CHAPTER - 5

Russell on Names and Descriptions

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Section – I

Overview

In his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, Russell defined a proper name in the following manner, "A name is a simple symbol, directly designating an individual, which is its meaning, and having this meaning in its own right independently of the meanings of all other words".[1]

Russell's theory of names is divided into two, based on his differentiation between two types of proper names — 'logically proper names' and 'ordinary proper names'. It is important for us to understand clearly the nature of proper names, as because, not only it plays a major role in grasping fully the meaning of Russell's theory of descriptions, but also that several philosopher including prominent ones like Plato have discussed it in their philosophical investigations. The question that is puzzling them is: Do proper names like 'New Delhi' or 'Mahatma Gandhi' have sense associated with them similar to common nouns, adjectives or definite descriptions like "the blue book" or " the man with the glasses"?

In the last chapter we discussed how Russell differentiated between names and descriptions. In this chapter we will discuss more about proper names and descriptions. We will see what exactly Russell meant by 'ordinary proper names' and 'logically proper names', parallely discussing Frege's views on the topic. We will also take up Russell's solutions to the problems of reference.

Section – II

Sense and No-sense Theories of Proper Names

It is popularly held that proper names do not have sense or meaning; they simply stand for or denote certain objects. Views of this sort can be found even in Plato's *Theaetetus*. The view famously held by Mill was that proper names have denotation but no connotation. They are non-connotative singular terms. Mill gives the example of a "horse" which is a common noun, as having both connotation and denotation. Its meaning comprises those qualities that together make up the definition of the word "horse" and it refers to all horses. But a proper name like "Queen Elizabeth" only denotes its bearer but does not imply any property or attribute possessed by the bearer. Modern philosophers of language like Russell and Wittgenstein also conform to this no-sense theory of proper names. In Wittgenstein's *Tractatus–Logico-Philosophicus* it is said that a proper name is simply the name of the object for which it stands.

Frege argued that proper names must have senses, else identity statements like a = b cannot be other than trivially analytic. If proper names are nothing but denotations then these statements are trivial for they only convey that an object is identical with itself. If that is not the case then we have to conclude that they are arbitrary in the sense that any name can be assigned to any object. Frege in his classic paper 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' invoked the notion of sense motivated by the idea of the informative claim involved in the notion of identity statements like a = b. He concluded that the identity claim asserts an identity of reference, but presents the object in different modes. The suggestion is that informative identity statements rely on a difference in the mode of presentation of the object, and so new information can be obtained even if the two names 'a' and 'b' stand for or refer to one and the same object. This is what stops the identity statement a = b from being trivial or arbitrary. He gave as an illustration that one and the same object, planet Venus, can be referred to by two different names, viz. 'the morning star' and 'the evening star'. This theory that all proper names have sense was a departure from the no-sense theory proposed by other philosophers, particularly Mill. The crucial differences between these two types of theories may be specified as follows:

i) The classical theory holds that names do not have any sense but essentially have reference; whereas Frege's theory states that names must have senses but may or may not have reference.

ii) According to the Fregean sense theory, names refer only when some object is associated with its sense. According to philosophers like Plato and Wittgenstein, who support the no–sense theory, proper names are the connecting link between words and the world.

iii) The sense theory holds that ordinary proper names are to be classed with definite descriptions; both have descriptive content. Further, a proper name is a shorthand description, which we are able to present in place of the proper name for meaning-equivalence. But the no-sense theory maintains that descriptions are not the definitional equivalents of names.

iv) The no-sense theorists hold that naming is prior to describing; Frege holds that describing is prior to naming because a name only describes the object it names.

Exponents of both classical no-sense theory and Fregean sense theory put forward arguments in their favour. The no-sense theory supports the view that proper names (ordinary proper names) cannot be said to be equivalent to definite descriptions because naming is not any kind of describing. And, how to proceed about giving a definition of a proper name is also not very clear. If, in order to define a proper name we give a complete description of it, then what happens is this: that any statement true or false made about that name becomes either analytic or self-contradictory. About descriptions we can say that it is

'true' or 'false' of its bearer, but this cannot be applied to proper names. The proper name of an object is only its name, nothing more or less.

Another problem, which the no-sense theory faces, is that, it is unable to explain the occurrence of proper names in existential statements. Proper names in an existential statement cannot be said to denote, because existential statements are not ordinary subject predicate sort of statements. 'Existence' is not a predicate, but a second order concept. So, an affirmative existential statement cannot refer to an object and state that it exists. The problem then is that, proper names occurring in existential statements (if they cannot refer) must be having some sort of descriptive content, which means that they have sense associated with them, thus turning the theory towards Frege's sense theory.

