

Bertrand Russell in Bloomsbury

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I

The topic of this paper is not topographical. But if it were, perhaps the first thing to be said about Bertrand Russell in Bloomsbury is that his family owned a good part of the place. There were Russells in Bloomsbury long before there were Stephens or Stracheys. The Dukes of Bedford were Bloomsbury's landlords, and the squares and streets that the Group inhabited bore names associated with Russell's family—Bedford, Tavistock, Woburn, and Russell itself. But my title of course is metonymic and stands for the significance of Bertrand Russell's thought and character in relation to the Bloomsbury Group, especially their literary history.

That is an involved subject, and in order to survey it here I have had to concentrate on Russell's ideas rather than their embodiment in the philosophical assumptions of Bloomsbury's work. I have tried elsewhere to describe the particular nature of the Bloomsbury Group, the complicated interaction of puritanism, Utilitarianism, liberalism, and aestheticism in their intellectual background, and the literary uses to which Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster put Moore's and Russell's Realism.¹ A more immediate context for Russell's influences on Bloomsbury that must also be taken for granted here is the Cambridge setting in which Bloomsbury encountered Russell. He was one of four philosophers, all members of the celebrated, now notorious, Cambridge Conversazione Society, a.k.a. the Apostles or the Society. Like Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart, and G. E. Moore, Russell's influence on the Apostolic brothers who came to make up the male contingent of Bloomsbury was both intellectual and personal. This needs to be insisted upon because recent studies of the Apostles have tended to emphasize the personal interrelations of the

brothers at the expense of the intellectual ones. Henry Sidgwick and Lytton Strachey, to take two Apostolic boundaries of Russell's time in the Society, were agreed that the one absolutely essential Apostolic quality was the pursuit of truth. What truth was underwent considerable modification from Sidgwick to Strachey, but it cannot responsibly be reduced to the merely personal. Russell, especially, exerted less personal attraction for Bloomsbury than Dickinson or Moore, but his fame easily leads to interpretations that overemphasize his biographical involvement in Bloomsbury and underestimate his intellectual importance for them. The variety and complexity, not to mention the longevity of his thinking were unequalled by anyone of his time. Russell's impact on Bloomsbury extends far beyond the Cambridge years, when he and Moore made their philosophical revolution, to the Great War, when Bloomsbury strongly supported Russell's crusading pacifism, and on into the Twenties and Thirties, when Russell's social, historical, and popular philosophical writings were more appealing to Bloomsbury than the work in logic and epistemology which the Group had originally found so interesting.

But to argue for the significance of Russell's ideas for Bloomsbury runs counter to the division sometimes made between Russell's historical, literary, and personal aspects on the one hand, and his philosophical and mathematical ones on the other. As with the Apostles, there is a danger in this division of personalizing Russell's historical and literary significance by dissociating it from his philosophical thought. For Russell studies, the thesis of my paper is a holistic historical one: Russell the writer, the reformer, the educator, the moralist—Russell the lunatic, the lover, and the poet ought to be all compact in our historical imagination with Russell the philosopher, or we shall never properly understand his unique importance. Instead of separating off Russell's tough from his tender-minded thoughts, I want to try and use some distinctions from his own work as a means of organizing an examination of his significance for Bloomsbury.²

In his two full-length autobiographical works Russell drew a clear distinction between his personal and his philosophical developments. He says relatively little about his philosophical work in *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, published from 1967 to 1969 but originally written in 1931 and then extended to cover the last forty years of his life as well as supplemented with letters and with autobiographical essays written later. In 1959, however, Russell devoted a book to his work entitled *My Philosophical Development*. But what Russell meant by philosophy in that work had essentially to do with matters of logic and epistemology; there is virtually no discussion of his extensive ethical or social writings. In trying to understand the particular nature of Russell's relevance to Bloomsbury, it is helpful to follow these distinctions he made between his life and his technical and non-technical philosophy, beginning with a short account of his place among the Apostles

and then going on to a brief consideration of his Edwardian work in logic and epistemology before turning to the ethical and social philosophy that influenced Bloomsbury mainly during the First World War and then concluding with a look at Russell's criticisms of Bloomsbury, which will take us back to the Apostles again. (Russell's popular philosophical and historical writings after the war continued to be read in Bloomsbury but they were not as significant to the Group's development as his work before the Twenties.)

But Bloomsbury's interest in Russell cannot be completely compartmentalized. The brilliance of his mind was an essential aspect of his personality; the attention the Group gave to his social thought stemmed from his authority as a mathematical logician. And while it is impossible, in a literary history at any rate, to avoid simplifying the thought of a philosopher that reaches from *The Principles of Mathematics* to *The Conquest of Happiness*, it may be possible to indicate something of the intellectuality that intrigued his contemporaries. "He has not much body of character", Virginia Woolf said in her diary in 1924, thinking he perhaps disapproved of her:

This luminous vigorous mind seems to be attached to a flimsy little car, like that on a large glinting balloon. His adventures with his wives diminish his importance. And he has no chin, and he is dapper. Nevertheless, I should like the run of his headpiece.³

This headpiece fascinated all of Bloomsbury and was an essential part of their philosophical education.

