

100 YEARS OF LOGICAL ATOMISM

GRAHAM STEVENS

Philosophy / U. of Manchester
Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK
GRAHAM.P.STEVENS@MANCHESTER.AC.UK

Landon D. C. Elkind and Gregory Landini, eds. *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism: a Centenary Reappraisal*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pp. xxvii, 343. €135.19; US\$159.99. ISBN: 978-3-319-94363-3. US\$119.00 (ebook).

A great benefit of studying Russell's philosophy now is that we are temporally positioned to enjoy the benefits of so many centenaries of his most important works. Following on from the many high quality studies produced on the centenaries of *The Principles*, "On Denoting", and *Principia*, we are now treated to a volume of similar quality inspired by the centenary of Russell's lectures on the philosophy of logical atomism. These lectures, delivered some years after *Principia* and the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript, but before the new direction he took in the 1920s, are a rich source of material for those seeking retrospective insight into the work he had recently left behind him, as well as that which he was looking towards and developing. The lectures have also fascinated (and often frustrated) those who seek a better understanding of the interaction between Russell and Wittgenstein, whose ideas regularly arise, explicitly and implicitly, in Russell's discussions.

This volume tackles the challenging task of approaching the lectures, which are wide ranging in their topics, by a well-structured approach organizing the discussion around five themes: the history of Russell's logical atomism, his influences, metaphysics, philosophy of language, and epistemology. These divisions are, of course, a little arbitrary and overlap, but the structure is helpful.

Part One approaches the historical aspects in a way which, again, is helpfully organized, with the first paper (Elkind) focusing on the origins of Russell's view, and the second (Landini) focusing more on providing a particular interpretation of the project Russell was embarked on. The third, and final, contribution to this section (Koç Maclean) is a discussion of the role of Russell's logical atomism in his later works. This chapter one of the highlights of the book, in my view, exploring aspects of Russell's (much) later philosophy that are all too often neglected, and making a careful case for the links back to the period of the lectures.

Part Two, unsurprisingly, has a chapter devoted to the influence of Frege (Garavaso), and two devoted to that of Wittgenstein (Stern, Wahl). Part Three turns to the issue of Russell's metaphysics. The most famous metaphysical doctrine of the lectures was Russell's commitment to negative facts, and we are provided with two detailed studies of this aspect (Linsky, Perović). Before these two chapters, however, there is a discussion of Russell's conception of fundamentality (Klement) and how this fits with contemporary views in metaphysics about ontological commitment. Klement does a superb job in this chapter of not only connecting Russell's metaphysics to a major topic in current metaphysics—the nature of *grounding*—but also of drawing attention to the relevance of later works by Russell that are often overlooked as our attention is distracted by the 1903–18 period of his philosophical career.

Language is the focus of Part Four. The first chapter (Korhonen) tackles the important question of when Russell ousted the multiple-relation theory of judgment from his semantics. Traditional interpretations of Russell hold that the theory was irrevocably destroyed and rejected in 1913 in light of objections from Wittgenstein. However, recent commentators have disputed this narrative, insisting that the theory survives in modified form in these lectures. Korhonen's chapter is an important addition to this debate.

Perhaps the most notorious linguistic doctrine of the lectures is Russell's descriptivism, according to which proper names in ordinary language are understood as disguised definite descriptions and therefore subject to analysis by the celebrated theory of descriptions. The near universal consensus among philosophers of language is that Russell was wrong, and that theory must be rejected. The second chapter in this part (Orilia) swims against the tide here by insisting that the doctrine can survive the objections commonly taken to refute it, so long as we first excise Russell's *subjectivism* from that doctrine. Subjectivism is the view that the description that provides the semantic

content of a name can differ from speaker to speaker. Orilia rejects subjectivism by replacing it with a causal account which links the descriptive content to the object it refers to in the same way that many direct reference theorists would link a name to its referent (a similar strategy is alluded to by Fumerton in a later chapter). Orilia's strategy is puzzling for two reasons: (1) it is unclear whether this heavily modified version of descriptivism would do the work that Russell wants it to do (all of Russell's appeals to descriptivism in epistemology for example, seem motivated by subjectivism); (2) what benefit does this presumably rigidified descriptive content have over the content that a directly referential name has? No answers are evident in the chapter. Furthermore, many other issues are left unaddressed. For example, Orilia extends the defence of descriptivism to indexicals, but does not engage with the many arguments arising from the semantics of indexicality which seem to entail a direct reference semantics, such as those involving scope of indexicals in embedded contexts or the apparent failure of Russell's principle of acquaintance in cases of indexical reference. It is frustrating that the arguments for such a controversial and provocative thesis are left incomplete here (although Orilia urges readers to seek them out elsewhere in his work, it would have been nice to have them included more fully here).

The nature of acquaintance is a major focus of the final part of the book, dealing with Russell's epistemology. The three papers here are primarily aimed at the method by which Russell thinks we achieve knowledge. Fisher and McCarty assess competing notions of analysis arising from interpretations of Russell and Wittgenstein and argue that there can be no proof procedure for testing whether these schemes converge by outputting the same ultimate sentences. This, they suggest, leaves the possibility that they do not converge or that they may converge but unprovably. The chapter by Fumerton that follows is a careful examination of Russell's principle of acquaintance as a core element of his theory of meaning. Russell's motivation, argues Fumerton, stems from his belief that direct acquaintance is necessary for direct thought. This view is often challenged by considering externalist accounts of thought, although Fumerton suggests they may be more compatible with Russell's view than is usually assumed. The final paper (Levine) returns, quite fittingly, to the relation between Russell and Wittgenstein. Whereas much discussion of the two in the context of studies of logical atomism is driven by examining the ways the two philosophers influenced one another, Levine focuses on an aspect of philosophical methodology where they diverge: namely the role of Occam's razor in analysis.

Every one of the chapters in this book makes a useful contribution to important debates which are just as relevant now as they were a century ago. The book is yet another essential read for Russell scholars and for historians of analytic philosophy in general.
