

The evolution of Frege's critique of psychologism and the Brentano school

A evolução da crítica de Frege ao psicologismo e a escola Brentano

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Abstract

Frege's criticism of psychologism evolved over time. The main point of this evolution is the passage from the criticism of psychologism in the "Foundations of arithmetic" to that of the "Basic laws of arithmetic". The determining role in this passage is played by the criticism Frege received from Kerry.

Keywords: Frege, Kerry, Brentano School, psychologism.

Resumo

A crítica de Frege ao psicologismo evoluiu ao longo do tempo. O ponto principal desta evolução é a passagem da crítica do psicologismo em "Fundamentos da aritmética" àquela das "Leis básicas da aritmética". O papel determinante nesta passagem se dá a partir da crítica que Frege recebeu de Kerry.

Palavras-chave: Frege, Kerry, escola Brentano, psicologismo.

Introduction

In this paper I will defend two theses that, although independent in principle, can indeed be thought of as connected to each other:

(a) The standard reading claims that Frege's critique of psychologism is an indivisible whole, usually – and carelessly – quoting numerous passages of Frege's texts from different periods. However, even though it is correct to say that the criticism of psychologism is a constant in Frege's work, one must notice that it went through a number of changes in the course of time, making it plausible to argue that there is an evolution in this criticism.

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(b) The standard account of Frege usually treats his criticism of psychologism as a one-way street, thereby losing sight of its controversial character. The story is frequently told as if Frege had “put the psychologistic logicians back in their place” and as if the latter had not reacted in any sort of way to Frege’s comments. Nevertheless, this story doesn’t hold. In fact there was indeed a massive reaction to Frege’s critical analysis. This reaction, far from being irrelevant, played a significant role in the development of Frege’s anti-psychologistic arguments. The development of Frege’s criticism is not a kind of immanent process, but it is also related to the disputes between Frege and his contemporaries. Kerry’s criticism of Frege is especially important here.

In what follows, I shall structure my exposition around the theses just mentioned, following the order above.

The development of Frege’s critique of psychologism

It is possible to distinguish four main phases in Frege’s criticism of psychologism:

- (a) 1879: *Conceptual notation* (Beg.)
- (b) 1884: *The foundations of arithmetic* (GAK)
- (c) 1893: *The basic laws of arithmetic* (GGA)
- (d) 1918: *The thought*

(a) In Beg. there are a few passages in which the critique of psychologism in logic is based on the distinction between *quid-iuris* and *quid-facti* (Frege, 1971, Beg., p. IX-X p. III-IV). However, psychologism is not a central issue in this work. Moreover: If one recognizes the further developments in Frege’s criticism of psychologism, then one must admit that by the time he wrote Beg. Frege himself was not completely free of psychologism, given the fact that he considers that ideas (*Vorstellungen*) are the meanings of terms and that judicative contents are associations between ideas (*Vorstellungsverbindungen*) (Frege, 1971, Beg., § 2, p. 2).

(b) In GA the critique of psychologism is a main topic and the ambiguities of *Conceptual notation* are completely overcome. Among the novelties of 1884 concerning our current theme, four of them deserve major attention:

- The critique of psychologism is primarily aimed at psychologist arithmetic and numbers, but not at logic.
- On one hand, the criticism of psychologism in GA is, like the one in Beg., associated with the distinction between *quaestio facti* and *quaestio iuris* (Frege, 1988, GA, p. 6ss, § 26); on the other hand, it points out two new distinctions which are relevant for the controversy surrounding psychologism: (a) the distinction between two different meanings of an idea (*Vorstellung*) (Frege, 1988, GA, § 27); (b) the distinction between what is objective and what is real (Frege, 1988, GA, § 26-27).

(c) A decisive step is taken by Frege in GGA. It is common among scholars who are not great supporters of Frege’s philosophy (as is the case of Baker and Hacker, 1989) to call attention to the fact that there is no conclusive argument in Frege’s criticism of psychologism. In a sense, especially when referring to GA and GGA, that is correct. However, it is not correct to judge Frege based on standards and goals that are alien to him. Is it really the goal of the preface of GGA to offer “arguments” against psychologism? If one reads the text care-

fully, then one sees that Frege is quite clear regarding the goal that wants to accomplish: the central focus of Frege's considerations is a clarification of the controversy that tries to set his point of view by opposition to his opponents (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XXV).

