Russell and Popper count as among the most influential philosophers of this century. Although they followed substantially different lines and traditions, especially concerning a priori knowledge and abstract objects and the role of induction in science, they held each other in high esteem; and they corresponded on a number of occasions, largely after the Second World War. The recent organization of Popper's papers by the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University, California, where they are now kept, complements the files at the Russell Archives, and enables both sides of the correspondence to be available. This article presents the contexts and texts of the most significant documents, divided around three groups of events, two just after the War (secs. 1–2) and the last one in 1959 (sec. 3). The texts are transcribed in section 4.

I. EXCHANGES OVER BOOKS, 1946–47

At the time of the war's end both Russell and Popper came to Britain and published important books. Russell arrived from the USA in June...
Among other work he completed his *History of Western Philosophy*, which first appeared in 1945 in the USA from the New York house of Simon and Schuster.

After nine years at Canterbury University College, Christchurch, New Zealand, Popper arrived in Britain in January 1946, to take a Readership at the London School of Economics. His *The Open Society and Its Enemies* had appeared the previous year in London from Routledge, but the American publication was not yet secured.

On 22 July Russell replied from Penrhyn Dewdraeth, Wales, agreeing to a request (now lost) from Popper to recommend *Society* to Simon and Schuster but asking to be sent a copy (Doc. 1), which is still in Russell's library. On 30 August he sent to Popper the promised "appreciation"; he praised the book very highly, agreeing with Popper's evaluation of Plato as a totalitarian and finding "deadly" his treatment of Marx (Doc. 2b). In a covering note he informed Popper that an unbound copy of *History* would be coming from Allen and Unwin (Doc. 2a). The "Inner Sanctum" of Simon and Schuster sent an encouraging letter to Russell on 30 September 1946, which Russell forwarded to Popper on 5 October; however, nothing came of this initiative, although Routledge used extracts of Russell's appraisal on the dust-jacket of their 1947 reprint of the book. *Society* appeared in the USA only in 1950, from Princeton University Press, who included some of the extracts from Russell's appraisal on their dust-jacket.

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2 Russell had supported Popper for the New Zealand post in an open testimony dated 12 October 1936 from Telegraph House, Haringey, Tottenham: "Dr. Karl Popper is a man of great ability, whom any university would be fortunate in having on its staff. I learn that he is a candidate for a post at Canterbury University College, Christchurch, New Zealand, and I have no hesitation in warmly recommending him."

3 Russell wrote this letter from a hotel in Penrhyn Dewdraeth, not from the house there that he was to rent and occupy from 1956 until his death in 1970.
Russell's History appeared in Britain from Allen and Unwin in November 1946, and Popper prepared a review of it for broadcasting on 19 January 1947 for the Austrian Broadcasting Service (according to Popper's recollection: Document 3, with an English translation published elsewhere in this issue of Russell). The circumstances of a radio talk with limited allotted time prevented him from analyzing the book in detail; for example, while he bracketed Russell with Kant at one point as among the great philosophers, he did not comment on Russell's unsympathetic chapter on Kant. He praised the author to the skies as the only great philosopher of our time, the most important contributor to logic after Aristotle when he published The Principles of Mathematics (1903), the kind of thinker who saw philosophy as "argumentation" "before Fichte and Hegel ruined it" and kept it free from the "charlatanry and windbaggery" of "our time", where the aim was "to beguile" rather than "to instruct". Popper took these terms from Schopenhauer, but as an example he may have had in mind a more recent experience.

2. A GAME OF POKER: POPPER, RUSSELL AND WITTGENSTEIN AT CAMBRIDGE, 1946

An event notorious in the annals of modern British philosophy occurred on the evening of Saturday, 26 October 1946. Popper had accepted an invitation from the Cambridge University Moral Sciences Club to speak on some "philosophical puzzle", but he actually addressed it on the topic "Are there philosophical problems?". The lecture was delivered in the rooms of R. B. Braithwaite at King's College. Popper began it by stressing the difference between the invitation and its fulfilment, whereupon Wittgenstein indicated that he had directed the form in which the invitation was to be sent. During the evening he interrupted, challenging Popper to provide an instance of a moral rule, and at one point even resorted to the behavioural extreme of brandishing a poker at Popper; he then left the room after Popper claimed that this action had infringed the moral rule advocating the peaceful use of pokers, thereby exhibiting to the members of the Cambridge University Moral Sciences Club the existence of a philosophical category which Wittgenstein prohibited.

