

RUSSELL'S PHILOSOPHICAL EXCHANGES

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Elizabeth R. Eames. *Bertrand Russell's Dialogue with His Contemporaries*.
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This book has two main objectives: (1) "to show the issues that emerged in Russell's exchanges, both published and unpublished, with certain other philosophers"; (2) "to interpret the resulting reciprocal influences and reactions" (p. xv). The issues concerned are supposed to be the most important from the point of view of Russell's philosophical development. Concerning the selection of the philosophers involved, it embraces, within seven chapters, the following: Joachim, Bradley, Moore, Frege, Meinong, Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Schiller, James and Dewey, preceded by an introductory chapter and followed by a global judgment ("The Legacy of the Dialogue").

To attain these aims Professor Eames has made use of a great amount of materials and, remarkably, of a lot of unpublished correspondence in the Russell Archives. However, before I present my detailed criticisms in the following sections, I would like to anticipate two global ones. First, I think that the general treatment of the issues offered does not delve deeply into Russell's most important problems in the various stages of his development in an illuminating way. Thus, although there is little doubt that Eames usually does show the emergence of some important issues, for instance in the unpublished correspondence, I think in general she does not interpret this emergence in the correct context, i.e. by *explaining* the role of those issues in the *actual* development of Russell's philosophy. Second, the selection of the philosophers studied does not seem to me to be satisfactory, for nothing is said about some of the authors who made possible Russell's most important work in several outstanding fields: the foundations of mathematics and the analysis of scientific knowledge, as well as his later evolution towards a more linguistic approach to logic and philosophy.

In the following I shall devote separate sections to Eames' treatment of Russell's interaction with Bradley, Moore, Frege, Whitehead and Wittgenstein, then I shall consider the main gaps in the book and finish with a brief overall judgment.

Bradley was one of the main influences on Russell (and Moore), but I think that Eames' treatment of the interaction with him is not very convincing. Eames does show the emergence of several themes, such as (among others) the following: the subject-predicate mode of analysis; the theory of relations; the theory of meaning; the theory of truth. But in general she follows Russell's presentation of Bradley's doctrines, which are usually misleading without an accurate interpretation. Besides, the treatment offered does not effectively use the material available but only proceeds by scattered quotations,

which often lack the necessary exegesis. A good example may be Russell's criticisms of the subject-predicate pattern. Here I think it is indispensable to say clearly that Bradley was also an enemy of this mode of analysis (which, for him, was the basis for traditional logic, and therefore to be rejected), and his writings contain many examples of this rejection. For Bradley judgment is chiefly a relational reality, within which there are only grammatical distinctions between subject and predicate, no matter how strong was his emphasis in presenting particular judgments as attributes, or "predicates" of one main subject: Reality.

We find a similar flaw in the presentation of the problems involved in the theory of relations. Eames locates the main controversy between Russell and the idealists in the issue of "internal" versus "external" relations, but she offers only a couple of short quotations (p. 31), without any use of the rich correspondence available about that point, and without indicating the complexity of both positions. I think it would have been necessary to say, for example, that for Bradley all relations are ultimately to be rejected, and that for Russell there was no satisfactory explanation of the difficulties arising when relations are presented as entities (terms). Thus, nothing is said about Bradley's paradox against relations: if we say that relations are *entities* relating terms, then we have to give an account of how they are related to those terms, which immediately leads us to an endless regress. However, this was one of the main ontological difficulties of Russell's position from 1900 onwards, so it is difficult to see how his philosophical development can be understood without discussing—or at least noticing—his several attempts to solve the problem.

As for the theory of meaning, Eames' account begins by transcribing a long passage from *The Principles of Mathematics* where Russell states his first distinction between indication and denotation (p. 21), but she does not offer the necessary context to understand Russell's ideas, or even any discussion of the content of the passage itself. We are told only that at this period Russell rejected "the mentalistic and psychological aspects of idealist theory of meaning and logic" (p. 21), by which the reader is unavoidably led to think that for Bradley meaning was a psychical phenomenon and logic a science of mental contents. I think the truth is that Bradley's logic, including his theory of meaning, was the first serious attempt in England to liberate logic from psychologism and present it as the science of objective contents: meaning must then be understood as an entity that is neither physical nor mental, but fully objective, in the sense of the entities pertaining to the "third realm" (whose introduction is sometimes attributed to Frege). Besides, Russell's real enemy in the quoted passage was Bradley's attack on proper names, according to which they have no meaning-denotation but only meaning-connotation, i.e. they are disguised descriptions.

