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# The experience and knowledge of time, through Russell and Moore

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**Abstract:** This paper develops the account of our experience and knowledge of time put forward by Russell in his *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript. While Russell ultimately abandons the project after it receives severe criticism from Wittgenstein (though several chapters derived from it appear as articles in *The Monist*), in producing this manuscript *time*, and particularly the notion of *the present time*, play a central role in Russell's account of experience. In the present discussion I propose to focus largely on Russell's writing in 1912-3, comparing this with some of the remarks made about memory by Moore in 1910-11. My motivation is twofold. First as a matter of scholarship, to reveal an original interpretation of Russell's notion of immediate memory and of his view of our experience and knowledge of time over this period. Second as a matter of philosophical curiosity. There has been an increase in interest in temporal experience in contemporary discussions of the philosophy of mind, from memory and the imagination to the temporal aspects of perceptual experience. Russell's writing in 1912-3 provides us with a philosophically interesting account of temporal experience which has points of contact with contemporary debates.

**Key words:** Russell; Moore; Specious Present; Immediate Memory; Time.

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## Introductory remarks

In his own writing, Russell recalled how, at the turn of the Twentieth Century, he and Moore revolted against the neo-Hegelian, idealist tradition within which they had been educated in Cambridge and began to champion the method of analysis. As Russell recounted: “Moore led the way, but I followed closely in his footsteps. ...I think Moore was most concerned with the rejection of idealism, while I was most interested in the rejection of monism” (*My philosophical development*, 54).<sup>1</sup> Championing analysis, Russell writes his manuscript for *The Theory of Knowledge* (hereafter, *TK*). What he says he was at pains to provide – and sees James’ Neutral Monism (in the latter’s *Essays in Radical Empiricism*) as unable to provide – is an explanation of why the present time and the object of awareness at that time were so intimate to a given subject, as no other object or time is to that subject at that time; while also explaining how the same intimacy will belong to other subjects in relation to other times and objects (*TK*, 40).

Correspondence between Russell and Ottoline Morrell reveals that he produced the partial manuscript of *TK* between April and June of 1913, before abandoning the unfinished project. The existence of the partial manuscript came to light in 1967 when Russell’s papers were catalogued; at that time, Russell didn’t respond to inquiries about it (see Blackwell and Eames, “Russell’s Unpublished Book”, 4). The first 142 pages of the manuscript were also missing, but these are now taken to consist in a series of six articles that Russell published in *The Monist* of 1914 and 1915; several of these include discussions of the experience of time – particularly his “On the Experience of Time” (1915) – and these chapters of *TK* will be a main focus of the present article.<sup>2</sup> Russell stopped writing at page 350 – summarising a second part of the manuscript which he initially intended to be followed by a third part – following criticism from Wittgenstein on one or more of the major themes of the book, and never resumed (and in a letter to Ottoline Morrell he reported that being forced to abandon this work was an “event of first-rate importance in my life” [#1,123, 4 Mar. 1916]).<sup>3</sup>

In the present discussion I focus on Russell’s writing in 1912-3, and – through discussion of his understanding of the notion of the specious present, and the notion of immediate memory that he

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<sup>1</sup> Russell often stresses his indebtedness to Moore, but it’s not clear the extent to which Moore led the way in this new philosophy. See Griffin (“Russell and Moore’s Revolt”, 400-2) for discussion.

<sup>2</sup> There is some (disputed) evidence that these may have been revised from Russell’s earlier *TK* draft, see Perkins (“Russell’s unpublished book”).

<sup>3</sup> This letter is extracted and printed in Russell’s *Autobiography* (267). For a comprehensive overview of the history of the *TK* manuscript, see Blackwell and Eames (“Russell’s Unpublished Book”).

takes up from Moore – propose an account of his view, over this period, of our experience and knowledge of time. Russell is an interesting figure to consider because of his prominent role in British philosophy during this period. His interest in time is no surprise, given that he was educated at Cambridge by McTaggart, and had worked in close collaboration with Whitehead – who pioneered the process philosophy approach to metaphysics – on *Principia Mathematica*. Russell was frequently engaging with work from James, and through James’ writing on the experience of time he was – knowingly or not – engaging with the work of Hodgson;<sup>4</sup> and at this time he was writing – albeit rather dismissively – about Bergson (“The Philosophy of Bergson”). One motivation for the present discussion also comes from how Russell’s view over this period has, I believe, often been misinterpreted.

Russell’s views on experience have long captured scholars’ interest – notably, e.g., Pears (*Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition*; “Acquaintance in Russell’s Philosophy”) and Urmson (“Russell on Acquaintance”) – but when focused on the experience of time many have primarily concentrated on Russell’s view(s) of memory, such as Perkins (“Russell on Memory”), Baldwin (“Russell on Memory”; “Knowledge by Acquaintance to Knowledge by Causation”), and Martin (“Out of the Past”; “Old Acquaintance”). Few have specifically considered Russell’s view of the experience of time and his appeal to the notion of the specious present in *TK* – though see, e.g., Eames (“Russell and the Experience of Time”) – and those that do typically misconstrue his account, as I argue below.

