

Reassessing the “Standard” Realist Responses to the Bradley Regress

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0. Introduction

There are (hopefully) familiar responses that the realist¹ might make in response to the Bradley regress as it applies to the instantiation² of a universal or relation by a particular (or particulars). One initial response is to maintain that “relations simply relate” [Russell 1911; 1912: ch. 12; 1913: Part I, ch. 7, Part II, ch. 1]³. Ultimately, I think that this sort of claim amounts to one of the two following positions: (1) there exists a unique entity, called (among other things) a “predication relation” [Russell 1911: 108-9] or a “non-relational tie” [Johnson 1921: chs. 1, 13; Bergmann 1959: chs. 11, 13; Strawson 1959, ch. 5], which serves to connect the (monadic) universal or (polyadic) relation to the particular(s) which instantiate(s) it; (2) no such entity is required in order to connect the universal/relation to the particular(s) which instantiate it (this is the sort of view adopted by those who have claimed that the universal/relation and particular(s) “hang together like links in a chain” [Wittgenstein 1912: 8], or that the particular(s) “saturate(s)” [Frege 1892: 192-193; Armstrong 1997: ch. 8] the universal/relation which it (they) instantiate(s)). These responses are taken by many philosophers to be inadequate for various reasons. It is the purpose of this essay to examine these reasons and determine whether they alone are good enough to justify the rejection of either of the aforementioned types of response to the Bradley regress.

¹ Generally, anyone who acknowledges the existence of universals/relations may be called a realist. I use ‘realist’ in this essay as the label for a more specific type of realist: namely, one who acknowledges the existence of both universals/relations and particulars.

² For the purposes of this essay, ‘instantiation’ and ‘exemplification’ may be used interchangeably.

³ This claim may not be explicit in the works I have cited, but some version of it does seem to be implicit.

1. *A Brief Review of the Bradley Regress*

Bradley's regress argument may be put as follows. The realist about universals/relations claims that the truth of ' a is F ' is explained by the instantiation of F by a . To put this explanation in ontological terms, there exists some entity consisting of a and F "tied" together via the connection of instantiation. The problem then is to explain what this connection of instantiation is. *Prima facie*, it appears to be a relation that holds between a and F . If this is the case, then it seems that a stands in that relation of instantiation, I , to F – or, to put it another way, a and F jointly instantiate I . Thus, it seems that one must then acknowledge that a , F , and I are themselves (jointly) related by an instantiation relation; consequently, an infinite regress of instantiation relations ensues. The regress is taken to be vicious because it is a regress of explanation: in order to explain (i.e. provide an account of) one instantiation, one appeals to another, and so on *ad infinitum*.

2. *"Relations Simply Relate"*

The argument, as it is stated above, focuses on explaining the truth of a statement regarding a particular instantiating a universal. Consider instead a statement concerning how two particulars are related, e.g. ' a and b are related in a certain way'. The truth of this statement can be explained by claiming that there exists a repeatable (in the same way that a universal is repeatable) entity, R , which relates a to b (or, alternatively, there exists an entity which consists of a standing in a certain relation, R , to b). For the regress argument to work in this case, it must be shown that a standing in R to b requires a , R , and b to stand in a triadic instantiation relation, I – that is, a , R , and b must jointly instantiate I . But one might wonder why this move should be accepted. The dialectic proceeds as follows: one must explain why ' a is related to b in a certain

way' is true, and one does so by acknowledging that there is a certain relational entity, R , which relates a and b . To then ask what accounts for R 's relating a and b is to ask an absurd question – R is just the sort of thing which can relate a and b (and, in fact, does). But, notice that to acknowledge that there must be an instantiation relation relating a , b , and R is just to attempt to answer this question. In other words, to speak of a , b , and R jointly instantiating I is to ignore the purpose of acknowledging the existence of R in the first place. It is unclear why some further relation must relate a and b to R – in other words, why can't R itself be what relates? One might appeal to the locution ' a stands in R to b ' in order to motivate the regress. For in addition to a , R , and b , one speaks of 'standing in', which might be taken to be a further relation (if one thinks that ontological commitments can be read off the language). But, the following response seems available: all that is meant by ' a stands in R to b ' is that R relates a and b , and the "relating" here is done by R , not some further entity. It is not that a "stands to" R and R "stands to" b , which would seem to indicate that something relates both a to R and R to b . Instead, a and b "stand in" R , which just means that R relates a and b . These considerations might lead one to accept the position that relations simply relate: in order to account for the truth of the proposition ' a and b are related in a certain way', one must acknowledge the existence of a certain relation which relates them.

