

**Passages from Frege's "The Thought" (1918-19)**  
(References to Beaney Frege Reader, bolding added)

Just as 'beautiful' points the way for aesthetics and 'good' for ethics, so do words like 'true' for logic. All sciences have truth as their goal; but logic is also concerned with it in a quite different way: logic has much the same relation to truth as physics has to weight or heat. To discover truths is the task of all sciences; it falls to logic to discern the laws of truth. [325]

In order to avoid any misunderstanding and prevent the blurring of the boundary between psychology and logic, I assign to logic the task of discovering the laws of truth, not the laws of taking things to be true or of thinking. The *Bedeutung* of the word 'true' is spelled out in the laws of truth. [326]

We should have to inquire whether it is *true* that an idea and a reality, say, correspond in the specified respect. And then we should be confronted by a question of the same kind, and the game could begin again. So the attempted explanation of truth as correspondence breaks down. And any other attempt to define truth also breaks down. For in a definition certain characteristics would have to be specified. And in application to any particular case the question would always arise whether it were *true* that the characteristics were present. So we should be going round in a circle. So it seems likely that **the content of the word 'true' is *sui generis* and indefinable.** [327]

Without offering this as a definition, I call a 'thought' something for which the question of truth can arise at all. So I count what is false among thoughts no less than what is true. So I can say: **thoughts are senses of sentences**, without wishing to assert that the sense of every sentence is a thought. The thought, in itself imperceptible by the senses, gets clothed in the perceptible garb of a sentence, and thereby we are enabled to grasp it. We say a sentence *expresses* a thought. [328]

All the same it is something worth thinking about that we cannot recognize a property of a thing without at the same time finding the thought *this thing has this property* to be true. So with every property of a thing there is tied up a property of a thought, namely truth. It is also worth noticing that the sentence 'I smell the scent of violets' has just the same content as the sentence 'It is true that I smell the scent of violets'. So it seems, then, that nothing is added to the thought by my ascribing to it the property of truth. And yet is it not a great result when the scientist after much hesitation and laborious researches can finally say 'My conjecture is true'? The *Bedeutung* of the word 'true' seems to be altogether *sui generis*. May we not be dealing here with something which cannot be called a property in the ordinary sense at all? In spite of this doubt I will begin by expressing myself in accordance with ordinary usage, as if truth were a property, until some more appropriate way of speaking is found. [328-9]

Therefore two things must be distinguished in an assertoric sentence: the content, which it has in common with the corresponding propositional question; and assertion. The former is the thought or at least contains the thought. So **it is possible to express a thought without laying it down as true**. The two things are so closely joined in an assertoric sentence that it is easy to overlook their separability. Consequently we distinguish:

- (1) the grasp of a thought - thinking,
- (2) the acknowledgement of the truth of a thought- the act of judgement,
- (3) the manifestation of this judgement - assertion. [329]

**We express acknowledgement of truth in the form of an assertoric sentence. We do not need the word 'true' for this. And even when we do use it the properly assertoric force does not lie in it, but in the assertoric sentence-form;** and where this form loses its assertoric force the word 'true' cannot put it back again. This happens when we are not speaking seriously. [330]

If someone wants to say today what he expressed yesterday using the word 'today', he will replace this word with 'yesterday'. Although the thought is the same its verbal expression must be different in order that the change of sense which would otherwise be effected by the differing times of utterance may be cancelled out. The case is the same with words like 'here' and 'there'. [332]

The occurrence of the word 'I' in a sentence gives rise to some further questions. Consider the following case. Dr Gustav Lauben says, 'I was wounded'. Leo Peter hears this and remarks some days later, 'Dr Gustav Lauben was wounded'. Does this sentence express the same thought as the one Dr Lauben uttered himself? Suppose that Rudolph Lingens was present when Dr Lauben spoke and now hears what is related by Leo Peter. If the same thought was uttered by Dr Lauben and Leo Peter, then Rudolph Lingens, who is fully master of the language and remembers what Dr Lauben said in his presence, must now know at once from Leo Peter's report that he is speaking of the same thing. [332]

Now everyone is presented to himself in a special and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else. So, when Dr Lauben has the thought that he was wounded, he will probably be basing it on this primitive way in which he is presented to himself. And only Dr Lauben himself can grasp thoughts specified in this way. But now he may want to communicate with others. He cannot communicate a thought he alone can grasp. Therefore, **if he now says 'I was wounded', he must use 'I' in a sense which can be grasped by others, perhaps in the sense of 'he who is speaking to you at this moment'; by doing this he makes the conditions accompanying his utterance serve towards the expression of a thought**. [333]

So the result seems to be: thoughts are neither things in the external world nor ideas.

