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DRAFT VERSION

Frege im frage

Thinking of thinking

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Caspar David Friedrich, Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer

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ABSTRACT

In 1918, towards the end of his academic career, Frege published “Der Gedanke“. It addresses important issues which have since been discussed extensively in literature. Customarily, such a discussion takes up a specific question, debating its implications against the backdrop of Frege’s other writings and what others have said about it.

More than a century after its initial publication, it may be fruitful to examine the landscape that Frege has painted in this article. Not so much the bold strokes and the vibrant colours, but the smudges and smears: the areas where Frege expresses doubt, leaves room for interpretation, even openly admits to not knowing. In doing so, we discover that far from providing us with an all-encompassing system of thought, at this time of his life, in this article Frege was fully aware of presenting an imperfect and incomplete picture. Indeed, the landscape he paints sets the stage for many of the problems of Philosophy of Mind and Language that continue to puzzle us today.

1 THE LANDSCAPE

First, a bird's-eye view of Frege’s landscape. There are three distinct realms.

The **inner realm** is where our mental states are: “a world of sense-impressions, of creations of his imagination, of sensations, of feelings and moods, a world of inclinations, wishes and decisions / eine Welt der Sinneseindrücke, der Schöpfungen seiner Einbildungskraft, der Empfindungen, der Gefühle und Stimmungen, eine Welt der Neigungen, Wünsche und Entschlüsse”¹. These, except for decisions, Frege calls ‘ideas’ (Vorstellungen).

The **outer world** comprises “material, perceptible things /der Welt der sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Dinge”². It is real. It occupies time and space, and things happen in it which cause it to change: “The world of the real is a world in which this acts on that, changes it and again experiences reactions itself and is changed by them. All this is a process in time / Die Welt des Wirklichen ist eine Welt, in der dieses auf jenes wirkt es verändert und selbst wieder Gegenwirkungen erfährt und dadurch verändert wird. Alles das ist ein Geschehen in der Zeit”³.

The **world of thoughts** constitutes the third realm and connects the inner, private world with the outer, public world. This is a connection on several levels at once:

- It is the task of science to discover truths⁴, but it is through thoughts that these truths become connected to our inner mental process of understanding
- Thoughts are actionable because our thoughts may shape our actions .
- Thoughts, unlike ideas, can be shared between people.

¹ Frege, 1975, p. 299 / Frege, 1918, p. 66

² Frege, 1975, p. 308 / Frege, 1918, p. 75

³ Frege, 1975, p. 309 / Frege, 1918, p. 76

⁴ Frege, 1975, p. 289 / Frege, 1918, p. 58

The highest value, the holy grail of this land, is *truth*. Truth, as Frege uses the word, does not mean veracity or authenticity. Nor does it refer to scientific essence⁵. It is also “not a material, perceptible property / Dennoch ist das Wahrsein keine sinnlich wahrnehmbare Eigenschaft”⁶. Nor is truth “a quality that corresponds with a particular kind of sense-impression / Wahrheit ist nicht eine Eigenschaft, die einer besonderen Art von Sinneseindrücken entspricht”⁷. Truth is not a relation at all. Therefore, truth cannot be a correspondence⁸ relation between an idea and the outside world. So, what does it mean to be true? Frege says that the meaning of the word ‘true’ is explained by the laws of truth, and these must be discovered by the laws of Logic. He stresses that logic does not deal with mental processes like thinking, understanding, and judging; these are governed by psychological laws⁹.

In the next paragraphs the principle inhabitants of Frege’s landscape, *ideas* and *thoughts* are described further. Frege’s own descriptions and explanations are set out to follow the line of argument of his article, so for present purposes these had to be retrieved from where they were scattered throughout the article. For the sake of clarity, a reference to both the English translation and the German original is supplied.

2 THE INHABITANTS

2.1 IDEAS

Frege describes ideas both in terms of what they are and what they are not.

