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### Bentham's Contextualism and Its Relation to Analytic Philosophy

Silver Bronzo

This paper (i) offers an interpretation of some central aspects of Jeremy Bentham's philosophy of language, (ii) challenges the received view of its relation to analytic philosophy, and (iii) seeks to show that this investigation into the prehistory of analytic philosophy sheds light on its history proper. It has been often maintained, most notably by Quine, that Bentham anticipated Frege's context principle and the use of contextual definition. On these bases, Bentham has been presented as one of the initiators of a tradition that shares a common commitment to the "semantic priority of sentences" and that includes authors as otherwise diverse as Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein. In opposition to this narrative, I argue that Bentham did indeed anticipate the use of contextual definition, but was *not* a forerunner of Frege's context principle. The two issues should be sharply distinguished. I show that Bentham's philosophy of language is informed by a set of empiricist assumptions that Frege's contextualism was centrally meant to oppose. I conclude that with respect to the question of the relation between propositional and sub-propositional meaning, we should distinguish two opposed strands in the history of analytic philosophy: an empiricist strand anticipated by Bentham, represented most notably by Russell, and an anti-empiricist strand, represented most notably by Frege and Wittgenstein.

# Bentham's Contextualism and Its Relation to Analytic Philosophy

Silver Bronzo

## 1. Introduction

There is a standard story of the relation between Jeremy Bentham's philosophy of language and the analytic tradition. As the story goes, Bentham is a forerunner of the form of contextualism that is encapsulated in Frege's context principle, according to which "it is only in the context of a proposition that words have any meaning" [Frege, 1980, 73].<sup>1</sup> Two features of Bentham's philosophy are said to anticipate Frege's contextualism: the use of contextual definition, and the claim that sentences, rather than words, are in some sense the real "integers" of language. These features, it is maintained, are connected to one another. Moreover, they are taken to show that Bentham was committed to the same kind of priority of sentence-meaning over word-meaning that is stated in Frege's context principle. On these grounds, the advocates of the standard story conclude that there is a significant continuity between Bentham and subsequent analytic philosophers who either endorse some sufficiently close version of Frege's context principle (such as Frege himself, of course, but also early and later Wittgenstein), or make explicit use of contextual definition (such as Russell and Quine).

This paper challenges the standard story. I will argue that Bentham did anticipate later uses of contextual definition, and was committed to a certain view about the semantic primacy of sen-

tences, but was *not* a forerunner of Frege's contextualism. I will show, in fact, that Bentham's philosophy of language is developed within a philosophical framework that Frege's contextualism is centrally concerned to oppose. Such a framework—which I will stipulatively dub the *Empiricist Framework*—is characterized by two fundamental commitments.<sup>2</sup> The first commitment (1) is an *atomistic* conception of sub-propositional meaning: it is assumed that genuinely significant words must have a meaning that is in no way dependent on their propositional contexts. This commitment is derived, more or less inchoately, from an understanding of ostensive definition that runs deep in the empiricist tradition—namely, an understanding according to which some sort of ostensive act plays a foundational role in a non-circular explanation of how words can first acquire and retain their meanings.<sup>3</sup> The second fundamental commitment of the Empiricist Framework (2) is that, when we inquire into the semantic status of any given word, we must choose between two options: (a) either the word complies with the atomistic ideal and has a meaning that in no way depends on its propositional context, or (b) the word is characterized by the unilateral form of contextual dependence that belongs to contextually defined expressions. In the latter case, the word turns out to be a *sham* semantic unit that, in spite of grammatical appearances, makes no contribution to the meanings of the sentences in which it occurs.<sup>4</sup> I will show that Bentham's allegiance to the Empiricist Framework, in conjunction with his collateral metaphysical and epistemological doctrines, drives him into a philosophical dialectic which ultimately commits him to the paradoxical position that I shall call *Radical Benthamite Contextualism*: a position that extends to *all* sub-propositional components the semantic status of contextually defined expressions. Meaning-

ful propositions, according to this radical position, are semantic monoliths that may exhibit at most a merely grammatical sub-propositional articulation. The very idea of a sub-propositional semantic unit vanishes into thin air.

In order to bring out the *depth* of the disagreement between Frege and Bentham, I will compare Bentham's position with the family of views that Russell put forth during the broad phase of his philosophical development that begins, roughly, with the publication of the *Principle of Mathematics* in 1903 and ends with the deliverance of the "Lectures on Logical Atomism" in 1918. On the surface, the views that Russell champions during this period seem to be very different from Bentham's, because none of Russell's assumptions force him to embrace such an implausible position as Radical Benthamite Contextualism. However, Bentham and Russell are both firmly committed to the Empiricist Framework. Russell can avoid the dialectic in which Bentham finds himself entangled because he integrates the fundamental assumptions that define the Empiricist Framework with a different set of collateral metaphysical and epistemological doctrines. By the same token, however, Russell faces a different problem—i.e. the problem of the unity of the proposition. There are therefore both similarities and differences between Bentham's and Russell's respective accounts. But if our aim is to understand the specificity of Frege's contextualism, the similarities are more significant than the differences. I shall argue, in fact, that Frege rejects the entire Empiricist Framework, which is equally taken for granted by Bentham and Russell.<sup>5</sup>

Frege, I will maintain, rejects the atomistic conception of genuine sub-propositional meaning, as well as the assumption that we must choose between the options (a) and (b) indicated above. For Frege, propositional wholes and propositional parts are character-

ized by a form of *conceptual interdependence* for which there is no room within the Empiricist Framework. In the central case, meaningful propositions are articulated into words that have a meaning of their own and that make a semantic contribution to the meaning of the whole; but words have a meaning, on each of their occurrences, only in so far as they contribute to the expression of some complete propositional content. I will show that Frege does admit contextually defined expressions, which are characterized by the unilateral form of contextual dependence envisioned by the Empiricist Framework, but only as parasitical cases.

My conclusion will be that Bentham's contextualism should be contrasted, rather than aligned, with Frege's. Moreover, when we look at the history of analytic philosophy, we shouldn't expect to find a uniform tradition committed to a rather unspecified "primacy" of sentence-meaning over word-meaning (as the standard story has it), but two quite opposite strands: a strand that shares with Bentham a commitment to the Empiricist Framework (which includes Russell), and a strand that, following Frege, rejects this commitment (which includes, arguably, both early and later Wittgenstein).

I begin, in the next section, with a more detailed characterization of my target.

## 2. The Standard Story: Quine and Hacker on Bentham's Contextualism

The standard story of Bentham's contextualism has been advocated by several authors, both within and outside Bentham scholarship. Some representative formulations can be found in W. V. O.

Quine and P. M. S. Hacker.<sup>6</sup> Consider, for example, these passages from two famous papers of Quine's:

Bentham's [innovation] was the recognition of contextual definition, or what he called paraphrasis. He recognized that to explain a term we do not need to specify an object for it to refer to, nor even specify a synonymous word or phrase; we need only show, by whatever means, how to translate the whole sentences in which the term is to be used. [...] This idea of contextual definition, or recognition of the sentence as the primary vehicle of meaning, was indispensable to the ensuing developments in the foundations of mathematics. It was explicit in Frege, and it attained its full expression in Russell's doctrine of descriptions as incomplete symbols [Quine, 1969a, 72].

Contextual definitions precipitated a revolution in semantics. [...] The primary vehicle of meaning is seen no longer as the word, but as the sentence. Terms, like grammatical particles, mean by contributing to the meaning of the sentences that contain them. [...] It was the recognition of this semantic primacy of sentences that gave us contextual definitions, and vice versa. I attribute this to Bentham. Generations later we find Frege celebrating the semantic primacy of sentences, and Russell giving contextual definition its fullest exploitation in technical logic [Quine, 1981, 69-70].<sup>7</sup>

Quine is maintaining that Bentham shared with Frege the two ideas that I mentioned in the opening paragraph of this paper, namely (1) "the idea of contextual definition" or "paraphrasis," and (2) "the recognition of the sentence as the primary vehicle of meaning." These two ideas, for Quine, are intimately connected: they mutually support one another (as he suggests in the second passage), or can even be seen as basically equivalent (as he suggests in the first passage). They jointly constitute a "revolution in

semantics" that was initiated by Bentham, was further developed by Frege, and culminated in Russell's theory of descriptions. It is evident from other passages that Quine wants to place some regions of his own work (such as his discussion of the "virtual theory of classes," which will be briefly considered below) along this line of historical continuity. Even though Quine, in the two passages quoted above, does not mention explicitly Frege's context principle, it seems safe to assume that such a principle is at least part of what he has in mind when he speaks of Frege as "celebrating the semantic primacy of sentences."

More recently, Hacker has made similar points [Hacker, 1997, 67n24]. He stresses, like Quine, that Bentham's use of "paraphrasis" anticipates Frege's philosophical procedures. For example, Bentham's paraphrastic analysis of legal notions is supposed to be similar to Frege's contextual analysis of numbers: "As Frege thought that the way to investigate the nature of numbers was to analyze sentences in which numerals occurred, so Bentham thought that the way to analyze the nature of duties, obligations and rights [...], was to analyze sentences in which the terms 'duty,' 'obligation' or a 'right' occurred" [Hacker, 1997, 67n24]. Hacker also agrees with Quine about the fact that Bentham anticipated Frege's recognition of the semantic primacy of sentences. Here Hacker explicitly connects Bentham's contextualist views with Frege's context principle: "Bentham propounded a form of the context principle, closer to the later Wittgenstein than to Frege's (not altogether happy) contention that a word has meaning only in the context of a sentence" [Hacker, 1997, 67n24]. According to Hacker, Bentham's version of the context principle "rightly stresses that the sentence is, as Wittgenstein was later to argue, the minimal move in the language game" [Hacker, 1997, 67n24]. In

support of this attribution, he quotes the following passage from Bentham:

But by anything less than the entire proposition, *i.e.* the import of an entire proposition, no communication can have place. In language, therefore, the *integer* to be looked for is the entire proposition—that which Logicians mean by the term logical proposition. Of this integer, no one part of speech, not even that which is most significant, is anything more than a fragment; and, in this respect, in the many-worded appellative, part of speech, the word *part* is instructive. By it, an intimation to look out for the integer, of which it is a part, may be considered as conveyed. A word is to a *proposition* what a *letter* is to a word [Bentham, 1983, 400; quoted in Hacker, 1997, 67n24].

Bentham is here attributing some form of priority to complete propositions over their parts. For Hacker, it is the same kind of priority that constitutes the true insight behind Frege's "not altogether happy" formulation of the context principle—*i.e.*, the insight that finds more proper expression in the later Wittgenstein's restatement of the principle. Hacker's discussion suggests that such a contextualist tenet is connected, somehow, to the use of contextual definition; but he does not explain the precise nature of this connection.

In the next two sections, I will show that Quine and Hacker are *right* in claiming that Bentham's use of paraphrasis anticipates later uses of contextual definition. In the rest of the paper, I will argue that they are *wrong* in claiming that Bentham is a forerunner of Frege's context principle. The first thing that I will need is an account of Bentham's conception of "paraphrasis."

### 3. Bentham on Paraphrasis and Fictitious Entities

Throughout his long career, and in connection not only with his main intellectual interests—jurisprudence and the philosophy of law—but also with several other areas of philosophy, Bentham engaged in a sustained discussion of a problematic class of words that he called "names of fictitious entities." These words present themselves, grammatically, as nouns, just as the words that Bentham calls "names of real entities." In virtue of their grammatical form, names of fictitious entities seem to have the linguistic function of *naming* something; but this impression, according to Bentham, is deceptive.<sup>8</sup> A fictitious entity, as he puts it, "is an entity to which, though by the grammatical form of the discourse employed in speaking of it existence be ascribed, yet in truth and reality existence is not meant to be ascribed" [Bentham, 1997, 164].<sup>9</sup> When we employ names of fictitious entities, despite grammatical appearances, we do not *really* intend to name objects; on the other hand, our understanding of *what* it is that we really want to do with these words is cloudy and needs clarification. According to Bentham, the only method of clarification that can be helpful in this connection is what he calls "paraphrasis"—a method that he regards as one of his main inventions [Bentham, 1843c, 594]. Bentham gives several descriptions of paraphrasis, which are not always identical to one another.<sup>10</sup> The description contained in the following passage, however, can be regarded as representative:

The *paraphrasis* consists in taking the word that needs to be expounded—*viz.* the name of a fictitious entity—and, after making it up into a *phrase*, applying to it another phrase, which, being of the same import, shall have for its principal and characteristic word the name of the corresponding *real* entity. In a *definition*, a phrase is employed for the

exposition of a single word: in a *paraphrasis*, a phrase is employed for the exposition of an entire phrase, of which the word, proposed to be expounded, is made to constitute the principal or characteristic word [Bentham, 1983, 272n].

