

RUSSELL'S "DO DIFFERENCES DIFFER?"

THOMAS R. FOSTER
Philosophy / Ball State U.
Muncie, IN 47304-0500, USA
TFOSTER@BSU.EDU

This paper examines one of Russell's views, held about the turn of the century, found in a short, unpublished manuscript entitled "Do Differences Differ?". This work was one of Russell's early attempts to focus solely on the issue of whether relations were *universal* or *specific* relations. Written before *The Principles of Mathematics*, the manuscript can serve as a step toward that work. To provide a framework for our discussion, we look at aspects of his yet earlier views on this matter. In discussion of the manuscript itself, the present paper divides "Do Differences Differ?" into four distinct parts, discusses some issues and problems with its view, and ends with four distinct responses by Russell to its view.

I

Philosophers and logicians did not truly begin accepting relations until the nineteenth century. Even then, quite a battle ensued. Though Russell was one of the main philosophers arguing for the acceptance of relations, he still had a number of questions about exactly what a relation was. One of these questions focussed on whether or not a relation was a universal. In the manuscript the present paper is discussing, Russell's "Do Differences Differ?" (hereafter, DDD),¹ he argues that relations could not be universals. Rather, relations were particular to the things related; they were *specific* (or, as he sometimes puts it, "particularized"). They could not be shared. And, Russell was not alone with such a view. His position on specific ("particularized") relations of DDD is reflected in the view of his philosophical colleague, G. E. Moore, who wrote: "Only particular instances of ... [difference] ... alone can relate."²

¹ "Do Differences Differ?" (1899), in *Papers* 3: 555–7.

² G. E. Moore, "Quality", in J. B. Baldwin, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy and*

Russell's DDD provides an interesting step towards his position in *The Principles of Mathematics* and later. As this paper will show, a fair portion of the *Principles'* text on universals and particularized relations can be seen as a response to DDD.

Earlier views on specific relations

Before writing DDD, Russell had already made a number of statements claiming that relations that relate are *specific* to their terms. One early argument for relations (and properties) being specific relied on their being *locatable*. Just like the redness-here had to be *different from* the redness-there, so too the relation of, say, *A's-being-a-mile-from-B*, had to be different from that of *C's-being-a-mile-from-D*. It quickly became clear that there were a number of important relations which did not fit such a model, and he looked for other arguments for specific relations.³

One such line of reasoning Russell then adopted can be seen in his "Fundamental Ideas and Axioms of Mathematics"⁴ where we find statements such as: "It is absolutely necessary to regard a relation between two terms as . . . differing from any relation which can hold between a different pair" (*Papers* 2: 295). For Russell, such "necessity" was found in examples like the following: "Diversity differs from *A*.' Here the diversity which *occurs as relation* cannot be related to that which *occurs as term*, and therefore, by symmetry, not to *A* either" (*Papers* 2: 287; emphases added). Here we find Russell concerned with the case of *one item*—in this case a relation—*playing multiple logical roles* within a given proposition, as $D(D, A)$.⁵ To take care of this kind of case, Russell insists on specific differences occurring as the relating relation, or $D^{DA}(D, A)$.⁶ Even this line of reasoning, however, was not what Russell employed in DDD.

II

In DDD, Russell does not doubt that there are propositions which contain (relating) relations. Nor does he doubt that such propositions are

Psychology (1901; repr. Kessinger Publishing, 2007), 2: 406.

³ We do have a background assumption that items *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D* are four in number.

⁴ "Fundamental Ideas and Axioms of Mathematics" (1899), *Papers* 2: 222–305.

⁵ Though this was written before Russell had fully articulated his paradox, some of the kinds of concerns which led to that discovery are here.

⁶ Such superscript notation will here designate specific relations.

meaningful. He further assumes that these propositions may be subject to analysis. Living as he did at a time when Bradley's regress arguments for idealism were widely discussed, Russell's (and Moore's) new realism took very seriously relational paradoxes involving regresses. We may put DDD's main question as follows:

What is the nature of a (relating) relation occurring in a meaningful proposition?

For Russell, an answer must come in terms that do not pose some paradox of analysis. With these assumptions, this question, and this restriction placed upon an appropriate answer, we may now begin to look at that manuscript.

DDD begins with Russell asking: "Does the difference between red and blue differ from the difference between identity and difference?" (*Papers* 3: 555). This is Russell's attempt to introduce the general question as to whether a (relating) relation is to be treated as a *universal* relation or as a *specific* relation.

