# BERTRAND RUSSELL'S SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE VICTORIAN CRISIS OF FAITH, 1888-1914



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# BERTRAND RUSSELL AND THE VICTORIAN CRISIS OF FAITH

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## ABSTRACT

The present study may be viewed, at one level, as a spiritual biography of Bertrand Russell during the period from 1888 to 1914. I have taken as my starting-point Russell's adolescent speculations and subsequent abandonment of his childhood faith. This "loss of faith", one of the most characteristic cultural phenomena of the Victorian era, was a much more significant episode in Russell's life than his autobiographical writings have suggested. Like many of the mid-Victorian "honest doubters", he retained what Carlyle called the "aftershine of Christianity", a profound need for reverence and worship which could not be satisfied by a creed of scientific materialism.

I have traced the evolution of Russell's religious ideas from the time of these early struggles to his emergence as a spokesman for the "scientific outlook" in 1913-14. However, this is not intended to be a detailed analysis of Russell's religious philosophy. My aim has been primarily historical -- to examine the growth of these ideas in relation to the prevailing assumptions and dilemmas of the time.

Although this study puts forward concepts and information concerning Russell which, as far as I know, are

new, its chief claim to originality lies in the approach that has been adopted. By combining spiritual biography with what may be called psycho-historical analysis, I have tried to bring known facts and recognised attitudes into new relations with each other, thereby giving them fresh significance.

My conclusions have been based on an extensive analysis of the source materials available in the Bertrand Russell Archives, with particular reference to Russell's journals and personal correspondences. The range of secondary sources consulted includes selections from the literary works of the period, critical and historical material and biographies.

How hateful is the light of day to me
And all the weary tasks of daily life
Without that faith which ever led me on
And gave me hope through thickest clouds of pain.
The faith, that One above doth rule the world
In perfect equity and perfect love,
For all his creatures toiling here below
For then I felt that good must ever come
From all the misery and sin around,
And I did trust that man must ever move
Upward and onward toward the perfect life
But now I know not whether the world moves;
Evil may come of good, and sin and death
Hold sway as long as man shall live to suffer pain.

Bertrand Russell (Sonnet written in September, 1890)

Reverence and worship, the sense of an obligation to mankind, the feeling of imperativeness and acting under orders which traditional religion has interpreted as Divine inspiration, all belong to the life of the spirit. And deeper than all these lies the sense of a mystery half revealed of a hidden wisdom and glory, of a transfiguring vision in which common things lose their solid importance and become a thin veil behind which the ultimate truth of the world is dimly seen. It is such feelings that are the source of religion, and if they were to die most of what is best would vanish out of life.

Bertrand Russell (Principles of Social Reconstruction, 1916)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Hither and thither spins
The wind-borne, mirroring soul,
A thousand glimpses wins,
And never sees a whole;
Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last employ.

Matthew Arnold (Empedocles on Etna, 1852)

. . . Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.

E. M. Forster (Howards End, 1910)

Bertrand Russell's polemical attacks on religion and the impulses which make people religious have encouraged the belief that he was fundamentally hostile to any attitude to life which could be called "religious".[1] Russell himself has done little to discourage this interpretation. In a review of William James's essay "Pragmatism", Russell admitted that he belonged to the "tough-minded" school of British philosophers whose attitude to the world was summarized by James as "empiricist, sensationalistic, materialistic, irreligious, fatalistic, pluralistic, sceptical".[2] However, the most recent studies of Russell's religious attitude, in particular those of Ronald Jager and Duncan Martin, have strongly supported the view of his daughter, Katharine Tait, who described him as "a profoundly religious man, the sort of passionate moralist who would have been a saint in a more believing age".[3] These conflicting interpretations are not only an indication of the contra-

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[1]See, for example, Walter Kaufmann, Critique of Religion and Philosophy (London, 1958), pp. 30-34 and John Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Religious Thought (New York, 1963), pp. 230-232.

[2]Bertrand Russell, "William James's Conception of Truth" in Philosophical Essays (London, 1910), 128.

[3]Katharine Tait, My Father, Bertrand Russell

dictions in Russell's thought but also of the contradictions within the intellectual climate of his formative years. By the middle of the nineteenth century members of the "intellectual aristocracy" with religious temperaments were becoming increasingly disenchanted with the traditional forms of religious observance.[4] In an atmosphere of growing secularism and disbelief, advanced thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle were spreading a new gospel based on the conviction that a deep sense of religion was compatible with an entire absence of theology. Russell himself recognised the need to extricate "the religious attitude" from the entanglements of dogma. When he attempted to clarify his position he divided religion into three distinct aspects: personal beliefs as to the nature of the world and conduct of life; theology; and the institutionalized religion of the churches. The complexity of his attitude to religion derived from the fact that

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(London, 1976), p. 184. Cf. also Duncan Martin, "The Rôle of Love in Determining the Relgious Attitudes of Bertrand Russell", unpublished M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1978 and Ronald Jager, "Ethics and Religion" in The Development of Bertrand Russell's Philosophy (London, 1972), Ch. 10.

[4]Hugh McLeod traces the decline in church attendance and Sunday observance in Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City (London, 1974), esp. Ch. VIII, "The 'Chaos'".

> . . . although I consider some form of personal religion highly desirable and feel many people unsatisfactory through the lack of it, I cannot accept the theology of any well known religion and I incline to think that most churches at most times have done more harm than good.5

This statement is both illuminating and misleading. It tells us what Russell's religion is not; it has nothing to do with orthodox theology or the established church. On the other hand, its sanguine tone gives us no idea of the intensity with which he sought satisfaction for his religious impulses. That intensity is revealed in a letter he wrote in 1916 to Constance Malleson, one of the closest intimates of his life:

> The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain -- a curious, wild pain -- a searching for something beyond what the world contains, something transfigured and infinite -- the beautific vision -- God -- I do not find it, I do not think it is to be found -- but the love of it is my life . . . it's like passionate love for a ghost.6

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[5] P. A. Schilpp, ed., The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell (New York, 1951), p. 725. This statement was made in reply to E. S. Brightman's criticisms of Russell's philosophy of religion. In reply to Brightman's claim that Russell's need for something more than human was an experience of the divine, he wrote: "The fact that I feel a need for something more than human is no evidence that the need can be satisfied, any more than hunger is evidence that I shall get food. I do not see how any emotion can be evidence of something outside me".

[6] Bertrand Russell to Constance Malleson, October 23, 1916, Constance Malleson Papers. Bertrand Russell Archives.

It was these two aspects of Russell's thought which led his most perceptive biographer, Alan Wood, to describe him as a "passionate sceptic". While his intellect could be convinced that the non-human world was not worthy of worship, the logical outcome of such an attitude -- a "religion of humanity" -- did not satisfy his emotional need for non-human truth.[7] Although he was appalled by anthropomorphism, Russell was equally frustrated in his "vain search for God". This parallel tension between emotion and intellect, romanticism and scepticism, faith and belief ran "like a thread of torture" throughout Russell's life and work and ultimately determined the character and content of his religious thought. Of course, this conflict is by no means peculiar to Russell who observed in the essay, "Mysticism and Logic", that

> . . . . the attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought has been developed from the first by the union and conflict of two very different human impulses, the one urging men towards mysticism, the other urging them towards science. . . .8

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[7] In an essay entitled "My Mental Development" Russell wrote: "Those who attempt to make a religion of humanism, which recognizes nothing greater than man, do not satisfy my emotions. And yet I am unable to believe that, in the world as known, there is anything that I can value outside human beings. . . . And so my intellect goes with the humanists, though my emotions violently rebel". R. E. Egner and L. E. Dennon, eds., The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell (London, 1961), p. 48.

[8] Bertrand Russell, Mysticism and Logic (London, 1963), p: 9.

Nevertheless, Russell himself experienced much more conflict than union; my main contention is that the tension, in the peculiar form in which he experienced it, was, to some extent, a legacy of the mid-Victorian time-spirit. The most salient feature of this "Zeitgeist" was an increasing faith in science and its method which had, by the second half of the nineteenth century, begun to undermine the validity of a religious outlook on life. The nineteenth century has been viewed by most historians as the "locus classicus" of the religion-science conflict. In 1909, the French historian of ideas, Emile Boutroux, observed that during the nineteenth century a "radical dualism" between religion and science had established itself.[9] The tension between the "scientific spirit" and the "religious spirit" became so pervasive that it was chosen by some intellectuals as an underlying theme in the development of their ideas. Lord Acton, in his biography of George Eliot, described her novels as the emblem of "a generation distracted between the intense need of believing and the difficulty of belief".[10] Beatrice Webb appears to have inherited Eliot's perplexities.[11] In the introduction to

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[9]Emile Boutroux, Science and Religion in Contemporary Philosophy (London, 1909), p. 35.

[10]Quoted in W. E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (Yale University Press, 1957), p. 106.

[11]F. R. Leavis, in his introduction to Mill on

her autobiography, My Apprenticeship, she described her whole life as a struggle between two egos, "the Ego that denies and the Ego that affirms the validity of religious mysticism".[12] By the middle of the nineteenth century, the increasing respect given to the scientific, critical spirit was threatening not only religious orthodoxy but the legitimacy of religious feeling itself. Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill both stressed the dangers of an undue emphasis on the reasoning faculty and Thomas Hardy, like Arnold, put his faith in poetry as a solution to the Victorian dilemma:

> It may be a forlorn hope, a mere dream, that of an alliance between religion, which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality, which must come, unless the world is to perish, by means of the interfusing medium of poetry.[13]

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of Bertrand Russell's religious thought in the period 1888-1914 within the frame of this "mal du siècle".

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Bentham and Coleridge (London, 1950) and Samuel Hynes in Edwardian Occasions (London, 1972), pp. 153-171 both view Beatrice Webb as the spiritual descendant of George Eliot.

[12] Beatrice Webb, My Apprenticeship (London, 1926), p. xiii.

[13] Thomas Hardy, Late Lyrics and Earlier (London, 1922), p. xvii. Hardy described his career as an "infinite trying to reconcile a scientific view of life with the emotional and spiritual" -- J. I. M. Stewart has connected this aim with Hardy's transition from novels to poetry at the turn of the century: "The struggle between an intellect

I have attempted to show that Russell's perplexities were shared by many important contemporaries who found, like Russell, that the scientific spirit had shaped a world unfit for the habitation of the religious spirit. In "The Free Man's Worship", an attempt to find a solution to this problem, the author was describing a historical disaster, not simply a personal one. Russell called upon mankind to face the "facts" which science presented, and to realise fully the implications of the disparity between the course of nature and the values of man.

Russell's affinities with "emancipated Puritans" such as George Eliot, Matthew Arnold and William Hale White suggest that he never felt completely at home in a positivist, secular age. He turned to philosophy in the hope of discovering a unified system of belief which would enable him to see life steadily and whole. During this spiritual adventure, Russell found himself successively attracted to Wordsworthian nature-worship, Hegelian idealism and Spinoza's concept of "the intellectual love of God", the last of which proved to be the most satisfactory expression of the harmony he craved. But ultimately Russell was forced to admit that the universe which emerges from a scientific outlook on life was "without coherence or

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subdued to determinism and an imagination nourished upon the Christian assertion of spiritual and moral order wrought Hardy to poetry", Eight Modern Writers (Oxford, 1963), pp. 21-22.

orderliness or any of the other properties that governesses love".[14] Russell also loved these properties, but his dedication to the scientific method forced him to remain a fragmented being whose emotional impulses were resisted by a sceptical intellect.

Before embarking upon an examination of Russell's own pilgrimage, I have attempted to show the elements of continuity between Russell's perplexities and those of his mid-Victorian predecessors.

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[14] Bertrand Russell, The Scientific Outlook (London, 1931), p. 98.

## CHAPTER II

## THE VICTORIAN BACKGROUND

If e'er when faith had fallen asleep,
I heard a voice "believe no more"
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep;

A warmth within the breast could melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answered "I have felt".

No, like a child in doubt and fear:
But that blind clamour made me wise;
Then was I as a child that cries,
But, crying, knows his father near;

And what I am beheld again
What is, and no man understands;
And out of darkness came the hands
That reach through nature, moulding men.

Alfred Lord Tennyson
(In Memoriam, 1833-50)

The development of Bertrand Russell's religious thought can best be understood within the frame of the decline of religious belief and rise of the scientific spirit which were perhaps the most characteristic features of the Victorian Age. Russell later recognised that his adolescent perplexities had been "very much those of which one reads in Victorian biographies. Two things preoccupied me: one was religion, the other was doubt as to whether there is any indubitable knowledge. It was these two motives in conjunction that led me to the study of philosophy".[1]

The changes which formed the background to Russell's perplexities are naturally complex but certain basic trends can be discerned. W. E. Houghton has convincingly argued in The Victorian Frame of Mind that the rapid changes resulting from advances in science and technology, the growth of democracy and the decline of traditional religious

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[1]Bertrand Russell, My Own Philosophy (Hamilton, 1972), pp. 3-4. In Portraits From Memory (London, 1958), p. 14. Russell identified two motives in particular which led him to the study of philosophy: "The one which operated first and continued longest was the desire to find some knowledge that could be accepted as certainly true. The

belief were, by the middle of the nineteenth century, producing a peculiar mixture of anxiety and optimism among the Victorian intellectual aristocracy.[2] From the 1830s, the geological and biological discoveries of Lyell, Chambers and Darwin successively undermined the prevailing view of nature as the manifestation of a benevolent Deity. A year after the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) religious orthodoxy received another blow from the sphere of historical criticism. Works such as Essays and Reviews (1860) written by liberal churchmen and Renan's Life of Jesus (1863) cast doubt on the literal acceptance of the Bible through the application of scientific methods of historical research.[3] Darwin's evolutionary theory did not merely challenge religious orthodoxy. If man and his environment could be explained by purely natural laws acting mechanically, there could be no place for any spiritual view of life. Many Victorians found themselves

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other motive was the desire to find some satisfaction for religious impulses".

[2]This discussion of the Victorian background is largely indebted to the following studies: W. E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (Yale University Press, 1957); L. S. Stevenson, Darwin Among the Poets (New York, 1963); William Robbins, The Ethical Idealism of Matthew Arnold (Toronto, 1959) and Basil Willey, More Nineteenth Century Studies (London, 1956).

[3]Essays and Reviews strongly influenced both Kate Stanley and Viscount Amberley, Russell's parents, in their rejection of orthodox Christianity.

suddenly deprived of a religious explanation of the meaning of life and forced to accept, whether they liked it or not, a creed of scientific materialism. For some, the implications of evolutionary theory were a source of depression; the profound sense of isolation and alienation created by the "disappearance of God" was reflected in the poetry of Matthew Arnold and Arthur Clough.[4] Matthew Arnold's famous poem Dover Beach (1867), which bemoaned the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of the sea of faith, is representative of this fatalistic mood.[5] The theory of natural selection, by transferring the notion of an immutable law operating through the universe to the organic sphere seemed to remove the plan and purpose from life. For the poet Tennyson the implications of these scientific advances were unthinkable:

> O life as futile, then, as frail!
> O for thy voice to soothe and bless
> What hope of answer, or redress?
> Behind the veil, behind the veil. . . .[6]

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[4]The most explicit statements of the "mal du siècle" are to be found in Clough's Seven Sonnets and Arnold's Empedocles on Etna (1852).

[5]W. E. Houghton draws attention to the pervasiveness of this mood in the Victorian Era: "It is the mood of Werther and René, Oberman and Lélia . . . of Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh. It appears in Browning's Pauline and many of Tennyson's earlier poems from the 'Confessions' to In Memoriam and Maud. . . . For longer or shorter periods it swept over Sterling, Maurice, Robertson, Kingsley and Mill", The Victorian Frame of Mind, pp. 64-65.

[6]Alfred Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam (1833-50).

These lines are taken from the poem In Memoriam (1833-50), which is a striking example of the ambivalent reaction of the Victorian to the rise of the scientific spirit. Its popularity and influence indicate its representative quality:

> The Victorians loved it, and were moved by it, because it dealt seriously and beautifully with the very problems that most concerned them: problems arising from the gradual fading-out of the older spiritual lights in the harsh dawn of a new and more positive age.[7]

In Memoriam reveals the poet's fears that man might be a chance product of blind natural processes. But, despite his doubts, Tennyson concluded on an optimistic note, defining God as a loving being who was directing evolution towards beneficent ends. This ambivalence can also be discerned in the writings of W. K. Clifford who once recorded his melancholy feeling that he belonged to the generation which had seen "the spring sun shine out of an empty heaven, to light up a soulless earth; we have felt the utter loneliness that the Great Companion is dead".[8] And yet Clifford is more commonly remembered as an apostle of the generation which confidently believed in the reconstruction of society

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[7]Basil Willey, More Nineteenth Century Studies (London, 1956), p. 79.

[8]Quoted in W. E. Houghton, op. cit., p. 85.

on a scientific basis.[9] Evolutionary theory was frequently employed to confirm the paramount belief in progress and the perfectibility of man. Herbert Spencer based his "religion of science" on a Darwinian ethic, and philosophers such as Mill and Sidgwick similarly put their faith in positive science and a utopian vision of the future. But beneath the official progress-cult there remained a basic tension between the "traditional heart" and the "emancipated head":

> Whether to follow the critical mind whatever its destructive effect on religious faith or to follow the will to believe and abandon reason could become, for some Victorians, perhaps a majority of intellectuals, the two horns of a dilemma. They could do neither. No sooner had they concluded, under the influence of science and biblical criticism, that Christianity was a myth or that all supernatural religion was a delusion that they felt the hopes and consolations so deeply imbedded by the Bible readings and church services of their youth, not only still alive but renewing the more intensely as they were threatened with extinction.10

This underlying tension affected different personalities in different ways but sensitive intellectuals were conscious of a growing dualism between reason and feeling

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[9] In Cosmic Emotion (1877) Clifford predicted that man would "rationally organize society for the training of the best citizens. . . . Those who can read the signs of the times, read in them that the Kingdom of Man is at hand". Quoted in W. E. Houghton, op. cit., p. 35.

[10] W. E. Houghton, op. cit., p. 106.

and spent their lives attempting to find a satisfactory synthesis. A brief examination of three case studies -- John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold and Russell's own father Viscount Amberley -- will serve to illustrate Bertrand Russell's affinities with his mid-Victorian predecessors.

Viscount Amberley was a deeply religious individual.[11] After he lost his belief in orthodox Christianity in 1863, he devoted the rest of his life to the solemn purpose of finding a new faith which could satisfy his spiritual needs and yet withstand the cold glare of scientific analysis. His conclusions were published posthumously in a large book entitled An Analysis of Religious Belief (1876). His avowed aim, which was to become that of his son, was to prove that unbelief was "consistent with a deep and religious feeling and with goodness and purity of life".[12] Amberley considered the book an effective refutation of Christian dogma and warned

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[11] In his autobiography Bertrand Russell's brother, Frank, observed that "something in the Russell blood" prevented them from being indifferent to religious matters (My Life and Adventures [London, 1923], p. 334). This circumstance was possibly not unconnected with the fact that the formative years of Frank and Bertrand were dominated, like those of their father, by the influence of the rigidly puritanical Lady Russell.

[12] Letter to Kate Stanley, October 25, 1864. The Amberley Papers, edited by Bertrand and Patricia Russell (London, 1937), p. 338.

his readers that they might require more than a little courage:

> May those who find in it their most cherished beliefs questioned or condemned, their surest consolations set at nought, remember that he had not shrunk from pain and anguish to himself, as one by one he parted with portions of that faith which in boyhood and early youth had been the mainspring of his life.13

Amberley divides religion into two distinct elements -- faith and belief. Faith is defined as a term "of large and general signification" which refers to feeling rather than reason whereas belief involves the intellectual adoption of a definite proposition. The author, having justified the application of the scientific method in the name of "the mental progress of mankind", then proceeds to a detailed analysis of the various manifestations of religious belief using the relatively new techniques of ethnology and comparative religion.[14] Since none of these manifestations can be shown to be true by methods of logical demonstration, religion must be removed from the realm of positive belief and confined to "an abstract,

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[13]Viscount Amberley, An Analysis of Religious Belief (London, 1876), Address to the Reader.

[14]Amberley's little known work anticipated the use of comparative method made famous by James Frazer's Golden Bough (1890) and Leonard Hobhouse's Morals in Evolution (1907).

indefinable, pervading sentiment".[15] In order to avoid a radical dualism between religion and science Amberley invokes Herbert Spencer's concept of the "Unknowable", a first principle which can be penetrated by neither. Harmony is restored through contemplation of the "Unknowable", an activity which "does equal honour and accords equal rights to the scientific faculty and to the emotional instinct".[16]

Amberley was aware that adherence to this doctrine of nescience would require stoicism and courage in a universe which was seemingly indifferent to humankind. His conclusion is remarkably similar in content and style to Russell's essay "The Free Man's Worship" (1903). For Amberley, as for Russell, man can only achieve freedom by facing "the undoubted evil in the world" through faith in "everlasting Truth".[17] The adherents of the universal religion

> . . . will be willing, if need be, to remain in a world where their labour is not yet ended, even though that labour be wrought through suffering, despondency and sorrow; willing also, if need be, to meet the universal lot -- even

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[15] Ibid., p. 431.

[16] Ibid., p. 436.

[17] Ibid., p. 488.

> though it strike them in the midst of prosperity, happiness and hope; bowing in either case to the verdict of fate with unmurmuring resignation and fearless calm.[18]

Matthew Arnold saw a growing rift between sentiment and intellect as one of the worst symptoms of the "strange disease of modern life" and sought to rectify it by extracting the pure, poetic message from the Bible. His life and work were dominated by the desire to be a "healing and reconciling influence" between physical science and religion. Arnold was convinced that the "Hebrew old clothes" of traditional Christianity must be discarded because they were intellectually unfitted to withstand the assaults of modern science and the "Zeitgeist". This could only be achieved by extracting those permament and psychologically verifiable truths from Christianity which were indispensable to man's spiritual welfare. This search for

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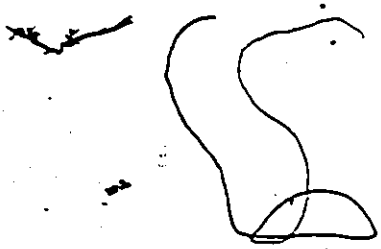
[18] Ibid., p. 496. This passage is striking in its similarity to the impassioned rhetoric used by Bertrand Russell in "The Free Man's Worship". Russell did not become acquainted with his father's thoughts until he discovered Amberley's journal in December 1893. He was then amazed to discover that his grandmother had attempted to obstruct Amberley's marriage to Kate Stanley in the same way as she had attempted to obstruct his own marriage to Alys Pearsall Smith. Russell discovered deep affinities with his father which he recorded in a letter to Alys -- ". . . it was almost uncanny: the very echo of my own thoughts, the repetition of the same events at the same age. . . . I could hardly have believed that I was not influenced by the knowledge" (Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, December 19, 1893) Alys Russell Papers. Original in the hands of Mrs. Barbara Halpern, Oxford (photocopy). Hereafter cited as A.R.P.



a pure, distilled religious outlook led Arnold to conclusions similar to those outlined in Bertrand Russell's essay "The Essence of Religion"(1912). Like Spinoza, whose Ethics strongly influenced both Russell and himself, Arnold based his religious philosophy on certain unassailable facts of human nature. Arnold accepted the basic stoical-Christian distinction between man's ordinary or passing self of sense, appetite and desire and man's higher or enduring self of reason, spirit and will. Russell, too, found man to be ". . . a strange mixture of God and brute, a battleground of two natures, the one particular, finite, self-centred, the other universal, infinite and impartial".[19]

In both cases, the passage from the ordinary, passing self to the higher or enduring self was found to be the essential process of self-development by which, in Spinozist language, man fulfils the law of his being and achieves "a life in harmony with the whole".[20] In Literature and Dogma (1873), Arnold concluded that the two most vital elements in Christianity, renunciation and love,

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[19] R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, eds., The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell (London, 1961), p. 565.

[20] Ibid., p. 567. The influence of Spinoza's "strong thought" on both Arnold and Russell will be considered in more detail in Chapter VI.

must be separated from "Aberglaube" or inessential "extra-beliefs". The same process of "distillation" can be found in "The Essence of Religion" in which Russell strove to disentangle what was of permanent value in Christianity from its "fettering dogmas". According to Russell there were "in Christianity three elements which it is desirable to preserve if possible: worship, acquiescence, and love".[21]

Matthew Arnold felt deeply the doubts and fears which lingered beneath the official Victorian cult of moral optimism. In his most famous poem Dover Beach (1867), he mourned the loss of his childhood faith which had been undermined by rationalism in the 1840s. The poem expressed Arnold's self-pity and pity for his fellow wanderers in a universe which has no special regard for mankind. This mood of cosmic melancholia was often shared by Russell, who mentioned this affinity in a letter to Ottoline Morrell: "Matthew Arnold, at one time, I found exactly what I wanted, and Dover Beach still expresses my feeling. . . ."[22] Al-

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[21] Ibid., p. 568.

[22] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, April 3, 1911. Ottoline Morrell Papers (original in the Humanities Research Centre, The University of Texas at Austin). Dover Beach and Russell's essay "The Free Man's Worship" (1903) are often cited as examples of cosmic melancholia. Russell's acknowledgement of his debt to Arnold suggests that his use of sea imagery in this essay in order to convey the loneliness of humanity in a hostile universe may have been

though Russell did not share Arnold's faith that poetry would eventually provide a substitute for religion, he came to believe that mathematics, by attaching emotion to knowledge, could play an equally important rôle. Dr. Gladys Leithauser has compared Russell's essay The Study of Mathematics (1907) with Arnold's earlier essay The Study of Poetry (1880) and suggested that Russell was, to some extent, consciously following the Arnoldian tradition:

> The similarities of concept and tone suggest Victorian sensibilities in the two writers, with Russell working as inheritor to enlarge certain concepts in the tradition that Arnold leaves. Arnold links poetry and religion; Russell links mathematics and religion. . . . Like Arnold, whose belief in the noble elevation of human character has roots in classical literature, Russell sees sources of the ideal in the writers of antiquity, quoting Plato's view of the "divine necessity" inherent in mathematics. . . .[23]

The affinities between Russell and John Stuart Mill are better known and documented. Both belonged to the British tradition of scepticism, empiricism and liberalism, sharing a common intellectual ancestry which included John

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inspired by Dover Beach. Cf. Russell's short piece entitled "The Ocean of Life" (c 1902), unpublished manuscript, Bertrand Russell Archives.

[23]Gladys Garner Leithauser, "Principles and Perplexities: Studies of Dualism in Selected Essays and Fiction of Bertrand Russell", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 1977, 52-53.

Locke, David Hume and Jeremy Bentham. Viscount Amberley was a disciple and friend of Mill, who was asked to become Russell's non-religious godfather. His mother remarked in a letter to a friend that there was "no one in whose steps I would rather see a boy of mine following in ever such a humble way, than in Mr. Mill's".[24] Walter Kaufmann has argued that neither Mill nor Russell showed any more concern with aesthetic or religious experience than their "tough-minded" predecessors, Bentham and Hume.[25] This was only true of Mill until his mental crisis and subsequent "conversion" at the age of twenty. In his Autobiography, Mill gives an account of the utilitarian education he received from his father which turned him into a Benthamite "reasoning machine". The resulting dissociation of intellect and feeling produced an inner tension which eventually brought him to the verge of suicide. In this mood of utter despondency, Mill realized that his education, by laying too much stress on intellectual analysis, had led to a frozen emotional existence. He now realized that

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[24]Quoted in R. W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell (London, 1975), p. 24.

