

## WITTGENSTEIN, CRITIC OF RUSSELL

RUSSELL WAHL  
English and Philosophy / Idaho State U  
Pocatello, ID 83209, USA  
WAHLRUSS@ISU.EDU

Jérôme Sackur. *Formes et faits: Analyse et théorie de la connaissance dans l'atomisme logique*. Paris: Vrin, 2005. Pp. 313. €31.00. ISBN 978-2-7116-1722-7.

Sackur joins several other recent French authors in writing penetrating analyses of Russell's and Wittgenstein's work. *Forms and Facts* is an explication of the *Tractatus*, conducted by means of a contrast between Russell's work and Wittgenstein's. Sackur examines the interplay between Russell's and Wittgenstein's versions of logical atomism, particularly, as Sackur puts it, between Russell's original thought on the one hand, which provides the material for Wittgenstein's position in the *Tractatus*, and Wittgenstein's critique and development on the other, which, he says, provides a unity to Russell's position (p. 12). While recognizing the influence of Russell on Wittgenstein's project, Sackur in the end sees Wittgenstein as undermining and ultimately rejecting Russell's logicism. He does not just repeat old claims about Wittgenstein, Russell and logical form. His analysis is very subtle and, perhaps unusually for a work on Wittgenstein which defends Wittgenstein over Russell, *Formes et faits* displays a surprisingly detailed knowledge of Russell's work, before, during and after the period in question, 1913–19. Anyone who is interested in Russell's and Wittgenstein's work during this period, and in particular Wittgenstein's criticisms of Russell, will benefit greatly from this book. There are detailed, well informed discussions of important points of disagreement, particularly Russell and Whitehead's account of succession and the ancestor relation, Wittgenstein's remarks on operators, in particular the *N* operator, various remarks about the theory of types, and Wittgenstein's now well known criticism of Russell's theory of judgment.

The subtitle of the work, "Analysis and the theory of knowledge in logical atomism", reflects the points where Sackur sees the greatest disagreement between Russell and Wittgenstein. In the first place, he sees them differing in their attitude toward analysis, with Russell offering translations of sentences into a

perspicuous language and Wittgenstein offering explications, or elucidations, of senses already in the sentences. Secondly, they differ on the role that epistemology should play in logical atomism, with Wittgenstein criticizing the role of acquaintance in the development of logic. While both of these points have been made before,<sup>1</sup> Sackur's discussion is more thorough than previous studies and leads to some new interpretations of passages in the *Tractatus*.

Sackur's discussion of analysis is important to his argument. He is interested in a tension between what he sees as two aims of analysis in Wittgenstein's work, one found in *Tractatus* 3.2–3.3 and the other in *Tractatus* 4.21–4.2211. He sees analysis in the first group as revealing or elucidating the sense a proposition expresses, a sense understood and already there in the ordinary unanalyzed proposition, and analysis in the second group, driven by the theses of necessity and logical independence, as focusing on truth-functional analysis in terms of elementary propositions that consist of names referring to simple objects. He argues that these two aims don't automatically go together and in fact appear to be at cross purposes.

In the course of the first chapter, the major distinction Sackur makes is between analysis as a kind of translation, in particular a translation to a logically correct language, and analysis as revealing the sense of what is already expressed. Russell's analysis is, he says, of the former variety; Wittgenstein's, despite the tension of the two aims, of the latter. He mentions three types of analysis in Russell's work. The first is the analysis of mathematical concepts to reveal their purely logical foundations, and this is found as early as *The Principles of Mathematics*. The second is what he calls "structural or linguistic analysis", and is found in "On Denoting". The last is actually the method of substituting logical constructions for inferred entities found, for example, in the 1914 works "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics" and *Our Knowledge of the External World*. The discussion of Russellian analysis is very competent, and Sackur sees the tension between these different notions of analysis, particularly between the second and third conceptions. However, his discussion is not as thorough as Hager's earlier discussion,<sup>2</sup> although Sackur indicates he is aware of Hager's work.

