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Report on Milan Soutor's Dissertation: *The Theory of Descriptions: Bertrand Russell's Road Toward Ontological Austerity*.

(I should note that Milan was a Fulbright Fellow studying at the University of Iowa with me in 2014. We had many very engaging discussions concerning Russell's early work. I am pleased to see that Milan's independence of thought is not diminished in his dissertation. This is good, and shows his significant analytic skills and knowledge of Russell's writings. One topic of our many discussions was the logic of Russell's book *The Principles of Mathematics*. I credit Milan for discovering what I call Russell's "conjunction problem." He had no occasion to mention it in his dissertation. I found the problem also in Peano's *Formulaire*. Milan catalyzed my writing of a new paper called: "Solving the Conjunction Problem in Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*," (JHAP, 2019). I have very high regard for Milan's analytic skills and I have no doubt that he shows great promise of new research in the field of early analytic philosophy.)

The main thesis of Soutor's engaging work is to defend one very central component of the Quinean interpretation of Russell's ontological development. That is the thesis that it was originally Meinongian and converted only *after* the 1905 theory of definite descriptions. Quine seemed rather unaware that Russell still maintains an ontology of general propositions and false proposition in 1905. (If one thinks of an endorsement of false propositions as also Meinongian, the full transition then waited 1910.) Soutor, like Peter Hylton (*Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of a Analytic Philosophy*, 1980) is very interested in the many ontological worries surrounding the change in 1905 because it is couched in the context of the ontology of propositions (general propositions and false ones). Soutor's discussion will be of interest to many Russell scholars and several new publications should come out of the dissertation—if Soutor desires to pursue them.

Quine's interpretation of PoM as Meinongian, once the orthodoxy, has largely been abandoned by the new Russell scholars today who maintain that well before his 1905 theory of definite descriptions, Russell's theory of denoting concepts *was used by him* to secure results such that, e.g., the null class as one does not have ontological status (Being). (Since the notion of a class as one requires that class have members, the null-class as one is a contradictory object.) Russell's stand against Meinongianism, according to the new scholarship, is not in conflict with the fundamental principle articulated at PoM p. 449:

'A is not' must either be false or meaningless.

There is no conflict because the letter "A" in the passage stands in only for a genuine proper name. Denoting phrases are not allowed in instances. Soutor wants to challenge this.

*Soutor doesn't mention Russell's 1904 "On The Existential Import of Propositions." This work conclusively settles what Russell himself thought at the time. It reveals that, without question, he had at *that time* (still) thought that denoting concepts can work to avoid Meinongianism. That is clear because he extended its application so that, unlike, PoM, "Apollo" and "The Chimera" and so on are no longer to be regarded as genuine proper names. He concluded that his theory of denoting concepts was rich enough so abandon PoM's Being vs Existence distinction (except insofar as it seems more natural to say of abstract entities that they have *Being* rather than saying that they Exist). This fact about the 1904 paper, makes it especially difficult to

gauge the timeline suggested by Russell's comments (in his 80's) when (e.g., in the 1954 publication of *My Philosophical Development* 1954) he admitted to an early thorough going Meinongianism.

All are agreed that Russell's 1903 book *The Principles of Mathematics* (PoM) was put together in various complicated ways and it underwent important changes to produce the meld that it is. Russell scholars agree that Russell's early instincts were with Meinong, so the important question Soutor is raising really concerns the melding of doctrines in the 1903 PoM itself and their viability. Soutor's dissertation is not designed to investigate the early threads of Russell's views, tracing historical origins of the pastiche that is PoM. That has been attempted (e.g., by Byrd in 1987, 1994, 1996, 2000, *Russell Journal*). Although PoM was a melding of various views which may originally have been tension (if not inconsistent) with one another, it is clear that at the time of PoM Russell thought he had achieved a meld, even if he may have been mistaken. I think Soutor might agree for he writes (p. 3):

There is textual evidence, it must be admitted, that shows that even early in Principles Russell wanted his then semantical treatment of descriptions to account for referential failures .

So the question comes down, not to whether Russell *thought* the PoM theory of denoting concepts can work, but whether in fact it can (perhaps with modification) work. The jury has been out. Soutor's dissertation goes a long way toward settling the case.

Soutor's focus is on the question of whether the theory of denoting concepts of PoM can work to evade ontological commitment to impossible objects. This is quite important, for if it cannot, then according to Soutor, Russell's having come to see that it cannot sometime late in 1904 or early 1905 is precisely what is sufficient to *compel him* to adopt the ontological austerity of 1905. He has to save his logicism from the *explosion* that would derive from Meinongianism embracing contradictory objects. That is the crux of Soutor's new and interesting thesis. The abandonment of denoting concepts is often thought by Russell scholars to hinge upon a (still barely intelligible) "Gray's Elegy argument" first articulated in a manuscript of June 1905 called "On Fundamentals" and then revised in "On Denoting." Soutor's history, if correct, makes the "Gray's Elegy" argument irrelevant.

*Soutor's work sometimes is unclear between the question of whether the theory of denoting concepts *succeeds* (or can succeed) and the quite different question of whether, at the time, Russell thought that it succeeds (or can succeed). Both questions are important but they must be separated. Soutor means to argue that Russell's theory of denoting concepts of PoM cannot succeed to avoid a Meinongianism embracing not only non-existing entities as the present king of France, but more importantly, the extremely damaging Meinongianism of contradictory objects. It is extremely damaging, Soutor (p. 91 ff) argues, because Russell's logic is classical (accepting *ex falso sequitur quodlibet*) and hence such a Meinongianism destroys logicism. Soutor says that (p70) that "every problem of TDC (the PoM theory of denoting concepts) should be counted as a problem of Russell' logic in *Principles* and, consequently, as a problem of Russell's early logicism."

Soutor rightly notes that classical nature of the logic of PoM is manifest in its yielding an explosion theorem. There is no doubt that the following is indeed an intended theorem

$$x \supset x : \supset_{x,y} : y \supset y \cdot \supset. (x \cdot \supset. \sim x \supset y).$$

Assuming for the sake of argument, that Russell's PoM theory of denoting concepts cannot block commitment to logically impossible terms, how does Soutor derive a contradiction? Soutor says (p. 94) that PoM is committed to:

The round square is round.

The round square is square (non-round).

Meinong's principle of the *Independence of Sein and Sosein* immediately yields the result that The F is F. But I don't find evidence that this is in PoM. Perhaps Soutor thought it obvious. But I worry that it can arrive only by extrapolation from the "law of denoting concepts" at PoM, p. 74. One gets:

If the denoting concept 'the F' denotes *y* then the proposition 'y is an entity that is an F' is true.

