

THOUGHTS WITHOUT PARTS: FREGE'S DOCTRINE

Andreas KEMMERLING
Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg

Summary

Does a thought à la Frege consist of parts? There are several passages in his later works which suggest an affirmative answer. However, if these passages are balanced against many of Frege's claims concerning thought-identity and thought-diversity, a negative answer is more credible. For Frege, a thought proper is an amorphous entity, but one which can be decomposed, in more than one way, into parts.

*Für WK,
in Freundschaft und Verehrung*

In this paper I want to revisit a question concerning Frege's concept of a thought.¹

The question

"A thought consists of (unsaturated and completing) parts."—Should this claim be considered as a tenet of Frege's mature doctrine (*i.e.*, of his theory of thought from 1892 on)?

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1. For my previous attempt to answer it, see Kemmerling (1990). During the past twenty years, several authors have argued for answers which seem to faintly resemble the one I gave twenty years ago. See, for example, David Bell (1996), José Luis Bermúdez, Pieranna Garavaso, Wolfgang Kühne (2009), James Levine, Mark Textor and Carlo Penco. I shall not discuss, nor draw on, their claims and arguments here. Although they arrive at answers which may appear somewhat similar, their accounts differ from the one presented here. It would take another paper to compare and evaluate them in detail.—The new version has profited from comments by Kit Fine, Andreas Graeser, Wolfgang Kühne, Chris Peacocke, Tobias Rosefeldt, Stephen Schiffer, Benjamin Schnieder, Moritz Schulz, Mark Siebel and Julia Zakkou. Thanks to all of them. Special thanks to H.-P. Schütt for enriching my Latin vocabulary.

Many authors, including David Bell (1987), Dalia Drai, Michael Dummett, Paul Horwich, Jeffrey King, Christopher Peacocke, Ian Rumfitt, Stephen Schiffer, Robert Stalnaker, and Pavel Tichý have answered *The Question* affirmatively. It seems to be widely assumed that Frege held what sometimes is called a building-block theory of thoughts: a thought consists of parts, pretty much like a stone wall consists of stones. And there is a lot of textual evidence in Frege's writings which may seem to suggest this. I have included some of the relevant quotations in the appendix.

Nevertheless, I think that this answer is mistaken. What I shall try to do in this paper is to argue that Frege held thoughts to be intrinsically unstructured entities. Although they do not consist of parts, they can be decomposed or split up into parts, like a square can be divided into triangles.

In a recent paper, Wolfgang Kühne, after carefully displaying several thorny exegetical problems, prefers, and therein seems to recommend, to side-step the issue. Without going so far as to scold Frege for his "part-whole talk about thoughts", he proposes to "shun [this kind of talk] entirely" and suggests a self-made "revision" in which he tries to "preserve as much of Frege's theory as possible" (Kühne 2007; for the quotations, see 109 and 96). Preserving as much as possible of an untenable theory is a very kind thing to do, especially if it is executed by a sympathetic admirer who knows better. But Frege's position concerning *The Question* is tenable, I think. Maybe Kühne indeed knows better what Frege rather should have said on this topic, from an otherwise strictly Fregean point of view. (I shall not discuss the merits or, God forbid, weaknesses of Kühne's revision of Frege.) My humble aim here is just to defend Frege against the accusation of incoherence, in the light of what he has said concerning *The Question*.² He doesn't need anybody's help on this, however well-meant and nicely done - but merely a charitable reading of what he has written. A reading which grants him, here and there, an innocent equivocation in his use of the word "thought". At least, this is what I shall argue in the following.

So what I present in the following is presented in the spirit of: *amicus Wolfgang, sed magis amica fregitas*.

2. There is no explicit accusation of incoherence in Kühne (2007). If I get his drift, he wants to help Frege out of an avoidable muddle in which he has brought himself by talking about thought-parts.—In his exegetical work on Frege's *Logische Untersuchungen*, Kühne (2009) attributes to Frege a view which appears to me as very similar to the one I argue for. For more on this, see the end of this paper.

1. How “Something consists of this and that” is to be understood here

Let A be some of those things which can be decomposed into things of type τ (like sentences can be decomposed into words or some walls into bricks). Let's concentrate on the simplest case, in which A consist of just two τ -components.³ I shall say that:

A **consists of** the τ -entities B and C iff

- (i) B and C , if taken together in a certain manner m , are identical with A ; and
- (ii) for any X of type τ it holds: if $X \neq B$ und $X \neq C$, then there is no Y of type τ , such that X and Y , taken together in whatever manner, are identical with A .

That is to say: A consists of B and C , iff there is no decomposition of A into things of type τ which yields τ -components different from B or C . (That is not to say that there is only one way of decomposing A ; for it is not excluded that there are two different manners in which A can be decomposed into B and C .)⁴

This characterization is not meant to capture each and every feasible sense of “consisting of”. It is designed to capture a particular sense of this phrase, one which is apt for the purpose at hand. “Consisting of”, as used in our question, must mean something more demanding than just “being decomposable into”, at least if we accept that a sheet of paper is decomposable into halves (upper/lower, front/back, left/right, etc.), although it does not consist of halves-*tout-court* (but only of sufficiently specified halves). It is completely uncontroversial that Frege held thoughts to be decomposable, in the weak sense just hinted at. What is contentious is whether he held them to consist of parts, in the stronger sense specified above.

3. “The simplest case is that of a thought which consists of a complete part and an unsaturated part.” (NS 262)

4. So a soccer team A (in a particular match) consists of the eleven players B and the substitutes C ; but it may happen that B and C are also what results, if A is decomposed into those who played in the previous match and those who didn't.

