

bio.1 Bertrand Russell

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Bertrand Russell is hailed as one of the founders of modern analytic philosophy. Born May 18, 1872, Russell was not only known for his work in philosophy and logic, but wrote many popular books in various subject areas. He was also an ardent political activist throughout his life.

Russell was born in Trellech, Monmouthshire, Wales. His parents were members of the British nobility. They were free-thinkers, and even made friends with the radicals in Boston at the time. Unfortunately, Russell's parents died when he was young, and Russell was sent to live with his grandparents. There, he was given a religious upbringing (something his parents had wanted to avoid at all costs). His grandmother was very strict in all matters of morality. During adolescence he was mostly home-schooled by private tutors.

Russell's influence in analytic philosophy, and especially logic, is tremendous. He studied mathematics and philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was influenced by the mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. In 1910, Russell and Whitehead published the first volume of *Principia Mathematica*, where they championed the view that mathematics is reducible to logic. He went on to publish hundreds of books, essays and political pamphlets. In 1950, he won the Nobel Prize for literature.

Russell's was deeply entrenched in politics and social activism. During World War I he was arrested and sent to prison for six months due to pacifist activities and protest. While in prison, he was able to write and read, and claims to have found the experience "quite agreeable." He remained a pacifist throughout his life, and was again incarcerated for attending a nuclear disarmament rally in 1961. He also survived a plane crash in 1948, where the only survivors were those sitting in the smoking section. As such, Russell claimed that he owed his life to smoking. Russell was married four times, but had a reputation for carrying on extra-marital affairs. He died on February 2, 1970 at the age of 97 in Penrhyndeudraeth, Wales.

Further Reading Russell wrote an autobiography in three parts, spanning his life from 1872–1967 (Russell, 1967, 1968, 1969). The Bertrand Russell Research Centre at McMaster University is home of the Bertrand Russell archives. See their website at Duncan (2015), for information on the volumes of his collected works (including searchable indexes), and archival projects. Russell's

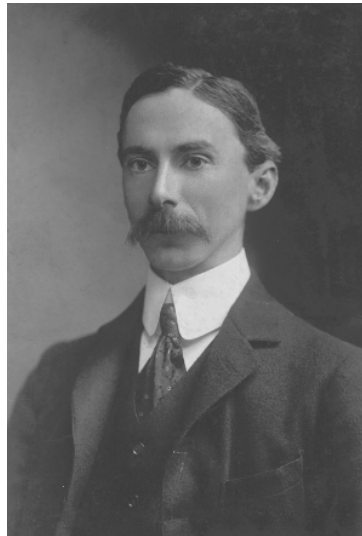


Figure 1: Bertrand Russell

paper *On Denoting* (Russell, 1905) is a classic of 20th century analytic philosophy.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Russell (Irvine, 2015) has sound clips of Russell speaking on Desire and Political theory. Many video interviews with Russell are available online. To see him talk about smoking and being involved in a plane crash, e.g., see Russell (n.d.). Some of Russell's works, including his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* are available as free audiobooks on LibriVox (n.d.).

Photo Credits

Bertrand Russell, p. 1: Portrait of Bertrand Russell, ca. 1907, courtesy of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library. Bertrand Russell Archives, Box 2, f. 4.

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