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The Bertrand Russell Society Bulletin

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Russell at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1945
Source: Photograph in the Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster University and used in Sheila Turcon's "Grosvenor Lodge and Dorset House, 1944-1949" (*The Homes of Bertrand Russell*)

2025 Bertrand Russell Society Annual Meeting

BY LANDON D. C. ELKIND

This year's Bertrand Russell Society meeting was held in Bowling Green, Kentucky at my home institution, Western Kentucky University. Thanks to everyone who made the trip and to all the speakers who presented. Thanks also to my department of political science and the university's philosophy club, which co-sponsored our meeting.

The in-person gathering was smaller than in pre-Covid years, no doubt in part because of our continued use of hybrid meeting modalities and in part because of continued concerns about the safety of travel (especially by plane) to and within the United States. But happily we saw a many of participants online.

If you missed our banquet this year, do not fret–our 2026 annual meeting will be at McMaster Unviersity in Hamilton, Ontario, likely in late June, and might even be adjacent to the 2026 SSHAP meeting in nearby Toronto. Stay tuned for more from 2026 host Andrew Bone!

Treasurer's Report

BY LANDON ELKIND

The treasurer's report on the (January 1–December 31) 2024 fiscal year is now available for viewing on the Bertrand Russell Society website. It was also sent over the BRS list.

At our recent meeting in Amherst, New York, we lowered dues for most of our membership types. Despite this, thanks in large part to the savings from the new arrangement with Project MUSE for the *Russell* journal, we remain in the black. We saw a revenue of $2,311.03 despite going in-person for our 2024 annual meeting.

This year's annual meeting was also in the black and relatively inexpensive, so I expect continued good news on our revenue front. We want to be good stewards of the our membership's donations, dues, and role in preserving and promoting Bertrand Russell's logical, philosophical, and political legacy.

Multiple members have complained about the complexity of paying over PayPal for memberships. We have heard the membership's complaints; alternatives are being explored.

Principia Mathematica Critical Edition gets $68,927 more NEH funding

BY LANDON ELKIND

Members of the BRS may remember that the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) funded a new critical edition of Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica* (RQ-286963-22). Work on this grant began in January 2023 as a joint venture between Western Kentucky University and the University of Iowa (between Matthew Butler, Gregory Landini, and me).

I am happy to report that the grant has been given an extra $68,927 from the NEH to continue work on the new edition, also extending our grant period by one more year to December 2026.

Predictions are hazardous, and I care more about doing a solid editorial job than a quick one. But I anticipate Volume I's manuscript, textual notes and all, will be in Cambridge University Press' hands within a few months, with Volumes II and III delivered in mid and late 2026, respectively.

I cannot say when the new edition of *Principia* will appear after manuscripts are delivered, but I can note that 2027 is the centenary of the second edition's Volumes II and III.

Principia's 19-syllable number

BY LANDON D. C. ELKIND

Alfred Whitehead and Bertrand Russell have a fun example in *Principia Mathematica* (p. 61):

> The number of syllables in the English names of finite integers tends to increase as the integers grow larger, and must gradually increase indefinitely, since only a finite number of names can be made with a given finite number of syllables. Hence the names of some integers must consist of at least nineteen syllables, and among these there must be a least. Hence "the least integer not nameable in fewer than nineteen syllables" must denote a definite integer; in fact, it denotes 111,777. But the "least integer not nameable in fewer than nineteen syllables" is itself a name consisting of eighteen syllables; hence the least integer not nameable in fewer than nineteen syllables can be named in eighteen syllables, which is a contradiction.

In a footnote, Whitehead and Russell credit G. G. Berry of the Bodleian Library, who "suggested" this contradiction; it is now known as the Berry Paradox.[1] How did Berry (or Whitehead and Russell, if they checked Berry's work) come up with the example? Consider the words used to indicate the ones-places and how many syllables they have:

0. Two syllables
1. One syllable
2. One syllable
3. One syllable
4. One syllable
5. One syllable
6. One syllable
7. Two syllables
8. One syllable
9. One syllable

Consider also the words used to indicate decimal place and how many syllables they have; English has special words to indicate tens places, and then numeral words above plus another word to indicate any decimal places beyond that (at least as far as English goes):

