

POETIC EMOTION *VERSUS* TRUTH: RUSSELL'S PREFERENCE FOR SPINOZA OVER LOCKE

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This article explores why Russell believed Spinoza to be a superior philosopher to Locke. The latter's empiricism is closer to Russell's epistemology than the former's rationalism, and the superiority of the former's metaphysic is dubious at best. This makes for an intriguing choice. Normative ethics is the most likely basis, but Russell did not believe that this area of inquiry should be considered part of philosophy.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the American preface to his *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell states that, although he views Spinoza as “a greater philosopher than Locke”, he has provided more space for Locke on account of Locke's greater influence (*HWP*, p. ix). He arrived at this conclusion because he considers a given thinker's *influence* more important than the thinker's *worth*.

This article explores why Russell, especially by the time he was writing his *History*, thought Spinoza a better philosopher than Locke. I begin by arguing that Russell could not have based his preference for Spinoza on epistemological grounds. I argue this because Locke's empiricism was more akin to Russell's theory of knowledge than Spinoza's rationalism. I then make the case that Spinoza's metaphysic would not explain this preference because his theories about reality present at least as many liabilities for Russell as they do advantages; Locke is uncomplicated—even innocuous—by comparison. This leaves normative ethics as by far the most likely basis for Russell's preference of Spinoza's philosophy over Locke's. The paramount irony in all this is that normative ethics is the

one area of traditional philosophy that Russell thought should be *excluded* from philosophy. Thus, Russell, in exalting the philosophy of Spinoza over that of Locke, resorts to *extra*-philosophic considerations as criteria for philosophic preference.

II. THE LOCKEAN VS. SPINOZISTIC THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

One of the things that makes Russell a complicated figure in the history of philosophy is his reverence for both logical rigour and empiricism. Although Russell retained to his last days a fondness for the a priori that he was never quite able to shake, his epistemology tends to become, as I have argued on another occasion, more empiricist as he aged. It was Russell's view that "The hardest of hard data are of two sorts: the particular facts of sense, and the general truths of logic" (*OKEW*₂, p. 78). Which of these two, though, enjoys primacy in his theory of knowledge seems to vary greatly.

From the late 1890s to 1910, Russell focused on mathematics. In 1910, he turned his attention from the realm of mathematics to that of the physical world. He credits Alfred North Whitehead with inspiring him to apply Ockham's razor in investigating that of which the physical world truly consists.¹ Starting in 1912, Russell had visions of bringing back "the union of philosophy and science that existed in the 17th century, as well as in Plato and Aristotle".² Russell became increasingly fascinated by science.³

¹ *MPD*, p. 102, Russell explains that it was his application of this method of substituting logical constructions for inferred entities to the realm of physics, even with due acknowledgement to Whitehead for suggesting it (*ML*, p. 157), that "vexed" Whitehead. "In fact, it put an end to our collaboration" (*Auto.* 2: 78). See Monk 1: 487.

² Russell–Ottoline Morrell, 26 October 1912 (cited at Monk 1: 282).

³ Clark (p. 196) speaks of how:

The relationship between the hypotheses of physics and the broader questions of philosophy were in fact to pre-occupy Russell increasingly from the autumn of 1912 onwards—with results which spread far beyond the purely academic.... [A]s the great *bouleversement* of traditional physics became apparent with the acceptance of radio-activity, the Quantum Theory and Relativity, Russell became so immersed in symbolic logic that little time was left for thought on other things. Only now, early in the second decade of the twentieth century, did he appreciate how much physics was demanding not laboratory experiment but the mathematical expertise which he understood so well.

During this period, “Knowledge by acquaintance is the central pillar of Russell’s epistemology. . . .”⁴ All a priori propositions are necessarily *hypothetical*, and all knowledge of other things must be derived from empirical data (*PP*₂, p. 75). Russell considers it “obvious” that sensory perception provides the sort of “common knowledge” that is “completely self-evident” (*OKEW*₂, p. 75).

By the time of *A History of Western Philosophy*, Russell believed a proper role for logical analysis is to reduce the role of mathematics and to rein in its anti-empiricist tendencies. He demotes mathematical knowledge to the status of “merely verbal knowledge . . . of the same nature as the ‘great truth’ that there are three feet in a yard” (*HWP*, pp. 833, 832). Indeed, for Russell of the 1940s, logic in general, far from enjoying its heyday as the “essence of philosophy” (*OKEW*, Lec. II), was relegated to not even being part of philosophy (*HK*₂, p. v).

