

## RUSSELL SOCIETY NEWS

No. 65

February 1990

## ANNUAL MEETING (1990)

- (1) June 22-24 at The Russell Archives. The Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada is the handsome site of the BRS's 1990 Annual Meeting. We repeat what BRS President Michael Rockler said in the previous newsletter:

It is a sad fact that most members have never attended an Annual Meeting. That's a pity because attending a meeting and meeting fellow members is a very satisfying experience, quite aside from the fact that you see an interesting program and learn more about BR.

I know that -- alas! -- it can be expensive to attend a meeting. But if you cannot afford to attend a meeting every year, perhaps you can afford it once in a while, and if so, 1990 is a good year to do it...because the Archives are a special place. There you can see not only books, including BR's own personal collection of books, but also manuscripts, letters, pictures and posters...and meet Archivist Ken Blackwell and his Archives colleagues. BR's own personal desk (and chair), the one on which he did much of his writing, is there. You can also hear BR talk, on tape; there's a large library of tapes to choose from.

The program for the weekend includes a tour of the Archives; a talk by Michael Rockler, *Bertrand Russell and Education: Katharine Tait's Critique*; a Marvin Kohl workshop, *Russell's Theory of Rational Love*; a Don Jackanicz discussion, *Religion and Science*; Tim Madigan on *Russell and Dewey on Education: Similarities and Differences*; Thom Weidlich on *The Bertrand Russell/City College Case: 1940*; a talk by Louis Greenspan at the Saturday Night Banquet; *A History of the Bertrand Russell Society* by Lee Eisler; and a Red Hackle Hour before the Banquet.

There is a single, all-inclusive charge for all of this. It includes the registration fee; lodging Friday and Saturday nights in Wallingford Hall, an excellent McMaster Residence; all meals, from the Friday evening meal through Sunday morning breakfast, including the Saturday Night Banquet. The per person charge for double occupancy is \$110 Canadian; for single occupancy, \$125 Canadian. A U.S. Post Office money order for \$125 Canadian was \$108.76 US (on 1/29/90). A Pennsylvania bank wanted \$128.96 US for the equivalent.

We urge you to register immediately. This will help the McMaster planners. Please send \$110 or \$125 Canadian to THE BERTRAND RUSSELL ARCHIVES, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4L6. Remember, the cheapest way to send money to Canada is by US Post Office Money Order.

Use the Registration Form on the blue top sheet of this newsletter. Thanks!

The May newsletter will provide certain specifics, such as how to head for McMaster (from anywhere), and where to check in on arrival, etc.

See you there!

- (2) Marvin Kohl's Workshop on *Russell's Theory of Rational Love* will meet Saturday, June 23rd, at 3:30 pm. Participants and suggestions are welcome. The topic: What is love, and can we (collectively or individually) determine what is worthy or most worthy of being loved?

Basic reading: *What I Believe* (1925), Section II, *The Good Life*, in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, Egner and Denonn, eds. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1967. 371-375. You are strongly urged to read this in advance.


Other suggested readings:

- . Robert Brown, *Analyzing Love*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- . Marvin Kohl, *Brink, Russell and Rational Love*. RSN64-6.
- . Robert J. Sternberg, *Liking vs. Loving*. *Psychological Bulletin* 102:3 (1987), 331-345.

## OFFICERS OF THE BERTRAND RUSSELL SOCIETY, INC.

- (3) Chairman, Marvin Kohl; President, Michael Rockler; Vice President, John Lenz; Treasurer, Dennis J. Darland; Secretary, Don Jackanicz; Vice President/Information, Lee Eisler.

BY BERTRAND RUSSELL

(4) From *I Believe*, Clifton Fadiman, ed., NY: Simon & Schuster, 1939, pp. 409-412, with thanks to TOM STANLEY:


*Bertrand Russell*

NOTHING that has happened in the world since the first appearance of *Living Philosophies* has caused me to alter any of my beliefs, but some events have led to a change of emphasis. In ordinary life we do not have to proclaim vigorously that two and two are four, because we do not find it questioned; but if important governments put people to death for asserting it, we might have to devote time to the multiplication table which otherwise might be better employed. So it is at the present time. It had seemed, to my generation, that certain principles were definitely accepted in politics, e.g., that Jews and Christians should have the same social and political rights; that a man should not be deprived of life or liberty except by due process of law; and that there should be freedom of opinion except in so far as some interference might be necessary in time of actual war.

These principles, in whole or part, are now rejected by the governments of Germany, Italy, Russia, India, and Japan, not to mention many smaller countries. Those who disapprove of their rejection in one case very often approve of it in another. Communists are shocked by the tyranny in Fascist countries, but think it quite right that Stalin should be able to execute his colleagues whenever the humor seizes him. Fascists are horrified by the sufferings of Russian kulaks, but think that Jews deserve no mercy. The world grows more and more fierce, and fewer and fewer people object to atrocities committed by their own party.

In these circumstances, those of us who still believe in tolerance and democracy are told that we are condemning ourselves to futility, since victory must go either to the Fascists or to the Communists. I think this point of view quite unhistorical, but in any case I could not accept it.

To begin with the historical argument. For a time, the Western world was divided between the followers of Luther and the followers of Loyola; all governments were on one side or the other, fierce wars were fought, and the few who, like Erasmus, remained neutral might have been thought negligible. But after about a hundred years of slaughter without victory to either side, people got tired of the whole business and just stopped. To us, in retrospect, there seems very little to choose between persecuting Protestants and persecuting Catholics: we should divide the world of the seventeenth century into fanatics and sensible people, putting the opposing fanaticisms together as analogous follies. So, in retrospect, will Communism and Fascism appear. The ultimate victory is never to the fanatic, because he tries to keep men's emotions in a state of tension which the great majority, in the long run, find unbearable. The eighteenth century—the age of reason—was a period of relaxation after

the excitements of the wars of religion. So, I doubt not, the modern wars of ideologies will be succeeded by another age of reason, in which, once more, people will not be willing to persecute in the name of beliefs for which there is no evidence.

Fascism and Communism, when analyzed psychologically, are seen to be extraordinarily similar. They are both creeds by which ambitious politicians seek to concentrate in their own persons the power that has hitherto been divided between politicians and capitalists. Of course they have their differing ideologies. But an ideology is merely the politician's weapon; it is to him what the rifle is to the soldier. This is still true, psychologically, even if the politician is taken in by his own eloquence. The technique of both parties is the same: first, to persuade a minority by an ideology which appeals to hate; then, by some trick, to confine military power to this minority; and finally, to establish a tyranny. The method, so far as the modern world is concerned, was invented by Cromwell.

The defects of the method are obvious. Since it appeals to hate, it involves, internally, cruelty and suppression of every kind of freedom, and externally, a vehement reaction of fear and preparation for war. Owing to its revivalist's technique, its success, like that of analogous religious movements in the past, cannot be more than temporary; before long, enthusiasm gives place to corruption, and zeal degenerates into the activities of spies and informers. The ruler, terrified of assassination and palace revolutions, is the prisoner of his own secret service; everyone else comes to know that the road to success is to denounce relations and friends for imaginary conspiracies. There is nothing new about all this; it may be studied in the pages of Tacitus as well as in recent accounts of Russia.

It is a great misfortune that so many radicals should have persuaded themselves that the millennium is to be reached along such a road, and should have closed their eyes to the similarity of different brands of totalitarian states. The mentality produced by the Great War has encouraged an excessive belief in what can be achieved by violence, without the concurrence of the populations concerned; and at the same time impoverishment has stimulated the desire to find an enemy to whom misfortunes may be attributed. The cure for the crisis due to the Great War is thought to be a still greater war; all the disillusionments of idealists at Versailles and after are forgotten. In this there is no wisdom. It is not by violence and cruelty and despotism that the happiness of mankind is to be secured. In 1914 the world started along a wrong road, which it is still traversing, faster and faster the longer the end of the journey remains out of sight. Perhaps the blind alley will have to be followed to the very end, as in the wars of religion, before men discover that it leads nowhere. But in the meantime those who retain the use of reason should not encourage the frantic stampede toward disaster.

## BR ON WORLD GOVERNMENT

(5) *Why should we bother thinking about world government?*

It may be thought needlessly Utopian to consider world government, since it remains totally impossible so long as the East-West tension continues. It is, however, an urgent problem, since, unless it is solved within the next generation, it is unlikely that the human race will survive. A statement of this sort is found annoying, because people do not like changing their mental habits, and hating certain foreign nations is one of the most deeply ingrained of these habits.

It does not, of course, present itself in this way to their minds. What presents itself consciously is a quick conviction that any unusual thought is absurd. The conviction is so quick and firm that they never look to see whether it has a rational basis. I think, however, that anybody who can resist this unreasoning impulse must perceive that the survival of the human race depends upon the abolition of war, and that war can only be abolished by the establishment of a world government. (*Fact and Fiction* 1961 Simon & Schuster pp. 99-100)

*What powers would a world government need?*

Primarily those involving peace and war. It would need a monopoly of all the more important weapons of war. It would need the right to revise treaties between nations, and to refuse to recognize any treaty to which it would not give assent. It would need a firm determination to make war upon any nation which rebelled against its authority or committed a hostile aggression against any other nation.

*But it would not need to control nations as regards their internal economic development, as regards their education or their religious institutions, or any of the matters that could rightly be regarded as internal.* (Italics added.)

What, in fact, it should take away from a nation is what has long ago been taken away from an individual -- namely, the right to kill. Individual citizens, unless they are gangsters, do not feel their liberty unduly hampered by the fact that they cannot shoot their neighbor whenever he plays the piano too loudly.

Individual nations ought to learn that a similar limitation upon their liberty is equally unobjectionable. They ought to be content with liberty to control their own affairs, and not demand the opportunity to shoot foreigners whenever the whim takes them. It is this opportunity of which a world government would have to deprive them. But it need not deprive them of any liberty that a decent person could desire. (*Fact and Fiction* 1961 Simon & Schuster pp.100-101)

*What are the prospects for world government in the near future?*

Attempts to form new groups by purely voluntary co-operation usually fail, because whatever government is constituted for such groups does not command traditional respect, and is not likely to be allowed enough power to enforce respect.

The most important application of this principle in the present day is to world government.

For the prevention of war, the existence of a single Government for the whole planet is indispensable. But a federal Government formed by mutual agreement, as the League of Nations and the United Nations were formed, is sure to be weak, because the constituent nations will feel as the barons felt in the Middle Ages, that anarchy is better than loss of independence.

And just as the substitution of orderly government for anarchy in the Middle Ages depended upon the victory of the royal power, so the substitution of order for anarchy in international relations, if it comes about, will come about through the superior power of some one nation or group of nations. And only after such a single Government has been constituted will it be possible for the evolution towards a democratic form of international government to begin.

This view, which I have held for the last thirty years, encounters vehement opposition from all people of liberal outlook, and also from all nationalists of whatever nation. I agree, of course, that it would be far better to have an international Government constituted by agreement, but I am quite convinced that the love of national independence is too strong for such a Government to have effective power.

When a single Government for the world, embodying the military supremacy of some nation or group of nations, has been in power for a century or so, it will begin to command that degree of respect that will make it possible to base its power upon law and sentiment rather than on force, and when that happens, the international Government can become democratic.

I do not say that this is a pleasant prospect; what I do say is that men's anarchic impulses are so strong as to be incapable of yielding in the first place to anything but superior force. This would not be the case if men were more rational, or less filled with hatred and fear.

But so long as the present type of national sentiment persists, any attempt to establish a really vigorous international Government would be countered by an irresistible propaganda: "Would you rather live as slaves than die as free men?" the champions of national independence would ask. In every nation in which there was a good hope of not dying, but living, as free men, this rhetorical question would be answered by a general shout in favor of dying for freedom.

I do not say that there is no hope of a better method of ending the international anarchy; what I do say is that there is no hope of this unless and until individuals are much changed from what they are now. It will be necessary that individuals shall have less feeling of hostility and fear towards other individuals, more hope of security as regards their own lives, and a far more vivid realization that, in the world which modern technique has created, the need of world-wide co-operation is absolute, if mankind is to survive. Can a leopard change his spots? I believe that he can, but if not, terrible calamities must befall him.

(*New Hopes for a Changing World* 1951 Simon & Schuster pp.72-73)

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BR's views on nuclear war -- which assume that nuclear war would destroy all life on earth -- are being called "extreme" by some. William C. Gay's paper *The Russell Hook Debates of 1958: Arguments from the Extremes on Nuclear War and the Soviet Union* was presented at the October 1989 meeting of *Concerned Philosophers for Peace*. In it Gay says:

I will focus on Russell's tendency to argue from the extreme premise that nuclear war could destroy all life and on Hook's tendency to argue from the other extreme premise that communism could destroy all freedom.

Is BR's view "extreme"? No one can know for certain whether a nuclear war would extinguish all life on earth. Maybe it would, maybe it wouldn't. If you assume that life would survive a nuclear war -- then if nuclear war occurs, and it turns out you were mistaken, nothing alive would be left. But if you make the other assumption, that life would not survive a nuclear war, then you become aware of the crucial importance of preventing war...and if you succeed, life can continue.

It is therefore prudent to assume the worst. BR, in assuming the worst, is in fact acting prudently.

Add to this BR's feeling that nuclear war was inevitable. As a student of history, BR believed that any horrible act that could occur, sooner or later would occur. No atrocity has ever failed to occur when the means of performing it were available. Man's inhumanity to man has always been limited by his means. Hitler killed millions of Jews and others; he had the means of doing so. He would surely have killed all the inhabitants of Churchill's England -- the only country that stood up to Hitler at the time, and fought him -- if he had had the means...if he had had A-Bombs.

At present, thousands of nuclear missiles are aimed at the adversary from both sides of the Iron Curtain. The means of fighting a nuclear war clearly existed in BR's day (and still exist today).

