THE ORIGINS OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

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Ray Monk and Anthony Palmer, eds. *Bertrand Russell and the Origins of Analytical Philosophy.* Bristol: Thoemmes P., 1996. Pp. xvi, 383. US$78.00; US$29.95 pbk.

This is a very enjoyable collection of papers to read. As the editors tell us, its purpose is to help remind us of Russell's many contributions to the concerns and methods of twentieth-century philosophy. Specifically in light of Michael Dummett's recent claim that analytic philosophy is essentially connected to linguistic philosophy,[1] and hence that Russell could have played only a negligible role in the founding of analytic philosophy, it is Monk and Palmer's hope that this volume will "go some way towards restoring" Russell's reputation in this regard (p. vii).

The book itself originates in a conference held at Southampton University in July of 1995 and brings together contributions by thirteen leading Russell scholars. Almost without exception, the essays are philosophically sophisticated, yet accessible to the general reader. (One exception is the less accessible, but still very significant, paper by Gregory Landini concerning the logic of *Principia Mathematica.*)

In general, the book may be understood as dealing with the following major themes: the nature of propositions and denoting phrases; the influence of Wittgenstein on Russell's philosophical development; Russell's logic and early philosophy of mathematics; Russell's contribution to other areas such as ethics and the history of philosophy; and, finally, the nature of philosophical analysis and, hence, of analytic philosophy more generally.

At the centre of much of Russell's early philosophy lies the idea of a proposition. As a result, several of the contributors discuss the relationship between Russell's theory of propositions and his theory of denotation. Both Nicholas Griffin and Harold Noonan argue that in order to understand

[1] Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1993), p. 5.

Russell's most influential article, "On Denoting", it is important that the theory of denotation which appears in *The Principles of Mathematics* not be interpreted in the standard "quasi-Meinongian" way. Thus, in his "Denoting Concepts in *The Principles of Mathematics*", Griffin argues that it was because of close connections between Russell's earlier theory and Frege's that his argument in "On Denoting" against the Fregean theory becomes crucial. Noonan makes much the same point in "The 'Gray's Elegy' Argument—and Others", concluding that it is this argument, and "not some problem about the significance of empty denoting phrases, which provides the main consideration motivating Russell to develop the theory of descriptions of 'On Denoting'" (p. 65). On this view, since denoting concepts are essentially linguistic, while propositions and their constituent terms are non-linguistic, the ultimate purpose of "On Denoting" is to eliminate the notion of a denoting concept in order that Russell may retain a non-linguistic theory of analysis.

In this context, Griffin also points out that it was Russell's theory of analysis which generated his "problem of the unity of the proposition", a paradox based upon the fact that, according to Russell's early theory, propositions and their constituent terms (entities or individuals) are understood to be non-linguistic items in the world. However, through analysis the "essential unity" of the proposition is destroyed; once analyzed into its constituents, it becomes unclear how these constituents together form the proposition. In his "The Unity of the Proposition and Russell's Theories of Judgement", Stewart Candlish explains the problem very helpfully as follows:

> What, then, is the unity of the proposition? It is what distinguishes a proposition from a list of its constituents, so that it says something. But this seemingly undeniable unity, when combined with Russell's principle that 'Every constituent of every proposition must, on pain of self-contradiction, be capable of being made a logical subject' ... generates a difficulty. On pain of contradiction, the verb must itself be a term, something capable of appearing as a logical subject. But it must be a very unusual kind of term, for it must simultaneously be the source of the proposition's unity, relating all its constituents while itself being one of the related items.... Yet as soon as we make the verb a logical subject, we are forced to identify it as 'a relation in itself' rather than as a 'relation actually relating', destroying the unity of the original proposition in which it was the source of that unity.... Russell's problem, then, is that while he cannot deny propositional unity, he can find no account of the proposition which can do justice to it. (Pp. 104f.)

Both Candlish and Mark Sainsbury consider possible solutions to this problem. Candlish examines Russell's various attempts at solving the problem, including solutions offered in the *Principles*, *Principia*, and the 1913 *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript. In contrast, in "How Can We Say Something?", Sainsbury proposes a solution to the problem using contemporary Davidsonian truth-conditional semantics.

Related to this general discussion, Francisco Rodríguez-Consuegra sees the problem of the unity of the proposition as being significant in another respect: according to Rodríguez-Consuegra, it was this problem which led to Russell's eventual dissatisfaction with his multiple-relation theory of judgment and his theory of logical atomism. In "Russell's Perilous Journey from Atomism to Holism 1919–1951", Rodríguez-Consuegra argues that by embracing neutral monism, Russell began a "perilous journey" away from logical atomism and towards holism.

