

BERTRAND RUSSELL ON NUCLEAR WAR, PEACE, AND LANGUAGE

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This volume contains seven essays on Bertrand Russell, mostly based on papers presented to annual meetings of the Bertrand Russell Society, and now made available to the general public in a hard-bound volume of 144 pages. The editor, Alan Schwerin of Monmouth University, has divided the book into two parts: (1) “On Nuclear War and Peace”, with the emphasis in two of three

papers on Russell's complicated and changing attitude toward the Soviet Union, and (11) "On Language", with most, though not all papers focusing on Wittgenstein's critique of Russell's views on ordinary language. The volume is well edited and the essays thought-provoking, making this a valuable addition to any Russell scholar's bookshelf.

RUSSELL ON THE SOVIET UNION, WAR AND PEACE

Two of the essays in Part 1 deal with Russell's political positions in the late 1940s and mid-1950s, dates separated by less than a decade but characterized by two very different strategies to promote and achieve peace. Ray Perkins, in "Bertrand Russell and Preventive War", analyzes the period from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, focusing on a 1948 incident when Russell, in an address to students at the Westminster School, was widely believed to have advocated preventive nuclear war against the Soviet Union. Perkins' position is that this charge is exaggerated, and that what Russell put forward—in this and most other writings of the period—was the conditional proposition that the West should wage war against the Soviet Union unless the Soviets agreed to international control of atomic energy and weapons, and that the USSR would likely comply.

However, a combination of public misunderstanding of the conditional nature of Russell's proposal, and the publication in 1954 of a clearly belligerent private letter of Russell's, sent in 1948 to a Berkeley, California psychiatrist named Walter Marseille, led many critics, including I. F. Stone, to assume that Russell had defended a preventive war strategy all along.¹ This was complicated by erroneous admissions and denials on Russell's part about what he had actually said, which Perkins attributes to "faulty memory and a desire to draw attention away from the bellicose nature of the Marseille letter" (p. 10).

Perkins' article is important for its clear exposition of the conditional nature of Russell's argument, which Perkins was the first to stress as significant. Readers interested in this controversy should also consult Perkins' articles in two debates in the pages of this journal: a previous debate with Douglas Lackey over the moral assessment of Russell's approach,² and a subsequent debate with the author of the present review over the characterization of Russell's conditional strategy.³

¹ I. F. Stone, "Bertrand Russell as a Moral Force in World Politics", *Russell*, n.s. 1 (1981): 7–26.

² Douglas P. Lackey, "Russell's Contribution to the Study of Nuclear Weapons Policy", *Russell*, n.s. 4 (1984): 243–52; (2) Ray Perkins, Jr., "Bertrand Russell and Preventive War", *Russell*, n.s. 14 (1994): 135–53; (3) Lackey, "Reply to Perkins on 'Conditional Preventive War'", *Russell*, n.s. 16 (1996): 85–8; (4) Perkins, "Response to Lackey on 'Conditional Preventive War'", *Russell*, n.s. 16 (1996): 169–70.

³ David Blitz, "Did Russell Advocate Preventive Atomic War against the USSR?", followed by

By the mid-1950s, Russell's strategy had changed, as he realized that the use of the hydrogen bomb in war could spell the end of humanity. This period, focusing on the events leading up to and immediately following the 1955 Russell–Einstein Manifesto, is ably analyzed by Andrew Bone, editor of the recently published Volume 28 of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* which covers this period. Russell had moved, as Bone subtitles one of the sections of his essay, from “coercion to coexistence” (p. 19) as a result of the changes in the Soviet Union in the post-Stalin period, and the development of the hydrogen bomb as weapon of choice in the arms race.

Now, Russell had to decide what to do with anti-war forces that were openly in sympathy with the Soviet Union—in Bone's terms, whether to choose “cooperation or exclusion” (p. 22). Russell chose the former, inclusive path, a significant modification of approach from his strident anti-Communism of the previous period. This was key to the success of his activity during the mid- to later 1950s. As a result, the Russell–Einstein Manifesto was co-signed by the French Communist and chemistry Nobelist Frederick Joliot–Curie, and the Pugwash Conferences regularly invited scientists from both the West and the East to consider means of reducing international tension. This bipartisan approach helped to move the peace movement from fringe status to centre stage.

Bone's essay nicely complements that of Perkins, by following Russell into the next stage of his peace campaign. What is missing is a third essay dealing with the later 1950s, when Russell once again changed strategy, now identifying the US as the main danger to world peace. This led many commentators, Sidney Hook in the US to name just one, to accuse Russell of capitulating before the Soviet Union, based on his statement that if the choice came down to “red” or “dead”, he preferred the former to the latter. Indeed, the accusations of this third period were the mirror image of those during the first, when Russell was accused of advocating preventive war against the Soviet Union (a “dead red” position, one might almost say).

