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6 Russell on Judgment and the Judging Subject

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Introduction

Nowadays there is a revival of Russell's multiple relation theory of judgment (*MRTJ*). Philosophers such as Peter Hanks aim to develop a non-propositional theory of judgment and see in Russell's theory an inspiring example. Most readers of Russell focus on the question whether Russell's theory of judgment is able to account for the logical articulation of what is judged: the theory seems neither to account for the difference between the judgment that Desdemona loves Cassio and the judgment that Cassio loves Desdemona (the direction problem), nor for the fact that what is judged has an articulated unity: that it is more than a collection of terms, and that not all terms can form a unity (the articulated unity problem). This question stimulated Russell several times to come up with a new variant of the theory. It is true that this question is a driving force for Russell, but underlying it lies a deeper problem that I would like to address in this paper.

This deeper problem shows itself in three problematic issues that we may identify in Russell's theory:

- 1 Russell understands judgment as an external relation between terms to be represented by a predicate; judgment is thus one of the propositional attitudes, and there is no explanation of the unique role that judgment and assertion have in logic. No account can thus be given of the logical notion of judgment, of the uniqueness of this notion and its relation to truth.
- 2 On Russell's account, the empirical subject is part of the analysis of judgment. As judgment is for Russell the bearer of truth and falsity, such bearers are thus psychological phenomena. If judgment and assertion is then to play a role in logic through the assertion sign, as it does in *Principia Mathematica*, Russell's logic will be infected with psychologism.
- 3 Judgment is for Russell a relation between independently existing objects and a mind. This means that he is not able to account for the logical articulation of what is judged, as mentioned above.

This paper aims to show that these three issues are three sides of the same *fundamental problem*: Russell gives an analysis of judgment as an empirical

phenomenon, addressing the question of what judgment is from an *external* point of view, while taking belief-attributions as paradigmatic.

In the first section, I will explain the difference between a logical and an empirical notion of judgment by means of a discussion of Frege, in whose work this distinction is particularly clear. In Section 2, we will see how Russell struggles to find an account of the logical notion of assertion in *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903). In the end, Russell realizes that he is not able to give a consistent account of it, and this may explain why a psychological, empirical notion of assertion and judgment becomes more prominent in his writings after 1903. In Section 3, I will analyze the different variants of the *MRTJ* that Russell proposed between 1910 and 1918. Finally, in Section 4, I will argue that there is a *lacuna* in all these variants. Russell's external approach leads him to understand the notion of judgment through cases of belief-attribution. He never addresses the question of what it is for a first person to utter a declarative sentence with assertive force. Understanding judgment from an external point of view alone makes it impossible to understand the relevance of judgment and assertion for logic. Russell did not see that, in order to give an analysis of "Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio", one first has to give an account of a first person's paradigmatic use of the sentence "Desdemona loves Cassio".

1 The logical and the empirical notion of judgment

In the *Grundgesetze* Frege writes: "the Begriffsschrift presentation of a judgment by means of the sign '┌' I call a *Begriffsschriftsatz* or *Satz* for short" (GG, §5). A *Begriffsschriftsatz* or *Satz* is for Frege not merely a sentence in his Begriffsschrift notation, for the *Satz* comes with assertive force. It is the announcement of a judgment, indicated by the judgment stroke. A *Begriffsschriftsatz* is thus a *Begriffsschrift assertion*; it is either an axiom or a theorem of the logical system as presented in the *Begriffsschrift* (1879) or the *Grundgesetze* (GG, 1893). Judgment, as Frege writes in the same section of the *Grundgesetze*, is "the acknowledgment of the truth of a thought". This remark on judgment is not meant as a definition, as though judgment were a special case of acknowledgment. Judgment is *sui generis*, one of a kind. As we can see, Frege elucidates *judgment* in terms of *thought* and *truth*, not in terms of the *judging subject*. This does not mean, though, that the judging agent is irrelevant to the assertion. As Frege writes elsewhere: "With this judgment stroke I close a sentence, ... and the content of the sentence thus closed I assert as being true by the same sign" (Frege 1980, p. 22, 1896, p. 377; cf. BS, §2). The judgment stroke, which is strictly speaking only the "┌" part of the sign "┐", thus serves to indicate that he himself acknowledges the truth of the thought. This does not mean that the name of the judging agent, Gottlob Frege, must accompany the judgment stroke. The judgment stroke is not to indicate that Frege has made the judgment at a particular moment in time. Rather, the reader should make these judgments by herself; in this

sense Frege's ideography is meant to provoke a first person's engagement. Judgment is, for Frege, a *first-person* notion, where this notion is not to be understood in a subjective sense: "If I assert something as true, I do not want to speak about myself, about a process in my mind. And in order to understand it, one need not know who asserted it" (WB, pp. 126, 127).¹