Part of this opening question, viz., "the difference between identity and difference", is similar to the above-quoted "diversity differs from *A*" of his earlier argument in that each is a case where one item (viz., "difference") seems to be playing two roles within each proposition, the roles of (relating) *relation* and of *relatum* (term). So, in writing the opening sentence of his manuscript, Russell clearly has one of his earlier ways of arguing for specific relations on his mind. However, that past kind of argument was not what moved this work along. Rather, in his writing of DDD, Russell wants the argument for specific relations *not* to rely on such examples as "difference between identity and difference". He wants a case where he feels he could safely generalize his results, and, in DDD, he believes that he has found just that. As we shall see, Russell himself later raises questions about both this approach and its results.

Russell approaches answering the above opening question about the nature of a relating relation (which, for most of this work, is that of Difference) by setting forth three hypotheses:

- (1) When *a* and *b* are distinct, between them is the abstract relation of Difference, a universal—identical across any context in which it occurs.
 - (2) When *a* and *b* are distinct, there are *two* relations between them: a
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universal relation of Difference, shareable with pairs other than **a** and **b**; and a specific relation of difference, particular to the pair **a** and **b**.

- (3) When **a** and **b** are distinct, their relation of difference is specific to them, had by no other pair; while *Difference itself* (the “universal”) does not function as a relation at all (as the universal did in (1) and (2)), but rather as a *class-concept* for all specific differences.

Russell argues for (3), adopting *specific* (“particularized”) *relations* as the only ones that can relate. Though he has introduced three hypotheses, the paper’s focus is on a comparison of universal with specific relations.

III

In laying out the details of DDD, we want here to present four distinct matters: first, DDD’s argument *against* universal relations; second, DDD’s argument *for* specific relations; third, an important concern of Russell’s in DDD; and, fourth, DDD’s general conclusion. In the last section of this paper, we will talk about four eventual responses of Russell to DDD.

I. DDD’s argument against universal relations

The argument may be represented as follows:

- A. All relational propositions have a meaning.
- B. The meaning of the proposition expressed by “*A* and *B* differ” is not (what Russell will call) “inadmissibly complex”.
- C. Relations are either *specific*, i.e., particular to just one set of terms; or, they are *universal*, i.e., they may relate more than one set of terms.
- D. If a relation is taken to be universal, then the *meaning* of the relational proposition expressed by “*A* and *B* differ” will be (paradoxically) “inadmissibly complex”.

And, Russell would conclude that:

- E. Relations are *specific* and not *universal*.

In the DDD manuscript itself, the main thrust of Russell’s argument against relations being universal is to argue for the truth of *D* above.

Russell begins by considering above-mentioned hypothesis (1), where the relating relations are universals. For this to be the case, Russell claims that there must be:

... an argument from the analysis of the proposition "*A* differs from *B*". If what is asserted here were the abstract relation of difference, it would seem the proposition could be analyzed into "*A*, difference, *B*". But this is obviously not the case. We must suppose some relation between difference and the whole composed of *A* and *B*: "*A* and *B* have difference" will express this fact.

(*Papers* 3: 556)

This is the same problem of which Bradley spoke. Why is it "obviously not the case"? Because we are talking about the meaning of a proposition, and that involves a statement showing some sort of *connectedness*, or as Russell later puts it, some sort of *unity*. Since [*D*, *a*, *b*] does not have such, Russell looks to a proposition that the initial proposition implies, viz., $R(D, a, b)$. Why this? Russell thinks that this expresses the "have" of Russell's above "*A* and *B* have Difference". But then we also need an analysis of $R(D, a, b)$. But, about this, Russell reasons:

Since this necessity arises from the analysis of the proposition, the relation of *difference* to *A* and *B* must be part of the *meaning* of "*A* differs from *B*". But now the question arises whether this relation (which we will call *R*) is the same as that which holds between difference and any other pair of related terms.

(*Papers* 3: 556)

Russell is here asking: Is this new relation, "*R*", which is needed for the *meaning* of our initial proposition, "*D(a, b)*", specific to Difference and *A* and *B*; or is it—like the hypothesis about Difference itself—a universal?

Russell reasons that, since *R* must be a universal (according to hypothesis (1)), then:

... the analysis of our proposition now appears as "*A*, *B*, difference, *R*". But the same reasons which compelled us to introduce *R* will compel us to introduce a new relation *R'* between *A* and *B* and difference [and *R*].