In order to clarify the use of a name of a fictitious entity, we need, first of all, to form an entire proposition of which it is the “principal and characteristic word”—an operation that Bentham calls *phraseoplerosis* (“filling-up-into-a-sentence”);<sup>11</sup> then we need to *translate* this sentence into another sentence, with exactly the same “import” or content, which has for its “principal or characteristic word” a name of a real entity (*paraphrase*, Bentham remarks, literally means “giving *phrase* for *phrase*” [Bentham, 1843c, 594]; in this whole discussion, Bentham uses “phrase” to refer to a complete sentence). Here is the example that Bentham himself chooses to illustrate his doctrine of paraphrasis—the paraphrasis of the term “obligation”:

An obligation (viz. the obligation of conducting himself in a certain manner), is incumbent on a man, (*i.e.* is spoken of as incumbent on a man), in so far as, in the event of failing to conduct himself in that manner, pain, or loss of pleasure, is considered as about to be experienced by him [Bentham, 1843a, 247].<sup>12</sup>

This means that when I say, for example, that I have an obligation to give your money back to you, what I *really* mean is that I expect to suffer pain if I don’t do it. In the new and (according to Bentham) equivalent sentence, the problematic word “obligation” has been made to disappear; moreover, there is no mention of cognate words that Bentham regards as equally problematic such as “right,” “duty” or “entitlement.” Talk about obligations has been unmasked as talk about people and their sensations of pleasure

and pain, which Bentham regards as real entities. The first kind of talk is, in Bentham’s words, a mere “representative” or “sucedaneum” [Bentham, 1843a, 246] of the corresponding talk involving reference to real entities: if we make true and significant statements about our obligations, rights, titles, etc., that is so only in so far as we are making statements about the pain that we expect to suffer in case we perform, or fail to perform, certain actions. As Bentham nicely puts it, the talk that involves names of fictitious entities such as “obligation” stands to its paraphrased equivalent as paper currency stands to its gold equivalent:

These fantastic denominations [i.e., names of legal fictitious entities] are a sort of paper currency: if we know how at any time to change them and get sterling in the room, it is well; if not, we are deceived, *and* instead of being masters of so much real knowledge as by the help of them we mean to supply ourselves with, we possess nothing but sophistry and nonsense [Bentham, 1970, 251].

There is nothing intrinsically problematic, for Bentham, in using sentences containing names of fictitious entities, as long as we know how to paraphrase them away. A genuine content expressed in a grammatically misleading way is still a genuine content. The use of names of fictitious entities is problematic only to the extent to which it can lead us to form sentences that do *not* admit of any adequate paraphrasis—sentences that, despite grammatical appearances, do not express any real content, but only “sophistry and nonsense.”<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. Comparing Bentham, Russell and Quine on Contextual Definition

We can now compare Bentham's conception of paraphrasis to later uses of contextual definition. I shall focus on two examples: Quine's virtual theory of classes, and Russell's theory of definite descriptions.

According to Quine, the "virtual theory of classes" provides a reduction of part of set theory to first order logic. The reduction is accomplished by providing (what Quine calls) a "contextual definition" of the distinctive expressions of set theory, namely the term "class" and the predicate "is a member of." Such a contextual definition consists in taking the whole sentence " $a \in \{x: Fx\}$ " (i.e., " $a$  is a member of the class of Fs") and translating it into the equivalent sentence " $Fa$ " (i.e., " $a$  is F"), which contains only expressions belonging to the language of first order logic. The first sentence, according to the virtual theory, is just a potentially misleading notational variant of the second sentence; it just says, "in disguise" [Quine, 1986, 72], what the second sentence says. Even though our grammatical form of expression suggests that we are invoking a particular class of objects, namely "classes," and a particular predicate of class-membership, this is a "sham invocation" [Quine, 1986, 69], a mere "manner of speaking to be paraphrased away at will" [Quine, 1986, 73].<sup>14</sup> Turning now to Bentham, we see that that these same descriptions apply quite well to his theory of names of fictitious entities. For Bentham, when we talk about obligations, for example, we just say, *in disguise*, what we could say by means of a more parsimonious language that lacks any legal vocabulary and mentions only people, their actions, and their sensations of pain. Even though, by employing the language of obliga-

tions, we seem to invoke a class of "legal objects," that is just a *sham invocation*, a *manner of speaking to be paraphrased away at will*.

Let's now consider Russell's theory of definite descriptions. This theory analyzes sentences containing definite descriptions into sentences in which these expressions have been made to disappear. To take Russell's famous example, "The present King of France is bald" should be analyzed as "There is one and only one  $x$  such that  $x$  is the King of France and  $x$  is bald." Expressions like "The present King of France" are, according to Russell, "denoting phrases," and the theory that he proposes "gives a reduction of all propositions in which denoting phrases occur to forms in which no such phrases occur" [Russell, 1956a, 45]. Denoting phrases present themselves, grammatically, as expressions that have the logical function of naming objects; but this is a misleading impression that the theory of descriptions can help to dispel by representing in a more perspicuous way what we are actually saying when we employ denoting phrases in discourse. As David Kaplan has put it, Russell's "contextual definitions" of denoting phrases may be treated "as rules for translating ordinary, logically imperfect language into a logically perfect symbolism" [Kaplan, 1972, 233-234]. In a similar fashion, we may regard Bentham's paraphrastic exposition of the term "obligation" as a *translation rule* that allows us to move from sentences of ordinary language to sentences (not so much of a "logically perfect symbolism," but rather) of a restricted version of ordinary language that has been purged of all names of legal fictitious entities—a restricted version of ordinary language that supposedly presents in a clearer and more perspicuous way what we want to say when we use sentences involving those problematic expressions.

On the basis of these strong similarities, we may conclude that there are good reasons to regard Bentham's use of paraphrasis as an anticipation of the use of contextual definition by later analytic philosophers such as Russell and Quine. But in order to address the further issue of whether Bentham is a forerunner of Frege's context principle, we need to look closer at Bentham's philosophy of language.

## 5. Overview of the Dialectic of Bentham's Contextualism

Bentham is committed to a number of semantic, ontological, and epistemological views that jointly determine what is allowed to count as a genuinely significant sub-propositional expression. In the next three sections, I will describe these commitments and show that they trigger a philosophical dialectic unfolding in three stages. At the first stage of the dialectic, Bentham appeals to the doctrine of names of fictitious entities and to the correlative technique of paraphrasis in order to accommodate apparent counter-examples into his view of genuine sub-propositional meaning.<sup>15</sup> At this stage of the dialectic, to which I shall refer as the *central application of the theory of fictions*, paraphrasability is a constitutive feature of names of fictitious entities: every name of a fictitious entity can be effectively paraphrased away. However, the attempt to deal with the implications of his own commitments leads Bentham to introduce the notion of names of fictitious entities that cannot, even in principle, be paraphrased away. This is the second stage of the dialectic of Bentham's contextualism, to which I shall refer as the *extended application of the theory of fictions*. Even this position, however, turns out to be unstable. When we proceed to the *last stage of the dialectic of Bentham's contextualism* (as Bentham is never

fully prepared to do), we eventually realize that according to Bentham's commitments *no* sub-propositional grammatical unit can really be regarded as a genuine semantic unit: *all* words, of any possible articulate language, are names of fictitious entities. The examination of this dialectical progression will bring out Bentham's firm commitment to Empiricist Framework (as I characterized it in Section 1), thereby setting the stage for the contrast with Frege's contextualism.

## 6. Bentham's Empiricist Commitments and the Central Application of the Theory of Fictions

Bentham's crucial and most unexamined assumption is that the only way in which words can genuinely have a meaning is by *naming* some kind of entity:

The only part of speech which is perfectly simple in its import, and at the same time integrally significant, is the noun-substantive. [...] A noun-substantive is a *name* [...]. The entity of which it is a name, belongs either to the class of *real* entities, or to the class of fictitious entities [Bentham, 1983, 402].

Full-blooded sub-propositional meaning is explained in terms of the name-bearer relation: a word is significant in so far as it has been "attached," so to speak, to some entity. On this view, which words are genuinely significant will depend on which entities there really *are*: an entity must be *there* in order to have a word attached to it. Hence the relevance of Bentham's ontological doctrines, which are shaped in turn by his epistemological views. He divides "real entities" into "perceptual" and "inferential." The former are entities that we know through the immediate testimony

of the senses (including inner sense); the latter are entities whose existence we infer on the basis of what we are immediately aware of.<sup>16</sup> Bentham is not completely consistent about what is supposed to belong to each of these ontological categories. When he is engaged in applying the theory of fictions and the technique of paraphrasis to particular cases (e.g., when he offers his paraphrasis of the term “obligation”), he is not very interested in inferential real entities and seems to count among perceptual real entities not only first-personal mental items such as impressions, ideas, and sensations of pleasure and pain (which he consistently regards as perceptible real entities), but also objects of the external world such as people and tables. However, in his more theoretical writings, he explicitly contemplates the possibility of inferential real entities such as the “Almighty Being” or “the human soul, conceived in a state of separation from the body” [Bentham, 1983, 271n],<sup>17</sup> and he shares with other classical empiricists the impulse to retreat from the external world and to relegate ordinary objects to the class of *inferential* real entities: the only genuine perceptible real entities would be first-personal mental items.<sup>18</sup> However, Bentham is reluctant to pursue consistently this latter line of thought. He tries to reduce the distance between our individual perceptions and the objects of the external world by observing the irresistible character of the inference here at issue, and by offering a sort of “pragmatic proof” of the existence of the external world—a proof that, in all its crudity, amounts to the following: Suppose that the objects that correspond to your sensible ideas do not exist, act accordingly, and “the perception of pain [...] will at once bear witness against you, and be your punishment” [Bentham, 1997, 182].<sup>19</sup>

In spite of these oscillations in Bentham’s ontological and epistemological doctrines, the general picture of sub-propositional

meaning that emerges from his commitments is quite clear: a word has meaning by naming something that exists and that we can somehow point to, either directly (with our actual finger or, as it were, with our mind’s finger) or indirectly (with the aid of our inferential capacities). In accordance with a characteristic tendency of the empiricist tradition, ostensive definition is here taken to display the essence of sub-propositional meaning. Moreover, the relevant understanding of ostensive definition is one that makes it mysterious why sub-propositional meaning should be anything else than *atomistic*: if words acquire and retain their meanings by being “attached” to some entities (whose existence and identity must be determined in advance on independent grounds), then what difference can it make to their meaningfulness whether they occur alongside *other* words—each of which, insofar as it has a meaning, also already names an entity? In particular, what difference can it make to their meaningfulness whether words occur in complete propositions?<sup>20</sup>

Given these commitments, it is inevitable that some words are going to appear in good shape, while many other words are going to appear problematic. All abstract terms, for example, seem to threaten the plausibility of Bentham’s assumptions. Take the term “obligation.” There surely is no Benthamite “real entity” that is named by this word: we cannot perceive or point to an *obligation* (neither with our actual finger, not with our mind’s finger) and we cannot infer its existence as we may infer the existence of material objects from our perceptions, or the existence of a soul from the movements of a human body. It seems therefore that the word “obligation” should be condemned as meaningless. But this would be paradoxical, since we ordinarily employ the word in sentences that appear to express perfectly intelligible contents. At this point,

paraphrasis can be used as an elegant accommodating device. By paraphrasing away the term “obligation,” we show that there is no need of accounting for the meaning of the word by looking for an entity that is named by it. The word, in fact, does not have any meaning of its own: it is only a *sham* sub-propositional semantic unit. At the same time, paraphrasis allows us to vindicate the idea that the sentences in which the word “obligation” typically occurs are perfectly intelligible. So it turns out that the word “obligation” is not, after all, a real problem for Bentham’s views about genuine sub-propositional meaning.

## 7. The Extended Application of the Theory of Fictions

The manner in which Bentham paraphrases away the term “obligation” shows that he can accommodate some apparently recalcitrant cases into his view of sub-propositional meaning. But on closer inspection, it becomes clear that the class of words that do not seem to comply with his view extends well beyond the class of abstract legal terms such as “obligation.” We shouldn’t be surprised, therefore, to find Bentham trying to deal with an explosive proliferation of “names of fictitious entities.”

