Russell’s unpublished book on theory of knowledge

In *The Life of Bertrand Russell*, Ronald W. Clark traces the early relationship of Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein. In so doing he briefly describes the manuscript of a book on Theory of Knowledge which Russell wrote and abandoned (because of criticisms from Wittgenstein) in 1913. This manuscript, which is in the Russell Archives, marks an important stage in the development of Russell’s logical atomism and of the theories of judgment published by Russell in 1918 and Wittgenstein in 1921 and discussed in detail in the latter’s *Notebooks, 1914-1916*. The manuscript is incomplete, however: the first six chapters are missing, and it ends with a summary of a second Part which is intended to precede a third Part. An examination of the manuscript and documents related to it makes it possible to reconstruct the full scope of the intended work.

The existence of the manuscript was apparently known only to Russell, Wittgenstein, Lady Ottoline Morrell and perhaps Russell’s own family until recent years, when the Russell Archives were made available to researchers. Some mention of the manuscript has been made in print, but as yet no detailed criticisms of it have appeared and it has not even

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4 And perhaps Oliver Strachey, whose letters to Russell in 1913 indicate sight of part of the manuscript. The Whiteheads and Phillip Jourdain may also have known of it, though there is no evidence of their having known.
The manuscript does not bear a title, and in his correspondence Russell never gives it one. "Theory of Knowledge" seems as good as any. Russell customarily referred to the subject-matter of the book by this term. A few days before he began to write it he wrote to Lady Ottoline: "Still sketching out my book on Theory of Knowledge". On folio 299 of the manuscript he remarks: "In a 'theory of knowledge', it may seem strange to have postponed the consideration of knowledge so long." Russell may here be quoting his own title or referring to the class of books to which his belonged.

The existence of "Theory of Knowledge" did not become publicly known until Russell sent his archives to London for cataloguing and eventual sale. Blackwell was one of the cataloguers. He noticed that the 208-page manuscript had never been published. It had not even been mentioned in Alan Wood's biography of Russell, or in Russell's My Philosophical Development. It seemed that there must be something important about a book on philosophy by Russell which had never been published.

Publishers were not in the habit of refusing his writings. Blackwell therefore persuaded the literary agent in charge of the archives, Mr. Anton Felton, to write to Russell for more information about the book. Russell did not answer the letter. Later on the same year (1967), Blackwell had a chance to ask him in person whether he had written a book on epistemology ... Before the question could be finished, he replied, "Yes. Human Knowledge." It was explained that the question referred to the period just before the First World War. But Russell was too busy with his secretary that morning, and said only that it would take some time to think carefully about a period so long passed. The matter was not raised again. The existence of the manuscript was duly noted in the catalogue of the archives.5

In 1968 the second volume of Russell's Autobiography was published. In a 1916 letter to Lady Ottoline, quoted in the work, this passage occurs:

Do you remember that at the time you were seeing Vitoz (a Swiss physician who treated her) I wrote a lot of stuff about Theory of Knowledge. Which Wittgenstein criticized with the greatest severity? His criticisms, though I don't think you recognized it at the time, was an event of first-rate importance in my life, and affected everything I have done since. I saw he was right, and I saw that I could not hope ever again to do fundamental work in philosophy.6

This "event of first-rate importance in my life" received no other treatment in the Autobiography or anywhere else in Russell's writings, save his letters to Lady Ottoline.

Lady Ottoline's visit to Vitoz was easily dated. In a brief write-up of the manuscript in 1968 Blackwell concluded that it was "written in the spring of 1913 and then abandoned because of criticisms from Wittgenstein". Eames, who had just published Bertrand Russell's Theory of Knowledge, visited McMaster to examine the manuscript, and from her knowledge of Russell's other epistemological writings suggested that the missing six chapters had been published as articles in the Monist during 1914 and 1915. Her original hypothesis was based on comparing the topics of these articles with the summary of the first part of the book given in the manuscript (folios 143, 187-8); on the order of the topics in the articles and in the summary; on the connected, book-like character of the articles; and on comparing the number of words in the Monist articles with an estimate of the number in the missing 142 pages of the manuscript; and on eliminating the alternatives among Russell's writings of the same period. This hypothesis was confirmed for Eames in 1971, when she read Russell's letters to Lady Ottoline at the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas, and for Blackwell on his study of the letters in 1972. Russell's letters to Lady Ottoline during the composition of the book provide details of how it proceeded and of


6 Russell to Lady Ottoline Morrell, no. 764, postmarked 4 May 1913, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas. A microfilm of Russell's letters to Lady Ottoline is in the Russell Archives.


