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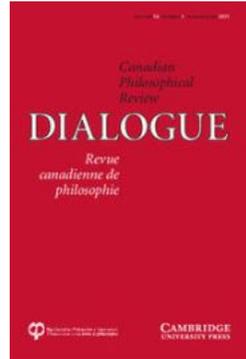
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## Objects and Senses and Substitutions: A Reply to Dwyer

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# Intervention/Discussion

## Objects and Senses and Substitutions: A Reply to Dwyer

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In this brief note I clarify two points made in my 1996 book *Philosophical Perspectives on Language (PPL)*. The clarifications are prompted by some criticisms in a recent *Dialogue* review of that book.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. On Objects Having Senses

The first point to be clarified actually has two sub-parts, one substantive the other exegetical:

[Q1] Is it a use-mention confusion to say that senses are real things that objects have?

[Q2] Is it an outright error to attribute to Frege the belief that objects have senses?

Phil Dwyer explicitly answers “yes” to the second question. I take his use of “*a propos*” in the following quotation to signal “yes” to [Q1] as well.

On the contrary, of course, for Frege, objects do not have senses (any more than they have references); only words do. Though senses are indeed real things for Frege—a kind of abstract entity—they are otherwise entirely semantic in

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nature. According to Stainton, it is not just that “the morning star” has a sense, the morning star has a sense. *A propos* of use/mention confusions, note the following howler . . .<sup>2</sup>

In *PPL*, in contrast, I am committed to answering “no” to both questions.

Who is right? Frankly, I am. But I can understand how Dwyer was misled. Hence the need to clarify. Regarding [Q1], it obviously would be a mistake, a use/mention confusion, to suppose that ordinary non-linguistic objects *express* senses. In particular, the morning star, i.e., Venus, does not express a sense. But, as I tried to make quite clear in the text, this is not a view I espouse. What I maintain, now and in the text, is that objects are non-conventionally associated with senses—specifically, objects are determined by senses. Senses, I maintain, are objective features of objects, “real things” that objects exhibit independently of a given linguistic community’s decrees; that is, the object::sense relation is non-conventional in the respect that humans must discover what senses are associated with an object, we do not simply decide this. Whether correct or not, *this* view contains no use/mention confusion. And yet it might be fair to complain that, especially in a pedagogical context, it was unwise to employ the term “have” both for the word::sense relation and the object::sense relation. I tried, in the text, to explain that there were two quite different kinds of “having” involved; and I sometimes used scare quotes as a reminder. But, in retrospect, it would have been preferable to employ the word “have” for the word::sense relationship and, say, the words “presented by” for the object::sense relationship.<sup>3</sup> Still, there is not, ultimately, a use/mention confusion here.

Moving on, once “Do objects have senses?” is understood as “Are objects non-conventionally associated with senses?” there is surely good reason to answer [Q2] in the negative. Frege unquestionably took objects to be determined by senses: if senses did not determine objects, the whole Fregean story about how reference is achieved would collapse. And this determination is not something instituted by fiat, or by a linguistic group. The following passage from “On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*” makes plain that senses are just such features of objects (and notice that here words are not mentioned at all): “Comprehensive knowledge of the *Bedeutung* would require us to be able to say immediately whether any given sense attaches to it. To such knowledge we never attain.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, there is other textual support for answering “no” to [Q2]. Consider first one of Frege’s unpublished writings, where he himself employs the term “correspond” for the object::sense relation. (Thought-parts are, of course, senses; and ordinary objects are among the things in the “realm of *Bedeutung*.”) “Even a part of a thought, or a part of a part of a thought, that is in need of completion, has something corresponding to it in the realm of *Bedeutung*.”<sup>5</sup> Frege says similar things in his published work, including “On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*.” Thus: “The regular connection between a sign, its

sense and its *Bedeutung* is of such a kind that to the sign there corresponds a definite sense and to that in turn a definite *Bedeutung*.”<sup>6</sup> To sum up so far: though employing the word “have” may have been pedagogically unwise, it is ultimately not a use/mention confusion to suppose that objects have senses. Moreover, there is reason to suppose that Frege himself held this position. Enough, anyway, that one cannot reasonably call it an “outright error” to suppose otherwise.

