

## NEW RUSSIAN WORK ON RUSSELL

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A. S. Kolesnikov. **Философия Бертрана Рассела** [*Filosofija Bertrana Rassela*]. Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1991. Pp. 232. 3 rub. 30 kop.

Anatolii Sergeevich Kolesnikov is a relatively new name in Russell studies, although his book shows a deep knowledge of the material available on Russell in Russian and a wide acquaintance with Russell's publications in English and in Russian translation.<sup>1</sup>

In this work, which translates as *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, Kolesnikov traces the evolution of Russell's "world-view", while presenting a traditional Soviet interpretation of Russell's place in "bourgeois" philosophy. This monograph presents for the first time in Russian a thorough analysis of the evolution of Russell's philosophy as the outstanding representation of contemporary bourgeois philosophy, and is the first major study on Russell's philosophy in Russian since the appearance in 1962 of Soviet philosopher I. S. Narskii's *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*.<sup>2</sup>

Russell himself is viewed by Kolesnikov as the best representative of the bourgeois humanist, philosopher, and mathematician. The author seeks a critical understanding of the historical and philosophical sources of Russell's ideas and conceptions and of the influence which these exercised and continue to exercise on contemporary Western philosophy and science. The author's aim is to "uncover" the neo-realist empiricist direction of Russell's philosophy as it manifested itself as a condition of his scientific and epistemological thinking. As had been usual for Soviet studies of Western "bourgeois" philosophers and their philosophies, Lenin and his empirio-criticism serves as a foil for the elucidation of Russell's thought and its development. Probably the most famous example of the dialectical attack on ana-

<sup>1</sup> Kolesnikov is also the author of *The Freethought of Bertrand Russell* [*Svobodomyслиje Bertrana Rassela*] (Moscow: Mysl', 1978).

<sup>2</sup> *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell: Lectures for Students in the University Philosophy Faculty* [*Filosofija Bertrana Rassela: lekcija dlja studentov filosofskih fakul'tov universitetov*] (Moscow: 1962).

In the first footnote (on p. 60) to his translation of the article on "Bertrand Russell in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia: Translation from Russian", *Russell*, nos. 23-4 (1976): 60-2, Charles Haynes wrote that "Narskiy ... appears to be a leading Soviet writer on Russell's philosophy." In fact Narskii wrote extensively on philosophy of logic, for which work he is best known.

lytic philosophy revolved around the rather rough treatment accorded to A. J. Ayer when he lectured at Moscow State University in 1962. This methodology for criticizing "bourgeois idealism" has declined in recent years as a consequence of *perestroika*; from as early as 1987 Soviet philosophers have managed to refrain from employing this tactic in their writings (as one may readily see, e.g., from Zinaida Sokuler's recent paper on "Wittgenstein on the Contradictions in Logic and in the Foundations of Mathematics").

Kolesnikov's discussion of political-ideological, social and moral issues is limited to the Preface, which also presents a brief sketch of Russell's life, especially his education and the earliest of the philosophical influences at Cambridge, of course Russell's visit in 1920 to Soviet Russia and the writings that derived from that trip, especially his book *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, and of his travels in China. Here Kolesnikov notes Russell's ties to the Fabian socialists and names in particular the Webbs, H. G. Wells and "other members representative of the bourgeois intelligentsia" (p. 5). Mention is also made here of his activism for nuclear disarmament and against the American war in Indochina, and of the essay "Why I Am Not a Christian". We are told at the very outset (p. 3) that "the name of this philosopher is widely known in our country." The remainder of the book is concerned with Russell's technical philosophy, i.e. with his work in philosophy of mathematics, logic, philosophy of language, metaphysics and epistemology.

Kolesnikov divides Russell's philosophical evolution into three stages (p. 22). The "early" period (1894–1910) is the developmental stage, characterized by the influence of neo-Hegelianism and neo-Kantianism and by the development of the conception of neo-realism. The "mature" period (1910–40), is characterized by elaborating neo-realism, by viewing logical atomism as a brand of realism, and by neutral monism. The "late" period (1940–70) retains a neo-realist humanistic-Kantian position which combines a radical and critical realism with metaphysical materialism. Because Kolesnikov takes "neo-realism" as the unifying feature of all stages of Russell's philosophy, one would expect a definition of this term. But the search for a straightforward definition yields nothing; instead, one must reconstruct the nature and meaning of this concept through comparison and contrast with the various other brands of thought with which Kolesnikov opposes it—for example with the empirio-criticism of Lenin's interpretation of dialectical materialism ("diamat") and with the idealism of Green, Bradley, McTaggart, Bosanquet and

<sup>3</sup> Written in 1987; published in *Philosophia Mathematica*, (2) 3 (1988): 21–8.

