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**ON WRINCH’s EXTENSION OF THE MULTIPLE RELATION THEORY OF JUDGMENT**

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Abstract

In 1919, Dorothy Wrinch suggested how to extend Russell’s multiple relation theory of judgment in order for the theory to be able to account also for molecular and quantified judgments. In this paper, some worries for her extension, which all stem from metaphysical considerations, will be presented and what Wrinch said and could have said about them will be discussed.

**Keywords:** The multiple relation theory of judgment • Wrinch • Molecular judgments • Logical form• Russell

1. Wrinch’s Aim

Belief, desire, fear, hope, etc. usually go under the label of *propositional attitudes* and the theory according to which they are dual relations holding, as the label suggests, between a subject and a proposition has been the standard theory for the past two thousand years in philosophy (Boh 1993); it has been, and still is, “widespread and in some circles orthodox” (Crane 2013, 108); it has been, and still is, considered to have “a default status, and it is the only theory of belief reports that has an initial *intuitive* basis” (Schiffer 2003, 47). In her paper “On the Nature of Judgment”, firstly presented in Cambridge in 1917 and then published in *Mind* in 1919, Wrinch, right at the start, addresses those many who “feel that the propositional theory of judgment as a dual relation is fairly satisfactory, and that any other theory is so far unnecessary and without interest” (1919b, 319), and urges that even for them it should be “of interest to investigate how far” (ibid.) another theory “could be made satisfactory” (ibid.). The other theory is Russell’s multiple relation theory of judgment (1906 – 1907, 46, 1910, 1912, §12, 1913, 1917, f41, 1918, Whitehead & Russell 1910, §II.III), according to which judgment, which for Wrinch is identical to belief (1920, 52f1), is a multiple relation holding among a subject and an array of entities. According to the propositional theory, my judgment that *a* loves *b* is a dual relation holding between me and the propositional unity *that a loves b*. According to the multiple relation theory, instead, that judgment can be taken to be a relation holding among, at least, me, *a*, *b*, and something corresponding to the relation of love and, with my act of judgment, I operate the unifying of the various other relata. Wrinch’s aim in her paper is not to assess the truth of the multiple relation theory, but rather to establish whether the theory put forward by Russell can be taken to “fit certain … relevant facts” (1919b, 319), i.e. to offer “suggestions as to the ways in which his idea for dealing with judgments of the form ‘*a*R*b*’ can be extended as to enable us to deal with more complicated judgments” (ibid.). In particular, Wrinch focuses on how to account for molecular judgments, such as my judgment that if *a* comes *b* will go, and quantified judgments, such as my judgment that somebody is ill, and she does not take a stance on exactly how to extend the theory, aiming exclusively at putting forward “the various classes of possibilities which suggest themselves” (ibid.).

While the various classes of possibilities Wrinch considers differ on some subtle and important details, since in this paper we will be concerned with issues that Wrinch’s accounts might face due to their metaphysical import and complexity, we will start from considering the metaphysically most complex proposal, which relies on all those three key ingredients that for Wrinch can make the theory work, i.e. logical forms, evaluators and operators, which are to be added as further relata we are related to when we judge (§2). We will then discuss three objections to the account, which all revolve around some metaphysical concerns. According to the first objection, forms metaphysically presuppose a propositional unity, so that the introduction of forms renders the multiple relation theory a theory that presupposes the dual propositional account, rather than an alternative to it (§3). According to the second, forms are metaphysically too questionable for a theory to be allowed to posit them (§4). Finally, we will discuss the objection according to which the entities Wrinch’s accounts posit, whether or not they are metaphysically questionable, are simply too many (§5). For each objection, we will see what Wrinch said in the very paper on judgment, we will supplement that with other remarks she put forward in other papers she published on different topics, and we will consider what else she could have said. We will see that what she did and could say about these objections is interesting no matter whether one is seduced by the default status of the standard propositional account, or prefers instead the multiple relation theory or any other account of judgment. In particular, we will consider some methodological remarks that Wrinch put forward, which apply to any theory of judgment.

1. Forms, Evaluators, Operators

Wrinch starts from “simple cases of elementary propositions discussed by Mr. Russell” (ibid., 323), such as my judgment that *a* loves *b*, which, according to the multiple relation theory, can be taken to be of the form

J(I, *φ*, *a*, *b*).

