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Bertrand Russell in Ethics and Politics*

Bart Schultz

I

It is more or less de rigueur to begin a piece such as this by considering why anyone should take a serious philosphical interest in the ethics and politics of Bertrand Russell. Russell was, of course, one of the most profoundly influential philosophers of the twentieth century, but his most important contributions were, by his own account and almost everyone else's, in the realms of logic and a conglomeration of epistemology, philosophy of language, and ontology. These are the predominant and often overlapping concerns of numerous papers, such as those collected in *Logic and Knowledge* (Russell 1971b), and also of a string of books, including the monumental *Principia Mathematica* (1910–13). Russell's extraordinary works on the logicist program and logical atomism—on the method of logical analysis and ontological economy best represented by his theory of types, his theory of descriptions and his approach to reference, and his various accounts of "our knowledge of the external world"—these are regarded as, if not exactly live options, then at least extremely important milestones on the way to the present state of philosophy and the basis for Russell's title to greatness.[1] But it was his colleague G. E. Moore who wrote *Principia Ethica*.

1. Perhaps it is misleading to suggest that nothing in Russell's substantive analytical work remains a live option. For example, Herbert Hochberg has remained committed to a version of logical atomism, and A. J. Ayer, right up until his recent death, continued to defend many highly Russellian points, e.g., a revised theory of descriptions, a sense-data epistemology, etc. (Ayer 1973, 1982). For an interesting alliance on the matter of propositional attitudes, see Donagan (1987), especially the first chapter. Of course, speaking more generally, vast tracts of analytic philosophy plainly bespeak a Russellian inheritance—obviously, much of the analytical method and reductionism of, say, Quine's work (as well as his taste for the world of physics) is heavily indebted to Russell. See, for an enjoyable encounter, the engaging symposium in *Russell* (Quine 1988b); for a fascinating philosophical correspondence between Russell and Quine, see Quine (1988a).

Thus, the Russell of serious intellectual interest is supposed to be Russell the discoverer of Frege and teacher of Wittgenstein, the mentor of Ayer, Carnap, and Quine, not Russell the humanist, educator, and activist, the man who was jailed for opposing World War I and the nuclear arms race and whose reputation (and employment) suffered terribly for taking up the causes of agnosticism and humane sexual morality, and of the Palestinians and the Vietnamese. There is Russell the philosopher, and Russell the partisan. As Noel Annan observes in *Our Age*, although Russell's political works "drew the sting from the words fornication and adultery," still, "those seriously interested in politics or even in social questions found his simplistic views and his failure to understand the impersonal forces of history naive" (Annan 1991, p. 76). In truth, enthusiasm for Russell's moral and political writings is sometimes thought to be in inverse ratio to one's capacity for understanding his philosophical logic, except for those enjoying their first tasty morsels of philosophy.

Yet Russell's moral and political work has elicited thoughtful admiration from such figures as A. J. Ayer, Richard Wollheim, C. L. Stevenson, D. H. Monro, I. F. Stone, Noam Chomsky, and E. P. Thompson. And the last dozen years or so provide particularly ample (though often critical) testimony to its significance; along with important essays by Benjamin Barber, Brian Harrison, Royden Harrison, Richard Rempel, Peter Clarke, Harry Ruja, S. P. Rosenbaum, Kirk Willis, and numerous others, there have been major treatments by Jo Vellacott, Louis Greenspan, Kenneth Blackwell, Nicholas Griffin, Andrew Brink, Paul Grimley Kuntz, and, most important, Alan Ryan, whose *Bertrand Russell: A Political Life* will serve as the touchstone for this article.[2] Most of the latter approach their wayward subject with an official posture of qualified, slightly defensive praise, though in Ryan's case especially, the guardedness often seems in danger of cracking, loosing a youthful enthusiasm for the man whose works have allowed countless teenagers to torture those entrusted with their religious instruction. Ryan does not want to press his readers to share his view that "Russell was one of the last great radicals," but no one can fail to perceive his delight in Russell's unflinching, aristocratic confidence and witty deflation of humbug. Indeed, as he goes on to say, "I shall be sorry if none of them are moved to read him or remain untouched by what they read, especially readers thirty years younger than myself. For

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At this level, one can appreciate Jules Vuillemin's remark that "it is sufficient praise of an author to state that a philosophy that ignores him is a dead philosophy" (Pears 1972, p. 5).

2. Most of the foregoing authors will be commented upon in this article, but special note will be made of Wollheim (1974), Greenspan (1978), Blackwell (1985), Brink (1989), Kuntz (1986), Vellacott (1980), Moran and Spadoni (1984), and, especially, Ryan (1988).

Russell always touched a particular chord with the young—just as he always irritated the middle-aged" (Ryan 1988, p. viii). Presumably, this is not a complaint.

On Ryan's side, there is at the very least A. J. Ayer's oft-repeated point that Russell's writings on political and social questions "express the moral outlook of a humane and enlightened man" and if "they seem less exciting today, it is because the liberal ideas which they put forward have gained much wider acceptance" (Ayer 1971, p. 7). But, furthermore, many Russell scholars are considerably more generous toward a number of Russell's ethical and political works. Ayer denies that all of Russell's books in these areas are "merely popular or propagandist. The *Principles of Social Reconstruction* [1971c], which first appeared in 1916, is one of the best defences of an anarchistic form of political theory, and *Freedom and Organization, 1814–1914* [1934], which came out in 1934, is a serious contribution to the history of political ideas," an assessment that Ryan, who has especially high regard for the *Principles,* would seem to share (Ayer 1971, p. 7). And both Ryan and Ayer note that Russell made serious contributions to ethical theory in his 1910 essay on "The Elements of Ethics" (1966), in which he followed Moore, and his book *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (1955, first published in 1952), much of which was originally meant to be part of *Human Knowledge* (1948).[3] To this list one could plausibly add *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (1900), *The Scientific Outlook* (1931), and *Power* (1938); of the latter Ryan remarks that Russell was "quite right" in regarding it as an underrated book: "If it did not establish him as the Newton of political science, it showed that he was capable of writing better sense in ten pages than most sociologists in ten volumes" (Ryan 1988, p. 155). Perhaps it was only because Russell wrote so much (some seventy books), and because his major works on philosophy were so epoch making, that the contributions he did make to moral and political theory tend to get overlooked.

Of only slightly lesser merit are such works as *German Social Democracy* (1896), *Political Ideals* (1917b), *Proposed Roads to Freedom* (1918), *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (1920), *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization* (1923, written in collaboration with Dora Russell), *Religion and Science* (1935), *Authority and the Individual* (1949), *The Impact of Science on Society* (1952), and that singular expression of fallibilist liberalism, *Philosophy and Politics* (1947), any one of which has greater intellectual content than Allan Bloom's Straussian potboiler, *The Closing of the American Mind.* There is also the book that philosophers love to hate, *The History of Western Philosophy* (1945), which gained Russell financial security for the rest of his life, and of course, there might be at least something to be said for the work that won the Nobel prize

3. See Ayer 1976.

for literature in 1950, *Marriage and Morals* (1929), notwithstanding Russell's response on hearing of the award—namely, "They don't like my philosophy."

But there seems to be at least a rough consensus among the authors under consideration that scholarly attention is best directed to *The Principles of Social Reconstruction; Human Society in Ethics and Politics; Freedom and Organization, 1814–1914;* and some of the essays, such as "The Elements of Ethics," perhaps with the additions of *Power* and *The Scientific Outlook.* These, on top of the magnificent ninety-eight-year life of protest itself, are reasonably taken as the best expressions of Russell's considered views on social and political questions, the works that bear examination. In the next three sections, respectively (but roughly) devoted to Russell's metaethics, ethics, and politics, I shall argue that it is maddeningly difficult to come to terms with them.

II

It may seem odd that Russell, who was passionately committed to various moral beliefs, and who was a colleague of G. E. Moore's and student of Henry Sidgwick's, should have been (relatively) reluctant to bring the full weight of his philosophy to bear on normative matters. There is an inveterate if somewhat antiquated response here—namely, Russell's commitment, during much of his life, to what he sometimes described as a form of subjectivism in metaethics, such that he would not have allowed that ethical or political theory can lay claim to any distinctive knowledge and, consequently, that it should even be included in the corpus of philosophy. When disagreement over values occurs, he urged, "there is not a disagreement as to any kind of truth, but a difference of taste" (Russell 1935, p. 249). Excepting the comparatively brief period (roughly 1894–1913) when he became a Hegelian under McTaggert's influence, a Platonic realist, and then an adherent of Moore's view that 'good' refers to an objective, though nonnatural, property, Russell cleaved to the Humean belief in reason as the slave of the passions—"Outside human desires there is no moral standard," nor any human action for that matter (Russell 1957, p. 62, first published in 1925). While he never found this view very satisfactory, and grew more unhappy with it as he aged, he could never find an acceptable antidote to it. In a well-known passage in his *Autobiography,* he stated, "If one believes that the earth is round and another believes that it is flat, they can set off on a joint voyage and decide the matter reasonably. But if one believes in Protestantism and the other in Catholicism, there is no known method of reaching a rational conclusion. For such reasons I had come to agree with Santayana that there is no such thing as ethical *knowledge*" (Russell 1969, p. 28).

Thus in *An Outline of Philosophy,* which appeared in 1927, he characteristically remarked that "ethics is traditionally a department

of philosophy, and that is my reason for discussing it. I hardly think myself that it ought to be included in the domain of philosophy, but to prove this would take as long as to discuss the subject itself, and would be less interesting" (Russell 1927, p. 233).

But Russell's hasty dismissals of ethics, and description of his own view as subjectivist, scarcely did justice to his own considered ethical and metaethical positions, in which he anticipated the emotivism of the logical positivists and its most sophisticated version in the work of C. L. Stevenson.[4] Ayer, in *Language, Truth and Logic*, took some pains to explain that "whereas the subjectivist holds that ethical statements actually assert the existence of certain feelings, we hold that ethical statements are expressions and excitants of feeling which do not necessarily involve any assertions" (Ayer, 1952, pp. 109–10, first published in 1936). Similarly, for Russell, the logical atomist predecessor of the positivists, moral judgments directly assert nothing; "when we assert that this or that has 'value,' we are giving expression to our own emotions, not to a fact which would still be true if our personal feelings were different" (Russell 1935, pp. 242). Thus, when "I say 'Hatred is bad,' I am really saying: 'Would that no one felt hatred.' I make no assertion; I merely express a certain type of wish" (Russell 1938, p. 247). Moral disputation is akin to preaching, since every "attempt to persuade people that something is good (or bad) in itself, and not merely in its effects, depends upon the art of arousing feelings, not upon an appeal to evidence" (Russell 1935, p. 247).

