

Russell's reply to Dewey

In John Dewey's Chinese lectures on "Russell's Philosophy and Politics", published in *Russell 11*, he characterized the philosophy's "theoretical aspects" as smacking "of authoritarianism appropriate to an aristocracy" and typical of people who "are impatient with the practical affairs of life, and seek to raise themselves above mundane considerations and enter a sphere of pure reflection" (p. 7). Russell probably never learned details of these lectures, though he may have heard that they were given. But he had already made his reply. Dewey had made similar remarks in his *Essays in Experimental Logic* (Chicago, 1916), pp. 72-73. Russell's reply, in his long review of the book, can be read with the Chinese lectures in mind. The review is in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* (16: 2 Jan. 1919, 5-26) and is not least interesting for Russell's acceptance of Dewey's invitation to set down "the personal motives which make me like or dislike different aspects of behaviourism and instrumentalism". Here is Russell's defence of contemplation:

Professor Dewey has nothing but contempt for the conception of knowledge as contemplation. He is full of that democratic philanthropy which makes him impatient of what seems to him a form of selfish idleness. [Then follow the remarks.]

Will the present amusing inappropriateness of these remarks to the case of one at least among analytic realists suggest to Professor Dewey that perhaps he has somewhat misunderstood the ideal of contemplation? It is not essential to this ideal that contemplation should remain without effect on action. But those to whom contemplative knowledge appears a valuable ideal find in the practise of it the same kind of thing that some have found in religion: they find something that, besides being valuable on its own account, seems capable of purifying and elevating practise, making its aims larger and more generous, its disappointments less crushing, and its triumphs less intoxicating. In order to have these effects, contemplation must be for its own sake, not for the sake of the effects: for it is the very contrast between action and pure contemplation that gives rise to the effects.

Maybe Dewey had read this review by the time of his Chinese lectures, maybe not. But if he had, and although he remarked on the "strange" contrast between Russell's democratic ethical and social philosophy and the aristocratic nature of its "theoretical aspects", he certainly did not appreciate the ideal of contemplation any better.

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