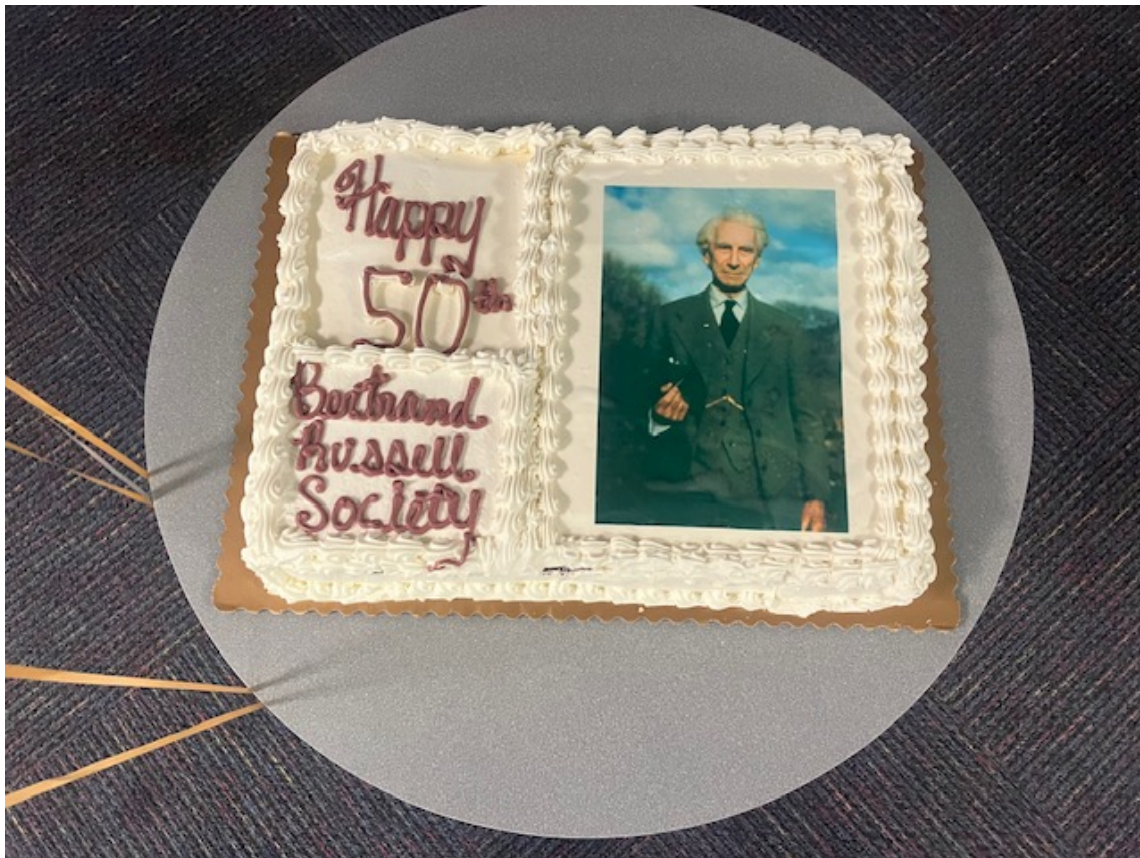


THE BERTRAND RUSSELL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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Bertrand Russell Society 50th Anniversary Cake
Source: Timothy Madigan, June 8, 2024

In Memoriam: David S. Goldman

Members of the Bertrand Russell Society were saddened to learn that Dr. David S. Goldman, a practicing psychiatrist in New York City for 48 years, passed away on February 3rd, 2024. Born on February 24th, 1938, he was 85. His wife was Amy Beth Goldman (nee Ziegler). His family asks that contributions be made to a charity of the donor's choice.

David certainly led the way with that last request. He leaves an impressive array of charitable contributions from his estate, including a generous bequest to the Bertrand Russell Society, which is an enormous boon to our mission of promoting the causes that Russell championed, promoting interest in the life and work of Russell, and bringing together persons interested in the same.

A longer remembrance of David will follow in the next issue of the *Bulletin*. Members are invited to send their recollections to the *Bulletin* editors.

Renaming of Bertrand Russell Society's Student Essay Prize

In memory of David, the board of the Bertrand Russell Society voted unanimously to rename our Student Essay Prize the David S. Goldman Student Essay Prize. Our heartfelt condolences go to David's family.



Genuine Red Hackle served at the annual banquet
Source: Timothy Madigan, June 8, 2024



Founding BRS Member Robert Davis with meeting organizer Timothy Madigan
Source: Bertrand Russell Society Annual Meeting, June 8, 2024



Giovanni de Carvalho enjoying the Red Hackle
Source: Bertrand Russell Society Annual Meeting, June 8, 2024

This Year's Prize Winners

Bertrand Russell Society Award

The 2024 Bertrand Russell Society Award goes to the Center for Inquiry. We thank them for their years of defending science and critical thinking in examining religion. The award also supports their (thoroughly Russellian) vision for a world in which public policy is guided by evidence, science, and compassion. We deeply appreciate their generosity in hosting our annual meeting.

David S. Goldman Student Paper Prize

This year's David S. Goldman Student Paper Prize goes to Nicholas Francis Marshall (McMaster University) for his paper (written for James Connelly's seminar!), "The Activity of Judgment: A Relevance Condition of Inclusion in Russell's MRTJ," which was presented at the annual meeting. The Goldman Student Prize comes with \$200, lodging and registration at the annual meeting, and a complimentary year of membership in the Bertrand Russell Society. Congratulations, Nicholas!

How far would Russell go in defense of his beliefs?

