

Russell in metareview

Russell in Review: The Bertrand Russell Centenary Celebrations at McMaster University, October 12-14, 1972. Edited by J.E. Thomas and Kenneth Blackwell. Toronto: Samuel Stevens, Hakkert & Co., 1976. Pp. xx, 268. 5 illus. \$18.00 (\$12.00 to individuals through *Russell*).

Finally (after much promise and delay) the proceedings of McMaster's Russell Centenary Celebrations have been published. Two points should be taken into consideration: first, this collection of thirteen essays is a selection from the twenty papers actually read--the remaining papers are to be found in the Russell Archives; secondly, some of these papers have now been published elsewhere--for example, the paper by D.F. Pears is in his *Questions in the Philosophy of Mind*. Despite both these facts, the volume has some excellent features. The various topics cover a wide range of interdisciplinary activity. Contributors rarely indulge in discipleship or hagiography. A fine spirit of criticism pervades the book.

Due to the number of papers, my comments on individual ones must be brief. The introduction by J.E. Thomas certainly captures some of the excitement of those "three unforgettable days" at McMaster University. The short remarks by Cyrus Eaton point out the subtle combination of Russell's seriousness concerning world affairs and his incredible capacity for wit and laughter. Christopher Farley's paper, it seems to me, is perhaps somewhat disappointing. Although it is well written and presents a sympathetic view of Russell's life and achievements, it is still too much of a biographical sketch. Farley's own personal glimpses nevertheless reveal the many sides of Russell's complex character, and I hope he will sometime write more. The paper by Kenneth Blackwell assures the informed reader that Russell's papers are not gathering dust but instead are the subject of much scholarly research.

The next two papers illustrate the diversity of the material contained in this book: one in the field of history, on Russell's pacifist participation in the first world war by Jo Newberry, and the other in literature, on the use of Russell as a literary symbol by S.P. Rosenbaum. Both essays are admirable examples of scholarship. Moreover, they can

be easily read by the non-specialist. In particular, Newberry's essay conveys a thorough understanding of Russell's changing character and his strained relationships with both militant and pacifist groups. It should be further noted that Newberry's research is based on unpublished letters and documents from several archival sources, and that her paper has been superseded by her dissertation on the subject.

The second section of this volume is entitled "Religion, Education and Politics". A separate paper is devoted to each of these topics. Ronald Jager in a rambling but entertaining style attempts to tie Russell's Platonism to his philosophy of religion. While there is undoubtedly a connection between the two, it is a matter of degree as to how much the former actually supports the latter. Jager argues, for example, that Russell's early Platonism has no official intellectual support but is mainly mystical. Yet, Russell's letters to Moore, along with early drafts of *The Principles of Mathematics*, show that Russell accepted Platonism well before his mystical experience of 1901. The ontological paradox which Quine affectionately calls "Plato's beard" is an *intellectual* problem in *The Principles*. Robert C. Marsh's paper is devoted to updating Russell's educational philosophy. One of Marsh's claims, however, is that drug users suffer from an educational deficiency. On examination, this appears to be either false or tautologous. The essay by John G. Slater deserves praise for its clarity and organization. Yet, the disturbing aspect of Slater's essay is that he *seems* to agree with the supposed consequence of Russell's dichotomy between fact and value: a normative statement cannot be logically inferred from a factual statement. This in itself may not be objectionable. Russell, however, infers from this that all values are fundamentally subjective; this, surely, is objectionable.

In his essay on Russell's logic, I. Grattan-Guinness provides the reader with a wealth of documentation with respect to late nineteenth-century developments in set theory and mathematical analysis. For this reason alone, his essay is to be highly commended. There are however a number of minor shortcomings. First, the essay is mistitled--we learn nothing about the philosophical background to *The Principles of Mathematics*. Secondly, we are not told how *The Principles* actually evolved as a product of Russell's work. Thirdly, it is claimed that Russell's logic is basically a calculus of terms, not of propositions. In this matter, it seems to me that the author is misled by Russell's Platonic ontology of terms. Inference, Russell maintains, can only take place by means of propositions. Russell's definition of pure mathematics in *The Principles* is propositional, not termal.

The four remaining papers in this volume deal with Russell's philo-

sophy. Although A.J. Ayer's essay is a good summary of Russell's views, it is no more than a *précis* of his recently published book in the Modern Masters series. When this essay was read as a *public* lecture at the Celebrations, it met with a mixed reaction. Philosophers, familiar with Russell's writings, gained relatively little new information. Laymen, on the other hand, were mystified into somnolence. The contributions by C.E. Cassin and Pears, on Russell's theory of meaning and his theory of desire, respectively, both prove to be interesting. Cassin, for example, draws attention to an ambiguity in Russell's discussion of meaning where meaning is sometimes construed as a relation and sometimes as a term of the meaning-relation. The volume's final essay--by N.L. Wilson--is described in the preface as a "broad critique of logical atomism". Wilson's position however is more of an extension than a critique. Quotations from Russell's works are put forward merely as devices to foster Wilson's own semantics. How these quotations hinge together in a coherent, developmental pattern for Russell is of no concern to the author. When Wilson finds a quotation which does not suit his purposes, he simply remarks that we must "disregard a great deal of what Russell writes" (p. 245). Wilson's intent in this essay is to undermine the notion of intensional meaning. His own arguments however are at times so compact and obscure that assumptions and premisses are not spelled out carefully. At one point, he identifies "fact" with "true proposition" (p. 247), but nowhere does he tell us what exactly a proposition is supposed to be. When he is confronted with the question of the status of false propositions, he casually says without argument that it presents no difficulty (*ibid.*).

This collection of essays is a fitting conclusion to the success of the Russell Centenary Celebrations. The book is handsomely produced and the print well spaced and easy to read. Three typographical errors came to my attention: "spendour" on p. 99, "magnificant" on p. 139, and "geometrica" on p. 159 (fn. 11). The volume could perhaps have improved by the addition of transcripts of three television interviews made at the time. Participants in these interviews included members of the Russell family, Ronald Clark, A.J. Ayer, D.F. Pears and A. Shalom. I witnessed these interviews live and found them immensely interesting. With this petty complaint aside, the editors are to be congratulated for their efforts.

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