

RUSSELL ON MEMORY

THOMAS BALDWIN

University of York

Abstract

*Russell famously propounded scepticism about memory in *The Analysis of Mind* (1921). As he there acknowledged, one way to counter this sceptical position is to hold that memory involves direct acquaintance with past, and this is in fact a thesis Russell had advanced in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1911). Indeed he had there used the case of memory to develop a sophisticated fallibilist, non-sceptical, epistemology. By 1921, however, Russell had rejected the early conception of memory as incompatible with the neutral monism he now affirmed. In its place he argued that memory involves a distinctive type of belief whose content is given by imagery. Russell's language here is off-putting, but without much distortion his later position can be interpreted as an early formulation of a functionalist theory of mind based on a causal theory of mental representation. Thus interpreted it provides the basis for a different response to Russell's sceptical thesis.*

1. Introduction

Russell is famous for the sceptical thesis concerning memory which he formulated in *The Analysis of Mind* (1921 – AM). I quote the well-known passage at some length:

In investigating memory-beliefs, there are certain points which must be born in mind. In the first place, everything constituting a memory-belief is happening *now*, not in that past time to which the belief is said to refer. It is not logically necessary to the existence of a memory-belief that the event remembered should have occurred,

or even that the past should have existed at all. There is no logical impossibility in the hypothesis that the world sprang into being five minutes ago, exactly as it then was, with a population that 'remembered' a wholly unreal past. There is no logically necessary connection between events at different times; therefore nothing that is happening now or will happen in the future can disprove the hypothesis that the world began five minutes ago. Hence the occurrences which are *called* knowledge of the past are logically independent of the past; they are wholly analysable into present contents, which might, theoretically, be just what they are even if no past had existed. (AM 159–60)

I shall return to this passage several times. I begin from the first claim, that 'In the first place, everything constituting a memory-belief is happening *now*'. This is a claim which seems at first scarcely challengeable; but Russell notes one way in which it could be challenged — 'We could then have said that remembering is a direct relation between the present act or subject and the past occurrence remembered: the act of remembering is present, though its object is past' (AM 163). For if a present memory of mine is a 'direct relation' with some past occurrence, this past occurrence is a constituent of my memory which is not happening *now*.

Russell does not add here that the position he is sketching, though only to dismiss it without much discussion (I will return to the reason he gives), is precisely that which he had himself previously held. He had explicitly advanced it in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912 – PP) and there is a lengthy discussion of it in the unpublished 'Theory of Knowledge' mss of 1913 (TK). This first account of memory is well worth careful attention, both for its own sake and for the light it casts on Russell's early philosophy, in particular on his epistemology and philosophy of mind.

2. Memory as Acquaintance

Russell introduces the topic in *The Problems of Philosophy* in the context of his discussion of acquaintance. The paradigm of acquaintance is perception, which Russell here calls 'sensation'; and the objects of

sensory acquaintance of this type are of course 'sense-data' — apparent colours, shapes, sounds etc. In addition we are said to have introspective acquaintance with 'the data of what may be called the inner sense — thoughts, feelings, desires, etc'. (PP 28). Russell then goes on to add:

we have acquaintance in memory with things which have been data either of the outer senses or of the inner sense. (PP 28)

Thus memory, or at least the kind of memory which I shall call 'experiential' memory, is a form of acquaintance with past sense-data or past thoughts. It is naturally expressed by idioms such as 'I remember the taste of the coffee' or 'I remember how thirsty I was'. This position was sketched, though not clearly endorsed, by G. E. Moore in his 1910–11 lectures subsequently published as *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (see ch. XIII). At the start of *The Problems of Philosophy* Russell specifically alludes to these lectures (he clearly took his own title from them), and I think he probably took his conception of memory as a form of acquaintance with the past from them, since it does not occur in any of Russell's earlier discussions of acquaintance.

A question which naturally arises at this point is this: where a memory is an act of acquaintance with a sense-datum with which one was earlier acquainted in perception, how is this memory distinct from the earlier perception? One response might be that acquaintance just comes in different types — sensory acquaintance, memory acquaintance etc., and Russell does take this view. But it is entirely characteristic of his philosophy of this period that he also takes the view that the objects of these different types of acquaintance are different in ways which match the differences in type. For, he says,

Thus the essence of memory is not constituted by the image, but by having immediately before the mind an object which is recognised as past. (PP 66).

