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Reviewed by Roberta Ballarin

## Review: *Necessity Lost*, by Sanford Shieh

Roberta Ballarin

*Necessity Lost* is presented as the first volume of a massive work on the conception of modality in the early days of analytic philosophy. The introduction explains that Shieh's main aim is to correct a popular misconception according to which it was the logical positivists who initiated the misgivings against modality in analytic philosophy. They were motivated by epistemological qualms of an empiricist sort, a mixture of verificationism about meaning and the idea that modal propositions are not empirically verifiable, thus meaningless (13). According to this popular misconception, earlier analytic philosophers, Frege and Russell first and foremost, had no considered take on modality and so also no considered anti-modalist position. They simply ignored the topic. In this volume Shieh rebuts this standard view and argues that Frege and Russell held a precise and quite interesting position on modality, which he labels amodalism, to which they subscribed for logical rather than epistemological reasons. The volume reconstructs in great detail their distinct versions of amodalism and the logical roots of their views grounded first and foremost in an absolutist conception of truth.

The introduction outlines the contents of a second promised volume which will engage with C. I. Lewis's and Wittgenstein's rejections of Frege's and Russell's amodalism. Shieh promises to show that Lewis and Wittgenstein were also moved by logical reasons, though they reached the opposite conclusion. If Shieh is right, Lewis's and Wittgenstein's modalism stands apart from recent metaphysical endorsements of modality, similarly to Frege's and Russell's logically driven amodalism. Moreover, though logic, rather than metaphysics or epistemology, is the driving force behind these early analytic stances on modality, no common view of logic needs to be in place. Frege and Russell

can be amodalists for different though in either case logical reasons. Similarly, Lewis and Wittgenstein need not agree on logic in order to endorse modality for logical reasons.

*Necessity Lost* is a monumental effort, clearly the result of years, if not decades, of hard philosophical and exegetical work. The book displays a grand vision. It propounds a new major interpretative thesis that illuminates and deepens our understanding of Frege's and Russell's philosophical systems, and opens the way to a richer understanding of analytic philosophy. This grand vision is sustained by powerful exegetical arguments. Shieh displays both a sophisticated understanding of the main texts under consideration and an impressive engagement with the secondary scholarly literature. Shieh works exceptionally hard to explain even some of the most basic points and offers carefully detailed arguments for his positions. However, the reader should be warned that this meticulous labor does not result in an easy-to-read book. Even a very sympathetic and eager reader can at times lose the main thread of Shieh's intricate arguments. Thus, I agree with [Linsky \(2020\)](#) that "this big book is densely argued". Indeed, as I labored through the material, Quine's description of Kaplan's essay "Opacity" as "rather a workout" came to my mind. This book too is rather a workout and unlike "Opacity" not necessarily "fun to read" ([Quine 1986](#), 290). What helps Shieh's readers along the way is not Kaplan's perfectly paced sense of humor, but a myriad of scholarly gems and the promise that a big reward lies at the end of one's efforts: a better understanding, perhaps even a major reconceptualization, of the philosophical tradition to which most of us contemporary anglophone philosophers belong.

This book is too rich both in substantial theses and detailed arguments for me to examine or even touch upon all of its major points. In what follows, I focus on some of its main theses and discuss in detail those issues that I find of greater philosophical interest. This is first and foremost a book on the history of analytic philosophy, but I won't engage with Shieh's scholar-

ship. Shieh provides plenty of evidence for attributing to Frege and Russell the views that he credits to them. I lack the depth of scholarly knowledge required to seriously question Shieh's (well-motivated) interpretation of Frege's and Russell's texts or to reconstruct how it connects to the work of other historians. I can only imagine that some better-equipped readers will remain unpersuaded by some of Shieh's textual evidence and will even have at their disposal an assortment of textually-based counterevidence. Such is the nature of scholarship! Yet, regarding the "considerable interpretive controversy" over some of Frege's puzzling views, Shieh writes, "the main claim I make for my interpretation is that it shows how these puzzling doctrines make sense. . . I am not claiming that Frege ever articulated to himself this conception in the form I have developed it here. I am claiming that this conception makes coherent a number of views in which Frege is invested, and so there is good reason to ascribe it to Frege. At the very least it is a Fregean conception" (143–44). I feel thereby justified in ignoring the most scholarly side of this deeply scholarly book and proceed to engage with the coherence and intrinsic philosophical value of the views that Shieh attributes to Frege and Russell.

## 1. Part I: Frege

The first chapter of the book is devoted to Frege's 1879 *Begriffsschrift* in comparison to Kant's logic and theory of judgment. The part of the chapter most relevant to the main topic of the book (modality) and to the main thesis of Part I (the dependence of Frege's amodalism on Frege's theory of judgment) is the discussion of Frege versus Kant on the category of modality for judgments. Shieh claims that Frege's amodalism was a constant feature of his philosophy both in his early writings like the *Begriffsschrift*, preceding the sense-reference distinction drawn in "On Sense and Reference" (1892), and in his later work following the distinction.

