NEW ESSAYS ON RUSSELL

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Alan Schwerin (under the auspices of the Bertrand Russell Society), ed. *Russell Revisited: Critical Reflections on the Thought of Bertrand Russell.* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008. Pp. ix, 158. isbn 978-1-84718-494-8.

This is Alan Schwerin's second edited collection of essays on Bertrand Russell.[1] As in the first, he has provided us with an indexed smorgasbord of nine essays on a variety of subjects, but this time he has been less ambitious by not adding an introduction himself and engaging some less meritorious authors. On the other hand, the subjects chosen by the amateurs (in the sense of lover, admirer, and devotee) Russell scholars are refreshingly original, interesting and executed with a simplicity and clarity that I find lacking in some of the essays of the *bona fide* professors and graduate students of philosophy.

The first essay, "Bertrand Russell and Eugenics",[2] is by Stephen Heathorn. He has published a book and over twenty peer-reviewed articles. He is also responsible for co-editing three volumes of Russell's *Collected Papers.* In other words, he is a well-qualified researcher, and I can understand that the editor has

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[1] The first one was *Bertrand Russell on Nuclear War, Peace, and Language* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002). Reviewed by David Blitz in this journal, 23 (2003): 176–82.

[2] The essay first appeared in *Russell* 25 (2005): 107–39.

chosen to put his essay first, since it's the best, all things considered.

Heathorn starts his interesting, well-researched and well-documented essay with a short introduction to how the connotations of the term "eugenics" have developed from the time when Francis Galton coined it in 1883 to the present time, when most people tend to associate it with the Nazis' attempts to purify the Aryan race by killing, imprisoning or, in the best case, just sterilizing people who were deemed unfit to reproduce. But before Hitler entered the international scene in the 1930s, there was a period when "the ideas behind eugenics were both scientifically respectable and accepted by intellectuals from across the entire political spectrum" (p. 1).

Bertrand Russell was one of them, and this essay is an account of his public engagement with eugenics from the 1890s through to the post-World War II years. The main thesis is that his "belief in the potential of eugenics for bettering society was increasingly outweighed, over time, by his fear of the uses to which eugenics would be put" (p. 2). As Heathorn later shows, Russell didn't have much to say about the topic publicly after the mid-1930s, which doesn't mean that he had stopped thinking about it. This is evident, for example, from his private correspondence with the biologist Julian Huxley in the 1960s.

Russell first came to eugenics by reading Francis Galton in the 1890s. His interest was motivated by both general intellectual curiosity and personal concerns. In 1894 he married Alys Pearsall Smith, something that his grandmother was dead against. When she couldn't stop her grandson from marrying the older Quaker woman (she was his senior by five years), she insisted that they should not try to have any children on the grounds that there was a prevalence of mental illness among both families' ancestors—an argument that the young aristocrat could not dismiss.

Although preoccupied with mathematics and political theory, he kept up to date with developments in genetic research from the late 1890s. There was an obvious connection between his interest in politics and eugenics. Many Edwardians feared the negative consequences of the so-called "differential birth rate", i.e. that the poor sections of the population reproduced much faster than the wealthy. That, in the long run, could have disastrous effects on the stability and progress of society.

It seemed to be the case that "feeblemindedness" was more prevalent among the poor than among the rich, but there were no clear evidence if this was due to "nature or nurture", i.e. if this difference was due to biological or social conditions. On the whole Russell was always a supporter of scientific progress and believed that political decisions should be based on the latest results of what the scientific community in any given field deemed to be true. On the other, he was also critical of handing over too much power to the government to decide who could reproduce and who couldn't, since science always progresses and what is considered as scientific "facts" one day, can be revealed as unfounded theories

the next.

In his writings on eugenics Russell tried to find a reasonable balance between arguments for it and arguments against it, but after the early 1930s I can't find any public endorsement of it and the reason for this "would appear to be Russell's recognition of the changed political context of eugenics given the rise of European fascism" (p. 17).

At the end of his essay Heathorn refers to Russell's "Eurocentric assumptions about the meaning of 'race' and its implications for his views on eugenics" (p. 20). Today we might disagree with or even be shocked by some of Russell's views, but his conviction that the idea of improving the overall condition of society through biological manipulation, granted that the ideological element can be removed and that it can be applied ethically, is, according to Heathorn "the very premise that underpins the current science of human genetics" (p. 23). What Heathorn does not bring up is that ethically questionable eugenics programmes were still in place in many Western countries up to the 1950s and '60s, including Canada and the United States. Luckily he does not mention that, under social democratic governments, Sweden between 1934 and 1975 sterilized some 62,000 people, which was more than any other European country except Nazi Germany.

