

Guido Imaguire, *Russells Frühphilosophie: Propositionen, Realismus und die sprachontologische Wende*, Georg Olms Verlag: Hildesheim–Zürich–New York, 2001, Reihe “Studien und Materialien zur Geschichte der Philosophie”, vol. 58, 227 + viii pages, € 58.

### 1. Opening: Russell in Germany

German philosophers were among the first to creatively assimilate Bertrand Russell’s philosophy. In 1908 Kurt Grelling and Leonard Nelson, two pupils of David Hilbert and Edmund Husserl in Göttingen, published the paper “Remarks on the Ideas of Paradox by Russell and Burali-Forti” in which the so-called Grelling Paradox was first formulated. (Grelling and Nelson 1908) Hilbert made many efforts to establish a chair in exact philosophy, on the model of the program for exact philosophy put forward by Russell.<sup>1</sup> Eventually he succeeded, and the newly founded chair was occupied by his protégé and friend Nelson in 1919. Soon after he received the chair, however, Nelson became obsessed with political activity against the rise of the right radicalism in Germany which absorbed all his powers – this to such an extent that he died of physical exhaustion in 1927 at the age of 45. (Torbov 2005)

Grelling was estranged by the political strivings of his friend Nelson and soon moved to Berlin to work with Hans Reichenbach. Among other things, in 1929 he published the well informed paper “Realism and Logic: An Investigation of Russell’s Metaphysics” in *The Monist* and in 1936 “The Logical Paradoxes” in *Mind*. At the same time, Grelling translated Russell’s *The Analysis of Mind* into German in 1927, *The ABC of Relativity* in 1928, *The Analysis of Matter* in 1929, and *An Outline of Philosophy* in 1930.<sup>2</sup>

Another example of a creative reception of Russell’s philosophy in Germany during this period is that of Rudolf Carnap. We know from his “Autobiography” that Russell’s influence on him was formative. Indeed, Carnap’s *Der Raum* (1922) and *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* (1928) were, *pace* alternative claims of Michael Friedman and Alan Richardson, decisively inspired with Russell’s ideas.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this tradition of pro-

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<sup>1</sup> On Russell’s influence on Hilbert in the years 1910–14 see Mancosu 2003.

<sup>2</sup> It is easily possible that Grelling’s intensive work on Russell informed the other participants of the Berlin group for scientific philosophy, Reichenbach, in particular, with good knowledge of Russell.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson and Friedman claim, in contrast, that Carnap was massively influenced by the German neo-Kantians of the period. (cf. Richardson 1998, Friedman 2000) For a critique on their thesis see Milkov 2004.

ductive reception of Russell's philosophy in Germany soon ended. Carnap moved in 1926 to Vienna and then to Prague, only to immigrate to the United States in 1936. After Hitler came to power in 1933, Grelling immigrated to Belgium but was subsequently captured by the Nazis and sent to Auschwitz where he was exterminated in September 1942.

The situation in Germany today with regard to Russell studies is different from that of the early years of the twentieth century. It is true that for decades now serious efforts have been made to revive analytic philosophy in the country. Unfortunately, Russell is not among the authors which are seriously investigated; he is used mainly for didactical purposes, as propaedeutic. In line with these developments, many of Russell's books have been translated into German.<sup>4</sup> Some of them, especially *The Problems of Philosophy*, are regularly discussed in undergraduate seminars of philosophy departments. This, however, scarcely promotes a profound knowledge of his philosophy.

This state of Russell studies in Germany is reflected in the following two facts. (1) There are several publishing houses in the country which issue series on "Past Masters" in philosophy: Campus Verlag (Frankfurt), Junius Verlag (Hamburg), Beck Verlag (Munich), Herder Verlag (Freiburg), and Fischer Verlag (Frankfurt), among others. But there is no book on Russell in any of these series. The only introductory book on Russell in German today is the Ernst Sandvoss volume (Sandvoss 1980) published by Rowolt Verlag that appeared in the "Bildmonographien" series in which biographical data (with pictures) have prominence at the costs of theoretical analysis.

