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A BRIEF SURVEY OF RUSSELL'S NOTION OF ACQUAINTANCE

Abstract: The aim of this essay is to analyze the concept of acquaintance in the philosophy of Bertrand Russell. First, Russell's epistemological program and works are presented in a general manner. Then, the concept of acquaintance is defined and characterized, as well as the so-called principle of acquaintance. After that, acquaintance is placed in Russell's epistemology as the core of his theory of knowledge. Finally, I will make some critical remarks concerning the role of acquaintance in Russell's epistemological framework.

Keywords: Principle of Acquaintance, perception, knowledge, sense-data, physical object.

UNA BREVE RESEÑA DE LA NOCIÓN DE 'ACQUAINTANCE' DE RUSSELL

Resumen: El objetivo de este ensayo es analizar el concepto de acquaintance en la filosofía de Bertrand Russell. Primero, el programa epistemológico y las obras de Russell se presentan de manera general. Luego, se define y caracteriza el concepto de acquaintance, así como el llamado principio de acquaintance. Después de eso, el concepto se enmarca en la epistemología de Russell como el núcleo de su teoría del conocimiento. Finalmente, haré algunos comentarios críticos sobre el papel del concepto en el marco epistemológico de Russell.

Palabras clave: Principio de *Acquaintance*, percepción, conocimiento, datos sensoriales, objeto físico.

1. *Introduction*

Russell's epistemological inquiry is a reflection of the struggle between two theses, namely, realism and empiricism. As Miah¹ suggests, Russell's epistemology "is a form of empiricism in that all knowledge of what exists must come directly or indirectly from experience", and it also "is a form of realism in that the object known is independent of being known"². In other words, as Ayer³ puts it, Russell "takes it for granted that all our knowledge of the world is derived from sense-perception, and he also assumes that 'the things that are immediately known in sensation'⁴ are not straightforwardly identifiable with the physical objects which we ordinarily think that we perceive"⁵. Across Russell's works, we see that his arguments and concerns are guided by the alleged contradictory nature of those two theses. Thus, I will start by showing the basic elements that motivate his epistemological enterprise.

Among the many different projects that Russell pursued over his extended philosophical works, there is one which caught his attention for many years, i.e. the possibility of knowledge. Generally, it is assumed that knowledge is grounded on simple 'atoms' which then compose complex 'particles'; Russell's logical atomism is evidence enough of this assumption. Of these two main sources of knowledge, what seems more interesting and difficult to justify is the inferred knowledge that derives from them. Russell's approach, in relation to inferred knowledge, is clearly reductive, in the sense that it must be possible to explain any questionable entity in terms of a more fundamental one. Thus, according to Russell⁶, an ordinary physical object, for example, may be defined as:

1 Miah, S., *Russell's theory of perception: 1905-1919*, London, Continuum, 2006.

2 Miah, *Russell's theory of...*, cit., p. 1.

3 Ayer, A.J., *Russell*, London, The Woburn Press, 1974.

4 Ayer is making reference to Russell, B., *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 1998 (1912), p. 4.

5 Ayer, *Russell...*, cit., p. 72.

6 Russell, B., *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1949 (1914).

...a certain series of appearances, connected with each other by continuity and by certain causal laws. [...] More generally, a "thing" will be defined as a certain series of aspects, namely those which would commonly be said to be of the thing. To say that a certain aspect is an aspect of a certain thing will merely mean that it is one of those which, taken serially, are the thing⁷.

The reason for this is that "our world is not wholly a matter of inference. There are things that we know without asking the opinion of men of science"⁸. These 'things' are what Russell calls 'data', 'sense data', or '*sensibilia*', and the use of the different words correspond to the changes in his view mentioned earlier; I will not pay much attention to these details in this essay. What we should consider in the reductive spirit of Russell's approach is the idea that inferred knowledge could be logically constructed in this sense. Accordingly, as Irvine⁹ says,

It is in this context that Russell also introduces his famous distinction between two kinds of knowledge of truths: that which is direct, intuitive, certain and infallible, and that which is indirect, derivative, uncertain and open to error. [...] Eventually, Russell supplemented this distinction between direct and indirect knowledge of truths with his equally famous distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description¹⁰.

This distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description will be the center of the following discussion, and we will pay close attention to the nature of acquaintance, as well as to the principle that Russell puts forward as the basis for the construction of his theory of perception, the Principle of Acquaintance (PA).