(*Papers* 3: 556)

The "and *R*" portion was left out of the manuscript. One must assume this is what Russell meant to render cogent his immediately following claim: "Thus we shall be led on to an endless regress ... to greater and

greater complexities in the *meaning* of our original proposition. And this kind of regress is certainly inadmissible” (*Papers* 3: 556). Here we have come to the work’s conclusion that if a relating relation is universal, then the meaning of a proposition in which it occurs will be “inadmissibly complex”. Russell seems to be arguing that, if a proposition’s relating relation is universal, then to obtain the *meaning* of that initial relational proposition, one must proceed on an unending search of relations of greater and greater complexity, which is clearly inadmissible. And, since it was the universal relation which led to this difficulty, and this is common to hypotheses (1) and (2), Russell concludes with his hypothesis (3), viz., that relations must be *specific*.

However, one must be careful here. For surely the discovery of a problem with hypotheses (1) and (2) does not mean that hypothesis (3) is thereby “safe”. Can we not employ the *same argument* against specific relations as well? Aware of this possibility, Russell notes that a “specific difference *is related to A and B*” (*Papers* 3: 556; emphasis added). And when he says this, he is not merely reminding us that $D^{ab}(a, b)$. Rather, he is saying that there is some *further* relation between the specific relation D^{ab} and a and b . So, why not bring in this new different relation—just as he did in the previous argument against hypothesis (1)? Since there are regresses with both universal and specific relations, why are not both harmful? Russell answers that in the case of a specific relation (hypothesis (3)), for any such further relation R , it would not form any part of “the *meaning* of the proposition ‘ A and B differ’”, so that the resulting regress is of the harmless variety” (*Papers* 3: 556). So, Russell’s claim is that while in each case—universal and specific relations—there will be a regress, it is only with universal relations that this is a problem. For only there does a regress involve the *meaning* of the original proposition. But why does *the specific relation* answer the question about the proposition’s meaning, while *the universal relation* did not? The answer to this question brings in the other DDD argument.

2. DDD’s argument for specific relations

To make this argument clear, it will help to introduce a notion of “meaning” that Russell held in the earlier “Fundamental Ideas and Axioms of Mathematics”—a notion that is well captured in his characterization of “predication”:

The peculiarity of the relation of predication, which makes it scarcely a relation,

is that the second concept does not occur as term, but only as meaning. In relations of other kinds, both concepts occur as terms, and only the relation occurs as meaning. (Papers 2: 276)

This belief—that in a standard relational proposition it is only the relating relation that “occurs as meaning”—will guide him in DDD as well. So, when reasoning about a relational proposition’s “meaning”, Russell will focus primarily on the relation in that proposition.

We may thus think of Russell as arguing: given that the analysis of “ $D(a, b)$ ” is $[D, a, b]$, the entity of that analysis which “occurs as meaning” will be found in its relation, D . For Russell, this relation can be only a universal relation or specific relation. Let us consider each again:

1. Supposing D to be a universal, could it *alone* be what “occurs as meaning” in the proposition expressed by “ $D(a, b)$ ”? Since, *qua* universal, D alone would not be *unique* to the proposition under consideration, clearly it would not. What if we connected the members of this set? Such a connection could provide us with a relation, something Russell says “occurs as meaning”. That is, is the meaning of “ $D(a, b)$ ” to be found in the *relation* R of “ $R(D, a, b)$ ”? No, because *if*—to discover the meaning of “ $D(a, b)$ ”—one has to analyze the proposition “ $R(D, a, b)$ ”, *then*, since R would be a universal just like D , it would not work, and we would have to analyze “ $R_1(R, D, a, b)$ ” for R_1 as well, and it would not stop here. This, of course, is a different way of looking at Russell’s regress, that non-ending search for the proposition’s meaning.
2. On the other hand, under the supposition that the relating relation of “ $D(a, b)$ ” is a *specific* relation, and not a universal relation, different things seem to occur. Can we count the specific relation D^{ab} (the- D -of- a -and- b) as occurring as the *meaning* of $D(a, b)$? In DDD, Russell thinks we can. The specific relation D^{ab} (the- D -of- a -and- b) differs from the universal in being *unique* to the proposition under analysis (“ $D(a, b)$ ”), and so it avoids the difficulties that occurred with the universal relation. That unending series of questions about which relation occurs as the meaning of the initial proposition never gets started.

