

# WHITEHEAD AND RUSSELL ON THE NATURE OF EXPERIENCE AND JUDGMENT

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**Abstract:** It has already been widely discussed about the young Russell with his *Tiergarten Program* of idealistic inspiration and about his revolt against idealism, while the idealistic sources of Whitehead's philosophy began to be brought to attention only in the last decades. It became an accepted idea that Whitehead's metaphysics is influenced by Bradley and accords with the main principles of "absolute idealism". Some philosophers argued that many of Whitehead's doctrines cannot be understood without an adequate understanding of Bradley, both in terms of their affinities and contrasts. My aim in this paper is limited to investigating how the two philosophers, despite their common starting point, went in opposite directions and developed different theories regarding the nature of experience and judgment. I explore these hypotheses and I try to offer some conclusive remarks.

**Keywords:** Bradley, "Absolute Idealism", Whitehead, Russell, Experience, Nature of Judgment.

## RUSSELL AND WHITEHEAD. THEIR IDEALIST APPRENTICESHIP

It is well known that the philosophical beginnings of Russell and Whitehead are closely related to the neo-Hegelian tradition that was very influential at the end of the nineteenth century in the British cultural space. Both began by being faithful to the neo-Hegelian project of F.H. Bradley, and after an apprenticeship in this framework they sought their own paths in philosophy. The subsequent different ways in which they will discuss about the nature of experience and judgment can be understood depending on how they each overcame their own neo-Hegelian moment, as a rebellion in Russell's case, and as a creative exploration and development in Whitehead's case. A preliminary sketch of the two's relationship to neo-Hegelianism is not only useful, but even becomes a propaedeutic task that

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facilitates a better understanding of their philosophical insights in comparative terms.

The young Russell was initially an ardent neo-Hegelian. The so called *Tiergarten Programme* (1895–1898)<sup>1</sup> was conceived as two parallel projects, one on philosophy of science which would begin with the most abstract and proceed to the more concrete, from mathematics to physics, and then to physiology, the other would proceed in the opposite direction, from politics and social questions, the two projects uniting at last in a grand Hegelian synthesis of the scientific and the practical. Russell's plan was to develop a comprehensively Hegelian dialectic of the sciences, completed with a dialectical supersessions and culminating in a metaphysical science of the Absolute Spirit. Russell was also strongly inspired by the Hegelian dialectic as the proper method of philosophy.

Although Russell's neo-Hegelian project was subjected to a devastating criticism, especially regarding the use of scandalous arguments due to their invalidity or the inadequacy of the dialectical tools to the analysis of science, the young Russell's efforts were appreciated as such<sup>2</sup> and indisputably left its mark on his philosophical evolution. I have argued (2023) that we can speak of the long-term influence of this neo-Hegelian episode both in the form of a residual Hegelianism that remained in various contents throughout his work and in the form of a Hegelian rhetoric whose presence cannot be denied in Russell's narratives.

Like Russell, Whitehead establishes contact with philosophy through neo-Hegelian idealism and, perhaps more than Russell<sup>3</sup> the neo-Hegelian philosopher who guides him is Bradley. If Hegel is only mentioned the last in a chronological list of the great philosophers who have marked the philosophical tradition (*PR*, 14), Bradley is considered by Whitehead a landmark of the understanding of his own *Process and Reality*: "Though throughout the main body of the work I am in sharp disagreement with Bradley, the final outcome is after all not so greatly different." (*PR*, vii). A comparative analysis of Whitehead and Bradley reveals numerous

<sup>1</sup> The programme was called so by Griffin ("The Tiergarten Programme") because it was conceived while on a walk in 1895 through the Berlin zoological garden at a time when Russell was working not only on the fellowship thesis but simultaneously on his first political research on German social democracy. Russell's own testimony is enlightening: "I remember a spring morning when I walked in the Tiergarten, and planned to write a series of books in the philosophy of the sciences. (...) The scheme was inspired by Hegel, and yet something of it survived the change in my philosophy. The moment had had a certain importance: I can still, in memory, feel the squelching of melting snow beneath my feet, and smell the damp earth that promised the end of winter." ("My Mental Development", 11).

<sup>2</sup> Griffin is quite categorical on this point: "I believe that Russell's neo-Hegelian philosophy deserves rather more respect than it has received. By any standards, it is one of the most spectacular works by any philosopher in his early twenties." (*Russell's Idealist Apprenticeship*, vi).

<sup>3</sup> I have argued at length in a previous paper (2023), that Russell's project was the closest to McTaggart's philosophy, who was the most Hegelian of all the neo-Hegelians in terms of their philosophical commitment towards a theory of the Absolute as a positive determination of its nature.

affinities and contrasts, but, broadly speaking, Whitehead ultimately ends up to a Bradley-type project and can be better explored starting from Bradley<sup>4</sup>.

