# CHATEAUBRIAND'S SENSES[1]

## MARCO RUFFINO

*Department of Philosophy*
*Federal University of Rio de Janeiro/CNPq*
*Largo São Francisco de Paula, 1*
*20051-070 RIO DE JANEIRO, RJ*
*BRAZIL*

*ruffino@gmx.net*

**Abstract:** In this paper I discuss Chateaubriand's notion of senses. His notions retains the spirit of the original Fregean notion, but differ from it in some fundamental ways. I compare both notions, especially concerning the issue of indirect reference, and also concerning their explanatory power in epistemic matters. Finally, I raise some worries concerning the semantic role played by Chateaubriand's senses, as well as the notion of judgment that his notion of thoughts seems to imply.

**Keywords:** Chateaubriand. Frege. Sense. Indirect reference. Judgment.

## O SENTIDO EM CHATEAUBRIAND

**Resumo:** Neste artigo, discuto a noção de sentido de Chateaubriand. Sua noção retém o espírito da noção Fregeana original, mas difere da mesma em alguns aspectos fundamentais. Eu comparo ambas as noções, especialmente no que diz respeito à questão da referência indireta, e também no que concerne ao seu poder explicativo em questões epistêmicas. Por fim, levanto algumas preocupações sobre o papel semântico desempenhado pelos sentidos de Chateaubriand, bem como a forma dos juízos que a sua noção de pensamento implica.

**Palavras chave:** Chateaubriand. Frege. Sentido. Referência indireta. Juízo.

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Chateaubriand proposes a notion of sense based, as he describes it, on "variations on Fregean themes", i.e., his notion retains the spirit of Frege's notion of sense, but differs deeply from it in some crucial aspects. That is to say, he does not mean to explain Frege's notion, but to develop his own, though preserving the Fregean spirit. This is how I shall read him, and my contrasts between his theory and Frege's is, except for one particular point that I shall indicate, not meant to show that his theory is wrong as scholarship (although Chateaubriand himself is also a very fine Frege scholar), but rather as a comparison of the effects of both notions. Chateaubriand's theory is presented in chapters 11, 12 and 13 of his *Logical Forms* (2001, 2005), but it is synthesized and more self-contained in a later paper (2007), and for this reason I refer to the paper more frequently than to the books.

I shall start with the similarities between both notions. Chateaubriand's proposal agrees in spirit with the Fregean notion of sense: both his and Fregean senses are not the same as linguistic meanings. As Burge (1979) has forcefully argued, if Fregean senses were linguistic meanings, then indexicals would have only one sense in all contexts. E.g., the term 'today' referred to one day yesterday, and to another day today. It is unlikely that the meaning of the word has changed; if senses were meanings, the sense would be the same, and the reference would be different. Hence the meaning cannot be identical with the sense of the term in each day, since the same sense cannot have different references. What changes is the mode of presentation expressed by the word in each day (i.e., in each context), and this is the sense. Chateaubriand's senses are not meanings either, since they are what he calls identifying properties, i.e., properties uniquely instantiated by the reference (if there is one). His notion of senses, like Frege's, is not tied to language. There are, indeed, infinitely more Chateaubriand's (and Fregean) senses than terms for them in language (at least in ordinary language).

Consider the property 'being identical with *a*' for *a* being a real number. For any particular *a* this is an identifying property and, hence, a sense. But this means that there are (at least) as many senses as real numbers, and there is no way of recursively generating names for all real numbers. Hence, there are infinitely more senses than names that we or any computer machine, no matter how sophisticated, could generate.

The second point of agreement is that senses are, for both, not only language-independent, but also mind-independent. Although Frege talks of "modes of presentation of the reference", suggesting thereby that it is a form of presentation for the mind, it is clear from several of his remarks that senses do not depend, for their existence, on the possibility of their apprehension by any mind: there are actually many senses (e.g., thoughts) that will never be apprehended. In the same way, Chateaubriand's senses as identifying properties are not mind-dependent, since properties are not mind-dependent.

