

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF BERTRAND RUSSELL'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

In his Problems of Philosophy, Bertrand Russell distinguished knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge of truths. Russell believes that acquaintance is necessary in order for us to form any proposition; that any belief we form must be composed entirely of experiential components with which we have acquaintance. For Russell, all foundational knowledge is by acquaintance, and all non-foundational (inferential) knowledge is developed from acquaintance relations. The study aimed at critically examining Russell's theory of knowledge with the specific objective to evaluate the limits of Russell's theory of knowledge. The study adopted qualitative research design; data were sourced from text books, encyclopedias, journals, periodicals and internet. The study employed the historical, expository and evaluative methods of philosophical research. The historical method was used to trace philosophers' account of our knowledge claims. The expository method accounted for Bertrand Russell's theory of knowledge. The

evaluative method critically examined Russell's theory of knowledge to ascertain his claims of knowledge by acquaintance and truths. This study argued that Russell's claim of knowledge by acquaintance of an object neither suffices for knowledge that one is acquainted with the object, nor puts a subject in a position to know that he/she is acquainted with the object. Although, Russell insisted, knowledge by acquaintance is obtained through a direct causal (sense-based) interaction between a person and the object that person perceived. That is to say, experience of an object is the only thing that people can ever become acquainted with; they can never truly know the physical object itself. Russell is however, criticized for insufficient explanation of acquaintance with an asymmetrical relation to the sense of a proposition in which knowledge of an object occurs. The study thus concluded that our knowledge of physical objects and of other minds is only knowledge by description; the descriptions involved being usually such as involve sense- data.

Introduction

The problem of defining what counts as knowledge has been a perennial problem in the history of philosophy and epistemology in particular, thus, becoming crucial for an intellectual discourse as this. It is philosophically established that man is an inquisitive being; a curious animal possessing an intellect and further endowed with an insatiable craving for knowledge though, how to satisfy this desire has always been an issue. Before one claims to know something, he must not be guessing, he must not hit on the truth by chance; he must not rely on bad reasons (if he relies on reasons at all). This implies that before one can claim to know, that which one claims to know must not be a guess work and it must be logically sound.

Plato had earlier proposed three conditions necessary for knowledge namely; "Belief, Truth, and Justification" (Nonaka and Takeuchi 87). Epistemologists for centuries were contented with this tripartite account and definition of knowledge. Apparently, since Plato, majority if not all, agreed with this traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief. However, it was Gerttier who later observed that Plato's account has a tendency of incorporating "epistemic luck" and "educated

guess" as knowledge. For him the three traditional conditions for knowledge are not sufficient; that these three conditions can be fulfilled and yet can still be considered as not having knowledge. Meaning that belief, truth and justification are together not sufficient to prove our knowledge claims.

On the above premise, Bertrand Russell in his 1912 book titled: *The Problems of Philosophy* attempted to clarify what exactly accounts for knowledge. Russell established that certain familiarities develop from an individual's experience with various primary impressions (sensory or abstract) that are so much a part of awareness itself that the individual possesses knowledge of these familiar features without accessing memories by the cognitive process of remembering. Russell believes that acquaintance is necessary in order for us to form any proposition—that any belief we form must be composed entirely of experiential components with which we have acquaintance (91). For Russell, all foundational knowledge is by acquaintance, and all non-foundational (inferential) knowledge is developed from acquaintance relations (91).

Russell adds that we have acquaintance with sense data, desires, feelings, (probably) the self, and universals like color, brotherhood, diversity, etc. Direct acquaintance only refers to the individual's direct access to some aspect of her/his experience, whereas knowledge by acquaintance requires that the individual have a belief about it. Russell asserts that not only does acquaintance make knowledge possible; it makes thinking itself possible. This assertion is based on the epistemic principle that empirical experience is the source of properly simple concepts. It would still be observed in *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell clarifies that the knowledge we can have of a specific "so-and-so", which is a thing identifiable as the thing that it uniquely is, is knowledge by description. For Russell, acquaintance knowledge is an awareness that occurs below the level of specific identifications of things. Knowledge by acquaintance is knowledge of a general quality of a thing, such as its shape, color, or smell (106).