7 Russell, *Our Knowledge of...*, cit., p. 111-112.

8 Russell, B., *My Philosophical Development*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1959, p. 23.

9 Irvine, A.D., «Bertrand Russell», In E.N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/russell/>

10 Irvine, «Bertrand Russell»..., cit.

2. *The notion of acquaintance*

Russell's epistemological distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description depends, in great part, on the results of *On Denoting*¹¹ and, generally, on his theory of meaning. This is the reason why some interpreters, as Clark¹², take Russell's epistemology as a semantic consequence of the formal device developed in *On Denoting*, the one known as the theory of descriptions. In this essay, I will not address the theory of descriptions, though it is important to keep it in mind.

In his *Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description*¹³, Russell settles the basis for his latter epistemological work, which is grounded on the notion of acquaintance and the so-called Principle of Acquaintance (PA). There, Russell says that:

There are two sorts of knowledge: knowledge of things, and knowledge of truths. [...] Knowledge of things, when it is of the kind we call knowledge by acquaintance, is essentially simpler than any knowledge of truths, and logically independent of knowledge of truths [...] Knowledge of things by description, on the contrary, always involves, [...], some knowledge of truths as its source and ground¹⁴.

In *On Denoting*, Russell presupposed this distinction, but he did not provide clear definitions to sustain the epistemological distinction¹⁵. As the passage above indicates, knowledge may come from two sources, things and truths, and knowledge of things may come by acquaintance or by description¹⁶. A few lines after the passage, Russell writes: "All our knowledge,

11 Russell, B., «On Denoting», *Mind*, 14(56), 1905, pp. 479-493.

12 Clark, R., «Acquaintance», *Synthese*, 46(2), 1981, pp. 231-246.

13 Russell, B., «Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description», In R.E. Egner, & L.E. Denonn (eds.), *Bertrand Russell: The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, London, Routledge, 2009 (1912), pp. 191-198.

14 Russell, «Knowledge by Acquaintance...», cit., p. 191.

15 Cf. Russell, «On Denoting»..., cit., p. 479-480, 492.

16 Concerning knowledge of truths, we can make another distinction between intuitive knowledge of truths and derivative knowledge of truths, but this distinction does not concern my main objective (Cf. Russell, *The Problems of...*, cit., pp. 64-81), because we are interested in the role played by acquaintance in Russell's epistemology.

both knowledge of things and knowledge of truths, rests upon acquaintance as its foundation”¹⁷. Thus, in order to understand how Russell builds his epistemology, we must pay close attention to acquaintance, insofar as it is the main source from which all possible knowledge originates and, as Miah claims, “[t]he concept of ‘acquaintance’ is fundamental to his whole approach to the problem of perception and the relation of perception to physical objects”¹⁸. But, what is acquaintance?

In *Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description*, after the passage quoted above, Russell says that “we have *acquaintance* with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths”¹⁹. Acquaintance provides us with a kind of knowledge of which we are “immediately conscious”, and that is perfect and complete. But, more importantly, we must see that acquaintance is a relation between a subject and an object, and not a third element between the subject and the object; which is obvious by the fact that it does not depend on any “process of inference or any knowledge of truths”. According to Miah, we can enumerate some of the main features of the notion of acquaintance.

i. Acquaintance is a dual relation “between a cognizing subject and an object cognized [...] The subject is an entity acquainted with something (an object) and the object is also an entity with which something is acquainted”²⁰. It is worth noting that Russell is not committing the relation of acquaintance to any specific ontology, insofar as he is just considering the subject and the object as entities, but he is not explicitly stating the nature of those entities. As Russell himself claims, “acquaintance is a dual relation between a subject and an object which need not have any community of nature”²¹.

17 Russell, «Knowledge by Acquaintance...», cit., p. 192.

18 Miah, *Russell's theory of...*, cit., p. 3.

19 Russell, «Knowledge by Acquaintance...», cit., p. 191.

20 Miah, *Russell's theory of...*, cit., p. 10-11.

21 Russell, B., *Theory of Knowledge: The 1913 Manuscript*, London, Routledge, 1992 (1984), p. 5.

ii. Acquaintance is the “most pervading aspect of experience”²². This means that experience itself is a relation, again, between a subject and an object. But, as Miah says, “Russell employs the terms ‘acquaintance’ and ‘awareness’ synonymously in place of ‘experience’”²³, and this suggests that there is some degree of vagueness in the use of these terms, insofar as the definition of acquaintance cited above includes direct awareness as a feature of acquaintance.

