

Russell's foreword to the first German translation of "The Problems of Philosophy"

The following translation of "Vorwort zur deutschen Übersetzung" was undertaken because there is no English version of it and the German translation of The Problems of Philosophy for which it was written is now out of print. There have been two German translations of The Problems. The current one is by Eberhard Bubser and was published in Frankfurt by Suhrkamp Verlag in 1967. The translation which contained Russell's special foreword was by Paul Hertz and was published in Erlangen by Im Weltkreis-Verlag in 1926. The question immediately arises whether Russell wrote the foreword in German, or in English which was then put into German by Herr Hertz. Since there is no documentary evidence in the Bertrand Russell Archives which provides us with an answer, we are thrown back upon an examination of the text.

In the first place, the foreword has a highly polished quality, making it unlikely that it was written by anyone but a native-speaking German. In the second place, had Russell written it, he almost certainly would not have used some of the phrases which occur in it. For example, he would not have used "symbolisch-logische Konstruktionen" as a translation of "logical constructions". Our reason for this claim is that, in the many uses of "logical construction" to be found in his philosophical writings, he never modifies "logical" with "symbolic". Rather, he takes it for granted that his readers will gather his meaning from the context and apply the necessary restriction. The translator, to forestall possible misunderstanding of an unfamiliar term, added the restriction explicitly. Nor, to take a second instance, is it at all likely that Russell would have used the German expression, "ein fiktiver logischer Begriff von dieser überflüssigen Art", for the notion he always expressed in English by the phrase, "a logical fiction". Again, pains are being taken by the translator to get all the qualifications before his readers.

On the basis of this evidence, we believe that Russell did not write the foreword in German. In all likelihood, he wrote it in English, and the translator of the book put it into German. We offer our translation to fill the resulting gap in the Russell Archives.

*Department of Philosophy
Department of Comparative Literature
University of Toronto*

*Ibrahim Najjar
Heather Kirkconnell*

Foreword to the German Translation

This book was written in 1911, but since then my views on some of the subjects treated in it have undergone a significant development. This development results almost entirely from the use of a principle which my friend Whitehead and I found valuable in *Principia Mathematica*. In that work we established grounds for the claim that some objects, such as classes and numbers, are merely logical constructions. That is, the

symbols which stand for such objects have no meaning in themselves; rather their use is merely indicated. We can define the meaning of a sentence [*Behauptung*] in which such symbols occur, but that meaning [*Bedeutung*] does not contain any constituent corresponding to these symbols. We were thus led to a new use of the principle known as Occam's Razor, which states that the number of entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity. Whitehead convinced me that "matter" is a logical fiction, that is, a piece of matter can be constructed as a system of connected events in various parts of the space-time continuum. There are various methods one can use to carry this through - the choice between them has been very difficult up to now. Whitehead gave one way in his *Principles of Natural Knowledge* and in his *Concept of Nature*; another way is presented in my book, *Our Knowledge of the External World*. According to these presentations, the discussion of matter in Chapters II and III should be changed, although not so completely as might appear.

The same method and the same principle have led me to adopt a further change in my views. In the discussion of knowledge in *The Problems of Philosophy* I assumed the existence of the subject and treated acquaintance as a relation between the subject and the object. Now I also consider the subject to be a logical construction. The result is that one must give up the distinction between sensations and sense-data; on this question I now agree with William James and the school of American realists. The changes following from this which have affected my theory of knowledge are to be found in my *Analysis of Mind*.

At the time when *The Problems of Philosophy* was written the general theory of relativity was not yet known, and I had not yet sufficiently realized the importance of the special theory. I would have chosen some other examples, had I been considering the theory of relativity. But the problems dealt with in this book are, in large part, totally independent of that theory and are on the whole not decisively influenced by it.

If I were writing the book now, I would be much less inclined to view some ethical statements as *a priori*. I could have said more about induction had I been able to utilize Mr. Keynes's *Treatise on Probability*, which has since been published.

I found it impossible to make these changes in the text because the above-mentioned views are closely related to the logical calculus [*Logikkalkül*] and can scarcely be presented so as to be generally understood. It is easier to understand them as changes in previously presented theories than if they are explained alone. I have therefore con-

sidered it better to leave the book as I wrote it in 1911, adding only these introductory remarks about the further investigations which suggest its imperfections.

November 1924

BERTRAND RUSSELL