

Russell's re-evaluation of Meinong, 1913–14: an analysis of acquaintance

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MY TOPIC CONCERNS acquaintance in the 1913 book *Theory of Knowledge* in which Russell attempts a synthesis describing the analytic and constructive parts of knowledge. If you suspect that this book sounds like a Meinongian nonexistent object, you are right in one sense at least. The book was never actual in the sense described. It was laid aside at the end of the "Analytic" section ostensibly because of devastating criticism from the precocious Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Theory of Knowledge* became a detached and scattered object, partly published in *The Monist* in 1914–15 (the first six chapters), partly elaborated in other works, and partly buried in Russell's library, never to be fully individuated in its intended form in Russell's lifetime. Now, however, we have a unique perspective on one possible line of Russell's thought, one which demonstrates some peculiar twists and turns not generally known. Once revealed, however, these turnings throw new light on the impact of Meinong and Wittgenstein's thought on Russell's development.

Theory of Knowledge, now published for the first time as a whole as Volume VII of Russell's *Collected Papers*, edited by Elizabeth Eames in collaboration with Kenneth Blackwell, devotes its first part to the Nature of Acquaintance.¹ Russell founds

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¹ Russell's works are abbreviated as follows: "AMi" for *The Analysis of Mind* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1921); "DF" for "Definitions and Methodological Principles in Theory of Knowledge", *The Monist*, 14 (1914)—also as Pt. 1, Ch. IV of *Theory of Knowledge*; "KAKD" for "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1910) in *Mysticism and Logic* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963); "OD" for "On Denoting" (1905) in B. Russell, *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. R.C. Marsh (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956); "MTCA" for "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions", *Mind*, n.s. 13 (1904), reprinted in B. Russell, *Essays in Analysis*, ed. D. Lackey (New York: Braziller, 1973); "NA" for "On the Nature of Acquaintance", *The Monist* (1914), reprinted in *Logic and Knowledge*; "PP" for *Problems of Philosophy* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912); "TK" for *Theory of Knowledge: The 1913 Manuscript*, ed. E.R. Eames with K. Blackwell, Vol. 7 of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983).

Meinong's works are abbreviated as follows: "OA" for *On Assumptions*, 2nd ed. (1910)—trans. James Heanue (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1983); "TO" for "Theory of Objects" ["Über Gegenstandstheorie"] (1904) in *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, ed. R. Chisholm (Glencoe, IL: Free Press,

his theory of acquaintance ideas which have an explicit connection with Meinong's theory of presentation, and utilizes an analysis of awareness which clearly shows the influence of Brentano.

While Meinong is chiefly known to English-speaking philosophers for his negative influence on Russell, who is thought to have formulated the theory of descriptions in part to refute Meinong, my topic here will address Meinong's positive influences on Russell. These are more extensive than is generally recognized. While Russell adopted the principle that every object (that is, every genuine object) has being, he maintained some aspects of the relation of awareness to that object which were originally found in Meinong's theory of presentation.

During the period in which Russell wrote the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript (1913–14) he returned to some of the same issues he had addressed in "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions", and other reviews around the period of "On Denoting" (1903–07). In 1910, having abandoned the single-object theory of belief, Russell confronted the task of constructing an alternative theory of propositions and a multiple-relation theory of judgment. While formulating these views in *Theory of Knowledge* Russell returned to an examination of the theories of Meinong, a fact which bears out a view of Russell as formulating his theories partially in response to Meinong. Russell often used Meinong as a template against which to test and analyze his own theories.

After decisively rejecting Meinong's assumptions in 1904, Russell announced in 1910 that he now could see that Meinong was right in distinguishing presentations and assumptions. Exploring these matters in more depth in *Theory of Knowledge*, Russell announced that, not only did he see the point of Meinong's assumptions, but that there was "certainly an affinity" between Meinong's assumption and what he, Russell, means by understanding a proposition.

In eliciting these influences from Meinong my purpose is not merely exegetical, but philosophical. My aim is to clarify some of the issues involved in Russell's theory of acquaintance. Many of the basic problems Russell struggled with are now surfacing in the attempt to incorporate pragmatic aspects of speech into the formal semantics of indexicals and speech situations.² One of the basic problems is how to (whether to) recognize an intentional aspect of speaker awareness within a semantic theory. If Russell did not fully solve this problem, his attempts on it are at least instructive.

I. ACQUAINTANCE AND PRESENTATION

Brentano and Meinong: sources of influence on Russell

Russell could be said to share the following premisses about the nature of consciousness and mental phenomena with Meinong and Brentano during the period 1904–14. First, that consciousness is a dualistic relation. Mental phenomena are

relations between a subject and an object. Second, the distinguishing mark of mental phenomena as opposed to physical phenomena is that they are directed toward some object. Consciousness has a fundamental trait of directedness toward some object or other.

