

## RUSSELL AND HIS BIOGRAPHERS

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**T**hough lived forwards, lives are recounted and understood backwards. Perhaps the chief challenge of a biographer, therefore, is to recapture the contingency and incompleteness that mark every life in progress at every stage of that progress. Equally demanding and necessary is the need to make sense of the life from the outside as well as from the inside—the requirement not simply to reimagine the subject's emotional life no matter how turbulent or tranquil it may have been, but also to see that individual as others saw or were influenced by him or her and to identify and assess his or her achievement in the broadest possible terms. Lives, moreover, accumulate. Few of us fail to mature, to experience, and to increase our stock of intellectual and emotional capital over time, and fewer still manage (or seek) either to suppress the unhappy features of our past or to forget the frustrations of paths not followed or the joys of previous achievement and pleasure. Biographers must therefore also be alert to retrieve the lived experience common to every human life.

The writing of biography—any biography—is thus a daunting task. Even the apparently uncomplicated lives of individuals who travelled little, accomplished less, and concerned themselves with the world not at all present formidable difficulties of recovery, understanding, presentation, and interpretation. Lives of intellectuals offer their own peculiar demands. Not only must the biographer explain the subject's writings, doctrines, and discoveries with lucidity and sympathy, he must also trace their origins, explain their originality and judge their influence. He must as well delineate the evolving contexts of both the individual and the ideas. At their best—such as Peter Brown's magnificent life of Augustine or Abraham Pais's splendid study of Einstein—biographies are therefore among the finest and most exacting forms of historical writing.

Incomparably more demanding is the task of making sense of a life as long, as provocative, as productive, and as full of incident as that of Bertrand Russell. Simply gaining a genuine understanding of Russell's astonishing longevity is difficult enough, requiring as it does at even the most basic level an appreciation of British social, cultural, and political life from the age of Gladstone to that of Heath. And for all its length, Russell's was scarcely a quiet and uneventful existence. Rather, he moved in many different contexts in the pursuit of many different—albeit occasionally overlapping—roles as aristocratic scion, Cambridge don, philosophical innovator, anti-war activist, social theorist, schoolmaster, itinerant lecturer, freelance journalist, public intellectual, Establishment icon, and anti-war gadfly to name but a few. Each of these lives was, of course, at once a part of a larger life and an aspect of a particular context; the Cambridge which Russell entered as an undergraduate in 1890, to offer but a single example, was neither that to which he returned as a lecturer in 1910, nor that out of which he was driven in 1916, nor that to which he was welcomed back in triumph in 1944.

To master Russell's remarkable longevity is thus to take only the first step towards a biography; simply knowing where Russell spent every month of his life and identifying those individuals with whom he spoke, lived, quarrelled and loved is the task of a chronicler, not that of a biographer. Russell, after all, merits sustained biographical study not simply because he survived into his ninety-eighth year. He merits such attention because of the power and influence of his ideas and the extent and consequence of his activities. As even the most cursory of glances at Kenneth Blackwell and Harry Rujá's magisterial three-volume bibliography makes abundantly clear, Russell was above all else a writer and man of ideas. And of making many books, essays, and articles expressing those ideas there was no end from the 1890s to the 1960s. These writings, moreover, covered a staggering range of topics—from technical logic to evanescent journalism, from political theory to history—and appealed to vastly different audiences. As a technical philosopher, Russell published books, essays, and scholarly articles on the philosophy of mathematics, logic, metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, religion, the philosophy of science, and the philosophy of history all aimed at a learned audience. At the same time, he also wrote for a broad readership on virtually all of these same topics and did so, moreover, for a full half century of dramatic cultural change and intellectual transition. To make sense of this prodigious

