

PLATE XXXIX



LEONARD JAMES RUSSELL.

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1884-1971

LEONARD JAMES RUSSELL was born on 18 October 1884 in Birmingham and died on 8 March 1971 in the same city. His father, the Revd. E. T. Russell, had been a schoolmaster at Frampton on Severn, but under the influence of the evangelist Spurgeon had moved to Birmingham shortly before Leonard's birth in order to conduct a mission in the poorer parts of the town. An elder son born at Frampton was later to become Sir John Russell, the agricultural scientist of Rothamsted.

Not long after Leonard's birth the family moved to Burnley, and in later years he liked to say that his ideas of good education were formed at a primary school he attended there. Being unable to find time for systematic teaching of all his pupils according to their needs, the schoolmaster put the more advanced boys in a place by themselves, where he came to ask them occasionally if they had found any difficulties in the work he had set them to do. Since each boy worked on his own for most of the time but could, if he liked, overhear what the master said to his seniors in the small group, each went forward at his own pace, and the academic results were extremely good in that nearly all the boys in the special class won scholarships to grammar schools. Such methods, which were still in use many years later, might now be condemned as élitist, and it must be admitted that they depended for their success on a competitive interest in learning, which was often connected with a desire of parents that their children should 'get on in the world'. But what seemed important to the young Russell was simply that his elders expected him to try to understand things by himself or in a small group, and when he was in a position to organize a university department he did his best to make sure that his pupils took an active part in their own education.

When he was thirteen years old, his father accepted an invitation to be minister of the Unitarian Church in Glasgow, and he himself entered Hutcheson's Grammar School as a bursar. From that time on he was able to pay most of the fees for his rather lengthy education with 'prize money'. In 1902 he entered Glasgow University to work for the two degrees of M.A. and B.Sc. His honours course was in mathematics and natural philosophy,

but his programme required him to take in addition a class in Latin or Greek and a class in Logic or Moral Philosophy. Being less well grounded in Greek than in Latin, he chose to work at that, and was very glad in later years that he had done so, since Phillimore, the Professor of Greek, who was considered an infant prodigy when he joined the Senatus, gave him a lasting interest in Plato. Apparently the two professors of philosophy at that time did not have so great a personal influence on him; for in later years he could be irreverent about the efforts of Sir Henry Jones to resolve all differences 'into a higher unity'. Fortunately, however, among his teachers of mathematics there was at least one, Picken, who succeeded in imparting a philosophical interest in the foundations of his subject. For in 1903 there appeared not only the second volume of Frege's *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* but also the first and only volume of Bertrand Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*; and between that date and 1910, when Whitehead and Russell produced the first volume of *Principia Mathematica*, there were many lively papers by Poincaré and others about the status of geometry as well as about the paradoxes of set theory.

One of Russell's contemporaries at Glasgow was Hector Hetherington, later to be Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University. Between them they divided most of the available prizes, and after taking his first degree Russell had enough money left from his scholastic winnings to stay at the university for another two years. Though his chief interest was now in philosophy, he decided to follow up another interest during this time by taking the Honours course in English Literature under Professor Macneile Dixon, whose reading of poetry he would recall with admiration many years later. But in 1908, before he had finished the English course, Professor Latta, who had recently come from St. Andrews to the chair of logic, suggested that he should prepare himself for an appointment in the logic department by further study in Cambridge. Gratefully accepting this offer of a start in the academic life, he abandoned any professional concern that he may have begun to feel for English literature and went down south for two more years of very frugal life as a student, this time at Emmanuel College.

During his Cambridge days both Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore were living elsewhere, though their influence was still strong among the young philosophers, stronger indeed than that of the professors, Ward and Sorley. Of the older philosophers who helped to bring about a revival of logic only J. N. Keynes

and W. E. Johnson were active at the time, but Keynes had already published all he had to say and in order to meet the needs of the Faculty Board Johnson lectured for the Tripos on philosophical psychology, rather than on logic. Wishing, however, to learn something of the work which Johnson was known to have been doing for some years, Russell joined with John Laird, another graduate student from Scotland, and C. D. Broad, then reading for Part II of the Moral Science Tripos, in persuading him to give a special advanced course for their benefit and that of any others who might be interested. All three were to follow their lecturer into the British Academy. It is said that one of the students present at the lectures took them down in shorthand and later gave Johnson a typed copy, which he used as a basis for the three-volumed treatise he published after the first world war. Possibly John Maynard Keynes, who was a year older than Russell and working at the time on probability for his Fellowship dissertation at King's, had something to do with the amiable conspiracy to make Johnson talk; for when he came to publish his *Treatise on Probability* in 1921, his first acknowledgement was to the still unpublished work of Johnson. But unlike the other three young philosophers, he had his home in Cambridge and knew Johnson as a colleague of his father in the small world of Moral Science.

