On the face of it, Bertrand Russell would seem the least likely person to have been incarcerated for political radicalism. But he questioned one of the state's most fundamental powers: the ability to wage war. Given Russell's respected position, this was a serious challenge to the authority of the British government. While Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy, written during his imprisonment, does not directly deal with any issues of war or politics, it demonstrated Russell's fearless commitment to finding the truth, regardless of what others may think. It laid the basis for a fundamentally new understanding of mathematics and philosophy. Russell's willingness to challenge accepted conventions in philosophy was integral to his critique of World War I. There are many ways to question the authority of the state, and in a period of raw passions and war propaganda on all sides, patiently investigating the truth was itself a radical act. Although Russell was not an absolute pacifist, he remained an ardent political activist throughout his life, campaigning against war and, later, nuclear weapons.—J.W.R.

Summary

On February 9, 1918, almost four years into World War I, Bertrand Russell stood before an angry judge in the Bow Street Magistrate's Court in London. In particular, he had written an editorial in which he said that if American troops were stationed in Great Britain, they would be used to break up strikes by organized labor, as they had done in the United States. Normally expressing opinions would not be a crime in Great Britain. But the government had been stung too often by Russell's vigorous criticisms of it. He was prepared to defend himself at his trial but the judge cut him off, saying his offense was "a very despicable one" (Moorehead 280). He was found guilty and sentenced to six months in prison.

Sending a protester or war resister to jail was not unusual. "About 16,000 men either appeared before a tribunal or absolutely refused to join the war machine," according to Caroline Moorehead (Moorehead 294). The war had become increasingly unpopular through the years, as the number of casualties climbed far beyond anyone's expectations.

On the other hand, sending Bertrand Russell to jail was surprising. In 1918 Russell, 45, was famous all over the world as a philosopher and co-author (with Alfred N. Whitehead) of Principia Mathematica, an influential, three-volume treatise on the nature of mathematics and philosophy. He had been invited to teach at Harvard in 1914 and toured the United States that spring giving lectures. In addition to his stature as a scholar, he was a member of one of the most esteemed, aristocratic families in Great Britain. His grandfather was Lord John Russell, twice prime minister under Queen Victoria, and architect of the democratizing Reform Bill of 1832. When Russell's elder brother died in 1931, he became third Earl Russell, i.e., Lord Russell, and took his seat in the House of Lords. He was not an average war resister.

Russell had opposed the war from the beginning in August 1914, and his opposition was fierce, passionate, and energetic. His weapon was his remarkable ability to explain complex ideas clearly in language everyone could understand, and he wielded it effectively in numerous speeches, articles, letters, and editorials. His base of operations during 1916 and 1917 was the No Conscription Fellowship (NCF), an organization of conscientious objectors and pacifists. Besides speaking and writing, editing the organization's weekly Tribunal, and holding together the diverse, committed idealists who refused to fight, his campaign included visiting conscientious objectors in jail. Conditions were bad. Inedible food, uncomfortable, cold cells, forced labor, loneliness, and boredom combined to beat down and weaken the young men. Russell tried to encourage them. He needed all of his considerable patience and spirit to hold the group together. His efforts culminated in 1918 when he himself was sent to prison (although under better conditions).
Russell served about five months of his six-month term in the prison at Brixton, and was released early for good behavior. (Other protestors and conscientious objectors served longer terms.) While in prison he wrote *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, which, together with his other works, helped create analytic philosophy, the dominant mode of philosophy in Great Britain and the United States for the remainder of the century. Analytic philosophy is different from the prevalent schools of thought on the Continent, such as phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, and postmodernism. One writer says, "What unifies all analytic philosophers is their agreement concerning the central task of philosophy," which is "to clarify the meaning of language" (Stumpf 430). Or as Russell says, "the aim of analysis is to make sure that every statement represents an adequate picture of the reality, of the facts, of the world" (Stumpf 434). It is our language itself that causes confusion over philosophical issues, and clarifying or improving our language will help us understand these deep problems. We will examine Russell's particular brand of analytic philosophy below.

After the war Russell continued writing both technical and popular books on an astonishing range of topics. In 1950 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature "in recognition," the committee said, "of his varied and significant writings in which he champions humanitarian ideals and freedom of thought." During the 1950s and 1960s (when he was in his 80s and 90s) he spoke at rallies against the arms race, nuclear weapons, and the American involvement in Vietnam.¹

How is Russell's prison book related to his opposition to the war? *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* is about as far from political activism as one can get. It's a highly abstract discussion of the nature of mathematics. It isn't related to war and peace, or policies, or even people. It's not even about the physical world. In one way, then, we can think of *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* as a complete about-face, a flight from the emotive, messy work of persuasion and advocacy into a realm of impersonal, eternal concepts and pure thought. Russell himself spoke of his prison experience as a kind of rest, and his book as a refreshing return to his original vocation of philosophy (Monk 521).

