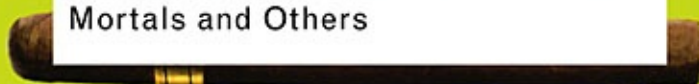




# Russell



Mortals and Others



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# Mortals and Others

American Essays 1931–1935

Volumes I and II

Bertrand Russell

With an introduction by John G. Slater



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‘Every man would be God, if it were possible; some few find it difficult to admit the impossibility.’

Bertrand Russe

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# Volume I

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# INTRODUCTION

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Bertrand Russell's occasional essays typically exhibit both the serious and the less serious side of his personality. Even if the subject of an essay is light and even, perhaps, frivolous-sounding, he still manages to come up with an angle on it which is worthy of serious consideration. Consider, for instance, 'Who May Use Lipstick?'. In his answer to this question he notes that the largest group of women who may *not* use it are school teachers, which leads him to consider the reasons behind this particular prohibition, and, consequently, to the sexual constraints under which these women work, and, finally, to the effect these constraints are likely to have on the children under their tutelage. No one will doubt that he has reached important matters here, although hardly anyone would have expected it when they read the title. The ability to surprise his readers is one of Russell's enduring characteristics.

The essays in this volume vary considerably in their structure, for Russell was inclined to let the content determine the overall logic of his treatment of it. There are, however, recurring features which mark them as his, unmistakably. Among them are his use of historical (or contemporary) events to illustrate a point, of appeals to his own experience to sharpen the force of what he wants to say, of wit to trap the hostile reader into giving a point otherwise dismissed out of hand sympathetic attention, of logical analysis to lay out the alternatives requiring discussion, and of a dazzling command of the English language which never fails to charm his readers.

After philosophy Russell was probably most interested in history, especially when it came to his recreational reading. During the course of a very long life he wrote a number of essays designed to encourage others to share this passion; one of them, 'The Consolations of History', is reprinted here. In his opinion a knowledge of history is essential to being civilised; he would certainly have agreed with his fellow philosopher, George Santayana, that 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' History lays out for us the ideas that have been tried and found to work, as well as those that have been tried and found not to work; consequently, those particular dead ends can, if knowledge of them becomes widely disseminated, be avoided in future. From the study of history we also learn something very important about the range of actual human behaviour, such knowledge tends to make us more tolerant of those with whom time obliges us to live. Take, for instance, this marvellous illustration of collective human gullibility from 'An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish' in Russell's *Unpopular Essays* (p. 145):

I admire especially a certain prophetess who lived beside a lake in northern New York State about the year 1820. She announced to her numerous followers that she possessed the power of walking on water, and that she proposed to do so at 11 o'clock on a certain morning. At the stated time, the faithful assembled in their thousands beside the lake. She spoke to them saying: 'Are you all entirely persuaded that I can walk on water?' With one voice they replied: 'We are.' 'In that case', she announced, 'there is no need for me to do so.' And they all went home much edified.

This story lays bare an important and disturbing point about human beings, namely, that in groups which become charged with emotion they tend to relax, and even to lose for a time, the use of their critical faculties. Knowing this story lessens our surprise when we hear of an absurd notion which has a wide currency. And the more such historical accounts we know, the better equipped we are to deal intelligently with the problems and perplexities of our own age. There is, when all is said and done, very little that is new under the sun.

Citation of historical examples is also used to contrast our age with an earlier time. In 'The Menace of Old Age' Russell observes that doctors have learned how to prolong life, but have done nothing to ensure that our capacities remain at a high level in old age. Despite this failure, the populace as a whole praises the work of the doctors. In the sixteenth century a different standard prevailed: 'When Pope Adrian VI (the last non-Italian to occupy the Papal See) died a few months after his elevation, deputations of eminent Romans marched with congratulations to the house of his physician.' Such thoughts now would lead to a suit for malpractice. Russell's point, of course, is that current practice is not the unmitigated good it is often represented to be.