In that generation it was common for 'reading men' to take their exercise in long walks, and one of those with whom Leonard Russell went out into the country round Cambridge was the Australian geographer Griffith Taylor. At Taylor's suggestion, in the long vacation of 1909, half-way through Leonard's time at Cambridge, they set out together to walk from Nancy southward through the Alps to Venice. Taylor wished to study glaciers, and for his benefit they crossed seven high passes; but being interested also in buildings and pictures, they made other detours for the purpose of seeing these. Neither had much money to spare, and so they resolved at starting not to spend more than the equivalent of two shillings each for a night's lodging. This meant that, if they could not find a suitable place at their price after thirty miles of tramping, they must go on again. On his way home Russell stayed for some weeks at a language school in Heilbronn in order to get a working knowledge of German. This was a time when young men who hoped to enter the academic career were encouraged to think they should if possible spend some time abroad learning foreign languages. Russell maintained this outward-looking tradition all through

his life, and after the second world war, when there seemed to be a great gulf between English-speaking philosophers and the philosophers of continental Europe, he did his best to restore co-operation. When necessary, he would talk French, that most frightening of foreign languages, without the self-consciousness which inhibits many of his fellow countrymen.

In 1910 he received the offer of a teaching post in St. Andrews, which had become a place of lively discussion in philosophy; but being already committed to Glasgow, which had kept a vacancy for him during the past two years, he returned there to work in the logic department for the next thirteen years. Soon after taking up his appointment he arranged to have lessons in elocution. He was a small man of slight figure, without the imposing presence of a born orator, and lecturing to an ordinary class in a Scottish university could be like addressing a convention of practical jokers. Even the venerable Sir Henry Jones had been put out of countenance by a young man on the back row of his lecture theatre who answered a rhetorical question by calling out 'All resolved into a higher unity!' In later years Russell's lecturing style was excellent. When old and frail he could still throw his voice to the back of a large room and command the attention of his audience. But his success in the difficult art of lecturing was not due solely to his teacher of elocution. He had taught himself to organize his material in simple fashion and to present it without affectation or any other kind of silliness into which academic persons may be tempted.

In his first years as a lecturer he also prepared and submitted a thesis for the Glasgow doctorate of philosophy. At that time British universities did not attach much importance to research degrees, but it was probably thought that he should acquire a specialist qualification of some sort in philosophy and that this was the most appropriate. Much more important for his general development was his marriage in 1911 to Alice Green, South African by birth but Scottish by education, who shared many of his interests and in particular his liking for travel. They had met in 1905 at the end of her first year as an undergraduate reading for honours in French and German, and their marriage six years later was the beginning of sixty years' happy companionship, in which they both became well-known figures at gatherings of philosophers not only in Britain but in many other parts of the world.

Finding very soon after his appointment that there was need for a new elementary text book of logic, he published in 1914 his

Introduction to Logic from the Standpoint of Education. As he himself said later, it was not a happy time for launching a new book of that kind, but the work had some success, even outside the United Kingdom, as a text for beginners, and it was translated into Japanese as late as 1950. When in the thirties mathematical logic became a whole-time occupation, he did not think of himself as a specialist in the subject, but he continued to be much interested in the teaching of it and spoke or wrote from time to time of methods by which the study might be strengthened in our universities.

