

## ***New Directions on the Narrow Direction Problem***

Daniel Brigham

Downing College, Cambridge

[djb223@cam.ac.uk](mailto:djb223@cam.ac.uk)

It is sometimes objected that Russell's multiple relation theory is flawed because it cannot adequately distinguish between different judgements involving non-symmetric relations. And it is often thought that the view that propositional attitudes are relations to propositions easily avoids this problem. Broadly speaking, I want to argue that the opposite is the case.

### *1. Motivating the Multiple Relation Theory*

If I judge (say) that Charles I died on the scaffold, is that a relation between me and a single "fact", namely Charles I's death on the scaffold, or "that Charles I died on the scaffold", or is it a relation between me and Charles I and dying and the scaffold? We shall find that the possibility of false judgments compels us to adopt the latter view. (Russell: 1910, p. 118)

Fact? No. State of affairs? No. Thought? No.

"[I]deas become a veil between us and outside things" (Russell: 1911, p. 155)

"I believe that in spite of all its snowfields Mont Blanc itself is a component part of what is actually asserted in 'Mont Blanc is more than 4,000 metres high'. We do not assert the thought, for this is a private psychological matter: we assert the object of the thought, and this is, to my mind, a certain complex (an objective proposition, one might say) in which Mont Blanc is itself a component part. If we do not admit this, then we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc." (Russell to Frege 12.12.1904)

An argument against the dyadic view:

- (1) Propositions are articulate: <p> says that p.
- (2) According to the dyadic view, any fact of the form 'x Vs that p', at least where 'Vs' signifies something appropriately intentional, consists in a relation between x and whatever 'that p' stands for.
- (3) None of the candidates for what sort of entity <p> says are remotely plausible.
- (4) We should reject the dyadic view.

## 2. The Narrow Direction Problem

'[Russell's] theory... fails to distinguish effectively between judging (or supposing) that  $aRb$  and that  $bRa$ ' (Anscombe: 1959, p. 46)

'If belief is just a nexus of things, how is it possible to distinguish between cases of belief comprised of the same constituents and differing in sense? (How, e.g., are we to distinguish between James' judgment that the pen is to the left of the cup from his judgment that the cup is to the left of the pen?)' (Carey: 2003, p. 30)

**First way of understanding the problem:** Russell cannot distinguish between the fact that  $S$  judges that  $aRb$  and the fact that  $S$  judges that  $bRa$ .

A [ $S$  judges that  $aRb$ ]

B [ $S$  judges that  $bRa$ ]

C [ $S$  stands in the judging relation to  $R$  and  $a$  and  $b$ ]

D [ $S$  stands in the judging relation to  $R$  and  $b$  and  $a$ ]

Response: Judgement is a non-symmetric relation!

Now I must state explicitly that this relation  $J$  is such that the arguments cannot be interchanged freely. In general " $J(l, \phi, a, b)$ " does not imply " $J(l, \phi, b, a)$ ". I put in this very obvious point because the criticism is sometimes advanced that on this theory "I believe that  $a$  loves  $b$ " cannot be distinguished from "I believe that  $b$  loves  $a$ ".  $J$  is in a perfectly precise sense not symmetrical: thus we can clearly distinguish. (Wrinch: 1919, p. 320)

E [ $a$  loves  $b$ ]

F [ $a$  loves  $c$ ]

G [ $b$  loves  $a$ ]

But this response is not enough. First, there is a revenge problem. Second, there are other, better ways to understand the objection.

## 3. Truth-conditions

'Russell held that judgment and supposing are (different) relations in which the mind stands to a set of objects including a relation  $R$ ; if  $R$  relates the objects other than  $R$  in this set, then the judgment or supposition is true, and if not it is false' (Anscombe: 1959, p. 45)

**Second way of understanding the objection:** Russell gets the truth-conditions of the judgment that  $aRb$  and the judgement that  $bRa$  wrong.

'judgment is a relation of the mind to several other terms: when these other terms have *inter se* a "corresponding" relation, the judgment is true; when not, it is false.' (Russell: 1910, p. 120)

The problem is that the judgement that  $aRb$  counts as true iff either  $aRb$  or  $bRa$ .

'if Othello believes truly that Desdemona loves Cassio, then there is a complex unity... which is composed exclusively of the objects of the belief, in the same order as they had in the belief, with the relation which was one of the objects occurring now as the cement that binds together the other objects of belief.' (Russell: 1912, p. 74)

The problem is that, since the judging relation imposes order on  $n+2$  things and the subordinate relation imposes order on  $n$  things, they can never impose the *same* order. (Miller: 2006)

Solution: Judgment as Predication.

#### 4. Objects of thought

**Third way of understanding the objection:** Russell cannot distinguish between the objects of the judgement that  $aRb$  and the judgement that  $bRa$ .

'His position may be stated as follows: Judging is always a relation of the judging mind to what it asserts or believes. But in mere judgment, apart from actual perception, what is believed is nothing single. It is always plurality as such, and the mind's relation to this plurality is a multiple and not a dual relation. Thus if what is believed is "that A loves B", "that A loves B" is not by itself a unity constituting a single object of belief...

The belief that A loves B is different from the belief that B loves A; and the difference, as Mr. Russell himself expressly recognises, can only be accounted for by saying that in the first case the relation of loving is apprehended as proceeding from A to B and in the second as proceeding from B to A. This seems fatal to the view that nothing single is before the mind in judgment except the complex formed by the judging mind itself and the manifold of objects to which it is related.' (Stout: 1910, pp. 201-3)

'My most fundamental objection to it is simply that it affirms what can be immediately seen to be false. It affirms that when I believe that A loves B, the words "that A loves B" stand for no object present to my thought having a unity such as to make it capable of corresponding with the actual fact of "A loving B." ...this must mean that I do not think of loving as a relation between A and B, still less as a relation which relates them in such an order that it is A who loves B and not B that loves A... But is it not transparently false that in believing or even in supposing that A loves B, I do not think of A and B as being related by this relation and in this order.' (Stout: 1914, p. 345)

Stout's argument:

(1) According to the multiple relation theory, what one judges, when one judges that  $aRb$  is the disunified collection:  $a, R, b$ .

(2) According to the multiple relation theory, what one judges, when one judges that  $bRa$ , is the disunified collection:  $b, R, a$ .

(3) Those two disunified collections are the same.

(4) According to the multiple relation theory, what one judges when one judges that  $aRb$  is what one judges when one judges that  $bRa$ .

Key interpretative claim: that what one judges, when one judges that  $p$ , is the disunified collection of the putative constituents of  $\langle p \rangle$ .

Understanding the 'object of one's judgement': (a) what one judges, (b) what one's judgement is about, (c) what one is related to in making the judgement.

Solution: deny the key interpretative claim.

But *what* does one judge?

#### *5. Questions for the Propositionalist*

- What is it to stand in the judging relation to a proposition?
- Why is my judgement that  $aRb$  correct iff  $aRb$ ?
- What do I  $V$  when I  $V$  that  $p$ ?