

OSCAR WILDE



THE SOUL OF MAN  
(UNDER SOCIALISM)



PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS &  
DISCUSSIONS  
FOR LAND & FREEDOM

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE ‘ANARCHIVE’  
“Anarchy is Order!”

*I must Create a System or be enslav'd by  
another Man's.  
I will not Reason & Compare: my business  
is to Create'*  
(William Blake)

During the 19th century, anarchism has developed as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, disappear little by little under the dust of history.

After the classical anarchism – of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives—a ‘new’ kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as ‘Anarchy is order’, ‘Property is theft’,...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disappearing. The ‘anarchive’ or ‘anarchist archive’ Anarchy is Order ( in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the ‘**principles, propositions and discussions**’ of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don't belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists and other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new impulse, to let the ‘new anarchism’ outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain

standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

**‘Anarchy Is Order’ does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives.**

**Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing texts from the CD (collecting all available texts at a given moment) that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts to friends and new ones to us,... Become your own anarchiv!!!**

(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and autors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchiv offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

*“...demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters down here;  
and the dirty microbes that send us dark diseases and wish to  
squash us like horseflies;  
and the will- ‘o-the-wisp of the saddest ignorance.”*

(L-P. Boon)

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us. Don’t mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism, cooperation can be sent to [A.O@advalvas.be](mailto:A.O@advalvas.be).

A complete list and updates are available on this address, new texts are always

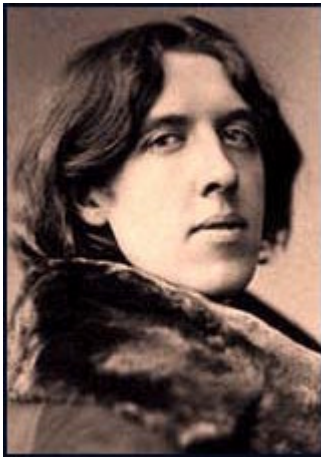
**WELCOME!!**

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(From:

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/>)



Oscar Wilde was born in [Dublin](#) in 1854. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin and Magdalen College, [Oxford](#). A brilliant student, his poem *Ravenna* won the 1878 Newdigate Prize. Soon after leaving university his first volume of poetry, *Patience*, was published. In 1880 Wilde went on a lecture tour of the USA. When immigration officials asked him if he had anything to declare he replied, "Only my genius".

Wilde married Constance Lloyd in 1884 and the couple had two sons. When the boys were children Wilde wrote fairy stories for them that were later published as *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888). This was followed two years later by the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and a book on the role of the artist, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891).

However, it was a playwright that Wilde had his greatest success. Comedies such as *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) made him one of Britain's most famous writers.

By 1895 Wilde had left his wife and began having an homosexual affair with Alfred Douglas. When the Marquis of Queensberry heard about his son's relationship with Wilde, he publicly accused the writer of being a "ponce and sodomite". Wilde sued for libel but he lost his case and was then himself prosecuted and imprisoned for homosexuality under the terms of the [Criminal Law Amendment Act](#).

After being released from Reading Prison in 1897 Wilde moved to [France](#). The following year he wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, a poem inspired by his prison experience. Wilde's time in prison badly damaged his health and he died in 1900.

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(1) Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891)

Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion. Sometimes the poor are praised for being thrifty. But to recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less. For a town or country labourer to practise thrift would be absolutely immoral. Man should not be ready to show that he can live like a badly fed animal. Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete state, there would be no advance towards civilization.

(2) Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*  
(1891)

In old days men had the rack. Now they have the press. That is an improvement certainly. But still it is very bad, wrong, and demoralizing. Somebody - was it Burke? - called journalism the fourth estate. That was true at the time, no doubt. But at the present moment it really is the only estate. It has eaten up the other three. The Lords Temporal say nothing, the Lords Spiritual have nothing to say, and the House of Commons has nothing to say and says it. We are dominated by Journalism.

# THE SOUL OF MAN (UNDER SOCIALISM)

BY OSCAR WILDE

From [Encyclopedia](#) [Index](#)  
<http://encyclopediaindex.com/index.shtml>  
<http://www.selfknowledge.com/464au.htm>  
The Soul of Man Under Socialism  
by [Oscar Wilde](#)  
Hypertext Meanings and Commentaries  
from the *Encyclopedia of the Self*  
([http://encyclopediaindex.com/self\\_encyclopedia.htm](http://encyclopediaindex.com/self_encyclopedia.htm))  
by Mark Zimmerman

**The chief advantage** that would result from the establishment of Socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that Socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present [condition](#) of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody. In fact, scarcely anyone at all escapes.

Now and then, in the course of the century, a great man of science, like Darwin; a great poet, like Keats; a fine critical [spirit](#), like M. Renan; a supreme artist, like Flaubert, has been able to isolate [himself](#), to keep [himself](#) out of reach of the clamorous claims of others, to stand 'under the shelter of the wall,' as Plato puts it, and so to realise the perfection of what was in him, to his own incomparable gain, and to the incomparable and lasting gain of the whole world. These, however, are exceptions. The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism - are forced,



indeed, so to spoil them. They find [themselves](#) surrounded by hideous poverty, by hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation. It is inevitable that they should be strongly moved by all this. The [emotions](#) of man are stirred more quickly than man's intelligence; and, as I pointed out some time ago in an article on the function of criticism, it is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with [thought](#). Accordingly, with admirable, though misdirected intentions, they very seriously and very sentimentally set [themselves](#) to the task of remedying the evils that they [see](#). But their remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease.

They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor.

