

THE CLOSING PASSAGE OF FREGE'S
 "ÜBER SINN UND BEDEUTUNG"

RONALD E. NUSENOFF

Suppose that the relation between name and reference is always arbitrary. How does this relate to Frege's distinction between sense and reference? David Coder has claimed¹ that

"we must, I think, take Frege to be trying to enforce the distinction between sense and reference by reducing to absurdity the proposition that the relation between name and reference is always arbitrary," because this proposition "directly contradicts the view that names have, besides reference, sense." (pp. 339-340)

Coder argues that if the name/reference relation is always arbitrary, then the sense/reference distinction is vitiated because this leads to the result that "' $a = b$ ' is no more informative than ' $a = a$.'" (p. 341) Frege's justification for attributing both sense and reference to singular terms is then undermined, for the notion of sense could not then be functioning to explain ' $a = b$ ' as being more informative than ' $a = a$ '. Coder's argument is as follows.

- (1) Suppose that the relation between name and reference is always arbitrary.
- (2) To know what ' $a = b$ ' is about, one must know what ' a ' and ' b ' refer to.
- (3) Given (1), the only way to find out what the reference of a singular term is, is to have it stipulated.
- (4) To know that ' $a = b$ ' is true, the stipulation chains for ' a ' and ' b ' must be ended at some point where some object x is stipulated as the reference of both ' a ' and ' b '.
- (5) "But then ' $a = b$ ' is no more informative than ' $a = a$.'" (p. 341)

Coder seems to base this result (i.e., (5)) on the fact that, in order to know that ' $a = a$ ' is true, we must reach the same end point as is described

1. In "The opening passage of Frege's 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung,'" *Philosophia*, vol. 4 (1974), pp. 339-343.