According to Russell, acquaintance does not involve reasoning that leads the individual to form an inference that the thing possessing the quality is any specific "so-and-so". He also includes self-consciousness of one's having an experience. For example, "When I see the sun, I am often aware of my seeing the sun; thus 'my seeing the sun' is an object with which I have acquaintance." It is only possible to have acquaintance with things that exist, according to Russell, and acquaintance does not involve thought, intention, or judgment, or application of concepts. Although, Russell allows for fallibility of acquaintance due to false impressions acquired in some acquaintance relations, and he argues that these do not negate the much greater number of accurate impressions that result in acquaintance based on truths. From this background, this paper would make an examination of Bertrand Russell's theory of knowledge.

Understanding the theory of Knowledge

Knowing is one of the most specific human processes and knowledge is its result. That means that knowing and knowledge have been subjects of human inquiry from the ancient times. Philosophers, starting with Plato and Aristotle, developed Epistemology as a theory of knowledge, trying to answer to the fundamental question: What is knowledge? There were many answers and many arguments used in supporting them, but none of those theories has been accepted as being fully satisfactory. Defining knowledge and explaining its nature proved to be elusive and without a convincing and universally accepted result (Neta and Pritchard 209).

Most of the theories (of knowledge) have been integrated into two major perspectives: rationalism and empiricism. Simplifying, it could be said that both theories accept that knowledge is a justified true belief, but they de-part in showing the ways through which one can find the truth or justify-ing the true belief. Rationalism, for which Plato is a pioneering philosopher, argues that knowledge is a result of a reasoning

process and that our sensory experience plays no role. Knowledge can be obtained only from rational reasoning grounded in axioms, like in mathematics, and it should be distinguished from opinion which is a product of our senses. In his theory about ideas, Plato makes a difference between a "cat" which represents a particular object in the real world and the concept of "cat" coming from the eternal world of cattytness. While the real "cat" is born and sometimes will die, the concept of "cat" remains in the eternal world of ideas. Knowledge belongs to that eternal world.

Explaining the Plato's frame-work of knowledge, Bertrand Russell in his *Theory of Knowledge* shows that "We perceive hard and soft through touch, but it is the mind that judges that they exist and that they are contraries. Only the mind can reach existence, and we cannot reach truth if we do not reach existence" (152). We cannot know the real world through senses alone since they can mislead us. In conclusion, "knowledge consists in reflection, not in impressions, and perception is not knowledge" (153). René Descartes made rationalism the basis of modern philosophy by integrating in his conceptual universe many new scientific discoveries. He founded the famous method of doubting everything and searching for certainty: "I can do nothing else until I have learned for certain that there is nothing in the world that is certain" (Descartes 139). By analyzing comparatively his thoughts coming from the mind and the information coming from the sensory system, Descartes reached the conclusion that thought is the only attribute that belongs to him that cannot be detached of him: "What of thinking? I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist, that is certain" (Descartes 141). That means that the only test of our existence is the fact that we think and through thinking we acquire knowledge. In his famous formulation "Cogito, ergo sum!", mind and body are like two different worlds, and while bodily sensations fail the reliability test, thinking proves to be the unique characteristic that is reliable and certain. Finally, he

remarks: "I am, however, a real thing and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks" (Descartes 142). This dualism of mind and body had a great impact on science, philosophy and education in Europe, and later on in America. Even today, many authors consider knowledge to be rational and based on solely mental processes.

