BERTRAND RUSSELL AND THE PARADOX OF THE COMMITTED EMOTIVIST

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Regarding his views on ethics, Russell is typically saddled with charges of (mainly pragmatic) inconsistency for holding that ultimate ethical valuations are subjective, while, at the same time, expressing emphatic opinions on ethical questions. In this paper, I re-examine some of the ways out of these accusations Russell himself proposed, mainly by pointing to the weaknesses of objectivism (among which its failure in reaching Occamist rigour is paramount). I also put forward some other possible replies that he did not explicitly explore. In particular, I stress that the object-language/metalanguage distinction, which has its historical roots in Russell's theory of types, can be used to hold that there is no possible contradiction in maintaining a subjectivist metaethics and defending substantive ethical claims. Along these lines, I argue that Russell should have not been concerned with the charges of inconsistency of any kind, for second-order claims about the nature of moral judgments are not conceptually apt to ground first-order substantive moral views.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I want to analyze the charges of inconsistency that have been repeatedly leveled against Russell regarding his views on ethics and the escapes from these critiques that Russell himself envisaged. I will argue that, in framing some of these replies, Russell conceded some points, which in my opinion should not have been

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conceded. This is so because Russell's philosophical tools allow one to rebut such critiques without affecting Russell's vigorous non-cognitivist stance on metaethics. It is revealing that Russell himself did not use such tools, perhaps because he frequently seems to imply (mistakenly, in my view) that a certain kind of objectivity in metaethics might have helped the positions he defended as a political and moral activist.

On the basis of Russell's uneasiness regarding the purported "gap" between his metaethics and the passionate formulation of his political views, mainstream literature on Russell's metaethics has repeatedly proposed to revise his emotivism (conjoined with the idea that value judgments are ineluctably subjective) and change it into a blend of milder and seemingly more sensible theses. Influential works reconstructing Russell's metaethics indeed have aimed at reconstructing the "best" Russell *qua* moral philosopher, respectively as a naturalist, quasi-objectivist, or missed error theorist.[1] By choosing such paths, I submit, one indeed would be forced to maintain, for a series of reasons, that Russell ended up framing a somehow shaky metaethics.

In this paper, I shall go on a different path, arguing that Russell was primarily a defender of emotivism (besides being nothing less than one of its founding fathers) and this was not at odds with his role as a moral activist. In section 2, I shall briefly summarize the main metaethical theses that characterize Russell's emotivism and explain why he is better seen as a consequent emotivist rather than something else. In section 3, I address the "traditional" inconsistency charges against Russell's views and his actual and possible escapes. In section 4, I analyze and respond to a new series of criticisms which have been recently framed against Russell's emotivism and put forward some tentative replies. In section 5, I briefly take stock.

[1] See AIKEN, *Bertrand Russell's Philosophy of Morals* (1963), p. 159; SCHULTZ, "Bertrand Russell in Ethics and Politics" (1992), pp. 604–6; PIGDEN, "Bertrand Russell: Meta-Ethical Pioneer" (1996). See also POTTER, *Bertrand Russell's Ethics* (2006), Ch. 3, who speaks of an enlightened emotivism, where the enlightening element would be that "despite the impossibility of truth or falsity, a measure of objectivity remains in this form of emotivism" (at p. 83).

2. RUSSELL'S METAETHICS REVISITED

Bertrand Russell was hardly satisfied by his theorizing on ethical matters.[2] When he identified the main problem for him *qua* moral philosopher, he alluded to the fact that, when he made ethical judgments on political questions, he was constantly told by critics that he had no right to do so, since he did not believe in the objectivity of ethical judgments.[3] This is what I shall analyze later under the heading "the paradox of the committed emotivist",[4] which Russell brooded over and tried to resolve his entire life.[5]

As we shall see later, he should not have been preoccupied with such a critique. But Russell, beyond the interest in replying to such recurring criticism, was genuinely aiming at refining his views on ethics over and over. This is not surprising for someone that had an extraordinary analytical talent and was willing to revise his views constantly.[6]

The most careful reconstructions of Russell's thought in the field accurately distinguish many phases of his ethical works. Some authors have distinguished up to six phases of Russell's metaethical thinking.[7]

[2] *Dear Bertrand Russell*, p. 130: "I do not myself think very well of what I have said on ethics." But this dissatisfaction was extended to other writers in ethics, as one can evince from *RoE*, p. 165: "I am not, myself, satisfied with what I have *read* or said on the philosophical basis of ethics" (italics added). See BLACKWELL, *The Spinozistic Ethics of Bertrand Russell* (1985), p. 5.

[3] SLATER, Introduction to RUSSELL, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (1954), p. vi.

[4] The expression is taken, *mutatis mutandis*, from CHIASSONI, "Conceptos tóxicos en la filosofía moral" (2012), p. 242, who speaks of the paradox of the committed relativist.

[5] *Auto*. 3: 34 affirms that the impossibility of reconciling ethical feeling with ethical doctrines was a source of frustration and that "in the depths of my mind this dark frustration brooded constantly."

[6] See PIGDEN, "Russell's Moral Philosophy" (2018), §1. See also GRAYLING, *Russell* (2002), p. 88.

[7] The main reference here is PIGDEN, "Bertrand Russell: Moral Philosopher or Unphilosophical Moralist" (2003), pp. 495–504. See also AIKEN, who divides Russell's ethical theorizing into three main stages: intuitionism, emotivism, and naturalism. PIGDEN, "Emotivism, Error, and the Metaethics of Bolshevism" (2014), §1, recognizes, however, that Russell mainly held the view that "moral judgments are *neither* true *nor* false, since their role is not to state facts or to describe the way the world is, but to express emotions, desires or even commands. This (despite some waverings) was Russell's dominant view for the rest of his life.... He tended to call it subjectivism or 'the subjectivity of moral values' though it is nowadays known as non-cognitivism, expressivism or emotivism."

Many of these phases, however, are just variations on the same emotivist themes. Accordingly, I shall maintain that Russell was a consequentalist emotivist almost his entire life, the only exceptions being, in my view, the first phase of his career, where he was heavily influenced by and collaborated in establishing the "intuitionism" of G. E. Moore, and Russell's "error theory", pioneeringly elaborated in 1922 in a paper that was not published during his lifetime.[8]

Indeed, Russell *invented* emotivism and refined it for his whole life, so that it is not surprising to find it defended one last time in his autobiography (*Auto*. 3: 33).[9] The somewhat critically received 1954 book *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* is regarded by many as a sort of interruption in Russell's adherence to emotivism.[10] This book was sometimes referred to as a work containing an ethical theory "close to Hume's with a dash of emotivism",[11] and other times was regarded as Russell's temporary conversion to ethical naturalism.[12] However, in *Human Society*, Russell defended a theory that was substantially a version of emotivism, although in a more circumvoluted and less felicitous way than on other occasions. It is known that, when he came to know of Aiken's naturalistic interpretation of his theory in *Human Society*, Russell declared his puzzlement[13] and seemed to renew his emotivist views.[14] Regarding such a period of his metaethical reflection

[8] "Is There an Absolute Good?", *RoE*, pp. 119–24. It is well known that Russell turned to emotivism after the criticisms put forward against his early intuitionism by Santayana. See SLATER, pp. xiv–xv; VALDÉS-VILLANUEVA, "George Santayana y Bertrand Russell" (2006).

