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Haaparanta, Leila

Routledge
2020

Haaparanta , L 2020 , Frege on "Es gibt," Being in a Realm and (Meta-)Ontology . in F Kjosavik & C Serck-Hanssen (eds) , Metametaphysics and the Sciences : Historical and Philosophical Perspectives . Routledge , New York , pp. 81 - 98 . <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429292958-5>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/329221>

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429292958-5>

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Frege on “Es gibt”, Being in a Realm and (Meta-)Ontology*

Leila Haaparanta

Abstract

Gottlob Frege did not call any of his philosophical views by the name “ontology”, let alone “metaontology”. When applied to Frege’s thought, the term “metaontology” is clearly anachronistic. Still, this paper discusses two philosophical positions that Frege held and that have metaontological relevance. They are the doctrine of the ambiguity of the word “is” and the doctrine of three realms. It is well known that Frege regarded existence as a second-order concept. Likewise, Frege’s distinction between three realms has been studied in detail. However, the relation between the two doctrines has not been clarified in detail; instead, they are studied as separate themes that occur in Frege’s writings. It is true Frege does not combine the two topics. This paper seeks to show that the two doctrines are connected in an interesting way: The concept of existence that is expressed as a second-order concept in the formula language plays an important logical role, while the doctrine of three realms is a means to express a division between three modes of being or three ways to exist. It seeks to show that the modes of being are predicated of objects, but they have a special, constitutive role in relation to those entities of which they are predicated. The word “exist” is thus an analogous rather than a completely ambiguous word. The paper suggests that Frege’s views on of “being” and being contain elements both of Aristotelian and of Kantian approaches to metaphysics.

1. Introduction

Gottlob Frege did not call any of his philosophical views by the name “ontology”, let alone “metaontology”. When applied to Frege’s thought, the term “metaontology” is clearly anachronistic. Ontology is often understood as the study of the categories of being, hence, as general metaphysics, and ontological views are construed as answers to the question “What is there?”, “What are the entities that exist?”, and “What is there fundamentally?” The editors of *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics* tell us that, besides general metaphysics as the study of the most fundamental concepts and principles, “ontology” may mean the list of basic kinds of entities; the basic kinds of entities assumed by a philosopher; the study of all possible general arrangements of the world; and, in computer science, a set of categories for programming and data representation (Poidevin et al. 2009, 591). How one understands the terms “metaphysics” and “ontology” naturally depends on which philosophical tradition or school one is working in. For Heidegger, for example, the most general categories discussed in contemporary analytic metaphysics would not be the basic categories of his fundamental ontology; such distinctions as that between being-there (Dasein), being present-at-hand (vorhanden sein) and being ready-to-hand (zuhanden sein) are what matters in his *Sein und Zeit*. In the “Introduction” of *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology* David Manley states that metaphysics is concerned with the foundations of reality, while metametaphysics is concerned with the foundations of metaphysics (Manley 2009, 1). Peter van Inwagen, for his part, calls the question “What are we asking when we ask ‘What is there?’”? the meta-ontological question,” the attempt to answer it “meta-ontology” and any proposed answer to it “a meta-ontology” (van Inwagen 2001, 13). Among other things, metaontology is interested in the conceptual tools and methods of ontology construed on the model of scientific theory; hence, metaontology is the study of the foundations of that very theory. The term “metaontology” also covers an old subfield of the philosophy of language and logic. That subfield is interested in the words “to be” and “to exist” of natural language and the possible epistemological and ontological

commitments that lie behind the ways the words are used in natural languages and analysed by means of formula languages.

Gottlob Frege was interested in what the words “is” and “exists” mean. He is a prime example of a philosopher who partly motivated his choice of a formula language by its ability to give a correct analysis for the concept of being. I have discussed that topic in my earlier studies, whose theses the present paper elaborates.¹ I discuss two philosophical positions that Frege held and that have metaontological relevance. They are the doctrine of the ambiguity of the word “is” and the doctrine of three realms. Frege’s semantics and his relation to Kant and to the so-called ontological argument for God’s existence have been analysed a great deal. Likewise, his distinction between three realms has been studied in detail. The two doctrines, one about the ontological argument and the other about three realms, are usually considered separate themes that occur in Frege’s writings. It is true that Frege does not combine the two topics. He does not raise the question whether they are related, and if they are, how that relation ought to be understood. To a contemporary reader, it may also seem that the two doctrines are not compatible. On the one hand, Frege argues that being or existence is not a real first-order property; on the other, he makes a distinction between three realms whose denizens seem to have the property of being in one way or other. This paper seeks to show that the doctrines can be connected, and this is precisely what it seeks to add to Frege scholarship, including my earlier studies on Frege. It argues that the concept of existence that is expressed as a second-order concept in the formula language plays an important logical role, while the doctrine of three realms is a means to express a division between three modes of being or three ways to exist. It seeks to show that the modes of being are predicated of objects, but they have a special, constitutive role in relation to the entities of which they are predicated; that very role makes them differ from normal predicates. If we use the terminology of medieval philosophers, we may say that the verb “to exist” is an analogous rather than a completely ambiguous word.