Although Whitehead does not explicitly and extensively deal with the recurring Hegelian themes in his philosophy, exegetes of his work have extracted some of the main categorical schemes and frameworks of thought that can be attributed to a Hegelian origin and that are constitutive of his philosophy. The turning point in this regard was the volume *Hegel and Whitehead: Contemporary Perspectives on Systematic Philosophy* edited by George R. Lucas Jr. in which various common aspects are investigated, from the concepts of system and totality to perspectives on nature and religious experience. Regarding the project of a Hegelian synthesis of the sciences, as initiated by Russell, it should be noted that “Whitehead is perceived as having developed a systematic perspective, which appears ‘Hegelian’ in many respects, but in which the natural sciences are *not* portrayed as discontinuous with other areas of human inquiry” (Lucas, “Hegel, Whitehead, and the status of systematic philosophy”, 7). The fact that both Whitehead and Russell believe in the possibility of a unitary vision on science and consider that philosophy can ensure the cohesion of the perspective on the world as a totality is an effect of sharing the Hegelian view of a systematic knowledge, in contrast to the dichotomy between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, respectively, between *Erklären* and *Verstehen* that Dilthey had proposed. Both remain devoted to the traditional idea that the task of philosophy is to provide a unified overall vision of the world by integrating the results of science.

My purpose in this paper is limited to analyzing the theories developed by the two philosophers regarding the nature of experience and judgment, comparing both one to the other and each of them in relation to the neo-Hegelian tradition, namely Bradley. My general hypothesis is that, ultimately, the differences between their theories on the nature of experience and judgment can also be understood as different relationships to Bradley’s metaphysics and to the tradition of British empiricism, especially Hume. However, the main stake of this research is their different assessment of Bradley’s “absolute idealism”.

### RUSSELL’S REBELLION AGAINST IDEALISM

Russell’s separation from the neo-hegelian tradition is described at length by himself: „During 1898, various things caused me to abandon both Kant and Hegel. I read Hegel’s *Greater Logic*, and thought, as I still do, that all he says about mathematics is muddle-headed nonsense. I came to disbelieve Bradley’s arguments against relations, and to distrust the logical bases of monism. I disliked the subjectivity of the Transcendental Aesthetic. But these motives would have operated

<sup>4</sup> McHenry (1991) argues that Whitehead’s metaphysics is influenced by the main principles of Bradley’s “absolute idealism” and that many of Whitehead’s doctrines cannot be understood without an adequate understanding of Bradley. The connection with Russell is also considered.

more slowly than they did, but for the influence of G.E. Moore.” (“My Mental Development”, 11–12).

This testimony indeed mentions all the reasons that Russell could have invoked for breaking with Hegelian idealism. Before all, Russell’s revolt came after his attempt to construct a neo-Hegelian approach of the sciences based on the Hegelian dialectic. The young Russell, at that time a Hegelian fully confident in the possibilities of dialectics as a method, wrote a lot of notes about the new developments in Mathematics and Physics and he tried to put them in a neo-Hegelian framework. The only completed work was the *Essay on the Foundations of Geometry* (1897), which could be understood as an attempt to offer a new version of Kantian transcendentalism. This project of grounding Geometry led Russell towards a theory of matter and motion, which, in the hierarchical order of the dialectical synthesis, implied the transition from Geometry to Physics.

The Hegelian steps proposed by Russell are intuitive: the concept of number, defined as the fundamental notion of arithmetic, presupposes the idea of measurability, hence the transition to Geometry, because space is measurable and can be given directly in sensation. But in order to measure we must locate objects in space, measure the distances between them, from which we inevitably arrive at the problems of identifying what can be located in space and what changes its position in space (given that position itself, by definition, cannot move), that is, to the problems of matter and its motion, hence to Physics.

Russell thus rose to where he wanted to arrive, that is, to a puzzle that requires a dialectical solution. Geometry is correct and solves its specific problems as long as we do not go beyond its limits. Contradictions arise when we derive ultimate consequences of a metaphysical type from its concepts. Now, the metaphysics of the Absolute, taken by Russell from Hegel through Bradley, is non-relational, while geometry requires an analysis in terms of relations. Since he cannot (yet) give up the presuppositions of Hegelian metaphysics, Russell gets out of the puzzle with the help of dialectics: Geometry is not a complete theory in the metaphysical sense and, therefore, must be overcome by a dialectical synthesis. The next level is represented by the study of motion, that is, the field of Kinematics. Russell (*The Collected Papers*, vol. I, 21) thinks that we already have matter and motion in metric geometry: the only difference is that in Geometry we study only the initial and final states of matter in motion, not the real process of motion, which Kinematics deals with.

One example can help us to understand even better the type of neo-Hegelianism practiced by Russell (*An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*, paragraphs 71–73). Let us consider the axiom of the free mobility of geometric bodies according to which figures can be moved arbitrarily in space without suffering any deformation. But if figures are individualized precisely by their relations to points and other figures, then it is meaningless to talk about moving the same figure from one place to another without deformation, since the relations in one place are not identical or

analogous to the relations in the other place. So, what are we actually moving when we think of moving a geometric figure? Obviously, the situation is completely different from moving a physical object, in which case we can deform it under the action of physical forces. Well, Russell admits, in geometry we move without deforming an abstract or “geometric” matter. But what is the nature of this matter? It is not physical matter, it is something else and less than physical matter, but it cannot be reduced to extension, because we cannot define the latter in any other way than relationally.

