

Supplement

News from the Russell Editorial Project

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CONFERENCE ON RUSSELL'S EARLY HUMANIST WRITINGS

The first of two conferences sponsored by the Bertrand Russell Editorial Project and the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (University of Toronto) was held at McMaster University on 24–26 June 1983. The theme was Russell's early humanist writings. The second conference, on Russell's technical writings up to 1922, will be held in Toronto in late June 1984.

Ten papers were presented, each making a contribution to the understanding of some aspect of Russell's powerful intellect and complex personal and public life. The following report briefly summarizes each paper's main topic and its reception. Interested readers, it is hoped, will soon be able to study the papers more closely in published form.

In "Bertrand Russell in Bloomsbury", S. P. Rosenbaum described Russell's role in the education of the Bloomsbury Group. Although Russell did not introduce philosophy to the Group (instead, he augmented and confirmed the philosophy of G. E. Moore), he nevertheless extended Bloomsbury's aesthetic and intellectual values—the development of intellectual imagination, the method of analysis, and realism in metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology—to the subjects of mathematics and logic, just as Moore had realized them in ethics. Russell's analysis of perception influenced Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, and Roger Fry sought Russell's logical acumen in the analysis of beauty. Russell was attractive to Bloomsbury because of his mysticism, his aesthetic view of mathematics, his authority as a mathematical logician, and his intense personal commitment to rationality.

In his social and political philosophy, Russell's influence in

Bloomsbury broke free of Moore's. The scope of Russell's social concerns, especially his liberalism and pacifism, and his *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1916) crystallized the Group's own social thinking. His influence began to wane with his subjectivist turn in ethics, and was almost extinguished after World War I. Although he had personal misgivings about several of the Group's members and even though he never achieved Moore's friendly relationship with them, Russell nonetheless represented intellectual values by which the Group identified itself.

Dr. Rosenbaum clarified several aspects of Russell's relation to Bloomsbury in reply to questions. Russell's political activity, his lack of interest in aesthetics, Bloomsbury's lack of interest in science, and the personal antagonism between Russell and Moore were suggested as possible sources of tension between Russell and the Group.

In "The Romantic Russell and the Legacy of Shelley", Gladys Leit-hauser showed that Russell sought guidance as eagerly from masters in the realm of feeling and value as in logic and mathematics. His work in the period 1900-20 documents especially clearly the rational and emotional aspects of his split self. In the emotional realm, Russell found Shelley's poetic blend of romanticism and realism most helpful in constructing his own model of feeling and values. He also found inspiration in the literary forms perfected by the Romantic legacy, especially the fragment and the elegy.

Russell's keen feeling for romantic poetry and other creations of the literary imagination found no counterpart in the visual arts. In "Bertrand Russell on Aesthetics", Carl Spadoni set himself the challenge of sleuthing out Russell's aesthetic views in the face of his well-known disavowal of any interest in the subject and his confessions of utter failure to appreciate the visual arts. Russell's aesthetic influences, biographical and bibliographical, were carefully documented, the few scattered pronouncements on aesthetics in existing writings (to be published for the first time in Vol. I of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*) were canvassed, and Russell's critique of Berenson's *Florentine Painters* was reconstructed from letters of Mary Costelloe to Bernard Berenson. Especially interesting were the details of the aesthetic interaction between Russell and Berenson, the disclosure of books on aesthetics that Russell read, and the treatment of traditional aesthetic questions, including a refutation of Moore's view of beauty, in two papers Russell wrote in the 1890s. As might be expected of a thinker of such a theoretical bent as Russell, he did deliver himself of some logical observations on aesthetics, discussing not only Berkeley's theory in *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* and Ruskin's theory of beauty, but also coming to a theoretical interpretation, following James's analysis of visual imagination in *The*

Principles of Psychology, of his own failure to appreciate the visual arts. Dr. Spadoni ended by characterizing Russell's own aesthetic values, found in his view of mathematics as the ultimate art form, as austere, non-human, and eternal.

The breadth of Dr. Spadoni's paper provoked vigorous discussion. It was suggested that Russell might have held a "primitive aesthetic" because of his interest in Chinese art. It was noted that the analytical approach to aesthetics, such as Russell might have found congenial, is a recent philosophical phenomenon, even granting the analyses of Roger Fry and Clive Bell. The tradition of Cambridge philistinism in the visual arts, of which Russell might, it was suggested, have been a typical representative, was deplored.

