

## From DEF

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**ABSTRACT:** *DEF* starts from the seed of a sentence by Gottlob Frege: “On the introduction of a name for something simple, a definition is not possible; there is nothing for it but to lead the reader or hearer, by means of hints, to understand the words as is intended.”<sup>1</sup> I replaced each word in Frege’s sentence with its dictionary definition. I then replaced each of the words in that new sentence with *its* dictionary definition, and so on. This procedure is an extended example of a proposal that Raymond Queneau called “definitional literature.”<sup>2</sup> With a precedent in Stefan Themerson’s “semantic literature,” the form has previously been most fully exploited by Georges Perec and Marcel Bénabou.<sup>3</sup> The excerpt published here is drawn from the fifth iteration of the process, using the *Oxford English Dictionary*. That entire fifth sentence is over forty-four thousand words long and—theoretically, if parsed in apposition—grammatically correct.

SCILICET: THE TAKING OF COMMUNION of a molestation by the mutual relation of two bodies whose external surfaces touch each other, and  
● ● ● at frequent or short intervals, often, repeatedly as deriving or deducing from a specified source their full, interesting, and productive existence, that is: a worthwhile, meaningful, or fulfilling lifestyle, of an inflorescence in which the central axis grows indefinitely in length, producing a succession of lateral branches bearing flower-buds (or of sessile flower-buds) which open

<sup>1</sup> Gottlob Frege, “On Concept and Object,” *Mind* 60, no. 238 (April 1951): 169.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Queneau, “La littérature définitionnelle,” in *La littérature potentiell: Creations, re-crétions, recreations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 115–18.

<sup>3</sup> See Marcel Bénabou, ed., *Presbytère et prolétaires: Le dossier P.A.L.F.*, Cahiers Georges Perec 3 (Valence: Éditions du Limon, 1989).

successively from the lowest upwards (typically liberal in giving, that is: generous, namely: bountiful, munificent, in other words: open-handed, also, liberal in expenditure, prodigal, lavish or a good deal) sum total to which anything mounts up or reaches in quantity, number, or the sum of the principal and interest due upon a loan or the part or share of an estate given or passing by law to an heir or other beneficiary, or to be distributed to an heir in the settlement of the estate or the exact quantity or amount of money or group of several closely related and morphologically similar species formerly (and still occasionally for convenience) not distinguished from each other belonging to an action of collecting money for a religious or charitable purpose, or to defray expenses, especially at a religious service or public meeting of self-same fees payable to a chief who presides at a Thing or unites in one person or substance in any way compelling, cogent, convincing, *scilicet*: clear, obvious or not full-fledged, sprouted in the ear after reaching maturity, or grown from a germ or rudimentary condition of the characteristic tendency to change, specifically: fickleness, that is to say: change of purpose or plans of a cipher for secret correspondence and moderate and proportionable mixture of elements in a compound, that is: the condition in which elements are combined in their due proportions, particularly: the combination of supposed qualities (*hot or cold, moist or dry*) in a certain proportion, determining the nature of a plant or other body, namely: the combination of the four cardinal humours of the body, by the relative proportion of which the physical and mental constitution were held to be determined, the condition of the weather or climate as resulting from the different combinations of the qualities, heat or cold, dryness or humidity, that is: the adjustment of the intervals of the scale (in the tuning of instruments of fixed intonation, as keyboard instruments), so as to adapt them to the purposes of practical harmony: consisting in slight variations of the pitch of the notes from true or 'just' intonation in order to make them available in different keys, strictly speaking: a particular system of doing this (sometimes extended to any system of tuning, including that of just intonation), namely: a middle course or state between extremes of any kind that is or has been portrayed in an œuvre, or *videlicet*: that is: the marking out of the precise form of anything, specifically: the form, mould, or stamp thus impressed, in which the period of time mentioned in certain biblical passages, usually understood to be a year of an entry or passage, now, in Scotland, especially, one leading from the street to dwelling houses, out-houses, or stables, at the back, or to a common stair communicating with the different floors or 'flats' of the building, also variously extended to include the common stair, the open lane or alley, or the court, to which such an entry leads or an outlying part of a village or small country town, the end of an estate, or an outlying property, usually preceded by a descriptive name of a passage, generally made up of two or four phrases, forming a complete musical idea and regarded as a distinct unit, *id est*: a set of digits in a long number marked off by commas or spaces to assist comprehension, also: the set of repeating digits in a recurring decimal, indicated by dots placed over the first and last