(2) Indeed, there are some good investigations conducted by German authors on early analytic philosophers. These early analytic philosophers are, however, all German-speaking authors. Such investigations are Wolfgang Carl's book on Frege (Carl 1994) and Joachim Schulte books on Wittgenstein (Schulte 1992, 1995) which were also translated into English. Thomas Mormann's book on Carnap (Mormann 2000) is also of good quality. Unfortunately, there is no book on Russell of a similar standing. The books on Russell published in Germany in the last decades are typically dissertations which demonstrate that the post-graduate student have reached certain

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<sup>4</sup> Some of them follow old translations of Russell from the 1930s.

level of knowledge of parts of Russell's philosophy. (e.g. Bornet 1991,<sup>5</sup> Rheinwald 1988, and Tatievskaya 2005) They are anything but mature achievements in Russell studies.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. My Overall Impression of Imaguire's Book

Guido Imaguire's recent book, *Russell's Early Philosophy: Propositions, Realism, and the Linguistic-Ontological Turn*, is a typical example in this respect. It is the work of a young scholar who is well-versed in Quine, David Lewis, and the others. He apparently sees his task as putting the philosophy of Russell in the scheme of analytic philosophy, as he understands it. The well-informed student of Russell, however, can easily see that the author is entering the realm of Russell studies for the first time. Imaguire's endeavor is, apparently, to outline and deliver a unifying picture of Russell's philosophy. As we are going to see in the pages to come, he succeeds in this, though only at the cost of a series of oversimplifications.

The author claims, in particular, that the whole philosophy of Russell is divided into two parts: before and after July 1905. His philosophy before "On Denoting" is called by Imaguire "Russell's early philosophy"; his philosophy after this paper is called "Russell's later philosophy". According to Imaguire, Russell's early philosophy was radically realistic and his later philosophy moderately realistic. This moderateness is claimed to be a consequence of the use of the Occam's razor which does not tolerate the assumption of superfluous existences. (p. 188)

From the technical perspective, the book profits from the newly published manuscripts volumes two, three and four of Russell's *Collected Papers*; it is actually the first book in German in which this new material is used. Furthermore, the book is firmly based on Peter Hylton's 1990 classic *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, and is also influenced by Paul Hager's 1994 *Continuity and Change in the Development of Russell's Philosophy*.

Imaguire's book has four chapters: Chapter I, "Propositional Realism" – Chapter II, "Theory of Relations and Pluralism" – Chapter III, "Foundations of Mathematics" – Chapter IV, "Critical Realism: Russell's Linguis-

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<sup>5</sup> Gérard Bornet dissertation was actually written and defended not in Germany but in German-speaking Switzerland.

<sup>6</sup> Even the newly published book *One Hundred Years of Russell's Paradox*, edited by the supervisor of Imaguire's dissertation, Godehard Link (see Link 2004), does not disprove this claim. There are few German authors in it who discuss Russell's Paradox specifically in the context of his philosophy.

tic-ontological Turn". My impression is that Chapters I and IV are organically connected and together state the main thesis of the book, while the other two chapters only deliver additional information about what the author calls "Russell's early philosophy". This point determines the order of my exposition of Imaguire's book. After some general comments in the next section, I shall review Chapters I and IV of the book, and then Chapters II and III.

### 3. Imaguire's General Characterization of Russell's Philosophy

As just noted, according to Imaguire, the principal metaphysical *position* of Russell's philosophy was that of realism. He started with a Platonic, or propositional Realism and transformed it in 1905 into a kind of critical, or reductionist realism. (Only a few will find Imaguire's claim convincing. Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) was still informed with a kind of Platonic realism.) This was a turn from naïve and extreme realism to a critical form of realism. (p. 216)

The author further claims that the most important *concept* in Russell's philosophy is that of proposition. (p. 3) Russell changed the term "judgment" to "proposition" in his paper "The Classification of Relations" (read before the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club on Jan. 27, 1899 and first published in Russell 1990) after his and Moore's realistic (anti-idealistic) turn of the summer of 1898. It is not by accident that in the same paper Russell introduced the logic of relations: the two conceptions are intrinsically connected.

