

BERTRAND RUSSELL'S RELIGION WITHOUT GOD AND DOGMA

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The religion which has no dogma is greater and more religious than one which rests upon the belief that in the end our ideals are fulfilled in the outer world.¹

Summary

To the philosophers of religion, Bertrand Russell is known, above all, by his pamphlet, *Why I am not a Christian*.² It is widely considered as, if not an atheistic text, an agnostic one. However, Russell also tried to “preserve religion without any dependence upon dogmas to which an intellectually honest assent grows daily more difficult”.³ Thus, he developed an interesting project for religion without God and dogma. The first task of this paper is to reconstruct it.

Russell's project of outlining a religion without God and dogma was severely criticized by his student Wittgenstein, who tried to radically improve it. This shows that the new “analytic philosophers,” Russell and Wittgenstein, had a strong interest in religious problems, which, however, was poorly articulated by them and, correspondingly, poorly investigated by their interpreters. Unfortunately, the obscure expression of their religious impulses made the most influential philosophy of the twentieth century—analytic philosophy—seem to be deprived of a world view. As a result, it was widely believed that the philosophies with a world view were existentialism, Marxism, or Thomism, but not analytic philosophy, and that analytic philosophy pretends to explain everything with scientific arguments.⁴ Another objective of this paper is to demonstrate that this belief is mistaken.

Russell's and Wittgenstein's Unwritten Philosophy

¹ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 1912, in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12th vol., *Contemplation and Action. 1902–14*, ed. by Richard Rempel et al. (London: Routledge, 1985), 110–122, here 115.

² London: Watts & Co., 1927.

³ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 115.

⁴ Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 2.

Conventional wisdom has it that Russell and Wittgenstein had radically different views about the role of logic and mystic contemplation in philosophy. Russell studied logic with the aim to advance a new philosophy method, while Wittgenstein sought to state with the help of logic what can be said, only to find out what can be shown: the mystical. And the latter was exactly what was important to him. Thus, Wittgenstein wrote in his famous letter to Ludwig von Ficker in 1919:

The book's [*Tractatus*'s] point is an ethical one. ... My work consists of two parts: one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one. My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical, from inside as it were; and I am convinced that *strictly*, it can be limited *only* this way.⁵

Unfortunately, Russell failed to understand Wittgenstein's concept of the inexpressible.⁶ A clear sign of this is his judgment of Wittgenstein's Principle of Showing in his "Introduction" to the *Tractatus*: "After all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said".⁷

In this paper, I will show that Russell, too, had an unwritten philosophy of life: his philosophy of religion without God and dogma (to him, the belief in God and dogma were intrinsically connected). Twice, in the years 1902–3, and again, in 1911–12, he tried to write it down but failed. What remained of these ventures were the essay, "A Free Man's Worship" (1903), and the paper, "The Essence of Religion" (1912), which were published at the time. Another group of papers and notes on this subject were released posthumously. As a result, while Wittgenstein's unwritten philosophy was openly discussed, only a small community of scholars tried to fix what Russell's philosophy of religion really was.⁸ So much the worse for the scholars since the documents

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker* (Salzburg: Müller, 1969), 35.

⁶ Cf. Teresa Iglesias, "Russell and the Ethical Concern of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*," *Philosophical Studies* (Ireland) 32 (1988/90): 145 ff.; Richard Raatzsch, "Wittgenstein as a Mystic," in *Wittgenstein and the Future of Philosophy. A Reassessment after 50 Years*, ed. by Rudolf Haller and Klaus Puhl, (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 2002), 366–379.

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Charles Ogden (London: Allen & Unwin, 1922), xxi.

⁸ Cf. Kenneth Blackwell, *The Spinozistic Ethics of Bertrand Russell* (London: George Allen, 1985) and Stefan Andersson, *In Quest of Certainty: Bertrand Russell's Search for Certainty in Religion and Mathematics up to*

show that Russell's writings on this subject, some of which Wittgenstein was well acquainted with, clearly influenced Wittgenstein's work on it.⁹ In this respect, as in many others, Wittgenstein was Russell's diligent apprentice.¹⁰

In particular, Wittgenstein's philosophy of life was based on Russell's epistemology, according to which there is a radical difference between the subject and the object of knowledge. The subject receives knowledge when s/he "grasps" the object. The act of grasping itself occurs in a relation of experience. Most importantly, the quality of experience is determined by the type of the relation between the subject and the object, and not by the object alone. Based on this understanding, Wittgenstein developed the conception that there are three different ways to experience the world *sub-specie aeternitatis*: logical, ethical, and aesthetic.¹¹ That is why the same object can be known differently, e.g. in science and in art. If we see the single object *sub-specie aeternitatis*, "together with the space and time instead of *in* the space and time," we see it as a work of art.¹² But if we see the same object in its causal relations, we see it as an object of science, or practice. Wittgenstein illustrated this point with the example of the happy people and the unhappy people. They experience the same facts in the world, but in different ways, with different attitudes.

In fact, this was Russell's idea. He maintained that:

'*The Principles of Mathematics*' (Stockholm: Alqvist & Wiksell, 1994).

⁹ See Nikolay Milkov, "Ist Wittgensteins Tractatus in irgendeinem Sinne mystisch?," *Theologie und Philosophie* 79 (2004): 511–526, here 513 f..

¹⁰ On Wittgenstein as Russell's apprentice in philosophy, see Gregory Landini, *Wittgenstein's Apprenticeship with Russell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The genetic connection between Wittgenstein's philosophy of the mystical and that of Russell, as articulated in his paper "Mysticism and Logic," in *Mysticism and Logic*, 3^d ed., (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), 9–30, was first pointed out by Brian McGuinness, "The Mysticism of the Tractatus," *The Philosophical Review* 75 (1966): 305–328.

¹¹ Cf. Nikolay Milkov, "On the Reconstruction of the Early Wittgenstein's Philosophy," *Darshana International* 27(1) (1987): 47–53; Donald Peterson, *Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy: Three Sides of the Mirror* (London: Harvesrer, 1990). The concept *sub-specie aeternitatis* was coined by Spinoza (*Eth.*, V, Theorems 29 ff.). Wittgenstein adopted it through Russell's mediation (cf. n. 18).