Bentham comes to regard as fictitious entities all Aristotle’s “Ten Predicaments,” with the exception of the Predicament of “Substance.” Thus, for Bentham, any term signifying a “quantity,” a “quality,” a “relation,” an “action,” a “passion,” a “place,” a “time,” a “situation,” or a “*habitus*” is a name of a fictitious entity [Bentham, 1843a, 234-236].<sup>21</sup> Terms purporting to designate “matter,” “form,” “space,” “motion,” “rest,” classes or “aggregates” of individuals, “existence,” as well as modal and epistemic notions such as “possibility,” “necessity,” and “certainty,” are also for Ben-

tham names of fictitious entities [Bentham, 1997, 88-161]. More generally, Bentham is led to think that *any* time we use language to say something we are already involved in naming some fictitious entity.<sup>22</sup>

This striking view follows from Bentham’s theory of predication. For Bentham, whenever we use language to perform a complete speech act we utter a “proposition.”<sup>23</sup> But any proposition expressed in articulate language, for Bentham, involves the name of a “quality,” which is for him a fictitious entity:

Among names of fictitious entities, the foremost, and those the designation of which is of the most immediate necessity to mind-expressing converse, are qualities.\*

[\* *Quality* being taken in the largest sense of which the word is susceptible, in that which, in its import, is co-extensive with the applicability of the word so much used in the Aristotelian Logic school, *predication*.]

Taking the word *proposition* in its simplest acceptance, by every proposition the existence of some quality in some subject is asserted. A proposition is any portion of discourse by which the existence of some quality in some subject is asserted. The name of the substance is the noun-substantive. The name of the quality is the noun-adjective. The word by which the relation between the quality and the substance is asserted, viz. the existence of the one in the other, is by logicians called the copula [Bentham, 1983, 403].

Every simple proposition (i.e. every articulate proposition that is not a combination of other propositions<sup>24</sup>) asserts the existence of a quality in a substance. The real form of every simple proposition—what we would call its *logical* form—is “ $\Phi$  is in  $S$ ,” where “ $\Phi$ ” stands for the name of a quality and “ $S$ ” stands for the name

of a substance.<sup>25</sup> Simple propositions that do not *appear* to exhibit this form possess, for Bentham, a misleading surface grammar. For example, propositions that appear to contain only a noun-substantive, the copula, and a noun-adjective involve an “abbreviation”:

[S]ugar is sweet. The number of words employed here no more than *three*; but, in the form of expression, an abbreviation may be observed. Sweetness (the quality of sweetness) is in sugar. [...] For the formation of a proposition [...] no fewer than four objects require to be brought to view [Bentham, 1843b, 337].

Every simple proposition contains, in its un-abbreviated form, four elements: (1) the name of a quality, (2) the sign of existence, (3) the preposition “in,” and (4) the name of a substance. As Bentham clarifies in the footnote that I cited in brackets in the previous long quotation, when he talks of “qualities” in the context of his general theory of predication, he uses the term “quality” in a very capacious sense, which covers not only the specific homonymous item that figures in the list of Aristotle’s Ten Predicaments, but *any* possible kind of predication.<sup>26</sup> Every predication involves a name of a quality in this capacious sense:

The predicate is always the name,—may at least be considered in every case as the name of a quality [Bentham, 1843b, 333n].

[P]redication may, in every case, be reduced to this: an attribution of a quality to a subject [Bentham, 1843b, 335].

Forms of predication that do not involve names of qualities in the narrow sense may still be reduced to propositions in which a quality in the broad sense is said to be in a substance.<sup>27</sup> For example,

Bentham argues that relational propositions may be reduced to quality-in-substance propositions by applying the schema: “ $S_1RS_2 = \text{Bearing-R-to-}S_2 \text{ is in } S_1$ .”<sup>28</sup> So names of qualities in the broad sense are involved in any possible predication. But since some predication is performed anytime we utter a proposition in an articulate language, and a proposition is expressed anytime we make an intelligible use of articulate language, it follows that names of qualities in the broad sense—which are for Bentham names of fictitious entities—figure in any intelligible use of language. Names of fictitious entities, as Bentham puts it, are “of the most immediate necessity to mind-expressing converse.”

Bentham illustrates this view with an instructive example:

That apple is ripe. Apples are sweet. Apples are good. An apple is a real entity; in saying that apple exists,—the existence of which, I express my opinion, is a real entity. But *that apple is ripe*; of what is it that, in addition to that of the apple, I express my opinion of the existence? It is the existence of the quality of ripeness in the apple.

But the quality of ripeness, is it a real entity? Different from apples, and everything else that is susceptible of it, has this quality, or any quality, any separate existence?

[...] In saying this apple is ripe, what is it that I affirm? It is, that *in* this apple is the quality of ripeness. The two expressions are equivalent. But,—in this apple is the quality of ripeness, in the assertion thus made, what is the image that I bring to view? It is, that the apple is a receptacle; and that, in this receptacle, the quality of ripeness, the imaginary, the fictitious entity called a *quality* is lodged.

[...] Thus it is that, in the use made of language, fiction, at the very first step that can be taken in the field of language, fiction, in the simplest, or almost the simplest case, in which language can be employed, becomes a necessary resource [Bentham, 1843b, 330-331].

Bentham just cannot conceive of words having a genuine meaning other than by naming some kind of “real entity.” So, when he considers a very simple proposition such as “That apple is ripe,” he cannot but be puzzled by the words in the sentence that do not even *appear* to name something. So he assumes—with a quick and supposedly innocent move—that the proposition “That apple is ripe” is equivalent to “Ripeness is in that apple.” Bentham regards the second sentence as a way of explaining the import expressed by the first sentence, a more perspicuous rendering of its content.<sup>29</sup> But once we have so rephrased our original proposition, we may ask what “ripeness” is a name of. What is the entity to which this word refers? Can we point to *ripeness*, as we can point to *that apple*? According to Bentham, there is no real entity of which “ripeness” can be a name; the word is a name of a fictitious entity, and the same holds for all words that appear to name qualities in the broad sense of the term—words that, according to Bentham, are necessarily involved in any possible articulate proposition. There is therefore a kind of fiction that is constitutive of articulate language: “[A]t the very first step that can be taken in the field of language, fiction [...] becomes a necessary resource.” Elsewhere, Bentham expresses the same point even more forcefully: “[F]iction [...] is a contrivance but for which language—or at any rate language in any form superior to that of the language of the brute creation—could not have existence” [Bentham, 1997, 84].<sup>30</sup>

The contrast to which Bentham alludes in this last quotation between human language and the language of brutes is not just a rhetorical flourish, but a theme that he elaborates in some detail and that sheds further light on his doctrine of ineliminable names of fictitious entities. Bentham thinks that animals definitely have a language, but one different from ours in being completely *inarticu-*

*late*. Like us, animals can express propositions; but, unlike us, they are incapable of expressing propositions that are articulated into sub-propositional elements: “Brutes have no terms—their language is all propositions; their faculties enable them not to break them down into words” [Bentham, 1843b, 322]. Moreover, according to Bentham, a language like that of brutes is at the origin of our own articulate language:

Of language in its origin, the parts could not have existed in a degree of simplicity, equal to that of the most simple of those at present in use. The first words must, in their import, have been equivalent to whole sentences, to sentences expressive, for example, of suffering, of enjoyment, of desire, of aversion.

Of this original language, the parts of speech called interjections are examples.

Of this nature is, and seems destined for ever to continue, the language of quadrupeds and other inferior animals.

To form the words of which language is at present composed has been the work of analysis. The original sentences were, as it were, broken down into words, those words into syllables, and these syllables, with the help of written and visible signs, into letters.

Of these elements, thus formed by analysis, those called words will now be put together in the way of sentences [Bentham, 1843b, 322-323].

Human beings first used to talk, like brutes, by means of unstructured propositions. Then, when their faculties evolved, our ancestors proceeded, “by abstraction and analysis” [Bentham, 1843b, 322], to break down propositions into parts, giving us the form of language that we presently master. According to Bentham, our use of “interjections” is a trace of that original language, as well as an element of commonality with other animals.

Bentham has an ambivalent attitude toward the inarticulate language that he places at the origins of human society. On the one hand, the fact that it is the sort of language that “inferior animals” still speak today suggests that the articulation characteristic of human language constituted some form of progress or gain. On the other hand, the process of “abstraction and analysis” that gave us articulate language is also the process that made us fall into fiction. By breaking down propositions into sub-propositional components, according to Bentham, we inevitably introduce a class of words (names of qualities in the broad sense of the term) that, in spite of grammatical appearances, do not name any real entity and are therefore devoid of genuine meaning. So there is a sense in which the inarticulate language originally employed by mankind—and still employed by non-human animals—is an *ideal language*: the only form of language that, by avoiding any sort of fiction, is not grammatically misleading. In an almost biblical way, it seems that fiction was the price we had to pay for acquiring specifically human capacities.

We need now to see how far we have moved from the central application of the theory of fictions. In the central application of the theory, paraphrasability is a constitutive property of names of fictitious entities. Meaningful sentences featuring names of fictitious entities can be rewritten as sentences that do not contain those problematic terms. A grammatically misleading sentence is always contrasted with a grammatically perspicuous sentence; and the accommodating power of Bentham’s doctrine depends precisely on the possibility of replacing a grammatically misleading sentence with a grammatically non-misleading one. The word “obligation” is not a counterexample to Bentham’s views about sub-propositional meaning *because it can be eliminated with no re-*

*mainder*. But in the case of names of qualities in the broad sense of the term, the situation is very different. These are labeled “names of fictitious entities,” even though it is *ex hypothesis* impossible to paraphrase them away (except perhaps on pain of giving up articulate language altogether). If Bentham appeals to paraphrasis at all in this context, it is for *introducing* names of fictitious entities rather than for eliminating them. As we have seen, he argues that the sentence “That apple is ripe” should be rewritten as “Ripeness is in the apple”: we need therefore to pass from a proposition containing the adjective “ripe,” which does not even *appear* to name something, to a proposition containing the abstract noun “ripeness,” which now does seem to name some sort of entity. Once we have reached this level of analysis, there is nothing else we can do. We cannot get rid of all names of qualities in the broad sense of the term via paraphrasis. They are an intrinsic feature of articulate language, and should be accepted as such. Bentham, in effect, is conceding that his view of sub-propositional meaning cannot account for the meanings of predicates. But he does not take this fact as a refutation of his initial commitments. Rather, he bites the bullet and claims that names of qualities in the broad sense of the term, even though indispensable for human linguistic communication, are not genuine sub-propositional components. Bentham’s “accommodation” of predicate expressions into his view of sub-propositional meaning boils down to a call for resignation: we should just accept that, as masters of an articulate language, we are condemned to express our thoughts in a grammatically misleading way.

We can sum up the picture of propositional and sub-propositional meaning that emerges from the extended application of the theory of fictions in the following way. Propositions can

be expressed by means of unstructured signals, as brutes express them; alternatively, they can be expressed by means of sentences that exhibit an internal grammatical articulation. This grammatical articulation, however, corresponds *only partially* to a genuine semantic articulation. Names of real entities are semantic units (Bentham wants to hold fast to this fundamental idea); but every articulate proposition necessarily involves names of qualities in the broad sense of the term, which are no more than sham semantic units.

Such a picture is highly problematic in several respects. First, the implicit suggestion that the inarticulate system of communication of our primitive ancestors would be more perspicuous than our own articulate language looks openly paradoxical.<sup>31</sup> Second, the picture is incapable of vindicating the intuitive idea that the meaning of a complete articulate sentence is the *result* of the semantic contributions of its parts. According to Bentham's official position, names of real entities contribute to the meanings of the sentences in which they occur; but there is no other semantic unit that can combine with names of real entities to convey a propositional content. We can use meaningful words, and we can convey complete propositional contents; but we cannot convey complete propositional contents *by* using meaningful words: there remains an unbridgeable gap between the meanings of words and the meanings of sentences. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the semantic picture that emerges from the extended application of the theory of fictions is still *unstable*. Even though Bentham is never fully prepared to acknowledge this point, his philosophical commitments entail that *even* "names of real entities" should be regarded as fictitious. This brings us to the last stage of the dialectic of Bentham's contextualism—which is arguably also its point of

implosion. As we think through Bentham's requirements for "genuine" sub-propositional meaning, we realize that the range of cases that actually satisfy them shrinks to a vanishing point.

## 8. The Final Stage of the Dialectic of Bentham's Contextualism

Let's recall that for Bentham a simple articulate proposition has the form " $\Phi$  is in  $S$ ," where " $\Phi$ " stands for the name of a quality (i.e. for the name of a fictitious entity), and " $S$ " stands for the name of a real entity. So the canonical form of a sentence such as "That apple is ripe" is "Ripeness is in that apple," where "that apple" (according to Bentham's official account) names a real entity and is therefore a significant sub-propositional expression. But if we look at the way in which Bentham describes this sort of example, the situation turns out to be more insidious. In a passage that I quoted above, Bentham writes:

[...] In saying this apple is ripe, what is it that I affirm? It is, that *in* this apple is the quality of ripeness. The two expressions are equivalent. But,—in this apple is the quality of ripeness, in the assertion thus made, what is the image that I bring to view? It is, that the apple is a *receptacle*; and that, in this receptacle, the quality of ripeness, the imaginary, the fictitious entity called a *quality* is lodged [Bentham, 1843b, 331; second emphasis added].

