THE CONTRIBUTION OF PHILOSOPHY TO
MORAL AND POLITICAL THEORY IN
THE WORKS OF BERTRAND RUSSELL

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The thesis is dedicated to my late father, for whom, in a very real sense, the work was done.

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NOTE REGARDING REFERENCES

Much of Russell's work appeared originally in the form of articles or edited lectures, which were later gathered together and published in book form, with the title of the book taken from one of the articles. Consequently a single book can contain pieces written at intervals over as much as fifty years. Like many of his critics, I consider it essential to examine Russell's work in its chronological context, and I have thus found it very irritating to come across quotations and references in which only the title, date and page number of the relevant book are given. This has necessitated obtaining a copy of the book in question, and looking up the reference, in order to establish the date and title of the article itself.

To avoid this confusion, wherever a quotation is taken from a book of collected essays, the title and the date (if known) of the essay itself is given in the reference, together with brief details of the book in which the essay has been published. In the bibliography, full-length books by Russell are listed first, and then, under the heading "Articles and Essays by Bertrand Russell", full details are given of the books of collected essays, and the most important of the essays are listed under the books in which they appear.
CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION ............................................ 1
Russell's life and circumstances ................... 22
Method of approach ..................................... 31

CHAPTER TWO
RUSSELL'S EARLY REALISM ................................ 36
Reaction against idealism ............................ 37
Relations ........................................ 42
Truth ............................................ 53
Objectivity in ethics ................................ 63
Social and political writings ....................... 82

CHAPTER THREE
LOGICAL ATOMISM AS PHILOSOPHY AND METHOD ........ 88
Analysis of language ................................ 89
Ethics and emotions .................................. 107
War and society .................................... 121

CHAPTER FOUR
NEUTRAL MONISM AS THE PATH TO BEHAVIOURIST ETHICS .......... 134
Russell's neutral monism ............................ 138
Ethics and behaviourism ................................ 155
Values and education .................................. 165

CHAPTER FIVE
RETREAT FROM STRICT EMPIRICISM ................. 179
Inference .......................................... 179
Inference as practice and habit .................... 182
Cause and effect .................................... 188
Simplicity .......................................... 191
Alternatives to inference ............................ 193
Probability .......................................... 196
Rationality in ethics ................................ 199
Existing ethical theory ................................ 204
Reason and passion .................................. 208
Ethics in practice .................................... 220
Dogmatic social ethics ................................ 220
Utilitarianism as a rational social ethic ........... 229
The value of the individual ......................... 236

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION .............................................. 244

Appendix ............................................... 254

Bibliography .............................................. 257
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As the title suggests, this thesis seeks to examine the part played by philosophy in moral and political theory. The central question posed is this: can - or indeed, should - philosophy have anything to say about our social and political behaviour? Can a socio-political theory be drawn from a clearly defined philosophical stance, or do the socio-political circumstances themselves influence and dictate the philosophy?

A philosopher does not, one must assume, question the value and relevance of his subject; but to the layman, the word 'philosophy' often suffers from wide and varied interpretation - interpretation so vague, in fact, as to remove philosophy altogether from every day life, and to place it at a great distance, as a subject reserved - to take a generous view - for those whose intellectual abilities equip them especially for the task, or (to the cynic) for those whose inabilities on a more practical level rule out their participation in the more useful, and therefore important, aspects of life. Even among the highly educated, there is often little respect to be found for the philosopher. He is dismissed as an ivory tower academic who is perhaps tolerated only because his work, although it has no practical and useful effect upon the world, at least refrains from positive interference in the more significant aspects of daily living.

This thesis aims to dispel such illusions, by placing philosophy very firmly in the centre of the social and political context, and by analysing the interaction between the two. Although, for reasons stated below, the thesis is based almost wholly upon the work of Bertrand Russell (in both philosophy and socio-political theory), the interaction between these two fields of study may be better demonstrated, as an introductory measure, by selecting one or two examples of current political thought, and examining
very briefly their philosophical roots. This, it is hoped, may serve to clarify precisely the kind of connections we are looking for.

Plenty of examples can be found in the general election campaign in Britain in the weeks prior to May 3, 1979, in which the electorate was offered a choice of two major parties, and a small number of minor ones. That the outcome of the election would affect the layman is beyond doubt; it would affect his income, his job prospects, his rate of taxation, cost of living, education of his children, cost of medical care etc. These are some of the direct practical issues which would influence the way he cast his vote, and all party speeches and manifestos were aimed at convincing him that he would be better off with the policies of the particular parties they represented. The ideologies underlying the election campaign made extravagant and exclusive claims, and it must be assumed that the parliamentary candidates themselves remained for the most part convinced of the validity of these claims. However, the manner in which the politicians presented their policy propositions reflects an interesting variety of philosophical views on the question of belief. In the first place, each party invariably made appeal to fact; they produced statistics—often confusing and conflicting statistics—to 'prove' that inflation, unemployment, cost of living etc. had risen while the opposing party was in power, and fallen during their own governments. In part, therefore, at least, they committed themselves to the philosophical view that there is such a thing as objective truth, and that the electorate would be able to judge rationally of this, and would be satisfied with nothing less. They urged the voter to make his own purely empirical study of the evidence (using, of course, the statistics they provided), and to reach a rational decision on the basis of these facts.

However, they also resorted to propaganda of an ever-increasing
professionalism and expertise, and such propaganda need not necessarily be objectively true. There have been one or two occasions within the past few years when the inaccuracy of such propaganda has come to light, to the considerable embarrassment of the parties concerned. Mr. James Prior, for example, some time after the election of Mr. Heath's Conservative government, confessed that the Prime Minister's undertaking to cut prices "at a stroke" had been no more than an election slogan, and was not intended to be taken seriously; and more recently, an elderly lady who had been the subject of a Conservative television broadcast protested loudly and publicly that a wholly false picture had been painted of her financial situation. The fact that the Labour Party did not choose to make enormous political capital out of these two incidents was due, it was suggested at the time, to caution in the light of an old proverb concerning pots and kettles. Furthermore, the Conservative voters, who might justifiably have felt betrayed by these two apparent misrepresentations of the facts, have not in consequence refrained en masse from voting Conservative. Whether they felt that this was no more than a small and forgiveable indiscretion, or whether they consoled themselves with the argument that empirical evidence is not the only criterion for judgement of election issues, is not known. The fact remains, however, that by the use of propaganda which may be wholly or partly false, both major parties (and no doubt the minor ones also) privately commit themselves to an altogether different conception of 'truth' which is founded upon emotion and feeling on the part of the believer, rather than upon objective fact. They are well aware, to put it bluntly, that skillful public relations and propaganda campaigns can persuade the electorate that what they say is 'true'; and the electorate, for their part, have seemed quite willing to be persuaded that the 'truth' lies in what they prefer to believe. Questions of 'truth' have been a major
concern of philosophy, and examinations of different philosophical views on this subject will feature largely in this thesis.

A second example may also be taken from the 1979 election campaign, this time concerning a particular issue: law and order. Both major parties recognized that increase in crime represents a major social problem, and both presented solutions. The Conservatives planned to increase the severity of the punishment in an attempt to deter would-be offenders, while the Labour Party planned to concentrate more on alleviating the conditions which give rise to crime and violence, in order to make the straight-and-narrow a more comfortable path to travel down. In this instance, both parties based their views on a similar philosophy - behaviourism. Behaviourism - to give a very brief preview - is primarily a psychological notion based on a neutral monist philosophy. Neutral monism argues that there is far less of a difference between 'mind' and 'matter' than has traditionally been supposed, and behaviourist psychology takes the argument one step further by demonstrating the manner in which physical and material conditions in life can, to a very large extent, be held responsible for behaviour (in humans and in animals) which was previously thought to be the result of mental processes.

Bertrand Russell describes one such demonstrative experiment conducted by Pavlov, who

.... put a dog in front of two doors, on one of which he had drawn an ellipse and on the other a circle. If the dog chose the right door he got his dinner; if he chose the wrong one he got an electric shock. Thus stimulated, the dog's progress in geometry was amazingly rapid. 1

Whether or not it is ethically desirable - or perhaps 'tasteful' would be a better word - to draw analogies between Pavlov's dogs and the

behaviour of human beings, need not concern us at this stage; the ethical implications of neutral monism, and the reluctance, in particular on the part of committed Christians, to accept them, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. The analogies can, nevertheless, be easily drawn: the Conservatives proposed to increase the voltage received on choosing the wrong door - the door to crime and violence; and the Labour Party intended perhaps to scatter tasty morsels around the door to law and order as a means of encouraging the right choice.1

With or without analogies, however, it can be clearly seen that this very real, every-day problem has its roots in philosophical ideas about the causes of man's behaviour.

This brief excursion into current political problems and their philosophical implications has indicated the sort of issue with which this thesis will be concerned. However, although the two philosophical notions already mentioned - the mind/matter dichotomy, and the subjectivity or objectivity of 'truth' - are among the most important to which philosophers, past and present, have applied their minds and their pens,

1. The Conservatives, who have adopted the 19th century liberal view of the benefits of self-help, which assumes a responsibility on the part of each man for his own actions and argues, therefore, that criminal tendencies are a question of deliberate choice rather than of misfortunes in upbringing and early environment, may be surprised to discover that the very methods they have advocated to combat this social problem seem to presuppose a commitment to the essential 'social' message of behaviourist and neutral monist philosophy - the superiority of environmental influences. The Conservative policies are not, one must assume, motivated by a spirit of revenge; they propose to alter the environmental influences (by making punishment, or threat of punishment, more severe) in the firm conviction that this will in fact deter would-be offenders. Thus it could be argued that they differ from the Labour Party not in the basic assumption that environment wields considerable influence upon men, but merely in their choice of which particular aspect of the environment they wish to change. Both parties advocate reform which is based on behaviourist psychology. Discouraging people from behaving badly, and encouraging them to behave well, are two sides of what is essentially the same coin.
they are by no means the only aspects of philosophy which are of interest and relevance to political and social theory. It is therefore necessary, at the outset, to establish more precisely what is meant by philosophy, what fields of study it covers, what questions it raises and what answers - if any - it offers.

Definitions of 'philosophy' are legion, and vary enormously. They range from fairly broad generalisations to detailed lists of the precise issues. Russell, for example, tells us that philosophy is ".... something intermediate between theology and science".,\(^1\) neither a matter of fact nor of belief, but something between the two. Alan Ryan confirms that philosophical questions "are not first-order or factual questions"; they are instead "second-order or conceptual questions".\(^2\) This gives a clearer definition, since instead of a vague "something" between theology and science, we now define that "something" as a "concept" - or several "concepts". Again, however, the notion of "concept" is too wide and all-encompassing to be of any great use, and we must further inquire what type of concept philosophy is concerned with, and in what manner does it concern itself. F.H. Peterson provides a large part of the answer to the first of these two questions by arguing that philosophy is ".... a long and sustained enquiry into the meaning of existence".\(^3\) Certainly the meaning of existence has been the subject of inquiry from Descartes onwards, but the doubts raised by Descartes concerning his own existence spread and enlarged other fields of philosophy. Russell argues, elsewhere, that philosophy discusses certain problems which "raise doubts concerning

what commonly passes for knowledge"; but the areas of doubt will themselves vary, since "the definition of 'philosophy' will vary according to the philosophy we adopt". One's own personal views, therefore, will influence the choice of questions for philosophical analysis. Ayer confirms this when he argues, first, that philosophy "aims at yielding knowledge", and then qualifies this by adding, "or .... at least comprises propositions which their authors wish us to accept as true". Ayer then goes on, however, to give examples of the many branches of philosophical study; he lists structure of reality (Peterson's "existence", perhaps), ethics, theory of knowledge and logic; and John Passmore adds to this list metaphysics, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, social philosophy and philosophy of law.

In the light of these - and many other - 'definitions' of philosophy, and in the light of examination of Russell's own writings - which at one time or another covered all the aspects of philosophy mentioned above and several more (linguistics, for example), and at the risk of oversimplification, the following categorisation is offered. Philosophical study seems to be divisible into two major areas - the one a purely theoretical intellectual exercise, 'academic' in the layman's sense of the word; and the other more active and more practical, and more directly relevant to life.

This division is, in a sense, a specifically twentieth century one. Philosophies of past centuries have aimed in general to combine both elements, to give theoretical backing to a view of how society ought, in an ethical sense, to be organised - to be, in other words, both

2. Ibid. p. 1.
theoretical and practical. Hobbes, Locke, Carlyle, Marx and Mill, for example, all held definite views on what the practice ought to be, and provided the theory in an attempt to justify these views. But the philosophers of the twentieth century who have followed Russell—particularly, of course, the school of linguistic analysis—tend to preserve and to emphasise the distinction. Logical positivism denies a connection between ideas and reality, and concentrates on the purely theoretical philosophy in isolation from the context of society and circumstances. As we shall see in Chapter Three, Wittgenstein went so far as to conclude that analysis of language led not only to inability to express views on the nature and aims of society, but finally and inevitably to inability to express anything whatsoever.

Russell's criticisms of Wittgenstein's pessimistic conclusions might lead us to suppose that Russell himself favoured a more nineteenth century approach, that is, that he believed that philosophy ought to be both descriptive and prescriptive; and yet his most virulent criticisms contradict this supposition, since they are levelled specifically at the pre-twentieth century philosophies, and in particular at the manner in which pre-twentieth century philosophers had tended to manipulate the theoretical aspects to suit the practical and ethical conclusions they wished to reach. Thus Russell's own position as a philosopher is a little ambiguous. He represents a watershed between nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy in this very specific manner: he attacked nineteenth century philosophy with twentieth century method. It is very evident from Russell's ethical writing that his personal predisposition was towards a nineteenth century view in which philosophy not only can but must tell us something about how, in an ethical and practical sense, we ought to live our lives; he himself needs, and strives to find, theoretical justification for his own views and values. The British
tradition of pragmatism which happily and easily distinguishes philosophy from day to day political and social problems was not sufficient, and nor, in later years, was the ivory tower existence of the analytical school. He was nevertheless dissatisfied with the nineteenth century tendency to utilise the theoretical aspects of a philosophy as no more than a means to an end. It was in order to avoid this kind of manipulation that Russell devised and refined his new method, which itself gave rise to the new philosophical trends of the twentieth century.

We shall see that Russell's unique position in modern philosophy gave rise to problems which he found almost insurmountable. At some stages in his philosophical career - as, for example, when he was concentrating on the development of Logical Atomism, and when he was analysing the philosophy of neutral monism - he adopted a twentieth century view by advocating new methods, and then found later, to his distress, that he could not then find his way back to accepting with any certainty a philosophy which offered values as well as theory. Pre-twentieth century philosophy was, in Russell's opinion, of the all-encompassing 'grand plan' variety which, although attractive, was subject to error because of lack of sound analysis; the twentieth century philosophy provided the new method of analysis and the precision and clarity which destroyed the 'grand plan'. Russell's misfortune, and the cause of many of his philosophical problems, was that he attempted to find a new and better 'grand plan' using new and better twentieth century method.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, however, and in the aftermath of the schools of linguistic analysis, the distinction between the theoretical and the practical in philosophy holds greater significance. The theoretical element, that which does not - or need not - so directly influence and affect daily life, concerns knowledge in general: what we know - about our own existence or that of other people; about the 'physical'
and 'mental' phenomena of the universe (tables and chairs, ideas and thoughts); about those phenomena which appear neither entirely physical nor entirely mental (sound-waves, light-waves, notions of space and time); about the way in which we express—more or less adequately—what we know in terms of language; about the certainty or uncertainty of our 'knowledge' of these things; and finally—but in the light of this thesis perhaps the most significant in this category—about the methods we use to discover, with greater or lesser degree of precision, what it is that we know.

Russell himself puts great emphasis on method. In an essay on "Logical Atomism" written in 1924, he makes it quite clear that what he regards as fundamental in philosophy is not arguments about, say, realism versus idealism, but the logic used in supporting them.¹ Passmore, by including in his list of the branches of philosophy, the philosophy of religion and law, and social philosophy (and again, such a list could be expanded almost indefinitely, with the addition of philosophy of science, mathematics, history or any other discipline), seems to imply that the philosophical element involved here is the method of analysis, the way of looking at other subjects which are already clearly defined as disciplines in their own right. In "Logical Atomism" Russell pinpoints more exactly the methods he favours. He was very impressed with the progress made at the turn of the century in mathematics (by such noted mathematicians as Peano and Frege), and looked more closely at the methods by which this progress had been made:

As all these results were obtained, not by any heroic method, but by patient detailed reasoning, I began to think it probable that philosophy had erred in adopting heroic remedies.

for intellectual difficulties, and that solutions were to be found merely by greater care and accuracy. ¹

Indeed the search for a more accurate method of analysis occupied Russell for some years (see Chapter Three), and also occupied many subsequent philosophers who made use of methods devised and clarified by Russell. Thus method of analysis must be included in this first category of philosophic study.

To label this type of inquiry 'purely theoretical' is perhaps to do it an injustice, in this sense: although philosophical study of issues such as these does not directly and intentionally affect man's daily life, nevertheless it does exert influence in ways more subtle and indirect, and over a long period of time. One way in which this is clearly demonstrated is the fact that many disciplines which now have a title in their own right were previously covered by the term 'philosophy'. Russell expresses very concisely this defence, as it were, of the use and relevance of philosophy in an essay specifically entitled "Philosophy for Laymen", which deserves to be quoted at length:

It is often said that philosophy is unprogressive, but this is largely a verbal matter: as soon as a way is found of arriving at definite knowledge on some ancient question, the new knowledge is counted as belonging to 'science', and 'philosophy' is deprived of the credit. In Greek times, and down to the time of Newton, planetary theory belonged to 'philosophy', because it was uncertain and speculative, but Newton took the subject out of the realm of the free play of hypothesis, and made it one requiring a different type of skill from that which it had required when it was still open to fundamental doubts. Anaximander, in the sixth century BC, had a theory of evolution, and maintained that men are descended from fishes. This was philosophy because it was a speculation unsupported by detailed evidence, but Darwin's theory of evolution was science, because it was based on the succession of forms of life as found in fossils, and upon the distribution of animals and plants in many parts of the world. A man might say, with enough truth to justify a joke: 'Science is what we know, and philosophy is what we don't

¹ Ibid., p. 324.
know'. But it should be added that philosophical speculation as to what we do not yet know has shown itself a valuable preliminary to exact scientific knowledge. The guesses of the Pythagoreans in astronomy, of Anaximander and Empedocles in biological evolution, and of Democritus as to the atomic constitution of matter, provided the men of science in later times with hypotheses which, but for the philosophers, might never have entered their heads. We may say that, on its theoretical side, philosophy consists, at least in part, in the framing of large general hypotheses which science is not yet in a position to test; but when it becomes possible to test the hypotheses they become, if verified, a part of science, and cease to count as 'philosophy'.

In Human Society in Ethics and Politics he expresses much the same view, but at a more general and also a more immediate and short-term level, in that he is concerned not only with the gradual emergence of what we call 'disciplines', but also with other more day-to-day issues: "Many fundamental discoveries", he argues, "have been the accidental reward of restless curiosity".

And if the layman is still dubious as to the value or relevance of philosophic inquiry, Russell elsewhere puts the case for the defence on a more individual basis. In a later (1959) essay on "The Expanding Mental Universe", he advocates an expansion of feeling and emotion to correspond with the ever-expanding physical universe:

Those who are aware of the cosmos as science has shown it to be have to stretch their imaginations both in space and in time to an extent which was unknown in former ages, and which to many in our time is bewilderingly painful.

Painful as this might be, attempts to understand other philosophies as well as "the cosmos" serve a useful purpose: "Practice in appreciating these different world pictures stretches the mind and makes it more receptive of new and perhaps fruitful hypotheses".

However, if the layman persists in the view that there is little in philosophy to interest him, the inclusion of ethics as a branch of philosophy should amply serve to quell all remaining doubt. Ethics is the undeniably active element in philosophy, in that social and political theories all have at root an ethical viewpoint. In some issues the ethical or 'moral' element is very obvious - abortion, for example, equal rights for women, racial prejudice and freedom of speech, collective versus individual responsibility. But even where the moral or ethical element is not so obvious, it would not be inaccurate to state that almost every issue discussed in Parliament, and certainly every issue which finds its way onto the statute book, concerns questions of what is right and what is wrong. Indeed the legal system itself, in Britain and elsewhere, exists primarily to define and clarify in law the moral or immoral, ethical or unethical, right or wrong actions of the members of the society for whom it exists.

Russell himself sees philosophy as having declined in social and political importance since the end of the Middle Ages: "the correlation between philosophy and political opinions", he argues, "grows less definite as we advance".¹ Also at times he becomes so disillusioned about the extent to which already established ethical and moral prejudices intrude upon philosophy that he hesitates to include ethics as a branch of philosophy. However, he clearly feels that one of the roles of philosophy is to provide a guide to daily living. Its two-fold purpose is defined as providing, on the one hand, a "theoretical understanding of the structure of the world", and, on the other, enabling us to "discover and inculcate the best possible way of life"². This is the area with

2. Bertrand Russell, "Philosophy for Laymen", op. cit., p. 34. (My italics.)
which this thesis will be primarily concerned, although it is necessary to stress at this early stage that the two categories into which philosophy has been, somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, divided, are by no means clearly delineated. There is an overlap, due largely to the fact—mentioned by Russell and Ayer above—that personal bias can confuse the issue by attempting to base an exhortation of an ethical nature on questions of the theoretical, the purely intellectual kind; by using the less obviously active, and therefore perhaps less questionable branches of philosophy as argument to encourage acceptance of a particular ethical or moral system. Russell points out that this has most often been the case at times of instability, or threat of instability:

Most philosophy has been a reaction against scepticism; it has arisen in ages when authority no longer sufficed to produce the socially necessary minimum of belief, so that nominally rational arguments had to be invented to secure the same result.¹

His inclusion here of the word "nominally" is sufficient indication of the caution he felt was necessary when tackling such subjects. "Philosophy", he argues, "if it is bad philosophy, may be dangerous, and therefore deserves that degree of negative respect which we accord to lightning and tigers".² But the skill with which philosophers have been able to make "bad" philosophy convincing renders them more dangerous than lightning and tigers. In an enjoyable, if irreverent, essay entitled "Philosophy's Ulterior Motives", Russell puts forward an apparently light-hearted redefinition of philosophy:

Philosophy has been defined as 'an unusually obstinate attempt to think clearly'; I should define it rather as 'an unusually ingenious attempt to think fallaciously'.³

2. Ibid., p. 454.
He gives examples of such fallacious thinking and the reasons behind it. Descartes, for example, despite promising beginnings, was subsequently led to produce work of a "slipshod and hasty" quality, influenced, Russell feels, by his caring about the truth of mathematics.\footnote{1} Leibniz produced two different sets of philosophical views, his "public" philosophy, which Russell feels was written specifically to please the House of Hanover — and this view is lent support by Russell's examination in detail, in his \textit{History of Western Philosophy}, of Leibniz's alternative philosophy, his second set of views, which remained hidden and secretive because it would, if expressed openly, have involved Leibniz in conflict with established views concerning the Church and determinism. And as for the ulterior motives of Hegel and Marx, Russell states:

To Hegel, at the head of his profession and revered by his compatriots, it was possible to regard the Prussian state as the goal towards which all previous efforts had been tending; but to Marx, poor, ill, and in exile, it was obvious that the world was not yet perfect.\footnote{2} Only David Hume escapes attack; Hume, says Russell, "the enfant terrible of philosophy, was peculiar in having no metaphysical ulterior motives".\footnote{3}

However, even the extreme flippancy of this essay cannot disguise the fact that there is a very real issue involved here, and it is one which Russell, with characteristic courage, chooses to bring out into the open. "The relation of philosophy to social conditions", he claims,

.... has usually been ignored by professional philosophers. Marxists are interested in philosophy as an effect, but do not recognize it as a cause. Yet plainly every important philosophy is both. Plato is in part an effect of the victory of Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, and is also in part among the causes of Christian theology. To treat him only in the former aspect is to make the growth of the

\footnote{1}{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 58.} \footnote{2}{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 66.} \footnote{3}{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 61-2.}
medieval church inexplicable. I am at present writing a history of Western philosophy from Thales to the present day, in which every important system is treated equally as an effect and as a cause of social conditions. 1

Russell's History of Western Philosophy, first published in 1946, was "from the moment of publication a runaway bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic". 2 Russell found the research for this book extremely interesting, and the history of thought and ideas seems to have appealed to him enormously in the latter half of his life. Freedom and Organisation 1814-1914 was published in 1934, and the largely historical Power in 1938, and these two, together with the massive History, constitute history "written in the large" and "held together by its point of view", as Russell believed all history should be. 3 The point of view expressed throughout the History is that the relation of philosophy and socio-political circumstances is one of "a reciprocal causation: the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy, but, conversely, their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances". 4 The scope of the book is vast: Russell begins, in fact before Thales (585 BC) by giving a brief survey of circumstances and philosophies in ancient Egypt and Babylon, and then proceeds through the centuries, identifying ideas, their origins, and their effect upon society, right up to the (then) present day. Although the book clearly had enormous popular appeal, it is a detailed and serious attempt to support arguments such as those irreverently expressed in the above-mentioned essay "Philosophy's Ulterior Motives" - and in this aim it certainly succeeds.

It is difficult to make a choice from the innumerable examples offered by Russell of the reciprocal influence of philosophy and socio-political circumstances without becoming involved in a never-ending succession of causes and effects, and thereby trivialising the argument as a whole by over-generalisation. Almost inevitably, a change of circumstances gives rise to a change of ideas, and the new ideas themselves influence the circumstances which follow - and so on, ad infinitum. The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, for example, would have been impossible without the preceding change of ideas regarding man as an individual; and the circumstances of 19th century industrial life in their turn gave rise eventually to new 20th century ideas regarding the role of the state in the lives of men. To say this, however, is to say no more than that a general pattern can be traced of developments throughout history; and it is not with this level of generality that Russell was concerned. His concern was with the particular rather than the general, with the particular thinker and his particular circumstances, rather than with the course of history as a whole. Thus in the History he gives us not merely a broad outline of developments, but a detailed picture of each of the most significant thinkers - or groups of thinkers - of the time, in the context of their individual circumstances. In this manner he points out the connections between philosophy and circumstances which modern philosophy sometimes attempts to deny.

Beginning, as he does, with the earliest recorded thinkers, Russell's History is concerned as much with religion as with what we would nowadays call 'philosophy'. Religion has in the past played a very significant role in society and what would now, in the 20th century, be termed philosophical problems, were in pre-Reformation days problems of theology. Views concerning the distinction between mind and matter, for example, were expressed in terms of bodily existence on earth, and future spiritual
existence in a life after death; the question of whether God was one, or God was three, provoked controversy in medieval theological debate of at least equal significance, in the context of medieval theology, as do questions concerning, say, the precise nature of physical objects in the context of modern philosophy. Furthermore, of course, religion featured largely in the lives of ordinary men, and indeed religious convictions still affect philosophical views today; therefore no history of philosophy would be complete without a discussion of the various religions that have wielded influence at different times.

The early Jewish religion provides many good examples of the effect of circumstances on the basic Jewish doctrines. Two particular instances in the history of the Jewish people had more easily identifiable effects: the first was the capture of Jerusalem in 586 BC, and the temporary removal (until 538 BC) of a large part of the population to Babylon. Previous to this event, although the god of the Israelites, Yahweh, had a special significance for them, yet "it was not denied that there were other gods, and their worship was habitual". But Jewish prophets protested against idolatry, and the period of captivity "was taken to justify the denunciations of the prophets. If Yahweh was all-powerful, and the Jews were his chosen people, their sufferings could only be explained by their wickedness". Belief in one God, together with other forms of exclusiveness, were firmly cemented as part of orthodox Jewish religion after the captivity, and were apparently far less strongly held by the Jews who had not been transported to Babylon. Later, in 170 BC, when the Jews strongly resisted the attempt of the Seleucid king Antiochus to hellenize all his dominions, and were as a result cruelly persecuted, the doctrine of immortality gained in importance. "It had been thought",

1. Ibid., pp. 312-3.
2. Ibid., p. 314.
Russell explains, "that virtue would be rewarded here on earth; but persecution, which fell upon the most virtuous, made it evident that this was not the case. In order to safeguard divine justice, therefore, it was necessary to believe in rewards and punishments hereafter".¹

The exclusiveness, inflexibility and intolerance of the Jewish religion remained a feature of the early Christian church, and Russell argues that the "inflexible moral principles"² of the early ecclesiastics contributed quite considerably to the spread of Christianity, especially in view of the fact that the moral principles themselves were "very superior to those of the average pagans".³ Furthermore the unity and discipline of the early Christians increased their power as a social and political force, for, although a minority, they had "a kind of organization which was then new .... and which gave them all the political influence of a pressure group to which no other pressure groups are opposed. This was the natural consequence of their virtual monopoly of zeal, and their zeal was an inheritance from the Jews".⁴ It is argued that the conversion to Christianity of the Emperor Constantine was due to the existence of a sizeable Christian element in the army, i.e. a political rather than a spiritual matter. In this manner, therefore, the 'philosophy' very strongly and directly influenced the circumstances both of the clergy who propounded it, and of the people who accepted it.

The growth and strength of the Church in the middle ages, in particular in terms of the power derived from a strongly held set of beliefs, is discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis. But the philosophies of the Reformation, which are given detailed examination by Russell in the History, provide more varied examples of the causal reciprocity

¹. Ibid., p. 317.
². Ibid., p. 332.
³. Ibid., p. 331.
⁴. Ibid., p. 332.
of philosophy and circumstances, since it is individual ideas that are expressed, rather than the views of a single united Church. The Renaissance in 15th century Italy, although it produced nothing new in theoretical philosophy, was a vital forerunner to the widening scope of thought of the Reformation, because appeal to the authority of the ancients replaced appeal to the authority of the Church. As Russell points out, "This was, of course, a step towards emancipation, since the ancients disagreed with each other, and individual judgement was required to decide which of them to follow." Humanism was a further step, but again more in the form of psychological preparation for a new approach to religion and philosophy, since the humanists, although recognizing the potential and actual evils of the papal system, had no positive theological alternative to offer. It was the Reformation thinkers - in particular, of course, Luther and Calvin - who combined a new individualistic approach to the Church's teachings with concern for theological subtleties, and thus presented the mass of the people with grounds for rejection of the papacy together with a clearly defined alternative - Protestantism. There were - inevitably, as with any doctrine based on individual judgements - many divisions among Protestant sects, and the strengths and weaknesses of the various sects depended largely on the compatibility of their doctrines with current political and social ideologies. Luther himself, for instance, was quite willing to accept a Protestant monarch as head of a country's church, and Lutheran protestantism was therefore almost guaranteed success in the states of ambitious monarchs such as Henry VIII and Elizabeth I in England, and the protestant monarchs in Germany, Scandinavia and (later) Holland. In terms of theology, Luther and Calvin adopted those parts of St. Augustine's teachings which

1. Ibid., p. 483.
concerned "the relation of the soul to God",¹ and endeavoured to bypass altogether the Church as intermediary. The most significant aspect of their new religion as regards modern philosophy was that, "By the doctrine of predestination, the fate of the soul after death was made wholly independent of the actions of priests".² In the 19th and 20th centuries, in the absence of strong religious influences which promised rewards or threatened punishments in a life after death, the question of predestination versus the actions of priests becomes a question of environmental (or, in Marxism, for example, material) influences versus free-will and individual choice, and is of particular ethical significance in behaviourist philosophy.

However, Protestant sects which carried individualism to its logical political conclusion - such as the thoroughly anarchic Anabaptists in Germany - fared less well in terms of political and social significance. And the philosophical counterpart of religious individualism - subjectivity - also provoked reaction because of its fundamental incompatibility with political and social aims, in particular in the 19th and 20th centuries. Subjectivism was given a strong and often dangerous boost by the 18th century 'romantic' movement and the "cult of the hero";³ and against this there have been a variety of reactions, ranging from liberalism as a "half-way compromise", to "the doctrine of state worship" as a more extreme reaction.⁴ The conflict between a subjective individualism in philosophy and ethics, and a recognition of the need for a certain minimum level of social and political unity to ensure the survival of humanity, is reflected throughout Russell's personal life and his writings on philosophy and politics.

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1. Ibid., p. 509.
2. Ibid., p. 510.
3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. Ibid., p. 21.
The fact that Russell became a well-known public figure, as well as applying his mind both to philosophy and to social and political issues, and publishing a very large number of books and articles, makes him a particularly strong candidate for a discussion on the reciprocal interaction between philosophy and circumstances. The fact that he was well aware of — and more than ready to criticise — the "ulterior motives" of philosophy, makes him a particularly interesting one. An examination of Russell the philosopher alongside an examination of Russell the political and moral theoriser might be expected to reveal — if he lives up to the standards he sets for others — on the one hand a reflection of his philosophy in his political and social theories and activities, and vice versa; and on the other, a conscious, and perhaps successful, attempt to avoid, in philosophical argument, the restrictions imposed by prejudice (in the strictest sense of the word) and the errors to which it might lead.

Russell's life and 'circumstances'

Although only brief references will be made, as and when appropriate in the course of this examination, to aspects and incidents in Russell's life which might have significantly influenced his writing, his personal life is sufficiently well-known to necessitate no more than a brief introductory outline, together with an attempt, on one or two issues, to clarify and correct the popular but usually inaccurate — or at least, incomplete — image of Russell as a man. His early years were spent in quite extraordinary isolation, the effects of which were accentuated in adolescence by the fact that such views and ideas as he learnt from the few people around him were in sharp conflict with a tradition of liberalism bequeathed him by his parents, and with his own developing views. His background was aristocratic: his grandfather was the first Earl Russell, and in
later life Bertrand inherited the title. It was also political, with a strong liberal tinge; his grandfather had twice been Prime Minister in the 19th century, and had introduced the first Reform Bill in 1832; his godfather was John Stuart Mill. His parents were noted for their advocacy of birth control - still, in the second half of the 19th century, a controversial subject - and it was their unconventional ideas on sexual morality which caused Russell's grandmother, on his being orphaned at the age of four, to fight and win a legal battle to take him under her own wing, rather than release him to the legally appointed guardianship of his late parents' unconventional friends. His grandmother's particular eccentricity was a passionate religious piety which, together with a most austere method of running her household, resulted in the young Russell's early isolation, introversion and frequent misery. In retrospect, Russell finds more to admire about his grandmother than might have been expected:

.... I have realised more and more the importance she had in moulding my outlook on life. Her fearlessness, her public spirit, her contempt for convention, and her indifference to the opinion of the majority have always seemed good to me and have impressed themselves upon me as worthy of imitation.  

At the time, however, and especially after the age of fourteen, he felt his isolation to be complete.

Shut up within himself, educated by tutors and governesses selected for him by his grandmother, Russell had plenty of time for reflection, and became obsessed at an early age with mathematics - "In his youth", says Ayer, "his attitude to mathematics was almost mystical".  

He was obsessed, in particular, with a desire to find definite proof of mathematical propositions, or indeed any other type of propositions.

His thoughts on religion, which formed such a major part of his grandmother's life, took a turn which would have earned her strong disapproval, since he could not satisfy himself that proof could be found for the existence of God; and he thus resorted to secrecy of thought, not daring to raise the questions which occupied his mind, even feeling obliged to write his personal diaries in a form of code. In his *Autobiography* he gives extracts from these diaries, written when he was about sixteen years old, which already furnish evidence of his remarkable talent for logical and rational analysis. Since he could not identify with the people with whom he lived, and knew of no other type of existence, he felt that the fault must be his — that he must be a very strange person indeed.

He was only released from this sense of intellectual isolation when, at the age of eighteen, he went to Cambridge. Here the relief was tremendous. He was overjoyed to find people who thought as he did, or who, if they did not, were at least willing to listen to the viewpoints of others. He found favour in the eyes of men whom he admired for their intellectual ability, and was encouraged to consider himself first and foremost an intellectual.

Russell then embarked on a distinguished academic career in the fields, first, of mathematics, and later of philosophy. Until the first World War, these two subjects occupied him almost wholly, and his only work on social and political issues was a brief history and discussion of *German Social Democracy*, written after a visit to Germany in 1896. During the war Russell was an active pacifist, and his support for individual conscientious objectors, and for the No-Conscription Fellowship, brought him sharply into focus in the eye of the public and of the British government. His views, openly expressed in speeches and in writing, led to hostility from some of his friends, two court cases (in the
second of which he was sentenced to six months imprisonment) and the loss of his lectureship at Trinity College. From this time onwards, until his death in 1970 at the age of 97, Russell continued to write and speak on philosophy and on current political and social problems. He became a public figure as well as an academic philosopher, and as such laid himself open to criticism from all sides.

He played an active, if unconventional role in politics and in the formation and changing of contemporary moral views. He achieved notoriety as well as fame for his writings on warfare, on state propaganda, on moral customs and traditions, on Christianity, Communism and nuclear weapons, and his outspoken and relentless attack on conventional views incurred the wrath of many. His personal life, which included four marriages and several affairs, was not such as would endear him to the upholders of strict Victorian morality, and the views which he put into practice were also openly expressed in books such as *Marriage and Morals* in 1929. Professor Ayer, however, testifies in defence of this and other similar works:

These books, which were thought shocking at the time and were, indeed, to do their author harm because of their advocacy of a certain measure of sexual freedom, have themselves contributed to the change of climate which makes them now seem dated. They do not have the depth of Russell's more academic work, but they are admirably written and the moral outlook which they represent is rational and humane. ¹

The rationality of Russell's moral outlook was also the cause of much criticism, implying, as it seemed to do, that his personal life was pursued in a cool, logical manner, unmitigated by compassion or sensitivity. It was certainly true that Russell placed a high value on reason - perhaps too high. His daughter Kate recalls that, at her father's school,

¹. Ibid., p. 27.
she had been

.... taught to believe that people were reasonable and would respond to reasonable argument. The whole school, and its promise for the future, rested on this belief, as false and fantastic as any religious superstition. ¹

However, her admirable biography, which takes an honest but also sympathetic look at the way in which Russell's personality was often reflected in, but far more frequently distorted by his popular image, does much to correct the general impression that Russell's life was cluttered with thoughtless and insincere love affairs and discarded mistresses. Ronald Clark, in his very thoroughly research biography, also portrays a genuine and sincere man, whose relationships with women (which, although better documented, were probably in any case no more numerous than those of many hundreds of less famous men) often continued and developed into much-valued and enduring friendships long after the sexual involvement had ceased. With innumerable examples of compassion, sensitivity and even sentiment, drawn largely from personal letters, Clark manages to dispel the illusion of "the cool clinical monster of popular fallacy". ²

These records, however, have provided only a posthumous defence of Russell's reputation. During his lifetime his outspokenness on three separate occasions cost him his job. The first, at Trinity, mentioned above, after which he was offered a Professorship at Harvard, which he was unable to accept because the British government refused him a passport. The second was at the College of the City of New York in 1940, when a private citizen was persuaded to bring an action on the grounds that Russell's teaching would be harmful to her daughter. Ayer gives a brief and concise account of this case, demonstrating the ridiculously biased

nature of the inquiry, including the fact that "he had been invited to
teach logic at a Liberal Arts College to which at that time women were
not admissible", which was, however, "not considered relevant". Clark,
in a more detailed account, tells us that the prosecution brief contained
the claim that Russell was "lecherous, libidinous, lustful, venerous,
erotomaniac, aphrodisiac, irreverent, narrow-minded, untruthful, and
to be bereft of moral fibre". The third occasion was in 1943, when the Barnes
Foundation in Pennsylvania terminated a five-year contract after only two
years, on the grounds (partly) that Russell's lectures were insufficiently
prepared - although on this occasion Russell successfully sued for breach
of contract. His defence of this particular allegation was the production
as evidence of two-thirds of his History of Western Philosophy which was
based on his lectures - and the allegation was thus "not merely denied
but looked ridiculous".

Until 1944, when elected to a Fellowship at Trinity, Russell
frequently found himself in financial difficulties. Apart from the lack
of financial security in academic work, there were several demands upon
his income. In the first decade of the 20th century he frequently - and
secretly - gave financial assistance to Alfred Whitehead, his friend,
colleague and co-author of Principia Mathematica; the earldom which he
inherited on the death of his elder brother Frank in 1931 brought with it
no money, but an obligation to pay alimony to Frank's second wife; and
Russell was also, by the mid-1930s, paying alimony and maintenance for
his own second wife and two children. He was therefore obliged to rely
almost entirely, on several occasions, on the income derived from 'popular'
writing. Problems of Philosophy, which, according to Ayer, "is probably

2. Clark, op. cit., p. 471.
3. Ibid., p. 485.
still the best introduction to the subject that exists in English,"\(^1\)
was originally commissioned for the 'Shilling Shocker' Home University
Library Series by Gilbert Murray, who chose Russell on the grounds that
he was "1. completely alive and original; 2. democratic, so that he wants
to communicate his thought to shop assistants; 3. sharp-eyed and not
wobbly or sloppy in thought".\(^2\) It sold 13,000 copies within months of
publication. Russell's style of writing contributed greatly to the
popularity of his works. "He is a great stylist", says one of his critics,

\[\ldots\text{ and by the clarity of his writing, its elegance, and}\]
\[\text{his frequent recourse to savage irony and mordant wit, has}\]
\[\text{won a Nobel Prize for Literature as well as securing a}\]
\[\text{readership embracing not only the academically qualified but}\]
\[\text{a multitude of readers.}\] \(^3\)

And his daughter explains that he

\[\ldots\text{ did not consider anything well written that could not}\]
\[\text{be read aloud, and he was convinced that one must appreciate}\]
\[\text{the sound of good writing in order to write well oneself.}\] \(^4\)

Russell's wit and irony, and his clarity of thought and expression,
while contributing to the popularity of many of his works, contributed
also to the criticisms levelled at him in the academic world. First of
all, he tried his hand at many different areas of philosophy. As Ronald
Jager puts it:

Russell is the philosophical Everyman. If it is an intellectual
idea, he has probably tried it; if it is a philosophical hope or
distress, Russell has shared it; if a technical novelty, he has
worried and exploited it; a noble theme, he has enlivened and
varied it; an error, he has been tempted by it. \(^5\)

To some this smacked of amateur dabbling. Others, however, were more
willing to give credit as, for instance, Alan Wood:

3. John Lewis, \textit{Bertrand Russell: Philosopher and Humanist} (New York,
4. Tait, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 117.
5. Ronald Jager, \textit{The Development of Bertrand Russell's Philosophy}
Russell's work covers so many different subjects that there is probably no single living person equipped with a sufficiently thorough knowledge of them all to write an adequate commentary — with the exception, of course, of Russell himself.¹

Many of the more 'technical' points of Russell's philosophy have been subjected to detailed criticism — some of these will be discussed in this thesis; but in more general terms, criticism arises from the fact that in the course of his long life, writing prolifically on such a wide variety of subjects, Russell displays in his work a wide and often conflicting variety of philosophical views. Ayer shrewdly remarks that this criticism is particular popular with "those who publish very little for fear of being discovered to be wrong".² Russell is not afraid of being discovered to be wrong, and in fact freely and openly acknowledges his changes of opinion as well as his errors. Alan Wood, in Russell's defence, points out that:

There are few faults and weak points in his work which he has not pointed out with the utmost candour himself; each advance he made constituted a criticism of his previous position.³

It is because of the fact that Russell's later philosophy is a development of his earlier work, that the chronology of his thinking assumes particular significance. "It is essential", Wood argues, "when reading any book by Russell, to know its place in the development of his thought".⁴ Failure to do so, and attempts to encapsulate once and for all what is, or was, Russell's 'philosophy', lead to confusion and inevitable inconsistencies, and do not do justice to his thinking. In this thesis, therefore, Russell's works on philosophy are examined, alongside his writings on political and social issues, in strict chronological order.

4. Ibid., p. 191.
In one respect, however, it would be difficult for even his fiercest critics to find grounds for the criticism of inconsistency. "There is throughout", argues Wood, "a consistency of purpose and direction, and a consistency of method".\(^1\) His consistency of method began as a strong determination to avoid, by use of rigorous and relentless analysis, the faults and weaknesses that he detected in other philosophies, occasioned by their authors' predispositions towards particular conclusions. The method Russell used, as we shall see, became more clearly defined as his work proceeded, and ended by becoming a philosophy in itself. The evidence he chose to support his own theories, and to support or confound others, was almost always empirical evidence (although there were times, especially in his later years, when he wavered in his adherence to strictly empirical criteria), and this method therefore exhibits its own predisposition towards empiricism. The fact that empirical evidence is now, in the post-Russellian 20th century, accepted for the most part as superior in value to other types of evidence, should not blind us to the fact that empiricism as a philosophy had many opponents in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; it could be argued that in siding with empiricism as a method Russell was guilty of as much prejudice and bias as were those whom he criticised severely for siding with philosophies based on religion, revelation or anything else.

And the claim of "consistency of purpose and direction" can be subjected to similar criticism. It could be argued - and with some justification - that there is little to distinguish a "purpose" from an "ulterior motive" - apart from the more emotive phraseology of the latter. In philosophy, in mathematics - indeed, in every field of life - Russell wanted certainty. Alan Wood believes that "the underlying purpose behind

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all Russell's work was an almost religious passion for some truth that was more than human, independent of the minds of men, and even of the existence of men". He also feels that this was indeed a matter of 'motive'. But his use of the phrase "some truth" - rather than this or that particular "truth" - sets Russell apart from most of his philosophical predecessors. Philosophers in the past had sought justification for belief in God or in gods; belief in the superiority of individual judgement; belief in the supremacy of dialectical materialism; belief in utilitarian principles; belief in the supremacy of the state, or of a particular state; belief in the overriding influence of inherited characteristics, or of environmentally transmitted ones; in short, justification had been sought by philosophers for belief in a multitude of specific, particular systems or goals. Russell, on the other hand, sought, quite simply, justification for belief. The following chapters will examine whether or not his search was successful.

