Teaching the Constructive Phase of Philosophical Theories

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Russell once complained of being misunderstood: “I have not so far found any philosopher who knew what I meant by this statement. [When a physiologist looks at another man’s brain, what he sees is in his own brain and not in the other man’s.] My defence of it must consist of explaining it, since the arguments brought against it are against some view totally different from mine.”1 The critic has misinterpreted Russell’s theory and presented an argument against a view Russell did not hold. In this connection, Alan Wood has advised, “I have come across few present-day critics of Russell who did not either unwittingly repeat points he himself has made, or else show ignorance of his true views...The need at the moment, therefore, is not to criticize Russell, but to understand him.”2 In this paper, I describe in outline a philosophical-methodological device for teaching and learning how to understand theory-builders, prior to criticisms of them.

The device entails thinking of students and teacher as acting in a certain role with respect to the contents of a philosophy course. It pictures an inquiry into a philosophical theory as involving four general elements: a) An original theory as an object of inquiry, b) a theory-builder, c) a theory-contactee, who engages in understanding the theory, and d) a theory-critic, who attempts to criticize the theory, once it is made public.

But it is well known that philosophical theories have at least two aspects—the publicized theory and the same theory under construction. As ordinarily regarded, students and teachers in the role of “theory-contactees” meet an established philosophical theory. For instance, we read and learn of pure reason through The Critique of Pure Reason or of the theory of neutral monism by way of The Analysis of Mind.3 These theories, however, had gone through a preparatory stage. There was a lapse of about ten years between the last publication on the pre-critical philosophy of Kant, which was made known in 1770 and his Critique, which came out in 1781. Russell’s The Analysis of Mind was published in 1921; about six years before, he had criticized his own forerunners. What was happening during the preparation, while Kant and Russell were constructing their theories?

For an understanding of the pre-constructive (philosophical methodologies, logic, and the like) and of the post-constructive (the finished theories and criti-
cisms of them), we have the extensive efforts and works in various kinds of systematic investigation brought about during the more than two thousand years in the history of Western philosophy. But the constructive labors, which correspond to the process of philosophic discovery, seems to me to have been almost completely neglected. As a teacher, I try to supply this missing part, because I found that for my introductory course in philosophy the constructive stage became the frame of reference as I reflected upon the question, "Why is the course taught?" Although objectives clearly include acquaintance with basic terms and representative theories, the course needed an access—from the non-philosophical to the philosophical. The design indicated was a philosophical-methodological reflection on the formative ways in which students and the teacher can engage in philosophical thinking at their own levels. Emphasis on the constructive phase of individual philosophical theories has revealed useful models, and has suggested a series of methodological check-ups to be employed in analyzing and synthesizing them.

In the School of Dentistry at Matsudo, Nihon University, Japan, I have the task of teaching philosophy to those who major in dentistry, almost all of whom have never been formally introduced to philosophical studies. My course is titled, "Roads to Philosophical Thinking: An Introduction to the 'Constructive' Phase of Philosophical Theories." In what follows, I will outline some of my basic ideas about stages involved in theory-construction, and relate them to the contents and methods I use in this course.

The Stages of Influence and Discovery

In my class at Matsudo, I try to paint a comprehensive picture of the constructive phase of individual philosophical theories. We spend an entire semester trying to become acquainted with the process by reconstructing some of the representative theories in western philosophy. They are the theory of "Cogito, ergo sum" by Descartes, the theory of "Human Understanding" by Hume, the theory or critique of "Pure Reason" by Kant, the theory of "Will to Power" by Nietzsche, and the theory of "Neutral Monism" by Russell. Accordingly my students get to know the way, how, and the reason why these philosophers in the past developed and presented their particular theories. We use these models with a view to finding an access into philosophy, an access from the non-philosophical to the philosophical.

The objectives of the course are my answers to the question: "What is the course trying to achieve when it is taught?" The answers are: acquaintance with one method of studying philosophy, that is to say, rules and a frame of reference for the analysis of philosophical theories under construction; acquaintance with some basic terms in philosophy; and acquaintance with some representative theories in western philosophy. I will outline some of my basic ideas about stages involved in the construction of individual philosophical theories.