In saying that the quality of ripeness is in that apple, we use the expression "that apple" to refer—*not* to a real entity that has "separate existence"—but to a mere *receptacle* of qualities; and in Bentham's framework, such a receptacle cannot be any less fictitious than qualities themselves. We can point to a particular apple; but can we point to a *receptacle of apple qualities*? In this connection,

it is helpful to have in view a remark that Bentham wrote shortly before the end of his life:

Each thing is,—the whole of it, what it is,—but we may consider the whole of it together, or any one or more parts of it at a time, as we please—thus we make,—thus we have abstracted,—abstract ideas [Bentham, 1843e, 72].

The expression “that apple” can name a real entity, and thus be genuinely significant, when it is used to name “the whole” of the apple. But as soon as we formulate and express an articulate *proposition* about the apple, we abstract from the real apple some fictitious qualities and a fictitious receptacle in which such qualities are said to exist.

Abstraction is required not only for obtaining the notion of a quality, but also for obtaining the complementary notion of a mere receptacle of qualities. Thus, if qualities are fictitious entities (as Bentham insists), mere receptacles of qualities are fictitious entities too. So a noun-substantive such as “that apple,” *when it is used in the context of a proposition*, is the name of a fictitious entity.<sup>32</sup>

A similar conclusion follows from Bentham’s discussion of Aristotle’s Ten Predicaments. As we saw above, Bentham contrasts substance with all the other Predicaments: substances are real entities, whereas all the other Predicaments are qualities in the broad sense of the term, and thus fictitious entities. However, when Bentham explains the relationship between a substance and its qualities, the alleged asymmetry between names of substances and names of qualities disappears. Consider the following explanations of the predicaments of “quantity,” “quality” (in Bentham’s restricted use of the term, which applies specifically to one of the Ten Predicaments), and “place”:

1. Quantity. Quantity cannot exist without some substance of which it is the quantity. Of substance, no species, no individual, can exist without existing in some quantity.

2. Quality. Quality cannot exist without some substance of which it is the quality. Of substance, no species can exist without being of some quality. [...]

3. Place. Of place the notion cannot be entertained without the notion of some substance considered as *placed*, or capable of existing or, as we say being *placed*, in it. [...] Of no individual substance is any notion commonly entertained without some notion of a place—a relative place—as being occupied by it [Bentham, 1997, 184].

Quantities, qualities, and places are not real entities that enjoy a separate existence; they are mere abstractions, and the words that seem to name them are only names of fictitious entities. But substance itself can only exist in some quantity, with some qualities, and positioned in some place. So *bare substance*—as the substratum of predications of quantity, quality and place—is also an abstraction, and therefore a fictitious entity. When alleged names of real entities are used in sentences to express complete propositions, they purport to name “substances” in this fictitious sense: mere “receptacles” that are said to contain the fictitious entities expressed by the predicates. It turns out, therefore, that *no part of speech*—as long as it is considered in the context of a complete sentence—is the name of a real entity.<sup>33</sup>

At this point, it seems that if we want to find a genuine name of a real entity (and thus a part of speech having genuine subpropositional meaning) we need to look at the way in which noun-substantives are used *outside* propositional contexts. Consider the following scenario. An apple is in front of me; I stare at it and fo-

cus my attention on it; but I don't perform any abstraction: I don't think of the apple *as such-and-such*, but consider it in its complete and concrete existence; then I utter the words "That apple," meaning to name the apple—*the whole of it*. In a case like this, one might think, the expression "that apple" names a real Benthamite substance. I suspect that it is the inchoate imagination of a scenario of this kind that sustains Bentham's initial assumptions about the meaning of words. But a philosophically uncaptive mind should find such a scenario rather puzzling. What is the person doing when she utters the words "that apple" while staring at an apple in front of her? We can imagine, perhaps, that the person is, as it were, calling, or invoking, or contemplating the existence of the apple. But in that case she would be performing a complete speech act. In Bentham's terminology, she would be expressing a complete proposition. Bentham himself insists that anytime we speak we assert an entire proposition, though we may do this by means of a single word [Bentham, 1843b, 321]. By Bentham's own lights, therefore, the scenario that we have described, to the extent that it is intelligible, does not show the essence of "real" sub-propositional meaning (as one might be initially inclined to suppose); it merely shows that what we recognize as a sub-sentential grammatical unit can be used to assert a complete proposition—or more generally, as we would put it, to perform a complete speech act.

If the reconstruction that I have offered is correct, Bentham's view of "genuine" sub-propositional meaning finally collapses. *No word satisfies the requirements that Bentham lays down*. What we are left with is Radical Benthamite Contextualism: a view that leaves no room for sub-propositional meaning and construes meaningful propositions as semantically unstructured wholes. This view, as I

argued in this section, follows from Bentham's commitments and surfaces at various points in his writings, even though he is never fully prepared to accept it: his official position does not go beyond the extended application of the theory of fictions. Thus Bentham recurrently wishes to talk about the "independent import" of words, about words being more or less "significant" than others, and about ways of "exposing the import" of words. But after ascending from the central to the extended application of the theory of fictions, and then to the final stage of the dialectic of Bentham's contextualism, we see that he is not really entitled to speak that way. The process of "abstraction and analysis" through which the inarticulate propositions of our quasi-human ancestors were broken down into "fragments" is, for Bentham, an intrinsically falsifying process. Between the "language of brutes" and our own language there is no real semantic difference. The articulation exhibited by our sentences is merely grammatical; at most it can *deceive* us into thinking that it corresponds to a genuine semantic complexity. From a semantic point of view, "[a] word is to a *proposition* what a *letter* is to a *word*" [Bentham, 1983, 400]. The letter "r" distinguishes the word "red" from other words; but the word "red" does not mean what it does in virtue of the meaning of the letter "r"; in fact, the letter "r," in such a context, does not have any meaning of its own. Similarly, according to Radical Benthamite Contextualism, the function of words is to distinguish complete propositions from other complete propositions; but propositions do not mean what they do in virtue of the meanings of their constituent words. Sub-propositional expressions can only *appear* to have meanings of their own.<sup>34</sup>

## 9. Comparing Bentham and Russell: Atomism, Contextualism, and Propositional Unity

In order to prepare the ground for a proper appreciation of the contrast between Bentham's contextualism and Frege's, it will be useful to compare Bentham's position with Russell's. There is the danger, in fact, of missing the depth of that contrast by construing Frege's contextualism as just another position developed within the Empiricist Framework. This is the sort of difference that holds between the views respectively advanced by Bentham and Russell. These authors are both firmly committed to the fundamental assumptions that define the Empiricist Framework (as I characterized it in Section 1), even though their respective views of propositional and sub-propositional meaning differ from each other in many respects, since each author combines those fundamental assumptions with a different set of collateral metaphysical and epistemological doctrines. Frege, on the other hand, as I shall argue in the next section, rejects the entire Empiricist Framework. While the disagreement between Bentham and Russell takes place *within* the Empiricist Framework, the disagreement between Bentham and Russell on the one hand, and Frege on the other, concerns the legitimacy of the Empiricist Framework itself. The form of contextualism that Frege recommends, therefore, will be properly construed only if we see that it opposes Bentham's view just as much as it opposes Russell's, and for the same reasons.

It is well known that Russell changed his mind many times and very rapidly. As I announced in Section 1, I am only going to consider the works he wrote between 1903 and 1918. More specifically, I will focus on the views that follow the introduction of the theory of descriptions in "On Denoting" (1905), taking into account the *Principles of Mathematics* (1903) only in so far as it ex-

presses commitments that continue to inform Russell's thought after the adoption of the theory of descriptions.

Throughout this broad phase of his philosophical development, Russell shares with Bentham an atomistic conception of sub-propositional meaning, modeled on a characteristically empiricist understanding of ostensive definition. A word—*any* word—has a meaning by naming an object to which it has somehow been attached. This assumption finds expression in Russell's "fundamental principle" for the analysis of propositions, which is known in the secondary literature as the "principle of acquaintance":

*Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted. [...] We must attach some meaning to the words we use, if we are to speak significantly and not utter mere noise; and the meaning we attach to our words must be something with which we are acquainted [Russell, 1997, 58; first published in 1912].<sup>35</sup>*

Words have meaning by naming entities with which we are directly acquainted. The view, here, is atomistic at all levels—ontological, epistemological, and semantic. The world is a collection of conceptually independent entities; we can be acquainted with some of these entities, where "acquaintance" is a primitive two-term relation that can hold between a subject and an entity independently of any other epistemic stance of the subject; and we can attach a word to each of the independent entities with which we are independently acquainted, so that the word acquires and retains a meaning independently of its possible occurrence in propositional contexts.<sup>36</sup> Thus, for Russell as for Bentham, the name-bearer relation, atomistically understood, constitutes the essence of sub-propositional meaning. Moreover, Russell shares with Ben-

tham the idea that we must choose between (a) the atomistic independence from propositional contexts of genuinely significant words, and (b) the unilateral form of dependence that characterizes contextually defined expressions. All the apparently significant expressions that do not comply with the atomistic ideal must be paraphrased away through contextual definition. Initially, in "On Denoting," Russell argues that we must paraphrase away all "denoting phrases," which include definite descriptions as well as the expressions that we use in ordinary language to express generality (such as "some," "all," "every," etc.). Then, in subsequent writings, Russell introduces the general notion of an "incomplete symbol" for all the expressions that require contextual definition, subsuming under this category not only denoting phrases, but also various kinds of "logical constructions" (such as, most notably, classes).<sup>37</sup>

There is therefore a substantial agreement between Bentham and Russell about the nature of sub-propositional meaning. However, Russell's epistemological and metaphysical doctrines differ significantly from Bentham's, and trigger a different philosophical dialectic. The first difference to notice is that Russell imposes a stricter epistemological requirement on sub-propositional meaning. As we saw above, Bentham maintains that we can name not only entities of which we are immediately aware, but also entities that we know by inference. "The Almighty Being" can be, for Bentham, a genuine name, and thus a genuinely significant word, provided that we are *right* in inferring its existence from entities that we know to exist non-inferentially. For Russell, on the contrary, all significant words must name entities with which we are immediately acquainted. Words that appear to be significant, even though they do not satisfy this requirement, must be paraphrased

away. So, for example, any meaningful sentence that asserts something about "the Almighty Being" must be analyzed until we reach a form of expression containing only words that stand for entities with which we are acquainted.

This stricter epistemological requirement on the meaningfulness of words can appear to set up the conditions for an even more uncontrolled proliferation of contextually defined expressions than the one to be found in Bentham. But this is not actually the case. We certainly find in Russell an astonishing growth of contextually defined expressions; but not as uncontrolled as Bentham's. When Russell comes to think that we can never be directly acquainted with the objects of the external world, but only with the sense data that are possibly caused by them, he also comes to maintain, as required by his assumptions, that all the words that appear to name such objects (i.e. the words that we ordinarily take to be *paradigmatic* examples of proper names) are *not* really names, but incomplete symbols that must be analyzed in terms of names of sense-data.<sup>38</sup> As Russell's philosophy develops, more and more expressions are regarded as incomplete symbols. But in spite of this, Russell, unlike Bentham, never reaches the point of being committed to the paradoxical idea that *all* words have the status of contextually defined expressions. In fact, he never needs to go beyond what corresponds to the first stage of the dialectic of Bentham's contextualism—i.e. the stage at which we introduce only contextually defined expressions that can be effectively paraphrased away.

Russell is entitled to stop at this point of the dialectic in virtue of a more liberal metaphysics, integrated with appropriate epistemological stipulations. This takes us to the second major difference between Bentham's and Russell's respective collateral views.

For Russell, *universals* are genuine entities. They do not “exist” in the manner in which (mental or physical) particulars exist; but they nonetheless “have being” or “subsist” in a timeless world [Russell, 1997, 89-90 and 100]. Moreover, he posits that we can have direct acquaintance with universals [Russell, 1997, 51-52 and 101]. As Bentham believes that every articulate proposition must contain the name of a quality, so Russell thinks that “[e]very complete sentence must contain at least one word which stands for a universal” [Russell, 1997, 52]. For Bentham, however, qualities are not real entities, and thus all the words that purport to name qualities must be regarded as sham semantic units that have no real meaning. For Russell, on the other hand, universals are entities that meet all the metaphysical and epistemological requirements for being named by our words. Russell, therefore, has room for sentences that contain only genuinely significant words, requiring no further analysis. These will be sentences that consist exclusively of names of particulars and names of universals with which we are immediately acquainted.

