On a suggested contradiction in Russell's educational philosophy

The publication in *Russell 11* of John Dewey's two lectures on Russell's philosophy and politics, delivered in Peking in 1920, reminded me that much could be written on a rather obvious contradiction in his philosophy of education, to which Dewey makes an oblique reference. Yet perusal of the literature shows that precisely nothing is mentioned concerning what I have in mind: Joe Park, in his *Bertrand Russell on Education*, does not come to grips with it and the several doctoral theses on his educational theory, collected in the Russell Archives, do not shed any light upon the subject.

The rather lengthy passage in Dewey's lecture which brought the matter to my attention runs as follows:

When he deals with theoretical matters, Russell takes a dim view of impulse; but impulse takes on considerable importance when he directs his philosophical enquiry toward human behaviour - an importance comparable to that of *élan vital* in Bergson's philosophy. Russell is not willing to let impulse intrude where knowledge is concerned for fear that it might disturb the quietude of knowledge; but he recognises the importance of impulse when he deals with practical concerns. In fact, he makes it the basis of human behaviour.

Dewey recognizes the possible contradiction here, but declines to say any more about it than the following:

We cannot at this moment enter into a detailed discussion of whether these much sharply divergent positions on theoretical matters and practical matters constitute a logical contradiction; nor can we go into detail about the questions of whether, or how, his theoretical philosophy has influenced his practical philosophy.

A pity, one might think, for I know of no other place where he returns to discussion of this important point. Yet Dewey's negligence allows for speculation on the part of those who follow gingerly in the footsteps of both him and Russell concerning the implications of the contradiction he points to. In relation to Russell's educational thought, the conflict between the claims of impulse and intellect is, I believe, central.

In Russell's educational theory there are, it seems to me, two distinct strands which he fails to reconcile. On the one hand, he talks of the need to allow for the liberation of the impulses within men which lead to a constructive life. Since impulse forms the basis of human
action, failure to recognize its importance in the development of the child leads to a life in which thwarted impulses later manifest themselves in much more destructive forms, such as the urge to fight wars. On the other hand, Russell does not wish education simply to fulfill this "negative" function of allowing maximum opportunities for individual growth. The "positive" aim of education is, rather, to train the intellect in such a way as leads the child to adopt a "scientific attitude" towards the world of objectivity. The recognition of "objective facts" independent of men's wills, Russell takes to be the cornerstone of the scientific spirit. By recognizing this to be the case, the child will be led to a certain "humility" towards the world in general, since he will recognize these facts as limits to individual freedom, and hence beyond the manipulation of human beings. Thus the instilling of the scientific spirit within the child serves both an intellectual and a moral purpose, namely the development of "impartiality, kindness and a modicum of self-control". The objective understanding of reality, which provides the main thrust of Russell's educational theory, clearly requires the subjugation of certain instincts and impulses which might otherwise colour the judgement of the child. How, then, does Russell propose to allow for the crucial development of impulses when intellectual maturity demands their suppression? That is, when, in his own words, it requires the following: "The scientific attitude of mind ... involves suppression of hopes and fears, loves and hates, and the whole subjective emotional life, until we become subdued to the material, able to see frankly, without preconceptions, without bias, without any wish except to see it as it is." Thus the instilling of the scientific spirit within the child as far as possible, treats questions in as objective a manner as possible, treating the child as capable of understanding what he is told. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, the child must learn, at the same time, the limits to his freedom required by the presence of other children and adults. What Russell seems to be aiming is teaching the child a sense of social obligation which issues not from external coercion (which would drive certain of his impulses underground) but from his own will. Russell vouches for the success of the Montessori methods in this regard, from the case of his son John, who became a "more disciplined human being". Rather, it attempts to subdue the instincts to the "material" of objective reality.

One way Russell sees out of this quandary is to deny that there is any contradiction between the anarchic tendencies of a man whose impulses have been liberated and the man of science. In Education and Social Order, for example, he writes:

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education to train the instincts so that they may produce a harmonious character, constructive rather than destructive, affectionate rather than sullen, courageous, frank and intelligent. All this can be done with a great majority of children; it is actually being done where children are rightly treated. Thus the impulses of the child are to be guided in such a way as to effect a certain harmony within the individual, and to build the following characteristics: vitality, courage, sensitiveness and intelligence. In fact, Russell held that the first three of these could be sufficiently developed by the age of six so that schooling could concentrate almost solely upon intellectual training after that age: "I am convinced that, if children up to the age of six have been properly handled, it is best that the school authorities lay stress upon purely intellectual progress, and should rely upon this to produce the development of character which is still desirable." Given the right training, therefore, Russell believed that the subtle balance between freedom and discipline could be achieved by early education, thereby effecting in the child the most healthy relation between his impulses and intellect. What exactly, we must now ask, was the ideal to aim at in this relationship?