Of course, Russell could be ambiguous, as when he claimed that a sentence like "You *ought* to do so-and-so" has "an emotional content; it means 'this is the act toward which I feel the emotion of approval,'" with approved action, on his view, typically being action aimed at producing good, at satisfying broadly shared, compatible desires (Russell 1927, p. 234). Furthermore, his views evolved in various ways, from the embryonic emotivism suggested in "The Ethics of War" (1917a, first published in 1915) to the more complex theories presented in *An Outline of Philosophy* (1927), *Religion and Science* (1935), *Power* (1938) and, more or less finally, *Human Society* (1955).[5] But for the most part, these post-Moorean developments are best viewed as variations on emotivism, since Russell did not usually claim that moral judgments are primarily descriptive, reporting the subject's (or society's) psychological state (though they might carry descriptive content) but,

4. Though it was in line with the typical complaint of the logical positivists that their views on ethics were receiving a disproportionate amount of attention; see Ayer (1959), p. 22.

5. Here I am indebted to Aiken (1963), though with the qualifications discussed below. That "The Ethics of War" marked Russell's conversion to emotivism is confirmed by Russell (1988, p. 61), where it is also noted that the piece was originally commissioned to appear in the *International Journal of Ethics*.

rather, that they primarily involve "giving expression to our own emotions" and attempting to arouse like feelings in others (Russell 1935, p. 242).[6] And in this, he was plainly in the forefront of philosophical currents. Indeed, in one of the most comprehensive statements of the emotivist position, *Ethics and Language,* Stevenson observed that Russell's views on ethics were "almost identical" to Ayer's, though less discussed, and went on to remark that "the present work finds much more to defend in the analyses of Ayer, Carnap, and the others, than it finds to attack. It seeks only to qualify their views—partly in the light of Dewey's—and to free them from any seeming cynicism. It hopes to make clear that 'emotive' need not itself have a derogatory emotive meaning. And in particular, it emphasizes the complex descriptive meaning that ethical judgments can have, in addition to their emotive meaning" (Stevenson 1944, pp. 265–67).

But as I will later show, Russell actually grew more dissatisfied with and cynical about his emotivism, even though, like Stevenson, he had always included a complex descriptive element in it, along with fully recognizing that many ethical disputes are about means. Hapless as it may often be, "ethics," he consistently urged, "is an attempt to give universal, and not merely personal, importance to certain of our desires" (Russell 1935, p. 244). Thus, an ethical judgment does not merely express a desire: "I agree with Kant that it must have an element of universality. I should interpret 'A is good' as 'Would that all men desired A' " (Russell 1944, p. 722).[7] In this, and many other respects, he advanced an analysis that anticipated, not just Stevenson, but later attempts to incorporate a more or less formal notion of universalization within a noncognitivist analysis of distinctively moral meaning.[8]

In *Bertrand Russell: A Political Life,* Ryan gives a very brief but illuminating overview of Russell on metaethics, one which confirms how Russell's more casual remarks often failed to do justice to his own views. Ryan interestingly argues that in fact the very best thing that

6. See also Hare (1981), pp. 76–77. Most accounts of Russell's views during this period regard him as an emotivist—see Blanshard (1961, p. 236) and Edwards (1967). But his use of the term subjectivist has sometimes confused the issue.

7. This work, like the previously cited *Outline, Religion and Science,* and *Power,* contains a good crisp statement of Russell's general position, though it is in response to some remarkably lackluster critical essays.

8. Such as prescriptivism. But like so many British moral theorists, he insisted on giving (at best) a limited, formal reading of Kant and saw no difficulty in combining the universalization requirement with utilitarianism, in a plainly heteronomous fashion. Any such adaptation of Kant is, of course, a complete travesty from a genuinely Kantian constructivist standpoint, though one can see how from Russell's perspective it might look like an improvement, since Russell actually believed that Kant thought that people should always act solely out of a sense of duty and be miserable in doing so. See Russell (1945, bk. 3, chap. 20).

Russell ever did on "moral philosophy in the strict sense" came in a diminutive unpublished essay from around 1922 entitled "Is There an Absolute Good?" (1987)—a piece that does make the stock history of his metaethical development from objectivist to emotivist look too simple. In it Russell defended an "error" theory of moral judgments that, much in the fashion of Hume (and Hobbes), explains the apparent contradiction involved in asserting that something is both good and bad by claiming that

> the mind is disposed to spread itself upon its objects. We project on to the things themselves the approval and disapproval which is really a matter of our own psyches. So, says Russell, we approve of a, b, c, etc., and therefore *call* them good. But 'good' does not *mean* 'I approve'; the connection between approval and the meaning of good is genetic, not logical. The literal meaning of 'piety is good' is thus 'piety has the same quality as truthfulness, friendship . . .', but the only fact in the case is our approval of all these things—there is no such quality. [Ryan 1988, p. 47]

Thus, calling something good expresses approval by the misleading means of suggesting that that thing has the property of goodness.

Ryan suggests that it is disappointing that Russell did not follow up on this analysis; his more or less final position was that of *Human Society*. The latter is not plainly inferior, but anyway, given Russell's lifelong view that ordinary language is massively misguided, his dabbling with the error theory does not seem surprising, and Ryan is perhaps right in thinking that it might have served him well.

At any rate, Ryan also maintains that Russell's brand of emotivist theory had undergone further complications by the time of *Human Society*, when he took

> a half-way position between objectivism and subjectivism in as much as he argued that moral judgements were not merely expressions of individual approval and disapproval, though they certainly did not attribute special, non-natural moral properties to states of affairs. He suggested that moral judgements were a disguised sociological judgement about the welfare of society. This did not follow . . . from an analysis of the literal meaning of 'good' and the like, but from reflection on the fact that even though there are no ethical properties, there is generally considerable overlap in the judgements made by different members of the same society. This fact invites the thought that what creates the agreement is social pressure and that what lies behind that pressure is consensus on what would benefit people in general. Moral judgements are, in fact, though not as a matter of their logic, rough and ready utilitarian estimates . . . even though moral judgements were neither true nor false, strictly speaking, because moral judgements "should be enunciated in the optative or imperative mood, not in the indicative", there was the possibility

of moral progress to the extent that moral judgements were founded on a more scientific and less superstitious view of the world. [Ryan 1988, pp. 40–41]

Ryan claims that Russell's proposal to "offer a persuasive definition of 'good' in terms of the satisfaction of desire" is somewhat misleading, since "what we are asked to do is not to attach a meaning to 'good' but to accept a standard of goodness" (Ryan 1988, p. 48). Perhaps in the last analysis that is so, but the issue is difficult. Certainly, Russell's use of Stevenson's terminology could be misleading, since he differed greatly from Stevenson in holding that 'good'—which the latter thought a more purely emotive term—had an important descriptive as well as emotive meaning, and that the persuasive definition that he was offering really did capture most reflective ordinary usage.[9] If Russell adopted the general analysis that stressed both the emotive and descriptive meaning of (some) ethical statements, he nevertheless married it to Sidgwick's utilitarian account of commonsense morality, qualified by a Moorean emphasis on the 'good' and his usual qualms about superstition and taboo, the "harm that good men do."

Thus, Russell preferred a more judicious combination of the functions of analyst and moralist, arguing largely in terms of proposed definitions and a theoretical reconstruction of the tendencies of commonsense morality. In utilitarian fashion, the resulting reconstruction defines 'right' in terms of maximal good and 'good' in terms of the intrinsic value of desire (and, as we shall see, impulse) satisfaction, and although Russell does not insist that this is the only admissible definition of 'good', he does claim "that its consequences will be found to be more consonant with the ethical feelings of the majority of mankind than those of any other theoretically possible definition" (Russell 1955, p. 36). Crucially, for Russell, it can be shown that the acts that "arouse emotions of approval" are largely those believed likely to have certain kinds of effects; the effects leading to approval are defined as 'good', and the best act in the circumstances is the one with the best effects and is defined as 'right'. Conversely for 'bad'. If these definitions and propositions are accepted, they "provide a coherent body of ethical propositions, which are true (or false) in the same sense as if they were propositions of science" (Russell 1955, p. 98). Indeed, if most approved acts "are such as are believed to have certain effects, and if it is found, further, that exceptional acts, which are approved without having this character, tend to be no longer approved when their exceptional character is realized, then it becomes possible, in a certain sense, to speak of ethical error" (Russell 1955, p. 100). The correlation is not perfect, but it is strong. In its broad tendency, com-

9. It is not clear that Russell actually read Stevenson; he may well have picked up Stevenson's arguments via Ayer and others.

monsense moral judgment is not only consequentialist but utilitarian as well.

Much of the work is given over to examining "ethical error" and showing how moral codes—facilitated, obviously, by moral language—serve to bring the welfare of the community to bear on the individual and the desires of the individual into harmony with the welfare of the community. For Russell, the definition of 'right' in terms of general desire satisfaction has "more than verbal importance," since it "means, or implies, that acts promoting the general good are those that will be praised by the community . . . [and] that it is to everyone's interest that everyone else's acts should be of this kind. It implies that there is more good, i.e., more satisfaction of desire, in a community if social pressure, whether through the law or through praise and blame, is applied to induce right action in the above sense than if it is applied in any other way" (Russell 1955, p. 38).

It would have been helpful if Ryan had further developed his analysis of the rather puzzling metaethics of this work. He is roughly right in saying that Russell held that moral judgments also carried sociological judgments along with imperatives or optatives (though not as a matter of their logic), but his description here is so thin—especially on the issue of whether moral judgments can be true or false—that it is hard to follow. Compare Russell's further elaboration:

> Although, on the above theory, ethics contains statements which are true or false, and not merely optative or imperative, its basis is still one of emotion and feeling, the emotion of approval and the feeling of enjoyment or satisfaction, the former being involved in the definition of 'right' and 'wrong,' the latter in that of 'intrinsic value.' And the appeal upon which we depend for the acceptance of our ethical theory is not the appeal to the facts of perception, but to the emotions and feelings which have given rise to the concepts of 'right' and 'wrong,' 'good' and 'bad'. [Russell 1955, p. 100]

At least one serious commentator, Lillian Aiken, in *Bertrand Russell's Philosophy of Morals* (a book which, though published in 1963, remains in general an extremely good, very reliable guide to Russell's ethical views) has suggested that *Human Society* marks Russell's conversion to a form of naturalism. According to Aiken, Russell had "held virtually all of the main theoretical positions in contemporary ethical theory," since he "began as an intuitionist. Then, long before the emotive theory became fashionable, he adopted a non-cognitive theory of ethical judgments. Finally, in his old age, he has come out at last for ethical naturalism; he has adopted a satisfaction theory. This development, as far as I know, is unique" (Aiken 1963, p. ix). The crucial change, according to Aiken, is that Russell here allows, for the first time, that "value terms and moral terms are definable in terms of words referring

to desires and satisfactions" (Aiken 1963, p. 161). On this view, Russell sounds like Ralph Barton Perry, one of his old critics.

Aiken's interpretation is somewhat misleading, or at least, Russell found it so. In correspondence, he explained that he was a "little puzzled" by Aiken's view that he "had made a fundamental change in *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*" since he "was not conscious of making any such important change" (Russell 1970, p. 98). Presumably, for Russell, the crucial point of continuity was that he still held that there was no rock-bottom knowledge to be had in ethics, no correspondence to percepts as in facts, ultimately only an appeal to the like emotions that stood behind the proposed/reported usage.[10] As he remarked in a (slightly) earlier work, "Why should I think all satisfaction of desire good? Only owing to an emotion of benevolence. It is therefore circular to deduce the excellence of benevolence from the principle that satisfaction of desire is good" (Russell 1944, p. 740).

