RUSSELL'S EPISTEMOLOGY AND ITS ONTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS:

HIS EVOLVING STANCE ON NEUTRAL MONISM CONSIDERING THE PROBLEM OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD

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Thesis submitted to the

University of Ottawa

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the PhD degree in Philosophy

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Faculty of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

Acknowledgment

The completion of this work would not have been possible without the guidance and support of numerous individuals to whom I owe my deepest gratitude.

First and foremost, I extend my sincerest appreciation to my supervisor, Professor Paul Forster, for his invaluable mentorship throughout my doctoral research. His intellectual generosity, unwavering support, and insightful feedback have been instrumental in shaping this thesis. His patience, encouragement, and scholarly rigor have not only strengthened my work but have also profoundly influenced my academic growth.

I am also deeply indebted to the members of the evaluation committee —Professors Paul Rusnock, Patrice Philie, Vincent Bergeron, and James Connelly— for their time, rigorous engagement, and thoughtful critiques of my research. Their expertise and constructive feedback have significantly enriched this work.

Beyond the academic sphere, I am immensely grateful to my friends and family for their steadfast support and encouragement throughout this journey. Their unwavering belief in me has been a constant source of motivation.

Finally, I acknowledge that this thesis is the culmination of the collective contributions of all those who have supported me along the way. To each of them, I express my heartfelt thanks.

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that Bertrand Russell's engagement with neutral monism does not stem from an intrinsic commitment to the theory itself but rather emerges as an epistemological necessity — a byproduct of his attempt to resolve the problem of reconciliation of subjective sense-data with the objective physical world (the RSP problem). This problem, central to his theory of knowledge, concerns the reconciliation of subjective sense-data with the objective physical world. By examining Russell's shift from initially rejecting neutral monism —due to his commitment to the cognitive theory of acquaintance— to later embracing it, I demonstrate that his methodological turn toward logical construction necessitated a revision of his epistemological framework. This revision ultimately compelled him to abandon subject-object dualism, thereby aligning with neutral monism. Russell's methodological commitments, particularly his reliance on logical construction, inevitably align his position with the core tenets of neutral monism, even though his primary motivation remains epistemological rather than ontological. This convergence between Russell's epistemology and ontology, evidenced in works such as his *Theory of Knowledge*, *The Problems of Philosophy*, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, *The Analysis of Mind*, and *The Analysis of Matter*, reveals a progression in which Russell adopts a partial neutral monism as a more effective approach to the demands of his theory of knowledge. Through a critical analysis of

his works, I argue that Russell's neutral monism, rather than simply advancing scientific realism or refining ontological positions, represents a profound philosophical synthesis of epistemology and ontology in his pursuit of a comprehensive theory of the world.

Contents

Introduction

Russell's engagement with neutral monism —the view that there exists a neutral element from which both mind and matter arise— is deeply intertwined with his epistemological inquiries. He examines this position within the context of discussions of knowledge and the problem of the relation of experience to knowledge of things beyond experience, a central problem in his philosophical work. Specifically, in seminal texts such as *Theory of Knowledge*, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, *The Analysis of Mind*, *The Analysis of Matter*, and *My Philosophical Development*, Russell explores neutral monism in connection with his theory of knowledge. In *Theory of Knowledge*, Russell critically assesses the grounds for his initial rejection of neutral monism, carefully analyzing the perceived incompatibility between his epistemological framework and its core tenets. However, in *Our Knowledge of the External World*, he advances his position by arguing for the compatibility of his epistemic theory of logical construction with the central claims of neutral monism. From this perspective, Russell identifies a potential synthesis between his method of logical construction and the neutral monist standpoint, leading to the adoption of a form of partial neutral monism, by 1921. In My *Philosophical Development* (Chapter 12), Russell retrospectively evaluates this intellectual trajectory, clarifying the reasons for his revised theory of knowledge and his eventual acceptance of neutral monism.

Russell's doctrine of neutral monism has been extensively debated from multiple philosophical perspectives, yet the epistemic dimension of his account has not received

as thorough an examination as other aspects in literature. Central to Russell's framework is the inseparability of metaphysical inquiry from epistemological concerns: for him, the question of *what* the physical world *is* is fundamentally intertwined with *how* we come to know it. Accordingly, I trace details about the contribution of epistemology to the development of Russell's neutral monism in the period of 1905 to 1927. My analysis provides a novel reconstruction of neutral monism by systematically situating it within Russell's broader epistemological program —specifically, his sustained effort to reconcile sense-data with the world of physics, thereby addressing the problem of our knowledge of the external world. This epistemic reexamination not only clarifies Russell's theory of neutral monism but also advances an original hermeneutic model for interpreting it.

Much of the literature has treated Russell's neutral monism as an independent philosophical question, with relatively less attention devoted to its epistemological grounding and particularly to the role of the RSP (relation of sense-data to physics) problem as a key motivator for Russell's adoption of neutral monism. Recent contributions by scholars such as Philip Goff, Sam Coleman,[1] and Donovan Wishon (2015, 2016) have primarily examined neutral monism's metaphysical implications, comparing it with competing frameworks like panpsychism and physicalism. Others, such as James Connelly (2024), have analyzed Russell's epistemology in relation to Wittgenstein's critiques, while scholars like Christopher Pincock (2018), Ayer (1971), and Stace (1946) have emphasized the role of Occam's Razor and developments in physics as key motivations for Russell's neutral monism. Meanwhile, Tully, Landini (2021), Banks

[1] "Russellian Monism", printed in Academia: https://www.academia.edu/journals. Draft of an article to appear in U. Kriegel (ed.) Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Consciousness.

(2014), Wishon (2024), and Leopold Stubenberg (2015) have touched upon its epistemic motivations, though their discussions often remain tied to modern physics or contemporary philosophy of mind.[2] Thus, while these works provide valuable insights, there remains room for more systematic examination of how the epistemic problem of our knowledge, specifically, the problem of the relation of perception to physics (the RSP problem), relates to Russell's neutral monism —a connection that appears significant in Russell's own philosophical writings.

One of Russell's central epistemological concerns is the justification of our knowledge of the external world based on what is immediately known to us.[3] As Russell explicitly asserts in *My Philosophical Development*, which serves as a foundational text for this study: "in the years from 1910 to 1914, I became interested, not only in what the physical world is, but in how we come to know it."[4] He further elaborates on this epistemological challenge, stating: "The relation of perception to physics is a problem which has occupied me intermittently ever since that time. It is in relation to this problem that my philosophy underwent its last substantial change."[5] This thesis consequently re-examines neutral monism through an epistemological lens that, while clearly present in Russell's own philosophical development, has not received systematic treatment in the

[2] Banks, Eric c., *The Realistic Empiricism of Mach, James, and Russell*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. In Chapter 4, Banks contends that Russell's neutral monism embodies a "realistic empiricism" prioritizing ontological simplicity, consistent with Ockham's razor. Banks argues that Russell adopted neutral monism as the most parsimonious framework for addressing both mental and physical phenomena, avoiding additional entities or properties, and drawing on parallels with Mach's and James's reasoning. Similarly, see Tully, Robert E., 1999, "Russell's Neutral Monism," *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, 8: 209–224. Tully interprets Russell's neutral monism as an application of Ockham's razor to minimize metaphysical assumptions, aiming to reduce dualistic explanations.

[3] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959, p. 13.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 13.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 13.

secondary literature. The study demonstrates how Russell's enduring concern with the perception-physics relation fundamentally shaped his adoption of neutral monism (albeit a partial version), thereby offering a new interpretive framework for understanding this crucial phase of his thought.

Traditional accounts, exemplified by W. T. Stace and A. J. Ayer, present neutral monism primarily as an ontological framework designed to resolve particular metaphysical difficulties in Russell's philosophy. While scholars like Ayer (1971) emphasize Ockham's razor as the primary driver of Russell's neutral monism, this thesis argues that epistemological concerns —specifically the RSP problem— played a more foundational role. This aligns partially with Stubenberg's (2015) epistemic hints but extends his analysis by rigorously tracing the interplay between Russell's epistemology and ontology. Contemporary scholars including Leopold Stubenberg, Donovan Wishon (2021), Eric C. Banks, David Bostock, Robert E. Tully, and Gregory Landini maintain that epistemological considerations significantly influenced Russell's adoption of neutral monism. Even though these commentators acknowledge this epistemological dimension, they typically frame it in terms of neutral monism's capacity to address issues such as the mind-body distinction, the subject-object dichotomy, the application of Occam's Razor, or the principles of logical atomism —aspects they consider fundamental to Russell's philosophical enterprise. I will explore some of these scholars more fully in Chapter Five, providing a brief comparative critique.

While the analysis concurs with this emphasis on epistemological motivations, it offers a distinctive interpretation regarding both the nature of Russell's primary epistemological concern and the extent of his commitment to neutral monism. I contend

that Russell's engagement with neutral monism constituted an outgrowth of his more comprehensive epistemological investigation rather than representing a direct solution to discrete philosophical problems. The central thesis maintains that from 1905 onward, Russell's paramount philosophical preoccupation was the problem of our knowledge of the external world —specifically, the relation between subjective perception and objective physical reality (what I termed the RSP problem). Within this framework, ontological questions, the mind-body distinction, and even logical atomism occupied derivative positions relative to this fundamental epistemological concern.

Moreover, this thesis demonstrates that Russell's alternating rejection and acceptance of neutral monism throughout his career was contingent upon its perceived efficacy in addressing what Russell himself identifies as "the problem of perception as the source of our physical knowledge."[6] This persistent epistemological challenge, I argue, ultimately compelled Russell's adoption of neutral monism. Consequently, I establish that neutral monism emerged not as an independent metaphysical commitment, but rather as a necessary consequence of Russell's developing epistemological views. Alfred J. Ayer offers a contrasting view, framing Russell's neutral monism as an ontological simplification driven by Ockham's Razor rather than epistemological concerns.[7] While Ayer's analysis highlights Russell's commitment to metaphysical parsimony, it underplays the centrality of the RSP problem in Russell's writings. This thesis bridges this gap, demonstrating that Russell's ontological choices were contingent upon his evolving solutions to the epistemic challenge of justifying knowledge of the external world.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 103.
[7] Alfred J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore. The Analytical Heritage*, London: Macmillan, 1971.

Russell confronts a fundamental philosophical challenge: the need to develop a coherent theory of the world that remains consistent with his theory of knowledge. He cannot advance a metaphysical framework that contradicts his epistemological account of what we can and cannot know, nor can he formulate a theory of knowledge that depends on an unsustainable ontology. Consequently, this thesis elucidates the complex reciprocal relation between Russell's engagement with the RSP problem and his eventual acceptance of neutral monism —an interplay that needs to be sufficiently emphasized and thoroughly examined. To comprehend Russell's theory of neutral monism, this study critically analyzes those epistemological commitments that either (a) served as direct catalysts for his adoption of neutral monism, or (b) significantly informed its conceptual architecture. More specifically, I demonstrate how Russell's investigations into the foundations of knowledge, particularly his theory of knowledge by acquaintance, initially created significant obstacles to his acceptance of neutral monism. However, as my analysis will show, the evolution of Russell's thought, especially through his development of the theory of logical construction, made his movement toward neutral monism (albeit a partial version) increasingly apparent. This intellectual trajectory vividly illustrates the dynamic interplay between Russell's epistemological concerns and the development of his neutral monist theory.

To accomplish this, in my first chapter, I discuss Russell’s epistemic notion of acquaintance, which plays a vital role in his method of analyzing knowledge, his theory of knowledge, and his response to the RSP problem in his pre-1919 works. This notion somehow informs Russell’s rejection of neutral monism. Building upon this epistemic notion, Russell presents his theory of knowledge by acquaintance as a response to the RSP problem in *The Problems of Philosophy* [1912]. Due to the inherent incompatibility

between the cognitive nature of acquaintance (and Russell's theory of knowledge by acquaintance) and the theory of neutral monism, Russell initially dismisses the latter in his manuscript *Theory of Knowledge* [1913]. According to Russell, the cognitive nature of acquaintance (and sensation) rules out the likelihood of neutral monism, which fails to adequately distinguish between the mental and the physical or 'subject' and 'object'. According to Russell, neutral monists assert that "there is nothing cognitive in the mere presence of an object to the mind."[8] Consequently, Russell claims that neutral monism cannot sufficiently account for "the difference between what is experienced and what is not experienced by a given subject at a given moment"[9] in our immediate experiences. This informs Russell's rejection of neutral monism and firmly, albeit negatively, links his theory of knowledge with the theory of neutral monism. The arguments presented in this chapter highlight the crucial role of the cognitive notion of acquaintance in Russell's epistemology and ontology, illustrating that Russell's epistemic notion of acquaintance, coupled with his epistemological concerns —though not the only factors— significantly contributed to his rejection of neutral monism before 1919.

In the second chapter, I argue that the shortcomings of Russell's solution to the RSP problem in 1912 compelled him to explore and subsequently devise a more suitable resolution by 1914, i.e., his theory of logical construction. I will show that this subsequent solution to the RSP problem brings Russell's perspectives on our knowledge of the external world into closer alignment with the theory of neutral monism, even though he has not yet rejected the cognitive nature of acquaintance (and sensation). In "The Relation

[8] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*, edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth Blackwell. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1984, p. 23.
[9] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*. 1913. Edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth Blackwell. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1984, p. 32.

of Sense-data to Physics" [1914], Russell comments, "what I have to say in the present paper is compatible with their doctrine [of neutral monism] and might have been reached from their standpoint."[10] However, Russell's theory of logical construction does not invalidate his arguments against neutral monism, as extensively discussed in his 1913 manuscript. It simply incorporates some ideas and principles that resemble those held by neutral monists. For instance, the idea that sense-data plays a dual role, being a constituent of data in both physics and psychology, and the application of Ockham's razor principle. Consequently, Russell's theory of logical construction can be viewed as a significant and necessary step toward embracing neutral monism. This supports my argument that Russell's evolving epistemological perspectives played a considerable role in his later adoption of the ontological theory of neutral monism.

In the third chapter, I argue that the consequences of Russell's method of logical construction compelled him to reevaluate his epistemological and ontological perspectives regarding the external world. For instance, Russell discards his theory of knowledge by acquaintance and refutes the inherent subject-object dualism in our immediate experiences. This move subsequently leads to his acceptance of neutral monism in 1919. Russell's method of logical construction reveals the inherent flaws in the cognitive nature of acquaintance, prompting him to discard such a perspective. This marks a pivotal step in Russell's shift toward neutral monism. This transition enables Russell to embrace the theory of neutral monism in 1919, which opposes the cognitive nature of acquaintance and sensation. In other words, Russell's decision to abandon the cognitive aspect of acquaintance clears the path for his transition to neutral monism. This

[10] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917. Reprinted Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1951, pp. 108–131, p. 112.

shift aligns more effectively with the constraints or criteria Russell establishes for a theory of knowledge, than his previous views, and effectively addresses his concerns regarding our knowledge of the external world, e.g., the RSP problem. The theory of neutral monism offers a reasonable answer to the RSP problem by eliminating the inherent distinction between mind and matter, thus, simplifying their relation, as they have sense-data as their "common ancestor".[11]

I believe that, when addressing the RSP problem, Russell opts to uphold neutral monism while abandoning the cognitive nature of acquaintance, as opposed to maintaining this cognitive aspect and rejecting neutral monism. This decision, I think, arises from Russell's conviction that if we embrace the cognitive nature of acquaintance and sensation, the 'subject' must be considered one of the genuine constituents of the world. In this perspective, the 'subject' is a mental entity that has no analog in the physical world. Consequently, a fundamental distinction between the mental and the physical will persist, preserving the question of the relation between mind and matter. They emerge as two entirely distinct entities with nothing in common, thus maintaining the RSP problem as a complicated problem. This duality posits the 'subject' or the mind as the fundamental constituents of the world, contrary to Russell's view where both 'subject' (or mind) and 'physical objects' are seen as logical constructions. Anything beyond our hard data, such as our sense-data, cannot be immediately experienced and thus cannot constitute the real constituents of the world. Therefore, the subject or mind, which cannot be immediately experienced, cannot be considered as the genuine constituent of the world. Consequently,

[11] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Mind (1921)*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1968, p. 11.

post-1919, echoing William James' perspective that the 'subject' is a logical fiction, Russell rejects it as an integral element of the world.

Without a cognizing subject in our immediate experience, there would be no object of cognition (sense-data), leaving only pure sensation which, according to Russell, does not qualify as knowledge anymore. By withholding the notion of 'consciousness', i.e., the knower, in our immediate experiences, the distinction between Russell's notion of sense-data and sensation collapses. "Accordingly the sensation that we have when we see a patch of colour simply is that patch of colour, an actual constituent of the physical world, and part of what physics is concerned with."[12] Hereafter, Russell abandons the notion of sense-data as something different from sensation and maintains that sensation or sense-data, though not knowledge in itself, is the source of our knowledge of the world. Russell concludes that the mind and the external world share sense-data as their constituent elements. In essence, the theory of neutral monism better meets the constraints on a theory of knowledge that Russell imposes, making it a more suitable perspective compared to his previous view of the cognitive nature of acquaintance.

In the Fourth chapter, I revisit the close interplay between Russell's epistemology and ontology, focusing on the constituents of the external world and our knowledge of them. I commence my discussion by examining how Russell's ideas regarding the components of the external world undergo development in alignment with his various solutions to the RSP problem. That is, Russell's perspective on 'what the physical world is' is intricately linked to 'how we come to know it'. I will focus on the characteristics of the basic elements of reality that enter Russell's ontology before and after his neutral

[12] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959, p. 136.

monism and will discuss how Russell explains these characteristics according to his epistemological concerns. For instance, in 1927, Russell explains that the source of the distinction between these constituting elements, which now he calls 'neutral events' and categorizes as mental events and physical events, is epistemological, rather than any intrinsic metaphysical duality. He says: "the distinction between what is mental and what is physical does not lie in any intrinsic character of either, but in the way in which we acquire knowledge of them."[13] Russell's constant attempt, in 1921 and 1927, is to modify the definition of the neutral stuff in a way that apparently helps him secure our knowledge of the external world. Subsequently, I conduct a comparative analysis of Russell's theory of neutral monism as presented in his two key works, *The Analysis of Mind* [1921] and *The Analysis of Matter* [1927]. My analysis is framed within the context of Russell's primary epistemological concern, the RSP problem. Within this analysis, I critically assess certain claims made in some secondary literature regarding Russell's neutral monism that, in my view, contain inaccuracies. These sources, I contend, may have overlooked the profound connection between Russell's epistemological concerns and his theory of neutral monism, which forms the core of my thesis argument.

One group, including Stace and Ayer, argues that Russell abandoned neutral monism after 1921 in favor of scientific realism. This perspective, however, fails to appreciate the deep connection between Russell's epistemological concerns and his commitment to neutral monism. Stace and Ayer see Russell's shift toward scientific realism as a rejection of neutral monism, when in fact, it represents an evolution of his efforts to reconcile empirical knowledge with philosophical analysis. When one considers

[13] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959, p. 254.

Russell's neutral monism in the context of his attempts to solve the relation between sense-data and the physical world (the RSP problem), it becomes clear that he did not abandon his theory. Instead, his neutral monism offers a robust solution to the RSP problem by integrating the sciences of the mental and physical under a unified, neutral framework —an aim that Russell pursued consistently, particularly since his work "The Relation of Sense-data to Physics". Another group of scholars, including Michael Lockwood, Mafizuddin Ahmed, and Eric C. Banks, argues that Russell's neutral monism in *The Analysis of Matter* represents a more mature and refined version of the theory compared to *The Analysis of Mind*. They suggest that his 1927 work marks a transition to a fully developed neutral monism, where the fundamental constituents of reality are entirely neutral. However, as I will demonstrate, the progression of Russell's doctrine from 1921 to 1927 reflects only minor adjustments intended to provide a more scientifically rigorous definition of reality's basic elements, consistent with his ongoing epistemological investigations. In essence, Russell's neutral monism across these works can be understood as a form of partial neutral monism concerning his neutral stuff.

Ultimately, the alignment between the constraints on a theory of knowledge and the theory of neutral monism leads Russell to opt for a kind of partial neutral monism. I aim to demonstrate that Russell's engagement with neutral monism reflects a nuanced, well-rounded theory that brings Russell's ontology into closer alignment with his epistemology.

In the Final chapter, having demonstrated how Russell's RSP problem drove him towards partial neutral monism, I now assess some secondary literature on Russell's neutral monism, comparing their similarities and the differences with my thesis. Despite extensive scholarship on Russell's neutral monism, much of the literature has not

attended to the RSP problem as one of its main epistemic foundations. They often treated Russell's neutral monism as an independent theory, not an epistemic byproduct.

Chapter One: Russell's Pre-1919 Endeavors on the RSP Problem; The Notion of Acquaintance and Rejection of Neutral Monism

One of Russell's central epistemological concerns regarding the external physical world centers on the problem of how our sense-data —immediate objects of our sensory experiences— relate to the external world. This concern, often referred to as the relation between sense-data and physics (the RSP problem), addresses the challenge of justifying our knowledge of the external world and our understanding of physics based on the immediate data available to us. Despite the objective nature we often attribute to knowledge, particularly in scientific fields like physics, Russell grappled with the inherent subjectivity of our experiences, raising ongoing questions about the scope and certainty of our understanding. Consequently, Russell persistently sought to determine the limits of our knowledge and the degrees of certainty or uncertainty associated with it, while advocating "the natural view, that there really are objects other than ourselves and our sense-data which have an existence not dependent upon our perceiving them."[14] Russell justifies this ontological view by its contribution to a systematic theory of the world and based on his theory of knowledge.

Prior to 1919, Russell explores various solutions to the RSP problem, consistently rejecting neutral monism —a philosophical position that denies the fundamental

[14] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 37.

distinction between the knower and the known in our immediate experiences. Russell's rejection of neutral monism was largely rooted in his epistemological views, particularly his commitment to the cognitive notion of acquaintance, which emphasizes a fundamental distinction between the 'subject' and the 'object' in our immediate experiences. Russell posited that acquaintance is a cognitive relation between the mind and something else, such as sense-data. In contrast to neutral monists, who deny the cognitive nature of our immediate experiences, Russell firmly disputed this perspective. While neutral monists rejected the foundational ontological distinction between mind and matter, Russell asserted the indispensability of such a distinction in shaping our immediate experiences. He maintained that mind and matter possess distinct natures and cannot be conceptually collapsed into one another. Consequently, Russell upheld the fundamental dualism of mind and matter, asserting that both are genuine and irreducible to each other or to any other entity. In his view, dualism implies the independent reality of both mind and matter (or subject and object), with neither being reducible to the other or to any other factor.

Russell's reasoning for this view is explicitly outlined in his paper "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1911) and further elaborated in his other pre-1919 works, such as his *Theory of Knowledge* (1913) and *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912). His objective was to avoid Naïve Realism, Idealism, and Materialism while developing a theory of knowledge that effectively explains the ontological and epistemological connection between our sense-data and the external world, thereby addressing the RSP problem. Naïve realists claim that our mind has direct acquaintance with physical objects, like tables and chairs, positing a direct cognitive relation between our mind and the physical objects of physics and common sense. This direct connection,

according to them, ensures that our knowledge of these physical objects is accurate, reflecting their true nature. Materialism posits that only matter exists, and all phenomena, including consciousness and thought, result from interactions between material entities, denying the existence of a non-material reality. Idealists, such as Berkeley, argue that everything that exists is either a mind or the content of a mind, making all reality mind-dependent. To refute these theories, Russell offered his theory of knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. He challenged naïve realism by arguing that we have direct acquaintance only with our sense-data (and possibly with ourselves), not with external objects. While acknowledging the existence of the external world, Russell argued that our knowledge is grounded in the cognitive relation between subject and object of experience, challenging the materialistic view. He also rejected idealism by arguing for the nonmental nature of sense-data, which are the objects of our immediate knowledge. Based on his theory of knowledge by acquaintance, Russell distinguished between the subject and the object of immediate experiences and similarly rejected neutral monism, which denies such dualism. Neutral monism posits that neither mind nor matter is fundamental, but rather that both emerge from a neutral element. However, in "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1911), Russell specifically stated that "I wish to preserve the dualism of subject and object in my terminology, because this dualism seems to me a fundamental fact concerning cognition. Hence, I prefer the word *acquittance*, because it emphasizes the need of a subject which is acquainted."[15]

[15] Russell, Bertrand. "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, vol. 11 (1910-1911): 108–128, p. 109.

In this chapter, I will provide a detailed explanation of Russell's views briefly outlined above. The arguments presented underscore the fundamental significance of the cognitive notion of acquaintance in shaping Russell's perspectives on both epistemology and ontology. This chapter will focus on Russell's notion of acquaintance in relation to his method of analyzing knowledge, the RSP problem, and the theory of neutral monism. I will begin by elaborating on Russell's method of analysis, which is grounded in his notion of acquaintance, and explain his approach to analyzing our knowledge of the external world, which was inspired by Descartes' method of doubt and was a consistent feature of his work. Russell's continued analysis of our knowledge of the external world emphasizes the importance of the notion of acquaintance and presents his two famous analytic theories: the theory of Definite Descriptions, which will be explained in this chapter, and the theory of Logical Constructions, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Both theories play a substantial role in his epistemology and ontology. In the concluding section of this chapter, I will elaborate on how Russell's cognitive notion of acquaintance influenced his rejection of neutral monism. These arguments demonstrate that Russell's epistemic concept of acquaintance, in conjunction with his epistemological concerns, played a significant role, though not the sole determinative factor, in his dismissal of the theory of neutral monism before 1919.

For a proper understanding of the relation between Russell's epistemology and his theory of neutral monism, it is crucial to delve into his method of analysis. Russell's method of analysis, particularly his emphasis on the notion of acquaintance before 1919, serves as a foundational element in the continuous development of both his epistemological and ontological perspectives. This method is key to grasping his philosophical views and underscores the intricate connection between his ontological

theory of neutral monism and his epistemological stance. The significance of the notion of acquaintance becomes evident not only in Russell's theory of knowledge but also in his broader ontological theories, including the theory of definite descriptions and neutral monism. Russell maintained acquaintance as "a relation involving a subject's direct awareness of objects such as sense-data, 'without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths'."[16] This notion of direct awareness, without the need for inference or knowledge of truths, is fundamental to understanding Russell's approach to both epistemology and ontology before 1919. Furthermore, Russell's ontological theory of definite descriptions and his epistemological theory of logical constructions represent essential initial steps toward the development of his theory of neutral monism. However, it is crucial to note that Russell's notion of acquaintance serves as a pivotal factor in his initial rejection of neutral monism. The interplay between these elements illuminates the intricate journey of Russell's thought, emphasizing the interconnectedness of his epistemological and ontological explorations.

1-1) Russell's Method of Analysis Grounded in the Notion of Acquaintance

According to Paul Hager, Russell follows a unique method of philosophical inquiry, which is consistently applied throughout his works and should not be neglected in assessing his philosophical views.[17] Russell's method of analyzing knowledge is crucial for comprehending the evolution of his philosophical ideas. Furthermore, I believe grasping Russell's method of logical analysis underscores the intimate interplay between his

[16] Tully, Robert E. "Russell's Neutral Monism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell*, edited by Nicholas Griffin, 332–370. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 342.
[17] Griffin, Nicholas, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 310.

ontology and epistemology. This, in turn, provides additional support for my thesis, which is that as Russell refines his epistemological perspectives, he appropriately refines his ontological standpoint (and vice versa).

Russell claims that Descartes' method of doubt, which involved doubting everything until he could find something indubitable, led Descartes to the realization "that subjective things are the most certain".[18] According to Russell, Descartes acknowledged the impossibility of doubting the existence of his own thoughts or the act of thinking itself, even if doubts were entertained about the external world or the accuracy of sensory perceptions. This recognition, famously encapsulated in Descartes' statement "I think, therefore I am", emphasized the certainty of one's own thoughts and immediate experiences (subjective data), showcasing the certainty of the knower (the 'I'). Russell, while critical of Descartes' specific formulation and the conclusion that "I think" is fundamental, aligns with the acknowledgment of the certainty of subjective data. Russell expands this certainty not only to thoughts and feelings but also to our sense-data. In essence, he accepts that our immediate sensory experiences, such as visual perceptions or tactile sensations, possess a foundational certainty that withstands doubt. This shared acknowledgment of the certainty of subjective data forms a point of agreement between Russell and Descartes within the broader context of epistemological inquiry.

Russell argues that skeptics may harbor uncertainties regarding the existence of physical objects like a table, but they cannot dispute the reality of the subjective data that serves as evidence for the presence of the physical table. This data comprises objects with which we have direct acquaintance. Russell posits that by grounding our knowledge in the

[18] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 29.

immediate and undeniable presence of sense-data, we can construct a coherent and logically consistent depiction of the external world. Acquaintance is central to Russell's attempt to reconcile the relation between our immediate sensory experiences, our knowledge of the external world, and the nature of reality itself.[19] The exploration of the notion of acquaintance significantly influences Russell's stance on philosophical issues such as the RSP problem and neutral monism. Before 1919, this concept plays a pivotal role in his solution to the RSP problem and is instrumental in his initial rejection of neutral monism. This underscores the indispensable role of the notion of acquaintance in Russell's method of analysis during this period.

1-1-1) The Central Tenet of Russell's Philosophy: The Notion of Acquaintance

Russell contends that acquaintance is inherently irreducible, constituting a primitive notion fundamental to our cognition and knowledge, resisting further simplification in any analytical endeavor. Russell explains this notion by attributing to it a dual relation as a relation connecting the mind and the immediate object of knowledge. In Russell's framework, acquaintance is a twofold relation involving a 'subject,' typically a state of awareness within an individual's mind, and an 'object' in the grammatical sense, representing the entity being perceived or known. This cognitive connection is unmediated, requiring no shared nature or characteristics between the subject and the object involved.[20] The object can be physical or mental or abstract, particular or universal, material or non-material —essentially embodying the object in its generic logical sense.

[19] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 73.
[20] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*, edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth Blackwell. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1984, p. 1.

Irrespective of its specific characteristics, the object maintains a direct cognitive relation with the mind.

In essence, while some philosophers may debate the extent to which acquaintance is truly primitive, Russell takes it as primitive, asserting that it constitutes the most fundamental and irreducible form of knowledge. The argument for its primitiveness is grounded in its non-demonstrative nature, its immediacy, and its role as the starting point for our knowledge of the world. Acquaintance is characterized by its non-demonstrative nature, meaning that it doesn't rely on further proof or justification to be valid. It stands as a self-evident and foundational aspect of knowledge. The immediacy of acquaintance is highlighted, signifying that it involves direct and unmediated awareness without the need for intermediate steps or reasoning. Acquaintance provides an immediate connection between the subject (mind) and the object. It serves as the foundational element upon which our understanding and beliefs are built. This perspective underscores the essential and primitive role that acquaintance plays in shaping our cognitive relation with the external world. Peter Hylton contends that Russell's concept of acquaintance doesn't demand an exhaustive exposition or an in-depth discussion on how knowledge is acquired through it.[21] In Hylton's view, the importance of acquaintance lies more in its foundational role, as the starting point upon which knowledge and beliefs are constructed, rather than the detailed workings of knowledge acquisition through this concept. According to Russell, as outlined by Hylton, knowledge is inherently present through acquaintance, obviating the need for further logical analysis.[22] Russell's assertion

[21] Hylton, Peter. *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 111.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 111.

implies that acquaintance, being primitive in nature, serves as a foundational and immediate connection between the mind and an object. According to this view, once we acknowledge this basic relation, there is limited need for additional detailed examination or logical scrutiny. The emphasis lies on the fundamental nature of acquaintance as a direct and unmediated awareness that already encompasses a form of knowledge without requiring elaborate analysis.[23]

Russell contends that the unmediated nature of acquaintance removes any room for questioning the existence or reality of the objects we directly perceive. This is because, when we are acquainted with something, there is always an object present in our mind, and we cannot be acquainted with nothing. Even if we occasionally struggle to accurately describe that object when communicating it to others or even to ourselves, our awareness of its existence and our acquaintance with it remain unshakeable. In other words, what cannot be challenged is we are acquainted with something, and we are acquainted with what is immediately before our mind. Consequently, our knowledge of its existence remains impervious to reasonable doubt. For example, consider the experience of seeing a red apple. In this scenario, our direct acquaintance is with the sense-data of the red color, the round shape, and the apple's visual appearance. Russell contends that the unmediated nature of acquaintance means that there is no room for questioning the reality of what we are perceiving. Even if we find it challenging to articulate the precise details of what we perceive when describing them to others, our direct acquaintance with these sensory aspects remains steadfast. Hence, Russell adds that while we may not be able to explain what the notion of 'awareness' or 'acquaintance' means, because it is the

[23] Hylton, Peter. *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 111-112.

base of our immediate knowledge, upon which we can explain our immediate knowledge of things, the unmediated nature of acquaintance removes any doubt about the existence or reality of the objects we directly perceive.[24] In other words, while we might doubt various things, our direct acquaintance with what is immediately present to our minds provides a foundation of certain and self-evident knowledge.

1-1-2) Russell's Method of Analysis

Russell's inquiry into our knowledge of the external world is centered on two skeptical questions: whether it is possible for us to have knowledge of a physical world beyond what we immediately experience and whether having such knowledge can be rationally justified. Russell emphasizes the importance of commencing philosophical inquiries by scrutinizing our existing beliefs and empirical data. Additionally, he recognizes skepticism as a crucial tool in the philosophical exploration process. In contrast to Descartes' method, Russell employs a distinct method of doubt. He rejects Descartes' formulation of the problem of the external world but simultaneously upholds the validity of the method of doubt and his own interpretation of the external world problem. Russell does not hold that skepticism and the problem of the external world disappears with the rejection of Descartes' project. Instead, he endeavors to elucidate which use of the method of doubt is genuinely worth pursuing. While Descartes' method of doubt involves the systematic rejection of any belief susceptible to doubt, Russell's approach centers on identifying and eliminating unnecessary assumptions or premises within our beliefs, with the goal of bolstering the reliability of our knowledge. In the *First Meditation*, Descartes advocates for the imperative to demolish everything completely and start again right from

[24] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*, edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth Blackwell. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1984, p. 7.

the foundations "to construct something lasting and unshakeable in the sciences."[25] He encourages the doubt of all knowledge and the rejection of everything except the mind and its thoughts (the Cogito).[26] Descartes believed that only through doubting everything could he establish if there is a foundation of certain knowledge, serving as the basis for all other claims. Descartes extends his method of doubt to challenge even well-accepted beliefs, such as the existence of the external world and the reliability of sense perception, aiming to reach the most fundamental belief, i.e., the cogito.

In contrast, Russell's method of doubt is less radical in its objectives. Russell maintains that "all refutation must begin with some piece of knowledge which the disputants share; from blank doubt, no argument can begin."[27] He asserts that any argument or refutation beyond solipsism must start from a point of common knowledge shared by the participants and, attempting to initiate an argument from a position of total skepticism is not feasible and is self-defeating. In this case, if we were to deny the existence of an external world and other minds, we would have nothing left as a foundation for philosophical exploration. Because there is no deeper source of knowledge to evaluate them with. According to Russell, our belief in an independent external world is instinctive, found ready in ourselves as soon as we begin to reflect. This underscores his

[25] Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, First Meditation, (AT 1:17). The quoted material can be found in the seventeenth paragraph of the First Meditation, where Descartes explores the nature of doubt and the foundations of knowledge. This work is crucial for understanding Cartesian skepticism and its implications for epistemology. For further analysis and context, see: Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

[26] Descartes doubted everything that could be doubted, including sensory perceptions and mathematical truths, in his pursuit of an indubitable belief. However, he approached the idea of God differently. He posited that the very act of doubt presupposes a thinking subject (himself) and a standard of truth, which, according to Descartes, could only be grounded in a benevolent and non-deceptive God. In *Meditation IV*, he further contended that a supremely perfect and non-deceptive God would not permit a systematically deceived mind. Thus, the concept of God became essential for Descartes as the guarantor of the reliability of clear and distinct perceptions, providing the foundation for certain knowledge.

[27] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 234.

focus on epistemology rather than psychology. While these beliefs are not absolutely certain, they possess a special kind of assurance, since we have no other criterion or source to test their reliability. Thus, Russell's method of doubt allows for questioning beliefs but discourages their outright dismissal, especially when they align with more reliable data, such as sense-data, and coexist harmoniously without contradictions. Otherwise, we would be left with no shared reality or common ground from which to launch any meaningful inquiry. Russell claims that our common-sense beliefs, such as the existence of a common reality and other minds, serve as the starting points for philosophical investigations. Russell's point is not so much an assertion that these common-sense beliefs are unquestionably true, but rather a recognition that they provide a necessary and workable starting point for philosophical discourse and investigation. He assumes that there is no underlying or more fundamental source of knowledge against which to assess these beliefs, thus, we have to accept them as the starting point. Nonetheless, through internal scrutiny, i.e., within the network of our data,[28] we can assess these established beliefs and claims to knowledge, in comparison to each other, using our subjective data (such as sense-data) and logical reasoning.

Accordingly, Russell diverges from Descartes, who is renowned for subjecting everything to doubt except the thinking mind (the Cogito). In contrast, Russell's approach initiates with our established scientific knowledge and common beliefs, abstaining from an immediate demand for proof, since there is no deeper step to demonstrate their truth. Unlike Descartes, Russell does not seek to prove the truth of the belief in an independent

[28] In this context, "internal scrutiny" refers to a method of critical self-reflection and analysis involving the careful examination and evaluation of one's beliefs, thoughts, and cognitive processes within the limits of one's knowledge. This process aims to assess the internal consistency and validity of these beliefs, ensuring they align with one's experiences and logical reasoning. For further reading on this concept, see: *Critical Thinking: A Beginner's Guide* by Jennifer Wilson, which outlines techniques for evaluating one's cognitive processes.

external world; rather, he considers it an accepted premise, in our argument for justifying our knowledge of such a world. Russell contends that our belief in an independent external world is not initially derived through argumentation but, as he puts it, "[w]e find this belief ready in ourselves as soon as we begin to reflect: it is what may be called an instinctive belief."[29] This underscores his emphasis on epistemology, the study of knowledge, rather than psychology, which delves into the workings of the mind. That is, from an epistemological standpoint, these beliefs hold a distinct status as foundational and instinctive, providing a practical starting point for philosophical inquiry. In essence, Russell suggests that the belief in an external world is something we intuitively and immediately accept without the need for elaborate reasoning or psychological analysis. According to Josh Zaslow, "Russell's point is that once we have such beliefs in our inventory, they possess a certainty that other beliefs lack."[30] Zaslow's interpretation shows that, for Russell, such beliefs hold a special kind of assurance that sets them apart from our other beliefs that lack the immediacy and foundational status of common-sense beliefs; for instance, hypotheses or theories within the realm of science that are subject to constant revision and empirical testing. This assurance is not rooted in absolute certainty, as Descartes might have envisioned, but rather in the recognition that we lack compelling reasons to consider these beliefs false. Consequently, we accept them as a reasonable starting point and assume as our premise that there is no deeper level of knowledge to assess them with.

[29] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 37.
[30] Zaslow, Josh. "Russell and Dewey on the Problem of the External World." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies* 32 (2012): 55–68, p. 60.

Russell admits that the sceptics may have a point in doubting our instinctive beliefs, such as the existence of the external world, since, he says, "[n]o logical absurdity results from the hypothesis that the world consists of myself and my thoughts and feelings and sensations, and that everything else is mere fancy."[31] This means that it is possible to construct a coherent and self-consistent worldview in which everything outside of one's own consciousness is illusory or a product of imagination. Russell admits that our immediate experiences are the only things we can be certain of. These subjective experiences are undeniable, and the external world is inferred from them. Russell's implication from these points is that our belief in the external world is not indubitable. While he doesn't endorse solipsism (the belief that only one's own mind is sure to exist), he acknowledges that there is a certain level of uncertainty and skepticism that can be applied to our beliefs about the external world, since our knowledge of them is not immediate. However, he also admits that it is impossible to attain any philosophical insight if we adopt the position of complete skepticism and reject all knowledge at the outset. If one were to reject all knowledge, there would be no deeper base on which to build knowledge. Without these instinctive beliefs, there would be no deeper grounds for starting our investigation. Thus, we do not question the whole web of our knowledge, but we start by accepting instinctive beliefs as knowledge until we have reasons to doubt them, based on our other beliefs. Thes instinctive beliefs are the data that our account of the axioms or first principles is supposed to explain.

In his *Problems of Philosophy* [1912], Russell advocates the use of logical principles such as Occam's Razor and the principle of simplicity as guiding frameworks

[31] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 34.

in his scientific and philosophical inquiries. The principle of simplicity involves adopting the most straightforward explanations that can account for our empirical, sensory evidence. When confronted with multiple explanations or hypotheses, the simpler one should be preferred. Although closely related and often used interchangeably, Occam's Razor and the principle of simplicity are not strictly identical. Occam's Razor can be summarized as "entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity." This principle advises against introducing unnecessary entities when seeking an explanation. In contrast, the principle of simplicity is a broader concept that includes Occam's Razor as one of its expressions. It encourages the selection of the simplest theories or explanations that require fewer assumptions or basic entities to account for the available data. An explanation involving fewer elements is often clearer and, in the absence of compelling reasons to the contrary, should be preferred. Russell suggests that when faced with competing hypotheses, it is more reasonable to choose simpler theories or explanations that require fewer assumptions to explain our data. However, a potential challenge arises when considering the assumption of a physical world outside our mind. According to Occam's Razor, assuming the existence of the physical world might seem to introduce unnecessary entities. It may appear simpler to imagine that everything is of one kind, namely, mental. This perspective questions whether positing a physical world is consistent with the principle of simplicity, as it seemingly adds complexity rather than reducing it.

Russell argues to the contrary, stating that assuming everything is merely a product of our imagination would complicate, if not render impossible, the explanation of events occurring in the world and in our experiences. By positing a physical world, we can provide more coherent and comprehensive explanations for the consistency and

predictability of our sensory experiences. In his *Problems of Philosophy* (1912), Russell supports the belief in physical objects, arguing that this belief is justified because it helps form a coherent theory of the world. He illustrates this with an example of seeing a cat in one part of a room and then seeing what appears to be the same cat in another part of the room. If we only consider our immediate sensory experiences, we only know about the two separate appearances of the cat and perhaps their order and similarity, which is more debatable. Russell argues that relying solely on immediate sensory awareness leaves the occurrence, content, and sequence of these appearances unexplained. Each appearance is simply a unique combination of colors and shapes without anything external to account for them. However, if we hypothesize that there are objects other than ourselves and our sense-data that exist independently of our perception, we can explain the occurrence, content, and sequence of the appearances by attributing them to the continuous movement of a cat in the interval between the two sightings. This hypothesis allows the nature and order of the appearances to be understood as consistent effects of a physical object interacting with our sensory organs. Russell next considers the appearance of a cat that looks full followed by an appearance of what seems to be the same cat looking hungry. If we limit ourselves to the objects of immediate awareness, our knowledge is confined to certain "changes of patches of color" and various other sensations —each of which is "as incapable of hunger as a triangle is of playing football".[32] With nothing beyond the sensations to refer to, the occurrence, content, and order of these appearances lack any coherent explanation. However, if we posit the existence of physical objects, the flux of sensations can be attributed to the behavior of an enduring cat. Furthermore, the cat's

[32] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 36.

hunger behavior can be explained as the result of its hunger —the gradual emergence of a discrepancy between the physical demands on the cat's activity and the supply of energy available to it. As before, otherwise unaccountable sensations are understood as regular effects of broader physical processes, both perceivable and unperceivable

For example, considering the existence of a physical cat can provide a plausible explanation for the cat's hunger and its movements in space.[33] When observing a cat and its behavior, we typically explain its actions based on the assumption that there is an actual, physical cat in the external world. For instance, if we have the appearances of a cat displaying signs of hunger and moving around in space, we explain these appearances by referring to the existence of an external, physical cat (a real cat) that causes these appearances. This explanatory approach relies on the premise that the cat's hunger is caused by physiological processes within its body, and its movements in space are determined by its sensory perception and motor abilities. According to this perspective, there is a causal relation between the cat's internal state and the external environment, with the external world providing the context for understanding these causal relations. While it may appear more straightforward to assert that we only have appearances without invoking the existence of the physical cat —treating them as two distinct entities, one mental and the other non-mental— Russell argues that such a position could lead to solipsism or radical skepticism. These outcomes are considered unsuitable for philosophical discussions that presuppose the existence of other minds as the starting point. Conversely, recognizing the existence of a physical and hungry cat simplifies the explanation of the observed manifestations of the cat's hunger and its corresponding

[33] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 35.

behavior. This acknowledgment entails positing that a real, physical cat can genuinely experience hunger. Russell argues that, when elucidating a phenomenon, the preference should be for the simplest explanation that accounts for all the observed facts. He concedes that it is conceivable to entertain the idea that life is merely an extended dream, but he believes that "there is no reason to prefer it to the common-sense view, according to which other people and things do really exist."[34]

In his final illustration, Russell considers a face-to-face conversation. As in the previous examples, denying that sensations are manifestations of physical things limits our knowledge to the unfathomable occurrences of the noises and changes in color and shape that we immediately perceive. Conversely, under the hypothesis of physical objects, visual sensations are attributed to the movements of the lips and facial muscles of another person, while the noises heard are linked to the unperceived workings of the speaker's trachea, larynx, and vocal cords. This speech behavior is further explained as the manifestation of an underlying intention to communicate thoughts residing in a mind we do not perceive. Russell emphasizes the difficulty in supposing that what we hear or read is not an expression of thought, as it would be if we produced the same sounds.[35] Furthermore, engaging in philosophy itself becomes impossible and nonsensical if we do not accept the existence of a reality, including other minds, external to our own.[36] Rejecting our common-sense and scientific beliefs leaves us with nothing to begin with, as our instinctive beliefs serve as the starting point for our analyses. Without them, we lack a basis for inquiry. Therefore, Russell's explanation is more favorable than assuming

[34] *Ibid*., p. 191.
[35] *Ibid*., P. 37.
[36] *Ibid*., P. 37.

that the cat is merely a mental image existing solely in our minds, where the existence of an external world or other minds is denied. It further avoids unnecessary complexities produced by postulating the existence of mental entities or divine ideas to account for the cat's existence.

