RUSSELL AND ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

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Collections of academic essays are published with alarming frequency these days, but it is rare that one comes along which contains as many important and indisputably first-rate articles as this one. Thirteen of the sixteen essays collected here were given as papers at a conference held at the University of British Columbia in June 1991, only one of which, "Logicism and the Nature of Mathematical Reasoning" by Michael Detlefson, has been published previously.[1] Of the three essays included here but not delivered at the conference, two have been published before: "The Origins of Russell's Theory of Descriptions" by Franciso Rodríguez-Consuegra which appeared in *Russell* (9 [1989]: 99–132), and "The Power of Russell's Criticism of Frege" by Simon Blackburn and Alan Code, which is reprinted from *Analysis* (38 [1978]: 65–77).

As far as I can see, the only thing the various essays have in common is an extremely high standard of scholarship and argumentation. There is not a single theme that unites them, and, despite the title of the collection, none of them are concerned either with Russell's place in the history of analytic philosophy or with the ongoing debate about what analytic philosophy *is*.

The nearest thing to a discussion of these fascinating general issues is the last essay in the collection, "Russell Making History: the Leibniz Book" by Graeme Hunter. This argues that in *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (1900), Russell ushered in a new tradition of historical philosophical writing, "analytic history", characterized by (to use the phrase Russell himself uses in the preface to the book) "a purely philosophical attitude towards previous philosophers". This attitude disdains an interest in the "dates or influences" of a particular

[1] In *Philosophia Mathematica*, ser. 3, 1 (1993): 24–49, as "Poincaré vs Russell on the Rôle of Logic in Mathematics".

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philosopher and concentrates instead on using the great philosophers of the past to illuminate "the great types of possible philosophies". In short, "philosophic truth and falsehood ... rather than historic fact are what primarily demand our attention."

Hunter is surely right in seeing in these remarks of Russell's an attitude towards the history of their subject that has characterized analytic philosophers. Typical of this attitude is the remark he quotes from P. F. Strawson's *Individuals*: "when I refer to the system of Leibniz, I shall not be much concerned if the views I discuss are not identical at all points with the views held by the historical philosopher of that name." Similar remarks, intended to pull the rug from under prospective critics who would question their interpretations of the philosophers they discuss, have been made by, among others, Jonathan Bennett when discussing Kant and Saul Kripke when discussing Wittgenstein. That Russell's book on Leibniz helped to originate and foster this attitude is, I think, both interesting and important.

I remain, however, unpersuaded by Hunter that this attitude amounts to an "analytic historiography" rather than just to an indifference to history. His account of this alleged new methodology, according to which one discusses a philosopher's work as representative of a type of philosophy rather than as the expression of an individual's point of view, makes it sound, not only historically irresponsible, but also inherently confused. For how can you know what type an author's work belongs to unless you have first formed some idea of what that author, as an individual, is trying to say? What Hunter characterizes as the task of the "scholastic" historian—the task of identifying "the particular intention of particular authors"—has to be done, even if it is done badly and perfunctorily. I take the disarming remarks discussed earlier by Kripke, Strawson, Russell, etc., as acknowledgements, confessions even, that they do not mind over-much whether they have performed this expository task perfunctorily, because their interest is not in the historical question of whether such and such a view was really Kant's or Wittgenstein's or Leibniz's, but in the philosophical question of whether the view is true. But it is one thing to express a comparative indifference to performing a task well; it is another to insist that doing it badly constitutes an interesting new way of doing it.

Among the other essays in this volume are representatives of both the "analytic" and the "scholastic" approaches to philosophical history: discussions of contemporary philosophical issues which take "Russellian-type" positions as their starting-point, on the one hand, and minute, careful analyses of what Russell himself actually wrote, on the other. An especially good example of the latter, Rodríguez-Consuegra's rigorous and detailed study of the pre-"On Denoting" manuscripts, will already be known to readers of

Russell. Another example, which shows how profitable such detailed study can be, is "Term, Relations, Complexes" by Nicholas Griffin.

