THE

JOURNAL

OF

PHILOSOPHY

VOL. LXIII, No. 21: NOVEMBER 10, 1966 DOUBLE NUMBER

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION EASTERN DIVISION SIXTY-THIRD ANNUAL MEETING

Symposium: The Philosophy of Bertrana Kussell	
Russell's Ontological Development: W. V. Quine	657
On Russell's Phenomenological Constructionism: CARL G. HEMPEL	668
Russell and Philosophy: HAO WANG	670
Symposium: Substitutivity and Descriptions	
Substitutivity and Descriptions: LEONARD LINSKY	673
Substitutivity: RICHARD CARTRIGHT	684
Substitution and Reference: Keith S. Donnellan	685
Symposium: The Concept of Morality	
The Concept of Morality; WILLIAM K. FRANKENA	688
On Some Unreal Distinctions in Ethics: HENRY DAVID AIKEN	697
Abstracts of Papers to Be Read at the Meetings	
Completeness Theorems for some Presupposition-free Logics:	
HUGUES LEBLANC and R. H. THOMASON	699
Ethics and Social Philosophy:	
JAMES D. WALLACE, ROBERT L. HOLMES, MARVIN SCHILLER	700
Knowledge and Formal Systems:	
ERNEST SOSA, R. F. TREDWELL, M. G. YOES, JR	702
Aristotle, Leibniz, and Whitehead:	
E. M. Adams, Clifford Brown, James Robert Simmons	704
Notes and News	706

PUBLISHED FORTNIGHTLY

BY THE

JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, INC.

THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

SYMPOSIUM: THE PHILOSOPHY OF BERTRAND RUSSELL

RUSSELL'S ONTOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT *

THE twentieth century began, as many of you know, in 1901. Russell was 28 and had published three books: one on politics, one on mathematics, and one on philosophy. Late next summer the century will be two-thirds over. Russell's books have run to forty, and his philosophical influence, direct and indirect, over this long period has been unequaled.

Russell's name is inseparable from mathematical logic, which owes him much, and it was above all Russell who made that subject an inspiration to philosophers. The new logic played a part in the philosophical doctrines that Russell propounded during the second decade of this century—doctrines of unsensed sensa and perspectives, logical constructions and atomic facts. These doctrines affect our thinking today both directly and through supervening schools of thought. The impact of logical empiricism upon present-day philosophy is to an important degree Russell's impact at one remove, as the references in Carnap and elsewhere generously attest. Moreover Wittgenstein's philosophy was an evolution from views that Russell and the young Wittgenstein had shared. The Oxford philosophy of ordinary language must admit, however bleakly, to a strong strain of Russell in its origins.

I think many of us were drawn to our profession by Russell's books. He wrote a spectrum of books for a graduated public, layman to specialist. We were beguiled by the wit and a sense of new-found clarity with respect to central traits of reality. We got memorable first lessons in relativity, elementary particles, infinite numbers, and the foundations of arithmetic. At the same time we were inducted into traditional philosophical problems, such as that of the reality of matter and that of the reality of minds other than our own. For all this emergence of problems the overriding sense of new-found clarity was more than a match. In sophisticated retrospect we have had at points to reassess that

^{*} To be presented in an APA symposium, December 29, 1966.

clarity, but this was a sophistication that we acquired only after we were hooked.

Russell spoke not only to a broad public, but to a broad subject matter. The scatter of his first three books set a precedent to which his books of the next six decades conformed. Some treat of education, marriage, morals, and, as in the beginning, politics. I shall not venture to guess whether the world is better for having heeded Russell in these farther matters to the degree that it has, or whether it is better for not having heeded him more. Or both.

Instead I shall talk of Russell's ontological development. For I must narrow my scope somehow, and ontology has the virtue of being central and not unduly narrow. Moreover, Russell's ontology was conditioned conspicuously by both his theory of knowledge and his logic.