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, ed. by Elisabeth Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 83.

...the quality of infinity, which we feel, is not to be accounted for by the perception of new objects, other than those that at most times seen finite; it is to be accounted for, rather, by a different way of regarding the same object, a contemplation more impersonal, more vast, more filled with love than the fragmentary, disquiet consideration we give to things when we view them as means to help or hinder our own purposes.¹³

There are also clear pieces of evidence that Wittgenstein developed his philosophy of life as an attempt to improve Russell's project. It is well documented that Wittgenstein read Russell's "The Essence of Religion," but found it disappointing. Wittgenstein saw Russell as "a traitor to the gospel of exactness [the two swore by, who] wantonly used words vaguely."¹⁴ To achieve an exact philosophy of life, Wittgenstein adopted an idiosyncratic topology of persons, according to which there are three meanings of "subject"—empirical, metaphysical, and willing—who are separated by sharp boundaries.¹⁵ The metaphysical subject, in particular, does not lie on the plane of ideas (pictures) which the supposed empirical subject experiences, but it is its boundary. The conclusion Wittgenstein made was that the fear of death is a psychologically motivated predisposition. It is not objectively grounded.

Russell's Two Projects for Truth-Searching

Next, I will argue that Russell's explorations of human religious impulses have their counterparts in his investigations into epistemology and metaphysics, which, in turn, have their counterparts in his logical investigations. This means that the analysis of Russell's religion without God and dogma can also shed light on his metaphysics and epistemology, and even on his logic; and vice versa.

Many authors correctly find the motives of Russell's technical philosophy in his search for certain knowledge. In support of this claim, Russell's statement that in his philosophical explorations, "there [was] only one constant preoccupation: I have throughout been anxious to discover

¹³ Bertrand Russell, "The Essence of Religion," 114.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein's letter to Russell from October 11, 1912 (Bertrand Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*; 1st vol., *The Private Years, 1884–1914*, ed. by Nicholas Griffin, Allen Lane: The Penguin Press, 1992, 438). For more on this topic, see the last section of this paper.

¹⁵ Cf. Nikolay Milkov, "The Meaning of life: A Topological Approach," *Analecta Husserliana* 84 (2005): 217–234.

how much we can be said to know and with what degree of certain knowledge or doubtfulness” is readily cited.¹⁶ Unfortunately, to this date, Russell’s search for certainty has been investigated almost exclusively in connection with his logical and epistemological studies.¹⁷ In fact, however, he developed two projects for truth-searching which run in parallel. On the one hand, there is a logical and an epistemological project; on the other, he adopted a “project to offer post-Christian religious consolation.”¹⁸ It was exactly so for Wittgenstein—the first, the logical project was incomparably better elaborated than the second, the religious one. At least in terms of projects, they were equally consistent and significant.

What is more, the two projects were intrinsically interdependent, so that the first shaped the second and vice versa. Moreover, there was mutual influence and mutual illumination between them. Nothing can better support this statement than a reference to the following facts. On August 18, 1911, Russell prepared an outline for a book called “Prisons” (not to be confused with the manuscript “Prison” that he eventually produced¹⁹). In it, together with chapters on religious contemplation and union with the universe, chapters titled “The world of universals” and “The physical world” were included.²⁰ But Russell also planned such a joint project on theoretical philosophy and the philosophy of life two years later, in April 1913, while preparing the “Lowell

¹⁶ Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1959), 11.

¹⁷ One exception is Stefan Andersson, *In Quest of Certainty: Bertrand Russell’s Search for Certainty in Religion and Mathematics up to ‘The Principles of Mathematics’*, who showed that Russell’s quest for mathematical certainty also had its religious dimension. Unfortunately, this author only addressed this dimension of Russell’s work until 1903, when the latter published *The Principles of Mathematics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1903). In the present paper, however, I have explored it in connection with Russell’s technical philosophy until the first half of the 1910s.

¹⁸ Richard Rempel, “Commentary on Prisons,” in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12th vol., 97–101, here 99.

¹⁹ Cf. Bertrand Russell, “On the Relations of Universals and Particulars,” in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. by Robert C. Marsh (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956), 103–124.

²⁰ Here is a summary of its contents: Chapter I: The Nature and value of religion. Chapter II: The world of universals. It will deal with mathematics, etc., showing their value. Chapter III deals with the empire of matters, the immensity of space, and the beauty of nature. Chapter IV: The past. Value of history. The physical world. Chapter V: Contemplation and emotions. Chapter VI: Contemplation and action. Chapter VII: Union with the universe (see Russell’s letter to O. Morrell from August 11, 1911, #173).

Lectures” that were to be delivered in Harvard in the spring of 1914.²¹ Its title was “The Search for Insight/Vision.” Later, Russell replaced it with another course of lectures that became known as *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914).

Furthermore, Russell wrote *The Problems of Philosophy*²² together with the ethical and religious elaborations he made in “Prisons”. To be more exact, *The Problems* were composed between July 1 and August 20, 1911, while on July 24, 1911, Russell began to work on “Prisons.” He continued to write them between September 16 and 29 that year, and again, between February and March, 1912. Moreover, parts of “Prisons” were reprinted in the six closing paragraphs of the final chapters of *The Problems of Philosophy*. Furthermore, “The Perplexities of John Forstice”²³ was written in April–July 1912, while between January and May, 1912, Russell worked on his “Spiritual Autobiography,” which is now lost.²⁴ Importantly enough, in exactly these months, he also worked—in intensive collaboration with Wittgenstein²⁵—on his paper “On Matter,” on which I will speak later in this paper.