Method of approach

The method of approach of this thesis will be largely comparative. Russell's philosophy will be examined alongside his writings on ethics and his more popular work on political and social issues, with a view to identifying wherever possible similarities between these three branches of his thought, and tracing the development of each and the influence exercised by Russell's personal life, and by the events of the world at any particular time. It must be stressed at this point, particularly in view of Russell's changes of philosophical opinion mentioned above, that events in the world and in his personal life were not the only things which influenced Russell's philosophy; indeed, they were probably not even the most important influences. Russell is perhaps unique in that 1. Ibid., p. 192.
amongst the influences upon his philosophical thought must be counted his own previous philosophical thought. We shall discover that the conclusions he reaches after a lifetime of study are not those he set out to reach; they are not those he expected or wanted to reach. And one of the major reasons for this is quite simply that his analysis itself led him to different results, and that he had sufficient courage and intellectual integrity to ask the awkward questions rather than to ignore them, and to direct his work not along the paths which might have led to confirmation of his preconceived ideas, but instead to let his philosophy go where it would, and to follow it through.

The philosophical issues are complex and require considerable attention; in order to avoid giving precedence to Russell's philosophy at the expense of other works, the aim throughout this thesis is to present not a full and complete exposé of his philosophy, but a selection of those issues which have a particular relevance to the general theme of comparison. Thus, in Chapter Two, Russell's views on relation theory are discussed in the context of the anti-Hegelian position he adopted, in order to defend his early work on mathematics. The question of 'truth' is examined - Russell's own, objective, theory, and his critique of other theories - and this is followed by an analysis of the difficulties he encountered in applying objectivity to the field of ethics; finally we see Russell's own political and social 'theory' in embryo, in his discussion of a concrete example of idealism in practice.

Chapter Three traces Russell's thought through a period of doubt. The firm belief in objectivity which coloured his earlier work is replaced by uncertainty, and in order to combat this Russell concentrates largely upon detail rather than upon overall schemes. In philosophy he turns his attention to the structure of language, and to analysis of sense perception and constructs a new clearly defined method of analysis which itself
contributes to the erosion of his leanings towards objectivity. In the field of ethics, objective certainty has been reluctantly put aside, and instead Russell presents his own value system as an essentially emotive one which he subsequently applies to the political and social situation of the world in the aftermath of the first World War. His reluctant rejection of objectivity at this stage causes him to react violently and critically against contemporary claims by others - in particular by socialists - that their systems are objectively true.

Chapter Four adds two new interests to the argument. Russell's interest in science - and particularly in scientific method - gathers impetus and prompts him to undertake a detailed examination of the theory of neutral monism. Side by side with this, as an extension of his work on the structure of man's mind and the manner in which thought and feeling develop, is his interest in behavioural psychology and the influence of circumstances and experience upon the actions taken by men. The combination of these two - his ever-growing conviction that a scientific, and essentially empirical, approach is the only guarantee of certainty, and that the minds of men are influenced only by experience - appears to sign the death warrant for philosophical and ethical objectivity; and yet Russell finds himself unable to subscribe wholly to the view that the value system to which he personally adheres is based on nothing more solid than subjective tastes. In his work on education - both theoretical and practical - we find the result of this conflict: his philosophical beliefs lead him to an educational theory in which the influence of the environment, and particularly of the teacher, plays the most significant part, in that it will continue for the rest of the child's life, while his personal 'subjective' set of values dictates more precisely what particular influence the teacher ought to try and wield.
Chapter Five represents, in a sense, the end of a road that leads nowhere. Russell pursues empiricism relentlessly, and achieves ultimately through this method not more certainty about those things of which he was uncertain, but a good deal less certainty about those things of which he was, or had been, absolutely certain. The entire structure of science itself falls victim to empiricism because the laws upon which it rests are not, and cannot be, proven by means of empiricism.

Russell examines solipsism and finds it wanting. The only possible alternative is to concentrate not on what can be proven, but on what is practicable. In philosophy, this involves a discussion of the notion of 'probability' as a workable alternative to 'certainty'; in ethical theory, it involves, on the one hand, recognition and acceptance of the view that rational thought and analysis cannot account for the moral convictions of men, or for the goals or aims of their actions; and on the other, and despite this acceptance, an attempt to formulate a more 'impersonal' moral code based as far as possible upon reason, to replace the variety of conflicting and mutually exclusive moral codes which divide and embitter the people of the world.

Finally, in his later writings on social and political life, Russell examines contemporary systems based both on dogma and on reason. He finds that both extremes, in different ways, are potentially dangerous in that they tend to stifle - either directly and forcibly in the case of the system based upon dogma, or by the more subtle and indirect persuasion and manipulation of the minds of men - what is, in Russell's view, the supreme value: the individual creative impulse of mankind. It is this creative impulse, this individuality which, given suitable encouragement - or at the very least unhindered in its development - would result in the achievement of their full potential, their personal excellence, by those
individuals who have, in skills and abilities of every kind, the most to offer in the world and who, in offering, endow mankind with all those things which have made our civilisation great.
CHAPTER TWO
RUSSELL'S EARLY REALISM

Ronald Jager argues that the source of attraction of an idea, even of an unsuccessful one, is often as important and interesting as the idea itself.\textsuperscript{1} As an undergraduate at Cambridge, Russell, in his third and fourth years, was considerably influenced by G.E. Moore who, "in the world of intellect .... was fearless and adventurous";\textsuperscript{2} and both Russell and Moore were influenced by the philosopher McTaggart, who was senior to both, though at that time still a young and enthusiastic Hegelian. After a brief flirtation with the philosophies of both Hegel and Kant, however, Russell - again following Moore - rejected both. Looking back on this period of his life, he feels he was "indoctrinated" with both philosophies, with the result that,

Having become convinced that the Hegelian arguments against this and that were invalid, I reacted to the opposite extreme and began to believe in the reality of whatever could not be disproved.\textsuperscript{3}

In a sense, everything that Russell wrote subsequently, in philosophy at least, is the story of the progress of that reaction, although it is in this early period, the first decade of the 20th century, that it is easiest to detect the errors, such as there are. His philosophical aim was to refute idealism, and we find on occasion that the aim appears to have had priority over the means; he leaves loose ends, or uses arguments in his refutation which he might himself have undermined, by putting to use the tools of logic developed in his mathematical work.

His work on philosophy and mathematics at this time far exceeds any other writing. He makes a start on ethics in two or three essays; but

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the socio-political writings of this period are few. His only major contribution to current political understanding was his book German Social Democracy, which, although written at a time when Russell was still under the influence of Hegelian idealism, is sufficiently analytic in its approach to serve as a preview of many of Russell's later concerns in philosophy and in moral and political theory. Furthermore he had not, at this time, become the popular public figure he was later to be, and his 'commentaries' on social and political issues were restricted to private letters and papers.

Reaction against idealism

The motive running through Russell's philosophy here was the attack on idealism, and more particularly on F.H. Bradley's brand of idealism. From Russell's own writing, we sense that this was a kind of rebellion, initiated not so much by the detection of a multitude of faults in the idealist theory, but by the detection of a few, and the subsequent throwing out of the whole theory with tremendous relief, in favour of the one he personally found more palatable:

I hated the stuffiness involved in supposing that space and time were only in my mind. I liked the starry heavens even better than the moral law, and could not bear Kant's view that the one I liked best was only a subjective figment. In the first exuberance of liberation, I became a naive realist and rejoiced in the thought that grass is really green .... 1

His approach was not, therefore, unbiased, and he might have been expected to make mistakes here and there, to close his eyes to the solution of problems when such a solution would undermine his own case. He himself views this period in retrospect, detecting the naivety and the

1. Ibid., p. 49.
reasons for it:

In my first rebellion against Hegel, I believed that a thing must exist if Hegel's proof that it cannot is invalid. 1

However, as Jager points out, his work on mathematics "provided a backdrop for the entire development of Russell's philosophy" 2 - and his work on mathematics was nothing if not thorough. It was in fact the implications of a Hegelian idealism for the world of mathematics which first motivated his attack:

All the arguments used by Hegelians to condemn the sort of things dealt with by mathematics and physics depended upon the axiom of internal relations. Consequently, when I rejected this axiom, I began to believe everything the Hegelians disbelieved. This gave me a very full universe. I imagined all the numbers sitting in a row in a Platonic heaven. 3

In retrospect, it would seem that Russell views his days of Platonic 'realism' with a kind of contempt, tempered by affection. However, a closer analysis of the issues at stake reveals a far more compelling argument than might have been supposed, in particular regarding mathematics and geometry. In The Republic Plato is attempting to explain the different kinds and different degrees of 'reality'. 4 He distinguishes two orders of 'reality', one concerning the 'intelligible world' and the other concerning the physical world. The cave analogy, which is most frequently used to illustrate Plato's meaning, answers, in a sense, only half the question: that of the physical world. Gregory Vlastos, in an essay entitled "Degrees of reality in Plato", offers a specific example - that of a horse - to clarify the cave analogy. When reflected on the cave wall, the horse is only a two-dimensional figure; when the prisoner in the cave is compelled to turn around and face the road and the fire behind it which

1. Ibid., p. 49.
casts the shadow, he sees a three-dimensional statue, which gives him a clearer and more 'real' view of what a horse is; and outside the cave is the real live horse, the model for the statue, which is "the most authoritative source the visible world can offer of true answers to the question 'What is a horse?'".

However, in the 'intelligible world', that is the world of thought, we experience a different kind of 'reality' which Vlastos calls "the 'really real' things, the Forms, as objects of mystical experience". It is here that Plato himself makes use of mathematical and geometrical examples. "Students of geometry and similar forms of reasoning", he explains,

.... begin by taking for granted odd and even numbers, geometrical figures and the three kinds of angle, and other kindred data in their various subjects; these they regard as known, and treat as basic assumptions which it is quite unnecessary to explain to themselves or anyone else because they are self-evident. .... they make use of and reason about visible figures, though they are not really thinking about them at all, but about the originals which they resemble; they are arguing not about the square or diagonal which they have drawn but about the absolute square or diagonal, or whatever the figure may be. The figures they draw or model, which again have their shadows and reflections in water, they treat as illustrations only, the real subjects of their investigation being invisible except to the eye of the mind.

G.C. Field, in The Philosophy of Plato, demonstrates more precisely the manner in which mathematical and geometrical propositions seem to be

1. Plato himself says that on the road "there are men carrying all sorts of gear .... including figures of men and animals made of wood and stone and other materials". (Ibid., p. 279). Here it must be admitted that there is a certain amount of confusion, since the men carrying the statues cannot themselves be statues, and must presumably be the 'real live' men whom Vlastos assumes to belong to the world outside the cave. If Plato was implying that all men, even the prisoners, were 'real live' men, then there seems no reason for them to have been carrying figures of men as well as of animals. However Plato's audience let the inconsistency pass unchallenged.


3. Ibid., p. 7.

true in a way in which physical representations of them can never be.
He defines various geometrical terms: a point, which has position but no
magnitude, a line, having length but no breadth, a surface, having length
and breadth, but no thickness. These are the forms which we can only
imperfectly represent:

.... we know that we cannot actually draw or make these things,
or observe them in the world around us. We can, for instance,
get nearer and nearer to a line the finer we draw it, but in the
nature of things we cannot either draw or observe a line with
absolutely no breadth.  
And therefore:

We can see from this how natural it is to come to think of the
mathematical objects as complete and perfect forms to which the
sensible objects can approach closer and closer but can never
quite reach, if they are to remain sensible objects.  

There is a further sense in which mathematical propositions seem more
'real' than other objects. Field points out that in sense perception we
are aware, when we look closely at a physical object, that much of what
we see is not real. Amongst the criteria for 'reality' which we apply
are permanency of the object (to distinguish 'real' from illusion, dream,
hallucination etc.), and ability to express very precisely, or to define
clearly, what it is we are talking about.  
Mathematical propositions
fulfill both these criteria: the language, being largely symbols, is
capable of infinitely more precision than is the language used to describe
a physical object, say a table; and the truth of the propositions - for
example, that one plus one equals two - is true permanently. Mathematics
does therefore seem to satisfy two of the major criteria for 'reality' in
a way that a physical object does not. Field quotes another author
regarding permanency:

p. 25.
3. Ibid., pp. 21-4.
In some sense, mathematical truth is part of objective reality. (He gives examples of theorems) .... (these) are not creations of our minds; Lagrange discovered the first in 1774; when he discovered it, he discovered something; and to that something Lagrange and the year 1774 are equally indifferent.¹

From these mathematical and geometrical examples, it is not difficult to understand why Russell, as a mathematician, found so compelling the arguments for a 'reality' outside and independent of anything created by, or knowable by, man.

Gregory Vlastos, however, emphasises the very important distinction Plato makes between the physical and the intelligible worlds. The intelligible world is given a value far superior to the physical world; 'reality' in this sense "functions as a value-predicate, but one that transcends the usual specifications of value, moral, aesthetic, and religious; it connotes more than goodness, beauty or holiness, or even than all three of them in conjunction".² Thus the intelligible world, or the world of thought, is imbued with mysticism in a way that the physical world - even the physical world outside the cave - is not. Vlastos later suggests an alternative method of distinguishing between these two types of 'reality':

.... only the Forms are 'real' as judged by the criteria of knowledge which aspires to logical certainty, while only sensibles³ are 'real' as judged by the very different criteria of empirically testable knowledge. ⁴

We have noted in the Introduction that Russell was to encounter difficulties as a result of applying 20th century methods of analysis to 19th century philosophies, and more particularly that his adoption of wholly empirical criteria prevented him ultimately from reaching the Platonic 'reality' which he sought. In his earlier work, his inability to provide proof of objective reality may have been directly due to confusion about

1. Ibid., p. 24.
3. That is, material or physical things.
these two types of 'reality', and to indiscriminate application of both logical and empirical criteria.

Later, in a survey of the various philosophies of the 20th century, Russell gives a more general, less personalised version of the attack on idealism with regard to mathematics. The principles of mathematics have always been significant to philosophy simply because they lay claim to a certain a priori knowledge to which philosophers themselves aspired.

Philosophy - particularly the idealist philosophy which flourished before the 20th century - had in consequence attempted to discredit mathematical principles in order to "supply a better brand"\(^1\) of a priori knowledge for which they could take credit. Developments by 19th century mathematicians did much to re-establish mathematical principles - including, for instance, Cantor's theories of continuity and infinity which "did away with all the old paradoxes upon which philosophers had batten";\(^2\) Russell himself, as we shall see, applied such mathematical solutions to similar problems in philosophy in the early 20th century, and indeed, he asserts that it was only the new, realist philosophies which took account of new developments in mathematics. And the rigorous treatment he gave to mathematics which first caused him to leap to its defence against idealism was also responsible for his gradual, and reluctant, abandonment of support for realism.

Relations

The most significant feature of Russell's early work, as mentioned above, is his doctrine of relations. He had already concerned himself with relations in his work on Liebniz at the turn of the century, where the "clue to understanding of Liebniz's philosophy" Russell saw as lying

2. Ibid., p. 56.
in "his belief that all propositions can be reduced to subject-predicate form, i.e. that relations are reducible to properties of the terms between which they hold". Russell had already made "a convincing attempt to show that the assumption of this logical doctrine can be made to account for the main features of Leibniz's metaphysics" and had attacked the doctrine in order to refute Leibniz's monadism. His motivation now for attack was the result of something much nearer his own interests. Russell had already presupposed the metaphysical reality and autonomy of relations in his work on mathematics, and Bradley was now denying this autonomy. Russell could not let this go unanswered.

The opposition view, briefly, is as follows:

Everything is apparently somehow related to everything else, and thus the so-called relational facts - such as that A is to the left of B, that B is heavier than C, that B is known to D - are really facts about A, B, C and D; facts that report elements of their respective natures. Each thing is thus involved in the nature of everything else.

The 'things' with which we are dealing Russell calls "terms", and these, we discover, can be "literally everything whatever", and all could be the subjects of relations. These relations are verbs or prepositions - 'to the left of', 'heavier than', 'known to' are some examples given by Jager. It should, however, be pointed out that the prepositional relations are not, in fact, relations unless a verb is added, for example, 'is to the left of', or 'is before, after' etc. Russell later - in 1918 in a discussion of 'atomic propositions' - explicitly states that apart from "the word expressing a monadic relation or quality" which remains a predicate, any word expressing "a relation of any higher order

4. Ibid., p. 61.
would generally be a verb, sometimes a single verb, sometimes a whole phrase.\footnote{Bertrand Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918) in Logic and Knowledge (London, 1956), pp. 199-200.} In 1918 Russell did not pay very great attention to this view, but in his earlier work on relations, the division into verbal and prepositional relations seems unnecessarily complex. It might therefore be useful to note that in the English language at least many verbs assume a preposition, and the verb 'to be' followed by a preposition could equally well be expressed by a single verb; for example, instead of saying 'A is before B' we might say 'A predates B', or 'A precedes B'; 'A is after B' could be rephrased 'A follows B' or 'A succeeds B'. In this way we do in fact dispose of many prepositions, and could in theory, presumably, dispose of them all. A relation, therefore, seems to be first and foremost a verb, and if it appears to contain or include a preposition, this is simply because our language has not devised a single word to do the work of two or three. Jager gives an example which appears to contain both the verbal and the prepositional kinds of relation: "John teases Mary behind the water cooler".\footnote{Jager, op. cit., p. 60.} The relation between John and Mary is "teases", a verb; the relation between John and Mary, and the water cooler, appears to be simply "behind"; but if we were to ignore the first half of the sentence, and ask, what is the relation between John and Mary, and the water cooler, the answer would be that they are behind it. The division of relations into verbal and prepositional therefore introduces more complexity than is strictly necessary.

Russell sets out the central doctrine of internal relations as follows: "Every relation is grounded in the natures of the related terms".\footnote{Russell, My Philosophical Development, op. cit., p. 43.} The axiom is essential to the monistic theory of truth which will be discussed.
in greater detail later in this chapter. Suffice it to say, for the time being, that the monistic theory of truth, which argues that truth does not lie in any part, but only in the whole, would undermine completely Russell’s work on mathematics in the following manner: Russell has stripped mathematics to the barebones, even to the extent of disposing of numbers, in order to arrive at the core of ‘truth’; if relations are nothing but properties, weaving all the ‘terms’ into one, single, united whole, then the foundations of Russell’s work on mathematics are not truths at all, but merely ‘partial truths’. If, however, relations are allowed to stand autonomous, then plurality is assumed, the monistic theory of truth collapses, and Russell’s mathematical ‘truths’ can be reinstated on their pedestal.

In order to refute Bradleyan idealism, Russell must go to work on the relation theory which is its cornerstone. There can, furthermore, be no half measures. Russell goes to the extreme and demonstrates—or claims to demonstrate—that in fact all properties can be expressed in terms of relations, rather than vice versa. He begins by claiming that the terms of relations are unchangeable, although they may take on and abandon relations to other terms.

What is called modification consists merely in having at one time, but not at another, some specific relation to some other specific term; but the term which sometimes has and sometimes has not the relations in question must be unaltered, otherwise it would not be that term which had ceased to have the relation. 1

And again:

Substances do not themselves change, only their states do, by taking on and abandoning relations with other things that do not themselves change. 2

An example given by Jager of the precise meaning of this is that of grass, which at one time has a relation to freshness and greenness, and at

2. Ibid., p. 61.
another a relation to brownness. Jager asks in passing, "What of the
glass itself?" Unfortunately he does not pursue this line of inquiry,
although it seems to be a necessary, indeed a vital part of the issue,
concerning as it does the definition of the notion of 'substance'.

First, however, we shall deal with the 'states', i.e. the relations
of substances with other substances, of terms with other terms. One of
Russell's major arguments against the doctrine of internal relations
concerns "identity in difference". Briefly, he argues that it is
impossible to express a relation "A is different from B" in a manner
which would accord with such a relation ("being different from") being
grounded in the natures of the terms A or B. The difference could be
expressed in terms of adjectives of either A or B or both, for example,
'A is red; B is blue'; but these adjectives in turn would differ - 'Red
is different from blue' - and thus the relation would still stand. The
conclusion is that the notion of diversity is incompatible with the doctrine
of internal relations. "If the axiom of internal relations is true",
Russell argues, "it follows that there is no diversity, and that there is
only one thing".¹ He gives another example, involving an asymmetrical
relation: "One volume is greater than another". Again we find that
"we cannot, without an endless regress, refuse to admit that sooner or
later we come to a relation not reducible to adjectives of the related
terms".²

The idealistic theory which Russell is combatting, however, does
indeed claim that "there is only one thing", and therefore, as they stand,
these examples present no argument. They merely indicate that Russell is
opting for diversity and plurality, and the monists are opting for total

1. Russell, My Philosophical Development, op. cit., p. 44.
2. Ibid., p. 46.
unity. Russell admits that this is no more than a demonstration of how difficult it is to "carry out" the doctrine of internal relations (at least for those of us who prefer to cling to notions of diversity). The doctrine itself has not been disproved.

In My Philosophical Development, published in 1959 when his realist tendencies had been curbed, Russell unfortunately does not give us any more detailed, retrospective discussion of his earlier views on relations, or their possible shortcomings. But Jager takes up the struggle, showing what he calls the "general angle of Russell's vision here, as distinct from any arguments". He presents us with the following sentence:

If plums are larger than grapes and apples are larger than plums, then apples are larger than grapes.  

If the relation 'larger than' is internal to plums, and internal to apples, then it would appear that we cannot reach the conclusion that therefore "apples are larger than grapes". Unless the relation 'larger than' is external and autonomous, the sentence is nonsense. "No one doubts (that apples are larger than grapes); yet how could we be content with such arguments if 'larger than' did not indicate a real relation, something for the argument to rest on?" This seems to be fairly conclusive, but again, under closer inspection, it is merely another demonstration of the difficulty of carrying out the doctrine, and not a cast-iron refutation of the doctrine itself. The fact that "no one doubts" it, is no proof.

If we relate the same example to mathematics - which is after all what Russell was concerned to defend - we find a more complex picture. It could be argued, on one hand, that it is part of the meaning of '3'

2. Ibid., p. 66.  
3. Ibid., p. 66.
that it is larger than '2' and smaller than '4' — in other words, that the relations 'is larger than' and 'is smaller than' are somehow integral parts of '3' and not separate and autonomous at all. However, if called upon to present a definition of the number '17', we would not use as part of the definition the fact that '17' is larger than '2'; and a definition of an apple would not include the fact that it is larger than a plum, a grape, a sultana or anything else. The relations might, however, be significant if the definition were to take the form of comparison with closely similar terms: '17' with '18' and '16'; an apple with other larger or smaller varieties of apple. Thus it now seems that a relation can be, and often is used as if it were an integral part of a term, in an attempt to define or describe the meaning of the term by relating or comparing it with other terms; but the relation does not seem to be a vital part of the meaning of a term unless it is being compared with others. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that Russell's theory on the definition of numbers, which, together with other problems of mathematical logic, occupied him for a very large part of the first decade of the 20th century, was one which defined numbers in terms of classes, without resorting to relations at all. The theory of classes gave rise to problems of its own, to which Russell supplied further solutions; one of these is relevant to our discussion.\footnote{See pages 54-56 of this thesis.} Despite this, however, it constituted a welcome and apparently successful break from the past, and solved a number of hitherto difficult problems for mathematical philosophy.

Jager himself feels that Russell is overstating his case. A less complex and equally valid argument would simply be that, to call a relation a property does not necessarily mean that it is an internal and necessary one. Both Bradley and Russell, it appears, assume without question that
it does. But this seems to be no more than a question about the words we use. Russell might proceed to inquire, what then is the nature of a property that is not internal and necessary? It would presumably be external and contingent, and an external contingent property might just as well be described as a feature or term attached to another term by means of a relation—precisely what the monists deny. Thus we are back to the same argument, and only the words used are different. Jager clearly takes the via media on the issue:

The internalists say all features are internal; the externalists say none are; sober realism (e.g. common sense) says some are and some are not.

A more telling criticism of Russell's bid for external relations might be put forward by taking a closer look at the 'substance' rather than the 'state', by following a line which Jager hinted at but did not pursue. Although it is clearly difficult to follow through the doctrine of internal relations (since this would involve abandoning such things as diversity and plurality), Russell's own theory, carried to its logical conclusion, appears to whittle away all the features of a term until there is nothing left; the 'substance' completely disappears. To take the example of the plum: it has (according to Russell) an external relation ('larger than') to a grape; it has an external relation to a colour (it could be red or purple and still be a plum); does it also have an external relation to a plum stone, flesh, skin? The colour of the grass mentioned by Jager, sometimes green and sometimes brown, is not seen as a property, but as a relation between grass and greenness or brownness; must we then assume that grass does not necessarily have any colour at all? And what other features of grass can be similarly stripped away before we lose sight of the thing altogether, and have only a word left?

1. Ibid., p. 74.
2. Ibid., p. 64.
3. See p. 46 of this thesis.
This problem appears later in Russell's work in another guise. In his writing on language which, although it clearly interested him at an early stage (one of his best essays on the subject was written in 1905), was not given Russell's full attention until 1918, he devises a system whereby a name - say 'grass' - is in itself meaningless, and only acquires meaning when linked, by means of what Russell calls a 'propositional function', to a property or to several properties. A result of this is that "if we want to say that a named object exists, we shall have to use such a device as that of saying that it has some property or other, or that it is identical with itself".\(^1\) The aim of these later essays is to clarify linguistic obscurities and ambiguities, in particular those concerning existence and identity propositions; but it is quite clear that Russell's later views, which will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Three of this thesis, are directly in opposition to this earlier position in which he is attempting to demonstrate that relations to properties of any kind are quite unnecessary to the meaning of a term.

Indeed, Russell's determination, in the early 20th century, to preserve the autonomy of mathematics and mathematical terms presents him very shortly with problems of ethical theory. With this in mind, it is interesting to examine the argument concerning relations in the light of a more controversial issue. If we take the example of a man, we might be moved to argue that, if all the properties of a man were not properties at all, but simply expressed relations between a man and, say, a height of six foot, a weight of twelve stone, red hair etc., could we not then go further than this and argue that he also has an external relation to two

\(^1\) A.J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore: The Analytical Heritage* (London, 1971), p. 36. Wittgenstein, who became a student of Russell's in 1911, later took issue on the same question, but with greater emphasis on the inadequacies of language and the erroneous assumptions we are led into by purely grammatical restrictions.
arms, or two legs, on the grounds that a one-armed, one-legged man is still a man? It would be erroneous to suggest that in order to qualify as a man, he must at some stage have had two arms and two legs, since modern medicine occasionally presents us with bitter evidence that this is not so. Eyes, ears, nose - in fact just about everything he has - could go, and he would still be a man. The only thing he must retain is a sufficient portion at least of his brain to keep him alive, for without life a man is not a man (although we talk of a 'dead man', what we really mean is 'a corpse' or 'the body of a man'). Where, at the end of all this pruning of external relations to properties, is our man? The only thing he cannot do without, it seems, is life itself - apart from this, he appears to be no more than an amalgamation of relations and related terms or features, all strictly non-essential. If this is really the case, what is there to distinguish a man from, say, a dog?

Clearly we cannot follow this argument through to its logical conclusions. We must stop somewhere, and admit of some properties, internal and necessary, or of some features, internally and necessarily related to a man. We might, perhaps, revert to the origins of the man, and argue that there is a kind of blueprint for 'man-ness' which in fact consists of a part of each of these features that we have stripped away, and many more. He must have a weight, a height, at the very least. The blueprint also specifies arms, legs, etc., and without these our man would indeed be incomplete and we would strictly speaking be obliged to qualify the name 'man' by mentioning such incompletions. The genetic blueprint represents the full potential of 'man' in a physical sense, and Russell surely cannot deny that the features it outlines are necessary and internal to 'man-ness'. 
If Russell was unaware of the problems here, we may perhaps interpret this as the result of his overwhelming desire to refute idealism. Were this his final position on the issue, we might with justification accuse him of falling short of the standards he sets for others; of having had clearly in his mind at the start, the conclusions of the argument, and of having twisted the argument, or at least been less than thorough, in order to reach those conclusions. But it would seem clear that the potentially ludicrous conclusions of the view that all relations are external, must sooner or later become apparent, and although relation theory does not feature greatly in his later work, his consistency of method does oblige him later to modify his views generally. Indeed, as early as 1908-10, his stated views on relations and properties appear to have been totally ignored in an essay on "The Elements of Ethics", when he has need of an internal property to which he can attach the word 'good'. He refers in this essay to the 'goodness' of a pen lying in its being good-of-its-kind (the 'goodness' in question will be discussed in the section entitled Objectivity in Ethics, later in this Chapter), that is, as a writing implement. Thus 'writing implement' is taken as being a necessary property of a pen, without which it would not be a pen.

Russell could, perhaps, have introduced the notion of 'internal and necessary relations', but this clearly would have solved nothing. He would merely be replacing one set of words with another. Instead, around 1911, during what Jager calls his Aristotelian phase, he introduces into his philosophy the notion of 'intrinsic' properties - a first step in his move towards particulars rather than Platonic universals.

Truth

Idealism in any form is a doctrine of subjectivity: everything stems from our minds. Plums, grapes and apples, with their accompanying properties in terms of size, are all linked, by fair means or foul, with everything else to form one comprehensive whole. And besides the objects in the material world, the 'truth' is also encompassed within this whole and becomes, in consequence, subjective truth. This, as one might expect, is not good enough for Russell, who wishes to see 'truth' sitting in the world of reality, alongside his row of Platonic numbers. The question of 'truth' must now be examined, with the aim of establishing its objectivity. Still considerably influenced by his early work on Leibniz, as a result of which he shares Leibniz's preoccupation with propositions, Russell puts the entire question in terms of propositions or statements, which he then equates with judgements:

Broadly speaking, the things that are true or false, in the sense with which we are concerned, are statements, and beliefs or judgements .... The truth or falsehood of statements can be defined in terms of the truth or falsehood of beliefs. A statement is true when a person who believes it believes truly, and false when a person who believes it believes falsely. 2

Again, his starting point is his refutation of the idealist notions of truth, and in his essay on "The Monistic Theory of Truth", published in 1906, he proceeds to put idealism in its place in the following terms: the truth, for the idealist, "is one, and whole, and complete"; from this it follows that "nothing is wholly true except the whole truth, and ... what seem to be isolated truths, such as 2 + 2 = 4, are really only true in the sense that they form part of the system which is the whole

1. Ibid., pp. 87-8.
truth". ¹ And from here it is but a small step to the following, apparently faultless logic:

The truth that a certain partial truth is part of the whole is a partial truth, and thus only partially true; hence we can never say with perfect truth 'this is part of the Truth'. Hence there can be no sense of truth which is completely applicable to a partial truth, because everything that can be said about a partial truth is only a partial truth. ²

Or, more concisely:

If no partial truth is quite true, it cannot be quite true that no partial truth is quite true. ³

The argument is, to Russell, conclusive; he has demonstrated its self-contradictory nature. And his argument was, we are told, taken by idealists as being a serious criticism, worthy of serious reply. ⁴

However, it seems that there is an element of double dealing here. Russell's refutation has a distinct flavour to it of the problem of the paradox. And at this point we must pause momentarily, and work backwards through Russell's earlier work.

John Passmore examines the paradox problem in detail, ⁵ and in order to establish the links between the notorious Cretan liar, and the Monistic theory of truth, it may be useful to set the two paradoxes side by side:

i. "Suppose a man says 'I am lying', then if what he says is true, he is lying, i.e. what he says is not true, and if what he says is not true, then also he is lying, i.e. what he says is true." ⁶

ii. Suppose a man says 'any proposition about a thing is only partially true', if what he says is true, then (this being itself a proposition) it is only partially true to say that any proposition about a thing is only partially true.

2. Ibid., p. 132.
3. Ibid., p. 133.
4. Ibid., p. 133.
6. Ibid., p. 221.
The Cretan liar paradox was not what Russell originally set out to solve. His starting point was buried deep in his mathematical philosophy and the theory of classes he had introduced for the purpose of definition of numbers. The mathematical aspects of the theory need not concern us here; but the problems the theory itself created are relevant. We must begin with some examples of classes which at first seem straightforward enough:

1. The class of things which are men, and
2. The class of things which are not men.

As Passmore points out, some classes appear to include themselves among their members, and some do not. Example 1., the class of things which are men, is not itself a man, and therefore is not a member of itself. The second example, however, is also not itself a man, and must therefore be included in itself as being one of the things which are not men. So far, we encounter no problem; we merely reach the conclusion that some classes are members of themselves, and some are not. But a paradox arises when we consider 'the class of classes which are not members of themselves'. Is this class a member of itself, or not?

If it is a member of itself, then it is not one of the classes which are not members of themselves; and yet to be a member of itself, it must be one of those classes. .... equally if it is not a member of itself, then it is not one of those classes which are not members of themselves. ¹

The discovery of this paradox created some consternation in the world of mathematics; it "made Frege say, when the news of it was communicated to him by Russell, that the whole foundation of mathematics had been undermined".² Russell himself devoted considerable time and trouble to its solution, which finally emerged in the form of his theory of types.

1. Ibid., p. 221.
The paradoxes all arise, (Russell) argues, out of a certain kind of vicious circle. Such a vicious circle is generated whenever it is supposed that 'a collection of objects may contain members which can only be defined by means of the collection as a whole'. To take a case: suppose we say 'all propositions have the property $x$'. On the face of it, this is itself a proposition, so that the class of propositions has among its members one which presumes that the class has been completed - because it talks of 'all propositions' - before it has itself been mentioned. This contradiction - that the class must at once have been completed and not been completed - brings out the fact that there is no such class. ¹

We must now return to our starting point concerning the idealists and their only-partially-true propositions. What they are saying is, 'all propositions have the property of being only partially true'. According to the above, Russell has concluded that there is no such class as the class of all propositions. If we are to develop a theory of propositions, then "the pseudo-totality 'all propositions' ... must be broken up into sets of propositions, each capable of being a genuine totality, after which a separate account can be given of each such set". ²

This then is the start of Russell's theory of types, and it goes some way towards solving the problem of paradoxes. It constructs a kind of hierarchy in which, at one level, we would find the actual propositions made by the Cretan (his lies), and by the idealist (his - or anyone else's - partial truths); and at another, higher level we find their respective pronouncements about these propositions. Thus it becomes possible for the Cretan to tell us truthfully that he always lies, and for the idealist to tell us truthfully that any proposition is not wholly true. This is not, of course, to say that the monistic theory of truth is therefore necessarily the right one, but simply that in Russell's own terms, it is possible for such a theory to be expressed without being faulted on purely logical grounds.

¹. Passmore, op. cit., p. 222.
². Ibid., p. 222.
The theory of types makes its first appearance, according to Passmore, in an Appendix to *The Principles of Mathematics*, published in 1903, subsequently in articles in 1908 and 1910, and finally most fully in *Principia Mathematica* in 1910. Russell's essay on "The Monistic Theory of Truth" was first published in 1906. Throughout this period, the problem was familiar to Russell. What possible excuse can he have had, then, for ignoring his new, albeit embryonic, theory completely, when the object under attack was idealism's partially true propositions? As a refutation of the idealist notion of truth, therefore, Russell's own argument fails in the light of Russell's own theories.¹

In his pursuit of objective truth, Russell then attacks the 'new' philosophy of the day - pragmatism - also strictly subjective, but claiming no absolute 'truth'. Instead pragmatism claims that "nothing that can be known, nothing that can properly be called 'real', is independent of the knower".² This metaphysic applies to truth as well as to knowledge, in the sense that, in order to establish a criterion for 'true' beliefs as opposed to false ones, we must look first at the believer himself and ask, "what characteristics of beliefs do in fact lead men to regard some as true, others as false?"³ And the characteristics in question seem to hinge on simple expedience: "An idea is 'true' so long as to believe it is profitable to our lives".⁴ We believe what we want to believe, they seem to be saying, and what we want to believe is, ipso facto, true.

1. It is interesting to note that this is not the only occasion on which appeal to Russell's own theory of types would have gone some way towards salvaging the argument of his opponents; nor is it the only occasion on which Russell ignores - either by choice or by inattention - such a possibility; see Chapter Five, p. 195.
Stated as baldly as this, the theory appears to open doors to any number of horrific beliefs that have done, or could do, untold damage to human society. To claim, for instance, that Hitler's belief that it was right to exterminate Jews, was a true belief because it furthered Hitler's purposes, would clearly be abhorrent. And yet it is all too uncomfortably accurate that we do in fact tend to believe those things which we find it most convenient to believe. And it should be pointed out that the pragmatists are not arguing that this is what ought to happen, but merely that this is what does happen; that this form of 'truth' is the only form of 'truth' that we have; that it is the best we can do.

However this, according to Russell, is only half the story. The pragmatists insist that belief in something is better than no belief at all: "in certain cases it is right to believe whole-heartedly in one of two alternatives, even when there is no evidence as to which of them is true". This, as Russell points out, implies that every choice we make is backed up by firm belief, which is not necessarily so. Our choice may be merely chance, even when the alternatives are presented in the context, as it were, of human life, i.e. even when the choice will affect us in some way. When alternatives are presented out of such a context as, for example, in scientific belief, or philosophical inquiry, Russell claims that the pragmatists have nothing to say. When we are faced with alternatives, neither of which would further or impede our purposes, how can we possibly decide which is the right course to take, which is the 'true' belief? To a certain extent Russell is right here; the theory does not explain scientific beliefs, nor yet the sort of exploration into

1. Ibid., p. 81.
2. We must assume that by philosophical inquiry Russell means the kind of inquiry which he himself advocates and attempts to pursue, rather than the kind of inquiry which he criticises precisely because the 'truth' arrived at furthers the purposes of the inquirer.
the 'meaning of truth' conducted by impartial philosophers, at least when short-term detail is considered. But the longer-term picture is not so convincing. The opponents of Galileo, for instance, persisted in believing that the sun revolved around the earth, even though it was subsequently proved to be untrue. Their belief, it could be argued, certainly furthered their purposes, since they did not suffer persecution as Galileo did. The beliefs of Galileo himself seemed to be flying in the face of his purposes, if we take these purposes to be a comfortable, happy existence on this earth. But here we meet problems of psychology involving what individual people consider their own purposes to be; if Galileo gave priority to the discovery of 'truth', if scientific advance was more important to him than personal comfort, then the pragmatists' case stands. The notorious Russian geneticist, Lysenko, who twisted science in order to 'prove' that environmentally acquired characteristics could in time become hereditary ones, was most certainly furthering the purposes both of his Party and of himself by his beliefs. And Russell's own inquiry, as we have seen, cannot be said to be wholly impartial; he has already hitched his wagon to objectivity, and his disbelief in the monistic theory of truth as outlined above, as well as his disbelief in the pragmatists' theory, were grist to his objective mill. When he later abandons objectivity, it could also be argued that, like Galileo, Russell's over-riding purpose was to be true to his own principles, rather than to be praised by his fellow men.

It is interesting to note that, in a much later essay when objectivity is gradually being eroded, Russell presents a fairer assessment of pragmatism as regards truth and belief. "Philosophy in the Twentieth Century", first published in 1924, portrays pragmatism as a kind of reaction to the traditional theories which aimed at proof or disproof, and which led to neither being possible. William James, he tells us,
argued that, as practical men, we cannot remain in doubt on these issues if we are to survive. We must assume, for instance, that the sort of food which has nourished us in the past will not poison us in the future. Sometimes we are mistaken and die. The test of a belief is not conformity with 'fact', since we can never reach the facts concerned; the test is its success in promoting life and the achievement of our desires. 1

This view, in 1924, Russell is more willing to accept, with only two major objections. The first is that, although the pragmatist theory of truth may be useful in cases where 'truth' is hard to obtain, in "humbler examples" - such as the 'belief' that thunder will follow a flash of lightning - the 'truth' is far more obvious and real. "When you hear the thunder", he points out, "your belief is verified or refuted, not by any advantage or disadvantage it has brought you, but by a 'fact', the sensation of hearing thunder". 2 In other words, the pragmatists' criterion for establishing 'truth' is in a multitude of mundane, trivial details, quite unnecessary.

His second objection, in this later essay, is along the lines of his major objection of the 1909 essay on pragmatism, in that it concerns the dangers of a doctrine of truth based on benefit or advantage to the believer: it is subject to abuse, to manipulation of people's beliefs, and may deteriorate into "an orgy of propaganda". 3 "The recent history of Europe", he claims, referring to the first World War, "is an object lesson of the falsehood of pragmatism in this form". 4

When Russell himself later abandoned objectivity altogether, he adopted a viewpoint very similar to that of the pragmatists, although without their apparent resignation to circumstances, without their scepticism which says that "since all beliefs are absurd, we may as well

2. Ibid., p. 48.
3. Ibid., p. 50.
4. Ibid., p. 50.
believe what is most convenient”.¹ It would, however, be true to say that, in later years, it is consideration of the practical effects of such scepticism – together with a lingering and never entirely subdued sense of mysticism – which prevents Russell from accepting completely and wholeheartedly a philosophy based on subjectivity.²

In 1909, however, Russell accuses the pragmatists finally of ambiguity about the word 'meaning', ignoring the distinction between causal connection ("that cloud means rain") and dictionary definition. They take causal connection to be the 'meaning' in the second, definition, sense. Here he seems to be missing the point. While endeavouring to establish the distinction between the two 'meanings' he himself is ignoring the fact that the pragmatists are simply rejecting the second type of 'meaning', at least in so far as it concerns truth, i.e. they are rejecting objectivity. They are explaining what they see as what actually happens, viz. that given a subjective starting point, the things we believe to be true (which are the best we can do as regards truth) are those things which further our purposes – or at least, those which further what we believe to be our purposes. To a subjectivist, there is no dictionary definition of 'truth'. By thus arguing on a different level, Russell manages to confuse the issue sufficiently to throw doubt on the pragmatist theory, and to demonstrate the difficulties and dangers involved; but this is insufficient to refute it altogether. Indeed, the most telling refutation of all forms of idealism would have been verification of his own thesis of objectivity – and this he continues to be unable to provide.

He does, however, set out a useful methodology for dealing with questions of truth and falsehood, in his essay "On the Nature of Truth"

2. See Chapter Five.
which ultimately replaced the final section of "The Monistic Theory of Truth". He admits that there can be no judgements without a mind to judge, but argues still that the truth or falsehood of the judgement does not depend upon the mind. His argument involves splitting up the judgement into its terms and relations, rather than the more traditional propositions. This is to avoid the awkwardness of what might be called 'objective falsehoods'. For example, if we consider my belief about the manner of death of Charles I, then the object of my belief in propositional form would be 'that Charles I died on the scaffold', or 'Charles I's death on the scaffold'; in this case it would be an objective truth. But if I believed that Charles I lived a long and happy life and died in his bed, then the object of my belief is 'Charles I's death in his bed' - an objective falsehood. It is indeed difficult to find a place for an 'objective falsehood'. If something is false, we assume that it does not therefore exist; but how can a thing be both objective, and non-existent? However, if we split the judgement into terms: I, Charles I, and the scaffold; and relations: believe and dying; then Charles I, the scaffold and death are all objects of my belief, and the judgement or belief is true if the relation which is one of the objects does indeed relate the other objects, i.e. if death does relate Charles I and the scaffold.

With another example, 'Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio', Russell is obliged to introduce a sense of order between the terms and relations which are the objects of belief, in order to make it clear that the relational object of Othello's belief, 'loves', relates the other objects in the right manner, i.e. that 'Desdemona loves Cassio' and not that 'Cassio loves Desdemona'. Thus we find that this belief of Othello's is false, not because there is no such object as 'Desdemona's love for Cassio', but because the relation 'loves' does not in fact relate the
other two terms in the required manner.\(^1\)

When the truth or falsity under consideration concerns relatively uncontroversial subjects such as these two examples, then the method is indeed useful. Different problems arise, however, when Russell tries to apply his philosophical methodology in the field of ethics. It is to this that we now turn.

**Objectivity in ethics**

Russell's views on objectivity extend, not surprisingly, to ethics. He believes, in this early period, that "values are as much facts as facts are".\(^2\) The views are expounded in a short essay entitled "A Free Man's Worship", published in 1902; in his review of G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* in 1904; and in a fairly lengthy essay, "The Elements of Ethics", put together from four articles written in 1908 and 1910. In this early work on ethics, Russell owes a great deal to Moore. Jager is kind enough to suggest that since the two were colleagues, it is unlikely that their views were worked out quite independently, and therefore the influence may well have been reciprocal;\(^3\) however, the difference in style and in content between the first essay and the other two works suggests that before Russell and Moore subjected ethical theory to close scrutiny, Russell did have his own views, somewhat ill-defined at this stage, but none-the-less significant, especially in the light of later developments in his ethical theory.

"A Free Man's Worship" is very different in its treatment of the subject from the other two works mentioned. The style is less precise, more flamboyant, and highly polemical. The content bears little relation

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1. These arguments are all to be found in Russell, "On the Nature of Truth", *op. cit.*, pp. 147-159.
to the analysis of the meaning of 'good' which Russell tackles later, but it does set out the 'values' which were important then to Russell, and which were to pursue him throughout his life. The essay forms a foundation for Russell's ethical theory, as opposed to the Russell-Moore theory, and introduces Russell's own brand of elitism which, although it is never explicitly expounded as a basis for morality, is nevertheless so much in evidence in his other writings that its significance is greater than at first appears.

