

‘The problem of the relation of mind and matter can be completely solved’ Galen Strawson

I have found ... that by analysing physics and perception the problem of the relation of mind and matter can be completely solved. It is true that nobody has accepted what seems to me the solution, but I believe and hope that this is only because my theory has not been understood (1959: 15)

The view to which I have been gradually led is one which has been almost universally misunderstood and which, for this reason, I will try to state as simply and clearly as I possibly can (1959: 16)

terminus a quo *The Analysis of Mind* 1921

Bertrand Russell 1921 ‘wrong philosophy of matter which has caused many of the difficulties in the philosophy of mind—difficulties which a right philosophy of matter would cause to disappear’ (1921: 307)

Russell 1927 settled view of mind–body relation (*The Analysis of Matter* and *An Outline of Philosophy*)

Mary Calkins 1925 Russell is some sort of idealist realist ...

Russell is a physicalist in my terms, i.e. *real* physicalist, i.e. physicalist who is full-on realist about *consciousness*

Russell ‘main purpose’ of his theory is ‘to fit our perceptions into a physical context, ... to show how they might ... become part of physics’ (1922: 478)

objection Russell considers himself a neutral monist, so can’t be a physicalist

reply respect in which Russell is a physicalist is fully compatible with his being a neutral monist

Russell 1945 and 1964 still defining himself as a neutral monist, he says he could be called a materialist, or, ‘better’ (Russell 1945: 247), a physicalist.

analytic philosophy of mind ‘terminological slum’ (Wiggins)

propose to avoid (i) talk of ‘logical construction’ (ii) focus on causal laws ... helpful to lay out the issue out by talking simply in terms of different descriptions

terminology 1 ‘physicalism’ = [P1] everything that concretely exists is (wholly) physical

[P1] ≠ [P2] the terms of physics can fully capture, express, convey, the nature of everything that concretely exists

[P2] is obviously false—no one has been more eloquent on this point than Russell

Mary Shepherd 1824 ‘particular forms of expression, in which thoughts of an abstruse and subtle nature are introduced to the imagination, and grow familiar there, are so intimately associated with them, as to appear their just and accurate representative.—But these forms of expression, though clear and satisfactory to the person in whose mind they are so associated, may yet fail in conveying the same ideas with sufficient precision to the understandings of others’ (1824: vi)

Francis Bacon 1620 ‘words do violence to the understanding’ (1620: §43)

what about [P3] everything that concretely exists has a *physics description*, a description in the terms of physics? ... this may be supposed to be part of physicalism

why ‘physics description’ rather than ‘physical description’? It’s an attempt to keep things clear

terminology 2 ‘conscious’ *not* using the term in Russell’s preferred way, but in standard present-day way to mean any kind of ‘experiential what-it’s-likeness’ or ‘quality’ or ‘phenomenology’ whatever, however primitive

Russell’s preferred use of ‘conscious’ essentially implies the presence of cognition in addition to ‘experiential what-it’s-likeness’ .. ‘pure’ or ‘crude sensation’ (Russell 1921: 12) is not a matter of consciousness in Russell’s sense

‘W-conscious’ = wide use, ‘N-conscious’ = Russell’s usual narrower use .. [N → W], not [W → N]

real physicalism Russell and I both real physicalists, i.e. physicalists who are real realists about consciousness in both senses

Russell 1927 ‘we know nothing of the intrinsic quality of *physical* phenomena except when they happen to be *sensations*’ i.e. (W-)conscious phenomena (1927b: 154)

Russell 1927 given that we know nothing of the intrinsic quality of physical phenomena except when they happen to be sensations, there is ‘no reason to be surprised that some are sensations, or to suppose that the others are totally unlike sensations’ (ibid.).