Popper included his own account of this event in his autobiogra-

phy, which was published in 1974; but versions of it were in circulation soon after its occurrence, and some have appeared in print. As Popper indicates in his account, the truth-contents of the versions are extremely variable; in particular, a well-known variant states that Russell was not present. Letters between Popper and Russell written at the time allow us to avoid such mistakes.

The Cambridge lecture arose first in the correspondence in a letter from Russell of 16 October, now based at Trinity College. He promised to be present at the lecture (though he misdated it to Friday the 25th), and also offered to meet Popper. They did meet on the Saturday afternoon, and then Popper spoke and defended himself from various forms of attack in the evening, returning to his home in Barnet that night. The next day he wrote a long letter to Russell (Doc. 4), thanking him both for their meeting and for his support during the lecture. He recalled Russell's mention of Locke's philosophy during the discussion after the lecture, and criticized Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy and attitude to other philosophies. The sentiments expressed, and even in places the wording, are similar to the broadcast review of Russell's History which he was to prepare three months later.

From the end of Popper's letter it emerges that (on some occasion of which there is no surviving record) Russell himself had suggested the anti-Wittgensteinian subject for Popper's lecture; and in his reply from Trinity College on 18 November Russell indicated his cool attitude to Wittgenstein, deploring the "failure of good manners" during the meeting but not being surprised at its manifestation in Witte-
stein himself (Doc. 5: he did not refer to any particular incident). At
the end he invited a further meeting, and in a note of 30 November
suggested a date early in December to rendezvous at his London flat
in Dorset House.

3. EXCHANGES OVER BOOKS, 1959

After 1947 contacts were much more occasional; some others were also
oblique, such as Russell to a sixth-former, 10 February 1960:

I do not think that, if philosophy is what interests you, you need regret not
going to Cambridge, as philosophy there is at a low ebb. I should have
thought that the London School of Economics would be the place for you.
There is a good deal of philosophy there and it has the merit of being
vigorou.

Another coincidence of publication occurred in 1959. Popper's own
translation/edition The Logic of Scientific Discovery of his Logik der
Forschung (1935) came out, and he wrote on 19 January from his home
at Penn to say that he had asked his publisher to send Russell a copy.
He also reported that a book-length Postscript was in preparation,
of which the first chapter "was written in the spirit of addressing you—of
an almost personal discussion with you" (Doc. 6). In a reply of 22
January from his home at Penrhynedudraeth, Russell thanked him for
the copy of Logic and looked forward to the appearance of the Post-
script volume. When his own My Philosophical Development came out
in May, he sent Popper a copy, which excited on 29 May both an
admiring response from Popper together with criticisms of his treat-
ment of induction, and also a request to dedicate the Postscript to him
(Doc. 7). On 9 June Russell reported himself too concerned with
nuclear war to deal with induction, but he warmly accepted the dedi-
cation (Doc. 8).

However, Popper has always been more deliberate a publisher than
Russell; in the end the Postscript did not appear until 1982 and 1983
(under the editorship of W. W. Bartley III), and by then Popper had
forgotten the planned dedication. And now in 1992 another connec-
tion comes into operation; for most books of both men will now be
published by Routledge.

4. DOCUMENTS

The nine documents, five by Russell and four by Popper, are trans-
scribed here. The archives involved are designated by the letters "RA"
and "P", involving typed materials, top copies or carbons as appropri-
ate. Editorial interpolations or corrections are enclosed within square
brackets, although the first one is by Russell.

Document 1. Letter from Russell to Popper, 22 July 1946, holograph
(P).

