

## TWO OF A KIND: SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON RUSSELL'S EXCHANGE WITH LADD-FRANKLIN ON SOLIPSISM

ADAM TRYBUS

Philosophy / U. of Zielona Gora

65-762 Zielona Gora, Lubuskie, Poland

ADAMTRYBUS@GMAIL.COM

On 21 August 1912 Christine Ladd-Franklin, by then an established logician, wrote a letter to Bertrand Russell. He replied on 27 September 1912, followed by another letter on 16 November of that year. After a hiatus on his side in 1913–14, they exchanged letters again in 1915. The main topic of their conversations is solipsism: a theme that was important for Russell throughout his writings. In fact, in some of his works he famously mentions his encounters with Ladd-Franklin, hinting at a difference of opinions and her inability to see the inconsistency in what she claimed. After analysing the correspondence, with some letters resurfacing only recently, one sees a completely different picture: Russell not only does not object to what she claims, he even agrees with her! This article aims to show what really transpired as evidenced by the letters, of which seven of the extant eleven are reproduced in full with annotations.

**I**n his *5000 BC and Other Philosophical Fantasies* Raymond Smullyan touches on many philosophical and logical issues in a light-hearted manner, often drawing from his own personal experiences. In one particular instance, he mentions Melvin Fitting's sharp-witted riposte regarding solipsism. What he states afterwards, however, makes every Russell scholar's ears prick up. For he says:

This comment [about Melvin Fitting on solipsism] is reminiscent of the famous story about the lady who wrote to Bertrand Russell, “Why are you surprised to hear that I am a solipsist? Isn’t everybody?”<sup>1</sup>

One might chalk it up to Smullyan’s penchant for zingers, especially when related to self-reference and paradox (and it has to be admitted that solipsism as a belief is particularly well suited for such jokes) that he got carried away and did not check, or did not care about, the source of that “quotation”. For if he had, he would have noted that Russell himself described it quite differently. To somebody not in the know, Smullyan’s version could well sound like a snide remark about an inept lady who fell into the trap of talking about solipsism without realizing the problems that lurk there. Do not let us be fooled by this image conjured up by Smullyan: as a discerning reader would surely suggest, in order to make up our minds we must hear it from the man himself. The first time Russell recalls this story in his *An Outline of Philosophy* (1927) as follows:

I once received a letter from a philosopher who professed to be a solipsist, but was surprised that there were no others! Yet this philosopher was by way of believing that no one else existed. This shows that solipsism is not really believed even by those who think they are convinced of its truth. (P. 302)

It still sounds as though Russell is speaking from a higher ground, looking down at whoever made this remark. We learn now that it was a philosopher and not simply a confused member of the general public, as the reader of Smullyan’s book might be excused for thinking. There is still an off-chance that Russell had two encounters of this kind: one with a philosopher and one with an unspecified lady. The next quotation, from *Human Knowledge* (1948), shows that the lady and the philosopher are, in all likelihood, one and the same person:

I once received a letter from an eminent logician Mrs. Christine Ladd Franklin, saying that she was a solipsist, and was surprised that there were no others. Coming from a logician, this surprise surprised me. (Pp. 195–6)

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<sup>1</sup> SMULLYAN, *5000 BC and Other Philosophical Fantasies* (1983), p. 28, remark #27.

This quotation is separated from the first by about twenty years. We see that the situation is quite different to the one described by Smullyan. It was Ladd-Franklin, a famous logician and a collaborator of Peirce,<sup>2</sup> who wrote to Russell professing her belief in solipsism. Knowing all that, one is less likely to use this story in a throwaway manner as a joke to be told at a philosophers' dinner. Still, one would be excused for siding with Russell on that issue. Is it not obviously contradictory to admit to being a solipsist, and to wonder why no one else is of the same conviction? Well, it could be, depending on how one understands what solipsism is. However, the fact that it was a famous logician who uttered these words certainly adds gravitas to the entire story. Why would *she* say so? She surely knew her logic.

In fact, digging deeper reveals that Russell presents a distorted version of the story. The short answer to the above question is that, as we will see from considering the letters below, she never said what Russell claims she did. Moreover, an analysis of the available sources reveals a markedly different picture. It is one where Russell's and Ladd-Franklin's positions are closer than one might have thought.

As it happens, the Bertrand Russell Archives contain three letters sent by Ladd-Franklin to Russell that include a description of her approach to solipsism and, crucially, four letters by Russell, where he states his position in this respect. Let us have a closer look at the contents of this correspondence. The first letter is dated 21 August 1912.<sup>3</sup> Ladd-Franklin starts by complimenting Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy* (published at the beginning of that year). She says:

I am delighted that you frankly insist upon the throwing overboard of all philosophy save epistemology, and I am also delighted that you keep constantly in the fore-ground that closely contiguous universe to the "real" one—the world of dreams....