As an instance of this, Soutor can get:

If the denoting concept 'the entity that is square and is round' denotes y then ' y is an entity that is square and is round'

Relying on this, Soutor is correct that if Russell cannot block the Being of contradictory objects, all is lost in PoM. But note that Soutor's argument from *explosion*, it seems, relies on the law of denoting of PoM. The law of denoting requires the existence and viability of denoting concepts (at least as used in the law). Thus, Soutor can't very well wholly undermine denoting concepts since that will also undermine his argument. It would be nice to hear Soutor's reply to this concern.

*Soutor discusses the two-fold ways of occurrence of concepts (e.g., p .22). As is well known, PoM holds that the very same concept 'human' occurs *as concept* unifying the proposition 'Socrates is human' and occurs *as term* in the proposition 'Humanity belongs to Socrates' where it does not unify. It seems clear, therefore, that *occurring as concept* cannot mean *occurring as exemplified*. In the proposition 'Fido is human' the concept 'human' occurs *as concept* (unifying), but obviously it does not *occur as exemplified* since Fido is a dog. If the proposition in question is true, then (and only then) we may say that the concept is exemplified. This is quite different from the situation in 1910 where propositions are abandoned and Russell speaks of facts unified by the exemplification of universals. One might wish to object to the PoM notion of *occurring as concept*, but it commits the fallacy of equivocation (I fear) if the objection presents *occurring as concept* as if it were *exemplification*. Does Soutor make this move? (See below concerning ' a differs from b '.)

*It seems important say at least *something* (pro or con) about Landini's thesis (" 'On Denoting' Against Denoting," *Russell Journal* 1989) that in Russell's view denoting concepts have the capacity for (at least) two kinds of occurrence in propositions. Soutor doesn't discuss this. The two-fold capacity for occurrence of concepts would seem essential to the viability the theory of denoting concepts. The denoting concept 'every man' occurs *as term* as in the proposition
'every man' is a denoting concept'

The denoting concept 'every man' occurs *as concept* as in the proposition
'Every man is mortal'.

Hence, the two propositions have quite different logical forms. It is clear that Russell knew this when he was struggling to form his substitutional emulation of classes as one—a struggle that began in PoM. And he may well have used it in articulating his Gray Elegy concern. The difference in logical form reveals that it is gibberish to speak of substituting 'every man' for Socrates in the proposition 'Socrates is mortal.' Realizing this, we see that the linguistic replacement does not track the ontological structure of the proposition--- for one can replace the word "Socrates" in the *wff* "Socrates is mortal" with the phrase "every man" and get a perfectly well formed *wff* "every man is mortal." So even in PoM, albeit late in its production, Russell may well have known that linguistic forms do not always track the logical forms. He wrote extensive manuscript notes in 1903 and 1904 struggling with "kinds of occurrence" of denoting concepts. Thus, very likely the thesis was *not*, as is often said, a unique discovery of 1905 and the theory of descriptions. (Soutor doesn't mention this. But his p. 25ff mentions McBride's confusion about ' a is bigger than b ' and ' b is smaller than a ' which presents Russell wondering whether they are the same proposition even though the statements seem linguistically different.)

*In fact, it would seem that in PoM denoting concepts must have many different kinds of *occurrences as concept* in propositions, for they have are to generate *scope* distinctions. Soutor is well aware of the central

issue of scope (p. 90ff) to the theory of denoting concepts. It is, to my mind, the main problem facing the theory of denoting concepts in PoM. I doubt it can be solved. The problem of how these occurrences work to generate scope is certainly not solved in PoM. Russell appeals to the medieval (heuristic) device of *suppositio*. (Geach discusses it at length in his book: *Reference and Generality*). Soutor understands the seriousness of the problem, but unfortunately focusses (p. 90) his criticism only against the viability of Russell taking seriously genuine objects that are “variable conjunctions” etc. Soutor acknowledges that Russell knew that they cannot be genuine objects.

*One important point of agreement I do have with Quine is that there is no good reason to think that the phrase “propositional function” is used univocally in Russell’s works. (Soutor may agree, p. 59.) There are many different uses to be concerned about. It may be used to speak of properties (and relation in intension), to speak of open *wffs*, to speak of letters used schematically for open *wffs* of the object language, to speak of bindable predicate variables of the formal object-language. Because of this, I think, it quite wise for interpretations to avoid the use of the phrase “propositional function” altogether. Happily, Soutor is sensitive to this concern, though he does at times use the phrase. Quine published his “Russell’s Ontological Development” in 1966 (*The Journal of Philosophy* 63 pp. 657-667). He wrote his paper “Whitehead and the Rise of Modern Logic” in 1942 (published in the Schilpp vol. on Whitehead and in *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 7, pp. 100-101) These works quickly became the canonical interpretations. Quite a lot has changed in Russell scholarship since Quine wrote. I have been a strong advocate for many objections to Quine’s interpretation and the “orthodoxy” that fused his account with that of Carnap and Church who regard *Principia Mathematica* as embracing ramified types, an unacceptable *ad hoc* axiom of reducibility, and a failed logicism unable to recover the mathematical necessity of an infinity of natural numbers.

I doubt one can say that there is a consensus among Russell scholars about the proper interpretation of Whitehead and Russell on the many points involved. Soutor’s dissertation wisely remains neutral on such matters, and does not engage with these questions of simple types vs ramified types. Instead, it picks up just one central thread (namely, the ontological status of logically impossible objects) and defends just that aspect of Quine’s interpretation. The implications of Soutor’s view are, however, certainly not thereby limited. The lessons Soutor draws for understanding the changes in ontology needed to accommodate the 1905 theory of descriptions are quite sweeping and important.

Soutor very importantly avoids falling into the dangers of accepting Russell’s views in philosophical logic as wholly archaic. Soutor understands that a balance must be reached in doing history properly. The case in mathematical logic is different from other cases precisely because, in many instances, we now know that right answers. We know (thanks to Tarski) how to do formal semantics for free and bound variables of a formal language for logic. We can therefore judge the extent to which Russell was, or was not, on the right track. The historical figure may or may not be confused. Charity requires that one approach historical interpretation of such matters with the assumption that the figure is endeavoring to be on the right track and that it is likely only just the figure’s expressions of that right track are what is archaic. It makes very bad history to ontologize on the basis of the archaic expressions so that that the historical figure has no chance of being on the right track at all! Sadly, this often happens in Russell studies. I think Soutor understands this concern very well. He tries to strike a balance. It is not the balance I would strike. But I am frequently accused of anachronism. I *never* ontologize Russell’s views so that they are archaic, but search instead for a deeper understanding which respects Russell’s genius so much that we find that he was grappling to be on the right track. Soutor offers a different balance from mine, but it is one that can be respected.