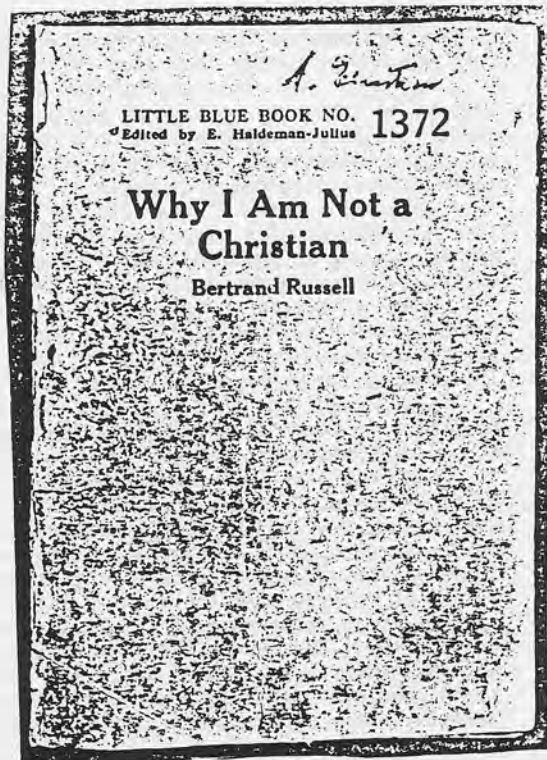
An interviewer told BR that some thought he was being "fanatical" in his views about the likelihood of nuclear war. BR's response was: "It is hard not to be fanatical. The issue is so large."

[Can someone supply the quotation (and source) in which BR says that any folly that could occur would occur: Ditto, BR's response to the interviewer. The Gay paper is in the RS Library.]

BR APPRECIATED

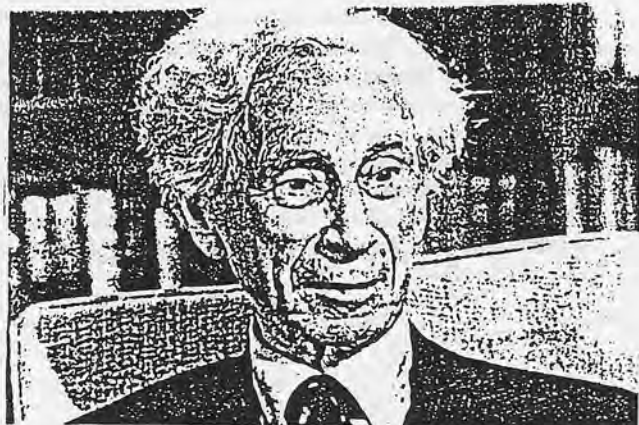
(6)

This is Albert Einstein's personal copy of *Why I Am Not A Christian*. Note -----> his signature in the upper right corner. Thank you, AL SECKEL.



## BR INTERVIEWED

- (7) CBS Interview, See It Now (3/22/55). From *See It Now*, Murrow and Friendly, eds. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1955. Thank you, TOM STANLEY.



MURROW: Lord Bertrand Russell is a scientist, a philosopher, and an author. He won the Nobel prize for literature at the age of seventy-nine. He is now eighty-three. He lives at 41 Queens Road, Richmond, Surrey, and it was here that Howard Smith interviewed him.

SMITH: Well, Lord Russell, we've been talking a great deal about America's faults. Are there any British faults that make—that make relations difficult?

LORD RUSSELL: I think the British have very grave faults. I don't think they're political. I think they are more social. I am constantly really shocked by the impolite things that English people, in talk, will say about and to Americans—things that really make me blush, because they are so unjust. And I think they ought to learn the ordinary courtesies of life in dealing with Americans, which they don't seem to have at present, and I think that's been a very great source of trouble—very great.

SMITH: Well, Lord Russell, there seems to have been an unusual amount of friction between America and Great Britain just in the past year. What do you feel is wrong?

LORD RUSSELL: Well, the fundamental cause of the friction between England and America is a difference of view as to policy, especially, I think, in the East. The English have a more cautious approach to Eastern questions, we think, than you seem to have. We're more afraid of war and less persuaded of the justice of certain causes which appear just to America. I notice that Attlee said quite emphatically and without reservation that the Chinese Communist government ought to have Formosa. I think that is a view which is very general in England and hardly anybody holds it in America. It's a very great difference, and of course, there goes with that another difference which is: most English people who know anything about China consider that Chiang Kai-shek is a ruffian, a totalitarian, a bad man altogether, and not the sort of man that one wants to support. And also they think that Americans are quite mistaken in supposing that if Chiang Kai-shek, with the help of America, were to invade China, large parts of the Chinese population would come over to support him. Because they remember that Chiang Kai-shek was beaten because his troops deserted to the Communists. That was before the Communists had power to make them do so.

SMITH: Well, what about America's general attitude toward world affairs? Could you make any suggestion as to how we might develop our attitude?

LORD RUSSELL: Well, in Europe, I don't think I have much criticism of the American attitude. I think, as far as European affairs go, I am pretty much in agreement with it. It's—it's almost entirely as regards Asia that I don't agree. Not that I like the Communist regimes. I don't. I don't like them at all. But I don't think it's the duty of the West to go crusading against any regime it doesn't happen to like. That's altogether too serious. I think, of course, in your internal, national affairs, the will of the country is supreme, and if the country wants something, that happens, and you get the habit of thinking the will of the country is supreme. Now, in international affairs, that is not so. You meet the will of other countries and there has to be give and take, and you haven't the habit of give and take in politics in the same way, I think, that you would have after long experience. You don't—you feel as though you are giving away a principle when you concede things to the other party; whereas it's in the very essence of negotiation.

SMITH: Can you suggest any practical steps we might take to improve relations and to strengthen the Western Alliance morally?

LORD RUSSELL: I think that one of the things I should most wish to see is that there should be no more of this purging of libraries and purging of professors, and no longer the attempt to impose upon the public, by authority and misinformation, a false view about a great many important world problems; and that it should no longer be thought that a man who brings forward some fact that the authorities would like to have kept dark is necessarily disloyal. I think that is one of the main sources of trouble. Undoubtedly, the harshness in America toward people who are thought to be Communist sympathizers is a thing which has shocked English opinion—and, I expect, continental opinion too. The kind of thing that has been associated with McCarthy—but it isn't by any means confined to him. I think what has defeated McCarthy is the fact that other people have taken up his policy, and so I don't see that, from a public point of view, there's very much gained.

SMITH: Yes.

LORD RUSSELL: I don't think it's very much better. Now, this habit of investigating anybody who works for government—so minutely—makes scientists shy off from government work, and is almost certain to be a very great impediment to atomic research in America, and actually to make the whole business of atomic weapons not nearly so effective as it would be if there was less.

SMITH: Do you draw any hope from such things as the Supreme Court decision against segregation in American schools?

LORD RUSSELL: Yes. I think that's a very good thing indeed. And I should like to say here, generally, that I find no criticism whatever of the federal judiciary in America, which I think is very good indeed. Its decisions seem to be sound and liberal and wise.

SMITH: Well, which do you think is the greater menace in the world today, Lord Russell: Communism, or the problems that arise due to the awakening of what are called the backward peoples in Asia and Africa?

LORD RUSSELL: Well, they are virtually the same problem because—thecertainly the awakening of Asia's a thing going like a prairie fire. The Communists have made themselves the protagonists of the—the people of Asia, and they will be the protagonists of the people in Africa as soon, as there is much doing there, and that is a very grave danger. But at the same time, I think that we, the Western nations, are very much to blame for not having done the things which ought to have been done—such as land reform, for instance, which ought to have been done long ago, and which we've left for the Communists to do.

SMITH: Well, do you feel then that we have a good chance of leading the Western Alliance along constructive paths?

LORD RUSSELL: Well, nobody else has—that's quite certain. I mean—[LORD RUSSELL LAUGHS] it's got to be you or nobody.

SMITH: I think a great many Americans doubt the validity of a policy of peaceful coexistence with the Russians. Do you feel that it is possible?

LORD RUSSELL: I think there are only two possibilities: coexistence and coextinction. If you're not going to find a way of coexisting, the human race will cease to exist. That's in view of modern armaments. And I think we've got to coexist. I think the Russians have got to realize that, and we have got to realize it. I am perfectly aware that we shan't get the Russians to realize it unless we have very powerful armaments. We must have sufficiently powerful armaments to make the Russians think a war is not worth while. That, I think, is obvious. I am not at all inclined to urge disarmament at the present time—not at all. But I do think we have got to realize, ourselves, and we have got to get the Russians to realize, that if there is a war, neither side will get *any single thing that it wants*. Nothing. The Russians won't get world empire. We shan't get security. What you would get is masses of corpses and an extinction of the human race. And that's not what anybody wants—so that we've got to learn to coexist somehow.

## BR'S BIRTHDAY

Wrong date. BR's birthday is May 18th, not May 17th as we wrongly reported (RSN64-3). Our knowledgeable colleagues, Archivist KEN BLACKWELL and Librarian TOM STANLEY, noted the error. Ken sent this confirming evidence:

B 10401

CERTIFIED COPY of an Entry in a REGISTER of BIRTHS,  
(6 & 7 Wm. IV., cap. 86.)



Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE,  
SOMERSET HOUSE, LONDON.

SUPERINTENDENT REGISTRAR'S DISTRICT <i>Monmouth</i>										
1872. BIRTHS in the District of <i>Trelleck</i> in the County of <i>Monmouth</i>										
No.	When and where Born.	Name, if any.	Sex.	Name and Surname of Father.	Name and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Rank or Profession of Father.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.	Diaptional Name, if added after Registration of Birth.
<i>178</i>	<i>Eighteenth May 1872</i> <i>Trelleck</i>	<i>Bertrand Boy</i>	<i>Boy</i>	<i>John Russell</i>	<i>Katharine Louisa Russell formerly Stanley</i>	<i>Viscount</i>	<i>Amberley Father Trelleck</i>	<i>Third June 1872</i>	<i>William Farmer Registrar</i>	<i>—</i>

CERTIFIED to be a true Copy of an Entry in the Certified Copy of a Register of Births in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, SOMERSET HOUSE, LONDON, under the Seal of the said Office, the *8th* day of *October* 18 *89*

By the Act of 6 & 7 William IV., c. 86, sec. 38, it is enacted, "That the Registrar-General shall cause to be made a Seal of the said Register Office and the Registrar-General shall cause to be sealed or stamped therewith all Certified Copies of Entries given in the said Office; and all Certified Copies of Entries, purporting to be Sealed or Stamped with the Seal of the said Register Office, shall be received as evidence of the Birth, Death, or Marriage, to which the same relate, without any further or other proof of such Entry; and no Certified Copy purporting to be given in the said Office shall be of any force or effect which is not Sealed or Stamped as aforesaid."

By sec. 37 of the same Act it is enacted that "for every general search of the Indexes shall be paid the sum of twenty shillings, and for every particular search the sum of one shilling, and for every Certified Copy the sum of five shillings and sixpence;" exclusive of Inland Revenue Stamp (35 & 36 Vict. c. 97) of one penny.

The Act 21 & 22 Vict. c. 28, sec. 16, enacts that "whosoever shall intentionally destroy, deface, or injure, or cause or permit to be destroyed, defaced, or injured, any Register of Births, Baptisms, Marriages, Deaths, or Burials, or any Certified Copy of any such Register, or any part thereof, or shall forge or fraudulently alter, in any such Register, any Entry relating to any Birth, Baptism, Marriage, Death, or Burial, or any Certified Copy of any such Register, or of any part thereof, or shall forge or counterfeit the Seal of or belonging to any Register Office, or shall offer, utter, dispose of, or put off any such Register, Entry, Certified Copy, Certificate, or Seal, knowing the same to be false, forged, or altered," shall be guilty of Felony, and be liable to Penal Servitude, or to Imprisonment with Hard Labour.



How should we take notice of BR's Birthday? With firecrackers? Roman candles? Dancing in the streets? LINDA EGDENDORF offers this suggestion:

On BR's birthday, members in areas where there are more than just a couple or members should arrange to meet for dinner at an agreed-on restaurant. They can arrange ahead of time to have a cake with candles come from the kitchen at dessert-time. All can raise their glasses in a toast to the memory of the man who said, "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." Someone may be given the honor of blowing out the candles...or all can join together in one great super-puff. How many candles on the cake? Many small ones forming the letters BR? As you wish.

Thanks, Linda!

Those of you who attend May 18th BR Birthday Dinners, please let us know about it. (Newsletter address on Page 1, bottom.)

BR QUOTED

(9) From *The Physician and Sports Medicine* (January 88).

George Sheehan, MD

## Pursuing Happiness



**M**an is an animal," wrote Bertrand Russell, "and his happiness depends on his physiology more than he likes to think." Health comes first. Of course, we look to a fundamental state free of disease—or, at the least, free of disease that limits our daily activities.

Happiness, however, connotes more than this neutral status. Russell thought that the trained body was important. "Unhappy businessmen," he stated, "would increase their happiness more by walking 6 miles every day than by any conceivable change in philosophy."

Walking 6 miles a day is quite likely to change one's philosophy as well. Thousands of walkers—and runners, swimmers, and cyclists—will attest to a new sense of life's meaning arrived at during their physical activity. The mind, as well as the body, is in motion.

Russell thought it was impossible to be happy without physical activity, as well as mental. But such activity, he suggested, should be agreeable. It also should be directed to a desired end, and not be contrary to our impulses. "A dog will pursue rabbits to the point of complete exhaustion and be happy the whole time. But if you put a dog on a treadmill, it would not be happy because it is not engaged in a natural activity."

Columnist Sheehan is a cardiologist in Red Bank, New Jersey.

I am an observer of happy dogs. Daily, I see numbers of them walking with their owners on the boardwalk and grass in front of our beach house. They are a curious lot, constantly in motion and exploring the world around them. At times they engage in play, chasing thrown sticks or pursuing frisbees. One characteristic is immediately evident: Dogs are very serious when having fun. They may wag their tails, but they are totally concentrated on what is about to happen.