iii. Acquaintance cannot be erroneous. This is a fundamental feature of acquaintance that derives from the fact that it is a form of direct knowledge of the object. In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell says that “[w]hatever we are acquainted with must be something; we may draw wrong inferences from our acquaintance, but the acquaintance itself cannot be deceptive”²⁴, also, in *Theory of Knowledge*, Russell states that “when we are acquainted with an object, there certainly is such an object, and the possibility of error is logically excluded”²⁵. It is important to keep in mind that the description of any object of acquaintance is subject to having a truth value, but this does not mean that the relation of acquaintance is also subject to having a truth value.

iv. There are no degrees of acquaintance. In *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Russell asserts that “[i]t is a mistake to speak as if acquaintance had degrees: there is merely acquaintance and non-acquaintance. [...] it is a mistake to say that if we were perfectly acquainted with an object we should know all about it”²⁶.

In Miah’s presentation there are many other features attributed to acquaintance, but in my opinion they could be deduced from the ones presented here. One interesting fact about Miah’s analysis is that the notion of acquaintance is dispersed across Russell’s works, which is a sign that the notion itself was not entirely clear in *Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Descrip-*

22 *Ibid.*

23 Miah, *Russell’s theory of...*, cit., p. 12.

24 Russell, *The Problems of...*, cit., p. 69.

25 Russell, *Theory of Knowledge...*, cit., p. 49.

26 Russell, *Our Knowledge of...*, cit., p. 151.

tion or, at least, Russell had to make several modifications and additions to it.

It seems that the notion of acquaintance is sufficient to serve Russell's purpose, except that so far I have not said anything about the kind of things with which we can have acquaintance. I intentionally left this issue aside because I take it that this is a highly problematic and weak aspect of the notion.

In *On Denoting*, Russell says that “[i]n perception we have acquaintance with the objects of perception, and in thought we have acquaintance with objects of a more abstract logical character”²⁷. But, what are the objects of perception and what are those more abstract objects?

We have acquaintance in sensation with the data of the outer senses, and in introspection with the data of what may be called the inner sense –thoughts, feelings, desires, etc.; we have acquaintance in memory with things which have been data either of the outer senses or of the inner sense. Further, it is probable, though not certain, that we have acquaintance with Self, as that which is aware of things or has desires towards things.

In addition to our acquaintance with particular existing things, we also have acquaintance with what we shall call *universals*, that is to say, general ideas, such as *whiteness*, *diversity*, *brotherhood*, and so on²⁸.

According to this passage, we have acquaintance with the data from a) sensation, b) introspection, and c) memory. We may also have acquaintance with the Self; although Russell was never fully convinced of this, as it is obvious from the passage. Finally, we have acquaintance with universals. The knowledge of universals may, also be thought of as problematic, in the sense that what counts as universal is one of the greatest problems in philosophy. Nonetheless, we can think that the source of the Self and of universals could be one of the three main sources mentioned at the beginning of the passage. Thus, following Miah, “the ob-

27 Russell, «On Denoting»..., cit., p. 479.

28 Russell, *The Problems of...*, cit., p. 28.

jects to which we can have a relation of acquaintance include particulars, universals and logical forms”²⁹.

In Russell’s view, the objects of sensation are called sense-data, and “they supply the most obvious and striking example of knowledge by acquaintance”³⁰. They are, so to speak, the paradigm of acquaintance. In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell states that they are “the things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardnesses, roughnesses, and so on”, and, also, he says that sensation is “the experience of being immediately aware of these things”³¹. In general terms, we can say that “sense-data is what is immediately given by the senses”³². However, the notion of ‘sense-data’ is not constant in Russell’s epistemological works, and he even decided to set it aside in some of his works. Among the problems related to this notion is the difficulty of considering a ‘patch of colour’, to use one of Russell’s examples, as something independent from shape. There is also the problem of considering this data as coming from the senses and not as properties of objects, as is common to other philosophers. But this discussion is beyond my present objective. Generally speaking, sense-data are independent of our sense-perception, insofar as they exist independently of being perceived by a subject. Introspection, the second source of knowledge by acquaintance, is also a kind of knowledge of particulars, just like in the case of sensation, but it refers to thought and feeling, “[w]e are not only aware of things, but we are often aware of being aware of them”³³. We could take this kind of knowledge by acquaintance as the knowledge of what goes on in our own minds.³⁴ Finally, Russell says that we

