

Kantian Conceptualism

Handout 9 – Fregean Content

October 31, 2013

1 Frege

In Frege's 1892 paper "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" he distinguishes between two semantic features of truth-evaluable expressions and their constituent components—viz. 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung'

1.1 Bedeutung & Semantic Value

Bedeutung (reference/denotation/meaning/semantic value): The semantic value of an expression is that feature of it which determines whether expressions in which it occurs are true or false

The semantic values of common expression types include:

- Proper names → objects
- Predicates/'concepts' → functions (ordered n-tuples of objects and truth values)
- Logical connectives → functions (ordered n-tuples of truth values and truth values)
- Quantifiers → functions (ordered n-tuples of concepts and truth values)

1.2 An Argument for the Existence of Sinn

1. There are identity statements (e.g. "The morning star is the evening star") which are cognitively significant
2. If the cognitive significance of an expression is identified with its semantic value then there would be no cognitively significant identity statements
3. There are cognitively significant identity statements
4. ∴ Cognitive significance is not identical with semantic value

Sinn (sense/meaning): The feature of an expression's meaning, distinct from its semantic value, that determines its semantic value

1.3 Gedanke ("Thought")

Thought: A truth-evaluable expression¹

- Thoughts are the senses expressed by indicative sentences, which can be the contents of assertions²
- Thoughts are composed solely of senses (*Sinne*)
- Thoughts are wholly objective, publicly graspable objects distinct from the psychological and linguistic modes of grasping them³

¹ I call a thought something for which the question of truth arises (Frege (1956), 292)

² The sense of a sentence is called a thought. The predicate 'true' is [only] applicable to thoughts (Frege (1897), 35).

³ One sees a thing, one has an idea, one apprehends or thinks a thought. When one apprehends or thinks a thought one does not create it but only comes to stand in a certain relation, which is different from seeing a thing or having an idea, to what already existed before (Frege (1956), 302)

1.4 Some Important Features of Fregean Sense

- distinct from the semantic values they determine
- distinct from other senses with the same semantic value
- distinct from the psychological and linguistic acts by which they are grasped
- constitutive of the cognitive value of an expression
- individuated in part by an appeal to the rationality of the subjects which grasp those senses⁴

2 Tolley on the Content of Cognition

2.1 A 'Fregean' Theory

SIX THESES:

1. The act/object distinction
2. The relation/object distinction
3. The 'content-as-relation' thesis
4. The content/object distinction
5. The act/content distinction
6. The 'objectivity of objects and contents' thesis

Tolley aims to that Kant accepts (1)-(6), but in particular that he accepts (4) and (6), since showing the truth of these demonstrates the incompatibility of Kant's view with, respectively, 'Russellianism' and a purely 'psychologistic' semantics.⁵

QUESTIONS:

- i. What does Tolley mean by 'object'
- ii. What is an intentional (or representational) relation?
- iii. Is there anyone who holds the 'Russellian' view as Tolley describes it?⁶
- iv. Do the six theses track what is fundamentally 'Fregean' about Frege's theory of sense?

2.2 The Key Claims?

Perhaps the following two theses are the main basis for relating Frege and Kant:

1. The content of cognition is an intentional relation
2. The content of a cognition is not identical with either the mental state/act or the object of the cognitio

⁴ The sense of a sentence, which is of course a function of the sense of its parts, is (in Frege's terminology) a thought; and the single constraint Frege imposed upon his notion of thought was that it should conform to what we might call 'the Intuitive Criterion of Difference', namely, that the thought associated with one sentence S as its sense must be different from the thought associated with another sentence S' as its sense, if it is possible for someone to understand both sentences at a given time while coherently taking different attitudes towards them, i.e. accepting (rejecting) one while rejecting (accepting), or being agnostic about, the other. (Evans (1982), 18-19)

⁵ My positive task here will thus be completed if I can show that Kant is committed to these six Theses. Since Thesis (4) is incompatible with Russellianism and Thesis (6) is incompatible with a psychologistic semantics, to show that Kant is committed to these theses will contribute directly to the negative task as well, as it will demonstrate the inadequacy of the competing interpretations. (Tolley (2011), 3)

⁶ Something that is the case, a fact, is something that can be truly said, or thought, to be the case. A fact is a true thought, in the sense in which a thought is the *Sinn* expressible by a sentence, perhaps on an occasion. (McDowell (2005), 56; note 22)

3 *A Short Argument for Non-Conceptualism?*

1. The content of a cognition (whether intuition or concept) consists in—i.e. is nothing but—a relation to an object
2. Concepts and intuitions relate to objects in different ways—viz. mediately and immediately
3. ∴ The content of intuition is different from the content of concepts
4. Representations are individuated as to type—i.e. intuition or concept—in virtue of their content
5. ∴ Intuitions cannot have conceptual content

4 *Further References:*

1. Evans, Gareth. 1982. *The Varieties of Reference*. Edited by John McDowell. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Frege, Gottlob. 1897. "Logik." In *Schriften Zur Logik Und Sprachphilosophie: Aus Dem Nachlass*, 277:35–73. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.
3. ——. 1956. "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry." *Mind* 65 (259) (jul): 289–311.
4. McDowell, John. 2005. "Evans's Frege." In *Thought, Reference, and Experience : Themes from the Philosophy of Gareth Evans* *Thought, Reference, and Experience : Themes from the Philosophy of Gareth Evans*, edited by José Luis Bermúdez, 42–65. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
5. Tolley, Clinton. 2011. "Kant on the content of cognition." *European Journal of Philosophy*.