But we can also look at his prison book in a different way. I don't think Russell's personality consisted of two completely different and separated parts—political activism and abstract philosophy. Instead, if we consider his whole career, I think we can see both the energetic opposition to the war and the highly technical theories in the *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* as expressions of one basic temperament. Russell was passionately, intensely devoted to the truth, to seeing things and understanding them as they really are. He campaigned tirelessly against Britain's war policies because he believed they were mistaken and wrong. In prison, his intense concentration on the foundations of mathematics reveals the same extraordinary drive to question the popular, superficial answers and find a deeper truth. It's true that sitting alone in a jail cell is very different from organizing meetings and distributing pamphlets on the street, which he had done for the NCF. But the energy devoted to the book, the faith in one's work, the attention to detail, the perseverance in the face of difficulties, are the same.

Russell's activism and his philosophical writing are similar in another way as well. In both he exhibited tremendous courage. When he criticized Britain's war effort, he faced vehement condemnation by virtually his whole society. Cambridge University fired him, close friends denounced him, the government imprisoned him. But he held to his convictions. *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* was also a kind of revolt against conventional assumptions in the field of philosophy. Together with G.E. Moore, Russell devised methods and produced results that were completely different from every thing they had been taught by the philosophy dons at Cambridge in the 1890s. Many in the philosophy establishment ridiculed the new "analytic philosophy" as trivial wordplay (Barrett 299–300). In 1912 Russell wrote a book in the new style with the comprehensive title *The Problems of Philosophy*. George Santayana, the pragmatist philosopher at Harvard, said that a better title would have been "The Problems which Moore and I Have Been Agitating Recently" (Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell*, 200). But Russell was convinced that his approach had promise, and he didn't let the opposition fright en him.

In the next section of this essay I will describe Russell's opposition to the war and the difficulties he faced, culminating in his imprisonment. Then I will explain how *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* influenced the growth of analytic philosophy.

**Russell and the War**

World War I began when Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian empire on June 28, 1914. The event set off a chain reaction, because of different nations' military alliances with each other. Austria declared war on Serbia; Serbia's ally Russia declared war on Austria; Austria's ally Germany declared war on Russia; Russia's ally France declared war on Germany.

Russell thought the conflict was sheer lunacy, mass slaughter for no reason. Nations went to war in 1914 not to defend lives or property, but for "national pride," he said.² The militaries insisted they could not break their agreements. So the civilian governments had to generate public support for war by creating lurid propaganda about "the enemy." Russell naively believed that when Great Britain (France's ally) declared war, most English people would protest. He was shocked when crowds poured into the streets to support the declaration (Monk 368).

In that situation, some people—probably most people—would join the crowds, and find a rationalization for doing so. As Russell wrote in a letter, "it is so hard not to think one must be wrong when everyone is against one." (Moorehead, 207) But Russell never wavered, even when his closest friend supported the war. Russell was very close to his co-author of *Principia*, Alfred North Whitehead, with whom he had worked for six years, and who had been his tutor at Cambridge. He was deeply depressed, therefore, when Whitehead told him conscientious objectors were "contemptible," and that Whitehead's son would volunteer (the young man was killed in March 1918). Russell's student and protégé, Ludwig Wittgenstein (who was from Vienna), joined the Austrian army at the beginning of the war.

The pressure on Russell increased as the war intensified. In May 1915, the Germans used two new technological wonders. Their submarines sank the *Lusitania*, a civilian ocean liner, in order to intimidate and cripple Allied shipping (and because they suspected it was carrying munitions). And at Ypres in Belgium, they used poison gas for the first time to kill and maim enemy soldiers. The public was outraged at the Germans but also at any British citizens who did not support the war. Ronald Clark says, "As the fighting went on and casualty lists showed that a confined European war had turned into a national blood-letting, Russell became one of the most hated men in Britain" (Clark, *Bertrand Russell and His World*, 51).