Grant for the sake of argument that the foregoing analysis is unproblematic (I shall take issue with it in section four). It remains to be explained how such an analysis would help to block the Bradley regress in the case of the instantiation of a monadic universal. One obvious way of utilizing this analysis is to say that the particular and the universal in the monadic case are related via the relation of instantiation and that this relation simply relates the two entities. In

other words, only one relation of instantiation is required – no regress ensues. This, in effect, is Russell’s 1911 analysis of the situation.

One thing to notice is that this sort of analysis apparently entails that universals and relations belong to distinct ontological categories, for the former kind of entity stands in relations while the latter kind relates. If one wishes to acknowledge that relations can instantiate universals (e.g. an asymmetrical relation, e.g. “precedes”, instantiates the universal of “being asymmetrical”)⁴, then this distinction must be clarified. In this case, a relation may be construed as the kind of entity which *can* relate but is not instantiated, while a universal is an entity which *cannot* relate but may be instantiated⁵. While this may be a theoretical cost of this analysis (insofar as it adds an additional category to the ontology), it is not in itself an objection to the view.

There are, however, other potential problems which present themselves. The view begins with the seemingly unproblematic acknowledgement of the existence of entities which relate particulars (i.e. relations). In order to explain the instantiation of a monadic universal by a particular, one acknowledges the existence of a relation of instantiation which holds between that universal and that particular. If the existence of higher-order universals is acknowledged, then the relation of instantiation will also presumably hold between an n -order universal and an $n+1$ -order universal which it instantiates, as well as between a relation and a universal which it instantiates. So, it seems that the relation of instantiation can function in one of the three following ways:

$$(\alpha) \quad I(\Phi^1, x)$$

$$(\beta) \quad I(\Psi^{n+1}, \Phi^n)$$

⁴ It is an open question whether a relation, if it instantiates universals at all, must instantiate higher-order universals. It does not matter to the present discussion how one answers this question.

⁵ A particular, then, would be an entity which can neither relate nor be instantiated.

$$(\gamma)^6 \quad I(\Psi, R^n)$$

The role filled by I will be the same in both (β) and (γ) if relations and universals are construed as belonging to the same ontological category. I have already given reasons for thinking that they should not be so construed on this view and, consequently, will heretofore take it for granted that they are categorially distinct. The question is whether instantiation itself should be construed as belonging to an ontological category distinct from that of relations. One reason for thinking so is that instantiation, filling any of the three roles just enumerated, appears to function differently from standard relations. Consider the roles⁷ filled by standard relations:

$$(\delta) \quad R^n(x_1, \dots, x_n)$$

$$(\epsilon) \quad R^{n+1}(\Phi^n, \dots, \Psi^n)$$

It is an open question whether higher-order relations of the (ϵ) -type should be recognized. Grant for the sake of argument that they should be. It should be apparent that there is a fundamental difference between (α) , (β) , and (γ) (on the one hand) and (δ) and (ϵ) (on the other). In the case of the former, instantiation relates entities either of different categories (i.e. (α) and (γ)) or of different types (orders) within the same category (i.e. (β)). In the case of (δ) and (ϵ) , a given relation relates things of the same category and type. This seems to be a reason to maintain that instantiation and standard relations are categorially distinct. It might be further argued that the “ (β) -instantiation” (if I may put it this way) should be considered categorially distinct from both the (α) - and (γ) -instantiation due to the fact that (β) -instantiation holds between entities of the

⁶ The notation used here indicates that relations may belong to different orders (types). Whether or not this should be allowed does not matter to the argument, as I shall point out ahead.

⁷ One might wonder whether the relation of difference (e.g. $\Phi \neq x$) should be added to this list. If so, this relation would seem to fit better into the family of instantiation relations, for the relation of difference can obviously relate entities of distinct categories and types (which, I am arguing, is not a function of standard relations). I am not certain what sort of negative consequences this would have for the view other than the oddity of aligning instantiation with difference. Ultimately, though, I don't think that any resulting negative consequences must be dealt with. For it is not clear that the realist needs to recognize the existence of a relation of difference in order to account for the truth of statements of difference: the two entities which are said to differ seem to be sufficient.

same category (but not the same type), while (α)- and (γ)-instantiation hold between entities of distinct categories. While it is unclear whether or not one must make this extra move, it at least seems clear that standard relations and instantiation must belong to distinct ontological categories.