[9] PIGDEN, "Bertrand Russell: Meta-Ethical Pioneer", p. 182: "Two forms of moral antirealism have dominated the 20th-century debate: emotivism, which denies that moral judgments are either true or false, and the error theory, which maintains that they are 'truth-apt'; but false. So far as the analytic tradition is concerned, Russell invented them both. His emotivist writings anticipate those of Ayer and Stevenson (the official inventors of emotivism) by more than twenty years, and he considered and rejected a version of the error theory long before J. L. MACKIE published his famous *A Refutation of Morals* in 1946."

[10] See GRAYLING, p. 90. But, for a contrary view, see SLATER, p. xv.

[11] As reported in PIGDEN, "Bertrand Russell: Moral Philosopher", p. 503.

[12] See AIKEN, pp. 155–63.

[13] See *Dear Bertrand Russell*, p. 130: "I was a little puzzled by your view that I had made a fundamental change in *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*. I was not conscious of making any such important change."

[14] Russell's renewed adherence to emotivism, I submit, can be inferred from his assertion that he was not aware of making any change conjoined with his defence of compossibility, which—as we shall see later—is an ingredient of his emotivism. When replying to AIKEN, RUSSELL affirms: "I gather that you do not think much of the idea

and the ties Russell identified between his earlier emotivism and the theory of *Human Society*, Schultz observes: "Presumably, for Russell, the crucial point of continuity [between emotivism and the theory elaborated in *Human Society*] was that he still held that there was no rock-bottom knowledge to be had in ethics, no correspondence to percepts as in facts, ultimately only an appeal to the like emotions that stood behind the proposed/reported usage."[15] This in turn depends on the fact that "On the theory of truth … most of Russell's mature views were simply variations on the correspondence theory, and he seems never to have countenanced 'moral facts' as verifiers of moral beliefs in any more robust sense than that of like emotions."[16]

For our present objectives, Russell's emotivism may be summarized in the following theses (*RoE*, pp. 135–44):

(1) Moral judgments are not truth-apt, since they are not assertions, but rather optatives or evaluations, by means of which one expresses one's desires regarding attitudes of other people (ideally, all the people) about certain states of affairs (ethical sentences have thus the following logical form: "Would that everybody desired *X*");
(2) There is no objective truth about ethical matters to be found;
(3) Being ethical sentences inapt for truth, no genuine moral knowledge is possible. As far as ethics is concerned, science can only "discuss the causes of desires, and the means for realizing them" (*ibid.*, p. 141).
(4) If two persons differ about values, there is not a disagreement as to any kind of truth, but a difference of taste or desires.
(5) Moral phenomena can be explained without positing moral properties (this is the Occamist ingredient in Russell's metaethics).

Embedded in Russell's metaethical theorizing is also the view that, whereas value judgments or moral norms are, as it were, *genetically subjective* (i.e. they can only stem from personal feelings or desires), they may have, and normally *do* have, a general content (i.e. they may claim application to a generality of people).[17] But the maximum of

of compossibility among objects of desire, but I do not quite know why" (*Dear Bertrand Russell*, p. 130).

[15] Schultz, p. 603.

[16] *Ibid.*, n. 10.

[17] Russell, *Human Society* (2010), p. 74, affirms: "Psychologically, I am bound to pursue my own good, that is to say, I shall always act from desire, and the desire is

objectivity they can reach is just intersubjective overlapping: as Russell writes, "there is nothing truly objective in the supposed concept of 'objective rightness', except in so far as the desires of different men coincide."[18]

Russell's emotivism—from the *first* formulation of such a metaethical conception to several revisited versions of it—has been interpreted by many authors as a particularly developed or mild form of emotivism and so has been variously characterized as "universalistic", "enlightened", "objective", etc. These qualifications are quite often used to mitigate, or even obliterate, some of the main theses of Russell's emotivism.

A first argument used to remove Russell from the emotivist camp, is provided by Lillian Aiken in her well-known book on Russell's philosophy of morals. She affirms that "we might call [Russell] a universalistic emotivist meaning by this that, on the one hand ethical sentences are indeed expressions of first-personal desire or approval, but, on the other hand, the universal *object* of our desires is … the general interest or the happiness of all men."[19] And this would lead Russell, so the argument runs, to hold a theory "which is objective in the sense that ethical sentences do not merely express our private wishes but express or voice the general interests of mankind."[20] And since it is the impersonal factors which render ethical sentences *ethical*, then Russell would ineluctably end up abandoning the emotivist camp.

In my view, Aiken's argument is flawed by a major shortcoming in so far as it conflates the object on which personal ethical desires bear with the scope of the interests or objectives whose defence is expressed by means of ethical sentences.[21] The same mistake would be made in the legal field if someone affirmed that laws are necessarily "objective" regarding the desires of the lawgiver just because they address a generality of people. Of course, the generality of the addresses of a rule does not imply the generality of interests pursued by enacting such a

necessarily mine." He also affirms (*RoE*, p. 139) that the business of ethics is "to seem to give universal importance to our desires."

[18] Russell, *Human Society*, p. 77.

[19] Aiken, p. 109.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

[21] Aiken, p. 144, affirms that she is aware of this problem and saddles Russell himself with such a conflation. However, due to other references to Russell's works, she argues that hers is still the best interpretation of his metaethics.

rule. A rule depriving everybody of their freedom of speech based on a dictator's whim would be surely general, but nobody would argue that it is an "objective" rule in so far as the general interest is concerned.

