

THE AMORAL MORALIST

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Caroline Moorehead. *Bertrand Russell: a Life*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992. Pp. 596. c\$39.99; £20.00. Also in paperback, at c\$25.99; £12.99.

It was at a large meeting in the City Hall in Sheffield July 1958 that A. J. P. Taylor launched the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Yorkshire. I chaired that meeting. Taylor stayed in my house. Over breakfast we talked about the leading personalities in CND. They were, Taylor insisted, all non-conformists; especially he himself. (I doubted this. Taylor made no secret of the fact that he wanted to be outrageous. As historian I thought of him as brilliant, but conventional. He worked in the tradition of Namier. He made only the most marginal of concessions to social history. As his host and still more as his junior, I made little of this.) Of Kingsley Martin, who had played the role of convenor in CND, we were in entire accord. A great editor, he was the personification of the non-conformist conscience with a deep instinctive antipathy to *raison d'état*. J. B. Priestley, the celebrated journalist, broadcaster and playwright, took exception to *raison d'état* less for its substance than its bad manners. An 'omely, but far from 'umble Yorkshire man, Priestley could not endure the Superior Person style of "Great Men" nor the pretensions of the upper classes. It was when we turned to the most formidable intelligence among the founding fathers of CND that Taylor made his most memorable remark: "Bertrand Russell is the most amoral man I ever met."

It's important to remember the context in which this was said. The champion of the c.o.s during the First World War: a prisoner of conscience himself in 1918: a "social revolutionary" who accepted appeasement in the 1930s: a convert to the armed struggle against Hitler: then an advocate of containment plus against Stalin immediately after the War: one ready to use the Bomb as a means of forcing the Soviets to the negotiating table: one who—as Caroline Moorehead reminds us—"... believed that [us] atomic bombs could provide a brief period of supremacy, during which Truman could 'compel the world to adopt a system making great wars impossible' " (p. 468):

he was one who could "joke": "Now that I yield to no one in my desire to slaughter Russians, I have become respectable" (p. 469). Russell then went on to become the foremost advocate of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Russell himself was a "non-conformist" in a way which has been important in English political culture since the seventeenth century. He was constantly bothered by the need to negotiate the claims of solidarity and dissent. He wanted fellowship but he needed to be his own man. To Lenin this might appear as the hallmark of the "intellectual" fearful of party discipline. To the Yankee plutocrat an absurd waste of energy. To Oriental despots and fascists a fatal weakness to be exploited. Russell evidently considered it as something peculiar to himself or nearly so.

In describing Russell as "amoral" Taylor did not intend to suggest that he was unconcerned with morals. This would have been absurd. It might be contended that Russell was passionately anxious to extend the dominion of morals: that he wanted to moralize politics. Yet this was to be accomplished by treating Golden Rules as guides to action which were frequently useful rather than iron laws which had to be obeyed. He summoned us to a strenuous exercise in considering the consequences of actions and a tireless assessment of their worth. Nor was their worth something which could be readily calculated upon some updated model of the felicific calculus. I fancy that he would have sympathized with the Oxford don who remarked that he was unhappy with the concept of pleasure. He did not believe that there was only one thing, such as happiness, which was ultimately worthwhile nor did he imagine that the plurality of all worthwhile things were held together in a natural harmony in which truth, beauty, justice, liberty and loving kindness all co-existed together without difficulty. Most of us are inclined to imagine that Moses, Jesus or Immanuel Kant can supply us with a map which indicates the short and narrow path to virtue. I think Russell was always concerned to dispute this whether in public or in private life. He imagined that the simplifications which appeared as the deliverances of the non-conformist conscience were often delusions as likely to occasion repression and misery every bit as often as they promoted liberty and joy.

