

“MY PERSONAL RUIN PASSES UNNOTICED”: RUSSELL, HARVARD, AND THE 1940 WILLIAM JAMES LECTURESHIP

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This article analyzes the contentious debate among senior administrators of Harvard University regarding the choice of Russell as the 1940 William James Lecturer. In the aftermath of the City College of New York controversy, influential Harvard bureaucrats, alumni, and members of the general public pressured Harvard President James B. Conant to rescind Russell's appointment. Utilizing the Russell Archives, Conant's private papers and Corporation records held at the Harvard Archives, and Grenville Clark's papers at Dartmouth College, the nature of the complex deliberations surrounding Russell's appointment and his status as a controversial public figure can be ascertained. Ultimately, Harvard stood by Russell, who delivered the James Lectures in the autumn 1940 term without incident, an engagement that ended Russell's formal involvement with Harvard extending back to the pre-World War I period.

*I*n his *Autobiography*, Bertrand Russell provides a cursory—and imprecise—overview of the events surrounding his selection as the William James Lecturer in Philosophy at Harvard University:

In the autumn of 1940 I gave the William James lectures at Harvard. This engagement had been made before the trouble in New York. Perhaps Harvard regretted having made it, but, if so, the regret was politely concealed from me. (*Auto.* 2: 221)

Russell scholars have also failed to scrutinize this prestigious appointment,¹ a curious oversight in relation to their detailed analysis of the

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¹ Edgar Pierce had endowed the William James Lectureship in 1926 in honour of the

revocation of Russell's appointment to City College of New York (CCNY) in the spring of 1940.² Caroline Moorehead provides a single sentence covering Russell's appointment process and tenure at Harvard.³ Ronald Clark offers a similarly brief description, noting incorrectly that Harvard's "governing body had made their personal support for him unequivocally plain."⁴ Among Russell's biographers, Ray Monk provides the most detailed account of the 1940 James Lectureship, yet even he devotes fewer than two pages to the issue and uses only published correspondence between Russell and Harvard's Department of Philosophy to briefly describe the sharp controversy that developed within the Harvard administration regarding Russell's appointment.⁵

A comprehensive examination of previously ignored or unavailable documentation found in the archives of Harvard University, Dartmouth College, and McMaster University provides important new insight into Russell's life and career. First, it adds a new chapter to the history of Russell's long affiliation with Harvard. Second, the controversy about Russell's appointment as the James Lecturer provides valuable context to the debate about academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of universities in the United States. In the CCNY case that transpired simultaneously, Russell and his supporters leaned almost exclusively on the principle of academic freedom to justify the honoring of the initial contract agreed to by CCNY. In the case of Harvard, senior administrators relied heavily on the school's private status as a bulwark against potential litigation aimed at nullifying Russell's appointment, and the issue of academic freedom—even among Russell's staunchest backers at Harvard—played little role in the ultimate

distinguished Harvard psychologist and pragmatist philosopher. It paid \$5,000 to see "eminent scholars not connected with Harvard University" give a course of lectures that would also be published by Harvard University Press. See Pierce to President and Fellows of Harvard College, 19 August 1926, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College, Grenville Clark Papers [hereafter GCP], series IV—Harvard Corporation, box 2, file "Harvard Corporation, Conant, James B.—1940".

² See, for example, WEIDLICH, *Appointment Denied* (2000), and DEWEY AND KALLEN, eds., *The Bertrand Russell Case* (1941).

³ MOOREHEAD, *Bertrand Russell* (1992), pp. 435–6.

⁴ CLARK, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (1975), p. 475.

⁵ MONK, *Bertrand Russell, 1921–70* (2000), pp. 239–40, 251. Other brief accounts of the 1940 controversy at Harvard can be found in HERSHBERG, *James B. Conant* (1993), and DUNNE, *Grenville Clark* (1986).

decision to allow Russell to lecture in the autumn of 1940. Finally, an account of Russell’s interaction with Harvard in 1940 allows a more complete picture of his American exile between 1938 and 1944 to be gained. While the challenge to his appointment at Harvard certainly placed additional strain on Russell and his reputation, the success and relative calm of his term as the James Lecturer provided an important respite between the CCNY debacle and his tumultuous employment at the Barnes Foundation beginning in January 1941.

Russell’s first experience of Harvard University occurred in 1896 at the end of a visit to America when he stayed in Cambridge with William James (*Papers* 11: 185). After consolidating his international academic reputation with the publication of *Principia Mathematica*, Russell accepted a three-month lecture engagement at Harvard in the spring of 1914.⁶ Although Russell informed Ottoline Morrell that the “teaching part of my time here is *delightful*”,⁷ his interaction with Harvard’s President, A. Lawrence Lowell, permanently jaded his view of the American university system and the corrosive influence of non-academic administrators and corporate financing. President Lowell, Russell observed, “is an intolerable person—a deadly bore, hard, efficient, a good man of business, fundamentally contemptuous of learned people because they are not business-like.”⁸ Harvard next extended an offer of a lectureship to Russell in January 1916, but the British Foreign Office refused to issue a passport to Russell because of his anti-war activities.⁹ In the interwar period, Russell regularly returned to Harvard during his lecture tours of the United States. In 1924, he became embroiled with Lowell in a public controversy over Harvard’s refusal to allow socialist speakers to be invited to address the Harvard Union, and he castigated Lowell for tolerating the “political propaganda” that prevailed in American universities such as Harvard that were now being run by “uneducated millionaires”.¹⁰ Russell also lectured at Harvard during visits to the United States in

⁶ For an overview of Russell’s Harvard experience in 1914, see WILLIS, “This Place is Hell’: Bertrand Russell at Harvard, 1914” (1989).

