*Articles*

# "ON DENOTING" AND THE PRINCIPLE OF ACQUAINTANCE

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While Russell's concerns in developing the theory of descriptions were primarily with his foundation of logic, he was aware of the epistemological uses of both the theory of denoting concepts and the 1905 theory of definite descriptions. At the end of "On Denoting" he suggests that the principle of acquaintance is a "result" of the new theory of denoting. In this paper I examine the relation between the theory of descriptions and the principle of acquaintance, and I reject two suggestions, one that Russell's view commits him to the position that quantifiers range only over objects of acquaintance, the other that the principle of acquaintance plays a crucial role in the Gray's Elegy argument.

Russell's earlier theory of denoting concepts went hand in hand with the principle of acquaintance, as Russell made clear in his "Points about Denoting". So the principle of acquaintance was neither a motivator for the new account nor a special consequence of it. The new account of "On Denoting", while dispensing with denoting concepts, preserved the connection that the older denoting theory had with the principle of acquaintance.

The development of Russell's theory of meaning and denotation and its replacement by the theory of descriptions were not motivated by epistemological concerns, nor by issues which we would now think of as issues in the philosophy of language. Russell's new theory of descriptions in "On Denoting" was motivated primarily by his concern for solving the contradiction and developing a foundation for the logic of *Principia.* This is true despite the fact that Russell very often discussed his views, both the original theory of meaning and denotation and the new theory of descriptions, in terms of problems in philosophy

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of language rather than the foundation of the class theory of *Principia*. This concern for the contradiction and the foundation of logic is evident from the series of papers developing the theory, written mostly in 1903 but including the 1905 paper, "On Fundamentals," which has written in Russell's hand at the top of the first sheet, "Pp. 18ff. contain the reasons for the new theory of denoting."

Nevertheless, Russell was also quite interested in issues in philosophy of language and epistemology both in the earlier manuscripts and in "On Denoting". The earlier theory of denoting concepts was used to solve puzzles in philosophy of language and epistemology. The puzzles in philosophy of language given in "On Denoting" are very well known as are some puzzles which touch on related issues in epistemology. At the beginning of "On Denoting" Russell mentions the relevance of denoting phrases for our ability to affirm propositions about things with which we are not acquainted, and at the end of "On Denoting" he mentions what he later called the Principle of Acquaintance, the principle that every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted. He says that this principle is a "result" of his new theory of denoting:

> One interesting result of the above theory of denoting is this: when there is anything with which we do not have immediate acquaintance, but only definition by denoting phrases, then the propositions in which this thing is introduced by means of a denoting phrase do not really contain this thing as a constituent, but contain instead the constituents expressed by the several words of the denoting phrase. Thus in every proposition that we can apprehend (i.e. not only in those whose truth or falsehood we can judge of, but in all that we can think about), all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance. (*Papers* 4: 427)

Now this may come as a surprise. We can all see, I think, how the theory of descriptions nicely fits with the principle of acquaintance, but it is unclear why we should think of this as a *result* of the theory. The relation between the theory of descriptions and the principle of acquaintance turns out to be a bit confusing. Two authors that I know of have made the startling claim that Russell was committed (whether he knew it or not) to the view that quantifiers range only over objects of acquain-

tance.[1] Two others have suggested that the principle of acquaintance is instrumental in the key argument, often referred to as the Gray's Elegy argument, which occurs in "On Denoting".[2]

## I. SOME REMARKS ABOUT DENOTING CONCEPTS AND THE PRINCIPLE OF ACQUAINTANCE

Russell gave his theory of denoting concepts in *The Principles of Mathematics*, but developed the theory further in the series of papers he wrote up to "On Denoting", where the theory was rejected. This previous theory has been discussed before, but I will very briefly summarize the important features. Sentences which contain proper names have as their meaning-relata[3] propositions which contain the objects the names stand for as their logical subjects. Sentences which contain denoting phrases, either indefinite or definite, have as their meaning-relata propositions which contain denoting concepts as constituents, but are about the object or objects denoted by the concepts. Unlike Frege's view that words have both sense and reference, Russell's view was that only complex denoting phrases have both meaning and denotation, although as the view was developed during 1903 he intended to extend the account of denoting phrases to include all propositions.[4]

The paper "On Meaning and Denotation" begins with some of the puzzles later discussed in "On Denoting". Russell focuses in particular on the difference between the propositions

(1) Arthur Balfour advocates retaliation

and

(2) The present prime minister advocates retaliation.