[Address till Aug. 15]
The Hotel Portmeirion
Penrhynedudraeth, North Wales
22.7.46

Dear Dr. Popper
Thank you for your letter. I should be glad to commend your book to my
American publishers, Simon and Schuster. But owing to the fact that at the
moment I have no house, my books (including yours) are inaccessible. Could
you lend me a copy, as I could write a better recommendation after refresh-
ing my recollection of the book.

My "History of Western Philosophy" was published last year in America,
and will be published here in September. I think my point of view is very

Russell and Karl Popper
similar to yours, but it would have been very regrettable if, on this account, you had refrained from publishing your book, the more so as, in mine, the kind of thesis that interests you occurs only in relation to some of the men discussed.

I shall be back in Cambridge early in October, and shall be glad to see you there if you ever visit that place.

Yours sincerely
BERTRAND RUSSELL

Document 2. Russell's (a) letter covering (b) a testimony for Popper's The Open Society, 30 August 1946, holograph (P). First complete and textually faithful publication of the testimony.

(a) The Hotel Portmeirion
Pennhyndieudraeth, North Wales
August 30, 1946

DEAR DR. POPPER

I have just finished re-reading your book, and think even better of it than at first reading. My only serious disagreements are: (1) I do not think there is adequate historical evidence for your favourable view of Socrates (or for its opposite); (2) I think Plato's views of Justice are more complex than appears in your account, and more connected with traditional Greek ideas; (3) I take a more unfavourable view of Marx's character than you do. Otherwise I agree closely—-with your hostility to Plato and Hegel, with your view that history has no "meaning", and with your positive opinions.

I have asked my publisher to send you an unbound copy of my History of Philosophy—published in U.S. a year ago, but still unpublished here. I have asked them also to send you my "Freedom and Organization, 1814—1914", where there is a long examination of Marx.

I am writing to Simon and Schuster on your behalf, and I enclose an appreciation, of which you may make whatever use you choose. (I have already sent it to Simon and Schuster.)

Yours sincerely
BERTRAND RUSSELL

Address after Sep. 20, Trinity College, Cambridge.

(b) "The Open Society and its Enemies", by Dr. K. R. Popper (of the London School of Economics and Political Science) is, in my opinion, a work of first-class importance, and one which ought to be widely read for its masterly criticism of theoretical enemies of democracy, ancient and modern. His attack on Plato, while inorthodox, is to my mind thoroughly justified, and is in line with my own view of that arch-totalitarian. Uncritical admiration of Plato has vitiated political thought ever since the Renaissance.

He points out that Fichte, the philosophic progenitor of German nationalism, was willing to throw in his lot with either the French or the Russians until he was made Professor in Berlin. His analysis of Hegel is deadly, and very able. Marx, whom he discusses at length, is treated more leniently than Plato or Hegel, but is dissected with equal acumen, and given his due share of responsibility for modern misfortunes.

The book as a whole is a vigorous and profound defence of democracy and of a philosophic outlook likely to promote belief in democracy. It is timely, and calculated to have an important beneficent influence. It is also very interesting and very well written. I cannot doubt that it will appeal to a large circle of readers.

BERTRAND RUSSELL.
August 1946

Document 3. Popper's unpublished review for radio of Russell's History, 19 January 1947 (P): my translation is published after this article. Typed, but with handwritten alterations by Popper. Only those underlinings which seem to indicate scribal rather than vocal stress have been adopted. There is also an extra folio containing three lines of text, which appear in the definitive version virtually unaltered.

AUSTRIAN TALKS (408) for 19th January 1947

BOOK REVIEW: THE HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY BY BERTRAND RUSSELL reviewed by K. R. Popper.