Once the correct perspective on how to approach Frege's text is established, its structure becomes clearer. In order to accomplish his main goal, Frege uses a regressive procedure in which he gradually deepens the arguments on both sides of the dispute until he gets to what one could call the core of the question (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XVIII), the end point towards which it leads (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XIX).

This regressive procedure is divided into the following steps:

(i) Frege argues that the differences between his conception of logic and that of his opponents derive from different concepts of logical laws (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XIV-XV).

(ii) More precisely: Frege holds that logical laws are laws of Truth (*Wahrsein*) and his opponents hold that they are laws of taking-to-be-true (*Fürwahrhalten*) (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XV-XVI).

(iii) This disagreement, in turn, derives from the divergence concerning the even more essential concept of truth. For Frege, truth is something objective, while for the psychologists it is not. They identify truth with being true for every man (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XVI).

(iv) However, the dispute is not limited to the statement or denial of the existence of truth, but has to do with the very existence of something objective in general, which includes not only truth-value assignments, but also thoughts and other logical objects (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XVII).

(v) More precisely: Frege assumes the existence of a sphere of the non-actual objective, which psychologistic logicians deny (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XVIII).

(vi) But why would psychologistic logicians deny the existence of an objective sphere? They do so because they ultimately restrict the objective to the actual. Now, given that the subjective is just an idea (*Vorstellung*), the psychologistic logician reduces the non-actual to ideas (*Vorstellungen*), that is, he considers everything that is not actual as subjective (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XVIII-XIX, XX, XXI).

(vii) Frege opposes this reduction. He draws attention to the fact that it is not conceptually necessary to identify the concepts of actuality and objectivity.

(viii) So far one gets the impression that the psychologistic logician denies the objective, but grants access to the actual. However, it is exactly that which will be denied next. The psychologistic logician not only denies the existence of the objective, but also direct access to the actual (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XX, XXVI).

(ix) If we ask ourselves why this occurs, then we would be compelled to see that the psychologistic logician ultimately assumes that the only immediate objects given to us are our own ideas (*Vorstellungen*) (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XX, XXI, XXII).

(x) To state that our only objects are our ideas (*Vorstellungen*) is precisely the same as to state the basic thesis of idealism. The conclusion of Frege's regressive analysis is, therefore, that the psychologistic logician is nothing more than an idealist (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XXI).

Now, even though it might seem obvious, it is indeed necessary to ask what Frege understands by "idealism", given that scholars frequently ascribe to Frege a conception of idealism that is not his and try to point out insufficiencies or confusions in his position based on this false attribution (that, for example, is the case of Kenny (1995), Küne (2010) and Mohanty (1989, 2003). Now, the

idealism that Frege battles against is not ontological, but epistemological, as he explicitly says in some of his writings (for example in Frege, 1980, L (1897), p. 41). The latter kind does not deny the reality or existence of something transcendent to my ideas, but only states that our ideas are our only direct and immediate objects, regardless of whether or not there is an independent reality to which these ideas correspond.

In order to determine correctly what Frege understands by “idealism”, as well as to understand the importance of its characterization as “epistemological”, it is of decisive relevance to look at Erdmann’s text, which Frege takes as his direct object of criticism (Erdmann, 1892, *Logik*, § 3, 11-16, p. 9-16; § 14, 84, p. 77-78; § 16, 91, p. 83). In this text it is clear that Erdmann’s main concern is to set himself apart from the metaphysical and, especially, the Hegelian idea of logic. Logic intends to be ontologically neutral and to deal with thinking in itself and its laws, without considering whether or not there is a transcendent reality corresponding to it.

In order to prevent future misunderstandings and to put Erdmann’s idealism in perspective in the wider context of modern philosophy as a whole, we will, from now on, name it “immanence principle” (IP), and we will trace its origins back to Descartes and Locke. One should notice that if one considers Erdmann as the ultimate source of Frege’s concept of idealism, then there is no reason whatsoever to identify it straight away with either Lockean-Cartesian representationalism or with Berkeley’s *esse est percipi*.