Russell 1956 ‘we know nothing about the intrinsic quality of physical events except when these are mental events that we directly experience’ (1956: 153)

since this is so ‘we cannot say either that the physical world outside our heads is different from the mental world or that it is not’ (Russell 1956: 153)

Roy Wood Sellars 1927 only in the case of such direct experience are we ‘on the inside of nature’: in ‘consciousness alone are we on the inside of nature ... in consciousness we are literally on the inside of being in the case of our brains’ (Sellars 1927: 225, 1929: 486) [[Russell 1927 in having conscious experiences ‘we know about what is happening in the brain exactly what naive realism thinks it knows about what is happening in the outside world’ (1927b: 138, 143)]]

the ‘under-the-hat’ theory of mind ‘as it is derisively called by both idealists and Cartesian dualists’ (Sellars 1932: 411) = the mind–brain identity theory

it seems clear (1) if Russellian physicalism is neutral monism, Russellian physical stuff is neutral stuff (2) its neutrality must be compatible with view that sensation is (at the least) part of its intrinsic nature

nb stuff = general term for all concretely real phenomena without regard to traditional categorial distinctions, so e.g. events are stuff, qualities are stuff

terminology 3 ‘stuff’ entirely general term for concrete existence ... events, processes, intrinsic qualities ...

terminology 4 ‘physical’ x is physical = x is (i) real and concrete (= φύσις, *phusis*) (ii) the subject matter of physics

as a physicalist I think everything that falls under (i) falls under (ii) ... take ‘physical’ to be the name of single kind of fundamental stuff ... my physicalism is therefore a ‘stuff monism’

Russell’s definition(s) of ‘physical’ ‘the word “physical”, in all preliminary discussions, is to be understood as meaning “what is dealt with by physics” ... whatever [its] nature may prove to be’ (1914: 150) →

Russell to say that something is physical is not to say anything about what he calls its ‘intrinsic nature’ = its non-structural intrinsic nature (a thing’s structure may be said to be part of its intrinsic nature); not to offer any sort of descriptive characterization of it → ‘physical’ can’t stand opposed to ‘mental’

Russell ‘from the standpoint of philosophy the distinction between physical and mental is superficial and unreal’ (1927a: 402) ... to say that something is physical is not to say that it is not mental; to say that something is mental is not to say that it is not physical. Russell’s considered philosophical position, already in 1921 →

less than ideal that Russell continues to use ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ in the ordinary way as contrasting (indeed essentially opposed) terms: by ‘physical event’ often means something different from ‘event that is “dealt with by physics” taken in a purely referential way; means instead ‘event considered specifically in respect of those of its characteristics that we ordinarily think of as physical or call “physical” (not only those characteristics that physics picks up on, but also, more generally, those characteristics that we talk of in everyday terms relating to shape, size, position, motion, and so on)’

so too by ‘mental event’ he often means ‘event considered specifically in respect of those of its characteristics that we ordinarily think of as mental’; his settled position is that any such mental event, call it e_1 , is also an event that is ‘dealt with by physics’

laborious restatement [1] mental event e_1 is a physical event in straight metaphysical sense (call it ‘M-physical’, ‘M’ for ‘metaphysical’): it’s dealt with by physics when physics gives its account of the world. [2] e is obviously *not* a physical event in the ‘under a certain description’ sense of ‘physical’ when considered in respect of characteristics we ordinarily think of as mental (e_1 is not then a ‘D-physical’ event, ‘D’ short for ‘description’, rather a ‘D-mental’ event). [3] This is so even though it’s also D-physical when considered specifically in respect of those of its characteristics that physics picks up on

Russell standardly puts the point by saying that mental and physical events fall under different causal laws, physical (D-physical) events under the laws of physics, mental (D-mental) events under the laws of psychology. Here I’m sticking to talking in terms of different descriptions

Leopold Stubenberg the D/M ambiguity also affects ‘what is dealt with’, in the quotation from Russell, and Russell usually has the D sense principally in mind. True. Here I favour the M sense; it doesn’t affect the validity of the argument

Russell’s overall use of ‘physical’ unsatisfactory precisely to the extent that we need to distinguish between ‘D-physical’ and ‘M-physical’ in order to make full sense of it

many today still think that [x is physical → x is not conscious/qualial] ... they take ‘physical’ to have a certain descriptive content which includes ‘not conscious’

not Russell’s position he has no doubt that consciousness—e.g. sensation or perception—is wholly physical: ‘sensations [are] physical phenomena’ (1927b: 154); ‘physical events ... are mental events’ (1956: 153)

in sum two fundamentally different ways of describing things, as mental or physical, given the ordinary acceptance of these terms; but all of the same fundamental metaphysical kind =

monism! add the claim that things can be described in two different ways, neither of which has priority over the other → neutral monism ... here Mach, James, and Russell fully agree. But Russell very different from Mach and James

too crude to say that Russell de-epistemologizes neutral monism but captures something

