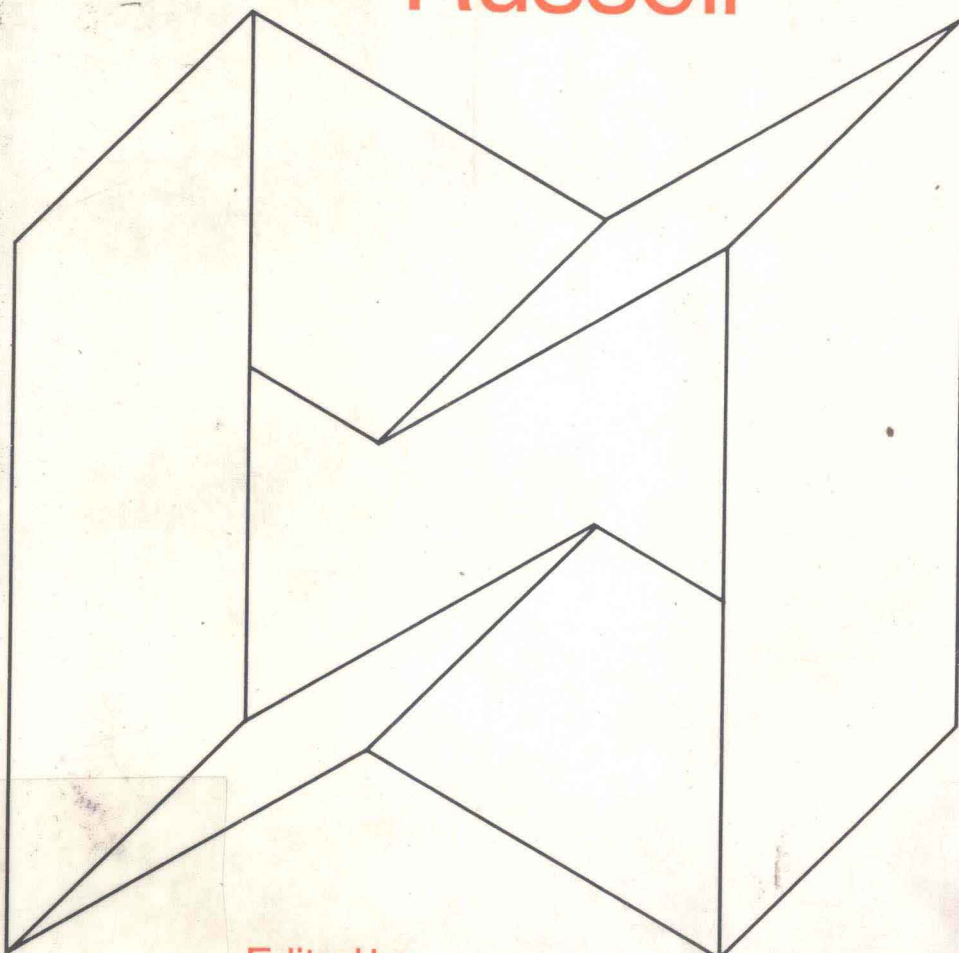
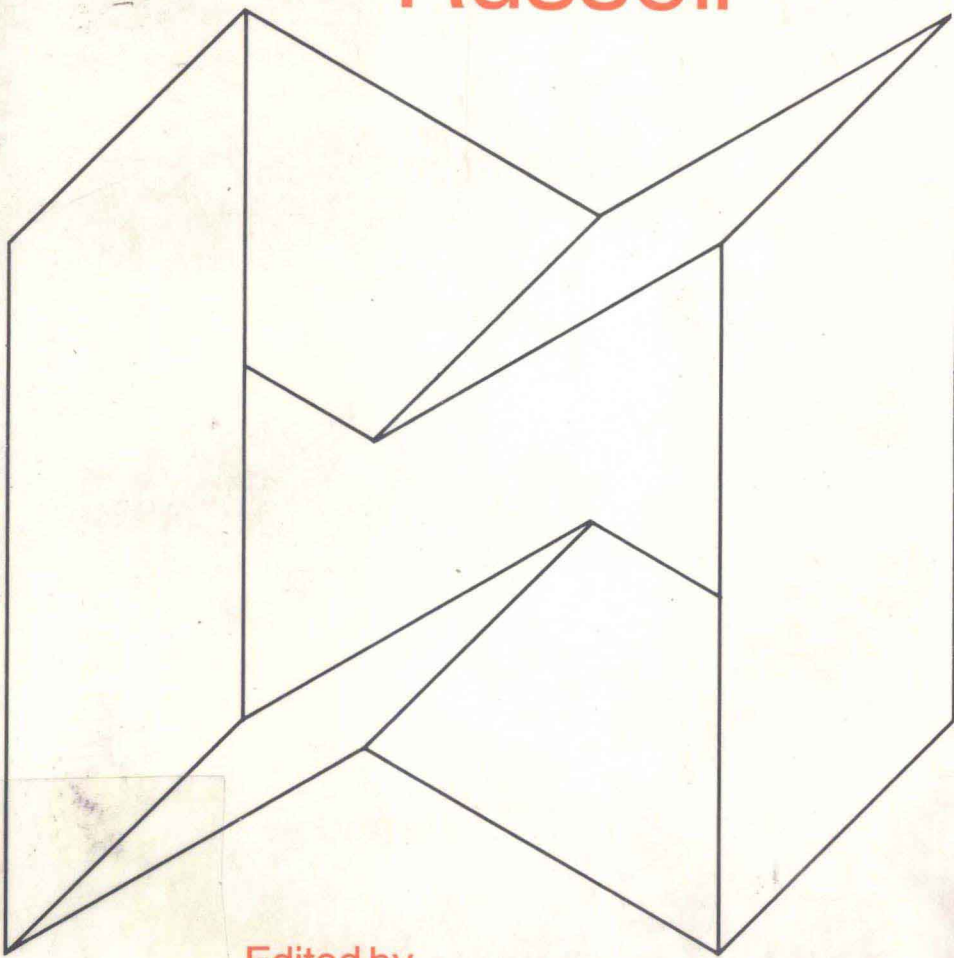


