

Psychologism and the Development of Russell's Account of Propositions

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the development of Russell's treatment of propositions, in relation to the topic of psychologism. In the first section, we outline the concept of psychologism, and show how it can arise in relation to theories of the nature of propositions. Following this, we note the anti-psychologistic elements of Russell's thought dating back to his idealist roots. From there, we sketch the development of Russell's theory of the proposition through a number of its key transitions. We show that Russell, in responding to a variety of different problems relating to the proposition, chose to resolve these problems in ways that continually made concessions to psychologism.

KEYWORDS: judgment; judgment, theory of; proposition; proposition, theory of; psychologism; Russell, Bertrand

1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of psychologism is often a sensitive one for analytic philosophers, and this is especially so for Russell. In the first place, analytic philosophy is historically identified with an anti-psychologistic attitude concerning most philosophical domains, especially logic (Baker and Hacker 1989). Indeed, some have gone so far as to claim that 'the very foundation of analytic philosophy ... [is] the principle that logic and psychology are *categorically* divorced from one another' (Shanker 1998, p. 65).¹ In the second place, it is often quite a complex matter to determine whether, and in what respects, a position is psychologistic, and whether this psychologism has the detrimental epistemological or logical consequences with which it has been traditionally associated.

¹ Nonetheless, it should not be concluded that analytic philosophy is co-extensive with anti-psychologism. There are non-analytic philosophers who reject psychologism (notably, the late nineteenth-century idealists, e.g. F.H. Bradley, against whom Russell rebelled into analytic philosophy in 1898) and there are – as we shall show in this paper – analytic philosophers who embraced important psychologistic doctrines.

Questions such as these are especially delicate for Russell. The matter is complicated by the fact that Russell's philosophical views developed so quickly. Oftentimes it was the very features that changed from one view to the next that were the most significant in Russell's philosophical position. Yet, on many topics Russell seems to have maintained a consistently anti-psychologistic attitude throughout his philosophical life. For instance, Russell maintained a metaphysical pluralism and realism and an epistemological objectivism which commonly accompany anti-psychologistic views. Through this realism and objectivism Russell sought to maintain the mind-independence of both the laws of the universe and (at least for a long time) of logical laws. In *My Philosophical Development* (1959), Russell wrote that '[the universe] proceed[s] according to laws in which mind plays no part' (*MPD*, p.12). Similarly, in a 1911 paper 'Analytical Realism', Russell wrote that "The laws of logic, while they are customarily called "laws of Thought", are just as objective, and depend as little on the mind, as the law of gravity' (*AR* in *CPBRv6*, p. 136).

On grounds such as these, authors such as Irvine (2003) have identified a persistent emphasis on anti-psychologism in Russell's post-idealist thought – although, as we shall show, it is equally to be found in the writings of his idealist period (see, e.g., Russell 1895). Similarly, on the grounds that "psychologism" is at least the view that the objects of acquaintance and judgment ... cannot themselves be described independently of features attaching to them as a result of the psychological conditions of their apprehension' (Grayling 2003, p. 453), Grayling has claimed that it is mistaken to see 'Russell's turn to epistemological themes after *PM* [*Principia*] as involving "considerable concessions to psychologism" [Hylton 1990, p. 330]' (Grayling 2003, p. 453). Yet, in our view, the matter is not so simple.

While there are admittedly anti-psychologistic threads that run throughout Russell's philosophy, we maintain that, after 1910, the proposition is the site of a relatively conspicuous psychologism in Russell's theory of language and logic. Specifically, in responding to a variety of different problems relating to his earlier theory of propositions, Russell continually revised his position in ways that made propositions increasingly dependent on psychology. To approach this issue, the first thing we need to get a handle on is the notion of psychologism itself.

2. THE NATURE OF PSYCHOLOGISM

'Psychologism' can be generically defined as the thesis that philosophy is dependent on psychology.² The thesis is generic because it does not indicate which parts or branches of philosophy are dependent on psychology; but more specific variants can be identified, for example, epistemological psychologism is the thesis that psychology is required for epistemology, while logical psychologism is the thesis that psychology is necessary for logic.

² See, e.g., Cussins 1987, p. 126; Mohanty 1989, p. 2; Notturmo (ed.) 1989, preface; Pandit 1971, p. 86; Richards 1980, pp. 19–20; Sober 1978, pp. 165–166.

All these theses are generic also in a different way, since they do not assert the nature or source of the philosophical dependence on psychology, and this dependence can be explained in a variety of ways. One common formulation asserts the metaphysical claim that the subject matter of philosophy (or some branch thereof) is (at least in some essential part) psychological in nature. Indeed, frequently 'psychologism' is defined as just such a metaphysical thesis,³ which could be called 'metaphysical psychologism'. Metaphysical psychologism in logic, then, is the claim that the subject matter of logic is, at least in some essential respect, psychological in nature.

A psychologistic account of propositions, then, is one which depends in some way on psychology. Such an account might involve the metaphysical claim that propositions are psychological in nature. One standard example would be the view that propositions are, or are composed of, psychological entities like ideas. This is precisely how Frege identified psychologism in his 1897 paper *Logic*, where he wrote that 'Psychological treatments of logic arise from the mistaken belief that a thought (a judgement as it is usually called) is something psychological like an idea' ([1897] 1979, p. 143). This view, which might be called mentalism, is an example of a full-blooded psychologism. Beyond claiming that (the contents of) propositions are psychological in nature, there are other, less drastic or overt, ways of making a theory of propositions dependent on psychology, for example by making the existence or structure of propositions dependent on the activity of the mind or in any way upon psychological facts.