In recent scholarship on Russell, Martin (“Old Acquaintance”) corrects some of the misconceptions of earlier writers regarding Russell’s use of the notion of the specious present, but he does so while ultimately taking Russell to offer a view of our experience of time which is absent of any distinctive form of memorial experience. I suggest that a somewhat more charitable and plausible view is attributable to Russell, on which we have past-like experience in what he calls immediate memory, and present-like experience over the specious present; where we gain knowledge of the past and present through these respective experiential relations (and where the future is only known descriptively as that which succeeds the present). I demonstrate that such an

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<sup>4</sup> While Hodgson (*Philosophy of Reflection*) seemed a great influence for James, it doesn’t appear as though Russell took himself to be engaging directly with the ideas of Hodgson in *TK*, not least because there are no direct references to Hodgson’s writing. Yet Russell must have known of Hodgson’s work in this area. While Hodgson stepped down as President of the Aristotelian Society in 1894, Carr (“Shadworth Hollway Hodgson”) recalls that Hodgson continued to attend and actively contribute to the meetings of the Society until his final illness and death in June 1912. Russell often attended meetings towards the end of this period, and he and Hodgson frequently took part in subsequent discussions (see, e.g., “Thirty-First Session”). Russell was also himself President of the Aristotelian Society from 1911-1913 (and again 1937-8).

interpretation is made plausible, at least in part, through reflecting on how Russell takes up the discussion of immediate memory from Moore (*Some Main Problems of Philosophy*; hereafter, *SMPP*). Revealing this interpretation of Russell's view – and, through the notion of immediate memory, its connections with Moore – is therefore an original insight of historical interest, bringing a new angle to how best to understand Russell (and Moore) on our experience and knowledge of time.

In what follows I briefly outline some assumptions behind Russell's (and Moore's) theorising during this period (§1) and present what I take to be the dominant, but mistaken, reading of Russell's account of the relationship between our experience and knowledge of time in 1912-3 (§2). Having introduced the notion of immediate memory (in §2), I then offer an interpretation of how this notion is being understood by Moore and Russell at this time (§3), explaining where my reading differs from Martin's, before turning to what I take to be the accurate reading of Russell's account of the relationship between our experience and knowledge of time in *TK* (§4).

## §1. Acquaintance and time

For Russell, “acquaintance is a dual relation between a subject and an object” (*TK*, 5). In his *Problems of Philosophy* (hereafter, *PP*), he says 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” (25). Russell postulates ‘sense-data’ as those paradigmatic things of which we are immediately aware, taking the term from Moore. Moore himself uses the term ‘sense-datum’ in a paper given to the Aristotelian Society (“The Subject-Matter of Psychology”, 57) and in the set of lectures he gave at Morely College, London, in the winter of 1910-11, later published as *SMPP*. As introduced, it is to stand for ‘whatever is given as the object of sensory awareness’ (and Moore appears to be committed, in the very definition of the term, to the idea that there is always an object of sensory awareness whenever one has sense experience).<sup>5</sup>

In their respective discussions, Russell and Moore each attempt to spell out the nature of sensory experience through relying, to an extent, on introspective reflection. While Russell takes sensory acquaintance – with sense-data – to be paradigmatic, he doesn't take the relation of acquaintance to be restricted to *sensory* acquaintance. Russell says that the restriction of acquaintance to sensory

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<sup>5</sup> This is how Moore presents his use of the term in 1910-11, but Moore did not coin the terminology (see Hatfield, “Perception and Sense-Data”, 951-2).

acquaintance would have the result that we can only know what is *now* present to our senses and “we could not know anything about the past—not even that there was a past” (*PP*, 26). He says that we have to consider further relations of acquaintance “if we are to obtain any tolerably adequate analysis of our knowledge” (*ibid.*). Such acquaintance is necessary, for Russell, because he holds that: “Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted” (*PP*, 32). He takes this latter claim to include universals, such as one-place and two-place (and so on) relations. Thus, in order to judge that *A* happened before *B*, for Russell we therefore must be acquainted with *A*, with *B*, and with the relation of temporal precedence (before/after).<sup>6</sup>

While our knowledge of time was one of Russell’s concerns in *PP*, it is more central in *TK*. In *TK* Russell makes use of introspective reflection on certain mental operations to reveal the (temporal) nature of these operations, assuming that the relational character of such operations is introspectively accessible. In broad strokes, he takes there to be three intrinsically and introspectively different temporal determinations of the acquaintance relation: sensation, memory, and imagination. In memory we aren’t merely related with past things, we are related to those things *as past*; in sensation we aren’t simply related to present things, we are related to things *as present*; and imagination is acquaintance with particulars not given as having any determinate temporal relation to the subject. For Russell, these different temporal flavours of the acquaintance relation are responsible for the very knowledge of time that we have. In the subsequent section I present the dominant, but (I suggest) mistaken, reading of how Russell develops these determinations of the acquaintance relation into an account of our experience and knowledge of time in 1912-3.