Russell tends to use many more historical examples than he does contemporary ones. No doubt the reason for this is that the historical stories have already stood the test of time and are unlikely to perish utterly, whereas the happenings of today will probably sink without a trace despite their seeming urgency. But his essays do occasionally mention current matters, as, for example, in 'On Economic Security' when he notes that about the only persons alive (in 1933) with a secure income were 'those Indian Princes who obtain a salary from the British Government on condition of living in Europe.' One is often astonished in reading Russell by the bewildering variety of facts with which he was acquainted. In this particular case he probably learned of this tiny class of persons from his work with Indians who sought independence for their country from British rule. Still, to have had it at the front of his mind for use in illustrating a point in an essay is remarkable. He seems never to have forgotten anything which had once come to his attention.

These essays are literally alive with allusions to his own experience. In 'On Politicians' he remarks that nearly everyone casts their votes in an election for a reason other than the superior merit of their candidate. Most when asked trace their membership of a political party to the fact that their father had belonged to it, and they readily admit that voting for that party's candidate is habitual with them. Russell cites himself in support of this observation: 'I myself, in England, vote for the Labour Party because my father was a Radical; my father was a Radical because his father was a Liberal; my grandfather was a Liberal because his father was a Whig; and he was a Whig because his ancestors obtained abbey land from Henry VIII. Having derived my radicalism from such a mercenary source, shall I turn Conservative? The very idea appals me.' In this case Russell describes himself as sharing an important characteristic with nearly everyone else. But in 'On Labelling People' he separates himself from the herd: 'When the gushing hostess says to me "Oh Mr Russell, I know you are so fond of books", I wish I could reply, with the manner of Dr Johnson, "Madam, I never read a book when some less unprofitable manner of disposing of my time is available."' In 'Are Criminals Worse than Other People?' Russell provides us with a vivid description of those he met in Brixton Prison during the six months he was confined there for opposing the First World War. The personal references in these essays constitute a series of grace notes to his autobiographical writings.

Russell was one of the wittiest writers of this century, and by their very nature these little essays provide him with an excellent opportunity to display his wit. 'Wit', as I am using the term here, is displayed in two types of remark: first, those that are clever and lively and made in an amusing way; and second, those that reveal an incongruous relationship in a surprising way. One of the most remarkable examples of a witty remark of the first type is found in *The ABC of Relativity*: 'We all have a tendency to think that the world must confirm to our prejudices. The opposite view involves some effort of thought, and most people would die sooner than think – in fact, they do so' (p. 166). Could any other writer of this century have written that? In 'On Being Good' he remarks: 'Some fool long ago – probably a Roman – said that to know how to command, a man must first learn how to obey. This is the opposite of the truth.' Readers are bound to notice points put so provocatively. Here is an example of the second kind (with an example of the first kind thrown in for good measure): 'There is a popular notion that vegetarians are mild and gentle folk who would not hurt a fly. Perhaps

they would not hurt a fly. As to this, I cannot speak, but their charity towards flies certainly does not extend to human beings. Perhaps the most powerful argument in favour of a vegetarian diet is the vigour and pugnacity which it gives to those who practise it.' It will hardly surprise the reader to learn that he called this essay 'On the Fierceness of Vegetarians.' In 'On Corporal Punishment' we find this paradigm: 'Men who, while they were schoolboys, were caned or flogged, almost invariably believe that they are the better for it. This belief itself, to my mind, is one of its bad effects.' This important observation could hardly be put more succinctly or more effectively.

As might be expected of an eminent logician, Russell often begins an essay by laying out the alternatives requiring his consideration. 'On Modern Uncertainty' opens with this witty observation: 'There have been four sorts of ages in the world's history. There have been ages when everybody thought they knew everything, ages when nobody thought they knew anything, ages when clever people thought they knew much and stupid people thought they knew little, and ages when stupid people thought they knew much and clever people thought they knew little. The first sort of age is one of stability, the second of slow decay, the third of progress, and the fourth of disaster.' In 1932 it seemed to Russell that the world was tottering into the last state, and that disaster was imminent. Scientists, economists, philosophers and statesmen all seemed unable to offer a cure for the world's troubles. 'The only people left with positive opinions are those who are too stupid to know when their opinions are absurd. Consequently the world is ruled by fools, and the intelligent count for nothing in the councils of the nations.' With the great depression deepening and a second world war looming, this gloomy assessment was not far off the mark.