Russell wants the meaning of a proposition to be unique to it yet different from it. Since D^{ab} is a relation which is *unique* to the proposi-

tion, Russell thinks it fulfills that requirement. Russell also argues that the specific relation is unanalyzable: “The hypothesis (3) demands that the difference of *A* and *B* should be strictly *unanalyzable*. It is only thus that it escapes the condemnation which was passed on (1) and (2)” (*Papers* 3: 557; emphasis added). It is thus—through this unanalyzability—that its very difference from the proposition (which *is* analyzable) is established. And thus, this requirement for meaning is obtained. So, while there are regresses in both cases, there is no regress involving meaning with the specific relation, as there seemed to be with the universal. This comparison of relational kinds and their regresses is the backbone of Russell’s argument in DDD.

3. *A concern*

Russell also has an important background concern supporting his adoption of specific and not universal relations. This is our (common-sense) understanding that there are (many) differences. While not an *argument* found in DDD, Russell does note that relations being universals would entail that “the plural *differences* is a mistake” (*Papers* 3: 555). If there were only one difference (the universal), how could there be different (many) differences? Though this common-sense truth—that there are many differences—is clearly in the back of his mind, he seems to want to show how we can account for such matters without an appeal to common sense, but through philosophical arguments involving “meaning”. Though in the background of DDD, it is clear how such a concern must have made specific relations initially more attractive. We will see how this concern becomes very important in Russell’s later conception of the correct way of thinking about specific relations.

4. DDD’s conclusion

It’s important to single out one of Russell’s conclusions because of the role it plays in his later thought. Russell states several conclusions—some particular to the case at hand, viz., difference: “When two terms differ, they have ... a specific difference ... not shared by any other pair of terms” (*Papers* 3: 556). And from this, Russell thinks he may draw the following conclusion: “Any relation which actually relates two terms must be incapable of relating any others” (*Papers* 3: 557). And, it is *this* more general conclusion, not the earlier one, which leads the DDD view into trouble for Russell.

IV

In this section on DDD, we first discuss the relation Russell proposes between a specific relation of difference and the abstract class-concept Difference; and we then summarize our findings on his notion of specific relations.

First: Russell characterizes each (specific) difference's relation to the class-concept Difference as follows: "Difference itself is not a relation, in the sense that there are no terms which it relates; it is a class-concept to which differences *are related* as redness to colour" (*Papers* 3: 556; emphasis added). Or, more briefly, "Difference in the abstract relates nothing, but *is related to* differences as *Point to points*" (*Papers* 3: 557). This relation (italicized above) is often called the "instance-of" relation, a terminology Russell himself sometimes employs.

In DDD, Russell says that with specific relations "... there is only one proposition in which any ... relation relates" (*Papers* 3: 557). And, with the proposition "*A is different from B*", let us designate its one relation of specific difference as " D^{ab} " and represent this relating by $D^{ab}(a, b)$. Russell continues by saying: "though there are ... others in which it is related" (*Papers* 3: 557). For an example of D^{ab} being related and not relating, take the specific relation (D^{ab}) as *an instance of* the class-concept Difference, represented as " $I(D^{ab}, D)$ ". Here, D^{ab} is related and not relating. Now, while we have a case in which D^{ab} relates [$D^{ab}(a, b)$] as well as one in which D^{ab} is related [$I(D^{ab}, D)$], we do not thereby have a proposition in which one thing functions as both relating relation and term.

Remember Russell's background worry about such statements as "Difference differs from Identity"—statements where the same item was serving as both relation and term in one proposition. In order to stay away from the worrisome statement-form of " $D(D, =)$ ", we may use the above discussion to model this statement as the conjunction " $D^{D=}(D, =) \& I(D^{D=}, D)$ ". In such a statement, while we still have the same thing ($D^{D=}$) serving as both relation and term, it is in different conjuncts that it occurs. So, even though in Russell's DDD argument for specific relations no sentence such as that conjunction was ever employed, Russell may well have considered this useful for handling his background concern. In this paper's last section, we shall see both how this relation of "instance-of" leads the DDD Conclusion into trouble, and how this relating-one-place/related-others pattern leads the DDD Argument for Spec-

ific Relations into trouble.