But this is not a solution: it is an aggravation of the difficulty. The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible. And the altruistic [virtues](#) have [really](#) prevented the carrying out of this aim. Just as the worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system [being](#) realised by those who suffered from it, and [understood](#) by those who contemplated it, so, in the present [state](#) of things in England, the people who do most harm are the people who try to do most [good](#); and at last we have had the spectacle of men who have [really](#) studied the problem and [know](#) the life - educated men who live in the East End - coming forward and imploring the community to restrain its altruistic impulses of charity, [benevolence](#), and the like. They do so on the ground that such charity degrades and demoralises. They are perfectly right. Charity creates a multitude of sins.

There is also this to be said. It is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property. It is both immoral and unfair.

Under Socialism all this will, of course, be altered. There will be no people living in fetid dens and fetid rags, and bringing up unhealthy, hunger-pinched children in the midst of impossible and absolutely repulsive surroundings. The security of society will not depend, as it does now, on the [state](#) of the weather. If a frost comes we shall not have a hundred thousand men out of work, tramping about the streets in a [state](#) of disgusting misery, or whining to their neighbours for alms, or crowding round the doors of loathsome shelters to try and secure a hunch of bread and a night's unclean lodging. Each member of the society will share in the general prosperity and [happiness](#) of the society, and if a frost comes no one will practically be anything the worse.

Upon the other hand, Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism.

Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition, will restore society to its proper [condition](#) of a thoroughly healthy organism, and insure the material well-being of each member of the community. It will, in fact, give Life its proper basis and its proper environment. But for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection, something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism. If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial Tyrannies, then the last [state](#) of man will be worse than the first. At present, in consequence of the [existence](#) of private property, a great many people are

enabled to develop a certain very limited amount of Individualism. They are either under no necessity to work for their living, or are enabled to choose the sphere of activity that is really congenial to them, and gives them pleasure. These are the poets, the philosophers, the men of science, the men of culture - in a word, the real men, the men who have realised themselves, and in whom all Humanity gains a partial realisation. Upon the other hand, there are a great many people who, having no private property of their own, and being always on the brink of sheer starvation, are compelled to do the work of beasts of burden, to do work that is quite uncongenial to them, and to which they are forced by the peremptory, unreasonable, degrading Tyranny of want. These are the poor, and amongst them there is no grace of manner, or charm of speech, or civilisation, or culture, or refinement in pleasures, or joy of life. From their collective force Humanity gains much in material prosperity. But it is only the material result that it gains, and the man who is poor is in himself absolutely of no importance. He is merely the infinitesimal atom of a force that, so far from regarding him, crushes him: indeed, prefers him crushed, as in that case he is far more obedient.

Of course, it might be said that the Individualism generated under conditions of private property is not always, or even as a rule, of a fine or wonderful type, and that the poor, if they have not culture and charm, have still many virtues. Both these statements would be quite true. The possession of private property is very often extremely demoralising, and that is, of course, one of the reasons why Socialism wants to get rid of the institution. In fact, property is really a nuisance. Some years ago people went about the country saying that property has duties. They said it so often and so tediously that, at last, the Church has begun to say it.

One [hears](#) it now from every pulpit. It is perfectly [true](#). Property not merely has duties, but has so many duties that its possession to any large extent is a bore. It involves endless claims upon one, endless attention to business, endless bother. If property had simply [pleasures](#), we could stand it; but its duties make it unbearable. In the interest of the rich we must get rid of it. The [virtues](#) of the poor may be readily admitted, and are much to be regretted. We are often told that the poor are grateful for charity. Some of them are, no [doubt](#), but the best amongst the poor are never grateful. They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so. Charity they [feel](#) to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or a sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent attempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannise over their private lives. Why should they be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to [know](#) it. As for [being](#) discontented, a man who would not be discontented with such surroundings and such a low mode of life would be a perfect brute. Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original [virtue](#). It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion. Sometimes the poor are praised for [being](#) thrifty. But to recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less. For a town or country labourer to practise thrift would be absolutely immoral. Man should not be ready to show that he can live like a badly-fed animal. He should decline to live like that, and should either steal or go on the rates, which is considered by many to be a [form](#) of stealing. As for begging, it is safer to beg than to take, but it is finer to

take than to beg. No: a poor man who is ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious, is probably a [real](#) personality, and has much in him. He is at any rate a healthy protest. As for the [virtuous](#) poor, one can [pity](#) them, of course, but one cannot possibly admire them. They have made private terms with the enemy, and sold their birthright for very bad pottage. They must also be extraordinarily stupid. I can quite [understand](#) a man [accepting](#) laws that protect private property, and admit of its accumulation, as long as he [himself](#) is able under those [conditions](#) to realize some [form](#) of beautiful and intellectual life. But it is almost incredible to me how a man whose life is marred and made hideous by such laws can possibly acquiesce in their [continuance](#).

However, the explanation is not [really](#) difficult to find. It is simply this. Misery and poverty are so absolutely degrading, and exercise such a paralysing [effect](#) over the nature of men, that no class is ever [really conscious](#) of its own suffering. They have to be told of it by other people, and they often entirely disbelieve them. What is said by great employers of labour against agitators is unquestionably [true](#). Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete [state](#), there would be no advance towards civilisation. Slavery was put down in America, not in consequence of any action on the part of the slaves, or even any express [desire](#) on their part that they should be free. It was put down entirely through the grossly illegal conduct of certain agitators in Boston and elsewhere, who were not slaves [themselves](#), nor owners of slaves, nor had anything to do with the question [really](#). It was, undoubtedly, the Abolitionists who set the torch alight,

who began the whole thing. And it is curious to note that from the slaves [themselves](#) they received, not merely very little assistance, but hardly any sympathy even; and when at the close of the war the slaves found [themselves](#) free, found [themselves](#) indeed so absolutely free that they were free to starve, many of them [bitterly](#) regretted the new [state](#) of things. To the [thinker](#), the most tragic fact in the whole of the French Revolution is not that Marie Antoinette was killed for [being](#) a queen, but that the starved peasant of the Vendee voluntarily went out to die for the hideous cause of feudalism.