When Russell wrote of the need to produce harmony in the individual, he meant a harmony between the following three elements: impulse (or emotion), intellect and will. The will, as he had explained in Principles of Social Reconstruction, was of prime importance in this respect: "The desirable kind of discipline ... involves the subordination of minor impulses to will, the power of a directing action by large creative desires even at moments when they are not vividly alive.... This kind of discipline ... can only be produced by education if education fosters such desires, which it seldom does at present." By encouraging the development of constructive desires, education could draw out of men the tendencies towards such worthwhile activities as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, which previous education had subordinated to the development of destructive, or aggressive, skills. Only, however, if the individual's will were sufficiently strong could this be achieved. This reliance upon the notion of will as of key importance in the educational process produces a dialectic in Russell's theory between its over- and under-development. The dialectic, in turn, reveals the original contradiction to which I have drawn attention, between the subjective (impulsive) and objective (intellectual) aims of education. It must, therefore, be examined in some detail.

The basis of the importance of the will is twofold: first, it is the source of the individual's awareness of his own power: "In this world of flux men bear their part as causes of change, and in the consciousness of themselves as causes, they exercise will and become aware of power." As a result, the individual can become an effective member of the community: "It is only through the will and through the exercise of power that the individual whom we have been imagining becomes an effective member of the community." There is, however, already a danger in the notion of the will, which Russell points out. Although he conceives of it as the bridge between the individual and the community, in isolation the individual will of the child tends to be "Godlike" and to issue orders to all and sundry. The will of the "citizen", therefore, has to become curbed so that it achieves an external harmony with the wills of others. The demands of the community are such that cooperation is necessary - again Russell believed that such cooperation could be expected of the child after an early education of the type he advocated. Yet now the problem was reversed, in the sense that this cooperation was to be achieved without instilling uniformity of behaviour in the child. A middle way had now to be trodden between competitive and cooperative activities which the individual could engage in, a middle way along which neither of the extremes is to be indulged in to the exclusion of the other. Here, as in so many places, Russell presents us with a simple dilemma, between whose horns he drives a none-too-easy passage.

In relation to impulse, Russell held two positions concerning its relation to will, which prima facie seem contradictory. "Passing" impulses must be repressed in order for the child to develop intellectually and to sacrifice short-term pleasure for long-term achievement. At the same time, Russell decried traditional morality for teaching the child to suppress his impulses by an act of will. His reason was the Freudian observation that such repression merely caused mental traumas which later
manifested themselves in more destructive forms. What, then, we may ask, of those "passing impulses" driven underground by the insistence upon intellectual training? Russell's answer would again appear to be twofold. First, the crucial difference between his and traditional morality's conception of the role of the will is that its curbing influence issues from within rather than from without. Not the orders of others, but the strength of the child's own will is to be the source of the restrictions placed upon his behaviour: "What is important in imposing limitations upon the desirable amount of discipline is that all training should have the cooperation of the child's will, though not of every passing impulse." Russell's optimism in this regard was not borne out by his experience of the children of Beacon Hill; yet this did not cause him to abandon this pedagogical principle, although he wrote of it in connection with On Education: "It seems to me now somewhat unduly optimistic in its psychology." The experience of difficult children caused Russell to re-emphasize the need for routine and discipline in early childhood, since children could not be expected to comply of their own accord with the rules of the community. The experience also contributed, along with the destruction of the world order during and after the First World War, to a major shift in his ascription of the relative importance of external authority in the control of the behaviour of individuals and of nation states. In just the same way as he came to emphasize the necessity of the establishment of a world state, endowed with the force of arms, to ensure world peace, so Russell came to place a larger share of the structuring of the educational environment to the authority of adults. In both cases the change in his position seems to have resulted from the first-hand observation of men in situations in which no such dominant authority was present. At Beacon Hill, this resulted in such behaviour as a child putting a hatpin in the soup in the hope that her brother, whom she secretly loathed, might swallow it. Russell concludes from this as follows: "In the school, I found that a very definite and forceful exercise of authority necessary if the weak were not to be oppressed. Such instances as the hatpin in the soup could not be left to the slow operation of good environment, since the need for action was immediate and imperative." Clearly, in such instances as this, the child's will is not in accord with authority and external coercion is called for. It is the members of the child's community - parents, teachers or other children - who impose rules of discipline upon the child. Russell could justifiably use in such cases the reasoning that coercion was necessary for the healthy functioning of the community at large, and in particular for the welfare of its weakest members. But in less dangerous cases this reasoning is less justified - for instance, where a child refuses to brush his teeth, or to leave the room when punished. Faced with situations such as these, which indeed occurred at Beacon Hill, it is quite clear that external authority, rather than the child's own will, is to play the dominant role. Russell's position now seems to reduce to the following: the rules of the community are not private rules which each individual formulates in the privacy of his own mind. Rather, they are rules decided upon by the community, and applied to each individual. What Russell seems to be saying is simply this - that the child should internalize the rules of his community rather than have them forced down his throat; not that he can, at will, demand that the rules be changed for his own convenience. If this is a correct interpretation, the problem still remains as to how the traumas of repressed impulses is to be avoided, for it is clear that in many cases it will not be. To this problem we shall return in considering Russell's criticism of Dewey.

