

## Metaperspectives and internalism in Frege

### 0. Introduction

It is a recognizably common theme in several otherwise divergent approaches to Frege's work that his logical thinking imposes a kind of metaphysical internalism according to which the broadest questions about thought's relation to reality – questions that have been at the centre of metaphysical concern in the philosophical tradition at least since Descartes – simply cannot be raised. There are, of course, substantial differences amongst the most prominent variations on this theme. In some of them, I think, a real insight is spoiled by being shackled to kinds of restrictive or deflationary internalism that have no grounding in Frege's thought. In section 2 I will argue that the interpretation of Frege advanced by Tom Ricketts suffers from this fault. By way of introduction, though, and to counter the predominantly negative tone of that section, I will first sketch two things that have been meant, and a third, better thing that might be meant, in counting Frege's philosophy of logic internalist.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Deflationary and Fregean internalisms

In *Frege: Philosophy of Mathematics*, much more than in his earlier works, Michael Dummett lays stress on the fact that in Frege's early work meaning, or content, is a unitary, undivided notion, one that allows no distinction to be drawn between a term's being meaningful and its meaning something. In that setting, Dummett holds, Frege's context principle, according to which for an expression to have meaning is precisely for it to contribute in a systematic way to the significance of propositions in which it figures, amounts to endorsement of an internalism that reduces would-be philosophical questions about relations between some region of language and reality to non-philosophical questions posed and answered within that region of language.

The context principle, as enunciated in *Grundlagen*, can be interpreted as saying that questions about the meaning (*Bedeutung*) of a term or class of terms are, when legitimate, internal to the language. ...any legitimate question about the meaning of a term, that is, about what we should call its reference, must be reducible to a question about the truth or otherwise of some sentence of the language... Questions about the meaning or reference of a term that cannot be thus formulated in the material mode are illegitimate and derive from attempting to ask after its meaning in isolation. In particular, there can be no further specifically philosophical enquiry needed, beyond the relevant enquiry within the subject matter to which the term relates, in order to establish whether or not it stands for anything. (1991: 195)

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<sup>1</sup> Section 2's discussion of Ricketts's interpretation is a lightly revised extract from section 4.2 of my paper "Frege's Logic" (2004). Section 1, though newly written, draws on section 4.1 of the same paper, where several of the ideas are more fully explained. I am grateful to the editors and publisher of the volume in which that paper appeared for permission to re-use or re-print the material here.

This internalism is, though, characteristic only of Frege's early thought. In terms now more associated with others Dummett holds that "[t]he doctrine of *Grundlagen* is, in effect, that there is no metalinguistic standpoint" (1991: 195). Without such a standpoint Frege's realist pronouncements are a kind of "rhetoric" to which he was at best dubiously entitled (1991: 197). The metaphysical doctrine of realism, properly understood, "stands or falls with the viability of a corresponding semantic theory" (1991: 198). Frege's development of the distinction of sense and reference in his mature work constitutes such a theory. Prior to that development, however, Frege's thinking "allows no basis for realism about mathematics, or indeed about anything else" (1991: 198).

In the interpretation advanced by Tom Ricketts repudiation of a semantic or metalinguistic perspective is not a shortcoming of Frege's early work, a symptom merely of the relative underdevelopment of his thinking in *Grundlagen*. It is instead a consequence of Frege's core and abiding commitment to a "universalist" conception of the content and nature of logical principles. Despite that central difference, though, Ricketts's reading of Frege has much in common with the view of Dummett just sketched – something that emerges in Ricketts's parallel inclination to describe as "rhetoric" those many pronouncements of Frege that would, on Dummett's account, demand occupation of the kind of metaperspective made available by a semantic theory, and the kind of metaperspective that, on Ricketts's view, Frege never occupies. The deepest difference between Frege's early and mature work, in Dummett's view, is not that Frege replaced a unitary theory of content by the theory of sense and reference; rather, it is that "in a clear sense, Frege did not even aim, in his early period, at constructing a philosophical *theory* of logic" (1991: 192). Adopting a line parallel to this, but projected across Frege's whole career, Ricketts insists that Frege never advanced any theory of logic: he offers us only a "retail", and never a "wholesale" conception of logic. The context principle of Frege's early work, in Dummett's view, dictates a position about the reference of terms that is "strictly analogous to the redundancy theory of truth, that theory which admits only the thin notion according to which 'Cleanliness is next to godliness' is true' reduces to 'Cleanliness is next to godliness' " (1991: 195-6). Again in parallel, but again projecting the claim, Ricketts makes central to his reading of Frege the repudiation of any genuine property of truth, countenancing only that notion according to which 'It is true that the sea is salty' is parasitic on 'The sea is salty' (1996). Finally, while Ricketts of course denies that the sense-reference distinction had for Frege the significance that Dummett attributes to it, of opening up the possibility of explaining language "as from outside language" (1991: 195), Ricketts does see in the distinction a similar, if unacknowledged watershed. One might say that whereas, for Dummett, Frege with the adoption of the sense-reference distinction comes to metaphysical maturity, for Ricketts Frege's admission of the distinction threatens his metaphysical innocence. For the first time it presents Frege with the issue "whether what appears, so far as the understanding of language goes, to be a name really does mean something" (Ricketts 1985: 9). Frege, on Ricketts's account, never thought through that issue in its full generality; but when Wittgenstein subsequently did so the effect

was to undermine Frege's logical universalism and the metaphysical internalism that went with it (Ricketts 1985: 11-14; cf. also Ricketts 1986a).