It is clear, then, that no Authoritarian Socialism will do. For while under the present system a very large number of people can lead lives of a certain amount of freedom and expression and [happiness](#), under an industrial-barrack system, or a system of economic tyranny, nobody would be able to have any such freedom at all. It is to be regretted that a portion of our community should be practically in slavery, but to propose to solve the problem by enslaving the entire community is childish. Every man must be left quite free to choose his own work. No [form](#) of compulsion must be exercised over him. If there is, his work will not be [good](#) for him, will not be [good](#) in itself, and will not be [good](#) for others. And by work I simply mean activity of any kind.

I hardly [think](#) that any Socialist, nowadays, would seriously propose that an inspector should call every morning at each house to [see](#) that each citizen rose up and did manual labour for eight hours. Humanity has got beyond that stage, and reserves such a [form](#) of life for the people whom, in a very arbitrary manner, it chooses to call criminals. But I confess that many of the socialistic views that I have come across seem to me to be tainted with ideas of authority, if not of actual compulsion. Of course, authority and compulsion are out

of the question. All association must be quite voluntary. It is only in voluntary associations that man is fine.

But it may be asked how Individualism, which is now more or less dependent on the [existence](#) of private property for its development, will benefit by the abolition of such private property. The answer is very simple. It is [true](#) that, under [existing conditions](#), a few men who have had private means of their own, such as Byron, Shelley, Browning, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and others, have been able to realise their personality more or less completely. Not one of these men ever did a single day's work for hire. They were relieved from poverty. They had an immense advantage. The question is whether it would be for the [good](#) of Individualism that such an advantage should be taken away. Let us suppose that it is taken away. What happens then to Individualism? How will it benefit?

It will benefit in this way. Under the new [conditions](#) Individualism will be far freer, far finer, and far more intensified than it is now. [I am](#) not talking of the great imaginatively-realised Individualism of such poets as I have mentioned, but of the great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally. For the recognition of private property has [really](#) harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by [confusing](#) a man with what he possesses. It has led Individualism entirely astray. It has made gain not [growth](#) its aim. So that man [thought](#) that the important thing was to have, and did not [know](#) that the important thing is to be. The [true](#) perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is.

Private property has crushed [true](#) Individualism, and set up an Individualism that is false. It has debarred one part of the community from [being](#) individual by starving them. It has debarred the other part of the community

from [being](#) individual by putting them on the wrong road, and encumbering them. Indeed, so completely has man's personality been absorbed by his possessions that the English law has always treated offences against a man's property with far more severity than offences against his person, and property is still the test of complete citizenship. The industry necessary for the making money is also very demoralising. In a community like ours, where property confers immense distinction, social position, honour, respect, titles, and other [pleasant](#) things of the kind, man, [being](#) naturally ambitious, makes it his aim to accumulate this property, and goes on wearily and tediously accumulating it long after he has got far more than he wants, or can use, or [enjoy](#), or perhaps even [know](#) of. Man will kill [himself](#) by overwork in order to secure property, and [really](#), considering the enormous advantages that property brings, one is hardly surprised. One's regret is that society should be constructed on such a basis that man has been forced into a groove in which he cannot freely develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in him - in which, in fact, he misses the [true pleasure](#) and [joy](#) of living. He is also, under [existing conditions](#), very insecure. An enormously wealthy merchant may be - often is - at every moment of his life at the [mercy](#) of things that are not under his control. If the wind blows an extra point or so, or the weather suddenly changes, or some trivial thing happens, his ship may go down, his speculations may go wrong, and he finds [himself](#) a poor man, with his social position quite gone. Now, nothing should be able to harm a man except [himself](#). Nothing should be able to rob a man at all. What a man [really](#) has, is what is in him. What is outside of him should be a matter of no importance.



With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have [true](#), beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people [exist](#), that is all.

It is a question whether we have ever [seen](#) the full expression of a personality, except on the imaginative plane of art. In action, we never have. Caesar, says Mommsen, was the complete and perfect man. But how tragically insecure was Caesar! Wherever there is a man who exercises authority, there is a man who resists authority. Caesar was very perfect, but his perfection travelled by too dangerous a road. Marcus Aurelius was the perfect man, says Renan. Yes; the great emperor was a perfect man. But how intolerable were the endless claims upon him! He staggered under the burden of the empire. He was [conscious](#) how inadequate one man was to bear the weight of that Titan and too vast orb. What I mean by a perfect man is one who develops under perfect [conditions](#); one who is not wounded, or worried or maimed, or in danger. Most personalities have been obliged to be rebels. Half their strength has been wasted in friction. Byron's personality, for instance, was terribly wasted in its battle with the stupidity, and hypocrisy, and Philistinism of the English. Such battles do not always intensify strength: they often exaggerate weakness. Byron was never able to give us what he might have given us. Shelley escaped better. Like Byron, he got out of England as soon as possible. But he was not so well [known](#). If the English had had any idea of what a great poet he [really](#) was, they would have fallen on him with tooth and nail, and made his life as unbearable to him as they possibly could. But he was not a remarkable figure in society, and consequently he escaped, to a certain degree. Still, even in Shelley the note of rebellion is

sometimes too strong. The note of the perfect personality is not rebellion, but peace.

It will be a marvellous thing - the [true](#) personality of man – when we [see](#) it. It will [grow](#) naturally and simply, flowerlike, or as a tree [grows](#). It will not be at discord. It will never argue or dispute. It will not prove things. It will [know](#) everything. And yet it will not busy itself about [knowledge](#). It will have [wisdom](#). Its value will not be measured by material things. It will have nothing. And yet it will have everything, and whatever one takes from it, it will still have, so rich will it be. It will not be always meddling with others, or asking them to be like itself. It will love them because they will be different. And yet while it will not meddle with others, it will [help](#) all, as a beautiful thing [helps](#) us, by [being](#) what it is. The personality of man will be very wonderful. It will be as wonderful as the personality of a child.