[1] Hintikka 1981, pp. 167–83. In (1974, p. 59), Wilfred Sellars also argued that Russell's theory entailed that a person must be acquainted with the objects over which the quantifiers range.

[2] Kremer 1994 and Noonan 1996.

[3] This is the term used by Sainsbury 1979 to indicate the item in the world related to an expression in the language.

[4] See the discussion in "On the Meaning and Denotation of Phrases", *Papers* 4: 286–7, and "What I have called the unasserted proposition is the meaning, the asserted proposition is the denotation. False propositions have only meaning, not denotation. *Excellent!*" ("Dependent Variables and Denotation", *Papers* 4: 303).

The first, Russell says, "expresses a thought which has for its object a complex containing as a constituent the man himself; no one who does not know what is the designation of the name 'Arthur Balfour' can understand what we *mean* …" (*Papers* 4: 316). But with respect to the second, he says that

> … it is possible for a person to understand completely what we mean without his knowing that Mr. Arthur Balfour is Prime Minister, and indeed without his ever having heard of Mr. Arthur Balfour. On the other hand, if he does not know what England is, or what we mean by *present*, or what it is to be Prime Minister, he cannot understand what we mean. This shows that Mr. Arthur Balfour does not form part of our meaning, but that England and the present and being Prime Minister do form part of it. (*Papers* 4: 316)

It is quite clear that in this stage of the development of the theory of denoting concepts, Russell already had the view that we had to have some relation (here called "understanding what we mean") with the meaning-relata contained within a proposition in order to understand the proposition in question. If there is some term in a proposition to which we are not related in such a way, then we don't understand the proposition. While he doesn't here characterize the relation as acquaintance, he did characterize the difference between knowing something under a denoting concept and having the meaning-relata before your mind as knowledge by description, as opposed to knowledge by acquaintance:

> Generally speaking, we may know, without leaving the region of general propositions, that every term of the class $a$ has the relation $R$ to one and only one term; as e.g. we know that every human being now living has one and only one father. Thus given any term of the class $a$, say $x$, we know that "the term to which $x$ has the relation $R$" has a perfectly definite denotation. Nevertheless, it's a wise child etc. This shows that to be known by description is not the same thing as to be known by acquaintance, for "the father of $x$" is an adequate description in the sense that, as a matter of fact, there is only one person to whom it is applicable. ("Points about Denoting", *Papers* 4: 306)

In the somewhat earlier "On the Meaning and Denotation of Phrases", Russell saw that this view required the position that some nouns that were apparently proper names were disguised definite descriptions. In particular, he said that since we could perfectly well understand a prop-

osition such as "Apollo comes leading / His choir the nine …", "Apollo" is not a proper name like "Aeschylus". He even extends this claim beyond names which denote nothing by saying "even genuine proper names, when they belong to interesting people, tend to become names which have meaning" (*Papers* 4: 284–5).

Let me make two remarks about the position developed in these manuscripts. One thing that they show is that the epistemological tasks later given to the new theory of definite descriptions were already being handled by the theory of denoting concepts. While Russell did not actually articulate his principle of acquaintance, it seems from these passages that he was in fact using that principle. Everything that goes into composing a proposition we can understand is an item with which we are acquainted, or at least that we "understand" in the sense that we have that item before our minds. When we are not so related to an item or person, such as Arthur Balfour, we cannot understand the proposition in which he occurs, but we can understand a proposition which contains a denoting concept which denotes him, provided we are acquainted with the constituents, such as England, etc., of that concept.

