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A RUSSELLIAN TRADITION? LOGIC AS A PHILOSOPHICAL INSTRUMENT

It is well known that Russell used his new logic as an instrument of philosophical analysis. Already in his (1903), Russell applies logic and mathematics to Kantian antinomies, to Zeno's paradoxes and to the philosophical debates about the infinite. This use will continue after *Principia Mathematica* (1913), as witnessed by Russell (1914). In the twenties and thirties, many thinkers took up the torch, and endeavored to extend the method of logical analysis: Carnap in Germany (1928) of course, but also Nicod in France (1922), and Wiener in America (1921). At the same time, critical voices appeared, as Stebbing (1932) and Wisdom (1931-32) in the UK, which further reinforces the idea that this set of works, aiming at pursuing Russell's project, is a sort of philosophical tradition.

For twenty years, this description has been the subject of a very strong and articulate criticism. Friedman (1999) and Richardson (1998) developed an interpretation of Carnap (arguably the most important figure among Russell's disciples) that downplayed Russell's influence, and that reinserted *Der Aufbau* into the German context of post-Kantian philosophy and phenomenology.

This interpretation (that today has become standard) is convincing in its positive side: there is no doubt that Carnap was extremely involved in the neo-Kantian and Husserlian debates that then agitated the German philosophical scene, and that no understanding of the *Aufbau* is possible without taking into account the particular features of this specific context, far removed from the issues that were raised by Russell.

My claim is however that the standard reading is mistaken in his negative side, when it suggests that Carnap owes absolutely nothing, or very little, to Russell. First, Friedman and Richardson have an oversimplified view of Russell, who is portrayed as a distant offshoot of British empiricism. In particular, they do not insist on Russell's idea that logic can be a new methodological instrument. But most importantly, Friedman and Richardson do not see that Russell's influence is compatible -- and even more, calls for an attention to the particular features of the philosophical context in which Carnap inscribed his work.

Let me explain. The idea that logic can be used as an instrument of philosophical analysis presupposes that logic is philosophically neutral. If logic had philosophical implications, then any use of logical analysis would be suspect to generalize without saying it a particular metaphysical point of view. To say that logic is philosophically neutral ultimately amounts to saying that logic is universal, that it applies to everything, that it is prior to all sciences, and that it is even prior to ontology or metaphysics.

Now, the neutrality hypothesis cannot be postulated as a principle on which everyone in philosophy agrees. That logic is universal and neutral must be proved by the relevance of the logical reconstructions that are made of the ongoing philosophical oppositions. One of the crucial issues in the Russellian analysis is indeed to give voice to each position in the metaphysical debate, so that each side in this debate can recognize in the image that is given of itself, and finally accept the diagnosis delivered by the analysis. This feature explains why the partisans of logical analysis must be very sensitive to the particular and local

characteristics of the philosophical questions they address – for them as well, the proof is in the pudding.

In other words, the claim that logic is universal is not opposed to the idea that logic must account for the specific. On the contrary, if logic is really universal, if it is really metaphysically neutral, then it can manage to represent the particular philosophical positions in conflict with each other. This is why Carnap in Germany, but also Wiener in the USA and Nicod in France, reconstructed various metaphysical point of views, some of them very foreign to Russell's own philosophy (Husserl's phenomenological approach in Carnap, Royce's holistic view in Wiener, Bergson's conception in Nicod). The fact that each of these figures (Carnap, Wiener, Nicod) is deeply involved in the philosophical debates that then agitated their respective countries do not move them away from Russell (as Friedman and Richardson think, which artificially isolate the Carnap case from other similar cases, Nicod and Wiener), but bring them closer to Russell's universalism.

This talk is the beginning of a research on the various ways Russell's logic has been used in philosophy in the twenties and thirties. For the moment, I have studied only three contexts: the German (Carnap), the American (Wiener) and the French (Nicod). To substantiate my claim, I need to explore others. Thus, I intend to work on Chwistek's logical and philosophical works (Poland), and on the Chinese early reception of Russell (especially by FENG Youlan and LI Yuelin). But I would like to know more about the possible receptions of Russell's logic and Russell's philosophy in Russia. In particular, I know that Couturat's rewriting of Russell (1903) has been translated as early as 1913 in Russia, and I wonder if this book has had an impact.

References

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