2. Basics

Thoughts, for Frege, are abstract entities which can be expressed by sentences but which are themselves nothing linguistic nor existentially dependent on language. They determine a truth value timelessly; they are intersubjectively accessible (in this point, Frege allows for exceptions); they are eternal and unchangeable as regards their intrinsic properties.

The entities of which Fregean thoughts consist, if they consist of parts, are of two types: unsaturated and complete abstract entities. Unsaturated thought-parts are, in particular, senses of predicates; complete thought-parts are senses of proper names. All entities divide into the unsaturated ones and the complete ones. Concrete particulars like a table or a dog, and abstract things like sets or thoughts are complete entities. All other entities are unsaturated, they are functions in Frege's sense of this word. Examples of unsaturated entities are properties of any kind and mathematical functions. Concepts, for Frege, are functions which always assign a truth value to their arguments. Concepts are of various orders; first-order concepts have arguments which are complete entities; second-order concepts, like the one signified by the existential quantifier, have only arguments which are first-order concepts; and so on. It should be noticed here that the distinction between the unsaturated and the complete is ontologically fundamental for Frege; there is no deeper level in the order of things such that the elements of this level divide into the unsaturated and the complete. (By the way, this is why speaking, as I just did, of *entities* some of which are complete and some of which are unsaturated is, from a sternly Fregean point of view, at best a clumsy manner of speaking.) In particular, there is absolutely no sense in which something unsaturated could be identified with something complete. And there is no clear sense in which a function or concept could be viewed as the unsaturated version of a certain complete entity, or *vice versa*.

What is important for us is how this distinction applies to the three realms which concern us here: language, sense and *Bedeutung*, *i.e.*, the realm of what we talk about in using language. In the linguistic realm, proper names (among them sentences) are complete; predicates and other function-names are unsaturated. In the realm of sense, thoughts themselves are complete, and they can be decomposed into an unsaturated and a completing part. In the realm of *Bedeutung*, truth values and other objects are complete, concepts and other functions are unsaturated. Frege's scheme is this: any proper name expresses a complete sense which in turn deter-

mines an object; any other meaningful linguistic expression expresses an unsaturated sense which in turn determines a function. In the following I shall restrict my discussion to fairly simple sentences and the thoughts they express.⁵

3. *Thought identity: two criteria*

There seem to be two candidates for a criterion of thought identity in Frege's writings. One is mentioned in unpublished manuscripts and a letter; the other is nowhere to be found explicitly formulated, but it seems to suggest itself by many of his remarks concerning thought-parts.⁶ Let's call the first *the equipollence criterion*:

- (EC) At least for simple sentences it holds: They express the same thought iff they are equipollent (roughly: understanding the sentences involves recognizing that acceptance-as-true of any one of them commits one to acceptance-as-true of the others).

The second is *the criterion in terms of thought-parts*:

- (TPC) Two sentences express the same thought only if those components of the sentences which belong to the same category express the same sense (which is part of the thought expressed by the respective sentence).

(Gloss: So if a thought *consists* of an unsaturated part U and a completing part C , then any sentence which expresses this thought must contain an unsaturated component which expresses U and a completing component which expresses C .)

Frege expresses a slight uneasiness concerning his own use of the word "part" as applied to thoughts. Speaking this way, he says, is using a simile. But he clearly thinks that using this simile is harmless. It stands to reason,

5. There is even an exegetical excuse for concentrating on such trite sentences as the ones I shall present below. At one of the rare points at which Frege explicitly addresses our issue, he expressly restricts what he says to sentences of which "there is no difficulty in grasping their contents" (*NS* 213). See the appendix below.

6. For some pertinent quotations, see the appendix below. Sometimes I have changed the available English translations.

he says, and it is, by and large, correct (or at least applicable, or appropriate; his word is *zutreffend*). Occasionally, the simile doesn't quite work, but even then we hardly perceive that as troublesome (*KS* 378). - In brief, speaking of thought-parts is an O.K. metaphor for Frege which he accepts not only ungrudgingly but with a good grace. So I shall make no fuss about it. (The situation is crucially different, for Frege, when he feels himself driven into talking about 'parts' of a truth value. After explaining why this way of talking is crucially inappropriate, he hastens to add that a new expression, instead of "part", ought to be created for what he has in mind. See *KS* 150f. and *cf.* Kemmerling 2003.)

4. *A difficulty: The apparent incompatibility of the criteria*

That these two criteria may easily appear incompatible, can be seen by considering two simple sentences which are equipollent but express thoughts which, *prima facie*, consist of different parts.⁷

- (1) Harvey is stupid.
- (2) Stupidity is one of Harvey's properties.⁸

We can render the sense of these two sentences as

$$\begin{aligned} \Sigma 1: & \sigma^u_2 (\sigma^c_1) \\ \Sigma 2: & \sigma^u_4 (\sigma^c_3), \end{aligned}$$

7. As instances of equipollent sentences, (1) and (2) may not seem beyond reasonable doubt. After all, Künne (2007, 117) bothered to mention in a footnote that every 'nominalist' will claim to be a living counter-example to my contention that the two are equipollent (or 'cognitively equivalent', as he prefers to put it). - I'm not convinced. I tend to doubt that anyone, even a scare-quoted nominalist, could consider himself a counter-example to a claim which is exclusively about the sense of sentences. Of course, someone may pride himself on not understanding (2), or on being able to consider it as false while considering (1) as true. But given that the vast majority of his fellow-speakers will disagree with him on his alleged feats, even he himself should have second thoughts about whether he quite understands both sentences - and not take it for granted that he does (or assume that the others don't). My guess is that what really marks out a reflective nominalist, with or without scare-quotes, from us regular folks is not his sheer preference for (1), but his insistence on M^* as the only ontologically acceptable method of decomposition among those which will be mentioned in the following.