We notice that during these dialectical steps the problem of a neo-Hegelian treatment of relations comes into play. Confronted with dialectically insoluble difficulties, from the metaphysics of the Absolute to the relations between physical and geometrical bodies, Russell completely abandons the neo-Hegelian discourse inspired by Bradley’s *Logic*. Russell moves from a Hegelian concept of external relations to that of internal relations within propositions, stating that in every proposition certain relations are asserted with respect to the terms that compose it. For example, he argues that transitive relations are not reducible to identity and diversity.

Russell is dissatisfied with the inadequacy of the neo-Hegelian theory of internal relations to the analysis of mathematics. He will consider that relations must be treated as real, as independent and irreducible constituents of propositions, so that to consider them true or false. George E. Moore (1899) was dissatisfied with the denial by Hegelian idealism of the existence of objects independent of any mind and believed that the understanding of propositions presupposes direct access to their constitutive concepts. Russell will later describe this philosophical rebellion in which he was involved: “It was towards the end of 1898 that Moore and I rebelled against both Kant and Hegel. Moore led the way, but I followed closely in his footsteps. I think that the first published account of the new philosophy was Moore’s article in *Mind* on ‘The Nature of Judgment’. (...) I felt ... a great liberation, as if I had escaped from a hot-house on to a wind-swept headland. (...) In the first exuberance of liberation, I became a naïve realist and rejoiced in the thought that grass is really green...” (1959, 54, 61–62). Another fragment similarly describes the stakes and consequences of the revolt. Russell mentions that Moore “took the lead in rebellion, and I followed, with a sense of emancipation. Bradley argued that everything common sense believes in is mere appearance, we reverted to the opposite extreme, and thought that *everything* is real that common sense, uninfluenced by philosophy or theology, supposes real. With a sense of escaping from prison, we allowed ourselves to think that the grass was green, that the sun and stars would exist if no one was aware of them, and also that there is a pluralistic timeless world of Platonic ideas. The world, which had been thin and logical, suddenly became rich and varied and solid” (“My Mental Development”, 12). Russell comes back in the *Autobiography* with a similar observation that underlines the epistemological and ontological significance of the conversion to realism. He mentions that at that

time (1898) he had begun to “emerge from the bath” into which McTaggart and Stout had thrown him: “I was greatly assisted in this process by Moore... It was an intense emotion to believe again that there are such things as tables and chairs after having assumed that the sensible world is unreal” (1967, 134–135)

The neo-Hegelian thesis according to which all our knowledge is mediated by conceptual structures is overturned by Moore and Russell, this being one of the decisive components of their revolt against idealism. Both will speak of the direct cognitive relationship between the mind of the epistemic subject and the things in the external world. Already in the “Preface” to *The Principles of Mathematics* Russell proposes an analogy between the use of the instruments of logic and direct knowledge. Thus, he specifies that the main part of the philosophy of logic is equivalent to the attempt to see more clearly the objects of analysis by bringing them into direct contact with our mind, just as we can know directly the color or taste of a fruit. The process is similar to that of the discovery of the planet Neptune, only we use a mental telescope. Russell uses the term “acquaintance” in this sense of a direct, immediate knowledge, a relationship between our mind and objects external to it in which nothing else from the prejudicial horizon mediates. It is evident that Russell adopts a direct realism that he considers more advantageous, despite its difficulties, than the idealism he had abandoned.

The correspondence with Frege is a good testimony for Russell’s attempt to exclude anything that would lead him back to idealism, including psychologist-type reminiscences, such as referring to ideas as entities in our minds or accepting a representational mediation between the mind and the objects we speak about. As a result, Russell accepts direct realism as the best explanation of how we are in an immediate relationship both to the objects about which we assert something and to the propositions that have these objects as constituents. In a letter sent as reply to Frege, who had pointed out that Mont Blanc is not a component part of the thought that Mont Blanc is higher than four thousand meters, Russell gives a significant rebuttal for the acceptance of direct realism with all its consequences: “I believe that in spite of all its snowfields Mont Blanc itself is a component part of what is actually asserted in the proposition ‘Mont Blanc is more than 4000 meters high. We do not assert the thought, for this is a private psychological matter: we assert the object of the thought, and this is to my mind, a certain complex (an objective proposition, one might say) in which Mont Blanc is itself a component part. If we do not admit this, then we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc.” (“Letter to Frege”, 169). If the object as such were not a component part of the proposition we understand, then it would be as if we had no knowledge of that object at all, that is, we would not know what our propositions refer to. Only accepting direct realism eliminates this risk.

