The traditional interpretation of Frege has him endorsing propositions that are not object dependent, i.e., propositions that can exist even though the proper names that occur in the sentences that express them do not refer. But John McDowell and Gareth Evans have challenged this with an influential interpretation of Frege. McDowell first introduced a Fregean reading that included object dependent propositions and contrasted them to Frege’s senses which he took to be object-independent (McDowell, 1977, pp. 172-174). But shortly thereafter, in *The Varieties of Reference*, Evans proposed an interpretation of Frege according to which Frege's senses are object dependent (Evans, 1981 and 1982, ch. 1). McDowell later endorsed Evans’ interpretation of Frege (McDowell, 1984 and 1986).

The introduction of object dependent propositions among Fregeans seems, at least initially, to blur the distinction between them and Russellians, for one way to characterize the two camps is to allege that Russellians accept object dependent propositions while Fregeans don’t accept such propositions and that Russellians, unlike Fregeans, are advocates of wide content. Although Evans does not make the object referred to a part of the proposition expressed, the introduction of object dependent thoughts in a Fregean framework made it possible for neo-Fregeans to do so, much as Russellians do with singular propositions. While there are some similarities between the theories of Russellians and neo-Fregeans, the salient difference between the two concerns the mode of presentation of the referent. The Russellians argue that the proposition expressed is a singular proposition that does not contain a mode of presentation, and

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1 Recanati characterizes the neo-Fregean view as being one where both the object referred and its mode of presentation are contained in the proposition in *Direct Reference: From Language to Thought*. Schiffer introduces such propositions in “The Basis of Reference”.

thus argue that there is a distinction between a proposition expressed and its cognitive content, or the thought. The neo-Fregeans, on the other hand, do not draw this distinction between proposition and thought and insist on making the mode of presentation of the referent a constituent of the proposition or thought. A consequence of the Evans-McDowell interpretation of Frege is that if someone hallucinates that there is an oasis in front of her, then there is no thought of an oasis but only an illusion of a thought. No reference entails no sense, and no sense entails no thought. Evans and McDowell have thus provided neo-Fregeans with a “wide content” interpretation of Frege.²

Evans argued that he is not deviating from the views of Frege in his interpretation, since Frege accepted object dependent propositions. He writes, for example, that

“Frege held, both before the distinction between sense and Meaning and, despite appearances, after it, a highly Russelian view of singular terms. Frege’s later apparent willingness to ascribe sense to certain empty singular terms was equivocal, hedged around with qualifications, and dubiously consistent with the fundamentals of his philosophy of language.” (Evans, 1982, p. 38).

This paper will focus on Frege’s views on the issue and, in particular, whether there is any evidence that the mature Frege, i.e., after he introduced the sense/reference distinction, accepted object dependent propositions. As will be evident in section II, when it comes to object dependent propositions I am reading Evans as attempting to give us a “correct” reading of Frege and thus, at this stage in his work, being concerned with making an exegetical point. He then does an excellent job of developing the consequences of his reading of Frege. However, one

² There is a rival notion of object dependent thought in the writings of, e.g., C. Peacocke, J. Perry, C. McGinn, and K. Bach. Bach characterizes the main idea of the notion nicely when he says that a thought determines a reference only with respect to a context, meaning that the thoughts themselves are context independent and can, and should, be
should note that if Evans’ interpretation of Frege is not well grounded in Frege’s writings, then the theoretical implication of Evans’ interpretation should be understood in that light. In the final section of the paper I will address one of the consequences of the Evans-McDowell reading of Frege, arguing that they have ignored one of his important insights into natural languages.

In his early works Frege was not as concerned with how language related to the world as he was with the logical relations between sentences and the thoughts that they express. At the time when he wrote the *Begriffsschrift*, first published in 1879, he was not concerned with how sentences relate to reality, and he never mentions what it is that makes a sentence true or false. His interest is focused on truth-values as they pertain to logical relations. Further, he was not concerned with how names refer, although he does come close to making the sense/reference distinction. When discussing equality of content in the *Begriffsschrift* Frege shows how names can determine the same content in different ways and that, in some cases, the same content actually is given by two ways of determining it. Frege illustrates this with a geometry example.