To Russell, the atrocities only confirmed his belief that the war was madness, and he redoubled his attempts to bring people back to sanity. He wrote anonymous pamphlets for the No Conscription Fellowship defending the conscientious objectors who had been jailed, unjustly, he believed. When some NCF members were arrested in 1916 for distributing one of his pamphlets, he wrote to the London *Times* revealing his authorship and saying he should be the one arrested. (Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell*, 283). The government agreed. In March he was convicted of "undermining the war effort" and fined 100 pounds. He refused to pay. The government confiscated the furniture and books from his rooms at Cambridge University, where he taught, and auctioned them to raise the 100 pounds. Some of Russell's friends went to the auction, bought the items, and returned them to him.

Russell's criminal conviction created two more sources of pressure on him, besides loss of friends, public contempt, and criminal prosecution. On
was from the government, which used the conviction as a basis for taking his passport to prevent foreign travel, and banning him from entering part of England. Since Russell was guilty of undermining the war effort, the government asserted, he might make further attempts to aid the enemy. Russell speculated that the government was afraid he would signal submarines from the coast. More seriously he said its real goal was to prevent him from accepting an invitation to the United States to give more anti-war speeches, and to prevent him from giving speeches to anti-war groups around England (Moorehead 258). But he was not intimidated.

The second source of pressure stemming from the conviction was a decision by Russell's employer, Cambridge University. In 1915 Russell's five-year lectureship had ended and been renewed. He asked for a two-year leave of absence to work for the NCF, which was granted. But after the conviction on in 1916, the governing board of the university voted to cancel the renewal. He was effectively fired.

Russell endured the pressures from all these sources. The reactions of ordinary people and his friends saddened him, but the actions of the government and the university made him angry. He worked even harder for the NCF in 1917. But in February of 1918 the government turned up the heat by charging Russell with a more serious crime: harming Great Britain's relations with an ally, i.e., the United States, by insulting the ally in an editorial. The Defense of the Realm Act prohibited "impeding recruiting and discipline" and harming Britain's relations with an ally, as well as other things (Monk 521). He was convicted, sentenced to six months in jail, and went to prison in May.

I think Russell showed a special kind of courage in his opposition to the war. What is difficult for some is easy for others, and that is true for courage as well. Some people would be discouraged by the loss of a job more than the loss of friends; for others the opposite would be true. Russell faced an additional difficulty: he was as devoted to truth and understanding as others were to friends, or their jobs. But the issues surrounding the war were exceedingly complex and cloudy. It was very hard to know if one's position was correct. For many, this was not very problematic. Firm conviction was more important than clear understanding. Many readily accepted the government's point of view. Others examined the questions superficially, and accepted answers that felt satisfying, under the pressure of the moment. Neither approach was enough for Russell. He demanded clarity. For him, therefore, sorting out the ambiguous facts and working through all the arguments were more daunting challenges than they were for many other people. One can say that in addition to personal, physical, and moral courage, Russell showed intellectual courage.

Russell's reasons for opposing the war were complicated. He was not a pacifist. He believed that some wars could be justified, but not this war with Germany. The pacifists who opposed the war held a simple, inviolable principle—all violence is wrong—which is easy to understand even if one disagrees with it. But Russell supported the violent Russian Revolution in March of 1917 (Kerensky's revolution, not Lenin's, which occurred in October). Russell resigned from the NCF later that year partly because he believed the violence used to overthrow the Czar was justified, while most other members of the NCF did not. He opposed the war with Germany because of his instinctive horror at the slaughter, but also based on his calculations of relative goods and evils. The "cure" of killing hundreds of thousands of young men was worse than the "disease" of allowing Germany to achieve its objectives, he thought. That is, he did not believe self-defense always justifies violence. He said that if the Germans occupied England, and the British passively resisted, the Germans would soon go home (Ryan 67–69). Nevertheless, he must have had doubts about this proposal at times. Russell wasn't afraid to think long and hard about the most complex problems and take stands on them.

Not only were Russell's motives complicated, but the situation in England was complicated as well. When the war broke out, Russell was against it while most British citizens were for it. (Germans supported their government, the French supported theirs, and so on.) But as Russell protested, additional issues arose. One was the Military Service Bill, adopted in January 1916. Should all physically fit, single men between 18 and 41 be required to pe rform military service? Or should some be exempt because of their long-held religious beliefs? Russell criticized the draft and supported the conscientious objectors. Some (like Whitehead) condemned Russell for his position on the war and his position on the draft. But others agreed with Russell in opposing compulsory military service, even if they disagreed with his view that the war was illegitimate. Opposing the war wasn't a single decision; it required a number of decisions on many different questions.