The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell



Edited by
Robert E. Egner and
Lester E. Denonn
with a Preface by
Bertrand Russell

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Philosophy
The Basic Writings of
Bertrand Russell

This is an authorized and representative selection of 81 essays and self-contained excerpts from half a century of Bertrand Russell's work as philosopher, psychologist, historian, mathematician, analyst of international relations, essayist, short story writer and autobiographer. Lord Russell himself has worked with the editors—Lester E. Denonn, his appointed bibliographer, and Robert E. Egner, Professor of Philosophy at Northland College, Wisconsin—and contributed a Preface. The volume includes an up-to-date chronological list of Russell's principal works and a chronology of his life.

Among the subjects treated are politics, economics, ethics, the philosophy of language, metaphysics, the history of philosophy, the logic and philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of science, epistemology, education and religion. This is a collection that reflects the depth, the wit and clarity—the extraordinary range and diversity of Lord Russell's lifelong search for truth and human values.



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OF
BERTRAND RUSSELL

1903-1959

EDITED BY
ROBERT E. EGNER
AND
LESTER E. DENONN

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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

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.

NOTE TO THIS NEW PRINTING

This book was first published over a quarter of a century ago, and much has changed and transpired in that time. On February 2nd, 1970, Bertrand Russell died in his 98th year at his home in Merionethshire, Wales, and on January 1st, 1978, his fourth and last wife, Lady Edith Finch Russell, passed away there too. Both of them gave abundantly of their time and energy in the long and arduous work of putting this large volume together, and Lord Russell himself wrote a special *Preface* for it. Also, it was Lord Russell who personally chose the specific selections from each of the three volumes of *Principia Mathematica* included in this book.

In this new printing we have brought completely up-to-date the chronology of the life of Bertrand Russell beginning on page 21 and the chronological list of his works on page 17. We are grateful to Dr. Kenneth Blackwell, the Chief Archivist at the Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster University in Hamilton Ontario, Canada for his personal help in bringing this chronological reference material up-to-date and for supplying many additional items that were overlooked in the original edition of this book.

ROBERT E. EGNER

LESTER E. DENONN

March 1987

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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*.