“Let a fixed point A lie on the circumference of a circle, and let a straight line rotate around this. When this straight line forms a diameter, let us call the opposite end to A the point B corresponding to this position. Then let us go on to call the point of intersection of the straight line and the circumference, the point B corresponding to the position of the straight line at any given time…We may now ask: What point corresponds to the position of the straight line in which it is perpendicular to the diameter? The answer will be: The point A. The name B thus has in this case the same content as the name A…” (Frege, 1960a, p. 11).

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individuated narrowly. See his *Thought and Reference*, p. 12. A traditional interpretation of Frege has us
But even though the two names have the same content, Frege argues that we can not use the same name from the start, for the justification for doing so is only given by the answer to the question which point B is in at this particular case.

Even here we should not understand Frege as providing a theory of reference. Instead Frege is pointing out that sometimes the same thing is determined (referred to) in different ways and that the symbol for equality of content is sensitive to the different ways in which names can determine the same content or the same thing. While Frege does mention reference, the notion of reference is not of much interest to him at this point. Instead, what is of importance is that the equality sign is sensitive to when two names determine the same content different ways. The focus is, again, on the relationship between sentences; in this case identity sentences, and the thoughts they express.³

In *Function and Concept*, presented in 1891, Frege sets out to supplement the ideas in the *Begriffsschrift*.⁴ In *Function and Concept* he is concerned with truth and falsity and, consequently, with the contribution names make to a thought. Here he presents the view that proper names have the role of introducing objects which are to be the arguments to functions. For example, the function “a is big” maps all and only big objects onto the value True. If ‘Paul’ is an argument to the function “a is big”, then the sentence ‘Paul is big’ is true only if the argument is mapped onto the value True and false only if it is mapped onto the value False. But the argument can only be mapped onto the values True or False if ‘Paul’ introduces an object, i.e., only if ‘Paul’ has a semantic value. That is, the sentence can express a thought or a

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³ If Frege didn’t make what amounts to the sense/reference distinction in *Begriffsschrift*, then he at least came very close to doing so. It is interesting that he thought that identity represented a special case and so the distinction in *Begriffsschrift* was at best only localized; i.e., applied only to identity statements. For an interesting discussion on this see Peter Simon’s, “The Next Best Thing to Sense in *Begriffsschrift*”.

⁴ Frege, 1960b. He writes: “I should like to … tell you about some supplementations and new conceptions” that have occurred to me since presenting *Begriffsschrift*. See p. 21.
proposition only if ‘Paul’ has a semantic value. In “Seventeen Key Sentences on Logic,” Frege puts the point in the following way:

“A sentence can be true or untrue only if it is an expression for a thought. The sentence ‘Leo Sachse is a man’ is the expression of a thought only if ‘Leo Sachse’ designates something. And so too the sentence ‘this table is round’ is the expression of a thought only if the words ‘this table’ are not empty sounds but designate something specific for me.” (Frege, 1979a, p. 174.)

And in his dialogue with Pünjer he says that “Once ‘Sachse is a man’ expresses an actual judgment, the word ‘Sachse’ must designate something…” (Frege, 1979c, p. 60).

What we can gather from Frege’s *Begriffsschrift* as supplemented by *Function and Concept* is that he held the view that if someone utters a sentence containing a proper name then that sentence can have a truth value only if the proper name has a semantic value and, furthermore, that a sentence containing a proper name expresses a thought or a proposition only if the name has a semantic value.

An interesting consequence of Frege’s early view is that if ‘Leo Sachse’ does not designate something, then the sentence ‘Leo Sachse is a man’ does not express a proposition. The proposition expressed by the sentence ‘Leo Sachse is a man’ is thus *object dependent* in the sense that it only exists if ‘Leo Sachse’ has a semantic value. Furthermore, on this view the sentence “Santa Claus is jolly” fails to express a proposition because ‘Santa Claus’ does not have a semantic value, as does the sentence “Thales was a philosopher” if it turns out that Thales

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5 There is some debate as to when Frege wrote “Seventeen Key Sentences on Logic”. It is now usually dated at about 1876-1877, which fits well with the development of Frege’s views as presented here. Dating the letter after the publication of “On Sense and Reference” as some want to do introduces serious conflicts into Frege’s later views.

