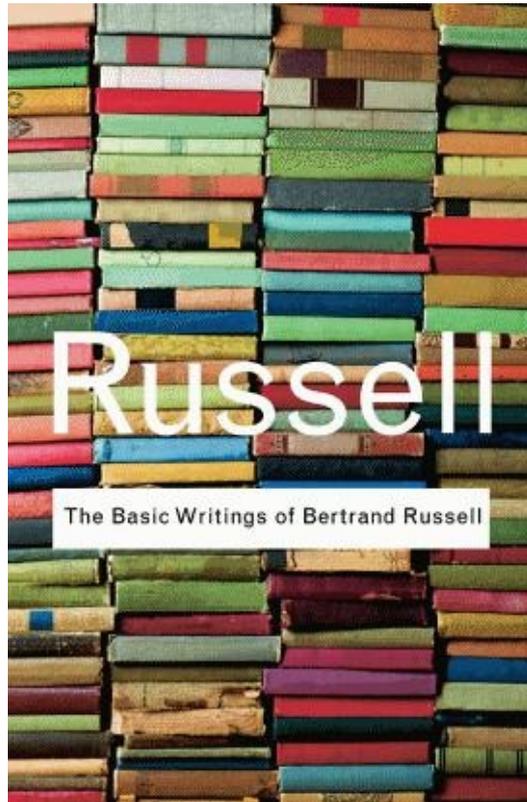


RUSSELL

The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell

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The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell

'I am in no degree ashamed of having changed my opinions. What physicist who was active in 1900 would dream of boasting that his opinions had not changed?'

Bertrand Russell



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The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell

Bertrand Russell

Edited by Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn

With an introduction by John G. Slater



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INTRODUCTION BY JOHN G. SLATER

The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell was first published in 1961. Although Russell wrote a preface for it, he had no hand in selecting its contents; that daunting task fell to its editors, Robert Egner and Lester Denonn. The importance of the book lies in the picture it gives of Russell's broad and diverse interests. If any twentieth-century author is a polymath, then Russell is one. Just about the only traditional branch of philosophy he did not write on is aesthetics. In a letter to Lucy Donnelly, written on 19 October 1913, he told her that the pupil she had sent him from Bryn Mawr had turned up and wanted to study aesthetics. Unfortunately, Cambridge had no one who could help her with aesthetics. 'I feel sure learned aesthetics is rubbish,' he wrote, 'and that it ought to be a matter of literature and taste rather than science. But I don't know whether to tell her so.' Little wonder, then, that he never wrote on the subject.

Russell's wide interests developed gradually over the years. From his grandmother he acquired a love of history and an interest in politics in all of its forms. A Russell was expected to take an interest in political matters and to make his opinion known. Russell wrote on a bewildering variety of public controversies, beginning with free trade and women's suffrage and ending with the Kennedy assassination and the Vietnam war. None of these writings was philosophical, although he often used philosophical techniques to demolish an opponent's argument. In his studies at Cambridge he developed his talents in mathematics, philosophy, and economics. His first degree was in mathematics, which he capped with a year's study of philosophy. Undecided whether to pursue philosophy or economics as a career, he finally picked the former and wrote a successful Fellowship dissertation for Trinity College on non-Euclidean geometry, which made use of both of his undergraduate subjects. But he continued to read economics books, which helped him in his researches on German social democracy, the topic of his first book; after that, economics tends to fade from the picture. While a fellow at Cambridge he wondered whether he had any talent for experimental science, so he arranged to spend some time working in the Cavendish Laboratory, but he quickly discovered that he had no such talent. He did, however, keep abreast with the new physics as it developed, at least until the early 1930s. After that there is no evidence that he continued to read original articles as they came out, although right through the 1950s he continued to read books on physics. His interest in science was not confined to physics; he studied it widely enough to be comfortable generalizing about its method; he adopted a version of the scientific method as his guide to philosophizing.

One question to which he applied his scientific method concerned the nature of mind. To prepare himself to analyse mental concepts he read very widely in the psychological literature of his day, especially the writings of the behaviourists. At about the same time, he was becoming increasingly interested in the philosophy of education. This interest arose from the need to provide an education for his own children. None of the available schools seemed suitable, so he and his second wife decided to open their own school. Running a school proved a formidable task. Russell

tried to give guidance to his teachers and others by writing on education; his books and articles defend what is called the progressive view of education.