Despite the agreement in their realist spirit, there are fundamental differences between both notions. Chateaubriand's basic idea is that senses are a particular kind of properties (in the Fregean sense of property) with a particular logical structure, i.e., properties that are only instantiated by the reference. He calls these *identifying properties*. This is already a major departure from Frege's conception, since senses are not to be confounded with properties for him. For Chateaubriand, the uniqueness condition is part of the content of the identifying property itself. An identifying property has the following structure:

$$Fx \ \& \ (y)(Fy \rightarrow x = y)$$

or, in Chateaubriand's notation,

$$[Fx \ \& \ (y) \ (Fy \rightarrow x = y)] \ (x)$$

He uses the following abbreviation for the above identifying property:

$$[!xFx](x)$$

Here there is another major departure from Frege's notion since, for Frege, the sense of a proper name is a "saturated" entity, i.e., an object. For Chateaubriand, senses that have objects as references are first-order identifying properties, while senses that have first-order properties as reference are second-order identifying properties (i.e., second-order properties that are, due to their form, instantiated by at most one first-order property). Presumably we can go on indefinitely on the hierarchy of senses using the hierarchy of identifying properties.

If senses are properties for Chateaubriand, and given that thoughts are senses, then we might expect him to consider thoughts to be properties as well. And that's what he does. He explains thoughts (e.g., the sense of sentences) in the following way: they are complex properties (or n-ary relations), composed of the properties that are senses of the parts of the sentence. For instance, if $[!xPx](x)$ is the identifying property corresponding to 'Plato', $[!xAx](x)$ is the identifying property corresponding to 'Aristotle', and $[!ZTZ](Z)$ is the second-order identifying property of the first-order relation corresponding to 'taught' ('Z' is a second-order variable), then the thought corresponding to 'Plato taught Aristotle' is the composed relation

$$[!ZTZ \wedge !xPx \wedge !yAy \wedge Zxy](Z, x, y)^2$$

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[2] It might appear strange at first sight that we have, within the square brackets, the conjunction placed between properties of different levels. But we have to look at it as the product of two levels of lambda-abstraction. Consider the conjunction $F(a) \wedge H(G)$ (where $F$ and $G$ are first-order

I.e., this is a complex ternary relation that applies to triads of things, the first one being a relation, and the other two being objects (persons).

Frege offers an argument to the effect that not all senses can be complete, i.e., saturated entities: if all parts that compose a thought were complete, there could be no unity in thought (Frege 1892a, 205). Therefore, according to him, some parts of the thought must be incomplete or unsaturated (i.e., the sense of concepts), while others are complete or saturated (i.e., the sense of proper names); the combination of both parts produce a complete unified whole, which is the thought. Although this forces the admission of incomplete senses (i.e., the senses of properties and concepts), this does not force the acceptance of complete senses, for we could have the combination of the sense of a first and a second-order concept building up a complete thought. (For Chateaubriand, there is no unity in the sense of thought being a complete whole, since, for him, thoughts are incomplete entities.) But Frege has a reason for not identifying senses with properties coming from his extensional criterion of identity for properties. Two apparently different properties like *creature with heart* and *creature with kidney* are, for him, the same because they are co-extensional. What explains the difference in cognitive value is the difference in sense, which is not to be confounded with the property itself (which is one and the same). Since Chateaubriand does not endorse an extensional criterion of identity of properties (2001, chap. 10), he does not have the same problem of explaining the difference in cognitive content between different co-extensional properties.

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properties, and $H$ is a second-order one). Then by first-order abstraction, we get the property $[Fx \wedge H(G)](x)$ and, by second-order abstraction, we get the property $[Fx \wedge H(Z)](x, Z)$ (where $Z$ is a second-order variable), which applies to ordered pairs composed of objects and first-order properties.

In Frege's conception, although sense and reference are two distinct semantic and ontological levels, something that is a sense in transparent contexts can become the indirect reference in special (i.e., in oblique) contexts. But something that is originally a reference in transparent contexts can never be a sense. Chateaubriand's conception is in a way more liberal since an identifying property is, in a transparent context, both a reference and a sense. But here the compositionality principles that Frege kept apart for senses (i.e., senses only combine with other senses, and the sense of a complex expression is a function only of the senses of its parts) and for references (references only combine with other references, and the reference of a complex expression is a function only of the reference of its parts) seem to get a little mixed up. If we combine, in a transparent context, a second-order identifying property with a first-order identifying property, are we combining senses or references? And if we combine a second-order non-identifying property with a first-order identifying property are we combining something that is not (and cannot be) a sense with something that is a sense? Does Chateaubriand's liberality lead to ontological promiscuity?

