

THREE STUDIES OF RUSSELL'S NEUTRAL MONISM

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My aim in this three-part study¹ is to examine the transition in Russell's thought from the dualism he advocated before the Great War to the monism he began to endorse afterwards. Dating the change with reference to the war is a matter of convenience rather than a suggestion about its cause, for Russell's thinking would almost certainly have altered during a time of world peace. I think that the change in his philosophy resulted from intellectual tensions and conflicts over three fundamental questions which in fact absorbed his attention through much of his career: the most fruitful way to accommodate the perspectives of both science and first-person experience within a metaphysical framework of realism; the nature of belief and awareness; and the correct analysis of the concept of a proposition. These questions were closely related for Russell. In what follows, they will be taken up in turn, without being fully pried apart. Each study will be set out independently of the others, with minimal cross-referencing (but with consecutive footnotes). Despite considerable overlap in the topics and texts they examine, and in the chronological threads they follow, each has a distinct focus. The theme which dominates the first study is the immense difficulty Russell

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found in making the transition from dualism to monism both convincing and complete. The background theme of the second, which examines his concept of a mental act, is the influence of Wittgenstein's criticisms, which propelled Russell to re-examine and eventually to revise his conception of philosophy. The third examines the tribulations Russell underwent in attempting to deepen and defend his logical intuitions about a correct theory of propositions. My method in all three studies will be to explore Russell's thought through his own words rather than through a prism of scholarly opinion and controversy.

I. OBJECTS OF AWARENESS

The collected discussions by learned commentators of Russell's neutral monism, the doctrine he adopted in stages after World War I, afford a good example of dust-raising at work. One version, which I believe originated with Stace, contends that Russell's neutral monism was essentially a phenomenalist doctrine that reached its fullest expression in *The Analysis of Mind*, only to be superseded in later writings (such as *The Analysis of Matter*) by physicalism.² Another view, shared by several, is that Russell eventually abandoned neutral monism in favour of something like the dualistic world of directly experienced sense-data and the inferred objects of science, which he had first described in *The Problems of Philosophy*.³ At least one commentator regards Russell's doctrine as a crudely expressed form of central state materialism.⁴ Yet another has raised a different kind of issue by charging that Russell's neutral monism is deeply flawed and ultimately incoherent.⁵

² Cf. W. T. Stace, "Russell's Neutral Monism", in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, ed. P. A. Schilpp, 3rd ed. (New York: Tudor, 1951), pp. 353-84.

³ This seems to be the view of Ayer and Sainsbury, among others. Cf. A. J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1971), esp. Chap. 5; R. M. Sainsbury, *Russell* (London: Routledge, 1979).

⁴ Cf. D. J. O'Connor, "Russell's Theory of Perception", in *Bertrand Russell Memorial Volume*, ed. G. W. Roberts (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp. 304-20 (at 317-18).

⁵ See A. Quinton, "Russell's Philosophy of Mind", esp. pp. 106-7, in *Bertrand Russell*, ed. D. F. Pears (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971). Quinton's charge of

With the exception of Stace's view, all of these opinions have appeared since the publication of *My Philosophical Development* in 1959, renewing the poignancy of Russell's complaint there that his philosophical theory has been "almost universally misunderstood" (*MPD*, p. 16). Yet the very persistence of misunderstandings—as Russell himself would surely have called them—just as surely indicates that there might be, after all, something more than merely puzzling or eccentric about his doctrine of neutral monism, that his doctrine might include principles which render it intractable or even ultimately untenable. Whether this is so, however, I do not know. One or another of Russell's commentators might in fact hold the right opinion about the nature and worth of his neutral monism, as formulated in *The Analysis of Matter* and apparently presupposed in later writings such as *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* and *Human Knowledge*. My concern here is with the origin of this doctrine, and particularly with the problems which he thought it could solve. The most notable feature of Russell's conversion to neutral monism from logical atomism (as he called his position in 1914) was the abandonment of acquaintance or awareness as the cornerstone of his metaphysics and epistemology. Acquaintance he had considered to be an irreducible mental relation between a *subject* of experience and the various sorts of *particulars* experienced by that subject, such as sense-data. In turning towards neutral monism, Russell was convinced that a different account of perceptual experience could be given which avoided the notion of a subject and the commitment to an act of awareness. This conviction will be examined in the next study. Russell recognized that the concept of sense-data would have to be tailored to fit the new account, and that is the topic I want to examine in the present study. I also want to consider the purity of his conversion to neutral monism, specifically whether Russell reintroduced the concept of acquaintance in a new form, thereby giving dualism an extended life.

incoherence concerns Russell's adherence to neutral monism combined with (he claims) his acceptance of a radical difference between the objects of physics and what is present in sensation. As will be seen, my own concern is with a possible incoherence within Russell's doctrine of neutral monism, not its alleged incompatibility with further views about the nature of matter. The flaws in Russell's doctrine on which Quinton concentrates concern his treatment of sensations and feelings.

Section 1.

Russell's published writings in 1914 broached several topics which would continue to preoccupy his later philosophical works: the interrelations of logic, epistemology and metaphysics; the relationship between physics and psychology; and the problem of deriving objects of the sort needed by theoretical science from the immediate data of first-person experience. At this time, as is well known, Russell was convinced that the inferred entities dealt with in physics could be defined as sets of sense-data. Probably exaggerating the degree of mathematical precision which he thought possible, he announced his objective "to solve the equations giving sense-data in terms of physical objects, so as to make them instead give physical objects in terms of sense-data."⁶ It seems not so widely acknowledged that an important element of this reductionist programme was to treat sense-data themselves as non-mental entities whose status does *not* consist essentially of being contents of experience. Of course, Russell regarded sense-data as precisely the kind of thing which one encounters in sensory experience; indeed, he held that sense-data, so encountered, "are all that we directly and primitively know of the external world" ("RSDP", p. 6). His point was that *even* at such times they are part of what constitutes material objects and are thus part of the actual subject-matter of physics. Besides actual data, other particulars assumed to be qualitatively similar to them were also claimed to be constitutive of external objects. Russell divided the latter into two sorts: (1) the actual sense-data of percipients other than oneself, and (2) sensibilia, or those so-called "appearances" which occur in physical space at a location "where no sense organs and nervous structure exist" (p. 13). Since such classes of particulars were thought by him to be both objective and real, it is evident that his sensibilia—despite the term's etymology and its association with phenomenalism⁷—are not merely possible con-

⁶ "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics", in *Papers* 8: 6. The essay was published in 1914 and reappeared four years later in *Mysticism and Logic*. (References will be abbreviated as "RSDP"; where the context makes it clear, only the page number(s) will be cited.)

⁷ In its traditional sense, "Phenomenalism" is the doctrine that the objects which one experiences in (for example) sense perception have the nature of ideas, i.e., mental entities whose existence depends upon their being experienced. In terms of such entities, this doctrine sought to explain both ordinary and scientific conceptions of

tents of one's experience; they exist independently and need not ever come within the ambit of sensory experience. Together, these three classes of items constituted the material of what Russell referred to as an "impersonal metaphysic" in which "the privileged position of [one's] actual data would probably disappear, and ... would probably appear as a rather haphazard selection from a mass of objects more or less like them" (pp. 6–7).

