

## Comparative Study about Proper Name : Frege -Mill-Russell

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### Abstract :

The term '**proper name**' has its immense importance in the field of analytic philosophy. It is generally accepted that proper names only have denotation, no connotation. Proper names only designate objects but do not imply their attributes. For example, the proper name '**Plato**' only denotes an individual, but does not speak about any attribute of that person. The meaning of a genuine proper name is the object it denotes. A name will be meaningless if there is no object corresponding to it. **Early Wittgenstein** thinks, "**A name means an object. The object is its meaning**" (3.203 Tractatus)<sup>1</sup>. Names do not have their separate meaning. Wittgenstein, however, makes no distinction between proper name and ordinary name. To him, "**Names are like points; propositions like arrows – they have sense**" (3.144 Tractatus)<sup>2</sup>. Names do not have sense but only have reference. In **Joseph's** language, "**... a singular term is a proper name if it does not indicate which individual it stands for by reference to any special element in its being.**"<sup>3</sup> However, this very notion is challenged from time to time.

In this paper, I will try to discuss the views of **Gottlob Frege**, **J. S. Mill** and **Bertrand Russell** regarding proper name and compare their views in this respect.

**Keywords** : Proper name, Puzzle about Identity, Sense, Connotation, Description

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#### *Puzzle about identity and Frege's View of proper name :*

Famous German philosopher and mathematician **Sir Gottlob Frege's** view regarding proper name is based upon a fact called "**puzzle about identity**", where he introduced the notion of **sense** in order to solve the puzzle. Now before explaining Frege's view regarding proper name, it is very much important to discuss briefly the so-called puzzle and the notion of sense and reference from Fregean perspective.

Frege took two types of **identity** statements given below in order to explain this puzzle :

- ❖ "The morning star = the morning star".
- &
- ❖ "The morning star = the evening star".

Both are the examples of two identity statements of the forms "**a=a**" and "**a=b**". These identity statements have different cognitive value - the first one is analytically true, conveys no information, hence merely tautologous. But the second one is an astronomical discovery, thus informative in nature, and synthetically true. The question arises that being identical, what is the main reason behind the differences of these two statements? This problem is known in the Philosophy of Language as **puzzle about identity** and Frege was able to solve this puzzle by introducing the notion of sense.

Frege had shown to us :

If the above identity statements speak about the relation between two objects designated by the signs or names "The morning star" and "the evening star", then the puzzle cannot be solved at all. If the meaning of these two identity statements (mentioned above) is planet Venus = planet Venus (planet Venus is the referring object of the two signs "morning star" and "evening star"), then according to Frege, there will be no difference between these two identity statements in their cognitive value and the puzzle remains unsolved.

Frege in *Begriffsschrift* (literally means ‘concept – script’ was the first strictly formal system of logic written by Frege) had tried to solve this puzzle with the help of another interpretation, though this interpretation did not leave any satisfactory mark in this regard. According to this interpretation, the relation of identity is a relation between signs or names, distinct from one another in virtue of their material properties (e.g., sound, shape, pronunciation, format etc.). These signs or names designate the objects different from the signs or names. Though the signs or names are different from each other, they designate the same object. Now according to this interpretation, the meaning of our previous two identity statements are:

- ❖ ‘The morning star’ = ‘the morning star’.
- &
- ❖ ‘The morning star’ = ‘the evening star’.

Apparently it seems that this interpretation has been able to solve this puzzle. In the first case, an identity relation between the sign ‘the morning star’ with itself is established which gives us no new information. According to Frege, it is an insignificant matter that one and the same sign ‘The morning star’ which is on the both sides of ‘=’ sign designate the same object - planet Venus. But in the second case, an identity relation between two different signs ‘The morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ is established and it gives us new information when these two different signs or names designate the same object – planet Venus.