By 1916 a third issue arose: free speech. When Russell was fined for writing a pamphlet, many supporters of the war thought the government went too far in punishing expressions of opinion. Many more felt the same way when he was imprisoned in 1918 for writing an editorial (Moorehead 253). But the issue was divisive. Some thought the punishment was too light. The specific charge was insulting an ally, but Russell himself thought the government was trying to silence him, and to intimidate the conscientious objectors and frighten them into joining the military. Free speech in a war is a complicated problem. Reasonable people can disagree about the philosophical questions as well as the interpretations of events. Russell understood the arguments against his point of view as well as his critics did (probably better), and that means he had to struggle mightily in his own mind in order to decide what he should do. For a man like Russell, facing that challenge required as much courage as facing an angry crowd.

Going to Prison

I have been arguing that Russell's opposition to the war required personal and intellectual courage. His willingness to go to prison is an example of his courage. However, a skeptic could reject this example on the grounds that Russell's stay in prison required no sacrifice at all. On the contrary, it was as pleasant and productive, more like a vacation. And going on vacation is not an act of courage.

I think this hypothetical objection is mistaken, but to see its origin, we need to examine British prisons in 1918 and Russell's prison experience. In the British penal system, one could be sentenced to the first division or the second division, comparable to minimum and maximum security prisons in the United States. Russell was sentenced to the first division, where conditions were much better than the second division. As the brother of an earl, a wealthy philosopher, Russell received some privileges that other prisoners could not. His cell was larger than average, he could hire another prisoner to clean it and do other chores, he could have his meals prepared elsewhere and delivered to him, he had unlimited access to books and newspapers. In fact, when he first arrived at Brixton Prison, he was very pleased to have a respite from the frustrating work of political activism. He wrote to his brother,

One is free from the torturing question: What more ought I be doing? Is there any effective action I haven't thought of? Have I a right to let the whole thing go, which is far more restful than choosing to let it go and doubting if one's choice is justified. Prison has some of the advantages of the Catholic Church [Monk 527–28].

He had been writing, speaking, and organizing for about three years, and he wanted to return to theoretical philosophy. There were some restrictions, which he found increasingly burdensome. He was limited to one short visit per week by a group of three people. His letters were limited to four pages per week on prison stationary (although Russell got around this by writing in French and telling the warden he was copying historical passages for his professional work). Nevertheless, his imprisonment was more like a scholarly retreat than a punishment, at least for most of the time. During his six months in jail he read a tremendous amount, he wrote the Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy, and he outlined another book on the nature of t
However, this objection to the idea that going to prison exhibited tremendous courage fails for a simple reason: when Russell took the risks that he knew could land him in prison, he didn’t know that he would be sentenced to the first division. As a matter of fact, he was initially sentenced to the second division. He had visited conscientious objectors in the second division, and he had seen firsthand the terrible wasting effects of poor food, poor ventilation, no exercise, isolation, tedious, maddening work, and nervous exhaustion. Some never recovered their health. Moreover, he thought the age of eligibility for military service would be raised, in which case he could be in prison for much longer than six months. It was only after the court received appeals from many of the most prominent people in England that his sentence was reduced to the first division. But he was willing to risk going to the second division to protest the war. That commitment shows uncommon courage.

Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy

When Russell went to jail in May of 1918, he was relieved to return to technical philosophy. He applied himself to his earlier vocation with his usual energy and focus. He divided his waking hours into three parts: for four hours he wrote, for four more hours he read philosophy, and for four hours in the evening he read history, science, literature, and other books that interested him.

Introduction is a summary for a popular audience of Russell’s and Whitehead’s earlier three-volume work Principia Mathematica. Though intended for non-specialists, it is still an abstract, detailed, dense book. It is also very interesting and illustrates the beginnings of analytic philosophy. Anglo-American philosophy for the past hundred years has been characterized by an emphasis on clarity, a focus on language, and the method of analysis. I will describe a few notions in Russell’s book without attempting to survey the entire work and use those notions to show how his thinking influenced much of later twentieth-century philosophy.

Russell’s goal in Introduction is to establish clear and firm foundations for the science of mathematics. For him, establishing firm foundations means showing how mathematics depends upon logic or can be derived from logic. So, for example, a key part of the book is Russell’s definition of “number”—a mathematical concept—in terms of classes—a logical concept.