Departing from the Brentano tradition and from certain famous Meinongian claims, Russell denied that the object of consciousness could be a nonexistent, pseudo-existing, or immanent object. There is also the question of the nature of the subject of consciousness. Russell does not use the terms "mind" or "consciousness" as his subject of acquaintance in the 1910 "KAKD" article or in the 1914 "Nature of Acquaintance" articles, but defines a "subject" neutrally as "any entity which is acquainted with something, i.e. 'subjects' are the domain of the relation 'acquaintance'" (NA, p. 162; TK, p. 35). His habit is to use the first person "I" to refer to the "things of which a man is 'aware'" (NA, p. 130; TK, p. 7). This has led certain commentators (Lackey, Chisholm) to conclude that Russell's subject is simply a person, a position which apparently departs from that of Brentano and Meinong. I think that this issue is one of those unsolved and perhaps open questions in Russell's thought during 1904–21. There seems to be no definitive evidence one way or the other. In any case, Meinong said very little about the nature of the subject, with the exception of some passages in *On Assumptions* indicating he takes the reasonable and informed speaker of a language to be the subject.

Before turning to Meinong's specific theses on presentation we should summarize Brentano's doctrine of intentionality which underlies both his work and that of his students, including, principally, Meinong. Consciousness is characterized by a relation to a content and direction upon an object. This relation of directedness upon objects distinguishes psychical from physical phenomena. Brentano states the doctrine as follows:

Every psychical phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional inexistence of an object, and what we, although with not quite an unambiguous expression, would call relation to a content, direction towards an object (which is not here to be understood as a reality), or immanent objectivity. Each contains something in itself as an object, though not each in the same way. In presentation, something is presented, in judgment, something is judged, in love something is loved, in hatred hated, in desire desired, and so on.

This intentional inexistence is exclusively peculiar to psychical phenomena. No physical phenomenon shows anything similar. And so we can define psychical phenomena by saying that they are phenomena which intentionally contain an object in themselves. (*Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* [1874], I: 115; AMi, p. 14 [Russell's translation])

Russell quotes this passage from Brentano in his *Analysis of Mind* only to reject it. Yet, clearly, he knew its significance:

The view here expressed, that relation to an object is an ultimate irreducible characteristic of mental phenomena, is one which I shall be concerned to combat.... Until very lately I believed, as he did, that mental phenomena have essential reference to objects, except possible in the case of pleasure and pain. (AMi, p. 15)

The passage implies that, heretofore, Russell had accepted the Brentanoan thesis

1960):

Brentano's works are abbreviated as follows: "PES" for Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874), ed. with Introduction by Oskar Kraus, 1924, English ed. by L. McAlister (New York: Humanities Press, 1973).

² See, for example, Jon Barwise and John Perry, *Situations and Attitudes* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, Bradford Books, 1983).

of intentionality (excluding the point about intentional inexistence which both Brentano and Meinong later rejected).³ We can conclude, therefore, that direction upon an object as a fundamental distinguishing characteristic of consciousness was an essential part of Russell's view of the mind up to 1921.

Following his teacher Brentano, Meinong distinguishes presentations (*Vorstellungen*) and judgments (*Urteilen*), and adds a third type of mental phenomenon, assumptions (*Annahmen*). (I use the translation "presentations" for *Vorstellungen*, following Russell, Findlay, Chisholm, etc., for the sake of consistency within the Russell–Meinong exchanges. J. Heanue, in his recent translation of Meinong's *On Assumptions*, translates "*Vorstellungen*" as "representations" in part, I suppose, to distinguish it from Meinong's use of the German "*Präsentieren*".) Brentano says that to be presented is to appear to consciousness or awareness, and Meinong seems to have taken over this basic relation. Presentation is for the most part a passive experience, in the sense that some object is placed before awareness without the active structuring or evaluation which takes place in judging.

Judging is always a doing as opposed to an undergoing, i.e., as opposed to the passive attitude we meet with, in say, feeling—but in presentation too, strictly speaking. (OA, p. 243)⁴

An object which is presented is offered before awareness through the experience of its content (the latter notion being consistently rejected by Russell). Meinong's theses on presentation as contrasted with judgment are, if not explicitly adopted from Brentano, at least consistent with Brentano's position. They are, in summary,

- (1) Presentation, though not the inclusive category for mental phenomena, "is the prerequisite of anything that occurs in the realm of thought. Unless a thought-occurrence is itself a presentation, it presupposes a presentation" (OA, p. 9). Thus, presentation is the foundation of judgment and other types of thought.
- (2) Presentation differs decidedly from the "distinct nature of judgment," a point which Meinong attributes to certain intellectual forebears, Hume, Mill, and Brentano (OA, p. 9).
- (3) Presentation lacks the two elements of (a) conviction, and (b) affirmation or negation; whereas judgment possesses each of these. (Assumptions, incidentally, possess (b) but lack (a) (OA, p. 10).
- (4) Words and noun-phrases signify objects of presentations, whereas sentences signify judgments (OA, p. 29)—a point which parallels Russell's observation that words denote objects of acquaintance and sentences express judgments.

Meinong distinguishes between two functions of language, expression (*Ausdruck*) and signification (*Bedeutung*):

Thus, a person who utters a word such as "sun" normally gives *expression*, whether he really

³ The point is reinforced by Roderick Chisholm, Introduction to *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, p. 5.

