

READINGS
IN
MODERN
ENGLISH
PROSE

上册

当代英文散文选读

吴景荣 丁往道 钱 青 合编

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说 明

本书是为高等学校英语专业三、四年级学生选编的，分上下二册。

上册共收十二篇散文作品，包括叙事、描写、说明、辩论等类型。大多数文章都是本世纪四十年代，也就是第二次世界大战以后的作品，少数是三十年代的。十二位作者中，英国和爱尔兰有九人，美国三人。文章的长度为一千到三千字左右。为适合教学需要，我们对某些原文作了一定的删节。文章内容基本上是健康的，但不是没有问题。我们一般通过作者介绍、提问、和句子解释等来阐明我们的看法。

每篇文章后，附有作者简介、注释、练习等。练习分三项：问题、句子解释和作文题目。问题分为两组：A组为复述性的；B组为讨论性的。作文题根据学生的具体情况，可以有所选择。我们的想法是：上课时可以把重点放在文章内容和语言风格的讨论上，课后要多做笔头练习。

如果每周上课四小时，大致可以教完一千字左右的一篇文章。因为有半数课文较长，所以这十二篇可供十八至二十周之用。

我们恳切地希望各地使用本书的同志指出书中的错误和缺点，以便不断改进。

编 者

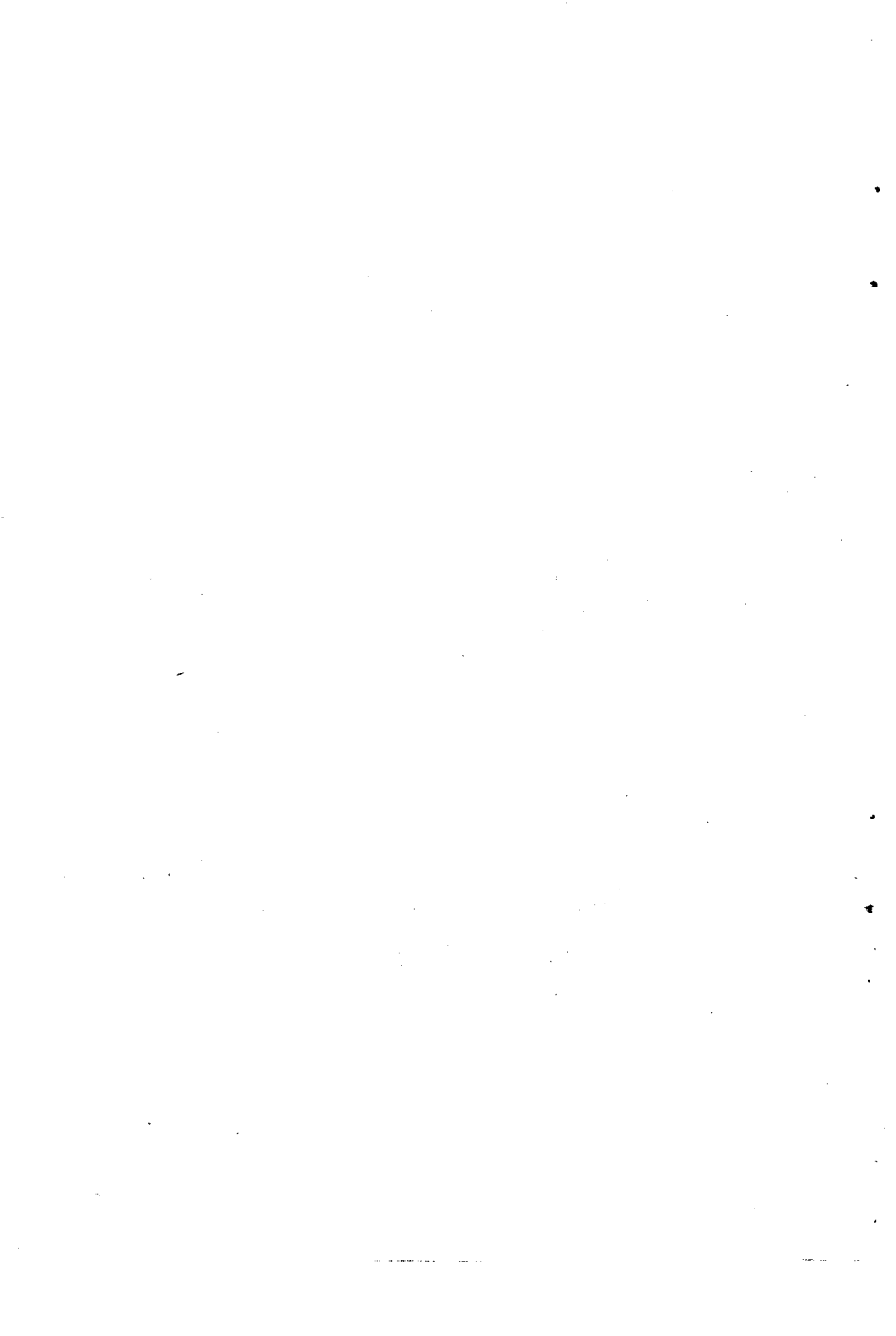
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1. What Use Is Philosophy?