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<sup>2</sup> Christine Ladd-Franklin (1847–1930) fought her way through the predominantly male-oriented educational system in the United States of that era. She wrote her PHD thesis under Peirce, for which she was not awarded the degree because of her gender. She was interested in many areas ranging from pure mathematics and logic (she is perhaps most famous for what is known as antilogism), to psychology and physiology (working on binocular and colour vision). She corresponded with many great thinkers of her time, and, surprisingly, her papers at Columbia University contain the galley proofs of RUSSELL's "The Theory of Implication" (1905). See GREEN AND LADUKE, "Ladd-Franklin, Christine" (1847–1930).

<sup>3</sup> For the complete letter, see Appendix, **Letter 1**.

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From the outset, it is clear what Ladd-Franklin finds most interesting in the book, which, after all, touches on many issues. She admits that the idea of the dream-world is important in her own work. One should point out that this letter shows that Ladd-Franklin had a lot of good to say about Russell, despite some evidence that there were aspects of his works that she critiqued.<sup>4</sup> This does not mean, obviously, that she did not point out what, in her opinion, Russell got wrong in this book:

In spite of my pleasure in your charming piece of argument ... I am ... far from agreeing with your view as a whole.... I venture to think that you are wrong in saying that there are *two hypotheses possible*—that of a dream-like universe of experience and that of the Physical object.

(**Let. 1**; emphasis in original)

Ladd-Franklin did not believe the two options above should be treated on an equal footing. We see this clearly in the following fragment.

Solipsism is simply a description of the incontrovertible facts of experience. That there is anything hypothetical in it I deny. (**Let. 1**)

And so Ladd-Franklin commits herself to solipsism at least in some sense. Finally comes the part that, so it would seem, lay at the core of the way in which Russell recollected the story:

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<sup>4</sup> Whether she was merely paying lip service, it is hard to say. To be sure, she was highly critical of Russell's approach to formal logic. See LADD-FRANKLIN, "Implication and Existence in Logic" (1912); PIETARINEN, "Christine Ladd-Franklin's and Victoria Welby's Correspondence with Charles Peirce" (2013); and ANELLIS, "Some Views of Russell and Russell's Logic by his Contemporaries with Particular Reference to Peirce" (2005). The first reference is most likely a publication she mentions to Russell in her letter from 1912 when she talks about her "forth-coming article in the (American) Philosophical Review." The Russell Archives contain an offprint of this article with a note saying "Regards of the writer". Ladd-Franklin also presented a paper at the Twenty-Fifth Summer Meeting of the American Mathematical Society (held in 1918), entitled "Bertrand Russell and Symbolic Logic", where—according to the abstract—she complains about Russell's results being frequently shown in need of correction and the way in which symbolic logic is shaped by him and Peano as diverging from the way Peirce and his followers see it (see Ladd-Franklin's abstract in COLE, "The Twenty-Fifth Summer Meeting of the American Mathematical Society" [1918]). There seem to be, however, aspects of Russell's writings that she did appreciate, as evidenced e.g. in the letters themselves.

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I am myself the Sole (so far as I can make out) Solipsist, but I am also a Hypothetical Realist. Don't you see at once that this is the only logical position? (Let. 1)

It is, most likely, what is echoed in Smullyan's version where "the lady" expects us all to be solipsists, not seeing the contradiction; and this, ultimately, seems to be the source of Russell's talk about surprise. Moreover, the stronger the notion of solipsism, the better the joke works: the extreme being when solipsism is taken to assume that there is no existence apart from one's own. How, then, one can be surprised that others are not solipsists, since to be surprised in that assumes that such others do exist, which is rejected by one adhering to such strong version of solipsism? Note that she talks about being a solipsist and a hypothetical realist in one breath. Thus deciphering what she means by the latter term might shed light on how to understand the former. At the core of what she understands as hypothetical realism lies the conviction that we should be cautious about what we claim exists:

... that there is such a thing as a Physical object is a *hypothesis* ... it involves an extrapolation of the belief that experience must have causes beyond its legitimate field. (Let. 1)

When hypothetical realism is revealed to be a tentative belief (in the sense of it not being a necessary logical conclusion from the available data) in the existence of external reality, one sees that her notion of solipsism is not the strongest possible. Moreover, Russell's description of her as someone "believing that no one else existed" is inaccurate. Finally, the way she talks about it—her being the *sole* solipsist (as far as she can make out!) indicates that she clearly realized the problems lurking in accepting solipsism as a label to describe one's beliefs and she is making puns about it: after all, solipsism comes from the Latin *solus* (alone) and *ipse* (self)! This interpretation is further confirmed by the following passage:

Of course the solipsist must say merely "so much is true" and must wholly refrain from saying "no more is true" if he wishes to keep in his high path of logic.... (Let. 1)

We see, therefore, that in her version of solipsism, one only says what

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one certainly knows and refrains from stating anything else (*definitely* not denying that there are other truths, which, however, cannot be shown from our limited point of view). The premiss of the joke is not valid: she sees the pitfalls of solipsism but is careful to avoid them.