Griffin's paper is an ambitious attempt to find some unity in the vast diversity of Russell's philosophical output. He finds it in the notion of unity itself, which, he demonstrates, posed a problem for Russell throughout his philosophical work, from *The Principles of Mathematics* of 1903 to *Human Knowledge* of 1948. The problem, which was to take various forms at various times, arises out of the tension between analysis and unity. In *The Principles of Mathematics*, for example, a complex was said to be composed of, analyzable into, a set of terms, but (in Griffin's words) "the assemblage of terms of which a complex was composed was not the same as the complex itself." A complex, that is, has a certain structure, a structure which is not, and cannot be, preserved in the breaking up of that complex into its constituents. An omelette might be made of eggs, milk, cheese, onions and salt, but not *every* set of those ingredients is an omelette!

It is a problem of which Bradley made much in his criticisms of Russell, and which he was inclined to think insoluble without some notion of "internal" relations. Russell, however, was prepared to go to almost any lengths to avoid such a notion. Faced with the version of the problem that plagues the analysis of propositions—the fact that a proposition has a unity which is lost when it is analyzed into its parts—he developed his now notorious "multiple-relation theory of judgment". This dispenses with propositions altogether in favour of judgments, which seemed preferable to him at the time, because instead of being shadowy platonic entities like propositions, they were real mental acts. The "glue" that holds the judgment together, he now believed, is supplied by the mind. As Griffin, with Russellian dryness, comments: "processes which otherwise might seem to be entirely mysterious were referred to the mind, where mystery was normal." When Russell came to deal with this mystery, his attempt to dispel it was typically radical (the doctrine of "neutral monism") and, again typically, introduced as many problems as it solved.

Before that, however, his faith in the multiple-relation theory was undermined by Wittgenstein's famous assault upon it in the summer of 1913, an assault which Griffin has discussed in detail in a previous essay.[2] Here he deals with Wittgenstein's *positive* contribution to the problem of unity. In the New Year of 1914, Russell wrote to Bradley acknowledging the importance of the questions Bradley had raised in his criticisms of Russell's logic, "particularly as regards 'unities' ", and said that he recognized his duty to answer them, promising to look for an answer "as long as I live." "Chiefly through

[2] *Russell*, n.s. 5 (1985): 132–45.

the work of an Austrian pupil of mine", he told Bradley, "I seem now to see answers about unities; but the subject is so difficult and fundamental that I still hesitate."

What answers did Russell think he could see in Wittgenstein's work? Through a detailed search of Wittgenstein's earliest writings on logic—the "Notes on Logic" of 1913, the letters to Russell from 1912 to 1914 and the "Notes Dictated to G. E. Moore" of 1914—Griffin sets out, bloodhound-like, to track down these putative solutions. The trail ends with Wittgenstein's distinction between showing and saying, and Griffin's nose starts wrinkling in disgust. "The doctrine of showing", he declares, "has all the advantages of winning the lottery over having to work for one's living.... That which, according to Wittgenstein, can only be shown is not unlike that which is 'supplied by the mind' in more traditional philosophies: a safety blanket available (apparently) for all emergencies."

In a short but suggestive section at the end of his paper, Griffin traces this, still unsolved, problem of unities through Russell's post-1914 work. In metaphysics, it emerges as the problem of how material objects could be constructed from sensibilia, or, after his adoption of neutral monism, from "events". In epistemology and philosophy of mind, it was the problem of how perceptual experience, or the self, could be constructed from discrete sense-data (or, again, from "events"). In the philosophy of science it became the problem of how events can be selected to form causal chains. Common to all these various problems is the struggle to preserve the value of analysis while confronting the old, old problem that analysis is always to some degree a falsification.