During the 1940s, Locke’s empiricism must have been more palatable to Russell than Spinoza’s rationalism. Like Russell, Locke had a comparatively *clear* way of saying that the ultimate nature of reality is *unclear*. A quotation from Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding* that is in a very Russellian vein is that “the general propositions that are made about substances, if they are certain, are for the most part but trifling; and if they are instructive, are uncertain. . . .”⁵ As Locke sees the matter, it is not feasible for us to ascertain the extent to which substances with which we are acquainted are dependent for their being on causes utterly unknown to us.⁶ Although Locke is optimistic about Newton’s innovations,⁷ he is defeatist about arriving at a “perfect science of natural bodies”.⁸

Spinoza’s rationalism is well known and is much more alien to Russell’s philosophy at this time. Russell considered epistemology and meta-

⁴ D. F. Pears, *Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition in Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 72.

⁵ *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chap. VIII, §9 (p. 524). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Locke are from *An Essay concerning the Human Understanding* (London: Routledge, n.d. [but c.1894]).

⁶ *Ibid.*, Chap. VI, §11 (p. 502). See also Chap. III, §26 (p. 454).

⁷ *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, §194.

⁸ Locke laments “as to a perfect science of natural bodies, (not to mention spiritual beings,) we are, I think, so far from being capable of any such thing, that I conclude it lost labour to seek after it” (*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chap. III, §29 [p. 456]). See also *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, §190.

physics the two fundamental areas of philosophy. Since the superiority of Spinoza over Locke does not follow as far as theory of knowledge is concerned, it is to metaphysics that we now turn.

III. LOCKE AND SPINOZA'S RESPECTIVE METAPHYSICS

Toward the end of 1898, Russell started rejecting the Hegelian idealist view that everything resides in the mental processes of the beholder, and believed instead in a fuller, Platonic universe replete with numbers, points of space, and universals (*MPD*, p. 62).

However, during the First World War, Russell experienced his “retreat from Pythagoras” in which he rejected mathematics as an “abstract edifice subsisting in a Platonic heaven and only reaching the world of sense in an impure and degraded form” (*ibid.*). This was to result for Russell in a metaphysic of materialism, or, more strictly speaking, *physicalism*.⁹

Up to a point, we can appreciate why Russell thought Spinoza a better philosopher than Locke. Although Spinoza is a rationalist, in *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* he confines reality to the phenomena of nature presented by the senses.¹⁰ And, in *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, he takes the position that “it is above all necessary for us always to deduce our ideas from physical things, i.e., from real beings ... and in such a manner as never to get involved with abstractions and universals, neither inferring something real from them nor inferring them from something real. For in either case the true progress of the intellect is interrupted.”¹¹

Russell is comparatively consistent throughout his long life about the suspect role of religion in our thinking. Both Locke and Spinoza had more to do with religion than Russell would have thought appropriate. While Locke might be viewed as something of a *moderate*, Spinoza espouses both the religious and the irreligious at different times. Indeed, when considering Spinoza's views of religion, one detects the presence of *two* Spinozas: Spinoza the secular, sane pantheist and Spinoza the pseudo-St. Anselm.

⁹ “Mind and Matter in Modern Science” (1946); reprinted in *Bertrand Russell on God and Religion*, ed. Al Seckel (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1986), pp. 151–66; *Papers* 11: 245–56.

¹⁰ *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, Part 2, Prop. 6, emphasis added. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Spinoza are from his *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002).

¹¹ *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §§99–100.

Spinoza's aforementioned aversion to interrupting the intellect's true progress by making inferences about reality from abstractions and universals does not prevent him from positing *essence* as something objective. In the "Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts", he is content with formulations such as "God necessarily exists, for his essence cannot be conceived without existence."¹² That is, "Spinoza surreptitiously objectifies after the manner of mediaeval Realists, a distinction which is only possible in abstraction, the distinction namely, between essence and existence."¹³ He perpetrates the neo-Platonic fallacy that degrees of perfection, here used as denoting "essence",¹⁴ correspond to degrees of reality.¹⁵

Russell, by contrast—at least the post-1919 Russell—will have nothing to do with the objectivity of *essences*. Rather, "the question of 'essence' is one as to the use of words.... [A] *word* may have an essence, but a *thing* cannot" (*HWP*, pp. 200–1). If this view of Russell's is right, it has unfavourable implications for Spinoza's philosophy. As Spinoza puts it, "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."¹⁶ For him, this enables the discernment of a nexus between the formal essence of certain attributes of God and the essence of things. Spinoza would never have suspected that, in proceeding from a true, or adequate, idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things, he was engaged in a merely linguistic process.

In full appreciation of such possible confusion, rather than claiming

¹² "Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts", Part I, Chap. 3, p. 183. See also *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 20.

