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THE PLACE OF NAÏVE REALISM IN RUSSELL'S CHANGING  
ACCOUNTS OF PERCEPTION

INTRODUCTION

There are many references to naïve realism in Russell's writings, nearly all of them sharply critical. He understood naïve realism as "the realism which claims that sense-data are identical with physical objects and that they subsist unchanged when not perceived" ("Analytic Realism," 135); later he put the same point by saying that "naive realism identifies my percepts with physical things" (*Human Knowledge*, 202). But Russell also offers a number of quite general accounts of naïve realism that do not involve appeals to sense-data or percepts. So he tells us that naïve realism is "the doctrine that things are what they seem" (*An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, 15), or that it is "the belief that external objects are exactly as they seem" (*Human Knowledge*, 197).

Russell's characterizations of naïve realism are brief. But they do capture the main idea, as explained by Bill Fish in this longer and more detailed definition of naïve realism:

Naïve realism is a theory in the philosophy of perception: primarily, the philosophy of vision. Historically, the term was used to name a variant of "direct realism," which claimed (1) that everyday material objects, such as caterpillars and Cadillacs, have mind-independent existence (the "realism" part); (2) that our visual perception of these material objects is not mediated by the perception of some other

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entities, such as sense-data (the “direct” part); and (3) these objects possess all the features that we perceive them to have (the “naïve” part) (FISH 2022, 1).

Russell reports that he became a naïve realist in 1898 (see *My Philosophical Development*, 58, 61–62). But we know that he had become a critic of the doctrine by 1910 (in “Analytic Realism”), and that he remained a critic of naïve realism throughout (most) of the rest of his long career.

In this paper I’ll try to sketch the development of Russell’s ideas about naïve realism. I’ll begin by questioning whether Russell’s early naïve realism is best understood as a theory of perception. There follows a discussion of his well-known sense-datum version of representative realism in *The Problems of Philosophy*. Then we encounter his less well known attempt to return to naïve realism in his 1912 manuscript “On Matter”. In the following sections of the paper I make much of Russell’s distinction between the matter of physics and the thing of common sense. I argue that Russell’s work from 1914 to 1927 can be interpreted as upholding a version of naïve realism with respect to thing of common sense (but not with regard to the matter of physics). I conclude the paper by noting that Russell’s later works contain no trace of any form of naïve realism and offer a tentative explanation of the demise of naïve realism in his later work.

#### EARLY NAÏVE REALISM

In 1959 Russell reports that he became a naïve realist “towards the end of 1898 ... [when] ... Moore and I rebelled against both Kant and Hegel” (*My Philosophical Development*, 54). He hated “the stuffiness involved in supposing that space and time were only in my mind” and he “could not bear Kant’s view that the one I like best [the starry heavens above me, rather than the moral law in me] was only a subjective figment” (*My Philosophical Development*, 61). And having made this confession, Russell goes on to endorse naïve realism: “In the first exuberance of liberation, I became a naïve realist and rejoiced in the thought that grass is really green, in spite of the adverse opinion of all philosophers from Locke onwards” (*My Philosophical Development*, 61–62).

Some have wondered whether this passage is best understood as an affirmation of a position in the philosophy of perception. To say that “grass is really green” is, after all, a rather elliptical way of saying that grass is exactly

as it seems to us. And the context in which the passage occurs suggests that Russell meant to take a stand against the view that the green grass is merely a subjective figment in mental space. Contrary to Locke (and his followers), Russell may be taken to say that secondary qualities—e.g. greenness—are not merely qualities in our minds, but are objective features of mind-independent things, like your lawn. And it is difficult to find texts in Russell's writings of the period that might definitely settle the question. Here, for example, is a passage in which Russell replies to Meinong and defends a realistic view of the objects of perception:

As against this view, I should prefer to advocate what is, presumably, the distinguishing feature of a common-sense philosophy, namely, that the object of a presentation is the actual external object itself, and not any part of the presentation at all. Thus to take the case of the steeple: we have (1) external perception, having as its object the actual steeple itself, or rather the existence of the steeple, the wholly extra-mental material thing. ("Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions (I)," 441)

The idea that the object of perception is the external physical thing is stated clearly; but we don't learn whether the steeple is the way it seems—round or square, for example, as in the case of Descartes's famous tower; nor are we told whether our relation to the steeple is direct or somehow mediated. The passage is certainly compatible with a naïve realist account of perception. But it falls short of establishing that Russell held this view.

A. J. Ayer is among the philosophers who think that Russell's assertion that grass is really green should not be understood as expressing a view about the nature of perception. He distinguishes two senses of "naïve realism"—an epistemic one, related to the theory of perception, and a metaphysical one, concerned with what there is. And he presents Russell as a philosopher who holds the metaphysical version of the doctrine: "Naïve realism, however, is also a theory about what there is. It consists, as Russell puts it, in such beliefs as that grass is green, that stones are hard, and that snow is cold" (*Russell and Moore*, 126).

Fraser MacBride also seems to think that Russell's expression "naïve realism" should not be read as endorsing a position in the philosophy of perception. He writes: "According to one creation myth, analytic philosophy emerged in Cambridge when Moore and Russell abandoned idealism in favour of naive realism: every word stood for something" ("The Cambridge Revolt against Idealism," 135).

And commenting on the early direct realism of Russell and Moore, Nicholas Griffin also comes out in support of the view that the realism in question must be understood as a semantic doctrine:

Judgements (or propositions) are neither mental nor linguistic but are complex combinations of the simple concepts which make up the world.... The direct realism of Moore's and Russell's early analytic philosophy derives from this account of propositions. In making a judgement the mind grasps a proposition which actually contains the mind-independent concepts themselves about which the judgement is made. It was on account of this direct realism that Russell found the new philosophy so bracing—like escaping from “a hot-house on to a wind-swept headland” he said. (*My Philosophical Development*, 48 [61]) (*Russell and Moore's Revolt*, 397–98)

In light of these reflections of Ayer, MacBride, and Griffin the view that Russell's 1898 conversion should be taken as a conversion to naïve realism as a theory of perception can be questioned. There is at least some reason to doubt that Russell ever was a card-carrying naïve realist of the ordinary sort. Perhaps the most plausible conclusion to draw from all this is that Russell endorsed both kinds of direct realism at the time: the metaphysical and the perceptual version of the doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

REPRESENTATIVE REALISM:  
*THE PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY*

Sense-data feature prominently in *The Problems of Philosophy*.<sup>2</sup> And that is typically taken to signal the end of naïve realism.<sup>3</sup> In *The Problems of Philosophy* sense-data are introduced as “the things immediately known in sensation” (*The Problems of Philosophy*, 17). Note that this does not tell us anything about what kinds of things sense-data are. One's views about this

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Donovan Wishon for pressing me on this matter. See WISHON 2017, 358–60, for a forceful defense of the view that the Russell of “On Denoting” held that we can be and often are acquainted with ordinary material objects. Given the strength of the arguments of both sides of this question, I now tend to agree with Wishon that the ecumenical view is the most reasonable one.