BY GÜLBERK KOÇ MACLEAN

Russell was interviewed sometime before 1964¹ and he was asked if he would die for his beliefs. He responded as follows: “Of course not. After all, I might be wrong.” A witty response, as one would expect from Russell. It shows a deep commitment to fallibilism, that we cannot be certain of the truth of any of our beliefs or knowledge claims, and therefore should not either take our own lives, or persecute others, based on the seeming certainty of our convictions. At the same time, Russell maintains that even though we can never be justified in our certainty of our empirical beliefs, we should not refrain from action; but act on beliefs which are mostly likely to be true – unless that action implies taking a life: “If it comes to burning somebody at the stake for not believing it, then it is worthwhile to remember that after all he may be right, and it is not worthwhile to persecute him.”²

Interestingly though, in another interview,³ around 1963, Russell is ready to die for his beliefs, in particular for the cause of nuclear disarmament. He said: “If I could influence opinion deeply by being martyred for the idea of nuclear disarmament, rather than just giving speeches about it in Trafalgar Square, I would be quite prepared to do so.” Is that because he realized that there was a belief, after all, he could be certain about? Or was there a limit to his fallibilism all along? Alternatively, is it that Russell acknowledged that he could be wrong about the nuclear arms race constituting a danger for the human race, but given that he was getting very close to the end of his life, he thought it would be worthwhile to sacrifice his own life for a belief whose truth he was not certain about?

Persuasion by appeal to reason and emotion

Some beliefs are so strong that they urge us to either change our own behaviour or to change

the behaviour of others in accordance with it. The belief that ‘the nuclear arms race ought not to escalate’ is one that can be satisfied only by making other people act in certain ways; it’s not enough that the believer themselves acts in accordance with the belief. And how do you make others act the way you want them to? How do you convince them? Possible means include: Appealing to their reason, giving a strong and cogent argument for others to change their ways, physical force, the insinuation of physical force or other undesirable consequences upon non-compliance, the promise of desirable consequences upon compliance, appealing to emotional connection with the target audience.

Russell had a strong belief that the Soviet and the American governments ought to cease threatening each other with nuclear bombs, and that neither side should actually go through with it. Which of the above methods did he take up to persuade the public?

Well, he tried reasoning, first and foremost, as a philosopher should. He published books, letters to the editors, columns on newspapers, listing the undesirable, dangerous consequences of a nuclear war on humanity. That didn’t achieve the goal. In his letter of 17 February 1953 to Julie Medlock, his literary agent in the U.S., in response to her question as to whether Russell would like to write more articles, Russell expressed his willingness to do occasional articles for a particular paper, but that that was enough for the moment. He didn’t think that “anything [he could] write [would] have any influence upon any country’s policy...”

This reveals Russell’s frustration with the limits of reason in persuasion. So, Russell had to buttress his rational arguments with an appeal to emotions.

On September 12th, 1961, Russell was taken to court at age 89 and was sentenced to prison, to prevent his campaign of non-violent disobedience against nuclear war, which was scheduled for September 17th, 1961. At the court,

he made a statement, which he prefaced as follows: “This is my personal statement, but I hope that those who are accused of the same so-called crime will be in *sympathy* with what I have to say.”⁴ [My italics]. I think this preface shows that he hoped to persuade the public by way of an emotional connection with his audience. Following Hume, and based on his own experiences in life, he knew very well the powerlessness of reason, when it has to compete with a counteracting passion. After all, when younger, he was beholden by passions himself. D. H. Lawrence, in his 1916 letter, had accused him of being “full of repressed desires, which have become savage and anti-social, [which] . . . come out in this sheep’s clothing of peace propaganda.” Lawrence had thought the younger Russell had “the maximum of desire of war,” and that what [Russell wanted was] to jab and strike, like the soldier with the bayonet, only [he was] sublimated into words. And [he was] like a soldier who might jab man after man with his bayonet, saying, “This is for ultimate peace.”⁵

In that 12 September 1961 court statement, Russell explained the reasons for why he “was driven” to civil disobedience. After the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, Russell spoke up to the House of Lords, he brought together scientists from all over the world to collect evidence on the harms of nuclear warfare. But he wrote, “no newspaper notices these reports and they have no effect either on Governments or on public opinion. The popular press minimizes and ridicules the efforts of those working against nuclear warfare, and television with rare exceptions is closed to us.”⁶ Failing to achieve his goal of informing the public of the facts about nuclear warfare, and how millions of lives are in danger, he had to resort to civil-disobedience to change opinions, and therefore actions, since this method was “more fully reported than any other method of making the facts known, and that it caused people to ask what had induced [them] to adopt such a course of action.” He expressed his willingness to suffer imprisonment for this cause for

the “salvation of [his] country and the world.”⁷

As well as getting more media coverage, and therefore causing the public to ask why someone would resort to this method of non-violent civil disobedience, another reason for his choice of this method was the hope of making an emotional connection with people, to get them to sympathize with an old man willingly suffering for a cause he believes in, and thereby pull them by his side.

Now, willing to suffer in prison for one’s beliefs is not exactly dying for one’s beliefs, though death would be a likely consequence of imprisonment, however brief, for a person his age. Would Russell go that far?

Would Russell die for his beliefs?

On 18th September, Russell was sent to prison for just 7 days, given his old age, after carrying on with his non-violent civil disobedience campaign. In the message he issued to the press, Russell appealed to both reason and emotion:

“To all, in whatever country, who are still capable of some thinking or human feeling.” First, an appeal to reason: it’s a delusion that there are two opposing sides, American and Russian leaders, who claim to “stand for a great cause;” in fact, these are two power-hungry men, merely driven by their desire to stay in power, who will sacrifice humanity, for the sake of it. Next, a combination of appeal to reason and emotion: “You, your families, your friends, and your countries are to be exterminated. . . All the public hopes, all that has been achieved in art and knowledge and thought, and all that might be achieved hereafter, is to be wiped out forever. Our ruined lifeless planet will continue for countless ages to circle aimlessly around the sun, unredeemed by the joys and loves, the occasional wisdom, the power to create beauty, which have given value to human life.”⁸

But neither the civil disobedience method, nor his martyrdom in prison for a week, yielded, at least immediately, the desired result. So, what options are left when commonplace appeals to reason and emotion as means of per-

suasion fail? Physical force on political leaders not being a viable option, dying for one's beliefs, making the ultimate appeal to emotion, was the only option left. Dying for a cause, I think, is an appeal to emotion that hopes to produce the most empathy in the audience, which would hopefully drive them to change their beliefs and practices in the desired direction.