Yet another problem the classical theorists have to face is, if a proper name only denotes, what is the proof of the existence of its denotation? If we go along with Wittgenstein to accept his theory that the meaning of a proper name is literally its denotation, then it seems we have also to accept that the existence of these denoted object is necessary. For, there may be changes in the world in the way of destruction of some objects, but still, words and their meanings are not perishable. So, it seems imperative to accept the fact that the existence of the objects named by proper names is necessary. "As Plato remarked, we cannot say of an element that it exists or does not exist". (*Theaetetus*, 201 D – 202 A)[2]

In her *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, G. E. Anscombe proposes a solution of this problem through a linguistic route. Wittgenstein himself has tried a metaphysical method to get out of this problem of the existence of the referent. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein comments, "objects form the substance of the world" (2.021), which means that the existence of a substance is over and above assertion or denial. Anscombe holds that there is a difference between ordinary proper names and genuine proper names. Names, which have denotations, can only be called genuine proper names. So, in this manner we can go about the problem and say that whether an expression is a proper name or not depends on the fact that its referent exists or has existed or will exist. This does not compel us to agree to any class of objects, which necessarily exist, but on the other hand leads us into accepting as proper name only those objects whose denotations have existence.

Influenced by Wittgenstein's view and following it, Russell declared that what are known as proper names in common language, ordinary proper names cannot be called genuine proper names because whether or not their bearers exist is a contingent fact and also does not follow from the status of the expression in language. In opposition to Frege he claimed that ordinary proper names are not genuine subjects. But should this conclusion not be undesirable for no-sense theorists who try to accept the common sense view that there is no sense attached to ordinary proper names?

Russell's declaration however leads them to accept that ordinary proper names never gain the status of genuine or logical proper names. They have to accept the intolerable conclusion that ordinary proper names are in fact disguised descriptions.

Though Anscombe's method is an attempt to avoid this implausible solution, there have been objections raised against it also. Anscombe's view, in short is that, the essential condition for a proper name to have a bearer. The first objection against this is that, an expression, which is a part of a particular syntax, gets excluded due to the contingent fact of denotation. Secondly, there are some names like "Cerberus" or "Zeus" which are obviously proper names, do not count as logically proper names because their bearer do not exist. The last objection is that Anscombe's view is an arbitrary view which is forced upon us because originally it was intended as an explanation of Wittgenstein's theory, but Wittgenstein himself later gave up his former view of proper names and put forth the theory that meaning and denotation of names should not be confused. He gives the following example to make his point: "When Mr. N. N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that meaning dies." (Philosophical Investigations, Para. 40)

Thus, we see that the classical no-sense theory, which at first seemed to be agreeable to our common sense cannot explain the occurrence of proper names

in identity or existential statements. Neither can it satisfactorily explain the nature of existence of referents of proper names. Frege's sense theory, though it leads to the uncomfortable consequence of accepting ordinary proper names as truncated definite descriptions, can however account for the puzzles over identity and existential statements and therefore is more acceptable to us.

Section –III

Frege and Russell on Proper Names and Existence

We will now compare and contrast Russell's and Frege's views on the relation between proper names and definite descriptions. Russell thought that both the propositions 'a exists' and 'a does not exist' are meaningless where 'a' is a proper name. This conclusion was implied by his theory of naming which suggests that the meaning of a proper name is its denotation. Thus, if 'a does not exist' is true, then the sentence is meaningless because it contains a meaningless subject term. In this way Russell reached a paradoxical conclusion that this type of assertion can only be true if it is meaningless.

Actually, it is fallacious to call a sentence meaningless because it contains a meaningless term. Moreover, it is absurd to assume a term to be meaningless because it does not have a denotation. In Russell's reasoning, existentials like $(\exists x) (x = a)$ and $\sim(\exists x) (x = a)$ are also not shown to be meaningless. In *Principia*

Mathematica's own language, all negative existentials of this kind are false for they do not contain non-denoting (vacuous) proper names. Therefore Russell's argument to establish that 'a does not exist' is meaningless, if true, is not tenable. But this does not nullify Russell's theory of naming. The question remains however, that, are there any logically proper names in ordinary language? Russell's theory is that, all ordinary proper names, if analysed correctly are found to be disguised definite descriptions and therefore are not logically proper names though they may appear to be so.