**A third realm must be recognized.** Anything belonging to this realm has it in common with ideas that it cannot be perceived by the senses, but has it in common with things that it does not need an owner so as to belong to the contents of his consciousness. Thus for example the thought we have expressed in the Pythagorean theorem is timelessly true, true independently of whether anyone takes it to be true. It needs no owner. It is not true only from the time when it is discovered; just as a planet, even before anyone saw it, was in interaction with other planets. [336-7]

Not everything is an idea. Thus I can also acknowledge thoughts as independent of me; other men can grasp them just as much as I; I can acknowledge a science in which many can be engaged in research. We are not owners of thoughts as we are owners of our ideas. We do not *have* a thought as we have, say, a sense impression, but we also do not *see* a thought as we see, say, a star. So it is advisable to choose a special expression; the word '**grasp**' suggests itself for the purpose. Note: The expression 'grasp' is as metaphorical as 'content of consciousness'. The nature of language does not permit anything else. **What I hold in my hand can certainly be regarded as the content of my hand; but all the same it is the content of my hand in quite another and a more extraneous way than are the bones and muscles of which the hand consists or again the tensions these undergo.** [341]

To the grasping of thoughts there must then correspond a special mental capacity, the power of thinking. In thinking we do not produce thoughts, we grasp them. For what I have called thoughts stand in the closest connection with truth. What I acknowledge as true, I judge to be true quite apart from my acknowledging its truth or even thinking about it. That someone thinks it has nothing to do with the truth of a thought. 'Facts, facts, facts' cries the scientist if he wants to bring home the necessity of a firm foundation for science.

**What is a fact? A fact is a thought that is true.** [342]

A thought belongs neither to my inner world as an idea, nor yet to the external world, the world of things perceptible by the senses. [342]

A thought, admittedly, is not the sort of thing to which it is usual to apply the term 'actual' [*wirklich*]. **The world of actuality is a world in which this acts [*wirkt*] on that and changes it and again undergoes reactions [ *Gegenwirkungen*] itself and is changed by them.** All this is a **process** in time. We will hardly admit what is timeless and unchangeable to be actual. [343]

Without the time-specification thus given we have not a complete thought, i.e. we have no thought at all. Only a sentence with the time-specification filled out, a sentence complete in every respect, expresses a thought. But this thought, if it is true, is true not only today or tomorrow but timelessly. [343]

If we merely use the assertoric sentence-form and avoid the word 'true', two things must be distinguished, the expression of the thought and assertion. The time-specification that may be contained in the sentence belongs only to the expression of the thought; **the truth, which we acknowledge by using the assertoric sentence-form, is timeless.** [343-4]

A property of a thought will be called inessential if it consists in, or follows from, the fact that this thought is grasped by a thinker. **How does a thought act? By being grasped and taken to be true. This is a process** in the inner world of a thinker which may have further consequences in this inner world, and **which may also encroach on the sphere of the will and make itself noticeable in the outer world as well.** [344]

**How different a process handing over a hammer is from communicating a thought!**

The hammer passes from one control to another, it is gripped, it undergoes pressure, and thus its density, the disposition of its parts, is locally changed. There is nothing of all this with a thought. It does not leave the control of the communicator by being communicated, for after all man has no power over it. **When a thought is grasped**, it at first only brings about changes in the inner world of the one who grasps it; yet **it remains untouched in the core of its essence**, for the changes it undergoes affect only inessential properties. **There is lacking here something we observe everywhere in physical process - reciprocal action. Thoughts are not wholly unactual but their actuality is quite different from the actuality of things. And their action is brought about by a performance of the thinker;** without this- they would be inactive, at least as far as we can see. And yet the thinker does not create them but must take them as they are. **They can be true without being grasped by a thinker; and they are not wholly unactual even then, at least if they *could* be grasped and so brought into action.** [344-5]