⁷ Russell to Morrell, 19 March 1914, no. 1,005, Rec. Acq. 69, Russell Archives, McMaster U.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ CLARK, pp. 287–9; *Papers* 13: 339–40.

¹⁰ “Bertrand Russell Refuses to Retract in Reply to Lowell”, *Harvard Crimson*, 25 April 1924.

1929 and 1931. After speaking at Harvard in October during the opening days of his 1931 lecture tour, Russell received an offer to take up the James Lectureship in one term of the 1932–33 school year, but he declined the offer after consulting with Dora Russell—who did not want Russell to be away from Beacon Hill School for an extended period—and believing that he had undertaken “no serious work” that would be worthy of Harvard.¹¹

Harvard offered Russell the James Lectureship a second time in December 1939 to take effect in the 1940–41 academic year. Ernest Hocking, Chair of Harvard’s Philosophy Department and the Alford Professor in Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy and Civil Polity, informed Russell that he wanted to make the lectures “especially notable” by inviting Russell, since it would mark the 100th anniversary of William James’ birth.¹² Russell—in the first year of a three-year appointment at UCLA after spending a year at the University of Chicago beginning in 1938—initially resisted Hocking’s approach, claiming that it would be difficult to secure a term’s leave from UCLA and that his current book project on “Language and Fact” (published as *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*) would be “too technical and of insufficient general interest” to serve as the basis of a lecture series.¹³ Undeterred, Hocking encouraged Russell to reconsider his position, noting that, while the “Language and Fact” material might have “limited popular appeal”, Russell was “incapable of giving a dull lecture” and that the next opportunity to have Russell would be in the 1944–45 academic year, since the offering of the bi-annual James Lectureship rotated between the departments of Philosophy and Psychology at Harvard.¹⁴ Russell subsequently approached UCLA officials and secured a term’s leave in the autumn 1940 academic year, and Hocking quickly arranged for the public talks that formed the primary component of the James Lectureship to occur on Friday afternoons and a

¹¹ Russell to Woods, 16 November 1931, GCP, series IV—Harvard Corporation, box 2, file “Harvard Corporation, Conant, James B.—1940”.

¹² Hocking to Russell, 2 December 1939, Pusey Library, Harvard University Archives, Harvard University [hereafter HUA], UAI 5.168, box 167, file “Academic Freedom 1939–1940”.

¹³ Russell to Hocking, 10 December 1939, GCP, series IV—Harvard Corporation, box 2, file “Harvard Corporation, Conant, James B.—1940”.

¹⁴ Hocking to Russell, 20 December 1939, HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file “Academic Freedom 1939–1940”.

seminar with graduate and senior undergraduate students on Wednesday afternoons.¹⁵

Russell's selection caused little controversy when Harvard announced it in the second week of February 1940. This situation changed, however, following the CCNY proclamation on 24 February that Russell had accepted an eighteen-month appointment in New York. Russell's vilification in the national media as the CCNY debacle played itself out during the next two months was mirrored on a local and regional level by the campaign to pressure Harvard to rescind Russell's selection as the James Lecturer based on the British philosopher's published writings on marriage and morality. Richard Welling, the Chairman of the National Self Government Committee, informed Harvard President James Conant that, as a personal friend of William James, he resented Harvard's invitation to Russell, a man who preached adultery. "If it is said Russell has the courage of his convictions", Welling complained, "why must we have someone whose convictions are not ours influencing youth, though subtly?"¹⁶ Adele Woodard, President of the Greenwich Council of Women in Connecticut, chided Conant for seemingly sanctioning Russell's "decidedly immoral life" and exposing Harvard students to "such a loathsome philosophy and personality".¹⁷ Russell's appointment also threatened Harvard's bottom line. Harvard alumnus Louis L. Whitney claimed that "I am no longer proud to be a Harvard man" in response to a fundraising letter. Among the reasons Whitney listed was the support of Russell given by Harvard faculty to Russell's appointments at CCNY and Harvard. "I can conceive of men who think white slavers and racketeers should have uninhibited license to proclaim their views", Whitney proclaimed, "but I know of no-one yet who believes tax money should be used to pay them for doing it."¹⁸

¹⁵ See the Appendix for the titles of Russell's James Lectures and his seminar topics. Both were to come from the lectures as they were to be published (Russell to Hocking, 22 April 1940, HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file "Academic Freedom 1939-1940"). A handwritten schedule of dates on for Russell's twelve lectures indicate they were scheduled to be delivered weekly from 4 October to 20 December. Russell fell ill before 20 December and does not seem to have delivered the twelfth lecture.

¹⁶ Welling to Conant, 1 March 1940, HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file "Russell, Bertrand—Comments, 1939-1940".

¹⁷ Woodard to Conant, 3 April 1940, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Whitney to Gordon Allen, 20 March 1940, HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file "Academic Freedom 1939-1940".