output is plainly a forbidding challenge. The obvious first step is to master the material itself which, for all of Russell's much-vaunted clarity of expression, is no small feat. But such a close reading is only an essential preliminary. In all of these various philosophical subdisciplines Russell had predecessors, contemporaries, and successors as well as antagonists, competitors, and allies. His ideas, moreover, were variously pathbreaking and insightful, careworn and commonplace, querulous and upsetting. The challenge of his biographer must therefore be not merely to make Russell's own views clear and to demonstrate how they changed over time—no minor task given their variety and complexity—he must also trace their origins, explain their novelty, and assess their influence. Nor, finally, can Russell's biographer neglect to locate Russell in the various intellectual and political movements in which he took part both consciously and unconsciously. A biography which failed to site Russell as a neo-Hegelian acolyte, or a self-consciously revolutionary partner of G. E. Moore, or a collaborator with Alfred North Whitehead, or a stalwart of the No-Conscription Fellowship, or a figurehead of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, to offer some obvious examples, would be weak indeed.

A final difficulty confronting any aspiring Russell biographer is of course his enormously complicated inner life and emotional existence. The demands of sympathetic understanding and psychological insight necessary to recapture that inner life are high and, indeed, beyond the capacity of many would-be biographers. More exacting still is the requirement to assess the enormously complicated and evolving interplay and mutual influence between Russell's intellectual and emotional selves.

As this peroration makes plain, Bertrand Russell presents a formidable challenge to any prospective biographer—a challenge rivalled only by John Maynard Keynes among twentieth-century British intellectuals. At the same time, of course, the writing of Russell's life provides similarly unique opportunities for understanding wide swaths of the intellectual, cultural and political life of modern Britain.

## I

The first attempts to make sense of this remarkable life were of course Russell's own. Russell, indeed, was an habitual autobiographer, an oft-repeated offender who committed a series of autobiographical writings

under the impulse variously of monetary necessity, popular demand, self-understanding, historical insight, and score settling. Such works as *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell 1872–1967* (3 vols., 1967–69), *Fact and Fiction* (1961), *My Philosophical Development* (1959), *Portraits from Memory* (1956), “My Mental Development” (1944), and *The Amberley Papers* (2 vols., 1937)—as well as unpublished broadcasts, interviews, and essays—reached a wide and receptive audience and comprise collectively an unrivalled source for biographers. Perhaps most importantly, such writings enabled Russell to lay down a master narrative of his life—an intellectually and emotionally privileged account which by its very clarity and ostensible frankness carries enormous authority and stands as the indisputable starting point of any attempt to understand Russell’s life and work.

At the same time, however, the very lucidity, wit, and apparent candour of these writings threaten to trap the biographer into merely retelling Russell’s own tale on essentially his own terms. At the most basic level, Russell’s aspiring biographers need to question whether his very narrative strategies and structures make the best sense of his life. Does, to offer a simple example, it make sense to break Russell’s life in 1914 and 1944 as he does in his *Autobiography*, or are there other—more preferable—divides? Did, to suggest another instance, his lyrical account of his undergraduate years at Cambridge match the experience not just of his friends but of his contemporaries more generally? Autobiographers rarely manage—or even attempt—to step back from their lives and see themselves through the eyes of others; for a skilled biographer such perspective is essential.

Nor is Russell’s autobiographical narrative either a seamless or an even one—certain individuals and episodes are explained in detail, while others are passed over with scarcely a mention. As Richard Rempel has so skilfully uncovered in his investigation of Russell’s role in the tariff reform controversy of 1903, for instance, there is often a great deal hidden behind a brief remark in the *Autobiography*. Nor does Russell’s usually luminous prose always succeed in conveying the points he wishes to make or manage not to betray as much as it reveals. To pick but one example from dozens, his consistent use of the passive voice to describe his idealist apprenticeship—“the bath of German idealism in which I had been plunged by McTaggart and Stout”—a usage so at variance with his usual writing is plainly evidence of a lingering shamefacedness

on Russell’s part and an unconscious attempt at distancing himself from what he had come to regard as an earlier wrongheadedness. The point of such examples, which could of course be multiplied many-fold, is that Russell’s autobiographical writings are far from transparent documents and that the task of the biographer is to probe beneath their elegant surface in pursuit of their silences, ambiguities, and delusions.