To summarize the DDD view, when Russell claims that relations are specific (or “particularized”), what exactly is he claiming? What is a specific relation? Considering just the specific relation: *the-difference-of-A-and-B*, Russell’s answer would be the following:

- (i) That *there is* a relation R , such that
- (ii) R holds between \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} , and
- (iii) R is a Difference, an *instance* of the concept Difference, and
- (iv) R is *specific* (“particular”) to just the terms \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} , and
- (v) R has no constituents; it is *simple* and not analyzable.

Using the symbol “ D ” for the class-concept Difference, “ I ” for the instance-of relation, and “ C ” for the is-a-constituent-of relation, we may state the above as:

$$(\exists R)(R(a, b) \ \& \ I(R, D) \ \& \ (x)(y)(R(x, y) \supset (x = a \ \& \ y = b)) \ \& \ \sim(\exists x)C(x, R))$$

This “ R ” is what we have been representing as “ D^{ab} ”. One of the several problems about Russell’s view is the above occurrence of “ $R(a, b)$ ”, or R holds between \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} . Our next section will discuss this point.

v

In this section we present several issues arising out of Russell’s DDD argument and its resulting view. These include: first, the idea of a “relating relation”; second, the very possibility of a false meaningful relational proposition; and, third, a problem, involving what we will call the list and non-list propositions.

To begin: there are at least two ways in which the expression “relating relation” can be used. For one, a “relating relation” could simply refer to the function of a relation in a proposition, when it occurs *as a relation* and *not as a term*. This notion, a matter of a proposition’s *form*, is how we have used and will continue to use this expression. Also, however, a “relating relation” could refer to a relation which is actually relating. This would bring in the notion of *truth*. These differences may be illustrated by considering two propositions: “ A is bigger than B ”, and “ B is bigger than A ”. In the first sense, the relation of being-bigger-than would count

as a "relating relation" in each of these; in our second sense, however, it would be a "relating relation" in at most one of them. In DDD, this distinction is not noted; this is because of an apparent collapse of meaningfulness and truth.

When Russell finally concludes in DDD that there are specific differences, he says:

... that the meaning of "*A* and *B* differ" is "There is a specific difference which relates *A* and *B*"; *in other words*, "There is a concept *difference of A and B*."
(Papers 3: 556; 1st emphasis added)

By this, Russell is equating the following:

- (i) There is a specific difference which relates *A* and *B*, with
- (ii) There is a concept difference-of-*A*-and-*B*.

Note the following:

1. For Russell, the *meaning* of the proposition, "*A* and *B* differ" is the specific concept, difference-of-*A*-and-*B*.
2. This concept, itself an instance of Difference, actually relates *A* and *B* (see (i) above), or, in Russell's later language, *subsists* between *A* and *B*. Such, however, is exactly what makes a proposition *true*.
3. So, relational propositions with *meaning* are true.

Does this mean that a false proposition is without meaning? Consider some false relational proposition $R(a, b)$. Is there a specific relation *R-of-a-and-b*, or R^{ab} ? On the one hand, if there is, then, according to the manuscript's above doctrine, this relation has to hold, the proposition thus being true. On the other hand, if there is no specific relation when the proposition is false, then, since (in this work at least) these relations are the bearers of the complete proposition's meaning, false relational propositions are going to be meaningless. But this is surely inconsistent with the understanding that meaningful propositions can be either true or false.

Another way of putting this point is to remember that Russell (in hypothesis (3) of DDD) characterized the specific relation of *A*-and-*B*'s-difference as being an instance of the class-concept Difference. We have to note that, whenever some specific relation of difference is an instance

of the class-concept Difference, then the proposition expressing that such a relation does hold will have to be true. And this feature holds for any specific relation. Put differently, try to consider the *false* relational proposition, $D(c, d)$. If its specific relation, D^{cd} , were an instance of the class-concept Difference, that would make $D(c, d)$ true and not false. In effect, there seems to be no logical “room” for a false relational proposition with DDD’s hypothesis (3), that aforementioned collapse of meaningfulness and truth. Later, in his long article on Meinong, Russell himself realizes this, making a similar point: “If what is actually meant by a relational proposition is the being of a particularized relation, then, when the proposition in question is not true, it must be meaningless...”⁷

