

# **That which 'is true' must already contain the verb: Wittgenstein's rejection of Frege's separation of judgment from content**

## **1. Introduction**

Frege presents it as a key advance of his logical theorising that it effects a “separation of the act from the subject matter of judgment” (CP 149). Propositional content is theoretically independent of, and so theoretically prior to, the acts of judgment and assertion. This would-be advance is not endorsed, however, by the Tractarian Wittgenstein, who on the contrary saw a profound misstep. Content, Wittgenstein insists, is explained only with judgment: a propositional content is fundamentally something *to be judged*.

Frege's separation is built into his conceptual notation, and Wittgenstein's contrary position likewise pervades his work, essentially informing the Tractarian treatment of negation and denial, the understanding of logical propositions, the conception of inference, the commitment to bivalence, and more besides. It would be a major project to trace such threads in Wittgenstein. In this essay, I want to take on the more limited task of examining a ground Wittgenstein offers for his position. In the 4.06s, Wittgenstein considers and rejects certain views he ascribes to Frege concerning sense and assertion. Indeed, Wittgenstein appears in 4.063 to offer an *argument* against these ascribed views. This section has I think been underestimated. Certain commentators have thought that its reasoning is vitiated by serious misunderstandings of Frege. Others have found the reasoning good but held it to target the later Frege's assimilation of propositions to names, something which hardly needs further disproof. As I shall read the section, Wittgenstein's basic target is something well worthy of our attention, namely the separation of judgment from content. And the section is of systematic importance, for contains in seed a compelling argument against this target. Wittgenstein shows Frege's view to be untenable that content is explained independently of judgment.

The essay will have three major parts. The first part will be concerned only with Frege, describing how he renders judgment external to content. Subsequently, I shall consider Wittgenstein's recognition and rejection of Frege's stance, providing interpretations in particular of *Tractatus* sections 4.062, 4.063 and 4.064. Finally, I shall consider a motivation offered by Frege, and say something brief about how that motivation may be deflected by Wittgenstein.

## **2. Frege's separation of the act from the subject matter of judgment**

### **2.1**

Frege's first great work, *Begriffsschrift*, sets out a novel script for the representation of judgment. This script is trailed in the book's introduction, where Frege recommends to his reader certain of its key features. First and apparently foremost amongst these is a repudiation of the Aristotelian notions of subject and predicate:

The mere invention of this ideography has it seems to me advanced logic. ... In particular, I believe that the replacement of the concepts *subject* and *predicate* by *argument* and *function* respectively will stand the test of time. (BS 7)

This replacement comprises two moves. First, Frege introduces his assertion sign “⊢”:

A judgement will always be expressed by means of the sign ‘⊢’ which stands to the left of the sign, or the combination of signs, indicating the content of the judgment. (BS §2)

Second, what indicates the judgment's content is divided into expressions of function and argument. These two proposals are fundamental to his new script and remain untouched throughout his ensuing career. Between them, however, they effect what Wittgenstein will see as a profound mistake.

Frege's assertion sign is on the face of it not terribly hard to understand. The symbol "A" in a Begriffsschrift formula "⊢A" indicates a propositional content but does not in itself effect an assertion of that content. To do that, to manifest a judgment, we prefix the contentful "A" with the sign "⊢". Frege's own explanation of his sign in *Begriffsschrift* section 3 is, however, slightly puzzling. The section begins:

A distinction between subject and predicate finds no place in my representation of a judgment (BS §3).

Later on, Frege then describes this new representation as follows:

Imagine a language in which the proposition 'Archimedes was killed at the capture of Syracuse' is expressed in the following way: 'The violent death of Archimedes at the capture of Syracuse is a fact'. Even here, if one wants, subject and predicate can be distinguished, but the subject contains the whole content, and the predicate serves only to present it as a judgment. Such a language would have only a single predicate for all judgments, namely, 'is a fact'. It can be seen that there is no question here of subject and predicate in the usual sense. Our Begriffsschrift is a language of this sort and the symbol '⊢' is its common predicate for all judgments. (BS §3)

How, one may however wonder, can this description be apt? If as Frege insists there is *no* place in the Begriffsschrift representation of a judgment for a distinction between subject and predicate, then how can there remain a sense in which Frege's script has a single predicate for all judgments?

To appreciate Frege's explanation here of his script, we need to consider the concepts of subject and predicate he at once rejects, and then also appeals to. These concepts belong as said to an Aristotelian tradition, one which would be familiar to his envisaged reader. And the basic, relevant feature of this tradition is a conception of judgment as *predication*. To judge is to act on a certain object: it is to predicate something of that object. To judge that Jack is tall, for example, is to predicate *tallness* of the man Jack. This conception of atomic judgment integrates with a view also of its linguistic expression. An Aristotelian atomic judgment is expressed by a sentence composed of a subject term and a predicate expression. The subject term introduces a certain object, and the predicate expression expresses an act of predication directed on that object. The judgment that Jack is tall, for example, is expressed by a sentence "Jack is tall" composed first of "Jack", a name introducing the object Jack, and second of "is tall", a predicate expression expressing the act of predicating *tallness*.