This "metaphysic" was admitted by Russell to have only the status of a hypothesis which served best to organize, explain and analyze the rival claims of science and common sense, as well as to reconcile what seemed to him to be a tension between epistemology and metaphysics which arises from a preoccupation with first-person experience. The tension could be relaxed, if never made completely to disappear, by regarding the claims of first-person knowledge to be a proper subset of metaphysical ones: "the special importance of sense-data", he wrote, "is in relation to epistemology, not to metaphysics. In this respect, physics is to be reckoned a metaphysics ..." (p. 7). Throughout his later career, Russell never abandoned the opinion that whatever systematic explanation he proposed was no more than a theory which, owing to both its nature and its comprehensiveness, could never be proved;⁸ the major changes he did introduce concerned the classification and description of components within the metaphysical framework set forth in 1914.

Years later, Russell commented briefly on these early ideas in a way which encourages the misconception that his 1914 programme was phenomenalist in nature: "In my first enthusiasm on abandoning the 'matter' of the physicist, I hoped to be able to exhibit the hypothetical entities that a given percipient does not perceive as structures composed entirely of elements that he does perceive" (*MPD*, p. 104). *Our Knowledge of the External World* and "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics" were then singled as containing the first expositions of this new approach. However, Russell confessed, he soon became persuaded that the programme was impossible, that "physical objects cannot be

material things together with their causal relations as systems of ideas. Phenomenalism is historically associated in British philosophy with George Berkeley (d. 1753) and John Stuart Mill (d. 1873).

⁸ Cf. *MPD*, p. 27.

interpreted as structures composed of elements actually experienced" (*MPD*, p. 105). Taken by themselves, these remarks make it appear that he not only once advocated a phenomenalistic account of science but had sought to expound it in the 1914 writings. If he did hold such a view, however, it was not presented in the two works he cites. The essay, for instance, assigned sensibilia a role alongside sense-data, being "those objects which have the same metaphysical and physical status as sense-data, without necessarily being data to any mind" ("RSDP", p. 7). Russell's recollection gives the false suggestion that the essay (from which he quotes) expounded two theories, one of which was to be preferred over a narrower, strictly phenomenalistic account. In fact, Russell publicly repudiated the description of his sense-datum theory as phenomenalistic. In a brief letter to a journal written in 1915, he declared: "... I hold strongly that the sense-datum is not mental—indeed my whole philosophy of physics rests upon the view that the sense-datum is purely physical."⁹

By the time Russell wrote the two works referred to, the necessity of positing sensibilia in a framework of Realism was accepted, at least while "the edifice of physics is being raised" ("RSDP", p. 13). True, the essay did mention his "desire to render solipsism scientifically satisfactory", which prompted him to remark further that sensibilia should not be viewed as "a dogmatic part of the philosophy of physics in its final form" (p. 13). But a desire is different from a doctrine. Russell was not concerned with the scientific millennium in this essay—his purpose was to offer a metaphysical perspective of contemporary science, well before its dreamed-of apotheosis. The fact that he should have quoted this remark in *My Philosophical Development* adds a touch of irony to his reminiscence of pre-War views, for it suggests that attachment to some form of solipsism, though much abated even as far back as 1914, continued to glow as an ember. Perhaps, however, his hankering for a narrower account merely reflects an acknowledged yearning for "logical economy" (p. 12), rather than a belief in what has been known traditionally as solipsism. I think that similar considerations apply to *Our Knowledge of the External World*. Russell's non-

⁹ "Letter on Sense-Data", in *Papers* 8: 88. I am grateful to Ken Blackwell for directing my attention to this letter.

solipsistic account, whose basis extends beyond one's immediate sense-data, was described there as Leibnizian, with each mind seeing "at each moment an immensely complex three-dimensional world".¹⁰ However, one major thematic difference is that he associated a solipsistic account with the philosophical sceptic's demand for conclusive proof of an external world. Recognizing that no such proof can be offered, and admitting the "elegant terseness" of scepticism, Russell urged that serious consideration be reserved for other hypotheses (doubtless like his own) which have "at least as good a right to our respect" (*OKEW*, p. 78).

One detail which Russell did not mention in *My Philosophical Development* is that the expression "sensibilia" was used only in the essay, not in *Our Knowledge of the External World* (or in his other writings from 1914 onwards, for that matter). However, this seems to be no more than a detail of terminology. The sensibilia of the essay are described as "ideal" appearances in the book, an ideal appearance being "an aspect [of a physical thing] merely calculated, but not actually perceived by any spectator" (*OKEW*, p. 117). Indeed, Russell deployed a battery of terms which were never adequately coordinated in this work. He refers to sense-data as *aspects* and *appearances* (both *real* and *ideal*) and describes them as entering into complex relations called *private worlds* and *public perspectives*. The difference between the last two notions corresponds to the difference outlined in "RSDP" between sense-data and sensibilia: perspectives include particulars which would belong to a scientific description of a material object, even though some or all of them are not sense-data for any observer. Finally, any given sense-datum can be construed from the viewpoint of physics as being *at a place*, while from the viewpoint of psychology (by which I take Russell to mean a scientifically enlightened description of first-person experience), that same particular can be characterized as being from a place.¹¹ Apparently Russell was far more clear in his own mind about the kind of metaphysical framework he wished to

¹⁰ *Our Knowledge of the External World*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926), p. 94. Russell discusses the Leibnizian hypothesis more fully beginning on p. 116. (References to this work in what follows will be abbreviated as "OKEW".)

¹¹ See *OKEW*, Lecture IV. The notions of private spaces and public perspectives were developed in "RSDP" as well.

construct in 1914, and about the *sorts* of particulars belonging to it, than about the technical vocabulary best suited for the exposition of his views. Having (as he later said) abandoned the "matter" of the physicist (*MPD*, p. 104), the new descriptions of matter he chose were laced with associations of phenomenalism which all too easily obscure the new direction he wanted to follow.

In treating sensory particulars as the common subject matter of both physics and psychology, Russell was adopting one of the tenets of the New Realism (or neutral monism, as the doctrine soon came to be called).¹² In fact, the list of criticisms of neutral monism which he published in 1914 omitted this tenet; what he objected to rather was the neutral monists' account of belief and their tendency to dismiss the importance of first-person experience.¹³ Unobjectionable on other grounds, the hypothesis must have satisfied his desire for logical economy, but if Russell wanted to classify sense-data (or *sensibilia*) as physical, whatever qualitative familiarity they were allowed to have, how did he think these particulars become part of first-person experience? What kind of relation occurs when a sense-datum is experienced? Evidently, it takes more than a sense-datum plus the presence of a human body with functioning sense organs and a brain, for such things are themselves physical constructs whose ultimate constituents (in the eyes of physics) would mostly be *sensibilia* (or "ideal" appearances). The existence of a brain might be necessary for the experience of sense-data but is hardly sufficient. To this question Russell offered a forthright answer: "If—*per impossibile*—there were a complete human body with no mind inside it, all those *sensibilia* would exist, in

¹² See my "Russell's Neutral Monism", in *Antinomies and Paradoxes*, ed. I. Winchester and K. Blackwell (Hamilton: McMaster U. Library P., 1989; also as *Russell*, n.s. 8 [1988]). The affinity is evident in the following passage from "RSDP": "Although I do not hold, with Mach and James and the 'new realists', that the difference between the mental and the physical is *merely* one of arrangement, yet what I have to say in the present paper is compatible with their doctrine and might have been reached from their standpoint" (p. 8).