8. This, of course, may be continued: "[Being one of Harvey's properties] is a property of stupidity", "[Being a property of stupidity] is a property of the property of being one of Harvey's properties", &c.

if we, ‘naturally’, assume that

- σ_1^c = the (complete) sense of “Harvey”;
- σ_2^u = the (unsaturated) sense of “... is stupid”;⁹
- σ_3^c = the (complete) sense of “stupidity”;
- σ_4^u = the (unsaturated) sense of “... is one of Harvey’s properties”.

Given this, it clearly holds that neither the two unsaturated senses nor the two completing ones are identical, *i.e.*

$$\begin{aligned}\sigma_1^c &\neq \sigma_3^c \\ \sigma_2^u &\neq \sigma_4^u\end{aligned}$$

$\Sigma 1$ is a natural way of representing the thought expressed by sentence (1), $\Sigma 2$ of representing the thought expressed by (2). But the unsaturated components of the two sentences do not express the same sense, neither do the completing components. Hence in the light of (TPC) the thoughts expressed by (1) and (2) are different, although they are the same thought according to (EC).

Let’s call the method of decomposition we applied in getting this undesirable result: method M :¹⁰

M -decomposition of (1): [Harvey] is stupid.

M -decomposition of (2): [Stupidity] is one of Harvey’s properties.

We can get rid of this difficulty by applying a different method of decomposition, namely M^* :

M^* -decomposition of (1): [Harvey] is stupid.

M^* -decomposition of (2): Stupidity is one of [Harvey]’s properties.

It assigns to the sentences (1) and (2) the thoughts $\Sigma 1$ and $\Sigma^* 2$, and these can be accepted as one and the same thought even according to (TPC).

9. Frege would not have appreciated this way of presenting the sameness of unsaturated senses, but let that go.

10. A method of decomposition, as I use this term here, is a way of systematically splitting up the sentences of a language into complete and incomplete constituents and assigning senses to them in such a manner that the semantical properties of, and relations obtaining among, the sentences are respected.

The trick is this: to decompose sentence (2) not in what may seem the most natural way, but rather in a way which categorically imitates the M -decomposition of sentence (1).

The upshot of all this, so far, is this. Our original way of dealing with (1) and (2) was M . This method proved to be unsatisfactory for a faithful Fregean who tries to adhere to both criteria, for it assigns to the sentences—which express the same thought, according to (EC)—senses which are different thoughts according to (TPC). To get rid of this difficulty, we introduced another way of dealing with our sentences, namely M^* . According to M^* , a new predicate, “Stupidity is one of ...’s properties” shows up; so, in the light of M^* , the sense of (2) should be rendered as

$$\Sigma^*2: \sigma_5^u(\sigma_1^c) \quad [\sigma_5^u = \text{the sense of “Stupidity is one of ...’s properties”} \\ = \sigma_2^u]$$

So far, so good. M^* looks satisfactory, because it assigns to both sentences the same thought, even in the light of (TPC).

5. *A further difficulty*

Now what if we played this trick the other way round: decompose sentence (2) in the first way, *i.e.*, according to M , and now decompose sentence (1) in a way which categorically imitates the M -decomposition of (2)?¹¹ What we would be doing thereby, in effect, is applying a third method of decomposition which assigns to (1) and (2) the thoughts $\Sigma'1$ and $\Sigma 2$, and these again can be accepted as one and the same thought even according to (TPC). So, there seems to be another method of analyzing (1) and (2), in order to reach the desired result, namely

M^{**} -decomposition of (1): Harvey is [stupid]

M^{**} -decomposition of (2): [Stupidity] is one of Harvey’s properties.

11. The point of the ensuing consideration is not to develop an objection to the Frege’s position, but rather to bring to the fore a certain difficulty. In sections 6—9, I shall consider several solutions which are not in accord with Frege’s doctrines. Eventually, in section 10, I shall present a way of solving the difficulty which is faithful to the spirit and (most of) the letter of Frege’s framework.

M^{**} introduces a new predicate, “Harvey is ...”, and a new complete sentence-part, “stupid”.¹² Accordingly, the sense of (1) should be represented as

$$\Sigma^{**}I: \sigma^u_6(\sigma^c_3) \quad [\sigma^d_6 = \text{the sense of “Harvey is ...”} = \sigma^u_4]$$

/u

and this is the same thought as $\Sigma 2$. So there seem to be at least two ways of decomposing the two sentences to our satisfaction, *i.e.*, in such a way that they express the same thought.

This result gives rise to the next difficulty because each of the methods M^* and M^{**} assigns the same thought to the two sentences, but the thought assigned by the one method is, in the light of (TPC), a thought different from the one assigned to them by the other method. Assuming that (1) and (2) are univocal sentences and that (TPC) is true, not both M^* and M^{**} can be correct methods of decomposition. But Frege repeatedly claims that different methods of decomposition are equally correct. Herein lies the next difficulty.

The source of this difficulty is this. It looks like Frege wanted to make all four of the following claims:

- (I) A univocal sentence expresses exactly one thought.
- (II) There are univocal sentences of the same language which express the same thought.
- (III) Thoughts consist of parts.
- (IV) There are different correct methods of decomposition.

