

2026 Meeting Abstracts

The Bertrand Russell Society

01

Russell Stetler (Independent Scholar)

Bertrand Russell and His International War Crimes Tribunal: A Personal Recollection

I had the privilege of working with Bertrand Russell and the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation from 1966 to 1968. I joined the foundation as it began to implement Russell's grand vision of an international war crimes tribunal. Although I spent much of this time in London, I worked directly with Russell in Penrhyndeudraeth, Wales, between the Tribunal's initial evidentiary hearing in Stockholm in May 1967 and its final session in Roskilde, outside Copenhagen, at the end of that year. As Russell's emissary, I met with Simone de Beauvoir in Paris and the playwright Peter Weiss in Stockholm to secure their participation in the Tribunal -- vital not only for their own eminence but also for recruiting the local logistical support that would be needed in both countries. I also met with President Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi on Russell's behalf to negotiate the necessary independence of the teams that would be sent to gather credible evidence of war crimes. I represented Russell throughout both sessions of the Tribunal and served as its deputy secretary general. Russell in his nineties was at the height of his international fame. We often joked at the foundation that if you addressed a letter to "Russell, England," it would reach him. Heads of state responded to his cables. Major newspapers published his letters and often responded editorially. He alone had the worldwide stature to convene the Tribunal when Vietnam was the central issue of the time. I am mindful that the Russell Archives at McMaster hold the documentary evidence that constitutes the authoritative and comprehensive source for these events in this now distant time frame. However, I also appreciate that these papers are only the skeletal architecture of these years. I will attempt to add flesh to the bones, to share my personal experience of Russell and the creation of the Tribunal in that extraordinary time.

02

Gregory Landini (University of Iowa)

Revolutionary Mathematicians Against the Metaphysicians of Abstract Particulars

Russell's 1901 paper "Mathematics and the Metaphysicians" has not been understood. The title came in 1917 when the paper was reprinted in *Mysticism and Logic*. The original title was "Recent Work in the Philosophy of Mathematics." I want to suggest the title "Revolutionary Mathematics Against the Metaphysicians." My point is that its heralding of the new Whitehead Russell Logicism has not been heard. It has an origin and lineage that is independent of Frege's Logicism and is antithetical to it. It is not a "reductive" program of rational reconstruction and derivation from logic of the results of the metaphysicians of mathematics who have imposed theories of abstract particulars governed by kinds of necessity (arithmetic, geometric). Whitehead Russell Logicism is the thesis that revolutionary mathematicians have discovered that mathematics is the cpLogical study of of relations and conducted independently of any contingencies of their exemplification. Revolutionary mathematicians are doing cpLogic when they do mathematics.

03

Tony Simpson (Atlantic Peace Foundation)

Carn Voel — Where I Write

Russell explicitly identified Carn Voel, his coastal home in remote Cornwall, as conducive to writing. He told Ottoline that work on the second edition of Principia Mathematica could only be done there. His daily writing routine produced a succession of new titles, including THE ABC OF ATOMS, ON EDUCATION ESPECIALLY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD, and AN OUTLINE OF PHILOSOPHY. The emphasis tended to writing for income on topics that were of personal interest. Russell established The Atlantic Peace Foundation as a registered charity in 1963. This will be an opportunity to give a brief update on the APF's objective to establish an educational centre and library at Carn Voel with an emphasis on Russell's life and work.

04

Tim Madigan (St. John Fisher University)

Parallel Lives: Bertrand Russell and George Bernard Shaw

In this presentation I will discuss the half-century long relationship between the two Nobel Laureates in Literature, their often humorous anecdotes about one another, the causes they agreed about and disagreed about, and the Canadian influence on their continuing relevance—the Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario and the Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

05

Landon Elkind (Western Kentucky University)

Principia Mathematica in the Digital Age

In this talk, I will present and discuss some new digital tools relating to Principia Mathematica. These include projects I have been involved in creating, like the PM-MATS resource, Principia Mathematica: the Choose Your Own Adventure book, the PMifier, and the principia TeX package. I will close by discussing how interactive theorem provers have recently been applied to Principia, the state and importance of those projects for Logicism, and what the long-term future looks like for the significant project of formally verifying Principia Mathematica.

06

Sheila Turcon (McMaster University)

Editing Bertrand Russell's Correspondence: His Letters to Constance Malleon

The letters begin in 1916 and end in 1969 the year before Russell's death. They span the longest time period of all of Russell's correspondences. They were often together and spoke on the telephone as well. Of importance to this project is the fact that they were often apart: Russell travelled to Russia and China in 1920 without Colette. After acting on the London stage she became a touring actress which separated them. They were apart during World War II—he in America and she in England, Finland and Sweden. There are also gaps in their correspondence when their relationship was broken: September 1921 to October 1925; and December 1931 to September 1935. Their times spent together ended in 1950 but they resumed a correspondence in 1955. I will outline the rules I followed to edit the letters, the steps that each letter goes through from rough transcription to finished product and the BRACERS platform on which they appear. There are normal letters, two abandoned letters, in addition to literary letters, a Russia series and a China project. This makes an exact number difficult to agree upon. As I write this there are 842 published letters with transcriptions.