6 Frege’s correspondence with Pünjer is dated from before 1884.
never existed. This is certainly not a view that is commonly associated with Frege. In order to distinguish this view from what was to come, let us call this the view of Frege I.

In “On Sense and Reference,” published in 1892, Frege presented his distinction between sense and reference and with it a view that appears to be significantly different from his earlier views. The cognitive aspect of language use motivated Frege to take a second look at his theory. In particular, he was concerned with how identity statements with co-designative but different names can be informative, although the problem extends to other statements as well. Consider, for example, the following two sentences;

1. Mark Twain is Mark Twain
2. Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens.

It is evident that (2) is informative while (1) is not informative and the problem is how to account for the informativeness. In the opening paragraph of “On Sense and Reference” he criticized the account of the informativeness of identity statements he gave in the Begriffsschrift, saying that if an identity statement only relates names they do not provide us with proper knowledge, so a different account is required.\(^7\)

Frege responds to the problem presented by the informativeness of identity statements by introducing the views of Frege II. According to the views of Frege II what a name contributes to a proposition is not the object denoted and the role of a name is not to introduce an object to a proposition. Instead, a name contributes its sense to a proposition. In Frege’s words, “A difference [in cognitive significance] can arise only if the difference between the signs

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\(^7\) It is quite possible that Frege had the resources in Begriffsschrift to deal with the cognitive puzzle. He stated there that identity statements related names and so the judgment becomes a judgment about the signs, not their contents. But in the opening paragraph of “On Sense and Reference” he doesn’t mention that he had introduced the mode of determination in Begriffsschrift, and so his argument against the Begriffsschrift account overlooks a key element of that account.
corresponds to a difference in the mode of presentation of that which is designated.” (Frege, 1960c, p. 57). So, senses of names are, at least typically, the ways in which objects are presented and the connection between a name, its sense, and its reference is such that to a name there corresponds a sense and to that sense reference, so the sense mediates between a name and its reference. Frege explains this with the following example:

“Let \(a, b, c\) be the lines connecting the vertices of a triangle with the midpoints of the opposite sides. The point of intersection of \(a\) and \(b\) is then the same as the point of intersection of \(b\) and \(c\). So we have different designations for the same point, and these names (‘point of intersection of \(a\) and \(b\),’ ‘point of intersection of \(b\) and \(c\)’) likewise indicate the mode of presentation; and hence the statement contains actual knowledge.” (Frege, 1960c, p. 56).

The names in the example above designate the same thing, but the ways in which they present this common referent is different, so they have different senses. With names contributing senses to the propositions expressed by the sentences in which they occur, and with the senses determining reference, Frege can account for the informativeness of the relevant sentences. The resulting view is that of Frege II.

At least on the face of it, Frege II differs significantly from Frege I when it comes to object dependent propositions. We saw that for Frege I a simple declarative sentence expressed a proposition only if the name in the sentence had a semantic value. Not so for Frege II. For example, in “On Sense and Reference” he says that “In grasping a sense, one is not certainly assured of a reference” (Frege, 1960c, p. 58.), and “every grammatically well-formed expression representing a proper name always has a sense. But this is not to say that to the sense there also corresponds a reference.” (Frege, 1960c, p. 58). So Frege II allows for there being meaningful
expressions that do not denote, such as ‘the celestial body most distant from the Earth’ and ‘the least rapidly convergent series’.

Further, in a letter to Russell dated from 1904 as well as in “Letter to Jourdain” Frege addresses what names contribute to propositions. In the letter to Russell he writes:

“…Mont Blanc with its snowfields is not itself a component part of the thought that Mont Blanc is more than 4,000 metres high….The sense of the word ‘moon’ is a component part of the thought that the moon is smaller than the earth. The moon itself (i.e. the denotation of the word ‘moon’) is not part of the sense of the word ‘moon’; for then it would also be a component part of that thought.” (Frege, 1980, p. 163).