Finally, I come to Eames' account of the polemic on truth. It is correct to say that in principle the controversy appeared in relation to the coherence

theory of truth, and that for Bradley coherence did not mean mere consistency, as Russell sometimes wrote. Also, it has to be accepted that Russell was not satisfied with a naively realistic theory of truth according to which propositions are true or false, as roses are white or red. However, although Eames points out correctly that Russell had put forward an alternative multiple-relation theory of judgment in 1907, she does not seem to realize that although the new theory is perfectly able to give an account of the non-existence of false propositions, as well as of the ontological status of errors, it could not overcome the idealistic danger of presenting propositions as mental entities, for in this theory they are complexes created by the mind.

Besides, the new alternative was not only a "suggestion" made by Russell in 1907. Russell's relevant manuscripts in 1906–07 already contain a full theory of judgment as a multiple relation. Also, Russell's correspondence with Bradley shows at many places the importance of Bradley's criticisms. So I think it is not enough to write: "it seems that Bradley was correct in finding unresolved difficulties in this theory of truth" (p. 30). We have even a proof in this correspondence that Russell accepted the new theory at this period, i.e. several years before *Principia Mathematica*, and the proof is Russell's letter to Bradley of 15 January 1908. As a whole, the main problem at this stage of Russell's development was the combination of realism with a theory of "external" relations presenting them as genuine terms relating other terms, and especially the impossibility of giving an account of the correspondence between belief and fact without falling into some form of Bradley's paradox. But I am unable to see anything about that in Eames' treatment, despite her work on the unpublished material.

III

The interaction between Russell and Moore is presented by Eames rather as a sort of biographical story than as what it was: a massive influence of Moore on Russell, although of course Eames quotes the famous words by Russell in which he recognized the importance of the influence. From the several periods referred to by Eames, I shall say something only about the two most important ones: 1898–1900, when a new epistemology, ontology and methodology were adopted by Russell, and 1910–14, when the method of logical constructions was applied to the external world. Regarding the first one, Eames offers to the reader only a brief summary of Moore's "The Nature of Judgment" (1899), together with the claim that Russell's "exuberant" term-realism in the *Principles* was a result of Moore's influence (pp. 36–8). But the summary does not point out what seems to me to be the most important issues from the viewpoint of Moore's influence on Russell (in particular, I see no word on philosophical method), and nothing is said about the crucial differences between the ontologies of the two philosophers.

Moore's realistic theory of proposition is correctly presented: "both the subject and the predicate of judgment stand for concepts that are constituents of a proposition", which "is a complex of concepts", and truth "belongs to the complex rather than to the simple and depends upon whether the relation which holds the synthesis together is an existent or not" (p. 37). However, Eames does not seem to realize the underlying parallelism with Bradley's theory of judgment, according to which judgment has the same relational character. (see above) and leads to a complex as well, which I think was, in the last analysis, the source of Russell's multiple-relation theory of judgment from 1906–07 onwards. Besides, Russell introduced certain complications in his ontology which became incompatible with Moore's simple admission of *concepts* as being the only ontological category. Thus, Russell introduced *terms* as being divided into "things" and "concepts" and concepts as being divided into "predicates" and "relations", which is equivalent to a division into subjects and predicates (monadic or dyadic), and so it contradicts Moore. However, according to Eames (p. 64), Russell followed Moore in distinguishing two kinds of terms. Furthermore, as Russell needed to consider fictitious proper names and certain difficult denoting concepts (the class of all classes, the round square, etc.), he was forced to include *objects*, a larger category embracing entities denoted by those concepts. And these divisions make it impossible to maintain a relational theory as conceived by Moore; rather they came to resort to the subject–predicate pattern to some extent.

