III.—SOME PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY.

BY F. MELIAN STAWELL.

MR. RUSSELL'S book in the Home University Series is written for the general public; it is, of course, most able, stimulating, and brilliant; and it raises an enormous number of difficult problems that the author has not space to discuss more fully. Under these circumstances I trust it will not be thought unbecoming for a student from the ranks to put a number of questions, in however halting a fashion, with the hope of clearing the ground.

§ 1. *Physical Space*.—Mr. Russell starts his exposition by distinguishing between (a) the "sense-data" which are "private to each separate person" (p. 32) and which cannot well be supposed to exist without the individual mind perceiving them, and (β) the "physical objects,"—whatever these may turn out to be,—which it is reasonable to assume exist in a different way from the sense-data, in a way which is "independent of us and our perceptions" (p. 42). Science assumes that the knowable properties of these "physical objects" are "position in, space and the power of motion according to the laws of motion" (p. 44). The "sense-data" that partly depend on these properties may be quite different from them, e.g. "light" is quite different from "wave-motion". Mr. Russell goes on (p. 48): "If, as science and common-sense assume, there is one public all-embracing physical space in which physical objects are, the relative positions of physical objects in physical space must *more or less correspond*¹ to the relative positions of sense-data in our private spaces. *There is no difficulty in supposing this to be the case.*"¹

What does *more or less correspond* imply? If it simply means that there must be *something* over and above private perceptions corresponding *in some way* to what we represent to ourselves as "space," then, no doubt, most of us would feel no difficulty in the supposition. But if it means (see p. 49 and p. 152 ff.) that this "*something*" must necessarily have

¹ *Italics mine.*

"*spatial*¹ relations" as we conceive space when we allow for an observer like one of ourselves, and yet exist in complete abstraction from any such observer, then the ordinary student feels countless difficulties and much desires further light. Mr. Russell touches on one of these (p. 47) when he points out that the apparent shape of a thing differs according to the point of view of the observer. He adds "the space of science, therefore, though *connected*¹ with the spaces we see and feel, is not identical with them, and the manner of its connexion requires investigation".

I should like to press this need.

If the particular shape depends on the point of view of the observer and there is no observer, then there is no particular shape, and what is a shape that is no shape in particular? Or, to take the general relation of right and left, is not the direction of this relation determined in private space by the point of view of the observer, and does it not differ with different observers? (A and B stand opposite each other and an object on A's right is on B's left.) What is to determine the direction in public space if there is no observer? And in what sense are we justified in talking of a direction the direction of which is not and cannot be determined? One might answer, perhaps, that "the direction" is such that if there were an observer it could be determined: but does that really get us any further? Does it not come back to saying simply that the "physical" relation is *in some way* the foundation of ours?

So far as I can see that the argument has gone, the relations that maintain in the space of science, the public space, might be no more like *our* spatial relations than wave-motion is like light.

Mr. Russell seems to suggest (pp. 49, 50) that we cannot answer the ultimate questions about physical space and yet can be practically certain that we know the relations which maintain in it and which are the foundation of our private space-relations. "We can know the relations required to preserve the correspondence with sense-data, but we cannot know the nature of the terms between which the relations hold" (p. 50). In this passage "*know*," I take it, ought not to mean more than "infer with a reasonable degree of probability," and if it only means this, I cannot see that we are justified in ruling out further "knowledge" about the nature of the terms between which the relations hold. And in face of the notorious difficulties about "the continuum,"

¹ Italics original.

"Achilles and the tortoise," etc., it is hard to see how it can be denied that until such further knowledge is obtained the first must be felt to be very insecure. The trouble for the ordinary student is this: the mathematical conceptions of space seem to imply either that along these lines no ultimate explanation is conceivable, or to offer an explanation too paradoxical for acceptance. Therefore the inquirer remains haunted by the suspicion that there is more in space and space-relations than a merely mathematical conception *as such* can supply, and he wants to get hold of that "more," and cannot be satisfied until he has, and until he sees how it could be connected with the mathematical conceptions themselves.