Shieh elucidates Kant's view of judgment as "an act of unifying or ordering representations, which produces a representation of those representations as ordered or unified" (21) and reminds us of Kant's classification of judgments under four titles: quantity, quality, relation and modality. Under the title of modality Kant distinguishes between problematic (possible), assertoric (actual), and apodictic (necessary) judgments (24). For Kant, modality does not contribute anything to the content or representation of a judgment (24), though what Kant means by this is open to scholarly debate. The key theses on Kant are two. First, Kant does not clearly separate the production of a content or representation from the act of judging, given that for him an act of judging produces a representation of representations. Second, for Kant modal distinctions are not part of the content of a judgment.

Shieh's discussion of Kant's modal distinctions is sophisticated and, despite this being a detour from his main focus, Shieh engages with the contemporary Kantian scholarship on how to interpret Kant on modal distinctions. Incidentally, the book is rich of such asides, which display the author's erudition and demonstrate that this book is built on a very solid background of textual knowledge. Shieh has firm control of a substantial amount of both primary and secondary literature and can draw complex connections between apparently disparate lines of thought. His own view surely builds on such extensive knowledge, accompanied by a deep understanding of the philosophical themes he handles. There is a cost, though one that more than a few readers will find worth paying. These asides sometimes make for a cumbersome reading and some of us might have benefited from a more streamlined account of the main arguments.

Shieh argues that at the time of the *Begriffsschrift*, Frege endorsed some of Kant's distinctions, but disagreed deeply on both logic and judgment, in particular concerning two crucial points. First, as is well known, Frege clearly separates the production of a content or representation from the act of judging

such content—just recall the distinction between the content stroke and the judgment stroke in the *Begriffsschrift*. For Frege, to judge is not to produce any content or representation, not even a representation of representations. Judging instead consists in acknowledging the truth of a content, whether acknowledging is understood in a weak non-factive sense or in a strong factive sense according to which only truths can be acknowledged. Second, for Kant modal distinctions are distinctions between three different kinds of judgments: problematic (possible), assertoric (actual), and apodictic (necessary), corresponding to assuming to be true, asserting to be true, and asserting to be true based on a logically compelling argument. But for Frege judgment is always simply the absolute acknowledgment of truth. There is thus no space in Frege's philosophy for modal distinctions at the level of judgment. Nonetheless, for now Frege agrees with Kant that modality does not contribute to the content of a judgment. Statements like "Possibly *P*", "*P*", and "Necessarily *P*" all express the same content. As a consequence, modalities at the time of the *Begriffsschrift* are neither part of the logical content of a statement nor of the form of judgment, and are instead mostly reduced to hints on the epistemic status of the speaker. Shieh ends up attributing to Frege the view that in a statement like "The human soul may be immortal" the contribution of the modal "may" is to convey or implicate that the speaker does not know of any deductive grounds for proving the opposite (similarly for the other two modalities: actuality and necessity). Shieh thinks of such hints as akin to Gricean implicatures (52–56). Thus, Frege in this early period sees modal terms not so much as contributing to the content expressed by a statement, but rather as implicating, off the content-record so to speak, some information about the speaker's epistemic status (59).

Chapter Two functions as a short but extremely rich transitional chapter where Shieh defines what he means by amodalism and supports his attribution of amodalism to Frege. In his later writings Frege does not explicitly discuss the modalities.

This has led to the widespread view that the later Frege has no well-considered, mature philosophical view on the topic. Moreover, Shieh points out that it is common to regard Frege's notion of sense as implicitly modal. A sense determines a referent via the satisfaction of a condition. Insofar as some of these conditions are contingently satisfied, a sense can be understood as determining a different referent in different possible circumstances (59–61). Notice that this modal conception of Fregean senses is incorporated into the widespread model-theoretic Carnapian representation of senses as intensions, i.e., as functions from possible worlds to extensions. In particular, given Frege's views in "On Sense and Reference" that full declarative sentences have thoughts as their senses and truth values as their referents, thoughts are standardly understood as functions from possible worlds to truth values.

Against this common (mis-)conception, Shieh presents many passages of Frege's claiming that truth is absolute, and argues that Frege finds no way of making sense of the idea that one and the same thought is true under certain circumstances and false under others. The only sense that Frege seems able to make of the modal variability of statements is that variable statements express different thoughts under varying circumstances (65). But once interpreted, that is, assigned the thoughts they express, statements are either true or false and *tertium non datur*. The way in which Shieh interprets this well-known Fregean claim is not only, or not so much, that according to Frege there is no third truth value over and above the True and the False, but rather that one and the same thought cannot possibly vary in reference between the True and the False (66–67). Truth is thus absolute in the sense that a thought has a truth value in an absolute way. What is absolute then is not so much truth in and of itself, but the truth evaluation of truth bearers. Amodalism is the view that "there are no distinct ways or modes of being true or being false" (57). This goes hand in hand with the idea that truth is not relative to any parameter. Incidentally, it seems possible to

distinguish amodalism understood as truth-attributions being unmodifiable, there being no distinct *ways* of being true, from amodalism understood as truth-attributions being free of relativization to worlds, times or locations, i.e., as non-indexed to a parameter. Indeed, some may welcome the thought (harbour the illusion?) that truth's relativity is preferable to modes of truth. In what follows, I follow Shieh in not differentiating these two positions, as Frege seems hostile to both.