Frege rejects this Aristotelian picture. More specifically, he rejects the unity of act and content embodied in the Aristotelian predicate. Within the Aristotelian sentence "Jack is tall", the words "is tall" express an act of predicating, and so an act of judging. And this is a *contentful* act. There is, that is to say, a commonality of content among judgments so made. (In this case, they are all judgments of something's being tall.) As Frege sees it, however, this unity is misconceived; the predicate's aspects of act and content should be separated out. To do this, he makes the two moves we noted above. First, he introduces his assertion sign whose role is to express pure, contentless act: it expresses that act common to all judgments no matter their content. And second, he introduces his function expressions whose role is to indicate actless content: a function expression expresses no act but serves instead to indicate the commonality of content embodied in a traditional predicate. With the Aristotelian predicate dissolved in this way, the judgment that Jack is tall is now represented in Frege's new script by a formula "⊢ Jack is tall" of not two elements but three. The name "Jack" combines with the function expression "is tall" to indicate the actless propositional content that Jack is tall. And attaching to this combination is the assertion sign "⊢" by which the content is then represented as judged.

As for the puzzle in Frege's explanation of his new sign, this arises from his desire to explain his representation of a judgment to a reader from the Aristotelian tradition, and so to explain it in Aristotelian terms. Here Frege has two options, depending on whether the traditional predicate is considered primarily as act or primarily as content. Foregrounding matters of content, the composition represented by the subject-predicate division is supplanted in Frege's new account by a force-free structuring into argument and function. And so we have "the replacement of the concepts *subject* and *predicate* by *argument* and *function*" (BS 7). Here we are stripping the essentially contentful predicate of its force and 'flattening it' into a function. We are, as Frege later puts it, "disassociating assertoric force from the predicate" (PW 185). From a perspective of predicate as force, however, Frege's dissolution is a stripping of the essentially forceful predicate of its content and relocating that content instead with an enlarged subject. And so Frege describes his script as a language in which "the subject contains the whole content, and the predicate serves only to present it as a judgment" (BS §3). Both of these perspectives may of course be helpful; but equally both may mislead, for the Aristotelian predicate is essentially both act *and* content. This being so, the strict truth of the matter is that the subject-predicate distinction "finds *no place*" (§3, italics added) in the *Begriffsschrift* representation of judgment.

## 2.2

In abolishing as he does the Aristotelian predicate, Frege effects a "separation of the act from the subject matter of judgment" (CP 149). This separation, I want now to underline, is a theoretical reordering. Where for the Aristotelian, propositional content is explained only with the act of judgment, Frege renders content theoretically independent of judgment, and so theoretically prior to it. A Fregean content is by its nature something which may be judged, but it is not something *in* its nature *to be judged*. To appreciate this distinction, let's consider a rather different case.

There are such things as dances: the Viennese Waltz, for example, and the Macarena. These dances may be the objects of various attitudes, or acts. One might revere the Viennese Waltz, say, and detest the Macarena. One might prefer the Salsa to the Rumba. The possibility a dance bears of being detested or preferred is, however, external to the dance itself. The Macarena is a dance, and as such is liable to be loved, but this liability is not constitutive of the dance's basic nature. One does not recognise what the Macarena fundamentally is by recognising it as something one might love. What is not so external to the Macarena, on the other hand, is that it may be *danced*. A dance – any dance – is fundamentally something *to be danced*. (As one might say, the dance has its being as something one may dance.) Or again, a dance is precisely a *manner of dancing*. Where the Macarena is danced, one's dancing does not have an act-object structure. There is not within one's dancing of the Macarena an entity danced discernible separately from one's dancing of it. Rather, the dance one dances is the form one's dancing takes. To dance a certain dance is not to act with a certain object, as one does when one adores the Waltz, say, or eats a cake; rather, it is to dance in a certain manner. In dancing, one *exemplifies* the dance one there dances.

Parallel remarks apply to Aristotelian predicates. The noun "predicate" is used in the tradition to refer both to the linguistic expression of an act of predication and also to what is predicated in such an act: *tallness*, for example, or *being tall*. To judge that Jack is tall is to predicate a certain predicate, namely *being tall*, of Jack. This predicate is not, however, something which can *as it happens* be predicated, as a dance can as it happens be admired. Rather, as a dance is essentially something to be danced, so a predicate is essentially something to be predicated. Or again, as a dance is a manner of dancing, so a predicate is a manner of predicating. To judge that Jack is tall is to predicate *being tall* of Jack, but what is predicated in this judgment is not a second object alongside Jack of an act of predication. There is here no act of 'pure predicating' which takes two objects, *being tall* and Jack. (Predicating *tallness* of Jack is not like introducing Jack to Jill.) Rather, the predicate predicated is the predicating's determinate form.

