
A CONTINENTAL VIEW OF RUSSELL'S LIFE AND INTELLECTUAL ACHIEVEMENTS

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Josef Rattner. *Bertrand Russell: ein Essay; Studienausgabe*. Berlin: Verlag für Tiefenpsychologie, 2016. Pp. 118 (hb). €20.00. ISBN: 978-3-921836-58-7.

Josef Rattner, born in Vienna in 1928, has been a critical admirer of the life and work of Bertrand Russell since his student days in Zurich. Relying largely on standard biographies and Russell's autobiography, Rattner provides in the first section of his latest essay a sympathetic appraisal of the philosopher's life and intellectual achievements. Whereas the author's account reflects a personal view of Russell's career as a public intellectual and of his moral stance on nuclear disarmament, a close reading of Rattner's text reveals a depth of philosophical and psychological insight into Russell's personal development and approach to philosophy which would greatly benefit experts and general readers alike. Although the essay is designated a study guide, the author emphasizes certain areas of interdisciplinary research where he clearly feels that the German philosophical tradition would complement the strict rationalism which Russell advocated in his pre-1914 career and which continued to be a feature of his writing on social issues.

In the second section of the essay, eight topics from Russell's popular writing are summarized and subjected to a critical analysis. Four of these subjects—the *Autobiography*, *Marriage and Morals*, *The Conquest of Happiness* and Russell's writings on education—might be considered to benefit from depth-psychological scrutiny. The more philosophical topics such as *Sceptical Essays* and *A History of Western Philosophy* have already been adequately dealt with in short introductions to Russell's philosophy by, for example, A. J. Ayer in *Russell* (1972) and A. C. Grayling in *Bertrand Russell: a Very Short Introduction* (1996) and, more specifically, in Grayling's *Scepticism and the Possibility of Knowledge* (2008).

Rattner supplements such accounts by his wide knowledge of German philosophy, his own theoretical approach to psychoanalysis being firmly grounded in the hermeneutical tradition.

In a largely favourable appraisal of the philosopher's autobiography, the psychotherapist Rattner focuses on Russell's genius, which he relates to the philosopher's ability to think things through untroubled by any adult interlocutors. The solitary childhood which Russell may have found painful at times was, according to this account, the source of his admirable capacity for original thought. The idea that genius is promoted by the lack of a strict conscience

or super-ego as Jean-Paul Sartre maintained was neither true of the French philosopher nor of Russell. The solitary Russell was also receptive to the cultural influence of the illustrious figures who frequented Pembroke Lodge and to the puritan morals of his overzealous grandmother.

Rattner has no complaints to make about Russell's atheism or his sceptical attitude. After outlining the important role played by scepticism in the development of science and of European thought in general, he concentrates on the need for doubt and justification as a component of a humanist world-view, emphasizing the difficulty of persuading the majority to question their dogmatic attitudes and beliefs. Citing the research of Adorno and his colleagues on the authoritarian personality and the structure of prejudice, Rattner emphasizes the fact that prejudice is a characteristic of personality deficits, neither easily overcome nor readily accessible to the rational appeals to which Russell often had recourse.

Turning to *A History of Western Philosophy*, Rattner brings his own philosophical preference to bear in pointing out the shortcomings in the work for which Russell is most widely known. Rattner, whose own emphasis on the hermeneutic and phenomenological tradition as a theoretical underpinning of psychoanalysis and psychosomatic medicine has been clearly documented in numerous publications, believes that Russell should have paid more attention to the speculative and anthropological aspects of German Idealism and life-philosophy. Among the major representatives of German thought whom Russell failed to include in his *History* were thinkers such as Ernst Cassirer, Edmund Husserl and Nicolai Hartmann, who were grappling with the problem of epistemology and methodology in a world where the natural sciences seemed to have successfully asserted their claim to be the sole arbiters of knowledge and truth.

In the section on *Power*, Rattner also considers that Russell would have done well to draw on the insights of Nietzsche and Alfred Adler, who illustrate the dynamics of power-striving in the individual psyche, which compensates for its real and imagined deficits by constructing aggressive ideologies.

Finally, regarding education, in which Russell and others have placed their utopian views of the perfectibility of mankind, Rattner is realistic in his assessment of the role played by progressive schools. Whereas Russell's own difficulties as a parent and advocate of open relationships seem in retrospect to have marred his and Dora Black's experiment at Beacon Hill School, Russell certainly contributed, with his fellow educator A. S. Neill of Summerhill, to the creation of a consensus in the educational world that aggressive parenting and restrictive sexual morals inhibit children in their early development. Today's teachers are generally more understanding of the child's developmental needs. Whether this in any way contributes to the progress of humanity in a wider sense is open to question.
