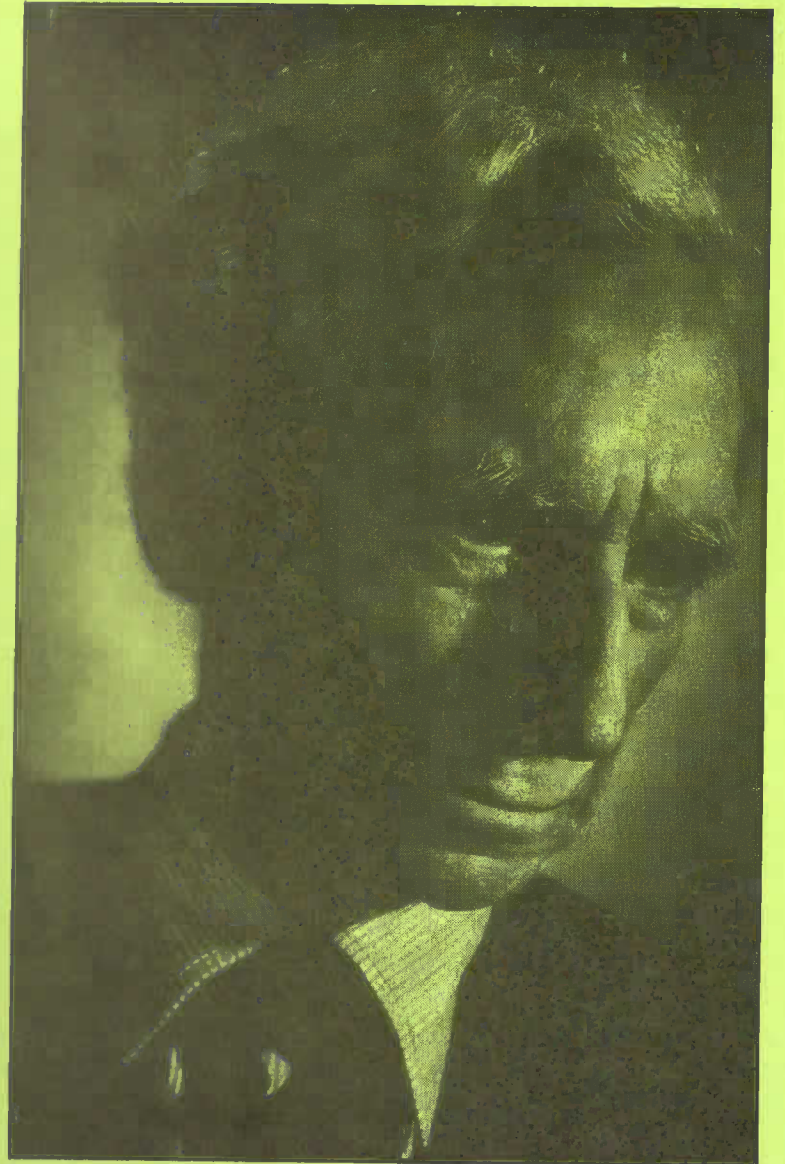


THE BERTRAND RUSSELL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

February, 1997

No. 93



Bertrand Russell Society
c/o Michael J. Rockler
529 14th St., NW, Suite 1125
Washington, DC 20045

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The Bertrand Russell Society

3805 North Kenneth Avenue, Chicago, IL 60641-2814, U.S.A.

The Bertrand Russell Society was founded in 1974 to foster a better understanding of Russell's work and to promote ideas and causes he thought important. The Society's motto is Russell's statement, "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge."

The Bertrand Russell Society Quarterly is published in February, May, August and November. Letters and manuscripts should be addressed to:

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THE BERTRAND RUSSELL SOCIETY

QUARTERLY

Newsletter of the Bertrand Russell Society

February, 1997

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Bertrand Russell Society Business

The following pages contain Society business that need your attention. Each page may be xeroxed and sent to the appropriate address.

SOCIETY BUSINESS INCLUDES:

- 1) Membership Renewal
- 2) Registration for the Annual Meeting
- 3) Tentative Program for the Annual Meeting

PLEASE NOTE

- A) It is now time to renew your membership. Please complete the enclosed form and return it to Dennis Darland.
- B) If you receive a damaged copy of the Bertrand Russell Society Quarterly, let us know and we will replace it.

