RUSSELL'S IDEALIST APPRENTICESHIP: IDEALIST OR REALIST?

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Reviewed by

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This book is about the first theoretic philosophy of Russell up to 1899. The education received by Russell, his intellectual environment and his first philosophical position, neo-Hegelianism, are revisited in the first, second and third chapters. Griffin also explains in the third chapter Russell's decision to work on a system of sciences using a Kantian method (What are the conditions that make possible the experience of the subject-matter of a science?) and employing a structure that is dialectical (in each science there are contradictions which are resolved by passing from one science into a science conceptually broader). Griffin calls this "the Tiergarten programme". The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters deal with Russell's attempts to construct such a system, and are devoted respectively to Geometry, Physics and pure Mathematics. Griffin explains exhaustively Russell's theories and arguments, their difficulties, mistakes and probable origins and influences.

In the seventh chapter, entitled "Logic", Griffin analyzes the influence of Moore, and the most remote antecedent of *The Principles of Mathematics,* Russell's manuscript, *An Analysis of Mathematical Reasoning* (1898). The eighth and last chapter entitled "Relations" is about the conception of those entities held by Russell at that time. This conception would be the key to understanding Russell's evolution towards analytical philosophy. Griffin's great exegetical work makes this book a helpful aid in reading vols. 1 and 2 of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* and *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry* (1897, frequently called *Essay* in the following discussion).

The book under review here deals chiefly with matters of detail, but I think that Griffin does not give us the right keys to understand the evolution of Russell's philosophy. From my point of view, Griffin seems to endorse Russell's own opinion about the evolution of his philosophy: for instance, he seems to give preeminence mainly to Moore's influence and to the change in the conception of relations. Also, the received view concerning Moore's and Rusell's rebellion against English neo-Hegelianism (i.e., mainly Bradley's) remains in Griffin's book, although many elements against that view can be pointed out.

Part I of this review starts by discussing the fourth chapter of the book, "Geometry". It continues with a discussion of those sections of the third chapter which deal with the system of the sciences (§3.3 of Griffin's book, entitled "The Tiergarten Programme") and with the evolution of Russell's philosophy of mathematics (§3.4, entitled "Russell's Mathematical Development"). All of these sections have a common subject: Russell's method and epistemology. In part II, I shall analyze Griffin's sixth chapter, which deals with Russell's conceptions of pure Mathematics. Here we shall see Russell's true reasons for rejecting Cantor, which are missing in Griffin's treatment. In part III, I shall review chapter seven, dealing with Russell's logic at that time. Finally, in part IV, I shall discuss the eighth chapter, which concerns Russell's conception of relations. Here we will see the influence of Bradley in the development of Russell's philosophy, which is almost neglected by Griffin.

I

In the fourth chapter of his book, Griffin strongly criticizes some of the geometric claims made by Russell in *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry* (1897); according to Griffin, Russell makes many mistakes. However, it seems to me that Griffin does not sufficiently exploit this subject in connection with Russell's *philosophical* evolution as it concerns Russell's analytic method. Griffin discusses this method in the third section of the fourth chapter and explains (p. 81) Russell's regressive and progressive method, i.e., the method of analysis and synthesis, which is called by Russell, in the end, the method of analysis.

Griffin continues by describing how Russell uses this method in metrical geometry. First, various metrical geometries are analyzed by Russell in order to determine the basic postulates common to every metrical geometry (this first stage of the method is analysis). This result is then confirmed by the second stage of the method (i.e., synthesis), which begins with the "experiential" subject-matter of metrical geometry . Both stages of the method are supposed to end in the same result: the axioms of

metrical geometry (§§ 4.5 and 4.6 of the fourth chapter of Griffin's book explain these ideas in full detail).

Griffin summarizes (p. 82) the main trait of Russell's method in the following statement: "if reasoning in the science is impossible without some postulate, this postulate must be essential to experience of the subject matter of the science" [cf. Russell 1897, §5], where "essential" means necessary. Griffin makes (pp. 82–83) two objections. First, regarding science: since there is the possibility of alternative axiom systems, the axioms chosen by Russell cannot be necessary. Second, regarding experience: the necessary conditions for the theory intended to be axiomatized do not have to coincide with the necessary conditions for experience.