Play is just as important to us as it is to dogs. Some things we do with our bodies should be done merely because they are fun—not because they serve some serious purpose. If we are not performing some activity that is enjoyable on its own account, we should look for something that is. We may not find an activity as natural to us as hunting is to a dog, but we can come quite close.

"When things are bad," observed Russell, "what a person needs is not a new philosophy, but a new regimen—a different diet, or more exercise, or what not." That advice seems simplistic, but it worked for me. I took to the roads in my 45th year and shored up a life that was coming apart.

Regimen was also the key to the Greeks' pursuit of happiness. They believed that self-mastery included mastery of the body. Their education treated the body as equal to the mind and spirit. The ancient Greeks spent time every day in the gymnasium and palaestra engaged in athletic activity.

The key is movement that is play. What we do with our bodies and minds must be an end in itself as well as a means to an end. Man is an animal, as Russell states. Man is a child, too, whose happiness depends more on that psychology than we think.

Our needs are complex. Our goals come from our highest yearnings, but we must recognize our animal instincts and our childhood impulses. Integrating animal, child, and adult is a formidable task. Yet our happiness depends upon it.

What marks happy people, according to Russell, are two qualities: a stable framework built around a central purpose, and play. Our leisure should include physical play of some sort. This need not be sport, although that is the best way to guarantee play. The game, the contest, the race, the competition, are not essential. What is required is the spontaneous expression of the self as body.

Achieving happiness is a large project, but Russell's suggestion makes for a good start. Like Emerson, and Spencer before him, he is saying that if you wish to be a success in this life, you must first be a good animal.

We can be good animals through exercise that is tedious and repetitious. The better way is through play, which is exercise done without realizing it. The secret of the successful 6-mile walk is leaving work, family, cares, and responsibilities behind, and entering a world that is strangely, yet satisfyingly, all your own. **PSM**

### QUESTION

(10)

David Meltz asks whether anyone recognizes the following quotation...and if so, is it correct:

The question is not whether you believe God exists, but whether, if He does, He is anyone you would want to be associated with.

David adds: "I thought H. L. Menken said it, but I cannot find a reference. Any help would be appreciated. Thanks"

Please send responses to the newsletter, address on Page 1, bottom.

## ASSESSMENTS OF BR

(11) From *The Times of India*, New Delhi (2/9/70). Thank you, HARRY RUJA.

# THE SCEPTICAL CRUSADER

## Russell's Achievement

By G. L. MEHTA

"I BELIEVE," said Bertrand Russell in his *What I Believe* written when he was fifty-two, "that I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive. I am not young and I love life. But I should scorn to shiver with terror at the thought of annihilation."

He thought in the same way when he was seventy-eight. "In an old man who has known human joys and sorrows and has achieved whatever work it was in him to do," he wrote, "the fear of death is somewhat abject and ignoble." The best way to grow old, he felt, is neither to have undue absorption in the past nor cling to youth in the hope of sucking vigour from its vitality, to make your interests gradually wider and more impersonal "until bit by bit the walls of the ego recede and your life becomes increasingly merged in the universal life."

Russell endeavoured all his life to put this precept into practice. When most philosophers—not to speak ordinary men—would have resigned themselves to the evils and ills of the world, murmuring, "after me the deluge", he continued to stand fearlessly for his innermost convictions and protest against man's inhumanity to man.

Russell was the greatest among the philosophers of his day. He was also a social theorist, an ardent reformer and an incomparable literary stylist writing with profundity, clarity and wit. Hardly anyone could equal him in his capacity to elucidate the essence of a question and to answer it with complete intellectual honesty. Einstein once said that Russell was the wisest man he ever met.

### Amazing

What was the secret of this man whose originality of thinking equalled his amazing versatility? Herbert Gottschalk, a German biographer, saw two very different facets of Russell's character in constant conflict in his personality. There was on one side, the cool, objective, scientific mind interested in nothing but the pursuit of truth and prepared to let it lead him where it might; and, on the other, the ardent philanthropist deeply conscious of his share of responsibility for social welfare.

Russell himself has revealed in his three volumes of *Autobiography* what actuated and impelled him. On his eightieth birthday, he wrote that his life had been devoted to two different objects, which had all along remained separate and had only been lately united in a single whole. He had wanted, on the one hand, to find out whether anything could be known; and, on the other, to do whatever was possible towards creating a happier world. It was the former which led him to mathematics which he thought would give him "a certainty in the kind of way in which people want religious faith."

From his childhood, Russell was an intellectual rebel refusing to accept axioms and secretly doubting religious precepts. He was bitterly disappointed when he found that geometry started with axioms which had to be taken on trust and could not be proved. When he questioned Euclid's axioms—he started by asking whether two things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another—his elder brother, Frank, who was teaching him, said in despair, "If we don't accept the axioms, we can't go on."

### Most Vital

This is the most vital element in Bertrand Russell's thought—philosophical and social. He refused to accept anything *a priori* and was careful not to allow (as most of us do) his ideas to be influenced by his desires. At Cambridge, which provided a milieu for rational thinking, he challenged mathematical symbolism and logical concepts and blazed a new trail in philosophy. His seminal work in mathematical logic was perhaps the most significant since Aristotle.

Russell cherished reason as the most valuable possession of civilised man. "In all things," he said, "I have made a vow, to follow reason not the instincts, inherited partly from my ancestors and gained gradually by selection, and partly due to my education." Not that he did not recognise the limits of attainable knowledge. But for that reason he was not prepared to accept "deep-rooted prejudices as heaven-sent intuitions."

A sceptical attitude in philosophy as in science was in his case a

source of new ideas. As the poet said:

*There lives more truth in an  
honest doubt  
Believe me, than in half the  
creeds.*

In his eloquent essay, *A Free Man's Worship* (1903), Russell vowed that a new and enduring faith could be created "only on the firm foundation of despair." An honest scepticism towards traditional values and conventional wisdom need not mean a paralysis of will nor a surrender to pessimism. For Russell it was a stimulus to creative thought and optimism.

### Distressed

He was a philosopher of action as well as a theorist. He did not live on Olympian heights. Pity for the suffering of mankind was one of his three governing passions. "Nietzsche despises universal love", he wrote in his *History of Western Philosophy*, "I feel it is the motive power to all that I desire as regards the world." He was deeply distressed by the first world war not because of some abstract principles but because he could not bear to see the maiming and slaughter of young men.

He opposed conscription at the time and was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. His opposition to war was strenuous although he disclaimed that he was a pacifist. Some wars, he thought, were justifiable; however intensely he hated them. The second world war, for instance, was unavoidable if Hitler was not to usher in a new dark age and the western civilisation was not to perish. But after the war, he was intensely concerned over the prospect of the total annihilation of human life on this planet by a nuclear war.

When over seventy-five, he began his campaign against nuclear disarmament. In 1961, nearing eighty, he performed a *dharna* near Whitehall in London and suffered seven days' imprisonment. At eighty-eight, he launched a civic disobedience movement against nuclear arms. Until the very end he did not lose either the intellectual élan of his youth or his moral courage.

Thus, all his life, this man who believed the will to doubt and the duty to question was a crusader—for emancipation of women, against imperialism and racial dis-

crimination, for social justice and freedom of speech, against the brutalities of war and the invention and manufacture of horrible weapons of destruction, and, above all, for peace.

### Adventure

Eric Fromm, the distinguished psycho-analyst and sociologist, has observed that for Russell "rational thought is not a quest for certainty but an adventure, an act of self-liberation and of courage which changes the thinker by making him more awake and more alive." He rejected dogmas and nebulousness in thought and everything that violated his reason and conscience in action.

Although an activist in many directions, he did not, except on rare occasions, identify himself with a party or an organisation nor did he pay obeisance to a creed. Life should not be too closely regulated or too methodical, he always contended. Social life demanded organisation and discipline but that was all the more reason why thought should be free—in art, philosophy and science. He believed that "to teach how to live without certainty and yet without being paralysed by hesitation is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy in our age can still do for those who study it."

Bertrand Russell was concerned with the whole spectrum of knowledge and human affairs and made a notable contribution to nearly all of them—mathematics, logic, metaphysics, psychology, social philosophy, theory of education and international politics. He was one of those rare geniuses who, while mastering a branch of knowledge, was never satisfied with working in a limited sphere and always sought to come to grips with problems of individual and collective life.

Knowing the tragic destiny of man and the ultimate futility of all human endeavour, Russell always acted with a spirit of resignation. And though his life lacked in some measure the virtue of self-control, it was one of personal involvement in causes which he cherished. He was indifferent to public obloquy and ready to suffer. His scepticism always concealed a deeper faith—faith in man's capacity to create his own paradise through knowledge and love.



## BRS PROJECT

- (12) A Bertrand Russell Calendar: Wouldn't you like to see one: Here's what one might be like:

11 x 8.5-inch pages. 12 pages, one for each month, plus a cover. Pages hinged together, so that when the calendar is in use, say, on a wall, you would see two 11 x 8.5-inch pages, one above the other.

The lower page would have the days of one month in boxes, as shown here (greatly reduced). Important events in BR's life would appear in the boxes on the proper dates: birth, death, marriages, divorces, ditto his children and wives, honors received (Nobel, etc.), major books published, other important events in his life or in the world (BR sent to prison, anti-nuke marches, start of WWI and WWII, etc.)

The upper page would have a BR quotation, or explanations of the events, or possibly a photo.

Probable cost \$5.

The Calendar should be a joint effort of BRS Members. Let everybody get into the act...and onto the Calendar! Members would send in items for the Calendar: dates, events, and quotations, including sources.

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU! If there is sufficient interest in this project, if you think you would buy one for \$5, let us know, and we'll go ahead with it.

19 MAY 90

Flower: Lily of the valley						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1*	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17*	18	19
20	21*	22	23	24*	25	26
27	28	29	30	31*		

## NUCLEAR STRATEGY

- (13) BRS Laureate John Somerville states the case against U.S. nuclear strategy, in *New Patriot* (Nov/Dec 1989), Suite 1420, 202 S. State, Chicago, IL 60605. We have added the underlining.

## NUCLEAR DETERRENCE -- PHILOSOPHY OF OMNICIDE

By John Somerville

From its beginning philosophy has meant the systematic use of reason to answer ultimate questions concerning human life and the fate of the human world. In our day, for the first time in human history, the physical existence of the whole human world can be irreversibly terminated by one brief conflict fought out with the present nuclear weapons. Philosophers, like everyone else, are therefore faced with the categorically imperative task of preventing what might well be called instant nuclear omnicide.

In this effort our best method is education of the public and of governments. It is not necessary for any philosophy to change its doctrines or teachings. It is necessary only to convince people and governments that in order to go on living in any human community whatever, nuclear weapons must be outlawed. To use them in conflict would not only be mass suicide but mass murder as well--enforced omnicide. The facts that need to be taught are relatively simple, though some are not widely known and others are so painful to admit that many refuse to believe them or even to think about them at all.

While everyone knows what happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki it must be emphasized that the nuclear weapons used there were only the first crude models, and were used only by one side, against only two cities. Yet the results were so inhumanly horrible that for next thirty years the acknowledged policy of our government was that we would never again be first to use nuclear weapons.

However, this policy was abruptly reversed July 2, 1975, in a startling public announcement by our Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger, who stated in his press interview: "Under no

circumstances could we disavow the first use of nuclear weapons". This option of first-use became the present NATO policy called nuclear deterrence. As officially acknowledged, this policy stance means that anything considered by us to be an attack against any U.S. or NATO forces by any conventional weapons, such as tanks, may be answered by our nuclear weapons if, in our judgement, our conventional weapons are insufficient to meet it. That is, we would transform survivable conventional war into unsurvivable omnicidal conflict.

This first-use policy stance has been maintained by the U.S. and NATO in spite of the fact that on ten separate occasions the United Nations General Assembly has reiterated that any first use of nuclear weapons would now be "a crime against humanity, and a violation of the U.N. charter". This charter was not only signed by us, but largely created by us.

We cannot overlook the fact, highly significant to the rest of the world, that both the People's Republic of China and the U.S.S.R. have unilaterally pledged before the United Nations that they would never be first to use nuclear weapons. It is also a fact, much better known by the world public than by our own, that the Warsaw Treaty Organization has several times proposed to the U.S. and NATO a mutual treaty that neither side would be first to use nuclear weapons. All these proposals have been rejected by NATO and by the executive branch of our government, without waiting for any debate in our Congress or our media.

At the same time President Reagan repeatedly stated in public speeches here and abroad: "Nuclear war cannot be won, and must never be

fought". Since the President is also Commander-in-Chief of our armed forces, Reagan's statements may account for the fact that repeated polls taken by the Public Agenda Foundation and Brown University show that more than 80% of our eligible voters are firmly but mistakenly convinced that our policy is now no-first-use, that is, that "we will never use nuclear weapons unless we are attacked with nuclear weapons". But the very heart of our present nuclear-military policy is to retain the option of first-use, in spite of the fact that nothing is more destabilizing than the explicit threat to be first to use nuclear weapons, and nothing would be more confidence-building than mutual agreement to ban their first use.

Paradoxically, President Reagan and later President Bush urgently called for a ban on the use of chemical weapons, specifically because they are "too horrible". Are not nuclear weapons even more horrible? The policy of first-use of nuclear weapons today is morally indefensible and legally criminal because it tries to justify a crime so horribly enormous that it could be committed only once, a sin so utterly unspeakable that it never even had a name, until now--omnicide.

In view of these facts nuclear deterrence might actually be termed insane nuclear blackmail. It was this that led the head of the government of India to say that nuclear deterrence is the ultimate form of state terrorism. It should be rejected by all people and every government in the world, by all philosophers and every philosophy in the world. Humankind has many other problems that philosophers and governments must deal with. But if the nuclear omnicide problem is not solved first, there will be no possibility of dealing with any of the others.