But there is another argument which is internal to Russell's conception, which deserves attention: if Aiken's argument is accepted, Russell's metaethics turns out to be inconsistent, since Russell expressly affirms: (1) that the notion of "objective rightness" (i.e. intersubjective moral consensus) is dependent on (or relative to) what group of people is taken as a benchmark, (2) that mankind is just a possibility among many others for identifying such a benchmark, and (3) that there is no logical argument to prove correct what is taken as "objectively right" in ethical matters by a certain group of people.[22] The combination of these three propositions is not logically compatible with affirming that all ethical sentences, *qua* ethical, necessarily express or voice the general interests of mankind. This shows that what Russell probably wanted to state with its universalistic element in value judgments is not that moral norms are universally objective (in opposition to relative to, or depending on, individual preferences), but that moral norms are by and large general, not particular norms (and this allows one to distinguish between simple preferences of taste and ethical judgments). In the terms of von Wright,[23] moral norms, understood as Russell does, are *eminently general*, for they are general regarding both the subject and the occasion (i.e. the space-time dimension in which they ought to be applied). But this is not a problematic feature for an emotivist, since there is nothing in emotivism that bars the possibility that value judgments have a universal scope regarding subjects and occasions, even though they are the product of subjective tastes, preferences, or desires.

Another argument used to allow for an objectivist element in Russell's metaethics, especially based on some passages of *Human Society*,[24] consists in stressing the intersubjectivity of desires as a way of

[22] Russell, *Human Society*, pp. 69–70.

[23] von Wright, *Norms and Action* (1963), p. 81.

[24] *Human Society*, p. 27: "The data of science are individual percepts, and these are far more subjective than common sense supposes; nevertheless, upon this basis the imposing edifice of impersonal science has been built up.… It may be that there is some similar way of arriving at objectivity in ethics; if so, since it must involve appeal to the majority, it will take us from personal ethics into the sphere of politics, which is,

identifying genuine moral *objectivity* (as opposed to mere overlapping of subjective desires).[25]

In *Human Society*, Russell famously sets up four fundamental propositions regarding ethics:

> (1) The acts which are approved of are those believed likely to have effects of certain kind, while opposite effects are expected from acts that are disapproved of.
> (2) Effects that lead to approval are defined as "good", and those leading to disapproval as "bad".
> (3) An act is defined as "right" when it has effects that are better than those of any other act which is possible in the circumstances; any other act is wrong.
> (4) It is right to feel approval of a right act and disapproval of a wrong act. (Pp. 115–16/105; *RoE*, pp. 161–3)

Lillian Aiken sees in the metaethical stance of *Human Society* a "shift to ethical naturalism". In turn, ethical naturalism is defined as "the belief that ethical terms are definable and designates certain empirical or natural properties. Moral judgments would then be descriptive as well as true or false."[26] So, in Aiken's reading, Russell would have embraced objectivism after all.

Even tough Russell is far from clear on this point, and so Aiken's views might be correct on a certain reading of Russell's book, I think that the four ethical propositions just mentioned are better seen as second-order "sociological" propositions about what is considered "right" or "moral" in the generality of societies, and not as first-order ethical claims.[27]

If they were read as first-order ethical claims,[28] they would be incompatible with a set of ideas that Russell vigorously and repeatedly defended—i.e. the idea that one cannot infer theoretical truths from the fact that a thesis is widely held, and the idea that one cannot derive practical correctness from the fact that a decision has been deliberated

in fact, very difficult to separate from ethics."

[25] See Aiken, pp. 146–8. On this point, see also Jager, *The Development of Bertrand Russell's Philosophy* (1972; 2014), pp. 479–84.

[26] Aiken, pp. 154, 155 n. 4.

[27] Grayling, p. 94.

[28] Other difficulties are discussed by Pigden in *RoE*, pp. 164–5.

by a vast majority.[29]

At any rate, Russell reverted rapidly to full-blooded emotivism,[30] and in 1960 he ended a letter to Reuben Osborn (the author of *Humanism and Moral Theory*) with the following bold emotivist statement: "any system of ethics that claim objectivity can only do so by means of a concealed ethical premiss, which, if disputed, cannot be demonstrated" (*Dear Bertrand Russell*, pp. 131–2).

In what are probably his last views on the matter, Russell suggests that the highest point of his reflection on ethics was the doctrine of compossibility,[31] which contains the first foundations of what is now called "expressivist logic".[32] Russell's doctrine of compossibility affirms that two moral norms are not compossible whenever they cannot be both fulfilled or satisfied. It also provides a criterion of comparability between sets of moral rules when affirming that a system which makes more states of things compossible is better than another with a more restricted number of compossible state of affairs. Accordingly,

[29] "The fact that an opinion has been widely held is no evidence whatever that it is not utterly absurd; indeed, in view of the silliness of the majority of mankind, a widespread belief is more likely to be foolish than sensible" (*Marriage and Morals* [1929], p. 58), and that "… the tyrannous power of the State, whether wielded by a monarch or by a majority, is an evil against which I will protest no matter how 'negligeable' may be the minority on whom it is exercised" (*RoE*, p. 116). According to Pigden (*RoE*, p. 153), Russell himself (*Human Society*, pp. 115–16/105) is guilty of inconsistency on this point, when he affirms that "the acts which are approved of are those believed likely to have, on the balance, effects of certain kinds, while opposite effects are expected from acts that are disapproved of."

[30] *RoE*, p. 165.

[31] As Pigden, "Bertrand Russell: Moral Philosopher", p. 502, correctly observes: "Not only did Russell anticipate Ayer and Stevenson but also his version of emotivism is distinctly superior to the versions they went on to invent. The early emotivists had trouble making room for moral contradictions—special curlicues had to be added to allow '*X* is good' and '*X* is bad' to contradict one another. This is not a problem for Russell. Two optatives contradict one another if the desires expressed cannot be jointly realized. For Russell '*X* is good', means 'Would that everyone desired *X*!' and '*X* is bad', means 'Would that nobody desired *X*!'—a pair of optatives which cannot both be fulfilled. Thus, we have moral contradictions without the need of curlicues. More generally, Russell's theory allows for logical relations between moral judgments which the theories of Stevenson and Ayer notoriously do not. We can define a consequence relation for optatives such that optative *B* is a consequence of the set of optatives *A* and a (possibly empty) set of propositions *C*, iff *A* cannot be realized under circumstances *C* unless *B* is realized too."