In his emphasis on the problem of unities, Griffin provides a fascinating, and I think unique framework[3] in which almost all of Russell's philosophical thinking can be placed. His excellent paper combines textual exactness with breadth of scope and should be studied by all who seek to understand the philosophical dilemmas that drove Russell, in C. D. Broad's oft-quoted phrase, to produce "a different system of philosophy every few years".

Russell's multiple-relation theory of judgment is probably better known for Wittgenstein's arguments against it than Russell's arguments for it. Though opinion differs as to how, exactly, Wittgenstein killed it, that it is as dead as a dodo is scarcely in dispute. In "Why Russell Abandoned Russellian

[3] In *Concept and Object* (London: Routledge, 1988), however, Anthony Palmer anticipates Griffin's theme to some extent in his discussion of Russell's theory of propositions in *Principles of Mathematics* in connection with what he calls "Bradley's Problem", i.e., the problem of preserving the unity of the proposition. Rather strangely, though, Palmer does not discuss either the published controversy or the correspondence between Russell and Bradley on this subject.

Propositions", however, Bernard Linsky attempts to breathe a little life back into it, not by defending the theory itself, but by presenting in a sympathetic light the thinking which led up to it. Even if Russell was not right about judgment, Linsky suggests, he may have been right in his sceptical approach to the "metaphysics of propositions".

In answer to the question of why Russell wanted to avoid propositions, Linsky echoes Griffin's theme. The problem with propositions, he says, "is not with their constituents, the objects and universals with which they are composed, but rather in the combination of them, the unity that holds them together." Objects can combine to form facts (Charles I died on the scaffold), objects can fail to combine and thus form (in some odd sense) *negative* facts (Charles I did not die in his bed), but objects cannot combine to form *false* facts. "Charles I died in his bed" is not a fact. What is it then, a false proposition? And what is a false proposition? A combination of objects that, in reality, are not actually combined? This, thought Russell, was a view which "no person with a vivid sense of reality" could hold. Indeed, as Linsky points out, it is a view that offends not only one's "sense of reality", but also one's sense of logic. For, as it stands, it is straightforwardly contradictory. There either is such a combination or there isn't. If there is, then there is such a fact; if there isn't, then there is no such thing as the purported "false proposition". So, there are objects and there are facts, combinations of objects, but propositions, "these curious shadowy things", as Russell called them, are mere fictions.

Linsky ends with the suggestion that it may be time to revive Russellian facts and kill off Russellian propositions (on Russellian judgments he is inexplicably silent.) Behind this suggestion lies the conviction that the problems connected with the unity of the proposition do not affect the unity of the fact. A study of the controversy between Russell and Bradley, of Griffin's paper, and of Russell's subsequent philosophical development suggests otherwise. Griffin, I think, sees deeper than Linsky into what the problem of unity is. It is not just that objects that are not, in fact, combined can't be held together by anything, it is that, on Russell's realist view of relations, the relations between objects that combine them into complexes have both to be one of the objects *in* the complex *and* the "glue" that holds the complex together. This problem does not disappear by eliminating propositions, it just reappears in a more difficult form.

In "Functions and Propositional Functions in *Principia Mathematica*", Peter Hylton shows how the "intensional" logic of *Principia,* that, with its elaborate ramified theory of types, looks so peculiar to modern eyes, was motivated by the general philosophical concerns discussed by Griffin and Linsky. Russell builds mathematics upon propositional functions, but, unlike

Frege, he does not regard these as a special kind of function. What one might regard as the more general, the more basic notion of a function is not a primitive idea in *Principia* but rather is introduced at a comparatively late stage (its definition is *30.01).

