

## Handout 14

### First person: Frege, Perry

**FREGE ON 'I'.** Frege lays down the foundations for treating indexicals and demonstratives when he says that thought cannot be grasped solely from the utterance of indexical sentences. We need to know as well the conditions 'accompanying the utterance'. With demonstratives, it can be pointing or other gestures. The discussion of 'I' initially occurs in the context of discussing the senses of proper names. Different speakers may associate different senses with the same name. Frege goes as far as to say that those speakers will be speaking different languages. 358

Then Frege says that everyone is presented to himself in a 'special and primitive way'. When Dr Lauben says: 359

I was wounded, (14-1)

Leo Peter can understand his thought and express it by uttering:

Dr Lauben was wounded, (14-2)

presumably using the name 'Dr Lauben' in his idiolect, possibly distinct from Herbert Garner's idiolect. Yet, if Dr Lauben is presented to himself in a unique way, you might worry that Leo Peter, in uttering (14-2), failed to capture the thought expressed with (14-1). This is the question Frege himself asks. What follows after is a lengthy meditation on the nature of thoughts. In a nutshell, thoughts are objective, can be 'grasped' and communicated, unlike ideas. 360

**TRANSPARENCY OF THOUGHT.** The distinction between character and content is further utilised in John Perry's illuminating examples. The principal target of his examples is the thesis of the transparency of thought due to Frege. This is the principle that if a speaker  $X$  understands a sentence  $S$  and a sentence  $S'$ , then, if  $S$  and  $S'$  express the same thought,  $X$  must realise this fact. There would be no possibility for the speaker to think that  $S$ , but not to think that  $S'$ . Thoughts are not like mountains observed from different location and presenting different appearances. Such cases of different appearance may be possible if thoughts are characterised as objects of propositional attitudes (beliefs or desires). But so far as they refer to truth and falsehood, they must be available to different speakers. This is the background of Frege's realist dictum that thoughts are transmitted through generations.

**THREE PROBLEMS.** We remember that, according to Frege, in using and understanding proper names we attach to them senses which can be identified with definite descriptions. Indexicals and demonstratives are referring expressions, but in that at least they are different from names. One cannot attach descriptions to indexicals, as these descriptions shift with occasions of utterance. Perhaps, however, we can say that for each speaker and for each occasion, there would be a description  $D$  associated with an indexical  $I$ , such that the speaker, on that occasion, believes that  $I$  is  $D$ . At this point a number of important problems emerge. 16

*Irrelevance of belief.*  $D$  would not determine the thought. For suppose that in fact  $I$  is not  $D$ . Then in uttering ' $I$  is  $D$ ' I should fail to express the thought that  $I$  is  $D$ . Thus, for instance, when Rip van Winkle wakes up and utters:

Today is 20 October 1803, (14-3)

he does not express the thought:

20 October 1803 is 20 October 2003. (14-4)

But if the thought were determined by the sense, this is what we should have said.

*Non-necessity of belief.* I may be able to express a thought by uttering ' $I$  is  $D$ ' even if I cannot identify the real referent of  $I$  in the context by non-indexical means. Again, if RW fails to associate any sense with 'today' in the utterance of (14-3), he still expressed a thought: it is possible to ask whether he said something true or false.

*Non-sufficiency of belief.* I may in fact be able to associate a correct description with the indexical, but that is not sufficient for producing a true thought. If Heimson imagines that he is Hume, and if, moreover, his life bears remarkable similarities to Hume's, still in uttering 'I am Hume', Heimson fails to express the thought that Hume expresses by uttering the same sentence. Why should that be so? Why cannot Heimson think of himself that he is Hume? Heimson is mad, after all! Well, precisely for this reason: we should respond to Heimson by rejecting his utterance: 'No, *you* are not Hume', 'No, *you* did not write the *Treatise*.' We would not issue same rejections to Hume. Hence the thoughts are different.

**ESSENTIAL INDEXICAL.** There are thoughts that simply can only be expressed in indexical sentences. Perry considers several examples.

*Perry and the sack.* Perry pushes the trolley in the supermarket, noticing that someone is making a mess with a torn sack of sugar. But he would not pause and fix the sack unless he believed that *he* is making a mess. Suppose it were announced in the supermarket:

John Perry is making a mess! (14-5)

Then Perry would still not pause, unless he also believed that *he* is John Perry.

*The late meeting.* A professor is sitting in his office waiting for the meeting to start at noon. Suddenly he gets up and begins moving toward the meeting room. What explains his motion? His belief that it is noon *now*. 34

*Heimson/Hume (two campers).* A mad Heimson believes that he is Hume. Hume, not being mad, also believes that he himself is Hume. Heimson is an expert on Hume. Indeed, he may know every minute fact about Hume. So Heimson and Hume may agree on every fact about Hume's biography. They should also agree that Heimson is not Hume! But they still disagree on who is Hume. Each says, 'I am Hume!' That is, their disagreement should be cashed out in terms of indexical sentences. The same problem occurs in the case of the two lost campers. 35

*Rudolf Lingens.* Lingens is an amnesiac in the Stanford library. He has found and read a biography of himself. So he knows a lot about Lingens. He may even know that Lingens is an amnesiac lost in the Stanford library. But he still does not know that *he* is Rudolf Lingens. He may try to exit the library and go to a doctor only if he knows that *he* is the amnesiac lost in the library.

**SELF-LOCATING BELIEFS.** Two difficulties emerge. First, the character/content distinction cuts deeper than we thought. Some contents (thoughts) are not expressible by eternal sentences. They are tied to their indexical character. It impossible to say what Perry or the professor came to believe, if we express their beliefs as indexical-free propositions, in eternal sentences.

Second, it is unclear how to individuate those self-locating, or 'perspectival', contents. If it is a different truth, for Lingens, that he is Lingens, even though he already knew all the facts about Lingens, should we say that the thought that today is sunny, expressed today, is the same as the thought that yesterday was sunny, expressed tomorrow? Identity criteria for those thoughts become blurred.