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Joseph J. Russell

Analysis and Dialectic

Studies in the Logic of Foundation Problems



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IN PIAM MEMORIAM
PATRIS MEI AMATI

Joseph Russell
1896–1965



Joseph J. Russell (photograph taken 1966)

FOREWORD

The present book was written some twenty years ago but it has not lost its topicality, for it contains an important re-assessment of the relations of two main-streams of contemporary philosophy – the Analytical and the Dialectic. Adherents and critics of these traditions tend to assume that they are diametrically opposed, that their roots, concerns and approaches contradict each other, and that no reconciliation is possible. In contradistinction Russell derives both traditions from the common root of the dissatisfaction with the arguments against speculative philosophy. These according to the author leave a lacuna – certain elements of our Weltanschauung have been removed, but they cannot be removed without replacement lest we have an incomplete world view, so incomplete in fact that it cannot be viable. According to Russell part of this vacuum is taken up by the analytical tradition but this tradition is not capable of taking up the remainder of it. That portion of the vacant space is however taken up by the dialectical tradition, which in turn cannot itself handle the whole of the problem. Thus the two reactions to the demise of speculative philosophy appear to be complementary in at least this sense. But the author goes further, for according to him the analytical arguments themselves clearly point to the emergence of dialectical problems, and the dialectical problems themselves need some such background to arise. In this way the lacuna left by the removal of speculative philosophy was filled by the two traditions between them, and it could not have been filled by either of them separately. In a very good sense then these two supposedly opposed schools of thought form a single world view. They are complementary rather than opposed. If Russell is right it becomes important to reassess their relation in some detail for it is never satisfactory to try to give an account by ignoring the other side of the coin. On the contrary, it is imperative to connect and compare the two sides – such a comparison is illuminating for both. In fact such is often the development of science. As physics and chemistry developed they were seen more and more as two sides of an overall view of material phenomena, both benefited vastly from this development. Russell himself provides a not inconsiderable element of such a comparison of the two traditions he is concerned with. Furthermore he brings in a most illuminating comparison with the development of the foundation of mathematics – the analysis of which is of considerable interest in its own right. The re-assessment of the contemporary philosophical scene presented by Russell

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is full and thorough, it is also based on a number of sound and forceful arguments.

This is a book that needed to be written if only in order to draw attention to the amount of sectional-ideological squabbling that took place between the two mainstreams of European thought – squabbles that tended and still tend to obscure the *meritum* of the case. Whether Russell is right or wrong, in the last analysis he has drawn our attention to the fact that the dialogue between the two schools proceeded on lines too far removed from the centrally important considerations. He has also identified some, at least of the considerations that need to be considered in a serious debate of the relative merits and achievements of the two types of approach. This remainder is as timely now as it was at the time when the book was being written, but it might be less of a surprise now.

The book most probably had to be written in the 60-ties, for then the factional fervour was near its zenith. The anti-metaphysical lobby dismissed any dialectical attempts scathingly – and their opponents equally scathingly discussed analytical playing with words. Since then the mutual respect and interest has grown. Since then both traditions have developed, and they have developed in a way that at least to some extent justifies Russell. The analytical philosophers were led to dabble in metaphysics sometimes shamefacedly and not always happily. The dialectic thinkers have come to dabble with variants or alternatives to analytical techniques sometimes gingerly and not always happily.

But serious analyses of the reasons and motivations behind these developments are conspicuous by their absence.

Russell's book is a welcome contribution none the worse for the fact that he anticipates the process rather than commenting on it after it has happened.

Jan Szrednicki

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Almost two decades have passed since the author, my father, finished working on **Analysis and Dialectic**. Given that there has been a lengthy delay in bringing this book into print a brief account of his life and of the history of this book is in order.