§ 2. *Berkeley, Sense-data and the Mind* (pp. 64 ff.).—"Berkeley was right in treating the sense-data which constitute our perception of the tree as more or less subjective, in the sense that they depend upon us as much as upon the tree, and would not exist if the tree were not being perceived." Mr. Russell in criticising Berkeley's inferences from this makes the important point that this does not suffice to establish that *whatever* can be immediately known *must* be in a mind, and he draws a very useful distinction between the mental act of apprehension and the thing apprehended, which need not, so far as the argument has gone, be conceived in every case as mental. But Mr. Russell goes on (p. 65) to ask concerning such a thing as the colour of his table: "Is there any reason to suppose that the thing apprehended is in any sense mental?" He evidently means the answer to be "No," but I should have thought that on his own showing the answer in this case ought certainly to be "Yes": that the thing apprehended was certainly in one sense mental, the sense relevant, namely that the colour, as a colour, "depends on him as much as on the table and would not exist if the table were not being perceived."

§ 3. *Direct Perception and the Object of Knowledge* (chap. v.).—Mr. Russell uses the convenient phrases: (a) "Knowledge by acquaintance," and (b) "Knowledge by description."

(a) "Knowledge by acquaintance" stands for the knowledge of anything "of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths" (p. 73).

(b) "Knowledge by description" stands for that knowledge where we are not directly acquainted with the object but "know truths connecting it with things with which we have acquaintance" (p. 74). Among such objects would be "physical objects (as opposed to sense-data)" and "other

people's minds" (p. 81). He adds (p. 84) that "the thought in the mind of a person using a proper name can generally only be expressed explicitly if we replace the proper name by a description". For instance, when we make a statement about Bismarck, we intend and would like to make it about Bismarck himself, an object with which, however, we are not "acquainted". But, Mr. Russell states, although we are not acquainted with it, we know there is such an entity (p. 89): "we know that there is an object B, called Bismarck, and that B was an astute diplomatist". I should have thought, so far as the argument has gone, that it was safer to say only "we have good reason for believing": but what I find most difficulty in is the "fundamental principle" given immediately afterwards on page 91: "Every proposition which we can understand is composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted". Unless "understand" is used in a special sense,—*e.g.* to mean "grasp all the bearings and implications of"—I do not see how to reconcile this with the preceding (p. 89). In the ordinary sense of the word "understand," *i.e.* "attach a recognisable meaning to," I should have thought it was quite clear that we *did* "understand" the proposition about the real Bismarck, and further that the real Bismarck was a constituent of that proposition. I suppose this opinion of mine would involve the belief that something would be "before our minds" (p. 90) with which we were not acquainted, but I do not see that this need be an insoluble difficulty (although I admit that I do not fully understand in what sense exactly it would be "before the mind"). In fact I should like to think such a belief was true, because it looks as though it might lead on to the view that the mind of man had a real hold on everything which it can think of,—on the entire universe indeed, seeing it can think of that,—and that this "hold" was capable of developing into articulate knowledge. Plato in the *Theætetus* seems to suggest something of the kind. But, however that may be, whenever in daily intercourse we want or intend to make a statement about an actual person, say Julius Cæsar or Bismarck, I cannot see that it helps matters at all to say that the real statement means something involving instead of Julius Cæsar (or Bismarck)—"some description of him which is composed wholly of particulars and universals with which we are acquainted" (p. 91). Because after all the essential part of the description is that it is "*of him*," *i.e.* refers to that object with which we are *not* acquainted but in which we *are* interested. It is that reference which

seems to me not only a constituent, but an essential one, in the judgment.

§ 4. *The Principle of Induction*.—This is formulated by Mr. Russell so as to allow for induction straight from particulars to particular, as well as from particulars to a general rule, *e.g.* (p. 103):—

“When a thing of a certain sort A has been found to be associated with a thing of a certain other sort B, and has never been found dissociated from a thing of the sort B, the greater the number of cases in which A and B have been associated, the greater is the probability that they will be associated in a fresh case in which one of them is known to be present”.