In doing history one must be careful not to fall into the mistake that I think often pervades Russell scholarship—namely, attempting to “fix” Russell’s based on an impression of the archaic ontological trajectory one imagines him to have been on. That is a mistake that pervades Hylton’s (1980) work. Having noted that there is a puzzle of what on the 1905 theory Russell thought were the ontological constituents of general propositions, Hylton invokes the entities he (Hylton) calls “propositional functions”. He imagines that

the best explanation is that Russell thought that general propositions contain as constituents ontological analogs of variables. Archaic as it is, Hylton thinks that there is no other ontological choice left to Russell. What Hylton misses, of course, is that the correct answer to the question may well simply be that Russell had *no* answer at the time at all. Indeed, I dare say that we know that he had no answer! In 1906 he all but admitted it, and abandoned his ontology of general propositions altogether.

We mustn't solve puzzles for Russell by appealing to archaic (and perhaps unintelligible) notions like Hylton's "propositional functions" which are supposedly entities containing variables as ontological constituents (whatever that is supposed to mean). Hylton (1980) gives-in to the dangers and renders interpretations that present ontological views that, by modern lights, are simply unintelligible. Soutor is sensitive to the dangers. He does at times seem like he is about to give-in (p. 119). He speaks as though he might hold (with Hylton) that according to the 1905 theory of definite descriptions, there is an entity – a function containing ontologically a variable (whatever that means) which is a constituent of the proposition named by nominalizing a general *wff*. But I should think that Soutor would want to reject such a view on this matter for he says (p. 120) "putting aside the issue of what the function ... for the Russell of this period or that period is, or what it stands for, we can see how the Theory of Definite Descriptions avoids ... the related Meinongianism." Soutor is clearly not endorsing Hylton's views on the constituents of Russell's general propositions in 1905, and he clearly has significant disagreements with Hylton concerning the origin and ontological implications of the 1905 theory. Indeed, Soutor offers several arguments that reject Hylton's objections to Quine concerning Russell's pre-1904 Meinongianism.

In *Principia*, this is illicit and " $p \supset q$ " is a *wff* only when " p " and " q " are *wffs*. Thus it is nice to use a different sign for PoM. I use " $x \supset y$ " to emphasize that " \supset " is a relation sign and it can be flanked by genuine singular terms (variables) to form a *wff*. Hence, I use nominalizing brackets to transform a *wff* such as " $x = x$ " into an open name " $\{x=x\}$ " which, once the free variable (the letter) " x " is assigned an entity in the domain of the interpretation of the object-language, would name a proposition.

(Nom PoM):

S is a *wff* of (the formal language) of PoM iff " $\{S\}$ " is a proper name in PoM.

Note that the grammar afforded by (Nom PoM) differs from the 1906 version in Russell's paper "On 'Insolubilia' and Their Solution by Symbolic Logic" where we find:

(Nom InS)

S is a quantifier-free *wff* of (the formal language) of InS iff " $\{S\}$ " is a proper name in InS.

In InS there are plenty of general *wffs*, but there are no general propositions. The fact that Russell later accepted (Nom InS) reveals that he understood well enough (likely also in PoM) that one can use a *wff* without being *thereby* ontologically committed to the existence of a proposition. The ontological commitment comes, not in the use of the *wff*, but in the *wff*'s occurring as a subordinate clause in a subject position in a relation or property expression. (Soutor seems to agree p. 132). We can drop the nominalizing brackets for convenience (as Russell does) when a *wff* occurs in a subordinate position of a relation sign. But note that in 1906, Russell retains general *wffs* and he defines subordinate occurrences of bound variables in *wffs* by appeal to *wffs* in which they are initially placed. Thus, for example:

$$(x)(x=x) \supset y =df (\exists x)(\{x=x\} \supset y).$$

This can only make sense if one can use general *wffs* without thereby being committed to an ontology of general propositions. In PoM through 1905, every *wff* can be nominalized to form a singular term and so Russell allows the *wff*,

$$\{(x)(x=x)\} \supset y.$$

But this is not a *wff* in 1906, because on that view one cannot nominalize any general *wff*. Instead, there is the above definition. (Unfortunately, Hylton and many others have missed this point. I see no good reason to think Russell didn't understand this in PoM)

*Now I don't wish to suggest that Soutor must solve the puzzle of what, in 1905, are the ontological constituents of general propositions—(in particular, those propositions named by nominalizing *wffs* of Peano's formal implications). But I would note that since in 1905 the theory of denoting concepts has been abandoned, it is clear that Russell has abandoned the answer to the puzzle that he gave in PoM. The answer in PoM, as Soutor knows well and discusses at length, is that such propositions contain denoting concepts. Soutor cannot, therefore, very well say that the 1905 theory has resolved the ontological problem. To be sure, the 1905 theory has avoided having to have kinds of occurrences *as concept* in propositions that generate the scopes for denoting concepts. But in abandoning denoting concepts it has taken on what seems to be a worse ontological problem --- until 1906 when Russell abandons general propositions. So perhaps Soutor would like to slightly revise the praise he heaps on the 1905 theory and reserve that for the 1906 no-general propositions theory.

*One very nice question Soutor raises (p. 69) is whether Russell's appeal to the primitive property 'is true' and/or the property 'is false' can be eliminated from the account of what are the constituents of propositions named by nominalizations of Peano's *wffs* of formal implication. Notice that Soutor (p. 62) notwithstanding, nothing whatsoever in the PoM account should be regarded as a case where "Russell envisages variables to be denoting phrases of a sort." I think perhaps Soutor didn't mean to say that. The letter "x" that is a bindable variable is in the *wff* only. Russell's point is that in the proposition named by nominalizing a *wff* "(x)(Fx)" one can loosely imagine that the use of the variable "x" of the *wff* gets captured by the use of the occurrence of 'any term'. But that by no means should be described as ontologizing variables or making them into denoting phrases of a sort. Consider the proposition named by nominalizing "(x)(Fx \supset Gx)". It is this

'Every term resulting from substituting any term for *a* in {Fa \supset Ga} is true.'

It certainly would not work (as PoM explicitly notes) to try to appeal to

'any term's being F implies any term's being G'

It won't work because the first occurrence as concept of 'any term' might pick out something other than the second occurrence as concept of 'any term' (PoM, p. 92). The PoM account does not in any way imagine that there is some ontological notion of a "variable". That view, perhaps original with Hylton, is unintelligible. It would be wise for Soutor to state more clearly his position on it

The question, recall, is whether the primitive predicates 'is true' and/or 'is false' can be avoided in the PoM account of the ontological constituents of the propositions named by nominalizations of the general *wffs* of Peano's formal implication. Take a simple case:

$$\{(x)(Fx)\}$$

What are the constituents of the proposition? The PoM answer:

{Every term resulting from substituting any term for *a* in {Fa} is true}

This proposition contains the denoting concepts 'every term' and 'any term' and also the primitive property 'is true'. The question is whether Russell can eliminate the appeal to the property 'is true'?