Finally, although Moore was initially interested in ethics and his critique of neo-Hegelianism was focused on psychologism and on Bradley’s treatment of judgement, while Russell was primarily interested in the philosophy of mathematics

and the problem of a neo- Hegelian foundation of it, they combined to replace neo-Hegelianism by a philosophy that was atomistic, direct-realist, and radically anti-psychologistic. Both of them entered into a necessary polemics with Bradley's theory of relations, but after the break with idealism Moore adopts a Platonist ontology, while Russell lived the revelation of an empiricist realism.<sup>5</sup>

### RUSSELL'S EMPIRICISM AND DECOMPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS

Russell combined his empiricism with the so-called decompositional analysis. He began to pay more and more attention to the analysis of propositions (sentences) and to language in general and he tried to develop a method for the analysis of language. In his "Nature of Judgment" Moore describes analysis in terms of decompositionality, as the decomposition of complex concepts into simpler concepts with the help of definitions. Thus, states Moore, "first of all, a thing becomes intelligible when it is analyzed in its constituent concepts" ("Nature of Judgment", 8).

Russell also proposed a program of logical analysis aimed at identifying the logical components of propositions and, more than that, the fundamental propositions (logical principles) from which all other propositions are derived. Thus, Russell correlates the general idea of logical analysis with a foundationalist project, the so called logicism, which also leads him to the axiomatization of logical calculus (propositional, of predicates, of relations). In *Principles of Mathematics* Russell claims both that "the method of discovering logical constants is logico-symbolic analysis" (*Principles of Mathematics*, 9), and that "the apprehension of the principles of mathematics consists in the analysis of symbolic logic itself" (*Principles of Mathematics*, 5).

The logical analysis as a decomposition one that continues until we obtain the logical constituents is outlined in *Principles of Mathematics*. Russell's set of suppositions is as follows (See Stoenescu, 2022):

- The indefinibles or indemonstrables are knowable only through logical analysis.
- All the undefinable concepts of pure mathematics are logical concepts.
- All the indemonstrable propositions are logical principles, they contain no constants except logical constants.
- All mathematical reasoning is deduction by logical principles.
- Formal logic does not admit the methods of reasoning and inference supplied by a priori intuitions.
- Logical analysis is the only way to identify the ultimate constituents.

<sup>5</sup> I also mention the historical reading proposed by Rusu and Desmet (2012). They remark the methodological similarity of Whitehead and Russell with regard to the logical and mathematical mode of philosophical analysis, and of Whitehead and Moore with regard to common sense.

Russell will develop this kind of analysis in the form of logical atomism.

But decompositional analysis, according to Russell, means not only decomposition into constituents, but also the description of the relations between them. In “The Classification of Relations” (*Collected Papers*, I) Russell argues for the first time that some relations are not reducible to identity and diversity, a doctrine of Hegelian inspiration that he still supported in “An Analysis of Mathematical Reasoning” (*Collected Papers*, I). Russell feels that the theory of relations is the most precarious part of logic, where the most mistakes have been made because it has led to incomplete analyses of the forms of judgments and categories. Russell moves from a Hegelian concept of external relations to that of internal relations within propositions, claiming that in every proposition certain relations are asserted with respect to the terms that compose it. For example, he argues that transitive relations are not reducible to identity and diversity, as is the case of the relations between part and whole, or between greater and less.

I think it can be argued that at least as regards the nature of the ultimate elements of analysis, Russell initially shares, even in the first stage after the break with idealism, a neo-Hegelian view, close to that expounded by Bradley in his *Logic*, although it seems to be different. Russell himself admits that he cannot overcome the confusion between the logical and psychological elements that constitute meaning. In fact, like Moore, he speaks of terms as the ultimate constituents of propositions, but by them he understands concepts. A proposition does not contain words, but the entities indicated by words. Consequently, meaning is in this sense irrelevant to logic. This means that when the word “a man” appears in the sentence “I met a man in the street”, the sentence is not about the concept of man, but about the bipedal being denoted by the concept of man. This is the non-psychological meaning of a concept, and is detectable only when the word appears in a sentence. This is the turning point where Russell departs from Bradley. In the sentence “This is a man” we attach the concept of man to an entity that is not a concept, but if we refer to a bipedal being using the word “John” then we cannot talk about meaning, as Bradley does. According to Russell, Bradley’s confusion is given by the occurrence of words in sentences, and the latter are thought of as mental entities that are related to the cognitive process.

