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JOHN RUSKIN

Unto This Last and Other Writings

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First and foremost an outcry against injustice and inhumanity, Unto this Last is also a closely argued assault on the science of political economy, which dominated the Victorian period. Ruskin was a profoundly conservative man who looked back to the Middle Ages as a Utopia, yet his ideas had a considerable influence on the British socialist movement. And in making his powerful moral and aesthetic case against the dangers of unhindered industrialization he was strangely prophetic. This volume shows the astounding range and depth of Ruskin's work, and in an illuminating introduction the editor reveals the consistency of Ruskin's philosophy and his adamant belief that questions of economics, art and science could not be separated from questions of morality. In Ruskin's words, 'There is no Wealth but Life.'

Unto This Last and Other Writings Details

Date : Published October 31st 1985 by Penguin Books (first published 1860)

ISBN : 9780140432114

Author : John Ruskin , Clive Wilmer (Editor)

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Writing, Essays, Politics, Nonfiction, Art, Classics, Economics

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From Reader Review Unto This Last and Other Writings for online ebook

Nordo says

Interesting but flawed scio/economic theories of a forgot scholar.

Benjamin Dawson says

On the back of this book it says that Proust declared of Ruskin: "He will teach me, for is not he, too, in some degree the Truth?"

This is one of the most interesting and compelling works of non-fiction I've read, ever. A monumental thinker.

Graychin says

Ruskin believed in the Middle Ages and resented that they had ever ended. In this particular book – a collection of four lectures on contemporary economics, published in 1862 – the Middle Ages are not exactly front and center. They hover in the background, however, and Ruskin achieves an unexpected synthesis in prescribing a sort of socialism which is also, clearly, an echo of the ancient guild system.

Brian says

Ruskin, known primarily as an art historian and critic, had the far-ranging genius needed to take on socio-economic and political theorizing as well. This collection is a difficult read, but is surprisingly relevant for today's global economic crisis. If only the various wings of the Tea Party would read this, the destructive faith in the oxymoronic Free Market ideology might lose some of its hold on them. And the Christian elements would delight in and get righteously schooled by Ruskin's complete mastery of the Bible (even though, at the time, he had lost his belief, holding on to the moral principles while letting go of the dogma, as my teacher, Richard Fadem, has pointed out).

Richard Thompson says

There is a reason why Ruskin is remembered as an art critic and not as an economist. There are so many fallacies in these essays that after a while I quit trying to analyze them and just let the words flow over me. Ruskin did write well, so the flow of the words gives a certain pleasure. Ruskin had a good heart, and he was not the only one to see the heartlessness in the theories and practices of classical economics. But Ruskin's response to this problem is to prescribe that we all must behave like Victorian gentlemen. Oh please, let's be real about this — Victorian gentleman engaged in a lot more immoral behavior and caused a lot more

suffering than all of Dickens' "hard facts" men put together. If you really think that the system is rotten, let's go all the way with Karl Marx and work to bring the whole mess crashing down, so that maybe something better will rise in its wake. Or temper the harshness of classical economics with concepts drawn from psychology, sociology and behavioral economics, taking into account our frailty, irrationality and basic desire to do good. But god save us from the scourge of Victorian gentleman.

Joseph Kugelmass says

The glorious first blossoms of a mature, modern utopianism.

Edward says

Introduction

Chronology

Further Reading

Commentary

--The King of the Golden River, or The Black Brothers: A Legend of Stiria (1841)

from **The Stones of Venice**, Volume II: The Sea-Stories (1853)

Commentary

--The Nature of Gothic

from **The Two Paths: Lectures on Art and its application to Decoration and Manufacture** (1859)

Commentary

--The Work of Iron, in Nature, Art, and Policy

from **Modern Painters**, Volume V Part IX: Of Invention Spiritual (1860)

Commentary

--The Two Boyhoods

Unto This Last

--Preface

--Essay I: The Roots of Honour

--Essay II: The Veins of Wealth

--Essay III: Qui Judicatis Terram

--Essay IV: Ad Valorem

from **The Crown of Wild Olive: Four Lectures on Industry and War** (1866)

Commentary

--Traffic

from **Sesame and Lilies: Two Lectures** (1865)

Commentary

--Of Kings' Treasuries

from **Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain** (1871-1884)

Commentary

--Letter 7: Charitas

--Letter 10: The Baron's Gate

Notes

John R Naugle says

Wow! I learned through a wiki-page that this book greatly influenced Gandhi. It stated: "... he received a copy of Ruskin's "Unto This Last" from a British friend, Mr. Henry Polak, while working as a lawyer in South Africa in 1904. In his Autobiography, Gandhi remembers the twenty-four hour train ride to Durban (from when he first read the book), being so in the grip of Ruskin's ideas that he could not sleep at all. Gandhi said: "I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.

Jacob Aitken says

John Ruskin gives us a vision of life that is strangely united: how do a few essays about art, architecture, and economic reform relate to one another? Indeed, much of Unto this Last seems disjointed—and not all essays are of equal worth; some are quite dated and others are just weird. Notwithstanding, rays of light break through and give us an alternative way of being and community.

