

THE UNIFYING COPULA

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In the second and third chapters of *Appearance and Reality* Bradley raised doubts about the conception of the logical copula as a relation of instantiation (or participation). These doubts were the result of what he viewed as a vicious regress. The regress (often called 'Bradley's Paradox') begins with the claim that one object is related to another. If the relation here is not itself a third object then the two purportedly related objects are not related (since there is nothing relating them). If the relation *is* a third object then there are three, not two, objects, and these three objects must stand in some (other) relation to one another. But this new relation is also either not an object (thus there is no relation among the three objects) or it is itself a fourth object. And so on, *ad infinitum*. The next step Bradley took was to say that in a categorical proposition the copula was either nothing, in which case the subject and predicate failed to form a unit, or it was a relation (of exemplification, instantiation, participation, predication, etc.) connecting the two terms and forming a propositional unit. But, in the latter case, the regress associated with relations between objects is generated anew.

Many analytic philosophers (e.g., Ramsey, Russell, Wittgenstein, Frege, Ryle and Strawson) have reacted to the paradox. As nothing succeeds like success, the Fregean solution has become standard. As everyone knows, Frege disarmed the paradox by eschewing the logical copula. This was neither a simple nor an original strategy. Plato, for one, had taken simple propositions to consist of pairs of terms without benefit of a connecting, unifying device.¹ The complexity of the Fregean strategy was due to the fact that once the logical copula is abandoned the logical unity of the proposition is in jeopardy. Frege's solution was to insist on a fundamental distinction between the two terms of the proposition. In the normal case, one must be incomplete (unsaturated as he usually called it) in such a way that

¹ See G. Englebreetsen, 'A Note on Copulae and Qualifiers', *Linguistic Analysis* 20 (1990), 82-86; 'Formatives', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 30 (1989), 382-389; *Something to Reckon With: The Logic of Terms* (University of Ottawa Press, 1996).

the other term (by necessity, not unsaturated) could complete it. Frege did allow cases outside the norm, however. A proposition consisting of a "second-level" concept expression (e.g., a quantifier) applied to a "first-level" concept expression (e.g., 'horse', thus yielding 'horses exist') achieves unity by completing an incomplete expression with an incomplete one rather than with a complete expression, as in the normal case. As Leonard Linsky has pointed out, in these abnormal cases "all the relevant parts may be incomplete. One kind of incompleteness must be capable of completing another kind of incompleteness. Here, however, the metaphors do no explanatory work whatever" (p. 265).² At any rate, Frege's *intention* was that the unity of a proposition be guaranteed by its being logically complete. According to Fregean semantic theory, complete expressions are names, whose referents are objects. Incomplete expressions are predicates, function expressions, whose referents are concepts. Propositions, therefore, being logically complete, are names of objects (viz., the True and the False). As I have said, the distinction between name and predicate, between object and concept, between the complete and the incomplete, was fundamental; and it was inviolable. No name could be used as a predicate in a proposition; no predicate could be used as a name in a proposition. In particular, concepts could not be named by predicates. Consequently, any expression used to name a concept would not be a concept expression (function expression, predicate). Thus 'Frege's Paradox': the concept [of a] horse is not a concept. Frege's paradox is the price paid by the Fregean logician for resolving Bradley's paradox and achieving propositional unity. Bradley made no demand that the terms of a proposition be of distinct semantic types, reflecting the kind of ontological distinction that holds between concepts and objects. Consequently, he had no account of propositional unity. Frege did account for propositional unity (at least for the normal cases) and avoid Bradley's regress. He did this by insisting on the name/function (object/concept) distinction, which forced him to admit his own paradox—out of the frying pan into the fire.

In two recent papers Richard Gaskin has joined those who would disarm both paradoxes.³ Gaskin's work is full of rich insights and suggestions concerning the nature of logical form, unity, semantics, negation, subject/predicate asymmetry, and more. In the first of these papers he follows

²Leonard Linsky, 'The Unity of the Proposition', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30 (1992), 243–273.

³Richard Gaskin, 'Bradley's Regress, the Copula and the Unity of the Proposition', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 45 (1995), 161–180; 'The Unity of the Declarative Sentence', *Philosophy* 73 (1998), 21–45.

David Wiggins's attempt⁴ to render Bradley's regress benign by resolving Frege's paradox. That paradox is resolved by introducing a so-called Fregean copula. The logical copula is reintroduced into the proposition as the only unsaturated element. A 'reformed Frege,' according to Gaskin, could avoid the Fregean paradox by allowing the unity of the proposition to depend on the completion of an incomplete expression (just as the unreformed Frege did), while still allowing predicates to name concepts (now a species of objects, thus opening the way for second order quantification), and thus admitting the concept of a horse as a concept. Bradley's paradox is then avoided, following Wiggins, by denying that the copula denotes any sort of relation (such as predication, instantiation, etc.).