Finally, Russell’s autobiographical writings, in common with his historical writings, emphasize individuals and intellectuals not merely as historical actors but as initiators of historical change. He applied, that is, the same philosophy of history to his own life that he did to others. And as has often been noticed but requires repeating in this context, Russell commonly describes that change as the result of moments of individual insight—of epiphanies, conversions, and turning points. Not merely does he write about himself in this way—whether it is his grasping the truth of the ontological argument, witnessing the suffering of Evelyn Whitehead, realizing he no longer loved Alys, or determining he must oppose the First World War—but he describes others in the same manner, whether they be Kant or Lincoln or Metternich. And although it is tempting to dismiss this repeated usage as either a rhetorical device or a linguistic convention, surely the more important point is that such accounts—despite their undoubted drama—are rarely convincing on either emotional or intellectual grounds. They thus represent fertile ground for any biographer, who needs to recapture both the psychological context of each individual “conversion” and the broader reasons which led Russell repeatedly to write about himself and others in such a manner.

Russell’s other great contribution to his own biography was of course his preservation of the remarkable collection of papers which Blackwell and his co-workers at the Russell Archives have cared for with such skill and attentiveness. Few collections of private papers are as vast and disparate; none are so well maintained and generously managed. With the ending of several embargoes, the acquisition of Russell’s own library, and the addition of other correspondences, moreover, the Russell Archives have grown steadily more useful. For all their richness, however, and despite the presence among Russell’s papers of materials from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Committee of 100, and International War Crimes Tribunal, Russell’s life cannot be understood solely from the Russell Archives. To appreciate the full range of Russell’s life and

achievement he must be seen as he was—as a part, often a leading part but still only a part—of larger movements and intellectual changes in philosophy, politics, education, social thought, and political protest across the past century. And that perspective can be gained only through wide reading and historical understanding far removed from the Russell Archives themselves.

## II

The first attempt at a full-scale biography of Russell was made by Alan Wood, a young Australian journalist and philosopher who died about the time of the book's appearance in 1957. Published over a decade before Russell's own death, *Bertrand Russell: the Passionate Sceptic* naturally did not draw directly on material from Russell's private papers, nor did it have access to most of Russell's voluminous autobiographical writings. It did, however, benefit mightily from the cooperation not merely of Russell himself but of many of his oldest friends and acquaintances, such as Charles and George Trevelyan, Bernard Berenson, Gilbert Murray, T. S. Eliot, and G. E. Moore.

Although not an approved biography in the formal sense, *The Passionate Sceptic* was very much an approving one. It is distinctly and consistently friendly to Russell and reads as if Russell were at Wood's shoulder—filling in details and offering aid. It must be seen, indeed, as a part of Russell's own autobiographical project. And, in fact, its initial readers and reviewers viewed it as such—as an admiring attempt to describe the life of the man who was then Britain's most prominent public intellectual—recipient of the Order of Merit and Nobel Prize for Literature, inaugural Reith Lecturer, and embodiment of a liberal culture that had prevailed over the evils of fascism and vanquished the horrors of nazism. The Russell who would lead the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and rail against the Vietnamese War is neither to be found nor to be anticipated in Wood's anodyne work.

For subsequent Russell biographers *The Passionate Sceptic* remains most useful as a source of the testimony of many of Russell's oldest friends. Wood's success at persuading many of Russell's longest-standing contemporaries to reminiscence preserved memories which would otherwise have been lost and which are worth their weight in biographical gold as witness to what others made of Russell. G. E. Moore's answer to

Wood's open-ended query about his recollections of the undergraduate Russell, to offer but one prominent example, is both striking and invaluable: "He was always talking." Surely it is not fanciful to see in that terse sentence evidence at once of Russell's sense of intellectual liberation at Cambridge, of his habit of monopolizing conversations and laying down the law therein, of Moore's nagging resentment at that habit, and of Russell's delight in argument and fellowship. Although Wood rarely makes the most of such accounts, his book is flecked with such nuggets to be mined by others.