This second objection refers to a Kantian and even a Bradleyan thesis. Kant's phenomena, or Bradley's appearances, are not bare reality, but the result of cognitive activity. I think this is a reasonable hypothesis. Concerning the first objection, Russell does not claim to offer any axiomatization of a science (in the present sense of the term), though he uses the word "axiom".

According to Richards [*1988*, 60 *ff.*], at that time in England geometry was thought to be a conceptual study, not a formal or logical one. Geometry was the science of space; thus its starting point was to describe it. This description gives rise to definitions and axioms, making it possible to deduce theorems. Yet the criterion of truth for these theorems does not depend mainly upon the axioms and the process of deduction, but upon the fact that they should mean something about our "intuitive" understanding of space. The "axioms" describe the intellectual result of spatial intuition: the concept of space. Russell's method deals with these elements and not with deductions. This has to do with Russell's conception of implication at that time. Russell in 1898 [Russell 1990, paper 18] mantained that the relation of implication takes place between concepts: the antecedent must be a complex concept and thus it can be defined by means of its consequents [Rodríguez-Consuegra *1991a*, 64–65].

Of course, this is not Russell's point of view in *The Principles*. Russell's logicist method has been characterized by Irvine [*1989*] as the regressive method. In mathematics, for example, mathematicians agree with some theorems such as the Pythagorean theorem because they think that these theorems are far from every reasonable doubt. From these theorems we can deduce more theorems as well as regressively justify other propositions. This regressive justification occurs when we deduce theorems from a proposition: we proceed regressively when we look for the fewest and logically simplest premises from which the theorems can be deduced [Irvine *1989*, 309 *ff.*]. Here we have the difference between the logicist Russell and the neo-Hegelian Russell, a difference that Griffin does not explore.

In the same section (section three of the third chapter), Griffin deals with the dialectic structure of the system of sciences, and in the following section (section four of the third chapter), entitled "Russell's Mathematical Development (1893–1900)", he argues against Richard's thesis about the weight of semantic matters on Russell's philosophical evolution. Griffin (p. 97) rightly argues that epistemological matters are more important. He believes that the key is intuition (in the Kantian sense): Russell tries to reconcile psychologism and logic in the *Essay*, but afterwards, Moore persuades Russell that he fails (p. 96, note 49, but Griffin on pp. 133–134 rightly specifies that Moore's arguments fail). In the *Essay*, according to Griffin (p. 97), what Russell takes to be philosophically important in a science is that which depends upon intuition. But as his work develops, Russell comes to regard intuition as less and less important and finally it disappears.

According to Griffin (pp. 98–99), we can observe a first reaction against intuition in Russell's early papers: the formalism of "On the Axioms of Geometry" (1899) [Russell *1990*, 394–415]. Griffin (pp. 143-144) maintains that this formalist and abstract tendency is restrained by intuition. But this statement about intuition is not coherent with what he says on pages 131 and 132, where Russell appears as an anti-intuitionist by connecting intuition with psychologism. I agree with what Griffin says on pp.135 *ff.* that Russell's interest in projective geometry is related to its intuitional aspects and that geometrical intuition is important for Russell (p. 158). But in my opinion Griffin wrongly ascribes to Russell the idea that intuition is a form of imagination. As a matter of fact, Russell refuses the epistemological importance of imagination in contrast to the importance of conceptualization and description [Russell *1897*, §§ 68, 183, 193].

Russell regards intuition in another Kantian sense: as a presentation of an individual [Hintikka *1973*, Ch. V, § 9 *ff.*]. Russell's opinion is that projective geometry contains the correct concept of the mutual externality between different things (form of externality), and that without it, it's impossible to experience different individuals. Moreover, I think (see section II of this review) that in the *Essay*, Russell tries to show that the world is a plurality of individuals, which is independent of how they are known [Russell *1897*, §193].