[25]Walter Kaufmann, op. cit., p. 31.

> . . . the habit of analysis has a tendency to wear away the feelings: as indeed it has, when no other mental habit is cultivated, and the analysing spirit remains without its natural complements and correctives.[26]

His education had not created these feelings in sufficient strength "to resist the dissolving influence of analysis".[27] The depression was eventually lifted by reading the poetry of Wordsworth which melted the coldness away:

> What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of.[28]

Thus Mill felt Wordsworth's healing power and came to realize that the feelings must be cultivated and developed in harmony with the intellect. Like Arnold, Mill believed that poetry might prove as useful as religion once had been in supplying men with ideals beyond those which they actually found realized in human life.[29]

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[26] John Stuart Mill, Autobiography (Oxford, 1924), p. 116.

[27] Ibid., p. 117.

[28] Ibid., p. 125.

[29] Edward Alexander's Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill (New York, 1965) contains a detailed analysis of the process by which both Mill and Arnold came to view poetry as the religion of the future. (See esp. Ch. V "The Utility of Poetry".)

This episode in Mill's life is strikingly similar to Russell's own experiences between the ages of fifteen and sixteen. Like Mill, Russell was led through isolation and intellectual precocity to a morbid habit of analysis and deep depression. Russell's solitary speculations led him to a mechanical view of the universe which was intellectually satisfying but could provide no comfort to the soul. And like Mill, the depression was lifted, albeit temporarily, by the "Wordsworthian philosophy of natural beauty" through which the God of Nature became "an ever present influence, moulding my action and my thought, comforting me in dejection and soothing me in inquietude".[30] It was undoubtedly the similarity of their experiences under the influence of Wordsworthian nature-worship which prompted Russell to observe in a letter to Alys that Mill's Autobiography was "at the bottom of a great deal in me".[31]

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[30] "Greek Exercises" (Bertrand Russell Archives). See typescript p. 32.

[31] Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, July 8, 1894, A.R.P. In an essay on Mill, Russell observed that "morals and intellect were perpetually at war" in his thought. (Portraits from Memory [London, 1958], p. 118). Russell himself suffered acutely from this tension; it seems reasonable to suppose that this diagnosis was aided by his awareness of their temperamental affinities.

Viscount Amberley, Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill were all deeply affected by the consciousness that they were living in a critical, transitional era whose most disturbing characteristic was a growing rift between the "scientific spirit" and the "religious spirit". While they all believed that the growth of the modern scientific outlook was necessary for the progress of society, they were equally convinced that it should not undermine a religious outlook on life, which was necessary for man's happiness and moral well-being. At some time in their lives, they had all experienced a spiritual crisis which had brought home the need for a philosophy which, in Amberley's words, would do "equal honour and accord equal rights to the scientific faculty and to the emotional instinct". Whether it was Amberley's "Unknowable First Cause", Arnold's "Eternal Not Ourselves Which Makes for Righteousness" or Mill's belief in the vivifying effect of poetry, these were all responses to a deeply felt need to see life steadily and whole. Mill and Arnold in particular were conscious of the need for synthesis. Mill believed that whoever could combine the methods and premises of Bentham and Coleridge, the utilitarian and the romantic, would "possess the entire English philosophy of his age".[32]

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[32] F. R. Leavis, ed., op. cit., p. 102.

Arnold wrote in a similar vein:

> It might be fairly urged that I have less poetical sentiment than Tennyson and less intellectual vigour and abundance than Browning; yet, because I have perhaps more of a fusion of the two than either of them, and have more regularly applied that fusion to the main line of modern development, I am likely enough to have my turn, as they had had theirs.33

These frequent demands for synthesis, fusion or harmony bespeak a common malaise; they were a reflection, in part, of the inner conflict experienced by intellectuals who found that the human mind had shaped a world unfit for the human spirit. Bertrand Russell's affinities with his mid-Victorian predecessors strongly suggest that the parallel tension in his thought between emotion and intellect was, in part, his own personal experience of the "mal du siècle". In the following chapters, I will attempt to show how the need for harmony between what Russell variously called "the true and the beautiful", "mysticism and logic" and "instinct, mind and spirit" determined the character and content of his religious thought in the period 1888-1914.

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[33]Quoted in Edward Alexander, op. cit., p. 11. Cf. Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (New York, 1955). In this biography, Trilling argues that Arnold's attractiveness for many Victorians lay in his "reconciliation of rationalism and faith" (pp. 193-194).

# CHAPTER III

## GREEK EXERCISES

He too upon a wintry clime,
Had fallen -- on this iron time
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.
He found us when the age had bound
Our soul in its benumbing round;
He spoke and loos'd our heart in tears.
He laid us as we lay at birth
On the cool flowery lap of earth,
Smiles broke from us and we had ease,
The hills were round us, and the breeze
Went o'er the sun-lit fields again;
Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.

Matthew Arnold (Memorial Verses, 1850)

When I first read Wordsworth I saw God in Nature. As I grew older I felt a difficulty in saying so much.

William Hale White (Last Pages from a Journal, 1915)

Bertrand Russell was born on May 18, 1872. His parents did not live long enough to infect him with ideas which had been formed in reaction to Victorian rigidity and hypocrisy: his mother died when he was two years old and his father died two years later. Amberley had left instructions that two tutors, who were both atheists, should act as guardians to Bertrand and his brother Frank. This arrangement horrified Amberley's parents who had the will set aside and the boys transferred to their home at Pembroke Lodge where they were to enjoy "the benefits of a Christian upbringing".[1] Thus Russell was subjected to the same early influences which moulded his father's character and outlook, a circumstance which contributed to a later feeling that he was re-living Amberley's life.[2]

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[1]Bertrand Russell, "My Mental Development" in R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, op. cit., p. 38. In another essay entitled "My Religious Reminiscences", Russell wrote that his parents "were considered shocking in their day on account of their advanced opinions in politics, theology and morals", ibid., p. 31.

[2]See Chapter I, note 18. Also The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell (London, 1967), I, 82. Hereafter referred to as A.B.R.

The atmosphere in which Russell grew up was one of rigid Puritan piety. Both he and his brother were subjected to an austere regime which included regular cold baths, family prayers, hymn-singing and food of "Spartan simplicity". Frank Russell later recalled that the atmosphere at Pembroke Lodge had been "one of halting, of diffidence, of doubts, fears and hesitations, reticences and suppressions and of a sort of mournful Christian humility".[3] After the death of Earl Russell when Bertrand was six, his grandmother's strict moral code completely dominated his childhood and adolescence. Lady John Russell was a Scottish Presbyterian whose liberal attitude in politics and theology was balanced by an extreme strictness in matters of morality. This combination of attitudes encouraged her to become a Unitarian at the age of seventy. The doctrinal details of the religion which Russell was taught by his grandmother do not seem to have been considered of paramount importance; he was taken to the Presbyterian church and the Parish church on alternate Sundays and taught at home a simple version of Unitarianism.[4]

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[3]Frank Russell, op. cit., p. 11.

[4]Duncan Martin has argued that Lady John Russell was deeply influenced by the most progressive Unitarians, in particular W. E. Channing and James

Lady Russell viewed religion as a system of moral imperative rather than divine revelation. The cornerstone of her moral code was the conviction that conscience, which was the Voice of God, must be followed as an infallible guide in all practical difficulties. Russell later remembered "being told, if I was tempted, to appeal to God for help and he would dispel the temptation and I remember using this device successfully several times. . . ."[5] Although, in conformity with Unitarian principles, doctrines involving man's innate sinfulness were not inculcated, Lady Russell's insistence on the supremacy of individual conscience gave him a strong sense of sin and evil. He recorded in his

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Martineau, who aimed to promote a more benevolent view of God and human nature by attacking the doctrines of the Fall, the Atonement and eternal punishment (op. cit., pp. 17-24). This view conflicts with that of Katharine Tait who wrote that in Lady Russell's religion ". . . the only form of Christianity my father knew well, the life of this world was no more than a gloomy testing ground for future bliss. All hopes, all joys were centered on the life after death and were to be achieved only by increasing warfare against evil in oneself and others" (op. cit., p. 183). Lady Russell's religion appears to have been a peculiar mixture of Unitarian "healthy mindedness" and morbid Presbyterian scrupulosity.

[5]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, February 21, 1894, A.R.P. In the same letter, Russell compared his experience to Alys's Quaker upbringing: "I was taught the same simple religion thee was, a reverence for Christ as Perfect Man and a belief in the same sort of God thee was taught to believe in".

autobiography that his favourite hymn had been "Weary of earth and laden with my sin".[6] His grandmother's absolute faith in moral intuition was backed up with biblical texts such as "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil", a maxim which continued to influence him after he had abandoned his orthodox religious beliefs.[7] Russell's recollections suggest that his religious upbringing provided him with moral stability and that he honestly endeavoured to let his actions and impulses be guided by the "inner voice". But, from the age of eleven, when he was first introduced to the study of mathematics, his belief in the divine value of conscience began slowly to be undermined by the opposing claims of reason.[8]

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[6] A.B.R., I, 28.

[7] In a review of Russell's religious philosophy, A. S. Pringle-Pattison compared Russell's religious attitude to "the old-fashioned saying that the voice of conscience is the voice of God" since "God, according to Russell is the creation of our own conscience, created by our love of the good". Pringle-Pattison's insights underline the lasting impact of Russell's religious upbringing ("The Free Man's Worship': A Consideration of Mr. Bertrand Russell's Views on Religion", Hibbert Journal, 12 [Oct. 1913], 47-63).

[8] Although progressive Unitarians such as James Martineau preached that free rational thought and conscience were equally essential as guides to the truth underlying religion and morality, Lady Russell who, according to Russell was "anti-intellectual from belief in moral intuition", spurned reason in favour of conscience and never tired

Apart from the tenets of Unitarianism Russell imbibed from the Pembroke Lodge atmosphere a faith in science and its method which was not considered incompatible with piety. Under the influence of his Uncle Rollo, who was fond of composing modern scientific psalms "using the biblical psalm metres, but bringing in scientific references to atmosphere pressure, 'contending' atoms and the nineteenth century ether which 'beareth messages from matter through all creation'" his scientific and critical instincts began to germinate.[9] Darwinism, which had been adapted to accommodate Victorian faith in progress by Herbert Spencer and others, was taken for granted at Pembroke Lodge. When, at the age of thirteen, a tutor informed him that he could not be both a Christian and a Darwinist, he was unable to believe that they were incompatible but felt inclined to follow the scientific impulse: "I was already clear that, if I had to choose, I would choose Darwin".[10] His study

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of repeating the saying: "What is mind?" -- No matter. What is matter? -- Never Mind."

[9] Alan Wood, Bertrand Russell: The Passionate Sceptic (London, 1957), pp. 17-18.

[10] R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, op. cit., p. 32.

of mathematics, to which he had been introduced two years earlier, had intoxicated him to the extent that "I began to despise everything else . . . I though of mathematics as the key to science and science as the liberator of the intellect from superstition".[11] He found his faith confirmed by W. K. Clifford's Common Sense of the Exact Sciences, a work which was inspired by the author's conviction that the society of the future would be rationally organised on mathematical foundations. Russell shared Clifford's confident belief that a proper understanding and application of mathematics would lay to rest such "old ghosts" as sin, conscience, and divine inspiration.[12] Inspired by these possibilities, he became increasingly less impressed with the Unitarians' attempts to infuse new life into Christianity:

> We stand in want of a new Luther, to renovate (renew faith) and invigorate Christianity, and to do what the Unitarians would do if only they had a really great man such as Luther to lead

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[11] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, September 28, 1911.

[12] Ibid. Cf. Russell's preface to the New York 1946 edition, ix: "In this beneficent process rational knowledge was to be the chief agent, and mathematics, as the most completely rational kind of knowledge, was to be in the van. This faith was Clifford's, and it was mine when I first read his book; in turning over its pages again, the ghosts of old hopes rise up to mock me".

> them. For religions grow old like trees, unless reformed from time to time. Christianity of the existing kinds has had its day. It wants a new form in accordance with science and yet helpful to the good life.13

This confidence in the dictates of reason led the young Russell into conflict with his grandmother. When he came to consider the problem of ethics at the age of fourteen, it became immediately self-evident that the principle of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" was a much more reliable guide for human conduct than the vagaries of conscience. When he proudly announced that he had become a Utilitarian his grandmother ridiculed him so remorselessly that he resolved never again to share his perplexities with other members of the family. The need for secrecy increased his sense of loneliness and estrangement which occasionally became so unbearable that he contemplated suicide, an urge he restrained because he "wished to know more of mathematics".[14]

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[13]Bertrand Russell, "Greek Exercises", unpublished notebook (1888-89), Bertrand Russell Archives. The version published in Russell's autobiography (Vol. I, pp. 47-55) is incomplete. "Greek Exercises" will hereafter be referred to as G.E.

Russell's observations on the Unitarians are similar to those of William Hale White (1831-1913) who found that, despite their "free thought lineage", the Unitarians were a "petrified set" whose theology "stands in need of a reformation greater than that of Luther's". The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford (London, 1881), pp. 127-8.

[14]A.B.R., I, 43.

At the age of fifteen, at a time when his growing scepticism was leading him to question the fundamental precepts of his religion, Russell experienced mystical yearnings which made him struggle to retain as much as possible of his orthodox beliefs. Thus far the analyzing and questioning habit had developed unimpeded but now he began to "notice beauty in nature, to read poetry and to care about religion".[15] As a consequence, he experienced an almost unbearable conflict between the impulse towards science and the impulse towards mysticism, two opposing trends which he later confessed were "almost equally passionate and made equal claims upon my allegiance".[16] In a notebook disguised as "Greek Exercises" Russell set out to examine the arguments for and against free will, immortality and the existence of God. When he began this pilgrimage, he hoped that his religious beliefs could be reconciled with scientific knowledge but was nevertheless determined not to be influenced by what he wanted to believe:

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[15] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, September 28, 1911. Russell recalled in a letter to Alys how he had "struggled and turned and twisted things in my mind, in the hopes of keeping my faith" (Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, September 7, 1894).

[16] Bertrand Russell, Fact and Fiction (New York, 1962), p. 47.

> . . . in finding reasons for believing in God I shall only take account of scientific arguments. This is a vow I have made which costs me much to keep, and to reject all sentiment.17

The arguments and conclusions set down in the "Greek Exercises" were mainly influenced by Russell's study of the laws of dynamics and Darwinian evolutionary theory. It was the latter which had convinced him that he must follow reason and not conscience, the product of the instinct for self-preservation and the educational methods which that instinct had created. It would therefore be absurd to follow blindly "the instincts inherited partly from my ancestors and gained gradually by them owing to a process of natural selection. . . ."[18] The fact that the action of force on matter was controlled by the laws of dynamics convinced him of the soundness of the First Cause argument but he could discover no arguments in favour of God's beneficence, a loss of faith which he found deeply distressing:

> What a much happier life mine would be but for these wretched ideas of mine about theology . . . tonight Granny prayed a beautiful prayer for me . . . in which . . . she said: May he especially be taught to

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[17] G.E., March 19, 1888.

[18] G.E., April 29, 1888.

> know God's infinite love for him. Well that is a prayer to which I can heartily say Amen. . . . For according to my ideas of God we have no particular reason to suppose he loves us. For he only set the machine in working order to begin with and then left it to work out its own necessary consequences.19

On the basis of the First Cause argument and "the evolution theory" which he regarded as "practically proved", Russell came to disbelieve in both free will and immortality. This led him to the painful but inevitable conclusion that man was simply an automaton, a physico-chemical organism cruelly endowed with consciousness, "a mere perishable chemical compound whose character and his influence for good or for evil depend solely and entirely on the particular motions of the molecules of his brain. . . ." Not only the arguments themselves but the language he used show the extent to which the young Russell had been imbued with the "scientific spirit". And, like many other Victorians, he had to face the purposeless, mechanistic universe which had emerged from eighteenth century rationalism combined with Darwinism. Then was "man destined to perish utterly after he has been so many ages evolving?"[21] Like

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[19] G.E., May 8, 1888.

[20] G.E., April 14, 1888.

[21] Ibid.

Tennyson, Russell felt compelled to ask this question but, unlike the poet, felt inclined to answer it in the affirmative: "We cannot say, but I prefer that idea to God's having needed a miracle to produce man and now leaving him free to do as he likes".[22] He was shocked by the views of a Unitarian minister, Mr. Muirhead, who argued in a sermon that, owing to scientific advances, immortality would have to be a matter of faith rather than belief. This confirmed his suspicion that the Unitarians' outlook was not sufficiently scientific:

> I should like to know what he meant. The only meaning I could think of was though his reason told him the contrary his inner conscience told him of the falseness of its conclusions. It is said that even such people as the unitarians have not got over all old supersititions, and come to follow pure reason.23

Russell turned for inspiration to the poetry of Wordsworth and Tennyson but discovered with dismay that they too had not freed themselves from sentiment. Although he was deeply moved by the beauty of Tennyson's In Memoriam, he could not accept the poet's argument that inner conviction of immortality outweighed all rational disputation. As we have seen, Russell could not share his

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[22] Ibid.

[23] G.E., May 6, 1888.

confidence in the "inner voice, this God-given conscience which made Bloody Mary burn the Protestants".[24] Although he agreed with Tennyson that redress could only be sought "behind the veil", he thought the poet would have done better to "add that it is a veil never to be lifted".[25] Wordsworth's Ode on Intimations of Immortality was similarly dismissed as sentimental nonsense. The crucial lines of the poem in which Wordsworth trusted that "The soul which rises with us, our life's star, / Has elsewhere its setting and cometh from afar," were disproved by the established fact of mental inheritance showing "that our soul comes from our parents and not, as Wordsworth says, from God".[26]

As his "former undoubted beliefs" slipped away from him one by one, Russell sank further into a mood of morbid despondency. Like John Stuart Mill, he began to view the search for truth as a necessary cause of suffering.[27] He became nostalgic for the stability of his childhood when

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[24] G.E., April 29, 1888.

[25] G.E., July 31, 1888.

[26] Ibid.

[27] See Edward Alexander, op. cit., pp. 112-113.

reason and conscience had been in harmony, a perfect state epitomized by Tennyson's blending of evolution and mysticism in In Memoriam:

> Let knowledge grow from more to more
> But more of reverence in us dwell
> That mind and soul according well
> May make one music as before
> But vaster. . . .28

But his analysis had revealed that these lines, the finest he knew, represented an unattainable ideal.

Russell's "Greek Exercises" can be divided into two distinct parts. The entries we have been examining were written between March and July 1888. However, the journal resumes with one final entry in April 1889 whose content shows that Russell had undergone a significant transformation during the intervening period. This entry deserves to be quoted at length since it represents Russell's first awareness of the value of impartial contemplation:

> Nature worship. When it first occurred to me to doubt the existence of God I contented myself with the answer that order and government prevail throughout nature, showing signs of a ruling intelligence. . . . This argument still appears to me perfectly satisfying to the intellect, but to the soul it is insufficient. It makes belief in God a mere intellectual inference, which has no more bearing on practical life than the conservation of energy or any other great scientific generalization. It cannot feed the

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[28]G.E., May 20, 1888.

> soul or sustain it in times of despondency; indeed it does not ever give any insight into the attributes of God.- But as I grew fonder of nature, and came more in harmony with her spirit, till I could fancy I heard the music of the spheres, a new aspect of God burst in upon me. In the calm of the moon, in the peace and silent vastness of the stars, in the boundless freedom of the ocean . . . in all these a soul appeared, with which my soul could commune, if but imperfectly. . . . Thus God has become a part of my life, an ever present influence, moulding my action and my thought, comforting me in dejection and soothing me in inquietude. Whether this faith be mere poetic sentimentalism, as a year ago I should have pronounced it, I know not; but this I do know, that it brightens my life and harmonizes with all my highest.29

There can be little doubt that this transformation from despondency to psychological well-being, whether sudden or gradual, was influenced by the poetry of William Wordsworth. Duncan Martin has concluded on the basis of a detailed examination of the phrases Russell used in this passage that the imagery is "unmistakably Wordsworthian".[30] Furthermore, the use of the expression "nature-worship" suggests the influence of Wordsworth more than any other romantic poet. In fact such elaborate methods of identification are not necessary. Although the only specific allusions to Wordsworth in the "Greek Exercises" were scathing condemnations of his ideas on immortality, Russell

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[29] G.E., April 1889.

[30] Duncan Martin, op. cit., pp. 59-60, note 154.

mentioned his debt in a later letter to Alys. He recalled how he

> . . . used to sit in the woods on Hurst Hill in the early morning and read Byron or Wordsworth or Milton and try to believe in the Wordsworthian philosophy of natural beauty -- with a momentary success which gave me keen pleasure, but soon vanished.31

A number of historians have drawn attention to the "healing power" of Wordsworth's poetry over Victorians suffering from an overdose of the scientific spirit.[32] The case of John Stuart Mill, who recovered his spiritual health under the influence of Wordsworth, has already been examined. Mill was not the only Victorian to discover the happiness of tranquility and contemplation through the medium of Wordsworth; George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, Leslie Stephen, William Hale White and John Morley all claimed that Wordsworth had influenced their development.[33] Matthew Arnold's "Memorial Verses" written in honour of Wordsworth acknowledge the debt of his generation to the poet who had shed "On spirits that had long been dead, / Spirits dried up and closely furl'd, / The freshness of the

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[31]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, September 28, 1894. A.R.P.

[32]See, for example, Basil Willey, Christianity Past and Present (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 100-106; Lionel Trilling's lecture "Wordsworth and the Iron Time" in Gilbert T. Dunklin, ed., Wordsworth: Centenary Studies Presented at Cornell and Princeton Universities (London, 1963), pp. 131-152 and W. E. Houghton, op. cit., pp. 267-268.

[33]Basil Willey, Christianity Past and Present, p. 102.

early world." With the exception of Mill, these "eminent Victorians" found in Wordsworth's religion of nature a temporary or permanent refuge after they had been forced to abandon their orthodox religious beliefs. According to Basil Willey, Wordsworthian nature-worship "became for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the most considerable alternative or rival to orthodox Christianity".[34] For many honest doubters, the heavenly truth reflected in nature contrasted very favourably with the spiritual redundancy of mid-Victorian Puritanism. The best account of Wordsworth's religious influence is that of William Hale White, a dissenting minister who, like Russell, had experienced the desiccating effect of Unitarianism. For Hale White, Wordsworth's

> . . . real God is not the God of the Church, but the God of the hills, the abstraction Nature, and to this my reverence was transferred. . . . God was brought from the heaven of the books, and resided on the downs visible in the far-away distances, seen from the top of the hill and every cloud shadow which wandered across the valley. Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every religious reformer has done -- he recreated my Supreme Divinity, substituting a new and living spirit for the old deity, once alive but gradually hardened into an idol.[35]

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[34] Ibid. We are, of course, only referring here to the intellectual élite.

[35] William Hale White, op. cit., p. 24.

Russell, like Hale White, discovered through communion with nature a "new aspect of God" which had hitherto eluded him. In Wordsworth's philosophy the Deist's God, which was merely an intellectual abstraction, was transformed into a living presence. Thus, as the spirit of nature breathed new life into the First Cause, Russell's mechanical materialism was transfigured and became emotional pantheism. As Russell reported to Alys, the resulting harmony between intellect and emotion brought him "keen pleasure, but soon vanished".

Russell's belief in the Wordsworthian God of Nature, in spite of the comfort it gave him, could not long survive his ruthless intellectual scrutiny. He might have argued that, since Nature contained disease and pain as well as beauty, nature-worship was, as he had suspected, "mere poetic sentimentalism".[36] As the habit of analysis reasserted itself, he came to realise that the Wordsworthian faith was

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[36] In My Philosophical Development (New York, 1959), Russell recalled that alongside his rationalistic temper he had "a very vivid emotional attitude for which I could find no intellectual support. I regretted my loss of religious belief; I loved natural beauty with a wild passion; and I read with sympathetic feeling, though with very definite intellectual rejection, the sentimental apologies for religion of Wordsworth, Carlyle and Tennyson", p. 35. This recollection sacrifices accuracy for lucidity; as we have seen, Russell did, during the spring of 1889, "believe in the Wordsworthian philosophy of natural beauty" (my emphasis).

insufficiently scientific.[37] In this mood, Russell found the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley more congenial to him. In his autobiography, Russell recalled the moment when he first discovered Shelley:

> I came upon Shelley by accident. One day I was waiting for my Aunt Maude in her sitting-room at Dover Street. I opened it at Alastor, which seemed to me the most beautiful poem I had ever read . . . and I spent all my spare time reading him, and learning him by heart . . . I used to reflect how wonderful it would have been to know Shelley, and to wonder whether I should ever meet any live human being with whom I should feel so much in sympathy.[38]

Russell found Shelley's poetry more intoxicating than that of Wordsworth partly because it combined an attitude of religious veneration and devotion with scientific truth: Shelley did not, like other romantic poets, "offend my intellectual taste by accepting conventional beliefs for which there seemed to be no good evidence".[39] In Alastor, he suggested that immortality was merely wishful thinking; that "the human

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[37] On May 31st, 1890, Russell noted in another private journal that ". . . all the arguments for immortality seem to be to be of a vague poetic nature, such as that put forward in Wordsworth's ode, while the arguments on the other side, though scarcely convincing are, I am afraid, far more scientific" (unpublished Journal 1890-94, Bertrand Russell Archives). Quoted with the permission of the Bertrand Russell editorial project.

[38] A.B.R., I, 40. Duncan Martin suggests that Russell made this discovery soon after writing the final entry in his "Greek Exercises" in April 1889. (Duncan Martin, op. cit., p. 71).

[39] Bertrand Russell, Fact and Fiction (New York, 1962),

heart, / Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave, / Sees its own treacherous likeness there".[40] In the preface to Alastor, the poet insisted that "the self-centred seclusion" of nature-worship must be ultimately unsatisfying to the soul and that man can only realize his higher self and achieve union with the universe through the medium of human communion. Duncan Martin, in a detailed examination of the impact of Shelley's poetry on Russell, has convincingly argued that Alys Pearsall Smith, with whom Russell fell in love at first sight in August 1889, was "the incarnation of the 'veiled maid' of Alastor".[41] Shelley had revealed to Russell that human love was the medium through which man approached "the white radiance of Eternity".[42] He was particularly impressed by the poet's shorter love-poems and "longed to experience the emotions they expressed even when they were painful".[43] However, Russell did not fully

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p. 11. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson worshipped Shelley for his ". . . clearly logical mind, a courage of conviction almost unique, and a burning passion for truth which is only not appreciated because it is of all passions the rarest. . . ." Quoted in E. M. Forster, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (London, 1962), p. 38.

[40]Quoted in Ellsworth Barnard, Shelley's Religion (Minnesota, 1936), p. 201.

[41]Duncan Martin, op. cit., p. 71.

[42]Ellsworth Barnard, op. cit., p. 238.

[43]Fact and Fiction, p. 10.

understand the Shelleyan "religion of love" until the autumn of 1893, when his love for Alys became something more than distant admiration and he confessed to her that, until that time, he could not believe in any "romantic theory" of love.[44] Nevertheless, the first four lines of a sonnet he composed in December 1889 show the extent to which he had become disenchanted with nature-worship:

> O weary soul, that seekest for more light,
> And finds't but broken fragments of the truth,
> That feels't a vague and undefined desire
> For something greater than this earth can give. . . .[45]

Russell's excursion into Wordsworthian nature-worship did much more than provide him with a brief respite from mechanical materialism. The experience of emotional pantheism had temporarily realised an ideal which he had thought unattainable after the loss of his orthodox religious beliefs. The memory of this brief period of internal harmony and the discovery that he could find release from self through impartial contemplation had a lasting effect on Russell. In January 1891, at the beginning of his second term at Cambridge, when he looked back nostalgically to

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[44]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, March 8, 1912.