This, however, is not the whole story. “A Free Man’s Worship,” too, was produced at a time when Russell did the most difficult and, also, the most important work in theoretical philosophy. He started to write the essay in March–June 1902, continued to work on it in December, and finished it in January 1903. In parallel, Russell studied Meinong and Frege in May–June after completing *The Principles of Mathematics* in May 1902. In November that year, he completed the paper, “The Logical and Arithmetical Doctrines of Frege,” which was published as Appendix A of *The Principles*, the paper that contributed most to acquaint the academic world with Frege’s logic. Finally, in April 1903, Russell wrote “Meinong’s Theory of Complexes and Assumptions”.²⁶

²¹ See Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 1911, in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12th vol., 97–109, here 100.

²² Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 1912 (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1932).

²³ This piece was written in a form of Socratic dialogue between a philosopher, a mathematician, a Russian novelist, and a British postman on the meaning of life.

²⁴ Parts of Russell’s lost autobiography of 1912 were used in “The Perplexities of John Forstice,” in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12th vol., 123–154.

²⁵ Cf. Nikolay Milkov, “The Joint Philosophical Program of Russell and Wittgenstein and Its Demise,” in *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 2 (2013): 81–105.

²⁶ Bertrand Russell, “Meinong’s Theory of Complexes and Assumptions.” in *Essays in Analysis*, ed. by Douglas

It is noteworthy that Russell's later attempts to write on religious themes, in times when he was not closely engaged in the most complicated technical works, e.g. in *What I Believe*,²⁷ were by far not as convincing as "A Free Man's Worship" or "The Essence of Religion" were; they simply lacked the depth of these two pieces. Apparently, Russell produced good philosophy of humanistic religion only when he worked in parallel on prime themes of his technical philosophy. Perhaps this explains why Russell's writings on religion can easily be divided into two parts: while those written until 1920—i.e. when he was most creative in philosophy—were sympathetic to religion, those written after 1920 were sharply critical of it.²⁸

The Early Russell on the Religion of the Free Man

As already noted, Russell's first attempt to elaborate on his religion without dogma and God was made in his essay "A Free Man's Worship". The main subject of this essay, and that of the unfinished and unpublished manuscript of the same period, "The Pilgrimage of Life," was "the inexhaustible mystery of existence, in which, as by some strange marriage of pain, the sufferer is bound to the world by bonds of sorrow".²⁹ This mystery rises from the tragic place man has in cosmos:

That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors 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, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe of ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can stand.³⁰

Lackey (New York: Braziller, 1973), 21–76.

²⁷ Bertrand Russell, *What I Believe* (London: Kegan Paul, 1925).

²⁸ See Nicholas Griffin, "Bertrand Russell as a Critic of Religion," *Studies in Religion* 24 (1995): 47–58.

²⁹ Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Mysticism and Logic*, 40–47, here 45.

³⁰ Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," 41.

Russell was conscious that this mystery cannot be resolved in quasi-scientific terms. He was critical of the “religion of reason” as advanced by some French philosophers of the Enlightenment, as well as by Hegel and his acolytes.³¹ In fact, on this point, Russell “would have argued readily with Tertullian and Kierkegaard that religion concerns the absurd rather than that it discloses a rational structure to the universe”.³² Russell realized this all of a sudden, on February 10, 1901, when he was 28 years old, in a moment of illumination:

Suddenly the ground seemed to give way beneath me, and I found myself in quite another region. 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.³³

This insight remained firm in Russell’s mind, also determining his conversion to a pacifist outlook that found expression in his fight against the Great War and in his remarkable career as an anti-war political activist later.

Russell’s main thought in “The Free Man’s Worship” was that the free man can challenge the hostility of the universe with brave action—both cognitive, and practical. The free man, as all other people, is powerless in this inhuman world. But he has ideals “in the realm of imagination, in music, in architecture, in the untroubled kingdom of reason”,³⁴ which work against it. We find a brief presentation of these ideals in “The Education of Emotions” (1902): “A broad, free, adventurous spirit, a spirit of bold hope, of reckless daring, a spirit swept by a breath as uncontrollable as the Atlantic winds—this is what makes the splendid achievements of the world, and sways the sluggard mass of humanity as the breeze sways the ripening corn.”³⁵ The faith based

³¹ Today it is thus understood by Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris, among others.

³² Luis Greenspan and Stefan Andersson, “Introduction,” in *Russell on Religion: Selections from the Writings of Bertrand Russell*, ed. by Stefan Andersson (London: Routledge, 1999), 1–18, here 4.

³³ Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 3 vols., 1st vol. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967), 146.

³⁴ Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” 44.

³⁵ Bertrand Russell, “The Education of Emotions,” in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12th vol., 56–61, here 60.

on such ideals communicates the energy that helps the free man to decisively descend into the world of facts and try to change it. The ideal is a kind of vision, of “unfettered contemplation.” This attitude toward the hostility of the universe is part and parcel of the free man’s life—he encounters the inconveniences of the future with its help. It is a way to contemplate the Fate.³⁶

Following the direction given by Christianity, Russell also praised the resignation—of desires, not of thoughts, though. Our thoughts have to be most active. The emancipated man is “free, during his brief years, to examine, to exercise, to know, and in imagination to create.”³⁷

In contrast to the free man, the ordinary man’s answer to the mystery of existence is to create a God, which is nothing but the mystic unity of what *is* and what *should be*. This religion has as its philosophical counterpart the metaphysics based on mysticism, not on logic. Russell opposed it with a kind of religious humanism: the objects of the free man’s worships are created by the free human mind.

Method Change

Russell’s 1911–12 philosophy of religion without God and dogma, which will occupy us in the present paper, was developed in a period of his philosophical development in which he is believed to have discovered a new, scientific philosophical method he called “philosophical analysis.” Russell was convinced that it is the true method in philosophy which has enormous heuristic power. He projected it as the kernel of a new type of philosophy he called “analytic philosophy.”

Armed with this new method, Russell took the courage to return to his old subject, the free man’s worship. Now, however, he tried to elaborate a *theory* of religious humanism which he articulated in a paper, with arguments and reference to evidence. (“The Free Man’s Worship” was only an essay.) The objective of this theory was to *analyze* religious beliefs. At the same time, and we will show that below, the tenor of his two projects for religion without God and dogma, that of 1903, and that of 1911–12, remained the same: both tried to outline a religion without God and dogma.

³⁶ Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” 46.