So, his view is that it is 'the essence of memory' that it is acquaintance with an object (e.g. a sense-datum) which is 'recognised as past'. It follows that it is misleading to consider this type of acquaintance to be a simple act/object relationship. For in memory that with which we are acquainted is recognized, and thus experienced, *as past*.

Hence the 'intentional object' of this type of acquaintance is not simply a sense-datum; instead, it is a sense-datum as past. To put the point in other terms, Russell's position implies that, at least in the case of memory, acquaintance has a quasi-propositional structure. It does not follow that acquaintance by memory is not 'knowledge of things', or that Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description comes under any pressure. For acquaintance by memory can still be thought of as essentially '*de re*', i.e. as involving a relation with a suitable object; all that follows is that in memory this object is experienced in a specific way — 'as past'.

3. Acquaintance and Understanding

One reason Russell gives for his claim that in memory what we remember is 'recognized as past' is that it is only because we have memories of this kind that we understand the past at all —

But for the fact of memory in this sense, we should not know that there ever was a past at all, nor should we be able to understand the word 'past', any more than a man born blind can understand the word 'light'. (PP 66)

This is a striking instance of Russell's 'fundamental principle' that '*Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted*' (PP 32). Memory provides us with the acquaintance with the past recognized as such which enables us to understand propositions concerning the past. Furthermore, since we have no similar acquaintance with the future, we are dependent upon our acquaintance with the past and present for our understanding of the future, which is obtained by extrapolating our understanding of the passage of time from past to present to the hypothesis of a time which is later than the present — i.e. to the hypothesis of the future.

Although Russell's position here is formulated in terms of our acquaintance with the past, it rests on the claim that memory is essential to our understanding of the past, and thus to our understanding

of time. This is an interesting claim which merits some attention on its own.

In thinking about it we need to introduce a distinction between two types of memory — the ‘experiential’ memory to which Russell’s doctrine of acquaintance applies and merely ‘factual’ memory. Factual memory is the ability to rehearse what one has learnt, as when one remembers that $13^2 = 169$ or that in January 2005 one will be in New York. As these cases show, factual memory has no essential reference to the past; it is primarily the ability to extract from the ‘store’ of one’s memory an item of information which has somehow become lodged there — either through active learning or through some less deliberate assimilation (as when one finds that one remembers, against one’s wishes, some unsavoury details about the lives of others). In principle, little understanding of the material remembered is required: there are those who can remember telephone numbers just like that. For most of us, however, our memory of what we have learnt is greatly enhanced as we gain an understanding which provides connections between initially separate facts, and the temporal structure of narrative stories often provides these connections. But a structure of this kind is not essential — the non-temporal structure of mathematical and scientific theories can also provide the required connections.

In experiential memory, by contrast, what is remembered is essentially remembered as past: when I remember arriving in Brazil, I recall that event as earlier than my present recollection of it, and thus as past. So memory of this kind is memory of one’s own past experiences. But this is not the whole story: my memory of my arrival in Brazil is not just my factual memory that I had certain experiences when I arrived in Brazil. Instead it is essential to experiential memory that it involves ‘reliving’ a previous experience of one’s own, which is now experienced as past because it is experienced as not one’s present experience. But just what it is in this way to ‘relive’ the past is notoriously difficult to characterise. Russell writes of imagery in connection with memory (as in the passage quoted above from *PP* 66) in order to express that quasi-perceptual aspect of experiential memory which also makes his treatment of experiential memory as a form of acquaintance with the past understandable. But explicit mental

imagery is not required, and, anyway, this is itself an intrinsically obscure phenomenon, so invoking it does little to elucidate experiential memory. One striking feature of experiential memory is in fact the way in which it is liable to be aroused by sensory resemblances (e.g. the famous taste of a madeleine that so captivated Proust, or, for most of us, tunes from childhood songs): somehow these stimuli provide a template, a key, which unlocks, as we are tempted to put it, a passage back to the past. But of course there can be no literal return to the past, nor any literal reincarnation of dead experiences. So in reality it must be that in experiential memory we are somehow put into a state in which traces of old experiences that have been preserved are reactivated; but just what it is to 'reactivate' present 'traces' of past experiences remains to be explained.

I shall not attempt to pursue this here. Instead, having tried to identify the phenomenon of experiential memory, I want to turn briefly to Russell's thesis that our understanding of the past depends upon experiential memory. It is clear that experiential memory does bring with it a conception of the past, primarily of one's own past. What remains to be assessed, therefore, is whether there might not be other ways of forming a conception of the past, e.g. through the exercise of factual memory, even though such memories are not essentially directed to the past. Russell does not discuss this issue; but one way to substantiate his thesis would be to show that an understanding of the past, as of tense generally, requires a conception of oneself as something with an extension in time, and thus a consciousness of oneself as something with a past — which experiential memory distinctively provides.