[45]Unpublished Journal 1890-94. In an entry on January 18, 1891, Russell commented that this sonnet had been ". . . written under the influence of feelings over which the intellect had for the moment lost control".

> . . . the spring of 1889, when I worshipped nature with an emotional pantheism and felt my faith renewed by "sunset and its gorgeous ministers and solemn midnight's tingling silentness". . . . I despair of ever regaining the moral and intellectual elevation which I had then reached.46

Although Russell, a child of the scientific "Zeitgeist", had to abandon such sentimental pantheism, he returned to nature-worship in his more mystical moods. In a letter of March 8, 1912 to his lover Ottoline Morrell we find him still wondering

> . . . whether the impartial worship is nonsense. I don't think so . . . there is a kind of attitude of awe and mystery one sometimes feels to everything -- I think Wordsworth has it. . . . One can feel it for rocks and streams, and moss, for falling leaves, clouds, stars, everything --47

In August 1890, the last shred of Russell's orthodoxy dropped away. He discovered in a passage in Mill's Autobiography that the First Cause argument was refuted by the question "Who made God?" At first the prospect of a godless universe seemed unbearable:

> To feel that the universe may be hurrying blindly towards all that is bad, that humanity may any day cease its progressive development . . . that Evolution has no necessarily progressive principle prompting it; these are thoughts which render life almost intolerable.48

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, March 8, 1912.

[48] Unpublished Journal 1890-94, entry on August 31, 1890.

This mood of cosmic gloom lasted until he went up to Cambridge University in October, where he found, to his surprise, "a large agnostic element".[49]

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The historical significance of Russell's adolescent perplexities lies more in their typicality than in their novelty. By the 1880s, the "scientific spirit" had become thoroughly pervasive, Darwin's theory was "practically proved" and the young Russell duly vowed not to accept a theological proposition "unless there is the same kind of evidence for it that would be required for a proposition in science".[50] In the 1850s the issue had not been so clear-cut: Viscount Amberley, who received a similar religious upbringing to that of his son, did not question his orthodox religious beliefs until the age of twenty. However, Victorian intellectuals who were adolescents in the 1870s and 1880s found their childhood faith undermined at a much earlier age. A brief examination of the experiences of three of these -- Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), Beatrice Webb (1858-1943), and J. M. Synge

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[49] Ibid., November 20, 1890.

[50] A.B.R.; I, 41.

(1871-1909) -- who, like Russell, left a detailed record of their early theological difficulties, will serve to illutrate the corrosive effect of the scientific "Zeitgeist".

For Havelock Ellis, the process of disintegration began when he read Renan's Life of Jesus (1863), a work of biblical criticism, at the age of fifteen. Ellis soon became convinced that theology was a thing of the past, and science the religion of the future. At the age of seventeen, the last vestige of his orthodox Christianity fell away when he read D. F. Strauss's The Old Faith and the New (1872). Although Strauss's creed of scientific materialism seemed to present a sound view of the world, it could provide no satisfaction for his religious impulses:

> . . . I had the feeling that the universe was represented as a sort of factory filled by an inextricable web of wheels and looms and flying shuttles, in a deafening din. That, it seemed, was the world as the most competent scientific authorities declared it to be made. It was a world I was prepared to accept, and yet a world in which, I felt, I could only wander restlessly, an ignorant and homeless child.[51]

In this mood of disillusionment, Ellis found consolation in the poetry of Shelley. According to his biographer, he regarded Shelley "as the intense Christian

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[51]Havelock Ellis, The Dance of Life (Cambridge, 1929), p. 205.

regards Jesus, as the Hope of the World and for the next decade he read everything that he could find, biographical or critical, about Shelley".[52]

But the poet who "refused to mourn the death of God" could not provide a complete cure.[53] Ellis found himself hopelessly torn between "the outlook of Darwin and Huxley" and "the divine vision of life and beauty which for me had been associated with the religion I had lost".[54]

Beatrice Webb's religious doubts began at the age of fourteen. On December 23, 1872, she recorded the fact in her diary:

> . . . I feel my faith slipping from me . . . intellectual difficulties of faith make it impossible to believe. I am very wicked; I feel (as) if Christ can never listen to me again.55

By the age of eighteen, she had completely abandoned orthodox Christianity. She ascribed her loss of faith to pervasive intellectual movements in the cultivated circles of London society, in particular the "implicit faith that

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[52]Houston Peterson, Havelock Ellis, Philosopher of Love (London, 1928), p. 89.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Havelock Ellis, My Life (London, 1967), p. 130.

[55]Beatrice Webb, op. cit., p. 63.

by the methods of physical science, and by these methods alone, could be solved all the problems arising out of the relation of man to man and of man towards the universe".[56] Although she shared this conviction, the loss of her early faith left her with the sense of a void which she spent her life attempting to fill. In order to solve this problem, she retained the habit of individual private prayer, which she attempted to justify in a letter to Russell:

> I make an absolute distinction between the realm of proof (knowledge of Processes) and the realm of aspiration or Faith (the choice of Purposes) . . . so far my own experience and experiment leads me to a working hypothesis of persistent prayer.[57]

This remarkable solution is indicative of a deep inner conflict, an impression which is confirmed by Mrs. Webb's autobiography My Apprenticeship, in which she confessed that her inner life had been plagued by a perpetual struggle between mysticism and scepticism, "an Ego that affirms and an Ego that denies".[58]

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[56] Ibid., p. 83.

[57] Beatrice Webb to Bertrand Russell, October 16, 1904.

[58] Beatrice Webb, op. cit., p. xiii. Leonard Woolf wrote that beneath Mrs. Webb's ". . . metallic facade . . . there was a neurotic turmoil of doubt and discontent, an ego tortured in the old-fashioned religious way almost universal among the good and wise in the nineteenth century" (Sowing -- An Autobiography of the Years 1880-1904 [London, 1967], p. 48).

J. M. Synge's religious crisis began at the age of fourteen when an interest in natural science led him to obtain

> . . . . a book of Darwin's. It opened in my hands at a passage where he asks how can we explain the similarity between a man's hand and a bird's or bat's wings except by evolution. I flung the book aside and rushed out into the open air . . . the sky seemed to have lost its blue and the grass its green. I lay down and writhed in an agony of doubt. . . .[59]

Synge began to read works of Christian evidence which confirmed his doubts; by the age of seventeen he had "renounced Christianity after a good deal of wobbling".[60] For a brief period, the works of Wordsworth and Carlyle satisfied his mystical impulses but ultimately he found himself falling "back into all manner of forebodings".[61]

The adolescent traumas of Havelock Ellis, Beatrice Webb, J. M. Synge and Russell himself demonstrate the decisive effect of both Darwin's discoveries and biblical criticism on Victorian thought. According to Beatrice Webb "the cult of the scientific method" was at its height in the 1870s and 1880s.[62] One of the apostles of this cult

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[59] J. M. Synge, Autobiography (Oxford, 1965), p. 22.

[60] Ibid., p. 23.

[61] Ibid., p. 24.

[62] Beatrice Webb, op. cit., p. 126.

was Winwood Reade whose highly popular Martyrdom of Man was first published in 1872:

> When we have ascertained, by means of Science, the methods of Nature's operation, we shall be able to take her place and to perform them for ourselves . . . men will master the forces of Nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds. Man then will be perfect; he will then be a creator; he will therefore be what the vulgar worship as a God.63.

For those who had been brought up in Christian homes emancipation was, as we have seen, often a slow and painful process. They were forced to renounce the comforts of old beliefs and became necessarily detached and isolated from their parents.[64] When he read Mill's Autobiography, Russell was slightly consoled by the fact that humanity would probably improve and that agnosticism might even be "a great agent for good", but he felt that Mill, who had been brought up as an agnostic, could not have experienced "the agony that it is to one coming to it after having known the repose of the other theory".[65] Russell's

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[63]Quoted in Helen Merrell Lynd, England in the Eighteen-Eighties (Oxford, 1945), p. 82.

[64]J. M. Synge wrote of his loss of faith: "This story is easily told, but it was a terrible experience. By it I laid a chasm between my present and my past, and between myself and my kindred . . .", op. cit., p. 24.

[65]Bertrand Russell, unpublished Journal 1890-94. Entry on August 31, 1890.

perplexities were, in a sense, a microcosm of a tension between "the traditional heart" and "the emancipated head" which, according to John Lester, was felt most acutely in the 1880s.[66] This underlying tension was the central theme of the most popular novel of the 'eighties, Mrs. Humphrey Ward's Robert Elsmere (1888), which referred to

> . . . this perpetual clashing of two estimates of life -- the estimate which is the offspring of the scientific spirit, and which is forever making the visible world fairer and more desirable in mortal eyes; and the estimate of St. Augustine.67

Although Russell ceased to believe in God in 1890, he never lost the Augustinian outlook. In his autobiography, Russell claimed that after abandoning his belief in God, he was "quite glad to be done with the whole subject".[68] This statement and others like it give no indication of the nostalgia Russell often felt for his childhood faith. This nostalgia was revealed in a review of J. M. E. McTaggart's Some Dogmas of Religion (1906) in which the author argued that popular theology should be replaced by metaphysics:

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[66]See John Lester, Journey Through Despair (Princeton, 1968), esp. Chapter Two.

[67]Quoted in John Lester, op. cit., p. 58.

[68]A.B.R., I, 41.

> I cannot but think . . . that the author underestimates the loss incurred in losing the love of God. By love, he says, he means something quite different from reverence and admiration and gratitude; and though the love of God must go, others remain to be loved. This view of the emotions is surely too atomic. A love which is mingled with reverence and admiration and gratitude, which has an object that is unchanging and sinless and always strong enough to help, is something different from any love which is possible towards a human being; but it is sustaining as no other love can be.69

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[69] The Independent Review (April 1906), 114-115.

# CHAPTER IV

## OPTIMISM

> . . . The struggle means suffering; intense suffering while it is in progress; but that struggle and that suffering have been the stages by which the white man has reached his present stage of development, and they account for the fact that he no longer lives in caves and feeds on roots and nuts. This dependence of progress on the survival of the fitter race, terribly black as it seems to some of you, gives the struggle for existence its redeeming features; it is the fiery crucible out of which comes the finer metal.
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> Karl Pearson (National Life from the Standpoint of Science, 1901)

In October 1890, when Russell went up to Cambridge, he was at once delivered from the isolation and intellectual constraints of Pembroke Lodge. In this more congenial atmosphere he ceased to be tormented by the fundamental problems which had caused him so much anguish in adolescence. The tension between reason and feeling evaporated for a while under Cambridge's beneficent influence, which has been excellently evoked by E. M. Forster in his biography of Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson:

> As Cambridge filled up with friends it acquired a magic quality. Body and spirit, reason and emotion, work and play, architecture and scenery, laughter and seriousness, life and art -- these pairs which are elsewhere contrasted were then fused into one. People and books reinforced one another, intelligence joined hands with affection, speculation became a passion, and discussion was made profound by love.[1]

Russell's private journal contains a remarkable testimony to Cambridge's healing power. On November 20th, he recorded his surprise that he had felt so much pain upon becoming an agnostic

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[1] E. M. Forster, op. cit., p. 35.

> for now I have become quite reconciled to it, and have even found some increase of response in the feeling of having nothing to lose. Since coming here, I have of course had no time to think, since work and society have divided practically the whole of my time among them.[2]

Apart from this psychological emancipation, being at Cambridge enabled Russell to acquire a first-hand knowledge of the latest trends in social and political thought. The keynote of the intellectual atmosphere in this "new world of infinite delight" was optimism.[3] By the late nineteenth century, population growth, technological advances, increases in trade and productivity and a flourishing Empire had all contributed to an implicit faith in progress. According to John Morley, belief in progress had by 1890

> . . . become the basis of social thought, and had even taken the place of religion as the inspiring, guiding, and testing power over social action . . . let us remain invincibly sure that Progress stands for a working belief that the modern world will never be content to do without.[4]

Progress could heal the rift between science and religion by becoming a religion. Darwinism became the basis of the

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[2]Bertrand Russell. Unpublished Journal 1890-1894.

[3]R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, eds., op. cit., p. 41.

[4]Quoted in Helen Merrell Lynd, op. cit., p. 81.

belief that the laws of society tended inevitably towards material progress. The aim of Leslie Stephen's The Science of Ethics (1882) was to show that natural selection would lead to the gradual perfection of human character.

Although the 1880s was a revolutionary decade characterised by the erosion of economic liberalism and the growth and proliferation of socialist groups and doctrines, automatic progress remained a basic assumption. The aim of Fabian socialists such as Beatrice and Sidney Webb was simply to accelerate that progress by means of far-reaching social legislation. The improvement of society was to be attained through the application of "the scientific method" to the problems of poverty, unemployment and bad housing. According to one historian of the 1880s, Helen Merrell Lynd, Fabianism, whose ideal of government Russell espoused during the 1890s, was based on the assumption that "there were no major problems of human existence not readily susceptible of solution by expert intelligence".[5] When Russell came to Cambridge, progress, which he had been brought up to believe in as an abstract ideal, became more tangible and real. He later recalled the confidence of the 1890s:

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[5] Ibid., p. 398.

> The world seemed hopeful and solid; we all felt convinced that nineteenth-century progress would continue and that we ourselves should be able to contribute something of value.6

In his second year as an undergraduate, Russell was elected to a secret, elite circle known as "The Society" or "The Apostles". This society had been founded in 1820 and its members since then had included Tennyson, Arthur Hallam, F. D. Maurice and Henry Sidgwick. When Russell became a member, its debates were dominated by A. N. Whitehead, J. E. McTaggart and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and, from 1894, by G. E. Moore whose skepticism, sincerity and self-effacement epitomized the spirit of the Apostles. Russell's happiest moments were spent at the society's weekly meetings in which the only stipulations were absolute integrity and close personal bonds between the members. The aim of the Apostles was the pursuit of truth, to which everything else was subordinated: "It was a principle in discussion that there were to be no taboos, no limitations, nothing considered shocking, no barriers to absolute freedom of speculation".[7] Russell's apostolic essays were

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[6] R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, eds., op. cit., p. 41.

[7] A.B.R., I, 69. Russell's emphasis on lack of taboos indicates that the Society was, to some extent, a reaction to the emotional and intellectual restrictions of Victorianism of which he had become intimately aware at Pembroke Lodge.

full of joy and hope for the future; one of them, entitled "Mechanical Morals and the Morals of Machinery" was a typical example of late Victorian moral optimism. In this essay, Russell began by dividing morals into three distinct categories -- instinctive, conventional and rational. Rational morality was seen as the ultimate ideal since, unlike the other two types, it did not "blindly defer to authority or evolution". Formerly morality had been based on the need for self-preservation but now the problem was no longer "how to keep alive but how to live". Russell concluded that as civilization progressed instinctive and conventional morality would gradually be replaced by morality based on reason so that ". . . we may devote ourselves to the adornment of life; to the growth of roses rather than cabbages, to the pursuit of all that makes life not merely possible, but beautiful, interesting and varied".[8]

The last decade of the nineteenth century presents certain difficulties to the student of Bertrand Russell's religious thought. These years offer a striking contrast to the period 1901-14 during which he attempted in two

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[8]Unpublished paper read to the Apostles on July 23, 1896 (Bertrand Russell Archives).

essays and a short novel to express his religious attitude.[9] Compared to the correspondence with Lady Ottoline Morrell in which religion was a constant theme, the references to it in his letters to Alys are surprisingly sparse and occasionally flippant. At first, the transition from the morbid scrupulosity of Pembroke Lodge to a more liberal atmosphere had not been easy. In his journal, he recorded his feeling of moral degradation: ". . . I find myself daily becoming more vulgar and conventional; I find (which proves the most frightful degradation) that even Agnosticism has become not unpleasant to me. . . ."[10] However, by the summer of 1893, when he began to write regularly to Alys, he was much more confident in his agnosticism. He insisted that her acceptance of the Quaker religion displayed an insufficient respect for reasoned argument and exhorted her to abandon her religion on the grounds that it represented a barrier to intellectual and social progress. But Russell was as much attracted by her religiosity as he was repelled by her religious beliefs:

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[9]These were "The Free Man's Worship" (1903); "The Essence of Religion" (1912) and The Perplexities of John Forstice (1912).

[10]Unpublished Journal 1890-1894. Entry for January 18, 1891.

> I cannot argue well with thee for when I am with thee thy religion seems so right I lose all wish to change it and yet at other times I am so strongly anti-religious that I am afraid it might in future become serious.[11]

Furthermore, the Alys letters suggest that Russell discerned in their spiritual union the "religion of love" which he was later to develop more fully under the influence of Ottoline. The deepening of his romantic attachment to Alys in the autumn of 1893 had disposed of his earlier "very biological view of love".[12] A year later his love had extended to worship and reverence:

> Thee never used to believe that the love of man and woman could be of this religious kind but now thee has proof in our love -- now especially, my love for thee has all the holiness and purity of a religion.[13]

Russell chose Shelley's poem Epipsychidion as the "perfect expression" of his feelings.[14] The essence of the poem

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[11]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, January 28, 1894.

[12]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, September 30, 1894.

[13]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, September 11, 1894. Four days later he ended another letter with the words "Goodbye my Dearest, my Life, my Joy, my Religion".

[14]Russell quoted Epipsychidion at length in a letter of October 25, 1894, referring to it as "a perfect expression for what we can only express 'with other eloquence than words'". See also A.B.R., I, 83.

is that love belongs by its very nature to an eternal world. Through the power of love, the two separate souls ". . . like two meteors of expanding flames, / Those spheres instinct with it become the same, / Touch, mingle, and are transfigured;" thereby achieving union with the universe.[15] These particularly intense feelings, however, do not seem to have lasted long after his marriage to Alys in December 1894. He later described the first years of his marriage as a period of hardness and limitation during which his deeper feelings were temporarily subdued. In a short piece which he called "Untitled Allegory" Russell attempted to express the transition in poetic prose:

> . . . the golden vision of love unlocked all the inner chambers of his soul and released imprisoned voices that sang for joy. And now at last he found rest — here was what he sought, here his worship was unchecked. But this too proved delusive . . . the object of his devotion was, after all, but a mortal among mortals.16

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[15]The Shelleyan theme of sudden transformation or transfiguration often recurs in Russell's religious writings e.g. "The Free Man's Worship" in which he exhorted mankind "so to transform and refashion the unconscious universe, so to transmute it in the crucible of the imagination, that a new image of shining gold replaces the old idol of clay" (Mysticism and Logic, p. 45). In Fact and Fiction, Russell wrote: "It was this transfiguring quality in Shelley's poetry that I found intoxicating" (p. 14).

[16]"Untitled Allegory", unpublished Fragmentary Manuscripts, Bertrand Russell Archives #266 (XV). This passage is undoubtedly a Shelleyan affectation, Epipsychidion had been dedicated to Emilia Viviani, whom the poet wor-

Russell's early letters to Alys leave us in no doubt that although he ceased to believe in God at the age of eighteen, he continued to feel a need for worship and reverence which was temporarily satisfied by their spiritual union. Commentators on his early philosophy have suggested that religious impulses were partly responsible for his conversion to neo-Hegelian idealism in the summer of 1894. Frederick Copleston has claimed that Russell hoped that metaphysics would provide "theoretical justification of emotive attitudes of awe and reverence towards the universe".[17] Carl Spadoni also lists the need for "metaphysical comfort" as one of the factors influencing Russell's acceptance of idealism.[18]

When Russell turned his attention to philosophy after completing the mathematics tripos in 1893, idealism was the dominant philosophy in the British universities. The traditional Cambridge atmosphere of empiricism and

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shipped but later realised was a mere mortal. In a famous letter to his friend John Gisborne, Shelley confessed that his tragic error had consisted "in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal". See Ellsworth Barnard, op. cit., p. 223.

[17]Frederick Copleston, S.J., A History of Philosophy (New York, 1967), VIII, Part II, 322, note 4.

[18]Carl Spadoni, "Russell's Rebellion Against Neo-Hegelianism", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Waterloo, 1977, p. 60.

common sense had by the 1890s received a strong infusion of idealism from the Oxford philosophers F. H. Bradley and T. H. Green. All of Russell's tutors, with the exception of Henry Sidgwick, espoused some form of Kantian or Hegelian idealism. Neo-Hegelian idealism, with its emphasis on the perfectibility of man and society, was well attuned to the Victorian progress-cult. The writings of Green, Edward Caird, Bosanquet and McTaggart gave support to the growth of collectivism and the emergence of a state in which individuals could fully develop their personalities. Idealism had become increasingly popular in the second half of the nineteenth century partly as a reaction against the "evils" of agnosticism, positivism and materialism. The essence of idealism was its insistence on the spiritual nature of ultimate reality. For this reason, some commentators have viewed it as a substitute religion:

> Stripped of its conventional arguments, idealism of the neo-Hegelian variety consisted for the most part of a prolonged hymn to the Absolute . . . the flowing periods, the incantatory rhythm, the outbursts of lyricism, were all part of the metaphysical ritual.19

Although this may be an overstatement of the case, British idealism was, at least in its early stages, concerned to preserve a religious outlook. William James, the American philosopher, wryly observed that "the most prominent spokesmen for British idealism were all sons of Evangelical

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19 E. W. F. Tomlin, "The Prose of Thought" in The Modern Age, ed. Boris Ford, Vol. III: The Pelican Guide to English Literature (London, 1963), p. 233.

clergymen within the Church of England".[20] Benjamin Jowett praised the Oxford philosopher T. H. Green for his stalwart attempts to breathe new life into a discredited theology by basing it on sound metaphysics. And Russell himself wrote to Alys of his astonishment when he perceived that the philosophical position of most of the younger men at Cambridge "might also be enunciated by a broad churchman as the modern form of heaven and hell".[21]

In the early 1890s the most charismatic and influential proponent of neo-Hegelian idealism at Cambridge was J. E. McTaggart, who managed to convince both Russell and his fellow Apostle G. E. Moore of its intrinsic merits. For McTaggart, the utility of metaphysics lay in its ability to provide religious consolation for its adherents. According to Dickinson, McTaggart's philosophy was a "vain attempt" to prove by logic his instinctive belief that ". . . in the relation of love we come into the closest contact we can attain with Reality; for the Reality is an eternally perfect harmony of pure spirits united by Love".[22]

Russell at first remained sceptical, referring to

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[20]Quoted in C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, eds., The Twentieth Century Mind (Oxford, 1972), p. 175.

[21]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, September 28, 1893. A.R.P.

[22]E. M. Forster, op. cit., p. 71. In McTaggart's

McTaggart's doctrines as "hopelessly mystical".[23] At the same time, he was not unaffected by the charm of McTaggart's metaphysics which seemed far superior to Christian dogma. The feeling of being in the mainstream of British philosophy encouraged him to write disparagingly of his earlier attempts at the age of fifteen: ". . . I was a shocking materialist and some of the opinions there make me shudder now. Thee ought to be glad I have done some philosophy, as it is that alone which has worked the change".[24]

The modest, undogmatic approach to religion which characterized the "Greek Exercises" was replaced by a new assertiveness. In another letter to Alys he wrote:

> I am so utterly out of sympathy with Christianity. It would be no use at all hoping that God is a Person; no reader of metaphysics could I think be brought to such a view. . . . But I do not mean to put nothing in its place: on the contrary I am convinced that as soon as we begin to reflect seriously on religion we shall find Pantheism a far finer, a far more inspiring faith. . . .[25]

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unique version of neo-Hegelianism, the self is viewed as immortal and forever moving towards this ultimate spiritual reality.

[23]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, November 21, 1893. A.R.P.

[24]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, April 12, 1894. A.R.P.

[25]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, October 31, 1893. A.R.P.

This first flush of enthusiasm in the autumn of 1893, during which Russell even accepted McTaggart's doctrine of immortality, did not last long. Apart from technical difficulties, a "common sense" awareness of the existence of pain and evil in the world made it difficult to embrace pantheism as a religion. In his blacker moods he could see "no way of escaping from the wickedness of the universe" through philosophy.[26]

Russell stood out against the idealist onslaught until the summer of 1894, when he suddenly became convinced of the soundness of the ontological argument. This involved the acceptance of F. H. Bradley's distinction between appearance and reality, the latter consisting in the spiritual Absolute, which was regarded as timeless and perfect. For the believing neo-Hegelian, the Absolute was "a complete union of every side of our being where intuition, feeling, sense and intellect are one experience".[27] During his adolescence, Russell had longed for such a synthesis:

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[26]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, March 2, 1896.

[27]Carl Spadoni, op. cit., p. 22.

> All sorts of mutually contradictory feelings and beliefs existed in me side by side, and claimed allegiance by turns. This was intolerable, and I imagined that in philosophy, if I ever gave myself up to it, I should find a satisfying synthesis.28

The Hegelian Absolute held out the prospect of that harmony between emotion and intellect which had proved so elusive. Wordsworthian nature-worship had provided a temporary solution to this difficulty but had been discarded as intellectually unsound. Monistic idealism, on the other hand, seemed to be both spiritually satisfying and logically demonstrable. In a letter to Alys written in September 1894, Russell recalled how he had been tormented as an adolescent by the conflict between "the true" and "the beautiful". This dualism could be dispersed, he felt, as long as he could remain convinced, as Bradley and McTaggart were, that reality is a unity consisting of spirit. Bradley's absolute idealism, by showing that the ideal is the real, could remove the tension between truth and beauty: "If I could believe in Bradley, as I do most days, I should never suffer from it again. . . ."[29]

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[28] Bertrand Russell, "A Turning Point in My Life" in Leonard Russell, ed., The Saturday Book, 8 (1948), 144.

[29] A.B.R., I, 98.

It is not clear when Russell first began to feel misgivings about the moral validity of this "metaphysical comfort". In March 1896, he commented in a letter to Alys that he could not "approve" of philosophy "as McT(aggart) is so fond of doing".[30] A year later, in a candid self-appraisal written for the Golden Urn he stated that he believed in progress "emotionally and scientifically" but not "metaphysically".[31] On December 7, 1897, Russell informed Moore that he was writing a paper for the Apostles which was directed against "McT's notion of getting religion out of philosophy".[32] In this paper, which he called "Seems, Madam? Nay it is", he argued that metaphysics neither could nor should give religious comfort to its adherents. The idealist's world of Reality, a mere construction of the imagination, could have no bearing on the world we actually experience. Russell concluded that metaphysics, like science, must be "guided by intellectual

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[30]Quoted in Carl Spadoni, op. cit., p. 187.

[31]The Golden Urn, 1 March 1897. The Golden Urn was a privately printed magazine published at Fiesole in Italy by Bernard Berenson and Alys's brother Logan Pearsall Smith. Russell's article was a "self-appreciation" written under the pseudonym "Orlando". See Ernest Samuels, Bernard Berenson, The Making of a Connoisseur (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1979), p. 273.