It seems, therefore, that in virtue of metaphysical and epistemological contrivances, Russell is able to vindicate the idea of sub-propositional meaning, avoiding the unpalatable tenets of Radical Benthamite Contextualism. But the same atomistic conception of the meanings of words that leads Bentham into trouble drives Russell into the *problem of the unity of the proposition*. Russell’s account reduces sentences to mere lists of objects. But sentences are different from mere lists: the former, unlike the latter, manage to *say* something. By conceiving all significant words as names of objects, and by assuming that naming is prior to and independent of saying, Russell puts himself in the uncomfortable position of having to answer the following question: How can we ever get from

naming to saying? Such a question has all the appearances of a hopeless philosophical impasse. To stipulate that a sentence is made up of words that atomistically name different *kinds* of entities—“particulars” and “universals”—does not help. The list “Socrates, walking” appears to be as incapable of expressing a genuine propositional content as the list “Socrates, Plato.” And it is equally unhelpful to introduce further propositional elements in the hope that they could “glue together” names of particulars and names of universals. Given Russell’s assumptions, these new expressions can only be names of further entities; their introduction, accordingly, will simply generate longer lists of objects.<sup>39</sup>

Russell was well aware of the problem. In the *Principles*, he formulates the problem of propositional unity as a difficulty in accounting for the nature of “verbs.”<sup>40</sup> A proposition, he maintains, is a unity that differs from the mere enumeration of its constituent parts. The source of propositional unity is the verb. Verbs can occur in two ways: as verbs, and as verbal-nouns. A verb binds together the propositional constituents only when it actually occurs as a verb. The problem is that when we analyze the proposition, we inevitably turn the verb into a verbal noun, thus destroying the unity of the proposition:

A proposition [...] is essentially a unity, and when analysis has destroyed the unity, no enumeration of constituents will restore the proposition. The verb, when used as verb, embodies the unity of the proposition, and is thus distinguishable from the verb considered as term, though I do not know how to give a clear account of the precise nature of the distinction [Russell, 1903, §54].

In Russell’s atomistic system, there is no room for “verbs as verbs.” He acknowledges that this is a fundamental difficulty, and

that he has no clue about how to solve it, but decides nonetheless to leave it unsolved, with the rather surprising excuse that the problem belongs to “logic” in general, whereas the book that he was writing was specifically concerned with the “foundations of mathematics” [Russell, 1903, §§52, 55]. The problem continues to haunt Russell in later works, even though he never discusses it as explicitly as he did in the *Principles*. In a letter to F. H. Bradley, written eleven years after the publication of the *Principles*, when his philosophical positions had already undergone many significant changes, Russell was still ready to admit that he had no solution to the question of unities: “I fully recognize the vital importance of the questions you raise, particularly as regards ‘unities’; I recognize that it is my duty to answer if I can, and, if I cannot, to long for an answer as long as I live” [Russell, 1999, 181-182]. It shouldn’t be surprising to find out that Russell continues to be stuck with the same problem. The various doctrines that he adopts after the *Principles* are developed within a framework that remains thoroughly atomistic; and it seems that the problem of propositional unity is bound to remain intractable unless this very framework is put into question.<sup>41</sup>

Bentham does not face the problem of propositional unity. According to the radical form of contextualism to which he is ultimately committed, there is nothing left that needs to be unified into a complete proposition. Meaningful propositions, according to Radical Benthamite Contextualism, are semantic monoliths, and there can be no issue of how the parts can cohere into a unified whole, if the whole is assumed to lack parts in the first place. Conversely, Russell does not run the risk of losing sight of the idea of sub-propositional meaning; but the very commitments that enable him to avoid this difficulty draw him into the problem of proposi-

tional unity. Even though Bentham and Russell face different problems, these problems spring from their shared acceptance of the Empiricist Framework. In fact, they can be seen as two variants of the same general problematic—call it *the problematic of semantic atomism*. Frege’s contextualism, as we are now going to see, rejects the Empiricist Framework as a whole and is therefore equally opposed to Bentham’s and Russell’s respective positions—with the relative advantage of avoiding the entire philosophical problematic in which these empiricist thinkers find themselves entangled.

## 10. Frege’s Contextualism

There is a limited respect in which Frege agrees with Bentham and Russell: he recognizes that natural languages may contain contextually defined expressions. Getting clear about the precise nature and limits of this agreement, however, will be crucial for preventing the risk that it might obscure a much more substantial disagreement—namely, Frege’s opposition to any general account of the relationship between propositional and sub-propositional meaning that is developed, like Bentham’s and Russell’s, within the Empiricist Framework.

Frege was clearly committed to the idea that some sub-sentential expressions of ordinary language are sham semantic units, merely purporting to have a meaning of their own. Most famously, he thought that the locutions used in many natural languages to express generality belong to this category. His analysis of generality in terms of variables and quantifiers—which is universally regarded as one of his major logical achievements—is in effect a way of paraphrasing away these misleading expressions.

In English, for example, we convey generality by means of words that appear to function in sentences like names. We say “John loves Mary,” and *similarly* we also say “Everybody loves somebody.” But the first sentence entails that Mary is loved by John, whereas it is a fallacy to infer from the second sentences that there is somebody who is universally loved. By rewriting these sentences into Frege’s logical notation, we will not even be tempted to draw such fallacious inferences. Words such as “everybody” and “somebody” will be made to disappear and the resulting sentences will contain only *genuine* semantic units, wearing their inferential relations on their sleeves.

Frege’s treatment of generality is not the only evidence that he recognized contextually defined expressions. In the appendix to the second volume of *Grundgesetze*, for example, he examines a view that proposes to treat class terms as “sham proper names” which “have no separate *Bedeutung*” and which are “part of signs that [have] a *Bedeutung* only as wholes” [Frege, 1997c, 282]. This is a view of class terms as contextually defined expressions, along the lines of the “virtual theory of classes” that I discussed in Section 4. In the *Grundgesetze*, Frege argues against this view; but shortly before the end of his life, when he becomes completely persuaded of the bankruptcy of logicism, he actually endorses it.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, in the same late years, he also wonders whether an analogous view should be adopted for number words.<sup>43</sup> (The two issues were of course closely connected for Frege, since he had sought to carry out his logicist project by defining numbers as classes.) There is therefore ample textual support for the claim that Frege recognized contextually defined expressions as an inherent potentiality of natural languages.

What we need to determine, now, is how this recognition is related to Frege’s context principle. The principle, in fact, does not purport to apply only to words of a specific sort (generality words, or class words, or number words), but to words quite in general: “it is only in the context of a proposition that *words* have any meaning.” At first, it might seem plausible to understand the context principle as a *generalization* of the (unilateral) contextual dependence that pertains to contextually defined expressions. Such a proposal can appear to be supported by the presence of some striking verbal similarities between the ways in which Frege formulates the context principle in the *Foundations* and the ways in which he describes, in some earlier writings, the semantic status of the words that are used in ordinary language to convey generality (which, we have seen, he treats as contextually defined expressions). In §9 of *Begriffsschrift*, for example, he writes:

The expression “every positive prime number,” unlike “the number 20,” does not by itself give rise to any independent idea, but only acquires a sense in the context of a proposition [Frege, 1997a, 67].<sup>44</sup>

What Frege says in this passage about “every positive prime number” sounds very much like what he says in the *Foundations* about words in general; and according to some commentators, such as Michael Beaney, the similarity here is not merely verbal. Beaney comments on the passage in the following way:

This could be regarded as the first appeal in Frege’s work to the context principle—here governing only subject terms involving quantifiers such as “every positive whole number” [...]. By the time of the *Grundlagen*, however, the appeal to the context principle has become generalized [Frege, 1997a, 67n31].<sup>45</sup>

Such a construal of the import of the context principle—as the idea that *all* words have the status that Frege assigns to “every positive prime number”—has also been fostered by some passages in Russell. When Russell characterizes the status of contextually defined expressions, he employs a language that resonates strongly with the formulations of the context principle that appear in Frege’s *Foundations*. In “On Denoting,” for example, Russell writes that “denoting phrases” (which include “indefinite descriptions” such as “every positive prime number”) “are not assumed to have any meaning in isolation, but a meaning is assigned to *every* proposition in which they occur” [Russell, 1956a, 42];<sup>46</sup> and in “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism,” he claims that “incomplete symbols” (which include denoting phrases) are “things that have absolutely no meaning whatsoever in isolation but merely acquire a meaning in context” [Russell, 1956b, 253]. Again, some commentators have thought that the similarity here is substantial rather than merely verbal: Frege’s context principle, they maintain, extends to all words the form of contextual dependence that Russell attributes only to denoting phrases and incomplete symbols.<sup>47</sup>

If this account were correct, then there would be little to object to the standard story of the relation between Bentham’s contextualism and the history of analytic philosophy. It would turn out, indeed, that the difference between the forms of contextualism respectively advanced by Bentham, Russell, and Frege is only a difference in *scope*: from a *qualitative* point of view, these authors are concerned with the same form of (unilateral) dependence on propositional context; where they differ is merely with regard to the question of *which* sub-sentential expressions are characterized by this form of (unilateral) contextual dependence. But while I agree that the contextual dependence that Bentham attributes to

names of fictitious entities is the same form of contextual dependence that Russell attributes to denoting phrases and incomplete symbols; and while I agree that this is, in turn, the same form of contextual dependence that Frege attributes to expressions such as “every positive prime number”; I submit that this form of contextual dependence cannot be what is at issue in Frege’s context principle.

The construal of the context principle that we have just considered can appear to be exegetically plausible only to someone who is not fully clear about the semantic status of contextually defined expressions—and about what would be involved in extending such a status to *all* words. This is a place where the examination of Bentham’s philosophy of language can help to sharpen our understanding of Frege’s philosophy. The view that results from that extension, in fact, is equivalent to the position that I called Radical Benthamite Contextualism: namely, a view that rules out the very idea of sub-propositional meaning. But no sensible reader of Frege would be inclined to saddle him with a view of this sort.

There are in fact many eloquent passages in which Frege emphasizes that words are, in general, genuine semantic units, making their own contribution to the meanings of the sentences in which they occur. One of the contexts (but by no means the only one) in which Frege stresses this point is where he connects the compositionality of language (i.e. the fact that sentences, in general, mean what they do in virtue of the meanings of their parts and the way these parts are put together) to its productivity (i.e. the fact that, by knowing a finite vocabulary and a finite set of grammatical rules, we can understand an indefinite number of sentences, many of which we have never heard before). Here is a representative passage:

The possibility of our understanding sentences which we have never heard before rest evidently on this, that we construct the sense of a proposition out of parts that correspond to the words. If we find the same word in two propositions [...] then we also recognize something in common to the corresponding thoughts, something corresponding to this word. Without this, language in the proper sense would be impossible [Frege, 1997d, 320].<sup>48</sup>

It is constitutive of language “in the proper sense” of the term that sentences are typically made up of grammatical units that are at the same time semantic units. For Frege, sentences are generally semantically complex signs:

As a sentence is generally a complex sign, so the thought expressed by it is complex too: in fact it is put together in such a way that parts of the thought correspond to parts of the sentence. So as a general rule when a group of signs occurs in a sentence it will have a sense which is part of the thought expressed [Frege, 1979b, 207-208].

Sentences are not semantic monoliths, as for Radical Benthamite Contextualism. On the contrary, they generally exhibit an internal semantic articulation that mirrors the logical articulation of the thoughts they express. As Frege puts it,

We can regard a sentence as a mapping of a thought: corresponding to the whole-part relation of a thought and its parts we have, by and large, the same relation for the sentence and its parts [Frege, 1979c, 255].

Explicit passages like these, as well as pervasive implicit evidence, make it virtually impossible to believe that the context principle, as Frege understands it, is intended to express a view that denies the reality of sub-propositional meaning.

Moreover, there is no evidence that Frege was committed to the sort of philosophical assumptions that drove Bentham into Radical Benthamite Contextualism. In particular, Frege had no sympathy for the empiricist fascination with ostensive definition, which sustains the atomistic ideal of sub-propositional meaning. On the contrary, he was self-consciously opposed to the idea that some kind of ostensive act plays a foundational role in securing meanings to words.<sup>49</sup> This opposition is very clear, for example, in the parts of the *Foundations* where Frege criticizes John Stuart Mill’s account of how arithmetical terms acquire and retain their meanings (namely, by being attached to properties of sensible objects, in the same way in which the word “red” putatively obtains its meaning by being attached to a property of entities with which we are sensibly acquainted).<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, when Frege argues that some words must be regarded as sham semantic units, this is never—as in Bentham or Russell—because he thinks that they fail to satisfy a set of substantive philosophical requirements. We saw that Bentham is drawn into the dialectic that ultimately results in Radical Benthamite Contextualism because he realizes that an ever increasing number of words do not satisfy the semantic, epistemological, and metaphysical conditions that he imposes on genuinely significant words. Thus he argues, for example, that all names of qualities are names of fictitious entities because he thinks that there *are* no suitable entities out there to bear these names. But Frege is not moved by this sort of consideration. His reason for claiming that an expression such as “every positive whole number” should be paraphrased away is that, if we take its surface grammar at face value, we will fall into fallacies. Similarly, Frege did not come to regard class terms as contextually defined expressions because he came to believe, contrary to his previous opin-

ions, that the furniture of the universe does not include classes (or because he came to believe that we cannot establish with these entities the right sort of epistemic contact), but rather because he eventually became persuaded that the talk of classes, if taken at face value, leads inevitably into some version of Russell's paradox. It is clear, therefore, that Frege is immune to the assumptions that ultimately commit Bentham to Radical Benthamite Contextualism.