¹³ Russell's criticisms were set out in two papers published by *The Monist* in 1914: "Neutral Monism" and "Analysis of Experience". These comprise the second and third chapters of Part I of *Theory of Knowledge (Papers 7)*. The first three of the *Monist* papers were also reprinted under the title "The Nature of Acquaintance" in *LK*.

relation to that body, which would be sense-data if there were a mind in the body. What the mind adds to *sensibilia*, in fact, is *merely* awareness: everything else is physical or physiological" ("RSDP", p. 8). What makes Russell's 1914 epistemology dualistic (in contrast to the dualism of *The Problems of Philosophy*) is the existence of what he called mental facts, such as sensation. Such facts are two-termed relations involving a subject related to an object by means of awareness. By 1914, Russell was prepared to acknowledge that the word "self" might not name a particular and thus might be reclassified as a description. The concept which came to the fore, however, is that of awareness. "At any moment of my conscious life", he wrote,

there is one object ... to which I am attending. All knowledge of particulars radiates out from this object.... Since I am attending to it, I can name it; I may give it any name I choose, but when inventiveness gives out, I am apt to name it "this".... "This" is the point from which the whole process [of reflection and analysis] starts, and "this" itself is not defined, but simply given." (*TK*, p. 40; *LK*, p. 168).

(Attending, for Russell, was a form of acquaintance and was meant to indicate sensory awareness of an object as present.) In his epistemology of 1914, this phenomenon was central. When the mind adds awareness to a sensible, the result is a complex mental phenomenon which constituted for Russell the foundation of knowledge. Awareness as such—the relation—never occurs by itself. Whenever awareness occurs, a subject is aware of an object: the existence of a sense-datum is logically necessary for a case of awareness. "An acquaintance which is acquainted with nothing is not an acquaintance, but a mere absurdity," he declared (*TK*, p. 48). To be given and to be a sense-datum mean the same for Russell, as long as sense-data are distinguished from *sensibilia*. Since sense-data were counted as epistemic objects, they seem far from enjoying the independence required by his metaphysics. Awareness is not simply "added" to sense-data, it encompasses what we mean by them. From the standpoint of metaphysics, however, the picture is supposed to be rather different. Subtract sense-data from awareness and one is left, on one side, with awareness itself and an elusive self;¹⁴ on the other side, with all the material required to

¹⁴ Russell uses "mind" and "self" interchangeably in "RSDP" and did not discuss

account for "the empirical verifiability of physics" ("RSDP", p. 26). But verification is primarily not a metaphysical concept. The process of verification depends upon more than the existence of a sensible, it requires the occurrence of a sense-datum, from which knowledge of other particulars (presumably including sensibilia) is supposed to radiate. An "impersonal metaphysic", far from being merely remote, may possibly be indescribable. As I see it, Russell's epistemology and metaphysics *circa* 1914 were far from enjoying a creative tension, and the essential difficulty arose from his making the concept of awareness indispensable to both parts of his philosophy. That, perhaps, was the price to be paid for a dualism which sought to avoid a traditional division between mental and physical entities. Harmony might be restored, he may have realized, by analyzing or even by eliminating this concept, though the cost would be acceptance of yet another tenet of neutral monism.

Section 2.

Two questions about Russell's neutral monism need to be distinguished right off: (i) In what does neutrality consist? (ii) Was Russell's version of neutral monism meant to be a comprehensive doctrine or was it confined to limits imposed by some larger, non-monistic framework? Although Russell's neutral monism evolved over many years and through several works, I shall look to an early, representative work for answers to these questions, incomplete though these are. I shall concentrate on Russell's formulation of the doctrine in *The Analysis of Mind*, a work which illustrates well that the early stages of evolution are sometimes awkward ones.

(i) Neutral monism claims that the particulars met within first-person experience (*viz.*, the customary colours, sounds, etc., of philosophical talk of more than seventy-five years ago) are in themselves neither mental nor material in nature. They become one or the other by virtue of described relations to other particulars. The same sensory particular is physical, for instance, when assigned to a causal account of perception, mental when it is associated with other particulars in

the concept in any detail, other than to indicate the self to be a "constituent" of a cognitive fact (p. 9). He was disinclined to treat the self as a particular in both *TK* and *OKEW*.

what Russell sometimes referred to as a biography. Being mental and being material are therefore construed as functions of sets of particulars rather than as intrinsic properties of their members. Despite his occasionally loose talk of a common ancestor (*AMI*, pp. 10–11), particulars themselves do not constitute a third realm between the mental and the material. To the neutral monists, whose ideas Russell began to write about in 1913, the properties of being mental and physical ultimately depend on the same kinds of things without being reducible to them, let alone to one another. While it was possible for sensibilia to exist without becoming sense-data, the possibility that a particular might occur in no function whatever was ruled out. On the other hand, the fact that a given particular might not obey the laws of physical science confers on it no ontological privilege. Wild particulars there might be, but none are born wild. Russell was clear about this point even in 1914. "The fact that correlations and connections of unusual kinds occur," he wrote in "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics", "adds to the difficulty of inferring things from sense and of expressing physics in terms of sense-data. But the unusualness would seem to be always physically or physiologically explicable, and therefore raises only a complication, not a philosophical objection" (p. 26). He was fond of comparing the central claims of neutral monism to the two ways a proper name used to be found in the London postal directory: it was given a geographical listing in addition to the usual alphabetical one, its occurrence being defined therefore in two alternate and independent ways. To adapt a phrase of Wittgenstein's, neutral monism sought to sublime the logic of our bureaucracy. Had he applied the simile of postal lists in greater detail, Russell could have described a wild particular as having only one entry, a name and location (*say*), with an address insufficient to locate the particular geographically. The doctrine of neutral monism envisioned a rather complete state of science. Not surprisingly, its orientation was towards physical science, even in the area of psychology, a fact which made Russell suspicious.

(ii) In the opening chapter of *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell professed himself "a realist as regards sensation but not as regards memory or thought" (p. 20). This comment jars with his earlier insistence that because "no object of acquaintance can be 'unreal'", we are forced to have "a certain attitude of respect towards dreams, hallucinations, and

images".¹⁵ Instead of continuing to treat all sense-data as neutral items, whatever their subsequent classification might be (as images, hallucinations or as "real"), Russell now insisted on distinguishing between sensations¹⁶ and images. He contended that the thesis of neutral monism actually holds only of the former: "I should admit this view as regards sensations: what is heard or seen belongs equally to psychology and to physics" (*AMi*, p. 25). But why not accept neutral monism in cases where what is heard or seen is only an image? Russell's reason is quite possibly spurious. He claimed that the difference between images and sensations arises from a difference, possible ultimate, in the kinds of laws appropriate to them. Sensations are subject to both physical and psychological causal laws, while images might appear under psychological laws alone. Yet, even granting the distinction between kinds of laws, it would not follow that images are different kinds of *things from* sensations; the neutral monist could contend that certain functions of neutral items demand laws of much greater complexity, which is only to be expected in the treatment of mental or psychological phenomena—as opposed to (say) merely inorganic phenomena. In any event, *some* difference between the two is likely to show up, since a reduction of the mental to the material was never anticipated by neutral monism in the first place. Russell recognized this but claimed to see in it a "fundamental" difference between physics and psychology. He thought it significant that sensory particulars are treated in physics as systems constituting "causal units", whereas in psychology the particulars themselves "are what interests the psychologist" (*AMi*, p. 106). This view invites much the same response. Why should a difference in attitude towards particulars, or a difference in use to which science puts them, or even a difference in the conception of laws about them, set *limits* to the doctrine of neutral monism? Russell's stand is made more puzzling by the fact that in the concluding chapter of *The Analysis of Mind* he declared the whole question about laws to be open (p. 305).

