

LETTERS OF BERTRAND RUSSELL AND WINCENY LUTOSŁAWSKI ON IMMORTALITY, MATTER AND PLATO¹

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Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954) was internationally recognized in the academic world as a prominent Plato scholar. His fragmentary correspondence with Bertrand Russell is presented in this paper. Before World War II he initiated an exchange of letters with Russell on issues such as reincarnation, but the replies he received were laconic and discouraging. This changed, however, after the war when Russell published his *History of Western Philosophy*. Despite their different philosophical positions, Lutosławski's opinion on this work as a whole was favourable, in particular the chapters on Plato. Such an assessment was the exception rather than the rule for that book, and knowing Lutosławski's general recognition in Platonic studies, Russell forwarded the letter to his publisher.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to supplement the list of Russell's Polish correspondents with Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954), and to introduce *Russell* readers to his life and his most substantial ideas and influential works, though in the first half of the

¹ Some of the content of this paper appeared in a paper in Polish (“Bertranda Russella spotkanie z Wincentym Lutosławskim” [2008]). The author addressed the matter of Russell's Polish correspondents in another paper (“Bertranda Russella spotkania z filozofią polską (L. Chwistek, W. Lutosławski, S. Themerson)” [2011]). He wishes to thank the editor for his encouragement. Words of gratitude should also go to the employees of the Archive of Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (PAU) in Kraków (Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU), where they recently discovered a more extensive draft of Lutosławski's 1948 letter to Russell and helped the author of this paper to acquaint himself with this document. The language editing of this text was done by Una Maclean-Hańćkowiak.

twentieth century Lutosławski was internationally recognized in the academic world as a prominent Plato scholar, and in his homeland as a propagator of Polish national messianism. Lutosławski's studies on Plato and their reception, as well as his own philosophical system, must be presented, for these explain some aspects of his correspondence with Russell.

Born in 1863 into a fairly wealthy aristocratic family whose ancestral residence was the village of Drozdowo near Łomża, Poland, then under Russian rule, Wincenty, a firstborn son, was able to complete his education at recognized Russian institutions. First, he attended what is now Riga Technical University in Latvia, for his father expected him to study natural sciences, especially chemistry, so that he could take over and develop one of the family businesses, a brewery of established reputation. He then moved to the Imperial Russian University in Dorpat (Tartu), now in Estonia, and graduated in chemistry (one of his teachers was W. Ostwald). Soon, however, his interests in philosophy prevailed and he also obtained a degree in philosophy under the supervision of G. Teichmüller. It should be remarked that in both these institutions, based in imperial Russia, his education was conducted in German. The subject of his thesis was a comparison of theories of political revolution in Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli, and was quite favourably reviewed by Teichmüller himself, and by F. Susemihl and É. Durkheim.

Having completed this dissertation, Lutosławski decided to focus solely on Plato. Meanwhile he married a Spanish poet and writer, Sofía Casanova, and they both travelled between Spain, Moscow and Kazan, where he had a position as a lecturer, and London, where he was engaged in researching the literature on Plato, resulting ultimately in a lengthy volume titled *The Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic with an Account of Plato's Style and of the Chronology of His Writings* (1897),² which—to his disappointment—did not secure him a permanent position at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, though it had been promised to him by the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy. This book,

² A concise English report on Lutosławski's studies on Plato can be found in: PAWŁOWSKI, "Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954); a Forgotten Father of Stylometry" (2004); MRÓZ, "Wincenty Lutosławski Platonic Studies: Plato as an Inspiration for Polish Messianism" (2014), or in French in: PAWŁOWSKI AND PACEWICZ, "Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954); Philosophe, helléniste ou fondateur sous-estimé de la stylométrie" (2004). There are also numerous Polish works on this subject.

together with his preceding papers on this topic in German, Polish, French and English, brought him to the attention of Plato scholars worldwide. However, leading Plato scholars, classicists and philosophers showed no signs of haste in analysing his works, and his critical attitude towards reputed German researchers only incited them to produce polemical papers, reviews or notes. His works on Plato were received quite positively, though not uncritically, in reviews and studies by, for example, L. Campbell,³ H. Vaihinger, T. Gomperz, C. Ritter, H. Ræder, G. Santayana, while the most critical responses came from P. Shorey (who was generally sceptical of Continental research on Plato) and E. Zeller, among others. It should be noted that the founder of the Lvov–Warsaw school of philosophy, K. Twardowski, included a special lecture on the polemic between Zeller and Lutosławski in his university course on Greek philosophy. Almost all of the above authors focused on the first part of his book, which dealt with his method of stylometry, a complex language statistics method, and with the chronological order of the dialogues resulting from this method. The author himself considered this to be merely a preparatory study, an introduction to his research into Plato’s philosophical evolution. Despite the mixed response to his work, Lutosławski’s reputation as a Plato scholar was established, and although not all of his conclusions were accepted, they still proved to be beneficial, for they inspired a number of scholars to reflect on this method of researching the chronology of Plato’s dialogues.

After establishing his international reputation as a Plato scholar, Lutosławski abandoned Plato to develop his own philosophical system, the metaphysical foundations of which stemmed from his own interpretation of the mature views of Plato. In brief, according to Lutosławski, Plato had been an idealist, as he was traditionally labelled, and a communist thinker in his *akme*, but in later years he changed his views, abandoned communism and evolved towards spiritualism, shifting the central point of his system from the ideas to eternal, reincarnating souls, which formed a hierarchy of spiritual perfection. This idea of individualism and spiritualism was combined by Lutosławski with the nineteenth-century Christian tradition of Polish philosophy, that is, the philosophy of national messianism. In most

³ Cf. MRÓZ, “Scottish-Polish Cooperation on Plato at the Turn of the Twentieth Century” (2018).

general terms, according to this philosophy, Poles, who had no independent political existence in the nineteenth century and experienced oppression from three neighbouring monarchies (Russia, Prussia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire), were credited with having the Christ-like mission of redeeming humanity by means of their suffering, and of uniting all the nations to bring humanity closer to the future kingdom of God. Lutosławski modernized this view, stressing its metaphysical foundations and their ancient, Platonic roots, with emphasis on the immortality of reincarnating souls.