[32]Bertrand Russell to G. E. Moore, December 7, 1897.

curiosity alone" and not by the desire to find comfort which had "produced a great deal of fallacious reasoning and intellectual dishonesty".[33] This objection to idealism was more moral than intellectual; like his opposition to Christianity it was based on the conviction we should not judge reality by our moral or religious standards and ideals. The philosopher, he argued, must maintain an attitude of "ethical neutrality". This attack was soon followed by a complete rebellion which was purely intellectual in character. Towards the end of 1898, Russell and Moore abandoned neo-Hegelianism as a result of its inadequacy in the realms of mathematical logic and epistemology. At first the escape from the "subjective prison" of Hegelianism was exhilarating:

> . . . we allowed ourselves to think that the grass is green, that the sun and stars would shine if no one was aware of them and also that there is a pluralistic timeless world of Platonic ideas.[34]

However, this mood was mingled with disappointment; Russell had been forced to abandon his quest for a unifying synthesis with its vague but attractive promise of "metaphysical comfort". In a letter written in 1911, he commented more

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[33]Paul Edwards, ed., Why I am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects (New York, 1962), p. 103.

[34]R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, eds., op. cit., p. 43.

soberly that when he rebelled against neo-Hegelianism "the last hope of getting any creed out of philosophy vanished".[35]

The period 1890-1901 was, generally speaking, one of quiescence in Russell's spiritual development. His adolescent speculations had led him to suspect that the universe might be "hurrying blindly towards all that is bad" but at Cambridge he had ceased to be tormented by the bleaker implications of Darwinism. At Cambridge Russell shared the bright optimism of his fellow undergraduates and the spiritual complacency reflected in the popularity of Hegelianism and other evolutionary philosophies. At Friday's Hill, the home of the Pearsall Smiths, he met Fabians such as Graham Wallas and Beatrice and Sidney Webb and was favourably impressed by their doctrines and ideals. Russell's German Social Democracy (1896), which was first delivered as lectures at the London School of Economics and the Fabian Society, was written "in the full flow of his Hegelian enthusiasm".[36] In it he asserted that

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[35] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, September 28, 1911.

[36] R. W. Clark, op. cit., p. 77.

> . . . Social Democracy 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.37

As we have seen, Russell, had, by 1897, abandoned the "metaphysical comfort" of Hegelianism, but continued to believe in progress "emotionally and scientifically". During the 1890s he shared the basic assumption of the Fabians and others that social theory must be based on the "facts" of natural selection and evolution. Under the influence of Sidney Webb, Russell became an imperialist and "even supported the Boer War".[38] He seems to have shared the assumptions of social scientists such as Karl Pearson, who believed that the laws of natural selection and inheritance should be assisted by a conscious attempt to modify the percentage of "bad stock . . . in our own community and in the world at large".[39] In the Golden Urn article of March 1897, Russell had written: "I believe in several definite measures (e.g. Infanticide) by which society

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[37] Ibid.

[38] R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, eds., op. cit., p. 47.

[39] Karl Pearson, National Life from the Standpoint of Science (1901), quoted in F. L. Baumer, ed., Main Currents of Western Thought (New York, 1970), p. 577. In a letter to Alys dated October 2, 1894, Russell "had adopted an argument from Karl Pearson to the effect that the quality and survival of the human race is dependent on maternity", Carl Spadoni,

could be improved".[40] His support for the Boer War was also sanctioned by a simple form of social Darwinism. From late 1899 until the end of 1900, Russell wrote a series of letters to the French philosopher Louis Couturat in which he attempted to defend his position as an imperialist. In one of these letters, he told Couturat that if he had a better knowledge of anthropology he would realise

> . . . what makes a country truly savage, and what are the benefits which result from civilized government. To get the argument going, I will express my desire that every part of the world should be governed by some European race or other.[41]

The purpose of this brief and highly selective examination of Russell's social and political thought in the 1890s has been to show the extent to which he was influenced by the late Victorian progress-cult. If belief in progress did, as we are frequently told, supply the place of a religion for many Victorians, it was a religion

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"Philosophy in Russell's Letters to Alys", The Journal of the Bertrand Russell Archives (1978), 29-32. See also R. W. Clark, op. cit., p. 82.

[40] The Golden Urn, see note 31.

[41] Bertrand Russell to Louis Couturat, May 5, 1900, Couturat Papers, Bibliothèque de la Ville, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland (photocopy).

which evaded the deeper questions of human values, and encouraged an attitude of spiritual complacency. The author of "The Free Man's Worship" could never have written, as Russell did in 1897, that

> I am quite indifferent to the mass of human creatures; though I wish, as a purely intellectual problem, to discover some way in which they might all be happy. I wouldn't sacrifice myself to them, though their unhappiness, at moments, about once in three months, gives me a feeling of discomfort, and an intellectual desire to find a way out.42

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42 The Golden Urn, see note 31.

# CHAPTER V

## THE RELIGION OF SORROW

> The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky -- seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.
>
> Joseph Conrad (Heart of Darkness, 1910)

The last months of the nineteenth century were, for Russell, a period of "intellectual intoxication".[1] From October to December 1900, he drove his intellect relentlessly in order to complete The Principles of Mathematics, finishing the manuscript of the last day of the century. A month later, he experienced what he was later to describe as a "conversion".[2] This was triggered by the sight of Alfred North Whitehead's wife, who suffered from heart disease, in intense pain:

> Suddenly the ground seemed to give way beneath me. . . . Within five minutes I went through some such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at least useless; it follows that war is wrong . . . that the use of force is to be deprecated. . . .
>
> At the end of those five minutes I had become a completely different person. For a time, a

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[1] A.B.R., I, 145.

[2] Cf. Rupert Crawshay-Williams, Russell Remembered (London, 1970), p. 113: "Bertie said he really had felt a sort of divine afflatus, starting suddenly and very intensely about 1901 . . . and then gradually decreasing in intensity".

> sort of mystic illumination possessed me. . . . Having been an Imperialist, I became during those five minutes a pro-Boer and a Pacifist. Having for years cared only for exactness and analysis I found myself filled with semi-mystical feelings about beauty . . . and with a desire almost as profound as that of Buddha to find some philosophy which should make human life endurable.3

In spite of the alleged suddenness of this transformation, it seems unlikely that Russell's outlook would have undergone such a complete change had it not been for two further blows which plunged him into the worst depression he had ever known. In May 1901, his "intellectual honeymoon" was shattered by the discovery of a paradox which made it impossible to make progress with his mathematical work. The "loss" of his first love, mathematics, was compounded in the first weeks of 1902 with the sudden realization that he no longer loved Alys. Thus Russell came to experience "in a very intense form" the loneliness which he had, in February 1901, perceived to be the essence of human existence.[4] The impact of these emotional and

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[3] A.B.R., I, 146.

[4] Ibid., p. 149. Cf. Russell's unpublished journal 1902-5, entry for 27 January 1903, "I am unhappy beyond what I know how to bear -- dull aching depression, not anguish -- would it were! . . . . my work is second-rate, and all that I care for is going or gone. . . ." (Bertrand Russell Archives). In deference to convention, Russell and his wife continued to live together, eventually separating in 1911.

intellectual crises shook him out of the occasionally complacent optimism which had characterised his attitude to religion and politics in the late 1890s. He rapidly fell out of sympathy with any world-view based on Utilitarianism, imperialism, or blind faith in science as the sole source of knowledge. His letters to intimates such as Gilbert Murray and Lucy Martin Donnelly bear witness to this sudden disillusionment with mundane ethical standards. Although McTaggart and Moore had made Russell aware of the intellectual drawbacks of hedonistic Utilitarianism, he had never questioned its basic premises. But now such technical problems were irrelevant, as he explained to Gilbert Murray:

> . . . I may as well begin by confessing that for many years it seemed to me perfectly self-evident that pleasure is the only good and pain the only evil. Now, however, the opposite seems to me self-evident. This change has been brought about by what I may call moral experience. . . .[5]

Russell's conversion and the subsequent crises in his life had convinced him that a religion of humanity based on the ideal of progress was spiritually empty. Feeling again the intense loneliness of his adolescent years he turned, as he had done in April 1889, to a religion

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[5]Bertrand Russell to Gilbert Murray, April 3, 1902.

based on contemplation. The best life, he now believed, was "one which thinks truly and feels greatly about human things and which, in addition, contemplates the world of beauty and of abstract truths".[6] This revolt against hedonistic Utilitarianism extended itself to the belief that "scientific" knowledge was of little importance compared to the knowledge of "ideal and eternal objects" as revealed by mathematics and philosophy.[7] And the British Empire, which Russell had supported with patriotic fervour during the early stages of the Boer War, was now considered trivial when compared to "the great eternal facts".[8] This attitude, he informed Lucy Martin Donnelly, was the product of "a personal knowledge of great unhappiness" which had taught him the value of an ascetic life. In My Philosophical Development, he recalled that he had at this time "disliked the real world and sought refuge in a timeless world, without change or decay or the will-o'-the-wisp of progress".[9]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Bertrand Russell to Lucy Martin Donnelly, November 25, 1902.

[9] Bertrand Russell, My Philosophical Development (New York, 1959), p. 210.

Although Russell recognised the need to transcend the real world, he did not abandon it. From April 1902 until December, when he began to write "The Free Man's Worship" he composed over twenty short reflections on religious subjects. These disjointed reflections, mostly written in poetic prose and often very sentimental, are not simply the expression of a mood; they represent the deliberate construction of a religious attitude which could supply a spiritual basis to life without being dependent on dogma.[10] He later told Ottoline that he had been motivated during this period by a profound desire to "give religion to those who cannot believe in God and immortality".[11] This was Russell's "religion of sorrow" which had gradually evolved from his first experience of mystical illumination. In a piece entitled "On the end results of life", he expressed this transition in poetic prose:

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[10] Cf. A.B.R., I, 150: "I read religious books, such as Taylor's Holy Dying, in the hope that there might be something independent of dogma in the comfort which their authors derived from their beliefs".

[11] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, August 12, 1911.

> So out of pity grows service, out of service grows love and out of love grows wisdom and the power of endurance. And when endurance has been learnt, a strange, sad beauty shines through the life of man, for tenderness, pity and the wisdom of infinite love ennoble the tragic burden of humanity.12

Although man, a "blind embodiment of the forces of nature", could derive no comfort from Christian dogma, there were, nevertheless, elements of the "Christian myth" which it was desirable to preserve. The stoical-Christian doctrine of renunciation was to be an integral part of the religion of sorrow:

> To each one of us the choice is open, whether to add to the burden of humanity or to bear it, to crucify or be crucified. To die, and still more often to live upon the cross, to endure toil and pain that others may escape the penalty which is demanded by inexorable laws, is the part of those who choose the right.13

These disjointed reflections bear no resemblance to anything Russell wrote during the 1890s but are often very reminiscent of the final entry in the Greek Exercises of April 1889 when he had "worshipped nature with an emotional

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[12] Unpublished MS 266 (IV) (Bertrand Russell Archives).

[13] "The Atonement" (c. 1902). Unpublished MS (XIII), Bertrand Russell Archives. It is worth noting that as early as 1902 Russell had perceived love, acquiescence and worship to be "the essence of religion".

pantheism".[14] Duncan Martin has argued that, in 1902, Russell returned to the Wordsworthian impartial worship which "he had forsaken near half a life-time before".[15] In fact, Russell turned to a number of sources in order to find the inspiration he required; in December 1902 he informed Gilbert Murray that he had, during the last eight months, "been making myself a shrine . . . where I worship the things of beauty that I have known".[16] Naturally he looked back nostalgically on the "moral and intellectual elevation" he had reached in 1889 before he had been subjected to the "corrupting" influence of Cambridge.[17] In his despondency, he tried to find consolation in the impartial worship of nature, longing to

> become one with that great soul of sadness that speaks in the stars, in the dawn, in the rustle of midnight breezes, in the lonely ripple of mountain tarns, in the ceaseless sighing of pines, in the tender grace of willows whitened by the passing wind.[18]

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[14] But N. B. Rupert Crawshay-Williams, op. cit., p. 47. "Bertie told us once that he had written masses of extremely purple passages in his early twenties but had destroyed them all."

[15] Duncan Martin, op. cit., p. 105.

[16] Bertrand Russell to Gilbert Murray, December 16, 1902.

[17] See Russell's unpublished journal 1890-1894, entry for November 20, 1890.

[18] "The Ocean of Life" (June 1902), unpublished MS

Despite its attractiveness, Russell could not completely acquiesce in nature-worship; nature's hostility called for an element of defiance in his religious attitude. In this respect, his mention of Carlyle's "Everlasting No" is significant. In a short piece entitled "Religion", he defined religion as "a way of feeling, an emotional tone", a good example of which was Carlyle's "Everlasting No, the defiance to the Devil: I am not thine, but free, and forever hate thee. . . ."[19] In January 1889, Russell had been given a copy of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus (1831), which was based on the author's own conversion experience.[20] This began with the realization that the universe was "all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb".[21]

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266 (X), Bertrand Russell Archives.

[19]"Religion" (c. 1902), unpublished MS 266 (XX) Bertrand Russell Archives. A letter to Lucy Martin Donnelly dated July 6, 1902 also suggests that Russell was finding inspiration in Carlyle's writings: "I have been re-reading the most exquisite of all bits of history, Carlyle's Diamond Necklace. He is the only author who knows the place of History among the Fine Arts".

[20]The three chapters which deal specifically with the conversion -- "The Everlasting No", the "Centre of Indifference" and "The Everlasting Yea" -- are heavily marked in the margin by Russell.

[21]Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus -- Russell's personal copy, p. 160 (Bertrand Russell Archives).

From this gloom Carlyle emerged with his "Everlasting No", the first stage of his conversion which led him to defy an indifferent universe and filled him with pity and humanity. However, Russell found himself morally repelled by "the Everlasting Yea", Carlyle's rejection of the "worship of Sorrow" in favour of a religion based on the worship of force and hero-worship.[22]

The fact that Russell could be simultaneously attracted to Wordsworthian nature-worship and Carlylean defiance is an indication of the tension in his thought between truth and beauty, which, as we have seen, had been momentarily relieved by Bradley's absolute idealism. While nature, his "inspiration", led him to impartial worship, her indifference forced him to look beyond nature, aided by mathematics, his "purifier", to the eternal world of Platonic ideas.[23] Although Russell desired a religious attitude which would leave the spirit open to nature's beauty, his awareness that nature was, in fact, an

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[22]Cf. R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, op. cit., p. 41: "'The Everlasting Yea' seemed to me sentimental nonsense".

[23]In his journal, Russell had written: ". . . Nature is my inspiration, and Mathematics is my purifier", unpublished journal 1902-1905, entry for November 12, 1902. Bertrand Russell Archives.

"unthinking Mother" debarred him from impartial worship. "The Free Man's Worship", which he completed in January 1903, is derived from the premise that the free man's religion must be based first and foremost on the world of fact, "the world which Science presents for our belief".[24] The verdict of science shows the universe to be hostile, purposeless and devoid of meaning. Man is compelled to face the fact that "his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms" and that ". . . all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system. . . ."[25] Russell, using impassioned rhetoric, exhorts us to realize the full extent of the rift between fact and ideal. Since the world as conceived by science is "unworthy of our worship", the ideal must be a creation of man's imagination. Thus the worship of the free man is not impartial but selective -- he must "burn with passion for eternal things".[26]

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[24]Bertrand Russell, Mysticism and Logic (London, 1963), p. 41.

[25]Ibid., p. 41.

[26]Ibid., p. 46. Here I find myself in disagreement with Duncan Martin who asserts that the "free man's worship was, of course, the impartial worship of Wordsworth. . . ." (op. cit., p. 116).

At the same time, he should not seek refuge in the Platonic ideal world. Russell's "religion of sorrow" demands, above all, courage and renunciation in its adherents who must be prepared to "return to the cave": "Let us learn, then, that energy of faith which enables us to live constantly in the vision of the good; and let us descend, in action, into the world of fact, with that vision always before us".[27] Russell's dedication to the "scientific spirit" compelled him to base his religious attitude on "the firm foundation of unyielding despair".[28] Although he shared the emotional demands of Wordsworth and Carlyle, their ultimate vision was rejected as being too sentimental. Two months before he began to write "The Free Man's Worship", he attempted to explain his difficulties to Dickinson:

> Seriously, the unmystical, rationalistic view of life seems to me to omit all that is most important and most beautiful. . . . The more facts a religion takes account of, the greater its victory . . . I should myself value a religion in proportion to its austerity. . . . But I fear that, however austere, any religion

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[27] Ibid., p. 43. Cf. "The Return to the Cave", April 19, 1902 (Bertrand Russell Archives). Russell thought that the doctrine of the cave in Plato's Republic was particularly applicable to the plight of modern man. When man has emerged from the cave of common life and learnt to love the good he must return ". . . to the tasks and disgusts of the cave, putting away, for the service of his fellow-men, the spectacle of what is best. . . ."

[28] Ibid., p. 41.

> must be less austere than the truth. And yet, I could not bear to lose from the world a certain awed solemnity, a certain stern seriousness. . . .[29]

Russell's conversion and subsequent unhappiness had deepened his friendship with Dickinson, who also suffered from this inner conflict between scepticism and mysticism.[30] He had always been fond of Dickinson, who shared his love for Shelley and Plato, but now their friendship became almost a spiritual communion.[31] His new concern to find a spiritual refuge in a hostile universe made him aware that they had a similar attitude "in religious subjects . . . which is not the same as that of any of the well-known opponents of Christianity".[32] Dickinson, in turn, was surprised and comforted to find that Russell shared his sense of being on a pilgrimage and was now "wandering in the same region".[33] In July

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[29]Bertrand Russell to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, August 26, 1902.

[30]Dickinson, according to Virginia Woolf, was rigorously agnostic while aspiring "to climb the heights of the metaphysical Parnassus". Virginia Woolf, Roger Fry: A Biography (New York, 1940), p. 102.

[31]See Duncan Martin, op. cit., pp. 122-124.

[32]Bertrand Russell to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, July 16, 1903.

[33]Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson to Bertrand Russell, July 21, 1912. Although this letter was written in 1912,

1903, Dickinson sent Russell three articles on religion which, like "The Free Man's Worship", were to be published in the Independent Review.[34] Russell encouraged him to pursue his attempt to define a religious attitude which could be maintained separately from the realm of positive knowledge. He considered the attempt particularly worth making in view of the inadequacies of the prevailing attitudes to religion:

> There is the Voltaire tradition, which makes fun of the whole thing from a common-sense, semi-historical point of view; this, of course, is hopelessly inadequate, because it only gets hold of the accidents and excrescences of historical systems. Then there is the scientific, Darwin-Huxley attitude which seems to me perfectly true, and quite fatal, if rightly carried out, to all the usual arguments for religion. But it is too external, too coldly critical, too remote from the emotions. . . . Then there are the philosophers, like Bradley, who keep a shadow of religion, too little for comfort but quite enought to ruin their systems intellectually.[35]

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it was essentially a reflection upon the blossoming of their friendship in 1902-3.

[34]The Independent Review was primarily a political journal founded in October, 1903 to combat Joseph Chamberlain's aggressive Imperialism and protection campaign and generally to promote the policies of the "New Liberals" or "Progressives". Its editorial council included Dickinson, G. M. Trevelyan and C. F. G. Masterman and among its regular contributors were E. M. Forster and G. K. Chesterton. "The Free Man's Worship" was published in December 1903.

[35]Bertrand Russell to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, July 16, 1903.

Both Russell and Dickinson had a profound respect for the religious instinct. They could feel no kinship with members of the present generation of undergraduates such as J. M. Keynes, who regarded Christianity as mere "hocus pocus" or Lytton Strachey, who is reputed to have gone about the streets of Cambridge exclaiming "Damn God!".[36] Nor could they share the conviction of this "Bloomsbury generation" that the publication of G. E. Moore's Principia Ethica in October 1903 announced the dawning of a new Age of Reason.[37] In his autobiography, Russell claimed that the generation of Keynes and Strachey distorted Moore's doctrines in order to evade the deeper questions of human values by escaping into "a life of retirement among fine shades and nice feelings".[38] The difference between the two generations was expressed in the sentence "We were still

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[36] J. M. Keynes, Two Memoirs: Dr. Melchior: A Defeated Enemy and My Early Beliefs (London, 1949), p. 96 and Michael Holroyd, Lytton Strachey: A Biography (London, 1971), p. 230. Cf. Russell to Ottoline Morrell, January 1, 1912: "I do not agree with the run of Cambridge people. Ask Lytton what he thinks of my religious views and he will tell you I am a Xtian [sic]. They don't care for religion -- I care for it more than anything in the world".

[37] See Michael Holroyd, op. cit., pp. 206-212. Cf. J. M. Keynes, op. cit., p. 82: "It was only for us, those who were active in 1903, that Moore completely ousted McTaggart, Dickinson, Russell".

[38] A.B.R., I, 70.

Victorian; they were Edwardian".[39] For Russell and Dickinson, being "Victorian" meant viewing life as a pilgrimage and maintaining an attitude of "awed solemnity" and "stern seriousness".[40] Dickinson, like Russell, was convinced that religion must be a matter of feeling rather than belief. He defined the essence of religon as "an attitude of spirit" towards a hostile or indifferent universe.[41] Dickinson saw no possibility of complete harmony between religion and science since "faith" and "knowledge" must operate in mutually exclusive spheres. There was, however, a point of interaction: Faith, which Dickinson defined rhetorically as "the passion in the explorer's heart, dictating the vision by which he is led" must always be prepared to concede its territory to knowledge for faith is "not assertion but suggestion; not

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Cf. E. M. Forster, op. cit., p. 119: "For him (Dickinson), as for the Victorians, life was a pilgrimage not an adventure. . . ." Also Russell's unpublished journal 1902-1905, entry for December 10, 1902: "At Cambridge this time the notion of the Pilgrimage to the Mountain of Truth shaped itself in my mind -- an idea in which I hope to find all the expression I want for my religion" (Bertrand Russell Archives).

[41] G. L. Dickinson, Religion: A Criticism and A Forecast (London, 1913), p. 56, originally published as articles in the Independent Review (1903-4).

logic but passion; not prose but poetry".[42] Although Russell preferred the word "hope" to "faith", feeling strongly that faith "ought not to be applied to an attitude which is not one of actual belief", he found himself largely in agreement with Dickinson's views.[43] He urged him to publish the articles in a book, believing that they contained a valuable message for the age, namely

> . . . that the emotion with which we contemplate the world may be religious, even if we have no definite theological beliefs . . . and this is useful both to the person who insists on a creed in order to save his religious life, and to the person who ceases to think seriously because he has lost his creed.[44]

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The strong Platonic element in Russell's religious thought suggests that "The Free Man's Worship" was, to some extent, influenced by the metaphysical and ethical views which he held at that time. As we have seen, Russell had, in late 1898, abandoned the metaphysical comforts of the Hegelian Absolute and become a realist who found consolation in the eternal Platonic world. Under the

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[42] "Knowledge and Faith", Hibbert Journal (1908), quoted in H. G. Wood, Living Issues in Religious Thought (London, 1924), p. 13.

[43] Bertrand Russell to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, October 1, 1904.

[44] Bertrand Russell to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, July 20, 1904.

influence of G. E. Moore, Russell had come to believe in the objectivity of good and evil. He accepted Moore's argument that "good" represents a simple indefinable attribute which cannot be identified with anything actually existent and that human beings must evaluate the world by reference to their a priori sense of good.[45] However, "The Free Man's Worship" was much more than the expression of a temporary mood or ethical viewpoint. In his preface to the 1917 edition of Mysticism and Logic, Russell wrote that, although he was no longer certain about the objectivity of good and evil, he still recommended the essay as an attitude of life "which must be adopted in times of stress and difficulty by those who have no dogmatic religious beliefs, if inward defeat is to be avoided".[46] "The Free Man's Worship" was a reflection of a mood of cosmic pessimism which was becoming increasingly prevalent in the late nineteenth century. Russell's own experience of profound melancholia in 1902 had sharpened his tragic consciousness and increased his awareness "that we are all exiles

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[45]This was to become the central doctrine of Moore's Principia Ethica (1903).

[46]Mysticism and Logic, p. 7.

on an inhospitable shore".[47] In a review of "The Free Man's Worship", written in 1919, the Quaker theologian H. G. Wood attributed Russell's "astronomical intimidation" to the pervasion of Darwinism, which had rendered men homeless in an inhospitable world.[48]

The darker implications of evolutionary theory had been perceived as early as the 1850s by Tennyson and Arnold but both had succeeded in discovering intimations of God in nature, society and the human soul. Towards the end of the century, however, it had become increasingly difficult to accept Tennyson's optimistic pantheism or even Arnold's more tentative belief in an "Eternal not ourselves that makes for righteousness". John Lester examines this trend in his Journey Through Despair, concluding that by the 1880s "the implications of Darwin's work had finally closed the deterministic ring".[49] The cosmology implicit in the new science led inevitably to the tragic worlds depicted in the novels of Thomas Hardy

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[47] Bertrand Russell to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, July 16, 1903.

[48] H. G. Wood, op. cit., p. 26.

[49] John Lester, op. cit., xxii. See also Murray Krieger, The Tragic Vision (New York, 1960).

and Joseph Conrad and the plays of Henrik Ibsen. The novelist John Galsworthy wrote that Victorian moral optimism was gradually undermined "from 1885 onwards, about the time that the discovery of our simian origin began to be accepted. . . ."[50] In the 1890s, sensitive intellectuals were increasingly tormented by the realization that the struggle against blind, irrational forces left no room for idealism. In 1897, Joseph Conrad wrote to R. B. Cunninghame Graham:

> There is a -- let us say -- a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold! -- it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. . . . And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing had made itself, made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident -- and it has happened.[51]

In his autobiography Leonard Woolf recalls similar feelings of cosmic pessimism: "I felt something more powerful than fear, once more that sense of profound, passive cosmic despair, the melancholy of a human being eager for happiness and beauty, powerless in the face of a hostile universe".[52]

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[50]Quoted in Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princeton, 1968), p. 84.

[51]Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters (London, 1927), I, 216.

[52]Leonard Woolf, op. cit., p. 42.

"The Free Man's Worship", like the deterministic novels of Conrad and Hardy, was an expression of the late Victorian "Zeitgeist". Leithauser has observed that Russell, like Hardy, employs the rhetorical device of "vast landscapes which dwarf human beings" in order to convey man's helplessness and isolation.[53] The world-views of Conrad, Hardy and Russell himself, however, were not completely pessimistic; all three recognised that the betterment of the soul could only be achieved through an uncompromising recognition of the "facts" as presented by scientific knowledge. The denial of an anthropocentric view of the universe increased the need for man to construct his own internal sense of order, to "sustain alone . . . the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power".[54] The responses of both Hardy and Conrad to this challenge were very similar to the stoical courage tempered by love which was recommended by Russell. On the subject of mankind's destiny, Hardy wrote:

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[53] Leithauser, op. cit., p. 65.

[54] Mysticism and Logic, p. 47.

> Whether the human and kindred animal races survive till the exhaustion or destruction of the globe, or whether these races perish and are succeeded by others before that conclusion comes, pain to all upon it, tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free-will conjecturally possessed by organic life.[55]

And Joseph Conrad, whose novels were dominated by the disillusionment of this generation, was nevertheless convinced that the human heart was ". . . valiant enough to bear the burden".[56] In a letter of December 22, 1913, Conrad thanked Russell for "the marvellous pages on the Worship of a free man" which had "reduced to order the inchoate thoughts of a life-time and given direction to those obscure "mouvements d'ame" which, unguided, bring only trouble to one's weary days on this earth".[57]

The popularity of "The Free Man's Worship" among the "intellectual aristocracy" and its frequent reprinting testify to the essay's significance as an expression of the

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[55]Quoted in Lionel Stevenson, Darwin Among the Poets (New York, 1963), pp. 245-6.