Over the course of the remainder of this article, we trace out the development of Russell's theory of the proposition in relation to the question of psychologism. Tracing a continuous lineage and providing a comprehensive analysis of the thinking occasioning those changes is well beyond the scope of the present article. Instead, we will present a series of snapshots, illustrative pictures representative of Russell's views at several key or transitional stages of development, enabling us to highlight some of the important changes and some of the things that occasioned these changes. In each case we will see that Russell responded to problems in the theory of propositions in a way that made concessions to psychologism.

3. TENSION IN RUSSELL'S EARLY IDEALISM

It is well-known that Russell began his philosophical life as a neo-Hegelian idealist, under the influence of such thinkers as Bradley and McTaggart (Griffin 1991; Griffin 2003b). Moreover, many of the characteristic features of Russell's later thought can be traced back to his idealist beginnings. Examples include his pluralism (Griffin 2003b, pp. 87–88) and his methodological inclination to begin with current scientific theory and to proceed by the processes of analysis and synthesis to reach the basic principles or the basic entities required by that science (Griffin 2003b, pp. 88–90).

Yet another feature of Russell's later thought can also be found in his idealist roots.

³ Bell 1992, pp. 401–402; Brockhaus 1991, p. 494; Engel [1989] 1991, p. 292; Haack 1978, p. 238; Sober 1978, p. 166; Toulmin 1958, p. 86.

Alongside Russell's early idealism there stood a trenchant anti-psychologism (Griffin 1991, p. 132) that manifested itself in Russell's first published work (an 1895 review of G. Heymans: *Die Gesetze und Elemente des wissenschaftlichen Denkens*) where he argued against the 'confusion between the psychologically subjective and the logically a priori' (CPBRv1, p. 251). Even as an idealist, Russell rejected the psychologistic views that laws of logic are psychological laws, that thoughts (i.e. ideas) rather than things are the subject matter of arithmetic, and that epistemology could take the form of a 'psychology of thought' (*ibid.*, pp. 251–252).

Despite this seemingly objectivist, non-mentalist account of the nature and constituents of propositions, Russell's anti-psychologism here was offset by a second idealist tendency towards the use of transcendental arguments which are typically held to explain features of the world in terms of characteristics of the human mind or cognition (Griffin 2003b, p. 102). Russell, though, insisted that his transcendental arguments were 'purely logical' and 'without any psychological implication' (EFG, p. 3), though this did not convince his colleague at Cambridge G.E. Moore (1899).

Russell's early anti-psychologism is also reflected in his account of the nature and constituents of judgments as given in his 1898 manuscript *An Analysis of Mathematical Reasoning*, which was written exactly at the time of his break with idealism. On Russell's theory in the *Analysis*, judgments are composed of terms. A term is 'whatever can be a logical subject' (AMR in CPBRv2, p. 167), including 'every possible idea' (AMR, p. 168). Terms have a kind of non-psychological reality, not identical to existence, which Russell called being (*ibid.*). 'It is true, in fact', Russell wrote, 'that there *are* such terms; and when we say this, we do not intend merely to assert a psychological fact' (*ibid.*).

To avoid Bradley's famous regress argument against relations (Bradley 1893, III, ch. 3, p. 28; AMR, p. 175), Russell claimed that subjects and predicates do not occur in the same way in propositions. Rather, terms can occur in judgments either as referents or as meanings, depending on whether they occupy the subject or the predicate place in the judgment (AMR, p. 174). Predicates remain terms, since they can serve as the subject of a judgment, and as a result the difference between subject and predicate is only one of aspect (AMR, p. 168). For this reason, the basic unit is the judgment rather than the term, since a term's place in a judgment will determine how it occurs therein (Griffin 1991, p. 276).

Russell's position in *An Analysis of Mathematical Reasoning* is strongly anti-psychologistic – aggressively so. Yet there remains a residual tension between his anti-psychologism and his use of transcendental arguments. The latter, however, are much less in evidence than in his earlier work; they are on their way out, and are gone entirely in his next major work, *The Fundamental Ideas and Axioms of Mathematics* (1899, FIAM in CPBRv2). This inaugurated Russell's most extreme reaction against psychologism which lasted, despite several important intervening shifts in his philosophy, until around 1907.⁴

⁴ Ironically, it was exactly at this time that Russell was explicitly accused of psychologism, by Boris Jakowenko at the third international philosophy congress at Heidelberg in 1908. Mistaking entirely the philosophy underlying Russell's logicism, Jakowenko accused him of trying to determine the structure of pure thought and reifying the

4. ABSOLUTE REALISM: THE "NEW PHILOSOPHY"

The underlying theme in Russell's late idealism and early realism is that propositions are, as Hylton puts it, *out there* (Hylton 1984, p. 381). Propositions are entities that are neither linguistic nor mental in nature. Rather, they are real entities, in some abstract sense, whose constituents are equally real. Propositions are also complex entities, made up of simpler entities called 'terms'. Terms are the actual objects which the proposition is about and they actually occur in the proposition. As Russell put it in the *Principles* (1903), 'a proposition, unless it happens to be linguistic, does not contain words, it contains the entities indicated by words' (POM, §51; p. 47). So, '[w]hen we make a statement about Arthur Balfour, he himself forms part of the object before our minds, *i.e.* of the proposition stated' (OM&D in *CPBRv4*, p. 315). On this picture, analysis is not a linguistic endeavour, but is rather a process of 'finding the parts of which things are in fact made up' (Hylton 1984, p. 376). Perhaps most importantly, propositions are mind-independent in all respects. They do not depend on the mind for their existence, for their unity, or for their meaning – similarly with the truth of a proposition and its logical relations to other propositions. Finally, while propositions can be grasped by the human mind, their nature is independent of, and unaffected by, this relationship with minds.