> In saying of 'Romulus' that if it were really a name the question of existence "could not arise", Russell clearly intended the implication that since "the question of existence" can arise, 'Romulus' is not really (logically) a name. But of course, 'Romulus' is a paradigm case of a name from the point of view of its surface grammar.[3]

Russell held that names are "disguised" or "truncated" descriptions. For Russell 'a does not exist' is either false or meaningless if 'a' is a logically proper name. So, according to him true singular negative existentials are possible. Again, to take the example, 'God does not exist'; if this is a disguised description, we must first determine the description, as a replacement of which, the name is being used.

Though Frege never said anything explicit about negative existentials involving proper names, we can build up his opinion from a careful understanding of his other theories. In short, the fundamentals of Frege's theory were as follows :

i) A complex expression, if one of its constituent names does not have a denotation, also does not have a referent.

ii) Denotations of complex expressions are their truth-values.

Frege cites the following example in order to make himself clear :

> The sentence 'Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep' obviously has sense. But since it is doubtful whether the name 'Odysseus', occurring therein, has reference, it is also doubtful whether the whole sentence has one.[4]

It seems that these principles imply that all declarative sentences having non-denoting expressions, as constituents such as 'Pegasus does not exist' are truth-valueless. But this point cannot be raised against Frege because Frege also puts forward the theory of customary sense and customary referent. We had discussed this issue in Chapter – 3 itself and so will spare the details. To put in briefly, following this theory, it can be said that names in oblique contexts have as their referents what is actually sense in ordinary context. Sentences like 'Pegasus does not exist' are therefore not non-denoting. They have denotation in oblique context.

As opposed to Russell, names are not short forms of description for Frege. Though according to Frege names sometimes denote their customary sense (as in the case of negative existentials) and also that some definite descriptions and proper names have the same sense, it would be a mistake to assume that Frege

held that sense of every proper name is the same as some definite descriptions. Frege only holds the sense theory without accepting the description theory. Philosophers like Kripke however hold that sense theory implies the description theory. More about Kripke's theory will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

There are also some points of agreement between Frege and Russell. Both of them hold that the logical behaviour of proper name is identical to that of definite descriptions. Frege coined a special term to represent both proper names and definite descriptions — *eigennamme*. But there is a difference in their approach. According to Frege, all singular terms, definite descriptions classed by Frege with proper names, have both sense and reference, whereas Russell says that there may be vacuous descriptions, though he does not make room for empty names. So, there is no requirement for Frege to distinguish between ordinary proper names (which may not have denotation) and logically proper names (which always have denotation). As because Frege holds that all descriptions have denotation, they become free to be substituted for proper names and there remains no room for scope ambiguities in extensional contexts.

On the other hand, as because, Russell allows vacuous descriptions, they cannot be freely substituted for proper names and this induces ambiguities of scope for descriptions in the *Principia*. Russell, therefore, has to distinguish between

logically proper names from ordinary proper names, which behave in the same way as descriptions. We must keep in mind these points of difference in Frege and Russell's views while we refer to their common theory that ordinary proper names are similar to descriptions and they do have meaning. We could say that Frege's view, namely, that definite descriptions classed with proper names have both sense and reference, is the same as Mill's view of singular connotative terms, if we could straightway identify sense and reference with connotation and denotation. But this we cannot. We are not sure whether the mode of presentation of the object is a property or set of properties of the object. For, we know that Frege explicitly identifies a property with a concept, and a concept belongs to the realm of reference. A concept is, for Frege, the reference of a predicate. But the denotation of a predicate, for Mill, is any object of which it is true. However, these differences are not, right now, extremely important for our purpose. Let us now move to the theory of descriptions itself.

Section – IV

The Theory of Descriptions

The most detailed discussion by Russell on the topic of 'Descriptions' is found in one of his lectures titled "Descriptions and Incomplete Symbols", which,

together with his other lectures came to be grouped under "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism". In this essay, Russell makes it clear from the very beginning what he wants to discuss. He wanted to speak on the subject of descriptions, 'incomplete symbols' and the existence of described individuals:

> I am going to deal to day with an existence which is asserted to be singular, such as 'The man with the iron mask existed' or some phrase of that sort, where you have some object described by the phrase 'The so-and-so' in the singular, and I want to discuss the analysis of propositions in which phrases of that kind occur.[5]