His school made a heavy drain on his resources, which he had to make up by writing and lecturing for payment. During the 1920s he regularly made lecture tours of the United States, where he was paid much better than elsewhere. And he accepted nearly every offer to write for cash. For a long period, to cite one remarkable example, he wrote a short article every week for the Hearst newspapers. These little pieces usually took some catchy topic—'Who May Use Lipstick?' or 'Do Dogs Think?'—and discussed it wittily. In a few of them there is quite serious philosophical argument, but mostly they are just fun. As the examples suggest, they range widely, and accordingly add greatly to the sweep of Russell's writings. What is really impressive about them is their erudition; Russell, it seems, never forgot a word he had read.

History, as already mentioned, was another subject for which Russell had a lifetime fascination. Very early in the century he wrote an essay, 'On History', reprinted in this book, which he opened with this ringing declaration: 'Of all the studies by which men acquire citizenship of the intellectual commonwealth, no single one is so indispensable as the study of the past.' He goes on to argue that history is important for two reasons: first, because it is true; and second, because it enlarges the imagination and suggests feelings and courses of action that may otherwise never fall within the reader's experience. On later occasions he wrote further on the nature of history and its role in human life. *The Problem of China* (1922) was his first historical study and one fruit of the year he spent in China. In 1934 he published a political history of the hundred years preceding the outbreak of the First World War; he called it *Freedom and Organization, 1814–1914*. And later in the decade he undertook a practical history project, the editing for publication of the papers of his parents, Lord and Lady Amberley. *The Amberley Papers* was published in 1937 in two large volumes. For an understanding of his family background it is an indispensable document. During the war, when he was stranded in the United States, he wrote *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945). It is not as reliable a history as some of the more standard efforts, but it is a stimulating book to read, because Russell brings his formidable critical skills to bear on the views and arguments of his predecessors.

Russell is perhaps best known to the general public for his views on religion, a topic which engaged his attention from boyhood onward. Reading John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* led him to lose his belief in God. Before reading Mill he thought the first-cause argument proved God's existence, but Mill wrote that his father had taught him that to say that God caused the world immediately raised the question what caused God, because if everything requires a cause then God does too. Newly bereft of religious belief, Russell went up to Cambridge where, to his surprise and delight, he found the majority shared his view. For a time, when his love for Lady Ottoline Morrell was in full bloom, he professed to share her interest in mystical religion. 'The Essence of Religion', included here, is a fruit of that period. After this detour, he returned to his usual agnosticism. In 1927 he delivered his famous lecture, 'Why I Am Not a Christian', which shocked the theologians and T. S. Eliot. It too is reprinted here. Delighted that he had touched a raw nerve, he followed it with a number of other essays critical of established religion. Most of these have been collected together, by Paul Edwards, in *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related*

Subjects (1957). Edwards includes a valuable appendix detailing the way in which Russell was prevented in 1940 from taking up a professorship in philosophy at the College of the City of New York. Since the fight was led by high-ranking clerics, it seems more than likely that it was his anti-religious writings and not his views on premarital sexual relations in *Marriage and Morals* (1929) that stirred their ire.

It is nearly impossible to indicate all of the areas of human concern to which Russell contributed his views. But the new reader should be warned that Russell himself did not regard these popular writings as philosophical. Indeed, he did not even think that his books on political theory were philosophical. In the course of replying to his critics in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (1944), edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, he made the point that none of these popular pieces was to be judged by philosophical standards. 'I did not write *Principles of Social Reconstruction* in my capacity as a "philosopher"; I wrote it as a human being who suffered from the state of the world, wished to find some way of improving it, and was anxious to speak in plain terms to others who had similar feelings. If I had never written technical books, this would be obvious to everybody; and if the book is to be understood, my technical activities must be forgotten.' Philosophy proper was concerned with problems of logical analysis; therefore much that was traditionally regarded as philosophical turns out, on his conception, not to be so. Even ethics, which he did write upon, was largely excluded; he did allow that some ethical sentences present certain logical problems and to that extent ethics was philosophical, but most of it was not. Happily for the reader, Russell did not refrain from writing on topics he thought unphilosophical, otherwise this book would be much thinner, and much less fun to read, than it is.