Joseph Johnston Russell (1923–1975), my father, was born and brought up in Glasgow, Scotland. He entered the University of Glasgow in 1941 and began his studies as a medical student. A few years later, however, he transferred into the Faculty of Arts and he graduated in 1948 in Philosophy and English Literature. In 1950 he was awarded the Shaw Philosophical Fellowship by the University of Edinburgh. From 1952 to 1954 he held a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship at Yale University.

Between 1948 and 1963, with the exception of the two years he studied at Yale, he was a lecturer in the Department of Logic at Glasgow University. In 1963 he accepted an appointment at the University of Kansas (Lawrence) in the United States and stayed there until 1966 when he moved to Canada to take up a post at Queen's University at Kingston. After a lengthy illness he died at Kingston nine years later.

While at Yale in the early 1950's J.J. Russell concentrated his studies on logic, the philosophy of mathematics, and the philosophy of science. At this time (and I quote from a private document of his written in 1961) he "came to the firm conclusion that the further development of these investigations . . . demands a radical re-thinking of the problematic of philosophy". He therefore undertook "a study of the contemporary crisis in philosophy, and developed some theses about its nature and solution". In this way **Analysis and Dialectic** took shape through the 1950's and early 1960's. The text of this work, as it is here published, is based upon my father's final manuscript which was completed in 1965. The text itself is almost completely unaltered.

In early 1966 Allen and Unwin accepted **Analysis and Dialectic** for the "Muirhead Library of Philosophy" on condition that the author agree to make certain alterations in the text shortening its length. However he felt unable to comply with the suggested alterations. I am sure that he recognised that the work was

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long and heavy, particularly for modern tastes, but believed that the "main point of the book is made by the cumulative effect of many analyses". Given that this was his explicitly expressed view on this matter I have deemed it inappropriate to alter or reduce the text itself in any substantial way. It may well be that, were the author still alive and preparing the book for publication himself, more changes would be made. However, failing this, it is better to present the book in the way he wrote it.

Although the text itself was entirely complete some editorial work has had to be done to prepare the manuscript for publication. In the first place the footnotes and references were frequently fragmentary and incomplete. To remedy this problem I have reorganized the footnotes and supplied all the necessary information in a bibliography. The bibliography covers all the books and articles referred to in the text and footnotes as well as a few other works which the author clearly had in mind but did not explicitly mention. (I have not, however, tried to cover any of the literature which has been published since 1965, except for the occasional reference to new editions or translations of some works.)

A more important change has been the alteration of the format of the original manuscript. Because the book is long and heavy it seemed wise to break it down into smaller sections. Originally the book comprised seven chapters divided into "parts" (e.g., Chapter One is divided into three parts, the first of which is entitled "Revolution in Philosophy"). These divisions and titles have been left intact and are representative of the author's intentions. I have further divided the book into "sections" and, occasionally, "sub-sections". Throughout the text sections are indicated by arabic numerals in square brackets and bold-type (e.g., **[2]**); sub-sections are indicated by letters in square brackets and bold-type (e.g., **[b]**). Sections and sub-sections are listed in the table of contents where I have provided my own titles for them. I have implemented these changes with two primary objectives in mind: (1) to help the reader find his way about the book more easily than he would have otherwise; and (2) to give the reader some idea of the topic under discussion in each section and sub-section. The reader may also find a survey of the table of contents of some help in seeing the structure of the argument(s) of the book.

It will be seen that some parts have lent themselves to being further divided and given appropriate titles more readily than others. The reader should keep in mind that these features of the book are entirely my responsibility and may be ignored if so desired.

As the table of contents is quite detailed I have decided to add only an index of names.

Originally there was neither introduction nor preface for **Analysis and Dialectic**. However, I think that a few remarks describing the general scope, aims and contentions of the book will help the reader to find his bearings more easily. I believe

that the concluding remarks at the end of the book may be of some help in this regard:

... [T]he set of interrelated essays of which ... [this book] is composed is an exploration of themes rather than an argument towards a firm conclusion. Its general context is the contemporary mood of self-criticism in philosophical analysis. I [am here] ... concerned to argue, first, that some accepted techniques of analysis are inappropriately applied to the foundation-problems of philosophy; and that this leads, secondly, to a renewed inquiry about the logical nature of those problems and the ways in which they differ from the topics to which these techniques were successfully applied.