In the interwar period Lutosławski took up a position at Vilnius University, now in Lithuania, but he preferred to devote his time and energy to disseminating his philosophy and related ideas. He delivered numerous open lectures on the metaphysics of marriage and on economics based on Christian ethics and individual contributions to national welfare, exhorting his audiences to adopt healthy lifestyles with dieting and abstinence and to work on their spiritual and intellectual development. When he retired in the thirties, he settled in Kraków, where he survived World War II and died in 1954. Until his last days he worked on developing his views into a uniform system.

He proved to be the first to bring to the attention of most Plato scholars the importance of language statistics as a means of establishing the chronology of the dialogues, which he himself had researched and developed on an unprecedented scale. The method itself subsequently came to be associated with Lutosławski's research.⁴ His conclusions on chronology, the main point of which was to demonstrate that the so-called dialectical and critical dialogues (*e.g.* the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Parmenides*) belonged to the late phase of Plato's philosophical development, significantly contributed to the rejection of the view of the youthful character of some of these dialogues, as well as demonstrating Plato's philosophical evolution. It is generally accepted that the dominant view of Plato's chronology stems from the works of three researchers: Lutosławski, Ræder and Ritter.⁵ There is no evidence that Russell read Lutosławski's book. It was sufficient for Russell to accept the most general outline of Plato's chronology. *Plato's Logic*, however, provided inspiration for both some significant contem-

⁴ BRANDWOOD, *The Chronology of Plato's Dialogues* (1990), pp. 130, 135.

⁵ THESLEFF, *Studies in Platonic Chronology* (1982), p. 4.

porary philosophers and those succeeding him. C.S. Peirce, for example, who admired Lutosławski's method, though not his philosophical biases, was encouraged to turn to Plato's original texts;⁶ while others, such as K. R. Popper, simply adopted Lutosławski's chronology of the dialogues and with only insignificant modifications used it for his own philosophical purposes.⁷ In the English-speaking philosophical world, Lutosławski's position and premisses still find advocates who, though aware of the deficiencies of stylometry, still either support the chronological conclusions of Campbell, Lutosławski and others against revolutionary and almost untenable chronological hypotheses,⁸ or, admitting the 'orthodox status' of some of his conclusions, attempt to refine and correct them.⁹

LUTOSŁAWSKI'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH RUSSELL

The amount of correspondence between Lutosławski and Russell that has been preserved up to the present is not impressive, yet in some respects it is significant.¹⁰ In the following presentation and discussion of the substance of this correspondence the focus is on the issues of how they started to exchange letters in the interwar period, what Lutosławski's expectations were, and how he was disillusioned by Russell. Finally, the last chord of their correspondence from 1948 will be discussed more extensively, since it supplements the reception of Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*.¹¹

Initiating correspondence with well-known figures such as Russell was quite a run-of-the-mill occurrence for Lutosławski, who continually sought philosophical contacts abroad. While a professor at Vilnius

⁶ O'HARA, "Peirce, Plato and Miracles" (2008), pp. 28–30. O'Hara supposes that James, who had received a copy of Lutosławski's book from the author himself, then handed it over to Peirce.

⁷ POPPER, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), pp. 183, 264.

⁸ PRIOR, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics* (1985), pp. 2–3, 179–85, 192–3.

⁹ SAYRE, *Plato's Late Ontology* (2005), pp. 256–67.

¹⁰ Lutosławski's abundant manuscript legacy is preserved in the Archives of Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Kraków, and it testifies to his correspondence with acquaintances worldwide, for among them were, e.g., Mahatma Gandhi, H. Bergson, W. James, J. Conrad, A. Huxley, A. Toynbee, G. K. Chesterton, E. S. Brightman, E. Mounier, C. de Foucauld, as well as many reviewers of his works, numerous people who attended and responded to his lectures, and somewhat surprising personalities such as H. Ford.

¹¹ Cf. WAHL, "The Reception of Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy*" (2019).

University, he had special postcards printed in English, and by the end of 1928 he had sent off several dozen to different destinations abroad. Russell must have been one of the addressees of this postcard, the text of which read as follows:

Whenever I like and esteem an author, a question occurs to me, which refers to a problem to which I have given forty years of my life. Have you ever in your life met persons fully convinced of having lived before? Are you not aware yourself that you must have existed before? I have myself this certainty, which I believe to have fully justified in my recent book, *Pre-existence and Reincarnation*, published by Allen and Unwin in 1928. In it I have made the attempt to prove by new and convincingly decisive arguments that old truth, so well known in India, Greece and Celtic Gaul, now very much acknowledged chiefly in Poland and France, but also by such writers as Walt Whitman, Tennyson, Longfellow, Browning, Kipling, Edwin Arnold, Carpenter, Rider Haggard, Fielding Hall, Clifford Bax, Algernon Blackwood, Arnold Bennett, Lafcadio Hearn, etc. namely that each of us has lived in human shape many times and that we reap now what we have sown ages ago. Did you ever come across another book on that subject? Do you know other authors betraying belief in reincarnation? I do not count so called Theosophists who blindly believe what they are told. What I seek are genuine spontaneous testimonies, independent of any literary suggestion. Do you know such? I am preparing a new edition of my book, in which I should like to include more references.¹²

The subject of the book *Pre-existence and Reincarnation* was the theory and history of these concepts which had originated in antiquity. To substantiate the theory of reincarnation Lutosławski compared spiritual evolution to the theory of natural evolution. Just as essential progress could not be achieved within one generation in biology, so progress in the spiritual and intellectual world required more than one incarnation. Every inborn talent brought into this world was the result of a great deal of effort in previous incarnations. The same applied to the development of moral perfection.

¹² A copy of this postcard in the author's collection.