digits of the set depends on that of the sumptuous, magnificent, munificent, stately, splendid, imposing, enclosed with clouds or darkness, the end, close, finish, termination, 'wind up' (e.g. of a speech or writing) of the central or far from central sharp horny nail with which the feet of birds and some beasts are armed on the lowest part of the leg beyond the ankle-joint of an effort to force phlegm up the throat or ancient kind of light cannon or a man, woman, or child, or any of the characters in a play or story (in view of what has happened principally, mainly, for the most part as a colloquialism of a low or unrefined character characteristic of or proper to ordinary conversation, as distinguished from formal or elevated language, or as each of the days in the year fixed for payment of rent, wages, and other dues, at the beginning and end of tenancy of marriage to one of inferior rank, that is to say: the disgrace or dishonour involved in such a misalliance) or (one's own) person granting tenure of a feudal fee to another (the *vassal*) on condition of the annual payment of a certain sum or the performance of certain services in no small many medical advance warnings, fore-warnings, originally: actions of warning in advance, that is: advance notifications of subsequent events, now usually: strong feelings that something is about to happen, especially something unpleasant, expressly: presentiments or forebodings of sudden sticking, jamming, or locking fast, specifically: a becoming unworkable, as by reason of undue heat or friction of the nature of epilepsy that comprises not only parents and children but also consanguine and conjugal relatives living in proximity or brought out and rendered visible (the latent image produced by actinic action upon the sensitive surface) in an office or function of the conductor of an orchestra or choir running lengthwise in the sweet music or song (sometimes used with reference to the singing of birds), that is: the beauty of musical sounds, tunefulness, melodiousness, in later use often simply: music (frequently with overtones of a series of single notes arranged in a musically expressive or distinctive sequence, *scilicet*: a tune, to wit: the tune around which a polyphonic composition is constructed, or which constitutes the predominant part of a piece, to which other parts serve as accompaniment), fuss or outcry *about* something, particularly: the very small or trifling sum, amount, or value, or a thing of little worth or importance belonging to a "way in which a text reads", in other words: "the 'letter' of a text", by way of explanation: "the form in which a text is found in a particular copy, a lection," a vituperation, angry reproach, reproof, when the itinerancy, revolution, gist, group (of harpists), is going down *upon one's knees* in a portable case for holding arrows (and sometimes also a bow) or tremble or quaver in the voice in such a way as to make a fraudulent imitation of these or those organized (in later use usually covert) opposition to an invading, occupying, or ruling power, that is: that (organized body of) individuals engaged in such opposition, by way of explanation: *specifically* (usually with *the* and capital initial) (in the Second World War [1939–45]), the underground movement formed in France in June 1940 with the object of resisting the authority of the German occupying forces and the Vichy government in order to send (a message)

electronically, especially by telegraph, *id est*: to send (a person) an electronic message, especially a telegram conveying, while bearing up, the transmission of nerve-force along a nerve in a charged pan in which cane or maple juice is heated as part of the process in sugar manufacture, or *scilicet*: (also said in the context of) the units of pressure equivalent to one dyne per square centimetre or the district under the jurisdiction of a collector of customs, taxes, etc., of wine-cups made of 'the unquenchable stone', specifically: a fabulous stone, the heat of which, when once kindled, was alleged to be unquenchable (a distorted reference to the phenomena observed in pouring cold water on quick lime), that is: an alleged kind of incombustible flax, by way of explanation: a mineral of fibrous texture, capable of being woven into an incombustible fabric, specifically: all fibrous varieties of Hornblende or Amphibole, and of Pyroxene, with *Amiantus* merely being specifically the finest Hornblende Asbestos, distinguished by its long silky fibres, usually pearly white, etc., in a very amusing, funny, that is: fun, exciting, that is to say: great, excellent steam made suddenly exciting, thrilling, or intense, as if caused by an electric charge or shock, *scilicet*: a mist rising from the ground with a steely, brilliant, or metallic colour or shade having comparatively more stocks or reserves of money, materials, people, or some other asset, which can be drawn on when necessary pertaining to the art of literary construction, and returning less frequently to an assembly point or resting place, that is to say: rarely retiring to one's friends or to a certain place, that is to say: trusting on abundance of some good constituent pertaining or relating to the words or vocabulary of a language, that is: connected with a lexicon (accepted or recognized as true or valid, that is: acknowledged as such by general assent or by admission of the speaker or writer as faithful, loyal, or trusty person, particularly: a 'true man', namely: a member of the Protestant or Whig party in the 17th century, technically perfect or efficacious, entitled to obedience or acceptance, come to agreement on a matter or point, deposited under an agreement by which the owners assent to some proposed change affecting their amount, nature, or status, or, that is: a man, woman or child who has become an object of knowledge to the civil force of a state responsible for maintaining public order and enforcing the law, including preventing and detecting crime, or *videlicet*: a personal appearance of questionable character, belonging to one who gives evidence in relation to matters of fact under inquiry, that is: *specifically* one who gives or is legally qualified to give evidence upon oath or affirmation in a court of justice or judicial inquiry or a living creature killed and offered as a sacrifice to some deity of sinfulness or supernatural power of wrongdoing: extracted with a pick or by picking [in various senses], *viz.*: dug out, pecked out or acknowledged, accepted, namely: known, identified [an apprehensive expectation], especially from an assembling of a number of persons in a line, e.g. for inspection or identification, by way of explanation: an instance of bringing into a line, that is: a list of players in a game, orchestra, etc., or from a assemblage of [two or more] figures or objects forming in combination either a complete design, or a distinct portion of a design of pictures made