This theory of the proposition presented many difficulties, of which we will focus on two.⁵ First is the problem that if objects themselves constitute the contents of propositions,

psychical as the formal, a position Jakowenko described as 'formalist psychologism' (Jakowenko 1909).

⁵ There are other associated problems which we shall not discuss here. For instance, in the *Principles*, Russell claimed that '[i]t is a characteristic of the terms of a proposition that any one of them may be replaced by any entity without our ceasing to have a proposition' (POM, §48). This is apparently false as some substitutions of terms can generate nonsense propositions (cf. Cartwright 2003, p. 115) – a consequence which Russell appeared willing to accept in 1903.

Another problem on this theory is that, it fails to give a theoretically satisfying account of propositions as bearers of truth-values. If a proposition is just an arrangement of objects, truth cannot be explained as a correspondence relation between a proposition and a fact, since 'a fact appears to be merely a true proposition' (MTCA in *CPBRv4*, p. 473). As L. Linsky puts it '[t]here is no space separating facts from propositions' (1992, p. 253). Yet, now the distinction between true propositions and false ones seems to disappear, and it becomes difficult to explain the truth-value of any given proposition, as well as why we should give epistemic preference to true ones over false ones. Hylton describes two further problems on this view: 'First, the fact that each proposition is either true or false, and that none is both, must be accepted as completely inexplicable, as a brute contingency. Second, and perhaps worse, if truth is indefinable and inexplicable then no connection is made between the truth of a proposition, on the one hand, and reality or fact on the other hand' (Hylton 1984, p. 385). There was a time when Russell seemed prepared to accept these consequences, as when he espoused an identity theory of truth, maintaining that it was an unanalyzable fact that some propositions were true and others false just as some roses were red and others white (MTCA, p. 473; for identity theories of truth see Baldwin 1991). Yet, eventually, Russell would surrender the view for the multiple relation theory of judgment, writing that '[t]he impossibility of allowing for falsehood makes it impossible to regard belief as a relation of the mind to a single object, which could be said to be what is believed' (POP, p. 72; OTNTF, p. 152).

then it would seem that we regularly deal with propositions for which we have had no contact with the constituent objects. These needn't be non-actual objects, or perceptually distant particulars, since this problem also arises for most general propositions as well (Griffin 2003a, p. 22). Yet, Russell realized that in addition to being the bearers of truth, propositions also have to be meaningful to the cognitive agents who use them, and that this is unlikely if we have no contact with the contents of the proposition. As early as 1903 Russell was committed to the 'doctrine of acquaintance' that, in order to understand a proposition it is necessary to be acquainted with all its constituents (Griffin, *ibid.*; PAD in *CPBRv4*, p. 307). A second cluster of problems relates to false propositions. On the robust realist view, false propositions embody non-actual states of affairs which could further involve non-actual objects. That is, false propositions are complex, abstract objects which somehow actually involve a non-actual arrangement of their constituents. Perhaps the most unfortunate problem of the new theory of propositions was that it failed to account for the very problem it was meant to solve – the unity of the proposition (L. Linsky 1992; B. Linsky 1993).

These problems prompted Russell to change his account of both the contents and the structure of propositions dramatically. Yet, as Russell acted to solve these problems, each of the changes he made to the theory of propositions moved him closer to psychologism.

5. ACQUAINTANCE AND THE CONTENTS OF PROPOSITIONS

Regarding the contents of propositions, Russell realized that there were many cases in which it could not be maintained that the things about which a proposition made an assertion could conceivably form a part of the proposition itself. In *Principles of Mathematics* he accommodated the two most troublesome cases – where there is no term about which the proposition makes an assertion and where there are infinitely many such terms – by means of his theory of denoting concepts (*POM*, chapter v). When a denoting concept occurs in subject position in a proposition the proposition is not about the denoting concept but what, if anything, the denoting concept denotes (see Griffin 1996). In this way, even in 1903, he was able to maintain both that grasp of a proposition required acquaintance with all its constituents (denoting concepts were objects of acquaintance) and that propositions could be about the terms which were not their constituents.

Subsequently, by 1911 the principle of acquaintance had been raised to a 'fundamental epistemological principle' and given its canonical formulation: *Every proposition which we can understand must be composed of constituents with which we are acquainted* (KAKD in *CPBRv6*, p. 154; cf. *POP*, p. 32). Moreover, denoting concepts were soon eliminated,⁶ and the range of acquaintance was radically restricted. Acquaintance is explained as a 'direct cognitive relation' to an object (KAKD, p. 148) whereby 'the object itself [is brought] before the mind' (KAKD, p. 161). Problematically, we are directly acquainted with few of the objects of which we have knowledge and about which we make assertions. 'We have

⁶ They were swept away by the theory of descriptions (Russell OD in *CPBRv4*).

acquaintance with sense-data, with many universals [i.e. concepts], and possibly with ourselves, but not with physical objects or other minds' (*ibid.*). The slack was to be taken up entirely by the theory of incomplete symbols, of which the theory of descriptions was the best-known component.