However there is a gap in the volume, filled only in part by the third essay: “Russell on Happiness” by Jose Idler-Acosta. Idler-Acosta's essay is a survey of Russell's views, focusing on two writings, *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930) and *Authority and the Individual* (1949), the former for the conceptual content of happiness, and the latter for its social context. The discussion is satisfactory, but covers well-known territory without any significant new contributions. Moreover, Idler-Acosta neglects Russell's more theoretical writings, notably *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (1954), in which Russell provides the basis in ethics—

in part through the Leibnizian-derived notion of “compossibility of wills”—to the pursuit of happiness that he elsewhere recommends as a lifestyle. Although an interesting piece, this third essay doesn’t fit well with the theme of War and Peace of the first part of the volume under review.

RUSSELL, WITTGENSTEIN AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE

Why Russell rejected the views of the “later” Wittgenstein, and to what extent he was justified in doing so, is a common theme of three of the four essays in the second part of the book. In the first two essays, and to a lesser degree in the third, Russell is taken to be in the wrong, and seen as engaging in an unsuccessful and unwarranted rear-guard action.

The most vociferous, albeit brief, critique is Antony Flew’s “Russell, Wittgenstein, and *Cogito ergo sum*”. Flew rejects Russell’s claims—made in *My Philosophical Development* (1959) and in his introduction to Ernest Gellner’s *Words and Things* (1958)—that Wittgenstein’s approach (and that of his followers such as Strawson) ignores real world problems, instead taking refuge in linguistic games. Flew attempts to show that consideration of the use of terms throws considerable light on the three metaphysical problems identified by Kant: freedom of the will, immortality of the soul, and the existence of God. I must confess that I was unable to follow this claim through Flew’s series of examples, ranging from quotations from Ryle’s *Concept of Mind* (1949) to a discussion of the views of the Church of England on future life, all within the space of about a half dozen pages, that purport to refute Russell.

The most revealing part of this paper is a recollection by Flew of a talk by Wittgenstein to the Jowett Society in 1947 at Oxford, which Flew, then an undergraduate, attended. He recalls that Wittgenstein was asked by H. A. Pritchard what he thought of Descartes’ argument “*cogito, ergo sum*”. Wittgenstein replied by saying that the statement was “peculiar”, while pointing to his own head while he pronounced the words “*cogito*” and “*sum*”. Though unimpressed at the time, Flew later came to recognize this as a “radically and totally devastating objection” to mind–body dualism, since pointing to one’s head while stating these words clearly showed that the “I” presupposed in the *cogito* argument is a “flesh and blood human being” (p. 67). The reader can easily imagine Russell’s response at such an attempt to trivialize the mind–body problem, in a manner similar to Dr. Johnson’s kicking of the stone to refute Berkeley. The problem has not been solved, but made into a non-problem, or at any rate, a non-philosophical problem: precisely Russell’s critique of the later Wittgenstein.

The philosopher of science Rom Harré engages in a more focused and comprehensive critique of Russell, “Reference Revisited”, based on Strawson’s rejec-

tion of Russell's analytic approach as he developed it in "On Denoting" (1905). Among other points of critique, Harré states: "Strawson accuses Russell, rightly, of failing to heed the distinction between a sentence and the use of a sentence to make a statement" (p. 77). The claim is that a sentence cannot be judged to be true or false independently of its use to make a statement. This latter alone can be evaluated for veracity, while sentences, such as "The present King of France is bald" (hereafter referred to as PKFB) are only potentially true or false. According to Harré we must take into account the context, the "rules, habits and conventions" (p. 77, quoting Strawson), in other words what Wittgenstein termed the "language game".

Applied to the case at hand—PKFB—this is both inappropriate and false. Russell developed the example to show how analysis can solve a specific problem, which is our intuition that both PKFB and its apparent negation—"The present King of France is not bald" (PKFNB)—are both false: since there is no present King of France to be bald or not. In that case, the universally true proposition that $p \vee \sim p$ would be false for $p = \text{PKFB}$, a serious problem for the system of *Principia*, then under development. By applying his method of analysis Russell was able to show that the logical form of both sentences was not what we naively believe, and that in particular PKFNB is not the negation of PKFB. The essential difference is that the negation sign in the logically analyzed PKFNB is inside the scope of the existential quantifier, not outside of it, as would be the case for a proper negation of PKFB. Though the point is technical, the result is significant: the removal of the apparent violation of the rule of excluded middle for bivalent logic. Russell hoped that others would go on to solve other problems using this as a model or exemplar. It is therefore easy to imagine his disappointment when, a half-century later, Strawson should reject a fairly straightforward, if complex, analysis for a simplistic appeal to "use".

The problem is striking if we take as our example a more contemporary and politically significant sentence. Consider the sentence: "The President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, had weapons of mass destruction". Does the truth-value of this sentence depend on its use as a statement? More specifically, did President Bush utter a true statement when making this claim to Congress in order to gain support for war? Is the statement, however, false when examined in a different context, that of the US inspectors who subsequently found no weapons? With Russell, and *pace* Wittgenstein, it seems we would want the sentence to be true or false, not true or false as a statement depending on who uses or makes it.