This view must thus recognize (at least) four different categories of entity: universals, particulars, and two kinds of relational entities, one of which relates only entities of the same category and type, and the other of which relates only entities of different categories or types. Again, this in itself does not seem to be an objection to the view, although it does seem to be a further theoretical cost (due to concerns about ontological economy). There is, however, a worry which results from this. It might be argued that there is no reason to accept the existence of this unique relation of instantiation other than that it blocks the Bradley regress. In absence of such a reason, the acknowledgment of the existence of this type of relation would appear to be *ad hoc*. I shall return to this objection in the next section.

It is worth noting here that the charge of producing an *ad hoc* solution to the problem can seemingly be avoided if it is denied that instantiation is categorially distinct from all other relations. It would seem that the only way to justify such a denial is to claim that universals and particulars are of the same ontological category.⁸ This would seem to be an unpalatable position for those philosophers who seek a response to the Bradley regress, although there may be some that are happy to eliminate the distinction. Interestingly, the foregoing response to the Bradley regress would seem to provide some reason for thinking that universals and particulars are not distinct after all. For if one wishes to distinguish universals from particulars in terms of the “predicability” (in an ontological sense) of the former (as is sometimes done), it would seem that

⁸ If it is maintained that relations can instantiate universals, then it seems that one would also have to claim that relations belong to the same category as universals and particulars, which would seem to be even more problematic for the view.

one would be unable to do so on this view given that the only predicable entities are standard relations and instantiation.

3. The Non-Relational Tie

Suppose one rejects the position that relations simply relate (the reasons for doing so will be discussed in the next section). Instead, suppose one responds to the Bradley regress as follows: one must acknowledge the existence of a special kind of entity which serves to “tie” a universal and particular together – in fact, such an entity is also required to tie a relation to the particulars which it relates. The proponent of such a view must deny that this kind of entity is a relation, which has led to its being characterized as a “non-relational tie” (or sometimes as a “nexus” or “copula”). Some philosophers reject out of hand the notion of a non-relational tie because the label itself seems self-contradictory. Such a rejection is unfounded if the Bradley regress is to be taken seriously. For one might take the Bradley regress to show that some entity is required to connect a relation to the things it relates. Again, if this line of reasoning is to be taken seriously, then clearly such an entity cannot itself be a relation. Thus, it is a *non-relational* entity which serves to tie or connect a universal/relation to a particular (or particulars). The characterization of such an entity as a tie, connection, or nexus is merely an attempt to give a label to something that cannot be a relation. Perhaps the ‘non-relational’ part of the label should be dropped in order to avoid the *appearance* of contradiction, but an infelicity in the labeling of the entity is no reason to reject it out of hand. What must be argued for is that either (a) there is no reason for thinking that this entity is different from a relation, or (b) the acknowledgment of the existence of such an entity is unfounded (i.e. *ad hoc*). The reason for rejecting (a) is simple: the proponent

of the tie will deny that it is a relation since it performs the role that a relation purportedly cannot. The reason for rejecting (b) is another matter.

In raising the issue of whether or not the acknowledgment of the existence of a non-relational tie is *ad hoc*, it should be obvious how this view is similar to the view discussed in the previous section. In both cases, the existence of a categorially-distinct kind of entity is acknowledged in order to account for the connection between an instantiated universal and the particular which instantiates it. However, the view currently being discussed goes a step further: the Bradley regress is taken to show that relations, like universals, have to be connected to the entities which they “relate” by some further entity – that is, *contra* the view discussed in the previous section, it is claimed that relations are completely unlike instantiation (the non-relational tie). Furthermore, relations and universals belong to the same ontological category: those entities which can be instantiated but which cannot tie entities together. Thus, the existence of a categorially-distinct entity is acknowledged: the non-relational tie.