In fact, Russell himself is on record yielding to the logical strength of the above (in the book that Ladd-Franklin praised):

In one sense it must be admitted that we can never *prove* the existence of things other than ourselves and our experiences. No logical absurdity results from the hypothesis that the world consists of myself and my thoughts and feelings and sensations, and that everything else is mere fancy.... There is no logical impossibility in the supposition that the whole of life is a dream, in which we ourselves create all the objects that come before us. (PP<sub>2</sub>, p. 22)

It seems reasonable to assume that it is the above passage that Ladd-Franklin had in mind when complimenting the contents of *The Problems of Philosophy*. However, Russell is quick to add that

... although this is not logically impossible, there is no reason whatever to suppose that it is true; and it is, in fact, a less simple hypothesis, viewed as a means of accounting for the facts of our own life, than the common-sense hypothesis that there really are objects independent of us, whose action on us causes our sensations. (PP<sub>2</sub>, pp. 22–3)

Thus, according to Russell in the above passage, a version of the principle of parsimony allows one to argue convincingly for the independent existence of the external reality.<sup>5</sup> We do not know the full extent of the correspondence between the two but what we do know makes Russell's further remarks on the topic the more puzzling. The Russell Archives contain one more letter from Ladd-Franklin (**Let. 6**, dated 23 April 1915) that has a bearing on the topic at hand. Before we begin analysing its contents (and it is a very short letter), we should have a look at what was attached to it: namely a copy of Russell's letter to her from 1912. A full version of this letter (Ladd-Franklin attaches a

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<sup>5</sup> Let us point out that while Ladd-Franklin combines solipsism and hypothetical realism as she understood it, Russell (in *Problems*) seemingly views solipsism and the common-sense hypothesis that there are physical objects as contrary positions. We thank one of the reviewers for this suggestion.

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fragment) has recently resurfaced in the Archives. Russell says there:

As regards Solipsism, I am inclined to think *I really agree with all you say....* At any rate ... my grounds for believing in the solipsistic world are very much stronger than any grounds I can have for believing in any world beyond.... I admit that I stated the case for matter perhaps rather too strongly in my little book. (Let. 2; my emphasis)

Thus, he seems to be siding with Ladd-Franklin on what she says after all!<sup>6</sup> Or, at the very least, he is nowhere close being as critical about what she says as he seems to be in his later recollections of this exchange. Ever the optimist in that regard, Russell also seeks ways of securing the belief in the existence of the external world:

... I do not think the antithesis between what we “know” and what we “do not know” is a sharp one: like everything else, it seems to me a matter of degree. I am loathe to admit that we have not some inductive probability in favour of the external world.<sup>7</sup> (Let. 2)

And finally adds:

It seems to me that I might also call myself a “hypothetical realist” but then the hypothesis would not be a mere hypothesis but one which would have some degree of probability. *However, I am full of doubt about all this.* (Let. 2; my emphasis)

One wonders what Russell meant by this last remark. Was he doubting his own outlined solution? Was it a comment about what Ladd-Franklin had to say about it? Or perhaps about the field in general? Whatever the case might be, the Russell that emerges here is one who is unsure, who cedes the point where it matters, and who cautiously puts forth an argument supporting the *hypothesis* that the external world does exist.<sup>8</sup> There is no trace here of the surprise at Ladd-

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<sup>6</sup> Obviously, it does not mean that he is a solipsist (in his sense). We thank one of the reviewers for this suggestion.

<sup>7</sup> Russell will come back to this point in his later publications (see the remarks near the end of this article).