The most serious challenge to Russell's appointment came from Thomas Dorgan, architect of the infamous Massachusetts Teachers' Oath in force in the state from 1935 to 1967.¹⁹ A staunch Roman Catholic and American Legionnaire, Dorgan had been appointed as the legislative agent for the City of Boston in 1939 after serving as a Democratic state representative in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. On 22 March 1940, Dorgan bluntly informed Conant—with whom he had sparred frequently over the loyalty oath—that Russell was “positively Public Menace No. 1 at the present time” and that, in addition to his moral teachings, Russell should be denied permission to teach at Harvard because of his conviction for sedition in 1918 under the terms of the British Defence of the Realm Act.²⁰ Dorgan went public with his criticism of Russell and Harvard's position regarding the James Lectureship in a letter to the *Boston Transcript* published on 9 April and threatened immediate legal action if Harvard did not rescind Russell's appointment. In addition to noting that the Massachusetts constitution specifically mandated the promotion of Christianity by Harvard, Dorgan pointed to a number of legal cases that emphasized the primacy of moral conduct in the state education system, including the 1862 *Sherman v. Charlestown* decision that upheld the expulsion of a student who had allegedly engaged in prostitution outside of school hours. Referencing an earlier *Transcript* editorial, Dorgan noted that academic freedom was “a charming symbol” that played no role in the current controversy; only the exercise of “American democracy” would rectify the “abuse of rights” demonstrated by Harvard's cavalier indifference to public opinion.²¹

Dorgan's threats to pursue legal action clearly alarmed Harvard. Conant noted in his diary that the seven-member Harvard Corporation—the smaller of the two governing boards of the university—met on 8 April to discuss Russell's appointment:

Short Corporation meeting Cambridge before Overseers meeting. Case of B. Russell brought up for reconsideration. Great stew in New York

¹⁹ For an overview of this loyalty oath and Dorgan's role in promoting it, see SLETCHER, “The Loyalty of Educators and Public Employees” (2010).

²⁰ Dorgan to Conant, 22 March 1940, HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file “Russell, Bertrand—Comments, 1939–1940”.

²¹ “Former Representative to Sue Harvard if It Fails to Revoke Russell Appointment”, *Boston Transcript*, 9 April 1940.

over his appointment to C.C.N.Y. Court action. Some members of the Corporation particularly the treasurer ready to rescind appointment of him as William James Lecturer for first half of 1941.²²

Corporation member Grenville Clark, the prominent Wall Street lawyer who had successfully challenged Franklin Roosevelt’s Supreme Court-packing scheme in 1937,²³ subsequently counselled Conant that Dorgan would not act immediately on his threat to launch a legal challenge. Clark also expressed the preliminary opinion that a private citizen could not bring a legal action under the school laws clauses Dorgan highlighted. Furthermore, Harvard should strongly confront any potential lawsuit that might be brought by the Massachusetts attorney-general on Dorgan’s behalf, since an adverse decision would “in actual practice, not be usable as a precedent to review other appointments”.²⁴ Finally, Clark also provided an early draft of a response to Dorgan’s letter emphasizing that Russell’s lectures “would have no relation to other subjects on which Professor Russell has written or spoken”, that Russell’s appointment was temporary, and that Harvard might even be willing to cooperate with Dorgan in seeking a judicial opinion about Harvard’s freedom to hire faculty of its choosing.²⁵

After Conant promised Dorgan in a courtesy letter that he would continue to examine the issue of Russell’s appointment, the Corporation produced a thorough nineteen-page position paper on 18 April dealing with the legal reasoning Dorgan used to support his position and the type of legal action that could be brought. The paper noted that Dorgan’s legal arguments were highly subjective. Sections of the Massachusetts constitution pertaining to Harvard did not mandate the promotion of Christianity; instead, the constitution declared that

²² Conant Diary, 8 April 1940, HUA, UAI 15.898, James B. Conant Papers, box 5, file “Diary—1940”. Conant mistakenly identifies Russell’s term at Harvard as falling in the Winter 1941 session instead of Fall 1940.

²³ Russell and Clark corresponded frequently in the 1950s and 1960s concerning issues of disarmament and world government.

²⁴ Clark to Conant, 10 April 1940, GCP, series IV—Harvard Corporation, box 2, file “Harvard Corporation, Conant, James B.—1940”.

²⁵ “Possible Form of Letter to Mr. Thomas Dorgan from President Conant”, 10 April 1940, HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file “Russell, Bertrand—Comments, 1939–1940”. The second page of the typed draft letter dealing with legal matters had been crossed out in pencil in an unidentified hand (presumably Conant’s).