There was one side of Bertrand Russell which would have heartily concurred with Karl Marx's call in his Inaugural Address to the First International: "to vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the rules paramount of the intercourse of nations." There was another side which would have entirely understood why Marx had to explain to Engels that he had his tongue in his cheek. The most high-souled and wide-minded individual is going to find consequentialist morality harder to apply in personal than in public life. He is more involved in it. It is more inescapable. Selfish interests insinuate their

way into personal relations more than they do into public ones. Contrary to the popular wisdom, face-to-face groups are the scene of the worst instances of cheats, duplicities and cruelties. (Of course, *this* was not what lurked behind Marx's apology.) If Ms. Moorehead's book has a "Big Idea" or an "Organizing Insight" it is with Russell as the amoral moralist. She seeks to work this out in both his personal and in his public life. As an accomplished journalist she does this in a highly readable manner. As an intelligent woman she places it in a decent appreciation of Russell's life as a whole. If she goes after Russell's warts she does not go after them until they become his "all". If she makes a feminist protest, it is neither strident nor absurd. On the contrary it raises very important issues to which all Russell's admirers must attend.

Yet if we are to consider these merits we must begin with a full and frank recognition of Ms. Moorehead's limitations.

She was not possessed by the idea of this volume. She tells us that it was presented to her by her publisher "who gave me the idea for the book" (p. 3). Without pretending to be a scholar, she still has no excuse for the strange multiplication of errors on points of fact: some strange conceptual confusions and the preposterously inadequate navigational aides which she employs to steer her way around the rocks of Russell's Life. She is sharp enough to spy other ways in which she might have organized her work. For example, it might have been interesting to have taken on Santayana's perception that the young man was not the passionate sceptic, but a "many-sided fanatic" (p. 57). She leaves that way of working Russell's "Life" to another. She leaves to her own reviewers the task of separating the rewarding core of her argument from the surrounding pulp of error and confusion.

As has been asserted the errors come fast and furious. Disraeli was *not* Prime Minister when Russell was born on 18 May 1872 (p. 12). Rather it was Gladstone in the midst of his first great reforming administration. In view of Ms. Moorehead's insistence that Russell was always "an old-fashioned Liberal at heart" (p. 352), this is not only a mistake, but an opportunity missed. J. S. Mill did *not* begin by having a wife (p. 10) but Mrs. Taylor instead. This unimportant circumstance was *not* unimportant then. Wimbledon was *not* the safest Tory seat in the country when Russell stood there in 1907 (p. 145-6), but the City of London. It is *not* the case that Russell "was never again to stand so close to the British political party process" as when his candidature was aborted in Bedford in 1910 (p. 149). As is subsequently noted, he stood twice in Chelsea in the 1920s. John Reid did *not* write "*Six [sic] Days That Shook the World*".

Among Russell's closest friends and acquaintances were the Webbs. Ms. Moorehead's errors and confusions at this point are monumental. The Webbs

were not the Webbs when they first met Russell (p. 135). Sidney did not have a job with the London County Council (p. 136). He had been the duly elected Progressive and Fabian member for Deptford since 1892. It is an absurd understatement to assert that "by 1903, the Webbs were becoming an influence in British socialist circles" (p. 135). Sidney was already known as the author of the London Education Act of that year and with Beatrice he had created modern British Labour historiography and largely succeeded in shutting out or in replacing Marxist with Fabian influence in Socialist and Labour circles. More importantly Russell did not fall out with the Webbs over Bolshevism, but over imperialism and his failure to observe the rules of what Beatrice termed "unblemished monogamous love". Ms. Moorehead is hopelessly confused when it comes to dating the differences between Russell and the Webbs over Russia. She writes of the reception of *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*:

When others did not see the truth as he had, some of his friendships began to slip away. The first open and public break was, predictably, with the Webbs, who had become dedicated to what they considered to be the Soviet idea and now attacked him in the *New Statesman*. They declared that Russell had been transformed from a revolutionary—if he ever had been one—into a "reformer of the reformists".

