

"Russell 1973"

McMaster has just heard six informal talks on Bertrand Russell, under the title of "Russell 1973". The talks were sponsored by the McMaster Philosophy Circle, an undergraduate society. They were ably and almost single-handedly organized by its President, Mr. David Harley. I will report them in the order they occurred.

I. "Russell as Seen through his Archives" by Kenneth Blackwell. I spoke on the relevance of archives to the study of philosophy. The papers of several contemporary philosophers have gone into institutions - e.g., those of Carnap (Pittsburgh), Dewey (Southern Illinois), Wittgenstein (Trinity College), recently joining those of Frege, James, Pierce and Schiller. The argument for studying them is the same as the argument for studying anything in addition to a philosopher's major work: to see how his philosophy grew. Several research areas in Russell's philosophy that could make use of unpublished papers were suggested. Archives also reveal something of the personal relationships of philosophers. Passages about Wittgenstein from Russell's letters to Lady Ottoline Morrell were read. The discussion following the talk centered rather too long on whether Russell could have written such brilliant letters without an eye on posterity, and, if not, whether he was therefore a "genuine" person.

II. "Bertrand Russell and the Problem of Religion" by Ibrahim Najjar. Mr. Najjar (who wrote an M.A. thesis on Russell at McMaster) explained in what non-dogmatic and non-supernatural sense Russell had written favourably on religion. During the discussion, one ordained minister said he was astonished to find himself in almost complete agreement with Russell's religious views. There was a heated debate on whether the word "religious" was being used correctly, some saying it implied supernaturalism.

III. "Russell and a Method of Doing Philosophy" by Don D. Roberts of the University of Waterloo. Professor Roberts illustrated his talk on how one might actually get down to drawing out and writing up one's own philosophy with references to Russell's works. An interesting discussion ensued.

IV. "Historical Development of Russell's Theory of Descriptions" by Carl Spadoni - another author of a McMaster M.A. thesis on Russell. Spadoni, using *The Principles of Mathematics* and several unpublished papers on denoting, traced the theory of descriptions back to Russell's "denoting concepts". The discussion strayed beyond the logical: one person thought that since Russell regarded the realm of *being* as eternal, he therefore unconsciously regarded human *beings* as immortal.

V. "Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein" by Irving Block of the University of Western Ontario. Professor Block was concerned to show exactly what it might be in Russell's introduction to the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein objected to, and also what his criticisms of *Principia* were. The discussion included the question, what brought Wittgenstein and Russell together in the first place.

VI. "Introduction to Russell's Political Philosophy" by Louis Greenspan of McMaster. Professor Greenspan, who wrote his dissertation on Russell's politics, outlined the central role of freedom and coercion in Russell's political theory, with frequent references to his political actions. Discussion concerned Russell's support of wars of national liberation, his support of socialism, and his attempt to deduce his political theory from his theory of human desire.

I hope that some of the talks will be published, or developed for publication. The audience, which ranged from 20 to 50 each lecture, was diverse and appreciative. Mr. Harley deserves our thanks for organizing the talks, and the Philosophy Circle for the coffee that appeared without charge each night.

Kenneth Blackwell