So, yes, I think Russell would go as far as dying for a cause, if it were "worthwhile"; if he believed that it was the right thing to do, if he believed that dying for the cause of nuclear disarmament would be the most effective way of persuading the masses to change their minds in the right direction. But I don't think he did. For it would not be the right action given Russell's expected utility theory: The goal is that two opposing political world leaders agree not to resort to nuclear weapons. The means is that a famous intellectual kills himself for the cause. Granted, if successful, the pleasure gained would outweigh the pain ensued by a wide margin, considering all involved. Yes, this method might be effective, but is it highly likely to be effective? I'm not sure on this last condition. Neither was Russell, for he didn't go through with it, and in that 1963? interview he said, *if I could* influence opinion by martyring myself, *I would*, which is a counterfactual, in that he knew that his martyrdom did not have a very high chance of bringing about the desired result, that is, to influence public opinion to compel their political leaders to prevent nuclear war.

Resolution

Assuming that Russell would have died for the cause, if he thought that this would indeed bring about the desired result of persuading the masses, how will I square this with his earlier remark that he would never die for his beliefs due to his commitment to fallibilism?

Russell never relinquished his commitment to fallibilism. He always held that we can never know with certainty that our empirical beliefs are true; we believe in them with degrees of

probability, as based on our evidence. Any of our beliefs, however strongly supported by experiential evidence, may turn out to be false.

One possible explanation is that at that time he did not feel so sure about the perils of nuclear warfare. It would help if we knew exactly when this interview took place, but the interviewer doesn't say. At first, it seems that it cannot be that he all of a sudden found a belief he was certain about, namely, that the nuclear warfare will destroy all of humanity. He would admit that it is possible that nuclear warfare occurs, but somehow a pocket of humanity and Russell's precious "civilized culture" remains intact. But, on second thought, a narrower belief, such as 'A nuclear war will cause great pain and suffering to a very large number of human beings and other life on the planet' is a belief Russell, or any one of us, can be almost certain about, putting logical possibilities aside. So, he did not feel this strongly about the dangers of the nuclear warfare, that is, earlier he was not *psychologically* certain, though he remained *epistemologically* uncertain at both times.

Russell explains the difference between epistemological and psychological certainty as follows: A proposition is epistemologically certain "when it has the highest degree of credibility, either intrinsically or as a result of argument. Perhaps no proposition is certain in this sense; i.e., however certain it may be in relation to a given person's knowledge, further knowledge might increase its degree of credibility." In contrast, a person is psychologically "certain of a proposition when [they] feel no doubt whatever of its truth. This is a purely psychological concept."⁹ Russell notes that "subjective certainty . . . is no guarantee of truth, or even a high degree of credibility."

So, the resolution I propose is that Russell's response was incomplete; it required clarifying the two distinct senses of certainty and adding the requirement that the ultimate sacrifice would have to be worthwhile, and that his response of giving fallibilism as an ostensible reason against the ultimate sacrifice was employed for its rhetorical effect.

Russell's response that he wouldn't die for his beliefs because he is not certain of the truth of his beliefs means that if Russell had sacrificed his life for a cause, then we could have concluded that he was certain of the truth of that belief, effectively proposing certainty as a necessary condition for dying for a cause. But this is not in line with his acceptance that actions, in general, do not require certainty. As Russell reminds us in the *History of Western Philosophy*, we just have to live with uncertainty, but try not to be paralysed by it, and that studying philosophy would be beneficial in this regard."¹⁰ On the other hand, an action such as killing oneself for a cause, *would* require that the subject is certain of the cause they are dying for. Otherwise, it would be psychologically impossible for them to go through with it. In fact, certainty, or at least the appearance of steadfast commitment to one's beliefs, is essential in the art of persuasion of all kinds. For aren't we more inclined to be persuaded of a speaker when we sense that they seem absolutely certain of their belief? If they waver, we lose interest. But what's required, I think, is psychological certainty, not epistemologically certainty.

Psychological certainty is necessary for the ultimate sacrifice, but it is not sufficient. First, it needs to be kept in check by recognizing the epistemological uncertainty of all of our empirical beliefs. Second, the ultimate sacrifice must be "worthwhile", as Russell would put it. One would have to have good reasons to think that going through with it has a very high chance of achieving the desired result and that there's no other way of securing the same result without the accompanying self-destruction. And I think that this is the additional requirement that was missing from that brief dialogue between Russell and the interviewer. That is, Russell's response was incomplete. When Russell said he wouldn't die for a belief for he might be wrong, Russell gave fallibilism as an ostensible reason against taking one's life. And, I think, he would have added, if the conversation carried on further, that he could not foresee any circumstance at the time where the expected utility of taking

his life for a cause would outweigh the disutility of it.

Apart from reasons as to the nature of the interview, the reason why Russell did not provide a full analysis of the conditions under which one would be justified to sacrifice themselves for a cause could be that Russell wished to draw attention to fallibilism, to remind people not to be too sure of their own beliefs, keep their psychological certainties in check by remembering the uncertain nature of all our empirical beliefs from the epistemological point of view; to think carefully over the potential consequences of their putative actions before embarking on it, be that action as barely significant as a vote for a legislation or as grave as dying for a cause.