In “Letter to Jourdain” Frege is equally clear on what a name contributes to a proposition

“[T]he sense of the name ‘Ateb’ is different from the sense of the name ‘Aphla’.

Accordingly, the sense of the proposition ‘Ateb is at least 5000 metres high’ is also different from the sense of the proposition ‘Aphla is at least 5000 metres high’.” (Frege, 1993, p. 44).

From this we can infer that names contribute their senses to the propositions expressed by the sentences in which they occur. Because ‘Ateb’ and ‘Aphla’ have different senses that they contribute, the resulting propositions have different senses. We can then conclude that according to the views of Frege II the name in a sentence contributes its sense to the proposition expressed, and the sense does not have to belong to an object although, presumably, typically it does.

The introduction of senses has serious implications for Frege's view of object dependent propositions. Frege I held the view that if a name in a sentence failed to refer, then the sentence failed to express a proposition. But, as we have seen, in “On Sense and Reference” Frege says that one can grasp a sense without being assured of reference. And since a name or a singular
term can have a sense without reference and it contributes its sense to the proposition expressed by the sentence in which it occurs it is evident that, according to Frege II, sentences that contain non-designative names can nevertheless express propositions. But if sentences that contain non-designative names can express propositions, then those propositions are not object dependent. So, Frege II, contrary to Frege I, does recognize propositions that are not object dependent.

II.

In *The Varieties of Reference* Gareth Evans argues that Frege II, as well as Frege I, held a highly Russellian view of singular terms and that Frege II, as well as Frege I, held that propositions expressed by simple sentences containing proper names were object dependent. In particular, Evans claims that Frege’s willingness to ascribe sense to empty terms, terms with no semantic value, is “only dubiously coherent.” (Evans, 1982, p. 22). Evans has four main arguments for claiming that Frege II accepted object dependent propositions.

I. The modes of presentation argument. A mode of presentation is, according to Frege, associated with a name giving it its sense. But a mode of presentation has to be a presentation of something. In the case of empty terms there is no object denoted, so there is no mode of presentation. Therefore, empty names have no sense.\(^8\)

II. The semantic gap argument. Frege tried to construct a theory of meaning according to which the semantic meaning of the whole depends upon the semantic meaning of its parts. But, empty terms do not contribute a semantic value to the proposition expressed by the sentence in which it occurs. Therefore, there is a group of sentences to which Frege’s view that the semantic value of a sentence is determined by the semantic value of its parts does not apply. And this position, Evans maintains, is barely intelligible (Evans,

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\(^8\) A version of this argument can be found in Evans, p. 22.
1982, p. 22). And since we should try to avoid attributing barely intelligible interpretation to Frege when a “more intelligible” interpretation is available, we should go with the “more intelligible” interpretation, namely Evans’ interpretation.

III. The truth-value gap argument. Frege held the view that language supports truth-value gaps, that is, that there are sentences with, by virtue of containing empty names, are neither true nor false. But if that is so, then consider the following possibility. Suppose we have a scientific language containing a negation operator, ‘neg’. If the language contained a sentence $Fa$, where ‘$a$’ is an empty proper name, which expresses a thought that is not true, then there is nothing to prevent ‘neg $Fa$’ from being true. But since Frege accepted the principle that if a sentence $S$ has no truth value, then no embedding of $S$ can be true, he needs to find a way to deny that ‘neg $Fa$’ is true which, according to Evans, he can only do under Evans’ interpretation (Evans, 1982, p. 24).

IV. The mature Frege I argument. Frege I had a mature theory of meaning and the later Frege should be interpreted in light of that theory of meaning. When we do that we have to acknowledge that since Frege I accepted object dependent proposition, so does the later Frege.9

None of these arguments are sufficiently strong to warrant Evans’ claim that Frege II accepted object dependent propositions.

The modes of presentation argument does not force object dependent propositions upon Frege II. It is true that Frege says that modes of presentation belong to objects and, naturally, objects can not have modes of presentation without existing. But Frege also says that modes of

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9 David Bell presents Evans’ view in the form of ten thesis attributed to Frege, and his ensuing discussion addresses two of the arguments presented here. Bell provides textual evidence against the modes of presentation argument, but fails to note that Evans has a powerful reply that needs to be addressed. Bell also addresses Evans’ claim that if ‘$a$’
presentation are associated with proper names. In order for Evans’ argument to work he has to assume the following;

MP: A mode of presentation can not be associated with proper names without the mode of presentation being a presentation of an (existing) object.