BRIEF AND DISCOURAGING REPLIES FROM RUSSELL

The exchange of letters with Russell did not bring Lutosławski the enriching material that he might have expected:

Dear Dr. Lutosławski,

The question of pre-existence appears to me to be bound up with that of survival after death. I have occasionally discussed the latter question,¹³ and since I see no reason to suppose that we continue to exist after the death of the body, I equally see no reason to suppose that we existed before conception. I am inclined to agree with you that the orthodox position which accepts post- but not pre-existence is illogical.

Yours sincerely,
Bertrand Russell.¹⁴

Similar short and unhelpful answers to Lutosławski's request were sent, for example, by Santayana and Huxley. Russell's laconic reply did not, however, discourage Lutosławski from making an attempt to write to him again on this subject.

Lutosławski spent a significant amount of time in England during the interwar period, including a stay in London in the second half of 1927. During this trip he frequently visited Chesterton, who invited Lutosławski to his home in Beaconsfield. In 1928 Toynbee's family stayed at the Lutosławskis' home in Vilnius and then Lutosławski was their guest in England. In 1930 he attended the seventh International Congress of Philosophy in Oxford and did not fail to benefit from this opportunity to enjoy a prolonged stay in England. It is possible that it was during these trips that the Polish philosopher learnt more about Russell's social and political work and may have had the opportunity to meet him, for Russell recalled a meeting in his second letter to Lutosławski. Although his two letters are separated by almost a decade, his attitude had not changed much:

¹³ Russell had discussed immortality in his 1925 *What I Believe*, pp. 14–18, and again in an essay, "Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?" (1929), first published in the same month as his letter was written. Both are reprinted in *Why I Am Not a Christian*.

¹⁴ A typewritten letter from Beacon Hill School, Harting, Petersfield, 4 June 1929 (Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU, Kraków, K-III-155). Russell's letter, and especially its last sentence, appear to address more questions than those printed on Lutosławski's postcard, so the postcard may have been accompanied by a letter or note.

Dear Sir

Thank you for your letter and offprints. I remember our meeting; I was interested in your work, and glad to make your acquaintance. I do not know your *Knowledge of Reality*, but I have now read your article in *The Monist*. I am afraid our points of view are so far apart that we could hardly find any common ground for argument. As for survival after death,¹⁵ I am willing to concede it as a bare possibility, but I think it so improbable that, for practical purposes, I assume the negative.

Yours sincerely
Bertrand Russell.¹⁶

Russell, then, put an end to Lutosławski's delusions about the possibility of their agreement, or even of discussion. Lutosławski must have asked Russell about his knowledge of his English books. *Knowledge of Reality*, mentioned by Russell, though not read by him, presented a vision of the historical development of philosophical systems. It began with materialism, and progressed through idealism, pantheism, spiritualism, mysticism and messianism, thus allowing all philosophers to be classified into one of these views. One of Lutosławski's goals in this book was to make readers aware of the possible diversity of views and their sources, so that they would realize the importance of using discourse rather than violence to convince one other of their world views.¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that neither *Pre-existence and Reincarnation* nor *Knowledge of Reality* ever gained a reception comparable to that of his works on Plato.

Although Russell did not read *Knowledge and Reality*, he did read Lutosławski's article in *The Monist*, titled "A Theory of Matter" (1929), which must have been posted to him by the author. Actually, it consisted of a short selection of issues from several chapters of *Knowledge of Reality*.¹⁸ Russell completely distanced himself from Lutosławski's philosophical views in the article, for in it the Polish philosopher analysed the different ways of experiencing matter. He began

¹⁵ Two years before he wrote this letter Russell published "Do We Survive Death?" (in *WINC* and **41** in *Papers* 21).

¹⁶ A handwritten letter from Amberley House, Kidlington, Oxfordshire, 10 April 1938 (Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU, Kraków, K-III-155).

¹⁷ LUTOSŁAWSKI, *The Knowledge of Reality* (1930), pp. 189–190.

¹⁸ These chapters are "The Scientific Theory of Matter" and "The Matter of Art, Business, Training and Sexual Life, Ritual, National Life and Theory of Matter", *The Knowledge of Reality* (1930), pp. 16–97.

his arguments with scientific views on matter, discussing astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology, all of which resulted from passive observation of the material world. The higher stages, including art, sculpture, architecture, dance, painting, music, poetry, and dramaturgy, involved active human participation with matter. It can be reasonably doubted if Russell read this paper from beginning to end, because his views on matter articulated, for example, in *The Analysis of Matter*, show that his goal was to analyse the philosophical consequences of theories of modern physics, and this was quite distant from Lutosławski's aspirations.

So much for the scanty correspondence between the two philosophers in the interwar period. Lutosławski's earnest efforts to engage in some dialogue with Russell were dismissed, for Lutosławski's questions concerning immortality and pre-existence or the spiritual influence exerted on matter were simply beyond Russell's interests. This situation was about to change, however, when Russell produced his synthesis of the history of philosophy.

LUTOSŁAWSKI'S RECOGNITION OF RUSSELL'S ACCOUNT OF PLATO

Another decade was to pass before the final part of their correspondence appeared, after Russell had published his *History of Western Philosophy* in 1945. Lutosławski's letter to Russell has survived in two draft versions in the Polish philosopher's literary legacy in Kraków. This letter must have been a response to a previous letter from Russell, which, in turn, may have been provoked by Lutosławski's third attempt to initiate correspondence with Russell. These two letters have, unfortunately, not survived.

The preserved manuscripts of Lutosławski's drafts bear the stamp of his age, for in 1948 he was 85 and was suffering from eye disease, which was clearly evident from his handwriting. This is the letter *in extenso*:

Dear Lord Russell,

I thank you for your kind letter of 24. IV. You are quite right that we differ, especially in our attitude towards mysticism. But this matters less than to see how much we agree. Your *History* proves that we agree in our esteem of Plato. You give him 55 pp. while Aristotle gets 49, Locke 45 and all others much less. I have devoted to Plato 10 years of my life (1887–

1897) and I believe to know him. In your six chapters on him I did not discover a single error and I agree with everything you say. If ever you read my book on *Plato's Logic* (Longmans 1897) you will see how after 60 he gave up his communistic utopia and his theory of transcendent ideas, and came as near as possible to your logical analysis.