Bertrand Russell Society 1997 Membership Renewal Coupon

This is the final notice to renew BRS membership for 1997.

If you have already renewed for 1997 or have joined the BRS in 1997, please again accept our thanks for participating in the BRS.

But if you have not yet renewed your membership for 1997 — or if you would like to join the BRS for this first time — please mail this coupon with your payment TODAY. Thanks!

Please mail your coupon and payment to BRS Treasurer Dennis Darland at:

Dennis Darland
1965 Winding Hills Road, #1304
Davenport, IA 52807
U.S.A.

I have looked at the membership categories below and have checked the one that is right for my circumstances. I enclose my 1997 dues in U.S. funds payable to "Bertrand Russell Society."

- Individual \$35
- Couple \$40
- Student \$20
- Limited Income Individual \$20
- Limited Income Couple \$25
- Contributor \$50 and up
- Sustainer \$75 and up
- Sponsor \$100 and up
- Patron \$250 and up
- Benefactor \$500 and up
- Life Member \$1000 and up
- Organization Membership \$50

PLUS \$10 if outside U.S.A., Canada, and Mexico

PLUS \$4 if in Canada or Mexico

Name _____ Date _____
Address _____

Registration Information: BRS 1997 Annual Meeting

"HUMANISM: THE NEXT GENERATION"

the First Annual

CAMPUS FREETHOUGHT ALLIANCE CONFERENCE

Friday, May 30 to Sunday, June 1, 1997

at the Center for Inquiry, Amherst, New York

This exciting event will focus on ways to promote the cause of humanism among all generations, but particularly those of college age. There will be workshops, hands-on presentations, poster sessions, and cultural events. This conference will be co-sponsored by the Council for Secular Humanism, the Humanist Association of Canada, and the Bertrand Russell Society.

YES! I (we) will attend "Humanism: The Next Generation"

Registration(s) for ___ person(s) \$75US/\$100/CDN each \$ _____

Friday Luncheon for ___ person(s) \$22US/\$28CDN each \$ _____

Friday Night Trip to Niagara Falls, Ontario for ___ person(s) \$50US/\$65CDN each \$ _____

Saturday Banquet for ___ person(s) at \$35US/\$46CDN each \$ _____

MC Visa or Check or Money Order Total \$ _____

Card Number _____ Exp. Date _____

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(required for charges)

Name _____ Daytime Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Residents of the United States, please make checks payable to FREE INQUIRY, Box 664, Amherst, NY 14226. To charge by phone call 1-800-458-1366 or FAX to 1-716-636-1733. For residents of Canada, please make cheques payable to the Humanist Association of Canada, PO Box 3736, Station C, Ottawa, Ontario, K1Y 4J8. For further details, contact Tim Madigan at 1-716-636-7571 (e-mail: TIMMADIGAN@AOL.COM).

Hotel Information — Mention "Free Inquiry Conference" for these special conference rates at the **Buffalo Marriott Hotel**, 1340 Millersport Highway, Amherst, NY (716) 689-6900. **\$84 Single/Double**. Includes complimentary Airport Shuttle. **Red Roof Inn**, I-290 and Millersport Hwy N., Amherst, NY 1-800-843-7663. **\$69 Single/\$79 Double**. Ask for Block Number B104000365. **Hampton Inn**, 10 Flint Road, Amherst, NY (716) 689-4414. **\$65 Single/Double**. Includes complimentary Airport Shuttle and Continental Breakfast. **Super Eight Motel**, 1 Flint Road, Amherst, NY (716) 688-0811. **\$49 Single/\$52 Double**. **Motel 6**, 400 Maple Road, Amherst, NY (716) 834-2231. **\$36 Single/\$42 Double**.

Annual Meeting—Preliminary Program

The 24th annual meeting of the Bertrand Russell Society will be held on the weekend of May 30-June 1, 1997, at the Center for Inquiry in the Buffalo suburb of Amherst, NY. This year we will meet in conjunction with the Council for Secular Humanism, the Humanist Association of Canada, and the Campus Freethought Alliance.

For more on this, see "Letter from the President" and the separate registration form, both in this issue.