(P. 320)

This is unsupported by any reference in what passes for a scholarly apparatus. (Such references as there are must be sought at the back of the book where they are assembled in a slipshod manner.) It is absurd to imagine that the Webbs would complain of anyone passing from the ranks of revolutionary to reformist. It is wrong to imagine that because they helped to found the Fabian Society: the London School of Economics: the *New Statesman* and the Labour Party that they were responsible for everything which issued forth from these institutions. In fact the Webbs did not turn to Russia until some ten years or more after the publication of Russell's book. Sidney belonged to that minority within the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party which was in favour, towards the end of the Great War, of putting the Bolsheviks down with fire and sword. Beatrice taught the women in Sidney's constituency of Seaham Harbour that the Russian Revolution had been the biggest disaster that had overtaken the British Labour Movement since the French Revolution. It was not until the Bolshevik abandoned his character as *homo revolutionary* in favour of that of *homo bureaucrat* that he found favour with Sidney and Beatrice and lost such little sympathy as he may have had from Bertrand Russell. I know of no evidence that the Webbs—under threat of a complete breach of friendship with Russell—"wrote personally to Stalin" on behalf of Freda Uteley's husband (p. 415). They did not know Stalin per-

sonally and Beatrice boasted about this in her diary. Russell himself assured me that he had no idea of the extent of Beatrice's doubts concerning the cult of the personality: "the disease of orthodoxy": the contradictions in Soviet foreign policy nor the "liquidations". What Ms. Moorehead herself does notice is that Bertrand Russell himself was no pushover in relation to the appeals about Russia addressed to him by Emma Goldman. He advised her that "the cruelties would be a least as great under any other party" (p. 354).

This introduces a difficulty more important than the innumerable errors on points of fact. (Russell described himself as a "Marxist" not a Communist when he was in China.¹ There was not, is not and never will be a "Barnsley" colliery, etc., etc.) All this may be written off as small fault-finding or pedantry. (One must remember that Russell remarked that a pedant was someone who liked his statements to be true.²) What is worrying is the failure to remove contradictions and muddles from the text. Returning to the Webbs for one moment, "Neither of the Webbs was much interested in friends, seeing people primarily as 'instruments' for advancing their cause ..." (p. 135). Yet it had been noticed earlier that Beatrice understood Russell better than almost anyone else! "Better than anyone, she had detected the conflicting forces in his nature and the intense difficulty he had in keeping his intellect and his passions harnessed together ..." (p. 109). Returning to Russia, Ms. Moorehead seems unable to manage the distinction between what Russell *felt* about Russia and what he *thought* about it. Yet this distinction appears crucial to the understanding of how he worked out his relations with Dora in the early twenties. He was appalled where she was exhilarated, but they both fancied that they understood the inescapable need for it all. And perhaps they were right about that. When it comes to politics, Ms. Moorehead, who writes a column for *The Independent* on human rights, follows a simple navigational principle. She proceeds upon a course equidistant from *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*.

In fact she does better when she turns to Russell in his capacity as "lean" philosopher and tough logician. (She acknowledges the help which she has received in these departments from Professor Bernard Williams and others.) She is not afraid of *Principia Mathematica*. (There is a theorem in Volume II which is notoriously comprehensible.) She does not avoid a confrontation with the celebrated "paradox"—even if she does not rehearse it as vividly as Ernest Gellner in his *Words and Things*: "is the class-of-all-classes-which-are-not-members-of-themselves, itself a member of itself? If it is, then it isn't; but

¹ See my "Science of Social Structure: Bertrand Russell as Communist and Marxist", *Russell*, n.s. 9 (1989): 5–11.