There is something like a naturalistic bent in *Human Society,* with its solicitude for the way in which approval is embedded and systematized in commonsense moral theory, sophisticated sociological account of how moral codes develop and contribute to social cohesion, etc.; even Ryan claims that Russell's view is "a form" of naturalism, falling between "objectivism" and "subjectivism," though again, he scarcely explains this. But what needs to be better understood is just how this view of socialization and ethical language differs from Russell's earlier (fairly complex, though less systematic) emotivist view, in which he had certainly recognized the (secondary, often utilitarian) descriptive content of ethical claims and the facts of moral development: "I do not mean quite simply that the good is the desired, because men's desires conflict, and 'good' is, to my mind, mainly a social concept, designed to find an issue from this conflict. . . . the use of words is social, and therefore we learn only to call a thing good, except in rare circumstances, if most of the people we associate with are also willing to call it good. Thus 'good' comes to apply to things desired by the whole of a social group" (Russell 1927, pp. 239, 242).

Again, ethics involves the "expression of desire concerning the desires of mankind" (Russell 1938, p. 247). In ethical argument, one must typically proceed by trying to show how one's own "desires harmonize with those of other people" (Russell 1935, p. 243). Thus, ethics is "closely related to politics: it is an attempt to bring the collective desires of a group to bear upon individuals; or, conversely, it is an

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10. Perhaps she might be forgiven for assuming that Russell had once again changed his mind, writing as she was while he was still a live and no doubt exasperating subject for a dissertation. On the theory of truth, however, most of Russell's mature views were simply variations on the correspondence theory, and he seems never to have countenanced "moral facts" as verifiers of moral beliefs in any more robust sense than that of like emotions (see below, and Russell 1959, chap. 15).

attempt by an individual to cause his desires to become those of his group" (Russell 1935, p. 243). Russell's ethical theorizing always recognized both the political task of establishing an institutional harmony of interests and the social task of molding antisocial desires and impulses into beneficial ones, through praise and blame, education, etc., and how these activities determine what can pass for ethics. Indeed, the *Principles* is ultimately "an essay on the nurturing of benign impulses" (Ryan, 1988, p. 73). As the next section will demonstrate, his views on shaping people were particularly original.

However, naturalism aside, Aiken does make the extremely interesting observation that Russell's various comparisons

> between the impersonality in science and a similar impersonality in ethics might have led him to a very different type of view than he finally adopted. For example he perhaps could have arrived at a view of the following sort: Just as science has a body of inter-subjective rules which govern the decisions and procedures of the scientist, so morality has its own set of inter-subjective rules which render moral decision objective and which make it possible to speak of justification in ethics by reference to these rules, without however "reducing" moral judgements to statements of fact. From the time Russell abandoned his intuitionism, he has, off and on, been on the verge of expressing a theory very similar to the one suggested above. [Aiken 1963, p. 159]

Admittedly, Russell was less than consistent (especially earlier on) in his pronouncements on whether there really are many significant differences over ultimate ends, and if it is hard to pin down his position, it is perhaps because he himself often seemed quite uncertain to what degree he was reporting usage and to what degree trying to reform or stipulate it. But even so, supposing that Russell was not a likely convert to full-blooded naturalism, it is all the more interesting that he surely was, as Aiken suggests, increasingly troubled by the fact (perfectly well recognized in his Mooreian phase) that ethical discourse seems to have a certain objectivity and, granting that, although there are some fundamental ethical conflicts, it makes sense to speak of ethical judgments, and not simply judgments within a common herd, as enjoying a type of objectivity (Russell 1955, pp. 106–8). He was increasingly (or, rather, once again) troubled by the assimilation of basic ethical differences to simple differences of taste, and he did in fact seem more inclined to soften the demarcation between science and ethics, allowing that the individual percepts that form the data of science are more subjective (and thus perhaps more like the data of ethics) than common sense supposes. The objectivity of impersonal science "depends upon the fact that there are certain respects in which the percepts of the majority agree, and that the divergent percepts of the color blind and the victims of hallucinations can be ignored. It

may be that there is some similar way of arriving at objectivity in ethics" (Russell 1955, p. 5).[11]

To be sure, Russell's aversion to cognitivism, especially naturalistic cognitivism, stuck throughout his mature work; the moral outlook was not the scientific outlook, analogy was not identity. Of course, if he had ever been willing to follow the pragmatists at least some way toward allowing the basic emotional reactions that he took so seriously anyway to play the role of bits of evidence, and to be subject to greater cognitive constraints, he could indeed have allowed an even larger "measure of objectivity" for ethics than he allowed in the passages indicated. However, he was to the end of his days hostile to pragmatist and holist accounts of truth and knowledge, whose vindications of ethics were, he held, made possible only by jettisoning all forms of objective truth.[12] Furthermore, he had a deep antipathy to anything suggestive of the later Wittgenstein; as linguistic philosophy grew less systematic and more antitheory (even in Stevenson's work), Russell went the other way.[13] In the distasteful descent from ideal language to deal with moral usage, he could at least take Sidgwick's more systematic approach over a family resemblance account of the word 'good' and strive to "trim the ragged edges" of ordinary usage rather than salute them (Sidgwick 1907).

If, as Aiken sometimes intimates, there is in Russell some appreciation for the distinctively moral point of view (as his remarks on universalization and the social pressure to harmonize one's desires suggest), nevertheless, it is a moral point of view that, in *Human Society* at least, is inseparable from his utilitarianism, for better or worse. Perhaps *Human Society*'s greater emphasis on objectivity goes with its greater emphasis on the utilitarian logic of commonsense morality and usage, and is better seen as Sidgwickian reconciliation, though with much greater stress on the superstition and muddle-headedness of the plain man's morality (especially if the plain man is a cleric).[14] Not surprisingly, like many other prominent twentieth-century utilitarians (notably J. J. C. Smart and Alan Gibbard), Russell can be viewed as essentially trying to work out a noncognitivist version of Sidgwick's utilitarian analysis of commonsense morality, replete with an attempt

11. It is worth noting that the arguments that Russell gave, in his Mooreian period, for the objectivity of the good were, indeed, very good; "The Elements of Ethics" (1966) still repays the effort.

12. For a characteristic statement, see Russell 1944, p. 723.

13. Indeed, Michael Dummett once suggested that the only common bond among ordinary language philosophers (as hostilely depicted by Gellner) was being the object of Russell's hatred, though he retracted this upon recognizing that Moore was also grouped with them. See Dummett 1978, pp. xi–xii.

14. Naturally, Sidgwick's dualism of practical reason meant that he had not reconciled all the different methods of ethics, only utilitarianism and dogmatic intuitionism.

to show how the latter tends to move in a utilitarian direction.[15] In fact, Russell had studied *The Methods of Ethics* (Sidgwick 1907, first published in 1874) and taken the courses that would later appear in book form as *Philosophy, Its Scope and Relations* (Sidgwick 1902b), and *Lectures on the Ethics of T. H. Green, Mr. Herbert Spencer, and J. Martineau* (Sidgwick 1902a), which is not to mention Sidgwick's role in the Apostles, the elite Cambridge discussion group that so decisively influenced Russell and Moore. The conventional wisdom more or less uncritically accepts Russell's (and Moore's) claim that as a student he had regarded Sidgwick as dull and out of date and consequently owed less to him than he should have.[16] But *Human Society* is markedly more Sidgwickian than any of Russell's other works, and Russell in fact admits that he had wound up struggling toward a noncognitivist, nonexclusively hedonistic version of Sidgwick's view to the effect that commonsense was fundamentally utilitarian:

> We are thus led to the conclusion that there is more agreement among mankind as to the effects at which we should aim than as to the kinds of acts that are approved. I think the contention of Henry Sidgwick, that the acts which are approved of are those that are likely to bring happiness or pleasure, is, broadly speaking, true. . . . I do not think, however, that pleasure is quite the nearest that we can come to the common quality of the great majority of approved actions. I think we must include such things as intelligence and aesthetic sensibility. If we were really persuaded that pigs are happier than human beings, we should not on that account welcome the ministrations of Circe. [Russell 1955, pp. 99–100]

Of course, unlike Sidgwick, Russell's emphasis is not on 'right' or 'ought' as the fundamental ethical notion, but on the notion of 'good', on which there is, he claims, greater consensus. Still, as indicated,

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15. Surely, if anything today approximates the project Russell had in mind—recognizing the expressive and emotive component in moral judgments but within the context of an analysis of the social role and function of moral codes—it is something along the lines of Alan Gibbard's norm-expressivistic approach in *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (1990), an analysis that combines expressivism with a naturalistic account of the social role of normative judgments and how they tend toward consensus. An early (and confused) letter (Russell 1969, vol. 1, p. 208), shows how Russell believed that Sidgwick's intuitionism undercut his analysis of commonsense morality.

16. For good statements of said wisdom, see Nicholas Griffin (1989) and Spadoni (1978, 1979). For valuable primary source material on Russell's relationship to Sidgwick, see Russell (1983b), which among other things contains Russell's surviving student papers for Sidgwick, with the latter's comments. Particularly interesting is "The Relations of Rule to End," in which Russell argues, against Kant, that "we must have, in willing, some end in view other than momentary conformity to virtue" (p. 217). Russell was quite pleased with this paper, and so, apparently, was Sidgwick. However, Russell 1969, vol. 1, p. 208, was less astute.

although Russell's view is obviously closer to Stevenson's combination of emotive and descriptive meaning than to Sidgwick's intuitionism, nevertheless, this is harnessed to a more Sidgwickian account of the utilitarian direction of commonsense morality—on this he was clear. Really, the only thing that kept Russell from producing a major twentieth-century statement of the utilitarian program, one with a more acceptable metaethics, was his unshakeable disdain for the imprecision of all such inquiry.

Although Russell may not have found his metaethical position very satisfying, whatever cynicism he had about it did not prevent him from appreciating the constructive, perhaps even liberating side of moral and political engagement. There is a little irony in the fact that Benjamin Barber, in *The Conquest of Politics* (1988), uses both Russell and Rawls as examples of "capital P" Philosophy, foundationalist Philosophy that would authoritatively pronounce on what should be honored as true knowledge, to the detriment of democratic political practice. Such a characterization is plainly not apt for Rawls's practical political view, and as I shall demonstrate, any attempt to depict Russell's politics as suffering from some sort of de-moralizing, invidious comparison with "professional" philosophy leaves something to be desired, even if it is not wholly inaccurate.[17] After all, it was Russell's philosophical conscience that mostly kept him from theorizing about ethics and politics and spurred him to action, and he could even remark, of the work resulting from the personal crisis caused by his profound opposition to World War I, that "what wanted doing in logic was too difficult for me. . . . What the war has done is to give a new and less difficult ambition, which seems to me quite as good as the old one" (Russell 1988, p. xxxiii.) Also, Russell was obsessed with the problem of how to preserve the creativity and free, critical intelligence of moral and political debate in the face of the mass conformity and technocratic authoritarianism of the twentieth century. The philosophers and the scientists had to be watched.