11 Blackwell's reconstruction and interpretation was written up in his master's thesis (fn. 5). Eames' interpretation has been given in lectures on the relation of Russell and Wittgenstein at McMaster University, Southern Illinois University and the University of Wisconsin, and will appear in her forthcoming book, Russell's Dialogue with His Contemporaries.
when Wittgenstein's criticisms occurred, and Clark has given an account of these events. This correspondence is still the only one, to our knowledge, in which Russell mentions the book. The only available letters to Russell about the book are two from Wittgenstein; and they do not actually mention the book but refer to topics in it.12

Associated with the manuscript are a few other pages of outlines and summaries, all in Russell's handwriting. The relevant documents are as follows:


Manuscripts (6) and (7) have been identified as brief descriptions Russell sent Harvard for the courses he was to give in March and April 1914, and were published in the *Official Register of Harvard University* in May 1913.13 The other outlines and summaries are useful in reconstructing the full plan of the projected work. First, however, we must show that we do in fact have the six missing chapters.

How do we know that the six *Monist* articles are the missing six chapters? They were published quarterly from January 1914 through April 1915, without any explicit indication that they were part of a larger work, and the last three were presented as separate articles. Here are the bibliographical details:


13 See Blackwell, "Russell's American Lecture Courses", *Russell*, no. 6 (Summer 1972), 8-9.

The first three were collected in *Logic and Knowledge*, under the title "On the Nature of Acquaintance", again without any indication of their original context. There is so far no trace of the missing manuscript pages (or typescripts made from them) in the papers of the Open Court Publishing Company, which published the *Monist*.14 Since new acquisitions are periodically made to the Carus papers (which include those of Open Court) at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, new corroboration may yet be found there. There is only one sentence of significance in the available correspondence of Russell to the *Monist's* English editor, Philip E.B. Jourdain; this sentence is discussed below. The conclusive evidence comes mainly from backward references in the unpublished manuscript and from Russell's letters to Lady Ottoline. The important pieces of evidence are these:

1. The first page of the extant manuscript (f. 143), which begins Chapter VII, is a neat summary of "the various kinds of acquaintance upon which our knowledge of particulars appears to be based". This is the general topic of the six published articles.

2. Folio 173 refers to "the neutral monism which we examined in Chapter II" - the topic of the second *Monist* article.

3. Folios 187-188, at the end of Part I, are another summary of the first six chapters, and the summary matches the general content of the *Monist* articles.

4. Folio 329 has this passage: "It will be remembered that in Part I, Chapter , when we were discussing the perception of time...." (The chapter number was not filled in.) This must be a reference to Chapter VI, "On the Experience of Time".

5. In letter no. 768 (postmarked 8 May 1913) to Lady Ottoline, Russell writes that "the first substantial chapter ... is called 'Preliminary Description of Experience'." This is exactly the title of the first *Monist* article.

There is much other evidence that might be adduced - the frequent references in the published articles to "theory of knowledge", though there is no avowed theme running through all articles; the slips where

14 See Eames, "Jourdain and the Open Court Papers", p. 104.
The word "chapter" has not been changed to "article" and more evidence from the letters.

The letters enable us to follow Russell's progress very closely indeed. Russell told Lady Ottoline how many pages he had written almost every day, and how he was exceeding his stated goal of an average of ten pages a day. In all, he wrote three hundred and fifty pages in the thirty-one days from 7 May to 6 June, 1913. Even for Russell, this was an extraordinary output. The explanation of why he never mentioned it after 1916 is very likely the sense of utter failure he had at the time despite the wonderful progress, in sheer words, that the manuscript seemed to make. At the beginning he was "as happy as a king". He was soon "living the life of one possessed". But a fortnight later, Wittgenstein had delivered the second of two criticisms which "rather destroyed the pleasure in my writing". "I have only superficially and by an act of will got over Wittgenstein's attack" he told Ottoline.