## 2 PHILOSOPHERS REMEMBER SIDNEY HOOK

(14) Paul Kurtz, in *Free Inquiry* (Winter 1989/90, pp.40-1):

On September 25, 1989, a memorial was held at the New York University to commemorate the passing of the veteran secular humanist philosopher Sidney Hook. Participating at the meeting were distinguished leaders of thought and action representing a wide range of viewpoints—Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan; Jean Kirkpatrick, the former ambassador to the United Nations; Lane Kirkland, the president of the AFL-CIO; John Bunzel and Miro Todorovich of the University Centers for Rational Alternatives; Leo Cherne and Leonard Sussman of Freedom House; Carl Gershman of the Endowment for Democracy; Herbert Hill of the A. Philip Randolph Institute; Melvin Laskey, the editor of *Encounter* magazine; and others.

Many of the speakers who attended are considered neo-conservatives—yet Hook resisted that description. He was a social democrat, he said, who believed in a free society and the welfare state, but strongly rejected the idea that the social order must be based on religion. He was well known for his polemical skills, and maintained relationships with individuals of diverse political and ideological stances. He once quipped that many of his friends were not friends of one another.

Sidney Hook exerted a powerful influence on modern thought. Moynihan, Laskey, and others heralded his vital role in alerting Western intellectuals to the dangers of Stalinism, and noted that Hook lived to see his heroic efforts vindicated: Even within

the Soviet Union he is now recognized as one of the vital critics of totalitarian repression.

In my remarks at the memorial I pointed out that Hook was one of the leading American secular humanist philosophers of the twentieth century. Belief in God, he argued, was a "speculative hypothesis of an extremely low order of probability." He did not criticize religious beliefs, which are personal, but he objected to efforts to publicly declare religious doctrines as a form of public truth, or to impose them upon others in the community.

Hook disagreed with those who attempted to justify democracy in terms of religion. He pointed out that from belief in the fatherhood of God, mutually antagonistic political systems may be drawn: Monarchy, oligarchy, dictatorship, and so on. He believed democracy to be justifiable only by virtue of its empirical consequences, that is, whether it leads to the good life for the ordinary person and preserves the dimensions of freedom. He likewise thought that morality was independent of religious foundations, and that ethical judgments would be justified autonomously by means of intelligence.

It was thus a cause for considerable dismay for many at the Hook memorial when Norman Podhoretz, the editor of the neo-conservative *Commentary* magazine, published by the American Jewish Committee, came to the podium wearing a skullcap, and immediately proceeded to chant the

*kaddish*, an ancient Hebrew prayer for the dead. Those who understood and appreciated Sidney Hook's entire philosophical career were aware of how this might have offended him. Irving Kristol, a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* and *Public Interest*, related his profound indebtedness to Hook but he too adamantly rejected Hook's secular humanism. Yet Sidney Hook represented the secular humanist tradition in his time as no one else did; he was a fearless defender of free inquiry, reason, and the ethics of democracy.

Hook confessed to me several times over the years his displeasure with the religious tone that many neo-conservative journals were taking. He deplored the "new failure of nerve" in an article published in *Partisan Review* shortly after World War II, and continued throughout his life his opposition to it. He even disagreed with his revered teacher John Dewey about whether humanism was religious in nature; he believed that Dewey was abusing the ethics of language by using the term "God" to refer to human ideals. Hook maintained on the contrary that humanism is secular.

Hook embarrassed me several times in his later years by telling me that John Dewey had passed the torch of freedom and reason to him and that he was bequeathing the same responsibility to me. When I remonstrated at his generous remarks he said that all around us contemporary society seemed to be abandoning the conviction that rational inquiry and science could be used for the betterment of humankind, and that the ideals of secular society needed to be defended against its religious detractors. He thought that FREE INQUIRY, SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, and Prometheus Books were beacons of light in an often irrational world.

Last fall, I went to New York City to bestow upon Andrei Sakharov—like Hook a humanist laureate in the Academy of Humanism—the International Humanist Award on behalf of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. I invited Hook along, but he was too ill to go. He told me, however, to give Sakharov his regards and tell him how much he appreciated his valiant defense of democracy and humanism. One of Sidney Hook's definitions of humanism seems to best sum up his ideals: "An ethical humanist today," he said, "is one who relies on the arts of intelligence to defend, enlarge, and enhance the areas of human freedom in the world."

Adieu, Sidney. You will be sorely missed. We hope we will fulfill your great expectations of us.

## Notes

1. Sidney Hook, *The Quest for Being* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961).
2. Paul Kurtz, ed., *The Humanist Alternative* (London: Pemberton Books, 1973), p. 34.

### Quotations from Sidney Hook

"Instead of a revival of religious faith in general, we should work specifically toward a revival, or a new birth, of faith in democracy."

"The validity of democracy as a moral and political ideal does not rest upon religious doctrine."

"Of great relevance to the concerns of rational humanists is the contention that without commitment to transcendent religious beliefs no programs of social reform can be justified or implemented. Even some neo-conservative thinkers . . . hold this view. . . . In recent years many large claims have been made for religious faith. It has been celebrated as the topsoil of democracy, indeed of all morality. . . . I believe all of these claims are false. The validity of democracy as a moral and political ideal does not rest upon religious doctrine."

"The validity of a moral proposition . . . is independent of any divine revelation or any other transcendent or supernatural element."

"Humanism to me is the view that morals are autonomous of religious belief, that they are relevant to truths about nature and human nature, truths that rest on scientific evidence."

"I do not believe there is empirical evidence that large-scale ideas about the existence of God, freedom, and immortality have a direct bearing on human behavior and that the erosion of transcendental beliefs gets expressed in immoral conduct."

"I am willing to call myself an atheist except when it is assumed . . . that an atheist must be a Communist."

All of the above quotations are reprinted from FREE INQUIRY

- (15) Corliss Lamont, in *Free Mind* (Jan/Feb 1990, p. 7):

The eulogy on Sidney Hook in the September/October 1989 issue of *Free Mind* properly praises him as an eminent Humanist philosopher. However, in noting that Professor Hook was "one of communism's fiercest critics in the West," it did not add that he was so fierce that he became one of America's most fanatical anti-communists and anti-Soviet polemicists. His speeches, articles, and books helped to stimulate the Cold War and make rational relations between the Soviet Union and the United States more difficult. At the same time, he conducted irrational feuds against liberals and radicals, including Bertrand Russell, a greater philosopher than Hook, and also myself.

Regardless of his basic philosophy, Hook went far astray in his politics and, toward the end of his life, aligned himself with right-wing forces in the United States. Although we were fellow students and friends at Columbia, Hook later carried on a bitter feud with me for some fifty years, based primarily

upon our disagreements about the Soviet Union. At one point, Hook claimed I was not a genuine Humanist because I remained sympathetic to the Soviet Union even while the tyrant Stalin remained its bloody dictator. Admittedly, I and thousands of other intellectuals in America and the world at large made serious mistakes about the U.S.S.R.

However, I do not believe we should expel American Humanists from our ranks because of their position on the Soviet Union or any other foreign country. The primary job of American Humanists is to educate the American people concerning naturalistic Humanism and win them over to that philosophy.

I must state that I never wished any kind of stormy fight with Sidney Hook or anybody else about the Soviets but have discussed disagreements on that subject with many people in the calm and rational attitude of a dedicated Humanist. Hook carried on the battle with the publication of his auto-

biography *Out of Step* in 1987, in which he uses four or five pages to demolish my character by telling of my bad judgment about fifty years ago in the late thirties. Ye gods, Hook, should there not be a statute of limitations on denunciation for intellectual errors? In the same volume, Hook registers his support of the United States' brutal and evil war in Vietnam.

In conclusion, let me say that Sidney Hook was a man of varied attributes—a first-rate Humanist philosopher and teacher on the one hand and on the other an intemperate and irrational individual in the realm of politics.

Let us now put aside the Cold War wrangles and rejoice that Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev is putting through reforms in the Soviet Union that promote democracy and is also offering a foreign policy that truly aims to establish international peace and disarmament.

#### OPINION

- (16) Arthur Schlesinger Jr. This essay has been adapted from a lecture given at Brown University on the occasion of Vartan Gregorian's inauguration as president. From *the New York Times*, 1989, exact date uncertain.

## The Opening of the American Mind

**L**ITTLE is more surprising these days than the revival of blasphemy as a crime. A secular age had presumably relegated blasphemy—irreverence toward things sacred—to the realm of obsolete offenses. No American has been convicted for blasphemy since Abner Kneeland in Massachusetts a century and a half ago (for what was deemed a "scandalous, impious, obscene, blasphemous and profane libel of and concerning God"); and the last prosecution, in Maryland 20 years ago, was dismissed by an appellate court as a violation of the First Amendment.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. is professor in the humanities at the City University of New York.

But a secular age, when it creates its own absolutes, may well secularize blasphemy too. Consider the deplorable role the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag played in a recent Presidential campaign; or the cries of outrage provoked by the Supreme Court decision in *Texas v. Johnson*, holding that punishment for the political burning of an American flag breached the Constitution; or the demonstrations protesting the "desecration" of the flag at the Art Institute of Chicago.

The very word "desecration" implies that the American flag is sanctified, an object of worship. We are witnessing the rise of what Charles Fried, Ronald Reagan's Solicitor General, calls the "doctrine of civil blasphemy." Whether religious or secular in guise, all forms of blasphemy have in common that there are things so sacred that they must be protected by the arm of the state from irreverence and

challenge—that absolutes of truth and virtue exist and that those who scoff are to be punished.

It is this belief in absolutes, I would hazard, that is the great enemy today of the life of the mind. This may seem a rash proposition. The fashion of the time is to denounce relativism as the root of all evil. But history suggests that the damage done to humanity by the relativist is far less than the damage done by the absolutist—by the fellow who, as Mr. Dooley once put it, "does what he thinks th' Lord wud do if He only knew th' facts in th' case."

Let me not be misunderstood lest I be taken for a blasphemer myself and thereby subject to the usual dire penalties. I hold religion in high regard. As Chesterton once said, the trouble when people stop believing in God is not that they thereafter believe in nothing; it is that they thereafter believe in anything. I agree with Tocqueville that religion has an indispensable social function: "How is it possible that society should escape destruction if the moral tie is not strengthened in proportion as the political tie is relaxed?" I also sympathize with Tocqueville who, André Jardin, his most recent biographer, tells us, went to his death an unbeliever.

**I**T would hardly seem necessary to insist on the perils of moral absolutism in our own tawdry age. By their fruits ye shall know them. It is as illogical to indict organized religion because of Jimmy Swaggart and the Bakkers as Paul Johnson is to indict the intelligentsia because of the messy private lives of selected intellectuals, but the moral absolutists who are presently applauding Paul Johnson's cheap book

"Intellectuals" might well be invited to apply the same methodology to their own trade. As the great theologian Reinhold Niebuhr said, "The worst corruption is a corrupt religion"—and organized religion, like all powerful institutions, lends itself to corruption. Absolutism, whether in religious or secular form, becomes a haven for racketeers.

As a historian, I confess to a certain amusement when I hear the Judeo-Christian tradition praised as the source of our concern for human rights. In fact, the great religious ages were notable for their indifference to human rights in the contemporary sense. They were notorious not only for acquiescence in poverty, inequality, exploitation and oppression but for enthusiastic justifications of slavery, persecution, abandonment of small children, torture, genocide.

Religion enshrined and vindicated hierarchy, authority and inequality and had no compunction about murdering heretics and blasphemers. Till the end of the 18th century, torture was normal investigative procedure in the Roman Catholic church as well as in most European states. In Protestant America in the early 19th century, as Larry Hise points out in his book "Pro-Slavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840," men of the cloth "wrote almost half of all the defenses of slavery published in America"; an appendix lists 275 ministers of the Gospel who piously proclaimed the Christian virtue of a system in which one man owned another as private property to be used as he pleased.

Human rights is not a religious idea. It is a secular idea, the product of the last four centuries.

of Western history.

It was the age of equality that brought about the disappearance of such religious appurtenances as the auto da fe and burning at the stake, the abolition of torture and public execution, the emancipation of the slaves. Only later, as religion itself began to succumb to the humanitarian ethic and to view the Kingdom of God as attainable within history, could the claim be made that the Judeo-Christian tradition commanded the pursuit of happiness in this world. The basic human rights documents -- the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man -- were written by political, not by religious, leaders. And the revival of absolutism in the 20th century, whether in ecclesiastical or secular form, has brought with it the revival of torture, of slaughter and of other monstrous violations of human rights.

Take a look at the world around us today. Most of the organized killing now going on is the consequence of absolutism: Protestants and Catholics killing each other in Ireland, Muslims and Jews killing each other in the Middle East, Sunnis and Shiites killing each other in the Persian Gulf, Buddhists and Hindus killing each other in Ceylon, Hindus and Sikhs killing each other in India, Christians and Muslims killing each other in Armenia and Azerbaijan; Buddhists and Communists killing each other in Tibet. "We have," as Swift said, "just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love." The Santa Barbara Peace Resource Center, reporting on the 32 wars in progress around the planet in 1988, found that 25 had "a significant ethnic, racial or religious dimension." And when religious religion is not the cause, then the totalitarian social religions of our age inspire mass slaughter.

It is natural enough, I suppose, if you believe you have privileged access to absolute truth, to want to rid the world of those who insist on divergent truths of their own. But I am not sure that it is a useful principle on which to build a society. Yet, as I noted earlier, the prevailing fashion is, or was a year or two ago, to hold relativism responsible for the ills of our age. A key document, of course, is Allan Bloom's best seller of a couple of years back,

*The revival of absolutism in the 20th century has brought with it the revival of monstrous violations of human rights.*

"The Closing of the American Mind" Indeed, one cannot but regard the very popularity of that murky and pretentious book as the best evidence for Mr. Bloom's argument about the degradation of American culture. It is another of those half-read best sellers, like Charles Reich's murky and pretentious "Greening of America" 17 years before, that plucks a momentary nerve, materializes fashionably on coffee tables, is rarely read all the way through and is soon forgotten.