Those that wish to deny that the acknowledgment of the existence of such an entity is well-founded might offer the following line of argument (which I hinted at in the previous section). There may be *prima facie* reasons for acknowledging the existence of relations: after all, one does seem to be acquainted with things being related to other things, and one does acknowledge the truth of statements like ‘*a* is related to *b* in such-and-such a way’. On the other hand, there does not seem to be any similar, *prima facie* reason to acknowledge the existence some unique kind of ontological tie. What the Bradley regress shows is that it is impossible to reach a “rock-bottom” account of how relations are related (or connected) to the things which they purportedly relate. In other words, relations appear to be the only sorts of things that can serve to relate things (after all, what else could do the job?), but ultimately they can’t even fill

this role. If one wishes to claim that there is some kind of entity which ties relations to the things they relate, one is essentially claiming that there is some kind of entity which is not subject to the Bradley regress. But, it appears that the only reason for thinking that there is such an entity is that it serves to block the Bradley regress. This is an *ad hoc* solution to the problem. So much the worse for relations, universals, states of affairs, etc.

The proponent of the non-relational tie might respond as follows. True, there is no *prima facie* reason for acknowledging the existence of a non-relational tie in the same way that there is for acknowledging the existence of relations. Furthermore, it is true that the Bradley regress shows that a relation cannot by itself serve as the ontological connection between particulars (which stand in a relation) or between a universal and a particular. What this shows is that there must be some other sort of entity which plays the role of ontological connector. For it is a datum that statements like '*a* is *F*' and '*a* and *b* are related in such-and-such a way' are sometimes true. The truth of these statements somehow depends on how things stand ontologically. Lacking arguments showing that the truth of '*a* is *F*' and '*a* and *b* are related in such-and-such a way' can be accounted for in the ontology without an appeal to the instantiation of a universal/relation by a particular or particulars, one must accept that there is some entity in the ontology which accounts for instantiation. The acknowledgment of the existence of such an entity is not *ad hoc* because the data cannot otherwise be accounted for. At this point, the defender of the Bradley regress will turn to offering the arguments which the proponent of the non-relational tie says are lacking. Such arguments are beyond the scope of this essay. The point is that it is not obviously *ad hoc* to respond to the Bradley regress by acknowledging the existence of a non-relational tie.

4. “Relations Simply Relate” Revisited

Suppose that the defender of the Bradley regress is successful in producing the sorts of arguments just mentioned and is thereby entitled to claim that the acknowledgment of the existence of a non-relational tie is *ad hoc*. The realist must then either produce a different response to the Bradley regress or accept that the regress is an insurmountable problem for realism and abandon his view. The question then is whether there is any other realist response to the Bradley regress available.

What must first be determined is how the realist might amend his view in order to avoid an *ad hoc* solution to the Bradley regress. In the foregoing, the appeal to a unique kind of entity (be it instantiation or the non-relational tie) as a way of blocking the Bradley regress was the move which was considered *ad hoc*. So, the realist must avoid such an appeal – that is, he must block the regress utilizing only those kinds of entities the existence of which he has *prima facie* reason to acknowledge: universals, relations, and particulars. Consider the view discussed in section two. In the case of a relation holding between two or more particulars, such a view holds that no unique kind of entity is required in order to account for the relating of the particulars by the relation: the relation simply *relates*. This analysis, as it stands, appears to block the regress without being obviously *ad hoc*. It is only when one claims that the instantiation of a universal by a particular requires the acknowledgement of the existence of some unique relation of instantiation that one risks making an *ad hoc* move. So, it seems that one must deny that there is a distinction between the instantiation of a universal by a particular and a relation holding between particulars. I have already argued that a relation of instantiation must be considered categorially distinct from other relations, so it seems that the existence of such a relation must be

denied in order for this distinction to be eliminated. In other words, one must explain how a universal is related to a particular without appealing to some further entity.

Recall the view discussed in section three. Relations and universals are of the same ontological kind on such a view: they are entities which cannot relate entities, but which can be instantiated. It is the fact that they are construed as unable to relate entities which requires the proponent of this view to acknowledge the existence of the non-relational tie. So, in order to avoid acknowledging the existence of such an entity, one must claim that relations and universals are able to relate entities. To make such a claim is to, in effect, extend the claim that relations relate to include universals. The realist's task is to articulate what justifies this move.