Russell might very ably have responded with a complete answer and said: 'It depends on the degree of confidence with which I hold the belief to be true and whether dying for it would bring about the desired result, and whether there was no other way of achieving the same result without the accompanying harm to myself.' But giving such a convoluted response in conversation, listing all the conditions under which it would be permissible to die for a cause and talking about degrees of confidence would not come across as snappy as his 'Of course not. I might be wrong!' That extreme generalization – 'I'd never do it! What if I'm wrong?' – has the conversational effect of shaking the audience and inducing them to think for themselves about the conditions under which it would be worth to die for a cause, which is always a more effective way of learning compared to someone's telling you what those conditions are.

Thus, I conclude that there isn't any inconsistency between the way Russell reasoned about the rationality of killing oneself for a cause and his commitment to fallibilism. He has always held that almost all of our beliefs are epistemologically uncertain. But he recognized that we may nevertheless be psychologically certain about the truth of a belief and be prepared to commit the ultimate sacrifice for it, and in such cases, the grounding would always be a utilitarian calculation of benefits and

harms. The apparent tension arises due to the incomplete nature of the dialogue.

Notes

¹Leonard Lyons remembers such a conversation between Russell and himself, but does not give a date. *The New York Post*. 23 June 1964.

²Russell, Bertrand. "Persecution." *Essays in Skepticism* (The Philosophical Library, 1962), 85.

³Jones, Martin and Clive Wood. "A Conversation with Bertrand Russell." [1963?] *Russell: the Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies* 3, no. 1 (1983): 17–20.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵D. H. Lawrence to Bertrand Russell. 14 September 1915. James T. Boulton, ed. *The Selected Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge U. P. 1997 [1979]), 107–8.

⁶*I. F. Stone's Weekly*, September 11–18, 1961.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Human Knowledge* (Simon and Schuster, 1948), 396.

¹⁰*History of Western Philosophy* (Routledge, 2005 [1946]), 2.

Russell's Narcoleptic Kant¹

BY CHAD TRAINER

Bertrand Russell disagreed with the assessment of Immanuel Kant as the “greatest of modern philosophers.”² Instead, he maintained Kant was a “mere misfortune” who “deluged the philosophic world with muddle and mystery, from which it is only now beginning to emerge.”³ “Kant made me sick” he remarked in a conversation with his biographer Alan Wood.⁴

According to the philosophy of David Hume, knowledge can never be more than merely probable.⁵ The purported matters of fact from which we reason are, in truth, only customs, which are, in turn, products of “repeated perceptions.”⁶ So all that human reason has to show for its familiarity with the natural world is a reduction of certain principles to “greater simplicity” and the resolution of a multitude of effects into “a few general causes” by way of “reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation.”⁷ Hume readily acknowledged nature’s operations as being independent of our mental procedures and nature’s objects as exhibiting patterns of contiguity and succession. But he stopped short of acknowledging any such thing as necessity in natural processes as he considered all arguments that causes are necessary to be fallacious.⁸

Kant understood Hume as arguing that philosophy is unable to reach propositions that are universal and necessary.⁹ By Kant’s own admission, “However hasty and mistaken Hume’s conclusion may appear,”¹⁰ “remembering David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction.”¹¹

In Russell’s chapter on Kant in his *History of Western Philosophy*, he explains “Hume, by his criticism of the concept of causality, awakened him [Kant] from his dogmatic slumbers—so at least he says, but the awakening was only temporary, and he soon invented a soporific which enabled him to sleep again.”¹² But what specif-

ically did Russell see as Kant’s soporific? I see three candidates for this.

The first candidate for what Russell saw as Kant’s soporific is Kant’s belief that our moral experience mandates belief in God, immortality, and free will. The second candidate for what Russell saw as Kant’s soporific is Kant’s view of causality as being both a mere category of our understanding and yet that which explains the relation between the world of things-in-themselves and the world of appearances. The third candidate for what Russell saw as Kant’s soporific is his belief that there are propositions universal and necessary but not simply tautological, namely, synthetic a priori propositions.

Metaphysical tenets our moral experience mandate

Concerning the first candidate for what Russell saw as Kant’s soporific, this is Kant’s belief that our moral experience mandates belief in God, immortality, and free will. The strongest reason for this being what Russell sees as Kant’s soporific is that it is the first aspect of Kant’s philosophy mentioned after the above-quoted passage on Kant’s soporific.

When we apply our reason to matters like God, immortality and free will, Kant saw reason as finding itself “compromised by the conflict of opposing arguments.”¹³ He agreed with Hume’s empiricist criticisms of metaphysics’ pretensions. But Kant was also critical of empiricism itself to the extent it “dogmatically limits reality to phenomena and thus treats them as though they were things-in-themselves.”¹⁴ So with this defect of empiricism and the antinomies plaguing the realm of metaphysics, how did Kant think we are to orient ourselves concerning what we can know and what we ought to do? According to Kant, we are to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith.¹⁵

In his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant

candidly describes “faith” as “the constant fundamental principle of the mind to assume as true that which it is necessary to presuppose as a condition for the possibility of the highest moral final end.”¹⁶ Such a conviction enabled Kant to take an intellectual holiday in the realm of metaphysics and let his wish fulfillment fantasies reign.