- Tens are indicated by one-to-five syllable phrases as follows as follows:
  - "ten" – one syllable
  - "thirteen", "fourteen", "fifteen", "sixteen", "eighteen", "nineteen" – two syllables
  - "twenty", "thirty", "forty", "fifty", "sixty", "eighty", "ninety" – two syllables
  - "eleven", "seventeen", "seventy" – three syllables
  - "twenty-one", "twenty-two", . . . , "thirty-one", . . . , etc., – three syllables
  - "twenty-seven", "thirty-seven", etc., – four syllables
  - "seventy-seven" – five syllables
- hundreds are indicated by the number of syllables for the ones-place numeral plus two, or:
  - "[numeral]" plus "hundred" is [numeral's syllables] plus two
- "[numeral]" plus "thousand" is [numeral's syllables] plus two

We will not need to go beyond this. Now *Principia*'s example number is read aloud as:

> "One hundred and eleven thousand, seven hundred and seventy seven."

Adding these syllables up we get:

> "One hundred" "and" "eleven thousand", "seven hundred" "and" "seventy seven."

$$3 + 1 + 5 + 4 + 1 + 5 = 19 \text{ syllables}$$

Notice that if we omit the "and" that sometimes comes between numerals in the number, the example is no longer correct. More on that later. We assume throughout that leading zeros are omitted, too (or "1" would be a correct number, as "0,000,000,001" would do the trick). The usual conventions for omitting ending mention of zeros are also followed, as in "one hundred" rather than "one hundred and zero".

Generally, we want as few decimal places as possible. If we stick to only three-digit numbers, we will never get a sufficiently syllabrious numeral name, since we can get at best

> "seven hundred" + "and" + "seventy seven"

$$4 + 1 + 5 = 10 \text{ syllables}$$

But as a matter of fact we have now maximized the number of syllables up to hundreds. Consulting the above syllables per name of the numeral, we can see that maximal numbers of syllables will have "77" in the tens places (or tens of thousands, etc.) and "7" in the hundreds places (or hundreds of thousands, etc.). So, we will need to go into the thousands places.

Going up to "Seven thousand and" only adds five syllables, so we need, as Saruman says in The Two Towers movie, "tens of thousands". But even that will not do, since "seventy-seven thousand and" adds eight syllables, so even with the maximally syllabrious numeral in the tends of thousands, 77,777, we only reach 17 syllables:

> "seventy-seven thousand", "seven hundred" "and" "seventy-seven"

$$7 + 4 + 1 + 5 = 17 \text{ syllables}$$

Now in hundreds of thousands, we can maximally get 777,777, a twenty-one syllable number:

> "seven hundred" "and" "seventy seven thousand", "seven hundred" "and" "seventy seven"

$$4 + 1 + 7 + 4 + 1 + 5 = 22 \text{ syllables}$$

So, we need to find the number between 777 and 777,777 that cannot be named (by the words for its numeral) in fewer than nineteen syllables.

Since we need a number in the hundreds of thousands, the leading digit should be 1. As for the other two digits in the thousands places, since "eleven" has the same number of syllables as "seventy" and is smaller, we will try that first. If we need to go up in syllables to a slightly bigger number like "twenty-seven", we can. But we should maximize the number in the hundreds rather than in the thousands.

So we get a leading phrase, for a minimal number in the hundreds of thousands, with nine syllables:

> One hundred and eleven thousand, ...

By our earlier attempt at maximizing the number of syllables in the hundreds places, we found that 777 has a ten syllable name, and this gives us a number with the requisite nineteen syllables.

Incidentally, I think the actual number answering to *Principia*'s description should not count the "and" in between numbers. Are there strict rules for where the "and"s between the numbers go? Would you correct someone who said "one thousand and fifty"? What if we remove "and" from numeral names – what number then answers to the description?

If we want a number with nineteen syllables, then we get ten from the hundreds places with "777" as our final three digits. With no "and" in between, "seven hundred seventy seven" is nine syllables. But we still need to go up to the hundreds of thousands to hit 19.