In the *Grundgesetze*, Frege calls the laws of logic the *laws of truth* (GG, p. xvi); at other places, he prefers to say that it is assertive force rather than truth that contains the essence of logic (NS, p. 272). The aspect of assertive force in the logical notion of judgment shows it is a *normative* notion, for it essentially relates the notions of judgment and truth. This normative element is already present in the idea that the judging agent is a first person. Anyone who has read the *Begriffsschrift* with understanding is entitled to make the next step. It also means that, if the writer realizes that he has made a mistake while constructing the *Begriffsschrift*, he has to withdraw his judgment and delete the assertion sign at the relevant place. One should be able to support the *Begriffsschrift* assertions with grounds (cf. BS, p. 21, §11). That is, assertions come with obligations. As a normative notion essentially related to truth, judgment cannot be understood as one of the so-called propositional attitudes, as though judgment were a mental attitude directed toward a proposition. If one really wants to use the direction metaphor, one could say: in judgment, one is directed toward truth by mediation of a thought as *Sinn*. Yet metaphors such as "aiming" or "being directed" at truth easily slip into a psychological reading. The logical notion of judgment is *internally* related to truth: judgment cannot be understood without its relation to truth.

In contemporary introductions to philosophy of language, Frege's view on judgment and belief presented in the second half of "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" (1892) is often taken as a starting point. After having given an account of the logical notion of judgment in the first half of the paper (Frege 1892, p. 35), Frege presents in the second half of the paper an analysis of sentences such as "John believes that snow is white". In these passages, Frege is concerned with an *empirical* notion of belief, which is to be distinguished from the logical notion of judgment. The abovementioned sentence may be represented as *Bab*, where *Bxy* stands for the relation of believing, *a* for John, and *b* for the thought that snow is white. The empirical notion of believing is thus a relation to be referred to by a two-place predicate, where one empty place is to be filled by a name of the judging subject, and the other by a name of the relevant thought. Belief is thus analyzed from an external point of view, and its analysis does not essentially differ from an analysis that one may give of a propositional attitude like a yes-no question. Judgment's special relation to truth has disappeared in the analysis. In the sentence "John believes that snow is white", one describes an empirical phenomenon in the world. One looks at someone else's belief from the outside, without considering the question whether the belief is correct. One may still speak of judgment here, but then one has to realize that the notion is an empirical one, to be distinguished from the normative notion of judgment that is needed in logic.

In the next section, we will see that in *The Principles of Mathematics* Russell likewise allows for a distinction between a logical and a psychological notion of judgment or assertion. Russell does not see, though, that Frege's understanding of the logical notion of judgment in terms of the first person is actually different from a psychological understanding.

2 Russell's distinction between logical and psychological assertion (1903–1904)

In 1903, in *The Principles of Mathematics*, Russell makes a distinction between “a proposition actually asserted, and a proposition considered merely as a complex concept” (PoM, §38). Russell considers implication to be a relation between propositions as complex concepts, such as *A being greater than B*. Inference, though, is not a relation between propositions as complex concepts. It is a relation “between asserted propositions”, that is, between assertions that have the form *A is greater than B*. But if there are two notions involved here, the notion of a proposition as complex concept and the notion of assertion, the question arises: how is Russell to explain the validity of our inference rules? Russell rightly understands the inference rules to apply to assertions. In *Modus Ponens*, one of the premises is, say, the assertion *A is greater than B*, while the other premise is the assertion *A being greater than B implies B being greater than C*. For Russell, *A is greater than B* and *A being greater than B* are different in kind, the former being an assertion, the latter being a propositional complex. How, then, can there be an identical *p* that would explain the validity of *Modus Ponens*?

For Russell, assertions can be taken in either a logical or a psychological sense (PoM, §§38, 52). The *psychological assertion* is an external, binary relation between a subject and a proposition as complex concept, consisting of concepts and objects.² Russell's psychological notion of assertion is inspired by Moore's paper “The Nature of Judgment”. For Moore, any cognitive relation, including the act of judgment, is an external relation directed toward concepts which have an independent being: it is indifferent to their nature whether anybody thinks these concepts or not (Moore 1899, p. 179). For Moore, the object of judgment is an objective, timeless proposition composed of concepts. Russell puts it somewhat differently in the *Principles of Mathematics*: propositions are composed of things and concepts or relations. These things, concepts, and relations are *terms*, which are “immutable and indestructible” (PoM, §47). Propositions as complex concepts are likewise independent of time, space, and the judging subject. This psychological notion of judgment will be the dominant one for Russell after 1903. In 1904, Russell understands judgment as a binary relation between a subject and a proposition as complex; judgment or belief is a certain attitude toward propositions (1973, p. 76). In response to the idealist account of judgment, Russell takes judgment, like acquaintance, to be an external relation: both the subject and the object of judgment, the proposition, have being independently

of the judging relation. And although the notion of judgment will undergo an important development in the years to come, the idea that judging is an external relation will stay in place.