It is sometimes argued, Wrinch maintains (ibid., 320), that the theory already struggles with simple judgments. For, it is argued, the theory cannot distinguish my judgment that *a* loves *b* from my judgment that *b* loves *a.* But Wrinch rejects the objection quite quickly, noting that since J is “in a perfectly precise sense not symmetrical” (ibid.), it is “such that the arguments cannot be interchanged freely” (ibid.), so that my judgment that *b* loves *a* is on the theoryof a different form, i.e.

J(I, *φ*, *b*, *a*),

and the two judgments can then indeed be distinguished. Since moreover J is a multigrade relation, judgments that involve more objects, like for example my judgment that *a* is between *b* and *c*, are not an issue either. For the theory can take the belief complex to be of the form

J(I, *φ*, *a*, *b*, *c*).

Wrinch admits, though, that taking J to be not symmetrical and multigrade is not sufficient for the theory to be able to provide a satisfactory account of molecular judgments of the kind *p* ⊃ *q*, *p* v *q*, *p*.*q*, *etc*. (ibid.), i.e. *p* implies *q*, *p* or *q*, *p* and *q*, etc. (ibid. f1). For, clearly, we cannot take my judgment that if *a* comes *b* will go to be of the form

J(I, *φ*, *a*, ψ, *b*),

as otherwise the theory would conflate that judgment with the obviously different judgment that *a* comes or *b* will go. So something needs to be added. Obviously, if the theory wants to be an alternative to the default propositional account, we cannot add anything like *φa*, for this is the proposition *that a comes*. So Wrinch’s aim is to add relata without making the multiple relation theory collapse into the propositional account. As already seen, Wrinch puts forward various proposals as to how Russell’s theory can be extended to account for complex judgments and she repeats at various times that she is unwilling to take a stance on which one to prefer – “We have been able to adduce no important considerations which enable us to decide between the three or sometimes four alternatives which seemed satisfactory with each kind of proposition considered” (ibid., 328). But in this section we will focus only on one of those proposals, the worst-case scenario from a metaphysical point of view. According to such proposal, three kinds of ingredient should be added as relata of at least some judgment relations. The first of Wrinch’s suggestions is that “the *form* of the proposition be introduced … *e.g.* “———” or “*x*R*y*” (ibid., 321). Now that we have logical forms, there are various operations that we can operate on them. These operations are the further ingredients that Wrinch suggests adding to Russell’s multiple relation theory in order to account for complex judgments. The second key ingredient is an “evaluator” (ibid.), i.e. an operator that assigns values to, “put[s] constants” (ibid.) in, the form’s blank spaces or variables. Now that forms and evaluators are at the multiple relation theory’s disposal, my judgment that if *a* comes *b* will go can be taken to be of the form

J(I, E, *fx* ⊃ *gy*, *φ*, *a*, ψ, *b*)

*x=a f= φ*

*y=b g= ψ*

i.e. as a relation holding among me, the evaluator that puts the constants in the form’s places in the way specified, the form *fx* ⊃ *gy*, something corresponding to coming, *a*, something corresponding to going, and *b*. While Wrinch thinks that the argument that we should try to treat all judgements in as uniform a way as possible “has little cogency” (ibid.), since “sometimes one feels a desire for uniformity in the various parts of the theory” (ibid.), and since forms and evaluators have been added for molecular judgments, we can now take my judgment that *a* loves *b* to be of the form

J(I, E, *fxy*, *φ*, *a*, *b*)

*x=a*

*y=b*

*f= φ*

For judgments in which an apparent variable occurs (ibid., 322), though, a large array of forms and evaluators is not sufficient. Surely, while we can fully evaluate a form, so as to obtain, for example, *a loves b* out of *fxy* and the evaluator that assigns *a* to the *x*, *b* to *y* and something corresponding to the relation of love to the *f*, we can also only partially evaluate a form, so as to obtain, for example *a loves y* out of *fxy* and the partial evaluator that assigns *a* to the *x* and something corresponding to the relation of love to the *f*. But not even partial evaluations can do. Take for example my judgment that someone is ill. We cannot take its form to be

J(I, E, *fx*, *φ*),

*f= φ*

because, Wrinch maintains, we would then not be able to distinguish my judgment that somebody is ill from my judgment that everybody is ill. Moreover, one can add, this form would not do because my belief that somebody is ill can be true or false, but if one variable is not bound or evaluated, we do not have something that is true or false. In order to account for quantified judgments, a third kind of ingredient is then needed. While evaluation is one way of operating on a form, it is not the only one and the viability of the theory relies on “the possibility of correlating certain spaces with one evaluation or with one particularisation or generalisation” (ibid., 323). In order to account for quantified judgments, Wrinch then also adds two operators: P, whose operation is of “‘particularising’ a form” (ibid., 322), and G, which “performs the operation of ‘generalising’” (ibid.). My judgment that someone is ill can then be taken to be of the form