The meeting proves to be a rich one and the BRS will participate in a wide range of activities. Here is the program (to date) the BRS will present as part of this large gathering.

Meeting of the BRS Board of Directors

Meeting of the Bertrand Russell Society

Red Hackle Hour (prior to the banquet on Saturday)

Debate: Michael Rockler (BRS) and John Novak: Russell vs. Dewey on Democracy.

Talks:

Jim Alouf, "Bertrand Russell and the Teaching of History."

Stefan Andersson, "Russell's Personal Religion: Did He Have One?"

John Lenz, "Bertrand Russell's Utopian Hopes for the Future."

John Shosky, "Russell as Philosophical Partner."

Peter Stone, "Russell's Political Thought: What's Ethics Got to Do with It?"

A paper by the 1997 winner of the BRS undergraduate paper prize.

From The Editor

Michael J. Rockler

I recently read Banesh Hoffman's biography of Albert Einstein. Like Russell, Einstein led a fascinating life, one which makes for interesting and valuable reading.

Einstein died in 1955 at the age of 76. In 1955 John Dewey had been gone for three years and Russell was to continue to live for another fifteen years until the age of 98. Thus all three of these intellectual giants were alive and worked during the same time period. Einstein helped to define modern physics. Dewey, among other achievements, helped to conceptualize modern education. Russell contributed to mathematics, logic, philosophy, education and linguistics among other pursuits.

All three of these men, often in concert, worked for world peace. Einstein and Russell composed a letter opposing atomic warfare which was made public shortly after Einstein died.

As I read Einstein's biography and reflected on his life, I thought about how rich a period of intellectual history was the first half of the twentieth century. There have also been other epochs when several brilliant intellects were contemporaries. Plato and Aristotle, for example, both lived and worked in Athens at the same time that some of history's greatest playwrights were producing timeless drama.

I wonder about our own times. As we approach the twenty-first century who today can we consider as intellectual giants on the same level of these men? I ask readers of BRSQ to respond to this question by way of a letter or even a short paper. I would be glad to publish any answers I receive; it would be interesting to see how persons who belong to BRS evaluate contemporary thinkers. Drop me a line in Washington, DC and I will publish your response in the next issue.

This issue of the Quarterly contains an index to the Newsletters edited by Don Jackanicz and Dennis Darland and to the Quarterlies which I have edited over the last two years. Beginning next year, there will be an annual index of the Quarterly. Hopefully, this will be helpful to scholars who wish to find material that was previously published. I would like to thank Don Jackanicz for preparing this index.

This year's annual meeting will be held in conjunction with *Free Inquiry* as well as with the Canadian humanists. The gathering will take place in Buffalo, New York at the Center for Inquiry which is only a short drive from Hamilton Ontario and the Russell Archives at McMaster University. This will be an interesting and rewarding meeting from May 31-June 2. I hope to see many BRS members there. I will be glad to join you in toast to Bertrand Russell over a glass of Red Hackle.

All of us who are interested in Russell studies are sorry to know that Ken Blackwell has retired from the Archives. He will continue to serve on the BRS board and to publish *russell*. We wish him well in his retirement and we know that he will continue to be a major contributor to Russell studies.

From the President

By John R. Lenz

It's time again to make plans for our upcoming annual meeting, the most pleasant event and the hub of the BRS year for both socializing and stimulation of thought. Our 24th consecutive annual meeting will be held on the weekend of May 30-June 1, 1997, at the Center for Inquiry in the Buffalo suburb of Amherst, NY.

The Center for Inquiry (located near the campus of SUNY—Buffalo) is a magnet for secular humanism. Founded by Paul Kurtz (a past recipient of the BRS Award), the Center is home to *Free Inquiry* magazine, the Council for Secular Humanism (formerly called CODESH), the International Academy of Humanism, and other related organizations; nearby is the home of Prometheus Books (also begun by Kurtz).

This year we will meet, as we did a few years ago in Toronto, in conjunction with the Council for Secular Humanism and the Humanist Association of Canada. BRS member Tim Maidgan has organized a large gathering around the theme of "Humanism: The Next Generation." The BRS is especially pleased to co-sponsor this humanist conclave, because it will serve as the first annual conference for the Campus Freethought Alliance.