In its development it will be assisted by Christianity, if men [desire](#) that; but if men do not [desire](#) that, it will develop none the less surely. For it will not worry itself about the past, nor care whether things happened or did not happen. Nor will it admit any laws but its own laws; nor any authority but its own authority. Yet it will love those who sought to intensify it, and speak often of them. And of these Christ was one.

'Know thyself' was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, 'Be thyself' shall be written. And the message of Christ to man was simply 'Be [thyself](#).' That is the secret of Christ.

When Jesus talks about the poor he simply means personalities, just as when he talks about the rich he simply means people who have not developed their personalities. Jesus moved in a community that allowed the accumulation of private property just as ours does, and the gospel that he preached was not that in such a

community it is an advantage for a man to live on scanty, unwholesome food, to wear ragged, unwholesome clothes, to sleep in horrid, unwholesome dwellings, and a disadvantage for a man to live under healthy, [pleasant](#), and decent [conditions](#). Such a view would have been wrong there and then, and would, of course, be still more wrong now and in England; for as man moves northward the material necessities of life become of more vital importance, and our society is infinitely more complex, and displays far greater extremes of luxury and pauperism than any society of the antique world. What Jesus meant, was this. He said to man, 'You have a wonderful personality. Develop it. Be [yourself](#). Don't imagine that your perfection lies in accumulating or possessing external things. Your affection is inside of you. If only you could realise that, you would not want to be rich. Ordinary riches can be stolen from a man. [Real](#) riches cannot. In the treasury-house of your [soul](#), there are infinitely precious things, that may not be taken from you. And so, try to so shape your life that external things will not harm you. And try also to get rid of personal property. It involves sordid preoccupation, endless industry, [continual](#) wrong. Personal property hinders Individualism at every step.' It is to be noted that Jesus never says that impoverished people are necessarily [good](#), or wealthy people necessarily bad. That would not have been [true](#). Wealthy people are, as a class, better than impoverished people, more moral, more intellectual, more well-behaved. There is only one class in the community that [thinks](#) more about money than the rich, and that is the poor. The poor can [think](#) of nothing else. That is the misery of [being](#) poor. What Jesus does say is that man reaches his perfection, not through what he has, not even through what he does, but entirely through what he is. And so the wealthy young

man who comes to Jesus is represented as a thoroughly [good](#) citizen, who has broken none of the laws of his [state](#), none of the commandments of his religion. He is quite respectable, in the ordinary sense of that extraordinary word. Jesus says to him, 'You should give up private property. It hinders you from realizing your perfection. It is a drag upon you. It is a burden. Your personality does not need it. It is within you, and not outside of you, that you will find what you [really](#) are, and what you [really](#) want.' To his own friends he says the same thing. He tells them to be [themselves](#), and not to be always worrying about other things. What do other things matter? Man is complete in [himself](#). When they go into the world, the world will disagree with them. That is inevitable. The world [hates](#) Individualism. But that is not to trouble them. They are to be calm and self-centred. If a man takes their cloak, they are to give him their coat, just to show that material things are of no importance. If people abuse them, they are not to answer back. What does it signify? The things people say of a man do not alter a man. He is what he is. Public opinion is of no value whatsoever. Even if people employ actual violence, they are not to be violent in turn. That would be to fall to the same low level. After all, even in prison, a man can be quite free. His [soul](#) can be free. His personality can be untroubled. He can be at peace. And, above all things, they are not to interfere with other people or judge them in any way. Personality is a very mysterious thing. A man cannot always be estimated by what he does. He may keep the law, and yet be worthless. He may break the law, and yet be fine. He may be bad, without ever doing anything bad. He may commit a sin against society, and yet realise through that sin his [true](#) perfection.

There was a woman who was taken in adultery. We are not told the history of her love, but that love must have been very great; for Jesus said that her sins were [forgiven](#) her, not because she repented, but because her love was so intense and wonderful. Later on, a short time before his death, as he sat at a feast, the woman came in and poured costly perfumes on his hair. His friends tried to interfere with her, and said that it was an extravagance, and that the money that the perfume cost should have been expended on charitable relief of people in want, or something of that kind. Jesus did not [accept](#) that view. He pointed out that the material needs of Man were great and very permanent, but that the [spiritual](#) needs of Man were greater still, and that in one divine moment, and by selecting its own mode of expression, a personality might make itself perfect. The world worships the woman, even now, as a saint.

Yes; there are suggestive things in Individualism. Socialism annihilates family life, for instance. With the abolition of private property, marriage in its present [form](#) must disappear. This is part of the programme. Individualism [accepts](#) this and makes it fine. It converts the abolition of legal restraint into a [form](#) of freedom that will [help](#) the full development of personality, and make the love of man and woman more wonderful, more beautiful, and more [ennobling](#). Jesus [knew](#) this. He rejected the claims of family life, although they [existed](#) in his day and community in a very marked [form](#). 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' he said, when he was told that they wished to speak to him. When one of his followers asked leave to go and bury his father, 'Let the dead bury the dead,' was his terrible answer. He would allow no claim whatsoever to be made on personality.

And so he who would lead a Christlike life is he who is perfectly and absolutely [himself](#). He may be a great poet, or a great man of science; or a young student at a University, or one who watches sheep upon a moor; or a maker of dramas, like Shakespeare, or a [thinker](#) about God, like Spinoza; or a child who plays in a garden, or a fisherman who throws his net into the sea. It does not matter what he is, as long as he realises the perfection of the [soul](#) that is within him. All imitation in morals and in life is wrong. Through the streets of Jerusalem at the present day crawls one who is mad and carries a wooden cross on his shoulders. He is a symbol of the lives that are marred by imitation. Father Damien was Christlike when he went out to live with the lepers, because in such service he realised fully what was best in him. But he was not more Christlike than Wagner when he realised his [soul](#) in music; or than Shelley, when he realised his [soul](#) in song. There is no one type for man. There are as many perfections as there are imperfect men. And while to the claims of charity a man may yield and yet be free, to the claims of conformity no man may yield and remain free at all.

