

## On Frege

My dissertation, which I finished in 2018, has five chapters. I have submitted three for publication:

**Frege on the Generality of Logical Laws** (*European Journal of Philosophy*): Frege claims that the laws of logic are characterized by their “generality,” but it is hard to see how this could identify a special feature of those laws. I argue that we must understand this talk of generality in normative terms, but that what Frege says provides a normative demarcation of the logical laws only once we connect it with his thinking about truth and science. He means to be identifying the laws of logic as those that appear in every one of the scientific systems whose construction is the ultimate aim of science, and in which all truths have a place. Though an account of logic in terms of scientific systems might seem hopelessly antiquated, I argue that it is not: a basically Fregean account of the nature of logic still looks quite promising.

**Frege’s Critical Arguments for Axioms:** How are we justified in accepting the most basic truths? We can uncover an interesting answer by resolving an interpretive puzzle: why does Frege insist that logical axioms are “self-evident,” and then offer *arguments* for those very axioms? The answer is that he is following a Neo-Kantian approach to justifying logical axioms: the “critical method.” To pursue this method is to derive the axioms from a cognitive goal by presupposing that the goal can be reached, and hold that such arguments justify us in accepting the conclusion even though we lack justification for accepting their premises.

**Frege on Science: Simplicity and Grounding:** Why does Frege think science must aim at systems that are maximally *simple* and which consist of proofs that follow relations of *grounding* among truths? I argue that he derives the grounding requirement from the simplicity requirement, and that this reveals two interesting things. The first is how closely he believes simplicity and understanding to be connected with each other: a counterintuitive but defensible position which helps us to understand aspects of his work in logic. The second is that he accepts a close parallelism between cognition and ontology, while taking no stand on whether or how it is to be explained: a position more metaphysically minimal even than quietism.

My most recent work on Frege builds on the above. **Frege’s Radical Anti-Psychologism** concerns the general argument against psychologism made possible by Frege’s view about the normativity of logic: an argument which calls for a form of anti-psychologism more radical than we have yet seen, even among the avowed anti-psychologists of the analytic period in philosophy.

The next chapter of my dissertation that I plan to prepare for publication is this:

**Frege’s Early Philosophy of Language:** Frege’s *Foundations of Arithmetic* introduces linguistic doctrines that have been central to philosophical thought ever since. I argue, however, that those doctrines are always motivated by independent epistemological considerations, many of which are borrowed directly from Hermann Lotze’s *Logic*. Epistemology justifies claims about language only because Frege has adopted a revisionary perspective on language of which the *Begriffsschrift* is the model: he is not describing language at all, but reforming it to prevent certain “illusions” and help us to think as effectively as possible.

I am also working on two non-historical projects—though both are inspired by the way that Frege’s philosophical approach challenges and suggests improvements to contemporary ways of thinking.

### On The Value of Truth

I have written two connected papers on this topic:

**Why Can’t What is True be Valuable?** (*Synthese*) In recent discussions of the so-called “value of truth,” it is assumed that what are valuable in the relevant way are not the things that are true, but only various states and activities associated with those things: knowing them, investigating them, etc. I consider all the arguments I know of for this assumption, and argue that none provide good reason to accept it. By examining these arguments, we gain a better appreciation of what the value of the things that are true would be, and why it would matter. We also encounter three indications that what is true really is valuable, each of which provides a promising starting point for a serious argument with that conclusion.

**Post-Truth and the Value of Truth:** Cultural commentators claim that people do not *value* the truth enough anymore, and that this lies behind the tendencies that characterize our “post-truth” era: tendencies, for example, not to punish lying public figures, and to allow our desires to exert undue influence on our beliefs. I think that, with an adequate account of how desires impact belief and of what it is to value the truth, this diagnosis proves to be plausible. The serious question this leaves us with is whether or not we *could* and *should* value the truth in the way that would counteract the post-truth tendencies.

The connection is that I think the way of valuing the truth that would help to counteract the post-truth tendencies is not one that makes sense unless what is true is, itself, valuable. In **Williams on Valuing the Truth**, I hope to make this connection in the course of a critical discussion of Bernard Williams’ account, in *Truth and Truthfulness*, of why and how we should value the “virtues of truth.”

### On The Normativity of Logic

Influential arguments attempt to reach important conclusions about logical methodology from claims about how, exactly, logic is normative. I think these discussions are missing something:

**Psychologism and the Normativity of Logic:** The idea that psychological truths could help us establish logical ones is often dismissed on the grounds that logic is normative while psychology is not. But psychology *is* normative: like logic, it helps us establish truths about how we ought to think if we are to reach the truth. Any viable anti-psychological argument must identify a particular *way* in which logical truths are normative, while psychological truths cannot be. The most promising candidate appeals to the *generality* of logic’s norms; but if we are to give substance to the claim that logic’s norms are specially general, we must attend not to how logic guides us in achieving minimal cognitive goals (like avoiding falsehood), but how it guides us in achieving ambitious ones (like understanding). This is one reason why these norms should be the focus of our thinking about the normativity of logic.

Closely related points bear on recent discussions of the viability of pluralism in the light of logic’s normativity, as I plan to show in **Pluralism and the Normativity of Logic**.