

Frege, *The Thought*: A Logical Inquiry

The big picture

- Frege's life project was to show that math was a branch of logic in the sense that all mathematical truths could be proved from logical laws and definitions alone.
 - This would secure the foundations of math (granting that logic is secure).
- Frege's *The Thought* is part of an abandoned work on the nature of logic.
- One of Frege's main goals is to clarify logic (and hence, in his view, mathematics) by clarifying the nature of **truth**.
 - This is to be done by way of clarifying the things which are true (**thoughts**).
 - Specifically, Frege argues that thoughts need to be distinguished not only from ordinary material objects, but also the psychological ideas in our heads.
 - In so doing, Frege invents much of the philosophy of language as we know it.

Truth

- Logic is concerned with the **laws of truth** in much the way that physics is concerned with the laws of motion.
 - Logic is not concerned with "truth" in the sense of:
 - That painting is a *true* Rembrandt.
 - That novel really evoked the *truth* about love.
- Truth is not a relation of **correspondence** between a *picture*, or *idea*, and the reality it *pictures*, or is an *idea of*.
 - Unlike 'left of' or even 'is a mother', 'true' is not a *relational term*.
 - A picture would be true only if it were *exactly* to correspond with the reality it pictures. If so, the picture is *identical* to the reality it pictures. But pictures are not identical to the realities they picture. So, nothing could be true.
- There is no non-circular definition of truth.
 - To define truth would require stating characteristics of what is true.
 - Something would then be true only if **it is true** that it has those characteristics.
- We should take the notion of **truth** as unanalyzable.
 - We can still get a clearer understanding of truth by investigating what sorts of things are true or false.

Thoughts

- **Thoughts** are that which the question of truth may intelligibly arise.
 - Meaningful sentences have **senses**.
 - A sentence is true or false *in virtue of* its sense being true or false.
 - Sentences **express** thoughts.
 - Every thought is the sense of a sentence.
 - I may intelligibly raise the question whether ‘Fido is a dog’ is true—the thought FIDO IS A DOG is expressed by ‘Fido is a dog’.
 - Not all senses are thoughts.
 - I may not intelligibly raise the question whether ‘Shut the door!’ is true—no thought is expressed by ‘Shut the door!’.
- **Truth is not a property of thoughts.** This is because the sense of ‘true’ would have to contribute something to the sense of the sentence in which it occurs, if it were a property of thoughts (c.f. ‘red’).
 - But the sentences ‘Fido is a dog’ and ‘It is true that Fido is a dog’ have the same sense, and so express the same thought.
- If truth is not a property of thoughts, how is it possible for us to discover that it is true that Fido is a dog?
 - We must distinguish **thinking** a thought from **judging** it and **asserting** it.
 - The sentence-question ‘Is Fido a dog?’ and the sentence ‘Fido is a dog’ both express the same thought: THAT FIDO IS A DOG.
 - I may **think** THAT FIDO IS A DOG without judging that it is true, or asserting it, by wondering whether it is true.
 - I may **judge** THAT FIDO IS A DOG is true without asserting it by believing it.
 - I may **assert** THAT FIDO IS A DOG is true.
 - It is the **assertoric force** with which I put forward the thought that makes it an *assertion* of a thought.
 - So, I may assert THAT FIDO IS A DOG without asserting THAT IT IS TRUE THAT FIDO IS A DOG.
 - To **communicate** is to induce in others the apprehension of some thought you intend them to apprehend.
- The **content** of a sentence is distinct from the thought it expresses.
 - The content of a sentence may go beyond the thought it expresses.

The third realm

- Thoughts do not belong to the “**outer [extra-mental] realm**” of objects like tables, chairs, electrons, clouds, and the like.
 - These are material and, *in principle*, perceivable; but thoughts are neither.
 - The thought THAT FIDO IS A DOG does not, and cannot, be red or have a tail.
- Nor do thoughts belong to the “**inner [mental] realm**” of **ideas**.
 - **Ideas** are sense-impressions, creations of the imagination, feelings, moods, inclinations, wishes, and decisions.
 - **Ideas are imperceptible.** I do not *see* my sense-impression of a blue sky.
 - **Ideas are had.** I just *have* my sense-impression of a green field.
 - **Ideas have bearers.** A sense-impression of a green field is *essentially someone’s* sense-impression of a green field.
 - **Ideas have unique bearers.** My sense-impression of a green field cannot be your sense-impression of a green field.
 - Thoughts are not ideas.
 - **Thoughts needn’t have unique bearers.** You and I can both think the thought THAT $2+2=4$.
 - **Thoughts needn’t have bearers.** It might have been true THAT $2+2=4$ even if no one thought it.
 - Were thoughts ideas, there wouldn’t be intersubjective communication; no sciences with a common subject across its practitioners.
- Thoughts belong to a **third realm** apart from the inner and outer worlds.
 - *As with the outer realm...*
 - Thoughts do not essentially have unique bearers.
 - I am the bearer of my *thinking* a thought, but not my *thought*.
 - Thoughts do not depend upon us for their existence anymore than stars.
 - Objects of thoughts might belong to the outer realm.
 - When we both think THAT FIDO IS A DOG, the object our thought is Fido.
 - *As with the inner realm...*
 - Thoughts are immaterial and imperceptible.
 - The objects of thoughts might belong to the inner realm.
 - You and I both might think of the pain in my leg. The **object** of our thoughts will be the pain. But your **idea** of my pain will not be my **idea** of my pain.