In this context the relationship between Russell's metaphysics and analytic philosophy more generally also becomes significant. In "What Is Analytical Philosophy?" Ray Monk argues energetically against the revisionist view that, far from being a founder of analytic philosophy, Russell should not even be classified as one of its practitioners. As Monk points out, Dummett dates the beginning of analytic philosophy from the moment "Frege begins by asking about the nature of number and ends by asking instead about the meanings of sentences containing number words" (p. 3); the moment, in other words, when Frege first makes the linguistic turn. On this view, given Russell's antipathy to linguistic philosophy and his often repeated conviction that it is the job of philosophy to study the world, not language, Russell would not even count as a proponent of analytic philosophy, let alone one of its founders. Explains Monk, "Throughout all the various transformations of Russell's philosophical doctrines, one thing remained quite constant, and that was the conviction that, whatever it is the philosopher is concerned with, it is precisely *not* language. The 'linguistic turn' in twentieth-century philosophy indeed was something which Russell looked upon with despair" (p. 4).

Despite Dummett's claim, it remains clear that, along with Moore, it is Russell who is responsible for introducing the idea that the correct way to understand a complex proposition or judgement is to analyze it, and it is this idea which lies at the heart of analytic philosophy. As Monk puts it, Russell's view was that

> progress in philosophy depends upon its adopting an ethically neutral 'scientific' attitude towards its enquiries, together with what he called the 'analytic method', examples of which include the use of mathematical logic in defining both numbers and points in space.... The message, then, is this: slow down, learn the techniques of mathematical logic, apply them wherever possible, and pin your faith in logical analysis rather than speculative metaphysics. Then, philosophy might hope to become a systematic discipline. (P. 15)

As Russell himself emphasized over and over throughout his career, "the chief

thesis I have to maintain is the legitimacy of analysis."[2]

Of course, understanding Russell's philosophy during this period also requires that we take notice of Wittgenstein and his influence. In "The Complex Problem and the Theory of Symbolism", Anthony Palmer argues that the *Tractatus* is a much more anti-analytic and anti-Russellian work than normally portrayed. If correct, this view shows that there is much greater continuity between the earlier and later Wittgenstein than has generally been assumed. It also shows just how deep Wittgenstein's criticisms of analytic philosophy lie. In a similarly critical vein, Peter Hylton argues in his "Beginning with Analysis" that Russell's

> conception of propositions and analysis, is in fact inextricably tangled in metaphysics. The idea of 'finding and analysing the proposition expressed' by a given sentence is one that makes sense only within a given philosophical context, which imposes constraints on the process; the philosophical context cannot itself, therefore, be based on a neutral or uncontroversial notion of analysis. (Pp. 183f.)

If, as it is generally assumed, it was Russell's desire to use analysis as a foundation for "all good philosophy" (*PL*, p. 8), such a result is bound to be disappointing. It is for this reason that Hylton believes that Russell's theories of analysis and logical atomism were flawed from the very beginning.

Three contributors investigate Russell's logic and philosophy of mathematics. C. M. Kilmister and A. C. Grayling both do so by returning to Russell's first book in philosophy, *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*. In "A Certain Knowledge? Russell's Mathematics and Logical Analysis", Kilmister defends the view first found in the *Essay* that technical advances (such as the introduction of projective geometry as opposed to metrical geometry, and the definition of numbers as classes) are crucial for solving many philosophical problems. In "Russell's Transcendental Argument in *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*", Grayling goes even further, defending Russell's early Kantianism against the claim that it remains inexorably linked to an idealist metaphysics. In contrast, Gregory Landini revisits the logic of *Principia*. In "Will the Real *Principia Mathematica* Please Stand Up? Reflections on the Formal Logic of the *Principia*", Landini defends Russell against the charge that the philosophical motivation behind the theory of descriptions, the theory of types, and the multiple-relation theory of judgment (as outlined in the book's Introduction) is inconsistent with the logic developed in the remainder of the book. By distinguishing between language and metalanguage—something that it is generally assumed Russell and Whitehead did not do—Landini

[2] *PLA*, in *LK*, p. 189; *Papers* 8: 169.

argues that the logic of *Principia* is "not only consistent with, but the natural outcome of, the philosophical ideas of the Introduction. Thus understood, the formal logic of *Principia* can be seen as the expression of a coherent, and philosophically tenable, view of the nature of logical form" (p. xv).

Finally, in the last two papers of the book, Charles Pigden and Louis Greenspan examine Russell's contributions to two other areas of philosophy. In "Bertrand Russell: a Neglected Ethicist", Pigden works to revive interest in Russell as a moral theorist, pointing out that Russell was the first to introduce both the theory of emotivism and error theory, "the two anti-realist theories that have dominated the twentieth-century debate" (pp. 332f.). In "*The History of Western Philosophy*—Fifty Years Later", Greenspan reminds us of Russell's important contribution, not just to the history of philosophy, but to understanding the relationship between intellectual and social history, and the political impact that philosophical ideas can have on social issues.