Four Stages of Construction

THE STAGE OF INFLUENCE: The development of a particular philosophical
theory is an outcome of the life of a theory-builder. It is conditioned in one way or another by various factors which are inseparably bounded up with his life. Some of them are such factors as heredity, personal character, domestic circumstances, personal experience, education, intellectual activities, concepts, theories, or his own ways of thinking as well as influence of other thinkers, traditions, religions, social systems, and so forth. So, we, as theory-contactees, may inquire into the philosophy of particular thinkers in connection with their political and social circumstances. As a theory-contactee, I am concerned, in my philosophical-methodological inquiry, with the influence of logico-epistemological factors and try to scrutinize concepts, theories, or ways of thinking which had the most influence upon a theory-builder in the development of his particular theory in question. At this stage of my inquiry I raise two questions: 1) "What were the concepts, theories, or ways of thinking that influenced a theory-builder in the development of his theory in question?" and 2) "How did the theory-builder react to the concepts, theories, or ways of thinking?"

To cite an example, before he became a neutral-monist, Russell had been engaged in the investigation of Ernst Mach's concept of "World Elements" or "Weltelemente," William James's concept of "Pure Experience," and the concept of "Neutral Stuff" proposed by the American new realists (i.e., Holt, Marvin, Montague, Perry, Pitkin, and Spaulding). In his reaction to these concepts Russell took full advantage of the concept of "Neutral Stuff" by the American new realists. He presented, however, in his article "On the Nature of Acquaintance," published in 1914, his "five arguments" against the concepts of Mach's "World Elements" and James's "Pure Experience," while he was inclined to accept some aspects of them at the same time. Later, he became a neutral-monist and presented the theory which claims that "mind and matter are not two radically different kinds of entities, but that both are constructed out of the same ultimate material called "neutral stuff," which in itself is neither mental nor physical."

THE STAGE OF DISCOVERY: According to Polya, a heuristic element consists in a chain of inference to solve a new problem. In every individual philosophical theory there exists a heuristic element by which the theory-builder obtains the solution to a new philosophical problem. This state of affairs can be regarded as the stage of discovery in the constructive phase of an individual philosophical theory. At this stage of discovery I ask myself two questions: "What was the problem which the theory-builder intended to solve in the development of the theory in question?" and "What was the solution worked out for the philosophical problem by the theory-builder in the development of the theory in question?"

To cite again Russell's theory of neutral-monism as our example, Russell adopted a dualistic conception concerning perception in the article "On the Nature of Acquaintance." In 1921, about six years after the publication of the article, he had presented, for the first time, his theory of neutral-monism in his book entitled The Analysis of Mind. In this book, he attempted to accomplish a philosophical task: to establish the principle or fundamental category that may harmonize two different sciences, physics and psychology, or to unify two
different entities, matter and mind. "This book," he claims, "has grown out of an attempt to harmonize two different tendencies, one in psychology, the other in physics, with both of which I find myself in sympathy, although at first sight they might seem inconsistent." This attempt was motivated by two ways of thinking prevailing in the western culture at that time: one in psychology and the other in physics. The way of thinking in the former was adopted by the behaviorist school, which abandoned the concepts of mind and consciousness and restricted both animal and human psychology to the study of behaviors. The way of thinking in the latter was adopted by physicists, especially Einstein and other exponents of the theory of relativity. For them the world consists of "events," from which "matter" is derived by a logical construction.

This problem was posed by the method of systematic doubt, which is well known as Descartes's method of "\textit{de omnibus dubitandum.}" In 1912, Russell raised the question: "Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it?" As his answer to this question, he put forth the hierarchy of certainty or doubtfulness of knowledge in terms of his distinction between "hard data" and "soft data." This distinction helped him later with fixing a principle or fundamental category in the development of his theory of neutral monism.