Shieh rightly claims that if truth-evaluation is thus absolute (non-modifiable, non-relational and non-variable) then there can be no space for a modal interpretation of Frege's notion of sense, not just for thoughts but even for the senses of singular terms and predicates. Shieh makes the point for proper names like "Theaetetus" and predicates like "flies" (61), but in a Fregean framework that treats descriptions as singular terms the point must extend to descriptions too. It is natural, it seems to me, to take the sense of a description like "The teacher of Alexander the Great" as having different referents in different circumstances. This of course goes hand-in-hand with the naturalness of truth-value variability for thoughts.<sup>1</sup> But if this were Frege's considered view on the subject, then the thoughts of statements containing this description could also vary in truth value in different circumstances. For example, "The teacher of Alexander the Great was Greek" would be false in circumstances where the teacher of Alexander was some Persian scholar. But then the thought that the teacher of Alexander the Great was Greek would vary in truth value, which is patently excluded by Frege.

I emphasize this point as it is possible to understand Shieh's claim that for Frege truth is absolute, i.e., that one and the same thought does not have different truth values in different circum-

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<sup>1</sup>On the other hand, reference variability is not natural for proper names and predicates, which for Frege refer to what he calls concepts, not to their extensions. Variability is not natural in these cases as these terms do not appear to determine their referents via the satisfaction of a descriptive condition (*pace* Frege on proper names).

stances, as just an invitation not to project onto Frege's notion of thought the apparatus of possible worlds with its world-relative notion of truth, and in general not to project onto Frege's notion of sense the technical notion of intension defined in terms of such an apparatus as a function from possible worlds to extensions. Moreover, the notion of extension too, insofar as it too is a world-relative notion, should not be confused with Frege's notion of reference. This is a fair warning that we would surely do well to heed.

Nonetheless, setting aside this world-relative technical reinterpretation of Fregean semantics, it is quite natural to think that the descriptive sense of an expression might have determined a different referent in different circumstances, understood now in a pre-theoretical way rather than as the possible worlds of formal semantics. Fregean senses seem to present or determine their referents by property satisfaction. Aristotle is the referent of "The teacher of Alexander the Great" insofar as he satisfies the property of teaching Alexander the Great. Whoever uniquely satisfies this property is the referent of the term, and so it seems that had someone else satisfied it they would have been the referent. This has nothing to do with the projection of the technical apparatus of possible worlds onto Frege's semantic notions. We need neither understand counterfactuals in terms of possible worlds nor senses as intensions in order to grasp the idea that objects satisfy some of their properties contingently and might have satisfied properties that they do not actually satisfy. Still, as Shieh points out, truth-absolutism presupposes the more general thesis of reference-absolutism, insofar as reference-variability, even for descriptions, may result in a change in truth value for the whole thought. Thus, if Frege can make no sense of the idea that a thought might have had a different truth value, then he must be equally unable to make sense of the idea that any interpreted expression might have had a different referent, that is, that a property might have been satisfied by different things. But this amounts to saying that according to Frege it is impossible

to meaningfully entertain the question of who else other than Aristotle might have been the teacher of Alexander. This is the radical view of amodalism, which Shieh pins on Frege. Simply put, the claim appears to be that for Frege modality is unintelligible. This strikes me as a very Quinean interpretation of Frege, and one that I whole-heartedly welcome as laying the foundations for a better understanding of the historical roots of Quine's thought. Shieh's reading of Frege may help us understand why Quine, in opposition to Carnap's attempts to sanitize modality, seems to reject even the most epistemically unproblematic explanations of modality.<sup>2</sup> If I am right on this, without discussing Quine, this book helps us unmask the Fregean roots of some of Quine's positions, chiefly his (in)famous animadversion to the modalities, that severed from their historical background all too often run the risk of appearing as inexplicable Quinean quirks.

Shieh argues that Frege is an amodalist in the very general sense that he regards truth as unqualifiable, period. Not only relatively to possible circumstances, but also relatively to time and location. He defines "temporalism" as the view that truth is relative to time, "localism" as relativity to places, "circumstantialism" as relativity to circumstances, and employs the term "modalism" for all such positions, qualified as temporal modalism, spatial modalism and metaphysical modalism, respectively (71). Frege, who holds that truth is absolute, subscribes to all forms of amodalism.