One might think that assertions in a logical sense are also to be explained in terms of propositions as complex concepts, but this is not the route Russell takes. In what sense do logical assertions differ from propositions as complex concepts? Russell starts with a grammatical distinction. There is a difference in form between “A is greater than B” and “Caesar died”, on the one hand, and “A’s being greater than B” and “the death of Caesar”, on the other – a *syntactic difference*, which can be captured by saying that the declarative sentence contains a finite form of the verb that is lacking in the second type of phrase (PoM, §38).³ For Russell in 1903, distinctions in grammar form a guide to logical distinctions (§46). *Caesar died* has a special quality “which, in a non-psychological sense, may be called being *asserted*” (§38). A logical assertion is an articulated unity, which “contains its own truth or falsehood as an element” (§52). Of course, if *A is greater than B* is true, then the complex concept *A being greater than B* is true as well. But in the latter case, the propositional concept is merely “externally related” to its truth, whereas *A is greater than B* contains its truth-value as a constitutive element. Logical assertions and complex concepts thus seem to share something, but they cannot be identified. So, how does Russell then explain the logical assertion? Russell ends these sections with a proposal: “only true propositions are asserted” (§52). What does he mean by that?

Russell aims to explain this issue in the appendix on Frege’s writings: “assertion does not seem to be a constituent of an asserted proposition, although it is, in some sense, contained in an asserted proposition”. Russell realizes that the distinguishing element of logical assertion cannot be a concept that is added to the proposition *p* as a complex concept, for “‘*p*’s truth’ is not the same as *p* asserted”. *John being ill’s truth* or *John being ill being true* is not an assertion, but a complex concept. According to Russell, in the logical account of assertion, one should not “divorce assertion from truth”. *Psychological assertions* may be true or false, but *logical assertions*, taking the role of premises in one’s logical system, have to be true propositions (PoM, §478).

Can Russell now explain that there is an identical element, an identical *p*, in the two premises of an inference? We have seen that for Russell the logical assertion has the form *John is ill*. In order to account for the identical *p* in cases of MP, one may try to understand the logical assertion *John is ill* as consisting of the propositional concept *John being ill* plus the element of assertion or truth. This combination should then be identical to *John is ill*, and we would thus have an identical *p* in the premises, namely, *John being ill*. But can there be for Russell an element *John being ill* in the logical assertion *John is ill*? How are we to understand the relation between the complex concept *John being ill*, which would then be part of the logical assertion, and its truth? It cannot be an external relation of the propositional concept to truth, for that would merely constitute another proposition as a complex concept, namely, *John being ill being true*. But if the propositional concept had an

internal relation to truth, its identity would be constituted by this relation, and it would thus no longer be a propositional concept, which means that there would be no identical *p* in the two premises. If Russell wants to be able to explain the validity of inference, it seems the only possibility left for him is to say that the logical assertion *John is ill* may occur as part of other assertions, such as conditional ones. Russell thus identifies logical assertions with true propositions; all true propositions in an inference are thus assertions, even when these propositions only form part of a premise (PoM, §479; cf. §483). This means, though, that the logical difference between asserted and unasserted contents is no longer accounted for.

For Russell, the logical notion of assertion, like the notion of proposition as a complex concept, is explained in ontological terms. It consists of terms, objects, concepts, and relations, in such a way that the assertion is true. This means that the problem raised above connects to the better-known problem of the dual nature of (ontological) verbs, concepts, and relations in the *Principles*. Relations may occur as actually relating, thereby accounting for the articulated unity of *A is greater than B* (PoM, §54). Or they may occur as (ontological) subjects or terms, the relations we speak about, thereby losing their relating aspect; this is how they occur in propositional concepts like *A being greater than B* or *Desdemona loving Cassio*. If, then, the relation were to occur as relating, *A is greater than B* could not be false, an issue that will reappear in Russell's later theory. Given his single ontological category of terms as mutually independent entities (PoM, Preface, p. xxiii), Russell is not able to account for the articulated unity of the ontological proposition (cf. Hylton 1984, p. 381, 2010, pp. 539–540). Even if one admits that these relations actually relate in the case of *A is greater than B*, one is left with the question of how Russell is to account for the unity of the proposition as complex concept, where relations do not occur as relating.

Russell is thus not able to present a logical notion of assertion that can account for the logical difference between asserted and unasserted contents and, at the same time, for the validity of the inference rules. Already shortly after he wrote the *Principles* and the *Appendix*, Russell wrote in a letter to Frege, May 24, 1903: “the judgment stroke means for me a different direction towards a [complex] object. Complexes are true or false: if one judges, one aims at a true complex; although we may err, of course”.⁴ Propositions as complex concepts are called complexes here. The judgment stroke, which ought to be an indication of the logical notion of assertion as it is part of a Begriffsschrift, is presented by Russell as indicating a judgment in the *psychological* sense, as a binary relation between the judging subject and a propositional complex. It is now possible for him to account for the validity of logical inference and, at the same time, for the distinction between asserted and unasserted contents. For there is an identical *p*, expressing the proposition as complex, which may occur both asserted and unasserted. The price, though, is high, for it introduces a form of psychologism into Russell's logic, as we will see below.