This claim is simply a repetition of point above that the Aristotelian linguistic predicate expresses a unity of act and content. The linguistic predicate does not play two separate roles: it does not on the one hand express an act of pure predication, and on the other supply an element of the judgment's content, an

object for that pure act. (The predicate “is tall” does not divide into an “is” and a “tall”.) Rather, it expresses a unitary, contentful act of predicating. It expresses, that is to say, a manner of predicating, and so a manner of judging. This manner act of predicating is, however, precisely what is repudiated by Frege’s separation of the act from the subject matter of judgment. Indeed, Frege rejects with his separation all idea of a manner of judging. For the Aristotelian, what is judged – the judgment’s content – is a way of judging: it is a way of predicating as directed on a certain object. But this is not so for Frege. In disassociating the act of judgment from all elements of content, and so from content *tout court*, there remains no unitary manner of judging, one which does not divide into act and object. A Fregean content, it follows, is not something to be judged but is, where judged, a theoretically independent object of that act.

### 2.3

An appreciation of the wider significance of this point within Frege’s theorising is beyond the scope of this essay. (It entails, for example, a division in Frege between the prior, descriptive laws of truth and the subsequent, normative laws of judgment (see e.g. CP 351).) In preparation for Wittgenstein, however, two contextualising comments may quickly and somewhat dogmatically be made, comments which relate to the “pride of place” Frege ascribes in his theorising to the notion of truth (PW 253).

The first of these comments is that content, whilst prior to judgment, is coeval theoretically with truth. Propositional contents are for Frege the basic truth bearers: for a judgment to be true is for it to have a true content. The notion of truth is thus explained with that of content. And conversely, the notion of content is explained with that of truth. Frege writes: “I ... introduce a thought as that to which the question ‘is it true?’ is in principle applicable” (PW 253). Here Frege is not singling out for our attention a certain type of being, namely thoughts, on which we already had a separate grip, a grip independent of truth. Rather, he is introducing the notion of a thought as the notion of that which may be true. A Fregean thought is in its conception a truth or falsehood. (See PW 168: “the most appropriate name for a true thought is a truth”).

Frege’s separation of judgment from content is thus at once its separation from truth: if truth and content are coeval, then if content is prior to judgment, so too is truth prior to judgment. Truth is theoretically independent in Frege of the notion of judgment. For the second preparatory comment, we may pause a moment on Frege’s conception of a propositional content as at base something true or false. Here, one might think, there is a suggestion that a content is something *for the mind*; for a truth or falsehood, so one might think, is something *to be thought*. Thought here cannot of course mean *judged*, but there are other things for it to mean.

Frege tells us many times that in order to judge, the subject must first *grasp* the thought (see e.g. PW 267). This is not a claim of temporal priority, a speculative assertion about temporal order in human psychology. Rather, it is a claim of act containment. To judge for Frege means to judge something grasped; the subject judges *with understanding*. (Just the same goes for the act of questioning. As the act of judgment contains that of understanding, so too “in raising the question [the investigator] is grasping a thought” (CP 375).) Grasping is strictly prior here in the order of explanation: whilst the act of judgment is set out only with that of grasping – to judge means to judge something grasped – the act of grasping is independent of judgment. What is more, grasping is internal for Frege to that which is grasped. So he writes:

The being of a thought may ... be taken to lie in the possibility of different thinkers’ grasping the thought as one and the same. (CP 376)

Thoughts are not in their basic nature entities external to the mind, so that a question might arise of how it is we manage to grasp them. (How do we access the third realm?) Rather, as Frege writes, the task of logic – including centrally that of the explanation of content – “could be represented as the investigation of *the mind*” (CP 369). A thought is not merely something which may be grasped; rather, it is fundamentally something *to be* grasped.

In dancing a certain dance, subjects exemplify the mode of dancing which is the dance. Similarly, where the Aristotelian subject predicates a certain predicate of an object, her predicating exemplifies the mode of judging which is the predicate. And again, the Fregean subject's grasping of a thought is not an act with a certain object, but an exemplification of that mode of the understanding which is the thought she there grasps.

### 3. Wittgenstein's repudiation of Frege

#### 3.1

Like Frege, Wittgenstein explains truth with notions of content, and explains content with reference to truth. (Indeed, Wittgenstein's endorsement of Frege's conception of logic as an unfolding of the nature of truth is I think his most basic inheritance from Frege.) The sense expressed by a Tractarian proposition, the situation it represents (4.031), is precisely the condition of its truth. What is more, a Tractarian sense is, as a truth condition, something *for the mind*, something *to be thought*. Here, though, the alignment with Frege contains also a divergence, for the act of thought internal to Tractarian content is correlate not to Fregean understanding but to Fregean judgment.

The *Tractatus* does not deploy a consistent and narrowly circumscribed terminology of judgment and assertion, preferring instead a more varied bag which, besides judging and asserting, includes also thinking and representing and saying and picturing. Like Fregean judgment and assertion, however, and unlike Fregean grasping, these are all acts for which truth is *correctness*. So on picturing, we find:

The picture represents its object rightly or falsely. (2.173)

In the agreement or disagreement of [the picture's] sense with reality, its truth or falsity consists. (2.222)

The picture agrees with reality or not; it is right or wrong, true or false. (2.21)

For the picture, truth is agreement with reality, and so truth is correctness. A true picture is as such a correct picture. And crucially, it is with the act of picturing (representing, saying, thinking) that truth and content are explained for Wittgenstein. It is with an act for which truth is correctness, rather than with an act correlate to Fregean grasping – one for which truth is no correctness – that truth and content are set out in the *Tractatus*. Truth has no understanding in the *Tractatus* separate from its status as correctness in judgment.