It is improbable that there should be no truth to be found in a region where opposed interpretations so notably converge, or that there should be nothing fundamental in Frege's thinking that Dummett and Ricketts are responding to in the internalist readings they offer. On the other hand it seems to me just as improbable, in the face of the evident and rare consistency of outlook across Frege's career, that whatever is rightly identified as the internalist strand in his thinking should be something inconsistent with his mid-career adoption of the sense-reference distinction, as Dummett and Ricketts, with the difference of emphasis just explained, both propose. Suppressing that difference Dummett's and Ricketts's shared view involves the following implications: (i) that the sense-reference distinction made available to Frege substantive semantic concepts, most centrally a substantive concept of truth, in terms of which external questions about the status and functioning of language might be framed; (ii) that the sole role for any genuine, 'non-parasitic' or 'non-redundant' concept of truth is in framing such external questions; (iii) that any genuine, more than merely rhetorical significance in Frege's realist pronouncements would lie in their being answers to such external questions; (iv) that the apparent consistency in Frege's metaphysical outlook is thus a product either of misleading inflation in his early work (Dummett) or a failure to think through its subsequent revision (Ricketts). I think those implications make the shared view seriously misleading.

Certainly, at any rate, it does not represent how things appeared to Frege when, in the explicitly reflective and retrospective "Notes for Darmstaedter" of 1919, he outlined the development of his ideas. Frege then wrote:

What is distinctive of my conception of logic is that I begin by giving pride of place to the content of the word 'true', and then immediately go on to introduce a thought as that to which the question 'Is it true?' is in principle applicable. So I do not begin with concepts and put them together to form a thought or judgement; I come by the parts of a thought by analysing the thought. This marks off my concept-script from the similar inventions of Leibniz and his successors, despite what the name suggest; perhaps it was not a very happy choice on my part. (PW 252/NS 273)

Frege is here clearly remembering, and not reconstructively glossing, thoughts that had guided him from the very beginnings of his philosophical work. The strategy this quotation outlines, which accepts the priority and primitiveness of the notion of truth and assigns to it the role of carving out the arena of logic's concern, was already explicit in one of the earliest surviving fragments of his writing, the "17 Key Sentences on Logic". Two of these sentences read:

6. A criterion for whether a mode of connection constitutes a thought is that it makes sense to ask whether it is true or untrue. Associations of ideas are neither true nor untrue.

7. What true is, I hold to be indefinable. (PW 174/NS 189)<sup>2</sup>

Frege's strategy is inconsistent with a redundancy conception of truth, which presents the notion as parasitic on prior understanding of that to which it is applied: one cannot hold *both* that the notion of a thought, or that of a possible occupant of the place of '*p*' in 'It is true that *p* iff *p*', is explained by the notion of truth, *and* that this notion is explained by that schema. And it seems plain that, from the beginning, Frege recognized that. In the first of a series of parallel statements stretching from the beginning to the end of his career, he wrote:

...there is a sharp divide between these disciplines [i.e. psychology and logic], and it is marked by the word 'true'. Psychology is only concerned with truth in the way every other science is, in that its goal is to extend the domain of truths; but in the field it investigates it does not study the property 'true' as, in its field, physics focuses on the properties 'heavy', 'warm' etc. *This is what logic does. It would not perhaps be beside the mark to say that the laws of logic are nothing other than an unfolding of the content of the word 'true'. Anyone who has failed to grasp the meaning of this word – what marks it off from others – cannot attain to any clear idea of what the task of logic is.* (PW 3/NS 3, my emphasis. Cf. also PW 128/NS 139; CP 351/KS 342.)

While the role Frege's strategy assigns to the notion of truth rules out the kind of deflationary internalism associated with a redundancy theory, it by the same token leaves no room for the most intractable of external questions that confronted the "successors of Leibniz". The greatest of these, Kant, begins, as Frege says, with concepts – or more accurately, with the general notion of representation of which concepts form a major sub-species. He conceives logic as comprising formal rules for correct transitions amongst representations. Because the domain of application of these rules is not understood from the beginning, as it is in Frege, through the notion of truth, and because the rules themselves are therefore not intrinsically, as they are in Frege, laws of truth, Kant's conception faces the general question, to which the Transcendental Deduction attempts an answer, of how the framework concepts interconnected in the laws of logic can be guaranteed any application to reality so as to constitute real knowledge. For Frege there can be no such question. The place of the notion of truth in his scheme ensures there can be no gap, such as Kant attempted to bridge, between those features of a transition of thought that bring it within the sphere of logic's authority and those that give it real content or "objective validity".

That it permits no such general question about logic's "objective validity" as Kant posed and aimed to answer is one thing that might reasonably be meant by saying that Frege's conception of logic allows no serious or real metaperspective (cf. Ricketts 1986: 76, 78). If the words were so used then a 'metaperspective' would be one *from which* the notion of truth was deployed in forging or ratifying a connection between *that about which* it was deployed and reality. Possession of the notion of truth, that is, would have been ceded to this metaperspective, and would no longer intrinsically structure the language towards which this

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<sup>2</sup> For a persuasive argument for an early dating of this fragment, see Dummett 1981: 77.

metaperspective takes its stance, nor be internally the aim of judgements expressed in its terms. But then whatever, if anything, would then structure this language, and whatever, if anything, would then constitute the norm of correctness for moves made within it, could not, in Frege's view, be logic, since it would have "no inherent relation to truth" (cf. PW 2/NS 2). In summary, logic cannot admit such a metaperspective without surrendering to it the very thing that makes it logic, its internal connection with truth.

One might justify the label 'internalism' by re-expressing this point as the claim that the notion of truth belongs *within* the language, and is not to be ceded to any external vantage point on it. Internalism so characterized has, though, no sympathy with the leading idea of the redundancy theory: understanding of the notion of truth cannot be parasitic on that of the statements of the language to which it belongs, since it is presupposed in the recognition of these statements as the expressions of thoughts subject to its laws. Anyone who makes a judgement, Frege holds, recognizes the True and the False (CP 163); and, we might add, he recognizes these "objects" precisely in making a judgement, not in consequence of, or on the back of, the judgements he makes.