If we choose "777,777" we get 20 syllables (nine syllables in "777" twice, plus the two in "thousand"):

> "seven hundred seventy seven thousand, seven hundred seventy seven"

$$2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 2 = 20 \text{ syllables}$$

We can lose no more than one syllable. Removing one syllable from the leading "7" by substituting "1" would make the number as small as could be while still being in the hundreds of thousands, which we need to reach the requisite 19 syllables:

> "one hundred seventy seven thousand, seven hundred seventy seven"

$$1 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 2 = 19 \text{ syllables}$$

Now we can entertain the same question about rationals. The number one, of course, cannot be represented in any fraction as 19 digits (whether we allow "and"s or not), since it will have the same numeral in its numerator and denominator. This means that it will have an even number of syllables (because it will be 2 * n-many syllables, where n is the number of syllables of the numerator and in the denominator).[2] We can get an answer for 3, since 12,765 / 4,255 is said aloud

> "twelve thousand" "seven hundred" "sixty five", "four thousand" "two hundred" "fifty fifths"

$$3 + 4 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 = 19 \text{ syllables}$$

We can also get an answer for 2, such as 9,352 / 4,676, which is said aloud

> "nine thousand" "three hundred" "fifty two", "four thousand" "six hundred" "seventy sixths"

$$3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 4 = 19 \text{ syllables}$$

The smallest example for 2 that I have been able to find is 2,254 / 1,127, which is said aloud

> "two thousand" "two hundred" "fifty four", "one thousand" "one hundred" "twenty-sevenths"

$$3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 4 = 19 \text{ syllables}$$

Arguably, this means that the 2 is the least (positive whole) number nameable in nineteen syllables – depending entirely of course on specifying that "names" in this sense are improper fractions.

Now if one sticks to a fraction whose denominator is in the hundreds (and so also with a numerator less than 2,000), one cannot get an improper fractional name for 2 that is 19 syllables. The best one can do is 18, as with 1,774 / 887 or 1,754 / 877. Notice that 777 is the most syllabrious number in the hundreds at 9 syllables. But its double is 1,554, which has 9 syllables also, and we still only get 18 syllables here.

Also, we do not think integers in the modern sense (positive and negative whole numbers) should be included in this exercise, since it makes the exercise trivial. For any negative number with a 19-syllable name, we can multiply it by 100 and get a strictly smaller number (since it is still negative) with a name having strictly more syllables (since we will add a word like "hundred" or "thousand", etc., that was not in the name before) – assuming Infinity, of course.

Notes

[1]The Berry Paradox also appears in Russell's 1908 "Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types" (with identical wording and the same attribution to Berry). For further details about Berry and the origins of this paradox, see Appendix IV of Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, Volume 5.

[2]This argument, and the following example for 3, are due to Gregory Landini. The first example for 2 was discovered by Frann Ostroff.

From Galway to Philadelphia: A Russellian Travel Report

BY PETER STONE

Over the summer, I've had the opportunity to visit two sites that should be of interest to any Russellian. At the end of July, my wife Heike and I made our annual trip to Connemara, in the west of Ireland on the border between Mayo County and Galway County. (A fabulous vacation spot, I might add—very relaxing and quiet, if that's your cup of tea.) Every year, there are places out west that we wish to visit, and every year we get to a few of them. This year, I had a definite target in mind—the cottage in which Ludwig Wittgenstein spent several months during his sojourn in Ireland from November 1947 to June 1949. (The cottage had been owned by Myles Drury, brother of one of Wittgenstein's former students.) Fortunately, I was able to persuade Heike to help me find the place (an essential step in the plan, given that she would be doing all the driving). While Heike is not a Russellian, she is usually willing to help me investigate Russell-related sites—as she did when we tracked down a barn outside of Dublin bearing a striking picture of Russell's face. (For that story, see the Autumn 2020 issue of the BRSB.)

Wittgenstein's cottage is in a village called Rosroe, along the coast of a fjord called Killary Harbour. It's a fairly isolated spot—not too far from a major road, but accessible only by a rather narrow and muddy drive. The village itself looked quite small, with many more sheep visible than people. (Sheep in Connemara definitely have the right of way, and you can tell how deep into the countryside you have gone by the number of them exercising that privilege.) A sign warned that dogs were not allowed, and although we had all three of ours in the car with us (Leela, Shaylee, and Robin), we elected to keep them in the car rather than risk getting them shot. (Sheep farmers mean business.) A walk around the village quickly located both a beautiful view and the cottage we sought.