Truth is fundamentally correctness in representation. What a picture represents, its sense, is fundamentally a condition of correct representation. That Wittgenstein diverges here from Frege is something of which he is well aware. Indeed, it is something he thematizes. This is most explicit and sustained in the 4.06s, a passage headed by the claim:

4.06 A proposition can be true or false only in virtue of being a picture of reality.

A proposition has content – is true or false – only insofar as it is a picture of reality: only insofar, that is, as it is something which agrees or disagrees with reality, something which is correct or incorrect. For Frege this is not so. A Fregean proposition “FA” has content in virtue of the content of its component “A”, and this component has content – it expresses a truth or falsity – quite separately from any matter of judgment and assertion, and so quite separately from any matter of agreement or disagreement with reality.

In this second part of the essay, I want to examine two key moments of the 4.06s. First, I shall consider Wittgenstein's rejection in 4.062 of an idea that we might “make ourselves understood with false propositions just as we have up till now with true ones”. Here the contrast with Frege is manifest, but there is no argument against Frege, nothing which would demonstrate Frege to be mistaken. For that, we shall move to consider Wittgenstein's “analogy to illustrate the concept of truth” of section 4.063. In this section,

I shall suggest, Wittgenstein offers a forceful argument against Frege's view that content is explained independently of judgment.

### 3.2

Dummett begins his paper 'Truth' with a criticism of Frege's separation of truth from assertion. He makes a comparison between truth and winning: much as "it is part of the concept of winning a game that a player plays to win" (Dummett 1959, 142), so too "it is part of the concept of truth that we aim at making true statements" (Dummett 1959, 143). Frege's theory of content, however, "leaves this feature of the concept of truth quite out of account" (Dummett 1959, 143):

Frege indeed tried to bring it in afterwards, in his theory of assertion- but too late; for the sense of the sentence is not given in advance of our going in for the activity of asserting, since otherwise there could be people who expressed the same thoughts but went in instead for denying them. (Dummett 1959, 143)

Frege doesn't deny that judgment and assertion aim at truth. What he does, rather, is bring this in afterwards, as something subsequent to the account of truth and content, so that whilst it is internal to judgment that it aims at truth, it is not internal to truth that it is the goal of judgment. But this is too late, Dummett holds, for if content were theoretically prior to assertion, "there could be people who expressed the same thoughts but went in instead for denying them" (Dummett 1959, 143).

Dummett is repeating here a consideration of *Tractatus* 4.062. Wittgenstein asks:

Can we not make ourselves understood by means of false propositions as hitherto with true ones, so long as we know that they are meant to be false? (4.062)

In English, we express a propositional content by means of a sentence "*p*", and in doing so we assert that content. But if, as Frege holds, judgment is external to content, and so assertion is external to the expression of content, this will be a matter simply of convention. It is a convention of English that a symbol expressing a propositional content – a sentence – effects an assertion that content. This convention does not operate for Frege's script. In Frege's script, no forceful act is made by the symbol which expresses the thought. To make an assertion we need to do something more than deploy a symbol with propositional content: we need to prefix that symbol with the assertion sign. Equally, though, one might from Frege's perspective have a convention opposite to that of English, a convention whereby in expressing a certain content one effects not an assertion of that content but a *denial* of it. Instead of deploying sentences intending them to be understood as true, we could deploy sentences intending them to be understood as false.

Dummett doesn't elaborate on the incoherence of "people who expressed the same thoughts but went in instead for denying them" (Dummett 1959, 143). This is supposed, it seems, to be evident. Wittgenstein is slightly more expansive, answering his question as follows:

No! For a proposition is true, if what we assert by means of it is the case; and if by "*p*" we mean  $\sim p$ , and what we mean is the case, then "*p*" in the new conception is true and not false. (4.062)

To put a sentence with the content that *p* forward as false would be to assert that not-*p*. It would be to make an assertion with the correctness condition that not-*p*. If by deploying a certain sentence we assert that not-*p*, Wittgenstein however maintains, then that sentence is true if not-*p*. The sentence, that is to say, will have as its content not that *p*, but that not-*p*.

In this reasoning, Wittgenstein's anti-Fregean position is manifest that a sentence's content, its truth condition, is not separable from the correctness condition of the assertion it effects. Truth is essentially correctness in assertion. It is rather less clear, however, why Frege should not hold the line – why, that is, he should admit that if a sentence is used to assert that not-*p*, then the sentence is true if not-

*p*. Dummett apparently senses a *reductio*, but Wittgenstein does not write as if he were demonstrating a mistake, and it is clear, I take it, that any such demonstration would require substantial additional support.