## **2. Ricketts's 'no metaperspective' interpretation**

### **2.1 Fregean and Wittgensteinian internalisms**

Central contentions in Ricketts's exposition of Frege could be understood as in line with the internalism just sketched. In "Objectivity and Objecthood", for instance, Ricketts argues that commitment to the objectivity of judgement is a starting point in Frege's conception of logic, one that "needs no securing and admits of no deeper explanation" (1986: 72). That commitment, he explains, precludes any "metaperspective" from which are raised such questions as "How does language hook onto reality?" or "How do we know that the ontological presuppositions of our discourse are satisfied?" (1986: 66). His elaboration of the theme elsewhere, though, makes plain that Ricketts does not distinguish the Fregean internalism recommended above from the deflationary internalism of the redundancy theory.

[Frege's] conception of judgement commits [him] to taking the statements of language more or less at face value. There is no standpoint from which to ask whether the thoughts expressed by the statements of language really represent reality, whether they are really true or false. Similarly, there is no standpoint from which to ask whether the statements of language really do express thoughts." (1985: 8).

Fregean internalism rules out the first of these 'standpoints' by the centrality it accords to the concept of truth in fixing what, for the purposes of logic, thought must be understood to be: any notion whose connection with truth remained an open question could not be the notion of thought that is properly logic's concern. But that very reason casts doubt on Ricketts's claim about the second of these standpoints, with its question whether "the statements of language really do express thoughts". Of course, if a "statement of language" were to be understood

here simply as the expression of a thought, then the question would be tautologously excluded without any contribution from Frege's conception of logic. But if it is not so understood – if “statements of language” are presumed to be identifiable independently of the notions of thought and truth, for instance by their occurrence in actual human exchange – then the second question remains open: no contribution from Frege's conception of logic can, or should, close it.

That the first of these supposed questions *is* closed off is, I agreed, something that might reasonably be meant by saying that Frege's conception of logic allows no “*serious*” or “*real* metaperspective” (1986: 76, 78; my emphasis both times). To hold that the second is likewise closed off is to retract what seemed to be the important qualifications on this doctrine just emphasized. What then inclines Ricketts to make this move?

A passage from his discussion quoted in part above reads more fully:

From the perspective Frege acquires in starting from judgements and their contents, the distinction between objective and subjective exhibited in our linguistic practice needs no securing and admits of no deeper explanation. (1986: 72)

Why this incongruous mention of “our linguistic practice”? To the Fregean internalist this will appear either as a distracting change of topic, or else as an allusion to something tacitly presumed to play the very securing and explaining role which, one imagined, it was the intention of the passage to maintain that *nothing* can play. The former is hardly to be expected, and the latter is confirmed when, later in the essay, Ricketts speaks of “those features of our linguistic practice that fund Frege's conception of logic”.<sup>3</sup> But what (if anything) should be said to ‘fund’ Frege's conception of logic is the notion of truth. Ricketts's framework of interpretation allows only two possible roles for this notion. The first ‘external’ role is that of a metalinguistic predicate used to describe or stipulate semantic relations between the expressions of a language and the things they can be used to describe. To hold that the *fundamental* grasp of the notion lies in appreciation of that role for it would be, as Ricketts clearly sees, incompatible with the universalist aspects of Frege's logical conception – though, as we will see below, this point does not prohibit use of the notion in that role. The ‘internal’ alternative he recommends, the only alternative he thinks there is, casts truth as a device of compendious redescription. “Frege's language for talking about judgement” – for instance, the language of ‘truth’, ‘thought’ and ‘expression’ employed when Frege holds that an assertion gives expression to a judgement, the recognition of the truth of a thought – is, Ricketts holds, “a means for systematically redescribing selected features of our linguistic practices” (1986: 72). Whatever significance attaches to the terms of the redescription must therefore be sustained by our antecedent grasp of what is redescribed: “it would be a mistake to think that we have any understanding of what an act of judgement is apart from [that] given by the formula that judgements are what assertions manifest” (1986:

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<sup>3</sup> 1986: 92. It seems that by ‘funding’ Ricketts intends something like grounding or justifying; compare his remark, “Passages like these should not be taken to fund the platonist reading of Frege” (1986: 72).

71).<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the significance of ‘true’ in ‘It is true that the sea is salty’ is “parasitic on” the equivalence of that statement with ‘The sea is salty’ (1986a: 174). Because the notion of truth is in that way sustained entirely from within our linguistic practice it cannot turn around on itself to criticize or assess that practice. Ricketts thus sees no option but to attribute to Frege an “uncritical attitude” (1986a: 187) which “commits him to taking the statements of language more or less at face value” (1985: 8).

Even if one allowed his premises the conclusion Ricketts draws is, in allowing no important difference between the two kinds of questions distinguished above, too narrowly internalistic. The position those premises do plausibly dictate is that described by Wittgenstein in  $\exists 136$  of the *Philosophical Investigations*. At bottom, unsecured and admitting of no deeper explanation, lies the language game of assertion. The notion of truth “belongs to”, but having no independent anchor it cannot – cannot, that is, without danger of generating a philosophical illusion – be said to “fit” the propositions that are moves in this game. To hold that a proposition is something assessable as true or false is to enunciate a rule of this game, one that records the internal connection between two notions: to treat something as a proposition *is* to treat it as so assessable. That being so, candidates for the first status are not admitted or rejected according as they meet or fail to meet a criterion provided by the second. But this does not imply that every candidate is admitted. While as a whole the game has no external arbiter, it has multiple aspects, and its own internal standards of coherence between, and ways of negotiating between, ways of coping with threats of collision between, these various aspects. These are already enough to separate the two kinds of questions we have been considering. The game is feasible only if players “do not come to blows” ( $\exists 240$ ), and over a given question of our second kind they well might.<sup>5</sup> This tempers, to a greater extent than Ricketts acknowledges, the supposed commitment to “taking the statements of language more or less at face value”.

