

## RUSSELL'S "PARALYSIS"

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Rosalind Carey. *Russell and Wittgenstein on the Nature of Judgement*. London and New York: Continuum International, 2007. Pp. [viii], 150. ISBN 978-0-8264-8811-4. US\$132.00; £65.00 (hb).

Rosalind Carey's new book, *Russell and Wittgenstein on the Nature of Judgement*, offers a fresh look at Wittgenstein's fateful but notoriously obscure criticisms of Russell's so-called "multiple-relation theory of judgment", offered in May–June of 1913 as Russell was hastily composing the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript. In light of the fact that this manuscript was abandoned and subsequently suppressed as a result of these criticisms, and given the fact that Russell nevertheless went on to develop and defend new versions of the multiple-

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relation theory long after these events, Carey sets out to answer the question: “what objections to his theory of judgment could have allowed Russell to think that his theory of judgment was still viable, but sufficed to cause him to abandon the manuscript?” (p. 2). Through a careful and detailed examination of extant correspondence, working notes and diagrams, as well as of both the manuscript itself and subsequent work of Russell’s, Carey attempts to reconstruct the events of May–June 1913 in such a way as to give a plausible answer to this question. In so doing, she makes a powerful case against the orthodox interpretation of Wittgenstein’s criticisms and Russell’s reactions to them, an interpretation according to which the criticisms culminate in the so-called “postcard” objection of June 1913 and concern either issues of logical type, or the unity of the proposition. Carey downplays the significance of the June letter and instead sees Russell’s paralysis as consisting in his having no ready analysis of the *form of belief* which will both account for the bipolarity of judgment as well as accommodate Wittgenstein’s critique. Unwilling to eliminate belief and so succumb to Wittgenstein’s more austere extensionalism, Russell had no choice but to cease writing the manuscript, while holding out hope that an analysis of the form of belief which is immune to Wittgenstein’s critique would someday be forthcoming.

Carey develops her case over the course of four compact chapters (the whole of which make for a quite digestible 120 pages), each of which builds on the insights of those coming previously. In Chapter 1, Carey looks at the development of Russell’s epistemological and logical views over the period from 1903 through 1910, for the express purposes of showing “how the multiple relation theory of judgment emerges from and is influenced by a number of problems and doctrines that contribute to his eventual paralysis in the face of Wittgenstein’s objections” (p. 6). She begins by introducing Russell’s early conception of belief as involving a dual relation between a subject and a complex unity, a so-called “Russellian proposition”, and grounds this conception in Russell’s view to the effect that word meanings consist in mind- and language-independent, often Platonic, objects and properties. The relation between these semantic doctrines and Russell’s characterization of logical truths as topically and contextually unrestricted, universal principles, is also probed. Carey then goes on to show how tensions within and amongst these views lead to important theoretical difficulties, which in turn motivate the development of the theory of incomplete symbols. Notably, Carey reads the theory of incomplete symbols as designed primarily to address the sorts of concerns outlined in the so-called “Grey’s Elegy argument” contained in “On Denoting” and having only secondarily to do with either issues of ontological parsimony, or difficulties surrounding non-referring singular terms, e.g. “The Present King of France”.<sup>1</sup> That is, she reads the theory

<sup>1</sup> In giving this reading, Carey follows Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon P., 1990), esp. pp. 266–7, and

as an attempt to circumvent the difficulty that we end up referring to the wrong thing if we wish to refer to the meaning of a denoting phrase, e.g. “a man” or “the last man,” and think of that meaning as a denoting concept, i.e. an intensional entity. Russell is able to alleviate this difficulty by characterizing denoting phrases as incomplete symbols which stand for nothing in their own right, but instead contribute to the proposition expressed by any sentence in which they occur, along the well-known lines developed within the theory of descriptions. This sets the stage for the multiple-relation theory, according to Carey, in that it provides Russell a means to “talk about propositions for the purposes of logic, while acknowledging that there are no such single entities (as propositions)” (p. 16). The motivation to in turn *employ* the theory of incomplete symbols in eliminating propositions as single entities in favour of belief states, however, has its twofold root, according to Carey, in Russell’s ongoing attempts to resolve various logical and epistemological paradoxes (such as that of the Liar), on the one hand, and a burgeoning interest in the descriptive psychology of Alexius Meinong, on the other. The remainder of the chapter treats of these two distinct but interrelated strands of Russell’s thought during the period leading up to 1910–12, and more specifically, examines their role in Russell’s ongoing reflections upon, and developing characterizations of, the nature, content, and form of belief. Carey canvasses several important struggles which plagued Russell’s efforts, such as those, on the logical side, concerning the possibility of false beliefs or judgments, of non-existent complexes, of distinct judgments with their constituents and form in common, and of common propositional contents for distinct acts of judgment. On the psychological side, Carey considers Russell’s attempts to both characterize and clarify the nature of various integral relationships, such as attention, acquaintance, perception, and belief, between the mind or subject of a judgment, and its (simple or complex) objects. She then concludes Chapter 1 by tracing both the emerging importance of the notion of logical form within Russell’s attempts to develop a theory of belief capable of handling the various logical paradoxes, and Wittgenstein’s emergence on the scene as Russell’s protégé and collaborator on these issues.

