

Frege's Two Senses of 'Is'

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It is widely believed that there are two senses of 'is', the 'is' of identity and the 'is' of predication, and that this distinction was clearly drawn by Frege in "On Concept and Object" [5], although it was anticipated by others, perhaps, e.g., by Plato in the *Sophist*.¹ As opposed to this received view, I will argue that Frege had not successfully distinguished two senses of 'is', indeed that his argument leads to precisely the opposite conclusion; on the other hand, the distinction Plato had supposedly drawn in the *Sophist*, which seems to rest on a semantics Frege was explicitly rejecting, is, given that semantic framework, viable. Frege had introduced this distinction in order to buttress his view that proper names could not serve as genuine predicates: a proper name occupying ostensible predicate position could not be functioning as a predicate because the 'is' in such a statement would have to be the 'is' of identity, not the 'is' of predication. I will argue that Frege had been mistaken on this point as well. More generally, I will argue that Frege's theoretical analysis of language is not, as he had thought, incompatible with proper names being allowed to play a genuinely predicative role.

My remarks are prompted by Michael Lockwood's stimulating article, "On Predicating Proper Names," [8], which contains an extensive and detailed criticism of Frege's position. Lockwood argues that Frege failed to make out the distinction between the two senses of 'is', and that proper names can serve as predicates. I agree with Lockwood on both of these points. But I believe that Lockwood has criticized Frege for the wrong reasons, and that, as a result, he has drawn the wrong conclusions. Lockwood, in rejecting Frege's distinction (which he mistakenly identifies with Plato's), takes himself to have established that 'is' need not be assigned any sense other than the usual 'is' of predication, so that an identity can be regarded as a special sort of predication. He believes that he has thus eliminated the most significant barrier to the development of a coherent nonrelational analysis of identity, and he sketches a theory, based on a (very radical) reconstruction of Mill's well-known treatment of proper names, on which the logic of identity is obtained within a traditional sub-