Russell's *method* in philosophy, according to Imaguire, is that of analysis of propositions. (p. 2) This method constitutes the unity of Russell's philosophy. (p. 3) It is Imaguire's answer to Paul Hager's book, in which Hager asserts that the unity of Russell's philosophy results from the method of analysis (as such) and the role of relations in such analysis. There is not only unity in Russell's philosophy; his philosophy experienced many changes as well. But a single method runs through all of these changes, and this is the method of analysis of propositions. The same is also true of different aspects of his philosophy. Russell's realism, his pluralism, and as well, his philosophy of mathematics are all run through with a certain kind of analysis of propositions. (p. 217)

### 4. Chapter I: "Propositional Realism"

The task of Chapter I is to show that the central concept of Russell's investigation is proposition. For this purpose Imaguire first reviews Moore's and Bradley's notions of a proposition. Russell introduced propositions into his philosophy following these two authors in the summer of 1898 with his turn towards realism.

My impression is that Imaguire primarily treats Russell's propositions like those of the Austrian realists, in particular Meinong. Indeed, to Imaguire, Russell's propositions are Meinong's possible objects of judgments (p. 38); or his objective complex objects of judgments. (p. 120) Imaguire compares them expressly with the concept of "states of affairs" of Reinach, Stumpf und Marty. (p. 34) This explains why Russell's paper "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions", and its critical pendant "On Denoting", occupy such a prominent place in Imaguire's book.

Imaguire argues that Russell, in his early pre-1905 theory of propositions, accepts the view that these are entities which exist and other entities which subsist; objects in space and time exist, while abstract entities, such as propositions, subsist. Only contradictory objects, such like round square, do not exist. Russell's attitude towards contradictory objects is the difference between him and Meinong in 1904: Meinong embraces even them. Thus, Imaguire notes that existence and subsistence are primitive concepts for Russell, and all existing and subsisting objects fall under one or the other of them. For example, a proposition, when it is a fact, falls under 'existing'. This means that it is not the facts which determine which propositions are true or false. Russell doesn't separate meanings from facts: propositions *are* facts.<sup>7</sup> Imaguire notes further that Russell's identification of the sum of all true propositions with existence, also accepted in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, paves the way for the ontology of possible worlds. (p. 58) It remains unclear why Wittgenstein's logical atomism was closer to the Russell of 1898–1903 than to Russell after 1905 (and especially to Russell from 1912–1918).

Unfortunately, Imaguire fails to mention in his discussion of Russell's propositions that these disappear from his writings with the introduction of the multiple relation theory of judgment around 1910. Another critical remark to Imaguire's treatment of Russell's theory of propositions from 1898–1904 is that in the *Principles*, e.g. in §§ 43 and 65, Russell often speaks as if propositions consist of words. It is far from clear that Russell means by 'proposition' only ontological, non-linguistic entities and not linguistic ones. It is also frustrating that the author is silent about the "Russellian propositions" as introduced into recent discussion of propositional attitudes by David Kaplan as a way of explaining his notion of "direct reference".

## 5. Chapter IV: Critical Realism: Russell's Linguistic-ontological Turn

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<sup>7</sup> Imaguire does not speak of an "identity theory of truth" but this is what theories like this are called in the literature today. (see Dodd 2000)

According to Imaguire, this chapter treats the most important turn in Russell's philosophy, that of 1905. In "On Denoting", Russell introduced the principle of ontological reduction; it was also called by Russell "Occam's Razor".<sup>8</sup> The idea of logical construction plays a central role in the principle of reduction: indeed, only constructed entities can be reduced. (p. 201) That interpretation of Imaguire is certainly incorrect. Russell started to speak of "logical constructions" only in 1914.

Imaguire's interpretation of "On Denoting" is made wholly in (Dummett's interpretation of) Fregean terms. On the differences between Russell and Frege, so widely discussed in the literature, Imaguire says nothing. Here is his story:

Until 1905 Russell believed that language is a "transparent medium" which gives us an unproblematic access to ontology. That is why Russell claimed that "the study of grammar ... is capable of throwing far more light on philosophical questions than is commonly supposed by philosophers." (*Principles*, § 46) Russell jettisoned this belief in "On Denoting" by revealing defects in ordinary language. In particular, he discovered that the form of a sentence hides and disguises the form of the proposition. That is why philosophers must concentrate their efforts on criticizing language. To be more precise, language must be purified in the direction of an ideal language. This was a real linguistic turn!