Much more importantly, however, Ricketts’s premises are mistaken. For Frege, the notion of truth is neither a “metalogical” one, one external to logic, nor one internal to “linguistic practice”. *It is internal to, because constitutive of, logic*. Acknowledging the primitiveness and priority of this notion means accepting, not only that it is indefinable, but further that it is “parasitic on” *nothing*. Truth no more needs the domesticating, practice-internal grounding that Ricketts offers it than it needs the external metaphysical justification he denies it. To grasp the notion is, as Ricketts would agree, to acknowledge a norm for judgement. And since judgement is something to be done, there is no harm in re-expressing that by saying that truth is a norm governing a practice. But then we must insist that what counts as engagement in that practice is precisely what is spelled out in the laws of truth that ‘unfold’ the content of its governing norm. To participate in the practice, and to acknowledge and fall subject to the authority of its laws, is one and the same. Neither can be

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<sup>4</sup> No such ‘formula’ occurs in the passages of Frege that Ricketts refers to. Nor, I think, does any other passage assign this kind of priority to the notion of assertion over that of judgement.

understood antecedently to the other. There can therefore be no presumption of a practice independently characterized – for instance, a practice of human linguistic exchange – that to engage in *it* will be to fall subject to the laws of truth, nor that a compendious redescription of *its* accepted norms will unfold that notion. Grasp of the kind of norm truth is excludes any such essential reference to “linguistic practice”, as much as, and in the same way as, it excludes reference to human psychological processes.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2 ‘Extra-logical’ and extra-systematic thought

The ‘internal’/‘external’ dichotomy that structures Ricketts’s discussion leaves no place for the notion of truth as Frege understands it, and therefore involves a misrepresentation of his views. Underlying it, I think, is neglect of an elementary distinction between logic *per se*, on the one hand, and a particular formulation or system of logic on the other – a neglect that seems endemic to the interpretative tradition in which Ricketts writes. A passage co-authored by two of the originators of this tradition provides a useful illustration of this.

For Frege, and then for Russell and Whitehead, logic was universal: within each explicit formulation of logic all deductive reasoning...was to be formalized. Hence...metasystematic questions as such...could not be meaningfully raised. We can give different formulations of logic [that differ over choice of primitives and axioms, etc.], but we have no vantage point from which we can survey a given formalism as a whole, let alone look at logic whole... We are within logic and cannot look at it from outside. We are subject to what Sheffer called “the logocentric predicament”. (Dreben and van Heijenoort 1986: 44)

We cannot look at logic whole because we are within it; we cannot look at it from outside, because it has no ‘outside’. That is to say, we cannot think about logic from a neutral, external vantage point, because logic has authority for *all* thought, so that to think at all is already to fall subject to its laws. But this is not true of the laws of any particular formulation of logic. Before 1879, for instance, no one spoke or thought in a fashion that rendered them subject to the particular rules presented in Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*. So the obstacle to thinking about logic from outside gives us no reason to deny that we can “survey a given formalism”, or a particular system of logic, from outside. Yet a *system* of logic is, one would have thought, what *metasystematic* questions are raised about. Metasystematic thought is a modest venture; it betrays no ambition to stand outside logic *per se*.<sup>7</sup>

Ricketts in the following passage makes just the same slide we find in Dreben and van Heijenoort.

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<sup>5</sup> That is to say, they might well do so *if* the game did not allow enough flexibility and sideways movement for local differences to be negotiated.

<sup>6</sup> That Frege endlessly complains against the second while hardly mentioning the first is indicative only of the kind of misunderstanding he encountered amongst his contemporaries.

<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps worth remembering that Sheffer found in the predicament he christened no obstacle to the metasystematic investigations that, working in a mathematics department, were his stock in trade.

Frege puts forward his *Begriffsschrift* as a formulation of the principles of valid reasoning. In developing a conception of logic that supports this identification Frege addresses the issues raised by the logocentric predicament... However, in the end, this conception of logic is unsatisfactory. For there are deep tensions between Frege's official construal of the content of the axioms of the *Begriffsschrift*, and his view of judgement that underlies the identification of the *Begriffsschrift* as logic. (1985, 3)

Here Frege's *Begriffsschrift* appears first as *a* formulation of logic, but is then *identified with* logic. By that means the "logocentric predicament" – that "in order to give an account of logic, we must presuppose and employ logic" (Sheffer, quoted Ricketts 1985: 3) – is transferred from logic itself to a particular formulation of it. If the predicament precludes any "real" or "substantive" metaperspective on logic, this is now taken to confine thought within that formulation. The possibility of genuine thought and reasoning about that formulation which, nonetheless, "presupposes and employs logic", is closed down. So the only alternative that Ricketts can conceive to a metaphysical externalism altogether insensitive to the predicament is the practice-internalism he develops and attributes to Frege. Every remark or passage in Frege which at first sight seems to exemplify the closed down possibility has then to be assigned a different role. Ricketts's preferred description of that different role is "elucidation".<sup>8</sup> Elucidations do not comment on, explain or justify aspects of a practice, however much their surface assertoric form may suggest that they do; rather, they are prompts, hints or clues that serve (somehow) to induct one into the practice. Elucidations are therefore not subject to standards of assessment that would properly be applied to assertions, standards of clarity, consistency or truth. The only relevant assessment of an elucidation invokes a pragmatic, or, more straightforwardly, a causal standard: a 'good' elucidation is one that in fact has the intended effect of inducting a beginner into the practice.<sup>9</sup> That being the role of an elucidation it has, for any given reader, no lasting value: once the effect is achieved the instrument can be thrown away as completely as, and with no more loss than, we abandon the babbling and imitative games through which we came to speak English.