The notion of logical assertion should have made it possible for Russell to capture the unique relation that propositions have to truth and our special

interest in them. But now that he is not able to give an account of the logical, normative notion of assertion, Russell realizes that he is not able to account for the special status that true propositions have for us. It now seems to him that some propositions are true, and some are false, “just as some roses are red and some are white” (Russell 1973 [1904], p. 75). He is thus in need of “an ultimate ethical proposition: ‘It is good to believe true propositions, and bad to believe false ones’” (p. 76).⁵ In order to account for our special interest in true propositions, there is nothing left but to assume an ultimate ethical proposition, which may be either true or false, and may or may not be endorsed. Immediately following the comparison with roses, Russell writes: “belief is a certain attitude towards propositions”, and he seems to have no option but to understand judgment in the same terms. Judgment and belief are for Russell propositional attitudes: attitudes directed toward a complex entity. Russell thus understands judgment as a phenomenon in the empirical world.

Russell started with a distinction between a logical and a psychological notion. But because he was then not able to account for the logical notion of assertion, he draws the conclusion that we can talk of assertion or judgment only in psychological terms. In consequence, when Russell uses the assertion sign in the 1910 *Principia Mathematica*, he falls back on this psychological notion of assertion:

The sign “ $\vdash$ ”, called the “assertion-sign”, means that what follows is asserted. It is required for distinguishing a complete proposition, which *we* assert, from any subordinate propositions contained in it but not asserted ... if “ $\vdash (p \rightarrow p)$ ” occurs, it is to be taken as a complete assertion convicting *the authors* of error unless the proposition “ $(p \rightarrow p)$ ” is true (as it is).

(PM, pp. 8–9, italics added)

As the italicized terms make clear, Russell’s assertion sign indicates that the assertion is made by “the authors”, Whitehead and Russell. In terms of the distinction between the logical and the psychological notion of assertion from the *Principles*, the assertion-sign indicates a psychological assertion, for the authors may be in error. At one place in the *Principia Mathematica*, Russell writes that the assertion-sign may be read as “it is true that” (p. 96), immediately adding that this is philosophically not exactly what it means. No further explanation is given. Regarding Russell, Wittgenstein was right: the assertion-sign merely indicates that the author holds these sentences to be true; thus it cannot have any logical significance (TLP, 4. 442).

3 The multiple relation theory of judgment (1910–1918)

After 1905, Russell no longer acknowledged objective propositions. True propositions are identified with facts, but there are no objective falsehoods.⁶ Judgments are now the bearers of truth and falsity. In order to get to his new parsimonious ontology, Russell makes a radical distinction between the

grammatical structure of a sentence and its logical structure. What seem to be singular terms with an independent meaning have to be given a contextual definition. This is most famously done for definite descriptions in “On Denoting” (1905), and a similar approach is given in “On the Nature of Truth and Falsehood” (1910) for that-clauses. I will discuss each of these issues in turn.

In 1905, Russell does not allow non-referring terms to have a meaning or *Sinn*. So how are we to give meaning to sentences like “The (present) king of France is bald”? According to Russell, a denoting phrase such as a definite description is not to be treated as a singular term, for it is not a *complete symbol* with an independent meaning: “a denoting phrase is essentially *part* of a sentence” (Russell 1968a, p. 51). We cannot understand the phrase “the King of France” without analyzing the sentence as a whole in which it occurs, for “denoting phrases have no meaning in isolation” (p. 55). Already in 1905, these logical-semantic considerations are consolidated by the epistemic principle of acquaintance: “in every proposition that we can apprehend ... all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance” (p. 56). As Russell puts it in his paper “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description” (1910–1911), acquaintance is a cognitive relation between a subject and an object, where the object is completely present to the mind. Acquaintance is a relation between two terms, between the object of acquaintance and a subject who thinks. The relation of acquaintance is an external one: it does not constitute the identity of its terms. Explaining that he prefers the term “acquaintance” to “presentation”, Russell writes: “I wish to preserve the dualism of subject and object in my terminology. ... Hence I prefer the word *acquaintance*, because it emphasizes the need of a subject which is acquainted” (Russell 1910–1911, p. 109). In order to understand a logically analyzed sentence, we have to be acquainted with the objects referred to by its terms, whether these objects are particulars or universals. Since these objects are guaranteed to exist by being the object of acquaintance, there is no possibility of lack of meaning or truth-value.