An essay where his analytical skills are very much on display is 'Illegal?', which would be better named 'Should Suicide Be Illegal?'. It is Russell's only sustained discussion of suicide, which is surprising given that, by his own witness, he contemplated suicide on more than one occasion earlier in his life. In England and in most of the United States at the time he was writing both suicide and attempted suicide were illegal, positions he regarded as irrational. Suicide should not be a crime, in his opinion, since it consists of persons disposing, wisely or unwisely, of what is legally their own property, namely their lives. He arrives at this position by examining all the usual reasons given in support of the contention that suicide is a form of murder and rejecting them all. Concerning the criminality of attempted suicide he is scornful: 'When a man finds life so painful that he tries to kill himself he is given a dose of prison to teach him to find life more pleasant.' The purpose of punishment ought to be to deter, but in this case it is most unlikely to achieve its purpose.

Russell's command of the English language is truly extraordinary. He knows and employs the usual literary devices; he is especially adept at using irony to make his points. During his discussion of why teachers may not use lipstick, he remarks: 'Hypocrisy is, of course, very necessary to success in life and there is much to be said for the view that those concerned in education should be competent to teach it.' The intelligent reader (and Russell always credits his readers with more than average intelligence) nods approval of his intended meaning. Unfortunately, the literal-minded (and the stupid) form the opinion that Russell approves of hypocrisy. Clever writers do run certain risks when they allow their works to be printed and sold, especially when the subject of the work is one of social or political concern about which all readers, however unintelligent or ill-informed, consider themselves expert. On more than one occasion Russell did find himself in trouble with certain groups and sometimes he paid a rather heavy price. But even imprisonment did not lead him to alter his writing style. Until he was a very old man he continued to delight his sympathetic readers and to provoke his detractors – as he does in these little essays – by the enormous skill with which he stated his views on the important topics of the day.

JOHN G. SLATE  
*University of Toronto*





# PREFACE

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In the early 1930s, the *New York American* and other newspapers owned by William Randolph Hearst published a literary page to which a large number of writers and artists contributed. Among them were some distinguished authors, both English and American: Aldous Huxley, G. K. Chesterton, Havelock Ellis, V. Sackville-West, Rebecca West, Philip Wylie, James Thurber, H. L. Mencken, Gertrude Atherton, Robert Benchley, Ogden Nash, Lewis Browne, and Ludwig Lewisohn.

Bertrand Russell was one of the regulars, contributing a total of 156 essays from 22 July 1931 to 2 May 1935. In one year alone (1933), he contributed fifty items, virtually one each week.

Intended as they were for a newspaper audience, his essays made frequent reference to the events and problems of the day, the Depression, the rise of Nazism, Prohibition, the 'New Deal', and so on, but to a large extent, though many of the allusions are temporal, the themes are perennial: love, marriage, freedom, individuality, character, parenthood, peace and war, brotherhood, progress, knowledge, truth, science, ethics, education, and so on. After all, they were written by a philosopher – 'the spectator of all time and all existence,' in Plato's phrase – by one of the great minds and personalities of the twentieth century, by a man who by the end of his long and full life had pursued with vigour and even distinction five or six careers in addition to that of philosopher: mathematician, logician, educator, moralist, propagandist for social reform, and agitator for peace – and all these roles to a degree find expression in these essays.

When the essays first appeared, Lord Russell (as by then he was) was no stranger to America. He had first visited the United States in 1896 with his first wife, herself an American, staying for three months, meeting her relatives and lecturing at Bryn Mawr College and at Johns Hopkins University. He had come to the States again in 1914, 1924, 1927, 1929, and 1931.