Later in his essay *On Sense and Reference*<sup>4</sup>, Frege criticized his previous interpretation and argued that if the meaning of the identity statement “The morning star = the evening star” is ‘The morning star’ = ‘the evening star’, then we are only speaking about the sign. Thus this identity statement would be only linguistic fact stated statement and we do not have any knowledge about the referring object i.e., planet Venus. Thus we do not get any knowledge or information about the world or matter. Moreover if an identity statement speaks only about a relation between two signs or names, then the truth-value of this identity statement “The morning star = the evening star” will depend upon our custom or conventions as names are arbitrarily used by us to refer to particular objects. But the above identity statement is true and its truth is determined by invention and not by our custom or convention, as it is an astronomical discovery. Frege also told that if an identity statement of the form “a=b” expresses the co-reference between the two different signs (‘a’ and ‘b’) then the cognitive value of the statement “a=a” becomes essentially equal to that of “a=b” provided a=b is true.

Thus Frege in his essay *On Sense and Reference* gave his third interpretation and concluded that if the meaning of a name is only the reference i.e., the object it denotes, then the cognitive value of “a=a” and “a=b” (where a=b is true) will be the same. But if we accept another additional component i.e., the **sense** of a name, then this puzzle can be solved. According to this interpretation, if in an identity statement, the sense of the names or expressions which are on the both sides of ‘=’ signs are different, then that identity statement will convey information. “The morning star = the evening star” - this identity statement is informative as the names ‘The morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ have different senses. But if the sense of ‘The morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ would remain the same then the statement “The morning star = the evening star” would be merely tautologous i.e., analytically true or uninformative like the other identity statement “The morning star = the morning star”. In our example “**The morning star = the evening star**” the two names ‘The morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ refer to the same object - planet Venus. Thus this identity statement is true. But as the senses of these two names are not the same, the statement is informative too. When we use the name ‘the morning star’, we think about the referent object of this name (planet Venus) which is visible in the morning sky. Again when we use the name ‘the evening star’, we think about the referent object of this name (planet Venus) which is visible in the nocturnal sky. Thus the referent object of these two names ‘the morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ is same though the modes of presentation of the referent are different. Thus the statement is informative and synthetically true. On the other hand, in the identity statement “**The morning star = the morning star**”, the referent object and the sense of the name ‘the morning star’ is same. Thus it is an uninformative, analytically true identity statement. **Sense**, according to Frege, is the **mode of presentation of the referent / criterion**

of identifying the referent. In Dummett's language, "In grasping the sense of a proper name we are not merely aware that the name is associated with a particular object as its referent, but we connect the name with a particular way of identifying an object as the referent of the name."<sup>5</sup> Thus by introducing the notion of sense, Frege had solved the puzzle about identity. Frege suggested that a proper name has not only its referent object (NOMINATUM / BEDEUTUNG) but also its sense (SINN). According to Dummett, "...names with different senses but the same referent, correspond to different routes leading to the same destination."<sup>6</sup>

In order to describe the features of proper name, Frege considered that both an ordinary proper name (e.g., Socrates) and a definite description (e.g., the teacher of Plato) are to be considered as proper name. Thus for example, the ordinary proper names like 'Socrates', 'Plato' etc. as well as definite descriptions like 'the husband of Xanthippe', 'the teacher of Aristotle' etc. – all are considered to be the examples of proper name in Fregean philosophy. According to Frege it is not right to consider that a proper name only has denotation, but no connotation and he is quite justified in saying so. In Fregean philosophy, a name that has reference also has a sense but not always the vice-versa; it cannot be always said that a name that has sense also has reference. Due to the **imperfection of our ordinary language**, there is no one to one correspondence between sense and reference. Thus the existence of **vacuous / empty proper name** is possible in our ordinary language. Frege himself cited the examples like "the celestial body most distant from the earth", "the least rapidly convergent series" etc. having senses but in the first example it is doubtful whether it has a referent or not and in the second example it is known to have no referent. Frege shows "Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep" – the sentence has sense but it is doubtful whether the name 'Odysseus' as well as the whole sentence has reference at all. By introducing the notion of the sense, we can see the sentences like "The Present King of France is bald", "The ten-legged tiger is a beautiful creature" etc. become meaningful to Frege. The proper names like 'Santa Claus', 'Pegasus' (winged horse) etc. have senses but no references. The definite descriptions (which are also be considered as proper name to Frege) like "the ten-legged tiger", "the present king of France" etc. have no references but only have senses. If the meaning of a proper name is only its reference, in other words, if a proper name only denotes, never connotes then the sentences e.g., "The present king of France is bald", "The ten-legged tiger is a beautiful creature", "Santa Claus has a bag full of gifts" etc. will be completely meaningless as parts of these sentences i.e., 'the present king of France', 'the ten-legged tiger', 'Santa Claus' are meaningless because of having no references at all. But because all these linguistic expressions have their senses, the above stated statements, according to Frege, become meaningful. In a **logically perfect language**, every expression has both sense and reference. Here the expressions which have no references, according to Frege, we have to posit the references and those references will be **null class**. Thus in **logically perfect language**, there is one – one correspondence between sense and reference, but the ordinary language, being vague, lacks this feature sometimes.

