

## BR'S WRITINGS ASSESSED

(6) Brink, Russell, and Rational Love, by MARVIN KOHL.

To attempt to briefly say anything about the nature of rational love seems presumptuous, and requires a degree of wisdom I do not possess. But in light of Brink's recent assault<sup>1</sup>, it would seem timid, even cowardly, not to say something. The use of the genetic fallacy may have its use in the halls of deception, but, to my mind, has no place in the academe, especially in the halls of responsible psychobiography.

Brink seems disposed -- not merely to explain Russell's behavior and beliefs about love in terms of their origin but -- to depreciate them because of their problematic origins. "Russell was a flawed moralist," he writes, "torn by love and hate from which he sought deliverance by impersonal service to humanity. Like many obsessional personalities, he was hyper-moral -- forced by the war in his ego to be always vigilant lest he destroy more than he could create."<sup>2</sup> "Russell," Brink concludes, "wanted to teach the world to live at peace. The reasons for our inability to do so may be judged from his own hidden, unprocessed, retributive emotions about being imprisoned by women."<sup>3</sup>

Brink forgets that the quality and truth of Russell's writings have nothing to do with his early loss of his parents, his having too many nannies, or his general beliefs about women. Perhaps Russell did have a troubled childhood. Perhaps he did have an unappeasable hunger, a need to be mothered and, therefore, an obsession with finding perfect love. Perhaps his quest for perfect love was unrealistic and often did have a devastating influence upon his relationships. But how does this affect the accuracy of his definition of love or help us understand the importance of being able to distinguish between loving non-rationally and loving only that which is worthy of our affection? Or does Brink believe that all who urge that we ought to love humanity -- or hold that if A loves B rationally, then A must love B for what A takes to be worthwhile qualities or features -- have simply suffered trauma in childhood?

Russell appears to claim:

- (1) There are various kinds of love;
- (2) Consummate love<sup>4</sup> or "love at its fullest is an indissoluble combination of two elements, delight and well-wishing."<sup>5</sup>
- (3) To love someone, in this sense, is to delight in the contemplation of that person and want that person's good. Accordingly, if A loves B, A must cherish and desire the welfare of B.
- (4) There is a distinction between loving consummately without good reason and loving consummately with good reason;
- (5) Important things should not be loved unless they are worthy of being loved;
- (6) The only love that need never be checked is the love of goodness itself<sup>6</sup>; and
- (7) Only active and rational consummate love can save the world.

Critics may disagree. They may wish to remind us that Russell failed to adequately explicate some of these statements. They may want to argue that his theory has no, or little, psychological value. Or that, given relevant evidence, some of the statements are false. Here I only insist: first, that the truth or warrant of the above statements stand or fall independently of Russell's life or personality; second, that to flay a moralist and his theory simply and only because of his infirmities of childhood is, at best, psychological sleaze.

## Notes

1. Andrew Brink, *The Psychobiography of a Moralist*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1989.
2. *Ibid.*, 129.
3. *Ibid.*, 161.
4. Although I use "consummate love" in a slightly different sense, I am indebted to Robert J. Sternberg for the term and his valuable analysis of various kinds and theories of love. See: *Liking vs. Loving: A Comparative Evaluation of Theories*, *Psychological Bulletin* 102:3, 1987, 331-345.
5. Bertrand Russell, *What I Believe*, London, Kegan, Paul, Truber, 1925 30-35.
6. Bertrand Russell, *The Pilgrimage of Life* [1902-1903]. In *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 12, eds. Richard A. Kempel, Andrew Brink, and Margaret Moran. London: Allen & Unwin, 1985, 39.