While positing physical things and other minds alongside appearances complicates our basic ontology, Russell argues that it results in a much simpler theory of the world. Instead of treating each appearance as an isolated and inexplicable occurrence, acknowledging physical things and other minds offers the prospect of unifying first-person knowledge of experience with general processes uncovered in physiology and physics, as well as with knowledge of other minds revealed in psychology. Given the explanatory power of this approach, Russell believes that "every principle of simplicity urges us to adopt the natural view, that there really are objects other than ourselves and our sense-data which have an existence not dependent upon our perceiving them."[37] In a philosophical discussion grounded on the premises that there are other minds for discourse and there is an external reality independent of our minds, it is simpler to conceive of this reality as non-mental. Assuming the existence of a physical cat aligns with empirical consistency and is more congruent with our everyday experiences. This perspective is preferable to positing that the cat is merely a mental image in the mind of God, as suggested by idealists like Berkeley. Berkeley posits that a cat exists outside our mind, but it is a mental cat or an idea in the mind of God. However, idealists cannot sidestep the complexity of explaining how and why a mental and non-material entity (or an idea in the mind of God) could experience hunger or change its position in space —

[37] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 37.

matters inherently physical. Even idealists find themselves compelled to account for such phenomena by relying on additional basic beliefs, such as the existence of a God or the will of God. In essence, Russell's assumption not only provides simpler and more intuitive explanations but also aligns with our common-sense and scientific knowledge, making it a more effective way to make sense of the complexities of our experiences.

In his *Problems of Philosophy*, Russell explains the most important reason behind the skepticism regarding the existence of an independent external world. He argues that our common sense, which tends to perceive our sense-data as actual physical objects in the external world, akin to the perspective of Naïve Realists, has led to uncertainties about the existence of a distinct, independent physical world. According to common sense belief, our sense-data are considered the real properties of the external objects. But, if our sense-data are the properties of the objects, any changes in our sense-data would imply changes in the object, while the object is considered to be fairly permanent. So, the crux of the matter lies in the problem of perceptual variation, where changes in our sense-data do not imply changes in the external objects themselves. If we believe that there is an independent external world, then there exists a single, shared reality perceived by everyone, which remains constant and unaffected by individual beliefs or subjective experiences. Naïve Realism asserts that when we see, hear, touch, or otherwise sense an object, we are perceiving the object as it truly is; it is perceived by acquaintance. However, challenges to this commonsense belief of naïve realism arise when we encounter situations where our sense-data change while we also maintain the belief that the object remains the same; we cannot only go with the subjective appearances if we believe that there is an external physical world. This discrepancy questions naïve realism. Russell asserts that to explain these changing appearances, while believing in an independent

external reality, it is necessary to recognize the distinction between sense-data and external objects. Russell thinks that this realization reinforces our instinctive belief in the existence of the external world, as there is no compelling reason to reject it.[38] That is, this distinction "leaves undiminished our instinctive belief that there are objects *corresponding* to our sense-data,"[39] and it doesn't pose any challenges to our system of beliefs; rather, it simplifies our account of experiences. Therefore, there is no reason to reject our instinctive belief in the existence of an external world that "is not wholly dependent for its existence upon our continuing to perceive it";[40] even though we cannot prove it. All knowledge, Russell says, "must be built up upon our instinctive beliefs, and if these are rejected, nothing is left."[41]

Russell deems it imperative to maintain our instinctive beliefs, albeit with a hint of skepticism that their truth is not guaranteed, , and to strive to provide justifications for holding them.[42] While Russell acknowledges the potential for error in any belief that is not known directly, including our instinctive ones, that initiates our inquiries, he emphasizes the importance of not dismissing a belief without a reasonable basis; he simply seeks a justification for such beliefs. Russell says, "among our instinctive beliefs some are much stronger than others, while many have, by habit and association, become entangled with other beliefs, not really instinctive,"[43] and philosophy "should show us the hierarchy of our instinctive beliefs, beginning with those we hold most strongly."[44] Taking these factors into account, Russell, in his *Problems of Philosophy*, concludes that

[38] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 38.
[39] *Ibid*., p. 38.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 38.
[41] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[42] *Ibid*., pp. 38-40.
[43] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[44] *Ibid*., p. 39.

philosophers cannot provide absolute certainty regarding our instinctive beliefs since these beliefs are not known through acquaintance, and the certainty of the existence of nothing beyond our immediate experiences is acknowledged. As we possess these beliefs and lack an alternative starting point, we are justified in holding them unless there is a reason to the contrary. Consequently, Russell holds that philosophers should prioritize the organization and systematization of collective knowledge over pursuing unattainable absolute certainty concerning the external world. This highlights Russell's preference for methodology, specifically logical analysis, over specific philosophical assumptions. In other words, Russell favors a systematic and analytical method to navigate philosophical questions, prioritizing the application of logic and reason over dogmatic or predetermined beliefs. Acknowledging the unattainability of absolute certainty in philosophical inquiries about the external world, Russell directs his focus toward justifying our instinctive beliefs, which form the starting point of our knowledge. He seeks to uncover the bedrock of our knowledge through analysis, scrutinizing intuitively held beliefs encompassing both common-sense and scientific notions about the external world. This method aims to ensure that the beliefs are defensible within the framework of sound reasoning and empirical verification.

Russell's approach involves a thorough examination of these beliefs, considering their coherence (internal consistency), logical consistency (alignment with logical principles), and empirical support (corroboration by sensory experiences and evidence). For instance, if a belief entails two conflicting ideas, it may lack internal coherence. Furthermore, if a belief contradicts well-established scientific evidence, it may lack empirical support. To conduct this examination, Russell introduces two crucial theories that analyze the content of beliefs in terms of objects of acquaintance. The first of these

theories is the theory of Definite Descriptions, introduced by Russell in 1905. This theory seeks to elucidate how denoting phrases function, addressing questions such as how we can possess knowledge about things with which we are not acquainted and how expressions like 'the present King of England' retain meaning in a sentence, despite our lack of acquaintance with the referred entity. Russell's theory of definite descriptions posits that a denoting phrase, like 'the present King of England', doesn't directly refer to a particular person and is meaningless in isolation. Instead, it must be understood within a sentence and in terms of the component parts of the proposition. Each proposition may be ultimately analyzed into those made up of terms with which we are acquainted, such as our sense-data. Russell's theory of definite descriptions can be seen as the initial step toward his subsequent logical method, introduced in 1914, namely, the method of Logical Construction. The theory of logical construction seeks to demonstrate how our comprehension of the external world can be systematically built, starting with the most fundamental elements of knowledge. In this method, it is proposed that the foundational building blocks of the external world need not necessarily be individuals like 'the present King of England' or physical objects like tables and atoms. In other words, affirming the actual existence of these entities in the realm of ontology is not obligatory to justify our system of beliefs, although we believe that England has a king.

According to this theory, the fundamental elements of the physical world are entities with which we can have direct acquaintance, such as sense-data. Russell's theory of logical construction involves "the *substitution of a symbol* whose denotation is given in sense-experience or is continuous with and similar to something given in sense-experience for a symbol whose denotation is neither given in sense-experience, nor is similar to and continuous with something given in sense-experience but is postulated as

an unempirical, inferred entity."[45] This approach enables the construction of physical objects that exist external to our sense-data and are not immediately accessible through sensory experience. Through this method, we can provide justification for our knowledge of these objects by grounding it in our sense-data. Both of Russell's theories signify the importance of the notion of acquaintance and sense-data within his epistemological and ontological frameworks. The theory of definite descriptions and the theory of logical construction, foundational to his logical analyses, reveal that our understanding of the external world is intricately linked to the concept of acquaintance. Well before his articulation of the theory of definite descriptions in "On Denoting", Russell had already incorporated the cognitive notion of acquaintance as a central element of his philosophy. Subsequently, Russell grounds his theory of knowledge in this concept, asserting that acquaintance is essential for the formulation of meaningful thoughts and propositions. Given the pivotal role of the cognitive notion of acquaintance in Russell's epistemological and ontological views and theories, he was hesitant to embrace the theory of neutral monism, which denies such a cognitive notion. This reluctance is identified as one of the main reasons for Russell's rejection of neutral monism.

I will now delve into Russell's theory of definite descriptions, deferring the discussion of his theory of logical construction to the next chapter, where he introduces it as a novel solution to the RSP problem. The ensuing discussion will emphasize that Russell's ontological theory of definite descriptions is deeply intertwined with his epistemic concept of acquaintance and holds "very great importance, not only in logic and

[45] Schilpp, P. A., ed. *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, The Library of Living Philosophers Volume 5. Evanston, IL: The Library of Living Philosophers, Inc., 1946, pp. 65–66.

mathematics, but also in theory of knowledge."[46] Russell's theory of definite descriptions is instrumental in addressing concerns about our knowledge of the external world, illustrating that our knowledge is justified by immediate data, such as sense-data, which serves as the foundation of Russell's theory of knowledge. The subsequent discussion will highlight the significance of the cognitive notion of acquaintance in Russell's ontology, explaining his reluctance to accept other theories, like the theory of neutral monism, which contradict it. Russell's theory of definite descriptions as an ontological theory in line with his epistemic theory of logical construction is compatible with the theory of neutral monism, however, Russell's adherence to the cognitive notion of acquaintance as a justified explanation for his theory of meaning in 1905 prevented him from accepting neutral monism.

1-1-3) Theory of Definite Descriptions within the Framework of Acquaintance

In "On Denoting", Russell aims to solve the problem concerning the meaning of denoting phrases. He accomplishes this by initially distinguishing between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about*.[47] Expanding upon this epistemological differentiation, Russell introduces his ontological theory of definite descriptions as a resolution to the issue of denoting phrases.[48] The theory of definite descriptions elucidates how we can comprehend propositions that hold true for things we are not acquainted with, despite acquaintance forming the foundation of meaning. It shows that, in addition to knowledge by acquaintance, there exists another form of knowledge known as knowledge by

[46] Russell, Bertrand. "On Denoting." *Mind*, New Series, vol. 114, no. 456 (October 2005): 873–887, p. 873.
[47] Russell, 1905, "On Denoting", p. 873.
[48] *Ibid*., p. 873. At the opening of his article, Russell explains his concept of "denoting phrases," stating: "By a 'denoting phrase' I mean a phrase such as any one of the following: a man, some man, any man, every man, all men, the present King of England, the present King of France, the Centre of mass of the Solar System at the first instant of the twentieth century, the revolution of the earth round the sun, the revolution of the sun round the earth. Thus, a phrase is denoting solely in virtue of its form."

description. This type of knowledge enables us to make claims about objects without direct acquaintance and to justify these assertions without contradictions. Russell's emphasis on the distinction between acquaintance and knowledge about, as presented in his "On Denoting", provides a clear insight into the crucial role of his epistemic notion of acquaintance. Acquaintance serves a dual purpose —it fixes meaning and enables immediate grasp of knowledge. Thus, acquaintance serves as the bedrock for both meaning and knowledge.

The 'problem of denoting phrases' revolves around the intricate task of grasping the propositions conveyed by language, essentially delving into the meanings embedded within linguistic expressions. Take, for instance, the use of phrases like 'the present King of France' in a sentence such as 'the present King of France is bald.' The crux of the matter lies in unraveling how such a sentence can hold meaning when, in reality, there is no present King of France. Ontology, which delves into the nature of existence and the various types of entities in existence, grapples with the challenge of denotation as it investigates what exists or what language signifies in the external world. Russell posits that the problem of denotation is equally pivotal in the realm of knowledge, specifically in epistemology. Within his theory of knowledge, Russell introduces a critical distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* something, a differentiation with both epistemological and ontological implications. According to this epistemological classification, acquaintance pertains to things we directly perceive, while knowledge about involves our understanding of things through descriptions, wherein we ascertain the truth of these descriptions.[49] Russell's key insight lies in the possibility of having

[49] *Ibid*., p. 873.

knowledge about something even without direct acquaintance with it. In the example of 'the center of mass of the Solar System is too far', one can make claims and reason about it, despite lacking direct acquaintance with this point in space.[50] The problem is how can we grasp meaningful propositions without acquaintance with what appears to be their constituents, given Russell's assertion that sentences derive meaning from our acquaintance with the constituting parts of their propositions.

Russell further contends that names and denoting phrases, such as 'unicorns' or 'the present King of France,' lack any reference. If these expressions lack meaning, there is no corresponding real entity, as the meaning of an expression is grounded in its denotation in reality. This perspective results in an ontology populated by nonreal entities. Moreover, statements like 'Unicorns do not exist' or 'The present King of France is bald' express meaningful propositions that can be either true or false, yet they give rise to inherent contradictions. In the former example, it appears as if we are indicating something while simultaneously asserting its nonexistence, raising the question of what exactly we are pointing to. Additionally, the sentence seems to be about unicorns, yet unicorns are not real, rendering it a meaningless word that complicates the overall sentence's meaning. The challenge lies in comprehending how we understand the proposition expressed by the sentence when a part of it is devoid of meaning. Similarly, in the latter example, 'the present King of France' presents a paradox since it fails to denote anything —there is no King of France in the external world. This contradiction emerges as the statement appears to be about someone who, in reality, does not exist. These issues highlight the need for a meticulous and thoughtful analysis. In "On

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 873.

Denoting", Russell challenges the notion that every denoting phrase has a corresponding entity as its meaning, disputing this claim and emphasizing the crucial distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about*. According to Russell, this epistemic division aligns with the ontological difference "between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases."[51] He contends that some things are known directly through acquaintance, such as our sense-data, while others are not and known indirectly through descriptions, such as the center of mass of the Solar System. Russell introduces his theory of definite descriptions, asserting that denoting phrases do not inherently denote anything and lack meaning in isolation. Instead, he proposes treating denoting phrases as descriptions that require analysis. This analysis involves dissecting the proposition expressed by the sentence in which the denoting phrase occurs into its constituent components, which are the proper constituents of the expressed proposition —the meanings of the words with which we are *acquainted*.

According to Russell's theory of definite descriptions, statements about the present King of France can be understood and possess meaning, even though these statements are false due to the absence of an individual meeting the conditions for being the present King of France. If this statement is deemed meaningful, it must correspond to something existing in the external world. However, given that France operates as a republic with a President as the head of state and lacks a monarchy, there is no present King of France. Thus, the question arises: How can a meaningful statement be made about a non-existent current King? Russell, through his theory of definite descriptions, demonstrates that we can interpret the statement about the present King of France as a false proposition

[51] *Ibid*., pp. 875,876.

without construing the phrase ‘the present King of France’ as a predication of a non-existent French monarch. By analyzing the proposition ‘the present King of France is bald’ into its real constituents, it becomes evident that no one satisfies the criteria for being the present King of France. The analysis of the ‘The present King of France is bald’ can be expressed as follows: ‘There is only one x which has the property of being the present King of France, and if there is a y who has the property of being the present King of France, y is identical with x, and x is bald; the formula would be: $\exists x[(Kx \ \& \ (\forall y(Ky \rightarrow x=y) \ \& \ Bx]$. As no entity exists to fulfill this formula and render it true when substituted for x, the statement ‘The present King of France is bald’ is false. A debate arose as to whether statements about the present King of France, a non-existing character, are false, as in Russell’s analysis, or neither true nor false. Nevertheless, the statement is meaningful and not nonsensical. It should be noted that merely understanding the constituents of a proposition does not ensure knowledge of its truth or falsehood. Further examination, such as knowledge of historical facts or the current political situation, is necessary to determine the falsity of the proposition. In the case of the statement about the present King of France, the absence of a current monarchy in France serves as evidence that the proposition does not accurately reflect reality.

Russell subsequently claims that all singular terms, akin to definite descriptions (e.g., ‘the so-and-so’), lack meaning in isolation, while the statements in which they are employed do express meaning. He contends that even proper names function as descriptions, and the thought conveyed by a person using a proper name can only be expressed explicitly through a replacement with a description. Russell uses the example

of Bismarck to illustrate his point about descriptions and knowledge.[52] When a person who knew Bismarck directly makes a judgment about him, they may have direct acquaintance with Bismarck himself, they rely on knowledge by acquaintance with certain sense-data connected to Bismarck's body and behaviour. In this case, the proper name 'Bismarck' has its direct use as standing for a specific object without needing a description. However, when someone who did not have direct acquaintance with Bismarck makes a judgment about him, they rely on descriptions or knowledge connected to the name 'Bismarck'. In this scenario, Bismarck is known by description, and the specific description in the person's mind may vary. For instance, they might think of Bismarck as "the first Chancellor of the German Empire". Russell's key point is that, when making statements about individuals known by description, individuals often intend to make statements about the actual thing described, as if they could make judgments the way the person directly acquainted with Bismarck could. However, lacking direct acquaintance, they rely on descriptions that involve universals, and their judgments are often grounded in knowledge obtained through various sources, like historical knowledge or testimonies. Russell's example shows the hierarchy of knowledge, ranging from direct acquaintance with individuals to knowledge through descriptions and universals. When someone lacks direct acquaintance with an individual, as is often the case with historical figures like Bismarck, knowledge is obtained through descriptions. Descriptions involve sense-data that are connected (rightly, in Russell's view) with the individual's body and behavoiur. In the absence of direct acquaintance, individuals know the person by description, forming mental images or concepts based on available information.

[52] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, pp. 86-92.

When making a statement about Julius Caesar, for instance, it becomes evident that Julius Caesar himself is not directly present in our thoughts since we are not personally acquainted with him, nor we have appearances of him. Instead, we hold in mind a description of him, such as he is ""the founder of the Roman Empire," or perhaps merely "the man whose name was Julius Caesar"."[53] These descriptions serve as the foundation of our assertions about Julius Caesar, even when we lack direct acquaintance with the historical figure. Russell's analytical approach suggests that our statements about Julius Caesar imply something that involves a description of him, and this description is entirely constructed from particulars and universals with which we are acquainted.[54] In essence, although we lack direct acquaintance with Julius Caesar, we can understand the propositions expressed by sentences in which 'Julius Caesar' appears. It is possible based on historical facts that we know of him and based on our direct acquaintance with the constituting parts of these facts. Our acquaintance with these facts renders our statements and judgments about Julius Caesar meaningful, even in the absence of direct acquaintance with the man himself. Russell's argument emphasizes that even in knowledge by description, there is a foundational role played by acquaintance with sense-data. Sense-data, such as historical facts or visual images associated with the individual, serve as the starting point for forming descriptions and mental representations. Ultimately, knowledge about individuals, whether through direct acquaintance or description, involves a connection to sense-data. Acquaintance with sense-data forms the basis for our understanding, even when we resort to descriptions and concepts in the absence of direct perceptual acquaintance. Russell's epistemic notion of acquaintance has

[53] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, pp. 91-92.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 87.

been a prominent element in his works since his departure from idealism, especially evident from 1903 onwards in his *Foundations of Logic: 1903–1905*. This notion finds its most articulate expression within the framework of his theory of meaning and in the context of understanding propositions. Russell's theory of meaning states that "*Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted*."[55] In accordance with this theory, the bedrock of our knowledge is Acquaintance.

Ayer's ontological interpretation of Russell's definite descriptions theory (1971, Chapter 2: The Theory of Descriptions) emphasizes its role in avoiding metaphysical commitments to non-existent entities. However, this overlooks Russell's explicit epistemological aim: to ground meaning in acquaintance with sense-data. For Russell, the theory was not merely a logical tool for ontological hygiene but a response to the RSP problem's demand for certainty. As he states in his "On Denoting", "All thinking has to start from acquaintance"[56] —a claim that subordinates ontological parsimony to epistemic foundations. Where Ayer sees a metaphysical gambit, I argue Russell's theory reflects his deeper epistemological project: securing knowledge of the external world through primitive cognitive relations.

Russell's theory of definite descriptions holds both ontological and epistemological significance, preventing contradictions that may arise from treating denoting phrases as referring to real entities without introducing non-beings into our ontology. Additionally, it introduces two types of knowledge. For instance, in the case of a denoting phrase like 'The present King of France', we can comprehend the meaning of the sentence in which

[55] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, P. 91.
[56] Russell, 1905, "On Denoting", p. 874.

this phrase occurs without being acquainted with an actual individual who is the present King of France. This explanation clarifies how we can understand the claim, demonstrating its ontological relevance. Similarly, understanding a sentence like 'The present King of France is bald' does not imply direct acquaintance with such a king —an ontological point. Instead, the proposition expressed by the sentence containing the phrase must be analyzed into its real constituents, known through immediate experiences. Russell's 1905 paper highlights an epistemological aspect within the context of meaning, emphasizing the "distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about*"[57] and emphasizing the significance of the epistemic notion of acquaintance in our understanding and knowledge. His theory of definite descriptions is in line with his theory of meaning which asserts that "[w]e must attach some meaning to the words we use, if we are to speak significantly and not utter mere noise; and the meaning we attach to our words must be something with which we are acquainted."[58] This is consistent with his overarching epistemological stance, where knowledge is grounded in direct acquaintance with sense-data and the constituents of propositions. Russell emphasizes that forming judgments or entertaining suppositions is inconceivable without acquaintance with meanings, as, according to his theory of meaning, the genuine constituents of a proposition are the entities with which we are acquainted. The challenge with neutral monism lies in Russell's conviction that the notion of acquaintance is inherently cognitive —a cognitive relation between a subject and an object of acquaintance in our immediate experiences, classifying our acquaintance with sense-data as knowledge by acquaintance.

[57] Russell, 1905, "On Denoting", p. 873.
[58] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, p. 91.

This perspective positioned him as a dualist, precluding acceptance of any form of monism.

In essence, Russell asserts that our acquaintance with things takes precedence over their description, aiming to validate our knowledge by description through its intrinsic link to our knowledge by acquaintance of sense-data. Acquaintance is associated with our direct presentations of things, such as perceiving a specific color, while 'knowledge about' involves entities accessible solely through denoting phrases or descriptions. By elucidating this distinction, Russell introduces two discernible forms of knowledge: Knowledge by acquaintance, rooted in direct sensory awareness, and knowledge about, acquired indirectly through descriptions. His 1905 paper marks his initial endeavor to address the problem of our knowledge of things, laying the groundwork for his subsequent exploration of this distinction as a solution to the RSP problem, which became a focal point in his philosophical inquiries from 1910 onward. Russell says,

> … in the years from 1910 to 1914, I became interested, not only in what the physical world is, but in how we come to know it. The relation of perception to physics [RSP] is a problem which has occupied me intermittently ever since that time. It is in relation to this problem that my philosophy underwent its last substantial change.[59]

Since 1910, one of Russell's primary objectives has been to devise a solution to the epistemological problem of the relation between our sense-data and the external world. His goal is to justify our knowledge of the external world by establishing a foundation in our immediate acquaintance with sense-data. In his *Problems of Philosophy*, Russell delves into the distinction between these two kinds of knowledge within his theory of knowledge, aiming to clarify the nature of knowledge of things, especially our

[59] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959, p. 13.

comprehension of external physical objects. He believes that distinguishing between these two kinds of knowledge offers sufficient justification for our knowledge of the external world.

1-2) Russell's 1912 Endeavor to Address the RSP Problem

Since 1910, Russell was trying to ground knowledge of the world in immediate experience to secure the reliability of our knowledge of the physical world. His first attempt is his theory of 'knowledge by acquaintance' of things, where sense-data serves as the object of such knowledge. In the *Problems of Philosophy* [1912], he refers to the direct cognitive relation between the subject and sense-data as 'knowledge by acquaintance' of things. The external world of common sense and physics is then inferred from these sense-data. In the opening of his *Problems of Philosophy* [1912], Russell poses a fundamental question central to epistemology: "Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it?"[60] With this query, Russell delves into the search for a highly reliable form of knowledge that can serve as a foundation for justifying our knowledge of the physical world, including our deeply ingrained belief in the existence of an external physical world. In his attempt to answer this question, Russell starts with our immediate data —our instinctive beliefs— as the groundwork for his account of justification. He contends that, in the pursuit of certainty, it is better to begin with our current experiences, as knowledge to some extent emanates from them.[61]

Russell observes that our perception of an object, like a table, is subject to variations influenced by factors such as lighting, angle, or perspective. This variability highlights a distinction between what we perceive (sense-data) and the objective existence

[60] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 9.
[61] *Ibid*., pp. 10-11.

of the physical object (the table). Sense-data encompass immediate sensory experiences, such as visual or tactile sensations, while the physical object exists independently of our perception. The crux of Russell's argument resides in the non-identity between the dynamically changing sensed objects (our transient sense-datum) and the unchanging, fixed physical object (the table), thereby establishing that sense-data and the ordinary physical objects cannot be the same, which means that there is an ontological distinction. This ontological distinction serves as the foundation for the philosophical dichotomy between 'appearance' and 'reality'. 'Appearance' encapsulates how things subjectively appear to us, since the way things appear is shaped by the observer's specific conditions, such as lighting, angle, or perspective. Each person's perception of the table may vary based on these subjective factors, resulting in a view that is not universally objective but rather influenced by individual subjectivity. Conversely, reality pertains to the intrinsic nature of the object, irrespective of how it appears to us. Russell contends that this ontological distinction implies that our senses don't directly unveil the precise properties of the physical table. Instead, our sensory experiences serve as indicators or signs of the existence of the physical object. In essence, our perceptions are not direct replicas of the actual properties but rather cues pointing to the reality that lies beyond our immediate sensory experiences. It means that two kinds of entities are in play: the sense-data of the table (which are the appearances of the table) and the physical table itself.

Russell argues that due to this distinction, substituting the observed shape or colour of an object with its actual shape or colour is not as straightforward as the substitutions allowed by definite descriptions or proper names. For instance, in the case of proper names, replacing Julius Caesar with an accurate description, such as 'the founder of the Roman Empire', maintains the truth value of propositions. This is because

we know some historical facts that validate the accuracy of the description as belonging to Julius Caesar, or we know that it is a true description of Julius Caesar. Thus, replacing Julius Caesar with this description does not alter the truth or falsehood of our statement. However, with observed shapes or colors, such straightforward substitutions are not applicable, as these sensory qualities do not guarantee the preservation of truth or falsehood in statements. In the case of the table, for example, we cannot always replace 'the table' with the properties that we observe. Measurements and our scientific knowledge tell us that the table is round, yet, depending on our specific vantage point, it might visually appear oval. Consequently, if we perceive the table's shape as oval, we cannot merely replace oval with the actual round shape and claim that 'the table is oval'. This claim does not accurately describe the table, even though we see the oval shape. According to this analysis, Russell concludes that naïve realism is untenable, as "it becomes evident that the real table, if there is one, is not the same as what we immediately experience by sight or touch or hearing."[62] Naïve realism is a perspective that mistakenly equates the appearances of the table (the objects we perceive) with the table itself, overlooking their ontological difference. It is essential to note that in this analysis, Russell presupposes the presence of an external enduring object (the table) that exists independently of our sense-data.

The distinction between appearances and reality presents both ontological and epistemological challenges, raising fundamental questions about the nature of the external world. When the external world doesn't align with our perceptual experiences, the quest to discern its true nature and the justification of our knowledge become

[62] *Ibid*., p. 16.

paramount. Russell's exploration delves into the relation between appearance and reality, grappling with how we can validate our knowledge of the external world, given that our access is mediated through our sense-data.[63] Russell posits that we can justify and explain our knowledge of the external world by embracing the theory of inference as a simpler and more effective explanatory framework. According to this theory, we infer the existence of physical objects from our sense-data. A crucial dichotomy emerges in Russell's framework: direct knowledge, or acquaintance, pertains to our comprehension of appearances, primarily in the form of sense-data. On the other hand, indirect or inferential knowledge involves our understanding of physical objects, such as a table. Physical objects aren't directly accessible through our senses; instead, their existence and attributes are inferred from sensory data. In essence, our senses provide us with appearances, and our knowledge of the physical objects is only obtained by an inference. In his *Problems of Philosophy [192]*, Russell contends that the theory of inference serves as the justification for statements about physical objects in the external world. This theory posits that our knowledge of the external world can be elucidated in terms of inferential knowledge. Russell further clarifies that although we may harbor doubts about the existence of the table, the existence of the sensory data that gives rise to our perception of the table remains unquestioned, since our knowledge of them is immediate and unmediated.[64] As a result, he emphasizes that our theory of knowledge about the external world must be founded on sense-data, considering them the most certain data available to us.

[63] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[64] *Ibid*., p. 29.

In rejecting naïve realism, Russell challenges the misconception that equates sense-data directly with the physical objects of the external world. Nonetheless, he also dismisses idealism, which posits that sense-data are mental entities, hence implying that everything real is mental. In his *Problems of Philosophy*, Russell interprets idealism, as exemplified by Bishop Berkeley, as a belief that everything, especially what can be known to exist, is mind dependent.[65] Russell argues that the grounds for advocating the *ontological* theory of idealism often originate from their *theory of knowledge*, particularly from examining the conditions necessary for acquiring knowledge.[66] Idealists argue that knowledge is rooted in sense-data, using these immediate experiences as the foundation for their epistemological framework. Starting with the undeniable certainty of sense-data, which they consider mental, idealists then infer an ontological view, claiming that the external world is fundamentally mental, though not dependent on our mind. While Berkeley acknowledges the existence of an external world, he posits that it is a mental image in the mind of God, independent of individual minds.[67] Thus, Berkeley does not deny that sense-data may indicate the existence of something independent of us but argues that this something is inherently mental. He contends that whatever exists is either a mind or the ideas of a mind.

Russell acknowledges Berkeley's accurate claim that sense-data depends on our senses and the act of perception, involving seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, or tasting. Colors, sounds, and textures that we immediately perceive are our subjective data. Yet, he disagrees with Berkeley's subsequent assertion that being known necessitates being 'in' a

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 58.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 60.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

mind, and thus, being mental.[68] Berkeley asserts that sense-data, being dependent on the observer's perception and ceasing to exist if the observer does, are inherently mental. In contrast, Russell challenges Berkeley's position, contending that there is insufficient evidence to categorize sense-data as integral to the mind or mental processes. Russell rejects Berkeley's perspective and offers an alternative explanation as a simpler theory, advocating the adherence to the best explanation to explain reality. Russell proposes that it is more parsimonious to consider the external world as physical. I have explained his argument previously through his cat-example. The key point in Russell's cat example is that explaining the cat's hunger and behavior by acknowledging the existence of a physical, external cat aligns better with our everyday experiences and is more empirically consistent. Furthermore, since sense-data are considered to be the signs of the external reality, either caused by or correlated with physical objects in the world, Russell claims that it is more reasonable to characterize sense-data as sharing the same nature as the physical objects. In this way, Russell advocates for a viewpoint that aligns with empirical consistency and simplicity in explaining the relation between sense-data and the external world. Russell emphasizes the need for cautious conclusions regarding the fundamental nature of sense-data. Even if mental processes play a role in perceiving sense-data, Russell contends that it does not necessarily imply that sense-data are intrinsically mental. Instead, he suggests that a more plausible explanation for sense-data lies in their correlation with external objects, as illustrated by Russell's method of analysis, particularly through examples such as the cat scenario. In this approach, Russell maintains that there is a physical world external to our sense-data that can be understood.

[68] *Ibid*., p. 60.

While he acknowledges the causal dependence of sense-data on our senses and physiology, Russell diverges from automatically classifying sense-data (and the external world) as inherently mental, distinguishing his position from Berkeley's.

Russell contends that the apparent plausibility of Berkeley's view arises from a confusion between the object being perceived (sense-data) and the act of perception (sensation).[69] According to Russell, the act of perception or sensation is undeniably a mental process, because sensations (the act of sensing something) are experiences or mental events that take place within an individual's consciousness. However, Russell emphasizes a crucial distinction between 'the acts of apprehension', which includes only sensations or the mental process of perceiving, and 'the objects of apprehension', which includes the objects of sensations, i.e., sense-data. He argues that Berkeley makes a mistake by conflating the mental act of apprehension (sensation) with its object (sense-data).[70] Through this equivocation, where sensation is confused with sense-data, Berkeley arrives at the conclusion that anything perceivable must be mental. Russell considers this "to be the true analysis of Berkeley's argument, and the ultimate fallacy upon which it rests."[71] Emphasizing this separation between the mental act and the external object, Russell holds that sense-data exist independently of the mind. Being acquainted with something, according to him, is not synonymous with that thing to be mental; instead, it signifies a direct awareness of objects that may be external to the mind. For Russell, acquaintance with objects is essentially a relation that enables the mind to *know* non-mental things, such as sense-data.[72] If one insists that things apprehended by the mind

[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

must exist in the mind, Russell claims, it unreasonably constrains the mind's ability for knowledge of something external to it, being mental or not in nature. He asserts that the mind's ability to directly know entities external to itself, i.e., acquaintance, is a fundamental attribute; for him, it is what having a mind consists in. Russell clarifies sense-data as non-mental entities that we become acquainted with, distinguishing them from sensations that represent the mental processes of knowing or experiencing. For instance, when we perceive or sense a color, the act of perception or sensation is a mental act, but the object of perception or sensation, i.e., that color is the sense-data and non-mental. Thus, Russell says, it is crucial to recognize that the color itself is a sense-datum, distinct from a mental sensation, which pertains to the act or state of awareness.[73]

Russell contends that sense-data possess a subjective nature as they are private to each individual, that is, they vary depending on the observer's perspective, leading to variations in individual experiences of the same external object or event. In contrast, physical objects in the external world, being public and accessible to all, are considered to have an independent reality from the observer's perspective and conditions. Our knowledge of sense-data, being immediate and first-person, establishes a robust foundation for the reliability of our understanding of the external world. Additionally, our knowledge by acquaintance of sense-data is undeniable. For example, even in the presence of scientific evidence indicating that a table is red, our immediate experience of a brown patch while looking at the table remains unchanged. This shows that sense-data are the most certain data, in need of no validation, since our acquaintance with these entities is the most certain form of knowledge, which Russell refers to as 'knowledge by

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

acquaintance'. In contrast, knowledge of physical objects, like a table, lacks the same certainty, relying on indirect inferences and the assumption that sense-data are caused by these objects. Accordingly, in *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell highlights his theory of knowledge by acquaintance in contrast to knowledge by descriptions.[74] The primary significance of knowledge by description lies in its capacity to transcend the boundaries of our individual subjective experiences.[75] This becomes especially crucial considering the limited scope of our immediate experiences.

Knowledge by description is knowledge about entities that we cannot directly know. It allows us to acquire knowledge about entities that we can never directly experience. For example, from our sense-data of brown round shape and the belief that there are physical tables, we infer the existence of a brown round table. How we describe the table relies on our sense-data. We must also believe that there is a connection between the physical object (the table) and things we are acquainted with, namely our sense-data. That is, our sense-data are caused by physical objects. Therefore, all our knowledge of physical objects ultimately consists of these instinctive beliefs, plus what we have as sense-data.[76] This is the essence of Russell's argument for his theory of knowledge by description. To elaborate, besides the sensation of a brown, round patch and the tactile qualities of solidity and softness, we are also acquainted with fundamental propositions such as 'I am currently experiencing the sensation of brown and round' or 'I am aware of the sensation of solidity and softness.' Building upon our acquaintance with these undoubtful, basic premises, we "assume that there is something else [a physical table], of

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

which these things [e.g., our sensation of the brown, round patch] are appearances."[77] In essence, we infer the existence of the table from our sensations, assuming that there is a table, and this table is the cause of these sensory experiences. Consequently, our immediate knowledge serves as the justification for our understanding of the table, categorized as knowledge by description. This implies that the foundation of our inferential knowledge of the external world is knowledge by acquaintance. The nature of inference in this context involves drawing conclusions about the existence of the table based on our sensations. It is the process of reaching a belief in the physical table as the cause of sensory experiences. However, the uncertainty lies in the lack of concrete, verifiable justification for this belief beyond the inference made from our direct acquaintance with sense-data.

In *The Problems of Philosophy,* Russell proposes that the concept of knowledge by acquaintance provides a plausible solution to the longstanding issue of the relation between perception and physics, commonly known as the RSP problem. He believed that our belief in the physical table lacks verifiable justification beyond the inference drawn from our acquaintance with sense-data. Direct acquaintance with sense-data offers a certain and unfalsifiable form of knowledge, serving as the only certain data for explaining physical objects. This highlights that our knowledge of the external world finds no better justification than being inferred from our knowledge by acquaintance. Russell's theory posits that belief in the existence of external physical objects is justified through psychological inference from sense-data, where we derive the presence of physical objects from our sense-data. He maintains that adhering to such inferences, as outlined in his

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

theory of inference, is more reasonable and simpler than alternative explanations. These inferences can effectively elucidate the connection between the physical world and sense-data. Russell asserts that knowledge by acquaintance serves as a reliable foundation for such an inferential knowledge, highlighting the significance of his cognitive notion of acquaintance for his theory of inference.

1-3) Russell's Early Exploration of Neutral Monism: His 1913 Manuscript

Russell's theory of knowledge by acquaintance plays an important role in his rejection of the ontological theory of neutral monism. Russell's primary rejection of neutral monism is articulated in his *Theory of Knowledge* (1913) —this manuscript remained unpublished during his lifetime— where he critiques ideas proposed by neutral monists like William James. This emphasizes the intimate connection between Russell's theory of knowledge and neutral monism, as he challenges the ontological tenets of neutral monism, drawing from his epistemological standpoint. The interplay between Russell's theory of knowledge and his stance on neutral monism becomes evident as he scrutinizes the ontological position of neutral monism through the lens of his epistemological concerns. Russell's arguments against neutral monism are presented within the framework of his *Theory of Knowledge* (1913), highlighting perceived inconsistencies or limitations in this ontological perspective. Despite his contentions, Russell concedes that if neutral monism were true, it would simplify the duality of mind and matter by proposing a single neutral element, aligning with Ockham's Razor, which discourages unnecessary multiplication of entities. Despite recognizing this ontological merit, Russell ultimately rejects the ontological theory of neutral monism.

Until 1919, Russell maintained that the mind's direct acquaintance with objects external to itself is crucial to avoiding the pitfalls of both idealism and materialism, both of which he adamantly dismisses. He was concerned that rejecting the cognitive relation between the subject and object in our immediate experiences might lead to conflating them into a singular entity with either purely mental or purely physical attributes.[78] Consequently, he preferred using the term 'acquaintance' to signify a two-term cognitive relation inherent in our immediate experiences, opposing any kind of monism. Russell argues that, in contrast to idealistic monism and materialistic monism, neutral monism posits "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."[79] Russell elaborates on the neutral monism views by likening the relation between mental and physical entities to a postal directory, where names appear twice: once in alphabetical order (mental), and once in geographical order (physical). "Just as every man in the directory has two kinds of neighbors, namely alphabetical neighbours and geographical neighbours, so every object will lie at the intersection of two causal series with different laws, namely the mental series and the physical series."[80] That is, while the same entities are represented, their connections and behaviors differ depending on the context. In the mental realm, associations of ideas (governed by psychological laws) link objects, while in the physical realm, the object follows physical laws. Despite this contextual difference, the object remains the same and neutral across both realms.

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[78] Russell, Bertrand. "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description." In *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, vol. 11 (1911): 108–128, p. 109.
[79] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*. Edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1984, p. 15.
[80] *Ibid.,* p. 15.

After explaining neutral monism in general, Russell delves into the detailed perspectives of influential neutral monists, chiefly William James, examining and critiquing his ideas regarding neutral monism to underline potential shortcomings in this philosophical framework. In his analysis of James' views, Russell quotes him as asserting:

> "Thoughts" are not different in substance from "things"; the stream of my thoughts is a stream of things, namely of the things which I should commonly be said to be thinking *of*; what leads to its being called a stream of *thoughts* is merely that the laws of succession [mental laws] are different from the physical laws.[81]

According to Russell, this implies that a bit of experience lacks inherent mental and physical duality, being both thought and thing simultaneously —but not inherently so.[82] James's classification of an element as mental or physical hinges on its relations with other elements, rather than its relation to a mind, as advocated by Russell's relational view of sensation. When experiencing a stream of thoughts, James suggests that we are encountering a stream of things —the objects or content of our experiences— that can be considered both as mental thoughts, thus part of a mind and subject to the psychological laws, or physical things, hence part of a physical object and subject to laws of physics. This implies that the intrinsic distinction between the mental and the physical is absent, as the categorization depends on the relations these elements have with other experienced elements. Thus, they can be regarded as part of the mental realm at one moment and part of the realm of physics at another.

In essence, what Russell typically perceives as the subject (knower) and the object (the known), in our immediate experiences and intrinsically distinct as mental and

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[81] *Ibid.,* p. 15.

[82] James, William. "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 1, no. 18 (1904): 477–91. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2011942, p. 480.

physical, are one entity considered in two different sets of relations, one mental and the other physical. According to Russell's interpretation of James's view, a unified segment of experience can serve two distinct functions depending on the context in which it is considered.[83] In one context, this segment of experience is seen as within the domain of 'consciousness' or a state of mind, forming part of the ongoing stream of thoughts constituting an individual's experience. In a different context, the same segment is viewed as something known treated as an external entity or object of knowledge, separate from the individual's experience. James asserts that this dual nature of experience, distinguishing between 'thought' and 'thing', emerges from the relations between experiences rather than being inherent to the immediate experience itself. For instance, consider sitting by a window and hearing the sound of raindrops falling on the glass. In one context, you might associate the sound with a memory of a cozy evening spent reading a book while listening to the rain, turning the sound of rain into a 'thought' triggering a personal, introspective experience. In another context, if you shift your attention away from personal memory and focus on the sound as a sensory experience, the sound of rain is perceived as a 'thing' —an objective sensory stimulus coming from outside, separate from personal thoughts. Therefore, according to James' perspective, in the same immediate experience of hearing the rain, your perception can shift between viewing it as a 'thought' and as a 'thing'. This illustrates James' idea that the dual role of experience, distinguishing between 'thought' and 'thing', depends on the relations between experiences and is not intrinsic to the immediate experience.[84]

[83] *Ibid.,* p. 480.
[84] *Ibid.,* p. 477.

James contends that 'consciousness' is essentially a name for a non-entity, referring to nothing that can be found in reality.[85] This view aligns with the philosophical view known as 'functionalism' or 'functionalism about consciousness', which posits that consciousness is not a distinct substance or quality of being. Instead, it is seen as a function of the human brain. According to James, this function is carried out by thoughts, which are the means by which we generate ideas and form our perceptions. James's view suggests that this function allows us to know, experience, and be aware of the world around us. That is, this function is related to our ability to know and understand the world, thus, it can be called the function of *knowing*. To understand James's position, Russell contents, we must understand his account of 'knowing'.[86] According to James, Russell says, the act of mere seeing, hearing, and other sensations does not qualify as 'knowing' in themselves, as they are non-cognitive. We gain knowledge of these sensations only when we add cognition or the function of knowing to these sensations. In cases where Russell would claim direct knowledge of sense-data, James claims that there is no knowledge present. Because there exists only the presence of the sense-datum, which James suggests is erroneously perceived as a distinct entity from the knower, when in reality it is an integral constituent of the mind itself, blurred in the distinction between the knower and the known (sense-datum).

According to James, Russell says, knowing is an external relation involving two distinct experiences, with one experience leading to another. On this view, mere sensation or direct experience should not be called knowledge; instead, knowledge entails two

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 477.
[86] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*. Edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1984, p. 19.

continuous experiences or moments related to each other. The initial experience, whether a sensation, event, or thought, is not knowledge in itself. It is only when this initial experience is related to another subsequent experience that knowledge emerges. In this stage, knowledge is formed through making connections, drawing inferences, and understanding the significance of the initial experience; this kind of knowledge is similar to inferential knowledge. According to James, the process of knowing occurs after the initial experiences is in relation to another experience that has taken place after. That is, according to James, one piece of immediate experience cannot be considered as knowledge, since knowledge requires further experiences put together and reflected on. For example, consider someone encountering a new, exotic fruit they've never seen before. The initial experience involves tasting the fruit, a sensory experience without any cognitive feelings beyond the taste. To transform this experience into knowledge about the fruit's taste, a second experience is required to be connected with the first. According to James, this reflective process forms the basis of knowledge. Therefore, Russell explains that in James's framework, knowledge does not manifest immediately in the first encounter with a phenomenon. As a result, there is no immediate knowledge, or knowledge by acquaintance, according to James's view.

Russell argues that neutral monists like James rightly reject representative views suggesting that our understanding of the external world relies on mental ideas or representations. This rejection is grounded in the recognition that such views create a dualism between mental representations and the external world. Representative theories posit that our perception of the external world is mediated by mental representations, serving as intermediaries between our minds and reality. This view introduces a division between the mind and the perceived world, contradicting the holistic view of neutral

monists. According to Russell, neutral monists, however, fail to adequately address the inherent distinction between the 'known' and the 'knower' in our immediate experiences and, they wrongly dismiss this fundamental dualism, which is essential to our immediate knowledge.[87] Russell contends that neutral monists, in their emphasis on one neutral element, may have abandoned the idea of mental representations, but they still need to address how we distinguish between our subjective experiences and the external reality. According to Russell, neutral monists like James have adopted the ontological assumption that "*if anything is immediately present to me, that thing must be part of my mind*."[88] This assumption blurs the line between subjective experience and objective reality. While this move away from representationalism is understandable, Russell believes it oversimplifies our immediate experiences. By focusing solely on the neutral substance, neutral monists neglect the crucial distinction between the 'known' and the 'knower'. They argue that there's no strict division between what's considered part of the mind and what's part of an external object. This challenges the common-sense notion of an external, objective reality independent of our minds. Russell aims to counter this view by emphasizing the need for the cognitive relation of acquaintance. He seeks to challenge the ontological assumption of neutral monists by demonstrating the epistemological necessity for a division in our immediate experiences.

Russell identifies two main challenges with the theory advocated by neutral monists, both arising from their assertion "that there is nothing cognitive in the mere presence of an object to the mind."[89] The first challenge is their difficulty in explaining

[87] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*. Edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1984, p. 17.
[88] *Ibid.,* p. 22.
[89] *Ibid.,* p. 23.

how the contents of our momentary experience are distinguished from other things not currently experienced.[90] If everything is fundamentally neutral and lacks inherent cognitive qualities, the question arises: How do we differentiate between what we are presently perceiving and what we are not? In this framework, there's no intrinsic distinction between what is currently being perceived and what is not. The second challenge is that neutral monism fails to account for emphatic particulars such as 'I', 'this', and 'now' because they are defined based on the subject's acquaintance with the objects of experience.[91] And if, as neutral monists advocate, we eliminate the distinction between the subject and the object, then we lose the basis for explaining emphatic particulars. Without this fundamental distinction, there's no framework to account for their definition. These terms are typically understood as intimately tied to the subject's direct acquaintance with the objects of experience. For instance, when we say, 'I see this red apple now', 'I' refers to the subject's self-awareness, 'this' refers to a specific object in the subject's experience, and 'now' refers to a particular moment in time as it is experienced by the subject. Russell contends that these terms are defined based on the subject's direct acquaintance with the objects of experience. His critique doesn't necessarily advocate for acquaintance as the sole solution; rather, he highlights that neutral monism faces significant challenges in explaining these aspects of experience. At the same time, he suggests that the cognitive notion of acquaintance could offer a satisfactory account of how these terms can be explained. In essence, Russell believed that appealing to this cognitive notion offers a satisfactory response to the challenges of explaining individuation and emphatic particulars.