In Principles of Mathematics, 1903, Russell's ontology was unrestrained. Every word referred to something. If the word was a proper name, in Russell's somewhat deviant sense of that phrase, its object was a thing; otherwise a concept. He limited the term 'existence' to things, but reckoned things liberally, even including instants and points of empty space. And then, beyond existence, there were the rest of the entities: "numbers, the Homeric gods, relations, chimeras, and four-dimensional spaces." 1 The word 'concept', which Russell applied to these nonexistents, connotes mereness; but let us not be put off. The point to notice, epithets aside, is that gods and chimeras are as real for Russell as numbers. Now this is an intolerably indiscriminate ontology. For, take impossible numbers: prime numbers divisible by 6. It must in some sense be false that there are such; and this must be false in some sense in which it is true that there are prime numbers. In this sense are there chimeras? Are chimeras then as firm as the good prime numbers and firmer than the primes divisible by 6?

Russell may have meant to admit certain chimeras (the possible ones) to the realm of being, and still exclude the primes divisible by 6 as impossibles. Or he may, like Meinong, have intended a place even for impossible objects. I do not see that in *Principles of Mathematics* Russell faced that question.

Russell's long article on Meinong came out in Mind in installments the following year.² In it he criticized details of Meinong's system, but still protested none against the exuberance of Meinong's realm of being. In the same quarterly three issues later,

¹ London: Allen & Unwin, 1956; pp. 44, 449.

^{2 &}quot;Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions," Mind, 13 (1904): 204-219, 336-354, 509-524.

however, a reformed Russell emerges: the Russell of "On Denoting" (1905), fed up with Meinong's impossible objects. The reform was no simple change of heart; it hinged on his discovery of a means of dispensing with the unwelcome objects. The device was Russell's theory of singular descriptions, that paradigm, as Ayer has said, of philosophical analysis. It involved defining a term not by presenting a direct equivalent of it, but by what Bentham called paraphrasis: by providing equivalents of all desired sentences containing the term. In this way, reference to fictitious objects can be simulated in meaningful sentences without our being committed to the objects.

The new freedom that paraphrasis confers is our reward for recognizing that the unit of communication is the sentence and not the word. This point of semantical theory was long obscured by the undeniable primacy, in one respect, of words. Sentences being limitless in number and words limited, we necessarily understand most sentences by construction from antecedently familiar words. Actually there is no conflict here. We can allow the sentences a monopoly of full "meaning," in some sense, without denying that the meaning must be worked out. Then we can say that knowing words is knowing how to work out the meanings of sentences containing them. Dictionary definitions of words are mere clauses in a recursive definition of the meanings of sentences.

Bentham was perhaps the first to see the sentence thus as the primary vehicle of meaning. Frege took up the tale.⁸ But Russell, in his theory of singular description, was the first to put this insight to precise and effective use. Frege and Peano had allowed singular description the status of a primitive notation; only with Russell did it become an "incomplete symbol defined in use." What suggested the expedient to Russell was not in fact Bentham's work, it seems, but a use of operators in the differential calculus.⁴

Russell's preoccupation with incomplete symbols began with his theory of singular descriptions in 1905. But it continued and spread, notably to classes. For background on classes we must slip back a few years. Classes were an evident source of discomfort to Russell when he was writing *Principles of Mathematics*. There was, for one thing, his epoch-making paradox. Burali-Forti had found a paradox of classes as early as 1897, but it concerned infinite ordinal numbers, and could be accommodated, one hoped, by some local adjustment of theory. On the

³ Grundlagen der Arithmetik (Breslau, 1844; New York: Oxford, 1950), §60.

⁴ Cf. Principia Mathematica I, p. 24, second edition.

other hand, Russell's simple paradox of the class of all classes not belonging to themselves struck at the roots. It dates from 1901, when, as Frege expressed it to Russell, arithmetic tottered.