Of these thirteen papers, several also discuss Russell's method of analysis and its relation to philosophy in general. Of special interest in this regard is Monk's suggestion that it is the perceived purpose of philosophy, rather than its method, which distinguishes the various schools within the discipline:

> The question at stake, I believe, in providing broad characterizations of philosophical points of view, is what one thinks philosophy is and what it can achieve. In the light of this, Wittgenstein's resolute rejection of the idea that it is the task of philosophy to provide theories and doctrines is of far more fundamental importance than the relatively superficial fact that he, like Frege, adopted a more or less linguistic method. (P. 12)

As a result, Monk suggests an "alternative cartography of twentieth-century philosophy, one in which the crucial boundary is defined neither by the English Channel nor by the 'linguistic turn', but by the commitment to analysis ... thus the opposite of 'analytical' is neither 'continental' nor 'phenomenological' but rather 'Wittgensteinian'" (p. 11).

Would Russell himself have agreed with this view of philosophy? It is well known that, according to Russell, philosophy has two main purposes. The first is to encourage a degree of intellectual modesty; to show that there are things which we thought we knew but do not. As Russell explains it, philosophy allows us to see that even our most everyday observations have associated with them questions which are difficult to resolve. It is only in this respect that Russell and Wittgenstein see eye to eye. As Russell puts it, philosophy "removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect" (PP_3, p. 91).

The second purpose of philosophy is to keep alive speculation about

things that are not yet amenable to scientific knowledge, that is, "to keep alive that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining ourselves to definitely ascertainable knowledge" (*PP_3*, pp. 90ff.) Says Russell, "There are a great many things of immense interest about which science, at present at any rate, knows little, and I don't want people's imaginations to be limited and enclosed within what can be now known."[3] As a result, philosophical questions "enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation ..." (*PP_3*, pp. 93f.)

On this view, philosophy may be understood as a kind of pre-science, something which occupies us prior to our being able to address matters scientifically: "... philosophy consists of speculations about matters where exact knowledge is not yet possible ... science is what we know and philosophy is what we don't know." It is for this reason that "questions are perpetually passing over from philosophy into science as knowledge advances."[4] It is for this same reason that philosophy contains so little which is uncontroversial. As Russell explains it, as soon as definite knowledge concerning any subject becomes possible

> this subject ceases to be called philosophy, and becomes a separate science. The whole study of the heavens, which now belongs to astronomy, was once included in philosophy; Newton's great work was called 'the mathematical principles of natural philosophy'. Similarly, the study of the human mind, which was a part of philosophy, has now been separated from philosophy and has become the science of psychology. Thus, to a great extent, the uncertainty of philosophy is more apparent than real: those questions which are already capable of definite answers are placed in the sciences, while those only to which, are present, no definite answer can be given, remain to form the residue which is called philosophy. (*PP_3*, p. 90)

In one sense, then, philosophy and science are on a par: both have as their goal our understanding of the world. At the same time, philosophy is pre-scientific in the sense that the questions and issues it addresses are often not yet well defined, not yet sharp enough to be regularized into normal science. Philosophical analysis is what gives us this sharpening. It is in this context that we recall Gödel's famous comment that "while philosophy analyzes the fundamental concepts, science only uses them",[5] and Einstein's related suggestion that "Science without epistemology is—insofar as it is thinkable at all—primitive and muddled."[6]

[3] *Bertrand Russell Speaks His Mind* (New York: Bard Books, n.d.; 1st ed., 1960), pp. 9f.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[5] Paraphrased in Hao Wang, *Reflections on Kurt Gödel* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P., 1987), p. 151.

As Russell himself explains, his philosophical methodology is one which emphasizes our ability to move from the vague to the precise, from pre-science to science:

> It is a rather curious fact in philosophy that the data which are undeniable to start with are always rather vague and ambiguous.... The process of sound philosophizing, to my mind, consists mainly in passing from those obvious, vague, ambiguous things, that we feel quite sure of, to something precise, clear, definite, which by reflection and analysis we find is involved in the vague thing that we start from, and is, so to speak, the real truth of which that vague thing is a sort of shadow.[7]

As an example, Russell considers the claim that "There are a number of people in this room at this moment." Although the claim in some sense may be undeniable, says Russell, it turns out that when we try to define what a room is, or what it is for a person to be in a room, or what it is to be a person, we find such tasks remarkably difficult. As a result, moving from the vague to the precise is never easy or straightforward. Says Russell,

> If I start with the statement that there are so and so many people in this room, and then set to work to make that statement precise, I shall run a great many risks and it will be extremely likely that any precise statement I make will be something not true at all. So you cannot very easily or simply get from these vague undeniable things to precise things which are going to retain the undeniability of the starting-point.[8]