Sackur juxtaposes Russellian analysis with Wittgenstein's notion of a complete analysis. Wittgenstein's analysis, he says, initially follows the lead of Russell's second type of analysis, the structural or linguistic analysis, but with a

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<sup>1</sup> For the first point, see (among others) P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 69–70. For the second, see (again among others), David Pears, *The False Prison* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1987), 1: 63, where Pears says that Russell's atomism was founded on the doctrine of "forced acquaintance".

<sup>2</sup> P. J. Hager, *Continuity and Change in the Development of Russell's Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994).

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different goal: not to eliminate reference to certain entities or denoting concepts, but to eliminate the pseudo-concepts, such as “object”, “relation”, “fact”. This part of Sackur’s discussion is convincing, and it supports the claim that there is a continuity between Russell’s and Wittgenstein’s writings, with Wittgenstein pushing the use of analysis further than Russell did.<sup>3</sup> What is somewhat less convincing is Sackur’s solution to his initial tension between a complete analysis as bringing to light the expressed thought on the one hand, and the claim that analysis involves a truth-functional account in terms of elementary propositions consisting of names referring to simple objects on the other. To resolve this tension, Sackur emphasizes the reference to “objects of thought” in *Tractatus* 3.2, where Wittgenstein says, “In propositions thoughts can be so expressed that to the objects of the thoughts correspond the elements of the propositional sign.” Sackur takes this as evidence that the objects we would arrive at in a “complete analysis” (of 3.201) are not the “objects of facts” or ontological simples, but objects of my *thought* which are not remote from my expression (pp. 54–6). Two points should be made about this discussion. First, while Wittgenstein did see himself as elucidating the meaning already in our ordinary propositions, it doesn’t follow that he thought the whole analysis must be open to us. *Tractatus* 4.002 suggests otherwise. The second point is that Russell wasn’t always very clear whether his analyses were revealing a meaning that was already there or advocating some kind of translation. He certainly thought they clarified what was being said.

Sackur’s second chapter is entitled “Elementary Propositions”, but it deals with more than just these. It includes discussions of different kinds of elementary or atomic propositions in Russell’s thought, Wittgenstein on general propositions, and an extended discussion of the distinction between operators and relations and a discussion of the *N* operator in particular. Elementary propositions are the building blocks of the theory of types; they are propositions which contain no variables. Atomic propositions, on the other hand, are those propositions whose constituents correspond to ontological simples and which themselves correspond to basic complexes. Sackur sees Wittgenstein accepting the theory of types as a theory of symbols, but rejecting a theory of types for things. He is well aware of Russell’s own remarks in his earlier substitution theory and even in *Principia*, where Russell can be read as holding that the theory of types is just a theory of correct symbolism. However, Sackur thinks that Russell and Whitehead were ultimately committed to different types of classes. He cites especially the treatment of “sameness of type” in section \*63 of

<sup>3</sup> This is a theme present, for example in Gregory Landini, “Wittgenstein’s Tractarian Apprenticeship”, *Russell* n.s. 23 (2003): 101–30. While on this one point Sackur sees a continuity between Russell’s and Wittgenstein’s projects, for the most part he would reject the position taken here by Landini.

*Principia* (pp. 122–4). Here he appears to side with Hylton (p. 317) against Landini (261).<sup>4</sup> Sackur then sees Wittgenstein's rejection of the theory of types primarily as a rejection of Russell's theory of classes (p. 125 where he also cites *Tractatus* 6.031). Toward the end of this chapter Sackur discusses the *N* operator and Wittgenstein's treatment of generality. Here we see Sackur's theme concerning analysis: Wittgenstein was not interested in developing a rival logical system to Russell or Frege but instead revealing what must be contained in any adequate language (pp. 69, 130).