[90] *Ibid.,* p. 23.
[91] *Ibid.,* p. 41.

To elucidate the two challenges associated with the neutral monistic view, Russell, in his manuscript *Theory of Knowledge* (1913), initially examines the scope and constraints of experience within his broader epistemological framework. When Russell speaks of 'experience', he is referring to the totality of what we are aware of, encompassing mental phenomena, perceptions, thoughts, and sensations constituting our conscious awareness at a given moment. Russell asserts that regardless of how we define 'experience', certain objects undeniably exist within our present awareness.[92] That is, there are elements within our conscious experience that we can clearly identify and acknowledge. These elements or 'objects' of experience include our sensory perceptions (e.g., the sight of a red apple), our thoughts (e.g., thinking about a specific concept or idea), and even our own self-awareness. These are things that we are directly aware of in our immediate experience. Among these, there are at least some that are not present in our current experience but can still be recalled at the moment, namely, our immediate memories. Importantly, Russell emphasizes the need to confine the discussion to what is currently within our immediate experience, eliminating ambiguity or confusion. By focusing on elements within our current immediate experience, Russell contends that we can clearly define and discuss these elements without introducing speculation about things that may exist outside of our current awareness. This approach aligns with the nature of immediate experience, avoiding conjecture and emphasizing the significance of what is currently within our conscious awareness. Russell considers his notion of cognitive acquaintance as one of the fundamental facts about immediate experience, acknowledging its crucial role in shaping our subjective data.[93] However, critics may

[92] *Ibid.,* p. 33.
[93] *Ibid.,* p. 34.

contend that Russell's reliance on the cognitive notion of acquaintance appears to presuppose its necessity for justifying any theory of knowledge. They argue that by rejecting theories that deny the role of acquaintance, Russell might be engaging in circular reasoning or begging the question. In other words, his argument assumes the truth of acquaintance as a prerequisite for dismissing alternative perspectives, which could be seen as unsatisfactory from a critical standpoint.

Russell's first objection to neutral monism concerns how the group of one's present experiences, forming part of the 'stream of consciousness' according to James, is distinguished from other things in the world.[94] James' 'stream of consciousness' refers to the continuous flow of one's experiences as they occur in real time. The challenge is twofold: whether neutral monism can provide a satisfactory explanation for the distinction that sets the parts of immediate experience apart from the unexperienced aspects of reality, and whether it can account for the connection that unites these parts into a continuous stream of experiences. Russell illustrates this twofold problem using the example of seeing a patch of color and then closing one's eyes. He points out that when our eyes are open, the patch of color is part of our immediate experience, but when our eyes are closed, it vanishes from our consciousness. Although one might assume that the patch of color continues to exist even when not perceived, Russell emphasizes that it is an empirical fact that it is no longer part of our experience. This empirical fact shows that individuals can only have immediate knowledge of what they themselves are acquainted with. For example, each person can be aware of their own sense-data. This limitation also applies to various mental phenomena such as judging, feeling, desire, and willing, which,

[94] *Ibid.,* p. 28.

according to Russell, are inherently personal experiences. Since experiences occur within the realm of personal awareness, they are inherently limited to the individual's immediate sphere of acquaintance. Because one can only directly know what one experiences firsthand.

However, Russell contends that neutral monists downplayed this inherent, subjective aspect of experience due to their emphasis on neutral stuff/elements that underlies the whole reality —both mental and physical. In neutral monism, mental and physical phenomena are seen as different manifestations of an underlying shared stuff. Despite neutral monists arguing for a shared or universal underlying element, Russell asserts that this shared nature does not erase the distinction between an individual's direct apprehension of their own subjective data and the objective reality. However, neutral monism falls short in providing an explanation for this fundamental distinction. Russell underscores that at any given moment, individuals encounter experiences unique to themselves, which others cannot directly access. This emphasis on cognitive notion of acquaintance is crucial in elucidating this fundamental distinction between what is experienced and what is not.[95] Russell's argument emphasizes the importance of direct, first-person experiences in contrast to what is not experienced. Russell contends that neutral monists, by disregarding the cognitive notion of acquaintance, fail to adequately explain immediate experiences, which form the foundation of all knowledge. This critique arises from his observation that neutral monism, despite positing a shared element, lacks a coherent account of how individuals directly apprehend their subjective data.

[95] *Ibid.,* pp. 7-8.

This argument brings attention to a fundamental difference between James's theory of knowledge and Russell's perspective. Russell argues that defining the notion of 'awareness' may pose challenges, since it is a primitive notion. While potential errors might arise in describing these objects to others, it remains an empirical fact that they are immediately present to us without requiring further identification. This implies that our sense-data are self-evident, known to us without any additional process or explanation. Contrastingly, James suggests that our sense-data are known through a process of identification, which involves carving out these objects from the stream of consciousness, undermining their self-evident nature. According to James, our knowledge of the patch of colour in our experience depends on its relations, particularly causal relations, with other contents of experience. For example, when the patch of red colour is perceived alongside other qualities of the red apple, such as its circular shape and soft texture, it is regarded as a physical attribute of the material object —the red apple. However, when considered solely as our subjective sensation of red associated with our sensory experiences or ideas, detached from its association with the apple or other external objects, it is seen as belonging to the realm of the mind and is thus considered mental. Russell argues that if the inclusion of the patch of color in conscious experience is contingent on causal relations, these relations must be thoroughly explained and verified, while James does not provide an explanation for why a patch of colour enters one arrangement and not the other. It is unclear how the various elements of conscious experience are bound together into a coherent stream of consciousness.

The debate between James and Russell revolves around the nature and cognitive aspects of immediate experience, particularly regarding the concept of acquaintance. James emphasizes the non-cognitive aspect of experience, characterizing it as felt prior

to cognition. In contrast, Russell defends acquaintance as a legitimate form of knowledge, asserting a cognitive element in immediate experience. He posits, "these are the objects of my "awareness", the objects "before my mind", or the objects that are within my present "experience"."[96] He argues that there is something distinctive about the immediate nature of our experiences that cannot be ignored. In any given moment of immediate experiences, specific things are present in the mind, and Russell maintains that neutral monism fails to account for these specific things in experience. Russell suggests that additional factors are necessary to explain the distinction between perceiving a patch of color and its absence from perception. This implies that he deems acquaintance with the patch of color as an indispensable element in understanding this difference. Therefore, the crux of their debate lies in their differing perspectives on the cognitive nature of immediate experience and the validity of acquaintance as a form of knowledge. In essence, Russell believes that without the cognitive notion of acquaintance, neutral monism fails to adequately explain the distinction between the objects of our immediate experiences and what is not experienced. For Russell, the distinction between what is experienced and what is not lies at the core of our theory of knowledge. Without a clear account of how we cognitively apprehend the objects of immediate experience, any theory of knowledge, including neutral monism, would struggle to provide a satisfactory explanation of how we come to know about the world.

Russell identifies a second issue with neutral monism, which revolves around its inability to explain emphatic particulars. These emphatic particulars include 'I' (referring to oneself as a subject), 'this' (referring to a particular object in one's immediate

[96] *Ibid.,* p. 8.

experience), and 'now' (referring to the present moment).[97] Russell proposes that these concepts ('I', 'this', and 'now') should be understood in relation to the unity and content of our ongoing, lived experience. Russell observes that when we consider our immediate experience, it has a sense of unity and coherence. For instance, when we look at a red apple, our experience combines various sensory perceptions (seeing the color, feeling its texture) and mental activities (thinking about its taste). Despite this variety, it feels like a single, unified experience. This unity resembles James' 'stream of consciousness'. The unity and coherence of 'my present experience' arise from the interconnectedness and simultaneous experience of various elements within our consciousness. Russell's argument centres on the idea that 'my present experience' is the foundational level of knowledge. It encompasses the immediate, lived experience of an individual, including sensory perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. According to Russell, this immediate experience precedes concepts like 'I' and 'now' and serves as the basis upon which these concepts derive their meaning and significance.

Russell believes that without the cognitive relation of acquaintance, explaining the usage of terms like 'this' would be challenging. Because, in contrast to purely objective terms found in physics or other scientific disciplines, which often describe entities in a third-person, impersonal manner, terms like 'this' are intimately tied to subjective experience. They refer to entities known directly through individual consciousness. For instance, consider the statement, 'I see this beautiful sunset'. Here, the term 'this' refers to the sunset directly perceived by the speaker. This perceived sunset, grounded in the speaker's immediate acquaintance with it, cannot be directly perceived by others.

[97] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*. Edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1984, p. 41.

Therefore, in this sense, it is subjective and inaccessible to others. The challenge arises in finding a common usage for a term that denotes our private sensory experiences.[98] Russell addresses this challenge by defining 'this' in terms of immediate acquaintance. According to him, when an object is within immediate experience, individuals are acquainted with it. The term 'this' denotes the objects of acquaintance, our sense-data, and serves as the starting point for defining other emphatic notions. It is not defined but presented as is, immediately known and subsequently confirmed through reflection as 'that which is given'.[99] The subject who directs attention to 'this' is identified as 'I', and the temporal reference to the objects that hold the relation of presence to 'I' is known as the present time 'now'. Since the term 'this', and consequently 'I' and 'now', can be defined and have a meaning in relation to the cognitive notion of acquaintance, Russell claims that any other theory to define such a term must accept the cognitive notion of acquaintance. That is, neutral monists that deny such a notion cannot provide an explanation for the concept of 'this'.[100]

What Russell is seeking is an explanation for the underlying principle of selection that uniquely renders one object, one subject, and one time intimately close and immediate for a specific individual at a given moment, while excluding others. Essentially, Russell aims to comprehend why certain objects, subjects, and moments possess a distinct level of immediacy and intimacy, contrasting with others that lack this quality. Russell argues that in a world devoid of specifically cognitive aspects, there would be complete impartiality regarding these experiential facts. Without the cognitive relation of

[98] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[99] *Ibid.,* p. 40.
[100] *Ibid.,* p. 40.

acquaintance to differentiate certain objects, subjects, or times, there would be no basis for selectivity in our experiences. In other words, there would be no reason why one particular object, subject, or time should be experienced as more immediate, intimate, or significant than any other. Russell acknowledges the theoretical possibility of proposing alternative explanations for concepts like 'this,' 'I,' and 'now' without explicitly invoking cognitive facts. One alternative, the theory of neutral monism, attempts to account for these concepts solely in terms of a neutral element. However, Russell claims that neutral monists fall short particularly in explaining why specific objects (denoted by 'this'), subjects (denoted by 'I'), or times (denoted by 'now') are selected as immediate and intimate in our experiences. Neutral monism posits a neutral element underlying all aspects of reality, both mental and physical. However, Russell contends that the significance of this shared element stems from its presence within our immediate experiences. He believes that these immediate experiences necessitate the cognitive relation of acquaintance. In Russell's epistemological framework, what accounts for our experiences is acquaintance which refers to direct and immediate awareness of objects. This illustrates the interconnection between epistemology and ontology, where Russel's epistemological considerations, such as acquaintance, shapes his understanding of the nature of reality, thereby placing constraints on his ontological frameworks. Russell further claims that the examination of these emphatic particulars offers the most definitive and conclusive refutation of neutral monism.[101] He sees it as a point where the limitations of the theory become most apparent, as it fails to account for essential aspects of experience.

[101] *Ibid.,* p. 41.

Russell argues that neutral monism struggles to define how the entirety of one's experience is distinct from things that exist outside of that experience. For example, a color that is seen and a colour that is not seen, due to our point of view or conditions, have different status that is not solely based on their relation to other colors, objects of experience, or the nervous system. Russell contends that the perceived colour is immediate, intimate, and intuitively evident, while the unperceived colour is not.[102] What accounts for this unique status of the perceived colour compared to the unperceived one, Russell believes, is the cognitive aspect of our immediate experiences. Thus, in order to provide a comprehensive explanation of our experiences and knowledge, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of this cognitive aspect, the cognitive relation of acquaintance. Acquaintance denotes our immediate awareness of objects in our experiences and ontologically requires a mind separate from the objects of awareness, thereby not neutral. By incorporating the epistemic notion of acquaintance, Russell argues that we can clarify the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the objects of our experiences, ontologically differentiating them from other aspects of reality that we do not directly encounter. To summarize, Russell's primary objections to the theory of neutral monism stem from his analysis of immediate experiences and knowledge. This analysis highlights the interplay between his epistemological views, such as the cognitive notion of acquaintance and his ontological views on the nature of reality.

Scholars like Alfred J. Ayer (1971) have interpreted Russell's engagement with neutral monism through a primarily ontological lens, arguing that Russell's commitment to Ockham's Razor —understood as a metaphysical principle of parsimony— compelled

[102] *Ibid.,* p. 32.

him to unify mental and physical entities under a neutral framework. Ayer contends that Russell's rejection of dualism stemmed from a desire to minimize ontological categories, not epistemological constraints. [103] While this perspective aligns with Russell's explicit appeals to simplicity, it overlooks the foundational role of the RSP problem in shaping his philosophical trajectory. My analysis demonstrates that Russell's dismissal of neutral monism in 1913 was not merely a rejection of ontological dualism but a direct consequence of his epistemic commitment to the cognitive nature of acquaintance. Where Ayer emphasizes ontological economy, Russell's manuscripts reveal a deeper preoccupation with justifying knowledge of the external world through immediate experience. For instance, Russell's insistence on the subject-object duality in his *Theory of Knowledge* (1913) arises from his need to preserve the epistemic certainty of sense-data as the basis for inferential knowledge —a concern orthogonal to Ayer's ontological reading.

Ayer [104] situates Russell's use of Ockham's Razor within a broader metaphysical project, interpreting it as a tool for eliminating superfluous entities like the "self" or "consciousness".[105] While this aligns with Russell's 1914 shift toward logical constructions, it neglects the epistemic urgency of the RSP problem that catalyzed this

[103] Alfred J. Ayer, in the chapters "Logical Atomism" and "Russell's Conception of What There Is," (*Russell and Moore. The Analytical Heritage*, London: Macmillan, 1971.) argues that Russell's commitment to neutral monism is primarily grounded in ontological principles, particularly his adherence to Ockham's razor as an ontological maxim. Ayer discusses Russell's drive to minimize metaphysical assumptions, showing how neutral monism allows him to unify mental and physical entities within a single framework. This commitment to parsimony, Ayer suggests, reflects Russell's prioritization of simplicity and reduction of ontological categories over epistemological considerations in adopting neutral monism.

[104] Alfred J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore. The Analytical Heritage*, London: Macmillan, 1971.

[105] Alfred J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore. The Analytical Heritage*, London: Macmillan, 1971, in the chapter "Russell's Conception of What There Is."

shift. Russell's appeal to simplicity in *Problems of Philosophy* —preferring the "natural view" of physical objects over solipsism— is an epistemological necessity. The Razor, for Russell, served to streamline explanations of how sense-data relate to physics, not to reduce reality to a neutral substrate for its own sake. Thus, while Ayer rightly identifies parsimony as a theme in Russell's work, my thesis reframes it as a secondary consequence of his primary goal: resolving the tension between perception and physics.

Chapter two: Russell's Pre-1919 Approach to the RSP Problem; The 1914 Solution and Its Connection to Neutral Monism

In *My Philosophical Development*, Russell says, "I have throughout been anxious to discover how much we can be said to know and with what degree of certainty or doubtfulness."[106] This statement encapsulates his persistent quest to explore the possibility and limits of certainty in our knowledge of the external world, a quest that closely ties into his engagement with the RSP problem —the relation between sense-data and physics. Russell aimed to justify our knowledge of the inferred external world by grounding it in what we immediately perceive through our senses. Although he never questioned the duality of mind and matter as distinct entities, believing that they could and did interact despite their differences,[107] his primary epistemological concern from 1910 onward was how to adequately explain the relation between our subjective, non-mental sense-data and our objective knowledge of the external world.

By 1912, Russell had developed his theory of knowledge by acquaintance, which he believed explained the connection between the mind and sense-data, while his theory of inference clarified the correlation between sense-data and the external objects of the world. Together, these theories, he argued, justified our inferential knowledge of the external world. In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell asserted that inference was the most effective method for validating our knowledge of the world, allowing him to avoid

[106] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959, p. 11.
[107] For more information on Russell's views on causation, you can see: Russell, Bertrand. "On the Notion of Cause." (1912-1913), p. 9.

the pitfalls of both Naïve Realism and Idealism.[108] Russell refutes both idealism and naïve realism, while trying to justify our knowledge of the external world through the theory of inference and his theory of knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. However, a discernible shift in Russell's thinking emerges, signaling a quest for a more secure foundation for our knowledge of the external world beyond mere reliance on inference. This shift led to a critical examination of the theory of inference as presented in *The Problems of Philosophy*, prompting a critical examination of it.

Russell began to argue that solving the RSP problem required a synthesis of the sciences of the mind, such as psychology, with the sciences of the material world, like physics. This interdisciplinary approach aimed at uncovering deeper connections between perceptions and physical objects. In 1914, Russell introduced the idea that the world could be logically constructed from sensory objects that we directly experience. Rather than inferring the existence of an external world from sensory data, he proposed defining the external world in terms of these apprehensible sensory objects, such as sense-data. In this view, our immediate experience of sense-data is seen as part of both psychological and physical data, forming an integral component of the external world. This approach, known as the Theory of Logical Construction, posits that our knowledge of the external world is logically constructed from sensory objects like sense-data, offering

[108] Naïve realists claim that our sense-data directly corresponds to the external world, positing that what we immediately experience are, in fact, the physical objects of that world, such as tables and chairs. According to this view, there is a direct relationship between our mind and the physical/external world, which enables us to know the external world as it is. In contrast, idealists like Berkeley argue that we only have access to our sense-data, which are subjective and mental. Consequently, they contend that we cannot meaningfully speak about a non-mental world. In other words, all we know is a mental world composed of minds and their contents or ideas. For further reading on these perspectives, consider the following source: Berkeley, George. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. London: J. Tonson, 1710. Berkeley articulates his idealist view, emphasizing the nature of perception and reality. Also, see: Smith, Barry. "Naive Realism." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2020. This entry provides an overview of naïve realism and its critiques.

direct and immediate access to the fundamental elements of external reality. Russell presented this epistemic theory as a more effective resolution to the RSP problem than the theory of inference, arguing that it better explained the connection between our subjective experiences and objective reality. Moreover, this theory streamlined ontology, making it compatible with neutral monism.

The limitations of Russell's earlier solution to the RSP problem in *The Problems of Philosophy* highlighted the need for an alternative theory that could provide a more comprehensive account of our knowledge of the external world. This consideration, alongside Russell's evolving ideas, notably his concept of Six-Dimensional Space, paved the way for the epistemic theory of logical construction. This marked a significant shift towards neutral monism, aligning his views more closely with this theory. Russell's 1914 solution to the RSP problem played a crucial role in his eventual adoption of the ontological theory of neutral monism. However, before 1919, his insistence on the cognitive nature of acquaintance (and sensation) prevented him from fully embracing neutral monism, as it denies such a cognitive relation.

2-1) The Shortcomings of the 1912 Solution for RSP

In his *Problems of Philosophy*, as elucidated in the preceding chapter, Russell claims that our belief in an independent external world (or physical objects) is instinctive in us, emerging as an "instinctive belief".[109] However, this belief becomes questioned due to the nature of our sensory perceptions. When we see objects, for example, it often feels as though the sensory experience itself —the sense-datum— is the physical object of the

[109] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 38.

external world, giving rise to the misconception that it is the external object itself, leading to confusion about the true nature of what we perceive. Russell says:

> We should never have been led to question this belief but for the fact that, at any rate in the case of sight, it seems as if the sense-datum itself were instinctively believed to be the independent object, whereas argument shows that the object cannot be identical with the sense-datum.[110]

Russell counters the challenge to our instinctive belief by refuting the stance of naïve realists who believe that our sensory experiences directly and accurately represent the objective reality around us. He argues that the physical object cannot be identical to the sense-datum. Russell claims that when we observe a common object that is usually thought to be known through our senses, what our senses provide is not the absolute truth about the object itself, independent of our perception, as naïve realists claim. Instead, our senses reveal information about certain sense-data —sensory experiences such as visual or tactile senses. For instance, the colour, texture, and shape of the table that you perceive are not inherent properties of the table itself, but rather your sense-data caused by the interaction between you and the table. If another observer were to view the same table from a different angle or under different lighting conditions, they might have a different set of sense-data, leading to different perceptions. These sense-data seem to be contingent upon the relation between us and the physical object, i.e., the table. In other words, our sense-data is caused by the interactions and connections between us as observers and the external object. Consequently, what we directly see or feel is regarded as 'appearance' of the table, and there is a belief that this appearance is a sign or indicator of some underlying 'reality' of the table that exists independently of our sense-data. It means that

[110] *Ibid*., p. 39.

the known appearances, i.e., our sense-data, and the real property of the physical table are two distinct entities.

Accordingly, Russell proposed that our sense-data and the physical objects of the external world are distinct entities, with the existence of the latter inferred from the former. Russell's project in 1912 aims to provide the simplest reconstruction of our data, which are the instinctive beliefs we accept now, grounded in the fewest primitives —our immediate data and inference principles. He acknowledges the reliability of certain inferences as the simplest method for explaining the connection between our sense-data and the physical objects of the external world, as two distinct entities. Russell considered these inferences as the most reasonable and effective means available to understand aspects of reality beyond immediate sensory experiences. The basis for these inferences lies in the assumption that our sense-data are caused by these entities. He claims that our knowledge of the physical objects in the external world, i.e., knowledge by description, is based on inferential reasoning, hence, characterized as inferential knowledge, as opposed to our knowledge of our sense-data, which is direct knowledge, i.e., knowledge by acquaintance. However, the lack of evidence beyond our sense-data and our instinctive beliefs to verify these causal relations between our sense-data and physical objects raises doubts about the accuracy of our inferential knowledge concerning these physical objects. Subsequently, by 1914, Russell starts to question the idea that inferences alone can provide a reliable basis for our knowledge of the external world, acknowledging a new viable approach for elucidating the connection between our subjective data and objective reality.

In "The Relation of Sense-data to Physics" [1914], Russell initiates his project by casting doubt on the inferential connection between sense-data and the physical objects

of the external world.[111] He argues that the existence of physical objects is inferred from our sense-data, yet these inferences cannot definitively be verified. We merely believe that physical objects are the cause for our sensory experiences, however, this assumption lacks empirical evidence beyond our sensory perceptions and intuitive beliefs. We cannot directly access the external world but only interpret it through our senses. Therefore, without direct access to the external world to confirm these causal relations, the inferential link between sense-data and physical objects remains uncertain and open to doubt. Accordingly, Russell endeavors to establish a discernible connection between physical objects and our sense-data, aiming to provide a justification for the existence of physical objects based on our sensory experiences.[112] Josh Zaslow suggests that "[i]n posing his problem of the external —or inferred— world Russell is attempting to determine how safe the ground of such claims can be made."[113] Russell highlights a significant obstacle to justifying our knowledge solely through inference: the asymmetry of observation. On one hand, we can directly observe and be aware of one term of the correlation —the sense-data, encompassing sensory experiences like seeing, touching, and hearing. However, the physical object itself, purportedly correlated with these sense-data, remains unobservable. We lack immediate access to it, confined to observing and verifying the data of our senses alone. Consequently, the existence and nature of the physical objects believed to correspond to these sense-data remain beyond our direct observational grasp. Similar to Kant's noumenal world, these objects are entirely out of

[111] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917. Reprinted Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1951, pp. 108-109.
[112] *Ibid*., p. 108.
[113] Zaslow, Josh. "Russell and Dewey on the Problem of the External World." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies* 32 (2012): 55-68, p. 60.

reach and distinct from our sense-data. Therefore, doubts about their existence and nature loom larger due to this inherent separation and unobservability. For instance, when we witness a lightning flash, we infer that the light waves reached our eyes and generated the sensation of brightness. This inference relies on our understanding of the typical causal relation between light and vision. However, since the light wave is entirely distinct from our sensation of brightness, it may possess a different nature from our sense-data, or at least its nature remains unknown to us. Moreover, other factors could cause our sensation of brightness; for example, we might be hallucinating or dreaming. These uncertainties lead Russell to seek a different and more secure approach to understanding the relation between our sense-data and the external world.

In 1912, Russell recognized the objectionable nature of inferring a connection between two entirely distinct entities. However, he found himself without an alternative approach to address the problem of their relation while staying faithful to his overarching objective: offering the simplest reconstruction of our data while refuting naïve realism. Russell was acutely aware of a critical gap in our observational access. While we can directly observe the sensation of brightness (our sense-data), we cannot directly observe the external world, specifically the light waves themselves. The light waves are outside our immediate experiential realm. We perceive the effects of external stimuli —such as light waves— through our senses, but the stimuli themselves remain beyond direct observation. This introduces doubts regarding the connection between our sensory experiences and the external reality they purportedly represent. This assumption of a direct causal relation between external events (like lightning) and our internal experiences (such as the sensation of brightness) indeed underpins the inference process.

However, it poses a significant challenge because it presupposes a straightforward and unproblematic link between external events and our sensations. Russell's argument in *The Problems of Philosophy* stemmed from the realization that, at the time, he had no alternative method for verifying knowledge other than relying on inference. Nonetheless, the lack of empirical evidence for this correlation compelled him to seek alternative solutions. Russell was aware of this issue, however, at the time, he lacked an alternative method to refute naïve realism, whose ideas undermined our instinctive belief in the existence of a physical world external to our sensory data. His argument doesn't necessarily reject all inferences but rather questions the validity of certain types of inferences that rely on unsupported assumptions about the nature of perception. The absence of a connection, other than unverifiable inferences, between our sense-data and the physical objects of the external world highlights the need for a more robust epistemological framework.

Russell's subsequent philosophical developments aimed to address this concern by exploring alternative approaches to understanding the relation between our subjective data and objective reality. In response to this concern, Russell asserts that "verification is only possible if physical objects can be exhibited as functions of sense-data."[114] This assertion highlights Russell's epistemological stance, which seeks to ground our knowledge of physical objects in verifiable experiences, i.e., our immediate experiences of sense-data. He recognizes that for knowledge to be deemed valid and verifiable, there must be a means to confirm or substantiate the truth of our assertions. In the realm of inferential knowledge regarding physical objects, the only available verification hinges on

[114] *Ibid.,* p. 109.

the assumption that physical objects in the external world serve as the causes of our sense-data. This is an instinctive belief that there is a world external to us that causes our sensations. Accordingly, we assume a causal relation between our sense-data and the external objects. And having sense-data, we infer the existence of physical objects as part of the simplest theory of the world. for example, we infer the cat as the cause of our sense-data, because that is the simplest hypothesis that explains our sense-data and their relations. Our inferences are based on the assumption that there is a causal relation between our sense-data and the cat. However, it's crucial to note that this assumption itself is not also verifiable. We make this assumption, based on our instinctive beliefs and because we require such a premise to explain the existence of specific and distinct sense-data, not because we undoubtedly know about the presence of physical objects causing our sense-data. Inferring the causes of our sense-data may appear circular, as the inference often relies on the assumed premise that sense-data are signs of physical objects. This line of reasoning can be seen as a form of begging the question, as the argument assumes the truth of what it seeks to prove —that sense-data is caused by physical objects— without providing independent verification for this claim.

This type of reasoning, where the explanation for the existence of sense-data relies on physical objects, and conversely, the existence of physical objects is explained by the presence of sense-data, is a circular argument. In the cat example presented by Russell, imagine you are in a room and perceive what appears to be a cat. You see its fur, hear its purring, and feel its warmth when you touch it. These sensory experiences constitute your sense-data, the immediate and certain perceptions you have in that moment. Now, you might infer the presence of a physical cat in the room. This inference assumes that your

sense-data are caused by interactions with the cat. This inference to the presence of the cat relies on the assumption that our sense-data are caused by something external, the cat, as the simplest way of explaining the existence of our sense-data. In other words, to justify the existence of the cat, you rely on your sense-data, which you assume are caused by the cat. This creates a loop of reasoning where the existence of the cat is both the premise and the conclusion of the argument, leading to circularity. To avoid this circularity, Russell suggests a different approach. Instead of starting with the assumption that our sense-data are caused by something unknown and external to them and explaining our sense-data based on it, he proposes starting with our known sense-data and explain or define the cat based on these sense-data. In this case, the sensations of seeing fur, hearing purring, and feeling warmth serve as the basis for our concept of the cat. Unlike external objects such as the cat, which we cannot directly observe or confirm directly, we can be certain of the existence of our sense-data and their characteristics because we directly experience them. Therefore, Russell argues that our understanding of external reality and its nature should begin with the examination of our immediate sense-data and its nature, which serve as the foundation for our knowledge of the external world.

This approach would confer validity to our knowledge because it is firmly grounded in immediately observable and verifiable elements. Accordingly, in 1914, Russell proposes that we should logically construct the physical world by using sensible entities such as sense-data.[115] That is, instead of relying on uncertain inferences that posit the existence of physical objects as causes of our sensory data, we define physical objects directly in

[115] Russell's works *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914) and "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics" (1914) indeed tackle similar themes, particularly regarding the nature of perception and its relation to physical reality. In these texts, Russell articulates his views on how sense-data can be understood in the context of physical objects and the external world, emphasizing a logical and empirical foundation for knowledge.

terms of our sensory data. This means justifying the existence of physical objects not merely as independent entities causing our sense-data, but as logical constructs built from our sense-data. For instance, a cat is defined by the collection of our sense-data (the purring sound, the moving mass of fur, the sensation of warmth, etc.) that constructs the cat for us. According to this view, the sense-data we directly experience are considered integral components of the external world —they are the very building blocks of the external world. As a result, it implies that we have immediate access to the fundamental elements that make up the external world, reducing the probability of error that arises from trying to infer the existence of physical objects beyond our sensory experiences. This shift in Russell's approach reflects a change in his thinking as he attempts to reconcile the relation between our sensory data and the physical reality they are believed to reflect. The theory of logical construction becomes his new approach to address this philosophical issue, the RSP problem.

2-2) The Development of a New Approach in 1914

Russell undergoes a significant shift in his philosophical perspective between 1912 and 1914. Initially, in 1912, he asserts the idea that sense-data are entirely distinct from the physical objects of the external world, implying a clear separation between our immediate sensory experiences and the physical, external reality. However, he revises this stance in 1914, rejecting the earlier view and introducing his method of Logical Construction. This method involves considering sense-data as the actual substance of the physical world. Basically, he suggests that sense-data are not entirely separate from the physical object; rather, they are integral components of it. Hence, Russell's 1914 approach advocates a perspective that integrates our sense-data into the fabric of the physical world, asserting

that this viewpoint not only lacks significant objections but is also essential for explaining the empirical verifiability inherent in the study of physics.

Russell claims that sense-data are the immediate objects of awareness. When we perceive something, it's our sense-data that we directly experience. Thus, our knowledge of the external world is ultimately based on our sensory experiences. Everything we know about the physical world is filtered through our senses. In scientific inquiry, empirical evidence plays a crucial role in verifying theories. Sense-data constitute the empirical evidence upon which scientific observations and experiments rely. Empiricism, the philosophical stance that emphasizes the role of experience and evidence in the formation of knowledge, aligns with the idea that sense-data are fundamental to our understanding of the world. If sense-data are not considered part of the actual substance of the physical world, then there's an epistemological gap in our understanding of how we come to know about reality. Including sense-data as part of the substance of the physical world provides a coherent framework for understanding how our perceptions relate to external reality. Accordingly, Russell states:

> … no valid objection exists to the view which regards sense-data as part of the actual substance of the physical world, and that, on the other hand, this view is the only one which accounts for the empirical verifiability of physics.[116]

In any trial or physical experiment, our immediate access is to our sense-data, which serves as our sole empirical evidence for verifying theories in physics. Russell suggests that the data obtained from these experiments and observations, namely our sense-data, form the basis of our understanding of the physical world. Thus, he contends that sense-data are the foundational components of the world of physics accessible to us, upon which

[116] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917, p. 131.

physical theories are tested and empirically verified.[117] Since there exists no other empirical data apart from our sensory experiences to support theories in physics, Russell asserts that considering sense-data as integral to the constituents of the physical world is a justifiable perspective. Therefore, he proposes that our sense-data should be considered the fundamental substance of the physical world.

Russell's viewpoint implies that our sensory data serve as the primitive substance for our knowledge of the physical world and form the foundational substance of the world of physics. This perspective highlights the essential role of sense-data in shaping our knowledge of reality and highlights their significance in the empirical verification of scientific theories. Russell's new approach, which leads to his theory of logical construction, is also compatible with the theory of neutral monism, which posits a neutral substance (our sense-data) as the ultimate constituent of reality. In fact, it can be seen as a necessary step towards neutral monism.

2-2-1) Russell's 1914 Method of Analysis of Data

In 1914, Russell undertakes a renewed attempt to tackle the RSP problem, the "problem of the connection of sense with objective reality",[118] utilizing his innovative approach. In his book *Our Knowledge of the External World [1914*], he initiates a logical analysis, starting with an examination of what is referred to as Data.[119] Russell posits that data refers to the things we consider ourselves to know, encompassing our instinctive beliefs that are universally accepted. Through internal scrutiny and applying his method of

[117] 'Empirical verifiability' refers to the ability to confirm the truth or accuracy of scientific theories through observation and experimentation. This concept is central to the philosophy of science, particularly in the context of logical positivism, which emphasizes that meaningful statements about the world must be empirically verifiable. For instance, A.J. Ayer in *Language, Truth, and Logic* argues that a statement is only meaningful if it can be empirically tested.

[118] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World: As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*. London & New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 78.

[119] *Ibid.,* pp. 51-55.

doubt, Russell aims to categorize our knowledge by considering the varying degrees of certainty associated with different types of knowledge. By comparing different beliefs and claims, assessing their doubtfulness, he recognizes that different kinds of knowledge display different levels of certainty. "These varying degrees of certainty attaching to different data",[120] Russell says, "lie within the vague, complex, inexact body of knowledge which it is the business of the philosopher to analyze."[121] Russell's assertion encapsulates the essence of philosophical inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge. He suggests that our initial understanding of the world is often characterized by vagueness, complexity, and inexactitude. This vagueness arises from the multifaceted nature of our experiences and the inherent limitations of human perception and cognition. As we encounter the world through our senses, we are confronted with a myriad of sensory stimuli and information, which may appear fragmented and indistinct. However, Russell proposes that through the process of reasoning and philosophical analysis, we can strive towards greater clarity, simplicity, and precision in our understanding. By subjecting our beliefs and concepts to rigorous scrutiny and logical examination, we can refine and clarify our knowledge of the world. This involves breaking down complex ideas into their constituent parts, identifying underlying patterns and principles, and formulating precise definitions and explanations. This process of reasoning towards precision and simplicity is central to the philosophical endeavor and the quest for knowledge.

As previously discussed, according to Russell, our immediate acquaintance with sensory objects, or "the evidence of the senses",[122] makes them one of the most certain

[120] *Ibid.,* p. 53.
[121] *Ibid.,* p. 53.
[122] *Ibid*., p. 53.

data. The strong sense of certainty arising from our immediate experiences stems from the direct and unmediated nature of our acquaintance with sensory objects. When we perceive something directly through our senses, there is a feeling of immediacy and intimacy that accompanies the experience. Unlike knowledge derived from inference or reasoning, which may involve a chain of uncertain steps and assumptions, immediate acquaintance provides direct awareness without the need for any intermediary processes. This direct perception creates a profound sense of certainty because it bypasses any potential distortion or misinterpretation that could occur through inferential reasoning. The immediacy of our acquaintance with sensory objects makes them less susceptible to questioning or skepticism because they are experienced firsthand.[123] Russell contends that our direct acquaintance with sensory objects provides a robust foundation for knowledge of the physical objects, characterized by a high degree of certainty. Conversely, knowledge acquired through testimony, such as historical or geographical facts obtained from books, exhibits varying degrees of certainty contingent upon the nature and reliability of the testimony itself. The level of certainty in testimonial knowledge relies on factors such as the trustworthiness of the source and the consistency of the information presented. Consequently, the certainty associated with testimonial knowledge can vary based on these considerations. Doubts about the existence of Napoleon, for example, would be seen as unreasonable, because there is overwhelming historical evidence, including eyewitness accounts, official records, and a wealth of secondary sources, attesting to his existence and significance. In contrast, the existence of Agamemnon, a figure from Greek mythology, can legitimately be debated because the evidence for his

[123] *Ibid*., p. 53.

existence is primarily based on ancient texts and mythological narratives, which may be subject to interpretation and skepticism due to their legendary nature and the lack of corroborating historical evidence. Within the realm of physics, different levels of certainty are also observed.[124] The law of gravitation, for example, is widely accepted and regarded as highly certain, whereas the latest speculations regarding the constitution of matter are generally recognized to have only a relatively low probability at this point.

Accordingly, Russell introduces various categories of knowledge. His categorization of knowledge serves the purpose of delineating different types and sources of knowledge and understanding their roles within his theory of knowledge. By identifying these four categories of derivative, primitive, psychological, or logical knowledge, Russell aims to establish a framework for analyzing and classifying the different kinds and distinct sources of knowledge. This categorization plays a crucial role in Russell's theory of knowledge by providing a structured approach to understanding how knowledge is acquired, justified, and utilized. Each category represents a distinct aspect of knowledge, with its own characteristics and implications. Derivative knowledge refers to knowledge that is derived from other knowledge or propositions through inference or logical deduction. It relies on preexisting data as its basis and is often used to extend or elaborate upon existing knowledge. Russell argues that a belief is considered derivative if its cause can be traced back to other beliefs or to information that is not what the belief asserts. Primitive knowledge, on the other hand, denotes knowledge that is immediate, direct, and not derived from any other beliefs or facts. It encompasses our immediate experiences that are not based on reasoning or inference. Each of these categories, derivative and

[124] *Ibid.,* p. 53.

primitive, is further divided into logical vs psychological kind. For example, we may judge someone's emotional state based on the expression on their face, through the association of ideas, even though we only see a frown. This judgment is psychologically derived, as it arises through non-logical processes, based on an empirical fact; we see the frown and we infer the pain or the anger. But logically it can be considered primitive since it is not derived from another belief or principle of logic by logical deduction. All our immediate data, such as our sense-data or universal laws (law of non-contradiction) are considered logically and psychologically primitives, since they are not derived from any other beliefs or facts.

Russell is interested in understanding the foundations of our knowledge of the external world, and distinguishing between derivative and primitive beliefs allows him to explore the fundamental elements that underlie our knowledge. Primitive knowledge serves as the bedrock for justifying our derivative knowledge of reality. Our primitive data, the objects of our immediate experiences, constitute the most certain knowledge that we possess. It is the only kind of knowledge that we experience, hence, it underpins our understanding of the external world and serves as the foundation for justifying derivative knowledge about physical objects. By contrast, since our derivative knowledge of the external world is not direct and firsthand, it is inherently less reliable and more susceptible to doubt, hence, necessitating further justification. Furthermore, our knowledge of the physical world is psychologically derivative, as it is derived from our sensory experiences (sense-data) and is justified based on empirical facts rather than logical truths alone. For instance, our belief that 'there is a red apple' involves synthesizing various sensory data, such as the sight of a red patch, the soft texture, and the sweet smell. These sensory experiences collectively inform our inference about the presence of a red

apple, which is contingent on our previous encounters with similar sensory stimuli. Thus, our knowledge of the external world is intricately tied to our sensory experiences and empirical observations. The assumption of an external world causing our sensory experiences is based on repeated empirical observations and previous experiences. It is grounded in the consistency and regularity of our sensory perceptions across different contexts. Our confidence in the existence of an external world stems from the reliability and predictability of our sensory experiences, which validate the assumption of a causal relation between external objects and sensory data. This assumption is also psychologically derivative knowledge derived from empirical data, but it is logically primitive. By delineating beliefs according to their causes (logical vs. psychological) and immediacy (primitive vs. derivative), Russell establishes a framework for scrutinizing the epistemic status of various types of beliefs and their functions within our broader system of knowledge.

Russell places particular importance on distinguishing between *psychological primitiveness* and *logical primitiveness* in discussions about the degree of certainty.[125] The distinction between logical and psychological beliefs plays a crucial role in his understanding of the problem of the external world. Russell emphasizes this distinction to highlight the difference in the epistemic status between different beliefs. Logical primitives refer to beliefs or propositions that are not deduced from other beliefs. They are accepted without further justification within the framework of logical possibility. For instance, our knowledge of the external world is logically primitive, since we do not derive this belief from other logical beliefs. However, since it is derived from our direct

[125] *Ibid.,* p. 55.

acquaintance with sense-data (the empirical facts that are the cause of our beliefs), it is considered psychologically derivative. There are some beliefs that are logically and psychologically primitives and our knowledge of them is knowledge by acquaintance. For example, the principle of non-contradiction is considered a fundamental and self-evident truth that underpins logical reasoning and discourse. We do not need to justify its truth, but by immediately having it we know it is true. Similarly, our sensory data are logically and psychologically primitive, since our knowledge of them is immediate, grounded in direct acquaintance. For Russell, the problem of the external world lies at the intersection of logic and psychology. Logically, the existence of an external world is not inherently problematic; it is conceivable within the bounds of logical possibility. However, psychologically, the challenge arises when attempting to establish the certainty of our beliefs about the external world based on our sensory experiences. Russell's distinction between logical and psychological primitives informs his understanding of this problem. While our belief in the external world may be logically primitive, i.e., it is not deduced from logical beliefs, it is psychologically derivative, as it is grounded in our sensory experiences. By delineating between logical and psychological, Russell recognizes that the problem of the external world stems from psychological uncertainty, despite their logical possibility.

Russell claims that when beliefs are logically primitive but not psychologically primitive, our confidence in their truth tends to diminish if we cannot logically deduce them from psychologically primitive beliefs. In such cases, our confidence in the truth of these beliefs relies on their logical connection to beliefs that are immediately known, i.e., psychologically primitive. Without this logical connection, doubts arise regarding the validity or reliability of these beliefs, as they lack a clear foundation in our immediate

experiences. It means that our knowledge of the external world is only justifiable in terms of our psychologically primitive beliefs, our sense-data. The commonly held belief that trees and mountains continue to exist even when we are not observing them serves as an illustrative example. This belief is logically primitive, since we do not have any logical ground for believing in it, i.e., it is not arrived at by logically deduced from other logical beliefs, but it is psychologically derivative, because the belief is caused by some empirical facts (our sense-data) other than what the belief asserts, i.e., we believe it on the basis of the continuous appearances (sense-data). Russell argues that the psychological foundation of the belief in the continued existence of trees and mountains is rooted in consistent past experiences of perceiving their appearances whenever observed. However, the accuracy of this belief can be prone to doubt, and Russell emphasizes caution in hastily accepting the validity of this belief. By contrast, our belief in the existence of these appearances, which is both psychologically and logically primitive, is beyond question. From our direct experience or firsthand observation of these appearances, we imply the existence of these enduring objects as the cause of these appearances. That is, we go beyond these immediate appearances and infer that there are physical trees and mountains of which these are appearances. It follows that, for our belief in their continued existence to be well-founded, it necessitates a reasoned justification beyond our immediate experiences.[126] That is, since this belief goes beyond our sensory experiences, it needs a reasoned justification (such as the theory of inference), and it is prone to doubt. This necessity means that we need to provide reasoned justification, demonstrating why

[126] *Ibid.,* p. 55.

the belief is reasonable, while it may not be true. Without this basis, our derivative belief lacks the solid foundation needed to establish it as justified knowledge.

Accordingly, Russell introduces two significant categories within our knowledge, Hard data and Soft data, with the former serving as the bedrock for the latter.[127] Hard data, being psychologically and logically primitive, form the basis needed for our derivative knowledge. Conversely, soft data, such as our knowledge of the physical objects of the external world, constitute derivative knowledge and require justification. Russell posits that our knowledge of the external world is psychologically derivative, relying on empirical facts and sensory experiences, while also being logically primitive, as it is not deduced from other logical beliefs. For instance, the belief in the existence or non-existence of a physical table lacks a logical foundation, as either proposition is logically permissible. However, hard data, which encompass particular sensory facts like sense-data, logical/mathematical truths such as the law of non-contradiction, and immediate memory, are not subject to reasonable doubt. Russell claims that as we contemplate and grasp the nature of these hard data, our certainty in them strengthens over time.[128] Through reflection and examination, we increasingly recognize the immediate and incontrovertible nature of sensory experiences and logical principles, acknowledging them as the sole pillars supporting our knowledge, because they are the only data that are directly acquired. For instance, our percept of the color red is an example of hard data. We see the red color, and this direct sensory experience is considered psychologically primitive because our belief in the existence of the red colour is caused by the red colour, i.e., it is caused by the thing the belief is about. It is logically primitive because our belief

[127] *Ibid.,* pp. 56-57.
[128] *Ibid.,* p. 56.

in the existence of the red colour is not derived from other beliefs. We don't need any additional reasoning or inference to know that we are perceiving the color red. In contrast, soft data are subject to doubt upon critical reflection. Unlike hard data, which is firm and unquestionable, soft data may raise uncertainties when scrutinized closely. For instance, our knowledge of the physical objects of the external world is psychologically derivative, because our belief in their existence is caused by our sense-data and not by our acquaintance with the physical objects, meaning that our belief is based on inference. For example, our belief in the existence of a physical table is caused by a fact of sense, such as observing a patch of color, which is not what the belief asserts —the existence of a table external to this patch— making this belief psychologically derivative.

