

Bertrand Russell Editorial Project Presented by Dr. Louis Greenspan

Well, since we're such a small, informal group, I will omit my usual Churchillian cadences and speak in a conversational tone about the Russell project. I won't directly refer to my collection on religion. The book that I'll be talking about centrally will be Russell's "History of Philosophy," his best-known book, but I will talk about religion and other topics. Anyway, and the other thing is that even though I come from the age of the quill, [laughter] I'm going to try to see how I--how I can make out with iPad, you know. I may as well jump from the 18th to the 21st century, yes.

First, the Russell Archives at McMaster. McMaster University has the entire collection of Russell Archives. The story of how we got it is very good. If anybody is interested, they can raise it in the question period. This consists of about 30,000 letters. This consists of these letters that go to huge correspondences with Gilbert Murray. Some of you--he was big in my day, big in your day too -- of Ottoline Morrell who's one of the great loves in his life. There are letters to wife; they had huge correspondences. And also, letters to people like T.S. Eliot, this kind of diplomatic correspondence almost. There are also letters to major world leaders. When an Israeli politician came to McMaster, I showed him all of Russell's letters to Ben-Gurion. When an Egyptian diplomatic official came to McMaster, I showed him all his letters to [Gamal Abdel] Nasser at the time. So, it's great letter writing.

And letter writing in those days was something like emailing today. I say before the age of the BlackBerry because the letters are more than text messages. They're lengthy letters. In cities like Paris and London, there were four mail deliveries a day. Three or four, so they're back and forth. You see Russell writing letters that he gets back and answers the same day, then writes another one the same day, so and so. So you can track his life very well. Sadly, we won't be able to do that again unless we get hold of people's hard drives. I don't know how they keep reading in trials that they got hold of somebody's emails, you know. So I'm not quite sure how that's done. But the age of these vast correspondences and--if you ever want to feel like a god, they say that philosophers who do metaphysics and talk about the whole universe try to think that they're gods. But that doesn't make you feel like a god as much as reading correspondences which tell you, you know, about struggles that are taking place when you yourself know the outcome. So, that really makes you feel like a god. Hmm, I see a problem with the iPad. It keeps turning off. Probably when it doesn't like what I'm saying.

[Laughter]

There are other collections of letters to ordinary people. Whoever wrote Russell, he answered. So there's a charming volume you may have in your library called, "Dear Bertrand Russell." They ask of everything, such as what he likes for snacks to whether he's still a Marxist. And he writes these charming replies. That's the side of Russell you don't really know. Now, the other thing that we have in the library is all his manuscripts and articles. The number is colossal. The volume I worked on, on World War I, he wrote an article for a pacifist paper called "The Tribunal" every week and they were on every subject. This is now for four years and you know the numbers of articles he wrote, I mean all the American journals and so on. So we have all of those. We have all his books in every, you know, translated, whatever language that translated into. We have his library with the marginal--marginalia of books that he recorded in. The marginalia is very extensive. The usual word on the side of an article is "rubbish."

[Laughter]

So, you could see the word "rubbish" in various different handwritings, you know. And we have also a number of crucial tapes and videos. So it's a very extensive archive. It has been estimated that he wrote 3,000 words a day. It's more than most of us can do, you know, a month. I mean after two memos, I have to take to the sofa. So the craft of writing in those days is something well worth studying because usually sometimes you see a second draft or corrections, but doing what I do draft after draft and so on and so forth was [inaudible] to do. But one of the secrets of this, you can see with him, is that he wrote very much like he talked, and he talked very "Gibbonesque" prose. I think Gibbon was his favorite writer. One of my favorites too but I don't write in the Gibbonesque way. So that's Russell's – the Russell collection. If you're ever in Hamilton, I'll be happy to show it to anybody.

And I actually once found a letter about an article that had been written at Dalhousie when I was there. And so I looked up the journal to see what the letter was. And it turned out to be a letter about an article. The letter said, "I'm just sending you a letter from my brother-in-law. My brother-in-law can't understand what you're about and always criticizes you and I can't change his mind. Perhaps you have a reply." Now, as it happens, his brother-in-law was chair of our department at the time. So I told him, "your brother-in-law has ratted on you." He says, "Yes," oh, he says, "You know, you keep this little, finding these little things in archives."

Now, my involvement to this. I had to do my thesis on Russell. But also, the university set up a Bertrand Russell editorial project in which all of Russell's articles, work are collected. You may have the volumes here, the Bertrand Russell collection, so all his work, on different topics. So as I say, I worked on the World War I but we have his trips to China, to Russia. We have all the volumes dealing with the emergence of the "Principia Mathematica." We have all, you know, of an incredible life, all with vast volumes of correspondences, articles and so on. So, it's a good historical enterprise. I don't know if this will be done anymore now because it's very expensive to do volumes like this, you know, to look up who it is that he is writing to, to look up who wrote this answer to his. You know, this is very, very expensive. But it's one of the jobs of the boiler room of the university, of making sure that the articles and everything that you have are authentic. There's a big scandal – a number of periods of history that you're dealing with manufactured articles. And actually, one of the books that we have put in there, we discovered that all the publications had omitted three or four pages from Russell's original manuscript. So, these editorial projects are prior to the mission of the university but they're very expensive.