In his third chapter, Sackur illustrates the distinction he has made between Russell's analysis and Wittgenstein's by an extended discussion of Wittgenstein's criticism of Russell and Whitehead's account of order. The discussion focuses particularly on *Tractatus* 4.1273 and Wittgenstein's criticism of the definition of the ancestral relation. This discussion is very thorough. Sackur gives a clear account of Wittgenstein's concept of formal concepts and formal series, and even supplies the form of the series given in 4.1273, using Wittgenstein's notation for the general term of a series given in 5.2522 (p. 192). He rightly points out that Wittgenstein thought that such a formal series should not be presented as a class (cf. 4.1272). But he goes further in his discussion of operations in general and Wittgenstein's view that the position adopted in *Principia Mathematica* distorts the role that operations play in mathematics. Sackur thinks that Russell, enamoured by his symbolism and his theory of relations, thought he was reducing everything to relations, but there and then illegitimately introduces operations in \*38.

At *Tractatus* 4.1273 Wittgenstein accused Russell and Frege of giving a definition of a formal series which contains a vicious circle. Sackur rejects Anscombe's account of the vicious circle and focuses instead on a remark made in \*91 that the ancestor relation  $R^*$  could have been defined as the sum of all the particular  $R$  power relations (where  $R^2 = R|R$  and  $R^3 = R|R|R$ , etc.). Sackur says that in the system of *Principia* there is no method of doing this, for the characterization of what is being summed would itself require the ancestral relation (p. 205).

The fourth part of the book deals with Wittgenstein's criticism of Russell's bringing epistemology into his logical atomism, particularly the principle of acquaintance. There is an interesting discussion of acquaintance and the role this plays in Russell's concept of analysis. The heart of the matter, though, is the concept of logical form and Russell's account of propositions in *Theory of Knowledge*, which included logical forms as objects of the judging relation and also demanded acquaintance with these objects. The story has been told several times now and is presented carefully here. The multiple-relation theory fragmented

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<sup>4</sup> The pages cited are from Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1990), and Gregory Landini, *Russell's Hidden Substitutional Theory* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1998).

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propositions and so had the judging relation do the double duty of relating the constituents which would make a judgment true to the judge and also to themselves in such a way that they form a proposition capable of being judged. For the latter, Russell added the logical forms as constituents of the judgments, though not of the facts themselves. Given Russell's principle of acquaintance, the introduction of logical forms requires that people be acquainted with them. On Wittgenstein's view the requirement that forms are objects, and so objects of acquaintance, makes logic contingent on their existence. Sackur suggests that Russell's concerns about logical form were stirred up by Wittgenstein's criticism of his earlier versions of the multiple-relation theory (p. 242), and in his discussion of the actual details of Wittgenstein's criticism, he appears to favour the account of Landini over that of Sommerville and Griffin (pp. 250–1).<sup>5</sup>

In the end Sackur thinks that Wittgenstein's criticism of Russell is telling, and he believes that Russell's project is inextricably linked to his epistemology. He moves from this to a discussion how both Russell and Wittgenstein, given their respective projects in the years after the publication of the *Tractatus*, had to become more interested in psychology.

While it is true that Wittgenstein thought that the position Russell held in *Theory of Knowledge* concerning acquaintance with logical forms was all wrong, and that he is careful to reject Frege and Russell's "self-evidence" as a criterion for logical truths (see *Tractatus* 6.1271), it isn't clear that Russell's own atomism necessarily requires the relation of acquaintance. It is true that Russell advocated his atomism along with the principle of acquaintance, but the logic of *Principia* (where the theory of judgment places an important role in the construction of the hierarchy of propositions, *PM* 1: 42–5) is independent of the principle of acquaintance. In the letters in which Wittgenstein develops his criticisms of Russell, questions concerning types, identity and reducibility do come up; but Wittgenstein nowhere mentions acquaintance.

<sup>5</sup> S. Sommerville, "Wittgenstein to Russell (July, 1913): 'I Am Very Sorry to Hear ... My Objection Paralyzes You'", in Haller and Grassl, eds., *Logic, Language and Philosophy* (Vienna: Holder Pichler-Tempsky, 1981), pp. 182–8; N. Griffin, "Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment", *Philosophical Studies* 47 (1985): 213–47; and G. Landini, "A New Interpretation of Russell's Multiple-Relation Theory of Judgement", *History and Philosophy of Logic* 12 (1991): 37–69.