Knowledge is not created a priori and is not innate in a deterministic form. It is created through our sensory interface with the real world, and it is processed finally by our mind. John Locke continued that approach emphasizing that objects do exist in the outer world and that our sensory perception is the most important source of our knowledge. Many contemporary philosophers tried to bridge the gap between rationalism and empiricism by generating conceptual frameworks based on different syn-theses between them. In sharp contrast with the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, the Japanese intellectual tradition based on Buddhism and Confucianism created an integrated perspective of mind and body with three overarching premises: "(1) oneness of humanity and nature; (2) oneness of body and mind; and (3) oneness of self and other (Nonaka and Takeuchi 27).

Knowledge definition as mentioned before, a frequently adopted definition of knowledge is that of "justified true belief" (Nonaka and Takeuchi 87). That definition incorporates three basic conditions, fact for which some authors call it the tripartite account of knowledge. These conditions are the following: i) The truth condition. It requires that if one knows a proposition then that proposition must be true. If the proposition is not true, then that person does not know what he claims to know. The truth condition makes the difference between opinion and knowledge. ii) The belief condition. That condition demands that if one knows a proposition then he believes that proposition. iii) The justification condition. That condition requires a practical way of justifying that the belief one has is true (Neta and Pritchard 89). Putting together these conditions for knowing,

one may conclude that “the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing that something is the case are first that what one is said to know be true, secondly that one be sure of it, and thirdly that one should have the right to be sure” (Ayer 13). This explains what is knowledge and its basic constituents knowledge.

Bertrand Russell's theory of Knowledge

The foundations of Russell's epistemology in *Theory of Knowledge* are nearly as his earlier writings on epistemology, notably, *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) and “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description” (1911), and from the six chapters of *Theory of Knowledge* which he did publish in *The Monist* in 1914 and 1915. Russell had, in *Theory of Knowledge*, a familiar two-tier epistemology: on the first tier the central concept was the concept of acquaintance, a dyadic relation between a cognizing subject and the object cognized (Griffin 133-134). At this time, Russell was, of course, a Platonist about universals, and so, in addition to acquaintance with sense-data (and of course, the contents of our minds) there was also acquaintance with universals, which Russell thought was necessary for the understanding of propositions. This much is already present in *The Problems of Philosophy*.

In *Theory of Knowledge*, Russell held that there was a third type of acquaintance: acquaintance with logical objects. Such acquaintance was necessary not just for understanding logic, or molecular propositions, but for understanding any sort of proposition; for understanding a proposition required being acquainted with the form of the proposition, and the form of the proposition was, in some sense Russell was not very clear with logical object. But these unclarified logical objects were not the main problem. They are a sign more of an incomplete project than of a fatally flawed one. The second tier of Russell's epistemology concerned what it's convenient (though misleading, as we shall see) to call “propositional attitudes”, such as belief, judgment, understanding, etc. The key difference

between the two tiers consisted in the fact that truth and falsehood (or correctness and error) arose at the second level but not at the first. Because one couldn't have an erroneous sensation, as one might have an erroneous belief. For this reason, of course, it was often held that the objects of such attitudes as belief were propositions, items which could be true or false (134).

The difficulty, for Russell, in dealing with belief was that he wanted an account of propositional attitudes which would not invoke propositions. Russell felt that there could be no such objects as propositions (in particular, there could be no such objects as false propositions), and thus the relation of believing could not be a dyadic relation between a subject and a proposition, nor, indeed, a dyadic relation of any kind, because the objections against propositions as objects of belief would hold against any other type of object. There would have to be two kinds of such objects, true ones and false ones, and it was hard 'to see how there could actually be false ones. Russell's response to this difficulty was the multiple relation theory of judgment, outlined in *The Problems of Philosophy*, in "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" and in the final essay on truth and falsehood in *Philosophical Essays* (1910).

Russell's epistemology went through many phases. Once he shed neo-Hegelianism in his early years, Russell remained a philosophical realist for the remainder of his life, believing that our direct experiences have primacy in the acquisition of knowledge(<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/russell/>). While some of his views have lost favor, his influence remains strong in the distinction between two ways in which we can be familiar with objects: "knowledge by acquaintance" and "knowledge by description". For a time, Russell thought that we could only be acquainted with our own sense data, momentary perceptions of colors, sounds, and the like, and that everything else, including the physical objects that these were sense data of, could only be inferred, or reasoned to, i.e. known by description and not known directly. This

distinction has gained much wider application, though Russell eventually rejected the idea of an intermediate sense datum. (<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/knowledgeacquaintdescrip/>).