I will proceed as follows: First, I outline Frege's distinctions between the meanings of the word "is", which are written down in his formula language. I also make a few remarks on the view on existence that Frege puts forward in his discussion with Pünjer; that view illuminates the way he treats existence in his formula language. I then introduce his doctrine of three realms, discuss its possible ontological and meta-ontological relevance, and compare it with the medieval theory of the analogy of names. In Section 4, I will discuss Frege's view on existence in the context of his distinction between sense and reference. In Section 5, I will combine the doctrine of the ambiguity of "is" and the doctrine of three realms. A.W. Moore (2012) has argued that Frege neither has metaphysics nor meta-metaphysics; still, he admits that what he calls Frege's theory of sense was important in view of the quest for sense in analytic philosophy, including later analytic metaphysics. I will return to that argument in Section 5 and discuss Frege's thought in relation to Kant's and Aristotle's views on being and existence. Section 6 concludes the article and suggests that Frege's views on being contain elements both of Aristotelian and of Kantian approaches to metaphysics.

2. Frege's Struggle with Natural Language and the Word "Is"

Frege's great achievement was his conceptual notation, "Begriffsschrift", which was meant to be a genuine universal language of Leibnizian spirit that speaks about all that there is. Frege states in the preface of his *Begriffsschrift* (1879) that Leibniz's idea was too grand to be reached, but he seeks to realize it by giving it a more modest form. Natural language leads us astray, Frege argues, and therefore a new language, a new tool for philosophers, is needed (BS, XI – XII). Frege can be interpreted as saying that the world has a structure independently of languages, and that structure can be shown by an ideal language. That, however, is something that he does not formulate as an

explicit philosophical thesis. The claim he makes is precisely that natural language leads us astray, hence, that it ought to be revised or even replaced by a better language.

Since the 1960s, there have been studies on Frege's metaphysics and on the similarities and differences between Aristotle and Frege. Frege scholars like Ignacio Angelelli (1967) and Eike-Henner W. Kluge (1976, 1980) already considered Frege in relation to the tradition of metaphysical thought. They compared Frege with Aristotle, medieval philosophers, Leibniz, and others, and argued that Frege tried to present a proper metaphysical system. Kluge sought to show that Bolzano was a transitional figure between Leibniz and Frege (Kluge 1980, 280). Reinhard Grossmann claimed that if we take as our paradigm of an object a spatiotemporal individual thing and as our paradigm of a function a property or relation, then Frege's ontology seems to be a modification of Aristotelian ontology. However, as Grossmann notes, Frege's ontology includes all kinds of entities, such as value-ranges and truth-values, thus differing radically from that of Aristotle (Grossmann 1976, 31 – 32).

The very word “is” receives various interpretations in Frege's conceptual notation. “There is” is construed as a second-order concept and expressed by means of the symbol for generality, that is, the universal quantifier, and two negation signs. Existence is attached to objects only as an empty predicate of self-identity. Non-empty predication is expressed by means of function-names and parentheses, and class-inclusion or subordination between concepts is captured by Frege's symbol for generality, together with a symbol for implication or conditionality, plus function-names and parentheses. The symbol for identity is a natural choice for expressing the “is” of identity. In his vocabulary Frege also has what he calls the judgment stroke or the assertion sign, which can be read as “it is the case that ...” or “it is true that ...”. That Frege regards the word “is” as ambiguous in the described ways is shown by the very fact that he makes the mentioned distinctions in the ideal language, which is meant to be free from ambiguities typical of natural language. Besides the “is”

expressed by the assertion sign, ambiguity that Frege finds in natural language is thus between the following expressions:

- (1) “being” that expresses a property of a concept (the “is” of existence, existence as a second-order concept, e.g. There is at least one philosopher; $(\exists x) (P(x))$).
- (2) “being” that expresses the existence of an object (an empty concept “to be identical with oneself”, e.g. Socrates is; $(\exists x) (s=x)$).
- (3) “being” as a part of predication (the “is” of predication, e.g. Socrates is a philosopher; $P(s)$)
- (4) “being” that expresses identity (the “is” of identity, e.g. The Morning Star is the Evening Star; $a=b$)
- (5) “being” that expresses class-inclusion or generic implication (the “is” of class-inclusion, e.g. Man is an animal; $(x) (M(x) \rightarrow A(x))$).