## §2. Russell’s view of temporal experience (1912-3): the dominant reading

Russell takes for granted that we know of various time-relations. We know the time relations of simultaneity and before/after, relations Russell attributes to physical time – i.e., McTaggart’s B-series (“The Unreality of Time”). We can also know of the relations of past, present, and future – i.e., McTaggart’s A-series – which are relations that Russell attributes to mental time. The appeal to mental time is an appeal to temporal relations holding between subjects and events. Given

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<sup>6</sup> While Russell takes acquaintance to be an enabling condition for knowledge, unlike James he does not take it to be a limiting condition, since denoting enables us to go beyond the limits of our acquaintance (for discussion see Proops, “Russellian Acquaintance Revisited”, 794; on James’ prior use of ‘acquaintance’ as a technical term, see 806–7).

Russell's view of knowledge at the time, to know such time-relations we must be acquainted with these time-relations. This much appears to be agreed upon by commentators. What I will dispute is exactly how we are so acquainted with such time-relations. According to the dominant view among commentators, this is through a combination of sensation and immediate memory – or, in what they take to be a broadly synonymous use of words (when applied to Russell's view at that time), it is through the specious present.

The notion of the specious present was introduced into the wider philosophical and psychological literature in William James' *Principles of Psychology*, though he credits Kelly with having coined the terminology, and draws extensively on Hodgson.<sup>7</sup> As developed by James, the specious present is said to be a short duration of which we are *immediately and incessantly sensible*, characterised in contrast to the mathematical present. Whereas the latter is durationless, the specious present is said to be of a brief extent, sufficient to accommodate succession and duration.

Under the influence of James, Russell is read as reasoning along the following lines. If we are only acquainted with an instantaneous state of affairs, then it would appear to follow that we could not have the knowledge of time-relations that we do. It is indubitable that we have such knowledge, and so we must reject the idea that we are only acquainted with an instantaneous state of affairs. That which a subject is acquainted with is therefore not confined to the instantaneous and is in fact of some positive (though a quite limited) temporal extent – i.e., the specious present. That Russell can be faithfully read as so appealing to the specious present to explain our knowledge of many temporal relations seems beyond reasonable doubt. What is up for debate is exactly how Russell is understanding both the notion of the specious present in *TK* and that which is responsible for its temporal breadth.

The question of the correct interpretation of Russell connects with a point of contention in contemporary discussions of the phenomenology of temporal experience; within this debate we can distinguish between two general views which, following Dainton ("Temporal Consciousness"), we can call the *Modal* and *Non-Modal*. On the Modal view, the phenomenology of the specious present is perspectival insofar as the successive contents within a single specious present appear under different temporal modes of presentation: some as 'present', others as 'just

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<sup>7</sup> For Kelly's characterisation, see the quote James attributes to 'Clay' (*Principles of Psychology*, 406). On the origins of the specious present, see Shardlow ("A Tale of Two Williams"); specifically on the confusion around Kelly being given the pseudonym 'Clay', see Andersen and Grush ("A brief history of time-consciousness"). For how Hodgson's writing relates to current debates regarding temporal experience, see Andersen ("The Hodgsonian Account of Temporal Experience").

past', others as 'more past' (see, e.g., Almäng, "Tense as a Feature of Perceptual Content"). On the Non-Modal view, the phenomenology of the specious present is not so perspectival and does not feature these temporal modes of presentation; the successive contents within a single specious present appear equally present (see, e.g., Lee, "Temporal Experience"). I argue that Russell offers a Non-Modal view; yet this is not how he has been popularly understood.

The dominant view among commentators would appear to be that Russell appeals to the specious present in order to explain our knowledge of *all* temporal relations – except 'future', which Russell says is only known descriptively as what succeeds the present (*TK*, 74). On this reading, the subject is said to have acquaintance in sensation with some – presumably instantaneous – sense-datum, in addition to retained acquaintance, in the form of what Russell calls immediate memory, with what was given in sensation immediately previously. So understood, the specious present may be said to be the temporal breadth of that which a subject is so acquainted with through the combined efforts of sensation and immediate memory. Being of a temporal breadth, the subject may be acquainted with the temporal relations of simultaneity and before/after within the specious present; and as immediate memory and sensation are responsible for its temporal breadth – and since immediate memory presents its object *as past* and sensation presents its objects *as present* – the subject is also acquainted with the temporal relations past and present within the specious present.<sup>8</sup>

Bostock certainly appears to offer a Modal interpretation, saying that Russell (in *TK*) only retained the idea of acquaintance with the past "...for what he calls 'immediate memory', which is my present experience of what happened only a moment ago, and which still counts as part of what I am experiencing now, since it is still part of my 'specious present', though I am aware that its original experience was in the past." (Bostock, *Russell's Logical Atomism*, 119).<sup>9</sup> Eames makes a similar claim, saying that, for Russell: "Present experience has a temporal spread to it within which the earlier, middle, and later parts are ordered in succession. This kind of present experience allows us direct knowledge of the immediate past (the earlier part of the specious present) ..." ("Russell

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<sup>8</sup> Whether or not it had a bearing on interpretations of Russell, it is possible to read Hodgson and James, who popularised the notion, as offering Modal views of the specious present (see, e.g., Hodgson, *The Metaphysic of Experience*, 35–36; James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 406).