The author of the second essay, "Russell on Acquaintance and *De Re* Belief", Emilio Reyes Le Blanc, was awarded the student essay prize at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Bertrand Russell Society. The essay is clever and shows that the student is well acquainted with his topic, but maybe too clever. The essay is pedagogical and honest about its shortcomings and inconsistencies, but those virtues can be seen as excuses for taking on too large a subject with not enough space to really explain what he is trying to show. Reading it, I felt as I have felt watching Julia Childs on TV preparing a meal, which in reality would take several hours, in ten minutes, because each part had been pre-prepared and is shown to the audience without revealing how exactly it was done.

In the first two paragraphs the author gives the reader a good summary of what his essay is about. It visits two questions: one popular and one less popular. The first one is: what is a *de re* belief? The second, less popular, is: which objects can be the constituents of such a belief? To answer these questions the author takes an in-depth look at the philosophy of Bertrand Russell. He begins with his early work on the structure of propositions and sifts through his views on acquaintance. While his ultimate goal is to come up with coherent Russellian answers to these questions, the work of contemporary philosophers informs his discussion.

To begin, Reyes explicates the notion of a structured proposition. He then makes a distinction between singular and non-singular propositions. He then distinguishes between *de re* and *de dicto* beliefs. He notes that these beliefs differ in so far as they characterize the attitudes subjects have to one of the proposition

types. (This discussion answers the popular question.) He then takes a look at Russell's notion of acquaintance. He discusses what it is and, most importantly, which sorts of things we can be acquainted with. He then works up to his negative conclusion that the only objects we can be acquainted with are our own sense-data. (Whatever kind of animal that is, he doesn't explain.) To conclude, he puts forth his positive proposal that, if we hold something like Russell's view of acquaintance, we can, indeed, only have *de re* beliefs about our own sense-data. (This answers the unpopular question.) The essay ends: "Sadly, no one today is a Russellian about singular thought; at least, not to the extent that they would say that our *de re* beliefs are limited to beliefs about sense-data. It is too bad, really, because sometimes some hegemonic opposition is healthy."

As a delivered paper it might have been rhetorically successful, but when you have time to sit down and read, and reread it, you'll find out that he uses too many long and undefined terms to explain other long and undefined terms. You can only explain so much in twelve pages.

Michael K. Potter had a revised version of his master's thesis published as *Bertrand Russell's Ethics* (2006). His present essay, "For Love and Knowledge: Bertrand Russell's Integrated Emotivism", is partly based on his book and a paper presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the Russell Society held at McMaster University. In this essay he presents and discusses "the most charitably interpreted and persuasive account of Russell's emotivism that I can cobble together" (p. 36).

Potter refers to Russell's "enlightened emotivism", which, he says, must be complemented by his moral psychology, a theory of impulse and of desire that we find in his *Principles of Social Reconstruction* and *The Analysis of Mind*. The combination of these two elements create a metaethical theory that Russell thought was compatible with his normative theory—"an idiosyncratic blend of utilitarianism and 'Spinozistic ethics'", according to Potter (p. 37).

He then lists three conditions that a successful metaethic must fulfil: (1) It must explain our common moral language and concepts. (2) It must explain the nature of moral values and goods. (3) It must be compatible with a plausible account of moral psychology (p. 37). Potter then goes on to explain "the principle of growth", which lies behind Russell's theory of desire and impulse. This leads him to introduce many interesting complications, which I won't go into here. He ends his essay by saying:

While I'm not entirely persuaded that integrated emotivism is a satisfactory approach to ethics, Russell deserves credit for trying something so intriguing and unique, for presenting a theory he didn't like but couldn't dismiss, and most of all for attempting to account for the psychological realities often ignored by moral philosophers. If ought implies can, Russell is admirable for providing an attempt to figure out the psychological forces at work in ethics that can be used to inform his morals.   (P. 45)

I think Potter has managed to "cobble together" a pretty good defence of Russell's "integrated emotivism".