A selfie in Rosroe, facing Killary Harbour.

The cottage itself was plainly marked, although it had clearly been expanded since the days of Wittgenstein's residency. Sadly, we found no one around to provide further details regarding the subsequent history of the cottage.

The Cottage.

Hopefully, on a future trip to Connemara we will be able to obtain further information (assuming Heike's up for making the drive again).

A selfie in Rosroe, facing Killary Harbour.

A month later, I travelled to Philadelphia to attend the 2024 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA). I knew it would be a busy conference, and I didn't have a lot of time for sightseeing, but there was one site I couldn't miss—the Barnes Foundation, Russell's employer from January 1941 to December 1942 (following the shameful incident in which he was denied a teaching position at City College of New York). The Foundation, home for Albert Barnes' masterful collection of (mostly impressionist) art, had been on display in Merion (a Philadelphia suburb) from the Foundation's founding until May 2012, when financial circumstances led to its movement to increase public access (thereby generating more revenue). I had previously visited the Foundation at Merion, but was anxious to see the collection at its new location—especially to see the arrangement of the artwork. Barnes had planned for his art to remain in Merion for eternity, with every work of art in exactly the place he had assigned it. As a condition of the move, the Foundation pledged to ensure that the rooms housing the art at its new location would have exactly the same layout as the old, so that the arrangement of everything would remain the same. I was eager to test that pledge to the limits of my memory.

I was not disappointed. The new and more spacious location facilitates some lovely amenities unavailable at the Merion site—an atrium featuring a café, a basement housing an extensive gift shop, an additional gallery for special exhibitions—all of which make a useful complement to the main galleries. The upstairs gallery was closed off for renovations, with some of its contents available in the auxiliary gallery as part of a special exhibition entitled "Matisse & Renoir: New Encounters at the Barnes." But the other galleries are more or less as I remember them. Of particular interest is the mural The Dance, designed by Henri Matisse especially for the Foundation. It was painstakingly moved to its new location high above the windows of one of the galleries, and is perhaps even easier to enjoy now due to the improved lighting.

Unfortunately, I did not take any pictures during my afternoon visit to the Barnes Foundation. My experience at the gift shop was mixed. I own copies of Barnes' magnum opus, The Art in Painting (1925), and his later The Art of Renoir (1935), and had hoped to get copies of some of his other books—his studies of Cezanne and Matisse, for example. But sadly the only books by Barnes carried by the gift shop these days are the two I already possess. (Apparently, he's not a bestseller.) But there is still quite a lot to browse in the shop, from relatively intellectual art books to pretty souvenirs. Now if only they could start carrying copies of A History of Western Philosophy.

All in all, I have greatly enjoyed my recent Russell-related travels, and recommend both of these destinations to BRS travellers.

Note: All photos are courtesy of Heike Stone.

For Further Reading:

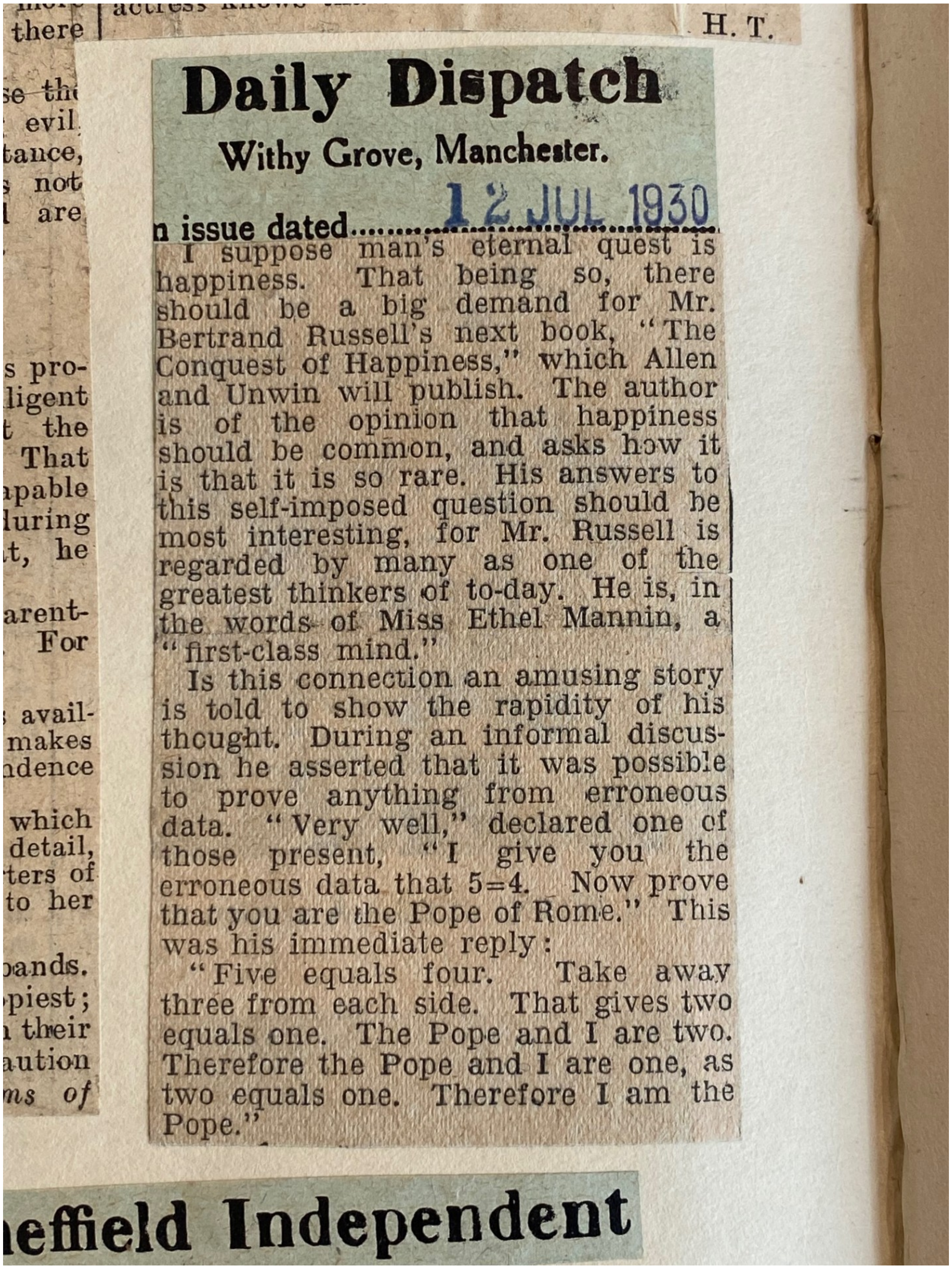
The Barnes Foundation Handbook. Philadelphia: The Barnes Foundation, 2021.

Hayes, John. "Wittgenstein's Irish Cottage." History Ireland 26, no. 4 (2018): 36–38.

‘Russell = the Pope’ Doesn’t Follow from ‘5=4’

BY GREGORY LANDINI

In a scrapbook, Bertrand Russell’s secretary preserved the following clipping concerning Russell’s then forthcoming book *The Conquest of Happiness*. The clipping is dated 12 July 1930.



H. T.

Daily Dispatch

Withy Grove, Manchester.

n issue dated........12 JUL 1930

I suppose man’s eternal quest is happiness. That being so, there should be a big demand for Mr. Bertrand Russell’s next book, “The Conquest of Happiness,” which Allen and Unwin will publish. The author is of the opinion that happiness should be common, and asks how it is that it is so rare. His answers to this self-imposed question should be most interesting, for Mr. Russell is regarded by many as one of the greatest thinkers of to-day. He is, in the words of Miss Ethel Mannin, a “first-class mind.”

Is this connection an amusing story is told to show the rapidity of his thought. During an informal discussion he asserted that it was possible to prove anything from erroneous data. “Very well,” declared one of those present, “I give you the erroneous data that 5=4. Now prove that you are the Pope of Rome.” This was his immediate reply:

“Five equals four. Take away three from each side. That gives two equals one. The Pope and I are two. Therefore the Pope and I are one, as two equals one. Therefore I am the Pope.”

heffield Independent

A 1930 Press Clipping Saved by Russell’s Secretary
Source: Scrapbook 3, p. 3 – Photo Source: Kenneth Blackwell, May 8, 2024

The clipping suggests that there is a “proof” that Russell = The Pope if $5 = 4$.