Die Philosophie war, bis Fichte und Hegel sie ruinierten, Argumentation. Der Mensch wusste, dass er argumentieren musste, um seine Meinung durchzusetzen. Die Modephilosophen, die uns zu betören, wie Schopenhauer sagte. Die Modephilosophen, die uns zu betören, stellten uns dezidiert dar, um unser Bewusstsein zu erweitern. Sie hörten auf, Argumente für ihre Meinungen herzustellen. Sie posierten als Propheten, als Menschen, die durch tiefe Denken zu tiefer Weisheit gelangten, und die uns in der Fülle ihrer Weisheit aus ihrem Ueberfluss ein paar Brocken zukommen lassen.


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The London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street, Aldwych
London, W.C.2
October 27th, 1946.

Dear Lord Russell,

I am typing this letter — it won't be very short, and I do not wish you to have to decipher my handwriting.

I returned from Cambridge fairly late yesterday night, and the first thing I am doing this morning is to write this letter. I wish to tell you how much I

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9 At this point Popper annotated his text with the instruction "(langsaml!)" ("slowly!").
enjoyed the afternoon with you, and the opportunity of co-operating with you, at night, in the battle against Wittgenstein.

As to the battle itself (and the victory we won) I did not quite enjoy it as much as I had hoped. I must admit that it dispelled my doubts in the reality of Wittgenstein which I had mentioned to you in the afternoon. He is real. But he is not quite the Wittgenstein I had expected to meet. My Wittgenstein, as it were, is unfortunately unreal—as I had expected—although in a somewhat different way! In other words, I was very disappointed by the debate. Heated as it was, it did hardly produce anything new—no new light was thrown on the situation. My own paper contained only little (as, you will remember, I had warned you); it was, for this reason, that I had considered discussing something else.

Your bringing in Locke helped a great deal. Indeed the situation is now, I feel, as clear as it can be.

(a) Locke says something about ideas. What he says is neither very clear nor very enlightening, but obviously he has in mind something relevant to philosophy.

(b) Wittgenstein says “Why does Locke say such queer things?” thereby expressing (not very clearly) that he wants to give various interpretations of what Locke might have meant. Obviously, to give such interpretations as Wittgenstein has in mind is also relevant to philosophy.

(c) Wittgenstein’s assertion that nothing but what he is doing under (b) is relevant to philosophy is quite obviously, dogmatic and narrow.

Besides, it is itself a philosophical assertion not falling under (b), that is to say, it presupposes a philosophy (of philosophy and of language) which, if we discuss it, leads us beyond the “why does he say this?” of (b).

(d) it is only the fact that (a) was a philosophical assertion of sorts, which makes (b) philosophically relevant. That is to say, the primary problem is contained in (a), and (b) is only a preliminary for the improved re-formulation of (a). Thus Wittgenstein’s assertion (c) is an attempt to confine philosophy to its preliminaries.

(e) Besides, the discussion on (b), i.e. the philosophical activity in Wittgenstein’s sense, is not exoterically arguable. It cannot, and does not, consist of more than clever guesses about various intended meanings. It leads to a series of “He may have meant …”, but it does not lead to any assertion which can be open to argument. This fact completely destroys any link with the rationalist tradition in philosophy and must lead to esotericism.

(f) Thus, the only assertion available and capable of being discussed is the methodological assertion (c). It offers the only possibility to break through the magic circle with the help of rational argument. This is why I had to choose (and why, advised by you, ultimately did choose) this topic.

Please excuse this long letter. You will understand that I had to write it to somebody who was present (and who is sympathetic to the line I took).
always considered your way of writing as my model, and as a consequence, I am always terribly dissatisfied with what I have written.

The first chapter of the Postscript is very long (129 galleys—about 260 pages, I should say), and it was written in the spirit of addressing you—of an almost personal discussion with you.

I had always hoped, for these last two years, to finish my corrections very soon, and to send you this chapter for your comments. But since I have still not completed my corrections, I have meanwhile asked my publishers to send you a copy of my Logic of Scientific Discovery. I do not expect that you will find time to read it, but you might find time to read the two Prefaces. The second contains my criticism of the present language analysts (both English and American). I feel fairly certain that you will not disagree. I wished I could feel as certain that you will be amused.