³⁷ Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” 41. This point of Russell was echoed in Wittgenstein’s *Notebooks* on August 13, 1916:

“How can man be happy at all, since he cannot ward off the misery of this world?
Through the life of knowledge.” (Ludwig Wittgenstein *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 81)

Theoretically, Russell's second project was developed in the context of his philosophical discussion of two terms: universals and matter. This is clearly seen in the manuscript of "Prisons" in which the problem of universals and the discussion of matter loomed large. In fact, these topics became prominent in Russell's philosophy only after the introduction of the concept of sense-data in it in the summer of 1911, while he was writing *The Problems of Philosophy*.³⁸

In that book, Russell adopted the view that we do not directly perceive physical objects; we perceive only sense-data and universals (the latter are qualities and relations, including qualities and relations of sense-data). We can know physical objects only by inference. We know them since, from the sense-data and the universals we are acquainted with, we can logically infer that there are physical objects.

In "On Matter," however, Russell abandoned the view that we infer matter from sense-data and universals. Instead, he started to consider matter as a logical construction out of them. The underlying idea of this new epistemology was to conceive the world as ultimately consisting of independent atomic units (later called "logical atoms")—sense-data and universals. These primitive elements can be ordered in different, logically organized nets in which sense-data and universals are interrelated. The objects of common sense can be seen as the constructions of some of these atoms, while the objects of the hypotheses of science are alternative constructions of these and of other atoms.

Significantly, this new conception of matter had important world-view consequences. Russell designed his new conception of matter as "a model of cold passionate analysis, setting forth the most painful conclusions with utter disregard of human feelings. ... There is nothing to compare to passion for giving one cold insight".³⁹ Russell was glad that he would "shock the people" with this new theory,⁴⁰ as long as it made them see the world without *here*, without *now*, and also without *me*.

Contemplation and Action

³⁸ Cf. Nikolay Milkov. "The History of Russell's Concepts 'Sense-data' and 'Knowledge by Acquaintance'," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 43 (2001): 221–231.

³⁹ Russell's letter to Ottoline Morrell from April 24, 1912.

⁴⁰ Russell's letter to Ottoline Morrell from April 28, 1912.

Russell's 1911–12 philosophy of religion followed the ancient and medieval tradition of adopting two possible attitudes toward the world—contemplation and action.

(i) The *action-attitude* aims at producing some change in the world. To shape the world, it divides it into two opposites: good, and bad. Here are some of the characteristics of the acting soul: it strives for power and possession; it is limited to bounded spaces: monads, modules; its projects are realized in private, not in universal, perspectives.

(ii) Things are altogether different with the *contemplative attitude* toward the world. It comprehends the world in a universal perspective. Thus, it enlarges the soul to the rooms of the universe. In such a state, “the soul becomes free from the bonds of friend and foe, a citizen of the universe and not only one walled City at war with all the rest”.⁴¹ Russell did not insist that the division between the action-attitude and the contemplative attitude is absolute. In fact, it is only a matter of degree. The question is which attitude toward the world prevails. In fact, one attitude cannot oust the opposite one completely. Freedom, for example, is only a goal towards which we can approach; we cannot achieve complete freedom. On the same note, there is no exclusive contemplation—at some point, the contemplation leaves room for action.

Although the free man mostly contemplates, he is also engaged in action—but only in an action that is filtered (controlled) by contemplation. The free man's action is “impregnated with contemplation”.⁴² His world of action is “tamed” through training in contemplative vision; his strivings and desires are not, thus, insistent as the desires of the man who is not free.

As already mentioned, this project ran parallel to Russell's program for the new philosophy he called “analytic.” Two years after he wrote the words just cited from “Prisons,” Russell stated that he defended an “analytic philosophy” that uses “the harmonizing mediation of reason, which tests our beliefs by their mutual compatibility, and examines, in doubtful cases, the possible sources of error on the one side and on the other”.⁴³ This is a philosophy of “the scientific restraint and balance”.⁴⁴ It, so to speak, permeates speculative philosophy with reason.⁴⁵ Converse-

⁴¹ Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 104.

⁴² Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 104.

⁴³ Bertrand Russell, “Mysticism and Logic,” 17.

⁴⁴ Bertrand Russell, “Mysticism and Logic,” 20.

⁴⁵ Cf. Nikolay Milkov, “The 1900-Turn in Bertrand Russell's Logic, the Emergence of His Paradox, and the Way Out,” *Siegener Beiträge Zur Geschichte und Philosophie der Mathematik* 7 (2017): 29–50.

ly, the old philosophy (*philosophia perennis*) produces theories and ideas that are not examined in this way. In other words, the old (also “speculative”) philosophy tries to achieve in the realm of theoretical philosophy what dogmas try to achieve in religion. Its endeavor is to reveal the unique truth that is valid forever and for everyone. Russell was convinced that this approach was abortive.

Furthermore, in his technical philosophy, he set out that whereas the old logic advanced canons or logical forms that are restrictive—researchers are to follow them, the new logic suggests only possible hypotheses that help our imagination, thus, freeing us from the fetters of the logical prejudices.⁴⁶ Similarly, in “The Essence of Religion,” Russell maintained that “the divine part of man⁴⁷ does not demand that the world shall conform to a pattern [to a dogma]: it accepts the world [as it is], and finds in wisdom a union which demands nothing of the world”.⁴⁸

But let us return to our exploration of Russell’s religious dilemma: contemplation, and/or action. The contemplative attitude was seen by Russell in two different plains again: (i) In cognitive plain, as “the vision of all the ages of the earth, the depths of space, and the hierarchy of the eternal truths, met and mirrored in one mind”.⁴⁹ (ii) On an emotional plain, as a combination of joy and sorrow. On the one side, what this type of

vision seems to show ... is that we can live in a deeper region than the region of little everyday cares and desires—where beauty is a revelation of something beyond, where it becomes possible to love all men, where Self as a separate fighting unit fades away, and where all common tasks are easy because they are seen as parts of what is greatest. ...