Russell’s next step was made in “On Denoting” when he passes from the theory of denoting to the theory of knowledge: “The subject of denoting is of very great importance not only in logic and mathematics, but also in theory of knowledge” (479). The epistemological distinction between acquaintance and knowledge about is defined by Russell as the distinction “between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrase” (479). He mentions the possibility to know that a phrase denotes unambiguously although we don’t know by acquaintance the object which it denotes, as in the case of the centre of mass of the Solar System. The centre of mass of the Solar system can’t be acquainted, but it is denoted by the description “the centre of mass of the Solar

system". We are acquainted with objects of perception, but also with abstract logical objects. It isn't necessary to be acquainted with the object denoted by the descriptions whose meanings are acquainted by us. We can think and we may know about things with which we are not acquainted (e.g. other minds). Therefore, Russell's main intention was to avoid the difficulties related with denoting phrases which stand for genuine constituents such as "the present King of France" or "the round square". He wanted to give a reply to Meinong who admits that these phrases are grammatically correct denoting phrases which stand for an object. Russell develops his theory of description so that to solve these strange cases in which the denoted object appears to be absent, such as "the present King of France is bald".

Thus, I argued in "Acquaintance and Descriptions in Russell's Early Philosophy" that the principle of immediate knowledge is considered by Russell to be a consequence of the theory of descriptions. In his "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" Russell states: "The fundamental epistemological principle in the analysis of sentences containing descriptions is this: Any sentence that can be understood must be composed only of constituents that we know by immediate experience" (159). Russell explains how we solve the difficulties of denotation by using descriptions. He states that when we say "the author of Waverley was Scott" we mean "one and only one man wrote Waverley and he is Scott". We have here an identity between a variable, that is, the indefinite pronoun "he" and Scott. Thus, the expression "the author of Waverley" has been analyzed and no longer appears as a constituent of the sentence. Analysis is transformation, not elimination, in the sense that the original expression is transformed into something else in the context of the sentence in which it appears.

This was Russell's way from neo-Hegelianism to logical empiricism as a combination between epistemological empiricism and logical analysis developed initially as a decompositional one. These topics, the nature of experience and the nature of judgment, were also considered by Whitehead the core of a comparative look to the traditional idealist philosophy, but exactly these two make the difference between the paths followed by Russell and Whitehead and regarding their uses of neo-Hegelian assumptions.

### **WHITEHEAD'S EMPIRICISM AND THE BRITISH EMPIRICIST TRADITION**

While Russell accepted the primitive notion of experience as "common sense", as it was used by Locke and Hume, and thus found in it a platform for breaking with philosophical idealism, Whitehead tried to reconceive the notion of experience upon which a new philosophy of experience should be founded. In the end, Whitehead used Locke's and Hume's approaches on empiricism in order to develop a new and original metaphysical view on process and reality. Therefore,

I think that the so-called philosophy of organism developed by Whitehead in *Process and Reality* is based on certain assumptions that come from Locke and Hume and, at the same time, in certain key critical points, it moves away from them. Moreover, the different approaches proposed by Russell and Whitehead on British empiricism are a turning point that distinguishes the very different empiricist commitments of the two philosophers.

Russell's account on British empiricism is nothing more than an adaptation of British empiricism according to the new analytical approaches. Thereby, in his *Human Knowledge. Its Scope and Limits* (1966) Russell continues and develops the topics of Hume's conceptual empiricism, with the novelty to put the debate in framework of logical empiricism. In an imaginary conversation sketched by Reichenbach (1949) between Hume and Russell, the last comes to the conclusion that their main problems were the rejection of the synthetic a priori and the elimination of metaphysical concepts based on an empiricist criterion of meaning. Whitehead's approach to British empiricism is much more complex, more refined, and opens up new perspectives. Ultimately, as I will try to argue, if empiricism deprives Russell of idealism, in Whitehead's case we may speak about a critical and philosophically original return to Bradley's neo-Hegelianism.

I try to offer a synthetic reconstruction of the approach that Whitehead develops on British empiricism in his *Process and Reality*, especially in chapter V, "Locke and Hume". He attributes to the two an attempt to led a revolt against the traditional substantialist metaphysics, as it was from Aristotle to Descartes, but it was just partial in Locke's *Essay* and it becomes inconsistent with Hume's *Enquiry*. More precisely, the dominance of substance-quality metaphysics was promoted by the logical bias of the medieval thought and it triumphed with Descartes. Locke thought in terms of ideas and operations of mind, perceptions first of all, so that a subject-predicate proposition is considered as expressing an abstraction. Perceptions, for Hume, are what the mind know about itself and tacitly the knowable facts are treated as qualities of a subject. This means that Hume works with Locke's ideas in the same substantialist framework.

However, Whitehead thinks that Locke states a principle that anticipates his own philosophy of organism, nothing more than the thesis according to which ideas are related with the particular objects and they become general by abstraction. The simple ideas are found in external things and they are the elements of mind operations. For example, we obtain the idea of human being as an abstraction starting form some real persons, John, Brown and Smith. Then, Locke always supposes that consciousness is consciousness of the ideas in the conscious mind, but he never separates the "ideas" from the "consciousness". On the contrary, Whitehead's philosophy of organism makes the separation between "ideas" and

“consciousness” and gives to Locke’s *Essay* a metaphysical interpretation which was not targeted by Locke.