II

In Cambridge Russell's influence in the Apostles was tied to Moore's for Bloomsbury. Except for Roger Fry—the only member of Bloomsbury mentioned by Russell as a Cambridge friend⁴—the Bloomsbury Apostles encountered Russell as a mathematical philosopher and fellow of Trinity who confirmed and augmented G. E. Moore's philosophy. Russell had turned to philosophy in his last year as a student at Cambridge, disgusted with the trickery of mathematical teaching, which he had nevertheless mastered. As with the other Apostles, his real education began in the Society; Whitehead, McTaggart, and Moore, the principal philosophical influences on him at Cambridge, were all Apostles. Under McTaggart's domination Russell and Moore, who was two years behind Russell at Trinity, became Idealists for a time. Then Moore, as Russell once put it, "found Hegelian philosophy inapplicable to chairs and tables, and I found it inapplicable to mathematics; so with his help I climbed out of it and back to

common sense tempered by mathematical logic.”⁵ Russell’s development from the Idealism of McTaggart and F. H. Bradley to the Realism of Moore can be traced in the Apostle papers Russell wrote in the Nineties and then in his books that appeared around the turn of the century. The Kantian analysis of geometry that he dedicated to McTaggart was followed by a study of Leibniz, in which Moore’s influence began to appear, and in his third philosophical book, *The Principles of Mathematics*, published the same marvellous year as *Principia Ethica*, Russell announced,

On fundamental questions of philosophy, my position, in all its chief features, is derived from Mr. G. E. Moore. I have accepted from him the non-existential nature of propositions ... and their independence of any knowing mind; also the pluralism which regards the world ... as composed of an infinite number of mutually independent entities.⁶

With such principles Russell said he was able to show mathematics and logic were identical, and he spent the next ten years doing so with Whitehead. Keynes, the only member of Bloomsbury qualified to understand Russell’s discoveries in symbolic logic (and whose work on probability Russell later used), thought in retrospect *The Principles of Mathematics* supplied “in spirit” a method for treating the material of *Principia Ethica*, and he gave as an illustration rather absurd problems in ethical mensuration that the Apostles played with.⁷ What Keynes may have meant was that Russell’s aim to analyze the fundamental concepts of mathematics and deduce them from a small number of logical concepts was related to Moore’s analysis of the fundamental concepts of ethics that derived them from a few elementary concepts; both rely, for instance, on indefinability to establish their respective principles.

Nevertheless, at the end of his career G. E. Moore thought that all Russell owed him were mistakes, whereas *he* had been influenced by Russell more than any other single philosopher.⁸ For Bloomsbury, however, it was the thought and character of Moore that dominated the Apostles when Russell was an active member of The Society and later. Leonard Woolf likened a philosophical argument between them to a race between the tortoise and the hare.⁹ Nor were Russell and Moore, despite their intense concern with each other’s ideas, especially close friends. Russell thought, correctly, that Moore disapproved of him,¹⁰ and James Strachey has suggested that Russell was jealous of Moore’s ascendancy among the Apostles.¹¹ Desmond MacCarthy, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, and Maynard Keynes were all certainly closer to Moore than Russell in the Society. They all appear to have valued personal relationships higher than Russell. From time to time in the Apostles there were discussions during Bloomsbury’s time as to whether love of truth and knowledge was as high an ideal as love of beauty and love of

love. Russell definitely thought so; his supreme goods were abstract—the certainty of mathematics or the intellectual love of God were ends he idealized more than personal relations and aesthetic enjoyments. Russell was also less tolerant of homosexuality than Moore and other heterosexuals in the Society were. Russell later claimed in his revised autobiography that “homosexual relations among the members were for a time common, but in my day they were unknown”.¹² Enough is known now about the Apostles to question both parts of Russell’s statement. “The higher Sodomy” as it was called existed among the Victorian Apostles; with Keynes, Strachey, and others, a lower sodomy was embraced but it is still not clear how common homosexual relations actually were in the Society during Bloomsbury’s time.

Another important factor that may account for the greater influence of Moore than Russell over Bloomsbury at Cambridge was the fact that Russell came to philosophy directly but Moore was trained as a classicist. (T. S. Eliot thought it “a public misfortune” that Russell lacked a classical education.)¹³ Translation between English, Greek, and Latin had been the focus of Moore’s intellectual efforts before he switched to philosophy, and Russell thought this led him “to attach enormous importance to verbal precision”.¹⁴ Moore is a great philosophical translator, as it were, who seeks clear meaning from the opaque utterances of other philosophers; he tries to construe their meanings correctly and exactly. It was a valuable literary discipline for the nascent writers of Bloomsbury. And more generally, Moore’s intense absorption in the classics was a common literary experience with many of the Bloomsbury Group which Russell lacked. In assessing Russell’s early approaches to literature, it is important to remember that he did not come to it through the literary discipline of classical studies.

But for all Bloomsbury’s personal and intellectual devotion to Moore, and through which many of the Group viewed Russell, there was no doubting Russell’s genius in Bloomsbury. Leonard Woolf, the proudest intellectual in Bloomsbury and the most worshipful of Moore, testified that Russell had the quickest mind of anyone he had ever known.¹⁵ In one respect Russell was far more Apostolic than Moore, and that was his marvellous wit. (Leonard Woolf did not think he ever heard Moore say anything witty.)¹⁶ And Russell also knew more about logic and mathematics than anyone else in the Society at this time except Whitehead. Perhaps the absence of any close Bloomsbury relationships with Russell added to the persuasiveness with which, in the decade after *Principia Ethica*, Russell’s writings extended for the Group the significance of Moore’s epistemology, analytic methods, and—for a time—ethics.

