



Russell

The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell

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**'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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Bertrand
Russell

The Basic Writings of
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