These four claims are incompatible, if we suppose that our examples are O.K., *i.e.*, if we suppose that the following claims are acceptable instantiations of (I)–(IV):

- (a) Sentences (1) und (2) are univocal, and hence each expresses exactly one thought.

12. Of course, at first sight it may look a bit surprising or even unnatural to decompose (1) in this way. But a devout Fregean should not care, as long as the application of M^* at large leads to results which are as true to the semantical facts as the results one gets from applying M . After all, according to Frege’s own pet method of decomposition, in a sentence like “Everything flows”, the first word expresses an unsaturated sense which is completed by the sense of the second. Hence the *prima facie* artificiality of a decomposition ought not be considered as an objection against its correctness. (“If the logician wanted to pay attention to objections of unnaturalness, he would run the risk of getting tangled up in endless squabbles over what is natural—issues which [...] do not belong to logic”. *NS* 158)

- (b) Sentences (1) and (2) express the same thought.
- (c) The thoughts expressed by (1) and (2) consist of parts.
- (d) M^* and M^{**} are correct methods of decomposition.

In the rest of the paper, I shall discuss three ways of dealing with this difficulty.

6. *Option #1: Giving up (a). The indeterminacy doctrine*

It says: $\Sigma 1$ and $\Sigma 2$ are different thoughts. (1) may express both of them, as may (2). Relative to M^* , (1) expresses $\Sigma 1$, relative to M^{**} the same sentence expresses $\Sigma 2$. The expressing-relation which obtains between sentences and thoughts is a three place relation: "Sentence ... expresses thought --- relative to method of decomposition ---". It is only relative to a method of decomposition that a sentence determinately expresses a thought. Because of (IV) the choice of a method of decomposition is not determined by objective features alone; for all objective properties of and relations between sentences and thoughts are preserved by all correct methods of decomposition: truth value, entailment, identity or diversity of the thought expressed. Two speakers who grasp the thoughts expressed by the sentences of their language relative to two correct but different methods of decomposition do not thereby disagree on any factual issue. They may hold true the same sentences under the same circumstances, they may accept the same sequences of sentences as valid inferences, and they may regard the same sentences as expressing one and the same thought. If one person, in understanding sentence (1), grasps the thought $\Sigma 1$, whereas someone else grasps $\Sigma 2$, this doesn't have a bearing on any factual issue concerning Harvey's cognitive abilities. Since the choice of a method of decomposition is not a matter of objective factors alone, and since a sentence expresses exactly one thought only relative to a method of decomposition, it is objectively indeterminate which thought is the sense of a given sentence.

7. *Why the indeterminacy doctrine should not be ascribed to Frege*

There is no textual evidence whatsoever that Frege held such a view. He never mentions what would be a remarkable fact, namely that simple,

seemingly univocal sentences like (1) are semantically indeterminate as long as they are not accompanied by a method of decomposition. Even when he speaks of different correct methods of decomposition, he never claims that the expressing-relation is a three place relation and that it therefore would never be strictly true that a sentence expresses a thought. According to the indeterminacy doctrine, almost any sentence would be like a structurally ambiguous sentence of the “Flying planes can be dangerous” kind; such sentences express the thoughts they express only relative to a certain way of decomposing them. But the semantical indeterminacy here envisaged is even more dramatic than structural ambiguity: since there may be indefinitely many correct methods of decomposition, there may be indefinitely many thoughts expressed by the most harmless univocal sentence.

8. *Option #2: Giving up (b). The super-determinacy doctrine*

It says: $\Sigma 1$ and $\Sigma 2$ are different thoughts. The expressing-relation which obtains between sentences and thoughts is a two place relation: “Sentence ... expresses thought ---”. Sentence (1) expresses only the first one, sentence (2) expresses only the other, or possibly—if somewhat perversely—*vice versa*.

9. *Why the super-determinacy doctrine should not be ascribed to Frege*

According to this doctrine, hardly any two sentences of the same language, except strictly synonymous ones, could express the same thought. (That’s why I call it the super-determinacy doctrine: Very few exceptions aside, the expressing-relation is superlatively determinate in assigning exactly n thoughts to n sentences of the same language.¹³)—But Frege very often points out that non-synonymous sentences may express the same thought. Here are some examples he gives between 1884 and 1914:

“ M gave document A to N ” / “ N received document A from N ”
 “Alfred has not yet come” / “Alfred has not come”

13. The exceptions concern cases of ambiguity, in which one sentence expresses more than one thought, and cases of glaringly strict synonymousness (or *congruency*, as Frege puts it in a letter to Husserl) in which different sentences of the same language express the same thought.

“ p , but q ” / “ p and q ”
 “ p ” / “ p or p ” / “ p and p ”
 “If p , then q ” / “If not- q , then not- p ”
 “Some bodies are light” / “There are light bodies”
 “There are men” / “There are men identical with themselves” / “Something identical with itself is a man”
 “There is at least one square root of 4” / “The concept *square root of 4* is satisfied” / “The number 4 has the property that there is something the square of which it is”
 “Frederick the Great won the battle of Rossbach” / “It is true that Frederick the Great won the battle of Rossbach”

Frege often insists that common language is misleading as to the identity of the thoughts expressed by different sentences. Common language is misleading in this respect precisely because the differences in the lexical material and the grammatical constructions of the sentences lure us into assuming that the thoughts expressed are different. It is of the essence of the very concept of a thought à la Frege that it captures a common content aspect of sentences which differ in other aspects of their grammar and meaning.

