THE SIMPLICITY ARGUMENT IN WITTGENSTEIN AND RUSSELL

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In previous publications,[1] I have historically traced the prevalence and the influence of an argument—an argument which Kant calls the Achilles, the most powerful, of all rationalist demonstrations in the history of ideas (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 351-352). This proof, which ultimately derives from Plato (*Phaedo*, 78b) has been repeatedly used and has had a major influence in shaping certain philosophical discussions since the Hellenic Age. The form of the argument is fairly straightforward: the essential nature of the soul consists in its power of thinking; thought, being immaterial, is unextended, i.e., simple, having no parts; and what is simple is (a) indestructible; (b) a unity; and (c) an identity. I have attempted to map the incidence and force of this demonstration in the 17th and 18th centuries —from the Cambridge Platonists to Kant (and even later into Hegel, Marx, Bergson, Husserl, and Sartre)— a time when it becomes crucial in questions concerning (1) the immortality

[1] *The Achilles of Rationalist Arguments* (Nijhoff, 1974), hereafter cited as *ARA*; "Descartes's Bridge to the External World," *Studi Internazionali di Filosofia* (Autumn, 1971); "Hume and Shaftesbury on the Self," *The Philosophical Quarterly* (Oct., 1971); "The Premise of the Transcendental Analytic," *ibid.* (April, 1973); "Marx and Engels on Idealism and Materialism," *Journal of Thought* (July, 1974); "The Simplicity Argument and Absolute Morality," *ibid.* (April, 1975); "Kant's General Argument in the Analytic," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (Summer, 1974); "Locke and Leibniz on Personal Identity," *ibid.* (Summer, 1975); "Hume on Space (and Time)," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming); "The Simplicity Argument and the Freedom of Consciousness," *Idealistic Studies* (forthcoming); "The Simplicity Argument vs. a Materialist Theory of Mind," *Philosophy Today* (forthcoming); and "Brentano's Theory of Consciousness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (forthcoming).

of the soul; (2) the "transcendental" condition necessary for the unity of consciousness (or the rationalist principle that the soul must be an immaterial unity in order for consciousness to exist); (3) the necessary and sufficient criteria for the establishment of personal or moral identity; and (4) its use as a sometimes hidden or unconscious premise, but often explicit "principle," of certain metaphysical, epistemological, and even ethical idealist doctrines. Thus if thoughts or ideas are essentially unextended, and given directly to consciousness, it at once becomes problematic how an immaterial soul can know a material, extended, "external" world. Furthermore, (5) if meanings, as ideas, are non-physical, it follows that we can investigate and describe immutable, unified, and identical moral meanings as they are given absolutely to consciousness. In addition, (6) Hegel summons the argument for still another employment, for he contends that it constitutes a demonstration of the freedom of self-consciousness. And I have claimed that this same Hegelian model of consciousness serves both Bergson, in *Time and Free Will*, and Sartre, in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and *Being and Nothingness*, with their conceptions of the freedom of consciousness. But there is even another use, for a number of authors, in both literature and philosophy, invoke the argument as a ground for a certain "romantic" conception of time. The general structure of this proof begins, once again, with the principle that consciousnesses or minds, thoughts or ideas, are non-extended, immaterial, simple, i.e., indivisible and consequently self-contained and self-sufficient, free. Furthermore, consciousness of time is an awareness of pure, non-extended qualities (as opposed to quantities), whether these qualities are internally and directly given in awareness as (a) feelings; or (b) "sensed" intuitions (*minima sensibilia* being intrinsically non-extended, purely intensive magnitudes). This version of the argument is exploited by Schelling, in his conception of the Absolute; by Schopenhauer, in his theory of the immersion of the self in eternity; and by Bergson, in his in-

tuition of pure duration. And, finally, the simplicity argument serves to ground an alternate model of the mind —one might almost say an antidote— to the prevailing materialist or physicalist attempts at reducing and identifying consciousness with a "mind"-brain paradigm. In this spirit, I take issue with A. M. Armstrong's recent claim, in a *Materialist Theory of Mind* (Humanities, 1968), that the "mind is the brain," and that it is reducible to, identical with, or explainable by "Central State Materialism." In opposition, I seek to establish counter-arguments from basically three different standpoints: (1) the unity of meaning and the existence of pure relational structures in consciousness; (2) the characteristic of an essential element of freedom in awareness; and (3) the indubitability of the temporality of human consciousness and the inability of the physicalist model to account for this giveness. All three, with their implications, combine as arguments which reject the materialistic, mechanistic conception of a "mind"-brain model.