To accommodate this, Russell revised his views on the content of propositions, affirming that the constituents of propositions are the objects of our acquaintance: concepts (for universals) and sense-data for particulars (AR, 133). Terms beyond the reach of our experience have no place in our propositions. Importantly, Russell's sense-datum theory is not a form of phenomenalism, and sense-data are not like Cartesian sensations or Humean sense-impressions. Instead, Russell claimed that '[n]either concepts nor sense-data are *in* the mind which knows them' (*ibid.*), and as such they are not psychological (or mental) in nature. Sense-data are physical, while concepts remain a species of abstract objects with which we have 'logical acquaintance'. Concepts do not exist as particulars do, but they subsist, and '[t]heir subsistence depends in no way on the minds which know them; the abstract sciences have, therefore, as their object something completely independent of any mental element' (AR, p. 133). So the theory of propositional contents under the doctrine of acquaintance remains a form of direct realism – we are directly acquainted with certain features of reality.

Yet, although sense data may not be inherently psychological, they have many of the problematic properties of ideas. They are (i) epistemically private and (ii) perspectival, in the sense that they are unique to the perceptual circumstances of individual perceiving agents (*POP*, p. 9). As a result, sense data are subjective in an important sense, one which might easily give rise to the epistemic problems traditionally associated with psychologism.

6. STRUCTURE: THE MULTIPLE RELATION THEORY OF JUDGMENT

Regarding the structure of propositions, Russell realized that the problem of treating false propositions as terms (*CPBRv7 [TK]*, p. 109), and the problem of explaining the unity of the proposition, could not be met by the single-object theory of judgment whereby a belief or other propositional attitude relates a cognitive agent (a mind) to a proposition understood as a unified complex object. In place of this single object theory, Russell proposed the multiple relation theory of judgment. On this theory, a judgment relates a cognitive agent not to a single complex object (the proposition) but rather to the individual constituents of that proposition. By this means Russell sought to explain both false judgments and the unity of propositions. False judgments no longer require the positing of a false complex in the world. Instead, the falsehood of false judgments is explained by the fact that there is no complex in the world corresponding to the arrangement of the terms in the false judgment.

The unity of the proposition, on the multiple relation theory, is explained psychologically. On this picture, the 'relating relation' (or the active ingredient) in the judgment is the 'propositional attitude'⁷ obtaining between the cognitive agent and the other

⁷ This important piece of terminology seems to have been introduced (with some misgivings) by Russell in 1918 (PLA in *CPBRv8*, pp. 199–200; MN in *CPBRv6*, p. 268), when propositions were on the way back. Russell did not

constituents of the judgment. It is this attitude which explains the precise relationship of the other constituents of the judgment, and ‘holds them in place’ as it were.⁸ But, these ‘propositional attitudes’ are expressly psychological. So, the structure of propositions cannot be explained independently of psychology, and this is a considerable concession to psychologism.

Furthermore, the multiple relation theory also surrenders the thesis that the occurrence or existence of propositions is mind-independent. Instead, propositions are the result of what Claudio de Almeida (1998, p. 136) usefully called ‘propositional activity’ in the mind. As Hylton writes, ‘propositions become dependent for their existence (or pseudo-existence) upon mental acts’ (Hylton 1984, p. 386). It should not be thought, however, that propositions are some kind of psychological entity created by the mind. Propositions, on the multiple relation theory are eliminated entirely; they are fictions. The corresponding psychological entity is a belief (or other propositional attitude) of which propositions are incomplete fragments, ‘incomplete symbols’ as Russell rather misleadingly calls them. Formally they are double functions from {subject, attitude} pairs to mental states. Thus the proposition that Desdemona loves Cassio (to use Russell’s favourite example) can be represented as the function $\hat{\varphi}(\hat{x}, \text{Desdemona, loves, Cassio})$, where φ is a variable ranging over propositional attitudes and x is a variable taking cognitive agents as its values. In *Theory of Knowledge*, where the multiple relation theory is most fully elaborated, Russell describes the proposition as ‘something which a number of mental events have in common’. The mental acts may differ as to who has them (their subject) and as to the relation between the subject and the objects (the ‘propositional’ attitude), ‘but when we abstract both from the subject and from its relation to the objects, what remains seems to be exactly the same in the case of doubt or desire or will as in the case of judgment. It is this common element that we call the “proposition”’ (CPBRv7 [TK], pp. 114-115).

Importantly, during the period he held the multiple relation theory Russell did not psychologize the proposition without misgivings. In his most extended account of the multiple relation theory, he notes as the ‘chief demerit’ of theory the fact that ‘we cannot be sure that there are propositions in all cases in which logic would seem to need them’, though he notes cheerfully that it does provide propositions ‘as fast as we can think of them’ (CPBRv7 [TK], p. 115). He does claim that the theory does not require that ‘there should actually be a subject which has one of the familiar mental relations to the objects, but it is necessary that there should be some term and some relation by which a complex results having the requisite form and containing the objects in question’ (*ibid.*). It is difficult to know how seriously to take this

use the phrase while he held the multiple relation theory, for on that theory there were no propositions. Considerable searching by Emily Varga failed to turn up any previous use of the term, though Moore (1910, p. 60) speaks of belief, disbelief, and understanding as three attitudes we may have to a proposition.