It was also at this time, while he was in close contact with Latta, that he became a serious student of Leibniz. Latta had published his edition of the *Monadology* and some other writings of Leibniz as early as 1898, two years before Bertrand Russell's *Philosophy of Leibniz*, and it seems likely that one reason why he wanted Leonard Russell on his staff at Glasgow was that he thought a philosopher with a scientific background would be a good recruit both for the study of Leibniz and for that part of systematic philosophy which is especially concerned with natural science. Certainly Leibniz was the philosopher whom Leonard Russell studied most closely throughout his life, and his best papers were devoted to Leibnizian scholarship. Whereas Bertrand Russell and Couturat had been most interested in the place of logic within Leibniz's system, he was especially concerned to understand Leibniz's thought about the physical world and in particular how this developed in the formative years between Leibniz's visit to Paris in 1672 and his writing of the *Discourse* in 1686. In 1913 and 1915, not long after Leonard Russell had set up house in Glasgow, a Russian called Jagodinsky published and analysed some hitherto unpublished texts which seemed to show that if a reconstruction of Leibniz's development were based only on older collections of his papers it might be seriously at fault. Leonard Russell's ambition was to write a comprehensive survey of Leibniz's thought, but he felt, quite rightly, that it was impossible to do the work properly until all the papers of Leibniz preserved at Hanover, and all the evidence about their order of composition, had been made available. Soon after the first world war the Prussian Academy of Sciences, which was Leibniz's own creation, conceived a plan for publishing a complete edition of his work in about forty volumes, and orders for the series were invited in the middle twenties. But the leading workers in this project were driven from Germany when Hitler came to power, and for many years nothing could be done to

support it except by giving comfort and encouragement to those who had been expelled. This was presumably what the Council of the British Academy had in mind when it invited Paul Schrecker to give the Master Mind Lecture on Leibniz in 1937. Although publication of the Prussian Academy edition was resumed after the second world war when conditions in the Eastern Zone of Germany made this possible, the work is still very far from being finished, and it is therefore not possible, even now, to make sure that one has a clear and complete view of Leibniz's development. The long article on Leibniz which Leonard Russell contributed to the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* published in 1967 under the editorship of Paul Edwards is perhaps the best thing of its kind that can be produced in present circumstances, and it gives some idea of what he might have achieved if circumstances had been more favourable.

His strength as an expositor and interpreter of Leibniz derived from the breadth of his own interests. Leibniz was the last man of universal learning, and Leonard Russell, though not himself a universal genius, was better equipped than most philosophers of his time for sympathetic understanding of all the various interests of Leibniz, from mathematics and physics to jurisprudence and ecumenical reconciliation. The value of his work in this field was recognized by other philosophical scholars such as Clement Webb and Sir David Ross, and it brought him also the friendship of scholars in other disciplines. Among his papers on Leibniz there is one, for example, which he wrote as a contribution to a volume of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* published in honour of Grierson. Inevitably the course of events left him feeling frustrated, and he can scarcely have agreed with the Leibnizian doctrine that this is the best of all possible worlds, but he was not one to nourish a grievance against fate. On the contrary, all through his life he remained remarkably cheerful; and even when quite old he followed the discussions of his juniors with an appearance of friendly interest.

In 1923 Leonard Russell succeeded Broad as Professor of Philosophy at Bristol, but for family reasons he moved again in 1925 to Birmingham, and there he remained as Professor of Philosophy until his retirement in 1950. During this century the philosophy departments of English universities have never enjoyed the broad base provided by the Scottish seven subject degree in Arts, and in the twenties and thirties universities such as Bristol and Birmingham contained very few undergraduates who wished to take an honours degree in philosophy.

In most of the newer universities there were therefore only two teachers of the subject, a professor and a lecturer; and these had to justify their existence by attracting pupils to their first year 'intermediate' courses and giving as many 'service' lectures or optional extras as they could for other departments. Russell was convinced of the merits of the Scottish system within which he had spent most of his adult life, but he determined now to make the best of the English type of organization, and he worked hard to extend the influence of his subject by the only means available to him. A pupil who attended his classes in the late twenties, while reading English Literature under his friend Ernest de Selincourt, testifies to the liveliness of his teaching at this time and to the kindness of the interest he took in all for whom he had any responsibility. He was 'apparently never put out, never cross, below par, or liverish' but 'maintained a light-hearted demeanour and a constantly cheerful equanimity which refused to be provoked'. In accordance with his views on education in general and philosophical education in particular he encouraged discussion as much as possible and sometimes for this purpose tried the device of getting small groups of students to prepare joint reports on topics of the syllabus instead of writing individual essays. By such methods he even succeeded in attracting some students to follow more philosophical courses than were needed according to the regulations under which they hoped to acquire degrees in more bread-and-butter subjects, and in this connection his lectures on Plato are said to have been especially well attended.