<sup>2</sup> The term is used in at least two papers that were published before *The Problems of Philosophy*: “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description” (1910–11) and “Analytic Realism” (1911).

<sup>3</sup> We will come back to the question whether sense-data must be understood as the end of naïve realism below.

question will depend on one's views about the kinds of objects the sensing relation takes. The naïve realist will hold that ordinary physical objects are sensed, thereby classifying ordinary physical objects as sense-data. Others will hold that there are good reasons to reject this view. Russell, for example, offers up the following list of things as the likely objects of sensing. According to him, sense-data are "such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardnesses, roughnesses, and so on" (*The Problems of Philosophy*, 17).<sup>4</sup> Acquaintance with an object is the relation that yields the sort of immediate knowledge in question: "We shall say 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" (*The Problems of Philosophy*, 73).

The knowledge resulting from acquaintance—knowledge by acquaintance—reveals its object *just as it is* (see *The Problems of Philosophy* 74): "so far as concerns knowledge of the colour itself, as opposed to knowledge of truths about it, I know the colour perfectly and completely when I see it, and no further knowledge of it itself is even theoretically possible" (*The Problems of Philosophy*, 73).

What more can be said about these immediate objects of perception that are known *just as they are*? Russell notes that the external objects appear differently to different observers. He also notes that the external object cannot be all these different ways at once. And he concludes that the things that appear to the different observers cannot be the external thing. The things that we become acquainted with, the things that we know *just as they are*, must be other things—things whose nature depends not just on the external object but also on our sensory apparatus. These things—jointly caused by the external thing and our physiology—are the sense-data.

In this way, sense-data become subjective: you have yours and I have mine. But the causal dependence on the subject that Russell has in mind here is limited to the purely physiological aspect of the subject. Psychology plays no role here.<sup>5</sup> The sense data are "shaped" by their "passage through" the

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<sup>4</sup> Tropes—particular instances of universals—are what Russell seems to have in mind when talking about sense-data. Here is how he clarifies the view expressed in *Problems*: "although there is a universal which is a given shade of colour, there are also particulars which are instances of the universal, and are sense-data when that shade of colour is seen ("The Nature of Sense-Data. A Reply to Dr. Dawes Hicks," 188).

<sup>5</sup> On page 136 of the paper "Analytic Realism" (1911)—first published in English in Russell's *Collected Papers*, vol. 6—sense-data are said to causally depend on psychology. But Nicholas Griffin—the general editor of the *Collected Papers*—confirmed that this is an error. In the French original the dependence in question is said to be on physiology.

eye, the optic nerve, and the relevant parts of the brain. Eventually Russell will coin the term “physiological subjectivity” (“The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics,” 9) to capture the entirely non-mental subjectivity that characterizes sense-data.

In “Analytic Realism” Russell goes so far as to say that the falsity of naïve realism is “purely accidental”—naïve realism might well have turned out to be true, but, given the way we—the subjects—are embedded in the world, it turns out to be false (see “Analytic Realism,” 136). The problem is that, as he puts it in a slightly different context, our sense-data are “casually dependent upon sense-organs and nerves and brain. Since we carry those about with us” (“Letter on Sense-Data,” 88), we cannot get a direct view onto the external object itself. The problem is, in short, that you are stuck behind your eyes and brain. If you could “step out” from this odd place for a moment, then the direct realist vision of the world would be yours: “I do not know of any reason why the mind should be ‘disqualified’ from knowing the physical thing; the question is one of fact, do we know the physical thing or do we not? My whole theory is purely empirical” (“The Nature of Sense-Data,” 186).

Things might have turned out otherwise. Naïve realism—“the realism which claims that sense-data are identical with physical objects and that they subsist unchanged when not perceived” (“Analytic Realism” 135, see also “On Matter,” 85)—could have been true. But as a matter of fact, it is not.

What, then, is the status of naïve realism in *The Problems of Philosophy*? The obvious answer seems to be that Russell abandoned the doctrine. Though Russell grants that our sense-data license inferences to the structural properties of physical objects, he argues that there is no reason to believe that the intrinsic qualities of physical objects are similar to those of our sense-data (see *The Problems of Philosophy*, 53–56). There is, therefore, no reason to believe that “external objects are exactly as they seem” (*Human Knowledge*, 197). But it’s not just that the external physical objects don’t seem to be the way they really are. Strictly speaking, the external physical objects do not seem or appear to you at all. The external physical object has turned into something that is beyond your perceptual reach. “The real table ... must be an inference from what is immediately known” (*The Problems of Philosophy*, 16–17). The belief in the existence of the “real table” (of the external world in general) is justified by an argument from simplicity: the existence of the real table/physical objects affords the simplest explanation of the course of our sense-data. In this way the physical object becomes, as

Russell sometimes puts it, something close to a “thing in itself”: “The physical object is a ‘thing in itself’ which cannot be known directly. Even its existence is doubtful, since it depends on a rather precarious induction” (“Analytic Realism,” 136).

Using Bill Fish’s three conditions for naïve realism, we can summarize the ways in which Russell’s theory of perception presented in *The Problems of Philosophy* is or is not a version of naïve realism. The score card looks as follows:

- (1) The realism condition: fail. Russell’s theory is realistic, but Russell’s material objects are of the wrong kind—something like things in themselves, not “everyday material objects such as caterpillars and Cadillacs”.
- (2) The directness condition: fail. The material objects Russell postulates are inferred and not perceived—neither directly nor indirectly.
- (3) The naivety condition: fail. Russell’s material objects do have certain structural features they seem to have, but don’t have all the features they seem to have.