⁸ Importantly this changed in the final, 1913, version of the multiple relation theory where Russell introduced the notion of a logical form which contributed to the unifying structure of judgments (CPBRv7 [TK], p. 115).

remark. Later, after he had abandoned the multiple relation theory, he objects to the term 'propositional attitude' on the ground that 'attitude' is a psychological term⁹: 'there is no reason to suppose that all the verbs I am talking of are psychological ... One should always remember Spinoza's infinite attributes of the Deity. It is quite likely that there are in the world the analogues of his infinite attributes' (PLA, p. 200). He certainly doesn't mean that God may have thought of all possible propositions, though this would be one way to ensure that there were propositions whenever logic needed them, for this does not avoid the psychologism that is worrying Russell: God would be just another subject, and divine contemplation another 'familiar mental relation'. What is needed is some relation which will produce every possible combination of objects, only this will *ensure* that there are propositions in every case where they are needed. But this relation must be both non-actualizing, in the sense that the terms which have this relation to the given term do not themselves form a complex *inter se*, to avoid offense to Russell's realism, and non-mental (to avoid psychologism). It is very difficult to imagine what sort of a relation this could be, or what sort of object might plausibly occupy its first argument place.

Also, during this period Russell maintained several anti-psychologistic theses. Principally, he maintained an objectivism whereby the nature and being of the objects of knowledge are mind-independent (AR, p. 136). As a result, Russell denied epistemological psychologism, in that he continued to deny that 'knowing makes a difference to what is known' (BR in *CPBRv6*, p. 130), and thus that objects of knowledge including their epistemic properties are objective, and independent of psychological acts of knowing. He further denied logical psychologism, claiming that the laws of logic are also mind independent. 'Abstract truths [such as logical laws] express relations which hold between universals; the mind can recognize these relations, but it cannot create them' (AR, p. 136).

7. RUSSELL'S REPRESENTATIONALISM

While writing the 1913 *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript, Russell abandoned the multiple relation theory of judgment in the face of criticisms from Wittgenstein. Paralyzed by Wittgenstein's objections (see Sommerville 1981), Russell for some time lacked a theory of judgment (his remarks on the topic in 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism' (1918) [*CPBRv8*, pp. 191–200], merely explore the difficulties). At this time he treated propositions linguistically.¹⁰ Although still retaining the semantic property of being the bearers of truth and falsity (PLA, pp. 165), propositions are indicative (or declarative) sentences (*ibid.*), or, more

⁹ In the prison manuscripts written later the same year he prefers the term "propositional occurrences" (MN, pp. 265, 271), though he still occasionally uses 'propositional attitude' (MN, p. 268).

¹⁰ It is not widely appreciated how late Russell came to his interest in language. In *MPD* he dates it to 'about 1917'; before that, he explains, he had thought of language as 'transparent – that is to say, as a medium which could be employed without paying attention to it' (*MPD*, pp. 13-14). His concerns with language was an integral part of his growing interest in neutral monism.

properly speaking, sentence-types. Instead of being complex objects (like facts), propositions are complex symbols (symbols whose parts are also symbols) (PLA, p. 166), whose nature is essentially representational. The defining feature of a symbol is that it is ‘something that “means” something else’ (PLA, p. 167). While Russell declared that he is not willing to explain what he means by the word ‘meaning’ (*ibid.*), he did assert the nature of meaning is inherently psychological.

I think that the notion of meaning is always more or less psychological, and that it is not possible to get a pure logical theory of meaning, nor therefore of symbolism. I think that it is of the very essence of the explanation of what you mean by a symbol to take account of such things as knowing, of cognitive relations, and probably also of association. At any rate I am pretty clear that the theory of symbolism and the use of symbolism is not a thing that can be explained in pure logic without taking account of the various cognitive relations that you may have to things. (PLA, p. 167)

Here, the theory of propositions seems to be replaced with a theory of symbolism. Furthermore, it is with this symbolism that we make inferences, so it is inherently involved in the business of logic. Yet, the symbolism itself cannot be explained independently of psychology.¹¹

On the other hand, while increasing the role psychology had in the theory of propositions, Russell still sought to maintain the objectivity of truth and logic. Truth, on this theory, is explained by a kind of correspondence relation between facts and linguistic propositions.¹² Facts themselves are not either true or false. Rather, ‘a fact is the sort of thing expressed by a whole sentence’ (PLA, p. 164), and ‘the sort of thing that makes a proposition true or false, the sort of thing which is the case when your statement is true and is not the case when your statement is false’ (PLA, p. 171). Most importantly, facts are independent of minds and experience. ‘It is important to observe that facts belong to the objective world. They are not created by our thought or beliefs except in special cases’ (PLA, p. 164).

Almost immediately after giving the lectures which composed ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’ Russell’s philosophy changed quite dramatically, the result of the opportunity for reflection provided by four months in prison in 1918. The first published result of the new philosophy, which he called ‘neutral monism’, was a long paper ‘On

¹¹ It is generally acknowledged that, under Wittgenstein's influence, Russell came to regard the laws of logic as linguistic. But exactly when this change took place is not so clear. Russell didn't write directly on the issue until very much later in 1950 (IMPL in *CPBRv11*), but the view is implied (rather than stated) in occasional remarks much earlier.

