But a lot has happened in the last hundred years, and the dangers of interpreting Frege anachronistically have increased. I have attempted to

avoid these dangers here by approaching Frege's work from the ideas of his predecessors and the problems that they posed, trying to understand Frege's motivations and seeing how his views developed through the course of his work. I confront the methodological issues that such 'historical philosophizing' raises in the introduction. I have also sought to keep the main text free of engagement with the burgeoning secondary literature, to enable as clear a picture of Frege's philosophy to emerge as possible. But I have not been hesitant to make use of notes, indicating some of the many debts that I owe to previous writers on Frege, marshalling additional evidence and support for my account, clarifying my position in relation to some of the debates within recent scholarship, and commenting on connected issues. The task of the historical philosopher is to carve their own way through the forest, not to map all the possible paths, parallel routes or picnic spots; but I hope that I have charted enough of the terrain in the notes to enable others to find their bearings and explore it for themselves. (For the policy adopted throughout the text concerning references, see the Bibliography.)

This book began life as an Oxford B.Phil. thesis, which developed into a D.Phil. thesis submitted in 1990. Of the latter, which contained chapters on Aristotle, Frege and Wittgenstein, only the first three chapters survive in any recognizable form, as the introduction and first two chapters of the present book, although material from the fourth chapter of the thesis has been reworked. The majority of the book has been written over the last three years, as the need to provide a detailed account of the development of Frege's conception of sense and its role in Frege's philosophy as a whole became clear. The influence of Wittgenstein on the present work has been far more profound than the number of references to him might suggest; and I hope to return to the story of the evolution of his own thought in due course.

Many people – supervisors of my graduate work as well as friends, colleagues and students of the less distant past and present – have helped shape my ideas since I first began research in the history of analytic philosophy; and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the following, in particular: J.L. Ackrill, David Bell, Geoffrey Cantor, Wonbae Choi, Martin Davies, Dorothy Edgington, Anthony Grayling, Peter Hacker, Jonathan Hodge, Peter Millican, Peter Mott, Gianluigi Oliveri, Peter Simons, John Skorupski, Barry Smith, Roger White, David Wiggins, Adrian Wilson, and two anonymous readers of the penultimate version. Some may be horrified at the result of their influence, and no one bears more than a tiny responsibility for the deficiencies of the book; but I have been grateful for their comments, criticism and encouragement. I would also like to thank the students at Sheffield, Birkbeck and more recently at Leeds who have attended my lectures and classes on Frege over the last nine years and whose questions have made me more aware of what needs to be explained and how best to go about it. I owe a particular debt to Colin

Haycraft, who encouraged the book from the beginning and whose tragic death 18 months ago deprived the academic world of a publisher whose personal interest and commitment was deeply appreciated. I am grateful to Deborah Blake and Anthony Grayling for overseeing the latter stages of publication.

My greatest debt is to Sharon Macdonald, whose intellectual influence and practical support has been enormous, and to whom this book is dedicated, and our three children, Tara, Thomas and Harriet. They have all suffered, and the family time that was lost in the writing of this book is not easy to justify. The two eldest children would occasionally read sentences from pages left lying around and in baffled amusement pronounce them 'nonsense'; but I have been able to draw some comfort in the confirmation it provided of just what lengthy initiation into logic and philosophy is required to even start to appreciate what 'sense' involves.

January 1996

Michael Beaney