

## ONCE MORE: BRADLEYAN REGRESSES

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### INTRODUCTION

Old English manors have their ghosts. And though I would not want to call analytic philosophy a ‘manor’, nor exactly ‘old’, it certainly is of some decent English origin, and it left adolescence a while ago. No wonder then, that it is not exempt from haunting terrors. One particular spectre has been haunting it for decades; it already gave some analytic pioneers the creeps, and we still now and then find people terrified by it: the ghost of old Bradley has not yet found its rest and keeps on threatening people with his notorious regress. The present essay is a lecture in exorcism; much of the fear old Bradley spread, so I will argue, peters out once we dare to look it in the eye.

However, this essay is not primarily exegetical, and especially not an attempt in *interpreting Bradley*. I find Bradley’s writings, to say the least, not particularly accessible. Discussions of isolated passages from his longer treatises will probably be less fruitful than a careful study of the positions within the whole argumentative structure, supplied by the examination of Bradley’s intellectual upcoming.

His treatments on relations and properties, in which he develops the famous regress argument, are motivated by a radical goal: a vindication of some form of monism. To reach this goal, he tries to deconstruct the most basic categories of our ordinary conceptual framework. Thus, he holds that

the distinction between things and their qualities, fails ‘as a serious attempt at theory’ (1930: 16). Reality, he holds, is different from how we conceive of it; ‘the arrangements of given facts into relations and properties may be necessary in practise, but it is theoretically unintelligible,’ (1930: 21) and that ‘a relational way of thought – any one that moves by the machinery of terms and relations – must give appearance, and not truth’ (1930: 28). Many allusions to Bradley’s regress argument are hardly faithful to his work, because they do not take this radical goal into consideration.<sup>1</sup>

Now, as I said before, I am not a Bradley scholar and I do not intend to put Bradley’s original argument in perspective. Rather than discussing Bradley’s regress argument(s), I will focus on *Bradleyan* arguments – arguments that are, in one or the other way, inspired by his treatise – and on certain concepts that are central to them. Since more or less elaborate references to such regresses are legion, I will in no way strive for completeness in my discussion of the relevant literature. My selection may be personally motivated, but I hope it also successfully picks out some of the more important issues.<sup>2</sup>

The Bradleyan regresses that I will consider are concerned with our *ordinary* conception of relations and/or properties, not with some elaborate and artificial philosophical theory. The regresses are supposed to raise some problems about this conception. The alleged problems will concern either the category of a relation (and/or a property) as such, or a particular member of this category, namely the relation which holds between a thing and its properties – the relation, that is, of *having*, *possessing*, or, to use a philosophical phrase, *exemplification*.

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<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, Bradley not only formulates *one* regress arguments, but three of them (op. cit. 17-18; 22; 26), whose relation would deserve discussion.

<sup>2</sup> What I will not discuss, is the distinction between external and internal relations. But notice that the role it plays in Bradley’s thoughts is often misunderstood; thus, Peter van Inwagen (2002: 33-37) reconstructs Bradley as arguing for monism on the premise that all relations are internal. But, as William Vallicella (2002: 5ff.) points out, Bradley rejects relations *tout court* – not only external ones (which becomes apparent already from Bradley 1930, but which is explicitly stated in Bradley 1935: 641ff.). Vallicella’s essay is, by the way, one of the more serious attempts to evaluate Bradley’s original argumentation.

## 1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON PROPERTIES AND RELATIONS

### a. *Canonical Designators for Properties and Relations*

Talking about  $\phi$ s would be a rather idle affair without the possibility of identifying reference to  $\phi$ s. Now, the proper vehicle for such reference is a singular term. Accordingly, the central component of the fragment of English which allows for discourse about properties and relations is the stock of singular terms for properties (for short: property *designators*) and relations. For a start, I will briefly investigate into the semantics of such designators. I will, for the nonce, concentrate on property-designators. I think that most of what I say about them equally applies to designators of relations. However, I shall briefly hark back to them at the end of this section.

Designators of properties (or: traits, characteristics, attributes, qualities) divide into several groups; there are, of course, definite descriptions which denote properties ('my favourite virtue'); much more important, however, are certain derived singular terms that I call *canonical* property-designators. Canonical property designators are nominalizations of general terms and predicates.<sup>3</sup> Two familiar groups of such canonical designators are

- (i) abstract nouns ('wisdom'), derived from adjectives ('wise'), and
- (ii) gerundive phrases, derived from verbs ('converging') and verb-phrases ('being earnest').

Members of both species can receive an additional categorial prefix, such as 'the quality of' (while members of the second group more often *require* such a prefix). Two other important groups comprise (i) combinations of 'to' and a verb or verb-phrase in the infinitive ('to converge', 'to be a lucky man'), and (ii) that-clauses ('He hath this property of an honest man that his hand is as good as his sword'). We see that the devices for deriving

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<sup>3</sup> While abstract nouns are, in the vast majority of cases, derived terms, there are some exceptions to this rule; thus, the adjective 'courageous' is derived from the noun 'courage', and the noun 'animosity' lacks a corresponding adjective in English. I will henceforth ignore such exceptions and concentrate only on the standard cases, which are derived terms.

property designators are rich and hardly limited; the layman's properties, we may conclude, are far from sparse.<sup>4</sup>

In the relevant ontological literature, designators like 'wisdom' or 'redness' (i.e. members of the first mentioned group; for schematic reference to them I shall from now on use '*F*-ness') are often classified as (proper) *names* of properties. Why is this? Non-indexical singular terms are often divided into two major groups, names and definite descriptions. Now, judged from its grammatical form, the property-designator 'wisdom' bears little resemblance to definite descriptions, which are typically many-worded and contain the definite article. Furthermore, 'wisdom' contains no descriptive material which would pick out its referent by correctly describing it, and it is a rigid designator. That could make the choice to classify 'wisdom' as a name at least somewhat reasonable.

But perhaps we are driven towards a doubtful decision by an artificially limited range of options. Some reflection on the semantic profile of canonical property-designators proves it to differ significantly from that of proper names:

- (D-1) Canonical property-designators are *semantically complex*, such that the conditions of understanding them systematically depend upon the conditions of understanding the corresponding general term: whoever understands the general term *F* and who knows how to derive the corresponding designator *F*-ness will also understand this expression. Furthermore, whoever understands *F*-ness must know that exactly those things have the denoted property, of which the corresponding general term *F* is true.
- (D-2) The reference of a canonical property-designator is a function of their meaning, which in turn is a function of the meaning of the corresponding general term(s). Thus, the meaning of 'verbose' determines the meaning of 'verbosity', which in turn determines the reference of the designator.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hence, sparse theories of properties cannot yield an account of the ordinary conception of properties. At least their most prominent proponent, David Armstrong, never made a secret of this circumstance (see his 1978 II: 18).

<sup>5</sup> Cp. Strawson (1953/54: 256f.).

(D-3) Knowledge of the meaning of a canonical property-designator suffices for knowledge of its referent. Understanding ‘verbosity’ is enough for knowing to what it refers.<sup>6</sup>

In virtue of these features, property-designators such as ‘wisdom’ differ clearly from proper names, which are in general semantically simple, and typically lack any linguistic meaning. And even if a name can be said to possess some linguistic meaning (think, for example, of ‘Dartmouth’ or ‘Sitting Bull’), its reference is neither a function of its meaning nor of the meaning of some correlated terms. Thus, it seems better not to class the property-designators in question with *either* definite descriptions *or* proper names. Instead we should realize that they form a class of their own. But they are not the only examples of this class. The semantic profile of derived abstract nouns is shared by the second class of property designators I mentioned, gerundive phrases, such as ‘being verbose’. Although they do contain descriptive material, this material is in general not true of their referent (thus, they do not receive their referent by description). They are rigid designators of properties that satisfy conditions analogous to (D-1)-(D-3).<sup>7</sup>

Just as we can and do explicitly talk about properties, we can and do talk about relations (or, which comes to more or less the same, about connections, ties, links, contrasts, etc.). And we have the same devices of deriving singular terms for relations as we encountered in the case of properties – in particular, we can use abstract nouns and gerundive phrases for our discourse about relations.