The fourth chapter of Griffin's book deals with geometry in the scheme of Russell's system of the sciences. The first section not only reviews the philosophy of space and time of Kant's followers at that time, but also Russell's role within this philosophy. The next two sections describe Russell's investigations towards the *Essay*. This book is the subject of the remaining sections of the chapter.

Griffin here maintains that transcendental arguments concerning synthesis in Russell's method always fail. Griffin thinks (p. 134) that the

transcendental method has to gain new ground beyond that which can be achieved by drawing mere analytical consequences (whose necessity is merely conceptual). However, Griffin stresses that the difference between the neo-Hegelian Russell and the analytical Russell is his refusal of Kant's transcendental method and also stresses that Russell's way of using philosophical analysis comes from that method. But he doesn't explain it. He only says that Russell rejects Kant because Moore criticizes the psychologism of the *Essay*, but Griffin rightly stresses that Moore's arguments fail (pp. 306 and 133-134). Nevertheless, Griffin afterwards says that though Moore may lose this battle, he wins the war. How is this possible?

We can resolve these problems if we agree that Russell, like many other philosophers from ancient Greece, always uses the method of analysis and synthesis, and if we grant that transcendental arguments are characterized by their contents (they deal with *a priori* or necessary conditions for knowledge), Russell can then obtain necessity when he analyzes the components of a concept, for example, the concept of knowledge. This necessity is a conceptual necessity, and this alone is all that Russell requires (see below). It is important to point out that Russell's work deals with concepts and not with propositions (or theories) because at that time he still had not developed a logicist conception. Russell does not move across deductions from premises to conclusion and from conclusion to premises; his axioms do not axiomatize. For example, in projective geometry Russell only searches for a concept, the concept of the difference between things (form of externality), and the axioms can only describe the elements of the concept.

At this point we can remember the philosophical plan of Russell's *Essay* which is Kantian and new at the same time. What are the (necessary) conditions of the possibility (the concept) of experience (empiric knowledge)? Russell's answer, in chapter four of his *Essay*, is: a plurality of real things that are related. Russell Kantianly extracts from geometry the concept of this plurality (*Essay*, third chapter). Here, Russell works with the *concept* (*possibilitas*) of experience (empiric knowledge) and the *concept* of mutual externality between different things (form of externality) that come from projective geometry. The existential meaning of these concepts and analyses relies on granting to ourselves the existence of some knowledge and the existence of *real* different things. Russell's argument for this last question is in the fourth chapter of his *Essay* and he will not go beyond that which can be achieved by drawing mere analytical consequences. Let us take a look at the argument.

First we can certainly observe idealistic efforts in Russell's physics (Griffin deals with this in the fifth chapter), but it is not clear that Russell's *Essay* was idealist. Why would an idealist say: "Owing to the constitution of the *mind,* experience will be impossible unless the *world* accepts certain adjectives. . . . For these axioms [of Geometry] and these

only, are necessarily true of any world in which experience is possible."? [Russell *1897*, §181, Russell's emphasis]. Furthermore, Russell maintains, against something which is peculiar to idealism, that the world cannot be a series (of phenomena — Kant; of appearances — Bradley) because in this case there would not be substantial complexity (Russell needs this for his theory of judgment) and that world ". . . would be like a Leibnizian monad, without any God outside it to prearrange its changes. Causality, in such a world, could not be applied, and change would be wholly inexplicable" [*ibid.*, §191]. Two important difficulties arise here: first, if somebody was a pluralist and an idealist then this person would have to be a monadist; but Russell rejects Leibniz in the *Essay*. Second, Griffin is surprised (p.130) at Russell's direct realism in perception [Russell *1897*, §2] but leaves this datum behind and mantains that the fundamental argument of the *Essay* is an argument against solipsism (*ibid.* p. 170; see too p. 83). This is true in "The A priori of Geometry" of 1896 [Russell *1983*, paper 44], but in relation to the *Essay* I do not think so. I differ from Griffin (in the fourth chapter of his book) in the conception of the argumentative structure of the *Essay*. This is my proposal: First, after the "Introduction" and the first two historical chapters, the third chapter works out the concept of the reciprocal exteriority of real different things (form of externality) through the regressive and progressive method applied to projective geometry. Regressively, Russell [*1897*, §§118-125] obtains three axioms and three corresponding properties. Progressively, they are deduced from the form of externality [*ibid.*, §§ 126-140]. Second, in the fourth chapter [*ibid.*, §§ 180-193], Russell arrives regressively at the conclusion that the world consists of a plurality of non-serial entities. The premises are that empiric knowledge is identity-unity (of the subject of reality) in diversity-plurality (of its attributes) and that knowledge uses the principle of causality. If we accept these reasons and if knowledge exists, the world is a plurality of entities: real diversity (needed by knowledge) is proved. (Futhermore, the rest of the chapter is not the exposition of a manifold of useful dialectical paradoxes but Russell states that the unity in knowledge comes from reality: spatial order refers to atomic matter whose connections furnish this unity [Russell *1897*, § 208]; the world is a plurality of entities truly related by a relation that inheres within the related whole).