Beginning with Mephistopheles' view of the Creation, as related to Faustus, Russell argues that science (evolution) now presents us with as gloomy and purposeless a prospect, i.e. with no ultimate plan. Russell's view, however, is more optimistic: civilised man can hope for more than this. He is free, "during his brief years, to examine, to criticise, to know, and in imagination to create", and thus is not as overwhelmed by the forces of nature as is the "savage". The worship of Power - from the primitive savage who can do nothing to control it, to the Darwinist political creeds which use it as moral justification for their survival - is "the result of failure to maintain our own ideals against a hostile universe". Russell is not here mourning the decline of religion, but rather the failure to replace the values and ideals of religious creeds with any new moral creed. We see here the age-old dichotomy of passion and reason - "in action, in desire, we must submit perpetually to the tyranny of outside forces; but in thought, in aspiration, we are free". It is this freedom of thought which gives rise to "the whole world of art and philosophy". And when we compare this 'free man' with the slave who is "doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death, because they are greater

2. Ibid., p. 12.
3. Ibid., p. 13.
than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour",¹ we see what Russell is putting forward as a replacement for God. The full potential of man is the aim - a theme which finds a place not only in the other works which will be discussed in this section, but also, many years later, in his book Human Society in Ethics and Politics.

It is the freedom of thought which Russell finds particularly attractive in G.E. Moore's Principia Ethica. Most philosophers, he feels, are prejudiced from the start in ethical inquiry by their already clearly defined theories: they are "interested, almost exclusively, in establishing some apparently valuable conclusions, for which they seek to find premises".² Moore, by contrast, sees ethics as "the general inquiry into what is good, and into what good is".³ The method of Moore's inquiry thus meets with Russell's approval, and as we have already noted, method became, for Russell, the cornerstone of all philosophy.⁴ The substance is also for the most part acceptable - and indeed much of it reappears in Russell's essay on "The Elements of Ethics". We find the distinction between good as end and good as means; the criticism of the unsatisfactory tautological nature of 'naturalistic' ethical theories such as the evolutionist school; the refutation of the Utilitarian notion of pleasure being the sole good, on the grounds that, under analysis, pleasure turns out to be no more than a constituent of "valuable wholes" and that their value "does not lie wholly in that constituent".⁵ All these arguments find their way into Russell's own work on ethics.

1. Ibid., p. 17.
3. Ibid., p. 328.
4. See pp. 10-11 of this thesis.
5. Ibid., p. 330.
The one area in which Russell is not in agreement with Moore is on the question of conduct, of what we ought to do. Moore's own starting point of the whole discussion concerns the indefinability of 'the good':

If we say: 'pleasure is good', we say something different from 'pleasure is pleasure'; thus good cannot mean the same thing as pleasure. The notion that good can be defined, is called by Mr. Moore the Naturalistic Fallacy, because usually some natural object is taken to be the meaning of good. 1

It is from this valid argument that we get Moore's - and Russell's - view of good, at this point in time, as a non-natural quality. Although Russell later rejects the notion of a non-natural quality, he retains the view of the indefinability of good. 2 But Moore, when considering conduct, appears to imply that, even if good cannot be defined, ought can:

It is held that what we ought to do is that action, among all that are possible, which will produce the best results on the whole; and this is regarded as constituting a definition of ought. 3

Such an argument is subject to the same criticism as the naturalistic fallacy: unless it is tautological, then we have made no progress in definitional terms. Thus Russell holds that it is not a definition, but a "significant proposition". A further difficulty arises with the question of knowing the full consequences of our actions. Moore argues correctly that we can never know what action will produce the best results, and concludes from this that with regard to moral principles, even though "there must be instances where better results would follow from breaking them, yet, since we can never know when such an instance is before us, .... we ought always to obey such rules". 4 The rules in question are those

1. Ibid., p. 329.
2. It is possible here to see a connection between the impossibility of defining 'good' in ethics, and the impossibility of drawing a line with no breadth, or a point with no magnitude, in geometry. Both 'good' and 'line' are in this sense not directly knowable to man.
3. Ibid., p. 330.
4. Ibid., p. 330.
laid down by conventional morality, and Russell's own life provides us with innumerable examples of his own firm conviction that there are times when such rules must be broken. In his treatment of this aspect in "The Elements of Ethics" he allows more scope for individual conscience.¹ His only argument here seems to be the common sense notion that in some cases it seems a pity that "a man did his duty" - an argument which Moore sees, not unnaturally, as paradoxical. "Yet paradox of some kind", Russell claims, "is apparently unavoidable".²

However, what both he and Moore seem to have overlooked here is that the argument has shifted from the precision of analysis. The "moral principles" Russell is talking about here he describes loosely as being "generally useful and generally obeyed".³ And yet such moral principles are no more than conventional morality. A moral principle such as 'Thou shalt not commit murder' could be paraphrased: 'Refraining from murder is good'; and it would then instantly crumble under the same sort of analysis that Moore uses in dealing with the Utilitarian ethic. It can have no greater status in ethical argument than any of the other principles which Moore has already dismissed under the general title of naturalistic fallacies. Despite the fact that 'thou shalt not commit murder' has been a fairly consistent constituent of moral codes which have been valued throughout history, under the strict analysis which Moore purports to be adopting, and for which Russell heartily applauds him, such a principle must in all fairness be relegated to an inferior status in a purely analytical ethical argument. Moore cannot claim that we ought always to obey such a rule, any more than that we ought always to follow the evolutionist in pursuit of what is more evolved, or the Utilitarian in the pursuit of pleasure.

3. Ibid., p. 330.
Both Moore and Russell seek objective good; but analysis yields nothing except the conclusion that 'good' is indefinable. Such a negative conclusion presents no problems until we move to the area of conduct, of ethics in action, as it were, whereupon Moore happily assumes that in the absence of anything more definite, we might as well follow conventional morality; and by this assumption he implicitly upgrades the more traditional 'moral principles' at the expense of more recent and controversial ones. Russell draws the same implication, but is inevitably less satisfied with it. On a personal level, he has already flouted conventional morality in his private rejection of religion; in academic terms, he sees the weaknesses in the analysis. He is not yet ready to reject objectivity, but he is certainly doubtful.

Mr. Moore, in consequence of his definition, is led to infer, that we can never be sure what we ought to do, since we cannot calculate all the consequences of our actions; also that no moral law can be self-evident, as the Intuitionist school suppose. If ought is indefinable, these consequences do not follow. They may, nevertheless, be true in the main; but there must be at least one self-evident proposition as to what ought to be done. This will be some such rule as, that we ought to do what, so far as we can judge, will have the best consequences; though it is doubtful if this particular rule is itself quite true.¹

The confusion and the imprecision both of Moore's *Principia Ethica* and of Russell's critique arise only when they attempt to link ethical theory with ethical practice. The theory alone presents no practical problems, but only problems of logic and language; but a theory in which 'good' is indefinable can offer no advice on a practical level as to the way in which life ought to be conducted. The implications of this are more far-reaching than this particular argument. Indeed, they bring us back to the starting point of this thesis: the question of whether or not philosophy, or philosophical argument, can in fact make a useful contribution

¹. Ibid., p. 331.
to the social and political theories which necessarily underlie action. The objectivist reaches the point where what he is looking for is indefinable, and he can go no further; anything he has to say beyond this is an expression of opinion rather than a solid theory backed by rational argument. For him the gap between theory and practice is, ultimately and inevitably, unbridgeable.

Russell's major attempt, three years later, to bridge the gap between objective theory and its practical application, fares no better, although in "The Elements of Ethics" he uses the same - or recognisably similar - language as in his philosophical works. At the beginning of the essay, for example, as an introduction to the nature of ethical propositions, he draws on his theories of classes and types when pointing out that:

.... propositions about practice are not themselves practical, any more than propositions about gas are gaseous.¹

The influence of his theory of external relations is also detectable in his attempt to establish that the 'goodness' of a thing is unrelated to men's views, when he argues:

.... when we say a thing is good in itself, .... we attribute to the thing a property which it either has or does not have, quite independently of our opinion on the subject ... ²

Here, of course, we must add that in contrast with the thoroughness with which all properties are stripped away from a thing in Russell's philosophical discussions, he appears in ethical analysis to be quite willing to accept the property 'goodness' as an intrinsic property. In general terms, however, Russell's approach is clearly to be analytical - and indeed this is just what we might expect; but it is the analytical method which

1. Russell, "The Elements of Ethics", op. cit., p. 13. We may in passing compare his use here of these theories in connection with his own ethical propositions, with his apparent reluctance to see their relevance in his discussion of the monistic theory of truth on pages 53-56.
2. Ibid., p. 20.
causes the imperfections. Russell has not yet accepted what he was in later years to acknowledge with extreme reluctance: that analysis, in particular analysis based on empiricism, is incompatible with objectivity in philosophy and in ethics. At the time, the essay was subject to criticism, in particular from George Santayana;¹ but despite the fact that the theories expressed in "The Elements of Ethics" were vulnerable to criticism - including Russell's own in a later period - and that they were in any case taken very largely direct from Moore's _Principia Ethica_, the essay serves well to link Russell's philosophy with his ethical theory of the early 20th century. It also lays the foundations for his later theory in that it presents a totally different approach from "A Free Man's Worship" and thus provides a preview of the conflict underlying Russell's ethical views - the problem of combining logical analysis with a set of highly valued moral principles whose status in ethical argument is completely undermined by such analysis. These two early essays, taken together, serve as a backdrop for much of Russell's later work, and they are both, therefore, important.

Russell's efforts to infuse objectivity into ethics leave a lot to be desired in terms of argument. He endeavours, in a number of different ways, to persuade us that 'good' exists independently of man, in the same way, perhaps, as the mathematical propositions such as 'two plus two equals four', or the geometrical lines, points and surfaces, exist independently of man. His first line of attack is the Moorean distinction he makes between 'good conduct' and 'good'; the 'good conduct' is what concerns men, but it would be clearer to rename it 'right conduct', since it is the type of conduct which leads to 'good consequences', or to the best

¹ Santayana's critique of Russell's ethical theory is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, pp. 108-111.
possible consequences in the circumstances.\(^1\) The distinction is a
popular one, but it later leads Russell (and perhaps others) into diffi-
culties concerning the moral judgement of ends and means.\(^2\) For the time
being, however, the distinction serves its purpose, which is to put the
good consequences of a right action into the realm of things which are
good on their own account, i.e. separate and distinct from human activity.
"The study of what is good or bad on its own account must be included in
ethics, which thus ceases to be concerned only with human conduct".\(^3\)

There is a distinct similarity between this theory and his views on
the nature of truth outlined above. He uses precisely the same method
to distinguish between the human activity and the thing in itself. His
examples of propositions concerning truth, Charles I's death on the scaffold,
or Desdemona's love for Cassio, might be equated here with, say, 'I believe
that the consequences of the pursuit of pleasure are good'. He would
argue that the truth or falsity of the second proposition in no way depends
upon my believing it, just as the truth or falsity of the proposition
'Charles I died on the scaffold' does not depend on my belief in it. To
repeat a previous quotation:

> It is important to realize that, when we say a thing is good
> in itself, and not merely as a means, we attribute to the thing
> a property which it either has or does not have, quite independ­
> ently of our opinion on the subject, or of our wishes or other
> people's. \(^4\)

He admits that it is difficult to discover the truth, but this fact
does not, according to his theory, prove "that there is no truth to be
discovered".\(^5\) His solution involves, on the one hand, establishing a
relation between the terms Charles I, death and the scaffold (which is a

1. Ibid., p. 15.
3. Ibid., p. 15.
4. Ibid., p. 20.
5. Ibid., p. 20.
relatively easy thing to do, by consulting history books); and on the other, a relation between pleasure and good. However, in the first instance the terms we are dealing with are not themselves subject to dispute; Charles I and the scaffold present no problems, and the relation, death, is subject to medical rather than philosophical argument. We would not doubt the possibility of the terms existing independently of ourselves, and therefore a relation between them could be similarly independent. But the same cannot be said - or at any rate, cannot yet be said - about either the pursuit of pleasure and hence its consequences, or 'good'. Both are subject to a multitude of different interpretations in a way that Charles I and the scaffold are not. Since Russell has not yet given us a definition of 'good' which might put it into the same category as Charles I and the scaffold, we find the relational links between the terms are vastly more complex. Whether or not there is a relation between good and pleasure, there most certainly is - or at least, Russell has not proved that there is not - a relation between the 'I' that judges and the term 'good'. Thus Russell's argument for objectivity, so far, is by no means watertight.

A further difficulty arises when we consider the judgement, both of right and wrong action, and of good and bad consequences. Where does the action of judging fit into this scheme? It is, after all, human beings who must judge, so we must presume that human beings can either judge rightly or wrongly, since this is the limit of human conduct. It is all too often forgotten that, when dealing with human beings, we do not necessarily pass judgement merely for its own sake; the judgement itself has consequences. Othello's (wrong) judgement, for instance, led him to murder Desdemona. Must we therefore assume that a 'right judgement' is one which will lead to good consequences, or to the best possible consequences in the circumstances? To take another example, "the study of
what is good or bad on its own account" is a human activity; we might therefore ask, when confronted with a human being pursuing this particular activity, what good-on-their-own-account consequences will result from the study of what is good or bad on its own account?

This larger question is vital both to Russell's theory as expressed here, and to the more general theme of this thesis. Russell's argument is that 'good', if it can be found anywhere (and at this stage in his life he believes that it can), can be found in the consequences of an action. What effect does a value system of this nature have on further action? The problem may become clearer if we apply the same analysis to other value systems - for example, religion. In most varieties of Christianity the question of 'good' is a question of what the Church, the priests and the orthodox texts have to say. The consequences of acceptance of this system have been of enormous significance. The system has led to a united Church which has, especially in medieval times, wielded enormous power; it had led to persecution of dissenters; it has led to accumulation of wealth by the Church, and to the accumulation of a vast wealth of ritual and tradition which has served both to unite and divide societies in the past; and finally, with the Reformation, it has led to the strengthening of the opposition, the anti-authority body, and the replacement of the whole system in favour of a new one. Thus among the consequences of one value system must be numbered the development, and ultimate success, of another.

To return to Russell's value system, and to the possible consequences of its acceptance, we find in one sense far less scope for opposition. There is no authority to dictate which actions shall lead to which consequences, nor which consequences are 'good' and which are 'bad'. But this greater freedom for individual judgement in itself poses problems; it has

1. Ibid., p. 15.
its own consequences. Some of these - the tendencies towards moral
anarchy - have been discussed briefly in the introductory chapter. Thus
one consequence of acceptance of the view that actions are to be judged in
the light of their consequences, is a freedom which to many may seem
dangerous, insecure and even intolerable. Russell himself in later years
feels this to be the case. Another consequence, which will be more fully
discussed in Chapter Five, is that the distinction between actions and
consequences, when interpreted in terms of 'means' and 'ends', leads, in
the manner indicated above, to a situation in which the 'ends' or conse­
quences can themselves be seen as 'means' or actions towards some further
end; the result is an endless progression towards an elusive 'end' or
'consequence' which forever escapes us, and without which we can pass no
moral judgement whatever.

For the time being, however, we must be content to observe that unless
Russell can provide some clearer definition of what is good on its own
account, we are merely back to square one, at one remove. Russell faces
the problem, and wriggles round it. He rejects the idea of defining 'good'
in terms of other things such as pleasure, desire etc., on the grounds that
there have been so many - incompatible - 'definitions' of this kind that
they cannot possibly be definitions at all, but merely "substantial affirm­
ations concerning the things that are good". He prefers instead to rely
on examples of 'good', claiming that we can grasp the "idea" of good by
example, in the same way as we can grasp, as children, the idea of red.
And he goes on to say that there may be "many goods of which we human beings
have absolutely no knowledge because they do not come within the very
restricted range of our thoughts and feelings. Such goods are still goods,
although human conduct can have no reference to them" - presumably in the

1. Ibid., p. 20.
2. Ibid., p. 17.
same way that there may be many examples of red which we will never come
across, but which are, nonetheless, red.

There are immense problems here. First, in his rejection of
definitions in other terms, Russell is right in his view that such
definitions are merely examples of 'good' in the sense he later admits.
This is no more than his version of Moore's naturalistic fallacy. The
significant factor in this argument, however, is that, by rejecting
definitions already proposed, he effectively rules out any definitions
that he or anyone else might care to propose in the future. This bodes
ill for the validity of objective 'good', since all we are left with are
types - and it is human beings who must judge whether an example of
'good' is a valid one or not.

Secondly, his claim that "there are many goods ...." is inconsistent
with his earlier, flimsy, last-resort 'definition' of good as an 'idea'
which can be grasped in the same way as "the idea of red". "Red" and
"good" are two different types of things. We are content merely to grasp
the 'idea' of red because this is all that most of us need in life. But
'redness' is not merely an idea in our minds; it does exist independently
of our minds, and is in fact scientifically defineable as the colour with
the greatest wavelength. And perhaps most significantly, with the
exception of borderline cases of red/purple or red/orange, we do not dispute
about what is red and what is not because, quite apart from the idea that
we have in our minds regarding red, and quite apart from what the scientist
might say about it - we can also see it with our eyes; it is perceptible
to the senses in a way that 'good' is not. The introduction here of
'intuition' as the source of ethical knowledge - the counterpart to percep-
tion as the source of knowledge of physical things - would not serve
satisfactorily to remove 'good' from the realm of ideas. The term itself
was Moore's rather than Russell's, although since Russell adopted most of
Moore's subsequent theory, it may be assumed that 'intuition' was also tacitly adopted. But 'intuition' cannot be equated with perception in terms of reliability. In The Problems of Philosophy, published in 1912, Russell applies himself to the question of objectivity in the sphere of physical things. He examines perception and 'sense-data', and argues that the objectivity of a thing is demonstrated by the fact that, although our impressions, our sense-data of a thing may be slightly different from other people's, still we all see more or less the same thing. If 'intuition' were to be accorded as high a status as a source of knowledge as Russell gives to perception, he would need to argue that 'intuition' is a source of knowledge common to all men, and that all our 'intuitions' are more or less the same as other people's. Use of 'intuition' as a basis for objective ethical knowledge would necessitate the very dubious claim that each and every man's 'intuitions' were closely similar to those of his fellow men in the same way that his sense-data are similar; and such a claim Russell does not attempt to make. Thus 'good' remains an idea which even 'intuition' cannot elevate to the status of objectivity; and as long as it remains so, as long as Russell is content to let it remain so, then there can be no 'goods' to which human conduct can have no reference, for there can be no ideas of 'good' without a human mind to think them.

The third problem in Russell's early ethical theory is pinpointed by Jager; it is the confusion between what Jager calls intrinsic, and specimen goodness, the pleasure-versus-the-fountain-pen problem. Can both pleasure, and a fountain pen, be 'good' in the same sense? Moore,

1. The term is later explicitly included as part of Russell's definition of 'mysticism', see Chapter Three, pp. 114-5.
2. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.
according to Jager, avoids the problem by careful choice of examples. Russell, on the other hand, appears to confuse the two without a qualm of conscience. Having made his point about 'right action' rather than 'good action', he still seems to imply that right action can lead to such things as a good picture, a good dinner etc.,\(^1\) thus ignoring the fact that the goodness is not an intrinsic property of the picture (as it is, or so Jager thinks, of pleasure), but a contingent one.

Almost by accident, it seems, Jager puts forward an interesting idea concerning the subtle difference between a good (specimen) dinner, and a good (serves-its-purpose-well) automobile. Although there may be controversy over whether or not a good dinner is one which serves its purpose well, it is the idea of serving a purpose, rather than the dinner, which is significant, and on a grander scale than either dinners or automobiles. The view that something is good because it serves its purpose well, seems to put the serving of the purpose into the position of the ultimate 'good'. Here all good pragmatists may applaud, and objectivists, including the Russell of the first two decades of this century, shrink back in horror; but the idea is worth pursuing because, as has already been mentioned, Russell himself later adopted a more pragmatic viewpoint. The reservations he has in later years about such views are discernible in his early work, and concern exactly the distinctions which Jager mentions here, and which Russell appears to confuse.

Jager's distinction between 'specimen' goodness and 'serves-its-purpose-well' goodness seems to be, in part at least, an objection against Russell's implied application of the term 'good' to both pleasure and the fountain pen. Russell is raising the status of a specimen goodness to equal that of intrinsic goodness - or even to become intrinsic goodness.

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\(^1\) Ibid., p. 468.
Jager claims that this is due to confusion; but let us examine the consequences of the hypothesis that Russell, far from being confused, is in fact ignoring the distinction because he sees no necessity for it; that he is seeking some definition of 'good' which could be universally applicable, which could be used as a yardstick for judging pictures, fountain pens, dinners and automobiles as well as pleasure and other nobler and more acceptable views of 'good' things; that he was looking for a definition of 'goodness' which could be applied at any level, no matter how lowly.

Russell's early writing on ethics does not help us at this stage; he has quite clearly rejected the possibility of defining 'good' in terms of other things - in particular in terms of pleasure or desire. 'Good', he has assured us, is indefinable. And yet he persists in the view that it exists independently of men - in a way, perhaps, that pleasure and desire do not. Even in his most sceptical days - as for example when he examines neutral monism and the behaviourist ethical theory to which it leads, he is still unable to account satisfactorily for all aspects of human thought and behaviour in terms of what we perceive of human beings; and at odd incautious moments he acknowledges an underlying mysticism in his beliefs. Despite his justified criticism that Moore's naturalistic fallacy notion can be used in argument against any and all attempts to define 'good', he is never - either in 1910 or at any time up to his death - entirely convinced that there is, therefore, nothing more to be said on the subject. In *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, published in 1954 - his last major work on ethics - 'objectivity' is replaced by 'impersonality' which imposes far less restrictions on the definability of 'good'; he is

1. See Chapter Four, especially his essay on "Styles in Ethics", pp. 159-161.
therefore at that later date - as we shall see - able to treat ethics in greater particular detail, giving full and serious consideration to notions of 'good' being definable in terms of pleasure or desire, rather than simply ruling them out at the beginning of the argument, as he does here.

For the time being, however, Russell's objectivist convictions rule out any explicit definitions of 'good', and we must therefore bear in mind the need to investigate the implications of his less cautious work on ethics - and indeed on philosophy - in order to extract the essence of his embryonic ethical theory.

We have noted already the fact that Russell's concern for objectivity led him into difficulties in his early philosophical work. He was determined to uphold the theory of external relations, despite the unpalatability (both psychological and philosophical) of its conclusions.¹ We have suggested as an alternative the notion of a genetic blueprint for, in our example, a man, representing what we have called his 'full potential'. The term 'full potential' was not an arbitrary one; indeed Russell himself later suggests it by implication.² We find that it is applicable also to the plum, the apple and the grape on page 47 of this thesis, in this sense: the blueprint for the apple would indicate colour range, size range (in terms of measurement rather than comparison with other fruits), basic structure, method of propagation etc. Our blueprint for the full potential of an apple would in fact contain the sort of information imparted in an elementary biology class. The full potential of grass could be similarly documented; and the full potential of a pen, as Russell himself (somewhat inconsistently) has noted, lies in its effectiveness as a writing implement.

We thus have a standard to which each and every object can aspire: achievement of its full potential. If the object is imperfect - if, for

1. See pp. 44-51.
2. See Chapter Five, pp. 240-3 of this thesis.
instance, the grass is brown or yellow, if the pen is a trick rubber pen, if the apple is small and shrivelled - we can then argue that it has in some way been prevented from reaching its full potential. In the case of a man-made object such as a pen, the prevention has been deliberately imposed. In the case of the grass, it has been deprived, either deliberately or accidentally, of a vital ingredient, water or light, necessary to its achievement of its full potential.

In this manner the problem of internal and external relations can be dealt with more adequately than with either Russell's or the idealist's solutions; and Jager's via media - that 'some' relations are internal and 'some' are external - can be more clearly defined as, say, that internal relations are those which feature in the blueprint for the full potential of an object. There would no doubt be arguments, in particular concerning discoveries of new species of plants or animals which fail to fit traditionally accepted blueprints - for example, the platypus which has all the features of a mammal except that of giving birth to live young;¹ but discoveries of this nature have in fact resulted in modifications and qualifications to the blueprint of the full potential of a mammal, rather than caused complete rejection of the notion of mammal.

The application of the notion of a blueprint in areas which are not strictly and solely concerned with physical characteristics may cause greater disagreements of definition as to what constitutes the 'full potential'. Here Russell does have something to say, although it is by implication only. In "A Free Man's Worship", as we have already noted, we have found that in contrast with the restrictions or deprivations of

the 'savage', the "free man" can, in thought, aspire high. He can achieve his full potential in a way that the 'savage' — for want of a better word — cannot.

The fact that Russell gives a specific example of what the full potential of man might consist of — "the whole world of art and philosophy" — and thus indicates unequivocally his own particular tastes and values, does not necessarily invalidate the theory. In this early essay, art and philosophy are not posited as ultimate 'goods', but merely as examples of the ultimate 'good', the full potential, in the same way in which mathematical achievements and, later, scientific ones, are held up as examples of what can be achieved by individuals pursuing their own paths of excellence. Russell's particular tastes and values in art in its widest sense do indeed cloud some later arguments — even given the semi-emotivist standpoint he was compelled to adopt after objectivity had proven untenable, which would have justified the expression of personal values. But despite the expression of personal values, it is the notion of the full potential of man, as an individual and as a member of society, which forms the basis for all his subsequent work on ethics and on social and political issues, and it is the manner in which the full potential is restricted, or deprived of a vital ingredient (often, sufficient intellectual freedom) which forms the basis of his arguments against both the societies of his time, and the philosophies upon which they are based.

1. Use of the word 'savage' here seems to be a result of polemic and/or carelessness on Russell's part, since he includes amongst those who are "doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death" the followers of evolutionist political creeds; these latter would not welcome such a classification.
2. See, for example, discussion of Russell's Prospects for Industrial Civilization, Chapter Four, pp. 166-8.
Social and political writings

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Russell's writings on social and political issues in this early period of his career were few. The only book he wrote was German Social Democracy in 1896 and this, it must be emphasised, was written while Russell was still very much under the influence of Hegelian idealism. However, in view of his rejection of Hegel in 1898, and of his attack on idealist philosophy which has formed the major part of this Chapter, it is interesting to note that his commitment to idealism was not nearly as whole-hearted and complete as might be supposed; and already, in 1896, his own ideas are beginning to emerge. After his rejection of Hegel, however, Russell's attention was concentrated almost wholly on philosophy and mathematics. Having only recently emerged from the comparative isolation of his extraordinary childhood, it might be true to say that he was at this time content to immerse himself in the new-found world of academia to which he felt he belonged. Although he undoubtedly gave consideration to the social problems of the time, he had as yet no strongly-felt message to put across to the public; furthermore, despite what Ronald Clark calls a tentative "dabbling in politics" in 19071 - which Russell seems to have regarded as rather a joke - and further half-hearted attempts to enter Parliament in the early 1920s, Russell throughout his life showed very little inclination to achieve fame through the conventional political methods chosen by his ancestors. He did not, therefore, come to the notice of the public until his anti-conscription views in the first World War gave him notoriety, and in the first decade of this century, he had no 'public' to give a message to.

In 1895 Russell visited Berlin with his first wife. This first visit was travel for its own sake, rather than a specifically educational trip, but he was clearly interested in what he found, and made a conscious decision to write about it.\(^1\) To this end he returned to Berlin later in the year, and made the German Social Democratic movement the focus of his investigations. In his autobiography he dismisses his views of the time in a somewhat patronising manner:

> In those days Social Democrats were fiery revolutionaries, and I was too young to realise what they would be like when they acquired power.\(^2\)

At the time, however, he was clearly very impressed with this predominantly Marxist movement. His 'rebellion' against Hegel did not occur until 1898,\(^3\) and so, not surprisingly, one of the aspects of Social Democracy which attracted him then was its world view, its all-encompassing nature. "Social Democracy", he wrote at the beginning of his book on the subject, .... is not a mere political party, nor even a mere economic theory; it is a complete, self-contained philosophy of the world and of human development; it is, in a word, a religion and an ethic.\(^4\)

Enthusiasm of this order leaves no doubt as to the considerable influence of idealism in Russell's early years. Closer analysis, however, reveals that even in 1895 it was not so much the particular new philosophy which attracted him, but rather the enthusiastic and courageous manner in which it rejected older traditions and philosophies. He has nothing but praise, for instance, for the Communist Manifesto, but he is not prepared to take a stand as a Communist; what interests him more than the particular idea, is its new and adventurous spirit. The Communist Manifesto is praised for its literary merits and historical insight rather than for its aims.

1. Ibid., p. 59.
Its determination and enthusiasm, together with its rejection of traditional ideas, no doubt struck a chord for Russell, whose adolescence had been preoccupied to quite a large extent with anxiety about his own lack of religious conviction and his secret quest for something new. The emphasis is not so much on the validity of the new ideas, as on the struggle against narrow-minded traditionalists:

The charge of atheism .... is brought against Social Democracy with the same truth with which it is brought against every new religion - the old dogmas are rejected, and the new ones appear, to those educated in traditional beliefs, to be mere denial and unbelief. 1

Russell is undoubtedly in favour of Social Democracy, to the extent that, aware of the dangers of the theory behind it, he attempts to justify its 'might is right' attitude - which he does, interestingly, by stressing fine distinctions between the German words for 'might' and 'force' 2 - the latter being, in his view, reactionary, police-initiated anti-revolutionary activity - and thus gives us a brief preview of his later concern for clarity of language. But the picture he paints of the evils of the prevailing régime indicate that his argument is directed against that régime, rather than in favour of the new ideas that Social Democracy has to offer. Bismarck's Socialism is dismissed as "military and bureaucratic despotism, tempered by almsgiving"; 3 and his detailed discussion of the provisions of the Exceptional Law of 1878, with its oppressive restrictions and censorship, 4 give him good reason for opting for any available alternative.

Thus what begins as unmitigated praise for a new idea, turns out to be praise for the intentions behind it, combined with intense dislike of

1. Ibid., p. 94.
2. Ibid., pp. 98-9.
3. Ibid., p. 107.
4. Ibid., pp. 100-101.
tradition and the limitations it imposes. Of the movement itself, he is more cautious. The bulk of the book is devoted to a historical analysis of the development of German Social Democracy - but here Russell diverges from what might be termed 'orthodox' idealism in that he places great emphasis on the part played by the individuals concerned. The sudden death of the charismatic leader of the movement, Lassalle, left German Social Democracy in the hands of less competent men, and in Russell's interpretation of the story, this fact is of great significance; he does not see the socialist movement as the inevitable result of the progress of history, but as a man-made philosophy and a man-made movement; it is, in his account, the individuals who influence the movement, rather than vice versa.

Not only does Russell place greater emphasis on the significance of particular individuals than would be compatible with genuine idealism, but he also has very definite ideas as to the type of individuals who must wield influence - and these most emphatically are not the proletariat. Indeed, he reveals an almost Burkeian elitism when criticising the new programme sought by the Social Democrats after the repeal of the Exceptional Law in 1890:

.... a democracy whose principle is, that the ignorant voter is as good a judge of current questions as the member who has specially studied them, would, if consistently carried out, make all wise and expert government impossible. 1

He demonstrates also his concern for the practicability of a theory, when he contrasts "the opportunist tradition of English politics" with the "dogmatic German" to whom "logic comes before political success, and no programme whose parts contradict each other can be tolerated". 2 It is interesting to note that, although much of his work between 1900 and the

1. Ibid., pp. 142-3.
2. Ibid., p. 152.
1940s is devoted to the very difficult task of making theory compatible with practice, of combining logic and political or social success, he finally reaches the conclusion, in the 1940s and 1950s, that theoretical contradictions not only can, but must be tolerated in the interests of other, more practical needs and desires.

Finally, at the close of the book, Russell examines the German Social Democratic movement in the light of its history and with regard to its uses to modern society. What, he asks, "is the essential kernel of the Social Democratic programme, which it could not lose without losing its whole political and historical identity? Are the demands, contained in this inner core of Socialism, in themselves possible or desirable?"^1

We have seen in this Chapter that Russell's views with regard to an "essential kernel" are to change fundamentally within a few years, and to be replaced by properties or characteristics which have a strictly non-essential relation to a term. But already, when discussing the "inner core of Socialism", Russell implies a dissatisfaction with idealism when he questions whether the demands are possible, and whether they are desirable. There is here no question of socialism being inevitable; the concern is rather whether or not the aims of the movement are possible, on a practical level; and whether or not they are desirable, on an ethical level.

Russell, it seems, was a considerably less than orthodox disciple of idealism, and thus the 'rebellion' may not have been as dramatic as the word implies. The greatest influence upon Russell's thinking here, as indeed in later years, was not the ideas he gleaned from other thinkers, but rather the individual interpretation that he put upon those ideas. And perhaps the most significant aspect of his thinking, even at this early stage, was his dissatisfaction with unquestioning acceptance of other

1. Ibid., p. 164.
people's theories, and his insistence on analysis of each and every aspect of the issues concerned. His method of analysis, which was to have a significant effect on philosophical inquiry later in the 20th century, emerged directly from this dissatisfaction and, as we shall see in the next Chapter, became as important to Russell as the philosophical issues it was employed to investigate.
The first phase of Russell's philosophical work began, as we have seen, with his rejection of Hegelian idealism. This second phase is not so clearly delineated. Most of the work to be examined here was written between the years 1911 and 1920, although his thinking on the subjects he examines is evident as early as 1905. In essence, the work on linguistic analysis out of which Russell's theory of logical atomism developed is really no more than a refinement and perfection of methods of approach which he had already adopted. His views on ethics are little more than postscripts to his philosophy in this period, and largely concern wartime issues. Their status of secondary importance is, furthermore, deliberate policy on Russell's part. In an essay on "Mysticism and Logic" written in 1914, Russell argues that

..... the elimination of ethical considerations from philosophy is both scientifically necessary and - though this may seem a paradox - an ethical advance. 1

And later:

..... some kind of ethical interest may inspire the whole study, but none must obtrude in the detail or be expected in the special results which are sought. 2

The argument here is directed against the sort of prejudiced - as he sees it - philosophy of idealism in which the ethical view of the philosopher dictates the mode and direction of the inquiry. To avoid this type of prejudice, Russell advocates a more scientific approach; he stresses, in another essay written at about the same time,

2. Ibid., p. 45-6.
... the possibility and importance of applying to philosophical problems certain broad principles of method which have been found successful in the study of scientific questions. ¹

Russell's interest in method is now becoming more dominant, and the fact that he favours a specifically 'scientific' approach is no doubt due to his earlier mathematical training. This scientific approach he sees not just as a means of solving philosophical problems, but as an end in itself; the employment of such a method is in itself a type of education which he defines as:

... the formation, by means of instruction, of certain mental habits and a certain outlook on life and the world.²

This, clearly, is the "kind of ethical interest" which inspires Russell's study; his call for the elimination of ethical considerations from philosophy is in itself, or at least implies, an ethical consideration of his own. Furthermore, it becomes apparent as the method of logical atomism is developed that it is far more than just a method; it is a philosophy in itself. One of the major essays on the subject is in fact entitled "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism". First, however, the essential elements of the methodological side of logical atomism must be dealt with.

Analysis of language

Russell's interest in analysis of language is first clearly seen in his essay "On Denoting", which was published in 1905. The theory of logical atomism in effect developed from this work, and the delay of thirteen years before the theory was worked into an overall philosophical view of method may perhaps be explained by the fact that the theory was

not at first well-received by his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{1} An essay on denotation was motivated partly by Russell's mathematical interests, but it has wider implications:

The subject of denoting is of very great importance, not only in logic and mathematics, but also in theory of knowledge. ... The distinction between acquaintance and knowledge about is the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases.\textsuperscript{2}

As an introduction to the subject, this quotation is perhaps slightly ambiguous, the more so since Russell's better known and later work on the same - or closely related - issues makes a similar distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge 'about', but calls the latter 'knowledge by description';\textsuperscript{3} here, it seems, the knowledge about is reached "by means of denoting phrases" rather than descriptive ones. However it is important to remember that it is precisely this type of confusion that Russell is, in 1905, beginning to disentangle:

It often happens that we know that a certain phrase denotes unambiguously, although we have no acquaintance with what it denotes.\textsuperscript{4}

We have come across similar confusion in Chapter Two with the concept of 'objective falsehoods'.\textsuperscript{5} In the present context we have to deal with such things as "the present king of France", a phrase which would seem to denote a particular person, and yet no such person exists. The denotation is indeed unambiguous, but we can have no acquaintance with the present king of France because there isn't one. Denoting phrases are thus misleading, and Russell's aim is to give "a reduction of all propositions in which denoting phrases occur to forms in which no such phrases occur".\textsuperscript{6}

5. See page 62 of this thesis.
These forms are fairly simple. Russell makes use of what he calls a "propositional function" - which is later, in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", more clearly defined as "any expression containing an undetermined constituent, or several undetermined constituents, and becoming a proposition as soon as the undetermined constituents are determined".¹ The key element is the 'variable', 'x', and this is the constituent which is "essentially and wholly undetermined";² in other words, simply by mentioning this variable, we are not obliged to commit ourselves to the existence of this 'x'. We may say what we like about it, describe it in detail, but ultimately we need not say that it exists. It is left open to us whether or not there is in fact a 'value' for 'x' which would make a proposition containing it true. Thus "the present king of France" does not denote a particular person. When we interpret this in Russell's terms, we reach the conclusion that: there is no value for x such that 'x is the present king of France' is true.

The mathematician Frege met problems when dealing with this issue which he attempted to solve by the use of classes: he put the present king of France into the 'null-class' - the class which has no members. But this, as Russell points out, is not satisfactory, since if the present king of France is put into the null-class, then it immediately has one member, and consequently innumerable others - it becomes not a class with no members, but the class of non-existent things, and presents problems of the same order as those presented by the concept of 'objective falsehoods'. Using Russell's method, however, "the whole realm of non-entities such as 'the round square', 'the even prime other than 2', 'Apollo', 'Hamlet', etc. can now be satisfactorily dealt with".³

3. Ibid., p. 54.
Besides this problem of how to deal with assertions concerning the existence of non-existent things, Russell also pinpoints two other philosophical problems in "On Denoting" which are solved by his system of propositional functions. The first is the confusion concerning identity. If, for example, A is identical with B, then it should be possible to substitute them for each other in propositions; however, this is clearly not the case if, in the proposition "George IV wanted to know if Scott was the author of Waverley", we take "Scott" as being identical with "the author of Waverley".\(^1\) George IV obviously did not want to know if Scott was Scott. In Russell's propositional function form,

... the proposition 'Scott was the author of Waverley' (i.e. 'Scott was identical with the author of Waverley') becomes 'One and only one entity wrote Waverley, and Scott was identical with that one'; or, reverting to the wholly explicit form: 'It is not always false of x that x wrote Waverley, that it is always true of y that if y wrote Waverley y is identical with x, and that Scott is identical with x'.\(^2\)

Written thus in this unabbreviated form, we find that the original proposition now "does not contain any constituent 'the author of Waverley' for which we could substitute 'Scott'".\(^3\) Some years later Russell light-heartedly adds: "You have instead this elaborate to-do with propositional functions, and 'the author of Waverley' has disappeared".\(^4\)

1. In "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" Russell is more rigorous in his approach to names, arguing that the 'proper names' we use daily are in fact abbreviated descriptions - although he still treats 'Scott' in this example as being a name in the strictest logical sense. D.F. Pears makes much of this (see D.F. Pears, "Russell's Logical Atomism", in Pears (ed.), Bertrand Russell (New York, 1972)); A.J. Ayer more generously attributes the apparent inconsistency to the fact that "here, as on some other occasions when he is giving a popular exposition of his theory, Russell is pretending that 'Scott' is a genuine name"; he is "concerned with making the distinction between names and descriptions clear to his audience, rather than expounding to them his special theory about names". (See A.J. Ayer, Russell and Moore: The Analytical Heritage (London, 1971), p. 42.)
3. Ibid., p. 52.
The second problem concerns the 'law of excluded middle' which tells us that either a proposition is true, or its opposite is true. Again using the example of the king of France, this would imply that either

i. 'the present king of France is bald' is true, or

ii. 'the present king of France is not bald' is true.

Yet if we enumerated the things that are bald, and then the things that are not bald, we should not find the present king of France in either list.¹

The problem is solved by distinguishing between primary and secondary occurrences of the phrase 'the present king of France'. Example i. involves a primary occurrence, and can be rephrased in propositional function form:

"One and only one term has the property (of being king of France) and that one (also) has the property (of being bald);² this clearly can then be dealt with in the same manner as the existence assertion problems mentioned above - there is no value for x such that x has the property of being king of France and also of being bald. Example ii. can be either false or true, depending upon whether the phrase 'the king of France' is taken to have a primary or a secondary occurrence, i.e. whether we are claiming that there is a king of France who is not bald (false), or that it is not the case that there is "an entity which is now king of France and is bald" (true).³ It is therefore necessary to make clear exactly what it is that we are denying.

A.J. Ayer pinpoints difficulties here which Russell appears to have missed:

An interesting consequence of Russell's analysis is that existence cannot significantly be attributed to anything which is designated by what he would take to be a proper name.⁴

1. To which Russell adds: "Hegelians, who love a synthesis, will probably conclude that he wears a wig". Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting", op. cit., p. 48.
2. Ibid., p. 53.
3. Ibid., p. 53.
Existence can only be attributed to a propositional function and "what is denoted by a name, which cannot, like a description, be expanded into a propositional function, cannot meaningfully be said either to be or not to be".\(^1\) Ayer mentions Professor Quine's "celebrated dictum that to be is to be the value of a variable".\(^2\) Therefore "if we want to say that a named object exists, we shall have to say that it has some property or other, or that it is identical with itself".\(^3\) The significance of this point lies in the fact that the real thing, if there is one, recedes into the background, and we cannot, it appears, even talk about it in any meaningful manner until we begin adding properties to it.

Whatever the inadequacies of Russell's theory of names and their meanings, one thing does seem clear, whether we are talking of 'Scott', 'this', 'that' or merely 'x': the theory of names

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\text{.... requires that the objects which are denoted by names should be of the order of sense-data \ldots (and the name) has to guarantee the existence of its object, in the sense that the failure of the object to exist deprives the name of any significant use.} \quad \text{\textsuperscript{4}}
\]

Thus, in 1912, in the popular Problems of Philosophy, Russell adds another branch to his general quest for clarity through analysis - that dealing with the senses. Here we find a link between the world as we know it (or think we know it), and the somewhat more abstract realm of linguistic analysis. Russell is looking at objects which are familiar to us all - tables, chairs etc. - and the question he poses is, what exactly is it that we see? He is not here concerned so much with what we say about them, but with what they are.

1. Ibid., p. 36.
2. Ibid., p. 35.
3. Ibid., p. 36.
4. Ibid., p. 36.
The interesting point to be noted here is that Russell is finding it increasingly more difficult to maintain his objective standpoint. In Chapter Two we have seen how he was able to convince himself, at least, of the validity of such a view, although some of the defects of his arguments have been pointed out, and it was observed that it surely could not be long before Russell himself had second thoughts. His development and refinement of a very precise and thorough analytical method leads him nearer and nearer to subjectivity, as he discovers that the end result of his analysis is not as solid and objective as might have been expected.

In his analysis of language he is concerned with what we make of the two types of knowledge - knowledge of, and knowledge about - or in later terminology knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. When we are talking about Scott, or the present king of France, Russell manages quite adequately to sort out the linguistic complications by analysis, so that we can be more sure when we are describing something, and when we are simply pointing it out. But his work on sense-data takes us deeper. What exactly is it that we see? Is it a physical object or something in our minds? Common sense tells us that it is both. But the only thing we can be sure about is what Russell - and others - call 'sense-data'. We know that our senses receive impressions which lead us to believe that there are around us physical objects which in some way create these impressions. The question whether or not there is any justification for such beliefs is the one which occupies the most part of The Problems of Philosophy.

Russell adopts a Cartesian method of inquiry, and begins with objects which are not subject to doubt; going one step further than Descartes' cogito ergo sum, he reaches the indubitable fact that something is thought, thus "it is our particular thoughts and feelings that have primitive
certainty".1 If we leave the argument here, then we would be obliged to accept a purely subjective world. But common sense tells us there is more to it than this, and Russell also is anxious to go further and establish the existence of physical objects because "we want the same object for different people".2 The sense-data we receive of a table, for example, concern colour, shape, size etc., and it is these sense-data that have primitive certainty. But the sense-data, Russell points out, "are private to each separate person",3 and therefore "if there are to be public neutral objects which can be in some sense known to many different people, there must be something over and above the private and particular sense-data which appear to various people".4

Russell points out that we can, of course, doubt the existence of these other people, that "we can never prove the existence of things other than ourselves and our experiences" and that "there is no logical impos­sibility in the supposition that the whole of life is a dream".5 But this is a far more complex system than the common-sense view, and "every principle of simplicity urges us to adopt the natural view, that there really are objects other than ourselves and our sense-data which have an existence not dependent upon our perceiving them".6 We reach this conclusion not by argument, but by 'instinctive belief'; and we must build all our knowledge upon this.