However, the famous article by Moore (together with other writings of the same period) contained another extremely important methodological element: philosophical analysis is *the* method of a correct philosophy, and it has to consist of definitions showing how complex concepts are constituted by simple ones. Thus, the philosopher's task must be to do this work until reaching those simple and undefinable concepts, which have to be recognized by our direct intuition, or mind's eye. Some evidence for Russell's immediate adoption of that method, which he followed for the greater part of his life, is already present in his work on Leibniz. But the pre-*Principles* manuscripts, from 1898 to 1900, offer us lots of examples of Russell's explicit application of that philosophical method, as being the only one compatible with a realistic foundation for mathematics. I am afraid that Eames' work on the archival material regarding this point is defective.

As for the period 1910–13, Eames correctly points out the probable general influence of Moore's lectures from 1910 (published only in 1953 as *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*), together with his "The Status of Sense-Data" (1913–14), on Russell's ideas from that period. But she does not mention Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World*, assuming that, as Moore did not accept the "Mill–Russell" view of the external world, he could hardly have contributed to its development. However, in the writings mentioned Moore introduced at least two ideas which are very likely to have inspired Russell's

method of constructing the external world (apart from Whitehead's clear influence): the system of perspectives and the introduction of *sensibilia* to complete the account of (possible) sense-data. So I think some discussion on these two points would have been necessary.

IV

Eames' treatment of the relationship between Russell and Frege contains mainly summaries of: Appendix A of the *Principles*; the appendix of the *Grundgesetze* on Russell's paradox; "On Denoting"; and a few references to the correspondence between them. In addition, there are a lot of bibliographical references that receive no use in the text. (Would that Eames had taken into explicit consideration all the writings she recommends to the reader.) As a whole I am unable to see anything that cannot be found in many other available sources. However, as a reviewer I must say something about Eames' treatment of these important materials.

The summary of Appendix A of the *Principles* appears in isolation from Russell's treatment of the same topics in the body of the book, so Eames is apparently unable to notice changes and improvements. Thus, for example, she writes that there Russell used "meaning" and "indication" to translate Frege's *sense* and *reference* and, after a rather misleading analysis, she concludes that Frege's conception "might fit with Russell's view" (pp. 69–70; see also p. 94). But some explanation is needed of Russell's attempt to incorporate Frege's semantics, which concluded in a complete failure. First, Eames does not say anything on Russell's division of meaning into "denotation" and "indication" in the body of the book, and she even seems to me to confuse it with the pair "meaning" and "indication". Second, Russell's main reason for trying to accept Frege's distinction in the appendix was that it provided a way to eliminate problematic denotations. Third, Russell started from a referential theory of meaning where meaning and reference are the same, but this is hardly possible to reconcile with his interpretation of Frege's semantics, whose main distinction is first identified with the one between a concept and the entity it denotes, then translated as "denotation" and "indication". I think this makes it impossible for *Bedeutung* to be *indication*, for this is not a denoting relation.

Eames includes some information about the correspondence between Russell and Frege, but rather surprisingly she does not use this information for throwing light on the relevant problems. Frege's distinction between object and concept is presented as being attractive for Russell, given his own distinction between thing and concept (subject and predicate phrases, Eames writes on p. 73). There is, however, no possible coincidence between both ontological pairs. For Frege there are only objects (which are saturated) and functions (which are unsaturated, i.e. in need of completion, and include

concepts and relations), while for Russell concepts are terms as well. Besides, there is very interesting evidence on this polemic in the correspondence of June 1902, which Eames does not take into consideration. According to this evidence, we can see how clearly Frege states that a function cannot be regarded as an entity or object, but as the name of a concept, i.e. a sign. This is the principle leading to the unsaturatedness of the concepts, which Eames left unexplained (p. 74).

The famous paradox of the class of classes not being members of themselves is explained in a rather misleading way, by presenting, for example, classes of classes as similar categories to teaspoons (instead as *classes* of teaspoons) (p. 76), while the complexity of Russell's first draft of a solution in 1903 is not studied. Also, Eames does not state any distinction between the former (logical) paradox and, say, that of the Liar (which is rather semantical). It is true that at that time Russell did not completely realize the differences between both kinds of paradoxes, but in Appendix B of the *Principles* a paradox of propositions (then semantical) has appeared for the first time and is presented as requiring a different solution.