Let’s put b = Russell, and g = the Pope. We have:

1. $\vdash 5 = 4 \supset 5 - 3 = 4 - 3$
2. $\vdash 5 - 3 = 4 - 3 \supset 2 = 1$
3. $\vdash 5 = 4 \supset 2 = 1$
4. $\vdash \mathrm{N_0c}`\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g}) = 2$

The homogeneous cardinal number of the class $\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g})$ = 2

5. $\vdash \mathrm{N_0c}`\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b}) = 1$

The homogeneous cardinal number of the class $\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b}) = 1$

6. $\vdash 2 = 1 \supset \mathrm{N_0c}`\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g}) = \mathrm{N_0c}`\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b})$
7. $\vdash \mathrm{N_0c}`\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g}) = \mathrm{N_0c}`\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{g}) \supset$
$\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g}) \ \mathrm{sm} \ \hat{z}(z = \mathrm{g})$

If the homogeneous cardinal number of the class $\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g})$ equals the homogeneous cardinal number of the class $\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b}) = 1$, then

the class $\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g})$ is similar to the class $\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b}) = 1$.

8. $\vdash 2 = 1 \supset \hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g}) \ \mathrm{sm} \ \hat{z}(z = \mathrm{g}) \supset \mathrm{b} = \mathrm{g}$
9. $\vdash \hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g}) \ \mathrm{sm} \ \hat{z}(z = \mathrm{g}) \supset \mathrm{b} = \mathrm{g}$

If the class $\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{b} \vee z = \mathrm{g})$ is similar to the class $\hat{z}(z = \mathrm{g})$ then b $= g$

9. $\vdash 5 = 4 \supset \mathrm{b} = \mathrm{g}$.

If $5 = 4$ then Russell equals the Pope.

The demonstration is flawed. There is a significant problem with its use of the innocuous looking line #1. This is a theorem of *Principia*, only in virtue of the convention that it calls its Rule of Indefinite Numbers. This convention allows us to uniformly raise the relative type of the natural numerals "5", "4", "2", "1" so that none are equal to the empty class. This is always viable, because in any given theorem (or proof) there are only finitely many numeral occurring in it.

But both the Pope and Russell are individuals of lowest simple type, and thus for the demonstration we have to work in a relative type where we don't have a proof that 2 is not equal to the empty class ($i.e., \nvdash 2 \neq \Lambda$). Of course, in this relative type it is also the case that we don't have a proof that 2 is equal to the empty class ($i.e., \nvdash 2 = \Lambda$). Consider line #3. If it should happen that $2 = \Lambda$, then $5 = 4 = 3 = 2$. Yet $\vdash 2 \neq 1$. Hence line #3 is not correct. There is no such theorem.

We can use the relative type notations of *63-*65 to make the point, writing $\vdash 2_{\xi_\mathrm{b}} = \Lambda_{\xi_\mathrm{b}} \supset 5_{\xi_\mathrm{b}} = \Lambda_{\xi_\mathrm{b}} = 4_{\xi_\mathrm{b}}$ and yet $\vdash 2_{\xi_\mathrm{b}} \neq 1_{\xi_\mathrm{b}}$. The notation 2_{ξ_b} indicates a class of two-membered classes ξ each whose members are either equal or not equal to Russell. Thus line #9 above, would be

$$5_{\xi_\mathrm{b}} = 4_{\xi_\mathrm{b}} \supset \mathrm{b} = \mathrm{g}.$$

As we can see, the above is not a theorem. (Relative type notations vanish with the contextual definitions of the no-classes and no-relation-in-extension theories. They should not be conflated with the different simple type indices that adorns the individual variables.)