This is, again, an argument about which more needs to be said; my aim here, as before, has only been to begin the task of substantiating Russell's interesting claim that our understanding of the past depends upon our acquaintance with it, not to complete this task. There are further issues to be explored here too: for example, the thesis that we can legitimately construe a certain mental phenomenon as a way of 'reliving' some past experience may well have important presuppositions concerning the relationship between this phenomenon and the world. Kant's argument in his 2nd Analogy suggests some connections here and modern externalist theories suggest another, which I

shall explore at the end of this paper in connection with Russell's initial sceptical thesis.

4. Knowledge and Memory

But I return now to Russell's treatment of memory in his early philosophy. The fact that experiential memory is a form of acquaintance which provides us with our understanding of the past implies, for Russell, that such memory is a fundamental type of knowledge, upon which all knowledge of the past depends. In Russell's terminology, our acquaintance in memory with things provides us with 'intuitive' knowledge of truths concerning the past; this knowledge cannot be derived from knowledge which does not include the understanding of the past which is alone provided by memory. Thus memory is in this respect 'self-evident'; it gives rise to justified judgements concerning the past whose justification cannot be reconstructed without invoking memory. The evidence for the judgements lies in the acquaintance inherent in memory itself.

Yet, as Russell also acknowledges, memory is inherently fallible: although our memory of a flash of lightning we saw and heard half a minute ago 'will be so reliable that it would be preposterous to doubt whether there had been a flash at all' (PP 66), we have also to acknowledge phenomena such as the following:

going backwards over the day, I find things of which I am quite certain, other things of which I am almost certain, other things of which I can become certain by thought . . . , and some things of which I am by no means certain. (PP 67).

Hence, Russell concludes, 'there is a continual gradation in the degree of self-evidence of what I remember'.

This conclusion has important implications for Russell's account of knowledge. Russell acknowledges that there is an ideal conception of knowledge which is such that one who knows is absolutely certain of what is known. But he takes it that the case of memory shows us that this ideal cannot be clearly separated from cases which fall short of this ideal. For although knowledge of truths of all kinds is founded

upon the 'intuitive' knowledge of truths which arises from our knowledge by acquaintance of things, in the case of memory, some of this intuitive knowledge has a less than perfect degree of self-evidence and thus of certainty. Hence in this respect our knowledge of truths concerning the past typically falls short of the highest degree of self-evidence, and this is one reason why Russell holds that knowledge is not a 'precise conception' and merges into 'probable opinion' when the degree of self-evidence of the justifications for belief is too low to warrant the title 'knowledge' (PP 81).

Russell's discussions of the relationship between knowledge and 'probable opinion' in *The Problems of Philosophy* are complicated and not altogether consistent — compare the following passages —

Thus the greater part of what would commonly pass as knowledge is more or less probable opinion (PP 81)

But as regards what would commonly be accepted as knowledge, our result is in the main positive: we have seldom found reason to reject such knowledge as the result of our criticism ... (PP 87)

It is not, however, just the fallibility of memory that leads Russell to maintain that knowledge of truths falls short of absolute certainty. For he holds, in a way that looks forward to subsequent discussions by Wittgenstein and others, that because in framing a judgement of any kind we have to 'analyse the given complex fact', it is always possible to commit an error (PP 80). So, since judgement as such is inherently fallible, 'all knowledge of truths is infected with some degree of doubt' (PP 78). Hence what is striking about the position developed in the book is the way in which he adapts the traditional foundationalist conception of knowledge from which he starts to encompass the fallibility of memory and judgement in general which he comes to acknowledge as the argument of the book develops. It is then scarcely surprising that, in the course of doing so (since he was writing at his usual incredible speed!), he should sometimes contradict himself, as in the passages quoted above.

Nonetheless the resulting position certainly differs from the scepticism which he later envisaged as unanswerable in that passage from *The Analysis of Mind* which I quoted at the start of this paper, with

its striking claim that 'nothing that is happening now or will happen in the future can disprove the hypothesis that the world began five minutes ago'. In the terms of his earlier philosophy, our acquaintance in memory with events that happened more than five minutes ago provides us with good enough reasons to reject this hypothesis. Our memories are of course fallible, but once we have recognised that 'all knowledge of truths is infected with some degree of doubt', the fallibility of memory will be seen not to be a good reason for maintaining that, for all we now know, the world began five minutes ago.