So, the book I want to talk about today is Russell's "History of Philosophy," which contains his views on everything. It's probably the most famous of Russell's books. Now, it has an odd presence in the world. I don't think there is a single philosophy department anywhere that uses it as the history. There have been dozens for that. Nevertheless, it's the philosophy book you're most likely to find at an airport bookstore. It's a wild, you know, remains of wild bestsellers since that time. One of the meetings I had with the publishers in England told me that that keeps them going because students in Japan who want to go to university have to take a certain English text test, and they use Russell's "History of Philosophy" as their text. So these are wonderful writings on the history of philosophy. Now, why is it that the "History of philosophy isn't used? It is a very good read."

Alright, so the next part of what I'll do is tell you about his "History of Philosophy is why he had so much difficulty and what Russell's view on philosophy is. What it is that comes out of that history, and we could talk about that because the problems he deals with are very familiar. The first reason that fell out of favor was that the "History of Philosophy" became popular roughly at the same time as another book by Karl Popper, "The Open Society and Its Enemies," was

popular. These were wild bestsellers, both of them. I think Russell got a Noble Prize for Literature” on the basis of this.

He got two theses in it that really disturbed everybody. The first was that German philosophy was the sort of grandfather of the Third Reich – that means [George W. F.] Hegel, [Immanuel] Kant. The thought was certainly misguided but, you know--but after that fifth [inaudible]. Hegel, especially Hegel and [Friedrich] Nietzsche, were proto-Nazis from the beginning. This view was so popular and so widely accepted, you know, in my day that they weren't even taught in the universities. Except that what I went to, which was pre-19th century Dalhousie University. But all over America, nobody was reading these books, especially Nietzsche. The only thing of Nietzsche that was floating around was an autobiography called "My Sister and I," about his sex life. It was extremely--it was extremely well-written but was exposed as a fraud. But everybody read that because you could read soft porn with a kind of learned look on your face, you know, exposing. So that was – that was part of Russell's effect. Nietzsche--and it took a generation to restore Nietzsche, too. Now he's probably the most popular philosophy writing. So, his [Russell's] undermining of German philosophy.

Second, his chapters on Plato – that was the beginning of the “Plato-was-a-fascist” industry. So, that was in Russell's book. His claim was that Plato modeled his idea of republic after Sparta and he wanted some kind of military dictatorship. So these were kind of givens in those days and Russell's philosophy plus--and a lot of it come up in different branches of philosophy – was the center of them. So this kind of philosophy wasn't taught anywhere except at Dalhousie. Heg--we were still doing Hegel in the [inaudible]. I don't know whether we had the stamina to do Nietzsche. but we were studying Hegel. So therefore we weren't reading Russell, you know, except for this book. Now, so what was the – there are some things in the history of philosophy that people didn't notice and one of them is that the center of his [Russell's] work was not Hegel and so on. It was another interest.

First of all, Russell claims at the end of the book that we now have a very modest kind of philosophy – basically, his thesis, along with Popper's, that metaphysics led to authoritarianism because you had ideas that you couldn't test so you had to have them shoved down your throat. So, metaphysics was poisoned, and so on. And, therefore, at the end of the book it says that the careful day-to-day work of empiricism is what gives us true knowledge. And so when you read the philosophy with that in mind, it was also a kind of trope that was common in philosophy departments of those days. When you read the book, you discover strange things. One, that he thought that the classical empiricism likely considers a thumping bore, and some of the other noted empiricists he doesn't like at all. But who does he like? No, no, no, not [David] Hume. The whole book – you're going to see – is against Hume.

[Inaudible Remark]

The whole book is against Hume.

[Inaudible Remark]

No, I would say it's there. This is--yeah, well, I would get a Noble Prize for this, but probably the whole book is written against Hume. You know, I'll show why in just a moment. So, where are we? You know, so [John] Locke is a bore, most of the empiricists are bores. But St. Augustine's speculations on time he thought were terrific. He thought that the – you know, Russell had a real love for speculative philosophy. You know, then when the speculation stopped, you got better statements you would come to science, you know. But in the meantime speculation was what

philosophy was about. His absolute favorite philosopher was [Benedictus/Baruch] Spinoza. So, this is a big surprise which you never found in his contemporaries, his followers, you know, at that particular time.

So, what was the book written against? He didn't like the German philosophers but you can't say that there was a Hegel mania that was so rampant and it had to be stopped. But there was something else you thought had to be stopped, skepticism. Now, that's strange because the books on Russell call him a passionate skeptic and so on, but he has in the center of the book an argument against the ancient Pyrrhonist skeptics – Hume, who probably gave him many, many sleepless nights, and John Dewey. Now, these philosophers are related to what we now consider, you know, the skepticism; skeptical streaks and continental philosophy, and so on. And they were sort of emerging under – especially under Dewey's pragmatism.

