
The Bertrand Russell Society

"The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." -Bertrand Russell,
"What I Believe"

MENU

2020 Papers

*Below is a list of accepted speakers and their talk titles for the **2020 Annual Meeting** to be held on 19-20 June 2020. The papers will also be posted below, and abstracts are all already given here. The meeting will be held online due to COVID-19, and is locally and virtually organized by our president, **David Blitz**.*

- **David Blitz** (Central Connecticut State University) “Russell and Leibniz (in part)” ([slides](#))
- Andrew Bone (McMaster University) ““An Isolated Outpost of Western Civilization”: Geopolitics, Security, Population and Race in Russell’s Appraisal of mid-Century Australia” ([full paper as revised for publication in *Russell* \(2020\) Volume 40, Issue 2](#))
- Fizza Chaudry, Richard Dejesus, Saad Islam, Amy Lezon (Central Connecticut State University) “An interactive timeline of Bertrand Russell’s life” ([link](#))
- **James Connelly** (Trent University Durham-GTA) Revisiting Landini on Wittgenstein’s Critique of Russell’s MRTJ ([full paper](#))
- **Dennis Darland** (Independent Scholar) “On a Multiple Relation Theory of Belief” ([full paper](#), [slides](#))
- **Landon D. C. Elkind** (University of Iowa) “Generalized Molecular Formulas in Logical Atomism” ([full paper](#))
- **Alexander Klein** (McMaster University) “Russell’s Representationalism About Consciousness: Reconsidering His Relationship to James” ([full paper](#))
- **Gregory Landini** (University of Iowa) “Gödel Incompleteness Doesn’t Hold in *Principia Mathematica*” ([full paper](#), [presentation](#))

- **Tim Madigan** (St. John Fisher College) “Reports of His Death were Sometimes Exaggerated: The Many Obituaries of Bertrand Russell” ([presentation](#))
- **Abdul Latif Mondal** (Aligarh Muslim University) “Bertrand Russell on Sensations and Images” ([full paper](#))
- **Giovanni Battista Ratti** (University of Genoa) “On Russell’s Ways Out” ([full paper](#))
- **Michael Stevenson** (Lakehead University) “Bertrand Russell at UCLA, 1939-1940” ([full paper](#))
- **Peter Stone** (Trinity College, Dublin) “Chomsky and Russell Revisited” ([full paper](#))
- **Adam Stromme** (Independent Scholar) “Russell and Smith” ([full paper](#), [slides](#))
- Laurie Thomas (Independent Scholar) “On the Notion of Cause” ([full paper](#))
- Ethan Tion and Hans Loewig (Independent Scholars) “Bertrand Russell’s Theory of Impulse” ([full paper](#))

Papers and Abstracts

David Blitz (Central Connecticut State University)
 “Russell and Leibniz (in part)” ([slides](#))

This paper will look at Russell’s “last” statement of his philosophy, “My Present View of the World” the first chapter in *My Philosophical Development* (1959), where Russell makes an unusually large number of references to Leibniz and his monads, adapting some aspects to his own point of view. I’ll compare and contrast Russell’s treatment of Leibniz in his *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (1900) more than half a century earlier, as well as Russell’s presentation of Leibniz in *History of Western Philosophy* (1945). My interest here is how Russell’s Leibniz (his interpretation) provides both negative, but also positive material for Russell’s own philosophy.

Andrew Bone (McMaster University) “”An Isolated Outpost of Western Civilization”: Geopolitics, Security, Population and Race in Russell’s Appraisal of mid-

Century Australia” (full paper as revised for publication in *Russell* (2020) Volume 40, Issue 2)

In lectures given by Russell as he traversed Australia for nine weeks during its winter of 1950, Russell talked more about Cold War problems generally than the particular effects of these issues—ideological polarization, for example, nuclear weapons, or superpower rivalry in the developing world—on the country that he was visiting for the first and only time. But he was often coaxed into giving his impressions of Australian geography, society, culture and (of particular relevance to the present paper) international relations. Russell considered Australia, like most inhabitants of this British Commonwealth society and American ally, as an integral if distant part of the “West”, rather than as a Pacific nation that required a better-defined regional identity. As a keen but non-expert observer of the country, Russell connected its vulnerable geopolitical situation to the small size of its almost exclusively white population—a perspective which drew him towards Australian political debates about race and immigration.