Frege argues that his language is better than natural language in several respects, one of them being that it distinguishes between objects, on the one hand, and concepts and relations, on the other.² One important argument is presented in the critical remarks against Boole.³ Frege notes that Boole does not recognize the distinction between predication and subordination, such as the distinction between “Socrates is a man” and “Man is an animal”, because he does not keep individuals [“Einzeldinge”] and concepts apart. In his article “Über Begriff und Gegenstand” (1892) Frege points out that the “is” of identity and the “is” of predication must be distinguished from each other in order to show clearly that objects and concepts differ from each other (KS, 167 – 168). Hence, the “is” in “The Morning Star is the Evening Star” is the “is” of identity, and the sentence is about an object, while the sentence “The Evening Star is bright” contains the “is” of predication, and it relates an object to a concept under which the object falls.

In his *Begriffsschrift* of 1879, Frege distinguishes between a thought [“Gedanke”] and a judgment [“Urteil”], which is an acknowledgment of the truth of a thought, a thought as judged. In his conceptual notation the distinction is shown by two strokes, one being the content stroke or the horizontal stroke and the other being the judgment stroke or the vertical stroke (BS, § 2).

In “Einleitung in die Logik” (1906), he remarks:

In fact at bottom the sentence ‘it is true that 2 is prime’ says no more than the sentence ‘2 is prime’. If in the first case we express a judgement, this is not because of the word ‘true’, but because of the assertoric force we give the word ‘is’. (NS, 211; “Introduction to Logic”, PW, 194.)

In his “Meine grundlegenden logischen Einsichten” (1915) he writes: “In language assertoric force is bound up with the predicate” (NS, 272; “My basic logical insights”, PW, 252). As noted above, for Frege, the judgment stroke or the assertion sign is the sign for “it is the case that ... “ or “it is true that ... “. Charles Kahn calls this meaning of “is” the veridical “is” (Kahn 1973, 331 - 370).⁴

In his dialogue with Pünjer on existence (before 1884), Frege assumes for the sake of argument that being is a real, non-empty property of an object. His argument goes as follows. If being is a real property of an object, it is a characteristic [“Merkmal”] of a first-order concept and the negation of the sentence “A is” can be true; hence, it is possible that there are entities which do not have the property of being. But then the expression “there are” [“es gibt”] cannot be replaced with “being”, that is, “There are B’s” is not equivalent in meaning to “Something that has being [“einiges Seiende”] falls under the concept B”. For if the sentence “There are entities which do not have the property of being” means the same as “Something that has being falls under the concept of not-being [“der Begriff des Nichtseienden”]”, it is a contradictory sentence. Frege concludes that if the sentence “There are B’s” is equivalent in meaning to the sentence “Something that has being is B”, then the concept of being does not distinguish between any two objects and being is not a real property of an object.⁵ The other obvious alternative is that “There are B’s” and “Something that

has being is B” are *not* equivalent in meaning. That is also what natural languages, or at least some of them, for example German, suggest. Frege concludes that what is expressed by “there is” [“es gibt”] is a property [“Eigenschaft”] of a concept, not its characteristic [“Merkmal”], and the word “exist” cannot be regarded as the characteristic mark of a concept, either, because it adds nothing to the individual objects that are discussed (NS, 83 – 85). He then adds:

We can see from all this how easily we can be led by language to see things in the wrong perspective, and what value it must therefore have for philosophy to free ourselves from the dominion of language. If one makes the attempt to construct a system of signs on quite other foundations and with quite other means, as I have tried to do in my concept-script, we shall have, so to speak, our very noses rubbed into the false analogies in language. (NS, 85; PW, 67)

It seems, however, that natural language gives hints at the right perspective on things. That is precisely the case with the German distinction between “es gibt” on the one hand, and “ist” or “existiert”, on the other. However, as will be shown in Section 4, “is” or “exists” can be analysed in such a way that it turns out to be a second-order predicate.

3. Frege’s Doctrine of Three Realms and “Being” as an Analogous Term

At first glance, the doctrine of three realms appears to be an answer to a direct ontological question concerning what there is. A similar doctrine to that of Frege’s can be found in Hermann Lotze, who was one of Frege’s teachers. According to Lotze, the actuality [“Wirklichkeit”] of abstract objects, such as thoughts, is not like the actuality of concrete objects. Abstract objects are valid [“geltend”]. Lotze distinguishes between what is valid and what is (Lotze 1874, 16 and 507). Gottlob Frege made a sharp distinction between subjective psychological acts, such as thinking and judging, and