¹³ Friedrich Ueberweg, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1871), p. 64.

¹⁴ "Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts", Part I, Chap. 6, p. 189 (emphasis added).

¹⁵ Spinoza maintains "by perfection I understand only *reality* or *being*" (*Principles of Philosophy*, Part I, Prop. 7, p. 138 [emphasis added]). "The more perfect a thing is by its own nature, the greater the existence it involves, and the more necessary is the existence" (*Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, Part I, Prop. 7 [p. 138]). See also "Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts", Part I, Chap. 6, p. 189; *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 12, p. 223; Part II, Definition 6; Part IV, Preface, p. 322). Spinoza also speaks of how "By reality and perfection I mean the same thing" (*Ethics*, Part II, Definition 6). "[P]erfection does not annul a thing's existence; on the contrary, it posits it; whereas imperfection annuls a thing's existence" (*Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 12, p. 223).

¹⁶ *Ethics*, Part II, Prop. 7. See also *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §41.

to have knowledge of “formal essences”, Locke took the trouble to note how the universal propositions we can posit with regard to substances are limited to the properties of the *nominal* essence of the substance in question.¹⁷ In this respect, Locke departs from the Scholastics’ view that the structure of objective reality is deducible from the structure of our language. Instead, for Locke, the close connection between words and ideas requires careful consideration of the nature, utility, and meaning of language.¹⁸ For language is fraught with imperfection, and words by their very nature are doomed to obscurity and ambiguity.¹⁹

Locke is aware of the fallacies that can ensue when words are mistaken for things,²⁰ and he decries the substance/attribute dichotomy as confused and obscure.²¹ Our ideas of substance are merely postulates of a vague substratum with qualities generating simple ideas in our minds that are usually termed “accidents”.²² “Our specific ideas of substances are nothing else but a collection of a certain number of simple ideas, considered as united in one thing.” Of body’s “substance,” or “substratum,” we have “no other idea of it at all”.²³

Although Spinoza was more prone than Locke to overestimate the extent to which *syntactical* structures adumbrate *ontological* ones, he was less inclined than Locke to project on to the cosmos at large the sort of plans, or designs, characteristic of human behaviour. Thus, as Spinoza sees the matter, we are to equate the “will of God” with the “sanctuary of ignorance”.²⁴ That is, for Spinoza, matter consists only of mechan-

¹⁷ *An Essay concerning the Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chap. VIII, §9 (p. 524).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Book II, Chap. XXXIII, §19 (p. 320). See also Book III, Chap. V, §16 (pp. 354–5).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chap. IX, §1 (p. 385). “[L]anguages, in all countries, have been established long before sciences. So that they have not been philosophers or logicians, or such who have troubled themselves about forms and essences, that have made the general names that are in use amongst the several nations of men: but those more or less comprehensive terms have, for the most part, in all languages, received their birth and signification from ignorant and illiterate people, who sorted and denominated things by those sensible qualities they found in them . . .” (*ibid.*, Chap. VI, §25 [pp. 366–7]).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Book II, Chap. XIII, §18 (p. 116). See also Book III, Chap. 10, §14 (p. 402).

²¹ *Ibid.*, §19 (p. 117).

²² *Ibid.*, Chap. XXIII, §2. See also Chap. XXXII, §18 (pp. 311–12).

²³ *Ibid.*, Book II, Chap. XXIII, §14 (p. 216).

²⁴ *Ethics*, Part I, Appendix, p. 241.

ically oriented structures and operations:²⁵ “Nature has no fixed goal and ... all final causes are but figments of the human imagination.”²⁶ They who attempt to demonstrate that nature does nothing that is not conducive to humanity’s well-being show only that “Nature and the gods are as crazy as mankind.”²⁷

With the exception of Spinoza’s use of words like “God” to describe nature, the secular, sane pantheist Spinoza says little with which the most ardent materialist would take issue. According to Steven Nadler’s *Spinoza: a Life*,

Despite Spinoza’s theological language and what look like concessions to orthodox sentiment..., there is no mistaking his intentions. His goal is nothing less than the complete desacrilization and naturalization of religion and its concepts.... Nearly all of Spinoza’s critics saw the [*Theological-Political*] *Treatise* as a dangerous and subversive work that, under the cover of a nominal belief in God, was intended to spread atheism and libertinism. Even Thomas Hobbes, not one to be squeamish when it came to political and theological controversy, was taken aback by Spinoza’s audacity. According to his biographer, the English philosopher claimed that the *Treatise* “cut through him a bar’s length, for he durst not write so boldly.”²⁸

For prudential reasons, however, Spinoza expressly dissociates himself from atheism on the bizarre grounds that atheists are addicted to the sort of honours and riches he had always held in contempt.²⁹

Notwithstanding Spinoza the secular, sane pantheist’s criticism of ascribing to God “human attributes, which have no place in God”,³⁰ Spinoza the pseudo-St. Anselm takes anthropomorphism to the extreme. He characterizes God as *infinite actual intellect*.³¹ All things are in God as

²⁵ “Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts”, Part 2, Chap. 6. See also Part 1, Chap. 3, p. 182.