The theory of Acquaintance

Acquaintance was the foundation for Bertrand Russell's *theory of knowledge*. The rest of the theory was supported by it. When one grafts a tree to the base of the trunk of another, one still has the same tree bearing the same fruit. Only the roots are different and this serves to make the tree stronger. Russell grafted his theory of knowledge onto the roots of neutral monism. His theory became stronger but not greatly different. According to Bertrand Russell in "On Denoting", knowledge by acquaintance is obtained through a direct causal (sense-based) interaction between a person and the object that person perceived. Experience of an object is the only thing that people can ever become acquainted with; they can never truly know the physical object itself. A person can also be acquainted with his own sense of self and his thoughts and ideas. However, other people could not become acquainted with another person's mind, for example. They could not in a way of directly interacting with it, since a mind is an internal object. They can only perceive that a mind could exist by observing that person's behavior (105).

To be fully justified in believing a proposition to be true one must be acquainted, not only with the fact that supposedly makes the proposition true, but with the relation of correspondence that holds between the proposition and the fact. In other words, justified true belief can only occur if I know that a proposition (e.g. "Swan is white") is true in virtue of a fact (e.g. light-waves, that the frequency of the light reflected off the swan causes the human eye, and by extension, the human mind, to perceive swan to be white) (*The problem of philosophy* 17-18). By way of example, Jude is justified in believing that he is in pain if he is directly and immediately acquainted with his pain. Jude is fully justified in his belief not if he merely makes an inference regarding his pain

("I must be in pain because my nose is bleeding"), but only if he feels it as an immediate sensation ("My nose hurts"). This direct contact with the fact and the knowledge that this fact makes a proposition true is what is meant by knowledge by acquaintance.

By inference, Russell referred to acquaintance as "the given". He theorized that certain familiarities develop from an individual's experience with various primary impressions (sensory or abstract) that are so much a part of awareness itself that the individual possesses knowledge of these familiar features without accessing memories by the cognitive process of remembering. Russell believes that acquaintance is necessary in order for us to form any proposition—that any belief we form must be composed entirely of experiential components with which we have acquaintance. For Russell, all foundational knowledge is by acquaintance, and all non-foundational (inferential) knowledge is developed from acquaintance relations.

The theory of Neutral Monism

The shift to the theory of neutral monism is a shift of perspective. Russell's older theory of acquaintance has as an underlying assumption: the notion of a duality of mind and matter. Through his theory of acquaintance, Russell holds that one becomes acquainted with relations between objects through an active experiencing of them. In *The Theory of Knowledge*, Russell expresses the experience of relations as a relation of the mind of the one, who experiences, with object of experience (213). This relation between mind and the relations which we are to know is not necessary in the neutral monist's doctrine. According to Russell, the neutral monist believes that mind and matter are secondary classifications of the single and primary "stuff" that composes the world. This stuff is "sensation". Instead of maintaining that mind is somehow removed from matter yet becomes aware of material things and their interactions together and with mind, the neutral monist suggests that when we speak

of mind we group sensations in a certain manner, and when we speak of matter we group sensations in a different pattern of organization (Boggs 28). Consequently, the neutral monist maintains that philosophers tend to manufacture two things that simply do not exist. These things are: consciousness or mind (Russell uses "mind" and "consciousness" interchangeably) and matter. Consciousness concerns us the most here.