In connection with these ideas of Russell, Imaguire sees the theory of descriptions as a new theory of logical analysis. In particular, whereas before 1905 Russell was occupied with analyzing propositions, after he introduced the theory of descriptions he was occupied with analyzing sentences. (p. 192)

The theory of descriptions is also seen as the beginning of a new, critical realism. It critically views assumptions of existence suggested by the form of our particular language. (p. 194) This disproves naïve realism and establishes a much more consistent and moderate realism. This is due to the fact that "On Denoting" eliminates Meinong's presupposition that there is a real object corresponding to every meaningful expression. (p. 185) In the last pages of his book, Imaguire claims that this interpretation also explains Russell's philosophy from 1912–1918. In these years Russell eliminated the physical objects he accepted in *The Problems of Philosophy* and replaced them with logical constructions. According to Imaguire, all these developments were a consequence of ideas articulated in "On Denoting". Finally, Imaguire takes the main claim of the theory of descriptions to be that

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<sup>8</sup> It was surely not called by Russell "Occam's Razor". Russell started to speak about "Occam's Razor" only in 1914.

denoting phrases never have meaning in themselves. (p. 183) With this claim Russell accepted the context principle.

I have two main critical remarks on this interpretation of “On Denoting”:

(1) Something similar to the context principle was already accepted in the *Principles* with the theory of denoting phrases which Russell elaborated after he became acquainted with the works of Peano. There he claims that denoting phrases have contextually determined meaning only.<sup>9</sup> bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbb. This explains why Russell considered his turn of August 1900 – and not that of July 1905, as Imaguire tries to persuade us – as the most important in his philosophical development.<sup>10</sup>

(2) Russell was always uncertain about the correctness of the context principle. So his logical atomism, as we find it in “On the Relations of Universals and Particulars”, *Our Knowledge* and in some papers of *Mysticism and Knowledge*, accepts as atoms some individuals (particulars and universals). Only in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* did he accept facts as logical atoms. All this is evidence for the fact that Russell did not become an ardent supporter of the context principle in 1905.<sup>11</sup> Rather, his position on this point was ambiguous.

## 6. Chapter II: Theory of Relations and Pluralism

As already noted, the second and third chapters of Imaguire’s book are not a part of the main story which his book tells. Here is the story Imaguire tells us in Chapter III of his book.

Russell used his thesis of the irreducibility, and hence the reality of relations in order to disprove idealism and to justify his propositional realism. (p. 61) In the *Foundations of Geometry*, he claims that the objects of cognition are complex: in order to know them, we must be able to differentiate them, and in order to differentiate them, they must be external (divergent) to one another. This is the principle of differentiation, which is based on the form of externality of individuals (“terms”). There are at least two forms of externality, space and time, which are most important for humans: Indeed, two time-points can be different only when they are mutually external; in contrast,

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Milkov 2003, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. with this avowal of Russell’s: “The most important year in my intellectual life was the year 1900, and the most important event in this year was my visit to the International Congress of Philosophy in Paris.” p. 12. “My Mental Development”, pp. 3?20.

<sup>11</sup> On this see Milkov 2003, pp. 81 f.

two events can happen together in time. This is our most fundamental a priori knowledge about space and so is the first axiom of geometry.

Russell claims further that points are the main category of geometry; geometry is understood by him as investigating relations between points. (pp. 67 f.) This conception identifies geometrical and physical points. In his philosophy of time Russell criticizes people's inclination to accept the view that time is a property, whereas space is a relation: This belief in the asymmetry between space and time is a prejudice. In fact, space and time have the same – relational – structure. (p. 70) At the end of this chapter Imaguire emphasizes that even before his anti-idealistic turn, Russell was convinced in the importance of relations and believed that they cannot be reduced to properties.