Senses play a derivative (but equally important) role in Frege's theory: they are the indirect reference in oblique contexts. For example, consider the expression 'Aristotle' in the following context:

(A) John believes that Aristotle was Greek

We do not have substitution *salva veritate* for all terms co-referential with 'Aristotle' in this context, and this is the reason why this kind of context is called oblique (as opposed to transparent, in which we always have substitution *salva veritate* for co-referential terms). But, as Frege notices, we can have substitution *salva veritate* for terms that have the same sense as 'Aristotle', since it is the indirect

reference of the term. Chateaubriand does not clearly tell us what the sense and reference of expressions in oblique contexts is. This is understandable, since his interest is primarily ontological and not semantical. But we can speculate about how to apply his theory of senses to this problem. Since there are higher-order senses in Chateaubriand's view (i.e., identifying second-order properties of identifying first-order properties), we can infer that, following Frege, he would consider these second-order senses as the indirect sense of an embedded expression. And, for a doubly embedded expression, the third-order identifying property of the second-order identifying property, and so on. (I am not sure that he would endorse this, but it seems to be compatible with other things that he says.) For example, let [!$xAx$]($x$) be the identifying property corresponding to 'Aristotle', and [!$ZTZ$]($Z$) an identifying second-order property of [!$xAx$]($x$). In Chateaubriand's version, we can substitute *salva veritate* 'Aristotle' by any terms that express the same identifying property in A. I.e., we can substitute *salva veritate* in A any term expressing a second-order identifying property of [!$xAx$]($x$), and having this property as reference. I am not sure whether this theory is clearly coherent or intuitively sound, but it is certainly no more obscure than Frege's hierarchy of indirect senses.

On Frege's view, although senses are objective and language-independent, they are seen as playing primarily an epistemic role[3], as a form of presentation of its reference (if there is one; a sense might be a form of presentation of nothing at all, as the sense of 'prime number between 8 and 10'). Things are different with Chateaubriand's senses. Senses are seen as properties that are identifying in virtue of its own form: the property is such that at most one object can instantiate it. It strikes me as counter-intuitive that we identify objects through identifying properties in Chateaubriand's sense. If I

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[3] Chateaubriand challenges this interpretation, as I will discus below.

see my little daughter Daniela at a distance, I might identify her as my daughter, or as a 2 years old girl, or as having brown hair, or as having a playful expression, etc., or perhaps as a conjunction of all these properties (of which, maybe, she is the only instance). But it seems strange to think that I identify her by means of a property that contains in its own form the condition of its uniqueness. I identify her through the property of being my daughter, and I presume that she is the only one satisfying this property, but this is something additional, besides the property of being my daughter. It seems odd to think that uniqueness is part of the property under which I identify her. Frege's perspective seems more natural, i.e., it is more intuitive to think of identifying properties not as something that contain the uniqueness condition in its own structure, but rather that presupposes it (or leaves it to the world). He offers the seed of an argument for this view in "*Über Sinn und Bedeutung*". Actually the argument is against the existence condition being part of the sense of a proper name or description, but it can easily be extended to the uniqueness condition. It arises in connection with the discussion of the famous example 'The one who discovered the elliptical form of the planetary orbits died in misery':

> Now languages have the fault of containing expressions which fail to designate an object (although their grammatical form seems to qualify them for that purpose) because the truth of some sentence is a prerequisite. Thus it depends on the truth of the sentence

> 'There was someone who discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits' whether the subordinate clause 'the one who discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits' really designate an object, or only seems to do so while in fact is *bedeutungsloss*. And thus it may appear as if our subordinate clause contained as part of its sense the thought that there was somebody who discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits. If this were right, the negation would run:

> 'Either the one who discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits did not die in misery or there was nobody who discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits'. (Frege 1892, p. 40)[4]

Chateaubriand's idea that the uniqueness condition is part of the property itself is, as it seems, inspired by Russell's theory of definite description. According to this theory, when I say 'Daniela is Mexican', what I actually expressed is that *the G* is Mexican (where *the G* is the description under which I apprehend her). But in Russell's theory, not only uniqueness but also existence is part of what is said, so that the whole thing becomes

$$\exists x(Gx \wedge \forall y(Gy \rightarrow y=x) \wedge x \text{ is Mexican})$$

If this is so, i.e., if his inspiration is indeed Russell's theory of description, then one might wonder why existence (but not uniqueness) gets out of the picture. This is certainly required for a theory of sense, since there are senses that have no reference, but he should present an independent reason for that.