At any rate, however one chooses to characterize Russell's metaethics, his substantive ethics were, as indicated, broadly utilitarian, though based on various considerations of desire and impulse satisfaction rather than merely pleasure. On this, too, there is a fair amount of consensus. As Ryan and many others have noted, Russell's "changes of mind about the epistemological standing of moral judgements made no difference at all to his political views" (Ryan 1988, p. 46), a point from which Russell might have drawn a moral: "Philosophers are fond of endless puzzles about ultimate ethical values and the basis of morals. My own belief is that so far as politics and practical living are concerned

17. For similar accounts, see Flathman (1989) and Spragens (1981).

we can sweep aside all these puzzles, and use common sense principles."[18] In this, one might say that Russell's life and work amply, if curiously, testify to the claim, notably associated with Rawls, that substantive moral and political work need not wait on the resolution of metaethical issues.[19] Small wonder that he found the sixties congenial.

III

On the matter of Russell's substantive ethics there is a fairly familiar story, some of it already sketched. It concerns how Russell, the secular (but literal) godson of John Stuart Mill, had at an early age announced that he was a utilitarian (much to the amusement of his family) and indeed, on the strength of Mill's criticisms of religion, substituted this and love of mathematics for his religious faith (which did not much amuse his family); how his early utilitarianism did not survive his exposure, at Cambridge, to British Hegelianism and belief in the Absolute; how with Moore he rejected Hegelianism and was ultimately led to share much of Moore's outlook, which in substance was of course a form of utilitarianism; how in the first two decades of the century, especially, Russell was inclined toward a rather florid, rapturous writing about his semimystical experiences, as captured in "A Free Man's Worship" (1971a, first published in 1903); and how finally he rejected Moore's objectivist metaethics and much of the "ideal" side of Moore's utilitarianism and returned, more or less, to the view of his godfather, though with modifications.

Some such picture (with important variations) is accepted by most of the authors under consideration, and many others as well, with one particularly interesting piece being Richard Wollheim's "Bertrand Russell and the Liberal Tradition" (Wollheim 1974).[20] Wollheim remarks that

18. Russell, quoted in Wood 1957, p. 202. Wood's work, though not as informed on political theory as Ryan's, or as massive as Clark's *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (1976), is still illuminating. Russell (1935) nicely expresses his impatience with metaethics: "We have wishes that are not purely personal, and, if we had not, no amount of ethical teaching would influence our conduct except through fear and disapproval. The sort of life that most of us admire is one which is guided by large impersonal desires; now such desires can, no doubt, be encouraged by example, education, and knowledge, but they can hardly be created by mere abstract belief that they are good, nor discouraged by an analysis of what is meant by the word 'good'" (pp. 252–53).

19. Perhaps to the chagrin of some. In an *Ethics* symposium on metaethics, Holly Smith wrote, "In the late nineteen-sixties, partly as a result of political events, attention shifted to normative ethics. Philosophers turned to developing and criticizing normative systems and especially to resolving concrete moral problems. . . . Much of this investigation was consciously conducted in the absence of any metaethical thesis about what moral judgments meant or how they could be justified. This methodology was felt to be justified by the pressing nature of these practical issues and by the fact that sufficient progress could apparently be made without resolving foundational issues" (Smith 1986, p. 471). Some remain pressed and progressive.

20. See also Nakhnikian's reply in the same volume.

it would "be a matter only of simplification, and not of grave distortion, to look on the whole of Russell's social philosophy as an attempt, a sustained attempt, to repair that of John Stuart Mill: to supplement its deficiencies, to relate it to new ideas, and to demonstrate its applicability to the ever-changing realities of the twentieth century" (Wollheim 1974, p. 209).

Wollheim's remark raises the problem, not simply of Russell's utilitarianism (and his perhaps Millian inconsistency), but of his relationship to the entire British liberal (or radical) tradition. For the present, it is enough to consider the changes that Russell wrought in the most basic utilitarian doctrines.

Russell clearly thought extremely well of the utilitarians, not just of J. S. Mill, but also of Sidgwick and even of Bentham. In the case of Sidgwick, this admiration, as noted in the last section, only explicitly emerged after all vestiges of Russell's undergraduate affectations had worn off; in the case of Bentham, it also had to overcome Russell's boyhood exposure to "a statement by the Rev. Sydney Smith to the effect that Bentham thought people ought to make soup of their dead grandmothers" (Russell 1928, p. 111). In spite of his wry suggestion that it would be subversive of all true morality to follow Bentham in defining a "good" man as someone who actually does good, Russell often remarked that it "is the fashion to decry the Victorians, but I wish our age had half as good a record as theirs," explaining that "a very large proportion of the progress during those years must be attributed to the influence of Bentham" (Russell 1928, p. 112). *Freedom and Organization, 1814–1914* (1934) backs up such claims, giving Russell's fullest and best account of the Philosophical Radicals (though not of the later, more conservative and academic utilitarianism of Sidgwick). However, although in this work he expresses his admiration for the utilitarians on many counts, he says little about his own views, which, as noted, were in some respects original and much less in the grip of hedonism than Bentham's or Sidgwick's.

One of the most basic innovations, on all accounts, concerns Russell's substitution of impulse and desire satisfaction for any form of hedonism. As he explains in *Principles of Social Reconstruction*:

> All human activity springs from two sources: impulse and desire. The part played by desire has always been sufficiently recognized. When men find themselves not fully contented, and not able instantly to procure what will cause content, imagination brings before their minds the thought of things which they believe would make them happy. All desire involves an interval of time between the consciousness of a need and the opportunity for satisfying it. . . . But desire governs no more than a part of human activity, and that not the most important but only the more conscious, explicit, and civilized part. . . . In all the more instinctive part of

> our nature we are dominated by impulses to certain kinds of
> activity, not by desires for certain ends. Children run and shout,
> not because of any good which they expect to realise, but because
> of a direct impulse to running and shouting. [Russell 1971c, pp.
> 11–12, first published in 1916]

This analysis is a consistent feature of Russell's mature approach
and certainly figures in *Human Society* (see Russell 1955, pp. xvii–xix).
Although never a convert to Freudianism or behaviorism, he was
strongly inclined in his writings to borrow what he took to be the best
insights of these schools, which mostly concerned recognizing the
irrational side of human nature and the inability of many people to
resist manipulation and brainwashing by authority or resist the herd
instinct generally. He emphatically rejected Bentham's psychological
hedonism, and in general held that the classical utilitarians had vastly
overestimated the power of reason in human affairs; they had not
devoted enough attention to the problems of warped impulses and
boring, zestless lives, even when, as with J. S. Mill, their basic vision
was sound. Indeed, the *Principles* was partly a response to D. H. Law-
rence's furious (though muddled) criticisms of Russell's belief in human
reason, which the carnage of World War I belied, and it self-consciously
downplayed his relationship to the utilitarians, calling for a new political
philosophy with a more realistic psychological account of human ir-
rationality (see Russell 1988, pp. 305–14). His aim was to "suggest a
philosophy of politics based upon the belief that impulse has more
effect than conscious purpose in molding men's lives" (Russell 1971c,
p. 6).

Ryan's treatment of Russell's utilitarianism is rather thin (and
ambivalent), which is somewhat suprising given his work on Mill. At
one point he states that Russell's is not "fully fledged utilitarianism
because it does not assert that the summum bonum is happiness or
pleasure, but the satisfaction of desires and impulses, and these as
Russell had always said were not invariably directed towards happiness
or pleasure" (Ryan 1988, p. 48). At another, he allows that "Mill
argued, as did Russell almost throughout his life, that the only rational
basis for social morality is the pursuit of happiness, the doctrine generally
known as utilitarianism." As he goes on to explain parenthetically,
however, "Russell qualified this by saying that 'happiness' was not a
very satisfactory name for the goal of morals and politics, but then
Mill had already done something very similar by claiming that only
some sorts of happiness were really worth pursuing." Thus, "Russell
and Mill largely agreed on *what* was to be pursued, if not on how best
to describe it." And, though "Russell was never as systematic a utilitarian
as Mill and therefore never faced quite the same problems," he also
"frequently abandoned his utilitarianism when it ran counter to deeply
felt intuitions about freedom or other deeply held values" (Ryan 1988,

pp. 12–13). More Millian liberal than consistent utilitarian would seem to be Ryan's verdict on Russell's position, but it is hard to be sure, since he prefers the label "utilitarian" to any alternative.

Two things are somewhat disappointing about this. First, Ryan rather peculiarly says very little about how the desire satisfaction theory is at least in some ways an advance over classical utilitarian hedonism, if not a wholly satisfactory one. Instead, he simply rehearses the familiar objections to counting the sadistic desires of Nazis, etc.[21] But of course, the general framework of economic theory is utilitarian in a way that is closer to the desire satisfaction theory than to classical hedonism, and as we shall see, although there is a sense in which for Russell all desires are equal, he also supplies some cogent arguments as to why some desires should be cultivated and others not.

Second, Ryan does not go very far at all in what would seem to be the entirely natural direction of considering whether Russell was a type of indirect utilitarian, holding that the good was not best pursued in too direct fashion, as John Gray and others have suggested of Hume, Mill, and, indeed, of Russell's teacher, Sidgwick.[22] Obviously, this tactic might at least go some way toward answering the charge of inconsistency. And there certainly seems to be material in Russell to support such a view. Russell's notions of how, for instance, impulse should or should not be controlled or cultivated often seem especially in line with an indirect utilitarian approach regarding the cultivation of certain dispositions and traits: "It cannot be said that the control of impulse beyond a point is desirable. In extreme forms, such as an impulse to murder, it must be controlled either by the individual or by the law. But a life in which impulse is controlled beyond a point loses its savor and become joyless and anemic" (Russell 1955, p. 162). Russell was no advocate of the Panopticon. However, despite his preoccupation with the psychological, he seems to have had a much better understanding of the classical utilitarian emphasis on standards or criteria of rightness, as opposed to personal decision procedures, than a great many twentieth-century utilitarians (see Griffin 1982; Hardin 1988, pp. 18–22).

In a 1951 work to which Ryan frequently refers, Russell was only too happy to identify with his godfather, remarking that "with Mill's values, I for my part find myself in complete agreement" (Russell

21. There is of course an immense literature on the merits and demerits of the desire satisfaction theory. For a recent treatment, see Griffin (1986).

22. See Gray (1989) and Berger (1984). The indirect approach, and variations on it, of course goes far toward explaining why such twentieth-century controversies as the act/rule issue missed the point; Russell's utilitarianism, with its more respectable lineage, was mercifully free of such nonissues. See J. Griffin (1982) for brisk commentary on the harm that good philosophers do. But see also Russell 1969, vol. 1, p. 208, for a less than perspicuous assessment of Sidgwick's position.

1956a, p. 133). Although he goes on to state that "I think he is entirely right in emphasizing the importance of the individual in so far as values are concerned," he also explains that individual liberty is "an essential source of simple happiness" and vital to "all the more important and difficult kinds of usefulness," and he nowhere suggests that he finds Mill's celebration of the free individual to be fundamentally at odds with his utilitarianism (Russell 1956a, pp. 133, 138). To the contrary, he often stressed that freedom was a fundamental component of welfare.