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, one finds traces of Russell's exchange with Ladd-Franklin in his *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript of May–June 1913. The following passage appeared as part of the first chapter's publication in *The Monist* in January 1914:

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Franklin's views that features so prominently in his later recollections about the exchange: Russell is found to be siding with whatever she *did* say about solipsism.<sup>9</sup> Why would she attach his own letter to hers? After complimenting Russell's writings on the war, she says:

I am sending you a copy of your letter of two years ago. In referring to it, I had wished not to use it so much as an indication of your present views, but rather as showing to what extent your views have changed in your latest book. I regard the letter of yours as exhibiting a sort of middle stage.... (Let. 6)

So it seems that she was perhaps disappointed in Russell's change of opinion in that respect. The new book that she mentions is, of course, *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914) and its publication, one supposes, was something that spurred her to write to him pointing out her disapproval. To be fair, Russell still talks there about the existence of the external world in hypothetical terms. However, the phrasing he uses indicate even a stronger commitment to what Ladd-Franklin would have considered a mere hypothesis:

The hypothesis that other people have minds ... systematizes a vast body of facts and never leads to any consequences which there is reason to think false. There is therefore nothing to be said against its truth, and good reason to use it as a working hypothesis. When once it is admitted, it enables us to extend our knowledge of the sensible world by testimony, and thus leads to the system of private worlds which we assumed in our hypothetical construction. In actual fact, ... we cannot help believing in the minds of other people, so that the question whether our belief is justified has a merely speculative interest.... Our hypothetical construction

"... we may be urged to a modest agnosticism with regard to everything that lies outside our momentary consciousness. [Adding that] ... the principles of solipsism ... would seem, if rigorously applied, to reduce the knowledge of each moment within the narrow area of that moment's experience." (*Papers* 7: 10-11)

Does it not sound like a fairer description of what Ladd-Franklin claimed? Importantly, Russell attacks this position not by pointing out logical inconsistency of a purported solipsist of the sort he talked about later, but by pointing out two ways of refuting solipsism: empirical and logical, hinting at an argument by induction and heavily relying on examples from the realm of mathematics.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, as indicated above, Russell would not have used the term in the way Ladd-Franklin did.

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... shows that the account of the world given by common sense and physical science can be interpreted in a way which is *logically unobjectionable*, and finds a place for all the data, both hard and soft.

(*OKEW*, pp. 96–7;<sup>10</sup> my emphasis)

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Russell Archives also contain a number of papers by her, some of which she talks about in her letters.<sup>11</sup> One notes that the above-described ideas permeate most of her writings with hypothetical realism as well as the problems related to the notion of existence discussed in her articles. Let us focus on a piece by her where such issues take centre stage. In December 1913 Ladd-Franklin presented a paper at the annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association entitled “The Non-Existence of Existence”,<sup>12</sup> where she argued that the notion of existence is when treated abstractly has no meaning and should always be appended with the information regarding the domain of existence. The task of philosophy would be to describe such domains. Ladd-Franklin proposed a more formal framework reminiscent of how one would design a logical structure. She believed, however, that such domains are too

<sup>10</sup> The passage is unchanged in the revised editions of 1926 and 1929.

<sup>11</sup> An effort was made to identify the publications she had in mind, when writing to Russell. This is indicated throughout the article by means of a relevant comment. I want to thank the Editor for his help in the identification and analysis of the sources.

<sup>12</sup> In her second letter to Russell, as quoted here, Ladd-Franklin mentions a paper with the same title: “I have just given in Columbia my paper ..., in which I defend my doctrine of Hypothetical Realism (which I show to be the same thing as what I have called Pure Idealism).” The Archives also contain three other letters from Ladd-Franklin, two of which will not be the focus of this article: those of 29 August 1913 and 26 May 1914. In February 1915 (**Let. 4**) she requests permission to quote from **Letter 2**. In the 1913 letter she welcomes him to Harvard for 1914, and in the second she mentions her hypothetical realism (“It is still the only true doctrine, I assure you!”) and seems eager to discuss the issue further. She also mentions enclosing the abstract of “The Non-Existence of Existence” with the first letter; the abstract is preserved with the letter. Russell did not indicate that he replied to either letter of 1913–14. In that of 1914, written from the University of Chicago, she hoped to meet Russell for a discussion. He was due to lecture there the next day. They may have met first as early as 1896, when Russell lectured on geometry at Johns Hopkins and Ladd-Franklin and her husband, Fabian Franklin, attended the lectures (her letter of 20 July 1915). In “Symbolic Logic and Bertrand Russell” (1917), she alluded to his views at that time: “How many of his views has he not given up since the *Foundations of Geometry*!”

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fundamental to be defined<sup>13</sup> and proposed to consider them as primitives.<sup>14</sup> She also said that the term “reality” has the same problems associated with it as the term “existence”. She also puts forward that everything is real in its specified domain. It’s hard to determine from the short abstract at hand, what she precisely means here. Claiming that the real objects have a non-mental presence relies on inference that is not based on sufficient grounds. All one can claim is to be a *hypothetical realist*.<sup>15</sup> She mentions the paper to Russell in her second letter and attached an offprint of the paper abstract, which is available in the Russell Archives (the full paper is not included). It is worth pointing out that her last paper (written in French and published posthumously in 1931), entitled “La Non-Existence de l’existence: l’idéaliste pur et le réaliste hypothétique” deals with much the same issues that have been described so far and connect them with other features of Ladd-Franklin’s approach to philosophy and logic.<sup>16</sup> It is evident, therefore, that Ladd-Franklin remained a believer in her version of solipsism until the end.