III

“Revolt into Pluralism” was the chapter title Russell gave in *My Philosophical Development* to his and Moore’s rejection of Idealism at the turn of the century. The subjectivity of Idealism was the focus of Moore’s attack, but for Russell it was the monism that made mathematics impossible. In the end Russell realized there were mistakes in their new Realism but he thought Moore still agreed with the negative part of their revolution, “the doctrine that fact is in general independent of experience”.¹⁷ Pluralism remained a basic assumption of Bloomsbury’s philosophical outlook; conceptual analysis not metaphysical synthesis was the proper method of philosophy for them. Throughout Bloomsbury’s writings, philosophy and the analysis of ideas were virtually synonymous, and along with analysis went an appreciation of the analytic virtues of clarity and simplicity.

The kinds of analysis Russell and Moore did early in their careers were as different as mathematics is from ethics. The logical paradoxes that made Russell philosophically famous in his thirties showed Bloomsbury the power of philosophical analysis to clarify without metaphysics the paradoxes of language. Roger Fry, for example, turned to Russell early for help in analyzing what Sir Joshua Reynolds meant by beauty as the common form in his Royal Academy discourses which Fry edited in 1905.¹⁸ The values inherent in the pursuit of mathematics Russell expressed for Bloomsbury in an essay written originally in 1902 and published as “The Study of Mathematics” in *The New Quarterly*, the first of Desmond MacCarthy’s magazines, in 1907.¹⁹ It was on the appearance of this essay that Lytton Strachey wrote to Russell,

Oh!—I shall have this engraved on my tombstone—
HE KNEW MOORE AND RUSSELL
and nothing more.²⁰

Strachey particularly liked the comparison of the understanding of mathematics with the emergence of an Italian palace out of the mist before a traveller. Whether Strachey also agreed with Russell that mathematics was superior to literature because of its greater generality is another matter, but he and Bloomsbury would have liked the aesthetic point, which is related to Moore’s notion of an organic whole, that “an argument which serves only to prove a conclusion is like a story subordinated to some moral which it is meant to teach: for aesthetic perfection no part of the whole should be merely a means.”²¹

“The Study of Mathematics” is one of the more Platonic of Russell’s works, idealizing a timeless realm to be contemplated by pure reason beyond this vale of tears. In their early Realism, Russell and Moore were

persuaded of the independence of propositions as well as material things from knowing minds; these are combined in Russell’s essay into a transcendent, if not transcendental, intellectual consolation:

The contemplation of what is non-human, the discovery that our minds are capable of dealing with material not created by them, above all, the realization that beauty belongs to the outer world as to the inner, are the chief means of overcoming the terrible sense of impotence, of weakness, of exile amid hostile powers.²²

Virginia Woolf made the heroine of her second novel, modelled on Vanessa Bell, into a mathematician rather than a painter, and the conflict of *Night and Day* might be expressed in these words of Russell’s; eventually her education and her love involve Katherine Hilbery in becoming more humanly diurnal, less Platonically nocturnal. So too with Russell, who lost his enthusiasm for mathematics when he realized under the influence of Wittgenstein that it consisted of tautologies. Russell called this stage of his philosophical development “The Retreat from Pythagoras”.²³

But Russell never retreated from analysis. His continuing importance as a philosopher for Bloomsbury appears in his analyses of the nature of perception. 1912 saw the publication of *The Problems of Philosophy* in the Home University Library series, together with Moore’s *Ethics* and Strachey’s *Landmarks in French Literature*—an *annus mirabilis* for that series. Russell’s book has been well described as “the manual of the empiricist and realist revival”.²⁴ No other work sums up so lucidly and concisely the conception of philosophy that Bloomsbury took from Russell and Moore; none illuminates so well the intimations of epistemology to be found in the Group’s criticism, biographies, and fiction. Many of his ideas were taken, Russell acknowledged, from Moore’s unpublished lectures of 1910–11, and some also came from Keynes’s unpublished work on probability—but it was *The Problems of Philosophy* that made them all easily accessible to Bloomsbury. The value of philosophy is still in the end Platonic and mystical, the union of mind with the universe, but its methods are unrelentingly analytical. Problems, the title announces, are the province of philosophy. Questions not answers are its concern, “because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation.”²⁵ The enrichment of the intellectual imagination, for which Bloomsbury honoured all its philosophical mentors at Cambridge, took place in philosophy through its essential function: criticism. This is what distinguishes it from science as well as art. The problems of *The Problems of Philosophy* have to do with the ways things and truths can be known. Russell’s ideas about sense-data, the difference between acquaintance and description in knowing, and

the correspondence theory of truth all stimulated Bloomsbury's intellectual imagination. His book enacted for them an analytical and epistemological conception of philosophy that diminished the value of other contemporary philosophies such as Bergson's. The year that *The Problems of Philosophy* was published Russell demonstrated how the critical function of philosophy could be used to expose the confusions of a metaphysics of time. In *The Philosophy of Bergson* he pointed out how the theory of *durée* rested on "the elementary confusion between the present occurrence of a recollection and the past occurrence which is recollected".²⁶ Bergson thought he was explaining the difference between present and past but all he was really doing was describing the difference between present facts of perception and recollection. This was another example, Russell thought, of the confusion in a good deal of modern philosophy between the act of knowing and what is known, which was the original, essential distinction of Moore's Realism. Perception and recollection, knowing and what is known, are also fundamental distinctions for the fiction of E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf.