Russell's use of denoting concepts to answer the question appeals to primitive properties of 'truth' (or 'falsehood'). If one *cannot* eliminate 'is true' or 'is false' then this would mark a significant difference from the 1905 theory which does not require occurrences of "is true" or "is false" in the object-language. Now Soutor (p. 69) correctly observes that in Russell's substitutional theory, which uses the new 1905 theory of descriptions, we find *wffs* such as:

$$(x)(\exists q)(\{Fa\}/a; x !q .\&. q).$$

Unfortunately, Soutor infelicitously put the brackets of the above in the wrong place, writing (p. 69):

$$(x)(\exists q)(\{Fa\}/a; x !q) .\&. q.$$

That mistake snowballs. Soutor goes on (p 70) to replace the & using the definition

$$p \& q =df \sim(p \supset \sim q)$$

$$\sim p =df_{1906} (r)(p \supset r)$$

Putting these together we get:

$$p \& q =df (r)(p .\supset. q \supset r : \supset: r)$$

Thus, Soutor winds up with this:

$$(r)((x)(\exists q)(\{Fa\}/a; x !q) \supset (q \supset r) \supset r)$$

The correct replacement, however, should be this:

$$(x)(\exists q)((r)(\{Fa\}/a; x !q .\supset. q \supset r : \supset: r))$$

Note further that this uses a definition of "~" of 1905/1906 change to the logic of PoM, where all the many clauses "x ⊃ x" to say "x is a proposition" have been dropped. In PoM, negation is this:

$$\sim p =df_{PoM} (r)(r \supset r .\supset. p \supset r)$$

$$\text{i.e. } \sim \alpha =df (y)(y \supset y .\supset. \alpha \supset y).$$

So the right *wff* needed for PoM is this:

$$(x)(\exists q)((r)(r \supset r .\supset. (\{Fa\}/a; x !q .\supset. q \supset r : \supset: r)))$$

In any case, Soutor very nicely notices that Russell cannot appeal in PoM to the definition of negation and use double negation. It is itself a formal implication and thus itself would have to be treated by the theory of denoting concepts.

*Be this as it may, Soutor's investigation of this matter concludes that PoM, just as Russell's 1905 theory, does *not* need to appeal to object language predicates "is true" or "is false". That is a nice result. But I have a worry. Soutor's attempt at a solution (p. 70) is based on his misplacement of brackets. That is, his approach has a false appearance of working only because the misplaced brackets made it seem sufficient to capture:

$$(r)((x)(\exists q)(\{Fa\}/a; x !q) \supset (q \supset r) \supset r).$$

But that is not what needs to be captured. Russell needs to capture:

$$(x)(\exists q)(\{Fa\}/a; x !q .\&. q).$$

So Soutor has arrived at the conclusion without justification. Perhaps the following would help:

{Every term substituted for a in $\{Fa\}$ yields a term and that term's implying every term implies every term.

Is this allowed? It would require a denoting concept 'that term'. Now Russell doesn't mention such a denoting concept in PoM. Oddly Soutor does allow 'your father' as a denoting concept (p. 57). Hence it would seem that Soutor allows 'that term' to count as a legitimate denoting concept and could use it to help Russell's case. That raises the new question of whether and when anaphora can be allowed. Perhaps on Russell's behalf one can allow such anaphora, but only if the anaphoric reference is contained within a stand-alone denoting concept explicitly accepted in PoM. This would legitimate the above as a solution.

*On p. 6 Soutor seems to praise Frege's approach to the ontology of quantification, even likening Russell's 1905 quantification theory to it. But Frege's ontology of functions in logic is very foreign to modern quantification theory and its semantics. I think the appeal to Frege would be wise to remove from the dissertation. It plays no role in any of Soutor's arguments and it entirely forgets Frege orientation to a mathematical ontology of functions—an orientation that Russell is committed to abandoning in PoM and also after. Frege's orientation to functions (in the mathematical sense) makes Russell's theory of definite descriptions entirely impossible. The theory of definite descriptions, once Russell abandons his ontology of propositions, enable him to hold that there are no terms in pure logic besides variables. That is quite impossible for Frege who has only terms and no *wffs* until one puts a turnstile \vdash on a term. (This point about Frege is often missed because followers of Dummett engage in the confusion that Frege took sleighted the distinction between terms and *wffs*). For Frege the following is a term:

$$\vdash \cup \vdash \cup \Omega y = (y=x)$$

It names a second level function which takes a level function $f\xi$ to the True or the False. The *wff* is:

$$\vdash \cup \vdash \cup f y = (y=x).$$

Perhaps it is best to leave Frege out of the story.

***The central question of concern for Soutor's dissertation turns on the question of what was Russell's theory (1901-1904) theory of denoting concepts and whether it is viable. He has established that PoM depends on it being viable. Can the PoM theory of denoting phrases, paired with the theory of proper names, evade ontological commitment (i.e., the Being and/or existence) of e.g., the null class as one, the round square, etc., while embracing ontological commitment to Apollo, The Chimera, Pegasus, etc). The popular view today is that it can. Soutor dissents.

Quoting passages of PoM, it is clear that (p. 73) Russell *denies* that the denoting concept 'all chimera' denotes anything. At the same time, it is clear that he thinks that 'a chimera' denotes, for he writes (PoM p., 43):

A man, a moment, a number, a class, a relation, a chimera or anything else that can be mentioned is sure to be a term. ; and to deny that such and such a thing is a term must always be false.

How can this make sense? How can these passages be reconciled? Cocchiarella (1984) reconciliation imagines that Russell meant to say that the denoting concept 'all chimera' does not denote anything, but that the denoting concept 'all merely possible (i.e. non-existing) chimera' *does* denote non-existing beings—including The Chimera. ("The Chimera," since it is a genuine proper name, refers to an entity that has Being but does not exist.) Though Soutor doesn't mention Cocchiarella's view, I imagine that he would hold that Cocchiarella's explanation is too thinly supported by the PoM text – even though Russell does have the Being vs Existence distinction.