Russell's second position on the differences between his theory and that of traditional morality is closely related to the first. Unlike traditional morality, Russell's philosophy requires not the weakening of impulse but its "direction towards life and growth rather than towards death and decay." His claim is that by acknowledging the place of impulse in human behaviour, he does not expect "the complete control of impulse by will, which is sometimes preached by moralists [since such] a life exhausts vitality." To appreciate this requirement, it is necessary to consider Russell's analysis of impulse in greater detail.

In Principles of Social Reconstruction, Russell claimed that the basis of man's instinctual life lay in a founding principle which he called the principle of growth. The innate tendency of this principle is toward free and untrammelled growth. The task of social institutions is to provide the environment suitable for such growth, but, in fact, the structure of modern capitalism impedes it. Social institutions, such as the family, the school, the church and the state come under fire from Russell for the encouraging of the destructive impulses that manifested themselves in the eagerness with which the combatants welcomed the First

18Ibid., p. 35.
19Ibid., p. 24.
21See Education and the Social Order, pp. 23-4.
23Principles of Social Reconstruction, p. 18.
24Ibid.
War. Of the principle of growth, Russell writes:

The impulses of men and women, in so far as they are of real importance in their lives, are not detached one from another, but proceed from a central principle of growth, an instinctive urgency leading them in a certain direction as trees seek the light. So long as this instinctive movement is not thwarted, whatever misfortunes may occur are not fundamental disasters, and do not produce those distortions which result from interference from natural growth.

Two sorts of impulses, corresponding to two types of goods, could proceed from the principle. These are constructive, or creative, impulses on the one hand, and destructive or possessive impulses, on the other. Of the two he writes: "possessive impulses ... are ones towards which I am entitled by right of ownership. [whereas] creative or constructive impulses ... are ones towards which I am entitled by right of creation."26 What distinguishes the two is the following: whereas the supply of material goods is limited and in cases of limited supply, "what one man has is obtained at the expense of some other ... On the other hand mental and spiritual goods do not belong to one man to the exclusion of another.... In such matters there is no possession, because there is not a definite amount to be shared; any increase anywhere tends to produce an increase everywhere."27 Thus the mental and the spiritual - such as the love of knowledge, the impulse to paint, or to scientific discovery - assume a higher level of importance for Russell than the material in individual and political development. It must be noted that the set of impulses with which the child is endowed28 is not per se any more likely to result in war than in the writing of Principia Mathematica. It is rather the training given to these impulses that determines the direction in which they will flourish. What is more, worthwhile activities, just like their destructive counterparts, must proceed from the child's impulsive activity itself not from the direction of others. "The very same vital energy which produces all that is best also produces war and love of war."29 It is in this sense that we must understand his demand not for weakening impulse, since this entails thwarting such activity, but for its re-direction along the non-possessive path. He does agree, however that

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27Ibid., p. 11.
28In the later Practice and Theory of Belief (London: Allen and Unwin, 1920), Russell classifies the instincts as follows: the primary ones are those towards food, sex, housing and clothing (these man shares with the rest of the animal kingdom); secondary ones are peculiar to man and incapable of complete satisfaction - acquisitiveness, vanity, rivalry and love of power. In contradistinction to the earlier work, Russell refers to all of them as desires, rather than impulses. See pp. 128-30.
29Principles of Social Reconstruction, p. 95.