Russell's criterion for presenting the philosophical problem was the maxim known as "Occam's Razor." By the maxim: "\textit{entia non multiplicanda praeter necessitatem}" he meant that "if everything in some science can be interpreted without assuming this or that hypothetical entity, there is no ground for assuming it." In his interpretation of the systems of knowledge (physics and psychology), he neither affirms nor denies the existence of matter and mind, and he does not use them as premises. If this is the case and if we seek for a basic principle for interpreting a system of knowledge, e.g., physics or psychology, we have, together with Russell, a question to be answered: What will be a third element or principle which serves as the substitution for both matter and mind?

Now, Russell's solution to the philosophical problem in the development of his theory of neutral-monism was the concept of "sensations" or "sensational core." A sensational core forms a sensation which will be found in the process of perception isolated from all others such as habit, expectation, image, interpretation, etc. For instance, when we look at a black cat it is "a feline patch of black color," which is in the process of perception, isolated from our expectation, or image, of the black cat. Russell maintains that we can speak about such a sensational core, inasmuch as we have a sensation which becomes the starting point of our perception and upon which we may react in one way or another. So, we have no trouble when "a feline patch of black color" meows, which we expect from our past experience. We shall, however, be surprised very much if it howls or gives a loud neigh.

This solution was worked out by the method of analysis: "I have sought solutions of philosophical problems by means of analysis." Russell not only
uses the method of analysis for reducing the procedures of modern natural sciences, but he also insists that every progress in human knowledge is possible only through the analytical proceeding. According to him, it is a confirmation of the following three issues: 1) To expose the elements of a certain object of investigation, 2) to specify the properties of each element of the object, and 3) to inquire into the relationship in which these elements of the object stand to each other. The criterion for working out the solution in the development of his theory of neutral monism is Russell’s distinction between “soft data” and “hard data,” or the “hierarchy of certainty of knowledge.” In this distinction he determined the sensations or sense-data and the general truths of logic as the hardest of hard data. These data are, according to him, certain kinds of things whose existence are more certain than the metaphysical entities such as matter and mind. If we neither affirm nor deny the existence of them and do not use them as the premises to interpret a system of knowledge, what remains as most certain is the hardest of hard data. From this point of view, Russell picks up the sensations or sensational cores as such a premise, and indulges himself in developing a new system of his philosophy. This is later known as his theory of neutral-monism.

THE STAGE OF JUSTIFICATION: A philosophical problem is a directing of a question by a questioner or theory-builder at something which is still unknown to him, and its answer or solution is a linguistic expression of the unknown that has been grasped by the questioner or theory-builder. For instance, the philosophical problem as to Russell’s theory of neutral-monism was, as previously stated, the question: “What is the principle to harmonize matter and mind?” The answer was unknown to Russell at the outset of the development of his theory and at this something unknown the question was directed. And, what was grasped and linguistically expressed by him was “sensations” or “sensational cores.” We cannot, however, decide yet at this point, whether or not, the answer worked out is true; we need to prove and demonstrate that the worked out answer is true. This sort of proof and demonstration in the development of a philosophical theory has to do, among others, with two issues: the conceptualization of the worked answer into a principle or fundamental category and the disposition or confinement of the range of its application. I look upon this state of affairs as the stage of justification in the constructive phase of an individual philosophical theory.

As to the first issue I raise a question: “What conception was embodied into a principle or fundamental category of the philosophical theory in question?” To answer my question I will again cite Russell’s theory of neutral-monism. Russell regarded sensations or sensational cores as the premise to define matter and mind. The word “sensation,” however, is used—in the ordinary sense of the term—to denote mental qualities and thus is partial to the mental side in the relationship between matter and mind. In order to give sensations or sensational cores a status which is neither mental or material and which is meant to construct mind and matter at an equal level, Russell gave to them the name of “neutral stuff.”
Russell did not explicitly mention the methods of the conceptualization in the development of his theory. We can say, however, from the methodological point of view, that various sorts of intellectual activities, as we saw here, (pp. 2-3), are involved. I pick up among them two procedures as typical activities: generalization and "naming." The former is a process of arriving at a general notion or concept from individual instances. In the development of his theory of neutral-monism, Russell, as we may say, arrived at the general concept of neutral stuff from individual instances, i.e., sensations or sensational cores. The latter is characterized in that, when we, with Russell, name sensations or sensational cores as "neutral stuff," we intend to cover two things at the same time: 1) we intend to identify sensations or sensational cores with things which are "neutral" and any things which are "stuff," i.e., those which are neither mental nor material and out of which both matter and mind are constructed and 2) we intend to distinguish sensations or sensational cores from everything else that does not possess those properties of neutral stuff. As the criteria for the conceptualization of sensations or sensational cores into the principle of neutral stuff, he used the following conceptions: those of "identification," "neutrality," "stuff," and "causality" or "causal laws."