² *The Good Citizen's Alphabet* (London: Gaberbochus, 1953).

if it isn't, then it is."³ Ms. Moorehead disposes of this difficulty with commendable efficiency. "He found to his delight that, once it was seen that any statement referring to other statements must be of a higher order than the statements it is about, his paradox disappeared" (p. 100). She despatches other long-standing philosophical difficulties with a comparable sureness of touch. Thus, in congratulating Russell (quite rightly) on his readiness to relinquish lost philosophical positions and to reconsider the most fundamental assumptions made in the course of his own philosophical development, she admires his resolution of the problem of the existence of an external world in his *Our Knowledge of the External World*. Earlier, in discussing his *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), she notes that after "abandoning idealism, Russell had held to the belief that knowledge basically comes to us through the senses. Given the recent scientific discoveries—ranging from the atom to radioactivity—the senses were turning out to be less reliable than they had seemed" (p. 169). This is the sort of nonsense which maddened that great huzar against nonsense, the late A. J. Ayer. It is of absolutely no philosophical importance whether we make out molecular structures through the naked eye, by x-ray defraction or with the aid of the electron microscope. She notices that "Russell publicly used the term 'logical atomism', and it marked a new stage in his philosophy, in which philosophical scepticism became the concern. Russell again returned to his sense-data, and to his tables" (p. 197). But what sort of "resolution" of any difficulty is this? If we have no direct knowledge of "material objects", then we have no direct knowledge of "sense-data" either. It is still as Berkeley said it was only "sense data" are no more the objects of perception than material objects. The vulgar—in whose number your reviewer confidently includes himself—suspect a confusion between the *object* and the *act* of apprehension. Philosophy—which I was advised as an undergraduate to exchange for economic theory, politics or history—remains a delightful subject, but one in which it seems peculiarly difficult to distinguish between the progress of Truth and changes of Fashion.

Ms. Moorehead is conscientious in her treatment of Russell as philosopher. She tries hard and enlists the support of expert opinion. However, it is in Russell as a man—lover, husband, father, and political activist—that she is most interested. Generally she succeeds in reducing the intrusive and judgmental bits to a minimum. She spares us the equivalent of a census enumerator's return on his "affairs". She avoids the fashionable biographer's

³ E. Gellner, *Words and Things*, with a Foreword by Bertrand Russell, 2nd ed. (London: Gollancz, 1979), p. 4.

conjectures about his performances in bed—although she does, on the authority of the Metropolitan Police, advise us that he had a small penis (p. 511).⁴ She does not waste time speculating on what went on in the bed with Vivienne Eliot or on the edge of it with Katherine Mansfield. (For these small mercies, many thanks!) What she does rightly insist upon doing is pointing out some of Russell's prejudices which were not only "politically incorrect", but downright nasty.

Today no one can read, without profound unease, what he wrote to Ottoline Morrell when he was in prison in 1918. "I hate being all tidy like a book in a library where no one reads. Prison is horribly like that. Imagine if you knew you were a delicious book and some Jew millionaire bought you and bound you uniform with a lot of others ..." (p. 286). Russell's opinions on Blacks were equally disagreeable. As for homosexuals, he had "little but contempt for homosexuality" (p. 121).

Like [D. H.] Lawrence, Russell came to dislike and disapprove of homosexuality: "Lawrence has the same feeling against sodomy as I have," he wrote to Ottoline in 1915. "You had nearly made me believe there is no great harm in it, but I have reverted; and all the examples I know confirm me in thinking it sterilizing." The examples were Strachey and Keynes; and they knew it. (P. 237)

If Hitler never "dropped his bombs on Slough", he did at least make such prejudices run for cover where he did not unintentionally demolish them entirely. As for Women: Russell would have been outraged by any suggestion that he was less firmly opposed to their subjection than his godfather had been. Yet he believed that women were not up to the most demanding type of intellectual activity. In *Marriage and Morals* he insisted: "women are on average stupider than men." He doubted whether they could do higher mathematics properly. He loved them and left them with staggering frequency and marvellous regularity. He never managed to reconcile fidelity with fornication. But then, dialectics was never his strong point.