By J. B. S. Haldane

G. Alexandrov and four colleagues have just been awarded a Stalin prize of 200,000 roubles for a three-volume book on the history of philosophy. Most of the other prizes went to scientists. Many people will be inclined to say, "Why rank with scientists men who have merely described the opinions, mostly false, held by a number of people in the past? No doubt this has some interest, like a history of fairy tales or astrology, but it isn't much use, particularly at the present grim moment."

There are a great many reasons for studying what philosophers have said in the past. One is that we cannot separate the history of philosophy from that of science. Philosophy is largely discussion about matters on which few people are quite certain, and those few hold opposite opinions. As knowledge increases, philosophy buds off the sciences.

For example, in the ancient world and the Middle Ages philosophers discussed motion. Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas taught that a moving body would slow down unless a force were constantly applied to it. They were wrong. It goes on moving unless something

slows it down. But they had good arguments on their side, and if we study these, and the experiments which proved them wrong, this will help us to distinguish truth from falsehood in the scientific controversies of today.

We also see how every philosopher reflects the social life of his day. Plato and Aristotle, in the slave-owning society of ancient Greece, thought man's highest state was contemplation rather than activity. In the Middle Ages St. Thomas believed in a regular feudal system of nine ranks of angels. Herbert Spencer, in the time of free competition between capitalists, found the key to progress in the survival of the fittest. Thus Marxism is seen to fit into its place as the philosophy for the workers, the only class with a future. But we can hardly guess what the world will look like to men and women with several generations of communism behind them, who take the brotherhood of man for granted, not as an ideal to be aimed at, but a fact of life, and yet know that this brotherhood was only achieved by ghastly struggles.

The study of philosophies should make our own ideas flexible. We are all of us apt to take certain general ideas for granted, and call them common sense. We should learn that other people have held quite different ideas, and that our own have started as very original guesses of philosophers.

If a dog could speak, it would probably not distinguish between motion and life. Some primitive men do not do so, and travellers interpret them as saying there are spirits everywhere. In our age of machines we are

apt to look for mechanical explanations of everything, yet it is only three hundred years since machines had been developed so far that Descartes first suggested that animal and human bodies were machines.

A scientist is apt to think that all the problems of philosophy will ultimately be solved by science. I think this is true for a great many of the questions on which philosophers still argue. For example Plato thought that when we saw something, one ray of light came to it from the sun, and another from our eyes, and that seeing was something like feeling with a stick. We now know that the light comes from the sun, and is reflected into our eyes. We don't know in much detail how the changes in our eyes give rise to sensation. But there is every reason to think that as we learn more about the physiology of the brain, we shall do so, and that the great philosophical problems about knowledge and will are going to be pretty fully cleared up.

But if our descendants know the answers to these questions and others which perplex us today, there will still be one field of which they do not know, namely the future. However exact our science, we cannot know it as we know the past. Philosophy may be described as argument about things of which we are ignorant. And where science gives us a hope of knowledge it is often reasonable to suspend judgment. That is one reason why Marx and Engels quite rightly wrote so little on many philosophical problems which interested their contemporaries.

But we have got to prepare for the future, and we cannot do so rationally without some philosophy. Some people say we have only got to do the duties revealed in the past, and laid down by religion, and God will look after the future. Others say that the world is a machine, and the course of future events is certain, whatever efforts we may make. Marxists say that the future depends on ourselves, even though we are part of the historical process. This philosophical view certainly does inspire people to very great achievements. Whether it is true or not (and I think it is true) it is a powerful guide to action.

We need a philosophy, then, to help us to tackle the future. Agnosticism easily becomes an excuse for laziness and conservatism. Whether we adopt Marxism or any other philosophy, we cannot understand it without knowing something of how it developed. That is why a knowledge of the history of philosophy is important to Marxists, even during the present critical days.

— From *A Banned Broadcast and Other Essays*

About the Author

J. B. S. Haldane was born in 1892 and educated at New College, Oxford. He became President of the Genetical Society and was on the committees of the Royal Society and the Biochemical Society. A Fellow of New College, Oxford, Haldane became Reader in Biochemistry at Cambridge, then

Professor of Genetics at London University. He died in 1966 of cancer.