Another important chapter is that on my friend William James, who wrote a splendid *Preface* to my *World of Souls* which he had read 24 years before its publication.¹⁹ I agree with you in every point on what you say of him.

I have read some of your earlier works, with which I often disagreed but I am very sorry I do not know and cannot get more recent works like: *Sceptical Essays, Marriage and Morals, Conquest of Happiness, In Praise of Idleness, Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*. If you could afford to send me some of them I would be delighted to read them and to tell you in what we agree. Books sent as a gift by post reach us but we are forbidden to export money from Poland and we cannot order foreign books from booksellers. I owe the *History* to an English friend who guessed that it would interest me. I always am more interested in those of an opposite camp than in these who are of my own party.²⁰ This is my way of loving our apparent enemies.

Your *History* is really very good and may last longer than any of the books on your own thoughts. Your judgment on philosophy from Plato to James on p. 863²¹ is certainly a very true opinion. Truth is more important than edification. We can do very little to improve others but we can by constant endeavors increase our knowledge of world and then

¹⁹ *The World of Souls* was Lutosławski's first book published by Allen & Unwin (1924). In 1928 they published his *Pre-existence and Reincarnation*.

²⁰ In the earlier draft "opinion" appears instead of "party" and this sentence is supplemented with the following: "just as Plato wrote more about Protagoras than about Pythagoras".

²¹ Lutosławski refers here to Russell's words from the chapter "The Philosophy of Logical Analysis":

"Philosophers, from Plato to William James, have allowed their opinions as to the constitution of the universe to be influenced by the desire for edification: knowing, as they supposed, what beliefs would make men virtuous, they have invented arguments, often very sophistical, to prove that these beliefs are true. For my part I reprobate this kind of bias, both on moral and on intellectual grounds. Morally, a philosopher who uses his professional competence for anything except a disinterested search for truth is guilty of a kind of treachery. And when he assumes, in advance of inquiry, that certain beliefs, whether true or false, are such as to promote good behaviour, he is so limiting the scope of philosophical speculation as to make philosophy trivial; the true philosopher is prepared to examine *all* preconceptions."

(*HWP*₂, p. 863)

improve ourselves. In this again I agree with you. The aim of a thinker is truth and this kind of men who value truth above everything is very rare. I believe you belong to them and have besides the rare gift of writing clearly without superfluous words.

The lack of mystic experience increases your acuity in the intellectual activity and it is refreshing to read you after Ward, McTaggart, Samuel Alexander, Royce and others who cannot express concisely and clearly what they mean. "In the welter of conflicting fanatisms"²² the unifying force is not only correct reasoning, but also an immediate intuition of what exceeds average understanding. That is the only point on which we sometimes differ but not as you say with antipathy.

Yours Sincerely
W. Lutosławski.²³

This letter demonstrates that Lutosławski had carefully studied Russell's *History*, or at least those chapters of interest to him, for he clearly referred to specific passages of this book. His favourable words on Russell's literary style and intellectual acuity and the general laudatory and conciliatory tone of the letter are evident. Lutosławski seems to have been replying to some of Russell's more negative statements relating to the differences between them. Although Lutosławski confirmed these differences, his intention was to smooth over the negative emotions, preferring to stress what was more significant and could unite them both, that is, a respect for their devotion to truth.

Lutosławski claimed to have agreed with Russell's discussion of Plato, yet *The Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic* and the chapters on Plato in *History of the Western Philosophy* do not have much in common. In Russell's book Plato was just one philosopher among many others

²² Lutosławski quoted here the initial words from the final paragraph of *HWP*, where he believed he had found Russell's philosophical credo: "In the welter of conflicting fanaticisms, one of the few unifying forces is scientific truthfulness, by which I mean the habit of basing our beliefs upon observations and inferences as impersonal, and as much divested of local and temperamental bias, as is possible for human beings. To have insisted upon the introduction of this virtue into philosophy, and to have invented a powerful method by which it can be rendered fruitful, are the chief merits of the philosophical school of which I am a member" (*HWP*₂, p. 864).

²³ A handwritten letter from Kraków, 9 V 1948 (Archiwum Nauki PAN i PAU, Kraków, K-III-155). Dubious or unclear words were supplemented from the earlier draft. The earlier draft bears no date, is longer and has some deletions and corrections that were implemented in the later version. Some insignificant parts of non-deleted text from the earlier draft were transferred by the author (Mróz) to the final version.

in the entire history of philosophy. Lutosławski supported his own interpretation of Plato with meticulous analyses of original Greek passages from the dialogues while Russell simply used the classical translations of Benjamin Jowett, whose first editions date back to the 1870s. Both authors, then, set themselves different goals and this resulted in disparate methods in their discussions of Platonism.

Most likely, Russell did not know Lutosławski's *Plato's Logic*, for it was not necessary for his goals, and there is no need here to discuss in detail all the possible discrepancies in their respective views. The presentation of Plato in Russell's book is in fact a discussion of some of the most important dialogues, accompanied with authorial commentary that was sometimes biased and personal, and referred to contemporary problems. The chapter "Plato's Utopia" is essentially a discussion of the *Republic*, which is also the basis of the chapter "The Theory of Ideas", with the *Parmenides* as a supplement in which Plato articulated important, critical arguments that emphasize the internal difficulties of the theory of ideas. The chapter "Plato's Theory of Immortality" was based on the *Phaedo*, with references to the *Crito* and the *Meno*; "Plato's Cosmogony", on the *Timaeus*, considered by Russell to have no philosophical significance; and finally "Knowledge and Perception in Plato", on selected passages from the *Theaetetus*. Altogether only four dialogues were discussed extensively, with references to three more. This could not pretend to be an extensive historical presentation of Plato's works. More dialogues are mentioned by Russell in his chapters on Protagoras and on Socrates, but they are used there as sources, of not unquestionable reliability, to discuss these men's views and not Plato's.

