

Bertrand Russell Society Annual Meeting, 2011

Abstracts of Presentations

Kenneth Blackwell

“You Need Not Suppose I Do Not Try to Get Money”: Towards a Russellian Philosophy of Personal Finance

Bertrand Russell was born into a family that was well off, and he died wealthy—or rather, shortly before his death he was in command of wealth. In between he suffered many vicissitudes of fortune. As details of his financial life are unlikely to be treated in a biography, I will sketch the cyclic nature of his finances, how he himself tracked them, his plush years and barren ones, and how he met his financial needs. ¶ I will conclude by drawing inferences as to his financial habits and records, expenditures, investments, estate-building (if any), role of advisors, and what he seems to have considered his purpose with his income; and last, but not least, whether any of this amounts to a Russellian philosophy of personal finance.

David Blitz

Russell and the Non-Absolute: From Pacifism to Atheism

Russell characterized his view of pacifism as “non-absolute pacifism”. The term “non-absolute” reflects Russell's rejection of the idealist Absolute of Hegel and the Forms of Plato. It also influenced his view of religion, which can be characterized as “non-absolute atheism”. Russell's “non-absolutism” also finds an interesting reflection in his willingness, unusual in philosophers, to collaborate with others, both in philosophy (e.g. Whitehead and Wittgenstein) and in politics (especially during his anti-war involvements). ¶ This provides an interesting link, to be elucidated in the presentation, between Russell's academic philosophy and his practical engagement.

William (“Bill”) Bruneau

***Principia Patrum*: Conrad and Bertrand Russell as Political Intellectuals**

The main points of the paper are twofold. First, I want to explain political reversals in the two generations of Russells—BR starts out as a Liberal/liberal, becomes a democratic socialist, and famously tears up his Labour Party membership card in 1965. Conrad does the opposite—starts out a Labourite and leaves for the Lib-Dems. My view is that were

Conrad alive, HE would be tearing up his Lib-Dem membership card just about now. ¶ Second, I want to show exactly how far Conrad's historical reasoning takes into account the standards of argument and inference that Bertie took to be appropriate in the social sciences—and in a sense, the arts. ¶ In passing I'll refer to the common interests of father and son in things like “true liberalism” and “academic freedom.” The paper would balloon to 20,000 words if I attempted all this, of course—so I'll stick mostly to the two main points listed just above. ¶ The family background is well known and very important: Conrad and Bertie did not speak for 17 years (1950–67), and yet we have the oddity of their political histories (only a minority of academics are so politically committed as these two were), and of their common commitment to forms of historical reasoning that have direct “lessons” not just for other historians, but for citizens. Both men wanted to change the world, when you come right down to it.

Kevin C. Klement

Universals as Individuals in *Principia Mathematica*

James Levine argues in a forthcoming paper that Russell's metaphysics at the time of 1910's *Principia Mathematica* (*PM*) embraced metaphysical type distinctions between genuine entities, and in particular between particulars and universals (predicates and relations), contrary to arguments given in past works by Greg Landini, Graham Stevens and myself. Levine's argument is multifaceted but involves in particular a reading of some still unpublished pre-*PM* manuscripts. In this response piece, I argue for a different reading of those manuscripts, draw upon manuscripts that come between the ones Levine cites and *PM* itself, and argue that they tell a different story. I also counter some arguments Levine gives based upon how he reads some published works such as 1905's “The Existential Import of Propositions” and 1912's “The Relations of Universals and Particulars”. ¶ The conclusion is that Russell still held that both universals and particulars were subsumed under the logical type of individuals at the time of *PM*.

Gregory Landini

Types ‘ Typos ‘ *Principia*: On the Orders of Elimination of Incomplete Symbols

Principia goes to great lengths to hide its type theory and to make it appear as if its incomplete symbols (definite descriptions, class expressions) are well-behaved. But well-hidden as they are, we cannot understand the proofs in *Principia* unless we bring them into focus. ¶ When we do, some rather surprising results emerge—which is the subject of this paper.

Tim Madigan

Mr. Russell's Chicken

In this talk, I will examine BR's two famed usages of a chicken analogy—the first in his chapter “On Induction”, from *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), the second in his 1959 book, *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare*, where he describes the game known as “chicken” and offers mordant comments on those who play the geopolitical version of it. ¶ I will furthermore offer an argument as to why the chicken rather than the owl should be the symbol of philosophy, and give due credit to Mr. Russell's Chicken as the exemplary case.

Dustin Olson

From “the Maxim” to “the Postulates”: the Role of Inference in Russell's Scientific Philosophy

This paper would discuss Russell's maxim: whenever possible, use a construction in the place of inference when discussing empirical knowledge. He held this view in “The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics” (1914) in *Mysticism and Logic*. We find, however, that as Russell focuses more on the problem of perception and our knowledge of the world according to physics—specifically in *The Analysis of Matter* and *Human Knowledge*—this maxim becomes less influential. ¶ Ultimately Russell is forced to incorporate inferences into his epistemology and metaphysics.

Ray Perkins

Was Russell's 1922 Error Theory a Mistake?