So I agree with Soutor that Russell was just outright inconsistent in the “chimera” passages. Be this as it may, is Soutor correct that this undermines PoM? There is a simple gloss that Soutor doesn’t discuss. It may be that Russell forgot that the case of “all chimera” is not a proper example of what he is trying to say. He shouldn’t have said that ‘all Chimera’ doesn’t denote anything. Thus, Soutor is quite correct that Russell is committed in PoM to holding that ‘all Chhimera’ denotes, but Soutor offers the wrong diagnosis of why. The reason why is that there is a proper name from Greek mythology that is “The Chimera”. Genuine proper names must refer. So Russell is guilty merely of a *faux pas*. It is really just a minor mistake. A proper example of Russell’s point is made when he mentions “the null class as one”. Thus, the denoting concept ‘all null classes as one’ doesn’t denote anything. That is because there is no proper name involved, and PoM is crystal clear (it seems to me) in saying that the null class does not have Being. There is no conflict there with the fundamental principle articulated at PoM p. 449, where we find:

‘A is not’ must either be false or meaningless.

There is no conflict because the letter “A” in the passage stands in only for a genuine proper name. Denoting phrases are not allowed in instances. Hence, “The Chimera is not” is either false or meaningless. As noted, that is because “The Chimera” is a genuine proper name according to PoM. This result holds whether “... is not” is intended in the principle to mean “.. does not exist” or is intended to mean “... has no Being”. Now I should hasten to note that in 1904 (“On the Existential Import of Propositions”) “The Chimera” would no longer be regarded as a genuine proper name. Russell is explicit about “Apollo” so he would surely say that same of “The Chimera.” Such apparent names, Russell says, are really disguised definite descriptions, which are denoting phrases. We thus have a very straightforward solution to the puzzle over Russell’s “a chimera” case. This ought to be mentioned in Soutor’s discussion.

In fact, the above simple solution (that Russell made a minor *faux pas*) is so natural (given what we know about the pastiche that was the meld of PoM) that it is hard to resist. The point Russell intends to make (PoM, p. 74) still stands. His example was just infelicitous. A good example would be, e.g., “all null classes as one are without members.” Russell’s point is that in Peano’s formal implication notation, this would say:

x ’s being a null class as one implies x ’s being without members, for all x .

This is trivially true since there is no null class as one.

So all is well—provided that Russell can use his theory of denoting concepts to explain the ontological constituents of those propositions named by nominalizations of Peano’s notations of formal implication. This is a very substantive role that the theory of denoting concepts plays in PoM. And it is one which Soutor was rightly very concerned about.

One can, therefore, agree with Soutor that the passages of PoM (pp, 43, 73, 449) are incompatible. But we also have a simple explanation which does not harm to any of Russell’s points. Thus that part of Russell’s melding of old and new views, is not a significant problem to solve. The case of the denoting concept ‘the null class’ is the key question, not the case of ‘all chimera’.

Soutor seems to realize this because he engages in a lengthy discussion of the case of the denoting concept ‘the null class as one’ hoping to convince readers that Russell, in spite of appearances, *was* committed to the Being (though not the existence) of the null class as one! Such an entity, although it would only have Being, would be logically impossible (given the extensional view of classes as one, it would both have and not have members) and thus bring down the entire house of cards. Soutor is right to draw this conclusion. But to my mind he hasn’t established the result that Russell’s use of denoting concepts cannot enable the truth that there is no null class as one.

*Charity of interpretation seems on the side of the view that Russell thinks ‘the null class as one’ does not denote. Russell thinks that one must (in emulating a theory of classes as one) find a proxy. Soutor correctly reports (p. 100) that he was never satisfied with his treatment of the null class as one. But Soutor seems to

lose sight of the fact that Russell was after finding a proxy. (See PoM Appendix A). The *proxy* is not the null class as one! It is rather that Russell thinks there is a proxy (which does exist/have being) that plays the role the null class as one plays in the emulation of a theory of classes as one. I fear that Soutor might have forgotten Russell's plan was to *emulate* a theory of classes as one by his theory of denoting concepts (which forms what he calls his theory of *classes as many*, i.e., his theory that a certain denoting concepts give all we would want when we say, e.g., that "Socrates is one among men." Here "men" is not committing us to a class as one. Russell can put "Socrates is a man" the denoting concept 'a man' and this does justice to the so-called class as many. But in "the class of men is a member of the class of subsets of the class of animals", we have a problem. Here it seems that we are committed to there being one entity that is the class whose members are all and only men. The theory of classes as one has to be emulated, Russell thinks, and thereby he can avoid any commitment to classes as one. There is nothing "dubious" (as Soutor) puts it (p. 7) about what Russell is up to concerning the class as one vs the class as many—once it is understood. He was simply trying to evade an ontology of entities that are classes as one by using his theory of denoting.

The need for a proxy for the singleton class as one and the null-class as one arises because the theory of classes as one is a theory of classes as wholly extensional entities (defined in terms of membership). This extensional view would force the identification of a singleton class with its single member and force there to be no null class (as one). Russell puts the later point saying that there is no null class as one (PoM, p. 75); there is only null class concepts. PoM (section 74, Appendix A, p. 513-17) is clear on this point: any emulation of classes as one (classes as genuine entities, individuals, terms) must find a way around this. Russell hoped to do this by a theory of *substitution* coupled with his theory of denoting concepts.

Soutor is quite right that PoM stands or falls with its theory of denoting concepts which played a great many roles in the various constructions of the work. He is quite right, as well, that the ontological transformation brought about by the 1905 theory of definite descriptions (which abandons denoting concepts altogether) is quite dramatic (even though both theories retain the ontology of general propositions).

Let us now turn to some details of Soutor argument in favor of Quine and against the ability of denoting concepts to evade a very damaging Meinongianism (which would commit him to impossible objects).

*Soutor (p. 115; section 5.4.) has following principle

(IR) Every sentence is meaningful *iff* there is an x such that one can use that sentence to make a statement about that x (i.e., one can use that sentence to assert something of x or deny something of x).

There is an ambiguity in the English concerning the scope of the quantifier "every" here; we don't want the left side of the "*iff*" to be the end of the scope of the quantifier. I think Soutor means to accept the schema:

⌈S⌋ is meaningful *iff* there is at least one x such that one can use ⌈S⌋ to make a statement about x .

The schema holds for all declarative statements S . But even with this clarification, (IR) requires modification. The relevant notion for PoM is that of logical aboutness, not psychological aboutness, which Soutor would agree is not germane to Russell's work. So it seems best to put:

*(IR) ⌈S⌋ is meaningful *iff* there $(\exists y)$ (the proposition 'A does not exist' is logically about y).

Note that Soutor's *(IR) would yield:

If "A does not exist" is meaningful, then $(\exists y)$ (the proposition 'A does not exist' is logically about y).

In the end, the Soutor's *(IR), by itself sheds no light on PoM, p. 449 where we find:

'A is not is either false or meaningless'.

Let's take the following case:

“The null class as one does not exist” is meaningful *iff* $(\exists y)$ (the proposition ‘the null class does not exist’ is logically about x).