I want to return to Russell's relations with women in a moment. But before considering Ms. Moorehead's valuable evidence and observations it is necessary to warn the reader that she does not feel obliged to tell the reader to put his or her judgments of the amoral moralist in some historical perspective. His "non-approved" attitudes to racial groups, homosexuals and women were *usual* among the upper and middle classes before 1940 and not unheard of among the proletarians either. In general, Ms. Moorehead has too little

⁴ [Moorehead gives as her source a fellow arrestee being processed by the police at the same time as Russell (p. 571).—Ed.]

recourse to the critical-comparative method set within a sense of place and time.

One of the ways of bringing this home is to reflect about Russell's celebrated "conversion." She treats this prominently and uncritically. The sight of Evelyn Whitehead "suffering brought on some kind of mystical trance in Russell" (p. 91). She reminds us that in his *Autobiography* he records:

Within five minutes I went through some such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless; it follows [*sic*] that war is wrong, that a public school education is abominable, that the use of force is to be deprecated, and that in human relations one should penetrate to the core of loneliness in each person and speak to that. (*Auto.* I: 146)

One can concur with all Russell's conclusions without allowing that they could "follow" from a mystical trance: a "call" or an experience of conversion. Other humanists have had comparable experiences. Recall Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the road to Vincennes where Diderot had been imprisoned for an infringement of the press laws.

The heat was excessive. He had two leagues to go on foot, along an unshaded road.... He was suddenly "pierced by a thousand rays of light; a multitude of living ideas" assailed him; he was suffocated, inebriated; he fell beneath a tree near the avenue, and here he passed a half-hour in a delirium of thought, from which he emerged with the front of his jacket soaked with tears. At that instant, he wrote, "I lived in another world, and I became another man." It was not only the answer to the question of the Academy which came to him ("Has the progress of science and art contributed to the corruption or to the improvement of morals?")—but in its train, as if the sluice-gates were opened, a torrent of "great truths" which would form the basic matter of his entire future work. The shock had revealed to him his true being.⁵

This sudden awakening, this "conversion experience" seems to have been experienced, in a more roundabout way, by John Stuart Mill. Even Russell's godfather experienced "A Crisis in my mental history". In his *Autobiography* he wrote: "It was the autumn of 1826. I was in a dull state of nerves, such as everybody is occasionally liable to; unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement; one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times, becomes insipid or indifferent; the state, I should think, in which converts to Methodism usually are, when smitten by their first 'conviction of sin.'" But

⁵ Romain Rolland, ed., *The Living Thoughts of Rousseau* (London: Cassell, 1939), pp. 9–10.

this state was destructive rather than constructive. Received opinions fell apart and it was some time before the Romantic poets, Coleridge and Wordsworth, helped to put Mill back together again. He asked himself: "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No". It was not until he had discovered that happiness is only to be discovered in promoting the happiness of others that he felt better.

I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness: on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way. The enjoyments of life (such was now my theory) are sufficient to make it a pleasant thing, when they are taken *en passant*, without being made a principal object. Once make them so, and they are immediately felt to be insufficient. They will not bear a scrutinizing examination. Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so.⁶

Not so much *The Conquest of Happiness* as the Submission to it! Russell might have benefitted from this lesson. But it is not to the immediate point, which is concerned with conversion experiences. Lots of late Victorian Socialists had them, including Beatrice Webb—or claimed to have had them. Entire volumes were published entitled "How I Became a Socialist". Some of them have the authentic "it was in these circumstances: at this hour: in this place:" ring about them. They deserve to be respected as genuine expressions of a new secular religiosity. But all need to be critically considered. Thus, Beatrice Webb is quite unreliable on "why I became a Socialist".⁷ This is all about why *you* should become *one*. She did not become one suddenly—unless that was just after she first met Sidney. This, if true, was something which she would not, in her pride, have allowed herself to confess. But the grand point is that the accounts to be found in autobiographies of "conversions": visitations: flashes of light, etc., ought, one and all of them, to be taken *cum grano salis*. How much more entertaining they are than tales of the slow and painful progress of opinion!

⁶ J. S. Mill, *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, ed. John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (*Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. 1) (Toronto: U. of Toronto P., 1981), pp. 145–6.