Individualism, then, is what through Socialism we are to [attain](#) to. As a natural result the State must give up all idea of government. It must give it up because, as a [wise](#) man once said many centuries before Christ, there is such a thing as leaving mankind [alone](#); there is no such thing as governing mankind. All modes of government are failures. Despotism is unjust to everybody, including the despot, who was probably made for better things. Oligarchies are unjust to the many, and ochlocracies are unjust to the few. High hopes were once formed of democracy; but democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people. It has been found out. I must say that it was high time,

for all authority is quite degrading. It degrades those who exercise it, and degrades those over whom it is exercised. When it is violently, grossly, and cruelly used, it produces a [good effect](#), by creating, or at any rate bringing out, the [spirit](#) of revolt and Individualism that is to kill it. When it is used with a certain amount of kindness, and accompanied by prizes and rewards, it is dreadfully demoralising. People, in that case, are less [conscious](#) of the horrible pressure that is [being](#) put on them, and so go through their lives in a sort of coarse [comfort](#), like petted animals, without ever realising that they are probably [thinking](#) other people's [thoughts](#), living by other people's standards, wearing practically what one may call other people's second-hand clothes, and never [being themselves](#) for a single moment. 'He who would be free,' says a fine [thinker](#), 'must not conform.' And authority, by bribing people to conform, produces a very gross kind of over-fed barbarism amongst us.

With authority, punishment will pass away. This will be a great gain - a gain, in fact, of incalculable value. As one reads history, not in the expurgated editions written for school-boys and passmen, but in the original authorities of each time, one is absolutely sickened, not by the crimes that the wicked have committed, but by the punishments that the [good](#) have inflicted; and a community is infinitely more brutalised by the habitual employment of punishment, than it is by the occurrence of crime. It obviously follows that the more punishment is inflicted the more crime is produced, and most modern legislation has clearly recognised this, and has made it its task to diminish punishment as far as it [thinks](#) it can. Wherever it has [really](#) diminished it, the results have always been extremely [good](#). The less punishment, the less crime. When there is no punishment at all, crime will either [cease](#) to [exist](#), or, if it occurs, will be treated

by physicians as a very distressing [form](#) of dementia, to be cured by care and kindness. For what are called criminals nowadays are not criminals at all. Starvation, and not sin, is the parent of modern crime. That indeed is the reason why our criminals are, as a class, so absolutely uninteresting from any psychological point of view. They are not marvellous Macbeths and terrible Vautrins. They are merely what ordinary, respectable, commonplace people would be if they had not got enough to eat. When private property is abolished there will be no necessity for crime, no demand for it; it will [cease](#) to [exist](#). Of course, all crimes are not crimes against property, though such are the crimes that the English law, valuing what a man has more than what a man is, punishes with the harshest and most horrible severity, if we except the crime of murder, and regard death as worse than penal servitude, a point on which our criminals, I believe, disagree. But though a crime may not be against property, it may spring from the misery and rage and [depression](#) produced by our wrong system of property-holding, and so, when that system is abolished, will disappear. When each member of the community has sufficient for his wants, and is not interfered with by his neighbour, it will not be an [object](#) of any interest to him to interfere with anyone else. [Jealousy](#), which is an extraordinary source of crime in modern life, is an [emotion](#) closely bound up with our conceptions of property, and under Socialism and Individualism will die out. It is remarkable that in communistic tribes [jealousy](#) is entirely unknown.

Now as the State is not to govern, it may be asked what the State is to do. The State is to be a voluntary association that will organise labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities. The State is to make what is useful. The individual is to



make what is beautiful. And as I have mentioned the word labour, I cannot [help](#) saying that a great deal of nonsense is [being](#) written and talked nowadays about the dignity of manual labour. There is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labour at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading. It is mentally and morally injurious to man to do anything in which he does not find [pleasure](#), and many [forms](#) of labour are quite [pleasureless](#) activities, and should be regarded as such. To sweep a slushy crossing for eight hours, on a day when the east wind is blowing is a disgusting occupation. To sweep it with mental, moral, or physical dignity seems to me to be impossible. To sweep it with [joy](#) would be appalling. Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. All work of that kind should be done by a machine.

And I have no [doubt](#) that it will be so. Up to the present, man has been, to a certain extent, the slave of machinery, and there is something tragic in the fact that as soon as man had invented a machine to do his work he began to starve. This, however, is, of course, the result of our property system and our system of competition. One man owns a machine which does the work of five hundred men. Five hundred men are, in consequence, thrown out of employment, and, having no work to do, become hungry and take to thieving. The one man secures the produce of the machine and keeps it, and has five hundred times as much as he should have, and probably, which is of much more importance, a great deal more than he [really](#) wants. Were that machine the property of all, every one would benefit by it. It would be an immense advantage to the community. All unintellectual labour, all monotonous, dull labour, all labour that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant [conditions](#), must be done by machinery. Machinery must work for us

in coal mines, and do all sanitary services, and be the stoker of steamers, and clean the streets, and run messages on wet days, and do anything that is tedious or distressing. At present machinery competes against man. Under proper [conditions](#) machinery will serve man. There is no [doubt](#) at all that this is the future of machinery, and just as trees [grow](#) while the country gentleman is asleep, so while Humanity will be amusing itself, or [enjoying](#) cultivated leisure - which, and not labour, is the aim of man – or making beautiful things, or reading beautiful things, or simply contemplating the world with admiration and delight, machinery will be doing all the necessary and unpleasant work. The fact is, that civilisation requires slaves. The Greeks were quite right there. Unless there are slaves to do the ugly, horrible, uninteresting work, culture and contemplation become almost impossible. Human slavery is wrong, insecure, and demoralising. On mechanical slavery, on the slavery of the machine, the future of the world depends. And when scientific men are no longer called upon to go down to a [depressing](#) East End and distribute bad cocoa and worse blankets to starving people, they will have delightful leisure in which to devise wonderful and marvellous things for their own [joy](#) and the [joy](#) of everyone else. There will be great storages of force for every city, and for every house if required, and this force man will convert into heat, light, or motion, according to his needs. Is this Utopian? A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, [seeing](#) a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.