Ryan does explain, in reference to some popular essays by Russell, that Russell often followed Mill in avoiding the problem of the possible conflicts between liberty and happiness (which Ryan believes are plain) by redefining happiness; the conflict dissolves because "the pleasures of conditioned and manipulated creatures are not part of happiness at all. This abandons the attempt to show that freedom is useful as a means to happiness and defends freedom as a good in itself—which is plainly what Russell mostly thought it was" (Ryan 1988, p. 16). This seems right—as Fred Berger wrote of Mill, "Freedom, then, is an essential element of human well-being; it is of value in itself, as well as for the other goods it facilitates our achieving" (Berger 1984, p. 231). And, as Berger argues, this need not conflict with utilitarianism. Russell's view could be interpreted in this fashion.

And very curiously, Ryan observes that, in these more popular essays,

> Russell's arguments are at once less utilitarian and less dependent on appeals to high-flying ultimate values than one would expect from what one might call his official moral philosophy. The doctrine Russell preaches is very much closer to eighteenth-century moralists such as Bishop Butler or David Hume, who emphasized that ethics was not entirely about sacrificing ourselves for the good of others, and that one powerful argument for cultivating a benevolent disposition in ourselves was that benevolence led to happiness, while misanthropy and envy generally did not. The argument is very simple, very old and absolutely persuasive; it was also, and very oddly, an argument which had somehow gone underground throughout the high tide of utilitarianism on the one hand and Kantianism on the other. [Ryan 1988, p. 165]

But that enlightened egoism and utilitarianism might coincide (and both be indirect in various ways), as in Smith and Hume, J. S. Mill and Sidgwick, was hardly a submerged consideration in Russell's thought. To say, as he did, that institutions can only harmonize narrow self-interest to a degree, and where such institutions leave off society must count on the cultivation of large and generous desires, did not necessarily preclude the possibility that such desires, not always directly utilitarian in their object, could contribute to the individual's happiness

as well as society's. As I shall show, Russell claimed that individual psychology and social welfare were often isomorphic. He certainly made such claims in the *Principles*, for example (see Russell 1971c, p. 27). And Sidgwick, after all, had done about as much as anyone to consider precisely the question, in its explicitly Butlerian form, of the dualism of practical reason and to what degree it could be overcome by adapting utilitarianism accordingly, even if he insisted on giving an ultimately hedonistic account of the good.[23] Despite the references to Sidgwick in *Human Society*, Ryan seems not to have considered the possibility that Russell got more out of "Old Sidg" than he ever let on, though of course Ryan's approach is largely in keeping with the conventional wisdom on this matter. But as the previous observations should suggest, a more scrupulous comparison could prove revealing. Naturally, Russell was not notorious for lamenting the nonexistence of God or the decline of religion, and his utilitarianism was anything but "tame and sleek," as critics had said of Sidgwick—on these points Russell and Sidgwick were worlds apart. But on the issues of indirect utilitarianism and the analysis of commonsense morality—and indeed, on the general issues of professionalizing philosophy, divorcing it from theology and rendering it a highly technical discipline—they seem to have had much more in common than has been generally recognized.

At any rate, the crucial further element in Russell's theory, the thing that gives it much of its originality and critical bite, is the way his utilitarianism calls for more than simply the satisfaction of desires and impulses that people happen to have. Borrowing a term from Leibniz, he explains that "we may call two desires or impulses 'compossible' when both can be satisfied, and 'conflicting' when the satisfaction of one is incompatible with that of the other" (Russell 1955, p. xix). Then,

> It is obvious that there can be a greater total of satisfaction of desire where desires are compossible than where they are incompatible. Therefore, according to our definition of the good, compossible desires are preferable as means. It follows that love is preferable to hate, cooperation to competition, peace to war, and so on. (Of course there are exceptions; I am only stating what is likely to be true in most cases.) This leads to an ethic by which desires may be distinguished as right or wrong, or, speaking loosely, as good and bad. Right desires will be those that are capable of being compossible with as many other desires as possible;

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23. Of course, Sidgwick's dualism of practical reason stands as a reminder that he certainly recognized the difficulty of reconciling individual and social happiness. But the point is that he recognized, among other things, the limitations of Bentham's psychological egoism and the various tactics for reconciling egoism, utilitarianism, and commonsense morality.

wrong desires will be those that can only be satisfied by thwarting other desires. [Russell 1955, pp. 39–40]

The theory of compossible desires and impulses is another constant in the mature Russell's approach to substantive ethical theory, though in his earlier work he did not use the term 'compossible' but spoke instead of "harmonious" desires and impulses.[24] It carries the burden of his ethical criticism of existing moral and political structures.[25] It is through the shaping and proper sublimation of impulse and the cultivation of and exhortation to harmonious desires that moral progress might occur. "It is evident . . . that there can be more good in a world where the desires of different individuals harmonise than in one where they conflict. The supreme moral rule should, therefore, be: *Act so as to produce harmonious rather than discordant desires*" (Russell 1927, p. 242).[26] And this, as mentioned, applies at the intrapsychic as well as interpsychic level: Robinson Crusoe would also do well to cultivate harmonious desires (Russell 1927, p. 238).

As Ryan notes, while the idea of compossible desires may often seem banal if left too sketchy (as Russell often left it), it has more bite when set in a particular context. Thus:

> Russell takes it for granted that certain kinds of unhappiness are much more likely to occur in the twentieth century than in previous centuries, and certain kinds are not—the art of cultivating a stoical indifference to pain was a much more valuable route to happiness or resource against misery in the days before modern medicine and modern anesthetics; conversely, the ability to stand up to public opinion, not be distracted by notions of success and failure which do not suit us, and not give in to the excesses of competition is much more necessary today than it was for someone living in an isolated village where economic life went on as it had done for half a millennium. [Ryan 1988, p. 166]

In combination with his political analysis of how, say, capitalism fosters competitive impulses, modern large-scale organization tramples on nonconformity, etc., the argument for cultivating compossible desires

24. As Harry Ruja, among others, has observed; see Ruja (1984, pp. 149–51). This piece gives a good overview of the similarities and differences between the (very) early Russell and what I have called the mature (i.e., post-Moore) Russell. See also Russell's reply to Justus Buchler's "Russell and the Principles of Ethics," in Russell (1944, p. 725).

25. On this, Slater (1976) is also very helpful and detailed.

26. Admittedly, this does not sound very indirect; however, it is hard to see how the project could otherwise work—Russell was not so naive as to suppose that the cultivation of desires was a matter of direct intention, as opposed to education, habits, etc. Furthermore, he also recognized the serious difficulties involved in consciously grasping the nature of one's desires (see especially his arguments in Russell [1921]).

was far from vacuous; it carried far-reaching implications for education, the structure of government, economic organization, and so on. On this point, Wollheim is absolutely clear and especially insightful:

> Having divided the sources of human action into desire and impulse, Russell then went on to divide both desires and impulses into two groups: desires and impulses which are creative, and desires and impulses which are possessive. This distinction, repeated throughout Russell's social writings, turns out to be a distinction of great political significance. For the creative desires and impulses of man are inherently harmonious, whereas the possessive desires are inherently conflictive: and in both cases along two dimensions. The different creative desires and impulses of a single individual cohere, and so do the creative desires and impulses of different individuals: similarly for the possessive desires and impulses of individuals and the disharmonies to which they give rise. [Wollheim 1974, pp. 213–14]

As Wollheim observes, Russell, in *Human Society,* began with the notion of compossible desires and ultimately wound up treating creative desires as extensionally equivalent. Consequently, it was natural for him to hold that the distinction between creative and possessive desires and impulses "should replace Mill's distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding desires and that the principle of state interference should be reformulated in terms of it. The principle thus reformulated Russell called the Principle of Growth, and it became his central political belief" (Wollheim 1974, pp. 213–14).

Wollheim's identification of the central axis of Russell's thought is hard to dispute (see also Ruja 1984; Russell 1988). It suggests that, as Russell himself had insisted, ethics is very difficult to separate from politics. Effective socialization, sublimation, and persuasion are largely collective societal enterprises—"it should be part of a wise social system to encourage compossible purposes, and discourage conflicting ones, by means of education and social systems designed to this end" (Russell 1955, p. xx). The efforts of the individual tend to merge with the efforts of the group and societal institutions; education is more effective than exhortation, though, as Russell discovered, the former cannot quite get by without the latter.

Before moving on to Russell's political thought, more must be said about his view of the good life for the individual, which he so often described as one inspired by love and guided by knowledge. For Russell did recognize the way in which ethics, despite its crucially important social dimension, is concerned not simply with the actions of individuals in relation to the social whole but also with the more solitary side of life, reflected in the human quest for certain types of self-perfection. Indeed, he had always had a streak of romanticism,

which found expression in such things as his love for Shelley's poetry.[27] More than this, Russell, especially in the first two decades of the century, was sometimes inclined to articulate a personal creed in which he waxed rhetorical about the unbearable aspects of human existence and the need for a substitute for religion (indeed the longing for certainty and some form of solace for human aspirations within the realm of knowledge was surely a motivating force for Russell throughout his life). With dubious veracity, he often recounted how, in 1901, upon seeing Evelyn Whitehead suffer an attack of angina, he had undergone a "mystical" conversion to an ethic of benevolence and a conviction that human existence is unbearably lonely. During the first two decades of the century, and especially during his long association (and affair) with Lady Ottoline Morrell, Russell, in such works as "A Free Man's Worship" (1971a, first published in 1903), was inclined to write in the following vein:

> The life of Man, viewed outwardly, is but a small thing in com-parison with the forces of Nature. The slave is doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death, because they are greater than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour. But, great as they are, to think of them greatly, to feel their passionless splendor, is greater still. And such thought makes us free men; we no longer bow before the inevitable in Oriental subjection, but we absorb it, and make it part of ourselves. To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things—this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship. [Russell 1971a, p. 46]

This is followed up with lines about shedding sunshine on the path of our comrades and lightening their sorrows by the balm of our sympathy, etc.

Ryan is plainly impatient with this side of Russell's thought, de-bunking much of the popular wisdom about it; he tends to write it off as self-indulgent aesthetics largely attributable to Russell's flowery romance with Lady Ottoline (Ryan 1988, pp. 52–53). Russell's maturer work, as Ryan observes, was comparatively free of such gushing and more sensibly robust in recommending an active unselfish life.

This is probably too curt on Ryan's part, though one can sometimes appreciate the sentiment. Russell archivist Kenneth Blackwell, in his very well researched *The Spinozistic Ethics of Bertrand Russell* (1985), has presented a comprehensive interpretation of Russell's substantive ethics based on precisely this side of Russell's work. And, in a roughly similar vein, Paul Grimley Kuntz, in *Bertrand Russell* (1986), stresses the notion

27. See Russell (1962, pp. 9–14). For an interesting account of Russell the Romantic, see Leithauser (1984).

of "cosmic piety" in Russell's ethics and goes to something of an extreme in turning Russell into a "deeply religious" man whose greatest tragedy was that he spent so much time mocking existing religions rather than founding a new one, on a world order at that (Kuntz 1986, chap. 8). This interpretation in part rests on the tensions in Russell's ethical and social writings and on such biographical evidence as the testimony of Russell's daughter, Katherine Tait, who, somewhat to Russell's cha- grin, became deeply religious and maintained that her father's attitude was really that of an essentially religious man (Tait 1975). But Kuntz's thesis is also based on a comprehensive reinterpretation of Russell's philosophical work that sees him less as the advocate of piecemeal, technical analysis, and more as a frustrated metaphysician whose notion of language reflecting the order of things put him in the great tradition of Spinoza and Leibniz, and even Hegel and Bradley.