After having traced, in a rough and general outline, the history of the argument from simplicity in its various functions, and as it appears within the context of certain rationalist and idealist doctrines, it seemed obvious and natural enough to proceed and consider whether the argument might not have enjoyed some corresponding service in the interests of "analytic" philosophy, more specifically in the theories of "logical atomism" as well. The subject matter of this paper, accordingly, is the possible role the simplicity argument may have played in the early and middle periods, respectively, of both Wittgenstein and Russell. More specifically, I wish to contend that there is a definite employment and dependence by Wittgenstein and Russell on the simplicity argument and that it serves them in accounting for both (a) Wittgenstein's unity and identity of meaning in consciousness (or language); and (b) the unity and identity of the elementary mental constituents of awareness, i.e., Russell's "sense data" commitments.

I shall begin with the more difficult interpretational case of Wittgenstein. Concerning the *Tractatus*, George Pitcher has said:

> One has the strong impression that each proposition has been carefully thought out and painstakingly worded, and that behind each lies a host of subtle, but mostly unexpressed, considerations. Hence the passages of the *Tractatus* need to be interpreted —somewhat like those in a sacred text.[2]

It shall be in great part a primary task of this paper to ferret out certain of those concealed "considerations." In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Kegan Paul, 1933), Wittgenstein strikingly announces that:

> The object is simple (2.02).

What he seems to mean by this is that the ultimate and most basic constituents, elements, of reality are simple objects, which, as it turns out, can be referred to by simple names.[3] As such simples, objects are indivisible, not further analyzable that is, a simple object is without parts or components of any kind. Furthermore:

> The name means an object. The object is its meaning (3.203).

Thus, the ultimate elements of a language are the most elementary words or simple names. These names in turn directly denote, intend, mean, or signify simple things, i.e., objects in the world and, in turn, combine into elementary proposi-

[2] G. Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 17.
[3] As numerous commentators have rightly pointed out, Wittgenstein here shares the "analytic" model of knowledge with most of the notable epistemological figures of the 17th and 18th centuries, including Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, and Hume (Pitcher, *op. cit.*, p. 42); and James Gibson, *Locke's Theory of Knowledge and Its Historical Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 47 ff.

tions depicting "atomic situations." Accordingly, any meaningful language must in the last analysis be founded on names, on irreducible, indefinable terms, the smallest units of language, which in turn directly, i.e., immediately denote objects, i.e., simples (*Tractatus*, 3.26, 4.221), and serve to form the elementary propositions of meaningful discourse. The building blocks of the world and of our language then are the "same," in a significant but unspecified sense, namely, objects that are simple and names that are likewise simple, the latter which *mean* or refer to the former pertinent objects. And Wittgenstein, like Russell before him in his analysis of the theory of descriptions, assumes some degree of structural identity between language and existents, some correspondence between discourse and reality. The crucial assumption here is the principle that (correct) logical form is also the structure of reality; the concept of logical form is thus taken to belong to ontology as well as to logic and the logical pattern of the proposition, reducible to atomic unities, is held to be the "same" as the inner structure of reality. Consequently, Wittgenstein's ontology is a theory of the ultimate contents of the world, a world composed not simply of objects but of objects arranged or configurated in facts which "picture" them; although, to be sure, Wittgenstein's "pictures" are not (or not just) spatial pictures like maps or photographs but rather "logical" pictures.

What, however, is such a simple object? What is an example of a simple object? This is a difficult problem. Wittgenstein rejects proper names since they are in fact analyzable into further components i.e., they are not truly indefinable. They are, bluntly put, not rock-bottom descriptions but instead abbreviations for a complex of descriptions. But, according to Wittgenstein:

> A [simple] name cannot be dissected any further by means of a definition (3.26).