Russell denies explicitly that there is a null-class as one. Hence either he rejects Soutor’s (IR) or we have to find some other object for the proposition to be logically about. That is all too easy to do. We can take the proposition to be:

‘the null class as one exists’ implies every proposition.

This proposition is about the proposition ‘the null class as one exists’ and thus all is well. Soutor (IR) is preserved. But it does not have the import that Soutor would like it to have.

Nonetheless, there remains a good puzzle: What is a proposition logically about when it has a denoting concept in *primary scope* that does not denote anything? That is a very old and time honored question. In the case of “the null class as one does not exist”, the denoting concept ‘the null class as one’ doesn’t have a primary scope. All is well. But if we keep Soutor’s *(IR) it would seem that Russell has to deny that there are any propositions in which such a denoting concept (that doesn’t denoting) occurs in a primary scope. But now what to say about the proposition ‘the null class as one exists’? It is here that Soutor’s concern seems valid. Now ‘existence’ is a primitive property in PoM, so it would seem that Russell is caught.

But perhaps Russell still has a way out. He can maintain that in the proposition ‘the null class as one exists’ we don’t have the property ‘existence’ at all. Instead, we have the notion of “membership”.

‘something is a member of the null class as one’

In this proposition the denoting concept ‘the null class as one’ has a secondary scope. So all is well. Russell can hold, it would seem, that there is no proposition in which the primitive property ‘existence’ occurs with a primary scope of the denoting concept ‘the null class as one’.

*The key is that denoting concepts have scope. Russell has to establish that denoting concepts have scope. Soutor is right to point out that it is far from easy for Russell to explain the scope when it comes to denoting concepts. Russell tries to explain scope of denoting concepts by appeal (I think heuristic in nature) to “variable disjunctions” and “variable conjunctions” and so forth. These are vestiges (according to Geach *Reference and Generality*) of the medieval doctrine of “*suppositio*”. Geach concludes that it is a quagmire and just doesn’t work. Soutor makes the same conclusion independently of Geach, but on grounds that Russell cannot formally embrace any genuine entities that are variable conjunctions, variable disjunctions etc. He is quite right about that. But if such an appeal was, at the time of the melded PoM, meant only as a heuristic, Russell needn’t embrace such entities. The key question, then, is simply whether denoting concepts have scope. If so, their different scopes would have to come from a theory of the *ontological kinds of occurrences* of denoting concepts in propositions. The jury is out. Admittedly, Russell himself may well have abandoned denoting concepts precisely because he couldn’t make ontological sense of the need kinds of occurrences required for the needed scope distinctions—whereas the new 1905 theory of descriptions makes the issue of scope quite easy (especially when, in 1906, Russell abandoned general propositions). That is a very important difference indeed.

Now Soutor’s (IR), or better *(IR), is only the beginning of his argument in favor of Quine and against those defending the theory of denoting concepts as something Russell thought was a viable way to avoid impossible objects. In section 5.5 (p. 117) Soutor introduces his “master argument”. Unfortunately, it doesn’t work. Consider his first premise:

- (1) If ‘A does not exist’ is meaningful, then $(\exists y)$ (we deny the existence of y if we assert ‘A does not exist’)

This is said (p. 117) to be “an instance of (IR)” but strictly speaking it is not. Note that Soutor’s (1) is logically equivalent to:

* (1) If ‘A does not exist’ is meaningful, then
If we assert ‘A does not exist’ ($\exists y$) (we deny the existence of y).

Now with the second premise (2) that ‘A does not exist’ is meaningful, we get:

* (3) If we assert ‘A does not exist,’ then ($\exists y$) (we deny the existence of y).

Nothing here tells us anything about whether one has to have a proper name in the place of “A” above. Nothing in (IR) or better *(IR) assures this either.

To advance farther, Soutor offers the following as a fundamental principle that he thinks Russell PoM accepted:

(4) (y) ([we deny the existence of y if we assert ‘A does not exist’] iff $y = A$).

There is a difficulty here. The left hand side of the *iff* is true if we don’t assert ‘A does not exist’. Hence, it follows from (4) that

(y) (if we don’t assert ‘A does not exist’ then $y = A$).

That is clearly false. Thus the rest of Soutor’s argument collapses. I don’t see how to correct (4).

I suppose Soutor might imagine adopting the following principle:

If ‘A does not exist’ is meaningful and true, then ($\exists y$) ($A = y$).

But this is worse, not better, than what is on PoM p. 449. It is worse because the clause “($\exists y$) ($A = y$)” is in Peano’s formal implication notation (modified by “ \exists ”) and PoM gives an analysis of the proposition named by its nominalization by employing the theory of denoting concepts. It names this:

‘Some term is such that some proposition resulting from substituting it for a in ‘ $A = a$ ’ is true.

This in no way helps to resolve the question of whether Russell allows “A” on PoM, p. 449 to stand in for denoting phrases as well as for proper names.

Soutor’s version of his (IR) argument (p. 128) fares no better when “does not have being” is replaced for “does not exist”. I don’t see a way to fix it.

**The upshot is that the proper interpretation of PoM p. 449 is unresolved and Quine’s interpretation has by no means been established by Soutor’s appeal to (IR) or *(IR). It was a good try and it is valuable in many ways nonetheless. It revealed to us that Russell is committed to denying that there is a proposition named by nominalizing “the null class as one exists” where the “...exists” is meaning the property ‘existence’.

Now consider the case:

‘The round square does not exist’ is either false or meaningless

Soutor has not established that this is a proper instance of PoM p. 449. But what Soutor has revealed is that Russell has to deny that there is a proposition named by nominalizing the “the round square exists” where “exists” is meant to refer to the property ‘existing’. That is quite striking. In contrast, Russell can embrace the following proposition:

‘the class as one of *round squares* does not have members’.

One might interpret it as having a secondary scope, so that we have:

'the class as one of *round squares* has members' implies every proposition.

This then accords with *(IR) because it is about the proposition 'the class as one of *round squares* has members'. The denoting concept does not have a primary scope. And as before, this proposition does not contain the primitive property 'exists'. So once again, all is well for the anti-Quinean interpretation. But there is a cost. Russell must deny the being of certain propositions.

If this interpretation is correct, then Soutor has made major discovery. It is that given the plausibility of *(IR), and given that the anti-Quine position is correct, then Russell is committed to the thesis that there is no proposition 'the round square exists' containing the denoting concept 'the round square' and the property 'exists'. That is wonderfully new and moves Russell scholarship forward. Though the research conclusion he was hoping to establish (namely the vindication of Quine) was not established by his argument from his (IR) or better *(IR). This result is worth publishing.

*Next let us examine Soutor's argument (p 134) that PoM's theory "of propositions (and their unity) renders every proposition true". He adopts the following:

(PD) s iff there is such a thing as $\langle s \rangle$.