Hume goes further than Locke. He proposed a revision of Locke’s theory, first of all using the term “idea” with a narrower meaning. Locke used the term in the Cartesian sense, as it was taken from the scholastic tradition, as a name for any mind event. Hume talked about impressions and ideas and also divides both into simple and complex, definitively clarifying at least the case of simple ideas: “All our simple ideas in their first appearance are derived from simple impressions which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent” (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part I, Sect. I, 4).

Hume’s radical empiricism is stated from the beginning of his research in *Treatise*: “We may observe, that it is universally allowed by philosophers, and is besides pretty obvious of itself, that nothing is ever really present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas, and that external objects become known to us only by perceptions they occasion. To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see, all this is nothing but to perceive” (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part II, Sect. VI, 67). But according to Whitehead, Hume and his empiricist followers have failed to understand the true nature of immediate experience. They have exclusively focused on only one mode of perception, namely, that based on distinct data of sensation projected in a spatial-temporal framework. Whitehead argues that our sense-perceptions are entirely dependent on our body, that the primary mode of direct experience is emotional and causal and in this mode we are aware of all our feelings about the world. Whitehead explains that Hume, by neglecting this causal mode of perception, loses the direct connection with things and inevitably falls into scepticism.

Generally speaking, Hume’s philosophy is based on certain assumptions that come from the British empiricist tradition and which were then accepted by Kant and became constitutive to modern philosophy. Whitehead mentions that his philosophy of organism have to be understood both as an extension of Hume’s concerns, but also as a break with his presuppositions and the consequences derived from them. This ambivalent attitude of Whitehead towards Hume has become in the exegesis literature a model for a critical approach in a constructive manner.

Whitehead’s general account on Hume is structured around three axes:

(i) Hume’s philosophy of experience, namely, “that Hume states with great clearness important aspects of our experience” (*PR*, 158);

(ii) Hume’s philosophical style of thinking, namely, “that the defects in his statements are eminently natural defects which emerge with great clearness, owing to the excellence of his presentation” (*PR*, 158);

(iii) Hume's and his followers, namely, "that Hume differs from majority of his followers by the way in which he faces up to the problems raised by his own philosophy" (*PR*, 158)

Regarding the philosophy of experience, Whitehead asserts that Hume is devoted to a double search: "first, for manners of unity, whereby many simples become one complex impression; and secondly, for a standard of property by which to criticize the production of ideas" (*PR*, 155) Regarding complexes, Whitehead thinks that Hume fails to distinguish sufficiently between:

(i) the "*manner*" (or the "*order*") in which simples constitute complexes, how the simples constitute complex impressions and ideas;

(ii) "the *efficacious fact* by reason of which this complex perception arises" (*PR*, 153);

(iii) the multiplicity of simples which constitute the complex perception in this manner.

Even though Hume will get into trouble because the association of ideas is not adequate to explain causality through the mechanisms of repetition and expectation, he would thus ascertain the limits of an empiricist morphology of ideas as proposed by Locke. In fact, in Kant's terms, Hume's scepticism is nothing but the discovery that there is something in the world which cannot be expressed in analytic propositions.

Moreover, Whitehead discovers in Hume's description of mental phenomena an anticipation of a processual explanation: first, there are the impressions of sensation, of an unknown origin; then, ideas of such impressions, derived from the impressions; then, impressions of reflection derived from the antecedent ideas; and then, ideas of impression of reflection. Somewhere in this process there is a repetition of impressions, and then by habit, as a mode of derivation, a repetition of correlate ideas, and hence expectancy of the repetition of the correlate impressions (See *PR*, 165). But Whitehead claims that Hume and Locke share the over intellectualist bias that emotional feelings are necessarily derivative from sensations. He thinks that this pure myth was taken by Locke and Hume from the medieval tradition and was passed to successors.

Thus, Whitehead made a correction of British empiricist and preferred the doctrine that the more primitive mode of objectification is via emotional tone, and "only in exceptional organisms does objectification, via sensation, supervene with any effectiveness" (*PR*, 164) Whitehead will introduce the concept of prehension: weprehend some actual entities more primitively by direct mediation of emotional tone, and only secondarily by direct mediation of sense. But the two modes fuse upon our perceptive knowledge. This problem regarding the nature of our perceptual experience was considered by Whitehead as a basic one for the philosophy of organism and it was developed in *Process and Reality* in Parts III and IV.

### WHITEHEAD'S PHILOSOPHY OF ORGANISM AS A NEW LOOK ON EXPERIENCE

Unlike Russell, Whitehead does not break away from neo-Hegelian idealism, but uses it to propose a new vision on and about experience. If Russell brings back to the forefront the presuppositions of British empiricism, Whitehead relies on them to ascend to a philosophical synthesis. If *Process and Reality* is understood, as Whitehead himself suggests, as an attempt to elucidate the nature of experience, then, as Whitehead himself admits, his philosophy is in consonance with Bradley's vision: "I am particularly indebted to his chapter on the nature of experience, which appears in his *Essays on Truth and Reality*. His insistence on feeling is very consonant with my own conclusions. This whole metaphysical position is an implicit repudiation of the doctrine of vacuous actuality" (*PR*, vii). Moreover, as it was already argued in Rusu (2016), the concept of feeling as immediate experience is developed by Whitehead in close connection with Stout's philosophical psychology, another common source of influence for him and Russell during their philosophical beginnings.