And two weeks after Russell gave up writing the book, he confessed to her that

All that has gone wrong with me lately comes from Wittgenstein's attack on my work - I have only just realized this. It was very difficult to be honest about it, as it makes a large part of the book I meant to write impossible for years to come probably. ...

the first time in my life that I have failed in honesty over work.

The previous day, he added, he had felt ready for suicide.

The book was to have two major sections, an "analytic" section and a "constructive" section. The analytic section was divided into three parts: acquaintance, judgment, and inference. The latter two parts were also termed "atomic propositional thought" and "molecular propositional thought", respectively. Only Parts I and II of the first section were written. Clearly Russell had a large book in mind. At one point he estimated that it would make five hundred pages of print, and take fifty days to write at ten pages a day. Two weeks later his estimate seems to have shrunk: the five hundred pages of manuscript are to make three to four hundred pages of octavo print. The actual count of three hundred and fifty pages for just two-thirds of the first section indicates that the earlier estimate would have been closer to the true size of the full work.

Although there is no table of contents, one can be reconstructed using the Monist articles, the manuscript, the letters, and the various outlines. From one letter to Lady Ottoline we know there was to be "an introductory chapter", which Russell was going to leave to the last. Parts I and II of the first section are derivable from the first two sources. We do not know the exact contents of Part III, but document (5), entitled "Molecular Thought", is a likely outline of the chapter headings. It seems to be development of the plans for Part III sketched in (8), the second of the documents headed "Theory of Knowledge" (in which Part III is labelled "C. Inference"). This document is our only source for the "constructive" section, whose reconstruction we regard as the most tentative. Document (3), called "Atomic Propositional Thought", is a sketch of Parts II and III of Section A. It seems to follow (8) because Russell here labelled Part III, "Molecular Propositional Thought", and remarked beside it in square brackets, "Not 'Inference'". Document (4), "Theory of Knowledge Lectures, Part II", concerns knowledge of Physics and may date from early 1914, when Russell was preparing outlines for his Harvard lectures; it corresponds to Section B of the book. An analysis of Victor F. Lenzen's notebook of the Harvard lectures on theory of knowledge shows that the first section of this course (86 of 146 notebook pages) dealt with topics which correspond to the topics and order of topics in the first eight chapters of the reconstructed manuscript. The last section of the lecture notes deals with "The Epistemology of Physics" and is similar to the topics of the Lowell lectures, although more detailed and technical. The course, as taught, thus fit within the vague description of the Harvard calendar, and included no material from the middle section of the manuscript. It is, however, notable that the last chapter of Part I, "Logical Data", was not covered in the course. This is of interest for the impact of Wittgenstein on Russell's theories, but it is outside the scope of the present article. (2), the last document to be discussed on the list and the verso of the first page of "Props", is merely a rejected attempt to describe Meinong's "Anahme", and which he re-wrote. "Props" itself is important

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16See letters numbered 768, 772 and 776.
17No. 768, postmarked 8 May 1913.
18No. 781, postmarked 20 May 1913.
19No. 787, postmarked 28 May 1913.
20No. 793, postmarked 1 June 1913.
21No. 811, postmarked 20 June 1913.
22No. 768, postmarked 8 May 1913, and no. 792, postmarked(?) 28 May 1913.
23No. 782, postmarked 21 May 1913.
24No. 768, postmarked 8 May 1913.
25Ibid.
26Gift of V.F. Lenzen to Russell Archives, file 133b.
as an attempt by Russell to understand the new theories of Wittgenstein. Here, then, is the reconstructed table of contents.

[THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE]

Introduction

Section A. Analysis

Part I. Acquaintance

Ch. I Preliminary Description of Experience
II Neutral Monism
III Analysis of Experience
IV Definitions and Methodological Principles in Theory of Knowledge
V Sensation and Imagination
VI On the Experience of Time
VII On the Acquaintance involved in our knowledge of relations
VIII Acquaintance with predicates
IX Logical Data

Part II. Atomic Propositional Thought

Ch. I The Understanding of Propositions
II Analysis and Synthesis
IV Belief, Disbelief, and Doubt
V Truth and Falsehood
VI Self-Evidence
VII Degrees of Certainty

Part III. Molecular Propositional Thought

Ch. I Negation. Disjunction. Conjunction. Hypothetical
II Inference - general nature of. Knowledge of logical principles
III Inference - valid and invalid, logical and psychological
IV Logical, psychological, epistemological premises
V Logical and epistemological order - certainty and probability
VI General propositions
VII Acquaintance and Description
VIII A priori and empirical
IX Epistemological order of Sciences

Section B. Construction [Tentative]

Part I. Knowledge of Logic

Pure form: variables only. Includes mathematics. A priori.