Kant was an avid student of Rousseau who is believed to have shown Kant the way to a “new theory of morality.”¹⁷ From Rousseau Kant seems to have adopted the idea that faith in God ought to have as its basis the sense of right and wrong. In Rousseau’s *Émile*, ‘The Confession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar’ makes its appearance. The degree to which we ought to understand *Émile*’s Savoyard Vicar as a spokesman on Rousseau’s behalf is unclear, most notably in the realm of natural religion where he eloquently defends and elaborates on its merits¹⁸ only to eventually reject it.¹⁹ According to Ronald Grimsley’s understanding of Rousseau and the Savoyard Vicar, for Rousseau, “although reason has a function in all reflection about the meaning of the world, the heart may often provide surer insights into the ultimate mystery of creation. . . . The thinker concerned with fundamental truths will do well, in Rousseau’s view, to concentrate on what is of interest to him, ‘interest’ here being defined not in any narrowly pragmatic or empirical sense but as indicating those matters which appertain to man’s original nature. This means that Rousseau finally emerges as a moralist rather than as a traditional metaphysician.”²⁰

As said earlier, Kant was a devout student of Rousseau. Russell thought Kant’s “appeal to the heart against the cold dictates of theoretical reason. . . might, with a little exaggeration, be regarded as a pedantic version of the Savoyard Vicar.”²¹

In Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, faith is the “constant fundamental principle of the mind to assume as true that which it is necessary to presuppose as a condition for the possibility of the highest moral final end, on account of the obligation to that, although we can

have no insight into its possibility or into its impossibility.”²² Kant maintained anyone intent on implementing the “idea of the supreme good” is necessarily “driven to believe in the cooperation or the management of a moral ruler of the world.”²³

This assumption to be true whatever conduces to the “highest moral final end,” in spite of reason’s incompetence in the realm of metaphysics, Russell elsewhere cites as Kant having “believed implicitly in the maxims he had imbibed at his mother’s knee.”²⁴ This calls to mind Russell’s point that “The method of ‘postulating’ what we want has many advantages; they are the same as the advantages of theft over honest toil.”²⁵

The biggest problem with Kant’s belief that our moral experience mandates belief in God, immortality, and free will is that it seems to be more of a rejection of philosophy as such rather than the sort of technical fudging I associate with Russell’s use of the word “soporific.” As mentioned earlier, though, the strongest reason for the candidacy of this tenet as what Russell saw as Kant’s soporific is that it is the first aspect of Kant’s philosophy mentioned after the above-quoted passage on Kant’s soporific.

Kant’s Inconsistent View of Causality

Kant saw causality as being both a mere category of our understanding and that which explains the whole relationship between the world of “things-in-themselves” and the world of appearances. That this is a possibility for what Russell saw as Kant’s soporific can be argued because of Russell’s remark, concerning Kant’s philosophy, “This inconsistency is not an accidental oversight; it is an *essential* part of his [Kant’s] system.”²⁶

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argued the “things-in-themselves” are not “subject to the causal relation.”²⁷ Rather, causality is merely a form of thought, conditioning the forms of our judgments along with eleven other “original conceptions of the understanding,” or categories. According to Kant, a rule “according

to which something usually happens” may be derivable from appearances but such a rule can “never prove the sequence to be necessary.”²⁸ Rather, the concept of cause must be either “inherent in reason and revealed through its operation rather than derived from experience or observation”²⁹ or “must be entirely given up as a mere phantom of the brain.”³⁰

W.H. Walsh would have us understand, “whereas Hume is content to treat the occurrence of regular sequences as an ultimate and entirely contingent fact, Kant believes that without the presumption of sequences that are regular (determined by a rule) there could be no knowledge of objective succession.”³¹

So, for Russell, Kant’s thought that “percepts are caused by ‘things in themselves’” is not only “by no means logically necessary”³² but contradicts Kant’s view that causality is merely a “category” conditioning the forms of our judgments and does so in a way as to make the inconsistency essential to Kant’s system. This essential inconsistency sounds as though it could very well be Kant’s soporific. Kant’s view was that the law of causality is “synthetic, but nevertheless... known a priori”.³³ This leads us to Kant’s belief in synthetic a priori propositions.

The Belief That There Are Propositions Universal and Necessary But Not Simply Tautological

According to Russell, the whole purpose of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* is to “prove that, although none of our knowledge can transcend experience, it is nevertheless in part a priori and not inferred inductively from experience.”³⁴ Whereas Hume thought we have no idea, regarding concepts as fundamental as space, or extension, except insofar as we consider them as objects of our vision or touch,³⁵ Kant thought the very “concept of appearances” necessitates a difference between a thing in itself and a thing as it appears,³⁶ the thing as it appears largely being determined by the concepts and categories our minds bring to it. In-

deed, Kant himself saw the *Critique of Pure Reason* as “the working out of Hume’s problem in its widest extent.”³⁷ “According to Kant,” Russell explains, “the outer world causes only the matter of sensation, but our own mental apparatus orders this matter in space and time, and supplies the concepts by means of which we understand experience... Space and time are subjective, they are part of our apparatus of perception. But just because of this, we can be sure that whatever we experience will exhibit the characteristics dealt with by geometry and the science of the time. If you always wore blue spectacles, you could always be sure of seeing everything blue (this is not Kant’s illustration).”³⁸ This “subjective apparatus” of ours “is always the same, since we carry it about with us.”³⁹

Kant conceded that empirical rules acquired “through induction only comparative universality, that is, extensive applicability.”⁴⁰ But he argued that, “though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience.”⁴¹ This “subjective apparatus” of ours that “is always the same” enjoys its “ordering” as a “condition of awareness or consciousness, not a consequence of it.”⁴² Kant assumes that “experience is only possible if necessary connections are to be found among our perceptions.”⁴³ “Since, then, the mind prescribes its laws to nature,... [w]e can know that the perceived world will always be connected in certain intelligible ways, that our experiences will always be of things in fixed spatial and temporal order... ”⁴⁴