Of all the essays which appeared during those five years in this series, only seven have ever been reprinted in a book. A few of the essays were reprinted also in certain British magazines, and one, in translation, appeared in a German magazine. This is the extent of it! By far the greater proportion of the essays have suffered the fate of yesteryear's newspaper: oblivion. They do not deserve oblivion. The publishers and I are confident that the candid and judicious reader will agree with this judgement and it is for this reason that we make them available to a new generation of readers.

We include in the present two-volume collection all of the Hearst essays except some which dealt with transitory issues and the four which were reprinted in Russell's books during his lifetime. We are reprinting for the first time an essay ('On Being Edifying') which appeared to our knowledge only in the British journal, *Time and Tide*. We include it in this collection and also include some previously unpublished essays because they were written at about the same time as the Hearst essays and are similar to them in style and format.

Though unostentatious and sometimes even casual, the essays reveal Russell's genius: his wit, his irony, his perspicuousness, his erudition, his moral sensitivity, his boldness – why not say it? – his wisdom. Our generation has as much urgent need for his rational clarity and his sense of concern for mankind as that generation that first read the essays forty years ago. Moreover, they are a delight to read, for Russell's love of fun keeps bubbling over in them all.

I have exercised my editorial privileges lightly, supplying a few explanatory notes for the more transitory and recondite allusions here and there and indulging, in modest degree, my own prejudices relating to capitals, commas, spelling, hyphens, and the like. I have occasionally broken some of the longer sentences and paragraphs into shorter ones and very occasionally recast sentences to enhance clarity.

I have Mr Kenneth M. Blackwell, archivist of the Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster

University, to thank for his encouragement on this project and Barry Feinberg and Continuum i Ltd o  
London for making it a reality. I may be permitted to add that Lord Russell knew of the project and  
approved it, but death prevented his seeing it realised. I dedicate the volume to his revered memory.

HARRY RUJ  
*San Diego, Californ*

# ON JEALOUSY

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One of the dividing lines between people who are old-fashioned and people who have a modern outlook is as to jealousy. The traditional outlook was that while jealousy is to be condemned when it is unfounded, it is to be counted as just indignation where cause for it exists. Othello did wrong in murdering Desdemona because she was innocent, but if she had sinned his action would have been becoming to an officer and a gentleman. Appeals to the unwritten law are still not uncommon, and most people still view leniently a man who is driven to violence by his wife's infidelity. Indeed a tolerant attitude in such circumstances is viewed by many as unmanly.

This attitude causes jealousy to be much more violent than it need be. There is undoubtedly an instinctive element in it, but the instinctive element is greatly inflamed by the sense that one's rights are being infringed. When a man's beliefs as to his rights change, there is a corresponding change both in the violence of his jealousy and in the occasions on which he feels it. A man who in one social environment will be led by jealousy to commit murder will in another environment be led only to feel a bit surly.

Should we desire the diminution of jealousy, it can be brought about in this way. I think as regards the extreme case of the so-called unwritten law there can be no rational doubt. If a man swindles you out of your money, you may be very angry, but you are expected to seek redress through the law, not through private vengeance. It is incompatible with the whole idea of a civilised state that private wrongs should be redressed by private violence.

But what are we to say of less extreme forms of jealousy? Let it be granted that it would be better not to give grounds for jealousy, but that being admitted, we know nevertheless that many people will give such grounds. So long as jealousy is considered socially admirable, people will conceal such actions as might cause it, with the result that the most intimate of human relations becomes filled with deceit. Every man knows that he is liable to an occasional lapse from technical fidelity without on that account wishing his marriage to be broken up, but while everyone knows this concerning himself, few people can manage to believe it with regard to their partner. Everybody carries about with him two kinds of sexual psychology: one applicable to himself, the other to the person he is in love with. These two exist in watertight compartments and never meet. I believe myself that the psychology a man applies to himself is nearer to the truth than that which he applies to his wife, and I believe also that in the long run it never does any good to believe what is untrue.