Part II. Knowledge of Sense

What can be discovered by mere analysis of data, without assuming principles by which existents not given can be inferred. Time. Space. Psychical data.

Part III. Knowledge of Science

Problem: To state (a) existence of certain sense-data (b) certain principles of inference, which must be self-evident, such that science shall follow. Matter. Causality. Induction. Principles of inference required: can they all belong to logic? Kant's query again.

After Russell's writing had ground to a halt on 6 June 1913, he did not, as his letters to Lady Ottoline give one the impression, put the manuscript aside for several months. He did proceed to have a wretched summer, culminating in his praying in a cathedral; and Wittgenstein, the cause of his despair, proceeded to have a brilliant one, culminating in his "Notes on Logic". In September Russell turned finally to a job that had been worrying him for some time, namely writing his Lowell lectures on Our Knowledge of the External World. In these lectures he tackled the problems of matter which had absorbed him before he began "Theory of Knowledge" and which were to be discussed in the second section of that work. (This is not to say that they would have been discussed in the same way: throughout the writing of Our Knowledge, Russell refers to them, in his letters to Lady Ottoline, as his "popular" lectures.) After some success in a second attempt at this task, it appears from a letter to Lady Ottoline that he turned again - for the first time in months - to the unpublished manuscript:

I have been looking at the stuff on Theory of Knowledge that I wrote in the spring. It seems to me the early part is as good as I thought at the time, but that it goes to pieces when it touches Wittgenstein's problems, as he said at the time.

This was on 24 October 1913. It might be thought that it was at this point that Russell decided to publish the first six chapters. But a better-fitting and more interesting hypothesis is available.

During the past twelve months Russell had been in correspondence with Ralph Barton Perry, who, as chairman of the Harvard Department of Philosophy, was in charge of arrangements for Russell's stint as visiting professor in the spring of 1914. The greater part of their correspondence is preserved. As has been noted, Russell had already sent Perry brief descriptions of his two lecture courses. On 26 June 1913 Russell wrote to Perry in the following terms:

Dear Professor Perry

In preparing my lectures on Theory of Knowledge, I have found that it is impossible to advance until I have discussed fully the theory which I call Harvard Realism, which is contained in your Present Philosophical Tendencies, in James's Radical Empiricism, and

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27 See Clark, p. 209, and McGuinness, "Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'Notes on Logic'".


29 No. 900, postmarked 24 October 1913.

30 Russell's letters to Perry are in the Harvard University Archives, with photocopies deposited in the Russell Archives at McMaster; Perry's letters are in the Russell Archives, with some carbons at Harvard.
Although Russell told Perry that his reason for wanting to publish his "criticism" was to "accelerate the process of coming to closer understanding with Harvard realism", money may also have been a factor. The same day, or a day later, he told Lady Ottoline that he had "for purely unselfish reasons, an imperative need to make money". (The Monist, however, did not pay him for the articles until April 1914, when he recorded the receipt of $200.) It is also likely that, Wittgenstein's criticism having brought the work on "Theory of Knowledge" to an end, Russell sought to salvage what he could of it by publishing the chapters which were not touched by that criticism. Perry replied on 7 July that there could not be any objection to his writing what Perry termed "the critical article you mention". Russell had not mentioned a "critical article" but a "criticism" in his letter. This less precise term allowed Russell to publish as much as he could of "Theory of Knowledge".

On 27 October 1913 Russell wrote again to Perry, probably in response to a letter which has been lost. At the end of the letter he says:

"Yours very truly
Bertrand Russell"

It is impossible to tell from this how many chapters of "Theory of Knowledge" Russell means here. Probably he means only the first three, since they were the only ones explicitly connected by the common title, "On the Nature of Acquaintance", in the Monist. But it is safe to say that since this letter was written only three days after the one to Lady Ottoline in which he said "I have been looking at the stuff on Theory of Knowledge that I wrote in the spring", Russell could not have had reason to tell Perry "I have not yet had proofs" if he had only arranged for publication of the chapters in the last three days. His reasons for looking at the "stuff on Theory of Knowledge" were probably two: he was in correspondence with Wittgenstein over the text of "Notes on Logic", which in part attacks the theory of judgment presented in "Theory of Knowledge", and he had to prepare some thirty-six lectures on theory of knowledge for Harvard.