Recent Russell scholarship has made clear the importance of Russell's contributions to ethical theory. But his brilliant two-page 1922 paper, anticipating by two decades what has come to be called “error theory”, is still little known and not fully understood by students of Russell's ethics. In that succinct paper, never published in Russell's lifetime, he criticizes the “absolutist” view of G.E. Moore; and with the help of his own theory of descriptions, he exposes the “fallacy” underlying Moore's (and his own earlier) arguments regarding value judgments, and puts forward a new analysis of value judgments which preserves the “absolutist” meaning at the cost of rendering all value judgments false. ¶ I will (1) attempt to make clear just what Russell was up to in his little paper, (2) defend his 1922 theory against some recent criticisms, and (3) suggest the real reason that Russell so promptly abandoned his new theory.

Tom Riggins

**Russell vs. Mao on the Preconditions of Chinese Liberation
(based on *The Problem of China*)**

In the presentation I compare the suggestions and recommendations that Russell put forth re Chinese development with the actual historical program of the Chinese Revolution led by Mao and the current policies of the CPC (Communist Party of China).

Peter Stone

Master Class on *Taming Economic Power*

From the BRS Library online, here is a recording of the original radio discussion, as broadcast in 1938: <http://www.russellsocietylibrary.com/Memberproceed.asp>. The page links also to a PDF scan of the published text of Russell's broadcast: <http://www.russellsocietylibrary.com/1938.pdf>.

Chad Trainer

**Bereft of God and Anglican Complacency: a Comparison of
Russell's Empiricism with Berkeley's**

Bertrand Russell considered George Berkeley's philosophy to be fundamentally flawed. He thought Berkeley had an unduly expansive view of subjectivity's role in the constitution of the cosmos' nature. He considered Berkeley's philosophy to be further defective on account of its uncritical assumption of the mind/matter dualism. And even within this dualism, Russell sees Berkeley as failing to consistently apply to "spirits" the skepticism he was so determined to apply to matter. If anything, Berkeley's arguments would have been more appropriate as a means to establishing solipsism instead of the immaterialism for which Berkeley longed. ¶ However, Russell does credit Berkeley with being the first philosopher to show that a denial of matter's existence can be tenably maintained without being simply ridiculous. ¶ Whatever misgivings Russell may have harbored about Berkeley's linguistic theory of mathematics, Russell himself largely retreated from his earlier Platonic universe and viewed the progress of physics, albeit with some wryness, as ultimately vindicating much of Berkeley's views.

Martin C. Underwood

Joseph Rotblat, Bertrand Russell and the Bomb

Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat was one of the most distinguished scientists and peace campaigners of the post-Second World War period. His life from the early 1950s until his

death in August 2005 was devoted to the abolition of nuclear weapons and peace. For this he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952, together with the Pugwash Conferences he helped found with Bertrand Russell. ¶ The BBC organized a Panorama programme to discuss the hydrogen bomb. Rotblat, the Archbishop of York and Bertrand Russell were invited. Rotblat was to explain the physics of the hydrogen bomb and the others discuss the moral implications. This was his first meeting with Bertrand Russell and was to be the start of a remarkable relationship. From 1945 until his death, Russell campaigned tirelessly, with Rotblat, for the abolition of nuclear weapons. ¶ Rotblat's Archive is now available at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, University of Cambridge. This provides new insights into the production of the Russell–Einstein Manifesto that can be seen as leading to the foundation of the Pugwash Conferences. ¶ The Archive also contains new material on the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Rotblat was initially involved, but resigned. There were evident tensions. The Pugwash Conferences were, essentially, private meetings, although press statements were sometimes made. This contrasts with the position of Russell, who, with CND, was for the total, open debate on nuclear weapons, their testing and use. ¶ Using new Archive material these tensions are discussed, together with Rotblat's and Russell's differing views on how best to engage the Public in the debate.

David White

Philosophy, Literature, Russell and Woolf

Jaako Hintikka ("Virginia Woolf and Our Knowledge of the External World", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38 [1979]: 5-14) argues for an analogy between the construction of the external world that Russell proposed and Woolf's stream of consciousness in constructing a fictional world. ¶ The positive points of the analogy have to do mainly with Woolf's using the impressions she attributes to fictional characters to construct her unreal world, whereas Russell bases his real world construction on the observations of real-life individual observers. Hintikka concludes that this parallel is useful for enjoying our everyday experience of the world and for illuminating by means of a case study a more general collaboration of philosophy and literature. ¶ Objections may be raised on all these points. Russell's philosophy is subject to Wittgenstein's rejection of the possibility of a private language, but Woolf's stream of consciousness is not. That is one point of disanalogy. Secondly, there are many other ways in which literature can be in a collaborative relationship with philosophy: by asking questions, by suggesting answers, and more importantly by motivating the search for answers. Hintikka minimizes such concerns in favor of the epistemological. ¶ Finally, we need to review the general atmosphere of Bloomsbury in relation to Moore and Russell on the one hand and Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, on the other, with particular attention to the relations

between *Principia Ethica* and literature and *Principia Ethica* and later analytic philosophy.

Donovan Wishon

Russellian Acquaintance without Discriminating Knowledge

What does it take to have genuinely singular thoughts about individuals? That is, what does it take to have thoughts whose contents are constituted by the very individuals and features, if any, that the thoughts are about rather than by some way of getting at or identifying them? ¶ Russell's well-known constraint on genuine singular thought is that a subject must be acquainted with an individual or feature in order for that individual or feature itself to figure into the content of the subject's thought or talk about it. In fact, on Russell's view, all cognition and linguistic designation ultimately rests on our fundamental epistemic capacity to be acquainted with, or consciously aware of, individuals and their features.