Start with the grouping of relations and universals into one ontological category, particulars into another. Universals/relations, on this view, are the kind of things which can be⁹ instantiated; particulars are kind of things which cannot. One must then explain what instantiation is. For relations one need only recall the explanation given in section two: a relation may be said to be instantiated by some particulars when it *relates* those particulars. For universals, the explanation is not so apparent. As a first step toward developing it, it is instructive to put the relational case in different terms: a dyadic relation is predicated (in an ontological sense) of two particulars, a triadic relation of three, and so on. If one thinks of relations in these terms (as Russell, for example, appears to in his logical atomism lectures [1918: 198-9]), the case of a particular instantiating a universal becomes easier to explain. A universal is a *monadic relation* which may be predicated (in an ontological sense) of one particular, just as a dyadic relation may be predicated of two particulars. This sort of explanation is based on the asymmetry of predication: the basic ontological distinction is between, on the one hand, those entities which are predicable of other entities (or which may be said to “hold of”

⁹ This is a first-blush characterization – ultimately, I think that ‘can be’ should be replaced by ‘are’.

other entities) and, on the other hand, those entities which are *not* predicable. Universals belong to the same category as relations (indeed, polyadic relations *just are* polyadic universals) because they are both predicable; particulars are not and are thus of a different category. So, to say that a universal is instantiated by a particular is just to say that it is predicated of that particular in the same way that a relation is predicated of the particulars which it relates – if there is no objection to relations being predicated (ontologically) of particulars without the existence of some further entity, then by parity there should be no objection in the case of universals (monadic relations). At base, this is the sort of view that has been expressed in the various ways enumerated in the introduction (i.e. completeness/incompleteness, saturatedness/unsaturatedness, “hanging together like links in a chain”).

The foregoing obviously assumes that there is no objection to the claim that relations simply relate – i.e. that no further entity is required to explain their predication of or instantiation by particulars. The opponent of the realist may raise just such an objection along the following lines. Consider the case of a dyadic relation, e.g. “being five meters from”, which holds between two particulars. On the standard version of the foregoing view, this relation is what unites the two particulars into what may be called a relational *fact* (or *state of affairs*, if one prefers). Now, the relation is “doing two jobs” here. On the one hand, it is the entity which provides the qualitative content of the fact – in other words, it makes a given fact the kind of fact it is (in this case, a “being five meters from” fact) instead of making it some other kind of fact (e.g. a “being seven meters from” fact). On the other hand, the relation is the entity which serves as the “ontological glue”, so to speak, for the fact – it is what unites the two particulars and itself into one fact. (The same is the case for a monadic universal.) That there are two jobs being done here, so the objection continues, should lead one to acknowledge the existence of two kinds of

entities, each responsible for only one of the two jobs. But, to acknowledge the existence of the kind of entity which serves as the “ontological glue” of the fact just is what is done when one acknowledges the existence of a non-relational tie or instantiation relation. And, again, if one acknowledges the existence of such an entity simply because it blocks the Bradley regress, one has provided an *ad hoc* solution to the Bradley regress.

The foregoing is a rough way of putting the objection only. I have put it this way in order to provide something of an overview before discussing it point-by-point, which I now proceed to do. The first thing to notice is that the last points of the objection are just the same arguments that were discussed in section three. Assume for the sake of argument that my response to these points given there is inadequate. The realist’s task, then, is to block this argument before it reaches these last points. There would appear to be two ways of doing so: deny either (1) that the relation is “doing two jobs”, or (2) that an entity cannot “do two jobs”. It does not seem that (1) can plausibly be denied, so the realist must deny (2). The first step one might make in doing this would be to identify the justification(s) for accepting (2). Consider the realist’s own distinction between universals and particulars. One standard reason for acknowledging such a distinction is that each kind of entity serves to account for certain data. For example, the existence of universals is acknowledged in order to account for the qualitative sameness of things in the world: the truth of ‘*a* and *b* are both *F*’ (or ‘*a* and *b* are exactly similar’) is explained by acknowledging the existence of one thing (a universal) which both *a* and *b* instantiate¹⁰. On the other hand, the existence of particulars is acknowledged in order to account for the numerical distinctness of qualitatively-indiscernible things: ‘*a* is numerically distinct from *b*’ is true, for qualitatively-indiscernible things *a* and *b*¹¹, because both *a* and *b* “contain”, in addition to their

¹⁰ Obviously, it is implicit here that ‘*a*’ and ‘*b*’ refer to *a* and *b*, respectively.

¹¹ Again, *a* and *b* are implicitly taken to be the referents of ‘*a*’ and ‘*b*’, respectively.

respective qualities (universals), a particular¹² which is numerically distinct from the particular “contained” by any other numerically distinct thing. The question then is: What prevents one from acknowledging the existence of only one kind of entity which can do both jobs? Some philosophers respond to this question in a word: nothing. Realists are not among these philosophers. So, the realist must have an argument for why the answer to this question is not ‘nothing’. This argument must be examined in order to see whether it entails that the realist must accept (2).