Ruskin uses current (19th century) capitalism as his foil and “bad guy.” This will cause many free-marketers to bristle. Not without reason will they consider Ruskin a “socialist.” However, one must also consider that the days of the Industrial Revolution were quite grim. Whatever benefits it provided—and we cannot minimize the eventual breakthroughs in wealth—it was brutal and harsh. However, in reading Ruskin, we find this is not the worst criticism he throws at capitalism. It is not the fact that capitalism destroyed lives and introduced 16 hour workdays to the children. Rather, it was only the symptoms of a greater disease: Western world at this time had a view of reality that was violent and pragmatic, an ontology of violence if you will. Unfortunately, this is the weaker part of the book. Many of Ruskin’s proposals—uniform wage among other things—will strike the reader as bizarre, at best. Fortunately, I think Ruskin’s vision can be redeemed.

The following will be part Ruskin’s proposals and partly my own reconstruction of Ruskin’s thought. Ruskin proposes a Gothic society. Whether or not he truly understood it, Ruskin’s vision is not too different from Augustine’s in City of God book 19.4 and certainly echoes much of Plato’s thought in The Republic. Ruskin notes that a society’s architecture reflects its moral vision (233-234, 237). A Gothic society is one that arises out of a pure national faith and domestic virtue (239). This sounds like fascism, doesn’t it? That’s not what Ruskin has in mind. Following St Augustine, who reasoned that a society is one that shares its common objects and commonly loves its Object. Therefore, a pure national faith is nothing other than a society worshipping Christ and reflecting it, among other things, in its architecture.

Paul says

Ruskin may have been a social critic of the time, but his works does little to inspire the world of today. His only contribution to today's society is how to appreciate gothic architecture. To address your readership as delusional is not a great way to introduce yourself. It's almost as if you're telling your reader that they can't make up their own mind. This fierce attack leads onto a capitalist rant, much of which is hard to follow and the ideas come thick and fast without thought for his readership. It's also quite strange that someone who has such a strong view on communism is also very appreciative of gothic structures; since this form of architecture represents the highest social status. He also believes that to complete a task requires the sacrifice of a soul, but if the worker never enjoyed producing the architecture; then the piece should not have been attempted. There are some very mixed views here.

Steven Wedgeworth says

This is an excellent critique of certain forms of capitalism conceived apart from ethics. Ruskin's main target is John Stuart Mill, and I think he hits his mark. Ruskin's philosophy is grounded in a sort of classical virtue ethics and natural theology. I think any serious Christian engagement with economics will need to take this line of thought very seriously. I hated his practical solutions, of course, but the conceptual critique seems sound on its own.

Stevecernak says

Unto This Last is the best political economy essays I've read. Ruskin's business was art and made his living as a critic. This does not seem to be the best foundation for a political economist but it does once you start reading... great art is not made possible without the distribution of wealth being directed in a way where society values its creation.

If that description sounds left, it is, and Unto This Last ultimately shaped Gandhi's philosophies and put them into practice when he started his newspaper in 1908, the Indian Opinion, where all employees were paid the same salary regardless of function or race or nationality. He also translated the book into Gujarati in 1908.

Pandafeet says

Heavy going for me but with moments of brilliance.

Marts (Thinker) says

Essays on the principles of political economy by John Ruskin.

The essays are as follows:

Essay 1 - The Roots of Honour

Essay 2 - The Veins of Wealth

Essay 3 - Qui Judicatis Terram

Essay 4 - Ad Valorem

As summed up in the closing remarks:

"And if, on due and honest thought over these things, it seems that the kind of existence to which men are now summoned by every plea of pity and claim of right, may, for some time at least, not be a luxurious one; -- consider whether, even supposing it guiltless, luxury would be desired by any of us, if we saw clearly at our sides the suffering which accompanies it in the world. Luxury is indeed possible in the future -- innocent and exquisite; luxury for all, and by the help of all; but luxury at present can only be enjoyed by the ignorant; the cruellest man living could not sit at his feast, unless he sat blindfold. Raise the veil boldly; face the light; and if, as yet, the light of the eye can only be through tears, and the light of the body through sackcloth, go thou forth weeping, bearing precious seed, until the time come, and the kingdom, when Christ's gift of bread, and bequest of peace, shall be "Unto this last as unto thee"; and when, for earth's severed multitudes of the wicked and the weary, there shall be holier reconciliation than that of the narrow home, and calm economy, where the Wicked cease -- not from trouble, but from troubling -- and the Weary are at rest."

Haythem Bastawy says

This is Ruskin at his best. The four chapters are very organised, he masterly refuted economic theories and typically tried to add the human factor and the human value to the economic equation. The book is a credit for a highly acclaimed art critic, who very easily, it seems, criticised economic theories and made it look as though he could really criticise anything and add valuable opinions to every street of life.

It is no wonder he got attacked in an age when capitalism was at its most vicious peak in England. I wish he had enough confidence to complete it though. He had his own printing house, so it was only a matter of confidence that stood between him and the unwritten part of the book, and what was planned to be serialised could have easily joined the rest of the essays in the union of a printer's spine.

My main reservation on the book is its mythical dimension. Ruskin, it seems, is never able to detach himself fully from the mythical world that runs in his brain. Even when he is discussing theories of economics and application of commerce, refuting political economists and trade experts, the mythical element has to still come up. He couldn't help it though, if this was his frame of mind