⁴ My quotations are from the second edition of 1910, but the particular passages in question remain unchanged from the first edition of 1902 read by Russell.

wants to or not, that a definite presentation is occurring to him—a presentation which can, of course, just as well be a perceptual one as a reproductive one. As to what presentation this is, that is in the first instance determined by what is presented by means of it—or in other words, determined by its object; and this object is simply that which the word "sun" signifies. (OA, p. 24)

Bedeutung, however, is not private for Meinong, but has a public status, incorporating "what the totality or majority of speakers mean and, hence, what the individual speaker reasonably 'should' mean" (OA, p. 24). *Bedeutung* also has an intentional aspect which Meinong makes quite explicit in the following passage:

As a part of life, signifying is surely always a signifying for someone.... This signifying is tied to the fact of a word's being an expression ... in the sense that a word signifies only as far as it expresses. More precisely, a word signifies [*bedeutet*] only to the extent that it expresses an intellectual experience, the object of the experience in that case constituting the signification [*Bedeutung*] of the word. (OA, p. 25)

II. RUSSELL'S ACQUAINTANCE

I shall now turn to an analysis of Russell's theory of acquaintance, showing how certain Meinongian influences may be present in Russell's analysis. Meinong's influence on Russell in the doctrine of acquaintance has been recognized in the literature. Less recognized, however, is the fact that certain Meinongian traces of the doctrine of intentionality may have seeped into Russell's account, not only of the acquaintance relation, but of denoting and, later, of naming. In a very insightful article, Hidé Ishiguro states:

Russell's notion of 'meaning' seems in his earlier works to carry many Meinongian or Bradleyan undertones.

In his article "On Denoting," Russell assumes that an expression used as a grammatical subject in the verbal expression of a proposition does not have any meaning by itself unless its meaning, which he equates with the object denoted, figures intact in a proper analysis of the proposition. Thus for Russell not only do words like 'everything', 'nothing' and 'something' have no independent meaning; phrases such as 'a man' or even 'the king of France' have no meaning. These are called incomplete symbols. For Russell, to say of a word that it has meaning by itself is tantamount to saying that the meaning of the word is an object such that if we express a proposition using the word, the proposition will be about the object. 'John Smith is fat' would express a proposition about John Smith if the meaning of the phrase 'John Smith' is the man John Smith.

... [A]lthough Russell in this article refers to Frege's '*Sinn*' as meaning, and '*Bedeutung*' as denotation, Russell's own notion of the meaning of an expression is quite different from Frege's notion of '*Sinn*'. If anything it is closer to Frege's '*Bedeutung*'.⁵

I wish Ishiguro had made more explicit connections between specific Russellian

⁵ Hidé Ishiguro, "Use and Reference of Names", in *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, ed. Peter Winch (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 26.

points and Meinongian theses, but I take it that the identification of "to mean" with "denote" may pack an implicit intentional element into Russell's denoting relation. There is also the possibility that, included in Russell's notion of "*Bedeutung*" or denotation, are some of the intentional aspects of Meinong's *Bedeutung*, or what has been defined above as "signification".

Bearing out this conjecture, Ishiguro subsequently quotes Russell's "Nature of Acquaintance" articles, the first three chapters of the *Theory of Knowledge* book which is my focus here. She diagnoses another intentional aspect within Russell's naming thesis:

Russell wrote as if names get attached to their bearers by the speaker's intention. According to him, at any given moment there are certain things of which a man is 'aware', which are 'before his mind'.⁶

In support of her thesis Ishiguro quotes the following passage:

If I describe these objects [of acquaintance] I may of course describe them wrongly: hence I cannot with certainty communicate to another what are the things of which I am aware. But if I speak to myself, and denote them by what may be called 'proper names' rather than by descriptive words, I cannot be in error. So long as the names which I use really are names at the moment, i.e. are naming things to me, so long the things must be objects of which I am aware, since otherwise the words would be meaningless sounds, not names of things. (NA, p. 130; TK, p. 8)

Ishiguro, writing from the viewpoint of Wittgenstein, remarks that "such a private act would not for Wittgenstein make a sound into a name of an object although a man can privately commit himself to a consecutive use of an expression, and thereby give an object a name for his own purpose." Only the consecutive use of a name addressing shape, colour, and/or surface shape of an object will establish which of these I did name. But we should note that proper names are not names in the ordinary sense for Russell of 1914. Nor are they names in any recognized philosophical sense, but in a special Russellian sense. I shall return to this issue later. For now I wish to point out that this character of names of objects of acquaintance, is what Ayer has called "pleonastic", that Russell's proper names cannot fail to name, and their very pronouncement (one should not, I think, say "utterance") entails an object named, and furthermore, that the object named exists.⁷ Hence, it is in a sense superfluous (or a pleonasm) to say of "this" that "this exists".