I shall be told that every properly constituted man would find life intolerable if he were not absolutely convinced that his wife was more virtuous than himself, but this again depends upon expectation and social convention. The first time one learns that one's best friends are liable to be wittily satirical at one's expense, the experience is very painful, and one feels furious in spite of the consciousness of often having done the same thing oneself; but a little experience and a little reflection will convince anybody that he cannot hope to be an exception and to have none of his foibles ever laughed at. The same sort of thing applies also to graver matters.

It is possible, though I admit that it is difficult, to view oneself as no exception to general laws and as not having a sacrosanct immunity from the ordinary misfortunes of life. There is much too much pompous self-esteem in the world, and anything that diminishes the harm that people do by demanding more than their due share of the world's room is to be welcomed.

*22 July 193*

# SEX AND HAPPINESS

---

We are told that sex was inflicted upon Adam and Eve after the Fall as a punishment. From what I have seen of its workings in the present day I am inclined to agree with this view. Almost all the young men and young women that I know suffer acutely in one way or another through its workings. Can you, reader, lay your hand on your heart and say that you have derived more pleasure than pain from sex and its consequences? In the old days of masculine domination the matter was simple. Men took what they wanted, and women submitted. In this way half the human race was happy and half unhappy. But with the modern demand for justice as between men and women, this arrangement became impossible. The reformers may have intended that women should become as happy as men, but what in fact they secured was that men became as unhappy as women. All would be well if only people would pair off as they did in Victorian novels and live happily ever after. But simple and satisfactory as this prescription is, people resolutely refuse to follow it. Either the wife gets tired of the husband or the husband gets tired of the wife. If the wife is sufficiently dutiful, she may conceal the disgust inspired by her husband's habitual gestures and habitual anecdotes and habitual pronouncements on questions of public moment. In that case, she will take out her dissatisfaction on her children. Or she may seek distraction elsewhere, in which case she must either become an adept in deception or drive her husband to distraction with jealousy. If it is the husband that gets tired first, he may, if he is a man of high morality and iron self-control, take refuge in politeness and hard work, but sooner or later the strain will become intolerable, and he will either break down or break out.

Sometimes the solution is sought in divorce, but the same reasons which led to the first divorce are likely to lead to a second and third. I have frequently been embarrassed in talking to American ladies to find that whatever man I happened to mention had been their husband at some time or other.

All this is very sad. It all springs, we may be told, from the mistaken notion that sex should be a source of happiness. No one changes his dentist because the hours spent in his company are not wholly pleasurable. If people expected misery from sex they would be less disappointed when they got it.

This point of view is one of respectable antiquity and is indeed bound up with much traditional morality. But is it really the best that can be done? I do not believe so: I believe that a little more realism and a little more self-control in the matter of jealousy and ill-temper would make all the difference. A great deal of our modern trouble has come from mixing up romantic love, which is a poetic and anarchic impulse, with marriage, which is a social institution. The French have not made this mistake, and on the whole they are considerably happier in these respects than the English-speaking nations.

However that may be, it is clear that precept and practice in our day are in some way at fault. Modern marriage too often fails not only to give happiness to the husband and wife but also to produce satisfactory children, which is its purpose considered as an institution. The children of modern marriages are apt to be few, nervous, and over-wrought, surrounded by an atmosphere of anxiety in which it is impossible for them to thrive, either neglected by their mothers or watched with too meticulous a solicitude. Somehow or other, the old institutions seem to be out of gear. It is useless to preach that men and women ought to return to the modes of behaviour of a simpler age, for they will not do it. An ethic is called for, but it must be a new ethic, and above all it must be realistic in taking account of the facts as they exist in our day.

*5 August 193*

# TOURISTS: WE LOSE OUR CHARM AWAY FROM HOME

It is an odd fact that, while we are all charming people when we are at home, most of us become horrid as soon as we travel abroad. English travellers in the United States frequently have made me blush by their arrogance, their wholly unfounded superciliousness and their blindness to the very important merits of American civilisation.

This foolish behaviour causes untravelled Americans to think far worse of the English than they deserve. The fact is that the average tourist, of whatever nation, views the life of a foreign country in its more trivial aspects and fails to display his own best qualities. This applies not only to European tourists but also to those from the Western Hemisphere, with the result that Europeans who have never left their own continent get a very false impression of Americans.

