

## BERTRAND RUSSELL AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

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Freedom cannot effectively exist where it is understood to mean no more than the toleration of occasional differences about matters which are of small importance. (Bertrand Russell<sup>2</sup>)

This quotation typifies the kind of uncompromising defence of free speech and academic freedom which we associate with Bertrand Russell. A long-time advocate of both, Russell is also often said to personify the type of outspoken public intellectual which principles of academic freedom have been designed to defend. Throughout his long career on both sides of the Atlantic, Russell was not only famous for his ground-breaking advances in technical philosophy. He was also famous—and in some quarters infamous—for his sustained public contribution to many of the most controversial issues of his day. Of equal

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<sup>2</sup> "Bertrand Russell's Memorable Message on Getting the ECLC Tom Paine Award", *I. F. Stone's Weekly*, 10, no. 46 (17 Dec. 1962): 4. Reprinted in *BRA* 2: 161.

notoriety were his several court cases and two jail terms (both pertaining to freedom of expression in the broad sense), and his related dismissals from academic positions at Trinity College, Cambridge, and the College of the City of New York. Thus, in many ways, Russell represents a unique focal point for any discussion of free speech and academic freedom.

Given his intellectual and philosophical heritage, it is not surprising that Russell's views concerning free speech and academic freedom turn out to be connected, not so much to his political thought, but to his conception of the nature and utility of knowledge. On Russell's view, it is reasoning about the role that free speech and academic freedom play in the generation and acquisition of knowledge, rather than reasoning from political first principles, which underlies their justification. After reviewing some of Russell's many personal battles relating to free speech and academic freedom, this article considers the development of Russell's views on these topics and explores a tension that exists between Russell's defence of academic freedom and his views concerning the utility of knowledge. The paper concludes with the observation that Russell's emphasis upon the double-edged nature of scientific knowledge undercuts his otherwise uncompromising defence of academic freedom.

### I. A LIFE OF CONTROVERSY

Russell's life and influence have been well chronicled.<sup>3</sup> However, several episodes deserve to be highlighted when discussing his contributions to matters relating to free speech and academic freedom. Russell was born of freethinking parents, Lord and Lady Amberley, and had John Stuart Mill as a kind of "secular godfather". His grandfather was Lord John Russell, the Prime Minister famous for his reform of Parliament, who had been created Earl Russell and Viscount Amberley in 1861. The pol-

<sup>3</sup> In addition to Russell's four volumes of autobiography—*MPD* and *Auto.* 1–3—see, for example, C. D. Broad, "Bertrand Russell, as Philosopher", *Bulletin of the London Mathematical Society*, 5 (1973): 328–41; Clark; R. O. Gandy, "Bertrand Russell, as Mathematician", *Bulletin of the London Mathematical Society*, 5 (1973): 342–48; Georg Kreisler, "Bertrand Arthur William Russell, Earl Russell: 1872–1970", *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, 19 (1973): 583–620; and John G. Slater, *Bertrand Russell* (Bristol: Thoemmes P., 1994).

itical and intellectual issues of Russell's day—freethinking in religion, utilitarianism, birth control within marriage, educational reform, and women's suffrage—were the common currency of his heritage. Orphaned four months before his fourth birthday, Russell was raised primarily by his grandmother. (His grandfather died at the age of 86, two years after Amberley's death, when Russell was six.) In his will, Russell's father had appointed two atheists, including his wife's *paramour*, as guardians for his two sons, but the will was contested by Russell's grandparents and informal custody was granted to them. Russell himself was later to cite the event as an example of how impediments to free thought still existed in the courts.<sup>4</sup>

Educated first privately and then at Trinity College, Cambridge, Russell became interested in mathematics and, later, in philosophy. By the time he was thirty he had published three major books, had fallen in and out of love with his first wife, Alys Whitall Smith, and had begun to develop a practical, as well as a theoretical, interest in politics. Over his lifetime he would publish over 80 books (many on controversial topics), be married four times, and become known for his many extramarital relationships. In addition to his numerous university appointments and his unqualified achievements in philosophy, he would also stand unsuccessfully for Parliament three times, in 1907, 1922, and 1923.<sup>5</sup>

Russell's opposition to British participation in the First World War led to his involvement, first with the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) and, later, with the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF), the two main organizations for publicizing and advancing pacifist interests in Britain at that time.<sup>6</sup> He eventually became acting chairman of the NCF, editing its journal, *The Tribunal*, from 1916 to 1917. In 1916, following the anonymous publication of an NCF pamphlet on behalf of an imprisoned conscientious objector,<sup>7</sup> six men were arrested for its dis-

<sup>4</sup> "Free Thought and Official Propaganda" (1922), in *SE*, pp. 152f.

<sup>5</sup> Russell also came close to running in 1910, until it was discovered that he was an agnostic (*SE*, p. 153).

<sup>6</sup> See Jo Newberry (later Vellacott), "Russell and the Pacifists in World War I", in J. E. Thomas and Kenneth Blackwell, eds., *Russell in Review* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, Hakkert, 1976), pp. 33–55.

<sup>7</sup> *Two Years' Hard Labour for Refusing to Disobey the Dictates of Conscience* [the "Everett leaflet"] (London: No-Conscription Fellowship, n.d.). Reprinted in *Auto.* 2: 63–4 and *Papers* 13: 351f.

tribution. Russell immediately wrote to *The Times* admitting authorship of the pamphlet. The letter, which appeared on 17 May 1916, clearly stated Russell's role in the matter: "I wish to make it known that I am the author of this leaflet, and that if anyone is to be prosecuted I am the person primarily responsible."<sup>8</sup> As a result, he was tried before the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House and convicted on the charge of making, in a printed publication, "statements likely to prejudice the recruiting and discipline of His Majesty's forces."<sup>9</sup>

Fearful that they would excite public opinion, Russell's statements made in his own defence and published by the NCF were censored by the government. Russell himself was sentenced to a fine of £100, with £10 costs, or sixty-one days in jail. An appeal was unsuccessful. According to G. H. Hardy, Russell "declined to pay the fine, but, since he had valuable books in his rooms which could be seized and sold, there was never any question of his going to prison. The books were however saved by the action of his friends, who subscribed the necessary £100 and offered that sum for the first book put up at the auction."<sup>10</sup> In essence this account is confirmed by Paul Delany, who concludes that

The court order to sell Russell's goods to pay the £110 fine was to be carried out on 26 July. Philip Morrell generously offered to raise enough money from supporters to pay £125 for the first item auctioned and thus discharge the fine. But Russell was eager to make a clean break [with Trinity] by clearing out all his household goods.... After the first lot, Russell withdrew his library from the auction; then everything else in his rooms was sold off for thirty pounds, from rugs to teacups.<sup>11</sup>

Part of the reason that Russell was eager to make a "clean break" with Trinity was that he had been dismissed from his lectureship at the College as a result of his conviction. On 11 July 1916, the College Council had "agreed unanimously that, since Mr. Russell has been convicted

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Wood, p. 104; reprinted in *Auto.* 2: 64f. and in *Papers* 13: 372.

<sup>9</sup> Godfrey H. Hardy, *Bertrand Russell and Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1970; 1st ed., 1942), p. 34; Wood, p. 104. Perhaps ironically, those statements in the pamphlet which proved to be most controversial did not originate with Russell, but were likely added later by an editor within the NCF office. See *Papers* 13: 349f.

<sup>10</sup> Hardy, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Delany, "Russell's Dismissal from Trinity: a Study in High Table Politics", *Russell*, n.s. 6 (1986): 49.

under the *Defence of the Realm Act*, and his conviction has been confirmed on appeal, he [shall] be removed from his lectureship in the College."<sup>12</sup> Sadly, Russell's long-time mentor and collaborator, Alfred North Whitehead, himself a Fellow of the College, was less than supportive.<sup>13</sup> The same was also true of another long-time colleague, G. E. Moore.<sup>14</sup> However, neither the conviction nor the dismissal was at all effective in impeding Russell's anti-war crusade.