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the environment should be so manipulated that the impulses towards force would be weakened in the following manner: "Good political institutions would weaken the impulse toward force and domination in two ways; first, by increasing the opportunities for the creative impulses, and by shaping education so as to strengthen these impulses; secondly, by diminishing the outlets for the possessive instincts."30 Thus property ownership, an obviously possessive activity, could be diminished by Russell's proposals for Guild Socialism and by the general decentralisation of power that he urges in factories, schools and the administration of the state in general. The establishment of the world state, which he first mentions in Principles of Social Reconstruction,31 was the means by which Russell proposed to deflake the impulse towards war. The central point to be grasped, however, is that there is no intrinsic difference in the genealogy between those impulses Russell doubts possessive and those he calls constructive. To interfere with the source of both sets of impulses is to stifle the instinctual basis to all human behaviour, and to all possibilities of the betterment of the human race.

It was remarked above that there is a dialectic between the over- and under-development of the will in Russell's theory. So far, we have considered only the arguments for developing the will. Two main reasons are presented for curbing it. First, the "negative" theory of education (which aims simply at allowing maximum growth in the child) fails both to develop his intellect and to instill in him the necessary feeling of awe towards the world. By teaching him that there are no limits to the possibilities of human manipulation of reality, the child is not led to an attitude of humility in his dealings with the world and his fellow men. In his History of Western Philosophy, in attacking Dewey for attempting to substitute the notion of "warranted assertibility" for the notion of truth as correspondence to fact, Russell writes: "[His theory] enlarges the sense of human power and freedom.... If I find the belief that Caesar crossed the Rubicon very distasteful I need not sit down in dull despair; I can, if I have enough skill and power, arrange a social environment in which the statement that he did not cross the Rubicon will have 'warranted assertibility'."32 What Russell accuses Dewey and all the pragmatists of is a denial of the ontological priority of the realm of non-human facts by which any scientific theory is verified. By reducing the notion of a truth claim to the manner in which a statement is established or disproven, Dewey succeeds in eliminating all factors

30Political Ideals, p. 24.
32History of Western Philosophy, p. 780.
except for the human activity involved in scientific verification. The
notion of truth as correspondence with external fact, which Russell never
abandoned despite other changes in his epistemology, now acquires a signifi-
cance in the social dimension. It acts as a brake to the "Godlike" indi-
vidual will which Russell sees lusting for power in both the modern
applications of crude scientific theory, and such instrumentalist philos-
ophies as Dewey's. The basic impulse, as we have seen, which Russell
ascribed to the search for scientific truth was what he called a "love
for the world", rather than a desire to control it. This difference
separated Russell from the pragmatists and from an overriding optimism
about the possible achievements which modern science could attain.
Russell indeed perceived the double-edged blessing which science and
modern technology brought to man,33 and sought refuge in a contemplative
account of knowledge in general: "In advocating the scientific restraint
and balance ... we are only urging, in the sphere of knowledge, that
largeness of contemplation, that impersonal disinterestedness, and that
freedom from preoccupations which have been inculcated by all the great
religions of the world."
34 What Russell called "reverence" (or love of
the world) was the quest for truth which he saw as the basis of both
mysticism and science. When he writes, "reverence towards fact which
constitutes both what is valuable in humility and what is fruitful in
the scientific temper",35 he is opposing the Deweyian notion that:
"there is no such thing as genuine knowledge and fruitful understanding
except as the offspring of doing. The analysis and arrangement of facts
which is indispensable to the growth of knowledge and power of explanation
and right classification cannot be attained purely mentally - just inside the
the head. Men have to do something to the things when they wish to find
out something; they have to alter conditions."36 In this way, Russell
questions the drive to mastery over nature which he sees at the root of
much modern scientific experimentation and replaces this activity with a
more passive and contemplative view of the world, which he couples with
the moral quality of humility. Both contemplation and its concomitant
virtue of humility Russell incorporates into his education theory as an
intellectual and moral aim of education, since they limit the power of
the will.