¹⁵ *TK*, p. 48. The same view was later expressed in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (*Papers* 8: 224, 237–8; *LK*, pp. 257, 274).

¹⁶ Russell treated both sorts as particulars, whereas in "RSDP" he had defined a sensation as "the fact consisting in the subject's awareness of the sense-datum ... a complex of which the subject is a constituent and which therefore is mental" (p. 9).

I think that what accounts for Russell's hesitation about neutral monism in *The Analysis of Mind* only becomes clearer from his discussion of the role images are supposed to play in building knowledge. He regarded them as crucial to a whole range of mental phenomena, such as memory and belief, and as underlying our meaningful use of language. Besides images he identified certain mental phenomena such as feelings of expectation, bare assent, and remembering which often occur in the company of images. However, Russell further recognized that an event such as believing or remembering could not be accounted for in terms of the mere association of an image and a specific feeling. Such cognitive phenomena are complex, requiring not only a compresent image and feeling but a relation which bonds them and by virtue of which an image refers to some episode in the past or to the content of a belief. Russell describes this mental relation as "actually subsisting" (*AMi*, p. 251). The intentionalistic character of this position is unmistakable, not simply contrasting but clashing with the neutral monist principle of rejecting the existence of essentially mental phenomena; it also seems to undercut Russell's own criticisms of Meinong's views about the nature of mental phenomena at the beginning of the book,¹⁷ and makes it appear that his real doubts about neutral monism as providing a comprehensive framework for metaphysics and epistemology had really little to do with the assumed difference between physical and psychological causal laws.

It would be unfair, however, to dwell on inconsistencies in Russell's first book on neutral monism; several others would follow in the next few years giving a more carefully formulated behaviouristic analysis similar to his treatment of the concept of desire in *The Analysis of Mind*. How successful his later accounts of belief and memory are I leave aside, however, because I want to focus on a topic which goes straight to the heart of neutral monism, even that narrow version of it which Russell had endorsed in this book. This is the topic of first-person awareness. Earlier, I quoted a passage from Russell's *Monist* essay, in which he placed the focus on the object of acquaintance, the "simply given". The following words, written a quarter of a century

¹⁷ See *AMi*, pp. 16–20. Even when he defended dualism against neutral monism, Russell sought to distinguish his own views from those of Meinong (see, for instance, *TK*, pp. 41–4; *LK*, pp. 169–73).

later, echo the same theme:

What must be done with an experience in order that we may know it? Various things are possible. We may use words describing it, we may remember it either in words or in images, or we may merely "notice" it. But "noticing" is a matter of degree, and very hard to define; it seems to consist mainly in isolating from the sensible environment.... It seems, then, that the most immediate knowing of which we have experience involves sensible presence plus something more, but that any very exact definition of the more that is needed is likely to mislead by its very exactness, since the matter is essentially vague and one of degree. What is wanted may be called "attention"; this is partly a sharpening of the appropriate sense-organs, partly an emotional reaction.... Every empirical proposition is based upon one or more sensible occurrences that were noticed when they occurred, or immediately after, while they still formed part of the specious present. Such occurrences, we shall say, are "known" when they are noticed. The word "know" has many meanings and this is only one of them; but for the purposes of our inquiry it is fundamental.

These words form, in a sense, a double quotation: appearing originally in *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*,¹⁸ they were included by Russell years later in *My Philosophical Development* (pp. 142–3). The context in the latter work is quite significant. After noting the immense simplification which had been realized by accepting neutral monism, Russell turned to face its major disadvantage: "There is a duality", he wrote, "which is essential in any form of knowledge except that which is shown in mere bodily behaviour. We are aware of something, we have a recollection of something, and, generally, knowing is distinct from that which is known. This duality, after it has been banished from sensation, has to be somehow reintroduced" (*MPD*, p. 139). And so, Russell recalled, he had introduced the word "noticing" as "an undefined term" (p. 140), intending it to substitute for the older term "acquaintance".

In this way, Russell had returned to confront a problem once handled rather glibly years before in "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics", where he spoke of the mind adding mere awareness to sense-data. Curiously, the immediate implication of this restored duality of

¹⁸ *IMT*, pp. 49–51.

act and object was not drawn out. Noticing or "attention" (as he otherwise called it) is not simply a matter of sharpened sense organs combined with an emotional reaction, since such events are measurable from without and have in themselves no essential reference to what a subject might notice. "Noticing" seems to have provided more than a piece of convenient terminology for Russell. He wanted it to capture, if possible, the dualistic relation of perceiver to object which had been central to his earlier epistemology. And if this concept is indeed fundamental to Russell's inquiry, then all hope of absorbing epistemology in metaphysics, of treating the objects of first-person experience as neutral particulars which are at once either mental or material, depending on their relations, seems finally to be cancelled. The fact that particulars are noticed at all introduces the very feature of experience which once had made Russell a committed dualist. To a philosopher inching towards neutral monism in 1914, as Russell was, an appreciation of this fact would have made the gulf between physics and psychology seem as dauntingly wide as ever; but to the partially converted neutral monist of 1921 who wished to extrude any recognition of awareness from the new analysis of sensation, and who clung to the notion of "actually subsisting" relations, a recognition of this fact should have made that gulf seem permanent.

II. THE VANISHING ACT

Russell's career as a productive philosopher spanned some sixty years. During six of these (1913–19) an exceptional transformation took place: beginning this period as a dualist (in *Theory of Knowledge*), he ended as a neutral monist (in "On Propositions"). This at least is a common view.¹⁹ The crucial step in the transformation, as Russell himself acknowledged, was the abandonment of the act-object distinction and with it the need to assume a subject as the recessive term in the acquaintance relation. The reasons he gave for taking this step were twofold: neither the subject nor a separate act is able to be identified.

¹⁹ For convenience I mark the start of Russell's long productive period with *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry* (1897) and its end with *My Philosophical Development* (1959). The view that Russell began to be a neutral monist from the time of "On Propositions" (1919) can be found in, e.g., Sainsbury's *Russell*, p. 226.

Of the latter he wrote: "... I am at a loss to discover any actual phenomenon which could be called an 'act' and could be regarded as a constituent of a presentation."²⁰ Since the type of evidence he cites has a quasi-empirical, introspectionist cast, it is puzzling that Russell failed to make the discovery earlier and thus embrace this particular tenet of neutral monism sooner. That is the topic I want to explore here. I think the story of his conversion is more complicated than he suggested and has very little to do with the reasons he mentioned. The real cause was Russell's problem in framing a satisfactory dualistic account of belief, a problem which (we now know) was sparked by Wittgenstein's criticisms and which undermined his resolution to complete *Theory of Knowledge*.²¹ Ironically, the new analysis of belief which Russell offered in "On Propositions" made him more a dualist than ever, though one whose stripes had much changed.

