

*My Basic Logical Insights*¹

[According to the original German editor of what eventually came to be published as Frege's *Posthumous Writings*, this piece was written around 1915.² It provides a clear statement of what would now be called a 'redundancy theory' of truth.]

271

The following may be of some use as a key
to the understanding of my results.

Whenever anyone recognizes something to be true, he makes a judgement. What he recognizes to be true is a thought. It is impossible to recognize a thought as true before it has been grasped. A true thought was true before it was grasped by anyone. A thought does not have to be owned by anyone. The same thought can be grasped by several people. Making a judgement does not alter the thought that is recognized to be true. When something is judged to be the case, we can always cull out the thought that is recognized as true; the act of judgement forms no part of this. The word 'true' is not an adjective in the ordinary sense. If I attach the word 'salt' to the word 'sea-water' as a predicate, I form a sentence that expresses a thought. To make it clearer that we have only the expression of a thought, but that nothing is meant to be asserted [*behauptet werden sollte*], I put the sentence in the dependent form 'that sea-water is salt'. Instead of doing this I could have it spoken by an actor on the stage as part of his role, for we know that in playing a part an actor only seems to speak with assertoric force. Knowledge of the sense of the word 'salt' is required for an understanding of the sentence, since it makes an essential contribution to the thought – in the mere word 'sea-water' we should of course not have a sentence at all, nor an expression for a thought. With the word 'true' the matter is quite different. If I attach this to the words 'that sea-water is salt' as a predicate, I likewise form a sentence that expresses a thought. For the same reason as before

¹ Translated by Peter Long and Roger White (*PW*, pp. 251–2; from *NS*, pp. 271–2; page numbers from the latter in the margin).

² *PW*, p. 251, fn. 1/*NS*, p. 271, fn. 1.

I put this also in the dependent form 'that it is true that sea-water is salt'. The thought expressed in these words coincides with the sense of the sentence 'that sea-water is salt'. So the sense of the word 'true' is such that it does not make any essential contribution to the thought. If I assert 'It is true that sea-water is salt', I assert the same thing as if I assert 'Sea-water is salt'. This enables us to recognize that the assertion is not to be found in the word 'true', but in the assertoric force with which the sentence is uttered. This may lead us to think that the word 'true' has no sense at all. But in that case a sentence in which 'true' occurred as a predicate would have no sense either. All one can say is: the word 'true' has a sense that contributes nothing to the sense of the whole sentence in which it occurs as a predicate.

But it is precisely for this reason that this word seems fitted to indicate the essence of logic. Because of the particular sense that it carried any other adjective would be less suitable for this purpose. So the word 'true' seems to make³ the impossible possible: it allows what corresponds to the assertoric force to assume the form of a contribution to the thought. And although this attempt miscarries, or rather through the very fact that it miscarries, it indicates what is characteristic of logic. And this, from what we have said, seems something essentially different from what is characteristic of aesthetics and ethics. For there is no doubt that the word 'beautiful' actually does indicate the essence of aesthetics, as does 'good' that of ethics, whereas 'true' only makes an abortive attempt to indicate the essence of logic, since what logic is really concerned with is not contained in the word 'true' at all but in the assertoric force with which a sentence is uttered.

Many things that belong with the thought, such as negation or generality, seem to be more closely connected with the assertoric force of the sentence or the truth of the thought.⁴ One has only to see that such thoughts occur in *e.g.* conditional sentences or as spoken by an actor as part of his role for this illusion to vanish.

How is it then that this word 'true', though it seems devoid of content, cannot be dispensed with? Would it not be possible, at least in laying the foundations of logic, to avoid this word altogether, when it can only create confusion? That we cannot do so is due to the imperfection of language. If our language were logically more perfect, we would perhaps have no further need of logic, or we might read it off from the language. But we are far from being in such a position. Work in logic just is, to a large extent, a struggle with the logical defects of language,⁵ and yet language remains for us an indispensable tool. Only

³ A different version of the manuscript has 'to be trying to make' in place of 'to make'. (*Eds. of NS.*)

⁴ This sentence and the one following are crossed out in the manuscript. (*Eds. of NS.*)

⁵ Cf. *SKM*, p. 369 below.

after our logical work has been completed shall we possess a more perfect instrument.

Now the thing that indicates most clearly the essence of logic is the assertoric force with which a sentence is uttered. But no word, or part of a sentence, corresponds to this; the same series of words may be uttered with assertoric force at one time, and not at another. In language assertoric force is bound up with the predicate.