The Campus Freethought Alliance consists of representatives from student clubs from colleges across the United States and Canada. This is a fairly new movement, whose importance I can attest to. At most colleges, it is easy to find representatives of various religious traditions, but no focus for atheists, agnostics, or other doubters, freethinkers or secular humanists. I myself was very pleased, a few years ago, to be one of the first two faculty co-sponsors of the new Atheist and Alliance Student Group at Texas A&M University. Believe me, such a group was really needed there, and not just for students! Since then I have seen that group go on to host the largest World Wide Web site devoted to freethought. (You can find links to this and other humanist Web sites at this address: <http://daniel.drew.edu/~jlenz/humanism.html>.) Russell would surely endorse this harnessing of technology in the cause of freethinking.

The theme of "Humanism: The Next Generation" is also a very congenial one for the BRS. Alan Ryan (a lively speaker at last year's meeting) wrote of Russell, "He always believed that it was to be the young that we must look for salvation . . . it is on them that he pins his hopes . . ." (*Bertrand Russell: A Political Life*, 1988, pp. viii-ix).

At this meeting, the BRS will present two sessions of interesting papers and we will also participate in plenary sessions with the other

co-sponsors. We will conduct our usual meetings of the Board of Directors and of the Society, elect officers, award the 1997 BRS Award and Book Award, and, especially, enjoy our famous Red Hackle Hour.

Please see other pages in this issue for two other things: the preliminary BRS program and list of talks, and the registration form which gets sent directly to Buffalo. This includes full information about hotels in the area. They are all within walking distance, and a shuttle bus will run from these hotels to and from the meeting place.

As always, you can contact me at jlentz@drew.edu with any questions or comments.

I hope you do consider attending the meeting on May 30-June 1. The annual meeting is the best expression of our group's identity and purpose, when we gather to express our shared interests and values. This year, perhaps you will be curious as I am to visit a new facility created as a home for humanist and freethought groups around the world, and to welcome students, the future of humanism.

And, remember to "check out" the BRS home page at: <http://daniel.drew.edu/~jlentz/brs.html>. Here I have collected links to writings by Russell, the texts of articles about him, and related Web sites of Interest for philosophy and humanism, and you can also find information about subscribing to Russell-L, the worldwide electronic discussion group, via e-mail, devoted to Russell's work.

"Philosophy and Politics" A Discussion of Russell's Essay

by John Shosky
American University

In our universities, political parties, and cultural life, many people have found Russell to be a powerful, hopeful, and cogent voice of reason. Many readers are drawn by Russell's honesty, humanism, humor, and optimism. True, his examples may be dated. His belief that world government would harness greed and dissolve hatred now seems naive. His anti-religious venom, in my view, still seems too harsh an assessment (although somewhat close to the mark). But his vision of universal suffrage, better living conditions for poor and minority classes, expansion of educational opportunities, ending nationalistic imperialism, and fostering respect and tolerance among all people are messages of great relevance for our own time. Russell was an intellectual who was willing to engage in the political struggle, not merely study it. He had a global, not parochial, vision. He used his reason, credibility, and stature to fight for a new and better world.

While I personally admire his work in logic and epistemology enormously, and sometimes have little regard for some of his radical social commentary, I do find many of Russell's non-philosophical writings full of deep insight and great wisdom. Frankly, many readers of Russell only know him through his historical, political, or cultural writings, which often strike a responsive cord. Many, probably most, of the people drawn to the Russell Society are not as interested in "On Denoting" as in *New Hopes for a Changing World*.

For those who wish to further examine Russell's political and social commentary, I recommend his essay "Philosophy and Politics". This year is the fiftieth anniversary of "Philosophy and Politics", a lecture originally given at the Friends House, Euston Road, London, on October 23, 1946. The occasion was the Fourth Annual Lecture of the National Book League.

The timing of the lecture was most important. World War II had just ended. There were indications of a prolonged struggle between America and the Russian Empire. The British Empire was itself beginning to crumble. Those who had fought for peace, and those who were the victims of aggression, looked for a brighter future. It was a time of harsh realities, and hopeful optimism.