What ideas are not:

- Ideas are not perceptible. “Ideas cannot be seen or touched, cannot be smelled, nor tasted, nor heard / Vorstellungen können nicht gesehen oder getastet, weder gerochen, noch geschmeckt, noch gehört werden”¹⁰.
- Ideas do not exist independently. Moods, pains, and wishes do not wonder about on their own. To experience something, there must be someone who does the experiencing¹¹.

What ideas are:

- Ideas are experiences. “One has sensations, feelings, moods, inclinations, wishes. An idea which someone has belongs to the content of his consciousness / Man hat Empfindungen, Gefühle, Stimmungen, Neigungen, Wünsche. Eine Vorstellung, die jemand hat, gehört zu dem Inhalte seines Bewußtseins”¹².
- Ideas are private. We all have them, but we cannot share them. Even when our ideas refer to the same thing, in Frege’s example a strawberry, we may see the same strawberry, but we each have our own sense impression, our own idea which cannot be shared. “Every idea has

⁵ Frege, 1975, p. 290 / Frege, 1918, p. 59

⁶ Frege, 1975, p. 292 / Frege, 1918, p. 61

⁷ Frege, 1975, p. 292 / Frege, 1918, p. 61

⁸ Frege also offers other arguments as to why any correspondence theory of truth is not valid.

⁹ Frege, 1975, p. 290 / Frege, 1918, p. 59

¹⁰ Frege, 1975, p. 299 / Frege, 1918, p. 67

¹¹ Frege, 1975, p. 299 / Frege, 1918, p. 67

¹² Frege, 1975, p. 299 / Frege, 1918, p. 67

but one bearer; no two men have the same idea / Jede Vorstellung hat nur einen Träger; nicht zwei Menschen haben dieselbe Vorstellung”¹³.

2.2 THOUGHTS

Frege also describes thoughts in terms of what they are and what they are not. He takes great pains to ensure that thoughts will not be confused with ideas.

What thoughts are not:

- Thoughts are not part of consciousness. “Although the thought does not belong to the contents of the thinker's consciousness yet something in his consciousness must be aimed at the thought. But this should not be confused with the thought itself / Obgleich zum Bewußtseinsinhalte des Denkenden der Gedanke nicht gehört, muß doch in dem Bewußtsein etwas auf den Gedanken hinzielen. Dieses darf aber nicht mit dem Gedanken selbst verwechselt werden”¹⁴.
- Thoughts are neither material nor immaterial: “The thought belongs neither to my inner world as an idea nor yet to the outer world of material, perceptible things / Der Gedanke gehört weder als Vorstellung meiner Innenwelt noch auch der Außenwelt, der Welt der sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Dinge an”¹⁵.
- Thoughts are not created by the act of thinking: “in thinking we do not produce thoughts, but we apprehend them / Beim Denken erzeugen wir nicht die Gedanken, sondern wir fassen sie”¹⁶.
- Its essential properties are not affected by being thought. “A property of a thought will be called inessential which consists in, or follows from the fact that, it is apprehended by a thinker / Unwesentlich wird man eine Eigenschaft eines Gedankens nennen, die darin besteht oder daraus folgt, daß er von einem Denkenden gefaßt wird”¹⁷.

What thoughts are:

- Thoughts are actionable. They are not ‘unreal’, but their reality is different from that of material things. The reality of thoughts lies in their application: “being apprehended and taken to be true. This is a process in the inner world of a thinker which can have further consequences in this inner world and which, encroaching on the sphere of the will, can also make itself noticeable in the outer world / daß er gefaßt und für wahr gehalten wird. Das ist ein Vorgang in der Innenwelt eines Denkenden, der weitere Folgen in dieser Innenwelt haben kann, die, auf das Gebiet des Willens übergreifend, sich auch in der Außenwelt bemerkbar machen”¹⁸. So, thoughts have a reality, but different from that of material things.
- Thoughts can be communicated: ‘One brings about changes in the common outside world which, perceived by another person, are supposed to induce him to apprehend a thought and take it to be true / Man bewirkt Veränderungen in der gemeinsamen Außenwelt, die, von dem andern wahrgenommen, ihn veranlassen sollen, einen Gedanken zu fassen und ihn für