Russell says: "Applying our distinction of "hard" and "soft" data to psychologically derivative but logically primitive beliefs, we shall find that most, if not all, are to be classed as soft data."[129] In other words, our knowledge of the external physical world, which is psychologically derivative, is soft data, hence, must be justified based on our psychologically primitive sensory data, our sense-data. For instance, our belief in the existence of the table is not caused by immediately experiencing the table but is inferred from our sensory experiences of seeing a color or feeling the hardness. In the absence of direct acquaintance with the table, there is a need for additional evidence or reasoning to support our belief against sceptics of such a belief. Building upon his differentiation between hard and soft data, Russell formulates the problem of our knowledge of the external world.[130] He first clarifies that by the 'external world' he means a world that is

[129] *Ibid.,* p. 56.
[130] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

external to our sense-data, which is part of our hard data.[131] While our sense-data exists outside the mind —qualities like redness are not constituents of our mind— the domain of physics and common sense extends beyond our sense-data, hence, soft data. Russell's analysis reveals that our sense-data, categorized as hard data, form the foundational and unquestionable basis upon which we construct and validate our understanding of the external world. Consequently, Russell reframes the RSP problem in light of his distinction between hard and soft data. He poses the question: "Can the existence of anything other than our own hard data be inferred from the existence of those data?"[132] With this inquiry, Russell embarks on a quest to address the RSP problem by establishing a justified link between our sense-data (hard data) and the external world (soft data), aiming for a solution that relies on the fewest possible primitives and acknowledges the limitations of his earlier theory of inference formulated in 1912.

In pursuit of this goal, Russell analyzes his overarching question into two specific inquiries.[133] The first inquiry revolves around the belief in the existence of sensible objects, like sense-data, even in the absence of present perception. The second inquiry probes the belief in the existence of enduring physical objects or 'matter'. Both the existence of sensory objects(sensibilia) and physical objects fall under the category of soft data and are psychologically derived. Russell's central question is whether these soft data can be derived from our hard data —our sense-data. His aim is to present arguments defending their relation to our hard data.

[131] *Ibid.*, p. 58.
[132] *Ibid.*, p. 58.
[133] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

2-2-2) Russell's 1914 Analysis of Enduring Physical Objects and Sensory Objects (Sensibilia) within the Dichotomy of Hard and Soft Data

As per Russell's definition, sensible objects (sensibilia) are directly perceptible, encompassing elements like the color patch we observe or the distinct sensation of hardness we feel. It is commonly accepted that each time we interact with, for instance, a table, we will have a sensation of hardness as we did during the initial touch. The participation of the presence of sensory objects, even when not actively perceived, is an inference drawn from our past sensory experiences. Russell endeavors to examine the soundness of such inferences, to ascertain their epistemic reliability and to establish whether sensibilia can be justified based on our immediate sensory experiences. Additionally, Russell aims to evaluate the belief in the continuous and independent existence of physical objects, often referred to as the 'thing-in-itself' or 'matter', regardless of our current perceptions. [134] Both issues delve into the intricate relation between our subjective experiences (our hard data) and objective reality. The belief in the endurance of sensible objects revolves around our direct sensory experiences and how they lead us to affirm the existence of specific sensible objects, while not perceived. The challenge of establishing the continuous existence of physical objects takes a further step by questioning whether these external entities, which are beyond our sensory encounters, genuinely exist. Unlike sensible objects, which we can potentially perceive under suitable conditions, physical objects are postulated to exist beyond the realm of our perceptions,

[134] The term 'physical object' is a broader concept that can encompass both matter and the thing-in-itself, depending on the philosophical perspective. It refers to the objects and entities that exist in the external world, which is outside of our minds and perceptions. In philosophy and metaphysics, 'matter' typically denotes the substance that constitutes physical objects, representing the material composition of things. The concept of the "thing-in-itself" originates from Immanuel Kant's philosophy, where he argued that our knowledge is confined to the realm of appearances (phenomena) and that we cannot directly access the 'thing-in-itself' or the noumenal realm. The thing-in-itself represents an ultimate reality that exists independently of our perception and conceptualization.

remaining forever unperceived. Therefore, confirming the continuous existence of physical objects involves grappling with additional complexities, including the nature of their existence beyond our perceptual awareness and the reliability of the inferences that lead us to posit their existence.

Through the examination of our hard data, Russell initially addresses his inquiry into the continuous existence of physical objects in the external world.[135] He argues that in scenarios such as circling a table, our perception involves a succession of changing visual appearances.[136] However, Russell observes that despite these alterations in appearance, when we use phrases like 'walking around the table,' we continue to hold onto the assumption of a singular table persisting through these various appearances. This underlying assumption, Russell identifies as the instinctive belief from which we begin and which we seek to justify. However, Russell contends that upon closer examination of our immediate experiences, we discover that they consist of a succession of changing sense data, not a solitary, unchanging object. The variations in our sensory experiences suggest that what we perceive is not an enduring, unchanging table, but rather a collection of sensory appearances that may differ from one moment to the next. Russell argues that by liberating our minds from the assumption of a permanent 'thing', we can redirect our attention to what we truly have —the appearances themselves— which constitute the genuine content of our experiences. This shift in perspective allows us to approach the problem without presupposing the enduring existence of physical objects, enabling a more accurate analysis grounded in our immediate sensory data. Russell advocates this

[135] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World: As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy.* London & New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 61-62.
[136] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

approach as a means to circumvent the circularity inherent in the traditional perspective, particularly the view presented in his *Problems of Philosophy*. The traditional view assumes the existence of enduring physical objects, i.e., the 'thing-in-itself' or 'matter', as the cause of our sensory experiences. However, as it was previously explained, this assumption relies on the very phenomena it seeks to explain, creating a circular argument.

By redirecting attention to the immediate appearances or sense data, Russell aims to break free from this circular reasoning. He suggests that rather than presupposing the existence of external objects, we focus on the raw sensory experiences themselves. This shift allows for a more direct analysis of our experiences without presupposing the existence of external objects as their cause. Russell's argument here challenges the traditional view that posits enduring physical objects as the basis of our sensory experiences. Instead, he posits that our direct experiences consist of sense-data, casting doubt on the assumption of enduring physical objects without sufficient evidence beyond our sensory perceptions. This perspective questions the validity of traditional metaphysical concepts such as 'matter' or 'things-in-themselves', emphasizing the need for empirical evidence to support claims about the external world. Russell argues that beliefs in enduring physical objects lack justification beyond the sense-data we possess. According to him, our experiences unfold as a series of diverse appearances without revealing any enduring object like a 'thing-in-itself' or 'matter'. This undermines the assumption of the existence of such enduring entities, considering it baseless. Consequently, the existence of enduring 'matter' or the 'thing-in-itself' is brought into question. Russell argues that there is no verifiable basis to establish the existence of enduring physical objects. This stance forms his response to inquiries about the enduring existence of 'matter' or the 'thing-in-itself'. Russell asserts that inferences drawn from our

sense-data (hard data) to posit the existence of enduring physical objects (soft data) lack justifiable support, since all we have is our changeable sense-data which is not durable.

Russell then proceeds to address his concern about the existence of sensory objects, which he subsequently labels as sensibilia. He aims to determine whether these sensory objects, which can be the immediate contents of our experiences, can be justifiably inferred from our sense-data. To illustrate his point, Russell introduces a scenario involving the use of 'blue spectacles', wherein the blue glass of the spectacles, when clean, remains imperceptible to our sight. [137] Instead, we perceive the blueness as residing in the objects viewed through the glass, while the glass itself is discerned solely through the sense of touch. When we touch and have the sensation of hardness, we directly experience both the sense of touch and the sense of blueness. However, even in the absence of the sense of touch, the direct sense of blueness persists. It assures us of the presence of the effects of the sense of hardness after ceasing tactile contact, crucial for explaining why we perceive blue appearances while not experiencing the hardness.[138] Inferring the presence of the hardness is based on the continuity of our blue color perceptions. This inference is grounded in the sensory facts experienced both presently and in the past. As long as the perception of the blue color persists, we simultaneously maintain an ongoing sensory awareness of weight, and we anticipate the sensation of hardness. Thus, the belief in the existence of the effects of the sense of hardness, even when not perceived, is founded on inferences derived from our sense-data, previously experienced, and these effects are of the same nature as our sense-data. Accordingly, Russell claims that we can reasonably verify the existence of sensible objects (such as the

[137] *Ibid.*, pp. 62-65.
[138] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

sense of hardness) while not present in our immediate sensory experiences but share the same nature as objects we have been acquainted with in the past (for example, through touch). That is, "we have means of knowing of the present existence of objects not given in sense, though of the same kind as objects formerly given in sense."[139]

The method to which Russell alludes is inductive reasoning or inductive inference.[140] Inductive reasoning enables us to draw generalizations based on observed patterns. Consequently, when we touch an object and later cease touching it, we can rely on our past sensory encounters to infer that the sensory object still exists even in the absence of current tactile perception. This inference is validated by the expectation of encountering a particular sense-datum in the future; every time that we touch, we get acquainted with a similar sense of hardness. When we anticipate an appearance and subsequently perceive the anticipated appearance, it affirms the existence of the appearance that we previously encountered, thereby reinforcing our inferences.[141] As an illustration, consider the anticipation of the sense of hardness before sensing it. Prior to our sensation of hardness (e.g., of a table), we often harbor expectations or anticipations regarding this tactile quality. The anticipation itself arises from past sensory experiences wherein we have encountered similar sensations of hardness. These past experiences form the basis of our expectations or anticipations regarding the tactile quality of

[139] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[140] Unlike deductive reasoning, where the conclusion logically follows from the premises, inductive inference involves making generalizations that are likely but not guaranteed to be true. Inductive reasoning plays a crucial role in forming hypotheses, making predictions, and drawing conclusions about the world based on empirical evidence. However, it is essential to recognize that inductive reasoning does not provide certainty; rather, it offers degrees of probability or likelihood. For a more in-depth understanding of inductive reasoning and its applications, consider the following source: Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Hume critically examines the principles of inductive reasoning and the problem of induction.

[141] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World: As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy.* London & New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 65.

hardness. When we finally experience the sensation of hardness as anticipated, this alignment between our expectation and the actual sensation serves as validation for the existence of the quality of hardness before being experienced. In other words, the confirmation of our anticipated sensation reaffirms our inference. This suggests the presence of unperceived sensible objects that resemble our sense-data. Our knowledge of these unperceived sensible objects is justifiably derived from our perceived sensible objects, our sense-data, through the recognition of their effects that continue over time.[142] Through his analysis, Russell establishes a method of validating the probability of the continued existence of objects of sense while they are not currently being perceived. These sensible appearances are inferred from our own sense-data, without presupposing a domain of physical objects underlying these appearances.[143] Accordingly, Russell confirms that "there exist means of inferring *sensibilia* which are not data from those that are."[144] That is, we can justifiably infer the existence of unperceived sensory objects (soft data) from our sense-data (hard data). He contends that although we cannot determine how things appear from locations devoid of our presence, our examples demonstrate the reasonableness of inferring that they would exhibit some appearance, aligning with our expectations. By recognizing the continuity of sensible objects through their effects, Russell suggests that we can ascertain the existence of these objects without relying on assumptions beyond acknowledging our sensations when they occur, both in the present and in the past.

[142] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[143] *Ibid*., pp. 62-65.
[144] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917, p. 111.

This outcome aligns with Russell's assertion that "*in so far* as physics or common sense is verifiable, it must be capable of interpretation in terms of actual sense-data alone. The reason for this is simple. Verification consists always in the occurrence of an expected sense-datum."[145] In the context of the 'blue spectacles,' we deduce the existence of the sense of hardness even before direct contact, drawing this inference from our present sense-data of the blue color observed in every object. That means, the verification of sensible appearances can be exclusively rooted in the sensory objects that are perceived.[146] Hence, Russell proposes that our sense-data can be regarded as part of a larger category of 'sensible objects', which he refers to as Sensibilia. John Hamilton, in his thesis 'Russell and the Metaphysics of Neutral Monism', writes: "Russell coins the term sensibilia' (singular 'sensibile') to denote the 'appearances' of things, whether they are data for some observer or not."[147] So, sensibilia, or sensible objects, encompass a broad range of entities that can be experienced through our senses, even if we have not directly perceived them. Sensibilia, as it was illustrated in our example, "have the same metaphysical and physical status as sense-data without necessarily being data to any mind."[148] Sensibilia and sense-data having the same physical status means that they both are non-mental, and having the same metaphysical status means that both are considered to exist as the primitive constituents of reality. While they may not exist in the same relation to the mind, they are regarded as having the same nature and existence. Consequently, the existence and characteristics of inferred sensibilia appear to be less

[145] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[146] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[147] Hamilton, John. "Russell and the Metaphysics of Neutral Monism." PhD thesis, 2013. https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/46483/1/JHamiltonThesis.pdf, p. 27.
[148] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917, p. 110.

doubtful than those of the physical objects in the external world. This is because sensibilia, as defined by Russell, closely resemble our sense-data, and their existence and nature can be verified through our confirmed expectations, reassuring the validity of our inferences. In other words, from our sense-data, we infer sensible objects that are of the same nature, unlike something entirely different, such as the cat in Russell's example. Thus, these inferences are different from inferring the cat as the cause of our sense-data in 1912. Inferred physical objects, like the cat, possess an unknown nature that remains beyond our immediate grasp.

The lack of resemblance and verifiability renders the inferences of physical objects in Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* more dubious compared to the inferences of sensibilia in *Our Knowledge of the External World*. Sensibilia, similar to Russell's account of physical objects in his *Problems of Philosophy*, are entities inferred from sense-data, but they share the same nature as our sense-data and are capable of being perceived, even if not currently perceived. It means that we know exactly what sensibilia are and we can verify our inferences when we experience them. Conversely, inferred physical objects, such as the cat, are totally distinct from our sense-data and are incapable of ever being perceived. The difference between sense-data and the inferred physical objects of the external world, as defined in the *Problems of Philosophy*, is ontological and metaphysical. This means that the distinction between sense-data and physical objects concerns their fundamental nature and existence in reality. Since physical objects such as the cat are not perceivable, there is no way of experiencing them and verifying our inferences. By contrast, the differentiation between sense-data and sensibilia primarily revolves around epistemological distinctions. Sense-data are objects of direct acquaintance, discerned through immediate sensory experiences, while sensibilia are

entities inferred or anticipated based on our prior sense-data and resembling our sense-data. To illustrate this resemblance, consider the sensation of warmth outdoors. We directly perceive and experience this warmth through our senses. Building upon this direct acquaintance, we can anticipate that another entity (a person or an object) situated in the same location and under the same conditions would also undergo a similar warmth or sensation. Based on our previous experiences and expectations that came true, we infer that the sense of warmth similar to what we experienced would exist, even if we are not experiencing it.

Russell entertains the idea of sensibilia to address fundamental questions about our knowledge of the external world. He proposes that even in a hypothetical scenario of a human body devoid of consciousness, sensibilia would still exist in relation to that body. However, these sensibilia would only be categorized as sense-data when a mind is present to perceive them. Thus, he asserts that the mind's function is solely that of awareness, while all other aspects of sense-data are considered physical or physiological in nature.[149] his conceptualization provides Russell with independent and foundational elements of the external world, which is why he entertains the idea of sensibilia.[150] Russell defines sensibilia as the entirety of sensible objects which are distinct from the physical objects commonly understood. By introducing the concept of sensibilia, he addresses his main question regarding our knowledge of the external world. He shows that we can reasonably infer and verify the existence of soft data (sensibilia) from the existence of our hard data (sense-data). Russell further claims that the foundation of our knowledge extends beyond

[149] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[150] Hamilton, John. "Russell and the Metaphysics of Neutral Monism." PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2013, p. 27. https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/46483/1/JHamiltonThesis.pdf

our individual sense-data and encompasses verifiable sensible objects inferred from our sense-data. This expansion broadens the spectrum of data upon which our knowledge of the external world is built. Sensibilia, resembling our sense-data and verifiable based on them, serve as reliable data supporting the assertion of external existence beyond our immediate data. Therefore, any claims or knowledge concerning the external world should be grounded not only in our sense-data but also in our sensibilia, even though they are not categorized as hard data. Russell argues that verifiable inferences from sense-data to entities of similar status, namely sensibilia, hold greater reliability than unverifiable inferences from sense-data to physical objects whose status is unknown. Consequently, Russell suggests that physical objects should not be regarded as the real and ultimate constituents of the external world due to the doubtful nature of their inferred existence. Instead, sensibilia should be acknowledged as the ultimate constituents of the physical world. Instead, sensibilia should be "recognized as the ultimate constituents of the physical world".[151] This is because there is a verifiable justification for their reality, and their nature closely resembles that of sense-data, which are considered our hard data. It means that we can legitimately make such inferences. By recognizing sensibilia as foundational elements, Russell provides a more robust framework for our knowledge of the external world.

With the existence of sensibilia now justified, Russell has a solid basis from which to embark on his quest to justify our knowledge of the external world. He aims to elucidate and validate our understanding of the physical world by building upon its ultimate constituents, sensibilia. This endeavor is crucial for addressing and explaining the

[151] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics", 1917, p. 113.

relation between sense-data and physics —the RSP problem. To achieve this, in 1914, Russell proposes his epistemic theory of Logical Construction, asserting that "[w]herever possible, logical constructions are to be substituted for inferred entities [physical objects]."[152] This entails replacing inferred and unknown physical objects of the external world with constructions from known entities, i.e., sensibilia, which include our sense-data.

2-2-3) Russell's 1914 Notion of Six—Dimensional Space: A Framework for Constructing Physical Objects from Sensibilia

Sensibilia, within Russell's framework, encompass entities capable of being directly perceived, even if not currently so, and include attributes such as color, taste, and smell. Nevertheless, Russell contends that considering sensibilia as the foundational elements of the physical world poses a significant challenge, namely, the diverse appearances of the same object.[153] His previous solution to this problem in 1912 involved positing physical objects as enduring entities entirely distinct from our transient and ever-changing appearances such as sense-data. Thus, it did not matter if these appearances were always changing and cannot all be consistently considered as related to the same enduring physical object since they are subjective and dependent on the perceiver's condition, totally distinct from the enduring physical objects that are inferred. However, Russell's new theory of logical construction suggests that we construct these physical objects from these appearances, perceived or not, meaning that the physical objects of the external world are defined in terms of these appearances. It implies that Russell had to address the problem of these ever-changing appearances to consider them as the constituent parts

[152] *Ibid.*, p. 115.
[153] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

of physical objects. He argues that the problem lies in our misconception of space, particularly in its incorrect definition, which stems from viewing space as three-dimensional when, according to him, it is actually six-dimensional. Russell's critique of the traditional notion of space has implications for how we understand the external world. He suggests that rather than positing an objective and fixed spatial framework as the foundation of our perception of the world, we may acknowledge that physical space itself is a product of our perceptual experiences. In other words, space as is used in physics is a concept we use to organize and make sense of our sense-data, but it doesn't exist independently of those experiences. Russell formulates a theory of the world that accommodates this new understanding of space, which in turn informs his theory of logical constructions.

Russell clarifies that the core issue revolves around the apparent difficulty of reconciling disparate sense data, even when they are designated as manifestations of the same object. Take, for instance, the observation of a table, where various sense data such as color, shape, and texture contribute to our perception. These sense-data may vary based on factors like perspective, lighting conditions, or individual sensory faculties (as demonstrated by a colorblind person perceiving different colors). However, suggesting that the table itself undergoes these changes or that all diverse appearances coexist in the same space at the same time proves implausible. Given the difficulty of linking the physical object to a particular appearance, in 1912, it seemed obvious to Russell to posit that the object is totally distinct from and underlies all its appearances. He claimed that none of these appearances can definitively represent the true nature of the object. However, Russell acknowledges a potential problem of skepticism in this context. Since direct access to physical objects is unavailable, and our sense-data are totally distinct from

the inferred physical objects, a skeptic might argue that we lack sufficient grounds to believe in the existence of these inferred physical objects. In response to this challenge, Russell proposes his theory of logical constructions, defining physical objects as constructions made of all their appearances (sensibilia), perceived or not. Nevertheless, the challenge persists in reconciling diverse appearances under the same object. Therefore, Russell must initially clarify how it is possible for incompatible appearances to coexist at the same place and at the same time? Russell contends that the formulation of this question is problematic, since we must make clear what we mean by 'the same place'.[154] He explains that these changes in appearances are due to changes in space, as we move or alter our positions in space, hence, we cannot say 'the same place'. He emphasizes that variations in sense-data arise from different standpoints and different viewpoints when perceiving objects, which result from changes in our locations or the fact that different individuals occupy distinct positions in space and have immediate access only to the subjective space of their own sense-data. Consequently, the notion of 'the same place' loses its accuracy when considering these variations in perspective.

According to Russell, when examining the relation between physical objects and our sense-data, two distinct notions of space come into play —Private space and Public/Perspective space. Russell's differentiation between these two spatial concepts within the context of the physical object —sense-data relation is a pivotal element of his philosophical stance, reflecting his broader hypothesis about reality. Private space corresponds to the space within which our sense-data are situated, representing the spatial relations (left-right, up-down, near-far) among our individual sensory

[154] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World: As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*. London & New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 69-71.

experiences, such as color, shape, and texture. On the other hand, public space of physics is a theoretical construction used in scientific discourse to elucidate the connection between physical objects and our sense-data, envisioned as the three-dimensional space of the external world (length, width, height). This physical space is deemed to exist outside the private space of individuals' sense-data, defined as a public space encompassing all individuals and physical objects. For instance, in scenarios like observing a table, the private space encompasses the spatial relations between my sense-data, like the visual sensations of color and the tactile sensations of texture. Meanwhile, the public space is the objective location of the table in the external world and my position (the observer) in relation to it. This public space, governed by the laws of physics, is shared among all observers and is external to my individual sense-data. In this public space, the table is a physical object with its own objective location, my sense-data and I, as physical beings, also occupy an objective location. While private space is internal to our sense-data, consisting of individual sensory experiences unique to one's perspective, public space is external to our sense-data, shared, and subject to physical laws. This public space is what physics and common sense describe as the three-dimensional physical space in which objects exist and interact. The crucial point lies in the connection between the private and public worlds. Although sense-data are private individual experiences, they are also linked to objective reality in the public world. Sense-data are part of the category of sensibilia, which are the real constituents of physical objects. Sensibilia, inferred from sense-data, are objective and exist independently of our mind, occupying a space in the public space. For instance, consider the redness of an apple as a sensible object. While unperceived, this redness belongs to the objective domain of physics, making it an objective reality. However, once it is perceived, it transitions into the private realm of the

individual experience, becoming subjective. Yet, whether perceived or not, the redness remains a property of the apple in the external world. Therefore, each sense-datum, whether perceived subjectively or objectively, is considered a constituent part of the physical object and thus belongs simultaneously to the private space of individual perception and the public space of objective reality. This dual nature implies that the concept of space encompasses six dimensions. Russell's metaphysics proposes a theory of a six-dimensional world wherein sense-data occupies its rightful place, bridging the gap between the private and public spheres of experience and reality.

Essentially, Russell's differentiation between private space (the realm of sense-data) and public space (the external world where physical objects exist in relation to each other) provides insight into how our subjective experiences relate to the objective reality of the external world. Conceptualizing each mind as a point, akin to Leibnizian monads,[155] within physical space. These points represent different perspectives or private worlds. Each private world involves the unique private space belonging to a mind and is arranged in relation to others within the public space, alongside all other physical objects.[156] According to Russell's theory of the world and our place in it, each individual perceives a distinct three-dimensional world unique to them, separate from the worlds perceived by others. The private world experienced by one person doesn't share common places with

[155] According to Leibniz's metaphysics, monads are fundamental, immaterial units that constitute the entirety of reality. Each monad is an individual, indestructible substance with its own perceptions and inclinations. These monads exist throughout the world and have unique points of view, which aligns with Russell's perspective on space and individual standpoints. However, Leibniz asserts that each monad has no connection or access to anything beyond itself (it is like a windowless room). Russell denies this claim and emphasizes the interconnectedness between individuals and the external world. For further reading, consider: Russell, Bertrand. *The Principles of Mathematics*. In this text, Russell critiques and expands upon Leibniz's ideas in the context of modern philosophy.

[156] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World: As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*. London & New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 70.

the world experienced by another person, though it is real and independent of the mind. The distinction between private worlds arises from the unique set of sense-data that each individual possesses. In other words, each private world has its own space or place, defined by the objects within or surrounding it, and these private worlds each include their own sense-data different from others. To elaborate, let's consider the example of two people observing a table. Each person's perception of the table involves a distinct set of sense-data, influenced by factors such as their viewing angle, lighting conditions, and individual sensory faculties. In this scenario, Person A perceives the table with certain attributes such as color, shape, and texture, constituting their sense-data within their private space. Similarly, Person B perceives the table with a different set of attributes, based on their unique sensory experiences, which also exist within their private space. Now, since each individual's private space is defined by their own set of sense-data, it follows that the appearances of the table observed by Person A and Person B belong to separate private spaces. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to state that "there are two appearances of the table in the same place" because these appearances are located in different private spaces. Accordingly, the problem of multiple appearances existing in the same place simultaneously loses its force when considering the individualized nature of private worlds. Russell's view enables the definition of an ordinary physical object based on its changing appearances without encountering contradictions. The contradiction he aimed to address arises from the apparent inconsistency resulting from changes in the appearances of the same physical object, considered as its defining aspects. The key to resolving this lies in understanding how appearances from different perspectives contribute to defining a physical object, whether from the standpoint of common sense or within the framework of physics.

Russell introduces the concept of the private world, positioned in public space, to refer to the perceived perspective, meaning the appearances that are perceived, our sense-data. He also acknowledges that numerous unperceived perspectives exist. Russell clarifies that the concept of public space encompasses all perspectives, whether perceived or unperceived. For example, when two individuals are in a room near each other, they perceive somewhat similar but private worlds. The introduction of a third person into this scenario introduces a potential world to be perceived. As this person occupies a space between the two individuals, a new intermediate private world is perceived, which was unperceived before that. This world is not a simple combination of the two private worlds but a distinct entity with its own appearances. Russell emphasizes that this intermediate world includes aspects of the universe that existed, even if no one was actively perceiving it. The distinction between perceived and unperceived perspectives brings focus to Russell's notion of sensibilia. This scenario shows that there are appearances that are not perceived. Sensibilia, in this context, encompasses all sensory objects within both perceived and unperceived perspectives. The perceived perspective specifically entails the appearances that are observed, constituting what Russell terms as our sense-data. On the other hand, the unperceived perspective includes appearances that are unobserved, collectively termed sensibilia by Russell. If an individual were to eventually perceive these sensibilia, they would become that person's sense-data. An ordinary physical object can be understood by integrating all its observable aspects from different perspectives, forming a comprehensive representation of the object. Regardless of whether these perspectives are currently perceived or not, each aspect contributes to the overall identity of the object. For instance, imagine a sculpture displayed in a museum. From one angle, it may appear smooth and curved, while from another angle, it might reveal intricate

details and textures. These various appearances, observed or potential, collectively contribute to our knowledge of the sculpture as a whole. Russell's method suggests that these diverse aspects of the object constitute a set, with each aspect serving as a member of this set. By considering all these aspects together, we arrive at a holistic representation of the physical object.

Russell considers all aspects of a thing as real objects since they are sensory objects capable of being perceived. However, he treats the object itself as a hypothetical construct, defined in terms of these real aspects. For example, consider a painting hanging on a wall. From one angle, it may appear vibrant and colorful, while from another angle, it might seem dull and shadowy. Each of these perspectives constitutes a real aspect of the painting, but the painting itself, as an abstract whole beyond any particular viewpoint, remains hypothetical. This is because what is commonly referred to as the physical object, such as a table, is a set of all its aspects, sensibilia, while we have no direct access to the object itself; we have no way of sensing or immediately experiencing the table. Thus, the individual aspects, that we experience, we are justified in their existence, hence, they are real, but the existence of the thing is not verifiable by our senses or through immediate experiences, hence, their existence is hypothetical and prone to doubt. Accordingly, Russell regards the physical object of physics or common sense as a hypothetical entity, whose existence is subject to error and uncertainty, contingent upon the assembly of different aspects. According to Russell's method of justification, we don't arrive at the traditional solid physical object but a convenient fictional object that may not underly all these aspects. Yet, we do not deny or assert its existence, and that is the significance of Russell's theory of logical construction, compared to his views in 1912. This method does not lead us to affirm the traditional solid physical object but rather constructs a

convenient fictional entity based on our sensory experiences. Russell argues that there is no harm if physical objects exist as assumed by physics or common sense, as we neither deny nor assert their existence. Instead, our affirmation is directed towards the existence of these aspects or appearances. Thus, if physical objects are absent in some cases, or if there is no 'matter' or 'thing-in-itself', our method safeguards us against erroneously asserting their existence. He states: "In the absence of special knowledge, therefore, the method we have adopted is the only one which is safe, and which avoids the risk of introducing fictitious metaphysical entities."[157] In Russell's view, we neither assert nor deny the existence of the physical object itself; instead, we affirm the reality of its aspects or appearances.

In summary, Russell's philosophical framework, which includes his distinction between hard data and soft data, his private versus public space, and his theory of logical construction, provides a cohesive metaphysical view of the world, demonstrating a close connection between sense-data and physical objects. Russell's conception of a six-dimensional world allows him to present his epistemic theory of logical construction, which effectively addresses the problem of establishing the relation between sense-data and physics. This picture assists him in addressing the RSP problem and justifying our knowledge of the external world, based on verifiable data.

2-3) Analyzing Russell's Theory of Logical Construction

Through the method of logical construction, Russell endeavors to substitute constructions for inferences and articulate the definition of inferred physical objects or matter solely in terms of sensible objects. This pursuit is directed towards justifying the connection

[157] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

between our sense-data and physics while addressing the RSP problem. He employs his method of logical construction and attempts to systematically derive the physical objects of the external world from sensory objects or sensibilia. His theory of logical construction simplifies his ultimate ontology by characterizing physical objects as hypothetical entities, eliminating the necessity for them to be primary constituents in his ultimate ontology, or in his metaphysical view of the world. Russell's method establishes a hierarchical structure in his epistemology, with sense-data enjoying a higher level of certainty owing to their immediacy, deeming them as one of the most secure objects of knowledge. He asserts that there are no 'illusions of sense,' suggesting that objects perceived through our senses, even those encountered in dreams, possess an undeniable reality for us.[158] In other words, when we perceive something through our senses, whether in waking life or in dreams, Russell contends that these perceptions hold a genuine reality for us. He argues that our experiences, whether waking or dreaming, are equally real in the sense that they are immediately perceived and experienced by us.

According to Russell, by identifying a thing with the collection of its appearances, as long as this collection serves the intended purposes for which the thing was conceived, we achieve a proper definition. For instance, when the collection of appearances fulfills the original purpose of assuming the existence of a table, identifying the table with this collection proves superior to positing an object, called the table, beyond these appearances and underlying them. While Russell clarifies that this doesn't negate the possibility of a physical object or underlying table beyond these appearances, he argues

[158] *Ibid.,* p. 68.

that "it is merely expedient to abstain from asserting this unnecessary entity."[159] Russell's new approach can be understood in the context of his broader philosophical framework, particularly his theory of logical construction. He suggests that our understanding of the world is constructed through the organization and interpretation of sense-data and appearances. When we perceive what we commonly refer to as a table, we are actually perceiving a collection of sensory experiences: the color, shape, texture, and so forth, which we amalgamate into the concept of a table. Russell argues that this collection of appearances, or sense-data, is sufficient to serve the purposes for which we conceive of a table. For example, if we use the table for writing, dining, or any other practical purpose, it is the sensory qualities that we interact with and rely upon, not some underlying 'matter' or 'thing-in-itself' beyond those appearances. Thus, he emphasizes that while it is not necessarily wrong to posit the existence of a physical object or an underlying 'table' beyond these appearances, it is philosophically more expedient to refrain from doing so unless absolutely necessary. In other words, if a set of appearances effectively fulfills the functions and purposes associated with the concept of a table, then introducing an additional entity beyond those appearances adds unnecessary complexity to our understanding without providing any additional explanatory power. This approach aligns with Russell's favorite maxim of Occam's Razor and principle of simplicity, advocating simplest explanations with the fewest elements necessary to account for all available evidence. The connection to Occam's razor is evident in defining a thing by its appearances, which relies on direct observability and eliminates the need for postulating unobservable entities. Emphasizing the visible and tangible aspects of the thing also

[159] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917, p. 115.

adheres to the principle of simplicity, avoiding unnecessary complexities. Russell's approach involves favoring a constructed definition that relies on the most immediate and verifiable aspects of the thing, provided these appearances fulfill the intended purposes for which the concept of the thing (e.g., the table) was conceived.

Russell, however, acknowledges the current impossibility of replacing all inferred entities with logical constructions. Notably, among these entities are unperceived sensibilia, which serve as the logical elements used to construct the 'matter' in the realm of physics.[160] To avoid falling into solipsism,[161] Russell embraces these entities.[162] But since they are our primitive data that needs explaining in more fundamental epistemological terms, Russell has no explanation other than justifying them by inference. These sensory objects, similar to sense-data, are the perceivable data capable of being verified, hence, they can be used as the basis of our knowledge; they differ from the constructed objects that are not capable of being perceived or verified. Russell says that these entities are inferred from sense-data and there is no other way of confirming their existence. Therefore, Russell accepts sensibilia that would manifest in places devoid of minds, i.e., unperceived sensibilia, as the basic building blocks of the external world.[163] He posits that we are compelled to infer their existence from our sense-data. For example, in our scenario of the pair of blue spectacles, when we anticipate the sensation of hardness, drawing from our past tactile experiences, we infer the presence of hardness. In this scenario, our inference relies on prior sensations of hardness with which we have

[160] *Ibid.*, p. 116.
[161] Solipsism is the philosophical position that only one's own mind and its contents are certain to exist, while everything else, including the external world and other minds, is uncertain or may be mere illusion.
[162] Tully, Robert E. "Three Studies of Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives* 13 (1993): 5-35, pp. 10-11.
[163] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917, pp. 116-117.

become acquainted, as well as our understanding of hardness as sense-data.[164] According to Russell, recognizing the existence of unperceived sensibilia —qualities or characteristics not presently perceived but presumed to exist independently— serves to maintain an objective connection to the external world. By recognizing the existence of unperceived sensibilia, Russell establishes an objective basis for our knowledge of the external world, unperceived sensibilia. Sensibilia provide a bridge between our subjective experiences and the objective reality beyond these experiences. They represent the underlying qualities of physical objects, which exist even when not directly perceived. This perspective precludes the embrace of solipsism or extreme skepticism concerning the existence of anything beyond one's immediate experience. These inferences are derived from our own immediate experiences. Russell asserts that the ideal situation would involve substituting all inferred entities with constructions rooted exclusively in our own sensations. However, he concedes that attaining this ideal remains a distant goal that requires substantial preliminary work.

Russell's epistemological method of logical constructions can be interpreted as a continuous of his logical/ontological theory of definite descriptions, showing the profound interconnection between Russell's epistemology and ontology. In both cases, Russell seeks to establish a justification for our knowledge of the external world by grounding it in our sense-data, which is hard data. The latter systematically analyzes all definite descriptions and proper names into their real constituents, signifying objects with which we are acquainted, such as our sense-data. Correspondingly, the former assembles elements with which we are acquainted, such as our sense-data, in an attempt to

[164] *Ibid.,* pp. 116-117.

systematically construct our understanding of the external world while defining all the objects within such a world. Both theories highlight the indirect nature of our knowledge concerning physical objects, emphasizing the significance of knowledge through descriptions, albeit from distinct perspectives —one epistemological and the other ontological. The theory of definite descriptions shows that our understanding of physical objects relies on our hard data, such as our sense-data, rather than on direct access to the physical objects themselves. However, being a logical/ontological approach, it does not explicitly elucidate and justify this reliance, which is precisely where Russell's theory of logical construction, as an epistemological approach, makes progress. This approach asserts that our knowledge of physical objects is constructed based on our sensory experiences. The theory of logical construction employs these sense-data as the building blocks of physical objects, thereby clarifying the relation between our sense-data and the external world. By treating sense-data as the building blocks, Russell's theory aims to establish a coherent connection between our subjective experiences and the objective existence of the external world.

According to Russell's logical construction, a physical object is defined as a hypothetical entity that may not actually exist. This implies that the Sun is a logical construct rather than a tangible entity, as there isn't a singular object in the external world corresponding to the term "sun." Instead, what we encounter are a series of appearances or sense-data, which constitute our experiences. When we refer to the Sun, we're actually referring to the amalgamation of sensations such as light, warmth, and other perceptions that collectively form our conception of it. We don't have direct access to the Sun itself as a celestial object; rather, our understanding of it is based on these sensory inputs. This perspective aligns with Russell's theory of definite descriptions, which posits that singular

terms, like names for physical objects, function as descriptions rather than direct denotations of those objects. These descriptions are considered true due to the set of attributes we attribute to those objects. For example, the term 'sun' shouldn't be interpreted as denoting the physical celestial body in space; instead, it should be understood as a convenient label encompassing all observable properties and characteristics that define our perception of the Sun. These properties may include its luminosity, heat, and composition of hydrogen and helium. The statement 'there is a sun' is true, but it signifies 'there is an x with such and such properties'. Therefore, this x (the Sun) is known through descriptions and the sensible properties that we can immediately experience. While some of these properties can be directly perceived through observation, such as witnessing a circular shape or feeling warmth, we lack direct sensory access to the physical Sun itself. It implies that there is a physical sun in the sense that the description is true of it, but this sun is defined based on our sensible data, and we cannot know it directly. Hence, while the Sun of physics exists, it deviates from the common-sense understanding of the sun. According to Russell, the existence of the Sun is not contingent upon our direct acquaintance with an object labeled 'the sun'. Instead, it derives from our access to the real constituents composing the object, shaping our conceptualization of what we refer to as the Sun —a belief we instinctively hold. The existence of its constituents, our sense-data, justifies our knowledge of its existence. Russell further elucidates that although our sense-data constitute the physical object, such as a table, our sense-data is not the physical object itself. Rather, it is a part of what defines the table as a physical object in the external world. Therefore, although we do not have direct acquaintance with the table, our acquaintance with a part of it —unlike in 1912—

validates our belief in the existence of the table. For example, when we experience a sensation of a brown patch of color, this brown patch is not the physical table itself. Instead, it is one of the constituent aspects of the table in the physical world. These aspects serve as integral components of the table, as it is properly defined. Consequently, having sense-data of the table does not equate to being acquainted with the table as a physical object, though it justifies its existence. This approach elucidates the relation between sense-data and the physical objects of the external world.

Russell's analytic theory of logical construction and his analytic theory of definite descriptions both demonstrate that our knowledge of the external world is rooted in our direct acquaintance with hard data, such as our sense-data. Offering these two theories, Russell attempts to justify our knowledge of the external world. His analytic method of logical construction is an attempt to elucidate the relation between our sense-data and the external world, addressing the RSP problem. It offers a way to reconcile the subjective nature of our sense-data with the objective reality of the external world, by taking our sense-data to be an important part of the physical objects of the external world. Through this approach, Russell delimits the ontological, metaphysical, and the epistemological connection between our sense-data and physical objects, elucidating the relation between our perceptions and the realms of physics and common sense, presenting a more robust solution than inference for validating our knowledge of the external world —the RSP problem. In the *Problems of Philosophy*, when inferring the existence of an inaccessible object based solely on our sense-data, we faced a dilemma: lacking a verifiable reason for the reliability of this inference or the origin of the assumed characteristics of the inferred physical object. This knowledge gap persisted because we possessed no verifiable information about the inferred physical object or its properties beyond our sense-data,

which were assumed to be entirely distinct from physical objects. However, Russell's theory of logical construction offers a compelling alternative. By considering sensibilia, whether perceived or not, as the constituent parts of the physical object and defining it based on these appearances, we gain insight into the component parts of the physical object. While some of our data may be inferred, such as unperceived sensibilia, these inferences are verifiable, and both perceived and unperceived sensibilia are recognized as entities with the same metaphysical and physical status. This framework provides a more robust justification for the relation between our sense-data and the physical objects themselves. By identifying the constituents of physical objects as sensibilia, some of which are directly given through our experiences, we possess reliable and verifiable knowledge concerning the constituents of the physical object. Instead of assuming an inferred object beyond these properties as the real object, logical construction suggests that we consider different aspects or properties, which are real, as integral parts of the physical object, thus defining the object in virtue of its aspects.

In essence, the substitution of logical constructions for inferred physical objects is crucial in resolving the problem of connecting our perceptions to the objective realm of physics. Within the realm of sensibilia, specific instances known as sense-data exist. These sense-data are apprehended by our minds and experienced through our senses. This subjective experience is dependent on the individual's body, making it subjective. Simultaneously, based on the theory of logical construction, sense-data are objective, constituting the building blocks of the external physical world. Accordingly, Russell's theory of logical construction elucidates the relation between subjective perception and the objective reality of the external world. It enables the formulation of an account of the world that integrates and accommodates observed facts, our hard data, thereby

grounding our knowledge of the external world in verifiable evidence. Since there is no compelling objection to the notion that incorporates sense-data as an integral part of the actual constituents of the physical world, Russell asserts that it stands as a logically sound idea. Consequently, he deems his theory of logical constructions as a useful approach to addressing the relation between our sense-data and external reality.[165]

2-3-1) Logical Construction in the Context of Neutral Monism

Until before 1919, according to Russell's cognitive notion of acquaintance and his theory of knowledge by acquaintance, a recognized distinction persisted in the constituents of the 'subject' (mind) and the physical object (matter), though, it is not explicitly articulated. According to his theory of knowledge by acquaintance, Russell regarded "sense-data as not mental, and as being, in fact, part of the actual subject-matter of physics."[166] He believes "that the actual data in sensation, the immediate objects of sight or touch or hearing, are extra-mental, purely physical, and among the ultimate constituents of matter."[167] Russell's emphasis on the physical nature of sense-data suggests an inherent difference between them and mental phenomena, highlighting the distinction between the physical realm and the mind. In contrast to physical particulars (sense-data), Russell says, "I shall call a particular 'mental' when it is aware of something, and I shall call a fact 'mental' when it contains a mental particular as a constituent."[168] This demarcation extends to the very essence of reality indicating an ontological distinction between the mental and physical. This distinction implies that there are

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[165] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World: As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*. London & New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 78.
[166] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917, p. 111.
[167] Russell, Bertrand. "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter." In *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, 1918, pp. 95-109. URL: http://www.feedbooks.com, p. 97.
[168] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917, p. 112.

aspects of experience that are distinct from physical particulars (sense-data) and these mental particulars pertain to the realm of the mind rather than matter. Russell asserts that "however difficult it may be to know what we mean by "mental," it is not difficult to see that colours and noises are not mental in the sense of having that intrinsic peculiarity which belongs to beliefs and wishes and volitions, but not to the physical world."[169] Based on his claims, it is clear that the constituents of matter differ from those of the mind. Matter is comprised of sensory objects, while these sensory objects are nonmental and totally distinct and external to the mind. The mind, on the other hand, is a separate kind of entity constructed from entities other than physical sense-data.

In 1914, despite Russell's recognition of the metaphysical distinction between mind and matter, he admits that his theory of logical construction is compatible with the theory of neutral monism, even though the latter rejects a clear distinction between mind and matter. Russell believes that his theory of logical construction and the theory of neutral monism are compatible since in both cases, our subjective data, sense-data, are considered as an integral part of the objective world of physics, which was not the case in 1912. Russell's new approach, akin to the theory of neutral monism, promotes the integration of the mental sciences (psychology) and the physical sciences (physics), as both fields explore the same foundational data —specifically, sense-data. Russell further posits that the lack of precise definitions for the terms 'mental' and 'physical' complicates efforts to definitively define these two concepts of mind and matter. Therefore, it is not far-fetched to reject a fundamental distinction between them, as is the case for neutral monists. Moreover, both theories of logical construction and neutral monism align with

[169] *Ibid*., p. 99.

Occam's Razor maxim. Nevertheless, as outlined in the preceding chapter, before 1919, Russell continued to express reservations regarding the theory of neutral monism, based on his theory of knowledge by acquaintance.

In 1914, Russell tries to clarify the meanings of the terms 'physical' and 'mental' within the context of their use in preliminary discussions.[170] The term 'physical,' in Russell's discussion, refers to what is addressed by physics, representing the subject matter within the domain of physics. He asserts that the identity of the data studied by physics may be uncertain, yet despite this uncertainty, they are still termed 'physical' since they are the subject matter of physics. Russell recognizes that the nature of mental states, thoughts, and experiences is even more elusive. He designates something as 'mental' when it is aware of something, that is, awareness is the nature of mind. Similarly, a fact is considered 'mental' when it contains a mental particular (an aware entity) as a constituent. However, Russell notes that the mental and the physical are not necessarily mutually exclusive, although no reason is provided to believe that they overlap. This stance aligns Russell's view more closely with the perspective of neutral monists. According to Russell's theory of logical construction, sense-data are considered part of the objective world of physics while also belonging to the subjective realm of psychology For instance, sense-data can be considered physical studied by physics "among the ultimate constituents of matter."[171] They involve interactions between an individual's sensory organs and the external world; these sensory organs are in the external world, hence, they are physical. Simultaneously, sense-data, serving as the private objects of our

[170] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." In *Mysticism and Logic*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917, pp. 111-112.
[171] Russell, Bertrand. "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter." In *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, 1918, p. 97.

subjective experiences, can be studied by psychology as elements comprehended by our mind through acquaintance. Therefore, sense-data serve as the data utilized in both the sciences of the mental (psychology) and physical (physics). This dual role underscores the intricate relation between the mental and the physical. This perspective is in line with the idea of neutral monists, who claim that both sciences study the same primitive stuff, which is neutral between the mental and the physical, equally belonging to both. In essence, both theories, neutral monism and logical construction, posit that mind and matter are not the ultimate and actual constituents of reality. They adhere to the principle of Occam's Razor by elucidating the entirety of reality in terms of a minimal set of primitive elements. According to the theory of logical construction, all the perceived aspects of an object —our hard data— are deemed real, yet the object itself is treated as a hypothetical construction, not indispensably integral to Russell's ultimate ontology. This theory prevents the inclusion of unnecessary objects and minimizes the likelihood of errors. Russell perceives this as a significant philosophical advancement, enhancing the appeal of the theory of neutral monism. However, as elucidated in the preceding chapter, Russell harbors reservations about the theory of neutral monism.