Mr Russell says,—and I am entirely prepared to accept it, so far as the principle *thus stated* is concerned,—that “the probability of the general law is obviously less than the probability of the particular case, since if the general law is true, the particular case must also be true, whereas the particular case may be true without the general law being true” (p. 104).

But later on (p. 124) he infers from this that it is better to argue “A, B, C are mortal, therefore Socrates is mortal” than to go the roundabout way—

“All men are mortal.
Socrates is a man.
∴ Socrates is mortal”.

Now the point I wish to raise is this:—

The inductive principle as stated does not seem to me, *taken alone*, to be self-evident at all. It would, on the other hand, be self-evident, *on the supposition* that there really is an intelligible essential connexion, ultimately discoverable though as yet undiscovered (see p. 166) between certain characteristics (“universals”) connected with the cases in question. If there is such a connexion, then the one characteristic will always be accompanied by the other, and if so, then it is evident that the inductive principle is a good rough guide to the discovery: otherwise I do not see its logical justification.

This appears to be the way Aristotle conceived the matter, and the form of the syllogism was designed by him to bring out this point. I mean that, for example, we believe that Socrates dies, not because he is *Socrates*, but because he is a *man*: we believe that there is some connexion between the universal “man” and the universal “mortal”. At the same time I quite agree with Mr. Russell that we do not see what

it is. But is it not the aim of science and of every-day inquiry alike to get on the tracks of some such connexion? Let me take Mr. Russell's witty instance of the man who has fed the chicken every day and at last wrings its neck instead, "showing that more refined views as to the uniformity of nature would have been useful to the chicken" (p. 98).

The refined views, it seems to me, would have shown the chicken that two syllogisms were formally possible:—

"All men with a disinterested love for chickens will feed them daily.

This man has a disinterested love for chickens.

∴ This man will feed them daily."

"All men who want to eat chickens will feed them daily.

This man wants to eat chickens.

∴ This man will feed them daily."

The point for the chicken was to look for something that would show which of these syllogisms was appropriate to the case in hand.

It is the search for a true "middle term," in Aristotelian phrase, for the true connexion between universals relative to the case in point, that is the vital matter. And this point seems altogether obscured if we pass straight from particulars to particular.

This question, I imagine, is closely connected with Hegel's "transition" from the categories of the syllogism to the conception of a self-differentiating Notion, a Notion accompanied by subordinate Notions, "the connexion between the first Notion and its subordinates being intrinsic" (McTaggart: *A Commentary on Hegel's Logic*, § 231).

§ 5. *The Doctrine of Universals*.—This is one of the most interesting, and most difficult, theories in the book.

There seem to be two senses in which the word "universal" is used, and I am not sure of the connexion between them.

(1) "Universality" may denote what I might call, perhaps, for want of a better word, "predicability": I mean the fact of being a characteristic that can be conceived as predicable of one particular thing or more.

This sense seems to follow from pages 143, 145, and from the distinction suggested there between certain things which are *not* universals, *e.g.*, particular sense-data as particular, individual human beings, moments of time, etc., and in opposition to these, those general characteristics represented by substantives other than proper names, adjectives, prepositions, and verbs, all of which *are* universals.

I feel this a very important distinction, and I am quite prepared to hold that no knowledge is possible without "universals" in this sense, but my trouble is that I do not see the connexion of this meaning with the other, *viz.*,—

(2) "Universality" as implying that the thing in question can be an *object of thought* and can be thought of by two different men and by the same man twice (p. 155).

For I should have thought that *in this sense* moments of time, particular sense-data, and individual personalities were themselves capable of being "universals," capable of being objects of thought in themselves *over and above* the characteristics by which we mark them out, though I am prepared to believe *not without* those characteristics.

It seems quite possible for me to think twice of the particular moment of my waking on June 4, 1909, and for another person to think of it also. When we hang a man, surely we hang *him* and not his general characteristics only, and it may be presumed that we think about him when we do it,—certainly we ought to.¹

Even to discuss a particular sense-datum *as a particular* seems to me to imply that it is even as such an object of thought. I imagine it would follow from this that our sense-data after all may not be quite so private as we thought—(nor yet our personalities nor our moments of time)—that there may be something in them that is *communicable*, but there might be no reason to object to that. We might agree that "one man's act of thought is necessarily a different thing from another man's" (p. 155), and yet see no reason to deny that there was also an element of identity between them.