But then, again, just what would serve as an example of a

simple? Now, although Wittgenstein is certain (during the *Tractatus* period) that there must be such simple objects and hence names —otherwise all language would be devoid of meanings, these simples being the ultimate bearers of meaning— he confesses that he cannot think of a single concrete example of one (cf., *Notebooks 1914-1916,* 14.6.15, 16.6.15, 21.6.15). That, he regards as an empirical problem (not a "logical" one). One possibility is the familiar one of the empiricists, the sense impression of a color, say, blue. By "simple" is here meant something further indefinable or unanalyzable in terms of quality, although to be sure not quantity (cf., Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature,* II, I, ii; II, II, i [pp. 277, 329]; and Locke, *Essay,* II, 2, 1). The problem here is that Wittgenstein realized, as Hume himself later did,[4] that a color-patch in our visual field necessarily involves divisible extension. In other words, a blue object —of a single, uniform shade of blue— nevertheless is comprised of particular blue visual points (cf., especially, *Notebooks,* 17.6.15). The problem then becomes are the points themselves extended or not; if they are, then they are themselves further divisible and hence by definition not simple; but if the points are non-extended, can they be colored (cf., *Tractatus,* 2.0131)? (Hume's doctrine of the *minima visibilia,* which he shares with Leibniz, Berkeley, and Kant, is just such an attempt to claim that non-extended visual points, without quantity or parts, nevertheless have a color quality.) To suggest, as Wittgenstein himself does, that every "tone must have *a* pitch" and that a "speck . . . must have color" (or a color must have extension) comes dangerously close to opting for the existence of genuine *a priori* synthetic relations obtaining within the context of an allegedly "simple" object or name. (But "There is no picture which is *a priori* true," *Tractatus,* 2.225.) Obviously, however, such a connection, even if it did empirically exist, could hardly be described

[4] See my forthcoming article, "Hume on Space (and Time)," *Journal of the History of Philosophy.*

as simple in any usual sense of the term or in the sense apparently intended by Wittgenstein.

However, if the disadvantages of finding a clear example of a simple object are considerable, the benefits of stressing the principle of ultimate simplicity far outweigh the difficulties involved. Apart from it being simply an assumption, a "first principle" that objects and names either have —or are— intrinsic meanings, true simples are entities which, by their very nature, are unities and identities. What is simple, having no parts, must be essentially a unity (although obviously not everything that is a [complex] unity must thereby itself be simple). Similarly, if some thing, an object, is simple, it remains an identity as long as it exists. Needless to point out, any one who is interested in a theory of meaning would be greatly encouraged if he could establish the existence of true simples, for he would by that very stroke also solve the problem of the unity of meaning (or consciousness) as well as the identity of meaning (its stability, which serves as condition for both (a) solipsistic recognition and (b) intersubjective communication).[5]

If we are to know the world, then our signs, symbols, or names (*Tractatus*, 4.24) must remain simple, unique, determinate. Now change is defined as the redistribution of parts within a complex. But what is simple cannot, in principle, undergo change or transformation. Therefore, Wittgenstein seems to have speculated, the possibility of unified and identical meanings finally rests on the existence of simple names, which in turn *mean* or intend simple existences. In other words, Wittgenstein substituted an identity and unity of meaning for the traditional concepts of the identity and unity of consciousness (cf. my *ARA*, Chapters III and IV).

[5] See my article, "The Simplicity Argument and Absolute Morality," *Journal of Thought* (May, 1975), wherein I claim that Husserl likewise depends on the simplicity argument in order to ground a unity and identity of meaning in consciousness. Philosophers impressed by mathematics —as Wittgenstein was— stressing as it does the conception that all numbers are modelled on the paradigm of the monad, would naturally be led into connecting the concepts of simplicity, unity, and identity.

The requirement that simple signs be possible is the requirement that sense be determinate (3.23). Differently put, again, identity and determinacy of meaning rests on something (metaphysically or "logically") being intrinsically simple. Ideally, the names should (and ultimately must) mean, picture, or refer to determinate, particular individuals or objects and not just e.g., *some* watch on *some* table or *any* watch on *any* table (*Notebooks*, 20.6.15-22.6.15). The alternative to this account would be the condemnation of our language as indeterminate, non-specific, meaningless; and in that case, we could never mean what we say.

Wittgenstein, at times, seems to confess that the metaphysical principle "there are simples" is an *a priori* assumption. But he believes that we should assume that simple objects exist, as well as simple names (i.e., their indefinable but meaningful signs), in order not to be trapped into the sceptical crises engendered by either: (a) an infinite regress of forever reducing complex names and objects to lesser but nevertheless compound ones *ad infinitum*; or (b) regarding all names as merely circularly interdependent, in which event we would be trapped within, if not a Lockian "way of ideas," at least inside a verbal "way of words," forever doomed, in principle, not to have any possible intercourse with the external and public world.