As he had always hoped, such success eventually made possible some increase in the size of his department, and he showed extremely good judgement in his choice of new members for his staff. But the methods which produced the success involved a great output of energy, even for a person as extrovert and tireless as he seemed to be; and although they had the important result of persuading a number of young people to try to see their lives in better perspective, they did not bring many to share the curiosity which moved him to work on Leibniz and the theory of knowledge. When in retirement he looked back on this period of his teaching, he confessed sometimes to a feeling of disappointment. It was not that he thought the midlands 'sodden and unkind'. Birmingham was his native place and the place where he intended to die. But he had not found there among his students the intellectual liveliness which seemed common in Scottish universities when he was young, and he had not been

able to develop his philosophical teaching much beyond the protreptic level. If there was indeed the contrast which he thought he could detect, it was probably due in part to a very old difference between the ways in which the English and the Scots have regarded their universities, but certainly in part also to economic circumstances which affected both countries alike between the wars. Within the fifty years since he left Glasgow there have been social changes greater than in any other half-century of our history, and an incidental result of the enlargement of the civic universities of England since the second world war has been an improvement in the status of their philosophy departments.

From 1937 Russell served for six years as Dean or Acting Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and in this time he had some opportunities of advancing the educational causes he had at heart. It was, for example, in his period of office that Birmingham University, hitherto strictly secular in accordance with the terms of its foundation by Josiah Mason, acquired a chair of theology through the generosity of the Cadbury family. Russell was not a member of any church, but he thought that a university should provide for the scholarly study of religion, and for some years he had been a member of the Religious Study Circle connected with the Selly Oak Colleges. In general, however, his period of administrative office was a time for steadiness and hard work rather than for innovation, and again in the five years after the war during which he continued to teach, although there was a general willingness to expand the universities and make experiments, the chief need was to cope somehow or other with the problems raised by the influx of ex-service men. But in 1949 he was one of the three sponsors for the University College of North Staffordshire when this was established under the leadership of Lord Lindsay, whom he had known already in his student days at Glasgow, and he undertook this new responsibility with pleasure, because he was a firm believer in the merits of the old Scottish degree system and hoped that Lindsay's experiment at Keele might lead to permission for other universities to establish four-year courses. Unfortunately economic difficulties and the increasing pressure of demand for university places have made such reform impossible, so that we find ourselves condemned to make do with shorter university courses and earlier specialization than is thought proper in any other civilized country, although for various reasons our secondary schools have increasing difficulty in maintaining the standard of their teaching in

languages and mathematics, the 'grammar' subjects most necessary at that stage for children who will be able to profit later from university education.

In 1932 Russell was elected President of the Aristotelian Society and President also of the Mind Association. This is the only occasion on which the two offices have been held together by one person. During his year as temporary head of the philosophical establishment preparations were made for publication of a new periodical called *Analysis*, of which the first number was to appear in November 1933. Since it was intended that this should consist of short papers written by and for the Young Turks of philosophy, it would have been inappropriate that he should have appeared as a sponsor, but the editor was Austin Duncan-Jones who had been appointed by him to a lectureship on the recommendation of G. E. Moore and who was later to succeed him as professor. This was in fact an enterprise of the sort to which he gave consistent support, and when later in the thirties a small meeting of sympathizers was organized by Susan Stebbing to launch the Analysis Society, he was the oldest, but by no means the least enthusiastic, of those present.

Feeling perhaps that in England he was a missionary for philosophy *in partibus infidelium*, Russell was ready to speak on the subject to anyone who would listen, and soon after he had settled in Birmingham he gave a series of broadcast talks which became the basis of a small *Introduction to Philosophy* published in 1929. This was the fateful year in which Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge as Fellow of Trinity, but long before talks on philosophy had become a regular stop-gap in the Third Programme. In his old age Russell warned his friends of the perils of the microphone by telling how in Perth, Western Australia, where he had consented to speak on philosophy in the Women's Hour of the local broadcasting service, his address was preceded by practical hints from a beauty specialist and followed by a song called 'Come, Sweet Death'. But undeterred by such little things, he remained all his life a vigorous talker, glad to make new acquaintances among people who shared any of his interests.