Misguided, philosophers tend to embellish consciousness with powers and properties which result in much philosophical confusion. Russell took this view very seriously, though he was not prepared to accept it until Wittgenstein convinced him that something had to be done to eliminate the judgment of nonsense in Russell's theory of knowledge. As we will see, the elimination of the possibility of judging nonsense was instrumental in pushing Russell toward neutral monism while abandoning his old theory of acquaintance. This shift in Russell's thought was not as great as it might seem. It did not necessitate the abandonment of the multiple relation theory of knowledge which was the backbone of much of the theory of knowledge. And in spite of various problems which Russell saw in neutral monism, he considered the theory to be the only serious rival to his own theory of acquaintance (29). 'This theory (acquaintance) has to be defended against three rival theories: the theory of Mash and James, according to which there is no distinctive relation such as "acquaintance", involved in all mental facts, but merely a different grouping of the same objects as those dealt with by non-psychological sciences. The first of these rivals (neutral monism) is the most interesting and the most formidable (5).

An Examination of Russell's theory of Knowledge

Russell says that the neutral monists have, in certain areas, contributed so much to philosophy by providing fresh perspectives and observations which had somehow been overlooked by earlier thought: "It is important to be clear as to the extent to which the experience of one mind may overlap that

of another. *Neutral monists* pointing out that the same object may be experienced by two minds which do not in any way change the nature of the object. This certainly applies, as a matter of fact, to universals and abstracts; it applies also, though I think only as a theoretic possibility, to things of sense" (34). Further Russell seems to imply that neutral monism, whether correct or not, is a considerable advance beyond classical dualism. Neutral monism might be flawed but not the extent of many of its rival theories, including some of the most respected:

Neutral monism, maintains that there are not two sorts of entities, mental and physical, but only two sorts of relations between entities, namely those belonging to what is called the physical order. In favor of this theory, we may admit that what is experienced may itself be part of the physical world, that the old distinction of "mind" and "matter", besides ignoring the abstract facts regarding "matter", and the "space" in which matter is, as something obvious, given, and unambiguous, and is in hopeless doubt as to whether the facts of sensation are to be called physical or mental. In emphasizing all this, we must acknowledge that neutral monism has performed an important service to philosophy (31).

In spite of the "advancements" which Russell believed that the neutral monists had made, he has reservations about several ideas which seem to arise from neutral monism. Russell lists five aspects of neutral monism to which he objects. Two of these are very much interrelated, so much so that if one of the problems is solved the other disappears. Russell complains that it is difficult, under neutral monism, to distinguish between an individual's experience and things that lie outside an individual's experience: "If neutral monism is true, a mind which had only one experience would be a logical impossibility, since a thing is only mental in virtue of its external relations; and correspondingly, it is difficult for this philosophy to define the respect in which the whole of my experience is different from the things that lie outside my experience" (32).

This problem would be eliminated if neutral monism could give a better account of emphatic particulars such as "I", "you", "this", "that". The reason that things experienced are difficult to separate from things that are possible to experience is that James's and Mach's neutral monism (at least as Russell understands it) does not give an adequate account of "I". Russell's emphasis of the word "I" is an attempt to make a distinction between what is experienced by a specific individual (named I, according to Russell) and the possible experience of things not yet experienced. Yet Russell duplicates his first objection with his fifth! In addition to these difficulties, there is a fifth, more fatal, I think, than any of them, which is derived from considerations of "this" and "now" and "I" (Russell 32).

The second objection which Russell raises can be eliminated by simply introducing into neutral monism, a slight modification of the correspondence theory of truth. Russell says that because James reduces belief to sensation, "Fatal results with regards to the theory of error" are produced. "A second difficulty is derived from belief or judgment, which James and his followers unduly assimilate to sensation and presentation, with fatal results as regards the theory of error. Error is defined as "belief in the unreal", which compels the admission that there actually are unreal things" (32). It is not the admission of unreal things that is really bothering Russell here. After all, Russell is prepared to admit all manner of hallucinations into the realm of what is. (Russell makes the claim that hallucinations are real in the theory of knowledge. Accordingly, the real and the unreal, considered as objects of a possible belief or judgment". There is nothing unusual in this definition, yet it suffers from a defect so simply and so fundamental that it is amazing how so many philosophers have failed to see it. The defect is that there is no such thing as the unreal, and therefore, by the definition, there can be no such thing as the false (24); yet it is notorious that false beliefs do occur'.