[32] Alchourrón and Bulygin, "The Expressive Conception of Norms" (1981); Ratti, "Incompatibility and Entailment in the Logic of Norms" (2018); Dalla Pozza *et al.*, "A Pragmatic Logic for Expressivism" (2020).

compossibility is a formal criterion, in two senses. First, it provides a tool to determine whether a certain value (e.g. general happiness) gives rise to more compossible state of affairs than another value (e.g. domination of the powerful over the weak). Second, on this criterion, moral systems that tend to be permissive (i.e. moral systems which as a rule authorize rather than prohibit) are "logically" preferable, since they will give rise, by definition, to a higher number of compossible behaviours.[33] For its formal character, it must be clear that such a doctrine is not a *basis* for ethics, since its use is mainly that of comparing moral systems which have different degrees of fulfillment or satisfaction regarding a certain value, but the doctrine is incapable of proving the ultimate value on which such a comparison is carried out.[34]

Whatever the indubitable merits of Russell's emotivism, Charles Pigden has repeatedly affirmed that the best conception of morals that Russell ever entertained was his own formulation of the error theory, elaborated in a wonderful short paper written in 1922 and published only several decades after. In such a paper, following his famous theory of meaning elaborated in "On Denoting", Russell defends the view that ethical sentences express descriptive propositions bearing upon goodness and badness. But since such properties do not exist, all ethical sentences are systematically false. But this conclusion, whatever its theoretical merits, would be a total failure for Russell *qua* moral activist, since "once they accept error theory and Falsity, error theorists have to abandon their moral beliefs".[35] This is something that Russell opposes fiercely, when he affirms that "I am not prepared to forgo my right to feel and express ethical passions.... I am not prepared to give up all this than I am to give up the multiplication table."[36] This is one of the reasons—probably the main one[37]—why

[33] Alchourrón, "Conflicts of Norms and the Revision of Normative Systems" (1991), p. 417: "In relation to permissive norms we expect that the agent has an opportunity to perform the authorized action but we do not expect the existence of an opportunity to perform all the actions authorized by several permissions. So we may say that a set of permissive norms (norm-sentences) is consistent iff it is possible to perform each of the actions authorized by the norms of the set."

[34] *Auto*. 3: 34. See Blackwell, p. 228 n. 6.

[35] Kalf, "The Belief Problem for Moral Error Theory" (2019), p. 4.

[36] Russell, "Reply to Criticisms" (1944), p. 720; **2a** in *Papers* 11, p. 48.

[37] Pidgen, "Emotivism, Error, and the Metaethics of Bolshevism", p. 24, interestingly observes that "for Russell at this time there were two meta-ethical alternatives: emotivism and the error theory. He was inclined to think that if the error theory were correct it would be sensible, rational, and humane to give up morality. The Bolshevik

Russell never did give up emotivism in favour of the error theory he himself pioneeringly envisaged.[38]

3. THE TRADITIONAL CHARGES OF INCONSISTENCY AND RUSSELL'S REPLIES

When approaching ethical matters, Russell was saddled and preoccupied by what we have called the "paradox of the committed emotivist", consisting in holding ethical positions apparently at odds with his metaethical assumptions. Formulating vehement ethical judgments without the conceptual possibility of determining whether they are right or wrong was something that left both Russell and his critics unsatisfied.[39]

A good example of this line of criticism can be found in Justus Buchler's and Edgar Sheffield Brightman's contributions to the volume on Russell's philosophy edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp.[40]

Buchler finds that many moral paradoxes "find curious counterparts in Russell's thinking." The crucial one is that "The discrimination of one end from another, he maintains, neither is nor can be a matter for science to determine; yet his page burns with the implicit admonition that wisdom in the selection of ends is the essential human *desideratum*."[41] In turn, Brightman affirms that Russell's ethical scepticism is "strangely inconsistent with Russell's own commitment … to values such as freedom, happiness, kindness, and justice."[42]

Some years later, Carlos Nino explained the problem at the heart of "the paradox of the committed emotivist" in the following way: "Consistent or not with his theoretical views, when defending his pacifistic

experiment indicated that the consequences of consciously giving up morality were anything but sensible, rational and humane. This suggested that the error theory was false, leaving some form of emotivism as the only alternative. Russell never expressed this argument in print and he might not have assented to it if asked, but something like this inference probably lay behind his eventual conversion to emotivism."

[38] See PIGDEN, "Bertrand Russell: Meta-Ethical Pioneer", p. 194. Other reasons are explored by PIGDEN, *ibid*., p. 194ff, and PIGDEN, "Two Arguments for Emotivism and a Methodological Moral" (2019). See also SENOFONTE, *Scienza, religione e morale in Bertrand Russell* (2002), p. 87.

[39] The classical references are to PERRY, "Non-Resistance and the Present War" (1915), and BUCHLER, "Russell and the Principles of Ethics" (1944).

[40] BUCHLER; BRIGHTMAN, "Russell's Philosophy of Religion" (1944).

[41] BUCHLER, p. 514.

[42] BRIGHTMAN, p. 547.

stance Bertrand Russell wanted to give *reasons* in its favour, and not simply to exercise a causal influence on his audience."[43] The main idea of Nino is that "if we want our conduct to be rational, it is not the same to defend a moral stance believing that there are reasons supporting it as to defend it knowing that we only feel an emotive attraction towards it."[44] Emotivism of the kind of Russell's, according to Nino, "destroys morality for, if the meaning of moral discourse is mainly emotive, there is no way of deciding rationally between conflicting moral judgments."[45]

In replying to or preventing this kind of criticism, based on the idea of inconsistency between his metaethics and practical ethics, and on the idea that practical ethical judgments should find a grounding in metaethics, Russell used several good arguments, but he also conceded points which in my view should not have been conceded. In particular, he affirms that "I do not think that an ethical judgment *merely* expresses a desire; I agree with Kant that it must have an element of universality."[46] He also adds: "What are 'good' desires? Are they anything more than desires that you share? Certainly there *seems* to be something more." This 'something more' is, according to Russell, that one's desires are felt as *right*. Therefore, he concludes: "I can … show that I am not guilty of any logical inconsistency in holding to the above interpretation of ethics and at the same time expressing strong ethical preferences. But in feeling I am not satisfied."[47] In these lines, Russell seems to admit that, though no logical consistency can be detected, there might be a pragmatic inconsistency, i.e. a tension between two speech acts, which undermines one of the two or both.

Here I shall briefly recall the main arguments used by Russell against the notion that his metaethics is inconsistent with his practical

[43] NINO, *Introducción al análisis del derecho* (1980), p. 365: "Sea o no coherente con sus convicciones teóricas, seguramente cuando Bertrand Russell defendía su posición pacifista pretendía dar razones en apoyo de ella y no meramente ejercer una influencia causal sobre sus oyentes."

[44] *Ibid.*: "Si pretendemos que nuestra conducta sea racional, no es lo mismo defender una posición moral creyendo que hay razones en su apoyo que hacerlo a sabiendas que sólo hay una atracción emotiva hacia ella."

[45] *Ibid.*: El emotivismo "destruye la moralidad, puesto que si el significado del discurso moral es principalmente emotivo, no hay manera de decidir racionalmente entre juicios morales contrapuestos."