We will introduce our next problem by focussing on some logical facts. Again, taking Russell’s “ A and B differ” as represented by “ $D(a, b)$ ”, we note that it would entail the proposition expressed by:

$$(\exists x)(\exists y)(\exists R)(x = a \ \& \ y = b \ \& \ R = D),$$

However, no such entailment goes the other way. On the other hand, while “ $D(a, b)$ ” also entails:

$$(\exists x)(\exists y)(\exists R)(x = a \ \& \ y = b \ \& \ R = D \ \& \ R(x, y)),$$

this time the entailment does go the other way. The former statement, presenting us with just the constituents of the proposition under analysis, we shall call the “list proposition”, the latter the “non-list proposition”. Notice that the “list proposition” expresses neither:

- (i) the *fact* of the relation D being (in the proposition analyzed) connected with a and b , nor
- (ii) the *fact* of the relation D being connected with a and b in the *order* in which such items occur in the proposition analyzed, nor
- (iii) the *fact* of the relation D occurring (in the proposition analyzed) as a *relating relation*, and not as a term.

The non-list proposition, with its addition of “ $R(x, y)$ ”, expresses all of these. And this means it will be *logically equivalent* to “ $D(a, b)$ ”, or that

⁷ “Meinong’s Theory of Complexes and Assumptions”, *Mind*, 1904; *Papers* 4: 432–74 (at 453).

" $(\exists x)(\exists y)(\exists R)(x = a \ \& \ y = b \ \& \ R = D \ \& \ R(x, y)) \equiv D(a, b)$ ".

Now, upon interpreting the above " D " as a *universal* relation of difference, there is no question about this distinction between "list" and "non-list" propositions. It is clearly a needed distinction. However, what happens if we interpret " D " as the *specific* relation the-difference-between- a -and- b , letting " D^{ab} " stand for that relation? Does this latter interpretation dissolve the list/non-list distinction? Does the very description of the relation D^{ab} make the phrase " $R(x, y)$ " unnecessary? To think that " $R(x, y)$ " is not needed when R is a specific relation is a mistake.

And, to see why, recall what was "missing" when we compared the list with the non-list proposition. Crucial here is (iii). For while this description of " D^{ab} " (the-difference-between- a -and- b) may provide both what the relation relates (see (i) above for the items it relates), as well as the order of that connection (see (ii) above for the order of that relation), it does not supply us with (iii): the fact of the relation D^{ab} occurring in the proposition under analysis as a *relating relation*, and not as a *term* in the initial proposition. For, as we have noted, a specific relation can occur in a proposition in which it *relates*, as well as others in which it is *related*. The need for " $R(x, y)$ ", which tells us that—in the proposition under analysis— D^{ab} is *relating* and not *related*, is thus never eliminated. In neither case—universal or specific—does our list proposition entail the non-list proposition. This similarity will prove useful in understanding the problem of reconstitution we will soon see in the *Principles*.

VI

Later, in the *Principles* and elsewhere, Russell himself advances a number of arguments against his earlier position in DDD. We shall here discuss four things: first, Russell discovering why at least one relating relation *must* be characterized as universal; second, Russell coming to see that it is not some infinite regress that is "harmful" to a proposition's meaning; third, Russell noting that a proposition's constituents never "reconstitute" that original proposition; and, fourth, Russell's own vocabulary of definite descriptions providing a framework for understanding his final abandonment of the argument for specific relations found in DDD.

Russell's response to DDD's conclusion

DDD had shown that "all" relations are specific. In the *Principles*, Russell argues that this is not the case. There he argues that even if relations

like difference are specific (“particularized”), and thus different, there must—for relations alike in kind—be some sense in which they are still the *same*. In the *Principles*, he says that the “way in which two terms can *have anything in common* is by both having a *given relation to a given term*” (p. 51; emphasis added). For Russell, two specific relations of difference, say, D^{ab} and D^{cd} , can be said to be of the *same kind* when each bears the *instance-of* relation to the common class-concept of Difference—each is a Difference. However, Russell here realizes that if this instance-of relation is *itself particularized*, then the relations, D^{ab} and D^{cd} , would *not* have the needed “given relation to a given term”, and, as a result, they would not be of the same kind. As Russell puts it above: they would not “have anything in common”. So, against this possibility, he sees that at least the instance-of relation must be shareable, and thus could not be a relation specific to its terms. In the *Principles*, he says: “The relation of an instance to its universal ... must be ... numerically the same in all cases where it occurs” (p. 52n.). This also confirmed for Russell that the reasoning in DDD was somehow at fault, since it had “shown” that *all* relations are specific.