While Kuntz's work has the merit of bringing out how Russell did retain a more systematic, ambitious vision of philosophy than many of his positivist successors, his account of the technical side of Russell's work and its relation to the development of analytic philosophy does not successfully situate Russell's accomplishments against the back- ground of British Idealism. Fortunately, two splendid accounts of this period in Russell's philosophical development have recently appeared: Peter Hylton's *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (1990), and Nicholas Griffin's *Russell's Idealist Apprenticeship* (1991). Unfortunately, these works fall outside the scope of this review, since they do not expressly deal with Russell's ethical or political writings, though it should be noted that Griffin's work, especially, has some very helpful asides and background material on these matters.[28] Kirk Willis's forthcoming study of the early Russell will provide an important comprehensive treatment.

As for Russell's ethics, Blackwell's account of the Spinozistic aspects of his thought is much more carefully worked out than Kuntz's. Ac- cording to Blackwell, the central unifying theme of Russell's ethics is to be found in his adaption of Spinoza's notion of the intellectual love of God, turned into an ethic of "impersonal self-enlargement." As Blackwell would have it:

> Russell and Spinoza—despite vast differences in their meta- physics—share a certain view of the self. In part this is also the self of the monistic idealists, with a tincture of the notion of self- realization to be found in F. H. Bradley but avoiding the specifics

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28. It should be noted that some of the recent secondary literature on such figures as Keynes and Moore contains helpful, if not very sophisticated, discussions of Russell's ethical ideas. See, e.g., Levy (1979); Rosenbaum (1984) is also very interesting. Russell was appalled by much of the Bloomsbury ethos, which he thought involved a bizarre misrepresentation of Moore.

of Bradley's ethic. . . . The notion of the wider self that is involved in Russell's normative ethic is hinted at in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), in a passage discussing the rewards of philosophical study. The gist is that through that study the boundaries of your mind are extended in proportion to the greatness of the object contemplated (and the object here is the universe); then the mind "becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good." Enlargement of self is thus achieved through contemplation of what is not-self, with the result that your interests are widened. [Blackwell 1985, p. 15]

There is no doubt a good deal to be said for this interpretation, which Blackwell pushes further than any commentator heretofore.[29] That Russell's work should have shown continuing effects from his conversion to British Hegelianism should not be surprising, especially since Russell had so often remarked on the admirable features of their attitude toward life, which he thought could be accepted even without their metaphysics. And Russell did indeed single out Spinoza for the wisdom of his ethic, and this even in later writings:

Where danger is real the impersonal kind of feeling that philosophy should generate is the best cure. Spinoza, who was perhaps the best example of the way of feeling of which I am speaking, remained completely calm at all times, and in the last day of his life preserved the same friendly interest in others as he had shown in days of health. To a man whose hopes and wishes extend widely beyond his personal life there is not the same occasion for fear that there is for a man of more limited desires. . . . I do not pretend that such a man will always be happy. It is scarcely possible to be always happy in a world such as that in which we find ourselves, but I do think that the true philosopher is less likely than others are to suffer from baffled despair and fascinated terror in the contemplation of possible disaster. [Russell 1956b, p. 184][30]

But apart from his earlier work, Russell was, I believe, especially inclined toward Spinoza's view mainly in his world-weary writings in the aftermath of World War I, which, he sometimes claimed, had made him more Spinozistic.[31] Moreover, Blackwell concedes that there is

29. For other, unpublished work on this theme, see the references in Blackwell (1985, p. 207, n. 44).

30. This work also contains the essay, "How I Write," in which Russell explains how he abandoned his earlier, more florid literary style. For an early but quite good discussion of Spinoza, in relation to Leibniz, see Russell (1900).

31. Of course, vast quantities of Russell's earlier ethical and political work are now available thanks to the publication of vols. 1, 12, and 13 of Russell's collected works (the overall project is proceeding very handsomely but slowly and with some distribution problems, though the recent switch to Routledge, Chapman & Hall for U.S. distribution

still some tension in Russell's writings between the celebration of Spinoza's philosophic calm and the celebration of strong emotion and zest, robustness and vigor, and so his success in presenting a unified interpretation of Russell's thought has limits. Russell could, after all, also celebrate the "warm expansive feeling towards the vast majority of men and women" found in Walt Whitman (see Russell [1971c, p. 27], but also Russell [1969, vol. 2, pp. 115–16], for an appreciation of Spinoza's robustness). And, finally, Blackwell in fact scarcely seems to think that the Spinozistic element in Russell's thought need be in much conflict with his (Millian) utilitarianism. For Blackwell, both views pull Russell toward an excessive, unrealistic impersonality in his ethical thought. But unfortunately, in his discussion of these matters, Blackwell presents a far too simplistic (and rather Godwinian) interpretation of utilitarianism that makes surprisingly little progress in exploring how (especially on an indirect view) the utilitarian framework of Russell's thought might be able to account for his views on what kind of people we should have, perhaps calling for a balance between philosophic calm and vigor.[32] Although it may be arguable that ethics should be more ideal in this way, and politics more (traditionally) utilitarian, Russell himself never would have admitted such a sharp division, as his application of the Principle of Growth makes clear.

Still, as suggested, it would be difficult to maintain that Ryan makes much progress on these matters either, and it seems that the themes that Blackwell identifies in Russell's thought are, at least in part, what so complicate Russell's utilitarianism and render Ryan's account of it so ambivalent:

> [Much] of his politics is straightforwardly utilitarian. . . . His most distinctive contribution was less utilitarian, however; his vision of the free creative self owes much to Spinoza, perhaps even more to Shelley, and nothing whatever to the tidily bureaucratic politics of the Fabians. [Ryan 1988, p. 87]

> The only happiness worth promoting was that of enlightened people whose sympathies lay with the development of the whole

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promises to be an improvement. Not surprisingly, there is considerable overlap between the editors of the collected works, the editorial group around *Russell*, which is the journal of the Russell archives at McMaster University, and the authors reviewed here). See Russell (1985). Volume 12, which contains the unpublished fragment "Prisons" is particularly noteworthy here, since it exhibits Russell's Spinozistic ethics at some length—e.g., "All the goods men seek consist in some form of union of Self and Not-Self. Thus when this good is attained, the Not-Self is made smaller than the Self, and the Self sets bounds to the greatness of its goods" (Russell 1985, p. 105).

32. Indeed, Blackwell's account of utilitarianism, and his few remarks on Sidgwick, often seem to miss entirely the utilitarian arguments for limiting the impersonality of decision procedures and dispositions. See, e.g., the discussion on p. 182 (Blackwell 1985).

human race, with great causes transcending themselves and their own immediate welfare. Russell's emphasis on these impersonal and ideal goals makes it almost misleading to call him a utilitarian. The great good, by which all lesser goods are to be judged, is the expansion of the ideals of European civilization, which can hardly be summed up as 'happiness'. [Ryan 1988, p. 67]

But again, Ryan does little to press the analysis, failing to consider Russell's possible indebtedness to some aspects of Sidgwick's account of (indirect) utilitarianism (or even Moore's ideal utilitarianism), the degree to which Russell's high-minded account of the good reflects the imperative to increase desire satisfaction, etc.; he simply explains that Russell's view was "utilitarian in holding that the justification of moral rules and principles lies in the contribution they make to the general happiness" but "unlike any other utilitarian theory in the special place it gave to a particular kind of happiness" (Ryan 1988, pp. 66–67). At least, in the end, Ryan is rightly reluctant to abandon the designation "utilitarian"—even if it must be stretched to cover Russell's taste for the low-flying values of Hume and the high-flying values of Spinoza. Admittedly, this task might often make utilitarian indirection look uncomfortably like undirection.

IV

As political life made abundantly clear to Russell, the actual is not necessarily the compossible. Whatever his indebtedness to Mill and Sidgwick may have been, he sounded more like Bentham when it came to discussing existing political arrangements and the character and motives of his opponents. Ryan's book makes it emphatically clear that Russell's political work was often strident, polemical, utopian, preachy, uninformed by concrete institutional analysis, elitist, and abusive, riddled with quite nasty aspersions about the sinister interests of the other side, which in his later years usually meant the United States. Russell was nothing if not impatient and angry, increasingly so in later life. Ryan makes as compelling a case as can be made for his subject: Russell often made a conscious sacrifice of philosophical nicety and fair play for the sake of effective persuasion. The causes were that urgent, and anger, especially from Russell, was appropriate.

Once again there is a familiar story to be told. From an early age, Russell's adherence to the biblical injunction not to follow a multitude to do evil (it was a favorite of the rather ferocious grandmother who mostly reared him—Lady Russell) had the not overly surprising effect of often putting him in a despised minority. While he was in many ways politically active even before World War I, campaigning for free trade and women's equality among other things, it was the war that provoked his first and most important political crisis, causing him to regard his philosophical interests as bizarrely spectral and unreal,

lacking in any real humanity (though Wittgenstein's philosophical criticism had also unnerved him). His active opposition to Britain's involvement, which he viewed as pointless and murderous, landed him in court twice, once to be fined and once to be sent to jail, and cost him his position at Cambridge and many old friendships. After the war, he managed to alienate both the Left and the Right—the first by opposing the Bolshevik regime for its cruelty and oppression (Russell was never a Marxist, a view he regarded as false and hateful), the second by remaining a socialist, however idiosyncratically.

The best account of many of these early political activities is now to be found in Jo Vellacott's *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (1980), a primarily historical work that nevertheless sheds much light on the formation of Russell's ethical views, as well as making it plain that despite his abiding contempt for nationalism and the herd instinct, he was not at all insensitive to the values of political comradeship. Also very useful, though wider ranging, is *Intellect and Social Conscience: Essays on Bertrand Russell's Early Work* (Moran and Spadoni 1984), which includes essays on such topics as the early Russell's feminism, relations to Bloomsbury, aesthetics, and mysticism; of special interest here is Peter Clarke's controversial contribution on "Bertrand Russell and the Dimensions of Edwardian Liberalism," which argues that prior to the war Russell had largely rejected the social (collectivist) dimensions of Edwardian Liberalism (Clarke 1984). Naturally, volumes 12 and 13 of the *Collected Papers* (Russell 1985, 1988), which respectively cover Russell's other than technical papers for the periods 1902–16, are absolutely indispensable for the study of these crucial formative periods in the development of his ethical and political views; volume 13 does an especially nice job of demonstrating the supreme importance of the *Principles* as a statement of Russell's considered position, including, as it does, various unpublished pieces relating to the public lectures that were the basis for that book. Richard A. Rempel's knowledgeable introduction cogently observes that Russell's mature politics "drew upon the most decentralized tradition within socialism and the most communitarian tradition within liberalism" (Russell 1988, p. xxviii). Also noteworthy is Rempel's "From Imperialism to Free Trade: Couturat, Halévy and the Development of Russell's First Crusade" (1979), which gives a very appreciative account of Russell's initial foray into politics, his "passionate and intellectually formidable defense of free trade" (Rempel 1979, p. 423), and Royden Harrison's fine overview and critique of all of these interpretations (and others) in "Bertrand Russell: From Liberalism to Socialism?" (1986). And, again, Kirk Willis's major forthcoming work will provide a comprehensive treatment. Clearly, the study of Russell's early politics is thriving.