The other remark I wish to make is that these manuscripts also demonstrate that the concern with Meinong's non-existent objects cannot be the motivating force behind the new theory of "On Denoting". These manuscripts are fairly early. The notation dates them to the latter half of 1903, the same year that Russell wrote "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions" and also the year *Principles of Mathematics* was published. It is true that in the *Principles* Russell said,

> *Being* is that which belongs to every conceivable term, to every possible object of thought—in short to everything that can possibly occur in any proposition, true or false, and to all such propositions themselves…. Numbers, the Homeric gods, relations, chimeras and four-dimensional spaces all have being, for if they were not entities of a kind, we could make no propositions about them….
>
> Existence, on the contrary, is the prerogative of some only amongst beings. To exist is to have a specific relation to existence—a relation, by the way, that existence itself does not have. (*PoM*, p. 449)

Here he had an account of non-existent concrete individuals, an account discussed very thoroughly by Nino Cocchiarella in "Meinong Reconstructed *vs.* Early Russell Reconstructed". However, it seems that this view lasted only a very short while. While there remains a distinction be-

tween existence and being, even in "On Denoting",[5] in these 1903 papers he did not include such concrete individuals as the Homeric gods among those having being. Given what he says in his 1905 paper, "The Existential Import of Propositions", it is clear that numbers would have being, though they don't exist, while chimeras would neither exist nor have being.[6] We have instead the view that "Apollo" is a definite description which means a denoting concept, which, as a matter of fact, denotes nothing. Since some have seen "On Denoting" as providing a remedy for the ontological excess of non-existent objects, we should be aware that this remedy existed already without the elimination of the denoting concepts.[7]

Quantification in the 1903 theory was handled by denoting concepts. For example, the denoting concept *all men* could occur in a proposition. The proposition would be about all men, but all the men would not be constituents of the proposition. This was in fact the fundamental role of the denoting concepts. In the examples given above from "On the Meaning and Denotation of Phrases" (1903), it is clear that the denoting concept, *the present prime minister of England*, is a constituent of the proposition in question, but that Arthur Balfour is not. Denoting con-

[5] See *OD* (*Papers* 4: 420–1) where he distinguishes existence from subsistence or being. It is clear that in "On Denoting" there are no subsistent non-existent concrete objects.

[6] See "The Existential Import of Propositions", *Papers* 4: 487. Numbers exist in the sense that the class of numbers is non-empty, but they do not have a concrete existence. He does not quite say, but it follows from what he says in this paper, that the quantifiers range over beings. He does say that chimeras don't exist in either the sense of being concrete existents or in the sense that the class of chimeras is non-empty, because "if there were chimeras, they would be entities of the kind that exist [in the sense of concrete existents]."

[7] Russell is quite clear on this point in the later paper, "The Existential Import of Propositions", *Papers* 4: 487. There Russell is clear that the complex concepts have being, and that the class concept, "present King of France", has being but does not have existence in the sense of having any members. Given that numbers, which don't exist but have being, are members of classes, to say a class is empty would be to deny not only existence, but being to whatever one might have thought fell under the concept: "The phrase intends to point out an individual, but fails to do so: it does not point out an unreal individual, but no individual at all. The same explanation applies to mythical personages, Apollo, Priam, etc. These words have a *meaning* … but they have not a denotation: there is no entity, real or imaginary, which they point out" (p. 487). As Gregory Landini has pointed out to me, it is important to realize that the notion of being used here is not the same as the notion of being in the *Principles*, but more like the notion of subsistence.

cepts were eliminated in "On Denoting". Sentences which contained denoting phrases were analyzed as sentences which contained quantifiers. However, the full ontology of quantified propositions was not worked out in "On Denoting".