“the encouragement of arts and sciences, and all good literature” tended to “the advantage of the Christian religion”. The *Sherman v. Charlestown* case did indeed assert the right of a local school committee to discipline a student for improper conduct out of school hours, but this judgment also emphasized the right of a school to determine internal policy, which could only help Harvard’s position. Finally, the various provisions of the General Laws in Massachusetts relating to moral conduct were “admonitory only” and that “at no time has there been any mechanism ... designed to insure the selection of proper professors” at Harvard. The paper then bluntly advised the Corporation that Dorgan had no private interest in Russell’s appointment and could not bring equity proceedings against Harvard. The attorney-general did possess the power to launch an equity case, but such instances were undertaken sparingly to enjoin public nuisances or to enforce charitable trusts. These conditions clearly did not apply to Harvard, and the potential review of every professor appointed by Harvard would render the school’s administration impotent and “would be inconsistent with the confidence which has elsewhere been displayed in the integrity of the governing officers of our school and college system.”²⁶

Despite the seeming weakness of Dorgan’s position, the Harvard Corporation met on 22 April and refused to unanimously endorse Russell’s original appointment. Three members, in fact, wanted to rescind the offer, while three members wanted to hold fast and Conant himself reserved judgment on the matter.²⁷ Conant canvassed a variety of key officials associated with Harvard and received the same split opinion, with Ernest Hocking indicating that he now supported abandoning Russell. Conant recorded in his diary his “continued stewing” over the matter,²⁸ and he also reached out to both Dorgan and Russell through intermediaries to see if either individual would let Harvard off the hook by withdrawing from the battlefield. Dorgan refused to consider pulling back his threat to launch legal action against Harvard, believing that he was “absolutely right on the law

²⁶ “Memorandum Re Bertrand Russell Appointment”, 18 April 1940, GCP, series IV—Harvard Corporation, box 7, file “Harvard Corporation, Shaw, O.M.”.

²⁷ Conant Diary, 22 April 1940, HUA, UAI 15.898, James B. Conant Papers, box 5, file “Diary—1940”.

²⁸ Conant Diary, 23 April 1940, *ibid.*

and [that] the best thing Harvard could do would be to back down.”²⁹ In the evening of 22 April following the contentious Corporation meeting, Conant phoned Warder Norton, Russell’s American publisher, to ask him to approach Russell about refusing the invitation to lecture at Harvard. Although Norton assured Conant that “Russell would behave in Cambridge”,³⁰ he nonetheless telephoned Russell to ask him to consider dropping his plans to take up the James Lectureship. Russell refused Norton’s request, leading “to a cooling of Russell’s previously warm friendship” with the publisher (*SLBR* 2: 375). Rebuffed in these back-channel negotiations, Conant informed Henry James—a Corporation member (and William James’ son) who described Russell as “the subject of our nightmares”—on 23 April that “we are not to try to induce the appointee to offer a voluntary resignation.”³¹

Conant instead moved quickly to bring the Harvard Corporation to a consensus position on Russell’s appointment. He circulated a detailed memorandum on 24 April noting that the three Corporation members supporting the rescinding of the offer to Russell had refused to budge from their positions in the days following the 22 April meeting, despite personal lobbying from the Harvard President. Conant now aggressively asserted that renegeing on the Russell appointment would cause Harvard’s reputation to “suffer a severe blow”. “The issue is not one of free speech, or even of academic freedom in the usual sense”, Conant continued, “but seems to me to be rather one of university independence—independence of waves of popular indignation.” Conant reported on his failed efforts to induce Russell to voluntarily withdraw, but he believed that if a firm public position could be taken regarding Russell’s appointment and the university could take “the blows and brickbats” for a few weeks, another effort to secure Russell’s withdrawal could be undertaken. If Russell did insist on coming to Harvard, Conant believed that Russell’s public and private conduct had been impeccable in recent years and any controversies would deal with stale events that occurred more than a decade earlier.

²⁹ D.E.B. to Conant, 18 April 1940, HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file “Russell, Bertrand—Comments, 1939–1940”.

³⁰ Conant Diary, 23 April 1940, HUA, UAI 15.898, James B. Conant Papers, box 5, file “Diary—1940”.

³¹ James to Conant, 23 April 1940, GCP, series IV—Harvard Corporation, box 5, file “Harvard Corporation, James, Henry”.

After consulting with Harvard alumnus Arthur Page, the pioneering public relations expert at AT&T, Conant proposed that the Corporation simply issue a concise public statement confirming the appointment and emphasizing Russell's undisputed academic eminence, his previous employment at Harvard, the University of Chicago and UCLA, and the temporary nature of the James Lectureship.³²

Conant's strong initiative on the Russell appointment unified the Harvard Corporation. Henry James, one of the Corporation members at the 22 April meeting who had lobbied for dropping Russell, now informed Conant that "I have come round definitely to your view that we must stand by the Russell appointment at this stage."³³ Grenville Clark, who had supported the appointment at the 22 April meeting, praised Conant for his leadership and particularly supported the idea of a possible future voluntary retirement from Russell. "I never thought that this would even be a possibility", Clark noted, "but a few weeks hence, after we have taken the public position, this possibility should, I think, be canvassed again."³⁴ The only rearguard opposition within Harvard's administrative ranks to Conant's strategy to uphold Russell as the James Lecturer now came from Hocking. In a bizarre private letter to Conant, Hocking criticized the idea that "the more damn nonsense any highly talented intelligentsium publishes, the more we are bound by the high chivalry of our love for truth to take him to the bosom of our academic family." Harvard had no obligation to employ Russell, Hocking emphasized, "who has in evident irresponsibility published stuff which outrages the sense of institutional decency of a large part of the public. Hence there can be no united stand of the university in his defence."³⁵

Hocking's arguments—which largely corresponded with continued appeals from the general public to rescind Russell's appointment—failed to sway the Harvard Corporation. Five weeks after Thomas Dorgan wrote to Conant threatening legal action, he received a curt

³² "Memorandum to the Corporation", 24 April 1940, GCP, series IV—Harvard Corporation, box 8, file "Harvard Corporation, Administration Dockets—1940".