Russell evidently understood the need for a guiding philosophy in this rapidly changing environment. He began his lecture by noting that the British were different from other European people because they had a

contempt for philosophy, but actually had produced excellent philosophers. This contempt for philosophy was wise, and universal "Absolute Idea"; in other words, thought thinking about itself. History is a deterministic movement of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (being, nothing, becoming) which turns into a new thesis, and so on. Everything is "Geist" or Spirit. It is an idealistic, universal, systematic view of history. It is justified by the use of "logic", which in Hegel's hands becomes a historical movement, not a tool of reasoning. There is no room for science or choice, knowledge or freedom. Given Russell's empiricist bent and Hegel's perversion of logic, his assessment is extremely harsh. Russell finds that

Hegel's philosophy is so odd that one would not have expected him to be able to get sane men to accept it, but he did. He set out with so much obscurity that people thought it must be profound. It can quite easily be expounded lucidly in words of one syllable, but then its absurdity becomes obvious.

Marx, following Hegel, is used as the philosophical inspiration of the Soviet state, which is autocratic, repressive, and dogmatic. Worship of the State and its leaders is required. The Soviet State became, for Russell (and Popper) a modern example of Plato's ill-conceived brew of totalitarianism and philosophy.

Empiricism is the view that all knowledge about the world is to be found in the external world. Because our sense data is unreliable, and our inferences based on that data subject to change, empiricism borrows heavily from both skepticism and science: skepticism because we must continually question our justification for what we know, and science because the scientific methodology produces tentative results which may be revised as new information is obtained. Russell advocates empiricism as the philosophy best designed to produce social progress, individual respect, and democratic equality. Empiricism is not dogmatic; yet it is not entirely skeptical. Russell argues that

The Liberal creed, in practice, is one of live-and-let-live, of toleration and freedom as far as public order permit, of moderation and absence of fanaticism in political programmes. Even democracy, when it becomes fanatical, as it did among Rousseau's disciples in the French Revolution, ceases to be Liberal; indeed, a fanatical belief in democracy makes democratic institutions impossible, as appeared in England under Cromwell and in France under Robespierre. The genuine Liberal does not say "this is true"; he says, "I am inclined to think that under present circumstances this opinion is probably the best". And it is only in this limited and undogmatic sense that he will advocate democracy.

Russell argues that the tentativeness of opinion, and the empowerment according to Russell, because bad philosophy is dangerous and destructive.

Russell found that the connection between philosophy and politics was less evident in Britain than in Continental Europe. Yet, throughout history philosophy had been intimately tied to politics: the Catholic Church with Aquinas (and Aristotle), the Soviet Union with Marx (and Hegel), and Nazi Germany with Kant (and Fichte, Hegel, and Heidegger) are but a few obvious examples. In Britain, the empiricism of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, among others, produced a democratic liberalism that Russell champions in this essay. Russell's purpose is this: "I want to consider in this relation of philosophies to political systems as it has in fact existed, and to inquire how far it is a valid logical relation, and how far, even if not logical, it has a kind of psychological inevitability."

For Russell, philosophy is distinguishable from religion precisely because it does not look to authority, tradition, or dogma for justification. Philosophy is also not science, which tells us about the world. But an essential part of philosophy is that it tells us how we ought to live. Philosophy is not skepticism; it tries to uncover the nature of the world. Unfortunately, many philosophical world-pictures defy common sense, urging "injustice, cruelty, and opposition to progress." Such philosophical positions can lead to totalitarianism or authoritarianism.

One example is Plato's *Republic*, which is anti-democratic, oligarchic, and anti-scientific. In this book, the Platonic Socrates tries to convince his followers that philosophy and politics can be mutually beneficial to each other. Philosophy can demonstrate the wisdom of allowing a select few to make the decisions for the many. In turn, the proper political arrangements can create a more conducive environment for doing philosophy. In fact, one goal of the *Republic* was to obliterate enthusiasm for the atomists like Leucippus and Democritus, who were looking for an objective understanding of the world through a scientific methodology that rejected any use for a "philosopher-king". The atomists threatened the Socratic approach to philosophy (and hence, the political *quid pro quo* involved in the Socratic bargain) because of the rejection of the theory of eternal forms, knowable only through a mystical internal quest. So, the *Republic* found favor with Spartan militarism, asceticism, and socialism — all of which amounted to a rejection of the objective world. The *Republic* was a marriage of "aristocratic prejudice and 'divine philosophy'." Russell's verdict is entirely negative: "That Plato's *Republic* should have been admired, on its political side, by decent people, is perhaps the most astonishing example of literary snobbery in all history."