<sup>9</sup> In response to Pears' (*Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition*) claims about Russellian acquaintance in memory, Urmson ("Russell on Acquaintance with the Past", 511-2) also insists that Russell only takes there to be such acquaintance across the temporal breadth of the specious present, where objects are given as both past and present in experience. For discussion of the dispute between Pears and Urmson, see Perkins ("Russell on Memory"). As Pears ("Acquaintance in Russell's Philosophy", 155) maintains, there are several places in which Russell gives examples of memory acquaintance with particulars beyond the bounds of the specious present.



and the Experience of Time”, 681-2). In saying this, Eames also directs the reader to *TK*, and says: “It seems, then, that Russell’s view of present experience includes that of immediate memory and succession in so far as he employs ‘the specious present’” (682; also see Miah, *Russell’s Theory of Perception*, 27).

Russell certainly presents a Modal view of the specious present in later writing (see, e.g., *The Analysis of Mind*, 174).<sup>10</sup> Yet, it is far from obvious that Russell wishes to commit himself to such a view in *TK* (see §4). This raises the question of why such a view is attributed to Russell if he does not explicitly endorse it. One possibility is highlighted by Martin (“Old Acquaintance”), who also critiques the attribution of a Modal specious present to Russell in *TK*. Martin suggests that it is the notion of acquaintance with the past in memory that readers find problematic. If Martin is correct, to avoid any such issue concerning memory acquaintance, and applying the principle of charity, theorists might have been moved to suppose that immediate memory was merely invoked by Russell to account for the temporal breadth of the specious present – this being viewed as less problematic.

A further possible explanation for the misinterpretation of Russell is that theorists find the alternative Non-Modal view of the specious present, which appeals to a sensed interval of time *as present*, incomprehensible – or incredibly implausible.<sup>11</sup> On this basis, and applying the principle of charity, they may not wish to attribute such a view to Russell. If this is part of the explanation, we need to say something about what is supposed to be so implausible about this view. It may be that theorists are moved by a broadly Augustinian line of reasoning.

Augustine famously argues that an objectively present moment would have to be durationless. If we suppose that the present lasts for a non-zero interval, then – so the reasoning goes – it would be divisible into earlier and later parts. If so divisible, then its parts cannot all be present – if some part of the interval is present, then some later part is future with respect to that part and some earlier part is past with respect to it. The conclusion Augustine draws is that the present cannot be so divisible and must be durationless (see *Confessions*, Book XI, §15 [264–6]). If theorists are moved by this line of reasoning, they may (explicitly or implicitly) take it to extend to the experiential (see, e.g., Le Poidevin, *The Images of Time*, 87-8). They may hold that it is nonsense to say that we could

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<sup>10</sup> Russell also adopts a different view of memory in later work (see, e.g., *The Analysis of Mind*, 159-60); for discussion of the differences between Russell’s earlier and later views of memory, see Baldwin (“Russell on Memory”).

<sup>11</sup> A further possibility is that Russell’s change of heart on this matter, and his later view, is simply read back into his earlier work.

perceive two events as present *and* perceive temporal precedence between the two; this is seemingly what leads Sellars to describe the specious present as “an incoherent combination of literal simultaneity and literal successiveness” (*Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes*, 232). As a result, theorists may be reticent to attribute such a view to Russell. I will outline how 1912-3 Russell may respond to such a worry below (§4). Before I turn to this, I first outline how to understand Russell’s notion of immediate memory (§3); having done so, I then explain how this notion features in Russell’s view of our experience and knowledge of time (§4).

### §3. Russell and Moore on immediate memory

If, as I suggest, Russell doesn’t appeal to the notion of immediate memory to provide an account of the specious present, we are left with the question of what exactly immediate memory is, for Russell. Martin (“Old Acquaintance”, 37) appears to suggest that there is no good account of what immediate memory is, in *PP* and *TK*, because of an equivocation over the notion of acquaintance. In what follows I present an alternative interpretation on which immediate memory is, for Russell, an experiential acquaintance relation, though distinguishable from sensation – in part, through its objects being felt *as past* rather than *as present*. To make my reading of Russell clear, I first outline Martin’s interpretation and what Martin finds unsatisfying in Russell’s view, before presenting Moore’s discussion of memory, highlighting its influence upon Russell, and explaining my reading of the latter’s notion of immediate memory.

Martin (“Old Acquaintance”, 35-36) presents two alternative readings of Russell’s notion of acquaintance. On the first reading, to be an object of acquaintance is to meet the following sufficient condition: that the object is so related to the mind that the subject can employ it in thought. On this reading, there is nothing distinctively experiential to be said about acquaintance. On the second reading, Russellian acquaintance provides a more substantive explanatory function: acquaintance firstly serves up an object for thought, and secondly it provides awareness of how the object is so served up (be it through sense experience, or memory, and so on). On this second reading, an experiential relation may do explanatory work in providing such awareness.

Martin reads Russell as equivocating between the above two general ambitions for the notion of acquaintance. When it comes to immediate memory in *PP* and *TK*, Martin takes Russell to ultimately commit himself only to the former notion. That is, Martin reads Russell as offering a

view on which there is no distinctively memorial form of experiential relation; where the experiential elements we commonly appeal to when discussing memory are instead attributed to presently entertained imagery. For example, when I conjure up an image of a cat that I saw a few seconds previously, on Martin's reading of Russell, memory acquaintance is invoked to account for the fact that I can entertain thoughts about the cat, but the experiential aspects of this episode are not attributed to memory; instead, they are said to be mere contingent accompaniments. This, Martin suggests, is what ultimately makes Russell's proposal unsatisfactory.