[46] RUSSELL, "Reply to Criticisms", p. 722; **2a** in *Papers* 11: 49.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 724; *Papers* 11: 51.

ethics: the Occamist argument, the argument from the genetical irrelevance of metaethics, and the argument from consequentiality.

I will then develop new arguments based on Russell's own philosophical tools, such as the argument from the types of languages, the argument from the logical form, the membership argument, the inutility argument, the ambiguity argument, and a Russellian argument against the Frege–Geach Objection. I shall do so to show that Russell should not have felt dissatisfied with his metaethics and that there is no conceptual tension whatsoever between the defence of his ethical preferences and his metaethics.

3.1 *The Occamist argument*

The first argument is based on the famous Occam's razor.[48] This argument has two sides, one theoretical and the other practical. The theoretical one says that if one can account for ethical facts and practices without using the notion of an absolute good, this must be dismissed as useless. The practical one is that, there being no space for any absolute good to be described in metaethics and used in practical ethics, "an ethical argument can only have practical efficacy … by altering the desires or impulses of the opponents." Since no argument that shows that something is intrinsically good or bad can be framed, it follows that "ethical valuations not embodying desires or impulses cannot have any importance" (*RoE*, p. 117). So, far from being inconsistent, the lack of objectivity at the metaethical level and the subjective character of ethical judgments would support each other.[49]

[48] For the importance of Occam's razor in Russell's methodology, see *MPD*, pp. 12–13.

[49] Another variety of this argument conjoins the argument from relativity with Occam's razor. It is clearly reconstructed by Pigden, "Bertrand Russell: Meta-Ethical Pioneer", pp. 189–90, as follows: "People disagree in their basic evaluations, so even if you think your own intuitions are correct owing to your acquaintance with the good, you must believe in the possibility of false intuitions, in which people wrongly perceive goodness to inhere in states that are, in fact, bad or indifferent. These mistaken intuitions are presumably due to natural causes, to upbringing, indoctrination, temperamental bias, and so forth. But if other people's basic evaluations can be (and indeed must be) explained away in this manner, why cannot the other people return the compliment and explain away your own alleged perceptions in the same way? The diversity of moral opinion … suggests that real properties of goodness and badness are not needed to underwrite the phenomenology of value or to account for people's beliefs.… If moral properties are not needed to account for people's beliefs, they are not needed at all, because they can influence events only through the medium of human action. Hence they are ripe for the razor."

3.2 *The argument from the genetical irrelevance of metaethics*

Another argument used by Russell against the paradox under examination is that metaethical issues are not relevant for practical questions.[50] Russell hints at this argument when he affirms (*RoE*, p. 143): "The sort of life that most of us admire is one which is guided by large impersonal desires; now such desires can, no doubt, be encouraged by example, education, and knowledge, but they can hardly be created by the mere abstract belief that they are good, nor discouraged by an analysis of what is meant by the word *good.*" So, again, there is no possible inconsistency of any sort between one's metaethics and his or her practical judgments, since the latter are *genetically* independent from the former, that is, metaethics has no part in framing full-blooded ethical judgment.

3.3 *The argument from consequentiality*

However, the main argument Russell deploys against the critics is that its ethical judgments are perfectly attuned to his metaethical stipulations. For him, the main function of the words "good" and "bad" is to express certain kinds of desires. So, when formulating ethical judgments, one is indeed expressing his or her own desires regarding other people's desires about some relevant features of public life or interests. In Russell's own words, "By my own theory, I am, in [formulating ethical judgments], expressing vehement desires as to the desires of mankind; I feel such desires, so why not express them?"[51] The argument is quite good. However, it does not respond to the critiques' challenge regarding the inability of Russell's metaethics to distinguish between right and wrong answers to moral questions. Russell seems to find this last critique compelling and ends up making an unexpected and unnecessary concession. Russell in fact writes: "But what are 'good' desires? Are they anything more than desires that you share? Certainly there *seems* to be something more." And he adds that, in

[50] SCHULTZ, pp. 607–8: "*Philosophers are fond of endless puzzles about ultimate ethical values and the basis of morals. My own belief is that so far as politics and practical living are concerned, we can sweep aside all these puzzles, and use common sense principles.* In this, one might say that Russell's life and work amply, if curiously, testify to the claim, notably associated with Rawls, that substantive moral and political work need not wait on the resolution of metaethical issues." (Italicized words are Russell's.)

[51] "Reply to Criticisms", p. 722; *RoE*, pp. 147–8; **2a** in *Papers* 11, p. 51.

framing ethical judgments, "I should *feel*, not only that I was expressing my desires, but that my desires in the matter are *right*, whatever that may mean".[52] This has been read by more than a commentator as the spark of a "conversion" to objectivism, which allows one to regard moral judgments as truth-apt.[53] As Pigden observes: "in admitting that he could not help feeling that he would be right (that is, correct) to oppose [a certain practice], Russell, was admitting to feelings which suggest that his meta-ethic is false. Moreover the very fact that he *had* these feelings provides evidence for his theory's falsehood."[54] In my view, this interpretation is too radical, and Russell's words might be interpreted as a kind of psychological reconstruction of the process of uttering and publicly presenting ethical judgments. In so far as ethical judgments involve (entail or even are equivalent to) a rule, they present themselves as answers to practical questions, in the sense that they recommend a certain course of action to its addressees. It is in the "nature" of arguing morally that one presents his or her ethical judgments as correct, even though he or she has no *ultimate* grounds to do so in a justified manner.[55] However, there is still an argument that can be at least used to retort against any charge of inconsistency for a committed emotivist, one which is based upon the fundamental distinction between language and metalanguage—another tool that, if not directly invented by Russell with such a terminology, undeniably has its roots in his works.

3.4 *The argument from the types of languages*

Another way out of the perplexing paradox of the committed emotivist—one that subtracts importance from the paradox, by undermining its possibility—rests on the fundamental distinction between language and metalanguage. According to relevant literature,[56] such a

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 724; *RoE*, p. 149; **2a** in *Papers* 11, p. 51.

[53] Pigden, "Russell's Moral Philosophy" (2018); Aiken, pp. 143–51. See also Schultz, p. 604.

[54] Pigden, "Russell's Moral Philosophy", §8.7.

[55] It is possible, of course, to think that a moral judgment is correct *within* a certain moral system, in the sense that it constitutes a logical consequence of its basic principles (in combination perhaps with certain factual premises).