But the intention which Ishiguro recognizes within this phenomenon and the characteristic which Ayer has called "pleonastic" are not due to the naming or to the denoting relation. They are, I suggest, due to Russell's acquaintance relation, which has embedded within it a strongly intentional element, including an ability to "select by attention" the relevant aspect of an object which shall serve as the nominatum in consecutive naming instances. So it is misleading to talk of "speakers' intention". We should look first at the intentional aspects of acquaintance, a task to which I now turn.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷ A.J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1971).

Tracing the development of Russell's theses on acquaintance, we can see several lines of influence from the Brentano–Meinong sources. These can be divided into *terminological influences*, evidenced primarily in Russell's definition of "acquaintance" in terms of "presentation", *structural influences*, evidenced by the definition of the acquaintance relation in the same general terms (with variations) as presentation, and *implicit influences*, found by noting certain of Russell's unstated assumptions or explicit analyses and remarking on their similarity or parallelism to Brentano or Meinong. The last of course are the most conjectural, particularly in the case of Brentano, whom Russell does not footnote until 1921. But since Russell carefully read Meinong, and Brentano's influence is explicitly detailed in Meinong's works, Russell must have been aware of Brentano's general analyses, even if he did not read Brentano's work carefully.

Another caveat must be added here. I do not maintain that the only sources of influence on Russell's theory of acquaintance were Brentano and Meinong. We must also recognize that Augustine's *De Magistro* contains the distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and by description.⁸ Descartes' dualism between subject and object pervades Russell's discussion of acquaintance in *The Problems of Philosophy*. Hume's sense-impressions and Berkeley's immediate knowledge may have been other sources. And, surely, G.E. Moore's distinction between acts of consciousness (the only indubitably mental entities) and objects of consciousness (which need not be mental) played a part. Anthony Quinton emphasizes Moore's act–object distinction, saying that it "may well be the main source of Russell's initial views about the mind."⁹ Russell attended and participated in the presentation of Moore's December 1909 paper to the Aristotelian Society on "The Subject Matter of Psychology". Yet, to attribute the main sources of influence to Moore is to ignore Russell's detailed, analytical, published articles on Meinong, with whom Moore shares the basic act–object distinction. Of course there is a confluence of sources here. Russell's rejection of Meinong's notion of content, in the act–content–object distinction, may also have been due to Moore's influence. And Russell rejected not only the Meinongian nonexistent objects, but Moore's contention that "I am as directly aware of the existence of material things in space as of my own sensations."¹⁰ The point is that in the act–object distinction and the direct relation between subject and object in acquaintance there are structural influences from both Meinong and Moore, in the sense that the basic relation is taken over even if Russell changes its terms in his version.

A.J. Ayer remarks in *Russell and Moore* that Moore's influence on Russell waned after 1903.¹¹ Yet one philosopher Russell went back to reread and reconsider during the years 1905 to 1921 was Meinong, a fact which will hopefully be highlighted by the appearance of *Theory of Knowledge*.

Taking a close look at the development of Russell's theses on acquaintance we can see that the definition in terms of presentation occurs as early as 1905 in "On Denoting", which can only indicate a distinct influence from Meinong. We can also

⁸ R.C. Marsh, Preface to "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", in *Logic and Knowledge*, p. 125.

⁹ Anthony Quinton, "Russell's Philosophy of Mind", in *Bertrand Russell: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. D.F. Pears (New York: Anchor, 1972), p. 84.

¹⁰ G.E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1922), pp. 29–30.

¹¹ Ayer, *Russell and Moore*, p. 4.

see a progressive refinement and elaboration of the relation of acquaintance. It becomes clear, in addition, that it is correct to call this relation "simple" only in the sense that it is unmediated. It is not dependent on any other cognitive relations, such as knowledge of truths, whereas knowledge by description is. That is, acquaintance is direct. It is simple only in relative terms as compared to knowledge by description or knowledge involved in the analysis of logical constructions. When we look at what Russell actually says, it becomes clear that neither the relation of acquaintance, considered from the point of view of the conscious subject, nor its objects, are necessarily simple.

"On Denoting" [1905]

In the opening paragraphs to "On Denoting" Russell introduces the distinction between acquaintance and "knowledge about" as "the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases" (*OD*, p. 41). By the use of the term "presentation" we can detect shades of Meinong's influence on Russell as early as 1905. This fact is not surprising since Russell had recently finished the articles "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions", in which he discusses Meinong's theory of presentations, assumptions, and judgment. The acquaintance vs. "knowledge about" distinction is introduced as one among the many applications of the theory of denoting, which helps explain how we go from acquaintance to things with which we have no immediate acquaintance. Russell announces:

All thinking has to start from acquaintance; but it succeeds in thinking *about* many things with which we have no acquaintance. (*OD*, p. 42)

Among the objects of acquaintance Russell mentions in 1905 are: objects of perception, and "objects of a more abstract logical character" in thought.