## II. HINTIKKA'S CLAIM THAT QUANTIFIERS RANGE ONLY OVER OBJECTS OF ACQUAINTANCE

In 1981 Jaako Hintikka claimed that Russell was committed to the view that the range of quantifiers in analyzed sentences consists of objects of acquaintance. He took as support for this claim the remarks Russell made at the end of "On Denoting" that the principle of acquaintance is a result of the theory of denoting. Hintikka asked,

> Why should such reducibility to acquaintance be entailed by Russell's theory of definite descriptions? … The only reason why Russell can think that his theory of denoting implies his theory of knowledge by acquaintance is apparently by assuming that the values of the variables in the *analysans* of each sentence containing definite descriptions range over objections of acquaintance.
>
> (1981, p. 176)

Now if this were a correct account of Russell's view, then his position would have radically changed from his earlier accounts. But unfortunately for Hintikka, this analysis doesn't fit well with anything Russell does with the theory of descriptions. Hintikka here referred to Russell's "theory of knowledge by acquaintance", but the concern is clearly with the principle of acquaintance. Russell's remark that knowledge by description lets our knowledge reach beyond acquaintance clearly requires that propositions which we understand have quantifiers in them which range beyond objects of acquaintance. In his 1969 paper, "Ontology and the Philosophy of Mind in Russell", Wilfred Sellars recognized that Russell's quantifiers ranged over everything, but thought that the principle of acquaintance would require that a person who understood such a proposition be acquainted with everything (Sellars 1974, p. 59). Unfortunately, he didn't make his reasons for this claim explicit, but perhaps he was relying on the position that a quantifier enters into a proposition through its values. Russell clearly rejected this position.

At the end of his paper, Hintikka modified his claim, saying that Russell in fact didn't hold the view that the quantifiers are so restricted,

but that his view committed him to it. Hintikka suggested that Russell didn't see this result because he was confused about the ontological commitment of variables.[8]

Hintikka developed his argument not so much around Russell's own words, but around a problem which results from quantifying into epistemic contexts. The problem parallels closely Russell's own problem concerning whether George IV knew whether Scott was the author of *Waverley*, but involves names instead of definite descriptions. Let us suppose that Queen Victoria doesn't know who Charles Dodgson is, but does know that Charles Dodgson exists and knows that Charles Dodgson = Charles Dodgson. Hintikka renders "Queen Victoria doesn't know who Charles Dodgson is" as

(1) $\sim (\exists x)$ Victoria knew that (Charles Dodgson = $x$).

However, since it was true that

(2) Victoria knew that (Charles Dodgson = Charles Dodgson)

and since

[8] Hintikka's remarks are as follows:

> Unfortunately, this is not the whole story. Russell would not have accepted the interpretation I have outlined as a fair representation of either the spirit or the letter of his views. The reason for this descrepancy [*sic*] is merely another mistake of Russell's, however. The view I have attributed to him is not what he actually held, but what he was committed to holding. The real historical reason why Russell thought elimination of definite descriptions in favor of quantifiers proved (or helped to prove) reducibility to acquaintance was not that he thought that these quantifiers range over objects of acquaintance. Rather, he thought that the elimination of all denoting phrases apparently referring to other kinds of objects in favor of any sorts of quantifiers whatsoever is sufficient to do the trick. This presupposes that quantifiers carry no ontological commitment; only denoting phrases do. It is fairly obvious that this is what Russell thought. Variables, especially bound variables, were for him merely a notational device. He did not realize that in the kinds of first-order languages he was using the main interpretational (ontological) burden is carried by quantifiers and their variables…. (1981, p. 181)

In fact, as Russell's labours with his substitutional theory show, Russell accepted Quine's standard for ontological commitment. A passage from a 1907 manuscript, "Fundamentals", makes this clear: "A value of an apparent variable must be something" (1907, fol. 6).

(3) $(\exists x)$(Victoria knew that Charles Dodgson = $x$)

follows from (2) with an unrestricted generalization, we are able to derive a contradiction (1) and (3) in a situation which is perfectly possible. In the 1981 paper, Hintikka's solution was to restrict the range of the quantifiers in such sentences to objects of acquaintance, accepting (2) but rejecting that (3) follows from it. In an earlier paper (1972) he allowed another kind of quantifier which ranged over objects cross-identified by description.