Russell’s dual use of ‘physical’ retains the mental/physical distinction as a valid descriptive-classificatory distinction (the distinction between D-mental and D-physical) even while he scraps it as a fundamental metaphysical distinction

terminology 5 ‘mental’ most think that ‘ x is (W-)conscious’ entails ‘ x is mental’ ... Russell’s rejects this

imagine isolated 'bare' feeling or sensation W-conscious by definition, but not a mental event in Russell's sense

Russell df. *mind, mentality*, is essentially cognitive, essentially intentional, essentially systematic, essentially involves 'mnemic' phenomena (necessary for recognition, conceptualization)

Russell 1927 "'mental'" is a character, like "harmonious" or "discordant", that cannot belong to a single entity in its own right, but only to a system of entities'; 'mentality' is not a matter of 'the quality of single events' (1927b: 209, 292)

attraction of this df. allows one to say that all *mind* is a product of evolution, although *consciousness* isn't

terminology 7 'neutral monism' confusion! illustration: [1] the position Russell called 'neutral monism' in 1913 was form of extreme direct realism, so-called *naïve* realism ... but Russell had already settled definitively into a view about our knowledge of the 'external world' that most direct realists today would call 'indirect realism' → he was certainly not a neutral monist on the terms of the view he originally called 'neutral monism'. [2] James was a 'radical empiricist' ... Russell was never a *radical* empiricist: he rightly never doubted the *intelligibility* of the idea of a something-we-know-not-what that is the cause of our experiences, nor its *reality*

Russell's physicalism?

Russell 1944 'I find myself in ontology increasingly materialistic' (1944: 700) ... 'In ontology I start by accepting the truth of physics' (1944: 700)

Russell 1945 ['it would be better to substitute the word "physicalism" for the word "materialism"'] (1945: 247)

Russell 1957 'the epistemological aspect of my thinking has grown less' (letter to C. A. Fritz)— already true

What is this physicalism? obviously not fake physicalism, the consciousness-denying physicalism that some espouse today (why fake? because its claim to be a general theory of reality depends essentially on denying the existence of a vast part of reality that certainly exists)

real physicalism Russell with his 'robust sense of reality' (1919: 170) is an outright realist about consciousness

not Vienna Circle physicalism Russell also accepts this view, but it isn't a metaphysical view at all; it's a view about scientific language, the view that everything can in principle be described in the language of physics = [P3] everything that concretely exists has a *physics description*

[P3] = Vienna-Circle physicalism has no intrinsic connection with [P2] = fake physicalism ... Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap, Moritz Schlick all *real* physicalists = full-on realists about consciousness; but does have fatal *causal* connection: all one has to do to get from [P3] to [P2] is to take 'everything' in 'everything can in principle be described in the language of physics' in the wrong way

Neurath, Carnap, Schlick, Russell agree that descriptions of things offered by physics are intensely abstract, descriptively thin, and capture nothing or almost nothing about the intrinsic non-structural nature of reality

Schlick 1935 Vienna flytrap opens: 'the claim that an absolutely complete description of the world is possible by the use of physical methods; that every event in the world can be described in the language of physics, and therefore specifically, that every psychological proposition can be translated into an expression in which physical concepts alone occur' (1935: 399).... misunderstanding of 'absolutely

complete' reinforced by misunderstanding of 'translate'

Schlick 1935 by 'absolutely complete description of the world' Schlick means only what he immediately goes on to say—that 'every event in the world can be described in the language of physics'—that extraordinarily abstract language which says nothing at all about the qualities of the world.

You still haven't given Russell's own definition of physicalism! True. We have from Russell

[1] 'I find myself in ontology increasingly materialistic' (1944: 700)

[2] 'In ontology I start by accepting the truth of physics' (1944: 700)

[3] 'It would be better to substitute the word "physicalism" for the word "materialism"' (1945: 247).

add

[4] 'I should define "physicalism" as the doctrine that events are governed by the laws of physics' (1945: 247)

[5] events are Russell's fundamental concrete *realia*

[4] + [5] → no concrete reality that is not governed by the laws of physics → [P4]] everything that concretely exists is governed by the laws of physics

add

[6] 'I should define an event as "physical" when it is the sort of event that is dealt with by physics' (1945: 254)

here in spite of usual slipperiness in 'physical' and 'what is dealt with' (here Russell means 'D-physical' as also in [7] 'the physical is what is dealt with in physics' (1945: 253))

we can conclude that he holds that

[P1] everything that concretely exists is physical

—given that *all* events are dealt with by physics inasmuch as they are governed by the laws of physics ([P4])) and therefore have a physical (D-physical) description ... physics deals with sensations—all mental goings-on—just as much as with anything else there may be

Russell 1921 'physics ... is concerned with particulars of just the same sort as those which psychology considers under the name of sensations' (1921: 301). What is a sensation?