As to the second issue, i.e., the disposition or confinement of the range of the application of the principle or fundamental category, I raise a question: "To what was the principle applied in the development of the theory in question?" To answer my question I will continue to use Russell's theory of neutral-monism. As we previously saw, Russell fixed upon sensations or sensational cores for neutral stuff. Matter and mind, both of which he regarded as metaphysical entities, are not presupposed by him as substances in his interpretation of a system of knowledge in psychology as well as in physics. We have, however, the word "matter" which is related to physical phenomena such as thunder, rising and falling of a ball, a black cat meowing, etc., and the word "mind" which is related to mental phenomena such as perception, memory, thought, etc. If matter and mind are composed of neutral stuff, i.e., sensations or sensational cores, the composition may be regarded as a demonstration of the answer to the question: "What is the principle to harmonize matter and mind?" Russell attempts to construct them out of sensations or sensational cores as neutral stuff in the development of his theory of neutral-monism. This is by itself known as his "logical construction" of matter and mind.

Russell's criteria for his logical construction are four different sciences: physics, psychology, physiology, and mathematical logic. In creating structures of a physical object, Russell used mathematical logic, whose general truths, as previously mentioned, he regarded as the other kind of the hardest of hard data. He published, together with Alfred North Whitehead, "Principia Mathematica" in 1910. In this work, he was concerned with such logical concepts as "class," "series," "relation," etc. After that, he became interested in a method "to build a bridge between the world of sense and the world of science." He dealt with matter or physical objects in "Our Knowledge of the External World" (1914), and psychology or mental phenomena in "The Analysis of Mind" (1921). In his
logical construction of physical objects, Russell uses "logical concepts (series, relation, etc.)," "the laws of perspective and gravitation," and "aspects." In his logical construction of mental phenomena, he makes use of "physical object (already logically constructed)," "images," "the laws of psychology (the laws of association and mnemonic causation)," and "appearance."

THE STAGE OF PRESENTATION: In our inquiry into the constructive phase of an individual philosophical theory, we now come to the last stage, i.e., the stage of presentation. This is of paramount importance on the part of a theory-builder in the development of his particular theory, since the results—however excellent and instructive they may be—would be the same as buried in the ground if he left them in his own mind and did not make them known to the public. This means that he has not yet officially established his philosophical theory in question. Therefore, a theory-builder has to make the results known to the public, the results which he has achieved at each stage: influence, discovery, and justification. Generally speaking, we have two means of an official presentation: oral and written.

At this stage I raise, among others, the following questions: a) "In what article(s), thesis (theses), or book(s) did the theory-builder present the results of his inquiry to the public?", b) "What was the method(s) of writing or writing habits(s) of the theory-builder?", and c) "With what purpose(s) did the theory-builder present the results of his inquiry to the public?"

To cite again Russell's theory of neutral-monism, Russell presented it from 1921 to 1927 in the following four books: *The Analysis of Mind* (1921), *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (1926, revised edition), *The Analysis of Matter* (1927), and *An Outline of Philosophy* (1927).