Carey then turns, in Chapter 2, to examine in more detail the influence of this collaboration on the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript itself. Her focus, more specifically, is upon the parts composed between 21 and 26 May, which are “crucial for determining the nature of Wittgenstein’s objections and for grasping the fate of the text as a whole” (p. 43). These include Chapter VII and IX (“On the Acquaintance Involved in our Knowledge of Relations”, and “Logical Data”) of Part I, as well as Chapter I (“The Understanding of Propositions”) of Part II.

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Nicholas Griffin, “Denoting Concepts in the *Principles of Mathematics*”, in Monk and Palmer, eds., *Bertrand Russell and the Origins of Analytic Philosophy* (Bristol: Thoemmes P., 1996), pp. 23–64.

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These chapters are amongst those composed immediately following Russell's receipt of a purported "refutation" of his theory, offered by Wittgenstein on 20 May, and recorded in Russell's correspondence with Ottoline Morrell as requiring a "not very serious" correction (Carey, p. 43, *TK*, p. xxvii). Carey sees this correction as consisting in the introduction of form as an "explicit component of the proposition and not merely an additional doctrine" (p. 46). Wittgenstein's objection is thus directed at the 1912 version of the multiple-relation theory<sup>2</sup> within which the role of forms was not made so explicit, and concerns

the tendency to bridge the way in which a relation occurs in a fact of believing with that in which it occurs in a proposition. ... [The theory] hasn't produced a proposition or sense that is independent of judging ... [or explained] how a judgment can be meaningful and false. (P. 48)

Turning, then, to the relevant portions of the text themselves, Carey detects Wittgenstein's influence within Russell's analysis of asymmetrical relations in Chapter VII of Part I, according to which our knowledge of asymmetrical relations within complexes is to be analysed by invoking conjunctions of further complexes containing only purely symmetrical relations. Since this analysis requires that we can describe an asymmetrical relation but not name it, Russell can be seen to be incorporating Wittgenstein's concern, evident in a January 1913 letter,<sup>3</sup> to distinguish quite sharply between relations (or predicates) and terms (or particulars), where the latter, unlike the former, are things that can be named. Russell's Chapter IX on "Logical Data", furthermore, can be seen to attempt to incorporate Wittgenstein's claim (sometimes called his "*Grundgedanke*"<sup>4</sup>) that there are no logical constants (e.g. logical forms occurring within judgments are not "entities"), while nevertheless failing to give an account of the logic of depiction which would satisfactorily address the concerns in the service of which this claim was introduced. Russell, for instance, and in stark contrast to Wittgenstein, continues to treat the logic of depiction as on a par with empirical discourse, seeing the former only as more general than the latter, and as invoking different "types". Chapter I of Part II on "The Understanding of Propositions", finally, exhibits the most important aspects of Wittgenstein's influence on these portions of the text, in and through Russell's efforts to "introduce a proposition independent of subjective states of mind and neither asserted nor

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, the version is that developed in *PP*, Chap. 12, pp. 119–30.

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Letters to Russell, Keynes, and Moore*, ed. G. H. von Wright *et al.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), pp. 19–20.

<sup>4</sup> In *Tractatus* 4.0312 Wittgenstein writes: "My fundamental idea (*Grundgedanke*) is that the 'logical constants' are not representatives; that there can be no representation of the logic of facts" (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and Brian McGuinness [Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities P. International, 1964]).

denied” (p. 69), thereby allowing for the possibility of meaningful but false propositions, and of a common propositional content to various cognitive acts. This, according to Carey, Russell purports to accomplish by introducing “understanding” as a neutral cognitive act within which the propositional content occurs, but is nevertheless neither affirmed, nor denied. Russell thus moves in the direction of, though does not capitulate to, Wittgenstein’s anti-psychologism, while simultaneously attempting to work out his own version of the bipolarity thesis (i.e. the thesis that a proposition is essentially either true or false). Logical forms, furthermore, are then explicitly introduced into the content of these acts of understanding, as a means of ensuring the sense or meaningfulness of a proposition, and in response to Wittgenstein’s 20 May “refutation”.