Is there a way to repair the argument? It is difficult to see how. Of course, we have the following which (loosely put) assures that everthing follows from a contradiction.

$$\vdash p \bullet \sim p \, . \supset . \, q$$
$$\vdash \sim\sim (\sim p \vee \sim\sim p) \vee q$$
$$\vdash (\sim p \vee p) \vee q$$

The above are rather obvious in *Principa* where we find:

$$p \bullet q = df \ \sim (\sim p \vee \sim q)$$
$$p \supset q = df \ \sim p \vee q$$

If we take it for granted that $5 \neq 4$, then we could proceed via a contradictory antecedent. That is, we have the easy demonstration using the fact that everything follows from a contradiction. The above might be described as saying:

$$\vdash 5 = 4 \bullet \sim (5 = 4) \,.\supset.\, \mathrm{b} = \mathrm{g}$$

But this is not the sort of demonstration given (according to the clip). Thus the clip poses something of a challenge to interpret– and of course we are after the most a charitable interpretation we can find. The question before us is then whether Russell actually said that from $5 = 4$ it deductively follows that Russell is equal to the Pope. Perhaps he didn't. There are different versions of the story. An alternative is that in a lecture on logic, Russell mentioned that in the sense of material implication, a false proposition implies any proposition.

> A student raised his hand and said: "In that case, given that 1 = 0, prove that you are the Pope."
>
> Russell immediately replied: "Add 1 to both sides of the equation: then we have $2 = 1$. The set containing just me and the Pope has 2 members. But $2 = 1$, so it has only 1 member; therefore, I am the Pope."

This variant of the story fairs much better. We have:

$$\vdash 1 = 0 \supset 1 +_c 1 = 0 +_c 1$$
$$\vdash 1 +_c 1 = 0 +_c 1 \supset 2 = 1$$
$$\vdash 2 = 1 \,.\supset.\, \mathrm{b} = \mathrm{g}$$
$$\vdash 1 = 0 \,.\supset.\, \mathrm{b} = \mathrm{g}$$

Note that the above avoids the flaw in the variant of the clipping because $\vdash \sim (1 = 0)$. Of course, once we see this, we realize that we have:

$$\vdash 1 = 0 \bullet \sim (1 = 0) \,.\supset.\, \mathrm{b} = \mathrm{g}$$

Ultimately, this is the only point made–namely, that everything "follows" from a contradiction.

Who first identity-fied Pope Bertrand Russell?

BY LANDON D. C. ELKIND

We know who killed Pope Bertrand Russell. Gregory Landini has rightly shown there to be a serious flaw in the most widely-quoted version of the demonstration. But who invented this amusing demonstration of the identity "Pope=Bertrand Russell"? Landini thinks it was not Russell since the 'demonstration' is not valid in the logic of *Principia* (see the previous *Bulletin* piece).

Ken Blackwell sent a note over the Society's listserv with a photo of a press clipping from 1930. It reads:

> Is [*sic*.] this connection an amusing story is told to show the rapidity of his [Russell's] thought. During an informal discussion, he asserted that it was possible to prove anything from erroneous data. "Very well," declared one of those present, "I give you the erroneous data that $5 = 4$. Now prove that you are the Pope of Rome." This was his immediate reply:
>
> "Five equals four. Take away three from each side. That gives two equals one. The Pope and I are two. Therefore the Pope and I are one, as two equals one. Therefore I am the Pope."

Now it would be peculiar if Russell would have saved this story if the reported conversation were totally fictitious. So I am inclined to think that Russell did really repeat this line of argument at some point. But who contrived it?

Inspired by the clipping shared by Ken, I sought to track down the first recorded occurrence. The argument is, I now believe, due to G. H. Hardy. Whitehead recalls in a February 1925 lecture at Harvard (p. 200 in this volume):

> G. H. Hardy just after Principia Mathematica appeared
>
> If $1 = 2$: Russell is the pope of Rome. Russell and the pope are 2. $2 = 1$ ...)

Memory wasn't what it used to be. Whitehead's recollection is about 10 years later. Moreover, what does "just after *Principia Mathematica*" appeared" mean? After the first volume appeared in November or December 1910? After the second volume appeared in 1912? Or after February 1913, when the full set had appeared?

Nonetheless, "just after" probably means within two years. So I am inclined to think Hardy devised the argument sometime between late 1910 and 1913. I think we can trust Whitehead's recollection, and even if it is off by two full years, Hardy would still have priority over any other written retelling of the argument that is known to me.

Harold Jeffreys wrote (*Scientific Inference*, 1957, second edition) that the argument stemmed from a conversation between J. M. E. McTaggart and Hardy (p. 18):

> McTaggart is said to have denied the conclusion, saying, 'If twice 2 is 5, how can you prove that I am the Pope?' G. H. Hardy answered 'If twice 2 is 5, $4 = 5$. Subtract 3; then $1 = 2$. But McTaggart and the Pope are two; therefore McTaggart and the Pope are one.'