II

Russell's pluralism is constant and we can find it again in pure Mathematics, which is analyzed by Griffin in the sixth chapter. Russell thinks that numbers are counting numbers and he rejects infinitesimals, limits and Cantor's set theory. The problem, then, is how to reconstruct calculus. Griffin's opinion (pp. 235–243) is that Russell rejects Cantor

because of Cantor's theory of numbers as well as his rejection of infinitesimals and limits; this last repulse is a result of Russell's deficient mathematics. Griffin explains (p. 243 *ff.*) to us Russell's mathematical arguments against the continuum and other philosophical arguments against its intelligibility (*ibid.*, p. 247 *ff.* and p. 253 *ff.*), then Griffin writes (p. 247) that Russell, because of the above, claims support for his own atomistic conception of quantity. Why does Russell claim all of this to be so? We can give credit to his mathematical education.

In my opinion this is too circumstantial. Griffin could take into account other possibilities. For example, Anellis [*1987a* & *1987b*] thinks that Russell's arithmetical and geometrical atomisms (related to Boscovich's atomism that underlies Russell's geometry in the *Essay*) are dependent on a *philosophical* position: atomistic pluralism. According to Anellis, Russell mantains that "the individual (mathematical) objects in the universe are physical units and the concept of the unit is the reference for the pure abstraction, the number *one*" [Anellis *1987b*, 308]. This coheres with the position of the previous part of this review.

Rodríguez-Consuegra [*1991a*, 86–90] agrees with this role of atomism but he also adds its connection to epistemology. Cantor uses a concept of intuition too close to imagination for Russell to accept. Furthermore, although Russell and Cantor agree upon the search for the essence of concepts, they disagree about the criterion of this essence. Cantor, instead of using the usual sense of words in order to obtain the true meaning of concepts, intends to construct the true meaning by means of previously defined concepts. Then, the possibility to finish the analysis with fundamental individual entities, the objective counterpart of concepts, disappears. This was unacceptable for Russell.[1]

I think that Griffin neglects these aspects because he is too loyal to Russell's self-understanding. This is constant in his book and I think it damages his attempt to provide a clear view of Russell's philosophy at the time.

III

In chapter seven of his book, Griffin deals with the most remote antecedent of *The Principles of Mathematics,* that is *An Analysis of Mathematical Reasoning* of 1898 [Russell *1990*, paper 18]. In this manuscript Russell tries to find the *a priori* foundations of mathematics: the basic concepts and propositions of mathematics (p. 273).

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[1] Linsky has pointed out the ontological side of Rodriguez-Consuegra thesis: Russell's doctrine of terms in *The Principles of Mathematics* "shows" an inconsistency with Cantor's theorem [Linsky *1992*, 260].

To do that, Russell reduces mathematical judgments to their constituent terms. In this way he obtains a classification of these terms: the entities which constitute the world. Predicates are terms as well, and they can function as meanings (i.e., as non-terms), when they function as predicates such as those in a proposition. This difference allows Russell to avoid Bradley's argument against relations (p. 278), which worries him and will go on worrying him (see the next section of this review). But the "transformation" of predicates at this time has problems and opens the way for Russell's relational account of predication, and with it, for a return to Bradley's objection (p. 280). We shall see (part IV of this review) the importance of this objection for Russell. But Griffin, in spite of Bradley's objection, does not explain how and why Russell accepts the relational account of predication.