J(I, PxE, *fx*, *φ*)

*f= φ*

and is therefore accounted for in terms of my particularizing the form *fx*, partially evaluated so that something corresponding to the property of being ill is put in the space *f*, i.e. I am judging that there is at least one way to complete the evaluation, so as to obtain something true. My judgment that everybody is ill receives a different account, as it should be, i.e. it will have the generalising operator instead of the particularizing one as one of the relata, and judging that everybody is ill is judging that with any way of evaluating the space *x* we obtain something true.

Thanks to her[[1]](#footnote-1) addition of logical forms, evaluators, partial and complete, and generalising and particularising operators, Wrinch maintains, the multiple relation theory can indeed be taken to fit molecular and quantified judgments of any complexity.[[2]](#footnote-2) Has her proposal been considered to genuinely fit those facts? Unfortunately, Wrinch’s paper did not receive much attention after it was published. But more recently things have changed. While they do not go into the details of her accounts, Ostertag maintains that “it presents techniques that are well worth re-examining” (2019, 569), Hodes holds that Wrinch’s is “an intriguing step toward spelling out” (2015, 408f32) Russell’s multiple relation theory, and Korhonen stresses that “Wrinch (1919) works out the extension in some detail” (2020, 733f32).[[3]](#footnote-3) But there are also obvious objections that one might raise against Wrinch’s extension of Russell’s multiple relation theory of judgment. The objections we will focus on are not about whether logical forms, evaluators and operators genuinely make the theory fit the facts. Rather, they revolve around the extended theory’s metaphysical import. Was Wrinch interested at all in the metaphysical issues that might surround a theory? She was interested indeed. For example, in a review she wrote in 1918, she made the point that a theory should not rely on dubious metaphysical claims: “It seems, however, to the reviewer a little unwise to base a theory on such a disputable point as the non-existence of negative facts” (1918, 623). In the rest of the paper, the question we will be interested in is whether Wrinch’s metaphysical sensitivity is compatible with her positing logical forms, evaluators and operators as relata of judgment relations so as to make the multiple relation theory fit the facts.

1. Are Propositional Unities Presupposed?

Wrinch herself raises a first worry for her extension of the multiple relation theory in terms of logical forms, evaluators and operators, which stems from metaphysical considerations:

In introducing the form as a unity in the judgment complex … is one not perhaps falling into the very same mistake—if it be a mistake—of imagining that propositions are unities? Is there any justification for introducing a form, which embodies the logical structure of the proposition, when one has refused to introduce the proposition as a unity? (1919b, 324)

Wrinch is interested in discussing the multiple relation theory of judgment because it is an “other theory” (ibid., 319) with respect to the propositional account. If the theory ended up presupposing propositional unities, first, the attempt at extending the theory by adding logical forms as relata so as to account for molecular judgments would end up being pointless, as we could instead simply add propositional unities as relata. Second, the multiple relation theory would lose its status as an alternative theory and all the problems for propositional accounts would be problems for the multiple relation theory as well, rather than advantages of the theory over the propositional account. While Wrinch does not put forward herself objections to propositions, in the paper on judgment she explicitly relies on the arguments that “are adduced in Mr. Russell’s essay in which he introduced his theory” (ibid., 320) and only echoes explicitly one of his points, i.e. that propositional accounts are subject to

objections of various kinds, tending to show that there are not only mistaken beliefs, but also non-facts, which are the objectively false objects of mistaken beliefs. (Russell 1906 – 1907, 45),

by stating that “[i]t would be a matter of little difficulty to get out a large class of theories of judgment, if judgments were all true” (1919b, 324). In mentioning the issue created by false beliefs only briefly, Wrinch does not explain how severe the issue is, but Russell took it to be quite severe. He urged that positing objective non-facts, “is in itself almost incredible: we feel that there could be no falsehood if there were no minds to make mistakes” (1910, 152) and it also “leaves the difference between truth and falsehood quite inexplicable” (ibid.). Moreover, for Russell, the chief difficulty for propositional accounts was the one

derived from paradoxes analogous to that of the liar, e.g., from the man who believes that all his beliefs are mistaken, and whose other beliefs are certainly all mistaken. If he is mistaken in this belief, then all his beliefs are mistaken, which is what he is believing; therefore he is not mistaken; therefore he is right in believing that all his beliefs are mistaken, and therefore this belief is mistaken. (1906-1907, 46)

These issues for propositional accounts are points in favour of alternative accounts. But if Wrinch’s extension ended up presupposing propositional unities, it would not be a genuine alternative and the issues would all in fact be problems for her extension.