Fizza Chaudry, Richard Dejesus, Saad Islam, Amy Lezon (Central Connecticut State University) “An interactive timeline of Bertrand Russell’s life” ([link](#))

We will present an online, interactive timeline of Bertrand Russell’s life, work and times, which will include major events in his biography, academic work, political work, and related world events. There will be some discussion of the technical aspects of producing the code for this project, and its capacity to be reused for other projects.

James Connelly (Trent University) “Revisiting Landini on Wittgenstein’s Critiques of Russell’s MRTJ” (full paper)

In this paper, I revisit Gregory Landini’s reading of Wittgenstein’s May-June 1913 critique of Russell’s MRTJ, and subject it to critical scrutiny. According to Landini, Wittgenstein’s critique of Russell’s MRTJ was driven by Wittgenstein’s emerging ‘doctrine,’ or ‘intuition,’ of showing. While, as Landini acknowledges, the doctrine is not formulated explicitly until April 1914 (2019, p. 20), in the context of the notes dictated to Moore in Norway, he sees it as implicit in much earlier remarks, going

as far back as summer 1912. The doctrine of showing is evident, he claims, both in correspondence with Russell over the years 1912-13, but also within Wittgenstein's reflections on the ab-notation in, inter alia, the Notes on Logic. In essence, according to Landini, the ab-notation is Wittgenstein's attempt to implement the doctrine of showing, and thus evidence of Wittgenstein's work on the ab-notation may be taken as a reliable indicator of the presence of his doctrine, or intuition, of showing. (2019, p. 5) However, a better explanation of the saying/ showing distinction, consistent with my alternative reading of Wittgenstein's critique of Russell's MRTJ (which I call the 'Logical Interpretation' or LI), is that it is an idea Wittgenstein developed while working in Norway, as an attempt to address problems inherent in the "bestly theory of types" (Cambridge Letters, p. 38) without falling prey to his own objections to the account of logical form inherent in Russell's 1913 MRTJ. The saying/ showing distinction is thus a doctrine which emerges from Wittgenstein's critique of Russell's MRTJ, not a prior intuition which motivates that critique.

Dennis Darland (Independent Scholar) "On a Multiple Relation Theory of Belief" (full paper, slides)

I will explain a modification of Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Belief (Judgement) from *The Problems of Philosophy*. I will combine it with his theory of definite descriptions from "On Denoting"—for cases in which objects do not exist. I also consider how this answers a problem with "opacity" described by Quine in *Word and Object*.

Landon D. C. Elkind (University of Iowa) "Generalized Molecular Formulas in Logical Atomism" (full paper)

In his 1918 logical atomism lectures, Russell argued that there are no molecular facts. But he posed a problem for anyone wanting to avoid molecular facts: we need truth-makers for generalizations of molecular formulas, but such truth-makers seem to be both unavoidable and to have an abominably molecular character. We might call this the *problem of generalized molecular formulas*. I clarify the problem here by first distinguishing two cases: *incompletely generalized* molecular formulas and *completely generalized* molecular formulas. I next argue that, if empty worlds are logically possible, then the model- theoretic truth-

functional considerations that are usually given address the first kind of formula, but not the second kind. I then show that the commitments Russell has already made provide an answer to the problem of completely generalized molecular formulas. An upshot of this discussion is that, assuming empty worlds are logically possible, some truth-makers will be general facts that have no constituents.

Alexander Klein (McMaster University) “Russell’s Representations About Consciousness: Reconsidering His Relationship to James” (full paper)

In recent years, several scholars have taken an interest in Russell’s turn towards what look to be characteristically pragmatist accounts of belief, meaning, and knowledge, accounts that reach maturity in the 1921 *Analysis of Mind*. That book also constitutes Russell’s first, mature articulation of a neutral monist account of mind more generally. And yet through to the end of his career, Russell always rejected the pragmatist account of truth, particularly as James had articulated it (e.g., Russell 1953-1955). Why?

One reason is Russell’s enduring commitment to the notion that truth often involves a copying relation between a mental “picture” and a fact (Russell 1948/2009, 139), a view that is anathema to classic pragmatism. In this paper I attempt to make sense of Russell’s commitment to a correspondence theory, even in the context of his neutral monism, by examining what he has to say about consciousness in the *Analysis of Mind*. I also compare and contrast this account with James’s complimentary (yet interestingly different) views on the same topic.