²⁶ *Ethics*, Part 1, Appendix, p. 240. See also *Theological-Political Treatise*, Chap. 16 (p. 534) and Chap. 19 (p. 560).

²⁷ *Ethics*, Part 1, Appendix, p. 241.

²⁸ Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: a Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U. P., 1999), pp. 190, 295–6.

²⁹ Letter 43, p. 878. On the subject of Spinoza’s “atheism”, see Nadler, pp. 246–8.

³⁰ Letter 23, p. 833.

³¹ “Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts”, Part 2, Chap. 1. See also Chap. 7, p. 198.

thought,³² and the objects of his love are his own self and humanity.³³

On the subject of a philosophical basis for belief in immortality, the silence of Locke's *Essay* is deafening.³⁴ The same cannot be said so simply concerning Spinoza. Kenneth Blackwell, in *The Spinozistic Ethics of Bertrand Russell*, will have us understand that "Russell's interpretation of Spinoza's notion of immortality ... is bound up with the transcendence or enlargement of self."³⁵ However, Spinoza's manner of speaking seems to have metaphysical and not just ethical implications.

In the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy's* "Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts", Spinoza states that nature's laws require us to believe in the human mind's immortality because of the indestructibility of *substance*.³⁶ Unless Spinoza has in mind nothing more than the eternity of the universe, the immortality of individual *souls* seems a particularly odd tenet for a thinker to adopt who denies the apparent plurality of substances³⁷ and our ability to even conceive of a substance independent of *God*.³⁸

The situation is hardly helped by Spinoza's bizarre equation of a mind *conceiving* something "under a form" of eternity with a mind *being* eternal.³⁹ Nadler explains: "Spinoza basically denies that the human soul is immortal in the sense of enjoying a life after death. Although he is will-

³² *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. 2 (p. 181).

³³ *Ethics*, Part V, Prop. 36 Corollary, Interestingly, Spinoza also characterizes "God" as *incorporeal* (*Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, Part I, Prop. 16. See also Part 2, Prop. 2), in spite of the facts that he identifies God with nature and encourages us to restrict what we understand as reality to the phenomena of Nature *presented by the senses*.

³⁴ Locke's *Essay* mentions belief in life and death only to consign it to those tenets that are "purely matters of faith, with which reason has directly nothing to do" (Book IV, Chap. XVIII, §7 [p. 587]). This is noteworthy because Locke also took the position that "he that takes away reason to make way for revelation, puts out the light of both" (Book IV, Chap. XIX, §4 [p. 591]). And it was most likely this latter sentiment that prompted Leibniz to remark "Mr. Locke and his followers are uncertain at least whether the soul be not material and naturally perishable" ("The Controversy between Leibniz and Clarke" in Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters: A Selection* trans. and ed. Leroy E. Loemker, 2 vols. [Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1956] p. 1,096). Leibniz's great foe Samuel Clarke concurs: "That Mr. Locke doubted whether the soul was immaterial or no may justly be suspected from some parts of his writings" (*ibid.*, p. 1,097).

³⁵ (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 77.

³⁶ "Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts", Part 2, Chap. 12, p. 209.

³⁷ *Ethics*, Part I, Prop. 8 (p. 221), Prop. 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Prop. 15, p. 224.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Part V, Prop. 31.

ing to grant that the mind (or part of it) is eternal and persists in God even after the death of the body, he believes that the personal soul perishes with the body.”⁴⁰ It remains obscure, however, how we are to understand this relationship between personal and impersonal soul. Paul Edwards, in his posthumously published *God and the Philosophers*, marvels at how Russell was “apparently under such a spell of Spinoza that he reports this view without one word of dissent.”⁴¹

Spinoza seems to assume that, merely by thinking of eternity, the psyche is somehow actually united with eternity⁴² and thus partakes of eternity itself. The love that accompanies this mode of conception is eternal as well.⁴³ His contention that the mind is subject to passive emotions only as long as the body survives⁴⁴ really only makes sense if the mind is capable of living apart from the body.