Russell had a pitched battle all of his life against Dewey. That Dewey used to go into a rage, why doesn't he read what I'm saying, You know, that is Dewey according to Russell's account, which is unfair, Dewey said that an idea is good – is true – only if it comes to some practical outcome – you know, warranted assertability. The practical outcome of an idea is what makes it true. So he and [George Edward] Moore used to sit around and cackle. “Do you know whether it is good to say that your toast was hot this morning?” You know, so hot it was a kind of grim realism. which is what he'll come out with. Now, what are his arguments against skepticism? Pyrrho of the ancient world – do you think Russell would really like?. He dismisses him – he dismisses skepticism – that is, pure skepticism – as a flight from reality.

And one of his weapons is that David Hume was a famous conservative. And you never hear that. You always associate skepticism with radicalism. No. Hume thought that you could criticize people if they hadn't gone to the right English public schools. Hume, you know, was in the colonial office. He was a great defender of the public order. Skepticism is a kind of philosophy filled with relativism that you can't launch any criticisms of anything, you know. Or if you do, you do it in Pyrrho's sense; first you criticize one side, then you criticize the opposite, but you have nothing. You know Pyrrho used to – the Greek world takes a thesis then criticizes that, then takes the antithesis and criticizes that. So, then people would ask him, “How do you know that what you're saying that your criticisms are right? And he would then jump off the bridge into the river or something.

So, that was Russell's – so Russell believed in a theory that was realistic, namely what they call the kind of realism or correspondence theory that ideas are true if they correspond to what's out there. Now, there are a number of variations of this theory. Russell believed it. He didn't argue with what you would call epistemological grounds but he always argued this point that ideas are connected to reality. It was part of his moral philosophy. His very first articles, 1910 or 1912, on the moral philosophy and science or the moral use of science was that once your ideas have to withstand the discipline of reality, then you have a basic cosmic humility.

So, this was his argument for this realist theory and his argument against pragmatism, skepticism and so on – that you do not have the discipline of reality. And that particular philosophy of knowledge is very suited to liberalism because liberalism as he understood it was a theory of testing and, you know, jostling with reality, getting things right and so on. So, that was Russell's theory of realism, that you live in a moral universe. What's wrong with Dewey's [inaudible], you can do anything, you know. He associated pragmatism with the most reckless parts of industrialism. You know, actually it's not a fair account of the pragmatism – but this is where he did it. So, you see, Hume was the enemy. And he was the enemy because he admired him so much. I mean Hume is wonderful to read – I have Hume on my iPad. What

greater honor could come to him, you know. So this was the basic thrust of the history of philosophy, and Russell's "History of Philosophy." And you can read at the sections on Dewey and the sections on Hume to confirm that.

But what he said about the Germans and what he said about the whole tradition of metaphysics took the foreground. And that part of what Russell argued got lost, only to be revived now at the pitched battles today between the skeptical philosophies and the so-called, you know, the realist philosophies. So, that's what's worth looking for in "The History of Philosophy." Otherwise, you have a number of very colorful accounts of a number of philosophers. Some of them seem far-fetched but some of them are quite good.

Another point to be made about the "History of Philosophy" is written in the late '30s. Russell got into a lot of trouble with it. The sequence was that in the late '30s he had been hired to CCNY in New York to teach a course in logic. But the Anglican Bishop of New York knew Russell as a prophet of free sex, and because he read [Russell's] book, called "Marriage and Morals," where he thought it was alright for unmarried couples to live together. And a number of things to which in today's sexual world you could find, you know, even *Playboy* wouldn't notice, so he wrote a number of provisions of this sort. And the Anglican and then the Catholic diocese ganged up on him and succeeded in getting CCNY to fire him. And then he was hired by Barnes – Julian Barnes – who was financing various cultural enterprises. Then Julian – but he wasn't very sociable with Julian Barnes. He just sat home and wrote. He was polite when he needed to be. But in any case, Barnes refused to pay him. So, it was Russell, for one of the major intellects of the modern world, has been kicked out of three universities. He has had more trouble than some, you know, maniac. So, finally he took Barnes to court and Barnes was forced to pay him.

This book was published then in 1941-42 and then became this wild bestseller. Now at the time that he had written it in the late '30s – and this is an important part of Russell's intellectual makeup – is that this was a time when he became a patron, almost, of Western thought, except for the metaphysics. At the end of the first World War, Russell was a radical and was an anarchist and he went to the Soviet Union. He was one of the first two or three people to go to the Soviet Union, you know, from the west, just as the Civil War between the Bolsheviks and the--and then Russell went there on a tour. And he came back and wrote praise to the Bolsheviks to the skies but he made a number of what have turned out to be brilliant criticisms of the regime. And then in the '30s when fascism arose and you had a contest in Europe between the fascists and the communists, Russell started to move more in the direction of liberalism, more in the direction of the third way, you know. So the history of philosophy is actually a defense of western empiricism as against Bolshevism and as against the fascism of course. So that's its role in the political history.