#### EXCURSUS: NAÏVE REALISM ABOUT SENSE-DATA?

Peter Hylton has presented an intriguing account of the reasons that led Russell to embrace sense-data. According to Hylton, Russell’s embrace of the sense-datum theory should be viewed as a resulting from Russell’s resolute commitment to naïve realism, not as Russell’s abandonment of the doctrine:

The best way to think of Russell’s notion of a sense-datum is thus as the result of his extreme and naïve realism, subject now to certain epistemological constraints which played no role in the earlier work. When Russell turns his attention to physical objects he finds that we cannot suppose that we are in direct and immediate contact with the objects themselves. Given well-known facts about the fallibility of perception, this supposition, as we have seen, violates the epistemological constraints which he (now) takes to be built into the idea of direct and immediate contact. Russell’s response is not to abandon the view that we are in direct and immediate contact with objects outside our minds, but to hold this notion fast and to look for objects which are suitable to play the role of *relata* to this relation. This is where the notion of a sense-datum comes from. Epistemological arguments show that the object which the mind confronts is not independent of the body of the perceiver. Indeed a natural way to understand Russell is perhaps

as saying that the sense-datum is in the body of the percipient, more specifically in the central nervous system. There must be no medium through which the object is apprehended. Any such medium would run counter to the idea of direct contact between mind and object. The medium is avoided by positing the sense-datum as an entity that exists, so to speak, on the same side of any putative medium as the perceiving mind; our acquaintance with it thus does not take place through any medium but is direct. (HYLTON 1990, 371–72)

Russellian sense-data clearly meet Fish’s conditions (2) and (3) for naïve realism: we perceive them directly and they have all the features they seem to have. And, in contrast to contemporary sense-data, Russellian sense-data are mind-independent: neither their existence nor their nature depend on the mind whose data they are. But in other respects they are quite unlike “everyday material objects, such as caterpillars and Cadillacs”. Everyday material objects are public objects—equally accessible to all observers—whereas a person’s sense-data are private—private in the sense that, as a matter of fact, only that person can access their sense-data. And everyday material objects enjoy some measure of longevity, whereas sense-data are short-lived: there is no reason to think that they continue to exist unchanged after they cease to be perceived.

One may, therefore, want to resist the idea that there could be such a thing as a naïve realism with regard to sense-data, even if the sense-data are conceived along Russellian lines. The fact (if it is a fact) that we enjoy direct and accurate access to our sense-data brings us no closer to the ideal of naïve realism as it is ordinarily conceived.

#### MODIFIED NAÏVE REALISM: “ON MATTER”

In the current discussion, sense-data are typically understood as incompatible with naïve realism, and this is on (at least) two counts. First, they are taken to be mental and therefore to lack the sort of reality that a proper object of perception is supposed to have; second, they stand between us and the object and form the dreaded curtain that screens off the external object from our view.

But Russell’s sense-data are different (as are those of Moore and Broad and Price and, I believe, Ayer). We have already seen that Russell’s sense-data are *non-mental*. And during most of his sense-datum period, Russell goes further and classifies them as *physical*. On this count, then, Russell’s sense-data do



not stand in tension with naïve realism: they could serve as the objects of a (peculiar form of) naively realistic perception.

In “On Matter” (and in much of his subsequent work) Russell also addresses the second concern about sense-data—the concern that the sense-data from a curtain that screens off the external world from view. Russell’s reflections about the nature of matter—the nature of the objects in the external world—have the consequence that the curtain vanishes. On Russell’s new account of matter, sense-data cease to be representations of external material objects and turn into constituents of these very objects.

In *The Problems of Philosophy* Russell justified the belief in material objects by an appeal to simplicity: positing such objects affords the simplest explanation of our experience. But Russell’s confidence in this argument from simplicity was short-lived. In “On Matter”—a paper written in the same year that *The Problems of Philosophy* was published—we read the following:

The argument from simplicity ... has absolutely no weight whatever. If it were known that the universe had been created for the purpose of delighting mathematicians, there would be some reason to suppose that, of two hypotheses which both fit the facts, the simpler is more likely to be true. As, however, there is no evidence that this is the purpose of the universe, there is no reason whatever to expect the true laws of nature to be simple. (“On Matter,” 86)

To avoid the looming threat of skepticism about the external world, Russell goes back to naïve realism—albeit to a modified version of the doctrine. The modification concerns the object of perception. In keeping with his program of logical construction—“Wherever possible, substitute constructions out of known entities for inferences to unknown entities” (“Logical Atomism,” 164)—Russell proposes that we should think of material objects—objects that we know only through inference—as constructions out of other, less questionable, entities.<sup>6</sup> These are, in the first instance, our own sense-data.

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<sup>6</sup> An anonymous referee points out that Russell had not yet embarked on the program of the logical construction of matter when writing “On Matter” in 1912. There is much to be said for this view. For traditionally *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914) is taken to be the first full presentation of this program. But there is some evidence that Russell already embraced the idea of the logical construction of matter in his 1912 paper. He writes:

There are only two alternatives in regard to matter, if we are to have any reason to believe in matter. (1) It may happen that a piece of matter is a mere logical construction from certain sense-data.... (2) It may happen that we know some à priori principle by which, from sense-

And, in addition to these, there is a vast number of entities that are—in certain respects—like sense-data, though not sensed by me or, in most cases, by anybody. The inferences that take us from our own sense-data to similar entities that we do not sense are, according to Russell, considerably less daring than the ones that lead from sense-data to matter, as it is traditionally conceived. My sense-data as well as the many unsensed entities that I can infer from them—the sensibilia, to use a term that Russell will introduce in 1914—are the “known entities” with which we are to construct the “unknown entities”, viz., “the “matter” of physicist and the “thing” of common sense” (“On Matter,” 95). Russell contends that complex groups of sensibilia—both sensed and unsensed—can play the roles of matter and ordinary things, thereby freeing us from the risky inference to the existence of these two kinds of things.<sup>7</sup>

On the face of it, Russell’s proposal to logically construct “everyday material objects, such as caterpillars and Cadillacs” (see FISH 2022 above) in terms sense-data and other sensibilia is puzzling. For this process locates the construction materials for a given thing throughout the space surrounding the thing, rather than at the place where the thing is. And this has a paradox-

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data, we can infer the existence of entities of a sort with which we are not acquainted, but which we know to possess the kind of properties that physics assigns to matter (“On Matter,” 84–85).

In the course of the paper Russell concludes that we have good reason to reject option (2) and that, for the time being, we should tentatively embrace the view that matter is a construction of sense-data. And Russell’s letter to Lady Ottoline from December 29 of 1912 further suggests that the idea of understanding matter as a logical construction—an idea that Russell received from Whitehead—is already on his mind in 1912: “The impulse to this work on matter is extraordinarily strong.... I can’t make people even see what I want to work at, except Whitehead and Wittgenstein.... In fact Whitehead is partly the cause of my interest in it” (quoted in the Introduction to “On Matter,” 79).