When I attended the International Congress of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science in Moscow in August 1987, the only person I can recall whose speech continually evoked the names of Marx and Lenin was the elderly Rector of Moscow [State] University; and his speech seemed to embarrass most of the members of the audience, both Soviet and non-Soviet.

others—and through the details of Kolesnikov's discussions of each of the stages of Russell's thought.

The idea that there is an overriding unity in Russell's thought despite various differences at each stage of his career was formulated by Morris Weitz. Weitz's doctoral thesis at the University of Michigan sought to show that there was a unity in Russell's philosophical writings (in opposition to those who argued that Russell was forever changing his metaphysical position). This unity was Russell's adoption of the analytic method in his continual efforts to combat all manner of philosophical idealism, in particular the neo-Hegelian variety of idealism with which he himself flirted in the waning years of the nineteenth century. The analytic method was the underlying theme in all of Russell's philosophical work from at least 1910 forward, and probably from as early as 1900; it provided the motivation for the work in logic and served as the unifying scaffolding through—or despite—all of the changes in Russell's philosophical positions thereafter. A version of this thesis was included in Paul Arthur Schilpp's *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* and was very favourably considered by Russell in his "Reply to Criticisms", where he called it "a remarkably thorough study, such as one expects to see made of Plato or Aristotle or Kant, but hardly of oneself", and adding that "in the main, his interpretations seem to me completely just..."<sup>4</sup> For those who know Weitz's work, Kolesnikov's claim of the neo-realist unity throughout Russell's philosophical evolution is interesting and familiar, even if Kolesnikov identifies it with a metaphysical position rather than with a method. However, the list of references cited does not include Weitz's paper.

The core of Kolesnikov's book is divided into two parts. The first, consisting of six chapters, surveys the work of Russell's early period. This part treats Russell's work on the problems of logic and mathematics as a "prolegomena" to his work on theory of knowledge. The first chapter, on the development of Russell's philosophical views, traces his studies of mathematics, focusing in particular on *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry* as the beginning of the fulfilment of the programme to present a neo-Hegelian, neo-Kantian system of mathematical and physical science, and as supplemented by the material from the period 1896–98 which was first published in *My Philosophical Development*. The "antinomies" that Russell saw in his application of atomistic and discrete concepts to continuous processes in physics and mathematics are a particular focus of concern here for Kolesnikov. The second chapter is devoted to Russell's *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (1900). It was through this study that Russell formulated the task of applying the tools

<sup>4</sup> M. Weitz, "Analysis and the Unity of Russell's Philosophy", in P. A. Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (Chicago/Evanston, Northwestern U. P. 1944), pp. 57–121; and Russell, "Reply to Criticisms[Weitz]", *ibid.*, pp. 684–6 (p. 684 for the quotation).

of mathematical logic to the analysis and elaboration of all science, including epistemology. Chapter 3 is pivotal, tracing Russell's shift from a critique of the neo-Hegelianism he had previously embraced to preparing the grounds of neo-realism. In this chapter, Kolesnikov points to the tripartite aspects of the originating roots of twentieth-century British analytic philosophy as the logico-linguistic one of G. E. Moore, Russell's logical atomism, and the linguistic one of Wittgenstein's later period. But it was, says Kolesnikov (p. 49), Moore's development of the neo-realist method, together with Russell's variant of neo-realism, which drove "Absolute Idealism" out of British intellectual life in the twentieth century. We do not get a sense of the significance that Moore's influence had on Russell as Russell himself rebelled against the British idealism of Bradley *et al.* Thus, we are left with the distinct impression that it was his work on Leibniz that was the critical turning-point in Russell's thinking at this stage of his philosophical development.