Yet [we] have another vision, equally insistent, equally seeming like a revelation; in this vision, sorrow is the ultimate truth of life, everything else is oblivion or delusion.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Cf. Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926), 68.

⁴⁷ Russell often speaks about the “divine part” of man, opposing it to her/his “animal part.” In doing so, he follows, apparently, without realizing it, an old tradition that has its roots in the Kabbalah teaching.

⁴⁸ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 122.

⁴⁹ Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 103.

⁵⁰ Bertrand Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, 1st vol., 414.

In such moments we feel “a nameless infinite sadness”.⁵¹ The desire for suicide rises, and is a question of instinct, not of theory, nor even art or contemplation, would we survive it.

Infinity

Russell’s analysis of contemplation led him to explore the personal infinite. According to him, the structure of the personal infinite parallels the structure of the concept of infinite in mathematics.⁵² This is clearly expressed in some of Russell’s letters from 1912, in which he confessed:

I simply can’t *stand* a view limited to this earth. I feel life so small unless it has windows into other worlds. ... I like mathematics largely because it is *not* human and has nothing particular to do with this planet or with the whole accidental universe—because, like Spinoza’s God, it won’t love us in return.⁵³

In “The Perplexities of John Forstice,” Russell maintained that “the same attitude which the mathematician adopts towards the abstract world is possible also towards the world of existence”.⁵⁴ In fact, it was exactly this attitude—supported by such powerful emotions—that urged Russell (perhaps unconsciously) to adopt unusually uncritical (for his own standard of exactness) account of infinity in mathematics between 1898 and 1919.⁵⁵

In a letter to Ottoline Morrell from November 18, 1911, Russell wrote:

What you call God is very much what I call infinity. I do feel something in common in all the great things— ... it is very mysterious and I really don’t know what to think of it—but I feel it

⁵¹ Bertrand Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, 1st vol., 415. A concept apparently related to Heidegger’s “tiefe Langeweile” (Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1967, 110) and to Sartre’s “absurdité fondamentale” (Jean-Paul Sartre, *La nausea*, Paris: Gallimard, 1938, 178).

⁵² Cf. Stefan Andersson, *In Quest of Certainty: Bertrand Russell’s Search for Certainty in Religion and Mathematics up to ‘The Principles of Mathematics’*.

⁵³ Bertrand Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, 1st vol., 417.

⁵⁴ Bertrand Russell, “The Perplexities of John Forstice,” 137.

⁵⁵ See on this Nikolay Milkov, “The 1900-Turn in Bertrand Russell’s Logic, the Emergence of His Paradox, and the Way Out”.

is the most important thing in the world and really the one thing that matters profoundly. It is to me as yet a mystery—I don't understand it. I think it has many manifestations.⁵⁶

But they are chiefly two, namely, love and truth.

In other places, Russell defined infinity in rather psychological terms: “It is the escape from prison that gives to some moments and some thoughts a quality of infinity”.⁵⁷ The latter promotes an insight deeper than the piecemeal knowledge of our daily life. To achieve such infinity, “it is necessary to abstain from any demand that the world shall conform to our standards”.⁵⁸ In other words, we must strive to eliminate the instinct in us, in particular, in our will—or at least, to minimize its role, and to embrace the infinite; we should do that since the instinct leads us to the prison of the finite. Importantly enough, we must curb our instinct with the help of reason. Indeed, the reason is infinite; the insight is finite.

Union with the Universe

As I have just pointed out, Russell's new humanistic religion was formulated in optical terms,⁵⁹ as a contemplation of the universe. The main thesis of “Prisons” was that we must evade a life in one perspective, in one monad. Instead, we should strive to reach an access to many perspectives from which we can contemplate the world more fully. To stay in one perspective means to stay in a “prison.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Bertrand Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, 1st vol., 410.

⁵⁷ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 113.

⁵⁸ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 121.

⁵⁹ It is difficult to expect something different from one who introduced the Principle of Acquaintance into philosophy. See on this principle Russell Wahl, “‘On Denoting’ and the Principle of Acquaintance,” *Russell* 27 (2007): 7–23.

⁶⁰ Here, Russell used Plato's metaphor. In a letter to Ottoline Morrell from August 20, 1911, he wrote: “I have been reading a lot of Plato (in English!); he is extraordinarily good” (Caroline Moorhead, *Bertrand Russell. A Life*, London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1992, 387). Later, Russell used the “prison” metaphor, also referring to his theoretical philosophy. In “My Mental Development,” for example, he described his and Moore's revolt against the philosophy of British Idealism in 1900 as an “escape from prison” (Bertrand Russell, “My Mental Development,” in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, ed. by Paul Schilpp, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1944, 1–20, here 12).

Russell explained the prison-building with the dominance of self-interest and subjectivity. It is a prison “because [it] shuts out the love, the knowledge, and the attainment of goods otherwise possible”.⁶¹ Against this kind of “spiritual incarceration,” Russell outlined a program for a new religion which presents a “union with the universe achieved by subordination of the demands of the Self”.⁶² not a union of omnipotence, however, but of impersonal contemplative vision. It circumscribes all acts of will. Only such a union can ease our existential pain. It is to be achieved by embracing not our personal perspective (that of our private monad) but by opening an access to all possible perspectives. Only such a religious attitude can bring us to the infinity.

Russell’s conclusion was: “It is therefore important to preserve religion”,⁶³ but in a new form. In the old age, it was the love to God that secured this unity; nowadays, with our beliefs faded away, our outlook became finite. The important point is that this mode of union with the universe “asks nothing [no rewards] of the world [and of God], and depends solely upon ourselves”.⁶⁴

It should be kept in mind that in his epistemology, as developed in *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Russell advanced a theory of perception according to which the world is full of infinite perspectives or aspects. The perspectives are objective (they are real), and also mutually related. They can be perceived, or can remain unperceived. The perceived perspectives are private. A common-sense object, at this particular moment, can be seen as a system of aspects. Similarly, a physical object can be seen as logical constructions of aspects. Every aspect of an object is a member of two different classes of aspects: (i) the various aspects of the object; (ii) the perspective of which the given aspect is a member. The physicist classifies the aspects in the first way, the psychologist in the second.