This report of Whitehead’s importance on his thinking about this matter is confirmed by Russell’s description of Whitehead’s impact on him during this time:

When, however, after 1910, I had done all that I intended to do as regards pure mathematics, I began to think about the physical world and, largely under Whitehead’s influence, I was led to new applications of Occam’s razor.... He considered—and in this I came to agree with him—that the stuff of the physical world could consist of events.... (*My Philosophical Development*, 2–3)

<sup>7</sup> The point of substituting a logical construction of known entities (sense-data, etc.) for an unknown entity (a table, an atom, etc.) is, primarily, epistemic. If we are going to talk and theorize about tables, atoms, etc., then it is incumbent upon us to ensure that these entities are knowable entities. That goal we achieve by logically constructing these entities out of materials we know—sense-data, etc. Whether the “unreconstructed” tables, atoms, etc. do or do not exist, is a question that Russell takes no stand on. In this way logical construction differs profoundly from the idea of reduction, be it retentive or eliminative.

ical ring to it. Commenting on a similar oddity encountered in the logical construction of points, Russell commented that “the oddity of ... [this] ... wears off with familiarity (“On Scientific Method,” 69). Be that as it may, the usefulness of the proposed logical reconstructions for salvaging some form of naïve realism is readily apparent. Rather than the mind having to “venture out to the object”, the object—i.e., one of its constituents—now comes to the mind in form of a sense-datum, thereby presenting itself directly to you.

Russell’s substitution of logically reconstructed objects for “everyday material objects” also explains how one can reasonably argue that Russell continues to hold a version of naïve realism, given his repeated dismissals of the doctrine. What Russell objects to is the idea that we enjoy direct and accurate access to everyday material objects, as these are ordinarily conceived. But once these objects have been reconceived in a way that allows them—certain constituents of them—to be located where the mind is, direct and accurate access to these reconstructed objects no longer poses a difficulty.

The feature that makes the early presentation of this idea in “On Matter” so distinctive is that the unsensed sensibilia of this early period are taken to be of the same basic kind as the sensibilia that we know as the data of our senses: they are, all of them, colors, shapes, hardnesses, etc.—just the sorts of things (instances of sensory qualities) that we are acquainted with in sensation. Here is how he puts the point:

What is self-evident is, I think, what crude realism affirms, namely that qualities which are or resemble sense-data, or at least those of sight and touch, exist at times when they are not given in sense.... If this view can be maintained, matter will be composed entirely of qualities of the nature of sense-data, but not only of those which one observer perceives; it will consist of all the sense-data which all possible observers would perceive in perceiving the same thing... In this view, matter consists entirely of constituents of the same kind as the data of sense—it consists of colours and shapes, hardnesses, roughnesses, and so on—but it consists not only of those which are actually given, but of many others besides.... The “matter” of the physicist and the “thing” of common sense will then be collections of constituents of the nature of sense-data, some actually perceived, some not (“On Matter,” 93–95).

In this way, one’s sense-data are turned from *representations* of external objects into *constituents* of external objects. In being acquainted with my green sense-datum, I am, *ipso facto*, acquainted with my lawn. Of course,

my lawn isn't simply identical with my sense-datum of it. Most of its components are inferred entities—sensibilia with which nobody is acquainted. But this still amounts to a direct perceptual contact with my lawn; direct perceptual contact with a thing does not require direct perceptual contact with all constituents of that thing. In this way Russell takes himself to have established a modified version of naïve realism—a result that is crucial for our knowledge of the external world: “if every form of naïve realism is rejected, our knowledge of matter, even if we have such knowledge, is only descriptive, and absolutely nothing can be discovered as to its intrinsic nature” (“On Matter,” 95).

And he goes further and worries that only by “preserving, as far as possible, what is most essential in the views of naïve realism” (“On Matter,” 95) can complete skepticism be avoided.

Should this account of perception count as a version of naïve realism? Here is how it fares with respect to the three criteria laid down by Bill Fish. The sense-data (and, more generally, the sensibilia) of “On Matter” do satisfy the second and third criteria of naïve realism: we are directly acquainted with them and they are the way they seem. But what about the first condition—the realism condition? Does the account that Russell presents in “On Matter” countenance “everyday material objects such caterpillars and Cadillacs” that exist mind independently? The answer is a qualified yes: if caterpillars and Cadillacs (and material objects in general) are understood as logical constructions of (mind-independent!) sensibilia, and if it is granted that those sensibilia continue to exist (more or less) unchanged when unsensed, then the caterpillars and Cadillacs, etc. really do exist in a manner that may satisfy the naïve realist. And if we happen to be visually acquainted with a sensible that is a constituent of the collection of sensibilia that is the Cadillac we are facing, then we are seeing the Cadillac directly and as it really is.

I therefore conclude that “On Matter” is best read as Russell's return of (a version of) naïve realism that he (allegedly) embraced around the turn of the century.

#### THE “MATTER” OF THE PHYSICIST VS. THE “THING” OF COMMON SENSE

We already encountered the distinction between “the ‘matter’ of the physicist and the ‘thing’ of common sense” in “On Matter” (95). But the distinc-

tion did not seem very important at the time, because Russell initially treated matter and things along similar lines. Starting in 1914, Russell clearly distinguishes between matter and thing. The way he draws the distinction changes over time. But that does not diminish its importance, for it turns out that the matter of physics always turns into something that cannot be perceived; much less can it be perceived in a naively realistic fashion. But we can still ask whether there remains a sense in which naïve realism remains true with regard to ordinary physical things—the “things” of common sense.

#### NAÏVE REALISM & THE MATTER OF PHYSICS

In “The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics” Russell emphasizes the distinction between physical objects as ordinarily conceived and matter as it shows up in physics:<sup>8</sup> “We defined the ‘physical thing’ as the class of its appearances, but this can hardly be taken as a definition of matter” (“The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics,” 16).

The appearances that make up ordinary physical things are not just the sensibilia that happen to appear to certain observers; they also included all those sensibilia that occur in places where there are no observers.<sup>9</sup> The physical matter of the ordinary thing consists of a subclass of the appearances of the ordinary thing. In “The Relation of Sense-Data of Physics” he introduces (the first rough) idea of matter as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> In *Our Knowledge of the External World* Russell also talks about the matter of physics and the thing of common sense. But there the distinction is not as clearly drawn as in “The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics”. At times he switches between “thing” and “matter” in a way that suggests that he uses the terms interchangeably. Having defined “thing” (not “matter”) in terms of aspects—where it is clear that sense-data are included among those aspects—he immediately goes on to consider an objection against this definition of “matter” (not “thing!”). The definition says: “Things are those series of aspects which obey the laws of physics” (*Our Knowledge of the External World*, 115–16), and the objection he considers reads: “It may still be objected that the “matter” of physics is something other than series of sense-data” (*Our Knowledge of the External World*, 116). This leads me to think that the distinction between the matter of physics and the thing of common sense is not yet firmly in place in *Our Knowledge of the External World*.