Two years after *The Problems of Philosophy* Russell published his last sustained work of technical philosophy before the war, which was also the last of Russell's strictly philosophical works to interest Bloomsbury very much. *Our Knowledge of the External World* is usually referred to by that short title, but the rest of the full title—*as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*—indicates how Russell was moving away from more or less common-sense views of perception towards scientific ones. It may have been this book that Fry wrote to Russell about, saying how mistrustful of metaphysics he was, yet how real and solid he had found Russell's discussions, especially of infinity. Fry concluded with a question: "Will you ever turn to Aesthetics or is that too complex even for your analysis?"²⁷ It has also been suggested that Virginia Woolf's fictional representations of time and space owe something to Russell's constructions in *Our Knowledge of the External World* rather than Bergson's cruder ones.²⁸

In *The Analysis of Mind*, given as lectures in London after the war to an audience that included Leonard Woolf, Russell was now influenced by William James and the behaviourists in their denials of consciousness—in violent reaction, says John Passmore (whose excellent account of Russell I have been relying on here) "to the whole pattern of ideas within which his own and Moore's earlier theories had been worked out."²⁹ But Fry was again an enthusiastic reader, preferring *The Analysis of Mind* to any other metaphysics, including Moore's.³⁰ The twists and turns after *The Analysis of Matter* (1927) that, in a moment of disillusionment recorded in the epilogue to his 1931 autobiography, Russell thought had brought him almost full philosophical circle back to the subjectivity of Idealism³¹ were not much followed after the First World War in New Bloomsbury, though some of his popularizations of philosophy were read by members of the

Group—*An Outline of Philosophy* delighted Fry;³² *Sceptical Essays* brought a fan letter from Clive Bell;³³ and Virginia Woolf cited *The Scientific Outlook* in *Three Guineas*.³⁴

IV

Bloomsbury found, then, in Russell's analytical, epistemological work a conception of philosophy that was pluralistic, Realistic, and even Platonic. In Russell's moral, social, and political philosophy that he separated from his logic and epistemology the Group discovered a range of concerns whose scope and practical applications interested them considerably. Here Russell's influence on Bloomsbury became quite independent of Moore's. Throughout his extraordinary career, Russell remained a touchstone of liberalism for them. His grandfather, after all, had been a Liberal prime minister, his parents were philosophical radicals, and John Stuart Mill had been his godless godfather. Russell's very first book, an analysis of German social democracy published in 1896, had included a critical exposition of Marxism quite consistent with his criticism of communism after the visit to Russia in 1920—a criticism Bloomsbury was sympathetic with. Bloomsbury would have voted for Russell when he ran in 1907 as a Woman's Suffrage candidate; they agreed with his pacifism and opposition to conscription in the First World War and with his anti-pacifist opposition to Fascism in the Second; and those who were still alive after that war supported some aspects at least of his nuclear disarmament crusade.

Russell emerged as a stimulating social thinker in Bloomsbury and beyond during the First World War with *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, his first widely read book. Russell's earlier writings on such subjects as religion and ethics had, with the exception of "The Study of Mathematics", not as much appeal for the Cambridge Apostles as his more technical work because, to begin with, they were not as original. Dickinson and McTaggart on religion and Moore on ethics were more interesting, even for Russell. "The Study of Mathematics" and its companion piece "The Free Man's Worship"—deplorably the most famous essay Russell ever wrote—were done before Moore's *Principia Ethica* or McTaggart's *Some Dogmas of Religion*. As a testament, the former essay had a certain authority because of its subject, but the latter seems little more than a *fin-de-siècle* prose hymn of stoic renunciation. Fry, who was more sympathetic to Russell than anyone else in Bloomsbury, thought the article very fine but did not agree that resignation was the logical result of such worship and thought "indignation however fatuous would be more justified" for the world Russell described.³⁵ And Russell himself came to regret the essay and thought he must have been reading too much Milton and Taylor.³⁶ He also appears to have been reading too much Pater: "To abandon the struggle for private happi-

ness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things—this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship."³⁷ How remote the sentiments and the prose are from *Principia Ethica*, which appeared the same year, and from the two reviews hailing it that Russell himself wrote.³⁸ Russell's versatility as a stylist at this time is astonishing and disturbing. When he wished, he could write the plain style with greater forcefulness than Dickinson, greater lucidity than McTaggart, and greater grace than Moore. Such prose was closer to Bloomsbury's idea of good writing than anyone else's in Cambridge.

The impetus behind "The Free Man's Worship" was a mystical experience brought on by the illness of Whitehead's wife with whom Russell appears to have been in love.³⁹ Nearly a decade later, when he was in love with Lady Ottoline Morrell, Russell began writing various works on religious topics again. Part of an unpublished work was printed as an essay on the essence of religion, which Russell saw as fundamentally mystical in a Platonic rather than a Christian way; the only Christian religious elements worth preserving, Russell thought, were worship, acquiescence, and love.⁴⁰ Bloomsbury would have accepted only the last on the assumption, perhaps, that it included the other two. Forster at eighty-three, in an undelivered speech for Russell at ninety, praised his impressive irreverence "because it is a positive quality and not the negative of reverence, and because it is devoid of arrogance";⁴¹ like Russell, he had no sense of sin or need of prayer, though he experienced a thanksgiving directed, however, to people rather than gods for whom it was too meagre a fare.

Another essay of Russell's on mysticism written before the war has more bearing on Bloomsbury's philosophical education than most of Russell's religious or ethical essays because it attempted to reconcile mysticism with logic. Russell's definition of mysticism in "Mysticism and Logic", as "in essence little more than a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe"⁴² may not have been very helpful but his examination of four basic mystical principles clarifies the associations of the visionary and the rational that are made in so many Bloomsbury works—*A Passage to India* and *To the Lighthouse*, for example. The first mystical principle that intuition is superior to reason is modified in Russell's conclusion that both harmonizing reason and creative intuition are necessary; the second that reality is monistic is the only one of the four that Russell cannot find some way of accommodating; the third and fourth principles that time and evil do not really exist are both fallacious for Russell, though it is sometimes useful, he concedes, to think and act as if they did. The combination of the rational and the intuitive are fundamental in Bloomsbury's thinking, and along with Russell and McTaggart, they could conceive of a mystical pluralism. Time could at times be illusory, particularly in the fiction of Virginia Woolf, yet its reality, including of

course the reality of history, was, *pace* McTaggart, very real and important. In his analysis of the fourth principle of mysticism, however, Russell diverged from the ethics of Moore that Bloomsbury accepted. Evil could be considered illusory in some way, for Russell, because good as well as evil are subjective, merely the reflections of certain kinds of feelings we have. The good should not be identified with the real, as in Plato, for this splits science and philosophy.⁴³ It also split Russell and Bloomsbury.