### 3.3

Wittgenstein's tone is rather different in section 4.063. Here, he is clearly offering an argument, and names Frege as its target. It is less clear, perhaps, what aspect of Frege is being targeted. Wittgenstein speaks specifically of the later Fregean doctrine that propositions designate truth-values, and certain commentators have suggested that this doctrine is at the centre of Wittgenstein's sights (see e.g. Sullivan 1994 and Ricketts 2002). As I shall read this section, however, what is at basic issue in the argument is something constant throughout Frege's career, something deeper in his thought, and something much more engaging philosophically, namely the separation of judgment from content.

The section is reproduced verbatim from the 1913 *Notes on Logic* (NB 99-100) and could certainly have used a rewrite. Indeed, its final sentence deploys a Russellian notion of a verb, but this notion is obsolete by the time of the *Tractatus* and is found nowhere else in the book. (Where a thought holds good, and is enjoyed by Wittgenstein, he typically doesn't take the trouble to update its expression.) Let's begin by sketching the section sufficiently to find puzzling a certain attribution it makes to Frege. This puzzle will then provide the initial context for a more thorough review.

The section comprises three paragraphs, the first of which sets up an "analogy to illustrate the concept of truth". Here, Wittgenstein compares points of a sheet of paper which are either black or white to sentences "*p*" which are either true or false. Proceeding to a second paragraph, Wittgenstein writes:

But to be able to say that a point is black or white, I must first know under what conditions a point is called black, and when white; in order to be able to say "*p*" is true (or false) I must have determined in what circumstances I call "*p*" true, and thereby I determine the sense of the proposition. (4.063)

In order to be able to say that "*p*" is true, I must determine when this symbol is called true. And in doing so, I determine its sense. This single sentence paragraph is then followed by a third, again of a single sentence, which begins:

The point where the simile breaks down is this: we can indicate a point on the paper, without knowing what black and white are; but to a proposition without a sense corresponds nothing at all ... (4.063)

Unlike the point on the paper which can be indicated separately from a determination of when it is called black and when white, there is, Wittgenstein holds, nothing meant by "*p*", and so no contentful "*p*" here to recognise, separately from a determination of when "*p*" is called true – separately, that is, from a determination of its sense. In spelling out the simile's breakdown, however, Wittgenstein makes at the same time a puzzling criticism of Frege:

... but to a proposition without a sense corresponds nothing at all, for it signifies no thing (truth-value) whose properties are called "false" or "true"; the verb of the proposition is not "is true" or "is false" – as Frege thought – but that which "is true" must already contain the verb. (4.063)

There is a question here of the attribution to Frege of 'the verb of the proposition'. But the more basic puzzle is the criticism of Frege that he fails to recognise the breakdown of the simile. Like a Tractarian sense, a Fregean thought or judgeable content is fundamentally a truth condition (see GG §32). So, for Frege as much as for Wittgenstein, there is no meaningful "*p*" to be found separately from a determination of the condition of its truth. What can Wittgenstein mean in suggesting otherwise?

My strategy with 4.063 be to start at the end, looking first at the attribution to Frege of 'the verb of the proposition' – and for this we shall consider also section 4.064. With that understood, we shall be able to see how, for Wittgenstein, Frege does indeed not recognise the simile's breakdown. Only then shall

we turn to the question of what Wittgenstein's *argument* might be, what ground Wittgenstein might provide in this section for *criticising* Frege.

### 3.4

Whilst Wittgenstein didn't give 4.063 the rewrite it needed, he does follow it in the *Tractatus* with a section which recasts its final thought:

Every proposition must *already* have a sense; assertion cannot give it a sense, for what it asserts is the sense itself. (4.064)

Here, one might suspect, Wittgenstein has got Frege plain wrong. It is not Frege's position that a proposition gathers a sense – that is for Frege, comes to express a thought – through an act of assertion. Seeking to decipher 4.063, Ian Proops ascribes to Wittgenstein just this mistake. He writes:

Let us begin by considering how Frege introduces the assertion sign in *Grundgesetze*. He writes: "In a mere equation there is as yet no assertion: '2+3 = 5' only designates a truth value, without its being said which of the two it is ... We therefore require another sign in order to be able to assert something as true" (GG I §5). The point Frege wants to make is that the *thought* expressed by '2+3 = 5' does not assert itself; rather, *we* have to intervene by recording our recognition that the proposition is true, ... and we do this by means of the assertion sign.

Frege's point is thus that '2+3 = 5' designates a truth value in contrast to expressing a judgment. He is not claiming that '2+3 = 5' designates a truth value in contrast to expressing a sense. I think it likely, however, that Wittgenstein read this passage in the second of these ways. (Proops 1997, 132)

Reading certain passages of Frege, Proops suggests, Wittgenstein comes to the misunderstanding that a Fregean proposition expresses a thought only insofar as it is asserted. By itself, the symbol "*p*" in Frege's " $\vdash p$ " refers to a truth value, but expresses no thought. For that, we need to apply the assertion sign.

