People who speak of iconic signs are also usually willing to speak of signs in terms of denotation, signification and connotation. Thus, if iconic signs are to be a distinct kind of sign, their difference should be statable in terms of the traditional vocabulary of denotation, signification and connotation. Further, iconic signs are usually contrasted with conventional signs. Consequently, we should expect that they are different from conventional signs either in respect to their denotation, or signification, or connotation, or in respect to a combination of them.

Denotation:

Some conventional signs may be said to denote nothing, for example, "unicorn;" others may be said to denote one and only one thing, in which case we call it a proper name, for example. "United States of America;" while still others may be said to denote more than one thing, in which case, if the several things denoted are similar, we call it a general name, for example, "lamb."

Signification:

Conventional signs may be said to require signification. They signify those characteristics which any object must possess if the sign is to be correctly applied to the object. Correctness of application, then, is dependent upon a term's signification.

If there is no object possessing all the signified characteristics, the sign denotes nothing, for example, "unicorn." If there is one and only one object possessing all the signified characteristics, the sign denotes one and only one thing, for example, "United States of America." If there is more than one object possessing all the signified characteristics, the sign is a general name, for example, "lamb."

Connotation:

Conventional signs may be said to have a connotation; this connotation is expressed by a definition, and this definition may be composed of a sign or signs each of which names a signified characteristic. The connotation of a conventional sign consists of the conjunction of names of the sign's signified characteristics. (The nature of primitive names is not in question here).

Connotational phrases, that is, definitions, are important and useful because they enable us to inform some one how to correctly apply a conventional sign, which otherwise gives us no clue to its correct appli-

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cation. Charles Morris in *The Foundations of the Theory of Signs* puts it this way:

> "A sign has a semantical dimension in so far as there are semantical rules. . . . which determine its applicability to certain situations under certain conditions" (p. 24).

A conventional sign's semantical rule is its connotational phrase.

Here, with regard to connotation, we find a difference between conventional and iconic signs. Charles Morris indicates the difference as follows, and I quote from the same source:

> "The semantical rule for the use of icons is that they denote those objects which have the characteristics which they themselves have - or more usually a certain specified set of their characteristics" (p. 24).

Iconic signs differ from conventional signs because iconic signs dispence with connotation. Iconic signs dispence with definitions; they dispense with connotational phrases. They have no connotations because they have no need of it; their own nature exhibits their signification. Conventional signs have need of connotational phrases because their own physical nature gives no clue to their signification or their denotation.

We have located a difference between iconic and conventional signs with semantic dimension. This difference is an important one. Given signs with semantic dimension, we have to insure ways of applying them; if we find two ways of learning to correctly apply signs with a semantic dimension, we have found two kinds of signs.

Having located the difference between conventional and iconic signs in connotation, we yet can see that neither denotation nor signification has been given up. We have seen that the signification and denotation of the two kinds of signs are simply known in different ways. In the case of iconic signs, we literally see their signification; and we know their denotation in virtue of their resemblance, in whole or in part, to that which they denote. Neither the signification nor the denotation of a conventional sign is known in this way.

Does the fact that iconic signs can dispense with connotation mean they are not signs?

Probably anyone who thought they were signs, even though lacking connotation, would do so because they still have denotation and signification. There are no other reasons in the traditional armory which would support their being signs. It is clear from the quotations that Charles Morris considers their having denotation and signification sufficient reasons for their being considered signs. Of course he holds, as do most people, a more modest view about the proportion of signs which are iconic than Cratylus did, for Morris believes only some signs are iconic, while Cratylus believed that all signs are iconic, or, in Jowett's translation, that all names are natural names.

I maintain an extreme view on Morris's other flank. I maintain that there are no iconic signs at all. There are no signs whose denotation and signification depend solely on their resemblance to that which they denote.

My claim that there are no iconic signs is to be distinguished from the truism that there sometimes is a resemblance between signs and that which they denote. One could maintain that there is a resemblance without making the further claim that the resemblance is the basis for one of the resembling terms being a sign.

I proceed now to my arguments against the view that there are any iconic signs in the sense indicated.

1. *The Metaphysical Argument.* In so far as there are universal meta-physical categories, we should have to say that there are some characteristics shared by everything in the universe. That being so, and it also being the case that a thing is an iconic sign in virtue of its denoting those objects which have the same characteristics which it exhibits, we should have to conclude (a) that anything in the universe iconically denotes everything in the universe, and (b) that anything in the universe is iconically denoted by any other thing in the universe.

This hardly seems suitable unless we are prepared to call everything a sign and unless we are prepared to acknowledge that everything has the same denotation. (And they do have the same denotation, for everything resembles itself, and so includes itself as well as everything else in its denotation).