The use of Hegel and Marx also led to a polity that was anti-democratic and elitist. For Hegel, the objective world as we understand

it is false. Real Reality is a timeless, progressive, of each individual thinker, is the essence of the Liberal outlook. Dogma is unacceptable. Authoritarianism is unjustifiable. Universal systems of philosophy are mental mythology. The proper outlook is "half way between dogma and skepticism;" this is where Russell believes empiricism takes us.

However, the philosophy of tolerance and universal suffrage, which Russell refers to as "Liberal philosophy", is often seen as "too tamed and middle-aged." Many people want a dogma that can be pushed with "missionary activity and gives hope of a millennium brought about by conquest." In Russell's time, the threat of nuclear war was the most overt threat. But historically, academic and personal freedom, individual safety and security from government intrusion, and protection of property were also at risk from the conquistadors of philosophy who dogmatically pushed their philosophy with missionary zeal. The Inquisition, Auschwitz, and the Gulag are only three reminders that philosophers and politicians don't need nuclear weapons to destroy millions of lives.

So, "Philosophy and Politics" becomes an apology for democratic liberalism and empiricism — a view that underlines the importance of rational decision-making, human dignity, mutual tolerance, and openness to new ideas. Russell concludes by arguing that only such a view allows for scientific evidence for our beliefs and places human happiness above adherence to dogmatic doctrines. He warns us that

Our confused and difficult world needs various things if it is to escape disaster, and among these one of the most necessary is that, in the nations that still uphold Liberal beliefs, these beliefs should be whole-hearted and profound, not apologetic towards dogmatisms of the right or the left, but deeply persuaded of the value of liberty, scientific freedom, and mutual forbearance. For without these beliefs life on our politically divided but technically unified planet will hardly continue to be possible.

This essay contains a relevant message for our own time. As we struggle to fully empower our citizens in the United States, as Russia and other countries struggle to transplant democracy into their own politics, and as all people debate the limits of governmental, clerical, and personal power, Russell's advice is a vital contribution. Without empiricism and Liberal democracy, philosophy can be used to place power in the hands of a few. In a time where political tolerance is often viewed as a decadent weakness, prudent reason is regularly vilified by self-righteous zealots, and progressive science is seen by many as methodologically suspect, we would do well to remember the most oppressive threat we face — those who think they have all the answers.

"Philosophy and Politics" was published as a small bound pamphlet by the Cambridge University Press in 1947. It is reprinted as the opening essay in the collection *Unpopular Essays*, Simon and Schuster, 1950. I

also recommend the essay, "Philosophy and Politics" by A.J. Ayer, the Eleanor Rathbone Memorial Lecture given at Bristol University, 1965. It has been published as the last essay in *Metaphysics and Common Sense*, San Francisco: Freeman, Cooper and Company, 1967. My recommendations would include "Philosophy and Politics," the last chapter of Antony Flew's *Philosophy: An Introduction*, published by Prometheus Press, 1980.

Russell and Kant

Nicholas Griffin
McMaster University

Paul Haber (*BRS Quarterly*, No. 92, Nov. 1996) appeals for further evidence of Russell's denigrating Kant. Russell's harsh criticisms of Kant were not the late development that Hager supposes, nor did they have to wait for Cantor's forthright dismissal of Kant as 'yonder sophisticated philistine' (in a letter to Russell of 1911). In fact, the passage from the *Outline of Philosophy* (p. 64) in which Russell credits Kant as a prime source of 'muddle and mystery' in philosophy and which Hager cites as the first of his really sharp criticisms of Kant, was clearly anticipated in the 1899-1900 draft of the *Principles of Mathematics* where he refers to Kantian intuition as 'that lazy limbo of mystery'.¹

At the same time, there is the astonishing remark in *My Philosophical Development* (p. 75) that Russell had originally thought of *Principia Mathematica* as a long parenthesis in the refutation of Kant. Obviously any philosopher who warranted such a refutation must be important and, while he might be a 'misfortune', could hardly be a 'mere misfortune' (as Russell had said in the *Outline*, p. 64).