Now the principle of acquaintance was concerned with propositions which we can understand and their constituents. Hintikka's concern is with quantifying into epistemic contexts. The two issues are related, as we shall see, and there is something correct about Hintikka's view since it turns out that existential generalization on such epistemic contexts will be restricted to objects of acquaintance. But this will not be because the variables of quantification range only over such objects. This solution is alien to Russell's views, as it is clear that for Russell's account of knowledge by description both in the pre- and post-"On Denoting" phase the quantifiers of sentences we can understand have to range over objects with which we are not acquainted.

Hintikka insisted that we treat "*A* knows who *B* is" as "$(\exists x)$(*A* knows that $B = x$)". In most of the contexts where Russell uses this locution, he seems to restrict it to "*A* is acquainted with *B*". Thus he often said that even those whom we would say know who Bismarck is, "do not know who he is"—meaning that they are not directly acquainted with him. Thus for Russell, if Victoria did not know who Charles Dodgson was, then Victoria was not acquainted with Charles Dodgson and so he could not occur in any proposition she could understand or know. Thus "Charles Dodgson" would have to be a disguised definite description. (1) above would be true, but (2) could not be. (2) would need to be replaced by

(2′) Victoria knew that $(\exists x)\ (Dx \,.\, (y)(Dy \supset x = y) \,.\, x = x)$

where "*D*" is whatever predicate applying to Dodgson which she has in mind, and will have to have in mind, according to Russell, if Victoria understands at all the claim that Charles Dodgson is self-identical. From this, (3) above doesn't follow. (3) clearly cannot be correct, since it claims that Victoria is entertaining a proposition which contains Dodgson as a

constituent. For knowledge by description to work, we have to be able to have before our minds existential propositions, and to know they are true, without being able to have before our minds the actual instance that makes them true.[9] Given Russell's principle of acquaintance, propositions such as (3) would be false in the circumstances described.

Hintikka thought that attempting to solve this problem by turning names into disguised definite descriptions won't work (1981, p. 174) as it "sweeps the problem under the rug instead of solving it." He said this because

> The defenders of this way out must presuppose some domain of individuals whose members can have "proper" names, i.e. proper names which do not reduce to definite descriptions. Moreover, in all interesting applications, not all these individuals have identities which are known to everybody. Hence we are back at the same problem from which we started. (1981, p. 174)

Now I am sympathetic to Hintikka's criticism of the intense restriction Russell places on proper names, but Russell's restriction of proper names to immediate objects of acquaintance such as fleeting sense-data does in fact prevent such problems from arising. If the identity of something is not known to someone in Hintikka's sense, then that thing cannot be a constituent of a proposition that person understands, and so the quantification in (the move from (2) to (3) in Hintikka's argument above) would never be justified. Thus there is no reason to think that Russell's theory of denoting in any way requires that quantifiers in propositions we understand must range over objects of acquaintance. It is true that applications of existential generalization into epistemic contexts will have to be generalizations on instances with which the person whose knowledge or belief is being quantified into has such acquaintance. *This* result, which blocks Hintikka's paradox, is a consequence of the principle of acquaintance, not a consequence of the restriction of the range of quantifiers to objects of acquaintance.

[9] As Gregory Landini has pointed out to me, the situation is a bit more complicated than this at the time Russell wrote "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1911), for while Russell still talks about "constituents of propositions", he had, with the multiple-relation theory of judgment, abandoned his ontology of propositions. So it would be more correct to say that we have to make existential judgments, and know they are true, without having before our minds the instances which make them true.

### III. KREMER AND NOONAN

The second claim about the relation of the principle of acquaintance to the new theory of denoting is that the argument for the new theory used the principle of acquaintance. This position was advocated by Michael Kremer in 1994. In 1996 Harold Noonan also claimed that the pre-1905 theory of denoting concepts was incompatible with the principle of acquaintance (Noonan, p. 70), but he did not claim that this incompatibility was behind the arguments in "On Denoting", in particular behind the Gray's Elegy Argument (here abbreviated GEA).