However, it appears that abstract nouns which denote relations are rarer than those which denote properties. This is not to say there are none; ‘equality’ (or ‘identity’) and ‘difference’ seem to be two clear, albeit formal, examples. (Or perhaps they are not so clear? ‘Equality gives rise to challenging questions,’ writes Frege at the commencement of his ‘On Sense and Meaning’, ‘which are not altogether easy to answer. Is it a

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<sup>6</sup> Cp. Künne (1983: 177f.), Levinson (1978: 16), Peterson (1986: 298), and Schiffer (1990: 604).

<sup>7</sup> The rigidity of at least some designators of this kind is sometimes contested; for a rebuttal of this challenge see Tye (1981: 24) and furthermore Schnieder (forthcoming), in which the rigidity is traced back to the semantic peculiarities mentioned above.

relation? A relation between objects, or between names or signs of objects?) Some material examples are ‘matrimony’, ‘contact’, and ‘causality’. Thus, we say that matrimony is a bond between two people – and what else should a *bond* be but a relation? Similarly, a contact can be called a relation between two objects, and causality a relation between two events.

But nevertheless, the stock of abstract nouns that function as designators of relations seems less rich than that of property designators. This is partly due to the fact that adjectives in the comparative, which play a pivotal role for relational statements, do seldom, if ever, give rise to derived nouns (some girls are bigger than others, but we never talk about *biggerness*).

What we often rely upon in our discourse about relations, when we lack appropriate abstract nouns, are *descriptions* that characterise them via their relata: in this way, we use phrases like ‘the relation between *F*s and *G*s’, ‘the relation of an *F* and a *G*’ etc. These expressions are used as if they were *definite* descriptions; but notice that although we may speak about the relation between natural science and philosophy, the relation between the lord and his servants, or the relation of wealth to social well-being, there surely are countless distinguishable relations holding between the mentioned pairs of objects. Thus, the semantics of such expressions would deserve some further attention (but I lack the space to go into this issue here).

It might be interesting to further investigate into the differences between discourse about properties and discourse about relations, and to see whether, for instance, the comparative dominance of abstract property-nouns over abstract relation-nouns has some systematic reason. But I shall not do so here; I am content with the observation that analogous devices for discourse about both sorts of entity are well enough entrenched in language.

### b. *The Individuation of Properties and Relations*

I distinguish properties and relations from *concepts* (understood as *meanings* or meaning-like entities).<sup>8</sup> Concepts are plausibly individuated by some epistemic conditions that constitute the possibility of grasping them. But properties, I take it, are individuated by their exemplification-conditions with respect to different possible worlds. On this view of the *intensional* individuation of properties, the following identity conditions hold:

(Int-Prop) For all properties  $p, p^*$ :  $p = p^* \leftrightarrow \Box \forall x (x \text{ has } p \leftrightarrow x \text{ has } p^*)$ .

Similarly, we can formulate identity conditions for relations. In the case of dyadic relations, we would have:

(Int-Rel) For all dyadic relations  $r, r^*$ :

$r = r^* \leftrightarrow \Box \forall x_1, x_2 (x_1 \text{ stands to } x_2 \text{ in } r \leftrightarrow x_1 \text{ stands to } x_2 \text{ in } r^*)$ .

(It is easy to see how we can generate analogous conditions for  $n$ -adic relations.)

Although this is not the right place for an exhaustive discussion of concurring accounts of the individuation of properties and relations, let me say a few words in defence of the intensional account. Some philosophers thought that this view can be refuted by simple counterexamples: don't we say that the property of being an equilateral triangle is to be distinguished from the property of being an equiangular triangle (although they have the same conditions of exemplification)? I sympathise with David Lewis' eclectic answer to this: 'Sometimes we do, sometimes we don't.' (Lewis 1986: 55) Such naked (non-) identity statements are hardly ever made at all in everyday talk. If the question about property individuation turned solely on our intuitions what careful and competent speakers would say about explicit identity statements of the form 'the property of being  $F$  = the property of being  $G$ ', the linguistic data would simply not be sufficient to yield a determinate answer.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This distinction is often made; see for example Bealer (1982), Jackson (1998: 15f.), and Künne (2003: 26, *et passim*).

<sup>9</sup> Cp. Bennett (1988: 78) on identity conditions of events.

What further data might be relevant to our present concern?<sup>10</sup> If some entities are meaning-like, then talk about them should be relevantly linked to cognitive or epistemic notions. Such links exist, for instance, in the case of propositions. Natural language expressions for them (general terms like 'doubt', 'belief', 'assertion', 'statement' and that-clauses ruled by opaque contexts) are clearly epistemically constrained. But no such links exist between epistemic notions and uses of 'quality', 'state', 'property' etc.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, we have other terms for the relevant purposes; we talk about the *idea*, the *concept*, the *notion* of something, and these terms are clearly linked to epistemic notions. Ideas can be grasped, understood, conveyed, and they can be coherent, confused etc. What is characteristically said of properties, on the other hand, is that they are *had* or *possessed*. Now these terms could perhaps also be applied to concepts; but if they are, they differ significantly in meaning. To possess or have the concept of courage would consist in having some kind of mental capacity (the ability to conceive of something as courage), but surely not in being courageous – whereas having or possessing the property of courage does consist in being courageous. To exhibit the property of patience is to behave patiently in some situation, whereas to exhibit the concept of patience may at best be to illuminate it in a philosophical lecture.

These observations suggest that properties, contrary to ideas or concepts, are conceived of as rather 'worldly' entities, as ways things *are*. They are not, like concepts, ways of thinking about or conceiving of things. Furthermore, playing a worldly role, properties constitute (possible) differences between things. Not everything which constitutes a difference *for us*, i.e. a difference in how we think about certain things, also constitutes a difference in things. It makes a (cognitive) difference whether we think of something as an equilateral triangle or as an equiangular one. However, since necessarily all equilateral triangles are equiangular ones and vice versa, there is no difference between these *things* at all. It seems to me that this 'worldly' feature of properties is central to everyday talk of prop-

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<sup>10</sup> Elliot Sober (1982) brought forth an argument that is relevant to the discussion. However, I wholly agree with Frank Jackson's reply (1998: 126f.) and could not add anything substantial to it.

<sup>11</sup> For the following cp. Strawson (1987: 404).

erties and this is why I opt for the individuation via exemplification-conditions (the sketched reasoning, I should add, is of course far from being a *proof* of my position; I do not expect something like that to be available).

## 2. A MULTITUDE OF ENTITIES (REGRESS #1)

Assume some entity  $x$  is *thus-and-so* related to some other entity  $y$ . In this ontological state of affairs, we obviously can distinguish two different entities which I have already named:  $x$  and  $y$ . But then, we can make out another entity that is somehow involved in the matters, the relation of *being thus-and-so related to something*. Let us call it, for sake of brevity,  $R$ . Having now three entities at our ontological disposal, we can make out yet another entity. A second relation (let us call it  $R^*$ ) comes into play, because we see that  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $R$  are somehow related, of course:  $x$  stands to  $R$  and  $y$  in the relation of *being related by something to something*. Once we have recognised this fourth entity, the relation  $R^*$ , we can go on and realise that  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $R$ , and  $R^*$  are somehow related, of course. Thus, there will be another relation,  $R^{**}$ , in which they stand to each other. Obviously,  $R^{**}$  cannot be identical with either  $R$  or  $R^*$ , since it is a tetradic relation, whereas  $R$  is dyadic, and  $R^*$  is triadic. We can easily climb up the adicities in this way, making out ever more relations along our way. There are infinitely many of them.

This circumstance (which could have been expected) is as harmless as the hierarchy of sets that starts with the empty set,  $\emptyset$ , proceeds to its singleton,  $\{\emptyset\}$ , then to the singleton of this singleton,  $\{\{\emptyset\}\}$ , and so on, *ad infinitum*. The worst we can say about both sequences of entities is that they are terribly long and rather boring to look at.

