

## Thoughts

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In August 1919 Bertrand Russell wrote to the author of the *Tractatus* to ask, among other things, about the nature of thoughts and their constituent elements. Wittgenstein replied: "I don't know *what* the constituents of a thought are, but I know *that* it must have such constituents which correspond to the words of Language. Again the kind of relation of the constituents of thought and of the pictured fact is irrelevant. It would be a matter of psychology to find out" ([14], p. 72). Returning to the topic some thirty years later, Wittgenstein wrote, with more than a little irony:

"Can one think without speaking?"—And what is *thinking?*—Well, don't you ever think? Can't you observe yourself and see what is going on? It should be quite simple. You do not have to wait for it as for an astronomical event and then perhaps make your observation in a hurry. ([15], p. 327)

Now these remarks, and many others like them scattered throughout Wittgenstein's writings, raise a number of very general and, I think, profoundly difficult problems; among them: the problem of how we are to account for the relation of thought to the language which expresses it; of how to account for the relation of thought to the reality it sometimes concerns; and, even more generally, of how to provide a genuinely *philosophical* theory of what can easily seem to be a phenomenon of primarily, if not exclusively, psychological concern. What can philosophy legitimately tell us about thoughts, that it would *not* be "a matter of psychology to find out"?

In what follows I shall try to set out some of the most general, but therewith most pressing, demands that an acceptable philosophical theory of thoughts must meet. I shall then try to establish the extent to which Frege's own theory successfully meets them. In a sense, however, there are not two tasks here but only one, for in specifying the general constraints within which a philosophical theory of thought should work, one is already merely recapitulating what is perhaps Frege's most lasting and revolutionary contribution to our understanding of the matter. In an important sense the very subject is Frege's—and our first task will be to get a bird's-eye view of it.

*Received May 16, 1986*