Martin offers two considerations to make such an interpretation of Russell plausible. First, unlike in earlier work, Russell does not here explicitly explain memory acquaintance in terms of presentation, and Martin takes this to suggest that he no longer thinks of memory acquaintance as a kind of presentation. Second, Martin takes Russell's distinction between the object of memory and memory images to demonstrate that, for Russell, "any experiential element belongs to imagery, and so not to memory itself" ("Old Acquaintance", 37). That is, Martin reads Russell as attributing any experiential elements to presently entertained imagery rather than to memory, there being no experiential acquaintance relation with past objects. I grant that Russell is keen to distinguish presently entertained imagery of past things from 'true memory' (see, e.g., *TK*, 9-10), but it does not follow that Russell wishes to attribute *any and all* experiential elements to presently entertained imagery.

Contrary to Martin's interpretation, we can best make sense of Russell's claims on a reading of his proposal in *PP* and *TK* where he does take there to be an experiential element to our acquaintance with past objects in immediate memory. (That there is, for Russell, an experiential element to our acquaintance with the past is what the dominant reading gets right. Though I argue, with Martin, that the dominant view is wrong to assign this experiential element to the specious present and it is wrong if it characterises this experiential element as presentational in any sense that would assimilate it too closely to sense-data or mental imagery.) It is plausible that Russell's reading of an unpublished set of Moore's lectures (later published as *SMPP*) contributed to his focusing upon, and his understanding of, the notion of immediate memory.<sup>12</sup> Through reflection on this connection between Moore and Russell, we can make sense of Russell's distinction between the objects of memory and memory images without abandoning the more substantive notion of

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<sup>12</sup> In the preface to *PP*, Russell says that he derived valuable assistance from unpublished writing of Moore's; in the preface to *SMPP*, Moore says that these writings were the first 10 of the 20 lectures published in *SMPP*.

acquaintance in immediate memory, and while maintaining that the appeal to a memorial form of the acquaintance relation can be motivated by reflective analysis of memory experience.

In one of his lectures Moore poses himself the following question: “When I remember a thing, is it or is it not the case, that the images which I directly perceive at the moment of memory are identical with the *object* of memory – with *what* I remember?” (*SMPP*, 237). This, Moore says, is a very confusing question and calls for distinctions that aren’t easily expressed in words. Of particular interest, Moore stresses a need to distinguish between true memory of an object and an accompanying image of said object. He suggests that we often do enjoy present images of past things, but that true memory refers to something known to be past and not the image presently enjoyed, and that there can be such cases of true memory *whether or not* you are now directly perceiving any image of that thing (*SMPP*, 238).

Moore emphasises that it is extraordinarily difficult to introspectively attend to what, other than some relevant imagery, is before our minds when we remember; even if we are convinced that there is something there to be attended to, he says that it is extraordinarily difficult to reveal *the way in which* this something is before our minds (*SMPP*, 244). But he says that it can be proven that in (at least certain cases of) memory we are conscious, in a way that is difficult to specify, of things which are not presently sensed sense-data. In support of this claim, he says that the image one conjures up in memory can be known to be different from the original sense-datum – sensed immediately previously – in certain respects, and to know this one must also be conscious *of* the original sense-datum itself, not merely the image.

Regarding the way in which the subject is conscious of the original sense-datum, Moore says that all that can be said with certainty is that you are conscious of it “in the obscure sense in which it is necessary that you should be conscious of it, in order to know that it was different from the image – different, therefore, from anything which you are directly perceiving” (*SMPP*, 246). He takes it for granted that we do know that memory-images are often not identical with a given past sense-datum and says that he can only point out that, in this instance, there must be a way in which the original sense datum – that which is being compared with the presently enjoyed imagery – is before the mind: “that the obscure kind of consciousness I have spoken of does sometimes actually occur” (*SMPP*, 247). Russell appeals to very similar considerations in the context of his discussion of immediate memory in *PP* and *TK*.

Distinguishing immediate memory from memory images, Russell says:

There is some danger of confusion as to the nature of memory, owing to the fact that memory of an object is apt to be accompanied by an image of the object, and yet the image cannot be what constitutes memory. ... we are certainly able to some extent to compare our image with the object remembered, so that we often know, within somewhat wide limits, how far our image is accurate; but this would be impossible, unless the object, as opposed to the image, were in some way before the mind. Thus the essence of memory is not constituted by the image, but by having immediately before the mind an object which is recognized as past... (*PP*, 66)

Russell, like Moore, says that we often know that memory-images are not identical with a given past sense-datum. For example, when I conjure up an image of the cat I saw a few seconds ago, I may know that this image does not accurately capture the appearance of the cat in various respects. For one to know this, he says, the original sense-datum itself must be, in some way, before one's mind. Such a parallel between Russell and Moore is interesting to note because of how some commentators have suggested that Moore's discussion of memory, in this context, undermines Russell's principle that every proposition that we can understand must be wholly composed of constituents with which we are acquainted (see, e.g., Baldwin "G. E. Moore and the Cambridge School of Analysis", 435). Given that Russell appears to broadly agree with Moore's claims about memory – as well as holding that we do know (by acquaintance) various things about the past – we are due some explanation of how, for Russell, a subject can be acquainted with some past sense-datum where this is not, in Moore's terms, anything which the subject is directly perceiving (neither *present* sense-datum nor *presently entertained* image).