Now, that's all that I want say for the moment about "The History of Philosophy." But it is an important document for that particular period.

Now, I want to say a few words about what your main topic is this year ["chance"].. And it also appears in the history of philosophy, and it's one of the themes, chance and determinism. I understand that you're discussing this issue. The role of chance comes up in Russell's thought in several contradictory ways. I don't know if it's still the case, but when I was an undergraduate, everyone had to read "A Free Man's Worship" and that was a passionate essay by Russell that said here we are, flung in a dark universe. And we have, you know, and he has God overseeing this. Let's have human history. And then we have human history. We see these people fighting with each other and so forth. In the end, as the scientists predicted, the whole universe is going blow up and God says, "That was great, let's do it again some time." So, he therefore takes the

view, which is later attributed to the existentialist, of the totally meaningless universe. And that we ourselves have to struggle to find meaning in it. And he says the one thing that gives us meaning is tragedy. So it's in the universe that has no--that has no progressive order in it. There is no providential structure. It's a universe that's just wild. So there is a universe of chance.

Nevertheless, he still believes in the classical Newtonian determinism that everything in the universe is determined in the way in which the 18th century philosopher said. And this came into challenge, as you know, in the early 20th century – by quantum mechanics and then by various interpretations of Einstein's philosophy. So when this was popularized, when the quantum mechanics was popularized and it was said that the universe is basically law--not lawless, but filled with probabilities. You know, this line of things led to Heisenberg's laws of indeterminism. That there are no laws of the universe, there are just these probabilities. So there was a great cry of relief from many sides. And several scientists, including James and [Arthur] Eddington, wrote books that free will is back, and if free will is back, God is back; determinism is out, free will is in. So Russell had to respond to this. I don't know. Did anybody of you see the PBS, a great film on Eddington and Einstein? Oh, that's a great film. Eddington's proof, Eddington's test of Einstein's theories, that's a great film. It all takes place through World War I, where the two of them – Einstein and Eddington – are corresponding with one another to the outrage of the physicists on both sides of the border. Then Eddington conducts the tests that put Einstein's theories on the map. This has to do with going to Africa and find – anyway, I'm not a physicist so I can't describe it reliably.

So there are these books. And religion came back. And a very interesting manifestation of this is that those scientists who thought the world was a fight between Judaism and Hinduism, those scientists who thought that world is indeed ruled by chance began to preach the Bhagavad Gita. [J. Robert] Oppenheimer was the main, you know, all his books are filled with phrases of the Bhagavad Gita – that the universe is not structured. Whereas Einstein was preaching, no, we don't have laws of the universe now, but we'll get there. You know his famous phrase, "God doesn't play dice with the universe," so he had in the heart of science a fight between Hinduism and Judaism as to how the universe was constituted.

Now, Russell's view on this. He was a strong defender of determinism, but determinism was in his view an article of faith. We don't know what determines things now but we will, you know. So you had determinism in the '30s as an article of faith. Now, there are all kinds of theories now coming out. I don't follow physics. And I think I had Newton. I played a tape by Hawking on what the world looks like according to modern physics, and Newton would have committed suicide. I mean, they're dealing with questions like if an astronaut falls into a black hole, will he come to the beginning of time? This is a legitimate question in physics. I think Newton would have fainted. Yeah, for sure, yeah. Anyway, but they were coming into this realm of physics and so Russell stood behind determinism, even though at that time it was basically a question of faith that someone will find the theory. Now, how that stands I don't know. The scientists at McMaster have a powerful scientific place, and I get different accounts of where that stands. Some of you, maybe you'll be able to say something on that.

On the other hand, Russell wrote on history and the philosophy of history. And here his books were anti-Marxist. He was against the scientific account of history; that is to say, that you had something predictable like class war and the end of history. Science and very much history, very much in his hands, is determined or moves according to the act of individuals. So history, according to his entire philosophy of history, is not what we came to let's say in the '70s, and so on. Scientific structures which unfold according to scientific laws as we had with the Annales

School of historians in France and [Fernand] Braudel. There are no laws. They're the acts of individuals, any of which can change things a lot.

You know. Russell would be a WikiLeaks person. You know, look like how one fellow, one anarchist from Austria can affect the entire world. Of course when you go back, you can predict this. Everybody predicts and I always--I have sympathy for this in this sense. As I said last night, there's not a single major thing that's happened in my lifetime that anyone had predicted. That includes the rise of the Japanese automobile industry which is way before some of you came along, the collapse of communism, the rise of the fundamentalist militancy, the collapse of capitalism in 2008. They all come as huge surprises and then somebody writes a book saying all these was inevitable. You know, it was coming by some inevitable causality. So in many ways, you can do that. I told a story yesterday about this Ph.D. thesis in the London school of this fellow who had written a Ph.D. on the inner stability of the communist system. And by the time the Ph.D. came to defense, the communist system had disappeared from the face of the earth. So that is the whole problem of projection and prediction in history. So Russell has both of these accounts. So how he would defend himself on this, I leave that up to you.