As one might expect, the effects of this reading are most apparent in connection with axioms and basic rules. These are, trivially, end points of justification – unjustified justifiers – within the system they define; and so, equally trivially, any justification they can be given will be extra-systematic. If the system and logic are identified, this triviality becomes the

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<sup>8</sup> Frege does employ such a notion, but much more narrowly than Ricketts's view entails. In Frege elucidations are introductory remarks aimed at securing common understanding of simple and primitive notions, such as that of a concept, which cannot be defined (see e.g. CP 182/KS 167-8; CP 300/KS 288). It would be a mistake of the kind illustrated in the text of this section to transfer what Frege says about such absolutely indefinable notions to notions that happen to be chosen as primitives of, hence not capable of formal definition within, a particular formulation of logic. One way of bringing out the mistake would be to note that the notion of a concept, Frege's favourite example of something indefinable in the first, system-independent sense, *is* straightforwardly definable in the second sense, within the later system of *Grundgesetze*:  $\forall x \varphi x = \text{---} \varphi x$  holds just in case  $\varphi$  is a function whose value is always a truth-value, i.e. a concept.

<sup>9</sup> Ricketts gives every impression of intending this quite strictly. Were we so constituted that a bang on the head would have the same effect, there would be nothing to choose between the two methods. Compare Davidson's off-putting remark about the effectiveness of metaphor (1981: 217), whose relevance here Roger White alerted me to.

baffling claim that their justification must be ‘extra-logical’. But since logic is the framework of *all* justification, an ‘extra-logical’ justification is nothing at all. Hence those justifications that Frege appears to offer must be something else: they are elucidations.

One simple example of this move comes in Joan Weiner’s mystifying contention that arguments explicitly presented by Frege as premised on the definition of the conditional stroke cannot be such, because within the system of *Begriffsschrift* the conditional stroke, being a primitive, has no definition:

...if the justification of a logical law requires an argument in which the definition of the conditional figures, this definition must be expressible in *Begriffsschrift*. But no such definition is expressible in *Begriffsschrift*. Frege’s symbol for the conditional, the conditional stroke, is a primitive symbol in his language. (1990: 72)

What makes this contention mystifying is that it first invokes a notion of an argument whose identity is independent of the specifics of its formulation (it is supposed to be the *same* argument, premised on the same definition, that would, *per impossibile*, be expressible in the *Begriffsschrift*), but then immediately reverses that to maintain that the existence of an argument is equivalent to the availability of one specific formulation. Without that confusion, the contention reduces to the triviality that an extra-systematic argument cannot at the same time be intra-systematic.

More revealing of motivations that can encourage that confusion is Ricketts’s construal of Frege’s attitude to the justification of basic laws.

...characteristically, the logical law with which [a particular application of logic within science] begins will be inferred from simpler, more perspicuous general truths. There is, as far as Frege is concerned, nothing to be said about the justification for our recognition of those basic laws of logic to be truths...[quotation omitted] Moreover, the maximal generality of these laws precludes their inference on the basis of truths of any other discipline. (1986: 81)

Here, evidently, the salient aspect of the logocentric predicament is the threat of circularity. If one supposed that there was something to be said in justification of the axioms and rules of the *Begriffsschrift*, and so took at face value those passages in which Frege appears to say it, that would be, Ricketts suggests, tantamount to interpreting Frege as attempting to infer the most general laws of truth from truths of one particular science – presumably, the science of logical semantics.<sup>10</sup> But the maximal generality of those laws consists in their setting the standards for judgement and inference in every science, including that one. So the imagined inference would be immediately and transparently circular, and the interpretation of Frege as engaging in it is therefore to be rejected.

Now there is indeed, in Frege’s view and in fact, no non-circular justification of logical principles. It is a commonplace that a demonstration of the soundness of *modus ponens* (for

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<sup>10</sup> See on this point Stanley 1996: 58.

instance) will itself most naturally employ *modus ponens*. But how, if at all, does this bear on the passages for which Ricketts recommends an elucidatory interpretation? Consider the following typical instance.

A result of the definition [of  $\rightarrow$ ] given in  $\text{\textcircled{5}}$  is that from the two judgements ‘ $\mid \Delta \rightarrow \Gamma$ ’ and ‘ $\mid \Delta$ ’ the new judgement ‘ $\mid \Gamma$ ’ follows. Of the four cases enumerated above [i.e. the four rows of a truth-table] the third is excluded by ‘ $\mid \Delta \rightarrow \Gamma$ ’ and the second and fourth by ‘ $\mid \Delta$ ’, so that only the first remains. (Bs  $\text{\textcircled{6}}$ ).<sup>11</sup>

Does the commonplace show that this, construed as a genuine piece of reasoning, is circular? In one very obvious sense, No. The reasoning demonstrates the soundness of Frege’s rule, that from formulae ‘ $\mid \Delta \rightarrow \Gamma$ ’ and ‘ $\mid \Delta$ ’ the formula ‘ $\mid \Gamma$ ’ is inferable. And that *that* rule (call it R) is not employed in the demonstration is obvious: *that* rule, being syntactically formulated, specifically mentions Frege’s logical symbols, and is therefore employed only in formal derivations conducted in that symbolism, of which the quoted passage is evidently not one. On a different method of counting, of course, we might reasonably say that rule R is *modus ponens*, and *modus ponens* is (tacitly) involved in the demonstration. So in suggesting that the reasoning would be circular Ricketts is employing this second method of counting, on which rules have an identity independent of any particular formal implementation. Yet this is in the service of an interpretation according to which logic is *identified with* one particular formal implementation! It is perfectly coherent to count rules in the second, Ricketts’s preferred, way. What is not coherent is to combine that way of counting with a classification of rules as primitive or derivable according to the location in a deductive calculus of their formal implementations – for that would lead to a single rule being counted both primitive and derivable.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, it is perfectly coherent, in line with the second way of counting, to hold that Frege’s rule R is (i.e. that it implements) *modus ponens*; that is, indeed, one reasonable way of formulating the conclusion of the reasoning of *Begriffsschrift*  $\text{\textcircled{6}}$  just quoted. What is not coherent is to employ that very conclusion to dismiss, or condemn to elucidatory reinterpretation, the reasoning that warrants it.

