

RUSSELLIAN ANALYSIS

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Paul J. Hager. *Continuity and Change in the Development of Russell's Philosophy*. Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Pubs., 1994. Pp. 13, 195. US\$99.75.

When I was in graduate school I was told that Bertrand Russell lived so long and changed his mind so often that there was not a philosophical position that at one time or other he hadn't advocated. The general view was that unlike the system-building philosophers such as Hegel, Russell would develop his views until he found a problem, and then change his mind, adopting a new position. Paul Hager is out to dispel this image of Bertrand Russell as a somewhat fickle philosopher and also to give Russell's later work its proper due. In this tightly argued work (which, though, suffers somewhat from the style typical of dissertations), Hager maintains that there is a great continuity in Russell's work, namely the project of analysis and the commitment to the reality of relations, and that what change there is in Russell's philosophical positions can by and large be chalked up to his changing understanding of space and time.

One consequence of this emphasis is that Hager consistently downplays the role of epistemology in Russell's development, seeing Russell's changing positions in epistemology as driven not by epistemological concerns, but rather by his changing attitudes toward space and time.

Hager sees Russell's philosophy as going through four major stages, which he labels the Neo-Hegelian phase (up to 1899), the Platonist phase (1899 to 1913), the Empiricist phase (1914 to 1918) and the Modified Empiricist phase (from 1919 on). It may seem curious that after chastising others for ignoring Russell's later philosophy, Hager lumps all the later works together, putting the *Analysis of Mind*, *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, and *Human Knowledge* in the same period. However, given Hager's emphases, this turns out not to be so surprising.

Hager sees Russell as committed to the method of analysis throughout all these phases; in the last three this is tied to his commitment to the reality of external relations. Hager's discussion of analysis is first rate. He includes elaborate diagrams of examples of analysis in the various phases and sees common features throughout the various applications. Two main points which are present here and not always appreciated in discussions of Russellian analysis should be noted: (1) Russell's analytic method, broadly understood, includes synthesis, and (2) Russell thought that the method of analysis did not necessarily give firm epistemological foundations, and thus was unlikely to be final.

Let me deal briefly with the first point. As Hager makes clear, it is propositions which are the primary objects of analysis, and entities only derivatively. The analysis seeks to find a simpler set of propositions from which the ordinary results can be derived. For example, during what Hager has termed the Platonist phase, when Russell was working on the foundations of mathematics, the starting points of analysis are the ordinary propositions of mathematics. While the truth of these propositions is not really under question, in terms of what ontology and epistemology one might be committed to in endorsing them, they are vague, and they are logically interdependent. The analysis yields simpler propositions which are logically independent, involve a smaller ontological commitment, are precise, and from which the ordinary propositions of mathematics (now properly constructed) can be deduced. In the empiricist phase, the propositions under analysis are the ordinary propositions which are about common-sense objects. These are analyzed into propositions which are perceptual judgements and logical principles, which yield the basic entities. Then the initial propositions are replaced by complex propositions which concern these basic entities and the relations which hold between them. The common-sense objects here are not replaced by just the basic entities (sense-data in this case), but by the entities *and the relations which hold between them*. The logical constructions of this phase are not simply the particulars, but the particulars as they are related. Part of this is masked by Russell's reference in the period after *Our Knowledge of the External World* to physical objects and such as "logical fictions". Something is a logical fiction for Russell if no reference is made to it in the propositions which result from a correct analysis. Recognizing that the analysis of, e.g., a proposition about a penny will not simply be a proposition about sense-data, but about sense-data and the relations which hold among them, in particular those that order the sense-data into series, enables Hager to disarm arguments against Russellian constructions proposed by Ayer and Sainsbury (pp. 111–12).

The second important point Hager makes about Russellian analysis was that it was never intended to give epistemologically certain foundations, but

rather to clarify and enlarge our understanding of our common-sense beliefs. Hager corrects the misconception that Russell and Whitehead wrote *Principia Mathematica* because they weren't sure whether $2 + 2 = 4$ was true, and needed to prove it from premisses more certain. What Russell was interested in accomplishing was finding a minimal group of premisses from which the propositions of mathematics could be derived, thus addressing the Kantian claims concerning the autonomy of mathematics and also organizing and extending mathematical knowledge. While the philosophy of logic of the more recent twentieth century has taken it for granted that the propositions of logic are certain and can be seen to be true by mere inspection, this was not Russell's view, although he clearly felt this about some of the propositions of logic, such as the basic rules of deduction (p. 44). Thus his remarks in *Principia Mathematica* with regard to the lack of self-evidence of the axiom of reducibility, and the method outlined in the 1907 paper "The Regressive Method of Discovering the Premises of Mathematics", are seen here not as anomalies, but central statements of the programme of Russellian analysis.