Hence, Wrinch takes the point that the theory cannot presuppose propositional unities “seriously” (ibid.) and her own reply to the worry consists of two points. First, she maintains that a reply cannot be provided by relying on the notion of fact:

It might be thought that something could be said with regard to the fact; *e.g*., there is a fact of this structural form and therefore the form is in a sense a unity; but that is no answer whatever—for the difficult case is the case in which the judgment is false and then there is no fact … Thus no answer can be given to this objection by reference to the fact. (ibid.)

Second, she maintains that considering what a logical form is can help mitigate the worry,

I am at a loss to know what to advance in favour of the introduction of a form when this objection is brought up. I can only suggest that a form is a very colourless thing indeed. It is a few blank spaces with a bare logical structure uniting them: and I feel that the kind of way in which it is a unity does not in the least imply any propositional unity. (ibid.)

But she does not think that her remark is sufficient to reply completely to the objection:

of course, I have not adduced any important considerations which in any way dispose of this criticism … with regard to the criticism that in allowing the form, one was tending towards assuming that propositions are themselves unities, although we did not really feel any great weight in the argument, it was not found possible to bring up any counter arguments and the objection must therefore stand for further consideration. (ibid., 325-328)

But, in fact, there is room to think that Wrinch could fully dispose of this criticism. For, first, we can take propositional forms to simply be abstract structures that we can build without having to abstract them from some unified entities. Second, even if we assume that logical forms should come out of some entities by abstraction, still it seems possible to obtain forms without relying on propositional unities. In another paper on the notion of existence, also published in 1919 and also Russellian in spirit, Wrinch states that

[t]he things which make up the outside world appear to be particulars and facts. … Having considered briefly the crude data given empirically, we have to build up the other objects of thought by means of logical construction. (1919a, 142)

Even if one agrees with her on this, still one could maintain that we can obtain any logical form starting from those unities that any theory of judgment can rely on without becoming a propositional theory, i.e. the very facts Wrinch speaks about in her reply. For, one might continue, in case there are logical forms that cannot be abstracted away from any fact, we could obtain them by logical construction. It is really quite unclear why we are not allowed, suppose, to move from “———”, maybe obtained out of a fact, to “————”, which might be the form of no fact whatsoever. The fact that “a form is a very colourless thing” does seem an important consideration, which disposes of the criticism.

Hence, despite the criticism, it still seems possible to hold that Wrinch’s extension of the multiple relation theory is a genuine alternative to the propositional account.

1. Quixotic Posits?

There are other worries that forms seem to give rise to, though. Boër, who does not mention Wrinch and attributes the extension of the multiple relation theory in terms of logical forms only to Russell himself (2002, 182), claims that “it is a matter of record that none ever came close to” (ibid., 183) incorporating “a precise account of the nature of the posited ‘logical forms’” (ibid.).

Maybe Wrinch did not come close to providing an account of the nature of logical forms, but she did take some steps toward it. Besides what we already saw, Wrinch also says something about the blank spaces in the form. First, relying on Russell’s theory of types, she holds that “[e]ach of the spaces is guarded by one type so that only arguments of certain types can be put in certain spaces” (1919b, 321), “there is a type belonging to every blank” (ibid., 325). Second, the spaces might be coordinated, or “correlated” (ibid., 324), so that “[t}hese are different” (ibid.): *fx.gy*. *x*H*y*; *fx.gy*. *y*H*x*.[[4]](#footnote-4)

But while Wrinch’s remarks do provide us with a characterisation of forms, they also give rise to another worry, one that Lebens raises in discussing Wrinch’s proposal. In his words, the worry is that logical forms are, “quixotic posits” (2017, 193):

Think of a logical form as a strange kind of entity: a concatenation of gaps, or spaces. Wrinch … wanted us to think that such entities *exist*, however hard it might be to conceive of such a thing … What is a string of gaps? What is a type-restricted gap? How do two equally long strings of gaps with identical type restrictions *differ* from one another? … the metaphysical picture that emerges … Wrinch’s theory … posits weird gappy objects (ibid., 193-206)