³³ James to Conant, 26 April 1940, GCP, series IV—Harvard Corporation, box 5, file "Harvard Corporation, James, Henry—1940".

³⁴ Clark to Conant, 25 April 1940, GCP, series IV—Harvard Corporation, box 2, file "Harvard Corporation, Conant, James B.—1940".

³⁵ Hocking to Conant, 27 April 1940, HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file "Russell, Bertrand—Comments, 1939–1940".

three-sentence reply with a copy of a press statement to be released on 28 April.³⁶ The statement largely matched the draft text circulated internally by Conant on 24 April with some specific improvements suggested by Corporation members. The statement emphasized that the “appointment is of a temporary nature and for only half a year”, which meant that the approval of the second governing body of Harvard, the Board of Overseers, was not required. The announcement also provided more specific language about the seminar Russell would teach to advanced students and added text about Russell being “a mathematician and philosopher of recognized eminence” who had recently taught at prestigious institutions such as Cambridge, Chicago and Los Angeles. Finally, the press release firmly reasserted Harvard’s independence of action in the contentious matter of the James Lectureship: “The President and Fellows have taken cognizance of the criticism of this appointment. After reviewing all the circumstances, they have considered it to be for the best interests of the University to reaffirm their decision, and they have done so.” *The Harvard Crimson*, the student newspaper, succinctly diagnosed the Corporation’s response to “professional moral-minders” such as Dorgan, noting that “Harvard is not hollering for free speech, a phrase which dominated the recent New York controversy.” Instead, the *Crimson* emphasized that Corporation members had adopted a “completely unassailable” position by “merely upholding their right as an independent body to appoint men they believe are specially qualified for certain jobs.”³⁷

Despite the public confirmation of the Russell appointment, Conant immediately put into effect his last-ditch plan to secure the British philosopher’s withdrawal without waiting for several weeks. Warder Norton again wrote to Russell on 29 April on behalf of an unnamed Harvard official—presumably Conant—asking Russell not to provide the press with any comments about the James Lectureship in a message surely designed to goad Russell into voluntarily withdrawing from the Harvard post.³⁸ Russell had been scrupulously careful to refrain from issuing any press statements concerning the Harvard imbroglio, a stance that stood in stark contrast to his assertive press statements protesting the treatment he had been subject to over

³⁶ Conant to Dorgan, 27 April 1940, *ibid.*

³⁷ “Naughty Bertrand”, *Harvard Crimson*, 29 April 1940.

³⁸ Norton to Russell, 29 April 1940, Rec. Acq. 1A, box 6.36, Russell Archives.

the CCNY affair. Although he promised to maintain his silence,³⁹ Russell lashed out at Norton. “You cannot imagine how maddening it is to be enveloped in a fog of hush-hush hints instead of being told plain facts”, Russell declared, and he ordered his publisher to cease acting as an intermediary and to have Harvard officials contact him directly about any matter relating to the James Lectureship.⁴⁰ Norton quickly apologized, and Russell subsequently expressed the strain under which he operated after leaving UCLA to accept the now-cancelled CCNY appointment:

You must forgive me if I am a little prickly just now. To be suddenly reduced to the situation where I cannot support my children, and shall very likely have to risk their death by sending them back to England, is painful. As things stand, it seems unlikely that my income for the next 12 months will reach \$1000. Everyone fusses about the public issue; my personal ruin passes unnoticed. (Russell to Norton, 10 May 1940)

Russell’s mood could hardly have improved by receiving the official notice from Hocking written on 30 April that the appointment would go ahead. In what would no doubt be one of the most tepid support letters in the history of American post-secondary education, Hocking noted that “it would be foolish for me to pretend that the university is not disturbed by the situation” and claimed that the Dorgan lawsuit threat “has some footing in the law of the Commonwealth.” Hocking emphasized that academic freedom had nothing to do with Harvard’s

³⁹ Russell did subsequently write a letter to *The Harvard Crimson* on 6 May responding to the 29 April *Crimson* commentary on his Harvard appointment and how it differed from the CCNY case. Russell emphasized that the defence of his CCNY appointment did not rest on the principle of freedom of speech but on “the principle of academic freedom, which means simply the independence of duly constituted academic bodies, and their right to make their own appointments”; this was “exactly the defence contemplated by the Corporation of Harvard”. Russell then proceeded to firmly define the concept of freedom of speech that exists outside of a paid occupational environment. A salesman, a postman, a tailor, and a teacher of mathematics, Russell argued, “should all equally be allowed to express their opinion freely and without fear of penalties in their spare time, and to think, speak, and behave as they wish, within the law, when they are not engaged in their professional duties.” But this principle of free speech, Russell lamented, “appears to be little known. If therefore anyone should require any further information about it I refer him to the United States Constitution and to the works of the founders thereof.” See “Mail”, *Harvard Crimson*, 9 May 1940, p. 2; *Auto.* 2: 232–3.