[56] Copi, *The Theory of Logical Types* (1971), pp. 50, 107–8; Church, "Comparison of Russell's Resolution of the Semantic Antinomies with That of Tarski" (1976). Kennedy, *Peano* (1980), p. 74, attributes it to Frege and affirms that Peano was not aware of the distinction. On Peano, see also Quine, "Peano as Logician" (1987).

distinction stems from Russell's theory of types and has his first expressed formulation in his introduction to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.[57] As is known, Russell uses it overtly in 1950 paper on "Logical Positivism".[58] It is quite telling that Russell, as far as I can see, never thought of using it in his writings on ethics to reply to the charges of inconsistency. Indeed, it is quite natural to regard metaethics as a second-order metalanguage bearing upon the first-order language of practical ethics. Now, the second-order metalanguage can be a descriptive one, which clarifies or reconstructs certain features of the first-order discourse. But it can also be a prescriptive or justificatory one, whose function is to justify or support first-order ethical evaluations.[59] Many, if not all, forms of objectivism try to find in metaethics a justificatory basis for their first-order judgments, whereas emotivism (and non-cognitivism in general) regard metaethics as a genuine descriptive (or conceptual) enterprise, uncapable of grounding any substantial first-order ethical judgment. Practical ethics and metaethics are on two different linguistic levels (metaethics bearing upon first-order practical ethics), and it is not possible to derive a conclusion in a certain language deriving it from premisses that belong to a different language (i.e. a metalanguage).[60] It is manifest that, if we understand metaethics in this second way (i.e. as a descriptive, or conceptual, second-order metalanguage), no inconsistency is possible for the committed emotivist. He or she can formulate his or her first-order optatives when debating in the public arena, and explain the moral discourse as a set of personal evaluations when accounting for its "nature" in the second-order metalanguage. An interesting consequence of such a reconstruction is that objectivism, being prescriptive or justificatory in character, can be reconstructed as a set of second-order expressions of desires bearing upon first-order optatives. However, these second-order expressions of desires being in need of a justification, objectivism is inevitably doomed to infinite regress.

[57] Russell, Introduction to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1922); **18** in *Papers* 9. On the introduction of the concept of metalanguage into the Vienna Circle in 1930, see Carnap, "Intellectual Autobiography" (1963), p. 29.

[58] Russell, "Logical Positivism" (1950), p. 7; **17** in *Papers* 11, pp. 158–9.

[59] Bobbio, "'Sein' and 'Sollen' in Legal Science" (1970).

[60] *IMP*, pp. 135–7. See also Guastini, "On the Relations between Non-Cognitivism and Liberalism" (2020), p. 148.

4. THE NEW CHALLENGES

A new series of incisive criticisms of Russell's emotivist metaethics have been formulated by Charles Pigden in several studies.

A foundational problem for Russell, and for any emotivist, is that "value judgments certainly *look* like propositions and are normally taken to be capable of truth and falsity" (Pigden, in *RoE*, p. 135). For the emotivist, accordingly, value judgements are optatives under the guise of indicatives. Pigden retorts that "it does seem a little odd that we should have so radically misunderstood our own concept." This is what Pigden calls the "Duck argument": if something looks, swims and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck.[61] Analogously, if something *looks* like a truth-apt expression (since on the surface it is in the indicative mood), if it *behaves* logically like a truth-apt expression (which again is what "*X* is good" undoubtedly does), if it is *treated* by the people whose use sustains its meaning *as if* it were truth-apt, then, absent compelling arguments to the contrary, it probably is truth-apt.

There are at least four arguments, I submit, that can be articulated against the Duck argument: the argument from the logical form, the membership argument, the ambiguity argument, and the inutility argument. Let me briefly present them in this order.

4.1 *The argument from the logical form*

Again, Russell's philosophical tools are crucial in replying to this critique. It may certainly be the case that some kinds of sentences are disproportionately formulated as indicatives but, despite their grammatical appearance, are to be reconstructed by means of the logical forms of other kinds of sentences.[62] Regarding logical form, Russell (*OKEW*$_2$, p. 53) writes: "[S]ome kind of knowledge of logical forms, though with most people it is not explicit, is involved in all understanding of discourse. It is the business of philosophical logic to extract this knowledge from its concrete integuments, and to render it explicit and pure." It is a task of metaethics to reconstruct, *inter*

[61] "Russell's Moral Philosophy", §8.7.

[62] Regarding value judgments, CARNAP, "Intellectual Autobiography", p. 80, affirms that "The fact that they are often expressed, not in the most appropriate form as imperatives such as 'love thy neighbor', but in the grammatical form of declarative sentences such as 'it is thy duty to love thy neighbor', has misled many philosophers to consider them as assertive, cognitive sentences."

alia, the logical form of value judgments, beyond their grammatical one. Analogously, it is a task for the legal philosopher to discover the logical form of normative authorities' precepts, beyond their grammatical forms. Take, for instance, section 8 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Like many other laws, it is phrased in indicative terms: "Everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure." Nobody, however, believes that it expresses a proposition. It rather expresses several rules, prohibiting legislatures to enact laws which infringe the dignity, integrity, or autonomy regarding the private sphere of people and the executive power to carry out unreasonable searches or seizures of their property and their personal information. Its aim is to prescribe, not to describe. Many articles of several European civil codes are also phrased in the indicative mood. Take, for instance, article 1231-7 of the French Civil Code: "*En toute matière, la condamnation à une indemnité emporte intérêts au taux légal même en l'absence de demande ou de disposition spéciale du jugement*." (In all matters, an award of compensation attracts interest at the legal rate even in the absence of a request or a special provision of the judgment.) Again, the surface syntax is that of an indicative, but nobody has doubts about the fact that the article expresses a rule imposing on judges and other law-applying organs the duty to add interest in calculating compensation. The same goes for value judgments in ethical discourse: their indicative surface is not decisive in determining their logical form.[63] And, analogously to what happens within the legal domain, it is much more reasonable to think that one uses value judgments—whatever their grammatical form might be—to *evaluate* a certain behaviour or state of affairs (that is, to show approval or disapproval regarding it), rather than to describe its purported "moral properties".