Russell abandoned Moore's ethics in 1913 when Santayana published a criticism of *Principia Ethica* that argued *good* might be indefinable but it was not unconditioned, not an intrinsic property independent of personal interests.⁴⁴ Russell's original reviews of *Principia Ethica* had called the book brilliant and profound—especially the last chapter on the Ideal which Russell agreed with his brother Apostles in Bloomsbury was the best in the book. His only real criticism was of the chapter on ethics in relation to conduct where Russell found Moore going too far in his consequentialist definition of *ought* and suggested it too might, like *good*, be indefinable. He was not as prepared as Moore and Bloomsbury to dismiss the whole deontological basis of Victorian moral philosophy, and his criticism may be reflected in the changes Moore made later in *Ethics*. In the only substantial piece of ethical writing that Russell did before the war—an essay originally published in MacCarthy's *The New Quarterly* and then reprinted and retitled as "The Elements of Ethics" in his 1910 *Philosophical Essays*—he tried to combine conscience and consequence types of ethical theory, using the non-Moorean terms of "subjective" and "objective" to describe them.⁴⁵ In almost all other main points in this essay Russell followed Moore's ethics closely; even the new title was the one Moore had given to the lectures that formed the basis for *Principia Ethica* and which Russell had read in typescript.⁴⁶ Until he reversed himself under Santayana's criticism and abandoned objective for subjective ethics, Russell's moral philosophy was, like his epistemology only less so, basically an extension of Moore's thought as far as Bloomsbury was concerned. And when Russell's ethics became subjective, so in a sense did his epistemology in *Our Knowledge of the External World*.

Russell came to believe that the only objective elements in ethics were political ones, and at the end of his life he felt deeply frustrated at "the impossibility of reconciling ethical feelings with ethical doctrines".⁴⁷ Moore too at the end of his career was uncertain about whether *good* had merely emotive meanings.⁴⁸ In Cambridge and during the first decade of the twentieth century there were no doubts; after Russell changed his mind, it was his social and political rather than ethical writings that continued to interest most of Bloomsbury.

Russell was more closely involved with members of the Bloomsbury Group during the First World War than at any other time, before or after. His pacifism split the Society, but he had the support of the Bloomsbury Apostles when he lost his lectureship. The lectures he gave in London early in 1916 and published under the title *Principles of Social Reconstruction* are among the most important of his writings for Bloomsbury because of the scope of their concerns, the genius of the lecturer, and the times in which they were written. Under the shock of the greatest public catastrophe of their lives, Bloomsbury paid attention to what the brilliant logician of *The Principles of Mathematics* had to say about the *Principles of Social Reconstruction*.

The principles Russell develops for the reconstruction of society are based on a theory of impulse. There are two fundamental kinds of impulse, possessive and creative, and social reconstruction should aim at liberating, vivifying the latter and diminishing the former by developing, first of all, an organic common purpose to counteract the overdeveloped individualism in our society. Syndicalism is the form of socialism Russell sees doing this for the government of the state but there must also be world government to end the international anarchy that caused the war. As for individuals, they must learn to revere necessary authority and the spirit of life in others. The egoism of romantic love must be broken down, and there should be a Platonic harmonizing of our instinctual and intellectual lives by our spiritual life. Both individual and community growth must be fostered and a philosophy or religion developed that will incarnate such an ideal as God, truth, or beauty so that out of the war's destruction may come hope for a rebirth.

This sketch does not do justice to the sweep of Russell's synthesis, though it may suggest his eclectic combination of Platonic psychology, Spinozistic religion, Lawrentian love, and liberal socialism. The various themes of the *Principles of Social Reconstruction* recur in different forms throughout the extensive social and political writing that Russell did over the next half century. His socialism did not remain syndicalist; his ideas on education, marriage, and morals grew more permissive; his psychology became more behavioural. But along with Bloomsbury he continued to see modern history in terms like those in the titles of two of his later works—*Freedom and Organization* and *Authority and the Individual*. Bloomsbury continued to read and even occasionally review his later popularizing and historical works but none seems to have had the impact on the Group's development as his writings just before and during the war. The Group clearly approved, for example, of the destructive analysis of the current social principles of the state, war, property, education, marriage, and religion, each the subject of a

chapter, that preceded Russell's reconstruction in the book. "It is splendid the way he sticks at nothing" Lytton Strachey wrote to Lady Ottoline after attending Russell's lectures, "Governments, religions, laws, property, even Good Form itself—down they go like ninepins—it is a charming sight."⁴⁹ The Apostles had been engaging in piecemeal analyses of the social order for a long time, but none had done so publicly with the completeness that Russell managed, which made fellow Apostles like Forster think the *Principles of Social Reconstruction* "a brave and splendid book".⁵⁰