Shieh emphasizes that amodalism for time (atemporalism) is the view that it makes no sense to attribute temporal qualifications to truth. Thus, it is not just the case that it makes no sense to regard one and the same thought as true at a time and false at another. It also makes no sense to regard a thought as true or false *at all times*. Atemporalism stands in opposition not only to standard temporalism, understood as truth-variability for time, but also to eternalism, if eternalism is understood as

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<sup>2</sup>Perhaps more surprisingly, in the second part of the book Shieh will also reveal the Russellian roots of some of Carnap's views.

the view that a thought is true, if true, at all times. Eternalism, so understood, accepts time as an (invariant) truth-parameter.

I applaud Shieh's distinction between what he calls atemporalism and what he seems to regard as standard contemporary eternalism. I agree with Shieh that it is essential to distinguish the view that it makes *no sense* to attribute time-variability to the truth value of thoughts from the view that thoughts have the same truth value at all times, i.e., that they are constant functions of time or, more simply put, that they are either always true or always false. But not all eternalists are created equal, and I would argue that Quine, like Frege, subscribed to atemporalism, though this is not the place for doing so and Shieh might well agree on this. The chapter ends with an exposition of some bad reasons for attributing amodalism to Frege, and thus paves the way for Chapter Three where the correct reason is expounded.

Chapter Three is a long and complex chapter whose aim is to argue that Frege's amodalism depends on Frege's conception of judgment. The chapter is devoted to Frege's later post-sense-and-reference philosophy and aims to establish that Frege's notion of judgment is central to his logical views making other key notions of Frege's philosophical system—thought, truth and to some extent predication—depend upon it. Ultimately, Shieh will argue that if truth depends on judgment and judgment is absolute then so is truth.

Shieh attributes to the mature Frege what he calls the Recognitional Conception of Judgment, according to which a judgment is the recognition that what a thought represents to be the case does indeed obtain: "a judgment is a recognition, in the factive sense, that something is the case" (102). Judgment, in contrast to the activity of judging, is thus factive: only true thoughts are proper objects of judgment. Judgment plays a central role in Frege's notion of logic which has to do with truth and the deductive connections between truths. The factivity of judgment is also in accordance with Frege's views linking judgments to knowledge and science (80).

Shieh explains that while at the time of the *Begriffsschrift*, judgment was understood as ascription or predication of truth to a thought (Judgment as Predication), in later writings instead Frege characterizes judgment as taking a step from a thought to a truth value, the True (83). Obviously, this is a metaphor, so Shieh wants to elucidate what it means to say that judgment is a step from thought to truth. The Recognitional Conception of Judgment encapsulates Shieh's proposal of how judgments connect thoughts to truth values.

Shieh argues that in Frege's system judgment is prior to predication, thought and truth, insofar as these notions must be understood in terms of judgment, not vice versa. Concerning judgment and predication, we have seen that Frege clearly distinguishes the production or contemplation of a content from its judgment. So, if predicating *F* of *o* is understood weakly as contemplating the attribution of *F* to *o* (representing *o* as *F*) it clearly does not capture judgment. So, judgment cannot be understood in terms of a prior and independent, but as such weaker, notion of predication. Crucially, this irreducibility of judgment to weak predication applies also to the suggestion that the judgment that *o is F* consists in predicating the property of *being true* to the thought that *o is F*. Representing a thought as true does not suffice for judgment. So, insofar as judgment can be correctly understood as predication of truth to thoughts, this can only be in terms of a stronger notion of predication, itself analysed in terms not of representation but of the (factive) recognition that the thought is true. But this stronger interpretation of predication presupposes judgment itself. We must thus understand judgment before we can understand the kind of truth-predication that is relevant to judgment (93–94).

On the other hand, concerning truth as an object rather than as a (predicated) property, Shieh is also wary of understanding judgment quite literally as taking a step from a thought to a truth value (the True or Truth). If this were correct, judgment would essentially be a relation to a special object, the True, and

we would need to understand this kind of logical object prior to and independently of the notion of judgment. It is in contrast to these two distinct interpretations of judgment in terms of truth-predication or of some other relation to Truth as an object that Shieh proposes that judgment be interpreted instead in terms of *recognition* that what a thought represents as obtaining *obtains*. Essential to judgment, claims Shieh, is the notion of recognition not of truth: "On my interpretation . . . what Frege came to realize, starting in 'On Sense and Reference,' is that judgment is fundamentally not a matter of truth at all. Rather, at the most basic level, judgment is recognition of what is the case at the realm of reference" (119).

