

WHERE WORDS FAIL

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A thought makes truth turn in a determinate way on how things are; specifically on whether they are such-and-such way *for* them to be. In the case of a (singly) singular thought, such as that Sid smokes, this is decomposable into two elements: one making truth turn on how some object is; the other making it turn on which objects are some particular way for an object to be. From 1891 on Frege speaks of thoughts, and thought-elements, as having what he calls *Bedeutung*. The *Bedeutung* of a predicative element, he writes, is what, from 1891 on, he calls a *concept*. Only, he also tells us, there is a peculiar obstacle to saying such things as the above (seem to be). A further idea is to be (as it were): no concept is an object; concepts are in need of completion by objects (one or more, depending on the sort of concept); objects need no such completion. But there is that same obstacle to saying this as well.

At different times Frege locates that obstacle in different places. Sometimes it is posed by language; sometimes it lies in the nature of concepts. Thus, in 1892 he writes,

I do not dispute Kerry's right to use the words 'object' and 'concept' in his way, so long as he preserves the same right for me, and affirms that with my designation I have grasped a distinction of the greatest importance. Granted, a peculiar obstacle stands in the way of communication with the reader, namely, that, with a peculiar necessity of language, my expression, taken strictly literally, sometimes misses the thought, in that where a concept is meant an object is named. I am fully aware of being directed in such cases to the friendly accommodation of the reader who will not be sparing with a pinch of salt. (1892: 204)

While writing at some time between 1892 and 1895 he locates the obstacle elsewhere:

The nature of a concept is now a great obstacle for proper expression, and for communication. Where I want to speak of a concept, language forces me with nearly inescapable force to use an unfitting expression, by which the thought is obscured—I could almost say falsified. If I say, 'the concept *equilateral triangle*', one would assume, following the

linguistic analogy, that I thereby designate a concept, just as, without doubt, I name a planet if I say 'the planet Neptune'. But this is not the case; for predicative nature is missing. Accordingly, the *Bedeutung* of the expression 'The concept *equilateral triangle*' (insofar as there is one) is an object. We cannot avoid words such as 'the concept', but must then always be conscious of their unsuitability. (1892-1895: 130)

The *Bedeutung* of 'The concept *equilateral triangle* is an object, and *hence*, the idea is, not a concept (under which precisely equilateral triangles fall.). Here it is the nature of a concept which is the villain.

It *looks* as if we can say what the *Bedeutung* of a given predicative element is (if, that is, we know what Frege means by 'concept'). What we would like to say is that it is such-and-such concept. But if Frege is right, then when we try to say this, we do not say what the *Bedeutung* of that element is, for (for a start) what we speak of is something else. Frege may seem to be suffering confusion here. Or he may seem to have an insight. James Conant, in a remarkably rich essay, comments on this situation as follows:

Another cousin of our problem can be seen in Frege's treatment of the Kerry paradox, when he insists that the words he himself must resort to ("the concept horse is not a concept") in order to illuminate what is confused in Kerry's talk about concepts do not themselves express coherent thoughts—any more than Kerry's own formulations do. ...

Frege's discussion of these two cousins of our problem are viewed by many contemporary commentators as among the most embarrassing moments in all of his work—sudden signs of an otherwise uncharacteristic softening of the mind. Yet they are precisely the moments in Frege's work from which Wittgenstein takes himself to learn the most. The central source of confusion in Frege's thought about logic is located elsewhere by the *Tractatus*—in the one assumption that it shares with psychologism (that "widespread philosophical disease": that logic is a science.(1991: 140-141)

The other cousin (besides Kerry's paradox) is the idea that since rules of inference "are presupposed in every act of judgement, they themselves cannot serve as candidates for judgement" (1991: 140).

Conant sees insight in Frege's idea of an obstacle. He also sees this idea as inspiration for another idea, expressible this way: logic is not a science. In what follows I plan to do two

things. First, I will question whether there really is any such obstacle as Frege suggests. The answer one gives that question will turn out, ultimately, to depend on one's answer to another, very fundamental question as to what logic is, or what it says, and, in particular, as to what its 'universality' consists in. I will suggest an answer to this question which gives substance, and some plausibility, to the idea that logic is not a science. At the same time, the questions arising as to how to conceive logic mark precisely, I think, that which distinguishes later Wittgenstein from his young self. Which shows, in turn, that there are some quite different ways of understanding that slogan. Here, then, a verbal similarity can mark a deep difference. (Though *in re* verbal similarity what later Wittgenstein actually says is slightly different: "logic does not treat of language—or of thought—in the sense in which a natural science treats of a natural phenomenon" (1953: §81).)

In what follows I am betting heavily on Frege being wrong as to the obstacle. If he is right, then much of what I say will be nonsense, or at best, certainly not the sense I hope it to be. In that case I will take no consolation in the thought that, by choosing the right nonsense, I might have coaxed an audience into seeing 'what can only be shown, but not said'. I am betting on there being no need for taking refuge in that. If there is, though, I do not consider it much of a refuge. *Thus* far, and, as will emerge, farther than that, Conant and I agree.