⁷ *My Apprenticeship* (London: Longmans, Green, 1926), pp. 346–413.

What is interesting is that a woman, Mrs. Whitehead, should be recollected as being at the centre of one of Russell's great experiences. Women rather than men, mattered most to him. Even the men whom he respected—some of them—did not like him. Thus he confronted Moore with the awful challenge: "You don't like me, do you?" And received the short and terrible answer: "No" (p. 129). Leonard Woolf, whom I remember as a very gentle and wise person, thought Russell quite abominable. Of course, not every woman dissented from these negative judgements. Ms. Moorehead draws attention to some of them who considered that he was a *bastard*. (And he might have been in a quite literal sense. His father and mother agreed that "it was hardly fair" that a tutor engaged for the family should be condemned to absolute celibacy. "It became known that from time to time Spalding [the tutor] shared her bed" [p. 14].)

Barbara Strachey, great niece to Bertrand's first wife, remarked that "the less one saw of Russell, the more one liked him...." He was, she insisted, "cruel to women, selfish and also a goat". Without seeming to go out of her way to do so, Ms. Moorehead proved much supporting evidence for this judgement. Even she shudders sometimes. For example, in summing up his emotional life in 1916 and 1917 she remarks on what strenuous years they had been for him.

During part of the time at least, he was not only placating Ottoline but toying with Katherine Mansfield and Vivienne Eliot, falling in love with Colette, and trying to detach himself from poor Helen Dudley, who had stayed on in England and moved into his flat after Russell and the Eliots left. Some of his more callous letters, breaking off relations with one woman, can presumably be attributed to the emotional demands of one or more of the others becoming too insistent so that he was unable to cope with them all. His autobiography is coy on the subject, but to give two examples: the summer of 1917 was the zenith of his affair with Colette, and the two of them spent remarkably happy holidays in the country together. Russell was also planning to share a country cottage with the Eliots—apparently the place where he may have made love, hating it, to Vivienne—for Russell was in one way or another involved in the Eliots' lives between the summer of 1915 and the spring of 1919. The second example is that Russell met Colette on 31 July 1916, and their affair began on 23 September. By November he thought he had fallen "more or less in love" with Katherine Mansfield, yet went off to the Cat and Fiddle with Colette. The letters he wrote to each of them⁸ were sometimes interchangeable; moving from rapture to disillusion, from disillusion to accusation, from accusation to the revelation of another (but probably unimportant) love, which was going to necessitate a (probably brief) separation. (Pp. 277–8)

⁸ [Only Russell's letters to Colette and Lady Ottoline are extant.—Ed.]

If Ms. Moorehead manages to subdue her indignation at Russell's conduct as husband and lover, no such restraint is possible when it comes to his behaviour as parent. The only word to describe that is "chilling".

Women who wanted children must regard it as a profession. Those who wished to bring them up themselves should be trained and then paid to do so. The others should put their offspring into the hands of professionals, for nothing was more harmful to a child than a "fussy and small-minded mother." Fathers, wrote Russell in *The Conquest of Happiness*, cannot "be expected to do much for their children." The idea of joint parenthood was not one that occurred to him. (P. 390)

Ms. Moorehead is not the sort of biographer who spoonfeeds her readers. She has already informed them that Russell was not merely a motherless child but an orphan. If they can't see why Russell imagined that encouraging children's independence rather than loving them was what mattered, that's their fault.