**N**OW one may easily share Mr. Bloom's impatience with many features of higher education in the United States. I too lament the incoherence in the curriculums, the proliferation of idiotic courses, the shameful capitulation to factional demands and requisitions, the decay of intellectual standards. For better or for worse, in my view, we inherit an American experience, as America inherits a Western experience; and solid learning must begin with our own origins and traditions. The bonds of cohesion in our society are sufficiently fragile, or so it seems to me, that we should not strain them by excessive worship at artificial shrines of ethnicity, bilingualism, global cultural base-touching and the like. Let us take pride in our own distinctive inheritance as other countries take pride in their distinctive inheritances; and let us understand that no culture can hope to ingest other cultures all at once, certainly not before it ingests its own.

But a belief in solid learning, rigorous stand-

ards, intellectual coherence, the virtue of elites is a different thing from a faith in absolutes. It is odd that Professor Bloom spends 400 pages laying down the law about the American mind and never once mentions the two greatest and most characteristic American thinkers, Emerson and William James. Once can see why he defined the confrontation. It is because he would have had to concede the fact that the American mind is by nature and tradition skeptical, irreverent, pluralistic and relativistic.

Nor does relativism necessarily regard all claims to truth as equal or believe that judgment is no more than the expression of personal preference. For our relative values are not matters of whim and happenstance. History has given them to us. They are anchored in our national experience, in our great national documents, in our national heroes, in our folkways, traditions, standards. Some of these values seem to us so self-evident that even relativists think they have, or ought to have, universal application: the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, for example; the duty to treat persons as ends in themselves; the prohibition of slavery, torture, genocide. People with a different history will have different values. But we believe that our own are better for us. They work for us; and, for that reason, we live and die by them.

At least this is what great Americans have always believed. "Deep-seated preferences," as Justice Holmes put it, "cannot be argued about . . . and therefore, when differences are sufficiently far-reaching, we try to kill the other man rather than let him have his way. But that is perfectly consistent with admitting that, so far as it appears, his grounds are just as good as ours."

**O**NCE Justice Holmes and Judge Learned Hand discussed these questions on a long train ride. Learned Hand gave as his view that "opinions are at best provisional hypotheses, incompletely tested. The more they are tested, . . . the more assurance we may assume, but they are never absolutes. So we must be tolerant of opposite opinions." Holmes wondered whether Hand might not be carrying his tolerance to dangerous lengths. "You say," Hand wrote Holmes later, "that I strike at the sacred right to kill the other fellow when he disagrees. The horrible possibility silenced me when you said it. Now, I say, 'Not at all, kill him for the love of Christ and in the name of God, but always remember that he may be the saint and you the devil!'"

These "deep-seated preferences" are what Holmes called his "Can't Helpes" -- "When I say that a thing is true, I mean that I cannot help believing it. . . . But . . . I do not venture to assume that my inability in the way of thought are inability of the universe. I therefore define truth as the system of my limitations, and leave absolute truth for those who are better equipped." He adds: "Certitude is not the test of certainty. We have been cock sure of many things that were not so."

Absolutism is abstract, monistic, deductive, ahistorical, solemn, and it is intimately bound up with deference to authority. Relativism is concrete, pluralistic, inductive, historical, skeptical and intimately bound up with deference to experience. Absolutism teaches by rote; relativism by experiment. "I respect faith," that forgotten wit Wilson Mizener once said, "but doubt is what gets you an education."

I would even hazard the proposition that relativism comports far more than absolutism with the deepest and darkest teachings of religion. For what we have learned from Augustine, from Calvin, from Jonathan Edwards, is not man's capacity to grasp the absolute but quite the contrary: the frailty of man, the estrangement of man from God, the absolute distance between mortals and divinity -- and the arrogance of those who suppose they are doing what the Lord would do if He only knew the facts in the case. That is why Reinhold Niebuhr acknowledged such an affinity with William James -- far more, I would warrant, than he would have found with Allan Bloom.

When it came to worldly affairs, Niebuhr was a relativist, not because he disbelieved in the absolute, but precisely because he believed in the absoluteness of the absolute -- because he recognized that for finite mortals the infinite thinker was inaccessible, unfathomable, unattainable. Nothing was more dangerous, in Niebuhr's view, than for frail and erring humans to forget the inevitable

"contradiction between divine and human purposes." "Religion," he wrote, "is so frequently a source of confusion in political life, and so frequently dangerous to democracy, precisely because it introduces absolutes into the realm of relative values." He particularly detested "the fanaticism of all good men, who do not know that they are not as good as they esteem themselves," and he warned against "the depth of evil to which individuals and communities may sink . . . when they try to play the role of God to history."

Niebuhr accepted, as James did, "the limits of all human striving, the fragmentariness of all human wisdom, the precariousness of all historical configurations of power, and the mixture of good and evil in all human virtue." His outlook is as far away from Mr. Bloom's simple-minded absolutism as one can imagine. It represents, in my view, the real power of religious insight as well as the far more faithful expression of the American mind.

I would summon one more American, the greatest of them all, as a last witness in the case for relativism against absolutes. In his Second Inaugural, Lincoln noted that both sides in the Civil War "read the same Bible, and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other . . . the prayers of both could not be answered, that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes." Replying thereafter to a congratulatory letter from Thurlow Weed, Lincoln doubted that such sentiments would be "immediately popular. Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however, in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world."

The Almighty has His own purposes: this is the reverberant answer to those who tell us that we must live by absolutes. Relativism is the American

*Our relative values are not matters of whim and happenstance. They are anchored in our national experience.*

way. As that most quintessential of American historians, George Bancroft, wrote in another connection, "The feud between the capitalist and laborer, the house of Haves and the house of Wants, is as old as social union, and can never be entirely quieted, but he who will act with moderation, prefer fact to theory, and remember that every thing in the world is relative and not absolute, will see that the violence of the contest may be stilled."

**T**HE mystic prophets of the absolute cannot save us. Sustained by our history and traditions, we must save ourselves, at whatever risk of heresy or blasphemy. We can find solace in the memorable representation of the human struggle against the absolute in the finest scene in the greatest of American novels. I refer of course to the scene when Huckleberry Finn decides that the "plain band of Providence" requires him to tell Miss Watson where her runaway slave Jim is to be found. Huck writes his letter of betrayal to Miss Watson and feels "all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now." He sits there for a while thinking "how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell."

Then Huck begins to think about Jim and the rush of the great river and the talking and the singing and the laughing and friendship. "Then I happened to look around and see that paper . . . I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself 'All right, then, I'll go to hell' -- and tore it up."

That, if I may say so, is what America is all about.

## BOOKS

(17) Gross error. Starting on Page 131 of *The Best of Humanism*, Roger Greeley, ed., this series of numbered sentences is attributed to Sherwin Wine:

1. Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.
2. Do not think it worthwhile to produce belief by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.
3. Never try to discourage thinking, for you are sure to succeed.
4. When you meet with opposition, even if it should come from children, endeavor to overcome it by argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.
5. Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.
6. Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for if you do, the opinions will suppress you.
7. Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.
8. Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent than in passive agreement, for if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.
9. Be scrupulously truthful, even when truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.
10. Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for only a fool will think that it is happiness.

Recognize them? They are by BR, and are called *A Liberal Decalogue* in BR's *Autobiography*, Vol III (Simon & Schuster, 1969, p.71.) They are called *Bertrand Russell's Ten Commandments* in *The Humanist* (July/August 1982). They also appeared in RSN30-14, and again in RSN54-2.

To attribute them to Wine instead of to Russell is a gross error. It is, of course, an unintended error, a slip-up; somebody goofed. Sherwin Wine had nothing to do with the error.

Nevertheless the error is a continuing one. There it stands, in print. There is no erratum page (which corrects the error) accompanying the book. The reader who doesn't happen to know that Russell is the author will not learn it from this book; he will be misinformed.

We want to see an erratum page included in the book, and have requested it.

We cannot recommend the book -- which we would like to do, for it contains an excellent collection of quotations on Humanism -- until it provides an erratum page.

## BOOK REVIEWS

We are indebted to HARRY RUJA for all of the following reviews.

(18) From *The Times Literary Supplement* (12/3/76 p.1518):

## The view from outside

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**By Mary Furness**

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**KATHARINE TAIT:**  
**My Father, Bertrand Russell**  
 211pp. Gollancz. £5.95.

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Katharine Tait's *My Father, Bertrand Russell* is perhaps mistitled; it is not, except incidentally, a memoir of her father, but an account of what it was like in her own case to be part of his family. It is a serious attempt to analyse

the effect this had on her, as someone subjected both to her parents' high-minded theories about the education of children and to the vicissitudes of their lives, which refused to be moulded into the theories of even such a great man as Bertrand Russell.

The union of Dora Black and Bertrand Russell started out in the joyous confidence of their shared theories about the right conduct of life; marriage being for the production and benefit of children (but without entailing sexual fidelity) and for the education of children to produce "a generation educated in

fearless freedom". Their own children were welcomed not only for themselves, but also as an opportunity to put their theories into practice.

Katharine Tait's memories of her early childhood, with its long summers spent in Cornwall, are nearly all happy, although from the first she was aware of an atmosphere of superiority in her family, a feeling that they were wiser and knew better how to live than the ordinary run of humanity. Being set apart from other people by their unconventional views was the self-righteous convention in which the children were brought up. It is significant that her earliest remembered pastime was, with her brother, making a mixture which they called "Poison for the Government". Bertrand Russell pointed out that the Government would be far more likely to drink it if it were labelled "Nectar for the Gods". Children have a natural desire to conform; and the insecurity of a child who is brought up on the outside, albeit in fierce pride that the outside is the only right side, has pursued her ever since. To conform and to belong have remained among her strongest desires.

Bertrand Russell early on rejected Christianity as a set of irrational beliefs adopted by people too cowardly to face life without their comfort, and put pure rationality in its place. He had a hatred and a fear of the irrational, perhaps stemming not only from his own unhappy childhood, which had been dominated by Christianity, but also from the streak of madness which allegedly ran in his family and which his grandmother used as an excuse to try to prevent him marrying his first wife.

It is ironic that both his children by Dora Black, having been brought up with rationality as their creed, should in their separate ways have been overtaken by the irrational: John suffered a serious mental breakdown and Katharine only found true happiness when she became a dedicated Christian and a missionary. There is a curious flash forward in Katharine Tait's childhood to her eventual destiny. On the way to one of the beaches in Cornwall there was a rectory which she regarded with fear because of her parents' attitude to the Church of England. But, again, she had a sense of unease at being on the outside:

I felt vaguely that if I could get inside there and *belong* I might cease to be afraid. Within the house lived possessors of a magic

powerful against the wild chances of life, and those they welcomed into the charmed circle might share their protection. But I could not be one of them, for I was part of the enemy, exposed not only to the normal risks of living, but also to their powerful disapproval, and could not wish it otherwise, knowing they were both wicked and foolish.

She thinks that her parents' liberation consisted in casting aside one set of rules and adopting another, and maintains that when she finally rejected her father's demanding and unrealistically idealistic precepts and adopted those of Christianity, which she found much easier to live with, she had the same sense of liberation herself.

When the family founded Beacon Hill school and started putting their educational theories into practice, the sunshine of her early years began to be overcast. She felt a growing sense of isolation from her parents, although in many ways she appears to have enjoyed the school. Theories about marriage, too, were put to the test; Dora Black had two children by someone else and life, which could not be contained by theories, erupted, leading to the separation of her parents and Bertrand Russell's marriage to Peter, their governess: "It was hard to admit that the ideal had been destroyed by the old fashioned evils of jealousy and infidelity." Thus the children of a union whose reason for existence had been the well-being of the children "became the battleground for their now opposing theories of child welfare". The children were shared religiously between the parents to the extent that if the holidays contained an uneven number of days, there would be a quarrel if the odd day was not divided.

Yet Katharine Tait's book is not composed entirely of musings over an experiment that failed. It is also full of charming and affectionate recollections of Bertrand Russell who is, to a small child's eyes, the ideal father; he is kind, witty, commands respect and tells fascinating stories about everything, particularly about China. He gets so carried away on this subject that the children often cunningly manage to postpone bedtime by asking him about it at the right time. Regularly, on April Fools' day, he looks out of the window and says "There's an elephant coming down the path", and no one ever fails to be taken in by it. Indeed, the presence of elephants in unlikely places was, to Bertrand Russell, a recurring and serious possibility.

There is a story which tells how, when giving a lecture about the evidence of the senses, he asked if anyone could seriously doubt that there were no elephants in the room. Wittgenstein, who was in the audience, said that he could and, after the lecture, the two of them were

to be seen crawling about on all fours looking under tables and behind chairs trying to establish whether or not there were in fact any elephants lurking there. Their conclusions are not recorded. But Bertrand Russell, elephant-hunter *manqué*, is a nice thought.

(19) From the *New Statesman* (9/10/76, p. 344):

David Caute

## Please, Sir

*My Father, Bertrand Russell* by KATHARINE TAIT Gollancz £5.95

In every month of every summer, on every beach in my childhood, he stands in the centre of the picture in the sunshine, the very image of love. . . . He is holding a pipe in his hand and telling a witty story, which he finishes with a deafening burst of hearty laughter, looking quizzically at his listeners to see if they share his amusement.

Thus Katharine Tait, daughter of Bertrand Russell, recalls her father 50 years later.

But this idyll, associated with the six months of the year when Russell and his second wife, Dora, moved from London to Carn Voel in Cornwall, was shattered for the four-year-old Kate when her parents decided in 1927 to bestow on their children the educational theories they had nurtured in intellectual abstraction. Russell himself had longed for children but was not rewarded until John was born in 1921, when the father was almost 50. 'I felt,' he later wrote, 'an immense release of pent-up emotion, and during the next ten years my main purposes were parental.' Demanding an immaculate synthesis of emotion and reason, the brilliant philosopher who had sacrificed his own reputation and career by abandoning a first wife he no longer loved and by openly campaigning against the war, now placed his little son and daughter on the altar of 'unconquerable hope', of 'fearless freedom'.