(d) To summarize our argument, it is important to notice that if the reconstruction just made is correct, then the great novelty of “The thought” is that, for the first time, Frege does not restrict himself to the mere assumption that IP is false, but sets himself the task of rejecting it by means of a *reductio* argument. In other words, just as the idealism criticized by Frege in GGA is an epistemological one, the problem of “The thought” is not the Cartesian problem of the external world.

The differences between 1884 and 1893 and the question about their origins

From now on I will leave other possible perspectives aside and direct my attention to the differences between Frege’s criticism of psychologism in 1884 and 1893, including in the latter, for reasons to be explained, the analysis of texts from 1894 and 1897.

The differences between GA and GGA can be summarized by four aspects:

(a) As already mentioned, in GGA Frege comes by means of a regressive procedure to the conclusion that the IP is the ultimate origin of psychologism. That reasoning is new in his thought, and in it lies a decisive difference between the criticism of psychologism in GA and GGA. In GGA Frege explicitly states two theses: on one hand, he identifies the nucleus of the psychologistic argument in the conviction that our only immediate objects are our ideas; on the other hand, he opposes this assertion with the statement that we are able to directly apprehend objects that are not our ideas. In GA, in turn, Frege assumed that we have access to objects that are not our ideas (Frege, 1988, GA, § 93, p. 96). From this assumption it follows indirectly that it is false to claim that we only have access to objects that are our ideas. However, that does not mean that he recognized it as being the ultimate thesis that lies on the basis of psychologism, which is the axis of his regressive argument in GGA.

(b) In GA, the problem of psychologism was conceived as a problem essentially related to ideal objects and was derived precisely from the ideal nature of these objects. In GA, the psychologistic logician is ultimately an empiricist that asserts unrestrictedly the rights of sensible knowledge and rejects every epistemological claim that goes beyond it. It is precisely because the psychologistic logician of GA is an empiricist that he does not question the possibility of knowledge of the external world, and it is precisely his empiricism that leads him to consider that everything that cannot be apprehended by the senses must be, therefore, an idea. While the psychologistic logician criticized by Frege in GA grants without questioning the existence of real objects, and also our access to them, something different occurs in GGA: here the psychologistic logician, on the basis of one sole reason, not only denies the existence of ideal objects, but also questions our access to real objects (i.e. the possibility of knowing these objects directly). Summarizing, whereas in GA psychologism derives from empiricism, in GGA it comes from idealism.

(c) But the difference between GA and GGA is not a purely quantitative one, if by that we mean that in the latter the psychologization of a greater number of objects is taken into consideration, i.e. that in GGA the psychologism of ideal objects is extended to the real ones. The actual change that occurs between GA and GGA concerns the diagnosis of what would be the ultimate source of psychologism and, correspondingly, the definition of psychologism itself. Both in GA and in GGA, the psychologist "subjectifies" ideal structures. However, if the result in both cases is the same, the fundamental reason that leads to this "subjectivization" is different and, consequently, the range of the resulting psychologism is different. In GA, numbers and the ideal are reduced to ideas because of the refusal to admit the existence of the non-real objective; in GGA, it happens because, besides the reason given in GA, ideas are our only objects.

(d) Between GA and GGA there is not merely a change, but also a deepening of Frege's standpoint and of his comprehension of the actual differences between his views and that of his opponents. The acceptance of the existence of the non-real objective is, in GA, the last word in Frege's position, and the fact that we are able to grasp it remains in the background. In GGA, by contrast, it is clear that the distinction between the objective and the real does not put an end to the discussion, but instead it is viewed only as a provisional step, a crossing point to the future development of a process that will ultimately lead to something even more fundamental: the IP. What follows from this is that while in GA psychologism is looked upon as a problem related to the reductionism of the object, in GGA it is regarded as a problem that springs from a false conception of subjectivity. Psychologism in GA is a consequence of the denial of the existence of certain objects – the ideal ones – and, in that sense, it is an ontological thesis concerning the objects that exist. In GGA, on the other hand, psychologism is a consequence of a false conception of subjectivity.