In conclusion, while Russell acknowledges that his theory of logical construction is compatible with aspects of neutral monism, he rejects the view held by philosophers like "Mach and James and the 'new realists',[172] that the difference between the mental and the

[172] New Realism, associated with philosophers like R. B. Perry and Edwin B. Holt, posits that an objective reality exists independent of human perception and cognition. They argued that science serves as a reliable method for investigating and understanding this reality, suggesting that humans can gain authentic knowledge through perception, reasoning, and empirical inquiry. Perry, in particular, emphasized that reality is not solely a construct of the mind but has a material basis that can be studied scientifically. This perspective stands in stark contrast to idealism, which posits that reality is fundamentally shaped by mental processes or is inherently spiritual. New Realists advocated for a materialistic view, asserting that the external world is a concrete entity that can be understood through systematic investigation.

physical is merely one of *arrangement*."[173] This rejection reflects Russell's belief in a more substantial distinction between the mental and physical domains. His skepticism arises primarily from neutral monism's denial of the cognitive relation of acquaintance and the cognitive nature of sensation, which he believes undermines the fundamental distinction between the 'subject' (mind) and the 'object' (matter). This skepticism highlights the deep interconnection between Russell's epistemological and ontological perspectives. For Russell, epistemological considerations, such as the cognitive processes involved in perception and knowledge acquisition, are crucial in shaping his ontology and defining the boundaries between mental phenomena and physical entities. His rejection of neutral monism is thus rooted in both ontological concerns and his understanding of how we come to comprehend and interact with the world. Despite his reservations, Russell maintains that his theory of logical construction aligns with the tenets of neutral monism and can be approached from that vantage point.[174] He acknowledges that while his approach maintains a clear distinction between mind and matter, his theory of logical construction shares certain commonalities with it.

[173] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." In *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by P.A. Schilpp, 1914, p. 112.
[174] *Ibid*., p. 112.

Chapter Three: Russell's Transition to Neutral Monism; A New Perspective on the Problem of Our Knowledge of the External World

Russell's development of the theory of logical construction plays a significant role in his philosophical shift towards neutral monism. The consequences of his method of logical construction led him to reevaluate his epistemological and ontological perspectives concerning the external world. Notably, Russell abandons his theory of 'knowledge by acquaintance,' rejecting the dualism between 'subject' and 'object' in our immediate experiences. This critical shift ultimately allows him to adopt the theory of neutral monism in 1919.

Russell's method of logical construction exposes the deficiency in the idea that acquaintance is a cognitive relation between 'subject' and 'object'. In this view, the 'object' is our sense-data, which is physical and immediately experienced, while the 'subject' or mind is a mental entity without a physical counterpart. This duality introduces the subject as a constituent of the world. However, after 1914, Russell argues that anything beyond our hard data, including sense-data, that cannot be immediately experienced, cannot be considered a real constituent of the world. Consequently, the subject or mind, which cannot be immediately experienced, cannot serve as a genuine constituent of the world. That is, both the subject and physical objects (such as tables and atoms) are understood as soft data.

The central principle of neutral monism asserts that mind and matter are distinct manifestations of a more fundamental neutral entity, thereby eliminating the distinction between subject and object within our immediate experiences. This view aligns with Russell's new perspective on the 'subject' and addresses the relation between our sense-data and the realm of physics (the RSP problem) while adhering to Ockham's Razor. Although Russell may not have explicitly articulated this connection, a thorough examination of his evolving ideas reveals his growing recognition of neutral monism as a novel and viable solution to the RSP problem, so that neutral monism gradually becomes an integral component of Russell's philosophical framework.

Russell's primary epistemological concern revolves around the problem of the relation between sense-data and the external physical world. In his pre-1919 attempts to address this issue, Russell heavily relies on his notion of acquaintance to justify the connection between sense-data and the external world. However, by 1919, he abandons this notion, accepting neutral monism, which rejects the mind-matter dichotomy and considers sense-data as constitutive of both. Neutral monism simplifies the relation between subjective data and objective reality by eradicating the subject-object duality in our immediate experiences. However, Russell acknowledges the persistence of this duality in knowledge. He states, "there is a duality 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."[175] He believes that although this duality is eliminated in sensations, it must be reintroduced in perception, imagination, and memory.[176] Perception, according

[175] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[176] *Ibid*., p. 139.

to Russell, "involves habit based upon past experience. We may distinguish sensation as that part of our total experience which is due to the stimulus alone, independently of past history."[177]

I will begin by examining Russell's reassessment of his dualistic perspective on the 'subject' and the 'object' of experiences, a shift catalyzed by his 1914 method of logical construction. This pivotal change leads to Russell's embrace of neutral monism, which provides a more satisfactory approach to the problem of our knowledge of the external world compared to his earlier views, as it eradicates the subjective-objective distinction.

3-1) The Impact of Russell's 1919 Theory of Logical Construction

Until 1919, Russell believed that "acquaintance is a dual relation between a subject and an object which need not have any community of nature. … All cognitive relations —attention, sensation, memory, imagination, believing, disbelieving, etc.— presuppose acquaintance."[178] This view implies that sensation is a cognitive relation between the known and the knower, maintaining the duality of the subject (mind) and object (sense-data) in our immediate experiences. In these experiences, the subject and the object of acquaintance constitute the two essential elements of sensation. The analysis of these elements can lead to two paths. One path leads to dualism, suggesting that the mind and matter are fundamentally distinct entities of different natures, with the 'subject' and the 'object' inherently separate. The alternative path leads to monism, which posits that the 'subject' and the 'object' can share the same kind and nature. In a monistic framework, both the 'subject' and the 'object' can be understood as either mental, material, or as

[177] *Ibid*., p. 143.
[178] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*. Edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1984, p. 5.

manifestations of a neutral entity, suggesting a unity between the mental and physical aspects of reality and challenging the strict dualism between mind and matter.

Before 1919, Russell rejected monistic perspectives, including those of idealists, materialists, and neutral monists, upholding an inherent duality between the 'subject' and the 'object' within our immediate experiences. However, maintaining this dualism posed a challenge to his theory of logical construction, as it positioned the 'subject' —which Russell considered as soft data— as "one of the actual ingredients of the world".[179] Russell's theory of logical construction designates hard data as the genuine constituents of the world, viewing both the 'subject' and physical objects of the external world as soft data and hypothetical entities.

3-1-1) Reexamining the Subject/Object Dualism

Russell's perspectives on the ontological status of the 'subject' underwent significant changes over time. In 1912, he asserted that both mind (subject) and matter (object) were actual components of the world, each irreducible to the other. This view upheld the duality between mental and physical elements as fundamentally different kinds of entities in the world, both considered real. By 1914, however, Russell began to shift his perspective, viewing both the 'subject' and physical objects as logical constructions while still maintaining their duality. According to his theory of logical construction, sense-data constitute parts of physical objects, whereas the 'subject' or mind is a distinct, purely mental entity that is aware of sense-data.[180] He described the 'subject' as "a 'mental' entity to which there was nothing analogous in the material world."[181] This highlights the inherent distinction between the *components* of mind and matter, emphasizing their

[179] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. New York: Simon & Schuster, LTD., 1959, p. 136.
[180] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." 1914, p. 112.
[181] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. New York: Simon & Schuster, LTD., 1959, p. 139.

ontological separation.[182] Accordingly, before 1919, Russell asserts the existence of two fundamentally different kinds of entities in the world —mental and physical— that cannot be reduced to each other, and both are real. This perspective implies that the 'subject' (the mind) and the 'physical object' are perceived as having distinct natures, in contrast to neutral monism. In this view, mental elements, such as thoughts and memories, constitute the mental world or mind, while physical elements, such as sense-data, constitute the physical world or matter. These are considered the genuine constituents of reality, with mind (the subject) and matter being seen as mere constructions. In this framework, the objects of acquaintance (sense-data) are components of matter in the external world, but they do not comprise the 'subject', emphasizing the ontological separation between mind and matter.

Despite this new perspective, Russell maintained his cognitive notion of acquaintance and the duality of 'subject' and 'object' in immediate experiences, which seemed increasingly incompatible with his evolving views. He recognized that while we may be acquainted with mental states, it was uncertain whether the mind or the 'subject' itself could be an object of acquaintance. This uncertainty raised doubts about whether our knowledge of the mind was part of our hard data, yet it did not initially trouble Russell, as it did not directly challenge his theory of knowledge or his belief in an external physical world grounded in our acquaintance with sense-data. In 1914, Russell's theory of logical construction marked a significant departure from his earlier views. He acknowledged that only our hard data —such as sense-data, memories, and feelings— constitute the actual constituents of reality. The 'subject,' if not immediately experienced,

[182] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*. Edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1984, p. 5.

could not be considered an ultimate constituent of our ontology. Russell contended that the subject (the Cogito), "if it exists at all, is an inference, and is not part of the [hard] data",[183] suggesting it should not be included in our ultimate ontology without immediate experience or observed evidence of its existence.

Even before formulating his theory of logical construction, Russell exhibited hesitancy in accepting that we become acquainted with the 'subject' or the 'mind',[184] acknowledging uncertainty regarding whether "we have acquaintance with Self, as that which is aware of things or has desires towards things."[185] Russell acknowledged that while we may have acquaintance with mental states, it was unclear whether the mind or the 'subject', *which is aware of things*, itself could be an object of acquaintance.[186] This uncertainty raised doubts about whether our knowledge of the mind is part of our hard data.[187] However, Russell's hesitation did not initially trouble him, as it did not directly challenge his theory of knowledge or his worldview, which maintained the belief in a physical world external to the mind, with our knowledge of this world grounded in our acquaintance with sense-data. In 1912, Russell held that both mind and matter, encompassing the 'subject' and physical objects, being hard data or not and whether immediately experienced or not, constitute the actual constituents of reality and were part

[183] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World: As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*. London & New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 59.
[184] In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell distinguishes between mind and matter, highlighting that the mind is immaterial and does not occupy physical space, while being capable of thought and consciousness. He discusses how mental phenomena include not only the mind itself but also the ideas and perceptions that it entertains. (*The Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 19-20)
[185] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 81.
[186] Whenever Russell employs the terms 'subject' or 'self', they appear to encompass the notion of 'mind' as the entity that is aware of things. Consequently, these terms are sometimes used interchangeably; I will do the same.
[187] Russell states, "In some sense it would seem we must be acquainted with our Selves as opposed to our particular experiences. But the question is difficult, and complicated arguments can be adduced on either side. Hence, although acquaintance with ourselves seems probably to occur, it is not wise to assert that it undoubtedly does occur." (*The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 80)

of his ultimate ontology. This perspective allowed him to navigate the complexities of his philosophical framework without dismissing the possibility of acquaintance with the 'subject' outright.

However, in his 1914 theory, Russell acknowledges that only our hard data constitute the actual constituents of reality, while everything else is a constructed entity that should not be included in our ultimate ontology. That means, the mind or subject if not immediately experienced cannot be considered as the ultimate constituent of our ontology. In other words, without immediate experience of the 'subject' (or mind) or observed evidence for its existence, the 'subject' (or mind) should not be accepted as the ultimate constituent of our ontology. However, his theory of knowledge by acquaintance, which posited a cognitive relation between the subject/mind and sense-data, suggested that the subject/mind was an unquestionable component of reality. This created a contradiction: the existence of both the mind (soft data) and sense-data (hard data) seemed evident and essential. Once Russell realized the incompatibility between his theory of knowledge and his theory of logical construction, he rejected the theory of knowledge by acquaintance and denied the cognitive nature of sensations.

With regard to Russell's abandoning of the cognitive notion of acquaintance, Tully argues that Russell's difficulties with belief propositions were a crucial factor in his decision to abandon acquaintance.[188] By recognizing the limitations of his earlier theory, Russell was able to develop a more comprehensive and coherent epistemological framework. This transition not only addressed the problem of belief but also laid the groundwork for his adoption of neutral monism, which provided a unified account of both

[188] Tully, Robert E., "Three Studies of Russell's Neutral Monism", 1993, Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives, 13: 5-35.

mental and physical phenomena. As Tully notes, Russell faced significant challenges in reconciling his theory of acquaintance with the nature of belief propositions.[189] This issue became a pivotal point in his philosophical development, ultimately leading him to reject the cognitive nature of acquaintance and embrace neutral monism.

Russell's theory of acquaintance posited a direct cognitive relation between the subject and the object of experience. However, this framework struggled to account for the nature of belief propositions, which involve a complex interplay between the subject, the object, and the act of believing. Tully highlights that Russell's difficulties in understanding how belief propositions could be grounded in acquaintance led him to question the adequacy of his earlier epistemological commitments.[190] Belief propositions, such as 'I believe that it is raining,' involve a subject (the believer), an object (the proposition believed), and the act of believing. This triadic structure could not be easily reduced to the dyadic relation of acquaintance. Tully argues that this difficulty was a significant motivation for Russell to abandon acquaintance as the foundation of his epistemology.

Russell's shift away from acquaintance was further complicated by his commitment to logical atomism, which emphasized the analysis of complex propositions into simpler, atomic components. Tully notes that Russell's logical atomism required a method for analyzing belief propositions that could account for their relational nature without invoking a cognitive subject.[191] This led Russell to explore alternative frameworks, such as neutral monism, which could provide a more coherent account of

[189] *Ibid*., p. 28. See Eric Banks (2014, Chapter 4): Banks also claims that Russell's difficulties in making sense of belief propositions played a significant role in his decision to abandon the cognitive notion of acquaintance.
[190] *Ibid*., p. 28.
[191] *Ibid*., p. 28.

belief. In his 1919 work, Russell began to develop a new theory of belief that did not rely on the cognitive notion of acquaintance. Instead, he proposed that belief could be understood in terms of logical constructions, where the act of believing was seen as a relation between the subject and the proposition believed. This shift allowed Russell to avoid the difficulties associated with the cognitive nature of acquaintance and provided a more robust framework for analyzing belief propositions.

3-1-2) Abandoning the Cognitive Notion of Acquaintance

In 1919, Russell abandons his cognitive notion of acquaintance, arguing that "if sensations are occurrences which are not essentially relational, there is not the same need to regard mental and physical occurrences as fundamentally different."[192] This shift implies that in our immediate experiences, there is no cognitive relation between the 'subject' and 'object'; there is only sense-data. In other words, if sensations are not inherently connected to the mind or cognitive processes, they are simply raw occurrences, devoid of any inherent meaning or interpretation. This challenges the traditional view that sensations are cognitive relations, allowing Russell to remove the need to fundamentally differentiate between mental and physical occurrences. Consequently, in immediate experiences, only sense-data exist without a distinct subject-object distinction, enabling him to exclude the mind or subject as an ultimate constituent of the world. Essentially, Russell renounced his theory of knowledge by acquaintance to avoid the challenge of the 'subject' becoming an integral part of the world.

Another challenge to Russell's theory of logical construction is the issue of phenomenalism. John Hamilton succinctly addresses this concern, stating:

[192] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. 1959, p. 139.

> If we ask, 'was Russell ever a phenomenalist?' we must first be clear what we mean by phenomenalism. If to be a phenomenalist is to definitely subscribe to the notion that it is possible to reduce statements about physical objects to statements about sense-data, then Russell subscribed to this doctrine towards the second half of 1913 (when he wrote *Our Knowledge of the External World*) and at the beginning of 1914 (when he wrote 'The Relation of Sense-data to Physics').[193]

Walter Terence Stace supports Hamilton's viewpoint, arguing that Russell's theory of logical construction "is a movement away from realism towards phenomenalism."[194] Stace asserts that Russell's theory takes on a "more or less phenomenalistic theory of matter".[195] Both scholars claim that Russell's new approach resembles phenomenalism, the philosophical stance that statements about the physical world can ultimately be reduced to our sensory experiences or sense-data. Stace contends that Russell's theory aligns closely with this perspective, indicating a departure from a purely objective interpretation of the physical world. From this standpoint, the essential link to phenomenalism in Russell's theory of logical construction emerges from the cognitive nature of acquaintance or sensation, which he avoids by denying this cognitive notion in 1919.

To address the RSP Russell sought to reduce statements about the physical world to sense-data and sensibilia, arguing that "empirical knowledge is confined to what we actually observe."[196] In 1914, he introduced his theory of logical construction as a theory of the world, outlining the connection between sense-data and the external world. Russell suggested that our sense-data make up the physical objects in the external world, allowing

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[193] Hamilton, John. "Russell and the Metaphysics of Neutral Monism", 2013, p. 43. https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/46483/1/JHamiltonThesis.pdf

[194] *Ibid*., pp. 358-359.

[195] Schilpp, P.A., ed. *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*. The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume 5, 1946. Evanston, Ill.: The Library of Living Philosophers, Inc., p. 357.

[196] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World: As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*. 1914. London & New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 90.

us to formulate statements about those objects in terms of sense-data. However, he simultaneously introduced the concept of 'sensibilia' —unsensed sensory objects or appearances— possibly as a way to avoid commitment to phenomenalism and solipsism,[197] which he regarded as untenable positions. He stated that nobody "can sincerely believe"[198] in solipsism, which denies the existence of anything beyond one's mind. Phenomenalism, on the other hand, "accepts testimony from other people but refuses to believe in lifeless matter."[199] Russell disagrees with this stance and posits that a physical world would exist even if there were no human beings.

The inclusion of sensibilia allowed Russell to accommodate the possibility that certain elements of the physical world, namely sensible objects, may remain unobserved yet could be perceived under suitable conditions. This implies that the world of physics or common sense is constructed upon sensibilia, whether they are experienced or not. As Russell said, "I gave up the attempt to construct 'matter' out of experienced data alone, and contented myself with a picture of the world which fitted physics and perception harmoniously into a single whole."[200] Russell's concept of sensibilia served as a counter to accusations of pure phenomenalism and solipsism by providing a framework that accommodates the existence of an external world independent of individual perception. Sensibilia represent potential sensory data that could be encountered, suggesting that

[197] Russell states that solipsism is "the doctrine that there is no valid reason either to assert or to deny anything except my own experiences" (*My Philosophical Development*, p. 104). He notes that phenomenalists "hold that it is reasonable to accept experiences, whether one's own or other people's, but that it is not reasonable to believe in events which no one experiences" (*My Philosophical Development*, p. 104).
[198] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. 1959, p. 104.
[199] *Ibid*., p. 104.
[200] *Ibid*., p. 105.

there are aspects of the external world beyond immediate perception, thus asserting the existence of an objective reality independent of individual minds.

However, before 1919, Russell's insistence on the dualism between the 'subject' and the 'object' within our immediate experiences introduced complications to his new picture of the world. One key problem, which Russell himself recognized in 1919, was the inclusion of the 'subject' as a component of the real world, which he considered "to be a logical fiction, like mathematical points and instants."[201] Another issue arose from maintaining the cognitive relation of acquaintance between the subject and the object, making it challenging to entirely avoid the implications of phenomenalism. Russell's method of logical construction asserted that our sense-data validate and constitute the foundation upon which the external world of common sense and physics is built. However, since our sense-data are directly apprehended by the 'subject,' they inherently retain a subjective element in the real constituents of the world. Consequently, grounding the external world in our sense-data associated with the 'subject' leaves it susceptible to the implications of phenomenalism.

Russell's theory of logical construction suggested that physical objects in the external world are less real than our sense-data. As he put it, "All the aspects of a thing are real, whereas the thing is a merely logical construction."[202] This implies that beyond the aspects of an object and the relations between them, the object itself may not necessarily be real. We have the aspects and their relations, so we do not need an additional object beyond these. However, for Russell, tables and atoms are still real, but their reality is redefined. They exist as collections of their aspects and relations, making

[201] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[202] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World*. 1914, p. 72.

the statement 'there are tables' true —similar to how we have sets and don't need numbers over and above these sets, yet numbers are real based on their new definitions as sets. According to Russell, what we perceive as immediate data —our sense-data— constitutes the actual foundation of the external world. These sense-data provide the fundamental ontological elements from which physical objects are constructed. For example, our sense-data of a brown patch is a component of the brown table, indicating that our sense-data are as objective as the physical table, even though they do not entirely encompass the table itself. This perspective eliminates the ontological or epistemological distinction between our sense-data and the physical table by considering sense-data as constitutive of the physical object. By removing this metaphysical distinction, Russell sought to merge our sense-data with the external world, transforming our data into an objective component of the physical realm.

However, eliminating the distinction between sense-data and physical objects while maintaining the subject-object dualism might have had the opposite effect. Instead of merging the objective world into our subjective experiences, it risked incorporating the objective world of physics into the subjective realm of immediate experiences. Here, the 'subject' becomes a central element, effectively transforming the objective world of physics into the subjective phenomenal world. This shift emphasized the crucial role of consciousness in our experiences, potentially leading to an interpretation aligned with phenomenalism, where the subject is an indispensable aspect of reality. Before 1919, Russell still regarded acquaintance as a two-term relation between the 'subject' and an object of experience, acknowledging "the need of a subject which is acquainted". His suggests that the construction of the external world relied on our sense-data, which must be cognitively related to a 'subject' to qualify as sense-data. Thus, although sense-data

were the constituting elements of the external world, a subject capable of a cognitive relation to sense-data was still necessary. This made the 'subject' an integral component of reality, even though Russell's method of logical construction seemed to argue otherwise. In essence, the duality of the mental and physical, or subject and object, introduced two distinct aspects in our immediate experiences, mental and physical terms in a dual relation. Both aspects were fundamental to our experiences and integral to what was considered the basic element of reality. In this context, sensibilia and sense-data only gained significance as elements of reality when sense-data were cognitively related to a 'subject'. This perspective implied that the construction of the external world was inherently linked to the cognitive relation of acquaintance (sensation) between the mental 'subject' and sense-data, underscoring the dependence of our knowledge of the external world on the notion of the 'subject'. However, according to Russell's later epistemic approach (the theory of logical construction), the 'subject' could not be considered a basic constituent of reality.

In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell expressed ambivalence about whether the 'subject' is a genuine component of the world. He argued that we have direct knowledge, or acquaintance, with the content of our immediate experiences —this includes our sense-data or what we perceive through our senses, memories, feelings, and thoughts, collectively referred to as mental states. When we say things like 'I have a painful feeling' or 'I see something,' it appears that we are referring to both the experiencer (the person having the experience) and the object of that experience (what is being felt or seen). Russell's point was that acquaintance with our feelings or sense-data seems to imply a relation between the experiencer and the object of the experience. Given this, it might seem natural to conclude that we are also acquainted with the 'self' or the 'subject' who is

having these experiences. However, Russell remained indecisive about whether one can truly be acquainted with their mind or 'self.' He did not firmly assert that such an acquaintance was possible. Instead, he maintained that "it is our particular thoughts and feelings that have primitive certainty."[203] In other words, he believed that our introspective knowledge is primarily concerned with individual mental states —specific thoughts and feelings— rather than with the self or mind as a whole.

In summary, while Russell's theory of logical construction offers a framework to bridge sense-data and the external world, it falls short of fully justifying the objectivity of our knowledge due to the fundamental distinction between sense-data and the mind —one as a physical element, the other as a mental element. As long as acquaintance, as a cognitive relation, remains essential to knowledge, and the subject plays a crucial role in our immediate experiences, the subjective nature of our foundational data endures, with the subject being an indispensable component of reality.[204] However, Russell's theory of neutral monism addresses these issues by eliminating the duality of subject and object in our immediate experiences. This theory posits that sense-data are constituents of both mind and matter, thereby dissolving the distinction between subjective data and objective reality while supporting the validity of the theory of logical construction. If what is immediately experienced through the senses is metaphysically a constituent of both the mind and the external world, the challenge of reconciling perception with objective reality can be resolved. Neutral monism secures the reliability of our knowledge of the external world by explaining reality in a way that transcends the superficial duality of mind and

[203] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 30.
[204] *Ibid*., p. 135.

matter, eliminating the fundamental distinction between sense-data and the mind. It provides an alternative method for justifying the relation of sense-data to physics without the need to posit a hypothetical entity such as the 'subject'.

3-1-3) Adopting Neutral Monism

Initially, Russell used the concept of knowledge by acquaintance, particularly through sense-data, to establish the reliability of our knowledge of the external world. This concept served as both an argument against idealism and an epistemic basis for ontological entities, such as sense-data, whose existence was beyond question. By anchoring knowledge in immediate experiences, Russell aimed to ground our understanding of the external world in undeniable entities. However, as his epistemology evolved, Russell began to view the subject (or the mind)[205] as a hypothetical construct, inconsistent with his method of logical construction, while sense-data remained undeniably real.[206]

Russell's commitment to logical construction required a strict separation between what is real and what is constructed. He recognized that maintaining the theory of knowledge by acquaintance would necessitate positing the subject as a real entity, which conflicted with his rigorous approach to reality. This realization led him to abandon the cognitive nature of sensation and the theory of acquaintance altogether. Initially, Russell attempted to maintain a primitive cognitive relation[207] between the mind and its immediate contents to navigate between idealism and materialism.[208] Idealists like

[205] Russell uses the terms 'subject' and 'mind' interchangeably. For instance, in discussing the cognitive relation of acquaintance, he equates the mind with the subject in the relation. Russell defines the subject or self as "that which is aware of things or has desires towards things" (*The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 81), which is also how he defines the mind. Similarly, he states, "In every act of judgment there is a mind which judges, and there are terms concerning which it judges. We will call the mind the subject" (*The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 197).

[206] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. 1959, p. 135.

[207] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge*. Edited by Elizabeth Ramsden Eames in collaboration with Kenneth, George Allen & Unwin, 1984, p. 5.

[208] Russell, Bertrand. "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 11 (1910–1911): 108–128. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4543805, p. 109.

Berkeley contended that everything known to the mind is inherently mental and mind-dependent, reducing existence to either a mind or the contents of a mind. In contrast, materialists asserted that matter is the fundamental substance of reality, explaining mental phenomena in terms of material processes, thereby reducing everything to either material or the outcomes of material interactions. To steer clear of these philosophical positions, Russell initially maintained a primitive cognitive relation between the mind and its immediate contents, effectively separating the 'subject' from the 'object' of acquaintance. However, by 1919, he rejected the subject as a necessary component of perception, viewing it as a constructed entity rather than a real one.

This rejection of the subject required a shift toward a non-relational theory of sensation. In a relational theory, sensation involves a relation between a subject (or perceiver) and an object (or sense-datum). A non-relational theory, by contrast, denies that sensation involves any such subject-object relation. Instead, it posits that what we experience are simply sense-data, without the need for a perceiving subject. Russell argued that without the subject, the distinction between sensation and sense-datum collapses, undermining the cognitive nature of sensation central to his earlier efforts to secure knowledge of the external world. Russell initially hesitated to fully embrace neutral monism, partly due to his commitment to the cognitive aspect of acquaintance and his broader theory of knowledge. Robert Tully argues that this reluctance stemmed from neutral monism's perceived inability to account for the cognitive aspects inherent in first-person experience (This problem was fully explained in my First chapter, as the problem of emphatic particulars).[209] Russell had conceived acquaintance as a cognitive relation

[209] Tully, Robert E. "Three Studies of Russell's Neutral Monism", *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives*, 1993, 13: 5-35.

between the subject and sense-data, with 'knowledge by acquaintance' serving as a theory to ground knowledge in direct sensory experiences. This hesitation prevented Russell from fully appreciating neutral monism's potential in addressing the relation between our sense-data and the external world or physics (the RSP problem).

By 1919, Russell experienced a pivotal shift, abandoning his theory of knowledge by acquaintance. As Tully notes, Russell discarded "the act-object distinction and with it the need to assume a subject as the recessive term in the acquaintance relation."[210] This change was driven by the realization that the distinction between subject and object lacked empirical verification and was, in Russell's view, superficial. Consequently, he came to see the subject as a hypothetical construction, leading to the abandonment of the cognitive aspect of sensation and the embrace of neutral monism. Tully posits that Russell made this shift because he recognized that neither the subject nor a separate act could be clearly identified within the process of experiencing or perceiving.[211] Russell grappled with the realization that epistemologically, neither the subject nor a distinct act could be clearly identified within the process of experiencing or perceiving.[212] This acknowledgment reflects Russell's understanding of the inadequacy of traditional dualistic frameworks to capture the intricacies of human experience.

Russell's distinction between basic ontological entities, like logical atoms, and constructed entities, like minds, matter, tables, and atoms, plays a crucial role in his philosophical framework. While constructed entities can be the subjects of true propositions, they are not part of his basic ontology. Neutral monism, which posits that

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[210] Tully, Robert E. "Three Studies of Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives*, 1993, 13: 5–35, p. 19.
[211] *Ibid*., p. 19.
[212] Tully, Robert E. "Three Studies of Russell's Neutral Monism", *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives*, 1993, 13: 5-35, p. 20.

both mind and matter are composed of the same neutral substance, i.e., sense-data, provided a new framework for addressing the relation between sense-data and the external world without relying on a cognitive relation between the mind and sense-data. The removal of the cognitive character from sensation presented a challenge to Russell's earlier attempts to justify our knowledge of the external world based on immediate experience. One solution to this challenge was neutral monism, which Russell ultimately embraced. This shift allowed Russell to move beyond the limitations of his earlier theory of knowledge by acquaintance, offering a more consistent and rigorous approach to understanding the nature of reality.[213]

3-2) Russell's Path to Neutral Monism

The transition in Russell's philosophical views toward neutral monism began to take shape in 1918, a period during which he increasingly leaned toward this perspective. In 1918, Russell delivered a series of eight lectures, later published as *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*. Here, he reiterated ideas from his earlier work, *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914), where he argued that objects of common sense and objects of physics are hypothetical constructs, not present in immediate experiences. He defined an ordinary physical object as a system of "series of classes of particulars, and the particulars are the real things, the particulars being sense-data when they happen to be given to you."[214] This means that a physical object is essentially a construction out of sensory objects, whether perceived or not.[215] However, Russell emphasized that these sensory objects are physical and do not constitute the mental world.

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[213] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959, p. 136.
[214] Russell, Bertrand. *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*. 1918, p. 116.
[215] These sensory objects can be either perceived (currently experienced) or unperceived (not currently experienced but potentially accessible through perception).

Russell argued that the mental world is composed of mental phenomena, such as our feelings, thoughts, and other conscious experiences, which "seem rather far removed from the sort of thing that happens in the physical world."[216] Mental phenomena are inherently subjective, personal, and private experiences known directly to the individual who has them. In contrast, physical events and objects are typically considered objective and independent of individual experience. Russell also highlighted that mental phenomena are not subject to physical laws, such as gravity, just as physical objects are not subject to mental laws, like association.[217] This distinction underscores Russell's assertion of a clear ontological divide between the constituents of mind and matter. However, in 1919, Russell explicitly abandoned the notion of the 'subject' as a necessary component of perception, reducing it to a logical construction. [218] This shift arose from the observation that in our everyday experiences and observations, we do not directly perceive a separate 'subject' engaged in perception. Instead, our experiences appear to consist of events or sensations. Since there is no direct sensory evidence confirming the existence of the 'subject', using senses like vision or touch cannot verify or deny its presence. In other words, there is no observable aspect of our experiences corresponding to the 'subject'.

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[216] Russell, Bertrand. *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*. 1918, p. 23.

[217] Physical laws, such as those governing gravity or electromagnetism, are principles that describe the behavior of physical objects and natural phenomena in the external, objective world. Mental phenomena don't fall under the purview of physical laws like gravity because they are not physical entities with mass, location, or properties that can be measured or predicted in the same way that physical objects are. They fall under the Mental laws, such as the principles of association in psychology, which describe patterns of thought and how mental contents are linked in our minds. For example, association by contiguity suggests that we tend to associate things that occur together in time and space. The distinction here is that physical objects in the external world are not subject to mental laws like association.

[218] Russell, Bertrand. "On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, Vol. 2, Problems of Science and Philosophy (1919): 1–43. Published by Wiley on behalf of the Aristotelian Society, p. 1. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4106441.

Russell also expressed dissatisfaction with the theory that divides perception into an 'act' and an 'object'.[219] This theory posits the existence of an 'act' of perceiving, involving the subjective experience or mental process of perception, and the 'object' being perceived. He found the notion of an 'act' or 'subject' as a constituent of perception to be unempirical and unnecessary. Since the 'subject' cannot be observed in our experiences, there is no direct evidence that can prove or disprove its existence, making it a needless posit. Russell's critique followed his method of logical construction, which avoided positing entities or concepts that cannot be verified or observed through our senses. Russell suggested that concepts, including mathematical ones like points and instances, are not arbitrary postulations but rather constructions assembled from various elements. These constructions allow us to treat them as unified entities for the sake of communication and understanding, even though they are, in reality, composed of multiple elements. However, Russell had difficulty identifying any real phenomenon or observable entity corresponding to the concept of an 'act' in perception. He questioned whether any concrete experience could be identified as this 'act' and argued that the 'subject' or the 'act' as a constituent of perception cannot be substantiated or observed in our immediate experiences. Consequently, Russell concluded that it was imperative to develop a theory of presentation and belief that does not rely on the 'subject' or an 'act' as integral components.

Such a theory, formulated without these entities, would align with a more realistic and scientifically rigorous approach to understanding perception and belief. Russell states:

[219] *Ibid*., p. 25.

> They are not of the stuff of the world, but assemblages which it is convenient to be able to designate as if they were single things. The same seems to be true of the subject, and 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. … It seems to me imperative, therefore, to construct a theory of presentation and belief which makes no use of the "subject," or of an "act" as a constituent of a presentation.[220]

Russell's rejection of the subject carried significant implications, particularly in necessitating the adoption of a non-relational theory of sensation. This theory would focus solely on the content of direct experience, without positing a separate, unverifiable entity like the 'subject' as part of the content.

This departure marked a significant shift from the perspectives of Franz Brentano, who argued that mental phenomena are intrinsically tied to the relation between a subject and the objects of experience. Brentano's philosophy is grounded in the concept of intentionality—the idea that all mental phenomena are inherently about or directed toward something, whether a physical entity or an abstract idea. For Brentano, this intentionality made the relation between the subject and the object fundamental. However, Russell's departure from this view signaled a profound rethinking of the nature of mental phenomena. By rejecting the necessity of a subject in experience, Russell challenged the very foundation of Brentano's theory. If there is no subject, the idea that mental phenomena inherently refer to external objects becomes problematic. Without a subject to anchor the experience, the relation between mental phenomena and external objects loses its grounding. In a non-relational theory of sensation, sensations must be understood independently of any inherent connection to a subject.

Russell articulated the impact of rejecting the subject:

[220] Russell, Bertrand. "On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean." 1919, pp. 25–26.

> The first effect of the rejection of the subject is to render necessary a less relational theory of mental occurrences. … A sensation in particular can no longer be regarded as a relation of a subject to a sense-datum; accordingly the distinction between sensation and sense-datum lapses, and it becomes impossible to regard a sensation as in any sense cognitive.[221]

Here, Russell acknowledged a significant shift away from the traditional relational account of sensation. Once the 'subject' was no longer considered necessary, the cognitive nature of acquaintance —where sensation involves a direct cognitive relation between a subject and a sense-datum— disappeared. Traditionally, sensation was viewed as a relational process where a subject perceives a sense-datum, representing some aspect of an external object or quality. However, by rejecting the 'subject,' Russell asserted that this relation collapses. Without a subject to serve as the intermediary, there is no clear way to distinguish between the sensation itself and the sense-datum, leading to the conclusion that sensation cannot be considered cognitive in any meaningful sense. As a result, the idea that sensation involves a cognitive act —where the mind perceives and processes an external reality— loses its foundation.[222]

The rejection of the subject introduced a significant challenge to the problem of our knowledge of the external world, particularly in relation to the RSP (relation between sense-data and physical reality) problem. Russell acknowledged that this shift magnified "the difficulty of problems involved in connecting experience with the outer world".[223] By eliminating the subject, he argues that our immediate experiences of sense-data —our sensations— no longer inherently involve knowledge; they become pure experiences

[221] *Ibid*., p. 26.
[222] *Ibid*., p. 26.
[223] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959, p. 13.

without cognitive content. Previously, Russell posited that our sensations served as the means through which we gained immediate knowledge of sensible objects, establishing a cognitive relation between the mind and our sense-data. This cognitive character of sensation was central to his claim that we possessed immediate knowledge of the basic elements of the external physical world. However, by rejecting the cognitive nature of sensation, Russell diminishes the claim that we have direct and immediate knowledge of these fundamental elements. This development poses a significant challenge to Russell's longstanding goal of securing our knowledge of the external world through immediate knowledge of sense-data.

The rejection of knowledge by acquaintance effectively severs the direct relation between the mind and the basic constituents of the external world, making it difficult to assert that we possess immediate knowledge of these constituents. This shift is particularly consequential for Russell, given his consistent efforts to establish a secure foundation for our knowledge of the external world based on immediate experience. With the notion of 'knowledge by acquaintance' removed, the foundation for this knowledge becomes less secure, complicating his attempts to address the RSP problem. While Russell still upholds basic propositions in works like *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (1940) and *Human Knowledge* (1948),[224] the removal of the cognitive character of sensation challenges the earlier framework where our sense-data provided indisputable knowledge through a direct mind-(sense-data) relation.

[224] The idea of basic propositions is central to Russell's effort to ground knowledge in empirical reality. Russell highlights that basic propositions are less prone to error because they are closely tied to direct experience. This concept is particularly relevant in his attempt to reconcile the challenges of empiricism with the demands of logical analysis. In *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (1940), Russell says: "Those statements about matters of fact that appear credible independently of any argument in their favour may be called "basic propositions" .* These are connected with certain non-verbal occurrences which may be called " experiences" ; the nature of this connection is one of the fundamental questions of epistemology." (p. 17), Also see pages 137,138,152.

One solution to this challenge is the theory of neutral monism, which posits that both mind and matter are composed of the same neutral stuff, namely sense-data. By 1919, Russell himself saw promise in this perspective and eagerly embraced neutral monism. His adoption of neutral monism marked a pivotal shift in his approach to addressing the problem of the relation between sense-data and physics, and in justifying our knowledge of the external world.

3-3) Neutral Monism as a Solution

Before 1914, Russell assumed that the existence of physical objects and 'matter' could be inferred from our immediate knowledge —what he termed our hard data. However, he later acknowledged that these "inferences cannot be logically [or empirically] demonstrative,"[225] lacking both logical and empirical verifications. In 1912, he identified a fundamental distinction between sense-data and the physical objects of the external world, such as tables and atoms, which created "an uncomfortable gulf between physics and perception, or, in other language, between mind and matter."[226] This division poses a challenge in establishing a coherent and unified understanding of physical world based on our subjective experiences. To address this disparity, Russell introduced his method of logical constructions in 1914, proposing that sensibilia (whether perceived or not) are the real constituents of the external world.[227] While this approach was designed to bridge between mind and matter, it carried its own implications and limitations. Russell aimed to construct physical objects, or 'matter,' from sensory objects known through a cognitive relation between the mind and these sensory entities. Although this method reduced the

[225] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959, p. 104.
[226] *Ibid*., p. 104.
[227] *Ibid*., pp. 104-105.

gap between our sense-data and physical objects, it did not fully resolve the "uncomfortable gulf … between mind and matter."[228] The problem lies in the persistence of the mental aspect in our experiences —the subject— which remains part of the mental world but is absent from the realm of sense-data and physical objects.[229]

By rejecting the cognitive nature of sensation, Russell later sought to eliminate the 'subject' from our immediate sensory experiences, leaving only the sense-data, which he considered to be of a physical nature. However, this removal of the subject also severed the cognitive link between the mind and the sense-data, thereby undermining knowledge by acquaintance as a means of justification. Russell argued that what is experienced —such as the color blue, for instance— is merely a patch of blue that, on its own, does not constitute knowledge.[230] This significant shift in Russell's epistemological view, i.e., his rejection of knowledge by acquaintance, does more than just alter his theory of knowledge; it fundamentally transforms his entire ontology. In earlier stages of his thought, Russell's reliance on knowledge by acquaintance implied a dualistic ontology, where the 'knower' and the 'known' were distinct, leading to a division between the mind and the external world. By rejecting knowledge by acquaintance, Russell implicitly dismantles the very structure that supported this dualism. This rejection aligns closely with the core tenets of neutral monism, a view that posits a single, neutral substance underlying both mental and physical phenomena.

In essence, as Russell abandons the notion of sensation as a cognitive relation between subject and object, he simultaneously discards the metaphysical dualism that

[228] *Ibid*., p. 104.
[229] *Ibid*., p. 136.
[230] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959, p. 136.

once underpinned his philosophy. The acceptance of neutral monism becomes almost inevitable after rejecting the relational view of sensation. If sensations and their corresponding objects are not distinct entities but rather manifestations of a single, neutral substance, the need for a dualistic ontology disappears. Thus, Russell's epistemological shift directly leads to an ontological transformation, where mind and matter are no longer seen as fundamentally different substances but as different expressions of the same underlying reality. In this way, his rejection of knowledge by acquaintance does not merely move him toward monism, it constitutes his embrace of it. However, Russell opts for neutral monism specifically, as it posits that the fundamental constituents of reality are neither purely mental nor purely material but neutral. This stance challenges both idealism, which claims that reality is fundamentally mental, and materialism, which argues that reality is fundamentally material.

3-3-1) Reconciling Psychology and Physics

Russell's theory of neutral monism aims to reconcile psychology and physics, traditionally viewed as addressing different aspects of reality. He redefines the nature of mind and matter by suggesting that both can be understood through the same neutral particulars, leading to a more cohesive worldview. According to neutral monism, our sense-data or sensation, which constitutes external/physical objects, is also a constituent of the mind. For example, the sensation of blue, which is part of a blue object, is simultaneously part of our mental experience. As Russell states, "a sensation becomes equally part of the subject-matter of physics and of psychology: it is simultaneously part of the mind of the person who "has" the sensation, and part of the body which is "perceived" by means of the sensation."[231] In this framework, the same sensory content (e.g., the sensation of blue) is

[231] Russell, Bertrand. "On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean." 1919, p. 26.

present in both our mind and the external object, understood differently depending on the approach. This dual aspect of experience suggests that sense-data is not exclusive to either the mind or the external world but serves as a bridge between the two.[232] As a result, Russell's neutral monism provides unity between what we traditionally think of as mental and physical, positioning sensation as a common foundation for both disciplines.

Neutral monism posits that reality's fundamental nature is neither physical nor mental but neutral. Sensations, as neutral particulars, are central to both physics and psychology, intertwining these fields by involving sense-data as a common foundation. Consequently, the distinction between mind and matter dissolves, aligning with modern trends in both disciplines. In essence, both fields suggest that the boundaries between mind and matter are not as distinct as previously thought, leading to a reevaluation of their metaphysical importance. Gülberk Koç Maclean argues that Russell's neutral monism significantly contributes to understanding the relation between the mental and the physical. She notes that neutral monism "is a better ground for bridging the gap between the world of sense and the world of physics."[233] Before adopting neutral monism, sense-data served as the bridge between the mind and physical objects, but with the abandonment of sense-data, neutral events now serve as the common ground linking perception and physics. Russell's theory mitigates the "uncomfortable gulf" between mind

[232] The crucial difference between things with minds (conscious beings) and things without minds (inanimate objects) lies in how they interact with and interpret sense-data. Minds have the capacity to be aware of and interpret sense-data. When a conscious being perceives an external object, they have experiences and can make sense of the sense-data. In this case, sense-data is part of their subjective experience, and they can think, reason, and make decisions based on it. By contrast, inanimate objects lack the capacity for awareness or interpretation of sense-data. When sense-data is attributed to an inanimate object, it does not have subjective experiences or the ability to process or interpret the sense-data. Instead, sense-data is seen as a property or attribute of the object itself, contributing to its objective properties.

[233] Maclean, Gülberk Koç. *Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars*. Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2014, p. 37.

and matter, offering a more integrated and non-dualistic perspective. This integration is further highlighted by modern shifts in physics and psychology.

In modern physics, the nature of matter has been reinterpreted through quantum mechanics and relativity, challenging classical notions of matter as solid and impenetrable. Quantum physics describes particles as entities with wave-like properties and probabilistic behaviors, while Einstein's theory of relativity emphasizes events and their causal relations as foundational elements of the physical world. Similarly, modern psychology, particularly through behaviorism and neuroscience, seeks to explain mental phenomena in terms of observable behavior and physiological processes, aligning psychology with empirical science. These emerging paradigms in both fields reflect a move away from rigid dualism and towards a recognition of the complex interplay between physical and non-physical aspects of reality. Russell's theory of neutral monism, with its emphasis on the neutrality of sensation, provides a framework where the mental and the physical can be understood as different aspects of the same underlying reality. This view suggests a metaphysical unity between matter and mind, offering the potential for a more unified perspective on the traditionally separate domains of physics and psychology. Russell's commitment to simplicity, influenced by Occam's Razor, is evident in his preference for neutral monism. [234] By reducing the number of postulated entities, Russell aims to minimize error and achieve a more refined view of the world. His method of logical construction seeks to clarify notions like 'physical object' or 'matter' by defining them in terms of simpler components, such as sense-data. The metaphysical depiction of

[234] Russell, Bertrand. *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*. 1918, p. 53.

reality as consisting of only one kind of neutral stuff resonates more with Russell than the dualistic view of two distinct kinds of ultimate existence, mental and physical.

3-3-2) A Neutral Approach to Sense-data

In *My Philosophical Development* (1959), Bertrand Russell elucidates the primary reasons behind his major philosophical shift from knowledge by acquaintance to neutral monism. This transition is rooted in his recognition of shared components between the mental and physical realms that cannot be easily dismissed. Russell acknowledges that the only certainties accessible to us are found within the content of our experiences, including sense-data, without necessitating an act of cognition. Influenced by William James in 1919, Russell dismisses the notion of a cognitive relation as part of our immediate experiences, marking a pivotal moment that sets the stage for his ontological shift to neutral monism. This viewpoint aligns with the principle of Occam's Razor, emphasizing simplicity by reducing unnecessary assumptions, and becomes a foundational aspect of Russell's evolving philosophical framework.

Before embracing neutral monism, Russell posited that explaining how knowledge arises from immediate experiences involves recognizing perception as a two-term relation between a knowing subject and something external that is known.[235] This framework justified our understanding of the external world through an immediate cognitive relation.[236] Russell argued that when adhering to knowledge by acquaintance, it is necessary to differentiate the act of sensation from what is sensed, namely, sense-data. For instance, "when we see a patch of colour of a certain shape, the patch of colour is one thing and our seeing of it is another. This view, however, demands the admission of the

[235] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development,* New York: Simon & Schuster, LTD., 1959, p. 13.
[236] *Ibid*., p. 13.

subject,"[237] who perceives the patch. Russell points out that observing a patch of color necessitates distinguishing between the color patch itself and the act of perception, introducing the concept of a subject encompassing the act of perception. Yet, Russell points out that the "subject, however, appears to be a logical fiction, like mathematical points and instants."[238] Since the subject, akin to mathematical points and instants, cannot be empirically ascertained or logically demonstrated, it is considered a hypothetical entity, challenging its ontological status in Russell's philosophical framework.

