Russell's First Theory of Denoting
and Quantification

PAOLO DAU*

Russell presented his first theory of denoting in his 1903 work, *The Principles of Mathematics* (*PoM*) [13] (unless otherwise indicated, all parenthetical page references in this paper are to that work). Russell's theory poses a considerable puzzle for the modern reader. It is clear that a principal role of the theory of denoting is that of providing an analysis of sentences containing expressions of generality — expressions of the form "any *A*", "an *A*", "some *A*", and so on. Unfortunately, there is little agreement about how it is supposed to do this. Jager, the author of one of the most detailed analyses of Russell's philosophy [10], proposes the following interpretation:

> Russell's theory of denotation (1903) may be characterized as one which envisages, in place of the now standard two quantifiers (universal and existential) *three* independent operators. His three operators correspond respectively to the English terms *all* (i.e. 'each and every'), *a* (i.e. 'some or other'), and *some* (i.e. 'some particular'). [10], p. 146

Jager is sympathetic to what he takes to be Russell's purpose in developing his first theory of denoting. His assessment of that theory stands in sharp contrast with that of Geach [8]. Geach understands Russell to be proposing a version of the medieval theories of different types of *suppositio*, or mode of reference, again for the purpose of analyzing sentences containing expressions of generality. Geach argues that this sort of analysis is radically mistaken, and considers Russell's use of *denoting concepts* and *denoted objects* to be unwarranted "metaphysical speculation, which we may henceforth ignore as irrelevant to logic" [8], p. 62.

I find Jager's interpretation of Russell's theory implausible, and Geach's dismissal of it too hasty. In this paper I want to re-examine the connections

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