All propositions (according to Russell's correspondence theory of truth) will also correspond to a fact or group of facts. 'These facts will be the occurrences of the actual sensations, through *Theory of Acquaintance* one can say that one may judge a sensation falsely. But neutral monism dictates that sensations are immediate. A material object does not cause a sensation which can then be misinterpreted as being caused by some other and different material object. Rather, the sensation I first and we construct the object accordingly. Therefore, we cannot judge a sensation falsely. Sensations will all be true and therefore all propositions which correspond to them will also be true. All propositions will correspond to sensations; therefore, all propositions will be true. It is the result that there can be no false propositions that bothers Russell. But such a conclusion is not warranted. All sensations will be true, but they will occur in a specific manner in a "specific pattern" or relation. The proposition must accurately portray the relations between sensations in order to be true. Inaccurate representations will produce false proposition, even though the component sensations are true (24).

We are still left however with the case of hallucinations. Here, Russell maintains that while the sensations are accurately represented by the proposition proclaiming them, a belief based on the proposition is nevertheless false because it does not correspond to a fact. A hallucination is a fact, not an error, what is erroneous is a judgment based upon it. But if I believe that to-day is Wednesday when in fact to-day is Tuesday, "that to-day is Wednesday" is not a fact. We cannot find anywhere in the physical world any entity corresponding to this belief. It is impossible to account for the occurrence of the belief "that to-day is Wednesday" invoking something not to be found in the physical world (24).

But in fact it is not necessary to "invoke something not of the physical world" in order to explain false belief under neutral monism. Insufficient sensual data explains false belief quite

nicely. What Russell seems to be overlooking is that facts depend on a conglomeration of occurrences in the physical (or neutral) world not just one. The correspondence theory of truth must be appended to include the assessment of the totality of evidence available not just a specific event or entity. With this modification we need not proclaim the “unreal” or that some things “subsist”. And we need not be compelled to think of “mind” as being anything very different from matter. Russell's third objection is also not very convincing; he maintains the same point in regard to memory; for if what is remembered actually exists in the mind, its position in the time-series becomes ambiguous, and the essential pastness of the remembered object disappears (32).

Russell eventually solves this problem himself by realizing that remembering is itself an experience of a past experience. The time series is maintained by the link between the first experiences of experience of object with the second experience of the experience of the object. This establishes a definite order and therefore a recognition of “past”. A fourth difficult arises in regard to the definition of knowledge offered by James, though here it is hard to say how far this definition is essential to neutral monism. There is Russell objects to James's definition of knowledge. But here he admits that the definition may not be essential to neutral monism (32).

Russell laid emphasis on the immediate experience which could be said to be of real knowledge by asserting that “Immediate experience, which I should regard as the only real knowledge of things, he [James] refuses to regard as knowledge at all: and it would seem that what he calls knowledge of a thing is really knowledge of a proposition of which the thing is not even a constituent” (32). All these amount to the complaint that James does not accept the theory of acquaintance; and as we will see, Russell was forced to abandon the theory of acquaintance himself. Therefore, of the four objections against neutral monism

which Russell lists, only one has any real staying power, and this one stayed with Russell for the rest of his life. This is the argument to which he refers in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*.

There is, on the other hand, the argument from emphatic particulars, such as "this" and "now" and "here" and such words as that, which are not easy to reconcile, to my mind, with the view (Neutral Monism) which does not distinguish between a particular and experiencing that particular' (153).