07

Bernard Linsky (University of Alberta)

Russell's Photograph of Gottlob Frege

The photograph of Gottlob Frege that once sat on Russell's desk has now come to the Bertrand Russell Archives. An examination of the photo reveals peculiarities that help to understand its origins. Although signed by Frege, it was clearly not sent in the form in which it now takes, as it is on paper stamped with "Cambridge Studios", and so was not sent in this form by Frege. The original photograph was taken in 1908 by Emil Tesch in Jena. The discovery of a special issue of *The Monist* on Gottfried Leibniz from October 1916 helps to reveal at least some of the story. The issue, containing the photo with dedication, was edited by P.E. Jourdain. Russell's copy has a handwritten slip of paper pasted on with the dedication "Mit freundlichen Grusse\ Ihr \ G. Frege". Further examination of the photograph may reveal more of the story. I have Dolf Rami of Bochum University to thank for his study of all the existing photographs of Gottlob Frege.

08

Leyla Belle Drake (Swedish Institute for North American Studies, Uppsala University)

The epistemology and politics of witnessing: Russell's war crimes tribunal on Vietnam

The paper focuses on witnessing practices at the 1967 Russell Tribunal on American war crimes in Vietnam. I argue that the Russell Tribunal established a form of "knowledge activism" in which public testimony from experts, on-site investigators, perpetrators, and victims were used as means of both knowledge production and political protest. Examining the role of witnessing in a time of revolutionary aspiration, I show that Russell Tribunal witnesses not only responded to and shaped standards of testimony but contributed to unique forms of antiwar knowledge and a new understanding of the Vietnam War. I argue that witness testimony was central to the Russell Tribunal's efforts to gain legitimacy, and that the Tribunal as a whole helped make both Vietnamese suffering and American perpetration legible while providing powerful counternarratives to the U.S. government line that rattled the Johnson administration.

09

Juan J. Colomina-Alminana (Mills College at Northeastern University)

Russell Reconsidered: Against the Panpsychist Interpretation of Neutral Monism

Recent interpretations of Bertrand Russell's neutral monism have positioned him as an early panpsychist, often aligning his later metaphysical views with contemporary formulations of panpsychist "Russellian monism." This paper argues that such readings are both textually and methodologically misguided. I first reconstruct the core commitments of contemporary Russellian monism—structuralism about physics, quiddities as intrinsic properties, and the explanatory role of such intrinsic properties in accounting for consciousness—and then ask, in detail, which of these commitments Russell could plausibly share. Drawing from Russell's writings from 1921 through 1959, I show that he explicitly rejects both panpsychism and dual aspect metaphysics, and that his neutral monism is best understood as a scientifically disciplined, non reductive physicalism grounded in logical construction, structural realism, and a rejection of phenomenalism. On this reading, the "neutral" basis is not proto mental, nor does Russell leave open that the intrinsic nature of physical reality is phenomenal in character. Rather, the intrinsic character of physical reality is epistemically, not metaphysically, indeterminate. Russell's metaphilosophical commitment to scientific method in philosophy blocks the speculative move from structural ignorance to panpsychist quiddities, and his mature view treats mentality as an organizational feature of complex physical systems, not as a ubiquitous property of basic events.

10

Michael Stevenson (Lakehead University)

‘What we are doing is dastardly and hypocritical’: Bertrand Russell’s Critique of British Policy in China, 1925-1927

In January 1927, the British Government despatched 20,000 troops to China to counter the potential capture of Shanghai by Chinese Nationalist Forces. This rash act spurred Bertrand Russell—who had already focused much of his journalism over the previous two years on Britain’s deteriorating position in China—to undertake one of his most sustained campaigns of activism in print and through public speaking to vigorously oppose the actions of the Stanley Baldwin Conservatives. This paper will examine the reasons behind Russell’s strident condemnation of British actions in China from 1925 to 1927 that culminated in the formation of the Shanghai Defence Force as well as his commentary on the turbulent internal situation in China that featured the growing power of Chiang Kai-Shek and his powerful Kuomintang movement. For Russell, these two factors were ultimately linked, and when Chiang’s forces clearly emerged as the de facto government of China and caused the Baldwin government to adopt a more conciliatory policy, Russell’s interest in Chinese affairs waned and did not feature prominently in his international affairs commentaries during the remainder of the interwar period.

