

Handout 4
Thought: Frege II

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GUSTAV LAUBEN. In the rather complex Gustav Lauben example (*'glauben'* is 'to believe' in German), different characters form different beliefs about Gustav Lauben. Because of that, they attach different senses to the name 'Gustav Lauben'. Then there is a question about the sense that speaker attaches to the indexical 'I'. As the text shows, the example was initially supposed to illustrate the use of indexical expressions, such as 'I', 'today', 'now'. This subject (which we skip in our course) is interwoven with the subject of the senses of proper names.

LEO PETER AND RUDOLPH LINGENS. So Gustav Lauben is a doctor living in a certain house. Fighting in a duel (say), he utters the sentence:

(4-1) I was wounded.

Leo Peter is witness to this utterance. Can he express the same thought? It is clear that what Gustav Lauben uttered is a thought meant to be communicated. In fact there should not be any great mystery about it, since we communicate similar thoughts daily. And so, if it can be communicated, then Leo Peter must be able to grasp and express it *himself*. But how? Not by uttering (4-1)! Perhaps he should instead replace 'I' with the speaker's proper name. As he knows (we assume) that the speaker is called 'Gustav Lauben', he should say:

(4-2) Gustav Lauben is wounded.

Enter Rudolph Lingens. Here the story gets very complicated. Lingens is a competent German (well, English here) speaker, who is *also* witness to Lauben's utterance. As I read Frege, Lingens knows that a certain 'Dr Gustav Lauben' lives at a certain address. Lingens also saw Dr Lauben at the duel. But he didn't realise that the man who was wounded was in fact Dr Lauben (a man living at a certain address known to him).

And so, some days later Lingens has overheard Leo Peter uttering (4-2). Frege asks: Should Lingens at once grasp the thought that Leo Peter is now expressing (which is the same thought as Gustav Lauben was expressing before)? In other words, does Leo Peter succeed in communicating his thought to Rudolph Lingens? When Lingens hears Peter uttering (4-2), it is clear that he will not agree with Peter. This can be for either of the two reasons: either Peter and Lingens understand each other (i.e. understand what is being said), but disagree on the facts. Or they do not understand each other.

As Frege imagines the situation, Lingens is a user of the name 'Gustav Lauben' and he *can* identify him, though not visually. So you can imagine this dialogue:

Leo Peter: Gustav Lauben was wounded!
Rudolph Lingens: No, you are wrong: I know Gustav Lauben, I have talked to him on the
(4-3) phone today, and he mentioned nothing!
LP: But he is the man with the wooden leg you saw yesterday at the duel.
RL: Ah! So Gustav Lauben has a wooden leg, I see. And he was wounded!

So here both characters speak of the same person. Do they associate the same sense with it? It seems to me that we have to say that they do. For if they do not, then they do not understand each other. Yet, it seems to me, they do understand each other, and their disagreement is just about the facts.

OTTO FENBAR. Suppose though there is *another* character, Otto Fenbar (*'offenbaren'* is 'to reveal' in German). He was at the duel, but he has not heard the name 'Gustav Lauben' before. Then this dialogue could take place the next day:

Leo Peter: Gustav Lauben was wounded!
(4-4) Otto Fenbar: Who is Gustav Lauben?
LP: He is the man with the wooden leg you saw yesterday at the duel.
OF: Ah! So his name is 'Gustav Lauben'.

Here Otto Fenbar does not *understand at all* at first what Leo Peter is saying. Why is that? Precisely because he does not associate any individuating characteristic with 'Gustav Lauben'—i.e. does not know the sense of that name. Leo Peter reveals the use of that name to Fenbar.

Remark 1. Observe that a natural way of expressing your ignorance about the sense of the name is to say that you don't know 'who' the name refers to—i.e. you don't know its reference. Otto Fenbar couldn't well say, 'What do you mean by "Gustav Lauben"?'. This fact matches Frege's view that, once you have grasped the sense of the name, you should also know its reference (ignoring the case of empty names).

Now thought is the sense of a sentence. And the sense of the sentence is composed of the senses of its ingredient parts. Hence, for Peter and Fenbar, the thought initially expressed with the utterance (4-2) is also different. In fact, as things stand, for Fenbar there is no particular thought expressed: he does not understand the utterance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDEXICALS. It is important to keep track of the main thread of the argument here that began with the question of the sense of 'I'. Frege uses this example to claim that the thought expressed by Lauben with (4-1) is not the same as the one expressed by Peter with (4-2). For if it were the same, then Lingens, who *understood* what Lauben was saying, should also have understood what Peter was saying.