These considerations should suffice to establish that Frege's context principle does *not* express the view that all words have the semantic status of contextually defined expressions. Granted this negative point, the question is how Frege's context principle should be understood in positive terms. This is a very debated issue.<sup>51</sup> The relevant debate, however, has tended to be informed by the assumption that Frege shares the conception of the space of possibilities that belongs to the Empiricist Framework (as I characterized it in Section 1). Most commentators, in fact, have maintained that Frege's context principle (which confers some form of priority on sentence-meaning over word-meaning) is in tension, at least *prima facie*, with Frege's recognition of the compositional nature of language (which confers some form of priority on word-meaning over sentence-meaning). But Frege's commitments to contextuality and compositionality can so much as appear to be in tension with one another only if one assumes that Frege envisages exclusively *unilateral* forms of priority and dependence between propositional and sub-propositional meaning—i.e. the forms of priority and dependence that are allowed by the Empiricist Framework. Plainly, two items cannot be, at the same time and in the same respect, unilaterally prior to (or unilaterally dependent on) each other.

Commentators have tried to deal with the putative tension between Frege's commitments in different ways. Some have recommended a developmental approach: early Frege subscribed to the context principle, whereas later Frege gave it up and endorsed the principle of compositionality.<sup>52</sup> Others have sought to "reconcile" Frege's commitments by introducing a distinction between different "orders" or "levels" of priority. Michael Dummett, for example, has influentially maintained that for Frege the meanings of sentences are prior in the "order of explanation," whereas the meanings of words are prior "in the order of recognition."<sup>53</sup> However, each of these strategies has been challenged on several grounds, and it seems fair to say that none of them has been capable of attracting a widespread consensus. The state of the debate is today hardly very different from what it was more than twenty years ago, when some authors described the task of reconciling Frege's commitments to contextuality and compositionality as a "notorious crux of Frege interpretation" [Fodor and Lepore, 1992, 210n5].

There is, however, a different exegetical option: rejecting the assumption that Frege is willing to place a unilateral priority on *either* the meanings of complete propositions *or* the meanings of their constituent parts (whether in absolute terms, or only relative to a particular "order"). This approach has been explored only by a small minority of commentators, but provides, I submit, the best way of making sense of Frege's texts as they stand.<sup>54</sup> According to this approach, Frege holds that proposition and sub-propositional meaning are *conceptually interdependent*, in the following sense: the meaningful propositional is in the central case articulated into significant words, each of which makes a semantic contribution to the meaning of the whole proposition; but words have a meaning, on

each of their occurrences, only in so far as they make a semantic contribution to the meaning of some complete proposition. On this reading, the context principle and the principle of compositionality, as Frege understands them, are two sides of the same coin. In accordance with Frege's understanding of the context principle, having a meaning is not something that a word can achieve in isolation, prior to and independently of its occurrence in propositional contexts. On the contrary, in order to have a meaning, a word must occur as a semantically working part of a meaningful proposition. The meaning of a word, on each of its occurrences, is given by the semantic *function* that the word fulfills within the complete proposition of which it is part. By adopting this view, Frege rejects the atomistic conception of genuine sub-propositional meaning that characterizes the Empiricist Framework. At the same time, expressing a propositional content, for Frege, is not something that a proposition can achieve prior to and independently of the meanings of its parts. Propositions are not, in the central case, semantic monoliths. On the contrary, in accordance with Frege's understanding of the principle of compositionality, propositions generally mean what they do in virtue of the collaborative work of their parts. By adopting this view, Frege rejects the idea that words, in general, exhibit the form of contextual dependence envisioned by the Empiricist Framework—namely, the form of unilateral contextual dependence that pertains to contextually defined expressions. For Frege, the meanings of propositions and the meanings of their parts are characterized by a form of interdependence for which there is no room within the Empiricist Framework.<sup>55</sup>

This reading of Frege's contextualism can be given a more detailed formulation by taking into account Frege's distinction be-

tween logic and psychology and his conception of propositional structure.<sup>56</sup> For Frege, when we talk about the "meaning" of a word, we might want to talk about its *psychological* meaning, or about its *logical* meaning. The psychological meaning of a word consists in the feelings and mental images that we associate with it. This sort of meaning is atomistic: a word may elicit the same psychological associations quite independently of the character of its propositional context. Frege concedes that psychological meaning may be a legitimate topic of investigation; but he argues that any such investigation will be completely irrelevant if we are interested in logical matters—that is, in the truth of propositions and in the validity of inferences. If *that* is our concern, then we should look exclusively at the *logical* meanings of words, which are *not* atomistically independent from their propositional contexts. With regard, now, to Frege's conception of propositional structure, he thinks that there are two fundamental kinds of sub-propositional logical units: "proper names," signifying objects, and "concept-words," signifying concepts. In the simplest case, we have a proposition when a concept-word combines with a proper name. Frege's context principle can then be unpacked as follows: A linguistic expression (e.g. a spoken or written word) is, on each of its occurrences, a sub-propositional logical unit (signifying a concept or an object) if and only if it works *as such* within an intelligible proposition. The same word may fulfill different logical functions in different propositions—and *be*, therefore, in each of those propositions, a different logical unit. In "Vienna is the capital of Austria," to take one of Frege's examples, the word "Vienna" contributes to the expression of the content of the whole proposition by signifying an object; it is, accordingly, a proper name; but in "Trieste is no Vienna," the same word makes a different logical

contribution to the whole: it signifies a concept (something like “being a metropolis”) and *is*, therefore, in that context, a concept-word [Frege, 1997b, 189]. The word “Vienna” may elicit, on both occasions, the same psychological associations (e.g. the image of a certain skyline); but this is perfectly compatible with the fact that the word has, in each context, a different *logical* meaning. If we are interested in the logical meanings of words, we must look at the logical role that they fulfill in the propositions in which they occur. Sub-propositional meaning, therefore, depends for Frege on propositional meaning. But this is not a unilateral form of dependence. It is equally the case, in fact, that the meanings of complete propositions depend, in the central case, on the meanings of the words of which they are composed. Propositional and sub-propositional meanings necessarily come together. Borrowing a term from the British Idealist tradition, we can say that for Frege the meaningful proposition is an *organic unity*: it is essentially articulated into parts, but by parts that cannot be what they are except as parts of the appropriate wholes.<sup>57</sup> This view involves a non-atomistic notion of part, a non-monolithic notion of unity, and a non-agglomerative notion of complexity—all notions that are ruled out by the Empiricist Framework.

The interpretation of Frege’s contextualism that I am recommending contains a qualification that is in need of clarification. For Frege, I have maintained, the meaningful proposition is *in the central case* articulated into sub-propositional expressions that make logical contributions to the meaning of the whole. The qualification is required because Frege, as we have seen, does assign *some* role to the unilateral form of contextual dependence that is countenanced by the Empiricist Framework. For Frege, some expressions of natural language are indeed sham semantic unit, lacking a

meaning of their own and making no semantic contribution to the wholes in which they occur. The propositions that contain them have a meaning, but do not mean what they do in virtue of the collaborative work of their grammatical parts. My suggestion, however, is that Frege assigns to these cases a *parasitical* status.<sup>58</sup> A language may contain grammatical expressions that misleadingly purport to be logical or semantic units; but in order to be a language “in the proper sense” of the term, its manifest grammatical structure must be, “by and large,” a genuine logical articulation. All we can have without any degree of sub-propositional semantic complexity is a language *in an improper sense*—i.e. a system of signals like the “language of brutes” that attracted so strongly Bentham’s imagination. In the absence of an approximate correspondence between grammar and content, we begin to lose our grip on the very idea of thought-expressing discourse. Contextually defined expressions—far from being taken as the general model for all sub-sentential expressions, as happens in Radical Benthamite Contextualism—remain for Frege a necessarily parasitical phenomenon.<sup>59</sup>

We can then summarize the differences between Frege’s contextualism and the positions that can be developed within the Empiricist Framework (such as Bentham’s and Russell’s) in three points. First, Frege rejects as spurious the atomistic ideal of sub-propositional meaning that is championed by the Empiricist Framework. *All* significant words, for Frege, are characterized by a form of dependence on their propositional contexts. Second, Frege refuses to choose between the two options provided by the Empiricist Framework; that is, he refuses to choose between (a) the atomistic independence from propositional context that supposedly belongs to genuine sub-propositional semantic units, and (b)

the unilateral dependence on propositional context that pertains to contextually defined expressions. For Frege, the meaningful proposition is an organic unity in which the whole and the parts are conceptually interdependent. Third, Frege believes, like Bentham and Russell, that natural languages may contain expressions that are in need of contextual definition; these expressions, for Frege, are unilaterally dependent on their propositional contexts; but he treats them as parasitical cases.

Given these differences, Frege's contextualism should be contrasted with, rather than aligned to, the positions advanced by Bentham and Russell. It can be argued, moreover, that Frege's contextualism, by rejecting the Empiricist Framework, avoids the philosophical problematic that burdens, in different ways, both Bentham and Russell. On the one hand, we have already seen that Frege is completely free from the assumptions that ultimately commit Bentham to the paradoxical idea that there is no such thing as sub-propositional meaning. There is nothing in Frege's system that forces him to generalize to all words the semantic status of contextually defined expressions. On the other hand, it can be plausibly maintained that Frege's position yields a satisfactory dissolution of the problem that was a constant source of trouble for Russell—namely, the problem of propositional unity. If words have a meaning only in the context of a meaningful proposition, then there can be no such thing as a mere list or juxtaposition of meaningful words which fails to amount to a complete proposition.<sup>60</sup> On the contrary, the meaningfulness—and thus the unity—of the whole proposition is always already presupposed by the meaningfulness of its constituent parts. By opposing the atomistic conception of sub-propositional meaning, Frege rejects the assumptions that are required for the very *formulation* of the prob-

lem of propositional unity.<sup>61</sup> Thus, Frege's contextualism can be seen to provide not only an *alternative* to the framework adopted by Bentham and Russell, but also a *more promising* approach for developing an adequate account of the relationship between the meanings of sentences and the meanings of words.

## 11. Conclusion

The standard story of Bentham's contextualism is, at the same time, a story about the history of analytic philosophy. Bentham is presented as a precursor of a uniform tradition that is committed to the semantic priority of sentences, where the precise nature of this priority is left quite unexamined. The grain of truth contained in the standard story is that Bentham did in fact anticipate the use of contextual definition, which played an important role for many central figures of the analytic tradition—including Russell, Quine, and even Frege. But Bentham did *not* anticipate Frege's context principle. Bentham's account of the general relationship between propositional and sub-propositional meaning is developed within a philosophical framework that constitutes the *target* of Frege's contextualism. With respect to this question, Bentham and Frege occupy opposite camps. I have argued that Russell sides with Bentham, and I believe it can be shown that Wittgenstein, in both his early and later years, sides with Frege.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, Bentham's views about the relations of dependence and independence between the meanings of words and the meanings of sentences anticipate only *one* of the strands that run through the history of analytic philosophy.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also [Frege, 1980, x and 71].

<sup>2</sup> Even though there are good reasons to refer to the framework that I am going to characterize as the “Empiricist Framework,” my characterization is meant to be stipulative. It may in fact not be the case, or it may not be immediately clear, that each classical empiricist is consistently committed to such a framework. Moreover, the form of “empiricism” elaborated by some contemporary philosophers (such as John McDowell and, before him, Wilfrid Sellars) is inherently inimical to the Empiricist Framework as I characterize it. Finally, some philosophers may be committed to the Empiricist Framework even though they do not count as empiricists in *all* respects. Early Russell is a good example: his philosophical approach, in *The Principles of Mathematics*, is already informed by a commitment to the Empiricist Framework, even though he is comparatively less concerned with epistemological issues as in later works and certainly does not believe—as the classical empiricists do—that all knowledge comes from sensory experience.