Russell’s response to DDD’s argument against universal relations

Russell began with the basic notion of a proposition. Such entities have meaning. In DDD he presented a comparison of regresses, in which the harmful regress involving meaning seemed to occur with a universal relation, but not with a specific relation. This was partly a result of “the meaning” of a proposition initially being grounded in a single constituent of that proposition (the predicate or the relation). When this notion of meaning changes into a feature of a proposition as a whole, the comparison of regresses also changes. With such a change, Russell believes that no analysis will be “harmless”, since in the *Principles* he notes that an analysis yields only a list, which itself will lose the *proposition’s unity* and thereby its meaning. Russell in the *Principles* states that: “A proposition ... is essentially a unity, and when analysis has destroyed the unity, no enumeration of constituents will restore the proposition” (p. 50). It seems that, in DDD, Russell insisted on the meaning of the proposition having a unity capable of being located in the predicate (or relation); while in the *Principles*, he has shifted his focus of concern about the meaning of the proposition to the entire proposition. Though regresses will still occur, they will not be “harmful” to the proposition’s meaning:

... when a relation holds between two terms, the relations of the relation to the terms, and of these relations to the relation and the terms, and so on *ad infinitum*, though all implied by the proposition affirming the original relation, form no part of the *meaning* of this proposition.

(*PoM*, p. 51; 2nd emphasis added)

These regresses are simply a list of propositions, the n th always implying (or equivalent to) the $(n+1)$ th, as harmless as " P ", " $P \vee P$ ", " $P \vee P \vee P$ ", etc. Russell now believes that it is not an infinite regress, but rather the very *analysis* of the initial proposition, that is "harmful" to that proposition's meaning. The analysis of a proposition always yields a list not equivalent to the proposition, thus bringing about the "harm".

Russell's response to DDD's argument for specific relations

As a result of the above, Russell saw that the problem he had once considered "solved" by the selection of specific over universal relations was not really solved at all. Russell will now say that the "problem" is not with the *kind of relation* a proposition has, specific or universal, but rather with the fact that a unity (the proposition) has been analyzed as some set (the proposition's constituent parts), thereby losing that very unity which is essential for its being meaningful. And, by the time Russell wrote the *Principles*, he was aware that such a loss would happen with either kind of relation he had been considering in DDD. As he said in the *Principles*:

... even if the difference of A and B be absolutely peculiar to A and B , still the three terms A , B , difference of A from B , do not reconstitute the proposition ' A differs from B ', any more than A and B and difference did. (P. 51)

We can take this "reconstitution problem" to be Russell's way of putting what we said at the end of our last section, viz., that the distinction between what we called the list and the non-list propositions would hold *regardless* of whether the relation is taken to be specific or universal. For in neither case would the "list-proposition" be logically equivalent to (or, as Russell above puts it, "reconstitute") the original proposition under analysis. In this failure to "reconstitute", universal and specific relations are similar. So, while the specific relation is different from the universal in that it may be *unique* to the proposition under analysis, this is no longer sufficient for Russell. The claim of DDD that this role—the ability

to reconstitute—provides a significant advantage to specific over universal relations can no longer be recognized.

Russell's response to his concern

Russell's own later Theory of Definite Descriptions will provide a framework for understanding this issue. By his theory we mean, of course, taking sentences like "The F is G " and treating them as of the form "There is exactly one F and it is G ." In this sentence, the "The F " part is called "the definite description".⁸

Now let us begin DDD all over again, slightly altering its opening question:⁹ "Does the difference of A and B differ from the difference of C and D ?" We now can show that, when writing DDD, Russell did not see the ambiguity in the very question he was asking. For now, using the vocabulary of definite descriptions, we may take this question to be actually one of *two* quite different questions. Let us look at each of these.

Question X : First, in asking the above, we could be asking if *these* are different:

1. The *proposition* that A is different from B .¹⁰
2. The *proposition* that C is different from D .

Here we have a case of *two* definite descriptions. Since the descriptions are of propositions and propositions are determined by their content, the items described *must* be different from each other. Analogous to such a case would be: "the number that is successor of 11", and "the number that is successor of 15". For this is also a clear case of different definite descriptions, different things described.

Question Y : Or, we could be asking if *these* are different:

1. The *relation* of difference *that* is had by A and B .
2. The *relation* of difference *that* is had by C and D .

⁸ Since this paper is not a history of the development of the Russell's theory of denotation, though we may use some of its vocabulary here, we are not claiming that this full theory was already on Russell's mind.

⁹ The sentence is "altered" just to avoid the awkward side of the original question.