Hylton's answer to why this should be is both ingenious and persuasive and connects with what Griffin has dubbed Russell's "absolute realism". In Hylton's terms, Russell has a "two-stage analysis" of language, rather than the "three-stage" analysis favoured by Frege and widely accepted by contemporary philosophers. For Russell, that is, there are words and there are the objects they stand for, there are sentences (or judgments) and the facts they describe. But there is no third thing, mediating between the two, like Frege's "thoughts" or his *Sinne*, or indeed the "propositions" accepted by the majority of philosophers. This is a familiar theme, but Hylton connects it in an interesting and unexpected way with Russell's famous elimination in "On Denoting" of definite descriptions, or "complex referring expressions", as Hylton calls them. Hylton's view is that a "two-stage" analysis of language cannot accommodate the complexity of a referring expression like "the teacher of the teacher of Alexander", because it cannot say to what the complexity belongs (for it does not, on the face of it, belong to Plato himself). Fregean analyses can attribute the complexity to the *sense* of the expression, but this is precisely what is denied a two-stage analysis.

So what does Russell do? He does what he always does in this sort of scrape and denies that there *are* such things as complex referring expressions. But the ordinary functions of mathematics—"the positive square root of x", "the successor of y", and so on—are, on their ordinary interpretations, just such expressions. So, according to the inexorable logic of this development, they, too, like classes, propositions, and numbers, have to be declared "logical fictions". Strictly speaking, there are no ordinary functions—or *descriptive* functions, as Russell calls them—there are just the propositional functions from which they and all other logical fictions[4] are constructed.

Or perhaps there aren't any propositional functions either. In "Reconciling *PM*'s Ramified Type Theory with the Doctrine of the Unrestricted Variable of the *Principles*" (a title, I suspect, unlikely to whet the appetites of many outside the small band of dedicated Russophiles), Gregory Landini presents a convincing case for abandoning the widespread interpretation of *Principia* that sees it as founding mathematics upon propositional functions, while understanding these latter as kinds of platonic entities.

The first Introduction to *Principia* provides much evidence for Landini's

[4] Including, A. J. Ayer once mischievously remarked, Lady Ottoline Morrell.

interpretation, particularly in the emphasis Russell gives there to his newfound conviction that, as he puts it, "a 'proposition', in the sense in which a proposition is supposed to be *the* object of a judgment, is a false abstraction ... [it] is not a single entity at all" (*PM*$_2$ I: 44). Given this emphasis, it would be odd, to say the least, if Russell were to attribute to propositional functions the kind of real, platonic existence he so vehemently and repeatedly denies to propositions. For a propositional function, on Russell's view, "differs from a proposition solely by the fact that it is ambiguous." Indeed, a few pages later we find him explicitly denying them such an existence: "A [propositional] function, in fact, is not a definite object ... it is a mere ambiguity awaiting determination."

In the face of such apparently unequivocal denials of the platonic reality of propositional functions, the conventional interpretation of *Principia* demands some explanation. It rests, one must suppose, on an understandable bafflement as to how one can make sense of Russell's theory of mathematics, and in particular, of the hierarchy of propositional functions given by the ramified theory of types, unless we assume the existence of propositional functions. The multiple-relation theory of judgment given in the Introduction, it is widely believed, is straightforwardly inconsistent with the theory advanced in the rest of the book, for that theory demands an ontological hierarchy. Peter Hylton, for example, in *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, ignores Russell's remarks to the contrary, and commits himself to the view that: "in *Principia Mathematica* ... he [Russell] abandons the claim that there are no ultimate ontological distinctions among entities [and] sets up a distinction of ontological category, or *type*, between propositional functions and individuals...."[5]

It is the great merit of Landini's paper that he enables us to understand Russell's theory without such cavalier disregard for what Russell actually says. On his view, Russell never *did* abandon the claim that "there are no ultimate ontological distinctions among entities." Russell's belief that "whatever is, is one", Landini maintains, conflicts with any kind of ontological hierarchy and forms the basis for the allegiance to the "doctrine of the unrestricted variable" that forms, so Landini believes, the unchanging bedrock to the many changes in Russell's philosophical logic between *Principles* and *Principia*.