Now, what does Russell mean by 'incomplete symbols'? Though it is not very clear from his writing, for Russell, an 'incomplete symbol' is an expression, which 'does not have any meaning in isolation'. Examples of this are the connectives of the propositional calculus. They have no meaning on their own, though they 'contribute to the meaning' of the sentences in which they occur. These symbols are given contextual definition. Russell says that definite descriptions are incomplete symbols as opposed to proper names, which are not "This is the principle of the theory of denoting I wish to advocate: that denoting phrases never have any meaning in themselves, but that every proposition in whose verbal expression they occur has a meaning".[6]

Russell later distinguished what appeared for the first time as "denoting phrases" in his 'On Denoting', 1905, as "indefinite descriptions" and "definite descriptions". According to Russell there were indefinite or 'ambiguous'

descriptions of the form 'a so-and-so'. Examples of this type of descriptions that Russell cites are, a man, a dog, a pig, Cabinet Minister, etc. But Russell was not much concerned with this type of descriptions. He only mentions and briefly discusses them. The other kind of descriptions, which he called definite descriptions were of prime interest to him. This type of descriptions are of the form 'the so-and-so'. Russell cites the following expressions as examples of definite descriptions:

The man with the iron mask
The number of inhabitants of London
The sum of 43 and 34.

To quote Russell, "There are two sorts of descriptions, what one may call 'ambiguous descriptions', when we speak of 'a so-and-so', and what one may call 'definite descriptions,' when we speak of 'the so-and-so' (in the singular)."[7]

He also adds, "(It is not necessary for a description that it should describe an individual: it may describe a predicate or a relation or anything else.)"[8]

We notice that the problem of reference is mainly concerned with the singular terms, and not so much with the general terms. General terms, as opposed to singular terms apply to more than one object of a class in the same sense. For example, 'dog' or 'man' may denote any dog or any man. These terms do not pose any difficulty for philosophers dealing with the problem of reference for their scope is not restricted. Singular terms, on the other hand, are supposed to

denote particular individual things, which means that they are restricted in scope and thus they generate problems of reference. Singular terms are of a few kinds which include proper names like, "Indira Gandhi", "New Delhi", "3.15 pm" etc; definite descriptions like "the Cat is on the mat", "the king of Bhutan" etc; singular personal pronouns like "me", "he" etc. and demonstrative pronouns like "this", "that" and such others.

Russell's theory of descriptions was proposed in order to solve the same confusions that troubled Frege, but with a different approach. The root of the referential puzzles lies within the theory of meaning underlying it. The referential theory of meaning which is very much plausible on the common sense level is this: We are able to understand meanings of words because, linguistic expressions 'stand for things' or, in other words, what they mean is what they stand for. Though a very appealing view, the referential theory, when closely examined runs into serious errors. Even then, the general idea is that, though the referential theory does not hold good for all words, it is at least applicable to singular terms, for singular terms purport to designate individual objects. Against this view Bertrand Russell argued forcefully saying that it is not acceptable at least for definite descriptions and also raised objection against this theory's being true of other singular terms such as proper names. He came to the conclusion that sentences containing definite descriptions are actually abridged form of three generalisations.

Russell differentiated between "definite descriptions" and "proper names" respectively as expressions, which have no meaning in themselves and expressions, which have meaning on their own right. Russell thinks that this distinction is important because confusion between these two leads to certain paradoxes. There is no problem when I say, "Socrates was the teacher of Plato". Here I am asserting some facts about the persons, Socrates and Plato. However we often come across propositions of the sort, 'I exist' or 'God exists' or 'Homer existed', and problems arise in dealing with them. According to Russell whenever one says 'Romulus existed', most of us assume that Romulus did not exist. But if he did not exist then statements made about him would not be significant. If Romulus himself was actually present in the statements made about him that he existed or that he did not exist, then the statement would be insignificant unless he existed. Russell says that it is a mistake to assume that Romulus was a constituent of the proposition 'Romulus did not exist'. In fact he does not enter into the proposition.

When we try to make out the meaning of a proposition, we generally try to put together all information that we have gathered about if. We thus transform the information into a sort of propositional function like 'x has such and such properties'. If x did not exist then for this propositional function there will remain no value of x to make it true. There is another type of non-existence,

which we will mention here. Let us consider the proposition in which a definite description occurs. We cannot speak of "the inhabitant of London". In this case the described subject cannot be said to exist because inhabiting London is a description, which applies to more than one person. There cannot be any unique individual referred to here, as there are so many inhabitants of London.