#### CONCLUSIONS

We saw that not only Smullyan’s representation of Russell’s words was inaccurate: Russell’s own 1927 and 1948 descriptions of the situation were distortions. The issue at hand might be dismissed by some as facetious or trivial, for after all Smullyan’s book is designed to amuse and draw the casual reader into the eerie world of philosophy and logic and is not a scholarly work. The issue has a more serious undertone, however. As a female scientist in the nineteenth century,

<sup>13</sup> It is unclear what she means by that.

<sup>14</sup> “Explicit indefinables” is the term she uses here. However, elsewhere Ladd-Franklin makes use of the term (explicit) primitives (see e.g. her “The Foundations of Philosophy: Explicit Primitives” [1911]: she seems to be referencing this paper in her first letter when she talks about “a brief paper [that is] a preliminary statement of some of [her] views”). The idea is that terms that are used in a given domain but cannot be defined precisely should be mentioned to be as such at the outset of any philosophical or scientific endeavour.

<sup>15</sup> See her abstract of “The Non-Existence of Existence” (1913).

<sup>16</sup> Ladd-Franklin also emphasizes there her epistemological views: and for that she uses the term “histrygy”. The term also appears in her first letter to Russell referring to her paper given at the Philosophical Congress in Heidelberg in 1908 entitled “Epistemology for the Logician”. See also her “Explicit Primitives Again: a Reply to Professor Fite” (1912).

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Ladd-Franklin suffered enough systemic injustice in her lifetime. It is doubly unfair, therefore, that she be misremembered for what she did or did not write and that she be the butt of many a philosophical joke.

As an off-shot of this analysis we also saw some indications in Russell's writings that his views shifted from being slightly more sympathetic to her position to expressing a stronger critique of solipsism as he saw it. *Human Knowledge* contains an entire chapter devoted to solipsism (pp. 191–7). It is a much later work, so perhaps it would be instructive to have a look at what Russell writes there for his final say on the matter. After making the matter precise enough to be the subject of meaningful analysis, he first divides solipsism into dogmatic (“there is nothing beyond data”) and sceptical (“there is not known to be anything beyond data”) varieties, only to immediately abandon the former as a viable alternative. He then subdivides the sceptical variety into two forms: more and less drastic. The former is more logical but implausible, and the latter more plausible but illogical. The difference lies in what sorts of inner experiences are accepted: the more drastic form requires that only the present moment sensations can be known, whereas the less drastic version allows for a more common-sensical approach. The former is very restrictive, the latter means that one has to accept some sort of a way of justifying going beyond the present moment (and it cannot be based on deduction but rather on induction, which brings back the sorts of problems that the solipsist tried to avoid in the first place).<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the more restrictive version seems to be the only consistent option, and Russell admits that this view cannot be disproved using deductive logic. Interestingly, he calls the assumption behind this type of solipsism “the empiricist hypothesis” (what we know without inference consists solely of what we have experienced together with the principles of deductive logic), perhaps echoing the terminology Ladd-Franklin herself used. He then says that solipsism is psychologically impossible to believe and goes on to describe his encounter with Ladd-Franklin in that regard, which we have already quoted.

We see that what Russell states in *Human Knowledge* might be consistent with what he wrote to Ladd-Franklin: solipsists should only say “so much is true” (i.e. not being dogmatic) and that the logical

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<sup>17</sup> This is reminiscent of what Russell wrote to Ladd-Franklin in responding to her first letter.

consistency of (the more restrictive form of) solipsism is undeniable. However, he also adds that, for him, the only plausible alternative is one going beyond solipsism by using some sort of means of justification for the inferred data.