Speaking broadly and ignoring many exceptions, one may say that Americans come to Europe chiefly to find satisfaction for those parts of human nature which are least catered to in their own country. A degenerate Italian aristocrat with a name familiar in Renaissance history is more interesting to these Americans than Einstein. To Europeans, unless they are professional antiquaries, such an attitude is impossible, since they have to live in the present and, if possible, make Europe fit to live in. Nor do they observe that American interest in European historical survivals always is very discriminating.

A culture impregnated with history has a certain depth and solidity which may not be without value but the mere survival of quaint costumes, titles and customs has only the superficial kind of interest that is exploited by Hollywood. No one likes to be the object of this kind of interest, and Europeans tend to be impatient of being regarded as picturesque though absurd relics.

There is another, less cultivated tourist, who seeks, chiefly in Paris, a loosening of the moral restraints to which he is subject when at home. He does not suspect that the Parisians have their own code and therefore does not know when he offends against it. But throughout his enjoyment the serious aspects of French life remain hidden from him.

It is a curious feature of American (and to some extent of British) civilisation that those who have created and maintained it seek for themselves, in their spare time, something differing from it as widely as possible. This does not apply, for example, to the civilisation of France. A Frenchman likes a foreign country in proportion as it resembles his own, and there is no feature of his own world from which he longs to escape. What is the reason for this difference?

My explanation is that the French have been thinking mainly of what was agreeable to themselves, while many Americans, and not a few British, under the influence of their lofty ethical standards, have been thinking mainly of what would be good for their neighbours. What is good for us is, alas, not always agreeable, though it is gratifying to think that we are producing what is good for others. Consequently the pleasure to be derived from American civilisation largely is the altruistic pleasure reflecting upon the noble men and women it is producing, while for private delight countries based upon a less exalted morality are more agreeable. This is, I believe, the explanation of the curious paradox that even the most patriotic Americans seek out eagerly whatever is most different from what they approve in their own country.

*24 August 1933*

# THE MENACE OF OLD AGE

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One of the greatest perils of our time has crept upon us almost unobserved. The skill of the medical profession has prolonged the span of human life but has not yet learned to prolong the span of human capacity. Throughout the last sixty years people have been getting born less and less and have also died less and less. The result is that the average age of the population is continually increasing. Strange to say, the doctors who produce this result by skilful ministrations to their aged patients are thought to deserve well of the public. When Pope Adrian VI (the last non-Italian to occupy the Papal See) died a few months after his elevation, deputations of eminent Romans marched with congratulations to the house of his physician. But this spirit, alas, has died out.

The results of this unfortunate misdirection of scientific ability are already becoming apparent. I have the misfortune to live in a country whose government is composed almost entirely of men over seventy.<sup>1</sup> There were originally several younger men, but they resigned; of those who remain several have been known to me for thirty or forty years. I can remember a period when they had vigour and initiative; there was a time when it seemed to them quite natural to act in accordance with their beliefs. But there is no standing up to physiology. As our tissues stiffen, our habits become more set: we go through the same motions every day (I am speaking as an old man) when we shave, when we brush our hair, or when we relate our favourite anecdote. We may remain intellectually convinced of the necessity of change since this is one of our fixed verbal habits, but we cannot bear actual change. The aged radical is therefore in the sad situation that he can only be happy so long as he is ineffective; he cannot stop doing any of the things that he always has done, including the advocacy of change, but not of course including its actual realisation.

One of the saddest cases known to me was that of the secretary of the Society for Legalising Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister. He obtained this post as a vigorous young man of twenty-two. Through his untiring efforts and by the exercise of immense skill, he succeeded in the course of fifty years in converting the British public to the necessity of the reform which this society advocated. The measure once passed, the society was no longer needed, and he lost his job. By this time he was an old man of seventy-two, capable of only one thing, namely, the clear and vigorous statement of the arguments for a measure which had already been passed. (I do not vouch for the above facts, but it is quite likely that something of the sort occurred.)