Russell makes clear in “On the Nature of Truth and Falsehood” that the method developed for definite descriptions can be applied to that-clauses. That-clauses are incomplete symbols that can be given only a contextual definition.

It seems evident that the phrase “that so-and-so” has no complete meaning by itself, which would enable it to denote a definite object as (e.g.) the word “Socrates” does. We feel that the phrase “that so-and-so” is essentially incomplete, and only acquires full significance when words are added so as to express a judgment, e.g. “I believe that so-and-so”, “I deny that so-and-so”, “I hope that so-and-so”.

(Russell 1992b, p. 119; cf. *PM* p. 46)

In 1910, Russell endorsed a non-propositional theory of judgment, in which the act of judgment is the bearer of truth and falsity. As it is possible to give a contextual definition of the that-clause, one need no longer understand it

as referring to a proposition. Russell seems no longer in need of propositions as complex concepts fulfilling the role of bearers of truth and falsity (as explained in Section 2). How is one to understand, then, the bearer of truth and falsity, the act of judgment? Russell understands the act of judging as a relation between the judging subject and the objects and relations the judgment is about. If one's judgment is true, the objects and relations form a complex unity, a fact; if the judgment is false, there is no such complex unity, but there are the objects and relations the judgment is about. So, in the case of false judgment, we do think of something, though not of a complex unity.

Already in a paper from 1907, Russell had proposed this new, correspondence theory of truth. Russell's theory seems to have been provoked by a criticism of the traditional correspondence theory of truth given by the British idealist H.H. Joachim in *The Nature of Truth* (1906, pp. 126–129). According to Joachim, such a theory cannot account for error, for error would then be “the thinking of nothing” (p. 127), as there is no object corresponding to the belief. As Russell writes in reaction to Joachim, it is true that error is belief in nothing, but this does not mean that error is “thinking of nothing”, because it is thinking of the objects the belief is about (Russell 1906–1907, p. 47).⁷ Russell then proposes an early variant of the *MRTJ* that I will leave aside.

Why does Russell use the indexical “I” in the passage from 1910 quoted above? For him it is a singular term that guarantees its object to exist, and this object is the only thinking subject the judging agent may be acquainted with (Russell 1910–1911, p. 110). This special use of “I” seems to be unessential to his analysis of judgment, for in subsequent analyses Russell takes “Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio” as his proto-typical example (*PoP*, p. 75). Othello's judgment that Desdemona loves Cassio is an external relation between four terms: Othello's mind, Desdemona, love as a non-relating term, and Cassio, which are all before the mind of the judging agent. Othello's judgment relates each of these terms, thereby creating a judgmental complex. Because there is no actual complex, no fact, in which Desdemona loves Cassio, Othello's judgment is false. Other judgments may involve fewer or more terms. Essential to all variants of the *MRTJ* that is still to come is that the objects the judgment is about, Desdemona, love and Cassio, do not actually form a unity by being judged, for that would commit Russell to objective falsehoods.⁸ The thesis that judgment is an external relation is crucial for Russell, for in this way he can account for the fact that what is judged is independent of the act of judging. It also means that the judging subject is just one term among the other terms of the relation of judging; the judging subject is an object among others that can be named. Judging, the judging subject, and what is judged are all part of the empirical world that can be described, just as one would describe any empirical event. As we will see in the next section, this means that the act of judging is represented by a predicate, *J*, just as one would express an act of loving by the predicate *L*.

The first reaction to Russell's theory came from G.F. Stout, who was Russell's tutor at Cambridge in 1893/1894. If loving is to occur as a term, and

not as a relating relation, there is no distinction between the judgment that Desdemona loves Cassio and the judgment that Cassio loves Desdemona (Stout 1910–1911, p. 203). This is known as the direction or order problem. Russell answers this point in a letter quoted by Stout. According to Russell, the act of judging is to order the elements of the judgment (p. 203; cf. *PoP*, p. 73). The problem with this position, Stout writes, is that it cannot account for error. Because the elements of the judgment are the objects themselves about which one judges, the objects would actually be related by the act of judging. By making the judgment, Othello would thus actually relate Desdemona with Cassio by means of loving, that is, Desdemona would then actually love Cassio (Stout 1910–1911, p. 204). Furthermore, Russell's position seems to fall back on the traditional account of judgment in which the content of judgment is constituted by the act of judging (p. 205). Stout gives a full criticism of Russell's position in 1914–1915, in his paper "Mr. Russell's Theory of Judgment". Even if the new version of the theory solved the direction problem, there is still the problem that love may occur in the place of A or B, and the other way round. On Russell's new account, Stout writes, the judging relation may pass from *loving* to A and from A to B, thus allowing for the nonsense judgment *Loving As B* (Stout 1914–1915, p. 341).⁹ As Russell puts the problem in 1913, "It is also necessary to know how these three terms are to be combined" (1984a, p. 111). This is the unity or mode-of-combination problem. This problem applies as much to *A loves B* as to *A is similar to B*, and the problem is thus independent of the direction problem. Like Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* (5.5422), Stout understands that Russell is not able to account for the logical articulation of what is judged. As Michael Potter puts it in connection with Wittgenstein's *Notes on Logic*, Russell "did not have the resources to distinguish, in what is judged, between terms ... which derive from verbs and those ... which do not" (Potter 2009, p. 122). Russell is not able to account for the special articulated unity of *A loves B*. As a result, he is not able to exclude nonsense judgments.