If Russell's aesthetic values remained austere, non-human, and eternal, his personal moral values did not. In "Bertrand Russell's Conversion of 1901", Andrew Brink argued that Russell's conversion was not only the root of his pacifism, but also the grounds for a fundamental reorientation from a Platonic to a human world. Three levels of analysis were offered to explain Russell's transformation. First, the conversion was situated in its immediate temporal context, showing, for example, the effect on Russell of Gilbert Murray's reading of his translation of the *Hippolytus* just prior to the conversion experience. Secondly, a larger historical context was provided, showing how Russell's articulation of his conversion experience was influenced by the many documented secular transformations of his time, especially those of Mill, Rutherford, and Jeffries. Finally, the analytical tools developed by Ellenberger in his concept of the "creative illness" and those familiar to readers of Dr. Brink's previously published works on how loss can be repaired through literary creation, were employed to provide psychological explanations of Russell's conversion.

Questioning from the audience began by offering Ellenberger's concept of a spiritual guide as a further analytical tool to help understand Russell's conversion. Mrs. Whitehead and Lucy Donnelly were considered as possible spiritual guides for Russell. Dr. Brink defended his view of the significance for Russell's life of his conversion experience in response to suggestions that Russell's conversion was an emotional setback rather than a breakthrough, and that perhaps Russell's own report of its significance should not be taken at face value.

Russell presents his conversion of 1901 as his most dramatic, but it was not his first. In "The Evolution of Bertrand Russell's Early Religious Beliefs, 1888-1914", Kirk Willis told the story of Russell's religious crisis of the 1880s. This earlier conversion to independent thought about traditional religious issues such as the existence of God, free will, and the

immortality of the soul was the result of his effort to find the intellectual grounds of his moral training at Pembroke Lodge. Dr. Willis showed that Russell's early interest in science as the key to what can be known precipitated not only an intellectual rebellion, but also a conversion away from the values of self-restraint, repression, and control of impulse characterizing his early upbringing. It was a conversion of the whole person, involving the intellect, awakening sexual urges, and the entire emotional life. Dr. Willis emphasized the importance of Russell's "Greek Exercises" (to be published in Vol. 1 of the *Collected Papers*) to document his growing doubts and seriousness of approach to the issues that preoccupied him.

Dr. Willis was challenged by questions suggesting that Pembroke Lodge provided Russell with many positive influences. It was agreed that Russell's intellectual fortunes were advanced by Pembroke Lodge, but that his emotional development was retarded.

Russell's conversion of 1901 also formed, in part, the subject of Nicholas Griffin's "Bertrand Russell's Crisis of Faith". Dr. Griffin argued that Russell's intellectual change from neo-Hegelian absolute idealism to analysis and absolute realism was essentially connected with three important events in Russell's life: (1) his conversion of 1901, (2) his discovery of the class paradox, and (3) his break with Alys. After providing an analysis of the social context of British absolute idealism and Russell's programme of work in it, especially in mathematics, Dr. Griffin showed how Russell's abandonment of neo-Hegelian metaphysics entailed a change in what he thought possible in human relationships as well as in regions of abstract thought such as mathematics. In particular, it was argued that Russell's post-conversion absolute realist belief in the loneliness of isolated human souls communicating only by superhuman efforts of love was incompatible with the absolute idealist view of internally connected human souls. Dr. Griffin also showed how Russell's post-conversion social philosophy depended upon an abandonment of neo-Hegelianism, and he ended with an analysis of Russell's response to his crisis of faith in "A Free Man's Worship" and "Mysticism and Logic".

Russell's subjectivist turn in ethics, presented by Dr. Rosenbaum in partial explanation of Russell's waning influence on Bloomsbury, was the topic of Harry Ruja's "Russell on the Meaning of 'Good'". Dr. Ruja documented Russell's early agreement with Moore's ethical realism, in which "good" is objective, discernible by inspection, and indefinable. According to this view, ethical judgments can be known to be true by direct inspection together with the familiar analytical tools philosophy

provides. But after Santayana's criticisms (in *Winds of Doctrine*), Russell abandoned the basic tenets of Moore's ethics and replaced them by a subjectivist view according to which ethical assertions are expressions of desires. In the question period, Dr. Ruja discussed criteria of identity for desires and the distinction between desires and needs.