In 1914, influenced by Alfred North Whitehead, Russell began applying Occam's Razor to analyze the nature of the physical world.[239] Russell draws a compelling analogy between Alfred North Whitehead's stance on mathematical entities and his own views on mind and matter. Whitehead proposed that mathematics can exist meaningfully without positing the reality of entities like points and instants as fundamental constituents of the external world. Instead, these mathematical ideas can be logically constructed from events, which he deemed the genuine constituents of the world. Russell drew an analogy between Whitehead's stance on mathematical entities and his views on mind and matter, suggesting that philosophical concepts like subject and object are logical fictions, not "the actual ingredients of the world".[240] Russell and Whitehead both emphasized the importance of these concepts as tools for human understanding, rather than insisting on their representation of fundamental aspects of the external world. This approach aligns

[237] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[238] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[239] *Ibid*., p. 13.
[240] *Ibid*., p. 136.

with their overarching philosophical method of logical construction and the avoidance of unnecessary ontological commitments.

Russell's reluctance to affirm the existence of a subject, particularly the mind, aligns with his broader epistemological concerns and his commitment to empirical evidence as the cornerstone of our understanding of the external world. Russell argues that there is no direct empirical evidence supporting the existence of the subject. Consequently, the subject should not be considered one of the fundamental elements of the world, as it is not directly presented in our immediate experiences.[241] Russell's viewpoint posits that for an entity to be deemed fundamental, it must be directly evident in our experiences. The ultimate constituents of reality, according to Russell, are our hard data directly given to us, and there is no room for doubt regarding their existence. The subject, unlike a patch of color, is not an object of immediate sensory experience but is introduced "not because observation reveals it, but because it is linguistically convenient and apparently demanded by grammar."[242] In language and grammar, it is often necessary to have a linguistic subject to make sentences and descriptions coherent. For example, when we say, 'I see a blue patch', the 'I' serves as the linguistic subject that helps us convey the act of perception. It facilitates clear communication and expression. Russell emphasizes that whether or not these entities like the 'subject' exist in reality, there is no strong basis for assuming their existence, hence, these entities are logical fictions. Russell's epistemological considerations play a crucial role in determining what elements can be included in his ultimate ontology.

[241] *Ibid*., p. 136.
[242] *Ibid*., p. 135.

In *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), Russell initially overlooked the question of whether the subject is immediately experienced, as it did not impact his realistic view of the external world. However, influenced by William James' perspectives on consciousness, Russell concluded that since there is no immediate experience of the subject, its existence cannot be regarded as certain. James argued that 'consciousness' is a term for a non-entity, as there is nothing in the content of our immediate experiences that we can identify as consciousness. Despite the presence of thoughts, feelings, memories, and sense-data in our immediate experiences, there is no discernible trace of consciousness or the subject. This realization led Russell to reject the cognitive nature of sensation, marking a shift toward a more unified perspective where the traditional boundary between subjective sensations and objective sense-data becomes less relevant.[243] Russell asserts that if "we admit —as I think we should— that the patch of colour may be both physical and psychical, the reason for distinguishing the sense-datum from the sensation disappears, and we may say that the patch of colour and our sensation in seeing it are identical."[244] In essence, the terms 'sensation' and 'sense-data' both refer to the very same entity, which is the object of our immediate experience and is neither mental nor physical. For instance, "the sensation that we have when we see a patch of color simply *is* that patch of color,"[245] which is our sense-datum. Therefore, the notion of sensation considered mental and part of our mind and the sense-datum considered physical and part of the physical object are identical.[246] As Russell puts it, "the possibility of distinguishing the sensation from the sense-datum vanishes; at least I [Russell] see no

[243] *Ibid*., p. 13.
[244] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Mind*. 1921. Reprinted in Great Britain by Routledge, 1995, p. 143.
[245] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development,* New York: Simon & Schuster, LTD., 1959, p. 136.
[246] *Ibid*.*,* p. 136.

way of preserving the distinction."[247] This blue patch is neither physical nor mental; it is neutral and is prior to both mind and matter.

In general, Russell's evolving views were shaped by a reassessment of his earlier epistemological foundations and a desire to address the challenges posed by eliminating the cognitive subject. The adoption of neutral monism provided a framework that more satisfactorily harmonized the relation between mind and matter. Central to his project was the distinction between private and public spaces, which paved the way for unifying physics and psychology under a neutral perspective. In 1914, Russell introduced the concept of six-dimensional space as part of his efforts to reconcile the subjective world of data with the objective world of physics. Building on this concept, he developed his method of logical construction to bridge between mind and matter. However, his commitment to the cognitive notion of acquaintance, which upheld a dualism between mind and matter and maintained the 'subject' as fundamental, limited his ability to fully reconcile these realms. Recognizing these constraints, Russell eventually concluded that it was essential to discard the cognitive aspects of sensation and eliminate the 'subject' from our immediate experiences. This pivotal shift led to the formulation of his theory of neutral monism, offering a more coherent explanation for the connection between perception and physics and justifying knowledge of the external world without relying on the cognitive notion of acquaintance.

3-3-3) The Notion of Six-Dimensional Space in Relation to Neutral Monism

In 1914, Bertrand Russell introduced the concept of six-dimensional space to address the challenge of reconciling subjective appearances with objective reality. He argued that the misunderstanding of space as purely three-dimensional contributed to this challenge.

[247] *Ibid.,* p. 136.

Russell proposed that reality is actually six-dimensional, with three dimensions representing physical space (length, width, and height) and the other three relating to the perspective or private space of individual perceivers. He states, "The world which we have so far constructed is a world of six dimensions, since it is a three-dimensional series of perspectives, each of which is itself three-dimensional."[248] According to Russell, this six-dimensional understanding of space could effectively connect subjective sense-data with the objective world of physics.[249] He suggested that physical objects should be seen as assemblages of momentary particulars given in our immediate experiences. By recognizing that the "space of the real world is a space of six dimensions,"[250] Russell believed he could provide a coherent explanation for the relation between these momentary particulars and physical objects, thereby bridging the gap between perception and physics.

Russell noted that our immediate sensory experience is three-dimensional, with each observer's space being distinct. However, he suggested that these various three-dimensional spaces could be organized within the public space of physics. This organization implies that six coordinates are needed to describe the position of any given sense-datum: three for its location in its own space and three more to indicate its position among other spaces. Russell introduced the idea that there are two locations in the constructed physical world related to any sensory experience: the place from which the 'sensible' appears, making the experience seem subjective,[251] and the place where the

[248] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." 1914, p. 119.
[249] Russell, Bertrand. "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter." Published in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (1918), pp. 95–109. http://www.feedbooks.com, pp. 103–105.
[250] Russell, Bertrand. "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter." Published in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (1918), pp. 95–109. http://www.feedbooks.com, p. 103.
[251] "This is the place *from* which the 'sensibile' appears." (Russell, 1914, "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics", p. 120.)

physical object exists, making the experience seem physical and external.[252] Russell also explored the differing perspectives of psychologists and physicists regarding sensory experiences. Psychologists focus on the subjective "place from which" sensory experiences appear, while physicists are interested in the objective "place at which" these experiences occur. This dual categorization resembles the theory of neutral monism, which posits that sense-data can be understood from both psychological and physical perspectives.

Russell classified sense-data as part of a 'biography' (associated with a person's life experiences) or a 'thing' (a cluster of particulars with consistent independence). This dual classification highlights the differing perspectives provided by psychology and physics. While psychologists focus on 'perspectives' and 'biographies,' emphasizing the subjective aspect of experience, physicists classify particulars as 'things,' emphasizing the objective and consistent nature of physical reality.[253] Based on the two distinct places related with a sense-datum, Russell introduces a new categorization of sense-datum: as an aspect of a 'biography' or as an aspect of a 'thing'.[254] Russell explains:

> The world may be conceived as consisting of a multitude of entities arranged in a certain pattern. The entities which are arranged I shall call "particulars." ... the physicist finds it convenient to classify particulars into "things," while the psychologist finds it convenient to classify them into "perspectives" and

[252] "This is the place *at* which the 'sensibile' appears." (Russell, 1914, "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics", p. 120).
[253] Russell, Bertrand. "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter", 1915, p. 105.
[254] However, Russell says, there's no inherent necessity for particulars to fit into these classifications. He says, "dreams and hallucinations are composed of particulars,"[(p. 105)] which may not fit these usual classifications and could be considered 'wild'. He argues that defining what constitutes a perspective is somewhat complex. In the context of visible or tactile objects, a perspective can be defined as all particulars that have a direct spatial relation with a given particular. To include sounds and other sensory experiences in the same perspective, Russell proposes defining a perspective as all particulars simultaneous with a given particular, using 'simultaneous' to refer to a direct and simple temporal relation.

> "biographies," … one biography may constitute the whole of the data of one percipient throughout his life.[255]

He claims that the classification of these particulars —whether as 'things' in physics or as 'perspectives' and 'biographies' in psychology— depends on the arrangement and relations among them.[256] This suggests that sense-data can be considered part of both psychological and physical data, depending on the context.

Perspectives capture momentary sensory data, while biographies may encompass all the data a person experiences throughout their life. However, Russell clarified that a biography is not necessarily tied to a single person; it represents the complete set of particulars associated with a specific experience. A 'thing,' on the other hand, is described as a cluster of particulars that maintain consistency across different perspectives By adhering to psychological laws and associating sense-data with a person's subjective experiences, a history or biography is created within these experiences. Conversely, by following the laws of physics and associating sense-data with the appearance of a thing, sense-data are situated within the objective world of physics and common sense. In this way, sense-data, though subjective, also become part of the external, shared physical reality. Russell's dual classification implies that the distinction between the mental and the physical is contingent upon the perspective one adopts. This resonates with the central tenet of neutral monism, which posits that the classification of something as mental or physical depends on the arrangement of the same specific sensation. Although Russell's early work predated his full acceptance of neutral monism, his classification of sense-data and his concept of six-dimensional space laid important groundwork for this theory.

[255] Russell, Bertrand. "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter." 1915, pp. 98, 106.
[256] Russell, Bertrand. "The Ultimate Constituents of Matter." 1915, p. 98.

Neutral monism seeks to reconcile the mental and physical world through a common underlying reality, and Russell's later views align with this theory. He eventually rejected the cognitive nature of sensation and the need for a perceiving 'subject' in immediate experiences, which allowed him to embrace neutral monism as a solution to "the traditional problem of the relation of mind and matter".[257]

After accepting neutral monism, Russell distinguished three different 'places' associated with any sensory experience: "(1) the place in physical space where the 'thing' is; (2) the place in physical space where I am; (3) the place in my perspective [private space] which my percept occupies in relation to other percepts."[258] The first one refers to the location of the physical object that is the source of the sensory experience. The second one is the location of the observer or perceiver in physical space. The third one is the internal, subjective space in which the percept (or sense-data) is situated in relation to other percepts (or sense-data). This classification suggests that the perceived divide between the mental and the physical might result from how we categorize and describe our experiences rather than representing an inherent difference. In the context of neutral monism, Russell's reclassification of sense-data within a six-dimensional space provides a unified perspective that integrates the mental and the physical, eliminating the perceived gulf between them. By recognizing these three different 'places' associated with sense-data, we can better understand how neutral monism explains the relation between perception, physics, and the mental/physical distinction.

[257] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. 1959, p. 104.
[258] *Ibid*., p. 108.

3-4) Russell's Resolution of His Objections to Neutral Monism

At the end of this chapter, I delve into Russell's evolving stance on neutral monism, focusing on how he confronted the very objections he had once raised against this philosophical perspective. By examining how he reconciled these objections, we gain a deeper understanding of his eventual acceptance of neutral monism and the nuanced way in which he sought to integrate this view with his broader philosophical framework. Initially, Russell was a strong critic of neutral monism, primarily because it struggled to adequately address egocentric terms and the vital distinction between the 'knower' and the 'known'. These concerns were central to his understanding of cognitive experience and the relational nature of knowledge. In his 1913 manuscript, Russell considered the failure to account for egocentric terms as "the most conclusive" refutation of neutral monism. However, by 1918, in *The Theory of Logical Atomism*, Russell shows a growing inclination towards neutral monism, admitting, "I feel more and more inclined to think that it[neutral monism] may be true. … But nevertheless there are a number of difficulties",[259] that makes it complicated to accept neutral monism. One such difficulty lies in "the argument from emphatic particulars, such as "this" and "now" and "I" and such words as that, which are not very easy to reconcile, to my mind, with the view which does not distinguish between a particular and experiencing that particular."[260]

These terms are deeply tied to the distinction between the 'knower' and the 'known', a distinction that Russell viewed as essential for our cognitive experiences; the question of whether sensation is relational. For Russell, this inability to distinguish between a particular (sense-data) and experiencing that particular (sensation) was a

[259] Russell, Bertrand. "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism". 1918, p. 122.
[260] *Ibid*., pp. 122-123.

significant obstacle to accepting neutral monism. However, after 1919, Russell began to identify as a neutral monist, attempting to address his earlier objections. Robert Tully says: "After noting the immense simplification which had been realized by accepting neutral monism, Russell turned to face its major disadvantage",[261] which he had long criticized: that neutral monists fail to adequately account for the essential distinction between the 'knower' and the 'known' within our immediate experiences.[262] Russell believed that the failure to account for this distinction had significant implications for our understanding of knowledge itself. In his view, knowledge is inherently relational —it involves a knowing subject and a known object. If this relational aspect is neglected, as he thought neutral monism did, then the nature of knowledge becomes unclear. This perspective significantly shaped his objections to neutral monism.

Despite these concerns, Russell eventually rejected the relational character of sensation and embraced neutral monism. In *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (1940), he attempted to resolve the issue by replacing the notion of 'acquaintance' with 'noticing,' which he defined as involving "sensible presence plus something more."[263] This shift from 'acquaintance' to 'noticing' marks an important development in his thought, as he sought to account for immediate knowledge without relying on an immediate cognitive relation (acquaintance). But how does 'noticing' differ from 'acquaintance'? Russell claims that knowledge is not derived from pure sensation alone; rather, it is acquired when our attention is drawn to that sensation. This introduces a dual aspect, that is, the sensory data and the act of noticing it. Russell states:

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[261] Tully, Robert E. "Three Studies of Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives*, 1993, 13: 5–35, p. 18.
[262] Russell, Bertrand. *Theory of Knowledge,* 1913, p. 17.
[263] Russell, Bertrand, 1940, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books,* 1973, p. 51.

> There is a duality 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 re-introduced.[264]

Thus, to solve the problem of knowledge, which he still believes to involve a dual relation between the known and the knower, Russell argues that sensation in itself is not knowledge, though our knowledge of the external world is rooted in our sensations.[265] Russell reintroduces a new duality in our perception; that is, perception, not sensation, involves a dualistic relation of the perceiver to the object perceived, via "noticing". He claims that perception involves past history and past experiences, but sensation consists only of the present occurrences.[266] Russell further elaborates that every empirical proposition is based on sensible occurrences that are noticed either when they occur or immediately afterward. These occurrences, according to Russell, are 'known' when they are noticed. He replaces his cognitive notion of acquaintance with noticing, which he claims to be an undefined term.[267] The notion of acquaintance was at the level of immediate experience, while noticing is much less direct than immediate experience.[268]

By the time of *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (1940), Russell shifts away from this direct, relational model of acquaintance and instead introduces the concept of noticing. Unlike acquaintance, which was a purely passive reception of sense-data, noticing involves an active element of attention. It's not just about having a sensation or

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[264] Russel, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*, 1959, p. 139.
[265] *Ibid*., *p. 136*.
[266] *Ibid*., p. 143.
[267] Tully, Robert E. "Three Studies of Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives*, 1993, 13: 5–35, p. 19.
[268] Russel, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*, 1959, p. 140.

being in a state of consciousness but also about being consciously aware of or attentive to that sensation. Tully notes that in *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, Russell "describes the concept of "noticing" and the causal conditions between brain and outside world that account for the use of "this" [egocentric terms] as a response to a stimulus."[269] Russell connects the act of noticing with the causal relation between the brain and the external world. The concept of noticing implies that when we respond to a stimulus (e.g., seeing a brown patch), our brain processes the stimulus, and our mind notices this process or attends to the stimulus. This attention is what allows us to use words like "this" in reference to our perceptual experiences. This is where it might seem that sense-data, which Russell appeared to distance himself from, returns as the object of noticing. However, there's a critical difference now: in the earlier theory of acquaintance, sense-data were seen as the direct objects of knowledge. In the later theory, sense-data are not objects of immediate acquaintance but rather something we *notice* —something that becomes cognitively significant through our attention. Russell explains that "[i]t seems, then, that the most immediate knowing of which we have experience involves sensible presence *plus* something more."[270] This shift aligns with his theory of neutral monism, which does not take our pure experiences or sensations as knowledge. According to neutral monism, sensations are not relational; hence, in sensation, there is not a known-knower division, or there is no subject-object distinction in immediate experiences.

In summary, in 1914, Russell introduces the concept of six-dimensional space as part of his efforts to reconcile the subjective world of data with the objective world of physics. Using this concept as a foundation, Russell develops his method of logical

[269] Tully, Robert. "Russell's Neutral Monism." 2003, p. 364.
[270] Russell, Bertrand. *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*. 1940. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 51.

construction to bridge the gap between mind and matter. However, his commitment to the cognitive notion of acquaintance and the dualism of mind and matter imposed significant limitations on his ability to fully eliminate the divide between the mental and the physical. These constraints, particularly the role of the 'subject' as a fundamental element in the world, prevented him from achieving complete reconciliation of mind and matter at that time. Building upon his theory of logical construction, Russell eventually realizes the need to discard the cognitive aspects of sensation and eliminate the 'subject' from our immediate experiences. This pivotal shift allows him to formulate his theory of neutral monism. By doing so, he offers a coherent explanation for the connection between perception and physics, ultimately justifying our knowledge of the external world without relying on the cognitive notion of acquaintance.

Chapter Four: Russell on What There Is; The Ontological Path towards the Neutral Constituents of Reality

In the previous chapters, I explored Russell's epistemological journey towards neutral monism. In this final chapter, I will examine his ontological development in the same direction, demonstrating once again that Russell's epistemology is central to his ontological views, that is, his ontology is consistently aligned with his epistemological concerns. As Robert E. Tully aptly observes, one of the core questions that preoccupied Russell was finding "the most fruitful way to accommodate the perspectives of both science and first-person experience within a metaphysical framework of realism."[271] Russell grappled with the perceived divide between subjective experience and the physical world, that is, between individual perceptions and the objective reality described by physics. This divide raises critical questions about how we can justify our knowledge of 'what exists' based on our subjective perceptions or data, the RSP problem. Russell believed that the best approach to resolving this issue was to integrate psychology with physics, showing that the data examined by both fields share commonality and are, at times, identical. The doctrine of neutral monism has the potential to address this problem since it eliminates the intrinsic distinction between the subjective world of the mind and the objective world of matter, introducing neutral stuff as the ultimate constituents of both; Russell believes that neutral monism "made it possible to accept this simplification and to regard the traditional problem of the relation of mind and matter as definitively

[271] Tully, Robert E. "Three Studies of Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives*, 1993, 13: 5–35, p. 5.

solved."[272] For this reason, this doctrine [neutral monism] is "at the centre of Russell's mature views about perception and scientific knowledge."[273]

As previously outlined, there are three critical phases in Russell's views on our knowledge of the external world, each driving his ontological stance during those periods. These phases correspond to the years 1912, 1914, and after 1919. Russell's ontological views during each of these phases are not only consistent with, but also a direct extension of, his theory of knowledge concerning the external world, as will be unequivocally demonstrated. For instance, Gülberk Koç Maclean, one of Russell's scholars, claims that "Russell's main reason for rejecting substance is that there is no empirical evidence for it. All we are acquainted with are sense-data; … a substratum is not something that we can be acquainted with. Therefore, Russell drops the substratum theory of ordinary particulars in 1914."[274] In the discussions of the last phase of Russell's ontology, I will analyze his doctrine of neutral monism and the neutral stuff as it is most prominently presented in his seminal works, *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) and *The Analysis of Matter* (1927), within the context of his primary epistemological concern: the problem of the relation of sense-data to physics (the RSP problem). My discussion will conclude with Russell's 1927 formulation of neutral stuff, where he elaborates on this concept in full detail. Throughout my analysis, I will engage with critical works on Russell's neutral monism to deepen the understanding of his own conception of neutral stuff. To fully appreciate Russell's neutral monism, it is essential to examine it within the context of his epistemological concerns, particularly the RSP problem. By doing so, I aim to correct

[272] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development,* 1959, p. 104.
[273] Tully, Robert E. "Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, 1999, 8: 209–224, p. 210.
[274] Maclean, Gülberk Koç, 2014, *Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars*, Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. p. 34.

certain inaccuracies present in the secondary literature regarding Russell's theory and demonstrate that his commitment to neutral monism remained steadfast, with his 1927 formulation aligning consistently with his views from 1921.

4-1) The Foundational Elements of Reality in 1912: Universals and Particulars

In *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), Russell offers a clear distinction between two fundamental categories in his ontology: particulars and universals. He explains that particulars are entities that we encounter directly through our senses, i.e., specific objects or phenomena that have a concrete, individual existence. For instance, when we perceive a specific white object or a just action, we are dealing with particulars. On the other hand, universals are abstract entities that are not tied to any single object or instance but are instead shared by multiple particulars. Universals encompass qualities or properties such as 'whiteness' or 'justice'; characteristics that can be found across different individual objects or actions. Universals such as relations are non-spatiotemporal abstract entities, which are real but neither part of the mind nor material world. For example, while we can encounter many white objects or just actions (particulars), the concept of 'whiteness' or 'justice' itself is universal, as it represents a common feature that these objects or actions share. Russell says:

> We speak of whatever is given in sensation, or is of the same nature as things given in sensation, as a particular; by opposition to this, a universal will be anything which may be shared by many particulars, and has those characteristics which, as we saw, distinguish justice and whiteness from just acts and white things.[275]

[275] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 145.

Russell's distinction, in 1912, underscores the importance of universals and particulars in understanding the world. He identifies universals (such as relations and qualities) and particulars (such as sense-data and ordinary physical objects) as the fundamental constituents of reality. This dualistic view contrasts with opposing philosophies that argue for the primacy of only one of these categories.

Russell regarded universals (relations and qualities) and particulars (sense-data and ordinary physical objects) as the fundamental constituents of reality. The debate over this duality sees opponents arguing in favor of either particulars or universals as the sole ontological components of the world. Nominalists, like Hume and Berkeley, assert that only particulars exist, viewing universals as merely conceptual abstractions derived from our experiences of particulars. They reject the existence of entities, such as relations, that do not exist in space and time.[276] Nominalists mainly deny the existence of universal entities that do not exist in space and time, such as relations. On the other hand, Platonic realists hold that universals are the true building blocks of reality. They argue that what we perceive as particulars are simply bundles of universal properties. In contrast, Platonic realists argue that universals are the primary building blocks of reality, suggesting that particulars are merely bundles of universal properties. For instance, a red ball is seen as a collection of general qualities like 'redness' and 'roundness', with universals like 'redness' existing in multiple places simultaneously, such as in a red ball and a red car. Russell, however, upheld a metaphysical dualism, maintaining that both universals and particulars are essential and irreducible components of reality. In 1912, Russell believed that particulars and universals were metaphysically and terminologically distinct, with

[276] Russell, Bertrand. "On the Relation of Universals and Particulars." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, 1911-1912, Vol. 12: 1–24. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4543817.

each playing a crucial but separate role in the structure of reality. This dualism, expressed in his 1912 work, places him at odds with the theory of neutral monism, which posits that the basic elements of reality are neither mental nor physical but neutral in nature.

4-1-1) Universals: The Non-Particular Elements of Reality

Against nominalists like Hume and Berkeley, Russell argues that the reality of abstract objects, such as relations, cannot be dismissed. Specifically, he contends that certain relations, like the relation of similarity or resemblance, are essential components of reality. Russell notes, "It has been customary for philosophers to ignore or reject relations, and speak as if all entities were either subjects or predicates."[277] Russell's observation highlights a common philosophical tendency to oversimplify the nature of entities by reducing them to just two categories: subjects (individual entities or particulars) and predicates (properties or qualities attributed to these subjects). In this traditional view, universals —abstract concepts like 'redness' or 'justice'— were often treated merely as properties of particular objects or actions. For instance, 'redness' would be seen as a quality that only exists because there are red objects, and its existence would be dependent on those objects. The problem with this approach, as Russell points out, is that it neglects the importance of relations, which cannot be easily classified as either subjects or predicates. Relations, such as similarity or difference, are not tied to a single particular entity but rather describe how multiple entities relate to each other. For example, the relation of 'resemblance' between two red objects is not a property of either object individually but rather a connection between them.

[277] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

Russell further says that relations do not have specific instances in the way that properties like 'redness' might. Instead, relations are abstract entities that exist independently of the particulars they connect. He argues that even if we regard all properties as particular instances, we still need an explanation for why one particular is similar to another. For instance, if we claim that a red car and a red house are both red, we must explain what justifies our belief that these two particulars share the quality of 'redness'. According to Russell, this explanation necessarily involves appealing to the relation of resemblance between the two particulars. Even if the redness of the car is distinct from the redness of the house, the fact that they resemble each other in terms of redness implies that this resemblance is a universal relation. As Gülberk Maclean puts it, "Indeed, all Russell argues for is that there must be a universal difference to explain what each specific difference has in common." [278] This means that the relation of resemblance is a universal, shared by the two instances of redness, making it an abstract entity in itself. By acknowledging the relation of resemblance as a necessary explanation for the similarity between particulars, we are compelled to accept the existence of at least one universal —namely, the relation of resemblance. This leads to the conclusion that both universals and particulars must exist. Russell argues that if we accept this one abstract entity, the relation of resemblance, then for the sake of a coherent explanation of the external world, we might as well accept the existence of other abstract entities or universals as well.

One might argue that the relation of similarity is an innate concept or a Kantian category —something we impose on the external world through our cognitive faculties.

[278] Maclean, Gülberk Koç. *Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars.* Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., 2014, p. 29.

According to this view, the relation of similarity does not exist independently of our perception; it is a mental construct that we project onto the world. This would imply that universals, like similarity, exist only in our minds, not in the external world. However, empiricists like Berkeley and Hume would reject this notion. They deny the existence of innate ideas or concepts, asserting that all knowledge comes from sensory experience. From their perspective, the concept of similarity cannot be hardwired into the human mind; it must be learned through observation and experience. If something is not empirically experienced, it cannot be considered real. Even if we entertain the idea that certain concepts, such as similarity, are innate or hardwired, this view encounters a significant challenge. We must explain why animals also seem to possess this cognitive ability. Animals often display behaviors that suggest they can distinguish between similar and dissimilar things, indicating that the concept of similarity may not be uniquely human. This raises the question of whether the ability to recognize similarity is a fundamental aspect of cognition shared across species, rather than an exclusively human mental construct.

Russell offers a counterargument to the claim that similarity, or any other concept, is merely a mental construct imposed on the external world. He argues that when we make statements about reality, we are not simply describing mental occurrences. For example, when we assert that 'London is inside the UK,' we are expressing a fact about the external world, a fact that remains true regardless of whether anyone is thinking about it.[279] This suggests that the relation between London and the UK is as real as the existence of these places themselves. Therefore, according to Russell, such relations cannot be mere mental

[279] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 152.

constructs; they must possess an objective existence independent of our perception. In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell advocates the existence of Platonic universals —abstract entities that exist in a third realm, distinct from both the mental and physical realms. These universals are not located in space and time, yet they are instantiated in particulars that exist within space and time. For instance, the statement 'my house is bigger than my room' illustrates the universal relation of 'being bigger than'. This relation holds between my house and my room and manifests in the physical world through these particular instances. According to Russell, such relations, while abstract and non-physical, are real and play a crucial role in our understanding of the world.

In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell's argument for the ontological reality of universals is fundamentally semantic, rooted in his correspondence theory of truth and closely linked to his analysis of language. This aligns with Gülberk Koç Maclean's observation that "early Russell combines the correspondence theory of truth with the referential theory of meaning."[280] Russell begins by asserting that the truth of a statement depends on how accurately it corresponds to reality. According to his view, a proposition —the meaning of a sentence— is composed of the actual entities to which the words in the sentence refer.[281] For a proposition to be true, its constituent parts must correspond to real entities in the world. As Maclean notes, "On the referential theory of meaning, in order for a proposition to be meaningful, the logical constituents of the proposition acquires meaning by standing for an entity."[282] This reasoning extends beyond just logical

[280] Maclean, Gülberk Koç. *Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars*. Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., 2014, p. 32.
[281] Propositions as the meaning of the sentences are constituted out of things that are part of reality and have real being.
[282] Maclean, Gülberk Koç. *Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars*, Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., 2014, p. 32.

proper names, typically understood to refer to particular entities. Russell's theory requires that even non-substantive words —such as relational terms and predicates— must also designate some abstract entity in reality. In other words, for a proposition to be meaningful and true, every part of it, whether a specific noun or an abstract concept, must correspond to something real. This leads Russell to the conclusion that universals, though abstract, must exist as real entities because they are necessary for the meaningfulness and truth of propositions that describe the world. Therefore, Russell's semantic argument for the reality of universals is not just a theoretical construct but a necessary outcome of his broader philosophical commitments to the correspondence theory of truth and the referential theory of meaning.

In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell expands his ontological framework by exploring how language designates entities in the world. He explains that proper names, like "Eiffel Tower," refer directly to particular things —specific entities that exist in space and time. For example, 'Eiffel Tower' refers to the famous structure located on the Champ de Mars in Paris, France. However, Russell observes that not all parts of speech function this way. Qualities and relations, for instance, "can be named by parts of speech which are not substantives; they are such entities as qualities and relations."[283] These entities, such as relations like 'in' or qualities like 'redness', function differently from proper names. Russell illustrates this distinction with the example of the proposition 'Adam is in his room.' In this case, 'Adam' and 'his room' are particulars, that is, specific objects that exist in space and time. However, the relation 'in' does not exist in the same physical way as Adam or his room, yet it still expresses a fact about the external world. For the proposition

[283] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1912, p. 56.

to be meaningful and true, 'in' must designate something real, even though it does not correspond to any specific physical object. Russell concludes that 'in' refers to an abstract relation —a universal that exists outside space and time, yet is essential for the truth of the statement. This demonstrates that universals, while not concrete objects, are necessary components of reality because they enable us to make meaningful and truthful statements about the world.

Russell further argues for his position on the duality of universals and particulars by demonstrating the difference between particulars as the objects of our Perception and universals as the objects of our Conception. He distinguishes between how we come to know particulars and universals. He argues that particulars are the objects of our perception, meaning that we directly experience them through our senses. For instance, when we see a specific patch of red, we are perceiving a particular at that moment. Universals, on the other hand, are the objects of our conception. We do not directly perceive universals; instead, we understand them by abstracting from our experiences with particulars. For example, when we perceive various red objects —a red car, a red house, a red ball— we conceptualize the universal quality of redness, which is shared by all these objects. Maclean says that "[a]ccording to Russell, we are supposed to be acquainted with sense-data as well as with universal qualities themselves (*POP* 28)."[284] Russell further elaborates on the distinction between particulars and universals by discussing their relation with space and time. Particulars are restricted to being in one place at one time; [285] for example, your body can only be in one location at any given

[284] Maclean, Gülberk Koç. *Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars*, Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., 2014, p. 28.
[285] Russell, Bertrand. "On the Relations of Universals and Particulars", 1911, p. 3.

moment. In contrast, universals like redness can be present in multiple locations simultaneously, wherever there are red objects. Additionally, universal relations, such as 'being greater than', are not found in any specific place because they do not have particular instantiations in space.

In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell divides both particulars and universals into two categories: those known directly by acquaintance and those known indirectly by description. He argues that for a statement to be meaningful, we must be acquainted with the objects that constitute the meanings of its words. This means that both particulars and universals, as constituents of propositions, can be known either through direct experience (acquaintance) or by inference from other things with which we are acquainted (description).[286] For example, when we observe various instances of red in different objects, we abstract the quality of redness as a universal that exists beyond any particular red object. This process of abstraction allows us to conceptualize universal qualities like redness, which are independent of the specific instances we perceive. Russell claims that our knowledge of these universals is a priori because it does not depend on any single empirical experience. However, our initial knowledge of the particulars from which we abstract these universals is empirical, based on direct sensory perception. Thus, in Russell's view, our knowledge of the external world is grounded in a dual process: we gain empirical knowledge through acquaintance with particulars, and we develop *a priori* knowledge of universals by abstracting from these particulars. Both forms of knowledge are essential for understanding reality, and both involve direct acquaintance —whether with physical particulars or abstract universals.

[286] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate, Chapter 10.

4-1-2) Particulars: Momentary Particulars Vs. Substratum Theory of Particulars

Russell defines particulars as "whatever is given in sensation or is of the same nature as things given in sensation,"[287] distinguishing them from universals, which are "anything which may be shared by many particulars."[288] Since our senses can only grasp spatiotemporal entities through perception, we come to know particulars directly via our sensory experiences. However, Russell challenges the bundle theory of particulars, which posits that objects are merely collections of coexisting qualities in a single location. He argues that this theory fails to account for the unity of these qualities into one cohesive entity.[289] To illustrate this, Russell examines the complexity of sensory space, noting that different senses perceive space differently; that is, visual space differs from tactile space, and both differ from physical or public space. For example, when you tap on a table, your tactile sense perceives immediate contact with no space between your hand and the table, while your auditory sense registers the sound as emanating from a distance. This discrepancy underscores the difficulty of unifying various sensory experiences into a single, coherent perception of an object. Babies, for instance, must learn to coordinate visual and tactile spaces to effectively grasp objects they see. Consequently, sensory qualities are situated in different spaces depending on the sense involved, complicating the process of combining them into a singular sensible space.

Russell argues that the space of sensory objects differs from the public space in which ordinary physical objects exist. We construct this public space from our private sensory experiences, inferring that real objects cause our sense-data. However, these real objects exist in a different spatial framework than our sensory perceptions, which are

[287] *Ibid*., p. 59.
[288] *Ibid*., p. 59.
[289] Russell, Bertrand. "On the Relations of Universals and Particulars", 1911, p. 8.

confined within our bodies or minds. As a result, we lack direct access to these real objects and their intrinsic qualities. Given these complexities, Russell concludes that "the bundle of co-existing qualities in the same place is not an admissible substitute for the thing."[290] He contends that ordinary objects cannot be fully explained as mere collections of universal qualities immediately perceived; something more is needed to account for their existence and persistence over time. According to Maclean, this leads Russell to endorse the substratum theory of particulars. As explained by Maclean, "there is a substratum in each particular (ordinary or transient), and it holds the qualities together to form a particular. A substratum is of a different category from that of qualities. It itself is not a quality; it is what bears qualities (Loux, *Metaphysics* 102)."[291] This substratum serves as the underlying entity that unites various qualities into a cohesive object and remains constant even as those qualities change. Russell, aligning with Locke, argues that this substratum is not directly knowable through experience; it is a 'bare particular' that endures over time, providing continuity and identity to physical objects.

For instance, consider a red ball: its redness and roundness are qualities borne by its substratum. If the ball is flattened, changing its shape, it remains the same ball because its substratum persists despite the change in qualities. Russell emphasizes that the logical subject in subject-predicate sentences must be understood as a substratum to maintain consistency over time. Without this underlying entity, the subject would change with each shift in its qualities, undermining the stability of our references and descriptions. Russell's endorsement of a substratum theory of particulars can be inferred from his

[290] *Ibid*., p. 8.
[291] Maclean, Gülberk Koç. *Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars*, Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., 2014, p. 11.

discussions of sense-data, qualities, and the persistence of ordinary objects. While he does not fully commit to the traditional metaphysical substratum theory in the same way as Locke, certain aspects of his philosophy suggest an underlying concept similar to a substratum. In *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), Russell critiques the idea that ordinary objects can be adequately explained as mere bundles of co-existing qualities. He argues that the bundle of qualities in a particular place cannot account for the thing itself. He suggests that something more is needed to explain the persistence and unity of objects over time. This view implies that objects cannot simply be collections of qualities, but must be unified by something more fundamental, which resonates with the idea of a substratum. This theme is developed further in *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914), where Russell discusses the relation between sense-data and physical objects. While Russell doesn't explicitly use the term "substratum," his argument that physical objects cannot be reduced to mere sense-data or qualities points toward the need for an underlying entity that holds these qualities together.

Russell further illustrates this point with the example of a table: even if the table breaks and changes form, we still recognize it as 'the same table' due to its enduring Russell uses the example of a table to illustrate the role of a substratum. Even if the table breaks and changes form, we still recognize it as 'the same table' because of its enduring substratum. In propositions like 'my table is square', the table serves as the logical subject bearing the predicate of squareness. Even when the predicate changes (e.g., the table becomes round), the subject remains identifiable through its substratum. This distinction is also crucial in differentiating between two individuals that share identical qualities. Without a substratum, there would be no basis for distinguishing them, as "these subjects

cannot be mere bundles of general qualities."[292] The substratum provides the necessary foundation for identifying and differentiating particular objects beyond their observable attributes.

In Russell's epistemology, sense-data play a critical role. He distinguishes between sensible particulars, known directly through immediate sensory experience, and ordinary particulars, known indirectly through inference from these experiences. Despite this distinction, both are fundamentally physical. Sense-data, such as a brown patch of color, are physical effects produced by external objects on our senses, but they are not components of the physical objects themselves. Ordinary particulars like tables and atoms, on the other hand, are inferred from sense-data, leading to our understanding of the external world. However, Russell leaves open the question of whether sense-data themselves possess a substratum or are simply combinations of particular qualities. For example, perceiving "a circular-shaped red patch inside a rectangular patch of black" raises the issue of whether this perception involves an underlying substratum or is merely a composite of qualities experienced simultaneously. Ultimately, Russell's analysis suggests that ordinary particulars must possess substrata to ensure their persistence over time. Without substrata, these objects could not maintain continuity, and our understanding of the physical world would lack stability. In contrast, sense-data are transient particulars, existing only at the moment of perception without enduring beyond that instant.

In general, before 1914, Russell viewed the ultimate constituents of the external and physical world as the ordinary objects of common sense and physics, such as tables

[292] Russell, Bertrand. "On the Relations of Universals and Particulars", 1911, p. 19.

and atoms. While he considered sense-data to be real and physical, he maintained that they were ontologically and epistemologically distinct from these enduring physical objects. In his earlier work, Russell's conception of reality is rooted firmly in the physical objects of everyday experience and scientific inquiry, with sense-data serving as immediate but transient gateways to understanding the external world. Sense-data, for Russell, are momentary and subjective, providing direct sensory access to the world, but they do not themselves constitute the ultimate nature of reality. This perspective reflects a layered understanding of reality in Russell's epistemology: it bridges the immediate, fleeting experiences of sense-data with the more stable, enduring objects they represent. For example, the experience of seeing a table provides access to the table as an external object, but the table itself is not reducible to the sense-data; it exists independently in the external world. Russell's later work, however, marks a shift toward a method of logical construction and a theory of neutral monism. In this later framework, sense-data are no longer seen as mere ephemeral experiences, but as integral components of reality itself. This new view blurs the lines between the subjective world of sense-data and the objective world of physical objects, addressing the RSP problem.

4-2) Sensible Particulars as the Constituting Elements of Reality in 1914

In 1914, Russell argues that instead of inferring physical objects from sense-data, one can logically construct them from these sensory particulars. He does not give the complete construction but only sketches the work to be done. In this manner, Russell says, the physical objects of the external world should be considered as logical fiction because they are not the sort of things revealed in immediate experiences, but rather they are constructed out of sensory particulars, so their existence could be denied. To avoid phenomenalism, which indicates that all we know is the subjective world of our

perception so we could have no access or knowledge beyond our immediate experiences, Russell constructs physical objects not only from momentary physical particulars that are immediately perceived via acquaintance, i.e., sense-data, but also, from other momentary particulars that can be perceived but are not perceived and so are defined in terms of sense-data. Russell calls all sensible particulars (perceived and unperceived) sensibilia and claims that they all have the same metaphysical status; here Russell believed that they are all physical transient entities constituting the physical world.

As of 1914, Russell revises his analysis of ordinary physical objects, abandoning the idea that they are composed of a substratum and qualities. He emphasizes the role of epistemology, arguing against confirming the existence of entities that cannot be directly experienced. Russell contends that, as much as possible, we should replace inferred particulars with those we are directly acquainted with. As Maclean observes, "a substratum is not something that we can be acquainted with. Therefore, Russell drops the substratum theory of ordinary particulars in 1914."[293] According to Russell, we are only acquainted with our own sense-data, and while we can become acquainted with sensibilia, there is no possibility of directly experiencing substrata or ordinary objects, such as tables and chairs. Consequently, we cannot be acquainted with ordinary objects or their substrata. Russell recognizes that when we perceive sense-data, we do not experience substrata directly but rather momentary particular instantiations of universal qualities. He concludes that there is no sensory evidence to justify the existence of substrata, as they are merely inferred entities that cannot be experienced. Since no substratum is directly

[293] Maclean, Gülberk Koç. *Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars*, Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., 2014, p. 34.

experienced, he finds no reason to assert the existence of a persistent entity like a substratum.

Russell argues that belief in a substratum arises from an instinctive assumption — reinforced by the practical success of common-sense interpretations— that something permanent must underlie the changes we observe in the sensible world. This assumption is rooted in the idea that it is easier to explain a persistent world than a constantly shifting one. The concept of a permanent entity surviving visible changes is simpler, and the laws of physics are often seen as relying on this assumption of enduring objects. However, Russell later critiques this view, arguing that the appearances of an object, i.e., its sense-data, are in fact its constituent parts and change with each observation. Unlike in *The Problems of Philosophy*, where he suggested a lasting object behind appearances, he now contends that the object constructed from sense-data is also temporary. There is no reason to believe that what we observe represents a permanent entity. For Russell, sense-data, which are immediately experienced, constitute ordinary physical objects, applying his method of logical construction. The existence of 'matter' or 'physical objects' is justified through the sense-data that compose them, eliminating the need to assume an underlying substratum.[294]

Maclean notes that Russell argues against the need to believe that these changes reflect the same enduring substance.[295] For example, when ice melts into water, we need not claim that the underlying substance remains the same. Empirically, we only observe the appearance of ice replaced by the appearance of water, and the laws of physics explain

[294] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World*, 1914, p. 83.
[295]Maclean, Gülberk Koç.*Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars*, Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., 2014, p. 34.

this transformation. In physics, these changes are explained by molecular behavior: when heat is applied, the energy in the system increases, causing ice molecules to move faster, eventually leading to water. This explanation relies on concepts such as matter, space, and time, without requiring an enduring substratum. While physics provides a physical explanation for changes, in epistemology, the explanation works in the opposite direction: from experience to reality. Russell argues that there is no need to posit a permanent substance to explain persistence. Instead, the focus is on how our experiences and sense-data lead us to construct our understanding of reality. The existence of substrata, he contends, lacks epistemological justification because it is based on a presupposition of an enduring world rather than on what is directly given in experience.

To address this, Russell introduces his theory of logical construction, proposing that an ordinary physical object is a bundle of particular aspects or appearances, which can be empirically verified when accessible; though not all objects are empirically verifiable. He argues it is more appropriate to consider these momentary appearances as constituting the object itself, rather than inferring the existence of an underlying entity with unknown intrinsic characteristics, as he previously believed in 1912. Instead of inferring physical objects from sense-data, we logically construct the physical world from sense-data, which are empirically available and form the basis of our knowledge. Thus, each physical object is seen as a bundle of fleeting sensible particulars that can become data for us. Russell acknowledges that there are things in space and time beyond our direct knowledge, but our understanding is limited to the data we perceive. Therefore, there is no need to assume the existence of enduring substrata or permanent physical objects. As Russell states, “In the world of immediate data nothing is permanent; even the things that we regard as fairly permanent, such as mountains, only become data when we

see them, and are not immediately given as existing at other moments."[296] While mountains like Mount Everest may appear relatively permanent, our immediate data about them are not permanent.

Russell justifies the impermanence of the physical world by asserting that nothing in our immediate data is permanent. While objects like mountains may seem permanent, the data we have about them are not. He emphasizes that our knowledge of physical objects is not direct, as they are not immediately given to us. Instead, we have transient sense-data (immediate appearances) and inferred sensibilia (inferred appearances). Through these fleeting experiences, we infer the existence of physical objects, such as mountains. This ties into the problem of the relation of sense-data to physics (RSP). Russell likens this process to perceiving motion in a sequence of rapidly shown sketches: although we think the drawings are moving, they are just a series of passing images. Similarly, what we perceive as a continuous object like a mountain is actually a series of momentary appearances, either given or inferred, which we combine based on our empirical data. However, explaining relatively permanent entities like Mount Everest poses a challenge. No object of common sense or 'matter' of physics is empirically accessible; what we have are momentary appearances, either from sense-data or inferred from them.[297] Thus, the belief in a permanent and continuous physical world is a supposition based on passing appearances, much like the example of passing images. Russell acknowledges that while we might consider objects like Mount Everest to be relatively permanent, our direct knowledge of such objects is limited to transient

[296] Russell, Bertrand. *Our Knowledge of the External World*, 1914, p. 83.
[297] For more information on Sensibilia, look through the first chapter, section 1-3.

appearances. Therefore, he concludes that there is no need to posit enduring substrata to explain the physical world; our knowledge is grounded in immediate experience.

As early as 1912, Russell had recognized this issue but still assumed a permanent physical world. His later work, however, challenges this assumption and underscores the importance of epistemology in shaping his ontological beliefs. In his revised ontological approach, a physical object is defined as a class of passing appearances associated with it. These appearances include both those perceived by an observer and those that could have been perceived if an observer or device had been present. As Russell explains, "The 'thing' of common sense may in fact be identified with the whole class of its appearances —where, however, we must include among appearances not only those which are actual sense-data, but also those 'sensibilia.'"[298] Sensibilia, as the ultimate physical entities, are the particulars that form a class, replacing the traditional notion of physical objects in common sense and the "matter" of physics. Morris Weitz, a critic of Russell, interprets this as a shift toward logical construction, where a symbol grounded in sense-experience replaces a symbol with no direct relation to sense-experience but was previously postulated as the cause of sense-data. Weitz explains:

> it seems to me that Russell means by a logical construction the *substitution* of a *symbol* whose denotation is given in sense-experience or is continuous with and similar to something given in sense-experience for a symbol whose denotation is neither given in sense-experience nor is similar to and continuous with something given in sense-experience but … was postulated as the cause of our sense-data and whose intrinsic nature is a mystery to us.[299]

[298] Russell, Bertrand. "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics." 1914. In *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 8, pp. 1–26. 1986, p. 10.
[299] Weitz, Morris, "Analysis and the Unity of Russell's Philosophy", printed in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, 1946, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, (pp. 55-121), pp. 65-66.