In *Theory of Knowledge*, the unfinished manuscript that Russell was working on in 1913, he proposes to add a further component to the analysis of judgment: a logical form of the object-complex. In this way he would be able to account for the fact that we understand each of the different constituents as unified without actualizing the judged object-complex. Russell gives the following analysis of judgment: $J(S, F, x_1, x_2, \dots x_n)$ (1984a, p. 144). J is a predicate standing for the relation of judging; in S one is to substitute a name for the judging subject; the term to be substituted for F is to denote the logical form; and the names that will take the place of the object variables x will denote the objects the belief is about, including the relation as term. In the case that the subject S judges that A is similar to B , the judgment will be represented as $J\{S, A, B, \text{similarity}, R(x,y)\}$, where $R(x,y)$ represents the logical form of the object-complex, namely, *something has some relation to something* (p. 114). As Russell now sees it, the act of judgment is not to account for the unity of the object-complex, for then the judging agent would

actually unite *A*, *B*, and similarity, and, as Stout pointed out, we would be unable to give an account of falsehood. In his new proposal, Russell introduces the simple notion of the logical form of the object-complex, that is, the complex that would exist if the judgment were true. Such forms are actual, abstract objects that we should be able to be acquainted with. For Russell, this logical form is a fact, a proposition that cannot be false. We understand such simple propositions, comparable to the way we are acquainted with objects. Although Russell takes logical forms to be facts, he also takes them to be simple objects. And this means that when we apprehend them, the possibility of error is excluded: “For since understanding is here a direct relation of the subject to a single object, the possibility of untruth does not arise” (p. 132). Introducing the notion of logical form raises many questions.¹⁰ What are they, and how can we apprehend them? And in what sense are they true without the possibility of being false? Most importantly, though, does the notion of logical form solve the problem for which it was introduced? How can the non-relating relation of similarity be related to the logical form such that we understand *A*, similarity, and *B* as connected in the right way, while not thereby actualizing the object-complex?

In 1918, in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, Russell will come to realize, with due reverence to Wittgenstein, that belief is a new beast for our zoo: a new species (1968b, p. 226).¹¹ Russell now admits that “loves” in the Othello example cannot stand for a non-relating relation; the ontological verb *loves* has to unify Desdemona and Cassio, even when the judgment is false. What he does not question in 1918, though, is the role of the judging subject in the analysis: the subject is still one of the terms of the external relation of judging; it is an empirical object that can be named. He never ends up presenting an improved, more satisfying version of the *MRTJ*.¹²

4 An evaluation of Russell’s *MRTJ*

We have mentioned in the introduction that Russell’s *MRTJ* gives rise to three problematic issues. The *first issue* is that Russell is not able to account for the uniqueness of judgment: its special relation to truth. As we have seen, in 1903 Russell understood the logical notion of assertion as a true proposition of the form *A is greater than B*. This account would make it possible to understand the logical notions of assertion and judgment to be normative; their internal relation to truth would give them a unique status. His explanation of the logical notion of assertion made it impossible, however, to account for the distinction between asserted and unasserted contents, and, at the same time, for the validity of *Modus Ponens*. Without an explanation of the logical notion, Russell considered only a psychological account of assertion possible. In 1904, Russell understood judgment as a binary relation between a subject and a proposition as complex. In response to the idealist account of judgment, Russell took judgment to be an external relation: both the subject and the object of judgment, the proposition, have being independently of the

judging relation. In this analysis, *judgment* is no longer internally related to truth, and no account is given of judgment as a normative notion. Already at that time, Russell analyzed judgment from an external point of view, as though judgment were one event among others in the world.

From that time on, Russell's focus was on an empirical notion of belief or judgment. For this reason, Russell prefers the term "belief" over "judgment". The former denotes more clearly a "particular dated event which may be studied empirically by psychology" (Russell 1984a, p. 136). Russell associates the term "judgment" with the rationalist and idealist tradition. "Belief" is not taken in its dispositional sense, but rather as what philosophers today sometimes call "occurrent belief". With his preference for "belief", Russell makes explicit his view that judgment is an empirical phenomenon.