In his second paper, Gaskin offers a much deeper account of the problem of propositional unity. Here he expands on his solution (offered in the earlier paper) to Frege's Paradox in terms of "deferred reference." Yet, in doing so he seems to embrace Bradley's paradox. Far from posing a challenge to the possibility of propositional unity, Bradley's regress is just what guarantees it. Gaskin is committed to the view that all the significant components of a proposition, including logical copulae, must have reference (e.g., 1998, 42). Moreover, the referent of any significant expression must be a 'saturated' object (41). Consequently, the logical copula, while unsaturated, has reference—but not 'reference *simpliciter*.' (40). This is because a Bradley-type infinite regress essentially characterizes the copula. Any attempt to specify the referent of a logical copula (e.g., 'the relation of instantiation') renders the proposition just a list of names, including the name of the relation of instantiation. Thus a further attempt is required to specify the referent of the logical copula that renders that new concatenation of names more than a list, renders it a proposition. 'At each stage of the regress we try, but fail, to specify the total referent of that predicate (specifically of its copulative component)' (36). The long and the short of it is that while most of us would want to avoid such a regress as fatal to the task of accounting for unity, Gaskin embraces it. The referent of the logical copula is either the infinite totality of all the partial references achieved at each stage of the regress or it is 'deferred' (indefinitely) and so is indefinite. In either case the referent (of sorts) has been specified for the logical copula.

This way with propositional unity simply pays too high a price in terms of a Bradley-like infinite regress to offer real promise. Best to avoid the path altogether. And the best way to do that is first to reject the assumption that the logical copula is itself a significant component of a proposition.

⁴David Wiggins, 'The Sense and Reference of Predicates: a Running Repair to Frege's Doctrine and a Plea for the Copula', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1984), 311–328.

Gaskin sees a proposition as more than a list of terms because at least one of the terms contains an unsaturated component, which unifies all the components. But calling the logical copula a term simply confuses the issue. There is a good reason why Frege himself, as Gaskin admits (1995, 172) rejected the 'Fregean copula.' He just didn't need it. Frege did not take the terms of a proposition to constitute a list that was in need of unification (indeed, he thought that was what was wrong with the 'Booleans'). For Frege, unity was the result of completion (of an incomplete expression by an appropriate number of complete expressions), or, equivalently, of saturation (of an unsaturated expression by an appropriate number of saturated expressions). He did not see unity as the result of terms being bound or tied by a 'copular' element (either an expression or function or structure). Frege had no need of a Fregean copula; Frege was no reformed Fregean. So who, other than perhaps Gaskin and Wiggins, *is*? Who accounted for the unity of a proposition by construing it as a pair of terms (both sharing a common semantics) connected by a third expression not enjoying the semantic roles of the two terms (*viz.*, not referring, not having sense)? Who, in other words, introduced the *logical* copula into logical studies?

The answer is not Abelard, who merely introduced the *word* 'copula' into logical studies. (He had in mind the qualifier as it appeared in propositions with singular subjects.⁵) The real reformed Frege was, of course, Aristotle. Now it was the theory of logical syntax advocated by Aristotle, and all those centuries of Aristotelian logicians (of one sort or another), including the Scholastic logicians, Leibniz and Boole, that Frege was rejecting when he hit upon the idea (suggested by mathematical language) of dividing the lexicon into two distinct and utterly separate kinds of expressions (saturated and unsaturated), and giving the latter the job of propositional unification. In doing so he saw quite clearly and correctly that his new theory of logical syntax could dispense with the logical copula altogether. Aristotle had a logical copula (and needed it). Frege never did. A reformed Frege is not Fregean. A reformed Frege, 'repaired' by imposing the logical copula (though surely not the kind constructed by Gaskin), is an Aristotelian. Unlike Gaskin, the Aristotelian does not allow that the logical copula has *any* kind of reference, "deferred" or otherwise. There are neo-Aristotelians toiling the logical fields today.⁶ They are logicians who have seen cause to re-

⁵This is discussed more extensively in Englebretsen's 1990.

⁶Particularly Fred Sommers. See, for example, *The Logic of Natural Language* (Oxford University Press, 1982); 'Predication in the Logic of Terms', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 31 (1990), 106–126; 'The World, the Facts, and Primary Logic', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 34 (1993), 169–182.

ject Frege's version of logical syntax in favor of Aristotle's. In spite of his defense of the logical copula, Gaskin is not among them.

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