We can avoid this consequence of ubiquitous denotation only by limiting an iconic sign's signification to those characteristics which are not universal. But in doing this, we already have determined an iconic sign's signification and denotation by some other means than its resemblance to other things. We have done so by introducing what we may call a negative connotation, that is, by introducing a phrase containing the names of the universal characteristics which are *not* to be included in the sign's signification. This, however, is introducing connotation, something with which iconic signs were supposed to have dispensed.

The Metaphysical Argument has the additional consequence that no iconic sign could share the denotative freedom of conventional signs. Some conventional signs denote nothing; others denote one and only one thing; while still others denote several but not all things. An iconic sign could have none of these features unless negative connotation eliminating universal characteristics were introduced. Now if iconic signs could have none of these features on the basis of resemblance alone, then it is hard to see how iconic signs could be considered signs in the usual sense at all. But if these features are thought essential to signs, it is important to note that they can only be obtained for iconic signs after introducing negative

connotation eliminating universal characteristics from their signification.

2. *The Null Denotation Argument.* Some conventional signs denote nothing because nothing in the universe possesses the signs' signification. Is it possible for iconic signs to have null denotation?

An iconic sign denotes all objects possessing resembling characteristics; that is, given any two things between which the resemblance relation holds, at least one of the terms of that relation will be an iconic sign. The resemblance relation is reflexive; therefore, an iconic sign denotes itself. Hence, it is impossible for an iconic sign to have null denotation.

We excluded universal characteristics from an iconic sign's signification to make it possible for an iconic sign to share the denotative features of conventional signs. To that end we introduced a negative connotation. Now, however, we see that despite our liberty, it cannot share the property of having null denotation.

3. *The Uniqueness Argument.* Suppose we lend ourselves another liberty: That we are not to include an iconic sign in its own denotation. Is it possible for an iconic sign to have null denotation given that it cannot denote itself?

If an iconic sign is to have null denotation, it must not resemble anything else in the universe, that is, it must be unique. But since, according to Morris, the semantical rule which makes an object an iconic sign in the first place is a feature in which it resembles some other object, the uniqueness which would permit it to have null denotation is the very thing which prevents it from being a sign at all. Thus, it is impossible for an iconic sign both to have null denotation and be a sign.

4. *The Diversity Argument.* If every distinct object in the universe were unique in all respects, we could conclude, by the previous argument, that no object could be an iconic sign.

However, this argument seems to pose no threat to the possibility of their being iconic signs, since the diversity of objects seems possible without recourse to such a stringent principle as the complete uniqueness of objects. The diversity of objects seems possible even if each shares some characteristics with other objects. If at least one object shares one characteristic with another object, the resemblance requisite to making an object eligible for iconic signhood obtains.

It is instructive, however, to notice that we have paid a price. We have had to dichotomize the object's characteristics into those in virtue of which it is a sign and those in virtue of which it is not a sign. This dichotomization leads to the following result: The same thing both is and is not a sign. It is a sign because it resembles something in some respect; and it is not a sign because it does not resemble something in another respect.

To avoid this contradictory result, we shall have to be told that only

those characteristics in virtue of which an object resembles are decisive in determining its status as a sign.

5. *The Residue Argument*. Consider the residue of characteristics remaining to an object after we have eliminated its universal and unique characteristics. And while considering this residue do not forget that the elimination constitutes negative connotation. It involves specifying that certain charactistics are not relevant to determining a sign's signification or denotation.

It is logically possible, and empirically probable, that on the basis of some of the residue characteristics an object will resemble one class of objects, while on the basis of other residue characteristics an object will resemble a different class of objects. Consequently, on the basis of re-semblance alone all iconic signs are ambiguous.

Ambiguity of iconic signs can be eliminated if and only if we specify which characteristics constitute the sign's signification. Indeed, we are given the authority to do so by Morris, for recall his phrase when he spoke of an icon's semantic rule: "- or more usually a certain specified set of their characteristics." (In fact, I have never seen an example of an iconic sign where the person did not make a selection from the residue). But to specify such a set of characteristics is to state the connotation of the sign. If that is done, the distinction between conventional and iconic signs collapses. The distinction between the two kinds of signs has proved chimerical. The fact that an icon resembles objects turns out to be inter-esting but does not convert an icon into a sign. The fact that an icon resembles some other object is not sufficient to determine its signification, nor, consequently, its denotation.

6. *The Symmetricality Argument*. If an object's resemblance to another object is sufficient for its being an iconic sign, we have no way of deciding which of the two objects is the icon, for resemblance is a symmetrical relation.

Surely people who maintain that there are iconic signs had it in mind that they denoted something other than signs.