When one judges that *o is F* (that *Renzo is hasty* or that *Lucia is pious*) one recognizes that *o is F* obtains in the realm of reference, that is, that object *o* has property *F*. In so doing, one thereby also judges that it is true that *o is F*, as according to Frege "we cannot judge that a thing has a property without finding the thought that this thing has this property to be true" (102). Shieh proposes to interpret Frege's "finding" in the above passage as "judging", thus supporting what he calls Judgment Redundancy, a principle according to which all the following claims hold or fail to hold together, ad infinitum:

- (1) *S* judges that *o is F*
- (2) *S* judges that *the thought that-o-is-F is true*
- (3) *S* judges that *the thought that-the-thought-that-o-is-F-is-true is true*

This regress however is in no way vicious and Shieh understands it as a form of Judgment Supervenience for truth-predicating judgments (100). Statement (3) supervenes on (2) which supervenes on (1) given that "recognizing the truth of a thought supervenes on recognizing the obtaining of what that thought represents" (78). This goes hand in hand with the Redundancy Thesis

according to which “ascribing truth to a thought is in some way redundant” (77). Namely, recognizing the truth of the thought that *Renzo is hasty* consists in recognizing that Renzo is hasty, which is nothing but the recognition that the referent of (the sense expressed by) “Renzo” is indeed in the extension of (the referent of the sense expressed by) “is hasty”. Thus, Shieh holds that “the truth of a thought consists in the obtaining of what it represents” (108) and also that “a thought’s referring to the True consists in the obtaining of what that thought represents. That is to say, referring to the True also supervenes on the obtaining of what a thought represents” (108). Thus, claims Shieh, Truth (or the True) as a logical object, is not to be understood as a prior and independently identifiable entity. This is an intriguing thesis, inevitably evoking some affinity with Frege’s treatment of numbers and other abstract objects in the *Foundations*.

The chapter ends with the even more striking suggestion that the notion of thought too, like truth and strong predication, depends on judgment, though Shieh recognizes that the textual evidence for attributing this view to Frege is less than absolutely compelling. The view Shieh reconstructs on behalf of Frege differentiates between genuine and apparent thoughts. Genuine thoughts are judgeable. They fall within the realm of logic governed by the laws of truth that apply to judgments. Thoughts that fail to determine a truth value instead are regarded as fictitious and as such excluded from the realm of logic and science (135). Such apparent thoughts, concedes Shieh, can still perhaps be grasped, but they are not the proper objects of the judgments that interest logic and science. (The view is complicated by the fact that within judgeable thoughts we need to distinguish between true and false ones as only the true ones are objects of factive judgments as opposed to our activity of judging.)

Shieh concludes the chapter with his “Basic Argument for Truth Absolutism” (136–43; see also 78). The main gist of the argument appears to be that insofar as modalism implies that thoughts do not in and of themselves (absolutely) determine a

truth value, then modalism propounds a view of thoughts as merely apparent thoughts, namely, as not subject to the laws of truth that govern judgeable contents. For example, according to temporal-modalism, the thought expressed by “France is a monarchy” does not (absolutely) determine a truth value, but then “France is a monarchy” would be no better off than fictitious statements like “Renzo is hasty”.<sup>3</sup> Both statements would express merely apparent thoughts that fall outside the realm of logic and science. But this result is patently false of “France is a monarchy”, hence modalism is defeated.

I must confess to finding this ingenious argument unpersuasive. Modalism is excluded based on the assumption that a thought that lacks an absolute truth value is on a par with mere fiction in falling outside of the domain of discourse open to truth evaluation. But this assumption holds only if there is no third alternative between an absolute truth evaluation and an absolute lack thereof, as for fictional discourse. Namely, the possibility that truth evaluation be relative is excluded from the get-go.

Shieh also claims that the Recognitional Conception of Judgment grounds Frege’s idea that there is no distance between truth-makers (facts) and truth-bearers (thoughts) (117) insofar as judging that a thought is true is no more than recognizing that a fact obtains. The impossibility for thoughts to be true in different ways seems then to correspond to, indeed supervene on, the impossibility of facts obtaining in different ways. But the question remains open of why Frege assumed that what obtains obtains absolutely, so that the only alternative to absolutely obtaining or absolutely not obtaining is fiction, that is, the altogether lack of reference. Why indeed is a *tertium non datur*? As far as I am concerned, I do not expect Frege to have an argument for such a fundamental tenet, so I don’t expect Shieh to be able to reconstruct one on Frege’s behalf, though Shieh has surely woven a fascinating interpretation of Frege, one that links together some

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<sup>3</sup>For those not trained in Italian high-schools, Renzo and Lucia are fictional characters.

of his most puzzling views and in so doing illuminates them. What Shieh seems to be exposing then is that in Frege's system the absoluteness of truth ultimately depends on the absoluteness of facts, i.e., of (what *obtains* in) reality, united of course to the absolute character of judgment qua *recognition*. There are no modes of truth because there are no modes of reality, no different ways for reality to obtain. But ultimately (reality-)absolutism remains a basic assumption of Frege's philosophy, one that cannot be explained in terms of the absoluteness of judgment as recognition. In other words, it seems to me that amodalism for truth may well depend on the absoluteness of judgment, but this last depends on the absolute character not only of *recognition* but also of *what obtains*.

