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Russell's Denoting Complex by Ronald Jager

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Geach has tacitly rewritten Russell's "indication" (words indicate the corresponding propositional constituent) as "meaning" (a word Russell almost never used in expounding his own theory). In connection with proper names, Russell explicitly denies that they have meaning, only indication. Only if we restrict attention to proper definite descriptions as normally used can we find a close parallel between Russell's 1903 theory and Frege's theory. In this case according to Russell, the phrase *indicates a denoting concept* which in turn *denotes* an individual. The denoting concept is a constituent of the proposition, and the proposition is *about* the individual. Here the denoting concept seems analogous to Frege's *Sinn* and the individual certainly corresponds to Frege's *Bedeutung*, the only differences being that for Frege the phrase *bedeutet* the individual whereas for Russell the individual is denoted not by the phrase but by the denoting concept.

In further support of the disparity of their conceptions Geach discusses what motivated Frege and Russell to make their distinctions. He claims that Frege's distinction was mainly derived from puzzles about oblique contexts. But it seems more likely that it was puzzles concerning identity sentences that primarily motivated Frege, who then found wide application for the distinction. In 1903, Russell uses his distinction between the indication of a denoting phrase and its denotation to analyze identity sentences involving definite descriptions in a way exactly parallel to Frege's. Geach claims that Russell's motivation was "his 'robust sense of reality'—his laudable dislike of such Meinongian monstrosities as the round square and the indefinite man." But these emotions were involved rather in *rejecting* the 1903 theory in favor of the theory in *On denoting*. In 1903 "a man" indicated a certain propositional constituent which denoted "a kind of combination of all men." This was admittedly "a very paradoxical object." In *On denoting* this object is banished by denying any corresponding propositional constituent to the indefinite description.

The article contains a fairly accurate discussion of the 1903 theory of definite descriptions and the way in which *On denoting* revises that theory. Unfortunately, Geach does not undertake to show us exactly how this illuminates the passage discussed by Searle. And although the reviewer believes that it is useful to view Russell's argument against the background of his own earlier theory, the relevant differences concern the 1903 treatment of proper names and 'unusual' uses of definite descriptions not the appropriate 1903 counterparts to Frege's "*Sinn*" and "*Bedeutung*."

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RONALD JAGER. *Russell's denoting complex*. Ibid., vol. 20 (1960), pp. 53–62.

The phrase "denoting complex" occupies a prominent position in Russell's argument against Frege (see above). Searle claims that Russell's use of the phrase is slipshod, but that it stands for the meaning of a denoting phrase. Geach identifies its use with that of "denoting concept" in Russell's 1903 theory (wherein "denoting complex" does not occur). Butler and Reeves suggest an equivalence between the denoting concepts of the 1903 theory and the denoting phrases of *On denoting*, which makes it reasonable to assume that they understood "denoting complex" to be synonymous with "denoting phrase" (though neither Butler nor Reeves either uses or mentions "denoting complex").

All these (indeed all possible) views regarding the meaning of "denoting complex" are supported by the text. Jager advances still another view: that a denoting complex is that which denotes the meaning of a denoting phrase. According to Jager, Russell noticed that denoting complexes do not allow one to talk of meanings without talking of denotations, since the meanings spoken of are the denotations of denoting complexes. From this Russell is said to have erroneously concluded that even for a single phrase, the meaning and denotation cannot be distinguished. The denoting complexes of *On denoting* are thus seen as provisionally introduced to perform an impossible job (denote what is not a denotation), which Russell vaguely associated with a demand of Frege's theory.

One of the main drawbacks to this (and any other) analysis of Russell's argument is neatly stated by Jager. "It does not make the argument sound. Nothing could do that. Nevertheless, only a small part of the unsoundness has been caught by Searle, a smaller part by Butler, and none at all by others." With these sentiments the reviewer concurs, and also with Jager's simple epitome, "The argument as a whole has a number of defects." I doubt that we have heard the last of it.

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