Because of this external approach to judgment, Russell is not able to say what distinguishes judging from mere predicating. When Russell gives an analysis of belief-attributions, he uses a predicate-expression, predicate for short, J , to represent the act of judging. Actually, it has to be represented by different predicates, J_1, J_2 , etc., depending on the number of terms in the multiple relation of judging. But that is not the issue I want to raise. The point is that Russell uses a predicate to refer to judging, which is made possible by his understanding of judging as an external relation between a subject and several objects. In describing the event of judging, one attributes the relation of judging to the judging subject and the different objects about which the judgment is made. Judging is thus a special case of attribution or predication and may thus be represented by a predicate. The uniqueness of judgment and its special relation to truth is thus not accounted for. When Russell realizes in 1913 that he somehow has to account for the distinction between judging and mere understanding, he gives the following analysis of understanding that A is similar to B : $U \{S, A, B, \text{similarity}, R(x,y)\}$ (1984a, p. 117). Now the predicate U takes the place of the predicate J . No explanation of the distinction between judging and understanding is given. Since all the other propositional attitudes are analyzed similarly, judging is just one of the propositional attitudes. By analyzing judgment from an external point of view, and taking his starting point in belief-attributions, Russell is forced to understand Othello's judging as part of the *content* expressed by the sentence "Othello judges that ...".

This leads us to *the second issue* in MRTJ. Because Russell sees judgment as an external, empirical relation between independently existing terms, the judging subject is just one object among others. Russell is in need of a judging subject as one of the terms of the relation of judging. In the analysis of judgment $J(S, F, x_1, x_2, \dots x_n)$, one has to substitute a name for S , standing for the mind of the judging subject. As we have seen in the preceding section, we have to be acquainted with all the terms of the judgment. As one is not acquainted with any other mind, the subject term can only be the indexical "I", as referring to one's own mind. In this sense, the judging subject is just one ontological term among others, as one of the terms of the relation of

acquaintance or judging. It is treated as an object in the empirical world. Judgments thus depend upon an empirical notion of subject. If this notion of judgment is then to play a part in the logic of *Principia Mathematica*, through the presence of the assertion sign, Russell's logical system is threatened by a form of psychologism.

This analysis of judgment stands in sharp contrast to Frege's presentation of judgment by means of the judgment stroke, as presented in the first section, where no name for the judging agent is needed, and judging is not an external relation. Frege's judgment stroke captures the paradigmatic first-person use of a declarative sentence to make an assertion.¹³ The first person using the judgment stroke to announce a judgment is not to be represented by a name or the indexical "I", for the judgment stroke does not express any content. Nor does one need a name for the judging agent, for the logical judgment is not a relation between terms, one of them being the judging subject. When Russell aims at an analysis of judgment by means of belief-attributions, such as "Othello judges that Desdemona loves Cassio", he is forced to consider both the judging subject and the act of judging as part of the content; he is describing an empirical event in the world.

In this context, it is of interest that Russell himself saw a connection between his understanding of judgment as a relation and the idea that the judging subject is part of the analysis of judgment. In 1919, Russell gives the following reason for leaving the *MRTJ* behind:

The act, or subject, is schematically convenient, but not empirically discoverable. It seems to serve the same sort of purpose as is served by points ... [in] mathematics. All these things have to be *constructed*, not postulated: they are not the stuff of the world ... The first effect of the rejection of the subject is to render necessary a less relational theory of mental occurrences.

(Russell 1968c, pp. 305–306)

From 1919 on, Russell takes his empiricist account of judgment more seriously: he now sees propositions as psychological entities, and belief as a feeling (p. 311). His new empiricism does not allow for a subject, and he no longer understands belief as a relation.

Finally, we come to *the third issue*. In giving an analysis of judgment, Russell takes as an example a sentence expressing Othello's judgment:

- 1 "Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio".

He thus starts the analysis of judgment with a belief-attribution. As we have seen in the preceding section, this leaves the special articulation of sentence (2) unexplained:

- 2 "Desdemona loves Cassio".

Russell treats sentence (2) as it occurs in (1) as a mere list of terms. The problem with this account is that it aims to give an analysis of (1) without first giving an account of (2), “Desdemona loves Cassio”. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein points out that a correct explanation of sentences such as (1) must show that it is impossible to judge nonsense (5.5422). This means that one has to account for the articulated unity of (2) before one can give an account of (1). Wittgenstein’s point is that a proper symbolism takes care of the articulated unity of sentences like (2). A proper symbolism has to be developed for a language that counts as language for me, who utters the sentence “Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio”. This means that (2), “Desdemona loves Cassio”, has to have a meaning for me as a user of the language, before I can give an analysis of (1). This significant sentence says something, asserts something (*TLP*, 4.21), namely, that Desdemona loves Cassio. We do not need a judging subject in the analysis, because the first person is already there as soon as there is language: the language is my language, the language I understand. Wittgenstein thus sees that, in order to solve the issues in Russell’s account of judgment, one first has to address the question what a judgment is for me, as a first person. The three issues that were raised in this paper with respect to Russell’s account of judgment are three sides of the same problem, namely, that Russell has neglected the question what it is for a first person to judge.