"On Propositions" quilts together a wide variety of arguments for views which seem at best eccentric: that ontological questions might be settled by analyzing the concept of belief, that beliefs should be regarded as structures of facts, and (strangest of all) that propositions themselves consist of images—the outrageous claim which is all that many philosophers remember from the essay. Nevertheless, there is some constancy to be found in Russell's views during at this time. Perhaps the most important was his conviction that the very notion of a proposition, taken in its full sense, is epistemological.²² In 1913 Wittgenstein had urged Russell to recognize the need for a new theory of propositions, and doubtless he meant an approach that would give more prominence to formal syntax and to the closely related account of facthood. Whether in reaction to this plea or in spite of it, but certainly not in ignorance of the direction Wittgenstein wanted him to take, Russell maintained his epistemological orientation to proposi-

²⁰ B. Russell, "On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean", in *Papers* 8: 278–306. The paper also appears in *LK*, pp. 285–320. (References to the paper are abbreviated "OP".)

²¹ The story is well documented in the Introduction to *TK*, pp. xv–xlv.

²² Cf. Russell's comment in the first lecture of "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism": "At any rate I am pretty clear that the theory of symbolism and the use of symbolism is not a thing that can be explained in pure logic without taking account of the various cognitive relations that you may have to things" (*Papers* 8: 167; *LK*, p. 186).

tions. This persistence also provides a convenient focus on his treatment of dualism.

What sort of dualism did Russell endorse in 1913? Not a dualism of substances or of objects, nor strictly a dualism of properties. Although there is a strong suggestion of a dualism of objects in *The Problems of Philosophy*, where he contrasts sense-data with matter as conceived by physics, Russell's work in 1913 and early 1914 clearly shows that sense-data were intended to define matter itself.²³ Sense-data were also thought to provide a sufficient basis for interpreting our ordinary concepts of both material objects and mere images. One probably familiar quote will sum up his position on the status of images:

The general correlations of your images are quite different from the correlations of what one chooses to call "real" objects. But that is not to say images are unreal. It is only to say they are not part of physics. Of course, I know that this belief in the physical world has established a sort of reign of terror. You have got to treat with disrespect whatever does not fit into the physical world. But that is really very unfair to the things that do not fit in. They are just as much there as the things that do. The physical world is a sort of governing aristocracy, which has somehow managed to cause everything else to be treated with disrespect. That sort of attitude is unworthy of a philosopher. We should treat with exactly equal respect the things that do not fit in with the physical world, and images are among them.²⁴

Such a privileged status for sense-data suggests the sort of monism associated with Mill and other phenomenologists, but that is certainly not what Russell was thinking when he characterized sense-data as "among the ultimate constituents of the physical world" and as being "purely physical".²⁵ The point he laboured to make was that sense-data are not intrinsically mental. A mental phenomenon takes place whenever there is awareness of a sense-datum. "What the mind adds ...", he contended, "is *merely* awareness: everything else is physical or physiological" ("RSDP", p. 8). Acquaintance (or awareness) was the

²³ Russell advanced this view not only in "RSDP" and *OKEW* but also in the essay, "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter", published in 1915 (reprinted in *Mysticism and Logic* and in *Papers* 8).

²⁴ "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", *Papers* 8: 224; *LK*, p. 257. (References to this work will be abbreviated as "PLA".)

²⁵ "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter", *Papers* 8: 86.

supreme relating relation in epistemology, the mental act Russell would later renounce, which had played so central a role in his thinking about knowledge from "On Denoting" (1905) through nearly the whole of the six-year period.²⁶ His most detailed description of the concept can be found in *Theory of Knowledge*, where he described mental facts such as understanding, memory, belief, desiring and willing as all presupposing the relation of acquaintance. "The distinguishing mark of what is mental, or at any rate of what is cognitive," he wrote, "is not to be found in the particulars involved, but only in the nature of the relations between them. Of these relations acquaintance appears to be the most comprehensive and therefore the most suitable for the definition of cognitive facts" (*TK*, p. 45). Together, this relation and sense-data comprised Russell's dualism.

There is apparent dissimulation in Russell's later claim that he could not locate any act as a constituent of a presentation. A few years earlier, nothing was more evident to him. In *Theory of Knowledge* he wrote of a special sense "in which objects given in *sensation* are 'present', ... the sense in which objects are present in sensation and perception but not in memory. The relation of "presence" in this sense is, I think, one of the ultimate constituents out of which our knowledge of time is built ..." (*TK*, p. 38). Russell used the verb "attends" to express this relation, describing it as a species of acquaintance. Of course, being a relation, attention cannot be separated from cognitive facts, yet all that was required for its identification, he recognized, was that some particular be given or attended to. "When an object is in my present experience, then I am acquainted with it; ... the object itself is known to me without the need of any reflection on my part as to its properties or relations" (*TK*, p. 39). Surely Russell could not have forgotten that acquaintance was supposed to be a different *kind* of constituent from any particular. The basic distinction was recalled in the 1918 lectures. "In every atomic fact," he told his audience, "there is one component which is naturally expressed by a verb.... This one component is a quality or dyadic or triadic or tetradic ... relation."²⁷ Similarly, one would think, the relating rela-

²⁶ Cf. "On Denoting", in *LK*, pp. 41-2 and 55-6.

²⁷ "PLA", *Papers* 8: 177; *LK*, p. 199).

tion of acquaintance with a particular would be naturally expressed by a verb. However, when Russell dismissed acts of attention and acquaintance from his epistemology, he was not yielding to new evidence about cognitive phenomena. He was abandoning an old way of talking about them.

As for the idea of a subject, the elusive particular, Russell's later avowal that this too could not be located was actually a restatement of the position previously taken in *Theory of Knowledge* and repeated in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism".²⁸ And he had already devised a solution to the problem. Subjects were to be reached through description rather than acquaintance. That is, although seemingly a term in the acquaintance relation, the subject was to be symbolized not by a name but by an apparent variable. By calling the subject a logical fiction he only meant to deny that the pronoun "I" survives logical analysis as a logically proper name and was to be treated in that respect like the nouns "point" and "instant". In *Theory of Knowledge* Russell considered the subject as a construction of entities belonging to the converse side of the acquaintance relation and pointedly refused to classify the subject in acquaintance as mental.²⁹ So it is odd to find the realist about sense-data later contending that the subject, though "schematically convenient", should fail to be "empirically discoverable", and that "our theories ought to avoid assuming either that [subjects as entities] exist or that they do not exist,"³⁰ when his earlier method of analysis made it possible to avoid making either assumption.

Considerations like these undercut Russell's *stated* reasons for abandoning the act-object distinction, making it necessary to look for more compelling ones to explain the change in the "theoretical attitude" he thought was needed ("OP", *Papers* 8: 294). A remark made further on, when he turns to list some of the advantages and disadvan-

²⁸ See *TK*, pp. 38-9; "PLA", *Papers* 8: 239-40; *LK*, pp. 276-7).