Having taken the "logical turn", Russell's newly found realism developed into the position of logicism. Thus, Chapter 4 is devoted to a consideration of the problems of Russell's correlation of logic and philosophy with mathematics. Kolesnikov opens his discussion (p. 61) with the assertion that "in the paper 'On Denoting' (1905), Russell wrote that first logical theory must be made as useful as possible for dealing with unsolved problems and paradoxes, since these are for logic what experiments are for natural science." This chapter traces the background for the writing of *Principia Mathematica*, examining the new influences of Peano, Couturat and especially Whitehead, on Russell's work in logic as foundations and philosophy of mathematics. He quotes (p. 67) Russell as saying in the paper "Recent Work on the Principles of Mathematics" (1901) that "the proof that all pure mathematics, including geometry, is just [the same as] logic", and adding that "it delivered the fatal blow to the philosophy of Kant."<sup>5</sup> It is at this stage that one begins to get a hint of the characteristics that Kolesnikov identifies with "neo-realism", for he continues (pp. 67–8) to quote Russell, particularly with respect to the Leibniz book, that Russell rejected the Leibnizian view that all knowledge is ultimately *a priori* and asserted the position that all knowledge is ultimately derived through the senses (p. 116 of the Russian translation of *PP*). Kolesnikov finds the first articulation of the logicist philosophy in "Recent Work on the Principles of Mathematics", where, he says (p. 65), Russell "set forth a large-scale programme of the methodological basis of logicism and developed as one of its leading representatives." The problem here is that, apart from this sentence and a few more like it in which Russell says that "the most remarkable

<sup>5</sup> On pp. 105–6 of the Russian translation. Russell's original English says: "The proof that all pure mathematics, including Geometry, is nothing but formal logic, is a fatal blow to the Kantian philosophy."

result of modern methods in mathematics is the importance of symbolic logic and of rigid formalism", there is little in this particular paper, which is essentially a survey and evaluation of the work of Peano, Cantor, Dedekind, Weierstrass and others primarily on the axiomatic presentation of geometry and especially in set theory and foundations of analysis—rather than being a programmatic or methodological statement—to support Kolesnikov's claim that in this paper can be found the source of Russell's logicism.

The attitude that the unsolved problems and paradoxes of logic serve as experiments for logic—act as a test of the usefulness and efficacy of logic—is carried over into, and analyzed and criticized in, the next two chapters. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the Russell paradox and of philosophical aspects of *Principia Mathematica*. Kolesnikov (p. 78) gives the unusual opinion that "The *Principia* appeared as a rough and hasty immature draft" after previous work gave a definitive statement of logicism, a view he shares with the renowned Soviet philosopher of mathematics G. I. Ruzavin. In Kolesnikov's case, this view is at least consistent with, if not required, if the earlier "Recent Work on the Principles of Mathematics" is to be taken as presenting Russell's first and most definitive expression of logicism. The philosophical parts of *Principia*, dealing, for example, with the theory of definite descriptions, as opposed to the technical parts which are devoted to proving various theorems, certainly are expressions of the specific aspects of the logicist philosophy, and the *raison d'être* of *Principia* is to carry out the logicist programme to develop all of mathematics by deduction from a small set of basic axioms of logic. Kolesnikov's assertion can, then, be justified in the sense that *Principia* carries out the logicist programme but does not describe it.

One of the principal contributions that logic makes, according to logicism, is the solution of the paradoxes. But logicism must then be accounted a failure. The paradoxes demonstrate that any mathematical system built upon logic or set theory is inconsistent, and Gödel's incompleteness theorems reinforce this by showing that the system of *Principia* is incomplete and incompletable; thus logicism is an inadequate philosophy of mathematics. The paradoxes and the failure of proposed solutions to them such as Russell's theory of types led to the development of axiomatic set theories whose axioms were formulated in such a way that the offending sets, such as the Russell set (the set of all sets not members of themselves), were banished. Another development was the constructive approach, which in the work of Kolmogorov, Markov, Shanin and other members of the Russian constructivist school, was compatible with the dialetheic philosophy and complemented dialectical logic.

The final chapter in the first part concerns the theory of descriptions and connects Russell's philosophy of language with the problem of existence. Propositions in the subject–predicate form that depict reality, says Kolesnikov (p. 112), pass from logic to the gnosological loss of their specific subject.

Thus, by the very structure of ordinary language, we are seen to commit ourselves to some kind of existence of things whose very existence we seek to deny in our statements denying their existence. Russell's views are set in the context of the history of the problem of the metaphysical baggage behind the commitments implied by use of language. Thus, the theory of descriptions is seen to arise in response to Meinong's various levels and degrees of existence, growing out of linguistic analysis of propositions about non-existent objects such as "the present King of France". Kolesnikov also analyzes other approaches to this problem, including Lesniewski's and Quine's, as well as that of various dialectal philosophers such as Narskii. The reflection theory of truth proposed by Lenin in his empirio-criticism and the materialism of the dialectal philosophy of which Lenin's reflection theory is a part, is proposed as a solution to Russell's Meinongian problem by Narskii and by Kolesnikov.