<sup>9</sup> Russell is aware of the oddness of his use of the term ‘appearance’, but he uses it anyway: “It may be thought monstrous to maintain that a thing can present any appearance at all in a place where no sense organs and nervous structure exist through which it could appear. I do not myself feel the monstrosity” (“The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics,” 13).

We commonly assume that the information we get about a thing is more accurate when the thing is nearer. Far off, we see it is a man; then we see it is Jones; then we see he is smiling. Complete accuracy would only be attainable as a limit: if the appearances of Jones as we approach him tend towards a limit, that limit may be taken to be what Jones really is. It is obvious that from the point of view of physics the appearances of a thing close to “count” more than the appearances far off. We may therefore set up the following tentative definition:

The *matter* of a given thing is the limit of its appearances as their distance from the thing diminishes. (“The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics,” 17)

In thus shrinking the group of appearances/sensibilia that make up the matter of a thing, Russell tries to ensure that appearances that compose the bit of matter are free of distorting influences due to other matter. The effects that Russell wants to exclude are brought about by, for example, “intervening smoke or mist, by blue spectacles or by alterations in the sense-organs or nerves of the percipient (which also must be reckoned as part of the intervening medium)” (“The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics,” 17).

And thus our sense-data—the appearances of a thing that actually do appear to us—are excluded from matter by definition. The very fact that a sensible appears to you guarantees that this sensible cannot be a constituent of the matter of the thing that you are perceiving. A direct perception of matter—of any one of its constituents—is therefore impossible.

With respect to matter, we are, in effect, thrown back to a position that is analogous to the position he defended in *The Problems of Philosophy*. There he maintained that “the real table ... must be an inference from what is immediately known” (*The Problems of Philosophy*, 16–17). And nothing could be known as to the intrinsic nature of this inferred real table. In “On Matter” Russell was considerably more optimistic. There he took the “real table” to be a logical construction out of sensibilia. And though most or all of these sensibilia were inferred entities, we could know something about their intrinsic nature, viz., that they are qualities similar to those that constitute our sense-data. But in “The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics”, Russell moves back to a more agnostic position. Instead of insisting that unsensed sensibilia “resemble” or are “of the nature of” or are “of the same kind” as the data of our sense, Russell now makes the obvious point that we cannot verify this hypothesis: “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” (“The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics,” 7–8). And

in addition to this we have good empirical reasons for thinking that our sensory apparatus changes the sensibilia that “pass through” it, leading to the conclusion that our sensory objects “probably never persist unchanged after ceasing to be data” (“The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics,” 8). Consequently we can have no knowledge about the intrinsic nature of matter, as it is understood in physics—a result that Russell tried to avoid in “On Matter”.<sup>10</sup>

#### NAÏVE REALISM & THE PHYSICAL THINGS OF COMMON SENSE (SENSE-DATUM PERIOD)

It is clear that Russell has given up on naïve realism as far as the matter of physics is concerned. But his accounts of the nature and of our perceptual access to the physical things of common sense do hold out some hope of salvaging at least some of the spirit of naïve realism for this domain.

The crucial fact to recall is that Russell’s logical reconstruction of ordinary physical things includes our sense-data, it includes those sensibilia that become the objects of our senses, it includes those appearances that the object presents to us:

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,” if any, which, 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. (“The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics,” 10)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The conclusion reached in *Our Knowledge of the External World* is even more guarded. There Russell argues that all we can know about a sensible, that we now no longer sense, is (at best) that the effects it had while we sensed it, still continue on. But whether the (now unsensed) sensible exists—or what its nature is—we do not know. “The assumption that sensible objects persist after they have ceased to be sensible—for example, that the hardness of a visible body, which has been discovered by touch, continues when the body is no longer touched—may be replaced by the statement that the effects of sensible objects persist, i.e. that what happens now can only be accounted for, in many cases, by taking account of what happened at an earlier time” (91; cf. 86–87).

<sup>11</sup> Compare this formulation from *Our Knowledge of the External World*: “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*” (*Our Knowledge of the External World*, 112). The same idea is still present in his “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism” from 1918 (see especially Section 8: “Excursus into Metaphysics: What There Is,” 234–44).

So far, then, the current account of the thing of common sense looks very much like the one in “On Matter”: since the sense-datum you see when you look at your lawn or your Cadillac is a part of these respective physical objects, you are in direct perceptual contact with these objects; and since your sense datum does have the features it seems to have, your perception is also properly naïve, in Bill Fish’s sense. But Russell’s change of mind about the persistence of sensible objects makes it even more difficult to argue that his theory satisfies the realism condition of naïve realism. In “On matter” our sense-data seemed to enjoy a robust existence: the green sensible you sensed when looking at your lawn continued to exist when you stopped looking. Therefore it was plausible to argue that your lawn continued on as a green physical object, even if nobody was looking. But now Russell holds that our objects of sense “probably never persist unchanged after ceasing to be data” (“The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics,” 8). And that suggests that your lawn may change/lose its color when you close your eyes. That is not how “everyday material objects, such as caterpillars and Cadillacs” are supposed to behave.

In light of this consideration, one might be willing to grant that Russell has presented something like a naïve realism *of the present moment*—after all, the lawn is green while you are seeing it—about a peculiar class of logically reconstructed objects. But at the same time one might argue that this view does not manage to capture the basic idea of naïve realism as traditionally understood.

Notice, however, that the focus of the argument seems to have shifted. The debate is no longer centered on the nature of our perceptual access material objects, as those are ordinarily conceived; it has shifted to the metaphysical question concerning the nature of material objects: are they the sorts of things we ordinarily take them to be, or should they be reconceived as Russellian constructions? If we think of them as logical constructions, then the sort of naïve realism that Russell offers may well be the best we can get. Perhaps the right thing to say is that the question of naïve realism can only be stated (and answered) clearly, once some agreement about the pre-supposed realism has been reached.



NAÏVE REALISM & THE PHYSICAL THINGS OF COMMON SENSE  
(NEUTRAL MONISTIC PERIOD)

*The Analysis of Mind*

Russell became a neutral monist in 1919. In *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) he presents a neutral monistic account of the mind—of the phenomena of belief, desire, memory, perception, the self, etc. In his hands this becomes an exercise in logical construction, governed by the same maxim that guided him in the logical reconstruction of common sense objects and the matter of physics: “Wherever possible, substitute constructions out of known entities for inferences to unknown entities” (“Logical Atomism,” 326). The method of logical construction stays the same. But the construction materials are new. The sense-data that, up to this point, constituted the primary construction materials are replaced by *sensations*.<sup>12</sup>

In the past, Russell frequently used the term “sensation” to stand for what we might call an experience, e.g., a sound experience, a color experience, a smell experience, etc. And he analyzed such experiences as complexes consisting of three interrelated elements: (i) the sense-datum (occupying the object position), (ii) the self (occupying the subject position), and (iii) the relation of acquaintance (or awareness) obtaining between (i) and (ii). But in the course of his reflections on neutral monism, Russell came to view (i)—the self—and (ii)—the mental acts of the self—as dispensable posits. This also meant that the sense-datum should no longer be thought of an object, for there no longer exists a subject whose object it could be.