Conclusion

Studies on Russell’s *MRTJ* generally focus on the question of how Russell is to account for the logical articulation of what is judged. My aim has been to take a step back, and to understand this question as part of a wider problem. Russell considers judgment from an external point of view, as an empirical phenomenon, and thus gives an analysis of what it is for someone else to make a judgment: how can we give an analysis of “Othello judges that Desdemona loves Cassio”? By taking an external approach to the question what judgment is, he neglects the question what it is for a *first person* to judge by means of an utterance such as “Desdemona loves Cassio”. As a result, his theory of judgment faces several problems: (1) Russell sees judging as an external relation, as one propositional attitude among others, which means that he is not able to account for the uniqueness of judgment and its relation to truth. (2) He takes the empirical subject as part of the analysis of judgment, which infects his logic with psychologism. (3) And, because of his focus on belief-attribution, Russell is not able to account for the unique logical articulation of what is judged.

Russell’s views on these matters have been so influential that it is necessary for all of us to understand what this position implies. When writing the history of early analytic philosophy, one should not forget that an internal, first-personal approach to philosophical issues has been central to Frege’s writings, and to the *Tractatus*, too. I also hope that the reader now sees that an external approach to the question of judgment, with its focus on

belief-attributions and on the idea that judgment is one propositional attitude among others, prevents us from understanding the role that judgment and assertion have to play in logic.¹⁴

Notes

- 1 I have given a more extensive account of Frege's use of the judgment stroke in Van der [Schaar \(2018\)](#).
- 2 The idea is implicitly present in Russell (*PoM*, §§48, 52).
- 3 Jeremy [Kelly \(2013\)](#) develops a consistently syntactic reading of the judgment stroke in reaction to Russell's view.
- 4 Italics mine, MS. The letter is in German: "Also bedeutet für mich der Urtheil[s] strich eine verschiedene Weise des Gerichtetseins auf ein Objekt. Komplexe sind wahr oder falsch: wenn man urtheilt, meint man einen wahren Komplex zu treffen; doch kann man sich natürlich irren" ([Russell 1903](#), p. 242).
- 5 A criticism of Russell's position is nicely formulated by [Joachim \(1906, p. 37\)](#): "The truth or falsity of a Proposition is, so to say, its *flavour*, which we must recognize, if we recognize it at all, immediately: much as we appreciate the flavour of pineapple or the taste of gorgonzola". I will come back to Joachim in the next section.
- 6 His arguments against his former theory are presented in [Russell \(1992b, pp. 119, 120\)](#). A full analysis of these arguments is given in [Sullivan and Johnston \(2018, pp. 154 ff., §6.2.2\)](#).
- 7 To be more precise, Russell writes "because it is thinking of the objects of *the ideas* which constitute the belief" (italics mine, MS).
- 8 On the earlier versions of the *MRTJ*, see [Ito \(2020, p. 126\)](#) and [Sullivan and Johnston \(2018, p. 154\)](#). Ito's paper is of interest to our topic because a distinction is made there between giving an explanation of judgment from a *subjective* point of view, as obtaining "within the mind", and describing judgment from an *objective* point of view, "counting the judging mind itself as a constituent of the judgement" ([Ito 2020, p. 122](#)). I understand the distinction in different terms, though. In Section 1, I contrast the external point of view with a logical, internal point of view, which understands judgment to be a first-person notion. My point is that the latter notion is not to be understood in subjectivistic terms, but is rather a normative notion.
- 9 For a full analysis of Stout's criticism of Russell's theory, see Van der [Schaar \(2013, pp. 101–105\)](#). This does not bring in all the issues that led Russell to change his position.
- 10 On the problems with Russell's notion of logical form, see [Griffin \(1985, p. 224\)](#).
- 11 Fraser [MacBride \(2013\)](#) and Anssi [Korhonen \(2018\)](#) have noted that Russell did not abandon his *MRTJ* during and after writing the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript, but rather continued to hope to come up with a new variant as late as 1918. On the period after 1918, see [Stevens \(2006\)](#).
- 12 In my analysis, I have neglected the notes printed in the appendix to the edition of the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript. In that text, Russell introduces the idea of a neutral fact, which has to replace the notion of logical form. Apparently in direct reaction to Wittgenstein, Russell tries out some analyses of judgment that do not involve a judging subject; see [Russell \(1984b, p. 197\)](#).
- 13 If this is the paradigmatic use of the declarative sentence, the judgment stroke seems to be redundant, as Irad [Kimhi \(2018\)](#), inspired by the *Tractatus*, has argued. Kimhi does allow for a distinction between such paradigmatic uses and non-assertive uses of the declarative in embedded sentences and belief-attributions.
- 14 I thank Gilad Nir for comments on two former versions of this paper.

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