Following his dismissal, Russell was offered a lectureship at Harvard and in the 14 October 1916, issue of *The Cambridge Magazine* there appeared an article with the title "Trinity in Disgrace—America's Opportunity". Unfortunately for both Harvard and Russell, he was unable to take advantage of "America's opportunity" since the British Foreign Office refused to issue him a passport. By the following year little had changed; Russell's 1917 book, *Political Ideals*, was published in the United States but banned in Britain by the War Office.

In 1918 Russell was again convicted for a publication relating to his opposition to the war effort.<sup>15</sup> This time he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment, again under the *Defence of the Realm Act*, for "having in a printed publication made certain statements likely to prejudice His Majesty's relations with the United States of America."<sup>16</sup> As John Slater reports, upon appeal Russell's prison sentence

was altered from Second to First Division. In the First Division he had to pay rent for his cell but he could have his own furniture; he could pay another prisoner to keep his cell clean; he could also have books and writing materials; and he could have more visitors and more letters than Second Division prisoners were allowed.<sup>17</sup>

Thus it was while in Brixton Prison that Russell wrote his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* and began work on *The Analysis of Mind*. By his

<sup>12</sup> Hardy, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Delany, pp. 42-7.

<sup>14</sup> Delany, pp. 46f.; Paul Levy, *Moore: G. E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), Chap. 10.

<sup>15</sup> "The German Peace Offer", *The Tribunal*, no. 90 (3 Jan. 1918): 1. Reprinted in *Auto.* 2: 79f.; *Papers* 14: 398-9.

<sup>16</sup> Hardy, p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> Slater, p. 119.

own account, being without any responsibilities he found prison almost enjoyable, even smuggling love letters back and forth inside volumes of the *Proceedings of the London Mathematical Society* (*Auto.* 2: 35).

Following the war, Russell remained controversial. He lived openly for a time with Dora Black, who was to become his second wife, even though a divorce from Alys had not yet been negotiated. The divorce and second marriage both took place in September 1921, just in time for the birth of Russell's first son, Joseph Conrad, in November of that year. Katharine was born two years later. With a growing family to support, both Russells turned to writing for the popular press in order to earn a living. Together, they also decided to open their own school, since no existing school seemed to them to be educationally sound, yet suitably progressive. So controversial was the school that financing it proved to be a challenge.<sup>18</sup> Following his second divorce, in 1935, and his third marriage, to Patricia ("Peter") Spence, in 1936, Russell returned to professional philosophy, taking up a one-year teaching post at the University of Chicago, followed by a three-year appointment at the University of California, Los Angeles.

During his first year at UCLA, Russell received an offer to teach at the College of the City of New York. Preferring New York to Los Angeles, Russell resigned from UCLA in order to take up the position at CCNY. The appointment proved to be controversial. Many New Yorkers agreed with William Manning, the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York, when he asked: "What is to be said of colleges and universities which hold up before our youth as a responsible teacher of philosophy and as an example of light and leading a man who is a recognized propagandist

<sup>18</sup> One famous anecdote purportedly concerning the school, and repeated many times with various minor alterations, is as follows: There was a clergyman who, upon arriving at the school and ringing the front doorbell, was met by a young girl who was completely naked.

"Good God!", the clergyman gasped.

"He doesn't exist!", the girl replied, slamming the door in the poor man's face.

Although no doubt apocryphal (for example, Katharine Tait recalls that she and the other children "treated this story with the contempt it deserved because we knew we didn't have a front doorbell"), the anecdote remains indicative of the school's reputation. See her *My Father, Bertrand Russell* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 71.

against both religion and morality, and who specifically defends adultery ...?"<sup>19</sup> In fact, so much adverse public opposition was generated that calls to reconsider the appointment began to have some effect.

CCNY tried to stay above the fray by emphasizing that Russell had been hired to teach mathematics and logic, and not morals or religion. The effect was negligible. However, as the campaign of vilification intensified against him, Russell's situation became something of a *cause célèbre*, not only for organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Federation of Teachers, but for a host of individuals as well. The list of such individuals included, most famously, John Dewey, Albert Einstein, Hans Reichenbach, Edward Kasner, Charlie Chaplin, Aldous Huxley, Franz Boas, and Arthur Lovejoy, as well as numerous editorialists, churchmen, publishers and other academics, including philosophers from Harvard, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Cornell, New York University and, of course, CCNY itself. It was in this context, and referring to Russell, that Einstein wrote his oft-quoted remark concerning the violent opposition of mediocrity to greatness:

Great spirits have always found violent opposition from mediocrities. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence. (*BRA* I: 143)

Of interest, too, is the fact that both A. N. Whitehead and G. E. Moore were more willing to come to Russell's defence in 1940 than they had been in 1916.

However, among Russell's most prominent and articulate defenders were members of the Committee for Cultural Freedom. On 9 March 1940, an open letter, signed for the executive by Sidney Hook, appeared in the New York *Herald Tribune*:

The hue and cry which has recently been raised in some quarters over the appointment of Bertrand Russell ... carries with it a serious attack on hard-won principles of academic and cultural freedom.... To censor Mr. Russell's intellectual activity, because some of his views on matters not germane to his chief theoretical interest are objectionable to some members of the community,

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in American Civil Liberties Union, *The Story of the Bertrand Russell Case* (New York: ACLU, 1941), p. 4; Paul Edwards, "How Bertrand Russell Was Prevented from Teaching at the College of the City of New York", in *WINC*, p. 209; *BRA* I: 136.

clearly contravenes the Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure adopted both by the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges... (Quoted in *BRA* 1: 139)

Although the letter appeared to have some effect, the appointment was not to be. At the height of the controversy, Mrs. Jean Kay, a Brooklyn housewife with no direct connection to the College, successfully petitioned the New York State Supreme Court to revoke Russell's lectureship. At issue were not only Russell's personal morals, but his jail term in England and his views about education as they had been implemented in his and Doris's school. Putting the case in the most inflammatory of terms, Mrs. Kay's lawyer, Joseph Goldstein, argued that, far from being a philosopher of high repute, Russell was

lecherous, salacious, libidinous, lustful, venerous, erotomaniac, aphrodisiac, atheistic, irreverent, narrow-minded, bigoted, and untruthful; that he is not a Philosopher in the accepted meaning of the word; that he is not a lover of wisdom; that he is not a searcher after wisdom; that he is not an explorer of that universal science which aims at an explanation of all the phenomena of the universe by ultimate causes; that in the opinion of your deponent and multitudes of other persons he is a sophist; that he practices sophism; that by cunning contrivances, tricks and devices and by mere quibbling, he puts forth fallacious arguments and arguments that are not supported by sound reasoning; and he draws inferences which are not justly deduced from a sound premise; that all his alleged doctrines which he calls philosophy are just cheap, tawdry, worn-out, patched up fetishes and propositions, devised for the purpose of misleading the people.<sup>20</sup>

It was not academic freedom that was at issue, Goldstein emphasized, but whether Russell should be granted a "license to teach and be the purveyor of filth, obscenity, salaciousness and blasphemy" (*ibid.*). Compared to any number of other opinions which appeared in the press during the controversy—including claims that Russell was "bereft of moral fibre", "a dog", "a bum", "a professor of paganism", "a philosophical anarchist", "a moral nihilist", "a polluter of public morals", and "an advocate of barnyard morality"—Goldstein's comments appeared to the

<sup>20</sup> Supreme Court, New York County, Appellate Division, *Papers on Appeal from Order*, in the matter of the application of Jean Kay against the Board of Higher Education of the City of New York, p. 49; quoted in *BRA* 1: 153.

presiding judge to be a model of restraint.

In the judgment revoking Russell's appointment, Justice John McGeehan concluded that, were the appointment to come into effect, it would be "an insult to the people of the City of New York" and that it would be equivalent to the establishment of "a chair of indecency".<sup>21</sup> With regard to the matter of academic freedom, he piously observed that "While this court would not interfere with any action of the [New York] Board [of Higher Education] so far as a pure question of 'valid' academic freedom is concerned, it will not tolerate academic freedom being used as a cloak to promote the popularization in the minds of adolescents of acts forbidden by the penal law."<sup>22</sup> An appeal was judged inappropriate following a line item veto in the New York City budget, by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, of the monies allocated for Russell's post.