In the following decades, Russell strongly advocated a less taboo-ridden sexual morality and frequently criticized religion, especially

Christianity, as a source of fearful superstition and silly, harmful rules. Believing that education was vital to any effective long-term social reform, he tried his hand at running an experimental school, an effort that proved to be financially disastrous and not otherwise terribly effective. His criticisms of religion and the church, and of conventional sexual morality and educational practice, ultimately resulted in his being disgracefully denied a position at the City University of New York, when he was judicially pronounced unfit, because of his moral views, to teach mathematical logic.[33]

Although his horror of war had caused him at a very late hour to call for appeasement with Nazi Germany, he ultimately decided that Hitler was an altogether different matter from the Kaiser and strongly supported the war effort, though he was stuck in the United States for much of it. In the decade after the war, he enjoyed a time of unusual respectability (being awarded a Nobel prize and OM) and was quite nervous about it. He did not have to worry for long, since his increasingly radical, activist opposition—from Pugwash to the CND to the Committee of 100—to the nuclear arms race, and Britain's involvement in it in particular, would land him in jail for a second time, in 1961. During the sixties, his radical opposition to American imperialism, especially as manifested in the Vietnamese war, damaged his reputation considerably, and he was widely regarded as senile and a captive of opportunistic Leftists who wanted to use his prestige to further their own agenda. A high point during his post–World War II period came when he helped mediate during the Cuban Missile Crisis. A low point when, panicked at the thought of an unrestrained arms race, he called for a pre-emptive war by the United States against the Soviet Union, before the latter could develop an effective deterrent. Happily, many of Russell's most important writings on these controversies will soon be available as volume 22 of the *Collected Papers*.

There was, as Ryan shows, a considerable consistency in Russell's political life. By the time of the *Principles*, the main themes were well in place: "The nature of authority, the power of the state, the need to abolish capitalism without substituting an equally oppressive form of socialism, the prospects of an international authority to prevent war, the role of education in the modern world, the duties of parents and the future of marriage and the family" (Ryan, 1988, p. 74). The central core of Russell's politics can be found in his belief that the "liberal virtues of freedom, toleration and individualism no longer shelter easily under laissez-faire and a capitalist economy; what we

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33. Ryan's account of this incident is unfortunately quite brief. It makes a fascinating, if depressing study. See Dewey and Kallen (1941), especially the pieces by Kallen, Dewey, Cohen, and McKeon.

need is democratic socialism at home and some form of effective international authority abroad" (Ryan 1988, p. 144).

All of this from a man who chose to disregard his family's wishes and go into philosophy rather than politics. And the bare facts scarcely do justice to the sea of essays, articles, books, letters, lectures, radio talks, etc. that Russell employed as his weapons. A very entertaining assortment of Russell's prodigious social and political commentary can be found in the two volumes of *Bertrand Russell's America* (1973, 1983a), as well as in the previously noted volumes of the *Collected Papers* (1983b, 1985, 1988).[34]

Ryan's book gives an enjoyable overview of the vicissitudes of Russell's politics (though for many of the details, one is still best advised to turn to Clark's *The Life of Bertrand Russell* [1976], and to some of the other previously cited works, such as those by Rempel, Vellacott, and Moran and Spadoni). Again, Ryan is willing to forgive Russell much. If Russell was often impatient, at least he acted; if his political work was often strangely thin philosophically, at least it was relevant and provocative, a force for the good. And Russell's work could be insightful even when thin.

Naturally, Ryan defends Russell against the sillier charges of inconsistency and irresponsibility. Russell was "not a pacifist, because he was a consequentialist" (Ryan 1988, p. 178). Despite what often seemed like a supreme desire for international peace, as in his opposition to the First World War and defense of appeasement at the start of the second, Russsell was in fact fairly consistent in thinking that not all war was bad, only most war. Even in *Which Way to Peace?* (1936), the book Russell was most ashamed of, the argument was "as ever, the application of Russell's brand of utilitarianism, where 'civilization' rather than 'happiness' is the supreme goal, and 'civilization' embraces the search for knowledge, the cultivation of passionate relationships, the development of art, music and literature. To these everything else is instrumental. Russell was as ready as Machiavelli to employ violent means to preserve civilization if they would work" (Ryan 1988, p. 145). Indeed, as Russell's other major political gaffe, his recommendation of a preventive war against the Soviet Union, ought to suggest, he was more than willing to urge war if the likely benefits were great enough. As Ryan makes clear, Russell the consequentialist had some difficulty taking the "just war" doctrine seriously.

Similarly, Russell was scarcely a dogmatic socialist (see also Harrison 1986). Indeed, his socialism was often of a piece with his views on war; capitalism was bad not only because it "makes too many people work too hard at boring work in order to enrich the few" and fosters

34. The two volumes of *Bertrand Russell's America* (1973, 1983a) reflect, as their title suggests, only one vein of Russell's commentary, though it is a very rich one.

possessive impulses and desires, but because it is likely to lead to war. World government and the end of nationalism might be best, but such policies must also be weighed by their likely consequences. And inflamed though his rhetoric often was, Russell found it very hard to be certain that his estimate of the consequences was correct: "I have imagined myself in turn a Liberal, a Socialist, or a Pacifist, but I have never been any of these things, in any profound sense. Always the skeptical intellect, when I have most wished it silent, has whispered doubts to me, has cut me off from the facile enthusiasms of others, and has transported me into a desolate solitude" (Russell 1969, p. 38).

But one of the great merits of Ryan's book is that it manages both to bring out (and make somewhat sympathetic) the polemical nature of many of Russell's views on policy, and to situate these against a very cogent, appealing intepretation of what Russell saw as the broader social concerns that set the twentieth century apart and called for new (though still broadly utilitarian) analyses. It is in his discussions of Russell's books *Power* (1938), *Freedom and Organization, 1814–1914* (1934), and *The Scientific Outlook* (1931), that Ryan best succeeds in capturing the middle-range principles that structured Russell's moral and political positions, even if, as Ryan suggests, Russell vacillated between Realpolitik and a habitual utopian appeal "to immensely exalted considerations as the first premises of the politics of change—as if governments were to be estimated by their success in promoting that sense of communion with an impersonal god that Spinoza called freedom or blessedness" (Ryan 1988, p. 84).

As Ryan explains, Russell

> was obsessed with the relationship between freedom and orga-
> nization. Moreover, he thought that the currency of politics was
> power—not, like most socialists, the ownership of property, though
> property certainly mattered. Russell thought that the basis of
> power in civilized societies was opinion—partly because anyone
> wanting to achieve changes of any kind depends upon knowledge
> of the necessary techniques to do so, partly because getting the
> cooperation of others depends on persuasion, which is directly
> a matter of opinion, or coercion, which depends on opinion,
> though less directly, to the degree that it requires people to
> believe that cooperation is in their interests and non-cooperation
> is not. The role of knowledge also encouraged him to place the
> discussion of socialism in the context of the impact of science on
> society—to refer to yet another of his books. [Ryan 1988, pp.
> 84–85]

Russell was ever concerned with "how to preserve life and liveliness against narrowness, oppression, debility, and death," and apart from war, the great threat to freedom was, for him, modern mass organization supported by scientific technique. Science, while it could free mankind

from slavery to nature, might also serve the causes of authoritarianism, rendering the latter more historically effective than ever. In *The Scientific Outlook* (1931), Russell paints a picture of the technocratic brave new world that could come to pass, a combination of American productivity and Russian authoritarianism, run by an administrative elite devoted to tranquil totalitarianism. He at first presents this as a vision of the new utopia, only later revealing it to be the nightmare of the contemporary era. As Ryan notes, Russell with some justice believed that Aldous Huxley had stolen his ideas.

Many of the same themes run through *Freedom and Organization* and *Power*. The former is basically a historical account of how the nineteenth century produced the crisis of organization versus freedom; the latter is a more analytical approach to the nature of power, stressing the pervasiveness of power in social life and the diversity of forms that it can assume.[35] With some exaggeration, though not too much, Ryan claims that Russell's development of this line of argument has been underrated:

> In the 1960s writers such as Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas accused Anglo-American empiricism of complicity in the creation of a technocratic universe; like Russell, they argued that technocracy was philosophically shallow and confused the ability to manipulate people and things with a deep understanding of them. Like Russell, they thought that something very like dictatorship by manipulation was consistent with a politics based on giving people what they thought they wanted, a politics of bread and circuses. Like him, they thought that science, properly understood, contained in its practice values of a less crassly utilitarian kind than those which the "affluent society" had elevated to its supreme principles. Where *The Scientific Outlook* is brisk, lucid, overstated and entertaining, *One-dimensional Man* is lumbering, turgid and scholastic; none the less, it is not far-fetched to see most of what is worthwhile in the latter scattered among the abundant insights of the former. [Ryan 1988, p. 135]

Russell's favored antidote, of course, was a world of creative, zestful individuals, a world of compossible aims. Against a world of conflicting, stunted desires,

> The remedy is hard to practice but less hard to discern; a wide and optimistic education so that a happy childhood leaves no grudges festering in the adult mind, a search for useful work,

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35. For an intelligent and appreciative, though highly critical, account of Russell's book, *Power*, see Knight (1939). The upshot of Knight's criticism is that the "clear purport of the work is that both economic and political power are bad and, therefore, economic relations are to be replaced by political, but without the intervention of 'politics'!" (Knight 1939, p. 285). Knight's criticism has been echoed by many, and Ryan probably does as much as anyone heretofore to provide a Russellian response.

and the restoration of democracy to the world of work, avoiding both the oligarchical organization of capitalism and the bureaucratic tyranny that socialism had turned out in Soviet practice. Liberal democratic politics are not perfect, but—in this anticipating Popper's defense of democracy—Russell thought liberal democracy embodied a version of the true scientific spirit, institutionalizing the means of detecting errors and making new experiments in social and political organization. [Ryan 1988, p. 154]

Not to mention the avoidance of nuclear war.