Most old men have the good sense to avoid this sad fate and to do what they can to prevent even those changes in the environment which they have always advocated. Consequently every increase in medical skill is bound to make the world more and more conservative. Probably in another hundred years most people will be over eighty. They will be doddering, mumbling, and altogether senile, but rich, respected, and powerful. They will hold all the important posts in spite of the eagerness of young men of sixty to replace them.

In such a world all progress will be impossible. What is to be done about it? Swift, who foresaw this danger, suggested that at the age of eighty a man suspected of undue longevity should be deprived of his vote and his property. This is an admirable suggestion, but already the old men have so firm a hold of power that I am afraid Swift's plan is not practical politics. I suggest that all medical men under sixty should band themselves together into a league for the defence of youth and that they should exert their influence to prevent all researches calculated to prolong the life of the very old. By the threat of such a movement, the old may be induced to surrender their power. Once robbed of their power, they might become objects of benevolence. I would have them transported to islands in the South Seas, where there should be no prohibition and a plentiful supply of cigars and where special newspapers should be published under a strict censorship with orders to represent that the world is going to the

dogs and that in no respect is any improvement occurring anywhere. By this means happiness could be brought to the declining years of these victims of medical skill without their being in a position to oppress the young or to prevent the world from adjusting itself to new conditions.

*27 August 193*

# IN PRAISE OF ARTIFICIALITY

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Mankind is divided into two classes: those who, being artificial, praise nature, and those who, being natural, praise art. The praise of nature, in which our age abounds, is not itself natural: it is a reaction against too much artificiality. As a reaction, it has its uses; as a theory of life, it won't do.

I once watched a raven and his mate having a meal. The meal consisted of raw flesh, some of it tender, some of it tough. The male bird first ate all the tender portions, administering savage pecks to the female if she dared to approach. It was only when nothing fit to eat remained that the female was allowed to appease her appetite as best she might. I was led to consider what human meals would be like if they were conducted in this fashion. From the point of view of vigorous young men the result might be quite agreeable, but for women, children and old men the rules of polite behaviour are more advantageous.

All civilisation, especially on its aesthetic side, is artificial. Manners, good speech, good writing, good music, good dancing – everything that gives grace to life depends, not upon the denial of natural impulses, but upon training them to express themselves in ways that are delightful rather than in ways that are crude.

I visited yesterday a brand-new little restaurant on the coast of Spain. It existed almost entirely for the supply of drinks. The manager, a gay and charming young man, had spent his leisure moments painting delicious but very artificial pictures on the walls. His especial pride was in two ships, a French one being struck by lightning and a Spanish one sailing on serenely. He was a civilised being and tended to civilise his clientele because he made drinking artificial and stylistic, not a mere quenching of gross thirst.

Under the influence of the gospel of work, the northern nations have lost the graces which still survive, though precariously, in the south. The gospel of work teaches men that what matters is the resulting product, not the style displayed during its production. We build houses without beauty in which we eat meals that merely nourish, and beget children without love whom we subject to an education that destroys spontaneity and grace. Where there is delight in a process, there will be style, and the activity of production will itself have aesthetic quality. But when men assimilate themselves to machines and value only the consequences of their work, not the work itself, style disappears, to be replaced by something which to the mechanised man appears more natural, though in fact it is only more brutal.

Is this misfortune inevitable as men become more mechanised? I do not think so. We have allowed ourselves to be too much dominated by work and have not sufficiently used machines as a means of liberation from the thralldom of manual and mental labour. We could, if we chose, all have more leisure. We could, if we chose, educate our children so as to enable them to give artistic expression to their impulses, rather than so as to be convenient units in a regiment. We do not do this because we love power more than we love beauty. But I doubt whether the exclusive pursuit of power is the best road to happiness. Human nature contains other ingredients, which are at least equally worthy to be honoured. Until the machine age learns to give them their due place, the new civilisation will not be completely sane.

*9 September 193*



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