Whitehead expresses the rationalist faith that we cannot find in experience as such any intrinsic elements of a general theory about reality. Therefore, we need to move forward towards a rational picture of the world and this is the main reason to do science and metaphysics, from Plato to Bradley. But if we are talking about reality as it is given to us in experience, then then we must note, along with Whitehead, that "For rationalistic thought, the notion of givenness carries with it a reference beyond the mere data in question" (*PR*, 56). He talked about a "decision" by which what is given is separated off, in the sense of a "cutting off", and become an actual entity. The rationalistic ontological principle related to the notions of "actual entity", "givenness" and "process" may be explained in these terms: "an actual entity arises from decisions for it, and by its very existence provides decisions for other actual entities which supersede it" (*PR*, 56–57) Therefore, we'll say that the Castle rock of Edinburgh exist from moment to moment, from centuries, by decisions effected by its historic route as an experienced thing. If it was fragmented, this event was the destruction of that rock. If the rock had been broken into fragments as a result of a natural catastrophe, in order to understand what happened we would still need to conceptually fix the entity we call "this rock", then we can assume that we had the experience of this rock and we can detach the act of the experience as such.

But this amounts to a return to the experience of the Absolute as an experience, namely, to Bradley's doctrine of "Wolf-eating-Lamb": *that* wolf eat *that* lamb at *that* spot at *that* time. Whitehead agrees that the point is the particularity of things experienced and of the act of experiencing them and to describe them using our language: "Explicitly in the verbal sentence, or implicitly in the understanding of the subject entertaining it, every expression of a proposition includes demonstrative elements. In fact each word, and each symbolic phrase, is

such an element, exciting the conscious prehension of some entity belonging to one of the categories of existence” (*PR*, 57). This idea is taken by Whitehead from Bradley’s *Logic* where he explains that the subject of an existential judgement is the so called ultimate reality, either “(a) as it appears in some part of the series determined by the ‘this’, or (b) as it underlies the whole series of phenomena. When I say ‘A exists’, or ‘A is real’, the content A is in truth the predicate”. And he concludes that “The idea of what is real, or of that which exists, is found as an element in that actual reality and actual existence which we encounter directly” (*The Principles of Logic*, Volume I, Book I, Chapter II, Paragraph 42, 81).

We thus arrive at the so-called problem of priority between language and mind, between the linguistic description of the world and its comprehension by grasping acts of our mind, primarily the perceptual intentional and careful orientation towards an object. Whitehead thinks that the identification of priority in logic with priority in practice vitiated our thought from the mathematics and logic of old Greeks until today (See *PR*, 69). British empiricists proposed the solution of representational realism, but Whitehead thinks that a representational approach put some insoluble problems for epistemology. He suggests that already Locke discovered much more, namely, the problem for the philosophy of organism: “the mind is a unity arising out of the active prehension of ideas into one concrete thing.” (*PR*, 68), but, unfortunately, Locke used the Cartesian metaphysical framework, a representationalist and substantialist one.

Getting out of the mess starts with a critique of traditional logic based on the concept of propositional prehension. In Whitehead’s view, “the primary function of theories is as a lure for feeling, thereby providing immediacy of enjoyment and purpose” (*PR*, 214). But traditional logic, Bradley and young Russell, talk only of judgments and they support the doctrine that their one function is to be judged regarding their truth or falsehood. But it is obvious that if we consider a Christian meditating on the sayings in the *Gospels*, we’ll agree that he is not judging true or false, but he is grasping their value as elements in his feeling.

This limited insight over our mental acts and speech acts was historically combined with the confusion between the real world and the world of our experience. The three main errors of traditional philosophical thought were the doctrine of substance (or the quality doctrine of actuality), the sensationalist doctrine of perception and the Kantian doctrine of the objective world as a construct from subjective experience. But Kant, following Hume’s footsteps, noticed that experience needs certain prior elements that are not given through it. Therefore, Whitehead claims that a solution may be originated in Hume and Bradley, although “neither side conciliates philosophical conceptions of a real world with the world of daily experience” (*PR*, 181) Hume introduces the appeal to practice, not as a criticism of his empiricist premises, but as a supplement to his conclusions. On the other hand, Bradley repudiates Hume, but “find the objective world in which we live, and move, and have our being, inconsistent if taken as real” (*PR*, 181).

### LOOKING FOR A SOLUTION

Therefore, while Russell rejected Bradley's neo-Hegelian philosophy and returns to the tradition of British empiricism, Whitehead philosophy of organism assimilated some of Bradley's assumptions. I try to offer a reconstruction of this philosophical recovery of Bradley, which makes the difference between Russell and Whitehead. I believe that the key to this interpretation lies in understanding the relationship between the subject and the external world through experience.