Yours sincerely,

K. R. Popper

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My dear Lord Russell,

Thank you so much for sending me My Philosophical Development. It is a wonderful book—to me it is more fascinating than any book I have read since your Portraits from Memory. I think that it is much better than the Portraits or your Autobiography in The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell. There are very, very few books which can compare with it.

I have, of course, some criticisms, and I should like to mention one of them.

As you explain your theory of scientific inference (pp. 200ff.), you make it clear that your credibility is to satisfy Keynes' formal system of probability, and that your five postulates have the purpose of conferring a finite prior (or a priori) probability upon certain generalizations and not upon others.

But the interesting laws of science can be shown to have a probability which is ≤ that of the less interesting laws. Loosely speaking, one can measure the interest of a general theory by its improbability: the scientist tries to pack as much information or content as possible into his theories; and it is obvious that a theory that tells us more than another must have a smaller prior probability.

Thus what we may call, intuitively, the credibility or acceptability of a law cannot satisfy the laws of the (Keynesian) probability calculus.

It is a prejudice that science aims at high probability. I do not know whether you remember the following incident: In Amsterdam, in 1948, I said the same things in a discussion (after a lecture by von Wright).10 You talked to me afterwards, saying that my argument showing that science simply does not aim at high probability for its laws was new to you, and that you regretted not to have known it when you wrote Human Knowledge. I replied that it was already in my Logik der Forschung; see for example p. 273 of the English translation.

But I do not want to give you the impression that my attitude towards your book is largely critical. Although I am a very critical reader, I am in almost all of the really important points in agreement with you, and always, even where I do not agree, full of admiration.

The fact that you have sent me your book gives me the courage to ask you whether you would give me permission to dedicate to you my next book, still in proofs, Postscript: After Twenty Years. I do not dare to hope that you will agree with its contents, and it contains much criticism of you (and some that does no longer apply to your latest formulations). But for this very reason I wish to make it quite clear that I do not belong to those of your critics who think that another "style" of philosophising is required. In fact, I should like to put my dedication roughly as follows:

TO BERTRAND RUSSELL
whose lucidity
sense of proportion
and devotion to truth
have set us an unattainable standard
of philosophical writing.

Yours sincerely
K. R. Popper

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Dear Professor Popper,

Your letter of May 29 has pleased and gratified me in a high degree. I am

10 Popper was referring here to the Tenth International Congress of Philosophy. G.H. von Wright gave a paper "On Confirmation."
very glad you think well of My Philosophical Development.

The things you say about probability and the laws of science require serious consideration which I ought to have given sooner and would have if I had not been so preoccupied with nuclear warfare.

I feel much honoured by your intention of dedicating your next book to me with such a very flattering inscription.

Yours sincerely,

BERTRAND RUSSELL


Plas Penrhyn
[Penrhynedraeth, Merioneth]
6 May, 1960.

DEAR POPPER,

(I think formality between you and me is unnecessary)

Thank you for your letter of May 3, and for the enclosed lecture on “The Sources of Knowledge and Ignorance”.

I have not yet had time to read the whole of your lecture, but I can see that it is interesting and important.

I am sorry that I cannot agree to give such a lecture as you suggest. I never studied Whitehead’s philosophical work at all thoroughly and I made a point of not saying anything publicly in criticism of it. What I did know of his philosophical work displeased me, partly because of what I thought unnecessary obscurity, and partly because of the trail of Bergson. I could not give such a lecture as you suggest without first reading a lot of Whitehead’s work, which, on the whole, I do not wish to do as my time is very fully occupied in trying to induce the human race to let itself survive.

I am very glad that you are so vigorously conducting the fight against the “Oxford” philosophers, some of the worst of whom are at Cambridge.

Yours sincerely,

RUSSELL


11 For permission to publish these documents I express thanks to Sir Karl Popper (copyright © Karl R. Popper, 1992) and to McMaster University. Advice on details was received from Popper and from Dr. K. Blackwell. Mr. D. Reed, Deputy Archivist of the Hoover Institution, kindly referred to Sir Karl’s files there on my behalf.