2. Ibid., p. 9.
3. Ibid., p. 9.
4. Ibid., p. 9.
5. Ibid., p. 10.
6. Ibid., p. 11. Russell omits to mention the source or to discuss the validity of a "principle of simplicity" — perhaps his excuse here might be that The Problems of Philosophy was written as a popular rather than an academic work. Nevertheless it is not an excuse one might feel inclined to accept from a rigorous analyst such as Russell; the omission is careless.
The difficulty with this sort of conclusion is obvious. While it may seem natural to a vast majority of men to believe instinctively in the existence of physical objects, there are a multitude of other beliefs which might well be called instinctive, but which do not enjoy the same unanimous acceptance by all men. Russell argues simply that it is philosophy which should show us "the hierarchy of our instinctive beliefs"; he goes yet further and claims that a criterion for judging might be the compatibility of beliefs; they should not clash, but "form a harmonious whole". Although the notion of a "harmonious whole" seems perhaps idealistic and very un-Russellian, nevertheless if called upon to defend this statement, he would no doubt do so in logical terms: it is logically impossible for two contradictory beliefs to be true simultaneously. But the fact that the whole of knowledge must be based on the vague and indefinable notion of an "instinctive belief" is more worrying.

In a later chapter he sets out more clearly what he means by the two types of knowledge. Knowledge by description seems to present few problems in itself. We can have knowledge by description of a thing, provided that the description is composed of terms with which we are more directly acquainted, or can be broken up into such terms. But to have knowledge by acquaintance of a thing we must be directly aware of it. In the case of the table, we are directly aware of the sense-data, we are acquainted with the sense-data, and thus our "knowledge of the table as a physical object .... is not direct knowledge .... (but) is obtained through acquaintance with the sense-data that make up the appearance of the table". Since these sense-data are private to each separate person, then our knowledge of the table is essentially subjective knowledge. All that we

1. Ibid., p. 12.
2. Ibid., p. 12.
3. Ibid., pp. 25-6.
have - or the only thing, at least, that Russell can find - to link subjective sense-data, and thus subjective knowledge, with a concrete objective table, is an 'instinctive belief' that such a table must exist. As a proof of his argument, 'instinctive belief' is far from satisfactory.

There is, furthermore, a certain anonymity about the real table which echoes both the anonymity of the 'x' of Russell's propositional functions in his work on denoting, and also the anonymity of any term in his theory of external relations, when that term is stripped of all descriptive elements. What is the real grass, when bereft of all the characteristics by which we think we know it? What is the 'x' which either has or has not particular properties? What is the table, if different, separate and apart from the sense-data which enable us to perceive it?

Russell's lectures on "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" given in 1918 bring together the whole series of his ideas on language analysis; he then puts these to use in the final lecture in analysis of the physical world. These lectures have never been edited into essay form, but simply printed as spoken, and the tone is therefore chatty and conversational; the substance of the lectures also suffers in consequence from a certain lack of organisation. However, the significance of the lectures is very evident. It lies in the fact that Russell has finally reached the point where he can no longer uphold an objective viewpoint as regards matter with any degree of certainty. The importance of linguistic analysis for Russell has reached its peak. His own concern for clarity in this respect began, as we have seen, as early as 1905. In the years 1912-14, under the influence of his pupil Wittgenstein, Russell's interest increased, and the logical atomism lectures are thought to be his own independent assessment of the ideas which he and Wittgenstein discussed in those years. His

1. See pages 49-50 of this thesis.
system is acknowledged to be very similar to that found in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, but the ideas are essentially repetitions of earlier works - on propositions, descriptions, classes etc. - and it seems therefore that Wittgenstein's influence was rather to crystallise Russell's ideas, than to alter the ideas themselves in any significant way. Thus Wittgenstein in a sense helped to hurry Russell along to conclusions which he was well on the way to reaching, despite himself. In his introduction to the first English translation of the *Tractatus* (1922) Russell warns readers that "what Mr. Wittgenstein says here is said so shortly that its point is not likely to be clear to those who have not in mind the controversies with which he is concerned". He then proceeds to recommend as preliminary reading his own lectures on the nature of truth and falsehood in *Philosophical Essays*. In some areas, for example in education, Russell's methods of philosophical analysis are acknowledged to have been influential, although generally his influence goes uncredited:

Since Russell helped to set in motion this revolution fifty years have passed, and there has been time for some of his views to be forgotten. They have been presented again in recent years as though they were new discoveries due to Wittgenstein and his school.  

The essence of the logical atomism lectures is Russell's distinction between "complex" and "simple", or "molecular" and "atomic". Complex things are analysable into simple things and thereby rendered comprehensible, as long as the simple things, the final irreducible atoms, are things with which one is acquainted. He is concerned primarily with propositions, and his view that all propositions can be reduced to atomic propositions complements his work on relations discussed in Chapter Two: his atomic propositions are logically independent, and not all related and tied in

with each other. Russell talks longingly of "a logically perfect
language" in which:

.... there will be one word and no more for every simple
object, and everything that is not simple will be expressed
by a combination of words, by a combination derived, of
course, from the words for the simple things that enter in,
one word for each simple component. ¹

The language we do in fact use is symbolism; the words mean some­
thing, but are not the things they mean. A sentence or proposition is
the proper symbol for a fact, and a name is the proper symbol for a
particular.² There is a hierarchy of simplicity for the facts represented
by sentences or propositions. The simplest concern a quality, e.g. "this
is white"; when the proposition involves relations between particulars
(e.g. "A gives B to C") or contains more than one verb (as with propositions
involving belief, wish, desire etc. — for example, "Othello believes
Desdemona loves Cassio" already discussed in Chapter Two), then they
become more complex and require more careful analysis. Propositions
asserting existence must be dealt with by use of the propositional function
formula. And propositions which appear to assert general facts — for
example, the notorious "All men are mortal" — when subjected to analysis,
are found to be untenable in terms of logic:

Suppose, for example, that you wish to prove .... that 'All
men are mortal', you are supposed to proceed by complete
induction, and say 'A is a man that is mortal', 'B is a man
that is mortal', 'C is a man that is mortal', and so on until
you finish. You will not be able, in that way, to arrive at
the proposition 'All men are mortal' unless you know when you
have finished. That is to say that, in order to arrive by
this road at the general proposition 'All men are mortal', you
must already have the general proposition 'All men are among
those I have enumerated'. You can never arrive at a general
proposition by inference from particular propositions alone.³

1. Bertrand Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", op. cit.,
p. 198.
2. Ibid., pp. 187­8.
3. Ibid., p. 235.
The proposition 'All men are mortal' should not, incidentally, be confused with the paradoxes discussed in Chapter Two - 'All Cretans are liars' etc. There is nothing paradoxical about the proposition 'All men are mortal'. Russell's point is simply that you cannot make a general proposition to cover several particular ones. He does, however, allow general facts:

It is perfectly clear that when you have enumerated all the atomic facts in the world, it is a further fact about the world that those are all the atomic facts there are about the world, and that is just as much an objective fact about the world as any of them are.  

In this manner we can cut propositions down to size.

The simple particulars present greater problems - although not to Russell, or at least, not yet. Proper names are the words we use for particulars - but again we must analyse the name and its use or we run the risk of confusing description with denotation. In daily life we clearly regard the name 'Socrates', for instance, as a proper name. Under Russell's logical analysis 'Socrates' becomes merely an abbreviation for a description, and the only logically proper names would be 'this' or 'that'. The qualities or properties of a simple particular - or, for that matter, the relations it has with other particulars -

.... are external to their subjects in the sense that no single one of them, and not even any conjunction of them, is essential to the subject's identity; in principle it could have a wholly different set of properties and still be the same particular. Nevertheless it is only through the properties which it happens to have at a given time that any particular is identifiable.  

1. Ibid., p. 236.
2. We have seen that in the 1905 essay, 'Scott' appears to have been taken as a logically proper name. I would again stress, in Russell's defence, that the lectures on Logical Atomism represent the fullest development of the theory, and that Russell was never afraid to correct his own mistakes - even if the correction appears to be an unconscious one, as here.
This raises difficulties which were evident in Russell's work on relations. Russell has now stripped his simple particulars of any and every quality they might have been thought to possess; he has reduced them, in fact, to nothing more than an 'x' or an expressive grunt. In language analysis, the 'x' never stands so blatantly alone, but is always linked with its predicates; but for these particulars he appears to be claiming existence in some more tangible way. In some sense we must now bridge the gap between what we say about the real world, and what the real world actually is.

Having dealt with what he calls the grammar of philosophy, Russell now asks, what does this tell us about the physical world? Traditional metaphysics makes mistakes, according to Russell, because of loose employment of language. His logical atomism presents the view that "you can get down in theory, if not in practice, to ultimate simples out of which the world is built, and that those simples have a kind of reality not belonging to anything else".\(^1\) Armed with the Occam's razor technique, you go through ... propositions with a view to finding out what is the smallest empirical apparatus - or the smallest apparatus, not necessarily wholly empirical - out of which you can build up these propositions.\(^2\)

But the 'atoms' of a proposition have an advantage over the atoms of the physical world. In language we are freer, less bound by our own limitations, than when we are confronting physical objects. Metaphysical entities Russell defines as "those things which are supposed to be part of the ultimate constituents of the world, but not to be the kind of thing which is ever empirically given".\(^3\) Yet again, we can perhaps sympathise with this view if we take the geometrical examples of points, lines and

2. Ibid., p. 270.
3. Ibid., p. 272.
surfaces; if a point without magnitude does exist, then it can certainly never be empirically given. However, although it is disconcerting to arrive at this ultimate constituent, in geometry, of a point which has position but no magnitude, and in linguistic analysis, an ultimate constituent, an 'x', a 'this' or 'that' which seems to have no features whatever - at least we can still think of them in terms of words. When we go beyond language and try to visualise a table or chair which is somehow other than what we actually perceive it to be, then the real thing eludes us. When it concerns the senses, we expect empirical evidence, and this is precisely what we do not get. Russell tries to circumvent the problem. He offers us sensibilia, which are "those objects which have the same metaphysical and physical status as sense-data without necessarily being data to a mind".² Ayer rightly points out that Russell is here "relaxing the rule that simple objects must be objects with which one is actually acquainted".² The sensibilia are inferred, but Ayer excuses this on the grounds that the inference is horizontal rather than vertical, i.e. that "it is an inference to entities of the same type as those from which the inference proceeds, and not to entities of a higher type".³ Thus we can admit our own sense-data, and unsensed sensibilia - but not the sense-data of other people, since to do so would necessitate admitting the existence of other people, and this would be a vertical inference.

1. Bertrand Russell, "The Relation of Sense-data to Physics" (1914), in A Free Man's Worship, op. cit., p. 143. Russell's treatment of the physical world in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" - the last lecture of the series - is very sketchy and suffers more than the rest of the lectures from the chatty and conversational tone referred to earlier. His views on sense-data are set out in The Problems of Philosophy, and also - by far the best exposition of them - in an essay entitled "The Relation of Sense-data to Physics", from which this quotation is taken.
3. Ibid., p. 57.
The argument here is confused and unsatisfactory. Ayer points out the difficulties concerning the precise nature or status of a sensibile when it has, as it were, become a sense-datum (by being perceived by someone) and then stopped being a sense-datum (when the person stops perceiving it). Furthermore, there is a very acute problem regarding subjectivity and objectivity: sense-data have already been defined as being private to particular people, and therefore subjective, but sensibilia, it would appear, can be public and therefore objective in the sense that they are available to be turned into sense-data by any person who perceives them. Thus the sensibilia are not entities of precisely the same type as sense-data. All we are capable of knowing or sensing are the sense-data themselves, and the sensibilia now acquire a peculiarly temporary nature. Russell would have us believe that they exist (by horizontal inference) when unsensed in some objective manner, but as soon as they are sensed — and this is the only time we can be sure of their existence — they become sense-data and lose their objectivity. The key to the confusion seems to lie in the crucial fact that Russell has relaxed the 'rule' about acquaintance with a simple object. In terms of his linguistic analysis, acquaintance is the root of knowledge, and all simple things must by definition be things with which we are acquainted, if we are to know them. We cannot know anything unless we analyse it into simple components with which we are acquainted. It could perhaps be argued that this is to assume an overlap between theories of existence and theories of knowledge, between what there is and how we know it. The assumption, however, is very evidently basic to Russell's whole approach — as, of course, to most philosophy on this issue — and seems to be entirely justifiable. As Russell himself says later, "Knowing how we know is one

1. Ibid., p. 58.
2. Ibid., p. 58.
small department of knowing what we know". There seems, therefore, to be no justification here for inference, since the things inferred, the sensibilia, do differ very markedly from sense-data unless and until they actually become sense-data. The inference is not to entities of the same type, and the 'rule' that a simple object must be one with which we are acquainted is not a rule that can be relaxed.

The notion of sensibilia is a highly plausible one in terms of common sense, but not in terms of Russell's strict analysis. He may call them what he likes, but he is still unable to prove their existence. And later, in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", he seems to be acknowledging the difficulties himself. All we can know for certain about a table, for instance, after analysis, is that it consists of a series of appearances:

When you have found out what makes you take the view that they belong to the same thing, you will then see that that which has made you say so is all that is certainly there in the way of unity. ..... What I can know is that there are a certain series of appearances linked together, and the series of those appearances I shall define as being a desk. ..... In that way all the ordinary objects of daily life are extruded from the world of what there is, and in their places as what there is you find a number of passing particulars of the kind that one is immediately conscious of in sense. I want to make it clear that I am not denying the existence of anything; I am only refusing to affirm it.

The more thoroughly, the more rigorously Russell pursues objective realism, the further away it seems to get, and the wider the gap between the essentially subjective things of which alone we can be certain, and the 'real' things which we can only believe in or 'intuit' in the unsatisfactory manner discussed in Chapter Two. Russell remains in doubt for the rest of his life. He cannot prove the existence of anything -

2. Presumably he refers here to common sense, or is again appealing to the vague and undefined 'principles of simplicity' referred to on page 96 of this thesis.
4. See pages 75-6 of this thesis.
but he does not wish to deny it either.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, who reached much the same inconclusive conclusion, ends his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with the words:

What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence. ¹

Russell, in his introduction to the first English translation, points to the illogicality - perhaps the futility - of the book itself, which in analysing language, cuts the ground from under its feet:

Mr. Wittgenstein maintains that everything properly philosophical belongs to what can only be shown. .... It results from this that nothing correct can be said in philosophy .... In accordance with this principle the things that have to be said in leading the reader to understand Mr. Wittgenstein's theory are all of them things which that theory itself condemns as meaningless. ²

He also points out with a certain cynicism that, despite this fact, "Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said". ³

Russell himself stops short of such pessimism. We can talk about such things, he seems to be saying, and furthermore we can say at least one very important thing about them: we can express our uncertainty. This willingness to confess uncertainty is often seen as one of Russell's more important contributions to philosophical debate. The lectures on logical atomism show that "one of the greatest merits of modern logic is that it has allowed us to give precision to (several types of philosophical) problems while definitely abandoning any pretensions of solving them". ⁴

2. Ibid., p. xii.
3. Ibid., p. xxi.
Ethics and emotion

Russell has reached the point where he is no longer seeking
definitive answers to philosophical questions. The implications of
this attitude for the realm of ethics might lead us to expect an ethical
type more honestly and explicitly subjective than his earlier work.

Ronald Jager pinpoints the ideas developed in earlier ethical
writings - by both Moore and Russell - which were to be crucial to later
developments:

i. "propositions ascribing intrinsic value .... were incapable
of proof, not even open to evidence".

ii. "the value property ascribed, intrinsic goodness, was declared
to be a unique property, a 'non-natural' property".

iii. "this property was held to be indefinable, it could not be
explicated in terms of any other properties".¹

Jager then asks, "Is there any real difference between being a property
as unique as this and not being a property at all?"² This is precisely
the type of question that was being asked at the conclusion of the
previous section, with regard to the variables of propositional functions
in linguistic analysis, and the sensibilia of Russell's theory of percep­
tion. In philosophy Russell did not change sides, as it were, but merely
expressed doubt. In ethics, however, Jager argues that the change from
objectivism to emotivism was sudden, complete and unexplained. "He just
disappeared from one camp and reappeared as a champion of the opposition".³

The change, however, was far more gradual and furthermore, being the almost
inevitable outcome of the more consciously logical and scientific approach
to the whole question which Russell adopted at the time, it could have

1. R. Jager, The Development of Bertrand Russell's Philosophy (London,
2. Ibid., pp. 471-2.
3. Ibid., p. 472.
been prophesied when Russell was facing the problems set out in the section entitled "Objectivity in ethics" in Chapter Two of this thesis. A scientific approach, with its insistence on experiment, evidence (usually empirical) and 'proof', succeeds ultimately, as we shall see in Chapter Five, in reducing to zero the level of certainty even in those areas of physical science where certainty is most expected. Russell had hoped that scientific methods would lead to certainty in an objective sense; he found, instead, that the only certainty to be obtained through such methods was, that all things are uncertain.

The fact that the change is unexplained - a justifiable criticism certainly - may simply be the result of Russell's general confusion regarding ethics at this time; it is not easy to explain a new theory and the reasons for adopting it, when the new theory still lacks precision and certainty, and the theoriser is not totally convinced of its validity. Russell was not - either at the time or later - totally convinced that an emotivist theory of ethics was the right one. The change was by no means as complete as Jager suggests. Jager quotes Russell's own comments on the change of opinion, indicating the influence of George Santayana on the Moore-Russell theory of ethics:

When I was young, I agreed with G.E. Moore in believing in the objectivity of good and evil. Santayana's criticism, in a book called Winds of Doctrine, caused me to abandon this view, though I have never been able to be as bland and comfortable without it as he was. ¹

Santayana certainly "did a witty and devastating job on Russell's ethics", ² as some quotations given by Jager from Winds of Doctrine show; but the same quotations reveal that the criticisms were not aimed at the substance of Russell's theories in any thorough analytical manner - they

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1. Ibid., p. 473.
2. Ibid., p. 473.
remained at the somewhat superficial level of wit and devastation. One example will suffice to demonstrate this:

Food and poison are such only relatively, and in view of particular bodies, and the same material thing may be food and poison at once. .... For the human system, whiskey is truly more intoxicating than coffee, and the contrary opinion would be an error; but what a strange way of vindicating this real, though relative, distinction to insist that whiskey is more intoxicating in itself, without reference to any animal; that it is pervaded, as it were, by an inherent intoxication, and stands dead drunk in its bottle! Yet just in this way Mr. Russell and Mr. Moore conceive things to be dead good and dead bad. 

Furthermore, Russell's own views of Santayana do not suggest that he would have abandoned objectivity simply on the grounds that Santayana had been able to criticise it. In the same essay from which Jager quotes Russell's admission that "Santayana's criticism .... caused me to abandon this view", Russell comments that neither he nor Santayana had any great respect for each other's philosophical expertise. Santayana's attitude towards "northern philosophers" was "one of gentle pity for having attempted something too high for us", and Russell for his part was "never able to take Santayana very seriously as a technical philosopher". 

L.W. Aiken discusses in detail Santayana's critique of Russell. One of Santayana's main points is "to question the connection between the two following propositions: (a) 'Good' is indefinable and (b) 'Good' is unconditioned and just found 'out there', i.e. it is an objective primary quality". Santayana's argument is that (b) does not follow from (a). If we turn briefly back to Russell's critique of Moore's Principia Ethica (see pages 65-68 of this thesis), we find that Moore does indeed begin with proposition (a), that 'good' is indefinable. But in "The Elements

1. Ibid., pp. 473-4.
3. Ibid., p. 89.
of Ethics" we find that Russell begins with the second proposition, that 'good' is an objective primary quality. He begins with the argument that 'good' exists independently of man, and then proceeds later to discuss its indefinability. Thus, however defective may be Russell's argument for the objectivity of 'good', the argument itself does not hinge on the indefinability of 'good'; and Santayana's argument that (b) does not necessarily follow from (a), although it could certainly be used against Moore, could not, on the evidence, be used against Russell.

In the area of psychology, Santayana's influence may have been more justifiably significant. He questions Russell's assertion that where two people disagree about what is good, only one of them can be right. Russell's argument here, according to Santayana, seems to be that if this were not the case, we would not bother to use rational argument in ethical debate. Santayana, on the other hand, claims that "the obvious inference from the fact that different people think that different things are good, is that different attitudes and preferences are involved".¹ He later accuses Russell of "employing persuasive or emotional arguments",² and as we shall see, Russell was very shortly to pay more attention to human psychology in his analysis of ethics. However, as Aiken points out, Santayana skips too quickly over the important fact that "It does seem to be the case .... that we argue about questions of right and wrong, good and evil, whereas mere questions of taste or preference such as whether we like oysters do not arouse debate or reasoning".³

Aiken feels that on the whole Santayana's criticisms are "brilliant and persuasive" - and at the same time (and within the same paragraph) that many of his remarks are "inadequate as arguments".⁴ In view of the

1. Ibid., p. 24.
2. Ibid., p. 27.
3. Ibid., p. 25.
4. Ibid., p. 29.
above brief discussion, the latter view seems more plausible, and the reason for Russell attributing his change of opinion to Santayana's influence may simply be that it seemed easier in retrospect to do this, rather than to examine more minutely and thoroughly his own motives for the transition. That he had doubts, we know; Santayana's criticism may well have crystallised these doubts, but it seems unlikely that he caused them. Furthermore, Russell himself points out that he was never "able to be as bland and comfortable without (objectivity) as (Santayana) was".

There were, however, other influences in Russell's life at the time which almost certainly played a significant role in the development of his thinking. The first and perhaps most important was the first world War. Russell's own personal reaction to the war took him by surprise. He says that "it shook me out of my prejudices and made me think afresh on a number of fundamental questions". The prospect of war "filled me with horror, but what filled me with even more horror was the fact that the anticipation of carnage was delightful to something like ninety per cent of the population". Although not blind to the "crimes of Germany", he voiced his disgust at the "vast forces of national greed and national hatred" in a letter printed in Nation in August 1914:

A month ago Europe was a peaceful comity of nations; if an Englishman killed a German, he was hanged. Now, if an Englishman kills a German, or if a German kills an Englishman, he is a patriot, who has deserved well of his country.

This is a theme that recurs time and time again in his later works on international affairs. Here, in World War I, we find the beginnings of

2. Ibid., p. 240.
3. Ibid., p. 264.
4. See, for example, New Hopes for a Changing World (London, 1951), Has Man a Future? (London, 1961), Unarmed Victory (Harmondsworth, 1963) and many other later books and articles.
his interest in psychology, and his disappointment that men are content to follow the crowd, and lack the courage to stand up and be counted as opponents of current moral views. Russell himself certainly did not lack courage. He became active in the No-Conscription Fellowship, was prosecuted for his vociferous support of the school teacher Ernest Everett, who was court-martialled and sentenced to two years hard labour for "refusing to disobey the dictates of conscience", and he lost a good many of his friends in consequence of his anti-war activities. Nevertheless, he never wavered, although he writes in retrospect of the confusion concerning not so much his feelings, but their source:

I have at times been paralysed by scepticism, and at times I have been cynical, at other times indifferent, but when the War came I felt as if I heard the voice of God. I knew that it was my business to protest, however futile protest might be. My whole nature was involved. 2

Such depth of feeling was new to Russell. He began to question both the psychology of the warmongers, and also his own feelings. The former he examined in various political commentaries which will be discussed in the following section; the latter he tried to analyse, for a brief period at least, with the assistance and advice of D.H. Lawrence. Lawrence seemed at first as if he might be able to provide answers to Russell's problems:

We both imagined that there was something important to be said about the reform of human relations, and we did not at first realise that we took diametrically opposite views as to the kind of reform that was needed. 3

They met in May 1915, and in July Russell wrote of Lawrence's attacks on him for "having a scientific temper and a respect for facts". 4 Russell on the other hand found Lawrence to be "undisciplined in thought, and

1. Ibid., p. 289.
2. Ibid., p. 240.
3. Ibid., p. 243.
4. Ibid., p. 277.
mistakes his wishes for fact"¹ and yet at the same time these very defects appealed to him:

I liked Lawrence’s fire, I liked the energy and passion of his feelings, I liked his belief that something very fundamental was needed to put the world right. I agreed with him in thinking that politics could not be divorced from individual psychology. I felt him to be a man of a certain imaginative genius, and, at first, when I felt inclined to disagree with him, I thought that perhaps his insight into human nature was deeper than mine. ²

Lawrence’s interest in psychology was shared by his wife, who was acquainted with, and considerably influenced by, the Austrian school of Freudians.³ Lawrence in fact had little respect for some aspects of Freudian psycho-analysis,⁴ although his own psychological 'theory' does seem to hinge on the importance of releasing the 'id' from all its restrictions. D.H. Munro points out that this is "not so much Freud as popular Freudianism", and that the 'id', according to Freud, is in fact tyrannical in its own way.⁵ What appealed to Russell particularly was the potential – in terms of creativity – of a liberated 'id'; he also recognised the dangers.

Lawrence had "a mystical philosophy of 'blood'" which Russell disliked, and yet he was so fascinated by the man that "when (Lawrence) said that my pacifism was rooted in blood-lust I supposed he might be right".⁶ Lawrence himself, in the early days of the relationship, felt that he was having a beneficial effect upon Russell – "he is coming to have a real, actual, logical belief in Eternity, and upon this he can

1. Ibid., p. 278.
2. Ibid., p. 243.
work"; but this enthusiasm was short-lived, when he found Russell could not be swayed from an essentially rational approach to life. Lawrence urged him to "become a creature instead of a mechanical instrument", but finally, when convinced that Russell would not join him in the search for a kind of eschatological - and indefinable - change of the social order, he dismissed him, along with "young reformers, Socialists and Fabians - they are our disease, not our hope".

The friendship - if it can be called a friendship - did not last. But the notion that individual psychology is significant in politics continued to influence Russell's work, as did the more general idea that mysticism in some way had a role to play in philosophy. An element of mysticism had already begun to appear in Russell's work, perhaps as a means of explaining - or an excuse for leaving unexplained - the loose ends in objectivism which were becoming apparent. The 'intuition' of which he and Moore spoke in earlier ethical works was as vague and unspecific as the notion of 'good' being a 'non-natural' quality. Certainly intuition would not be able to find a place within the new analytical philosophy, and thus a place must be found for it outside. Mysticism offered just such a home, being defined by Russell in 1914 as "belief in a way of knowledge which may be called revelation or insight or intuition, as contrasted with sense, reason and analysis".

Russell attacks other major beliefs of mysticism - a belief in unity which, of course, given his hostility to idealism, we would not expect him to agree with, and the denial of the reality of time. And yet he still feels that "there is an element of wisdom to be learned from the mystical

way of feeling, which does not seem to be attainable in any other manner”.¹
Most of his criticism is aimed at the prejudices to which mysticism might lead - for example, to a philosophy based on evolutionary theories involving the notion of progress, which "is more interested in morality and happiness than in knowledge for its own sake"² and he emphasises the need for combining, or tempering, intuition with reason; but it is nevertheless the "instinct, intuition or insight (which) first leads to the beliefs which subsequent reason confirms or confutes".³

Mysticism appears to claim the existence of two kinds of ethics, the "lower mundane kind of good and evil, which divides the world of appearance into what seem to be conflicting parts", and the "higher, mystical kind of good, which belongs to Reality and is not opposed by any correlative kind of evil".⁴ This, clearly, is the ethic which excuses apparent evils on the grounds that they serve some purpose in the grand overall plan.
Although Russell has now found himself forced to lay his own indefinable notions of intuition at mysticism's door, nevertheless he feels the ethical theory which necessarily arises from a total acceptance of mysticism to be positively dangerous; we should concentrate more on the lower mundane kinds of good and evil, since it is these that we have some control over:

The good which it concerns us to remember is the good which it lies in our power to create - the good in our own lives and in our attitude towards the world. Insistence on belief in an external realisation of the good is a form of self-assertion, which, while it cannot secure the external good which it desires, can seriously impair the inward good which lies within our power, and destroy that reverence towards fact which constitutes both what is valuable in humility and what is fruitful in the scientific temper.⁵

1. Ibid., p. 29.
2. Ibid., p. 41.
3. Ibid., p. 30.
4. Ibid., p. 43.
5. Ibid., pp. 47-8.
Our immediate concern, therefore, is with the "inward good", and the ethical theory underlying this view is essentially subjective. "Ethical metaphysics", Russell writes in another essay at about the same time, "is fundamentally an attempt, however disguised, to give legislative force to our own wishes". And although he finds in mysticism a useful resting place for notions of his own which cannot be accommodated in a more scientific theory, he insists now on seeing these as they really are: "all ethics, however refined, remains more or less subjective".

We find thus two major areas of influence on Russell's ethical views at this time. On the one hand - perhaps predictably - we have the influence of circumstances in the form of the first World War, as a result of which a new element of Russell's own character was beginning to emerge, almost despite himself - a passionate and essentially subjective approach to the world around him - for which he clearly felt a place had to be found somewhere in his more intellectual pursuits; and on the other hand we have evidence of the influence of his philosophy in other areas. We noted in the Introduction Alan Wood's insistence on the importance of taking Russell's work in strict chronological order, to avoid the confusion of apparently conflicting ideas; we now find evidence of the validity of Wood's warning. Objectivism was proving difficult to maintain in philosophy; now it proves difficult to maintain in ethics, and Russell, with characteristic courage, rejects objectivism in favour of his own peculiar brand of emotivism.

J.O. Urmson, in a book entitled The Emotive Theory of Ethics which deals with later 'emotivists', sees the theory as arising primarily out of the negative aspect - other theories failed to convince - although there

2. Ibid., p. 106.
3. See Chapter One, p. 29.
are more positive aspects which will be discussed later. "The emotive theory of ethics", he argues, "has its origin in epistemological despair".\footnote{1} He also feels that the motivation for this new ethical theory came from other branches of philosophy - specifically epistemology and philosophy of language - rather than from inquiries into theoretical ethics itself. We have already seen that Russell's theory certainly had similar origins. Urmson sees emotivism as a last resort, the only two alternatives having failed to satisfy. Any possible varieties of a naturalistic theory fell to Moore's criticism that goodness cannot be identical with any 'natural' features (the 'naturalistic fallacy'); and the intuitionism which was Moore's - and Russell's - answer to the problem, involved the 'non-natural' quality of goodness, which would necessitate "the acceptance of what amounted to a priori concepts" and was therefore "impossible to maintain on the most basic grounds".\footnote{2} These are the difficulties Russell was himself experiencing at this time. Pure subjectivism in ethics, a possible third alternative, was subject to the same argument as naturalism, since "a definition of 'good' is no less naturalistic .... when couched in terms of goings on in the mind of the beholder than when couched in terms of any other transactions".\footnote{3}

Thus, almost by a process of elimination, we arrive at the view that pronouncements on ethics have to be taken as non-ethical. Urmson quotes another definition of emotivism: "Value judgements in their origin are not strictly judgements at all. They are exclamations expressive of approval".\footnote{4} Urmson himself suggests as an alternative title for his book "The emotive theory of value judgements".\footnote{5}

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{2} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 14.
\item \footnote{3} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 15.
\item \footnote{4} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 16.
\item \footnote{5} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 11.
\end{itemize}
It is interesting to note Urmson's claim that the earliest expression of emotivism is to be found in *The Meaning of Meaning* by I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden, published in 1923. Here we have Russell, a decade earlier, struggling with the problem ahead of his time. In examining his only 'ethical' piece of work of this period, we can perhaps excuse him for any failures to live up to a theory which was not, as yet, even in the philosophical dictionary. In "The Ethics of War", published in 1915, Russell seems to be stating the new view fairly explicitly:

The fundamental facts in this as in all ethical questions are feelings; all that thought can do is to clarify and systematize the expression of those feelings, and it is such clarifying and systematizing of my own feelings that I wish to attempt in the present article.  

He then proceeds to do just that. He is attacked at this point for inconsistency, since it appears from the article that he is not merely expressing feelings, but stating facts and making inferences therefrom as well. The defence which Ms. Aiken conveniently provides for Russell is that whenever he presents reasoned arguments against war, he is being persuasive rather than logical. He uses reason merely as a means of clarifying and systematizing his feelings, and not in order to turn the argument into a logically definitive one. Aiken feels that Russell's 'feelings' could still survive even if others presented good reasons for changing them. However, in view of Russell's amply demonstrated respect for reason, this seems a little out of character. Furthermore, it points to what seems to be a basic flaw in Russell's bid for emotivism: the good reasons which Russell presents — whether or not the intention is to persuade or otherwise — are all based, as another critic points out, on very definite

values which Russell clearly believes in. The arguments in "The Ethics of War" hinge on the notion of the 'best possible consequences' discussed in Chapter Two - a hangover from his Moorean days.

It is necessary, in regard to any war, to consider .... its real justification in the balance of good which it is to bring to mankind. ¹

And his own criterion for judging the best possible consequences - set out explicitly in the third section of the article where he discusses the types of war which may or may not prove beneficial to mankind - rest quite blatantly on a naturalistic theory of ethics, both Darwinian and ethnocentric. Wars of colonization, he argues,

.... have the merit, often quite fallaciously claimed for all wars, of leading in the main to the survival of the fittest, and it is chiefly through such wars that the civilised portion of the world has been extended from the neighbourhood of the Mediterranean to the greater part of the earth's surface. ²

Thus we find Russell in something of a dilemma. He has shed his belief in objectivity, for negative reasons rather than positive ones, but he is still left with values which he believes in, but can find no place for. Urmson discusses a more positive aspect of emotivism, involving the problems of individual psychology to which Russell's attention has already been drawn. Here, it seems, there may be found a more positive role for Russell's 'feelings' without the need to dress them up as values in any objective or subjective sense. The "essentials of this further ground for emotivism", Urmson claims, are to be found in the works of David Hume.³ Russell was by this time familiar with the works of Hume,⁴ and had in any case given much thought to empiricism, and the conclusions

¹ Bertrand Russell, "The Ethics of War", op. cit., p. 130.
² Ibid., p. 134.
³ Urmson, op. cit., p. 19.
to which it leads. At the age of eighteen, he tells us, although he
had not then read Hume, "it seemed to me that pure empiricism (which I
was disposed to accept) must lead to scepticism".¹ From this point on,
Hume's influence becomes more marked. Both naturalists and non-natural-
ists "make out value judgements to be scientific, cognitive or descriptive",²
none of which satisfied Russell; Hume argued that they involve more than
this. There is a 'dynamic' element to value judgements which motivates
us to action.

The emotive theory gives a positive explanation how ethical
judgements can be what Hume called 'influencing motives of
the will'.³

In an essay on "The Essence of Religion", published in 1912, Russell
seems to be aware of both the problems and the possibilities of the notion
of 'feelings'. He is discussing the influence of religious beliefs on
man's actions:

Indeed, it may not be belief but feeling that makes religion;
a feeling which, when brought into the sphere of belief, may
involve the conviction that this or that is good, but may, if
it remains untouched by intellect, be only a feeling and yet
be dominant in action.⁴

What he seems to be saying here is i) that a 'feeling' can and does
influence action, and ii) that if a certain amount of thought is added,
the 'Feeling' may then become stronger, strong enough to be a conviction.
Thus he sees greater possibilities for 'feelings' in the area of belief.

It need hardly surprise us at this stage that Russell should find
the more positive, active aspect of emotivism attractive - even if emotivism
as a theory was, as already mentioned, by no means clear and concise at

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¹ Bertrand Russell, "Logical Atomism" (1924), in Logic and Knowledge,
op. cit., p. 323.
² Urmson, op. cit., p. 20.
³ Ibid., p. 23.
⁴ Bertrand Russell, "The Essence of Religion" (1912), in R.E. Egner
and L.E. Dennon (eds.), The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell
this time. He has already expressed the view that we should concern ourselves with the "lower mundane kind of good and evil", with "the good which it lies in our power to create".\(^1\) The values which he holds all his life - values which began with idealistic backing, were then ascribed to intuition and now appear to have no home at all on theoretical grounds - are now ascribed to 'feelings', extricated altogether from theoretical argument, and thrown into their new role to play an active part in the world.

War and society

It is from this point on in Russell's works that it becomes difficult to distinguish between writings on ethics in the strictest sense, and the comments he makes on the social and political aspects of the world around him. The ethical theory is never again treated in isolation (with the exception of Human Society in Ethics and Politics, 1954), but appears mainly in the form of commentary on current issues. This has led many academics to argue that, "great as his achievements have been in other branches of philosophy, he is less a moral philosopher than a moralist".\(^2\) D.H. Munro feels this view is exaggerated, and that "even in his most popular works, Russell never loses sight of the philosophical problems in his concern for the political or psychological ones".\(^3\) This is perhaps being overly generous. It seems rather that there are good reasons, based in philosophy, which lead Russell to express his ethical views in this manner. As we have seen, he can find no certain objectivity in any of the branches of philosophy which he tackles, including ethics; having therefore ultimately - though reluctantly - opted for some form of subjectivism as being the only certain source of knowledge in all fields, it is

1. See page 115 of this thesis (my italics).
2. Munro, op. cit., p. 325.
3. Ibid., p. 325.
only natural that his discussion of ethics should be placed in the context of the multitude of subjective moral codes which he finds in the world. To discuss ethics in isolation from such a context would be a contradiction in terms for the subjectivist which Russell now finds himself to be.

The most immediately relevant 'context' for Russell at this stage was, of course, the first World War. His experiences in the early years of the war prompted him to embark on a series of books concerning current world problems, and their possible solutions - this at a time when it was becoming rapidly apparent that the old order was changing, and both reformists and revolutionaries were looking towards a new future hinging on some form of socialism. Russell examines Marxism and other forms of socialism at length - for instance in The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism,¹ and Roads to Freedom² - but persists in believing throughout that there is more to a society than its basic economic structure; it is perhaps for this reason that Russell's socio-political works written during and immediately after the war are included for discussion in Munro's essay on "Russell's Moral Theories".³

The first and most important of Russell's socio-political works of the time was Principles of Social Reconstruction, based on lectures given in 1915.⁴ This encompasses all aspects of society (while the others deal primarily with economic theories), discusses the problems and what has caused them, and offers long-term solutions. The changes he envisages are far-reaching and involve "changes in education, in the economic

3. Munro, op. cit.
structure of society, and in the moral code by which public opinion controls the lives of men and women.\(^1\) He assumes – although he gives no grounds for the assumption – that one of the major aims of mankind should be unity and integration at both state and international level:

The war has made it clear that it is impossible to produce a secure integration of the life of a single community while the relations between civilized countries are governed by aggressiveness and suspicion.\(^2\)

This integration is also to take place on an individual level:

The integration of an individual life requires that it should embody whatever creative impulse a man may possess, and that his education should have been such as to elicit and fortify this impulse.\(^3\)

The "creative impulse" in question concerns what Russell calls the "principle of growth", the "intimate centre" of each individual which "differs from man to man, and determines for each man the type of excellence of which he is capable".\(^4\) Munro feels that Russell's emphasis on impulse in Principles of Social Reconstruction stems from the popular Freudianism of the time;\(^5\) we have already noted the influence of D.H. Lawrence, and Lawrence's wife's acquaintance with the Austrian Freudian school. However, Lawrence's criticism of Russell's inability to give way completely to impulse has also been noted, and it seems here that 'impulse' for Russell is more than a mere shedding of psychologically repressive influences and inhibitions. The 'impulse' for Russell is essentially positive: it creates.

Later in the book Russell introduces the notion of "spirit"\(^6\) – ill-defined and vague, but its purpose seems to be to bridge the gap between

1. Ibid., p. 93.
2. Ibid., p. 233.
3. Ibid., p. 232.
5. Munro, op. cit., p. 333.
a purely selfish impulse, and pure reason, to provide the altruism that is otherwise lacking. Here Munro criticises Russell's assumption "that the happiness of other men is desirable for its own sake. ... he has not found any rational ground for this conviction other than the Moorean one (non-natural property) we had supposed him to be rejecting".\(^1\) This is certainly true; in a book entitled *Political Ideals*, based on a series of lectures of 1917, which he was forbidden to deliver\(^2\) (the book was first published in the U.S.A.), Russell states categorically that "the aim of politics should be to make the lives of individuals as good as possible"\(^3\), without suggesting why this should be so.\(^4\) But we can perhaps excuse this lapse of theory on the grounds that Russell has already - in January 1915 with "The Ethics of War" - professed belief in a subjective/emotive theory of ethical values, and would not therefore be obliged to give a rational ground for his convictions. The values underlying this and other works can be taken to be - in theoretical terms at least - mere expressions of Russell's own feelings on the subject. He also makes it quite clear that different views and values may suit different societies. In *Roads to Freedom*, where he traces the history and development of various

2. The British government had, as a result of Russell's activities for the No-Conscription Fellowship, issued an order preventing him from entering certain prohibited areas. One such area was Glasgow, where, before the banning order had been issued, Russell had arranged to give one of the series of lectures. Since the lectures were "to be handled in a serious, not to say sober, manner" - Clark adds that "The harshest claim that any authority could genuinely make was that they might make people think" - the government was considerably embarrassed by the situation. Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 301.
4. The only instance of a more strictly theoretical approach to the ethical side of politics is a faint echo of the pragmatists' view that an idea is true so long as action based upon it leads to "profitable" ends (see Chapter Two, pages 57-8). This view is here expressed in negative form: "Do not trust customary beliefs so far as to perform actions which must be disastrous unless the beliefs in question are wholly true". *Ibid.*, p. 63.
forms of socialism, he emphasises at every stage the fact that the
different ideals and values of each faction of socialism have developed
in response to differing circumstances in the countries in which they are
held, and to the differing characteristics of their leaders. Pure
Syndicalism, for instance, "is not very likely to achieve wide popularity
in Great Britain. Its spirit is too revolutionary and anarchic for our
temperament";¹ and the ideal of absolute freedom, and consequent hostility
to all forms of state government, which characterised the Anarchist move­
ment on the continent in the second half of the 19th century, owed a
great deal to the influence of its founder, Bakunin, whose political life
consisted of a long series of expulsions from some countries and imprison­
ment in others.²

Furthermore, Russell's explicit acceptance of these assumed values -
the happiness of individual men, and the unity of mankind as a whole -
lends support to the hypothesis suggested in Chapter Two: that the 'full
potential' of a society or societies is to be achieved by means of unity
and cohesion, and by the achievement of 'full potential' on an individual
level.