Russell defines ordinary particulars, such as tables and atoms, as bundles of sensible qualities. These sensory particulars, or sensibilia, "on grounds of continuity and resemblance, are to be regarded as belonging to the same system of appearances, although there happen to be no observers to whom they are data."[300] Thus, rather than positing an empirically inaccessible object (like a table), Russell redefines it as a series of appearances, that is, those empirically given to observers and those that could have been perceived. As Maclean notes: "In 1914, having decided that the material object with its substratum and qualities is empirically inaccessible, Russell rejects affirming its existence."[301] Russell's method of logical construction aligns with Occam's razor, which discourages the unnecessary multiplication of entities. This approach ultimately led to his theory of neutral monism, which he acknowledged was compatible with the neutral monist view of the external world.

Logical construction was a key step toward Russell's adoption of neutral monism, which holds that both mind and matter can be logically constructed from neutral elements like sense-data. While both logical construction and neutral monism agree that sense-data are the ultimate constituents of reality, they differ in their treatment of these constituents. Neutral monists argue that sense-data are neutral between the mental and physical realms, whereas Russell contends that sense-data, or 'sensibilia', are physical and serve as the ultimate constituents of the physical, not mental, world. Both theories agree that mind and matter are not fundamental, but they differ regarding the constituents of

[300] Russell, Bertrand, 1914, "The Relation of Sense Data to Physics" 1914. In *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell,* V.8 (pp. 1-26), published in 1986, p. 10.
[301] Maclean, Gülberk Koç, 2014, *Bertrand Russell's Bundle Theory of Particulars*, Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. p. 34.

the mental world. Russell acknowledged this compatibility with neutral monism in his paper "The Relation of Sense-data to Physics", stating:

> 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 ["The Relation of Sense-data to Physics"] is compatible with their doctrine [Neutral Monism] and might have been reached from their standpoint."[302]

4-3) Reconciling the World of Physics and the World of Sense

Russell believed that his method of logical construction could bring together our subjective sensory experiences and the objective world of physics by defining physical objects in terms of immediate sensory data. He argued that what we observe consists of appearances, which can be explained by the laws of physics. For example, when observing a fading wallpaper, the only things we directly observe and can verify are its changing appearances. Rather than assuming a permanent object underlying these appearances, Russell suggests understanding the wallpaper as a series of transitory aspects connected by causal laws. As he puts it, a 'thing' of common sense and the object of physics can be redefined "as a certain series of appearances, connected with each other by continuity and by certain causal laws."[303] This redefinition implies that in both physics and psychology, we deal with similar data (sense-data) though approached from different perspectives. For Russell, the empirically verifiable objects in both fields are sensory particulars (sense-data) and not the permanent physical objects assumed by common sense or the 'matter' in physics.

[302] Russell, Bertrand, 1914, "The Relation of Sense Data to Physics" 1914. In *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell,* V.8 (pp. 1-26), published in 1986, p.8.
[303] Russell, Bertrand, 1914, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, pp. 84-85.

Despite his efforts to connect the worlds of sensory experience and physics, Russell maintained a distinction between mental and physical realms. He argued that the ultimate particulars constituting reality belong either to the mental or the physical world, but not both. This is evident in his distinction between sensation (a mental process) and sense-data (the physical objects of sensation). Russell states that "a sensation is a complex of which the subject is a constituent, and which therefore is mental. The sense-datum, on the other hand, stands over against the subject as that external object of which in sensation the subject is aware."[304]

Russell's commitment to dualism kept him from fully accepting neutral monism in 1914, despite the compatibility of his method of logical construction with it. Logical construction, which reduces the mental and physical to sense-data, could have led Russell to neutral monism, but his insistence on a fundamental distinction between mind and matter prevented him from embracing it at the time. He maintained that sensation requires a subject (mental). However, after 1919, Russell shifted away from this dualistic view and adopted neutral monism. As Morris Weitz notes, by 1946, Russell had become a "modified neutral monist" regarding mental-physical dualism, indicating that he had moved beyond his earlier position. Weitz says, "until the present day [1946], so far as I know, Russell has been a modified neutral monist, as far as mental-physical dualism is concerned, and, in regard to universals and particulars, he has either become dubious about or rejected his dualism."[305]

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[304] Russell, Bertrand, 1914, "The Relation of Sense-data to Physics", Printed in his *Mysticism and Logic* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.:1917). Reprinted Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1951. (Pages 108-131). Pagination here matches the latter, p. 113.

[305] Weitz, Morris. "Analysis and the Unity of Russell's Philosophy." In *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, 55–121. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1946, 70.

This evolution in Russell's thinking highlights the tension between his earlier dualistic ontology and his later acceptance of neutral monism. What began as an attempt to reconcile sensory experience with physical objects through logical construction ultimately led him to reconsider the fundamental nature of mind and matter.

4-4) The Constituting Elements of Reality After 1919: The Neutral Stuff

By 1919, Russell fully embraces neutral monism, a theory which holds that sensations are neutral events that can conform to both mental and physical laws. This shift in his thinking offers a new way to bridge between sensory experience and the physical world. Previously, in *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Russell had argued that sense-data, which he considered physical, served as a convincing link between the two realms. However, his views evolved when he questioned the need for a 'subject' to justify knowledge. Russell eventually concludes that there was no epistemological basis for assuming the existence of a perceiving subject. As a result, he abandoned the distinction between sensation (the mental act) and sense-data (the object of perception). Without a subject to perceive sense-data, they could no longer be seen as distinct objects. Consequently, sensation and sense-data became indistinguishable. With this shift, Russell proposes that sensations or sense-data, now seen as 'neutral stuff', serve as the shared foundation connecting the mental and physical worlds. Sense-data were no longer simply objects of knowledge but the neutral elements from which both mind and matter are constructed. Russell's move away from dualism and subject-object distinction represents a significant shift in his thinking, leading to the idea that sensations are the building blocks of both mental and physical reality. This approach provides a unified foundation for understanding both realms. However, Russell's adoption of neutral monism has sparked significant debate among scholars, particularly regarding his

interpretation of 'neutral stuff' and how it underpins both mental and physical phenomena.

Russell's scholars,[306] when it comes to interpreting his view on neutral monism, mainly fall under one of the two following groups:[307] The first group believes that Russell's engagement with neutral monism was brief, limited to his writings between 1919 and 1921. They argue that after *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell moved away from this ontological doctrine, shifting his focus towards scientific realism. From 1927 onwards, they claim, his attention turned to the idea that scientific theories of physics and their underlying ontology provide the most accurate description of reality. These scholars see little importance in neutral monism within *The Analysis of Matter*, overlooking the deep connection between Russell's neutral monism and his earlier epistemological concerns.[308] The second group, however, maintains that Russell adhered to neutral monism throughout his entire philosophical career. Some within this group suggest that Russell held a partial version of neutral monism in *The Analysis of Mind*, while in *The Analysis of Matter*, he extended this idea, proposing that the fundamental elements of reality are completely neutral, referring to them as 'neutral events'.[309]

Contrary to the first group, I argue that when one considers Russell's neutral monism through the lens of his epistemological concerns —such as his attempt to address

[306] Other scholars, such as Robert Tully, John Hamilton, and Morris Weitz, offer perspectives that may support my interpretation of Russell's neutral monism, and I will consider their views as well.
[307] Tully, Robert E. "Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, 1999, 8: 209–224, p. 209.
[308] This view is shared by Walter Stace, Alfred Jules Ayer, and Richard Mark Sainsbury, among others. See Walter Stace, "Russell's Neutral Monism," in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, 3rd ed., edited by P. A. Schilpp, 355 (text and notes) (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951); A. J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), esp. chap. 5, pp. 121–124; R. M. Sainsbury, *Russell* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 210–211, 268.
[309] This view is shared by Michael Lockwood (1981), Mafizuddin Ahmed (1989), and Eric C. Bank (2014), among others.

the problem of the relation between sense-data and physics (RSP) — it becomes evident that Russell neither could nor did abandon neutral monism, in 1927.[310] In fact, by rejection of the act-object distinction and in the absent of cognitive character of acquaintance/sensation, both of which had played a significant role in his earlier epistemology, sense-data as the neutral stuff became equally central to his epistemological framework, helping him reconcile physics and psychology and address the RSP problem.

Contrary to the claims of some scholars in the second group, I argue that Russell's concept of neutral monism did not undergo the transformation they suggest. Neither his 1921 nor his 1927 versions of neutral monism suggest that the fundamental components of the world are governed equally by both mental and physical causal laws, equally constituting both mind and matter. According to Russell, the real constituents of reality —whether in *The Analysis of Mind* or *The Analysis of Matter*— are only partially neutral, with the exception of our sense-data. Thus, in neither 1921 nor 1927 Russell presents the basic constituents of reality as being entirely neutral. This is because his primary concern was epistemological: the relation between our sense-data and the world of physics and common sense. His aim was not to develop a purely metaphysical framework where all aspects of reality could be reduced to a single element, governed equally by mental and physical laws, as a thoroughgoing monist might. Unlike William James or Ernst Mach, who were committed to a comprehensive form of monism that sought to unify mind and matter under a single explanatory principle, Russell maintained a more pragmatic focus.

[310] At least until 1959, Russell considered himself as being a neutral monist. (My Philosophical Development, 1959, p. 139).

For Russell, neutral monism was a means to an end: it allowed him to reconcile the complexities of human perception (sense-data) with the external world of physics. He did not pursue neutral monism as an absolute philosophical goal but rather as a tool to address specific issues in his theory of knowledge. After abandoning the cognitive notion of acquaintance and the concept of the 'subject', Russell recognized that neutral monism is a byproduct of such a change of views. Unlike in 1914, when he still held onto a fundamental distinction between mental and physical, by the 1920s, Russell had embraced the idea of sense-data/sensations being the neutral elements, moving beyond the act-object distinction that shaped his earlier work. Russell's formulation of neutral monism was partially motivated by epistemological considerations, particularly his endeavor to reconcile the physical world and mental world. His theory of knowledge and his theory of reality were inseparable, as he aimed to develop a unified framework where what is known (reality) and how we know it (knowledge) could be coherently explained. In this sense, as Russell's epistemology evolved, so too did his metaphysical positions, in what can be seen as a double containment; his theory of knowledge shaping his views on reality, and vice versa.

4-4-1) The Analysis of Mind (1921)

In *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell reflects on his attempt to reconcile psychology and physics, writing: "This book has grown out of an attempt to harmonize two different tendencies, one in psychology, the other in physics, with both of which I find myself in sympathy, although at first sight they might seem inconsistent."[311] This quote highlights his desire to align the study of mind (psychology) and the study of matter (physics). It

[311] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Mind*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1921 (1968), preface, xvii.

reflects his broader project of aligning the different domains of science —mind and matter— within his neutral monist framework, reconciling the physical world and the world of perception, providing a unified picture of the world.

Russell, via his doctrine of neutral monism, seeks to provide a unified explanation of reality, where both mental and physical phenomena are derived from a common, neutral stuff. From the beginning of *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell is clear that his primary objective is the reconciliation of physics and psychology, with neutral monism offering a promising way to achieve this. In the Preface, he writes:

> The view that seems to me to reconcile the materialistic tendency of psychology with the anti-materialistic tendency of physics is the view of William James and the American new realists, according to which the "stuff" of the world is neither mental nor material, but a "neutral stuff," out of which both are constructed.[312]

Russell challenges the traditional division between mind and matter, proposing neutral monism as a framework in which the basic constituents of the world are neutral, forming the foundation for both mental and physical phenomena. Although *The Analysis of Mind* primarily deals with the mental realm, Russell's neutral monism extends beyond this, addressing his epistemological concerns about our knowledge of the external world, including the RSP problem; Russell's doctrine relates sense-data to both physical and mental phenomena. In Russell's view, sensations (or sense-data) are neutral elements that are governed by both physical and psychological laws, making them truly 'neutral'. These elements can be considered either mental or physical depending on the context in which they appear and the relational properties they exhibit. This dual-subjection of sense-data allows them to serve as a bridge between the mental and physical realms.

[312] *Ibid*., preface, xvii-xviii.

Russell begins his discussions by highlighting the core issue underlying the problem of the relation between the mental and physical. He argues that most philosophers, whether idealists or materialists, assume they understand the concepts of 'mind' and 'matter'. However, Russell points out that despite their confidence, none of these philosophers can provide a precise or universally accepted definition for either term.[313] According to Russell, assuming a fundamental distinction between mind and matter has led some philosophers, such as Descartes, to the mistaken belief in an unbridgeable divide between the two —an assumption that perpetuates the ongoing debate over the nature of reality.[314] Others believe that only one of the two is primary. By challenging this assumed divide, Russell paves the way for his theory of neutral monism, which seeks to diminish the distinction between mind and matter by proposing a more fundamental, neutral element that constitutes both.[315] He claims:

> The stuff of which the world of our experience is composed is, in my belief, neither mind nor matter, but something more primitive than either. Both mind and matter seem to be composite, and the stuff of which they are compounded lies in a sense between the two, in a sense above them both, like a common ancestor.[316]

According to Russell's theory of neutral monism, both physics and psychology are concerned with the same primitive elements (primitive data) which can explain the reality; these primitive elements are not explained by anything more basic. These primitive elements are neither inherently mental nor purely physical; instead, they exist in a neutral state, serving as the building blocks for both mind and matter. This suggests a profound commonality between our internal, mental experiences and the external,

[313] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[314] *Ibid*., p. 35.
[315] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[316] *Ibid*., pp. 10-11.

physical world. The same neutral stuff gives rise to both realms, meaning that the distinctions we draw between mind and matter are more about context and relations than about fundamental differences in nature. By recognizing the shared foundation of these two realms, we can see that there is no need for a cognitive relation (as was the case in 1914) to justify the connection between our subjective experiences and the objective reality; the subjective realm and the objective realm, both are composed of the same primitive stuff.

In support of his doctrine of neutral monism, in *The analysis of Mind*, Russell says that "James is right in rejecting consciousness as an entity".[317] According to Russell, there is no empirical evidence for the existence of consciousness as a distinct mental substance in our immediate experiences. Furthermore, there is no logical necessity to assume such a mental entity. We are not compelled to posit a separate subject who, through sensation, experiences sense-data. However, Russell further argues that while James and the American realists are partly correct in considering that both mind and matter are composed of a neutral stuff that is neither mental nor material in isolation, this perspective is not entirely accurate. Russell concedes that sensations —what we hear or see— can be considered as belonging to both psychology and physics. Yet, he says, "I should say that images belong only to the mental world, while those occurrences (if any) which do not form part of any "experience" belong only to the physical world."[318] This nuanced position leads scholars to argue that Russell's view in *The Analysis of Mind* represents a form of partial monism.

[317] *Ibid*., p. 25.
[318] *Ibid*., p. 25.

4-4-1-1) The Duality of Causal Laws

In *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell distinguishes between sensations, which can be considered neutral, and other elements such as images and sensibilia. According to Russell, sensations are subject to both psychological and physical causal laws, making them truly neutral. However, he argues that:

- Images are purely mental, existing solely in the realm of psychology and governed by psychological laws, such as the law of association.
- Sensibilia (unperceived objects) belong purely to the physical world and are governed by physical laws, such as the law of gravitation.

This distinction is central to Russell's argument. Sensations occupy a unique position in Russell's ontology, bridging the gap between the mental and the physical, but not all primitive entities share this dual-subjection. Russell acknowledges that the division between mental and physical laws persists for certain kinds of entities, such as images and sensibilia, which remain distinct in their adherence to causal laws. Russell's version of neutral elements differs from the more unified perspectives of other philosophers like William James, and this distinction has led scholars to interpret Russell's theory as a form of restricted neutral monism.

Scholars like Mafizuddin Ahmed argue that Russell's view in *The Analysis of Mind* represents a form of 'partial' neutral monism. Ahmed in his dissertation on Russell's neutral monism, compares Russell's ideas with those of other neutral monists who influenced Russell.[319] In his dissertation on Russell's neutral monism, Ahmed describes partial neutralism as a theory in which the fundamental 'stuff' of the world is only partly

[319] This dissertation was later published as a book in 1986 under the same title, retaining the original ideas.

neutral and partly divided into either the mental or physical realms.[320] Ahmed cites a critical passage from Russell's work to support this interpretation:

> There are, it seems to me, prima facie different kinds of causal laws, one belonging to physics and the other to psychology. The law of gravitation, for example, is a physical law, while the law of association is a psychological law. Sensations are subject to both kinds of laws, and are therefore truly "neutral" … But entities subject only to physical laws, or only to psychological laws, are not neutral, and may be called respectively purely material and purely mental.[321]

According to Ahmed, this passage reveals that Russell's monism applies primarily to sensation, which is the constituting element of the mental and physical realms and being subject to both kinds of causal laws. However, other entities, such as images and sensibilia, do not possess this neutrality and are categorized as purely mental or purely physical. Ahmed suggests that Russell's theory reflects a position of partial neutralism — where sensations are neutral but not all primitive entities are. He points out that Russell introduces a division, placing images in the mental realm and sensibilia in the physical realm. This separation preserves a form of dualism, as not all phenomena adhere to both mental and physical laws.

Russell's scholars, citing passages like this, argue that Russell's monism, in *The Analysis of Mind*, is not neutral in the conventional sense. Russell acknowledges that images follow psychological laws, such as the laws of association, while sensibilia adhere to physical laws, such as the law of gravitation. A sensation, however, can be classified as "physical" when it obeys physical causal laws and "mental" when it follows mental causal laws.[322] This allows sensations to bridge the gap between the mental and physical realms,

[320] Ahmed, Mafizuddin. *Bertrand Russell's Neutral Monism*. 1968. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses., p. 36.
[321] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Mind*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1921 (1968), p. 26.
[322] *Ibid*., p. 138.

supporting his theory of neutral monism in a nuanced manner that does not entirely eliminate all forms of duality. Thus, according to Ahmed's interpretation, Russell's *The Analysis of Mind* reflects a position of 'partial neutralism', which is distinct from a more orthodox form of neutral monism. Ahmed argues that in this work, Russell categorizes images as "purely mental" entities and sensibilia as "purely physical" entities, thus preserving a form of dualism. In this sense, I also believe that the Russell of 1921 did not fully abandon dualism and maintained what Eric Banks, one of his critics, describes as a "weird psychophysical 'dualism'".[323] Banks contends that Russell, despite advocating a form of neutral monism, did not entirely abandon dualism, as his treatment of images and sensibilia suggests that certain entities adhere strictly to either psychological or physical laws. Banks' interpretation further supports the claim that Russell's neutral monism in *The Analysis of Mind* represents a partial monism that retains some elements of dualism.

In essence, it seems that Russell's theory of neutral monism is more complex and nuanced than traditional interpretations of the doctrine. While Russell argues that sensations are truly neutral and part of both psychology and physics, he maintains that certain entities, like images and sensibilia, adhere exclusively to either psychological or physical laws. This division leads to a form of partial neutral monism, where only some aspects of reality are neutral while others retain a more dualistic categorization. Thus, Russell's work in *The Analysis of Mind* presents a dual-layered approach: sensations serve as the bridge between mind and matter, while other phenomena remain distinctly categorized as either mental or physical. This interpretation contrasts with the more

[323] Banks, Eric C. *The Realistic Empiricism of Mach, James, and Russell.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 130.

integrated forms of neutral monism proposed by philosophers like William James and Ernst Mach, who advocate for a unified ontological framework without such categorical distinctions.

4-4-1-2) Neutral, Purely Mental, and Purely Material

In *The Analysis of Mind* (1921), Russell argues that sensation alone is insufficient to explain either mind or matter. Instead, he posits that both mind and matter are logically constructed from more fundamental elements. He introduces three distinct entities —sensations, images, and sensibilia— as the ultimate constituents of reality. Sensations and images form the mind, while sensations and sensibilia form matter. This places Russell within the framework of neutral monism, though with important qualifications. For Russell, sensations, images, and sensibilia are the primitive elements of reality. Images are purely mental, existing only within the mind, while sensibilia are purely physical, inferred from sensations and existing independently of perception. Sensations are neutral; they are neither inherently mental nor physical but can belong to either realm depending on context. Sensations are mental occurrences when part of consciousness, and physical when related to external objects. Thus, neither mind nor matter exist as independent substances. The mental realm includes images, while the physical realm includes sensibilia, with sensations bridging the two. Russell's neutral monism differs from other forms in that it does not entirely eliminate the distinction between the mental and physical. While sensations are neutral, images are restricted to the mental realm and sensibilia to the physical realm. This makes Russell's neutral monism partial, applying only to sensations and not uniformly across all elements of reality.

Although Russell adopts core principles of neutral monism —such as the idea that consciousness is not a distinct entity and that some elements (like sensations) are

neutral— he retains a kind of duality. This duality, however, is not Cartesian mind-body dualism, but rather a logical construction where both mind and matter are built from different combinations of primitive elements. Images obey psychological laws, while sensibilia obey physical laws, with sensations acting as neutral elements. Russell explains that the distinction between mental and physical is not rooted in an ontological divide but in the causal laws governing these elements. Russell emphasizes sensations as the key neutral element, calling sensation the "neutral stuff which, in isolation, is neither mental nor material."[324] However, this neutrality does not extend to all elements of experience. As Russell explains, "images belong only to the mental world, while those occurrences (if any) which do not form part of any "experiences" belong only to the physical world."[325] Russell retains mental and physical categories even within his neutral monism framework. Only sensations function as neutral primitives, while images and sensibilia maintain their distinct roles. Though Russell rejects traditional mind-matter duality, he does not fully dissolve the distinction between mind and matter, viewing both as constructed from more fundamental elements governed by different causal laws.

In *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell argues that the difference between mental and physical occurrences stems from the causal laws to which they are subjected, not from any underlying ontological difference. Sensations, images, and sensibilia share the same metaphysical nature.[326] Images, for example, possess the same empirical characteristics as sensations because they are copies of past sensations, similar to Hume's ideas, though they may lack the vividness of original sensations.[327] However, unlike sensations, which

[324] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Mind*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1921 (1968), p. 25.
[325] *Ibid*., p. 25.
[326] In 1914, Russell expressed the idea that sense-data and sensibilia are of the same nature.
[327] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Mind*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1921 (1968), pp. 80, 109-110.

are caused by external stimuli, images arise from associations with sensations rather than from external stimuli.[328] This gives images a mnemic quality,[329] making them more private than sensations, as they are primarily produced by internal causes, though external triggers, such as music evoking memories of a scene, may play a role. For instance, hearing pleasant music might evoke the image of a delightful scene previously experienced. This differs from the original sensation of seeing the scene, which was caused by the actual scenery, whereas the image is produced by memory.

The key distinction between images and sensations, according to Russell, lies in their causal origins rather than their nature. Images are caused by internal neural stimuli, stemming from memory or habit, while sensations result from external stimuli. Sensations have both physical causes and mental effects: they are triggered by external physical stimuli and result in mental experiences, such as forming memories or making inferences. Images, by contrast, are governed solely by mental laws; that is, they are not directly tied to external physical causes but exist in relation to internal mental processes. Despite this difference in origin, both images and sensations are fundamentally the same in nature. Russell claims that introspective data, like images, remain distinguishable from sensations by their proximate causal laws, just as gases are distinguishable from solids, even though both are composed of the same matter.[330] Similarly, Russell held that sensibilia have the same metaphysical status as sensations, with sensibilia being unperceived sensible objects and sensations being the perceived ones. Although he later

[328] *Ibid*., p. 109.
[329] "we will give the name of "mnemic phenomena" to those responses of an organism which, so far as hitherto observed facts are concerned, can only be brought under causal laws by including past occurrences in the history of the organism as part of the causes of the present response. mean that, in attempting to state the *proximate* cause of the present event, some past event or events must be included" (p. 78).
[330] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Mind*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1921 (1968), p. 121.

adopts neutral monism, Russell maintains that sensibilia are unperceived objects distinct from sensations based on their causal laws, even though they are fundamentally the same in nature.

The distinction between images and sensibilia assumes they exclude each other. However, Russell suggests that images and sensibilia share the same ontological status as sensations, meaning that while they follow different causal laws, they are fundamentally the same. That is, since images and sensibilia both resemble sensations in nature, they also resemble each other. Thus, ontologically, Russell can claim that the basic elements of reality are of the same nature: they are either sensations or resemble sensations. Morris Weitz summarizes Russell's doctrine of neutral monism by stating that "the dualism in the world is not of entities but of causal laws."[331] He says that, for Russell, sensations, images, and sensibilia share the same metaphysical and ontological status, which is neutral —neither mental nor physical in isolation. This framework enables Russell to bridge the gap between subjective and objective reality, explaining how neutral elements can participate in both psychological and physical processes based on the causal laws they follow. Russell explains this as follows:

> What we call a material object is not itself a substance, but is a system of particulars analogous in their nature to sensations, and in fact often including actual sensations among their number. In this way the stuff of which physical objects are composed is brought into relation with the stuff of which part, at least, of our mental life is composed. … I believe that the stuff of our mental life, as opposed to its relations and structure, consists wholly of sensations and images.[332]

[331] Weitz, Morris. "Analysis and the Unity of Russell's Philosophy." In *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, 55–121. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1946, p. 72.
[332] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Mind*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1921 (1968), pp. 108-109.

However, a key question remains: how can images be neutral if they exist only in the mind, and how can sensibilia be neutral if they exist only outside the mind? Although Russell argues that the distinction between these elements reduces to causal laws, the resulting duality cannot be overlooked. Images remain confined to the mental realm, and sensibilia to the physical realm. This leads to what might be called partial neutrality, where sensations function as truly neutral entities, while images and sensibilia do not. Russell's theory of neutral monism aims to solve the problem of how sense-data relate to the physical world (the RSP problem). Sensations bridge the mental and physical realms, addressing the issue of how subjective sense-data connect to objective physical objects. Russell explains that material objects are not substances but systems of particulars, often including sensations. This dual applicability of sensations makes them central to his theory of knowledge, helping to reconcile the mind with the external world. Russell's theory, in 1921, does not achieve full neutrality, since images and sensibilia, as fundamental constituents of reality, are not truly neutral between the mental and physical realms. However, this framework enables Russell to bridge the gap between subjective and objective reality, explaining how neutral elements can participate in both psychological and physical processes based on the causal laws they follow.

By 1927, in *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell seems to embrace a more developed version of neutral monism, "adopting what he called "event particulars" as the basic happenings in nature, encompassing both sensations and physical events."[333] Some scholars argue that this represents a full embrace of neutral monism, while others claim that Russell abandoned it by 1927. However, this shift can be seen as a refinement rather

[333] Banks, Eric C. *The Realistic Empiricism of Mach, James, and Russell.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 3.

than a complete change in his theory.[334] In *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell focuses on constructing a metaphysic of matter that minimizes the gap between physics and perception, integrating epistemology and ontology to form a scientifically grounded version of neutral monism.

In conclusion, Russell's neutral monism in *The Analysis of Mind* does not achieve full neutrality, as images and sensibilia remain tied to their respective realms. However, the theory allows Russell to address both the epistemological problem of how subjective data relates to the physical world and the ontological status of the fundamental elements of reality. By *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell refines his neutral monism, aligning it more closely with scientific advances, yet maintaining his focus on the relation between perception and physics.

4-4-2) The Analysis of Matter (1927)

In *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell continues to explore the relation between perception and physics, aiming to "construct a metaphysic of matter which shall make the gulf between physics and perception as small."[335] His focus on refining the definition of the fundamental elements of reality distinguishes him from other neutral monists, who may have overlooked the importance of epistemology in forming metaphysical views. Russell's integration of epistemology with ontology ensures that his version of neutral monism remains scientifically grounded, addressing both the epistemological and ontological concerns of how the mental and physical are related.

[334] In his letter to Elizabeth Eames in 1964, Russell states: "I am conscious of no major change in my opinions since the adoption of neutral monism" (Eames, Elizabeth Ramsden. *Bertrand Russell's Theory of Knowledge*. Routledge, 2013, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203072660, p. 108).

[335] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Matter*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1927, p. 275.

Previously, in *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell emphasized that neutral stuff composes the constituents of reality. However, these constituents are not intrinsically mental or physical. The distinction between mind and matter emerges when these neutral components enter into different causal relations. This implies that the duality of mind and matter does not stem from the intrinsic nature of these neutral stuff, but from the lawful relations they engage in. These relations are extrinsic to the terms not intrinsic. This means that it is the causal roles and external relations of these events, rather than their intrinsic nature, that determine whether they are classified as mental or physical. Russell states, "we could call an occurrence "physical" when it obeys causal laws appropriate to the physical wor1d, and "mental" when it obeys causal laws appropriate to the mental world."[336]

However, in *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell introduces a new criterion for distinguishing between the mental and the physical, this time based on their epistemological differences. He emphasizes that our knowledge of the mental and physical arises in different ways: the mental is known through direct acquaintance, while the physical is understood through inference from sensory data. This modification refines his earlier framework but does not alter the nature of the neutral elements in his ultimate ontology. By 1927, what were once referred to as 'neutral stuff' —a term Russell used more as a convenient expression— are now more precisely described as 'events'. These events, in Russell's view, are brief, transient particulars that constitute the fabric of reality. They are the fundamental entities, and their lawful relations —whether psychological or

[336] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Mind*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1921 (1968), p. 138.

physical— account for the duality of mind and matter without invoking a metaphysical division.[337]

Due to Russell's shift in terminology, using the concept of 'events' for all the constituents of reality, interpretations among scholars diverge. Some argue that by 1927, Russell becomes a full-fledged neutral monist. They believe that "events themselves are the successor neutral stuff of Russell's mature doctrine."[338] For instance, Ahmed claims that Russell's 1927 version represents a "complete neutral monism", stating "that the whole of the stuff of the world is neutral, mind and matter both being composed entirely of the neutral stuff [events]."[339] However, this interpretation raises an important question: Does Russell mean that there is one set of primitives for both mind and matter, with all entities subject to a single system of laws? Scholars, who believe that Russell's 1927 version is a complete neutral monism, interpret Russell as claiming that the primitive constituents of reality —whether mental or physical— are events that are neutral between the two. They also note his statement that physical laws are the most general laws of reality, to which all events are subject. Russell asserts, "no one can doubt that the causes of our emotions when we read Shakespeare or hear Bach are purely physical. Thus, we cannot escape from the universality of physical causation."[340] This suggests that, at least for emotions, physical causation plays a dominant role, implying that even mental states may be reducible to physical processes. However, it is crucial to clarify what Russell

[337] In *Logical Atomism* (1924), Russell explains that "every event has to a certain number of others a relation which may be called 'compresence'; from the point of view of physics, a collection of compresent events all occupy one small region in spacetime. One example of a class of compresent events is what would be called the contents of one man's mind at one time—i.e., all his sensations, images, memories, thoughts, etc., which can coexist temporally" ("Logical Atomism," in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, Routledge Classics, 2010, p. 148).
[338] Tully, Robert E. "Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, 1999, 8: 209–224, p. 222.
[339] Ahmed, Mafizuddin. *Bertrand Russell's Neutral Monism*, 1989, p. 36.
[340] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Matter*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1927, p. 393.

means by 'emotion' here. If he adopts William James's view, emotions are physical states; if following Watson, they are behavioral dispositions; and in the mentalist view, they are purely mental states.[341] In any case, Russell's emphasis on physical causation for emotions hints that the basic constituents of reality (events) are indeed subject to physical laws. However, the broader claim about whether all aspects of mind are reducible to physical laws remains open to interpretation.

The shift in terminology in Russell's later work, specifically the use of 'event' to describe the basic constituents of reality, has led some scholars to believe that by 1927, Russell had moved toward 'scientific realism' —a view that the world described by science accurately reflects an objective reality independent of our perceptions. According to some scholars, this suggests a significant change in his metaphysical outlook. Walter Stace, for instance, argues that "*The Analysis of Matter* (1928), though it is true that it contains some elements of neutral monism, belongs on the whole to a later phase of Russell's thought, in which scientific realism and the causal theory of perception have finally gained the upper hand."[342] By this, Stace implies that in this phase of his thought, Russell is less concerned with mental-physical neutrality and more focused on how scientific descriptions, particularly those in physics, map onto a reality that exists independently of our minds, believing that scientific theories offer a more reliable account of reality than subjective experience alone. However, Russell himself denies that his later work marks a

[341] William James presents his view on emotions, commonly known as the James-Lange theory of emotion, in his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). In this work, James argues that emotions are essentially bodily responses to external stimuli, suggesting that physical changes in the body precede the feeling of emotion, which arises as we become aware of these changes. John B. Watson, a behaviorist, offers a different perspective in *Behaviorism* (1924). Watson views emotions primarily as observable behaviors and physiological responses, rather than as subjective mental states. He emphasized that emotions could be studied objectively, focusing on physical or behavioral dispositions without referencing the mental or introspective aspects of experience.

[342] Stace, Walter T. "Russell's Neutral Monism." In *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by P. A. Schilpp, 3rd ed. New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951, p. 355.

radical departure. He does not see neutral monism as incompatible with scientific realism. In response to Stace's interpretation, Russell states that while there is some change in *The Analysis of Matter*, it is primarily "a fuller and more careful statement of theories not very different from those of *The Analysis of Mind*."[343]

The key change in Russell's *Analysis of Matter* involves incorporating advances in contemporary physics into his neutral monism, not abandoning it. Russell introduces a more scientific explanation of the 'neutral stuff' that constitute both mental and physical phenomena. Nevertheless, the framework of neutral monism remains intact, continuing to propose that mental and physical entities derive from a common, neutral foundation. Russell's evolving theory aims to show that the events or particulars that science describes are neutral at their core yet participate in both mental and physical processes. In *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell's focus shifts slightly toward a more rigorous scientific account of these neutral elements, reflecting developments in physics such as relativity theory and quantum mechanics. The change is not a rejection of neutral monism but rather a refinement, incorporating these scientific insights while maintaining his epistemological concern: the problem of the relation of sense-data to physics (the RSP problem). This problem, central to both *The Analysis of Mind* and *The Analysis of Matter*, revolves around how subjective sensory experiences relate to the objective, scientific description of reality.

Russell's aim is to explain how both mind and matter can be understood as manifestations of the same neutral events, thus bridging the gap between subjective perception and objective reality. His transition toward scientific realism does not

[343] Russell, Bertrand. "Russell's Reply to Criticism." In *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by P. A. Schilpp, 3rd ed. New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951, p. 707.

represent a break from neutral monism. Instead, it reflects an effort to integrate his philosophical framework with the scientific knowledge of his time. While the emphasis on physical causation and events becomes more pronounced in *The Analysis of Matter*, the fundamental idea that mind and matter are different manifestations of neutral elements remains consistent with his earlier views. In *An Outline of Philosophy* (1927), Russell reiterates this position, stating, "It will be seen that the view which I am advocating is neither materialism nor mentalism, but what (following a suggestion of Dr. H. M. Sheffer) we call 'neutral monism.'"[344] This statement clarifies that, despite adopting a more scientifically grounded terminology, Russell remains committed to neutral monism, where reality is composed of neutral elements (events) that participate in both mental and physical domains depending on their lawful relations. The notion that his theory underwent a fundamental transformation is overstated; rather, it evolved to align more closely with scientific advancements, particularly in physics, while maintaining its core principles of a shared neutral foundation for mind and matter.

4-4-2-1) Epistemological Dualism: Mental Events and Physical Events

By the time of *The Analysis of Matter* (1927), Russell's understanding of neutral monism had evolved, though he maintained the core principle that both mental and physical phenomena derive from a common, neutral foundation. He says:

> To show that the traditional separation between physics and psychology, mind and matter, is not metaphysically defensible will be one of the purposes of this work; but the two will be brought together, not by subordinating either to the other, but by displaying each as a logical structure composed of what, following Dr. H. M. Sheffer,* we shall call "neutral stuff." We shall not contend that there are demonstrative grounds in favour of this construction, but only that it is

[344] Russell, Bertrand. *An Outline of Philosophy*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1927 (1951), p. 293.

> recommended by the usual scientific grounds of economy and comprehensiveness of theoretical explanation.[345]

This foundational 'neutral stuff' is now referred to as 'events'. An event, in Russell's terminology, occupies a finite region of space-time and serves as the building block of both mental and physical reality. Unlike the traditional concept of matter, which is typically thought of as solid, extended, and impenetrable, an event is penetrable (meaning it can be extended without losing its identity) and transitory, in that it is momentary and fleeting, rather than a stable, enduring object.[346]

Russell further refines his framework by categorizing sensations, images, and sensibilia under the umbrella of these neutral events, specifically classifying sensations as 'percepts'.[347] He states, "every percept is an event",[348] suggesting that percepts are a particular kind of event tied directly to sensory experience. A percept is essentially an immediate, conscious experience —what we see, hear, or feel in the moment— while sensibilia refers to unperceived entities that could be sensed under different circumstances.[349] Images, on the other hand, are mental representations or recollections of previous percepts, generated internally rather than through direct interaction with the external world. In *The Analysis of Matter* (1927), Russell introduces a distinction between events that we experience directly and those that we infer indirectly. Events that occur outside of our direct perception —referred to as sensibilia— are aspects of reality that exist independently of our immediate sensory experience. These inferred events, while

[345] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Matter*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1927, p. 10.
[346] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Matter*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1927, pp. 281-286.
[347] Tully, Robert E. "Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, 1999, 8: 209–224, p. 221.
[348] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Matter*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1927, p. 246.
[349] According to Tully, it seems that Russell uses the term "percept" interchangeably with "sense-data."

still part of the fabric of reality, are not subject to the same psychological laws that govern mental events. Instead, they follow physical laws exclusively, existing independently of our mental processes. This means that they do not depend on our bodies or perception for their existence; they exist as physical events, independent of any observer.

In *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell's distinction between events is based on how we come to know them. He states:

> … the distinction between what is mental and what is physical does not lie in any intrinsic character of either, but in the way in which we acquire knowledge of them. I should call an event 'mental' if it is one that somebody can notice or, as Professor Ryle would say, observe. I should regard all events as physical, but I should regard as *only* physical those which no one knows except by inference.[350]

According to Russell, this epistemological distinction does not imply a difference in the intrinsic properties of events. Rather, all events —whether perceived directly or inferred— are fundamentally neutral and share the same nature as our sensations. However, he introduces an epistemological distinction between mental and physical events. Mental events are directly experienced, while physical events are inferred. Russell maintains that all events are subject to physical laws, yet only some —those we directly experience— are also governed by psychological laws. This suggests that while all events are physical, some are experienced as mental due to their direct relation to our perception. Sensibilia, aspects of reality beyond immediate perception, are classified as purely physical. This leads to a bifurcation of events, those directly experienced (mental) and those inferred (physical), and it introduces a distinction at the foundational level of reality

[350] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959, p. 254.

between mental and physical events. This raises the question of what remains truly neutral in Russell's framework.

In this framework, sensations, images, and sensibilia all fall under the general category of events but are differentiated by how we come to know them. Mental events are "with which we are acquainted",[351] such as when we experience sensations or images (e.g., seeing a color or hearing a note). Russell's theory of acquaintance, as seen in *The Analysis of Mind*, posits no subject-object duality. The experience is neutral but classified as mental due to the manner of acquaintance. Physical events, by contrast, are inferred through empirical observation and physical laws, existing independently of subjective experience, and do not conform to mental laws.[352] In *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell introduces an epistemic distinction: perceived events are mental, and unperceived events are physical. This reflects his focus on how we come to know the constituents of reality rather than their metaphysical status. The basic components of reality (what Russell calls events) are neutral but epistemologically differentiated into mental and physical events based on how we acquire knowledge of them. This distinction does not signal a radical shift in his metaphysics but an evolution in how he explains the relation between mind and matter. By grounding the distinction in epistemology, Russell aligns his ontology more closely with scientific realism, suggesting that mental events can be understood in terms of physical laws, even though they are experienced differently. He believes that "the formulae of physics may perfectly well be applicable to collections of mental events".[353] Russell insists that while mental events are governed by psychological laws, they are not

[351] Russell, Bertrand. *The Analysis of Matter*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1927, p. 159.
[352] *Ibid*., p. 393.
[353] *Ibid,*. p. 159.

exempt from physical laws. He takes a scientific realist view, asserting that all events, whether mental or physical, are ultimately subject to the laws of physics. This means that even mental events, like sensations, are caused by physical processes and can be understood in terms of physical causality.

Although Russell claims the mental-physical distinction is superficial —emerging from external relations rather than the intrinsic nature of reality's components— his definition of neutral events in *The Analysis of Matter* suggests a more nuanced approach. He posits that the world is composed of primary components, or events, which are ontologically neutral but become epistemically distinct based on how we come to know them. This distinction seems central to the differentiation of mind and matter. Russell appears to shift his position, suggesting that each event in isolation may be inherently mental or physical: sensations and images are classified as mental events, while sensibilia are classified as physical events. This introduces an epistemic duality at the most basic level of reality. Events are categorized based on how they are known —either through subjective knowledge (mental) or objective knowledge (physical). This duality shapes the distinction between the mental and physical worlds. Russell writes: "As to what the events are that compose the physical world, they are, in the first place, percepts, and then whatever can be inferred from percepts [sensibilia, which are physical events]."[354] It means that percepts as mental events "are part of the material of the physical world."[355] This implies that percepts, though mental, are part of the physical world. The mental world, however, is constructed solely of mental events (percepts and images). In this revised framework, Russell acknowledges that what we directly perceive as mental events

[354] *Ibid,*. p. 386.
[355] *Ibid,*. p. 387.

constitutes both mental and physical realms. However, unlike idealists, he does not believe all reality is constituted from mental events.

In *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell implies that mental events differ from physical events because of their epistemic distinction. This marks a shift: the mental-physical distinction, initially based on causal relations, is now rooted in the epistemic nature of the events themselves —known either through direct experience or inferred. Thus, the distinction between the mental and physical worlds stems from the nature of the constituents of reality. Purely physical events (sensibilia) constitute the physical world, while purely mental events (images) constitute the mental world. Sensations or percepts, which have both physical causes and mental effects, bridge the two domains. Ultimately, being mental or physical is presented as a fundamental characteristic of the primitive constituents of reality. This perspective contrasts with the claim that the basic constituents of reality are all neutral and could, through different arrangements, give rise to both mind and matter. Now, the distinction between mind and matter seems intrinsic to the character of these constituents (events) themselves, rather than merely a consequence of their different arrangements or external relations. Although Russell claims that the basic elements of reality (events) are neutral and all follow physical laws, the mental-physical distinction at the level of events —prior to any arrangement— could be seen as indicating a deeper division within reality itself. Initially, in *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell argued that the distinction was based on how events were organized or arranged. However, in *The Analysis of Matter*, he grounds the distinction more firmly in epistemology, suggesting that the way we come to know events determines their classification before them entering any arrangements or relations.

To elaborate, in *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell identifies two fundamentally different ways of knowing the primitive constituents of the world (events). He views events as dynamic occurrences that can be understood in different ways, depending on whether they are directly experienced or inferred. For instance, a noise or a color that we perceive as particular qualities are examples of mental events, while the movement of electrons is an example of a physical event —something we do not perceive directly but infer through scientific observation. Although Russell does not explicitly endorse dualism, this epistemic distinction between mental and physical events implies a sort of dualism between mind and matter. According to him, the neutral constituents of reality are categorized into two distinct groups: mental events (those directly experienced) and physical events (those inferred from mental events). This distinction introduces a division that challenges his claim of neutral monism —the idea that reality is composed of a single kind of neutral stuff that can be either mental or physical, depending on how it is known. This classification suggests that Russell's neutrality may be compromised, as the distinction between mental and physical seems to suggest a more fundamental division between mind and matter. Russell asserts that only percepts (what we directly perceive) and images (mental representations) fall under both physical and mental laws. For example, the sight of a red apple is both a mental event (the direct experience of redness) and a physical event (the light waves and their interaction with the eyes). However, physical events, unperceived events, according to Russell, always remain outside the domain of mental causal laws.[356] We infer their existence from our mental events, but these external events remain purely physical. This distinction raises the issue of whether

[356] *Ibid*,. p. 393.

Russell can truly maintain a neutral, non-dualistic framework when the basic constituents of reality are so sharply divided between mental and physical categories.

In *The Analysis of Matter* (1927), Russell asserts that only percepts and images fall under both physical and mental causal laws, while unperceived events (sensibilia) remain outside mental causal laws. Consistent with his earlier view in *The Analysis of Mind*, he concludes that unperceived physical events (sensibilia) cannot be constituents of the mind or mental world, and that images, being mental events without external stimuli, do not belong to the physical world, though they are subject to both physical and mental causal laws. This leads to the conclusion that there is no 'mind' composed of sensibilia and no 'matter' composed of images. The epistemic distinction between images and sensibilia separates them into two exclusive categories: images belong solely to the mental world, while sensibilia belong solely to the physical world. Although Russell attempts to demonstrate that both mind and matter are composed of the same neutral 'stuff' (events), not all events can be part of the mind, and not all can be part of matter. As a result, mind and matter do not always share the same kinds of events, implying that certain events cannot be neutral. Thus, in his 1927 version of neutral monism, similar to his 1921 version, Russell has three basic categories: mental events (images), neutral events (sense-data), and physical events (sensibilia), though he names all of them as events.

An analysis of the characteristics of entities in Russell's ultimate ontology across different phases of his philosophy reveals how deeply his epistemological concerns influenced his ontological views. Russell's evolving account of the ultimate constituents of reality, such as neutral stuff, was shaped by his theory of knowledge, particularly the relation between perception and reality. For example, in his later work, Russell excludes universals from his ontology of the external world because, from an epistemic standpoint,

universals cannot be perceived or sensed as particulars can. Since Russell emphasizes the primacy of perceptual knowledge, the status of universals becomes more tenuous compared to that of particulars. Unlike sense-data (mental events) and inferred sensibilia (physical events), whose nature can be directly tied to sensory experience, the nature of universals remains abstract and less certain. This is why universals, for Russell, cannot share the same metaphysical status as particulars: the two are distinct in both their epistemological and ontological roles. Russell's ultimate ontology, then, is shaped by this epistemic distinction between what is immediately known (mental event) and what is inferred (physical event). His neutral monism, which attempts to explain both mind and matter as composed of the same neutral stuff, prioritizes those entities, i.e., sensations, that are grounded in direct sensory experience.