using a camera in which an image is focused on to sensitive material and then made visible and permanent by chemical treatment by the books of the New Testament which immediately follow the Gospels and relate the history of the early Christian Church having no person, thing, or space intervening, in place, order, or succession standing or coming nearest or next or papers containing an account of observations, the results of research or intellectual speculation, or the like, as presented to a learned society, submitted for publication in an academic journal, etc., of the aspects pertaining or relating to, concerned or connected with sight or vision of a system for reproducing an actual or recorded scene at a distance on a screen by radio transmission, usually with appropriate sounds widely scattered, artificial imitations or representations of persons or the busts of persons in solid form, that is: statues, effigies, sculptured figures, often: figures of saints or divinities as an object of religious veneration obtaining to vision via distant objects by collective action or arrangement, or, expressly: the conveyance or passage through a medium, as of light, heat, sound, etc., or the returning of documents or other physical evidence to the custody of the court of such things as reflect, such as mirrors, or, namely: also the badge, emblem, symbol responding or 'answering concordingly' to them, of or belonging to the labour, toil and wasteful expenditure, extravagance in reality devolved or accrued throughout the whole continuance of unnecessarily elaborate performance, in plain English: a fuss, commotion, drama as differentiated from [one's] regular occupation or employment that serves to help, assist, or supplement, especially: providing assistance or supplementary supplies and [material] loads, burdens, weights placed or situated overhead, or at a distance above the ground, that is to the best or highest quality, first class, excellent number of Pigs, each containing six Stone wanting two Pound or the fourth parts of the bende existing at the outset, or, to wit: also, decoratively affixed or attached to a group of moles in [another's] employ for 'the method of ascertaining a ship's course by trigonometrical diagrams') of what a batsman, an oarsman, etc., has to do, especially with reference to the points at which his force is to be applied with undeviating course (in the absence of the interference of a state or government in the domestic affairs or foreign relations of another country belonging to one who contracts or undertakes to supply certain articles, or to perform any work or service [*especially* for government or other public body], at a certain price or rate or one who is prepared to undertake work by contract) by unhindered literates characterized by refined grace of form (usually as the result of art or culture) no longer in servitude or subjection to a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable, the use of symbols in a story, picture, etc., to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one, that is: a story, picture, etc., which uses symbols to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one, especially: a symbolic representation, expressly: an extended or continued metaphor no longer in servitude or subjection to the character or practice of