⁴⁰ Russell to Norton, 2 May 1940, Rec. Acq. 1A, box 6.36, Russell Archives.

action to uphold Russell’s appointment—“the University is simply holding the ground of the independence of our appointing bodies from outside interference.” Hocking upbraided Russell for using a freedom of speech argument in defending himself in the CCNY case. This defence, in Hocking view, deepened public suspicion “that the colleges insist on regarding all hypotheses on the same level ... [and that] they are all playthings of debate for a lot of detached intellects who have nothing in common with the intuitions of average mankind.” Nonetheless, Hocking closed his epistle informing Russell that “your scheme of lectures has come, and it looks splendid to me.”⁴¹ Russell wearily replied to Hocking that he wished he could honourably resign the James Lectureship, but he could not do so “without laying myself open to the charge of cowardice”. In Russell’s opinion, it would be better to be dismissed from the post immediately and be paid compensation than to be terminated as the result of future court action and be denied any financial reparation. “I hope that Harvard will have the courtesy to keep me informed officially of all developments”, Russell requested, “instead of leaving me to learn of matters that vitally concern me only from inaccurate accounts in newspapers.”⁴²

Hocking then became embroiled in a war of words with John Dewey, the noted pragmatist philosopher and staunch defender of Russell during the CCNY affair to whom Russell had passed Hocking’s 30 April letter. Dewey castigated Hocking for daring to challenge Russell for his aggressive public self-defence as the New York court system stripped him of his appointment. “There will always be kept prostitutes in any institution”, Dewey noted, who were joined by those “more timid by temperament who take to teaching as a kind of protected calling.” In Dewey’s view, “the outlook is dark indeed” if academics such as Russell outside of the traditional tenured faculty structure could be denied even temporary teaching appointments as a result of public pressure or judicial opinion.⁴³ But Hocking refused to be cowed, and he replied sharply to Dewey again criticizing Russell for using freedom of speech as his primary argument against his opponents in the CCNY case. “I am certainly unwilling to join the Russell-baiters”, Hocking emphasized, but he was “equally unwilling to

⁴¹ Hocking to Russell, 30 April 1940; in *Auto.* 2: 229–31.

⁴² Russell to Hocking, 6 May 1940, *ibid.*, 231–2.

⁴³ Dewey to Hocking, 16 May 1940, *ibid.*, 233–5.

subscribe to the heroics with which Russell has been draping himself” in his public pronouncements. Hocking concluded it was “mistaken chivalry” to defend Russell’s free speech rights in the light of the “rot” of his social views:

I refuse to consider free fornication for undergraduates (for example) as serious hypotheses, whose promulgation is a sacred right, to be defended by a line-up of liberals under the guise of freedom of speech.... For if the utterances of every damnable folly proposed by an able man is to be supported by our freedom, without discrimination, the cumulative effect on American confidence in the serious significance of the colleges can only be disastrous.⁴⁴

The Harvard Corporation’s decision to stand by Russell effectively closed the debate within the University about the James Lectureship, regardless of Hocking’s personal views. Public opposition to the appointment continued to be evident. The City Council of Cambridge, for example, passed a resolution on 7 May 1940 claiming it was “unalterably opposed” to Russell’s selection.⁴⁵ The Boston City Council debated a similar condemnatory motion, with Councillor Maurice Sullivan describing Russell as a “moral leper”.⁴⁶ Personal attacks on Russell included the Reverend Edward Murphy addressing the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae and criticizing the concept of academic freedom designed to “allow a titled liberal to spew his philosophic filth”.⁴⁷ Thomas Dorgan continued to threaten legal action, but these pressures eventually subsided, and no court case challenging Russell’s employment ever materialized after Dorgan’s action had “been turned down from the Massachusetts courts on the grounds of no direct interest.”⁴⁸

During the summer, Russell experienced “an extraordinary contrast between public horror and private delight” while writing *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*—that would also form the basis of his Harvard lectures and seminar—at Fallen Leaf Lake in California’s Sierra

⁴⁴ Hocking to Dewey, 22 May 1940, HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file “Russell, Bertrand—Comments, 1939–1940”.

⁴⁵ Burke to Conant, 10 May 1940, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ “Boston City Council Scores Bertrand Russell’s Morals”, *Harvard Crimson*, 7 May 1940.

⁴⁷ “Attack Russell on Moral Stand”, *Boston Post*, 6 May 1940.

⁴⁸ “Russell Will Arrive Here Early Today”, *Harvard Crimson*, 1 Oct. 1940.

Mountains, a location Russell described as “one of the loveliest places that it has ever been my good fortune to know” (*Auto.* 2: 220). He maintained a cordial correspondence with Hocking during this period relating to his schedule and accommodation plans.⁴⁹ After accepting the position at the Barnes Foundation, Russell had planned to live in Cambridge alone for the duration of the autumn term beginning 25 September 1940 while his wife, Patricia, searched for and furnished a house in the Philadelphia area. But illness delayed Russell’s arrival for a week, and Russell, Patricia and their son Conrad lived together at the Commander Hotel in Cambridge for the term’s duration after deciding to put off looking for accommodation near Philadelphia.