Given the views of Frege II we should regard MP as false. It suffices to point out, again, that in “On Sense and Reference” Frege gave examples of proper names that have sense but do not refer, and that clearly indicates that Frege II accepted the view that a mode of presentation associated with a name does not need to be of an object. Once sense is couched in a definite description we can associate a description with a name, thus giving the name a sense, without the description describing an existing object. But if that is so then MP is false. MP needs to be argued for and, given the views of Frege II, it is hard to see how one can do so. Nevertheless, Evans attempts to do so when presenting the second argument.

The second argument, the semantic gap argument, claims that Frege’s theory does not apply to some sentences because the semantic value of sentences containing empty names can not be determined by the semantic value of its parts. The proper reply to this is that after Frege introduces his sense/reference distinction we can have sense without reference and that sentences containing empty proper names have one kind of meaning and not another. In “On Sense and Reference” Frege gave examples of proper names that have sense but lack reference. Also, in “Compound Thoughts” Frege states that

“Names that fail to fulfill the usual role of a proper name, which is to name something, may be called mock proper names. Although the tale of William Tell is a legend and not

doesn’t exist, then ‘a is F’ is meaningless. Here Bell again underestimates Evans’ recourses, for in addition to textual evidence, Evans’ also mounts pretheoretical intuitions as to how we should sensibly read Frege.
history, and the name ‘William Tell’ is a mock proper name, *we cannot deny its sense.*”

(Frege, 1977, p. 56. Italics mine.)

It is important to note is that Frege talks about the *usual* role of names and that we can not deny that ‘William Tell’ has a sense although it lacks reference and, as a result of it lacking reference, is a mock proper name. So, Frege clearly tells us that a mock proper name can have a sense. Frege II therefore provides us with both empty names, such as ‘William Tell’, and empty descriptions, such as ‘the celestial body most distant from the Earth’. In both instances we have sense without reference, so it seems clear what position Frege II held on the issue.

Evans has a reply to the view that Frege II accepted empty proper names and that the sentences that contain them can convey thoughts. He states that “There just *is* a pre-theoretical notion of a sentence being significant—a sentence’s being so constructed that it is capable of expressing or conveying a thought to, and perhaps inducing a belief in, anyone sufficiently familiar with the language.” (Evans, 1982, pp. 23-24). The underlying assumption is that a sentence containing an empty name can not express or convey a thought. But, as we have seen, Frege II acknowledges sense without reference and so the assumption on which Evans’ reply rests is not compatible with Frege II’s stated views. Consequently, Evans has to provide some additional reasons for his interpretation. The evidence Evans provides for this interpretation includes the following quotes from Frege:

“Names that fail to fulfill the usual role of a proper name, which is to name something, may be called mock proper names… The sense of the sentence ‘William Tell shot an apple off his son’s head’ is no more true than is that of the sentence ‘William Tell did not

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10 As a referee of this journal pointed out, being a mock proper name is not a consequence of a singular term having a sense but not reference; rather, a mock proper name is a name that simply pretends to refer to something. While this is correct it is unclear how one could, as I read Frege’s, entertain a thought that includes a mock proper name
shoot an apple off his son’s head’. I do not say that this sense is false either, but I characterize it as fictitious…”

“Instead of speaking about fiction we could speak of ‘mock thoughts’.”

“Even the thoughts are not to be taken seriously as in the sciences: they are only mock thoughts.” (Evans, 1982, p. 29. Frege, 1979b, p. 130).

From this Evans concludes that, unqualified, these passages induce an inconsistency in Frege’s view. When they are qualified with Frege’s likening to fiction the inconsistency disappears, Evans says, for then we can say that the sentence containing the empty name does not “really” have a sense; instead it is only as if the sentence containing the name functions properly and only as if the name refers to something (Evans, 1982, p. 30).