The description of solipsism presented in *Human Knowledge* is by far the most extensive of all that Russell proposed on the matter in the books that were mentioned here. Note that a similar argument—although admittedly less developed—is to be found in *An Outline of Philosophy* (p. 302). Both books were written many years after the publication of *The Problems of Philosophy* and *Our Knowledge of the External World* (which appeared around the time of Ladd-Franklin’s letters) and both contain a reference to Ladd-Franklin’s views: this suggests a hypothesis that his encounters with the “eminent logician” led him to refine, adapt and expand on his approach to solipsism as evidenced by his later publications. Moreover, Russell’s defence of the external reality seems to have shifted ever so slightly, emphasizing different aspects in different publications: a version of the principle of parsimony plays an important role in *The Problems of Philosophy*, whereas the analysed fragments of *Our Knowledge of the External World* present an argument from common sense. Finally, in *Human Knowledge*, we see that the use of inductive/probabilistic reasoning takes centre stage (possibly echoing what he wrote to Ladd-Franklin some years prior). This finds some support in the letters Russell sent to her. In his reply from 16 November 1912, after praising her for what she wrote in some of her papers, he adds:

... on the whole subject of the external world I feel very uncertain as to what is the truth and what can be known; in fact, I find that it is a problem I want to think out as thoroughly as I can. Meanwhile, I do not know what I shall believe when I have thought more about it. (Let. 3)

In the letter from 5 March 1915, we read

In the last 2½ years I have thought a good deal about the questions involved, and it may be that what I said then would no longer represent my views. (Let. 5)

To this, in his last letter, Russell adds:

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My views on solipsism are full of doubt—in fact I have no views just now.  
(**Let. 7**)

A question suggests itself at this point: how should Ladd-Franklin's views be classified, given the distinctions described by Russell? She is a sceptical solipsist, that much is clear. Whether she is of the more or less restrictive kind, is not certain, and what she wrote does not show a preference one way or the other. She emphasized the logical inevitability of solipsism and a hypothetical character of our belief in the existence of reality (but by no means did she deny it!), whereas Russell, while agreeing with her on general points, focuses on problems related to accepting a solipsistic outlook and sees the belief in the external reality something for which it is important to find a justification. Ladd-Franklin's commitment to solipsism was viewed by Russell with caution. However, it might well be that by that moniker she meant a position that was much closer to Russell's own views (as he also admits in his reply to Ladd-Franklin) than the one he himself would have described as deserving of that name.<sup>18</sup>

#### APPENDIX

**Letter 1** *Ladd-Franklin to Russell, 21 August 1912*

Permanent address: 527 Cathedral Parkway,  
New York City;  
or: Columbia University,  
Breezy Hill, Lisbon, N.H.,  
August 21, 1912.

My dear Mr. Russell,

I am very much pleased with your little book on *Problems of Philosophy*, which I have just read. I am delighted that you frankly insist upon the throwing overboard of all philosophy save epistemology,—

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<sup>18</sup> *Acknowledgements:* I am indebted to Gregory Landini for pointing to the quotations in Russell's writings. The editor, as always, has been very helpful in terms of the archival queries related to this project. I wish to thank Bernard Linsky for his constant support of my endeavours into the world of Russelliana. Finally, the article has been thoroughly reshaped as a result of suggestions by the reviewers. The research on this article was partially supported by the Polish National Science Centre Grant No. 2017/26/HS1/00200.

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and I am also delighted that you keep constantly in the fore-ground that closely contiguous universe to the “real” one—the world of dreams! I am sending you, under another cover, an extract of the paper on “Histurgy” which I gave before the Heidelberg Congress.<sup>19</sup> In that I make much of the analogous case of the dream-world—and of the incomprehensible neglect of it by philosophers—(but in the part of the paper which I had to condense out from the abstract).

In spite of my pleasure in your charming piece of argument, (would that you had written your *Principles of Mathematics* with so much clearness!) I am however, of course, far from agreeing with your view as a whole. In particular, I venture to think that you are wrong in saying that there are *two* HYPOTHESES possible—that of a dream-like universe of experience and that of the Physical object. Solipsism is simply a description of the incontrovertible facts of experience. That there is anything hypothetical in it I deny. Of course, the solipsist must say merely “so much is true” and must wholly refrain from saying “no more is true,” if he wishes to keep in his high path of logic. It is true that he often fails in this abstemiousness—that he mixes up the “sufficient” and the “indispensible” (see my forth-coming article in the (American) *Philosophical Review*). But on the other hand, that there is such a thing as a Physical object is a *hypothesis* (tho a good one)—it involves an extrapolation of the belief that experiences must have causes beyond its legitimate field. I am myself the Sole (so far as I can make out) Solipsist, but I am also a Hypothetical Realist. Don’t you see at once that this is the only logical position?

I should like extremely to know what you think of this reprint which I am sending you (I have not had the full article printed yet).<sup>20</sup> I little thought, at the time I read it, that such a splendid new movement in the direction which I indicate as is that of the group of “European professors” would so soon be under way.

