

Philosophy in Review 24(5) (2004)

**Arthur Sullivan, ed.**

*Logicism and the Philosophy of Language:*

*Selections from Frege and Russell.*

Peterborough, ON and Orchard Park, NY:

Broadview Press 2003. Pp. 298.

Cdn\$34.95/US\$26.95. ISBN 1-55111-471-2.

Early analytic philosophy, the fifty-year period (exactly!) from Frege's *Begriffsschrift* (1879) to Wittgenstein's 'Remarks on Logical Form' (1929), includes some of the best philosophy by some of the best philosophers in our tradition. So it is puzzling that there should be so few (any?) anthologies canonizing this work as a whole. True, many of these original contributions

were book-length, and many were highly technical, but there is almost always a shorter less technical account by the authors of the general nature of the project and its purported contribution(s) that would be suitable for an anthology. Therefore, the work under review is welcome, as is its substantial (seventy-five-page) introduction to topics of the period. From Frege we have nine selections: the Preface and Chapter 1 of *Conceptual Notation* (1879), the two expositions of that system from 1882 ‘On the Scientific Justification of a Conceptual Notation’, and ‘On the Aim of the Conceptual Notation’, the Introduction from *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884), the classics from the 1890’s: ‘Function and Concept’ (1891), ‘On Concept and Object’ (1892), ‘On Sense and Reference’ (1892). There also ‘What is a Function?’ (1904) and the classic ‘The Thought: A Logical Inquiry’ (1918). From Russell we have six selections: ‘Mathematics and Metaphysicians’ (1901), the classics ‘On Denoting’ (1905) and ‘Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description’, as well as ‘Logic and the Essence of Philosophy’ (1914), ‘Descriptions’ (1919), and ‘Mathematics and Logic’ (1919). From Sullivan we have an excellent survey of terminology, concepts and issues that both sets the context for Frege and Russell’s logicist project, and presents the project in summary form. Its main components are (i) philosophical background to the logicists project, especially Kant’s philosophy of logic and mathematics, (ii) logicism, especially Frege and Russell, (iii) modern philosophical logic, (iv) some disputes in ‘Early Analytic Philosophy’ and (v) the legacy of logicism. All of this is, in my experience, very useful for the student new to the subject.

In an anthology, the materials collected are its focus and so choice of material is the issue. There were two options here: (i) to concentrate on early logic(ism) and language, or (ii) to broaden the coverage to Early Analytic Philosophy. Both are legitimate. Taking the first tack, Sullivan chose to restrict the collection to Frege and Russell, presumably leaving out Wittgenstein because of the difficulty of selecting relevant material from the *Tractatus*. Still, there is a definite continuity of subject matter from Frege’s *Conceptual Notation* to the *Tractatus*, a period which marks the transition from a work (roughly) on logic and mathematic with a language subtext to a work (roughly) on language with a logic and mathematics subtext. Wittgenstein’s comments on logicism, Frege and Russell are often obscure, but sometimes (relatively) clear and to the point — especially in the case of comments on Russell. So I for one would have appreciated an attempt here (though the *Tractatus* is available in inexpensive editions). Regarding Frege, two expository articles from (1882) are not necessary, nor is (1904), which overlaps (1891). I would have used the space for e.g.: (i) section #3 from the *Foundations of Arithmetic*, which contains Frege’s important recasting of the analytic-a priori distinction; (ii) selections from the Introduction to the *Basic Laws of Arithmetic* (1893/1903), parallel to (1879) and (1884), but also where Frege spells out his anti-psychologism in more detail; (iii) Russell’s letter (1902) announcing the paradox and Frege’s amazingly gracious reply (1902; see also 1903). As with Frege, I would have reduced some of the overlap ‘Descriptions’ is a clean introduction to the theory of descriptions, but

contains little that ‘On Denoting’ lacks). However, in contrast with Frege (and even Wittgenstein), Russell worked on logicism for only about a decade, and did little innovative work on logicism after *Principia*. So there is not as much new that could be added. However, the parallelism with Frege could be brought out more clearly by having more of Russell’s earlier work (playing the role of Frege’s *Conceptual Notation*), for instance selections from *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903), especially the chapter on denoting concepts (as an unacknowledged foil for ‘On Denoting’). Also, some selections from *Principia Mathematica* (the Introduction?) to parallel the Frege selections might have been useful. In short, an anthology on (early) logicism might want to display the parallel development of Frege and Russell through their major works on the subject.

Taking a cue from the introduction (iv) ‘Early Analytic Philosophy’ it might have been useful to enlarge the project not only to include some Wittgenstein (if not selections from the *Tractatus*, then ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’), but to include a range of topics that all three philosophers had something to say about besides the foundations of arithmetic: meaning, reference, propositions, compositionality, truth, judgment and understanding, propositional attitudes, opacity, quantifiers, proper names, indexicals, descriptions etc. Obviously most of these topics are already here in the collection as it stands. Why not canonize this fact with a broader approach to the selections? From this angle, selection choices would be slightly different. It would now be relevant to include, e.g., (i) Frege’s important letter to Husserl (1891), where the sense and reference of predicates as well as singular terms and sentences (a Fregean singular term) is clearly endorsed, (ii) selections from Frege’s *Logic* (1897) where he introduces the idea of ‘mock’ thoughts and assertions, providing an impetus for Evans’ (1982) re-interpretation of Frege as a ‘Russellian’, (iii) Frege’s correspondence with Russell (1904) where the issue of whether objects of reference can be constituents of propositions is debated — a preview of the current ‘singular’ (Neo Russellian) vs ‘general’ (Neo-Fregean) propositions debate, (iv) selections from Frege’s (1914) ‘Logic in Mathematics’ which contains rare discussions of grasping senses, compositionality, and principles for testing for identity of sense.

It would be relevant to include, e.g., (i) some very interesting unpublished works (from Russell’s *Collected Papers*) between *The Principles of Mathematics* and ‘On Denoting’, where Russell toys with and rejects something like Frege’s sense-reference distinction (see especially ‘On the Meaning and Denotation of Phrases’ and ‘Meaning and Denotation’ — both 1903); (ii) selections from ‘On the Nature of Truth and Falsity’ (1907) where he criticizes Frege’s theory of propositions (who remains anonymous, however), contrasts it with his ‘multiple relations’ view, but criticizes that too; (iii) and/or section 3 of Russell’s (1910) ‘Truth and Falsity’, where he settles on and defends his own multiple relation view; (iv) selections from *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (1918) relevant to any of the above themes, but including the last, sweeping ‘Excursus in Metaphysics: What There Is’. In short, there are also reasons to consider a broader-scoped collection, relevant to Early Analytic

Philosophy (courses), and not just to logicism (courses). But we should also be grateful to Sullivan for the excellent collection and introduction he has given us.

**Robert M. Harnish**  
University of Arizona