Following Russell's dismissal, offers for speaking engagements were withdrawn and the publication of Russell's writings in newspapers and magazines began to decline sharply.<sup>23</sup> The result was that Russell found himself stranded in the United States, unable to return to Britain because of wartime travel restrictions, and with no significant source of support for himself and his family.

To make matters worse, emboldened by the CCNY case, a California clergyman, I. R. Wall, initiated a second series of legal proceedings, this time against Russell's appointment at UCLA, which was still technically in effect. A similar case was also being threatened at Harvard, where Russell was scheduled to deliver the William James Lectures that September. However, unlike in New York, the California court unhesitatingly upheld the autonomy of the UCLA Board of Regents, dismissing all charges. The Harvard case, despite a large amount of protracted publicity, never materialized. Russell eventually found work when, through the intervention of John Dewey, he was offered a posi-

<sup>21</sup> Supreme Court, New York County, Appellate Division, *Papers on Appeal from Order*, in the matter of the application of Jean Kay against the Board of Higher Education of the City of New York, pp. 102-17; reprinted in Dewey and Kallen, pp. 213-25; and quoted in *BRA* 1: 153.

<sup>22</sup> Supreme Court, New York County, Appellate Division, *Papers on Appeal from Order*, in the matter of the application of Jean Kay against the Board of Higher Education of the City of New York, pp. 102-17; reprinted in Dewey and Kallen, pp. 213-25; and quoted in *BRA* 1: 153.

<sup>23</sup> *Auto.* 2: 219; Sidney Hook, "The General Pattern", in Dewey and Kallen, p. 193.

tion by the Philadelphia millionaire, Albert Barnes, at the Barnes Institute of Fine Arts. When the eccentric Barnes fired Russell two years later—ostensibly on the grounds that he had accepted outside speaking engagements, but more likely as a result of a personal animosity between Barnes and Russell's wife<sup>24</sup>—Russell successfully sued him for \$20,000. Through the intervention of Sidney Hook, Russell was again offered a temporary position, this time at the Rand School in New York.

Finally returning to England in 1944, Russell accepted a five-year lectureship at Trinity College, occupying rooms previously used by Newton. He remained a Fellow of Trinity for the rest of his life. During this time he continued his anti-war efforts, speaking not only at Trinity, but on the BBC, in the House of Lords, and in the War Colleges. So concerned was he with the possibility of a nuclear confrontation between East and West that, for a short time in the late 1940s, he even advocated that the United States threaten the Soviet Union with a preemptive nuclear strike as a means of preventing the communist world from obtaining nuclear weaponry. As Georg Kreisler dryly observes, "Obviously, he was quite fearless, in big things and in small ones."<sup>25</sup> Later Russell was to take almost the opposite view, that of advocating unilateral disarmament on the part of the West.

Russell received the Order of Merit in 1949 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. Russell's final marriage, to Edith Finch, took place in 1952. During the 1950s Russell campaigned against McCarthyism and the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and corresponding attacks on academic freedom.<sup>26</sup> His last fifteen years were spent agitating against nuclear war. Together with Einstein and a number of other leading scientists, Russell initiated a series of conferences through which high profile academics would be able to lobby their respective governments for world peace. After the first such meeting was held in 1957 at the summer home of Cyrus Eaton in Pugwash, Nova

<sup>24</sup> Hook, "Bertrand Russell: a Portrait from Memory", *Encounter*, 62, no. 3 (March 1984): 18.

<sup>25</sup> Kreisler, p. 590.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Russell, "Democracy and the Teachers in the United States", *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 1 Nov. 1951, p. 6 (reprinted in *BRA* 2: 332–4, and in *The University of Chicago Round Table*, 743 [22 June 1952]: 12–15), and Russell *et al.*, "Academic Freedom in America and Britain", *The University of Chicago Round Table*, no. 743 (22 June 1952): 1–11.

Scotia, these conferences became known as the Pugwash Conferences. A year later Russell became founding President of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Eventually frustrated by the CND's lack of effect, Russell began advocating civil disobedience as a means of promoting his message. Apparently the irony of breaking the law in order to advance the cause of peace was not lost on many CND members and Russell's extremism soon led to division within the organization. The rift was irreparable and, in 1960, Russell helped form the more extreme splinter group, the Committee of 100.

On Hiroshima Day, 6 August 1961, Russell was prohibited by police from speaking with a megaphone in Hyde Park, London. Shortly afterwards, he and Edith, along with other organizers of the Committee of 100, were brought to trial and convicted on charges of inciting acts of civil disobedience. Upon appeal, Russell's original two-month prison sentence was reduced to one week in the prison hospital. Arguably, the surrounding publicity was of more help than hindrance to Russell's cause. Nevertheless, even if the same were also true for other, previous actions intended as impediments to the advancing of Russell's views—the 1916 fine, the dismissal from Trinity, the travel restrictions and censorship of World War I, the 1918 jail term, the CCNY case and other American legal battles—the resulting personal hardships remain indicative of the kinds of challenges which many public intellectuals face throughout their lifetimes.

## 2. THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

Twenty-five years after his death, Russell remains one of this century's pre-eminent public intellectuals. In contrast to the narrow technician who remains cloistered within the academy, Russell understood it to be part of his duty to speak and write about the major issues of his day. Like other influential public intellectuals of the century—including Jean-Paul Sartre, John Dewey, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—he wrote with what Robert Boynton has called "the care of the expert and the passion of the anti-specialist."<sup>27</sup> Outspoken, principled, and controversial, he also personifies exactly the type of public intellectual which con-

<sup>27</sup> "The New Intellectuals", *Atlantic Monthly*, 275, no. 3 (March 1995): 54.

temporary principles of academic freedom have been designed to defend.

The need for such principles is as well known today as are the names of those thinkers over the centuries whose works have been banned, burned, or in some other way prohibited<sup>28</sup>: Bruno, Darwin, Galileo, Gassendi, Gibbon, Homer, Huxley, Marx, Newton, Paine, Rushdie, Shakespeare, Shaw, Solzhenitsyn, to name but a few in addition to Russell himself.<sup>29</sup> In philosophy alone, even a partial list of such individuals is staggering: Abelard's *Letters* were banned by the US Customs on grounds of obscenity until 1930. All of Bacon's writings were banned by the Spanish Inquisition in 1640. All of Confucius' writings—together with several hundred of his disciples—were ordered burned by the first ruler of the Chin Dynasty. Hobbes' *Leviathan* was placed upon the *Index librorum prohibitorum* in Rome in 1651, the year it was first published, and burnt at Oxford in 1683. Hume's *On Religion* was banned in Turkey as recently as 1986. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* not only remained on the Roman Index until early this century, it was also purged from libraries in the Soviet Union in 1928 and in Spain in 1939. His *Religion within the Boundaries of Pure Reason* was similarly banned by the Lutheran Church because it "assailed the truth of the Scriptures and the foundations of Creed beliefs."<sup>30</sup> Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* was made prohibited reading at Oxford in 1701. Not only Mill's *Social Philosophy*, but also his *System of Logic*, were placed on the Roman Index in 1856. Sections of Montaigne's *Essays* were banned in France in 1595. The author of *The Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine, was imprisoned in England, as was his publisher. In 1660, Louis XIV ordered that Pascal's *Provincial Letters*

be torn up and burned ... at the hands of the High Executioner, fulfilment of which is to be certified to His Majesty within the week; and that meanwhile all

<sup>28</sup> For example, see Evelyn Geller, *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876–1939* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood P., 1984), Jonathon Green, *The Encyclopedia of Censorship* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), and Anne Lyon Haight and Chandler B. Grannis, *Banned Books, 387 B.C. to 1978 A.D.*, 4th ed. (New York: Bowker, 1978).

<sup>29</sup> In addition to those works already mentioned, Russell's 1925 book, *What I Believe*, was banned in Boston in 1929. See Haight and Grannis, p. 62.