I enclose also a reprint of a brief paper<sup>21</sup> which I hurried to get into type *before* the meeting of the Phil. Ass’n. of last December (and after the appearance of the “Program”)—a preliminary statement of some

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<sup>19</sup> “Epistemology for the Logician” (1908). Also in the Russell Archives is card of greetings to Russell from the Heidelberg International Philosophy Congress. Ladd-Franklin signed it with seven others (RAI 710.050941).

<sup>20</sup> “The Foundations of Philosophy: Explicit Primitives” (1911). It was at this time that she probably also sent him her “On Some Characteristics of Symbolic Logic” (1889).

<sup>21</sup> “Explicit Primitives Again” (1912).

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of my views (and an attack upon theirs).

I am: very seriously yours,

Christine Ladd-Franklin.

**Letter 2** *Russell to Ladd-Franklin, 27 September 1912*

Trinity College Cambridge

27 Sep. 1912.

Dear Mrs Ladd-Franklin

Many thanks for your letter of August 21, which I am ashamed of having left so long unanswered. I have not yet received the paper you promised to send me, but I am sure it will interest me greatly.<sup>22</sup>

As regards Solipsism, I am inclined to think I really agree with all you say. The Solipsist who merely says “so much is true” and abstains from saying “no more is true” has my sympathy. At any rate, I am quite certain that my grounds for believing in the solipsistic world are very much stronger than any grounds I can have for believing in any world beyond. But I think when people speak of Solipsism they usually mean that there can be *no* probability of a world beyond, i.e. that no even probable inference to such a world is possible. As to this, tho’ I feel doubtful, I am not yet convinced. I admit that I stated the case for matter perhaps rather too strongly in my little book;<sup>23</sup> in a paper (not yet published) on Matter<sup>24</sup> which I read to a Society in May I put the case a good deal less strongly. But I do not think the antithesis between what we “know” and what we “do not know” is a sharp one: like everything else, it seems to me a matter of degree. I am loathe to admit that we have not *some* inductive probability in favour of the external world. It seems to me that our certain and probable knowledge ought to be arranged in gradations of diminishing certainty—by this I do not mean indubitable knowledge as to probability, such as one has in the mathematical theory of probability, I mean something from which certainly is wholly absent. It seems to me that I might also call myself a “hypothetical realist”, but then the hypothesis would not be

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<sup>22</sup> See **Letter 3**.

<sup>23</sup> *The Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. 2.

<sup>24</sup> RUSSELL, “On Matter” (1912), 10 in *Papers* 6. Russell was about to repeat the paper to the Moral Sciences Club at Cambridge, having revised it a good deal after giving it to the Philosophical Society of Cardiff University.

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a *mere* hypothesis, but one which would have some degree of probability. However, I am full of doubts about all this.

I have as yet only had time to glance through the book of the “Six Realists”,<sup>25</sup> but it looks very interesting, and I am very glad of the activity and vigour they display.

Yours very sincerely  
Bertrand Russell.

**Letter 3** *Russell to Ladd-Franklin, 16 November 1912*

Trin. Coll.  
16 Nov. '12

Dear Mrs Ladd Franklin

Thank you for your letter<sup>26</sup> and the papers—they reached me safely this time<sup>27</sup> and I read them with great interest. Oddly enough, the reason they did not reach me before was that they were registered: they were forwarded to my flat in London,<sup>28</sup> which was shut up, and the P.O. wouldn't leave them without getting the receipt signed. Your letter was left, and reached me when the charwoman found it.

I think “explicit primitives” is an excellent phrase; as for reserving “postulate” for particulars, I dare say it is right but I should have to think it over. As far as I can see, I do not appreciably disagree with your position; but on the whole subject of the external world I feel very uncertain as to what is the truth and what can be known; in fact, I find that it is a problem I want to think out as thoroughly as I can. Meanwhile, I do not know what I shall believe when I have thought more about it. Certainly I cannot agree with the confident dogmatism of the “Six realists”—when I wrote about them in the *Journal of Phil. Psych. etc.*<sup>29</sup> I tried to limit my agreement to logic and method mainly. I am sorry there are so many things you dislike in *Principles of Maths.*; I wonder if *Principia Matha.* pleases you at all better. If I might venture a suggestion, I should say that \*14 and \*20 are the most important

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<sup>25</sup> Russell reviewed the Six Realists' manifesto (13 in *Papers* 6), but not their book, *The New Realism* (1912). In the margins he reacted strongly to some passages.

<sup>26</sup> Dated 15 October 1912 (RA1 710.051904).

<sup>27</sup> The papers had been returned to Ladd-Franklin.

<sup>28</sup> 34 Russell Chambers, London W.C.1.

<sup>29</sup> “The Basis of Realism” (1911); 13 in *Papers* 6.