Evans’ interpretation contrasts sharply with what Frege himself says. In the first place, Frege is very indecisive in the above quotes. Instead of saying that we should call names that fail to refer mock proper names, and instead of saying that we should talk about mock thoughts, he more cautiously says that we may or could do so. Furthermore, Frege talks in several places without qualification of sense without reference and so it certainly seems like Frege did not see the need for his view to be qualified. For example, in “Letter to Jourdain” he writes:

“Without reference, we could indeed have a thought, but only a mythological or literary thought, not a thought that could further scientific knowledge. Without a sense, we would have no thought, and hence also nothing that we could recognize as true.” (Frege, 1993, p. 44).

without the name having a sense. I understand Frege’s remark, “we cannot deny its sense,” to indicate that since we can entertain thoughts “about” William Tell, we can not deny the sense of ‘William Tell’.
Here it is very clear that Frege does indeed acknowledge that we can have thought without there being an object the thought is of, although he says the thought is only a mythological or literary thought. The price to pay is that the resulting proposition is not a proposition of the type that can further scientific knowledge.

In the same passage where he talks of mock thoughts Frege writes:

“Assertions in fiction are not to be taken seriously: they are only mock assertions. Even the thoughts are not to be taken seriously as in the sciences: they are only mock thoughts. If Schiller’s *Don Carlos* were to be regarded as a piece of history, then to a large extent the drama would be false. But a work of fiction is not meant to be taken seriously in this way at all: it’s all play…

The logician does not have to bother with mock thoughts, just as a physicist, who sets out to investigate thunder, will not pay any attention to stage-thunder. When we speak of thoughts…we mean thoughts proper, thoughts that are either true or false.” (Frege, 1979b, p. 130).

Two things are clear in this passage. First, it is reasonable to assume that what sets thoughts proper apart from mock thoughts is that while thoughts proper have truth values, mock thoughts lack truth values.\(^{11}\) But if that is so, then that is the contrast we should be working with. Not, as Evans would have it, a contrast between “real thoughts” and “mock thoughts.” And second, it is very clear that fiction does not belong with the sciences and, presumably, the language of fiction that is a part of natural languages does not belong with the language of science.

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\(^{11}\) This assumes that the connection between a thought and (the possibility of) having a truth-value is an external one (as opposed to an internal one). In fact, assuming that seems to give us the most coherent reading of Frege. It is important that I have not assumed from the outset that Frege accepts such a connection and that instead I have been led to the view that he does so, for only by doing so can we account for mock names having senses and playing roles in thoughts, as Frege repeatedly asserts that they do. This methodological point is important, for if one assumes the connection as being internal, then one is forced to conclude that a thought failing to have a truth value is not a real thought. (I thank a referee of the journal for calling attention to this issue).
The difference between thoughts proper and mock thoughts is that the former have truth values while the latter do not. Correspondingly, one might suspect that the difference between real proper names and mock proper names is that the former refer while the latter do not. That, in fact, seems to be Frege’s view as evident, for example, in a previous quote where he said that although “‘William Tell’ is a mock proper name, we cannot deny its sense.”

In “On Sense and Reference” Frege gives a brief explanation of why we are sometimes content with using names that lack reference. The reason is that sometimes we are not concerned with truth values. Sometimes we are concerned with the feelings and the images aroused by the senses of the sentences, as when we are listening to an epic poem. Search for reference and truth would stand in the way of the aesthetic delight such work can arouse. “Hence, it is a matter of no concern to us whether the name ‘Odysseus,’ for instance, has reference, so long as we accept the poem as a work of art.” (Frege, 1960c, p. 63). Once again Frege is acknowledging sense without reference.