Wittgenstein, it seems, remained unsatisfied. As recorded in his correspondence with Ottoline Morrell, Russell met with Wittgenstein on 26 May to show him a “crucial part” of the manuscript, on propositions. Plausibly, this material corresponds to that which appears as Chapter 1 of Part II in the manuscript itself, on “The Understanding of Propositions”. Apparently, Wittgenstein vehemently disapproved of the work, insisting that he “had tried the view and knew it wouldn’t work” (Carey, p. 71, *SLBR* 1: #207). Chapter 3 of Carey’s book canvasses Russell’s work on the manuscript immediately following this 26 May meeting with Wittgenstein, and characterizes Russell as “trying to persevere in his original enterprise while acknowledging, in his writing in the text itself, numerous problems that threaten to unravel it” (p. 71). The problems include, amongst others, those which emerge in Chapter II (“On Analysis and Synthesis”) of Part II of the manuscript concerning Russell’s account of the perceptual basis of judgments of analysis. Analytic judgments such as “*a* is part of the complex  $\gamma$ ”, where the complex  $\gamma$  is that complex to which we are attending, cannot, for instance, be inferred from any prior judgment, but must rather be based on perception (presuming, that is, they are to have a “perceptual basis”). But if, alternatively, we first perceive the complex “*a* is part of  $\gamma$ ” and then derive our judgment, “*a* is part of the complex  $\gamma$ ”, we are embarked on a regress, since the move from perception of a complex to an analytic judgment about that complex was what was to be explained in the first place (*cf.* *TK*, pp. 124–5). This leaves the knowledge conveyed by judgments of analysis to be inexplicable. Turning to Chapter III (“Various Examples of Understanding”) of Part II, Carey goes on to probe difficulties surrounding Russell’s tendency to treat forms both as complexes occurring like simples within judgments, and as generalizations of empirical propositions. Russell’s attempt to introduce forms as such into judgments in an effort to preserve sense is, according to Carey, the view alluded to by Wittgenstein as being that which he had tried and failed to successfully implement (p. 92). Notably, further, in this chapter Russell again encounters the problem of explaining how a proposition can be both false and meaningful, this time in the case of the form “Something bears the relation *R* to something”,

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which, if false, can neither generate a proposition, nor capture what is meant by a proposition's falsity (Carey, p. 80). Further difficulties then emerge, finally, in Russell's account of truth and falsehood (Chapter v of Part II), which finds Russell struggling to articulate a non-arbitrary, as well as intuitively satisfactory, characterization of the relationship which holds between a belief and a corresponding complex, when that belief is true.

Russell's work on the manuscript then ended on 6 June, after which he took a short holiday. Upon returning from this holiday he received a postcard from Wittgenstein, upon which is inscribed the infamous objection to Russell's multiple-relation theory:

I can now express my objection to your theory of judgment exactly: I believe it is obvious that, from the prop[osition] "*A* judges that (say) *a* is in the Rel[ation] *R* to *b*", if correctly analysed, the prop[osition] "*aRb* . v .  $\sim aRb$ " must follow directly *without the use of any other premiss*. This condition is not fulfilled by your theory.

(Carey, p. 110; *TK*, p. xxvii)

In contrast to each of the two main "camps" into which scholarship on the issue is divided, one which sees Wittgenstein as here concerned with issues of logical type,<sup>5</sup> and the other which sees him as concerned with the unity of the proposition,<sup>6</sup> Carey instead sees the "premiss" here referred to as the claim that a neutral fact, which undergirds the sense of a proposition, exists (p. 112). This, somewhat controversial, claim then forms a key part of Carey's novel and provocative account of the demise of the manuscript, developed and defended in the fourth and final chapter of the book. Though it drives a crucial final nail into the coffin of the text, according to Carey, by the time Russell received Wittgenstein's correspondence, he had already come to appreciate that his various attempts to analyse belief (one of which involved the incorporation of a "neutral fact" as the content of a judgment) are incapable of accommodating bipolarity. Bipolarity could be accommodated *if*, following Wittgenstein, one were willing to eliminate belief states and so accept an extensionalist analysis of propositional attitude ascriptions, but Russell, as is evident from the marginalia on his copy of the "Notes on Logic",<sup>7</sup> as well as his later book *Our Knowledge of the External World*,

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Griffin, "Russell on the Nature of Logic (1903–13)", *Synthese* 45 (1980): 117–88, and "Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment", *Philosophical Studies* 47 (1985): 213–47; Stephen Sommerville, "Types, Categories, and Significance" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster U., 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Peter W. Hanks, "How Wittgenstein Defeated Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment", *Synthese* 154 (2007): 121–46.

