

Further notes on Russell's view of complex sentences and facts

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We have been discussing Russell's metaphysics, and his method deriving that metaphysics from the truth of various kinds of sentences. We can think of Russell's claimed correspondence between language and reality as consisting of the following three basic theses:

1. For every true sentence S , there must be some fact or set of facts which explain S 's truth.
2. The truth of atomic sentences of the form ' n is F ' is explained by atomic facts, which themselves consist of an object (the referent of ' n ') and a property (expressed by ' F ').
3. If the truth of members of some class of sentences can be explained without positing a special class of facts corresponding to those sentences, then we should not posit such a class of facts on the basis of the truth of members of that class of sentences.

One problem we had last time is in explaining what is required for a fact, or class of facts, to explain the truth of a sentence. I think that the implicit principle here is as follows:

A set of facts $f_1 \dots f_n$ explains the truth of S if and only if necessarily, if $f_1 \dots f_n$ exist, then S is true.

Another way of expressing this in terms of possible worlds might be the following:

A set of facts $f_1 \dots f_n$ explains the truth of S if and only if, in any possible world w , if $f_1 \dots f_n$ exist in w , then S is true in w .

An explanation in these terms of why Russell does not believe in conjunctive or disjunctive facts.

What about negative facts? Here there seem to be two importantly different classes of negations to consider.

1. Negative existentials, such as: "It is not the case that the Greek god of thunder and lightning exists."
2. Other negations, such as: "It is not the case that snow is red."

One idea is that this latter kind of negation can be explained in terms of the existence of facts corresponding to sentences like 'Snow is white.'

Problems caused by a then widely accepted connection between necessity and logic:

If there is a necessary connection between two sentences, then there is a logical connection between those sentences.

Is there a logical connection between 'Snow is white.' and 'Snow is red.'? If so, what is it?

The argument for the existence of general facts. Can we eliminate general facts in favor of negative facts? How about the reverse?