[56]Lord Jim, Chapter 34. Quoted in John Lester, op. cit., p. 193. Cf. Russell's portrait of Conrad in Portraits from Memory: ". . . we shared a certain outlook on human life and human destiny which, from the very first, made a bond of extreme strength" (p. 82).

[57]Joseph Conrad to Bertrand Russell, December 22, 1913.

Zeitgeist. Kingsley Martin later claimed that, in conjunction with Russell's Principles of Social Reconstruction, it had formed the basis of his philosophical thinking and political aspiration as an undergraduate at Cambridge.[58] Dickinson, who was by temperament less pessimistic than Russell, still felt that the essay embodied an attitude which was ". . . ultimately the only great one".[59] In the light of these reactions it is not surprising that commentators have emphasised the importance of "The Free Man's Worship" as a "skeptic's manifesto".[60]

"The Free Man's Worship" contains an impassioned critique of the basic assumptions of social Darwinism which Russell had accepted in the 1890s. The process of transformation may have begun as early as the autumn of 1899 when the Boer War broke out. Russell later recalled that he had felt the war so deeply that he had been unable

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[58] R. W. Clark, op. cit., pp. 332-333.

[59] Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson to Bertrand Russell, February 17, 1903.

[60] This phrase is used by R. N. Stromberg in An Intellectual History of Modern Europe (New Jersey, 1966), p. 350. In his famous essay The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers (New Haven, 1932). Carl Becker cites "The Free Man's Worship" as the quintessential expression of twentieth century cosmic pessimism (pp. 13-14). See also Leithauser, op. cit., pp. 64-67.

"to think of anything else in its early stages".[61] In a letter to Louis Couturat, he confessed that his feelings were primarily the product of "a stupid and instinctive patriotism". At the same time he recognised that British imperialism was derived from "quite respectable" arguments and ideals which sprang from "the idea of Rome, the history of Mommsen . . . from Carlyle and Nietzsche and finally from Darwinian evolutionary theory".[62] He admitted that such sentiments were undoubtedly "erroneous" but found himself overwhelmed by them during the catastrophes of "Black Week" in December 1899. Although Russell did not become a pro-Boer and anti-Imperialist until after his "conversion", the Couturat correspondence shows him occasionally troubled by his conscience. In "The Free Man's Worship" doctrines based on the struggle for survival and the "worship of Force" inculcated by Carlyle, Neitzsche, and the creed of militarism are strongly condemned as ". . . a prostrate submission to evil, a sacrifice of our best to Moloch".[63] Thus there is a profound link between

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[61]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, May 2, 1911. See also A.B.R., I, 136.

[62]Bertrand Russell to Louis Couturat, December 18, 1899 (my translation).

[63]Mysticism and Logic, p. 42.

Russell's cosmic pessimism and his opposition to imperialism, which he now regarded as a product of the worship of power, "the result of the failure to maintain our own ideas against a hostile universe".[64] This antipathy towards imperialism led to his resignation from the Fabian Society in December 1903 and to his active participation in the campaign for free trade.[65]

Russell's strong emotional reaction to the Boer War is a further indication that his moral transformation cannot be completely explained by his sudden "conversion" in February 1901. In another letter to Ottoline, he wrote that he had felt no "love of mankind" in the late 1890s:

> I was quite hard and intellectual. . . . Other feelings began to revive in me with the war . . . then other people's troubles touched me very nearly. . . . Then my own troubles completed the growth of universal love. . . .[66]

This recollection, which is admittedly vague, suggests that, to some extent, the Boer War acted as a catalyst

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Bertrand Russell to Lucy Martin Donnelly, July 29, 1903. See R. A. Rempel, "From Imperialism to Free Trade: Couturat, Halévy and Russell's First Crusade", Journal of the History of Ideas, XL, No. 3 (July-Sept. 1979), 423-443.

[66] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, May 18, 1911.

in this process. In The Edwardian Turn of Mind, Samuel Hynes argues that Britain's humiliations in the early part of the Boer War, combined with the "apocalyptic" effects of the turn of the century and the death of Queen Victoria, seriously undermined the Victorian progress-cult and contributed to a mood of "fin de siècle" despair which pervaded the literature of the period.[67] This mood was epitomized by C. F. G. Masterman's The Condition of England, which ended with the following passage:

> Humanity -- at best -- appears but as a shipwrecked crew which has taken refuge on a narrow ledge of rock, beaten by wind and wave; which cannot tell how many, if any at all, will survive when the long night gives place to morning. The wise man will still go softly all his days; working always for greater economic equality on the one hand, for understanding between estranged peoples on the other; apprehending always how slight an effort of stupidity or violence could strike a death-blow to twentieth century civilization, and elevate the forces of destruction triumphant over the ruins of a world.68

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[67] Samuel Hynes, op. cit., Chapters 2-4. G. R. Searle's The Quest for National Efficiency (California, 1971) is a good analysis of the impact of the Boer War on British political thought.

[68] Quoted in Samuel Hynes, Edwardian Occasions (London, 1972), p. 8. Hynes finds the same pessimistic spirit in the works of Belloc, Chesterton, Wells, Galsworthy, Forster and Conrad.

We may note that Masterman's cosmic pessimism, expressed in a rhetoric as impassioned as that of "The Free Man's Worship", was intimately linked with internationalist ideals. Masterman, who was on the editorial council of the Independent Review, actively opposed Joseph Chamberlain's aggressive imperialism and protection campaign. In a similar way, Russell's increased sense of man's smallness and instability formed the basis for his passionate defence of free trade, which he described as "the last piece of sane internationalism left. . . ."[69] The appearance of the Independent Review, which contained the writings of Masterman, Russell and other "New Liberals" such as Dickinson and E. M. Forster was indicative of a general disillusionment with social Darwinist Utopianism. The liberalism of these men was sanctioned by moral rather than economic and social considerations. Their political views were based on a fixed ideal of individual freedom which transcended party and national divisions. In the cases of Russell and Masterman, as we have seen, this conviction was strengthened by cosmic pessimism and the consequent need to strive to remove man from the tyranny of circumstance.

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[69]Bertrand Russell to Lucy Martin Donnelly, July 29, 1903.

"The Free Man's Worship", then, was not simply an expression of Russell's Platonic religious outlook. It was a crucial statement of liberal values at a time of ideological confusion and spiritual pessimism in Britain. In this essay, Russell was exhorting the true liberal, both explicitly and implicitly, to look beyond the narrow dogmas of power, progress and profit. In so doing, he was directly attacking the advocates of efficiency, opportunism and narrow national interest whether they were Imperialists such as Rosebery, Fabians such as the Webbs, or jingoists such as Joseph Chamberlain.

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In April 1904, Russell returned to the cloister of mathematics. He had temporarily abandoned his mathematical work the previous December in order to take part in the free trade campaign, later recording in his journal that his political activity had inaugurated the ". . . beginning of a more endurable life. . . ."[70] Nevertheless, the strains of severe intellectual work combined with the emotional traumas of a loveless union with Alys left an

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[70]Bertrand Russell, Unpublished journal 1902-1905, entry for January 14, 1905 (Bertrand Russell Archives).

indelible impression on him. In his letters to Ottoline he referred to the period 1902-1910 as the "long night" whose return he dreaded.[71] During these years he laboured to complete his magnum opus, Principia Mathematica, which demanded a predominantly ascetic existence. In his despondency, Russell continued to find consolation in the contemplation of the Platonic world of ideal objects. His essay "The Study of Mathematics", written in 1907, reveals the intensity of this worship:

> Mathematics, rightly viewed, possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty. . . . . The true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than man, which is the touchstone of the highest excellence, is to be found in mathematics as surely as in poetry.[72]

Mathematics, he claims, by teaching "the contemplation of great things" will enable men to "escape from the dreary exile of the actual world".[73] Russell thus attaches religious significance to mathematics; by showing men life as it may be, it can console them for its inadequacies in actuality. He displays his affinities with Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill, who both claimed that the study of poetry could only be justified if it served a high moral

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[71] See A.B.R., I, 152-153.

[72] Mysticism and Logic, p. 49.

[73] Ibid., p. 50.

purpose, by envisaging a similar role for mathematics:

> For the health of the moral life, for ennobling the tone of an age or a nation, the austerer virtues have a strange power, exceeding the power of those not informed and purified by thought. Of these austerer virtues the love of truth is the chief, and in mathematics, the love of truth may find encouragement for waning faith.74

Russell's recollections of his Principia Mathematica years suggest that his own "faith" had waned since the composition of "The Free Man's Worship". He recalled in a letter to Ottoline that while his austere worship of truth had remained, all that was "less cold and more coloured" had gradually faded: "To give religion to those who cannot believe in God and immortality has been for many years my deepest hope, but the fire left me, and I lost faith".75 This impression is confirmed by a short piece he wrote in January 1907 entitled "Why Do Men Persist in Living?" which ended on a note of ultimate despair:

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74 Ibid., p. 58.

75 Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, August 12, 1911. Cf. Russell's unpublished journal 1902-1905, entry for January 27, 1903 (soon after completing "The Free Man's Worship"): "The fire and inspiration I had has left me, and I cannot believe I shall do any more useful things to make the long pain worth while". Also Russell's letters to Ottoline of April 3 and May 27, 1911.

> But for one who does not believe in any "other world" whether a heaven or a mystical transfiguration of this world, is there any way in which he can strengthen his life with the kind of hope or belief that could be called religious?
> The reply is in the negative.[76]

Russell's "worship of truth" brought him into conflict with the American psychologist and philosopher William James. James's book Pragmatism, which appeared in 1907, was anathema to Russell. James argued that a proposition is true only to the extent of its utility in real life situations. According to James the "only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of life's demands, nothing being omitted".[77] James's psychological investigations of religious experience had convinced him that the mind has a natural disposition to adopt a religious view of the world. Since religious beliefs were clearly useful in concrete life, he criticized the intellectual ascetism of scientific philosophers such as Russell. In a letter of October 4, 1908, he urged Russell to ". . . say good-bye to mathematical logic if you wish to preserve your relations with concrete realities!"[78]

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[76]Unpublished MS, January 1907 (Bertrand Russell Archives).

[77]Quoted in John MacQuarrie, op. cit., p. 177.

[78]William James to Bertrand Russell, October 4, 1908.

James's overriding aim was to find a way of reconciling religion and science. In his essay "The Will to Believe", he attempted to combat the prevailing view of "intellectualists" who maintained that religious beliefs must not be adopted unless they could be scientifically verified.[79] He defended the "right to believe", claiming that by adopting "a believing attitude in religious matters" we avoid the paralyzing effect of suspended judgment.[80] Russell informed James that he strongly objected to the pragmatic philosophy's encouragement of religious beliefs since he considered such beliefs to be "pernicious".[81] In a review of Pragmatism published in April 1909, Russell observed that a "philosophy of action" was ". . . singularly well adapted to the predominant intellectual temper of our time".[82] He asserted that pragmatism was based on purely

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[79]"The Will to Believe" was specifically a reaction to W. K. Clifford's article, "The Ethics of Belief" (1877). See Walter Kaufmann, Religion from Tolstoy to Camus (New York, 1961), pp. 17-18.

[80]The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy (New York, 1897), p. 1.

[81]Bertrand Russell to William James, July 22, 1908.

[82]Bertrand Russell, "Pragmatism", Edinburgh Review, Lon., 209 (April 1909), 363-88.

mundane arguments and values which had been generated by the philosophy of evolution and the belief in human power. "Pragmatism", he concluded

> appeals to the temper of mind which finds on the surface of this planet the whole of its imaginative material; which feels confident of progress, and unaware of non-human limitations to human power; . . . which desires religion as it desires railways and electric light, as a comfort and a help in the affairs of this world, not as providing non-human objects to satisfy the hunger for perfection and for something to be worshipped without reserve. But . . . to men who do not find Man an adequate object of their worship, the pragmatist's world will seem narrow and petty, robbing life of all that gives it value, and making Man himself smaller by depriving the universe which he contemplates of all its splendour.83

The vehemence of this passage indicates the extent to which pragmatism offended Russell's moral and religious sense. He discerned in the pragmatic temper close affinities with the lower moralities which, in "The Free Man's Worship", he had exhorted man to transcend. Furthermore, James's doctrines, which concentrated on religion as a human phenomenon, failed to recognise the importance of the contemplation of ideal and eternal objects which formed the basis of Russell's own religious attitude in the Principia Mathematica period.

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83 Ibid., p. 388.

# CHAPTER VI

## THE RELIGION OF LOVE

If, indeed, by "science" we mean the organization of an intellectual relationship to the world we live in adequate to give us some degree of power over that world, and if by "mysticism" we mean the joyful organization of an emotional relationship to the world conceived as a whole, the opposition which we usually assume to exist between them is of comparatively modern origin.

Havelock Ellis (The Dance of Life, 1923)

The fierceness of the sea, the majesty of the stars and the gentleness of spring showers are all surpassed by love -- it is more fierce, more majestic, more gentle than they are -- I have tried to put it among the things of this earth and imagine a transcendant worship above it; there is no God, no heaven, no ideal which is not incarnate in love.

Bertrand Russell (Letter to Ottolline Morrell, March 1912)

Bertrand Russell's correspondence with Ottoline Morrell provides us with deeper insights into his religious thought than all his other correspondences. From March 1911, when he fell in love with Ottoline, until January 1914, when he completed the essay "Mysticism and Logic", Russell wrote nearly one thousand letters to her, sometimes at the rate of three a day.[1] There can be no doubt that the religious philosophy as expressed in "The Essence of Religion" and the short novel The Perplexities of John Forstice was profoundly influenced by his relationship with Ottoline.

At the beginning of the affair, Russell confessed to Ottoline that, while writing Principia Mathematica, he had "set out to kill" his more mystical yearnings in order to make his life endurable.[2] Upon completing this work, he felt as if he had been released from prison -- Ottoline completed this sense of emancipation:

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[1]Russell and Ottoline were unable to spend much time together largely because she remained tied to her husband Philip Morrell and their daughter in London. The consequent difficulties and traumas are described in great detail in R. W. Clark, op. cit., pp. 163-180.

[2]Betrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, April 3, 1911.

> You have released in me imprisoned voices that sing the beauty of the world -- all the poetry that grows dumb in the years of sorrow has begun to speak to me again. . . . I have gone back to reading poetry which I had not read for many years . . . I have been ascetic and starved my love of beauty. . . .3

Compared to the joy which Ottoline brought him, mathematics seemed a "cold and unresponsive love".[4] Freed from hard intellectuality, Russell now felt ready to renew his search for a religion "without fettering dogmas". He believed that this could be achieved through the medium of her love:

> I must somehow make what comes to me a gift to mankind, if I am not to feel ashamed of having so much that others lack . . . somehow you belong with religion to me . . . therefore I will make your love help me in trying to preserve ideals in men without what seems to me false belief -- which is at bottom what I most want to do.5

Russell's attitude towards Ottoline's religious beliefs was, from the first, ambivalent. While he was sure that she would not believe in God and immortality if she possessed a "stronger passion for truth", he was equally convinced that her religious faith was the basis of her most valuable quality which he described in one letter as

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[3]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, March 30, 1911.

[4]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, April 3, 1911.

[5]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, April 2, 1911.

"a sort of large-heartedness and universal love, and a power of reconciling opposites in practice".[6] Although Russell suspected that her harmonious nature was not compatible with "a very sharp clear-cut view of things", he could not be absolutely certain.[7] He began to wonder whether such harmony could be attained without religious beliefs which were not open to him. This conflict between "religion" and "truth" permeated Russell's correspondence with Ottoline in the period 1911-14. At first, the possibility of union made him anxious to write again on religion: ". . . I want to get free from business and away from technical jobs and really try to write something of what I live by in the way of faith. . . . You have given me faith when I was doubting and hope when I was despairing".[8]

These early letters are a remarkable testimony to Ottline's healing power; Russell felt that he had been completely transformed, experiencing for the first time in

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[6]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, May 13, 1911 (my emphasis).

[7]Ibid.

[8]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, May 19, 1911.

his life "a sense of absolute completion".[9] As we have seen, this fugitive feeling of internal harmony was intimately connected with religion in Russell's thought. When he attempted to evoke his feelings, religious imagery sprang naturally to mind:

> I can never tell you the feeling of solemn peace that I have when I am with you. I have often imagined the martyr's first moment in heaven -- when the glory of God is revealed and the grave music of the angelic choir first floods his soul -- I don't know anything less that will do for a comparison.[10]

In another letter he wrote:

> I want more absolute union than is possible for two separate souls -- I want something infinite, unattainable, absolute -- I can't quite tell you -- it is something mystical I want, something not of this earth. . . . It is the inmost heart of our love -- the something infinite in Man that enables him to long for an infinite and eternal love.[11]

This heightened sense of infinity directed Russell's thoughts to the religious philosophy of Benedict Spinoza (1634-77). There is sufficient evidence in these letters to indicate that Spinoza's concept of the "intellectual love of God" was more meaningful now that Russell was seeking a higher harmony between intellect and "vision". Soon after the beginning of the affair he and Ottoline were

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[9] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, June 10, 1911.

[10] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, June 11, 1911.

[11] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, July 22, 1911.

reading Spinoza's Ethics together. Spinoza's thought was not new to Russell. He had first read Sir Frederick Pollock's study of his life and philosophy as an undergraduate in 1894. Ever since then Spinoza had been

> . . . one of the most important people in my world. . . . I find his importance grows greater and greater to me -- all my own thought makes me understand him better and better, and see the things he is meaning to say more clearly. . . . I felt an uneasiness until we had shared him. What I want to say is extraordinarily like what he says.12

Spinoza was ahead of his time in rejecting an anthropomorphic deity and the whole metaphysical basis of traditional theology. In the Ethics, God is defined as infinite substance consisting of infinite attributes only two of which, thought and extension, are revealed to man. Spinoza views all man's activities "under the aspect of eternity"; man's body is part of infinite substance extended, his mind part of infinite substance thinking. Matter and spirit, although they are differently manifested, are identical since they both express God. It follows from this that the more knowledge we possess about ourselves and nature, the better we understand God. For Spinoza, the love of God consists in the knowledge of him; only by knowing

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[12]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, August 11, 1911.

and hence loving God can men understand that everything happens according to the Divine necessity. In making this necessity the centre of his thinking man attains the "intellectual love of God" which is a state of all-composing calm:

> In this union alone . . . our happiness consists. I do not say that we must know him adequately; but it is sufficient for us, in order to be united with him, to know him in a measure for the knowledge we have of the body is not of such a kind that we can know it as it is or perfectly, and yet what a union! what love![13]

Man's adequacy, then, lies in his ability to see himself as part of a system of necessary relations. His ideas are inadequate in so far as he is distracted from this understanding by his passions. The basic need for self-preservation gives rise to evil, hatred, and strife only when the passions are uninformed by reason. But through understanding the cause of strife, man is able to pass from a "state of lesser perfection" to the "intellectual love of God". According to Spinoza, this divinely implanted ability to understand himself and his emotions gives man the capacity to escape from the bondage of self and its shortsighted desires and to achieve the freedom which comes from being a willing part of the whole.

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[13] Ethic of Benedict Spinoza, translated by W. H. White (3rd ed.; London, 1910), Preface, p. xci.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Spinoza's religious philosophy had gained many enthusiastic adherents. Spinoza's attempt to reconcile the great helpful ideas of religion with the demands of the rational intelligence was particularly well suited to the requirements of the age. For J. A. Froude, Matthew Arnold, George Eliot and William Hale White, Spinoza came closest to providing a satisfactory moral code, a demythologized religion and removal of the gulf between heart and head.[14] These emancipated Puritans found in Spinoza a compensation for the loss of traditional beliefs. Froude (1818-94) found that the sublime conception of the "intellectual love of God" exposed the superficiality and emptiness of "the vapourings of the evangelicals and the incantations of the Tractarians".[15] He felt liberated by Spinoza's identification of virtue with the acceptance of necessity: "The love of God is the extinction of all other loves and all other desires. To know God, as far as man can know

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[14]F. D. Maurice, James Martineau and Samuel Coleridge also acknowledged their debt to Spinoza. See Wilfred Stone, Religion and Art of W. Hale White (Stanford, 1954), p. 101.

[15]Basil Willey, More Nineteenth Century Studies, p. 117.

him, is power, self-government and peace. And this is virtue, and this is blessedness".[16]

Matthew Arnold also found in Spinoza a religion far superior to what he considered the redundant ameliorated Christianity contained in works of biblical criticism such as Essays and Reviews. In an essay entitled "The Bishop and the Philosopher" (1863), he compared the "weak trifling" of Bishop Colenso to the "strong thought" of Spinoza, who displayed ". . . not a trace either of Voltaire's passion for mere mocking or of Strauss's passion for mere demolition. His whole soul was filled with desire of the love and knowledge of God and of that only. . . ."[17] Dr. William Robbins has shown that Spinoza was a major formative influence on Arnold's religious thought. Arnold's definition of God as "the stream of tendency not ourselves by which all things fulfil the law of their being" and of religion as "morality touched with emotion" are both indicative of a strong infusion of Spinoza's philosophy. Arnold, with Spinoza, believed that knowledge would only

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[16]Quoted in ibid., p. 118.

[17]Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism (New York, 1865), p. 249.

lift man above the sway of his passions in so far as it was "touched with emotion".[18]

George Eliot and William Hale White, who both translated the Ethics, were attracted to Spinoza for similar reasons. Neither they nor Arnold and Froude found much of value in Spinoza's metaphysical formulas which consisted of an intellectual demonstration of God's existence. The Ethics provided them with a guide to life -- an ethical imperative and religious atttitude based on a proper understanding of human nature. Like these mid-Victorian "progressives", Russell found that this was Spinoza's essential quality, as he explained to Ottoline:

> Spinoza is the man to teach love of mankind to people like me . . . what he is really doing is teaching one not to be indignant but to understand people instead. He takes self-preservation as the root of the passions and shows how it leads to strife. Then he goes on at last to point out how strife would cease if people put their self into things which all may enjoy together.[19]

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[18] See William Robbins, op. cit., p. 102. Also pp. 63-9, 122-7.

[19] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, May 24, 1911. In some of his letters to Ottoline, Russell makes use of Spinozist idiom. For example, in a letter of June 11, 1911, he wrote: "I know you now very well, and every growth in knowledge has been a growth in love and a realization of all you are. Don't you see that my reason and my religion love you just as much as my passions do. . . ."

This submergence of self was, for Hale White and Russell, the essence of Spinoza's message. By the removal of the distinction between self and not-self through the "intellectual love of God" men would cease to be enslaved by their passions. Hale White found great comfort in this "life in the whole" for when we understand that we are ". . . part of the whole, the grandeur and the office of the whole are ours. We are anxious about what we call 'personality' but in truth there is nothing in it of any worth, and the less we care for it, the more 'blessed' we are".[20] Russell felt that Spinoza's greatest value lay in his ability to teach men "to be universal, not particular, to be somehow in touch with the whole".[21] As we have seen, he was intrigued by the possibility that the quality of internal harmony, which he perceived in Ottoline, might be compatible with an absolute respect for reason. He found intimations of compatibility in Spinoza's concept

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[20]William Hale White, Pages from a Journal and Other Papers (London, 1900), p. 44.

[21]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, March 10, 1912.

of "reason informed by love" which gave him further insights into the philosopher's religious outlook:

> He is filled full with an emotion towards the universe which is at once mystical and intellectual -- it must have grown up in him through the feeling of god-like calm when one passes from passionate strife to an impersonal reasoned view of the matter of strife.[22]

Russell's problem was that he could not completely subdue his indignation towards what seemed a hostile universe. The note of defiance struck in "The Free Man's Worship" was not well attuned to the "intellectual love of God". He admitted to Ottoline that he found it much easier to imagine a God of wrath like that in Genesis than Spinoza's calm God who represented "merely the course of nature".[23] In these letters, we often find Russell backsliding into his "religion of sorrow", a basic pessimism which always remained not far beneath the surface:

> . . . I am afraid it is useless to hope that my views of the world will ever become very optimistic. . . . I see no evidence that there is any purpose in things and it seems probable that human life and all that we value must die out . . . it is hard not to suppose that evil predominates.[24]

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[22]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, May 24, 1911.

[23]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, March 23, 1912.

[24]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, June 2, 1911. (My emphasis.)

In his preface to the Ethics (1910), Hale White claimed that Spinoza had been motivated by the desire to relieve men "from the trouble and despair consequent upon what is really a dual government of the world".[25] Russell, however, could not accept Spinoza's, undiluted pantheism. "The Free Man's Worship" had been based on a matter-spirit dualism and opposition between fact and ideal; it was a selective worship which stopped short of union with the universe. In The Problems of Philosophy, an outline of his own philosophy which he completed in August 1911, Russell maintained this dualism but in the final chapter entitled "The Value of Philosophy", the extension and refinement of his religious outlook later manifested in "The Essence of Religion" was anticipated. In this chapter, the language is Russellian but the concepts are clearly derived from Spinoza. Here Russell defines the knowledge philosophy aims at as "a form of union of self and not-self".[26] The true philosophic contemplation "finds its satisfaction in every enlargement of the not-self", a

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[25]Preface, Ethic, p. xcix.

[26]Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy (New York, 1959), p. 159.

contemplation which makes us "citizens of the universe, not only of one walled city at war with all the rest . . . through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good".[27]

The attempt to blend Spinoza's religious philosophy with his own world-view presented Russell with certain problems. If religion could be legitimately confined to the realm of feeling, then Spinoza's reconciliation of the individual with the whole through the "intellectual love of God" would be its most perfect expression. At the same time, Russell required that this emotion should not conflict with the world as presented by modern scientific philosophy, which seemed to consist of an irreducible mind-matter dualism. On August 6, 1911, Russell suggested to Ottoline how these two views might be reconciled. Spinoza would have to be diluted a little since his religion was

> . . . too pantheistic for the truth and allows too little substantiality to individual things. I can fit the "universal and particular" view very well on to my metaphysic. The result will be extraordinarily Platonic . . . I hardly

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[27] Ibid., pp. 160-161.

> know where the journey will end. Monism in feeling, dualism in judgment covers much reconciliation of religion and truth. That is the fundamental notion of the whole, I think.28

Russell believed that Spinoza's most valuable ethical concepts -- the conclusions that self-preservation is the root of the passions, that realization of necessity liberates man from indignation, and that man is freed from the prison of the finite self through the contemplation of infinity -- could be harmonized with his own "non-pantheistic" perception of reality. In this endeavour, he was encouraged by Ottoline who assured him that if he could make Spinoza's "great vision" more accessible to the modern mind, his writing would "have a very great effect on many people and . . . lift them out into life and freedom and love and union with others. . . ."[29] On August 18, Russell sent her an abstract of a large book which he called Prisons.[30] Judging from this abstract, he

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[28]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, August 6, 1911.

[29]Ottoline Morrell to Bertrand Russell, August 12, 1911.