¹⁰ We have chosen "proposition" and not "fact" because of the language Russell employs about this time.

Here again we have a case of *two* definite descriptions, each of a relation of difference. This differs from the above case (*X*) in that it's here possible, though not necessary, that the items described be two in number. This is analogous to "the father of Henry" and "the father of George". Jones could have two sons, or Jones and Smith could each have a son.

So we have:

1. a case of *two* definite descriptions, one where there *must* be *two* items described (question *X*);
2. a case of *two* definite descriptions, but one where there do not have to be two items described (question *Y*);

Since, in constructing DDD, distinctions like these were not yet seen, we will find them useful in understanding Russell's final elimination of specific relations.

Before DDD was written, when Russell was beginning his examination of the nature of relations, he thought that the plural "differences" would have to indicate *specific relations*. For example, in "Fundamental Ideas and Axioms of Mathematics", he says:

"The difference of *A* and *B* is one difference". But the class-concept *difference* will ... not occur at all in "*A* differs from *B*". This view is borne out by the plural *differences*.
(*Papers* 2: 287)

Similar language was employed in DDD, in which—under hypothesis (1)—it was assumed that relating relations are universals. As we saw earlier, Russell thought universal relations would mean that our ordinary use of "the plural *differences* is a mistake" (*Papers* 3: 555). Consider Russell asking: Can *the difference of A and B* be one-and-the-same as *the difference of C and D*? That is, is "it" a universal? And Russell takes this question to amount to: are "they" the same? His answer had to be "no", for this was his only way to make sense out of our common-sense understanding that there are indeed many differences (Russell's *different differences* or the "plural *differences*" of the above quotations). So, since Russell does accept that there are relations, but thinks that they cannot be universals, he thinks relations must be specific.

But this all depends on Russell's assumption that, when we are counting "the difference of *A* and *B*" and "the difference of *C* and *D*", we must be counting different *relations*. But later, Russell is able to eliminate

that assumption, by finally seeing that such phrases as “the difference of A and B ” and “the difference of C and D ” could at least be interpreted as the *propositions* “that A is different from B ” and “that C is different from D ” (see question X) and not *as relations*. As Russell puts it:

The difference of x and y [a and b] is the proposition “ $xO'y$ ” [$D(a, b)$], and this is a different proposition from “ $zO'w$ ” [$D(c, d)$]. But O' [D] is the same in both; and there is no particularized relation.

(“Dependent Variables and Denotation” [1903],
Papers 4: 298–304 [at 300])

Here, in just two sentences, Russell exhibits an understanding and use of a version of what question Y is concerned with. For it is not until this interpretation and what it entails is clear to Russell that he realizes he might be able to fully account for the possibility of different differences without bringing in specific relations. Russell sees that to ask if there are different differences is simply to ask if there is more than one difference. And Russell can now answer that, if, with such a question, we are asking about *propositions* (or facts), then, yes, there is more than one difference; if, however, we are asking about *relations*, then, no, there is just one difference—the universal relation Difference.

Along with this, Russell finally sees that phrases like “Relation R between a and b ” can be read as a version of what question Y is concerned with, that is, even though the descriptions under question Y were two in number, there did not have to be two items picked out. Thus, even though *the Relation R between a and b*, and *the Relation R between c and d* might indeed involve different definite descriptions, there is nothing *in that fact* which forces one to claim there are two (different) relations that are being talked about. In his long work on Meinong, Russell said that there is “a relation R , and there are terms a and b ; but if R relates a and b , then ‘Relation R between a and b ’ is simply the relation R ... with a reminder that a and b are related by it” (*Papers* 4: 470). And, as a result of this, Russell now holds that there need be “no relation particularized by its terms” (*ibid.*). As previously mentioned, the very question introducing Russell’s DDD line of thought can no longer be seen as a single question. So, the possibility of getting a single answer from “it” is gone.

In his Meinong work, Russell again brings in what he calls “particularized relations”—but there in an attempt to account for a relational

proposition's *truth*, not its *meaning*. The different role this entity now plays—acting like a fact—is an entirely different story.¹¹ For Russell, however, those past arguments in DDD for particularization have vanished.¹²

¹¹ See my "Russell on Particularized Relations", *Russell* 3 (1983): 138–43, for a brief outline of this (failed) attempt.

¹² I want to thank Mike Slosarz and David Annis for their helpful comments during various stages of this work.