Now, I have said that the community by means of organisation of machinery will supply the useful things,

and that the beautiful things will be made by the individual. This is not merely necessary, but it is the only possible way by which we can get either the one or the other. An individual who has to make things for the use of others, and with reference to their wants and their wishes, does not work with interest, and consequently cannot put into his work what is best in him. Upon the other hand, whenever a community or a powerful section of a community, or a government of any kind, attempts to dictate to the artist what he is to do, Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble [form](#) of craft. A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want. Indeed, the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he [ceases](#) to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or a dishonest tradesman. He has no further claim to be considered as an artist. Art is the most intense mode of Individualism that the world has [known](#). [I am](#) inclined to say that it is the only [real](#) mode of Individualism that the world has [known](#). Crime, which, under certain [conditions](#), may seem to have created Individualism, must take cognisance of other people and interfere with them. It belongs to the sphere of action. But [alone](#), without any reference to his neighbours, without any interference, the artist can fashion a beautiful thing; and if he does not do it solely for his own [pleasure](#), he is not an artist at all.

And it is to be noted that it is the fact that Art is this intense [form](#) of Individualism that makes the public try to exercise over it in an authority that is as immoral as it is ridiculous, and as corrupting as it is contemptible. It is not quite their fault. The public has always, and in every

age, been badly brought up. They are continually asking Art to be popular, to please their want of taste, to flatter their absurd vanity, to tell them what they have been told before, to show them what they ought to be tired of seeing, to amuse them when they feel heavy after eating too much, and to distract their thoughts when they are wearied of their own stupidity. Now Art should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself artistic. There is a very wide difference. If a man of science were told that the results of his experiments, and the conclusions that he arrived at, should be of such a character that they would not upset the received popular notions on the subject, or disturb popular prejudice, or hurt the sensibilities of people who knew nothing about science; if a philosopher were told that he had a perfect right to speculate in the highest spheres of thought, provided that he arrived at the same conclusions as were held by those who had never thought in any sphere at all - well, nowadays the man of science and the philosopher would be considerably amused. Yet it is really a very few years since both philosophy and science were subjected to brutal popular control, to authority - in fact the authority of either the general ignorance of the community, or the terror and greed for power of an ecclesiastical or governmental class. Of course, we have to a very great extent got rid of any attempt on the part of the community, or the Church, or the Government, to interfere with the individualism of speculative thought, but the attempt to interfere with the individualism of imaginative art still lingers. In fact, it does more than linger; it is aggressive, offensive, and brutalising.

In England, the arts that have escaped best are the arts in which the public take no interest. Poetry is an instance of what I mean. We have been able to have fine poetry in England because the public do not read it, and

consequently do not [influence](#) it. The public like to insult poets because they are individual, but once they have insulted them, they leave them [alone](#). In the case of the novel and the drama, arts in which the public do take an interest, the result of the exercise of popular authority has been absolutely ridiculous. No country produces such badly-written fiction, such tedious, common work in the novel [form](#), such silly, vulgar plays as England. It must necessarily be so. The popular standard is of such a [character](#) that no artist can get to it. It is at once too easy and too difficult to be a popular novelist. It is too easy, because the requirements of the public as far as plot, style, psychology, treatment of life, and treatment of literature are concerned are within the reach of the very meanest capacity and the most uncultivated [mind](#). It is too difficult, because to meet such requirements the artist would have to do violence to his temperament, would have to write not for the artistic [joy](#) of writing, but for the amusement of half-educated people, and so would have to suppress his individualism, forget his culture, annihilate his style, and surrender everything that is valuable in him. In the case of the drama, things are a little better: the theatre-going public like the obvious, it is [true](#), but they do not like the tedious; and burlesque and farcical comedy, the two most popular [forms](#), are distinct [forms](#) of art. Delightful work may be produced under burlesque and farcical [conditions](#), and in work of this kind the artist in England is allowed very great freedom. It is when one comes to the higher [forms](#) of the drama that the result of popular control is [seen](#). The one thing that the public dislike is novelty. Any attempt to extend the subject-matter of art is extremely distasteful to the public; and yet the vitality and progress of art depend in a large measure on the [continual](#) extension of subject-matter. The public dislike novelty because they

are afraid of it. It represents to them a mode of Individualism, an assertion on the part of the artist that he selects his own subject, and treats it as he chooses. The public are quite right in their [attitude](#). Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine. In Art, the public [accept](#) what has been, because they cannot alter it, not because they appreciate it. They swallow their classics whole, and never [taste](#) them. They endure them as the inevitable, and as they cannot mar them, they mouth about them. Strangely enough, or not strangely, according to one's own views, this [acceptance](#) of the classics does a great deal of harm. The uncritical admiration of the Bible and Shakespeare in England is an instance of what I mean. With regard to the Bible, considerations of ecclesiastical authority enter into the matter, so that I need not dwell upon the point. But in the case of Shakespeare it is quite obvious that the public [really see](#) neither the beauties nor the defects of his plays. If they [saw](#) the beauties, they would not [object](#) to the development of the drama; and if they [saw](#) the defects, they would not [object](#) to the development of the drama either. The fact is, the public make use of the classics of a country as a means of checking the progress of Art. They degrade the classics into authorities. They use them as bludgeons for preventing the free expression of Beauty in new [forms](#). They are always asking a writer why he does not write like somebody else, or a painter why he does not paint like somebody else, quite oblivious of the fact that if either of them did anything of the kind he would [cease](#) to be an artist. A fresh mode of Beauty is absolutely distasteful to them, and whenever it appears they get so