This attribution makes easy sense of 4.064. And it provides an explanation also of Wittgenstein's claim against Frege in 4.063 that "to a proposition without a sense corresponds nothing at all, for it signifies no thing (truth-value)": Wittgenstein is objecting to a view he finds in Frege that a symbol "*p*" may refer to a truth value but express no thought. With this attribution, Frege will moreover fail to recognise the breakdown of Wittgenstein's simile, for his symbol "*p*" refers to a truth value even though the condition of its truth – the thought it expresses – is not yet set. These benefits granted, Proops's suggestion is nonetheless highly unwelcome. Wittgenstein is doubtless not the most diligent student of other philosophers. And someone could perhaps read selected passages of Frege in the manner Proops suggests. Still, it is surely preferable if at all possible not to interpret Wittgenstein as blundering quite so grossly in his understanding of the philosopher he identifies alongside Russell as his principal influence, the philosopher to whose "great works" he attributes "much of the stimulation of my thoughts" (ILP preface).

Avoiding Proops's reading is moreover perfectly possible. To do that, we hold that by "sense" in 4.064 Wittgenstein means something importantly different from *Fregean* sense. The possession of a sense which for Wittgenstein's Frege is achieved only by assertion is not the expression of a Fregean thought. This option might be hard to navigate, or even to notice, if one's understanding of Tractarian sense is not relevantly different from one's understanding of Fregean thought. For us, however, this is an open door. Unlike a Fregean thought, a Tractarian sense is essentially a correctness condition for judgment and assertion. For a symbol to have a sense is for it to effect an assertion with a certain condition of correctness. And Wittgenstein is quite right that for Frege, a propositional symbol has *such* a sense only in virtue of being asserted. What has a Tractarian sense is something correct or incorrect depending on how things are – a sense is fundamentally a correctness condition – and in Frege's script this is not his symbol "*p*" with propositional content (what refers for the later Frege to a truth value) but the composition of such a symbol



with the assertion sign. Being right or wrong comes into view for Frege only with the use of his assertion sign.

That a Tractarian sense is fundamentally a correctness condition for judgment and assertion is the key to understanding also section 4.063. Indeed, the final phrase of 4.063 can be seen as making the same, correct attribution as 4.064. In this phrase, Wittgenstein deploys a notion of verb which occurs nowhere else in his book. The term would appear, however, to derive from Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*, where it matches – broadly speaking – the Aristotelian notion of a predicate. A verb is a distinguished propositional element which contains, or gives, the assertion (Russell 1992 §51-2). Here in 4.063, then, Wittgenstein is describing Frege's position in the same way Frege himself describes it when he says in *Begriffsschrift* that his language has "a single predicate for all judgments, namely, 'is a fact'" (BS §3). (There is a notable issue that Frege's single predicate "is a fact" has become not one verb but two, "is true" and "is false". I set this aside here: it has to do with the consequences of Frege's separation for the treatment of negation and denial.) And in so describing Frege's theorising, the ascription is precisely that of 4.064, namely that what has propositional content for Frege – "that which 'is true'" – comes to participate in something with sense – something right or wrong depending on how things are, a (Tractarian) proposition – only with the application of the assertion sign.

Of course, Wittgenstein doesn't merely ascribe a view to Frege: he simultaneously rejects it. There is for Wittgenstein no propositional content – no expressing a thought, or referring to a truth value – prior to the possession of a sense. Indeed, what is asserted – the propositional content – is nothing less than the sense. ("That which 'is true' must already contain the verb"; "what it asserts is the sense itself".) And so we can see too how, from Wittgenstein's perspective, Frege fails to recognise the breakdown of the analogy with black and white points. Much as a point may be indicated separately from a determination of the circumstances of its being black or white, so for Frege – as Wittgenstein holds – a propositional symbol is given separately from a determination of the circumstances of its being true or false. This was puzzling, for a Fregean thought is precisely a truth condition. The puzzle goes away, however, when we recognise that by a condition of something's being true Wittgenstein means a *sense*: he means, that is, a *Tractarian* truth condition. And Frege does indeed hold there to be a meaningful "*p*" separate from any matter of correctness in judgment and assertion, and so separate from any determination of Tractarian sense.

### 3.5

We have in place now an understanding of the final paragraph of 4.063: an understanding of the attribution to Frege of "the verb of the proposition", and also of Frege's failure to recognise the breakdown of the analogy with black and white points. What we don't yet have is any idea of Wittgenstein's *argument*. What reason, if any, does Wittgenstein give us for holding against Frege that that which 'is true' must already contain the verb?

The first paragraph of 4.063 does no more than set up an analogy, and the third does no more in itself than reject Frege's position. If the section contains an argument, then, its basic move must be contained in the second paragraph:

But to be able to say that a point is black or white, I must first know under what conditions a point is called white or black; in order to be able to say "*p*" is true (or false), I must have determined under what conditions I call "*p*" true, and I thereby determine the sense of the proposition. (4.063)

There is indeed here, I think, a consideration against Frege. In order to say that a point is black, the subject must know when a point is called black: she must know, that is, when a point is *correctly* called black. Similarly, in order to assert that a sentence "*p*" is true, the subject must determine the circumstances in which this assertion is *correctly* made, the circumstances in which her assertion is *correct*. And in doing so, Wittgenstein says, she determines the correctness condition – the sense – of the sentence "*p*".