Nearly twenty years passed before a second attempt at a full-scale biography of Russell—two decades which witnessed Russell's bitterly contentious leadership of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and International War Crimes Tribunal, the cataloguing and opening of the Russell Archives, and his death in 1970. *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (1975) by Ronald Clark therefore marked a major advance in Russell studies. An accomplished and experienced professional biographer, Clark produced a non-technical, single-volume account that is very much a *life* of Russell—a record of where he was, whom he met, and what he did every month of his life. Agreeably written and deliberately fast-paced, Clark's *Life* is a distinguished example of what must be termed the Sunday supplement genre of biographical writing—briskly presented, appealingly comprehensive, intellectually undemanding, unashamedly preoccupied by celebrity and fornication, and easily extract-able for the Sunday papers (in this case the *Sunday Times*).

At the same time, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* is a book of many virtues. Most notably, it is based on serious research in the Russell Archives, especially in the correspondence between Russell and his various female confessors—such as Ottoline Morrell, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Constance Malleon, and Lucy Donnelly—material which Clark uses to good and original effect. Clark also brings to his study both a sense of detachment and a recognition of Russell's manifold achievements and contexts. He succeeds admirably, therefore, in presenting Russell as others saw him—for good and ill—and in describing Russell's constantly evolving intellectual and public reputations. The most impressive feature of *The Life of Bertrand Russell*, however, is Clark's detailed reconstruction of Russell's life after the latter's return to Britain from America in 1944. The final twenty-five years of Russell's life—beginning with unprecedented respectability and honour for Russell and

closing with unparalleled rancour and notoriety—are of course the thinnest and least revealing sections of his autobiographical writings. Clark's evocation of those difficult years is quite masterful and has yet to be bettered.

The great weakness of *The Life of Bertrand Russell* is its almost wilful lack of attention to virtually any aspect of Russell's thought, surely a damning quality in a biography of an intellectual. Although repeatedly and accurately praised as a philosophical innovator of uncommon virtuosity and unusual influence, Russell is nowhere given the sustained treatment necessary to make those claims fully credible or comprehensible. In its driving insistence to capture Russell's life within the hard covers of but a single volume, therefore, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* allows its greatest strength to become its greatest deficiency.

Although it will not culminate in a single, authorized life, the launching of the Russell Editorial Project in 1980 was obviously an event of enormous importance to the world of Russell scholarship. The fifteen volumes which have appeared thus far represent scholarship of the highest order and will put all subsequent students of Russell permanently in their debt. Conceived and executed on a heroic scale, they are already working a revolution in Russell studies by not simply reprinting papers without comment but by supplying instead indispensable introductions, headnotes, annotations, textual apparatus, and chronologies that, collectively, will enable students of every facet of Russell's life and thought to understand the contexts of that thought far more thoroughly and accurately than hitherto. Among modern British intellectuals only John Stuart Mill and John Maynard Keynes have been accorded such treatment, and the efflorescence in both Mill and Keynes studies bodes well for all those interested in Russell.<sup>1</sup>

Alan Ryan's *Bertrand Russell: a Political Life*, published in 1988, was the first biography to make use of the initial volumes of the *Collected Papers*. Much less grandiose in its ambitions than Clark's work, *A Political Life* is a sympathetic attempt to examine and explain the Russell who had such an enormous influence on Ryan's own post-1945 generation—the Russell of *Unpopular Essays* and *Why I Am Not a Christian*, of

<sup>1</sup> And like Mill and Keynes, Russell is also getting a valuable edition of his correspondence: *The Selected Letters*, edited by Nicholas Griffin.

CND and the International War Crimes Tribunal, of *A History of Western Philosophy* and *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare*.