Russell says that memory acquaintance is to be distinguished from sensation as a different form of acquaintance relation, rather than there being a single acquaintance relation with different objects (i.e., sense-data and memorial-data), but this is not yet to say what this relation to the past consists of. Russell focuses on our knowledge of the immediate past: "the short period during which the warmth of sensation gradually dies out of receding objects, as if we saw them under a fading light" (*TK*, 72). In this context he approvingly quotes James as saying that it is this experience which is "the *original* of our experience of pastness, from whence we get the meaning of the term" (*TK*, 72; James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 605). (And although objects are given as past in immediate memory, he is committed to saying that to know what is meant by 'past' an immediate remembering must itself be made the object of experience, in introspection.) He rules

out that talk of a ‘fading light’ should be read as an appeal to physiological memory – i.e. afterimages – on the basis that nothing in introspection alone shows that this is memory. With afterimages and other akoluthic sensations he says that the sense-datum is actually present, though faint, and we infer that the stimulus has ceased. He also appears to rule knowledge of remote portions of the past out of consideration, saying that such knowledge is difficult to analyse, as well as being liable to error.

Russell thus terms ‘immediate memory’ that relation we have “to an object which has recently been a sense-datum, but is now felt as past, though still given in acquaintance”, and he takes this relation to be intrinsically distinguishable from sensation and to be a primitive constituent of experience (*TK*, 73). Taking immediate memory to be a primitive constituent of experience explains how, for Russell, a subject can be acquainted with some object that was recently a sense-datum but where this object is not, in Moore’s terms, anything which you are now directly perceiving (neither *present* object of sense nor *presently entertained* image). Yet, it doesn’t follow that there is nothing experiential to this relation. Martin is correct to say that, for Russell, the experiential aspects of presently entertained imagery must merely be an accompaniment to memory, but it is a further claim to say that “[a]nything that is experience-like in an act of recall must be assigned to present imagery” (“Old Acquaintance”, 35). The second claim is stronger because it rules out that there could be anything other than present imagery that could be experience-like in recall, but this idea, I suggest, is precisely what Moore and Russell can be read as motivating.

That Russell wishes to make room for such an experience-like element to immediate memory is made textually plausibly in several ways. First, echoing Moore’s strategy, Russell talks of comparing the object of memory with present imagery – e.g., comparing the cat being recalled and the image of the cat that one conjures up – taking both to be before the mind in such a way as to make the comparison possible. Second, Russell talks of more than mere knowledge of the past; he says, for example, that the object of immediate memory is “felt as past” (*TK*, 73), unlike any present imagery. Furthermore, he frequently describes the immediate acquaintance with past objects as being given in a way which “enables us to know that they are past” (*TK*, 72), and being “such as to give rise to knowledge that the object is in the past” (*TK*, 72); here he repeatedly describes the objects of immediate memory as being *given in such a way* that we are able to know about the past, rather than these objects merely being such that the subject can employ them in thought. Third, and finally, Russell describes immediate memory as being “intrinsically distinguishable from

sensation”); thus, being a different relation between object and subject, and as being ‘a primitive constituent’ of experience (TK, 73). These passages support a reading of Russell’s view on which we have not only knowledge of the past together with present imagery, but past-experience. This is **not** to be understood as analogous to sensory acquaintance though with a temporal modifier of ‘past’ rather than ‘present’. Yet this past-experience, for Russell, is nonetheless to be thought of as a substantive memorial form of the acquaintance relation regardless of any presently entertained imagery, and which can be distinguished from such imagery (and from sensation) in reflective analysis of experience.

Is the above proposal too vague or implausible to attribute to Russell? I grant that no great positive account of the nature of this immediate memory, or its supposed experiential elements, is offered. Moore admits that he doesn’t know what else to say about this form of memory, other than that it exists; Russell takes it to be a primitive constituent of experience, distinguishable from sensation through its objects being felt *as past*, rather than *as present*. This isn’t a particularly substantive positive characterisation, but it does not follow that we cannot make sense of such a form of memory. There is much more to be said, but if we can follow the instructions of Moore and Russell (of conjuring up the relevant imagery while judging that the imagery differs in important ways from the sense-datum experienced in the recent past) then we might take this to be evidence that there is the relevant form of memory – that we can enjoy experience-like awareness of the object of immediate memory, such that we are able to judge any presently entertained imagery by comparison.

In Moore and Russell, the relevant form of memory is said to be subtle and difficult to articulate, as is often the case with aspects of experience that nonetheless garner much philosophical attention (see, e.g., Moore’s discussion of the diaphaneity of experience and the subsequent literature on the transparency of experience in the philosophy of perception). Whatever we ultimately say about the merits of the proposal (and I will leave further elucidation of the notion for future work, given the present space constraints), I take the above to demonstrate the plausibility of a reading of Russell on which, influenced by Moore, he does take there to be such an experiential form of memory acquaintance, which not only serves up objects for thought but also provides awareness of the fact that the objects are so served up through memory, but where this is to be distinguished from any presently entertained imagery. Russell, with reference to James, also appeals to this relation of immediate memory to explain the source of our knowledge (by acquaintance) of the past. Having outlined Russell’s notion of immediate memory, we can return

to his understanding of the specious present, and his general view of our experience and knowledge of time, in 1912-3.