¹² On this point, Russell would write in 1959 that ‘I still hold that any proposition other than a tautology, if it is true, is true in virtue of a relation to *fact*, and that facts in general are independent of experience’ (*MPD*, pp. 49-50).

Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean' which appeared in 1919.¹³ The most pronounced feature of the new philosophy was its drive toward naturalism. In this Russell was influenced by the early Wittgenstein, though not by the *Tractatus* which he read only after 'On Propositions' was written.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, naturalism carried in its train a heavy dose of psychologism.¹⁵

Neutral monism saw the entire universe as composed of elements of a single kind of stuff, in itself neutral between physical and mental, but capable of being distinguished as one or the other depending on whether they obeyed the laws of physics or psychology.¹⁶ Some elements (e.g. unperceived material things) obey only the laws of physics; some (e.g. images) obey only those of psychology; and some (e.g. perceptions) obey both types of law. Belief-contents are composed of images, as are the contents of other propositional attitudes, such as hoping, supposing, etc.¹⁷

In 'On Propositions' Russell admits two kinds of propositions: image propositions and word propositions. Both alike are actual complex occurrences, but image-propositions are primary. Russell does not maintain that the use of word-propositions always involves the occurrence of images, but he does maintain that, in those cases where words are used without images, this occurs as a result of what he calls a 'telescoped' process (OP in *CPBRv8*, p. 296; *AMind*, p. 206). 'The primary phenomenon of belief consists of belief in images' (OP, p. 296). 'As a general rule, a word-proposition "means" an image proposition' (OP, p. 297) and this applies to true propositions just as much as false ones. We take up an attitude (such as believing or expecting) towards '[a] complex fact composed of images, having a structure analogous to that of the objective fact which would make the belief true' (*ibid.*). These images give 'the whole content of what is believed' (*ibid.*). As with the multiple relation theory, a correspondence theory of truth is employed. But gone are the direct realist features of the multiple relation theory, propositions on the new theory are entirely representational. The theory is clearly and explicitly psychological. Propositions are no longer composed of things, nor even of sense-data, but of mental images (or of words that depend upon images).

The mere occurrence of an image-proposition in a mind does not constitute a belief in that proposition, for the proposition will occur equally when it is hoped for, or doubted, or

¹³ See Tully 2003 for an account of Russell's transition to neutral monism.

¹⁴ The influence derives from the 'Notes on Logic' of 1913 (Wittgenstein 1913). See Stevens 2006, pp. 111–18, on the similarities (and differences) of Russell's and Wittgenstein's theories.

¹⁵ For a more wide-ranging survey of naturalistic elements in Russell's philosophy, see Baldwin 2003.

¹⁶ In his first neutral monist book, *An Analysis of Mind* (1921), Russell misleadingly called these neutral elements 'sensations'. The term comes from Ernst Mach (Mach 1866), an early neutral monist, and should not be understood as denoting purely psychological elements. In *An Analysis of Matter* (1927), Russell used the more satisfactory term 'event' for the same purpose.

¹⁷ Rather surprisingly Russell does not treat desire as a propositional attitude (*AMind*, ch. 3). Instead he attempts a behaviourist account, a move which seems as unwise as it is unnecessary.

merely conjectured or considered. What turns the occurrence of the proposition into a belief is the feeling of belief that attends it (*AMind*, pp. 176, 233). Russell gives no explicit account of dispositional beliefs, that is, beliefs which we are naturally said to have even while the requisite proposition is not before our mind and consequently is not attended by the appropriate feeling of belief. Explaining belief in terms of a feeling of belief is a very typical device of British empiricism,¹⁸ a philosophy with which Russell in general has much *less* in common than is usually supposed. It is as psychologistic as it is unsatisfactory. There are many occasions on which propositions are entertained with *feelings* of belief and yet not believed; for example, the familiar feeling of hearing one's name called when, because one knows that there is no one around, one nevertheless does not form the belief that one's name was in fact called. More generally, there are many cases when we feel inclined to believe a proposition (i.e., we have a feeling of belief concerning it) but do not believe it because we are aware of defeaters. Conversely, there are occasions on which one believes a proposition – on the basis of overwhelming evidence it is hard to ignore, though one may wish to do so – but about which one has no feeling of belief: a not uncommon state of mind when cherished illusions are newly lost. Nonetheless, distinguishing belief from other propositional attitudes in terms of feelings may be as good an account as can be given within the bounds of the strict naturalism Russell is here embracing.

8. FURTHER ELABORATIONS: THE UNITY PROBLEM REDUX

The details of Russell's new theory of belief are spelled out in greater detail in the second edition of *Principia Mathematica* and in some of its preparatory manuscripts.¹⁹ There Russell changes his terminology again, though not in such a way as to undermine his earlier analysis in 'On Propositions'. He distinguishes now between the actual occurrence (or fact) in the mind of the believer, and what all similar occurrences in the minds of all believers have in common – namely a relation to a certain fact, the fact which makes the beliefs true or false. He calls what all the occurrences have in common a proposition (*CPBRv9*, p. 159). So as not to lose touch altogether with his earlier terminology, we shall distinguish between occurrent propositions and abstract propositions.²⁰ For each abstract proposition, there is a fact *f* such that the proposition has either the relation *T* to *f*, in which case it is true, or the relation *F* to *f*,

¹⁸ Cf. Hume, *Treatise* (Appendix), p. 624; *Enquiry*, v, ii, 39 (p. 48). The theory also has more recent advocates, e.g. Cohen 1992.