Again, it is said that "all mental facts" and "all facts concerning sense-data" have a certain "privacy" (p. 213), in the sense that no one can be acquainted with them except the person who has them. Universals, on the contrary, are said not to have this privacy, "many minds may be acquainted with the same universals." Now some of the universals in question, *e.g.*, *whiteness*, we become acquainted with (pp. 158, 159) simply by abstracting from our sense-data, *e.g.*, from many impressions of *white*. How then do we attain to this element of "universal acquaintability" if it was not already present somehow in the sense-data themselves? I should have thought that my conception of the "universal" *whiteness*, and my perception of the particular "sense-datum" *white* were, so far as communicability goes, on essentially the same footing

¹ See § 3, *Direct Perception of the Object of Knowledge*.

I do not see how I can be absolutely certain that my "whiteness" even resembles another's "whiteness" any more than that my particular sensation of "white" even resembles his particular sensation of "white," but unless I assume in both cases that there is *some* "object," *some* common element, over and above *my* sensation and conception merely taken as such, yet which is latent in such, I do not see how communication is to be held possible at all.

§ 6. *Hypothetical Knowledge à priori*.—On page 117 it seems to be stated clearly that, although the knowledge that anything exists can only be attained by experience, hypothetical knowledge *concerning* existence is attainable *à priori*: "it tells us that *if* one thing exists another must exist, or more generally that if one thing is true, another is true".¹

Again on page 132 it is said "we do not know who will be the inhabitants of London a hundred years hence: but we know that any two of them and any other two of them will make four of them".

The matter is of the highest importance, because, as Mr. Russell points out, the acceptance of this position seems to imply that we are "able to know some truths in advance about particular things of which we have as yet no experience" (p. 131), and in this sense to "anticipate experience". But later on (pp. 162 ff.) Mr. Russell seems to consider this implication not justified, and I want to know if I have understood him correctly. He seems to hold that although we can have *à priori* knowledge about the *properties* of particulars—"universals"—we cannot have it about the particulars themselves.

Now I should be quite prepared to agree that we cannot have *à priori* knowledge *involving the categorical assertion of existence* about particulars, but I find it very hard to admit that we cannot have *à priori hypothetical* knowledge about them, or that such "knowledge" is not, so far as it goes, knowledge. In short although I should agree that the *à priori* knowledge involved in our general statement about two and two being four "does not itself assert or imply that there are such particular couples" (p. 164), I yet find it very hard to admit that "our knowledge" thus fails to make "*any statement whatever* about any actual particular couple".²

I should have thought that although no *categorical* statement was implied, yet a *hypothetical* one was, and a hypothetical statement is still a statement. The possible, I should have thought, must somehow include all and any of the

¹ Italics original.

² Italics mine.

actual, and the general statement must involve statements about all the possible.

I imagine, and evidently Mr. Russell agrees, that this way of putting the matter involves the belief that we could have valid thought about something (here the particulars in question) with which we are not acquainted.

Mr. Russell objects to this,—and perhaps the objection is the foundation of his theory in this chapter,—but, as I said above (see the paragraph on Direct Perception and the Object of Knowledge) I find it much more difficult to deny it than to accept it. It may indicate a mysterious ultimate union between Thought, Being, and Existence, but that might in the end prove very satisfactory.

In conclusion, to put it in concrete form, as Mr. Russell does, I find it very hard to accept the statement (p. 165) that, although “we know *a priori* that two things and two other things make four things,” “we do *not* know *a priori* that if Brown and Jones are two and Robinson and Smith are two then Brown and Jones and Robinson and Smith are four. The reason is that this proposition cannot be understood at all, unless unless we know that there are such people as Brown and Jones and Robinson and Smith, and this we can only know from experience.”