On the other hand, perhaps a more radical interpretation of Shieh's argument is possible, one according to which it is not only the case that the absoluteness of truth supervenes on the absoluteness of reality, but also that the absoluteness of both reality and truth depends on the absoluteness of judgment. This more radical interpretation is perhaps suggested by Shieh himself, starting from the title of Chapter Three "From Judgment to Amodalism". In this more radical interpretation, judgment somehow shapes reality so that the absoluteness of reality depends on the absoluteness of recognition, rather than being independent from or even prior to it. This more radical interpretation however seems excluded by Section 3.6.4 where it is argued that for Frege truth is independent from our acknowledgment of truth, as *we can hold false* some true thoughts (130–31). Thus, if truth/reality depends on judgment it can only be on factive judgment, not on our activity of judging. But *factive* judgment itself, qua factive, seems to presuppose truth.<sup>4</sup>

Part I on Frege contains two more chapters. Chapter Four elucidates how Frege might explain away the intuitive appeal of

<sup>4</sup>This is perhaps to say that, in contrast to Linsky (2020), I am not sure that "thinking about Michael Dummett's anti-realism is somewhere behind [Shieh's] striking new interpretation of Frege".

temporalism, that is, the appearance that a sentence like "France is a monarchy" expresses a thought that is true at some times but false at others. One first suggestion, based on a remark in Frege's *Foundations*, is that this sentence expresses different thoughts at different times (157–58). This view makes the content of an expression vary with time but without assuming that "senses presenting these times are parts of these thoughts" (158) thus simply replacing reference variability with sense variability. The second alternative, based on remarks in "On Sense and Reference", agrees that the sentence expresses different thoughts at different times, but postulates that the various thoughts incorporate senses whose referents are times themselves.<sup>5</sup> Shieh offers quite a complex argument for this second position (158–67). In the course of this argument he considers the following sentences (163):

(18) Yggdrasil is covered with leaves;

(22) Yggdrasil is covered with leaves on 1 July 1896;

(23) Yggdrasil is covered with leaves on 1 January 1897.

Shieh argues that (22) and (23) do not "express representations about a single thought, namely, the thought expressed by (18)" (163). If they did, the door would be open to temporalism insofar as (18) in and of itself would be taken to express a thought lacking a fixed truth value, one that both (22) and (23) would represent as obtaining at some specific times. To rule this out, Shieh emphasizes that if *Mímameiðr* is Yggdrasil, then replacing "*Mímameiðr*" for "Yggdrasil" in sentences like (22) and (23) does not result in a change in truth value, despite these names having different senses, as it does instead in cases of belief reports where one can believe that Yggdrasil is covered with leaves without believing that *Mímameiðr* is covered with leaves. This,

<sup>5</sup>We see then that for the mature Frege modality is part of content, but in such a way that its modal character is deflated.

claims Shieh (165), “shows that there are no obvious Fregean grounds for taking the thought expressed by (22) [or (23)] to be about” the thought expressed by (18), thus ultimately defeating the temporalist suggestion that (18) too expresses a thought, one with a variable truth value.

Here Shieh appears to be arguing, based on the substitutivity of names in temporal contexts like (22) and (23), that such contexts are transparent. That is, he is arguing against an interpretation of temporal expressions, e.g., dates, as opacity inducing operators, rather than mere names of times.<sup>6</sup> However, Shieh is surely aware that (currently) coreferential definite descriptions are not equally interchangeable in all temporal contexts and this seems to offer an obvious Fregean ground for treating temporal expressions as opacity inducing operators. Shieh owes us an explanation of why we ought not to be led to such a conclusion based on the lack of substitutivity for descriptions in temporal contexts. Of course, such failures of substitutivity are due to the fact that descriptions appear to vary their referents through time in such a way that two distinct descriptions may have the same referent at one time but different referents at another time (consider “The President of the United States” and “Michelle Obama’s husband” which happened to be coreferential for eight years only). But temporal amodalism must exclude this. I imagine that Shieh would ultimately argue that for Frege descriptions too, like full sentences, express different senses at different times. They too incorporate as part of their sense a sense that refers to a time. Thus, only full descriptions like “Michelle Obama’s husband on 21 January 2022” express a full singular, object-referring sense. Shieh however does not elaborate on this point. It remains also unspecified whether he takes proper names for Frege to express descriptive senses rendered absolute by an implicit time specification, like descriptions, or whether he takes them to express absolute but non-descriptive senses. Shieh’s argu-

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<sup>6</sup>Shieh similarly claims that modal contexts are transparent too (171).

ments employing names rather than descriptions bypass these concerns, but only insofar as we are inclined to endorse the currently dominant anti-Fregean view of names as directly referential expressions. In a Fregean perspective, such questions must be faced.<sup>7</sup>

Shieh defends a similar but not exactly analogous analysis of the apparent modal variability of statements. The key difference between temporal and modal expressions consists in the fact that modal expressions do not refer or range over a class of modal objects (worlds rather than times). Unlike times, circumstances for Frege are not objects but thoughts (173). As a consequence, the apparent modal variability of merely apparent thoughts containing no explicit modal qualifications—like those apparently expressed by sentences like (18), (22) and (23)—is explained away by replacing it with the absolute truth values of genuine conditional thoughts whose antecedents express thoughts that are circumstances (174).<sup>8</sup>

Chapter Four contains many other considerations on necessity. In particular, Shieh also discusses how necessity for Frege is ultimately to be understood in terms of logical truth. Chapter Five concludes Part I of the volume with an explication of the nature of logic for Frege. The chapter also discusses the epistemology of logic and how logical laws are non-inferentially justified.