¹³ Frege, 1975, p. 300 / Frege, 1918, p. 68

¹⁴ Frege, 1975, p. 308 / Frege, 1918, p. 75

¹⁵ Frege, 1975, p. 308 / Frege, 1918, p. 75

¹⁶ Frege, 1975, p. 307 / Frege, 1918, p. 74

¹⁷ Frege, 1975, p. 310 / Frege, 1918, p. 76

¹⁸ Frege, 1975, p. 310 / Frege, 1918, p. 76

wahr zu halten¹⁹. In this way, Frege says, the great events of history have come about, through the communication of thoughts.

2.2.1 Thoughts and truth

Frege has further things to say about the relationship between thoughts and truth. We must bear in mind (see paragraph 1, The Landscape) that he is describing the significance of true thoughts without quite knowing what truth is or how it may be determined. A sketch then, rather than a full design:

- Thoughts are either true or false. “A thought is something for which the question of truth arises. So I ascribe what is false to a thought just as much as what is true”²⁰. Frege uses the word ‘thought’ in the same way as logicians may use the word ‘judgment’, he says, something which is either true or false²¹.
- True thoughts are timeless. It is the work of science to discover true thoughts. Frege gives the example of an astronomer applying a mathematical truth the events long passed. This is only possible because such a truth already existed, i.e. was not created when it was discovered.²²
- The truth of a thought is independent of its being thought: “that someone thinks it has nothing to do with the truth of a thought / Zum Wahrsein eines Gedankens gehört nicht, daß er gedacht werde“²³.
- The truth of a thought must be recognised: Thoughts can be recognised, i.e. judged, as either true or false²⁴.

2.2.2 Thoughts and sentences

Now we know about the intimate relationship between thoughts and truth, Frege explains how thoughts may be expressed through language. This is important because thoughts, unlike ideas, may be shared between people. Language is a means for sharing thoughts. Thoughts are the truth bearers, and:

- A thought can be expressed in a sentence, as its sense: „The thought, in itself immaterial, clothes itself in the material garment of a sentence and thereby becomes comprehensible to us / Der an sich unsinnliche Gedanke kleidet sich in das sinnliche Gewand des Satzes und wird uns damit faßbarer“²⁵.
- Only those sentences express thoughts “in which we communicate or state something / in denen wir etwas mitteilen oder behaupten“²⁶. This excludes sentences expressing an order, a desire or a request, emotional exclamations, and also incomplete sentences. It includes indicative and interrogative sentences, as one can be formed from the other.
- An indicative and an interrogative sentence may express the same thought, but they differ in that the one contains an assertion and the other a request. Hence, “it is possible to express the

¹⁹ Frege, 1975, p. 310 / Frege, 1918, p. 77

²⁰ Frege, 1975, p. 292 / Frege, 1918, p. 61

²¹ Frege, 1975, p. 292 / Frege, 1918, p. 61, footnote 1

²² Frege, 1975, p. 307 / Frege, 1918, p. 74

²³ Frege, 1975, p. 307 / Frege, 1918, p. 74

²⁴ Frege, 1975, p. 294 / Frege, 1918, p. 62

²⁵ Frege, 1975, p. 292 / Frege, 1918, p. 61

²⁶ Frege, 1975, p. 293 / Frege, 1918, p. 62

thought without laying it down as true / Es ist also möglich, einen Gedanken auszudrücken, ohne ihn als wahr hinzustellen“²⁷.