On the problem how to write, he suggests three maxims: "There are some simple maxims... First: never use a long word if a short word will do. Second: if you want to make a statement with a great many qualifications, put some of the qualifications in separate sentences. Third: do not let the beginning of your sentences lead the reader to an expectation which is contradicted by the end." The "rhetoric" plays an important part at the stage of presentation and a great many books on its use have been written from the Greek era down to the present time. Also, we have a lot of materials for the technical know-how of both oral and written presentation in the field of "Speech-Communication." They might help us, as theory-contactees, with our analysis of a publicized theory in question.

Russell did not explicitly mention the criteria he used for writing the books on his theory of neutral-monism. However, we may say in accordance with some of the modern theories of communication that the criteria or purposes of communication are, generally speaking, "Information," "Persuasion," "Evaluation," and "Entertainment." When we further assume with David K. Berlo that "all use of language has a persuasive dimension, that one cannot communicate at all without some attempt to persuade, in one way or another," and that philosophy attempts, above all, to justify the intellectual activities of mankind,
we may say that the criterion or purpose of Russell’s writing of the four books on the theory of neutral monism is fundamentally “persuasion.”

**Summary and Suggestions**

We may thus approach philosophy within the constructive framework for the teaching and learning of individual philosophical theories. We can here, besides teaching and learning what philosophers have discovered, get some ideas of how and why these results were arrived at. I have introduced, in outline, our methodological check-ups only on Russell’s theory of neutral-monism. We may also inquire into the constructive phase of Russell’s other theories, for instance, the theory of types, the theory of description, the theory of logical atomism, etc. We may further cast a spotlight on the constructive phase of various theories developed and presented by other thinkers, such as the theory of “Human Understanding” by Hume, or the theory of “Will for Power” by Nietzsche.

In addition to the inquiries into such theories in the past, we may also deal with those which have been developed and presented by living philosophers. In this case, we might obtain information about the constructive phase of their theories through a questionnaire asking them directly what they have or had been doing while the theories in question have or had been in the making.

The results of our inquiries could lead to a comparative study on the constructive phase of philosophical theories. We may then use the results of a comparative study of this kind as teaching and learning materials for introductory philosophy courses. Such courses would build a foundation for more fruitful critical discussions in later, more advanced courses in philosophy.

In teaching and learning the constructive phase of a philosophical theory in this way, we make, as previously stated, a sharp distinction among the role of the theory-builders, the role of theory-contactees, and the role of theory-critics, and attempt to face as squarely as possible any philosophical theory in question as the theory-contactees, not as the theory-critics. This distinction is very important because when we teach or learn the constructive phase of a theory, we are merely meditators or learners of it. The teacher here must act as a mediator between the learners and the theory-builder and can use the four stages for the analysis of the intellectual activity of the theory-builder in question. This way of teaching and learning philosophy will tend to save us, both teachers and students, from the danger of “committing an endless criticism on an original theory” or tilting at windmills.

This is accounted for by the fact that we may properly evaluate theories in question, since we can do it with the insight into their formative structure and contents. Besides, each one of us, who appeared as a theory-contactee at first, may turn out to be a theory-builder in time and build his or her own theory in one way or another, since he or she philosophically-methodologically knows how to construct and present a particular theory in philosophy. Obviously, such an introductory course concentrating on the constructive phase of philosophical theory building will not be designed to make the students experts in philosophical criticism. Critical discussions will be taken up in detail within the post-construc-
tive phase of theory building. This introductory course will, however, help them concentrate for a while on one step involved in teaching and learning how to philosophically criticize. It will help them find an entry into philosophy. In the long run, it may lead to enhancement of their native abilities to philosophically deal with the problems they encounter in their daily lives.

Notes

4. Immanuel Kant, De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis, 1770. 
8. The Analysis of Mind, p. 5.
32. For example, they might help us in understanding principles of organization in preparing some sort of outline for writing articles, theses, or books, and make it easier for us, theory-contactees, to analyse and synthesize unity, coherence, emphasis, etc. of the contents publicized; or to outline and summarize the contents of the publications in question. These intellectual reactions to them might well be regarded as a preparatory contribution to the theory-contactee’s attainment of worthwhile objectives such as knowledge, comprehension, justification, etc., of a publicized theory in question.

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