Perhaps it would be fitting if I were to conclude this introduction with a brief tribute to Lester E. Denonn (1901–1985), one of the book's editors, whose name has been associated with that of Russell for the last fifty years. Denonn was a New York attorney who specialized in tax law, but his principal love was philosophy and especially the life and work of Russell. Before taking his law degree he had studied philosophy, earning an MA degree, with a thesis on the philosophical significance of Plato's myths, from Cornell University in 1924. After I got to know him, he told me how it happened that he came to collect Russell's writings. His love of books led him to frequent the secondhand stores in New York. One day a bookdealer told him that he should use his time in bookstores more wisely and collect books, not just amass them. Denonn was taken by this remark and asked for suggestions as to what he might collect, mentioning that his resources were very limited. The dealer suggested the works of Russell, then in his prime as a writer. When Denonn indicated interest, the dealer told him that he had just acquired a scrapbook into which a previous owner had mounted a number of Russell's published articles. If Denonn were to buy it, he would have a decent start on a collection, since ephemeral items are always the most difficult to find. Denonn took the bait, bought and read the articles, and was hooked on Russell for life. From then on he never passed up the opportunity to visit secondhand bookstores. Throughout the great depression he bought books, circling a page number to indicate the price he paid for the book. Although he accumulated a mass of material by and about Russell, he was never a systematic collector. Once he had a copy of some publication, say, a paperback copy of *Why Men Fight* (the American title of *Principles of Social Reconstruction*), he would pass up copies of both the British and American

first editions. He also had the disconcerting habit, typical of his generation, of throwing away dustwrappers as soon as he got a book home. In Russell's case this was especially serious, since he nearly always wrote his own dustwrapper blurbs.

Despite his lack of system he did acquire many items of great scarcity, mostly ephemeral items published only in the United States. After his death his collection was purchased by McMaster University for the Bertrand Russell Archives. It is now being used by Kenneth Blackwell, the archivist, in the preparation of a bibliography of Russell's writings, to be published within the next few years.

Denonn's interest in Russell extended beyond collecting his writings. In the 1940s he met Russell for the first of several times and wrote an article reporting their conversation. His interest in Russell's writings came to the attention of Paul Arthur Schilpp, who was editing a volume on Russell for *The Library of Living Philosophers*; Schilpp asked Denonn to prepare the bibliography for the book. This bibliography, which was corrected and expanded in later editions, served for decades as the major source for information on Russell's output. Even in its latest version, it lists only a fraction of his writings, concentrating, as it might be expected to do in such a volume, on his philosophical writings. In 1951 Denonn published *The Wit and Wisdom of Bertrand Russell*, a collection of short excerpts from his works; and the following year he brought out another such collection, *Bertrand Russell's Dictionary of Mind, Matter and Morals*, which, as its title suggests, is organized according to concepts. These books, especially the second which had a very wide sale, served to introduce Russell to a new set of readers. So when he joined forces with Robert E. Egner to select the material for this book, he had been thoroughly over the ground to be covered and had definite ideas of what should be included. Egner, a professional philosopher, had edited another book of Russellian excerpts, *Bertrand Russell's Best*, first published in 1958. Sixteen books and eight articles are quoted in it, so he too had devoted much time to studying Russell's writings. At the time this book was prepared for publication, therefore, it would not have been possible to find two editors better prepared for their task than these two men.

John G. Slater
University of Toronto

PREFACE BY BERTRAND RUSSELL

Professor Egner and Mr Denonn deserve my very sincere gratitude for the labour and judgment with which they have selected the following items from my writings, which, in the course of a long life, have become so numerous that they must at times have induced a feeling of despair in the editors. The persistence of personal identity which is assumed by the criminal law, and also in the converse process of awarding honours, becomes to one who has reached my age almost a not readily credible paradox. There are things in the following collection which I wrote as long as fifty-seven years ago and which read to me now almost like the work of another person. On a very great many matters my views since I began to write on philosophy have undergone repeated changes. In philosophy, though not in science, there are those who make such changes a matter of reproach. This, I think, results from the tradition which assimilates philosophy with theology rather than with science. For my part, I should regard an unchanging system of philosophical doctrines as proof of intellectual stagnation. A prudent man imbued with the scientific spirit will not claim that his present beliefs are wholly true, though he may console himself with the thought that his earlier beliefs were perhaps not wholly false. Philosophical progress seems to me analogous to the gradually increasing clarity of outline of a mountain approached through mist, which is vaguely visible at first, but even at last remains in some degree indistinct. What I have never been able to accept is that the mist itself conveys valuable elements of truth. There are those who think that clarity, because it is difficult and rare, should be suspect. The rejection of this view has been the deepest impulse in all my philosophical work.

I am glad that Professor Egner and Mr Denonn have not confined themselves in their work of selection to what can be strictly called philosophy. The world in which I have lived has been a very rapidly changing world. The changes have been in part such as I could welcome, but in part such as I could only assimilate in terms borrowed from tragic drama. I could not welcome whole-heartedly any presentation of my activities as a writer which made it seem as though I had been indifferent to the very remarkable transformations which it has been my good or ill fortune to experience.