Consider a theory according to which tropes (quality instances, unit attributes) are the only entities. On the version of trope theory at issue, a trope is said to be an entity which is simple, particular, and qualitative.¹³ In other words, a trope is an entity which, like a universal, is qualitative, but, unlike a universal, is numerically distinct from all other exactly similar instances of that quality. Now, take two exactly similar tropes, t_1 and t_2 . The following two propositions are true: (a) ‘ t_1 is numerically distinct from t_2 ’, and (b) ‘ t_1 is exactly similar to t_2 ’. The trope theorist claims that what grounds the truth of (a) is the same as what grounds the truth of (b): t_1 and t_2 . The reason for this, again, is that each trope by its very nature is both particular and qualitative. The realist rejects this view because he thinks that a single entity cannot account for both qualitative sameness and numerical distinctness. In other words, he thinks that a trope cannot “do both jobs”.

Some realists [Hochberg 2001: 69-70; 2003: 238-41; Armstrong (following him) 2004: 43-4] have presented arguments for this position along the following lines. Consider any two basic (i.e. atomic) propositions, P_1 and P_2 , which have the same truth grounds. *Prima facie*, it would seem that the following bi-conditional must hold of P_1 and P_2 : ‘ P_1 is true iff P_2 is true’.

¹² By ‘particular’ here I mean a *bare* or *thin* particular.

¹³ Some characterize a trope as ‘abstract’ rather than ‘qualitative’.

The reason for this is as follows. For either proposition to be false its truth grounds would have to fail to obtain. But, this would mean that the truth grounds for the other proposition also fail to obtain, making it false as well. Now, consider propositions (a) and (b) introduced in the previous paragraph. These are basic propositions which purportedly have the same truth grounds.

However, the aforementioned bi-conditional does not hold of these propositions: at the very least, the truth of (a) does not entail the truth of (b)¹⁴, and it can also be argued that the truth of (b) does not entail the truth of (a)¹⁵. But, if the bi-conditional does not hold of the two propositions, then it follows by *modus tollens* that they do not have the same truth grounds. So, t_1 and t_2 cannot be the truth grounds for both (a) and (b). But, the objection continues, there is no other entity (or entities) in the ontology to which the trope theorist can appeal in order to provide distinct truth grounds for both of these propositions. Some would appeal to a relational trope of *exact similarity* which holds between r_1 and r_2 in order to provide a distinct truth ground for (b). But, such a move is met by Russell's regress argument [Russell 1911: 111-2].¹⁶ The same, it seems, would be the case if one were to appeal to a relational trope of *numerical difference* in order to ground the truth of (a). Lacking a successful appeal to a different trope or tropes (and it is hard to see what other sort of trope could be appealed to here), it seems that the trope theorist must expand his ontology (and thus give up this version of trope theory) in order to provide distinct truth grounds for these two propositions.

The realist takes this argument to show that no simple entity can account for both qualitative sameness and numerical distinctness. In other words, one must distinguish between

¹⁴ The trope theorist may reject this claim, but his reasons for doing so are, in my opinion, not good ones, and are thus not reasons to which I will appeal in defending the realist's position against this kind of argument.

¹⁵ A discussion of the details of this argument is beyond the scope of this essay.

¹⁶ I omit the details here because they are beyond the scope of this essay. Recall that the point here is not to determine whether or not this argument against trope theory is successful; rather, the point is to utilize this argument against trope theory (which some realists take to be successful) as a model for an argument against the realist's position.

entities which account for individuation and entities which account for qualitative sameness. It is because the trope itself purportedly does both that the theory fails. Of course, if one instead takes the trope to be a complex entity composed of two simples – one particular, one qualitative – then the problem does not present itself. But this is only true if the qualitative simple is repeatable (i.e. not numerically distinct from all other exactly similar qualitative simples). For if a given trope is composed of two particulars (one qualitative and one not), then the qualitative component of one trope will still be both exactly similar to and numerically distinct from the qualitative component of an exactly similar trope. One can see that the problem presents itself again in this case. Thus, the realist claims, there can be no entity which is simple, qualitative, and particular. Or, to put the point in a way that is relevant to this essay, no entity can “do the two jobs” of grounding qualitative sameness and numerical distinctness.