Whether Russell's neutral monism is truly partial is debatable. One interpretation is that the causal laws governing mind and matter create a duality, or reality is composed partly of mental elements and partly of physical ones, except for sensations. Another interpretation is that the world is composed of neutral elements, which manifest as images in some contexts, as sensibilia in others, and as sensations in still others.[357] These interpretations are crucial to understanding Russell's position, as they reflect his concern with the relation of sense-data to physics (the RSP problem), rather than focusing solely on their metaphysical status. Russell's primary objective is epistemological: to reconcile physics and psychology by explaining how subjective data relates to the objective physical world. He does not fully align with the neutral monism of thinkers like William James, Ernst Mach, or the New Realists, though he draws on their ideas to address his own

[357] Weitz, Morris. "Analysis and the Unity of Russell's Philosophy." In *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, 55–121. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1946, p. 73.

epistemological concerns. In that sense, I consider him a partial neutral monist. The only neutral element in his ontology, and the most important one for him, is sensation, while other elements (images and sensibilia) do not enjoy the same status.

This chapter shows that Russell's ontological views consistently align with his theory of knowledge. It demonstrates that epistemology is not merely about the nature of knowledge but also about what can be known and how this impacts ontological theories like neutral monism. A failure to recognize the depth of the connection between Russell's epistemology and ontology has led to misconceptions in secondary literature. By closely examining this relation, we can better understand the continuity and coherence of Russell's philosophical development, particularly his efforts to address his epistemological concerns, such as the RSP problem (the problem of the relation of sense-data to physics), through the concept of neutral stuff.

Chapter Five: Revisiting Russell's Neutral Monism in Scholarship: Alignments and Divergences with the Present Thesis

Although many commentators acknowledge that Russell's epistemology and ontology were intertwined —or even that his epistemology partly motivated his ontology— they often do not address the issue from the same perspective as this dissertation: namely, through the exclusive lens of Russell's epistemological concern, the RSP problem. This thesis follows details about the contribution of epistemology to the development of neutral monism in a specific period. It demonstrates that Russell's partial neutral monism is a byproduct of his epistemic project regarding our knowledge of the external world. Thus, while others engage with Russell's neutral monism, this thesis

advances a novel approach by systematically demonstrating how and why Russell's RSP problem serves as a driving force behind his ontological theory of neutral monism, thereby expanding upon existing scholarship.

5-1) The Scholarship Reconsidered and the Gap that This Thesis Fills

Existing scholarship partially supports the interpretation of this thesis by acknowledging the centrality of epistemology in Russell's thought. However, these scholars primarily analyze neutral monism within the framework of consciousness studies and the mind-body problem, frequently comparing it with panpsychism or physicalism, and the neutral monism of figures such as Mach and James. While these are significant areas of inquiry, they do not systematically examine its epistemological foundations, particularly Russell's enduring concern with the Relation of Sense-data to Physics (RSP) problem. The secondary literature can be categorized into three groups:

The first category includes Scholars who acknowledge epistemology but misplace its significance. The second group of scholars focus predominantly on metaphysical aspects and implications of Russell's theory of neutral monism. The last group are scholars, such as Walter Stace and A. J. Ayer, who largely ignore Russell's epistemological project; I have dealt with the third group in the preceding chapters, so I will not discuss them again in this chapter.

This chapter engages with these interpretations, demonstrating how the present thesis fills a gap by systematically tracing Russell's neutral monism to his epistemological prioritization of the RSP problem.

5-1-1) Category One: Epistemological Half-Steps

Donovan Wishon (2021) traces Russell's shift from acquaintance-based dualism to neutral monism, attributing it to dissatisfaction with the "multiple-relation theory of judgment," rejection of introspective evidence for an ego or mental acts, and confidence that neutral monism could explain cognition without dualism. This partly aligns with the argument that Russell's neutral monism emerged from epistemological concerns rather than purely ontological simplification. However, unlike this thesis, which follows Russell's epistemological path toward neutral monism, Wishon situates neutral monism within broader 19th and early 20th-century debates about the mind-body problem, contrasting it with idealism, materialism, and panpsychism. Wishon explicitly rebuts panpsychist readings (e.g., Brüntrup 2017) by citing Russell's assertion that "it must not be assumed that part of a mental state must be a mental state."[358] Wishon challenges readings of Russell as a panpsychist or idealist (e.g., Maxwell 1972, Quinton 1972), stressing that Russell's neutral elements are not intrinsically mental. He emphasizes the sophistication of neutral monism as a unified framework for reconciling psychology and physics, highlighting its appeal to figures like Mach, James, and Russell. While Wishon acknowledges epistemological motivations, he does not systematize this, showing how each ontological shift (e.g., from particulars to events) was driven by the RSP problem. Furthermore, Wishon notes logical construction as a bridge to neutral monism but focuses on its ontological implications. This thesis highlights logical construction as the pivot point forcing Russell to abandon the subject-object distinction, explicitly tying it to the collapse of acquaintance theory, a causal link Wishon underplays. Wishon rejects

[358] Wishon, Donovan. "Radical Empiricism, Neutral Monism, and the Elements of Mind." *The Monist* 104, no. 1 (2021): 125-51, p. 143.

claims (e.g., Stace, Ayer) that Russell abandoned neutral monism post-1921, yet he addresses whether Russell's later views (e.g., *Human Knowledge*, 1948) suggesting that Russell's neutral monism post-1921 verges on physicalism.[359] However, this thesis challenges Wishon's implicit suggestion that *Analysis of Matter* leans toward physicalism. Wishon notes the incompatibility of acquaintance and neutral monism but does not show how acquaintance actively blocked neutral monism until Russell's epistemic shift. This thesis demonstrates this via Russell's 1913 critique of neutral monism's cognitive inadequacy and the 1919 collapse of sense-data into "pure sensation," which removed the need for a subject.

In his 2016 paper "Panpsychism, Panprotopsychism, and Neutral Monism", Donovan Wishon explores the relation between panpsychism, panprotopsychism, and neutral monism, focusing on their philosophical motivations and theoretical commitments.[360] The central aim of the paper is to critically examine how neutral monism compares to panpsychism and panprotopsychism in addressing the mind-body problem and the metaphysics of consciousness. In his recent paper "Russell on Experience and Egocentricity" (2024), Wishon acknowledges that Russell's adoption of neutral monism was influenced by his rejection of the "diaphanous" nature of experience, which stemmed from his epistemological concerns about acquaintance and egocentric particulars.[361] He notes that Russell's objections to neutral monism in *Theory of Knowledge* (1913) were rooted in the need to account for the "immediacy and presence" of objects in experience,

[359] *Ibid*., pp. 126-127.
[360] Wishon, Donovan. "Panpsychism, Panprotopsychism, and Neutral Monism." In *Philosophy: Mind*, edited by B. P. McLaughlin, 51-70. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
[361] Wishon, Donovan. "Russell on Experience and Egocentricity." *Supplementary Volume - Aristotelian Society* 98, no. 1 (2014): 185-208, p. 186. https://doi.org/10.1093/arisup/akae002.

an epistemic issue.[362] However, this thesis expands on this and systematically traces how Russell's epistemological project—from acquaintance (1905–1913) to logical construction (1914–1918)—necessitated neutral monism by 1919. Wishon does not discuss logical construction (1914–1918) as a transitional phase. He jumps from Russell's dualist objections (1913) to his 1919 conversion, while this thesis identifies logical construction as the bridge between dualism and neutral monism, showing how it presaged neutral monism by reducing physical objects to sense-data (Chapter 2). Wishon rejects Martin's (2024) claim that Russell later denied "distinctively subjective facts", showing Russell retained subjectivity via "noticing."[363] I agree, but my discussions adds that Martin's and some other scholars' error stems from ignoring the *epistemic continuity* in Russell's works.

Robert Tully (1999) critiques the view that neutral monism was a fleeting phase in Russell's thought, arguing instead for its continuity from *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) to *The Analysis of Matter* (1927) and beyond.[364] He agrees with the claim that the search for a more coherent account of knowledge and perception were central to Russell's transition to neutral monism.[365] He challenges readings (e.g., Stace, Ayer) that label Russell's later work as "scientific realism" or "materialism," emphasizing Russell's persistent epistemological focus.[366] Tully acknowledges that Russell's move from "sensations" to "events" in *The Analysis of Matter* led some (e.g., Lockwood) to argue for a physicalist turn. However, he rightly insists this reflects refinement, not abandonment, of neutral

[362] *Ibid*., p. 195.
[363] *Ibid*., p. 201.
[364] Tully, Robert E. "Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies 8* (1999): 209-224.
[365] *Ibid*., p. 217. Also, Tully, Robert E. "Three Studies of Russell's Neutral Monism." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives* 13 (1993): 5-35, pp. 7, 20.
[366] *Tully, Robert E., "Russell's Neutral Monism," 1999*, p. 219.

monism.[367] This thesis strengthens Tully's point by explaining Russell's 1927 distinction that the difference between mental and physical lies in how we acquire knowledge, not in intrinsic properties.[368] This epistemological criterion anchors neutrality despite terminological changes. Tully in 2003 presents us with a sketch of three different phases in Russell's philosophical views: Russell's works before the acceptance of neutral monism (before 1919), Russell's pre-mature doctrine of neutral monism (1919-1927), and Russell's mature doctrine (1927 and so on). This essay repeats most of his previous papers on Russell's neutral monism, but with a more chronological approach.[369] While Tully traces neutral monism's continuity, the thesis systematically links each phase (1912–1927) to Russell's evolving solutions to the RSP problem. For instance, Tully notes Russell's 1914 "dual classification" of sense-data but does not tie it to the RSP problem as this thesis does in Chapter Two.[370]

Eric Banks (2010) portrays Russell's neutral monism as a response to the limitations of both dualism and abstract physicalism.[371] Banks highlights how Russell's rejection of cognitive notion of acquaintance in favor of a causal-relational framework was pivotal in his adoption of neutral monism.[372] He points out that Russell's neutral monism treats sensations as both epistemological (experienced) and physical (neural) phenomena, dissolving the traditional dualist divide.[373] Banks highlights the theory's aim to unify psychology and physics by positing neutral elements as the foundational

[367] *Ibid*., pp. 220-221.
[368] Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, 1959, p. 254.
[369] Tully, Robert E. "Russell's Neutral Monism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell*, edited by Nicholas Griffin, 332-370. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
[370] Tully, Robert E., "Russell's Neutral Monism," 1999, p. 217.
[371] Banks, Erik C. "Neutral Monism Reconsidered." *Philosophical Psychology* 23, no. 2 (2010): 173-187.
[372] *Ibid*., p. 174.
[373] *Ibid*., p. 176.

constituents of both mental and physical phenomena. He challenges the "phenomenalist" misreading of neutral monism (e.g., that neutral elements are purely mental). Banks situates neutral monism within the early 20th-century revolt against mechanistic materialism, emphasizing its development by Mach, James, and Russell. He stresses that Russell's elements are mind-independent and causally potent, bridging physics and psychology. While Banks' 2010 paper provides a robust defense of neutral monism's historical and metaphysical coherence, this thesis uniquely demonstrates its epistemological necessity for Russell, tracing his shift from acquaintance-based dualism to a partial neutral monism as a direct response to the RSP problem. The chronological analysis (from 1905 to 1927) fills a gap in Banks' broader historical treatment, showing why Russell's epistemology led him to neutral monism rather than just how it aligned with empiricist traditions.

Later, in 2014, Banks provides a historical overview of realist empiricism (the view that there is a real world external to us and we know it only via experience and observation) and explores the views of three of its main advocates— Mach, James and Russell— within their neutral monism approach. [374] This book examines the connection between these philosophers' views on neutral monism and the applicability of their theory to the philosophy of mind and physics. Banks claims that "Russell's neutral monism was also developing out of his philosophy of science in a much more straightforward way"[375] highlights how Russell's shift toward neutral monism was not solely an epistemological adjustment but also a natural outgrowth of his scientific realism and commitment to

[374] Banks, Eric C. *The Realistic Empiricism of Mach, James, and Russell.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
[375] *Ibid*., p. 131.

unifying physics and psychology. He argues that Russell's neutral monism was shaped by his engagement with modern physics (relativity, quantum mechanics) and his desire to construct a metaphysic compatible with science. Banks' comment reveals that Russell's turn to neutral monism was a coherent extension of his philosophy of science. However, this thesis demonstrates how the RSP problem pushed Russell toward neutral monism epistemologically, while scientific realism shaped its ontological form (events, perspectives, intrinsic qualities). This dual impetus aligns with the core argument: neutral monism was a byproduct of Russell's broader project, not an isolated metaphysical commitment.

While Banks recognizes the interplay between Russell's epistemology and ontology, his analyses predominantly concentrate on categorizing his neutral monism —assessing its compatibility with alternative metaphysical frameworks— rather than investigating how his epistemological priorities fundamentally shaped his formulation of neutral monism. This approach risks mischaracterizing Russell's philosophical emphasis by foregrounding debates that were, for him, secondary to his central epistemological project. For instance, Banks asserts: "Within this enhanced view of the physical world, realistic empiricists offer a solution to the problem of how the realm of human experience (colors, pains, sounds) relates to physics. Russell called his view "neutral monism"."[376] Accordingly, he further claims: "Neutral monism seemed to Russell to solve the problem of believed propositions and to save his theory of knowledge."[377] However, Russell explicitly states that adopting neutral monism generated new complications rather than

[376] *Ibid*., pp. 7-8.
[377] *Ibid*., p. 127.

alleviating existing ones. In *My Philosophical Development*, he says: "This change in my opinions [the denial of the cognitive nature of sensation and becoming a neutral monist] greatly increased the difficulty of problems involved in connecting experience with the outer world."[378] This admission directly challenges scholarly interpretations that present neutral monism as attractive to Russell primarily because it alleviated his epistemological concern regarding our knowledge of the external world. This thesis suggests that neutral monism was neither Russell's primary philosophical objective nor originally conceived (by him) to address problems such as the mind-body duality or consciousness—though it later proved relevant to these issues.

Gregory Landini (2021) provides a detailed examination of Russell's philosophical development, particularly focusing on his 1913 manuscript *Theory of Knowledge*.[379] While this thesis focuses on the epistemological motivations behind his adoption of neutral monism, Landini's book focuses on repairing and reviving Russell's 1913 theory of knowledge through a detailed logical and technical analysis. He critiques the common metaphysical assumptions about abstract particulars, emphasizing Russell's efforts to develop a philosophy that avoids such metaphysical commitments. Landini holds "that the transition from the *Principia* era to the neutral monist era centers as well on one and only one problem—the elimination of abstract particulars from Russell's acquaintance epistemology."[380] He highlights that Russell sought to develop an epistemology that did not rely on abstract entities, leading him to neutral monism, which posits a single type of substance that can be both mental and physical. Landini aims to address the internal and

[378] Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, 1959, p. 13.
[379] Landini, Gregory. *Repairing Bertrand Russell's 1913 Theory of Knowledge*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021.
[380] *Ibid*., p. 6.

external problems that Russell faced in his multiple-relation theory of belief and his acquaintance epistemology. Landini's analysis is more narrowly focused on the technical and logical aspects of Russell's theory of knowledge, particularly the issues of direction, compositionality, and the role of logical forms.

However, this thesis provides a detailed examination of how Russell's epistemological concerns shaped his ontological commitments. It argues that Russell's engagement with neutral monism was influenced by his efforts to resolve the RSP problem, which concerns the reconciliation of subjective sense-data with the objective physical world. Landini examines the historical context of Russell's work, including his interactions with Wittgenstein.[381] He provides historical context, but his primary focus is on the logical and technical aspects of Russell's work, rather than the broader epistemological motivations. However, this analysis spans from 1905 to 1927, examining the evolution of Russell's thought through various stages, including his initial rejection and later acceptance of neutral monism. The methodology involves a detailed historical analysis of Russell's writings, highlighting the transitions in his thought and the epistemological motivations behind these transitions. Landini rightly notes that Russell's neutral monism required rethinking his principle of acquaintance, which originally held that all knowledge derives from direct acquaintance with objects. This thesis shows that Russell's adoption of neutral monism represents a profound synthesis of epistemology and ontology. Landini contrasts Russell's neutral monism with Meinongianism, which posits intentionally inexistent objects of thought. Landini notes Russell's replacement of

[381] Landini, Gregory. *Repairing Bertrand Russell's 1913 Theory of Knowledge*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021, pp. 42-46.

acquaintance with "noticing" due to behaviorist sympathies and links this to neutral monism's rejection of Brentano's intentionality.[382]

However, this thesis contextualizes this shift within the RSP problem's demands, showing how logical construction (1914–1918) prefigured neutral monism by undermining dualism. Landini treats this as a local response to Wittgenstein, while the thesis frames it as part of Russell's broader epistemological project. Landini suggests that Russell's difficulties stem from the tension between his acquaintance epistemology and his agenda against abstract particulars. He concludes that Russell's acquaintance epistemology and multiple-relation theory can be reconciled with his scientific method in philosophy. This thesis suggests that Russell adopted a form of partial neutral monism, which allowed him to address the RSP problem while maintaining a coherent epistemological framework. I conclude that neutral monism emerged as a necessary consequence of Russell's epistemological concerns, particularly his efforts to reconcile sense-data with the physical world. While, Landini's work provides support for the thesis's claims about Russell's epistemological struggles, my thesis advances beyond Landini by centering the RSP problem as the engine of Russell's neutral monism, unifying Russell's developments under an epistemic framework, systematically demonstrating Russell's engagement with neutral monism to be conditional and secondary to his epistemological priorities, and reframing Russell's partial neutral monism as an incidental method subordinated to the RSP problem —a novel study absent in Landini's.

[382] *Ibid*., p. 8.

5-1-2) Category Two: Focused on Ontological Implications and Aspects

Paul Austin Murphy (2020) explores Bertrand Russell's neutral monism and its potential connections to panpsychism, emphasizing their appeal as powerful, elegant, and parsimonious theories that aim to bridge the gap between the physical and consciousness.[383] Murphy critically examines these theories, their historical roots, and contemporary interpretations. He notes that these theories appear to offer "elegant solutions" to the mind-body problem by grounding both domains in the same neutral substrate. He says: “The main example of this is, of course, the gap between the physical and experience/consciousness. And an almost obvious solution to that gap is to say that both the physical and experience/consciousness are “grounded” in the same “neutral stuff””.[384] However, he says, challenges remain, such as defining the nature of this neutral stuff and explaining its relationship to both consciousness and the physical world. While this thesis avoids panpsychism, focusing on neutral monism as a methodological tool —It cites Russell’s 1927 refinement to ‘neutral events’ without linking them to consciousness— Murphy explicitly explores panpsychist interpretations, contrasting Landini’s view (qualia as emergent) with James/Russell’s ‘pure experience’.[385] Murphy asserts: “According to the American philosopher Gregory Landini, Russell's neutral monism is *not* also a version of panpsychism. That is, Landini's Russell didn't believe in experience “all the way down”.”[386] While Murphy’s paper and this thesis both align on Russell’s epistemological motivations and rejection of dualism, this thesis prioritizes

[383] Murphy, Paul Austin. "Bertrand Russell's Neutral Monism and Panpsychism." *Paul Austin Murphy's Essays on Philosophy*, July 13, 2020. https://medium.com/@paulaustinmurphy2000/bertrand-russells-neutral-monism-and-panpsychism-6ebc16b7feeb. Accessed July 15, 2024.
[384] *Ibid*., p. 1.
[385] *Ibid*., pp. 4-5.
[386] *Ibid*., p. 5.

neutral monism as a methodological outcome of the RSP problem, whereas Murphy's paper explores its ontological ambiguities and panpsychist implications. The thesis's narrow focus on epistemic continuity contrasts with Murphy's broader philosophical critique, particularly regarding qualia and intrinsic properties of neutral elements.

David Bostock (2012) focuses on Russell's logical atomism, a methodological approach that Russell developed to analyze complex entities into simpler, atomic components.[387] It covers Russell's works from the early 20th century up to the 1920s, but with a primary emphasis on the logical and metaphysical aspects rather than the epistemological ones. This thesis interprets Russell's works through the lens of epistemology, emphasizing the role of sense-data and the problem of knowledge in shaping his philosophical views. Bostock focuses on works such as "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," "Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy," and *The Analysis of Matter*, discussing how logical atomism influenced Russell's views on metaphysics and the nature of reality. Bostock places significant emphasis on logical atomism as the central methodological tool in Russell's philosophy.[388] He argues that logical atomism was the primary driver behind Russell's philosophical development, influencing his views on metaphysics and the nature of reality. He argues that Russell's logical atomism was a fundamental aspect of his philosophical methodology.

Bostock highlights Russell's use of logical constructions to replace inferred entities (e.g., minds as bundles of sensations).[389] This thesis expands this by framing logical construction as an epistemological bridge between dualism and neutral monism,

[387] Bostock, David. *Russell's Logical Atomism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, x + 302 pp.
[388] *Ibid*., pp. 151- 169.
[389] *Ibid*., pp. 169-170.

necessitated by the RSP problem (Chapter 2). Bostock argues that Russell's neutral monism failed because, firstly, it could not explain identity over time without circularity,[390] and secondly, unsensed sensibilia were incoherent as "possible sensations".[391] However, this thesis argues that Russell's focus was epistemological—neutral monism was a methodological tool, not a finished ontology. This thesis offers a more systematic and original intervention by framing neutral monism as an epistemological byproduct of Russell's struggle with the RSP problem, whereas Bostock treats it as a metaphysical experiment with inherent limitations. Bostock sees Russell's 1927 causal theory as a rupture.[392] For him, neutral monism is a flawed metaphysical experiment abandoned due to internal contradictions. However, this thesis reinterprets Russell's 1927 work as a continuation of his epistemological project, now incorporating scientific realism. Neutral monism was an epistemological strategy, refined in 1927 but never abandoned. This aligns with Russell's 1959 reflection (*My Philosophical Development*) that neutral monism "definitively solved" the mind-matter problem.

Leopold Stubenberg (2024) examines Russell's evolving stance on naïve realism —the view that perception directly and accurately presents the external world as it is— across his philosophical career.[393] The paper is structured chronologically, tracing Russell's shifts from early sympathy with naïve realism (1898–1910) to its rejection in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), a modified return in *On Matter* (1912), and eventual abandonment by 1927. Stubenberg and this thesis both emphasize that Russell's adoption

[390] *Ibid*., p. 162.
[391] *Ibid*., p. 195.
[392] *Ibid*., p. 195.
[393] Stubenberg, Leopold. "The Place of Naïve Realism in Russell's Changing Accounts of Perception." *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 72, no. 1 (2024): 15-41. https://doi.org/10.18290/rf24721.2.

of neutral monism was driven by epistemological concerns. Stubenberg notes that Russell's shift to neutral monism was tied to his methodological commitment to logical construction and the need to unify psychology and physics under a single framework.[394] This aligns with my thesis, which argues that neutral monism emerged as a solution to the RSP problem, as Russell sought to ground knowledge in immediate experience. While Stubenberg acknowledges the epistemological dimension, this thesis provides a systematic reconstruction of how Russell's evolving solutions to the RSP problem necessitated neutral monism. It traces this progression from his early rejection of neutral monism (due to the cognitive theory of acquaintance) to his later acceptance of it as a consequence of logical construction (Chapter 3). This detailed epistemic narrative is absent in Stubenberg's paper.

Stubenberg highlights Russell's use of logical construction to reconcile sense-data with physical objects, particularly in "On Matter" (1912) and The Analysis of Mind (1921). He agrees that Russell's constructivist approach brought him closer to neutral monism by treating physical objects as logical fictions.[395] This thesis expands on this by showing how logical construction undermined Russell's earlier commitment to the cognitive subject-object distinction, which was the primary barrier to neutral monism (Chapter 2). Stubenberg does not explore this epistemic rupture in detail. Both Stubenberg and this thesis note that Russell's abandonment of the subject as a fundamental entity was pivotal for his neutral monism. Stubenberg cites Russell's conclusion that the "subject" is a logical fiction, echoing my argument in Chapter 3.[396] This thesis contextualizes this shift within

[394] *Ibid*., pp. 24-26.
[395] *Ibid*., pp. 23-25.
[396] *Ibid*., p. 22.

Russell's broader epistemological project, arguing that the subject-object distinction became untenable because it obstructed a unified solution to the RSP problem. Stubenberg treats this as a metaphysical shift, whereas this thesis emphasizes its epistemic necessity. Stubenberg focuses extensively on naïve realism in Russell's early work, suggesting that Russell's later rejection of it was a gradual process tied to his theory of perception.[397] Stubenberg's emphasis on naïve realism distracts from the core issue—the RSP problem. This thesis shows that Russell's neutral monism was a response to epistemic constraints (e.g., the failure of acquaintance theory). Stubenberg portrays Russell's transition to neutral monism as a smooth evolution (e.g., from sense-data to neutral elements). In contrast, this thesis highlights a rupture: Russell's 1919 rejection of the cognitive subject was a radical break necessitated by the failures of his earlier epistemology. Stubenberg argues that remnants of naïve realism persist for "things of common sense" but vanish for the "matter of physics."[398] However, this thesis demonstrates that in *The Analysis of Mind* and *The Analysis of Matter,* there is no naïve realist residue. Stubenberg focuses on metaphysics, concluding that Russell's engagement with naïve realism was nuanced, oscillating between rejection and qualified revival, while this thesis provides a granular account of how each epistemic failure (e.g., acquaintance theory, logical construction) led Russell closer to neutral monism, filling gaps in Stubenberg's narrative.

Leopold Stubenberg's paper, "Russell, Russellian Monism, and Panpsychism" (2015), explores the connections between Russell's neutral monism, contemporary

[397] *Ibid*., pp. 16-20.
[398] *Ibid*., p. 37.

Russellian monism (RM), and panpsychism.[399] The paper critically examines how Russell's views on the nature of matter and consciousness inform modern debates in metaphysics and philosophy of mind. Stubenberg notes that Russell's neutral monism emerges from his attempt "to bridge the gulf between physics … and perception"[400] stating: "It is this epistemic worry —not a concern about the metaphysical ungroundedness of physical properties— that leads him[Russell] to undertake his neutral monist reconstruction of matter and mind."[401] While Stubenberg acknowledges the epistemological dimension, this thesis systematically reconstructs Russell's shift from acquaintance-based epistemology to neutral monism, showing how each stage of his thought (1905–1927) was shaped by the RSP problem. Stubenberg implies Russell's neutral monism is a complete metaphysical system, potentially aligning with panpsychism,[402] while, this thesis suggests that Russell adopted only a partial neutral monism, tailored to his epistemological constraints (Chapters 3-4). Both agree that neutral monism dissolves the traditional subject-object dualism; however, this thesis goes further by tracing Russell's methodological shift (e.g., logical construction) and its role in dissolving the subject-object distinction, whereas Stubenberg focuses more on the following metaphysical implications, particularly how Russell's neutral monism relates to panpsychism and modern philosophy of mind.

[399] Stubenberg, Leopold. "Russell, Russellian Monism, and Panpsychism." In *Consciousness in the Physical World: Perspectives on Russellian Monism*, edited by Torin Alter and Yujin Nagasawa, 58-90. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
[400] *Ibid*., p. 69.
[401] *Ibid*., p. 69.
[402] *Ibid*., pp. 82-87.

More recent papers on Russell, such as “Russellian Monism” (2020) by Philip Goff and Sam Coleman,[403] are mainly focused on the metaphysical aspect of neutral monism, treating Russellian monism as a metaphysical solution to the mind-body problem or the hard problem of consciousness. Goff & Coleman’s paper (2020) emphasizes the ontological implications of neutral monism, particularly its claim that physics reveals only dispositional properties, leaving categorical properties (which ground consciousness) as "hidden".[404] Goff & Coleman interpret neutral monism as a bridge between physicalism and dualism, with no explicit linkage to the RSP problem. Their paper largely bypasses Russell's early epistemological struggles, focusing instead on his later neutral monism as a precursor to contemporary Russellian monism. They cite The Analysis of Matter (1927) to argue that Russell's neutral events provide a framework for reconciling physics with consciousness.[405] Their discussion mainly centers on the interpretations of panpsychist (by Philip Goff) and panprotopsychist (by Sam Coleman). This thesis traces a developmental narrative tied to epistemology, while Goff & Coleman treat neutral monism as a static metaphysical position with modern applications. This thesis anchors neutral monism in epistemology, tracing its evolution from the RSP problem, while Goff & Coleman anchor it in metaphysics, extending it to modern theories, engaging with current debates in consciousness studies.

James Connelly (2024) argues that Wittgenstein’s May-June 1913 critique of Russell’s multiple-relation theory of judgment (MRTJ) was the decisive factor in Russell’s

[403] Goff, Philip and Coleman, Sam. "Russellian Monism." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Consciousness*, edited by Uriah Kriegel, 301-327. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
[404] *Ibid*., p. 303.
[405] *Ibid*., pp. 303-305.

abandonment of his *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript.[406] Secondary to this, Russell's progress was halted by independent problems in analyzing molecular propositional thought, which emerged during his work on atomic propositional thought in Part II of the manuscript. Connelly labels this interpretation the "Logical Interpretation," distinguishing it from psychological readings of Russell's paralysis (e.g., Lebens, MacBride), as it centers on logical and philosophical —not psychological— factors.[407] This thesis and Connelly's paper both examine Bertrand Russell's philosophical development, particularly his abandonment of the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript and his eventual adoption of neutral monism. However, the two works differ in focus, methodology, and original contributions. Connelly argues that Wittgenstein's critique of Russell's multiple-relation theory of judgment was decisive in Russell's abandonment of the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript.[408] He emphasizes that Wittgenstein's critique of Russell's multiple-relation theory of judgment (1913) derailed Russell's *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript because it undermined his epistemological project —specifically, the deductive system linking sense-data to physics. Connelly frames this as a logical (not psychological) crisis, driven by Wittgenstein's objection to Russell's reliance on "extraneous premises" to ground atomic propositional thought.[409] This thesis similarly argues that Russell's ontological shifts (e.g., toward neutral monism) were driven by his epistemological struggles, particularly the RSP problem. While Connelly does not discuss neutral monism directly, his analysis of Russell's post-1913 retreat from cognitive

[406] Connelly, James. "Why Russell Abandoned: Theory of Knowledge: The Logical Interpretation." *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies* 44, no. 1 (2024): 45-86. https://doi.org/10.1353/rss.2024.a929931.
[407] *Ibid*., pp. 45-48.
[408] *Ibid*., p. 45.
[409] *Ibid*., p. 56.

relations (e.g., abandoning the "subject" in judgment complexes) foreshadows this thesis's claim that neutral monism emerged from dissolving the subject-object dichotomy. However, this thesis explicitly traces this shift to neutral monism (1919–1921), showing it was necessitated by Russell's failure to solve the RSP problem within dualist frameworks. Connelly prioritizes logical and metaphysical issues, particularly Wittgenstein's critique of MRTJ, as the main reason for Russell's paralysis. He downplays epistemology, stating: "Wittgenstein's objection is not epistemological. Instead, it is logical in nature."[410] While Connelly's paper offers a compelling account of Wittgenstein's role in Russell's abandonment of *Theory of Knowledge*, my thesis broadens and deepens the analysis by emphasizing the epistemological motivations (RSP problem) behind Russell's shift, positioning neutral monism as the byproduct of Russell's epistemological enquiries.

Christopher Pincock (2018) traces Russell's philosophical evolution from his earlier dualism (distinguishing between mental and physical entities) to his later embrace of neutral monism (influenced by William James and Ernst Mach).[411] The paper situates Russell's neutral monism within broader early 20th-century debates in metaphysics and epistemology. He says: "Russell's considerations for and against neutral monism focus largely on its ability or inability to make sense of what is distinctive of our mental experiences and activities."[412] Pincock's analysis frames Russell's neutral monism as an ambitious yet problematic effort to unify mind and matter through logical analysis, situating it as a significant —though contested— phase in Russell's philosophical

[410] *Ibid*., p. 62.
[411] Pincock, Christopher. 2018. "Neutral Monism." In *The Bloomsbury Companion to Bertrand Russell* (2019), edited by Russell Wahl, 312-33. New York: Bloomsbury.
[412] *Ibid*., p. 313.

development. He correctly observes that Russell's adoption of neutral monism was an inevitable outcome of his methodological commitments, particularly his reliance on logical construction. This emphasis aligns with the argument that Russell's post-1919 epistemological framework necessitated a neutral basis for sense-data to reconcile subjective perception with objective physics.[413] While Pincock acknowledges epistemological factors, he appears to prioritize ontological parsimony (invoking Occam's Razor) and developments in physics as primary motivators. For instance, he asserts that "[t]he overriding consideration is Occam's Razor and developments in physics. However, the way was surely prepared by the problems that Russell ran into in making sense of acquaintance with the self and his multiple-relation theory of judgment."[414] In contrast, this thesis, in details, shows that ontological simplicity is secondary (e.g., Chapter One: 1-3, Chapter Two: 2-3-1), arguing instead that Russell's partial neutral monism was not a metaphysical endpoint but a consequence of resolving epistemic challenges. Pincock further suggests that "Once Wittgenstein convinced him that particulars must be simple, and that only facts can correspond to facts, Russell was motivated to find simple, neutral particulars as the sole ingredients of his logical constructions of everything else."[415] However, this thesis demonstrates that the primary impetus for neutral monism stemmed from Russell's evolving solutions to the relation of sense-data to physics (RSP) problem —an epistemological concern that systematically shaped his ontological commitments.

[413] *Ibid*., pp. 319-322.
[414] *Ibid*., p. 330.
[415] *Ibid*., p. 330.

5-1-3) The Present Thesis: The RSP Problem and Russell's Partial Neutral Monism

This thesis posits that at the core of Russell's epistemological project—and, it is argued, a primary motivation behind his neutral monism—lies the problem of reconciling subjective sense-data with objective knowledge of the external world. It argues that Russell's engagement with neutral monism was subordinate to his epistemological concerns —specifically, the RSP problem.

This concern is implicitly present as early as 1905 in On Denoting, where Russell distinguishes between two modes of cognition: acquaintance (direct awareness of sense-data) and knowledge about. He writes: "All thinking has to start from acquaintance; [and further elaborates that] but it succeeds in thinking about many things with which we have no acquaintance."[416] Here, Russell addresses the fundamental epistemic problem: how can we claim knowledge of an external world if our immediate experience is confined to subjective sense-data? His theory of definite descriptions serves as an early attempt to mediate between direct experience and inferred knowledge. The second chapter of this thesis demonstrates that Russell's theory of definite descriptions and his theory of logical constructions are two facets of the same endeavor; both are conceived to solve the RSP (Relation of Sense-data to Physics) problem.

This epistemological inquiry becomes more explicit in "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1910), later incorporated into *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912). In these works, Russell identifies as a dualist regarding mind and matter or knower and known, and elaborates on his key epistemological notion:

[416] Russell, 1905, "On Denoting", p. 874.

acquaintance. In the opening chapter of *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell frames his concern about our knowledge of the external world in terms of certainty and justification: "Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it? This question, which at first sight might not seem difficult, is really one of the most difficult that can be asked."[417] This passage underscores Russell's enduring concern: the reliability of subjective data, such as sense-data or appearances, in grounding objective knowledge or reality.

Russell revisits this epistemological concern in "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics" (1914), where he introduces a "world of six dimensions" to address the mystery of different appearances of the same object. There, he explicitly introduces his supreme maxim that "Wherever possible, logical constructions are to be substituted for inferred entities."[418] This marks a revolutionary step in Russell's epistemology and ontology.

Later, in *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Russell applies his theory of logical constructions to resolve the problem of our knowledge of the external world, articulating the core issue with regard to our data: "The problem really is: Can the existence of anything other than our own hard data be inferred from the existence of those data [our subjective sense-data]?"[419] This represents another formulation of the RSP Problem, the challenge of justifying the relation between sense-data and the world of physics. Russell's proposed resolution develops through his theory of logical constructions, which posits that both sense-data and sensibilia (unperceived data) function as the fundamental constituents of external physical reality.

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[417] Russell, 1912, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 9.
[418] Russell, "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics", p. 115.
[419] Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World: As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*, p. 58.

By 1919, Russell's epistemology undergoes another significant shift: he rejects the cognitive character of acquaintance/sensation, thereby eliminating the notion of direct knowledge (knowledge by acquaintance). This implies that the subject/object distinction is no longer maintained in immediate experience. This epistemological and ontological shift aligns with the principles of neutral monism—the view that there is no subject/object distinction in immediate experience. This ontological shift from dualism to neutral monism is argued to be driven by Russell's enduring engagement with the problem of our knowledge of the external world. As he states in *My Philosophical Development*: "There is only one constant preoccupation: I have throughout been anxious to discover how much we can be said to know and with what degree of certainty or doubtfulness."[420] This statement encapsulates yet another formulation of the problem of our knowledge of the external world.

Accordingly, this thesis demonstrates that Russell's ontological trajectory —from the theory of descriptions and dualism to neutral monism— is driven by the need to resolve the RSP problem: the challenge of bridging subjective experience and objective knowledge, and to elevate the reliability of knowledge. This means that neutral monism was never an independent question for Russell. Rather, it emerged within his broader epistemological project aimed at solving the RSP problem. To address this, he explored various solutions throughout his philosophical works. Based on the differing solutions proposed at different stages of his career, Russell adopted specific ontological positions

[420] Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, p. 11.

each time. Tracing Russell's work from 1905 to 1927, each shift in his stance on neutral monism corresponds to a change in his answers to the RSP problem.

Unlike existing scholarships, this thesis reframes neutral monism as Russell's incidental solution to the RSP problem, not an independent metaphysical pursuit.

Conclusion

This thesis proposes that Russell's epistemological concerns, particularly the RSP problem (the problem of the relation of subjective sense-data with the objective physical world), played a significant role in shaping his treatment of neutral monism. It argues that Russell's complex engagement with neutral monism —his initial rejection and subsequent adoption of this position— is best understood as a response to his epistemological concerns, specifically his efforts to resolve the problem of our knowledge of the external world. Through careful analysis, this thesis demonstrates how Russell's evolving epistemological framework, driven by his commitment to grounding knowledge in immediate experience, led him to adopt a form of partial neutral monism. This thesis systematically traces Russell's philosophical development from 1905 to 1927, with particular attention to key works including "On Denoting", *Theory of Knowledge*, *The Problems of Philosophy*, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, *The Analysis of Mind*, and *The Analysis of Matter*.

Chapter One establishes that Russell's early epistemological framework was grounded in his theory of knowledge by acquaintance, which he regarded as foundational to his analysis of knowledge. Russell's early commitment to the cognitive nature of acquaintance, emphasizing the distinction between subject and object in immediate experience, informed his rejection of neutral monism during this period. This dualistic epistemology, evident in works such as *On Denoting* [1905] and *The Problems of Philosophy* [1912], shaped Russell's early attempts to resolve the RSP problem. In 1912, he seeks to address the RSP problem through his theory of knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, which is based on the cognitive relation of acquaintance. This notion, foundational to his epistemology, played a decisive role in his early rejection of neutral monism, as seen in his *Theory of Knowledge* [1913]. At this stage, Russell argued that neutral monism failed to adequately distinguish between the 'knower' and the 'known', in our immediate experiences, rendering it incompatible with his cognitive epistemology. Hence, the early Russell's notion of acquaintance made it difficult to acknowledge the monist view that subject and object could be manifestations of the same underlying reality. This chapter revealed that Russell's early rejection of neutral monism was rooted primarily in his epistemological commitment to the cognitive nature of acquaintance and subject-object distinction in our immediate experiences.

In Chapter Two, it is argued that by 1914, Russell began to recognize the limitations of his earlier epistemological framework, particularly its inability to satisfactorily address the RSP problem. It is shown that Russell's dualism created unresolved tensions regarding how objective knowledge of the external world could emerge from immediate sensory experiences which are considered to be subjective. These limitations led to the development of his theory of logical construction, which represented a critical turning

point in his philosophy. Logical construction allowed Russell to reinterpret the relation between sense-data and the external world, proposing that physical objects could be constructed from sense-data without presupposing their independent existence. This shift, grounded in the principle of simplicity, brought Russell closer to the framework of neutral monism. However, his continued adherence to the cognitive nature of acquaintance and subject-object distinction prevented him from fully embracing it during this period. Nevertheless, his comments in works like "*The Relation of Sense-data to Physics*" [1914], where he acknowledged certain compatibilities between his views and those of neutral monists, indicate that the seeds for his later transition were already present.

Chapter Three demonstrates how Russell's development of logical construction ultimately compelled him to reject the cognitive conception of acquaintance and adopt neutral monism by 1919. The theory of logical construction revealed that the subject-object distinction was not only unnecessary but actually impeded a unified solution to the RSP problem. My analysis contends that Russell's alignment with William James's view —specifically, that the subject is not immediately given in experience but rather constitutes a conceptual construction— proved decisive in facilitating this philosophical transition. Rather than conceiving sense-data as inherently dependent on a cognitive subject, Russell reconceptualized them as ontologically neutral elements that could be organized into either mental or physical phenomena based on their relational configurations. This position led him to conclude that direct experience reveals not a subject-object dichotomy, but rather a neutral, undifferentiated field of sense-data. This dissolution of the subject-object distinction, in our immediate experiences, allowed him

to conceptualize both mind (or subject) and matter (or object) as logical constructions from the same neutral elements. This chapter highlighted how Russell's rejection of the subject as a fundamental cognitive entity aligned his epistemology with his methodological commitment to simplicity, laying the groundwork for his adoption of neutral monism. Neutral monism's emphasis on neutral elements as the basis for both the mental and the physical offered Russell the means to adequately reconcile mind and matter while avoiding the pitfalls of idealism or materialism. This transition marked a decisive moment in Russell's philosophical development, as it brought his epistemological and ontological commitments into harmony and laid the foundation for his mature work in *The Analysis of Mind* [1921].

Chapter Four examines Russell's mature formulation of neutral monism, charting the progression of his ontological framework from an initial distinction between particulars and universals to his later theories of sense-data and sensibilia, culminating in his theory of neutral elements. Russell's early ontology posited particular physical objects and universal properties/relations as fundamental constituents of reality. However, this framework underwent significant revision as he developed his theory of sense-data (the immediate objects of perception, such as specific color patches or shapes) and sensibilia (unperceived but potentially perceivable entities), thereby anchoring his epistemological system in what can be directly known through immediate experience. While sense-data served as the foundation for Russell's epistemological project, they simultaneously revealed the limitations of this approach, particularly in accounting for their dual role in both psychological and physical explanations. This transitional phase effectively dissolved the rigid distinction between subjective experience and objective reality, leading to his subsequent adoption of neutral elements in *The Analysis of Mind*

(1921) and their further refinement as 'neutral events' in *The Analysis of Matter* (1927). This analysis demonstrates that neutral elements constitute a radical departure from traditional ontological categories. Unlike previous conceptions, these elements were characterized not by inherent mental or physical properties, but rather by their relational configurations: they manifested as physical phenomena when organized in certain ways and as mental phenomena when arranged differently. This theoretical innovation represented the apex of Russell's philosophical development, providing a comprehensive framework that successfully bridged the domains of psychology and physics.

This chapter further engages with competing interpretations in the secondary literature that characterize *The Analysis of Matter* either as merely refining or substantially departing from *The Analysis of Mind*. My analysis challenges these readings as misrepresenting the fundamental continuity in Russell's philosophical development and neglecting his persistent epistemological concerns about our knowledge of the external world. Rather than marking a theoretical shift, *The Analysis of Matter* systematically develops the core commitments of *The Analysis of Mind*, more thoroughly integrating neutral monism with contemporary physical theory while preserving its original epistemological foundations. Russell's sustained commitment to neutral monism in *The Analysis of Matter* enabled him to demonstrate that the mental-physical distinction represents not an ontological division but an epistemological one —a difference in our modes of knowing rather than in the fundamental nature of reality. This epistemological framework provided Russell with a powerful solution to the RSP problem by showing how immediate sensory experience could serve as the foundation for knowledge without recourse to metaphysical dualism. The apparent dichotomy between mental and physical phenomena does not indicate a real division in nature but rather

reflects the different cognitive contexts in which neutral elements are apprehended. Ultimately, *The Analysis of Matter* represents Russell's comprehensive attempt to synthesize psychology, physics, and philosophy within a unified explanatory system grounded in neutral elements. This project maintained remarkable consistency with his earlier work while achieving greater theoretical sophistication through its engagement with developments in modern physics.

Chapter Five engages in a sustained critical examination of secondary scholarship on Russell's neutral monism, systematically comparing existing interpretations with the original contributions advanced in this thesis. While scholars like Stubenberg and Wishon recognize epistemic elements in Russell's neutral monism, their analyses remain constrained by comparative metaphysical frameworks. Crucially, no existing study thoroughly demonstrates how each stage of his neutral monism —acceptance, rejection, and modification— corresponds to evolving solutions to the RSP problem.

This thesis conclusively demonstrates that neutral monism constituted neither Russell's preferred solution nor an independent metaphysical commitment. A comprehensive analysis of the textual evidence reveals it instead as the contingent outcome of his persistent engagement with the RSP problem. By systematically reconstructing this epistemic trajectory from 1905 to 1927 —grounded in Russell's own retrospective accounts— the study achieves three critical interventions: it establishes neutral monism's subordinate role to epistemological concerns, corrects prevailing metaphysical interpretations in secondary literature, and advances a methodological framework that prioritizes Russell's explicit philosophical preoccupations over later scholarly taxonomies. Russell's 1959 declaration renders this hierarchy unequivocal: "It

is in relation to this problem [of perception's relation to physics] that my philosophy underwent its last substantial change."[421] The study's distinctive contribution resides in its consistent application of this epistemological admission as the hermeneutic principle for interpreting Russell's entire neutral monist development.

[421] Russell, Bertrand. *My Philosophical Development*. 1959, p. 13.

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Russell really got into neutral monism in Brixton Prison —where he was incarcerated during the First World War. From there, he wrote many letters, which picks up interesting passages in the genesis of his adoption of the idea. Though, we can find the same content in Russell's published works. There is an access link to some of these letters provided by McMaster University:

https://russell-letters.mcmaster.ca/letters?combine=neutral+monism&field_date_sent_value%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=&field_date_sent_value_1%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=

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