With these antecedents it is not strange that the summary of "On Denoting" we are offered can hardly throw much light on the formidable problems involved. First, its results are treated in isolation from the former difficulties, and even from the unpublished manuscripts which provide the indispensable information for filling the gap between 1903 and 1905. Furthermore, Eames devotes two pages to the difficult passages where Russell stated his final rejection of the meaning–denotation distinction (pp. 90–1), but she provides neither new information (for instance by going to these manuscripts) nor a new interpretation of the information already available (for instance by discussing the relevant bibliography). And this is a pity, as there exists an unpublished manuscript from 1905 in the Russell Archives ("On Fundamentals") where Russell provided the context needed to improve, to some extent, our understanding of those difficult passages, by pointing out more clearly the attempt to maintain the distinction between meaning and denotation as giving rise to a new paradox, which, by the way, I think can be naturally interpreted as pertaining to the family of Bradley's paradox. Finally, Eames provides no study of the (at times) close parallelism between Frege and Russell's theories of descriptions.

V

The chapter on Whitehead follows a similar approach: some biographical information and more or less sketchy summaries of some of the relevant writings, but with no use of such extremely important materials, as well as a number of misleading remarks, both philosophically and historically, and the lack of a global perspective. To begin with, in the summary of *Principia*

Mathematica—which occupies a page and a half!—we read: “The theory of descriptions allowed an escape from that realism by providing an interpretation of nondenoting terms and of classes as incomplete symbols”; “The result [of the theory of types] was a ‘hierarchy’ of classes in which first-order propositions referred only to what were not propositions ...” (p. 107). But there is no explanation to the reader of the terminology or the complexity of the concepts involved. No mention is made of the fact that there were two kinds of paradoxes (see above) to be solved by the theory of types, which required different hierarchies, or of the rich development of the theory itself from 1905 to 1907, which can be followed through the relevant manuscripts.

The summaries of Whitehead’s “On Mathematical Concepts of the Material World” (1906) and “La Théorie relationniste de l’espace” (1914), as well as the respective comparisons with Russell’s applications of similar ideas in his construction of the external world, are hardly illuminating. One example is the question of time. We read that in 1906 there was also an analysis of instants and different definitions (p. 110), while in the following page it is said that only points were constructed (“a similar treatment is not given to time”). Then we find a long letter of 1911 from Whitehead to Russell where a first relational theory of time is sketched (pp. 111–12), with no exegesis for the reader. Besides, this is followed by a quotation from Russell, which is presented as an anticipation of Whitehead’s theory, in spite of the fact that it is precisely an explanation of the “absolutist” theory according to which physical continuity can be explained by means of “separate and individual elements” (for instance, points and instants!). Finally, Eames tells us that in 1914 there was “little to say about the construction of moments of time or of units of matter” (p. 118), while three pages later we read that the method was originally proposed to deal “with points, instants, and particles of matter”, and then that 1906 provided different frameworks “of space, time, and matter” and 1914 “a technical treatment of points (with instants in the background)” (p. 122). The truth is simpler: instants were not constructively defined by Whitehead either in 1906 or in 1914.

Another example is the treatment of Whitehead’s method of extensive abstraction. We are told that Whitehead’s essay of 1906 “demonstrates the use of the method called ‘extensive abstraction’ or ‘construction’ in the definition of a point”, and that this method is “a version of the method of construction by which a term for which no denotative meaning can be supplied ... can be replaced by the formulation of a series of propositions which make clear the context in which the term has meaning” (p. 111). With that description Eames is obviously thinking of Russell’s theory of descriptions, which is accepted immediately. But there are several definitions of points in the essay, and the only thing that they can be said to have in common is that they present points in terms of classes of complex entities which exhibit the properties usually required of points. Only in this sense is there some parallelism

with Russell’s theory of descriptions. The closer pattern is rather the famous definition of the concept of cardinal number as everything being the number of a class, and this last concept as the class of all classes similar to a given class. Thus Whitehead gives in the same essay a definition of a point which is more or less equivalent to saying that a point is the class of lines converging in a point, and then adding a definition of this last expression which avoids the possible vicious circle. Besides, we can regard 1906 only as an anticipation of the method, in so far as it contains the construction of points in terms of complex entities. Only in 1914 does the construction in terms of volumes, which is the main characteristic of the method, take place.