Having thus rejected each of the three elements of his old analysis of sensation, Russell presents a new, non-relational account of sensations. All that Russell now finds when attending to an experience is a patch of color, a sound, a smell, etc. He can no longer discover the articulation of this simple phenomenon into subject, act, and object:

There are those who will maintain that they can discern introspectively an event consisting in awareness of a noise, and that they can be certain by inspection that this event is not identical with the mere noise.... I formerly believed that my own inspection showed me the distinction between a noise and my hearing of a noise,

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<sup>12</sup> Russell also included *images* and other *transient particulars* that are not part of any experience into the building materials of his logical constructions (see *The Analysis of Mind* 25–26 and 143–44). I won’t discuss the difficulties that the introduction of these somewhat heterogeneous building blocks may introduce into the neutral monism of *The Analysis of Mind*.

and I am now convinced that it shows me no such thing, and never did (“On Sensations and Ideas,” 255).

Thus the sensations that from the basic building blocks for the logical constructions that Russell carries out in *The Analysis of Mind* lack the complex structure he had attributed to sensations during his sense-datum period. The new sensations are simple—they are patches of color, sounds, smells, etc. That’s the thought that Russell expresses when he tells us that “the sensations that we have when we see a patch of colour simply *is* that patch of colour ... we may say that the patch of colour and our sensation in seeing it are identical” (*The Analysis of Mind*, 141–43). And unlike the old sense-data that were non-mental or physical, Russell takes the new sensations of *The Analysis of Mind* to be neutral—to be neither physical nor mental, equally suitable to enter into the construction of physical and mental phenomena.

Though these changes are momentous, we can still ask whether there is any sense in which (some version of) naïve realism survives in the new theory. It turns out that Russell continues to distinguish between the matter of physics and the thing of common sense (though he draws the distinction a little differently than he did in “The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics”).<sup>13</sup>

The situation with respect to the matter of physics is unchanged. A piece of matter is now understood as the collection of the “regular” appearances of this piece of matter—appearances that have not been subject to the causal influence of any other pieces of matter:

Except in cases of perfect regularity in appearances (of which we can have no experience), the actual appearances of a piece of matter are not members of that ideal system of regular appearances which is defined as being the matter in question. (*The Analysis of Mind*, 300)

We get the same result as before: anything we experience cannot, by definition, be part of the matter of the thing we perceive.

The construction of ordinary physical objects in *The Analysis of Mind* proceeds along familiar lines. Only the construction materials differ: in place of physical sensibilia (some of which were sense-data), we now get neutral sensations and unperceived aspects or appearances of objects that collectively are identified with the object:

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<sup>13</sup> Russell’s definition of matter is found on pages 106–7. An example of how this definition is supposed to work is provided on p. 134. Preliminary accounts of physical objects, as ordinarily conceived (or of matter—the distinction is not always quite clear) appear on pages 98, 99, and 101.

Instead of supposing that there is some unknown cause, the “real” table, behind the different sensations of those who are said to be looking at the table, we may take the whole set of these sensations (together possibly with certain other particulars) as actually being the table. That is to say, the table which is neutral as between different observers (actual and possible) is the set of all those particulars which would naturally be called “aspects” of the table from different points of view.... I suggest, as a first approximation, that these particulars [perceived aspects or appearances of the table], together with such correlated others as are unperceived, jointly *are* the table; and that a similar definition applies to all physical objects. (*The Analysis of Mind*, 98, 99)

Should this count as a version of naïve realism about ordinary physical objects? I think that the answer must be the same as the one we arrived at in the previous section. You enjoy an unmediated and accurate perceptual access to your table. But the table that you can access in this privileged manner turns out to be strikingly different from what you previously took it to be. Whether this should count as a version of naïve realism is a question about which reasonable people may disagree.

*The Analysis of Mind* does, however, introduce an additional consideration about irregular appearances that may destroy this striking parallelism between Russell's positions just before and just after switching to neutral monism. He observes that the notion of an irregular appearance is vague: “When the distorting influence of the medium is sufficiently great, the resulting particular can no longer be regarded as an appearance of an object, but must be treated on its own account” (*The Analysis of Mind*, 135). It is natural to assume that Russell is thinking about cases of illusion and hallucination—difficult problems that every naïve realist must face.<sup>14</sup> But it turns out that the problem he has in mind is much more pervasive and much more serious:

This happens especially when the particular in question cannot be traced back to one object, but is a blend of two or more. This case is normal in perception: we see as one what the microscope or telescope reveals to be many different objects. (*The Analysis of Mind* 135)

If we take this at face value, the appearance that an ordinary object presents to us cannot be taken as a constituent of this object—it is a “confused appearance of several objects” (*The Analysis of Mind* 136) and “must be treated

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<sup>14</sup> For an extended discussion of these questions, see part 12 of “The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics”: “Illusions, Hallucinations, and Dreams,” 22–26.

on its own account” (*The Analysis of Mind* 135). If this is so, the case for attributing some version of naïve realism about ordinary objects to Russell collapses. What you perceive when—as we colloquially say—you perceive your table, is no part of the table. It is a somewhat muddled appearance or representation of your table that may be good enough to license some inferences about your table. So we are back to a form of representationalism.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, perhaps Russell’s discussion of perception in *The Analysis of Mind* is best understood as showing that his thoughts about this question were not fully settled at the time. For when he returns to the issue at the end of the book, he again seems to endorse the view that our sensations—understood as irregular appearances of the matter that constitutes the ordinary physical thing we are perceiving—are indeed constituents of the object in question:

The nerves and brain are matter; our visual sensations when we look at them may be, and I think are, members of the system constituting irregular appearances of this matter, but are not the whole of the system.... When a sensation is used to verify physics, it is used merely as a sign of a certain material phenomenon, i.e. of a group of particulars of which it is a member. (*The Analysis of Mind*, 301)

This seems to say that the whitish-grey sensation you have when looking at the brain in the vat *is* in fact a constituent of the ordinary (common sense) thing we call a brain.

The question whether *The Analysis of Mind* still contains a version of naïve realism with regard to the physical objects of common sense is one that I do not know how to settle. The text seems to offer some support for either side of this dispute.