²⁹ He observed: "It may be that subjects are constituents of other facts of the kind we should call physical, and therefore a fact which involves a subject may not be always a mental fact" (*TK*, p. 37; *LK*, p. 165). Russell's view of the self or subject in *TK* is very close to that of neutral monism; his discussion is also much fuller there than in either *OKEW* or "RSDP".

³⁰ "On Propositions", *Papers* 8: 294; *LK*, pp. 305, 306.

tages of his new theory of belief, gives a lead. At this point Russell had not yet presented the new theory but had merely abandoned the act-object distinction, an action for which he claimed certain advantages. The rejection of the subject (and apparently of the act too, though it is not mentioned here) makes it "possible to admit propositions as actual complex occurrences, and [to do] away with the difficulty of answering the question: what do we believe when we believe falsely?" (pp. 295–6). Admittedly, Russell says he does not want to recommend his theory because of these advantages but instead for reasons of the kind just examined, such as that "it accords with what can be empirically observed" (p. 296). The change of theory seems to be made inevitable by "the rejection of the subject" (p. 295).

Despite the absence of fanfare, Russell doubtless saw that a solution to the problem of false beliefs was a major advantage to the new theory, for the problem had long occupied his attention: he had examined it in an Aristotelian Society paper published in 1907;³¹ had explored it in a new account of truth which was published in *Philosophical Essays* and rehearsed in *The Problems of Philosophy*; had revised and deepened his approach in *Theory of Knowledge*; and, most recently, had made it a chief topic in the fourth lecture of "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism". Facts involving beliefs, "facts with more than one verb" (as they were called in that lecture), upset the symmetry between proposition and fact which is the hallmark of logical atomism. Referring to Othello's false belief that Desdemona loves Cassio, Russell pointed out that, in the propositional symbol or sentence,

there is a relationship relating these two things ["Desdemona" and "Cassio"] and in the fact it doesn't really relate them. You cannot get in space any occurrence which is logically of the same form as [a false] belief. When I say "logically of the same form" I mean that one can be obtained from the other by replacing the constituents of the one by the new terms. If I say "Desdemona loves Cassio" that is of the same form as "A is to the right of B". Those are of the same form, and I say that nothing that occurs in space is of the same form as [this] belief. I have got on here to a new sort of thing, a new beast for our zoo, not another member of our former species but a new

³¹ See "On the Nature of Truth", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n.s. 7 (1907): 28–49.

species. The discovery of this fact is due to Mr. Wittgenstein. ("PLA", *Papers* 8: 198–9; *LK*, pp. 225–6)

How the new beast was to be catalogued by the logical atomist was a mystery. Russell was certain only of two points: (i) that the content of any belief—the proposition itself—cannot be considered an "independent entity", and (ii) that the verb or relation in any such proposition cannot be treated like one of the terms it is supposed to relate. Russell did not linger over the first point, for the audience had already heard him stress that propositions are unreal;³² also, it is clear that he assumed his hearers were already familiar with this opinion about propositions from either *Philosophical Essays* or *The Problems of Philosophy*, where the same point had been made in connection with his account of belief.³³ Commenting on the second point, however, Russell went on to admit the inadequacy of that earlier account, commonly known as the multiple-relational theory of belief or judgment. According to the theory, cognition minimally involves two relations plus whatever terms these happen to relate. For instance, the two relations in his famous example from *The Problems of Philosophy* are *believes* and *loves*. Nevertheless, the cognitive relation always enjoys primacy in his theory. Relations like believing, understanding, desiring, and so on act as a sort of mental glue holding together all the terms and other relations, which in this example include Othello (who does the believing), Desdemona, Cassio and the embedded relation of *loves*. All are bonded by the relation of believing, as given in the following representation:³⁴

$$B\{O, D, C, I\}$$

An essential feature of Russell's theory was to classify propositions as incomplete symbols having to be filled out by the addition of a "propositional verb" expressing a relating relation, such as judging, believing

³² "[T]hese curious shadowy things ...", he had declared to them, cannot be supposed to "go about the real world" ("PLA", *Papers* 8: 196; *LK*, p. 223) and went on to contrast his view with Meinong's.

³³ *Philosophical Essays*, rev. ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966; 1st ed., 1910), pp. 147–59. *PP*, p. 70.

³⁴ I have adapted the form of representation used by Russell in *TK*.

or desiring. These cognitive relations relate the subject who has the belief (Othello) to what Russell sometimes called an “objective”, a complex expressed by the words of the proposition. The correct grammatical rendering of the proposition, then, would take the form of a dependent clause beginning with the word “that”: *that Desdemona loves Cassio* expresses the proposition, the objective of Othello’s belief, while the complete sentence or grammatical unit of meaning is *Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio*. In his two earlier presentations of the theory Russell was unconcerned with details of symbolism for terms and relations, or metaphysical questions for that matter: the constituents of a person’s judgment were simply the very particulars involved (including the person or mind) and the (minimally) two relations. But Russell’s theory of belief was clearly designed from the beginning to anchor a realistic version of the correspondence theory of truth between judgments and facts. “[T]he judgment that two terms have a certain relation *R*,” he wrote in *Philosophical Essays*, “is a relation of the mind to the two terms and the relation *R* with the appropriate sense: the ‘corresponding’ complex consists of the two terms related by the relation *R* with the same sense. The judgment is true when there is such a complex, and false when there is not.”³⁵ By the word “sense” here Russell meant the direction which a relation like loves has to its terms, proceeding from *A* to *B*, say, rather than from *B* to *A*. The version of the theory he gave a few years later in *The Problems of Philosophy* describes an embedded relation like loves as an “object-relation” and puts much less emphasis on their having a sense.³⁶ Founded on his theory of belief, Russell’s account of truth was offered and argued as a cogent alternative to rival views associated mainly with idealism. That at least seems to have been the quarter from which he was expecting a counterattack.

However, Wittgenstein apparently made Russell face a deeper problem with his theory, one which affects any belief, whether true or false. If the embedded relation is a mere “brick” on the same level as the two terms it is believed to relate, the model fails to show the specific relation that is supposed to hold between those terms, since it

³⁵ “On the Nature of Truth and Falsehood”, p. 158.

³⁶ *PP*, p. 75.

would fail to distinguish between Othello’s actual belief and the non-existent belief that Cassio loves Desdemona. Worse, what is to prevent the model from expressing an incoherency like Othello believes that love Cassios Desdemona? No wonder, then, that Russell should have admitted to his lecture audience that the earlier theory published “some years ago”³⁷ was “a little unduly simple”. It had treated “the object verb as ... just an object like the terms, as if one could put ‘loves’ on a level with Desdemona and Cassio as a term for the relation ‘believe’” (“PLA”, *Papers* 8: 199). What Russell failed to inform them, however, was that he had subsequently produced a deluxe version of the theory designed to overcome such problems. It was the focus of Part II of *Theory of Knowledge* in which Russell also devoted a good deal of attention to the matter of a correct symbolism for the theory. The model now swelled to include an important new term which he called the form of a relational complex, specifically the form of the embedded relation. Othello’s judgment would thus become:

$$B\{O, D, C, l, R(x, y)\}$$

Russell’s chief concern in deploying this model, however, was not primarily the problem of false beliefs. Indeed, he did not even mention the Othello example in *Theory of Knowledge* or dwell on issues peculiar to false beliefs but tended to focus on judgments about perceptual complexes and on the cognitive relation of understanding, which he took to be more basic than that of believing. He wanted to pursue a more fundamental problem, the directionality or sense of two-term relations, especially of asymmetrical ones like “before” and “to the left of”. Russell called such relations *homogeneous*, meaning that they retained a sense even when the terms they relate are interchanged (“*b* before *a*”, as opposed to “*a* before *b*”). In contrast, *heterogeneous* relations are asymmetrical ones which allow a single meaningful combination of their terms. For instance, given that some