The second part of the book, called "The Contents of Knowledge and the Forms of Their Expression", is concerned with Russell's work after completion of *Principia*, and focuses primarily on his work in epistemology and on the metaphysics underlying his theory of knowledge. Chapter 1, on "Neo-realism and the Problems of Philosophy", is devoted largely to Russell's book *Our Knowledge of the External World*, supplemented by a consideration of the themes developed in *Logic and Knowledge*. These works are also the basis for the discussion in the second chapter on "The Methodological Role of Gnoseology in the Perception of Nature and 'Logical Atomism'". The third chapter takes a more detailed look at the metaphysics behind Russell's theory of knowledge, in particular his "neutral monism", and concentrates its attention in particular on *The Analysis of Mind*, *The Analysis of Matter*, and *Logic and Knowledge*. This is supplemented by the analyses of Russell's metaphysics in Stace's study of "Russell's Neutral Monism" from Schilpp's *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, Eames' "Russell on 'What There Is'", and Quine's "Russell's Ontological Development". The fourth chapter centres on *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* and *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*. This chapter is devoted to a discussion of Russell's treatment of the logical and epistemological problems of language, meaning, and truth. In his consideration of Russell's theory of knowledge and of the logical analysis of linguistic and epistemological problems, Kolesnikov writes:

... Russell attached a very great special empirical meaning and hypothetical character to philosophical truth. The method of logical analysis was included in his philosophy, but without neo-positivist extreme.... Philosophy amounts to the method or theory of knowledge.... In the particular form in which it came together in Russell, it introduced logico-mathematical formalism and neo-realist gnoseology. (Pp. 169–70)

Kolesnikov clearly thinks, then, that Russell's neo-realism did not for one moment cause him to abandon the view that logic serves as a tool for the analysis of philosophical problems.

The final chapter is also devoted to a consideration of Russell's epistemology, with special attention to the postulates of scientific inference and the limits of empiricism.

In his conclusion, Kolesnikov (p. 203) does find an "ambivalence" in Russell's view of the world, but this arises because Russell belonged to two philosophical cultures, the Victorian and the modern. He expressed the bourgeois philosophy of the West but gave it a dynamic footprint, expressed through his neo-realism, based upon the idealism of Plato, Leibniz and Frege, but it was an idealism moderated by an empiricism derived from Hume, Mill and James. If, then, Kolesnikov were to have given us an explicit definition of neo-realism, we can reasonably suppose that it would have been one whose fundamental characteristic was an idealistic empiricism.

If the book has any significant scholarly shortcomings, these derive directly from a critical lack of access to archival materials, to the recent publications by the Bertrand Russell Editorial Project, and of the most recent secondary studies of Russell's work by Western scholars. In particular, the latest material the author seems to have had from Western sources is already a decade old. Moreover, while Kolesnikov refers to a wide range of Russell's writings, especially in the second part of his book, he tends to rely most heavily throughout the book on only two books, namely *The Problems of Philosophy*, along with its Russian version, and *My Philosophical Development*. Strangely, however, he fails to refer even once to "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" in the second chapter of Part 2, despite the focus of that chapter on Russell's logical atomism. The interpretation is old and so is the material presented. I did learn for the first time (on p. 7), however, that during the time that Russell was in the Soviet Russia and met with Lenin, Trotsky, Blok and Gorky, he also delivered a lecture to the Petrograd Mathematical Society.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Kolesnikov does not give any documentary evidence. However, there are circumstantial grounds for accepting his claim.

During the time of Russell's visit to Soviet Russia, A. V. Vasil'ev was the president of the Petrograd Mathematical Society. This is the same Vasil'ev for whose English translation of *Space, Time, Motion* (1924) Russell wrote the Introduction. A. V. Vasil'ev's son Nikolai Aleksandrovich Vasil'ev (1880–1940), a logician at Kazan University, had several formal and informal contacts with Russell; e.g., during Vasil'ev's time at the University of St. Petersburg, possibly meeting Frank Russell at the British Embassy there. Such contacts are currently being investigated by the Kazan State University logician, historian and philosopher of mathematics, Valentine Aleksandrovich Bazhanov, who has published a biography of the son (Moscow: Nauka, 1988).