Students of the Enlightenment will recognise the 200-year-long call of that clarion: 'If existing knowledge were used and tested methods applied, we could, in a generation, produce a population almost wholly free from disease, malevolence and stupidity.' Poor generation! Rejecting the prudery, religious instruction and 'many restraints on freedom' of conventional schools, the anti-academic bias of Deweyite progressive education, the fetishes of Montessori, as well as A. S. Neill's search for the head through the hands, the Russells brought some 20 little children to Beacon Hill School and offered them crude behavioural conditioning and merciless bullying by the stronger and more sadistic offspring of homes which couldn't wait to get rid of them. The education, Katharine Tait, recalls, was 'fantastic':

the total experience one of 'désolation'. And she lost her parents. For they, determined to avoid any semblance of favouritism, maintained an aloof distance during term-time, while John and Kate were cruelly persecuted as surrogates for their parents, the philosopher kings.

By the end of seven years the Russells had lost not only their children's confidence and a lot of money but also one another. Mrs Tait's painful and perceptive description of the breakdown of the marriage gives flesh to Russell's own elliptically honest account. Whereas he merely mentions that his *Marriage and Morals* (1929) did not claim that 'a marriage could with advantage be prolonged if the wife has a child . . . of whom the husband was not the father', she describes how Dora, though totally dedicated to Russell, pursued her own theories of womanly liberation by giving birth to two babies sired by another man. She recalls a summer at Hendaye when Patricia ('Peter') Spence, later the third Lady Russell, acted both as governess and Russell's mistress, while Dora brought along her new baby together with its father. If this was an attempt to transcend the cramping conventions of the nuclear family, it failed: Russell soon went off to live with Peter and to quarrel with Dora so violently that they could communicate only through lawyers. Fearing that their tough, fellow-travelling bohemian mother would carry the children off to Bolshevik Russia, the rebel philosopher who had been to prison and disinherited himself had them made wards in Chancery.

Faced with the lynching pressures of school holidays split fifty-fifty with a quibbling slide rule between mother and father, Kate, in her deep insecurity and guilt, not surprisingly gravitated towards the polite decorum of her father's new household and the dazzlingly assured beauty of his new wife. Her mother's battered old cars, eccentric clothes, lipstick-stained cigarettes and habit of remaining seated in cinemas during *God Save the King* made her squirm with embarrassment. And so it was always to be: the title of her autobiography, whatever its debt to sales promotion, is a genuine reflection of the long-term influence - ultimately a rich, inspiring and generous influence - of her father. And this despite the succession of divorces, quarrels and emotional breakdowns that dogged Russell and his children.

*My Father Bertrand Russell* is a book which should be read not only by admirers of Russell but by anyone who is fascinated by the impact of parental fame, talent, rigid idealism and ultimate indifference (or

so it seems to me - Katharine Tait makes no such judgment) on children. Written with verve and precision, unsparing in its quest for total recall, always sensitive to the salient detail, it describes far more than one ungainly girl's journey to a paradoxical terminus: marriage as a career. Having graduated from Radcliffe in German, Kate wanted and found everything her mother

had scorned: 'the man to earn money and fix things and grow a garden, the woman to cook and clean and mend and care for the children.' What Dora said about this she does not tell us; but her father, apparently, gave the project his benediction. Perhaps, in his later years, it was what he himself believed in for educated women; or, rather, found most congenial.

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H Cloth, otherwise paperback

Prices are postpaid. Please send check or money-order, payable to the Bertrand Russell Society, to the Russell Society Library, Box 434, Wilder, VT 05088.

New and forthcoming:

Issues in War and Peace: Philosophical Inquiries, edited by Kunkel and Klein. Papers read at the 1st National Conference of Concerned Philosophers for Peace. \$27.50 (cloth); \$14.95 (paper). Longwood Academic, P.O. Box 2069, Wolfeboro, NH 03894. Include \$1.50 for shipping and handling.

The Great Philosophers: An Introduction to Western Philosophy by Brvan Magee. This book is based on a series of television programmes first transmitted by the BBC in 1987. The dialogue with A.J. Ayer is titled "Freige, Russell and Modern Logic". Oxford Paperbacks. \$9.95.

The Giants of Philosophy. A series of audio cassettes on Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dewey, and Sartre. The tapes are sold as a continuous series, consisting of approximately three hours of listening per month for \$14.95, plus a \$2.00 shipping charge. A set of tapes on any single philosopher will be available for \$17.95, plus \$2.00 shipping. The first set is due in early 1990. Knowledge Products, 2005 Elm Hill Pike, Box 100340, Nashville, TN 37210

Recent acquisitions:

"Living in an Atomic Age". Audiocassette of six lectures by Russell. Broadcast over the ABC radio network from May 12-June 23, 1953. All the material was published in New Hopes for a Changing World. 90 minutes.

"Confession and Concealment in the Autobiography of Bertrand Russell" by Robert Bell. Offprint. 17pps. Donated by the author.

Misc:

90. RUSSELL, Bertrand. 2 similar full face portraits, each measuring roughly 250 x 200 mm., depicting Russell at approximately 60 years of age. Both by Indian artist Swamy. One portrait in black pencil and one in color. Each signed by Swamy in pencil and by Russell in ink.  
Black and white portrait \$850  
Color portrait \$1,050

Catalogue#2, 100 Rare Books & Manuscripts, David Waxman, 85 Bayview Avenue, Great Neck, NY 11021.



Item # 90

OBITUARY

(21) Polly Cobb, wife of Whitfield Cobb -- both members since 1978 and parents of 3 -- died of leukemia 10/21/89. The words "inspired by love and guided by knowledge" were engraved on their wedding rings 45 years ago and were included in their marriage vows (RSN21-18). She taught Russian and German, and in '87 started studying Japanese for beginners. She made 6 trips to the USSR between '68 and '85, and in '87 was interpreter for a group of Soviet citizens visiting Black Mountain, NC, in an intercity pairing project. She had a strong interest in international peace, intercultural understanding, interracial harmony, and inter-sex equality. She would have welcomed gifts to the American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia. A memorial service is planned for her birthday, June 9, 1990. We offer our sympathy to Whitfield.



## BRS LOCAL CHAPTERS

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**McMASTER UNIVERSITY**  
**THE BERTRAND RUSSELL SOCIETY**


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- (22) The BRS Chapter at McMaster met on 1/25/90, and heard a talk by Dr. Francisco Rodriguez-Consuegra titled, *Russell's Unpublished Manuscripts as the Only Way to Understand his Philosophical Evolution*.

Dr. Rodriguez, a post-doctoral fellow in McMaster's Department of Philosophy, teaches philosophy in his native Spain. His dissertation dealt with Russell's analytical method in philosophy. He discussed unsolved problems from his dissertation. These included the origins of Russell's logicism; the need for some account of logic, truth and the nature of propositions, in his developing system; and the evolution of his theory of judgment.

**RUSSELL'S UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS  
AS THE ONLY WAY TO UNDERSTAND  
HIS PHILOSOPHICAL EVOLUTION**

*Francisco Rodriguez-Consuegra*

*Dr. Rodriguez is a post-doctoral fellow in McMaster's Department of Philosophy. He teaches philosophy in his native Spain, and his dissertation concerned Russell's analytical method in philosophy. He will discuss unsolved problems from that dissertation.*

*These problems are the origins of Russell's logicism; the need for some account of logic, truth and the nature of propositions in his developing system; and the evolution of his theory of judgment.*

*The meeting will also bring the membership up to date on the plans for the annual meeting of the Bertrand Russell Society, Inc., to be held at McMaster on June 23-25, 1990. The theme for submission of papers is *Illusion vs. Reality: Education and Religion*.*




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**Thursday, January 25, 12:30. UH-317**  
**All welcome.**

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## FOREIGN CHAPTERS

- (23) Benares Plan approved. The vote was unanimous; all the Directors who voted voted to approve.

Here is most of what we said about the Benares Plan last August (RSN63-3):

There are people in foreign countries -- third world countries, developing countries, where living standards are low and money is scarce -- who might like to join the BRS but who cannot afford the dues.

That's a pity, because they are being deprived of the benefit of Russell's thinking, and we are being deprived of new foreign members.

We needed to find a way to let people who cannot afford the dues join the BRS anyway...and we have found it! Credit for this goes chiefly to Chandrakala Padia, of Benares, India, who knew there was a need, and who devised a way to fill it.

Here's the plan, the Benares Plan:

1. There will be a Benares Chapter of the Bertrand Russell Society, Inc. in Benares, India. This will be the first of what we hope will be many chapters in foreign countries and cities.
2. Dues will be \$40 per year for the Chapter, regardless of the number of members. Plus \$7.50 for airmail, which is essential. For example, if the Benares Chapter acquires 10 members, the cost to each member will be \$4.75.
3. The Chapter will receive only one copy of the BRS newsletter, which can be passed around, member to member, or photocopied.
4. The Chapter will be headed by a Director. The Director of the Benares Chapter will be Chandrakala Padia.
5. The members will have all rights (and responsibilities), including the right (and responsibility) of voting.

The Benares plan, having been approved, is now in effect.

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## NEW MEMBERS

(24) We welcome these new members:

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 MR. ANJAN GOWDA /P.O. BOX 113/MISSISSIPPI STATE/MS/39762/ /  
 MR. EARL HANSEN /737 W. ALEGRIA AVE, APT. A/SIERRA MADRE/CA/91024-1003/ /  
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 MR. JAMES J. PETRASSI /104-51 88 AVE./RICHMOND HILL/NY/11418/ /  
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 MR. LAIRD WILCOX /P.O. BOX 2047/OLATHE/KS/66061/ /  
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## NEW ADDRESSES

(25)

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The 6 BRS Officers are also Directors, ex officio

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## 1990 EARLY RENEWAL HONOR ROLL

Last year we set a record: 149 members renewed before January 1, 1989. This year we did even better: there are 191 early renewers. Very gratifying! We appreciate the splendid co-operation. Here are the co-operators:

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We thank these members who included a 1990 contribution in their renewal dues. Much appreciated!

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We thank Prof. Bruce White of Centre College, Danville, KY for a generous contribution to the Russell Society Library.

Contributions are welcome at any time, in any amount, large or small. Send them c/o the newsletter or the RS Library, addresses on Page 1, bottom.

## NEWS ABOUT MEMBERS

- (29) Herb Lansdell has a paper in *Behavioral Neuroscience* (1989, Vol. 103, No.4 893-897). Here is the top portion of its first page, which provides a summary.

### Sex Differences in Brain and Personality Correlates of the Ability to Identify Popular Word Associations

Herbert Lansdell

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke  
National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland

The ability of men to identify popular word associations had earlier been shown to be affected by left-sided thalamic surgery for movement disorders; now, over a year later, the impairment has been observed with operations on both sides. In addition, upon testing at approximately the same time interval, men who had undergone temporal lobe surgery for epilepsy have also shown the impairment. In contrast, women have improved after the operations. The Word Association Test (WAT) requires a subject to identify popular word associations to 54 words. In a large group of unoperated subjects, the errors on the WAT were greater for men than for women, although the men scored higher on the Wechsler-Bellevue Intelligence Scale (WB). WAT scores were found to correlate with scores on the WB and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, and the WAT scores of the men tended to show a higher correlation with these measures than did those of the women.

- (30) Cherie Ruppe, who is with Northwest Airlines, says she intends to contact BRS Member NOBORU INOUE during one of her visits to Japan.
- (31) Warren Allen Smith has the amiable custom of writing a year-end letter to his friends, reviewing his past year. Here is this year's, dated 1/1/90:

A friendship has been described as "a long, long conversation." On February 20th, a 40-year conversation with Fernando Vargas ended. Cancer claimed my Costa Rican roommate/business partner, the one who had been with me during most of the important times of my life (for example, from photographing Eisenhower as he handed me the M.A. diploma at Columbia U. to attending my retirement-from-teaching dinner 37 years later. At the memorial service we held in the recording studio, Steve Allen's touching letter was read, and we listened to Liza Minnelli's first demonstration record that "Freddy" had cut for her and pianist Marvin Hamlisch. No other man can be said to put you in mind of Fernando, although he looked and sounded a bit like Desi Arnaz. His wit penetrated in a moment to the inner core of international humbug, and although I may have taught him English he was easily the best teacher I ever had. For his remaining two sisters and family, I carried the remains to San Jose. Well, not all: One vial was scattered in the Hell's Kitchen and Times Square areas he (and I) loved so much; I, yes, still hold a vial. Toward the end of her life Queen Mary reportedly said, "The one thing I regret is never having climbed over a fence." In his 60 years, Fernando unashamedly climbed every conceivable fence, being included in Who's Who in the World as he did so. (I left a copy of that book in his Costa Rican colegio.)

Together, we'd built his Variety Recording Studio into the city's #1 Hispanic studio, with the loyal help of Joe Cvr, David Lescoe, and many others. We had clients from 50 different countries, completed mastering and stamper for pressing plants around the world, and had as customers a who's who of internationally known musicians....Upon his death, however, I decided to retire a second time, this time to really retire except for writing. Partly for sentimental reasons, I arranged sale of the studio to another Hispanic, also a Vargas; and continuing as the able manager is our talented Colombian-American buddy, Jose Gallegos. With no little pride I foresee the successful continuation of what Fernando and I had started in 1961, el mejor estudio para músicos Hispanos combined with a clientele of razzle-dazzle showbiz types that always, always made work a joy.