Russell's accommodation of the paradoxes, his theory of types, came only in 1908. In Principles, 1903, we find no more than tentative gropings in that direction. But Principles evinces much discomfort over classes also apart from the paradoxes. The further source of discomfort is the ancient problem of the one and the many. It seems strange now that Russell saw a problem in the fact that a single class might have many members, since he evidently saw no problem in the corresponding fact that a single attribute, or what he then called a class-concept, might apply to many things. What made the difference was that, in the bipartite ontology of Principles of Mathematics, classes counted as things rather than as concepts; classes existed. Russell observed against Peano that "we must not identify the class with the class-concept," because of extensionality: classes with the same members are the same (68). Since the class was not the class-concept, Russell took it not to be a concept at all; hence it had to be a thing. But then, he felt, it ought to be no more than the sum of the things in it; and here was his problem of the one and the many.

We saw that in 1905 Russell freed himself of Meinong's impossibles and the like by a doctrine of incomplete symbols. Classes were next. In his 1908 paper "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types" there emerges not only the theory of types but also a doctrine of incomplete symbols for explaining classes away. This latter doctrine is designed precisely to take care of the point Russell had made against Peano in connection with extensionality. Russell's contextual definition of class notation gave the benefit of classes, namely extensionality, without assuming more than class-concepts after all.

Seeing Russell's perplexities over classes, we can understand his gratification at accommodating classes under a theory of incomplete symbols. But the paradoxes, which were the most significant of these perplexities, were not solved by his theory of incomplete symbols; they were solved, or parried, by his theory of types. One is therefore startled when Russell declares in "My Mental Development" that his expedient of incomplete symbols "made it possible to see, in a general way, how a solution of the contradictions might be possible." If the paradoxes had invested only

⁵ P. A. Schilpp, ed., The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell (1944; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 14.

classes and not class-concepts, then Russell's elimination of classes would indeed have eliminated the paradoxes and there would have been no call for the theory of types. But the paradoxes apply likewise, as Russell knew, to class-concepts, or propositional functions. And thus it was that the theory of types, in this its first full version of 1908, was developed expressly and primarily for propositional functions and then transmitted to classes only through the contextual definitions.

The startling statement that I quoted can be accounted for. It is linked to the preference that Russell was evincing, by 1908, for the phrase 'propositional function' over 'class-concept'. Both phrases were current in Principles of Mathematics; mostly the phrase 'propositional function' was visibly meant to refer to notational forms, namely open sentences, while concepts were emphatically not notational. But after laying waste Meinong's realm of being in 1905, Russell trusted concepts less and favored the more nominalistic tone of the phrase 'propositional function', which bore the double burden. If we try to be as casual about the difference between use and mention as Russell was fifty and sixty years ago, we can see how he might feel that, whereas a theory of types of real classes would be ontological, his theory of types of propositional functions had a notational cast. Insofar, his withdrawal of classes would be felt as part of his solution of the paradoxes. This feeling could linger to 1943, when he wrote "My Mental Development," even if its basis had lapsed.

We, careful about use and mention, can tell when Russell's so-called "propositional functions" must be taken as concepts, more specifically as attributes and relations, and when they may be taken as mere open sentences or predicates. It is when he quantifies over them that he reifies them, however unwittingly, as concepts. This is why no more can be claimed for his elimination of classes than I claimed for it above: a derivation of classes from attributes, or concepts, by a contextual definition framed to supply the missing extensionality. On later occasions Russell writes as if he thought that his 1908 theory, which reappeared in *Principia Mathematica*, disposed of classes in some more sweeping sense than reduction to attributes.

Just how much more sweeping a reduction he was prepared to claim may have varied over the years. Readers have credited him with explaining classes away in favor of nothing more than a nominalistic world of particulars and notations.⁶ But Russell early and late has expressly doubted the dispensability of uni-

⁶ Hans Hahn, "Ueberflüssige Wesenheiten," Vienna, 1923.

versals. Even if we were ingeniously to paraphrase all talk of qualities, for instance, into an idiom in which we talk rather of similarity to chosen particulars instancing those qualities, still, Russell more than once remarked, we should be left with one universal, the relation of similarity. Now here, in contrast to the class matter, I think Russell even concedes the Platonists too much; retention of the two-place predicate 'is similar to' is no evidence of assuming a corresponding abstract entity, the similarity relation, as long as that relation is not invoked as a value of a bound variable. A moral of all this is that inattention to referential semantics works two ways, obscuring some ontological assumptions and creating an illusion of others.