After discussing Frege's view, I shall now discuss Mill's view of Proper Name which has also its own significance in the Philosophy of Language.

#### *Mill's View of proper name :*

John Stuart Mill made a distinction between denotation and connotation of the term whereas Frege made a distinction between reference and sense of proper names. Mill in his book *A System of Logic*, has classified term in **singular** and **general**. **Singular term** refers to a single individual whereas **general term** can be predicated of more than one individual. 'John', 'Ram' etc. are the examples of singular term whereas 'man', 'cow' etc. are the examples of general term. Now singular terms can be **connotative** or **non – connotative**. By **denotation** we mean the designated object or objects by the term and by **connotation** we mean the property or attribute which is present in every object whom the term denotes. Thus 'Socrates' is a non – connotative singular term and person Socrates is the denotation of the term 'Socrates'. But 'The Present Prime Minister of India' is a connotative singular term as this term denotes a particular person and connotes an attribute. On the other hand the entire class of men is the denotation of the general term 'man' and the essential and common character or property of every man despite their

dissimilarities is the connotation of this general term 'man'. According to Mill, **proper names only designate objects but do not imply their attributes**. So the proper name 'Socrates' does not imply any attribute but only denotes an individual. Thus according to Mill, by **proper name** we shall understand only the **non – connotative singular term**. Thus according to Mill, **"A proper name is but an unmeaning mark which we connect in our minds with the idea of the object, in order that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts, we may think of that individual object."**<sup>7</sup>

*Comparison between Frege and Mill's View of proper name:*

Though generally it seems that Frege's notion of sense and nominatum is quite similar with Mill's notion of connotation and denotation, but actually there are lots of dissimilarities between their views. In order to make distinctions between Mill and Frege we can see that :

➤ According to **Mill, proper names only denote, never connote any property**. The function of a proper name is solely to denote its referring object but not to connote. Thus 'Socrates', 'Plato' etc. are the examples of proper name in Mill's philosophy, but 'The Present Prime Minister of India' which is a connotative singular term cannot be considered as proper name at all, as this expression besides denoting a person implies an attribute also. But in Fregean philosophy, a proper name has both - sense and reference. According to Frege, a definite description is also to be considered as proper name. Thus 'The Present Prime Minister of India', 'The Present Capital of India' etc. are examples of proper name in Fregean philosophy and they have the both – sense and nominatum. Thus according to **Frege, proper names not only denote the object but also indicate the attributes of the designated objects.**

➤ According to **Mill, every proper name must have denotation**. The meaning of a proper name is the object it denotes and if there is no such object, the word is reduced to an insignificant mark. But according to **Frege, not all proper names have references as he admits of the existence of empty or vacuous proper name in his philosophy**. Thus the proper names like 'Socrates', 'The morning star' etc. have references but the proper names like 'Odysseus', 'Bucephalus', 'The celestial body most distant from the earth', 'the least rapidly convergent series' etc. do not have any reference. These kinds of vacuous or empty proper names have no place in Mill's philosophy.