So this is Russell on chance. I think that all of us are caught on this problem of how – it's very hard history, you know, looking at history of day-to-day politics to say that the world is governed by iron laws which we can use to predict everything. That becomes now an article of faith. Not, in fact the people that I know who actually predicted the collapse of communism, who predicted the collapse of capitalism, were all lunatics. [Laughter] You know, [inaudible] lunatics that have the best view of history of anybody.

[Inaudible Remark]

Yeah. I know. Well, there is a literary review that only the mad people see things as they are. So these are the various themes that are embedded in Russell's work and embedded in his history. On Russell's views of religion, he was brought up in a fiercely religious background with his grandmother who was actually a Presbyterian, which he hid, but she was in fact an Anglican and she presented herself as an Anglican. And so Russell knew the Bible very well. And he had one, he had a copy of the Bible which had one passage from the book of Proverbs underlined that he kept for his entire life. And that was something like "do not follow a crowd to do evil." So that's from the book of Proverbs. That became Russell's motto. And at a certain point in his early life when he himself was Hegelian, there's a famous thing that he was walking with a can of tobacco and all of a sudden he said, "Good God, the ontological proof is valid." So he was religious for--I don't think that made him religious, but then after that he became indifferent to religion.

And then in the '20s and '30s when these new religious ideas came out because of the theories of probability, that's when you find most of his writing against religion. So Russell was, you could say, hostile to the whole 18th century attempt to base religion on reason. So, most of his arguments follow Voltaire. The argument from design which was very popular in the 18th century, that the universe is so well structured that it's like a clock, you have to look for a clockmaker – that he ridiculed. You know, he used to ridicule the Darwinian version of it, that evolution has brought us up to where we are now. Russell said it's taken us billions of years to achieve not very much intelligence. And the argument from design – he would make pretty flippant arguments about what a mess the world is. He had a number of arguments that were peculiar to himself. Most of the Enlightenment people wrote respectfully of Jesus but he didn't, though he did write respectfully of Jesus' ideas. But Jesus has a phrase, you know, "abandon your family and follow me," so Russell is the only person that I know that attacked the New

Testament for undermining family values. [Laughter] I don't know what the tea party would make of that. So therefore his attitude to religion was very much of the 18, you know, a critique of natural theology; namely, that the reason could demonstrate religion. He has a number of things which you see the same things in documents and Hitchens. So Russell's views on religion are very familiar. Just within his work on "The History of Philosophy," he has some good things to say about Judaism and some good things to say about Christianity. But on the whole, he thinks both were awful. So that's it from "The History of Philosophy." So that's my spiel on these things. I'll be happy to hear whatever you want to respond or comment on.

Dr. Greenspan's formal presentation ends here. What follows is a question-and-answer session. Unfortunately, most of the questions are inaudible on the tape.

[Inaudible] earlier what things are--and it wasn't so much what Russell thought he was doing or maybe it's what so many--He's looked at the history of [inaudible] and the book, the history of [inaudible] all together [inaudible] Russell was doing. But Russell is generally characterized as reasoning within this empiricism, a modern version of Hume. And his skepticism and his remarks on religion is a 20th century Hume.

Well, actually our religions are closer to the books Hume kept in his drawer. But his empiricism is in direct opposition to Hume. And what's interesting about that.

[Inaudible Remark]

Pardon?

The logical atomism is actually what--I'm not sure.

Oh, yes. But that was earlier.

I understand.

Yeah, that was much earlier. The logical atomism because.

[Inaudible Remark]

Yeah. It was even before World War I. Russell kept changing his views and his disciples were usually left flat, you know.

>> Oh, yeah. Well, I used to say that, you know that saying that power is the ability to fire all the people who agreed with you last week? So that was Russell's – in philosophy he had abandoned many positions. In the late '30s, hatred for the Soviet Union, for Stalinism, was greater even during the war. And you know, remember, he was a defender of the radical left to the 1918 to '20. But during the war, when Joseph Stalin was in the cover of *Time* magazine, when all the journals like the *National Review* were praising him to the skies, all of conservative America. Russell was introducing him in his various articles and so on. He was anticommunist while everybody was pro Bolshevik. Remember somebody asked why didn't the BBC use Russell during the war, and the answer was they never knew what he was going to say. You know, the whole story that Orwell couldn't publish *Animal Farm* because nobody wants to offend the Soviet Union. Well, Russell would have, you know. Yes, sir?

That's very much – I mean by skepticism that Bertrand Russell is antagonistic towards skepticism. I mean I--what I think skepticism is, you know, soccer teams asking questions and stuff and it seems really that's a lot of version Russell did.

Yeah.