The distinction between restricted and unrestricted variables is spelt out by Russell in Chapter I of his Introduction to *Principia*. A variable, he says there, may either have a conventionally assigned range of values, in which case it is restricted, or it may "have as the range of its values all determina-

[5] Oxford: Clarendon P., 1990, p. 286.

tions which render the statement in which it occurs significant", in which case, it is unrestricted. "For the purposes of logic", he goes on to say, "the unrestricted variable is more convenient than the restricted variable, and we shall always employ it." What enables him to say this, Landini thinks, is that in the logic of *Principia*, contrary to the received wisdom: "All entities, universal and particular, are on a par; there are no types or orders of entities."

This interpretation makes sense of Russell's claim that propositional functions are not objects, but what sense can it make of the ramified theory of types, which does, after all, *seem* to be an ontological hierarchy?

Central to Landini's novel and persuasive answer to this question is the seriousness with which he is prepared to take the multiple-relation theory of judgment as the philosophical foundation for the entire edifice of *Principia*. According to this theory, propositions are, like definite descriptions, "incomplete symbols" (which, I suppose, makes propositional functions incomplete "incomplete symbols"). They are meaningless on their own, and require a context in order to be significant. In this case, the context required is a person's mind; a proposition becomes significant as soon as it becomes a judgment.[6]

It is this concern with significance that forms the core of Landini's interpretation of the theory of types. According to him, it is not an ontological or metaphysical theory, but rather a theory of meaning. It lays down conditions under which propositions can be meaningfully asserted. It does this, not by restricting the values of variables, by specifying what kinds of objects variables may or may not include in their range, but rather by providing a kind of "grammar" for the construction and use of propositional functions. The theory of types is, as Russell repeatedly stressed, a theory of correct *symbolism*.[7]

I find Landini's interpretation intriguing and almost compelling. But it leaves me with a residual doubt as to what, in *Principia*, Russell thought mathematics was about, It is often said that in *Principles* he thought mathematics was about classes and in *Principia* he thought it was about propositional functions. But, if Landini is right, what are we now to think? In the ontology of *Principia*, as understood by Landini, there are no propositional

[6] See *PM*, I: 46, where Russell says explicitly that "the phrase which expresses a proposition is what we call an 'incomplete symbol', and that, for example, the phrase "the proposition 'Socrates is human' uses 'Socrates is human' in a way which requires a supplement of some kind before it acquires a complete meaning; but when I judge 'Socrates is human', the meaning is completed by the act of judging, and we no longer have an incomplete symbol."

[7] See, for example, his letter to Wittgenstein, 13 August 1919 (also quoted in Wittgenstein's letter to Russell, 19 August 1919).

functions and no orders of different types of objects. There are just particulars and universals, judgments being complex particulars with the unique quality of being either true or false and the inconvenient feature that one of the objects in the complex is a person's mind. Surely Russell does not intend to found mathematics upon psychological entities? Perhaps, logic is the study of *forms* of judgment and mathematics a particular branch of this study? But what are "forms of judgment"? As supposedly real objects are they not just as shadowy as propositions? And if we are not to take a platonic view of these forms, how are we to avoid the kind of psychologism Russell set out to replace?

One of the great advantages of Landini's account is that, from it, one can see how the philosophical problems raised by the theory of judgment that lies at the heart of *Principia* lead directly into considerations about the nature of the mind. To this extent, *The Analysis of Mind* is not a departure from the concerns of *Principia* but an attempt to improve upon its foundations. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, of course, it just made matters worse, landing Russell in the mire of problems about privacy and about mental representations which the later Wittgenstein saw it as his task to clear up. In "Wittgenstein versus Russell on the Analysis of Mind", Stuart Shanker shows the surprising extent to which Wittgenstein's later agenda was set by Russell's book, and in "Regarding Privacy", R. E. Tully teases out allusions to Russell's thinking about the mind in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, emphasizing in particular the importance of the changes in Russell's thinking about privacy between *Our Knowledge of the External World* and "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism". Though both Shanker and Tully write with a determination to be fair to Russell, neither essay, I suspect, will do much to unsettle the widespread opinion of that influential group of philosophers identified by Griffin who hold that, "if only Russell had been a better philosopher he would have been Wittgenstein."