➤ As proper names, for **Mill**, are only the denoting symbols i.e., non – connotative singular terms so the identity statements - **"The morning star = the evening star"** and **"The morning star = the morning star"** are of same cognitive value in Mill's opinion. But Frege with the **notion of sense** has made difference between these identical statements - **"The morning star = the evening star"** and **"The morning star = the morning star"** from their cognitive valuation.

After discussing Frege and Mill's view, now it is the time to discuss Russell's view of Proper Name, the view which also has its special worth in the field of Analytic Philosophy.

*Russell's View of proper name :*

**Bertrand Russell's** view about proper name is quite similar with Mill's view in some respect and quite different from that of Frege as **Russell made a clearcut distinction between a proper name and a definite description**. Though in his earlier stage Russell was influenced by the view of **Alexius Meinong**, for whom all meaningful expressions have their references and those references exist either in this material world or like Platonic Form subsist in another world. Thus the propositions like **"The Present King of France is bald"**, **"Golden mountain does not exist"** etc. are meaningful and according to Meinong, the subject term of these types of propositions are also meaningful. But to have a meaning, 'The Present King of France', 'Golden mountain' need references otherwise, they become meaningless and being a part of the proposition, they will make the whole proposition meaningless. So Meinong suggested that the expressions mentioned above also have references in another world. Thus the subject term of those propositions

becomes meaningful as well as the whole proposition.

Though Meinong's theory was very convincing to Early Russell, but in his later stage Russell did not support Meinong's opinion because Russell believed that to have a meaning the references need to be present in this material world. According to Later Russell, **Meinong didn't understand the distinction between name and description**. 'The Present King of France', 'Golden mountain' etc. are wrongly supposed as proper name by Meinong himself, but actually these are not the examples of proper name, these are not even the subject terms of the above stated propositions, because these are not the components of those proposition at all. Later Russell suggested these are the examples of **definite description**.

Russell in *Descriptions*<sup>8</sup> made distinctions between **name** and **description**. According to Russell –

1. Names are **simple symbol** as the parts of a name i.e., the letters are not at all symbols. But descriptions are **complex symbol** as the parts of a description i.e., the words by which a description is constructed are symbols.

2. A name is a **complete symbol** as it has its own separate meaning and this meaning is the object it denotes – the individual it refers to. **Russell agrees with the view of Mill** in this respect that a genuine proper name is non-connotative and its sole function is to refer to a thing which is named. However, **Russell distinguishes his view from Mill** when he has made a sharp distinction between ordinary proper name and logically or genuine proper name in his philosophy. But a description has not its own separate meaning, its meaning lies in the whole sentence. Thus description is an **incomplete symbol**. Thus 'Golden mountain' etc. is not the example of name, but of description.

Names must have their references otherwise names will be meaningless. But descriptions, lacking this feature, are totally different from the names. Thus in the case of "———exists", Russell confirmed that this blank can be filled up only by **description**, not by name. To him, **it is totally meaningless to speak about the existence of a referent object in the case of a proper name**. Thus if 'a' is a proper name then "a exists" is completely meaningless. But if we fill the blank by descriptions like "ten-legged tiger" etc. then the sentence "———exists" will be meaningful.

After showing the difference between name and description, Russell took two propositions to illustrate his opinion:

1. **Scott was scotch.**

2. **The author of Waverley was scotch.**

According to Meinong, these two sentences have a common form i.e., both are the example of a categorical sentence having subject and predicate. But according to Later Russell, **the logical structures of these two sentences are different** though their grammatical structures are same. The **logical forms** of these two sentences are as follows:

1. Scott was scotch  $\rightarrow Ss$

[Notation -  $Sx$ : x is a Scotch]

2. The author of Waverley was scotch  $\rightarrow (\exists x) \{Wx \cdot (y) (Wy \supset y=x) \cdot Sx\}$

[Notation –  $Wx$ : x is the author of Waverley

$Sx$ : x is Scotch

$Wy$ : y is the author of Waverley ]