Granted —at least in the context of the arguments presented in the *Tractatus* period— that indeed there are simples, a further question seems both important and pertinent at this point, namely, what is the ultimate principle of unity underlying not simples but admittedly complex names and objects whose existence we all wish to admit and maintain; what is their "principle of connection," synthesis, or composition; why do they not fall apart or disintegrate; and why do we regard them as composing one complex rather than mistaking them for another? Of course, one answer is that our forms of language, or basic propositions, with their accompanying structural connectives so "unify" them. But the

problem I am driving at goes deeper than that, for this is merely an accidental aggregate or contingent set of connections, as Wittgenstein himself argues. Rather what I am suggesting is that Wittgenstein believed (in the *Tractatus* period) that just as there are absolute simples so likewise he must have been convinced that there is a corresponding final source of unity in the mind, which parallels the simplicity of objects and names. A unity not unlike that offered by Descartes's conception of the reflexive cogito; Leibniz's apperceptive monad; Kant's transcendental unity of apperception; or Schopenhauer's metaphysical will (*Tractatus*, 5.62-5.641; cf., *Notebooks*, 2.8.16-12.8.16: "the willing subject exists. If the will did not exist, neither would there be that [indivisible] centre of the world which we call the I" (5.8.16)). In this sense, the mind could be correctly characterized as a simple, essentially unified existent, whose corresponding reality is the simple object. And the intercourse between the object and the mind would be facilitated by simple, unified, identical names. Accordingly the mind would have the power of unifying diverse simples into stable unities, which we would then call complex objects. Why else would Wittgenstein say the following?

> This shows that there is no such thing as the soul —the subject, etc.— as it is conceived in contemporary superficial psychology. A composite soul would not be a soul any longer (5.5421).

Is Wittgenstein perhaps suggesting here that all unities of propositions —simple as well as complex— are, in the last analysis, recognized as such because the mind itself is a simple unity? Indeed, I think he is; and it is not an unusual conclusion for a thinker impressed by the speculative thought of Schopenhauer. See, again, especially *Tractatus*, 5.62-5.641.

Section 47 of the *Philosophical Investigations* is a long —and a rather polemical— criticism of the concept of the

absolute simplicity of objects and names, as Wittgenstein sought to use them in the *Tractatus* (cf., also §§ 91, 178, v). Similarly, any suggestion concerning a parallel metaphysical "unity of consciousness," based on a reflexive paradigm of simplicity between the subject and object, the knower and the known, is likewise completely rejected by him (*PI*, § 116, 398, 417, iv). But perhaps this is all rather a self-defeating way to let the fly out of the flybottle by breaking the glass. If, however, our original purpose was to make the receptacle useful, then smashing it in order to rid it of a nuisance may be going too far. For we may be doing without thinking.

In "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918), Russell contended that he desired to describe his doctrine as logical atomism, rather than physical atomism, because the ultimate indivisible units for which he sought, as the last residue of analysis, were logical in character as opposed to material. Among these logical atoms were a very important group which he characterized as "such things as little patches of colour or sounds," i.e., sense data.[6] Russell wishes, of course, to place himself in direct opposition to the "monadic" theory of Hegelian absolute idealism, current in his day, which stressed that reality consisted "of a single indivisible reality" (p. 178); thus, he formulated a theory which adopted a plurality of logical atoms, indivisible and self-sufficient, and ontologically subsisting apart from the existence or non-existence of any other atom. Each of these single, particular atoms themselves,

[6] B. Russell, *Logic and Knowledge: Essays 1901-1951*, ed. R. C. Marsh (Allen and Unwin, 1966), pp. 179, 203. For the purposes of this discussion, I have avoided the difficult interpretational problems Russell introduces concerning the distinction between sense data, as immediate mental contents of consciousness, and sensibilia, as independent possibilities of unsensed sensa, which would be invoked if one were to compare passages in *Mysticism and Logic* with *Our Knowledge of the External World*. Later in *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) Russell insists even more clearly that James' theory of "neutral monism" implies a distinction between phenomenal sense-data and physical sensations but that the difference depends on whether we are concerned with a mental, psychological context or with a material, physical one. But these distinctions, as critics have pointed out, hardly enable Russell any more than they did Hume to escape the confines of phenomenalism or idealism (see B. Blanshard, *The Nature of Thought* (Humanities, 1955), I, 306).