Soutor uses $\langle s \rangle$ to mean a nominalization of the sentence (*wff*) within the brackets. For the sake of clarity, I have used "{S}" to form a genuine proper name from the *wff* S. (The notion of "nominalizing" naturally indicated the formation of genuine proper name, not a denoting phrase. But Soutor does not use the word "nominalize" in that way. He allows as well that "nominalizing" can form a denoting phrase and this will play a role in his argument.)

*First and foremost (PD) is very questionable as a characterization of Russell's view in PoM. The proper characterization is one of grammatical nominalization and can be put schematically as follows:

(Nom PoM):

S is a *wff* of (the formal language) of PoM iff "{S}" is a proper name in PoM.

It is this, and not (PD), that is as Soutor puts it, a "brute linguistic fact" (p. 133).

Now the "brute linguistic fact" that is an instance of (Nom PoM) is:

" a differs from b " is a *wff* of PoM iff "{ a differs from b }" is a proper name in PoM.

This is quite innocuous. Unfortunately, in thinking the brute linguistic fact of nominalization is (PD), Soutor *mistakenly* concludes that the following is an instance:

(PD)d a differs from b iff there is such a thing as the difference between a and b .

Obviously (PD)d is not an instance of (Nom PoM). But (PD)d is interesting and worth evaluating anyway. Note first that Soutor takes

"the difference between a and b "

to count as a nominalization of the *wff* " a differs from b ". I wouldn't count that as a nominalization at all. PoM is less than clear about this matter. Soutor realizes this (p. 133) noting that subordinate propositional clauses are called "propositional concepts" in PoM. But are subordinate propositional clauses denoting

expressions or are they proper names? I think the grammatical rule (Nom PoM) requires nominalization to produce a genuine proper name. This by no means precludes the formation of denoting phrases that purport to denote propositions.

Soutor opens the nice question of how one expresses the nominalization of a *wff* in English, and what counts. I would say that the nominalization in English of “*a* is different from *b*” is this:

“*a*’s being different from *b*”.

Soutor allows “nominalization” to form denoting phrases and imagines a grammatical transformation rule quite different from (Nom PoM). That is worrisome. Even if a given denoting phrase is assured logically to denote, the question before us is whether in PoM, the nature and status of denoting phrases is different the status genuine proper names. The important point he has uncovered, it seems to me, is just that in PoM nominalization must always generate a *genuine proper name*, not a denoting phrase-- even if we are confident that the denoting phrase denotes.

Now I understand that Soutor wants to challenge the view that they proper names and denoting phrases have a different status in PoM, but that only makes it more worrisome that his argument for their sameness of status assumes a grammatical rule allowing nominalization to generate denoting phrases as well as genuine proper names. It must be remembered that the logical form of the following are different

‘the proposition $\{a \text{ differs from } b\} \supset y$ ’

‘ $\{a \text{ differs from } b\} \supset y$ ’.

The first proposition contains the denoting concept ‘the proposition $\{a \text{ differs from } b\}$ ’ *as concept*. The second proposition contains the proposition $\{a \text{ differs from } b\}$ *as term*. The point is the same with ‘the most famous teacher of Plato is human’
‘Socrates is human’

The first proposition contains the denoting concept ‘the most famous teacher of Plato’ *as concept*. The second proposition contains Socrates *as term*. They don’t have the same logical form. Hence, I would say that the grammatical rule of (Nom PoM) has to generate genuine proper names and not denoting phrases. The linguistic convention for PoM is that when a *wff* *S* occurs as a subordinate clause in the position of “*x*” in the *wff* “ $x \supset y$ ”, a nominalization (forming a *genuine proper name*) has occurs to render “ $\{S\} \supset y$ ”.

Nevertheless, (PD)d is interesting and it is nice the Soutor demanded that it be evaluated! So let’s take up that challenge. The first thing to realize is that (PD)d suffers from *ambiguity*. Consider:
a differs from *b* *iff* there is thing as the property differentiating *a* from *b*.

I don’t think Soutor is interested in this disambiguation. Fair enough. But note that it has a chance of being logically true (given Leibniz’s law of the identity of indiscernibles could be regarded as logically true and “*a* differs from *b*” is read as “ $a \neq b$ ”). Compare:

a differs from *b* *iff* there is such a thing as the proposition $\{a \text{ differs from } b\}$.

The above can be false. The right side of the “*iff*” is logically true given (Nom PoM) while the left side is contingent. Compare:

$\{a \text{ differs from } b\}$ implies and is implied by $\{ \text{there is such a thing as } \{a \text{ differs from } b\} \}$.

This can be false. The right hand side is logically true proposition. The left hand side is a contingent proposition. I fear that there is no telling evidence for Soutor’s accepting (PD) or (PD)d, but they are interesting anyway. The situation Soutor has raises is very important. It thrusts to the fore the problem that Russell had to face: what is the logical form of ‘the $F \supset y$ ’ where the denoting concept ‘the *F*’ occurs as

concept? There is no proposition ‘{the F} \supset y’ and the proposition ‘‘the F’ \supset y’ is about the denoting concept ‘the F’.

Next let us consider the following

The true proposition ‘*a* differs from *b*’

The proposition ‘*a* differs from *b*’

Consider the following:

The true proposition {*a* differs from *b*} implies and is implied by {*a* differs from *b*}.

Note that in this case we have a proposition in which (on the left side) a denoting concept occurs *as concept*. This is false if {*a* differs from *b*} is false. For in that case the denoting concept ‘the true proposition {*a* differs from *b*}’ does not denote anything. Compare:

The proposition {*a* differs from *b*} implies and is implied by {*a* differs from *b*}

Here again in this proposition we have a denoting concept occurring *as concept* on the left side. This is obviously logically true, but it works out only because it is logically true that the denoting concept ‘the proposition {*a* differs from *b*}’ necessarily cannot fail to denote and because of (Nom PoM) the genuine proper name “{*a* differs from *b*}” logically cannot fail to name.

As we see, Soutor is mistaken in thinking that PoM’s theory of denoting concepts has the dark consequence that every proposition is true. It was a good try! Very interesting things have emerged. In particular, we now see that the following two distinct propositions do not have the same import:

{*a* differs from *b*} \supset y.

the true proposition {*a* differs from *b*} \supset y

Note that the first proposition has the logical form $x \supset y$, while the latter does not. Russell doesn’t know what the logical form of the latter is. That is quite important and Soutor may want to use his concerns over nominalization to emphasize that. It is rarely noticed in the literature. In the second proposition (above) the denoting concept ‘the true proposition {*a* differs from *b*}’ occurs as concept. It doesn’t denote anything if the proposition {*a* differs from *b*} is false. Thus the above do not have the same import. The important point, which is salvageable from Soutor’s argument, is that the denoting concept

‘The true proposition {*a* differs from *b*}’

Does *not* merely purport to denote the proposition {*a* differs from *b*}. That is because it does not denote anything unless the proposition {*a* differs from *b*} is true. The difference is quite important and Soutor should be praised for flushing it to the fore.