When it came to Russell's reconstructive principles, there was not as much agreement in Bloomsbury. The elite concept of civilization being developed by Clive Bell was remote from guild socialism. Leonard Woolf's and even Roger Fry's socialism were closer to Russell's, and all agreed with Dickinson that world government was imperative for any post-war reconstruction. But what would Leonard Woolf (who attended the lectures) or Keynes have thought of the absence of any class analysis in Russell's discussions? Despite his early familiarity with Marx, Russell never mentions him in his lectures. One can imagine what Virginia Woolf (who attended at least one of the lectures) would have thought of Russell's ego-breaking, procreative theories of marriage or his confident assertion that the movement for the emancipation of women "is not far from complete triumph".⁵¹ Strachey must also have had misgivings about Russell's notions of marriage but he remained enthusiastic about the lectures, finding them "very grand; one feels one had always thought something like that—but vaguely and inconclusively".⁵² The way Russell puts them together, they were "solid shining.... I don't believe there's anyone quite so formidable to be found just now upon earth".⁵³ But E. M. Forster, writing to Russell from Egypt, where he was serving with the Red Cross, was more reflective and critical:

For a time I thought you would shake me out of my formula—that though of course there is a connection between civilization and our private desires and impulses and actions, it is a connection as meaningless as that between a word and the letters that make it up. But the formula holds. The war will only end through exhaustion and nausea. All that is good in humanity must be sweated and vomited out together with what is bad.⁵⁴

That Forster, just six years after *Howards End*, could now not connect the individual with civilization says something not only about the war but also about Russell's reconstructive principles. In his disillusionment Forster sounds a little like D. H. Lawrence, with whom he was more in sympathy than other members of Bloomsbury. Forster saw the disconnection between personal renewal and social reconstruction in Russell's philosophy but he

was unwilling to give up liberty for the kind of community that Lawrence's philosophy (developed in "The Crown") called for.

Keynes also recognized the disjunction between the individual and society in Russell's social thought and related it to Lawrence. In "My Early Beliefs" Keynes depicted Russell in the Apostles and elsewhere as sustaining

simultaneously a pair of opinions ludicrously incompatible. He held that in fact human affairs were carried on after a most irrational fashion, but that the remedy was quite simple and easy, since all we had to do was to carry them on rationally. A discussion of practical affairs on these lines was really very boring. And a discussion of the human heart which ignored so many of its deeper and blinder passions, both good and bad, was scarcely more interesting.⁵⁵

The context of Keynes's remarks, which certainly apply to the *Principles of Social Reconstruction* as a discussion of practical affairs, was his criticism of the Moorean Apostles' unrealistically rational conception of human nature—a conception that justified a little Lawrence's attack on Keynes and his friends. This is not the place to discuss the brilliant insights and distortions of Keynes's celebrated memoir, but it is worth noting that his imaginative reconstruction of Lawrence's reaction to Cambridge ignores its war-time setting and the homosexual revulsion that Lawrence experienced there in 1915. Despite Keynes's reticence and oversimplification, Russell made his memoir the basis for the account of Keynes, Strachey, and their Apostolic generation that Russell wrote in 1952 and then worked into his autobiography. This along with Russell's other reactions to Bloomsbury brings us back to Cambridge and the personal relations of Russell and the Bloomsbury Group.

VI

Russell's account criticizes the Apostolic generation of Keynes and Strachey for abandoning the Victorian idea of progress, indulging themselves in "the passionate mutual admirations of a clique of the elite", and degrading Moore's ethics to what he rather inaptly described as "girls-school sentimentalizing".⁵⁶ Russell was almost frightened by Keynes's arrogant brilliance but he thought his work valuable. Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* made him laugh in prison; yet Russell attacked his style and his veracity. When Russell originally published his recollections of Keynes and Strachey in *The Listener* he provoked a reply from E. M. Forster, who asked why Russell bothered to reminisce so ungenerously about Strachey since he so disliked him.⁵⁷ Perhaps because of Forster's complaint Russell did not include it in

Portraits from Memory with the other memoirs he broadcast, but he put it in his autobiography and added some paragraphs with reference finally to Strachey's and Keynes's homosexuality. Strachey "is diseased and unnatural", he wrote to Lady Ottoline in 1912, adding with a priggishness that is almost ironical, "and only a very high degree of civilization enables a healthy person to stand him".⁵⁸ It is now quite clear from Russell's and Lawrence's letters that despite their differences over the values of intellectuality and blood-consciousness they were agreed in disliking homosexuality, though for different reasons: Lawrence found the homosexuality of Duncan Grant, Keynes, and David Garnett threatening; Russell thought it sterilizing, abnormal.⁵⁹ The "deep and blinder passions" of the heart that Keynes found Russell unable to take account of kept him from understanding the full impact of *Principia Ethica* on Bloomsbury, even though he thought the chapter on the Ideal the best thing in the book. Unlike their other philosophical teachers in the Apostles, Russell had no close relationships with Bloomsbury of the kind he had at various times with Wittgenstein, Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, or even Katherine Mansfield.

Keynes and Strachey were, of course, aware of Russell's disapproval. During their years as Apostles, Keynes once wrote to Strachey how shocked Russell would have been at their correspondence, how unsurprised he would be when Keynes finally died of syphilis. In 1919 Strachey wrote to Virginia Woolf, who thought Russell might dislike her, that he had met him again at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington after the war: "Bertie worked his circular saw as usual. I've never been able to feel at ease with him, and I can only suppose he disliked me—pourquoi?"⁶⁰ Part of the explanation was that Russell disliked the "pose of cynical superiority" that he thought Strachey made fashionable at Cambridge.⁶¹ It is ironic that Russell of all people should complain of Strachey's cynicism. Desmond MacCarthy wrote to Russell in 1917 that he thought *him* too "symmetrically cynical" in his writings, like La Rochefoucauld, and that this may have affected Russell's and Moore's relations.⁶² Russell's letters to Lady Ottoline also show that he thought Strachey too passive a pacifist. Actually Strachey supported his friends' conscientious objections and maintained his own as well as composing a leaflet for the No-Conscription Fellowship and, of course, writing *Eminent Victorians*, which criticized the Victorian world order that contributed to the war. And in addition to his dislike of Strachey's sexuality, Russell also appears to have been a little jealous of Ottoline Morrell's considerable fondness for him.