As befits an accomplished political scientist recently returned to Oxford as Warden of New College, *A Political Life* is intellectual history of the highest quality—lucid, astringent, and learned. As its title makes plain, Ryan's work restricts itself to Russell's social and political thought as well as to his manifold political activities, from pre-war women's suffrage agitation to post-Hiroshima anti-nuclear campaigning. Given the extent of such writing and activity, however, *A Political Life* ranges widely over Russell's entire life. More importantly, however, it also traverses much of the political landscape of twentieth-century Britain. Thus while Ryan expertly explicates Russell's ideas, traces their origins and influences, and explores their reception, he also takes great care to explain the contexts in which they were written and received. A book such as Russell's introductory Reith lectures, *Authority and the Individual* (1949), is therefore not merely evaluated on its own terms, but also rooted firmly in the intellectual and cultural setting of post-fascist Europe and compared (largely favourably) with the contemporary writings of Orwell, Koestler, Popper, and von Hayek. Indeed, the greatest strength of *A Political Life*, along with its high intelligence and obvious sympathy, is its sustained contextualization. Not only does Ryan locate Russell in the history of contemporary social and political theory and assess his contributions to them, he also evokes a genuine understanding of what those ideas—and Russell himself—meant to others. Along with Nicholas Griffin's *Russell's Idealist Apprenticeship* (1991), *A Political Life* is one of the two best books on any aspect of Russell's life and thought.

Although Andrew Brink's *Bertrand Russell: the Psychobiography of a Moralizer* (1989) appeared hard on the heels of Ryan's book, two more different works can scarcely be imagined. Indebted to the theories and example of the eminent British psychologist John Bowlby, *The Psychobiography* is less a full-scale biography than a collection of essays round a central theme. It therefore passes over large stretches of Russell's life and thought in silence and focusses instead on his pacifist theories, anti-war activities, emotional conflicts, and psychological impulses—especially in the years before 1919. Within those perfectly defensible bounds, Brink's book is full of insight and wisdom about Russell, his ideas, and his legacy. Those insights, it must be said, derive most often not from the application of psychological theory but from the intelli-

gence of Brink's own experienced and careful readings of Russell's life and works. To make its theoretical claims as convincing as Brink plainly means them to be, however, *The Psychobiography* would have to be conceived on a scale quite different from what it is—a scale comparable to that of Bowlby's own life of Darwin. Even if not as wholly satisfying as it might have been, *The Psychobiography of Bertrand Russell* is one of the few genuinely indispensable books on Russell.

Such a claim, alas, cannot be made for Caroline Moorehead's *Bertrand Russell: a Life* (1992). A popular biographer and historian, Moorehead is a skilled and professional writer on the model of Ronald Clark (and of her own distinguished father). *A Life* therefore possesses many of the virtues and all of the limitations of Clark's work, without the compensation of priority. It is a clearly written, unimaginatively structured, unapologetically non-technical, and wholly unanalytical work aimed at the intelligent lay reader. Although based on material in the Russell Archives as well as on the usual suspects among secondary sources, it makes no effort to re-conceptualize Russell's life but instead covers much of the same biographical ground as do Russell and Clark—and does so on essentially their terms but without their verve. *A Life's* greatest virtue is Moorehead's care throughout to emphasize what others made of Russell across the course of his immensely long life—to explain the source of his attraction to so many women, for example, as well as to account for the scorn he provoked in so many of his fellow subjects at various times in his life. To the general reader, therefore, *Bertrand Russell: a Life* promises an agreeable and unchallenging survey; to the Russell specialist, it offers little.

### III

The appearance of the first volume of Ray Monk's long-anticipated life—*Bertrand Russell: the Spirit of Solitude, 1872–1921* (1996)—sets a new standard for biographical writing about Russell. Conceived on a monumental scale, Monk's project—when completed—will reign as the standard biography of Russell for a generation. Rooted firmly—indeed, at moments excessively—in the Russell Archives, it is gracefully written, compellingly argued, intelligently conceived, and impressively fine-grained. Readers of the completed biography will enjoy an unprecedented understanding of the complexities of Russell's daily existence, the

demands of his friends and family, the traumas of his emotional connections, and the ceaselessness of his efforts at self-understanding. They will also possess—even more valuably—an appreciation of the workings of his mind and of the equality of his writings. Monk is the first of Russell's biographers to discuss the full range of Russell's intellectual interests and writings—from *German Social Democracy* and *The Principles of Mathematics* to *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* and *The Analysis of Mind*. As might have been expected from the author of a deservedly acclaimed life of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Monk is completely at home with even the most abstruse of philosophical issues and writes with an enviable fluency, authority, and sophistication over the whole range of Russell's popular and philosophical writings. And it is this combination of intellectual engagement, emotional understanding, and archival detail that makes his book incomparably the finest biography of Russell to date.