Kremer thought that the principle of acquaintance (here POA) is central to the argument in "On Denoting". He said,

> The GEA shows that the attempt to use the theory of denoting concepts to handle apparent counterexamples to the POA is ultimately self defeating; for the theory of denoting concepts, turned on itself, *undermines* the POA. The GEA argues that *if* the theory of denoting concepts is true, we can *know* this only by knowing a proposition which *cannot* be composed only of constituents with which we are acquainted—propositions about denoting concepts themselves. (1994, p. 268)

There are two claims Kremer makes concerning the role of acquaintance in the argument. At one (crucial) point in the Gray's Elegy argument, Russell points out that when a denoting concept is in subject (or entity) position in a proposition, the proposition is not about the concept, but about what it denotes. In order to have a proposition about a denoting concept, there must be another denoting concept which denotes the first concept. So, to use Kremer's example, a proposition about the concept /the teacher of Plato/[10] must not have this concept in subject (entity) position, but rather another concept which denotes that one. Following Kremer, we will use //the teacher of Plato// as the candidate for the denoting concept which will denote the denoting concept /the teacher of Plato/. Then on the supposition being refuted, when this complex occurs in a proposition, that proposition will be about the denoting concept.

Kremer says on the view Russell was arguing against, we would have

[10] I am following Griffin 1980, "Russell on the Nature of Logic", in using slashes to indicate non-linguistic correlates of linguistic expressions. These correlates will be constituents of propositions. Kremer uses braces, "{", "}" (1994, p. 284).

to know that

(4) //the teacher of Plato// denotes /the teacher of Plato/[11]

and to do that we would have to be acquainted with all the constituents, which include these denoting complexes, and we don't have such acquaintance (1994, p. 288).

While I don't want to give yet another analysis of the Gray's Elegy argument, which I have done in a previous paper,[12] I think a little reflection on (4) and the principle concerning entity position which led us to this will show there is a difficulty for Russell's position without reference to the problem of acquaintance. Both of the complexes //the teacher of Plato// and /the teacher of Plato/ appear to occur in entity position in (4), and this is just the problem that Russell was attempting to address. The passage from "On Denoting" reads as follows:

> Thus to speak of *C* itself, i.e., to make a proposition about the meaning, our subject must not be *C*, but something which denotes *C*. Thus "*C*", which is what we use when we want to speak of the meaning, must be not the meaning, but something which denotes the meaning. And *C* must not be a constituent of this complex … for if *C* occurs in the complex, it will be its denotation, not its meaning, that will occur, and there is no backward road from denotations to meanings, because every object can be denoted by an infinite number of different denoting phrases.
>
> Thus it would seem that "*C*" and *C* are different entities, such that "*C*" denotes *C*; but this cannot be an explanation, because the relation of "*C*" to *C* remains wholly mysterious; and where are we to find the denoting complex "*C*" which is to denote *C*? (*Papers* 4: 422)

This passage does not mention acquaintance with complexes, but perhaps it is the last line which suggests to Kremer that acquaintance is what is at issue. The passage in "On Fundamentals" which corresponds to this argument does not mention acquaintance, nor the problem of finding the complex. The problem is phrased in terms of entity occurrences:

[11] Kremer is here giving an account of this passage in "On Denoting": "Thus it would seem that '*C*' and *C* are different entities, such that '*C*' denotes *C*; but this cannot be an explanation, because the relation of '*C*' to *C* remains wholly mysterious; and where are we to find the denoting complex '*C*' which is to denote *C*?" (*Papers* 4: 422); Kremer understands the last query in terms of a lack of acquaintance with these individuals.

[12] See my 1993.