In one important respect, however, his treatment remains somewhat inchoate: for he does not discuss clearly how one is to combine the thesis that memory is a form of acquaintance with the past, a 'direct relation' with the past recognized as such, with its fallibility. Where a memory is clearly illusory, as in the case of George IV's illusory 'memory' of fighting at Waterloo, (PP 67) Russell argues that there is no acquaintance at all with the event in question, but only with something else wrongly associated with it, such as George IV's self-deceiving assertions that he had fought at Waterloo. But he does not suggest that this applies to all cases where memory is uncertain; so the implication seems to be that the acquaintance with the past inherent in memory itself comes in varying degrees of self-evidence, i.e. that the uncertainty of our judgements about the past is grounded in the uncertainty inherent in experienced memory itself, in our acquaintance with the past. If this is right, then our acquaintance with the past clearly lacks the kind of certainty he takes to be inherent in sensory acquaintance.

5. Acquaintance with the Past

When one first encounters Russell's claim, as he put it later, that 'remembering is a direct relation between the present act or subject and the past occurrence remembered', one feels one's mind's eye adopt the 'incredulous stare'. How can the mind literally reach back into the past, to events that are now over and done with (dead and buried)? Yet, on second thoughts, perhaps Russell's claim admits of

an acceptable interpretation as a form of 'direct realism' concerning memory.

It will be clear that any acceptable interpretation must avoid any imputation of time travel; Russell's position cannot require us to suppose that in memory our mind somehow makes itself simultaneous with the event remembered so that it can inspect it afresh, as if memory were a kind of 're-perception' of the past. But there are phenomena which suggest that this kind of hypothesis is unwarranted. The obvious case is that in which we literally look back into the past, as, say, when we see a supernova which took place many thousands of light-years ago. The time-lag in such a case arises from the lengthy causal route from the supernova to the incidence of suitable light upon one's retina; so in this case the visual perception, although it has a distant cause buried far far away in the past, also has a proximate cause which is more or less simultaneous with the visual experience itself (they belong to the same 'specious present'). So no time travel of any kind is required.

Is this a suitable model for Russell's account of memory? On the face of it, it is not: his claim is not just that our present memory is a direct effect of the earlier event now remembered. For such a claim implies that the memory's identity is not essentially dependent upon the event remembered, since, in Hume's famous phrase, cause and effect must be 'distinct existences'. But Russell's conception of memory as direct acquaintance with the past seems to imply that, at the most fundamental level, memory is precisely this relationship with something past, so that it cannot be constituted from a causal relationship between two independent events — the occurrence in the past and the present memory.

But perhaps this is too quick. After all, Russell accepts that even though memory is direct acquaintance with some past item, it is always a past item (a sense-datum or thought) that has been experienced before, and the only way to understand this constraint is as an implication of an implicit causal structure inherent in memory: present memories are effects of past experiences. So there should be a way of understanding Russell's position which remains compatible with the obvious causal structure of memory. Since this structure implies that the existence of a particular memory is ontologically in-

dependent of that of the past item remembered (and of one's previous experience of it) his conception of memory as direct acquaintance with the past must not be understood to imply that memories are states which simply consist of a relationship to some past item. Instead, even if their characterisation as memories does imply this relationship, there must be another characterisation of them which both captures their essential identity and lacks this implication.

The functionalist position familiar from contemporary philosophy of psychology shows one way in which a position of this kind can be adumbrated. It would, of course, be grossly anachronistic to impute any such position to Russell in *The Problems of Philosophy* and I do not seek to do so, though I shall later show that his position in *The Analysis of Mind* admits fairly readily of an interpretation of this kind. My aim has only been to indicate that there are ways of overcoming the apparent absurdity of Russell's earlier position. One way to express the general requirement here is that acquaintance should be taken to be fundamentally an epistemological, rather than an ontological, relationship. Russell's claim will then be taken to be that in experiential memory, our experience 'directly' represents the past to us: in remembering the bitter taste of today's breakfast coffee we do not just infer that at breakfast today we must have had a bitter coffee from the structure of a present memory which we could characterise without reference to that taste. Instead our present memory makes apparent to us that bitter taste itself, and there is no way in which we can characterise what we remember except in that way.