On 9 November 1913, in a valuable letter on how he planned to teach the logic course, Russell told Perry that "The Monist has delayed: a preliminary article will appear in January, but the one on 'neutral monism' (i.e. James and you) will not appear till April." The definite date suggests that the publication schedule was well advanced and that therefore Russell had now seen proofs of at least the first article. (With the same letter Russell enclosed a "syllabus of my lectures on theory of knowledge." No copy has been found.) Russell would have arranged for Monist publication through Philip Jourdain, who had in 1912 become the journal's English editor and who was in these years in regular contact with Russell. Russell even employed his secretary to do his typing, and it was she to whom Wittgenstein dictated parts of "Notes on Logic". Very little of Russell and Jourdain's correspondence from this time survives, but in a letter of 18 November 1913 dealing with a classical reference Jourdain added the following postscript: "Will you send me back the two parts of your 'Nature of Acquaintance' when you have finished correcting them." Now Jourdain, as English editor, was evidently in charge of getting his Monist authors to read and return their proofs. In the same letter he states that he has "just got a proof of [Karin Costelloe's] article and am anxious that it should go back as soon as possible." Her article can only be "An Answer to Mr. Bertrand Russell's Article on the Philosophy of Bergson". As it appeared in the January 1914 issue with Russell's first "Acquaintance" article, and as Jourdain is not concerned to get back Russell's "two parts" as quickly as Costelloe's "proofs", it seems likely the "two parts" do not include the first "Acquaintance" article. Nor can they be proofs of the second and third articles. On 26 February 1914 Russell tells Lady Ottoline that he that day "corrected proofs of an article in the 'Monist' on W. James and the New Realists". The "two parts", then, are likely type-

35Russell to Lady Ottoline, no. 905, postmarked 5 November 1913.
38Russell to Lady Ottoline, no. 997, postmarked 28 February 1914.
39No. 995.
scripts of the second and third articles. As Russell probably employed Jourdain's secretary to type these manuscripts, Jourdain would not unnaturally have known about this task, especially as it was to type an author's manuscripts for publication in the *Monist*. The fact that Russell's archives do not contain the manuscripts (which presumably would have been returned by the secretary) is irrelevant because, of all the writings she typed for him, only the "Notes on Logic" and the first two pages of "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics" are extant as manuscripts, and only the former as a typescript.\(^{40}\)

Although the foregoing is only tentative, it does seem more likely to be true than the alternative hypothesis that the "two parts" were proofs of articles one and two. Future Carus papers, we hope, will confirm or deny the adopted hypothesis. But if it is true, its importance amounts only to showing that Russell's preparation of the articles for publication began earlier than otherwise.

There is no more information on the publication of the *Monist* articles until 16 July 1914, when Russell reports to Lady Ottoline that he is "doing a great deal of work, partly Sensation and Imagination."\(^{41}\) This surely refers to correcting the "Theory of Knowledge" chapter of that title which was published in the January 1915 *Monist*. It may mean that the chapter was considerably revised. In October 1914 the fourth chapter appeared in the *Monist*, with a reference to "unpublished work of my Friend Ludwig Wittgenstein".\(^{42}\) This reference would have been added after the writing of "Notes on Logic". The last reference to the *Monist* articles is to the sixth and last article, "On the Experience of Time". On 2 February 1915 Russell tells Lady Ottoline that he "had to revise an article on Time for the Monist".\(^{43}\) The only apparent substantial revision it contains is a reference at the end to a paper by Norbert Wiener,\(^{44}\) to which Russell also referred in *Our Knowledge of..."* (concluded on p. 181)

\(^{40}\)For an account of the manuscript (in Russell's hand) and the various typescripts, see McGuinness, "Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'Notes on Logic'".

\(^{41}\)No. 1053.


\(^{43}\)Russell to Lady Ottoline, no. 1216.

\(^{44}\)"Monist", 25 (April 1915), 233n.