So, Romulus is not actually a name, but is a truncated description since it introduces a propositional function. 'Romulus' is only shorthand for the person who did such-and-such things, e.g., killed Remus, founded Rome, etc. It is not a name because for a name, the question of existence does not arise, or a name must name something. So, Romulus is an abridged description. There cannot be any name for a non-existent person. To think of it as a name is a logical mistake. And if it is a description then any proposition about Romulus is actually a propositional function such as, 'x was called "Romulus". So, what happens when we say 'Romulus did not exist?' The answer is, this propositional function is not true for one value of x.

Descriptions, we have come to know, are of two kinds — definite and indefinite. It is important to note here that whether a description is definite or not, depends upon its form, not on whether there is a definite individual or not. To take the examples we have mentioned earlier, 'The inhabitant of London' is not

an indefinite description because no definite individual is being referred to; in fact it is a definite description because of the form, 'the so-and-so'.

Russell has written a lot on definite descriptions and it has been assumed that the meaning of the phrase 'definite description' is clear to us. In fact Russell has written very little as to what a definite description is. "He says that it is an expression of the form 'the so-and-so'; that it is an expression of the form $(7x)(Qx)$, and he says that this last is to be read 'the unique x that has the property Q.' "[9]

Now, what do we mean when we say that a phrase is of the form 'the so-and-so'? In answer it can be said that the form of a phrase is a matter of grammar. Peter Frederick Strawson, while talking about this form, says, "...phrases beginning with the definite article followed by a noun, qualified or unqualified in the singular."[10] What Strawson means is that Russell's theory of descriptions is concerned with expressions of the form 'the so-and-so'.

It can however be pointed out that there are many phrases which fulfil Strawson's definition (i.e., they begin with the definite article and are followed by a singular noun which is 'qualified or unqualified'), yet are not definite descriptions. Let us take for example the following propositions.

(a)   'The table is the most important article of furniture in a dining room.'

(b)   'The book is on the table.'

In the first case, the phrase 'the table' is not being used to refer to some particular table. Hence, it is not a definite description. In the second proposition the phrase 'the table' does refer to some particular table in a particular context. If we grant that the phrase 'the table' in the second case is a definite description, then a problem arises. We then have to go against Russell's view that a phrase is a descriptive phrase in virtue of its grammatical form, because in both the cases mentioned above the phrase 'the table' has the same grammatical form.

According to Leonard Linsky, the form that Russell speaks of should be understood as the logical form and not the grammatical form. Let us consider the proposition : "*The Vicar of Wakefield* is behind the desk."[11] If the words, "The Vicar of Wakefield" is used to refer to the novel then they are used as a name, not description. But, if the words are being used to refer to the Vicar himself then they are a description, not name. But this distinction cannot be based on grammatical form for only a phrase is involved. We also know that any case of reference to a unique object is not a case of definite description, for example, proper names are not definite descriptions.

So, it becomes clear that whether a phrase is a definite description or not depends on how that proposition is being analysed. If it is correctly analysed then the true character of it can be understood. For example in the proposition

"The Eternal City welcomed the new Pope",[12] the phrase 'The Eternal City' is not a definite description for it cannot be analysed into – that there exists one, and only one, city which is eternal. It can be concluded then that Russell's analysis of definite descriptions is a correct one and philosophers like Strawson who say otherwise are mistaken.

Let us now proceed with Russell's theory of definite descriptions by going more deeply into it. According to Russell definite descriptions have meaning that are over and above their referents. In this theory 'the' has been contextually defined, that is, he does not define 'the' explicitly; on the other hand he paraphrases sentences containing 'the' in a way that brings out the definition of 'the' indirectly and reveals the logical form of sentences. The main problem is therefore to grasp the meaning of 'the'. Let us take for example a sentence of the form:

"The F is G"

Example 1 : 'The author of *Waverley* was Scotch'.

This seems to be a simple subject-predicate sentence, which refers to Sir Walter Scott and predicating something (Scottishness) of him. But in reality things are not so simple. The singular term "the author of Waverley" contains the problematic word 'the' and the meaning of this expression is very important for us in order to recognise the expression's denotation. The denotation of the

expression 'the author of *Waverley*' is some one who did write *Waverley*. According to Russell, 'the' is an abbreviation of a complex construction that includes quantifiers. Quantifiers are words that qualify general terms ("all lawyers" "some flowers", "no tables", "six players", etc.). Russell opines that sentence (1) above is actually an abridged version of a conjunction of three quantified general statements, none of which makes reference to Scott in particular :

    (a)   At least one person authored *Waverley* and
    (b)   at most one person authored *Waverley* and
    (c)   whoever authored *Waverley* was Scotch.