Why Spinoza would equate a mind *conceiving* something “under a form” of eternity with a mind *being* eternal is beyond the present writer’s comprehension. It was consoling to read Frederick Copleston saying “it is not easy to understand precisely what he meant by this.”⁴⁵

The Spinoza that is a pseudo-St. Anselm may well have intended to pacify would-be critics rather than to elucidate truth. This hypothesis has the merit, at least, of accounting for Spinoza’s repeated use of gratuitously Scholastic or anthropomorphic terms in his metaphysics. Spinoza expressly cites as one of the reasons for writing the *Theological-Political Treatise* “[t]he opinion of me held by the common people, who constantly accuse me of atheism. I am driven to avert this accusation ... as far as I can.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: a Life* (New York: Cambridge U. P., 1999) p. 131.

⁴¹ Paul Edwards, *God and the Philosophers* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2009), p. 37.

⁴² *Ethics*, Part v, Prop. 31 Scholium. See also *Ethics*, Part v, Prop. 33 Scholium and *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Part II, Preface, p. 61n. and Chap. xxiii.

⁴³ *Ethics*, Part v, Prop. 33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Prop. 34.

⁴⁵ Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 4: *Descartes to Leibniz* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1958), p. 246.

⁴⁶ Letter 30. In the conclusion to Letter 6, Spinoza explains his hesitation in publishing *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* because of his fear that “the theologians of our time may take offence, and, with their customary spleen, may attack me, who utterly dread brawling” (p. 776). It is also known that the criticisms from both theologians and Cartesians were the reason for Spinoza’s decision against publishing his *Ethics* and that the “political and ecclesiastical persecution of the time” led his friends to delete

Russell disliked the religious aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics. Unsurprisingly, Russell found Spinoza's metaphysic "completely wrong from beginning to end".⁴⁷ Since the superiority of Spinoza over Locke does not follow in the areas of either theory of knowledge or metaphysics, it is axiology, or value theory, to which we next turn.

IV. ETHICS

According to Locke, moral truths are closer to being completely demonstrable than is generally appreciated.⁴⁸ He contends that moral truths can be established with as much certainty as those of mathematics.⁴⁹

Spinoza's views on metaethics are more complicated: he believes "good" and "bad" to be only relative terms.⁵⁰ This certainly has emotivist implications. On the other hand, instead of seeing the cosmic order as morally neutral or indifferent, Spinoza becomes neo-Platonic, and corre-

from the *Opera Posthuma* of Spinoza "personal matters" and "letters of a personal nature" (Morgan, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, p. 755).

In a supplementary note to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza makes the argument that the Old Testament's books of Chronicles were written after Judas Maccabee's restoration of the temple. Spinoza then says: "... I have preferred to keep silent on these matters for reasons which our own difficult times do not allow me to explain. A word to the wise is enough" (*Theological-Political Treatise*, Note 21, p. 578).

Also, in July of 1675, Spinoza had planned to publish his *Ethics* but refrained from so doing upon "[h]aving gathered... from certain trustworthy men ... that the theologians were everywhere plotting against me, I decided to postpone the publication ..." (Letter 68).

One cannot help but wonder to what extent considerations of this sort affected Spinoza's writings in general.

⁴⁷ Transcript of CBS' Invitation to Learning radio programme in *The New Invitation to Learning*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 112, also 117; *Papers* 10: 516. See also *ML*, p. 109.

⁴⁸ *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chap. III, §§18–20 (pp. 447–50).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Book IV, Chap. IV, §7 (p. 484). See also III, Chap. XI, §16 (p. 418).

⁵⁰ Spinoza expressly states that "the terms 'good' and 'bad' ... indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are nothing but modes of thinking, or notions which we form from comparing things with one another" (*Ethics*, Part IV, Preface. See also *Treatise on Emendation of the Intellect*, p. 5; *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Part I, Chap. x; "Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts", Part I, Chap. 6, pp. 188–9; Letter 32, p. 848, and Letter 54). The utility of something is what determines its goodness (*Ethics*, Part IV, Definition 1) and a person's judgment as to what is good or bad is according to their emotions (*Ethics*, Part III, Prop. 39).

lates degrees of goodness with degrees of reality. Russell himself cites the disparity between Spinoza's *words* concerning good and evil and his "emotional attitude" (*ML*, p. 11).

Accordingly, if we are to find the source of Russell's preference for Spinoza over Locke, it is Spinoza's *normative* ethics to which we must turn. Russell approved of both Locke and Spinoza's politics⁵¹ but is especially interested in and appreciative of Spinoza's ethics (whereas he must have looked on the philosophy of Locke as comparatively jejune and barren in this respect).