Evans’ third argument for claiming that Frege II accepted object dependent propositions is the truth-value gap argument; namely, if Frege held the view that there are truth-value gaps, then if sentence $Fa$ of a scientific language contains an empty name and expresses a proposition that is at least not definitely true, then it can not be ruled out that the language contains a negation operator so that the negation of $Fa$ is true. The quick reply to Evans is that Frege could agree that he can not exclude the possibility of such an operator existing. But such an operator would not give the results Evans claims it does. If $Fa$ is true then, presumably, $neg \ Fa$ is false, and if $Fa$ is false then, presumably, $neg \ Fa$ would be true. But in case $Fa$ lacks a truth value,

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12 Further evidence comes from “On Sense and Reference” where Frege says that the sentence “Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep” expresses the same thought regardless of whether ‘Odysseus’ has reference or not. Given his view on compositionality, the sentence wouldn’t have a sense if ‘Odysseus’ lacked sense. See “On Sense and Reference,” pp. 62-63.
which is something Frege thinks is a possibility as does Evans’ reading of Frege, then it is reasonable to claim that \( \neg Fa \) would also lack truth value.

This leaves Evans’ fourth argument which states that Frege’s later work, such as “On Sense and Reference,” ought to be interpreted in light of the mature theory of meaning in his earlier works. I have motivated the sense/reference distinction and the shift in Frege’s theory in light of cognitive significance. But that, surely, is not a full account of Frege’s motivation for introducing the sense/reference distinction. Others, e.g. Hans Sluga, have pointed to the importance of Frege’s attempts to reduce mathematics to logic and the prominent role axiom V plays in the introduction of the distinction.\(^{13}\)

On the interpretation I have given of Frege there is a development in his works that includes him rejecting his former view on semantics. In his earliest works he is only concerned with syntax. He then supplements his early view with an account of the semantics of proper names according to which names contribute their reference to the thought expressed by the sentences in which they appear. At the same time, we see the precursor of a sense-reference distinction, as when he points out that reference to the same thing can be determined in different ways. Finally, his interest in semantics increased in his later works leading to his sense/reference distinction and with it a rejection of his former view of the semantics of proper names.

Any reading of Frege that interprets him as being only concerned with syntax in the \textit{Begriffsschrift} or that he turned his back on the semantic view that he presented in \textit{Function and Concept} (when supplementing and further developing the ideas in the \textit{Begriffsschrift}) raises problems for Evans’ fourth argument. Given that some of the evidence for this reading of Frege, given as direct quotes from Frege’s works, plainly contradicts Evans’ interpretation, Evans’
interpretation of Frege is very implausible. We can therefore conclude that none of Evans’ reasons for the view that Frege accepted object dependent propositions after introducing the sense/reference distinction hold.

III.

Given the results of the discussion one has to wonder what motivates Evans and McDowell to introduce object dependent propositions into Frege’s framework. The reason, I believe, is the force with which the direct designation theory entered philosophy of language and with it the reintroduction of object dependent singular propositions and the proliferation of twin-earth style thought experiments.

Frege had emphasized that a single entity, namely thought, played the role of cognitive content and the role of truth-value bearer. Accordingly, he held that one could individuate a thought with either a cognitive content criteria or a truth conditional criteria. The advance of the direct designation theory introduced a different picture. In particular, twin-earth style thought experiments led many to argue that Frege’s two criteria diverge. For example, if Ted is watching a cat on earth and Twin-Ted (Ted’s replica on Twin Earth) is watching a cat on Twin Earth (of course a precise replica of the earth cat, this being Twin Earth), then their thoughts would have the same narrow content; i.e., from looking inside their heads their thoughts would be indistinguishable. In spite of that their objects of thought are not the same due to Ted having beliefs about the cat on earth while Twin-Ted has beliefs about the cat on Twin Earth, and thus two different animals figuring in the propositions that Ted and Twin-Ted believe. The natural conclusion to draw from this type of thought experiment was that Frege was wrong; it was not a

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13 Hans Sluga has argued that Frege was not concerned with reference in his early works and only takes interest in the sense/reference distinction when confronted with the problem that, according to the Begriffsschrift account,
single entity that played the role of cognitive content and the role of truth-value bearer. Instead we had a divergence; the cognitive significance criterion individuated narrow content, or what is in the head, while the truth-conditional criterion individuated the object of thought.

