# 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.
  - o 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**.
  - o This is to be done by way of clarifying the things which are true (**thoughts**).
  - o Specifically, Frege argues that thoughts need to be distinguished not only from ordinary material objects, but also the psychological ideas in our heads.
  - o 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.
  - o 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.
  - o 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.
  - o 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').
  - o 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.

- **Poetic value.** The sentences 'Socrates is wise' and 'One of Socrates' characteristics is wisdom' express the same thought, but differ in their **poetic value**.
  - ☐ This is because the poetic value of these sentences makes no difference to their truth or falsity.
- The thought a sentence expresses may not be well-captured by the sentence which expresses it.
  - **Context-sensitivity.** The *sentence* 'It is raining' may be true today, false tomorrow.
    - ☐ This is because it incompletely captures the thought it expresses.
    - □ Today I can use the sentence 'It is raining' to express the thought THAT IT IS RAINING IN NYC ON 9/4/08. But I cannot use that same sentence tomorrow to express the same thought.
    - □ The *thought* expressed by an utterance of that sentence, e.g. THAT IT IS RAINING IN NYC ON 9/4/08, is *always* true (false) if true (false) at all.
- Sense, reference, and compositionality. The sense of a sentence (a thought) is compositionally built out of the senses of its subsentential parts.
  - Two **thoughts** are **distinct** if it is possible for two competent people rationally to take different attitudes toward them.
    - The thought expressed by 'Superman can fly' ≠ the thought expressed by 'Clark Kent can fly', since Lex Luthor can believe the first but not the second.
    - The sense of 'I am the instructor' is special when I think it: for only I can think of myself in a first-personal way. You cannot.
  - o Two expressions may differ in **sense** but still have the same **reference**.
    - 'Superman' and 'Clark Kent' have the same **reference** but different **senses**.
    - T' and 'Mike' have the same **references** but different **senses**.
      - $\square$  So, the thought expressed by 'I am the instructor' in my mouth  $\neq$  the thought expressed by 'Mike is the instructor' in your mouth.
        - **Problem.** How can we communicate if the thought I apprehend is not the thought you apprehend?
  - o If two expressions have the same **sense**, they have the same **reference**.
  - o A sentence which is true refers to **the True**.

### The third realm

- Thoughts do not belong to the "outer [extra-mental] realm" of objects like tables, chairs, electrons, clouds, and the like.
  - o 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.
  - o 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.
      - $\Box$  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.