However, according to Eames the same method is also demonstrated in 1914, while she adds that now the method “anticipates” the one present in later publications, so that we have no idea of what “method” she is talking about, as we can only read that the point is defined “by means of the inclusion series” (p. 116). Besides, I find the comparison with Russell’s *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914) rather misleading. On the one hand we read that Whitehead criticized Russell’s treatment of the problem in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) mainly because that work interpreted the perception of objects in terms of sense-data and inferences to objects (p. 113), which for Eames is equivalent to saying that Russell maintained a “representative realism” which exposed him “to the charge of phenomenalism” (p. 114). But I think one cannot accuse Russell of being a phenomenalist and of maintaining a representative realism at the same time. The pertinent criticism would consist rather in saying that there is no need to admit *inferred* objects, which would be a Lockean position, because these objects can be *constructed*. It is really surprising that Eames does not realize the point, despite her many quotations of Russell where this idea is clearly stated (e.g., p. 109).

On the other hand, the chief difference between Russell and Whitehead is described as: “Whitehead’s view of experience is not of collocations of sense-data or particulars which are the building blocks out of which objects are constructed ...” (p. 117). However, phenomenalism was partially a result of Russell’s acceptance of the method, which was invented as a clear alternative to the causal theory of perception in Lockean terms, precisely because external objects have to be interpreted, according to Whitehead, in terms of our interaction with the physical world, which can overcome the need for admitting inferred objects. It is true that Whitehead’s view was also offered to overcome the resort to a philosophical subject, but Russell was, already in 1914, on the verge of accepting neutral monism, which was completely assumed from 1918–19 onwards, while the main techniques of constructing the external world were maintained in later works. I think this is the correct context in which to interpret the problem of the “bifurcation of nature” (mind–matter dualism), where I find Eames’ remarks again misleading (p. 123). Russell had rejected relationism before 1913 because he was afraid of the

danger of idealistic implications, but once relationism was admitted in 1914, both for space and time, the acceptance of the implicit monism was only a question of time (without forgetting the war of 1914–18). Since Eames does not—apparently—realize that, she accuses Russell of maintaining subject–object dualism even in 1918–21 (p. 120) and 1927 (p. 131), in spite of Russell’s numerous and explicit passages to the contrary.

VI

I find the chapter on Wittgenstein more acceptable, perhaps because in this case Eames speaks about materials she knows better. The presentation follows similar lines. Within a biographical context, there are brief and rather isolated summaries of: Russell’s manuscript “What Is Logic?”; Wittgenstein’s letters to Russell; Russell’s *Theory of Knowledge* (chiefly the parts on the notion of form) together with his letters to Lady Ottoline Morrell; Wittgenstein’s “Notes on Logic”; then a survey of the passages where Russell mentions Wittgenstein, which are presented as Wittgenstein’s influence. I shall limit myself to pointing out some remarks which I find misleading.

Eames writes that Russell’s theory of descriptions led Russell to give up the realism of propositions (p. 138), and that the multiple-relation theory of judgment provided the needed realism through the implicit correspondence of propositions to facts (p. 139), while Wittgenstein’s criticism caused Russell’s abandonment of the relational theory of judgment, involving the abandonment of “all remnants of the logical realism” of the *Principles* (p. 166). I see the correct story in a very different way: the exuberant realism of the *Principles* was abandoned even before the theory of descriptions, mainly thanks to the need for a first no-classes theory, and later through the substitutional theory of classes (not even mentioned by Eames), which failed in its attempt to preserve the reality of propositions. And it was precisely Russell’s introduction of his multiple-relation theory of judgment, which took place in 1906–07, that presupposed the abandonment of the realism of propositions. The reasons were mainly two: first because this theory involved the need to affirm that it is our mind that *imposes* a relation among certain objective terms, whether the corresponding proposition is true or false; second because this imposed relation is possible through a *form*, which provides the mental “glue” needed for constituting those propositions. Besides, the introduction of forms as new constituents of complexes, along with singular and relational terms, clearly violates the theory of types, which was pointed out by Wittgenstein many times, although without much clarity.