Each of these above sentences is a part of (1) and is a necessary truth. In other words, what the above sentences predict are these – (i) If the author of *Waverley* was Scotch, then there was such an author; (ii) if there were more than one author, the definite article 'the' wouldn't have been there, and if *somebody did the authorizing of Waverley,* he was Scotch. Propositions (a) – (c) taken together are the sufficient condition for the truth of (1). So we see that these sentences provide individually necessary and jointly sufficient condition for the truth of (1). In this way Russell makes a strong ground for his argument that descriptive phrases are in fact abbreviated form of three quantified general statements.

To symbolise Russell's argument :

(a) $(\exists x)$ Wx
(b) (x) $(Wx \rightarrow (y)(Wy \rightarrow y = x))$
(c) (x) $(Wx \rightarrow Sx)$

Where "W" represents, "… authored *Waverley*" and "S" represents, "…was Scotch". Propositions (a) – (c) when conjoined result in :

(d) $(\exists x)(Wx \,\&\, ((y)(Wy \rightarrow y = x) \,\&\, Sx))$

So, we can say that the above logical notation is the correct expression of the logical form of the sentence, "The author of *Waverley* was Scotch". Russell made it clear that two sentences having the same grammatical form may differ in logical form. Let us understand this with the help of an illustration.

(i) "I saw nobody".
(ii) "I saw Martha".

Both the sentences appear to have the same form – subject + transitive verb + object. But in actuality they differ in logical properties. When one says "I saw Martha" one means that one has seen someone, while the statement "I saw nobody" implies just the opposite. Sentence (i) is equivalent in meaning to "It is not the case that I saw anyone" or to "There is no one I saw." The factor, that introduces the difference between the two sentences, is that, actually "nobody", is not a singular term; it is a quantifier. Symbolising (i) we get,

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$$\sim (\exists\ x)\ \text{Aix} \quad \text{or} \quad (x) \sim \text{Aix}$$

Where "A" represents the verb '...saw' and 'i' represents 'I'. The logical properties are explained by the inference rules governing the notation.

Russell therefore concluded that the apparent singular term of the sentence (1) above is not a singular term at all, but an abbreviation of a set of general quantificational sentence as has been showed in (a) – (c). The apparent singular term vanishes on correct analysis. According to Russell the puzzles of reference arise because we do not realise this difference and take some expressions as singular term, which they in fact are not. In the next section we will see how.

Section — V

Russell's solutions to puzzles of reference

Let us now take the puzzles one by one and apply Russell's solution to each. In a recent publication William G. Lycan[13] has very nicely analysed these puzzles. He has presented four puzzles of reference with the help of illustrations, which we will follow. The first two of these puzzles are related and were previously referred to jointly as the Problem of Negative Existentials.

Sub-section – (i)

Problem of Apparent Reference to Non-existents

Let us take an example :

Example 2 : The present King of France is bald.

It seems that (2) is a normal meaningful subject predicate form of sentence. However, a meaningful sentence of the subject predicate form is meaningful only if its subject term denotes something and some property is ascribed to it. But in (2) the subject term does not denote anything existent. Therefore, either (2) is not meaningful at all or that its subject term denotes some non-existent thing. But the problem is that there is no such thing as a non-existent thing.

Now, let us apply Russell's method to (2) which becomes,

At least one person is presently King of France, and at most one person is presently King of France and whoever is present King France is bald.

It is clear that (2) is false on Russellean analysis because the first of the three conjuncts mentioned above is false as there is no monarchy in France at present. Earlier we saw that a meaningful subject predicate form of sentence is meaningful only in virtue of referring to something and ascribing some property to it, or we have to deny that 'there is no such thing as a "non existent" thing'. At the time when monarchy was present in France it seemed

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obvious that (2) is a meaningful subject predicate form of sentence. But now, Russell rejects (2) as a subject-predicate form of sentence because "the present King of France" is not really a singular term. (2) is expressed into a set of three general terms none of which mentions anyone as the alleged King. Or, it can also be said that (2) is a subject predicate sentence and it is not the case that a meaningful sentence is meaningful only in virtue of its denoting something because the denotation is in reality an abbreviation of three purely general statements.

Sub-section - (ii)

Problem of Negative Existentials

This puzzle is actually an extended case of the one dealt with above. Let us consider the following :

Example 3 : The present King of France does not exist.

It seems that (3) is a true sentence about the present King of France. But if it is so then the sentence cannot be about the present King of France for there is no monarchy in France at present. Again, if (3) is about the present King of France, then it has to be false for then, the King must exist. We have discussed earlier how Frege and Meinong tried to solve these two problems. Meinong had

approached the problem with the help of *So–sein* (i.e., so being of objects) and Frege had tried his sense theory to solve the problems. Both the solutions have been rejected by Russell. Now, we will follow Russell's solution.