Note that the argument does not occur in the 1931 first edition of *Scientific Inference*. My guess is that Jeffreys got the anecdote (which had probably become Cambridge lore by this point) from someone like Maxwell Newman.

Now Ken circulated in the BRS listserv a version of the story from Philip E. B. Jourdain ("The Philosophy of Mr. B∗RTR∗ND R∗SS∗LL", January 1916, p. 40) published in *The Monist*:

> A distinguished philosopher (M) once thought that the logical use of the word "implication,"–any false

> proposition being said to "imply" any proposition true or false, is absurd, on the grounds that it is ridiculous to suppose that the proposition "2 and 2 make 5" implies the proposition "M is the Pope." This is a most unfortunate instance, because it so happens that the false proposition that 2 and 2 make 5 can rigorously be proved to imply that M, or anybody else other than the Pope, is the Pope. For if 2 and 2 make 5, since they also make 4, we could conclude that 5 is equal to 4. Consequently, subtracting 3 from both sides, we conclude that 2 would be equal to 1. But if this were true, since M and the Pope are two, they would be one, and obviously then M would be the Pope.

I assume that ‘M’ here is McTaggart. In this version, as in Jeffreys’, we infer a Pope McTaggart instead of a Pope Russell. It could be that Jeffreys (or whoever Jeffreys got it from) found it in Jourdain’s book. But, as Landini rightly pointed out to me, it is unlikely that Jourdain got this version of the demonstration from Russell because *Prinicpia* does not have “$2+2 \neq 5$” as a theorem.

Notice that Jourdain’s version appears three years after Volume III of *Principia*. If Whitehead’s recollection is to be trusted–and I am inclined to trust it here–then Jourdain is only recording what had (by this point) become a tale from the Cambridge High Table.

So, what can we confidently say after our adventure down this rabbit-hole? I think we can be confident in the following claims about the Russell-Pope argument:

1. The demonstration is due to Hardy, not Russell (which is well since it is flawed as recorded).
2. The news clipping is probably to be discounted as sourced from Cambridge lore (not from Russell directly).
3. The argument was contrived between 1910 and 1913 (*maybe* as late as 1915).

It is a curious catechismic fact that Catholics may be open to “$1 = 2$” since their doctrines about the Trinity have three (distinct persons) being one (deity). But I suppose that joke has already earned me a spot in *Who’s Who in Hell* (if a new volume inspired by Warren Allen Smith’s excellent 2000 book is ever published). But did Hardy also earn a spot therein with his demonstration of “Pope = Russell”? Is a demonstration blasphemous despite being invalid in *Principia*’s logic, or because it is invalid in *Principia*’s logic?

Postscript to “Who first identity-fied Pope Bertrand Russell?”

After completing this piece and not long before publishing it, Ken Blackwell wrote to me with what I think is direct evidence supporting my conclusion (1), that Hardy invented the “Russell=the Pope” argument. Ken sent part of a *BBC* transcript of the February 11th, 1947 episode of *Brains Trust*, which included this exchange between C.E.M. Joad and Russell:

> *Joad*: Russell has said if you assume the truth of any single untrue proposition, you can deduce from it by perfectly logical methods any other untrue proposition. He illustrates how one can proceed from ‘2 and 2 are 5’, via ‘The Pope and I are one’ to ‘I am the Pope.’
>
> *Russell*: I think I must put in a word, if you will allow me, and that is to disclaim any invention of this argument which was due to Professor Hardy, a very eminent mathematician.

So there we have it, straight from Russell's mouth–and, as some of us were taught in Catholic school, Pope Russell always speaks infallibly.

Russell Quote of the Issue

BY BERTRAND RUSSELL

Our Russell quote of the issue this time comes from Kenneth Blackwell:

> He [Rousseau] is the father of the romantic movement, the initiator of systems of thought which infer non-human facts from human emotions, and the inventor of the political philosophy of pseudo-democratic dictatorships as opposed to traditional absolute monarchies.

History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, 1946, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, Chapter XIX

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