And I mean--

While the skept--

[Inaudible Remark]

Yeah, I know. Socrates, the skeptics, the ancient skeptics used Socrates as one of their own. But Socrates always questioned as though there is a truth to the questions that he's asking. But the skeptics were doing it to show there was none.

Okay.

You know, that was the big difference. Not only that there is no truth, once you realize that, then you achieve a system of serenity. You know, once you know that nothing is true, you're in a system of serenity. I used to have students who were ultra-multiculturalists, so one of them said to me, you know, everything is relative. Now, these ideas of contemporary relativism are meant to be positive. They're meant to show that you can't judge people by criteria that are not their own. That's when it's strong. So he says he won't accept any judgment. He's a complete skeptic. So I said, well, you do believe in tolerance, don't you? That means you believe something is true. And he thought [inaudible], "No, I'm against tolerance". So he's in favor of everybody's practices and he's against tolerance. So Russell--Russell never thought that this is where he is different from today. We think of skepticism as connected to some kind of radicalism. Hume was, again, indeed radical about religion but he didn't tell anybody. He kept the articles in his drawers. But on everything else on the structure of society, since you have no criteria to criticize the structures of society, you therefore sustain them, support them. That's what Russell thought skepticism amounted to.

It sounds a little bit like the [inaudible] that, you know, because it's just a few who wrote those articles that's against the post-modernist interpretations of various aspects of reality, right? And that it turns out that he's actually quite a radical leftist. I understand.

Yeah.

And his critique was that, so in other words one of the things that you would agree with is a lot of the postmodernist thinkers because they come from that side of things. But he thought that postmodernism takes the [inaudible] out from under which you can make arguments to change society for the better, right? To be [inaudible] to I guess skeptical in a sense.

Yeah. Well, in that sense it was a phalanx against the rise of pragmatism and the various theories that came. There was Popper and--there was Popper and there was Sokal's scandal. But as against them there is the historical work of Thomas Kuhn. So that is still being slugged out, you know, nobody had quite determined whether Kuhn had said that, that there are other criteria the sort that Russell wanted, or whether the different succession of scientific theories was like a fashion show. This--this is still being slugged out.

So, what is the story about how you guys came to have the Russell papers?

>> We have a [inaudible]. I'm sorry I have to repeat this. [Laughter] A librarian who was a Welsh Catholic, very colorful person that I could sit all night and tell stories about him. But he, early in his life, looked to find a career in which he could rise to the ranks very quickly. And he discovered that the best thing was to become a librarian because as a male he would shoot to the top like a rocket, which is actually what happened. So he became an archivist and a chronicler and so on. And while he was at McMaster he got word that Russell, even though he himself was a strong Catholic or his description of Catholicism was very colorful. He says the church is a windy barn but it's home, you know, so you can't say that he was a dogmatic. You know, so he heard that the Russell archives were up for sale. Now, Russell had an archivist working in his basement in Wales collecting all these things in boxes. They were up for sale. And when they came up for sale, several universities bid for them. University of Texas, which at that time was not in receivership to say the least, a consortium around MIT, and us. But then it was learned that this is the story that's come to me, that it was learned that Russell was going to use the money from the archives in order to prosecute his trial against Lyndon Johnson, the Vietnam War--

Oh yeah.

Yeah. So these--these offers mysteriously dropped and--

[Laughter]

[Inaudible Remark]

Yeah. So then they came to McMaster, and of course we didn't have the money unless the Board of Governors approved it. So the Board of Governors said they "wouldn't give a nickel for that communist." And then he was, you know, very anti-American. So both the librarian and the president of the university resigned on the spot. So they changed their mind. Cost in 1967 about \$700,000, which then was a whooping sum of money. But finally what we have and then we got another bid to get all of his stuff. So we have the materials that I described at the beginning. A bibliography has been written. Now, the fellow who was in the Russell house, his name was Ken Blackwell, most memorable to us. If he should ever get dementia or something like that, almost two-thirds of the world's knowledge of Russell will be gone. But he wrote one of the greatest bibliographical books, three volumes of the bibliography of Bertrand Russell, books, pamphlets, everything. So he did one like that. There was a time when McMaster was known for the medical school and the Russell collection. But then Russell, after the fall of communism in particular, disappeared from public view.

He's not well known now. We still have people doing researches. But in the time that I was the director of the project, I've been a host to every major philosopher working in these areas. They would come up to McMaster. And that's how we got it. As I said to someone last night, the work on authenticating documents is very, very expensive. I said that to you earlier. So lastly, you could bring him in the middle of battles that are taking place now but Russell didn't know anything about Kuhn, you know, and so the battles have to be updated.

When did he die again?

About 1970.

1970, right. Okay. So just the beginning of all the postmodern [inaudible].