<sup>3</sup> This is the conception of ostensive definition that is famously examined and criticized in the opening sections of Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* [Wittgenstein, 1958, §§1-49].

<sup>4</sup> This is the sense in which I will talk in this paper of “contextual definition”; it is not the only sense that reflects current philosophical usage. For a related but different use of the term, see below, note 59.

<sup>5</sup> As an anonymous referee pointed out, Frege's general opposition to the empiricist tradition is well-known. The claim that I make in this paper, however, is that Frege opposed the assumptions that define the Empiricist Framework—as I have just characterized it. This is a much more determinate point. Given the influence of the standard story of the relation between Bentham's contextualism and the analytic tradition that I criticize in this paper as a whole, and given the interpretations of Frege's contextualism that I discuss in the last section of the paper, I do not think it is fair to say that Frege's opposition to the Empiricist Framework is shared philosophical knowledge. As the same referee observed, there are indeed Frege scholars who have argued that Frege's context principle is intimately related to a thesis about the priority of judgment that Frege inherits from Kant, in opposition to the empiricist tradition (see e.g. [Bell, 1979] and [Sluga, 1980]). In this paper, I follow broadly this line of interpretation. Its full implications, however, seem to me still largely unappreciated. By construing Frege's contextualism as an alternative to *all* the positions that can be developed within the Empiricist Framework, I seek to give an account of Frege's context principle that makes it truly different from the options available to empiricist authors such as Bentham and Russell.

<sup>6</sup> Quine is arguably the author who, more than anybody else, has brought this historical claim to the attention of a wide philosophical public. To my knowledge, he is also the *first* who claimed that there is a connection between Bentham's contextualism and Frege's. Before him, between the two wars, C. K. Ogden and John Wisdom had argued that Bentham anticipated some contextualist aspects of Russell's philosophy, i.e. the use of contextual definition (see especially [Ogden, 1932] and [Wisdom, 1931]). Ogden was proud of contributing to the "rediscovery" of Bentham's logico-linguistic writings, and it is actually very likely that Quine knew about such writings through Ogden's *Bentham's Theory of Fictions*, to which he explicitly refers [Quine, 1981, 68]. (Ogden's volume consists of a long introduction and some excerpts from Bentham's collected works.) In the second half of the twentieth century, Quine's historical thesis (to the effect that Bentham anticipated Frege's contextualism) has been generally accepted by Bentham scholars (see e.g. [Harrison, 1983, 64-68] and [Hart, 1982, 10]). Outside Bentham scholarship, Quine's thesis has been restated by Peter Hacker [Hacker, 1997, 67n24; Baker and Hacker, 2005, 172-173] and, more recently, by Hans-Johann Glock [2008, 124] and Richard Gaskin [2008, 187-188]. The thesis that Bentham anticipated Russell's use of contextual definition and 20th century views about the "semantic priority of sentences" has also been defended by John Skorupski [1993, 27-28 and 162], even though he does not claim that Bentham anticipated Frege's context principle. It is worth emphasizing that this literature is not concerned with actual historical connections, but only with the question of whether Bentham anticipated the views of later philosophers. The same holds of the present paper.

<sup>7</sup> See also [Quine, 1953, 39].

<sup>8</sup> Here is one of the several passages where Bentham formulates the connection between names of fictitious entities and the surface grammar of language: “Wherever there is a word, there is a thing: so says the common notion [...]. Wherever there is a word, there is a thing: hence the almost universal practice of confounding *fictitious* entities with *real* ones—corresponding names of fictitious entities with *real* ones. [...] Identity of nomenclature is certificate of identity of nature: diversity of diversity:—how absurd, how inconsistent to make the certificate a false one!” [Bentham, 1843e, 73]

<sup>9</sup> See also [Bentham, 1997, 86]. Bentham contrasts both “names of real entities” and “names of fictitious entities” with “names of fabulous entities” [Bentham, 1997, 84-86; Bentham, 1983, 271n]. A name of a fabulous entity is *meant* to stand for a real entity satisfying a certain description, but *fails* to do so, because there is in fact no real entity satisfying that description. One of Bentham’s favorite examples is the expression “the Devil,” understood as the name of a being living at a certain address, “having a head, body and limbs like a man’s, horns like a goat’s, wings like a bat’s, and a tail like a monkey’s” [Bentham, 1997, 84]. A name of a fictitious entity, on the other hand, is not really *meant* to stand for any real entity. For Bentham, as we are going to see, sentences containing names of fictitious entities can be true. Sentences containing names of fabulous entities, on the other hand, can never be true. It is not clear, however, whether Bentham treats such sentences as simply false (*à la* Russell), or as significant but lacking a truth-value (*à la* Frege), or even as nonsensical. For the purposes of this paper, we don’t have to settle this question.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the passage quoted below, see [Bentham, 1843a, 246], [Bentham, 1843c, 594], and [Bentham, 1977, 495n].

<sup>11</sup> See for example [Bentham, 1843a, 247].

<sup>12</sup> For a similar passage, see [Bentham, 1997, 160].

<sup>13</sup> In addition to “phraseoplerosis,” Bentham indicates another operation that is “subservient” to the operation of paraphrasis: “archetypation” [Bentham, 1843a, 246-248; see also Bentham, 1983, 271-274]. For Bentham, the name of a fictitious entity generally presents to the mind a “material image,” i.e. the “image of some real action or state of things.” This is the “archetype” or “emblematic image” associated with the name of the fictitious entity. The goal of archetypation is to describe these material images. For example, the archetype associated with the word “obligation” is “that of a man lying down, with a heavy body pressing upon him, [...] in such sort as either to prevent him from acting at all, or so ordering matters that if so it be that he does act, it cannot be in any other direction or manner that the direction or manner [...] requisite” [Bentham, 1843a, 247]. However, the archetype associated with the name of a fictitious entity plays no role, for Bentham, in determining the truth-conditions and the inferential relations of the propositions in which the name occurs. When we say that somebody is subject to an obligation, we do *not* mean that she is under some sort of heavy body restricting her movements. As Bentham clearly puts it at one point, “[i]n the case of every name of a *fictitious* entity, the only sure test of intellection is *paraphrasis*” [Bentham, 1983, 274n]. If the name of a fictitious entity lacks an adequate paraphrasis, the propositions that contain it will express only “sophistry and nonsense,” no matter how vivid is the emblematic image that the word triggers in our mind. Thus I disagree with one of the anonymous referees of this journal, who contends that archetypation, for Bentham, is a “procedure for giving meaning to a word” that can be used as an “alternative” to paraphrasis. Bentham does indeed envision various ways of fixing or “exposing” the meaning or “import” of a word [Bentham, 1843a, 242-248]. But he presents paraphrasis as the “only instructive” mode of exposition that is applicable to fundamental names of fictitious entities (i.e. names of fictitious entities that cannot be defined *per*

genus et differentiam in terms of more general names of fictitious entities [Bentham, 1843a, 246]). Archetypation is not introduced by Bentham as an alternative to paraphrasis, but as an operation that is “subservient” to it: its main point is precisely to lead us to realize that the import of the name of a fictitious entity differs from the emblematic image that is associated with it, which is completely irrelevant if we want to understand the truth-conditions and the inferential relations of the propositions in which the term occurs. This said, there is a larger and more complex issue that is connected to Bentham’s discussion of archetypation, which is also raised by the same referee: namely, the question of the extent to which Bentham inherits the Lockean conception of language, according to which words are signs of ideas. There are certainly many passages where Bentham states or presupposes that words are signs of mental items; see for instance [Bentham, 1997, 124], [Bentham, 1983, 261], [Bentham, 1843b, 320, 329, 333]. However, it is also the case that the doctrine of paraphrasis and the correlative contrast between names of real entities and names of fictitious entities (which are the main concern of this paper) presuppose a conception of language according to which words stand for extra-mental items (except in those cases in which they are actually used to talk about mental events). If the function of the word “obligation” were to name a mental item (such as the archetype associated with it), then there would be no need to paraphrase it away; in fact, there would be no reason to call it a “name of a fictitious entity,” since for Bentham mental items such as mental images and ideas are real entities (see below, Section 6). Of course, this leaves us with the question of how the “idealist” strand and the “referentialist” strand in Bentham’s philosophy of language are meant to fit together. This is not a question that I can properly address in this paper. But any adequate answer to that question cannot simply ignore the referentialist strand (as the previously mentioned referee appears to be inclined to do) and claim that the meaning of

word, for Bentham, is given by the mental item with which it is associated. (Again, this would make the whole theory fictions unintelligible.) Rather, if there is a coherent view to be found in Bentham’s writings, it appears to be one according to which words stand for extra-mental entities, but do so in an *indirect* manner, *via* mental items that stand in appropriate relations to those entities. This is the view that seems to be expressed, for example, in the following passage: “Language is the sign of thought, of the thought which is in the mind of him by whom the discourse is uttered. It may be the sign of other things and other objects in infinite variety, but of his object it is always a sign, and it is only through this that it becomes the sign of any other object” [Bentham, 1843b, 329]. (In fact, there is evidence that even Locke, at least at some points, endorsed a view of this form, rather than the purely “idealistic” conception of language for which he has been often criticized; see [Losonsky, 2007].) It is worth emphasizing, however, that even under the assumption that Bentham endorses a two-stage conception of language of this sort, the “archetypes” associated with names of fictitious entities would still play no essential role in the determination of the contents of the propositions in which those terms occur. For Bentham, the word “obligation” does not purport to name a heavy weight restricting the movements of people—neither directly, nor *indirectly* (via some sort of mental item).

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of the virtual theory of classes, see [Quine, 1969b, 15-27].

<sup>15</sup> I do not wish to deny that some of Bentham's paraphrastic analyses, *in addition* to accommodating apparently recalcitrant cases into his conception of genuine sub-propositional meaning, may *also* fulfill a valuable and independent clarificatory function. One might argue that this applies, for example, to Bentham's paraphrastic analysis of "rights," as it is used in Bentham's discussion of the difference between "political rights" and "natural rights"; see [Bentham, 1843d, 217-224].

<sup>16</sup> See [Bentham, 1997, 164, 170-172] and [Bentham, 1983, 271n].

<sup>17</sup> See also [Bentham, 1983, 402] and [Bentham, 1997, 174].

<sup>18</sup> See [Bentham, 1997, 174 and 180].

<sup>19</sup> See also [Bentham, 1983, 402n].

<sup>20</sup> When Bentham discusses ostensive definition (under the rubric of "exposition by representation") he clearly assigns it a foundational role, which involves an atomistic conception of sub-propositional meaning. For Bentham, all other methods of explaining or defining the meanings of words must ultimately rely on the prior and independent possibility of ostensive definition, through which a child is taught her first language [Bentham, 1843a, 243; cf. also Bentham, 1843b, 328]. Apparently, all the child has to do in order to be taught the meaning of a word is to identify (a) the word, (b) the entity to which it is meant to be attached, and (c) the act of pointing that is supposed to perform the correlation—where none of these acts of identification is taken to require an understanding of the complete propositional contents that the word, so defined, may be used to express. The capacity to grasp the meanings of words is therefore conceived to be completely independent of the capacity to use words in intelligible sentences.

<sup>21</sup> Bentham follows here the exposition of the doctrine of the Ten Predicaments contained in Robert Sanderson's *Logicae Artis Compendium* (a textbook of Aristotelian logic that was very influential during the Early Modern period), rather than the original exposition contained in Aristotle's *Categories*. A similar discussion of the Ten Predicaments appears also in [Bentham, 1997, 184-192]. However, the list of Predicaments that Bentham discusses on this other occasion (i.e. substance, quantity, quality, place, time, motion, rest, action, passion, relation) does not straightforwardly correspond either to Sanderson's or to Aristotle's original list.

<sup>22</sup> For Bentham, some names of fictitious entities may be paraphrased away in terms of different names of fictitious entities. For example, Bentham proposes an analysis of modal and epistemic notions such as necessity, possibility, and certainty in terms of the mental attitudes of the speaker [Bentham, 1997, 152-156]. However, as we are going to see in a moment, Bentham thinks that there are names of fictitious entities that cannot possibly be eliminated from articulate language.

<sup>23</sup> "To be subservient to any use or purpose, every assignable portion of language must, on each occasion, be enunciative or suggestive of at least some proposition" [Bentham, 1843b, 333].

<sup>24</sup> See [Bentham, 1843b, 333].

<sup>25</sup> In addition to the passage that I have just quoted, see [Bentham, 1843b, 333-338].

<sup>26</sup> The distinction between a broader and a narrower sense of the term "quality" is emphasized also in [Bentham, 1843b, 335-6].

<sup>27</sup> See [Bentham, 1843b, 335-336].

<sup>28</sup> “[T]he bearing this or that relation to this or that other object may, without impropriety, be numbered among the qualities or properties of any object” [Bentham, 1843b, 335].