Russell arrived at Harvard on 1 October 1940 to an overwhelmingly positive reception. “The Lord Is Come”, headlined the *Harvard Crimson*, and it described Russell as “spick and span in grey suit, blue shirt and tie, and looking in the best of ruddy British spirits”, eager to engage his audience at the Faculty Club. “His calm, waiting stare is enough to topple the confidence of the crassest bluffer that ever fooled a section man”, the *Crimson* noted, “but Mr. Russell is unapproachable only in his special philosophical stratosphere. When the conversation moves to a mundane level, he loses his air of disconcerting coolness and begins to laugh, finger his horn-rimmed glasses, and bite his pipe.”⁵⁰ At a press conference on 2 October attended by fifteen reporters, Russell expounded on his personal preferences and the international political situation:

Bertrand Russell dislikes football, titles, and bridge, but is fond of hiking, Chinese people, detective stories, Harvard, and America’s younger generation.... Turning to the war, Russell said, “If it lasts long enough, America is sure to get dragged in on one thing or another—the Germans sooner or later are bound to do something you can’t stand. Once Hitler begins to doubt his star, he will get silly, just as Napoleon did.”

⁴⁹ Despite Hocking’s blunt correspondence with Russell—while much less inflammatory than his correspondence with Conant about Russell’s appointment—the two men seem to have developed a cordial and mutually respectful relationship. Writing twenty-three years after his tenure as the James lecturer, Russell informed Hocking that “I have continued to remember with gratitude your kindness to me in 1940.” See Russell to Hocking, 29 March 1963, RA2 710, box 10.48, Russell Archives.

⁵⁰ “Russell in Gay Vein; Hates Fishing, Too Many Murders”, *Harvard Crimson*, 2 Oct. 1940.

“Hitler”, the co-author of *Principia Mathematica* added, “is a foreign body, as if Europe had swallowed a stone.”⁵¹

The only public opposition to Russell’s arrival seemed to emanate from marginalized Thomas Dorgan, who issued a vitriolic statement condemning the appointment of “America’s number 1 filth thrower to America’s number 1 University”.⁵²

Despite the fanfare surrounding Russell’s first appearance at Harvard, “there is a curious and almost complete silence in the documentary record”⁵³ about Russell’s three-month tenure as the James Lecturer. Area newspapers covered his public lectures that took place on Friday afternoons on a sporadic basis. Little is known about the content and progress of his student seminar at Harvard held on Wednesday afternoons apart from a tantalizing mention provided by Roderick Chisholm, one of the most notable American philosophers of the twentieth century:

While I was at Harvard there were a number of distinguished visitors. Alfred Tarski was there. Rudolf Carnap taught a seminar; he was accompanied by Herbert Feigl. Phillip Frank was also there; I remember him as a very kind man indeed, but his philosophical interests were not the same as mine. Then Bertrand Russell came for a semester and I was lost to philosophy forever.⁵⁴

As Chisholm indicates, Russell’s time at Harvard allowed him to interact with Tarski, Carnap and W. V. O. Quine. Quine recalled that the autumn 1940 term was “graven in my memory”⁵⁵ because of the presence of Russell, Tarski and Carnap. “[W]e were together at the department luncheon meetings every week or so”, Quine noted of his interactions with Russell, “and I was of course a regular auditor at his lectures.... Also I must surely have attended the associated seminar.”⁵⁶ With his future financial situation seemingly stabilized by the signing of the contract with the Barnes Foundation, Russell did not have a

⁵¹ “Russell Dislikes Football; Calls Hitler ‘Foreign Body’”, *Harvard Crimson*, 3 Oct. 1940.

⁵² “Russell Will Arrive Here Early Today”, *Harvard Crimson*, 1 Oct. 1940.

⁵³ MONK, p. 251.

⁵⁴ CHISHOLM, “Self-Profile”, in Bogdan, ed., *Roderick M. Chisholm* (1986), p. 4.

⁵⁵ QUINE, *The Time of My Life* (1985), p. 149.

⁵⁶ QUINE, “Logical Correspondence with Russell” (1988), p. 228.

pressing need to lecture extensively beyond Harvard. Nonetheless, he did accept a considerable number of external speaking engagements. A statement prepared by Russell’s speaking agent, W. Colston Leigh, indicates that during his tenure as James Lecturer, Russell spoke on at least ten different occasions.⁵⁷ Russell also apparently committed to speaking engagements at Harvard beyond his seminars and lectures. Henry Chauncey, the Assistant Dean of the Faculty at Harvard, informed Russell’s son, John, on 7 December 1940, for example, that “Your father was kind enough to have dinner last evening with a small discussion group, to which I belong.”⁵⁸ Russell also delivered a talk at Harvard’s Eliot House on 8 December 1940, titled “Significant Changes in the World in the Past Sixty Years”.⁵⁹ But apart from these details, the picture of Russell’s day-to-day activities while he resided in Cambridge in the autumn of 1940 is incomplete.