Wrinch was perfectly aware that logical forms might not be everybody’s taste and that “it is round this question of the introduction of the form that most of the important criticism centres” (1919b, 323). Still, she goes into no further detail either on how it might work that a blank space might be guarded by a type, or on how correlation of blank spaces is possible. She is nonetheless adamant that these characteristics of the blank spaces are crucial for the theory to work if forms are employed:

Thus we must be able to correlate the spaces together in different ways, if the employment of a form is to be at all possible. The question whether such a correlation is justified is a different question, and as it appears to me a difficult and obscure one. But the fact remains that such a procedure is essential to the theory. Having pointed out this question, and having shown that it is necessary for my purposes that this procedure should be justified, I leave the further discussion of the point. … our enquiry into the difficulty as to correlating the spaces in the form … had to be left in an unfinished state (ibid., 324-328)

Moreover, she admits that there is an “obscurity round the whole question of the nature of forms” (ibid., 328) and holds that her aim in her paper is merely to show that

[w]hether or not the theory can be made to work (quite apart from whether or not the theory is true), depends, I hope to show, on various rather obscure questions. I shall content myself with showing that the answers given to these questions do determine the workableness of the theory, and I shall not attempt at present to investigate the answers to them in any serious spirit. (ibid., 319)

One might be dissatisfied with Wrinch’s reply. But with the aid of two further points she makes, we can mitigate the dissatisfaction. First, it seems that only for forms, out of the three key ingredients which Wrinch adds, can we raise this oddness objection and in fact even Lebens seems inclined to accept evaluators and operators as not quixotic — “I might not credibly be able to deny that partial and complete ways of filling in strings are the sort of things that can exist” (2017, 193). As we already saw, Wrinch put forward various suggestions and some of them do not involve forms, so that she thought that she could do without forms and hence the alleged fact that forms are quixotic does not need to doom all her extensions of the multiple relation theory:

I hope I have now shown that this extension of the theory that judgment is a multiple relation from the case of simple relational propositions to apparent variable propositions does not depend essentially on the form being introduced … if an attack is made on the “*form*” theory, if there is sufficient reason one will let it go without a qualm. (1919b, 327)

She in fact thought that by adding further operators, forms would be dispensable:

we shall possibly get PA, PO, HP as operators on *φ* and *ψ*, to give (∃x). *φx* . *ψx*; (∃x). *φx* v *ψx*; (∃x). *φ* ⊃ *ψ* respectively … The essential, the only essential point about the matter is the introduction of *operators*.(ibid., 326-327)

It should be recognised, though, that the account in terms of operators such as HP might raise a full new array of objections. But there is another point she makes that is relevant here. While she addresses the defenders of the propositional account, right at the start of her paper, she in fact also urges:

may I suggest that in making up a theory to fit certain facts, if all the relevant facts are included, then there are none left by means of which one can judge between different theories, each of which fits in with all the given facts. There is no reason, I think, to believe that there is only one theory which can satisfactorily account for a certain group of facts. (ibid., 319)[[5]](#footnote-5)

So what Wrinch is aiming at, really, is to show that the propositional account and the multiple relation theory, even when logical forms are relata, are on a par.

In light of the issues for propositional accounts we saw in §3, one might wonder whether Wrinch, in taking propositional accounts and her extensions of the multiple relation theory to be on a par, is downplaying the strength of the latter accounts. But there is room to think that Wrinch is in fact right on the two accounts being on a par. For logical forms, for their part, raise other issues, which Wrinch does not mention explicitly. As Griffin maintains, for example, a consideration that “played an important part in Russell’s rejection of the account of logical forms” (1985, 223) is the following infinite regress:

Suppose that forms have constituents. Then these constituents must be strung together in some way to yield the form. But forms themselves are merely ways in which items can be strung together to form complexes. Thus in order to yield forms from their constituents one needs a form, which in turn has constituents and requires a further form, and so on indefinitely. (ibid.)

Hence, it seems that “[a]t some stage … we need forms without constituents” (ibid.). But, as Lebens notes, if forms were without constituents, so as to avoid the regress, “they can’t play the role that Wrinch requires them to play, since they won’t have the parts in to which we can plug things” (2017, 194).[[6]](#footnote-6) Perhaps the regress is not genuinely troubling Wrinch’s extension, but, equally, maybe the liar-style paradox for propositions can be solved. Hence, it does indeed seem to be the case that, as Wrinch appears to urge, the propositional account and the multiple relation theory, even when logical forms are relata, are on a par, as both raise some obscure questions — about the nature of propositions on the one hand and on the nature of forms on the other — and might be taken to lead to paradoxes or regresses, but at the same time they can both fit the facts, at least when it comes to simple, molecular and quantified judgments. So, according to Wrinch, we should certainly be sensitive to metaphysical considerations, for example, we should make sure that the theory we are considering does not end up presupposing entities that are extraneous to the aim of the theory. But if obscure questions remain unanswered, as it was the case during the time she was writing, we should not abandon the account because of such obscure questions. She stresses again the point more forcefully in another paper on memory, which she published in 1920:

in any science which is of a complicated structure we have as one of our first aims “the organisation of problems”—and I include in what I mean by this phrase the investigation of the relations between different problems. The knowledge that one problem depends only on a certain other problem, in default of the complete solution of the problem is a step in this organisation. (1920, 56)

Instead of discarding an account because it gives rise to obscure questions, we should just keep considering all alternatives till we have the resources to “give estimates as to the weight of the objections” (1919b, 329).

Does Wrinch’s account stand the objection *now*, i.e. are we now at the stage in which we can give estimates as to the weight of the objections? Surely, we know much more about propositions. But it also does not seem too optimistic to maintain that we know much more about logical forms and coordination too. Boër, for example, provided us with an extension similar to Wrinch where the notion of logical form is fully defined. Outside of the literature on the multiple relation theory, it is natural to think about works on interpreted logical forms (Larson & Ludlow 1993) as places where to find answers to the questions Wrinch left unanswered concerning the notion of form, and works on logical structure (Taschek 1995) and coordination (Fine 2007) for answers to questions about correlations, evaluations and operators. Hence, first, rejecting Wrinch’s extension because logical forms are quixotic does not seem a move that was justified then, and it does not seem justified now either. Second, we can learn another lesson from Wrinch. Even though we know much more about both the propositional and the multiple relation theories, historically, it is a fact that the propositional account is generally taken to have won. If she could speak today, instead of maintaining that we should rather take the multiple relation theory as the winner, Wrinch would probably say that the question as to who the winner is, is simply misplaced, as various theories can be correct accounts, if all the facts are accounted for and all the obscure questions are answered satisfactorily.

1. Intolerable Ontological Profligacy?

Let’s suppose that the nature of forms, evaluators and operators can be specified in a way that is metaphysically acceptable. There is still another objection, which again stems from metaphysical considerations, and which Lebens moves to Wrinch’s proposals. According to it, Wrinch’s extension leads to a questionable “ontological profligacy” (2017, 193), to

a dizzying variety of logical forms and hitherto unheard of universals … Wrinch wanted us to think that [logical forms] *exist* … Wrinch wants to reify each and every *way* that a form can be evaluated … So *the way* that we fill in the gaps to yield “*a loves b*” is an evaluator that exists in Plato’s heaven, as is *the way* that we would fill in the gaps to yield “*b loves a*” (ibid., 192-193)[[7]](#footnote-7)

Was Wrinch not moved by economy and simplicity considerations? It is true that Wrinch urged that “the simplicity of a system is no important ground in its favour” (1919b, 320). But this should not make us think that she was oblivious to simplicity and economy considerations.[[8]](#footnote-8) Quite to the contrary, in the paper on existence we already mentioned, she took Ockham’s razor quite seriously:

Occam’s razor states that “entities are not to be multiplied without necessity.” The extreme importance of this principle is generally maintained among logicians of a certain school and should, I think, be more universally recognized to be of fundamental importance. (1919a, 144)

But then if, with Wrinch, one takes Ockham’s razor as a good guide to a theory, how can Wrinch’s account stand? In the same paper, Wrinch explains:

Of course it would be just as great an error of logical taste to assert dogmatically that points etc., have not got primary existences, as to assert dogmatically that they have: it would in fact be a logical mistake fundamentally of the same kind. Occam’s razor does not advocate that. … just as it is an error of logical style to assert the existence of things unnecessarily, so it is an error not to draw all the implications of the given data. (ibid., 145)

As Wrinch stresses, a complex theory is to be taken as complying with the razor, if the complexity is dictated by the complexity of the reality to be explained. The point emerges again in a lecture on the scientific method she delivered in 1926 and then published in 1927,[[9]](#footnote-9) where she stresses that while we should “endeavour to find the smallest possible body of assumptions to account for any well-established body of facts” (1927, 158), we should also recognise that

[t]here is no *a priori* reason to suppose that the external world can be described in simple terms. Indeed, the history of science tends rather to show that in the cases where some theoretical account of a set of phenomena seemed particularly simple, subsequent discoveries of further facts have made it necessary to modify the theoretical ideas, invariably in the direction of increased complication. It is unfortunately true, so far as one can see, that in the external world there is no preference for simplicity of structure, but rather the contrary. (ibid.)