What cannot be overemphasized is Kant’s “persistent but nonetheless questionable tendency to move from saying that unity of consciousness means that appearances must be capable of connection to the conclusion that they must be capable of connection according to universal and necessary laws.”⁴⁵ Such a “persistent but nonetheless questionable tendency” suffuses and mars Kant’s whole philosophy of synthetic a priori knowledge. Kant envisions natural science (physics) as containing universal and necessary laws as “principles,”⁴⁶ such as

“in all changes of the material world the quantity of matter remains unchanged; and... in all communication of motion, action and reaction must always be equal.”⁴⁷ “[T]he order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle nature, we ourselves introduce.”⁴⁸ Nature’s generation of “organized products” according to a merely mechanistic causality is just an idea, not even posited as a reality, but employed as a “guideline for reflection.”⁴⁹ “[B]oth observation and experiment are only methods to extract from sensible representation what we have tentatively... inserted.”⁵⁰

Walsh seems to be understating this case when he says, “It would... have been helpful had he [Kant] given some elucidation of his statement that, when a judgment is thought with strict universality, ‘no exception is allowed as possible.’ He cannot mean that no exception is logically possible, or every a priori judgment would be analytic.”⁵¹

The fact that, as Russell says, “Kant holds that the mind orders the raw material of sensation, but never thinks it necessary to say why it orders it as it does and not otherwise”⁵² certainly sounds like a dogmatic slumber. Russell’s chapter on Kant pays the most attention to this tenet, and so may be what he considered Kant’s soporific.

Conclusion

Kant’s belief that our moral experience mandates belief in God, immortality, and free will certainly seems the weakest of the three Kantian positions discussed. But it is such a weak argument it reads more as a plea to abandon philosophy as such than as a philosophic argument itself. The second candidate for what Russell saw as Kant’s soporific is the inconsistency in Kant’s philosophy that Russell considered essential to it, namely, Kant’s view of causality as at once both a mere category of our understanding and yet as that which explains the relation between the world of things-in-themselves and the world of appearances. It seems Kant perpetrated this inconsistency for two reasons.

On one hand, he was intent on avoiding the solipsism that would ensue were he to have been content with his own world of appearances. On the other hand, he longed to feel assured that the universal and necessary propositions that are philosophy’s holy grail are attainable, albeit in carefully circumscribed areas. Since Kant considered himself to have accomplished this by means of his belief in synthetic a priori propositions, the second and third candidates for Kant’s soporific seem interconnected. The question then becomes “Which of these two candidates is more fundamental: Kant’s view of causality as at once both a mere category of our understanding and as that which explains the relation between the world of things-in-themselves and the world of appearances or Kant’s belief that there are propositions universal and necessary but not simply tautological? Because Kant saw his philosophy of synthetic a priori propositions as a complete solution to “Hume’s problem,”⁵³ the third candidate seems more fundamental and so the strongest candidate for what Russell meant by Kant’s soporific.

Notes

¹Presented on June 18, 2023 at the 50th annual meeting of the Bertrand Russell Society at the University of Iowa, Iowa City (via Zoom).

²Russell 1945 704; see also 1927b 83

³Russell 1927b83

⁴Russell 1959 261; see also 1967 I:188

⁵*Treatise on Human Nature* Book I, Part IV Section I 473. Hume explains: “Though there be no such thing as Chance in the world; our ignorance of the real cause of any event has the same influence on the understanding, and begets a like species of belief or opinion. There is certainly a probability, which arises from a superiority of chances on any side; and according as this superiority encreases, and surpasses the opposite chances, the probability receives a proportionable encrease, and begets still a higher degree of belief or assent to that side, in which we discover the superiority” (*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Section VI p. 47)

⁶*Treatise on Human Nature* Book I, Part IV Section II 487, See also *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Section IV 26, Section V 37-40, Section VIII 63.

⁷*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Section IV 27

⁸*Treatise on Human Nature* Book I, Part III, Section III 381; see also *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Section VII

⁹Kant 1783 257; see also 1788 5:50-1

¹⁰Kant 1783 258

¹¹Kant 1783 260

¹²Russell 1945 704. Russell notes “Kant holds that the mind orders the raw material of sensation, but never thinks it necessary to say why it orders it as it does and not otherwise” (Russell 1945 715). “While there is an important sense in which perceptual space is subjective, there is no sense in which perceptual time is subjective” (Russell 1945 717).

¹³Kant 1781 A 464 B 492-A 465 B 493

¹⁴Copleston 1960 293

¹⁵Kant 1781 B xxx

¹⁶Kant 1790 5: 471-2

¹⁷Stumpf 1983 288. Stumpf continues: “So impressed was Kant by the insights of Rousseau that he hung a picture of him on the wall of his study, convinced that Rousseau was the Newton of the moral world” (Stumpf 1983 288).

¹⁸*Émile* Book IV 258-270

¹⁹*Émile* Book IV 270-278. It is the case that, before the Savoyard Priest’s advocacy of natural religion, Rousseau remarks: “I saw any number of objections which might be raised; yet I raised none, for I perceived that they were more perplexing than serious, and that my inclination took his part. When he spoke to me according to his conscience, my own seemed to confirm what he said” (*Émile* Book IV p. 258). However, Rousseau himself later cites the Savoyard Priest “not as a rule for the sentiments we should adopt in matters of religion, but as an example of the way in which we may reason with our pupil without forsaking the method I have tried to establish. So long as we yield nothing to human authority, nor to the prejudices of our native land, the light of reason alone, in a state of nature, can lead us no further than to natural religion; and this is as far as I should go with *Emile*. If he must have any other religion, I have no right to be his guide; he must choose for himself” (*Émile* Book IV p. 278). It may have been in light of these points that Frederick Copleston distinguishes between the “simple Savoyard priest” and “Rousseau’s thought” (Copleston 1960 78).