To speak of *C* itself requires either a concept which denotes *C*, or else some further kind of occurrence, over and above all those enumerated in 23 ["fact" 23 listed six pairs of manners in which an entity could occur in a complex]. And a concept which denotes *C* must not contain *C* as entity (as in the case, e.g., with "the meaning of *C*"), for then we get the denotation of *C* occurring where we meant to have the meaning. (*Papers* 4: 382)

In "On Fundamentals", Russell's first stab at the new theory, after giving up because of the "indissolubility of meaning and denotation" (*ibid.* 4: 383), was to introduce a relation of denoting between the complex (now considered a separate entity) and what it denoted (*ibid.* 4: 383–4). While at this point Russell's position was very much in transition, it would have been odd for him to make this move if the whole difficulty had been the problem with being acquainted with such facts as *X* denotes *Y*. Here is an excerpt:

But we want to be able to speak of what *x* denotes, and unfortunately "what *x* denotes" is a denoting complex. We might avoid this as follows: Let *C* be an unambiguously denoting complex (we may now drop the inverted commas); then we have

$$(\exists y) : C \text{ denotes } y : C \text{ denotes } z \,.\, \supset_z \,.\, z = y.$$

Then what is commonly expressed by $\phi$'*C* will be replaced by

$$(\exists y) : C \text{ denotes } y : C \text{ denotes } z \,.\, \supset_z \,.\, z = y : \phi\text{`}y.$$

(*Ibid.* 4: 383)

Russell's view is still in flux, but it is clear that the key move here is to have the *C* and the *x*, *z* and *y* to be what he has called entity occurrences. He does not have a difficulty with the denoting relation as long as all the terms are unambiguously entity occurrences, which is why he parenthetically said we could drop the inverted commas. The key first move was to get rid of the difference between meaning and entity positions. While the denoting relation remains above, what is clear is that the "*C*" and the variables are all in entity position, and occur as entities. Since this all takes place after the argument later phrased as the Gray's Elegy argument, I am not inclined to think that Kremer's analysis is correct.

There is a further problem which shows that Kremer's argument cannot be the correct interpretation. His argument turns on the demand that we must know a proposition of the sort

//the teacher of Plato// denotes the /teacher of Plato/

in order for the one concept to denote the other. But Russell's view, both before and after "On Denoting", did not have this requirement, and could not have had it. When he still held the view of denoting concepts, Russell held that /the centre of mass of the solar system/ was a denoting concept which denoted a given point, say *a*. Now he did not require that in order for anyone to use this denoting concept to denote *a* he would need to know a proposition of the form

/the centre of mass of the solar system/ denotes *a*,

as this proposition contains *a* as a constituent, and the whole point of using a proposition with the denoting concept as a constituent was to be able to refer to *a* when one wasn't acquainted with it and so could not entertain a proposition of which it was a constituent. On the "On Denoting" view we are also able to speak about the point without being acquainted with it by using the denoting phrase "the centre of mass of the solar system". But again, we can do this, and know things by description about *a* without having directly before our minds the proposition /*a* is the centre of mass of the solar system/, and again we couldn't have such a proposition before us since it contains *a* as a constituent. All that is required is that the proposition that *a* is the centre of mass of the solar system be true, not that we have that proposition before our minds.

Both Kremer and Noonan bring up the problem that given the difficulties shown in the Gray's Elegy argument, there will not be names of denoting concepts. They give this as a reason why Russell would have to reject the position that we can be acquainted with denoting concepts. Now the principle of acquaintance is that we must be acquainted with all the constituents of a proposition which is before us. It isn't clear whether we need to be acquainted with the whole proposition;[13] what is crucial is that we need to be acquainted with the building blocks of the proposition so that we can understand the whole complex. In the example given above from "On Meaning and Denotation" concerning /Arthur Balfour/ and /the present prime minister of England/, Russell didn't seem to be particularly concerned with the ability to be acquainted with the whole complex; his concern was simply whether we were ac-

[13] In fact Russell gave up the idea that propositions were single entities while still demanding that we be acquainted with what he still called the "constituents of a proposition".

quainted with the constituents.