<sup>30</sup> The banning order continues: "We order that henceforth you shall employ your talents to better purpose and that you shall keep silence on matters which are outside of your proper functions" (Green, p. 163).

printers, booksellers, vendors and others, of whatever rank and station, are explicitly prohibited from printing, selling, and distributing, and even from having in their possession the said book ... under the pain of public exemplary punishment.<sup>31</sup>

Rousseau's *Confessions* was banned by both US customs (for being injurious to public morals) in 1929 and in the USSR in 1935. Russell, as we have seen, had his work banned on at least two occasions. Sartre's *Saint Genet* was seized by British Customs for being indecent and obscene in 1984. Voltaire's *Candide* was seized by US Customs and declared obscene in 1929.

Of course, of even greater fame than any of these is the case of Socrates. Accused by Meletus of impiety and of corrupting the young, he was tried and sentenced to death. As one commentator points out, his trial was not unique. Even in ancient Athens, the prosecution of ideas was more common than one might expect:

Among the few surviving bits of consecutive information about the teachers who initiated philosophy and morals in ancient Greece, the tale of persecution, exile, and death on religious, moral, and political charges is a recurrent item.... Few of the great philosophers associated with Athens escaped suspicion or accusation of impiety and immorality or danger of the death penalty attached to conviction on such charges.<sup>32</sup>

Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Theodorus, Stilpo, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Euripides, and even statesmen with the standing of Pericles and Aristides, all faced similar accusations.

During the CCNY controversy, the parallel between the cases of Russell and Socrates was drawn more than once. As early as 1929 Russell himself had noted that "those who advocate any ethical innovation are invariably accused, like Socrates, of being corrupters of youth."<sup>33</sup> Eleven years later, at a rally in support of Russell, Morris Cohen—whose retirement at CCNY had made possible the original offer of an appointment to Russell—declared that if the campaign of intimidation were to succeed,

<sup>31</sup> Green, p. 163.

<sup>32</sup> Richard McKeon, "The Problems of Education in a Democracy", in Dewey and Kallen, p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> *Marriage and Morals* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929), p. 310.

“the fair name of our city will suffer as did Athens for condemning Socrates as a corrupter of its youth or Tennessee for finding Scopes guilty of teaching evolution.”<sup>34</sup> Upon hearing of Judge McGeehan’s decision, Russell echoed Cohen’s sentiment, observing that “Precisely the same accusations were brought against Socrates—atheism and corrupting the young.”<sup>35</sup>

In many ways, the parallel is a sound one. From Socrates’ time to the present, the public intellectual’s role has often been to raise controversial issues of wide concern. What this means in practice is that many (although of course not all) of the most prominent of public intellectuals come from outside the social and political mainstream. Recent debate over the passing of a generation of influential American intellectuals serves as a case in point. On the one side, Russell Jacoby laments the passing of the generation of Jewish-American intellectuals who did so much to set the course of public debate in North America during the middle 50 years of the twentieth century.<sup>36</sup> In particular, Jacoby sees the passing of writers such as Alfred Kazin, Edmund Wilson, C. Wright Mills and Irving Howe as sounding a death knell for the American public intellectual. On the other side, Robert Boynton sees this same vigorous tradition of social criticism continuing with a new generation of political outsiders, especially black thinkers such as Cornel West, Stephen Carter, Toni Morrison, Stanley Crouch, Shelby Steele, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Thomas Sowell. On this second view, while “chronicling the demise of a particular constellation of thinkers, Jacoby got it [only] half right. What he missed, however, was the emergence of a new public and the new public intellectuals who speak to it.”<sup>37</sup> It is thus no accident that so much debate—from Socrates to Russell to Stanley Crouch to Thomas Sowell—focuses upon issues of inclusiveness, citizenship, and national identity. These are exactly the questions that matter most to the political outsider.

What such debate highlights is not only the politically marginal position that such thinkers sometimes occupy, but how crucial this position is for the birth of social criticism. As Isaac Rosenfeld put it when com-

menting upon the New York milieu, “Jews were suited to be social critics because they were ‘specialist[s] in alienation’.”<sup>38</sup> Thus the passing of the New York intellectuals, long-time critics of American society, came about when they passed *into* American society and quietly disappeared. The same might well happen, Boynton’s hypothesis leads one to believe, if and when American blacks become full partners in their country’s political and cultural landscape.

In any important respect, the cases of Socrates and Russell are not so very different. In Socrates’ case the issue was likely as much political as philosophical. An admirer of anti-democratic Sparta and a critic of Athens’ open society, Socrates was more than a simple nonconformist. He represented the political opposition. Some commentators therefore see his trial as being a significant test of the liberal-democratic ideal itself:

The trial of Socrates was a prosecution of ideas... If he had conducted his defense as a free speech case, and invoked the basic traditions of his city, he might easily, I believe, have shifted the troubled jury in his favour. Unfortunately Socrates never invoked the principle of free speech. Perhaps one reason he held back from that line of defense is because his victory would also have been a victory for the democratic principles he scorned. An acquittal would have vindicated Athens... Had Socrates invoked freedom of speech as a basic right of all Athenians—not just the privilege of a superior and self-selected few like himself—he would have struck a deep and responsive chord. Socrates would have been showing a certain respect for Athens instead of the amused condescension all too evident in the *Apology* of Plato.<sup>39</sup>

On this view, there was one defence which would likely have proved successful for Socrates: an appeal to free speech. Yet this was the only defence which was, in principle, not available to an anti-democratic admirer of Sparta’s closed society. In standing by his principles, Socrates in effect challenged Athenian democrats to stand by theirs as well. Despite Socrates’ famous execution, there is some evidence that, in the end, the Athenians did just that. As Diogenes Laertius tells us,

... not long afterwards the Athenians felt such remorse that they shut up the training grounds and gymnasias. They banished the other accusers and put

<sup>34</sup> Quoted by Edwards, in *WINC*, p. 216; and *BRA* I: 146.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in *BRA* I: 157.

<sup>36</sup> Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

<sup>37</sup> Boynton, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> I. F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates* (London: Cape, 1988), pp. 197f., 214.

Meletus to death; they honoured Socrates with a bronze statue, the work of Lysippus, which they placed in the hall of processions.... Not only in the case of Socrates but in very many others the Athenians repented in this way.<sup>40</sup>

In its essentials, the case of Russell is not so very different: his opposition to British participation in World War I, his advocacy of liberal views on education and sexual relationships, his championing of both a nuclear first strike and nuclear disarmament, and his several unsuccessful attempts at achieving a seat in Parliament, are all examples of a political outsider at work. Russell's case shows that the single most important factor in determining whether one finds oneself outside the political mainstream is not birth or education or background, but belief.

As was also the case with Socrates, despite the individual hardship brought about by actions designed to limit Russell's ideas, such measures ultimately proved remarkably ineffective in achieving their primary objective. In one commentator's words,

The morals and the dialectic of Socrates need not be defended here, for the issue [of free speech] does not turn on the truth or the feasibility of a philosophy. The reaction of the Athenians no less than the all but universal judgment of men who have preserved the memory of this trial for more than two thousand years is better indication of its social significance than any estimate of the truth or falsity of what Socrates may have said. The accusers of Socrates were either right in their suspicions of the philosopher or wrong; if they were right, their efforts at suppression were so notoriously unsuccessful as to suggest that suppressive measures are not well suited to combat ideas; if they were wrong, their action and success (fatal to Socrates, whatever the effect on his reputation) mark an extremely important problem for democracies, since it is precisely the outstanding men and the strenuous and original minds who are at once the most likely custodians of the future of the state and the most probable victims of factional jealousies and official follies. (McKeon, p. 108f.)