### *The Analysis of Matter*

Six years later, in 1927, Russell publishes two books: *An Outline of Philosophy* and *The Analysis of Matter*. The distinction between the matter of physics and the thing of common sense seems to play no role in the *Outline*. But it is present in *The Analysis of Matter*. There Russell begins by analyz-

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<sup>15</sup> The rather understated summary with which Russell concludes this discussion suggests that he does not take himself to have established a major change in his views about perception. Perhaps, then, he meant to endorse a representationalist view all along? Here is what he says: “The notion of perception is therefore not a precise one: we perceive things more or less, but always with a very considerable amount of vagueness and confusion” (*The Analysis of Mind*, 135).

ing “common-sense material ‘things’” (*The Analysis of Matter*, 207) as “a group of events arranged about a centre” (*The Analysis of Matter*, 244). When such a thing is perceived, the resulting percept is a member of the group that is this common sense thing. Thus he can write that “we find that in ... [physical] ... space all the percepts belonging to one group (i.e. of the same physical object, from the standpoint of common sense) can be ordered about a centre” (*The Analysis of Matter*, 217). Some of the things Russell says—e.g., “the physical object, as inferred from perception, is a group of events arranged around a centre” (*The Analysis of Matter*, 244)—may suggest that he takes the percept to be a representation (not a constituent!) of the physical thing, and that we infer the physical thing from this representation. But that is not what he has in mind. The inferences involved here are those that take me from the small number of my own percepts to (i) the much larger number of percepts of other people and (ii) to the vast number of unperceived events that bear relevant structural similarities to these percepts. We subsequently discover that certain groups of these many events (including my percepts) behave in ways that parallel the behaviors of material things as commonsensically conceived, whereupon we substitute these orderly groups of events for the ordinary things we used to believe in. That is to say, the inferences involved here are the ones that allow us to generate the building materials that are then used in the process of logical construction. None of this casts any doubt on the idea that “a physical object ... is a group of ‘appearances’” (*The Analysis of Matter*, 259) and that the green percept I have when looking at my lawn is a constituent (a part) of the lawn, not a mere representation of it.

Matter, conceived of as the “existents satisfying the equations of physics” is treated as before. It, too, is a construction from events, but none of those events are our percepts.

It would appear, then, that Russell’s thinking about “common-sense material ‘things’” (*The Analysis of Matter*, 207) had not changed in relevant ways by the time he wrote *The Analysis of Matter*. Therefore we might still want to view him as committed to a qualified naïve realism with regard to physical things of common sense (where these are understood as logical constructions in Russell’s sense). But since *The Analysis of Matter* does not focus on these questions and does not bring any new considerations to bear on this discussion, it is best to move on to another issue.

The books of 1927 emphasize another striking consideration that has an indirect bearing on the question of the place of naïve realism in Russell’s

thought. Reflections about the causation of percepts convince Russell that (the events that are) percepts are located in the brain of the perceiver.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Russell thinks that the matter of the brain—like all matter—consists of groups of events. And the events that constitute a piece of matter are the events that occur where the matter is. As he says in reply to the question which group of events make up an electron: “Obviously it includes all the events that happen where the electron is” (*The Analysis of Matter*, 320–21, cf. 385). Hence we get the following conclusion about the relationship of our percepts and the matter that makes up our brain:

Thus a percept is an event or a group of events, each of which belongs to one or more of the groups constituting the electrons in the brain. This, I think, is the most concrete statement that can be made about electrons; everything else that can be said is more or less abstract and mathematical. (*The Analysis of Matter*, 320)

So, while it remains true that most of the physical matter in the universe is neither directly revealed by, nor composed of percepts, each of us contains a small amount of matter that is composed of percepts and intimately known in perception.<sup>17</sup> Obviously this is a far cry from the idea that inspires naïve realism. But it comes surprisingly close to satisfying the letter of the doctrine: every time you look at anything at all, you do succeed in gaining unmediated and accurate visual access to a material object in good standing: your brain. That is probably not the object you meant to look at; but it is what you end up looking at anyway. This is the point of Russell’s remark: “I know about what is happening in the brain exactly what naïve realism thinks it knows about what is happening in the outside world” (*Outline*, 138).

#### THE END OF NAÏVE REALISM

Perhaps Russell was a naïve realist between 1898 and 1910. After giving up on naïve realism in *The Problems of Philosophy*, he attempts to resurrect the view in the paper “On Matter” of 1912. And I have tried to show that his

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<sup>16</sup> The idea that our sense-data (sensations; perceptions) are located in our brains seems to be present in many of Russell’s earlier works—though the correct interpretation is not always quite clear. But now this view becomes central to his outlook.

<sup>17</sup> Russell restated this idea many times in his later writings, perhaps most succinctly in 1959: “the brain consists of thoughts” (*My Philosophical Development*, 25).

distinction between the matter of physics and the thing of common sense makes it possible to view Russell as maintaining a qualified naïve realism with respect to the thing of common sense (but not with respect to matter) up until *The Analysis of Matter*, published in 1927.

*The Analysis of Matter* is his last work in which he goes through the elaborate process of gathering up all the relevantly related percepts and events (appearances/aspects) in the various perspectives surrounding the object in question, with the aim of then substituting this correlated group of particulars for the object that common sense situates at the center of this group. This is how the logical construction of the thing of common sense was carried out beginning in 1912—first in “On Matter” and then in the two important publications of 1914: “The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics” and *Our Knowledge of the External World*. And Russell continued to practice this same kind of construction process all the way up to *The Analysis of Matter* from 1927. But after that time he no longer constructs the thing of common sense in this way or, so far as I can tell, in any other way. The thing of common sense simply drops out of the picture. It appears that Russell came to think that the thing of common sense is not needed for a satisfactory account of our perception of the physical world.

Accordingly, we are left with the matter of physics—located in physical space—and our percepts of things—populating in our private, psychological spaces.<sup>18</sup> The table you see is a percept in your private space. The matter of the table—which you cannot perceive in any way—is located in physical space. The table of common sense—the large, flat, hard, brown physical thing that you took yourself to perceive in an entirely unproblematic way—was a third thing, in addition to its matter and our percept of it. Russell reconstructed it as the sum of its appearances or aspects, including the sense-data/sensations/percepts of those who happened to observe the table. This object is now gone. That is to say, Russell no longer carries out this construction because ordinary physical objects have no role to play in his story of how perception relates us to the world. The table you see is taken care of—it is a percept in your private space. And the matter of the table—as it features in physics—is taken care of—it is a group of inferred events (none of which are percepts) located in the inferred space of physics. And these

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<sup>18</sup> Russell introduced the idea of private or psychological space in *The Problems of Philosophy*. It is the three-dimensional space of your experience. Physical or public space—a space we cannot experience—is the result of an elaborate construction. We and our respective private spaces are located at points in physical space.

two things are all that needs to be taken care of. The ordinary table of common sense is superfluous and drops out of his account of perception. What remains is a group of atoms etc. arranged tablewise in physical space and a group of mental states—some table percepts among them—filling your “mental space”.<sup>19</sup>

The case I have been making for the continued presence of a limited version of naïve realism in Russell’s theories of perception turned on the way in which Russell conceived of the things of common sense. Our sense-data/sensations/percepts of those things were, literally, constituents of those things. And in having those sense-data/sensations/percepts, we perceived those things directly and accurately. The new regime does not countenance objects of this kind. Therefore my case for the existence of remnants of naïve realism in Russell’s theory of perception comes to an end at his point.