Russell begins his book describing a similar attempt to establish a foundation for mathematics by Giuseppe Peano. Peano tried to derive the series of natural numbers (0, 1, 2, 3, etc.) from three primitive concepts and five basic principles. But Russell shows that Peano’s concepts are too vague. As an alternative Russell proposes his own definition of “number.” He proceeds very cautiously and first explains what he is not defining—“two,” “three,” or any particular number, but is defining the concept of number itself. He says,

> Returning now to the definition of number, it is clear that number is a way of bringing together certain collections, namely, those that have a given number of terms. We can suppose all couples in one bundle, all trios in another, and so on…. Each bundle is a class whose members are collections, i.e., classes; thus each is a class of classes [Russell, Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy 14].

For example, think of several groups: the three Musketeers, the three Little Pigs, the three Wise Men, and the three Blind Mice. Each of these group s, or classes, has three members. We can imagine all the groups that are similar to these (i.e., all the groups that have three members), which would be a very large group or class. That large group would be a class of classes. A number is a class of classes.

But this doesn’t tell us what distinguishes one number from another. Every number is a class of classes. To distinguish numbers, Russell first defines a “one-one relation.”

A relation is said to be “one-one” when, if x has the relation in question to y, no other term x’ has the same relation to y, and x does not have the same relation to any term y’ other than y [Ibid., 15].

Russell now uses his precise concept of a “one-one relation” to define “similar” classes. Two classes are similar when there is a one-one relation between each of the terms in one class with each of the terms in the other class.

With this groundwork in place, Russell gives the following definition: “The number of a class is the class of all those classes that are similar to it” (Ibid. 18). For example, the number of the class of Three Musketeers is the large class that contains all the other classes that are similar to the class of Musketeers. Russell’s definition of a number is not intuitive; he is saying that a particular number, such as three, is actually a class. But he argues that his definition has several advantages. It employs the concept of a class, which is a logical concept and part of the science of logic. Furthermore, as Russell says,

> we naturally think that the class of couples (for example) is something different from the number 2. But there is no doubt about the class of couples: it is indubitable and not difficult to define, whereas the number 2, in any other sense, is a metaphysical entity about which you can never feel sure that it exists or that we have tracked it down [Ibid.].

This passage shows that Russell is not only trying to clarify the fundamental concepts of mathematics, but is also trying to avoid confusing, metaphysical assumptions.

This brief example from Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy illustrates Russell’s general approach. He goes on to discuss such concepts as a series, different types of numbers, and especially infinity. Russell’s project is fascinating in itself, but it is also important for its influence on later philosophy. Russell was one of the principal founders of analytic philosophy, which dominated philosophical thinking in the Anglo-American world for decades. Analysis means taking things apart, and we can see Russell’s desire to do that in his analysis of number. He says “the philosophy I espouse is analytic because it claims that one must discover the simple elements of which complexes are composed, and that complexes presuppose simples, whereas simples do not presuppose complexes” (Moran 16).

One example of analysis is his explanation of counting. Counting seems like a simple process, but in fact it is complicated. Russell says counting the items in a group is actually a comparison: it is a “one-one comparison” of the group with the series of natural numbers beginning with one. The number of items in the group is the last number we come to in the one-one comparison with the number series.

Another example of analysis comes from the German philosopher Gottlob Frege, who also wanted to base mathematics on logic. Frege analyzed meaning.” Like counting, the notion of meaning may seem to be simple. A word has meaning or it doesn’t. We understand a word’s meaning or we don’t. But Frege analyzed meaning into three parts: First, a meaningful word has a reference. “The morning star” refers to Venus. The same term also has a sense. The sense of “the morning star” is a small object in the sky, bright, and occurring in the morning. Finally, meaningful words call up ideas or a
Many philosophers in the past have employed analysis. What is different about the movement Russell influenced is the emphasis on language. The British empiricists, for example, claimed that complex ideas could be analyzed into simple ideas, and analytic philosophy is similar. But Frege, Russell, G. E. Moore, Wittgenstein and other twentieth century philosophers shift the emphasis from ideas to words and language. That shift is “the major in novation of the century,” according to Christian Delacampagne (Delacampagne 32). In fact, Russell is as much concerned with translation as he is with analysis. In *Introduction* he wants to translate vague and confusing concepts of mathematics into precise, determinate definitions. For example, after painstakingly defining “posterity” in terms of several simpler concepts, Russell says,

> The notion of “those terms that can be reached from 0 by successive steps from next to next” is vague, though it seems as if it conveyed a definite meaning; on the other hand, “the posterity of 0” is precise and explicit just where the other idea is hazy. It may be taken as giving what we meant to mean when we spoke of the terms that can be reached from 0 by successive steps [Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* 22].