³⁷ Unfortunately, Russell did not provide the reference. His mention that the theory had been set out “some years ago” might point to the version in *Philosophical Essays*; on the other hand, his admission to having treated the embedded relation as “just an object like the terms” points more, I think, to the account in *The Problems of Philosophy*.

particular, *a*, belonging to a temporal complex, occurs earlier in that complex, it makes no sense to say that the complex itself is earlier with respect to *a*. So the relation "being earlier than" (with respect to such terms) counts as heterogeneous. One of the accomplishments of *Theory of Knowledge* which Russell abandoned to the shadows of that project was an argument to show the reducibility of homogeneous asymmetrical relations to heterogeneous ones, and thus to an unambiguous form of representation for any statement expressing understanding or belief. Russell's analysis is a complex one invoking not only abstract forms of relational complexes but also what he called associated complexes; these were required to ensure an absolutely univocal sense for the asymmetrical relations he sought to analyze as well as to furnish a basis for his correspondence theory of truth.³⁸ Moreover, he surrounded this new version with a thick layer of epistemological doctrine centred on the concept of acquaintance. Russell contended in *Theory of Knowledge* that acquaintance extends beyond particulars and their relations to abstract forms of relations, and he claimed as much empirical support for this view as he would six years later for the new theory of belief which he would base on the rejection of the subject and its acts.³⁹

I think that what may have intensified his resolve to develop a new theory of belief was the growing realization in the course of writing *Theory of Knowledge* that the only way of saving the original one was at too high an ontological price. By virtue of its stress on acquaintance, the self or subject acquired a new stature: it was able to be acquainted with universals in addition to sense-data; and it was credited with knowledge of abstract forms which it could recognize as a kind of code in order to identify certain terms as embedded relations. Russell was forced to recognize that a belief does not correspond to its objective in the relatively straightforward way indicated by the original theory. In the deluxe version, it directly corresponds with what he called an associated complex and only reaches the objective "at the second remove" (*TK*, p. 148). Thus, the revised version had become inflated with psychology and burdened with logical apparatus;

³⁸ See *TK*, Part II, Chaps. I and V. I have sketched this theory in "Forgotten Vintage", *Dialogue*, 27 (1988): 299–320.

³⁹ Cf. *TK*, p. 99, with "OP", *Papers* 8: 296 (*LK*, p. 307).

it conferred a metaphysical status on the self which any Idealist might well have applauded and altogether served as a prime example of a theory lacking that "instinct of reality" ("PLA", *Papers* 8: 197; *LK*, p. 224) which Russell, as a logical atomist, demanded of philosophy. And perhaps, for all that, the new version failed to make any significant advance in dealing with false beliefs.

I think that such considerations are what actually led to Russell's wholesale rejection of the acquaintance model in "On Propositions", though at the time of the lectures on logical atomism they were known principally to himself and Wittgenstein alone. The increased respect for logical symbolism which he revealed in Lecture I was offset in Lecture 5 by uncertainty over the best way to analyze the concept of belief. One point was especially clear to him, however: "You cannot get in space any occurrence which is logically of the same form as belief" ("PLA", *Papers* 8: 198; *LK*, p. 225). Yet an apologetic tone is also unmistakable. He admitted to his audience that "practically nobody has until quite lately begun to consider the problem of the nature of belief with anything like a proper logical apparatus ..." (p. 199; p. 227).

Near the end of the eighth and final lecture, Russell identified two difficulties which prevented his outright acceptance of neutral monism. The first concerned (not surprisingly) belief. "If there are such facts as this", he told his audience, "that, I think, may make neutral monism rather difficult, but as I was pointing out, there is the theory that one calls behaviourism, which belongs logically with neutral monism, and that theory would altogether dispense with those facts containing two verbs, and would therefore dispose of that argument against neutral monism" (*Papers* 8: 242; *LK*, pp. 279–80). The other difficulty standing in the way of his conversion pertained to the meaning of demonstratives like "this" which mark out those objects of attention from which, as he once said, all knowledge radiates. In *Theory of Knowledge* he had assigned great importance to this matter. The absence of a "principle of selection" in the doctrine of neutral monism constituted for him the "most conclusive" refutation (*TK*, pp. 40–1). Curiously, there is no mention of this second difficulty in "On Propositions", even though by that time Russell clearly accepted neutral monism's treatment of sensations as non-cognitive, as not singling out objects of attention. More curious still is his handling of belief. It is

unclear from the eighth lecture whether he thought that logical atomism and neutral monism were incompatible. I will suggest in a moment that in one important respect he did, but for now I want to concentrate on what I think is a more significant problem—his attempt to accommodate behaviourism in this essay. Either Russell did not really think that behaviourism “belongs logically with neutral monism” or else his new theory of belief, whatever he thought, was not in the spirit of neutral monism at all. I incline to the latter alternative.

“On Propositions” reveals more than circumspection about behaviourism; especially on one point—the nature and status of images—Russell shows a deep, unreconciled opposition to that doctrine. He singled out John Watson in particular, a champion of behaviourism whose observationalist account of mental acts and mental events he flatly rejected. Russell’s grounds of complaint are familiar in the light of *Theory of Knowledge*. He appeals to the method of introspection for disclosing to our immediate awareness things (images) that cannot be classified as public or physical. Taking the offensive against Watson, Russell defended introspection for the sake of science, it seems, rather than for philosophy. The sort of privacy associated with introspected data does not create an unbridgeable gulf. A toothache, he writes, “is essentially private. The dentist may see that your tooth is in a condition in which it is likely to ache, but he does not feel your ache, and only knows what you mean by an ache through his own experience of similar occurrences.... And yet one would not call a person introspective because he was conscious of toothache, and it is not very difficult to find a place for toothache in the physical world ... no one regards as scientifically negligible the knowledge of our own body which is obtained through these private data” (“OP”, p. 285; *LK*, 294). Whether such data obey a special class of scientific laws is less evident, however. In the present state of science, he acknowledges, images and the like obey psychological causal laws, as opposed to physical ones, though he realizes that such a fact may not be an ultimate one.⁴⁰

Surprisingly, the concept of introspection itself was left totally

⁴⁰ See “OP”, *Papers* 8: 289 (*LK*, p. 299), plus the note at the bottom of that page.

unexamined. Yet, in his appeal to it, introspection seems to be a kind of internal acquaintance, a type of mental act directed at a special class of objects (images). In this essay, introspection seems to be a concept of the traditional act-object variety which Russell has ushered in through the back door to compensate for kicking acquaintance out the front. Not only that, he now insists that there is a significant difference between images and the other sorts of sensory particulars with which they are compared. In a change of terminology that reflects his rejection of the act-object distinction, Russell began to refer to these particulars as “sensations”. The expression, “sense-datum”, formerly meant to include images, was retired as obsolete, and along with the new expression came an important contrast:

... the crucial phenomena as regards introspection are images of public sensations, i.e., especially visual and auditory images. On grounds of observation, in spite of Watson, it seems impossible to deny that such images occur. But they are not public, and, if taken as sensations, contradict the laws of physics.... Thus it seems that the physical world does not include all that we are aware of, and that introspection must be admitted as a source of knowledge distinct from sensation....