11

David Blitz (Central Connecticut State University (Emeritus))

Russell and a modified Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom Theory

Russell’s philosophy started from two basic propositions: that we are acquainted with sense data and that philosophy is based on science; physics and psychology in particular. From there, with the aid of logic, he constructed the objects of knowledge and his theoretical philosophy (in multiple versions). Separately he developed his practical philosophy as a public intellectual opposed to most wars and in favor of the taming of power and the goals of social justice and global peace. How can all this be reconciled or at least interpreted in terms of modern views of philosophy informed by an area of science remote from Russell’s thinking but now central to knowledge: information sciences and in particular artificial intelligence? The current paradigm often referred to is the Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom hierarchy (DIKW). This presentation will integrate some of Russell’s concepts into a more dynamic DIKW theory: as a cycle rather than a simple hierarchy and adding a fifth component: Doing: DIKW(D). It will incorporate not only sense data but also sensor data (from automated sources), data bases (for storing data) and the latest development, that of big data (in particular large language models – LLMs - in AI). I will also trace the main lines of an attempt to reconcile Russell’s two somewhat disparate projects of theoretical and practical philosophy in a version of the Tiergarten program meets DIKW(D).

12

Sydney Dilling (Department of Philosophy, Trent University)

Neutral Monism: A Defence of Russell’s Assessment

In this paper, it is argued that Bertrand Russell’s original denouncement of neutral monism discussed in his 1913 Theory of Knowledge manuscript is the correct assessment of the viability of this philosophical view. I begin by outlining neutral monism and Russell’s critical assessment of it, including both the strengths Russell sees in it as well as the six major weaknesses he identifies. These

weaknesses pertain to its account of direct experience, its account of belief, its confusion of “knowledge of truths” with “knowledge of things”, its inability to account for emphatic particulars, and its incorrect treatment of knowledge and truth as causal relations. In order to further support Russell's rejection of neutral monism, additional criticisms are then offered. Specifically, I build on Russell's first critique by showing that neutral monism cannot adequately explain the human phenomena of severe amnesia and infant cognition. In light both of Russell's criticisms, and these additional weaknesses, one can see that neutral monism is unable to account for fundamental elements of life and should be abandoned in favour of a philosophical view that can.

13

James Connelly (Trent University Durham-GTA)

On the Russellian Origin of Wittgenstein's Objects

In TLP, Wittgenstein characterizes objects in ways that can seem rather puzzling at least initially. For instance, he says that objects are simple (TLP 2.02), and that they make up the substance of the world (TLP 2.021). Moreover, he says that they cannot be composite (ibid.), otherwise the world would have no substance, and in that case, representation would be impossible (TLP 2.0211-2.02112). In TLP 2.021-2.02112 in particular, Wittgenstein appears to be making a transcendental argument to the effect that since representation is possible, objects must subsist. But the finer details of this argument are somewhat murky, making an assessment of its cogency problematic.

Challenging though these remarks are to interpret in any case, no adequate understanding of them is possible without an appreciation of the Russellian logical and semantic notions which serve as their integral background. In this paper, I will show how both the concerns raised by Wittgenstein in these remarks, along with the conception of objects he proposes to address these concerns, are directly influenced by, and critically appropriated from, ideas which can be found expressed in key texts of Russell's including the *Principles of Mathematics* (or PoM), *Philosophy of Leibniz* (PL), ‘*On Denoting*’ (or OD), and the 1913 *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript (or TK) among other related texts. As shall be shown, key ideas of Russell's which impact Wittgenstein's conception of objects in TLP include: from PoM, Russell's characterization of terms, his distinction between being and existence, and his association of being with substance; from OD, his puzzle about empty singular terms; from PL, Russell's account of the nature of relationships between the compound and the simple; and, finally, from TK, Russell's account of the of analysis of complexes into their constituents and form.

14

James Levine (Trinity College Dublin)

Ladd-Franklin and Russell on Solipsism

In a 2020 issue *Russell journal*, Adam Trybus (“Two of a Kind: Setting the Record Straight on Russell's Exchange with Ladd-Franklin on Solipsism”, *Russell* 39: 101—120) has helpfully called attention to a correspondence, beginning in 1912, between Christine Ladd-Franklin and Russell in which she presents herself as “the Sole Solipsist” as well as a “Hypothetical Realist”, and asks Russell, “Don't you see at once that this is the only logical position?” Trybus argues that although in both his 1927 book *An Outline of Philosophy* as well as his 1948 book *Human Knowledge*, Russell apparently jokes at Ladd-Franklin's expense that it is incoherent for a professed solipsist to attempt to convince others that they should also be solipsists, these later comments by Russell “present[] a distorted version of the story”—since Russell's own view, as reflected in their correspondence is actually closer to Ladd-Franklin's than his later comments suggest.