Peter Stone's primary research interests include theories of justice, democratic theory, rational choice theory, and the philosophy of social science. Thus the title of his contribution might come as a surprise: "Russell, Mathematics and the Popular Mind". One might be more astonished in reading the first sentence: "This paper brings together three topics, that as far as I'm aware, have never been connected—mathematics, movies, and Bertrand Russell" (p. 46). The combination seems forced. Stone says that his paper argues "that contemporary motion pictures depicting mathematicians and their work display a profound *innumeracy*, what John Allen Paulos (author of the book of that title) defined as 'an inability to deal comfortably with the fundamental notions of number and chance'" (p. 47). Stone's lamentations about how poorly mathematicians and their work have been explained in some recent movies might be legitimate. He uses almost ten pages to prove his case, but is he a better pedagogue himself? Do we know more about mathematics and what mathematicians have done and do after having read his paper?

Assuming that his first thesis is correct, he goes on to examine "Russell's writings on education, in order to diagnose the extent to which this illiteracy should be a matter of public concern." To accomplish this he has to move beyond Russell's overt pronouncements on mathematical education to draw conclusions "that Russell never explicitly endorsed but that seem to flow from his arguments." Finally, "Having shown that Russell's educational views provide reason to view popular innumeracy with alarm, the paper concludes by considering ways in which the cinema may help, and not hinder, the education of the public" (p. 47).

The second part of Stone's paper is concerned with Russell's views on mathematical education; when should it start, how and how much should be taught and who should be encouraged to deepen his or her knowledge? These are legitimate questions, and Stone does a good job in summarizing Russell's views using another ten pages. Less than one page is left for the resounding conclusion:

A wide variety of critics have argued that a for-profit media, left to its own devices, perform poorly a variety of social purposes [four references are given, two by Chomsky]. The analysis of innumeracy offered here suggests that there may be at least one more good reason to advocate reform of the mass media such as the film industry. (P. 65–6)

Stone's cause is laudable, but what should he expect from the movie industry, which is out to entertain and make a profit? From a pedagogical point of view, I think that Stone should have spent a page or two on the etymology of the original Greek words for "mathematician" (a learned person) and "mathematics", and said something about how arithmetic and geometry later were joined by algebra, calculus and many new species of "mathematics", the common de-

nominator of which is not easily described, if there even is one.

Matthew McKeon's primary research interests are philosophy of logic, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mathematics. His essay, "A Plea for Logical Objects", is the only contribution to this collection that presupposes some familiarity with the terminology and symbolism of model theory, set theory, predicate logic, and propositional logic (the two main branches of logic that concern Russell's "logicism", which is the topic of the following paper).

McKeon considers contemporary criticism of the Tarskian model-theoretic account of validity in first-order logic, and sketches a response that "appeals" to the logic in Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*. Russell ended up abandoning this logic partly because he was unable to provide a rationale for a logical ontology, within the framework of type theory, that salvages a central component of the early Russell's conception of *logic* and then appeals to such an ontology to defend the model-theoretic characterization of validity in first-order logic.

What might come as a surprise, as it certainly did to me many years ago: there are no universally accepted definitions of either "mathematics" (see the previous paper) or "logic". That's why the author can use the verb "appeal", since so many things in the wide field of logic seem to depend on personal preferences. If someone said, "Freudian psychology doesn't appeal to me, I rather prefer Jungian", most enlightened people would understand and accept that, since the mysteries of human thoughts, feelings and behaviour are still open to many rival interpretations. But, on the whole, natural scientists today agree about the most fundamental principles and results of their sciences, or—don't they? Well, at least, in logic they *know* things for sure. Or do they? My own experience is that it depends on who you ask. Did Russell and Whitehead (with the help of their type theory, which some logicians seem to detest) prove that all concepts and operations used in pure mathematics can be derived from more primitive logical concepts? Some people do, some don't; it all depends on what you demand of "a proof" in this context.

I can't follow and evaluate McKeon's argumentation in detail, but as I understand him what is really being discussed is the old question: do we *discover* logical objects and truths or do we *invent* them? This raises an even older question in philosophy: are you a *realist*, a *nominalist* or a kind of a *conceptualist*?

Dorothea Lotter has published works in the area of early analytic philosophy. Her contribution, "Logic as a Branch of Mathematics, or Mathematics as a Branch of Logic?", fits nicely with the two preceding papers in that it again raises the questions: What is logic? What is mathematics? And particularly what is their relationship according to Russell's version of "logicism"?