Another consequence of this observation is that we should not take Russell's basic objects, even in the empiricist phase, to be epistemologically primitive, nor should we identify logical fictions with epistemological fictions (pp. 50–2). The basic entities which were the result of one analysis, could well be the starting points for a further analysis according to this anti-foundationalist account of Russell's method. Following this, Hager sees the shift from the Platonist phase, where Russell thought of points in space and instances in time as basic entities, to the empiricist phase, where these were constructed out of sense-data, as less radical than has previously been thought. Russell simply realized a method of analyzing the basic entities of the former phase in terms of a new set of basic entities.

Hager is on the whole right in his account of Russell's method of analysis, including, I believe, Russell's lack of concern with foundationalism. However, I am less sure than Hager that Russell was as consistent on this point throughout his career. First, while it is true Russell did not see his premises as more certain than his results, he still hoped for a set of premises which was quite certain. His reservations concerning the axiom of reducibility and his endeavours to avoid it attest to this. Second, if he was so committed to anti-foundationalism throughout this whole time, it is curious that his remarks on Descartes's method in *Problems of Philosophy* are so positive. Indubitable foundations appear to be a goal which we have to give up reluctantly. Sense-data were preferred over the Platonic instances and points not simply because propositions about the points could be derived from them, but also because of their epistemological status. I think that Russell came to be more firmly in the anti-foundationalist camp somewhat later in life. There is a quotation

from *My Philosophical Development* where Russell clearly states this anti-foundationalism:

It has been common among philosophers to begin with how we know and proceed afterwards to what we know. I think this is a mistake, because knowing how we know is one small department of knowing what we know. (*MPD*, p. 16)

This sentence is included in the chapter entitled "My Present View of the World". A reader of the 1912 *Problems of Philosophy* will be forgiven for not seeing this as Russell's view. Russell made a related claim in "My Mental Development", where he suggested that his own emphasis might mislead people:

In some respects, my published work, outside mathematical logic, does not at all completely represent my beliefs or my general outlook. Theory of knowledge, with which I have been largely concerned, has a certain essential subjectivity.... Its data are egocentric, and so are the earlier stages of its argumentation. I have not, so far, got beyond the earlier stages, and have therefore seemed more subjective in outlook than in fact I am. (Schilpp, p. 16)

Here his concern is not so much with being a foundationalist, though, as with being thought a solipsist or idealist. His work on non-demonstrable inference sought to bridge the gap between these subjective starting-points and his general outlook.

In the second part of the book Hager seeks to show that change in Russell's general philosophical views can be traced to his views on space and time. At least after the rejection of Hegelianism, Russell thought of external relations among things as existing independently of their being known or perceived. According to Hager, Russell set out to refute the Kantian theory of space and time and appearance and reality, based on his theory of relations. Beginning with a view of space and time as absolute and objective in his "Platonist phase", Russell sought to show how this was connected to spatial appearance which he held was relative and subjective. The key to this was the correlation of the real spatial relations with those of perceived space. Hager is right to emphasize Russell's view of relations. He did not have the same view of qualities (p. 126).

In the second part of his book, Hager sees the changes in the last three major phases of Russell's philosophy as being driven by adjustments to his views of space and time. Very briefly, Hager holds that the first change from the Platonist phase to the Empiricist phase was instituted by his discovery, thanks to Whitehead, that points and instances in objective space may be constructed from sense-data, and thus analysis is pushed one step further. Physical space, on the new view, becomes relative to what can be observed

(though not relative to any particular observer). The second change, which occurs around 1919, Hager sees as instigated by the replacement of Newtonian space with Einsteinian space-time. This leads to the "modified empiricist phase", where Russell has to give up his hope that private space and time are closely related to objective space and time, and also an abandonment of the hope that the relations among those things that cause our perceptions can be discerned from the relations among our perceptions.

There is no doubt that Russell's views of space and time were very important to his philosophy, and Hager has done an excellent job of elucidating the three positions here. None the less, I have a feeling that Hager tries to have the theories of space and time do too much. On page 161 he suggests that Russell's abandonment of the subject as a particular was a result of his adopting Einsteinian space and time. This ignores Russell's long discussion of neutral monism and the existence of the knowing subject, which can be found in his articles on William James and later in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918) and the very important (in this regard) "On Propositions" (1919). Hager also ignores the severe difficulty Russell faced in his multiple relation theory of judgment, and his abandonment of *Theory of Knowledge*. In his letters to Ottoline Morrell of the time, Russell suggested that Wittgenstein's criticism of his position had a great deal to do with its abandonment. He doesn't mention Einstein's theory at all in this regard.

Despite this last reservation, I would strongly recommend this book to anyone who wants a deeper understanding of Russell's method of analysis and his philosophical development. Paul Hager has done a thorough job and brought out many points in Russell's philosophy (particularly his views concerning space and time) which have been neglected.