I take it that nobody should be irritated by such a ‘regress’ of relations just because of the number (or rather: numberless multitude) of relations involved. If there is anything scary about them, it cannot consist in their mere existence but must reside in some feature they (allegedly) have. So let us turn to another regress argument now.

## 3. NECESSITATION (REGRESS #2)

Let us say that an object  $x$  necessitates a proposition  $p$  iff  $p$  is (classically) entailed by the fact that  $x$  exists:

(Nec)  $x$  necessitates the proposition  $p \leftrightarrow_{\text{df.}} \Box (x \text{ exists} \rightarrow p \text{ is true})$ .

The notion of a truth-maker, which has enjoyed much attention recently, is sometimes identified with the notion of a necessitator.<sup>12</sup> Insofar as this equation is correct, one could rephrase my following remarks in terms of truth-makers. However, the equation is doubtful: every entity necessitates all necessary truths. But does, for instance, my right shoe *make* the theorem of Bolzano-Weierstrass *true*?<sup>13</sup> To be on the safe side, I shall stick to the notion of necessitation; everybody may feel free to draw whatever consequences seem appropriate about the notion of a truth-maker.

Now Bradley’s argumentation has been read as a complaint that the assumption of relations does not provide us with necessitators of relational statements. If  $x$  is *thus-and-so* related to  $y$ , it stands in the relation of *being thus-and-so related* (for short:  $R$ ) to  $y$ . But the mere existence of the three entities  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $R$  does not imply that  $x$  stands in  $R$  to  $y$ , and neither does it imply that  $x$  is *thus-and-so* related to  $y$ . Assuming a further relation, in which  $x$  stands to  $R$  and  $y$ , will not improve matters (nor will the assumption of yet another relation etc.).

This complaint is firstly true, and secondly not very surprising. Relations, which are universals, are surely not the right kind of things to necessitate specific relational statements. If one feels the need for having such necessitators (whence should this need come from, by the way?), then one should seek refuge not to universals but to other entities, such as particularised *instances* of properties and relations.<sup>14</sup> That Jean-Paul kisses Jean is not necessitated by the universal *kissing*. But it is necessitated by the particular *kiss* that Jean-Paul kissed to Jean.

Does the existence of such particularised relations give rise to a regress of such entities? That depends upon the conception of

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Fox (1987: 189).

<sup>13</sup> Cp. Restall (1996: 334) and Williamson (1999: 254). For other cases that speak against the equation see Smith (1999: 278).

<sup>14</sup> On the notion of a particularised property see, for example, Mulligan *et al.* (1984).

particularised relations involved. If one opts for very generous existence conditions, such that any relation may have particularised instances,<sup>15</sup> a regress will evolve.<sup>16</sup> There is a relation in which Jean, Jean-Paul, and their kiss stand to each other; Jean and Jean-Paul are the sole two subjects of their kiss, so we might describe the relation as that of *being, together with something, the sole two subjects of something*. Or, to save some breath, we might simply call it *R* again. But if every relation can have a particular instance, then *R* can have one, and it will have such an instance if Jean-Paul kisses Jean. But then there will be a relation in which Jean-Paul, Jean, their kiss, and the particular instance of *R* stand to each other – and on it goes.

Notice that even if one opts for existence conditions of particularised properties and relations generous enough to yield this regress, it would do no harm. *All* of the particularised relations in the regress would necessitate each other's existence, and furthermore that Jean-Paul kisses Jean. It might be bewildering to some philosopher that so many necessitators should exist – but then again, one might be bewildered by the number of things in general, by the numbers of positive integers etc. Bewilderment not always indicates philosophical dilemmas.

#### 4. LOGICAL FORM (REGRESS #3)

Without explicitly alluding to Bradley, Roger Teichmann (1989) presented a regress argument that obviously stands in the Bradleyan tradition. Teichmann's line of reasoning resembles Bradley's even in its radical goal: the argument is supposed to undermine a certain form of realism about universals. More precisely, it is supposed to show that apparent reference

<sup>15</sup> Any relation, I should add, which is not necessarily 'empty'. If there is a relation in which nothing can possibly stand to anything (as, for example, the numerical relation of *being both greater and smaller than*), then this relation cannot have any particularised instances.

<sup>16</sup> Such generous existence conditions are proposed by Mertz (1996: 9, *et passim*) and Moltmann (2003: 456). Other philosophers that accept the general framework of particularised properties and relations are suspicious about instances of *certain* (e.g. *formal* and *essential*) properties and relations.

to universals and apparent quantification over universals are merely that: *apparent*. Apparent discourse about universals has a misleading surface grammar; underneath it, on the level of logical grammar, we find no such reference any more.

#### a. *The argument*

The exact form of realism under attack holds that (i) there are genuine singular terms which refer to universals (properties and relations) while (ii) predicates do not refer to universals.

Teichmann's argues that the described realism about universals forces its advocates to attribute an absurd, because infinitely complex, logical form to ordinary, elementary statements. I should admit in advance that I feel a little uneasy about the central notion of the argument, the notion of *logical form*. This notion is often employed in contemporary philosophy, and often rather uncritically so. I doubt that it is always supported by a coherent conception of what it should amount to. Having expressed my reservation about this notion, I will have to employ it for the sake of the argument.

Let me turn to Teichmann. He writes:

If 'redness' is really a name, then the predicable '– has redness' cannot be treated as mere longhand for a logically simple predicable, any more than can '– loves Jack'. (1989: 156)

Fair enough. He continues that this

behaves us to regard '– has redness' as displaying the true logical form of '– is red'; the latter, despite appearances, must be considered as a relational predicable, like '– loves Jack'. (loc. cit.)

But just as the property designator 'redness' is derived from 'red', we can derive a further property designator from the relational predicate 'has (or: partakes of) redness': by building the gerundive form, we arrive at the designator 'having redness', which we can furthermore prefix with a categorical apposition, 'the property of', thus arriving at 'the property of having redness'. But now we can argue in a similar fashion as above that

since ‘partaking of redness’ is a genuine name, the logical form of ‘ – partakes of redness’ (and hence of ‘ – is red’) turns out to be shown perspicuously by ‘ – partakes of partaking of redness’. By similar steps, it seems that we end up driven to imputing an infinitely complex logical form to the apparently simple ‘ – is red’ – and this is absurd. (1989: 157)

We can precisely capture this argument by the following argument-schema:<sup>17</sup>

- (1) If ‘*F*-ness’ is a referring term, then ‘*x* has *F*-ness’ will be about what ‘*F*-ness’ refers to, namely *F*-ness.
- (2) If ‘*x* has *F*-ness’ is about *F*-ness, so is ‘*x* is *F*’.
- (3) If ‘*x* is *F*’ is about *F*-ness, then its logical form is more perspicuously shown by ‘*x* has *F*-ness’.
- (4) If ‘*F*-ness’ is a referring term, then ‘the property of having *F*-ness’ is a referring term too.
- (5) If ‘the property of having *F*-ness’ is a referring term, then ‘*x* has the property of having *F*-ness’ will be about the property of having *F*-ness.<sup>18</sup>
- (6) If ‘*x* has the property of having *F*-ness’ is about the property of having *F*-ness, so is ‘*x* has *F*-ness’.
- (7) If ‘*x* has *F*-ness’ is about the property of having *F*-ness, then its logical form is more perspicuously shown by ‘*x* has the property of having *F*-ness’.
- (8) So it goes on, *ad nauseam*.

Therefore:

- (C-1) If ‘*F*-ness’ is a referring term, then elementary predications exhibit an infinitely complex, logical form.
- (C-2) So, ‘*F*-ness’ is *not* a referring term.

<sup>17</sup> I deviate from Teichmann’s terminology in two aspects: (i) instead of the awkward ‘*x* partakes of *y*’ I simply use ‘*x* has *y*’; (ii) for reasons I have given in section (1.a.) I prefer to talk about property-*designators* instead of names.