⁶¹ Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 102.

⁶² Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 1911, 105. Russell adopted the concept of “union with the universe” from Spinoza (see Kenneth Blackwell, *The Spinozistic Ethics of Bertrand Russell*, vii). To be sure, Spinoza was the first Western philosopher to speak in these terms. Russell gained affinity to Spinoza’s philosophy of religion by his study of Frederick Pollock’s book on Spinoza (Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy*, London: Kegan Paul, 1880). Also, around 1894, when Russell considered himself a neo-Hegelian, he found the ontological argument sound (cf. Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, 1st vol., 60). In the philosophical tradition, this problem is known as that of *ecstasy*. See for it (Pseudo-) Dionysius Areopagita, *Divinorum nominorum*, iv, 13.

⁶³ Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 104.

⁶⁴ Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 105.

As I have already mentioned, this position was first developed in Russell's paper "On Matter," which he wrote in parallel to "The Essence of Religion." And as we have just seen, in "The Essence of Religion," he tried to demonstrate that in the same way in which there are no physical objects, we do not need to worship God. It is easy to see here that Russell applied the same procedure of decomposition analysis both in his technical philosophy and in his philosophy of religion.

Russell's conclusion is that it is "in union with the world [that] the soul finds its freedom".⁶⁵ People strive eagerly for religious illumination, or for spiritual ecstasy, with the hope to achieve such a union. The problem, however, is how this union with the world, or the universe, is to be realized: on the basis of the conventional theistic religion, or otherwise. Russell is convinced that traditional religion fails to destroy the prisons of the finite: it sticks to dogmas.

To suggest a better way of satisfying human cravings for freedom, Russell found out that there are three types of free union with the universe. These are actualized in three alternative realms in which this striving is experienced: (i) the union of thought;⁶⁶ (ii) the union of feeling, or desire; and (iii) the union of will. Their products are, respectively, (i) knowledge, (ii) love, and (iii) service.⁶⁷

What promotes a real union with the universe is the combination of these three, which can also be called "wisdom." "The life of wisdom seeks an impartial end, in which there is no rivalry, no essential enmity. The union which it seeks has no boundaries: it wishes to know all, to love all, and to serve all".⁶⁸ Importantly enough, Russell defended rationalism and intellect also in the realm of religion since without them one cannot achieve impartiality of contemplation. He pleaded for "rational contemplation"—this exactly is the contemplation of the free man. The latter acts "dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire of knowledge. [It] will value more the abstract and universal knowledge into which the accidents of private history do not enter".⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Bertrand Russell, "The Essence of Religion," 121.

⁶⁶ It is similar to Wittgenstein's later picture of thought, flying above the world, leaving it as it is. It sees the world *sub-specie aeternitatis* (cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 2nd ed., ed. by Georg Henrik von Wright, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, 5).

⁶⁷ Bertrand Russell, "The Essence of Religion," 122.

⁶⁸ Bertrand Russell, "The Essence of Religion," 122.

⁶⁹ Bertrand Russell, "Prisons," 106.

Education of Emotions⁷⁰

As already seen, the main characteristic of Russell's humanistic religion is the impartiality of vision: "The infinite part of our life does not see the world from one point of view: it shines impartially, like the diffused light on a cloudy sea".⁷¹ This impartiality leads to *truth* in thought, *justice* in action, and universal *love* in feeling. At the other extreme is the finite part of our life. For it, it is typical to have "the hatred of enemies and the love of allies in battle."⁷² ... [It] view[s] the universe as grouped about one point".⁷³

What is necessary in order to achieve an impartiality of vision is a certain emotional effort to eliminate our "attachment to the concrete facts," our "cognitive egoism"; something like a *skepsis* to arrive at a kind of stoic *ataraxia*.⁷⁴ But we can achieve a spiritual *ataraxia* only if we "no longer ask of life that it shall yield [us] any of those personal goods that are subject to the mutations of Time".⁷⁵ Only then can we receive a "new vision," consisting of the contemplation of Fate, which is to bring us to "the very gate of wisdom".⁷⁶ With that vision always in our mental eye, we can then descend into action.

Russell underlined that in our unexamined lives, we endeavor to impose ourselves upon the world. This is expressed in "Prisons" in this way: "The soul instinctively views the world as material for its own greatness".⁷⁷ This instinct is based on "the Will [which] is the very essence of the Self, the energy by which the Self lives, the self-assertion by which it secures its place in the

⁷⁰ "Education of Emptions" is the title of Russell's paper published in 1902. Cf. f. 35. Apparently, Russell, an avid reader of the literature of his time, borrowed the title from Gustave Flaubert's Roman *L'Éducation sentimentale*.

⁷¹ Bertrand Russell, "The Essence of Religion," 112.

⁷² Ironically enough, Russell wrote these lines just two years before the Great War—an event he would radically oppose.

⁷³ Bertrand Russell, "The Essence of Religion," 112.

⁷⁴ Already in 1902, in the days Russell worked on "The Free Man's Worship," he wrote to Helen Thompson: "I have learned at last the old Stoic Secret: ... Hope nothing, fear nothing, desire nothing" (Quoted according to Caroline Moorhead, *Bertrand Russell. A Life*, 115). In "The Free Man's Worship" itself, Russell praised "the stoic freedom in which wisdom consists ... in the submission of our desires, but not of our thoughts" (43).

⁷⁵ Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," 43.

⁷⁶ Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," 44.

⁷⁷ Bertrand Russell, "Prisons," 103.

universe”.⁷⁸ It is because of this that the Self is “less capable than the intellect of complete freedom and complete union with the world”.⁷⁹

Ultimately, Russell’s objective was the cultivation of a “free intellect.” Such an intellect

will see as God might see, without *here* and *now*, without hopes and fears, without the trammels of customary beliefs and traditional prejudices, calmly, dispassionately, in the sole and exclusive desire of knowledge—knowledge as impersonal, as purely contemplative, as it is possible for man to attain.⁸⁰

This is, incidentally, what Russell’s epistemology also strove for.