The contrast proposed here, between an epistemological and an ontological relationship, is alien to Russell's early philosophy, and I do not offer it as part of a straightforward interpretation of Russell's position. It suggests, among other things, a distinction between the (ontological) 'object' of acquaintance and its (epistemological) 'content' which is very alien to Russell's early philosophy of mind. Nonetheless, it does provide a way of making sense of the epistemological aspect of Russell's conception of acquaintance without leading to insuperable difficulties concerning the causal and temporal structure of memory. The resulting position will be a form of 'direct realism' concerning memory, but this is only an epistemological realism which still allows that present memories are mental states that are not es-

entially dependent upon the past (it is notable that the role of sense-data in Russell's early philosophy of perception is such that analogous difficulties do not arise in this case; whether the resulting 'indirect realism' is a satisfactory position is, of course, disputable, but there is certainly an interesting contrast between his treatment of these two cases).

As we shall see, Russell himself came to appreciate the force of some of these points. But before looking to his overhaul of his early philosophy of mind in his *Analysis of Mind* I want to look briefly at the signs of change in the 1913 'Theory of Knowledge' mss.

6. 'The Theory of Knowledge'

In the 1913 'Theory of Knowledge' mss. Russell reiterates his conception of memory as a form of direct acquaintance with the past. In his opening discussion he characterises acquaintance as 'experience'; hence he expresses his conception of memory in remarks such as this:

But in the immediate memory of something which has just happened, the thing itself seems to remain in experience, in spite of the fact that it is known to be no longer present. (TK 10)

But the fact that he continues

How long this sort of memory may last, I do not know.

is indicative of a growing uncertainty about the phenomenon.

Insofar as he here offers any reasons for thinking that there must be some such phenomenon, these concern the role of acquaintance with the past in our understanding of the past, which is now, however, associated with a need for freedom from error. He writes —

Since, however, the word 'past' has significance for us, there must be perception of facts in which it occurs, and in such cases memory must not be liable to error. I conclude that, although other complications are logically possible, there must, in some cases, be immediate acquaintance with past objects given in a way which enables us to know that they are past, though such acquaintance may be confined to the very recent past. (TK 72)

(he later glosses the 'very recent past' as 'the last thirty seconds or so'! (TK 170)).

As this passage indicates, Russell here abandons his previous willingness to accept, and work with, less-than-ideal forms of knowledge which coexist with fallibility. Instead, wherever we are fallible, we lack knowledge; but we need some knowledge if we are to have any understanding, and the role of acquaintance in general, including acquaintance with 'the very recent past', is that it is not liable to error, and therefore provides us with knowledge.

It is hard not to feel dissatisfied with this change in Russell's epistemology: the tentative and undogmatic explorations characteristic of *The Problems of Philosophy* have been replaced by a hardline foundationalism whose sceptical implications are apparent in the treatment of the past in the 'Theory of Knowledge' mss. even if they are not explicitly drawn there. The point can be readily expressed by reference, as ever, to the sceptical challenge later posed in *The Analysis of Mind*, that 'nothing that is happening now or will happen in the future can disprove the hypothesis that the world began five minutes ago.' Russell can still hold that our present acquaintance with the past suffices to disprove the hypothesis that the world began 30 seconds ago; but that it is any older than that must remain, on his new position, at least contestable. For we are not infallible with respect to any facts belonging to this more distant past, and therefore, on his new view, we lack any knowledge concerning it; hence we are not in a position to disprove the sceptical hypothesis even if it strikes us as absurd. I am not sure what underlies this change of mind, but I suspect the influence of the young Wittgenstein's dogmatic logical puritanism. Whatever the explanation, however, it is clearly a change for the worse.

7. Mental Contents and Neutral Monism

The Analysis of Mind was Russell's first major work of philosophy after the First World War, which was such a watershed in his life, both personal and intellectual. He actually prepared much of the material for the book while in prison for his opposition to conscription. In *The*

Analysis of Mind Russell set out a new philosophy of mind and epistemology which informs all his subsequent work. The consensus has been that Russell's writing here, and subsequently, is not as valuable as his earlier work — that his later philosophy is markedly inferior in quality to his earlier work. I do not share this view: I think there remains much of interest in Russell's later work, although it has to be said that he also makes things unnecessarily difficult for his readers at times. I shall not, of course, attempt here to characterise the totality of Russell's position in *The Analysis of Mind*; but since memory is a central theme of the book, an investigation of his account of memory here is in fact a good way of thinking through the central themes of this later work.

