

The Language Revolution
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Class 8
Russell's "Descriptions": A Summary

Russellian Propositions

- Grammatical form is not (in many cases) proper logical form.
 - Logical form reveals truth.
- A real name has to name something.
- Most so-called names are really abbreviations.
 - Names are really definite descriptions.
 - Definite descriptions are really general quantified formulas.
- Fregean propositions contain senses.
- Russellian propositions contain objects and their properties.
 - Logically proper propositions contain the actual thing named.
 - 'That (spot in my field of vision) is red.'
 - avoids senses - Ockham's razor
- We must recast sentences with so-called names to reveal their true logical form.

Russell on Cognitive Content

- 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' are abbreviated descriptions.
 - ▶ Thus 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is not really of the form 'a=b'.
 - ▶ It has content only because it is not really an identity.
- Logically proper names never raise questions of various cognitive content.
 - ▶ 'a=a' and 'a=b' have the same content when logically proper names are used.



Russell on Empty Reference

- ‘Sherlock Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street’ is a disguised description.
 - ▶ Frege packs the description into the mode of presentation: the sense of ‘Sherlock Holmes’.
 - ▶ Russell sees the name as an abbreviation for the description.
- Frege has truth-value gaps
 - ▶ Referential compositionality + names without bearers = sentences with no truth value
- Russell recasts such sentences as including an existential claim.
 - ▶ There is a thing, called Sherlock Holmes, with such and such other properties.
 - ▶ Since there is no such thing, the claim is false.



Russell on Opaque Contexts

Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly.
Superman is Clark Kent.
So, Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly.

- ‘Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly’ does not contain a thing called Superman.
 - We must replace ‘Superman’ with a description.
- The description of Superman (according to Lois Lane) is different from the description of Clark Kent.
- So, the invalid inference is blocked.

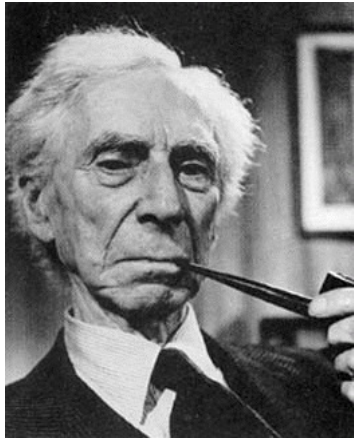


Russell on Definite Descriptions

The king of France is bald.

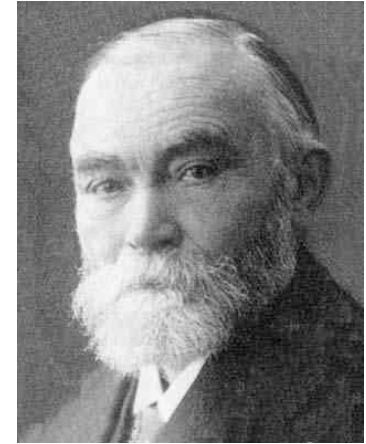
- There is a king of France.
- There is only one king of France.
- That thing is bald.
- “Propositions verbally about “a so-and-so” are found to contain no constituent represented by this phrase. And that is why such propositions can be significant even when there is no such thing as a so-and-so” (68)





Russell versus Frege

Extensionalism versus Intensionalism



- Frege and Russell agree that names are not just Millian denotations.
- Frege thinks that names have connotation, too.
 - Each object has different senses associated with it.
 - Different people can grasp the object under different modes of presentation.
- For Russell, ordinary names are abbreviations for the description which Frege associates with the sense of a name.
 - Descriptions are themselves disguised existential assertions.
- Frege sees sense and reference.
- Russell sees hidden logical form.

Descriptivism

- Both Frege and Russell are description theorists.
 - Frege could be called a sense descriptivist .
 - Russell is an abbreviational descriptivist.
- Descriptivism is opposed to Mill's theory of non-connotative names.
 - direct reference theory
 - 'Fido'-Fido

Ben