There are two ways of paraphrasing (3) in Russellean analysis. After the first paraphrasing (3) appears to be very peculiar. When we assume "exist" to be an ordinary predicate like "is bald" or "was Scotch" and apply "not" to modify that predicate, (3) becomes:

    i.   At least one person is presently King of France.

    ii.   At most one person is presently King of France.

    iii.   Whoever is presently King of France does not exist.

Here, the first conjunct asserts the existence of the present King of France and the last one rejects his existence. The second paraphrasing of (3) makes it more sensible for us. Russell says that in actuality, "not" applies not only to the verb "exist" but to the whole sentence which is as follows:

Not : (The present king of France exists)

Or, It is false that the present King of France exists

And applying Russell's analysis to it, we get :

Not : (At least one person is presently King of France

and at most one person is presently King of France

and whoever is presently King of France exists.)

Symbolically,

$\sim (\exists x) (Kx \ \& \ ((y) (Ky \to y = x) \ \& \ Ex))$; where "E" symbolises "exists" and "K"

is the "King of France".

The second paraphrasing is intuitively equivalent to "No one is uniquely King

of France" or "No one uniquely kings France". In this analysis non-existence is

never asserted of any individual, so the problem of negative existentials

disappears.

The preferred version of (3) is the second one where description occurs in a

"secondary" position which means that all the other quantifiers used in it like

"at least", "at most" and "whoever" are governed by "not". In the first

paraphrasing, description has a primary position, that is, it is placed in logical

order with "not" inside and governed by it. This type of distinction is a scope

distinction. Or, to express in a more contemporary language, in a secondary

reading quantifiers have a "narrow" scope, falling inside "not" and in a

primary reading quantifiers are outside the scope of "not".

Sub-Section – (iii)

Puzzle of Identity

Consider an identity statement :

Example 4 : Elizabeth Windsor = the present Queen of England.

Both the singular terms here refer to the same person. So, the question that arises is : that, Is not the statement trivial, for it asserts nothing more than the fact that a person is identical with himself? Yet (4) seems informative, for someone might learn something new about either Windsor or about who rules England. Again, (4) is not a tautology, it asserts a contingent fact which could have been otherwise. So, we have to accept that one of the singular terms in (4) must have some kind of meaning other than its denotation.

Frege said, it was 'sense' of the singular terms over and above their denotation, which made the two terms different from each other. That is how identity statements are informative; but it is not clear from Frege's analysis how they are contingent.

Let us now apply Russellean analysis to (4). The definite description is "the present Queen of England", so we will analyse only that phrase.

At least one person is presently Queen of England and,

At most one person is presently Queen of England and,

Whoever is presently Queen of England is one and the same as Elizabeth Windsor.

In Logical notation:

$$(\exists x) \ (Qx \ \& \ ((y)(Qy \rightarrow y = x) \ \& \ x = e))$$

It becomes clear now that (4) is non-trivial for we are learning something about both Elizabeth and present Queen of England. There cannot be any question about the contingency of the statement because someone else might have been the Queen or there might not have been any Queen at all. Russell's theory then correctly explains the contingency of identity statements though Russell calls this kind of identity statements superficial. According to him it is a predicate, which attributes a complex relational property to Elizabeth.

Sub-section — (iv)

Puzzle of Substituitivity

The fourth puzzle is concerned with the problem of Substituitivity. We often assume that two singular terms, which have the same denotation, are semantically equivalent; i.e., we can substitute one for the other without

changing the truth-value of the sentence containing them. But this is not always the case. Take for example, a true sentence,

Example 5 : Albert believes that the author of *Being and Nothingness* is a profound thinker.

Now, suppose Albert is not aware of the fact that the same author also writes pornography. But the author of *Being and Nothingness* cannot be replaced by the author of the *Sizzling Veterinarians* though they denote the same person, because that changes the truth- value of the sentence. Surely, Albert does not believe the author of pornography to be a profound thinker. According to W. V.O. Quine, the description in this sentence is referentially opaque brought in by the phrase "believes that".

While applying Russellean analysis to it, this sentence may also be paraphrased in two ways as we have done in the case of (3). But we will stick to the secondary occurrence or narrow scope which is much more preferable than the primary occurrence for the reasons shown in case of the second puzzle :

Albert believes that : (At least one person authored *Being and Nothingness*, and at most one person authored *Being and Nothingness*, and whoever authored *Being and Nothingness* is a profound thinker.)