The predicate “is true” here is Wittgenstein’s take on Frege’s assertion sign “⊢”, so that ‘calling “*p*” true’ means as much as asserting that *p*. Wittgenstein’s thought may thus be recast in terms simply of assertion. In order to assert that *p*, Wittgenstein maintains, the subject must determine the circumstances in which her act is correct: she must determine her assertion’s sense. Frege cannot agree with this. To assert a certain Fregean thought, the Fregean subject must have that content in view: she must grasp the content she would assert, and express that content with a symbol “*p*”. And the content she grasps and expresses is – as it happens – the correctness condition of the assertion she would make: it is the condition of the assertion’s truth, and truth is correctness in assertion. But the content is not grasped or expressed by the Fregean subject *as* her assertion’s condition of correctness, for it is not internal to the Fregean truth condition that it is a condition of correct assertion. The Fregean subject grasps a truth condition, and she asserts it, acting on the object grasped. But she does not possess therein a conception of her act’s correctness.

The same point may be made also for judgment. In order to judge, Wittgenstein will hold, the subject must determine *as such* the condition under which her act is correct. For Frege, this is not so. In order to judge, the Fregean subject must determine the content of her act. And this content is, indeed, the condition under which her act is correct. But it is not *as such* that she determines it for her act. Whether the point is framed in terms of assertion or judgment, however, it is here, I think, that Wittgenstein sees Frege as demonstrably mistaken rather than merely divergent. It is plainly true, as Wittgenstein sees it, that judgment and assertion involve a determination of Tractarian sense, that the subject judges or asserts only where she has a conception of her act’s correctness.

What is plain to Wittgenstein, however, might for others take a little spelling out. This may be done, I take it, with an idea of *aim*. Consider an act of shooting an arrow at a tree. In order to do this, the subject must have determined in what circumstances her act will be successful. Shooting at the tree, the subject must have a conception of what it is for her to hit the tree. This is because her act is, internally, at attempt at such success. To shoot at the tree is to attempt to hit the tree, and so there is no shooting at the tree without an understanding of what it is to hit the tree. Somewhat similarly, the thought will then be, judgment aims internally at truth. In judging, the subject aims to judge truly. And so it is a condition on the subject’s judging that she know what it is for her judgment to be true. Indeed – and this is the crucial point – the judging subject must know the condition of her act’s truth, *conceiving that condition as the condition of her act’s success*. The understanding of success involved in firing an arrow at a tree is not a grasp of an event whose occurrence would *as it happens* constitute success in one’s act. It is not an understanding of what it would be for the arrow one fires to strike the tree. Rather, it is an understanding of what it would be for one to succeed in one’s act – what it would be to *hit* one’s *target*, the tree. Similarly, the judging subject who aims at truth therein conceives her act’s truth condition as its condition of success. In Tractarian terms, the subject must, in order to judge, determine her judgment’s sense.

This requirement is met in the *Tractatus*, for it is simply the requirement that the subject know in judging what it is that she judges. Judgment is a self-conscious act: the subject judging that *p* knows that she so acts, and so she knows the sense of her act, the condition of its correctness. For Frege, by contrast, the subject has no such knowledge. The Fregean subject judges knowing the content of her act. (Indeed, this content is possessed by her in a prior act of grasping.) And this content is as it happens the condition of her act’s correctness, for truth is correctness in judgment. But it is not *as such* that the Fregean subject knows it. The grasp of content implied within Fregean judgment is a possession by the subject of the content’s internal nature. It is, however, no part of its nature that the content is the condition of correctness of its own judgment. And so the Fregean subject does not aim in judging at judging truly. It is not internal to Fregean judgment that the subject aims at truth.

### 3.6

The word “internal” is important here. A Fregean theorist might reply to the Wittgensteinian criticism by saying that their subject, the Fregean subject, will surely acknowledge that truth is in general correctness in

judgment, an acknowledgement which will then inform her judging. The subject will judge in the knowledge that the content she judges is the condition of correctness for her act. An appropriate spelling out of this point, the reply would then go, will provide a sense in which the Fregean subject can indeed aim at truth.

Such a reply will not, however, meet Wittgenstein's requirement that in order to assert, the subject must determine the condition under which her act is correct. Compare politeness in eating. It may in general be correct for me to eat politely. And this is something I may know, and so something which may inform my eating. I may, eating my meals, aim to eat politely knowing that I shall thereby act correctly. Politeness remains here, however, an *external* norm for eating, a norm in light of which I shall eat in certain ways, but not a norm without which no eating is possible. It is no part of what it is for the subject to eat that she aims at eating politely. Similarly, there could doubtless be a sense in which the Fregean subject may aim when she judges to 'do the right thing' and judge only truth. But this aim will remain external to the act of judgment itself. Whilst the Fregean subject may judge aiming to judge truly, it will not be constitutive of her act of judgment that she do so – no more than it is constitutive of the act of eating that one aim to eat politely.