The third essay on language is "Our Statements Are Likely to be Wrong: On Russell's Big Thesis", by the volume editor, Alan Schwerin, who examines the following claim made by Russell in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912): "Any ordinary language statement as to what it is that our immediate experiences

make us know is very likely to be wrong” (p. 92, Schwerin’s italics). In order to analyze this claim, Schwerin places it in the context of Russell’s views on scepticism, and what he identifies as Wittgenstein’s already developing critique of Russell, which he finds expressed as early as the *Tractatus*.

Russell held that the application of the method of scepticism would, as for Descartes, leave a residue of what is certain. In Russell’s case, this remainder consisted of knowledge of sense-data, which are simple and immediate. Schwerin argues that Wittgenstein (in *Tractatus* 6.51) rejected the application of scepticism to these types of philosophical problems, as attempting to raise doubts about what cannot be said. Wittgenstein was already developing his position that philosophy is a matter of showing, not saying (see Flew’s example of the later Wittgenstein pointing to his head to refute Descartes, mentioned above). This early identification of the Russell–Wittgenstein divergence, along with supporting evidence of Russell’s concerns from his correspondence with Lady Ottoline Morrell, is a major strength of Schwerin’s article.

Schwerin is less successful when he attempts to find a loophole in Russell’s “Big Thesis” that ordinary language is inadequate when applied even to everyday experiences, let alone logical and scientific matters. Schwerin believes that Russell has not taken into account that, in a large aggregate of such statements, one may be found that is true to the situation. Schwerin argues by analogy: suppose an individual tries to form a sporting team by choosing individuals at random. This is unlikely to produce a good team when one draws from a small sample, but as the sample size is increased, chances of finding the right players in one of many draws increases as well. So too, in a large sample of ordinary language statements, we may find one which, *pace* Russell, is fully adequate to the situation at hand. This is not Schwerin’s strongest point. Given a sufficiently large number of subjects in a remote sensing experiment, at least one can be found who reliably “identifies” the distant unseen object. But this does not mean that parapsychology is true—just that in a sufficiently large sample, unlikely events such as a series of lucky guesses will probably occur.

The last paper in this part of the book does not deal with Russell and language, but focuses on a much more specific issue: Russell’s logicism and his views on the nature of mathematics. This focus, and the application of analytical technique to a problem in textual criticism, are highlights of Nicholas Griffin’s “Russell, Logicism and ‘If-thenism’”.⁴ Griffin is concerned largely with a criticism of views held by the late Alberto Coffa, though misconceptions of Putnam and Quine are treated in passing. The relevant distinction is between

⁴ Also published in *Proceedings of the Canadian Society for History and Philosophy of Mathematics*, 13 (2000): 134–46.

two forms of logicism identified by Coffa: (a) conditional logicism, according to which all theorems of any branch of mathematics are logical consequences of the axioms of that branch, and (b) categorical logicism, according to which all mathematical concepts can be defined from solely logical ones, and all mathematical theorems derived from purely logical axioms. Coffa claimed that *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903) focused on the defence of conditional logicism, while *Principia Mathematica* (1910–13) focused on categorical logicism. Griffin disagrees, and argues for a much greater consistency in the underlying philosophical frameworks of the two works.

The problem is that conditional logicism is too weak a claim to sustain the earlier *Principles*, for as Griffin notes, any theory in science (physics, for example) can be conditionally logicized, simply by formalizing its theorems as logical consequences of its axioms. For example, consider Einstein's theory of special relativity (not given as an example by Griffin, but relevant). The Lorentz transformations—featuring time dilation and length contraction with increased velocity—can be derived from axioms about the physical nature of space and time and the invariance of the laws of physics. This reduction, while technically interesting, in no way implies that in addition the Lorentz transformations can be derived from purely logical considerations, as the stronger categorical logicism does for the concepts of mathematics.

It would appear that Coffa was misled by Russell's famous statement at the outset of the *Principles* that begins by noting that all mathematical statements "are of the form ' p implies q '..."⁵ Griffin argues that even in the *Principles*, Russell, who held that all mathematical statements involve universal variables, went beyond conditional logicism, and argued for the stronger form of categorical logicism. Whether successful or not, this was the common philosophical project underlying both *Principles* and *Principia*, an important point which is carefully analyzed and reaffirmed by Griffin.

The volume at hand is well edited, with one minor technical problem. The publisher, on a number of occasions, has printed the implication sign using the wrong font, so that it appears as an accented capital E in Griffin's article (pp. 120, 122, 126). Though disconcerting, the intended symbol is immediately understood, given the context. The papers are of considerable interest, though a case could be made for a third, miscellaneous section for the two papers by Idler-Acosta and Griffin which don't quite fit in with the other papers in their respective parts. Overall, this is a worthwhile volume for Russell studies.

⁵Russell's full sentence on the matter is: "Pure mathematics is the class of all propositions of the form ' p implies q ', where p and q are propositions containing one or more variables, the same in the two propositions, and neither p nor q contains any constants except logical constants" (*PoM*, p. 3).