The swift change of events also resulted in my decision to move from Hell's Kitchen (George Raft/Rocky Stallone/Sen. Moynihan territory) and also from Connecticut to Greenwich Village, not far from the White Horse Tavern where Dylan Thomas had his very last drink (and where in my radical youth I fought intellectual humanist battles with Dorothy Day's inspiring Catholic Workers or drank and fought with the Trotskyites). My co-op overlooks the Village, with a view from Jefferson Market to the World Trade Towers, the Statue of Liberty off in the distance. Such a change reminds me of the philosopher Mae West's observation: Too much of a good thing can be wonderful....

Trivial 1989 tidbits: I'm now listed in the fifth Who's Who book, this time in advertising....Langston Hughes's biographer, Arnold Rampersad, gave me a credit (Vol. II) for having arranged his meeting with Langston's favorite protege, Gilbert Price....Sun Ra gave me a credit on the CD we recorded for A&M Records, "Blue Delight"....When the CD of Manuel Acosta's "Paintings" comes out, listen for Vangelis on the synthesizer, Tito Puente on percussion, Jose Gallegos on piano, and me playing "Tambora Pa' Debussy" on the emulator....Isaac Asimov, Paul Edwards, Liz Smith, and Sidney Hock each gave me their permission to list them as honorary members of the Secular Humanist Society of New York, for which I'm treasurer....My intellectually stimulating correspondence with historian and humanist Priscilla Robertson ended on Nov. 26th, when I notified The Times of her death—the obituary was published. Author of Revolutions of 1848, she never had a chance to follow up with a book about 1989, the most exciting time since 1848 for revolutions....Another loss to the humanist cause is Andrei Sakharov, a major reason for the rapid and inspiring changes in the USSR. (In 1973, I had signed the Humanist Manifesto II that he, Julian Huxley,

and 200 signed.)....In one of the last letters he wrote, Sidney Hook supplied me with material for a forthcoming article on "Authors and Humanism." He also penned one last attack on Corliss Lamont (who had entertained me at his home earlier in the year and who at 87 and wearing a red vest is as provocative as ever. Lamont approves of CNN's Ted Turner, 1990 Humanist of the Year, who fearlessly told Dallas broadcasters that he'd like to see his Ten Voluntary Initiatives replace the Ten Commandments)....I've been re-elected to the board of directors of the Bertrand Russell Society.

In short, Auntie Mame was right when she said that life's a banquet. Cheers!

#### ABOUT OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

- (32) **CSICOP**, *Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal* -- publishers of *The Skeptical Inquirer* -- will hold its 1990 Conference in Washington, DC March 30 through April 1. Information: 1990 CSICOP Conference, P.O. Box 229, Buffalo, NY 14215.

- (33) **NECLC**, *The National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee*, ran this ad on the op ed page of *The New York Times* (1/12/90, A35). The original was 6.5 x 10.5 inches, shown here somewhat reduced in size. NECLC's *The Bill of Rights Journal*, goes to its members. The December 1989 issue includes, among other things, Thurgood Marshall's remarks at a Second Circuit Judicial Conference, a look at the judicial appointments of the Reagan and Bush Administrations, an appraisal of the Reagan-Bush legacy in civil liberties. Individual membership \$25. 175 Fifth Ave., NY NY 10010

## WE BELIEVE THE U.S. INVASION OF PANAMA VIOLATES:

1. THE AMERICAN WAR POWERS ACT
2. THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER
3. THE CHARTER OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
4. THE U.S. PANAMA CANAL TREATIES
5. INTERNATIONAL LAW IN GENERAL
6. THE HISTORIC AMERICAN IDEAL OF WORLD PEACE

Although the tyrant Noriega finally surrendered, it remains clear that President Bush's resort to military force against Panama was rash, immoral and unconstitutional. This flagrant aggression of one state illegally invading another state was condemned by the Latin American governments, the Soviet Union, China and public opinion throughout the world.

In the efforts to oust and seize Noriega 23 American lives were lost, while the dead in the Panama Defense Force numbered some 300, and civilians killed reached 400 with 2,000 wounded. "Gun Barrel Democracy," as *The Nation* puts it.

Further consequences of the invasion are to trap the United States into responsibility for helping to rebuild ruined Panama City and to restore the gutted economy. It is reliably estimated that for America to work its way honorably out of the Panama shambles will cost close to \$2 billion. At least 10,000 U.S. troops out of the 27,000 sent to Panama will need to stay on to help in the general reconstruction.

A deplorable example of American irrationality was that U.S. troops violently broke into and searched the Nicaraguan Embassy in Panama City. This action in itself showed a serious disregard for international law and diplomatic immunity, for which President Bush later apologized.

Any rational evaluation of the Panama invasion must conclude that in important ways it was a disaster. What the Pentagon probably claims as a military victory was clearly a serious defeat in terms of human values and international relationships. The U.S. giant has managed to shoot itself in the foot and humiliate itself in dealing with a very small nation of 2,400,000 people.

Once again the U.S. government, with Vietnam looming in the background, has disregarded the many mistakes of the past in Central America, and without considering all the implications, launched a massive overkill. This tragedy will increase anti-American sentiment abroad, especially in the nations of Central and South America.

As Democratic Congressman Ted Weiss says, "Ultimately the decision to invade Panama will be contrary to the national security interest of the United States and will reflect poorly on the reputation and prestige of our nation."

Corliss Lamont      Edith Tiger      John Scudder  
Beth Lamont        Harrington Harlow      Connie Hogarth

NATIONAL EMERGENCY CIVIL LIBERTIES COMMITTEE  
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**FREE**, *Freedom From Religion Foundation*, was written up in *The Atlanta Constitution* (10/6/89, p.C1). In RSN64, we ran the beginning of this story, but ran out of space. Here now is the whole thing:

# Atheists Gather to Keep Faith With Each Other

By Gayle White  
Staff Writer

Their T-shirts proclaim, "Blasphemy Is a Victimless Crime," their songs ring out with the words, "I don't need Jesus," and in tones reminiscent of camp-meeting testimonials, they describe their "deconversion" experiences.

Atheists and agnostics from across the country are gathering in Atlanta this weekend for the annual convention of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The organization, founded in Madison, Wis., in 1978, has two purposes: to further the cause of separation of church and state and to educate the

public about non-theistic thought.

The convention gives members a chance for fellowship and exchange of information. It also gives them a chance to buy "Reason's Greetings" cards to mail out in December, "Free-thinker" bumper stickers, and coffee mugs bearing pictures and quotations of famous atheists and agnostics.

Foundation members are not hostile to God, said Tom Malone, Southeast region vice president and head of the local chapter. "How can you be hostile to something that doesn't exist?"

The foundation does not attempt to pull people away from the church.

**ATHEISTS** Continued on C4



Doug Jager

## Atheists Come To Atlanta for Annual Meet

From Page C1

he said, and it doesn't advocate governmental opposition to religion. "We think the government should be neutral, as Jefferson and Madison proposed."

With 3,400 members, the national foundation is smaller than several metro Atlanta churches, but among its ranks are people whose influence has reached far, drawing the praise of church-state separatists and the ire of fundamentalist Christians.

■ William Jager of Douglas County will accept the Freethinker of the Year award on behalf of his family for his son Doug's successful lawsuit to stop prayer before Douglas County High School football games.

■ Dr. Ken Saladin, a biology professor at Georgia College, will discuss his application to lead a Scout den, which the Boy Scouts of America denied because he refused to sign an oath acknowledging the importance of a belief in God. He will also give an update on his fight with the city of Milledgeville to get the word "Christianity" removed from the city seal.

■ Columbus radio station manager J. Edward Wilson will describe his leaving the Seventh-day Adventist Church after years as a minister. Mr. Wilson hosts a radio talk show on which he sometimes expresses his atheistic views.

■ And part-time Georgian Butterfly McQueen will be given a Heroine Award for her advocacy of free thought. The honor comes during the 50th anniversary of her most famous film, "Gone With the Wind," in which she played Prissy.

### 'Home-Grown Concerns'

The program will include a speech by Dan Barker, a former Pentecostal evangelist who works for the foundation's home office, and a raffle featuring a "clean" \$100 bill — one printed before "In



GREG FOSTER/Special

Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation wears a T-shirt that reads, 'I'm Your Friendly Neighborhood Atheist.'

God We Trust" was added in the 1950s.

It is no coincidence that the agenda is loaded with Georgians. "We anticipated that since our organization is based in Madison, Wis., some people would accuse the organization of being outside agitators," said Mr. Malone, 30, a social studies teacher at Clarkston High School in DeKalb County. "We wanted to show some of our home-grown concerns."

Mr. Malone, who will welcome the group, said he grew up in a "mainstream Methodist" home. As a teenager, he began to question religious teachings, he said, a common posture of youth. Most adolescents return to the church because questioning is uncomfortable, he said. "Religion offers such comfortable crutches and props for life."

He said he likes to point out to Christians and Jews that "the only difference between me and them is that I have discarded one more God than they have."

For many foundation members, acknowledging their agnosticism or atheism, even to themselves, requires courage.

Mr. Barker, 40, who spent 17 years as an interdenominational Pentecostal evangelist, describes his change of heart as a gradual movement from religious fundamentalism to acknowledging that he no longer believed in God.

"There was no bitterness," he said. "In fact, I went through a period of almost mourning or nostalgia.

It was like getting a divorce, almost."

In fact, divorce soon followed. His experience made his former wife more religious, he said.

Mr. Barker later married Annie Laurie Gaylor, daughter of Foundation founder Anne Gaylor, whom he met on an Oprah Winfrey show about atheism.

He still receives royalties from earlier religious material, but now Mr. Barker writes hymns for the freethought movement, including "I Don't Need Jesus," a song with a chorus that says, "I don't need Jesus to give me a smile. Don't need a holy book to make my life worthwhile. Just give me reason, fairness and love. True human happiness is not from above."

### A Different Background

Unlike Mr. Barker, William Jager, 53, grew up with very little religious involvement. An Alaskan native, he lived in a remote village where the only religious figure was an Orthodox priest who occasionally came to town to conduct services in Russian.

After 20 years in the Army, sometimes stationed at Georgia bases, he settled down in Douglasville in 1976.

Although he describes himself as an agnostic, he said he would never have forced the issue of prayer before high school football games if his son had not been harassed by other students for not participating. When school officials failed to re-

spond to his concerns, he suggested that his son file suit.

Since the case before the U.S. Supreme Court, Mr. Jager has become active in the foundation.

Dr. Saladin, 40, a Michigan native, decided to challenge the city of Milledgeville to remove the word "Christianity" from its seal shortly after he moved there to teach at Georgia College in 1977. He waited to establish himself, he said, but filed suit in 1983.

Early this year, the city offered to remove the seal from the city's water tower, vehicles and uniforms but wanted to continue to display it on stationery and documents, in a form so small that it would be unreadable. Dr. Saladin refused the compromise. The case remains unsettled.

He became embroiled in another controversy in 1987 when he was removed from leadership of a Scout den for refusing to sign a statement recognizing that a belief in God is essential to good citizenship.

"To me, that says anyone who doesn't swallow that line is a second-class citizen."

J. Edward Wilson, 47, manager of WQGN radio station in Columbus and a talk show host, gave up 13 years of ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and, finally, the church itself.

"When I gave up superstitions ... when I was finally able to lay aside those things, I felt I had experienced a great deliverance," he said.

His greatest sadness was in losing relationships with fellow Christians, including fellow ministers. The foundation has helped to compensate.

That is one of its important roles, said Mr. Malone.

"To attend meetings with hundreds more like yourself is a very comforting feeling. It's the same sort of feeling church folks get."

This space  
for rent.

## 3rd National Conference

CONCERNED PHILOSOPHERS FOR PEACE

## Call for Papers

(35) CPP, *Concerned Philosophers for Peace* ----->

The 3rd National Conference of Concerned Philosophers for Peace will be hosted by the University of Notre Dame. The conference is scheduled for September 21-23, 1990. James Sterba (Department of Philosophy, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556) will serve as Conference Director.

Papers limited to twenty minutes reading time (about 10-12 pages) are now being reviewed for inclusion in the program. Papers are preferred over abstracts, although some detailed abstracts may be accepted. Topics include the entire range of nuclear issues, peace and justice concerns, and interactions with published books and articles. Be creative. The deadline for submissions is June 15, 1990. Send two copies to Duane Cody (Department of Philosophy, Hamline University, St. Paul, MN 55104) who will Chair the Review Committee for submitted papers.

## FOR SALE

(36) Members' stationery. 8 1/2 x 11, white. Across the top: "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." Bertrand Russell" On the bottom: "Motto of The Bertrand Russell Society, Inc." New reduced USA price, \$5 for 90 sheets, postpaid. Canada & Mexico still \$6. Order from the newsletter, address on Page 1.

## BOOK REVIEW

(37) From *The Observer*, London (1/22/84, p.53):

# Intellectual foundations

THIS is the first volume of a projected series of all Bertrand Russell's papers, published and unpublished, to be issued in 28 volumes between now and the year 2000. The volumes will be divided into two major groups by subject, so that volumes II to XI will consist of strictly philosophical material, while volumes XII to XXVI, containing political and social papers, will be ordered chronologically. A paper, for these purposes, is a 'public writing,' including political messages and open letters as well as newspaper articles, book reviews and essays. 90 per cent of these papers, the editors claim, have never been collected, and 15 per cent are unpublished.

This vast enterprise is edited from the Russell Archive at McMaster University, Hamil-

ton, Ontario, an institution whose quiet existence on a scarp by the Niagara River was transformed when it became, through the purchase in 1968 of Russell's papers, the world centre of Russell studies. The editors have provided a full-scale apparatus, with elaborate annotations and textual notes. This is clearly intended to be a great monument.

by BERNARD WILLIAMS

**THE COLLECTED PAPERS OF BERTRAND RUSSELL: Volume I, Cambridge Essays 1888-99**

edited by Kenneth Blackwell and others  
*Allen & Unwin £48*

The first volume covers,

among other things, Russell's adolescent years, undergraduate work at Cambridge, and material associated with his first and second books. 'German Social Democracy' (1896) and 'An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry' (1897). A good deal of the material is unpublished. Some papers that Russell read to the Apostles, that now excessively well-known secret society, are included, to some extent marked by what Paul Levy, in his biography of Moore, unkindly called the 'sophomoric' quality of the discussions. Russell, urging the cause of the admission of women (not entirely popular with his brethren), observes: '...when we divided last term on "Can we love those we copulate with?" the presence of women in the discussion would have been invaluable.'

