
Logical structure and the functional composition of thoughts

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Résumé

Frege scholars have long wondered how the thought expressed by a sentence relates to the senses of that sentence's constituent expressions. How does the sense of "3" relate to the thought expressed by "3 is a number"? We can roughly categorize answers to this question as falling into two camps. According to the orthodox camp, a thought contains the senses of the relevant expressions as its constituent parts: a thought is an intrinsically structured whole constituted of parts of the same type (Dummett 1973). Sub-thought senses are objects, which, when they hang together in the right way, form a thought. A few heterodox interpreters, however, claim that thoughts compose functionally: the senses of predicates are functions which take senses of different logical type as arguments and yield thoughts as values (Geach, 1975; Pickel, 2021).

Proponents of the orthodox approach have argued that the functional approach does not account for the structure of thoughts correctly, whereas their own part-whole approach does. Against this, I will argue that the functional approach can be spelled out in a manner which does perfect justice to the insights about logical structure which have been taken to motivate the part-whole approach. I will argue for this by defending the functional approach against the best objection which defenders of the orthodox approach have directed at it (Dummett 1973, developed in Heck and May 2011). The further question whether thoughts do in fact compose functionally is one I will have to leave for another day. It is useful to think of the present paper as clearing the ground for an argument to the effect that they do (Pickel's 2021 for example).

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Mots-Clés: Fregean thoughts, functional composition, Dummett