In Principles of Social Reconstruction Russell's attention is focussed
primarily - as one might expect - upon the individual. He examines the
"springs of human action, what they are, and what we may legitimately hope
that they will become",³ and aims to "suggest a philosophy of politics
based upon the belief that impulse has more effect than conscious purpose
in moulding men's lives".⁴ He does not yet appear to be concerned so
much with the reason/passion dichotomy, but feels rather that impulse can
only be counteracted by a contrary impulse. The more rational element of

2. Ibid., Chapter Two.
4. Ibid., p. 5.
man is described here as "desires for certain ends", while impulses are more instinctive and compel us "to certain kinds of activity".\(^1\) The principle of growth mentioned above requires for its development a certain freedom which has in the past been denied by various authoritarian institutions, leading to disunity as the underprivileged groups of society acquired the strength to oppose the authority. Renewed social cohesion is to be brought about by good relations, the sources of which are, on the one hand, common purpose, and on the other - and of far greater importance in Russell's view - "instinctive liking".\(^2\) Contrary to popular belief, this "instinctive liking" can be changed:

No doubt we have a certain native disposition, different in different people, which co-operates with outside circumstances in producing a certain character. But even the instinctive part of our character is very malleable. It may be changed by beliefs, by material circumstances, by social circumstances, and by institutions.\(^3\)

The bulk of the book is then devoted to an examination of just how men's instinctive impulses have in the past been manipulated or crushed, and their freedom correspondingly repressed, in every area of life. Within the confines of the state, the tyranny of the legal system and the pressures of an intolerant public opinion are to blame for the manipulation, and the sheer size of the state, and "the resulting sense of individual helplessness" crushes initiative.\(^4\) In war, "the inarticulate feelings of common men, which .... are always ready to burst into war fever at the

1. Ibid., p. 13. In the light of Russell's analysis here of human psychology, it seems very strange that in Urmson's discussion of emotivism no mention is made of Russell's work. Most of the required elements of Urmson's later definition of emotivism are to be found either in Principles of Social Reconstruction or in "The Ethics of War", including the emphasis on activity. Urmson's only reference to Russell is as a (temporary) Moorean intuitionist. See Urmson, op. cit., p. 13.
3. Ibid., p. 39.
4. Ibid., p. 60.
bidding of statesmen",¹ are manipulated by misguided leaders who feel their nation will gain either power or wealth through fighting. Russell clearly feels - and tries to persuade us - that there is more to be lost than gained, and argues that "although this impulse is strong, there is no reason why it should be allowed to lead to war".² He does not, however, at this point in the book, offer any suggestions as to an alternative direction for the impulse to take - although later it becomes clear that the impulses should be channelled into creativity, and also that such creativity - or potential for creativity - is available only to the few, and certainly not to the 'common men'. The system of production also provides little incentive for individual effort (Russell clearly recognises the problem of 'alienation'); but Marxist socialism he does not see as a satisfactory solution, largely because of its emphasis on material well-being and material justice. In Political Ideals he argues that "material possessions, in fact or in desire, dominate our outlook usually to the exclusion of all generous and creative impulses",³ and thus state socialism, "though it might give material security and more justice than we have at present, would probably fail to liberate creative impulses or produce a progressive society".⁴ Also, under state socialism, the authority would be infinitely larger and more powerful, and increase rather than decrease the danger of "the tyranny of the employer".⁵ To these criticisms Russell later adds a third, after a visit to Russia in 1920. He argues that Bolshevism, as it turns out, is now "not merely a political doctrine; it is also a religion, with elaborate dogmas and inspired scriptures".⁶ To a man whose life's works are in large part

1. Ibid., p. 88.
2. Ibid., p. 107.
3. Bertrand Russell, Political Ideals, op. cit., p. 27.
4. Ibid., p. 28.
5. Ibid., p. 34.
devoted to releasing men from the tyranny of tradition and dogma, this aspect of Russian state socialism is particularly abhorrent:

I believe the scientific outlook to be immeasurably important to the human race. If a more just economic system were only attainable by closing men's minds against free inquiry, and plunging them back into the intellectual prison of the middle ages, I should consider the price too high. ¹

All these criticisms of state socialism are discussed in the context of post-revolutionary Russia. Russell compares the Communist Party in Russia with Plato's Guardians,² and demonstrates by means of his own first-hand experiences the evils of a system where the mass of the people have little knowledge or understanding of political affairs, and where, because of the immense repression, there is hostility between the rulers and the ruled. Although he admits that Russian Communism may change over time, and come more to resemble what it was intended to be (he rightly insists on a distinction - even as early as 1920, when Russia was the only communist country - between Communism, and Russian Communism³), yet many of the errors committed by the Russian Communists, and the difficulties they face, do in fact form a necessary part of the Marxist theory, including centralised state control of all industry. He himself advocates "the practice of self-government" as "the only effective method of political education",⁴ and the system he would prefer would be some sort of syndicalism, with emphasis on worker-participation. He discusses syndicalism at greater length in Roads to Freedom, and admires its concern for job-satisfaction rather than mere financial benefit:

Syndicalists consider man as a producer rather than consumer. They are more concerned to procure freedom in work than to increase material well-being. They have revived the quest for liberty, which was growing somewhat dimmed under the

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¹ Ibid., p. 9.
² Ibid., pp. 28-9.
³ Ibid., p. 22.
⁴ Ibid., p. 129.
regime of parliamentary Socialism, and they have reminded men that what our modern society needs is not just a little tinkering here and there, nor the kind of minor readjustments to which the existing holders of power may readily consent, but a fundamental reconstruction, a sweeping away of all the sources of oppression, a liberation of men's constructive energies, and a wholly new way of conceiving and regulating production and economic relations. This merit is so great that, in view of it, all minor defects become insignificant.¹

The errors of the current education system lie in the crushing of individual sense of adventure which is common in children, in an effort to make them accept conventional teaching; and finally, religion and the teaching of the Church is also hampered by strict adherence to a creed, with the result that "intellectual honesty is imperilled".²

The emphasis throughout the book is on the psychological basis of men's actions, and although couched in layman's terms, the psychological 'theory' compares favourably with modern psychological and sociological works on similar topics.³ The general thesis which these psychological

3. A few brief examples will suffice here to demonstrate that, although not a psychologist in any way, Russell has a good understanding of what makes men think, feel and act. His 'analysis' of the inhibiting effects of "the prevention of free inquiry" (in Principles of Social Reconstruction, op. cit., p. 153) on the development of a child's mind is borne out by scientific experiments conducted in the U.S.A. and in Britain, a brief résumé of which can be found in M. Beadle, The Child's Mind (London, 1971) (especially Chapters 1 and 2). The effects of "the teaching of patriotism" (Principles of Social Reconstruction, op. cit., pp. 150-1) can be substantiated by studies conducted with schoolchildren in America, England and Scotland (for example, M.K. Jennings, R.G. Niemi, "The Transmission of political values from parent to child", APSR Vol. 62 (1968), pp. 177-179; A. Morrison, "Attitudes of children towards International Affairs", Educational Research, Vol. 9 (1966-67), pp. 197-202; G. Jahoda, "The development of children's ideas about country and nationality", British Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 33 (1963), pp. 47-60, 143-153; M. Beadle, op. cit., Chapter 9.) The link Russell makes between discontent (leading to revolutionary tendencies) and rising expectations - as, for example, when discussing women's rights in the past: "Since she did not seek or expect much happiness, she suffered less, when happiness was not attained, than a woman does now" (Principles of Social Reconstruction, op. cit., pp. 188-9) - is dealt with at length by Barrington Moore in The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (London, 1967) (especially Part III).
'theories' are intended to support, is that more scope and freedom should be allowed to the individual to develop to the full according to his own individual capabilities. Although Russell recognises the need for a certain minimum level of law and order, and the means for its enforcement, he manages to make several recommendations for change in various fields of life - agriculture, industry, science, art, international relations, criminal reform - all of which he feels would contribute towards encouraging the individual to achieve the utmost of which he is capable, within an ordered system of society falling far short of anarchism. Some of these recommendations - if not all of them - are well-reasoned, based on fact, and highly plausible (for example, his discussion of the possibilities for increased agricultural production); but his assessment of the character, and the possible response, of the common man seems to be somewhat optimistic, if not downright naive. He advocates worker-participation in management, not simply in order to give the workers more control over their work, but to stimulate them to the sort of creativity he seeks. Agricultural work, for example, should be "alive with the search for new methods and new inventions, filled with the spirit of freedom, and inviting the mental as well as physical co-operation of those who do the work", in which case "it might become a joy instead of a weariness". Industrial complexes should be "turned gradually into self-governing communities" in order that "the interest in the scientific aspects of production might become diffused among all producers with any native intelligence, and something of the artist's joy in creation might inspire the whole of the work". Whether or not this degree of worker-participation were possible in 1918 when the book was written, the ever-increasing division of labour in modern industry would make it difficult. A routine

2. Ibid., pp. 100-104.
3. Ibid., p. 113.
4. Ibid., pp. 113-4 (My italics).
task concerning one very small part of a finished product could hardly be expected to produce an "artist's joy in creation", and even if the workers were invited and encouraged to join "the search for new methods and new inventions", they would be unable to devote much time to this without either losing pay or jeopardising production. Furthermore, it is unlikely that very many factory workers would be capable of finding new methods and inventions, even if it were possible and practicable for them to search, and any that were found could probably be more easily channelled up by foremen etc. to the management level. Also, of course, this type of work is already done by specialists - both scientific and administrative advisers. The possibility of mental as well as physical participation in work of this nature is not open to the mass of the workers.

We have here the seeds of the élitism already hinted at, and which characterises much of Russell's later work on social and political issues. At the end of Principles of Social Reconstruction Russell devotes a chapter to "What we can do", where the emphasis is upon dogged persistence by the few, not the many, as the source of change:

Religious toleration was once the solitary speculation of a few bold philosophers. Democracy, as a theory, arose among a handful of men in Cromwell's army.

This sort of boldness of thought demands its own sacrifices - "those who wish to gain the world by thought must be content to lose it as a support in the present". Russell's own life gives ample demonstration of this. But Russell as an individual could not be categorised as one of the 'common men', and he admits that "most men go through life without much questioning, accepting the beliefs and practices which they find current, feeling that the world will be their ally if they do not put themselves in

1. See page 127 of this thesis.
3. Ibid., p. 226.
opposition to it".\(^1\) Thus far, Russell's reasoning is historically sound and no doubt justifiable. But his \textit{élitism} is not confined to the few adventurous thinkers who have the intellectual capacity to study the problems of society, and the strength of will and character to oppose current trends in order to right the wrongs. His \textit{élitism} extends also to the people for whom such changes are made. The type of individuals Russell has in mind here are not the 'common men'. The ethnocentricity already noted in "The Ethics of War"\(^2\) is present also in \textbf{Principles of Social Reconstruction} as Russell bewails the changes in population and the "absolute decline in the numbers of English, French and Germans", which will, he fears, result in "their subjugation by less civilised races".\(^3\) He goes further than this, and claims that within nations it is the \textit{best} elements of the population that are dying out. Precisely what these best elements are, becomes apparent when Russell puts forward a solution to the problem, which amounts virtually to a thinly disguised form of selective breeding. The State, he maintains, should play a positive - financial - role in reversing current trends by paying for the food, clothing and education of certain children:

The only condition attached to State maintenance of the mother and the children should be that both parents are physically and mentally sound in all ways likely to affect the children. Those who are not sound should not be debarred from having children, but should continue, as at present, to bear the expense of children themselves.\(^4\)

Elitism of this extreme nature elicits, from this author, sentiments of what might be called 'moral repugnance'. The \textit{élitism} of Russell's later writings takes a far more moderate - and less offensive - form and is, or appears to be, more directly related to his later philosophy and

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\(^1\) Ibid., p. 226.
\(^2\) See p. 119 of this thesis.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 182.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 185.
ethical thought. On closer inspection, however, it is possible at least to explain, if not entirely to justify, the expression of the views of the above quotation in terms of Russell's other work. We have seen in his philosophical writing at this time that his attention is devoted almost exclusively to questions of logical and rational analysis, in which humanitarian sentiment can play no part. We have seen in his ethical theory a totally contradictory view in which sentiment is everything, in which value judgements must reluctantly be seen as purely subjective in the absence of proof of objectivity. And we have seen that the circumstances of Russell's personal life served as encouragement, even exhortation, to give expression to his own thoughts.

Although Russell's elitism continued to colour his work, we shall see in the next chapter how a greater understanding of human psychology moderates not the strength of the elitism, but its expression, and guides it along more moderate lines of advocacy of gradual reform through education rather than, as above, of violent and radical change through state intervention.
CHAPTER FOUR

NEUTRAL MONISM AS THE PATH
TO BEHAVIOURIST ETHICS

In the previous chapter we have seen how Russell, in pursuing truth armed with the rigorous analytic methods which he himself devised, drifted further and further away from the realism which he had hoped to establish in his earlier philosophical works. He is not willing to deny the existence of 'real' things, in the material sense; but he cannot find sufficient evidence to support or prove their existence. He is obliged to draw the unsatisfactory conclusion that sense-data are the only things we can know with any certainty, and that the existence of the 'real' things - which he calls sensibilia - can only be inferred or believed in. We have also seen, in his political and social writings, a similar reluctance to deny the existence of objective values, even though no proof can be given of their existence; and the positing of various ill-defined notions concerning what is of value to men - for example, the 'creative impulse' and the potential for individual creativity which, he has argued, are all too frequently crushed by emphasis on material welfare and state intervention.

His philosophical views regarding matter do not change substantially after this; he still presents us with sense-data (or sensations) as being the element of material things into which our own minds intrude (in the sense that sense-data are strictly personal and individual¹); and with sensibilia as being the fabric out of which sense data - as and when we perceive them - are taken, but which in themselves remain unperceived and thus not subjective. He posits therefore two elements of material things,

¹. See page 96 of this thesis.
one which is objective but unknown, and the other subjective by virtue of its existence only when perceived. There is one area, however, which has not yet been analysed with Russell's customary rigour: the area of belief, feeling and intuition. He has previously assumed that we all know exactly what is meant by such words; he now begins to look more closely at the question, What makes us believe?

In view of the fact that he has ultimately been forced to allow 'reality' to be based on nothing more solid than 'belief' or 'intuition', it should come as no surprise that he does in time subject these terms to closer scrutiny. John Passmore suggests that Russell's move to neutral monism - or more specifically to behaviourism, which forms an essential part of his neutral monist theory - is a logical consequence of the difficulties encountered in dealing with belief statements in logical atomism. In the sphere of ethics also, as noted in Chapter Three, he has become more interested in the 'science' of psychology and its recent developments. His friendship with Lawrence, and his bewilderment about his own 'feelings' regarding the first World War, as well as the feelings of others, led him to take a greater interest in the theories of psychologists. Lacking objective truth, he was obliged to present his ethical views in emotive terms and yet, as we have noted, he clearly held views which he felt involved far more than mere expression of feeling. He could not abandon altogether some form of mysticism or intuitionism about ethical beliefs which he felt endowed them with something more than mere subjectivity. His analysis had demonstrated - to him at least - that a type of emotivism was all that could be salvaged from the argument; but the question remained: why then did he continue to feel, to think, to

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believe that there was something more? Thus in ethics, as well as in philosophy, Russell's attention is turned to what goes on in man's mind.

There were outside influences as well: in physics, the theories of Einstein and others, in particular regarding the concept of space, threw into confusion traditional views of matter and one of its essential characteristics, that of occupying space. In philosophy, neutral monism was gaining in popularity, along with behaviourist theories of human activity which attempted to deal with the mental side of life and which, clearly, had great significance both for philosophy and for ethics. Russell's work in the 1920s embraced all three: his continued interest in scientific method combined with his early experiences in mathematics made him well-suited to the task of interpreting in philosophical terms the theories of the new science; he was already acquainted with the work of William James, one of the founders of the neutral monist movement, and this provided him with a good starting point for analysis of 'consciousness'; and the first few chapters of his book *Analysis of Mind* demonstrate that he had studied in some depth recent psychological theories concerning men's actions and the reasons behind them.

Russell had become explicitly attracted to the neutral monist theory as early as 1918, despite having attacked it only four years previously. This apparent change of heart would be grist to the mill of those who criticise him on the grounds of inconsistency, until it is remembered that consistency in argument in Russell's theories had almost always played second fiddle to his consistently rigorous analytic method.

1. Perhaps it might be more accurate to say re-analysis, since Russell had earlier been in disagreement with James over a number of issues, for example the pragmatism discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis.
W.T. Stace appears to regard Russell's move to neutral monism as no more than an expression of anti-dualist prejudice, based on dualism's historical links with religion on such matters as the claim of the 'soul' to immortality, and perhaps, even worse, a belief in God\(^1\) - in the same manner, no doubt, as his prejudice against idealism led him initially, as we have seen in Chapter Two, to adopt a realist viewpoint, regardless of the philosophical difficulties he encountered. When examining the notion of 'consciousness', Russell speaks of the act of thinking as "the ghost of the subject, or what once was the full-blooded soul\(^2\) - and it may be this particular sentence that prompted Stace's suggestion that Russell was motivated primarily by anti-dualist and anti-religious prejudice. Stace himself argues that "there is nothing especially valuable or meritorious in aiming at a monistic theory"\(^3\). This seems reasonable enough - but it is hardly fair to attribute Russell's change of view to prejudices of this kind. For one thing, despite a consistent and lifelong refusal to believe in God, Russell had no hesitation in adopting a dualist viewpoint in his early philosophical career - before science shed doubts; his prejudice at that stage merely led him to seek alternatives to God as the fountain of 'good' in ethical terms, and in philosophy, to concentrate on the effect that mind had on matter in sense-data theory. At no time did Russell seem to feel that a dualistic approach necessitated a belief in God or in the immortality of the 'soul'. Secondly - and in particular in the 1920s when his analytic methods had been full developed and refined, the tools of analysis, as it were, sharpened and ready for use - the exploration of philosophical ideas had always held more attraction for

Russell than the reaching of definitive conclusions.

Anthony Quinton suggests that Russell had had doubts about traditional Cartesian dualism as early as 1912 when, in *The Problems of Philosophy*, he recognised that the concept of matter depends ultimately upon the concept of space. He devoted several pages in *The Problems of Philosophy* to a discussion of the extremely complex nature of both space and time – giving us a preview, perhaps, of the vastly more complex system which philosophers would have to tackle as Einstein's work on relativity became more widely known and accepted. Having in this manner qualified his dualist theories, there is no inconsistency in altering his views at a time when scientific advances presented evidence to undermine a very significant part of them.

It is also important to note that Russell’s so-called "conversion" from English to American new-realism, as John Laird calls it, was by no means a complete one; Stace, in fact, goes so far as to argue that there are several different versions of neutral monism, of which the three most important are those of James, the American neo-realists, and Russell – although James is acknowledged as the "original inventor of the whole idea".

**Russell's Neutral Monism**

The major thesis of neutral monism, in whatever version, is that the stuff of which the world of our experience is composed is .... neither mind nor matter, but something more primitive than either.

This quotation, which A.J. Ayer seems to take as Russell's definitive statement on the subject, appears in the first chapter of Russell's

"full-dress, or at least .... fairly dressy statement" on neutral monism, *Analysis of Mind*. But it is not the conclusion of the matter for Russell; his method of approach in most of his philosophical work has always been to start with a hypothesis, and work his way through analysis - and the conclusion may support or confound the hypothesis, or may itself suggest alternatives. His books are not statements, in that sense; they are exercises and explorations. In the case of neutral monism, he finds after analysis that the 'primitive stuff' cannot in fact account for all of what we call mind, or for all of what we call matter.

As the title of his major work of his 'neutral monist' phase suggests, Russell is here dealing primarily with things mental, and on the question of matter he refers us to *Our Knowledge of the External World*, and to *Mysticism and Logic*, where his views have been set out. His method of approach is twofold: on the one hand, he will make use of logical atomism, and on the other, he will restrict himself to what is empirically observable - especially with regard to human and animal behaviour - in accordance with principles of scientific examination.

Russell's first - and crucial - step is to tackle the concept of consciousness, held to be an essential characteristic of the mind. He looks briefly at the various ways in which we are 'conscious' - perception, memory, ideas and thought, and belief - and then reminds us of conventional doctrines which argue for the existence both of the 'consciousness' and of the object of which we are conscious. Russell declares that he no longer believes that "mental phenomena have essential reference to objects". Although there could be said to be an object of memory, belief and propositional thought (the things remembered, believed and thought about),

nevertheless there is not necessarily an object for 'feeling' - it is quite possible to 'feel' (happy, sad, etc.) without there being anything specific to 'feel' about.

He uses as a basis for his argument the division of thought into three elements: the act of thinking, the content of the thought, and the object to which the thought refers, with the above proviso that it is not always the case that there is an object. He then proceeds, somewhat arbitrarily it seems, to dispense also with the act:

The act seems unnecessary and fictitious. The occurrence of the content of a thought constitutes the occurrence of the thought. Empirically, I cannot discover anything corresponding to the supposed act; and theoretically I cannot see that it is indispensable. ¹

He seems to be attempting here to discredit the traditional view of the process of thinking. If his aim in so doing were merely to open closed minds and enable us to take a completely new look at the question, then this would seem justifiable. He appears at first to be making a determined effort to prune away unnecessary or uncertain elements. He adopted much the same view in The Problems of Philosophy when he argued that certainty lies only in "our particular thoughts and feelings", not in the fact that we think them. ² In that instance Russell allowed himself a considerable amount of flexibility because it was essential to the rest of his argument that he should be able to assume that other people also had thoughts and feelings in order to make a collection of varying sense-data of a single object. In Analysis of Mind, however, he has on the one hand burdened himself with the strict criterion of observability, and on the other, he has set himself the task of demonstrating - as far as is possible - the truth of the neutral monist theory that there is no essential difference

1. Ibid., pp. 17-18.
2. See Chapter Three, pages 95-6 of this thesis.
between mind and matter. The act of consciousness clearly has to go, and given his strict empirical criteria, he finds it easy to suppose that the act need not enter into the argument at all. Thus, according to Russell, the only remaining element in the process of thinking is the content of the thought itself.

Idealism, in terms of the act-content-object schema, endeavours to suppress the object; what is important to idealism is the act of thinking and the content of the thought - objects are rejected. Realism, on the other hand, holds that we know the objects directly; it suppresses the content of a thought and maintains that "a thought consists either of act and object alone, or of object alone".¹ To the former of these two realist viewpoints, Russell points out (in apparent refutation) that "the act seems mythical, and is not to be found by observation".²

Laird examines the progress from The Problems of Philosophy - where Russell "had spoken quite gaily of 'my seeing the sun'" - to the point where 'seeing' is reduced to various muscular sensations which, although certainly observable, can be regarded as 'sensa' (to use Laird's phraseology) and not as acts.³ Russell gives as an example here the seeing of colour. He had previously concluded that "colour is something other than my seeing of the colour. This argument, to me historically,⁴ was directed against idealism"⁵ - i.e. colour was essentially physical; now he adds that "it does not follow that the patch of colour is not also psychical", and therefore "the reason for distinguishing the sense-datum from the sensation disappears".⁶ Thus the words sense-data and sensation

¹. Ibid., p. 20.
². Ibid., p. 21.
⁴. This is a reference to Russell's period of 'rebellion' against idealism at the end of the 19th century.
⁶. Ibid., p. 143.
are taken to be, as it were, interchangeable. Laird stresses that, at least as regards direct sensations, these sensa are indeed all that we need:

What Russell, in the context, is most anxious to say is that in the crucial instance of sensation, the sensum is all that need be supposed to exist, and that there is no need whatever to suppose that the analysis of sensation requires either an act of sensing as well as the sensum, or an Ego to apprehend the sensum. ¹

With regard to direct sensation, this seems feasible. But awareness of sense-data lends itself more readily to analysis in terms of the muscular sensations (e.g. the effect of light waves on the optic nerves etc.) — reactions of a physical nature, rather than a mental awareness.

As mentioned earlier, Russell's views on sense-data do not change substantially and the reader is already acquainted with the notion of sense-data being the knowable elements of what, in his realist days, Russell called sensibilia. It is a short step from sense-data to the physical reaction that they might have upon the nervous system of the perceiver.

However, for 'thought' of a less direct nature, the problem is still acute, and the act still seems necessary. Ronald Jager suggests that Russell's views here constitute his particular version of what Jager calls the Cheshire Cat doctrine:

.... which admits a cat's grin without a cat, or a person's thoughts without a person. Persons (Russell) implies, are logical constructions from minds and bodies, each of which is itself a logical construction; they may be distinguished by the different bundles of thoughts and by different relations of these bundles to bodies. ²

Jager later adds another dimension, a more obviously physical act. He quotes from Analysis of Mind:

We think that Jones walks, and that there could not be any walking unless there were somebody like Jones to perform the walking .... (But) to say that it is Jones

who is walking is merely to say that the walking in question is part of the whole series of occurrences which is Jones. ¹

If this is the interpretation we are to put on Russell's dismissal of the act, then it is more acceptable. Jager implies that Russell's intention was not to dismiss the act altogether, but merely to put on one side both act and actor, in order to concentrate more fully on the thought itself.

However, if we are to take the view that the act has not been eliminated, but merely put aside, we still face difficulties with regard to memory. The act-plus-object realist, in order to explain memory, seems to require both an act which occurs now and an object, which is a past event. Retaining only the object is no use whatever here, since the object occurred in the past, whereas the type of thought which we call memory occurs now. (Even if we were to retain only the content of the thought, which Russell seems to be aiming for, the problem is not solved, for the content would have to be both now and in the past.) Russell himself says, "So long as we retain the act, this need cause no difficulty", but he goes on to add that although

.... there is no logical objection to this theory, .... there is the objection, which we spoke of earlier, that the act seems mythical, and is not to be found by observation. ²

In a later chapter on images, Russell confuses the issue still further by using the word 'observe' in a very private sense; he examines whether we can observe anything outside physics, i.e. anything that does not obey the laws of physics, and concludes that we can indeed observe

1. Ibid., p. 345.
our own images. And here, furthermore, he argues that "the purely empirical reasons for accepting images are overwhelming", although previously Russell's strict empirical criteria advised us against including as data things that we think we know about ourselves. We were only allowed to admit that thoughts existed in us, not that we thought them. (Here, incidentally, the problems seems to be on a par with Wittgenstein's difficulties in linguistic analysis - that we have to use language in order to analyse it. In the present case, the only way we can look at what the mind is, what thoughts are, is by thinking about them; thus the fact that we are thinking about whether or not thinking exists would seem to conclude the argument before it begins. Perhaps in this instance we can sympathise with Russell for not taking the Wittgenstinian view which Russell himself found somewhat hypocritical.)

The distinction between thought and thinking - unless it is to be in Jager's terms which have already proved unsatisfactory in the instance of memory - seems in any case to be difficult to uphold. Quinton argues that, quite apart from the difficulties it involves, Russell's attempts to dispense with the view of 'consciousness' as the essence of the mental, his attempt to dispense with the act of thinking, is out of place, since his sensations and images need consciousness to distinguish them from

1. His reason for doing this is that he has then reached the stage when all that can be said about sensations as 'neutral stuff' has been said, and yet there remain outstanding these 'images' which cannot be explained in terms of sensations since they have no essential relationship with the sort of external stimuli that produces the by-now-familiar sensation. He could, of course, overlook them on the grounds that they are not perceivable or observable in the same way as sense-data - but this would be to ignore a very obvious difficulty facing neutral monism, since nobody would deny the existence of images. He must therefore bring them somehow into the field of discussion, and the only way in which he can do this is by temporarily upgrading 'introspection' as the means by which we know of the existence of such images. See also later, pp. 148-9.

2. Ibid., p. 121.
3. See page 106 of this thesis.
When he distinguishes between what are now sensa, and sensibilia, "between actual and possible sensations", he needs consciousness in order to establish what the actual sensations are.\(^1\) In other words, on the material side, in order to neutralise his material object - or at the very least (given that Russell still leaves room for the possible existence of matter) in order to extract from matter that which can be called neutral - Russell needs a conscious mind; but in order to neutralise mind, consciousness must be eliminated.

It becomes increasingly clear that thoughts require a considerable amount of examination, if we are to make any sense of Russell's - and James's - dismissal of the conscious element of them. Russell proceeds to outline the work of William James, from whom in large part the second school of realists - those who retain only the object - derive their ideas. James is a neutral monist in the strictest sense: everything is composed of "one primal stuff" which he calls "pure experience".\(^2\) In order to uphold this view, he has to dispose absolutely of consciousness since it is this which divides the world into mental and material. By eliminating consciousness as an entity separate and distinct from the things one is conscious of, James can then set to work with his neutral "stuff" and rebuild the world along the lines of different arrangements of this stuff.

We find now that we have three major, separately identifiable schools of thought: the idealists, monist in nature in their claim that "nothing can be known except thoughts, and all the reality that we know is mental"; the realists, who hold that "we know objects directly", thus admitting a dualist view of the existence of both the act of thinking (consciousness) and of the object in a material sense;\(^3\) and the "new realists" who reject

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1. Quinton, op. cit., p. 98.
3. Ibid., p. 20.
both idealism's mind-orientated view of reality and traditional realism's dualistic view, replacing both with a reality consisting of one single type of neutral element which enters into both of what we traditionally understand as mind and matter. And Russell, despite the labels that have been glibly attached to his views of this period, falls neatly into none of these three categories. The ultimate conclusion he reaches has elements of both of the realist theories, in that he does manage to establish a neutral 'stuff', which accounts for a large part of both mental and material; but it does not account for all of them.

Russell's neutral 'stuff' consists of aspects (or appearances, or sensations, or sensa). The manner in which they enter into both mental and material is one of arrangement. Aspects can be grouped in two ways:

i. "all the aspects which radiate from a common centre and which are related to one another by the laws of perspective", or

ii. "all the aspects (of all things) which exist together at any point in space".¹

The first 'bundle' of aspects constitutes a "momentary material object".² In terms of his earlier work on sense-data, this would be a collection of sense-data of a particular thing, the sense-data and the aspect being synonymous. Since an aspect or sense-datum is not objective, but depends for its very existence upon being sensed, then the material object which is built of a collection of sense-data also depends upon being sensed and is not objective. It becomes less material. But for Russell, there is more to a physical object than its aspects. Although he can never prove it, he still adheres to the notion of sensibilia which are the unperceived aspects - or, more precisely, these are the elements

¹. Stace, op. cit., pp. 359-60.
². Ibid., p. 360.
which would become aspects if they were perceived. Sensibilia are not synonymous with aspects, and they cannot therefore be accounted for in terms of the same neutral stuff. As far as material objects are concerned, therefore, Russell's neutral monism can only account for those that are perceived. Unperceived objects remain strictly material:

.... those occurrences (if any) which do not form part of any "experience" belong only to the physical world. ¹

The second 'bundle' of aspects constitutes a perspective. This is the collection of all the aspects available "at any point in space" — in other words, available to any one perceiver. A series over time of these perspectives constitutes the "mind" of the perceiver, and it is in this sense that the mind may be said to be composed of the same neutral stuff as a (perceived) material object. Direct perception and recognition can be adequately dealt with by the introduction of "mnemic phenomena", to which Russell devotes considerable attention, and which are clearly and precisely defined by Stace as:

.... those responses of an organism which .... can only be brought under causal laws by including past occurrences in the history of the organism as part of the causes of the present response. ²

In other words, anything which needs an explanation for "an interval between the cause and the effect". ³ Russell himself is attracted to the theories of R. Semon, which define mnemic phenomena as "those due to engrams"; and an engram, Semon feels, "must consist in some material alteration in the body of the organism". ⁴ At the time, of course, this theory was largely conjectural, although presumably by now brain surgery and research may be sufficiently advanced to provide some of the answers. Russell, however, treated the theory as no more than an interesting

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3. Ibid., p. 360.
hypothesis, and he is content for his purposes with "mnemic causation", "in which the proximate cause consists not merely of a present event, but of this together with a past event".\(^1\)

This may be sufficient to account for direct perception and recognition, but it does not satisfactorily explain many of the other things that go on in the mind, and cannot easily be accommodated under the 'neutral stuff' umbrella: memory (other than simple recognition), desire, ideas, belief etc., which, having no immediately obvious external stimulus or "present event" to cause them, are not so easily explained in terms of 'aspects'. Beliefs, desires and so on do not seem to be aspects in the same way as, for example, the sense-data we receive of the physical objects around us. The pictures we receive are in our minds; they are 'images'. If they \textbf{are} to be explained in terms of aspects, then the aspects must in some way lie \textit{within} us. To examine these, we must turn to introspection, and to behaviourist theories of psychology.

Introspection is the way in which we observe what goes on in our minds, in the same way as perception is the way in which we observe what goes on around us. Traditionally it is thought to be more "trustworthy" - to use Russell's phrase - than external perception, but modern psychologists have shown us, with psycho-analysis and accompanying theories of subconscious desires etc., that introspection is by no means infallible, and certainly no more certain than perception.\(^2\) Stace sees no \textit{a priori} objection to "admitting the possibility of introspective data alongside the others". His reason is simply that introspection is no more different from other means of observing than the various other means of observing are from each other.\(^3\) There is, for example, just as wide a

1. Ibid., p. 85.
2. Ibid., p. 122.
gap between sight and touch as between sight and introspection. The possibilities here are endless and interesting, since traditionally the senses - or the five acceptable ones - have always been lumped together as being the same type of thing; and sight has usually been favoured in philosophical discussion as being the easiest sense to use for analysis of philosophical problems. It would indeed create enormous problems if philosophers had had to restrict themselves - or had chosen to restrict themselves - to what could be known by hearing, or touching. The other senses do, it is true, get an occasional mention in philosophy, but sight predominates. Modern technology provides us with evidence of the similarity in nature of the ways in which we perceive - in terms of light waves, sound waves, nerve endings, chemical reactions etc. - or more precisely in that their similarities lie in their being all accountable by laws of physics. In this respect the manner of 'perceiving' things in the mind still evades the scientist. But these are comparatively recent developments, whereas in the 1920s the various senses still appeared to differ very fundamentally from each other, and this fact went apparently unnoticed by philosophers who favoured sight.

For Russell, however, introspection at this time seemed subject to doubt. Although he must rely on introspection in the first place to establish the existence of images, once this has been done, he prefers to explain the images, if possible, by means of examination of the purely external, observable evidence presented to us by man's actions. This is essential if the mental world is to be reduced to the same neutral stuff as the physical world. He turns to behaviourism.

The behaviourists dismiss thought altogether, and argue that man's behaviour is merely a matter of habit. Even if we think we can know

1. See footnote 1, page 144 of this thesis.
about thought or about ourselves by introspection, the actual knowledge obtained is no different from what we can observe of other people's behaviour:

We may see more, because our own body is easier to observe than that of other people; but we do not see anything radically unlike what we see of others. ¹

Russell himself prefers to concentrate on what we can observe about the behaviour of animals, since this avoids confusing what is observable with what we think we know about the minds and consequent actions of men. There is, he points out, no gap in the physical continuity between protozoa and man, and it is therefore not unreasonable to hypothesise that mental continuity can also be traced. The learning process in animals, demonstrated by experiments involving rewards and punishments for different types of behaviour, can, the behaviourists argue, explain much of man's behaviour in terms of initial instinctive reaction to a stimulus, followed by repetitions of the stimulus and of the reaction (which becomes gradually more refined), and finally the formation of a habit. In man, although the procedure is basically the same, the 'habits' are likely to be far more complex and also capable of greater variation:

What is true of animals, as regards instinct and habit, is equally true of men. But the higher we rise in the evolutionary scale ..., the greater becomes the power of learning, and the fewer are the occasions when pure instinct is exhibited unmodified in adult life. ²

The "learning" here seems to present difficulties. If it is assumed to be a type of mental activity, or mental storehouse, then the instinct-habit schema of behaviourism is not as simple as they make out. Semon's engrams would have helped Russell here. Laird points out that if engrams - which he defines as permanent traces in the brain - can be found to exist,

2. Ibid., p. 71.
then the mind could indeed run according to behaviourist theory; but if, on the other hand, "mnemonic connection is not physiologically engrammatic, there is room for the logical construction of minds which are not material".¹ But Russell has already stated that he can do without engrams. He examines several theories, none of which seem to him entirely satisfactory, but he still sees "no reason to suppose that what is further required involves 'consciousness'". He finally settles for an explanation which hinges on a "bond" being established between stimulus and response which becomes stronger with repetition.² The notions of pleasure and discomfort are essential to this theory, motivating our responses to stimuli, and being themselves properties of sensations - which brings us comfortably (perhaps too comfortably) back to the neutral sensations.³ Desire and feeling, as well as the learning process, can be explained, according to Russell, in these terms. The sensation is a mental occurrence, and

A mental occurrence of any kind - sensation, image, belief or emotion - may be a cause of a series of actions, continuing, unless interrupted, until some more or less definite state of affairs is realized. ⁴

However, while this explains satisfactorily our immediate reaction to a stimulus, it still does not explain why our reaction today is likely to be very similar to our reaction to a similar stimulus in the past. Russell resorts to mnemonic causation, for which theory he can offer no justification, apart from its being - apparently - what we observe to happen:

To ask why such-and-such a kind of sequence occurs is either to ask a meaningless question, or to demand some more general kind of sequence which includes the one in question. The widest empirical laws of sequence known at any time can only be "explained" in the sense of being subsumed by later discoveries under wider laws; but these wider laws, until they

1. Laird, op. cit., p. 310.
3. Ibid., p. 71.
4. Ibid., p. 75.
in turn are subsumed, will remain brute facts, resting solely upon observation, not upon some supposed inherent rationality.

There is therefore no a priori objection to a causal law in which part of the cause has ceased to exist. ¹

This is not the first time we have come across such a jump in Russell's otherwise thorough analysis, which he has expected us simply to accept. ² Although here he seems to have very little justification for expecting our acceptance, it is possible that his doubts about causal laws stem from Einstein's quantum theory. This gets no more than a footnoted mention in Analysis of Mind, but the footnote is not insignificant:

The theory of quanta suggests that the continuity is only apparent. If so, we shall be able theoretically to reach events which are not processes.(in the manner of series of contiguous causes and effects). ³

It is from this new type of causal law that we get the basis of Russell's "arrangements" of his neutral stuff into mental and material. Thus, although the "stuff" is neutral, the arrangement is made according to different causal laws. In the absence of an engram theory, the question now arises as to the credibility of a totally different set of causal laws. Traditionally, cause and effect must be temporally continuous, and although tradition may be over-ruled, nevertheless this should not be done without good reason. Russell gives us no good reason, and argues furthermore that we should not ask for one; we should accept his new variety of causal laws as "brute facts resting solely upon observation". ⁴

Even if we do accept them, we must then ask whether, being so different from other causal laws, they deserve a category all to themselves.

1. Ibid., p. 89 (my italics).
2. See, for instance, the "principles of simplicity", footnote 6, page 96 of this thesis.
3. Ibid., p. 94.
4. For a further possible justification for Russell's new type of causal law, see Appendix p. 254.
Stace clearly thinks that they do. He questions the nature of the arrangement or, as he calls it, the relations. He looks at the relation, not at the 'stuff', and discovers that it is a very special kind of relation indeed. It is unique in that it "cannot be reduced to physical relations and...... cannot be found in the physical world". He goes on:

R (the relation) then, must be a unique non-physical relation. It cannot be itself a neutral entity. It must be purely subjective. But, when we have admitted this, we have admitted the existence of something which is purely mental, subjective and non-physical as the essential characteristic of mind. This is to admit to dualism. Why now trouble to deny the existence of other subjective factors of consciousness? At most neutral monism, if accepted, shows that what is peculiar and essential to mind is not a unique non-sensory stuff but rather a unique non-sensory relation. ¹

Neutral monism is a difficult theory to uphold in philosophical terms. One of the major reasons for this seems to be the fact - already mentioned² - that one can only analyse the 'mind' by already presupposing its existence. When Russell, in his earlier works, is analysing matter - the tables, chairs, patches of colour etc. - he is able to make use of cautionary phrases such as 'what we think we see'; we can think about what we see without having first to examine just what this 'thinking' is. In an analysis of the mind, 'what we think we think', or even 'we think that we think', is inevitably far more complex. Russell examines other theories and finds them wanting; his own theory also is less than satisfactory - if we are assuming that neutral monism in its strictest form is what he sets out to prove. But for Russell, the method of analysis is more important than the end result. His prejudice - if he can be accused of prejudice - is not against dualism, or any other philosophy; it is against the sort of unreasoned commitment to such philosophies which so often, he feels, is not only prior to analysis, but which itself colours

¹. Stace, op. cit., p. 379.
². See page 144 of this thesis.
and dictates the method of analysis in order that the desired conclusion should be reached. His work on logical atomism - which was presented in Chapter Three as a philosophy in itself - made this very clear. His examination of neutral monism, in terms of these aims, is satisfactory. Behaviourism in particular is useful to Russell as a means (rather than an end) of sorting out what it is that we do actually believe and feel, from what we think we believe and feel. It clears away much of the confusion and presents a new way of looking at men's actions and the motives for them, even if in itself it cannot provide definitive conclusions. It is this aspect of neutral monism - the psychological aspect - far more than the philosophical one which is important to Russell and which colours much of his work from now on.

The final point to be noted about Russell's 'neutral monist' phase is his insistence on empirical criteria. The influence of Hume is very much in evidence throughout Analysis of Mind - he is directly quoted several times. One must suppose that Russell had been acquainted with the works of Hume from an early age - the influence of British empiricism in general cannot have passed by one whose godfather was John Stuart Mill. But Hume in particular becomes increasingly more attractive to Russell, culminating in his acknowledged specific influence over two of Russell's later works - Human Society in Ethics and Politics, and Inquiry into Meaning and Truth.¹ And both empiricism and behaviourism certainly had a great effect on Russell's ethical thinking at this time.

Ethics and behaviourism

In the previous chapter we found that Russell's thinking on ethics was influenced both by his philosophical thinking at the time, and also by the real life circumstances in which he found himself. From 1910 to the early 1920s Russell's private life was dotted with amorous adventures, made much of by scandalmongerers. But the way in which this affected his writing was in his choice of particular examples to illustrate points of his ethical theory, rather than by influencing the theory itself. The question of marriage and sexual ethics clearly interested him on a personal level, and he wrote extensively on it. But the theory he holds on values arises more from his philosophy than from his philanderings.

Jager argues that "'the ethics of neutral monism' was not territory that (Russell) or anyone else explored at all". However, the link between philosophy and ethics at this stage seems to be quite clear, and in Russell's works actually explicit. In neutral monism there is on the one hand the attempted - if not entirely satisfactory - rejection of the 'mind', whose ethical counterpart is rejection of 'soul', 'God', 'immortality' etc.; and on the other, the explanation of man's actions primarily in behaviourist terms of habit, with a corresponding ethical theory which rejects altogether ultimate notions of 'good' and 'bad' and replaces them with the rules and regulations, habits and customs of particular societies motivated primarily by the desires of the individuals. The shift from the emotivism to which he subscribed - perhaps reluctantly - in 1915 is only slight; in a sense it is no shift at all, but merely a deeper exploration of the same views in order to establish sounder reasons for holding them. Jager does grudgingly admit that "there seems to be some general reason, perhaps more picturesque than logical, for saying that emotivism

got, as it were, 'moral' support from this ontology, even in the diluted form of getting no opposition'. I would go further than this, and argue that behaviourism provided positive support to Russell's rather negatively motivated acceptance of the view that ethical questions concern feelings and nothing more.

In 1925 Russell published a small book entitled What I Believe, and this constitutes the most important work of his ethical thinking at the time. His aim is to analyse "Man's place in the universe", and ways of achieving what he calls "the good life". Thanks to the efforts of science, the physical world is shrinking - and the mental world also:

What we call our 'thoughts' seem to depend upon the organisation of tracks in the brain in the same sort of way in which journeys depend upon roads and railways. The energy used in thinking seems to have a chemical origin; for instance, a deficiency of iodine will turn a clever man into an idiot. Mental phenomena seem to be bound up with such material structure.

The result of such a conclusion on religion is very clear: God, immortality, and other central dogmas of the Christian religion, can find no support in science. Russell's attacks on religion have been subjected to criticism, in particular on the grounds that his argument is largely emotional and prejudiced, leading him to select for attack ideas which are recognised by Christians to be outdated, if not absurd. This is certainly true to some extent; even when Russell is prepared to admit that some Christian teachings are excellent, he is quick with examples of so-called Christians who have failed to observe them. And he also devotes perhaps

1. Ibid., p. 478.
2. Bertrand Russell, "What I Believe" (1925), in R.E. Egner and L.E. Dennon (eds.), The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell (London, 1951), p. 368. It becomes more and more frustrating that Russell could not see his way to accepting Semon's engram theory. This would have lent tremendous support to his own theories, both philosophical and ethical.
too much attention to the "vindictive fury (shown by Christ) against those people who would not listen to his preaching" - although Ayer points out in Russell's defence that:

Now that a literal belief in Hell has ceased to be either intellectually or morally respectable, we are told that Christ's more bloodthirsty sayings are either not authentic or not intended to be taken literally. There is, however, no historical justification for discriminating between them and the rest of his reputed teaching.

However, for the purpose of this thesis, it is the method of argument used against religion that is significant - in this case scientific. Although Russell has been concerned since adolescence with the refutation of God, this is the first time that science has played a part in his argument. Strictly speaking, science does not play such a large part in his rejection of God as it does in his rejection of immortality. Two years later, in "Why I am not a Christian", Russell presents his reasons for not believing in God, which have more of a philosophic and logical tone than a scientific one. Treading fairly well-trod paths, he attacks systematically three major theological arguments in favour of God - the 'first cause' argument, the 'natural law' argument, and the argument from design, all of which must be sufficiently familiar to the reader not to necessitate repetition. He also attacks two 'moral' arguments, the first being that "there would be no right or wrong unless God existed". Again Russell presents the familiar counter argument, using logic, that if there is a difference between right and wrong, the difference is either due to God's fiat - in which case God himself is neither good nor bad; or the difference lies outside God - 'God is good' - in which case (assuming that this is not mere tautology, 'God = good'), which clearly tells us

4. Ibid., p. 590.
nothing about either God or good) 'good' is an adjective used to describe God, and thus good and bad, and therefore right and wrong, and "in their essence logically anterior to God". 1

Russell, however, would be the first to admit that, at least according to his own criteria, a categorical refutation would need proof, and while it seems easy to undermine arguments which claim to prove the existence of God, it is not so easy to prove that there is no God. In "What I Believe" he admits this without hesitation:

I do not pretend to be able to prove that there is no God.
I equally cannot prove that Satan is a fiction. The Christian God may exist; so may the Gods of Olympus, or of ancient Egypt, or of Babylon. But no one of these hypotheses is more probable than any other. 2

The second 'moral' argument concerns immortality; it is that "the existence of God is required in order to bring justice into the world" - which Russell interprets to mean that "if you are going to have justice in the universe as a whole, you have to suppose a future life to redress the balance". 3 Here, Russell does employ science. Why, he asks, should there necessarily be a balance? According to scientific laws of probability, the fact that justice does not reign supreme on earth indicates that it probably does not reign supreme elsewhere either. 4

1. Ibid., p. 590.
4. Treatment of this kind has led to criticisms such as:

.... he impresses one here as being more concerned to reject than to define, more concerned to express his dislike for Christianity than to present an explanation of what Christianity is.
(E. Sheffield Brightman, op. cit., p. 543.)

It may, however, be worth mentioning at this point that this essay, "Why I am not a Christian", which is a good example of Russell's biting sarcasm, was in origin a lecture which was delivered to the National Secular Society - who must have enjoyed it immensely.
In "What I Believe", his insistence on scientific criteria leads Russell to refute immortality along a more direct route. A belief in immortality involves belief in the 'soul', and believers clearly must insist that 'soul' and body are totally disparate, and that the soul is "something quite other than its empirical manifestations through our bodily organs". But for Russell as a neutral monist, all the evidence seems to point strongly in the opposite direction:

Our mental life is bound up with brain structure and organized bodily energy. Therefore it is rational to suppose that mental life ceases when bodily life ceases.

The conflict here, however, between Russell and his hypothetical Christian opponents is not primarily one concerning where the evidence leads us; rather it involves the criteria used in selecting the evidence itself. For Russell, at the peak of his empiricism, there seems to be no doubt that empirical data are of prime importance; others may not agree. Those who argue that the soul is, in fact, "something quite other than its empirical manifestations" clearly do not agree.

In 1924 Russell wrote about "Styles in Ethics" - a short, entertaining piece of work depicting a wide variety of moral views and customs. The conclusion he is led to draw from these is that:

Whatever the prevailing practice in a tribe, it is thought to be the only one compatible with virtue, and all departures from it are regarded with moral horror.