In recommending that such passages as that recently quoted from *Begriffsschrift*  $\text{\textcircled{6}}$  should be understood as presenting exactly the kind of genuine reasoning they appear to present, I am attributing to Frege commitment to a semantic metaperspective and an ineliminable use of a truth-predicate – commitments of which Ricketts is keen to relieve Frege, believing them to be incompatible with the fundamental role played by the objectivity of judgement in his conception of logic. In each case a metaphysically innocent bystander is mistaken by Ricketts for something far more ambitious and condemned in its stead. The next

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<sup>11</sup> For clarity I have changed Frege’s unobviously Greek letters to obviously Greek ones; and for convenience I have replaced Frege’s symbol for the conditional by a modern equivalent.

<sup>12</sup> I do not intend to condemn any remark that seems to mix methods of counting, e.g. ‘Disjunctive syllogism is a derived rule in  $S_1$  but primitive in  $S_2$ ’. That is an innocent shorthand, comparable to ‘I have the same book at home, but I keep it on the top shelf’.

two-sections will demonstrate the innocence of these bystanders; I'll then ask what the real villain, if any, might be.

### 2.3 A semantic metaperspective is a perspective on a language, not on *language*

According to Ricketts's elucidatory reading "Frege's stipulations, examples and commentary function like foreign language instruction to put his readers in a position to know what would be affirmed by the assertion of any begriffsschrift formula" (1986a: 176-7). Indeed so. They put a reader in a position to know that by telling him it; and to tell such things is to adopt a semantic metaperspective. Ricketts resists this conclusion. He chooses always to emphasize the "upshot" of the commentary rather than its content, the abilities induced rather than the thoughts conveyed (1986a: 177; cf. 1986: 87). And he does so out of a presumption that, were any thoughts conveyed by the commentary, they could only be understood as "incipient theorizing about a relation between words and things" (1986a: 176), theorizing of a kind that invites or addresses the philosophical problematic of "how language hooks onto reality" (1986: 66). Yet his own reference to foreign language instruction should have made plain the mistake in this. That the French 'cheval' means *horse* is a plain (non-philosophical) semantic truth, stating a relation between words (better, a word) and things (better, some things). It no more invites or contributes to philosophical theorizing about the grounding of that relation than the statement that the battle of Bannockburn was fought in 1314 invites or contributes to debate over the reality of the past. Ricketts, it seems, has no stable conception of what semantics involves. In the reasoning we are now considering he attributes to a semantic metaperspective metaphysical ambitions it does not have, and in consequence refuses to recognize as such the unambitiously semantic remarks by which Frege introduces us to his Begriffsschrift.<sup>13</sup> Yet in the previous discussion, concerning the justification of logical laws, we saw him cast semantics as merely one special science amongst others. It is quite right, but also quite obvious, that nothing can be both of the things that on occasion Ricketts takes a semantic metaperspective to be. The unambitious idea sometimes associated with it is that of a statement of the meaning of the expressions of *a* language (e.g. French, or Frege's formal language) from outside it (e.g. in English, or in German). The ambitious and dubious idea drawn upon at others aims at explaining meaning, or language in general, from outside. Running the two together under the title of a semantic metaperspective makes for too easy a target; where one hopes for a searching examination of the second one finds instead an inflation of the first.

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<sup>13</sup> See Weiner (1990: 198) for a striking example of the same thing. She there maintains that the question "To what does the word 'Pluto' refer?" is "not a question about language or semantics", on the ground that "it does not call for investigation into...the nature of our relations to the external world". True, it does not. But 'Pluto' is a word, and the question does ask about that word. Weiner is apt to deny that asking after the meaning of a word, e.g. 'Venus', manifests concern with the relation of the word with something "out there". Yet if the demonstrative "out there" were accompanied by a gesture towards the heavens that denial would be trivially false: out *there* is precisely where one must look, with a telescope if need be, to find what is meant by 'Venus'. So what are we to imagine is the gesture accompanying Weiner's use of the words? (Or are the words themselves the gesture?)

A clear and central example of this inflation is Ricketts's contention that, if a semantic metaperspective were available, so that statements "pairing linguistic expressions with the items meant by [them]" were possible, then "Frege's remarks about truth-value determination [would be convertible] into a genuine theory containing the resources for defining a concept of correctness or truth" (1986: 91). This is not so. A recursive characterization of truth conditions – into which form, as Ricketts here concedes, Frege's "remarks about truth-value determination" are readily cast – exploits the notion of truth in giving the content of the formulae of the language it treats. It *can* do this *only because* it does not simultaneously purport to define the notion of truth (Dummett 1959: 7; Davidson 1984, *passim*). Frege's commitment to the indefinability of truth does not therefore preclude a semantic metaperspective; instead, his acceptance of the primitiveness and priority of this notion provides for one.<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.4 An ineliminable truth-predicate

The statement, it is true that the sea is salty, makes use of a truth-predicate; but since what is thereby stated is as well stated, the sea is salty, the use is eliminable (cf. PW 251/NS 271). A statement may be said to make ineliminable use of a truth-predicate if it is not in that kind of way equivalent to a statement in which the notion of truth does not explicitly figure. This is not a precise explanation. What counts as 'that kind of way', and hence how stringently or generously equivalence should be understood, depends variously on the point of the original statement, on what is in question in it and hence on what can be presumed not to be in question. Is 'The sentence "The sea is salty" is true' equivalent to 'The sea is salty'? For most purposes, where the significance of the quoted piece of English is rightly presumed not to be in question, it of course is. But there are other contexts in which that *is* in question, so where one's aim would be undermined by substituting the second for the first (e.g. in the course of deriving a semantic theorem governing that sentence).