Right at the start of the book Russell introduces Meinong's distinction between act, content, and object with respect to mental phenomena. Though he does not say so here, his previous account had been one according to which there is no place for a serious conception of content in addition to those of a mental act and its 'object' (though these are terms of art whose application has to be determined in context). In particular the conception of acquaintance was precisely that of a pure act/object relationship (which is why my distinction between acquaintance as an ontological relationship and as an epistemological relationship is alien to his early philosophy). Hence he now signals a complete overhaul of his previous position when he now affirms that mental phenomena are essentially a matter of 'content': thus 'acquaintance' as previously conceived is discarded, and the main focus of his discussion of memory lies on the 'content' of memory.

Three points seem to underlie this radical change of mind. First, Russell takes it that there is no 'self' and, without a self, there is no agent to perform mental acts (AM 17–8). Second, Russell has come to see the absurdity of his earlier conception of knowledge by acquaintance. He does not identify his earlier self as the target of his criticisms, but the implication of his remarks is unmistakable: such a position —

assumes, if it is thought out, something like the mystic union of knower and known. These two are often said to be combined into a

unity by the fact of cognition;..... For my part, I think such theories and feelings wholly mistaken (AM 234).

Third, Russell argues that the contrast between 'content' and 'object' in the case of mental phenomena is, anyway, not fundamental. For, once one has grasped the truth of 'neutral monism', one will appreciate that mental phenomena are based upon structures of 'neutral' particulars which can be interpreted both as mental contents and as non-mental objects.

Russell's 'neutral monism' is, I think, the most difficult doctrine of *The Analysis of Mind*. Although Russell was inspired by the conception of 'experience' set out by William James in his *Essays on Radical Empiricism*, Russell's position is in fact rather different from that of James, who never uses the phrase 'neutral monism' and whose position is a good deal closer to that of F. H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* than to Russell's *The Analysis of Mind*. Russell's position combines a quasi-phenomenalist construction of the physical world with an insistence that the fundamental particulars involved, sensations, are just as much occurrences of physical colours, shapes, sounds etc. (though within a private space), as experiences of them (AM 143). The realist may well object that this is not much of a concession to his position; and Russell does acknowledge at several points that his position is close to idealism — he writes that

the physical world, as known, is infected through and through with subjectivity (AM 230)

and in the course of a comparison between physics and psychology in the final paragraph of the book, he concludes the book by affirming that —

In this respect psychology is nearer to what actually exists. (AM 308).

Although one cannot, therefore, interpret away this quasi-idealist aspect of Russell's position in *The Analysis of Mind*, there is a strand to his position that can be separated out and fitted into a reconstructed position which turns out, when applied to his discussion of memory, to yield a way of making remarkably good sense of Russell's position.

The strand I want to separate out is his emphasis on a dualism of laws, physical and psychological, as opposed to the traditional dualism of substances, physical and mental. Here is Russell:

The dualism of mind and matter, if we have been right so far, cannot be allowed as metaphysically valid. Nevertheless, we seem to find a certain dualism, perhaps not ultimate, within the world as we observe it. The dualism is not primarily as to the stuff of the world, but as to causal laws. (AM 137).

This passage should strike us as familiar; for the thesis that the mind has its own laws, that psychology is a 'special science', is one that is familiar from contemporary philosophy of psychology. I shall not attempt to elucidate this familiar position here, let alone discuss it critically; I only want to use it as a resource for thinking about Russell's later conception of the mind. In doing so, however, one major adjustment has to be made: contemporary positions are often characterised as forms of 'non-reductive physicalism', and this characterisation shows us that, whereas Russell's monism was a quasi-idealist monism of sensations, contemporary positions are physicalist in their metaphysics while maintaining that this is consistent with a non-reductive treatment of the mind. So in attempting to construct a revised version of Russell's later treatment of memory along lines suggested by contemporary philosophy of psychology, the plausibility of this adjustment to his metaphysics is an issue one will need to bear in mind.

In fact it is worth noting that Russell himself holds that it is likely that all mental events are causally dependent upon physical events (AM 303), although he goes on to add that since the physical events themselves are constructed from sensations, 'an ultimate scientific account of what goes on in the world, if it were ascertainable, would resemble psychology rather than physics' (AM 305). On my proposed revised version of his position, it is this 'ultimate scientific account' that is repudiated, and in its place Russell's intermediate materialism is inflated into a form of non-reductive physicalism.