<sup>7</sup> "Notes on Logic" can be found reprinted in Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, 2nd edn. (New York: Harper & Brothers; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), App. 1, pp. 93–106.

was unwilling to do this (Carey, pp. 108–9). According to Carey, careful analysis of notes and diagrams composed by Russell during or around the 3rd week of May, under the title “Props”,<sup>8</sup> furthermore, reveals Russell hard at work in attempting to accommodate bipolarity in and through incorporation of a neutral fact as the content of a judgment, as well as in considering the more austere, extensionalist approach of eliminating all reference to belief or subjectivity. It can be seen therein that Russell arrives at the following dilemma: bipolarity can be accommodated, but only by accepting extensionalism. Since Russell is unwilling to accept Wittgenstein’s austere extensionalism, he is left with no ready analysis of the form of belief that will accommodate bipolarity, but he is also unwilling, simultaneously, to abandon the centrality of these epistemological considerations to logical theory. This explains why, according to Carey, that although he abandoned the manuscript, he nevertheless went to defend various versions of the multiple-relation theory until he finally abandoned it entirely in late 1918, when the sudden seeming acceptability of neutral monism afforded him an independent reason to repudiate metaphysical dualism, and so accede to extensionalism (Carey, p. 109; cf. *PLA*, pp. 255, 294–5). In the years following the demise of the manuscript, then, but prior to his adoption of neutral monism, what Russell took from Wittgenstein’s objection, according to Carey, is simply the view that “belief is a new form” (p. 7) that “falls outside of the series of atomic and molecular forms” (p. 95), and which is particularly resistant to successful analysis.

Carey’s book is well researched, well written, and makes a thorough and powerful case for its central thesis. Without a doubt, it constitutes an important contribution to both the scholarship addressing this key event within the history of analytic philosophy in particular, and that concerning Russell’s work more generally. It is difficult to do critical justice to Carey’s text within the context of a review. In conclusion, nevertheless, I would like to suggest an alternative possible reading, to Carey’s, of the nature of the relation between the June letter, on the one hand, and the working notes under the title “Props”, on the other. Specifically, given the emerging significance of the notion of logical form within Russell’s theory during this crucial period, as evidenced in both the manuscript itself, and in Carey’s exposition, is it not possible that it is this conception of form which was the subject of Wittgenstein’s critical onslaught on the 26th of May, and that the “premiss” alluded to in the June letter refers not, as Carey suggests, to the asserted existence of the neutral fact discussed in “Props”, but rather to the significance constraint on judgments? I.e., to the dyadic analogue of \*13.3 of *Principia Mathematica*:

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<sup>8</sup> These notes can be found reprinted in *TK*, App. B.1, pp. 194–9.

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$$*13.3a \quad aRb \vee \sim aRb . \rightarrow . (xRy \vee \sim xRy) \Leftrightarrow [(x=a \ \& \ y=b) \vee (x \neq a \ \& \ y=b) \\ \vee (x=a \ \& \ y \neq b) \vee (x \neq a \ \& \ y \neq b)]$$

that is identified by Griffin<sup>9</sup> and Sommerville?<sup>10</sup> On this reconstruction, the objection itself would then concern, not an incompatibility between the multiple-relation theory and the theory of types, as suggested by Griffin<sup>11</sup> and Sommerville, but rather an inconsistency, more simply, between Russell's introduction of forms, on the one hand, and certain basic intuitions about logical inference on the other. Wittgenstein's point in the June letter, on this reading, is simply that Russell's theory cannot account for the fact that  $aRb . \vee . \sim aRb$  follows logically from the judgment that  $aRb$ , and so that  $aRb$  is significant, without the invocation of an additional premiss, i.e. the significance constraint, which specifies the positions occupied, within the judgment's logical form, of each of its additional constituents. But the inference from  $aRb$  to  $aRb . \vee . \sim aRb$  should not, according to Wittgenstein, require an additional premiss of this or any other sort. If  $aRb$  is well formed—which surely at least some of the complexes which result from the arbitrary substitution of terms, into each of the three positions within the form, are—it should follow *directly* from  $aRb$ , without having to resort to any additional premisses of any kind, that  $aRb . \vee . \sim aRb$ .<sup>12</sup>