Russell summarized what he saw as his relation to Bloomsbury in a letter written from prison to Lady Ottoline about an anonymous, hostile review of Siegfried Sassoon's poems that he thought came from Bloomsbury but was in fact written by Middleton Murry:

Ouf! I hate all the Bloomsbury crew, with their sneers at anything that has live feeling in it. *Beastly* of them to be down on S. S. They put up with me because they know I can make any one look ridiculous—if I had less brains and less satire, they would all be down on me—as it is, they whisper against me in corners, and flatter me to my face. They are a rotten crew. I wish you had more congenial “friends”.⁶³

Certainly Bloomsbury and just about everyone else who knew Russell were aware of how deadly his circular-saw intellect could be. They openly admired his mind and were amused, not always as openly, at the extraordinary figure this genius cut. Russell rarely appears as an ironic symbol in Bloomsbury’s writings as he does in the fiction of Lawrence, Huxley and Cannan or the poetry of Eliot and Campbell. But they were familiar with the paradoxes of his character—a logician who laughed and was lecherous, an Alice-in-Wonderland figure wandering in the modern waste land.⁶⁴ But just who made up the rotten Bloomsbury crew that Russell thought the friends of Lady Ottoline? Not Roger Fry, who had quarrelled violently with her yet remained friends with Russell. Not Desmond MacCarthy, who also kept up his friendship and had written together with Russell’s aunt a memoir of his grandmother, Lady John Russell. Not E. M. Forster, who was in Egypt and whose novels Russell quite liked. It probably included Keynes, whose *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* Russell nevertheless thought moral and clever, and also Strachey, whose book Russell was delighting in when he wrote Ottoline from prison. And it also probably included Clive Bell, to whom Russell was soon to write and ask for an educated layman’s opinion of the *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* he had written in prison. (Later Bell remarked, in qualifying a little Moore’s influence on all of Bloomsbury, that Russell, “though no one has ever called him ‘Bloomsbury’ appeared to be a friend and was certainly an influence”.⁶⁵) And maybe Russell’s crew included the Woolfs, to whose Hogarth Press Russell and his third wife submitted in the Thirties their edition of the letters and diaries of Russell’s parents, which were then published in two volumes as *The Amberley Papers*.

Apart from the familiar confusion as to whom Bloomsbury included, Russell’s denunciation reveals that the personal and the intellectual remained separate in his as well as Bloomsbury’s relations with each other. And *The Amberley Papers* suggests a final difference between them that was mentioned at the start of this paper. Russell was not—as were all of Bloomsbury—middle-class. He was an aristocrat, and this was one of his bonds with Ottoline, whose behaviour intrigued Bloomsbury. (Vita Sackville-West was another.) One of the Biblical texts Lady John Russell taught her grandson, and that he remembered all his life, was “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil”.⁶⁶ This background sustained him in his reforming crusades during the First World War and after the Second.

Bloomsbury saw in the aristocracy a freedom from criticism and the dreary self-consciousness of middle-class conformity. But the freedom could also lead to irresponsible contempt. The anti-semitism, for instance, that Russell expresses in his autobiography and elsewhere was accurately described by Leonard Woolf (who rarely seems to have noticed it in others) as “aristocratic anti-semitism”.⁶⁷

VII

When he was twenty-two, Bertrand Russell had a Hegelian vision of two series of books he might write, one about the philosophy of the sciences and another on social questions. “I hoped that the two series might ultimately meet in a synthesis at once scientific and practical”, he recalled in his autobiography and thought to some extent they did.⁶⁸ Later Russell agreed that there was no necessary connection between the two in his work, though there was a psychological one.⁶⁹ For Russell’s Bloomsbury readers and the others there was also a psychological connection in the sense that they hoped his analytical genius could provide wisdom in moral and social matters. And if Bloomsbury was ultimately disappointed in the discrepancies between Russell’s logical and moral intelligence, there was still profound wisdom for them in what Russell said had been the only constant preoccupation of his philosophical development: “I have throughout been anxious to discover how much we can be said to know and with what degree of certainty or doubtfulness”.⁷⁰ It was the scope, the subtlety, the versatility of this quest rather than its results that impressed Bloomsbury, whose admiration for Russell’s thought if not his character was an illustration of the truth of the last sentence in his *History of Western Philosophy*: “In abandoning a part of its dogmatic pretensions, philosophy does not cease to suggest and inspire a way of life.”

Notes

- 1 See: “The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf” in *English Literature and British Philosophy*, ed. Rosenbaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 316–56; *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary, and Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975); “*The Longest Journey*: E. M. Forster’s Refutation of Idealism” in *E. M. Forster: A Human Exploration*, eds. G. K. Das and John Beer (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 32–54; “Preface to a Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group”, *New Literary History*, 12 (Winter 1981): 329–44; “The Intellectual Origins of the Bloomsbury Group”, *Times Higher Educational Supplement* (29 Oct. 1982): 14–15.
- 2 I have described the conception of Bloomsbury assumed here in *The Bloomsbury Group*, pp. ii–iii. Only the central members’ associations with Russell have been discussed here, though he was also involved with peripheral figures such as his niece Karin Costelloe Stephen, Virginia Woolf’s sister-in-law.