Oh, yeah. No. He didn't know. Actually the postmodern, the French theorists came following the rebellions in 1968 in Paris and so on, so he didn't know. No one dreamed at that time that Nietzsche would be the number one philosopher studied in the western world. There's all history of how Nietzsche was rehabilitated. Actually I read a terrific biography of Nietzsche last summer by Julian Young. I don't know if I--so no one dreamed of that, that all of a sudden the undergraduate education that had made me totally irrelevant, you know, and studied Hegel and so on, was back in vogue. Now, there's huge Hegel societies all over the world, splendid books on Hegel. One of the ideas was that he was a Nazi, so utterly ridiculous. You can show that empiricists also have a capacity to be prejudiced.

That you mentioned I have personal experience. I was [inaudible] I mentioned I wrote my dissertation on Russell in the early '70s. I wrote and I heard the same thing that you've mentioned that he answered to a response. I wrote a note to him asking him about this article for any--a laundry list or anything. This--anything written in his hand and I got a note back that he had died.

No kidding.

[Inaudible Remark]

I would like you to do me a favor and not write me any letters.

[Laughter]

Actually, I heard that [inaudible].

[Laughter]

Yeah.

There are other reasons.

Laughter]

>> Well, do you have any questions either on religion or chance? One of the most interesting things about chance in the history of philosophy were provided in Russell's account with the Pythagoreans. And that's an account for religion as much as anything else. Pythagoras as a combination of Einstein and Mary Baker Eddy.

There is, I agree with you. That's my absolute favorite chapter in the book. His account to the and the religion of mathematics. The one that finally died with, you know, with Lichtenstein and various others. But there are now alternative accounts of the--there is now, what's his name? A French writer has written a book of ancient philosophy. He takes them as a group of religious cultic, you know, the Platonic Academy and so on are more like religious, so.

[Inaudible Remark]

Yeah, that's it. And the Pythagoreans were a kind of religious group but he says in the chapter in Pythagoras it has been the most persistent idea of the human race, of the intellectual history of the human race, that mathematics is independent and that the mathematical reality is an independent reality. That most of it lasted from the time of Pythagoras until now. And I think that it has defenders now, does it not?

Sure.

The idea that mathematics is independent.

Oh yes. What was Russell's view on that?

He agreed that he--you know, he reluctantly succumbed to some of the ideas of Lichtenstein. So either he held it in suspense or rejected it altogether that mathematics was an independent reality from a--

[Inaudible Remark]

Yeah.

Then like some day when they sit down and talk philosophy very constructivist.

[Laughter]

I agree to that. Well.

[Inaudible Remark]

Yeah. The strangest thing that I had ever seen in those years is that the Pythagorean view of mathematics was defended by none other than a Maoist. He was a Maoist mathematician. He says the liberal reactionaries say that mathematics is nothing but games. However, we know that mathematics was about [inaudible]. He thought he was defending Lenin and Marx by saying that. But that was the only person that I had heard that said that mathematics was a game.

[Laughter]

Then Russell had very strange views that the leaders of society that studied geometry would be in a position to be able--to be rulers, to be wise rulers. I can understand roughly how we came to this but it's in all a view.

His review of – just came to mind now – he has a lot of jokes but he reviewed Gilbert Ryle. There's a famous book in philosophy in the '50s of Gilbert Ryle, "The Concept of Mind." It was about the mind being a ghost in the machine and there's no such thing. Everything was behavioral, you know. There's not something that's in your mind that's not public so that Ryle says for example, when we see someone with a toothache we hear him screaming and grabbing his mouth and all that so we know from his behavior, it is Ryle's radical behavior. So Russell's review says none of Professor Ryle's friends are stoics. [Laughter] None of Professor Ryle's friend are stoics.

[Laughter]

I had a question about [inaudible] determinism, his [inaudible]. Could you say a little bit more about, so he rejected this kind of global like historical determinism. But if I understood this--

He has determinism at the individual level or--so you're saying individuals shouldn't make decisions like the WikiLeaks so--so that view. But he thinks that determinism as the pieces is true. So it just--there's definitely some tension between if the individuals, if determinism is true, individual choices are determined.

That's right.

And so then aggregate movements in history, how can they not be determined?

You're absolutely right. I mean, there is a serious problem in Russell. He's riding against the one major deterministic theory of history, namely Marxism angles, and at the same time he's affirming. I mean he was very enthusiastic about Pavlov and all these people that said you could determine individual psychology. So I think that he was just left in a contradictory point of view. I suppose you could say that someday we'll be able to, you know, like that film Galactica, you know, they take one drop of blood when somebody is born. They know who's going to marry or who's going to die. You know, I suppose you have that but we're certainly far from there yet. I mean, you can say it abstractly that determinism is true but we still don't know what's going to happen. Probably the economic collapse of 2008 was the most predictable thing if you'd follow this. And I saw there was a book where--pardon?

By Richard Engels. He predicted the decline of the West.

Oh, yeah. But he didn't--he didn't predict there's anything. I don't know of any Marxist who predicted this particular collapse in 2008. But surely both predicted the decline of western capitalism anyway.

