

# 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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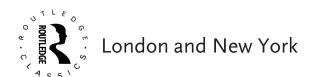
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# Bertrand Russell

The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell

Edited by Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn

With an introduction by John G. Slater



This edition first published 1961 by George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London

First published in Routledge Classics 2009 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge 270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2009.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Russell, Bertrand, 1872–1970.
The basic writings of Bertrand Russell / Bertrand Russell.

p. cm. – (Routledge classics)

Originally published as: Basic writings, 1903–1959, London:

George Allen & Unwin, 1961.

Includes index.

1. Philosphy. I. Title.

B1649.R91 2009

192—dc22

2008052126

ISBN 0-203-87539-7 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10: 0-415-47238-5 (pbk) ISBN13: 978-0-415-47238-8 (pbk)

ISBN10: 0-203-87539-7 (ebk) ISBN13: 978-0-203-87539-1 (ebk)

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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