For its achievement, philosophical training is of special importance. Russell was convinced that “[t]he mind which has become accustomed to the freedom and impartiality of philosophic contemplation will preserve something of the same freedom and impartiality in the world of action and emotion”.⁸¹ The ultimate upshot of the philosophical training in this realm is the suspension of the will:

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. [... This is] 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 (italics added).⁸²

⁷⁸ Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 107.

⁷⁹ Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 108. In fact, Wittgenstein’s ruminations about the will from the *Tractatus* (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.373 f., 6.423 f.) and the *Notebooks 1914–1916* (87 f.) not only followed Schopenhauer, as it usually is maintained, but Russell as well.

⁸⁰ Bertrand Russell, “Prisons,” 106.

⁸¹ Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 248.

⁸² Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 114.

As we have noted at the beginning of this paper, Wittgenstein suggested a similar solution—eliminating the willing subject from his ontology of person. It neither lies on the plane of ideas, nor on its outer boundary. We just see its effects on the plane of ideas or on its boundary.

Religion beyond God and Mysticism

At the end of “The Essence of Religion,” Russell produced a final philosophical analysis of religious beliefs. He decided to follow at that the scheme outlined by the Christian religion that served him as the guidance but filled its chapters with a new content. Little wonder then that, on the model of Christianity, Russell’s humanistic religion has three chapters: worship, acquiescence, and love.

(a) *Worship*. Religious worship can be either selective, or impartial. Selective worship is directed either to individuals (whom we call “celebrities” today), or to deeds of excellence, or to God. When the objects of contemplation are individuals, or great deeds, they sooner or later get discarded (the worship for them fades away), and this is simply because they also have sides that are not perfect. The only solid object of selective contemplation is God. The theism, or the belief in God, however, is dogmatic out of necessity, with all the problems of religious dogmatism I have discussed so far. Another problem with this kind of selective worship is that it “finds its full object only in the ideal good which creative contemplation imagines”.⁸³ It, thus, makes impossible the union with the actual world. Its advantage is that it satisfies our hunger for perfection.

The alternative to selective worship is impartial worship: “Such a worship is given by the contemplative vision, which finds mystery and joy in all that [really] exists, and brings with it love to all that has life”.⁸⁴ Since it is a direct attitude, it does not involve a judgment about what is good among the existing things and, so, cannot be right or wrong. Besides, it does not require

⁸³ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 116.

Russell adopted the subject of ideal good from G. E. Moore (George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903). However, his concept of ideal good clearly differs from Moore’s. Above all, Moore’s ideal was more reactive. He praised “personal affections and aesthetic enjoyments” but failed to speak about active creation (§ 113). This was Russell’s main topic.

⁸⁴ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 117.

belief in God, and so, does not embrace a dogma. Hence, it is “not assailable by the arguments which have destroyed the tenets of traditional religion”.⁸⁵

A problem with selective worship is that its object is the ideal good. The latter, however, belongs to the world of universals. Practical men have little interest in it, though, since the universals do not exist in the actual world. In contrast, the objects of the impartial worship do exist; however, they are not perfectly good. So, this kind of worship is wrong when it assumes that the universe *is* good. And this is a problem since an essential part of the worship is to wish that it may be as good as possible.

Russell’s conclusion is that the two kinds of worships, selective and impartial, have to be practiced complimentary: “one [involves] the goodness but not the existence of its objects, the other [involves] the existence but not the goodness of its objects”.⁸⁶ From this position, Russell entails the necessity for *religious action* as “a continual endeavor to bridge the gulf between the objects of these two worships, by making more good exist and more of the existence good”.⁸⁷

(b) *Acquiescence*. We have seen that Russell suggested the stoic *ataraxia* as a means to face the evil of the universe already in 1902–3. The religious attitude can help us develop in ourselves self-effacement with respect to the external world. In “The Essence of Religion,” Russell opened a special chapter in his project for religion without dogma which deals with the hardship of Fate: acquiescence. Acquiescence helps to achieve a “moral discipline.” It, too, is not a judgment about the events in the world (so that it cannot be right or wrong) but is an adopted attitude that can help us to free ourselves from fighting lost battles, to cope with the challenges of the Fate.

There are two kinds of acquiescence. The first one helps us diminish our private grief; the second one faces the fundamental Evil on Earth. Russell recommends acquiescence, in particular, with regard to private grief. “It comes in the moment of submission which brings about the birth of the impartial will. ... By submission our thoughts are freed, and our will is led to new aims”.⁸⁸ Such submission helps us to realize our boundaries and concentrate energy and creativity on objects that are under our control. Indignation toward the universe, which is of utmost im-

⁸⁵ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 117.

⁸⁶ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 117.

⁸⁷ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 117.

⁸⁸ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 118.

portance for all dogmatic religions, is pointless as well. In fact, “the realization of necessity is the liberation from indignation”.⁸⁹ We must not engage in abortive fights.

It is also important to notice that the two kinds of acquiescence are supported by the impartiality of contemplation. This means that acquiescence “is at once a cause and an effect of faith”.⁹⁰

(c) *Love*. Love, too, is of two kinds: divine,⁹¹ or heavenly love, and earthly love. The former is impartial; the latter is selective. The earthly love is, in principle, opposed to hatred. It polarizes the world in principle: we love our friends and hate our foes; one loves God and hates the Devil. In contrast, divine love “can be given to everything that has life”.⁹² It is contemplative, but whenever action is possible, it motivates one to act.

Divine love is accessible only to the “universal soul.” One can present it this way: While the contemplation relates to the intellect of the universal soul, divine love relates to its emotions. The latter helps us destroy the private prison of selective love. It supports the service to other people, to our community, and to humanity, in general. It makes service an enjoyable experience and helps us escape the disgrace of loneliness.

Since the love of man is connected to service, it is much more active than divine love, which is thoroughly contemplative. However, it is helpful if the love of man is supported by the non-theistic worship of the ideal good which gives it guidance. “The worship of good is indeed the greater of the two commandments, since it leads us to know that love of man is good”.⁹³

In conclusion, Russell underlines that “the three elements of religion, namely worship, acquiescence, and love, are intimately connected; each helps to produce the others, and all three together form a unity in which it is impossible to say which comes first, which last”.⁹⁴

Why Russell’s Project for a new Religion without God and Dogma Failed

⁸⁹ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 119. This position of Russell is clearly related to Hegel’s famous saying (in Frederick Engels’s formulation): “Freedom is the recognition of necessity.”