In a 1911 letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, Russell mentions that the only pictures in his room are those of his mother and small ones of Leibniz and Spinoza (*SLBR* 1: 387). Blackwell states that "It might be thought that interest in him [Spinoza] would have vanished when Russell developed his refutation of the subject-predicate analysis of propositions on which he claimed monistic philosophies are based.... *The place of honour can be explained only by the extremely high regard in which Russell holds Spinoza's ethical contribution*" (p. 72; emphasis added).

According to Spinoza's metaphysic, God has "preordained all things from eternity", so the predetermined nature of our emotions in particular is an important aspect of Spinoza's ethics. It is important because "*In so far as the mind understands all things as governed by necessity, to that extent it has greater power over emotions, i.e. it is less passive in respect of them.*"⁵²

⁵¹ While the value of Locke's political thinking is well known, the merits of Spinoza's politics have gone largely uncelebrated. Spinoza sees democracy as most nearly approximating the "natural" state (*Theological-Political Treatise*, Chap. 20, p. 571). The libertarian in him comes out in his opposition to sumptuary laws (*Political Treatise*, Chap. 10, Section 5), and his overall restriction of the law's role to affairs of *action* rather than any affairs of *thought* (*Theological-Political Treatise*, Chap. 20, p. 572. See also Chap. 18, p. 555). His view, generally, is that "He who seeks to regulate everything by law will aggravate vices rather than correct them. What cannot be prohibited must necessarily be allowed, even if harm often ensues.... Much more, then, should we allow freedom of judgment, which is assuredly a virtue, and cannot be suppressed" (*ibid.*, p. 569. See also p. 567).

Spinoza maintains that attempts at legally resolving religious controversies angers people instead of reforming them (*ibid.*, p. 571). He is of the view that the only religion the state ought to recognize is philanthropy and fair dealing (*ibid.*, p. 572. See also Chap. 18, p. 555). And Spinoza cites Amsterdam as a city credited both from within and without for having had these insights (*ibid.*, p. 571).

⁵² *Ethics*, Part v, Prop. 6. See also Prop. 3. Spinoza also speaks of how "We are passive insofar as we are a part of Nature which cannot be conceived independently of other parts" (*Ethics*, Part IV, Prop. 2).

Emotions are damaging only to the degree that they obstruct thought.⁵³ However, an emotion cannot be restrained or eliminated unless there is present a stronger opposite emotion to counter the first emotion.⁵⁴ So the desire to *think* should be the strongest emotion in order that it can check competing, or opposing, emotions. Emotions that have their source in reason are, in the long term, more potent than emotions grounded on more temporary, or transient, matters.⁵⁵

Spinoza goes on to explain that the mind's understanding is its *absolute virtue*. Understanding *God* as equal to "Nature",⁵⁶ Spinoza celebrates *God* as "the highest thing the mind can understand". The "intellectual love of *God*" constitutes the intellect's perfection and is of the utmost importance and the greatest source of happiness.⁵⁷

According to Spinoza,

He who rightly knows that all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature and happen in accordance with the eternal laws and rules of Nature will surely find nothing deserving of hatred, derision, or contempt nor will he pity anyone. Rather, as far as the virtue of man extends, he will endeavor to do well, as the saying goes, and be glad. (*Ethics*, Part IV, Prop. 50)

Men who are governed by reason, that is, men who aim at their own advantage under the guidance of reason, seek nothing for themselves that they would not desire for the rest of mankind; and so are just, faithful, and honorable. (*Ethics*, Part IV, Prop. 18 Scholium)

Russell describes Spinoza as not only among the wisest of men but one who lived accordingly (*NHCW*, p. 189). Russell's own world-view can certainly feature sunny reflections such as the great value of life and the attainability of true happiness. Yet, in contrast to Spinoza, Russell's outlook does not always abound in the most uplifting considerations. After all, Russell's philosophy is one in which the great achievements of the human race and the cosmos are as a whole bound to be obliterated.

⁵³ *Ethics*, Part V, Prop. 9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Part IV, Prop. 7. A similar idea in Russell is how, because "[o]nly passion can control passion," "[i]t is only those in whom the desire to think truly is itself a passion who will find this desire adequate to control the passions of war" (*PSR*, p. 12).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Part V, Prop. 7.

⁵⁶ *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Appendix I, Corollary and Letter 6, p. 776.

⁵⁷ *Ethics*, Part IV, Appendix, p. 358.

“[O]nly on the firm foundation of unyielding despair ... can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.”⁵⁸ Such wistful reflections are notably absent from Spinoza’s world-view.