I wish to submit, however, functioned exactly like the ultimate bearers of the "single indivisible reality" of the monistic absolute idealist system. Only instead of a single reality, there were many, a plurality of realities. In this sense, Russell did not so much reject the idealist model of reality, rather, in a sense, he merely managed to multiply it. Russell's atoms, his simples, are, of course, qualitatively simple, not quantitative ones. He simply seems to have neglected, for instance, the at least two-dimensional, extended aspect of our visual patches and the associated difficulty concerning their possible further reduction. This, as we pointed out previously, is a problem with which both Hume and Wittgenstein struggled. Thus, to say that an emotion, say of hate, is qualitatively simple, or to say that the good is simple, indefinable, unanalyzable, irreducible (Moore) may seem plausible enough; but then to claim that a two-dimensional colored sense patch is similarly non-complex seems like an equivocal use of the terms unanalyzable, irreducible.

In any case, in the essay under discussion, Russell avows his interest in "the kinds of atoms out of which logical structures are [ultimately] composed" (p. 189). In the course of pursuing this topic, Russell offers a view which he wants to reject. But in doing so, I believe, he significantly illuminates the context of his own implicit positive discussion. The passage is as follows:

> Of course, all the ordinary objects of daily life are apparently complex entities: such things as tables and chairs, loaves and fishes, persons and principalities and powers —they are all on the face of it complex entities. All the kinds of things to which we habitually give proper names are on the face of them complex entities: Socrates, Piccadilly, Rumania, Twelfth Night or anything you like to think of, to which you give a proper name, they are all apparently complex entities. They seem to be complex systems bound together into some kind of unity, that sort of a unity

> that leads to the bestowal of a single appellation. I think it is the contemplation of this sort of apparent unity which has very largely led to the philosophy of monism, and to the suggestion that the universe as a whole is a single complex entity more or less in the sense in which these things are that I have been talking about (p. 190).

As Russell emphasizes in the very next sentence he himself denies that there are basic complex entities of this kind. But what strikes me as important about the passage is its concern with the notion of unity. The ultimate unity of the absolute idealist model of reality rests, as we all know, on an organic paradigm of reality which seeks to identify being and knowledge. "Parts" are rather more like living members which are completely meaningful, in the last analysis, only in so far as they can be comprehended as related to the "whole"; and you cannot remove a member without thus changing the nature or meaning of the whole of reality. A face without a nose is not really a face. Ultimately, of course, with the realization that everything depends on, or is related to, everything else, the absolute idealists proceeded to claim that only the whole is truly real and that it constitutes a single, indivisible, unified reality. In the atomistic model of reality (represented in the *Tractatus* period of Wittgenstein and the middle period of Russell), by contrast, the collection of atomic units is more in the nature of a mass or an aggregate; and parts can be removed without a violation of the nature of the remaining parts. A piece of gold may be removed from a mass of the same substance without thereby in any respect changing the nature of the composition of the remaining amount. It follows, on the atomic model, that the units are independent of each other. Now, however, I wish to stress that on both accounts the principle of unity is of paramount importance. In the former case, the unity derives from the interrelation of different members within the whole; and in the latter case, the atoms, the indivisible parts, being essentially simple are

intrinsically unities. But, again, in both cases whether it be the monadic, indivisible reality of the (logical) atomists (or even for that matter of the monadic subjective idealism of Leibniz), it follows that what is perfectly simple must, in principle, be a unity and an identity. Russell's ultimate units of analysis then turn out to be "words whose meaning is simple" (p. 193). And "certain words express something [absolutely] simple" (p. 193); they, in brief, refer to simple sense data.

> Take the word 'red', for example, and suppose —as one always has to do— that 'red' stands for a particular shade of colour. You will pardon that assumption, but one can never get on otherwise. You cannot understand the meaning of the word 'red' except through seeing red things. There is no other way in which it can be done. It is no use to learn languages, or to look up dictionaries. None of these things will help you to understand the meaning of the word 'red'... All analysis is only possible in regard to what is complex, and it always depends, in the last analysis, upon direct acquaintance with the objects which are the meanings of certain simple symbols (pp. 193-194).