⁹⁰ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 119.

⁹¹ Cf. n. 47.

⁹² Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 120.

⁹³ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 120.

⁹⁴ Bertrand Russell, “The Essence of Religion,” 121.

My analysis of Russell’s religious writings between 1902 and 1912 shows that, as a philosopher, he was not interested only in securing certain knowledge. Russell also hoped that his new method in philosophy, the method of analysis, could help achieve a new form of religious consolation. Moreover, we have seen that Russell’s best pieces on religious consolation were written in parallel to his most abstract and also most influential works in technical philosophy. This indicates that technical philosophy can stimulate fruitful religious discussions. Even more importantly, it can help stir up reflections on religion that otherwise remain closed.

Russell’s project to outline a theory of religious consolation failed for two reasons. First, he lacked the physical and, apparently, also the psychological vigor to complete it. Russell himself made this point. As he noted in his letters, the work on the short essay “A Free Man’s Worship” was the “result of much suffering”.⁹⁵ It was written very slowly—something quite unusual for him. Russell must read “enormously to make up”.⁹⁶ After the collapse of the “Prison” project, late in 1912, Russell noted: “It was perhaps too soon to write so ambitious a book”.⁹⁷ He needed much more time to present it in a proper form.

Much more significant for the failure of the project, however, was Wittgenstein’s criticism of it. In a letter written shortly after “The Essence of Religion” was published, Russell noted: Wittgenstein “is frightfully pained by my [...] article which he evidently *detests*.”⁹⁸ In particular, Wittgenstein insisted “that such things are too intimate for print.”⁹⁹ Importantly enough, Russell cared about Wittgenstein’s arguments “very much, because [he] half agree[d] with him.”¹⁰⁰ Especially, he wondered whether the terms he used in his paper were appropriate. Perhaps, instead of “worship,” he should speak of “reverence”—wrote Russell in the same letter.

To sum up things, Wittgenstein’s criticism was the main reason for Russell to abandon the project of the philosophical analysis of religious beliefs forever. In an interview he gave in 1963, at the age of 91, he told a reporter that “The Essence of Religion” “soon came to seem to me too

⁹⁵ Bertrand Russell, “Journal,” 1902–05 in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12th vol., 3–28, here 18.

⁹⁶ Bertrand Russell, “Journal,” 17.

⁹⁷ Richard Rempel, “Commentary on Prisons,” 99.

⁹⁸ Russell’s letter to Ottoline Morrell from October 8, 1912, # 597.

⁹⁹ Wittgenstein’s letter to Russell from October 11, 1912 (Bertrand Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, 1st vol., 438).

¹⁰⁰ Bertrand Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, 1st vol., 438.

religious, and I never reprinted it”.¹⁰¹ This, however, is a pity since, as the reconstruction of Russell’s view on this subject has shown, the project was really promising.

Eventually, Russell’s negative stance toward the philosophical analysis of religion found expression in his famous pamphlet *Why I am not a Christian*, which is considered today as Russell’s official view about “the essence of religion.” In that pamphlet, Russell continued to criticize religious dogmas and also to argue against God, in particular, against Jesus Christ. At the same time, however, he refused to suggest any positive views about a religion without dogma and God. Now he considered this project a non-starter.

It should also be observed that shortly after his devastating criticism of Russell’s paper on religious consolation, Wittgenstein decided to explore the same subject—human religious beliefs—but following all the rules of exact philosophy as he understood it. (We have already spoken about this project at the beginning of the paper.) Importantly enough, in the process of reflecting on this subject, which Russell first explored, Wittgenstein became deeply engaged with it in practice. Here is the impression Russell gained from Wittgenstein when they met for the first time after the Great War in December 1919: “I had found in his book [the *Tractatus*] a flavor of mysticism, but was astonished when I found that he has become a complete mystic. He reads people like Kierkegaard and Angelus Silesius, he seriously contemplates becoming a monk”.¹⁰²

One can see the destructive role of Wittgenstein on Russell’s efforts to apply his new method of analysis to religious belief as the first case of a tendency in their joint work in philosophy¹⁰³ which reached its culmination some months later. In May and June 1913, Wittgenstein radically criticized Russell’s manuscript of the *Theory of Knowledge*.¹⁰⁴ The critique was so devastating that Russell lost his motivation to practice philosophy for years. He managed to restart his philosophical explorations only after the Great War, but in a new form. In the 1920s, he tried to apply

¹⁰¹ Richard Rempel, “Commentary on ‘The Essence of Religion’,” 1985, in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 12th vol., 110–111, here 111.

¹⁰² Bertrand Russell, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, 2nd vol., *The Public Years, 1914–1970*, ed. by Nicholas Griffin. London: Routledge, 2001, 198.

¹⁰³ See Nikolay Milkov, “The Joint Philosophical Program of Russell and Wittgenstein and Its Demise”.

¹⁰⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Theory of Knowledge*, 1913, in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, 1st vol., *Cambridge Essays 1888–99*, ed. by Kenneth Blackwell et al. (London: Routledge, 1983).

his method of philosophical analysis to psychology and physics, as they developed after the newest scientific discoveries of the time.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, this period of Russell's philosophical development was not as fruitful as the preceding one. Even more unfortunate, however, was that Russell never again had the courage to positively discuss "the essence of religion."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Bertrand Russell, *Analysis of Mind* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1921); Bertrand Russell, *Analysis of Matter* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1927).

¹⁰⁶ The first version of this paper was delivered at the Bertrand Russell Society Meeting held with the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Philadelphia (PA) on December 29, 2008, and was commented on by Timothy Madigan. Thanks to all the participants who made remarks at that session. The numbering of Russell's letters follows the tradition set up by the Bertrand Russell Archive at McMaster University, Ontario.