The crux of this matter lies in the referentialist theory of meaning and in an atomistic pluralism of *external* relations, predicates and things. I agree with Rodríguez-Consuegra [*1991a*, 215] when he maintains that Russell's pluralism is only possible by starting from the impossibility of admitting predicates that are mere linguistic appearances without ontological implications. Moreover, it is not only placing subject and predicate at the same level that makes it possible to regard relations as entities genuinely external [*ibidem.*], but relations must be external if Russell's atomistic pluralism holds up, as Bradley himself pointed out [Rodríguez-Consuegra *1992a*, 66].

IV

The last chapter deals with relations as the key to understanding Russell's philosophical development. The first section discusses Russell's conception of antinomies which articulate his dialectical system. These antinomies come together in "the contradiction of relativity" which indicates internal relations as the origin of these antinomies. The next section is an admirable and detailed analysis of Russell's doctrines of relations and an attempt at clarifying the position of Bradley. The next two sections are devoted, respectively, to *An Analysis of Mathematical Reasoning,* and to the influence of Leibniz. Griffin finishes this chapter, and the book, with a section about the contradiction of relativity and about Russell's paper "The Clasification of Relations" of 1899 [Russell *1990*, paper 16], where Russell maintains his new view on relations: external relations.

In this last section, Griffin shows that Russell's option between external and internal relations is caused by technical reasons: internal conceptions make asymmetric relations imposible. This and the connection

between pluralism and external relations (see sections II and III of this review) are powerful reasons for Russell's choice.

But in this section, Griffin again loses the key to Russell's evolution. For instance, Griffin does not quote the end of "The Clasification of Relations" (1899): "Finally, I must confess that the above theory raises a very difficult question. When two terms have a relation, is the relation related to each? To answer affirmatively would lead at once to an endless regress; to answer negatively leaves it inexplicable how the relation can in any way belong to the terms. (. . .) To solve this difficulty — if indeed it be soluble — would, I conceive, be the most valuable contribution which a modern philosopher could possibly make to philosophy." [Russell *1990*, 146].

The "difficult question", which Russell summarizes, is Bradley's argument against relations (external and internal) which is explained in chapter III of *Appearance and Reality*. The end of Russell's text is very important: to solve this difficulty would be *"the most valuable contribution which a modern philosopher could possibly make to philosophy"*. The sentence speaks for itself. However, Griffin (p. 280) only briefly mentions this difficulty without developing it, and he doesn't talk about its importance for Russell.

According to Russell and the received view, Russell's choice on external relations causes his rejection of neo-Hegelian philosophy and with it the solution to the contradictions in Russell's early philosophy. But Russell maintains the external conception of relations in "The Clasification of Relations" and there, we have seen, Russell cannot solve the Bradleyan argument against relations (*external* and internal). Moreover, Rodríguez-Consuegra [*1992b*, 204] finds difficulties in a fundamental point of Russell's analytic method: ". . .when we try to eliminate a "form" by resorting to a proposition which has the same form, . . ." These difficulties have the form of the Bradleyan argument against relations. From this we can see that the importance of this "difficult question" is not due to an occasional situation but to a fundamental trait in Russell's philosophy. Bradley is therefore very important in the rise of analytical philosophy, although not in Russell's view. However, Griffin agrees again with this Russellian view.[2]

In conclusion, although admirable in exegetic details, Griffin's book gives us neither the keys to understand Russell's evolution up to 1899 nor the connection between the problems in Russell's philosophy and the very important contributions of the philosopher Francis Herbert Bradley.

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[2] Furthermore, we can see that analytic philosophy is strongly linked with earlier philosophy. For example, we can find many of Russell's philosophical theses in Bradley's writings. See [Rodríguez-Consuegra *1991b* and *1992a*].

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