the contents of those acts, namely, thoughts. It is not clear what kind of being he was ready to ascribe to those contents. One could argue that Frege's *Inhalte*, marked by the content stroke in the conceptual notation, that is, *Gedanken*, thoughts, are ontologically real.⁶ It is also thinkable that Frege merely supported epistemological realism, which presupposes the distinction between the act of knowing and the object that is known. Frege himself did not use the term "realism". It is well known that Frege was not alone in nineteenth century philosophy with his distinction between psychological acts and their objective contents. Bernard Bolzano, for example, had argued along similar lines as early as 1837, in his *Wissenschaftslehre*. Frege distinguished between the thought, the judgment (*das Urteil*), and the assertion (*die Behauptung*), which is the linguistic expression of the judgment.⁷ Bolzano distinguished between propositions in themselves (*Sätze an sich*), which neither exist in space and time nor depend on mental acts, and the thinkings or assertions of those propositions (Bolzano 1929, § 19). He argued that since the proposition is different from the subjective idea (*Vorstellung*) which happens to be present in the consciousness of a thinking being and also different from the judgment, or affirmation, of the proposition, we cannot attribute existence (or actuality (*Wirklichkeit*)) to propositions in themselves. Bolzano maintains that "it is only the proposition asserted or thought, i.e., only the thought of a proposition, likewise the judgment containing a certain proposition that has existence in the mind of the being who thinks the thought or makes the judgment" (ibid., § 19). For Bolzano, propositions are matter that thinking beings grasp in mental acts and they exist only in those acts in which they are thought of or held to be true (ibid., § 122). Göran Sundholm (2000) has paid special attention to connections between Bolzano and Frege, while Wolfgang Künne has argued against the thesis that there is a historical link between the two philosophers (Künne 2010, 769).

Whether Frege received his doctrine of three realms from any particular source, it naturally follows from and is motivated by his antipsychologism. Frege was an antipsychologist in various ways, one of them being his view that the foundations of logic do not lie in psychology. In the *Grundlagen*

(1884) he formulates his basic principle: “always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective” (GLA, X). By the doctrine of the third realm, Frege expresses his view on abstract objects, such as thoughts and the categories and laws that constitute thoughts, hence, logical objects. In the first volume of his *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* (1893) and in his article “Der Gedanke” (1918) he makes a distinction between the realm of objective and actual (*wirklich*) objects, the subjective realm of ideas (*Vorstellungen*), and the realm of objects which do not act on our senses but which are objective, that is, the realm of such abstract objects as numbers and thoughts (GGA I, XVIII – XXIV; KS, 353). That distinction can be interpreted as a straightforward ontological view, or it can be construed as a doctrine proposed by a transcendental philosopher, whose ontology is ontology within the limits of knowledge or language.

It is usually assumed that Frege’s acknowledgment of the realm of thoughts and other abstract objects is a Platonic doctrine. Some interpreters have challenged the received view, but others, for example, Tyler Burge (1992), have argued for the interpretation that Frege held a Platonic ontology; Burge notes, though, that Frege did not seek to defend his position, except for showing problems in competing views, and that he did not develop a sophisticated version of his ontology. Other interpretations are also possible. When Frege discusses his third realm in his “Der Gedanke”, he remarks that he must use metaphorical language. In other words, such expressions as “the content of consciousness” and “grasping the thought” must not be understood literally (KS, 359, n. 6). Frege does think that the objects of the third realm are epistemically independent of subjective minds, but their being is not like the being of the denizens of the objective and actual realm. Thomas Seeböhm argued as early as 1989 that on Frege’s view, the existence of mathematical objects and logical categories is a necessary condition of the meaningfulness of mathematical and logical practice; Seeböhm claimed that Frege’s view did not amount to arguing directly for the thesis that those objects exist (Seeböhm 1989, 348).

In the Preface of the *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik I* Frege writes:

That the logical laws should be guiding principles for thought in the attainment of truth is generally admitted at the outset; but it is only too easily forgotten. The ambiguity (*Doppelsinn*) of the word ‘law’ is fatal here. In one sense it states what is, in the other it prescribes what should be. Only in the latter sense can the logical laws be called laws of thought, in laying down how one should think. Any law that states what is can be conceived as prescribing that one should think in accordance with it, and is therefore in that sense a law of thought. This holds for geometrical and physical laws no less than for logical laws. The latter then only deserve the name ‘law of thought’ with more right if it should be meant by this that they are the most general laws, which prescribe universally how one should think if one is to think at all. But the expression ‘law of thought’ tempts us into viewing these laws as governing thinking in the same way as the laws of nature govern events in the external world. They can be nothing other than psychological laws, since thinking is a mental process. ... authoritative only with qualifications (like fashion etc.) ... I understand by logical laws not psychological laws of holding as true, but laws of being true. (Frege, “Vorwort”, GGA I, in Künne 2010, 68 - 69; “Preface,” GGA I, in Beaney 1997, 202 – 203)

In “Der Gedanke” (1918) Frege writes:

So the result seems to be: thoughts are neither things in the external world nor ideas. A third realm must be recognized. Anything belonging to this realm has it in common with ideas that it cannot be perceived by the senses, but has in common with things that it does not need an owner so as to belong to the contents of his consciousness. (“Der Gedanke,” in Künne 2010, 101; “Thought,” in Beaney 1997, 336 – 337)

The three realms are thus constituted by different kinds of laws.