Now, while this passage is about the external world, arguably also in the internal world of our mental life there is no preference for simplicity, and this is exactly what she states in the paper on judgment, although merely in a sketch:

This theory is very complicated—and I must confess this at the outset, but may I put in a plea that it may not be regarded merely for that reason, as unsuitable? It is quite conceivable that judgment is a very complicated phenomenon (1919b, 320)

First, while she does not touch on this particular point in connection with judgment, in a review, also written in 1919, she is clear that a variety of forms and structures are needed independently of judgments, because facts have forms too:

it is stated … that “our expression of a fact is always in the form ‘A is related to B,’ … Now we cannot accept this very simple interpretation of the form of the fact “Hens lay eggs,” and it seems not extravagant to suppose that there are facts not expressible in the form:

A is related to B.

Thus, in geometry, we have such facts as:

A is between B and C. (1919c, 472)

Second, it is true that the multiple relation theory needs to be complex — “a development such as I have suggested seems to me inevitable if one begins with the idea of judgment as a multiple relation” (ibid., 323), “judgment may or may not be a multiple relation, but if it is, it must in the more complicated cases be extended in some such way as I have suggested.” (ibid., 328). But the theory is not alone in this. Both the propositional and the multiple relation theories need to be complex, because complex are the phenomena they aim at accounting for. While considering the proposal that has operators but no forms, she stresses:

At first sight one is amazed at and disturbed by the number of operators, and one feels, instinctively, perhaps that a theory which requires such a complicated apparatus simply will not do. But I think one must fight against this feeling bearing this point in mind. Propositions on the usual theory when they have two or more constituents are exceedingly complicated structures … Now my operators merely attempt to put the peculiarities of each form together so that different operators and combinations of operators acting on one set of terms produce different propositions. Thus the complexity of these groups of operators is due to the complexity of the proposition themselves, and for that we cannot be held responsible. Any theory of propositions must allow for the complexity of propositions, and so I am not really introducing in any way a more complicated kind of theory than it is absolutely necessary to have. (ibid., 326-327).

The propositional account has complex propositions, the multiple relation theory is instead complex because of the machinery it needs to account for complex propositions, but the two sorts of complexity are comparable. So we cannot favour the propositional account on the basis of considerations about simplicity. Moreover, neither account is criticisable because complex, as the complexity is due to the phenomena to be explained.

1. Conclusion

While Wrinch was primarily concerned with belief in her 1919 paper, hers was an investigation into all “psychological phenomena” (1920, 46), including “attitudes to propositions such as desiring, wishing, fearing, and so on … hope” (1919b, 327), “memory … knowing … imaginings” (1920, 46-49), “doubt” (Senechal 2013, 66). Concerning these other psychological phenomena as well, Wrinch maintains that while we should aim at simplicity, we should also recognise that the phenomena are complex. Hence, Wrinch concludes:

I do not think that it is unsatisfactory to define a class of phenomena such as memory acts as the sum of two classes whose determining functions are predicates having references to things of a very different nature … There seems then to be no reason for holding that at the root of every grouping … there is a property which is “genuinely one property” common and peculiar to all the phenomena. (1920, 59)

While “there is some element in common in such mental events as, ‘I believe *p*,’ ‘I hope *p*,’ ‘I fear *p*,’ ‘I desire *p*,’” (1919b., 327), for example, a theory of psychological phenomena should also recognise, Wrinch writes to Russell in 1918, that “judge it *will* rain, and … doubt whether it *will* rain, are of slightly different form” (ibid.). Similarly, she thinks that we should make sure to disambiguate the words “remembering”, “knowing” and “fearing”, which might designate an act or a disposition, “a possibility of … acts” (1920, 46), and to recognise that some phenomena involve certain feelings, some do not, some involve judgments, some do not.

To use a phrase Wrinch herself uses in a review concerning a different topic, when confronted with her proposals about psychological phenomena “the man in the street is puzzled and the logician is unsatisfied” (1919d, 637). Indeed, one does not find it difficult to understand why Frank Russell reacted to the message Wrinch sent in 1918 to his brother with “Good heavens what stuff fr. Wrinch” (Senechal 2013, 66). At the same time, Wrinch puts forward a point that is interesting no matter whether one is seduced by the default status of the standard propositional account, or prefer instead the multiple relation theory or any other account of judgment. One does not find it difficult either to see why Wrinch would tell us that if what we are after is a simple theory, we should simply move to try to build one for other, simpler phenomena.