Chateaubriand's notion of thoughts seems to have an odd consequence for the intuitive notion of judgment. Judgments are normally seen as an epistemic attitude towards a predication or, in Frege's theory, towards a thought which is a complete entity. For example, if I judge that Plato taught Aristotle is true, I have an attitude towards the thought that Plato taught Aristotle, which is something that I can grasp without any further element. (Of course

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[4] I quote here from Beaney's translation, with a small change. Beaney translates "der die elliptische Gestalt der Planetenbahnen entdeckte" as "whoever discovered the elliptical form of the planetary orbit". I changed that to "the one who discovered..." since it is clear from the context that Frege wants a definite description as the grammatical subject of the subordinate clause.)

an entirely different matter is my justification for this judgment, since here I would have to recur to something else besides the thought alone.) In Chateaubriand's view, however, things are not so simple. For the thought that Plato taught Aristotle is the complex ternary relation

$$[!ZTZ \wedge !xPx \wedge !yAy \wedge Zxy] (Z, x, y)$$

Now here is the oddity: thoughts are normally taken to be objects of judgment, but Chateaubriand's thoughts cannot be objects of judgments, since there is no judgment regarding a ternary relation *simpliciter*, just as there is no such thing as judging whether *red simpliciter*, but only whether *John is red*. There could be no such thing as judging that Plato taught Aristotle for, if it is analyzed in Chateaubriand's way, it is the ternary relation $Tpa(Z, x, y)$, and there can be no such thing as judging whether $Tpa(Z, x, y)$ *simpliciter*. According to his analysis, this judgment seems to require a third element, namely, the world: to judge that Plato taught Aristotle is to judge that the relation above (composed of the three properties) is instantiated by "an aspect of the world", as Chateaubriand puts it. (I take him to mean that the world as such instantiates the property in question, although this is not crucial for my remarks here.)

Not only this notion of judgment seems odd (since, intuitively, we do judge that Plato taught Aristotle *simpliciter*), but it also seems to lead to a sort of infinite regress. For in order to judge that Plato taught Aristotle, I cannot judge it as such (since it is only a relation), but I have to judge whether the world (or an aspect of it) instantiates this relation. But that this relation applies to the world is itself a predication, with the world (or an ordered n-tuple of entities of the world) as an element. It seems that in order to make such a judgment I would need, according to Chateaubriand's analysis, two senses, one (third-order) property that identifies $Tpa(Z, x, y)$, and

another (first-order) that identifies the world (or the n-tuple), and the whole thing becomes another relation, so that in order to make a judgment I would have to say that this new relation is instantiated by the world (conceived in a broader way so that it includes $Tpa(Z, x, y)$ and an ordered triple this time). And so on.

Chateaubriand mentions the possibility of a sense being a property that presents another property defining a natural kind as, e.g. (in Chateaubriand's notation)

[Z is the property common to the things in this sample] (Z)

taken with respect to a sample of gold. Now there is an important detail here because of the occurrence of an indexical ('this') in the expression within square brackets: the same expression placed in different contexts will designate different properties. E.g., this expression in the presence of pieces of gold indicates one property (i.e., being gold), while the very same expression in the presence of pieces of iron indicate a quite different property, namely, being iron. The same sense cannot have two distinct references, and hence we have to admit that the sense corresponding to the expression changes according to the context. But if this is so, i.e., if there is an irreducibly indexical element in the expression of the sense, it is hard to reconcile this with any notion of sense properly speaking (at least with any notion that is semantically interesting). For one of the corollaries of the contemporary theory of indexicals developed, among others, by Kaplan is that an indexical expression is directly referential, i.e., it does not have anything resembling a Fregean sense (or, if it has anything like it, it is completely irrelevant for its semantics).[5] In other words, if the expression within square brackets above contains an indexical, it is directly referential, and either

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[5] See Kaplan (1989, section IX).

expresses no sense at all or, if it does express anything like a sense, this is completely irrelevant for the reference.[6]

Both in chapter 11 (2001) and in chapter 13 (2005) Chateaubriand argues that his view on senses of proper names is, to some extent, compatible with Kripke's view on proper names. He says that Kripke's account of proper names not only is compatible with a notion of sense, but also "his [i.e., Kripke's] picture involves the notion of sense and [...] it provides the basis for an account of senses expressed by proper names" (2001, 384). In the following passage he explains how a name acquires sense, and how this sense is transmitted:

> In a ceremonial baptism, the manner of presentation may be something like the property 'is the baby in front of me now' or 'is the boat to which I am pointing' [...] Not that these words have to be spoken, but the very baptismal situation involves a manner of presentation that can be characterized as such a property; i.e., as a sense. In a reference fixing *via* a description, the sense is the descriptive property [...] When you fixed the reference of 'Freddie', you fixed the sense expressed by the name 'Freddie'. Similarly, when I fixed the reference of 'Bloody', I fixed the sense expressed by the name 'Bloody'. When the name gets transmitted, it gets transmitted with the sense it expresses, though the person acquiring the name may not know which sense this is. The transmission of the reference depends on this. I.e., if the name expressed by the name identifies an object, then, by transmitting the name with the sense it expresses, the reference gets transmitted as well. (2001, p. 384)