Meinong thought all sentences are categorical sentences having subject and predicate; the subject term is always a proper name and it refers a particular object of this world or another world and by predicate term we say some attributes about the subject. But to Later Russell, in the second sentence '**the author of Waverley**' is not the subject term, not even the component of the whole sentence. He suggested that the

whole sentence , “ **The author of Waverley was Scotch**” will be **true** when it is said that :

1. At least one person wrote Waverley .
2. At most one person wrote Waverley .
3. Whoever wrote Waverley was Scotch .

Thus the **meaning** of the whole sentence “ **The author of Waverley was Scotch**” is - **At least one person wrote Waverley and At most one person wrote Waverley and Whoever wrote Waverley was Scotch** . The logical structure of this above conjunctive proposition is :  $(\exists x) \{Wx . (y) (Wy \supset y=x) .Sx\}$  . Here the internal meaning of the main sentence is revealed through a conjunctive proposition and because the three conjuncts are true , the whole conjunctive proposition is also true . Now because this entire conjunctive proposition is **logically equivalent** ( $\equiv$ ) with the main proposition , thus the main proposition “**The author of Waverley was Scotch**” will also be true, thus meaningful . Russell showed us that the expression ‘**the author of Waverley**’ which was supposed to be the subject term of this main proposition, is totally absent into the three component parts of the main proposition . Thus it is concluded that the expression ‘**the author of Waverley**’ is not the subject term. It is not even the component of the main proposition, not at all a proper name. It is a definite description according to Later Russell . **Wittgenstein** commented that “... **it was Russell who performed the service of showing that the apparent logical form of a proposition need not be it’s real one.**” (4.0031 Tractatus) <sup>9</sup>

Later Russell also opined that **empty description is possible , but not the empty or vacuous proper name** . In the proposition “**The present king of France is bald**” , the expression ‘**the present king of France**’ is an example of an **empty description** and Russell is able to show easily that the whole proposition will be meaningful with the help of Quantification method . The main proposition “**The present king of France is bald**” will be true when it is said “**At least one person now reigns in France and At most one person now reigns in France and Whoever now reigns in France is bald**”. The logical structure of this entire conjunctive proposition is :

$(\exists x) \{Kx . (y) (Ky \supset y=x) .Bx\}$  [ Notation :  $Kx$  :  $x$  is the present king of France ;  $Ky$  :  $y$  is the present king of France ;  $Bx$  :  $x$  is bald] .

The meaning of the proposition “**The present king of France is bald**” is “**At least one person now reigns in France and At most one person now reigns in France and Whoever now reigns in France is bald**”. Thus the main proposition is **logically equivalent** ( $\equiv$ ) with “**At least one person now reigns in France and At most one person now reigns in France and Whoever now reigns in France is bald**”. As there is no king or monarchy now exists in France , the first conjunct of this conjunctive proposition as well as the whole conjunctive proposition becomes false and being **logically equivalent** ( $\equiv$ ) with this whole conjunctive proposition, the main proposition “**The present king of France is bald**” also becomes false , hence meaningful . **But name must denote something, lacking the denoting object, a proper name will be meaningless.**

According to Later Russell the **words which we normally think as proper name, are actually descriptions**. We know that Russell had previously said that if something is proper name, then the question should not arise that whether the denoting object exists or not . For example if ‘Homer’ is an example of proper name then the question “Whether Homer has existed or not?” should not arise . **But we can significantly ask this question.** Thus Russell concluded that the word ‘Homer’ is to be used as an example of **abbreviated description / disguised description / telescope description / truncated description** and we can write ‘the author of Iliad and Odyssey’ in the place of Homer. According to Russell , **if something is really an example of proper name , then it must have reference, we have the knowledge of direct acquaintance with that and that referent object will have to be present in front of us.** In this sense , Russell suggested that not the ordinary proper names but the **logically proper**

names (e.g., 'this', 'that' etc.) - the demonstrative symbols will be entitled as **proper names** as they directly designate something and we have direct acquaintance with their referring objects. Thus according to Russell the **ordinary proper names are actually descriptions** and the term 'existence' can be predicated of these

#### *Comparison between Frege and Russell's View of proper name :*

Now on the basis of this view, we can notice that there are big dissimilarities between the views of Frege and Russell.