The question now is whether an argument of this sort can be applied to the realist’s use(s) of relations. One must first produce a basic proposition expressing one job done by a relation. Next, one must produce a basic proposition expressing the other job done by that relation. It must then be shown that these propositions have the same truth ground(s). Finally, one must show that the aforementioned bi-conditional does not hold of these two propositions. Recall that the two “jobs” done by a universal/relation are, on the one hand, tying the constituents of a fact into a fact, and, on the other, providing the qualitative content of the fact. So, in the example of the relation *being five meters from* holding between *a* and *b*, it is the relation *being five meters from* (and not some further instantiation relation or non-relational tie) which “unites” itself, *a*, and *b* into one entity: the fact *a is five meters from b*. This is one job that is done by the relation. The other job done by the relation *being five meters from* is accounting for *a is five meters from b*

being a “five meters from” fact. Or, to put it another way, the relation is what accounts for this fact being exactly similar to other “being five meters from” facts.

As for basic propositions that are true in virtue of the relation uniting the constituents of a fact into a fact, the following seem to be the best candidates (call this *Group 1*):

- (i) *a* is five meters from *b*.
- (ii) *a* is related to *b* by (the relation) *being five meters from*.
- (iii) (The relation) *being five meters from* relates *a* and *b*.
- (iv) (The relation) *being five meters from* is (jointly) instantiated by *a* and *b*.¹⁷

Before proceeding to the next group of propositions, it will be helpful to answer the following question regarding the foregoing group of propositions: What is/are the truth ground(s) of each of these propositions? According to the realist, the truth of each of these propositions is grounded in the existence of the fact *a is five meters from b*.

As for propositions that are true in virtue of the relation providing the qualitative content of the fact, the following seem to be the best candidates (call this *Group 2*):

- (v) (The fact) *a is five meters from b* is exactly similar to (the fact) *c is five meters from d*.
- (vi) (The relation) *being five meters from* is a constituent of (the fact) *a is five meters from b*.
- (vii) (The fact) *a is five meters from b* is a “being five meters from” fact.¹⁸

¹⁷ These are likely not all of the propositions that could have been introduced, but I cannot think of any others that would be relevant to the discussion. Even if one can be produced, I am optimistic that it will either (A) fail to be a basic proposition, (B) have (a) different truth ground(s) than the propositions enumerated here, or, if it does have the same truth ground(s), (C) will not be logically independent of these propositions (i.e. the aforementioned bi-conditional will hold).

¹⁸ See the previous footnote.

Again, one must first answer the following question with regard to these propositions: What is/are the truth ground(s) of each of these propositions. According to the realist, the truth of (v) is grounded in the existence of two facts: *a is five meters from b* and *c is five meters from d*. The truth of each of the remaining propositions is grounded in the existence of the fact *a is five meters from b*.

Since (v) has different truth grounds than each of the propositions in Group 1, it cannot be employed in the argument. One must now show that the aforementioned bi-conditional does not hold between one of the Group 1 propositions and one of the Group 2 propositions (save for (v)). But, it should be clear that the following is true: (i) is true iff (ii) is true iff (iii) is true iff (iv) is true iff (vi) is true iff (vii) is true. Thus, the argument fails and cannot be a reason for the realist to abandon his position.

5. Conclusion

The foregoing is not intended to show once and for all that there is no argument against the realist's claim that relations "do two jobs". It is intended to show that an argument similar to one of the realist's arguments against an entity being able to "do two jobs" cannot be used against him. The door is open for the opponent of the realist to produce an argument showing that the realist is not entitled to claim that a relation fills the roles that it purportedly does, but, as far as I can tell, such an argument has not yet been produced. The point is that the onus is on the opponent of the realist to explain why the realist cannot block the Bradley regress by claiming that relations simply relate, and it is not clear that there is a good explanation for this available. Furthermore, since the realist has provided reasons for thinking that relations and universals should be treated the same way, there does not seem to be any reason that the realist cannot

block the Bradley regress without appealing to a unique entity – be it an instantiation relation, a non-relational tie, or whatever. And, even if the opponent of the realist is successful in arguing against this position, it is still unclear that there are good reasons for thinking that the realist cannot acknowledge the existence of a unique entity in order to block the Bradley regress.

Ultimately, this shows that, at the very least, the oft-maligned, “standard” realist responses to the Bradley regress should not be, as they often are, rejected out of hand.

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