

What I Believe



RUSSELL



What I Believe

'Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind.'

Bertrand Russell

Bertrand Russell is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century and a celebrated writer and commentator on social and political affairs. The grandson of twice Prime Minister Lord John Russell, Bertrand Russell was born in 1872 in Trellech, Wales. Both his parents died whilst Russell was in infancy, leaving him to be brought up by his grandparents in London. He gained a scholarship to read for the Mathematical Tripos at Trinity College, Cambridge, which he began in 1890. Following outstanding results in mathematics and philosophy he became a Fellow in philosophy in 1895. In 1903 he published *The Principles of Mathematics*, arguing that mathematics rested on a very small number of basic principles. In 1905 he wrote his famous paper 'On Denoting', which was to become a founding document in the philosophy of language and logic. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1908. The first of three volumes of *Principia Mathematica*, written with Alfred North Whitehead, was published in 1910 and in the same year, aged 38, Russell became a lecturer at the University of Cambridge.

During the First World War, Russell devoted much of his time to the cause of pacifism. He found himself dismissed from his post at Cambridge in 1916 as a result. He was also imprisoned for six months in 1918 for publicly lecturing against Britain's invitation that the United States enter the War. Russell then visited the United States, first teaching at the University of Chicago before moving to UCLA in Los

Angeles. He was appointed professor at the City College of New York in 1940, but after protests over Russell's liberal views on religion and marriage the appointment was annulled in court. He returned to Britain in 1944 to rejoin the faculty of Trinity College. During the 1940s and 1950s, Russell's oratory skills were heard on many BBC broadcasts, particularly The Brains Trust, where he spoke, with his customary acuity, on various topical and philosophical subjects. In 1948, Russell was invited by the BBC to deliver the inaugural Reith Lecture.

The 1950s and 1960s again saw Russell engaged in pacifist work, primarily related to nuclear disarmament and opposing the Vietnam War. The 1955 Russell–Einstein Manifesto called for nuclear disarmament and was signed by eleven of the most prominent nuclear physicists and intellectuals of the day. Russell continued to write and his celebrated *Autobiography* was published in three volumes between 1967 and 1969. He died in 1970 and was cremated in Colwyn Bay, Wales, near his home. His ashes were scattered over the Welsh mountains.

Alan Ryan was born in London in 1940 and taught for many years at Oxford, where he was a Fellow of New College and Reader in Politics. He was Professor of Politics at Princeton from 1988 to 1996, when he returned to Oxford to become Warden of New College and Professor of Political Theory until his retirement in 2009. His previous books include *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*, *Bertrand Russell: A Political Life* and *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism*. He is a Fellow of the British Academy.



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CONTENTS

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER	viii
FOREWORD TO THE ROUTLEDGE GREAT MINDS EDITION	ix
PREFACE	xx
1 NATURE AND MAN	1
2 THE GOOD LIFE	9
3 MORAL RULES	17
4 SALVATION: INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL	27
5 SCIENCE AND HAPPINESS	32
HOW I WRITE	43
WHY I TOOK PHILOSOPHY	48
INDEX	54

A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

This Routledge Great Minds edition of *What I Believe* contains a foreword by Alan Ryan that first appeared as a preface in the Routledge Classics edition published in 2004. Included in this edition are two essays by Russell that do not appear in the Routledge Classics edition, 'Why I Took to Philosophy' and 'How I Write'.