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Misguided References

By

Marc Helfer

Professor Mills

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1. The sentence 'The present king of France is wise' is obviously false, as there is no present king in France. However, the reason for the falseness differs from Russell to Frege. Russell was a proponent of the Direct Reference Theory, which relates symbols, such as names, directly to external objects. According to the Direct Reference Theory, names represent individuals. Russell sees 'The present king of France' as a complex name that refers to an individual. Actually, Russell would say that it refers to one individual. For him, the definite article 'the' functions as a proposition that reads 'true of exactly one'. The phrase 'present king of France' proposes a function for that individual. Since there is no king in France, that function fails to denote an individual, and 'the present king of France' has joined the array of indefinite things such as unicorns, round squares, and golden mountains. Russell believes that such things cannot be logical subjects of a sentence. While they are syntactically correct, they are meaningless subjects, and therefore false. On the other hand, Frege supports a theory of mediated reference. While Russell believes that meaning refers to a thing, Frege believes that meaning refers to the way a thing is presented. Frege added 'sense' as a form of presentation. It is how we think about something. The sentence is still meaningful because 'is wise' presents 'the present king of France' in a specific way. We can still think about that king even though it fails to refer to an external individual. So, the sentence is meaningful, but it lacks an actual referent.

2. I would like to discuss my preference between Strawson's or Russell's view. I find Strawson's view much more appealing than Russell's. First of all, it gives us

an easier chance to discuss unknown things, such as a scientific research. Imagine the sentence, 'Quarks are the underlying structure for atoms'. For Russell, this view would be either true or false, depending on whether quarks had already been discovered. However, Strawson presupposes the existence of quarks and has therefore less trouble speculating about their existence and properties. For scientific or philosophical speculations, Strawson view is much more progressive and supporting.

I also think that Strawson's description is a more accurate reflection of how language is used. If someone had a dream that the earth was destroyed by aliens, the sentence 'Aliens destroyed the earth' would be false according to Russell (because there are no aliens). However, judging from the personal reference frame of the dreamer, it is actually true. Strawson allows more flexibility than Russell does in this matter. Strawson would presuppose the existence of aliens and make the dreamer's experience valid. For all non-dreamers, the sentence would still be false, but solely based on the fact that the earth wasn't actually destroyed.

One of the problems I found with Russell's view is the dependence on an external object in order to verify the truth-value. I fear that the sentence 'Jesus was a wise man' will cause big trouble for Russell. Without proof of the existence of Jesus, Russell has to classify this sentence as false. Without a doubt, this would upset many people.

Reviewing, I find Strawson's approach much more realistic and value his addition of a friendly alternative between true and false.