[angry](#), and bewildered that they always use two stupid expressions - one is that the work of art is grossly unintelligible; the other, that the work of art is grossly immoral. What they mean by these words seems to me to be this. When they say a work is grossly unintelligible, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is new; when they describe a work as grossly immoral, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is [true](#). The former expression has reference to style; the latter to subject-matter. But they probably use the words very vaguely, as an ordinary mob will use ready-made paving-stones. There is not a single [real](#) poet or prose-writer of this century, for instance, on whom the British public have not solemnly conferred diplomas of immorality, and these diplomas practically take the place, with us, of what in France, is the formal recognition of an Academy of Letters, and fortunately make the establishment of such an institution quite unnecessary in England. Of course, the public are very reckless in their use of the word. That they should have called Wordsworth an immoral poet, was only to be expected. Wordsworth was a poet. But that they should have called Charles Kingsley an immoral novelist is extraordinary. Kingsley's prose was not of a very fine quality. Still, there is the word, and they use it as best they can. An artist is, of course, not disturbed by it. The [true](#) artist is a man who believes absolutely in [himself](#), because he is absolutely [himself](#). But I can fancy that if an artist produced a work of art in England that immediately on its appearance was recognised by the public, through their medium, which is the public press, as a work that was quite intelligible and highly moral, he would begin to seriously question whether in its creation he had [really](#) been [himself](#) at all, and consequently whether the work was not quite unworthy of him, and

either of a thoroughly second-rate order, or of no artistic value whatsoever.

Perhaps, however, I have wronged the public in limiting them to such words as 'immoral,' 'unintelligible,' 'exotic,' and 'unhealthy.' There is one other word that they use. That word is 'morbid.' They do not use it often. The meaning of the word is so simple that they are afraid of using it. Still, they use it sometimes, and, now and then, one comes across it in popular newspapers. It is, of course, a ridiculous word to apply to a work of art. For what is morbidity but a mood of emotion or a mode of thought that one cannot express? The public are all morbid, because the public can never find expression for anything. The artist is never morbid. He expresses everything. He stands outside his subject, and through its medium produces incomparable and artistic effects. To call an artist morbid because he deals with morbidity as his subject-matter is as silly as if one called Shakespeare mad because he wrote 'King Lear.'

On the whole, an artist in England gains something by being attacked. His individuality is intensified. He becomes more completely himself. Of course, the attacks are very gross, very impertinent, and very contemptible. But then no artist expects grace from the vulgar mind, or style from the suburban intellect. Vulgarity and stupidity are two very vivid facts in modern life. One regrets them, naturally. But there they are. They are subjects for study, like everything else. And it is only fair to state, with regard to modern journalists, that they always apologise to one in private for what they have written against one in public.

Within the last few years two other adjectives, it may be mentioned, have been added to the very limited vocabulary of art-abuse that is at the disposal of the public. One is the word 'unhealthy,' the other is the word



'exotic.' The latter merely expresses the rage of the momentary mushroom against the immortal, entrancing, and exquisitely lovely orchid. It is a tribute, but a tribute of no importance. The word 'unhealthy,' however, admits of analysis. It is a rather interesting word. In fact, it is so interesting that the people who use it do not [know](#) what it means.

What does it mean? What is a healthy, or an unhealthy work of art? All terms that one applies to a work of art, provided that one applies them rationally, have reference to either its style or its subject, or to both together. From the point of view of style, a healthy work of art is one whose style recognises the beauty of the material it employs, be that material one of words or of bronze, of colour or of ivory, and uses that beauty as a factor in producing the aesthetic [effect](#). From the point of view of subject, a healthy work of art is one the choice of whose subject is [conditioned](#) by the temperament of the artist, and comes directly out of it. In fine, a healthy work of art is one that has both perfection and personality. Of course, [form](#) and substance cannot be separated in a work of art; they are always one. But for purposes of analysis, and setting the wholeness of aesthetic impression aside for a moment, we can intellectually so separate them. An unhealthy work of art, on the other hand, is a work whose style is obvious, old-fashioned, and common, and whose subject is deliberately chosen, not because the artist has any [pleasure](#) in it, but because he [thinks](#) that the public will pay him for it. In fact, the popular novel that the public calls healthy is always a thoroughly unhealthy production; and what the public call an unhealthy novel is always a beautiful and healthy work of art.

I need hardly say that [I am](#) not, for a single moment, complaining that the public and the public press misuse

these words. I do not [see](#) how, with their lack of comprehension of what Art is, they could possibly use them in the proper sense. [I am](#) merely pointing out the misuse; and as for the origin of the misuse and the meaning that lies behind it all, the explanation is very simple. It comes from the barbarous conception of authority. It comes from the natural inability of a community corrupted by authority to [understand](#) or appreciate Individualism. In a word, it comes from that monstrous and ignorant thing that is called Public Opinion, which, bad and well-meaning as it is when it tries to control action, is infamous and of evil meaning when it tries to control [Thought](#) or Art.