If this analysis is correct, i.e. if there was indeed a significant evolution in Frege's criticism of psychologism between 1884 and 1893, then the question arises of whether this evolution occurred as a consequence of a purely immanent development of Frege's thought or there were external influences that played a relevant role in it. As I will argue, it seems that the latter answer is the correct one. Frege received seven reviews to his GA, among which three approved his anti-psychologist stand (Lasswitz, Cantor and Eucken) and three did not (Hoppe, 1885; Husserl, 1992; and Kerry, 1887). Hope's critique is nothing but a dogmatic contraposition of two incommensurable points of view; Kerry's, on the other hand, is philosophically substantial and deserves greater attention, for, as we shall see, it is important to set the adequate context for a better understanding of Husserl's criticism of Frege and the latter's reaction to it.

Kerry's criticism of Frege

Kerry's life and work

Kerry began his academic career as an assistant of the Neo-Kantian Windelband. Later on he became close to Brentano. This means that he shifted from the transcendental method to the psychological method, from anti-psychologism to the claim that a foundation of knowledge by means of a subjective analysis is needed (Kerry, 1887, *ÜApsV*, IV, p. 249).

Kerry sets himself the task of applying the psychological method to the foundations of arithmetic. Now, as for him the allegedly necessary choice between logicism and intuitionism is incomplete, he rejects both. Numbers cannot be grounded neither on concepts nor on intuitions, regardless of whether they are empirical or pure. On the basis of these assumptions, the question arises of how then numbers are given to us. In order to answer that question Kerry builds his theory of "psychic work" (*psychische Arbeit*), whose aim is to explain how objects that are not given to us by intuition are, notwithstanding, given to us through activities of consciousness (*Bewusstseinstätigkeiten*) (Kerry, 1887, *ÜApsV*, IV, p. 305). "Psychic work" is every "act" that we can execute voluntarily, which is a concept that is actually close to Husserl's "active synthesis" (*aktive Synthese*). In both cases we have a further development of Brentano's purely structural analysis of intentionality that is oriented towards a "constitution theory" (*Konstitutionstheorie*).

Kerry's criticism of Frege

Kerry makes four objections to Frege:

(a) The first one is well-known and concerns the difference between concept and object. However, one must have in mind that it is a consequence of the opposition between the psychological and the logical approaches.

(b) The second one points out the fact that Frege works with a concept of logic that is not adequately determined (Kerry, 1887, *ÜApsV*, IV, p. 261).

(c) The third objection is an accusation of Frege's appeal to Reason as the faculty capable of apprehending the non-real objective (Frege, 1988, GA, § 26-27), which, according to Kerry, is nothing more than "to hypostatize a completely unarticulated (*ungegliedert*) faculty as the foundation of objectivity", something that simply does not come to terms with the psychology of the time (Kerry, 1887, *ÜApsV*, p. 305-307).

(d) The third objection actually is just an aspect of the fourth and more general objection, which concerns a radical rejection of Frege's anti-psychologist struggle. Since this objection constitutes our focus at the moment a detailed analysis of it will be made in next chapter.

Kerry's rejection of Frege's critique of psychologism

In a brief but extremely important section (Kerry, 1887, *ÜApsV*, IV, p. 305) Kerry poses four substantial objections to Frege's anti-psychologism:

(a) A psychological grounding of logic/mathematics does not necessarily imply a threat to objectivity.

(b) If the last claim is correct, then Frege's radical struggle against psychologism is unfounded: Frege calls attention to a danger that does not exist. Therefore, his radical anti-psychologism must be immediately disqualified as a kind of "*horror subjectivi*".

(c) But if, according to Kerry, Frege, on one hand, intends to handle with his strict demarcation between logic and psychology a problem that does not exist, on the other hand, he fails to see the real difficulty that inevitably emerges in this context, that is, the question of how objective validity can arise on the basis of the subjective. In order to understand the full meaning of Kerry's objection we must notice the necessity of distinguishing between two possible questions, the first of which involves no serious objection, while the second one does.

The first question concerns the relation between the subjective and the objective in general. The situation is the following: while Frege continues to insist on the strict distinction between the subjective and the objective, Kerry requires of him the clarification of the positive relation between them.