As early as 1926 he was invited to speak to a gathering at Harvard, and in the summer of 1932 he went to Stanford University, California, as a visiting professor. Characteristically he chose to travel on each of these occasions by a roundabout route which would enable him to see more of the world and to

visit old friends on his way to keep his appointment. Mrs. Russell remembers going with him to Stanford by first crossing Canada on the railway (in order to stop off at Pincher Creek and see a Scottish schoolmaster) and then sailing into the United States by a boat from Vancouver to Seattle. But their most active travelling was done when their son and daughter were already grown up and they themselves had reached the age of retirement. In 1948, through the initiative of Sir Julian Huxley, a body called the International Institute of Philosophy was established under the auspices of Unesco for the special purpose of encouraging exchange of ideas between the philosophers of different cultures. Since this end was to be achieved partly through periodical discussions in different countries and partly through the publication of bibliographies, surveys, and translations, it was thought necessary that the Institute should consist of representative philosophers from a number of countries with not more than a few from any one. From the beginning Leonard Russell was an active representative of Britain, and in the time of his membership he attended meetings in many different places, from Amsterdam to Mysore, talking everywhere with vigour and good sense. In these journeys he made many friends. When, for example, he went to India in 1959, he combined attendance at the I.I.P. meeting with several months of lecturing for the British Council in the various universities of India and Ceylon and so got to know a number of their philosophers. But wherever he went, he was anxious also to learn about the people of the countries he visited. One of his colleagues recalls that when he visited Israel in his eighties he refused to 'waste' a Sunday in rest, as his hosts expected, but went off to see how life was lived in Tel Aviv. As if these activities were not enough to occupy his retirement, he went to Australia in 1951 as a Nuffield Foundation lecturer and to Singapore on two occasions several years later as an external examiner, once by sea and once by air. After his second journey to Singapore he managed also to revisit Australian universities and to call at Bangkok, Mauritius, and South Africa. In the year 1962-3 and again in 1966, when he was already eighty-two, he taught at Emory University, Georgia, as a visiting professor. All this was possible because he and Mrs. Russell, who accompanied him whenever possible, were seasoned travellers who had learnt how to make themselves comfortable with a portable tea kettle in any part of the world.

In 1954 Russell was elected to the Fellowship of the British Academy in recognition of the contributions he had made to

philosophical discussion and the work he had done for the stimulation and the organization of the study of philosophy. Among the various papers on subjects other than Leibniz which he had published in the previous thirty years it is not possible to say in retrospect of any one that it marked a turning-point in the development of philosophy, but he was near the centre of things for a long time, and the debates in which he took part, often at Joint Sessions of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association, did much to produce the lively development of British philosophy in the next generation. In the Supplementary Volumes of the Aristotelian Society *Proceedings* we find him writing in 1933, for example, of 'Substance and Process' and then next year discussing 'Communication and Verification' with Susan Stebbing. This was the time when the Positivists of the Vienna Circle had begun to influence English-speaking philosophers, and to those who were young at the time such topics as these seemed very important. Throughout that period his influence was liberal, inasmuch as he was ready to consider seriously the arguments of Carnap and Neurath but unwilling to swallow those parts of their positivist gospel that seemed silly.

When he was invited to give the Hertz Philosophical Lecture to the Academy in 1951, he began by saying

After studying Mathematics and Physics as an undergraduate, I decided to study Philosophy. My professor of Natural Philosophy was somewhat scornful. He quoted Archimedes: 'Give me a fixed point and I will move the earth.' 'You want to find a *ποῦ στῶ*', he said. 'I only want to know where I stand', I replied. And I still think the main significance of philosophical study lies in such contribution as it can make to our attempts to understand this our life, and to decide what attitude to adopt in it.

At this time, just after the end of his normal teaching career, he had come to the opinion that

some of the basic principles on which modern science rests are not themselves the expression of any insight into the facts, or into the fundamental nature of things, but rather express an attitude taken towards things, a determination to investigate the facts in certain ways rather than in others.

What he had particularly in mind when he wrote these words was the change in world-view which began in the seventeenth century with the rise of modern natural science, and he was right in thinking of this change among the leaders of thought as adoption of a new policy rather than explicit establishment of

a new thesis about the merits of inductive argument. But he may perhaps have been unnecessarily gloomy when he assumed, as he sometimes did, that principles or policies of the very general sort that interested him cannot be investigated usefully by the methods of conceptual analysis. Or rather, because his temperament was naturally cheerful and his interest in intellectual change primarily historical, he may perhaps have applied too soon the philosophical adage that justification must have an end somewhere. Certainly his intention was not that philosophy should become a branch of sociology in which talk about intellectual reasons for fundamental decisions would be replaced by talk about social causes of behaviour, but rather that philosophers should maintain their objectivity by realizing more fully than they have done the importance for all thinking of what he called a 'climate of opinion'.

WILLIAM KNEALE

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