Gregory Landini (University of Iowa) “Gödel Incompleteness Doesn’t hold in *Principia Mathematica*” (full paper, video presentation)

Gödel’s article “On Formally Undecidable Propositions of *Principia Mathematica* and related systems” (1931), offered in its title the promise of obtaining an important result concerning Whitehead and Russell’s *Principia*. I want to argue that, taken literally, it fails to make good on this promise. Of course, one may feel justified in interpreting the promise as having been made in the context, not of *Principia* itself, but of the modifications to *Principia* Gödel’s thought are needed to

make it viable as a theory in which natural numbers are abstract particulars that are identified as classes under an ontology of simple types of classes. Fair enough. But we must evaluate Gödel's first theorem as applied to the actual *Principia* (modified only by adding its wff infin ax as a new axiom). If we take seriously *Principia* thesis that there are no natural numbers as abstract particulars, Gödel's first theorem cannot apply. Its famous diagonal function does not exist.

Tim Madigan (St. John Fisher College) “Reports of His Death were Sometimes Exaggerated: The Many Obituaries of Bertrand Russell” (presentation)

In 1936, Bertrand Russell—then aged 64—wrote an 800-word mock “auto-obituary”, entitled “The Last Survivor of a Dead Epoch”, for the BBC's “The Listener” magazine. In it, he cheekily stated he lived until the age of 90, giving as the date of his death the year 1962. In fact, he would live until February 2, 1970, dying at the age of 97. In this presentation I will look at what Russell had to say about himself in his fake obituary, noting as well that, in 1921 several erroneous reports of his death at age 50 had allowed him, unlike most people, to read actual obituaries of himself. I will also compare his “auto-obituary” to the actual obituaries that appeared at the time of his real demise in 1970.

Abdul Latif Mondal (Aligarh Muslim University) “Bertrand Russell on Sensations and Images” (full paper)

Russell's Theory of Mind, on the one hand, explained the mind in positive terms of sensations and images. He tried to establish all the mental phenomena like imagination, belief, memory, emotion, desire, will, even consciousness as an entity, subject, or act. The explanations of these mental phenomena are given in his works *Analysis of Mind* and *An Outline of Philosophy*. In respect of some points linked with his theory of mind, Russell's explanations bear fundamental change at two stages of his neutralism. On the question of the neutrality of images, Russell, in his book *Analysis of Mind*, explained that they are not neutral, but in his later work, he described them to be neutral. The next point he relates to “mnemic” causation. But at the first point, he declared it as concerning with actions in time, later he explained it as a permanent modification of the structure of the brain required by past experience. And then he explained that sensations and images are the stuff of

our brain; this is the explanation of his later stage and not of early stage. However, Russell tried to explain various mental phenomena in his book “Analysis of Mind.” Among them, there are two problems that are fundamentally important and linked with his neutralistic theory of mind. Firstly, he tried to establish that each type of mental phenomenon is mixed up of sensations and images and does not imply a special entity which is called “consciousness.” The second problem is concerned with how combinations of sensations and images come to hold the consciousness in the sense of awareness, which interpretation was also acceptable to Russell.

According to Russell, a single sensation or image is not in itself a cognitive. Now the point is that in explaining a mental occurrence which is conscious, it would be necessary, besides analyzing it into non-cognitive constituents, to show what constitutes consciousness or awareness in it. Therefore we shall consider that Russell’s explanation of mental phenomena especially related to these two problems.

Giovanni Battista Ratti (University of Genoa) “On Russell’s Ways Out” (full paper)

Regarding his views on ethics, Russell is typically saddled with charges of (mainly pragmatic) inconsistency for holding that ultimate ethical valuations are subjective, while at the same time expressing emphatic opinions on ethical questions. In this paper, I will re-examine some of the ways out of these accusations Russell himself proposed, mainly by pointing to the weaknesses of objectivism (among which its failure in matching Occamist rigor is paramount). I shall also put forward some other possible replies that he did not expressly explore. In particular, I will stress that the object-language/meta-language distinction, which has its historical roots in Russell’s theory of types, can be used to hold that there is no possible contradiction in maintaining a subjectivist meta-ethics and defending substantive ethical claims. Along these lines, I will argue that Russell should have not been concerned with the charges of inconsistency of any kind, for second-order ontological claims about the nature of moral judgments are not conceptually apt to ground first-order substantive moral views.