I have dealt[3] with Russell's version of "logicism" as it is presented in the

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[3] See my *In Quest of Certainty: Bertrand Russell's Search for Certainty in Religion and Mathematics up to* The Principles of Mathematics *(1903)* (Stockholm; Almqvist & Wik-

Principles, but I also read the introduction to *Principia*, and could confirm that Whitehead's participation didn't change their main thesis: that mathematics rests on logic and can be seen as "a branch" of that topic. But reading Lotter's essay, I realized that I had neglected or suppressed what Russell said after the publication of *Principia*, where he reverses the order. In *Our Knowledge of the External World* mathematics is the tree and "logistics or mathematical logic" is a branch (p. 79 in Lotter's essay).

Why did Russell change his mind and what are we supposed to make of it? Lotter ends her paper by saying:

Thus whether or not Russell used the metaphor consciously and intentionally in a manner not only averse to Frege's but also to Carnap's way of referring to the project of logicism, it surely does appropriately reflect some essential differences between his and Frege's take on this project and thus betrays Russell's attempts at a unification of the entire tradition of symbolic logic. (P. 87)

To add to the confusion: in the introduction to the second edition of the *Principles* (1937), Russell says that "The fundamental thesis of the following pages, that mathematics and logic are identical, is one which I have never since seen any reason to modify." It seems that Russell held three different positions regarding the relationship between logic and mathematics: (1) mathematics is a branch of logic; (2) logic is a branch of mathematics; (3) mathematics and logic are identical. How this should be explained, I don't know. A fourth possibility is that both mathematics and logic are branches of a common trunk called set theory, algebra, common sense, or intuition.

David Goldman is a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at New York University Medical Center and a lecturer at the Columbia University Psychoanalytic Center. An active clinician, he has published on the psychoanalytic approaches to psychosomatic diseases and the use of advanced neurophysiological knowledge of the limbic system for treating anxiety disorders. His paper, "A Psychiatrist looks at Russell's *Conquest of Happiness*", is a tribute to Russell as an amateur psychologist. The book was, at the time of its publication in 1931, scorned by highbrows, but it was much appreciated by the general reader and received very high praise from professional psychiatrists.

According to Goldman, there are good reasons for the psychiatrists' approval. Russell addresses the causes of unhappiness and also proposes both common-sense and novel solutions that offer great value to psychiatric treatment. His contribution to psychiatry involves three principal areas, according to Goldman: (1) an analysis of widespread unhappiness among otherwise successful people; (2) a prescription for applying rational practices to combat unhappiness; and (3) a

sell, 1994).

revolutionary vision of embracing the healing potentials of society, nature, and the universe towards achieving balance and happiness.

Goldman's illuminating paper is an evaluation of Russell's views on these topics in light of contemporary psychiatry and a deliberation of the possibilities for adapting more of Russell's therapeutic ideas (p. 88). "Happiness" is not an easy concept to define or a state of mind easily measured. Many years ago, when I stayed with our editor and his family, I asked their five-year-old daughter if she was happy. She looked at me with shining eyes and a sly smile and answered "I don't know". I thought that a very interesting answer. She certainly appeared to be content and carefree, but she lacked the concept. We can know if we're happier today than yesterday or as children, but how can I know if I'm happier than so-and-so right now, and does it matter as long as I can pay my bills?

The opposite of happiness is unhappiness, or "discontent" as the German word "*Unbehag*" was interpreted, when Sigmund Freud's book *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) was translated into English. According to Freud, people are neurotic and discontent because they have to suppress strong sexual and aggressive impulses in order to be socially accepted and not spend their time in jail. The difference with Russell's analysis, as Goldman succinctly points out, is that he traces the causes of common unhappiness to social, political and economical factors rather than to thwarted sexual impulses, which Russell and Dora knew very little about at the time, since they both practised "free love" and seem to have had ample opportunities to put theory into practice. What Goldman doesn't say, but probably knows, is that Russell wrote his book during one of the unhappiest periods in his life. He knew from his own experience that inhibited expressions of strong sexual desires do not create bliss or even moderate contentment in the long run; it was rather the opposite. Replacing Dora Black with Peter Spence only made that truth clearer. But Russell also realized that professional and, least of all, economical success did not guarantee relief from stressful anxiety and depressive moods.