This conclusion—that “it is precisely ... the strenuous and original minds who are ... the most probable victims of factional jealousies and official follies”—rings true, given our earlier observations concerning the role of thinkers and social commentators from outside the political

<sup>40</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, ii.43; quoted in McKeon, p. 108 n. 16.

mainstream. It also highlights the close connection between the role of the public intellectual and the need for principles of free speech and academic freedom. As we shall see, it is exactly this relationship which is of crucial importance to any defence of such freedoms, given the inevitably critical viewpoints of those from outside the political mainstream. As Russell himself emphasizes in the opening quotation of this paper, such freedoms cannot effectively be said to exist if they protect only “occasional differences about matters which are of small importance”.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. RUSSELL'S ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF FREE SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

During the CCNY case, Russell's mind naturally turned to issues of academic freedom. It was at this time that he published his two most important articles on the subject, “Freedom and the Colleges” (in 1940) and “Education in America” (in 1941).<sup>42</sup> When Russell first commented upon the CCNY case he was careful to distinguish between issues of free speech and those of academic freedom:

I have never dreamed of claiming a right to talk about sexual ethics when I am hired to talk about logic or semantics; equally, a man hired to teach ethics would have no right to talk about logic. I claim two things: 1. that appointments to academic posts should be made by the people with some competence to judge a man's technical qualifications; 2. that in extra-professional hours, a teacher should be free to express his opinions, whatever they may be. (*Auto.* 2: 231; quoted in *BRA* 1: 170)

<sup>41</sup> “Bertrand Russell's Memorable Message on Getting the ECLC Tom Paine Award”, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> “Freedom and the Colleges”, *American Mercury*, 50 (May 1940): 24–33 (reprinted in *BRA* 1: 299–307), and “Education in America”, *Common Sense*, 10 (June 1941): 163–6, (reprinted in *BRA* 1: 308–14). Also see “Free Thought and Official Propaganda” (1922), in *SE*; “The American Intelligentsia”, *The Nation and the Athenaeum*, 36 (11 Oct. 1924): 50–1 (reprinted in *BRA* 1: 232–5); “Academic and Professional Freedom”, in Academic Freedom Committee, *Report of the Conference on Academic Freedom*, Oxford (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1935), pp. 15–18; “Do I Preach Adultery?”, *Liberty*, 17, no. 20 (18 May 1940): 57–9; “Freedom of Speech and the CCNY Case”, *The Harvard Crimson*, 9 May 1940, p. 2 (reprinted in *Auto.* 2: 232–3, and in *BRA* 1: 171f.), “Democracy and the Teachers in the United States” (*BRA* 2: 332–4); and Russell *et al.*, “Academic Freedom in America and Britain”.

In other words, Russell saw principles of academic freedom as being designed primarily to protect the autonomy of the academy, especially with regard to academic appointments. Principles of free speech, in contrast, were designed primarily to protect the autonomy of the individual, especially with regard to one's personal opinions. Nevertheless, the two issues were related. When commenting upon the relevance of the CCNY case to the threatened Harvard suit, Russell elaborated upon this relation:

In fact freedom of speech was not the defence of City College and the New York Board of Higher Education. The Board and College based their defence on the principle of academic freedom, which means simply the independence of duly constituted academic bodies, and their right to their own appointments....

The principle of freedom of speech has been invoked, not by the New York Board of Higher Education as their legal defence, but by many thousands of people throughout the United States who have perceived its obvious relation to the controversy, which is this: the American Constitution guarantees to everyone the right to express his opinions whatever these may be. The right is naturally limited by any contract into which the individual may enter which requires him to spend part of his time in occupations other than expressing his opinions. Thus, if a salesman, a postman, a tailor and a teacher of mathematics all happen to hold a certain opinion on a subject unrelated to their work, whatever it may be, none of them should devote to oratory on this subject time which they have been paid to spend in selling, delivering letters, making suits, or teaching mathematics. But they should all equally be allowed to express their opinion freely and without fear of penalties in their spare time, and to think, speak, and behave as they wish, within the law, when they are not engaged in their professional duties.

This is the principle of free speech. It appears to be little known. If therefore anyone should require any further information about it I refer him to the United States Constitution and to the works of the founders thereof.<sup>43</sup>

By "free speech", Russell no doubt had in mind quite a traditional notion, having returned to this theme many times over the years. For example, in 1922 Russell had commented: "We may say that thought is free when it is exposed to free competition among beliefs", in other words, when all parties are able to state their case without the fear of

<sup>43</sup> "Freedom of Speech and the CCNY Case" (1940), p. 2; reprinted in *Auto.* 2: 232-3; quoted in *BRA* 1: 171f.

"legal or pecuniary advantages or disadvantages".<sup>44</sup> Similarly, over a period of many years, Russell had often defined academic freedom in terms of university autonomy. As early as 1924, for example, he had warned of "two quite different kinds of tyranny" to which both public and private universities may be exposed. The first was primarily economic, the second primarily theological.<sup>45</sup> Both result in threats to academic freedom, or institutional autonomy, through the exercising of inappropriate forms of influence. Although both types of influence are equally unwelcome, Russell notes that it is undue economic influences which the modern university should fear the most. In the case of the public universities, "Since the taxpayer's money supports the State universities, he feels that these institutions ought to magnify his ego by teaching what he believes, not what is believed by those who have taken the trouble to form a rational opinion."<sup>46</sup> In the case of the private universities, only the source of influence is changed: "... obviously it is a bad system to make learned men dependent for their livelihood upon a collection of ignorant and bigoted businessmen."<sup>47</sup> Given Russell's later difficulties at both CCNY and the Barnes Foundation, such comments would prove to be prophetic. Much the same points are made by Russell again in 1940 and in 1952.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> "Free Thought and Official Propaganda", *SE*, p. 152.

<sup>45</sup> "The American Intelligentsia", *BRA* 1: 232.

<sup>46</sup> "The American Intelligentsia", *BRA* 1: 233. Similarly, in "Freedom and the Colleges": "Taxpayers think that since they pay the salaries of university teachers they have a right to decide what these men shall teach. This principle, if logically carried out, would mean that all the advantages of superior education enjoyed by university professors are to be nullified, and that their teaching is to be the same as it would be if they had no special competence" (*BRA* 1: 303).

<sup>47</sup> "The American Intelligentsia", *BRA* 1: 232f.

<sup>48</sup> Thus, in "Freedom and the Colleges", we read: "The essence of academic freedom is that teachers should be chosen for their expertness in the subject they are to teach, and that the judges of this expertness should be other experts. Whether a man is a good mathematician, or physicist, or chemist, can only be judged by other mathematicians, or physicists, or chemists. By them, however, it can be judged with a fair degree of unanimity" (*BRA* 1: 299). Similarly, in "Academic Freedom in America and Britain" we read: "I think that one can define academic freedom in this way: That it means that a man should be appointed and kept in an academic position for his competence in the particular academic job for which he is appointed—that is, knowledge of his subject, his excellence as a lecturer, and so forth; and that his opinions outside that subject should not be inquired into" (p. 2).

Russell's basic point in all of these discussions is that judgments on academic matters, such as hiring within universities or colleges, should be made strictly on academic grounds. This is best accomplished when those making the decisions are academically qualified<sup>49</sup> and, again in hiring, when issues peripheral to a person's academic abilities are ignored. In these terms, academic freedom once again may be viewed in terms of collective autonomy, freedom of speech in terms of individual autonomy. As Russell points out, this distinction in turn leads to two quite separate questions. The first, collective, question is: To what extent should universities manage their own affairs? The second, individual, question is: To what extent should a teacher be at liberty to profess whatever opinions seem best to him, so long as he performs the duties of his post?<sup>50</sup>

Given Russell's intellectual and philosophical heritage, it is perhaps not surprising that his answers to these questions are connected, not so much to his political thought, but to his conception of the nature and utility of knowledge. On Russell's view, it is reasoning about the role that free speech (or individual autonomy), and academic freedom (institutional autonomy), play in the generation and acquisition of knowledge, rather than reasoning from political first principles, which underlies their justification. In true Victorian fashion, Russell unhesitatingly identifies increased knowledge with increased utility. It follows almost immediately that both individual and collective autonomy are to be

<sup>49</sup> This is not to deny that Russell was also concerned about conformity of thought within the academy itself and about the dangers that this might pose to appointments. Thus, in "British and American Nationalism" (1945), Russell makes the point that the finances of American universities "are in the hands of a board of trustees, who are businessmen, usually wholly devoid of academic qualifications. These businessmen appoint a president who may or may not have had some academic education, but is selected for his supposed administrative ability, which, of course, includes agreement with the political and theological prejudices of the trustees." The result is that "cases in which younger teachers refuse to toe the line are rare" and that "by the time a man becomes a professor he has been tamed, and has learnt the advantages of submission" (*Horizon*, 11 [Jan. 1945]: 26-7; in *BRA* 1: 346). Such conformity, says Russell, will be especially harmful in disciplines such as politics, economics and theology. Thus, on Russell's view, the limitations of modern education often come about as much through internal institutional and ideological conformity as through the occasional case of external persecution. (I am grateful to Bart Schultz for making me realize this aspect of Russell's view.)