²⁰Grimsley 1967 7: 224. Prior to Grimsley’s work, Russell had also implied that the Savoyard Vicar is a mouthpiece for Rousseau’s views (Russell 1945 691-2). Referring to Rousseau, Russell says “In theology, he made an innovation which has now been accepted by the great majority of Protestant theologians. . . . Modern Protestants who urge us to believe in God, for the most part, despise the old ‘proofs’, and base their faith upon some aspect of human nature—emotions of awe or mystery, the sense of right and wrong, the feeling of aspiration, and so on. This way of defending religious belief was invented by Rousseau” (Russell 1945 691). In characteris-

tic Russell fashion, Russell continues: “The rejection of reason in favour of the heart was not, to my mind, an advance. . . . [I]f I had to choose between Saint Thomas Aquinas and Rousseau, I should unhesitatingly choose the Saint” (Russell 1945 693-4). According to Russell, Rousseau’s *Émile* “might have been considered harmless by the authorities if it had not contained ‘The Confession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar’, which set forth the principles of natural religion as understood by Rousseau and was irritating to both Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy” (Russell 1945 690). Russell also cited the rejection of belief in revelation and hell as that which presumably “so profoundly shocked the French government and the Council of Geneva” (Russell 1945 693).

²¹Russell 1945 705n b. Russell makes the point “to treat every man as an end in himself[.]. . . [i]f taken seriously, . . . would make it impossible to reach a decision whenever two people’s interests conflict” (Russell 1945 711). Russell also thought Kant was “unusually ignorant of psychology” (Russell 1914 118). But he did note “Kant’s ethical system, as set forth in his *Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) has considerable historical importance” (Russell 1945 710). Also, in what sounds like a sympathetic observation, Russell observes: “Since 1933, this treatise [Perpetual Peace] has caused Kant to fall into disfavor in his own country” (Russell 1945 712).

²²Kant 1790 5: 471-2

²³Kant 1793 6:139; see also 1794 8:328 330 and 1790 5: 445-58

²⁴Russell 1927c 11. “Kant spoke of himself as having effected a ‘Copernican revolution’, but he would have been more accurate if he had spoken of a ‘Ptolemaic counter-revolution’, since he put Man back at the center from which Copernicus had dethroned him” (Russell 1948 xi).

²⁵Russell 1919 71

²⁶Russell 1945 708 emphasis added; see also 1900 74

²⁷Ueberweg 1873 vol. II 157

²⁸Kant 1781 A91-2; see also A112 and A 636 B

²⁹Denis 2017 ix-x

³⁰Kant 1781 A91-2; see also A112 p. 139 and A 636 B 664. That is, “The concept of cause. . . is a pure concept of the understanding, which is totally disparate from all possible perception and only serves to determine the representation contained under it with regard to judging in general. . . .” (Kant 1783 300). This is an area where the word “objective” gets especially confusing in Kant. Thus, no sooner do we grasp that the “concept of cause. . . is a pure concept of the understanding, which is totally disparate from all possible perception” than we read that Kant proves the “objective reality of the concept of cause with respect to objects of experience” (Kant 1788 5:53). Even given the meaning of “objective” in Kant’s philosophy as expressing “not merely a reference of our perception to a subject, but a quality of the object” (Kant 1783 298), it is hard to follow how cause can be at once both a “pure concept of the understanding” and a “reference. . . to. . . a quality of the object.”

- ³¹Walsh 1967 4:314
³²Russell 1945 718
³³Russell 1945 707
³⁴Russell 1945 706
³⁵*Treatise on Human Nature* Book I, Part II Section III 345
³⁶Kant 1781 B 306. Russell made the point “If there is any intellectual difficulty in supposing that the physical world is intrinsically quite unlike that of percepts, this is a reason for supposing that there is not this complete unlikeness” (Russell 1927a 264).
³⁷Kant 1783 261; see also 1788 5:52-3. “Hume thus became negatively to him in the second period of his development what Newton had been to him positively in the first; and it was Newton’s science that carried him victoriously through the doubt of Hume” (Hastie 1891 xiii).
³⁸Russell 1945 707-8
³⁹Russell 1945 713
⁴⁰Kant 1781 A91-2, See also A112 and A 636 B 664
⁴¹Kant 1781 B 1
⁴²Copleston 1960 238 emphasis added
⁴³Kenny 2006 207 emphasis added; see also Kant 1783 278-9
⁴⁴Thilly/Wood 1953 425
⁴⁵Walsh 1967 4:312
⁴⁶Kant 1781 B 17
⁴⁷Kant 1781 B 17
⁴⁸Kant 1781 A 125 p. 147; see also 1783 320-322
⁴⁹Kant 1790 5: 389
⁵⁰Kant 1804? 22:318
⁵¹Walsh 1967 4:309-10
⁵²Russell 1945 715
⁵³Kant 1783 313. Copleston explains: “If objects of experience are of necessity partially determined or constituted as such by the imposition of mental categories, and if causality is one of these, we can know in advance or a priori that nothing will ever happen, within the whole field of human experience, without a cause. And by extending this idea beyond the single example of causality we can explain the possibility of the whole range of a priori cognition” (Copleston 1960 228).

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The Principia Map and Table Site: a new digital resource

Two Bertrand Russell Society members, Gregory Landini (U. Iowa) and Landon D. C. Elkind (Western Kentucky U.) collaborated with Matthew Butler (U. Iowa Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio) to build a new digital resource, the Principia Map and Table Site (PM-MATS).

A user guide is available [here](#). Users can feel free to report back using our [feedback form here](#). Particularly helpful would be any and all (a) feature requests, (b) apparent bugs or issues, and (c) evaluative feedback (whether positive or not).

A press release with information about the project is copied below.