Since Eames apparently derives nothing from that, her account seems to me to be only an accumulation of heterogeneous materials. Thus, she does not point out that the main difficulty in Russell’s attempt to introduce forms is closely related to Bradley’s paradox on relations (see above), this time

through the difference between first- and second-level relations. But if second-level relations are introduced, again, as entities with which our mind can be acquainted, then they are new terms, and we are going to need new—third-level—relations, and so on. If we put the problem that way, the main objections from Wittgenstein can be understood as already implicit in the old objections from Bradley. This can be clearly seen, for instance, in “What Is Logic” (1912), but I do not see in Eames’ summary of this important manuscript (p. 142) anything on this fundamental point. An alternative approach could have been the discussion of the important difference existing between the relation of judging itself and the relation that the fact of judging imposes among the different terms of the proposition, but again I do not find anything useful about that in the chapter (for instance on pp. 144, 146, 160–1).

VII

The chief omission in the book is a treatment of Russell’s admittedly main influence: Peano and his school. There are only two pages about this subject (66–7), but with no independent study of Peano’s works or of other secondary material on Peano and his school, so that Eames is forced to follow Russell’s views, which are not reliable. The only thing she says on Peano which cannot be found in Russell’s writings is this: “he [Russell] and Peano and Frege agree in defining numbers in terms of classes of classes” (p. 75). As it is well known that Peano never accepted the definition in terms of classes of classes (which, by the way, he seems to have been the first to formulate), using the argument that numbers and classes of classes have different properties. Besides, his acceptance by Frege requires considerably exegesis, given that he worked with properties, rather than with classes.

As a result of the lack of treatment of Peano and his school, we do not find any account of Russell’s main period (1900–10) as a compromise between Moore’s method of philosophical definitions (see above) and the demands of Peano’s logical definitions, which, in requiring purely technical devices, led Russell to other problems, for instance to that of abandoning the belief in absolute undefinable ideas. Another result is that Eames, like many other people, apparently sees Peano only as the inventor of a symbolic notation which was very useful to Russell. I think the truth is that Peano and his school (mainly Burali-Forti and Pieri) provided Russell with a whole series of logical recourses and a philosophical global view of the formal sciences which made it possible for Russell, who was already trying to construct a philosophical foundation for mathematics, to develop the logicist seed implicit in Peano, and which he achieved in the *Principles* and *Principia*.

There are other important gaps. There is nothing on Russell’s struggle with Cantor’s transfinite in the manuscripts of 1898–1900 and his final philosophical acceptance in 1900; nothing on the important influence of

Couturat's proto-logicism, in spite of the fact that the correspondence with Couturat is one of the most important ones available in the Russell Archives; nothing on the several philosophers who influenced Russell's later philosophy, like Broad (who provided Russell with the fundamental link between induction, probability and the need to admit postulates of empirical knowledge, with whom there are important letters in the Russell Archives), Eddington (who provided Russell with the "structural" vision of empirical knowledge), or Carnap (who was the main influence under which Russell finally admitted the linguistic character of logic and mathematics). The fact that these authors are usually classified as rather "technical" is not an acceptable argument for their complete absence, for Eames claims to have considered "the most important interactions" (p. 5). Besides, the actual selection includes Frege and Whitehead, whose respective writings everyone regards as technical.

VIII

I must confess I had been waiting for the appearance of this book for some years, mainly because one of the main aspects of my own work on Russell has been related to the influence of his contemporaries on his thought. After having read it I have to say that I feel disappointed. It is true that Professor Eames makes use of a lot of unpublished materials, but her use of the correspondence appears to me to be limited most of the time to a very few quotations, and when new, unpublished letters are transcribed, the context seems to me to be not enough to take advantage of them. Besides, there is almost no use of the mass of Russell's unpublished manuscripts in the Russell Archives (mainly from 1898 to 1907), which I think is the only way to understand correctly Russell's philosophical evolution in that fundamental period.

That, together with the reasons I have pointed out in earlier sections, is why it is so difficult for me to find a point of view from which the book can be openly recommended. I think it is not a scholarly piece of history of science or philosophy according to the required standards. But readers looking for a good piece of popularization of the main influences on Russell's philosophy may find that Eames' book presupposes that much be known in advance. At any rate, the book contains a lot of material and quotations that are interesting in themselves, given the richness of Russell's personality and the complexity of his relationship with many of his contemporaries. Thus, it may be used as providing a first contact with the fascinating field of the origins and development of analytic philosophy. Perhaps in this way readers lacking the background to understand the topics involved will be led to read more about Russell and, even better, by Russell. If so, the book will have been worth writing.¹

¹ My thanks are due to the editor for improving my English.