<sup>18</sup> You could formulate this premise as a strict analogy to premise (1); for sake of brevity, I contracted it a little.

Although I have my worries about the notion of logical form, I will agree with Teichmann that we should better not attribute an infinitely complex form to elementary predications. Nevertheless, the argument is unconvincing. There are good reasons to think that premise (7) is at least disputable, and there are even better reasons to think that premise (2) is definitely false. I will propound them one after another.

b. *Is F-ness distinct from the property of having F-ness?*

How can premises (3) and (7) be justified? Two statements that share a common logical form can differ in how perspicuously this form is mirrored by their respective surface grammar. That a statement is about some entity *x* must somehow be significant to its logical form. The relevant feature of the logical form will, on the level of surface grammar, be adequately reflected by the appearance of a singular term which refers to *x*. So, the following principle seems sound:

(LogForm) If two statements *s* and *s*\* are about *x*, while only *s* contains a singular term referring to *x*, then (*ceteris paribus*) *s* more perspicuously exhibits its logical form than *s*\*.

(The *ceteris paribus* is essential, because *s* might of course be much less perspicuous than *s*\* in some other aspects.)

This principle easily validates (3), and it might seem to validate (7) equally easily. If a statement is about the property of having *F*-ness, it should, for sake of perspicuity, contain a singular term referring to this property. Now a certain singular term suggests itself for this role: the term ‘the property of having *F*-ness’. But contrary to the statement ‘*x* has the property of having *F*-ness’, the statement ‘*x* has *F*-ness’ does not contain this singular term. Thus, the former is better off in terms of logical perspicuity.

However, we must not forget that we can usually refer to one and the same entity by the use of different singular terms. And it is far from obvious that ‘*F*-ness’ must differ in reference from ‘the property of having *F*-ness’. Indeed, if properties are intensionally individuated, as I have argued in section (1.b.), then both terms come out as coreferential: necessarily, whatever has *F*-ness, has *eo ipso* the property of having *F*-ness, and vice versa. So, (Intens-Prop) implies that the property of having *F*-ness is

nothing but *F*-ness itself. But if this identification is correct, then we have good reasons to be suspicious about premise (7). It obviously cannot be established by (LogForm) any more, because in terms of referential transparency the statements ‘*x* has *F*-ness’ and ‘*x* has the property of having *F*-ness’ will be on a par. *Each of them* contains a singular term referring to the property of having *F*-ness (or, what is the same, *F*-ness). What made (7) plausible was the assumption that ‘*x* has *F*-ness’ is about some entity (the property of having *F*-ness) to which it does not refer by any singular term. But now that we identify *F*-ness and the property of having *F*-ness, we have the singular term required.

Notice that similar considerations even apply to theories of properties on which they are individuated in a considerably more fine-grained manner. For we should realise that the property denoted by the term ‘*F*-ness’ is not only necessarily coexemplified with the property denoted by ‘the property of having *F*-ness’, but that this circumstance is furthermore *evident* to competent users of the terms. In this respect they differ from what is typically offered as counterexamples to the intensional view: pairs of property designators which can be thought to denote properties that are *not* necessarily coexemplified. The intuition that the property of *being an equilateral triangle* is not identical to the property of *being an equiangular triangle* surely receives some support from the difference in cognitive value of both singular terms. So, even on an account on which coreferentiality of canonical property designators is somehow tied to their having the same cognitive value, the terms ‘*F*-ness’ and ‘the property of having *F*-ness’ could be classified as coreferential.

### c. *Elementary Predication and Property-Attribution: The Synonymy Thesis*

As promised, I presented a reason for rejecting premise (7): whoever believes in the intensional individuation of properties should not accept (7), and the same will even hold for some less coarse-grained accounts. Still, some philosophers might adopt a view about property individuation which can support (7). So let me now turn to the second half of my promise: to give even better reasons for a rejection of the second premise:

(2) If ‘*x* has *F*-ness’ is about *F*-ness, so is ‘*x* is *F*’.

Why should we believe so? Teichmann argues for (2) as follows:

[...] it must surely be a necessary condition of two sentence’s being strongly equivalent, in the way in which ‘*A* is red’ and ‘*A* has redness’ are, that those sentences are not about, do not make mention of, different numbers of things. (1989: 156)

Teichmann relies on the following principle:

(T-1) If two sentences *s* and *s\** are strongly equivalent, then they are not about a different number of things.

Indeed, there seems no rational reason to hold (T-1) without holding also the stronger principle:

(T-2) If two sentences *s* and *s\** are strongly equivalent, they are about the *same* things.

If two sentences are about the same things, they are about the same number of things. Thus, (T-1) follows from (T-2). While the weaker (T-1) is all that is needed for the regress-argument, the stronger version is needed as the rationale of the weaker. So, I shall henceforth concentrate on (T-2).

To evaluate this principle we should know a little more about what is meant by ‘strongly equivalent’ here. Teichmann provides us with not more than a hint: the equivalence he has in mind is just the kind of equivalence holding between ‘*x* is red’ and ‘*x* has redness’. A characterisation in descriptive terms rather than by examples would be fine to proceed. Let us compare our sentences with some other sentence pairs:

(i) The sentences are *materially equivalent*, i.e. they have the same truth-value. But material equivalence is evidently much too weak to validate (T-2).

(ii) The sentences in question not only share their truth-value, but also their *intension* (in Carnap’s sense of the word). Sentences *s* and *s\** are intensionally equivalent iff the sentence ‘ $\Box (s \leftrightarrow s^*)$ ’ is true (more informally: iff they can be substituted *salva veritate* in modal contexts). But intensional equivalence is still too weak to validate (T-2); all mathematical truths are intensionally equivalent, but clearly, pairs of such statements (such as ‘ $1+1=2$ ’ and ‘ $\sqrt{2}$  is an irrational number’) can be about different things.



(iii) Although ‘ $1+1=2$ ’ and ‘ $\sqrt{2}$  is an irrational number’ are intensionally equivalent, we can take up different attitudes towards them. We may erroneously disbelieve the latter, because we have not yet been introduced to its proof. On the other hand it might seem that whoever differs in the evaluation of ‘ $A$  is red’ and ‘ $A$  has redness’ must have misunderstood one or the other of them; we might say, they are *cognitively equivalent*.<sup>19</sup> But so are all evident truths, like for example ‘No one is her own mother’ and ‘ $4=4$ ’. The latter, however, is about the number 4, while the former is not. So cognitive equivalence too proves to be insufficient for supporting (T-2).

(iv) There is of course an even stronger kind of equivalence, the one that holds between ‘Yesterday I had the mean reds’ and ‘I had the mean reds yesterday’. These sentences differ only with respect to the order of words but they *mean* the same, they express the same propositions (although they might have differing implicatures). Now, for sentences that are strongly equivalent in this sense, (T-2) surely is true. But are ‘ $x$  is red’ and ‘ $x$  has redness’ equivalent in this pretty strong sense? are they synonymous?

Many philosophers found the positive answer to this question, the *Synonymy Thesis* attractive, if not evidently true. It is a thesis upon which such antagonists as Quine and Strawson could (and did) agree on,<sup>20</sup> as the following quotation from Quine illustrates:<sup>21</sup>

The difference between (B) [‘Socrates possesses bravery’] and (b) [‘Socrates is brave’] is, as [Strawson] rightly suggests, ‘simply a matter of stylistic variation’. (Quine 1980: 164)

(Despite the general agreement that we find Strawson and Quine in, they disagree about what the alleged synonymy of elementary predications and corresponding property-attributions amounts to. While Quine is suspicious of properties, Strawson readily accepts them. In this dispute, I side – without argument – with Strawson. I am presently concerned with *defending* realism against a certain attack.)

<sup>19</sup> On this (largely Fregean) notion cp. Künne (2003: 42f.).

<sup>20</sup> Others who explicitly endorsed the *Synonymy Thesis* include, for instance, Bolzano (WL II, §127), Künne (1983: 30), and Ramsey (1925: 404).