Our criticism of fact, against Watson, has led us to the conclusion that it is impossible to escape the admission of images as something radically distinct from sensations.... (“OP”, *Papers* 8: 286–7; *LK*, p. 296)

I think that Russell was no longer repeating the familiar claim about maverick sense-data, namely, that certain species (images, dreams, etc.) are oppressed minorities in the governing aristocracy of the physical world but entitled to be regarded as equally real. To be sure, he continued to make this claim about images, essentially for the reason that he tended to regard even sensations themselves as in some sense private.⁴¹

But it is the *contrast*, the distinction now emphasized, which points to a change. In “On Propositions” images have acquired a new importance for Russell beyond this claim. They have migrated from the periphery of his interest. What accounts for the change? The

⁴¹ See “OP”, *Papers* 8: 285; *LK*, p. 294: “I shall not insist upon the fact that, in the last analysis, all our sensations are private, and the public world of physics is built on similarities, not on identities.”

explanation is to be found in the role images are expected to carry in the new theory of belief, being reckoned now as part of the content of beliefs and as forming something distinct from what Russell meant by the "objective" in his earlier theory of belief. Images combine with relations to form facts or structures of images. He illustrated this by the case of remembering that the window is to the left of the fire, where the structure consists of two images (of the window and of the fire) related by the relation that the former is to the left of the latter.⁴² Such complexes of images and relations are what Russell now wanted to call propositions—specifically, "image-propositions". Although he also recognized another sort of complex, called word-propositions, his account makes them dependent on image-propositions. "As a general rule, a word-proposition 'means' an image proposition," he declared; "this is the case with false propositions as well as with true ones, since image-propositions are as capable of falsehood as word-propositions" (*Papers* 8: 297; *LK*, p. 308). Whatever form it assumes, however, whether as a structure of images or of words, a proposition is the content of any given belief but no longer counts as the objective of that belief. This distinction was required by the fact that in the new theory the individual components of the objective are different from what they are taken to mean (the image of the window, for instance, vs. the window itself).⁴³

Such differences are also reflected in Russell's revamped version of the correspondence theory of truth. The belief that the window is to the left of the fire is true if there is an actual fact which corresponds to the propositional content (the structure of images); otherwise the belief is false. Either way, the world has been found after all to contain propositions. Other changes to the older version were required, too. Since all talk of the subject has been discarded, the complete structure of that belief had to assume a different form from what he envisioned

⁴² See "OP", *Papers* 8: 302-3; *LK*, pp. 315-16. The relation in question appears to be a relating relation in the new theory, not a "brick". In any event, it is not itself an image.

⁴³ Russell did not discuss how a spatial relation like *being to the left of* relates images as opposed to physical objects. As for images, he took these to be the meaning of words and to be in turn causally related to "prototypes" in sensation. The latter two topics he did examine in detail, but they are not relevant here.

in *Theory of Knowledge*, though there are interesting similarities. Instead of the subject (or self), Russell now identified an occurrent feeling, such as one of assenting or remembering; and in place of believing as a relating relation (the bonding agent of the old account), he offered a new relation which is held to subsist *between* the feeling and the objective and which makes the proposition the thing assented to. Little was said about this newly identified relation in "On Propositions"; perhaps he believed the power of introspection made comments unnecessary.

Such was Russell's new theory. In one way, logical atomism has been vindicated by it. The beast has been reclassified and has been discovered to be already on the books. There is a direct, symmetrical correspondence between one fact, my (true) belief that the window is to the left of the fire and the external fact involving the physical window and fire. But the simple correspondence required by logical atomism and found in the case of this "image-proposition" is unrealized by its counterpart word-proposition, "*The window is to the left of the fire*", which states the belief. This word-proposition is also a fact but, unlike both the image-proposition and the external fact it describes, it consists of four (not three) elements: the phrases "*the window*", "*the fire*" and "*to the left of*", plus the relating relation which determines the specific order these three terms have. It would seem, then, that one of the cardinal assumptions of Russell's logical atomism, "that there is an objective complexity in the world and that it is mirrored by the complexity of propositions" ("PLA", *Papers* 8: 176; *LK*, p. 197) has now been quietly wheeled off the stage. In any case, simple symmetry also fails in the case of any true image proposition whose verbal expression involves negation. "There is no 'not' in an image proposition," Russell maintains; "the 'not' belongs to the feeling, not to the content of the proposition" ("OP", *Papers* 8: 304; *LK*, p. 317). Thus there is "no parallelism" between true image-propositions (which he classified as positive facts) and the negative facts (their reference) on which the truth of these propositions depends. Negative facts continued to be defended as forcibly in "On Propositions" as they were in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism".

This tenet at least is left standing on the stage.⁴⁴

Did the change which "On Propositions" marks in Russell's philosophy transform him into a neutral monist? Was this position the inescapable consequence of renouncing his commitment to acquaintance and abandoning the act-object distinction? Assuming that Russell did arrive at a position closely resembling that of the neutral monists, his progress was neither straightforward nor fast. I think that what he presented to us in this essay is a disorganized demi-monism. The subject of experience has been extruded from the metaphysical framework, so too the act of acquaintance on which he had once based his chief criticisms of neutral monism. Sensations have now been installed in place of sense-data, as required by the new thinking, though ironically their status (as particulars) was virtually identical to what had been previously accorded to sense-data. Nevertheless, dualism itself has not been supplanted. Russell has tilted away from a dualism of mental relations and neutral objects to a dualism of images and neutral objects, while his new emphasis on the introspection of images not merely fills a gap left by acquaintance but brings a subjective dimension to his epistemology which he had clearly sought to avoid in "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics" and *Our Knowledge of the External World*, back in the days when he was a professed dualist. Along with images must be included such introspectible items as the feelings of assent and pastness—clear but unacknowledged echoes of Hume's own doctrine of belief—phenomena which Russell had identified in *Theory of Knowledge* as species of acquaintance but which now are far from being well-integrated in an epistemology which claims to find no empirical evidence for mental acts. Even more intriguing is the nature of the relation alleged to subsist between such feelings and their propositional contents.

Whether or not Russell's new treatment of images sprang from methodological objections to behaviourism, or from an assumption about the nature of scientific laws, or from a deep conviction about the very nature of images themselves, their newly acquired status in Russell's new epistemology now sets them apart from sensations; they have become virtual mental entities. It is evident, then, that "On

⁴⁴ See "OP", *Papers* 8: 280-1 (*LK*, pp. 287-9); "PLA", 8: 187-91 (*LK*, pp. 211-16).

Propositions" represents a rethinking of dualism rather than its abandonment. There is more in Russell's world than the obligatory single stuff of James and the new realists. His views at the end of the six years do not really "fit the image" of the neutral monist and indeed they would fail to do so even in *The Analysis of Mind*, where neutral monism as a metaphysical system would be given the starring role in place of logical atomism.