- A sentence is often more than just thought and form: “The contents of a sentence often go beyond the thoughts expressed by it / So überragt der Inhalt eines Satzes nicht selten den in ihm ausgedrückten Gedanken”²⁸. For instance: “what is called mood, fragrance, illumination in a poem, what is portrayed by cadence and rhythm, does not belong to the thought / Was man Stimmung, Luft, Beleuchtung in einer Dichtung nennen kann, was durch Tonfall und Rhythmus gemalt wird, gehört nicht zum Gedanken”²⁹. The same is true for things like word-order, intonation, grammatical form, accentuation, by-words and other features.
- The same thought can be expressed differently: “It makes no difference to the thought whether I use the word ‘horse’ or ‘steed’ or ‘cart-horse’ or ‘mare’. The assertive force does not extend over that in which these words differ / Ob ich das Wort „Pferd“ oder „Roß“ oder „Gaul“ oder „Mähre“ gebrauche, macht keinen Unterschied im Gedanken. Die behauptende Kraft erstreckt sich nicht auf das, wodurch sich diese Wörter unterscheiden”³⁰.
- Not all sentences express thoughts fully. Some words, like ‘today’ or ‘here’ are tied to the context of speaker and are used to aid comprehension, like “the pointing of fingers, hand movement, glances / Fingerzeige, Handbewegungen, Blicke”³¹.
- Similarly, for words such as ‘I’ and indeed for proper names in general – depending on circumstances, such words may be used in the same sentence to express different thoughts. This must be recognised, says Frege: “so it must really be demanded that a single way in which whatever is referred to is presented be associated with every proper name / Es muß also eigentlich gefordert werden, daß mit jedem Eigennamen eine einzige Weise verknüpft sei, wie der, die oder das durch ihn Bezeichnete gegeben sei”³².

2.3 LIVING INSIDE FREGE’S LANDSCAPE

We live in all three realms at once. We experience the outer world through our senses. This is a psychological experience which may lead to ideas in the privacy of our minds. Such ideas cannot be true or false, given Frege’s definition of ideas, nor can they be shared. Thinking thoughts opens up the world, both to ourselves and to each other. Without thoughts, we would all be locked inside our private experiences.

Thoughts go through a kind of life cycle during their interaction with us, the thinkers.

- Phase 1: existence. The thought exists, independently of a thinker or of being thought.
- Phase 2: apprehension. The thought is being thought/grasped/apprehended by a thinker. This ‘thinking’ is a mental process, much like holding an apple in your hand.
- Phase 3: manifestation. The thought is manifested by the thinker, for instance by expressing it in a sentence.
- Phase 4: application. The thought, when both grasped and recognised as true, may be applied by making a decision based on its truth.

²⁷ Frege, 1975, p. 294 / Frege, 1918, p. 62

²⁸ Frege, 1975, p. 296 / Frege, 1918, p. 64

²⁹ Frege, 1975, p. 295 / Frege, 1918, p. 63

³⁰ Frege, 1975, p. 295 / Frege, 1918, p. 63

³¹ Frege, 1975, p. 296 / Frege, 1918, p. 64

³² Frege, 1975, p. 298 / Frege, 1918, p. 66

- Phase 5: sharing. The manifestation or the application of the thought may lead to sharing the thought with another person: he or she then also grasps/apprehends or thinks the thought.

3 MYSTERIES

Frege is very clear that on a number of points, understanding eludes him or that his grasp may be limited. This is important. Garavasa & Vassalo (2015) quote Dummett – representing the received view on Frege – as saying that the main mistake that can be made is “to interpret what he said in his mature period in the light of his earlier writings”. Instead, we should view views expressed in the mature period as having more weight than earlier ones with which they conflict, and later formulations of old views as having more weight than the earlier formulations’; exactly because ‘Frege worked so single-mindedly at the perfection of his theories, every change must be regarded as fully deliberate’³³ Therefore, it is assumed here when in the paper under discussion, Frege offers an incomplete or obscure account, this is deliberate.