At the end of the article, Russell states that one "interesting result" of the theory of denoting is:

When there is anything with which we do not have immediate acquaintance, but only definition by denoting phrases, then the propositions in which this thing is introduced by means of a denoting phrase do not really contain this thing as a constituent, but contain instead the constituents expressed by several words of the denoting phrase. (*OD*, p. 55)

I take it that this interesting result is only that we are not required to postulate objects which are known only by description as proper constituents of the propositions, i.e. we need not include as constituents golden mountains anymore than the sun god, but rather we can, given the theory of denoting, rather analyze each component of these denoting phrases as the proper constituent, known by acquaintance. In other words, this application supports the well-known principle of acquaintance cited in the next sentence, "Thus in every proposition that we can apprehend ... all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance." Thus, by the time of "On Denoting", the following features of acquaintance have been already established in Russell's philosophy:

- (1) To be acquainted with something is to have a presentation of it.
- (2) Acquaintance is the foundation of human thought.
- (3) Each proper constituent of a proposition is known by acquaintance (the Principle of Acquaintance).
- (4) There is a basic distinction in theory of knowledge between acquaintance and "knowledge about". It is by means of denoting phrases that we are able to proceed from the immediate knowledge of acquaintance to knowledge about things with which we have no acquaintance.

"Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1910)

In his 1910 article "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description", Russell gives a more detailed account of acquaintance relations in terms of presentation. He also explicitly cites Meinong's view of presentation by acknowledging his mistake in 1904 of regarding assumptions as merely presentations (*KAKD*, p. 213n.3) and compares one's supposing (assuming) that "*A loves B*" to understanding the proposition *A loves B*. I take this 1910 article, along with more popular *Problems of Philosophy*, to be the antecedents of the more refined analysis of *Theory of Knowledge*.

Russell defines the acquaintance relation in the following theses: (i) To be acquainted with an object is to have a direct cognitive relation to that object. (ii) Acquaintance has to do with presentation and is distinct from judgment. (iii) Acquaintance is a subject-object relation, and is the converse of the relation of presentation ("To say *S* has acquaintance with *O* is essentially the same thing as to say that *O* is presented to *S*" [*KAKD*, pp. 201-3]). (iv) "Acquaintance" is the term to be preferred over "presentation" because (a) it features the relational character of acquaintance and the dualism of subject and object which seems a fundamental fact of cognition, (b) it emphasizes the need of a subject which is acquainted (avoiding materialism), and (c) it features the fact that I can be acquainted with an object even when it is not actually before the mind (avoiding solipsism).

Aside from the obvious terminological influences from Meinong around the term "presentation", there are structural influences on the dualism of subject-object, and the sharp distinction of presentation of acquaintance from judgment. In addition to these specific definitions of the acquaintance relation there is further evidence of structural influence from Meinong when, later in the article, having announced his shift toward Meinongian assumptions, Russell announces his definition of judgment as "a relation of a mind to several entities, namely the entities which compose what is judged" (*KAKD*, p. 212), and, most importantly, the following principle, which shares an obvious premiss with Meinong's assertion that presentations are the foundation presupposed in all judgment and in all assuming: (v) "Whenever a relation of supposing or judging occurs, the terms to which the supposing or judging mind is related by the relation of supposing or judging must be terms with which the mind in question is acquainted" (*KAKD*, p. 213). This principle is clearly an extension of the "Principle of Acquaintance" stated as: (v') "Every proposition which we can understand must be composed solely of constituents with which we are acquainted" (*KAKD*, p. 211). I will return to an analysis of these versions of the Principle of Acquaintance in discussing the general function of acquaintance in Russell's many-term theory of judgment in *Theory of Knowledge*, with the conjecture that in it may lie the source of one of Wittgenstein's dissatisfactions and criticisms

of that manuscript. For now, consider the summary Russell gives of the objects of acquaintance.

Among the objects of acquaintance are, first, particulars, which divide into the data of sense, imagination, and memory. Second, there are universals. We are aware of universals through a cognitive relation Russell calls "conceiving". This in turn includes "concepts" (properties) such as "yellow" predicated of one object, and relations such as "... before ...". This classification is maintained in *The Problems of Philosophy* (pp. 48–52). *Theory of Knowledge* adds acquaintance with "Logical Data" or logical form, although in a slightly different sense of acquaintance (*TK*, pp. 97–101). Russell includes the self as "probably" an object of the species of acquaintance he calls introspection in the 1912 *Problems of Philosophy*, but later abandons this position in favour of the view that the self is a construction.

III. THE ISSUE OF SIMPLICITY IN THE RELATION AND OBJECTS OF ACQUAINTANCE

The issue of whether the objects of acquaintance and the relation itself are simple is one which has puzzled many readers of Russell. I have taken the position that acquaintance *qua* relation is "simple" only in the sense that it is unmediated (by knowledge of truths) and in the relative sense of not susceptible to analysis in the manner of knowledge by description, or in the manner of judgment. If this is all that is meant by R. Clark in his remark that "There is simplicity in the form of the mental occurrence involved [in acquaintance]" then my analysis is in agreement with his. His second sense of simplicity, however, deserves comment, since I think it contains a confusion which Russell himself may be responsible for perpetuating, namely the equation of the semantic relation of naming with the epistemological relation of acquaintance. Clark says: "The relation of acquaintance itself is a semantic relation tying knower and known in an especially simple and direct way."¹² The source of confusion may be that Russell implicitly packed an intentional aspect into the acquaintance relation, but that his semantic relation of naming made no recognition of this intentional aspect.