** This returns us to the question of Bradley’s regress argument concerning the alleged problem of the unity of a proposition as addressed in PoM. It is very important to realize that the following is ambiguous:

‘difference’ relates *a* to *b*

This may mean to say:

‘difference’ unifies (occurs *as concept* in a proposition whose only other constituents are) *a*, *b*

But it might mean to say:

a and *b* exemplify (have, stand in, are related by) the relation ‘difference’

The second requires the proposition ‘*a* differs from *b*’ to be true. The first does not. Indeed, the first can be true and the second quite false. That is because there are false propositions unified by the relation ‘difference’

occurring *as concept*. To be unified by a relation is not for the relation to be exemplified. Soutor runs these two notions together (p. 36). Such an occurrence *as concept* by no means makes the proposition true. Consider the following

‘ ‘difference’ occurs *as concept* in a proposition whose only other constituents are *a* and *b*’
implies ‘*a* differs from *b*’.

The antecedent is logically true. The consequent may be a false proposition. Hence the implication may be false. Observe, in contrast, the following

‘ ‘difference’ occurs *as concept* in a true proposition whose only other constituents are *a* and *b*’
implies ‘*a* differs from *b*’.

Now if ‘*a* differs from *b*’ is a false proposition, then the antecedent must also be false. Hence the above is logically true. I fear that Soutor has misunderstood this.

According to Russell, the following are distinct propositions that are nonetheless logically equivalent:

‘*a* differs from *b*’
‘ ‘difference’ unifies (occurs *as concept* in a proposition whose only other constituents are) *a* and *b*’

Again, to unify is to occur *as concept*. It by no means make the proposition so unified into something that is true. Interestingly, logical equivalence is, for Russell, an external relation. That is because he holds that all relations are external relations. In this case, it means that the propositions both exist (or if you wish, have Being) independently of standing in the relation of logical equivalence, even though it is logically necessary that they do stand in the relation. I don’t think Bradley comprehended this. I think Soutor (p. 34) would agree. (Soutor rightly points out that Russell cannot express its being an external relation by saying that the one proposition is able to exist independently of the other’s existence.) In any case, the independence of the Being (existence) of these distinct propositions (required by Russell’s doctrine of external relations) reveals that Soutor’s interpretation would be misguided if he is saying that the unity of the proposition ‘*a* differs from *b*’ is *dependent ontologically* on the existence and truth of the proposition ‘difference’ is exemplified by *a* and *b*.’ It might be nice to understand better his view on this “dependence”. I disagree with Soutor (p. 42) if he is suggesting that Bradley’s important concern against Russell is that ‘relatingness’ cannot be responsible for the relating of ‘difference’ in the proposition {*a* differs from *b*}. I disagree because I do not think that Russell held that ‘relatingness’ is responsible in the first place.

From Russell’s perspective, the Bradley regress argument is just an outright equivocation between “relating” in the sense of *occurring as concept* and “relating” in the sense of *exemplifying*. In Russell’s view ‘difference’ occurs *as concept* in the proposition {*a* differs from *b*}. The relation ‘difference’ has a two-fold nature that is primitive and unanalyzable. It can occur as concept (unifying) and it can also *occur as term*. It is such an occurrence *as concept* that is all there is to be said about its ground of unity of the proposition {*a* differs from *b*}. Now there is a distinct proposition, {‘difference’ relates (occurs *as concept* unifying) *a* and *b*}. In this proposition, which (contrary to Soutor p. 47) is not just materially, but logically, equivalent to the proposition {*a* differs from *b*}, the relation ‘difference’ occurs as term. The relation ‘relatingness’ occurs *as concept* and this occurrence *as concept* is all that there is to be said about its ground of unity.

If the proposition {*a* differs from *b*} is false, then ‘difference’ is not exemplified by *a* and *b*. All the same ‘difference’ does *occur as concept* in this false proposition. Russell’s point is just this simple. I see no reason say, as Soutor puts it (p. 42) that “It is very probable that Russell did not understand Bradley’s regress properly”.

Soutor wonders (p. 42) what Russell's reason for thinking that the proposition {'difference' is relating *a* and *b*} is materially equivalent to {*a* differs from *b*}. Note that " 'difference' is relating *a* and *b*" is ambiguous. If it means " 'difference' is exemplified by *a* and *b*", then it is not materially equivalent--- unless of course both propositions happen to be true or both happen to be false. What is logically equivalent to the proposition {*a* differs from *b*} is the proposition {'difference' occurs as *concept* unifying *a* and *b*}. Why are they logically equivalent? Russell's answer is his Platonism about the Being of relations. But Russell hastens to add, that while this Platonism commits him to infinitely many propositions, and while they are all logically equivalent, none depend for their being any other. The logical relation standing between them is an external relation.

It should be noted that propositions are complex unities. Bradley imagines the metaphysical default is that there should be no such entities. Russell disagrees with Bradley's metaphysical default. Some complex unities (propositions) have Being/Existence (there is no important difference here) of logical necessity. The question of how they come into Being is vapid. Soutor seems (p. 37) to understand this quite well. That is laudable since the literature is rife with confusions about it.

*From what has been said, I don't think that Soutor's argument on p. 135 works to establish the being of the present king of France. Soutor's argument there assumes that he has established the absurd conclusion that in PoM all propositions wind up being true.

That takes us to the final chapter 7 *Theory of Descriptions*. I don't find myself with much new to say here. Note that p. 151 has a formula whose brackets are in the wrong place and should be corrected. In sum, I don't find Soutor arguments M1 and M2 valid. I didn't quite understand the claim that M4 cannot apply in Meinong's own case to the term "the round square." This might be clarified. I wasn't sure whether Soutor was trying to say that Meinong could avoid (without appeal to Mally's ideas) the contradiction in the case of "the existent golden mountain" which is existent, golden and a mountain but which doesn't exist. (I didn't find an M3 in the dissertation, but I may have somehow missed it.)

It is well-known (since Byrd's) that PoM is a melding of what may well have started out as incompatible views some of which Russell held even before 1900. Obviously, Russell thought that the meld works. But does it? Soutor says no. I don't think that his important research dissertation has made that point fully. But its research did yield many very important publishable discoveries. It is clearly an excellent work which would pass as a Ph.D. dissertation in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Iowa.

Cordially,

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