In spite of all the good things Goldman has to say about Russell as a pioneer of cognitive therapy and the potentials of his approach, he is perhaps too much of a physiologically oriented psychiatrist with a lot of faith in the development of potent drugs that can "normalize these disturbed sub-cortical circuits and restore the brain's reciprocal balance between necessary fear responses and proper intellectual evaluation" (p. 94), to have noticed one name that occurs more often than any other: that of Baruch Spinoza. Eisenhower warned us of the influence of the "military industrial complex", the destructive consequences of which Russell was well aware of and spoke out against. If Russell were alive today and been able to follow the development of the pharmaceutical industry and its compelling advertisement of chemical remedies for basic existential problems, he might have written a book with the title "Spinoza, Not Prozac".

However, Goldman's essay is well worth reading, and I know from my own

experience that some people suffering from panic anxiety, general paranoia and depression really are helped by taking their medicine on a regular basis. But I don't believe it can cure the emptiness and unhappiness that our present consumer society creates. Russell would surely have agreed with that conclusion.

Cara Elizabeth Rice has delivered papers on Russell's experiences as a schoolmaster and his contributions to the literary canon. She has just an interesting article, "Shelley: a Russellian Romantic", published in this journal.[4] In her *Russell Revisited* essay, "Who Stole the Future?", Rice finds ample support for Russell's allegation that Aldous Huxley in *A Brave New World* (1932) "all but plagiarized significant parts of his own work of non-fiction, *The Scientific Outlook*, published the previous year" (p. 100). The parallels that Rice brings to light are so convincing that I leave it to readers to embark on their own comparative study to form an independent judgment. In the third part, "Russell by any Other Name", she adds another, earlier, possible "crime" regarding Huxley's novel *Crome Yellow*, which seems to be partly based on his encounters with Russell, Lady Ottoline Morrell, and Mark Gertler among others at Garsington. The portrayals of Lady Ottoline and Russell are not flattering, but I see nothing wrong in this satirical use of reality. What is disturbing, however, is that Huxley denied that the characters Mr. Scogan and Priscilla Wimbush were based on his acquaintance with Russell and Lady Ottoline.

However, in the long run Russell remembered his humanity and forgot the rest, and by the time he was in trouble with the conservative religious mafia that ruled New York in the beginning of the 1940s, he considered Aldous to be a friend, or as Rice puts it: "If Russell ultimately did not let Huxley's novel create animosity or destroy friendship, Russellians can perhaps be magnanimous as well." That sounds like a good idea to me.

I find everything in this essay commendable, but I have some queries regarding Rice's reasoning in the new paragraph on page 113, which starts with a confession by Russell to Lady Ottoline that there are "three things I want & can't have—children, daily companionship & imaginative writing" and ends with: "If this is the case [that Huxley was influenced by reading Russell's *Outlook*], Russell's contribution to the literary canon is great indeed." Yet Russell received the Nobel prize for literature; Huxley didn't.

Chad Trainer has published several articles about Russell in different journals. In his present contribution, "In *Further* Praise of Idleness", Trainer opens with a short, well-chosen quotation from the title essays of Russell's *In Praise of Idleness* (1935): "there is far too much work done in the world, [and] … immense harm is caused by the belief that work is virtuous.…" He goes on to say that if Russell had been around today "he would have *more* rather than *less* cause for

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[4] *Russell* 29 (2009): 13–28.

concern on this front." His paper begins by discussing the dangers of technology and prosperity generating unnecessary work and an excessively quick pace of life. Secondly, it looks at the excessive toll that work takes on our mental and physical health. It then turns to how, since the industrial revolution, there has been such a focus on means that people lose sight of life's ends (p. 116).

Trainer's rhetorical achievement is accomplished by weaving quotes from Russell with later writers whose observations support and develop Russell's analyses. I was positively surprised to find out that a very successful Swede and disciple of Russell published a book *The Harried Leisure Class* already in 1970, where he was able to update and expand on his master's thinking. But Linder is accompanied by more contemporary writers who reinforce Russell's views, which only underline the importance of Russell and Trainer's gospel: Seek first the Kingdom of Idleness and everything else will be added unto you.

I have one final critical remark regarding the volume's comprehensive bibliography: Russell's books are neither alphabetically nor chronologically ordered, which can make it hard to identify a particular source. Apart from that, Schwerin is to be congratulated together with all readers of one of the greatest idlers in the history of mankind.