The foundation-problems of philosophy to which the accepted techniques of analysis have been inappropriately applied are termed "dialectical problems". This passage continues:

Dialectical problems are themselves disclosed by analysis, and they arise within limits which philosophical analysis can itself state. There is, therefore, for me, no question of going back on the original negative or critical elements of the analytic movement, although it now seems clear that even these elements are more complex than they seemed in the moment of controversy or polemic. [In this work] ... re-emphasize the prescriptive function of philosophical reflection, and [endeavour] to weaken the easy assumption that this function can be reduced to the proposal of mere conventions which are justified, in so far as they are justified, by reference to utilitarian and pragmatic considerations. The understanding of the prescriptive function of philosophy is tied to that of the nature of dialectical problems and to the source of these problems in certain kinds of extremely complex linguistic and conceptual change.

In short, as the above indicates, the central concern of **Analysis and Dialectic** is to describe and clarify the origins and nature of foundation-problems and to propound a method for their diagnosis and resolution.

Finally, a very brief survey of the course of the book may be of some help. The first chapter gives an account of the disintegration of "speculative philosophy" and the reorientation of philosophy towards analytic techniques. The second examines the origins and nature of the philosophical problems associated with the foundations of mathematics. Chapter Three introduces the notion of a dialectical problem and shows that the foundation-problems of mathematics are in fact problems of this nature (i.e. are metaphysical problems). It is argued that dialectical problems disclose ambiguities and obscurities in our conceptual system which it is the function of philosophy to remove. It is shown that neither descriptive analysis nor revisionary logical analysis can resolve these difficulties. In Chapter Four it is argued that dialectical problems are primarily and essentially rooted in an am-

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biguity or indeterminacy in the patterns of action involved in using a conceptual system. The last three chapters of the book centre about the theme of the essential unity of theory and practice. In Chapter Five it is shown that dialectical ambiguity cannot be eliminated by "purely intellectualist methods" (i.e., by means of theoretical reason alone). In Chapter Six the thesis of "the primacy of the practical" and its implications are examined in some detail. It is there argued that such a thesis is, ultimately, incoherent and intractably paradoxical. Having established that one cannot give an adequate account of either theoretical or practical reason without describing the operation of the other – and therefore that neither has "primacy" over the other – the last chapter endeavours to clarify the nature of the unity of theory and practice. That is to say, it is an exploration of "the concept of the unity of reason". In this chapter it is shown how a non-arbitrary resolution of dialectical problems is possible through the critical evaluation of "dialectical theses". The logic of such evaluation is described by way of an account of "the method of assaying".

Acknowledgements

Unfortunately my father never wrote down the names of those whom he would wish to thank for helping him in the preparation of his book. However, among those whom, I am certain, he would have mentioned on this occasion are the following: the late W.G. MacLagan, the late C.A. Campbell, the late Edward S. Robinson, Peter Dawson, Errol Harris, Charles Landesman and Howard Kahane. Above all, I am sure that the author would have wanted to express his gratitude to his wife, Janet.

I am grateful to Fraser Cowley and particularly to Martyn Estall for being so kind as to organize my father's papers and manuscripts shortly after he died. I would also like to acknowledge my deep gratitude to Martyn Estall and D.L.C. MacLachlan for their careful proof-reading of the final (edited) text and for their very helpful advice. Finally, I would like to thank Sue and Charlie Howes for their patient and diligent preparation of the camera-ready copy of the manuscript. As for my own part in bringing this book into print, I would simply like to record the fact that it is but the slightest expression of the esteem and affection in which I remember my father.

Paul Russell
St. John's College,
Cambridge, England
February, 1983

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