In 1904 Russell subscribes with Frege to a dual relation theory of judgment: judgment is a relation to a prior object, the proposition judged. In this context, Russell considers the "preference ... people ... feel in favour of true propositions" (1904, 524) when they judge, and concludes that this preference "must be based ... upon an ultimate ethical proposition: 'It is good to believe true propositions, and bad to believe false ones'" (1904, 524). The striking oddity of this suggestion consists, I take it, in the fact that by considering it an *ethical* matter that people aim to judge truly, Russell sees this aim as unexplained by the act of judgment itself. As I have interpreted *Tractatus* 4.063, Wittgenstein's consideration against Frege is that he is committed to this same view. In separating judgment from truth and content, Frege knowingly rejects that it is internal to truth that it is the aim of judgment. On the other hand, Frege wants – quite properly – to maintain that it is internal to judgment that it aims at truth. Wittgenstein's thought is that these positions are incompatible. There can be a propositional act – call it judgment, or representation, or picturing, or saying – which aims internally at truth only if it is internal to truth that it is correctness for this act.

#### 4. Frege's motivation

Wittgenstein's conception of truth as correctness is of pervasive significance in the *Tractatus*. It plays a fundamental role, for example, in his account of logical operations, logical propositions, and inference. Exploring such matters would however be work for another time. To close, I want to consider instead a key motivation Frege gives for his separation.

As we have seen, Frege believed that his replacement of the concepts of subject and predicate by those of argument and function would stand the test of time (BS p7). He doesn't set out his grounds for this belief in *Begriffsschrift*. Later on, however, Frege offers the following consideration in favour of his separation:

According to the view I am here presenting, '5>4' and '1+3=5' just give us expressions for truth-values, without making any assertion. This separation of the act from the subject matter of judgement seems to be indispensable; for otherwise we could not express a mere supposition – the putting of a case without a simultaneous judgement as to its arising or not. We thus need a special sign in order to be able to assert something. (CP 149)

Here Frege sets out precisely the view which Wittgenstein rejects in sections 4.063 and 4.064, the view that there is propositional content – expression of thought and reference to truth value – independently of the possession of Tractarian sense. With the view comes also, however, the thought that it must be so, for

propositional content can in certain contexts be expressed without there being asserted. The context Frege refers to here is that of a supposition, but there are of course others, including in particular that of molecular assertions. Frege writes of conditional propositions:

Even if the whole compound sentence is uttered with assertoric force, one is still asserting neither the truth of the thought in the antecedent nor that of the thought in the consequent. (PW 185-6)

An assertion “not- $p$ ”, or “ $p$  implies  $q$ ” involves the expression of the content that  $p$  without any assertion being made of that content.

Whilst I can’t hope here to give anything like a full Tractarian reply to this thought, a preliminary counter can quickly be sketched in line with recent work by Irad Kimhi (2018). Imagine there to be a play about Frege’s life. And imagine that at some point in this play the actor playing Frege writes a symbol “ $\vdash \epsilon'f(\epsilon)=\alpha'g(\alpha) \equiv \forall x[f(x)=g(x)]$ ” on a blackboard. Do we have here, on the blackboard, a token of the famous Begriffsschrift proposition? Well, we surely want to say the following. First, no assertion is made by the actor: the actor does not assert Basic Law V. (And this of course is Frege’s own view (see e.g. CP 164, PW 233).) Second, there is on the blackboard a token of Frege’s assertion sign: the mark “ $\vdash$ ” in chalk is Frege’s assertion sign, just as much as the mark “ $=$ ” in the formula which follows is the identity sign. And third, the essential role of Frege’s assertion sign is to effect an assertion. There is of course a tension between these three, but this tension is defused by saying that the context of a play is such that Frege’s assertion sign “ $\vdash$ ” does not on this occasion perform its essential role. The essential role is of course still present in a fashion: the context of the play doesn’t simply rub out the sign’s assertoric role, leaving the actor merely expressing the thought of Basic Law V. Rather, the context is such that, by this sign, the actor doesn’t assert the thought but *makes as if* to assert it.

What answer do we give, then, to the question whether we have on the blackboard a token of the Begriffsschrift proposition “ $\vdash \epsilon'f(\epsilon)=\alpha'g(\alpha) \equiv \forall x[f(x)=g(x)]$ ”? Well, we could give either answer. We could say yes: the symbols of the proposition are all tokened here, and they are combined exactly as they are on page 36 of volume I of *Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, so we do indeed have the proposition. Or we could say no: the proposition is tokened only where a certain assertion is made, and there is here no such act. What is important for our purposes, however, is that we *can* say yes, that there is this answer to give. For the first move in defence of Wittgenstein from Frege’s motivating consideration will be that in something like the same way in which there is indeed a Begriffsschrift proposition on the blackboard even though no assertion is made, so there is indeed the Tractarian proposition “ $p$ ” tokened within tokens of the Tractarian propositions “not- $p$ ” and “ $p$  implies  $q$ ” – and again in such contexts as “Suppose  $p$ ” – even though no assertion that  $p$  is made. The occurrence, such as it is, of “ $p$ ” in “not- $p$ ” no more requires a separation of judgment from content than the occurrence of the Begriffsschrift proposition “ $\vdash \epsilon'f(\epsilon)=\alpha'g(\alpha) \equiv \forall x[f(x)=g(x)]$ ” on the blackboard of our play requires a separation of judgment from Frege’s assertion sign.

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