The divergence view, the view that the cognitive significance criterion and the truth-conditional criterion diverge in the way explained, is a serious deviation from Frege. At the same time the twin earth arguments are powerful in showing that the objects our thoughts are about do play a role in individuating them. Evans and McDowell responded to these arguments by, unlike Frege, acknowledging the object dependence of our thoughts while, like Frege, denying the divergence view. As a consequence Evans and McDowell individuate a sense or a mode of presentation in part by the object that it is a sense of. While those who accept the divergence view can distinguish between narrow and wide contents which allows them to say that Ted and Twin-Ted can have the same narrow content while having different wide contents, Evans and McDowell do not acknowledge that Ted and Twin-Ted have the same narrow contents. Their denial of the divergence view means that they don’t admit there being a narrow mode of presentation; a mode of presentation independent of reference.\(^\text{14}\) This response, I believe, has disastrous consequences that rob Frege of one of his great intuitions about the workings of natural language, namely that we can and do have thoughts without reference.

We do think about Santa Claus, Pegasus, Zeus, and the Tooth fairy, to name a few, and one of the strengths of Frege’s theory is that he can account for such thoughts within his framework because we can have sense without reference. The advocates of the divergence view try to maintain Frege’s insight when they separate the cognitive significance criterion and the

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\(^{14}\) My concern here is not with the legitimacy of the wide/narrow content distinction, which has been hotly debated and would go beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, my concern is rather to show that the relevant intuitive insights that Frege had are lost on the Evans/McDowell reading.
truth conditional criterion, for that allows them to talk about narrow content (cognitive significance) even though the thought is not of an object (so it lacks truth conditions).

A consequence of Evans’ and McDowell’s interpretation of Frege is that if there is no object, there is no thought. The difficulty with this interpretation is brought out in the following example. Suppose that I am in the desert thirsty and tired and see an oasis in the distance. I form beliefs about the oasis and my thoughts are of the oasis. My travel companion, Samantha, is also tired and thirsty and is looking away from the oasis when she hallucinates an oasis. According to Evan’s and McDowell, since Samantha is hallucinating an oasis there is not an oasis thought in Samantha’s head; no object, hence no sense of an object, and hence no thought. But we have good reasons to believe that there is a considerable similarity between my thoughts and Samantha’s thought when it comes to an oasis. In particular, our behavior and our dispositions to behave will be affected in very similar ways, and we can not explain that without talking of us having similar thoughts about an oasis. For example, because I believe that there is an oasis in front of me I am happy and relieved. Because Samantha believes that there is an oasis in front of her she is happy and relieved. Because I believe that there is an oasis in front of me I am disposed to head in that direction. Because Samantha believes that there is an oasis in front of her she is disposed to head in that direction. Because I believe that there is an oasis close by I am disposed to quicken my steps, and so is Samantha. Because I believe that I see an oasis I am

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15 McDowell (1977) tries to explain the similar behavior of subjects, only one of which has a mock belief, by introducing second order beliefs. On that account, I have a second order belief, namely I believe that I believe that there is an oasis, and Samantha has the same second order belief; namely, she believes that she believes that there is an oasis. The difference is that my second order belief is true while Samantha's second order belief is false, since there is no first order belief that is the subject of her second order belief.

I have two concerns with this explanation. First, since there is no oasis, McDowell claims that we can not have a belief about it and so he introduces a second order belief to account for the subjects behavior. But, the second order belief is, supposedly, about the first order belief which, by McDowell’s own admission, doesn’t exist. It thus appears that we have not explained much and that we have instead pushed the issue one step back, for McDowell now needs to explain how the second order belief, about a non-existent first order belief, can exist. A second, and a minor concern, is that McDowell published “On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name” before he fully
disposed to inform Samantha that we can soon quench our thirst, and because Samantha believes that she sees an oasis she is disposed to inform me that we can soon quench our thirst. In short, there is a strong functional similarity between the two of us. Both of us have feelings and beliefs that are best explained with mental causation, namely a thought of an oasis being the cause. And both of us have behavioral dispositions that are best explained with reference to our thoughts about an oasis.

There is therefore a good reason to believe that there are thoughts available in empty cases, like in Samantha’s case. Frege acknowledged that. The divergence view retained Frege’s insight and accounts for the empty case with narrow content. Evans’ and McDowell’s interpretation of Frege gives us the improbable result that there are no thoughts in empty cases, thus giving up Frege’s insight on the issue.16
References.