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chapters—they, I believe, register a real advance in logic.<sup>30</sup> (They are explained in Chap. III of the Introduction.) I shall be very much interested to see what you say about *Principles of Maths*.<sup>31</sup>

In reading the pages you sent me, I felt in very great agreement with what seemed to be your aim—to try to get secure foundations in philosophy before raising an elaborate superstructure, not to be content with dogmatic assertions which do not command general assent, but rather to see what can be based upon premisses not open to denial. Philosophy has not hitherto been sufficiently modest, or sufficiently conscious that where there is persistent disagreement neither side has a right to feel confidence.

Yours very sincerely  
Bertrand Russell.

**Letter 4** *Ladd-Franklin to Russell, [February 1915]*

(letterhead)

527 CATHEDRAL PARKWAY

Dear Mr. Russell,

I have a letter from you of the date 27 Sept. 1912 from which I wish to make a quotation in an article I am bringing out soon.<sup>32</sup> Have I your permission to do so? I would send you the letter with it not for the danger of losing it in these troublous times. It was in reply to my letter to you on my doctrine of “hypothetical realism”.

What a terrible war! We cannot think of anything else, of course.

Very sincerely yours,  
Christine Ladd Franklin.

**Letter 5** *Russell to Ladd-Franklin, 5 March 1915*

Trin. Coll. Cambridge.  
5 March 1915

Dear Mrs Franklin

Would you be so kind as to send me a copy of what you wish to

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<sup>30</sup> *PM* \*14 concerns Descriptions, \*20 the General Theory of Classes.

<sup>31</sup> She wrote in her current letter: “You know there are very many things that I strongly object to in your *Principles of Mathematics* (great as that book is),—some of them I set forth (as vigorously as I can!) in an article which will appear in the next number of the *Philosophical Review*....” The article was “Implication and Existence in Logic” (1912), which describes the *Principles* as lacking in “saneness and sobriety”.

<sup>32</sup> Not found, although she wrote several articles on Russell. See Works Cited.

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quote from my letter? In the last 2½ years I have thought a good deal about the questions involved, and it may be that what I said then would no longer represent my views. I do not in fact remember what I said.<sup>33</sup>

Yes, the war robs one of all power of putting one's thoughts onto anything else. It is more dreadful that anything one had ever expected to experience.

Yours very sincerely  
Bertrand Russell

**Letter 6** *Ladd-Franklin to Russell, 23 April 1915*<sup>34</sup>

(letterhead)

527 CATHEDRAL PARKWAY

April 23d 1915

Dear Mr. Russell,

What splendid things you have been writing on the war!<sup>35</sup>

I am sending you a copy of your letter of two years ago.<sup>36</sup> In referring to it, I had wished not to use it so much as an indication of your present views, but rather as showing to what extent your views have changed in your latest book. I regard this letter of yours as exhibiting a sort of a middle stage between your *Problems of Philosophy* and your *Scientific Method*.<sup>37</sup>

I have just given at Columbia my paper on "The Non-Existence of Existence", in which I defend my doctrine of Hypothetical Realism (which I show to be the same thing as what I have called Pure Idealism). I shall send you a reprint as soon as this comes out.

Very sincerely yours.  
Christine Ladd-Franklin.

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<sup>33</sup> See **Letter 2**.

<sup>34</sup> Russell designated the letter as "Shop", meaning that it was related to his academic work and was a candidate for a possible published collection of such letters.

<sup>35</sup> In America by this time, Russell had published "The Ethics of War" (1915) and "Is a Permanent Peace Possible?" (1915). In her final letter, dated 20 July 1915, Ladd-Franklin praised another of Russell's anti-war articles, probably "The Future of Anglo-German Rivalry" (1915).

<sup>36</sup> She enclosed a typed extract comprising the long middle paragraph of **Letter 2**. Russell also designated it "Shop" and, following Ladd-Franklin, wrongly dated it "1913". He headed the page "[Extract from B.R.'s letter.]"

<sup>37</sup> The binding title of *Our Knowledge of the External World* as it was sold in the United States.

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Letter 7 Russell to Ladd-Franklin, [May 1915<sup>38</sup>]

Trinity College Cambridge

Dear Mrs Franklin

Thank you for your kindness about my remarks on the war. I am utterly ashamed of their feebleness and futility. One ought to be able to speak words that would be more powerful than battleships and have more effect than masses of great guns.

I don't see anything, in the copy of my letter that you sent me, that I should mind having published. My views on solipsism are full of doubt—in fact I have no views just now. I do not think so meanly of myself as to suppose that I created the Kaiser.

Very sincerely yours  
Bertrand Russell.

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<sup>38</sup> This undated letter is marked "1915" in the upper-right corner by Ladd-Franklin.

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