<sup>50</sup> "Education in America" (1941), *BRA* 1: 309.

encouraged.

As Russell points out, institutional autonomy first arose in the Middle Ages when the Church successfully resisted the secular power of the state, and when universities, as creatures of the Church, inherited this independence. In contrast, Russell sees individual autonomy, or what he calls the "liberal outlook", as arising under quite different circumstances:

The liberal outlook is one which arose in England and Holland during the late seventeenth century, as a reaction against the wars of religion. These wars had raged with great fury for 130 years without producing the victory of either party. Each party felt an absolute certainty that it was in the right and that its victory was of the utmost importance to mankind. At the end, sensible men grew weary of the indecisive struggle and decided that both sides were mistaken in their dogmatic certainty. John Locke, who expressed the new point of view both in philosophy and in politics, wrote at the beginning of an era of growing toleration. He emphasized the fallibility of human judgements, and ushered in an era of progress which lasted until 1914.... Where the controversies of the seventeenth century are concerned, men have more or less learnt the lesson of toleration, but in regard to the new controversies that have arisen since the end of the Great War, the wise maxims of the philosophers of liberalism have been forgotten.... Opinions which we disagreed with acquire a certain respectability by antiquity, but a new opinion which we do not share invariably strikes us as shocking. ("Freedom and the Colleges", *BRA* 1: 301-2)

Nevertheless, despite their different origins, Russell sees the justification both for individual and for institutional autonomy as resulting from the relation between such autonomies and the generation of knowledge. The basic argument is this: All opinions must be tested against contrary opinions in order for them to become justified. In order for the required variety of contrary opinions to arise, both individual autonomy (free speech) and institutional autonomy (academic freedom) must be present. As he put it in 1922,

None of our beliefs are quite true; all have at least a penumbra of vagueness and error. The methods of increasing the degree of truth in our beliefs are well known; they consist in hearing all sides, trying to ascertain all the relevant facts, controlling our own bias by discussion with people who have the opposite bias, and cultivating a readiness to discard any hypothesis which has proved inadequate. ("Free Thought and Official Propaganda", *SE*<sub>2</sub>, p. 155)

In short, free speech—nurtured by academic freedom—is the engine of

knowledge. Knowledge, in turn, is of immeasurable benefit to all of humankind.<sup>51</sup>

In its essentials, this argument is of course Millian in origin. Just as Mill observes that “There is no such thing as absolute certainty” and that “Complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action”,<sup>52</sup> Russell concludes that “The fundamental argument for freedom of opinion is the doubtfulness of all our beliefs”<sup>53</sup> and that “controlling our own bias” comes about through “discussion with people who have the opposite bias”.<sup>54</sup>

On Mill’s view,

The steady habit of correcting and completing [one’s] own opinion by collating it with those of others, so far from causing doubt and hesitation in carrying it into practice, is the only stable foundation for a just reliance on it: for, being cognizant of all that can, at least obviously, be said against him, and having taken up his position against all gainsayers—knowing that he has sought for objections and difficulties, instead of avoiding them, and has shut out no light which can be thrown upon the subject from any quarter—he has a right to think his judgment better than that of any person, or any multitude, who have not gone through a similar process. (*On Liberty*, p. 21)

Similarly on Russell’s view,

No man can pass as educated who has heard only one side on questions as to which the public is divided.... As soon as a censorship is imposed upon the opinions which teachers may avow, education ceases to serve this purpose and tends to produce, instead of a nation of men, a herd of fanatical bigots.... All those who oppose free discussion and who seek to impose a censorship upon

<sup>51</sup> Of course, as David Stove has pointed out in a related context, it is one thing to *tolerate* innovation in thought and action, quite another to *encourage* it. In other words, just because innovation proves to be a necessary condition for the advancement of knowledge, it does not follow that innovation, by itself, will be sufficient for such advancement. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Thus, nothing in this justification for free speech and academic freedom should be taken to imply the stronger of these two claims, a position often taken to be advocated by Mill’s talk of “experiments in living”. See David Stove, “The Columbus Argument”, *Commentary*, 84, no. 6 (Dec. 1987): 57–8.

<sup>52</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: Norton, 1975; 1st ed., 1859), p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> “Freedom vs. Authority in Education”, *SE*<sub>2</sub>, p. 200.

<sup>54</sup> “Free Thought and Official Propaganda”, *SE*<sub>2</sub>, p. 155.

the opinions to which the young are to be exposed are doing their share in increasing this bigotry and in plunging the world further into the abyss of strife and intolerance from which Locke and his coadjutors gradually rescued it. (“Freedom and the Colleges”, *BRA* 1: 302).

Mill’s most famous passage also makes the point that it is only through open debate that knowledge advances:

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind. ... the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error. (*On Liberty*, p. 18)

Russell makes virtually the same point when he remarks,

let it be remembered that what is at stake, in the greatest issues as well as in those that seem smaller, is the freedom of the individual human spirit to express its beliefs and hopes for mankind, whether they be shared by many or by few or none. New hopes, new beliefs, and new thoughts are at all times necessary to mankind, and it is not out of a dead uniformity that they can be expected to arise. (“Freedom and the Colleges”, *BRA* 1: 307)

In light of Richard Wollheim’s conclusion, in only a slightly different context, that it is “a matter only of simplification, and not of grave distortion, to look on the whole of Russell’s social philosophy as an attempt, a sustained attempt, to repair that of John Stuart Mill: to supplement its deficiencies, to relate it to new ideas, and to demonstrate its applicability to the ever-changing realities of the twentieth century”,<sup>55</sup> such similarities are perhaps not surprising.

Russell’s emphasis upon the relationship between academic freedom and the acquisition of knowledge has immediate consequences for both

<sup>55</sup> Richard Wollheim, “Bertrand Russell and the Liberal Tradition”, in George Nakhnikian, ed., *Bertrand Russell’s Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1974), p. 209.

education and democracy. In education, Russell observes that

Freedom in education has many aspects. There is first of all freedom to learn or not to learn. Then there is freedom as to what to learn. And in later education there is freedom of opinion. Freedom of opinion, on the part of both teachers and pupils, is the most important of the various kinds of freedom, and the only one which requires no limitations whatever. ("Freedom vs. Authority in Education", *SE*, pp. 199f.)

As a result, Russell is most famous as an educator for his lack of prohibitions with regard to knowledge. In *On Education*, he argues repeatedly that knowledge should not be thought advantageous in some contexts yet harmful in others.<sup>56</sup> This is so, he euphemistically emphasizes, even when a student's curiosity "takes directions which lie outside the school curriculum altogether." Even in cases in which such interests might be deemed socially inappropriate or obscene, such "curiosity should be regarded as laudable, and the boy or girl should be told how to satisfy it after school hours", for example through reading appropriate books in the library. "This, I am convinced, is the right way to deal with a narrow and morbid curiosity. Prohibition and moral horror can only make it worse" (p. 158).