For Frege, the word “is” mirrors the acknowledgment of the truth of a thought. We, as empirical subjects, are the ones who acknowledge and assert. But what is it to acknowledge or recognize (*anerkennen*) the third realm? A natural reading of Frege’s text is that it means acknowledging its constitutive laws. However, it does not follow that one who acknowledges those laws, always obeys them. In that sense the laws of the third realm resemble the constitution of a state; they express the essence of the realm, but an individual as a thinking subject may acknowledge and still sometimes violate those laws.⁸

As we saw above, for Frege “being” as a first-order predicate is empty. In the context of the doctrine of three realms being is treated as a first-order property, but it is also a property that belongs to all entities, as it is the property of belonging to one of the three realms. However, in his doctrine of three realms Frege distinguishes between what we could call *modes of being*, that is, being as being objective and actual, being as being subjective and unactual, and being as being objective and unactual. These are real in contrast to empty predications, although real in the sense of actuality [“Wirklichkeit”] only in one alternative, and each entity has one and only one of the three alternatives. If we think of the three realms on the model of categories and use the terminology of the Scholastic tradition, we may say that for Frege being as a first-order concept is transcategorical. It means that it overcomes the limits of categories. That view is on line with what Aristotle states about being, although Aristotle’s categories are clearly not those of Frege’s. Aristotle assumes that to be is always to be either a substance of a certain sort, a quality of a certain sort, etc. (An.Post. I 22, 83b13 – 17). The medieval analogy theory was based on Aristotle’s view on being.

The distinction between the order of knowing, or the terminological order (*ordo nominis*), and the order of being (*ordo rerum*) was important for theologians. In *Summa contra gentiles* Thomas Aquinas writes:

When a description is used in a related sense (by analogy), priority in terminology may diverge from factual priority. For terminological order follows the sequence in which we get to know the things. – Sometimes it happens that what comes first in fact is not known to us first. (Aquinas 1974, Cap. XXXIV)

Medieval philosophers construed nouns, verbs and adjectives as names or terms. They distinguished between different types of analogy, based on the location of similarities. In the analogy theory, similarities could be found in the notions expressed by the name, in the things named or in both. If they were found in both, the type of analogy was *analogia secundum intentionem et secundum esse*. Names, or terms, as well as things could be called analogous (*analogia nominum, analogia entis*).

Using the vocabulary of the Scholastic tradition, especially of Cardinal Cajetan (1498; 1953), we could say that as a transcendental term, as a term that transcends the limits of Frege's three realms, the term "being" is an analogous rather than an ambiguous or a totally multivocal term. The medieval analogy theory was a theory for positive statements about God. On that theory, we can tell what God is like, hence, ascribe positive predicates like "being good" or "being wise" to God meaningfully, if we think that those predicates apply to God on the basis of analogy. For example, Socrates's wisdom serves as a model which tells us something about God's wisdom, and the predicate "being wise" is thus analogous. That is not to say that we know all about God's wisdom if we know what a human being's wisdom is like. In the terminological order, Socrates wisdom is prior to God's wisdom, while in the order of being, God's wisdom comes first. In the philosophy of religion analogy theory is meant to show that the predicates that are applied to creatures in the world are meaningfully applicable to God without the danger of anthropomorphism. Univocity in theology would lead to anthropomorphism, whereas total equivocity or multivocity would make nonsense of positive theological language. The analogy theory was proposed as the third alternative. In the above example the predicate "being wise" is thus used transcategorially. The terms "being"

and “existence” are also analogous, for example, in the expressions “Socrates’s being” and “God’s being”, and “Socrates’ existence” and “God’s existence”.⁹ If we think of Frege’s realms along these lines, we may say that the word “being” is analogous. We may also suggest that the word “being” is primarily applied to the first realm, and the being of the denizens of the second and the third realm is understood on the model of the being of the denizens of the first realm. That is something that Frege does not propose himself, even if he tells that he uses metaphorical language when he talks about abstract objects like thoughts.