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As far as I can see there is no textual evidence that Frege ever held the indeterminacy doctrine or the super-determinacy doctrine. But apart from textual evidence, it is hard to make coherent sense of the very idea that $\Sigma 1$ and $\Sigma 2$ may be structures of different thoughts. How would such thoughts be related to each other? They are nothing but contents, contingent contents, and they entail one another. They seem to have something in common, as regards their content. But it is hard to see, within an otherwise Fregean framework, in what their content overlap might consist.

To make things vivid, think of two languages, $L1$ and $L2$, such that there is a sentence in $L1$ which expresses the thought $\Sigma 1$, but no sentence which expresses thought $\Sigma 2$. Correspondingly, in $L2$, there is a sentence which expresses the thought $\Sigma 2$, but no sentence which expresses $\Sigma 1$. These languages would not be translatable into each other. (This is an illustration of the indeterminacy doctrine, because what we are trying to imagine, in effect, are two languages with built-in methods of decomposition; $L1$ is a language which has built in M^* , $L2$ is a M^{**} -language.) Frege would have abhorred the idea of such untranslatability.

Or think instead of a language in which there are sentences, (1) and (2), such that (1) expresses only $\Sigma 1$, and (2) expresses only $\Sigma 2$. (This is what the super-determinacy doctrine says about English.) A competent speaker of such a language would have to grasp different thoughts when he thinks that the one sentence is true and when he thinks that the other sentence is true. But as a competent speaker he knows, if only implicitly, that “ x is stupid” analytically entails and is entailed by “ x has the property of being stupid”, and that the following is a conceptual truth: stupidity is the property anyone has who is stupid, and has not if he is not stupid. Given this, and his implicit grammatical knowledge, he can derive each sentence from the other. In a purely *a priori* manner he can switch, as it were, from judging one of these contingent thoughts to judging the other. For Frege, this kind of switchability is precisely the mark of thought identity, as long as we deal with contingent thoughts and deal with sufficiently simple sentences expressing them.

But nevertheless, let's try to assume that (1) and (2) do express different thoughts. Barring skepticism, it could not escape the competent speaker of such a language that these two thoughts have something in common which allows for this kind of switchability. But what could this common feature of the two thoughts be? Their unsaturated building blocks are different, and so are their completing building blocks. And if Fregean thoughts consisted of parts, the nature of the common feature of these two different thoughts would seem a mystery. It would have to be something which could transcend the boundary between the realms of the complete and the unsaturated entities. Impossible! There is nothing in Frege's framework which is beyond this division. There can be no proper name, no concept word for any component these two thoughts have in common. Nevertheless, they obviously have something in common. We couldn't possibly say what it is. (Maybe something which cannot be said but which shows itself? Frege wouldn't accept such a way out.)

* * *

God made the thoughts proper, all other is the work of men.
(Ancient saying)

There is a whole lot of textual evidence that Frege held a different doctrine concerning thought identity. A doctrine according to which thoughts do

not consist of, but can be decomposed into, parts. I call it the amorphousness doctrine. In the following sketch of it, I try to capture the spirit of what I take to be Frege's thinking on this point. As to its letter, I shall be cavalier. (Sometimes one must restrain the impulse to inundate the reader with quotations.)

10. *Option #3: Giving up (c). The amorphousness doctrine*

$\Sigma 1$ and $\Sigma 2$ are the same thought as viewed in the light of different methods of decomposition. This one thought is expressed by all sentences which are equipollent with (1). The expressing-relation which obtains between sentences and thoughts is a two-place relation: "Sentence ... expresses thought ---". All correct methods of decomposition assign the same thought to a sentence. The thought expressed does not consist of thought-parts, yet it is decomposable into thought-parts.

A thought has to be decomposable in order to become the object of human cognition and communication. For human cognition and communication require judging, and judging requires predication - which in the simplest case is the act of predicating of something that it falls under a concept. In judging, we accept a thought as true, and in order to do that we have to decompose it, in the simplest case into a concept-part and an object-part. We accept that a certain predication ("*Aussage*") is the True. A predication consists of parts.¹⁴ The predication of Harvey that he is stupid is not the same as the predication of stupidity that it is exemplified by Harvey. Both predications are the True,¹⁵ but they are different predications. Because predications consist of parts, thoughts must be decomposed whenever we

14. This is, as Wolfgang Künne rightly remarked in discussion, not exactly the way Frege uses the word *Aussage*. By this term, he refers to what is being predicated of something in a statement; so with regard to, e.g., sentence (1), he may say that in using it a certain *Aussage* is being made about Harvey, presumably, that he is stupid. But he variously makes it clear that there can be no *Aussage* without an existing object which it is about; without such an object it is merely a virtual [*mögliche*] *Aussage*, one which *lacks* an object (cf. for example *KS* 231, 352). Hence I consider this use of the term, though admittedly not in total accord with the letter of Frege's doctrine, as vindicable even for a staunch Fregean. (It is, of course, highly revealing that Frege carefully avoids using a special word for what I call an *Aussage*; as he remarked in this context: "a distinct expression ought to be created for this", *KS* 151.)

15. Frege is quite explicit about this. Cf. for example his "Funktion und Begriff" (*KS* 137) or *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik*, §§ 4ff.—This has to do with his view that an assertion of a sentence like (1) is to be construed as a way of saying of the truth value of the thought that Harvey is stupid that it is (identical with) the True.

grasp them and want to make a judgement. Sentences express thoughts; they consist of words but not of subject and predicate. What is to be considered as the subject of a sentence is dependent on which predication is made by asserting the sentence. The subject is that of the referent of which something is predicated by asserting the sentence. Which predication is being made is dependent on how the thought expressed is decomposed into a concept-determining thought-part and an object-determining thought-part. And the decomposition is ad lib, as long as a correct method is applied.