Russell 1927 'A sensation is merely one link in a chain of physical causation' (1927b: 156).

what is mind?

Russell 1927 'Mind is merely a cross-section in a stream of physical causation' (1927b: 156).

these are unequivocally M-physical uses of 'physical'. It's worth putting them next to another unequivocally D-physical use: 'I repeat that I mean by "mental" events the kind of events that someone can perceive, and by "physical" events the sort of events that are dealt with in physics' (1945: 255)

Russell's position

(i) events are ontologically fundamental

(ii) all events are subject to the laws of physics

(iii) in that core sense everything is correctly said to be physical, whatever else may or may not be said of it

(iv) W-consciousness ('experiential what-it's-likeness') is certainly known part of intrinsic nature of some physical events

(v) some sort of panpsychism may be true

attribution of (v) to Russell should not be controversial .. not a panpsychism of *mind* in Russell's sense (not a panpsychism of N-consciousness); panpsychism of W-consciousness ≈ panpsychism of late James, Eddington, Durant Drake, C. A. Strong, and many others at that time (+ Clifford, Fechner)

Russell is clear that W-consciousness—‘experiential what-it’s-likeness’, ‘qualiality’—might be everywhere .. can’t be ruled out, and strongly favoured by what Russell calls

‘the principle of continuity, which, though not logically necessary, has been found increasingly fruitful in science’ (1922: 483)

for which Russell has a deep and correct respect.

so to (i)–(iv) we add

(v) possible that W-consciousness is part (even perhaps all) of the intrinsic nature of all physical events

should remain sceptical in strict sense ... should also, however, be clear that

(vi) ‘if there is any intellectual difficulty in supposing that the physical world is intrinsically quite unlike that of percepts, this is a reason for supposing that there is not this complete unlikeness’ (Russell 1927a: 264)

there is a huge intellectual difficulty the traditional mind–body problem in all its gory glory

Russell 1927 ‘we no longer have to contend with what used to seem mysterious in the causal theory of perception: a series of light-waves or sound-waves or what not suddenly producing a mental event apparently totally different from themselves in character. As to intrinsic character, we do not know enough about it in the physical world to have a right to say that it is very different from that of percepts’ (1927a: 400)

and we have reason to think that it is not

Russell 1927 ‘the events that happen in our minds are part of the course of nature, and we do not know that the events which happen elsewhere are of a totally different kin’ (1927b: 311)

Russell 1929 Eddington ‘disagrees with neutral monism, and holds instead to the doctrine of “mind-stuff”, although he is careful to explain that this need not be either mind or stuff. I disagree with this doctrine, because I hold that mentality is a form of organization, not a property of individual events’ (1929: 53)

unworthy of Russell! he knows that Eddington’s amusingly guarded use of ‘mind’* extends to any sort of putative ‘bare’ sensation (any W-consciousness). In Eddington’s terms, Russell himself asserts that part of the fundamental stuff of the world is certainly mind-stuff, doesn’t want to assert that all of it is, but he allows that it may be

*Eddington ‘To put the conclusion crudely—the stuff of the world is mind-stuff. As is often the way with crude statements, I shall have to explain that by “mind” I do not here exactly mean mind and by “stuff” I do not at all mean stuff’ (1928: 276) in the everyday sense of the word

Russell 1959 ‘there is supposed to be a gulf between mind and matter, and a mystery I think the mystery is produced by [i] a wrong conception of the physical world and by [ii] a Manichaeian fear of degrading the mental world to the level of the supposedly inferior world of matter’ (1959: 22)

[i] true of all those who think that there is a deep problem of consciousness [ii] has also been true of many—needlessly. If we grant that there is some difference of status between mind and matter, then what actually happens in a correct account of the so-called mind–matter relation is that we upgrade the world of matter to the status of the world of mind