BURGE AND THE HIERARCHY

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A sentential expression like "Opus 132 is a masterpiece" as it occurs in

(1) Opus 132 is a masterpiece,

according to the Fregean tradition, denotes a truth value and expresses (has as its sense) a proposition, in this case the proposition that Opus 132 is a masterpiece. When the same expression occurs in the more complex construction:

(2) Bela believes that Opus 132 is a masterpiece

it denotes what in (1) it expresses. But what does it denote in the yet more complex:

(3) Igor believes that Bela believes that Opus 132 is a masterpiece?

An attractively simple answer to this question, one favored by several writers, is that it denotes exactly what it denotes in (2)—the proposition that Opus 132 is a masterpiece; but others have seen the need for a third entity, a denotation for "Opus 132 is a masterpiece" in (3) that is distinct both from its denotation in (1) and in (2).

Lately[1] Tyler Burge has produced an argument in support of the latter position, in support more generally of the

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[1] Tyler Burge, "Frege and the Hierarchy," *Synthese* 40 (1979), pp. 265-281. All references are to this article.

view that embeddings of sentential expressions in progressively more complex constructions requires a hierarchy of Fregean senses. This short paper is devoted to a consideration of that argument.

Everyone agrees on this much: that the occurrence of "Opus 132 is a masterpiece" in

(4) Igor believes of the proposition that Opus 132 is a masterpiece that Bela believes it

denotes just what it denotes in (2). So, if (4) is the (sole) reading of (3), then presumably (3) does not require a third entity and we don't get a hierarchy. Burge acknowledges that (4) is a reading of (3), but he avers that it is not "the relevant interpretation," i.e., the reading that forces the hierarchy.

What then is the relevant interpretation? Undoubtedly this:

(5) Igor believes (the proposition) that Bela believes (the proposition) that Opus 132 is a masterpiece.

But why shouldn't (4), which is acknowledged to be a reading of (3), also be a reading of (5)—in which case we'd still have but one (distinct) reading of (3)? Here is Burge's argument designed to demonstrate that two (distinct) readings are required:

... [(4)] is not the relevant interpretation of [(3)]. We may substitute coextensive phrases for 'the proposition that Opus 132 is a masterpiece' in [(4)] and preserve truth value. But on one reading of [(3)], analogous substitutions fail.[2]

So the argument seems to be: (3) has two readings given by (4) and (5) and these two readings are distinct because substitution is permissible on "the proposition that Opus 132

2 Burge, p. 274.

is a masterpiece" in (4), but not in (5). Is this a sound argument? We believe not.[3]
Consider:

(6) 9 is necessarily greater than 7,

and

(7) That 9 is greater than 7 is necessary.

Substitution of coextensive phrases for "9" is permissible in (6), impermissible in (7). Yet (6) and (7), we think, say the same thing; certainly they are L–equivalent. Returning to Burge's examples, it is true that the conjunction of (4) and

(8) The proposition that Opus 132 is a masterpiece = Zolton's favorite proposition

yields

(9) Igor believes of Zolton's favorite proposition that Bela believes it;

whereas (5) and (8) do not yield

(10) Igor believes (the proposition) that Bela believes Zolton's favorite proposition;

that is, (4) and (8) entail one proposition and (5) and (8) fail to entail a second. But that truth, whatever interest it might have, has no bearing on the logical realtions that obtain between (4) and (5).

Thus, so far as we can determine, (4) is the reading of (3). If this is correct and (4) does not give rise to a hierarchy, neither does (3).

[3] We have been forced to simplify considerably on Burge's rich exposition. Burge's paper is at odds with Terence Parsons' "Frege's Hierarchies of Indirect Senses and the Paradox of Analysis" in Midwest Studies in Philosophy, vol. VI. The Foundation of Analytic Philosophy. P. French, T. Uchling and A. Wettstein, eds., University of Minnesota Press, pp. 37-57. But these two seem to be among the best works on the subject.