But by this time, Russell is already expressing reservations about what he considers the most powerful of the arguments against neutral monism. "But the argument about emphatic particulars is so delicate and so subtle that I cannot feel quite sure whether it is a valid one or not" (qtd in Boggs 36). We understand that, as Russell said it, the shift from the theory of acquaintance to neutral monism was not very drastic. It generated only one significant conflict with his theory of knowledge. And he felt that this conflict could be overcome; "I feel more and more inclined to think that it (neutral monism) may be true, regard to it are the entire sort that may be solved by ingenuity" (Russell 155). Whatsoever a full and thorough analysis of James's and Mach's neutral monism might be, and whatever notions might be essential to the official doctrine, it is Russell's view of neutral monism which is important to us here because it is Russell's view of neutral monism which shaped his eventual conversion and the development of his brand of neutral monism. At the start of his analysis of neutral monism, Russell gives the following explanation: "Neutral monism is the theory that the things commonly regarded as mental and the things commonly regarded as physical do not differ in respect of any intrinsic property possessed by the one set and not by the other, but differ only in respect of arrangement and context" (qtd in Boggs 38).

As a result of this Russell means that in neutral monism what is physical and what is mental are the result of classes which are

defined differently yet separate and group together the same members. This union of mind and matter appeals to Russell's desire to analyze and simplify. It provides an explanation which requires only one type of thing to begin with, from which the totality of knowledge can be explained.

A Critique of Russell's theory of Knowledge

In his essay, "*Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgments*", Wittgenstein strongly objected to Russell which Nicholas Griffin maintains that the Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment established by Russell fell because it could not co-exist with the theory of types. Griffin gives Wittgenstein credit for realizing that the Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment was incapable of supporting Russell's developing philosophy. 'The multiple relation theory (more properly a theory of propositions than of belief) and the related doctrine of logical forms had roots in Russell's absolute realism. At the same time, they were to provide a basis for the transition to the theory of orders. What Wittgenstein realized, and what Russell failed to realize at first, was that they were totally unsuited for that task' (Griffin 243-244).

Yet Russell continued to hold the *Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment* even after Wittgenstein's criticisms were clear to him. In fact, Russell continued to present a Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment for several years. Was this pure persistence in the visage of Wittgenstein's vast criticism? Did Russell simply insist that he was right in spite of conclusive or convincing evidence to the contrary? I think not. It may be that Sommerville's "reconstructed" criticisms are devastating, but there is insufficient evidence to warrant attributing those criticisms to Wittgenstein in 1913. Even if these logical criticisms are valid, Sommerville's and Griffin's contention that they caused Russell to shelve the *Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment* are outlandish in view of the fact that evidence linking them to Wittgenstein is almost non-existent. If this reconstructed argument really does have the power attributed to it by Sommerville and Griffin, it

would be far more appropriate to say that Sommerville destroyed the Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment in 1986 rather than saying that Wittgenstein destroyed the Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment in 1913.

There are several criticisms of the *Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment*. Each seems to be spawned from Wittgenstein's arguments. Armstrong, Geach and Mackie all claim that the theory does not work. Griffin does a convincing job of arguing that such criticism was off the mark because Wittgenstein's criticisms were not properly understood (Boggs 62). It is the following contention of Griffin that is now the principal detractor of the multiple relation theory of types. If Griffin is right and Wittgenstein's criticism showed that the *Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment* had to be abandoned, why does Russell nevertheless stick to it in spite of appearance? Russell continued to have faith in the *Multiple Relation Theory of Judgment* and believe that it could be maintained, along with the theory of types, but only if he were to abandon the theory of acquaintance and adopt a form of the theory of neutral monism.

Regardless, the multiple relation theory of judgment and Theory of Acquaintance are in conflict with one another, and one of them is in conflict with certain theorems of the *Principia*. Griffin and Sommerville both seem to imply that we cannot be acquainted with complexes because of some defect in the Multiple Relation Theory Judgment; this seems like a strange conclusion (particularly when it is acquaintance which Russell begins to remove from his epistemology not the Multiple Relation Theory Judgment) (72). It looks more likely that it is a defect in Theory of Acquaintance which is responsible for its own inability to handle acquaintance with complexes (or at the very least that this is a possible interpretation and it is probably the interpretation which Russell subscribed).