However, Ms. Moorehead does encourage her readers to make a connection between Russell's cruel and immoral attitudes and relations with women and his view of world politics and the United States of America in particular. She cannot conceal her impatience with his denunciations of United States policy in the post-Stalin era and, in particular, his comparisons (real or imagined) between that country's conduct in Vietnam and elsewhere and that of Nazi Germany. For her there is plainly a symmetry between immorality in personal conduct (particularly towards women) and amorality in his judgements upon the conduct of political parties and actions. Indeed, she concludes this volume by contrasting the Russell who was so rational about his own mortality and so irrational about "body-counts" in Vietnam (p. 551). This outrageous misuse of the term "rational" is singularly inappropriate here. All reason cannot be reduced to "calm reason" nor taken to exclude indignation. To be reconciled to one's own death when one is nearly 100 years old is not to preclude fury at the *avoidable* death of the young as a result of napalm bombs. Noam Chomsky, arguably the closest successor to Russell in our time, has insisted: "If the Nuremberg laws were applied, then every post-war American president would have been hanged." It now appears that former Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, is inclined to agree with Russell and Chomsky—at least so far as his own complicity is concerned. Yet Russell's admirers cannot shelter their hero from Ms. Moorehead by simply assembling her inaccuracies on points of fact here or the collapse of her good sense and judgment there. She has, in a modest and reasonably discriminating way, marshalled a case which needs to be answered.

The "admirers" may respond to that by simply denying that there is any requirement to defend the thinker whom they revere by justifying his personal conduct. The greatness of *Principia Mathematica* and other works is

unaffected by its author's fornication or the cheating and pain which may sometimes have accompanied it. After all, nobody denies that Rousseau contributed to the liberation of children when he published his *Emile* although he consigned his own children to an orphanage. Alas! This line of defence can hardly be made to work. Rousseau, pursued by regret and remorse, departed from his own principles. The unhappiness which Russell's own conduct occasioned resulted from his strict *observance* in practice of his own theory. The amicable anarchy which he recommended resulted, for him and for others, in a cruel chaos.

A more promising line of defence is to insist that while Russell may not have been an ideal Moral Type, Ms. Moorehead does not really do him justice. Any "admirer" who elects to take that line had better acknowledge how fair she tries to be. She repeatedly acknowledges, albeit with some astonishment, how loyal and loving many of his women were ready to be. Perhaps even Russell himself found Alys's indestructible devotion a bit much. As for Dora, she was much the most independent, tough and equal spirit among the wives. The break-up of their marriage was horrid for them both and terrible for their children. How far it was all Bertrand's fault is unclear. Ms. Moorehead suggests that he had become impotent with Dora and that that is the context of her decision to have other children by another man. The third wife, Peter Spence, appears in a somewhat unfavourable light in Ms. Moorehead's book. Yet she never met her nor consulted any papers which may still be in her possession.⁹ One senses that the admirable and important *Amberley Papers* were even more her work than Bertrand's although they appear as co-editors. Under the circumstances it would be irresponsible to form any opinion about the character of their relationship or the responsibility for its collapse. Russell assured me that he had at last found a perfect partner in his fourth wife, Edith. But he added that he had ceased to be sexually active for some time. Since he was nearly 100 I did not know whether to congratulate him or to commiserate with him or to recommend a sexual therapist. (I did not record this in my interview published in *Russell*¹⁰ since it was not to the purpose of my visit and would not have been in accordance with the procedure recommended by Beatrice Webb in *Methods of Social Study*.) His main mistresses, Ottoline and Colette, evidently had an enduring love for him. The cartoon of a cheerful, elderly lady posting up a notice "Bertrand Russell slept here" evidently had considerable historical justification. As for his children; John certainly appears to have been wretched. Conrad, successor to

E. S. Beesly as Professor of History at University College, London, is mainly silent. But Kate as a child, although over-awed by her father's intellectual power, seems to have retained a loving regard for him however reserved. Nor, of course, did he damage her intellectual development or prevent her gaining high academic honours. Ms. Moorehead pays a tribute to *My Father, Bertrand Russell* rightly describing it as "one of the most poignant books written about childhood ..." (p. 361).

Near the end of his life Russell advised us to remember our humanity and forget all the rest. Much earlier Kant had observed: "Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made."