This argument can be eluded if we make a distinction between a sign's thatness and whatness. *That* an object is a sign can be known apart from knowing *what* a sign denotes. That something is a sign is a matter of decision and can be made independently of what a sign denotes. Thus, of two resembling objects we supposedly can decide that this object and not the other is to be the sign.

But this way out simply carries us back to considerations germane to conventional signs. In deciding that object A and not object B is the sign, we have decided on a denotation. We have decided that B shall be the denotation; the opposite decision would have given us A as the

denotation. In either case the denotation is dependent upon a decision, not resemblance.

Further, we had better decide that only one of the objects is a sign, for it is a feature of signs with the same signification that they have the same denotation. Given that an iconic sign is not included in its own denotation, if we allow both resembling objects to be signs, they would have the same signification but different denotation.

In the *Cratylus* Socrates maintained that the following two propositions were true of anything that we would call a sign. (1) A sign may be applied correctly or incorrectly. (2) Whether a sign is correctly or incorrectly applied, it maintains its meaning unchanged. He further argued that these two propositions are incompatible with this proposition: (3) The meaning of an iconic sign is determined by what it resembles.

I proceed now to develop the Socratic arguments.

7. *The Correct Application Argument*. The criterion for the correct or incorrect application of a sign is the sign's signification. How are we to know which characteristics of an iconic sign constitute its signification? This way. Given that an icon denotes an objects in virtue of its resemblance to that object, its signification consists of those characteristics which the icon and object share.

Apart from universal characteristics, it is logically possible for an icon to resemble nothing in the universe. If it resembles nothing, then it has no signification; and if it has no signification, then we have no criterion for deciding on the correctness or incorrectness of its application. Consequently, we are unable to say that an icon with null denotation is incorrectly applied. However, we certainly require that all applications of a sign with null denotation be incorrect. Hence, it is not true of all iconic signs that they may be applied correctly or incorrectly.

If someone were to reply that because the iconic sign has characteristics, it has signification, he would have specified that the characteristics constituted the signification by some other means than resemblance. But if it is done by some other means, then he will have abandoned the basis on which Charles Morris says we rely to decide that an object is an iconic sign.

8. *The Unchanged Meaning Argument*. Socrates thought that whether or not a sign is correctly applied, it maintains its meaning unchanged. This can be restated in the form of a dilemma: If a sign is correctly applied, then it does not change its meaning ,and if a sign is incorrectly applied, then it does not change its meaning.

If we suppose, contrary to the previous argument, that all iconic signs are applied either correctly or incorrectly, we may conclude by a constructive dilemma argument that either a sign does not change its meaning

or it does not change its meaning. We conclude, in short, that a sign does not change its meaning.

Should we be able to show that an icon does change its meaning, even though being correctly applied, then we can conclude that it lacks one of the features which a sign must have to be a sign. This can be done.

Suppose that an iconic sign resembles only X because they alone share characteristics C_1 and C_2. X will be the sign's denotation and C_1 and C_2 will constitute its signification. Suppose everything in the world undergoes change except our iconic sign. We look about and notice that it now resembles Y because it shares characteristics C_3 and C_4 with it. Y will be its denotation now and characteristics C_3 and C_4 constitute its signification.

Since iconic signs supposedly have no connotation, the only sense in which they can be said to have a meaning is in the denotative and significative sense. But in that case we have just shown that though our iconic sign is applied correctly, it will have changed its meaning. Fickle world, fickle signs. No iconic signs at all.

Showing that there are no iconic signs is important for three reasons. (1) It gives us a greater appreciation of the role of connotation; (2) we can appreciate the *Cratylus* of Plato all the better; and (3) it rids us of an unenlightening theory of art.

In the event that there are any among you who, though not yet ready with refutations of all the arguments, still cling to the belief that there are iconic signs because you cannot somehow believe that blueprints can be argued away. I have a parable ready.

Once upon a time there was a man who received in the mail an unsolicited box containing blueprints printed on heavy cardboard and an electric cord and plug. The blueprints showed the outlines of cogged wheels, all of different sizes, fitted into one another. This must be the blueprint of a machine, thought he, whereupon he went out and purchased steel, cogged wheels whose sizes were proportionately the same as the blueprint outlines. By putting the wheels in the same relative positions he constructed a metal machine, connected the cord and plugged it in an outlet. In proceeding to use the machine, he was electrocuted.

Two days following the funeral, his widow received a special delivery letter. It read: "WARNING! Do not use the blueprints to construct a metal machine .If you use metal wheels, you will be electrocuted. You are to cut the wheels out of the blueprint cardboard itself. Use the paper machine with safety and pleasure. Significantly yours, The Maker."

Parenthetically, this shows that sometimes it is a life and death matter to realize that there are no iconic signs in the sense that . . . .

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