Evaluation

The principal theme of the “Theory of knowledge” was the epistemic basis of Russell's theory of language, especially focused on his doctrine of acquaintance. Russell tried to discover what kind of thought processes and what sort of knowledge help in understanding contingent propositions and in establishing their validity. Unfortunately, even if the problems presented by his concerns were genuine, his solutions did not work (Pears 170). In the chapters published in *The Monist*, Russell defined 'acquaintance' as an extensional relation between subjects and objects and he demonstrated its importance in the cases in which the object is a particular. In this analysis of acquaintance, Russell dealt with three kinds of acquaintance with particulars, through sensation, memory, and imagination (Pears 171). In the unpublished part of the manuscript, he writes:

These, we found, though their objects are usually somewhat different, are not essentially distinguished by their objects, but by the relations of subject and object. In sensation subject and object are simultaneous; in memory the subject is later than the object; while imagination does not essentially involve any time-relation of subject and object, though all time-relations are compatible with it. (Russell 100, quoted in Pears 171).

There are two important points about this passage: first, it is important in the case of sensation that the particular that is the object of acquaintance may be simple or complex; second, it is surprising that Russell maintained that acquaintance is an extensional relation that does not involve any knowledge of truths about its object, even in the case of acquaintance with complex particulars. In the first two chapters that he never published, Russell argued that we are acquainted with predicates and relations as well as with particulars. Also, he was very interested in specifying the precise object of acquaintance when a relation is involved. This is happening because some dyadic relations are asymmetrical and, in these cases, acquaintance with the relation itself without an understanding

of the different properties of its two slots for particulars would not be enough. This case is applicable also for certain relations with more than two terms.

The difficulty with which he was contending is that if acquaintance is extensional, it will not include any knowledge of truths about its objects. It will be insufficient to explain the contribution of acquaintance with an asymmetrical relation to the sense of a proposition in which the name occurs. This is happening only if that acquaintance involves the knowledge that it may link the same particulars in two different ways and the ability to discriminate between them. In the same way, acquaintance with any universal must involve knowledge of its type and of the type of particulars with which it may combine to produce complexes. Although in 1913 Russell found out from Wittgenstein about his claim that the general words signify forms rather than objects, he refused to adopt this idea. He distinguished clearly the universals from forms and he claimed that we need acquaintance with both before we can understand a proposition. He maintained that we must be acquainted with the relation sentence itself (Pears 173).

Broadly speaking, if the relation is one-one, he calls it acquaintance, and if the relation is one-many, he calls it understanding. About the latter, there is an account of understanding propositions that Russell develops in *Theory of knowledge*. This involves a dramatic extension of the scope of acquaintance, because it includes forms among its objects as well as universals and particulars. Russell maintained that the only acquaintance that someone must have for understanding a proposition is the separate acquaintance with each of its elements. In order to answer to the question, what makes it possible to combine the three constituents in thought in a way that make sense? Russell suggests that this is possible only if we are already acquainted with the general form of dyadic relational propositions. Someone must have advanced knowledge of this form, a knowledge that supports his understanding of logic, because the difference between a relation and its terms is a logical difference.

Conclusion

In view of the above discussion which centered on examining Russell's theory of knowledge, it is understood that Russell majorly distinguished two sorts of knowledge of objects, namely: knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. Of these it is only the former that brings the object itself before the mind. We have acquaintance with sense-data, with many universals, and possibly with ourselves, but not with physical objects or other minds. We have descriptive knowledge of an object. When we know that it is the object having some property or properties with which we are acquainted; that is to say, when we know that the property or properties in question belong to one object and no more, we are said to have knowledge of that one object by description, whether or not we acquainted with the object. Our knowledge of physical objects and of other minds is only knowledge by description; the descriptions involved being usually such as involve sense- data. All propositions intelligible to us, whether or not they primarily concern things only known to us by description, are composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted, for a constituent with which we are not acquainted is unintelligible to us.

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