According to Russell, then, the word 'red' is a simple (logical) symbol which stands for or means a particular shade of red, it refers to a particular sense datum of red within a specific consciousness. As such it is simple, indefinable, irreducible, indivisible; and consequently, Russell concludes, in "the sense of analysis you cannot define 'red'," rather it is some entity you immediately, directly *know* the meaning of (identification of being and knowledge).

There are a number of important points which we should take up now. Beside the explicit assumption that any simple symbol refers to a (qualitatively) simple sense datum, there is, as I have tried to make clear above, an implicit presupposition that any and all true simples are necessarily and essentially atomic unities. Since, for Russell, simple words

that refer to sense data are intrinsically meaningful, it thereby necessarily follows that certain words are unities of meaning and, by implication, potentially recognizable as having identical meanings in the same consciousness at different times and (hopefully) various consciousnesses at the same time. So far we have not gone beyond what we have already said. But now certain difficulties arise which shake the foundation of this deceptively straightforward account. Russell assumes that 'red' *alone*, as a single term, is meaningful; and it is so because it refers to a particular and simple sense datum. But —apart from the question are colored sense data really simple— is a sense datum, 'red', meaningful even when it is referred to by a symbol? Can it be meaningful, for instance, apart from its relational context to other colors or at least to other and various shades of red? On this Russellian account it would seem that it is possible for someone to be aware of just one sense datum, say, if he were submerged in relatively deep water. But in such a case, we might wish to argue not that one is then aware *of* blue but rather that one's consciousness is a blue consciousness, simple, undifferentiated blueness. As Russell puts it, "There is no reason why you should not have a universe consisting of one particular and nothing else" (*Logic and Knowledge*, p. 202). But is this really consciousness? Is it not really the very antithesis of awareness? An awareness without any distinctions rather seems not to be a consciousness at all. (Hegel seems to have been right on this point.) Furthermore, Russell offers the example of colors; but what about the sense datum (or data) of spatial extension itself; is space simple or not? (Wittgenstein seems to suggest there could be extensions without color: "Roughly speaking, objects are colorless," [*Tractatus*, 2.0232; but see 2.0251].)[7] What Russell is really engaged in is a theory of consciousness, a philosophy of mind, which is unfortunately disguised from him by his concentrated em-

[7] Cf. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 29 ff. In this analysis, space is anything but a simple sense datum.

phasis on a theory of meaning. What he fails to fully realize is that his explicit adoption of intrinsically meaningful, *simple* symbols, with their accompanying sense data, conceals a complicated network of further hidden principles which deal with the ultimate simplicity and unity of the mind. As Russell himself ought to have recognized at the time, having previously written a commentary on Leibniz, the unity of the world with all its concomitant meaning rests, in the final analysis, on a monadic principle or paradigm of the mind.[8] And his own commitment to mental or "logical" atoms necessarily involves implications concerning the monadic character of the mind, since Russell himself, prior to his views on neutral monism, never suggests that the simples, as particulars, exist apart from consciousness. In this connection, it may be worth pointing out that Russell's sense data, in the works under discussion, are just as mental as Hume's perceptions and that the mental would seem to be, at least at this stage of Russell's development, immaterial. (Logical atoms are certainly not material or physical entities as Russell himself repeatedly underscores.) So we are not surprised to find Russell, in *The Problems of Philosophy*, puzzling about the existence of an external world and finally deciding that our assurance of it is simply "an instinctive belief" (Chapters I and II).[9] Russell, no less than either Leibniz or Hume, had closed himself into the single monadic world of subjective idealism or phenomenalism. The only difference was that like Hume he explicitly tried to argue his view from the standpoint of the indubitable existence of simple impressions; but unconsciously he was committed as well to a Leibnizian monadic model of the simplicity and unity of consciousness, a commitment which was itself hidden from him by his neglect to search into the further concealed implications of his own stress on "simple mental atoms."

[8] Cf. *Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 14-16, 36; and *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (Allen and Unwin, 1937), pp. 103-104, 239, 241, 242.
[9] Cf. Hume, *Treatise*, I, II, vi (pp. 67-68).

RESUMEN

El presente artículo se propone mostrar el papel que juega el argumento de la simplicidad en las tesis de Wittgenstein para dar cuenta de la unidad e identidad del significado en la conciencia (o en el lenguaje) y en Russell, en sus periodos temprano y medio, respecto a la unidad e identidad de los elementos mentales constitutivos del acto de conciencia. Dicho argumento reza como sigue: la naturaleza esencial del alma consiste en su capacidad de pensar; el pensamiento, al ser inmaterial, es inextenso, es decir, simple; y lo que es simple es (a) indestructible; (b) una unidad; (c) una identidad.