#### §4. Russell's view of temporal experience (1912-3): a corrective reading

In *PP* Russell says that we can be presented with a temporal spread, and before-after relations, both in sensation *and* in immediate memory (*PP*, 59). He thus suggests two ways in which we may arrive at knowledge of the relation of before/after, *either* in sensation *or* in memory. On the dominant reading of Russell, memory necessarily plays a role in arriving at knowledge of before/after, because memory – together with sensation – is responsible for the temporal breadth of the specious present. Yet in *PP*, Russell describes memory as a possible – but not necessary – source of our knowledge of the relation of before/after. Russell is even more explicit about the matter in *TK*.

In *TK* Russell says that sensation is a relation in which particulars are given as present – as simultaneous with the subject – and this enables us to know that they are at the present time. He emphasises that the temporal nature of the relation between subject and object should be clear upon introspection: “the simultaneity must be not merely a fact, but must be deducible from the nature of the experience involved in sensation” (*TK*, 63). By contrast, immediate memory is said to be that relation with particulars which enables us to know that they are past (*TK*, 56). This is noted by Martin, who says that Russell “insists strictly that immediate memory involves experience of objects as past, and hence as excluded from the specious present” (“Old Acquaintance”, 11). The objects of memory are not felt *as present*, but are felt *as past*, in contrast with sensation. Imagination is said to be that relation with particulars within which no time-relation is implied between subject and object.

In explaining the knowledge of time we have in virtue of these three temporal flavours of acquaintance, Russell appeals to his distinction between ‘mental time’ and ‘physical time’. He says that the essence of physical time – i.e., the B-series – is succession, but that the experience of succession will vary depending on whether the succession is an object of immediate memory, part memory and part sensation, or the object of sensation. In doing so, he is explicit in saying that a succession and change can be given *as present* in sensation: “knowledge of *succession* is possible



without passing outside the present, because the present is a finite interval of time within which changes can occur, yet knowledge of the *past* is not thus obtainable” (*TK*, 70).

Knowledge of the past is not obtainable from the specious present because Russell is thinking of the past as ‘precisely what precedes the present’, rather than as ‘whatever thing precedes some later thing’. Therefore, although one can see that one thing precedes another *within* the specious present one can’t thereby see that the earlier phase is past from the perspective of the later. Russell is explicit, in these passages, in taking sensation to be that relation with particulars which enables us to know that they are at the present time and taking the present time to be of some finite extent; thus offering a Non-Modal reading of the specious present.

One may nonetheless wonder just how different this Non-Modal reading is from the Modal reading which Russell appears to adopt in *AM*. The thought that there is not much of a substantive difference might be a consequence of the following line of reasoning (which I ultimately suggest we ought to reject). Granting that we have an experiential awareness of some interval of time, we might suppose that we are aware of this interval through, in some sense, the combined efforts of immediate memory – whose objects are presented *as past* – and sense perception – whose objects are presented *as present*. The tendency to think in these terms may then make it seem as though on a Modal view of the specious present, the specious present is simply defined as encompassing both immediate memory and sense perception, whereas on the Non-Modal view it is defined as encompassing only sense perception. On this line reasoning, immediate memory may be understood as playing a role on the Modal reading just like temporally extended sensation does on the Non-Modal reading – i.e., it adds temporal extension to that which the subject is immediately and incessantly aware of. Hence, it may appear as though all that has changed from *TK* to *AM* is how Russell chooses to define the specious present.

The above is a line of reasoning that, on the proposal I have offered, we have reason to reject, because it is in tension with the suggested reading of Russell’s notion of immediate memory in *TK*. On the reading I have offered, immediate memory isn’t to be thought of as analogous to sense perception though with the temporal modifier of ‘past’. The objects of immediate memory are, on the present proposal, not anything that you are now directly perceiving – neither present object of sense nor presently entertained image. Moore says that the objects of memory are “in a sense before your mind” (*SMPP*, p. 246) – i.e., before your mind in such a sense that they can be compared with present imagery – though he grants that this is an “obscure sort

of consciousness” which it is difficult to give a clear account of (SMPP, p. 246). To the extent that Russell is influenced by Moore in *TK*, as I have suggested, his notion of immediate memory should be read in these terms – i.e., it is subtle and difficult to articulate, though still experience-like, rather than simply being a past-oriented form of direct perception. This view of immediate memory does some of the work in distinguishing the Non-Modal reading of the specious present attributed to Russell in *TK* from the Modal reading he plausibly adopts in *AM*.