I should not wish to be thought in earnest only when I am solemn. There are many things that seem to me important to be said, but not best said in a portentous tone of voice. Indeed, it has become increasingly evident to me that portentousness is often, though not always, a device for warding off too close scrutiny. I cannot believe in 'sacred' truths. Whatever one may believe to be true, one ought to be able to convey without any apparatus of Sunday sanctification. For this reason, I am glad that the editors have included some things which might seem lacking in what is called 'high seriousness'.

In conclusion, I should wish to thank the editors once again for having brought together in one volume so just an epitome of my perhaps unduly multifarious writings.

BERTRAND RUSSELL

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITORS

Lord Russell has never particularly relished being anatomized although he readily consented to each of us attempting it by selections previously published. We have joined in this volume, again with his kind sanction, to present what we trust will be generally accepted as a useful, definitive sampling of complete essays and chapters indicative of the man and his work over more than sixty years of astounding productivity.

When we have been queried on frequent occasions as to the reason for our own continued absorbing interest in the myriads of words that have flowed from his fertile mind, we have uniformly responded that we deliberately chose his works as we know of no one comparable through whose eyes one can survey the status and progress of contemporary thought in its many variegations. It was that idea which prompted our selection from various fields, in many of which Lord Russell pioneered and advanced human thought and in all of which he spoke with distinction.

Few philosophers have had a more profound influence on the course of modern philosophy than Bertrand Russell. Perhaps no technical philosopher has been more widely read, discussed and misunderstood. This volume is an attempt to present within one cover the more definitive essays by Russell from 1903, when he wrote his celebrated essay, 'A Free Man's Worship', to 1959, when he wrote the frequently cited 'The Expanding Mental Universe'.

The essays were chosen for their contribution to thinking *at the time they were written*. As Russell himself says, 'I am in no degree ashamed of having changed my opinions. What physicist who was active in 1900 would dream of boasting that his opinions had not changed?'

There is no adequate substitute for first-hand contact with original thought; nor is there any substitute for reading the definitive works of any great thinker in their entirety. Russell anthologies and collections have appeared which show only one period in his thought. Some, for example, reveal the views he held for a limited time (*Mysticism and Logic*, 1903–1917), while others have been concerned with emphasizing his views on particular subjects (*Why I am not a Christian*, 1957). It was not our purpose to add still another to their number.

Our aim has been to present a wide portrait of the views of one of the few seminal thinkers of the twentieth century. There will no doubt be readers who would have wished that we had made different selections from Russell's works, but this problem confronts any anthologist.

The editors of any volume on a twentieth-century philosopher are faced with a peculiar dilemma. The recency of the period and the strong emotional attitudes about any major figure make it almost impossible to be objective. The historian of an earlier period need only retouch the portraits presented to him by tradition, however distorted they may be, but the anthologist of a contemporary must write under the scrutiny of living admirers and detractors. We venture to submit our selections and to let Russell and his works speak for themselves.

Before letting the reader loose upon the pages that follow, we pause to immortalize a London cabbie who drove one of us from a pleasant visit with Sir Stanley Unwin to a London hotel. It was the day the Wood biography of Russell appeared and the driver noticed a copy being admiringly thumbed.

'Is that the new Russell biography I have been reading about?'

'Yes, and I look forward to reading it.'

'So do I. Wonderful mechanism, isn't he?'

And so we invite you to the pages evidencing this wonderful mechanism.

ROBERT E. EGNER
LESTER E. DENONN

EPIGRAMMATIC INSIGHTS FROM THE PEN OF RUSSELL

His life, for all its waywardness, had a certain consistency, reminiscent of that of the aristocratic rebels of the early nineteenth century. *His Own Obituary*.

I had a letter from an Anglican bishop not long ago in which he said that *all* my opinions on *everything* were inspired by sexual lust, and that the opinions

I expressed were among the causes of the Second World War. bbc Interview with John Freeman. *The Listener*, March 19, 1959.

Boredom as a factor in human behaviour has received, in my opinion, far less attention than it deserves. *The Conquest of Happiness*.

Every man would like to be God, if it were possible; some few find it difficult to admit the impossibility. *Power: A New Social Analysis*.

In spite of the fundamental importance of economic facts in determining politics and beliefs of an age or nation, I do not think that non-economic factors can be neglected without risks of error which may be fatal in practice. *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*.

The scepticism that I advocate amounts only to this (1) that when the experts are agreed, the opposite opinion cannot be held to be certain; (2) that when they are not agreed, no opinion can be regarded as certain by a non-expert; and (3) that when they all hold that no sufficient grounds for a positive opinion exist, the ordinary man would do well to suspend his judgment. *Sceptical Essays*.

I should make it my object to teach thinking, not orthodoxy, or even heterodoxy. And I should absolutely never sacrifice intellect to the fancied interest of morals. *On Education Especially in Early Childhood*.