[30]See Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, August 18, 1911. Also R. W. Clark, op. cit., p. 198.

planned to encompass the whole range of his religious experience, combining the insights of the essays "The Free Man's Worship", "On History" (1904) and "The Study of Mathematics" with the specifically Spinozist concept of "life in the whole".[31] However, he was not completely satisfied with the manuscript, considering its style too analytical for the feelings he wished to express. This impression was confirmed by the criticisms of Mrs. Whitehead: "She says it appears 'voulu', that the emotions spoken of are not spoken of so as to be felt; and that the intellectual and emotional parts don't belong together. . . . She says the beauty of 'The Free Man's Worship' is lacking".[32]

Although Russell abandoned Prisons as a book, he incorporated parts of the manuscript in the essay "The Essence of Religion".[33] An examination of this essay

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[31] In a letter of October 12, 1911, Russell attributed this extension of his religious outlook to Ottoline's influence: "Large parts of it (Prisons) are transcripts of what I have observed in you. You have shown me how to live without barriers, in the free love of God". The connection between Ottoline's influence and the infusion of "Spinozism" into Russell's religious thought has been explored in detail by Duncan Martin who argues that he "discerned in Ottoline's philosophy and behaviour the incarnation of Spinoza's ethical system" (see Martin, op. cit., pp. 156-170).

[32] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, October 18, 1911.

[33] Russell appears to have used material from

and the reaction of contemporary critics to it will serve to illustrate the tension between Russell's intellectual and emotional demands and the consequent difficulties involved in extending his religion to embrace "monism in feeling". One of the surviving fragments of the Prisons manuscript contains the most succinct account of what Russell was attempting to achieve in "The Essence of Religion". "The moralist", he writes

> divides the world into good and bad, and this division is true and important. But besides this dualistic attitude, there is another, wholly compatible with it, but monistic; an attitude which ignores the difference between the good and the bad, and loves all alike. This is the essence of religion, but because it has not been clearly distinguished from the moralist's attitude, it has been supposed, wrongly, to require the belief that the world is good. Since this belief has been found scarcely tenable it has become vital to religion to free it from any dependence upon this belief.34

In "The Essence of Religion", Russell asserts that, in view of the decay of traditional beliefs, the most vital and valuable elements in Christianity -- worship, acquiescence, and love -- must be freed from the entanglements of dogma. Although he nowhere acknowledges his debt,

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Chapter I which was to be on "The nature and value of religion" and Chapter VII, "Union with the universe" (see Clark, op. cit., p. 198). "The Essence of Religion" was published in the October 1912 issue of The Hibbert Journal.

[34] Prisons I (c 1911). Unpublished MS. Bertrand Russell Archives.

the aspects of this essay which distinguish it from "The Free Man's Worship" are largely derived from Spinoza's Ethics. Religion, he argues, is necessary because it gives life "a quality of infinity", a quality obstructed by the finite self which, "impelled by the desire for self-preservation, builds prison walls round the infinite part of our nature, and endeavours to restrain it from that free life in the whole which constitutes its being".[35] Russell, with Spinoza, finds that self-realization is only achieved "in proportion as the infinite grows strong in us".[36] Thus man achieves freedom and union with the universe through the passage "from the life of the finite self to the infinite life in the whole".[37] However, in the section of the essay concerning worship, Russell "returns upon himself", claiming that, in view of the opposition of fact and ideal, the selective worship of the ideal good imagined through creative contemplation "forms an essential part of the religious life".[38] But selective worship is not alone

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[35] R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, op. cit., p. 566.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., p. 567.

[38] Ibid., p. 569.

sufficient; it must be combined with impartial worship in order to produce "that sense of union with the actual world which compels us to descend from the world of contemplation and seek, with however little success, to realize what is possible of the good here on earth".[39] Since religion is to be a matter of feeling rather than belief, neither worship is dependent on dogma and thus cannot be "intellectually mistaken". Russell defines religious action as the attempt to close the rift between the objects of these two worships "by making more good exist and more of existence good".[40] Worship, combined with the moral discipline of acquiescence, liberates us from indignation and permits the growth of universal love. Worship, acquiescence and love are, according to Russell, intimately interconnected and can all exist without dogma. Thus the essence of religion is a mode of union which makes no demands upon the universe, an attitude of spirit which enables man to stand alone with his ideals and "conquer, inwardly, the world's indifference".[41]

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[39] Ibid., p. 570.

[40] Ibid., p. 571.

[41] Ibid., p. 576.

Contemporary criticisms of "The Essence of Religion" fixed upon Russell's uneasy handling of impartial worship and his concept of the "whole". An anonymous reviewer writing in The Nation described the essay as a reaction against the "narrowness and anthropocentrism" of such substitutes for orthodox faith as the Positivist Creed and the "Ethical Movement".[42] Nevertheless, like these creeds, Russell's attempt to "plan a religion without a God" was part of a general revolt against mechanical determinism.[43] Its weakness, he argued, lay in its "failure to give any meaning to the unity of the universe" for ". . . without such a conception of the whole it is difficult to believe that any universal love or worship could be maintained".[44] R. F. Alfred Hoernlé voiced similar objections in the Harvard Theological Review. Hoernlé was confused by Russell's decision to place impartial worship alongside

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[42] Anon., "Religion without God", The Nation (Lon.), 12, October 26, 1912, p. 171.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., p. 172. Russell mentioned this review to Ottoline in a letter of October 27, 1912 (#613). He was surprised that the reviewer had "the impertinence to accuse me of bad logic", adding that he seemed to display "a tincture of Hegelianism".

selective worship, arguing that he had debarred himself from union with the universe ". . . by the way in which he opposes the actual and the ideal - in short by being half-hearted about the whole".[45] Finally, A. S. Pringle-Pattison accused Russell of using words without meaning when he spoke of "union with a world which outrages our moral sense by its absolute indifference to all our standards of value".[46] Like Hoernlé, he pointed out that by endeavouring to bridge the gulf between the objects of selective and impartial worship, Russell was virtually abandoning impartiality and adopting a position known as meliorism.[47]

Russell was himself aware that his religious writing was suffering from the conflict between two "equally insistent" visions: the Spinozist vision of love, which brought universal love and the submergence of "self as a separate fighting unit" through union with the universe, and the vision of sorrow. The latter

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[45] R. F. Alfred Hoernlé, "The Religious Aspect of Bertrand Russell's Philosophy", Harvard Theological Review (April 1916), 178.

[46] A. S. Pringle-Pattison, "The Free Man's Worship: A Consideration of Mr. Bertrand Russell's Views on Religion", Hibbert Journal, 12 (Oct. 1913), 62.

[47] Ibid. Pringle-Pattison added that meliorism (the view that the world is capable of being made better by our own efforts) had been "current in various forms during the last fifty years".

showed love to be "merely an opiate" making us "forget for a moment that we draw our breath in pain and that thought is the gateway to despair".[48] By the end of 1911, he had come to the conclusion that his failure to remove the tension between intellect and mystic vision had undermined the insights of both.[49] Nevertheless he remained confident that Ottoline's love would enable him to find a way of fusing the two. He assured her that he would

> grow gradually less afraid of what is religious in me, less fearing that there may be some hint of insincerity or self indulgence -- and that will make me able to write. But you don't know how profoundly you help me when you speak of your religion. It is really all very sacred to me and every word you say I respond to passionately. What I desire is to save all the good of it without any false or even doubtful belief. This is really a very great and worthy object. And I believe with your help I can do it.[50]

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[48] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, January 3, 1912.

[49] Cf. letter to Ottoline of March 17, 1912: ". . . some part of me is left out now whatever I do, intellect one way and mystic vision the other way. They ought both to come in. I tried with Prisons but didn't get either in whole and full".

[50] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, December 29, 1911.

Russell was particularly anxious to put into words the "sense of infinity" which Ottoline's love had given him.[51] The expository form employed in Prisons, he decided, had not been a good vehicle for the feelings he wished to express. A more artistic form, like Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, seemed more appropriate. This would enable him to depict moods he had outgrown and allow him to be "more tentative and undogmatic".[52] Now that Ottoline had freed his imagination, Russell wondered whether he might become "the prophet of the age, as Carlyle was to his age".[53] The problem, he told her, was that occasionally the vision faded and he found himself returning to a cold, intellectual frame of mind in which it was impossible to write imaginatively. In his endeavour to overcome his own inner conflict Russell fortified himself with the reflection that "Spinoza has it all -- intellect and love. It can be

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[51]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, October 11, 1911.

[52]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, January 9, 1912.

[53]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, late April, 1912 (#428). At about this time Russell did in fact write a sort of spiritual autobiography which he considered publishing "anonymously, under the name of Simon Styles". The manuscript of this autobiography has not come to light. (See R. W. Clark, op. cit., pp. 219-220.)

be done".[54]

The product of this new creative impulse was a novella entitled The Perplexities of John Forstice which he completed in July 1912.[55] Like Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, "Forstice" is largely based on the author's spiritual pilgrimage. And, like Carlyle, Russell finds fiction convenient for the purpose of describing, in a dramatic way, his own experience of spiritual awakening. Russell's mention of Carlyle indicates the seriousness of his purpose. In "Forstice", he is primarily concerned with the most pressing problem of the age: the need to reconcile religion with scientific knowledge. In view of the importance of the ideas it contains, it will be necessary to give a brief account of Russell's first excursion into the realm of fiction.

In the first section of the novella, Russell attempts to depict what he considers the most salient features of the Edwardian Age. The central character,

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[54]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, early March, 1912 (#372).

[55]Leithauser suggests that the name "Forstice" is an amalgam of "forced" and "ice", symbolizing the cold, analytical intellect. She also conjectures that Russell may have been paying tribute here to his friend E. M. Forster, whose most recent novel, Howards End (1910), had explored the dangers of the dichotomy between heart and head. Finally, she points out the resemblance between John Forstice and John Faustus, a classic figure of duality (Leithauser, op. cit., pp. 118-122).

John Forstice, a dedicated, unworldly scientist, attends, for the first time in his life, a garden party.[56] Here he encounters the advocates of the creeds of imperialism and socialism who are characterised by their optimism and spiritual complacency. Their Utopianism is contrasted by the attitude of a pessimist financier, who is plagued by ennui, the "mal du siècle".[57] We are reminded here of the ideological atmosphere which Russell encountered when he first emerged from Pembroke Lodge. The socialist, Shifsky, who informs Forstice that all life will ultimately be "conducted with the order and regularity of the Post Office" is reminiscent of Sidney Webb.[58] The pessimist financier, on the other hand, is representative of an equally pervasive mood of disillusionment and inward indifference.[59]

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[56] In The Edwardian Turn of Mind, Samuel Hynes chooses the garden party as the emblem of the luxury, propriety, and spiritual complacency of Edwardian England. See Chapter I "The Edwardian Garden Party".

[57] Cf. W. H. Mallock, The New Republic (1877) (Florida, 1950), pp. 52-56. Russell later admitted that Mallock's book had been the model for "Forstice" (Clark, op. cit., p. 220). Like Mallock; Russell finds ennui to be one of the most disturbing aspects of modern life.

[58] Barry Feinberg, ed., The Collected Stories of Bertrand Russell (New York, 1972), p. 21.

[59] Russell's vision of the age is corroborated by the historian John Lester who describes the period 1880-1914

Confronted with these conflicting attitudes, Forstice finds himself reflecting seriously upon his own sense of values. When he returns home, he discovers that his wife is dying of cancer. Overwhelmed by this news, he undergoes a conversion of spirit which culminates in a feeling of universal love: "With a sympathy which he had never known before, he saw the thoughts and feelings of others; the force of one great devotion set free the pent-up waters of love towards all the world".[60] However, as a scientist, Forstice requires a rational foundation for his newly-acquired faith. With this aim in mind, he attends a meeting of the Amanti del Pensiero (lovers of clear thought) in Florence. Of these Amanti, the mathematician and the novelist are the mouthpieces for Russell's "religion of sorrow". The mathematician recommends the contemplation of the world of universals as an escape from the imperfections of the real world. The vision of the novelist is more dynamic but also essentially tragic. He asserts that "infinite pain" is the essence of human existence and that wisdom can only be attained through "the flaming

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as "an age charged with a vibrant energy matched only by its world-weariness, a utopian resolve matched only by its despair" (Lester, op. cit., p. xiii).

[60]Feinberg, ed., op. cit., p. 23.

mystic marriage of pain".[61] The philosopher and the poet represent Russell's other, "equally insistent" vision. The philosopher advises Forstice, in the manner of Spinoza, to transcend the apparent division between good and evil by contemplating the universe "under the aspect of eternity".[62] Finally, the poet advocates a more creative and dynamic form of impartial contemplation which comes closest to Russell's own religious ideal at the time of writing: "I want a world where there is always something to be done, a virgin forest in which to hew a way, a night to illumine with beacon fires, an infinite chaos with a core of cosmos gradually growing. . . ."[63]

At this point in the story, Russell reveals one of his deepest concerns: the need for a gospel which will be helpful not merely to an intellectual élite but to the whole of humanity. After the Amanti have spoken, Alegno, a humble civil servant, points out that the great majority

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[61] Ibid., p. 31. Cf. "Wisdom" (c 1902). Unpublished MS (Bertrand Russell Archives).

[62] Ibid., p. 27.

[63] Ibid., p. 28. Russell actually copied this passage from a letter he sent Ottoline on March 17, 1912 (#386). In this letter he continued: "That's what I really want . . . I want man to have courage in the face of an alien universe, and to learn to love it and make beauty out of it without anthropomorphism." In his insightful essay, "Russell and Religion", Jager points out that this idea of "incarnation" is a recurrent theme in Russell's religious thought. He suggests that his demand that man should attempt to incarnate

of mankind has neither the capacity nor the leisure to appreciate the "refined delights" of their various heavens.[64] Alegno's speech plunges Forstice into perplexity. He becomes convinced that the best gospel must somehow retain the sense of the infinite contained in the visions of the Amanti while making itself, like Christianity, accessible to the common man. In the final section of the novella, Forstice finds the perfect embodiment of his ideal in a nun whose religious outlook combines simple Christian piety with a mystical sense of infinity in everything that exists. However he realizes that the essence of the nun's vision, her reverence and self-renouncing love, must be detached from the inessential extra-beliefs: "That secret in which Wisdom was shrouded he felt that Mother Catharine possessed; and yet, and yet, how could it be disentangled from the God, the life of prayer, the belief in the power of the Spirit, with which in her it was entwined?"[65] Thus Forstice becomes aware of an almost unbearable dualism: the conflict between "two truths, the

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the infinite in the world is intimately linked with "the instinctive Protestant unction in Russell's breast" -- Russell in Review, eds. J. E. Thomas and Kenneth Blackwell (Toronto, 1976), pp. 91-113.

[64] Ibid., p. 32.

[65] Ibid., p. 41.

truth of science and the truth of vision".[66]

In the last paragraphs of "Forstice", Russell shows how the nun's vision can be reconciled with the scientific outlook. He asserts that the core of her faith -- her reverence, "a wondering sense of infinity in everything" -- can not only be retained but enriched in the absence of definite theological beliefs. Russell argues, in the manner of Spinoza, that the vision draws its ethical vitality not from theology but from the inexorability of nature:

> Man, like the rest of nature, is part of the eternal Whole; to the eternal vision, all his deeds have their predetermined place, all are from the beginning of time necessarily what they are and not otherwise, no more exposed to indignation than the revolutions of the heavenly bodies. But Man, unlike what we know of mere matter, is endowed with the power of thought and feeling; in every man's heart the infinite pain, the infinite longing, make the inmost fibre of our life call out to us for love and sympathy; and when the vision has effaced self and quieted indignation, no obstacle hinders the free outpouring of love in response to this call.67

This conclusion clearly owes a great deal to Russell's recent immersion in Spinoza's philosophy. The final fusion of science and vision offered in "Forstice" is an unmistakable echo of "the intellectual love of God". Russell claims that

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., p. 42.

since worship, love and knowledge all spring naturally from reverence, science is not "hostile to the vision, but a necessary outcome of it".[68] By the same token, indifference to knowledge is, according to Russell, "a kind of irreverence".[69] This conclusion is surprisingly similar to Tennyson's triumphant reconciliation of science and religion in In Memoriam. Indeed it is particularly reminiscent of Russell's favourite stanza from that poem, which, as an adolescent, he had considered an unattainable ideal:

> Let knowledge grow from more to more
> But more of reverence in us dwell
> That mind and soul according well
> May make one music as before
> But vaster. . . .

The Perplexities of John Forstice was not published until 1972. When the story was being considered for publication, Russell felt obliged to observe (as he might have observed of In Memoriam) that the final section was "much too sentimental, much too mild and much too favourable to religion. In all of this I was unduly influenced by Lady Ottoline Morrell".[70] Russell felt no such misgivings in the summer of 1912. In a mood of

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[68] Ibid., p. 43 (my emphasis).

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., p. 12, letter to Anton Felton, Russell's literary executor, April 2, 1968.

euphoria, he informed Ottoline that the discovery that "love of truth" sprang naturally from reverence had bridged the gulf in his thought between intellect and vision.[71] A week after completing "Forstice" he told her that

> . . . now at last there really is a harmony -- I had despaired of it, and I should never have got it without you. It is important -- it is the main thing I ought to do in the world to make a harmony between intellect and mysticism -- not to put them side by side, but to make one fused whole of them. I feel now that is happening, and it gives me a mental freedom and absence of tension such as I have never known before.[72]

It was not long before Russell began to doubt the possibility of such a complete union. From about the autumn of 1912 there is a discernible change in the tone and content of his letters to Ottoline. In the first flush of enthusiasm after finishing "Forstice", he had informed her that he no longer felt any impulse towards technical philosophy.[73] However, three months later his mood had completely changed. He found himself unable to recapture the

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[71]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, #552 (c. August 1912).

[72]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, July 10, 1912.

[73]See Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, mid-July, 1912 (#510).

emotional intensity required for creative writing, a circumstance which he linked to a new urge to return to "technical thought".[74] At the time of writing "Forstice", he told her,

> as always when I am very deeply stirred emotionally I felt clear thinking rather trivial compared with mystical things. I think perhaps this is true, but I can't live permanently at the high level of feeling where mystical things fill one's life, and as emotion gets less intellect reasserts itself. The intellectual impulse has something mystical at the heart of it but not in the details. . . .[75]

The criticisms of the Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, may have acted as a catalyst in this process. Since Wittgenstein had arrived in Cambridge in October 1911 Russell had become increasingly impressed with his abilities as a logician. The Austrian's passion and intransigence made him feel a "puny compromiser" in comparison.[76] Wittgenstein's conviction that philosophy should be confined to the realm of logic and not even touch upon questions of human values made him highly critical of the "peroration" in the final chapter of Russell's The Problems of Philosophy. Furthermore, he was appalled by "The Essence of Religion", a reaction

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[74]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, October, 1912 1912 (#510).

[75]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, October 31, 1912. Cf. Mysticism and Logic, p. 22: "The impulse to logic, not felt while the mystic mood is dominant, reasserts itself as the mood fades. . . ."

[76]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, early September 1912 (#566).

which left Russell profoundly disturbed:

> Wittgenstein was really unhappy about my paper on religion. He felt I had been a traitor to the gospel of exactness, and wantonly used words vaguely; also that such things are too intimate for print. I minded very much because I half agree with him.[77]

It seems reasonable to conjecture that Russell's awareness of his own oscillating moods and his receptivity to Wittgenstein's criticisms led him to abandon the hope of making a "fused whole" out of mysticism and intellect. Nevertheless, he was conscious that he had arrived at a more balanced view of the relationship between the two. In October 1912, he was able to inform Ottoline that they had finally taken ". . . their proper places -- I see now where each thing fits, what is important and central and what is more or less accidental. The whole scheme of things is vastly clearer in my mind than it was a year ago. . . ."[78] As we have seen, the key to this harmony was Russell's gradual realization that the scientific and mystical impulses were not essentially antagonistic since both impulses

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[77]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, October 11, 1912. In his study of "Wittgenstein's Impact on Russell's Theory of Belief", Kenneth Blackwell claims that "Wittgenstein's criticisms of his imaginative (or "literary" or "non-scientific") writings put an end to such writing" (unpublished M.A. thesis, McMaster University, May 1974), p. 43.

[78]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, October 30, 1912.

sprang from the same centre. In other words, the outlook of the scientist and the outlook of the mystic, although they might manifest themselves in different ways, were alike based on fundamental natural instincts. This important discovery formed the basis of an essay he wrote in May 1913 entitled "The Place of Science in a Liberal Education". In this essay Russell argued that the cultivation of a scientific habit of mind is essential for the freedom and natural growth of the individual. He defined education as "the formation, by means of instruction, of certain mental habits and a certain outlook on life and the world".[79] The ideal outlook, he claimed, is an objective, impersonal view of human society and the universe. By adopting this outlook, we avoid that preoccupation with self which causes us to see life only "through the distorting medium of personal desire".[80] Russell implicitly recognised that man's primary instincts and impulses tend naturally towards both science and mysticism, each impulse being dependent on the other for its full development. The scientific outlook, if it was

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[79] Mysticism and Logic, p. 33. This essay appeared in two numbers of The New Statesman, May 24 and 31, 1913.

[80] Ibid., p. 35.

adequately taught and understood, could promote this development. According to Russell, the core of the scientific outlook is its ethical neutrality, "the refusal to regard our own desires, tastes and interests as affording a key to the understanding of the world".[81] However, he stressed that the aim of a scientific education would not be purely intellectual; by demonstrating the wisdom of viewing human life and the world "under the aspect of eternity" it would naturally engender a deep moral and religious sense:

> In this way education destroys the crudity of instinct, and increases through knowledge the wealth and variety of the individual's contacts with the outside world, making him no longer an isolated fighting unit, but a citizen of the universe, embracing distant countries, remote regions of space and vast stretches of past and future within the circle of his interests. It is this simultaneous softening in the insistence of desire and the enlargement of its scope that is the chief moral end of education.[82]

Thus the cultivation of the scientific outlook would facilitate the expression of man's creative impulses and the harmonious development of his personality. The spiritual outlook Russell was inculcating in this essay was the same attitude of impartial contemplation which he had advocated in "The Essence of Religion" and eulogised in the final chapter of The Problems of Philosophy. The ultimate aim of

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[81] Ibid., p. 37.

[82] Ibid., p. 35.

religion and philosophy (when considered contemplatively) -- the union of the self with the not-self -- was also found to be the ultimate aim of education. It appears, then, that Russell had, through the medium of Ottoline's love, arrived at an all-embracing vision of life "extraordinarily like" Spinoza's ethical doctrine.[83]

In August, 1913, Russell looked back nostalgically on his relationship with Ottoline, assuring her that she had taught him ". . . a very great deal that I shall never forget. I have seen a land of peace and have found some kind of union of reason and vision".[84] His famous essay, "Mysticism and Logic" (written in January, 1914) was, in a sense, a celebration of this hard-won harmony. One perceptive commentator on Russell's philosophy has referred to it as ". . . an intense exercise in religious philosophical autobiography -- done in the third person".[85] Throughout the essay Russell emphasized, both explicitly and implicitly,

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[83]In a letter of April 18, 1913, Russell told Ottoline of the "hold [Spinoza] gets on one, more and more, the more one reads him". See Duncan Martin, op. cit., pp. 170-209 for an excellent analysis of this process.

[84]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, August 29, 1913.

[85]Ronald Jager, The Development of Bertrand Russell's Philosophy, p. 495. Jager's insight is particularly impressive in view of the fact that he had not, at the time of writing, examined the Ottoline correspondence.

that the best attitude towards life lay in "the true union of the mystic and the man of science. . . ."[86] He claimed that this union had been most perfectly attained by ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Heraclitus who had desired knowledge not as a means of gaining power over the world but in order to acquire a deeper spiritual relationship with it. Russell argued that, although the actual beliefs of these mystics as to the nature of the universe were almost certainly false, the outlook which had inspired these beliefs need not be discarded with them. "The metaphysical creed", he wrote

> . . . is a mistaken outcome of the emotion although this emotion, as colouring and informing all other thoughts and feelings, is the inspirer of whatever is best in Man. Even the cautious and patient investigation of truth by science, which seems the very antithesis of the mystic's swift certainty, may be fostered and nourished by that very spirit of reverence in which mysticism lives and moves.87

Although this statement was less exultant and more cautious than the peroration of The Perplexities of John Forstice, the conclusion was essentially the same. Russell asserted that this "spirit of reverence", when applied in the realm of thought, would express itself in an attitude of ethical neutrality. This was the keynote of his plea for a truly

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[86] Mysticism and Logic, p. 11.

[87] Ibid., p. 16 (my emphasis). Cf. letter to Ottoline,

scientific outlook in philosophy. By removing ethical considerations from philosophy -- in other words, by refusing to seek in the universe an embodiment of our own ideals -- we would not only stand a better chance of discovering scientific truth but would also be achieving an "ethical advance".[88]

We are reminded here of Russell's first revolt against neo-Hegelianism in the essay "Seems Madam? Nay, It Is" where he had criticized philosophers such as McTaggart for expecting to derive religious comfort from their metaphysicizing. Now he extended this criticism to include any philosophy associated with the idea of evolution. Russell found evolutionism to be symptomatic of the complacent confidence of the modern world ". . . with its quick material successes and its insolent belief in the boundless possibilities of progress".[89] The main danger of the philosophies of Bergson, Nietzsche and the pragmatists lay in their failure to recognize the necessary limitations of

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March 23, 1912: ". . . there is . . . some rebellion in me against making religion conscious and explicit -- a feeling that it ought to be merely a colouring of other things, a kind of passion for spiritualizing other things to the uttermost, not something separate with a God and a spiritual world".

[88] Ibid., pp. 28-29 (summarized).

[89] Ibid., p. 29.

human power. Furthermore, evolutionism was, by its very nature, anti-scientific in view of its ". . . slavery to time, its ethical preoccupations, and its predominant interest in our mundane concerns and destiny".[90] By the same token, it was irreligious in so far as it represented a lack of reverence towards fact and a failure to maintain an attitude of impartial contemplation. Thus, in attacking the outlook and assumptions of the evolutionists, Russell claimed that he was doing no more than

> . . . urging, in the sphere of knowledge, that largeness of contemplation, that impersonal disinterestedness, and that freedom from practical preoccupations which have been inculcated by all the great religions of the world.91

In summing up, it may be said that "Mysticism and Logic" represents the final flowering of Russell's religious faith in the assimilation of the life of the "spirit" to the scientific outlook. As such, it is significant not only as philosophy or autobiography but also as a reflection of the quintessential perplexity of the modern world. The essay can be seen as a plea for a return to unity -- a spiritual integration of culture. On the eve of the First World War,

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[90] Ibid., p. 30.

[91] Ibid., p. 20.

Russell was already aware of the dangerous implications of philosophies which exalted the non-moral will to power. His praise for Plato and Heraclitus and his criticism of the "evolutionists" were alike based on his conviction that the spiritual side of man's life is of much greater importance for his well-being than his command over non-human nature. The attitude recommended in "Mysticism and Logic" was not, like the worship of the free man, built ". . . only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair".[93] Although Russell still recognised a basic opposition between fact and ideal, he was, by 1914, no longer advocating selective worship but rather an attitude of complete impartiality -- a joyful acceptance, both in thought and action, of the universe and its impersonal necessities:

> In religion and in every deeply serious view of the world and human destiny, there is an element of submission, a realization of the limits of human power. . . . The submission which religion inculcates in action is essentially the same in spirit as that which science teaches in thought. . . .[94]

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[92]See typescript p. 87.

[93]Mysticism and Logic, p. 41.

[94]Ibid., p. 29.