However, somewhat later in "On Meaning and Denotation" there is a passage which interestingly anticipates the problem of "On Denoting". In this passage, Russell discussed the difficulty of "apprehending" the complex except by means of denoting concepts in terms of our inability to name the complexes:

> [The complex] seems incapable of being apprehended directly except by an idea expressing it: we cannot form an idea designating it directly in the kind of way in which our idea of whiteness designates whiteness. In such cases, if we invent a proper name for the complex (as opposed to what the complex denotes), the proper name, quâ name, does, of course, designate the complex, but the idea indicated by the proper name merely expresses "the meaning of the complex so-called", which is a complex denoting the said complex. It is thus only through the medium of denoting that the concept can be dealt with at all as a subject.
> (*Papers* 4: 322)

This passage is puzzling in several respects. Noonan takes it as asserting that denoting concepts cannot be spoken of using Russellian proper names, and concludes from this that they cannot be proper objects of acquaintance. The theory of denoting would then conflict with the principle of acquaintance, since we could understand propositions of which they were constituents, but we would not be acquainted with them. Noonan agrees that Russell himself did not make this last argument, and I am not so sure that Russell would have drawn the conclusion. For one thing, Russell did seem to think, as can be seen from this very passage, that we can in some sense have the complex before our minds, suggesting we have some sort of acquaintance with denoting complexes even if we don't have proper names for them. In "On Fundamentals", in a passage elucidating the principle of acquaintance, Russell stated that in instances of indirect knowledge we "are *acquainted* with the denoting concept; thus immediate acquaintance with the constituents of the denoting concept is presupposed in what we may call denotative knowledge" (*Papers* 4: 369).

The problem concerning whether we need a further denoting complex to form judgments about denoting complexes is clearly related to the problem which motivates Russell's rejection of the theory of denoting concepts, but it does not turn on the question of acquaintance. Rather it turns on the claim that these complexes (which in the work mentioned include propositional complexes) can only be the subjects of propositions

if denoting concepts which denote them occur in the propositions. Noonan summarizes his own argument by saying that Russell is committed to the following four propositions, which are inconsistent:

(1) Any object of acquaintance can be given a logically proper name,
(2) denoting concepts are objects of acquaintance,
(3) whatever has a logically proper name can be spoken about by using that name,
(4) denoting concepts cannot be spoken about except by using denoting phrases. (Noonan 1996, p. 81n.)

These four are indeed inconsistent, but we see in the above passages that it isn't clear that Russell accepted (1). In any case, the arguments involved for (4) are what finally sink the theory in Russell's eyes. Once the theory is rejected, (2) will of course be rejected.

## IV. SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Both Noonan and Kremer would say that the new theory of denoting does not so much entail the principle of acquaintance as uphold it. They argue that the old theory is inconsistent with the principle of acquaintance, and that in this sense, Russell can see the principle of acquaintance as a "result" of the new theory. Now while Kremer is incorrect in thinking that Russell's actual argument involved the principle of acquaintance, there is something correct in the overall view he presents. Russell was committed to the principle of acquaintance all along, and he saw that his theory of denoting concepts accounted for people being able to think of things and form propositions about them even if they are not acquainted with them. It was in this sense that the theory of denoting concepts and the principle of acquaintance went hand in hand. When he rejected the theory of denoting concepts, Russell replaced it with a new theory which again went hand in hand with the principle of acquaintance, for the new theory did just what the old theory had attempted to do in this respect and more besides.

But in no way should we think the theory entails that quantifiers range only over objects of acquaintance. On the new theory as with the old, what we have before our minds, and what are constituents of propositions we can understand, are things with which we are acquainted, but they enable us to think of things with which we aren't acquainted. They

do this because on both theories it is true that given individuals fall under certain concepts which enable us to pick those things out. They enable us to do this even if we don't have before our minds the propositions which state that these individuals fall under the concept. Indeed, on the view in question, we can't.

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