At the risk of spoiling this conclusion, allow me to return to the tasks and the difficulties confronting a would-be biographer of Bertrand Russell. There will soon not be much to add so far as the facts are concerned. What will be wanted is a fresh concern or angle or better Organizing Insight. In relation to great events or great thinkers, the future has a way of turning up such insights. Fresh experiences and new modes of analysis open the door to an original perspective. We can be as sure that this will happen as we must be uncertain how it will happen. In the meantime the would-be biographer might do worse than attempt to relate Russell's life and work to that of his godfather. (Russell has indeed provided a direct way into this approach in his lecture on John Stuart Mill delivered in 1955 and published in the British Academy's *Proceedings* by Oxford University Press.)

Both wrote wonderful autobiographies. One recording a loving, pitiless discipline imposed upon siblings: the other loneliness helped by a brother followed by the liberating years with the Apostles at Cambridge. (Of course Mill's friends and relatives founded an infidel institution in Gower St., but he never attended it nor any other University.) Mill was besotted by Mrs. Taylor; but in the most touching and enduring way. Russell lived in the midst of a harem in which nothing but permanency was ruled out. Mill's step-daughter was more devoted to him than any of Russell's natural children appear to have been to their father. The extravagances of their sexual lives were at once comparable and incomparable. Mill imagined Mrs. Taylor to be a sort of Clothide De Vaux: the new virgin Mother who was neither a virgin nor a mother. Russell was moved by one passionate intensity after another. The irresistible temptation is to contrast "The Saint of Rationalism" with one of its great Satanic spirits: the irrational rationalist: the amoral moralist. From where we stand Mill must be regarded as Russell's inferior when it came to logic and philosophy. Russell could never have produced such howlers as Mill did when he maintained that mathematical axioms were merely well attested inductive generalizations. Or that the only proof that happiness was "desir-

⁹ [Ms. Spence has categorically indicated her wish for privacy.—Ed.]

¹⁰ "Bertrand Russell and the Webbs", n.s. 5 (1985): 44-9.

able" was that it was "desired". On the other hand Russell could never have produced an equivalent of the *Political Economy*. In political theory, Mill's Essay on Liberty has a "classic" quality not to be found in any of Russell's writings—despite their better recognition of complexity. In political practice, both appear somewhat inept by professional standards: the one ending up as a "trimmer", the other as a passionate enthusiast. Yet both shared a hope of a transition from possessive individualism towards forms of syndicalism or guild socialism. Yet both were more rebellious than revolutionary. Both were socially distant from the classes whose emancipation they advocated. During the great London building strikes of 1859–61 Mill so far forgot the realities of social production that he thought each worker ought to be free to decide the length of his own working day. In *The Conquest of Happiness* Russell imagined that he was discussing the new circumstances facing women after the war when he was only considering the professional woman. The domestic servant—usually a woman—appears only as a problem for her employer. Of course, such blind spots were the rule rather than the exception in those times. After all, Karl Marx was an incorrigible bourgeois when it came to his own family life—the secret illicit departure from the norm being the norm. It would be great fun and perhaps rewarding to try this prospectus out. Unfortunately nobody could manage it single-handed. Perhaps, the collaboration of Adrian Desmond and James Moore in *Darwin* (1991) shows the way. However, I fear that a larger collaboration may prove necessary. I doubt whether the comparison of *average* literary performance will prove favourable to Russell. After his dismissal from Trinity and beset by the need to support Beacon Hill School he had to support himself by his writings. While some of these were in the distinguished tradition of *The Problems of Philosophy* and placed him beside H. G. Wells and Lancelot Hogben as a great popularizer, others were journalistic jottings for the Hearst press which may be best forgotten. As Karl Marx observed: "One needs money in order to write, but one should never write for money."

Doubtless both Mill and Russell were both thinkers of enduring importance. But neither of them were men of genius to be compared with Darwin or Marx. They lacked the Organizing Insight which makes it impossible for us ever to think about ourselves in the same way again.¹¹

¹¹ A brief account of what I understand by an "Organizing Insight" will be found in my essay "Sidney and Beatrice Webb" in Carl Levy, ed., *Socialism and the Intelligentsia, 1880–1914* (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 39–40.