¹⁹ Cf. *PM2*, Appendix C; and 'Truth-Functions and Meaning-Functions' (1923), (*CPBRv9*, pp. 156–158); 'What is Meant by "A believes *p*"?' (*CPBvR9*, p. 159).

²⁰ Russell (*PM2*, vol. i, pp. 664–6) distinguishes between factual and assertive propositions, the reasons for this terminology are complex and we will not adopt it here.

in which case it is false (*CPBRv9*, p. 159).²¹ The believer, *A*, a series of occurrences (some of them beliefs), is treated as a relation and

$$A \text{ believes } p = \exists!p \cap C'A \text{ Df.}$$

That is, *A* believes *p* when and only when the intersection of *p* with the field of *A* is non-null, where *p* is the abstract proposition. This, however, is not an adequate analysis, for it does not distinguish the case where *A* believes *p* from the case in which *A* considers *p*, or wishes that *p*, etc. In each such case the intersection of *p* and *C'A* is non-null. The solution to the problem seems to be straightforward: we can distinguish belief from the other propositional attitudes by means of the belief-feeling towards the proposition which Russell introduces in *The Analysis of Mind*. Representing this by '*Bf*' we have the definition:

$$A \text{ believes } p = \exists!p \cap C'A \ \& \ Bf(p) \text{ Df.}$$

But this is less satisfactory than it appears at first sight, for *p* is the abstract proposition and it seems very doubtful that *A* has the belief-feeling towards that. It is surely the occurrent proposition that elicits the belief-feeling. We need to eliminate the abstract proposition *p* from the definiens of '*A* believes *p*'.

This policy is taken up in Appendix C of *PM2*, where Russell is exploring the possibilities of implementing Wittgenstein's extensionality principle, that every proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions (*Wittgenstein 1921*, 5).²² For this project, '*Bf(p)*' has to go, for it is not a truth-function of '*p*'. In the Appendix, Russell attempts to eliminate the proposition, once again by breaking it up into its constituents. Russell says that *A*'s belief that Socrates is Greek consists of two elements (thoughts or ideas): one of which means Socrates and the other of which means Greek. Many different thoughts can mean the same thing, so we have a class of thoughts which mean Socrates and a class of thoughts which mean Greek, α and β respectively. (There is room here for a distinction between occurrent thoughts and abstract thoughts, analogous to that between occurrent and abstract propositions.) The two thoughts that *A* has are related by the relation of predication, *P*. Then '*A* believes that Socrates is Greek' is:

$$(1) \quad (\exists x, y)(x \in \alpha \ \& \ y \in \beta \ \& \ xPy \ \& \ x, y \in C'A)$$

where *C'A* is the field of *A* (*PM2*, vol. i, p. 662):

²¹ This theory is sketched earlier in some of the prison manuscripts of 1918 (*CPBRv6*, pp. 267-269, 270-271).

²² It should be noted that Russell is wise enough not to commit himself to this disastrous project, he is concerned merely to explore its consequences (*PM2*, xiv) - they are not good (as he recognizes). His conclusion is that extensionality holds only for assertive (abstract) propositions and that these do not occur as objects of propositional attitudes (*PM2*, vol. i, pp. 665-666).

$$C'A = \{x: (\exists y)(xAy \vee yAx)\} \text{ (PM, *33.03).}$$

At some point we need to add the belief-feeling '*Bf*' in order to distinguish belief from other propositional attitudes, but we have other, more substantial, issues to deal with first.

The chief difficulty here is the relation *P*. It is not really the predication relation, for it holds between *A*'s occurrent thoughts and it is not *A*'s thought of Socrates that is Greek (let alone that *A*'s thought of Socrates is *A*'s thought of Greek). Nor is it the actual predication relation which holds between Socrates and Greek, for then it would be impossible to believe falsely. Russell says it is 'the relation which holds between our thought of the subject and our thought of the predicate when we believe that the subject has the predicate' (*PM2*, vol. i, p. 662). But this can't be taken as a definition, for then our definition of belief would be circular. Either we need a better definition or we must take *P* to be primitive. Though it is hard to think of *P* as primitive, it is even harder to find a satisfactory definition. Russell, later on in Appendix C and for somewhat different purposes, uses the notation for ordinal couples ' \downarrow ' (see *PM*, *55.01), but this won't do either. Simply using ' $x \downarrow y$ ' will not work, for it is merely the ordered pair <Socrates, Greek,> (where 'Socrates' and 'Greek' represent two occurrent thoughts in *A*), and does not capture the sense in which the latter expresses a property which is to be predicated of the item designated by the former, i.e. it misses exactly what we are trying to capture by the relation '*P*' as distinct from any old ordering-relation between *x* and *y*. Put in terms depressingly familiar in Russell scholarship, what we have lost by ' $x \downarrow y$ ' is the idea of specifically *propositional* unity, as distinct from the generic unity which attends all couples. We need to treat '*P*' in such a way that ' xPy ' represents the occurrent thought that Socrates is Greek. One can well argue that any such theory which treats occurrent propositions as combinations of occurrent thoughts will have to admit some such relation and, in lieu of a satisfactory definition, we might as well take it as primitive. Assuming this, we can use the *Bf* operator to distinguish belief from other propositional attitudes, replacing ' xPy ' in (1) by '*Bf*(xPy)'. Read thus, of course, we cannot take ' xPy ' as an accurate *de dicto* account of what inspires *A*'s feelings of belief, but it seems not impossible to hold that it is a philosophically sophisticated *de re* account of them. Even so, our account is still lacking, for we have only ensured that *A*'s thoughts of Socrates and Greek are elements of *C'A*. What is clearly needed is the assurance that the thought that Greek is predicated of Socrates, accompanied by the appropriate belief-feeling, is part of *A*, i.e., *Bf*(xPy) Putting all this together gives