Unsurprisingly, philosophic calm follows more directly from Spinoza’s views than from Russell’s. Still, a substantial amount of Spinoza’s outlook can be assimilated into Russell’s. Blackwell acknowledges: “It is clear that philosophic calm is more easily produced under the view Russell attributes to Spinoza than under Russell’s own doctrine, which is well known to be one of materialistic pessimism” (p. 119). “Fortunately, however, Spinoza’s concept of God as a non-personal being that is not fundamentally distinct from the world is something that Russell can appreciate without committing himself to a theology and a metaphysic inconsistent with his own” (p. 112).

As Russell would have it, the *key of wisdom* is what Spinoza characterizes as the *intellectual love of God*, namely, the “happy contemplation of what is eternal” (*PSR*, p. 245). Blackwell traces Russell’s concept of “self-enlargement through impersonality” specifically to his appreciation of Spinoza’s *Ethics* (p. 109).

Spinoza’s “intellectual love of God” has more in common than some may think with Russell’s brand of “mysticism”. Spinoza’s “intellectual love of God” can be properly deemed “mystical” as Russell understood the term.⁵⁹ For, “... mysticism expresses an emotion, not a fact; it does not assert anything, and therefore can be neither confirmed nor contra-

⁵⁸ “A Free Man’s Worship”, *WINC*, p. 107; *Papers* 12: 67.

⁵⁹ Lest anyone be left with the impression that Spinoza was much more mystical than Russell depicts him, it is well to bear in mind Copleston’s point that:

The third level of knowledge is called by Spinoza intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*). But it is important to realize that it arises from the second kind of knowledge and that it is not a disconnected stage reached by a leap or by a mystical process”. [Copleston 4: 235–6] “[O]ne must not let oneself be misled by the use of phrases such as ‘the intellectual love of God’ into interpreting Spinoza as though he were a religious mystic like Eckhart. Indeed, in interpreting Spinoza it is essential to remember that terms and phrases must be understood in the sense of his definitions and not in the sense which they bear in ‘ordinary language’. In Spinoza’s philosophy terms are given a technical sense, and this is often different from the meaning which we would naturally and spontaneously attach to them. The notion that the philosophy of Spinoza was a philosophy of religious mysticism arises only if one persists in neglecting his definition of terms like ‘God’ and ‘love’ and the light shed on those definitions by the system as a whole.

(Copleston, 4: 263)

dicted by science. The fact that mystics do make assertions is owing to their inability to separate emotional importance from scientific validity.”⁶⁰ “[M]ysticism is to be commended as an attitude towards life, not as a creed about the world. *The metaphysical creed is a mistaken outcome of the emotion ...*” (*ML*, pp. 11–12; emphasis added).

An inspiration concerning “how to live” is what Russell sees as the chief reward of reading Spinoza (Schilpp, p. 695). Spinoza figures among the authors Russell read with Lady Ottoline in their quest for the “enlargement that vision brings”.⁶¹ All this is noteworthy considering that “[t]he importance of philosophy in the conduct of life is not something the Russell of analytical philosophical reputation is thought to rate highly, because of his radical separation of reason and value.”⁶²

To be sure, Russell maintained “A judgment of fact ... is capable of a property called ‘truth’, which it has or does not have quite independently of what any one may think about it.... I see no property analogous to ‘truth’, that belongs or does not belong to an ethical judgment” (Schilpp, p. 723). That is, questions of *values* lie “wholly outside the domain of knowledge”, or “the realm of truth and falsehood”.⁶³ They

⁶⁰ *Religion and Science* (London: Thornton Butterworth (later by Oxford U.P.), 1935), p. 187.

⁶¹ Andrew Brink, “Russell to Lady Ottoline Morrell: the Letters of Transformation”, *Russell* nos. 21–2 (spring–summer 1976): 8.

⁶² Blackwell, p. 62. As seriously as he takes Russell when Russell dissociates concrete judgments of value from philosophy proper (*ibid.*, p. 14), Blackwell makes a compelling case that it hardly follows from Russell’s having held a non-cognitivist metaethic that “his normative ethic is an atomistic jumble of individual preferences” (p. 9).

As Blackwell would have it:

I submit the following as a working hypothesis in examining Russell’s ethical and political beliefs: philosophers strive to find conceptual connections, and they strive for conceptual unification, or systematization, of their beliefs; their beliefs *may* be heterogeneous and piecemeal, but for us to seek for systematization in them could well be rewarding. I reject the objection that, in his ethical and political writings, Russell is not writing as a “philosopher”. In a great deal of his writing on topics which do not fall within a narrow conception of philosophy, he nevertheless discloses a search for conceptual fundamentals. In political writings he usually brings in the more general because persuasion in politics is almost impossible if you start with the particular, and political disagreement usually concerns the particular. We may, then, hope to find fundamental conceptual connections in the value judgments contained in Russell’s normative ethic.

