

CHANGING PLACES

Abstract

Frege, as is well known, drew something like a categorial distinction—perhaps even a more profound gulf—between concepts and objects. (Not that ‘concept’ has any unique agreed on denotation.) His way of drawing it has been inspirational along several lines in philosophy. It has, notably, inspired such outstanding philosophers as Cora Diamond and Thomas Ricketts, first to a view of the (im)possibility of describing, or limning, the logical structure of thought, or its most general structure. One can *grasp* this structure, the idea is, in one’s capacity to recognise what clear and perspicuous expression of thought would be. But one cannot *say* what this is. More generally, on the view thus inspired, one, perhaps *the* main cause of philosophers so often end up just babbling, or talking pure *Geschwätz*, is that the nature of (traditional) philosophical questions forces one to try to ‘describe thought from outside it’, something comparable to jumping out of one’s own skin, or observing oneself rushing forward, or so on for a string of similar images.

The trouble is that on the concept-object distinction Frege was just wrong. He confused what are essentially, by his own lights, relational notions, or notions of roles, for notions of categories—as if in syntax one confused the notions *noun phrase* and *subject*. The confusion is easy to make, a point to be noted, less easy to unravel. Doing this will involve tracing the pedigrees of the two central notions in Frege’s thesis, objecthood and concepthood. On this last there are, of course, quite different philosophical notions *concept*. The central one here will not quite be Frege’s (post 1892). But it will be the most fit to purpose. Working through the others—notably Frege’s own—can (or here will) be left as an exercise for the listener. As to *object*, the relevant notion is the one which, as Frege points out, is *logikgemäss*.

Blindspots are rare in Frege. Undoing this one matters to *us* for several reasons. One is that it is a way of undoing notions of the centrality of language in a general account of representing-as (specifically, the business of *Wahrsein*). These are not Frege’s own notions, but are taken as givens, or truisms, by many of his (would-be) followers. Another is that it can help us to insights as to what application logic actually has to thought and its expression. And finally it matters to our conception of philosophy and of what philosophy might do.