[Inaudible Remark]

>> That's the name of this venture capital company. And so that's the name of his [inaudible], the Black Swan.

[Inaudible Remark]

>> I'm reading it halfway through now.

>> Yeah.

>> Is that the name of the same book?

>> I don't know.

>> Maybe so. But it's also the name of the book, yeah, the strange events happening, right?

>> Yeah. Yeah. That's--that's about how--wonderful [inaudible] brought this to mind you mentioned that in hindsight we can predict how these things are, you know, happening [inaudible].

>> Yeah.

>> Here--here are the reasons of the Civil War, I think the World War II happened [inaudible] and in a moment he is able to predict it with those of the variables are just huge and unknown. And we--but we developed these narratives that those would be [inaudible]. So it's important to us to make sense of them somehow rather so we--they go--in the narrative that makes us think we get to explain the thing when as a matter of fact all that information was available and we weren't able to predict it and we won't be [inaudible].

>> Well, I think that generally speaking the social sciences are in a terrific crisis. When I started in university, if you had told me that economists would--

[Noise]

>> Oh, Jesus, I'm sorry about that.

>> Oh, that economists would be on TV flatly contradicting one another it just didn't seem reasonable. All the social sciences in the '50s and '60s seemed to be saying the same thing. And there were the theories and all and so forth. So that we'd be in the disarray that we're in now I wouldn't have thought.

>> I think when it comes to chance and determinism, one of the things when we [inaudible] is simply the idea that chance operates based on probabilistic laws and those laws are pretty solid, right? So in other words, any specific event you might, you know, it might happen, it might not happen. But over time with enough events happening, then there are definite trends. Alright, so in other words you might not be able to predict any particular event but over time you want to make [inaudible] and it's the same thing. Yes, any individual position of an electron is kind of based on chance but overall, you know, they're going to depend on this area or that area, right? So it's a way of kind of marrying the two. You can almost [inaudible]. It is chance but yes, this is deterministic in the sense that, you know, we all know perfectly well how the physical things in the world are going to react in various circumstances. So really it may be possible that we have some configuration that electrons could occur that would make it either move uphill instead of downhill that over time in that item it is going to move downhill as a trend. We're talking about the trending more than anything.

>> If I may, I think that's what Steven Hawking says in his most recent [inaudible]. He's saying, you know, when you have something like a balloon and you've got so many quantum things, it's all in a big [inaudible] area. When you have them all together, then it's just kind of like something is going to happen.

>> Right. So it's essentially deterministic.

>> Right.

>> Maybe the individual [inaudible] isolated who can [inaudible] chance but in the real world things always occur [inaudible] huge masses where whatever the probability says, that's what is going happen, right? You can flip a coin a hundred times in a row. Yeah. It's possible that you could get a few heads and, you know, but eventually you can look at [inaudible].

>> But that's not the sense of determinism. That's not--that's not 18th century determinism.

>> Right. No that's right.

[Simultaneous Talking]

>> Yeah. Yeah, I suppose that's [inaudible].

>> I think [inaudible] is determinism. If I understood you is there's kinda 18th century given the state of the world, with the laws of physics and next event to determine. It's a very strict [inaudible].

>> Is that more like a little closer to [inaudible] of predestination that it--if you're certainly [inaudible] already written.

>> I don't think it's predetermined.

>> Okay.

[Inaudible Remark]

>> Predestination has a difference from determinism although this comes, I start my class with the Protestant reformation, is that pre--the predestination can never be known whereas determinism you will come to know what it's all about. There is one problem with that. Once you know, it changes to what determinism will be but that--that is the--a great problem. But the connection between predeterminist or predestination and Calvin sense of individual responsibility is a huge problem but it's the basic problem of western philosophical thought that we believe in free will, John Stewart Mill freedom but we also believe in the genome and so on. So you have an unresolved contradiction at the heart of western thought. And Calvin is no different except for the fact that predestination is unknowable. You have to act as if a [inaudible]. There is in Calvin Institutes these wonderful passages about you're on earth, you've been given a property and you will be held to account, you know. We are not our own. There's whole bunch of passages that would begin that sentence. We are not our own. We have been put in this vineyard and at the end we'll be asked what it was like. That's a complete critique of the environmentalist to tack on Calvin. Environmentalists tend to think that Calvin said that all of natures, whatever we wanna do with it, you know, with the--you know, it's not magical, it's not--we can do whatever we want with it. But Calvin has these passages that we are held accountable for whatever we do on earth. Again, he has this predestination. And--so somebody pointed out that environmentalism in general began only, mainly in Calvinist countries. You know, it's now attributed to a native religion and so on. But there's a link between Calvinism and environmentalism although there's a lot of environmentalists [inaudible] that say Calvin is the enemy. He's the [inaudible] because he said nature was only a thing and we can do what we want. But Calvin has the stirring passages that we will be held to account by what we do with the earth and so on.

[Silence]

>> That seems like a good [inaudible] to include from a formal person, so--

[Applause]

>> Well, thank you for your time

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