The period from 1911 to 1914 was clearly a crucial one in the development of Russell's religious ideas. It began with his spiritual awakening through the medium of Ottoline's love and ended with his emergence as a spokesman for the scientific outlook in 1913-14. Commentators who have suggested that Russell became increasingly "anti-religious" after the First World War have perhaps failed to recognise the extent to which his advocacy of scientific impartiality was intimately connected with his strong religious sense.[95] In fact, Russell's spiritual outlook does not appear to have altered substantially after 1914. A brief glance at the last chapter of The Scientific Outlook, written in 1931, will serve to illustrate this point. In this chapter (entitled "Science and Values"), Russell asserted that the development of science was the product of two impulses, the impulse of power and the impluse of love. He considered the most disturbing feature of modern science to be the gradual suffocation of "love-knowledge" -- the pursuit of knowledge in a contemplative spirit -- by "power-knowledge" -- the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of gaining power over non-human nature. The source of danger, he felt, did not lie

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[95] See Ronald Jager, The Development of Bertrand Russell's Philosophy, pp. 484-487. Also R. W. Clark, op. cit., p. 514.

in power and scientific technique themselves, which were necessary for the enrichment of human life, but in the pursuit of power for its own sake. Russell believed that the prevention of this dangerous tendency was essentially ". . . an educational problem, and not a very difficult one".[96] By teaching men that the value of knowledge lies not only in its practical uses but also in the joy of contemplation, the mentality of the scientific manipulator could be complemented and enriched by the outlook of the "mystic, the lover, and the poet":

> In all forms of love we wish to have knowledge of what is loved, not for the purposes of power, but for the ectasy of contemplation. "In knowledge of God standeth our eternal life," but not because knowledge of God gives us power over Him. Wherever there is ectasy or joy or delight derived from an object there is the desire to know that object -- to know it not in the manipulative fashion that consists of turning it into something else, but to know it in the fashion of the beautific vision, because in itself and for itself it sheds happiness on the lover.97

It is very likely that when Russell speaks of "love-knowledge" he has in mind Spinoza's concept of "the intellectual love of God". Indeed, the most concise statement of the outlook Russell was inculcating in the final chapter of The Scientific

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[96]Bertrand Russell, The Scientific Outlook (London, 1931), p. 277.

[97]Ibid., p. 271.

Outlook can be found in a passage from his review of Spinoza's Ethics, written in 1910:

> He believes that all human ills are to be cured by knowledge and understanding, that only ignorance of what is best makes men think their interests conflicting, since the highest good is knowledge, which can be shared by all. But knowledge as he conceives it, is not mere knowledge as it comes to most people; it is 'intellectual love', something coloured by emotion through and through.98

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Throughout this study, and particularly in this chapter, it has been suggested that Russell was an emancipated Puritan. Although he liberated himself from the strict moralism and orthodox beliefs of his religious upbringing, he retained the instincts and outlook of a Puritan. Indeed, Russell's spiritual development cannot be fully understood unless we recognise the "Bunyanesque" elements in his character -- his intense inner conflict, habitual self-criticism and profound sense of being on a pilgrimage. Russell's temperament and the influences of his early education made religious thinking natural to him. He had much closer affinities with mid-Victorian "progressives" such as Matthew Arnold and William Hale White than with the

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98"Spinoza", The Nation, November 12, 1910. (My emphasis.)

later "Bloomsbury" generation, whose attitude to religion was one of mere negation.. Like Arnold and Hale White, Russell never completely recovered from the loss of his childhood faith. He may have been distracted from his "quest for God" by the joys of Cambridge in the 1890s or deliberately suppressed it during the tortuous Principia Mathematica years but ultimately it was stimulated and brought to the surface by Ottoline Morrell. "More than twenty years ago", he told her

> I put away God -- now you receive the old pain, and it is greater because of all the accumulated experience of sorrow, which would be transformed by him. Your bird that you gave Mother Julian, your Mantegna, and your prayers -- I can't tell you how profoundly I feel them -- it is like the ghost of a dead friend speaking poignant words and then vanishing into the night.99

Among Russell's "confessions" in his letters to Ottoline were the admission that he had continued to pray for a long time after he had ceased to believe in God and that all his religious thought originated in the profound feeling of being "a miserable sinner".[100] It appears that Russell's

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[99]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, November 28, 1911. Cf. letter of December 27, 1911: "But that [Christianity] is not for me -- I shall always be hungry for your God and blaspheming him. I could pour forth a flood of worship -- the longing for religion is at times unbearably strong" (#300).

[100]See letters of March 7, 1912 (#372) and March 22, 1912 (#397). Cf. letter of August 19, 1913 in which Russell describes his visit to a church in Verona: "I went to San

conscience always remained burdened by the strong sense of sin and evil which had tormented him as a child.[101] Although this "sense of sin" certainly did not dominate his habitual consciousness, he could be overwhelmed by it in his blackest moods. A short piece he wrote in 1902, entitled "The Forgiveness of Sins" provides us with a striking illustration of this tendency:

> When the intoxication of sin is past, and the soul is left naked to contemplate its own deformity . . . then remorse, black, swift, fierce and terrible, takes possession of us, branding, scorching, withering, filling us with hatred of all sinners and a fiery desire for punishment. . . . Happy the sinner who escapes from remorse into amendment! Suddenly the world is transformed; gentle emotions grow again, pity revives, the love of goodness replaces the fiery hatred of evil and removes for ever the temptations which remorse could only intensify. It is necessary to escape from Self, to learn to think of other lives, and through love to forget the guilty desires which remorse vainly reprobates.[102]

Russell's yearning for internal harmony was, of course, intimately related to this need to escape from his preoccupation with the struggling, sinful self. It was this deep desire to lose all sense of self in union with the im-

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Zeno, where the beauty moved me infinitely. Sanger left me alone inside and I found myself on my knees praying. I can't justify it, but it was a deep and sincere prayer for strength to subdue my instincts" (#850).

[101] See Katharine Tait, op. cit., p. 183.

[102] "The Forgiveness of Sins", c. 1902, unpublished manuscript (my emphasis). See also "The Atonement", c. 1902.

personal which attracted him to such "sentimental apologies for relgion" as Wordsworthian nature-worship and Tennyson's pantheism. However, the most satisfactory solution to the conflict he felt between Nature's beauty and the equally undeniable facts of pain and evil was provided by Spinoza's ethical system. For Russell and others like him, Spinoza's fusion of moral enthusiasm and logical discipline was the essence of his healing power. Dr. Irvin Stock has pointed out that the great attraction of Spinoza for the nineteenth century ". . . lay in the fact that he had created a majestic and on the whole reasonable scheme designed to remove the contradiction that then seemed to exist between religion and science".[103] Judging from the reactions of Hale White, Arnold and Russell himself, Spinoza's "intellectual love of God" met a deeply-felt need. By identifying virtue with inner peace, by demonstrating that self-forgetfulness (and hence self-discovery) could only be attained through "life in the whole", Spinoza offered the tormented Puritan soul "a joy continuous and supreme to all eternity".[104] However, Russell's letters to Ottoline reveal that he found the Spinozist ideal -- the joyful acceptance of impersonal necessity -- extremely difficult to attain. On one occasion

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[103]Irvin Stock, William Hale White (London, 1956), p. 71.

[104]Ibid., p. 9.

he told her that "I worship your religion in you, but it is hard for me to achieve in myself. Struggle and fight is the essence of life in me -- inwardly and outwardly . . . to resign myself to the will of others or the universe is rare and difficult".[105] And in another letter he wrote: "I am dualistic in my instincts. God and Devil please me better than God alone -- God alone seems too sweet and sugary . . . I must have something to fight. My inmost soul is wild and raging, full of storm and conflict -- God and Devil at a death grapple always".[106] These glimpses into Russell's inner life help us to understand why he advocated a pantheistic outlook while rejecting the pantheist's beliefs as to the nature of the universe. His inability to believe, as Spinoza did, that knowledge of evil is an "inadequate knowledge" was not merely the product of intellectual considerations -- his rebellion against pantheism was also instinctive, the projection of his own inward struggle. The measure of harmony which Russell eventually attained was far from being the diapason he desired. He had discovered "intellectual love" but failed to find God:

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[105] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, February 20, 1912. (My emphasis.)

[106] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, March 17, 1912. (My emphasis.)

> What Spinoza calls "the intellectual love of God" has seemed to me the best thing to live by, but I have not had even the somewhat abstract God that Spinoza allows himself to whom to attach my intellectual love. I have loved a ghost, and in loving a ghost my inmost soul has become spectral. I have therefore buried it deeper and deeper beneath layers of cheerfulness, affection and joy of life. But my most profound feelings have remained always solitary and have found in human things no companionship. The sea, the stars, the night wind in waste places, mean more to me than even the human beings I love best and I am conscious that human affection is to me at bottom an attempt to escape from the vain search for God.107

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107 A.B.R., II, p. 38. In a footnote to this passage, written in 1967, Russell pointed out that this was "no longer true". Although the autobiography was written in the 1930s it was not published until 1967-8. In 1952, Russell had married Edith Finch, who provided him with the perfect human companionship he had longed for throughout his life.

## CHAPTER VII

## MOMENTS OF MYSTICAL ILLUMINATION

> And now the great mystery of the world overwhelms me more and more -- in spite of worship of reason, I have always utterly trusted impulse and instinct and vision when I had them -- it is only when they have faded that I have doubted them. But it is mysterious to me why one should trust them, only I know that all that is great is bound up with them.
>
> Bertrand Russell (Letter to Ottoline, January 1912)

> Change seemed to grow inside him slowly, gathering force until it burst forth like a volcano, obliterating all that had gone before.
>
> Katharine Tait (My Father Bertrand Russell, 1976)

The dynamic tension in Russell's thought between mysticism and logic was undoubtedly exacerbated by his own experiences of mystical illumination. In "Mysticism and Logic" he had stressed that while mysticism could not be relied upon as a means of interpreting the knowable world it was immensely valuable as an attitude to life. We have already established that, although this essay was written in the third person, parts of it were clearly autobiographical. It seems reasonable to assume, then, that Russell's passionate insistence on the value of mysticism owed something to his own experiences of "mystic insight". Nevertheless, his scepticism as to the validity of such experiences remained undiminished. In a letter to Ottoline, he reported an argument with Dickinson, who, although he had never actually undergone any mystical experiences, insisted that they were concrete occurrences while Russell maintained that they were "mere illusion".[1] In his autobiography, Russell completed his account of his "conversion" with the following remarkable words:

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[1]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, May 5, 1911.

> The mystic insight which I then imagined myself to possess was largely faded and the habit of analysis has reasserted itself. But something of what I thought I saw in that moment has remained always with me. . . .[2]

Although this attitude is perfectly consistent with the position Russell adopted in "Mysticism and Logic", its trenchant scepticism seems a little out of place. Having just described an experience so powerful and overwhelming that it had left him a completely different person, he goes on to suggest that it was merely a will-o'-the-wisp of his imagination. However, if we can detect a certain amount of uneasiness in Russell's handling of his own experience of "mystic insight", it is perhaps not surprising in view of his inner conflict between scientism and irrationalism. While this moment of mystical illumination was an overwhelming and undeniable feeling, it was very difficult to explain rationally, a circumstance which Russell must have found extremely frustrating. Indeed, it is difficult not to believe that so inveterate a self-analyst would not have been curious as to what exactly had happened to him. Surely Russell must have made some sort of inquiry into the precise nature of the psychic phenomenon known as

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[2] A.B.R., I, p. 146. (My emphasis.)

"conversion". This leads us to an important question: Did Russell attain any insights concerning the psychological causes and determinants of mystical illumination and, if so, did these insights influence the evolution of his religious ideas?

Before attempting to answer this question, it will be necessary to turn to another mysterious episode in Russell's life, which he referred to (indirectly) as a second "conversion". This second mystical experience appears to have occurred in late July 1911 at a critical moment in his relationship with Ottoline. There are three explicit references to it in the Ottoline correspondence; the first was written shortly after its occurrence and the other two were reminiscences written in February 1912. On July 30, 1911, shortly after returning from Ipsden where he had spent four days with Ottoline, Russell wrote:

> Our days were more wonderful to me than anything I had ever imagined. I felt no doubts or difficulties after the first moments and it seemed like inspiration seeing things clearly at last which I had groped after for many years. It is very seldom that one's inmost being is altered. Mine was nine and ten years ago; it began to be as soon as I began really to know you, but it was not complete till these last days.[3]

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[3] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, July 30, 1911 (#162). We may note that Russell refers here to two experiences. The other experience was undoubtedly his sudden realization in early 1902 that he no longer loved Alys. Al-

On February 13, 1912, Russell compared this experience to the "conversion" of February 1901:

> It doesn't seem to me odd that Goldie [Dickinson] has had no mystical experiences. I don't know any man who has, except myself, and I only twice: ten years ago and at the time of our summer crisis. I think it is much rarer, certainly among men, than you imagine. I have never known any woman either . . . except you, who really knew what it is.4

Finally, on February 21, he described the incident itself in more detail:

> My mind has been full all day . . . of the night of our summer crisis . . . first when we lay on the hill-side, then in the temple, where the night-wind seemed a lost soul in search of rest which it could never hope to find -- when "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden" suddenly came into my mind. Something passed from you to me that night in some very strange way. I thought I had lost you, and then suddenly I found the key -- not by seeking it but by the same thoughts growing up in me.5

It is curious that this experience is not mentioned in any of Russell's autobiographical writings nor in R. W. Clark's voluminous biography. It is possible

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though Russell apparently did not consider this to be a mystical experience, it was probably caused by a similar psychological process. See note 40.

[4]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, February 13, 1912.

[5]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, February 21, 1912.

that Russell later decided that the incident had less independent significance than he had attributed to it in 1911-12. Alternatively, he may simply have considered it too intimate for print.[6] Finally, and perhaps most significantly, it must be recognized that Russell the sceptic did not always approve of Russell the mystic. His rigorously sceptical intellect was constantly occupied in keeping his mystical impulses under control.[7] Indeed, Russell's persistent pleas for an attitude of "ethical neutrality" were, in a sense, the public expression of a private struggle with his own powerful religious [redacted]ngs which, if not subdued, might lead to "wishful think[redacted]. This is, of course, an oversimplification but a useful one since it helps us to understand the occasionally striking contrast between the public and the private Russell. My own conjecture is that Russell did not want to expose the more intimate aspects of his religious experience to the public eye not simply because they were intimate but because he felt that they represented, as it were, a failure in the control

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[6] Cf. Wittgenstein's criticism of "The Essence of Religion", see typescript p. 138.

[7] A perfect illustration of Russell's attitude was his advice to a student who was showing an interest in mysticism: "I encouraged her and said how great and important mysticism is, if it is kept under sufficiently". (Letter to Ottoline, June 14, 1913 -- my emphasis.)

mechanism.[8] As we have seen, Russell was deeply dissatisfied with the final section of The Perplexities of John Forstice and insisted that any publication of the work be accompanied by his opinion that it was "much too sentimental, much too mild and much too favourable to religion".[9] Early in 1912, he had written a spiritual autobiography in similar vein. In April, he confided to Ottoline that

> if I ever publish that autobiography, I might publish it anonymously, under the name of Simon Styles unless you can suggest a better name. I might invent an author of that name and publish lost of things of his. No one would ever guess it was me. That's not at all the person I am supposed to be.[10]

Whatever the reasons for its exclusion from his autobiography, Russell's references to this second experience

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[8]Cf. Mysticism and Logic, p. 22: "The impulse to logic, not felt while the mystic mood is dominant, reasserts itself as the mood fades, but with a desire to retain the vanishing insight, or at least to prove that it was insight, and that what seems to contradict it is illusion. The logic which thus arises is not quite disinterested or candid, and is inspired by a certain hatred of the daily world to which it is to be applied. Such an attitude does not tend to the best results" (the first emphasis is mine). This passage is clearly autobiographical and refers specifically to Russell's own "failure of honesty" over his work which had been detected by Wittgenstein in May 1913. On June 20, 1913 Russell told Ottoline that this lapse was ". . . more an attitude than anything definite . . . it is the first time in my life that I have failed in honesty over work . . . the disgust of human life which I have been feeling lately is generally a sign of unrecognised sin" (#811).

[9]See typescript, p. 135.

[10]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, April 25, 1912. (My emphasis.)

of mystical illumination in his letters to Ottoline indicate its significance in the evolution of his religious thought. It is noteworthy that both of Russell's "conversions" were followed by periods of more intense mysticism during which nearly all of his most religious writing was done. In the first period (1901-3), he composed the disjointed reflections and "The Free Man's Worship"; during the second (1911-12), Prisons, "The Essence of Religion", and The Perplexities of John Forstice were written. Russell's comments on the peculiarities of his own psychology display a high degree of self-awareness and are clearly the product of a lifetime of self-analysis. By the beginning of his affair with Ottoline, he appears to have grown accustomed to a continual tension between two opposing tendencies which manifested itself, on the psychic surface, in oscillations between predominantly mystical and predominantly intellectual states of mind. To some extent, this tension was created by what Russell called his "habit of analysis". In April, 1911, he warned her that

> I have a perfectly cold intellect, which insists upon its rights and respects nothing. It will sometimes hurt you, sometimes seem cynical, some-heartless. It is very much more dominant at certain times than at others. You won't like it. . . . But it belongs with my work -- I have deliberately cultivated it and it is really the main thing that I have put discipline into. In time I believe you

> will not mind it, but the sudden absolute cessation of feeling when I think must be trying at first. And nothing is sacred to it -- it looks at everything quite impartially as if it were some one else.11

As we have seen, the "divine afflatus" of 1901 had gradually faded as the "habit of analysis" reasserted itself. Russell recognised that the emotional upsurge at the beginning of his affair with Ottoline was, in part, a consequence of the self-imposed "intellectualism" of the Principia Mathematica years. He explained to her that ". . . for some time past, I have tried to live on the intellect alone, and by a natural reaction I am now undervaluing the intellect. But I know that this is temporary and ought to be so".[12] Like the sentimental disjointed reflections of 1902, many of Russell's letters to Ottoline are written in the language of religious experience. However, we are aware of a constant underlying tension. The correspondence is dominated by Russell's consciousness of the need for psychological integration, for some means of harmonizing his warring impulses. In The Perplexities of John Forstice he rendered this perpetual struggle as fiction:

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[11]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, April 29, 1911.

[12]Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, May 10, 1911.

> Day after day, in a passion of thought, the same problem held him; hour after hour, sitting or slowly pacing backwards and forwards, he saw side by side two truths, the truth of science and the truth of vision; struggling to make them combine, he saw them still part, still mutually destructive, yet still both true. Very slowly, with much doubt, not without some loss in the glory of the vision, he found a kind of possibility of union. . . .13

Russell's successive attempts to embody the "vision" in his religious writings from the summer of 1911 onwards were perhaps coloured by his awareness that he would not be able to maintain the level of emotional intensity required for this sort of writing. In a letter of March, 1912 we find Russell anxious to recapture the "vision" of the summer crisis but at the same time filled with doubt:

> Darling I long most passionately to live with you in your spiritual region, and at moments I have done it, particuarly last summer; but I can't do it permanently without denying my God because I can't believe whole-heartedly things that seem to me very doubtful.14

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[13] Barry Feinberg, ed., op. cit., p. 41.

[14] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, March 24, 1912. We may note that Russell is experiencing here the quintessential mid-Victorian dilemma -- yearning after religious truth, and yet plagued by "honest doubt". Indeed, a few days later he begins to sound very "Arnoldian": "The world, flying from the false light and superstition, is wandering down a darkling path, turning its back on the sun of wisdom" (early April, 1912 -- #428).

It is evident, then, that Russell had become conscious of a relationship between his occasional lapses into mysticism and his unbalanced psychic state. In one of his letters to Alys, he recalled that he had first become aware of this discord when, at the age of eleven, his scientific instincts began to germinate. He looked back nostalgically to the time before

> . . . my intellect had killed my senses. I have a vague confused picture of warm patches of red ground where the setting summer sun shone on it . . . of perpetually warm sunny weather, when I used to be taken driving and notice the speckled shadows moving across the carriage, before it occurred to me that they were caused by the leaves overhead. (As soon as I discovered this, the scientific interest killed the impression, and I began speculating as to why the patches of light were always circular and so on).15

We have already observed how, at about the age of fifteen, the impulse towards mysticism reasserted itself and Russell became immersed, for a short period, in Wordsworthian nature-worship. In an entry in his journal, written during his second term at Cambridge, he attempted to analyse these fluctuating moods. With this purpose in mind, he copied out two sonnets written in December 1889 and September 1890, respectively, stressing that

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[15]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, September 1, 1894.

> I insert them from the psychological point of view, and not as having in themselves the very minutest merit. They seem to me to throw light on what may be called the dynamics of psychology, though of course the first was written under the influence of feelings over which the intellect had for a moment lost control.16

It might be said that Russell's struggle with his childhood faith had fostered in him the natural instincts and attitude of a psychologist. It had given him a training in analysis, in criticism and, above all, in the resolutely impersonal treatment of personal problems. By the early 1890s, then, Russell was developing an interest in psychology at a time when it was emerging as an independent scientific discipline. Indeed, in a remarkable article on "Sigmund Freud and Bertrand Russell", the late psychotherapist Dr. Harry Guntrip has pointed out "unexpectedly intriguing parallels" between the careers of the two men.[17] Guntrip claims that Russell shared Freud's "intuitive psychodynamic understanding" and that his conversion in 1901 had given him

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[16] Journal 1890-1914. Entry for January 18, 1891. The first four lines of this sonnet (December 1889) are quoted on p. 45. The other sonnet is included as the frontespiece for this study.

[17] Harry Guntrip, "Sigmund Freud and Bertrand Russell", Contemporary Psychoanalysis, IX (May 1973), 263.

penetrating insights into the human condition.[18] He goes on to suggest that, if Russell had applied himself to the study of psychology, he might have "created a psychoanalysis that explored deeper depths than Freud's Oedipus Complex theory".[19]

In fact, the evolution of Russell's psychological ideas took a rather different direction. This may be ascribed, in part, to the influence of the American psychologist, William James, whose outlook and concepts were essentially "pre-Freudian".[20] Russell first read James's Psychology (1890) in August, 1894. It is possible that personal traumas played a part in Russell's decision to undertake a more detailed investigation of the subject. During the summer of 1894, his grandmother had made persistent efforts to deter him from marrying Alys. With the aid of

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[18] Ibid., p. 270. Guntrip believes that Russell's autobiographical writing ". . . arose out of his own deep need to understand himself as a person, to trace the path of his development to see if he could find out what had actually happened to him and what he had become".

[19] Ibid.

[20] James had little knowledge or sympathetic understanding of Freud's theories. On September 28, 1909 (a year before his death) he wrote to his friend Theodore Flournoy: "I hope that Freud and his pupils will push their ideas to the utmost limits, so that we may learn what they are. They can't fail to throw light on human nature; but I confess that he made on me personally the impression of a man with fixed ideas. I can make nothing in my own case with his dream

the family doctor, Lady Russell succeeded in convincing him that insanity was hereditary in the Russell family. At first, Russell was plunged into a mood of morbid despondency. In his diary, he solemnly vowed to ". . . avoid seeing more than a very little of my people and of P[embroke] L[odge], otherwise I shall begin to fear for my sanity. PL is to me like a family vault haunted by the ghosts of maniacs. . . ."[21] It was in this mood of Hamlet-like gloom that Russell first read James's Psychology. It did not offer much consolation: on August 24, he told Alys that he feared he was ". . . developing a divided personality like the people in James".[22] However, James's book may have contributed to a better understanding of his "people's" objections to his marriage for he now considered such criticisms to be the product of "defective psychology".[23]

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theories, and obviously "symbolism" is a most dangerous method". Henry James, ed., The Letters of William James (Boston, 1969), II, 327-328.

[21]Entry for July 20-21, 1894. A.B.R., I, p. 85.

[22]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, August 24, 1894. A.R.P.

[23]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, August 27, 1894. A.R.P.

Russell's numerous markings in the margin of his own copy of James's Psychology indicate that he read the book with enormous interest and enthusiasm. Occasionally he recognised himself in its descriptions and illustrations. For example, next to the case history of a "poor visualizer", he wrote: "This would do for a description of my own case!"[24] It is evident that his reading of James enabled Russell to arrive at a much deeper understanding of his own psychology. On October 6, he recorded in his journal that he had ". . . discovered in reading James that almost all my psychical life is carried on in auditory and tactile images -- I suppose that is why I can't read without pronouncing every word as I go".[25] A month later, he was given the opportunity to make good use of this knowledge. He replied to a complaint from Alys that his letters had been growing increasingly cold and dispassionate with a

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[24]Russell's personal copy of William James, Psychology, II, 57 (Bertrand Russell Archives). A very similar example is given in Vol. I, p. 265 with Russell's comment: "This is almost my own case".

[25]Journal. 1890-1894. Entry for October 6, 1894. This led Russell to the "psychological generalization" that "the temporal arts appeal to the ear, the spatial to the eye . . ." which helped him to understand why he was able to appreciate music and literature, but not the visual arts.

Jamesian "Psychological Explanation". This was written towards the end of his three month "exile" in Paris, where he had been sent by his family in the hope that he would change his mind about Alys. The "explanation" went as follows:

> Thee had grown, during these last 2½ months, gradually more and more remote from my imagination -- my memory was minute and exact, but in words only, not in images. The time seemed as long as the same number of years at other times -- or longer, because my whole mood and my whole habit of thought was changed so completely. In place of buoyant spirits, pure and happy thoughts, a life of such intensity and such high pitch that all the ordinary sources of pleasure and pain had sunk below the level of consciousness -- in place of this, I had a depressed, negative silent life with no greater pleasures than warmth and tobacco and solitude. . . .[26]

Particularly interesting here is Russell's recognition of an underground emotional existence, a subsconscious life. Although the idea of the "unconscious" had been suggested in the philosophies of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, it was a very new discovery in the realm of psychology. In the 1890s, English academic psychology was still almost exclusively concerned with consciousness and the nervous system.[27] James's Psychology did much to popularize the

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[26]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, November 15, 1894. (My emphasis.)

[27]See Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind, pp. 138-149. Hynes suggests that the subconscious was "discovered" in the 1880s and 1890s by amateurs such as Frederick Myers who were primarily interested in psychical

the notion that consciousness is a continuously flowing stream which "commingles" with "the darkness underground".[28] This conviction formed the basis of James's theory of "conversion" experiences, to which we must now turn.

In view of Russell's interest in psychology and his avowed respect for the pioneering work of William James, it is curious that he made so few references to James's The Varieties of Religious Experience which appeared in 1902, a year after Russell's first experience of mystical illumination. The book has since been recognised as an important landmark in both the history of psychology and religious thought. The Varieties of Religious Experience caused a great stir in English intellectual circles. According to the historian R. C. K. Ensor, James ". . . showed to great numbers of his readers something which they had never seen before, and carried their thinking about religion on to a different plane from any to which they had been

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research. He further points out that psychical research "appealed to a need that was essentially religious. Myers' own motive, as he confessed in his autobiography, was simply to recover the sense of meaning in the universe that he had lost when triumphant Darwinism deprived him of his Christian faith: 're-entering by the scullery', as he put it, 'the heavenly mansion out of which I had been kicked through the front door'" (p. 139). James himself was a close friend of Myers and was deeply interested in psychical research -- in 1893 James was elected president of the British Society for Psychical Research.

[28] Gay Wilson Allen, William James: A Biography (New York, 1967), p. 466.

accustomed".[29] James's examination of religious phenomena from the standpoint of psychology was grounded in his conviction that the essence of religion was to be found in individual religious experience and not in the "second-hand religious life" of theology and ecclesiasticism. Although the book, as its name implies, covered many different aspects of religious experience, James interests us here as one of the first psychologists to study the records of individual "conversion" experiences in an objective, scientific manner.