He offers his anthropological examples as evidence with which it is possible "to attack the general belief that there are universal absolute rules of moral conduct", and adds the argument that what popular morality gives us are rules of conduct, whereas what we should be more concerned

2. Ibid., p. 369.
with are the "ends of life".¹ This debate will be dealt with in Chapter Five, but what is of significance here for our present purposes is that Russell seems himself to question the validity of scientific criteria as a means to 'morality':

Perhaps there is not, strictly speaking, any such thing as 'scientific' ethics. It is not the province of science to decide on the ends of life. Science can show that an ethic is unscientific, in the sense that it does not minister to any desired end. Science also can show how to bring the interest of the individual into harmony with that of society.² But to proclaim the ends of life, and make men conscious of their value, is not the business of science; it is the business of the mystic, the artist and the poet.³

Science, it seems, can be used to pull down an 'ultimate' moral structure, but not to build another one in its place. Sentiments such as that expressed above represent a somewhat surprising departure from the otherwise consistently behaviourist theory of morality which Russell expressed in the 1920s. It might be explained by the fact that "Styles in Ethics" was written originally for an American audience, whereas the other two essays were first published in Britain where he had already made his name as an opponent of organised religion. It is possible, therefore, that he might have felt less restricted by his own reputation. And it is certainly true to say, as has already been noted, that Russell always shows remarkable reluctance to shut the door finally and forever on mysticism and intuitionism as a source of morality. He has generally kept them waiting, as it were, in the hall, until they might be needed.

Despite the mysticism lurking beneath the surface, Russell is ostensibly committed to behaviourism, and having discredited, at least to

¹ Ibid., p. 348.
² Russell in fact pays remarkably little attention to the manner in which science could harmonise the interests of the individual and of society. Much of his later work, which is discussed in Chapter Five, expresses concern at the extent to which the interests of the individual are crushed, either openly and deliberately, or in a more subtle, manipulative manner, by the excessive emphasis given by modern governments and peoples to the needs and interests of the state.
³ Ibid., pp. 349-50.
his own satisfaction, religion as a source of values, he looks elsewhere. Another possible candidate is nature, and Russell is anxious to put "laws of nature" in their place. Although we are certainly part of nature, "the outcome of natural laws, and their victims in the long run", although it is nature which produces "our desires, our hopes and fears, in accordance with laws which the physicist is beginning to discover", nevertheless in the world of value nature forms only a part.

In the world of values, Nature in itself is neutral, neither good nor bad, deserving of neither admiration nor censure. It is we who create value and our desires which confer value. In this realm we are kings, and we debase our kingship if we bow down to Nature. It is for us to determine the good life, not for Nature - not even for Nature personified as God.

Aiken is concerned at this point to rescue Russell from what seems to be a purely subjective view of ethical values. "His point here", she argues, "was to show that nature is cold and impersonal, and hence does not legislate value and does not contain value in itself". This is certainly so, but only in so far as it is an exhortation not to become burdened with value systems imposed upon us from elsewhere. Aiken goes on to argue that therefore, "when Russell says 'we create value', he does not necessarily mean that value must be defined exclusively with reference to the individual's personal desires; rather 'we' refers to human beings in general". Although certainly this is Russell's view, in this particular context Aiken is missing the optimism and encouragement - and also the elitism - that characterise so many of Russell's views on morality. His undisguised contempt for, and ridiculing of, the majority

2. Ibid., p. 371.
3. Ibid., p. 371.
5. Ibid., p. 90.
of sets of values created by "human beings in general" is scarcely compatible with his view of men as "kings" of the realm of values. When he says "it is for us to determine the good life", what he has in mind are the opportunities open to people such as himself who have already freed themselves from the restrictions imposed upon human beings in general by the moral traditions of the societies in which they live, whether inspired by God, gods or Nature. In "Styles in Ethics" he suggests something very similar when he says:

After studying these various customs it begins at last to occur to the reader that possibly the customs of his own age and nation are not eternal, divine ordinances, but are susceptible of change, and even, in some respects, of improvement. 1

What he seems to be aiming to do is release human beings in general from the limits imposed upon them by traditional moral codes, by undermining the foundations for those codes. "Popular morality", he argues, "... lays down rules of conduct rather than ends of life". 2 For his American readers, he allows himself to indulge in prescriptive argument:

The morality that ought to exist would lay down ends of life rather than rules of conduct. 3

And those who will formulate these "ends of life" are, as mentioned above, the mystic, the artist and the poet. But for a British audience he is more wary. It is possible to some extent to conduct argument on differences of views of the "good life" as, for instance, on the question whether prison sentences or education are more likely to cure crime, an argument regarding means to an end, for which statistical evidence could in theory be provided. But on questions regarding the ends themselves, "no argument is possible. I cannot, therefore, prove that my view of

2. Ibid., p. 348.
3. Ibid., p. 348. (My italics.)
the good life is right; I can only state my view, and hope that as many
as possible will agree.¹ The way of testing "moral rules" is to discover
whether or not they lead to "ends we desire". Russell is emphatic that
such ends are not what we ought to desire; the word "ought" is brought
by Russell very firmly within the behaviourist scheme, and its only effect
is to influence our desire:

Since all behaviour springs from desire, it is clear that
ethical notions can have no importance except as they
influence desire. They do this through the desire for
approval and the fear of disapproval. ²

The importance of ethical notions lies, therefore, in their purely
practical value. Morals are necessary in order to avoid conflict within
societies, and must be realistic in answering the desires of members of
the societies, in accordance with utilitarian principles which Russell -
on a purely practical level, not a moral one - feels to be necessary:

If the definition of right conduct is to make a wide appeal,
the ends must be such as large sections of mankind desire. ³

As for the "good life" itself, Russell's own preference is for a life
"inspired by love and guided by knowledge".⁴ "Love" here is clearly the
more laudable side of what later becomes "passion" and dictates our aims,
while "knowledge" is the reasoning which tells us the best method of
achieving them. He goes on to elucidate: love is of two kinds - "delight"
and "well-wishing" - the one selfish, the other selfless; both are needed,
since without well-wishing or benevolence, delight would become cruel, and
without delight, benevolence would become cold and superior. The details
of Russell's own particular recipe for the good life will be discussed in
greater detail in the following section; all that needs to be said here
is that it concentrates to a large extent on ways of influencing men's

₂. Ibid., p. 374.
₃. Ibid., p. 375.
₄. Ibid., p. 372.
desires and changing them for the better, for example by examining the
causes of "bad desires" such as malevolence, fear, envy etc. And these
are seen from a behaviourist viewpoint:

Human nature we should respect, because our impulses and
desires are the stuff out of which our happiness is to be
made. It is no use to give men something abstractedly
considered 'good'; we must give them something they
desire if we are to add to their happiness. ¹

In Russell's ethical views, two separate and distinct strands of
thought can be seen - the one descriptive, the other prescriptive. The
descriptive element attempts to cut down to size the grandiose claims to
universality or absoluteness exhibited by moral codes of different types,
by demonstrating that it is neither God, nor Nature, which sets them down,
but merely our own desires. The prescriptive element urges us, in view
of these findings, to recognise our own potential:

... no longer to look round for imaginary supports, no
longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look
to our own efforts here below to make this world a fit
place to live in. ²

Russell's criteria for fitness can be seen from his writings on
social and political issues of the time, and from the particular faults
and merits he detects in the societies with which he is familiar.

Values and education

In ethical philosophy we have seen that Russell's aim was to challenge
traditional views on the sources, origins and validity of traditional moral
codes; in his writings on the world around him at the time it is therefore
no surprise to find that he attacks the traditional moral codes themselves.
His work of this period is both descriptive and prescriptive. It combines
extremes of disappointment and of optimism which echo events in his life in

¹. Ibid., p. 389.
the early 1920s. He had met Dora Black, an intelligent young woman who was to become his second wife, and found in her "a complete absence of the usual academic faults - there is courage, adventurousness, love of colour, unbounded generosity and gentleness". From his Autobiography we learn that she surprised Russell on their first meeting by her "exceptional sincerity", and also that she was never very interested in politics. But it was the vigour and enthusiasm which were the dominant characteristics of Dora Black. Katharine Tait - Dora's daughter as well as Russell's - recalls that "she filled the house with her energy and her laughter and her love of bright colours". Whether or not Russell saw himself, approaching fifty, as possessed of the "usual academic faults", it is certain that Dora's youth and optimism presented a contrast to his own character - a contrast that is reflected in his writings. Indeed from the preface to Prospects of Industrial Civilization, written jointly by Russell and Dora, we learn that their views were diametrically opposed:

The authors of this book, after independent observation (of Russia) .... were fortunate in that the fury led them in completely opposite directions, the one recoiling in disappointment, the other expanding in the delight of fresh hope and knowledge.

Russell is at times totally preoccupied with despair at the evils of modern society - a despair which is often grossly exaggerated. He appears exceptionally narrow-minded in his wholesale condemnation of industrial society. He writes, to give just one example, of science

3. Ibid., p. 332.
5. Bertrand Russell, Prospects of Industrial Civilization (London, 1923). In the light of Dora's character, it is perhaps unnecessary to add that it was Russell who recoiled in disappointment.
which:

... hitherto, has been used for three purposes: to increase the total production of commodities; to make wars more destructive; and to substitute trivial amusements for those that had some artistic or hygienic value. ¹

It is certainly true that science has increased production and made wars more destructive; whether or not the amusements of an industrial society are trivial depends upon personal taste— but amusements of any sort are now, thanks to scientific advances in transport, photography etc., far more widely available. Also, Russell omits any mention of the more laudable scientific advances, for example in medicine, and even in the manufacture of the printed word, which makes knowledge itself far more widely available.

In 1924 Russell wrote a short book whose title neatly sums up his fears: Icarus, or the Future of Science.² The book itself is laden with gloomy prognostications about the future of the world, and in 1931, looking back on the 1920s, he writes that "while my personal life has been satisfying, my impersonal outlook has become increasingly sombre, and I have found it more and more difficult to believe that the hopes which I formerly cherished will be realised in any measurable future".³

The other side to this coin, the side which it seems likely that Dora had some part in promoting, is an excess of optimism. In a manner strangely reminiscent of Rousseau, who swung similarly between extremes of hope and despair, Russell displays a utopian view of what man could become, involving "instinctive happiness", "friendly feeling", "enjoyment of beauty", and "the intellectual curiosity which leads to the advancement and diffusion of knowledge".⁴ The utopianism becomes more evident when

1. Ibid., p. 186.
4. Bertrand Russell, Prospects of Industrial Civilization, op. cit., Chapter IX.
he goes on to define these terms, for instance:

Those who have instinctive delight in life are happy except when they have positive causes of unhappiness; those who do not have it are unhappy except when they have positive causes of happiness. ¹

There are, certainly, people who seem to answer to both descriptions; but a vast majority of people probably fall somewhere between the two: they have instinctive happiness only sometimes. When he moves on to discuss enjoyment of beauty, it becomes clear that he is basing many of his views on his own particular values - and since these are values concerning detail rather than values in the wider sense, they would be better described as personal tastes:

It may, I think, be taken as agreed that industrialism, as it exists now, destroys beauty, creates ugliness, and tends to destroy artistic capacity. ²

He is being particularly narrow-minded here; just as each age and society creates its own moral values, so it creates its own artistic values. Athens, Venice and Florence are given as examples of places where "commerce which is not industrial .... (has been) extraordinarily favourable to art"³ - but someone with a liking for the works of Lowry, for example, would argue that industrialisation had given rise to its own, equally valuable, art forms.

The above examples demonstrate three major defects which colour Russell's later social and political writing: his blindness to all but the evils of modern society; his unshaken faith in the great potential of mankind which a vast majority of men would quite simply be unable to achieve;⁴ and the intrusion of his own purely personal tastes (rather than values) into his arguments. Examples of all three abound in

1. Ibid., p. 167.
2. Ibid., p. 182.
3. Ibid., p. 183.
4. This leads ultimately to a type of (implicit) elitism, visible in later works - see Chapter Five of this thesis.
Prospects of Industrial Civilization, Icarus, On Education - and indeed in most of his other works that are not purely philosophical. These are the defects which, more than anything else, have contributed to his reputation as a 'moraliser' rather than a moral philosopher; have discredited his views on moral issues in the eyes of his critics to the point where they become no more than the ramblings of an amiable old eccentric; and have unfortunately overshadowed many of the more significant issues to which he turns his attention. As one critic puts it, perhaps too mildly, he has "a habit of overstating his case and thereby weakening it".\(^1\) It would be difficult to deny that these defects lower the quality of Russell's work as a whole. It would be equally difficult to ignore them altogether. However, this having been said, it is still possible to contend that Russell has interesting and important things to say about morality in general, and the task becomes one of separating the wheat from the chaff.

There are two important themes in Russell's work of this period. The first is that he presents utilitarianism as the ethical consequence of industrialism. In Prospects of Industrial Civilization he examines the "inherent tendencies of industrialism", amongst which is the 

\[
.... \text{tendency to value things for their uses rather than for their intrinsic worth. } ...\]

In an industrial community, the great majority of the population are not making consumable commodities, but only machines and appliances by means of which others can make consumable commodities. This leads men to become utilitarian rather than artistic, since their product has not in itself any direct human value.\(^2\)

We have mentioned that Russell's utilitarianism is based on practical necessity rather than ethical desirability.\(^3\) Both utilitarianism and

\begin{enumerate}
\item Bertrand Russell, Prospects of Industrial Civilization, op. cit., p. 48.
\item See page 163 of this thesis.
\end{enumerate}
behaviourism constitute in this sense the descriptive element. The scientific facts of the matter, as Russell sees it, are that men's behaviour is motivated by desire; men's desires are in turn motivated, in an industrial age, by notions of usefulness. In any industrial state, therefore, the collective desires of the majority centre around these ideas of value, to the detriment of the society as a whole.

He seems to be taking a highly utopian view of what a society could be like. He is setting standards far too high for the average man. However, the society he would prefer to see in the West is one of which he has already had a glimpse in China. In 1920 Russell, in the company of Dora Black, visited China, where he was impressed primarily by the fact that the Chinese appear to base their society on a system of values altogether different from our own:

Our industrial and commercial civilization has been both the effect and the cause of certain more or less unconscious beliefs as to what is worth while; in China one becomes conscious of those beliefs through the spectacle of a society which challenges them by being built, just as unconsciously, upon a different standard of values. ¹

The Chinese standard of values has evolved over centuries, and is largely based on the traditional teachings of Confucius and Lao-Tze. The details of Confucius' teachings Russell dismisses as being overly concerned with trivial points of etiquette, but what he finds interesting is that, although present day orthodox Confucianism - which dates from the 12th century A.D. - rejects religion as such, it does not, by so doing, leave a moral vacuum; pure Confucians are "sceptical in religion, but not in morals".² What Confucius has to offer is a system of "pure ethics, without religious dogma".³

². Ibid., p. 43.
³. Ibid., p. 190.
Russell's description of the teachings of Lao-Tze - from whom Taoism developed - is of more significance for the purposes of this thesis. Although magic and superstition characterised later Taoism, together with a preoccupation with a search for the elixir of life and hope of escaping death, Lao-Tze and his disciples presented originally a view of man which Russell clearly finds pleasing:

He held that every person, every animal and every thing has a certain way or manner of behaving which is natural to him, or her, or it, and that we ought to conform to this way ourselves and encourage others to conform to it.  

There is in Taoism an element of mysticism which Russell does not object to, although it would appear to contradict directly the behaviourist and neutral monist theory he now feels to be philosophically true. He is not, of course, stating his own theory here; he is setting out what he sees as the basis for Chinese life, and sketching the resultant society, with its vices as well as its virtues. However, the fact that he pays scant attention to the vices, and paints what must be an exaggeratedly glowing picture of the Chinese character throughout the book, is sufficient indication of the view, already mentioned, that although behaviourism may serve to describe morality, it does not necessarily follow that 'what is, is right". Not, at any rate, for Russell.

Russell expounds in detail on one aspect of Chinese society which clearly dominates his own thinking: education. This brings us to the second major theme in Russell's work of this period. The Chinese, by Russell's account, pay enormous respect to education. He gives examples to demonstrate the immense dedication of teachers in China; he gives impressive statistics to demonstrate the huge increase in numbers of schools, teachers and students in the previous decade. And in these he

1. Ibid., p. 188.
2. Ibid., pp. 215, 223, 225.
sees hope for the future:

What is being done in (the direction of education in China) is very interesting, and one of the most hopeful things happening in our not very cheerful epoch. ¹

In _Prospects of Industrial Civilization_ also Russell leads up, in the pessimistic manner already noted, to a chapter on education, which he sees as the only means of off-setting the unfortunate consequences of industrial society:

Our central problem in this book has been to inquire how far it is possible to combine the uniformity and large-scale organization which industrialism demands on the material side with diversity, individuality and spontaneity in the non-material aspects of life. . . . is it possible to have machinery in industry without having a mechanistic outlook in our thoughts and in the mental habits which our education forces upon the young? ²

Russell's views on education cannot be called a philosophy. His interest in education was primarily a personal one: in 1921 he married Miss Black, who bore him a son and a daughter, in 1921 and 1925 respectively. The Russells were therefore naturally concerned about their children's education. As he himself admits, "in the circumstances it was natural that I should become interested in education".³ His first book on the subject is entitled _On Education: especially in early childhood_;⁴ it was written only a year before he opened his own school, and it was motivated by his concern about the inadequacies of the existing education system.⁵ Thus, although his writings on education certainly reflect his behaviourist philosophy, they do not in themselves constitute a philosophy of education. To view them as such leads to easy criticism⁶ which is not

6. See, for example, B.H. Bode, "Russell's Educational Philosophy", in P.A. Schilpp, _op. cit._, which concentrates on its philosophical shortcomings and does not even mention Russell's practical application of his views in the school which he opened in 1927.
entirely justified. According to Jager, all Russell offered was a "framework of certain broad ideals" combined with "an empiricist's concern for practicality and experience".\(^1\) There was, however, a more thorough philosophical framework than Jager suggests, which centred around the behaviourism and psychoanalysis we have already discussed:

He refused to accept the narrow stimulus-response-punishment-reward psychology of behaviourism where it suggested that men should be trained as machines rather than as independent and critical human beings. At the time he accepted as a contribution of behaviourism much of what it had to say about instincts.\(^2\)

Russell's daughter also suggests that behaviourism, although able to explain many things about the actions of men (and of children), was not able to provide a guide for life:

I doubt if my father ever believed in behaviourism quite as thoroughly as he appears to in his book on education; he was far too much the passionate moralist. He may have thought that the right conditioning of his children would produce the right kind of people, but he certainly didn't consider himself the inevitable result of his own conditioning. If my father's view of the inescapable, dreadful results of old-fashioned education had been correct, it would have been quite impossible for him and my mother to be the courageous innovators they undoubtedly were.\(^3\)

The emphasis is on ethics rather than on what Russell calls "instruction". In *On Education* he makes a clear distinction between the two, and although he does deal with "instruction", the bulk of the book concentrates on what he has elsewhere defined as "ethical education", and which "consists in strengthening certain desires and weakening others".\(^4\) If this sounds rather grandiose an objective, suffice it to say that, in the context of the education of small children, he aims to produce no more than healthy habits:

The fact is that children are not naturally either "good" or "bad". They are born with only reflexes and a few instincts; out of these, by the action of the environment, habits are produced, which may be either healthy or morbid.¹

For the substance of his first book Russell draws heavily on contemporary educational theory, particularly that of the Montessori school, and also on his own experiences as a parent. His other major work on education, Education and the Social Order, published in 1932 after he had enlarged the scope of his own experiences with five years of looking after other children as well as his own, devotes considerable attention to the work of J.B. Watson on behaviourism; Russell is particularly impressed by Watson's replacement of instincts with emotions as the original foundations on which education had to work.² The implication seems to be that emotions are more malleable than instincts, and the educator therefore has more likelihood of being effective. It is the emphasis on emotions that Russell likes in Freudian psychoanalysis, paying particular attention to the dangers of repression in this area.

Russell’s 'theory' was put into practice at Beacon Hill, a school "whose reputation was a great deal better than that implied by the popular press".³ The instruction itself was clearly of secondary importance — although it would be wrong to suggest, as one critic does, that "such important subjects as music appreciation, instrumental music, the arts, vocational education, and physical education, not to mention spelling and writing"⁴ were completely neglected. What had priority in the aims of the Russells was the encouragement given to the children to tackle such subjects by means of fostering interest in them. Katharine Tait gives examples of some of the remarkably adult plays that were written by the

¹ Bertrand Russell, On Education, op. cit., p. 33
² Park, op. cit., p. 47.
³ Clark, op. cit., p. 421.
⁴ Park, op. cit., p. 130.
children, as a result of such interest and encouragement.\(^1\) Discipline was in part administered by the children themselves, and ultimately settled down at a level "midway between that of conventional enforcement and the unlimited freedom of Neill's Summerhill"\(^2\) (with which, incidentally, Russell was acquainted).

On a purely practical level, the school failed. There were severe financial and administrative difficulties, as well as problems developing in the relationship between Dora and Russell. They separated and eventually divorced in 1934, though Dora continued to run the school until 1940. Russell was deeply disappointed by what he saw as a failure - and the fact that Dora was able to continue alone, and presumably successfully, until 1940, is attributed by her daughter in part to Dora's more conventional background. Russell's early education had hardly equipped him for confrontation with the average child, and his disappointment was acute, whereas,

My mother had a thicker skin, perhaps. She had been to an ordinary school with ordinary children and she knew how they behaved.\(^3\)

There were, however, other reasons of a more theoretical nature for the failure of Beacon Hill. Russell saw his particular school as an experiment, but he hoped that it would serve as a model for more widespread application of his ideas. In 1928 he wrote: "What we are doing is of course only an experiment on a small scale, but I confidently expect its results to be very important indeed".\(^4\) In the introduction to On Education he is well aware that the problem of education and educational reform is of more relevance to the poor:

2. Clark, op. cit., p. 424.
3. Tait, op. cit., p. 77.
If the parents are well-to-do, it is not necessary to the solution of their private problem that all schools should be good, but only that there should be some good schools geographically available. But for wage-earning parents nothing suffices except reform in the elementary schools. ¹

Russell's determination to keep the school fees within the reach of poorer people contributed to the financial difficulties,² but the theoretically significant result of Beacon Hill's reputation as progressive and experimental was the recruitment of children from unconventional homes, children with particular problems — not, in other words, the "average" children for whom the new type of schooling was really intended. This certainly was not Russell's original intention. And yet it is hard to see how his educational theory could have more than a limited relevance in its practical application. He writes to one parent about the need to keep the school small and the staff/child ratio well-balanced:

At present we each of us know each child intimately, and can judge his or her psychological needs in a way that would be impossible if the school were large. ³

The practical difficulties of large-scale application of this idea are obvious. Perhaps less obvious is the doubt about whether or not such schooling would in fact prove beneficial to the mass of the population. Park argues that Russell "does not seem to have understood the great difference in ability among children", and demands too high an intellectual level. Beacon Hill should "serve as a model of pupil achievement for teachers of children of average or very high mental ability", ⁴ rather than as a model for schools in general. Russell would no doubt answer this criticism in philosophical and psychological terms:

3. Ibid., p. 427.
4. Park, op. cit., p. 133.
I attach great weight to modern psychological discoveries which tend to show that character is determined by early education to a much greater extent than was thought by the most enthusiastic educationists of former generations.  

Jager certainly approves of the philosophical approach, which is something new in education. He points out that "philosophers who have worked exhaustively on human ontology, for example, Sartre and Heidegger, have seldom had anything valuable to say on education"; but Jager also pinpoints one of the major difficulties in the practical application of philosophy - a difficulty which echoes the central theme of this thesis: Russell fails in this particular area, Jager argues, because:

... his conception of man is philosophically incomplete, despite the books on mind and matter and on freedom and order. These books are not addressed to the side of man which is amenable to educational reform.

Jager's argument here seems to be that the practical aspects of education should form a part of the philosophical views; that the books on mind and matter - the philosophical backdrop, as it were, to Russell's practical experiment at Beacon Hill - are perhaps too erudite to be relevant to those concerned with education at a grass-roots level. If this is what Jager means to imply, then as a criticism of educational theorists in general it may well be justifiable; the difficulties experienced by new teachers in reaching a satisfactory compromise between the educational philosophy they have absorbed at training colleges, and the practical requirements of the classroom, provide ample support for such a criticism. But as a criticism of Russell - one of the very few who have combined a high degree of philosophical understanding and a firm belief in a particular method of education, with the courage to attempt a practical application of the philosophy - it is perhaps a little unfair.

There is, however, another, more serious, interpretation of the view that Russell's "conception of man is philosophically incomplete". It is that behaviourism, for Russell, was potentially far more significant than a mere explanation of men's actions. Having rejected the view - as we have seen - that the "narrow stimulus-response-punishment-reward psychology of behaviourism" should lead to men being "trained as machines", he strayed perhaps too far in the opposite direction in his expectations of men as "independent and critical human beings". The standards he set were so high that, for those unable to live up to them, there must inevitably have been a psychologically damaging sense of failure. Katharine Tait brings out quite clearly in her book the burden she felt at being Bertrand Russell's daughter - the fear of incurring not just his disapproval but also his contempt, for example when she confessed that what she really wanted at a particular stage in her life was to be a wife and mother. Not even the enormous admiration and love for her father could mitigate this feeling of being in some way inadequate, less than perfect. In this sense, the excessively optimistic interpretation Russell puts on behaviourism is indeed "philosophically incomplete" because it caters only for the exceptionally talented, and cannot accommodate failure.

Even if this were not the case, even if it were possible for all men, given suitable educational opportunities, to become "independent and critical human beings", the practical consequences of Russell's optimistic interpretation of behaviourist philosophy would still render it incomplete. Jager tells us that Russell aims, in education, for "a kind of cheerful anarchy .... if only the requirements of civilization could tolerate it".\(^1\)

But a world full of independent and critical human beings would fall far

\(^1\) Jager, *op. cit.*, p. 450.
short of the requirements of civilization. The example of the Anabaptists in the introductory chapter demonstrates the dangers involved here. And as Russell himself in later years plays an ever more active and vociferous role in the social and political issues of his time, we may be forced to conclude that, although a few independent and critical human beings are essential to society, an excess of them would do more harm than good.

The individual versus society is a recurrent - and never fully resolved - theme in Russell's work. However, as his experience of human beings and of the different societies they live in grows and expands, his thinking on this issue becomes clearer and more precise, culminating in one of his finest books, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE

RETREAT FROM

STRICT EMPIRICISM

In his Autobiography, Russell writes of a significant episode in his early life which prompted a lifetime of work. At the age of eleven, Russell was taught geometry by his brother Frank: "I had been told", he tells us,

... that Euclid proved things, and was much disappointed when he started with axioms. At first I refused to accept them unless my brother could offer me some reason for doing so, but he said: "If you don't accept them we cannot go on", and as I wished to go on, I accepted them pro tem. 1

Russell, in the 1930s and 1940s, has reached the point where, after about forty years of philosophical work, he finally demonstrates to his own satisfaction the validity of his brother's words. His quest for certainty in all fields of study has led him to the conclusion that the only certainty is that all things are uncertain. There are two strands to Russell's work at this stage: in philosophy, there is the final crumbling of the edifice of certain knowledge; and this having been accepted, there is, in ethics, the examination of the 'axioms' of life which we must accept, and the justification – or the search for justification – of their acceptance.

Inference

Looking back, in 1959, on his philosophical work, Russell sees a continuity in his thinking and writing from 1918 onwards:

... I found my thoughts turning to theory of knowledge and to those parts of psychology and of linguistics which seemed relevant to that subject. This was a more or less permanent change in my philosophical interests. 2

The aspect of Russell's writings on language which has most significance for our present purposes is his examination of inference with regard to what it is permissible to say, within the limits of empiricism. Russell sums up this view briefly and concisely in his introductory chapter to *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*:

> It is argued that, on the basis of a single experience, a number of verbal statements are justified. The character of such statements is investigated (in the book), and it is contended that they must always be confined to matters belonging to the biography of the observer; they can be such as 'I see a canoid patch of colour', but not such as 'there is a dog'. Statements of this latter kind always involve, in their justification, some element of inference.¹

If, in other words, we are to be enabled to say anything about the things we perceive, we must add inference to observation; if we are to turn mere sense perception into knowledge, we need something else besides what can be experienced. In the example above, the statement 'there is a dog' is dependent upon our previous experiences or observations of dogs, which in turn is dependent upon memory; and memory infers a past. Therefore,

> .... Knowing is different from seeing; .... it seems to involve something that might be called classifying.²

The psychology has been examined at length in Chapter Four. It formed, as we noted, a very important part of Russell's variety of neutral monism, and the behaviouristic theories which continued to influence Russell's thought. Ronald Jager notes that:

> Russell combated neutral monism for ten years and then embraced it. Then, inadvertently, he began to betray it; but he never really relinquished it.³

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In Chapter Four we stressed the importance of differentiating between varieties of neutral monism. Russell's, we noted, sought a 'neutral' explanation for much, but not all, of what went on in the mind. Russell does not appear to see himself as a strict neutral monist. He talks, in retrospect, of rejecting monism, and it is clear that this refers to his early idealism, and not to his 'neutral monist' days. However, Jager is right in the sense that, in so far as Russell did subscribe to the neutral monist theory, he "never really relinquished it". The elements he retains in his later works are the notions of learned behaviour and conditioned reflexes.

Further research on "the physiological processes which precede and accompany sensation",¹ concerning nerve fibres in the body and the manner in which they carry messages to and from the brain, merely confirms his view that conditioned reflexes can be made to account for many of these processes, and of the remainder,

.... there is a bare possibility ... that, although occurrences in the brain do not infringe the laws of physics, nevertheless their outcome is not what it would be if no psychological factors were involved. ²

These "psychological factors" present the same problems as before, in that they cannot be brought within the scope of physical laws. Russell attempts first to lend them legitimacy by calling again on quantum theory:

.... according to quantum physics, there are no physical laws to determine which of several possible transitions a given atom will undergo, (therefore) we may imagine that, in a brain, the choice between possible transitions is determined by a psychological cause called 'volition'. ³

He then hypothesises on the possibility of 'volition' being found to be subject to physical laws, if only the process were subjectable to more

2. Ibid., p. 55.
3. Ibid., pp. 55-6.
minute examination; wherever adequate observation is possible, he argues,

.... the study of processes in the nerves and the brain, so far, has shown physical causation. .... the region as to which there is still ignorance is one where very minute phenomena are concerned, and where observation is very difficult. 1

The untenability of strict neutral monism here is of secondary importance. What is far more significant is the fact that Russell finds techniques of observation inadequate. This inadequacy of observation - which is the keystone to any empirical theory - is the underlying theme of Russell's philosophical work of this period. Strict empiricism is inadequate in two ways: on the one hand it is philosophically limiting, in that it leads, if carried to its logical conclusions, to scepticism and solipsism, which Russell cannot accept; on the other, it is inadequate in its failure to account for what actually happens. I will deal first with this second inadequacy.

Inference as practice and habit

Throughout his career as an empiricist, Russell has been influenced considerably by Hume, who "developed to its logical conclusion the empirical philosophy of Locke and Berkeley, and by making it self-consistent, made it incredible". 2 Hume's arguments and attitudes of scepticism were useful in the setting up of Russell's own methods of analysis; they were useful in the undermining of other philosophies; but in the process, Humean scepticism has also undermined any alternative philosophy that Russell - or anyone else - might care to put forward. The old friend and ally has finally become the foe. For a long time, Russell claims,

1. Ibid., p. 55. (My italics.)
philosophers took care to be unintelligible, since otherwise everybody would have perceived that they had been unsuccessful in answering Hume. ¹

Russell now presents his own attempts at an answer.

The inadequacy of strict empiricism is first demonstrated in Russell’s observation that it is nowhere strictly adhered to. In every sphere of daily life, we make use of generalisations for which, in strictly empirical terms, there is no justification whatsoever. We infer; and the inferences we make are not such as can be demonstrated by observation alone. And although daily life, and what happens in practice, is not generally acceptable (at least, not by Russell) as data for philosophical debate, Russell further points out that our casual acceptance of non-demonstrative inference is evident even in science; it plays "a larger part than is usually realized both in science and in common sense". ² This view represents for Russell a significant change in his philosophical thinking, and he dates the change at 1944:

My beliefs about induction underwent important modifications in the year 1944, chiefly owing to the discovery that induction used without common sense leads more often to false conclusions than to true ones. ³

The induction principle - the argument that the greater the number of cases in which A has been found to be associated with B, "the greater is the probability that they will be associated in a fresh case in which one of them is known to be present", and that "a sufficient number of cases of association .... will make it approach certainty without limit" ⁴ was already subject to doubt in 1912. But Russell then looked

3. Ibid., p. 154.
more favourably upon it; it was "at any rate not capable of being disproved by an appeal to experience".\(^1\) Now, he is anxious to demonstrate that induction can lead to the most ridiculous conclusions. As an example he offers the rate of growth per annum of an adolescent boy which, by induction, might lead us to suppose that such a growth rate would continue every year until the boy's death. Common sense, of course, assures us that it will not.

As an example this is not, perhaps, quite adequate. Induction from other data, i.e. regarding growth patterns of human beings, would lead us to the more accurate conclusion that the per annum growth rate of the adolescent would probably slow down and stop when he reached his early twenties. As a criticism, however, this does not so much undermine Russell's argument, as suggest a further step to it, namely the introduction of some sort of coherence theory. Induction about growth rates of adolescents, in other words, depend for their reliability on their compatibility with a whole range of other inductions.

Russell does not abandon his earlier reluctance to accept coherence as a criterion in assessing truth. In 1912 when he wrote *The Problems of Philosophy* his major concern was the refutation of idealism and its grand overall view of 'the whole', in his attempt to salvage some degree of autonomy for mathematics. He has also criticised coherence theory on the grounds that it is possible to invent a perfectly coherent, but completely fictional, system. But he does seem prepared to accept a coherence theory when his concern is with knowledge\(^2\) - although it could of course be argued that the distinction between knowledge and truth is

1. Ibid., p. 38.
difficult to uphold; indeed, by differentiating between them in this way, Russell seems to be adopting an idealistic stance himself, implying that what we know (or what we can know) is in some way different from what is true. However, his distinction is perhaps justifiable when we consider that his definition of knowledge only goes so far as to admit of probability; 'truth', on the other hand, lays claim to far greater degrees of certainty. And as regards probability, Russell argues quite clearly that a coherence theory is important and valid as a means of justifying inductions.

.... The whole system of science and everyday knowledge .... is, within limits, self-confirmatory. ¹

In 1912 he avoided the necessity of some form of coherence theory by the adoption of a more generous attitude towards empiricism:

Knowledge is called empirical when it rests wholly or partly upon experience. ²

This generous interpretation of empirical knowledge allowed him to introduce "empirical generalisations", even though he admitted that these were "more uncertain than the instances of them".³ However, under the strict empiricism of his behaviouristic theory, an "empirical generalisation" would have been inadmissible - almost, in fact, a contradiction in terms. If we are to make generalisations at all, then their respectability, as it were, must be found not in empiricism, but elsewhere.

And generalisations are certainly made, as Russell discovers. "The whole structure of science, as well as the world of common sense, demands the use of induction and analogy if it is to be believed".⁴ In the late 1920s he questions the validity of induction because he sees in it striking

2. Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, op. cit., p. 42. (My italics)
3. Ibid., p. 45.
similarities to the behaviourist theories concerning learned responses. "As a practice", he says, "induction is nothing but our old friend, the law of conditioned reflexes or of association", and he gives several Pavlov-type examples to demonstrate this. Later, in Human Knowledge: its Scope and Limits, when the emphasis is on the inference itself, rather than on our behaviour in accepting it, he admits that in his own life he has "a number of beliefs about events that I do not experience", and that he accepts these beliefs as being valid.

By this acceptance I commit myself to the view that there are valid processes of inference from events to other events - more particularly, from events of which I am aware without inference to events of which I have no such awareness.

He is insistent that this commitment is far more widespread than is supposed; that inference is what leads us to draw conclusions and formulate hypotheses which are "logically compatible with the observed facts"; and that upon such shaky foundations the whole of science is based.

The ultimate evidence for any scientific law consists of particular facts, together with .... principles of scientific inference.

In an earlier article on "The Limits of Empiricism" Russell sets out briefly exactly what it is that science relies on as evidence:

Physics, as ordinarily understood, accepts as factual premisses not only what I observe now, but also what I observed formerly and what others have observed; and it accepts as legitimate inferences, not only unobserved past occurrences, but also future occurrences implied by its laws.

He now subjects these observations to closer scrutiny, and finds, amongst the "principles of scientific inference", memory, testimony, analogy and

1. Ibid., p. 83.
3. Ibid., p. 10.
4. Ibid., p. 198.
5. Ibid., p. 204.
spatio-temporal causal continuity. The validity of memory brings once more into question the validity of introspection, which was discussed in Chapter Four. Russell's justification for accepting introspection as a means of observation was weak\(^1\), given the insistence on strict empiricism which a behaviourist theory necessitated. Now, in 1948, he is as determined as ever to allow introspective data, but his argument has disintegrated, it seems, altogether. Behaviourism relies on observations "such as a man might make on animals other than himself";\(^2\) however,

> While I admit the importance of what has been learnt by studying behaviour, I cannot accept this view. There are — and I am prepared to maintain this dogmatically — many kinds of events that I can observe when they happen to me, but not when they happen to any one else.\(^3\)

He does, however, make an attempt to put this view on a less dogmatic basis, by arguing that the borderline between public and private data is hard to draw. He defines a 'public' datum as "one which can be observed by many people";\(^4\) strict empiricism requires that it is observed. But owing to differences between people's powers of observation (short-sightedness, deafness etc.) even such supposedly public data are dependent upon individual observers and therefore are not public at all, but private.\(^5\) Russell concludes therefore that "the distinction between public and private data is one of degree ...";\(^6\) by this means he justifies intro-

1. See Chapter Four, pages 148-9 of this thesis.
3. Ibid., p. 58.
4. Ibid., p. 60.
5. Gone is the imprecision of The Problems of Philosophy, where he argued, in his quest for objectivity, that:

> ... although different people may see the table slightly differently, still they all see more or less similar things when they look at the table ....

(Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, op. cit., p. 9. My italics.)
spection - knowledge of private data - and can allow memory, dependent upon introspection, to stand as a valid source of data for science.

Testimony, the second 'principle' upon which science rests, is in fact recorded memory, and "the common-sense practice is to accept testimony unless there is a positive reason against doing so in the particular case concerned". But a more acceptable method of justifying testimony is by including it in analogy. In accepting testimony, he argues, "we depend .... upon an inference going beyond our experience"; we see that .... the behaviour of other people's bodies - and especially their speech behaviour - is noticeably similar to our own. - and since ours is associated with 'mental' behaviour, we infer that this is also the case with the behaviour of other people.

In the above arguments, Russell does manage to demonstrate the tendency of science to infer; indeed it is not difficult to see that without inference of this nature - reliance upon memory, testimony and analogy - science would not be possible. His treatment of causal continuity, however, is less satisfactory.

Cause and effect

Most philosophy as well as most science makes use of the principle of causality. The two schools of thought here, according to Russell, are the "invariable antecedent" school, and the "necessary" view. Russell sheds doubt on both. The first, which argues that 'A causes B' means no more than 'A is the invariable antecedent to B', is disproved, in his view, by the example of the barometer, a change in which invariably antecedes a change in the weather, but which cannot, clearly, be said to be the cause of the change in the weather. Russell here is misrepresenting the

1. Ibid., p. 206.
2. Ibid., p. 208.
3. Ibid., p. 332.
"invariable antecedent" view by his choice of this particular example, since on closer examination we find that what the barometer in fact records is not future changes in the weather, but present changes in atmospheric pressure which themselves herald weather changes. Thus according to his example, the "invariable antecedent" view becomes subsumed in the "necessary" view, and could be expressed in either of two ways: a change in atmospheric pressure invariably antecedes (or causes) both a change on the barometer and a change in the weather; or, a change on the barometer and a change in the weather necessarily follow a change in atmospheric pressure.

The "necessary" view argues that "B follows A" is not just a fact, but is necessary. Russell's criticism takes the form that even if "B follows A" is always true in fact, nevertheless "circumstances can easily be imagined which would prevent (this) from being so". This is certainly true; however, he has now brought us to a subtly different phrasing of causality, and by so doing he has altered the principle itself. The fact that circumstances might prevent B following A does not invalidate the principle of causality, but merely necessitates the addition of a proviso, such as: B necessarily follows A unless another factor intervenes.

Russell's earlier treatment of causality, in An Outline of Philosophy, is for the most part clearer and certainly more accurate. There is initially a certain amount of confusion about the time-sequence of cause and effect. Russell argues - correctly - that "we can just as often infer backwards as forwards" - for example, on receiving a letter, we infer that someone wrote it; but from this he argues that our receipt of the letter did not compel (the 1927 equivalent of "necessitate") the sender to

1. Ibid., p. 333.
write it. This is his argument against the notion of compulsion in cause and effect. However, what is lacking here is an appreciation of the limitations of language: 'cause' and 'effect' must be considered in their time sequence, because that is how we define the words. My receipt of the letter, therefore, allows me to infer not that the writing is the effect of the letter being received, but that it is the cause, or one of the causes - other possible causes being sealing, addressing, stamping and posting it, with the addition of the proviso that nothing intervened to prevent the effect, such as postal strikes or mailbag robberies. We may be able to infer backwards, but we must still treat cause and effect in their proper time sequence.

Far better than his argument hinging on the supposed reversibility of cause and effect, is his later observation that "If there is any finite interval of time, however short, between the cause and the effect, something may happen to prevent the effect from occurring"; the result of which is that,

.... although you cannot tell what may happen after a finite time, you can say that, if you make the time shorter and shorter, what will happen will be more and more nearly according to such-and-such a rule. 1

It is, however, necessary to add that, strictly speaking, this is not due to any rule governing A and B, cause and effect, but simply because there will be less and less time for outside influences to intervene.

Russell has, in the above, established very little, in fact, about cause and effect. His arguments neither prove nor disprove, neither validate nor invalidate, and cause and effect continue to be inferred without any apparent justification. What he has established is the significance of possible intervening factors between a cause and its

1. Ibid., p. 122.
effect - and this is clearly not new to science, which makes every attempt in experimental situations to isolate the materials under examination from the possibility of outside interference.¹

Simplicity

Our motives, or reasons, for accepting any particular laws - causal or otherwise - stem from a single principle: we choose "the simplest law that fits the known facts".² Russell has already appealed to the "principle of simplicity" in a somewhat arbitrary manner;³ here he gives it a little more of the attention it deserves. He recognises that the notion of simplicity is vague, and that frequently the 'simple' explanation becomes more correct as it becomes more complex, but argues that "in such cases the simple law is usually approximately right".⁴ This, however, is by no means the best - or even an adequate - defence of the simplicity principle. There have been theories and beliefs in the past, based on principles of simplicity, which were very dramatically wrong - for example, that the earth was flat, that the sun moved round the earth, etc. In terms of ethics, it might furthermore be considered a dangerous principle.

¹ It is the acceptance of this standard rule in science which makes the claims of the social 'sciences' to be considered as science somewhat dubious since, although it may not be difficult to achieve isolation when the materials concerned are chemical elements in test tubes, it is well nigh impossible - and also ethically undesirable - to achieve isolation when the materials are human beings. Even the methods used to collect data may influence and therefore interfere with the actual data received. The interviewing technique, one of the major methods of collecting sociological data, gives rise to very real problems; even when interviewers are highly trained and experienced, it is admitted that "Not only the personality of the interviewer, but also the social characteristics which the respondents attribute to him, may influence the result".
(Peter Worsley, Introducing Sociology (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp.90-91)


³ See Chapter Three, pages 96 and 105 of this thesis.

⁴ Ibid., p. 335.
to follow. The Aztecs, to give a colourful example, were certain that the earth was flat, and the simplest explanation they could find for the disappearance of the sun at dusk was that it died at night; from this, they concluded that the sun needed sustenance to bring it back to life again, and since it was a reddish colour, they assumed that it fed on blood. The result—especially at times of eclipse—was human sacrifice on a massive scale.¹

The justification which Russell in fact uses for his "principle of simplicity" is that in the absence of higher technology or greater understanding we do—as a matter of fact—accept the most simple explanation. A.P. Ushenko gives a concrete example of this; science, he points out, "assumes the existence of unperceivable events, such as sound-waves in the air". Some writers speak of these as convenient fictions, but the majority "accepts the existence of unperceived events precisely because this position allows for much simpler explanation than the alternative hypothesis of convenient fictions".² However, it is not always the case that the simplest explanation is chosen; Leibniz's monads, for example, depict a far more complex structure than would acceptance of some form of causal theory.³

But the problem is not solved, and Russell has to admit that it is not clear "by what right we objectify our preference for simple laws";⁴

3. Leibniz, who held that causal relations are merely illusory, posited instead a system comprising "an infinite number of substances, which he called 'monads'"; the reason why these monads appear to interact in a causal manner, is that "every monad mirrors the universe, not because the universe affects it, but because God has given it a nature which spontaneously produces this result". Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy, op. cit., p. 565.
He is forced to conclude, tongue in cheek, that:

It is not clear what is meant by 'simplicity', and there can be no a priori reason for expecting laws to be simple except benevolence on the part of Providence towards the men of science. ¹

The alternatives to inference

Ushenko's justification for acceptance of the principle of simplicity (which for him is a coverall name for inference, induction and analogy) is that it enables us to "adjust pure empiricism to what is generally recognized as empirical knowledge".² Russell himself is anxious to adjust "pure empiricism", and far more convincing than any attempts to justify inference of any kind, is his depiction of the logical consequences to which pure empiricism must inevitably lead. His best defence, in other words, is attack.