4.2 *The membership argument*

No doubt, moral systems are sets of rules or evaluations, aiming at guiding conduct: so, why interpret their members as assertions? This can be called the "membership argument". Just to follow up with an animal analogy, we can say that when we see a herd of buffalo, it is

[63] Russell, *Human Society*, p. 88/77: "ethical argument … differs from scientific argument in being addressed to emotions, however it may disguise itself by use of the indicative mood."

quite probable that, if we take a picture of a member of such herd, we would indeed get a picture of a buffalo. Analogously, if we analyze a set of moral evaluations (i.e. a moral system intended to evaluate or guide conduct), it is quite probable that if we look at a member of such a set what we see is a moral evaluation (also intended to guide conduct). It is possible that a normative system, from time to time, contains a descriptive sentence. However, a normative system containing such a descriptive sentence is commonly held to be an "impure" normative system, in that it contains a descriptive consequence which is at odds with the general prescriptive function of the system at hand.[64]

4.3 *The inutility argument*

Let us suppose that sentences like "*X* is good" are, according to the Duck argument, thoroughly descriptive. So understood, they describe a (purported) moral property of *X*, in the same way as the sentence "Mountains are high" is a description of a property of (some) mountains. But what follows, normatively, from such descriptions? Absolutely nothing. The fact that mountains are high is not, *per se*, a reason to carry out a certain course of action (such as climbing or paragliding). The same goes for "*X* is good": the sole "fact" that *X* is good is no reason to carry out a certain course of action. Accordingly, ethical sentences, understood as descriptions of moral properties, are morally useless, which is obviously quite paradoxical for someone desiring to persuade the others to follow his moral recommendation.[65]

4.4 *The ambiguity argument*

There is a remark, which is very common in analytical legal philosophy regarding deontic sentences,[66] which helps in better clarifying the meaning of ethical sentences. Indeed, one should note that ethical sentences such as "*X* is good" are systematically ambiguous

[64] Alchourrón and Bulygin, *Normative Systems* (1971), pp. 57–8, 62–4.

[65] Classical references are to Smith, *The Moral Problem* (1994), and Waldron, *Law and Disagreement* (1999), Ch. 8. Chiassoni, p. 243, calls this feature of objectivism "the paradox of the inutility of objectivism". For a critique of this argument, which he calls the "Motivation Argument", see Pigden, "Hume, Motivation and 'the Moral Problem'" (2007).

[66] Bulygin, *Essays in Legal Philosophy* (2015), pp. 188–206; Navarro and Rodríguez, *Deontic Logic and Legal Systems* (2014), pp. 78–85.

since they can be used, in different contexts and on different occasions, to express evaluations or to express descriptive assertions about moral evaluations (in particular, regarding their membership in normative sets).[67] So, the surface syntax of ethical sentences may be misleading, for it conceals two different logical forms. Where someone sees just one duck, others see a duck and a swan. We shall return to this argument in a moment, when dealing with the Frege–Geach problem.

4.5 *A Russellian stance on the Frege–Geach problem*

One of the other arguments recently raised against Russell's emotivism by Pigden, so that it is rendered unpalatable to metaethical gourmands, is the reframing of the famous Frege–Geach problem for Russell's metaethics.

In the words of Pigden, Russell's failure would be one of impossible reconstruction of value judgments in different contexts.[68] In particular, Russell could only account for a limited array of cases where sentences of the form "*X* is good" are used to frame a value judgment, but not the numerous cases in which such sentences are "embedded" as components of larger sentences.

Pigden writes:

> "*X* is good" would sometimes be a disguised optative and sometimes something else.... Now, consider the following argument schema:

[67] BULYGIN, "Carlos E. Alchourrón and the Philosophy of Law", p. 356: "It is important to observe that value terms, like 'good', 'right', 'reasonable' etc. play different roles in different contexts: they can be used to express valuations or to state that in a given case the conditions required in order that something be regarded as valuable (good or right) are satisfied. In this second case the sentence '*x* is good' may not express any approval: in such case it is not a valuation, but a mere factual description. This allows distinguishing between value judgments, which are expressive of valuations, and what can conveniently be named axiological propositions which—in spite of the occurrence of value-terms—do not express valuations, but are purely descriptive and hence true or false. The situation is analogous to norms and norm propositions. In both cases, we have expressive sentences (expressing either norms or valuations), which lack truth values, and on the other hand, true or false descriptive propositions (normative or axiological). The logical behavior of norm propositions and of axiological propositions is similar."

[68] "Russell's Moral Philosophy", §8.5.

i. *X is good.*
ii. If ***X* is good** then *Q*.
Therefore
iii. *Q*

> In this argument "*X* is good" would have one meaning in premiss (i)—in which it would be an optative—and another in premiss (ii)—in which it would be a creature of some other semantic kind. (I have emphasized the point by putting the first occurrence in italics and the second in bold.) But an argument is only valid if the words involved retain the same meanings throughout the inference. If not, we have an instance of the fallacy of equivocation. So it looks as if any attempt to deal with Geach's *first* problem by explaining how "good" works in unasserted contexts would have the unintended side-effect of converting obviously valid arguments such as the above into instances of equivocation. Not only is the theory radically incomplete—if it *were* completed, it would reduce a huge number of obviously valid arguments to invalidity by construing them as equivocal.

According to Pigden, this is the knock-out argument against Russell's emotivism (and, for what matters here, emotivism in general):

> … Russell's theory faces shipwreck unless this problem can be solved and, in my opinion, the problem is insoluble.

Again, we can use Russell's philosophical tools to rebut to this powerful criticism and save Russell's emotivism once more.[69] We may use two Russellian strategies.[70]

The first strategy consists in distinguishing the semantic meaning and the pragmatic use of expressions.[71] The Frege–Geach argument seems to conflate these two dimensions of language. From the perspective it advocates, *any* argument with embedded or unasserted expressions would result in equivocation. This would be a general problem of inference, not only affecting emotivism.[72] Let "⊢" be the usual symbol for assertoric force. We can represent modus ponens in

[69] See also Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1971), p. 308.
[70] For another possible Russellian escape from this problem, see Potter, pp. 112–14.
[71] Grayling, p. 49.
[72] Blackburn, "Antirealist Expressivism and Quasi-Realism" (2006), p. 156.

two alternative ways, depending on whether "p" is treated as independently unasserted or not.

First representation (unasserted p *in the second premiss)*

(a) $\vdash p$
(b) $\vdash p \rightarrow q$
Therefore
(b) $\vdash q$

Second representation (asserted p *in the second premiss)*

(a) $\vdash p$
(b′) $\vdash p \rightarrow \vdash q$
Therefore
(c) $\vdash q$

It might be argued that any inferential structure of the first kind contains an equivocation in so far as "p" is asserted in the first premiss and occurs unasserted in the second. Consequently, the first structure represents an inference in which a proposition "p" is asserted, together with the assertion of the conditional "$p \rightarrow q$". Since what is asserted regarding "p" in both sentences is different, we face an equivocal piece of reasoning. In fact, when "p" is asserted alone, we only assert its content. When it is asserted as a part of a conditional, we assert that its truth is a sufficient condition for another proposition "q".

The second structure represents those inferences where we assert "p" and to assert "p" implies committing to assert "q", so that we can derive the assertion of "q". As we have seen, Russellian emotivism conceives of value judgments as expressions of desire. Consequently, it is most charitably seen as reconstructing inferences with optative sentences by means of this second representation instead of the first.[73] We shall see it in a moment, by introducing a pragmatic symbol "!" concerning value judgments.