## 2. On Substitution in Quotational Contexts

I now want to clarify another of my remarks in *PPL*, this one about substitution in quotational contexts. Here is the contested passage from my book:

- (104) a. ‘Mark Twain’ has nine letters  
 b. ‘Samuel Clemens’ has nine letters

Again, the various parts of these two sentences have the same referents, and the parts share the same order. (The parts are the co-referential names on the one hand and “‘\_\_\_’ has nine letters” on the other.) But the whole sentences have different referents. Sentence (104a) is true, while sentence (104b) is false.<sup>7</sup>

As above, in clarifying my point I find it most useful to divide the discussion into two sub-points:

[Q3] Is it a use/mention error to claim that ordinary names cannot be substituted *salva veritate* in the context “‘\_\_\_’ has nine letters”?

[Q4] Is there any other sort of error contained in the quoted passage?

Dwyer seems to intend an affirmative answer to [Q3]. This is suggested by his writing “*A propos* of use/mention confusions, note the following howler . . .”<sup>8</sup> as his segue into this second quotation. But, for my part, I cannot see any use/mention error here. True enough, there would be such an error if a certain theory of quotation were true. According to such a theory, no person-name actually appears as a syntactic part of “‘Mark Twain’ has nine letters”—any more than the word “dog” appears in “dogma.” Quote-names, on this view, are non-compositional, and it is a mere “orthographic accident” that they resemble the word quoted. Hence, it would make no sense to speak of substituting Twain’s birth name for his pseudonym in “‘Mark Twain’ has nine letters,” since the latter simply does not occur in this sentence. Of course Twain’s pseudonym is the *referent* of part of the sentence, but it is not itself part of the sentence; hence, to speak otherwise is to confuse the thing referred to with (part of) the sentence itself. However, this Tarski-inspired theory pretty clearly is not correct. For one thing, it fails to explain how competent language users manage to understand unfamiliar quote-names, like “Stan Robston,” “Dwight

Filler,” or “Van Q. Willard.” So I take the answer to [Q3] to be quite definitely “no.”

As for [Q4], answering it is a bit harder. My view is this: the claim I actually make in *PPL* is perfectly correct; however, there are other claims that an incautious reader might take me to be making, and those claims are incorrect. Let me start, then, by underscoring the rather minimal claim I actually intended. It is that sentences (104a) and (104b) provide a *bona fide* example of non-substitutivity *salva veritate*. Claims I am not making include: that “\_\_\_” has nine letters is the only context of substitution at hand; that it is the only opaque one; and that it is a primitive, non-composed context whose opacity has nothing to do with the opacity of quotation marks taken on their own. (That I was *not* making these claims can, I believe, be gleaned from my text—though I now fear that my discussion may go by rather too fast for some readers.) Each of these three claims is definitely false. So, someone who thought the passage in question entailed them should indeed answer “yes” to [Q4]. Happily, I am not now (and was not then) committed to any of them.

Once it is clear that I am making only the minimal claim, [Q4] surely deserves a negative answer. It is not a mistake to suppose that these two sentences exemplify non-substitutivity *salva veritate*. (Again, assuming person-names appear in [104a] and [104b], which they clearly do.) But is there not some other error lurking in the passage? In his review, Dwyer adds a “[*sic*]” within the quoted passage, thus: “The parts are the co-referential names on the one hand and ‘“\_\_\_” has nine letters’ [*sic*] on the other.”<sup>9</sup> This suggests that he thinks it a mistake to take “‘\_\_\_’ has nine letters” to be the appropriate context of substitution, with the substituends being the author’s two names. Instead, he may reasonably suppose, the context of substitution should be “\_\_\_ has nine letters” (*sans* quotations), with the substituends being, not Twain’s two names, but the *names* of Twain’s two names. Is this not a more illuminating way of treating the example? And is it not some kind of error not to treat it that way?

To respond, let me stress that my plaint, at the stage in my book where the passage appears, was that *whole sentences* could change *truth value*, when singular terms within those sentences are changed, despite the fact that minimal-part reference remained constant. That is the variety of opacity I was discussing, i.e., substitutivity within whole sentences resulting in a change of truth value. I gave propositional attitudes as one example, but there are others—and I was presenting quotation as a case in point. Granting that this is okay, notice that to get an example of the desired variety of opacity the context of substitution cannot be anything but “‘\_\_\_’ has nine letters.”