acting in two ways at different times, or openly and secretly, specifically: deceitfulness, double-dealing or the intentional suppression of truth or fact known, to the injury or prejudice of another, or, namely: belonging to the Germanic nation, or coalition of nations, that conquered Gaul in the 6th century, and from whom the country received the name of France, comely, 'fair', strictly speaking: neat, tidy, prominent, striking, pronounced, contributing each of the ranks or levels in a (non-mathematical) hierarchy in which every member except those in the lowest rank is a function of members of the next lower rank kept or regarded as inviolate from ordinary use, and appropriated or set apart for religious use or observance on the fixed, firmly embraced or implanted dowries or restraints in conduct, that is: modesties, discretions, specifically: prudences, 'methodical arrangements, dispositions', a lengthier work occupying a person for or at a particular time's propagations of perennial plants by splitting clumps into parts capable of rooting themselves into the more rudely, angrily, or sternly brief or curt uropygial gland of a bird, which secretes the oil used for preening, setting, placing (*in* a specified state, situation, condition, etc.) 'the space of a specified period of time' or the measured flow of words or phrases in verse, forming various patterns of sound as determined by the relation of long and short or stressed and unstressed syllables in a metrical foot or line, that is: an instance of this, or the secret, private numbers marked upon dice, *id est*: throws in which the dice turn up two sixes of a shaking or movement of the ground, *especially* a violent convulsion of the earth's surface, frequently causing great destruction, and resulting from movements within the earth's crust or from volcanic action or the action of 'going off' with a loud noise under the influence of suddenly developed internal energy, also used of electric discharges, or of a boiler, bomb, gun, etc.: the action of suddenly bursting or flying in pieces from a similar cause into hiding or surreptitious activity, which continue to operate in secret (and often subversively) after becoming officially unacceptable (as clearly perceived or perceptible from the extreme force, strength, depth, brightness, etc., of its energy expended in such action [now called *work*] at any one partial small residential square or a side street [especially a cul-de-sac] lined with houses, in plain English: a short row of houses which originally stood by themselves or on a suburban road, by way of explanation: any group of houses not properly classifiable as a street), most often extracted or forced out by mechanical pressure by a precise sum or aggregate of a collection of individual things or persons, that is: a discharge or performance *of* (something) pertaining to the logarithmic curve of the highest, greatest resultant, consequent bending of rays of light from the straight line, by Hooke applied specifically to the apparent bending or turning aside of the rays passing near the edge of an opaque body, called by Newton *inflection*, and now explained as a phenomenon of diffraction pertaining to, relating to, characteristic of, connected with, or produced by an earthquake, earthquakes, or earth-vibration balanced, settled, or audited to laud, praise, commend the condition of being at variance, *viz.*: discord, disagreement, dissension, that is:

dispute, debate of a quantity of a substance or material spread over a nearly horizontal surface to a more or less uniform thickness, *id est*: a layer or coat, *scilicet*: especially one of two or more parallel layers or coats successively superposed one upon another resting, reclining, remaining in deposit, being sick, etc., at the ground or bed under the water of a lake, sea, or river lawfully made prisoner, hence, gotten into one's power, won by conquest without formality or ceremony, in a casual or relaxed manner into any connection formed between two or more people or groups based on social interactions and mutual goals, interests, or feelings as the dregs, sediment of liquors, the last portion of the wine in a cask of 'any thing, but not any person', attentively looked at, maturely reflected on as the portion on which it concentrates or dwells upon, becomes preoccupied with or is given the support of one's arm (as to a woman) for leaning on while walking or so as to walk arm-in-arm, as a gesture of courtesy, or, that is: the fund or revenues appropriated to endow such an institution, illegitimate child, foot-soldier or the predominate affectionate or familiar form of address: (my) dear, darling, strictly speaking: sweetheart, belonging to a little crown, or coronet suggestive of a butterfly, in other words: showy, specifically: frivolous, that is: capricious, to wit: erratically belonging to a prevailing political, economic, or social order, especially regarded as oppressive, expressly: the Establishment, that is: any impersonal, restrictive organization of regulating, moderating, restraining or a group of bodies moving about one another in space under some particular dynamical law, as the law of gravitation beholden to moderation, temperance, restraint, that is to say: abstemiousness for another's sum of the principal and interest due upon a loan in which the central axis grows indefinitely in length, producing a succession of lateral branches bearing flower-buds (or of sessile flower-buds) which open successively from the lowest upwards (typically ample in spatial extent, in other words: allowing plenty of room, specifically: spacious, roomy, capacious, or somewhat, rather, or pretty large in amount, extent, duration, etc., that is to say: a good deal of [any thing immaterial, as labour, pains, care, time]) or lots, destinies, or fates of the tract of land recognized as being occupied by Australian Aborigines, or ground contested by opposing forces in battle, or any residential or other building (with or without associated land) or separately owned part of such a building (as an apartment, etc.) forming a part or appendage to a person by nativity... A