The conference's three final papers provided views of Russell the feminist, the Edwardian liberal, and the pacifist, helping to develop that elusive composite picture of Russell's very complex and multifaceted personality. In "Bertrand Russell: The False Consciousness of a Feminist", Brian Harrison analyzed Russell as suffragist, feminist, and husband. Although he never became one of Britain's leading feminists, Russell's involvement with the suffrage movement comes as no surprise, given his commitment to the logical implications of his humanism and the accepted and expected role of men in the gender-collaborative nature of early British suffragism. Dr. Harrison documented Russell's role in the controversy between the strategists of equal franchise for propertied persons and universal adult suffrage. Feminism was an important influence on Russell's intellect, and much of his thinking on women's rights was informed by his contact with Margaret Llewelyn Davies. He became, in the end, more radical than the predominantly conservative British feminists, who did not share Russell's revolutionary view that granting human rights to women implied fundamental changes in basic social structures.

But the principles of Russell's public politics were not the principles of his private life. As a husband, he expected women to fulfil what he considered their natural roles as mothers and domestic managers. In addition, he expected emotional service and intellectual subordination from his wives. Russell, like so many men, liked to marry his servants.

A formal discussion between Drs. Harrison, Jo Vellacott, and Kathleen McCrone followed. Dr. Vellacott explained that Russell's humanism prevented him from holding with the adversarial or separatist wing of feminism, and that he never came to articulate the criticism that prevailing gender power relations are also damaging to men. Russell saw women's emancipation as a corollary of human liberation that should always take precedence over the rights of any special group. Dr. Vellacott also challenged the view of British feminism as predominantly conservative, citing as evidence Butler's radicalism, especially in sexual matters relating to the repeal in the 1880s of the Contagious Diseases Act.

In "Bertrand Russell and the Dimensions of Edwardian Liberalism", Peter Clarke explained why the devastating impact of World War I was necessary to convert Russell from his pre-war allegiance to the Liberal

Party to a post-war allegiance to the Labour Party. The puzzle exists because so many of Russell's contemporaries made the same intellectual transition smoothly, given that Labour was, after the war, the only party carrying on traditional liberal values and social philosophy. Dr. Clarke argued that Russell neglected the social dimension of Edwardian Liberalism, while developing strong commitments to its political and economic dimensions. Unlike those of his contemporaries who kept abreast of the developing social views of Edwardian Liberalism, Russell had to reconstruct his own social views before coming to accept the policies of the Labour Party. The horrors of the Great War convinced him of the necessity of a new social order.

Commentary by Dr. Jock Gunn and questions from the audience included the topics of Russell's logical atomism as influencing or reinforcing his political liberalism, and the suggestion that Russell's commitment to socialism extended no further than to a variety of guild socialism, incorporating strong hostility to centralized state power. Lloyd Chandler, whose photographs of Russell adorned the Archives during the conference, rose to share with the audience his personal knowledge of Russell as one who lived like an aristocrat, loving the masses as long as they didn't come too close to him.

Thomas Kennedy's "To Nourish Life or Minister to Death: Bertrand Russell and the Twentieth-Century Peace Movement" analyzed Russell's contribution to the modern peace movement. Dr. Kennedy argued that Russell should not be described as a pacifist because his commitment to peace was not a personal creed but a political stance. The nature and extent of Russell's political activity in the No-Conscription Fellowship was described, together with Russell's sense of personal excitement at working with young people of an attractive "wildness of character". The theme of *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, that it is both possible and necessary to harness the impulse of war for the good of society, was analyzed as part of Russell's anti-war effort. Especially interesting in the light of the attention given by so many speakers to Russell's conversion of 1901 was Dr. Kennedy's assertion that, despite Russell's own pronouncements to the contrary, his peace advocacy did not undergo a fundamental change as a result of his conversion.

The question period allowed for a comparison between Russell's and D.H. Lawrence's contributions to the peace movement. It was suggested that unlike Lawrence, but true to Lawrence's assessment of him, Russell advocated peace while feeling rage and hate for those he opposed. It was also suggested that Russell's pacifism was a species of elitism because the horrors of war were seen as destructive of values enjoyed only by a small and elite social class.

Conference attendance was about ninety. Among distinguished registrants were Katharine Tait, Colin Matthew, David Pears, John Passmore, John Yolton, Yvon Gauthier, Ivor Grattan-Guinness, and the executive of the Bertrand Russell Society. Dinners were held at the McMaster Faculty Club and at the home of Dr. Richard Rempel of the Bertrand Russell Editorial Project. The quality of the presentations, the enthusiasm and interest of the audience, and the special ambience of shared interest in important issues augur well for the success of the second conference.—Bernd Frohmann