If we now combine Frege’s thesis that existence as “es gibt” is a second-order concept with my construal of the three modes of being, we may say that the sentence “There are entities which are objective and unactual” expresses that the concepts of objectivity and unactuality are both instantiated in at least one entity. In that sentence we have both being as a second-order concept and being which is clarified in one of the ways Frege’s doctrine of three realms allows. Hence, in Frege’s formula language there is the second-order concept which captures the instantiation of a first-order concept, while in the non-formal vocabulary of ontology there is the property of being which is attached to objects, but which reduces to the three alternative modes of being. I suggested above that we could think of the being of abstract objects, the being of subjective ideas and the being of actual objects in the world to be analogous. The three modes of being have a special, constitutive role among the properties of objects, even if they can be distinguished in the formula language only by means of different symbols for concept-words and they thus seem to be similar to common predicates. In order to understand their status as special predicates, we need the vocabulary of ontology of our natural language, that is, such words as “objectivity” and the like. In that vocabulary the objects of the outer world and their being are primarily known to us and the being of the processes and states of our minds as well as the being of abstract objects is known but not reducible to the being of the objects of the first realm. By allowing this kind of ontological vocabulary, Frege partly gives up the idea that all predicates are on a par.

4. Senses, references, and existence

I argued in Section 2 that Frege makes a distinction between “There are B’s” and “Something that has being is B” in his ideal formula language. Frege’s concept of sense reveals new features in the way Frege understands the phrase “es gibt” in contrast to being as a first-order concept. In his dialogue with Pünjer, Frege notes that if we talk about Leo Sachse, such statements as “Leo Sachse is” and “Leo Sachse exists” are self-evident, because we presuppose that the words that we use designate something, that they are not empty (NS, 78). Pünjer, who opposes Frege’s view that existence is not a real predicate of objects, makes a Kantian suggestion that the word “is” carries the same meaning as “is something that can be experienced” [“ist erfahrbar”]. He considers the set of objects of experience [“Gegenstände der Erfahrung”] to be a subset of the set of objects of ideas [“Gegenstände von Vorstellungen”]. Frege shows that Pünjer’s view results in a contradiction: If “A is not” means that A is not an object of experience, what we say here is that there is something that is not an object of experience. Frege argues that if we accept Pünjer’s way of defining the concept of existence, this statement means that there is an object of experience which is not an object of experience, which is a contradiction (NS, 71 – 72). Pünjer could object that “A is not” means that there is an object of idea which is not an object of experience; however, that move in discussion would mean giving up the thesis that there is one non-empty concept of existence, which can be predicated of individual objects. Again, this example suggests that “there is” behaves in the context in a different manner from the “is” that follows the proper name. Relying on Frege’s later distinction between the three realms, we could also translate the expression as “There are entities that are not denizens of the first realm”.

If we apply Frege's later distinction between senses (*Sinne*) and references (*Bedeutungen*) to the example "Leo Sachse exists", we get one more analysis. For Frege, the senses of sentences are thoughts and the references of sentences are truth-values, the True and the False. Sentences are compounded out of proper names, which refer to objects, and function-names, which refer to functions. The senses of function-names are simply parts of thoughts.¹⁰ In "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" (1892) Frege remarks that the sense of a proper name is a way in which the object to which this expression refers is presented, or a way of "looking at" the object. He gives a few well-known examples of senses, such as 'the Evening Star' and 'the Morning Star' as senses of Venus, and 'the teacher of Alexander the Great' and 'the pupil of Plato' as senses of Aristotle, and states that senses belong to objects to which proper names refer (KS, 144).

Frege thinks that objects are given to us in a variety of ways. His examples suggest that he takes it to be our knowledge or at least our true beliefs concerning an object that determines what sense, or what senses, the name of the object expresses to us. He does not consider cases where we believe, but not truly, that an object falls under a particular concept or has a particular relation to another object. His concept of *Sinn* expresses our epistemic access to objects, but our knowledge of an object is always one-sided (*einseitig*). Frege argues:

Complete knowledge [*allseitige Erkenntnis*] of the reference would require us to be able to say immediately whether any given sense belongs to it. To such knowledge we never attain. ("Über Sinn und Bedeutung", KS, 144; Geach and Black, 58.)¹¹

Frege does not argue that knowing an object as falling under a particular concept constitutes knowing the object completely or knowing its essence. Nor does he distinguish between essential and accidental predicates.¹²

By introducing the concepts of sense and reference, Frege tries to give a natural reading to identity statements and to solve the problems of what we call intensional contexts. In his “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” he argues that in those contexts expressions refer to their normal senses. By this move, he preserves the principle, later called the principle of compositionality, which demands that the reference of a complex expression is determined by the references of its components, and there is no need to take senses into account. However, there is more to the distinction between senses and references, and it is also relevant if we wish to understand Frege’s way of thinking about being. For his *Sinne* are something that we cannot avoid when we try to reach the world by means of our language. His belief in the inescapability of *Sinne* is a special form of the broadly Kantian belief that we must always consider objects through our conceptual systems. In “Ausführungen über Sinn und Bedeutung” (1892–1895) he remarks that it is via a sense and only via a sense that a proper name is related to an object (NS, 135).¹³