3.1 THE INDEFINABILITY OF TRUTH

Frege offers no positive description of *truth*, and he even doubts that it is possible to say what it means for something to be true. Because this involves assigning characteristics which then also need to be true. “So one goes round in a circle. Consequently, it is probable that the content of the word ‘true’ is unique and undefinable / So drehte man sich im Kreise. Hiernach ist es wahrscheinlich, daß der Inhalt des Wortes ‘wahr’ ganz einzigartig und undefinierbar ist”³⁴. Yet his intuition is that *truth* is something singular. He notes that adding ‘it is true’ to a sentence does not seem to add anything. And yet, he says, “is it not a great result when the scientist after much hesitation and careful inquiry, can finally say ‘what I supposed is true’? The meaning of the word ‘true’ seems to be altogether unique. May we not be dealing here with something which cannot, in the ordinary sense, be called a quality at all? In spite of this doubt I want first to express myself in accordance with ordinary usage, as if truth were a quality, until something more to the point is found / ist es nicht ein großer Erfolg, wenn nach langem Schwanken und mühsamen Untersuchungen der Forscher schließlich sagen kann ‚was ich vermutet habe, ist wahr‘? Die Bedeutung des Wortes ‚wahr‘ scheint ganz einzigartig zu sein. Sollten wir es hier mit etwas zu tun haben, was in dem sonst üblichen Sinne gar nicht Eigenschaft genannt werden kann? Trotz diesem Zweifel will ich mich zunächst noch dem Sprachgebrauche folgend so ausdrücken, |als ob die Wahrheit eine Eigenschaft wäre, bis etwas Zutreffenderes gefunden sein wird”³⁵. There have been many treatments of this argument. Just to illustrate the variety: Reiss³⁶ describes Peirce as helping Frege by supplementing his account of truth. Pardey³⁷ and Baldwin³⁸ note that Dummett lumps the circularity argument together with the regress argument against the correspondence theory, as if Frege would not have known the difference between a regress and a circularity argument.

³³ Garavaso & Vassalo, 2015, pp. 8–9

³⁴ Frege, 1975, p. 291 / Frege, 1918, p. 60

³⁵ Frege, 1975, p. 293 / Frege, 1918, pp. 61–62

³⁶ Reiss, 2018

³⁷ Pardey, 2012

³⁸ Baldwin, 1995

3.2 DREAMING REALITY

Frege does not make clear what the relationship between the outside world and the truth is, possibly owing to the fact that 'truth' cannot be defined (see previous paragraph). The 'existence of the outer world' is not an indubitable certainty, much as Frege finds it 'incredible' if it should not exist. As he puts it: "Perhaps the realm of things is empty and I see no things and no men, but have only ideas of which I myself am the bearer / Vielleicht ist das Reich der Dinge leer, und ich sehe keine Dinge, auch keine Menschen, sondern ich habe vielleicht nur Vorstellungen, deren Träger ich selbst bin"³⁹. He eventually decides that there must be an outside world of which I, as a bearer of ideas, am a part. No dream without a dreamer, in an echo of Descartes. He is not entirely happy with this: "So, contrary to widespread views, we find certainty in the inner world while doubt never altogether leaves us in our excursions into the outer world / So finden wir im Gegensatz zu weit verbreiteten Meinungen in der Innenwelt Sicherheit, während uns bei unsern Ausflügen in die Außenwelt der Zweifel nie ganz verläßt"⁴⁰.

3.3 GRASPING THOUGHTS

Frege says nothing about how we may come to think, apprehend, or grasp a thought. We just do, it seems. In two ways: by interpreting a sense-impression, and by grasping a thought directly, without having a sense-impression first. He says: "Having visual impressions is certainly necessary for, seeing things but not sufficient. What must still be added is non-sensible. And yet this is just what opens up the outer world for us; for without this nonsensible something everyone would remain shut up in his inner world. So since the answer lies in the non-sensible, perhaps something non-sensible could also lead us out of the inner world and enable us to grasp thoughts where no sense-impressions were involved / Das Haben von Gesichtseindrücken ist zwar nötig zum Sehen der Dinge, aber nicht hinreichend. Was noch hinzukommen muß, ist nichts Sinnliches. Und dieses ist es doch gerade, was uns die Außenwelt aufschließt; denn ohne dieses Nichtsinnliche bliebe jeder in seiner Innenwelt eingeschlossen. Da also die Entscheidung im Nichtsinnlichen liegt, könnte ein Nichtsinnliches auch da, wo keine Sinneseindrücke mitwirken, uns aus der Innenwelt hinausführen und uns Gedanken fassen lassen"⁴¹.