29 Miah, *Russell’s theory of...*, cit., p. 20.

30 Russell, «Knowledge by Acquaintance...», cit., p. 192.

31 Russell, *The Problems of...*, cit., p. 4.

32 Miah, *Russell’s theory of...*, cit., p. 20.

33 Russell, «Knowledge by Acquaintance...», cit., p. 193.

34 It is worth noting that, regarding this theoretical grounding of Russell’s epistemology, it does not really matter what the mind is. So this issue is independent of ontological considerations and the nature of mind. Russell will make a stand on this issue and provide his own concept of ‘mind’, but, at this stage, the issue simply does not arise.

have knowledge by acquaintance in memory, the third main source, and, as Russell puts it, it “is the source of all our knowledge concerning the past”³⁵. This way have an idea of what the possible objects of acquaintance are. Nevertheless, it must be said that this is not a fully developed explanation and the problems are plenty, some of which were addressed by Russell himself³⁶.

Now, what happens, then, to knowledge by description? As Russell himself stated, “All our knowledge, both knowledge of things and knowledge of truths, rests upon acquaintance as its foundation”³⁷. Therefore, all the problems that the notion of acquaintance may have are inherited by knowledge by description. So, according to Baldwin³⁸, we can ask ourselves if acquaintance can hold the weight of a full theory of perception, since there are several hierarchical connections between knowledge of things and knowledge of truths, all of which depend on acquaintance. But, before evaluating the place of acquaintance in Russell's theory of knowledge, I must make explicit the principle that is supposed to hold his theory together and, in general, his whole epistemological research, the so-called Principle of Acquaintance (PA). One of the clearer presentations of the principle is found in *The Problems of Philosophy*:

Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted³⁹.

This is precisely the principle which is supposed to hold the weight of Russell's theory of knowledge. We can analyze the PA in two parts. First, all the components must be known by acquaintance and they must be grasped either by sensation, introspection or memory, according to what was explained above. Second, the way in which the understanding of a proposition is

35 Russell, «Knowledge by Acquaintance...», cit., p. 192.

36 Cf. Ayer, Russell..., cit., pp. 72-87; Soames, S., *The Analytic Tradition in Philosophy. Vol. 1: The Founding Giants*, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 537-543.

37 Russell, «Knowledge by Acquaintance...», cit., p. 192.

38 Baldwin, T., «From Knowledge by Acquaintance to Knowledge by Causation», In N. Griffin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 421-422.

39 Russell, *The Problems of...*, cit., p. 32.

analyzed is precisely that which is stated by Russell in *On Denoting*. So, once again, we see that Russell's epistemology is delimited by his theory of meaning and his theory of descriptions.

Seen from another perspective, the PA exhibits something else, concerning Russell's biases. The PA expresses Russell's empiricism in a very clear way, in the sense that it imposes a restriction on the origin of the basic and fundamental components of knowledge. In a certain way, the principle shows Russell's general approach to philosophical problems, i.e., given a formal apparatus, the one established by his theory of meaning, and given his empiricist bias, the kind of objects which serve as fundamental elements of knowledge are reduced to the notion of acquaintance and the analysis of any proposition that expresses knowledge of the world is provided by Russell's formal device. Nevertheless, Russell's empiricism must confront the kind of skepticism usually associated with every empiricist approach to knowledge. Even if Russell claims that the objects of acquaintance are independent from the subject, their independence is something that is not obvious and, therefore, his theory of knowledge must provide sufficient support for this claim of independence. Precisely in this point is where Russell introduces his realism concerning the objects of acquaintance, especially concerning sense-data. If sense-data are always what is perceived by a subject, then, at least in this sense, they must be private; which represents a great problem for any theory of knowledge of the external world. Consequently, Russell had to explain how it is possible for sense-data to be the ground of all of our knowledge. In other words, the independence of sense-data is one of the main objectives that Russell needs to pursue in developing his theory of knowledge.

So far, we have seen that the notion of acquaintance is the core of Russell's epistemology and that it is a relation between a subject and an object. Taking it to be a relation and not a third element between the subject and the object can be seen as an improvement over other theories of knowledge, but the difficulty of defining the kinds of objects which can be known by acquaintance weakens the project. Hence, there remains the

question whether acquaintance is able to support a full theory of knowledge.