7. *Self-evidence* (chap. xi. pp. 178 ff.).—In the first instance two kinds of self-evidence are distinguished, both concerning truths of sense-perception.

(1) The kind which “simply asserts the *existence* of the sense-datum, without in any way analysing it. We see a patch of red, and we judge ‘there is such-and-such a patch of red,’ or more strictly ‘there is that’” (p. 179).

Now I want to ask, does this “truth” differ except *formally* from the sense-datum on which it is based?

If it in *no* way involves analysis I should think it did not. But does it in no way involve analysis? Is it clear that there is not, after all, a certain amount of analysis necessary even for the minimum “there is that,” namely, the amount involved in marking it off from other sensations before, after, or along with it? Could we recognise it even as a “that” without so much analysis as this?

Even waiving this point I feel a great difficulty in the doctrine (p. 225, cp. p. 73) that theoretically we can have complete knowledge of a thing by acquaintance without knowing *any* propositions about it. Surely we must at least know that “something is there”: or does Mr. Russell only mean any *other* proposition than this? If he means strictly no proposition at all, is not this knowledge of sense-

data by acquaintance an entirely dumb thing which can give no account of itself? And ought so queer a kind of knowledge as that to be called knowledge at all? This "knowledge by acquaintance" seems to come very near to F. H. Bradley's conception of "Feeling," so far as I grasp the latter, but then Bradley, as I understand, thinks that it is exactly this unsatisfactory character of Feeling that drives the mind on to real knowledge. Of course this is a vital point, and bound up, perhaps, with the heart of the Hegelian position (p. 225). As I understand Hegel, such "acquaintance" could not *be* acquaintance until it could give an account, an ultimately coherent account, of itself. To begin this it would have to make at least one proposition, and to understand that proposition fully would lead it on to the whole set.

Returning to the chapter immediately before us (c. xi.) we find a second sort of self-evidence¹ where—

(2) "The object of sense is complex, and we subject it to some degree of analysis. If, for instance, we see a *round* patch of red, we may judge 'that patch of red is round'" (p. 179). Mr. Russell points out that here we have "a single sense-datum which has both colour and shape". "Our judgment analyses the datum into colour and shape and then re-combines them by stating that the red colour is round in shape." He goes on to point out that here, and, to give another example, in the judgment—"this is to the right of that," where "this" and "that" are seen simultaneously—"the sense-datum contains constituents which have some relation to each other and the judgment asserts that these constituents have this relation".

From the passage closing the chapter (pp. 183-185) it would appear that he considers all such truths of perception as these—i.e., I take it, wherever the mind is faced with a single sense-datum (simple or complex, analysed or unanalysed) and does not go beyond the sense-datum—possess that "very highest degree of self-evidence" which implies "absolute certainty".

Now in such judgments it seems natural to say that the mind *believes* the judgment it makes. But I am not sure if Mr. Russell would allow this or not. He speaks, it is true, (p. 195) of "*judging* or *believing*" as though they implied each

¹ Mr. Russell says—"perhaps in the last analysis the two kinds"—of self-evident truths of perception—"may coalesce"—and I would much like his own commentary on that statement, making it plain whether he thinks the first ought to be reduced to the second or the second to the first.

other. But on page 193 he seems to rule out from beliefs those cases where there is "a relation of the mind to a single object which could be said to be what is believed". His reason for doing this is the necessity of allowing for falsehood, because "if belief were so regarded"—i.e. as a relation to a single object—"we should find that, like acquaintance, it would . . . have to be always true". And obviously there are some false beliefs. Certainly I should quite agree, for the reason given, that it would not do to *limit* belief to cases where the mind was related to a single object, but, unless there are *some* such beliefs, or unless we can make true judgments *without* belief, how can we talk of such "truths of perception" as those of the first type given on page 179, where the mind is faced with a single "sense-datum"? For the rest I cannot see that there is any reason to object to the existence of certain beliefs which cannot be mistaken, e.g., where the judgments do not go beyond the sense-data.