Similar conclusions are defended in the case of university instructors. Thus, after reporting a number of arguments which defend the conclusion that within the university there should be unanimity on certain important social questions—such as what constitutes "good citizenship"—Russell concludes that the only point on which the university should require unanimity of opinion is on the matter of the university's purpose, which is to foster knowledge. Short of this, and on every other subject, each instructor should be free to hold his own opinion:

If they [University instructors] are prevented from expressing their conclusions, either by the democracy or by the plutocracy, it is almost certain that progress, both intellectual and social, will be seriously impeded. Everyone admits this as regards the past. Copernicus, from fear of condemnation, published posthumously; Kepler was forced to earn his living by astrology; Galileo recanted under threat of torture; Spinoza was condemned by Jews and Christians alike; Darwin could not have held a university appointment, except perhaps at London. No

<sup>56</sup> For example, see *OE*, pp. 156f.

system of university government, however democratic, would have led universities to endorse these men's opinions in their own day, and if it had been the practice to enforce collective decisions they would have been silenced. I conclude that collective decisions, however arrived at, should not be enforced upon university teachers in matters of opinion. ("Education in America", *BRA* I: 312–13)

Thus, on Russell's view, it is the promotion of free and well-informed discussion, rather than of this or that particular conclusion, no matter how important the issue, that will bind together members of the university. Such a conclusion is surely just as relevant in today's politically charged context as it was in Russell's.<sup>57</sup>

Given the striking similarity between the "scientific method" in epistemology and the "liberal outlook" in politics, Russell's conclusions regarding academic freedom and the university also have immediate consequences for the political realm. As Russell sees it,

The fundamental difference between the liberal and the illiberal outlook is that the former regards all questions as open to discussion and all opinions as open to a greater or lesser measure of doubt, while the latter holds in advance that certain opinions are absolutely unquestionable, and that no argument against them must be allowed to be heard. ("Freedom and the Colleges", *BRA* I: 301)

Thus, if it is correct that knowledge advances only through free and open debate and that the advancement of knowledge is of political benefit, it follows almost immediately that the liberal outlook should be

<sup>57</sup> Lest one believe that this is an overstatement, we need look no further than the "Recommendations" section (§4) of the 1990 Report of the University of Western Ontario's President's Standing Committee for Employment Equity, where we see one recent attempt to impose political uniformity in hiring. Recommendation 10 states (in part) that all shortlisted candidates should be "interviewed regarding evidence of their understanding of, and commitment to, employment equity". (See University of Western Ontario, "Abridged Version of the First Annual Report of the President's Standing Committee for Employment Equity", *Western News*, 31 Jan. 1991, Supp., p. S6. Italics added.) In this context it is also worth noting Sheila McIntyre's recent claim that anti-feminism is not simply a political view, but also a form of sexual harassment and that, as such, it should not be defended under ordinary principles of freedom of speech. (See Sheila McIntyre, "Reflections from Sheila McIntyre", *CAUT Bulletin*, 36, no. 3 [March 1989]: "CAUT Status of Women Supp.", 3.) Examples of such partisan political agendas are easily multiplied and will be inconsistent with even the most modest of liberal principles.

preferred to any of its competitors.

In addition, a second, independent, conclusion follows as well. This concerns the very preservation of freedom itself. In Russell's words,

Since there is a natural tendency for those who have power to exercise it to the utmost, it is a necessary safeguard against tyranny that there should be institutions and organized bodies which possess, either in practice or in theory, a certain limited independence of the State. Among such bodies it is important that universities should be included. ("Freedom and the Colleges", *BRA* 1: 303)

It is in these two ways—the promotion of advancement of knowledge and the safeguarding against tyranny—that academic freedom is of benefit to all citizens, and not simply to benefit those who are directly associated with the universities.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4. THE TENSION BETWEEN FREEDOM AND UTILITY

As we have seen, Russell's main argument in favour of academic freedom

<sup>58</sup> At this juncture it is interesting to note just how closely Russell's conception of academic freedom coincides with the contemporary one. Today we regularly define academic freedom in two stages: For the institution, academic freedom is the freedom to offer programs and to hire and evaluate teachers and researchers on purely academic criteria, without interference from sources outside the academy. For the individual student and scholar, academic freedom is the freedom to pursue one's studies or research, and to have it evaluated, again on purely academic criteria, without regard to factors such as one's political or religious beliefs, one's sexual orientation, etc.

These freedoms in turn are typically justified on two main grounds: First, they help foster the advancement of knowledge through the promotion of (i) intellectual pluralism and (ii) non-application-based research. Both factors are important, given the unpredictable directions in which knowledge develops. Second, such freedoms are also essential for the promotion of (i) an educated citizenry and (ii) political and social pluralism. Such factors, of course, play a role in the fostering of democracy itself.

In order to help bring about these freedoms at the institutional level, a diversity of "arm's length" funding sources typically gives the university independence from any single paymaster. At the individual level, these freedoms are ensured primarily through the granting of tenure, since it is tenure which (i) protects the scholar working in politically sensitive areas, (ii) gives the scholar the freedom to research subjects which are prompted by curiosity, rather than by short term payoff, and (iii) gives the scholar the security to obtain the years of specialized training that is required for work in the modern university.

is essentially Millian in origin: Free and open debate is a necessary condition for the advancement of knowledge. Such debate, in turn, relies heavily upon various forms of freedom. Without them, the kinds of hardship which Russell himself encountered would become common coin. It follows that the betterment of the human condition is directly served by the promotion of both academic and political freedom. Seen in this way, Russell's defence of academic freedom and of the liberal outlook rests upon an important assumption about the fundamental utility of knowledge. Should knowledge cease to have this utility, any argument which relies upon its advancement will be correspondingly weakened.

At the same time, Russell is also well known for his scepticism concerning the unfettered advancement of science. Most famously, in 1950 Russell used the occasion of the awarding of his Nobel Prize to warn of the nuclear threat and the dangers of too much technical knowledge.<sup>59</sup> Seventeen years later, looking back over his long life, oblivious to his many remarkable accomplishments, he put the issue in the starkest of terms:

The time has come to review my life as a whole, and to ask whether it has served any useful purpose or has been wholly concerned in futility. Unfortunately, no answer is possible for anyone who does not know the future. Modern weapons make it practically certain that the next serious war will exterminate the human race.<sup>60</sup>

Ultimately, the march of scientific knowledge led Russell, not to revel in its capacity for good, but to tremble at its capacity for harm.

Admittedly, such scepticism is balanced in Russell's writings by a remarkable commitment to the power of knowledge. As early as 1903, for example, in "The Free Man's Worship", Russell emphasized not only how the platonic forms of truth, beauty and the good, but how all of art and philosophy as well, were discoverable only through free, unencumbered thought.<sup>61</sup> Even as late as 1955, he continued to hold out hope for

<sup>59</sup> "Politically Important Desires", Nobel Lecture, 11 December 1950. Reprinted in *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), p. 164.

<sup>60</sup> "The Last Testament of Bertrand Russell", *The Independent*, London, 24 Nov. 1993, p. 21.

<sup>61</sup> "The Free Man's Worship", *The Independent Review*, 1 (1903): 419. Reprinted in

the betterment of humankind through the advancement of knowledge:

I think we must retain the belief that scientific knowledge is one of the glories of man. I will not maintain that knowledge can never do harm. I think such general propositions can almost always be refuted by well-chosen examples. What I will maintain—and maintain vigorously—is that knowledge is very much more often useful than harmful and that fear of knowledge is very much more often harmful than useful. Suppose you are a scientific pioneer and you make some discovery of great scientific importance, and suppose you say to yourself: “I am afraid this discovery will do harm”: you know that other people are likely to make the same discovery if they are allowed suitable opportunities for research; you must therefore, if you do not wish the discovery to become public, either discourage your sort of research or control publication by a board of censors. Nine times out of ten, the board of censors will object to knowledge that is in fact useful—e.g. knowledge concerning contraceptives—rather than to knowledge that would in fact be harmful. It is very difficult to foresee the social effects of new knowledge, and it is very easy from the sheer force of habit to shrink from new knowledge such as might promote new kinds of behaviour.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, despite its danger, Russell believed that scientific knowledge still held out the promise of a world without illness, poverty or conflict. “Science, whatever unpleasant consequences it may have by the way, is in its very nature a liberator, a liberator of bondage to physical nature and, in time to come, a liberator from the weight of destructive passions.”<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, it is also science which has brought the world unprecedented dangers and it is the “childish cleverness” of science which threatens the world with universal extinction.<sup>64</sup>

Karl Popper summarizes the impression we are left with as follows:

Russell has more than once complained that our intellectual development has outrun our moral development.