On Kripke's view, once a description is used for fixing the reference of a name, it drops out of the picture, i.e., it plays no relevant semantic role anymore since the name becomes a rigid designator. What is preserved from link to link in the communicative-historic chain is only the reference, but there is no sense accompanying the

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[6] I think this is, in essence, Putnam's conclusion for descriptions designating natural kinds (Putnam 1973).

name. The passage above shows that Chateaubriand thinks differently. For him, the original sense (i.e., the identifying property) accompanies the name, although the speakers may have no idea regarding this sense (e.g., hardly anyone knows the precise original description involved in the baptism of 'Aristotle'). But if this is so, once more we seem to be led to the conclusion that Chateaubriand's sense of a proper name might not play a relevant semantic role, since names continue to perform their referential task despite the fact that the original sense is almost universally ignored by speakers, and is not required for the performance task.

But besides this point, Chateaubriand's notion of sense of a proper name seems to be incompatible with Kripke's broader views on proper names. For Kripke, a proper name is a rigid designator, i.e., it designates the same individual in all possible worlds. He has a modal argument for this view: suppose that 'Freddie' has a descriptive content that applies to its bearer in this world (i.e., the person named 'Freddie'). Now we can imagine other possible worlds in which the descriptive content does not apply to Freddie (assuming that this descriptive content does not involve essential properties of him) and, nevertheless, in this possible world we continue to refer to him as 'Freddie'. This shows, according to Kripke, the semantic irrelevance of the descriptive content, since the name is directly referential. Now it seems to me that Chateaubriand's identifying properties would be vulnerable to the same argument: being the so-and-so might identify Freddie in this world, but not in other worlds, and nevertheless we continue to refer to him as 'Freddie'. Hence, if Kripke is right, the identifying property is not what gives a name its reference.

As I said, Chateaubriand gives no priority to the epistemic function of senses. Moreover, he claims that Frege himself gives no such priority, so that Frege's notion of senses is also, according to

Chateaubriand, primarily ontological rather than epistemic.[7] I do not find this plausible as an interpretation of Frege. If senses were only objective properties of things, there would be no need for Frege to introduce (or, better, to recognize) them as a special kind of entities, for his theory of functions and concepts would already contain everything that can be said about senses. The fact that Frege recognizes them as a separate kind of entities (and that he is drawn to this recognition by worries such as the cognitive content of identity-statements and the problem of substitutivity within epistemic-contexts) strongly suggests that their primary role is epistemic. Chateaubriand emphasizes the primary ontological nature of senses, but recognizes a derivative epistemic role by saying "To deny [...] that the notion of sense itself is primary epistemological is not to deny the epistemological importance of [...] the notion of sense" (2001, p. 392). But I think that the correct reading of Frege's notion of sense is the opposite one, i.e., it is meant primarily as an answer to epistemic worries, but this is not to deny their ontological nature, objectivity, language-independence, etc.

Perhaps the broader moral to be drawn from the above considerations is that Chateaubriand's notion of sense is less appealing than Frege's if senses are supposed to play explanatory role in epistemology. If we agree that Frege's notion of senses gives a better account of epistemic issues, should we conclude that this is a drawback for Chateaubriand's notion? Not necessarily. Maybe one could have the same sort of attitude that Wettstein (1986) has in view of the difficulties for the theory of direct reference in accounting for epistemic issues: he says that semantics as such should not worry about epistemic issues, and be restricted to a theory of meaning. Maybe something similar could be said regarding

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[7] This goes against most interpreters of Frege, most notably Burge (1979).

Chateaubriand's conception of sense, since it is basically ontological, and ontology as such does not have to worry primarily about epistemic matters, but with the structure of the world. I myself have no strong sympathy for this separation of fields. I think that ontological, epistemic and semantical issues come altogether, and the more a theory can account for problems of different fields, the better. As I said elsewhere (2007), it seems to be a sort of imperative in science (broadly conceived) that a theory that has explanatory power in more than one field should be preferred to a theory that is restricted to only one field.

It is clear that there are identifying properties as Chateaubriand characterizes it, and that they have many interesting properties. But if they do not play any crucial epistemic role, if they are not cognitive contents, if they do not play any special semantical role, if they are not the subject of judgments, then one might wonder why call them "senses" after all.

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