Wittgenstein afirma en el *Tractatus* que el objeto es simple (2.02), y lo que parece decir con esto es que los elementos constituyentes últimos de la realidad son objetos simples, y como tales indivisibles, no analizables ulteriormente. Por otro lado, "el nombre significa un objeto. El objeto es su significado" (3.203). De este modo, los elementos últimos del lenguaje serían las palabras más elementales o nombres simples y esos nombres, a su vez, entrarían en combinación en proposiciones elementales representando "situaciones atómicas". Acorde con esto, cualquier lenguaje debe fundarse en último análisis, en nombres, en términos irreducibles e indefinibles; las unidades más pequeñas del lenguaje que, a su vez, directamente denotan objetos, es decir, simples (3.26, 4.221).

Tanto Wittgenstein como Russell asumen algún grado de identidad estructural entre el discurso y la realidad; la asunción crucial aquí es el principio de que la forma lógica correcta es también la estructura de la realidad. Consecuentemente, la ontología de Wittgenstein es una teoría de los contenidos últimos del mundo, un mundo compuesto no simplemente de objetos sino de objetos configurados en hechos que los "representan", siendo estas representaciones, representaciones "lógicas".

No obstante, Wittgenstein no logró encontrar un ejemplo de objeto simple a pesar de que durante el periodo del *Tractatus* tenía la certeza de que tales objetos debían existir. Pero consideraba que el problema de encontrar un objeto tal era un problema empírico, no "lógico". Un posible ejemplo, a saber, el de la impresión sensible de un color, presenta el problema de si los puntos visuales son extensos o no, pues si lo son, entonces son divisibles y por definición no son simples; pero si los puntos no son extensos, ¿cómo pueden tener un color?

Pero aun si las desventajas de no encontrar un ejemplo claro de

objeto simple son considerables, los beneficios de asumir el principio de simplicidad última compensan con mucho dichas desventajas. Si alguien pudiera establecer la existencia de auténticos simples, resolvería también el problema de la unidad e identidad del significado.

Wittgenstein sustituye los conceptos tradicionales de la identidad y unidad de la conciencia por los de identidad y unidad del significado. La identidad y determinación del significado descansa en algo que es intrínsecamente simple (en sentido lógico o metafísico), pues si los nombres no designaran objetos determinados particulares, nuestro lenguaje sería indeterminado, no específico y carente de significado.

Wittgenstein parece confesar en ocasiones que el principio metafísico de que hay simples es una asunción *a priori*, pero cree que debemos asumir que existen tales objetos así como los nombres simples para no quedar atrapados en las crisis escépticas engendradas por (a) un regreso al infinito consistente en reducir por siempre nombres y objetos a grupos menos numerosos de nombres y objetos, que sigan siendo aun complejos o (b) considerar todos los nombres como circularmente interdependientes, en cuyo caso nos encontraríamos dentro de "un camino de palabras" incapaz de mantener una interacción con el mundo externo.

Concediendo, al menos en el contexto de los argumentos presentados en el periodo del *Tractatus*, que hay simples, una pregunta parece pertinente, a saber, ¿cuál es el principio último de unidad subyacente a los nombres y objetos complejos? Wittgenstein, supongo, creyó (en el periodo del *Tractatus*) que así como hay simples absolutos debe haber una correspondiente fuente final de unidad en la mente paralela a la simplicidad de objetos y nombres; una unidad similar a la concepción cartesiana del *cogito* reflexivo, a la de la mónada aperceptiva de Leibniz, a la unidad trascendental de la apercepción de Kant, o a la voluntad metafísica de Schopenhauer (*Tractatus* 5.62 – 5.641; cf. *Notebooks*, 2.8.16 – 12.8.16: "el sujeto con voluntad existe. Si la voluntad no existiese, tampoco existiría aquel centro [indivisible] del mundo, que llamamos el Yo" (5.8.16)). En este sentido la mente podría ser caracterizada correctamente como un existente simple esencialmente unificado cuya correspondiente realidad es el objeto simple; y la interacción entre el objeto y la mente sería facilitada por los nombres idénticos, simples, unificados. La mente tendría el poder de unificar diversos simples en unidades estables que llamaríamos objetos complejos; así, Wittgenstein nos dice "esto muestra que no hay una cosa tal como el alma, el sujeto, etc., tal y como la concibe la psicología superficial contemporánea. Una alma compuesta no sería más una alma" (5.5421, cf. 5.62 –

5.641). En *Philosophical Investigations* (§ 116, 398, 417, iv), Wittgenstein abandona esta tesis, ya que rechaza cualquier sugerencia concerniente a una "unidad de la conciencia" basada en un paradigma reflexivo de simplicidad entre el sujeto y el objeto.