8. The later account of memory

What then is Russell's new account of memory? It has two main elements: first, an account of the type of belief that is characteristic of memory; second, an account of the 'content' of memory, conceived as what is involved in remembering something. Russell's account is couched in explicitly Humean idioms: belief is a special type of sensation, or feeling; and the content of memory is given by images. This sounds at first utterly unprepossessing, a reversion to 18th century introspective psychology. But if one reads Russell sympathetically, and is willing to reinterpret his position along the lines suggested just now, the account can be transformed.

First, then, belief, and particularly 'memory-belief' as Russell calls it. Russell considers sympathetically the pragmatist thesis that the mark of belief is a 'kind of causal efficacy, namely efficacy in causing voluntary movements' (AM 234). He rejects this position because he thinks that this position has to treat belief as a 'mere disposition' (AM 236) and cannot therefore accommodate a non-dispositional conception of belief as a mental state. It is then in order to satisfy this requirement that he moves on to hold that belief is a special type of sensation, and that memory-belief is a sensation with the distinctive sense that the content to which the sensation is attached concerns the past (AM 179).

What are we to make of this? First, Russell's rejection of the pragmatist position belongs with his general rejection of Watson's behaviourism, and his affirmation of the reality of mental states such as memory. Secondly, his positive conception of memory as involving a distinctive sensation calls for reinterpretation, especially in the light of his own view that sensations are 'neutral' and therefore admit of interpretation as physical. So suppose, following the proposed revised interpretation of Russell's monism, one takes a physicalist view of these 'sensations' and interprets them as brain states: then this part of Russell's theory can be reinterpreted as a functionalist account of these brain states. For he is insistent that the importance of these sensations is their distinctively psychological causal efficacy — which is just what the functionalist says about the brain states which 'realise' mental states such as belief.

What, now, of the 'contents' of memory? These are formed from images which form 'image-propositions' (AM 241). Images are 'copies' of sensation and are, for Russell, distinctively mental if anything is. But by the end of the book he has decided that the only thing distinctively mental about them is their causal role (AM 287). So again they invite reinterpretation, as mental representations somehow realised within the brain; then the thesis that they provide the 'content' of memory will be primarily the claim that in memory the brain somehow activates a representation in such a way that the overall state functions as a belief. This is of course oversimple, but the main point I want to suggest is that Russell's talk of 'images' as the content of memory very readily admits reinterpretation in terms of mental representations somehow realised within the brain.

What needs to be added, of course, is an account of the way in which these image-representations represent anything. Here Russell's views undercut the introspective idioms he uses and invite the broadly functionalist reinterpretation I am suggesting. For he explicitly affirms that the 'meaning' of an image, that which it is an image 'of', is to be defined in causal terms, via its causes and effects (AM 244). Causal theories of intentionality are notoriously problematic, and I do not want to suggest that Russell's position is unproblematic. All I do want to maintain is that his emphasis on causation in this context implies that my reinterpretation at least does full justice to this aspect of his position. I suggest, therefore, that although Russell's account of memory in *The Analysis of Mind* sounds at first to be deeply embedded in an old-fashioned introspective psychology, it admits remarkably easily of reinterpretation as a functionalist theory. The basic change is just one from his quasi-idealist metaphysics of 'sensations' as ultimate and allegedly neutral particulars to a realist physicalism that permits distinctive and irreducible psychological laws concerning mental representations.

One further complication should be noted. In lecture IV of *The Analysis of Mind* Russell discusses what he calls 'mnemonic causation', namely the effects of past experience and learning on present and future thought and behaviour, and, in particular, the 'trace' hypothesis that these effects involve the persistence in time of some physiological (and thus physical) modification of the brain. Since, on

my revised interpretation, the images which constitute the 'content' of memory just are mental representations realised by such traces, Russell's attitude to this trace hypothesis is a matter of some importance (though it is not decisive). In fact Russell declares himself well-disposed towards this hypothesis which he is 'inclined to adopt', though only as a 'working hypothesis', and not because it is an essential implication of the causal structure of memory (AM 92). Russell's views here are complicated by the reductive treatment of causation he had developed earlier (in 'On the Notion of a Cause' (1913, reprinted in volume 6 of his *Collected Papers*); but in this context his position implies that without a persisting trace, the causal connection inherent in memory just amounts to a counterfactual dependence of some present thought or behaviour on the past. This is not, I think, sufficient for memory: for example, most of my present beliefs about my childhood are counterfactually dependent upon my early childhood: but these beliefs are not memories precisely because they do not arise from sources within myself, but from written records, photographs and stories told me by my parents. So, despite Russell's only tentative support for it, some version of the trace hypothesis does seem essential to our conception of memory, though there is clearly room here for conceptual revision in the light of scientific inquiry. Whatever the details, however, the status of the trace hypothesis lends support to my revised interpretation of Russell's position.