### 7. Chapter III: Foundations of Mathematics

This chapter discusses the structure of Russell's philosophy of mathematics in relation to his realism and his method of propositional analysis. Imaguire's thesis is that "the analysis of propositions is the methodological basis of Russell's philosophy of mathematics" (p. 120).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Russell's fundamental concepts of logic and mathematics originated and were founded in connection with the analysis of propositions. Now, while Chapter I studies propositions from an ontological perspective, Chapter III investigates them from a logical perspective. (p. 147)

Imaguire substantiates his interpretation of Russell's philosophy of mathematics with the fact that in the *Principles* Russell defines mathematics as the set of all absolute general propositions with the form of implication " $p$  implies  $q$ ". Further, the essence of the proposition is the propositional function with a variable. In fact, only when expressed with a variable can a proposition reach the realm of mathematics. This means that only the introduction of variables, and the method of generalizing mathematics which Russell accepted after he became acquainted with the work of Peano, made possible the transition from the theory of propositions to the theory of mathematical propositions.

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<sup>12</sup> In a generalization typical of him, Imaguire claims that "English analytic philosophy initially came into being (and similarly in Germany for Frege) within the framework of the procedure of analysis of mathematical propositions." (p. 121) In truth, Russell introduced the concept of "analytic philosophy" only in March 1911 (Russell 1911), and he never meant by it what Imaguire claims for it here.



The proposition is the most important object for Russell not only in mathematics but also in logic, since logic is interested in inferring propositions from propositions. Logical inference is nothing but a justified transition from one proposition to another. (p. 148)

## 8. Questions of Style

The style of the book is worse than the book itself. Above all, there is a problem with its system of reference: in particular, the Imaguire uses two different systems. In some cases, he lists sources quoted in the book in a six-page bibliography printed at the end of the book. When a work from this list is cited, Imaguire puts the name of the author and the year of publication together with the page-number of the cited material in brackets immediately after the citation. The problem is that he uses another method of reference along with this which places the references in footnotes.

This confusion of two methods of reference in one book is annoying enough. Unfortunately, it is not the whole story. More than this, the author often mixes the two methods into one: Then he often cites sources according to the first method but does not list the source in the bibliography. For example, on p. 198 he mentions a passage from “Smith 1985: 385” despite the fact that there is no “Smith” in bibliography. The same failure is repeated on the next page, where he speaks of “Makin (1995)”, but as with “Smith”, there is no “Makin” in the bibliography. Finally, on p. 203 we find the source “Janet F. Smith *The Russell-Meinong Debate* (1985)” in a footnote, though without the specification of where it was published (in fact, it was published in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 45, pp. 305–350). Even worse, in some places the author simply gives false bibliographical information. So Gideon Makin is called on p. 195 n. 143 “Gideon Making” and his paper “Making Sense of On Denoting” is claimed to have been published in 1985 when, in fact, it was published in 1995 in vol. 105 of *Synthese* on pages 383–412.

There are also problems with hyphenation: In several places, the first vowel is divided from the rest of the word: e.g., “E-xistenz” (cf. pp. 34, 206), or “A-symmetrie“ (p. 76). That kind of hyphenation is not acceptable in any European language. At other times the words are not hyphenated at all (for example, the word “*Propositionssubjekten* [subjects of propositions]” on p. 188), so that the words in the line above are separated with enormous spaces between themselves. And with quotation marks, a passage is often started with German quotation marks only to end with English quotation marks. (e.g., p. 147)

The Index, shorter than two pages, is also strikingly poor. It combines, unusual for German standards, the index of names and of concepts into one. I have already mentioned that Imaguire often refers to the authority of

Peter Hylton, and occasionally also to that of Paul Hager. Unfortunately, we do not find these two names in the Index, nor the names of approximately two-third of the other authors referred to in the book. The concepts are even more badly indexed than the proper names.

## 9. Epilogue

In the lines above I have made many critical remarks on Imaguire's book. In this last section, I want to emphasize that the author's exposition of Russell's thought is for long stretches clear and persuasive. Especially well written are parts of Chapter II, an extract of which was recently published in *Grazer Philosophische Studien*. (Imaguire 2001) Perhaps some beginners in Russell's philosophy will find these fragments of his straight narrative interesting, even stimulating. Imaguire's overall picture of Russell, however, has little to do with the real Russell.

My guess is that Imaguire's failure to give a true picture of the whole of "Russell's early philosophy" is due only to the fact that his theme is too far flung for him at this stage. I cannot preclude that after some years of further study of Russell, he will deliver a more precise treatment of a part of Russell's philosophy. His momentary failure shows only that Russell studies is a rather difficult field to investigate, and one in which academic excellence is only possible after many years of continuing efforts.

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