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1. Wrinch presents her extension as her own: “I must point out again that in the simple cases of elementary propositions discussed by Mr. Russell, the question of the introduction of the form does not assume the importance it has assumed in my extension of the theory” (1919b, 323). Famously, Russell was aiming for a substantial portion of *The Theory of Knowledge* to be devoted to complex judgments, but he never wrote it in full. Still, there is room to think that his solution would have looked not too different from Wrinch’s (Lebens 2017, 192-199) or at least that he “encouraged her to publish her thoughts in defense of his position even if he did not accept them in full” (Linsky 2011, 46). For Wrinch was Russell’s student and they stayed in touch long after she was his student in Cambridge (Monk 1996, 525; Senechal, 2013, chapters 5, 6, 7). Moreover, we know that Russell commented on her paper on judgment (Linsky 2011, 44). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In her paper, Wrinch also discussed the apparent problem that the multiple relation theory encounters when faced with the possibility of judging nonsense. For a discussion of her solution to the problem, see Felappi (2021) and references there. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is also worth noting that Boër (2002) proposes an extension similar to Wrinch’s and maintains that his extension can indeed make the multiple relation theory meet all the desiderata we have for a theory of judgment. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Wrinch also maintains that a “form seems to be an expression with blank spaces” (1919b, 321). It was common to Russell and to other contemporaries not to distinguish sharply between linguistic expressions and what those expressions aim at standing for, so it is not clear whether Wrinch thinks that the form is a linguistic expression, or that we can represent it via a linguistic expression, as she also seems to state: “*f(xy)* represents a form” (ibid.). It is worth noting that in another paper she takes both *f(xy)* and *xR*y to represent propositional functions (1922, 201), but we cannot take her to have maintained that propositional functions are logical forms, as in a complete evaluator for the form *xR*y, also the *R* is assigned a value, so it is not itself a predicate. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is not a point that Wrinch makes only concerning a theory of judgment or philosophical accounts, but rather a point that is at the core also of her reflections on scientific methodology. For example, she writes: “science builds up its theories on certain assumptions. Given the assumptions, their logical consequences are worked out. … If the theory represents the state of affairs satisfactorily in some respects, then it is worthy of consideration. … It will be set on one side in favour of another theory if the other theory explains and collates a more comprehensive collection of facts” (1925, 60-61. See also 1927, 156-157). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. It is not clear whether Wrinch was aware of all aspects of Russell’s epistemology or, if she was, whether she endorsed them all. But, as Griffin notes (1985, 222-223), within a Russellian epistemology, logical forms also lead to the following, related, problem: if logical forms are complex (and can then play the role Wrinch wants them to play), they can seemingly only be known *by description*. But this is incompatible with Russell’s principle of *acquaintance*: “in every proposition that we can apprehend (i.e. not only in those whose truth or falsehood we can judge of, but in all that we can think about), all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance.” (1905, 492) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It is very common to object to the multiple relation theory on the basis of simplicity and economy considerations. While he is discussing a version of the multiple relation theory different from Wrinch’s, Crawford, just to give a recent example, for example phrases the classic objection in the following way: “Can the anti-propositional multigrade theorist match the rigorous standards of the propositionalist here …? The task … appears to be a difficult one, and if it can be carried off at all, will most likely result in a very complex logical from, crucially one far more complex than the propositionalist’s, thus ruling it out on grounds of lack of simplicity.” (2014, 186-187) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Wrinch also worked on probability and she famously put forward with Jeffreys in 1921 the so-called *simplicity postulate* (Wrinch & Jeffreys 1921). See Howson 1988 for discussion of what the postulate really involves and in what sense it is a postulate about simplicity. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. From that very paper we can also extract a reply that Wrinch could put forward concerning another point Lebens makes, i.e. that “the metaphysical picture that emerges, with its strange gappy entities, is likely to offend all sorts of metaphysical intuitions”. In the 1927 paper Wrinch is adamant that intuitions might not be a good guide: “It cannot be denied that the private, unofficial, uninstructed intuitions of the human race laid the foundations of science at least in its elemental stages. Induction and analogy were certainly powerful instruments when science was still concerned with discovering the minor uniformities of nature. But when we try to get down to the problem of the deep and fundamental structural characteristics of the external world, these instruments are no longer adequate. Our private intuitions must give place to the more powerful intuitions which only logic can suggest.” (1927, 164) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)