That scientific inference requires, for its validity, principles which experience cannot render even probable, is, I believe, an inescapable conclusion from the logic of probability. For empiricism, it is an awkward conclusion.³

The only alternative for the empiricist is some form of solipsism. The less drastic forms of solipsism - for example, a theory which would allow us to infer some "mental states", or to infer that we existed before the age of two, though we may not remember it - does, by allowing even that small degree of inference, open the door wide to inference in general. W.C. Salmon, in a discussion of Russell's views on scientific inference, argues that there are two varieties of solipsism: ontological - the view that nothing exists except the contents of one's own consciousness; and methodological, according to which the contents of one's own

1. Ibid., p. 497.
consciousness "constitute the sum total of all evidence from which everything else must be constructed or inferred". Both varieties, however, lead to the same conclusion:

... a solipsism of the present moment. Without some independent assurance about the reliability of memory the very existence of the past is uncertain, and without the principle of induction, the future can likewise be doubted.

In other words, if the evidence is to be wholly and completely empirical, and if all non-empirical evidence is to be denied, then the truth of any principles which might help in sifting and sorting the evidence must be similarly denied, and the evidence will lead to no conclusion whatsoever.

In Salmon's view, Russell pinpoints the dilemma as being one of choice:

We must either accept solipsism of the present moment, or admit that there are non-empirical postulates which must be accepted as probably true.

However, since acceptance of even the probable truth of non-empirical postulates would be, in effect, a denial of strict empirical criteria, we must conclude that this would not be solipsism at all. We are left, therefore, with "solipsism of the present moment", or, as Russell calls it, "dogmatic solipsism".

"Dogmatic" solipsism, arguing that "there is nothing beyond data", is dismissed on the grounds that "it is just as difficult to disprove existence as to prove it, when what is concerned is not a datum" – in other words, as soon as the dogmatic solipsist states his theory as a

2. Ibid., p. 185.
3. Ibid., p. 185.
theory, he encounters difficulties. These could only be avoided by first giving an enumeration of one's own personal experiences, and then adding "And there are no other events"; and then, presumably, refusing to say another word, on that or any other subject.

Ushenko finds the same fault here as was discovered in Russell's criticism of the monistic theory of truth, viz. that the problem could be solved by appeal to Russell's own theory of types:

.... if the theory of empiricism is to conform to Russell's own doctrine of types, it must be concerned with knowledge of a lower type than itself, i.e. it is not intended to apply to itself. 4

However, although Russell might find it possible in this way to justify expression of the theory, Russell is not a strict empiricism; and for the strict empiricist, an appeal to a theory of types would be an appeal to something outside experience, and therefore would itself invalidate the empiricist theory. Although, therefore, pure empiricism cannot be disproved, it must remain no more than a hypothesis:

.... we cannot know the empiricist hypothesis to be true, since that would be knowledge of a sort that the hypothesis itself condemns. 5

1. The same criticism is applied by Russell to the Logical Positivist theory which maintains "that a statement is not 'significant' unless there is some known method of verifying it"; (Bertrand Russell, "Logical Positivism" (1950), in Logic and Knowledge (London, 1956), p. 372). Russell gives an example of a statement - "Rain sometimes falls in places where there is no one to see it" (Ibid., p. 372) - which is clearly significant, and yet cannot possibly be verified. He goes on to point out that the sort of a priori objections which logical positivists have to inference (that it cannot be verified) could themselves be used against the logical positivist theory. How do they manage, in other words, to verify the principle of verifiability? (Ibid., p. 380.)

3. See Chapter Two, pages 53-7 of this thesis.
Pure empiricism is, it seems, only tenable in its most extreme form - and against this both Russell and Ushenko can only protest. Ushenko's argument verges on the flippant:

.... knowing myself I know that I could not originate such an absurd view as solipsism. Therefore I know that I must have learned of solipsism from someone else. 1

Russell states simply:

.... against the thorough-going sceptic I can advance no argument except that I do not believe him to be sincere. 2

Probability

Russell has demonstrated that we cannot prove the validity of inferences; the next best thing is to find some means of grading them according to their 'probability'.

There is a gradation in the probability assigned to different inferences by scientific common sense, but there is no accepted body of principles according to which such probabilities are to be estimated. 3

This omission he attempts to remedy by a detailed discussion of probability. He sees two types of probability, the first of which is the mathematical, which can be expressed in the form of a ratio and is relatively simple as long as the events it is concerned with can be enumerated (e.g. the number of men in England named Smith). The second type of probability is the one which will concern us here. Russell draws on other theories, 4 but

4. For example, Keynes's Treatise on Probability, the Mises-Reichenbach Theory; see ibid., Part V. The question of probability is tackled by many philosophers and mathematicians, and the various theories and hypotheses revolving around the principle of induction are crucial to the general argument, although not crucial to Russell's argument which, as we shall see, turns ultimately to an argument on the criterion of rationality. For a concise summary of other theories, see W.C. Salmon, op. cit., pp. 186-208.
the end result is his own; it hinges on "degrees of credibility", a concept which can be subdivided into credibility as a result of argument, and "intrinsic credibility" (which appears in an earlier work as "a priori probability").

The clear and useful distinction which he makes between these two is confused by a subsequent reference to a proposition being rationally credible "solely in its own right"; it seems, however, as if Russell intended to preserve the distinction, and it certainly makes his argument at this stage a little clearer. I therefore take the liberty of rephrasing – temporarily – a crucial part of his argument as follows, putting the confusing words into brackets:

.... every proposition which is (rationally) credible in any degree must be so either (a) solely in its own right, or (b) solely as the conclusion from premisses which are (rationally) credible in their own right, or (c) because it has some degree of credibility in its own right, and also follows, by a demonstrative or probable inference, from premisses which have some degree of credibility in their own right.  

(a) I have taken to refer to "intrinsic credibility"; (b) to rational argument based on intrinsically credible premisses; and (c) to be a mixture of both.

Simplicity is once again the golden rule in rational argument, on the grounds that "the conclusion of a long argument has less certainty than the conclusion of a short one, for at each step there is some risk of error", (although this clearly has not been the case historically, where the more complex the argument, in many instances, the more certain the conclusion). The "intrinsic credibility" poses problems of a different order. Doubts having already been shed upon the certainty of

2. Ibid., p. 409.
3. Ibid., p. 400.
4. See pages 191–2 of this thesis.
of both perception and inference, it is difficult to see how Russell can justify the assertion that some things are intrinsically credible. In "The Limits of Empiricism", written thirteen years earlier, before his doubts about empiricism became overwhelming, Russell gives examples of what he calls "perceived general propositions" which are essential for "a priori probability". "I maintain", he says,

"... that 'yellow is more like green than like blue' is a premiss\(^1\) derivable by attention to one single instance of sensible compresence of yellow, green and blue.\(^2\)"

His other example is "A precedes B" (this is not stating a causal relation, i.e. it is not "A causes B"; what it states is a relation in time). In both of these examples he is correct in arguing that the relation is perceivable (in the first case, similarity; in the second, as already stressed, a relation in time - although it is possible that Russell has confused the relation in the second example, which he does not discuss in detail, with a causal relation). He concludes from this that:

"If we can sometimes perceive relations which are analogous to causation, we do not depend wholly upon enumeration of instances in the proof of causal laws.\(^3\)"

But neither of his examples offers anything analogous to causation. They demonstrate relations, but not causal relations. He has demonstrated that similarity and time-sequence are perceivable and that therefore, with regard to probability, repeated instances of yellow, green and blue are not needed in order to render more certain the proposition that 'yellow is more like green than like blue'. But he has still demonstrated nothing about causal laws. He has still failed to find any a priori reason for their validity.

1. Of the "general proposition" variety.
   (My italics.)
3. Ibid., p. 149.
In 1948 he is less ambitious, and more subjective. He introduces the individual, and "subjective certainty", a psychological concept which "is no guarantee of truth, or even of a high degree of credibility",¹ but which cannot be ignored, since,

If there were no relation at all between credibility and subjective certainty, there could be no such thing as knowledge. We assume in practice that a class of beliefs may be regarded as true if (a) they are firmly believed by all who have carefully considered them, (b) there is no positive argument against them, (c) there is no known reason for supposing that mankind would believe them if they were untrue.²

In the last resort, therefore, it seems that the tables are turned, and that rather than probability resting on intrinsic credibility, both probability and intrinsic credibility rest upon what has in practice been the keystone of Russell's philosophical and ethical works to date: rational argument. This is the point at which the brackets in the quotation on page 197 are removed, and rational argument examined as an end, rather than as a means.

Rationality in ethics

Whether we ought to aim at rationality is an ethical question.³

This is by no means the first time that rationality has had a role to play in Russell's ethical theory. Man's ability to think was in earlier work linked with man's "freedom".⁴ When Russell reluctantly abandoned objectivity in ethics, he still called on reason to clarify and systematize what he was obliged to redefine as nothing more than ethical "feelings".⁵

2. Ibid., pp. 414-5. (My italics.)
3. Ibid., p. 415.
4. See Chapter Two, pages 63-5 of this thesis.
5. See Chapter Three, page 118 of this thesis.
Now he has reached the point at which reason is forced into the limelight; it must occupy the centre of the stage, openly, as an ethical aim, and no longer be seen merely as a useful instrument for analysis. The criticism addressed to empiricism and to logical positivism: by what right do you insist upon criteria of observability and verifiability, can now be addressed to Russell: by what right does he insist on the criterion of rationality? The logical atomism which purported to be no more than a scientific method of inquiry, became a full-blooded philosophy and is now being questioned. The criterion used to judge supposedly 'objective' creeds, has itself become a creed, and must in its turn be judged.

_Human Society in Ethics and Politics_, published in 1954, is the only lengthy expose of Russell's ethical views of the 1950s and 1940s. It gives the fullest and most complete account of these views since his early abandonment of objectivity, and will form the basis of our examination in this section. It is, however, important to note that the parts of _Human Society in Ethics and Politics_ were written at different times. The effect of this is, not inconsistency within the book, but rather that the chapters (in particular regarding ethics) which appear to have been written later add immeasurably to the theoretical content of the book, and provide a foundation upon which the remainder could happily rest, and without which it is confusing. Special attention will therefore be paid to the chronological order of the writing.

It is also necessary to stress at the outset that Russell does not claim to be setting out an objective theory: "Ethics differs from science", he emphasises in his first chapter,

.... in the fact that its fundamental data are feelings and emotions, not percepts. .... an ethical judgement does not state a fact.  

This final and complete rejection of objectivity in ethics is the logical conclusion of empiricism which, as we have seen, sheds doubts even upon the validity of percepts as data. The rejection is given support, in Russell's view, by innumerable examples of differing ethical codes, all of which claim to be the 'truth', and yet all of which are in some aspects in conflict with each other, and even at times with themselves. This is nothing new in Russell's writing, and at this stage it is necessary to give only a few examples:

.... the Manicheans thought it wicked to eat any animal food except fish, but many sects have considered this exception an abomination. The Dukhobors refused military service, but held it proper to dance naked all together round a camp fire; being persecuted for the former tenet in Russia, they emigrated to Canada, where they were persecuted for the latter. The Mormons had a divine revelation in favour of polygamy, but under pressure from the United States government, they discovered that the revelation was not binding. Some moralists, including many eminent Jesuits, have considered tyrannicide a duty; others have taught that it is always a sin. ¹

Missionaries may argue that the superiority of the Christian code is known by revelation. The philosopher, however, must observe that other religions make the same claim. ²

However, just as in philosophy Russell could not bring himself to accept total scepticism, and took refuge in assessing degrees of probability, so in ethics, the rejection of objectivity is reluctant. He finds it "intolerable to suppose that when I say 'cruelty is bad' I am merely saying 'I dislike cruelty', or something equally subjective";³ and his efforts concentrate on providing a practicable alternative. He offers us again his earlier Moorean concept of "ethical intuition", which tells us what we "ought" to do, together with a supposedly updated, but in fact very similar version of it, in which what we "ought" to do is

1. Ibid., pp. 45-6.
2. Ibid., p. 45.
3. Ibid., p. 110.
redefined as "rules of conduct", and what we are in fact seeking is a definition of "intrinsic value".\(^1\) His critics have been quick to point out that there is little to distinguish these later views from the earlier ones, which have already been discussed in Chapter Two. Ms. Aiken goes so far as to argue that in *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* he "has returned to his early opinion that ethics does belong within the domain of philosophy because it is possible to attain ethical knowledge".\(^2\) She takes the view that Russell thinks he has found some form of objectivity in science, and offers a quotation from the book to demonstrate that ethics, according to Russell, may be treated in a similar manner:

> It may be said that if hopes and desires are fundamental in ethics, then everything in ethics must be subjective, since hopes and desires are so. But this argument is less conclusive than it sounds. The data of science are individual percepts, and these are far more subjective than common sense supposes; nevertheless, upon this basis the imposing edifice of impersonal science has been built up .... It may be that there is some similar way of arriving at objectivity in ethics.\(^3\)

Aiken feels that the analogy with science hampers Russell. The reason for her dissatisfaction may well be that Russell uses the word "objectivity" rather too loosely in this quotation; if the "objectivity" of ethics is to be similar to the "objectivity" of science, then, as we know from the examination of Russell's philosophical stance of the time, it can only be a rather half-hearted objectivity. However, he calls the science "impersonal" rather than "objective", and it seems that, in this particular instance, the analogy with science is essential - provided we bear in mind precisely what Russell means by "impersonal science".

Jager makes a useful distinction between knowledge about "good" and

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knowledge about what we say about good:

Presumably (Russell) had always thought, and still did, that a proposition to the effect that 'in calling something good we are expressing our approval of it', is itself to be regarded as knowledge. 1

Certainly Russell assumed that propositions about the ethical views of Manicheans and Mormons could be regarded as knowledge; but this is not the whole story, for Russell is not confining himself to a recitation of differing ethical or moral codes. He aims to do more. We have noted that he could not disprove pure empiricism, and therefore could not prove objectivity in science, and yet he retreated from solipsism because he observed that we do in fact treat science as objective, and that unless we did so, we "could not go on". He takes the same approach at this stage to ethics, and Jager does more justice to Russell than does Aiken, when he goes on to define Russell's ethics as "really only a subjectivity" which is, however, "enlarged not in the direction of privacy, but in the direction of a broadened base in human psychology and reason". 2

Russell aims, in short, at neither objectivity, nor subjectivity, but 'impersonality'; this 'impersonality' lies in endeavouring to discover what common - albeit subjective - elements can be found, in order to build up what he hopes will be a practical - or practicable - ethical hypothesis.

A final point to note in general terms of Russell's ethical views in the early 1950s is that his treatment of the subject at this stage is far more thorough than his earlier views - all of which were encapsulated in no more than half a dozen essays. Looking back on his motives at the time for writing Human Society in Ethics and Politics, Russell clearly feels that ethics has not been given full and sufficient attention.

2. Ibid., p. 480. (My italics.)
Although convinced that there was "no such thing as ethical knowledge",

Nevertheless ethical concepts have been of enormous importance in history, and I could not but feel that a survey of human affairs which omits ethics is inadequate and partial. 1

*Human Society in Ethics and Politics* therefore presents, first, an ethically orientated survey of human affairs.

**Existing ethical theory**

In *Human Knowledge: its Scope and Limits* Russell distinguishes two basic types of ethical theory: i) in which "good conduct is conduct obeying certain rules", and ii) in which good conduct is "conduct designed to realize certain ends". 2 According to the second of these views, "the virtuous man will act in the way in which, so far as his knowledge goes, will probably" lead to certain ends. 3 If, therefore, we subscribe to this view, then Russell's criterion of rationality is justified, in ethics at least, since reason will be needed to calculate the probabilities involved, and the likelihood of certain actions achieving certain ends. It would, of course, still leave open the question of the ends themselves.

First, however, an attempt must be made (by Russell) to discredit the first type of ethical theory, that in which good conduct consists in obeying a particular set of rules. He does this by reducing it to the second type, by demonstrating that the 'rules' are in fact - or were originally - themselves designed to realize certain ends. He notes that "Even when ethics is conceived as consisting in obedience to moral rules known by

3. The "ends" which Russell specifically mentions as an example at this point is the maximization of pleasure; however, his views on utilitarianism are discussed at length later, and it would be confusing to introduce them here.
revelation, it is still customary to defend these rules by utilitarian arguments\(^1\), and gives a concrete example of such a defence:

It is interesting to observe that Thomas Aquinas defends the received rules of Christian morality by utilitarian considerations. For example: if marriage were not permanent, fathers would have no part in education; but fathers are useful, both because they are more rational than mothers, and because they have the physical strength needed for punishment; therefore marriage should be permanent. Or again: brothers and sisters ought not to marry, because, if the affection of brother and sister were joined to that of husband and wife, the total would be so great as to lead to an excess of passion.\(^2\)

The reasons offered by Aquinas may seem to us to be invalid, but the fact remains that the use of reason implies a view of virtue "as a means to something other than itself".\(^3\)

Russell appears here to make an exception regarding "forms of morality based on tabu" for which, from his account, there seems to be no basis in terms of "ends".\(^4\) He gives examples, such as the prohibitions on various types of food, cleansing and purifying of the "unclean", and "the prevalence of laws or rules prohibiting various forms of endogamy",\(^5\) and argues that "all these opinions can only be justified on the basis of tabu" and that, regarding endogamy in particular, "such prohibitions are impossible to justify on the ground that the forbidden unions would do any harm".\(^6\) Here, however, he seems, according to more recent research,\(^7\) to be quite simply mistaken. Rules of tribes regarding marriage are now seen as having been, in origin, specifically designed to promote particular

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1. Bertrand Russell, Human Society in Ethics and Politics, op. cit., pp. 47-8; his use of the word "utilitarian" here is a little out of place, since it begs other questions regarding utilitarianism as an "end"; "rational arguments" might have better expressed what Russell wanted to say.
2. Ibid., p. 48.
3. Ibid., p. 48.
4. Ibid., p. 29.
5. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
7. See, for example, P. Farb, op. cit., pp. 24-7.
ends - for example, to cement alliances between families, or between neighbouring branches of the same tribe - in much the same way, in fact, as the customs prevailing amongst the European royal families through the ages. There is no reason to believe that other, apparently irrational "tabus" are not also based on particular "ends"; where the irrationality lies, if there is any, is in the lack of knowledge as to what actions will promote the desired ends (see, for example, the actions taken by the Aztecs, described earlier). Russell is therefore being less than fair in presenting what he calls "tabu" morality as having no ultimate purpose whatever.

Given, then, that in origin at least all moral codes serve to secure particular ends, the essential difference between the two types of ethical code mentioned above lies only in the manner in which they are presented, and here Russell presents two basic reasons for preferring the latter, the code designed to realize certain ends. He argues, first, that "it is difficult to preserve respect for what is merely traditional except by a tight control over education designed to destroy capacity for independent thought" ¹ - an argument which depends for its validity upon the value of independent thought. This will be dealt with at greater length in the final section of this chapter.

His second argument is more compelling, both in his critique of "rules of conduct" and also in its relevance to his philosophy as a whole. "If moral education has been confined to the inculcation of tabus", he warns, "the man who throws over one tabu is likely to throw over all the rest". ² This is, in a sense, the ethical equivalent of total scepticism or solipsism. If one applies to an accepted set of ethical beliefs - for example, the Ten Commandments - the same strict empiricism that

2. Ibid., p. 32.
Russell applied to philosophy, one is likely to reach the conclusion that there is no good reason for accepting one particular belief (say, that it is wrong to work on Sundays), just as there is no good reason for accepting one inference (say, the inference that I existed before the age of two); having rejected one belief in ethics, or one inference in philosophy, the only logical conclusion is a rejection of all beliefs, or of the validity of belief in general; just as pure empiricism must reject all inference.

A possible alternative as an "ethical" guide to conduct is one's own conscience, but Russell points out that "Conscience per se is an anarchic force upon which no system of government can be built".¹

Just as the pure empiricist in philosophy can merely list the things he immediately perceives at any one moment, and then say "and there are no other events", so the pure empiricist in ethics can merely list his own beliefs and then say, "and there are no other beliefs". Clearly in ethics the consequences of such anarchism are very much more dangerous than in philosophy, for ethical codes result in action, and as Russell points out "there have been some percepts (in "tabu morality") that were positively harmful, sometimes to a high degree".² The use of the word "harmful" here implies a belief on Russell's part in an ethical code of his own; it implies that the percepts were harmful in Russell's terms and thus that he has values. This should not surprise us in the least; Russell retreated from pure empiricism in philosophy and made a courageous bid for the validity of inference based on, or moderated by, probability and common sense. What we might expect from him, therefore, in the field of ethics is an ethical code based on similar notions. However,

1. Ibid., p. 34.
2. Ibid., p. 32.
before moving on finally to a discussion of Russell's own ethical code, we must first examine the validity of the second type of ethical code, based on the view that good conduct is "conduct designed to realize certain ends". This is, for Russell, a rationalized version of tabu morality, and the role of reason as a guide to conduct is vital at this point.

**Reason and passion**

Russell gives a behaviouristic explanation for the existence and development of ethical codes: "Ethics and moral codes", he argues, "are necessary to man because of the conflict between intelligence and impulse".¹ The "impulse" is the "pure instinct" of behaviourism, and the "intelligence" is, amongst other things, the ability to "learn" which results in a modification of pure instinct.² The distinction between intelligence and impulse is also supported by lengthy tradition, originating, so Russell tells us, with Aristotle.³

Man's impulses are complex, and again calling on observed behaviour of both animals and human beings, Russell concludes that:

He is neither completely gregarious, like ants and bees, nor completely solitary, like lions and tigers. He is a semi-gregarious animal. Some of his impulses and desires are social, some are solitary.⁴

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¹. Ibid., p. 15.
². See Chapter Four, page 150 of this thesis. Although the term 'learning' presented so much difficulty for Russell when he was endeavouring to find a 'material', or at the very least a 'neutral' base for processes in the brain, here he appears to have discarded, or neglected, his leanings towards neutral monism, and "intelligence" is very definitely treated as a characteristic of the mind.
Here Russell is diverging slightly from tradition, in crediting man with a "social" impulse or instinct. A majority of reason/passion theorists adopt the Hobbesian view that, left to his own devices, man's instinct would be purely selfish, and that it is his reason which leads him to acquire "social" habits. Russell himself, however, later appears to ignore his initial definition of instinct as at least in part "social" - to the detriment, in my view, of his theory as a whole. He encounters difficulties, for example, in finding explanations for apparently altruistic or at least disinterested actions taken by man, when retention of his view of man as instinctively semi-gregarious would have avoided such difficulties. A further difficulty which could have been avoided by consistency in definition is the conflict Russell finds between the interests of the whole community, and the need to preserve individuality:

... man, even if he could bring himself to be as submissive to public interest as the ant, would not feel complete satisfaction, and would be aware that a part of his nature which seems to him important was being starved.

He stresses the importance of spontaneous impulse, in particular in the case of "the mystic, the poet, the artist, and the scientific discoverer" who are "in their inmost being solitary". By preserving his original definition of man's semi-gregarious nature, he could have accommodated quite comfortably within a coherent whole the elitist tendencies to which reference has already been made, and which become increasingly more significant in his later works.

It is possible that his motives for dropping the definition lie in the fact that the evidence for it - as for the complete gregariousness of the ant and the bee, and the complete solitariness of the lion and the

1. See pages 218-9 of this thesis.
3. Ibid., p. 17.
4. See Chapter Two, page 85, and Chapter Three, pages 131-3 of this thesis.
tiger\(^1\) - is observation of behaviour, and Russell is no longer convinced that observation alone suffices to explain either philosophical or ethical phenomena. It is possible that the significance of the definition escaped him altogether - as it has escaped his critics. It is possible - in fact highly probable - that it was in fact a later addition: it appears in his Introduction to the book, and we have no way of knowing whether the Introduction was written first, or whether, as is often the case, it was written after the substance of the book was completed. Since the two parts of the book were written at different times (that on ethics in 1945-6, on politics in 1953) it seems likely that the Introduction was added later as a means of bringing the two parts together. But there are no later works on ethics, and the theory that man is naturally and instinctively both social and solitary remains tantalisingly incomplete.

In Human Society in Ethics and Politics, Russell does not, or does not explicitly, preserve the definition, and for the time being it is the selfish side of man's instinct or passion which must be considered, in particular in its supposed conflict with his intellect or reason. Although other theories abound, Russell bases this part of his argument on Hume, and

1. Recent research into animal behaviour has revealed some interesting examples of communication and co-operation among animals and insects. F.V. Smith, in Purpose in Animal Behaviour (London, 1971), gives a delightful account of the 'waggle' dance of the bee, the object of which is to impart information regarding the location of suitable flowers to other members of the hive (pp. 61-71); and N. Tinbergen, in Social Behaviour in Animals (London, 1965) describes the extraordinarily complex system of division of labour amongst bee communities (pp. 101-2). The fact that co-operation amongst animals is observed among groups of families as well as within each immediate family circle - for example, the assistance given to a wounded dolphin by other dolphins, which gather round beneath it and raise it to the surface of the water to enable it to breathe (see F.V. Smith, op. cit., pp. 94-5) - suggests that there is indeed some sort of social instinct among animals that cannot be accounted for by the instincts and needs of an individual animal, or even of the small family circle. There seem to be social instincts over and above what would be strictly necessary for the survival of the species.
on Hume's famous dictum that "Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions".\footnote{Bertrand Russell, Human Society in Ethics and Politics, op. cit., p. 8.} It seems strange that, having found Humean scepticism unsatisfactory in philosophy, Russell should still call on Hume in ethics. However, Human Knowledge: its Scope and Limits, which contains his attack on pure empiricism, was first published in 1948, while most of the ethical section in Human Society in Ethics and Politics was written, as we have already noted, in 1945-6. Russell notes in the Preface to Human Society in Ethics and Politics, written explicitly to bring the two parts together, that:

I had originally intended to include the discussion of ethics in my book on "Human Knowledge", but I decided not to do so because I was uncertain as to the sense in which ethics can be regarded as "knowledge".\footnote{Ibid., p. 7.}

However, he also makes it quite clear in the Preface that he fully subscribes to the Humean view. Reason, for Russell, "signifies the choice of the right means to an end that you wish to achieve. .... Reason is not a cause of action, but only a regulator".\footnote{Ibid., p. 8.}

The uncertainty regarding ethical knowledge is exhibited in the 1945-6 section of Human Society in Ethics and Politics - to which reference has already been made;\footnote{See pages 201-3 of this thesis.} and his discussion of reason and passion, and their counterparts, means and ends, is, in this early section, also uncertain. We must first of all examine the context of the contentious quotation. It is taken from Section V of Hume's Moral and Political Philosophy\footnote{See H.D. Aiken (ed.), Hume's Moral and Political Philosophy (New York, 1948), pp. 23-27.} entitled "Of the influencing motives of the will". Hume aims in this section to disprove old theories regarding passion and
reason, notably that there is a conflict between the two, and that virtue
lies in rationality as the "superior principle"; that reason is endowed
with "eternity, invariableness and divine origin", while passion is blind,
inconstant and deceitful. To disprove such theories, he will endeavour
to establish: "that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of
the will"; and, "that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the
will". In other words, Hume maintains that actions are motivated only
by passion. Passion dictates the "ends", and reason is only brought into
play when we wish to establish the best "means" to an end.

The significance of this issue for any ethical theory is evident as
soon as we attempt to attach labels such as 'good' and 'bad' to ends and
means. There are three major difficulties. The first is that reason in
fact plays a very vital role in assessing exactly what our passions are -
and at a very fundamental level. Hume defines passion in terms of
propensity or aversion caused by anticipation of pleasure or of pain; and
yet our anticipation of pleasure or pain is dependent upon past experience
and a process of reasoning which links the past experience with the present.
The fact that, according to Russell's philosophy, past experience is itself
only inferred, is a side issue at this point; Russell, as we have discovered,
thought it necessary to bend the rules in order to allow of at least some
forms of inference. But past experiences, inferred or real, can mean
nothing to the present without the reasoning process which tells us that
because on x occasions in the past, an action A has been associated with a
pleasant or painful experience, B, it is therefore likely that the action
A will be associated with B in the future. The propensity or aversion
goad us into action - but it is the reasoning process (in this particular
case, induction - subject, of course, to the safeguards regarding probability
which Russell has devised) which gives us the prospect of pain or pleasure,
and thus the propensity or aversion.
If we remove from "passion" all trace of reason, we find very little positive action. Hume offers examples of emotional conditions: anger, grief, fear, despair, joy, hope, security. These are the passions, in his (and presumably Russell's) view, which lead to action. And yet the actions they immediately prompt are either purely reflex and physical - increased heartbeat rate, increased flow of adrenalin etc; or they are somewhat negative, and merely give expression to the emotion - tears, smiles, frowns, shouting, laughing, hitting out, stamping one's foot, and so on. Any more positive action involves reason. The first four emotions will, it is supposed, prompt action to alleviate the conditions which caused the emotion, and the remaining three, actions to maintain and preserve the conditions; and such actions necessitate a certain level of reasoning in order to establish, in the very first instance, that the conditions have a cause. Crying, smiling and stamping one's foot are not the sort of actions that Russell is discussing.

The second difficulty concerns the definition of "ends". Russell argues that "A thing is 'good' .... if it is valued for its own sake, and not only for its effects". And yet most of the things we are accustomed to regarding as good turn out to be, on closer examination, merely 'means' to a yet more distant 'end'. Russell meets with this difficulty when dealing with the effect of higher levels of reasoning:

The difference between a civilized man and a savage, between an adult and a child, between a man and an animal, consists largely in a difference as to the weight attached to ends and means in conduct.

2. Russell argues earlier that "The end must, if we have gone far enough, be valuable on its own account, and not merely because it is useful for some further end." (The Problems of Philosophy, op. cit., p. 42. My italics)
In the case of the former of each pair, the capacity to reason is greater, and longer-term consequences can be more easily understood. "Forethought", says Russell, "which involves doing unpleasant things now for the sake of pleasant things in the future, is one of the most essential marks of mental development". But it is all too easy for the "pleasant things in the future" to become so remote as to be almost irrelevant. He gives some examples:

If you are a purchaser of tractors, you are almost equally removed from ultimate ends. The tractors are to be used to produce food to enable men to work in producing food to enable men to work ... and so on in an endless chain, in which the intrusion of any consideration of what is good on its own account would be felt by every sound economist or administrator to be a frivolous irrelevance.

In universities, mathematics is taught mainly to men who are going to teach mathematics to men who are going to teach mathematics to ....

Hume has also given a mathematical example; when talking about types of understanding, one of which is "the abstract relations of our ideas", he offers mathematics as an example of a sort of academic exercise which as such promotes no action; when it is brought into play in some action, it is used as a means, say, to work out money transactions. Russell, as one might expect, leaps to the defence of mathematics in particular, and

1. Ibid., p. 52.
2. Russell also, incidentally, seems to see this as being the basic reason for the disguise of ends/means morality under the cloak of obedience to certain rules:

Since forethought is difficult and requires control of impulse, moralists stress its necessity, and lay more emphasis on the virtue of present sacrifice than on the pleasantness of the subsequent reward. You must do right because it is right, and not because it is the way to get to heaven. (Ibid., p. 96.)

3. Ibid., p. 54.
4. Ibid., p. 54.
of short-term ends in general:

I met some twenty years ago a Russian Professor of mathematics who told me that he had once ventured to suggest to his class that mathematics is not only to be valued for its power of improving machines, but this remark, so he said, was met by the whole class with pitying contempt .... 1

At this point in his argument in Human Society in Ethics and Politics, however, Russell dismisses what he calls "these discursive observations", and moves on instead to a discussion of 'good' as being the 'satisfaction of desire'; we are left with a mental image of the rest of the world failing to understand why Russell felt mathematics to be valuable in itself - and indeed, without ourselves having been given any good reason why this should be so.

The third difficulty arises directly out of the second one. Russell clearly feels that intermediate ends must be given attention, but he does not provide any justification for this view, nor any guidelines for establishing which unpleasant things we might be permitted to do now for the sake of pleasant things in the future, and which unpleasant things must be regarded as ends in themselves, and judged accordingly. "Passion", however, is equated in Russell's writing with "impulse". It may be modified by reason in the manner indicated earlier; indeed it is difficult to see how the two can be separated and distinguished. But in Russell's terms they are separate; and in Russell's terms, borrowed from Hume, reason cannot and ought not to influence passion.

1. Ibid., p. 54. Russell's contention that short-term ends might be considered as ends, even if they also serve as means to some other, remoter, end, is lent philosophical support by his observation that "since distant consequences seldom have any appreciable probability, this justifies the practical man in usually confining his attention to the less remote consequences of his action". (Bertrand Russell, Human Knowledge: its Scope and Limits, op. cit., p. 416.)

From a broadcast of about the same time, John Lewis quotes Russell as saying:

Science can only deal with means, not with ends; the ends must be supplied by feeling. .... A man is not unscientific because of his ultimate ends, but because of mistakes as to how to achieve them. ¹

The counterpart of this, in ethical terms, must surely be that a man is not immoral because of his means. John Lewis adds:

This would no doubt apply to Hitler, who was unfortunate enough to miscalculate the effectiveness of the means to ends which we have no right to question. ²

Suddenly there is no room left for moral judgements at all, for how is it possible to attribute labels such as 'good' and 'bad' to aims which are mere impulse, mere 'feeling'?

Jager takes the argument yet further, by pointing out that there is a certain amount of theoretical confusion as to Russell's motives in opting for Hume's dictum. Russell states clearly in the Preface to Human Society in Ethics and Politics that Hume's dictum "expresses a view to which I, like every man who attempts to be reasonable, fully subscribe";³ to which Jager replies:

Reason as passion's slave - is this too one of these ends, for the choice of which reason itself has "nothing whatever to do?" Is there nothing reasonable then to urge against the man who proposes a different end - say passion as passion's slave? or passion as reason's slave? Suppose the latter were adopted, and it were urged against Russell that this is the view to which 'I, like every man who really attempts to be reasonable, fully subscribe'. Would Russell say: my form of being reasonable is to adopt the opposite, Hume's dictum. Do we adopt, or not adopt, reason itself on a non-rational basis? ⁴

². Ibid., p. 68.
The confusion arising out of Russell's argument is caused by linking reason, on the one hand, with 'means', and passion, on the other, with 'ends' and hence with 'intrinsic goodness'. Reason, we have discovered, is virtually indistinguishable from passion when our only way of desiring something is because we know from past experience that we will like it; reason, we have discovered, can, by projecting our ultimate aims so far into the future as to make them disappear altogether, be made to account for all human activity, with no room left for ends dictated by passion; and finally, if only our aims, distant as they can be made to seem, can be labelled 'good' or 'bad', and if these aims are dictated by passion over which we not only do not, but should not, exercise any control, then the concept of 'good' has nothing whatsoever to relate to.

How can Russell fail to see these inconsistencies? How can he still fully and completely subscribe to the doctrine that "Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions"? The answer seems to be that he does not carry the doctrine to its logical conclusions, or that, if he does, he retreats, just as he retreated from the logical conclusion of Humean empiricism. He calls instead for judgement of intermediate "ends" of a rather different kind, which seem to have more to do with man's nature than with abstract conceptions of good and bad. He adopts - very suddenly and without warning or justification - a totally new definition of "means" as purely materialistic (in the derogatory sense of the word), and by this interpretation he seems to include purely materialistic ends as well:

When we escape from the exclusive contemplation of means, the economic process, and the whole of human life, takes on a completely different aspect. We ask no longer: what have the producers produced, and what has consumption enabled the consumers in their turn to produce? We ask instead: what has there been in the lives of consumers and producers to make them glad to be alive? 1

Russell's subsequent discussion of the desires of man echoes the unconventional definition of man's nature as being semi-gregarious, but lacks its specific support. J. Buchler takes Russell to task on his use of "desires" as an indicator of what we call "good" and "bad". Russell argues that we call a thing good when we desire it, and bad when we have an aversion to it. Buchler points out that,

If this is a statistical statement, one which purports to describe how most people actually use the word "good", it is false. Most people determine value by choice, not by desire. They regard as best what they choose, not what they want; and as right, what they choose to do, not what they want to do. By and large, men make choices contrary to their desires. But men also call "good" what social authority desires and what they themselves do not, and they also call "bad" what authority forbids even when they desire it to the utmost. More significant yet, they will regard their own desires as bad, and to the extent not merely of calling them "bad" but of believing them to be bad. ¹

This difficulty has already been pointed out.² Russell could have answered the criticism quite adequately by arguing simply that in many cases our desire to please and be accepted by society outweighs other desires; he could also have argued that men had been conditioned to desire "virtue" rather than reward.³ What he chooses instead, to avoid the problem posed by actions which appear to go against desires, is an argument based on man's dual nature. He is careful to point out that desires are not necessarily wholly selfish:

When I say that each man seeks the satisfaction of his own desires, I am expressing a truism: all our acts, except those which are purely reflex, are inspired, of necessity, by our own desires. This does not mean that we are wholly egocentric in our actions, since we are not so in our

². See page 209 of this thesis.
³. See footnote 2, page 214 of this thesis.
Most people desire the happiness of their children, many that of their friends, some that of their country, and a few that of all mankind. 2

In the cases where the desires of various individuals do conflict, Russell attempts a solution by calling, indirectly, upon utilitarian principles. He argues, cautiously, that:

It may be said that we ought to seek the general good, and not only our own good. 3

But clearly Russell cannot expect this to be accepted without further explanation; and furthermore, he does not wish it to be accepted in the way in which the principle is generally understood, for he has no desire to see the general good take complete precedence over the individual good. The closest he is prepared to get to utilitarianism is to call on the ethical counterpart of a coherence theory:

It is obvious that there can be a greater total satisfaction of desire where desires are composable than where they are incompatible. 4

Lewis sees Russell's views as "humanitarian", which he feels implies values of a less materialistic nature, evoking sympathy and pity rather than merely advocating "ends" of a material kind. "Behind (Russell's) ethical passion", he argues, "is obviously a conviction that humanitarian ends are objectively right and true for all men". 5 And yet, from an outline of Russell's own "ends", it is quite clear on the one hand that action to promote "a greater total satisfaction of desires" is not always ethically desirable, and on the other, that Russell's view of what is right as regards "ends" is not necessarily applicable to "all men". He

1. This quotation is taken from the part of the book that was written earlier. Had this not been the case, Russell could have added at this point that the reason we are not wholly egocentric in our desires is that we are not wholly egocentric in our nature.
3. Ibid., p. 57.
4. Ibid., p. 59.
5. Lewis, op. cit., p. 32.
presents a view of practical ethics in which utilitarianism plays a necessary role, tempered certainly by "humanitarianism"; but neither of these, alone or together, allows a sufficiently significant role to the individual who, for Russell, occupies a very central position on the stage.

Ethics in practice

From the 1930s onwards Russell turned his attention almost wholly to social and political issues. He wrote prolifically on many topics, and examined, in these works, forms of government both past and present (together with perhaps rather utopian views of the future), and the effect that they had upon the lives of the people and upon society as a whole. Three central themes stand out clearly under his analysis, and reflect the difficulties and inconsistencies that were found in Human Society in Ethics and Politics. They reflect also the three-fold nature of man: his solitary passions, his social passions, and his capacity to reason. Taking these in reverse order, we will discuss first Russell's criticisms of societies which exist on creed and dogma, and in which reason is suffocated; secondly, his views on the present-day methods by which man's social instincts are manipulated in the service of the state; and finally, his insistence on, and reasons for, allowing scope to the individual to satisfy his solitary instincts.

Dogmatic social ethics

Adopting initially a psychologically orientated stance, Russell sees men's desire for power as a fundamental factor in social and political life. Given his conviction, discussed above, that passion and not reason is the motivating force in men's actions, and given also his continued interest in behaviourism as providing an explanation for the development
of men and societies, this approach is perhaps predictable. However, men's desire for power is a more complex force than might at first be supposed. The "love of power" is interpreted by one of his critics, V.J. McGill, as the instincts of aggressiveness and possessiveness, and this interpretation leads to the obvious criticism that many societies manage to survive in the absence of aggression:

Existence of societies in which war is unknown, and much property is communal, and such institutions as Potlach, show that aggressiveness and possessiveness often fail to appear .... 1

This is certainly true. But war, and the possession of material goods, represent only two methods of achieving power - the two most obvious and most direct methods - and Russell's work on behavioural psychology has demonstrated to him quite clearly that influence can be exercised in ways infinitely more subtle and less direct. He takes pains to qualify and amplify his notion of love of power; in his terms, power can be achieved by means other than aggression or force, or even economic superiority. The institution of Potlach - a practice among certain North American Indians in which status and thus power in a community is won by giving away rather than by acquiring 2 - is an excellent example to support Russell's view of power, and serves to prove Russell's point rather than McGill's. Furthermore, history has shown that the most effective forms of power have not been those based on force, violence and aggression, but those in which the loyalty of the subjects has been won in other ways.

In the first part of his book on Power, published in 1938, Russell takes a historical look at the many and varied methods by which power has been exercised in the past, and at the way in which retention of power has

been dependent to a large extent upon the acceptance by the mass of the population of some form of creed or dogma which justifies and even sanctifies the authority. His all-too-brief survey of power throughout centuries is thoughtful and illuminating, and deserves attention. He identifies three forms of power - traditional, revolutionary and "naked". The latter, "naked" power, is the only one of the three which is not dependent upon creed or dogma, but purely and simply upon force. "Power is naked", he says, "when its subjects respect it solely because it is power, and not for any other reason".\(^1\) He gives examples of ancient Greek tyrannies based on the naked power of wealth, and of the rule of Cesare Borgia in Renaissance Italy; a modern day example might be that of President Amin of Uganda. However, the reign of naked power is necessarily short, for several reasons: it lacks the sort of continuity found in hereditary monarchies, and therefore the system dies with the individual tyrant; it commands no loyalty, and is therefore susceptible to foreign invasion; it creates uncertainty and discontent, and therefore becomes vulnerable to new religions or dogmas; or, it becomes a more stable dictatorship, which is in time legitimized by tradition. Thus, although, as Russell says, "Most of the great abominations in human history are connected with naked power",\(^2\) for longer-term effects we must look to the traditional and revolutionary types of power which are longer lasting because they command a respect independent of sheer force.

The power of the medieval church stands out as an example of how respect for tradition outweighed other considerations, and enabled the papacy to continue, and to thrive and prosper, despite the most outrageous abuses, for a much longer time than would have been possible under a more

secular rule. From the end of the eleventh century to the beginning of the fourteenth the Church enjoyed enormous power, due in part to conscious efforts to separate it from the rest of the world and prevent it from sliding into feudalism, and in part to the fact that it was able to extort revenue by means of reverence for the Papacy rather than force of arms, and therefore became immensely wealthy. From the early fourteenth century, however, it began to lose respect by becoming increasingly subservient to the king of France, and by participating in "vast atrocities" for motives of gain; ultimately the Papacy itself became internally divided. But the hold had nevertheless been very strong:

It was only after the Papacy had, for a long time, so abused its traditional powers as to cause a moral revolt, that successful resistance became possible. ¹

Among the reasons for its strength Russell cites the fact that it was impersonal and continuous - the papacy was founded on a body of doctrine, and therefore was able to survive the deaths of popes - and that it inherited, "as a kind of moral capital, the glory of the persecutions in ancient times", ² besides producing its own moral heroes from time to time to reinforce this respect. Also, following Aquinas's view that temporal power was unimportant, it could survive worldly defeat in a way that monarchs, whose command of loyalty was far more dependent upon individual worldly success, could not.

The monarchy in Europe took over where the Papacy left off, but the power of the monarchs, though great at times, was far more vulnerable. The growth of nationalism and commerce ensured that when monarchs were successful in these areas - as, for example, were the Tudors - they prospered; but when they failed, like the Stuarts, they fell. The Stuarts

1. Ibid., p. 70.
2. Ibid., p. 72.
endeavoured to retain power by invoking the doctrine of the divine right of kings, by introducing, in other words, an element of creed and dogma into the power structure; but in the face of opposition from nationalism on the one hand, and from an increasingly wealthy commercial sector on the other, they, and other absolute monarchies, either disappeared altogether or were reduced to figureheads. Furthermore, in many cases, as Russell points out, "the rebels succeeded in transferring to themselves part or the whole of the old authority";¹ the Protestants kept the bible, but not the Pope; the British Parliament preserved the monarchy, but took the monarch's powers to themselves.

New régimes have often in this manner inherited the respect that the old régime commanded, while disposing of the old authority itself. The value of traditional doctrines and creeds as sources of power has been well recognised throughout history. Thus systems based on tradition, when they weaken, either give way to scepticism and anarchy, which calls up naked power, generally temporary, to restore order; or are replaced by a new, or a revised version of the old, creed, which in its turn becomes traditional. The Reformation placed emphasis on the anarchic teaching of early Christianity which "remained alive, though deeply buried, throughout the Middle Ages";² and while the weakening of the Church strengthened the power of the Reformation monarchs, the Reformation also, by encouraging private judgement in matters of religion, encouraged individuality in other areas, which ultimately became the weapon to be used against the absolute monarchs themselves.

Hence the doctrine of the Rights of Man, carried across the Atlantic by the defeated followers of Cromwell, embodied by Jefferson in the American Constitution, and brought back to Europe by the French Revolution. ³

1. Ibid., p. 82.
2. Ibid., p. 114.
3. Ibid., p. 117.
The "Rights-of-Man Revolution", as Russell calls it, developed into a form of nationalism in America in 1776, in France after the Revolution, and in Germany, not until 1848. In England, where nationalism had already taken hold, the doctrine, essentially anti-governmental, gave rise to the less metaphysical but basically similar doctrine of liberalism (a "peculiar mentality", say Russell, which "retains even when in power a certain suspicion of governmental action").