Unlike Lutosławski, Russell, obviously, did not interpret Platonism as a philosophical evolution towards a spiritualist system, but rather saw Plato as a philosopher who posed many substantial problems for the development of philosophy. Yet his attempts to solve them in the dialogues resulted in a number of errors and pseudo-problems that have continued to be discussed by subsequent generations of philosophers.

In declaring that he had not found any errors in Russell's work, Lutosławski may have merely considered Russell's discussion of particular dialogues to be accurate. When Russell discussed the *Phaedo*, he was much more focused on Plato's theory of knowledge and on the fallacies of reasoning in his arguments for the immortality of the soul

than on reincarnation, which latter topic was essential for Lutosławski. It would have been pointless for Lutosławski to object to Russell's selective discussion of the content of single dialogues; such a discussion could not be regarded as an error.

The chapter "The Influence of Sparta", which is followed by a discussion on the *Republic*, provides evidence that Plato's political views, his project of utopia, were of great significance to Russell. He made his attitude to Plato clear: "I wish to understand him, but to treat him with as little reverence as if he were a contemporary English or American advocate of totalitarianism" (*HWP*₂, p. 125). Lutosławski, on the other hand, argued in favour of the thesis that Plato had departed from his utopian project in his later years; but for Russell this fact was insignificant as he aimed to assess social ideas in the *Republic* by more modern standards, and the following comparison is symptomatic of his method:

... in the main Plato is concerned only with the guardians, who are to be a class apart, like the Jesuits in old Paraguay, the ecclesiastics in the States of the Church until 1870, and the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R. at the present day. (*HWP*₂, pp. 129-30)

Lutosławski referred Russell to his book on Plato, in which he not only demonstrated how Plato had departed from his communist ideals, but also how close he had come to logical analysis. According to Lutosławski, in the late dialogues, for example in the *Sophist*, Russell could have encountered some considerations (the questions of defining concepts and of analysis and synthesis in the scientific method) that, in Lutosławski's eyes, had much in common with Russell's interests.

FATE OF LUTOŚLAWSKI'S LETTER TO RUSSELL

Lutosławski's words must have been valued by Russell, since on receipt of the letter, he immediately forwarded it to his publisher, Sir Stanley Unwin, of George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Dear Unwin

I enclose a letter from Lutosławski, who, poor man, is marooned in Krakow. I am sending it to you for two reasons. The lesser, that he says

he has found no errors in my account of Plato, which, from so eminent an authority, is high praise. The major reason, that he would like to have some books of mine, and I should be glad to give them to him (except *Marriage and Morals*). I do not know which are in print, but if any are, could you send them with the author's compliments?"

I am glad the *History* is again available.

I am just off to Sweden for 10 days.

Yours sincerely
Bertrand Russell.²⁴

Unwin replied:

Dear Russell,

Thank you for the sight of the enclosed letter from Lutosławski. His tribute to your account of Plato is indeed high praise. As you will see from the accompanying invoice, we have sent him, with your compliments, the three other books of yours which are at the moment available. They fortunately include *SCEPTICAL ESSAYS* for which he particularly asked. The amount of the invoice will, of course, be deducted from your royalties in the usual way.²⁵

Russell, then, whether he had ever read Lutosławski's book or not, regarded him as an eminent authority in Platonic scholarship, and realized that Lutosławski's surname would be easily recognized by a publisher who had published two of his books in previous decades. Russell must have been grateful to Lutosławski, since he decided to repay him with a selection of his books, and this should not come as a surprise as Russell's account of Plato did not always meet with positive reviews. Modestly, however, he suggested that this praise was only a minor reason for forwarding the letter to Allen & Unwin.

²⁴ A handwritten letter from 27 Dorset House, Gloucester Place, N.W.1, London, 19.5.48 (Russell Archives, McMaster University, RA3 70, box 6.42).

²⁵ Unwin continued: "I hope you have a pleasant time in Sweden. / There is no longer any shortage of *THE HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY*. We have now supplied all orders and have a thousand copies or so in hand. We are nevertheless reprinting it to avoid risk of running out of stock of it again. / Yours sincerely,". A typewritten letter from of 24 May 1948 (Russell Archives, RA3 70, box 6.45).

CONCLUSION

The above correspondence is fragmentary; we only have Russell's replies to Lutosławski's letters, but to some extent we can infer Lutosławski's questions. We do not know Russell's letter of 1948 to Lutosławski, which provoked the latter to articulate his opinions on Russell's *History*. We are, however, fortunate to know the subsequent history of this response. It cannot be ascertained whether Lutosławski received the books sent by Allen & Unwin.

Lutosławski's attitude should, however, be appreciated, for despite his age and failing health, despite the conditions in post-war Poland, he took the time to carefully write, improve and send a letter praising Russell's work. Moreover, Lutosławski seems to have been unaffected by Russell's previous dismissive replies to his philosophical questions, and he sought an agreement on the most fundamental values. As for Russell, he gained a favourable opinion on his presentation of Plato from a scholar who had earned his international reputation on the basis of his works on Plato. This opinion was the most significant outcome of the contacts between them, for their achievements were too disparate to allow any fruitful cooperation.

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BIBLE STUDIES: FRANK RUSSELL AND THE “BOOK OF BOOKS”

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Religion was as much a concern for Frank Russell throughout his life as it was for younger brother Bertrand and their father before them. Each advocated its rational study untainted by Christian dogma. The chance discovery of an amusing film review by Frank Russell of the biblical epic *The Dawn of the World* (1921) became the catalyst for an exploration of this theme in the paper that follows, as well as providing the opportunity to explore the foundations of Frank’s agnosticism and demonstrate his erudition and wit through the reprinting of his article “The Bible on the Film”.