## 2. Part II: Russell

Chapter Six examines Russell’s views of necessity and logic during his early idealist period (1897-1899). The chapter expounds both Bradley’s and Moore’s influence on Russell and depicts

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<sup>7</sup>I don’t intend to suggest that this is a genuine shortcoming of this already massive work whose main focus is not on these semantic details.

<sup>8</sup>“Fixing” on Frege’s behalf the senses expressed by descriptions is similarly more complex in the modal rather than the temporal case, as we need to incorporate within their senses a full thought, rather than simply a world-referring sense.

how Russell moved from idealism to an early version of logicism. From Bradley, we are told, Russell originally inherited a revised Kantian interpretation of necessary judgments as apodictic, as well as the major thesis that the fundamental axioms of mathematics are necessary. However, Shieh suggests “that there is a tension between class-theoretic logicism and a modal conception of logic” (267). The modal conception of logic is based on the idea that logic handles necessary relations of implication between predicates. Russell uses this modal relation of implication to analyze class equivalence (269), but he also individuates classes extensionally. The suggestion is that in his later work Russell will have to choose between the modal understanding of logic and mathematics and a set-theoretic form of logicism.

Chapter Seven connects Moore and Russell’s rejection of modality to their rejection of Bradley’s idealism. Key to their anti-idealism are two stands: the rejection of the doctrine of internal relations and the acceptance of propositions as objects of judgment. Shieh points out that the rejection of internal relations implies the rejection of strong internal relations, namely, relations that are part and parcel of the objects that bear them. This leads to the rejection of necessities insofar as necessities depend on strong internal relations. However, Moore and Russell’s amodalism goes hand in hand not so much with the idea that there are no necessities, but rather with the idea that all truths are necessary, thus placing all truths on the other side of the modal divide. In Shieh’s words, “between late 1899 and the second half of 1900, Russell came to think that there is no significant difference between truth and necessary truth, and thereby to reject the philosophical and logical importance of modality” (272) and “Russell’s anti-modalist position is that *all* true propositions are necessarily true” (275). This is also Moore’s conclusion (300–305). But distinguishing Russell’s anti-modalism as of the all-truths-are-necessary brand in opposition to the all-truths-are-contingent version seems to presuppose that these two forms of anti-modalism are distinct, thus granting significance to the

modal notions in play. Shieh in fact acknowledges as much when he later discusses Russell’s *more radical* amodalism as the view that modal notions are nonsensical, in opposition to the less radical thesis that all truths are necessary. This view he finds encapsulated in Russell’s claim that “there is *no sense* in saying that a true proposition might be false” (305). I find this particular claim still open to a necessitarian rather than amodal interpretation, according to which it still (and only) makes sense to say that a true proposition cannot but be true. Overall, Shieh’s discussion of Russell’s amodalism seems to be conceding that modal notions can be deflated by less radical means than denying them any meaningfulness whatsoever. In any case, Russell’s original necessitarianism makes Shieh speculate that his amodalism is tied to the endorsement of Moore’s theory of propositions (what we these days call Russellian propositions) rather than to the rejection of internal relations.

Shieh recounts that Moore criticized Bradley’s theory of judgment as too psychologistic in deriving the objects of judgment (universals) from mental states (ideas). In contrast, Moore takes the objects of judgments to be propositions, understood as mind independent entities. Propositions are made up of concepts, “terms” in Russell’s terminology, that are part of the real world. Indeed, such terms can also be particular objects. Thus, Moore and Russell’s propositions are, unlike Fregean thoughts, non-representational (289). Additionally, both Moore and Russell reject the correspondence theory of truth and take true proposition to be nothing but facts that hold in reality. Shieh claims that ultimately Russell’s amodalism is like Frege’s based on an absolutist conception of truth, and provides plenty of textual evidence for this claim. Indeed, Russell’s 1910 claim “I do not myself admit necessity and possibility as fundamental notions: it appears to me that fundamentally truths are merely true in fact” reported by Shieh (324) strongly suggests that Russell’s necessitarianism too is perhaps better understood in terms of truth absolutism. Clearly, in the case of Russell, who completely identifies propo-

sitions with facts—while instead in Frege’s system there is still some space between thoughts and facts—it is even more evident that absolutism about truth goes hand in hand with absolutism about reality. And so in the case of Russell we need to take no detour through judgment in order to establish the absoluteness of truth based on the absoluteness of reality.