Let me use numbered sentences to make the point clearer. Sentence (1) cannot be the appropriate context, because that would not involve substitution in a whole sentence, yielding a change in truth value; instead, it

would involve substitution of a singular term within a more complex singular term, with a change in the referent of the latter.

1. “\_\_\_”

This illustrates opacity all right, but of a different kind.<sup>10</sup> Neither can the context of substitution be (2), because what gets substituted in (2) will not be co-referring expressions: the name-names which go into the slot refer to distinct names.

2. \_\_\_ has nine letters

Specifically, taking (2) to be the context of substitution, the substituends cannot be the co-referential (5) and (6); that would result in the absurd sentences “Samuel Clemens has nine letters” and “Mark Twain has nine letters.” Rather, if (2) is to be the context of substitution, the substituends must instead be (3) and (4). And these do not co-refer; each refers to a *different* name of the famous author.

3. “Samuel Clemens”

4. “Mark Twain”

5. Samuel Clemens

6. Mark Twain

Thus (2) doesn’t exemplify opacity at all. Taking (7) to be the context of substitution, as I did, the substituends can be (5) and (6); and, crucially, these two names both refer to the same author.

7. “\_\_\_” has nine letters

Hence, this context, with those substituends, exemplifies failure of substitutivity *salva veritate*. The punch line is this: in order to give an example of what I was discussing, the context of substitution had to be (7). So, given the topic, there is no mistake here.

To sum up this second half: the answer to [Q3] is “no,” essentially because quoted items really are syntactic parts of the larger quotational construction. Given this, talk of non-substitutivity *salva veritate* of ordinary proper names, within quotational contexts, is not a use/mention error. The answer to [Q4] is also “no,” if (as I intended) the passage is making only the minimal claim; moreover, given that the minimal claim *is* the one being made, there is not a more appropriate treatment of the example.<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

1 Dwyer 1998, pp. 611-13.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 612.

- 3 On the other hand, Lenny Clapp suggested the following very simple argument to show that the word “have” is not *per se* inappropriate, whatever its pedagogical demerits:

P1: Objects have modes of presentation.

P2: Modes of presentation are senses.

Therefore,

C: Objects have senses.

Both premises are quite solid. To deny P1 is to leave Frege without an account of how words connect up with objects. That is, if *objects themselves* are not given via their modes of presentation, then how does it help, in achieving reference to objects, to have words expressing modes of presentation? As for P2, it comes straight from Frege’s definition of sense: a sense just is a mode of presentation of the thing designated. (See Frege 1892, 152.) Of course neither Clapp nor I can take credit for originating this way of thinking about Frege. It was cogently defended years ago by Gareth Evans (1982), building on work by Michael Dummett.

- 4 Frege 1892, p. 153.  
 5 Frege 1919, p. 365.  
 6 Frege 1892, p. 153.  
 7 Stainton 1996, pp. 68-69.  
 8 Dwyer 1998, p. 612.  
 9 *Ibid.*  
 10 I should stress that, from there being other contexts of substitution, one of which plays a role in explaining the opacity of “\_\_\_’ has nine letters’, it does not follow that “\_\_\_’ has nine letters’ isn’t itself one. Compare the bizarre claim that ‘John believes that \_\_\_ is only visible at night’ does not exemplify non-substitutivity *salva veritate*, simply on the grounds that ‘believes that \_\_\_’ is itself intentional. In short, the existence of other opaque contexts embedded in (104 a-b) does not falsify my minimal claim.  
 11 This article was written during a semester-long visit to the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to my hosts/colleagues there. I am also grateful to the numerous philosophers who encouraged me to write this reply, as well as to those who provided comments on earlier drafts.

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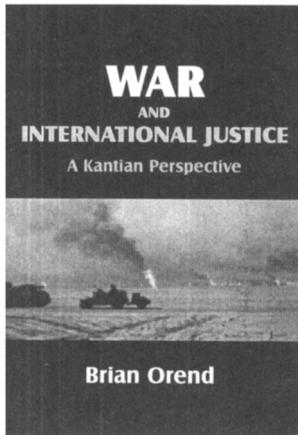
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