Much the same holds of the relation between the statement that an axiom is true and the axiom itself. Ricketts would accept, I think, that the use of a truth-predicate in the extra-systematic assertion that ' $a \rightarrow (b \rightarrow a)$ ' is true is not ineliminable, since what is there affirmed is as well affirmed by the intra-systematic assertion of the axiom.<sup>15</sup> But this holds only for some contexts. When, for instance, the first occurs as conclusion of an extra-systematic

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<sup>14</sup> As is well known, other attitudes towards the same recursion are possible, and Ricketts's mention of "a concept of...truth" perhaps suggests one of these. If the content of the formulae treated by the recursion is already known, then it can yield a characterization of truth as restricted to the language to which they belong – this being *a* concept of truth, truth-in-that-given-*L*. The concept of truth is evidently not a construction from such concepts, since it is presupposed in their characterization. In affirming this I take myself to be agreeing with Ricketts, and with at least part of what he intends in ascribing a universalist conception of logic to Frege. (The agreement was registered above, when I held that the *fundamental* grasp of the notion of truth does not lie in appreciation of its role in a semantic theory.) I differ from Ricketts in denying that it is any part of a semantic metaperspective to suppose otherwise.

<sup>15</sup> The course of Ricketts's argument at 1986: 83 (paralleled by 1986a: 176 and 1985: 7) strongly suggests this; contrasting statements of the truth of an axiom and the soundness of a rule, he suggests that ineliminable use of a truth-predicate arises only with the second.

argument providing a semantic validation of the axiom, one's aim would be undermined by replacing it by the second. This illustrates that the question whether the first and second are rightly counted equivalent, and so whether the first's use of a truth-predicate is eliminable, has only an unhelpful answer: in contexts where one's aim demands attention to the boundary between the system and extra-systematic remarks on it, the two are importantly non-equivalent, and the first's use of a truth-predicate ineliminable; otherwise they are effectively equivalent. Still less helpfully, *qua* extra-systematic, but only *qua* extra-systematic, the first makes an essential, extra-systematic use of a truth-predicate.

The same holds again of the statement that an inference rule is sound. The point is perhaps less obvious in this case, since it may have to do, not only with one intra-/extra-systematic boundary, but with a relation between systems.<sup>16</sup> But once it is allowed that effective equivalence can hold across the first kind of boundary, there is no reason to resist its holding across the second.<sup>17</sup> Ricketts does resist this, holding, for instance, that “there is no single logical law corresponding to the rule of instantiation for first-level variables... Nothing in the nearest approximation to a single corresponding logical law, ‘If  $\forall xFx$  then  $Fy$ ’, captures the notion of an instance” (1985: 7). The cited ground is true: it is essential to a rule's functioning *as a rule* that its generality be metalinguistic; the metalinguistic notion of an instance, by which we effect that generality, is thus not captured by any object-language generalization. But this point grounds only the same kind of unhelpful observation we made in connection with axioms, namely, that the extra-systematic *role* of the use of a truth-predicate in asserting that a rule is sound will not be shared by any intra-systematic statement which is otherwise equivalent to that assertion.

In short, the use of a truth-predicate should be counted ineliminable just in case the role of the statement employing it is extra-systematic. One cannot therefore *first* address such an understanding of the truth-predicate, subsequently turning the results to criticism of the perspective adopted in extra-systematic reasoning. There is no issue of the intelligibility of this truth-predicate that is, in the way Ricketts's approach supposes, independent of or prior to the issue of the availability of that perspective or the coherence of that reasoning. Thus, given the above defence of the latter, the former poses no issue at all.

## 2.5 The possibility of a metaperspective, or its necessity?

If, then, an ineliminable truth-predicate is another innocent bystander, what is the real villain? Indeed, is there a real villain? I believe there is, though it emerges only when the above unclaritys are dispelled. Ricketts overtly targets the possibility of an ineliminable explicit

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, between the system of Bs., in which ‘ $(d \rightarrow (b \rightarrow a)) \rightarrow (b \rightarrow (d \rightarrow a))$ ’ is an axiom, and the later system of Gg., in which interchangeability of subcomponents is a rule (Gg  $\exists$ 12 & 48/BL 53 & 107).

<sup>17</sup> See  $\exists$ 2.2.5 above. When, as Frege anticipates (Bs.  $\exists$ 6/CN 119-20), we “make a special rule of inference”, R in S<sub>2</sub>, out of “[a] judgement expressed in [a] formula[...]”, A in S<sub>1</sub>, a chain of effective equivalence holds between ‘R is sound’ (a meta-S<sub>2</sub>) statement, ‘A is true’ (meta-S<sub>1</sub>), and A itself.

use of truth-predicate. What I believe he is most concerned to combat is, almost oppositely, the ineliminable necessity for a perhaps implicit appeal to a truth-predicate.