One of the joys of research is the unexpected find; the article or letter you never anticipated that triggers a connection, sparks further study or is simply a delight in itself. Four years delving into Frank Russell’s life has provided me with many such moments, proving that, quite apart from his notorious reputation as the “Wicked Earl”, he had a diverse output that might suggest alternative epithets shaped either by his scientific interests or keen sense of social injustice. The *TLS* considered the “Conscientious Rebel” might be appropriate.¹ Little did I anticipate until very recently, however, another possibility that suggested itself in a 1921 letter to Bertie in China in which Frank thought to tell him he had written “an amusing article about a film the other day” for *The Nation*.² Russell the film critic? Surely not.

¹ *The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 1,102 (1 Mar. 1923): 134. A bibliography of Frank’s published writings and major speeches will appear in a future issue of *Russell*. My biography of Frank entitled *Bertrand’s Brother: the Marriages, Morals and Misdemeanours of Frank, 2nd Earl Russell* is due for publication by Amberley Publishing in spring 2021.

² Frank Russell to Bertrand Russell, 29 Apr. 1921, RA1 730.046942.

Yet there in the British Library newsroom, after a ten-minute tussle with the microfilm reader, was proof positive that for one day at least, Frank had tried a new vocation with an unsolicited article entitled “The Bible on the Film”.³ The article was such a surprise and so much fun (almost to the detriment of rules regarding silence in the newsroom when I first read it) that it was decided to reproduce it here for your reading pleasure. Frank’s sense of humour often comes through in his private letters, but only infrequently does one get public confirmation that aside from his better known “hair-shirt” qualities he was, when the mood took him, a genial man of wit and charm who enjoyed a good joke. Perhaps this is why he chose to tell Bertie of the article’s publication alongside other amusing goings-on in his absence.

The film concerned was the recently released “stupendous” silent movie *The Dawn of the World*, filmed in Italy over five years, with a cast of 12,000 and a hefty price tag of £1.5 million; reportedly, the most expensive film to date.⁴ Its director, Armando Vay, was ultimately responsible for a number of epic biblical productions said to be “built upon scholarly research of biblical sites and archaeological findings”.⁵ This one covered Adam and Eve to the death of Moses “in a spirit of reverence” and “from the purely historical point of view” and was hailed by the press as “one of the most remarkable [films] ever shown”.⁶ It premiered in London on Easter Monday, 28 March 1921, at the Palace Theatre, after its speedy transformation from music hall to cinema-with-a-difference over one weekend. Most films were then shown in each single venue for no more than six days. The Palace chose *The Dawn of the World* to introduce the idea of the movie “run”, predicting the film would fill seats for a month, if not two. Mrs. Patrick Campbell, the famous stage actress, was engaged for a fee of £200 to appear in person three times a day to read a specially scripted prologue, delivered with “a spiritual fervour in perfect keeping with the subject of the film” which, it was hoped, would draw “the class of

³ FRANK RUSSELL, “The Bible on The Film”, *The Nation & The Athenaeum* 29, no. 746 (16 Apr. 1921): 106.

⁴ “Never, in the history of the industry, has so much time and money been expended on a single production” (*The Bioscope* 48, no. 772 [28 July 1921]: 59).

⁵ TERRY LINDVALL, *Sanctuary Cinema* (2007), p. 149.

⁶ *Illustrated London News*, 2 Apr. 1921, pp. 8–9; *The Graphic*, 9 Apr. 1921, p. 427.

people who, as a rule, do not frequent cinemas" to see "something that really happened".⁷

Undoubtedly, Frank fell into this category, though the tone of his review does not suggest he came out thinking he had seen something that represented fact. Though he detested music hall, he was not *completely* averse to cinema—third wife Elizabeth's diary reveals he had taken her to "The 'Movies' as he says they're called"⁸ once, at least, in happier times—but as he readily admits, he did not have the "true movie spirit" which requires suspension of disbelief, just as he could not tolerate actors discordantly emoting all over the place. No doubt the draw, then, in this instance, had been to see what this brave new medium would make of something ancient for which he had a certain respect; his inner film critic awoken by the largely lamentable result.

Though both Russell brothers were agnostic, to speak of Frank's respect for the Bible is not, I think, exaggerating the fact. In *Lay Sermons* (1902) he advocated taking pleasure in it for its own sake, for its historical interest and "inexhaustible storehouse of beautiful English": "everyone who knows the Bible is aware that instance upon instance could be given of pathos, of dramatic effect, of simple narrative, or magnificent poetry, of stirring imagery such as is to be found in no other one book", he wrote.⁹ Such appreciation was fostered at Winchester College, which Frank attended from age fourteen to eighteen, where Divinity was a timetabled class and part of the Classical and English curriculum alongside Greek, Latin, History and Natural Sciences; scriptures being studied in English and Greek. There, also, he was exposed to the purposeful blending of spiritual instruction with social discipline. "Catechism them faithfully and painfully" was the order of a former headmaster still observed in Frank's time, to produce "a race of modest, earnest, noble-minded youths" with a Christian training that would fit them "for the faithful and high principled discharge of any duties to which they may be called in life".¹⁰ The overall effect, said Frank, was "too much" for him to resist and, despite the agnostic influence of his early years, so amply described in Stefan

⁷ *The Bioscope* 46, no. 775 (31 Mar. 1921): 12; *Daily Herald*, 20 Mar. 1921.

⁸ Elizabeth, Countess Russell, diary transcript, 27 Feb 1916, ER 102, Elizabeth Mary Russell, Countess Russell Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, ca.

⁹ FRANK RUSSELL, *Lay Sermons* (1902), pp. 194–5.

¹⁰ *Sermons of Rev. George Moberly* (1848), quoted in JAMES SABBEN-CLARE, *Winchester College after 606 Years, 1382–1988* (1981), p. 83.