[*Ibid.*, p. 9]

⁶³ *Religion and Science*, pp. 230–1, p. 243.

ultimately defy an intellectual resolution.⁶⁴ “Reason’ ... signifies the choice of the right means to an end that you wish to achieve. It has nothing whatever to do with the choice of ends.”⁶⁵ Instead, questions of values can be reduced to differences in people’s *emotions*, or *tastes*.⁶⁶

Russell is content to reckon Spinoza a thinker whose preoccupations are “mainly religious and ethical” (*ML*, p. 97), or *aesthetic*.⁶⁷ For Russell, in Spinoza’s thought, “[w]hat is valuable is the indication of some new way of feeling towards life and the world, some way of feeling by which our own existence can acquire more of the characteristics which we must deeply desire” (*ML*, p. 109). Nevertheless, as Russell acknowledges, these are *practical* benefits of Spinoza’s outlook rather than *theoretic* ones,⁶⁸ and as such they can be enjoyed without committing oneself to Spinoza’s metaphysic.⁶⁹

It is true that, when we go all the way back to “Seems, Madam? Nay, It Is”, a paper Russell read to the Apostles in 1897, we find him musing about how “We may use metaphysics, like poetry and music, as a means of producing a mood, of giving us a certain view of the universe, a certain attitude towards life—the resulting state of mind being valued on account of, and in proportion to, the degree of poetic emotion aroused, not in proportion to the truth of the beliefs entertained” (*WINC*, p. 80; *Papers* 1: 109). The example he gives of experiencing philosophy *aesthetically* is the way “most of us take Spinoza”. This sheds much light on Russell’s preference for Spinoza over Locke.

However, distinctions such as those between “the degree of poetic emotion aroused” and the “truth of the beliefs entertained” are fundamental to Russell’s philosophic activity. Russell was certainly capable of,

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), p. 8.

⁶⁶ *Religion and Science*, pp. 230–1, pp. 237–8.

⁶⁷ “Seems Madam? Nay, It Is”, *WINC*, p. 80; *Papers* 1: 109.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Interestingly, in Milton Marmor’s Associated Press interview with Russell, 18 November 1964, Russell considered as “philosophy” his own campaigning against nuclear war. The basis of his claim was that such activity involved the view of life as a whole (Blackwell, p. 228 n.48). How viewing life as a whole in any way reduces the valuational element of the ethical judgments (thereby making it more philosophic) was hardly grasped as of this writing.

⁶⁹ *New Invitation to Learning*, pp. 112–13; *Papers* 10: 516. Russell remarks: “My point about Spinoza is that a great many of the things he says have psychological truth when restated in other language than his, but do not have metaphysical truth so long as you stick to his language” (*New Invitation to Learning*, p. 115; *Papers* 10: 518).

and is better known for, profoundly more *philosophic* ponderings. For Russell's approach is one according to which thought ought to gaze fearlessly into the pit of hell (*PSR*, p. 165). We ought to be resigned to uncertainty concerning life's largest questions, for fear we be guilty of falling back on "comforting fairy tales" (*HWP*, p. xiv). A reflection in this mood that is vintage Russell is about how

There is something feeble, and a little contemptible, about a man who cannot face the perils of life without the help of comfortable myths. Almost inevitably some part of him is aware that they are myths and that he believes them only because they are comforting. But he dare not face this thought, and he therefore cannot carry his own reflections to any logical conclusion. Moreover, since he is aware, however dimly, that his opinions are not rational, he becomes furious when they are disputed. He therefore adopts persecution, censorship, and a narrowly cramping education as essentials of statecraft.

(*Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, p. 219)

V. CONCLUSION

Russell's reasons for considering Spinoza a better philosopher than Locke do not lie in considerations of either epistemology or metaphysics. Rather, it is in ethics where Russell felt we are to seek Spinoza's superiority. It is as though Spinoza's counsel for the sublimity of the *mood*, or aesthetic context, with which we ought to view the world as a whole passes for philosophy here. By maintaining that Spinoza was a better philosopher than Locke, Russell disregards his own earlier differentiation between *attitudes towards life* and *creeds about the world*, the latter being philosophy's proper domain. Russellian philosophy does not gauge the *truth* of beliefs according to "the degree of poetic emotion aroused".

Except for the analysis of the ethical proposition as such, Russell does not see ethics as part of philosophy. Consequently, it would have been more appropriate for Russell to have said in his *History of Western Philosophy* that Spinoza arouses more poetic emotion than Locke rather than that Spinoza was the better *philosopher*.