<sup>21</sup> For Strawson’s corresponding view see Strawson (1974: 33; 1987: 405; 1990: 318).

#### d. *An Argument Against the Synonymy Thesis*

Unlike Strawson and Quine, I deem the *Synonymy Thesis* to be false. The discussion of the *Synonymy Thesis* will take a few pages – only then I will return to Teichmann’s argument; it will prove to be unsound, because it implicitly relies on a false premise, the *Synonymy Thesis*.

My basic argument against the thesis is quite simple:

- (P1) Elementary predications and corresponding property-attributions differ in their conditions of understanding.
- (P2) If two statements differ in their conditions of understanding, then they express different propositions and accordingly they are not synonymous.
- (C) Elementary predications are not synonymous with the corresponding property-attributions.

Because the argument’s validity is out of question, and premise (P2) seems hardly controversial, I better say something in defence of the crucial premise (P1) now: to understand a property-attribution, a speaker must possess certain *knowledge about properties*. More particularly, whoever understands a property-attribution knows what property it is about (this follows from what I said about canonical property-designators; understanding them is sufficient for knowledge of their reference); and thus, he has certain knowledge about properties.

But the same is not true for elementary predications. A speaker may competently talk about thick or thin, red or yellow, and wise or naïve things or people, without knowing that there are, in addition to thick, thin, red, etc. things also properties. She need not have *any* idea about the existence and the nature of properties at all. Indeed, she need not recognise any entities relevant to her parlance apart from thick, thin, etc. things. But then we have no reasons to ascribe to somebody, on the basis of her ability to use elementary predications, any ontological commitments to properties. In general, we should not interpret a certain kind of discourse as involving reference to  $\phi$ s (and statements about  $\phi$ s) if it is not a requirement of mastering the discourse to have a grasp of the nature of  $\phi$ s.<sup>22</sup> We have reasons

<sup>22</sup> Evans defends a similar thesis (1975: 355f.).

to attest somebody such a grasp if he knows some existence-conditions and identity-conditions for  $\varphi$ s. The relevant knowledge might be some form of implicit knowledge, that could, for instance, manifest itself in a basic understanding of how to *count* and *re-identify*  $\varphi$ s, and thus in the ability to distinguish between a good many true and false identity statements about properties.

From the above I conclude that an elementary predication and its corresponding property-attribution differ in their condition of understanding, and since this is a sufficient condition for non-synonymy, they are not synonymous.

#### e. *On the Acquisition of the Conceptual Framework of Properties*

Mastery of elementary predications does not require knowledge about properties, so I have argued, while mastery of property-attributions requires it. It employs conceptual resources that are not employed by elementary predications. But how do we acquire the conceptual framework of properties? We do so by learning to use new linguistic forms, a new fragment of our language. This fragment is essentially constituted by a bunch of (i) statements of specific forms and (ii) relevant inferential relations between such statements and elementary predications. The following forms and rules of inference give an outline of this fragment.<sup>23</sup>

##### 1. *Introduction of designators of properties in property-attributions.*

From any elementary predication,

*a* is *F*.

you can infer the corresponding property-attribution (where the implication, of course, also holds in the other direction):

*a* has (or: possesses) *F*-ness.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cp. Brandt (1957) on the build-up of realistic languages.

<sup>24</sup> This rule has some exceptions due to the possibility of semantic antinomies: while we may truthfully say that courage does not exemplify itself, the property of non-self-exemplification cannot exist.

##### 2. *Using designators of properties as singular terms by allowing quantification into their position.*

Relevant inferences are for example the steps from statements of form

*a* possesses *F*-ness and *b* possesses *F*-ness too,

to those of form:

There is something that *a* and *b* have in common.

##### 3. *Using designators of properties in subject position in statements about properties.*

Apart from statements involving predicates custom-made for properties, as for example:

Wisdom is a virtue,

Red is a colour,

another important class are identity statements, both *contingent* ones, such as:

Wisdom is the virtue which Socrates was most famous for,

and *necessary* ones, as for example:

Being a spinster is being a female who has never been married.

Our knowledge of properties requires mastery of the outlined fragment of English (to avoid some kind of anglocentric fallacy I should add: or a corresponding fragment of another language), and this mastery is in turn all that is required. Talking about wisdom, intelligence, thickness, thinness etc. requires knowledge about properties and thus mastery of the relevant linguistic forms. But, and this is the crucial point, no such mastery is required for the ability to talk about wise, intelligent, thick, and thin people by using elementary predications. *Therefore*, since a property-attribution involves richer conceptual resources than the corresponding elementary predication, they are not synonymous.

Notice that it is *not* part of my proposal that knowledge about properties is *meta-linguistic* knowledge. Properties are not linguistic entities and therefore knowledge about properties is not to be construed as knowledge about language. Nevertheless, *mastery* of certain linguistic forms *consti-*

tutes knowledge about properties (where this constitution may or may not be in need of some additional constituting circumstances). Similarly, knowledge about natural numbers is not a form of meta-linguistic knowledge, while at the same time mastery of certain linguistic forms (idioms relevant to counting) may be required and partly constitute knowledge about numbers (some knowledge about numbers will not require much more than the mastery of certain linguistic forms, while other will additionally require most complicated processes of reasoning).

f. *The Connection Between Elementary Predications and Property-Attributions*

If the *Synonymy Thesis* is false, what can we positively say about how the meanings of elementary predications and property-attributions are related (it is evident that some intimate relation does hold between them)? Property-designators, I have said before, exhibit some kind of semantic complexity. This complexity suggests that they express *complex concepts*. Whoever understands the term ‘wisdom’ must know that its referent is a property possessed by all wise people and only by them – we cannot attribute a proper understanding of the term to anyone who fails to see this fact. Thus, the following expresses a substantial truth fixing the identity of the concept of wisdom:

(Wis)  $x = \text{wisdom} \rightarrow \forall y (y \text{ exemplifies } x \leftrightarrow y \text{ is wise})$ .

This principle opens the way for a conceptual analysis of the concept expressed by ‘wisdom’. The way is not wholly straightforward, though: we cannot simply turn (Wis) into a biconditional; while two sets cannot agree in their members, two properties may well be had by the same objects. In section (1.b.) I opted for the intensional individuation of properties. Given this account, we can explain the concept of wisdom as follows: by ‘wisdom’ we understand that property which is essentially such that all and only wise people possess it.<sup>25</sup> And we can even construct a schema whose instances provide analyses like the one proposed in droves:

<sup>25</sup> Cp. Peterson’s similar proposal (1986: 296).

(Schema Property Analysis)

By ‘*F*-ness’ we understand the property *p*, such that:

$\square \forall x (x \text{ has } p \leftrightarrow x \text{ is } F)$ .

These reflections enable me to answer my initial question about the relation between elementary predications and property-attributions: a property-attribution employs a *complex* concept analysable in recourse to a general concept employed in the elementary predication (by a *general concept*, I just mean a concept expressible by a general term).

Thus we may analyse a property-attribution of the form

(Pro-Att) *a* has *F*-ness.

as follows:

(Pro-Att\*) *a* has the property *p* which is such that  $\square \forall x (x \text{ has } p \leftrightarrow x \text{ is } F)$ .

Notice that for my proposal I once more relied on the view that properties are intensionally individuated. But the general idea behind my proposal is independent of such a view; we could hold onto it and accommodate for a more fine-grained conception of properties by replacing the notion of necessity with some stronger (perhaps epistemically laden) notion. My basic tenet is that concepts expressed by property-designators are derived from the concepts expressed by the associated general terms, such that an understanding of the property designator requires knowledge about what it is to have the property; into the content of such knowledge will enter the concept expressed by the associated general term.

g. *Conclusion: Why Teichmann’s Argument Fails*

I hope the reader did not, over my extensive discussion of the *Synonymy Thesis*, lose sight of what motivated my endeavours: Teichmann’s regress argument, which he supposes to undermine realism about universals as a whole. We have seen that a crucial step of his reasoning relies on the assumption that a realist is somehow compelled to accept the *Synonymy Thesis* – only this assumption would justify Teichmann’s second premise.