I argue that while Trybus is right to suggest that the correspondence influenced Russell in the way he discussed the issue of solipsism (including in his 1913 manuscript *Theory of Knowledge*), Russell was, from early on, concerned to distinguish his position from Ladd-Franklin's. In particular, in a letter to Ottoline Morrell in 1912, Russell makes the same sort of joke in referring to Ladd-Franklin, and in a 1914 letter to his father, Norbert Weiner makes clear that Russell had told him the same joke at Ladd-Franklin's expense. I argue that in contrast to Ladd-Franklin, who holds that while it is coherent for one to formulate the "hypothesis" that there is something beyond what she is currently experiencing, adopting such an "hypothesis" involves making an unjustifiable inference, Russell is concerned to defend the view that such an "hypothesis" can be justified.

15

Amanda Renai Curdt-Christiansen (De Montfort University)

Cross-cultural screen adaptation: Remodelling Bertrand Russell's story for global audiences

In this presentation, I outline the challenges of adapting traditionally privileged characters for the screen from an intersectional perspective. This paper is born out of my PhD research, the critical output of which is a biopic screenplay about Nobel Prize-winner Bertrand Russell focusing on his time in China as well as Chinese marketability. Diversity, representation and equal access have long been key points on the industry agenda. This progress is easily linked to scholarly advances on the interplay between semiotics and culture (Hall, 1997; Mulvey, 1975; De Lauretis, 1987). At the same time, this project is a timely beacon of hope for a struggling European film industry, as China's booming film market is an untapped trove of potential for cross-cultural, East-West collaboration. Moreover, in a world wholly oversaturated with media and the omnipresent screen, the modern viewer, the global audience, understands the sociopolitical power of cinema and has expectations for what message it conveys.

Therefore, my approach to Russell's character and its associated iconicity and privilege (gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) on screen is two-fold: first, I employ film theory and statistical data on representation in the UK film industry to demonstrate systemic and cyclical inequalities; second, I use autoethnography as a method of reflecting over the rippling effects of (mis)representation both in front of and behind the camera. How do I, as screenwriter, develop two so disparate perspectives (British and Chinese) during a tumultuous historical period, drawing a parallel to our current global climate of political unease? How can this project act as a springboard for further cross-cultural collaboration at a time when fascism is on the rise? How can I ensure that the film engages with global audiences in a way that pushes the industry forward, rather than maintains the convention of cinema created by, for, and about the privileged few? Critically, this paper suggests an inclusive adaptation framework to remedy the problématique of marrying privileged and marginalised voices on screen.

16

Andrew Bone (Bertrand Russell Research Centre, McMaster University)

"Oh I Shall Be Glad When It Is Over": Russell's Lecture Tour of the United States in 1924

In April 1924 Russell arrived in the United States for a third time, but this was his first visit to the country as a professional lecturer—on a tight and packed schedule of engagements fulfilled over the next six weeks on a circuit spanning much of the North-East and Midwest. Since Russell reprised this role on many subsequent occasions, and since a well-established commercial lecture tour business was still thriving in the 1920s, there is a need to establish for the first time the connection between Russell's American public speaking and a significant mode of cultural production that offered both entertainment and the enlightenment that Russell was striving to spread over a damaged post-war world. Using texts from the forthcoming Volume 16 of *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, the paper will also examine WHAT Russell said to his American audiences in 1924—particularly regarding his host nation, whose politics, culture, society and burgeoning international power he viewed with a blend of guarded optimism and profound disquiet.

17

Chad Trainer (Independent Scholar)

A Kind of Magical Faculty in the Soul Inexplicable by the Utmost Efforts of Human Understanding: Russell and Hume on the Topic of Universals

Since ancient times, the exact manner in which universals exist has been a source of controversy. Whereas John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume believed that universals exist only mentally, Russell is typically depicted, even in his later years, as having believed universals have extramental, or objective being, and that their being is not physical.

I argue that the same metaphysical economy that led Russell to reject belief in a supernatural world should also have led him to reject belief in this realm of being that has no existence. That Russell eventually did reject a realm of being that has no existence seems to be A.J. Ayer's view, but such a view, while certainly simplifying matters, probably oversimplifies them.

18

Giovanni Battista Ratti (Legal Philosophy, University of Genoa)

Russell on Power and Propaganda

In *Power: A New Social Analysis*, Bertrand Russell seeks to develop a comprehensive theory of power, based on the bold claim that "the fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics." While his work provides valuable insights into various forms of power – particularly factual or empirical ones – and their mechanisms, I argue in this paper that Russell's most significant contributions concern propaganda and its methods of idea diffusion. In this context, I contend that Russell's observations on advertising, regarded as a specific form of propaganda, are especially pertinent, particularly in light of the contemporary evolution of advertising communications. In the final section of the paper, I also examine the possible relationships between power, propaganda, and certain political ideologies (notably capitalism and socialism), as well as forms of government (especially autocracy and democracy).