What is important here is, that ideas are not grasped. Ideas are had. Only thoughts are graspable. It is only the how that is a mystery. Dummett assumes that we do this grasping via language: "To grasp the thought expressed by a sentence is to have a particular way of conceiving of the references of its constituents. For those of them which are functional expressions, this will involve a grasp of how the reference of each complex within the sentence, including the sentence itself, is determined by the references of its parts; and so the grasp of the thought will consist in a particular way of conceiving that which determines it as true or as false"⁴². Although Dummett may be right in thinking that our understanding of thoughts may be improved by analysis of sentences, Frege (1918) does not say anything that connects thoughts directly to reference, nor does he claim that the connection between thoughts and sense expressed through sentences is exclusive. He also does not offer a criterion by which to judge whether a thought is true or not. So Dummett's interpretation seems to go well beyond what Frege intended here.

³⁹ Frege, 1975, p. 302 / Frege, 1918, p. 69

⁴⁰ Frege, 1975, p. 306 / Frege, 1918, p. 73

⁴¹ Frege, 1975, p. 309 / Frege, 1918, p. 7410

⁴² Dummett, 1984

3.4 THINKING, THINKING AND THINKING

Frege says that “To discover truths is the task of all sciences ; it falls to logic to discern the laws of truth / Wahrheiten zu entdecken, ist Aufgabe aller Wissenschaften: der Logik kommt es zu, die Gesetze des Wahrseins zu erkennen“⁴³ He goes on to say that he uses the word ‘law’ not in a prescriptive but a descriptive sense. From these laws of truth follow “rules for asserting, thinking, judging and inferring / Aus den Gesetzen des Wahrseins ergeben sich nun Vorschriften für das Fürwahrhalten, das Denken, Urteilen, Schließen”⁴⁴. We may call these rules the ‘laws of thought’ but we must not, says Frege, mix them up with the mental processes of thinking which is governed by psychological laws. So these rules for thinking are not to be applied to the mental acts of thinking, but to asserting, thinking, judging and inferring truth.

Taking stock. In the realm of Thoughts, we have the thought, which is objective content and must be handled in accordance with the rules of thoughts, derived from the laws of Logic. Inside the realms of Ideas, or perhaps just on its border, there is the mental process of thinking, by which we hold the thought in our consciousness. Frege uses the word ‘apprehend’, comparing it to holding an object in consciousness as one’s hand may hold an apple/ Der Ausdruck „Fassen“ ist ebenso bildlich wie „Bewußtseinsinhalt“. Das Wesen der Sprache erlaubt es eben nicht anders. Was ich in der Hand halte, kann ja als Inhalt der Hand angesehen werden, ist aber doch in ganz anderer Weise Inhalt der Hand und ihr viel fremder als die Knochen, die Muskeln, aus denen sie besteht, und deren Spannungen”⁴⁵. In between there is the grasping of a thought, which means to hold the thought to be true, and to be true “quite independently of my recognition of its truth and of my thinking about it / ganz unabhängig von meiner Anerkennung seiner Wahrheit, auch unabhängig davon, ob ich daran denke“⁴⁶. In the previous paragraph it was pointed out that Frege does not tell us how we grasp a thought. But now it appears that it is not clear what kind of thinking apprehension is. Frege says it corresponds to a “particular mental capacity, the power of thought / Dem Fassen der Gedanken muß ein besonderes geistiges Vermögen, die Denkkraft entsprechen”⁴⁷. But what kind of power is this special power of thought? Not logical, nor psychological, according to the layout of his landscape. Then what? It appears we now have three types of thinking, one logical, one psychological and one bridging the gap between the two which is not defined.