What I have ascribed to confusion can be ascribed to indifference; for we are apt to take pains over a distinction only to the degree that we think it matters. Questions as to what there is were for Russell of two sorts: questions of existence in his restricted sense of the term, and residual questions of being-questions of what he came to call "subsistence." The questions as to what subsists evidently struck him as less substantial, more idly verbal perhaps, than questions as to what exists. This bias toward the existential would explain his indiscriminate bestowal of subsistence in Principles of Mathematics. True, he called a halt in 1905 with his theory of descriptions; but on that occasion he was provoked by the impossibility of Meinong's impossibles. And he had even put up with those for a time. Moreover, Russell continued to be very prodigal with subsistence even after propounding his theory of descriptions. We find him saying still in 1912 that "nearly all the words to be found in the dictionary stand for universals." 7

I am suggesting that through his fourth decade Russell took a critical interest in existential questions but was relatively offhand about subsistential ones. This bias explains his glee over eliminating classes and his indifference over the status of the surviving propositional functions; for we noted that in *Principles* the classes occupied, however uneasily, the existential zone of being. To hold that classes, if there be any, must exist, while attributes at best subsist, does strike me as arbitrary; but such was Russell's attitude.

Russell's relative indifference to subsistence shows again in his treatment of meaning. Frege's three-way distinction between the expression, what it means, and what if anything it refers to, did not come naturally to Russell. In "On Denoting," 1905, he even

⁷ The Problems of Philosophy (New York: Holt, 1912), p. 146.

argued against it. His argument is hard to follow; at points it seems to turn on a confusion of expressions with their meanings, and at points it seems to turn on a confusion of the expression with the mention of it, while elsewhere in the same pages Russell seems clear on both distinctions. The upshot is that "the relation of 'C' to C remains wholly mysterious; and where are we to find the denoting complex 'C' which is supposed to denote C? . . . This is an inextricable tangle, and seems to prove that the whole distinction between meaning and denotation has been wrongly conceived" (50).8

In other writings Russell commonly uses the word 'meaning' in the sense of 'reference'; thus "'Napoleon' means a certain individual" and "'Man' means a whole class of such particulars as have proper names." What matters more than terminology is that Russell seldom seems heedful, under any head, of a subsistent entity such as we might call the meaning, over and above the existent object of reference. He tends, as in the 1905 paper "On Denoting," to blur that entity with the expression itself. Such was his general tendency with subsistents.

For my own part, I am chary of the idea of meaning and, furthermore, I think Russell too prodigal with subsistent entities. So it would be odd of me to criticize Russell for not recognizing meanings as subsistent entities. However, the outcome that wants criticizing is just that, for want of distinctions, Russell tended to blur meaninglessness with failure of reference. This was why he could not banish the king of France without first inventing the theory of descriptions. To make sense is to have a meaning, and the meaning is the reference; so 'the king of France' is meaningless, and 'The king of France is bald' is meaningful only by being short for a sentence not containing 'the king of France'. Well, even if the theory of descriptions was not needed in quite this way, it brought major clarifications and we are thankful for it.

Russell's tendency to blur subsistent entities with expressions was noticed in his talk of propositional functions. It is equally noticeable in what he says of propositions. In *Principles of Mathematics* he describes propositions as expressions, but then he speaks also of the unity of propositions (50), and of the possibility of infinite propositions (145), in ways ill suited to such a version. In "Meinong's Theory," 1904, he speaks of propositions as judgments (523). There is similar oscillation in *Principia Mathematica*.

⁸ Pagination of Logic and Knowledge (New York: Macmillan, 1956).

⁹ Analysis of Mind (London: Allen, 1921), pp. 191, 194.

