

Bertrand Russell's 10 Commandments of Teaching by Maria Popova

“Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.”

British philosopher, mathematician, historian, and social critic Bertrand Russell endures as one of the most intellectually diverse and influential thinkers in modern history, his philosophy of religion in particular having shaped the work of such modern atheism champions as Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Richard Dawkins. From the third volume of *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1944-1969* comes this remarkable micro-manifesto, entitled *A Liberal Decalogue* — a vision for responsibilities of a teacher, in which Russell touches on a number of recurring themes from pickings past — the purpose of education, the value of uncertainty, the importance of critical thinking, the gift of intelligent criticism, and more.

It originally appeared in the December 16, 1951, issue of *The New York Times Magazine*, at the end of the article “The best answer to fanaticism: Liberalism.”

Perhaps the essence of the Liberal outlook could be summed up in a new decalogue, not intended to replace the old one but only to supplement it. The Ten Commandments that, as a teacher, I should wish to promulgate, might be set forth as follows:

1. Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.
2. Do not think it worth while to proceed by concealing evidence, for the evidence is sure to come to light.
3. Never try to discourage thinking for you are sure to succeed.
4. When you meet with opposition, even if it should be from your husband or your children, endeavor to overcome it by argument and not by authority, for a victory dependent upon authority is unreal and illusory.
5. Have no respect for the authority of others, for there are always contrary authorities to be found.
6. Do not use power to suppress opinions you think pernicious, for if you do the opinions

will suppress you.

7. Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.

8. Find more pleasure in intelligent dissent than in passive agreement, for, if you value intelligence as you should, the former implies a deeper agreement than the latter.

9. Be scrupulously truthful, even if the truth is inconvenient, for it is more inconvenient when you try to conceal it.

10. Do not feel envious of the happiness of those who live in a fool's paradise, for only a fool will think that it is happiness.

Thanks,

Will