It is surely a rare individual who can be celebrated for anticipating both Marcuse and Popper, as if Russell's psyche enjoyed its own internal positivist dispute in German sociology. No doubt Ryan's attempts to burnish the reputation of his subject will strike many as somewhat strained. But Russell's Millian celebration of a critical, scientific attitude as an antidote for fanaticism in politics and elsewhere had as its other side the unique perspective of a man whose life had been a struggle to retain something of his Victorian optimism and hope in the face of the oppressive technocracy and chillingly efficient, mechanized slaughter of the twentieth century. Power generally, and the power of science in particular, in its often sinister uses was the problem of political sociology as far as Russell was concerned. In Ryan's view, Russell's "strength is that he makes power and organization central issues of social analysis, not property and social class. This saves him from expecting too much from socialism, from wondering why the Soviet experiment failed or why the working class keeps on refusing to revolt in the way Marxists expect it to" (Ryan 1988, p. 101). Moreover, this concern leads him to the central dilemma of "how to secure sufficient organization to restrain mankind from self-destruction and enable us to live comfortably and well without creating so many constraints that we end up cramped and anxious, incapable of spontaneous happiness. This is exactly the dilemma that any libertarian socialist must take seriously; it is to Russell's credit that he does so, and to the discredit of most Marxists that they either ignore it, equivocate about the nature of freedom, or relegate its achievement to some far distant date. This side of Russell's work is, to my mind, admirable" (Ryan 1988, pp. 101–2). Russell's struggles with this dilemma form the central theme of Louis Greenspan's useful little book, *The Incompatible Prophecies: Bertrand Russell on Science and Liberty* (1978), which nicely brings out both Russell's ambivalence toward science and the degree to which this ambivalence distanced him from his utilitarian forebears. Greenspan, too, thinks that it was no coincidence that Russell's "complex blend of the heroic individualism of the nineteenth century and a future-oriented socialism" was well suited to the sixties. "The New Left, with its libertarian socialism, was in significant respects closer to Russell's ideal of the

good society than the more orthodox liberal technocrats" (Greenspan 1978, pp. 29, 27).

And so, in the end, this is the problematic that the Principle of Growth turned out to involve. As Wollheim maintains, when "we look to see what kind of society Russell thought was desirable for the re-alization of the Principle of Growth, we find that every proposal that he made follows directly from psychological considerations. Every change in institutions that he recommended was designed either to curb the lust for power or to provide the freedom necessary for the cultivation of creativity or directly to stimulate creativity" (Wollheim 1974, p. 217). This seems right, and it marks the strength and weakness of Russell's approach. He is forever casting his analyses in terms of individual psychology—"I think that most current discussions of politics and political theory take insufficient account of psychology"—and avoiding the sticky question of how different packages of compossible desires in different strategic situations might complicate his argument. The extrapolation from intrapsychic to interpsychic harmony is often very hasty, reflecting just one recipe for human flourishing, and often strangely apolitical, with little of Sidgwick's sense of how the present state of humanity may hedge in its possibilities (see, e.g., Knight 1939). This reduction of politics to psychology was the enduring legacy of his struggle to come to grips with the mass irrationality of World War I (see Russell 1956b, p. 33).

The bleakest side of Russell's politics is his sometimes despairing elitism. In rather too classical utilitarian fashion, he occasionally wondered whether the vast bulk of mankind did not in fact require a brave new world, whether his own view of happiness was not unsuitable for the herd. Certainly, his own experience of the jingoism and bigotry of mass politics could well have led him to fear for the fate of free, creative thought, though it is hard to see why his experience of academic politics would have been any more reassuring. Especially worrisome, for Ryan, is Russell's belief in eugenics and his suggestion that one Darwin was worth thirty million ordinary working men and women. Russell often made it clear that if the contest were between democracy and civilization, he would take the latter. There is considerable irony in the fact that the man who did so much to turn twentieth century philosophy into an inaccessible technical discipline could communicate so effectively with the wider public and insist that it was the duty of philosophers and scientists to make their most important ideas accessible. But, it seems that he never really questioned the distinction between serious work and popularization, and in some moods he rather despised the public for requiring the latter.[36] It is an issue that Blackwell politely,

36. It is in this region that pragmatist critics of Russell's politics might find more to which to object. Unfortunately, Barber (1988) largely misses the interesting problems. Hampshire (1989) doubts that there is much of a problem. Harrison (1989) is also

but widely, side-steps and that Ryan agonizes over but leaves unre-
solved—perhaps wisely so, since Russell did seem fundamentally torn
between his love for mankind in the abstract and his distaste for it in the
particular. How many Spinozas could we have? Or even Whitmans?

However, Russell's murkier depths and divided soul are much on
display in Andrew Brink's *Bertrand Russell: The Psychobiography of a
Moralist.* Brink's psychobiographical study—which is heavily indebted
to various going schools of psychodynamics, especially "attachment"
analysis—apparently resulted from the conversion that he underwent
while working as an editor on the *Collected Papers* project, when his
study of hundreds of Russell's early letters convinced him that the
flesh and blood Russell differed "even from the *Autobiography*" (Brink
1989, p. 6). Russell "was never the rationalist he wanted to be," Brink
argues, somewhat breathlessly (Brink 1989, p. 3).

According to Brink, the "chief difficulty in thinking about Russell
the social and sexual reformer is the discrepancy between his high-
minded ethical aims—for instance in assisting the Suffrage Move-
ment—and the cruel outcomes of his marriages and Don Juan ad-
ventures" (Brink 1989, p. 6). Even if we concede that Russell "sincerely
wanted a better world"—which Brink's account of his motives can
scarcely be said to do—he went wrong in "simplifying human nature,
in wishful thinking about progressive possibilities apart from a radical
critique of how individuals develop in the maternal, familial, and social
nexuses." Thus, Brink continues, Russell was too much "a nineteenth-
century progressivist" who

> failed to notice that the social sciences, and especially psycho-
> analysis, would force a revision of how we look upon the possibilities
> of human fulfilment, individually and in groups. His public op-
> timism about human nature, unwarranted in the form it took,
> needs reconsidering against the background of his obsessive de-
> structiveness in relationships. Russell's depressiveness made him
> acutely sensitive to human suffering on the large scale, but his
> controlling, competitive, obsessional defense, when used in more
> proximal relations, whether in winning arguments or leaving
> intimate relations with women, inflicted cruelties he could never
> explain. [Brink 1989, p. 7]

Brink believes that he can explain them, and he goes on to paint
a picture of a Russell who was "a needy little boy" for his entire life,

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interesting on this score; he takes Ryan to task for making "The Individual the lynchpin
of Liberalism without disclosing how often he is simply carrying the claims of a particular
social type who may or may not deserve to be freed from restraints" and for failing to
"relate Russell to the tradition of the Left-Wing Intellectual" (Harrison 1989, p. 70).
His remarks on Russell's depiction of the demise of English Liberalism (Harrison 1989,
p. 68) are instructive, but, contrary to what he supposes, consistent with Ryan's general
argument.

unable to articulate his deepest feelings, which had to do with the "loneliness of the heart that had suffered childhood abandonment" (Russell's parents having both died when he was a child) and "retributive emotions about being imprisoned by women"—again, his grandmother (Brink 1989, p. 161). Brink holds that

> we can infer that in early life he built up an obsessional control system to deal with his grandmother's manipulations, a system which became part of Russell's personality. His obsessional control system became a means of dealing with an active recurring sense that the presence of women must be guarded against to prevent impingement, despite a wish for close relations with them. Conventional morality did not give the freedom to pursue such a strategy. . . . Much of Russell's creative writing on morality . . . attempts to justify an anti-Victorian permissiveness. Like many of the Bloomsbury set, he advocated "creativity" in a love relationship—"spiritual" attachment to a woman—over a feared "possessiveness" by her. But if he thus lent his force to a powerful surge of cultural change, and if he had a profound impact upon the twentieth-century mind, we must also bear in mind the extent to which his creativity was loss-induced and of the obsessional variety. [Brink 1989, p. 32]

As for Spinoza, the intellectual love of god was too rarefied to help Russell with his emotional needs (his religious needs and emotional isolation), and his attachment to this ethic, especially during his relationship with Lady Ottoline Morrell, had been "mainly wishful thinking, an attempt to escape inner pain" (Brink 1989, p. 90). In fact, according to Brink, Russell's "four marriages, numerous liaisons, and propaganda for easier divorce seem to cancel from the record his earlier mysticism. He became captive of an anti-Spinozistic sexual passion, almost a caricature Don Juan adrift in a world without moral bearings. He could find no justification for other than a relativistic ethics" (Brink 1989, p. 91).

One could view this argument—to the effect that "Russell's transformation from sexual mystic . . . into propagandist and sexual politician signals his emergence as spokesman for a new psychoclass"—as providing some rather oblique support for Ryan's downplaying of the Spinozistic element in Russell's thought and Blackwell's recognition that Russell's Spinozism is compromised by his celebration of "strong emotion"—though this is perhaps not quite what they had in mind.

Although Brink has certainly done some valuable work on Russell in connection with the *Collected Papers* project, he does not do himself justice with this book. Russell's personal relationships undoubtedly left a great deal to be desired (neither liberals nor socialists should ever be so cruel—or so disgusting), and there may well be something to the notion that his grandmother warped him, but Brink's psychobiography is so resolutely and crudely reductionist and so uninformed

by any philosophical analysis of Russell's arguments that it reads like one long aspersion.[37] One wishes that Russell were around to deal with it as such.

V

Of the works considered, Ryan's surely best serves Russell's memory, though the others are, in their various ways, helpful. In the end, Ryan's attitude seems appropriate in the main—Russell's ethical and political works do have many points of genuine intellectual interest, whether one is a Rortyean pragmatist, Nagelian realist, or, like Dummett, a believer in philosophy as both foundational and technical. If these works often tended to be impatient and rough in execution, it is nevertheless surprising how often they contained real insights that would be picked up and developed at greater length in the work of others. His various metaethical views (including his emotivism and emphasis on universalizability), his (indirect) utilitarianism of compossible desires, and his account of the impact of science on society all testify to this. Perhaps the most maddening thing about Russell's moral and political writings is precisely that they were always strewn with insights waiting to be developed. But as Ryan remarks of Russell's ethical writings: "Russell's scheme is sketchy and undeveloped. The explanation is not discreditable, however. Once he had drawn the initial sharp line between genuinely philosophical inquiries and the realm of advocacy and persuasion, he was so unsure that there was anything worth saying about moral philosophy, and so passionate in innumerable good causes, that he turned away from philosophical ethics to a lifetime of advocacy and persuasion, though with some residual unease" (Ryan 1988, p. 49).

As Russell put it, "It is, in fact, not by ethical theory, but by the cultivation of large and generous desires through intelligence, happiness, and freedom from fear, that men can be brought to act more than they do at present in a manner that is consistent with the general happiness of mankind" (Russell 1935, pp. 254–55). In this respect, it is noteworthy that the first Russell lecturer was Noam Chomsky, whose cogent political writings perhaps reflect a similar skepticism about the value of professional philosophy (or social science) when setting out the gross cruelties and inanities of contemporary political life—cruelties and inanities that are frequently so plain, once they have accidently found their way into the media, that they can only be obscured by difficult and advanced training in philosophy and social science (Chomsky 1971). Surely Russell would have approved.

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37. For a somewhat less provocative, though still very damning, account of Russell's failings in his personal relationships, see B. Harrison (1984). See also Wood (1957), p. 202, on the limits of Russell's feminism.

No one, I think, will come away from these recent books with the impression that *Marriage and Morals* is in the same league as *Principia Mathematica* after all. But they do collectively yield the impression that there is more to some of Russell's ethical and political writings than the conventional wisdom would allow. And the political life itself is, to be sure, a fascinating one.

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