Analytic philosophy attempts to uncover what people meant when they said things that were vague and confusing. Russell wants to translate confusing statements into precise and clear equivalents.

In its early form, analytic philosophy was devoted to the creation of an ideal language. Russell says, “In a logically perfect language, the words in a proposition would correspond one by one with the components of the corresponding facts” (Stumpf 434). Facts could be analyzed into the simplest elements of experience, and the philosopher could show how complex thoughts and concepts were built up from simpler ones. In an ideal language, complex expressions could be explained by showing how they were constructed from simple ones. Russell (along with Frege) had helped create a new branch of logic, called “quantificational logic,” that was more flexible and precise than the traditional, categorical logic of Aristotle, and that could be the basis of an ideal language. In *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* he wanted to analyze mathematics into its simplest, most fundamental axioms, and prove that those could be translated into the new language of logic. Later philosophers such as Rudolf Carnap tried to translate the language of everyday life into a precise, ideal language.

Other analytic philosophers believed the ideal language was the language of science. They believed that our ordinary ways of speaking about physical objects or the self or good and evil only created confusion. The way to dispel the confusion was to translate these ordinary ways of speaking into the clearer, verifiable language of science. Such translation is a kind of analysis, but with an emphasis on language.

The best example of this type of analytic philosophy is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, published in 1921. Wittgenstein had been Russell’s student in Cambridge and absorbed most of his ideas. But he pushed them in new directions. He agreed with Russell that the “surface grammar” of ordinary expressions is misleading, and the task of philosophy is to discover the underlying, sensible, “logical form.” He also agreed that we could analyze statements about the world into simpler and simpler statements until we came to those that refer to “atomic facts.” But while Russell’s ideal language was quantificational logic, Wittgenstein believed natural science gives us the best form of knowledge and the best language we have.

A group of philosophers in Vienna in the 1920s, known as logical positivists, were strongly influenced by Wittgenstein’s book. Like Wittgenstein, they believed natural science gives us our only clear and reliable description of reality. Like Frege, they wanted to define meaning in relation to this reliable description. They proposed the “verificationist theory” of meaning, according to which the meaning of a sentence is the observations that would prove the sentence is true (or false). For example, what does the sentence “Apples are red” mean? We understand the meaning only by knowing what we would have to observe in order to verify that the sentence is true (i.e., we would observe that apples are red).

This positivist theory of meaning has some radical implications. If you cannot say how you would verify a sentence scientifically, then you do not know what the sentence means. “The soul is immortal.” What would you observe to prove that that sentence is true or false? In fact, there is nothing you could observe. The logical positivists concluded that all such sentences are meaningless. In a famous short book called *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) A. J. Ayer claimed that all talk about supernatural beings, the afterlife, beauty, and even moral goodness was meaningless. Most analytic philosophers, including Russell, decided that Ayer and the positivists had gone too far. But the positivists’ program of analysis and translation illustrates a fundamental trend of twentieth century philosophy. And Russell’s prison book was an important precursor of this trend.

**Conclusion**

While *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* seems completely divorced from his anti-war activism, I have argued that both were expressions of his devotion to finding the truth, and his courage in the face of criticism. There may be another connection. Russell believed his philosophical work was as valuable as his political work. He explains the value of philosophy in the concluding passage of his earlier book, *The Problems of Philosophy*. He says, philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, but for the sake of the questions themselves; because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because 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 [Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* 161].

**Notes**

1. In 1961, at age 88, he was arrested for using a loud speaker at a demonstration in Hyde Park, in violation of the park rules. He was convicted and sentenced to a week in prison (which he spent in the prison hospital, in deference to his age). Ronald W. Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 590.

2. Russell wrote, “All this madness, all this rage, all this flaming death of our civilization and our hopes, has been brought about because a set of official gentlemen, living luxurious lives, mostly stupid, and all without imagination or heart, have chosen that it should occur rather than that any one of them should suffer some infinitesimal rebuff to his country’s pride.” Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude*, 1872–1921 (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 369.

3. The day before Great Britain declared war, H. J. Massingham, the editor of *The Nation*, agreed to print a letter from Russell condemning the war.

People in the United States were imprisoned for actively opposing the war as well. The Espionage Act of 1917 “imposed stiff penalties for anti-war activities,” and the Sedition Act of 1918 penalized “anyone who might ‘utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States … or the uniform of the Army or the Navy.’” More than a thousand people were convicted under these broad restrictions on freedom of speech.” James A. Henretta, et al., America’s History, Vol 2: Since 1865, 3d ed. (New York: Worth, 1997), 728.


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