What I have put against this is a realist view on which the property-attribution is *not* synonymous with the elementary predication, but involves richer conceptual resources that draw on the conceptual resources

employed in the elementary predication. Thus, the latter may maintain whatever simple logical form it has; the logical form of the corresponding property-attribution differs from that of the elementary statement and exhibits a higher logical complexity. But this implies nothing less than the breakdown of Teichmann's regress at its very beginning. His argument is based on an inadequate account of property discourse, which no realist should adopt and which is certainly not *mandatory* for realism.

It should be noted that if the view on properties which I developed is correct, we should reject a certain claim that realists sometimes raise with respect to their position: to wit, that it provides for an *explanation* of elementary predication. At least we should reject that any conceptual explanation or analysis is provided for; contrariwise, the analysis of property-attribution draws on the device of elementary predication. To regard this mistaken claim as a cornerstone of realism is widespread both among realists themselves, but also among non-realists. It is furthermore not untypical that philosophers who formulate such a claim remain rather vague on what exactly the purported *explanans* is supposed to be, and whether explanation should differ from analysis (and if so, how).<sup>26</sup> No harm is done if we once for all abandon this idea; rejecting a mistaken claim will only make the realist's position stronger.

Perhaps, I may add, some realists have something else in mind when they talk about an explanation in this context; if so, only a closer investigation could reveal how the resulting claim would relate to the view I defended. But this is not the place to pursue those issues.

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<sup>26</sup> A recent example both of the misconception of realism and the sloppy use of 'explanation' and 'analysis' is provided by Moreland in his introductory monograph on universals (2001: 115, *et passim*).

## 5. THE COPULA AND EXEMPLIFICATION (REGRESS #4)

As far as I can make sense of Bradley's reasoning, Teichmann's regress argument indeed captures some of its central aspects. But an important step in Bradley's considerations has not yet been touched; he was puzzled by the meaning of the little word 'is' in its use as the copula:

[A lump of sugar] is, for example, white, and hard, and sweet. The sugar, we say, *is* all that; but what the *is* can really mean seems doubtful. (1930: 16)

In his 1995 article (to whose title both Bradley and the copula must lend their names), Richard Gaskin takes up this thread. Indeed, he formulates a regress argument which he supposes to be somehow concerned with the meaning of the copula. The exact connection that he has in mind is, however, not easy to figure out. So before I address his argument, I will prepare for it by a partially independent discussion of the copula in sections (a.) and (b.). I will examine Gaskin's views on the copula in section (c.), and turn to his regress argument in section (d.); in the final section (e.) I will come back to the doubts that Bradley voiced in the above quotation.

### a. *What Makes a Sentence? On an Alleged Function of the Copula*

In the title of his article, Gaskin not only alludes to Bradley, but also to an old topic of philosophy, the *unity of the proposition*. As often, it seems that several problems and ideas are more or less loosely subsumed under this heading. One of them concerns the difference between mere assemblies of words or ideas on the one hand, and assemblies that combine to form sentences or judgements on the other. This is a place at which Gaskin sees the copula to come into play:

If we make the basic assumption that the components of a proposition have reference on the model of proper name and bearer, we face the problem of distinguishing the proposition from a 'mere list' of names. (Gaskin 1995: 177)

It is not wholly clear to me what problem we allegedly have to face here. In his article, Gaskin incessantly moves back and forth between talk about *linguistic* entities (names, predicates, sentences) and talk about what is

expressed by (utterances of) linguistic entities. I will separate the issues and concentrate henceforth on the linguistic level. The following question seems to trouble Gaskin:

(Q) How can we distinguish a sentence from a mere list of names?

On an ordinary understanding this task poses no problems; proper names alone do not suffice for a sentence (except in elliptic utterances: ‘Who was that girl sitting next to you at Lady Gaster’s party?’ – ‘Juliet’). But assume we make the ‘basic assumption’ that just as singular terms, predicates have a reference. It would follow that there are sentences in which every syntactically distinguishable element has a reference (‘Socrates lives’). We could then reformulate our question:

(Q-2) How can we distinguish a sentence from a mere list of its referential components?

But if that is an important question, it will be so only because this question is equally important:

(Q-3) How can we distinguish a sentence from a mere list of its components?

I cannot see how the assumption that all sentential components have a referential function could in any significant way contribute to the difficulties that this latter question may pose. Can anyone?

Because I do not think that the more specific question is of any particular interest, I shall proceed to the question with the greater generality, (Q-3). I assume it is concerned with *inscriptions* of sentences (or equally the products of oral utterances of sentences), not with sentences understood as linguistic *types*. Now, on a rather lenient understanding, any inscription of words, if they are properly arranged, is the inscription of a sentence. In this sense, inscriptions of sentences can be produced by accident: if a friend of mine and I are mindlessly scrabbling down some words on the same sheet of paper, and they happen to be in the order of a well formed sentence (I wrote down ‘I want’, he wrote down ‘to fly’), then *there is* a sentence inscription on the paper. If we read (Q-3) on the basis of this understanding of a sentence inscription, then we must reject the question

because of a wrong presupposition: do not ask *how* we can  $\phi$ , if we cannot  $\phi$  at all.

But we could vote for a more restrictive understanding of what a sentence-inscription is. We can, indeed, distinguish between inscriptions of signs that are *intended as* sentential inscriptions and those that are not, reserving the term ‘sentence’ for the former kind of inscription. The scribbles of my friend and me will not classify as a sentence then, and (Q-3) will be a substantial question understood like that. John Stuart Mill was concerned with such a notion of a sentence when he raised a question similar to (Q-3) (mind Mill’s rather traditional use of ‘proposition’: a proposition, in his sense, is a *sentence*; to be more precise, it is a *token* sentence of the *declarative* kind<sup>27</sup>):

A proposition [...] is a portion of discourse in which a predicate is affirmed or denied of a subject. [...] as we cannot conclude from merely seeing two names put together, that they are predicate and subject, that is, that one of them is intended to be affirmed or denied of the other, it is necessary that there should be some mode or form of indicating that such is the intention; some sign to distinguish a proposition from any other kind of discourse. (*System of Logic*: ch. IV, § 1)

How do we find out whether a particular collection of word-inscriptions is the vehicle of an assertion rather than a question? – or, we may add, whether it is perhaps a mere list of words? In his answer, Mill stressed the role of the copula; indicating that something is intended as the inscription of a declarative sentence

[...] is sometimes done by a slight alteration of one of the words, called an *inflection* [...]. But this function is more commonly fulfilled by the word *is*, when an affirmation is intended, *is not*, when a negation [...] The word which thus serves the purpose of a sign of predications called [...] the *copula*. (Loc. cit.)

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<sup>27</sup> Mill’s use of ‘proposition’ is not wholly systematic, though. Cp. Skorupski (1989: 49f.).

I think Mill clearly overrates the role of the copula here. After all, the copula has not only a use in assertive utterances ('Belmondo is charming. '), but equally so in questions ('Is Belmondo charming?').

But there are several other conventions about how to mark off a declarative sentences from interrogative ones, and both, in turns, from non-sentential collections of words. We can derive important clues about such conventions from the two sentences about Belmondo: the classification of a sentence as declarative or interrogative is made possible by *word-order* and *punctuation*.<sup>28</sup> Both also play a role in distinguishing *any* sentences from non-sentential inscriptions; they are furthermore (at least in European languages) assisted by the use of a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence, and (a circumstance which is very basic) by some form of *linear* arrangement of words on a surface.