Russell's second reason for limiting the will follows directly
from the first, and has already been discussed, namely that socialization
requires the child to behave in ways not natural to him.37 Social co-
operation requires an effective training in order to be instilled, and
"progressive" educational theories, such as Dewey's, fail in this regard
since they pay too little attention to the dangers of the will. Given
that Russell had accused Dewey of substituting a manipulative concept
dependent upon human action for that of objective truth, it is strange
that he should ascribe this shortcoming to Dewey. After all, it is the
specifically social character of "warranted assertability" that worries
Russell since, unlike "truth", it could be used by a ruling elite to
justify a totalitarian regime which relied upon its socially effective
manipulation of 'facts' to keep it in power. Moreover, a close reading
of Dewey's work reveals that he agreed in many ways with Russell on just
this point. He writes, for example, that: "The natural or native im-
pulses of the young do not agree with the life customs of the group into
which they are born. Consequently they have to be directed or guided.
This control is not the same thing as physical compulsion; it consists
in centering the impulses acting at any one time upon some specific end
and in introducing an order of continuity into the sequence of acts."38
One possible reason for Russell's mistake in this regard is that he was
attacking the "progressivist" movement in general, whose source he traced
to Rousseau, rather than Dewey in particular. Indeed, there is some
evidence that when he produced the majority of his work on education,
Russell had not read Dewey's educational writings,39 although he was of
course familiar with Dewey's work in other areas and had entered into
debate with him over the nature of logic. Nevertheless, it must be
pointed out that the enforced cooperation which Dewey envisages is not a
particular problem for him, since he does not believe in an order
transcending the order of human "doing". Russell, on the other hand,
has to admit that the claims of "the citizen" (i.e. the need to co-
operate within a social milieu) conflict with the claims of "truth" made
upon the individual. While ultimately the latter were of greater worth,
Russell conceded the contemporary need to train the individual to be a
good citizen. He writes: "Considered sub specie aeternitatis, the
education of the individual is to my mind a finer thing than the education

33See particularly The Scientific Outlook (London: Allen and Unwin,
1931), for Russell's fears in this regard. For this scepticism à propos
technological advance, he comes under the gun from Trotsky in Leon
34"Mysticism and Logic", in Mysticism and Logic, p. 20.
38Democracy and Education, p. 41.
39When interviewing Russell for his book, Park was told that he had
not read Dewey's educational writings until beginning the research for
History of Western Philosophy.
of the citizen, but considered politically, in relation to the needs of the time, the education of the citizen must, I fear, take the first place. Thus the "needs of the time" allow for modification of the claims of truth by granting that certain tendencies of the child be curbed for the purpose of inculcating in him an attitude of submission to a specific society such as the school. At a critical point in his account, therefore, Russell has abandoned the principle which he regarded as the major brake to overhearing power and the necessary limitations to the madness of the modern world.

I have tried to show that there is a fundamental opposition between instinct, or impulse, and intellect in Russell's educational theory, which produces certain strains within that theory. It might be pointed out in Russell's defence that the development of intellect which leads the individual to the use of reason is conceived by him to be a harmonious force, regulating the strength of impulse and determining the means to the ends which only impulse itself can lead the individual to adopt. In his own words: "Reason" has a perfectly clear and precise meaning. It signifies the choice of the right means to an end that you wish to achieve. It has nothing to do with the choice of ends.... Desires, emotions, passions (you can choose whichever word you will), are the only possible causes of action. Reason is not a cause of action but only a regulator. The strength of impulse, therefore, which Russell never denied was necessary, was to be counterbalanced by the impersonal and objective understanding to which the individual is led by the development of his intellect and the cultivation of reason. The value of contemplation, or of "mirroring the world", was not to be underestimated in this regard, for it led the individual to a freedom of thought which had intrinsic value, and enhanced everyday practice by enlarging the scope of one's vision. This vision was to be brought back to earth in the case of the child's education by the need to account for his emotional development as well. Exactly how the two are brought into line is what constitutes the problem which any theory such as Russell's must face and it is this which he has in mind when he writes the following, with which I shall conclude:

To make human beings who will create a better world is a problem in emotional psychology: it is the problem of making human beings who have a free intelligence combined with a happy disposition.