3.5 SHARING CONSCIOUSNESS

The ‘sharing of ideas’ is another issue that Frege does not elaborate on, but not because he thinks it wholly impossible. He explicitly allows for the possibility that there may exist an all embracing, possibly divine, consciousness within which my or our consciousness is shared. He excludes this from his account on the grounds of it being too far outside human understanding⁴⁸. Indeed, the very concept of consciousness still eludes us, given the x-mas tree of rivalling theories in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. These days, the cognitive sciences tell us tempting tales of mental representations and mirror neurons to explain folk psychology. Autopoietic enactivism assumes language development to be built up from the roots of shared agency. Evolutionary

⁴³ Frege, 1975, p. 290 / Frege, 1918, p. 59

⁴⁴ Frege, 1975, p. 290 / Frege, 1918, p. 59

⁴⁵ Frege, 1975, p. 307 / Frege, 1918, p. 35, footnote 6

⁴⁶ Frege, 1975, p. 307 / Frege, 1918, p. 74

⁴⁷ Frege, 1975, p. 307 / Frege, 1918, p. 35

⁴⁸ Frege, 1975, p. 300 / Frege, 1918, p. 67

psychology has us believe that joint attention develops into shared intentions. No real let alone conclusive evidence has been offered yet for any of these views, but neither has there for the embracing, possibly divine consciousness that Frege so firmly puts outside of the limits of our understanding.

3.6 SENSE, REFERENCE AND TRUTH

Thoughts may be expressed in sentences, says Frege. There are of course non-linguistic ways of expressing thoughts⁴⁹, but Frege does not discuss these; he confines himself to sentence. Not all sentence express thoughts, he says, only those that have a sense. And he goes on: “And when we call a sentence true we really mean its sense is. From which it follows that it is for the sense of a sentence that the question of truth arises in general [...] *In any case being true does not consist in the correspondence of this sense with something else*, for otherwise the question of truth would reiterate itself to infinity. / Und wenn wir einen Satz wahr nennen, meinen wir eigentlich seinen Sinn. Danach ergibt sich als dasjenige, bei dem das Wahrsein überhaupt in Frage kommen kann, der Sinn eines Satzes. [...] *Jedenfalls besteht das Wahrsein nicht in der Übereinstimmung dieses Sinnes mit etwas anderem*; denn sonst wiederholte sich die Frage nach dem Wahrsein ins Unendliche”⁵⁰.

How are we to understand this, given Frege’s famous distinction between ‘sense’ and ‘reference’? As Dummett⁵¹ points out, the sense-reference distinction is not used in this article. Is it only the sense then, that is true, and not the reference? Frege also says that it is the sense of the (complex) sentence that corresponds to the thought, not the individual clauses and words that go to make up the sentence⁵². He stresses that as long as the sense of a sentence is not changed, one may substitute words; if there is ambiguity, this should be resolved (see paragraph 2.2.2 Thoughts and sentences), but not by applying ‘rules of thought’ governed by logic. Instead, his examples revolve around asking ourselves what thought is being expressed through the sense of this particular sentence, if necessary by complementing the sentence with additional information. Fregean sense appears to have evolved into something that “remains constant between communicators”⁵³.

4 CONCLUSION

In this paper a close reading of Frege’s *Gedanke* was presented, with interpretation restricted to the article itself. This yield a number of questions which Frege clearly grappled with. It is tempting to try to answer some of the mysteries raised in the previous paragraphs, by taking bit and pieces of text from another era, when Frege was younger and still assuming he would complete his grand system of Logic. Yet these same mysteries confound us today. One might therefore also assume that at the end of his active life, Frege wanted to say both what he knew and did not, in the end, know.

⁴⁹ MacFarlane, 2011, p. 3

⁵⁰ Frege, 1975, p. 292 / Frege, 1918, p. 60, my italics

⁵¹ Dummett, 1981, p. 659

⁵² Frege, 1975, p. 294, footnote 1 / Frege, 1918, p. 62, footnote 2

⁵³ Gaskin, 2020, p. 132

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