Must we deny the copula any relevance for an answer to (Q-3) and Mill's variant of it, then? No; the copula still contributes to these matters, even though its contribution is not as pivotal as Mill urges. The copula increases the number of components in an elementary predication; accordingly, it also increases the number of possible arrangements. Since word-order is highly important for our ability to tell declarative from non-declarative sentences or mere lists, the existence of the copula enriches the desambiguating devices of language. This circumstance has been clearly noted by Quine, who produced a nice illustration:

I was told of a telegram sent by a journalist to check on the age of Cary Grant: HOW OLD CARY GRANT. Came the reply: OLD CARY GRANT WELL STOP HOW YOU. (Quine 1987: 37)

Here the copula would have enabled us, not to recognise the interrogative sentence as interrogative, but to recognise the function of the words and the semantic units. Thus the addition of the copula would have resulted in a syntactically *unambiguous* expression of a question, instead of the ambiguous 'HOW OLD CARY GRANT', which can express either of two questions.

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<sup>28</sup> In spoken language, intonation may also be important.

We have seen that there are several factors that make us see what functions certain words or groups of words are meant to play. The copula only indirectly contributes to them.

Finally it is important to realise that the relevant conventions are not so rigid that they could not be overruled by the particular context of an utterance. After all, every word could appear as an item of some list, and you cannot deny a verb the possibility of being listed just because it is inflected. As an example, let us take a look at a mere list of a noun and an inflected verb: Socrates lives. Although the words that follow the colon in the last sentence are linearly arranged, are followed by a full stop, and would be apt to constitute a well-formed sentence, you can know that they are *not* a sentence but a list of words. You can know so because (and only because) I told you what they are.

Or take another example; the following does certainly appear to be a mere list of words:

Some Some poets others try think to it deconstruct is language impossible.

Context, however, might make us see things differently. The above arrangement of words is, in fact, a twofold sentential arrangement; it resulted from crossing over two sentences by alternately writing down a word from the one, and a word from the other sentence.<sup>29</sup> Such a procedure might, for instance, be employed in a poem, perhaps for effect of linguistic deconstruction. (One could perhaps even arrange two sentences in this way such that a third sentence emerges – but I lack both the ambition and the artistic ability to do so.)

Despite the fact that every sentence-like inscription might possibly be only a list, we normally have no difficulties of telling word-lists from sentences. There is a simple reason for this fortunate circumstance: lists of words just have not much use in everyday life – in comparison to the importance of sentences, the importance of lists is clearly inferior. There are, of course, some exceptional situations; in word games like *Scrabble* or *Boggle*, for instance, where single words are formed on a board or written

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<sup>29</sup> So it incorporates the following sequence of sentences: Some poets try to deconstruct language. Some others think it is impossible.

down on a piece of paper, we habitually generate lists of words. By accident, some such list might happen to be ordered such that it could be mistaken for a sentence. Again, only contextual knowledge will help to decide such issues.

### b. *The Copula is a Predicate-forming Operator*

So far, I have (with one exception) concentrated on showing what function the copula does *not* have. But we can indeed give a positive characterisation of what the copula does: the copula is a predicate-building operator that operates on general terms (be they adjectives, or complex noun-phrases like ‘a man of age’).<sup>30</sup>

Such an operation does not necessarily require an *operator* (a word or a phrase). It could have been conducted by some other linguistic device, like conventions about order or (in written word) highlighting and (in spoken tongue) intonation or pronunciation. But the existence of such an operation, however it is implemented, is important for our language. It highly increases the flexibility of language, because it enables us to use the same (general) terms in different logico-grammatical functions; thus, an adjective such as ‘old’ has an attributive use in ‘old man’ and it forms the substantial part of a predicate ‘is old’. Analogous remarks apply to nouns and noun phrases: thus, the noun ‘man’ has an appositive use (comparable to the attributive use of an adjective) in ‘the man Socrates’, it forms the substantial part of the predicate ‘is a man’, and it figures as part of quantified noun phrases such as ‘every man’ or ‘no man’.

So we see again that the copula is not idle. It helps distinguishing between the grammatical roles of other phrases – a job that could have been fulfilled by other devices, but which, as a matter of fact, is the responsibility of the copula.

### c. *Exemplification and the Copula*

Let me return to what Gaskin thinks about the copula. Above, I quoted him speaking about the ‘basic assumption that the components of a proposition have reference on the model of proper name and bearer’ (loc. cit.). I

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<sup>30</sup> Cp. Quine (1987: 36f.) and Künne (forthcoming).

assume that he uses ‘proposition’ in the traditional meaning of ‘sentence’ – otherwise, it would be strange that he speaks, in the same breath, of propositions and *names*, by which he surely means linguistic entities. Presumably, when Gaskin talks about the components of a sentence, he does not mean *all* of them (think, for example, of logical connectives or interjections, such as ‘unfortunately’); but he definitely intends his remark to apply to the copula. He reckons that ‘we are subject to a requirement [...] to find a referent for the copula.’ (1995: 175)

A minor remark: it is one thing to assign some expressions a semantic value, and another to say that they *refer* to this value, or that they stand to it in the relation in which a name stands to its bearer. I will illustrate this with an example (that will soon become important in another respect): it is rather common to assign, in a way, semantic values to predicates – for predicates are often said to *express* or *signify* properties (or relations).<sup>31</sup> These locutions can be explained such that it will be hardly contentious to speak in this manner; we can stipulate:

(Signify) Given a predicate *x*, let us say that *x* signifies whatever property is referred to by a canonical designator derived from *x* by means of nominalization.

By this stipulation, we can justify talk about semantic values of predicates with two low-level assumptions: (i) we can derive canonical designators of properties from predicates; (ii) there are (in general) properties which those designators refer to.

Since (i) is just a linguistic fact, whoever does not reject the ontology of properties and relations as a whole has therefore an unproblematic sense in which predicates signify properties. By assigning a predicate a semantic value in this sense, we do not assimilate the function of predicates to that of names (or singular terms).

But now let me proceed to a question which will lead to the basic disagreement between Gaskin and me: why should we want to assign a value to the *copula*? We have seen an easy and uncontroversial way of assigning

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<sup>31</sup> Similarly, we can assign such values to *general terms* (by which I mean *components* of predicates that need the copula to make a predicate). For the present concern, the differences between both practices are not important.

values to predicates – but the copula is not a predicate; it is only a predicate-forming operator. And indeed, its nominalization, ‘being’, does not denote anything. (Presumably, it has a reading in which it denotes *existence*; but in that reading it is related to the existential use of ‘be’, not to the copulative).

‘Being’ figures as a part in denoting phrases, in gerundive nominals. But in such phrases it is not itself a denoting component. It rather keeps its copulative status, just as any adjectives by which it is followed keep their adjectival status. The very same operations can be performed upon the components of gerundive constructions that can be performed upon their non-nominalised counterparts. Just as we can modify the adjective ‘witty’ in ‘is witty’ by some adverb, such as ‘scintillatingly’, we can modify the adjective in ‘being witty’ by an adverb, obtaining ‘being scintillatingly witty’. And similarly, components which attach to the copula, such as the negation in “is not witty”, still attach to the copulative element in a gerundive, as in “not being witty”. This relates to a fact that Zeno Vendler once stressed: verbal components of gerundive nominals still behave like verbs (as he put it himself, the verb in a gerundive nominal is still *alive and kicking*).<sup>32</sup> But the verbal phrase from which a nominal is derived may essentially contain the copula – and thus it should keep its copulative status in the nominal. And indeed, we cannot, *salva congruitate*, substitute any singular term for the ‘being’ of a gerundive phrase. The reason is simply that in these constructions ‘being’ does not play the role of a singular term.

I conclude that, *pace* Gaskin, we not only lack the need *and* reason to assign a value to the copula, we have all reason not to do so – it is not a singular term, nor is it systematically related to such a term in the way a predicate is related to its nominalization.<sup>33</sup>

But perhaps Gaskin would agree with my *linguistic* remarks about the copula and argue that the need does not arise for linguistic reasons; indeed, he describes the requirement of assigning a referent to the copula as the

*philosophical* need to be able to talk about instantiation (i.e. predicative being as such, not being *F* for any particular replacement for ‘*F*’). (loc. cit.)

(Notice that where I have talked about *exemplification* so far, Gaskin talks about *instantiation*. In the present context, I take this to be a mere difference in terminology; to avoid unnecessary confusions, I will from now on follow Gaskin’s diction.)