- 3 Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 2: 1920–1934, eds. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 295.
- 4 *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 3 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967–9), 1: 63.
- 5 “My Religious Reminiscences” in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell, 1903–1959*, eds. Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 35.
- 6 *The Principles of Mathematics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p. viii.
- 7 “My Early Beliefs” in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, Vol. 10 (London: Macmillan, St. Martin’s Press for the Royal Economic Society, 1972), pp. 438–9.
- 8 Moore, “An Autobiography” in *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University, 1942), pp. 13–16.
- 9 Leonard Woolf, *Sowing: An Autobiography of the Years 1880–1904* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1960), p. 134.
- 10 Ronald W. Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (London: Jonathan Cape and Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), p. 97.
- 11 Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Biography* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), p. 165.
- 12 *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 1: 74.
- 13 Eliot, *Selected Essays*, new ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), p. 434.
- 14 Russell, “The Influence and Thought of G. E. Moore”, *The Listener*, 61 (30 April 1959): 756.
- 15 Leonard Woolf, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *My Philosophical Development* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959), p. 54.
- 18 Roger Fry, Preface to Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy* (London: Seeley, 1905), p. v.
- 19 Reprinted in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 12, eds. Andrew Brink, Margaret Moran and Richard A. Rempel (London: George Allen & Unwin, forthcoming), pp. 85–93. Further citations to this essay are to this reprinting.
- 20 Strachey to Russell, 23 Oct. 1907, in *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 1: 127.
- 21 “The Study of Mathematics”, p. 92.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 23 *My Philosophical Development*, p. 208.
- 24 R. B. Braithwaite, “Keynes as a Philosopher” in *Essays on John Maynard Keynes*, ed. Milo Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 237.
- 25 *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912), pp. 249–50.
- 26 *The Philosophy of Bergson* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1912), p. 15.
- 27 Fry to Russell, 7 April 1915.
- 28 Jaakko Hintikka, “Virginia Woolf and Our Knowledge of the External World”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 38 (Fall 1979): 9.
- 29 Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1966), p. 238.
- 30 Fry to Russell, 29 Jan. 1922.
- 31 *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 2: 160.
- 32 Fry to Russell, 12 Jan. 1928.
- 33 Bell to Russell, 22 Sept. 1928.
- 34 Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1938), p. 326, n.45.
- 35 Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1940), p. 118.
- 36 *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 1: 150; *Portraits from Memory and Other Essays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), p. 212.
- 37 “The Free Man’s Worship” in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12: 71.
- 38 For Russell’s two reviews, see: *The Cambridge Review*, 25 (3 Dec. 1903): lit. sup., xxxvii–xxxviii; and “The Meaning of Good”, *The Independent Review*, 2 (March 1904): 328–33.
- 39 *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 1: 146.
- 40 “The Essence of Religion” in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12: 115.
- 41 Forster, *Commonplace Book* (London: Scholar Press, 1978), p. 263.
- 42 “Mysticism and Logic” in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12: 159.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 160–2.
- 44 George Santayana, *The Winds of Doctrine* (New York: Harper [1913], 1957), pp. 141–3.
- 45 “Ethics”, *The New Quarterly*, 3 (Feb., May 1910): 21–34, 131–43.
- 46 Rosenbaum, “G. E. Moore’s *The Elements of Ethics*”, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 38 (1969): 214–32.
- 47 *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 3: 34.
- 48 Moore, “An Autobiography”, p. 554.
- 49 Holroyd, *op. cit.*, pp. 621–2.
- 50 P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster, A Life*, 2 vols. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977–8), 2: 46.
- 51 *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1916), pp. 225–6.
- 52 Quoted in Holroyd, *op. cit.*, p. 622.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 Quoted in Furbank, *op. cit.*, 2: 46.
- 55 “My Early Beliefs”, p. 449.
- 56 *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 1: 70–1.
- 57 Forster, “Reply to Russell” in *The Bloomsbury Group*, pp. 406–7.
- 58 Russell to Lady Ottoline Morrell, c.24 Aug. 1912 #550b. Quoted in Sandra Jobson Darroch, *Outline: The Life of Lady Ottoline Morrell* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), p. 128.
- 59 Rosenbaum, “Keynes, Lawrence, and Cambridge Revisited”, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 11 (1982): 252–64.
- 60 Quoted in *Letters: Virginia Woolf & Lytton Strachey*, eds. Leonard Woolf and James Strachey (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956), p. 80.
- 61 “My Mental Development” in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University, 1944), p. 9.
- 62 MacCarthy to Russell, 5 Jan. 1917.
- 63 Russell to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 1 Aug. 1918.
- 64 “Bertrand Russell: The Logic of a Literary Symbol” in *Russell in Review*, eds. J. E. Thomas and Kenneth Blackwell (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, Hakkert & Co., 1976), pp. 57–87; “Gilbert Cannan and Bertrand Russell: An Addition to the Logic of a Literary Symbol”, *Russell*, nos. 21–22 (Spring–Summer 1976): 16–25.
- 65 Clive Bell, *Old Friends* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), p. 133.
- 66 “My Mental Development”, p. 5.
- 67 Leonard Woolf, “Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: Volume II”, *Political Quarterly*, 39 (1968): 345.
- 68 *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 1: 125.
- 69 “Reply to Criticisms” in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, p. 727.
- 70 *My Philosophical Development*, p. 11.