But by the time of "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," 1918, the oscillation has changed direction. At one point in this essay we read, "a proposition is just a symbol" (185); 10 at a later point we read rather, "Obviously propositions are nothing. . . . To suppose that in the actual world of nature there is a whole set of false propositions going about is to my mind monstrous" (223). This repudiation is startling. We had come to expect a blur between expressions and subsistent entities, concepts; what we get instead of subsistence is nothingness. The fact is that Russell has stopped talking of subsistence. He stopped by 1914. What would once have counted as subsisting has been disposed of in any of three ways: identified with its expression, or repudiated utterly, or elevated to the estate of out-and-out existence. Qualities and relations come to enjoy this elevation; Russell speaks in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" of "those ultimate simples, out of which the world is built, . . . that . . . have a kind of reality not belonging to anything else. Simples . . . are of an infinite number of sorts. There are particulars and qualities and relations of various orders, a whole hierarchy" (270).

Russell's abandonment of the term 'subsistence' was an improvement. It is a quibbling term; its function is to limit existence verbally to space-time and so divert attention from ontological commitments of other than spatiotemporal kind. Better to acknowledge all posits under an inclusive and familiar heading. Posits too dubious for such recognition will then be dropped, as were propositions in some sense.

As for propositions, in particular, we saw Russell in this essay taking them as expressions part of the time and part of the time simply repudiating them. Dropping then the ambiguous epithet, we might take this to be Russell's net thought: there are no nonlinguistic things that are somehow akin to sentences and asserted by them.

But this is not Russell's thought. In the same essay he insists that the world does contain nonlinguistic things that are akin to sentences and asserted by them; he merely does not call them propositions. He calls them facts. It turns out that the existence of nonlinguistic analogues of sentences offends Russell only where the sentences are false. His facts are what many of us would have been content to call true propositions. Russell himself called them that in 1904,¹¹ propositions then being judgments; and in the 1918 essay now under discussion he allows them full-fledged ex-

¹⁰ Pagination of Logic and Knowledge.

^{11 &}quot;Meinong's Theory," p. 523.

istence. "Facts belong to the objective world" (183). True, he says a page earlier that "when I speak of a fact I do not mean a particular existing thing"; but he is here distinguishing between fact and thing only as between sorts of existents, paralleling the distinction between sentences and names. Facts you can assert and deny; things you can name (270). Both exist; 'thing' has ceased to be coextensive with 'existent'.

Russell in this 1918 essay acknowledges Wittgenstein's influence. Russell's ontology of facts here is a reminder of Wittgenstein, but a regrettable one. Wittgenstein thought in his *Tractatus* days that true sentences mirrored nature, and this notion led him to posit things in nature for true sentences to mirror; namely, facts.

Not that Wittgenstein started Russell on facts. Russell was urging a correspondence between facts and propositions in 1912,¹² when he first knew Wittgenstein; and he equates facts with true judgments as early, we saw, as 1904. Russell had his own reason for wanting facts as entities, and Wittgenstein abetted him.

Russell was receptive to facts as entities because of his tendency to conflate meaning with reference. Sentences, being meaningful, had to stand to some sort of appropriate entities in something fairly like the relation of naming. Propositions in a nonsentential sense were unavailable, having been repudiated; so facts seemed all the more needed. They do not exactly serve as references of false sentences, but they help. For each true or false sentence there is a fact, which the sentence asserts or denies according as the sentence is true or false. This two-to-one variety of reference became for Russell even a central trait distinguishing sentences from names, and so facts from things.¹³

Russell continued to champion facts, right through his Inquiry into Meaning and Truth and into Human Knowledge, 1948. In Human Knowledge the term applies not only to what true statements assert, but to more: "Everything that there is in the world I call a 'fact'" (143).

Russell's predilection for a fact ontology depended, I suggested, on confusion of meaning with reference. Otherwise I think Russell would have made short shrift of facts. He would have been put off by what strikes a reader of "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism": how the analysis of facts rests on analysis of language. Anyway Russell does not admit facts as fundamental; atomic facts

¹² The Problems of Philosophy, pp. 198 ff.

^{13 &}quot;The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," pp. 187, 270; pagination of Logic and Knowledge.

are atomic as facts go, but they are compound objects.¹⁴ The atoms of Russell's logical atomism are not atomic facts but sense data.