According to the amorphousness doctrine, a crucial difference has to be recognized between two aspects of linguistic reference to the world. On the one hand, there is the objective, determinate and amorphous aspect (the *A*-aspect), which concerns sentences, thoughts and truth values as unstructured (but “structureable”) wholes. On the other, there is the aspect (the *S*-aspect) under which we consider them as they play their roles in our judgments: as having a certain structure. This aspect is subject to a certain amount of arbitrariness, or indeterminacy.

Let’s get back to our examples. Considered under the *A*-aspect, sentence (1)-as-a-whole expresses the amorphous thought θ which determines, say, the True; sentence (2) expresses the same thought which, of course, again determines the True.

If we consider things under the *S*-aspect, sentences are decomposed into logical subject and predicate, thoughts into a concept-determining thought part and an object-determining thought part, and truth values into a concept and an object. (Decomposing a truth value requires, as Frege remarks in “*Über Sinn und Bedeutung*”, going back to the thought at issue—see *KS* 150—and, according to the amorphousness doctrine, it involves a decomposition of it.)

Decomposition requires a way of doing it; different ways may yield different structures. If method M^* is applied to sentence (1), the resulting structures—of sentence (1) as a whole, of thought θ , and of the True—can be represented as

$\langle\langle$ “Harvey“, „is stupid“, $\langle\sigma_1^c, \sigma_2^u\rangle$, \langle Harvey, the concept of being stupid $\rangle\rangle$.

Whereas the application of M^{**} yields:

$\langle\langle$ “stupid“, “Harvey is“, $\langle\sigma_3^c, \sigma_4^u\rangle$, \langle the concept of being stupid, the 2nd-order concept of being one of Harvey’s properties $\rangle\rangle$.

Decomposing a univocal sentence into logical subject (completing part) and logical predicate (unsaturated part), however it is done correctly, does not affect the identity of the sentence: The sentence as decomposed into the predicate "... is stupid" and the subject "Harvey" is the same sentence ("Harvey is stupid", to wit) as the sentence which is decomposed into the subject "stupid" and the predicate "Harvey is ...". (Just to give it a name, let's call a sentence-*cum*-parsing, *i.e.*, as decomposed in a certain correct way, a *formula*.)—Correspondingly, according to the amorphousness doctrine, decomposing a thought into a completing and an unsaturated part, however it is done correctly, does not affect the identity of the thought. Hence $\langle \sigma_1^c, \sigma_2^u \rangle$ (*i.e.*, $\Sigma 1$) and $\langle \sigma_3^c, \sigma_4^c \rangle$ (*i.e.*, $\Sigma 2$) are the same thought, the one we called Σ . (Let's call thoughts-*cum*-structure, as an *hommage* to Stephen Schiffer, *Fregean propositions*. Cf. Schiffer 2003, 22.)—Moreover, the amorphousness doctrine says that decomposing a truth value in the light of a given decomposition of a given univocal sentence does not affect the identity of the truth value. \langle Harvey, the concept of being stupid \rangle and \langle the concept of being stupid, the 2nd order concept of being one of Harvey's properties \rangle are the same truth value.

The importance of distinguishing between the *A*-aspect and the *S*-aspect becomes obvious when we consider the different identity criteria involved. The two formulae we've just considered are different formulae but the same sentence. The two Fregean propositions we've considered are different Fregean propositions but they are the same thought. And the two predications we've considered are different predications, but they are the same truth value.

One lesson of this doctrine is this: In addressing semantical issues, we should be careful about whether we are considering things under the *A*-aspect (and talk about sentences proper, thoughts proper, and truth values proper) or whether we are considering things under the *S*-aspect (and talk about formulae, Fregean propositions, and predications). Often we consider things under a certain *S*-aspect (by implicitly presupposing a certain method of decomposition), but are unmindful of doing so. This seems true of Frege himself occasionally, when he talks about thought-parts in his late and especially in his last writings, without explicitly mentioning the method of decomposition he has in mind. (But commonly, it is clear enough from the context which way of decomposing he is envisaging; in the default case, it is his preferred way which he has taught us.) Moreover, although almost always he should be understood as speaking of thoughts proper, there are passages, especially in his *Logische Untersuchungen*, in

which he must be read as speaking about Fregean propositions (*e.g.*, when he speaks of “the two thoughts: A and the negation of the negation of A ”, *KS* 377).

It is the equipollence criterion which applies to thoughts proper, to thoughts ‘as they are in themselves’, if you wish.¹⁶ Therefore it is, for Frege, the ultimate criterion for thought-identity. (Remember that he held thoughts to be *eternal* - not merely *timeless* in their relation to the True and unchanging in their intrinsic properties. Thoughts were always there, even before there were human beings who would grasp them and make judgements, therein assigning them a structure, or more than one.¹⁷)

Künne seems not to concur. Thoughts à la Frege are not amorphous but rather, as he puts it, *polymorphous* (Künne 2009, 566). What he means by this, he explains as follows: “Hence the thought expressed by the sentence ‘ $\neg\neg A$ ’ is, as it were, polymorphous: it has the one structure [roughly: $\neg\neg(A)$] with regard to the one decomposition of this sentence, and it has the other structure [roughly: $\neg(\neg A)$] with regard to the other decomposition.” (Künne 2009, 583; square brackets mine). Since this seems not to point to any substantial disagreement with what I have argued for, I assume that Künne takes his preferred term to be more apt. And maybe he is right, as usually.