Creeds and doctrines have proved, historically, to be far stronger than physical force in supporting the power of both traditional and revolutionary governments.

Only where the revolutionary faith is strong and widespread, and victory is not too long delayed, can the habit of co-operation survive the shock involved in revolution, and enable the new government to rest upon consent rather than upon mere military force. A government without psychological authority must be a tyranny.

Thus far, Russell's outline of the exercise of power has been more or less impartial, but his treatment of contemporary power, traditional and revolutionary, is less satisfactory in this respect. Military force, he implies, is not the only form of tyranny; conscious consent is not the only basis for psychological authority. He discusses various ways in which public opinion can be influenced, so that the "consent" is, by subtle methods, imposed by force. Social cohesion, he acknowledges, requires a creed or an accepted code of behaviour which, although it can be imposed upon a few, must be deeply felt by the masses if the government is to be effective. Originally loyalty to a leader, religion and nationalism combined as creeds, but now nationalism has outstripped the other two. Systematic propaganda at all levels exercises considerable influence. In democratic countries, such propaganda is "divided between the Churches,

1. Ibid., p. 118.
2. Ibid., p. 120.
business advertisers, political parties, the plutocracy, and the State\(^1\), although these forces, for the most part, are "on the same side". In totalitarian countries, where the State is the only instrument of propaganda, the situation is even worse.

It is disappointing that Russell nowhere gives an adequate analysis of present-day Communism. He does, however, in his more historical works, pay considerable attention to the origins and development of movements such as socialism—for instance, in *Freedom and Organization*;\(^2\) and in *Power* he does make the necessary distinction between Marxism and Russian Communism. His criticism of Marxism as a doctrine is infinitely more satisfactory than what can only be described as bitter invective against the Soviet régime. He attacks Marxism—both here and, in greater detail, in *Freedom and Organization*—for its mistaken supposition that "economic self-interest could be taken as the fundamental motive in the social sciences".\(^3\) Nearly twenty years later he presents another, all too brief, criticism of Marx on theoretical grounds: Ricardo's theory of value was applied by Marx to wages—but not to prices of goods; he criticises Marx for "surreptitiously accepting Malthus's doctrine of population, which Marx and all his disciples explicitly repudiate";\(^4\) and, finding no solid grounds for accepting the notion of "dialectical materialism", he labels it "mere mythology".\(^5\) Unfortunately, however, his major attack is

5. It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine in detail Russell's criticisms of Marxism as a doctrine; the point to be stressed here is simply that Russell's hostility to any system based on dogma takes precedence over more thorough analysis of the dogma itself. Indeed, his criticisms of Marxism, as of other major philosophies, often appear to be remarkably uninformed, and they frequently take the form of mere ridicule.
launched against Marxism as practiced in the Soviet Union, of which the following two examples will, I feel, suffice:

The Soviet Government, when it seized power, reverted to the teaching of the Catholic Church in its great days: that it is the business of Authority to propagate Truth, both by positive teaching and by the suppression of all rival doctrines.  

The most dangerous features of Communism are reminiscent of the medieval Church. They consist of fanatical acceptance of doctrines embedded in a Sacred Book, unwillingness to examine these doctrines critically, and savage persecution of those who reject them.  

While both of these comments may be perfectly justified, the phraseology used itself implies an almost fanatical hostility to Russian Communism which seems to blind Russell to any possible solutions or ameliorations to the system. Although, as he points out, ".... it would be rash to assume that a State monopoly of propaganda must make a government invulnerable"; although, "sooner or later, some new Luther will challenge the authority of the State", and may even win; nevertheless, "whether the change will be for the better it is impossible to foresee".  

In less totalitarian states Russell has plenty of solutions for reducing such levels of dogma as there may be. Some of these we have already met - for example, his views on education. Some are a little utopian - in particular where he is concerned with reducing xenophobia as a means to world peace; And some, such as the following taken from a

4. Ibid., p. 148.
5. See, for example, Authority and the Individual (London, 1949), pp. 14-16; Human Society in Ethics and Politics, op. cit., pp. 168-171. The inadequacy of his views on this particular issue are, according to Ayer, due mainly to his "over-estimating the current likelihood of a global nuclear war, and correspondingly under-estimating the merits of the old theory of the balance of power" (A.J. Ayer, Russell (London, 1972), p. 149.)
lighthearted essay of the early 1940s, would only appeal to those already converted to Russell's way of thinking:

A good way of ridding yourself of certain kinds of dogmatism is to become aware of opinions held in circles different from your own. 1

And,

... for those who have enough psychological imagination, it is a good plan to imagine an argument with a person having a different bias. 2

If, indeed, it were possible to rid society of its dependence, for cohesion, upon some form of creed or dogma, would the situation in fact be any better? Russell has shown, in his historical survey, that revolutionary change as far as power is concerned either results in the revolutionary force becoming itself traditional, with its own, or an inherited, dogma; or leads to scepticism and anarchy which must be dealt with, albeit temporarily, by naked force, in order to retain some semblance of law and order. And the danger is very similar in the sphere of beliefs: once creed and dogma has been rejected, as an ethical guide to life as well as a means of ensuring support for the State, the resultant moral anarchy must in some way be remedied. Is it in fact possible for societies to "practice a sufficient modicum of morality if they are not helped by dogmatic religion?" 3 Russell is not unaware of the danger, as has already been noted; 4 and he has already toyed with the idea of utilitarianism as a rational replacement for the irrational codes which he would like to abolish. In view of his essentially subjective ethical theory, he cannot state categorically that a particular ethical system is the right one, but he can try and persuade. As D.H. Munro argues in an

2. Ibid., p. 117.
4. See pages 206-7 of this thesis.
excellent essay on Russell's subjectivist tendencies, subjectivism does not necessarily destroy morality. There is no need, he stresses, to "sink into the mood of cynical indifference which, according to the critics, necessarily accompanies a subjectivist ethic. .... Subjectivism .... makes for tolerance, but not for any lack of moral zeal".¹

In Munro's view, what Russell ultimately settles for is a morality based on "impersonal desires". In the following section we will examine systems based on impersonal desires, which allow man to accommodate his social passions, while at the same time making use of the reason which is denied him by creed and dogma; we shall find, however, that although in general terms, that is for the mass of mankind, such "impersonal" ethical codes find favour with Russell, still they fall short of his requirements where the individual is concerned. Russell, like many others, opts for some form of utilitarianism, with its political implications for democracy and socialism, as representative of a morality based on rationality and on "impersonal desires"; but ultimately he is unable to discard a fervent belief in the importance and necessity of preserving personal desires and the means for their expression.

**Utilitarianism as a rational social ethic**

Utilitarianism as an ethical doctrine profoundly influenced Russell in his youth. An ethical theory which could be subject to criteria of probability (as regards consequences of actions) in a way that other, primarily religious-based, codes could not, might have been expected to appeal in particular to Russell as a philosopher. In his excellent treatment of the historical development of Utilitarianism in *Freedom and*

Organization, Russell makes it quite clear that the utilitarian criterion of rationality is what he most admires:

The Utilitarians had another virtue, closely allied to prudence, namely intellectual sobriety. They reasoned carefully on every subject of which they treated. .... Where there was no evidence, they suspended judgment - a practice as admirable as it is rare. 1

However, there are two distinct and separate features of the utilitarian theory. L.W. Aiken defines utilitarianism loosely at first as meaning that "Right was always justified in terms of consequences"; 2 we know that Russell subscribed wholly to this view, since it was the assessment of possible consequences which allowed the greatest scope for reason. However, we know also that many other ethical theorists subscribed to what Aiken rather misleadingly calls the "utilitarian theory of right", theorists who were by no means utilitarians (for example, Aquinas), and therefore that "the utilitarian theory of right" is not exclusive to utilitarians. The distinguishing mark of utilitarianism as generally understood is the 'greatest happiness principle', according to which, Aiken says, "good means pleasure or happiness". 3 Russell himself goes further:

According to this principle, actions are good when they promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and bad when they do not. 4

Although both Aiken and Russell confuse these two features at times, nevertheless Aiken correctly points out that Russell "quite clearly .... has qualms and reservations about accepting (the utilitarian) standard as the exclusive one. .... As a moral individual, he believes that he would judge certain actions to be morally wrong or he would, as he says, feel a

3. Ibid., p. 121.
'moral repugnance' towards them even if they in fact led to good consequences".^1

Russell is not entirely happy with the utilitarian doctrine partly because the political institutions which necessarily support such a doctrine are by no means infallible. The most significant political 'institution' to which utilitarianism logically points is democracy. Given that utilitarianism demands a rational assessment of probable consequences of actions, and given also that it is by no means certain that any one man will correctly assess these consequences, the view of the majority is assumed to be a surer way of arriving at a correct assessment. Russell quotes James Mill, who argues that:

When various conclusions are, with their evidence, presented with equal care and with equal skill, there is a moral certainty, though some few may be misguided, that the greater number will judge right, and that the greatest force of evidence, wherever it is, will produce the greatest impression. 2

To which Russell adds:

There is a happy innocency about this confession of faith; it belongs to the age before Freud and before the growth of the art of propaganda. 3

James Mill was, Russell feels, over-optimistic about the extent to which men would be swayed by reason. Mill "imagined the working man coming home in the evening and reading Hume or Hartley or Bentham; he did not foresee the literature that would be provided for a population that had learnt to read, but had been taught almost nothing else". 4 From Chapter Four we know that Russell's educational aims embraced far more than mere literacy; had they been realised, no doubt democracy as a political institution might be successful. But in present circumstances, the fact that the people regard the government as their government, elected by them

1. L.W. Aiken, op. cit., p. 120.
2. Bertrand Russell, Freedom and Organization 1814-1914, op. cit., p. 120.
3. Ibid., p. 120.
4. Ibid., p. 120.
as their representatives, merely increases the likelihood of their being swayed by propaganda. His major concerns regarding modern democracies, as one critic points out:

.... seem to revolve around the notion that the people can, under democratic conditions, be easily deceived and manipulated, and precisely because they believe the government is theirs. The power of propaganda reduces the masses to impotence. 1

Furthermore, quite apart from being peculiarly susceptible to suggestions by propaganda, in terms of real power the citizen of a democracy is not as well off as he is led to believe. As Ayer points out,

In contemporary England, almost every adult has the right to vote, to adhere to a political party, and to stand for election if he can afford it, but the amount of effective power that this gives him may be very small. 2

This is particularly the case in view of the influential role played by political parties in this country. Although the party programme "is decided in a manner which is nominally democratic .... (it) is very much influenced by a small number of wire-pullers". 3 This may be cynical, but it is not, according to Ayer - or indeed to many others - "a wholly false account of the way in which representative government is conducted". 4

However, although democracy in the positive sense of allowing a vote to the people may be little more than mere sham, it is of value in that it prevents "the possession by an incompetent or unjust government of a permanent tenure of power". 5 It is for this rather negative reason, and this alone, that Russell includes democracy amongst the "Ideas that have helped mankind"; he states here that democracy was invented

.... as a device for reconciling government with liberty.

It is clear that government is necessary if anything worthy to be called civilization is to exist, but all history shows that any set of men entrusted with power over another set

3. Ibid., p. 140.
4. Ibid., p. 140.
5. Ibid., p. 140.
will abuse their power if they can do so with impunity. Democracy is intended to make men's tenure of power temporary and dependent upon popular approval. In so far as it achieves this it prevents the worst abuses of power. 1

Thus, although democracy is the logical political accompaniment of a doctrine of utilitarianism, Russell does not believe that the majority will necessarily make the right choice regarding consequences. This brings us to a far more fundamental criticism of utilitarianism, which is that it does not allow for differing values of 'pleasure'. It treats pleasure quantitively and not, as Russell would obviously prefer, qualitatively. Ayer contends that

Russell is a consistent utilitarian in that he draws no ethical distinction between the qualities of different forms of satisfaction. One is as good as another if the quantity of satisfaction is the same. 2

However, Ayer has in fact managed to circumvent the problem by using the word "satisfaction" instead of 'pleasure' or 'happiness'. As far as pleasure or happiness are concerned, Russell remains convinced that these are not necessarily - or not always - the right criteria for judging value. In Human Society in Ethics and Politics he argues:

I do not think .... 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. 3

In his Autobiography he states:

What first turned me away from utilitarianism was the persuasion that I myself ought to pursue philosophy, although I had (and have still) no doubt that by doing economics and the theory of politics I could add more to human happiness. It appeared to me that the dignity of which human existence is capable is not attainable by devotion to the mechanism of life, and that unless the contemplation of eternal things is preserved, mankind will become no better than well-fed pigs. 4

1. Bertrand Russell, "Ideas that have helped mankind" (1946), in Unpopular Essays, op. cit., p. 154.
And from private correspondence we learn that the "contemplation of eternal things" is a pleasure or satisfaction only to be enjoyed by the élite; of a mutual acquaintance, he writes to Gilbert Murray:

But he is too democratic for me - he said his charwoman was more in contact with real things than anybody else he knew. But what can a charwoman know of the spirits of great men or the records of fallen empires or the haunting vision of art and reason? ¹

A distinction between "pleasure" and "satisfaction" becomes, at this point, irrelevant. Russell himself would surely find it hard to deny that his academic pursuits gave him pleasure, even if the pleasure could be defined in terms of intellectual satisfaction. We must attempt instead to pinpoint the differences between the pleasures or satisfactions of the charwoman, and those of Russell. Ayer attempts a redefinition:

.... the ends which yield the greatest satisfaction, in Russell's usage, are not necessarily those that cause the greatest enjoyment. They are rather those that we continue to wish to pursue. ²

But to confine Russell's views of "the ends which yield the greatest satisfaction" to "those that we continue to wish to pursue" is rather ambiguous, and also rather restricting. If we are to assume, as I think we must, that the pleasures or satisfactions which Russell places on a pedestal, far superior to the pleasures of the average man, are those of the mystic, the artist and the poet, and those who can appreciate them, the pleasures of poetry rather than pushpin, then it is only a minority of people who will continue to wish to pursue them. And it could equally well be argued that the majority of the population will continue to wish to pursue pleasures of the pushpin variety. That Russell wished to go further than this is beyond doubt. If we must express pleasures in terms of a time scale, this would be better done by linking the "ends which

yield the greatest satisfaction" with, say, 'those that we are prepared
to wait for', or 'those for which we are prepared to sacrifice immediate
short-term pleasures'. In this manner, such pleasures become the
privilege of the élite minority, as Russell felt they were, since fore­
thought requires higher levels of intellect. But even this is insuff­
cient, for Russell, as we have seen, felt that short-term ends must be
given due consideration as well as long-term ones.

What we must look for instead is a definition of pleasure or
satisfaction in which the pleasure gained is comprehended by a single
individual, or a very few individuals, and is totally incomprehensible to
the majority of men - just as the class of Russian mathematics students
were unable to understand the satisfaction derived by their professor
from mathematics in itself. The satisfaction derives from essentially
solitary intellectual or artistic pursuits; it satisfies the solitary side
of man's nature.

The scope of Russell's own ability to appreciate such solitary
pursuits is wide: it embraces mathematics, science and philosophy as well
as art. But it is not all-encompassing, and therefore his - and anyone
else's - view of such satisfactions must necessarily be limited and subject­
ive. While not himself able to appreciate the solitary satisfaction
derived from, say, the designing of a sewage plant, or the craft of pottery,
nevertheless it is to be hoped that Russell would not deny the possibility
of his superior variety of satisfaction being found in such pursuits.

From an essay on "The Road to Happiness", written in 1956, we get an enter­
taining picture of the limitations of Russell's understanding of the humbler
pursuits of man. He is advocating, for happiness, "an activity which at
most times is enjoyable on its own account", into which category fall,

1. See pages 213-4 of this thesis.
predictably, the pursuits of "artists, authors and men of science".¹

However, he does at least concede that:

.... there are many humbler forms of the same kind of pleasure. Many men who spend their working life in the City devote their weekends to voluntary and unremunerated toil in their gardens, and when the spring comes they experience all the joys of having created beauty. ²

He does not, one must suppose, envisage any pleasure to be derived from the sight of the rose-bed, totally flowerless in January, but newly, and beautifully, manured! Nevertheless, although he pays scant attention to the satisfactions of the average man - this example, in fact, is the only one I have been able to find in which "humbler forms" of pleasure are even mentioned - Russell may perhaps be forgiven for the omission on the grounds that the average man cultivating his rose-beds at weekends is of only peripheral importance to ethics and philosophy. The individual who is uppermost in Russell's mind is he whose superior solitary pursuits are of value to the society in which he lives, and a source of satisfaction to himself.

The value of the individual

Russell has always been antagonistic towards creed and dogma, and he has always been wary of over-praising the less dogmatic modern political institutions which might be supposed to have replaced them. His ideas in these respects have not changed significantly - indeed Ayer is able to quote simultaneously from The Principles of Social Reconstruction (1916) and from Power (1938) without revealing self-contradictory argument. But the final - and I feel the most significant - aspect of Russell's political theory is the attention paid in his later works to the individual. An

2. Ibid., pp. 212-3.
ethic based on utilitarianism, although an improvement on religion and dogma, still provides, in Russell's view, no satisfactory answer to the delicate question of balance between society and individual. Ethics, Russell says,

.... is part of an attempt to make man more gregarious than nature made him. 1 The stresses and strains with which morals are concerned are due, it may be said, to the only partial gregariousness of the human species. But this is a half-truth. Many of the things that are best in the human species are due to the fact that it is not completely gregarious. The individual has his own intrinsic value, and the best individuals make contributions to the general good which are not demanded, and are often even resented, by the rest of the herd. 2

The pursuit of solitary passions or instincts are of crucial importance here, and it is worth noting - and indeed emphasising - that Russell's adoption of the Humean view of the superiority of passion over reason is a recent development. In essays written in the early and mid 1920s, when Russell's interests lay primarily in behaviourism, the cry was for a more rational human being. The principle of rationality, Russell felt then, already existed in practice, as contemporary trends in psycho-analysis suggested. Although demonstrating the irrationality in origin of men's hopes and fears, nevertheless the recommended cure was to reveal these irrationalities and make them known to the patient in order that he could revert to a more rational way of life. As Russell then argued:

This kind of treatment, and the outlook which inspires it, pre-suppose an ideal of sanity, from which the patient has departed and to which he is to be brought back by making him conscious of all the relevant facts, including those which he most wishes to forget. 3

1. This particular quotation, which uses the same terminology as the Introduction already mentioned, was one of the chapters written later, and supports the hypothesis that the semi-gregarious nature of man was an idea that Russell adopted after completing the major part of the ethical section of Human Society in Ethics and Politics.
In the same essay he argues:

I believe that the control of our acts by our intelligence is ultimately what is of most importance.  

This, written sometime before 1928, is a far cry from Hume. In the 1940s, as we have seen, Russell explicitly rejected Hume's scepticism in philosophy, and the inconsistency of his simultaneously accepting wholeheartedly the Humean reason/passion theory has been noted. The inadequacy of Russell's arguments, adopted later, in support of Hume, which have been fully discussed, seems to indicate that they were introduced not out of theoretical necessity, not as part of the logical process of Russell's views - but deliberately, and almost arbitrarily, as a method by which Russell could preserve, or lend theoretical respectability to, the value of independent individual thinking.

The value of the individual is two-fold, as Russell is anxious to stress. In the first place, he has a definite role to play in society. He is here given a more utilitarian function. Russell argues that the independent individual is of value to society, and in particular in the changing of society's moral codes. He argues that we cannot say that one act or code is right and another wrong unless we have first established a way of deciding that some are better than others. Not everyone, of course, pursues this issue in a philosophical manner, as Russell does. On the contrary, "The natural impulse of every untravelled person is to settle this question very simply: the code of his own community is the right one, and other codes, where they differ from his, are to be condemned". Russell is not unsympathetic to acceptance of the code of one's own community. "Without civic morality", he says, "communities perish".

1. Ibid., p. 42.
2. See pages 210-7 of this thesis.
4. Ibid., p. 28.
But Russell himself is not an "untravelled person", and cannot bring himself to condemn other codes, nor to accept, necessarily and without question, his own community's code. Although a man cannot be blamed for obeying his own community's moral code, he argues, he "should often be praised for not doing so".\textsuperscript{1} He points out that "some actions which we all think highly laudable consist in criticizing or infringing the moral codes of one's own community".\textsuperscript{2} The views of society on morality have undergone constant change throughout history. This change Russell sees as inevitable - and necessary:

A number of problems of great complexity arise from the impact of new techniques upon a society whose organization and habits of thought are adapted to an older system.\textsuperscript{3}

The "organization and habits of thought" must therefore be adapted to fit the new circumstances, and it is through the individual that such change is to be brought about. Where this involves taking a stand against the traditional codes, then a certain amount of personal courage is necessary, combined with a firm conviction that change is needed in a particular area. McGill criticises Russell's view of the individual on the grounds that he is too detached. "Men of action", McGill argues, "are viewed unfavourably, whether they advance by 'naked power' or by persuasion, whereas pure scientists, detached artists and dreamers are regarded with tolerant love. For Mr. Russell .... the great men of history are those who attempt to free men's minds".\textsuperscript{4} Russell certainly viewed the pure scientist and the artist especially favourably, in their state of detached isolation:

A certain degree of isolation both in space and time is essential to generate the independence required for the most important work; there must be something which is felt to be of more importance than the admiration of the

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., p. 39.
\item Ibid., p. 40.
\item Ibid., p. 20.
\item McGill, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 587.
\end{enumerate}
contemporary crowd. We are suffering not from the decay of theological beliefs but from the loss of solitude. 1

However the solitude, the detachment, serves to build the individual, to increase his inner strength to the point where he is capable of becoming, as it were, a man of action. Great individuals of the past have, when in conflict with society, gained support from belief in God; with religion on the decline, more courage is needed to voice individual views when these conflict with the views of the majority:

.... a greater energy of personal conviction is required to lead a man to stand out against the current of his time than would have been necessary in any previous period since the Renaissance. 2

It is not unnatural, then, that Russell considers that the individual who seeks change must be possessed of qualities over and above those of the ordinary man. And the individual is important in Russell's view, both as a custodian of society's more aesthetic values, and as a means of changing values that need to be changed. So, to complete a previous quotation:

This duality of personal and civic morality is one of which any adequate ethical theory must take account. Without civic morality communities perish; without personal morality their survival has no value. 3

It is not, however, only for his usefulness in changing society's attitudes when needed that Russell values the individual, nor even only for the part he plays in preserving what is aesthetically best in our society. The best individuals, as he has said, "make contributions to the general good". But the individual also has "his own intrinsic value", quite apart from his value to society. It is "pursuit of personal

2. Ibid., p. 81.
excellence"¹ which yields the utmost satisfaction, the superior type of satisfaction; the satisfaction which cannot be defined in terms of utilitarianism because, although it may, purely incidentally, satisfy others, or may, purely incidentally, contribute — in terms of aesthetic value or as instrumental in change and progress — to the general good, nevertheless it is not in its usefulness to society or in the satisfaction that others may share that its value lies.

In the final chapter of Human Society in Ethics and Politics Russell speaks of "the kind of happiness that should be distinctive of man".² He continues:

I say the happiness distinctive of man, because the happiness of pigs, which the enemies of Epicurus accused him of seeking, is not possible for men. If you try to make yourself content with the happiness of the pig, your suppressed potentialities will make you miserable. True happiness for human beings is possible only to those who develop their godlike potentialities to the utmost. ³

The development of full potential, the pursuit of private excellence — these are not social instincts; they are solitary, indeed almost selfish. They represent, for Russell, a value over and above, separate and apart from any variety of utilitarian values — even though a case can be made, as Russell has done, for their usefulness to society. They are not compatible with any ideals involving the "greatest number". For those whose "full potential" finds expression in the rose bed, manured or in full bloom, and who need, for daily living, a wider, all-encompassing moral code, then utilitarianism as a basis for social action will do very well. But for those, like Russell, whose private excellence lies in areas which bring them into conflict with the rest of society, then principles of utilitarianism must take second place to the pursuit of higher values.

3. Ibid., p. 238.
Pursuit of private excellence as the ultimate aim of life is not presented as a theory by Russell. It is not stated explicitly, but merely suggested throughout his works. It appears first in his early article on "A Free Man's Worship"; it appeared as a form of elitism in Russell's criticism both of any form of dogmatic socialism, and of the possible dangers of a utilitarian ethic; and it featured significantly in his views on education, and more particularly in the practical application of these views at Beacon Hill where perhaps he was being excessively optimistic about the degree of private excellence that might be achieved by ordinary children. The idea, as we have seen, has been growing gradually over the years, becoming stronger and more compelling. It is not given expression in the works of Russell's critics - perhaps because his early work on philosophy and on ethics, in which there was no more than a hint of the notion of development of full potential as part of a definition of 'good', has taken priority over his later writings in which the hints are more clearly spelled out. It has seemed useful and necessary to include and to expand upon the idea in this thesis because it provides, on the one hand, an interesting and appropriate foundation for much, if not all, of Russell's work; and because as an ideal it found active expression in Russell's own life, in the course of which he himself pursued private excellence sometimes at the expense of the happiness of his friends and associates, and frequently at the expense of a more worldly self-interest, with vigour and determination. Without such vigour and determination, without a firm conviction that pursuit of

1. See Chapter Two, pages 63-5 of this thesis.
2. See Chapter Three, pages 127 and 130-1 of this thesis.
3. See Chapter Five, pages 233-6 of this thesis.
4. See Chapter Four, pages 177-8 of this thesis.
his own private excellence and development of his own full potential were of a value superior to 'happiness' – either his own or that of others – then he might have chosen an easier path in the face of conflict, and much of his best work might never have been written.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The introduction to this thesis posed two central questions: to what extent is there a "reciprocal causation" between philosophy and circumstances? And, to what extent has Russell been successful in avoiding excesses of bias and prejudice in his own philosophical career? The subsequent four chapters have examined some aspects of Russell's philosophy, including, it is hoped, the most significant aspects for the purposes of this thesis. We have followed the path of Russell's philosophical thought from his initial reaction against idealism in the early years of the 20th century, to his deliberate attempts to formulate a more rigorous and more scientific method of philosophical analysis which would enable him — and perhaps others — to avoid the errors and contradictions otherwise resulting from prejudgement of the issues involved; from his brief, and incomplete, flirtation with neutral monism, and his more enduring interest in behaviourist psychology (including the more optimistic interpretation he gives of the possibilities suggested by behaviourism for human development), to his relentless and merciless examination of the implications of a truly empiricist position; and finally, to his ultimate inability to accept the scepticism, and the solipsism, which he sees as the only possible conclusion to be drawn from about half a century of philosophical study and analysis.

In conclusion, we must now endeavour to assess, as far as is possible, the effects, over the whole of Russell's life, of the circumstances in which he found himself, upon the general course of his philosophy; and the effects of his philosophical views upon his life, and upon the opinions, both expressed and acted upon, that he held of the world around him.
It cannot be denied that Russell's study of mathematics - which in fact constituted, for him, a large and significant part of his "circumstances" in the first decade of this century - influenced him profoundly. His great love of the subject, and his consequent hostility towards the idealist philosophy which purported to undermine its very foundations, were the motivating factors in his early philosophical work; it has been suggested that they also contributed to the inaccuracies discussed in Chapter Two - his inconclusive argument on relations, and his failure to make use of his own theory of types, a theory which had proved invaluable to him in his mathematical work, when use of the theory would have lent support to the monist theory of truth by justifying the apparent paradox contained therein.

It must also be admitted that Russell took an almost mystical view of mathematics, despite his logical and rational approach to the solution of its problems. His logic and reason was used to reinstate mathematics upon its other-worldly pedestal and, as he tells us, enabled him to imagine "all the numbers sitting in a row in a Platonic heaven".¹ The question of the precise status of 'reality' in Platonic 'realism' has been discussed briefly in Chapter Two, and it has been suggested that the 'reality' of the things outside the cave is of a different order altogether from the 'reality' which Russell sought first through logic (in mathematical philosophy), and later, with increasing determination, through empiricism in other areas of philosophy. We have noted that the convincing arguments in mathematics and geometry regarding truths or realities which seem to lie outside man, and to be independent of, and unknowable by, man - the 'reality' which cannot be subject to empirical proof - may have been largely responsible for Russell's early belief in objectivity, and for his determined

attempts to establish a similar type of other-worldly 'reality' in other areas of philosophy. But the 'reality' which Russell examines through his empirical microscope belongs most emphatically to this world; it consists of the things we perceive with the senses, the statements we make about these things, and the psychological make-up of human beings which causes us to make such statements. It consists, in other words, of the images reflected on the wall of the cave. To Russell, in his defence of mathematics and in his subsequent writings, both types of 'reality' are valid. Early in his philosophical career, however, they are not clearly distinguished and indeed are often confused.

Evidence of this confusion can be seen in Russell's ethical work of the early 1900s. The mysticism, the other-worldliness, is exhibited vividly in "A Free Man's Worship"; in his more disciplined ethical works, and perhaps as a consequence of the reciprocal influence of Russell and Moore, the approach is more logical, but the end result still belongs to a Platonic heaven rather than to an empirically objective 'real' world. The 'intrinsic goodness' which he introduces into the argument, and on behalf of which he is apparently prepared to sacrifice his theory of external relations, is not something that can be defined in this world, and is therefore not amongst the shadows reflected on the wall; if it is to be found anywhere, it will be found outside the cave, along with Russell's row of numbers. The finding of it is not a privilege to be accorded to man, but 'intrinsic goodness' is there, nevertheless.

Regarding objects of a more concrete nature, physical things rather than attributes such as 'goodness', Russell's method of argument is from the start empirical rather than an argument from logic. Initially he is convinced that a table is as objectively 'real' as common sense tells us it is, and he even goes so far as to provide us with a definition of the 'real' table in terms of sensibilia - something which he was unable to provide for
'goodness'. *Sensibilia* themselves, however, are as elusive as 'goodness' since the only grounds for belief in them are principles of common sense or simplicity - or even 'instinctive belief'. It is interesting to note that, although Russell eventually abandons objectivity in both 'goodness' and tables, his reluctance to do so is far more evident in his works on ethics. In the realm of physical science, he appears to be totally free to explore and examine any number of new theories - neutral monism, and quantum theory, for example - whereas in the realm of ethics, he is never happy with the subjective conclusions he inevitably reaches. In ethics he is, in a sense, restricted and influenced *throughout* his life, and not just in the early years when objectivity in both areas was as important to him as the autonomy of *a priori* mathematical principles.

Thus, in the first decade or so of this century, Russell's love of mathematics did influence his philosophy to the point where confusion about 'reality' set in. From his *non*-empirical, objective, mathematical and Platonically 'real' standpoint, Russell was attacking the similarly *non*-empirical idealism of Bradley; but the weapons Russell used for the attack were essentially empirical weapons - they were 'real' in an *empirical* sense - and in time Russell turned his attention almost wholly to the clarification and perfection of his method of attack, to the sharpening, as it were, of the weapons of empiricism.

Before we turn to Russell's logical atomism, we must first investigate the other influences which turned Russell's attention increasingly to the weapons of empiricism. Bradley's relational theory was not the only other occupant of Russell's mystical heaven; there was also religion, creed, dogma - indeed, any belief theory which was not supported by reason. As the first World War approached, with dangers and horrors of a practical rather than a theoretical nature, the effects of 'irrational' beliefs, in
particular of the 'dulce et decorum est .... ' variety, impressed Russell to the point where he was prepared to sacrifice personal circumstances for the sake of philosophy. At this point, while the concerns of society and the political and social circumstances of Europe were directing Russell's attention towards new and unexplored areas - belief and 'feeling' - Russell's philosophical hostility to irrationality resulted in loss of friends, loss of money, and even loss of personal freedom.

The logical atomism which Russell developed during the second decade of the 20th century, culminating in his lectures on "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", was undoubtedly the most important of his contributions to modern philosophy. It was very clearly both effect and cause: it was the effect of Russell's dissatisfaction with previous methods of philosophical inquiry and his determination to leave no stone unturned, however inconvenient that might be, in his quest for an unprejudiced assessment of idealist and other theories. It was the effect of his search for better and more efficient weapons with which to launch attack upon the ever-growing contingent of non-empirical theories, irrational prejudices and dogma. And it was at the same time the cause of injuries to Russell's own non-empirical theory: his belief in objectivity. The sharpening of his methodological weapons certainly increased their effectiveness against the particular theories that he wished to expose and discredit; but they also increased the vulnerability of his own theories. Logical atomism as a philosophy, advocating rigorous analysis based on empirical and rational criteria, was incompatible with mysticism of any variety. Theories of idealism, of internal relations, of whole and partial truths, of religion, revelation and intuition - all fell victim to logical atomism; but so also did theories of sensibilia, of objective 'truth', of 'intrinsic goodness', of a priori principles such as simplicity, and of old, accepted and thoroughly respectable laws such as the law of causation.
Russell's own convictions were revealed, with their shaky foundations devoid of rationality and of empirical certainty, as no more than beliefs. And however 'instinctive' they may have been, Russell was finally forced to admit that instinct, or even common sense (the two sometimes seem interchangeable) is no adequate substitute for empirical objectivity.

It seems at this stage relevant to emphasise the influence of Russell's philosophy upon his philosophy, rather than upon his circumstances. The eventual abandonment of objectivity must have been a severe blow to him - but he did not balk at it. Each step into empiricism caused objectivity to recede further and further into the background. In physical science, as we have noted, this did not seem to worry him at all - indeed it opened new areas of relevance, and his discussion on matter and on mind in the 1920s, although not conclusive and in parts subject to criticism of a technical nature, was at least free of prejudice. The impression obtained from the books on Analysis of Mind and Analysis of Matter is of an open mind, making an exploratory, intellectual journey through a previously uncharted areas, with no preconceived idea of the arguments that might be encountered en route, and no intention of avoiding any of them, because there was no previously stated goal. Although the conclusions he did eventually reach may not have been of major significance in the context of Russell's philosophy as a whole, his work in the 1920s on neutral monism stands out as a shining example of unbiased intellectual exploration, and more than lives up to the standards he sets in methodology in his work on logical atomism.

Russell persisted where a man of less intellectual integrity might have called a halt. At times, it is true, his insistence upon empirical criteria and upon rational and logical analysis served his own purposes; it enabled him, for instance, to pronounce harsh judgement upon the new 'creed' of socialism which emerged as practice rather than theory for the
first time after the first World War, and gave philosophical support to
his personal impressions of socialism in action in the U.S.S.R. But,
although the judgement was less harsh and less hostile, the criteria were
no less rigorously adhered to when the result of their application was
the slow but steady erosion of the objectivity which Russell had hoped to
establish, and upon which, from his early youth, he had set his heart.

There were certain things, however, which could not be explained by
empiricism: the 'images', for example, which could not be neatly accommo­
dated within neutral monism and had to be left outside it; the intangible
but psychologically compelling distinction between expressions of taste
(for or against oysters, for example) and expressions of moral conviction
(for or against Hitler); the strong, if apparently unfounded belief that
utilitarian theories could not adequately account for such things as
aesthetic pleasures or values, and that these things were therefore
inexplicable in scientific or empirical terms. These were the loose ends
in Russell's arguments, important in a philosophical context, but inexplic­
able in the context of Russell's philosophical empiricism. They remained
loose ends - Russell, as we have seen, was never able to relinquish an
element of mysticism in his thinking - until finally he reached the end of
his empirical journey. He followed the path of empiricism right through
to the end, and not until he had done so, did he then find a place for
these unexplained loose ends which had pursued him.

What empiricism led to, Russell discovered, was solipsism. Instead
of the certainty and the 'reality' he set out to find - a certainty in
ethics and in the physical world which would render them as certain as he
felt the objects of the physical sciences to be - he found uncertainty in
all things. Even the laws governing the physical sciences were found to
be no more than inference. At this point, in a sense, the 'realities'
merged; empirical analysis, by demonstrating that the whole edifice of
science rested upon inferred principles which were incapable of empirical proof, led to a 'reality' as intangible and other-worldly as the 'reality' outside Plato's cave. Russell's lifelong quest for philosophical certainty ended here.

Up to this point, apart from the initial 'ulterior motive' of defence of mathematics against idealist attack, Russell's circumstances had influenced his philosophy only very slightly, and only in this manner: they had directed his attention to various aspects of life which were of concern to philosophy, and they had supplied his philosophy with material for examples. His discussion on Marriage and Morals, it is true, might never have been written were it not for the fact that these were issues which confronted him in his own personal life; his discussion on education might have been considerably less detailed had circumstances not provided him with two children of his own, and thus a very direct interest in education. However, the approach he took in both these discussions was a result of his philosophy. In the case of relationships between men and women, he was hostile towards prejudice based on customs which had long since ceased to be rational; in the case of education, his views on the potential of the human race, given the right kind of influence in their early upbringing, were founded on behaviourist psychology. Thus both these approaches were based on philosophical views already very much in evidence in previous philosophical works; they had simply been applied to new areas of thought.

If Russell's circumstances at any time profoundly influenced his philosophy, it was not until the 1940s when empiricism had, as it were, run itself into the ground. In History of Western Philosophy Russell describes the philosophical voyage undertaken, and the conclusions reached, by David Hume; both voyage and conclusions find an echo in Russell's own, as we have set them out in this thesis. Hume's philosophy, Russell
argues:

.... represents the bankruptcy of eighteenth-century reasonableness. He starts out, like Locke, with the intention of being sensible and empirical, taking nothing on trust, but seeking whatever instruction is to be obtained from experience and observation. But having a better intellect than Locke's, a greater acuteness in analysis, and a smaller capacity for accepting comfortable inconsistencies, he arrives at the disastrous conclusion that from experience and observation nothing is to be learnt. There is no such thing as a rational belief: 'If we believe that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise'. We cannot help believing, but no belief can be grounded in reason. Nor can one line of action be more rational than another, since all alike are based upon irrational convictions. ¹

Hume's scepticism "paralyses every effort to prove one line of action better than another".² But Hume himself, somewhat inconsistently, "writes much as any other enlightened moralist of his time might have written; he applies to his doubts the remedy that he recommends, namely 'carelessness and inattention'".³ Russell has reached the same philosophical conclusions, but cannot accept the remedy.

To refute (Hume) has been, ever since he wrote, a favourite pastime among metaphysicians. For my part, I find none of their refutations convincing; nevertheless, I cannot but hope that something less sceptical than Hume's system may be discoverable. ⁴

Russell's "hope" has nothing to do with his philosophy; it has everything to do with his circumstances, and with the circumstances of men and women, groups and societies, and individuals to whom philosophical scepticism is not only inadequate, but irrelevant, because they have their lives to live. Russell does not deny that Hume's conclusions - and indeed Russell's own - are for the most part philosophically inevitable:

2. Ibid., p. 646.
3. Ibid., p. 646.
4. Ibid., p. 634.
inferences cannot give certainty. But because our circumstances demand a less negative, even if less certain, philosophy, Russell turns his attention finally to providing a theory of probability which will serve for practical purposes; at the same time he builds and develops a hypothesis of his own concerning the full potential of mankind, which might, had his long life been even longer, have been enlarged and expanded and presented to his readers - a hypothesis which might serve to provide mankind with some element of mysticism, of ultimate purpose in the absence of philosophical certainty, which we seem to need in order to justify and in some way to ennoble existence here on earth.

Russell has been accused of inconsistency in philosophy, and of being a moraliser rather than a moral philosopher. The examination, in this thesis, of the course taken both by his philosophy and by his ethical thought has, it is hoped, demonstrated beyond doubt firstly, that the inconsistencies in philosophy were in fact occasioned, for the most part, by a consistency of analytical method, and a consistency of philosophical integrity; and secondly, that his ethical theory is based very firmly upon philosophical foundations, as far as he honestly finds this possible. When it becomes impossible, when philosophical argument, taken to its logical conclusions, becomes incompatible with any ethical theory, or with any theory whatsoever which might provide us with some solid basis and guidance in every sphere of life - philosophical, scientific or ethical - then, and only then, might it be true to say that Russell ceases to be a moral philosopher. Indeed, he ceases to be a philosopher at all.
During the early 1920s Russell gives more attention to new discoveries in physics. In 1927 he published An Outline of Philosophy, one part of which is devoted to the new science; and Analysis of Matter, based on lectures given in 1925, gives it a far more thorough - and essentially mathematical - analysis. A detailed study of these works - in particular the latter - would be particularly rewarding, but it is beyond both the scope of this thesis and the abilities of the author. However, a brief and simplified digression into the realm of physics is important, because it may add a certain justification, or at the very least an explanation, for Russell's introduction of a new set of causal laws.

We are concerned here with the structure of the atom. "Every atom", Russell tells us, "is a structure consisting of electrons and protons"¹ which carry equal amounts of negative and positive electricity respectively; it has a nucleus consisting of one proton (in the case of the simplest, the hydrogen atom) or of a number of protons and electrons (the Uranium atom, for instance, has a nucleus of 238 protons and 146 electrons); and around this nucleus orbit one or a number of "planetary electrons".² One or more of these planetary electrons may be lost, in which case the balance between positive protons and negative electrons is upset, and the atom becomes positively electrified. But unless they are lost, the planetary electrons continue in orbit around the nucleus - and the possible orbits available to them are in fact limited "in ways for which nothing in Newtonian dynamics has prepared us, and for which, so far, there is nothing in

2. Ibid., p. 106.
relativity dynamics to account.\textsuperscript{1} Every possible orbit involves a certain constant, h (discovered by Planck in 1900, and subsequently found applicable to other areas besides that which Planck himself was studying), and this constant is involved during "quantum changes - i.e. the changes that occur in an atom when it radiates or absorbs energy".\textsuperscript{2} When the atom loses energy, the planetary electron or electrons will "jump" from a larger orbit to a smaller one; when it absorbs energy, the planetary electrons will jump from a smaller orbit to a larger one.

The implications for philosophy of these discoveries are, firstly, that matter becomes subject to doubt: "the electron ceases altogether to have the properties of a 'thing' as conceived by common sense; it is merely a region from which energy may radiate."\textsuperscript{3}

The second implication is of more significance in the context of Russell's work of this period: "the electron which has been moving in one orbit hops quite suddenly into another, so that the motion is what is called 'discontinuous', that is to say, the electron is first in one place and then in another, without having passed over any intermediate places".\textsuperscript{4}

In Analysis of Matter, Russell states that "we do not know what determines the electron to jump from one orbit to another; on this point our knowledge is merely statistical";\textsuperscript{5} in other words, what appears to happen in physics is no more than a brute fact resting upon observation.

In Analysis of Matter Russell has reservations about the quantum theory. What it says at present (in 1927) "is probably a temporary state of affairs".\textsuperscript{6} He recognises that further discoveries may be made which

1. Ibid., p. 107.
2. Ibid., p. 112.
3. Ibid., p. 112.
4. Ibid., p. 113.
6. Ibid., p. 38.
would explain the apparent discontinuity; but for the time being he asks us to accept the possibility - no more than the possibility - of a totally new set of causal laws.
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"My Mental Development" (1943), in P.A. Schilpp (ed.), The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell.


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**Sceptical Essays** (Unwin Paperbacks, London, 1977; according to the Unwin edition, Sceptical Essays was first published in book form in 1935; according to P.A. Schilpp's bibliography, the essays were first published in 1928. The latter seems more likely, since those of the essays which it has been possible to date were all written in the early and mid 1920s).

"Can men be rational?"

"Eastern and Western Ideals of Happiness"

"Freedom in Society" (1926)

"Free Thought and Official Propaganda" (1922)

"Machines and the Emotions"

"On the value of Scepticism" (1928)

"Philosophy in the Twentieth Century" (1924)

"The Danger of Creed Wars"

"The Harm that Good Men Do" (1926)

"Can Religion cure our troubles?" (1954)

"Individual and Social Ethics" (1948-9)

"Limitations of the Scientific Method" (1931)

"Note on non-demonstrative inference and induction" (1959)

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"The Expanding Mental Universe" (1959)

"What I Believe" (1925)

"Why I am not a Christian" (1927)

"Why I am not a Communist" (1956)


"An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish" (1943)

"Ideas that have helped mankind" (1946)

"On being modern minded"

"Philosophy and Politics" (1947)

"Philosophy for Laymen"
Unpopular Essays (continued)

"Philosophy's Ulterior Motives" (1937)

"The Functions of a Teacher" (1946)

"The Future of Mankind" (1950)
In the course of his long lifetime, Bertrand Russell wrote prolifically on innumerable subjects. His philosophical work has been subjected to criticism, but his contribution to twentieth-century philosophy has been fully acknowledged—indeed, Russell is often referred to as one of the greatest philosophers of our time; his moral and political theories, however, have won him considerably less acclaim in academic circles. These two branches of his work have therefore been considered, as often as not, as separate and distinct from each other. The tendency of philosophers has been to ignore all but the strictly philosophical writings; the tendency of political scientists has been to ignore the philosophy, and to concentrate on the moral and political issues which Russell tackled—often subjecting them to severe criticism.

Russell himself, however, would not have welcomed either tendency; his firm belief was that these apparently separate fields of study were in fact closely linked, that they inevitably influence each other, and that both also influenced, and were influenced by, the circumstances of the individual philosopher. The aim of this thesis has therefore been to pinpoint the links between the philosophy, and the moral and political theory, and also to examine both in the light of the circumstances of Russell's own life. By thus applying to Russell's own work his view of the reciprocal influence of these branches of study, it is hoped, on the one hand, that his moral and political views have been lent philosophical justification and explanation; and on the other, that the relevance of philosophy—whether Russell's or that of others—to daily living, and its place within the context of society, has been clearly demonstrated.