For all its determination to confront Russell's ideas, *The Spirit of Solitude* is nonetheless more an emotional than an intellectual biography. Its centre of scholarly gravity, that is, rests in a sustained attempt to chart and make sense of Russell's emotional and psychological evolution—to account for the spirit of solitude to which Russell so often gave such eloquent expression. Because so much of that evolution necessarily took place in the company—or at least under the influence—of others, this is a biography which is structured around Russell's successive relationships with family, friends, lovers, and adversaries. And because Russell was such a revealing and—especially when stirred—remorseless correspondent, Volume 1 of the biography is anchored in the remarkable letters he exchanged with a number of equally remarkable women—Alys Russell, Ottoline Morrell, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Helen Thomas Flexner, Constance Malleon, and Lucy Donnelly, most prominently. *The Spirit of Solitude* therefore follows the twists and turns of Russell's emotional involvements with careful and at times obsessive detail. The reader feels on occasion, indeed, as if he has gripped an electric eel; he is bound to the creature in some discomfort and to scant benefit but nonetheless unable to let go.

That such a detailed examination of Russell's emotional life must be central to any full-fledged biographical enterprise is indisputable. That Monk's own interpretation of the nature of Russell's emotional and psychological tensions is fully persuasive is of course more open to disagreement, although many readers will find his account fully credible

and compelling. Nor will Monk's determination to pursue each and every detail of Russell's emotional life not fail to disappoint others, who will see this pursuit as overriding the other professed aim of *The Spirit of Solitude*—to interpret and assess Russell's ideas and their influence. Many will, indeed, find it a disturbingly and disappointingly unbalanced book.

Such an imbalance manifests itself most often in Monk's unwillingness either to focus on Russell from the outside or to offer any sustained comparative dimension to this work. To offer but a single example, Monk's discussion of Russell's aristocratic lineage is at once narrowly accurate yet broadly distorted. His description of Russell's childhood and adolescence at Pembroke Lodge—an oft-told tale—is at the same time factually sound yet interpretively misleading because of his failure to look beyond the bounds of Richmond Park. Scores of aristocratic sons were raised at home and educated by private tutors in Victorian Britain, whereby they too were indoctrinated with their family's heritage and their nation's past, taught the rudiments of religious faith, and prepared for university—a fact one would never suspect from Monk's narrow focus on life within Pembroke Lodge. Nor is Russell's adolescent religious crisis—an event surely crucial to Monk's interpretation and one on which he passes many shrewd judgements—seen in any comparative perspective. Russell himself recognized that the religious doubts he confessed in the "Greek Exercises" were "very much those of which one reads in Victorian biographies", but Monk seems not to appreciate the cultural as well as individual dimension of Russell's religious questioning. Nor—to offer a final instance—should he ignore the simple fact that Trinity was the most aristocratic of Cambridge colleges and that Russell appeared on class lists as the Hon. B. A. W. Russell. Being a Russell, that is, meant something not just to Russell but also to his contemporaries; members of a resolutely class-ridden society, they saw him differently because of his name and a Russell biography neglects that simple fact at its peril.

Another example of imbalance concerns the evolution not merely of Russell's philosophy but also of his philosophical reputation. Thanks to the richness of Russell's correspondence, it is possible—as Monk does—to trace his emotional twists and turns, duplicities and confessions in minute detail. Thanks to the labours of the various editors of the Russell Editorial Project, it is similarly possible to track his intellectual fits and

starts, innovations and dead-ends as well. It is possible therefore to watch Russell at work, literally to see him thinking, in a way rare among major intellectuals. Yet Monk—though perfectly willing to pursue every one of Russell's emotional wills-o'-the-wisp—does not do the same to his intellectual fancies. His refusal is doubly regrettable because he is so obviously capable of doing so, as he demonstrates brilliantly in his discussion of the creation of *The Principles of Mathematics*, although he entirely ignores the published research on the mysterious genesis of Parts I and II of the final text. Monk understands Russell's thought more completely and deeply than any previous biographer but prefers to write about it in summaries rather than to allow Russell to speak and think for himself.