Yet the conflation of acquaintance and naming persists (with not a little help from Russell himself) with the result that Russell's epistemology recognizes more than his semantics accommodates. Or, put another way, Russell's semantics postulates less than his epistemology requires. This curious disjunction in Russell's philosophy of language may not wreak havoc in the analysis of descriptions reducible to acquaintance in the case of relatively simple sense-data examples. But when we bring in Russell's analysis of indexicals or demonstratives such as "here", "now", "this", and "I", the disjunction becomes more apparent, because the speaker-relative aspects of intentionality become inescapably relevant. I shall not go into this matter further here except to suggest that the following distinctions would make Russell's theses on naming and acquaintance clearer.¹³

(a) It is a mistake to identify the semantic relation of denoting or naming with

the epistemological relation of acquaintance. (b) Even if these two occur simultaneously in the awareness of a subject, they are analytically distinct. (c) The semantic relation between name and object is simple, non-inferential, and direct, as the syntactical expression (the name) is simple and undifferentiated. (d) But the epistemological relation standing behind these linguistic relations and grounding them (i.e. supplying them with instances) is simple only in a relative sense. (e) The objects of acquaintance are not necessarily simple but the *aspect* of each object which is selected for attention, presumably, is.

Russell himself is clear and explicit on the complexity of sense-data and other objects of acquaintance. He says in 1910:

When I see a colour or hear a noise I have direct acquaintance with the colour or the noise. The sense-datum with which I am acquainted in these cases is generally, if not always, complex. (*KAKD*, p. 203)

He is also quite explicit on the non-necessity of assuming that acquaintance is simple. In the article "Definitions and Methodological Principles in Theory of Knowledge" (Ch. IV, Pt. I of *Theory of Knowledge*) he says:

It is not necessary to assume that acquaintance is unanalyzable, or that subjects must be simple; it may be found that a further analysis of both is possible. But I have no analysis to suggest, and therefore formally both will appear as if they were simple, though nothing will be falsified if they are found to be not simple. (*DF*, p. 582; *TK*, p. 45)

Russell states explicitly in *Theory of Knowledge*, Part II, Chapter II ("Analysis and Synthesis") that "We may be acquainted with a complex without being acquainted with its constituents" (*TK*, p. 120). This principle holds even when we are unable to discover, "by introspective effort, that we are acquainted with the objects which are in fact its constituents" (*TK*, p. 121). In so stating this principle Russell is consistent with his position in "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions", that he "fail[s] to see any force in [Meinong's] argument against the presentability of complexes" (*MTCA*, p. 55). Although he subsequently saw that assumptions concerning Objectives (which Russell in 1904 identified with his own propositions) were distinct from presentations, Russell continued, apparently, to maintain that we can have presentations of complexes. So, we can have acquaintance with complexes, at least if these are of a perceptual nature.

While there is no direct evidence that Russell consulted Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* during the years before 1921, there are certain very interesting parallels between Russell's contention above and Brentano's theories on unconscious consciousness. Note the following statements by Brentano:

A sense experience often comprises in its object a multiplicity of parts. The experience is related to the whole object in its totality, and therefore it must be related to the parts implicitly insofar as they are given with the object; but it may not explicitly relate to each of its parts.¹⁴

¹² R. Clark, "Acquaintance", *Synthese*, 46 (1981): 233.

¹³ See my article, "Russell on Indexicals and Scientific Knowledge", in *Rereading Russell: Essays on Bertrand Russell's Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Vol. XII of *Minnesota Studies in Philosophy of Science*, ed. C.W. Savage and C.A. Anderson (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1988).

¹⁴ *PES*, p. 102.

An unconscious consciousness is no more a contradiction in terms than an unseen case of seeing. (*PES*, p. 102)

IV. ACQUAINTANCE IN *Theory of Knowledge*, 1913–14

As Anthony Quinton has remarked, the three articles “On the Nature of Acquaintance” (Chs. I–III of *Theory of Knowledge*) are a puzzling group and commentators have wisely avoided them. Quinton, in a somewhat mischievous tone, characterizes them as:

In some ways a rather typically Russellian piece of work: ingenious, fertile, offhand, helter-skelter, a desultory sequence of nimble impromptus.¹⁵

A leap of sympathy in Russell's favour provides a counter-characterization. The articles are:

innovative, non-pompous, varied, open-minded, courageously acknowledging any superior force in the opposition's arguments, and, finally, a considered review of various hypotheses, each carefully weighed and evaluated.¹⁶

But, of course, the “Nature of Acquaintance” articles are puzzling. They are detached parts of a larger work whose framework is now available widely for the first time. In presenting my analysis of these chapters, I shall start by summarizing Russell's overview of the general relation of acquaintance at the beginning of Chapter VII (“On the Acquaintance Involved in Our Knowledge of Relations”) of *Theory of Knowledge*. Russell views acquaintance as a genus, within which occur various species of experiencing particular objects. These include

attention, which selects what is in some sense *one* object, ... sensation, which serves to define “the present time,” ... memory, which applies only to past objects, ... imagination, which gives objects without any temporal relation to the subject. (*TK*, p. 79)