If we substitute "the author of *Sizzling Veterinarians*" for "the author of *Being and Nothingness* we get :

Albert believes that : At least one person authored *Sizzling Veterinarians*, and at most one person authored *Sizzling Veterinarians*, and whoever authored *Sizzling Veterinarians* is a profound thinker.

Now, it becomes clear why one cannot be substituted for the other because the second analysis is a completely different belief of Albert from the first one and may be fake while the first one is true. Logically, however we have not substituted anything because on analysis the singular terms have disappeared.

We know that there was a fifth puzzle as well called the problem of Excluded Middle. Here the problem is that according to the law of excluded middle either a sentence or its negation must be true. Yet both the following sentences, Russell says, are not true :

Example 6 : The present King of France is bald.
        6′ : The present King of France is not bald.

Since there is no King, he is neither bald nor not bald. Russell also added that since it seems that the King is neither bald nor not bald, philosophers following Hegel and his method of synthesis may want a way out by saying that probably the King wears a wig. Russell however meant to solve this puzzle in the same

way he solved the others. As Russell's method is clear from the solution of the foregoing puzzles, I will not repeat it here. Hopefully it is clear now, how Russell eliminates the descriptive phrases to solve the puzzles.

Sub-section — (vi)

Russell's Solution: A few Observations

Russell's theory is designed essentially to find a way out of the puzzles created by sentences containing definite descriptions. This theory can be applied to two kinds of statements. The statements of the form "the so-and-so exists" are of the first type. These are analysed as the assertion of the conjunction of two propositions :

"At least one thing has the property so-and-so" and "At most one thing has the property so-and-so". Or, in other words, "Exactly one thing has the property so-and-so". For example, "The present King of France exists" turns out to be "exactly one thing is a King of France".

The second type of statements from which definite descriptions must be eliminated are of the form "The so-and-so is such-and-such". This is analysed, as we have seen, as the conjunction of three general propositions. For example,

"The author of *Waverley* was a poet" is expressed as: "Someone wrote *Waverley*"; "Only one man wrote *Waverley*"; "Whoever wrote *Waverley* was a poet". Or, it can be said that "one and only one person wrote *Waverley* and he was a poet." The "the author of *Waverley*" disappears in the second statement. It follows from this analysis that every statement of the form "The so-and-so is such-and-such" is false when the so-and-so does not exist. This view was later criticized by Strawson, which will be our topic of discussion in the next chapter.

The underlying assumption of the theory of descriptions is that all reference is singular. It has been argued that not only is non-singular reference possible but there are various forms of it. It has been held that :

> Russell's mistake lay in the supposition that there is no fference between having a descriptive *content* and di-having a descriptive *function*. Russell jumped to the conclusion that it could not have a referring function, that it can never be used for the purpose of referring. ... but there is no such obvious opposition between having a descriptive *content* and having a referring function.[14]

Now, if we come to accept that all reference is not singular, the viability of the theory of descriptions to provide solution to different puzzles of reference may be seriously doubted.

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Notes & References on Chapter 5 :

1. B. Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, New York : Simon & Schuster, 1971, p. 173.

2. *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. VI, P. Edwards (ed.), New York : Collier Macmillan, 1967, p. 488.

3. L. Linsky, *Names and Descriptions*, The University of Chicago Press, 1977, p. 4.

4. *Ibid.* p. 6.

5. B. Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", in *Logic and Knowledge*, R.C. Marsh (ed.), London : Routledge, 1994, p. 241.

6. B. Russell, "On Denoting", *Logic and Knowledge, op.cit.*, pp. 42 – 43.

7. "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", *op.cit.* p. 243.

8. *Ibid.*

9. L. Linsky, *Referring*, London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, p. 62.

10. P. F. Strawson, "On Referring", *Mind* (1950), reprinted in A.G.N Flew, ed., *Essays in Conceptual Analysis*, London : Macmillan, 1956, p. 2.

11. Example cited in *Referring, op.cit.* p. 63.

12. *Ibid.*

13. All examples in this section quoted from *Philosophy of Language: a Contemporary Introduction* by William G. Lycan, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 13 –17.

14. P.K. Sen, "Non-singular Reference" in *Reference and Truth*, New Delhi : ICPR with Allied Publishers Ltd., 1991, p. 36. Also, "Proper Names", *Logic, Induction and Ontology* : Macmillan, 1980, pp. 170-71.

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