A believes that Socrates is Greek =

$$(\exists x, y)(x0\alpha \ \& \ y0\beta \ \& \ Bf(xPy) \ \in A \ \& \ x, y0C'A) \text{ Df.}$$

This may be as good an account as we can get within the present framework. Extensionality is, strictly speaking, lost, as Russell recognizes (*PM2*, vol. i, p. 666). '*Bf*' is not an extensional

operator and it takes propositions as operands. So much the worse for extensionality would be the appropriate reaction here. What saves the account as part of a programme of extensionalization, is that the only propositions that can occur as operands of the '*Bf*' operator are occurrent propositions; for abstract propositions, which never occur within propositional attitudes (or other intentional contexts), extensionality is (supposedly, at any rate) maintained. The problem of propositional unity is solved by mere fiat, by postulating '*P*' as a primitive – which, as Russell said on a different occasion, has the advantage of theft over honest toil. But the most troubling aspect of the account concerns the status of xPy which plays a double role: on the one hand it is an actual mental complex, on the other it is a proposition, which ought to (but on the present theory cannot) be something different.²³ One recalls (with some irony) F.H. Bradley's fulminations against the associationists for failing to distinguish the idea as mental image from the idea as meaning (*Bradley 1883*, Bk. I, ch. 1).

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summary, the overall picture presented here is, admittedly, incomplete. It consists merely of a series of snapshots detailing some of the transitions Russell's theory of propositions endured over its development between 1897 and 1925. Yet, when viewed together, these pictures are indicative not only of a tension in Russell's thought, but of a trend to increasingly involve psychology in the explanation of the nature of propositions.

The tension arises from the fact that, while increasingly relying on psychology for his theory of propositions, Russell simultaneously sought to maintain the objectivity of truth and logic. Perhaps it is in view of this tension that, in a 1938 symposium of the Aristotelian Society on the relevance of psychology to logic, Braithwaite would describe Russell as follows:

Russell is the only 'psychologizing' logician whom I know who appears to be at all aware of the philosophical objections to the psychological method of treatment and who makes heroic attempts to meet them. (*1938*, p. 20)

Further, Russell's changing views on the nature of propositions prompted substantial changes to his views on the foundations of logic. For instance, in *MPD*, reflecting on the *Problems of Philosophy*, Russell wrote:

I find, on re-reading, that there is a great deal in it which I still believe in.... But there are other matters on which my views have undergone important changes. I no longer think that the laws of logic are laws of things; on the contrary, I now regard them as purely linguistic. (*MPD*, p. 77)

²³ In this it is typical of what has been called a 'double aspect problem' (*Griffin 1993*), examples of which are endemic in Russell's philosophy.

Although this marks a change from a metaphysical to a linguistic foundation for logical laws, it may not succeed in closing the door to psychologism. Placing logic on a linguistic foundation seems to expose it to the contingencies of psychology, at least to the extent that psychology is involved in explaining linguistic meaning, whether through propositions or mental images.²⁴

As a final remark, it might be said that, if we are right, and Russell continually turned towards psychologism in developing his theory of propositions, then it is surely incorrect to categorically identify analytic philosophy with a thoroughgoing anti-psychologism. For, if Russell cannot be called an analytic philosopher, then who can?

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²⁴ In addition to providing logic its subject matter, the theory of propositions makes a significant contribution to our theories of meaning. In this way, the issue of psychologism is further linked to the theory of meaning. Indeed, some theorists have defined ‘psychologism’ as a thesis asserting that the contents of linguistic expressions are psychological in nature. For example, Ben-Menahem has written that ‘psychologism is a much more specific error than linking philosophy with psychology: it represents a theory of meaning based on private ideas’ (1988, p. 124). Similarly, Brockhaus writes that psychologism is ‘roughly the thesis that the meanings of words are mental entities’ (1991, p. 494). While a proper exploration of this theme is beyond the means of the present paper, it is worthwhile to note that this function of the proposition as being the locus of meaning also factored heavily in Russell’s reasonings about the nature of propositions, and their connection to psychology.

In the *Principles of Mathematics* (1903) Russell wrote that ‘meaning ... is a notion confusedly compounded of logical and psychological elements’ (*POM* §51). While verbal meaning has psychological elements, the meanings of concepts and propositions do not (*ibid.*). Indeed Russell went so far as to say that “[t]he meaning of a proposition or phrase must not be supposed to be something psychological” (*PAD* in *CPBRv4*, p. 316). Yet, by 1938, Russell would reflect that ‘The problem of meaning first led me ... to abandon the anti-psychological opinions which I had previously believed’ (*RPL*, p. 43).

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