In Problems of Philosophy, 1912, Russell had viewed both sense data and external objects as irreducible existents. We are acquainted with sense data beyond peradventure, he held, whereas our belief in external objects is fallible; still, speaking fallibly, both are real. Our belief in external objects is rooted in instinct, but it is rational of us, he held, to accept such dictates of instinct in the absence of counterevidence (39). This cheerful resignation echoes Hume and harmonizes also with the current Oxford way of justifying scientific method: scientific method is part of what 'rational' means.

Two years later, in Our Knowledge of the External World, Russell was more sanguine. Here it was that sense data became logical atoms for the construction of the rest of the world. Already in Problems he had talked of private worlds of sense data and the public space of physics, and of their correlations. Now we find him using these correlations as a means of identifying external objects with classes of sense data. He identifies the external object with the class of all the views of it in private worlds, actual and ideal. In so doing he also pin-points each of the private worlds as a point in public space.

It was a great idea. If executed with all conceivable success, it would afford translation of all discourse about the external world into terms of sense data, set theory, and logic. It would not settle induction, for we should still be in the position of predicating sense data from sense data. But it would settle the existence of external things. It would show that assumption superfluous, or prove it true; we could read the result either way.

It would neatly settle the ontology of the external world, by reducing it to that of the set theory of sense data. In Our Knowledge of the External World, moreover, Russell wrote as though he had eliminated classes, and not just reduced them to attributes (cf. 224 f); so he would have looked upon the project, if successful, as resting on an ontology of sense data alone (cf. 153). But by 1918 he thought better of this point, as witness the recognition of "qualities and relations . . . a whole hierarchy" lately quoted.

In Our Knowledge of the External World Russell expressed no confidence that the plan he sketched could be fully realized. In his sketch, as he remarked, he took other minds for granted; moreover he broached none of the vast detail that would be needed

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 198 f, 270; Our Knowledge of the External World (London: Allen & Unwin, 1914), p. 54.

for the further constructions, except for a few illustrative steps. But the illustrations gave a vivid sense that the concepts of *Principia Mathematica* could be helpful here and the many ingenious turns and strategies of construction that went into *Principia* could be imitated to advantage. A strategy much in evidence is definition by abstraction—what Whitehead came to call extensive abstraction, and Carnap quasianalysis.

It was left to Carnap, in 1928, to be inspired to press the plan. Russell's intervening works, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," The Analysis of Matter, and The Analysis of Mind might in view of their titles have been expected to further it, but they did not. The dazzling sequel to Our Knowledge of the External World was rather Carnap's Der logische Aufbau der Welt. Carnap achieved remarkable feats of construction, starting with sense data and building explicitly, with full *Principia* techniques and Principia ingenuity, toward the external world. One must in the end despair of the full definitional reduction dreamed of in recent paragraphs, and it is one of the merits of the Aufbau that we can see from it where the obstacles lie. The worst obstacles seems to be that the assigning of sense qualities to public placetimes has to be kept open to revision in the light of later experience, and so cannot be reduced to definition. The empiricist's regard for experience thus impedes the very program of reducing the world to experience.15

Russell meanwhile was warping his logical atomism over from its frankly phenomenalistic form to what, influenced by Perry and Holt, he called "neutral monism." Neutrality here has a bias, as it often has in politics; Russell's neutral particulars are on the side of sense data. Still, a drift has begun, and it continues. It does not reach the physicalistic pole, even in Human Knowledge; but there is an increasing naturalism, an increasing readiness to see philosophy as natural science trained upon itself and permitted free use of scientific findings. Russell had stated the basis for such an attitude already in 1914: "There is not any superfine brand of knowledge, obtainable by the philosopher, which can give us a standpoint from which to criticize the whole of the knowledge of daily life. The most that can be done is to examine and purify our common knowledge by an internal scrutiny, assuming the canons by which it has been obtained." 17

W. V. Quine

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

¹⁵ This ironic way of putting the matter is due to Burton Dreben.

¹⁶ Cf. Analysis of Mind, p. 25; Analysis of Matter (1927; New York: Dover, 1954), ch. 37.

¹⁷ Our Knowledge of the External World, p. 71.