Chapter Eight quite interestingly argues that ultimately even Russell’s rejection of Bradley’s idealism, encapsulated in the doctrine of internal relations, is based on amodalism. Bradley dismissed external relations based on the idea that they would have to hold only contingently: an external relation  $R$  may but need not tie the same entities  $a$  and  $b$ . But then, claimed Bradley, we need an explanation of what else is required over and above  $a$ ,  $b$  and  $R$  for them to compose a whole, that is, for the relation to hold in case it does. Such an explanation is supposed to involve us in an infinite regress of relations holding  $a$ ,  $b$  and  $R$  together. Bradley’s argument against external relations was thus driven by the search for an explanation of the alleged contingent, thus modal, fact that  $a$  stands in relation  $R$  to  $b$ . Shieh argues that Russell dismissed Bradley’s argument against external relations based on his rejection of modality. For Russell the fact that  $a$  stands in relation  $R$  to  $b$  is, like all facts, an absolute fact. As such, there is no need of an explanation of why it holds rather than not holding. We can thus simply bypass the question whether Bradley is right that a vicious regress would be required to explain the unity of the whole. Given that  $a$ ,  $R$ , and  $b$  form a whole in (absolute) actuality, Russell does not grant any sense to the idea that they might not, thus dismissing the need for an explanation of why they do in fact form it.

Yet, Shieh also claims that Russell is not barred from ever demanding an explanation for what is actually and absolutely the case. For example, Russell can still demand an explanation of why the proposition  $aRb$  is true while the proposition  $bRa$  is false. But such an explanation is not an explanation for the subsistence of the unit  $aRb$ . Indeed,  $bRa$  though false is also

taken to be a subsistent unit (334). We are thus told that Russell grants that some absolute facts, like the fact that  $aRb$  is true, may call for an explanation. But then how can Russell stop Bradley’s demand for an explanation of the existence of the unit  $aRb$  based simply on his rejection of Bradley’s assumption that this fact is contingent (if relations are external)? After all, if Shieh is right, Russell does not appear to hold that only contingent facts require an explanation. It is thus not clear to me that Russell’s amodalism suffices to reject Bradley’s theory of internal relations. If I understand Shieh’s quite compressed remarks, what seems to be blocking the need for an explanation in Russell’s mind is not simply amodalism. We need also the extra assumption that in all cases combinable parts do form a unit. Whenever the elements exist so does the unit, though it need not be true. Russell then seems to share Bradley’s worry about a vicious regress unless the demand for an explanation is blocked, and blocks the demand by letting all such units subsist. But if the regress is stopped by letting false propositions subsist too, we now seem to open a wedge between propositions and facts.

Chapter Nine is devoted to the mature Russell’s views on implication, from the *Principles* (1903) to *Principia* (1910). The chapter discusses how for the mature Russell the mark of logical truth and implication is not necessity but generality. Among other things, Shieh gives reasons for why Russell took implication to be undefinable to start with. He also reconstructs Russell’s arguments in defence of the so-called paradoxes of material implication, that is, a justification for why it is indeed the case that false statements imply everything and true statements are implied by everything. The chapter also explains how Russell eventually adopted a pragmatist account of definition as (something akin to Carnapian) explication of an unclear notion, thus in the end coming to accept that implication may in some sense be defined and moving more and more towards a form of logical pragmatism.

Finally, Chapter Ten returns to modality and investigates other arguments of Russell's against modality, over and above the absolute nature of truth. Mainly, Shieh shows how Russell argued that modal notions are confused and that often our attributions of necessity and possibility are epistemic. Two additional important points emerge. First, Russell like Frege seems to regard logic and logical truth as more fundamental than modality. Second, Russell tends to understand logical truth in terms of actual generality. These two lines of thought too will clearly strongly influence future analytic philosophers. Just think of Carnap's logical interpretation of the modalities, and of Quine's understanding of logical truths as true for all substitutions of the non-logical terms. Russell like Frege is thus an amodalist who gives logic center stage. Frege ties logic to judgment and regards judgment as absolute. For Russell logic is essentially amodal and extensional. In both cases, truth is taken to be absolute and unmodifiable. In Russell's case, Shieh is explicit that it is facts themselves, i.e., reality, that are taken to be absolute. I have tried to argue that the same seems to hold for Frege, as ultimately the absolute character of a factive judgment depends on the absolute nature of reality, not vice versa.

My conclusion is in complete agreement with Linsky's (2020). This volume is a monumental effort, clearly the result of decades of hard exegetical work and of even harder thinking on the logical foundations of the most central theses of early analytic philosophy. I am equally eager to see Volume II, where Shieh promises to demonstrate how C.I. Lewis and Wittgenstein will unravel Frege's and Russell's logical absolutism from within.

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