Andersson's "Religion in the Russell family",¹¹ he was confirmed into the church "a firmer and more definite believer than any of those who had been brought up from their earliest youth in the tradition."¹² Winchester, I would suggest—"the only place he loved and the only place where he was loved"¹³—was the decisive factor here. Lady John Russell, Frank believed, had never subjected him to any "definite religious propaganda" prior to his going—certainly nothing that stuck—while Bertrand, left under her influence, at a comparable age had spent "almost all my spare time thinking about Christian dogmas to try and find out if there was any reason to believe them" and had by age eighteen "discarded the last of them".¹⁴

The "freer air of Oxford where everything was discussed and everything questioned" liberated Frank's thinking such that the Bible became not so much the book of books but a book among books. He named Paine's *Age of Reason* (1794–1807) and Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883) as influential in broadening his perspective. His friendship and correspondence with Lionel Johnson was also a factor: "two of young England's rising generation in search of a creed".¹⁵ While Johnson was still at Winchester and Frank at Oxford, the pair spent a fruitful couple of years extracting from Buddha's and Christ's teachings their own set of ethical principles to live by and discarding the "dicta and dogmata", as Johnson put it, that distorted their pure message.¹⁶ By the time Frank left Oxford, it was the "impertinent interference of limited Christians" they held responsible for his sending down. Christianity in action—practically demonstrated at Winchester through its association with the Portsmouth Mission and, for Frank, through his involvement with aunt Maude Stanley's clubs for working girls in London—was to be valued over "the Christian virtue that is

¹¹ ANDERSSON, "Religion in the Russell Family" (1993).

¹² FRANK RUSSELL, *My Life and Adventures* (1923), p. 334.

¹³ George Santayana, "Autobiography (Notebook IV): Russell, Lionel Johnson, Jepson, Burke" (n.d.), Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia U. Libraries.

¹⁴ *My Life and Adventures*, p. 334; Bertrand Russell interview by Elaine Grand for CBC's Close-Up (1959), available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=tP4FDLegX9s. See also "Greek Exercises" (1888–89), I in *Papers* 1.

¹⁵ Letter from Johnson to Frank Russell, 16 Oct. 1883, *Some Winchester Letters of Lionel Johnson* (1919), p. 28.

¹⁶ Letter from Johnson to Frank Russell, 15 May 1885, MS Add. 8548, Department of Manuscripts and U. Archives, Cambridge U. Library.

keen scented after vice" and eager to damn the sinful.¹⁷ It blended with the "sort of Buddhistical, Theosophical, neo-Platonic, Walt-Whitmaniac, Brotherhood of Man cult" at Oxford, and Frank preached it seventeen years later in the first half of *Lay Sermons*.¹⁸

Without a hint of irony, he sat down to write his sermons while detained at His Majesty's pleasure for breaking the ecclesiastical-based English marriage laws by taking a second wife while his first still lived, blaming the church once again for his inability to divorce her. He had known his Bible "fairly well" before going into prison, he said, but took the opportunity of his incarceration to reacquaint himself with it. The result (with a nod to Bunyan), provocatively addressed from "Holloway Gaol", describes the Bible as a tool—a stimulus for personal development that had the added advantage of familiarity, having "served as a quarry, the stones from which have been incorporated in our literature and daily language till many of them bear the impress of association with our lives."¹⁹ Yet the potential pitfall of familiarity—blind acceptance—was also acknowledged, and Frank encouraged his readers to study the Bible with "an open and appreciative mind", to separate that which was useful as a foundation for a moral code from dogma based on selective reading.²⁰ This theme he revisited in his 1922 article "The Difficulties of Bishops" (sometimes incorrectly attributed to Bertrand²¹) in which he condemned the picking and choosing of scriptures "to be forced down our throats" and the drip-feeding of "hidebound superstition" in schools and parishes which stood in the way of "reasonable measures of freedom and progress".²² In the second half of *Lay Sermons*, he criticized the series of copyists within whose sphere the scriptures came, who "moved by ignorance, by a desire to elucidate, or even by actually dishonest motives added to, expanded and altered the story before him" and the "subjective hallucinations" of those who claimed to witness miracles: "The mind that wants to bolster its faith with portents and miraculous happenings

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ "A Glimpse at Lord Russell's 'Past Life'", *Vanity Fair* 46 (12 Dec. 1891): 462–3.

¹⁹ FRANK RUSSELL, *Lay Sermons*, p. 193.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

²¹ The error is corrected in *B&R* 2: S22.01.

²² FRANK RUSSELL, "The Difficulties of Bishops", *The Rationalist Annual* (1922), p. 31. Frank was honorary associate of the Rationalist Press Association (RPA) from 1927 to his death in 1931 and Bertrand its president 1955–70.

is in a very low stage of development and must shake off this hankering before it can begin to learn to worship God in spirit and in truth.”²³ But in suggesting that the Bible might be of value and also something that can be questioned as to authenticity, he struggled to convey the fact that these two ideas are not mutually exclusive. It was common for believers to think agnostics were simply Christians in a crisis of faith. Bertrand was subjected to the same misunderstanding when he advocated Christian love despite determinedly repeating he was not a Christian,²⁴ and *Lay Sermons* was regarded in some quarters as inconsistent and in others as being the work of a “suppressed theist”²⁵! It seems to have been a common Russell fate to attempt to dispel this myth. Amberley’s assertion—that “unbelief has nothing in it godless” and “Christian virtues in their purest, their most perfect form may exist apart from the remotest tincture of Christian dogma”—could equally have been written by Bertrand or Frank.²⁶ It was, they felt, an important message not easily understood. It interested me to read that in the 1940s, on a stay with Julian Huxley in Hampstead, Bertrand and Huxley had spent an evening considering compiling a series of texts from the Old Testament to “illustrate the contradictions in its moral precepts”, that Huxley afterwards commented that in modern times it was only the Rationalists who really studied the Bible, and to hear that some twenty years later, in his 95th year, Bertrand was still considering a work on the Bible’s contradictions.²⁷

In the end, Frank could find no better words to express his views than those of his brother (he quoted from “A Free Man’s Worship” in *Mysticism and Logic* at length in the chapter on religion and conduct in his memoirs) unless it be through articles like the one below. His horror at the devices used to make the Bible accessible to the masses

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 173 and 177.