We have become very clever, according to Russell, indeed too clever. We can make lots of wonderful gadgets, including television, high-speed rockets, and an atom bomb, or a thermonuclear bomb, if you prefer. But we have not been able

*Papers* 12: 68.

<sup>62</sup> “Science and Human Life”, in James R. Newman, ed., *What is Science?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955). Reprinted in *BW*, p. 721.

<sup>63</sup> “Science and Human Life”, *BW*, pp. 724f.

<sup>64</sup> “Scientific Technique and the Future”, in *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), p. 211.

to achieve that moral and political growth and maturity which alone could safely direct and control the uses to which we put our tremendous intellectual powers. This is why we now find ourselves in mortal danger. Our evil national pride has prevented us from achieving the world-state in time.

To put this view in a nutshell: we are clever, perhaps too clever, but we are also wicked; and this mixture of cleverness and wickedness lies at the root of our troubles.<sup>65</sup>

Thus there arises a significant tension within Russell’s views concerning the utility of knowledge. Knowledge, it seems, is both the saviour and the curse of humankind. This tension inevitably carries over into Russell’s defence of academic freedom. On the one hand, academic freedom is to be justified, not through political first principles, but through its contribution to the advancement of knowledge. On the other hand, if knowledge cannot be relied upon to improve the human condition, what motivation have we to work towards its advancement? Without this motivation, how can we continue to defend such freedoms? To put the point in the form of an *ad hominem* directly against Russell, if it were true that, in the absence of his anti-war efforts, the many miseries of World War I might have come to an end sooner, and if it is true that our main or only reason for defending Russell’s freedom to proselytize relies upon a calculation of utilities, it appears that blanket advocacy of such freedoms is no more warranted than the blanket advocacy of any other general measure.

This tension arising from the double-edged nature of science is one which Russell himself recognized and repeatedly commented upon, as early as 1916 (in *Principles of Social Reconstruction*) and as late as 1949 (in *Authority and the Individual*). For example, in his 1922 essay, “Free Thought and Official Propaganda”, he remarks:

My plea throughout this essay has been for the spread of the scientific temper, which is an altogether different thing from the knowledge of scientific results. The scientific temper is capable of regenerating mankind and providing an issue for all our troubles. The results of science, in the form of mechanism, poison gas, and the Yellow Press, bid fair to lead to the total downfall of our civiliza-

<sup>65</sup> Karl R. Popper, “The History of Our Time: an Optimist’s View” (1956), in his *Conjectures and Refutations*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 365.

tion. It is a curious antithesis, which a Martian might contemplate with amused detachment. (*SE*<sub>2</sub>, p. 172)

Similarly, in 1931 Russell concludes *The Scientific Outlook* by emphasizing that "The impulse towards scientific construction is admirable when it does not thwart any of the major impulses that give value to human life, but when it is allowed to forbid all outlet to everything but itself it becomes a cruel form of tyranny."<sup>66</sup>

Russell's own famous response to the tension, repeated many times, was to emphasize the importance of beneficence. Thus in 1925 he concludes that "Neither love without knowledge, nor knowledge without love can produce a good life."<sup>67</sup> He emphasizes this conclusion by citing examples of the harms that can arise both from actions based upon love without knowledge and from actions based upon knowledge without love. As an example of the harm that can arise from actions based upon love without knowledge, Russell mentions how, in the Middle Ages when pestilence appeared in a country, it was the Church which exacerbated the harm when it advised the population to assemble in churches and pray for deliverance. The result of such congregating was that infection spread with extraordinary rapidity among the crowded masses of supplicants. As an example of the harm that can arise from actions based upon knowledge without love, Russell cites the death and destruction of World War I.

In 1940, Russell repeats this main claim, asserting that "Love of truth, or (as it may be called) the scientific outlook, is, to my mind, only second to loving kindness as an ethical principle."<sup>68</sup> Despite this, the ten-

<sup>66</sup> *The Scientific Outlook* (New York: Norton, 1962; 1st pub., 1931), p. 260.

<sup>67</sup> *What I Believe* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1925). Reprinted in *BW*, p. 372.

<sup>68</sup> "Do I Preach Adultery?", pp. 57f.; quoted in *BRA* I: 172f. The quotation continues:

The man of science knows that it is difficult to ascertain truth, and probably impossible to ascertain it completely. He holds his opinions, not as unalterable dogmas, but only as what seems most likely to be true on the evidence hitherto available. Whatever opinions I have expressed, in regard to sexual ethics as in regard to the most abstruse questions of logic, I hold in this spirit. There is not one of them that I am not prepared to abandon if new evidence of a convincing kind is brought to my notice; but equally there is not one of them that I am prepared to modify or suppress from fear of punishment or hope of worldly advancement. It is difficult not to let one's opinions harden into dogmas when

sion within Russell's position remains. If, as he says, both beneficence and knowledge are necessary for the betterment of humankind, but it is the former which is the "more fundamental",<sup>69</sup> then what are we to do when the two collide? After all, it is rarely on grounds of hatred that we encounter the most persuasive of arguments in favour of censorship. Rather, such arguments are almost inevitably couched in terms of beneficence: it is in "the greater interests of society", or for "the short term in times of crisis", or for "the good of the community" that censorship and restrictions on academic freedom are most often invoked. In other words, it is exactly when beneficence appears to *require* the intrusion of authority that arguments against freedom take on their greatest power. Yet, as we have also seen, it is in just such cases that many thinkers and commentators are often at risk, and that those who stand outside the political mainstream are most vulnerable.

In his Nobel prize speech, Russell raised an analogous difficulty, not having to do with academic freedom, but rather with the age-old tension concerning the priority of the good or the right. Put in general terms, anyone who advocates a general policy on the ground that it promotes the good will be forced to retract that policy in any case in which an alternative action would bring about a greater good. Thus the rule utilitarian is regularly at a loss to explain why it is we should follow a rule in cases in which breaking the rule would result in greater utility. Yet without following the rule in just such cases, the rule itself becomes empty. In Russell's words, "If one man offers you democracy and another offers you a bag of grain, at what stage of starvation will you prefer the grain to the vote?"<sup>70</sup>

Is the advocate of freedom destined to stumble over exactly this same difficulty? Are we to tolerate diverse points of view only in those cases

one is attacked by furious dogmatists. But dogmatic resistance and pusillanimous surrender are alike untrue to the scientific spirit. It is for the scientific spirit, not for any conclusions to which it may have provisionally led me, that I am prepared to fight with all my strength. For it is only by the scientific spirit, wedded to loving kindness, that human life can be made less painful and less full of misery than it is now and has always been since the dawn of history.

<sup>69</sup> *What I Believe*, in *BW*, p. 372.

<sup>70</sup> "Politically Important Desires", *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, pp. 159f.

where it appears profitable to do so, censoring them in cases where it does not?

Rather than attempting to decide such issues either through simple utility or on the basis of principle, Russell's answer is to emphasize the holistic nature of our ethics and our desires:

All human activity is prompted by desire or impulse. There is a wholly fallacious theory advanced by some earnest moralists to the effect that it is possible to resist desire in the interests of duty and moral principle. I say this is fallacious, not because no man ever acts from a sense of duty, but because duty has no hold on him unless he desires to be dutiful. If you wish to know what men will do, you must know not only, or principally, their material circumstances, but rather the whole system of their desires with their relative strengths. (*Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, p. 160)

No doubt Russell is correct to emphasize the holistic nature of our ethics and our desires. Perhaps, too, there will be sufficient desire on the part of enough people in order for diverse voices to flourish. Perhaps, too, these desires will outweigh matters of immediate or short-term utility. Nevertheless, in contrast to the quotation with which we began, and recalling those intellectuals who so typically stand outside the social and political mainstream, such a response fails to give great hope to the advocate of freedom.

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