If we start with the epistemically loaded semantic views described above, Frege’s doctrine of existence in case of sentences like “Leo Sachse exists” or “Leo Sachse is” can be construed as follows. If we say that Leo Sachse exists and if someone asks us who is Leo Sachse, we give an answer by listing some of Leo Sachse’s properties, hence by listing concepts under which the individual called “Leo Sachse” falls. We can say that the sentence “Leo Sachse exists” means that there is an object, a person, who has certain properties. Here “x exists” reduces to “there is an x such that ...”, and existence is thus understood as a second-order concept, which means instantiation of a bundle of properties. It is via those properties that we know the object, and it is precisely existence as a second-order concept that draws our attention to those properties. However, we cannot say what the object or the person is as abstracted from the bundle of properties.¹⁴ Frege does not discuss that kind of reduction. His texts do not help us to decide whether he would be a bundle theorist or whether his objects would contain non-describable bearers of properties.

5. Frege, the metaphysician, the metametaphysician or neither?

I mentioned above that on Frege's view, a proper name is always related to an object via sense. Still, his universal language is meant to mirror directly those very objects and functions to which it refers. When Frege introduces his conceptual notation, he mentions Adolf Trendelenburg's article "Über Leibnizens Entwurf einer allgemeinen Charakteristik" (1967). Trendelenburg proposes that philosophers ought to construct a Leibnizian universal language by taking into account Kant's ideas. On his view, Kant continued Leibniz's project by studying the conceptual component of thought after distinguishing it from the empirical component. Frege regards himself as a follower of Leibniz, even if he emphasizes, like Trendelenburg, that Leibniz's aim was somewhat unrealistic. For Trendelenburg, it was Kant's focus on the conceptual component in his transcendental logic that made the project realizable.

In Frege's formula language there is a symbol formed by means of the symbol for generality and two negation signs, which is taken to be the symbol for existence. The symbol is thus compounded out of three parts, which are a name of a second-order function of one argument, the argument being a name of a first-order function, and two instances of a name of a first-order function of one argument, which are the negation signs. This is how we can characterize what is called existence as a second-order concept if we use the terminology and the list of primitive logical function-names which Frege gives in § 31 of his *Grundgesetze*. In the conceptual notation, or in the formula language of pure thought, as Frege calls his notation in the *Begriffsschrift*, existence appears as a compound logical concept. We may say that the compound logical function-name described above can be translated into German by the expression "es gibt" and into English by the expression "there is" or "there are".

If we consider Frege's doctrine of three realms, we get another story, which has to do with the empty predicate of being or existence, but which becomes meaningful when it is understood as the predicate of belonging to one of the three realms. That predicate applies to all objects, as the three realms exhaust all that there is. In this construal of Frege's view, being is an empty first-order predicate, but entities instantiate various modes of being, depending on which realm they belong to. Which their mode of being is, hence, which of the three belongingness they instantiate, is not shown by logical function-names of the conceptual notation. It is a topic of ontology to distinguish between subjectivity and objectivity, on the one hand, and actuality and unactuality, on the other. In the vocabulary of the conceptual notation those predicates would be represented as names of non-logical first-order functions. In Frege's semantic framework, a particular object that is named is considered via a bundle of properties which it instantiates. Seen this way, existence is a property of concepts. Simultaneously, according to the doctrine of three realms, the object has one of the three alternatives as its properties.

But is that all metaphysics or metametaphysics? A.W. Moore considers metaphysics to be making sense of things. Throughout the history of the field, Moore finds three questions under discussion that concern its scope and limits, first about "transcendent" things, second about the novelty of sense-making, and third about our creativity in the sense-making (Moore 2012, 9). On Moore's view, Frege is not himself a metaphysician, because his logic, even if it seeks to be maximally general, is an attempt to make sense of sense, not of things (*ibid.*, 215). Moore does not deny that Frege's project has relevance to what metaphysics is today in the analytic tradition; on the contrary, he argues that the project of making sense paves the way for contemporary metaphysics and metametaphysics. However, there is more to be said of Frege's contribution.

Frege's conceptual notation is intended to be a mirror of all that there is, and his distinction between objects and functions is meant to show how all that there is is structured. Certain distinctions are therefore made in his ideal formula language, such as that between objects and functions. As a

universal framework, Frege's conceptual notation is transcendental. Hence, there is no making sense outside that framework. If we emphasize this feature of Frege's project, we may say that he is a metaphysician if Kant is. Second, Frege's distinction between objects and functions and their senses is peculiar in that one cannot talk about functions, including properties, *as* functions or senses *as* senses, hence, without making them into objects. For Frege, they turn into objects once we begin to consider and speak about them, simply because in our sentences we refer to them. In that sense, semantic theorizing is not possible in Frege's philosophy. Therefore, on Frege's view, metaphysical theory about properties and relations is not possible, either. That does not prevent him from suggesting several things in his writings about metaphysical matters. We can conclude from his doctrine of senses and references, even if Frege himself does not, that every time we think of an object, we think of it under some description which captures at least one of its properties, hence, there is no direct access to what the object is in itself. Therefore, epistemically, objects are for Frege like bundles of properties.

