

Russell on Logical Form

Compare

- (1) Bob walks.
- (2) Somebody walks.
- (3) The king walks.

These sentences *look* like they have a similar structure. In fact they have similar *grammatical forms* (subject-predicate). But they have very different "hidden" structures according to Russell.

- (1') Bob walks.
- (2') Some x is such that x walks.
- (3') Some x is a king, every y such that y is a king is such that y is x, and x walks.

This deeper, hidden structure of a sentence is now sometimes called its *logical form*. Logical form is supposed to help explain:

- (a) when a sentence is true or false [cf. Russell's account of sentences with non-referring terms].
- (b) what entailments a sentence has [note: "The F Gs", for Russell entails "there is a unique F"]
- (c) some forms of ambiguity [cf. Russell on the ambiguity in "George IV thinks the F is Scott"]

Russell's striking claim: *logical form* is sometimes *radically* different from *grammatical form*.

This opens up a new job for philosophers: uncovering genuine logical form.

Meaning and Acquaintance.

Accepting that logical form can differ in this way from grammatical form has consequence for old philosophical projects.

An old form of "analysis": take terms of a sentence (corresponding to concepts used in a thought) and break them down into constituents. E.g.,

Marie loves a bachelor (analyzes to...)
Marie loves an unmarried man.

But clearly, for Russell, one can't analyze

The king walked.

By analyzing "the king" and "walked" separately. "the king" doesn't have an independent meaning. So analysis is now *from whole sentences to whole sentences*.

The benefits of his change: certain puzzles are easier to deal with (e.g. puzzles of non-referring expressions).

The detriments: a regress threatens. E.g.

Aristotle wrote the *De Anima*. (might analyze to...)
The greatest student of Plato wrote the *De Anima*. (might analyze to...)
The greatest student of the documenter of Socrates' arguments wrote the *De Anima*. (etc.)

The analyses are getting *longer*. How do we know we will come to an end? Two ways:

(A) End with no *names* (or other expressions to be analyzed) e.g.

"There is a unique greatest teacher of philosophy in the 7th century BCE such that he wrote the greatest treatise on the soul of the 7th century BCE."

(B) End with entities to which we have special *epistemic relation*. Russell calls this relation *acquaintance*.

One of the virtues of Russell's view is that it didn't seem to force us (as Frege's seemed) to always have thoughts about objects "indirectly". For Russell, sometimes objects themselves can serve as part of the information a sentence conveys.

But to make the theory work, it seems Russell needs to descriptively analyze anything that can be subject to a Frege-style puzzle. But that's just about anything!

Consequently, this position eventually forces Russell to say that the only objects of our acquaintance are "sense data": sensory experiences (very close to what Frege was calling conceptions).