Russell continues,

All these are different relations to objects, such that, even when the object is the same, the experience can be distinguished owing to the difference of relations. (*TK*, p. 79)

Viewing the various notions Russell uses to define acquaintance as species under the same genus helps resolve apparent inconsistencies between defining acquaintance as what is “before the mind” (*NA*, p. 130; *TK*, p. 7) yet saying that “it is natural to say I am acquainted with an object when it is not actually before my mind” (*KAKD*, p. 198). The overview of acquaintance provided in *Theory of Knowledge* also helps organize what seems initially to be a bewildering array of notions Russell uses to define acquaintance: presentation, experience, consciousness, aware-

ness, being before the mind, attention, selection, etc.¹⁷ Each of these notions is utilized in some particular aspect of acquaintance, trained on its various types of objects for various functions in knowledge. Surely Russell has made acquaintance a very broad and general category (a move which may get him into trouble), but we may make sense of this rich array.

Russell develops his analysis of acquaintance in these opening chapters in the process of a consideration of James and Mach's neutral monism, a move which makes sense in light of the fact that he was attempting to prepare a course of lectures on theory of knowledge for Harvard. The prospect of opposition may have led him to design arguments which define more carefully the intentional theory of consciousness he was defending.

Specific theses asserted in *NA* include:

- (1) Russell's definition of objects of which a man is “aware” or which are “before his mind” as among the objects of acquaintance (*NA*, p. 13; *TK*, p. 8).
- (2) The fact that I may denote these objects by “proper names”, and so long as these are “naming things to me” I cannot be in error.

Here Russell takes up a typically Meinongian position in (1) and adds his own version of what linguistic relation holds to such objects. Meinong's *Vorstellen*, or presentation, is essentially a passive experience in the 1902 edition of *Über Annahmen* which Russell read. (Even in the active grammatical mood, “*Ich stelle mich vor ...*” [“I place this before myself ...”] has the meaning “I am being presented with this....”) Something of this relation shows up in Russell's discussion above. Sensory data impinge on my awareness; when I notice this I am able to give expression to these objects in language.¹⁸ Russell's naming relation, of course, differs in many essential respects from Meinong's signification, or *Bedeutung*, which does not have the characteristics Russell attributes to proper names.

The next passage of note contains two theses which I shall call respectively, the

- (3) *Unity of Consciousness Thesis* (that “my present experience” possesses a certain inherent unity, and that the terms “I” and “now” must be defined in terms of it rather than vice versa. Unity of consciousness may be illustrated by becoming aware of a sound and thing seen simultaneously).

and the

- (4) *Selection by Attention Thesis* (unity of consciousness may be defined by “everything experienced together with this” “where *this* is any experienced thing selected by attention”) (*NA*, p. 130; *TK*, p. 8).

Now Meinong does not discuss unity of consciousness in these terms, nor are there any passages concerning “this” selected by attention. Moreover, in the pas-

¹⁷ Noted by A.R. White, “Knowledge, Acquaintance and Awareness”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 6 (1981): 160.

¹⁸ I am indebted to Professor Chisholm for helpful clarification of these and subsequent points on Russell's relation to Meinong.

¹⁵ Quinton, “Russell's Philosophy of Mind”, p. 86.

¹⁶ My gloss.

sages in question Russell refers to "my present contents of experience", a curious phrase, since he has already supposedly decisively rejected Meinongian contents. Yet here is the Russell of the logical atomist period discussing the subtleties of conscious experience with a skill and sensitivity worthy of a philosopher in the tradition of Brentano. Consider the following passage:

There is a certain unity, important to realize but hard to analyse, in "my present experience". If we assumed that "I" am the same at one time and at another, we might suppose that "my present experience" might be defined as all the experience which "I" have "now". But in fact we shall find that "I" and "now", in the order of knowledge, must be defined in terms of "my present experience", rather than vice versa.

... We shall have to say, I think, that "being experienced together" is a relation between experienced things, which can itself be experienced, for example, when we become aware of two things which we are seeing together, or of a thing seen and a thing heard simultaneously. Having come to know in this way what is meant by "being experienced together", we can define "my present contents of experience" as "everything experienced together with *this*" where *this* is any experienced thing selected by attention. (NA, p. 131; TK, p. 8)

Is it possible that Russell could have read Brentano and assimilated something of his approach? I do not know the answer to this question. Nor do I have any evidence to offer, other than Russell's 1921 footnote to Brentano. Laying Brentano's comments alongside Russell's, however, yields some very interesting parallels.

Russell seems to be claiming (a) that what is fundamental to "an experience" or "my experience" is the unity of the whole (totality) of the experience. This unity derives from (b) a conscious experience of the simultaneity of the parts of the experience, or what Russell calls an awareness of "being experienced together". ("Simultaneity" is also discussed at TK, p. 79.) Here is what Brentano says on each of these two points.