But finally and more importantly, Frege himself, at least at one point, may seem not to concur. In “Die Verneinung” he says that in grasping a (true) thought one neither creates it nor bestows on it the interconnection of its parts; and he carries on: *denn der Gedanke war schon vorher wahr, bestand also schon in der Ordnung seiner Teile, bevor er gefaßt wurde* (“for the thought was true before, and hence existed already in the arrangement of its parts before it was grasped”, *KS* 371). This *dictum* does not smell, at least not heavily, of the amorphousness doctrine. Is he not saying here,

16. “By the way, singularity does not, properly speaking, belong to a thought in itself [*kommt einem Gedanken eigentlich nicht an sich zu*], but only in respect of a way of possible decomposition”. (*NS* 203)

17. In “Der Gedanke”, Frege speaks of thoughts as timeless, as eternal and as strictly atemporal, and “timeless” seems to be his favourite word, when the thought’s relation to its truth value is concerned (*KS* 361). In his “Logik” from 1897 he says that true thoughts are always true, and, on the same page, that they are “*im wesentlichen unzeitlich*”, which may mean either: *by and large* atemporal, or (under a somewhat less natural reading of this phrase, but one which could be defended given the rest of the sentence): *essentially* atemporal (*NS* 160). Anyway, his speaking of thoughts as eternal seems not to be just an occasional carelessness, for in one of his last published writings, “Die Verneinung”, he says twice that the thought existed before it was grasped (*KS* 371).

in effect: “Thoughts in themselves do have a structure independently of how they are grasped”? No, fortunately, this is not what he says. He speaks of temporal order, not of essential inherence; not of what thoughts are in themselves, but of what comes first. I recommend to understand the *dictum* as follows: Methods of thought-decomposition are entities as eternal or atemporal as thoughts themselves. A thinker who is grasping a thought therein neither creates the thought nor the method of decomposition by which he grasps it; both are abstract entities which are not created by human acts of thinking. What the thinker does, in grasping the thought—in this “most mysterious act of all” (NS 157)—, is to apply just one method of decomposition, among the many methods which in principle could be applied.

All this, of course, is not to say that Frege considered thoughts proper as metaphysically, or even temporally, prior to Fregean propositions. Their priority rather has to do with the concerns of logic, as Frege envisages them. What the logician is after, according to Frege, are certain laws about the interrelations of thoughts proper - interrelations which obtain irrespectively of whatever structures they admit of, but which can be recognized and formulated, by us, only if we pay scrupulous attention to the structures in which we actually grasp and represent thoughts.

* * *

The Answer
No.

APPENDIX: SOME TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

Concerning the equipollence criterion

Zwei Sätze *A* und *B* können nun in der Beziehung zu einander stehen, daß jeder, der den Inhalt von *A* als wahr anerkennt, auch den von *B* ohne weiteres als wahr anerkennen muß, und daß auch umgekehrt jeder, der den Inhalt von *B* anerkennt, auch den von *A* unmittelbar anerkennen muß (*Äquipollenz*), wobei vorausgesetzt wird, daß die Auffassung der Inhalte von *A* und *B* keine Schwierigkeiten macht. („Kurze Übersicht meiner logischen Lehren“, 1906, NS 213)

Now two sentences A and B can stand in such a relation that anyone who recognizes the content of A as true must thereby also recognize the content of B as true and, conversely, that anyone who accepts the content of B must straightway accept that of A . (*Equipollence*). It is here being assumed that there is no difficulty in grasping the contents of A and B .

—

Um nun zu entscheiden, ob der Satz A denselben Gedanken ausdrücke wie der Satz B , scheint mir folgendes Mittel allein möglich zu sein, wobei ich annehme, dass keiner der beiden Sätze einen logisch evidenten Sinnbestandteil enthalte. Wenn nämlich sowohl die Annahme, dass der Inhalt von A falsch und der von B wahr sei, als auch die Annahme, dass der Inhalt von A wahr und der von B falsch sei, auf einen logischen Widerspruch führt, ohne dass man zu dessen Feststellung zu wissen braucht, ob der Inhalt von A oder von B wahr oder falsch sei, und ohne dass man dazu anderer als rein logischer Gesetze bedarf, so kann zum Inhalte von A , soweit er fähig ist, als wahr oder falsch beurteilt zu werden, nichts gehören, was nicht auch zum Inhalte von B gehörte; ... (Letter to Husserl, December 12, 1906; *WB* 105f.)

Now in order to decide whether sentence A expresses the same thought as sentence B it seems to me that the following means is the only possible one, and I assume here that neither of the two sentences contains a logically evident sense-component. For if both the assumption that the content of A is false and that of B true and the assumption that the content of A is true and that of B false lead to a logical contradiction, and if in order to note this contradiction one does not need to know whether the content of A or of B is true or false, and if one doesn't, for this purpose, require any laws except purely logical ones, then nothing can belong to the content of A , insofar as it can be judged as true or false, which would not also belong to the content of B ; ...

—

See also Frege's manuscript "Logik" (1897, *KS* 155).

Concerning the criterion with thought-parts (nowhere formulated as a criterion by Frege)

Wie der Eigenname Teil des Satzes ist, ist sein Sinn Teil des Gedankens. („Einleitung in die Logik“, 1906, *NS* 208)

As the proper name is part of the sentence, so its sense is part of the thought.

—

Wie der Gedanke Sinn des ganzen Satzes ist, ist ein Teil des Gedankens Sinn eines Satzteils. (*loc. cit.*, NS 209)

As the thought is the sense of the whole sentence, so a part of the thought is the sense of a part of the sentence.