➤ According to **Russell**, a **proper name cannot be a definite description and a definite description cannot be a proper name**. There are fundamental difference between the two. **But which is a definite description for Russell, is also indicated as a proper name by Frege**. Frege designated both - the ordinary proper name and definite description by the term '**proper name**'. Definite description for Frege, can refer an object like proper name and can be used as a subject term of a statement. E.g., "**The former Prime Minister of India is an economist**" – in this statement, the subject term '**the former Prime Minister of India**' is a definite description and it designates a person – Dr. Manmohan Singh.

➤ According to **Frege vacuous proper name is possible**. To him, ordinary proper name can be vacuous due to the imperfection in our ordinary language. He cited example that the expression "The celestial body most distant from the earth" which is termed as proper name in his philosophy, has sense but it is doubtful whether it has a reference. But according to Russell, if a proper name is genuine, it must designate certain object. Thus **Russell did not accept the existence of vacuous proper name**.

➤ **Russell** made a clear **distinction between ordinary proper name and logically proper name** and for him the ordinary proper names of our everyday language are to be entitled as **disguised description or abbreviated description or truncated description or telescope description**. **But no such view is found in Fregean philosophy at all.**

➤ Frege viewed the sentences "The morning star is the morning star" and "The morning star is the evening star" etc. as the examples of **genuine identity statement** and the terms 'morning star' and 'evening star' refer to the same object planet – Venus, though their senses are different. Thus according to Frege the first statement is uninformative and the second one is informative in nature. The statement, "Scott is the author of Waverley" will be a genuine identity statement to Frege having the same referent with different senses. But according to Russell this is not a genuine identity statement but actually a **complex conjunctive mixed quantified existential statement**.

#### **Evaluation :**

At the end it is to be concluded that though the views of Frege, Mill and Russell regarding proper name have their own individual worth in the philosophy of language, they are not beyond criticism. Mill's view that if any proper name has no denoting object that name will be meaningless – is totally unacceptable. **Later Wittgenstein**, in **Philosophical Investigations** has strongly opposed this view and suggests that in normal language we don't take the bearer of proper name as its meaning. **What corresponds to the name is its bearer, not its meaning**. In **Tractatus**, he confused the bearer of a name with its meaning and believed that the meaning of any word which is a genuine proper name is the thing it denotes – the view which is quite similar with the view of Mill. But in **Philosophical Investigations** Wittgenstein himself took the example of a sentence - "**Mr. N. N. passes away**" and clearly argued that this sentence does not consider that, 'Mr. N. N.' or the whole sentence in which this proper name is used as meaningless. Here the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies.<sup>10</sup> **Saul Kripke** in his book **Naming and Necessity**<sup>11</sup> rejects Fregean notion of sense and argues that **proper names have no sense at all**. With the notion of **Rigid Designator** Kripke argues that the proper names always rigidly designate the same referring object in every possible world. Thus according to Kripke, the two identity statements "**Tully = Cecero**" and "**Tully = Tully**" have no differences in their cognitive values, as both of the sentences rigidly designate the same

person in every possible world. Thus these two identity statements being necessarily and analytically true, becomes uninformative in nature. Against Russell's theory of descriptions it can be argued that if the logically proper names (e.g., 'this', 'that' etc) are to be considered as proper names, then their meanings will be changed in every moment and in ordinary language we do not find any such proper names at all. **Hintikka** commented that **"...not only is it strange to call 'this' and 'that' names; it seems positively perverse to allege that they are our only proper names properly so called."**<sup>12</sup> Proper names certainly have their referring objects but they remain meaningful even if there are no designating objects. But in spite of criticisms, it is to be concluded, that the views of Frege, Mill and Russell regarding proper name act as framework of different theories and doctrines which have their own epistemic value in the field of Analytic Philosophy.

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