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HERBERT GARNER. The idea of understanding proper names is refined further when we consider Herbert Garner who knows that Lauben was born on 13/09/1875 in Berlin. Suppose that, miraculously, no one else was born in Berlin on that day. So we say that Garner *can* identify Lauben, though again not perceptually. Leo Peter can also identify Gustav Lauben ('the doctor living in that house'). And in this case, Frege says that, in using the name 'Gustav Lauben', they do not speak the same language.

LUDWIG ANDERS. The situation of Herbert Garner is analogous to the situation of Lingens. And therefore, Frege implicitly takes the line that Lingens also does not speak the same language with Leo Peter. I think this should be wrong.

But we do have cases where people speak 'different languages' while using the same name. So consider Ludwig Anders who believes that 'Gustav Lauben' refers to his colleague living in a different city. Thus when Ludwig Anders hears the utterance (4-2) he completely misunderstands the speaker Leo Peter. Unlike Lingens, however, he forms a thought—namely, the thought that his colleague is wounded. Consider:

- LP: Gustav Lauben was wounded!
 (4-5) LA: You are lying! Gustav Lauben is healthy, I have seen him today.
 LP: No, I mean the doctor living here.
 LA: Ah! *That* Gustav Lauben was wounded.

So Ludwig Anders is able to disagree with Leo Peter, because he attributes to Leo Peter a thought about Gustav Lauben who lives in a different city. He *misunderstands* Leo Peter. Once the original thought of Leo Peter is clarified, disagreement is no longer. It is in this case that we should better not use the same name. That is, we should associate the same shapes and noises when referring to two different individuals. We should perhaps have Gustav Lauben₁ and Gustav Lauben₂, or as Frege suggested, 'Gustav Lauben' and 'Dr Lauben'. This ambiguity should have no place in a ideal, well regimented language.

Ludwig Anders' confusion over the name 'Gustav Lauben' is the same as the typical confusion over homonyms:

- A: I wrote my first letter when I was twelve.
 (4-6) B: What, you learned to write that late?
 A: I don't mean 'letter of alphabet'. I mean, my first epistle.

Here B clearly misunderstands what A said earlier.

PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE. I have argued that, as far as the use of proper names is concerned, there is no interesting difference between Leo Peter, Rudolph Lingens, and Herbert Garner. All three are competent users of the name 'Gustav Lauben'. All three are in possession of identifying senses—pieces of knowledge allowing them to single out Gustav Lauben among the objects in the universe. They do not, however, know everything there is to know about Gustav Lauben. Thus it is possible for them to disagree with each other and to have false beliefs about Gustav Lauben.

Question 2. What kind of knowledge does Gustav Lauben have of the name 'Gustav Lauben'? Is it any different from the knowledge of either of the three other characters?

Yet it may be thought that Leo Peter is fundamentally *more* competent than either Lingens or Garner. That is because he knows how Gustav Lauben looks: on seeing Lauben, he is able to say, 'This is Gustav Lauben.' Unlike either of the other characters (at least initially), he is able to recognise Gustav Lauben in the crowd.

I do not find this idea at all plausible. What is special about visual knowledge? That it is sensory? What about sounds and smells? Do we gain special knowledge about the person when we identify his voice or smell among other voices and smells? That seems odd.

In general, visual appearance is not the most individuating fact about the person, not the primary one that sets him apart from others. If you know very many unique facts about a person, his biography etc., but do not know what he looks like, shall we say that you are missing a vital bit of information? That is unlikely.

THE THIRD REALM. In a lengthy meditation Frege defends realism about thoughts (=senses, as we interpret him here), pursuing the line already taken in *On Sense and Reference*. The chief property of ideas is ownership, and in particular, unique ownership. This is something familiar to us from Berkeley. Indeed, Frege's polemic reads as if it is a polemic with Berkeley (and the Moon example, made famous by Berkeley, strongly suggests this anyway).

Thoughts are not ideas, since they do not belong to me or anyone else. The Pythagorean theorem is not my theorem or yours. This leads Frege to postulate the 'third realm' of thoughts. In this way thoughts are objective, independent of any one's consciousness, and accessible to different people, just as the denizens of the material realm are.

Frege's claim is that I am aware of thoughts, I can 'have' thoughts without them at the same time becoming dependent on me. Thoughts can be shared, in much the same way as material objects are shared. His main argument is that, if everything known is only an idea, then ordinary talk and scientific discourse dissolve into an absurdity. This may be intended to imitate Berkeley's own argument which was that the notion of a material body leads us to an absurdity. Among other things, it is also interesting to note the arguments on sense perception. Frege wishes to show that the claim that our awareness is only about ideas ends up perverting scientific method. In fact, however, exactly this claim was made by Hermann Helmholtz in the 1860s, and Frege must have been aware of that (since Helmholtz was probably the most famous and influential German scientist of the second half of the 19th century).

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