But Kerry does not ask Frege to simply "complement" his position, something that Frege could have done at will. On the contrary, Kerry wishes to indicate a fundamental flaw in his opponent's thesis, a difficulty that could only be overcome if he abandoned his point of view. Given the fact that Frege, in spite of his objectivism, cannot avoid answering the question about the apprehension of the objective, this should lead him to deny his own thesis, i.e. that one must separate radically the objective from the subjective, or, in other words, that one must ground the objectivity of mathematics without any psychological considerations. However, to adopt a purely objective path would lead us nowhere. The only possibility of grounding is the psychological one, which consists in giving an account of how something objective can arise from the subjective. This question cannot be avoided.

(d) It is obviously not evident to an unprepared reader that Kerry's reasoning can be in any way conclusive. In order for it to become conclusive, one must pay attention to the end of the sentence: "...from which anyhow our knowledge springs...".

The IP as the fundamental assumption of the whole objection

Kerry argues that even if one distinguishes psychology and logic and stresses the objective as much as one wants, ultimately the subjective cannot be eliminated, since every act of knowledge springs from a subject. In other words:

(a) Knowing necessarily starts with the subjective.

(b) Consequently one cannot avoid giving an explanation of how the objective arises from the subjective.

(c) For this reason, one cannot maintain a simple distinction between subjective and objective

(d) (i.e. insist on a simple distinction between logic/mathematics and psychology),

(e) but one necessarily must eventually call upon the psychological method.

Kerry's whole reasoning is thus built upon the unproved premise a., which is simply assumed to be evident. If this assumption is granted, then Kerry's arguments are conclusive; on the other hand, if it is not granted, then they become incomprehensible.

Let us, therefore, explain the exact meaning of the mentioned premise. In order to do that, we first must notice that the opposition subjective-objective, which Kerry takes from Frege and with which he works, is equivalent to the opposition immanent-transcendent. If we formulate Kerry's thesis on the basis of the latter op-

position, then it becomes even clearer that ultimately the main issue under debate is the IP. Kerry's argument then becomes:

- (a) Our only direct and immediate objects are the contents of our consciousness, that is, our ideas.
- (b) Thus, the only transcendence that we can talk about is the one that can arise from immanence.
- (c) Therefore, if one wants to talk about transcendence, one must first explain how it arises from immanence.
- (d) This is impossible without the use of the psychological method.
- (e) Consequently, to simply insist on the radical division between transcendence and immanence is to overlook the actual problem.

Frege's reaction to Kerry's criticism

Now that we have shown that Frege's critique of psychologism faced many critical reactions, we will concentrate on the question of how and to which extent Frege took these into consideration. In order to do so, we will proceed in two steps.

The struggle against psychologism as the background of the dispute over the distinction between concept and object

Let us begin with an observation that may not seem obvious: for Frege the problem of psychologism constitutes the background of his whole discussion with Kerry about the distinction between concept and object.

It is known that Frege lays down three principles in GA. For our present purposes only the first and the third of these are of interest:

- (1) "...always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective" (Frege, 1988, GA, p. 10);
- (3) "never to lose sight of the distinction between concept and object" (Frege, 1988, GA, p. 10).

At this point, Frege does not establish any relations between the mentioned principles. This changes in his *Concept and object* (Frege, 1966, BG), in which he indirectly refers to the relation between them in the following passage: "This seems to me all the more necessary, because his opposition [Kerry's (MAGP)] is at least partly based on a misunderstanding, which might be shared by others, of what I say about the concept" (Frege, 1966, BG, p. 66-42) and, repeating an argument that he had already made in GA, he notes: "The word concept is used in various ways; its sense is sometimes psychological, sometimes logical, and sometimes perhaps a confused mixture of both". Kerry is "confusing his own usage of the world concept with mine" (Frege, 1966, BG, p. 66-42).

If we now turn our attention from BG to GGA, we then must notice that the context in which the criticism of psychologism is introduced in the latter is the analysis of the ultimate origin of the resistance the new logic of Beg. must face. This origin is found in the interference of psychology in logic and it has as a consequence the denial of some essential distinctions that the new logic introduces, besides the requirement of other distinctions that are irrelevant to this logic. Amongst the fundamental distinctions that are put aside by the insertion of psychological elements in logic, Frege expressly mentions the one between first and second-order predicates, the one between characteristic and property and, last but not least, the

one between concept and object (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XIV). Frege returns to this very same topic in the criticism of psychologism of the preface of GGA in a passage that must be interpreted as a summary of the exposition just made that goes back to the starting point (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XXIV).

