Propositional Content without Propositions

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Friederike Moltmann

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Handout 4

Russell's Multiple Relations Analysis

Russell's Multiple Relations Analysis:

- An attitude verb specifies an n+1 place-relation in a syntactic context of a that clause involving n propositional constituents.
- A *that*-clause is an 'incomplete symbol (syncategorematic expression): it does not have a single meaning of its own but rather contributes n propositional constituents as arguments of the embedding verb.

Russell's early analysis:

(1) a. Othello judges that Desdemona loves Cassio.

b. judge(O, L, D, C)

Russell's motivations:

his theory of knowledge:

Knowledge relates individual directly to the world, not via a proposition

Do away with propositions as unnecessary representational objects (like concepts).

Russell's earlier view of propositions:

propositions a structured complexes consisting of relations and objects.

an (apparent) problem:

How to make sure that in (1b), D is to act as the argument of the first position of L, and C as the second argument?

How to distinguish (1a) from ‘Othello judges that Cassio loves Desdemona’.

Russell’s later analysis:
Add a logical form argument to the arguments of the attitude verb
(1) c. judge(O, L, D, C, λxyR[R(x, y)])

General agreement:
Logical form argument does not help the problem if there is a problem.

Wittgenstein’s objection to Russell:
- how to rule out that one cannot judge ‘nonsense’, e.g. three individuals, John, Mary, Sue
- one can judge only what could be true or false: a collection of entities (relations and objects) cannot be true or false

A common response to Wittgenstein’s objection on behalf of Russell:
The argument positions of the attitude verb need to be specified for particular types: relations are of a different type than objects.

Let’s say:
An attitude verb specifies a range of (n+2)-place relations for any n, such that the first position of the relation takes objects, the second position takes n-place relations, the third position objects, …

Avoiding an ambiguity / polysemy in the attitude verb (or taking the attitude verb to be itself an incomplete symbol):
Attitude verb are multigrade predicates (Oliver / Smylie ‘Multigrade Predicates’, *Mind* 2004), or rather two-place predicates with a second multigrade place, consisting of an unlimited number of positions (that may themselves be multigrade)
first place: for single objects (agents)
second multigrade place:
first position for n-place relation, second position for objects, third position for objects …

or second position for m-place function, second position for object (argument of the function), …

A common explanation why Russell did not come up with this remedy:
For Russell judgments are prior to types:
Types are characterized in terms of the notion of a judgment:
Entity of particular type is what can occur in a certain way in a judgment …
→ theory-internal reasons

Peter Hanks (2007b): 'How Wittgenstein defeated Russell's Multiple Relations Theory' (*Synthese* 154, 121-146):
this is mistaken; it is about the unity of what is judged:

further formulations from Wittgenstein:
- A judges that a bears R to b: *what* does a judge? → *What* does A judge to be true?
→ Only a proposition can be judged to be true; a collection of items, even they are of the right number and variety of type, cannot be judged to be true.
- 'However not-p may be explained, the question *what is negated* must have a meaning'.

Hanks:
By 'nonsense' Wittgenstein does not means something that violates type restrictions, but rather something that is capable of being true of false.

A different approach: the nominalization theory of special quantifiers and pronouns:
the term 'what is judged':
does not refer to the object of judgment, but rather of the 'product of a judgment',
it refers to 'the judgment that S' or someone's judgment that S

→ Appeal to propositions is motivated by misguided analysis of 'special' quantifiers and pronouns, in particular relative clauses.