Notes and Commentary

1. G. Alexandrov (1908-1961) — Soviet philosopher and academician, who wrote, among others, *History of Philosophy in Western Europe*.
2. As knowledge increases, philosophy buds off the sciences — As human knowledge increases, many problems of philosophy are clarified, so philosophy gives rise to beginnings of new branches of science.
3. Aristotle — Greek philosopher (384-322 B.C.).
4. St. Thomas Aquinas — Italian saint, theologian and philosopher (1225-74).
5. Plato — Greek philosopher (427?-347? B.C.).
6. man's highest state was contemplation. . . — In Plato's *Republic*, the king is the philosopher. Aristotle, though he disagreed with his master about the theory of "ideas" or "pure forms", nevertheless held that man's highest goal is to reason abstractly. The philosophy of Plato and Aristotle which expressed the social life of a slave-owning society was of course advanced in the interests of the slave-owners. *State* here has the meaning of "mode of existence."
7. a regular feudal system of nine ranks of angels — St. Thomas lived in the Medieval Age. His division of an-

gels into nine ranks naturally reflected the interests of the feudal rulers.

8. Herbert Spencer — British philosopher (1820-1903).
9. If a dog could speak. . . — It would regard motion as synonymous with life. In other words, in the eyes of a dog, whatever is capable of motion has life. That also accounts for the supernatural beliefs of primitive men.
10. Descartes — René Descartes (1596-1650), French philosopher and mathematician.
11. it is often reasonable to suspend judgment — It is wise to say little about certain philosophical problems where the possibility of science clearing them up is great. This is a warning against passing rash judgment on those problems of which we are still ignorant but to which future scientists will probably find a satisfactory solution.

Exercises

I. Questions

A

1. Why was G. Alexandrov awarded a Stalin prize?
2. Why do many people think that scientists are superior to historians of philosophy? Are they right?
3. How is it that we cannot separate the history of philosophy from that of science?
4. What were the arguments about a moving body advanced by Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas? What is the use

of studying them as well as the experiments which proved them wrong?

5. Name some philosophers who lived in slave society, feudal society and capitalist society. Prove the statement that every philosopher reflects the social life of his day.
6. How do you think the primitive men interpret natural phenomena? Do they connect motion with life? If so, how?
7. Is it correct to say that animal and human bodies are machines?
8. Is it true that all the problems of philosophy will be ultimately solved by science?
9. What should we do to prepare for the future?
10. What do Marxists mean when they say that the future depends on ourselves?

B

1. What is the use of philosophy?
2. What is the relation between philosophy and science?
3. What will the world look like in communist society?
4. What is meant by the survival of the fittest? Why do you think this theory cannot apply to human society?
5. In what sense does the author say that the workers are the only class with a future?
6. What is the law that governs the motion of a body?

II. Paraphrasing

1. No doubt this has some interest, like a history of fairy tales or astrology, but it isn't much use, particularly at the present grim moment.
2. But we can hardly guess what the world will look like to men and women with several generations of communism behind them, who take the brotherhood of man for granted, not as an ideal to be aimed at, but a fact of life, and yet know that this brotherhood was only achieved by ghastly struggles.
3. We should learn that other people have held quite different ideas, and that our own have started as very original guesses of philosophers.
4. Some people say we have only got to do the duties revealed in the past, and laid down by religion, and God will look after the future.
5. Others say that the world is a machine, and the course of future events is certain, whatever efforts we may make.
6. Marxists say that the future depends on ourselves, even though we are part of the historical process.
7. Agnosticism easily becomes an excuse for laziness and conservatism.

III. Topics for Composition

1. The Mission of a Philosopher
2. Philosophy and the History of Social Development
3. The Age of Science

2. How to Grow Old

By Bertrand Russell

In spite of the title, this article will really be on how *not* to grow old, which, at my time of life, is a much more important subject. My first advice would be to choose your ancestors carefully. Although both my parents died young, I have done well in this respect as regards my other ancestors. My maternal grandfather, it is true, was cut off in the flower of his youth at the age of sixty-seven, but my other three grandparents all lived to be over eighty. Of remoter ancestors I can only discover one who did not live to a great age, and he died of a disease which is now rare, namely, having his head cut off. A great-grandmother of mine, who was a friend of Gibbon, lived to the age of ninety-two, and to her last day remained a terror to all her descendants. My maternal grandmother, after having nine children who survived, one who died in infancy, and many miscarriages, as soon as she became a widow, devoted herself to women's higher education. She was one of the founders of Girton College, and worked hard at opening the medical profession to women. She used to relate how she met in Italy an elderly gentleman who was looking very sad. She