This emerges, for instance, in his insistence that,

[f]rom Frege's viewpoint, the most basic assessment to which a judgement is subject invokes no mention of the judgement, no metaperspective... Our appreciation that judgements are subject to assessment as correct or incorrect is not manifested by the use of predicates 'true' or 'false', but rather in the assertive employment of language in the construction of lines of reasoning. (1986a: 174)

This insistence is importantly true to Frege (see PW 252/NS 272, quoted at Ricketts 1986: 84). The point it makes is, however, one that holds good *just as much* when a truth-predicate is employed as when it is not. For, if the truth-predicate is eliminable, effecting no genuine ascent to a perspective on the language to whose sentences it is applied, then trivially it is not by its use that the statements one makes are marked as subject to logical assessment; but equally, if there *is* genuine ascent, then the truth-predicate *belongs to*, so does not serve to invoke a perspective on, the language to which one's statements then belong. In neither case does the basic assessment of a judgement, one's acceptance or rejection of the judgement, consist in ascribing to it or withholding from it a truth-predicate. Equally, in neither case do one's reasons for accepting or rejecting the judgement run *via* reasons for ascribing or withholding that predicate. So, to identify the real villain, we should ask: against what picture of judgement *would* Ricketts's insistence be apposite?<sup>18</sup>

Such a picture would be one according to which *any* judgement, *whatever* conceptual resources it internally employs, so far stands inertly in waiting for endorsement or rejection by ascription to it of truth or falsity. The judgement itself, as it were, never reaches so far as to determine how things are as being in accord with it or not – it does not, in Wittgenstein's graphic phrase, "reach right up to reality" (cf. TLP 2.1511). Instead, it provides only a potential object for that determination, which determination thus assumes the form of a comparison between (what we first called) the judgement and how things are. The ineliminable need for a truth-predicate is the necessity, if anything is *to be* true or false, for that comparison to be effected.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Other similarly emphatic passages present us with the same question. Thus, in "Logic and truth in Frege" Ricketts insists that "in the use of the sentence 'Sea water is salty' to assert that sea water is salty, nothing is predicated of what is asserted. In general, in an assertion nothing is predicated of the thought expressed by the asserted sentence" (1996: 133). The continuation of the passage makes clear that its talk of something being predicated is to be understood by reference to the behaviour of a "regular predicate" (1996: 134). That explanatory point is important: without it, Ricketts's claims would contradict Frege's remark that "what distinguishes [truth] from all other predicates is that predicating it is always included in predicating anything whatever" (PW 129/NS 140; cf. CP 354/KS 345). But *with* that explanation, one wonders what the issue might be. For, if we call a 'ground-level' judgement such as is expressed by 'The sea is salty' a judgement of level 1, and then say that a judgement which refers to and ascribes a property to a judgement of level  $n$  is a judgement of level  $n+1$ , then Ricketts's emphasized claims come to this: a level  $n$  judgement is not of level  $n+1$ . Indeed so. Whoever thought otherwise?

<sup>19</sup> "...I read Frege...[as arguing] that were truth a property, then a truth-predicate *would be required* to make a predication implicit in every assertion explicit" (Ricketts 1996: 134; my emphasis). This is, I think, the passage

This picture of judgement has only to be formulated to be recognized as incoherent. On the one hand, ascription of the truth-predicate is itself portrayed as a species of judgement; on the other, it is held to be what *any* judgement needs to get so far as being true or false; yet if that general requirement really held, it would apply as much to the species of judgement proposed to meet it as to any other.<sup>20</sup> The picture can, however, have a pervasive and destructive influence without ever being made explicit. It has such an influence, I believe, through the early modern canon, where it is evidenced, for instance, in Descartes' struggles to distinguish the various things that might be meant in calling an idea true or false, and in Hume's tangles with the notion of existence. Its influence persists in Kant's notion of what can be thought though it cannot be known, representations that we can handle logically but cannot bring into fully meaningful contact with reality. And it remains discernible in various modern trends which, while half-acknowledging the incoherence of the picture, suggest that we must somehow learn to accept that incoherence as a reflection of our predicament, as displaying the impossibility of properly conceiving how judgement stands to the world from within the only standpoint we have, that of judgement itself.<sup>21</sup> Frege's internalist strategy represents, I believe, the only fundamental cure for this incoherent picture. By locating the notion of truth as the defining norm of judgement he makes it impossible for that notion to be ceded to a perspective whose imagined role is to coordinate judgement with reality.

On any position that resists Frege's cure the laws of logic, laws that interconnect the forms of judgement, are *not yet* laws of truth. Ricketts rightly emphasizes the threat this poses to the immediate, presuppositionless applicability of logic, as well as to its universality (1985: 6; 1986a: 175; 1986: 75). On any such view the application of logic raises a real issue which must be addressed and settled *before* logical principles can be brought to bear, and which therefore cannot be settled *by* bringing to bear those principles. Those principles cannot therefore be, as in Frege's conception they are, the framework of *all* justification – the universal framework within which any real question is to be addressed. To put the point more in Ricketts's terms, on such a conception the application of logic presupposes a judgement *on* logic, and is in that way *essentially* metaperspectival.

The truth in the 'no metaperspective' slogan is, then, that it is a distinctive feature of Frege's conception, and one required by his universalist understanding of logical principles as authoritative for all thinking, that logic does not in that way *require* a metaperspective. That, in summary form, is the content of the Fregean internalism recommended in section 1. I hope to have shown in section 2 that there is no sound route from that point to the

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that most clearly displays Ricketts's real concern with the (supposed) *necessity* for a truth-predicate, rather than its possibility.

<sup>20</sup> I intend this to recall Ricketts's understanding of Frege's argument for the indefinability of truth, as targeting a confused attempt to explain the genus, judgement, by appeal to a species of it. See his 1986: 77-9 and 1996: 131.

<sup>21</sup> To bring out the 'pop-continental' tinge of this form of diagnosis, one might express it thus: the comparison does have to be effected, but all that we could offer to effect the comparison falls as far short of doing so as what it supplements; it is just 'more text'.

conclusion that Frege's conception of logic *precludes* the modest metaperspective adopted in metasystematic investigation.

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