After the American edition of *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* appeared in the first weeks of December 1940, Russell quietly left Harvard almost unnoticed and sick with bronchitis. His physician in Cambridge, Dr. Laurence Ellis, informed Harvard’s administration on 19 December that Russell “being ill and under my care is quite unable to keep any engagements until further notice.”⁶⁰ After moving into Little Datchet Farm outside Philadelphia, Russell marked student papers from his senior seminar in two batches. On 9 January 1941, he returned graded papers to the Philosophy Department for six students, including Chisholm and Rulon Wells III, both of whom received the

⁵⁷ Statement of Account [undated], RA3 Rec. Acq. 265, Russell Archives. Known speaking engagements included those in Boston (20 Oct.), Providence (6 Nov.), Chicago (12 Nov.), Boston (17 Nov.), New York City (18 Nov.), Williamstown (19 Nov.), Boston (20 Nov.), New York City (26 and 30 Nov.), Hanover (3 Dec.), and New London (4 Dec.). Reports of some of the speeches Russell delivered can be found listed in B&R 2: 351–2. Further information about Russell’s engagement on 12 November in Chicago is found in Leigh’s letter to Hocking on 19 September 1940, in which he states that “... much to my surprise and delight the people of Chicago have accepted Professor Russell for a lecture on November 12th. Will you, therefore, kindly note this on his schedule, so that there can be no conflict with his teaching duties?” (HUA, UAI 5.168, box 167, file “Academic Freedom 1939–1940”). Russell flew back from Chicago the next day just reaching his 4 p.m. seminar, but not in time to lay in a supply of “fizzy water” for drinks with his guest that evening, Warder Norton (Russell to Norton, 29 Nov. 1940, RA3 Rec. Acq. 1a, box 6.36).

⁵⁸ Chauncey to John Russell, 7 Dec. 1940, RA2 710, box 10.47.

⁵⁹ “Russell Notes Decline in World Security since 1890”, *Harvard Crimson*, 9 Dec. 1940.

⁶⁰ Laurence Ellis note, 19 Dec. 1940, *ibid.*

highest grades of “A” in the class according to the handwritten notation on Russell’s covering letter.⁶¹ Later that month, he communicated again with Harvard: “I have written direct to the other members of my seminar. I am returning the papers not sent direct to you, as you so kindly offered to return them to their authors.”⁶² With these administrative tasks complete and after privately indicating that “I had a very pleasant time at Harvard”,⁶³ Russell’s formal affiliation with Harvard stretching back several decades effectively ended, and he subsequently returned to Harvard to lecture on a single occasion, in November 1950.⁶⁴

The intense administrative debates concerning Russell’s appointment as the James Lecturer at Harvard, therefore, offer a fresh understanding of his life and career during his time in America between 1938 and 1944. While Russell experienced satisfaction on an intellectual and personal level in his interactions with many academics during this period, his experience with American educational institutions proved to be calamitous. By definition, his judicial lynching that terminated the CCONY contract stands as Russell’s worst experience in the United States. Similarly, Russell’s dislike of the autocratic presidents of the University of Chicago and UCLA certainly jaded his opinion of these universities. Russell’s dismissal from the Barnes Foundation in December 1942 also left him essentially destitute before he received an advance from a new publisher for *A History of Western Philosophy* in the spring of 1943 and represented another setback—albeit a temporary one—in his career. Russell’s tenure at Harvard in the autumn of 1940 should have represented a chance to firmly re-establish and rehabilitate his private and public reputation in the United States. But this opportunity proved unrealized. Although his three-month tenure in Cambridge was relatively tranquil in relation to these other American situations, “Russell, quite aware that his presence was an embarrassment”, Grenville Clark’s biographer has accurately summarized, “duly gave the James Lectures, pocketed his fee, and departed.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Russell to Ruth Allen, 9 Jan. 1941, *ibid.* Other members of Russell’s seminar included Symon, Feltenstein, Smith, Nunn and Moore. Only surnames are given on the letter.

⁶² Russell to Allen, [Jan. 1941], *ibid.*

⁶³ Russell to Earle Raymond Hedrick, 18 Jan. 1941, Special Collections Library, record series 359, Chancellor’s Office, Administrative Files, 1936–59, box 110, file 11, UCLA.

⁶⁴ See McLENDON, “The Philosopher among Philosophers” (2014), pp. 24–5.

⁶⁵ DUNNE, *Grenville Clark*, p. 111.

APPENDIX: RUSSELL’S SUBMITTED LECTURE TITLES

The William James Lectures

- I. Words and Sentences
- II. The description of experiences
- III. The Object-Language
- IV. Logical Words
- V. Perception and Knowledge
- VI. Basic Propositions
- VII. Significance of Sentences
- VIII. Language as Expression
- IX. What sentences “indicate”
- X. Truth and Experience
- XI. Truth and Verification
- XII. Language and Metaphysics

“Subjects for discussion in Seminar”

- I. Asymmetrical Relations and Syntax.
- II. Can we perceive a relation, and if so what, between an occurrence and a sentence which describes it.
- III. Alternative Definitions of the Object-Language.
- IV. Logical Words and Psychology.
- V. Differing Theories as to basic propositions: the thing-theory and the psychological theory.
- VI. Proper Names.
- VII. Egocentric Particulars (I, this, here, now, etc.).
- VIII. The principles of extensionality and atomicity.
- IX. What general propositions “express” and “indicate”.
- X. The rules of syntax: do they belong to (a) psychology, (b) ethics, or (c) etiquette?
- XI. The law of excluded middle (Brouwer).
- XII. Truth and Verifiability: logical and epistemological theories of truth.
- XIII. The desiderata of a logical language: minimizing of vocabulary and syntactical forms.

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