Before considering Russell's reaction to the book, it will be necessary to state briefly its basic assumptions concerning "conversion". James distinguished between two main religious types, the "healthy-minded" and the "sick souls". The former possess an inner constitution which is harmonious and their religious attitude tends to be cheerful and optimistic. The attitude of the sick souls, on the other hand, is characterised by a profound sense of sin and evil and a tendency towards religious melancholy.[30] The sick soul

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[29] R. C. K. Ensor, England 1870-1914 (Oxford, 1936), p. 531.

[30] As we have seen, Russell continued to suffer from a sense of sin after he had abandoned religious orthodoxy. An anecdote in Katharine Tait's My Father Bertrand Russell provides a striking illustration of the contrast between her father's outlook and the "healthy-mindedness" of the ancient Greeks: "Once, on a trip to Greece made late in life, he visited a small Byzantine church and found to his astonishment that he felt more at home there than in the Parthenon. 'I realized then,' he wrote, 'that the Christian

is also, according to James, a "divided self" whose existence ". . . is little more than a series of zigzags, as now one tendency and now another gets the upper hand".[31] James found that "conversion" is essentially a readjustment of the psychic elements of the "divided self"; in other words, men and women who have divided personalities are particularly likely to experience sudden conversions or moments of mystical illumination: "The psychological basis of the twice-born character seems to be a certain discordancy or heterogeneity in the native temperament of the subject, an incompletely unified moral and intellectual constitution".[32] James observes that, although the effects of "conversion" may not be complete or final, its immediate effect is to bring about an outlook in which ". . . religious

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outlook had a firmer hold upon me than I had imagined. The hold was not upon my beliefs, but upon my feelings. It seemed to me that where the Greeks differed from the modern world it was chiefly through the absence of a sense of sin, and I realized with some astonishment that I, myself, am powerfully affected by this sense in my feelings though not in my beliefs'" (p. 187).

[31] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York, 1929), p. 166.

[32] Ibid., p. 164.

ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and . . . religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy".[33]

Russell first read James's "Varieties" in September 1902, observing in a letter to Lucy Donnelly that everything was good about the book "except the conclusions".[34] He was undoubtedly referring here to James's famous conclusion that there exists beyond man's consciousness a mystical region in which his religious impulses originate. Furthermore, Russell was not, as we have seen, at all sympathetic to James's pragmatic view of religion. There is, however, a much more tantalizing reference to the book in a letter written to Alys on September 14. Here Russell indicated a connection between his conversion and his subsequent religious attitude:

> . . . by deliberate courage it is possible to be happy in a kind of way whatever one's circumstances may be, and even to sympathize with the sorrows of others without losing the dignity of an internal serenity. But this is a hard doctrine, of which I have only very lately learned the truth; perhaps thee will find it too hard. What it requires is resignation, the

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[33] Ibid., p. 193.

[34] Bertrand Russell to Lucy Martin Donnelly, September 1, 1902.

> feeling Christians express by "Thy Will be done" -- a feeling on which W. James has plenty to say. To me, this feeling has become part of my habitual consciousness; I hope earnestly that it may become part of thine.[35]

According to James, this "feeling Christians express by 'Thy Will be done'" plays a vital part in the process of a certain kind of conversion experience, which he calls the "self-surrender type". The "candidate" for this type of conversion is characterised by his constant struggle towards the unification of his warring impulses. This striving towards the positive ideal is accompanied by its negative aspect; the struggle away from sin or wrongness.[36] We have already noted Russell's admission to Ottoline that the key-note of his inner life was "struggle and fight" with "God and Devil at a death grapple always".[37] James points out that the subject who suffers acutely from inner division tends to possess a largely developed subconscious life where "motives habitually ripen in silence. . . ."[38] Indeed, the

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[35]Bertrand Russell to Alys Pearsall Smith, September 14, 1902. A.R.P. (My emphasis.)

[36]Ibid., p. 205 (summarized).

[37]See typescript p. 152.

[38]William James, op. cit., p. 195.

self-surrender type of conversion is characterised by gradual change at the subconscious level of which the subject suddenly becomes aware at the moment of illumination. James calls this the process of "incubation" or "cerebration".[39] Again, in one of Russell's letters to Ottoline, we find a description of a psychological process rather like this:

> . . . all the time there was a dumb underground emotional life going on -- hungry loneliness and a rebellion against the tyranny of such an isolating absorption. The absorption grows gradually less and the rebellion grows stronger and comes to the surface and I am human again.[40]

According to James, the process of incubation is set in motion as the subject struggles towards unification for, as he does so, ". . . his conscious strainings are letting loose subconscious allies behind the scenes, which in their

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[39] Ibid., p. 207.

[40] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, June 7, 1913. It appears that change tended to take place in Russell at a subconscious level, followed by mental rearrangements which were often sudden and violent. This helps us to understand some of the more mysterious episodes in his life, such as his sudden realization that he no longer loved Alys. It is also noteworthy that Russell's acceptance of Hegelianism took the form of a sudden "conversion": "I had gone out to buy a tin of tobacco, and was going back with it along Trinity lane, when suddenly I threw it up in the air and exclaimed: 'Great God in boots! -- the ontological argument is sound!'" (A.B.R., I, 63).

way work towards rearrangement. . . ."[41] The kind of conversion we are describing here cannot be completely volitional. James emphasizes that, when the will has done its uttermost towards achieving unification, ". . . it seems that the very last step must be left to other forces and performed without the help of its activity".[42] At this moment, the personal will must be given up; in other words, self-surrender is absolutely necessary in order to complete the process: "When the new centre of personal energy has been subconsciously incubated so long as to be ready to open into flower, 'hands off' is the only word for us, it must burst forth unaided!"[43] James illustrates this type of conversion with several striking examples, of which three may be briefly quoted here. One correspondent wrote:

> I simply said: "Lord, I have done all I can; I leave the whole matter with Thee;' and immediately there came to me a great peace. [Another:] I finally ceased to resist, and gave myself up, though it was a hard struggle. Gradually the feeling came over me that I had done my part, and God was willing to do this. [And another:] -- Lord, Thy will be done; damn or save! cries

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[41] William James, op. cit., p. 206.

[42] Ibid., p. 204.

[43] Ibid., p. 207.

> John Nelson, exhausted with the anxious struggle to escape damnation; and at that moment his soul was flooded with peace.[44]

It should be pointed out that, although these correspondents employ specifically Christian terminology, James is describing an underlying psychological process which, in its essence, has nothing to do with orthodox theology. Indeed, the best known and most influential conversion of the nineteenth century -- that of Carlyle's "alter ego" Teufelsdröckh in Sartor Resartus -- duplicated every essential feature of these "old-fashioned" religious transformations. Sartor Resartus has already been mentioned in connection with Russell's first conversion.[45] A brief examination of Teufelsdröckh's conversion within the frame of the Jamesian model will serve to illustrate the spiritual affinities between Russell and Carlyle.

Teufelsdröckh's spiritual agonies begin when the doubts and uncertainties of a precocious boyhood culminate in the loss of his religious beliefs. Suddenly imprisoned in a material universe, he is filled with agony and despair: "A feeble unit in the middle of a threatening Infinitude,

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[44] Ibid., p. 205.

[45] See typescript, pp. 82-83.

I seemed to have nothing given me but eyes, whereby to perceive my own wretchedness".[46] He is only saved from ultimate despair and suicide by what he calls ". . . a certain aftershine . . . of Christianity".[47] The first stage in Teufelsdröckh's conversion is the "Everlasting NO", the sudden birth of an attitude of defiance towards a hostile universe which marks the beginning of his struggle away from sin:

> . . . then was it that my whole ME stood up in native God-created majesty and with emphasis recorded its Protest. Such a Protest, the most important transaction in life, may that same Indignation and Defiance, in a psychological point of view, be fitly called. The Everlasting NO had said: "Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast and the Universe is mine (the Devil's); to which my whole ME now made answer: "I am not thine, but free, and forever hate thee!"[48]

Particularly interesting here is Carlyle's recognition that he is describing a psychological process. Teufelsdröckh passes from the everlasting No to a "Centre of Indifference" in which he is still tormented by self-consciousness. With the injunction "Too heavy-laden Teufelsdröckh!" Carlyle

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[46]Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus (1831). Russell's personal copy, p. 160.

[47]Ibid., p. 161. This statement and the passage following it are heavily marked in the margin by Russell.

[48]Ibid., p. 162. Also marked in the margin. See typescript p. 82.

calls for his hero to abandon the struggle and surrender himself completely. Thus he passes from the "Centre of Indifference" to the "Everlasting Yea":

> I seemed to surrender, to renounce utterly, and say: Fly, then, false shadows of Hope; I will chase you no more, I will believe you no more . . . the heavy dreams rolled gradually away and I awoke to a new Heaven and a new Earth. The first preliminary moral Act, Annihilation of Self . . . had been happily accomplished; and my mind's eyes were now unsealed and its hands ungyved.[49]

There are amazing parallels between Carlyle's moral-spiritual awakening and Russell's second "conversion" in the summer of 1911. The feeling evoked by the words "Thy Will be done", which had become part of Russell's "habitual consciousness" before the "habit of analysis" reasserted itself, appears to have played an essential part in this experience. As we have seen, Russell recalled that, at the moment of illumination the words "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden" suddenly came into his mind.[50]

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[49] Ibid., p. 179.

[50] In an account of his own experience of morbid melancholia (given anonymously in The Varieties of Religious Experience), William James recalled that ". . . the fear was so invasive and powerful that if I had not clung to scriptive texts like 'The eternal God is my refuge' etc., 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden' . . . I think I should have grown really insane (op. cit., p. 158). Russell misquotes scripture in his letter to Ottoline. The second text mentioned by James is from Matthew 11.28 -- perhaps the words

Furthermore, "The Essence of Religion" contains an account of a conversion experience very like those described by James and by Carlyle in Sartor Resartus. It seems reasonable to suppose that the following passage was based on Russell's own experience of mystical illumination:

> The transition from the life of the finite self to the infinite life in the whole requires a moment of absolute self-surrender, when all personal will seems to cease, and the soul feels itself in passive submission to the universe. After passionate struggle for some particular good, there comes some inward or outward necessity to abandon the pursuit of the object which has absorbed all our desire, and no other desire is ready to replace the one that has been relinquished. Hence arises a state of suspension of the will, when the soul no longer seeks to impose itself upon the world, but is open to every impression that comes to it from the world. It is at such a time that the contemplative vision first comes into being, bringing with it universal love and universal worship. . . . Thus from the moment of self-surrender, which to the finite self appears like death, a new life begins, with a larger vision, a new happiness and wider hopes.[51]

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which came into Russell's mind were an amalgam of this text and "Weary of earth and laden with my sin", which had been his favourite hymn as a child. (See A.B.R., I, 28).

[51] R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, eds., op. cit., pp. 567-568 (my emphasis). The only suggestion I have found that this is a description of a conversion experience is made by Jack Pitt in his insightful essay, "Russell and Religion" in the International Journal of Philosophy of Religion, VI, no. 1 (September, 1976). Pitt links this passage with Russell's conversion of 1901, but does not develop his argument any further. The Ottoline correspondence contains two references to this notion of "self-surrender" which are worth noting. On July 23, 1913, Russell told Ottoline that she was too careful of her soul ". . . which prevents that entire self-surrender from which peace comes" (#833). And on November 17, 1912 he mentioned a meeting of the Apostles

Russell's self-restraint and residual scepticism made it difficult for him to describe mystical experience in the manner of Carlyle. Nevertheless, he was, like Carlyle, impelled by a deeply-felt need to communicate the "visions" that had been revealed to him.[52] Just as "The Free Man's Worship" was the public expression of Russell's "vision of sorrow", so "The Essence of Religion" was an attempt to convey his "vision of love". Indeed, it seems unlikely that Russell would have written in this vein at all had he not been motivated by what he later called "divine afflatus".[53] About two weeks after his second "conversion", he told Ottoline that she had revived his impulse to become the "prophet of the age":

> Darling, I can never tell you the extraordinary solemn depths of joy that it is to me to have our love blend with my purpose, revive it, and give it substance when I almost despaired of it. To give religion to those who cannot believe in

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at which ". . . Moore read an old paper of his on Conversion -- not very good. Wittgenstein's remarks were interesting as autobiography -- he said as far as he knew it, it consisted in getting rid of worry, having the courage that made one really not care what might happen". Russell's implication that Wittgenstein's insights must have been based on his own experience seems to me significant. Cf. also A.B.R., II, 74: "The rare moments of mystic insight that I have had have been when I was free from the will to succeed" (Russell to Ottoline, September, 1916).

[52]Towards the end of the First World War, Russell wrote: "There is a possibility in human minds of something mysterious as the night-wind, deep as the sea, calm as the stars and strong as Death, a mystic contemplation, the 'intellectual love of God'. . . . If I could give to others what has come to me in this way, I could make them too feel

> God and immortality has been for many years my deepest hope, but the fire left me and I lost faith. Now I have a deeper, wider, calmer vision than ever before and your faith makes mine easy.54

When Russell began to compose Prisons, he cherished the hope that the book "might be to our time what Sartor Resartus was to an earlier generation".[55] But, lacking Carlyle's imaginative fecundity, he was persistently frustrated in his attempts to find a suitable mode of expression. At the heart of his difficulties were Russell's recurrent doubts as to the validity of his own mystical experiences. On January 3, 1912 he wrote:

> I have hitherto only seen the greatest things at rare times of stress or exaltation. In the summer I loved with the vision -- when I got back to Ipsden it faded because of my work. . . . But if I could embody the vision in my philosophy, I should not have this conflict. For that, I must trust the vision when it is absent as when it is present . . . I have always begun to doubt it when it faded.56

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the futility of fighting. But I do not know how to communicate it: when I speak, they stare, applaud, or smile, but do not understand. (Letter written from Brixton Prison On July 30, 1918 -- see A.B.R., II, 89).

[53] See typescript, p. 75, note 2.

[54] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, August 12, 1911.

[55] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, July 24, 1911.

[56] Bertrand Russell to Ottoline Morrell, January 3, 1912.

According to Russell's description, his second experience of mystical illumination in July 1911 did not in itself represent a spiritual revolution. It was the culmination of an ascensional movement, the sudden completion of a process of spiritual inflation fostered by his romantic attachment to Ottoline. It is difficult, therefore, to determine whether any independent significance can be attached to it in relation to the evolution of Russell's religious thought. However, it may be suggested that the experience provided mystical confirmation of Spinoza's "intellectual love of God" which Russell found so difficult of attainment. As we have seen, identifiably "Spinozist" concepts such as the definition of knowledge as "a form of union of self and not-self" can be found in Russell's philosophical and religious writing from August 1911 onwards.[57] In "The Essence of Religion" he asserts that the act of self-surrender, whereby the struggling self is submerged in the vast ocean of being, forms the key to

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[57] See typescript p. 118. The "vision of love" makes its first appearance in the last chapter of The Problems of Philosophy. R. F. Alfred Hoenlé believes that this chapter contains Russell's most harmonious conception of life and the universe: "In the exaltation of this last chapter . . . we catch again the Mystic's voice. But it is no longer the voice of the Mystic defying, or resigning himself to, a hostile universe, nor the voice of one denying that Mysticism can be based on, or lead to, any valid judgements about the nature of the world. Rather we hear words that promise genuine peace and lasting union" (op. cit., p. 188).

this union. Only thus can man attain "a life in harmony with the whole, outside the prison walls built by the instinctive desires of the finite self".[58]

It is to be noted that these conclusions follow directly from psychological considerations: the unification of the divided self can only be achieved through the establishment of a harmonious spiritual relationship with the universe. Russell's sudden experiences of spiritual afflatus were a symbol and a symptom of his inner division and led him to a better understanding of the need for psychological integration. Although he would never admit that the claims of mental health could take precedence in importance over the search for truth, he came to realize the dangers of the hypertrophy of the reasoning faculty at the expense of instinct and spirit. In Principles of Social Reconstruction (1916) he argued that this internal conflict formed the psychological basis of the "mal du siècle":

> Among civilized men and women at the present day it is rare to find instinct, mind and spirit in harmony. Very few have achieved a practical philosophy which gives its due place to each; as a rule, instinct is at war

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[58] R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn, eds., op. cit., p. 567.

> with either mind or spirit, and mind and spirit are at war with each other. This strife compels men and women to direct much of their energy inwards, instead of being able to expend it all in objective activities. When a man achieves a precarious inward peace by the defeat of a part of his nature, his vital force is impaired, and his growth is no longer quite healthy. If men and women are to remain whole, it is very necessary that they should achieve a reconciliation of instinct, mind and spirit.59

Russell claimed that the "life of the spirit" could play a vital part in the restoration of this harmony by acting as antidote to cynicism, depression and ennui:

> It brings the solution of doubts, the end of the feeling that all is vanity. It restores harmony between mind and instinct, and leads the separated unit back into his place in the life of mankind. For those who have once entered the world of thought, it is only through spirit that happiness and peace can return.60

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[59] Bertrand Russell, Principles of Social Reconstruction (London, 1960), pp. 208-209.

[60] Ibid., p. 223. Russell, as always, writes from personal experience. In "Why Do Men Persist in Living?" (1907) he had written: "But for some men instinct is not enough: either through some fundamental sorrow, or through weariness, or through inborn remoteness from the things of nature, they have been forced to seek a reason for living -- a belief, or a desire, or a purpose, which makes it worth while to be alive, regardless of pain. It is for these men that religions exist. Can any religion withstand the feeling that all is vanity?" The reply, in 1907, was "in the negative". See typescript, p. 104.

This study has been based on the assumption that the dualistic conflict in Russell's thought was not simply a product of his personal psychology but a reflection of the historical psychology of the Victorian era. As outward manifestations of this inner discord, Russell's sudden "conversions" are therefore of interest not only to the psychodynamic theorist but also to the historian of ideas. It is significant that many Victorian intellectuals whose sensibilities were acutely tuned to the dilemmas of the age underwent experiences which they described as "conversions" or sudden spiritual transformations. The best known cases are those of Mill and Carlyle -- to these may be added the names of George Eliot, William Hale White, Harriet Martineau, Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter. Doubtless there were many others. It is perhaps not surprising that an age of radical transition should be, at the experiential level, an age of conversion. The experience of sudden moral or spiritual awakening was, more often than not, the product of a prolonged period of anxiety and morbid self-scepticism. John Morley described the mid-Victorian era as ". . . the age of science, new knowledge, searching criticism, followed by multiplied doubts and shaken beliefs".[61] It was an age

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[61] Recollections (1917). Quoted in W. E. Houghton, op. cit., p. 11.

in which many sensitive intellectuals, in particular those who had been forced to abandon their childhood faith, found themselves to be lonely pilgrims wandering, as Matthew Arnold put it, "between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born".[62]

For advanced thinkers, the underlying tension between "the emancipated head and the traditional heart" was the most disturbing feature of modern life. Cosmic isolation, alienation, morbid introspection, ennui and religious melancholia were all, to some extent, variations on this discordant theme. Once the sensitive Victorian intellectual had become a divided self, he was liable to experience the miseries of the "sick soul". In an essay on Arthur Clough written in 1868, J. A. Symonds defined the "maladie du siècle" as

> . . . the nondescript cachexy in which aspiration mingles with disenchantment, satire and scepticism with a childlike desire for the tranquility of reverence and belief -- in which self-analysis has been pushed to the verge of monomania, and all springs of action are clogged and impeded by the cobwebs of speculation.[63]

In his book Is Life Worth Living? (1879), W. H. Mallock attributed this malady to the scientific Zeitgeist. He found that man had been

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[62]Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" (1855), lines 85-88.

[63]Quoted in Edward Alexander, op. cit., p. 124.

> . . . curiously changing. Much of his old spontaneity of action has gone from him. He has become a creature looking before and after; and his native hue of resolution has been sicklied over by thought. We admit nothing now without question; we have learnt to take to pieces all motives to actions. We not only know more than we have done before, but we are perpetually chewing the cud of our knowledge.[64]

One of the first Victorians to suffer from the paralyzing effect of intellectual analysis was J. S. Mill. Mill's mental and spiritual crisis in the autumn of 1826 and his subsequent "conversion" have already been discussed in relation to Russell's experience of a similar affliction as an adolescent.[65] In his autobiography, Mill described his descent into a mood of morbid despondency, a state of mind which he compared to that of converts to Methodism "when smitten by their first 'conviction of sin'".[66] He attributed this depression to the Benthamite education he had received from his father. Mill now realized that his upbringing had led to the atrophy of his emotions: "I

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[64]Quoted in W. E. Houghton, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

[65]See typescript, p. 23.

[66]J. S. Mill, op. cit., p. 113.

was thus . . . stranded at the commencement of my voyage, with a well-equipped ship and a rudder, but no sail; without any desire for the ends which I had been so carefully fitted out to work for. . . ."[67] The first step in Mill's recovery came when he was moved to tears by a passage from Marmontel's Mémoires d'un père. Thus he became aware that his mind was not irretrievably analytic and that he might even have the capacity for deep feeling. As we have seen, his spiritual awakening was brought about by the poetry of Wordsworth which taught him the value of tranquil contemplation.

Mill's mental crisis convinced him of the dangers of brooding self-consciousness and the one-sided development of human life and character. Accordingly, he developed an ethical creed which would serve to counteract these tendencies. In the first place, he adopted what he called Carlyle's "anti-self-consciousness theory".[68] Mill did not, like Carlyle, inveigh against happiness -- he continued to main-

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[67] Ibid., p. 118.

[68] Ibid., p. 120.

tain that happiness is the test of conduct and the end of life. However, he now realized that it must not be pursued directly:

> The only chance is to treat, not happiness, but some end external to it, as the purpose of life. Let your self-consciousness, your scrutiny, your self-interrogation, exhaust themselves on that; and if otherwise fortunately circumstanced you will inhale happiness with the air you breathe, without dwelling upon it, without either forestalling it in imagination, or putting it to flight by fatal questioning.69

Secondly, Mill came to believe that the "internal culture of the individual" was essential for his psychological well-being. Again, he did not react to the scientific Zeitgeist with the violence of Carlyle, who never tired of railing against intellectual analysis. Mill concluded, more soberly, that the practice of analysis had

> . . . consequences which required to be corrected by joining other kinds of cultivation with it. The maintenance of a due balance among the faculties now seemed to me of primary importance. The cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed.70

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[69] Ibid., pp. 120-121. Russell arrives at a very similar conclusion in Principles of Social Reconstruction: "If life is to be fully human it must serve some end which seems, in some sense, outside human life, some end which is impersonal and above mankind, such as God or truth or beauty. Those who best promote life do not have life for their purpose" (p. 245).

[70] Ibid., pp. 121-122.

Mill, Carlyle and Russell himself were all deeply concerned with the growing rift between the scientific and the spiritual streams in modern life and with the means of closing it. Russell's personal experience of the "mal du siècle" was strikingly similar to that of Carlyle, but in his response to it he displayed much closer affinities with Mill. Although Russell's diagnosis of the malady was psychologically more sophisticated than Mill's, the solution he proposed to it -- the harmonious development of "instinct, mind, and spirit" -- was essentially the same. Like Mill, Russell found that the pursuit of knowledge in a contemplative spirit could play a vital part in the attainment of internal harmony. Carlyle, on the other hand, equated contemplation with mental sickness since it could only lead to anxiety, doubt and hesitation. In Sartor Resartus he asserted that faith must be acquired pragmatically:

> . . . all Speculation is by nature endless, formless, a vortex amid vortices: only by a felt indubitable certainty of Experience does it find any centre to revolve round and so fashion itself into a system. Most true is it, as a wise man teaches us, that "Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action".[71]

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[71]Carlyle, op. cit., p. 188. The wise man is Goethe.

While Mill argued that action should be built on contemplation, Carlyle exhorted his countrymen to choose the work which lay nearest to hand in order to avoid the paralysis of doubt: "Up, up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called Today, for the Night cometh, wherein no man can work".[72]

Mill's antipathy towards the Carlylean gospel of work is paralleled by Russell's vehement opposition to philosophies of action such as pragmatism and Bergsonian irrationalism. Both Mill and Russell, for whom the disinterested pursuit of truth was bound up with a strong religious sense, protested against the "irreverence" of philosophies which advocated action for its own sake. Russell, as we have seen, believed that pragmatism represented a failure to maintain an attitude of ethical neutrality and was thus an illegitimate anodyne for doubt. However, he claimed that a truly scientific philosophy -- in other words, a philosophy based on impartial contemplation -- could provide men with the spiritual strength required for the endurance of uncertainty. In his introduction to A History of Western Philosophy (1945), he wrote:

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[72] Ibid.

> Uncertainty, in the presence of vivid hopes and fears, is painful, but must be endured if we wish to live without comforting fairy tales. It is not good either to forget the questions that philosophy asks, or to persuade ourselves that we have found indubitable answers to them. To teach how to live without certainty, and yet without being paralyzed by hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can still do for those who study it.[73]

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It is naturally very difficult to determine the extent to which the spiritual crises of Mill, Carlyle and Russell were generated by the prevailing intellectual atmosphere. Such experiences may, of course, be interpreted in purely psychological terms. For example, modern psychodynamic theorists have convincingly argued that Russell's early loss of his parents was a crucial factor in his "conversion" of 1901 and that Mill's mental crisis was the product of a secret death-wish towards his father.[74]

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[73] Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York, 1972), xiv.

[74] See Bennett and Nancy Simon, "The Pacifist Turn: An Episode of Mystic Illumination in Russell's Life", The Journal of the Bertrand Russell Archives, 13 (Spring 1974), 1-12, 17-24 and A. W. Levi, "The 'Mental Crisis' of John Stuart Mill", Psychoanalytic Review, 32 (1945), 86-101.

However, although these explanations contain valuable psychological insights, they may be misleading in so far as they remove the individual from his historical context.

The "conversions" of Mill, Carlyle and Russell were undoubtedly fostered, encouraged and given content by the intellectual milieu. All three men may be viewed as "seminal thinkers", who were deeply affected by the dilemmas of their age. Their struggle towards internal harmony was, in a sense, a microcosm of a general need to harmonize the "religious spirit" and the "scientific spirit", which had been torn asunder by the Zeitgeist. We are now prepared, I think, to accept that there was an intimate interconnection between the scientific Zeitgeist, the "divided self" and the experience of "conversion" or sudden spiritual transformation. The case of Havelock Ellis is a striking illustration of these links. Ellis's struggle with his childhood faith has already been discussed in relation to Russell's own adolescent perplexities.[75] As we have seen, the abandonment of orthodox religious beliefs left Ellis hopelessly torn between his spiritual aspirations and the "outlook of Darwin and Huxley". He was overwhelmed by the gloom of an empty and mechanical world which seemed to him like "a factory filled with the mechanical whirr of

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[75]See typescript pp. 48-49.

lifeless wheels".[76] In his autobiography, Ellis tells how the "surgeon's touch" was provided by James Hinton's Life in Nature:

> . . . as I read, I became conscious of what I can only call, in the precise and full sense of the word, a revelation. The clash in my inner life was due to what had come to seem the hopeless discrepancy of two different conceptions of the universe. On the one hand was the divine vision of life and beauty which for me had been associated with the religion I had lost. On the other was the scientific conception of an evolutionary world which might be marvellous in its mechanism but was completely alien to the individual soul and quite inapt to attract love. The great revelation brought to me by Hinton -- a man of science who was also, though he made no definite claim to the name, a mystic -- was that these two conflicting attitudes are really but harmonious though different aspects of the same unity. . . . In an instant, as it seemed, the universe was changed for me. I trod on air; I moved in light.[77]

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[76] Havelock Ellis, My Life, p. 130.

[77] Ibid., pp. 130-131.

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