Let us start from the distinction between propositions and judgments in our relationship with the external world as it is given to us in experience and as we describe it with the help of language. If a metaphysical theory admits a disjunction between the elements of any individual experience and the elements of the external world, then it inevitably run into difficulties over the truth and falsehood of propositions, on the one hand, and over the ground for judgment, on the other hand. The first difficulty is a metaphysical one, the second is an epistemological one. In Whitehead's view, the first difficulty poses the question as to the account of truth and falsehood, and the second difficulty poses the question as to the account of the intuitive perception of truth and falsehood. The former concerns propositions, the latter concerns judgments.

But Whitehead introduces the idea of "experiential togetherness" and obtains a new vision on these traditional metaphysical and epistemological riddles. He claims that there is a unique togetherness of the elements in any experience (stream or occasion of experience) and it was understood in two ways. Whitehead makes a distinction between two doctrines, a "subjectivist" one, that claims that there is no meaning outside the experiential meaning, and a contrary doctrine that leads to the disjunction between the components of subjective experience and the community of external world. Whitehead believes that Bradley inspired the subjectivist doctrine and his theory was a step forward. His own philosophy of organism is nothing but a reformed version of this subjectivist doctrine.

Really, the disjunction between subjective experience and external world creates an insurmountable difficulty for epistemology. It is easy to agree that all the empiricist theories are faced with a gap between our subjective experience and external world. Their epistemological dilemma is expressed by this question: how is possible to have a universal knowledge based on subjective perceptions of individuals? It becomes obvious that Kant's transcendental criticism express this difficulty. He combined in his *Critique of Pure Reason* a subjectivist doctrine with a sensationalist one concerning the analysis of the elements which are together in our experience so that to explain the possibility of universals and of knowledge.

Reaching this point, Whitehead proposed a historical evaluation and then he offered a solution. First of all, Whitehead thinks that if we take into account the sensationalist assumptions, "the only alternatives are either Bradley's doctrine of a

single experient, the absolute, or Leibniz's doctrine of many windowless monads" (PR, 220). We may say that Kant, in his final metaphysics, must either retreat to Leibniz, or advance to Bradley, but "Either alternative stamps experience with a certain air of illusoriness" (PR, 220) If we look back again, then it is obvious that Descartes and Leibniz mitigate this illusoriness by recourse to God as an epistemological warrant, the so called principle of *Veracitas Dei*, opposed to *Veracitas Naturae* (the truthfulness of nature).

Whitehead solution is his philosophy of organism. It admits the subjectivist doctrine, but rejects the sensationalist doctrine as it was outlined by empiricist tradition. He explained in his own concepts how an experience occurs and how we are able to describe it and to know by it something true about the world. A judgment is nothing but the subjective form of an integral prehension, a synthesis of two prehensions, one physical, another mental. "The physical prehension is the nexus of objectified actual occasions" (PR, 220) and "The mental prehension is the prehension of the proposition" (PR, 220). This prehension is impure because the pure conceptual prehension transfers its datum as a predicate.

Therefore, the theory of judgment in the philosophy of organism can equally be described as a correspondence theory or as a coherence theory. Whitehead agrees that a proposition can be true or false, and that a judgment can be correct, or incorrect, or suspended.

Thus, we accept that there is a correspondence theory of the truth and falsehood of propositions, and a coherence theory of the correctness, incorrectness and suspension of judgments. For Bradley, truth is just coherence into the system and if a proposition is accepted in the system it is necessarily true.

Whitehead agrees that his doctrine about judgment "is not far from Bradley" (PR, 231). According to Bradley, the ultimate subject of every judgment is the one ultimate substance, the absolute. Also, the judging subject is a mode of the absolute, self-contradictory if taken to be independently actual. This means that for Bradley "the judging subject has only a derivative actuality, which is the expression of its status as an affection of the absolute" (PR, 231). Thus, a judgment is an operation by which the absolute, under the limitations of one of its affections, enjoys self-consciousness of its enjoyment of affections. We also have the right to say that a judgment concerns the universe from the standpoint of the judging subject because each actual entity is a proof, let's say so, for the actuality of the universe. Therefore, in Whitehead's philosophy of organism Bradley's doctrine of actuality is simply inverted.

These final results that Russell and Whitehead reach definitively separate them, put them in contrast and conflict. Russell's *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* and Whitehead's *Process and Reality* can even be put in opposition in relation to the way in which each of them relates to the neo-Hegelian tradition. If among Russell's late topics we find only the idea of an overall conception of the world, Whitehead worked all the time in a framework in which the neo-Hegelian

presuppositions were constitutive. Perhaps this is why the impression that one simplifies, while the other complicates... Now we can also understand why Whitehead would have said about his former friend: “Bertie thinks I am muddleheaded; but then I think he is simpleminded” (Apud George R. Lucas, “Muddleheadedness and Simplemindedness – Whitehead and Russell”).

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