

24.400: Proseminar in Philosophy I

Fall 2013

“Theory of Objects”

1. “[T]he totality of what exists, including what has existed and will exist, is infinitely small in comparison with the totality of the Objects of knowledge” (p79). What are some examples of Objects that supposedly do not exist? What is his argument for the claim that “they” do not exist?
2. “[O]ur account up to now may seem to leave room for the conjecture that wherever existence is absent, it not only *can* but *must* be replaced by subsistence. But even this restriction is inadmissible...” (p81). Explain. What are Sein, Sosein, and Nichtsein, and what is the “principle of independence of Sosein from Sein” (p82)? Why should we accept this principle?
3. Why is the Theory of Objects not just a part of psychology? Or “pure logic”? Or epistemology? Or metaphysics? How does it relate to philosophy as a whole?

“On Denoting”

0. (i) Case 1: At the lion exhibit, I assertively utter ‘The cage contains cats’. In fact, the zoo contains many other cages containing tigers, cheetahs, and so forth. Case 2: I assertively utter ‘The cat is scratching Bertie’. In fact, the creature I am pointing to, although it is scratching Bertie, is not a cat at all, but a robot controlled from Mars. How would Russell paraphrase what I said in each case? There are (at least) two problems here. What are they?
- (ii) According to Russell, ‘The cat is not indoors’ (for example) is ambiguous between a reading on which ‘the cat’ takes “primary occurrence”, and one on which it takes “secondary occurrence”. Using logical notation as appropriate, explain.
- (iii) Treating ‘catsup’ much the same as ‘cat’, give the Russellian paraphrase of ‘The catsup has spilt’. Why is this paraphrase incorrect? Is there a quick fix?
1. Critically compare and contrast Russell’s and Frege’s accounts of sentences such as ‘The man who discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits died in misery’. What does Frege mean by ‘presupposition’? Are Russell’s criticisms of Frege correct?

2. According to Russell, his theory solves “three puzzles”. Does it?
3. What are the “curious difficulties” that show, according to Russell, “that the whole distinction between meaning and denotation has been wrongly conceived”?

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