So, Gaskin thinks that

(G-1) if there is a relation of instantiation, it will be the semantic value of the copula, and that

(G-2) as philosophers, we sometimes need to speak about instantiation.

While Gaskin’s second assumption has something for it, his first assumption, (G-1), should be rejected. The relation of *having* (instantiation), in which a property stands to its objects, is signified by the word ‘has’ (‘instantiates’). But this is, contrary to the copula, an ordinary *relational predicate* that requires completion by two singular terms.

#### d. *Gaskin’s Regress*

Let me now turn to Gaskin’s regress argument. He writes:

The basic idea of the regress is the following: if we analyse the connection between object and property (or object and relation) as the obtaining of a further relation of instantiation of the property by the object, or participation of the object in the property, we are launched on an infinite regress, because we shall have to analyse the introduced relation of instantiation (participation) as the obtaining of yet a further relation of instantiation (participation), connecting object, property and instantiation. And so on. (Gaskin 1995: 161)

What is remarkable about Gaskin’s formulation of the regress is that he never mentions the copula. None the less, it is obvious from his whole article that he thinks the regress is concerned with the copula. By bringing the foregoing discussion of the copula to bear upon this matter, we can shed light on why Gaskin thinks so: because he holds that the copula

<sup>32</sup> See Vendler (1967: 131).

<sup>33</sup> See also Künne (forthcoming), where he lends further support to the view that the copula should not be assigned any entity as its semantic value.



should be assigned a semantic value, more specifically, the relation of instantiation, and because the regress threatens the notion of instantiation, he thinks that the regress equally endangers the meaningfulness of the copula. But since his reason is erroneous (see my rejection of (G-1)), whatever destructive potential the regress may have, it will not affect the copula in any way.

Perhaps though, it does affect the notion of instantiation. Does it? I do not think so. Gaskin expects his regress to start from an *analysis* of the notion of instantiation. Above I proposed a schema for an analysis of the concepts expressed by canonical property designators, a schema that we can easily modify such as to apply to designators of dyadic relations:

(Schema Relation Analysis)

By ‘ $\phi$ -ness’ we understand the relation  $r$ , such that:

□  $\forall x, y$  ( $x$  stands in  $r$  to  $y \leftrightarrow x \phi y$ ).

Here the proper substitution for ‘ $\phi$ ’ will be a two-place predicate, such as ‘has’. So, if we want to analyse the connection of *having* (instantiation) which holds between an object  $x$  and one of its properties  $p$ , we should resort to the corresponding predication ‘ $x$  has  $p$ ’; we obtain:

*Having* is the relation  $r$  such that:

□ for all objects  $x$  and all properties  $p$  ( $x$  stands in  $r$  to  $p \leftrightarrow x$  has  $p$ ).

This rather trivial-seeming statement correctly explains what we understand by the singular term ‘having’ (or: ‘instantiation’). Notice that there is no mention of any other relation in this explanation; in particular, instantiation is not to be analysed by recourse to some further relation of instantiation. So the regress which Gaskin envisages cannot get off the grounds here. Just as concepts of properties should be explained with recourse to a prior understanding of monadic predicates, concepts of relations should be explained with recourse to a prior understanding of relational predicates.

*e. Bradley on the Copula and the Word ‘has’*

I take it that I have disposed of all of Gaskin’s challenges by now. Before I conclude this section, I shall, at least once in this article, pay some serious attention to what Bradley himself had to say. I already quoted him de-

claring that he finds the meaning of ‘is’ mysterious. His worries may become clearer when he writes:

One quality,  $A$ , is in relation with another quality,  $B$ . But what are we to understand here by *is*? We do not mean that ‘in relation to  $B$ ’ *is*  $A$ , and yet we assert that  $A$  *is* ‘in relation with  $B$ ’. [...] No, we should reply, the relation is not identical with the thing. It is only a sort of attribute which inheres or belongs. The word to use, when we are pressed, should not be *is*, but only *has*. But this reply comes to very little. The whole question is evidently to the meaning of *has*; and, apart from metaphors not taken seriously, there appears really to be no answer. (1930: 17)

Here, he is not only concerned with the meaning of the copula, but also with the meaning of ‘has’ (as used in connection with property-designators).

Let me address both points in turns:

(i) *Bradley’s alleged Problems in Understanding the Copula*. Bradley rightly insists that the copula cannot have the same meaning as the ‘is’ of *identity*. Where we use the ‘is’ to express identity, we can replace it by ‘is identical to’. Treating the copula in this way would deprive many true statements of their well-formedness (and indirectly of their truth): after all, the ‘is’ of identity requires completion by a second singular term, while the copulative ‘is’ accepts general terms. Replacing the copula in ‘Socrates is wise’ with the phrase ‘is identical to’ results in gibberish.

Thus far, Bradley is therefore correct. But he seems somewhat obsessed with the ‘is’ of identity. He pretends not to understand the copulative ‘is’. But this, I take it, is mere pretence; for we know that Bradley at the same time declares to understand the ‘is’ of identity. Now we have seen that we can spell out this use of the ‘is’ by the phrase ‘is identical to’. But as it occurs in *this* phrase, the ‘is’ certainly does not *again* express identity – a second replacement by the phrase ‘is identical to’ yields word salad. So, the ‘is’ in the ‘is identical to’ is our dear old copula. Since Bradley admits that he understands the ‘is identical to’, he indirectly commits himself to an understanding of the copula. So I do not think that we have any reasons to take his concerns about the copula seriously.

(ii) *The Meaning of 'has'*. Can we help Bradley a little with his understanding of the word 'has'? Though we may assume that he does have a sufficient understanding of the word, there is an important difference to the case of the copula. No understanding of 'have' is required for the ability to master elementary predications. Prior to our acquisition of the framework of properties, we have no need for such a relational predicate (or the concept expressed by it). Thus, unlike the copula, the word 'have' (in the use in which things are said to have properties) may allow for an explanation, which may even seem quite desirable. Now we might try the following:

(Have) An entity  $x$  has the property  $F$ -ness iff  $x$  is  $F$ .

This might, under usual circumstances, seem sufficient for an introduction of the 'have'. But notice that I already relied on an understanding of *having* in my explication of the meaning of property-designators. If in turns, by explication (Have) I rely on the understanding of property-designators, this seems circular.

Let us agree this *is* circular. Nevertheless, both explications will be helpful to someone who has not yet adopted the conceptual framework of properties. To do so, he must *both* acquire the concept expressed by 'has' and some concepts of properties. Without further aid, the explications given cannot produce the mastery of these concepts, because they are underdetermined due to their circularity. Someone who learned only about the two explications could, for example, mistake properties for sets, since structurally equivalent explications can be given for talk about sets and the membership relation.

But when I described the acquisition of the framework of properties, I pointed out that there are a lot of linguistic forms, in the combined mastery of which the understanding of this framework will manifest itself. These forms will in particular include statements whose mastery will yield an implicit grasp of identity-conditions for properties. Thus, their mastery will prevent speakers from mistaking properties for sets.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The process I describe is indeed similar to a prominent idea about how we come to a grasp of the concept of a set, i.e. the idea that we learn the concept by some form of implicit definition (for a recent defence of this idea about sets see Muller 2004).

I conclude that we cannot, simultaneously, give easy and non-circular explications for singular property concepts and the concept expressed by 'has'. But we can say something circular, yet nevertheless illuminating about them, and explain the mechanisms of how these explications will become sufficient with the aid of mastering several other linguistic forms. I do not know whether Bradley would have been content with this; but I think he should have been.

#### CONCLUSION

I have distinguished between four regresses, centring around the notions of the mere *existence* of relations (regress #1), of *necessitation* (regress #2), *logical form* and *synonymy* (regress #3), and finally *instantiation* and the *copula* (regress #4).

Furthermore, I have defended certain views about these notions in light of which the regresses lose their alleged sting. I think we can breathe a deep sigh of relief: whatever mischief the spectre of old Bradley may still do, it will have nothing to do with his notorious regress argument.<sup>35</sup>

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