I mean by wisdom a right conception of the ends of life. This is something which science in itself does not provide. Increase of science by itself, therefore, is not enough to guarantee any genuine progress, though it provides one of the ingredients which progress requires. *The Scientific Outlook*.

Rational apprehension of dangers is necessary; fear is not. *On Education Especially in Early Childhood*.

The main things which seem to me important on their own account, and not merely as means to other things, are knowledge, art, instinctive happiness, and relations of friendship or affection. *The Problem of China*.

Instinct, mind and spirit are all essential to a full life; each has its own excellence and its own corruption. *The Analysis of Mind*.

We have, in fact, two kinds of morality side by side: one which we preach but do not practise, and another which we practise but seldom preach. *Sceptical Essays*.

No nation was ever so virtuous as each believes itself, and none was ever so wicked as each believes the other. *Justice in War-Time*.

But if human conceit was staggered for a moment by its kinship with the ape, it soon found a way to reassert itself and that way is the 'philosophy' of evolution. A process which led from the amoeba to man appeared to the philosophers to be obviously a progress—though whether the amoeba would agree with this opinion is not known. *Our Knowledge of the External World*.

Philosophy should be piecemeal and provisional like science; final truth belongs to heaven, not to this world. *An Outline of Philosophy*.

The opinions that are held with passion are always those for which no good ground exists; indeed the passion is the measure of the holder's lack of rational conviction. *Sceptical Essays*.

To save the world requires faith and courage: faith in reason, and courage to proclaim what reason shows to be true. *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*.

If it is the devil that tempts the young to enjoy themselves, is it not the same personage that persuades the old to condemn their enjoyment? And is not condemnation perhaps merely a form of excitement appropriate to old age? (Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech) *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*.

There is something feeble and a little contemptible about a man who cannot face the perils of life without the help of comfortable myths. *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*.

There are infinite possibilities of error, and more cranks take up unfashionable errors than unfashionable truths. *Unpopular Essays*.

... the Crotonians burnt the Pythagorean school. But burning schools, or men for that matter, has always proved singularly unhelpful in stamping out unorthodoxy. *Wisdom of the West*.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF RUSSELL'S PRINCIPAL WORKS

1896	German Social Democracy. (A chapter by Alys Russell.)
1897	An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry.
1900	A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz.
1903	The Principles of Mathematics.
1910	Principia Mathematica—Vol. I. (With A. N. Whitehead.)
1910	Philosophical Essays.
1912	Principia Mathematica—Vol. II. (With A. N. Whitehead.)
1912	The Problems of Philosophy.
1913	Principia Mathematica—Vol. III. (With A. N. Whitehead.)
1914	Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy.
1914	Scientific Method in Philosophy.
1914	The Philosophy of Bergson. (Controversy with H. W. Carr.)
1915	War, the Offspring of Fear.
1916	Principles of Social Reconstruction. (Why Men Fight: A Method of Abolishing the International Duel.)
1916	Policy of the Entente, 1904–1914. (Part of: Justice in War-Time.)
1916	Justice in War-Time.
1917	Political Ideals.
1918	Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays.
1918	Roads to Freedom: Socialism, Anarchism and Syndicalism. (Proposed Roads to Freedom: Socialism, Anarchism and Syndicalism.)
1919	An Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy.
1920	The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism. (Bolshevism in Theory and Practice.)
1921	The Analysis of Mind.

1922	The Problem of China.
1922	Free Thought and Official Propaganda.
1923	The Prospects of Industrial Civilization. (With Dora Russell.)
1923	The ABC of Atoms.
1924	Bolshevism and the West. (Debate with Scott Nearing.)
1924	Icarus or the Future of Science.
1924	How to be Free and Happy.
1924	Logical Atomism.
1925	The ABC of Relativity.
1925	What I Believe.

1926	On Education Especially in Early Childhood. (Education and the Good Life.)
1927	Why I am not a Christian.
1927	The Analysis of Matter.
1927	An Outline of Philosophy. (Philosophy.)
1928	Sceptical Essays.
1929	Marriage and Morals.
1930	The Conquest of Happiness.
1930	Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?
1931	The Scientific Outlook.
1932	Education and the Social Order. (Education and the Modern World.)
1934	Freedom and Organization 1814–1914. (Freedom versus Organization 1814–1914.)
1935	In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays.
1935	Religion and Science.
1936	Which Way to Peace?
1936	Determinism and Physics.
1937	The Amberley Papers. The Letters and Diaries of Bertrand Russell's Parents. (With Patricia Russell.)
1938	Power: A New Social Analysis.
1940	An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth.
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