—

Wenn wir den Satz zerlegen in einen Eigennamen und den übrigen Teil, so hat dieser übrige Teil als Sinn einen ungesättigten Gedankenteil. (*loc. cit.*, NS 210)

If we split up a sentence into a proper name and the remainder, then this remainder has as its sense an unsaturated part of a thought.

—

Wie der Satz im allgemeinen ein zusammengesetztes Zeichen ist, so ist auch der Gedanke, den er ausdrückt, zusammengesetzt; und zwar so, daß Teile des Gedankens Teilen des Satzes entsprechen. So wird im allgemeinen auch eine Gruppe von Zeichen, die in einem Satze vorkommt, einen Sinn haben, der Teil des Gedankens ist. („Logik in der Mathematik“, 1914 NS 224)

As a sentence is generally a complex sign, so the thought expressed by it is complex too: in such a way that parts of the thought correspond to parts of the sentence. So as a general rule when a group of signs occurs in a sentence it will have a sense which is part of the thought expressed.

—

Die Sprache hat die Fähigkeit, eine unübersehbare Fülle von Gedanken auszudrücken, mit verhältnismäßig wenigen Mitteln. Dies wird dadurch möglich, daß der Gedanke aus Gedankenteilen aufgebaut wird und daß diese Gedankenteile Satzteilen entsprechen, durch die sie ausgedrückt werden. (*loc. cit.*, NS 262)

Language has the power to express, with comparatively few means such a profusion of thoughts that no one could possibly command a view of them all. What makes this possible is that a thought has parts out of which it is con-

structed and that these parts correspond to parts of sentences, by which they are expressed.

—

Die Welt der Gedanken hat ihr Abbild in der Welt der Sätze, Ausdrücke, Wörter, Zeichen. Dem Aufbau des Gedankens entspricht die Zusammensetzung des Satzes aus Wörtern, wobei die Reihenfolge im allgemeinen nicht gleichgültig ist. („Die Verneinung“, 1918/19, *KS* 367)

The world of thoughts is pictured in the world of sentences, expressions, words, signs. To the structure of the thought there corresponds the compounding of words into a sentence; and here the order is in general not insignificant.

—

Der Satz kann als Abbildung des Gedankens betrachtet werden, in der Weise, daß dem Verhältnisse vom Teil zum Ganzen bei den Gedanken und Gedanken-teilen im großen und ganzen dasselbe Verhältnis bei den Sätzen und Satzteilen entspricht. („Aufzeichnungen für Ludwig Darmstaedter“, 1919, *NS* 275)

We can regard the sentence as an image of the thought: corresponding to the whole-part relation of thoughts and thought-parts we have, by and large, the same relation for sentences and sentence-parts.

Concerning the correctness of different methods of decomposition

Ich glaube nicht, daß es für jeden beurteilbaren Inhalt nur eine Weise gebe, wie er zerfallen könne, oder daß eine der möglichen Weisen immer einen sachlichen Vorrang beanspruchen dürfe. (Brief an Marty, July 29, 1892, *WB* 164)

I do not think that for each judgeable content [after 1891, Frege considered his concept of a “judgeable content” as a conflation of the two concepts of thought and truth value—A.K.] there is only one way in which it can decompose, or that one of the possible ways could always claim a factual priority.

—

Dies ist nur wunderbar für einen, der erkennt, daß ein Gedanke mannigfach zerlegt werden kann und daß dadurch bald dies, bald jenes als Subjekt und Prä-

dikat erscheint. Durch den Gedanken selbst ist noch nicht bestimmt, was als Subjekt aufzufassen ist. („Über Begriff und Gegenstand“, 1892, *KS* 173)

This will be miraculous only to somebody who fails to see that a thought can be split up in many ways, so that now one thing, now another, appears as subject or predicate. The thought itself does not yet determine what is to be regarded as the subject.

—

Es ist daher nicht unmöglich, daß derselbe Gedanke bei *einer* Zerlegung als singulärer, bei einer andern als partikulärer, bei einer dritten als allgemeiner erscheint. Danach darf es nicht wundernehmen, daß derselbe Satz aufgefaßt werden kann als eine Aussage von einem Begriffe und auch als eine Aussage von einem Gegenstande, wenn nur beachtet wird, daß diese Aussagen verschieden sind. (*loc. cit.*, *KS* 173)

It is thus not impossible that *one* way of decomposing one and the same thought should make it appear as a singular judgment; another, as a particular judgment; and a third, as a universal judgment. It need not then surprise us that the same sentence may be conceived as a predication about a concept and also as a predication about an object; only we must observe that these predications are different.

—

Es ist aber zu bemerken, dass ein und derselbe Gedanke oft in verschiedener Weise zerlegbar ist und demnach auch in verschiedener Weise aus Teilen zusammengesetzt erscheint. Das Wort “singulär” gilt nicht für den Gedanken schlechtweg, sondern nur hinsichtlich einer besonderen Weise der Teilung. („Kurze Übersicht meiner logischen Lehren“, 1906, *NS* 218)

But it has to be noticed that one and the same thought often is decomposable in different ways and therefore in different ways appears to be composed of parts. The word “singular” [as in “singular thought”, *i.e.*, a thought expressed in making a judgement about one object which is referred to by a proper name—A.K.] does not apply to the thought *tout court*, but only with respect to a particular way of division.

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See also “Einleitung in die Logik” (August 1906, *NS* 203; partially quoted in footnote 17 above), where Frege makes the same point.

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