Michael Stevenson (Lakehead University) “Bertrand Russell at UCLA, 1939-1940” (full paper)

Bertrand Russell left the “bleak hideousness” of Chicago in March 1939 to accept a three-year appointment at the University of California at Los Angeles. Scholarly analysis of Russell’s sojourn in California has focused on the CCNY controversy that engulfed him in the winter term of 1940 and his subsequent departure from UCLA to take up the William James Lectureship at Harvard University. This paper will concentrate instead on Russell’s appointment to UCLA and his experience teaching in Los Angeles during the 1939-40 academic year in an attempt to at least partially reconstruct his activities during this uncertain and tumultuous period of his American exile between 1938 and 1944.

Peter Stone (Trinity College, Dublin) “Russell and Chomsky Revisited” (full paper)

This paper revisits the relationship between Bertrand Russell and Noam Chomsky as public intellectuals. The relationship between Chomsky’s and Russell’s ideas is worth exploring because of their similar reputations. Both Chomsky and Russell are leading intellectuals who earned their reputations through their work in highly technical fields. Both became radical critics of the existing social order, and made use of their reputations to help get their criticisms before a wider audience. But as a result, both Chomsky and Russell have had to face the accusation that they are nosing around in areas outside their areas of expertise. Why should their criticisms be regarded as anything but mere carping? Is there something more to their ideas than that? This paper responds to this accusation by identifying the contributions that a successful public intellectual must make to social and political discourse, and by demonstrating that Russell and Chomsky clearly made such contributions. Along the way, it will compare the contributions made by Russell and Chomsky, with a focus upon the connections Chomsky himself drew with Russell.

Adam Stromme (Independent Scholar) “Russell and Smith” (full paper, slides)

The intellectual debts of Bertrand Russell to his immediate forebearers in the domain of logic—Peano, Frege, and the like—are well known. Less well known, however, are the potential debts and intellectual parallels between Russell and other major political philosophers. While Russell’s political commitment to socialism is well known, as well as his countless ties to major political and social

movements, this essay explores some of the striking similarities in the outlooks of Adam Smith and Bertrand Russell.

Laurie Thomas (Independent Scholar) “On the Notion of Cause” (full paper)

In his 1912 paper *On the Notion of Cause*, Bertrand Russell explained some of the problems with the early 20th century ideas about causality, and why some scientists and many philosophers would rather avoid the entire subject of causality. Yet from a 21st century perspective, it is clear that the American educational system, from K-12 to medical school, needs to do a better job of teaching people about causality. Causality is of practical and political importance whenever we are faced with choices whose consequences matter. Causality is not a mathematical or logical concept but a form of mythology. To serve our emotional needs, we human beings tell ourselves stories about the relationships among the events that we perceive. Yet our perceptions are inevitably limited, biased, or imprecise, and the act of observation is itself an event that could affect other events. Although all theories of cause and effect are mythoi, not all mythoi are created equal. Some mythoi clearly have better explanatory and predictive power than others have.

Ethan Tion and Hans Loewig (Independent Scholars) “Bertrand Russell’s Theory of Impulse” (full paper)

In 1916, shaken by the events of the Great War, Bertrand Russell published *The Principles of Social Reconstruction*, originally titled *Why Men Fight*, a work that contributed to his reputation as a pacifist and social critic. In it, Russell offers an account of what motivates human action, and in doing so, argues that a large part of human activity stems from impulse. The types of motivation typified by Russell’s concept of impulse are those of which are seldom conscious and are guided by the community in which we are embedded. For Russell, a society averse to war and injustice demands institutions that will cultivate impulses that are averse to war and injustice. We set out to demonstrate that his concept of impulse pervades a large part of his social and political thought, and also suggest further linkages to seminal works in peace research. In doing so, we will proceed along the following lines: 1. We will elucidate Russell’s concept of impulse as presented in his *Principles of Social Reconstruction*; 2. Identify how Russell’s concept of impulse is

present in his anti-Soviet literature, his later anti-war writings, and his political writings that predate the Great War. 3. Examine how Russell's theory of impulse links the mitigation of structural violence embedded in political and economic institutions with the foundation for an international setting of positive peace.

NEWS: THE BERTRAND RUSSELL SOCIETY

Russelliana: 9/17 @ 1 pm EST

Register by May 13th for the 2022 BRS annual meeting!

CFP: 49th BRS Annual Meeting

Russellania (11-13 @ 1 pm EST): Master class on Russell's "What is democracy?" with Peter Stone (Trinity College Dublin)

Katharine Tait (1923-2021)

FACEBOOK