For Russell, being a logical atomist is thus really just having a certain kind of methodology: "It means, in my mind," says Russell, "that the way to get at the nature of any subject matter you're looking at is analysis—and that you can analyze until you get to things that can't be analyzed any further and those would be logical atoms. I call them logical atoms because they're not little bits of matter. They're the ideas, so to speak, out of which a thing is built."[9] It is in this sense that Russell claims philosophy to be "indistinguishable from logic as that word has now come to be used" (*ML*, pp. 111–12). It is also in this sense that Russell concludes that methodology, or logic, is fundamental, "and that schools should be characterized rather by their logic than by their metaphysic."[10] In short, Russell would likely have disagreed with

[6] In P. A. Schilpp, ed., *Albert Einstein: Philosopher–Scientist* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1949), p. 684.

[7] *PLA*, in *LK*, pp. 179f.; *Papers* 8: 161.

[8] *PLA*, in *LK*, p. 180; *Papers* 8: 162.

[9] *Bertrand Russell Speaks His Mind*, p. 12.

[10] "Logical Atomism", in *LK*, p. 323; *Papers* 9: 162.

Monk's suggestion that it is the purpose or doctrines of philosophy, rather than its method or logic, which distinguishes the various schools within the discipline.

Even so, this disagreement is not likely to be an especially important one. After all, we can partition philosophy in any number of interesting ways, depending upon the purpose at hand. In contrast, what will be important, given this view, is how philosophy integrates with science.

Russell himself is famous for emphasizing the similarities between philosophical analysis and the scientific method, going so far as to call his method "the scientific method in philosophy". As a result, he is often interpreted as holding that philosophy is to be distinguished from science, not by its method or its goals, but by its subject matter. Unlike the more specific scientific disciplines, philosophy investigates only the most general of topics, and it is because of this generality that philosophy is able to proceed, as it does, *a priori*. However, if philosophical issues are simply those which are not yet well defined, not yet precise enough to be regularized into normal science, it may be appropriate to consider an alternative view. Rather than emphasizing the general subject matter and *a priori* foundations of philosophy, we might instead view philosophy as simply science without a fixed methodology. On this suggestion, philosophy will have the same goals and subject matter as science, but it will be pre-scientific in the sense that the questions and issues it addresses are not yet sharply enough defined, or sufficiently integrated into other branches of knowledge, for us to know how best to answer them. Once we know, in principle, how to answer a question, that question is, by definition, scientific. Questions which we do not, even in principle, know how to answer (either because they are ill formed, or too vague, or not sufficiently connected to the world) remain, as we might expect, pre-scientific. Despite Russell's claim that it is analysis which is the hallmark of good philosophy, even such a basic point as this requires justification. In philosophy, unlike in science, *everything* is "up for grabs", even questions of methodology and logic. After all, Russell's logic is no more self-evident than was Frege's. Should a slogan be needed, it is this: philosophy is science without methodology.

Russell himself may be more sympathetic to this general view than is often thought. Although clearly a foundationalist with regard to what he called "instinctive beliefs" or "intuitive knowledge" (i.e., self-evident knowledge including both truths of perception and general principles [PP_3, pp. 64ff.]), it is to be remembered that Russell was also a precursor to contemporary coherentism. As Russell puts it,

> Philosophy should show us the hierarchy of our instinctive beliefs, beginning with those we hold most strongly, and presenting each as much isolated and as free from irrelevant additions as possible. It should take care to show that, in the form in which they are finally set forth, our instinctive beliefs do not clash, but form a harmonious system. *There can never be any reason for rejecting one instinctive belief except that it clashes with others; thus, if they are found to harmonize, the whole system becomes worthy of acceptance.* (PP_3, pp. 11f.; emphasis added)

This tension between coherentism and foundationalism is one which has become acute only in the last half of the current century. As Quine explains,

> The philosopher's task differs from the [scientist's], then, in detail; but in no such drastic way as those suppose who imagine for the philosopher a vantage point outside the conceptual scheme that he takes in charge. There is no such cosmic exile. He cannot study and revise the fundamental conceptual scheme of science and common sense without having some conceptual scheme, whether the same or another no less in need of philosophical scrutiny, in which to work. He can scrutinize and improve the system from within, appealing to coherence and simplicity; but this is the theoretician's method generally.[11]

The result is that on this view, even though logic (or method) is what distinguishes the various schools of philosophy, these methods, including philosophical analysis, must be self-applicable. In order to be successful, philosophy must help integrate our entire system of knowledge or, as Russell put it, philosophy must help develop a "harmonious system" of thought.

These speculations aside, the editors and authors of this volume are to be congratulated for showing us as much of Russell as they have.

[11] W. V. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P., 1960), pp. 275f.