The last thing I want to do is to cavil over a verbal point, but I want to know exactly where Mr. Russell places the first type of judgments given on page 179, whether he would only refuse the term "beliefs" to them because they are so-to-speak, *above* mere belief—being certain—or whether he thinks in the last resort they would turn out to be cases where the object of belief is complex.

This brings me to the second type of judgments given on page 179, and for these also, as I mentioned, certainty seems sometimes to be claimed (pp. 183-185). But later on this certainty appears illusory: for it seems we never can know when we have got it (pp. 210-214).

What might be called the "formal condition" of infallibility is given, so far as I understand, in the paragraph where two ways of knowing any fact are distinguished, *viz* :—

- (1) "by means of a judgment, in which its several parts are judged to be related as in fact they are related ;
- (2) by means of *acquaintance* with the complex fact itself, which may (in a large sense) be called perception, though it is by no means confined to objects of the senses" (p. 211).

Now, "the first way," it is said, "like all judgment, is liable to error". But "the second way gives us the complex whole," and the conclusion is drawn that "a truth is self-evident, in the first and most absolute sense, when we have acquaintance with the fact which corresponds to the truth" (p. 212).

This is promising, but on page 214 a great difficulty

appears. I do not see what use the self-evidence of the truth is to us unless we can know that we have got it, and I do not see how we can know this unless we know that we have the acquaintance which would ensure it, or know that unless we can be certain of the correctness of *some* judgment based on that acquaintance. Now this is exactly what Mr. Russell here says we cannot be. "Suppose we first perceive the sun shining, which is a complex fact, and thence proceed to make the judgment 'the sun is shining'. In passing from the perception to the judgment, it is necessary to analyse the given complex fact: we have to separate out 'the sun' and 'shining' as constituents of the fact. In this process it is possible to commit an error; hence even where a *fact* has the first or absolute kind of self-evidence, a judgment believed to correspond to the fact is not absolutely infallible."

What I want to arrive at is this: Does Mr. Russell believe that any truth or judgment whatsoever (implying analysis or not) that is based on sense-data and confined to them is certain or not? If not, what basis for truth have we here? And in connexion with this, another question: Does he believe that *any* judgments whatsoever are certain? I find his statements somewhat conflicting (*e.g.* pp. 112, 187, 210, 217): and if *no* judgment at all is certain I hardly see how we can talk about truth at all.

§ 8. *Arithmetic and the Universe.*

"All arithmetic can be deduced from the general principles of logic."

This is not developed here, but there is a point involved that seems so interesting I would like to set it down. In Mr. Whitehead's little book on *Mathematics* ("Home Univ. Series") the same position is taken and put even more strongly: *viz.*, that Arithmetic and generally all Mathematics, deals with the most general and abstract qualities of things, qualities that are shared by *all* things. Now in the development of Algebra, which appears as only a more convenient system of Arithmetic, handling in a more compact form the same subject-matter, certain symbols appear, *e.g.* $\sqrt{-2}$, which seem to have no significance so long as we consider things from the mere standpoint of number *irrespective of direction*. But Mr. Whitehead points out that these symbols have a significance, and are useful, if we introduce the idea of *direction*, right, left, up, down.

If this is so we seem to be faced with an important alternative. Either we have to recede from the position that Arithmetic and Algebra deal with the most general qualities

of *all* things, or we have to admit that *direction* in some sense is an inherent constituent of all things: that although when we began investigating the subject we thought that mere Number as such was all that concerned us we found that really we were concerned with a great deal more. This certainly reminds one of Hegel's transition from the conceptions of One and Many to the conceptions of Quantity, though I am not sufficiently well-read in Hegel to be sure if such was his idea. (And in this connexion I should like to ask what, if anything, might be conceived to distinguish direction *in space* from other direction, and whether Direction and Number together would not also imply Amount?) There can be no doubt that it is fascinating to the imagination, this idea that the multiplication-table might conceivably hold the secrets of the universe, and that the Eternal having once uttered the rash remark that two and two make four, was committed to the creation of the world. But I am well aware that from first to last I have been speaking of things too high for me; which I understand not.