From his years as an undergraduate, there is a 'locked diary' ('the dons are sad specimens of wasted power, and have persuaded me that emoluments for mere academical distinction are a very pernicious institution'), and there are also some essays read to his philo-

sophy teachers which, perhaps unsurprisingly, are greatly impressive. His history of philosophy is more accurate than in 'The History of Western Philosophy,' but there are fewer jokes.

The overwhelming impression is not merely the fact of Russell's precocity, but how much of his later style and manner was already formed in these earliest years. In 1888-9, when he was 16, he kept a secret journal written in Greek letters. It is full of sentences such as 'I now come to the most difficult of subjects, immortality, a question I have already tried to answer in this book, but, as now seems to me, on false lines of reasoning. . . . He seems to have had from the beginning an extraordinarily easy and elegant way of writing, and some of the earliest pieces here are a great pleasure to read, while one is less irritated at this stage of his life than one is in his later writing by those less happy characteristics of the bright youth which he was never to lose — the occasional condescension, for instance, and the unnerving briskness. He said that by the time he came to

write anything down, almost all the work had already been done; but the impression he too often gives in his mature work is rather that the work is being done then, at the speed it takes to read it.

After he left Cambridge, his wit also found its natural shape, and there are some funny pieces

in the book, particularly an unpublished item on the Uses of Luxury. The introduction to this, incidentally, shakes one's confidence in the editors, who seem to be better detectives than readers. They have tirelessly uncovered possible locations at which the paper

may have been read, but they also say that it defends inherited income, which it expressly attacks.

This very interesting book contains, as all this series will, public and scholarly documents rather than personal ones. We do not have so much here as we

do in the 'Autobiography' of Russell's chilly declarations of his emotions, but rather discover him looking brightly and busily outwards, at intellectual and political problems. It is rather wonderful to see him so fully formed so early, exercising just the weapons he would use for the next 80 years.

## OBITUARY

(38) From *The Times*, London, 6/29/89, with thanks to KEN BLACKWELL:

# A. J. AYER

## Language and logic in the pursuit of philosophical truth

Sir Alfred Ayer (A. J. Ayer), who died on June 27 at the age of 78, was without doubt the most widely known of the analytic philosophers who followed the tradition of Bertrand Russell in Britain since 1920.

He did not have the genius of Wittgenstein or the originality of F. P. Ramsey, Gilbert Ryle or J. L. Austin. But his quite exceptional brilliance as an expositor, together with his skill and resource as a debater, secured him as great an influence as any of them with the philosophical profession and he bulked much larger than they did in the eyes of the interested part of the general public.

Ayer matured early and the coherent system of ideas put forward with such striking effect in his first book, *Language, Truth and Logic*, when he was in his mid-twenties, remained as the abiding foundation of his thinking thereafter.

But there was a price to be paid for his youthful success. Before 1939 he enjoyed both the rewards of early achievement and the leadership of intellectual fashion. After 1945, in a philosophical atmosphere that was more sensitive to the varieties and complexity of thought, his point of view, with its simple, severe and exclusive lines, had a somewhat dated air, most of all to those more concerned that reasoning should be fashionable than that it should be valid.

Alfred Jules Ayer was born in London on October 29, 1910, the only child of Jules Louis Cyprien Ayer, a timber merchant of Swiss extraction. He went to Eton as a scholar in 1923. He entered Christ Church, Oxford in 1929 as an open scholar in classics and obtained a first in Lit.Hum. in 1932. It is said that he owed this good result to the high marks given to his papers on ancient history. Certainly the polemical flavour of his modern version of the philosophy of Hume was unlikely to attract the philosophy examiners.



His chief philosophy tutor was Gilbert Ryle, though an equally strong influence was H. H. Price, the leading defender of Russell's views in the generally unsympathetic Oxford of the period. Unlike his contemporary and chief rival and competitor, J. L. Austin, he was unsuccessful in his attempt at an All Souls fellowship. In the year in which they both sat for the John Locke scholarship: the principal examiner, H. A. Prichard, true to his principle of discouraging budding philosophers, ensured that it was not awarded. Ayer was a lecturer in philosophy at Christ Church from 1932 to 1935 and a research student there from 1935.

Soon after graduation Ayer visited Vienna and took part for some months in the discussions of the Vienna Circle, then at the height of its activity. The outcome of this was *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), his brilliantly forcible exposition of their main ideas in an English philosophical idiom.

Laying down that 'verifiability in sense-experience was a necessary condition of the meaningfulness of a sentence, he rejected speculative metaphysics and theology as literally devoid of sense and interpreted judgements of value as ejaculations expressive of feeling. He analysed the factual content of the world, physical objects

and minds, as systems of immediate experiences and held the necessary truths of logic, mathematics and analytic philosophy to be verbal propositions, true by definition. In a concluding chapter of splendid boldness he presented concise and tidy solutions to the outstanding disputes of traditional philosophy.

This was the most exciting and influential English philosophical book of the decade.

He joined the Welsh Guards in 1940 and became a captain in 1943. After a period of regimental duty he moved to intelligence work. He played a lively part in the liberation of France in 1944, where his enterprise was not always to the liking of his superiors. The fact that he was bilingual in French and English was useful to him here. (It could be said of him, as Johnson said of Hume, that he wrote like a Frenchman.)

The preface to his second book *The Foundation of Empirical Knowledge* (1940) was written from the Guards Depot at Caterham. In it the doctrines of H. H. Price's *Perception* are transformed in accordance with the philosophical methods of Carnap. A much more resolute phenomenalism than Price's is put forward and the essentially linguistic and conventional character of philosophical theories of perception is insisted on.

On demobilisation he went back to Oxford for two years as fellow in philosophy at Wadham College, which, in 1959 to his very great delight, elected him an honorary fellow. In 1946 he was appointed to the Grote Chair at University College, London, which had been vacant for some years.

On his arrival he found a dejected scene. The staff consisted of a disenchanted reader who spent as much time as possible in France and a Greek lady of negligible philosophical attainments who taught an idiosyncratic brand of ethics. The accommodation



consisted of a cupboard-like room with a small quantity of battered institutional furniture in it.

When Ayer left London in 1959 he had five first-rate lecturers in his department, three of whom had done their philosophical studies there. Ayer's public reputation from his books and from broadcasting vastly enlarged the recruitment of students and much improved its quality. The atmosphere of the department was combative, vigorous and rapid. Visiting philosophers found attendance at a seminar was a bracing experience to say the least. Ayer's own high-speed style of debate set the prevailing tone. The presence of both Ayer and Karl Popper in London soon made it the second philosophical centre in the country.

Ayer now became familiar to a very wide public through his frequent appearances on the television Brains' Trust. He was supremely qualified to provide the lucidity and agility of mind that the programme demanded. He was already known to a wide circle as the foremost "logical positivist", a term connoting for most people hostility to religion and scepticism about morals.

Journalists of various levels of intellectual elevation had often singled him out as a corrupter of youth and underminer of the body politic. For the most part he bore this good-humouredly. But at lifelong and active supporter of the Labour party, he re-

sented the accusation that he nourished fascism.

His critics took his view that morality was not a factual science to be a way of saying that it was unimportant. His position was that one's morality must be chosen since it cannot be proved. His personal choice was for a resolute utilitarianism and he himself was the most loyal of friends and the most public spirited fulfiller of obligations. Ayer was no puritan but his love of pleasure was not egoistic and his integrity and lack of cynicism were conspicuous. As far as the television public was concerned, his undeviating and well-informed fidelity to Tottenham Hotspur more than outweighed the effect of his more "shocking" opinions.

While at London he published a collection *Philosophical Essays* (1954) and an excellent general book on epistemology *The Problem of Knowledge* (1956).

In 1959 Ayer returned to Oxford as Wykeham Professor of Logic in succession to his mentor H. H. Price. His election caused something of a rumpus since three electors preferred two other candidates between them. However it turned out to be very successful although Oxford was deprived by Austin's early and lamented death of the enlivening spectacle of a direct engagement between Ayer and his most pertinacious critic. As it happened, Austin's more casuistic and delicately philological way of thinking has since come to seem more dated than the more rigid and

formalistic style of Ayer's philosophising.

Ayer took a notable part in the intellectual life of the university, not least as an indefatigable addresser of undergraduate societies, and also in the somewhat idiosyncratic social life of New College of which he was Fellow from 1959 to 1978, before being made Hon. Fellow in 1980.

In 1963 Ayer published *The Concept of a Person*, a collection of powerful, technical essays on currently active issues in philosophy, and in 1969 a collection of more popular and wide-ranging pieces: *Metaphysics and Common Sense. His The Origins of Pragmatism* came out of 1969, a detailed, sympathetic survey of the philosophies of Pierce and James. A parallel study of Russell and Moore, published in 1971, was first presented as the William James lectures at Harvard in 1970, during a visit to the USA in which he also gave the John Dewey lectures at Columbia on induction and probability. In 1968 Ayer was knighted, an honour that was in some part a recognition of his services as a member of the Plowden commission on primary education.

Ayer continued to write, almost to the end. *The Central Questions of Philosophy* (1974) was in many ways a new edition of *Language, Logic and Truth*, an elegant survey but somehow lacking the invigorating bite of Ayer's first book. *Perception and Identity* (1979) was a *festschrift* presented to Ayer in

1979 (he had retired from his Wykeham chair the previous year) with his replies to the essays by distinguished contemporaries. *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (1982) seen by Ayer himself as very much a sequel to Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, nevertheless abandoned Russell's attempt to relate philosophical ideas to their social and political circumstances, sacrificing, in doing so, the opportunity to provide an orderly account of the philosophy of our age. *Studies of Wittgenstein* (1985), *Voltaire* (1986) and *Thomas Paine* (1988) followed, and there were two volumes of autobiography, *Part of My Life* (1977) and *More of My Life* (1984).

Ayer was not a major philosopher like Russell or Wittgenstein, or even, perhaps, like Popper and Ryle. But he was a very able philosopher indeed, endowed with particularly sparkling intellectual gifts, an admirable if slightly chilly prose style and unflagging energy. As a philosophical teacher and influence there is no one to compare with him since Russell and Moore.

He was four times married: first in 1932 to Grace Isabel Rene Lees, by whom he had a daughter and a son, and secondly, in 1960, to Dee Wells by whom he had a son. In 1983 he married Vanessa Lawson, who had previously been the wife of Nigel Lawson. She died in 1985, and recently "Freddie" Ayer remarried his second wife, Dee Wells.

(39)

## PHILOSOPHERS

From *The New York Times* (12/30/89, p.10), with thanks to STEVE REINHARDT:

## Philosophers Hang Out The Shingle

Special to The New York Times

AMSTERDAM, Dec. 29 (Reuters) — Following the example of psychotherapists, Dutch philosophers are opening private practices and charging clients up to \$50 an hour to discuss ideas.

"There's a new generation of philosophers who want to take part in society, not just work in an ivory tower," said Ad Hoogendijk, who in 1987 became one of the first Dutch

philosophers to set up practice. "We are making use of philosophical tradition to exchange thoughts with clients over whatever subject they want."

Mr. Hoogendijk has been joined by a dozen others who talk with clients about subjects from the meaning of life to a possible career change. Unlike some psychologists and psychiatrists, practicing philosophers do not try to probe deep into the past of the individual to understand childhood-ingrained, subconscious behavior and then suggest modifications.

### 'Very Basic Questions'

Rather, they try to apply the wisdom of their discipline to help people see their problems from a new perspective.

"I try to help people answer very basic questions like: 'Who are you?' 'What do you want?'" Mr. Hoogendijk said in an interview. "It's a kind

of re-orientation to structure their desires. I don't try and fit a person into a pre-existing theory but take what they say about themselves at face value and try to act as a midwife to let them articulate what they have inside."

He said that about 80 percent of his clients are at some major emotional crossroads: businessmen worried about approaching retirement, women upset when their grown children leave home and youths unsure what to study at college. He usually meets a client four or five times.

Faced with a depressed client, he tries to offer some perspective in discussions about the high value modern culture places on happiness and how thinkers in the past have put a high value on melancholia.

### From Great Minds

"There is a famous saying that

Plato and Aristotle said it all, and it's true," he said. But his reading of Spinoza, Marcuse, Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt have also informed his counseling, he said.

One of his colleagues, Eite Veening, said he began his practice in the northern city of Groningen in 1987 because he was disturbed by "how much sloppy thinking there was around."

He said he was not interested in "curing" patients by helping them sort out their emotions but in helping them to puzzle out their values and thought processes intellectually.

"I try to get people to understand their own ethics and what the best choice would be for them in a situation," Mr. Veening said. "If you can get yourself to do what is best or not is another thing. If you find you can't, well then maybe that's more a matter for a psychologist."

## ASSISTANCE REQUESTED

(40)

BR books badly needed "for our poor tribal library," says Dr. K. D. Chauhan, Activist Amerbharat Library, Post. Unjha. 384170, North Gujarat, India. "We have no resources due to continuous failure of rain the last 3 years." Please "donate some of your publications new, old, bruised, defective or paperback, on any subject."

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NOW HEAR THIS, LAGGARDS!

WE MEAN YOU WHO HAVE NOT YET PAID YOUR 1990 RENEWAL DUES

TIME IS PASSING...THE METER IS RUNNING...YOUR DUES ARE OVERDUE

YOU ARE IN DANGER OF BECOMING A NON-PERSON. UGH!

MAIL YOUR DUES TODAY! DON'T PUT IT OFF ANY LONGER!