Landing page for the Principia Map and Table Site

With a \$281,104 Scholarly Editions and Translations grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), researchers at the University of Iowa and Western Kentucky University collaborated to build the first-ever digital map and data table for all three volumes and 1,992 pages of *Principia Mathematica*—a monumental work in the philosophies of mathematics and logic.

This new digital resource, the Principia Mathematica Map and Table Site (PM-MATS), is the result of a three-year NEH grant awarded in 2023 and ongoing collaboration between the University of Iowa’s Matthew Butler, senior developer in the Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio, Western Kentucky University’s Dr. Landon Elkind, assistant professor of philosophy in the Department of Political Science (and alumnus of the University of Iowa philosophy program, 2018), and the University of Iowa’s

Dr. Gregory Landini, professor of philosophy. The new digital scholarly tools will be leveraged to produce the first-ever critical edition of Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell’s landmark *Principia Mathematica*. The resulting scholarly edition will be published in print and digital formats with Cambridge University Press; Volume I of the new edition is slated for release in 2025.

Principia Mathematica first appeared as three volumes with Cambridge University Press in 1910, 1912, and 1913. A fourth volume on geometry was slated to appear but was never completed. It was one of the most symbolically dense works ever published and attempted to demonstrate Logicism—the view that all mathematical truths are logical truths. *Principia* ranks among the most influential books ever produced. Remarkably, Special Collections at the UI Libraries holds two complete sets of *Principia*’s

first edition—only 500 were ever published.

Despite *Principia*'s enormous significance, the text appeared without an editorial apparatus, such as a bibliography, an index of symbols or significant terms, and a table of citations of theorems in proofs. The text has also never been digitized; the only versions of the text available are Optical Character Recognition (OCR) scans that do not facilitate even baseline searches of the text, much less data about the dependencies between parts of *Principia* that would facilitate a structural or “bird’s-eye” view of the text. This digital humanities project is changing that.

“We’ve worked hard to make this specialized knowledge accessible to a wide range of potential users,” says Butler. “I’m delighted the Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio has been able to collaborate on such an important project and excited to see the many ways scholars and the public will utilize this work.”

The PM-MATS was produced from a database of all 9,944 “starred numbers” (a.k.a. propositions) in *Principia*. The landing page is a global map of the entire text showing the chapter-by-chapter structure of the text in a surveyable format. This global map is also interactive, allowing users to search for a specific starred number, and even click on the starred number to open a “mini-map” that shows where it is used and what is used to prove it. Users can even navigate from the mini-map of a starred number to the page of *Principia* where the starred number appears.

The new digital resource also includes a searchable and exportable table indicating which theorem is used where, and what is used to prove any given theorem, in simple and easily surveyed tables. The upshot of the new digital resources, according to Dr. Elkind, is to make accessible and clear structural connections be-

tween starred numbers in the text. Previously, discovering such connections required flipping through all 1,992 pages of *Principia*. Now, these connections can be revealed with a few clicks and keystrokes.

“We have created an incredible digital tool for scholars working with this important text,” says Dr. Elkind, the principal investigator (PI) of the project. “Dr. Landini and I could hardly stop ourselves from constantly using this new tool in other research projects on *Principia* even as we were still developing it. Based on our team’s frequent use of the new tools while they were being built, I expect there will be of sizable uptake of this new site among scholars working in this area.”

The website debuted at the 51st Annual Bertrand Russell Society Meeting on June 7–9, 2024, at the Center for Inquiry in Amherst, New York, but was developed with the public in mind. The site includes a guide for users and an about page that explains the importance of *Principia* and the purpose of the digital project. In addition to using this map to facilitate producing a new critical edition of *Principia*, the project team plans further additions to the map, like allowing users to search for specific symbols in starred numbers. Users can even suggest website features to the team using their contact form.

“It took 10 years for Whitehead and Russell to complete *Principia*,” says Elkind. “If we continue working at that brisk pace, adding all the intended features to the PM-MATS page will take less time than it took Whitehead and Russell to produce the original. Although we have some further work to do, we have reached a major milestone after a productive year of work on this grant. That has us celebrating, and quite deservedly, I should think.”

The PM-MATS project has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this article and on the PM-MATS page, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Board votes to reduce BRS membership dues

The board of the Bertrand Russell Society voted to cut dues in half for most types during its annual meeting at the Center for Inquiry in Amherst, NY. The new dues rates are:

- Individual/Couple \$40/\$50
- Student/Student Couple \$10/\$20
- Retiree (or Limited Income)/Retiree (or Limited Income) Couple \$10/\$20
- Developing Economies/Developing Economies Couple \$10/\$20 (see here for countries not on this list)
- Trial Individual Membership \$30 (renewable once)
- Life Membership/Life Couple Membership \$1,000/\$1,250

The reduced membership rates still offer all the benefits of membership, including:

- a print and electronic subscription to Russell: the Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies
- belonging to a community united by our abiding and shared interest in Russell's life, works, and values
- rights to vote in elections and at membership meetings eligibility to present papers at the annual meeting
- the privilege to stand for officer and committee roles in the Society
- subscription to our discussion list and and Russelliana event series

You can join the BRS (or renew your membership) at this reduced rate here.

Save the Date: 52nd Meeting on May 16-18, 2025

The 52nd annual meeting of the Bertrand Russell Society will take place on May 16-18, 2025 in Bowling Green, Kentucky. The meeting will be locally organized by Landon D. C. Elkind (Western Kentucky University). More information will be posted here as it becomes available.

Russell Quote of the Issue

BY BERTRAND RUSSELL

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is generally considered the greatest of modern philosophers. I cannot myself agree with that estimate, but it would be foolish not to recognize his great importance.

A History of Western Philosophy, And Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, 1945, Simon and Schuster, Chapter XX Section B

Have an idea for contributing to the Bulletin, whether by you or someone else? Write to the editor! See the footer for a link to contact us.