²⁴ BERTRAND RUSSELL, *Auto.*3: 30.

²⁵ A review by “H.F.” for *The Daily News* concluded Frank’s beliefs were “in a transition state” and expressed the regret that he had not waited until they were fully formed until publishing (“Earl Russell’s Sermons”, *Daily News*, London, 28 Nov. 1902, p. 10); the accusation of theism was voiced by essayist and critic Arthur Clutton-Brock in a letter to Frank Russell, 26 Dec. 1919, RAI, box 6.28, 732.080123.

²⁶ ANDERSSON, “Religion in the Russell Family”, p. 135, quoting *The Amberley Papers* (1937), I: 340–I.

²⁷ ALAN WOOD, *Bertrand Russell, the Passionate Sceptic* (1957), p. 203. This last fact communicated to the author by Ken Blackwell, who was tasked with sourcing a concordance for Russell.

as instructive entertainment is palpable; his amusement at the scenes which could not be ignored but were likewise too morally questionable to explain, a delight. Surely the “unfortunate incident” portrayed but not scripted refers to Lot’s Daughters.²⁸ The stills published in the illustrated papers reveal his descriptions of the characters to be spot on.

Frank went on to denounce all religious dogma and oppose the teaching of Christian principles in state schools while retaining close friendships with several clergymen. *The Dawn of the World* showed at the Palace for four weeks and then went on tour in the north of England and Scotland. Mrs. Pat, who had been compelled to accept the opportunity “to make a fool of myself” by an empty engagement book and ill health, broke down again afterwards and was banished to the country to recuperate.²⁹ In Manchester, the censors initially banned the film after complaints from the Biblical Society that the producers did not always show the Bible in its “best light”, only conceding after the offending scenes were cut.³⁰ Having been deemed such a success, after a year in the fast-moving world of cinema *The Dawn of the World* disappeared without trace,³¹ and now barely gets a mention in the annals of cinema history. It resurfaced briefly in the United States in 1929 with added dialogue, a controversy over attempts to use the Ten Commandments in its advertising, and a new title—*After Six Days*. Here, then, we revive it for one last showing through Frank’s discerning eyes.

THE BIBLE ON THE FILM

Lord Russell writes us:—

*M*oved by some rather good notices and by the novelty of the idea, I turned somewhat hesitating steps to the Palace Theatre last night to see the presentation of the “Dawn of the World”. After the

²⁸ Genesis 19: 30–8.

²⁹ MARGOT PETERS, *Mrs. Pat* (1984), p. 370.

³⁰ *The Bioscope* 48, no. 779 (15 Sept. 1921): 76.

³¹ The re-release is reviewed on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) at www.imdb.com/title/tt0244954?ref=nm_knf_il. The advertising controversy was settled by a Supreme Court ruling that the Ten Commandments were already the “exclusive property” of the Famous Players–Lasky Corporation (*The Bioscope* 61, no. 941 [23 Oct. 1924]: 45). A clip of Joseph “registering” emotion is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqTpDRdCVzY.

performance perhaps the most dominating impression left on my mind was how any inducement could be sufficiently large to bring Mrs. Patrick Campbell (who, after all, is an artist, and one that most of us remember with admiration) to take part in the jejune prologues and to sanction by her assistance some of the scenes that follow. Still, the earlier part of the performance was undoubtedly well done on the whole, and would have been interesting but for its exasperations. The Garden of Eden was quite good, although it did not seem to me sufficiently flowery: so was the Serpent: so were Adam and Eve, who were just sufficiently "not ashamed" to pass the Censor. We did not have the flaming sword, although I should have thought this was a trick particularly adapted to the capacities of the Cinema. Cain and Abel were quite good, too: so was the Tower of Babel. Then we had a great deal of Joseph, and the natural irritation of his brethren at his provoking dream was convincing and realistic. Potiphar's wife was all she ought not to be: with the worst Oriental touches. The scenes at Pharaoh's Court were magnificently staged, but entirely failed of their effect because of an extraordinary American Cinema tradition which requires even the most stately personages to walk at seven miles an hour and to waggle their shoulders from side to side like a runner in the last stage of exhaustion at the end of a three-mile race. In spite of the producers, I am convinced that no Pharaoh ever moved in this unseemly manner. Then the "close-ups" of Potiphar's wife, Joseph, and others, "registering" emotion in the approved manner, were very painful and irritating. I am afraid I have not a true movie mind, for I thought the quotations of the Bible's own perfect language the best part of it. Even here one was driven to inarticulate fury at times by mistakes which no third-rate proof-reader would have passed, and it is difficult to understand any London management allowing them upon its screen. We then had Moses and Aaron, the brickmaking, the Red Sea, the Tables of the Law, the Striking of the Rock, and Lot, with one of the more unfortunate incidents illustrated but not described. Incidentally it was rather curious to note that apparently not 10 per cent. of the audience knew what the incident was. Two of the very best effects were the fire and brimstone and the turning of Lot's wife to a pillar of salt.

Well so far, so fairly good: subject to the exasperations and annoyances I have mentioned, one had been able to appreciate the display. But after an interval of ten minutes came the second part, and here

the producers allowed themselves to break loose. Solomon—one at any rate thinks of him as an opulent and dignified figure, but here he was looking like an Arizona cowboy on the prowl; the Shulamite woman a village hussy. We had many scenes of the pursuit and approach, interspersed with the magnificent words of the Song of Solomon, and defaced with “close-ups” “registering” passion. However, the time had come when the American movie spirit could be controlled no longer. It broke all bounds, and after these two had at last met these noble words were flashed up upon the screen: “Where is your house? I’ll come to-night—and we’ll be happy.” I could bear no more. I flung myself out of the theatre, and rocked across Cambridge Circus with such unseemly mirth that I barely escaped arrest by the stolid and respectable police on duty. Well, well, as I said before, I fear I am lacking in the true movie spirit.

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