Perhaps even more influential among philosophical logicians is the view that if only Russell had been a better philosopher he would have been Frege. An important challenge to this view is provided by "The Power of Russell's Criticism of Frege" by Simon Blackburn and Alan Code, which seeks to defend Russell's discussion of Frege in "On Denoting" against the widespread view that, in confusing use with mention, in misunderstanding Frege's position and in a host of other ways, it is utterly hopeless. At stake in this debate is the conflict mentioned earlier between Russell's two-stage analysis of language and Frege's three-stage analysis, at least as this pertains to what Russell called "denoting phrases". Russell's view was that any attempt to identify the *sense* of such phrases as opposed to their denotation is bound to fail. We can denote the phrase itself simply by putting it in inverted commas, but we

cannot denote the sense of the phrase, unless we mean by that, its denotation.

Russell's famous example in this argument is the phrase "the first line of Gray's *Elegy*", which denotes the sentence: "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day." But can we speak of a *sense* of "the first line of Gray's *Elegy*" without meaning by that the sense of the sentence "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day"? Russell's use of this example receives a usefully detailed exposition in "The Interpretation of Russell's 'Gray's *Elegy*' Argument" by Michael Pakaluk, who, however, does not regard the argument as refuting Frege's view but rather as proceeding on the *assumption* that Frege was wrong. The argument, he therefore concludes, "does not have the importance that has been attributed to it by others."

Pakaluk's commentary on this passage, which devotes thirty pages to explaining what Russell expounded in eight paragraphs, is perhaps an extreme case of what Hunter calls the "scholastic" type of philosophical history. An equally extreme case of the "analytic" type is to be found in "Grammatical Form, Logical Form, and Incomplete Symbols" by Stephen Neale. Neale is so little concerned to *interpret* Russell that he hardly ever quotes from Russell's own writings. His many citations are rather to the work of contemporary semantic theorists, and his interest in Russell's work extends no further than to a desire to use the basic idea in Russell's theory of descriptions as "a component of a systematic and compositional semantics for natural language". In pursuit of this aim, he uses a jargon that is quite alien to Russell's work and which I find myself almost entirely unable to decode. "The scope of a quantified *NP*", runs a typical Neale sentence, "is just the *S* node to which it has been Chomsky-adjoined at *LF*." I dare say there is an entire literature written in this strange language, but it is not one with which I am familiar.

Matters are made worse by the fact that even when Neale's writing begins to approximate to standard English, his meaning is often difficult to decipher. "Ultimately", he writes in a sentence that looks as if it ought to mean *something*:

> ... I would like to espouse the view that the logical form of a sentence *S* belonging to a language *L* is the structure imposed upon *S* in the course of providing a systematic and principled mapping from sentences of *L* (as determined by the best syntactical theory for *L*) to the propositions (or perhaps proposition types) those sentences express. (P. 99)

The paper ends by generously conceding that "Russell cannot be blamed for not having the resources of generalized quantifier theory and generative syntax at his disposal", and claiming that, even in the face of such handicaps, he nevertheless "can be commended for a truly insightful theory, some of the merits of which are only now emerging." Russell can also be commended for the quality of his prose. Neale, alas, cannot.

Neale's incomprehensible essay[8] notwithstanding, this is a really excellent collection of papers that seems certain to secure itself a lasting and influential role in determining how Russell's work is to be read and assessed.

[8] Since I wrote this, I have been told by people whose opinion I respect that they see interesting and important things in Neale's paper. Perhaps, therefore, little weight should be given to the fact that *I* find it incomprehensible, and my ill-tempered remarks about Neale's writing style should be regarded as no more than an expression of my pique at having to read something that repeatedly resisted my attempts to understand it.