Here, then, is how I see the place of naïve realism in Russell’s changing accounts of perception.

- The early period, 1898–1910: I am inclined to think that the naïve realism that Russell embraced so enthusiastically early on may not have been intended as a naïve realism about perception, but as a metaphysical or semantical thesis.
- *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912): Russell abandons naïve realism (if, in fact, he ever held it) and presents a sense-datum version of representative realism.
- “On Matter” (1912): here we see Russell’s best attempt to defend something very close to the standard doctrine of naïve realism. The objects of perception—the “everyday material objects such as caterpillars and Cadillacacs”—have, of course, undergone severe reconstruction. But the resulting picture does capture the spirit of the doctrine.
- The period from 1914 to 1927: though Russell’s thinking about perception underwent some significant changes during this period—the sense datum theory is replaced by neutral monism—I have tried to show that the distinction between the matter of physics and the thing of common sense is a constant feature of Russell’s changing views. And I have suggested that

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<sup>19</sup> Talk of atoms and minds is convenient but superficial. According to Russell, neither atoms nor minds are fundamentally real—they are merely practical ways picking out stable patterns in the underlying events. They are mere matters of convenience, as he so often puts it: “Mind and matter alike are for certain purposes convenient terms, but are not ultimate realities. Electrons and protons, like the soul, are logical fictions; each is really a history, a series of events, not a single persistent entity (*What I Believe*, 9).



our perceptual relation the thing of common sense (as logically reconstructed by Russell) can usefully be viewed as a limited sort of naïve realism.

- The period after 1927: the thing of common sense no longer features in Russell's account of our perceptual access to the world. The things we perceive are percepts, located in our private spaces. The only material objects of which these percepts are parts are our brains. All other material objects are beyond our perceptual reach and are accessible only via inference. This is the end of anything resembling the traditional view of naïve realism in Russell's account of perception.

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THE PLACE OF NAÏVE REALISM  
IN RUSSELL’S CHANGING  
ACCOUNTS OF PERCEPTION

In this paper I describe the place of naïve realism in Russell’s changing accounts of perception. I argue for the following conclusions: (1) The early period, 1898-1910: I am inclined to think that the naïve realism that Russell embraced so enthusiastically early on may not have been intended as a naïve realism about perception, but as a metaphysical or semantical thesis. (2) *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912): Russell abandons naïve realism (if, in fact, he ever held it) and presents a sense-datum version of representative realism. (3) “On Matter” (1912): here we see Russell’s best attempt to defend something very close to the standard doctrine of naïve realism. The objects of perception—the “everyday material objects such as caterpillars and Cadillacs”—have, of course, undergone severe reconstruction. But the resulting picture does capture the spirit of the doctrine. (4) The period from 1914 to 1927: though Russell’s thinking about perception underwent some significant changes during this period—the sense datum theory is replaced by neutral monism—I try to show that the distinction between the matter of physics and the thing of common sense is a constant feature of Russell’s changing views. And I suggest that our

perceptual relation the thing of common sense (as logically reconstructed by Russell) can usefully be viewed as a limited sort of naïve realism. (5) The period after 1927: the thing of common sense no longer features in Russell's account of our perceptual access to the world. The things we perceive are percepts, located in our private spaces. The only material objects of which these percepts are parts are our brains. All other material objects are beyond our perceptual reach and are accessible only via inference. This is the end of anything resembling the traditional view of naïve realism in Russell's account of perception.

**Keywords:** Russell; perception; naïve realism.

#### MIEJSCE NAIWNEGO REALIZMU W BERTRANDA RUSSELLA ZMIENNYCH POGŁĄDACH NA TEMAT PERCEPCJI

##### Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiam miejsce, jakie naiwny realizm zajmuje w zmiennym stanowisku Russella co do percepcji. Argumentuję za poniższymi tezami. (1) Twierdzę, że we wczesnym okresie (lata 1898–1910) naiwny realizm, początkowo entuzjastycznie przyjęty przez Russella, może nie być realizmem odnośnie do percepcji, ale tezą z zakresu metafizyki lub semantyki. (2) *Problemy filozofii* (1912): Russell porzuca naiwny realizm (jeżeli w ogóle kiedykolwiek go głosił) i przedstawia wersję realizmu reprezentacyjnego odwołującą się do danych zmysłowych. (3) *On Matter* (1912): dostrzec tu można najskuteczniejszą próbę obrony przez Russella stanowiska bardzo bliskiego standardowej wersji realizmu naiwnego. Przedmioty percepcji – „zdroworozsądkowe przedmioty materialne, takie jak gąsienice i Cadillacy” – przeszły rzecz jasna poważną rekonstrukcję, finalny pogląd uchwytuje jednak ducha naiwnego realizmu. (4) Okres od 1914 do 1927 roku: choć stanowisko Russella w kwestii percepcji przeszło w tych latach znaczące zmiany – teorię danych zmysłowych zastąpił monizm neutralny – staram się pokazać, że w jego poglądach występuje pewna stałość, mianowicie przywiązanie do odróżnienia materii w fizyce i w rozumieniu potocznym. Jak sugeruję, percepcyjną relację do tej ostatniej (w kształcie zaproponowanym przez Russella) można z korzyścią potraktować jako zawężoną wersję naiwnego realizmu. (5) Okres po roku 1927: w ujęciu Russella przedmioty zdrowego rozsądku stają się percepcyjnie niedostępne. Tym, co postrzegamy, są percepty usytuowane w naszych prywatnych przestrzeniach. Jedyne przedmioty materialne, których owe percepty są częścią, to nasze mózgi, wszystkie inne zaś znajdują się poza zasięgiem naszej percepcji, a dostęp do nich zapewnia wyłącznie wnioskowanie. Jest to zarazem kres czegokolwiek, co mogłoby przypominać tradycyjny naiwny realizm w Russella ujęciu percepcji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Bertrand Russell; percepcja; realizm naiwny