3. *Acquaintance, perception and the theory of knowledge*

Russell's epistemology represents an effort to overcome the apparent contradiction between empiricism and realism. On one hand, empiricism leads to skepticism; which threatens any theory of knowledge of the external world. On the other hand, realism, as Russell's sees it, can be a way out of skepticism; but it must be clearly delimited, in order to avoid the inclusion of certain objects, like the round square, as parts of the world. The theory of descriptions is meant to play the role of limiting Russell's realism, by means of the correct analysis of propositions, the theory of perception is meant to play the role of overriding skepticism. Allegedly, these two elements should settle the ground for a full theory of knowledge. Thus, my next objective is to evaluate Russell's theory of perception in order to allow for the possibility of a theory of knowledge. Evidently, I cannot address every detail or even revise Russell's vast works on this, but a brief schematic presentation will suffice my purpose. As a consequence, my strategy here will be to go from the objects of acquaintance to the objects of perception, i.e., from sense-data to the objects of the external world.

As noted in the previous section, the subject is only directly aware of the objects of acquaintance, i.e., sense-data. Also, according to Miah, Russell "thought that the sense-datum provides a rock-bottom level of certainty on which to anchor empirical knowledge"⁴⁰. But, it is essential to make clear that sense-data are not objects in the common sense; which means that we do not perceive physical objects. As Miah puts it, "[w]hereas physical objects are such things as tables, chairs, houses, trees and the rest, sense-data are such things as visual appearances, sensations of hardness, sounds, odours, etc."⁴¹. Thus, in order to surpass

40 Miah, *Russell's theory of...*, cit., p. 50.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

skepticism, Russell must provide an account of how it is possible to have knowledge of physical objects. In other words, Russell had to make a distinction between sense-data and our experience of them, in order to guarantee their independence.

We shall give the name ‘sensation’ to the experience of being immediately aware of these things. Thus, whenever we see a colour, we have a sensation of the colour, but the colour itself is a sense-datum, not a sensation. The colour is that of which we are immediately aware, and the awareness itself is the sensation. It is plain that if we are to know anything about the table, it must be by means of the sense-data –brown colour, oblong shape, smoothness, etc.– which we associate with the table; but, [...], we cannot say that the table is the sense-data, or even that the sense-data are directly properties of the table⁴².

Sense-data must be independent of our sensation of them and, moreover, physical objects are not identical to sense-data. The properties of physical objects are independent from sense-data, even if sense-data is the only way of knowing physical objects, and are independent of sensation. In other words, we are dealing with three different kinds of elements that are constitutive of Russell’s theory of perception: physical objects, sense-data and sensations. Thus, Russell’s objective is to explain the relation between sense-data and physical objects.

In Russell’s view, we cannot directly perceive physical objects, but only sense data and, as Miah claims, “in any perceptual situation what we are immediately aware of are sense-data”⁴³. From this, we can conclude, with Miah, that “when I say that ‘x is a sense-datum’ what I mean is that I am immediately aware of x no matter whether x is a sense-datum of something or not”⁴⁴. But this, again, evidences the kind of skeptical empiricism that Russell wants to evade, inasmuch as physical objects, being independent from sense-data, seem inaccessible to the subject. To overcome this problem, i.e., to guarantee the continuity of

42 Russell, *The Problems of...*, cit., p. 4.

43 Miah, *Russell’s theory of...*, cit., p. 54.

44 *Ibidem*.

physical objects beyond the momentary and private character of sense-data, Russell introduces the notion of '*sensibilia*':

I shall give the name *sensibilia* to those objects which have the same metaphysical and physical status as sense-data without necessarily being data to any mind. [...] a sensible becomes a sense-datum by entering into the relation of acquaintance⁴⁵.

Sensibilia are supposed to overcome the aforementioned momentary and private character of sense-data, in the sense that they are the kind of things with which the subject has acquaintance. According to Miah, "all sense-data are *sensibilia* but not vice versa", thus "a sense-datum is merely a sensible that stands to a person as an object of acquaintance"⁴⁶.

With these elements, i.e., the relation of acquaintance, sense-data, and *sensibilia*, Russell builds a theory of perception that, as I have suggested, is fully based on the relation of acquaintance. So, there are reasons to believe that this is precisely what Russell intended in passages like the following:

We have not the means of ascertaining how things appear from places not surrounded by brain and nerves and sense-organs, because we cannot leave the body; but continuity makes it not unreasonable to suppose that they present *some* appearance at such places. Any such appearance would be included among *sensibilia*. If—*per impossibile*—there were a complete human body with no mind inside it, all those *sensibilia* would exist, in relation to that body, which would be sense-data if there were a mind in the body. What the mind adds to *sensibilia*, in fact, is *merely* awareness: everything else is physical or physiological⁴⁷.