Hager, however, seems to me to be wrong in his account of what Russell rejected in Kant's philosophy. It was not Russell's pluralism that made him anti-Kantian — after all, Kant was a pluralist too. It was Kant insistence upon intuition in mathematics and, with it, the view that mathematical items and hence mathematical propositions were, at least in part, the creation of the human mind. The evidence Hager cites — e.g. Alan Wood's description of Russell's disgust at Kant as 'like a Fundamentalist confronted with the suggestion that Moses had made up the Ten Commandments himself' (*My Philosophical Development*, p. 261) — bears out the idea that it was Kant's psychologism that Russell found so objectionable. Indeed, even in his most Kantian work, *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry* (1897), Russell was concerned to despsychologize Kant — though with imperfect success as he came quickly to think.

Why, then, did Kant fall in Russell's estimation from being 'the greatest of modern philosophers' whose refutation warranted the writing

of *Principia Mathematica*, to being a 'mere misfortune'? Not, I think, because Russell had difficulty in establishing pluralism, still less because swinging attacks on Misfortunate Dead Philosophers had sales appeal to magazine editors. There might, however, be something in Hager's suggestion that the young Russell was unduly deferential to Kant — he was certainly more deferential than the equally youthful G.E. Moore was in his Fellowship Dissertation of 1898 which was (ostensibly) on Kant's ethics. The chief reason for Russell's later impatience with Kant, however, was surely because he felt the influence of Kantian psychologism had lingered on long after it ought to have done. A chief concern of Russell's here would be the use of Brouwer's intuitionist philosophy of mathematics which threatened everything Russell hoped to achieve in *Principia*.

¹ *Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. III, G. Moore (ed.), London & N.Y.: Routledge, 1983, p. 106. In the corresponding chapter of the published version of the book he describes it instead as a 'mass of unanalyzed prejudice' (*Principles of Mathematics*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1964; 1st edn., 1903, p. 260).

Carl Sagan, Rationalist and Humanist

One of the things I've always liked about Bertrand Russell is the fact that he lived to the ripe old age of 97, and remained a provocative figure right to the end of his days. Like Russell, Carl Sagan had a passion for popularizing science, and promoting critical thinking. But alas, unlike Russell, he died far too young at the early age of 62. There were dozens of obituaries written about this gifted and admired figure, but I was troubled to see that almost none of these mentioned that he was a humanist, skeptical of organized religion. He had long been a supporter and friend to the Council for Secular Humanism, and was a laureate of the Academy of Humanism. During his last few months, he was often asked if facing imminent death had altered his skepticism about an afterlife, and he remained forthright in declaring his lack of belief in any life beyond the grave. In an interview published in the April 14th *Buffalo News*, Sagan declared that his battle with myelodysplasia — a rare blood disease which ultimately killed him — has taught him to appreciate "the beauty and sweet poignancy of life, about the preciousness of friends and family, and about the transforming power of love." Sagan was a Russellian figure, using his celebrity status to educate the public on the importance of scientific literacy. His enthusiasm and personal charm will be deeply missed. He was true humanist, in all meanings of the term.

The following obituary appeared in the *Charleston Gazette*. Written by its editor, James Haught, it is, as far as I know, the only memorial to emphasize Sagan's humanism.

— Tim Madigan, Executive Editor, *Free Inquiry: The International Secular Humanist Magazine*

Battling demons of the mind

By James A. Haught

Sincere seekers of reliable knowledge lost a friend when Carl Sagan died too young at 62.

Like all good scientists, the brilliant Cornell astronomer spent his life pursuing secrets of nature, looking for facts that can be documented, tested, and retested.

Like some maturing thinkers, he decided late in life to escalate his criticism of mystical mumbo-jumbo into an all-out, no-holds-barred attack. His last book, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, urged intelligent people to repudiate:

Astrology horoscopes, faith-healing, UFO "abductions," religious miracles, New Age occultism, fundamentalist "creationist," Tarot card reading, prayer, prophecy, palmistry, Transcendental Meditation, satanism, weeping statues, "channelling" of voices from the dead, holy

apparitions, extrasensory perception, belief in life after death, "dowsing," demonic possession, "magical powers" of crystals and pyramids, "psychic phenomena" etc., etc.