On (a), Unity of the Whole:

A sense experience often comprises in its object a multiplicity of parts. The experience is related to the whole object in its totality, and therefore it must be related to the parts implicitly insofar as they are given with the object; but it may not explicitly relate to each of its parts.¹⁹

On (b), Simultaneity and Unity of Experience:

When someone thinks of and desires something, or when he thinks of several objects at the same time, he is conscious not only of different activities, but also of their simultaneity.... Now if we find the perception of seeing in one thing and the perception of hearing in another, in which of these things do we find the perception of their simultaneity? Obviously, in neither of them. It is clear, rather, that the inner cognition of one and the

inner cognition of the other must belong to the same unity. (My emphasis; PES, p. 160)²⁰

If there is more than a mere coincidence here, Russell using even the same example of seeing and hearing simultaneously, what is implied? We cannot conclude that Russell was directly influenced by Brentano, but we can conclude that at the heart of the acquaintance relation lies an analysis consistent with an intentional analysis of consciousness.

There is another intriguing parallel with a Brentanoan position in Russell's schema $S'—P—(S—A—O)$ (or his more technical version, $S'—P—[(\exists S) . (S—A—O)]$) (NA, p. 166; TK, pp. 38–9). Russell presents the schema as an answer to the question "What is psychologically involved in our acquaintance with the present experience?" His answer is that, at least, there is an experience of the object *O* (i.e. $S—A—O$). And in addition, there is "another experience of experiencing *O*." This second experience can be captured by the relation "*P*". Then Russell says, "it is necessary that a subject should have the relation *P* to an object which is itself an experience." (He goes on to deny, Humean fashion, that the two subjects *S* and *S'* should be "numerically the same".) Essentially the same point is found in Brentano's *Psychology* on primary and secondary objects of consciousness:

Every mental act is conscious: it includes within it a consciousness of itself. Therefore, every mental act, no matter how simple, has a double object, a primary and a secondary object. The simplest act, for example, the act of hearing, has as its primary object the sound, and for its secondary object, itself, the mental phenomenon in which the sound is heard. (PES, p. 153)

Russell utilizes the distinction but does not swallow it up into his analysis of acquaintance. In fact, he uses it to go on and deny that the type of acquaintance involved in naming requires the secondary consciousness of, as he calls it, presence.

When an object is in my present experience then I am acquainted with it; it is not necessary for me to reflect upon my experience, or to observe that the object has the property of belonging to my experience, in order to be acquainted with it. (NA, p. 167; TK, p. 39)

He illustrates the point with the example of my being occupied "like Adam" in bestowing names on objects: "It would not be necessary for me to reflect that I was acquainted with them, or to realize that they all shared a certain relation with myself" (NA, p. 167; TK, p. 39). Presumably, the reason Russell makes this argument is the "logical difficulty" of identifying the two subjects of the initial and the reflective experience (*S* and *S'* in the schema), and this difficulty casts further doubt on the self as an object of acquaintance.

In concluding this section, let me emphasize the importance of Russell's "Selection by Attention" thesis for his theory of proper names, and for his subsequent philosophy even after he had officially rejected the doctrine of acquaintance in 1921. Russell says, "We may speak of *the* object of attention of a given subject at a given

¹⁹ Quoted in Chisholm, R., "Brentano's Descriptive Psychology", in *The Philosophy of Brentano*, ed. L. McAlister (New York: Humanities Press, 1976, p. 93) (In fn. 10 Chisholm relates the quote to Russell's *Inquiry*, Ch. on "Analysis". But doesn't this passage indicate a much earlier, and distinct, parallel?)

²⁰ Quoted in R. Chisholm, *The First Person* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1981). p. 87; PES, p. 160.

moment” (NA, p. 168; TK, p. 40). Such an object is named “this” and “this” means “the object to which I am now attending”. In stating the thesis in this manner Russell exhibits the conflation of an epistemological (or intentional) determination of an object and the semantic relation of naming, as analyzed above. As Russell says, the proper name “this” means the object to which I am now attending. Russell’s use of the term “means” may show parallels with Meinongian (or Brentanoan) intentional reference. I “mean” the object to which I am now attending when I name the object to which I am attending “this”. In other words, just as Russell took acquaintance to be the converse of presentation, he took naming to be the converse of meaning in the intentional sense of “I mean (to attend to) *this* object.”

Russell’s rejection of the doctrine of intentionality and acquaintance in *The Analysis of Mind* did not mark the end of his thesis on Selection by Attention. It is found in full force in Russell’s analysis of egocentric particulars in *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* and in *Human Knowledge*. A careful reading of the latter also shows the Unity of Consciousness thesis as part of what characterizes the notion of complete complexes of compresence. I conclude that Russell, having established these theses in what I have analyzed as an intentional aspect to awareness, persisted in stating them throughout his philosophy, despite the demise of acquaintance. They continued to play a role in his view of sensory experience as the empirical foundation of knowledge.²¹

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²¹ For an analysis of the ontological and logical issues disputed by Russell and Meinong, see my “The Russell–Meinong Debate”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 45 (1985): 305–50.