There are, on the present proposal, two related phenomenological differences between the Non-Modal and Modal models attributed to Russell in *TK* and *AM* respectively. Firstly, there is a distinction in terms of whether an extended interval is speciously presented *as present* (Non-Modal), rather than *as present and past* (Modal). Secondly, there is a distinction in how we are to think of the deliverances of immediate memory: something akin to a presentation of sense-data with the temporal modifier of ‘past’ (Modal), or something more obscure and difficult to offer a positive characterisation of, such that the objects of immediate memory are ‘before the mind’ in a way that is to be distinguished from our awareness of sense-data and mere imagery (Non-Modal). Thus, for Russell in *TK*, while it is to be granted that the subject can become aware of succession in immediate memory, in sensation, and in comparing the objects of immediate memory with the objects of sensation, I deny that the underlying phenomenon of the experience of succession in the context of immediate memory is much the same as applies to the experience of succession within sense perception. This isn’t simply to stipulate how we ought to read Russell, it is plausible that he meant to deny this too, in so far as he says that the experience of succession “will be very different” depending on whether the succession is an object of immediate memory, part memory and part sensation, or the object of sensation (*TK*, p. 64). As discussed previously, given these experiential differences, there are also associated differences in how subjects are said to arrive at knowledge of mental and physical time.

I said previously that theorists may find plausible that two items cannot be experienced as present without being experienced as simultaneous, and that the principle of charity may prevent theorists from attributing a contrary view to Russell. Given the reading of Russell I have offered, we can see why it is not the case that if we experience two items as being present then we experience them as simultaneous. The Augustinian line of reasoning gains traction once we assume that if the present takes up a non-zero interval, then it would be divisible into earlier and later parts where these parts will be future and/or past with respect to other parts. As we’ve in effect seen, Russell rejects the claim that the specious present – and so those sense-data that are given as present – is

divisible in this way. For Russell no sense-datum is given *as present* and simultaneously given *as past*, but succession may nonetheless be given as present. The specious present takes up a non-zero interval and those sense-data that are given *as present* are given as simultaneous with the subject, yet they may nonetheless be given as earlier or later – though not *past* or *future* – with respect to one another. We are not forced to suppose otherwise unless we take earlier-later to be synonymous with past-future, but to do so would be to run together mental and physical time for Russell. Similarly, the sense-data spanning the specious present are not given as earlier or later *than the subject*, yet it does not follow that there could be no discernible temporal precedence between the sense-data (and we are not forced to suppose otherwise unless we take it that the subject positively seems to occupy an extensionless instant in time, and some motivation would need to be offered for taking this to be so).

Thus, as Martin maintains (against the dominant reading), Russell is properly read as offering a Non-Modal view of the specious present – where occurrences over the breadth of the specious present are presented as successive without being presented as past/future – rather than the Modal version that the dominant reading portrays him as offering. In offering this view, Russell provides contemporary theorists with one method of blocking the Augustinian line of reasoning. Yet, contrary to Martin's claims (and in line with the dominant reading), Russell takes there to be a distinctive experience of the past in immediate memory, though (contrary to the dominant reading) this concerns times beyond the temporal extent of the specious present and is not analogous to sensory acquaintance though with the temporal modifier of 'past'.

Given the interpretation that I have offered of Russell's notions of immediate memory and the specious present, we can summarise his 1912-13 view of the experience and knowledge of time as follows. Russell takes all that is given over the interval of the specious present to be given via the relation of sensation and to be presented *as present*. In addition, subjects are said to have acquaintance with objects *felt as past* in memory, specifically in immediate memory of previously sensed sense-data (and this claim is motivated and evidenced by the fact that subjects can know that previously experienced sense-data differed in some respects from any presently entertained imagery). Thus, on Russell's proposal, for mental time, our knowledge of the past is derived from reflection on the memorial acquaintance relation, with objects felt *as past* in immediate memory, and our knowledge of the present is derived from reflection on our acquaintance relation with sense-data, presented *as present* over the specious present (with the future only being known by description). For physical time, on Russell's proposal, our knowledge of the relations of

simultaneity and before/after may come from reflection on the specious present, on immediate memory, or comparisons between the two – though, given the account of the specious present and immediate memory provided, in each case our experience of succession will be very different.

## §5. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have outlined the view of our experience and knowledge of time put forward by Russell in *TK*; the roles that he assigns to sensation and immediate memory as different temporal forms of acquaintance relation; and how his discussion is connected with remarks made by Moore about the notion of immediate memory. I have argued that, over 1912-3, Russell maintains that succession can be given as present in sensation, taking sensation to be that relation with particulars which enables us to know that they are at the present time, and taking the present time to be of some non-zero finite extent. The temporal breadth of the specious present is the temporal breadth that a subject is acquainted with through sensation, immediate memory and knowledge of the past concerns time beyond the boundaries of the specious present. For Russell, immediate memory is that two-term relation of acquaintance between subject and object which gives rise to knowledge that the object is in the past, where this accounts for our knowledge (by acquaintance) of the past. And Russell, like Moore, says that we can motivate the appeal to such memory by drawing attention to how we are able to distinguish memory-images from a given past sense-datum.

Although he ultimately abandoned the project, Russell's writing in *TK* is still of great philosophical interest. He offers one method for introspectively distinguishing memory, sensation, and imagination, while also offering a quite idiosyncratic view of (immediate) memory, which he appears to adopt under the influence of Moore. Russell's discussion also has points of connection with contemporary debates about the phenomenology of the specious present. When properly understood, Russell presents a Non-Modal view of the specious present, rather than the Modal version that the dominant reading presents him as offering. In doing so, Russell offers contemporary theorists with one method of blocking a line of argument, inspired by Augustine, against such Non-Modal views.

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