Moore is certainly right that Frege's project is not metaphysics if we demand that it is making sense of things, and if Frege should be answering the question concerning what there is explicitly, arguing for his answer, and criticizing its alternatives. However, even if his project were considered to be merely that of making sense of sense, as Moore claims, it can be seen to have more content in view of metaphysics or metametaphysics than Moore thinks. Frege has the quest for being and existence, because he gives the guidelines for how to make sense of "being" and "existence". That is, if not metaphysics, at least discussing the topics that the philosophers before Frege discussed and paving the way for future studies of the concepts of being and existence. I have sought to show that in his preliminary work Frege followed Kant in that for him as well as for Kant being or existence was not a real property of an object, but Frege also thought that more analysis is required. In particular, Frege argued that as a real property, existence is a property of a concept, or more generally of a function. Frege can also be seen as a follower of Aristotle, if we consider his view that an entity has

a specific mode of being depending on which realm it resides in. That view, which Frege does not elaborate in detail, comes close to the idea of the analogy of names and being discussed and supported by Aristotle and the Scholastic tradition.

6. Conclusion

We saw above that Frege finds a variety of meanings for words “being” and “existence” in what we might now call his tentative metaontology or metametaphysics. He does not tell us what being as a non-empty first-order predicate and as detached from all realms is, as each entity belongs to some realm. Still, he regards it as important to specify the mode in which an entity is, besides instantiating a bundle of properties through which we have access to it. The concept of existence, namely, existence as being an object of possible experience, which Pünjer suggests, is not far from what Frege says about the denizens of his first realm. However, the essential feature in Frege’s view is that Frege makes a distinction between the logical concept of existence as a second-order concept and the concept of being or existence which is given content when the specific mode of being of an object is specified. The idea suggests itself that for Frege the first-order predicate “being” or “existence” is analogous in the sense of the medieval analogy of terms. It can be primarily applied to the denizens of the first realm and then transferred and applied to the denizens of the second and the third realm. In this paper I have no suggestions concerning the ontological order, which would naturally be important if Frege were a Platonist. Frege’s view combines, although not without problems, features from what we would now call Aristotelian and Kantian metametaphysics.

Notes

* I am very grateful to Frode Kjosavik for useful comments.

1. See, e.g., Haaparanta (1985), (1986), (2001), and (2012).
2. Frege emphasizes this distinction in several writings. See “Boole’s rechnende Logik und die Begriffsschrift”(1880/1881), in NS, 9–52, “Dialog mit Pünjer über Existenz” (before 1884), in NS, 60–75, GLA (1884), X, “Über Begriff und Gegenstand” (1892), and a letter to Hilbert (6.1.1900), BW, 70–76.
3. See “Boole’s rechnende Logik und die Begriffsschrift” (1880/1881), NS, 19.
4. Also see Haaparanta (2012).
5. See Haaparanta (1985, 129), where it is argued that Pünjer combines a Kantian with an anti-Kantian view. Also see Haaparanta (1986). Cf. Rosefeldt (2011), where the same idea is elaborated. Stuhlmann-Laeisz (1975, 126) already argued that Frege came up with regarding existence as a logical first-order concept.
6. See, e.g., BS, § 2, and “Der Gedanke” (1918), KS, 346.
7. See, e.g., BS, § 2, and GGA I, § 5.
8. Also see MacFarlane (2002).
9. See, e.g., Aquinas (974) and Cajetan (1953). Also see Haaparanta (1992). Cf. Goris and Aertsen (2013).
10. See “Über Sinn und Bedeutung”, KS, 144 – 147, GGA I, X, and § 26, and “Über die Grundlagen der Geometrie I – III” (1906), KS, 285. Also see “Einleitung in die Logik” (1906), NS, 203.

11. Geach and Black use the translation “comprehensive” for “allseitig”.
12. See “Der Gedanke”, KS, 350, “Über den Begriff der Zahl” (1891/92), NS, 95, and “Über Sinn und Bedeutung”, KS, 144.
13. This distinction is similar to Edmund Husserl’s idea of aspect-wise grasping through different perspectives. See, e.g., Hua VI, § 45. For Frege, unlike for Husserl, the aspects are conceptual or something that can be expressed by means of concepts.
14. This point is also made in Haaparanta (1985, 142).

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