

Russell Reading Companion & Discussion Questions

Instructions: Read the 2 pages attached to this assignment and then answer the question(s) below. **Please answer this question in your Bell Ringer Journal.** Also, please make sure to submit this as it were any other assignment. In class, we will start by reading what you have written so please be prepared to share.

Bell Ringer

What is something that you believe you notice about the world that others do not? Do you believe that others pay attention to their daily surroundings and happenings? Is it important to care about what happens in your world? Why?

Make sure to write one paragraph

SEE THE NEXT PAGE -
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EVERYTHING THAT EXISTS

If we're going to think about things, then we need to think about just which things there are to think about. So let's try to make a list of everything that exists—starting with the questions which arise immediately as one sets out to construct such a list.

Let's start simply, with some ordinary physical things. You might want to list trees, say. But there are many different kinds of trees. Is merely listing “trees,” and thus leaving out all those differences, to leave something crucial off the list? On the one hand, no; “trees” covers all trees. But on the other hand, that there are different kinds of trees is a significant fact about the world, one which seems necessary for our list to be comprehensive, which a list of “everything” should be! And then what about forests—are these redundant once we've listed the trees? On the one hand, again, a world with scattered trees is different from one where they're collected into forests; but on the other, what exactly is a forest over and above its trees? Wouldn't it be redundant to list the trees *and* the forests? But then by the same reasoning, what is a tree over and above its atoms? Perhaps we should just list the basic particles that physicists tell us compose the world, or perhaps just “matter.” Or again, would leaving off the list the different collections of matter into objects be to leave our list, of *everything*, somehow incomplete?

And what exactly is an object, anyway? We often speak about an object by listing its properties. We say of an apple that it is round and red. So should we say that the apple, the object, is somehow distinct from those properties since “it” has “them”? And if so, does the apple deserve a separate line on our list from the roundness and redness? But then again, what is the apple once you take away its roundness, redness, etc.?

Our list of everything, regretfully, does not yet include itself.

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THE EYEBALL OF THE BEHOLDER

A friend recently looked askance at my supper. “What?” I said. “It’s delicious.” “No it isn’t,” he replied. I didn’t continue this argument since yielding meant more supper for me. But I also didn’t continue because there’s nothing to argue about here.

Why not? Because how things taste, like other things we’ve seen, is relative. Whether two objects match in color; whether a room feels warm or cool; or whether someone is beautiful, all of these vary between perceivers and we can’t say any one perception is correct while the others are not. The features perceived here are subjective: not in the object but in the mind of the perceiver. Beauty, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder.

But now consider even the shape and size of an object. The coin in your hand looks round from straight on but looks oval from even a slight angle. From far away it looks small while from nearby it looks large. In all of these cases, a certain perceived quality varies between acts of perceiving while the object itself does not: it’s the same coin whether it looks round or oval, or small or large. But if the perceived quality varies while the object itself does not, then the perceived quality must not be in the object. So what you perceive with respect to shape and size, too, is subjective, i.e. a sensation within your mind. But it doesn’t stop here.

For what we perceive, in perceiving objects, are colors, tastes, sizes, shapes. And objects are nothing more than collections of colors, tastes, sizes, and shapes. If these latter are all just sensations in perceivers, then *so are the objects themselves*. Or to put it bluntly: It’s not merely that what we perceive are sensations in minds.

It’s that mental sensations are all there is.

So there are no genuinely physical objects. There are only minds and their sensations. It’s not just beauty that’s in the eye of the beholder, then: even the eyeball of the beholder is in the eye of the beholder.