9. The sceptical challenge revisited

A question that now arises is just how the distinction between factual and experiential memory fits into the functionalist position I have offered as a reinterpretation of Russell's later position, and equally how his earlier emphasis on experiential memory as a way of gaining an understanding of the past is now to be accommodated. I shall not attempt to address these important questions here however, since to do so would take me well away from Russell's own discussions. Instead I want to return to the sceptical challenge Russell gives himself in *The Analysis of Mind*. Russell says here that the sceptical hypothesis is 'logically tenable, but uninteresting' (AM 160). I want to suggest,

however, that in the light of the account of knowledge Russell advances here, he is in fact in a position to challenge the sceptic.

Russell's account of knowledge in *The Analysis of Mind* fits reasonably well alongside the reinterpretation of his philosophy of mind that I have been offering. Here it is in outline:

I believe knowing to be a very external and complicated relation, incapable of exact definition, dependent upon causal laws ... (AM 234–5).

This is a recognisably 'externalist' approach which a contemporary functionalist would recognise. On this approach, knowledge is a matter of reliability, of being an accurate instrument (AM 255). Russell, however, argues that this is not the whole story: knowledge, he says, requires not just reliable accuracy, but also 'appropriateness'. This does not seem a very deep objection, and it is not clear that Russell holds that it is. Nonetheless, having introduced it, he turns to discuss 'internalist', first person, positions; not surprisingly he now rejects the kind of Cartesian foundationalism he had affirmed in 'The Theory of Knowledge' (AM 262); and after a brief critical discussion of coherence as a criterion, he endorses a verificationist pragmatism, to the effect that we can obtain good reasons for our beliefs by confirming their predictions (AM 270–1). In truth I think this final position will have to incorporate some foundationalist and coherentist elements, so the contrasts he draws are overstated. But I also think this position is entirely compatible with an externalist reliabilism that concentrates precisely on the presumptively self-evident types of belief that Russell's verificationist method has to assume; so his initial externalist thesis, which he does not repudiate, is compatible with the position he ends up with.

There are many debatable points here, but the issue I want to concentrate on is just whether Russell has now provided himself with materials for a good enough response to his own sceptical challenge, even though he himself reaffirms that the position is 'logically unassailable' (AM 271). The crucial issues are raised in the following passage from that sceptical argument:

There is no logically necessary connection between events at different times; therefore nothing that is happening now or will happen

in the future can disprove the hypothesis that the world began five minutes ago. Hence the occurrences which are called knowledge of the past are logically independent of the past; they are wholly analysable into present contents, which might, theoretically, be just what they are even if no past had existed. (AM 159–60)

The account of memory advanced in *The Analysis of Mind* is indeed such that our memories are 'wholly analysable into present contents'. But, we must ask, are these present contents such that they might 'be just what they are even if no past had existed'? These contents are, for Russell, image-propositions — mental representations, I have suggested. Although their ontological status does not depend upon the past, their role in memory draws on their intentionality, on what they are images 'of', what they represent. For Russell, this depends on their causes and effects: hence they would lack their meaning if no past at all had existed. So, although the causal account of intentionality must allow that any particular memory may be erroneous, the assumption that there was no past at all implies that the image-propositions which are the content of our memories have no meaning, represent nothing at all. Hence if we are right to think that our memories have some meaning, there must after all have been a past through which our current images (representations) received the meaning they have.

The sceptic can of course respond by challenging our assumption that we know that we have beliefs with meaning at all. But this is notoriously dangerous ground for the sceptic: the sceptic needs to allow that we can know that we are engaging in meaningful discourse and thought if he is to make himself intelligible at all, and it is hard to see how these assumptions can be granted without conceding all that is required for the externalist anti-sceptical argument to succeed. Thus Russell's externalist theory of mind and knowledge in *The Analysis of Mind* offers a cogent response to the sceptical challenge he poses here.

Keywords

Russell; memory; acquaintance; knowledge; neutral monism; scepticism

Professor Thomas Baldwin
Department of Philosophy
University of York
York YO10 5DD
UK
trb2@york.ac.uk