Frege's answer to Kerry

If it is granted that the struggle against psychologism sets the context for the concept-object distinction, then the question that naturally arises is whether Frege gave an answer to this specific point of Kerry's critique. It must be noted that Frege has never made an explicit reference to this criticism, but maybe he did do so implicitly. Even though his name does not appear anywhere in the text, Kerry's presence seems to appear throughout the preface of GGA and also in a relevant passage of the 1897 "Logic".

(a) We have already seen that Frege's goal in GGA is not to refute psychologism, but simply to clarify his own position. However, one might wonder why Frege thought that it was necessary to elucidate his point of view. In order to answer this question, one must remember that Kerry had criticized Frege for not having a clear conception of logic. Therefore, one must conclude that Frege wanted to clarify his conception of logic and, in order to do so, he contrasted his own conception to the rival one, namely, the psychologistic point of view (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XXV).

(b) The fact that Frege sets himself the task of clarifying the dispute in the preface of GGA is evident and totally coherent with the way in which the text develops, i.e. with the regressive procedure that we mentioned above.

(c) However, if one looks beyond merely systematic considerations, then one sees that it is explicit in Frege's text that he is indeed concerned with finding the ultimate "source of the discussion" (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XVIII), "the end point towards which it leads" (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XIX). In other words, Frege's intention of bringing the discussion against psychologism to an end is clear, and this end is, as we have already seen, no other than the identification of idealism as the ultimate source of psychologism, i.e. the acceptance of the IP as a silent and unquestioned presupposition upon which Kerry's criticism is based.

(d) While, on one hand, Frege makes use of a regressive procedure in establishing the ultimate source of the differences between his position and that of his opponents, on the other, he emphasizes that the ultimate consequence of idealism is relativism. This may sound strange to a contemporary reader. In fact, one could think that the idealist in Frege's sense is necessarily a relativist. But that is not a claim that every supporter of the psychological method, like Brentano and Kerry, would easily grant. For this reason, it is one of the main goals of the text to make it clear that relativism is an inevitable consequence of the IP (Frege, 1893, GGA, p. XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII).

(e) Once concluded, through a purely logic-conceptual reconstruction, that it is idealism that lies on the basis of psychologism, Frege alters his goal and, in doing so, also changes his *modus operandi*. He then tries to make clear that the described way of thinking is not only the one that is logically the basis of psychologism, but also the one in which psychologism is actually grounded. This is precisely why Frege takes Erdmann as his main target and quotes him in detail. If now we ask ourselves for the reasons why it is so important to Frege to prove that Erdmann actually operates in the way he describes, we need not speculate greatly about the answer, for Frege himself expressly answers the question: he wants to show that he is not fighting against windmills (*Windmühlen*), but rather the danger to which he refers is an actual danger. Frege's way of acting makes total sense if we keep in

mind that his background is Kerry's already mentioned ironic statement that Frege suffers from a case of "*horror subjectivi*". Frege wants to show thus, concretely in Erdmann's case, that psychologism presupposes idealism and inevitably brings relativism along with it.

(f) If we now leave the preface to the GGA and turn our attention to the "Logic" of 1897, we must consider a famous passage which is frequently quoted as being the irrefutable proof that Frege does not have any kind of interest in epistemological questions (and, more generally, in the theory of subjectivity) and that he attributes to psychology without any further ado the questions surrounding the apprehension of thought (*Gedanke*) (Frege, 1980, L (1897), p. 63-64). The mentioned passage indeed says that, but not only that. When taken out of context, it creates a partial and false impression. It is actually much more complicated than it might seem at first sight and contains various other elements, which are often overlooked. In a previous section of the text, Frege advocated the thesis that thoughts (*Gedanken*), considered by him as the genuine truth-bearers, cannot be psychic entities, i.e. they can be neither ideas nor associations between ideas. Thus, Frege considers the following objection: if thoughts cannot be psychic, one must at least admit that the apprehension of thoughts is psychic or a "mental process" (*seelischer Vorgang*) (Frege, 1980, L (1897), p. 63-64). In the first place, one must insist that from a purely formal perspective there is a serious objection here to Frege's position, which refers to an allegedly unquestionable truth that contradicts the starting point of his reasoning. Nevertheless, it is not so easy to understand why it is so. In principle, one could think that there is no necessary contradiction between the fact that thoughts are not psychic and that their apprehension is. One could indeed think that everyone, including Frege, must admit that the apprehension of thoughts is a mental process. If, however, the mentioned passage must contain an argument, it is because one thinks that the fact that the apprehension of thoughts is psychic implies that the thing apprehended must also be psychic. What is assumed here is the following: the act of grasping is psychic and thus nothing can be grasped without being psychic itself. But this in itself is not evident. Even though it does become evident if one goes further and accepts the claim that the subject can only apprehend what exists "in it", i.e. if we assume the IP to hold. If the objection taken into consideration by Frege in the "Logic" of 1897 is considered thus, then it becomes clear that it is intimately related to the objection Kerry had directed to Frege in 1887. The similarities in content are unquestionable and are expressed even at the literal level: Frege says: "*aber.... Doch...*"; Kerry says: "*...doch jedenfalls...*".