Now, if it was this attack on logical forms which was the subject of the June letter, and in which Wittgenstein's earlier, less articulate objection of the 26th was crystallized, then perhaps the working notes under the title "Props" represent, not the subject of Wittgenstein's critique, but an attempt to salvage the theory and manuscript whilst eliminating its invocation of logical forms. Hence Russell says that in the proposal offered in "Props": "The neutral fact replaces the form" (*TK*, p. 197). This would be consistent with the fact that, when Wittgenstein offers his "inarticulate" objection on 26 May, it is offered in response to a crucial portion of the manuscript, which, as Carey herself suggests, corresponds to Chapter I (on "The Understanding of Propositions") of Part II and in which the notion and role of logical form is explicitly developed and defended, in an attempt to address Wittgenstein's objection of 20 May. It would

<sup>9</sup> "Russell's Multiple-Relation Theory of Judgment", pp. 242–3.

<sup>10</sup> "Types, Categories and Significance", pp. 702–6.

<sup>11</sup> In conversations with me, Griffin has since disclaimed commitment to the reading in question, conceding the validity of certain objections to it raised in Graham Stevens, "Re-examining Russell's Paralysis: Ramified Type-Theory and Wittgenstein's Objection to Russell's Theory of Judgment", *Russell* 23 (2003): 5–26.

<sup>12</sup> This is a reading I develop more fully in "Wittgenstein and Early Analytic Semantics: Towards a Phenomenology of Truth" (unpublished PH.D. dissertation, York U., Toronto, 2008), pp. 93–9.

also be consistent with Russell's early appreciation of the deep significance of Wittgenstein's critical, if inarticulate, remarks of the 26th, and fit well with Carey's contention that the June letter, although it drives the crucial, final nail into the coffin of the manuscript, follows rather than precedes Russell's paralysis. So on this reconstruction, Wittgenstein's objection on 20 May is the more general one which shows up in both the "Notes on Logic" (pp. 96–7) as well as the *Tractatus* (5.5422), and applies most directly to the *Problems of Philosophy* version of 1912: Russell's theory, in representing judgment as a multiple relation between a judging subject and several distinct, mind-independent, and ontological commensurate terms, does not guarantee that one cannot judge a nonsense. Wittgenstein's inarticulate objection of the 26th, later clarified in the June letter, then concerns Russell's attempt to address this critique through the explicit introduction of logical forms. Specifically, the objection is that this new approach invoking form requires the introduction of an additional premiss, a significance constraint on judgments, which basic intuitions about logical inference tell us should not be required to make the move from  $aRb$  to  $aRb \cdot v \cdot \sim aRb$ . Russell, though he does not fully appreciate the objection to his introduction of forms—in part because Wittgenstein's expression thereof was inarticulate—nevertheless attempts to accommodate Wittgenstein's worries about form, and so salvage the theory and manuscript, through the alternative proposal involving neutral facts contained in "Props". Acknowledging in the notes themselves that the view is plagued by "great difficulties" (*TK*, p. 199), however, but convinced that Wittgenstein's objections to his alternative proposal of logical forms are decisive, Russell is painted into a corner, in light of his unwillingness to adopt Wittgenstein's more austere extensionalist approach. Russell's later defences of the multiple-relation theory, in spite of Wittgenstein's onslaught and in spite of his abandonment of the manuscript, reflect, nevertheless, the conviction alluded to by Carey that *some* more sophisticated theory of judgment, or account of the form of belief, *must* yield the correct analysis of propositions for the purposes of logic.

What I have offered above is admittedly sketchy, and, as mentioned, it is difficult to do critical justice to a text as rich and detailed as Carey's within the context of a review. Whether the account of the events of May–June 1913 provided by Carey can ultimately be assented to in all of these details, remains, it seems to me, up for further discussion, research, and debate. Nevertheless, Carey develops a formidable case for her reconstruction, which is backed up by painstaking research and insightful analysis. Most importantly, Carey offers what seems to me to be a both novel and illuminating perspective on these events, one which promises to enliven scholarly debate on the matter for years to come.

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