Thus, we can assert that Russell's theory of perception is grounded in the notion of '*sensibilia*', which amounts to the kind of objects with which the subject could enter in the relation of acquaintance. In other words, since all possible knowledge comes from acquaintance and the objects of acquaintance are sense-data, which are simply *sensibilia* that become sense-data to

45 Russell, B., «The Relation of Sense-data to Physics», *In Mysticism and Logic*, Barnes & Noble Books, 1951 (1917), p. 110.

46 Miah, *Russell's theory of...*, cit., p. 70.

47 Russell, «The Relation of...», cit., p. 111.

a subject through the relation of acquaintance, then a full theory of knowledge of the external world would depend on the possibility of entering in the relation of acquaintance with the objects of the external world; with the addition of a theory of meaning, as I suggested above. This theory, Russell thought would have the power to overcome the skepticism generated by his empiricist approach, though it would still have to justify the move from *sensibilia* to actual physical objects.

With the passages, arguments and notions that I have analyzed so far, though there are many other important details that a full analysis would have to consider, I can support the claim that Russell's epistemology has acquaintance as its keystone. Despite the many modifications and differences among his epistemological works, Russell maintained acquaintance as the fundamental source of knowledge and, consequently, also the principle of acquaintance, to which I made some reference in the previous section. Therefore, Russell's epistemology, i.e., his theory of perception and his theory of the knowledge of the external world, is grounded in the relation of acquaintance, which was one of my primary objectives in this essay. But, how can we evaluate Russell's epistemology? In particular, can acquaintance support the weight of a full theory of knowledge?

4. *Some critical remarks*

Even if we concede that acquaintance is a good starting point, compared to other approaches, Russell's definition seems to be considerably weak, insofar as the delimitation of the objects of acquaintance is not sufficiently clear. Certainly, patches of color, smells, and so on, are core elements of perception, but the road from those things to physical objects is entangled and problematic. Russell's epistemology is in need of details and strong foundations, which make us think that acquaintance may not be a strong enough foundation. That which seems to be a good methodological approach to a logical analysis, i.e., logical

atomism, may not be suitable for such an epistemological enterprise as a full theory of knowledge, because, even if sense-data seem to be the simplest constituent of our logical construction of concepts and propositions about the external world, perception does not seem to be susceptible to such a fined-grained logical decomposition. Thus, it seems to me that acquaintance, as explained by Russell, is not able to provide sufficient foundation to a theory of knowledge.

It must be noted that my rejection of Russell's proposal is not a rejection of acquaintance as the keystone of all possible knowledge, but a rejection of Russell's characterization of the notion. I agree to establishing the connection between the subject and the object as a relation and not as a third element in between, but the kind of relation that Russell uses seems too weak for its main purpose of grounding epistemology.

Another issue worth noting is that Russell's methodology, in analyzing perception, does not seem to be appropriate for epistemology. My reason for saying this is that logical analysis has a limited scope; it is a methodology which is applicable only in cases in which the extensions of the concepts to which every element in a proposition belongs are clearly definable. If we want to say that perception is composed out of certain kinds of elements, those elements do not seem to be analyzable as if they were logical atoms.

Finally, I would like to make some remarks on Russell's epistemological project and, also, on the way in which Miah presented it. One fact that my brief analysis of acquaintance shows is that Russell's epistemology is fragmented in several of his works, some of which I did not even mention here, and his arguments and concepts are dispersed. This shows that his thinking suffered many different changes, probably due to some of the problems that I mentioned in this essay. Thus, even if we agree with Miah that Russell was focused on epistemological issues between 1905 and 1919, we have no reason to think that there is such thing as a single theory of perception, nor of knowledge of the external world. As Miah claims, "there is more continuity

in Russell's philosophy than is usually supposed"⁴⁸, but I believe that the continuity is in his purpose and not in the development of a theory. As I see it, the only constant in Russell's epistemological works is acquaintance but, besides that, we find fragments and attempts to surpass the many philosophical problems that arose along the way. Miah's work is unquestionably detailed and extensive, but it also leaves the feeling that, in going back and forth through so many of Russell's works, he had to manipulate Russell's reasoning, in order to account for the alleged continuity⁴⁹.

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48 Miah, *Russell's theory of...*, cit., Preface, p. ix.

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