Nor does *The Spirit of Solitude* make any sustained attempt to see Russell through the eyes of others—beyond those of his lovers. Once again, Monk understands Russell's evolving intellectual reputation and asserts its existence from time to time, but he does little to chart its trajectory and less still to overlay it with his growing public renown. *The Spirit of Solitude* is thus a biography which finds space for a detailed discussion of Vivienne Eliot's menstrual difficulties but not for even the mere mention of Russell's election to the Royal Society in 1907. It devotes, to offer another example, considerable attention to Russell's unpublished manuscript "Prisons"—of which only scraps remain—but a mere page to *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), a book which sold in the tens if not hundreds of thousands and which is still used as a set text in introductory philosophy courses in North America and Britain. Although by no means an original work, *The Problems of Philosophy* was one of the most influential books Russell ever wrote; by defining the questions philosophers should ask, by setting the agenda for teaching and discussion, and by offering both an admonition to and an example of philosophizing, it advanced the philosophical revolution of Russell, Moore, and their allies against neo-Hegelian idealism beyond the specialist journals and into the classrooms. Such is the stuff philosophical reputations and philosophical revolutions are made of, after all, but readers of *The Spirit of Solitude* would have no notion of such realities.

A final instance of the book's disproportion is its discussion of the most defining moment of Russell's life—the First World War. Although Monk discusses Russell's anti-war campaigning and his work with the No-Conscription Fellowship, he lavishes far more attention on Russell's sexual adventures, frustrations, and betrayals—the view of Russell and

his life to be garnered from the correspondences in the Russell Archives. But the war was the defining moment in Russell's and Britain's national history in the twentieth century. Never, for Russell; never for Britain, such innocence again, and to devote more attention to Vivienne Eliot or Constance Malleson than to the NCF or Union of Democratic Control is to produce a badly disproportioned discussion of the war years. Such an imbalance is particularly unfortunate since, thanks to the labours of Richard Rempel, Louis Greenspan, and their associates on the Russell Editorial Project, we now understand Russell's writings and activities between 1914 and 1918 in rich and fully contextualized detail. Volumes 13 and 14 of the *Collected Papers* provide bountiful evidence of Russell's commitment to the anti-war cause, of the cost—social, political, professional, and personal—of his brave insistence not merely not to endorse the war but to campaign against it publicly, and of the extent of his influence and achievement—through the counselling of individual conscientious objectors, through the publication of anti-war articles and books, through raucous lecture tours and sedate addresses, through the direction of a quarrelsome and desperate anti-war coalition, and through the prompting of the British government to restrict civil liberties, muzzle opposition, and stigmatize any and all dissent as unpatriotic. Russell was many men during the Great War—lover, leader, minister, renegade, therapist, theorist, apostate—and it is the task of his biographer to tell the tale of each.

## IV

What remains for aspiring Russell biographers? Some may wish to look again at portions of Russell's correspondences and to see whether Russell might be given the occasional emotional benefit of the doubt—something Monk never does; Russell, after all, knew that flattery is the real expert's technique of seduction and many of his letters are surely open to more than one reading. Others may wish to question Monk's working assumption that the history of western philosophy culminates unerringly in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein; not every biographer will be persuaded that in every philosophical dispute between the two men Wittgenstein was uniformly in the right. And others still may wish to offer a more narrowly intellectual life—to free themselves from the thrall of the Morrell and Malleson correspondences, to avoid the occa-

sional voyeurism innate in concentrating on such intimacies, and to concentrate instead on the evolution of Russell's ideas and their influences.

Above all else, what remains is to see Russell whole in historical perspective. Not merely to recapture the sense of possibility and contingency of his life as he lived it, but to describe the swirling contexts in which he lived, wrote, and had influence. For it is that influence, after all, which is the source of Russell's reputation and achievement and that influence which makes the writing of his life such a demanding, rewarding, and necessary task.