Sagan's farewell message was simple:

— Many people believe almost anything they're told, with no evidence, which makes them vulnerable to charlatans, crackpots and superstition.

— Only the scientific outlook, mixing skepticism and wonder, can give people a sensible grasp of reality.

He scorned supernatural aspects of religion. *The Demon-Haunted World* abounds with comments like these:

"If some good evidence for life after death were announced, I'd be eager to examine it; but it would have to real scientific data, not mere anecdote. . . Better the hard truth, I say, than the comforting fantasy." (p. 204)

"If you want to save your child from polio, you can pray or you can inoculate. . . Try science." (p. 30)

"Think of how many religious attempts to validate themselves with prophecy. Think of how many people rely on these prophecies, however vague, however unfulfilled, to support or prop up their beliefs. Yet has there ever been a religion with the prophetic accuracy and reliability of science? There isn't a religion on the planet that doesn't long for a comparable ability — precise, and repeatedly demonstrated before committed skeptics — to foretell future events. No other human institution comes close." (p. 30)

"Since World War II, Japan has spawned enormous numbers of new religions featuring the supernatural . . . In Thailand, diseases are treated with pills manufactured from pulverized sacred Scripture. 'Witches' are today being burned in South Africa. . . The worldwide TM [Transcendental Meditation] organization has an estimated valuation of \$3 billion. For a fee, they promise through meditation to be able to walk you through walls, to make you invisible, to enable you to fly," (p. 6)

"The so-called Shroud of Turin. . . is now suggested by carbon-14 dating to be not the death shroud of Jesus, but a pious hoax from the 14th century — a time when the manufacture of fraudulent religious relics was a thriving and profitable home handicraft industry." (p. 46)

Sagan quoted the Roman philosopher Lucretius:

"Nature. . . is seen to do all things spontaneously of herself, without the meddling of gods." (p. 310)

And he quoted the Roman historian Polybius as saying the masses can be unruly, so "they must be filled with fears to keep them in order. The ancients did well, therefore, to invent gods and the belief in punishment after death." (p. 213)

Sagan recounted how the medieval church tortured and burned thousands of women on charges that they were witches who flew in the air, coupled with Satan, turned into animals, etc. He said "this legally and morally sanctioned mass murder" was advocated by great church fathers.

"In Italy, the Inquisition was condemning people to death until the end of the eighteenth century, and inquisitional torture was not abolished in the Catholic Church until 1816," he wrote. "The last bastion of support for the reality of witchcraft and the necessity of punishment has been the Christian churches." (p. 413)

The astronomer-author was equally scornful of New Age gurus, UFO buffs, seance "channelers" and others who tout mysterious beliefs without evidence.

He denounced the tendency among some groups, chiefly fundamentalists and marginal psychologists, to induce people falsely to "remember" satanic rituals or other non-existent events they supposedly experienced as children.

Sagan, a laureate in the International Academy of Humanism, had been a member of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal since its founding in 1976 by Dr. Paul Kurtz. The astronomer said CSICOP serves a valuable public purpose by offering the news media "the other side of the story" in response to supernatural declarations by "every levitation guru, visiting alien, channeler, and faith-healer. . . CSICOP represents a counterbalance, although not yet nearly a loud enough voice, to the pseudo-science gullibility that seems second nature to so much of the media." (p. 299)

Again and again in his last book, Sagan said wonders revealed by science are more awesome than any claim by mystics. He said children are "natural scientists" because they incessantly ask "Why is the moon round?" or "Why do we have toes?" or the like.

He urged youngsters be inculcated with the scientific spirit of searching for trustworthy evidence, or guide them through "the demon-haunted world." That's a noble wish for the young.

I'm a friend of Sagan's sister, Cari Greene, who donated bone marrow repeatedly in a desperate attempt to fend off his marrow disease. Through her, I watched the family's pain.

Although his unstoppable illness was cruel, I'll bet the wise scientist didn't personalize his misfortune, but saw it factually as part of the random lottery of life, which takes some victims early, some late.

Meanwhile, we who admired him can be grateful that his last act was a courageous battle against the many demons of the mind.

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