



The Ethos of Theorizing

Kyoko Murakami
Jim Cresswell
Tetsuya Kono
Tania Zittoun

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Edited by

Kyoko Murakami, Jim Cresswell, Tetsuya Kono
and Tania Zittoun

Editorial Assistant

Rita Diaz

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Chapter 3

Bertrand Russell's Philosophy of Logical Atomism and Neutral Monism

Abdul Latif Mondal
Aligarh Muslim University

SUMMARY

Neutral monism said that the mental and the physical are not fundamentally different things. This view holds that the mind and body are not separate substances, but only two aspects of "the neutral stuff". In neutral monism, Russell wanted a reconciliation of behaviourist psychology and relativity physics. The former reduced the psychological to physical and the latter the physical to non-physical. What was then left after these twin reductions was a neutral stuff which was neither physical nor mental, but which yet functioned as both physical and mental.

Neutral monism was a theory which Russell constructed on the basis of his earlier theory of logical atomism. The logical atoms were unanalysable basic units of simple statements or propositions. The logical atoms are not acquired by physical analysis but by the analysis of complex propositions. The knowledge of logical atoms was called by Russell "knowledge by acquaintance" that was differentiated from the "knowledge by description" of compound things. Knowledge by acquaintance was the direct knowledge by sense-data that the things produced and imprinted on the perceivers' mind. These sense-data were physical which presented themselves to mind, but mind and the objects were not substances as traditionally conceived, but the two functions of neutral stuff as described. Russell's account of neutral monism is an attempt to advance a metaphysical theory, which is ontologically neutral. He wants to underline that neither materialism nor idealism nor any intermediate reductionism is acceptable on methodological or philosophical psychology grounds.

INTRODUCTION

The Mind-Body problem is one of the foremost problems of philosophical psychology. It starts with Descartes who advanced a radical doctrine of mind-body dualism. For him, mind was pure consciousness and body was pure extension. In order to work out the relationship between radically different properties of mind and body, he advanced the doctrine of interactionism, which was replaced by psychophysical parallelism of Spinoza. Leibnitz also critiqued mind-body dualism of Descartes through his theory of pre-established harmony. In mid 20th century, Gilbert Ryle in his *Concept of Mind*, declared all doctrines pertaining to mind-body relationship as emanating from what he termed as Category Mistake or a fundamental confusion with regard to mind and body as logically same or similar entities. Long before Ryle's book, Bertrand Russell worked out his analysis of the Mind-Body problem in such books as *Problems of Philosophy*, *Analysis of Matter*, *Analysis of Mind*, and *An Outline of Philosophy*.

Bertrand Russell is one of the most important and influential philosophers of the twentieth century. He is credited to have revived the British empirical tradition of Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Mill in opposition to the idealistic philosophy of Neo-Hegelians of his time. He wrote on a wide variety of philosophical subjects including epistemology and metaphysics. For more than 50 years, he wrote books in which he

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This book is a collection of peer-reviewed papers presented at the 2017 International Society for Theoretical Psychology (ISTP) Conference held at Rikkyo University, Tokyo, Japan. The papers examine the ethical dimension of psychology both as subject matter and as discipline. They reflect the idea that theorizing, including the epistemological and ontological concepts, ought not just to be something abstract and detached, but can be deeply embedded in and intertwined with ethical and normative considerations. Theorizing is a practice that engages theoretical psychologists in a critical examination of knowledge production. But doing “good” theory is also about taking responsibility for the implications and effects of theory, examining the relevance of theory to real world issues, building new communities, re-reading the history of the discipline, and—as this volume amply illustrates—challenging and critiquing the status quo.

The book’s highlights are two-fold. First, it showcases established and emerging scholars in Japan, giving their work the international visibility it deserves. Second, it offers an important reminder that the boundaries between theoretical psychology and other fields of knowledge production are blurred and in flux. Work within theoretical psychology has long tended towards transdisciplinarity, and profits from engagements not just with empirical and applied psychology, but also with neighbouring disciplines within the natural and social sciences and the humanities. This means that theoretical psychology is constantly evolving. To continue making a mark in the discipline of psychology and its related fields, the ISTP community aims to remain open to ideas and perspectives that may otherwise be dismissed and marginalized. Fringe issues do matter in order to expand and create new synergies, and for constant innovation in theoretical psychology.

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