

The Role of Memory in a Russellian-type Neutral Monist Framework

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This will paper will aim at accomplishing two things. First, it will attempt to present, however briefly and succinctly is possible, Bertrand Russell's view on memory. And second, it will link memory to the problem of selfhood and suggest, albeit tentatively, that the handling of selfhood under a Neutral Monist framework has obvious advantages compared to any other dualistic framework.

The two parts of the paper are intimately linked for two main reasons. First, Russell himself shifted from dualistic to neutral monistic picture of the world. I will try to map out the difficulties as well as the advantages of the shift while showing that the shift was logical and even necessary. I will understand memory the way Russell understands it, as a capacity to have knowledge of the past. And second, while I will sketchily outline different types of Neutral Monism (e.g., William James', or Ernst Mach's versions of Neutral Monism with which Russell was well familiar), I will keep to Russell's version of the theory as the most systematic and convincing type. I am hoping to be able to show the advantages of Russell's Neutral Monism by tracing the reasons behind the shift in his philosophy. While Russell, by his own claims, adopted Neutral Monism directly from James, he did retain many features of his earlier, dualistic epistemology, which gave his own version of Neutral Monism a particularity which some scholars use to question and even discredit the neutrality of his Neutral Monism. I will argue against these suggestions and claim, instead, that Russell's Neutral Monism was much farther reaching than often ascribed to him, particularly in Russell scholarship.

I will show that while in what I call the 'acquaintance period' when Russell subscribed to a

dualistic picture of knowledge where knowledge is in the relation between the cognitive subject and the cognitive object, he became increasingly unhappy with the picture of selfhood he inherited from Hume and Kant. I will conclude that in this period, Russell does end up with memory replacing the self. This allows him, to an important extent, to turn decisively to Neutral Monism after 1919. Now that the notion of the self has been taken care of, Russell could proceed to dealing with other pressing matters such as what is to have knowledge of the past, versus imagined knowledge, or knowledge of the present. In all this, as relatively unknown textual evidence from the period shows, memory is the only cognitive faculty that not only links the different dimensions of the temporal continuum but ends up giving Russell the criterion for cognitive which he failed to secure under the dualistic picture of the world.