<sup>29</sup> Bentham states this explicitly a few lines after the passage that I have quoted: “[...] to the explanation of the import of the word *ripe*, the word *ripeness* may thus be rendered subservient [...]” [Bentham, 1843b, 331]. On this issue, I disagree with the otherwise extremely helpful reconstruction offered by Ross Harrison. Harrison argues that, for Bentham, qualities are problematic only in so far as they are referred to by means of abstract substantives (“ripeness,” “redness” etc.). According to Harrison, Bentham uses paraphrasis to move from sentences containing words of this sort (e.g. “Ripeness is in that apple”) to sentences containing the correspondent adjectives (e.g. “That apple is red”), which Bentham would regard as unproblematic [Harrison, 1983, 86-87]. But the passages that I am discussing show that Bentham uses paraphrasis in exactly the opposite direction: he wants to take sentences containing adjectives and explain their import by rewriting them as sentences containing abstract substantives.

<sup>30</sup> See also [Bentham, 1983, 258, 271n, 403] and [Bentham, 1843b, 331]. In the passage about the apple, the contrast between “That apple exists” and “That apple is ripe” may be taken to suggest that the former proposition, according to Bentham, does not contain names of fictitious entities—as if “existence,” for Bentham, were not a predicate. (See also [Bentham, 1983, 262], where Bentham states that “in saying [...] *this plant exists*, there is no fiction.”) But according to Bentham’s official account, existence does count as a quality (in the broad sense of the term), and thus as the name of a fictitious entity [Bentham, 1997, 150-152]. Therefore, existential statements are no exception to the thesis that any articulate proposition contains names of fictitious entities. In light of these considerations, the caveat included in the last part of the apple passage (“fiction, in the simplest, or almost the simplest case, in which language can be employed, becomes a necessary resource,” my emphasis) may be reasonably interpreted as a reference to the language of brutes, rather than to existential statements such as “That apple exists.”

<sup>31</sup> No doubt this is part of the reason why Bentham remains so ambivalent about the status of the language of brutes.

<sup>32</sup> Bentham employs the term “receptacle” in several other discussions of fictitious entities. For example, he writes that time (which is for him a fictitious entity) is spoken of as a “receptacle” in which events are located [Bentham, 1997, 106]. Similarly, he writes that classes of individuals (which are for him fictitious entities) are spoken of as “fictitious receptacles” containing individual real entities [Bentham, 1997, 120]. This pattern in Bentham’s use of the term “receptacle” is further evidence that substance, as a “receptacle” of qualities, does not count for Bentham as a real entity.

<sup>33</sup> What about the words “is” and “in,” which, according to Bentham, must appear in the canonical form of any possible articulate proposition in addition to names of substances and names of qualities? To the extent to which Bentham discusses this issue, he seems to treat such words as further names of fictitious entities. He claims that the copula is used to assert the existence of a quality in a substance [Bentham, 1983, 403], and he maintains that existence is a fictitious entity [Bentham, 1997, 150-152]. Moreover, he includes “in” among the “prepositions of place,” which are “expressive of the notion of place,” and place is just another fictitious entity [Bentham, 1997, 186]. However, Bentham is rather evasive about this topic, and it seems that there are good reasons for that. While we can rephrase “That apple is ripe” as “Ripeness is in that apple” (by nominalizing the adjective and introducing an expression that appears to name some kind of entity), it is difficult to see what it would be like to rephrase this latter sentence so as to “make perspicuous” the fact that the words “is” and “in” are names of fictitious entities. The concatenation “Ripeness existence inside-ness that-apple” does not even look like a significant proposition, let alone like an accurate rewording of our original sentence. Digging into these issues would have put even more pressure on Bentham’s assumptions about the nature of sub-propositional meaning. It is not surprising, therefore, that Bentham was reluctant to do it.

<sup>34</sup> An anonymous referee objected to my reconstruction of the final stage of the dialectic of Bentham’s contextualism by arguing that names of substances occurring in propositional contexts are meaningful, by Bentham’s standards, because they are associated with the mental image or archetype of a receptacle. Bentham does indeed emphasize this association. But this is his standard practice whenever he discusses names of fictitious entities. As I argued above (note 13), Bentham sharply distinguishes between the meaning of a word (which is relevant for understanding the truth-conditions and the inferential relations of the proposition in which they word occurs) and the mental image or archetype associated with the word. For Bentham, a word may be associated with a very vivid archetype, and yet be nothing more than a *sham* semantic unit, lacking any meaning of its own.

<sup>35</sup> See also [Russell, 1956a, 56]: “[I]n every proposition that we can apprehend [...] all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance.” Arguably, an anticipation of the principle of acquaintance appears already in the Preface to the *Principles*, where Russell writes that the process of logical analysis necessarily terminates with entities with which the mind must have “that kind of acquaintance [...] which it has with redness or the taste of a pineapple” [Russell, 1903, v].

<sup>36</sup> For a masterful discussion of Russell’s atomism, see [Hylton, 1990].

<sup>37</sup> See [Russell, 1956b, 253].

<sup>38</sup> Russell's view of how this analysis should be carried out changes significantly over time. In "On Denoting" (originally published in 1905), Russell was still allowing for the possibility of genuine names of persons and external objects, provided that we are acquainted (in a relatively ordinary sense of the word) with their bearers. In *The Problems of Philosophy* (originally published in 1912), Russell maintains that all names of external objects should be analyzed away by applying the theory of definite descriptions: when we speak about "Scott" we are really speaking about *the cause of such-and-such sense data*. In "The Relation of Sense Data to Physics" (originally published in 1914), Russell argues that we can avoid committing ourselves to the uncertain existence of external causes of our sense data: we can just construe the talk about people and chairs as talk about *classes of sense data*.

<sup>39</sup> The problem of propositional unity was one of the central concerns of early analytic philosophers. Its classical formulation is normally associated with F. H. Bradley; see for instance [Bradley, 1893, chap. 2]. The problem was then virtually forgotten by later generations of analytic philosophers. But in recent times, there has been a substantial "rediscovery" of the problem, even outside the circle of historians of analytic philosophy. See for instance [Palmer, 1988], [Gibson, 2004], [Davidson, 2005, especially 76-119], [Searle, 2008], [Gaskin, 2008].

<sup>40</sup> The account that follows is based especially on [Russell, 1903, §§52-5, 81, 136-138].

<sup>41</sup> There is widespread agreement among commentators about the lasting significance of the problem of the unity of the proposition in the development of Russell's philosophy. See for instance [Linsky, 1992], [Hylton, 2005], [Candlish, 1996], [Conant, 2002b, 98-108], [Hanks, 2007], [Stevens, 2008].

<sup>42</sup> See [Frege, 1979d, 269].

<sup>43</sup> See [Frege, 1979c, 256-257].

<sup>44</sup> See also [Frege, 1979a, 63]. For a proper understanding of the passage that I quoted, one must keep in mind that in the *Begriffsschrift* Frege does not yet use the word "idea" (*Vorstellung*) in a specifically psychological sense, as he does in and after the *Foundations*: his claim is that the expression "every positive prime number" does not have an independent (logical) *meaning*.

<sup>45</sup> The claim that the passage from §9 of *Begriffsschrift* that I quoted anticipates the formulations of the Context Principle that occur in the *Foundations* can also be found in [Hacker, 1979, 215-219].

<sup>46</sup> See also [Russell, 1956a, 43, 51, 55].

<sup>47</sup> This is the view that appears to be taken for granted, and described as widely accepted, in [Klement, 2004, 12n12].

<sup>48</sup> For similar passages, see [Frege, 1979b, 225] and [Frege, 1984, 390].

<sup>49</sup> An anonymous referee objected that Frege's treatment of indexicals shows that he was in fact interested in ostensive acts. But this is not at all what I am denying. What I am denying is that Frege was attracted to the idea that ostensive definition can play a foundational role by fixing the meanings of words prior to and independently of their propositional contexts. One may reject this idea while acknowledging the role of ostensive acts in linguistic communication.

<sup>50</sup> See especially [Frege, 1980, 29-30].

<sup>51</sup> Some helpful overviews of the debate can be found in [Pelletier, 2001] and [Janssen, 2001].

<sup>52</sup> See [Black, 1964, 117], [Resnik, 1967, 356-357], [Resnik, 1976], [Milne, 1986, 491-495].

<sup>53</sup> See [Dummett, 1981, 4]. For a recent elaboration of Dummett's proposal, see [Gaskin, 2008, 256-257]. For some interpretations similar to Dummett's, see [Linnebo, unpublished] and [Glock, 2004].

<sup>54</sup> I find indications of this alternative approach in some passages by Gilbert Ryle and, more recently, in the works of Cora Diamond and James Conant. See especially [Ryle, 2009, 61, 191-192], [Diamond, 1991, 109-111; Conant, 2002a, 432n34]. I elaborate and defend this approach in greater detail than I can do on this occasion in [Bronzo, 2014, chap. 2].

<sup>55</sup> Dummett's influential interpretation, which I am here opposing, is also concerned to attribute to Frege the view that there is *some* form of interdependence between the meanings of propositions and the meanings of words. However, Dummett's interpretation, by distinguishing different "orders of priority," seeks to combine two forms of *unilateral* dependence between propositional and sub-propositional meaning. This is shown, among other things, by the fact that Dummett's interpretation is meant to leave room for the idea that words can be meaningful even when they do not contribute to the expression of any propositional content (see for example the discussion of "Chairman Mao is rare" in [Dummett, 1981, 50-51]). The interpretation that I am recommending, on the other hand, maintains that Frege rejected any direction of unilateral priority between the meanings of propositions and the meanings of their parts.

<sup>56</sup> The following account is based especially on [Frege, 1980, i-xi] and [Frege, 1997b]. I will here abstract from the differences between Frege's early and mature semantic views.

<sup>57</sup> In [Bronzo, 2014, chap. 2], I explore in more detail the logic of the British Idealist notion of an "organic unity" and I argue that it is historically sound to invoke it in an explanation of Frege's conception of propositional and sub-propositional meaning.

<sup>58</sup> An anonymous referee objected that it is "awkward" to say that Frege assigned to quantifiers a parasitical status, "given that a language is essentially defined [for Frege] by its quantificational structure." I have not claimed, however, that Frege regarded quantifiers as contextually defined expressions. *A fortiori*, I have not claimed that Frege regarded quantifiers as parasitical cases. What I have in fact claimed is that Frege regarded *the expressions that we use in many natural languages to express quantificational generality* (i.e. words such as "everybody," "nobody," etc.) as contextually defined expressions, and thus as parasitical cases. Of course, when the sentences containing these misleading expressions are rewritten in Frege's logical notation, all the relevant contextually defined expressions have been made to disappear, according to Frege. The whole point of Frege's variable and quantifier notation is precisely to *eliminate* those misleading grammatical expressions and to introduce in their place *genuine* semantic units, wearing their logical role on their sleeve. Thus, for Frege, the expression " $\forall x(\dots x)$ " is not a sham semantic unit in need of contextual definition, but a genuine semantic unit (namely, a second-level concept-word), making a determinate logical contribution to the meanings of the sentences in which it occurs.

<sup>59</sup> When Frege scholars discuss Frege's view of "contextual definition," they are generally concerned with a different phenomenon from the one that I have examined in this paper. In *Foundations*, §§62-66, Frege considers (and eventually discards) the possibility of defining terms denoting abstract objects such as directions and numbers by fixing the meanings of a certain class of propositions in which they may occur. This is usually referred to, legitimately enough, as the attempt to provide a "contextual definition" of the relevant terms. But one must notice that this is not the attempt to *paraphrase away* the expressions that purport to denote the relevant abstract objects. Quite to the contrary, it is the attempt to turn these expressions into *genuine semantic units*, by securing them a determinate meaning. We may therefore talk of "contextual definition" in two quite different senses; throughout this paper, I have been exclusively concerned with the former sense (i.e., "contextual definition" as a device for paraphrasing away sham semantic units). These two senses of "contextual definition" are lucidly distinguished in [Wright, 1983, 68-69].

<sup>60</sup> This is not to say that Frege is committed to deny the possibility of lists—say, of my list for the grocery store. It is possible to develop an account of these uses of language that is fully compatible with Frege's contextualism.

<sup>61</sup> For this reading of the Fregean response to the problem of propositional unity, see [Hylton, 2005, 177] and [Sullivan, 2010, 111].

<sup>62</sup> I provide support for the part of this claim that concerns early Wittgenstein in [Bronzo, 2011].

<sup>63</sup> I am grateful to James Conant, Michael Kremer, Zac Loveless, Gianfranco Pellegrino, and two anonymous referees of this journal for many helpful comments on previous versions of this paper.

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