The second strategy consists in clearly distinguishing between expressions in the object language and expressions in the metalanguage. Sentences such "X is good" are systematically ambiguous, since they can express, depending on the context, optative meanings in the object language of practical ethics or descriptions of value judgments belonging to a certain system of morality at the metalinguistic level of

[73] NAVARRO AND RODRÍGUEZ, pp. 76–7.

metaethics.[74] I shall call the first kind of meanings "value judgments", while the second kind shall be dubbed "axiological propositions".

In the first case, the sentence "*X* is good" expresses a value judgment: in Russell's terms, something of the sort "I desire that everybody desires *X*" (in symbols: !*p*). In the second case, it expresses a proposition such as "*X* is a behaviour required by a moral system" (in symbols: "!*p*" ∈ *S*). Once this ambiguity is detected, there are two possible ways of reading Geach's piece of reasoning. The symbolization of these two readings, I submit, makes it clear that Russell's emotivism is on quite safe ground.

The first reading rests on the possibility of reconstructing Geach's puzzling inference as one concerning *only* descriptive propositions about value judgments. The reading would be as follows:

Reasoning with axiological propositions

i′. *X* is good ("!*p*" ∈ *S*)
ii′. If *X* is good then *Q*. ("!*p*" ∈ *S* → "!*q*" ∈ *S*)
Therefore
iii′. *Q* ("!*q*" ∈ *S*)

This piece of reasoning clearly contains no flaw. Premiss (i′) states that the value judgment "!*p*" belongs to the moral system *S*. Premiss (ii′) asserts that if the value judgment "!*p*" belongs to *S*, then also the value-judgment "!*q*" does so belong. It is now easy to derive the consequence, according to which the value judgment "!*q*" belongs to *S*. The deduction is sound and unequivocal and is typical of a metaethical discourse bearing upon the content of first-order practical ethics. This happens, for instance, when someone detachedly reports to the reactionary religious anti-immigration fundamentalist that, according to *his own* moral system, asserting the love of one's neighbour commits oneself to respect and aid immigrants.

The use of this first reading to object to the Frege–Geach problem is liable to two criticisms at least.

First, it presupposes a logic of value judgments, for we cannot determine the membership of a logically derived moral norm in a normative system (such as the obligation to respect and aid immigrants

[74] Unwin, "Norms and Negation" (2001); Moreso, "Il problema Frege–Geach" (2007).

in our example) if there are no logical relations between moral norms or value judgments. In this sense, to assert certain axiological propositions we must admit such a kind of logic (but this is something one cannot suppose if one wants to reply to the Frege–Geach argument).

Second, although it is important to emphasize the ambiguity of expressions containing value terms, we cannot limit ourselves to holding that descriptive sentences (such as axiological propositions) can be part of deductive valid inferences. We would not cut much ice against the Frege–Geach argument, since it was mainly addressed to full-blooded value judgments.

Another possibility consists of reading Geach's inference as made solely of value judgments, along the lines of our previous analysis on the two structures of inferences with unasserted and asserted premisses. This can be framed as follows:

Reasoning with value judgments

i". X is good ($!p$)
ii". If X is good then Q. ($!p \rightarrow q$)
Therefore
iii". Q ($!q$)

This inference explains that if we commit to the value judgment $!p$ (X is good) and the value judgment bearing upon a conditional, whose antecedent is asserted in the other premiss, $!(p \rightarrow q)$ (it is good that if X then Q), then we can infer $!q$ (it is good that Q). Of course, one can rebut—along the lines of the Frege–Geach argument—that premiss (ii″) is trickily understood, for the occurrence of "X is good" is here embedded and consequently it is not the same as in premiss (i″) where it expresses a genuine value judgment. Accordingly, we face equivocation, and this calls for an alternative symbolization.[75]

[75] One might want to represent premise (ii′) as expressing "$p \rightarrow !q$". Criticisms might be made against this symbolization at a higher level of philosophical reflection, by arguing that value judgments (or, more generally, norms) composed of a descriptive antecedent and a prescriptive consequent are logical hybrids that are philosophically inadmissible, but it is not necessary to go into details here. On this topic, see generally VON WRIGHT, "Norms, Truth and Logic" (1983), p. 151. What is important to notice here is that, elaborating on arguments articulated by PRIOR, "The Autonomy of Ethics" (1960), PIGDEN has maintained (*RoE*, p. 38) that Russell's logic is somehow committed to accepting such kinds of formal constructs and this would be another great problem for Russell. This argument is relevant both to the so-called

Such an alternative way of symbolizing the inference is the following:

(a) $!p$
(b) $!p \rightarrow !q$
Therefore
(c) $!q$

Such a reconstruction is completely safe regarding the problem discussed in the text. The value judgments "$!p$" is asserted in both premisses, and the second premiss states that if one commits to "$!p$", one also commits to "$!q$" (or, what is the same, one cannot commit to "$!p$" without committing to "$!q$"). These two premisses yield "$!q$".[76] Let us go back to our previous example to show how it occurs. One commits to the obligation of loving one's neighbours. If one does so, one commits oneself to respect and aid immigrants. From these two premisses, it can be derived that one commits to the obligation of respecting and aiding immigrants. There is nothing in Russell's emotivism barring such kinds of inferences. Quite the opposite: Russell's metaethical theory—thanks to compossibility as a means of building a logic of value judgments[77]—is very much equipped for this kind of inferential uniformity.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that Russell's metaethics is best seen, for the greatest part of its development, as an emotivist one. I reconstructed its main tenets, which are common to the various revisions it underwent, and tried to defend it against several criticisms, mainly pointing to its purported inconsistencies or explanatory failures. In doing so, I have used philosophical tools that Russell himself had

Jørgensen's dilemma, regarding the possible application of logic to normative language, and for the paradoxes of implication (see NAVARRO AND RODRÍGUEZ, pp. 50–4, 91–105). On the former, see BULYGIN, *Essays* (2015), p. 267. On the latter, see CASSINA, "Le dimostrazioni in matematica" (1949), pp. 139–40. Cassina was a direct pupil of Peano and in the paper just referred to there is a discussion of Russell's views regarding the paradoxes of implication.

[76] For further discussion, see BLACKBURN, *Spreading the Word* (1984), pp. 194–5.

[77] I have articulated this view in RATTI, "Some Remarks on Russell's Theory of Compossibility in Ethics" (2021).

invented for other purposes and that, quite surprisingly, did not employ in arguing in favour of his ethical theory. The overall coherence of Russell's philosophy—theoretical and practical—is indeed increased, I submit, by such an application of tools he provided.[78]

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