(g) If the objection that Frege posed to himself in the text of 1897 is basically the same as the one Kerry had posed to him, then it becomes even more crucial to pay attention to the way in which Frege reacts to it further on in the text. Indeed, Frege remarks that even if the process in question is a psychic one, it is located in the very limit of the psychic, for in this process there is an element, the thought, which is not psychic at all. At first sight it might seem that Frege does not answer the objection, but only contrasts it with an assertion that is as dogmatic as the one of his opponent: while the latter claims that the grasping of thought is psychic, Frege simply denies that it is so. However, this impression is false. Frege definitely does not want (nor can) deny that the grasping of a thought is a psychic process. What he denies is the claim that, because the process of grasping is a psychic one, the thing grasped must also be psychic. The decisive point here is that the thought does not have to become psychic just because it is grasped. Therefore, Frege's response consists in the clarification of his opponent's assumption as such, in order to then deny it. Now, if one sets forth the presupposition as such, one eliminates the potential problem presented by the opposition.

(h) However, Frege not only poses to himself and answers an objection similar to Kerry's, but, in his answer, he reformulates the problem. Correctly formulated, the main problem does not consist in explaining how the thought is produced (*hervorbringen*), but in explaining how it is grasped (*fassen*) (Frege, 1980, L (1897), p. 37), i.e. how one can apprehend something transcendent to oneself, that does not become immanent by reason of being apprehended, but remains as transcendent as it is in itself. Thus, the problem cannot be how the objective arises from the subjective, as Kerry intended, but how a psychological subject grasps something that is not his immanent content. Moreover, this problem, says Frege, has not been understood in its real difficulty. This is what Frege emphasizes in the footnote in which he criticizes the psychology of his time, because it, while trying to derive thinking (*denken*) from ideas, accepts uncritically that the latter are our only objects and, thus, ignores the real difficulty of the problem (Frege, 1980, L (1897), p. 64n).

(i) Notwithstanding, if this problem has not been understood in its actual difficulty, the problem concerning the way in which the objective arises from the subjective is a pseudo-problem: rather than answering the question that it purports to answer, in a best-case scenario it simply answers the question of how the appearance of objectivity arises (Frege, 1980, L (1897), p. 62). Therefore, Frege is correcting Kerry's own question and rephrasing it in the right way.