En "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918), Russell describía su doctrina como un atomismo lógico, ya que los elementos últimos, indivisibles, el residuo del análisis, eran de carácter lógico, no material. Un grupo importante de estos átomos lógicos eran los datos de los sentidos, y la teoría que Russell formula adopta una pluralidad de átomos lógicos indivisibles y autosuficientes, cada uno subsistente con independencia de la existencia o no existencia de cualquier otro átomo. Con esto se ubicaba Russell en oposición directa a la teoría monista hegeliana del idealismo absoluto que sostenía que la realidad consistía en una realidad simple e indivisible. Lo que deseo mantener, sin embargo, es que cada uno de estos átomos particulares funcionaba exactamente como los portadores últimos de la "realidad indivisible única" del sistema monista, idealista absoluto. Sólo que en lugar de una realidad única, había muchas, una pluralidad de realidades.

En el ensayo bajo consideración Russell se ocupa de "los tipos de átomos a partir de los cuales las estructuras lógicas se componen en última instancia" (p. 189).

En el modelo atomista de la realidad las partes pueden ser removidas sin una violación de la estructura de las partes restantes. En este modelo los átomos, las partes indivisibles, al ser esencialmente simples, son intrínsecamente unidades. Las unidades últimas del análisis de Russell vienen a ser "palabras cuyo significado es simple" (p. 193), y "ciertas palabras expresan algo absolutamente simple" (p. 193), éstas refieren a datos de los sentidos simples. Tómese por ejemplo la palabra 'rojo'. Con respecto a ella Russell afirma que "en el sentido del análisis no se puede definir 'rojo'". Esta es más bien una entidad cuyo significado se conoce inmediata y directamente (identificación del ser y el conocer).

Ya que para Russell las palabras simples que designan datos de los sentidos son intrínsecamente significativas, se sigue necesariamente que ciertas palabras son unidades de significado y, por implicación, poseedoras de significados idénticos en la misma conciencia en tiempos diferentes y (es de esperarse) en varias conciencias al mismo tiempo. Pero surgen ciertas dificultades que conmueven el fundamento de esta concepción: Russell asume que un término 'rojo', por ejemplo, que designa un color es, por sí solo, significativo porque se refiere a un dato de los sentidos particular y simple, pero ¿puede ser significativo un dato de los sentidos, por ejemplo, aparte

de su contexto relacional con otros colores o, al menos, con otras tonalidades del mismo? En esta concepción russelliana parecería que es posible para alguien ser consciente de un solo dato de los sentidos, es decir, tener un universo consistente de un particular y nada más; pero ¿es esto realmente ser consciente? Un acto de conciencia sin distinción ulterior alguna más bien parece no ser una conciencia en lo absoluto.

Con lo que Russell está comprometido realmente es con una teoría de la conciencia, con una filosofía de la mente que se halla infortunadamente disfrazada para él por su énfasis en una teoría del significado.

Como Russell mismo debió haber reconocido en ese entonces, la unidad del mundo descansa en último término sobre un principio monádico o paradigma de la mente, y su propio compromiso con átomos mentales o "lógicos" comprende necesariamente implicaciones concernientes al carácter monádico de la mente ya que Russell mismo, antes de su monismo neutral, nunca sugiere que los simples como particulares existan aparte de la conciencia. Vale la pena indicar que los datos de los sentidos de Russell, en los trabajos bajo discusión, son tan mentales como las percepciones de Hume y que lo mental parecería ser, en este punto del desarrollo de Russell, inmaterial. Es por ello que Russell decide finalmente que nuestra seguridad acerca de la existencia del mundo exterior es simplemente una creencia instintiva. Russell, al igual que Leibniz o Hume, se hallaba encerrado en el mundo simple monádico del idealismo subjetivo o del fenomenalismo.

(Resumen de Carolina Pérez y Cicero)