(j) We say that Frege never gave an explicit answer to Kerry's criticism. This assertion must be taken with a pinch of salt, corresponding to a final element relevant to this context. In a draft of the paper BG there is a passage that did not survive until the final version. In it, Frege notes that the ultimate source of the distinction between concept and object or characteristic (*Merkmal*) and property is the disease of the time (*Zeitkrankheit*) that also produces Locke's sensualism and Berkeley's idealism, that is, the lack of a clear distinction between representing (*Vorstellen*) and thinking (*Denken*) "strictly speaking" (Frege, 1969, NS, p. 114-115). The point I wish to call attention to is that what is ultimately underneath the fact that Frege notes the necessity of the mentioned distinction in this context is the rejection of the IP. Thinking can be opposed to representing basically because of two reasons: either one stresses the abstract character of the former's object and the intuitive character of the latter's object, or one stresses the dependence or immanence of what is represented with respect to the representing and the independence or transcendence of the thought with respect to the thinking. Now, there are three decisive elements that allow one to affirm that Frege's distinction is grounded on the second opposition and not on the first one, that is, on the one hand, the very wording of the passage (which opposes "the objective and the same for all" and the "different and subjective") and, on the other, the fact that only thus one can establish a reasonable connection between the failure to distinguish between thinking and representing and the confusion that is objected to and, finally, that this interpretation is coherent with the historical connections that Frege actually establishes with Locke and Berkeley (and not, e.g., with Leibniz). To sum up, Frege's opposition between thinking and representing hinges on the transcendence of the former's object and on the immanence of the latter's, such that the failure to make this distinction would imply that one would lose the transcendence of the object of thinking or that it would be restricted to the immanence of the object of representation. This text thus anticipates something that Frege will say much more clearly some years later when he establishes the notion of a Thought (*Gedanke*) and can, correspondingly, define thinking as the grasping of Thoughts. Here, the necessary transcendence of the object of thinking is clearly asserted, even though the lack of less equivocal concepts, still expressed by the equivocal term "content" (*Inhalt*, *Denkinhalt*, *Urteilsinhalt*), which Frege uses since the *Begriffsschrift*. But it

is precisely the “intermediate” character of the text that allows one to attend to the gradual and successive steps that eventually led to Frege’s definitive position, which is precisely crystallizing in these middle years.

Husserl’s review of Frege and Frege’s answer

We have already remarked that, if one pays attention to Kerry’s criticism of Frege, then one can reach a better understanding both of Husserl’s critiques of Frege in the *Philosophie der Arithmetik* (PhA) and of Frege’s reaction to them, for they are aspects of one and the same context. In this point there are six important elements:

- (a) In PhA Kerry and Frege are Husserl’s main interlocutors.
- (b) Even though Husserl moves away from Kerry in this work, he accepts his general program.
- (c) Husserl follows Kerry not only in his goal – to apply the psychological method to the foundations of arithmetic – but also in the execution of the project of a theory of constitution.
- (d) But there are numerous similarities not only in the positive projects developed by Kerry and Husserl (even though the results are not always the same), but also in their criticism of Frege’s anti-psychologism, not to mention the ironical tone with which they express their criticism: if for Kerry Frege’s fears are unjustified and a sign of a “*horror subjectivi*”, for Husserl they merely point towards “allegedly intrusions” (“*vermeintliche Eingriffe*”) of psychology in mathematics (Husserl, 1992, PhA, p. 118).
- (e) Precisely because, on one hand, one cannot ignore the systematic similarities between Kerry’s and Husserl’s project and, on the other hand, that both authors are in agreement in disregarding Frege’s criticism of psychologism, it is likely that Frege understands both of them as an expression of one and the same? same tendency, inside which it is irrelevant to distinguish singularities and different perspectives.
- (f) The latter fact probably explains the sharp reaction by Frege to Husserl’s text. After reading Kerry it was clear to Frege from the start which would be the end of the story. In that sense, it is not merely by chance that Husserl’s review of 1894 constitutes a unity with the Preface of GGA and with Frege’s response paper.
- (g) Even if one, as is common among Husserl’s supporters, frowns upon Frege’s critique of Husserl because it is incapable of handling the nuances and singularities of the latter’s position, one must not overlook the fact that Frege focuses only on what was essential to his point of view, in order to determine the correct question. In 1891, Husserl, just like Kerry and the general tendency of Brentano’s school at the time, is still committed to the IP and, therefore, is nothing but a psychologistic logician in Frege’s sense (Husserl, 1992, PhA, p. 80).

Conclusion

The analyses we have carried out make it plausible that Frege tried to handle Kerry’s criticism and that in doing so he deepened his own standpoint. Now, we straightforwardly admit that our thesis might never be definitely proved. As we have already noted, Frege nowhere explicitly takes a stand regarding Kerry’s objections. Nevertheless, the contact points are very striking. Actually, the material presented provides us with sufficient reasons to believe that reading the psychologistic criticism of Kerry was indeed relevant for Frege, even though he might even have not been thinking about Kerry at all when writing the corresponding passages of GGA

and of the Logic of 1897, and Kerry was nothing but a catalyst factor for something that Frege saw also less sharply present in his other opponents like Husserl.

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