Indeed, there is much more to be said in favour of the physical force of the public than there is in favour of the public's opinion. The former may be fine. The latter must be foolish. It is often said that force is no argument. That, however, entirely depends on what one wants to prove. Many of the most important problems of the last few centuries, such as the [continuance](#) of personal government in England, or of feudalism in France, have been solved entirely by means of physical force. The very violence of a revolution may make the public grand and splendid for a moment. It was a fatal day when the public discovered that the pen is mightier than the paving-stone, and can be made as offensive as the brickbat. They at once sought for the journalist, found him, developed him, and made him their industrious and well-paid servant. It is greatly to be regretted, for both their sakes. Behind the barricade there may be much that is [noble](#) and heroic. But what is there behind the leading-article but prejudice, stupidity, cant, and twaddle? And when these four are joined together they make a terrible force, and constitute the new authority.

In old days men had the rack. Now they have the press. That is an improvement certainly. But still it is very bad, and wrong, and demoralising. Somebody - was it Burke? - called journalism the fourth estate. That was [true](#) at the time, no [doubt](#). But at the present moment it [really](#) is the only estate. It has eaten up the other three. The Lords Temporal say nothing, the Lords [Spiritual](#) have nothing to say, and the House of Commons has nothing to say and says it. We are dominated by Journalism. In America the President reigns for four years, and Journalism governs for ever and ever. Fortunately in America Journalism has carried its authority to the grossest and most brutal extreme. As a natural consequence it has begun to create a [spirit](#) of revolt. People are amused by it, or disgusted by it, according to their temperaments. But it is no longer the [real](#) force it was. It is not seriously treated. In England, Journalism, not, except in a few well-known instances, having been carried to such excesses of brutality, is still a great factor, a [really](#) remarkable power. The tyranny that it proposes to exercise over people's private lives seems to me to be quite extraordinary. The fact is, that the public have an insatiable curiosity to [know](#) everything, except what is worth [knowing](#). Journalism, [conscious](#) of this, and having tradesman-like habits, supplies their demands. In centuries before ours the public nailed the ears of journalists to the pump. That was quite hideous. In this century journalists have nailed their own ears to the keyhole. That is much worse. And what aggravates the mischief is that the journalists who are most to blame are not the amusing journalists who write for what are called Society papers. The harm is done by the serious, [thoughtful](#), earnest journalists, who solemnly, as they are doing at present, will drag before the eyes of the public some incident in the private life of a great statesman, of a

man who is a leader of political [thought](#) as he is a creator of political force, and invite the public to discuss the incident, to exercise authority in the matter, to give their views, and not merely to give their views, but to carry them into action, to dictate to the man upon all other points, to dictate to his party, to dictate to his country; in fact, to make [themselves](#) ridiculous, offensive, and harmful. The private lives of men and women should not be told to the public. The public have nothing to do with them at all. In France they manage these things better. There they do not allow the details of the trials that take place in the divorce courts to be published for the amusement or criticism of the public. All that the public are allowed to [know](#) is that the divorce has taken place and was granted on petition of one or other or both of the married parties concerned. In France, in fact, they [limit](#) the journalist, and allow the artist almost perfect freedom. Here we allow [absolute](#) freedom to the journalist, and entirely [limit](#) the artist. English public opinion, that is to say, tries to constrain and impede and warp the man who makes things that are beautiful in [effect](#), and compels the journalist to retail things that are ugly, or disgusting, or revolting in fact, so that we have the most serious journalists in the world, and the most indecent newspapers. It is no exaggeration to talk of compulsion. There are possibly some journalists who take a [real pleasure](#) in publishing horrible things, or who, [being](#) poor, look to scandals as [forming](#) a sort of permanent basis for an income. But there are other journalists, I [feel](#) certain, men of education and cultivation, who [really](#) dislike publishing these things, who [know](#) that it is wrong to do so, and only do it because the unhealthy [conditions](#) under which their occupation is carried on oblige them to supply the public with what the public wants, and to compete with other

journalists in making that supply as full and [satisfying](#) to the gross popular appetite as possible. It is a very degrading position for any body of educated men to be placed in, and I have no [doubt](#) that most of them [feel](#) it acutely.

However, let us leave what is [really](#) a very sordid side of the subject, and return to the question of popular control in the matter of Art, by which I mean Public Opinion dictating to the artist the [form](#) which he is to use, the mode in which he is to use it, and the materials with which he is to work. I have pointed out that the arts which have escaped best in England are the arts in which the public have not been interested. They are, however, interested in the drama, and as a certain advance has been made in the drama within the last ten or fifteen years, it is important to point out that this advance is entirely due to a few individual artists refusing to [accept](#) the popular want of [taste](#) as their standard, and refusing to regard Art as a mere matter of demand and supply. With his marvellous and vivid personality, with a style that has [really](#) a [true](#) colour-element in it, with his extraordinary power, not over mere mimicry but over imaginative and intellectual creation, Mr Irving, had his sole [object](#) been to give the public what they wanted, could have produced the commonest plays in the commonest manner, and made as much success and money as a man could possibly [desire](#). But his [object](#) was not that. His [object](#) was to realise his own perfection as an artist, under certain [conditions](#), and in certain [forms](#) of Art. At first he appealed to the few: now he has educated the many. He has created in the public both [taste](#) and temperament. The public appreciate his artistic success immensely. I often wonder, however, whether the public [understand](#) that that success is entirely due to the fact that he did not [accept](#) their standard, but realised

his own. With their standard the Lyceum would have been a sort of second-rate booth, as some of the popular theatres in London are at present. Whether they [understand](#) it or not the fact however remains, that [taste](#) and temperament have, to a certain extent been created in the public, and that the public is capable of developing these qualities. The problem then is, why do not the public become more civilised? They have the capacity. What stops them?

The thing that stops them, it must be said again, is their [desire](#) to exercise authority over the artist and over works of art. To certain theatres, such as the Lyceum and the Haymarket, the public seem to come in a proper mood. In both of these theatres there have been individual artists, who have succeeded in creating in their audiences - and every theatre in London has its own audience - the temperament to which Art appeals. And what is that temperament? It is the temperament of receptivity. That is all.

If a man approaches a work of art with any [desire](#) to exercise authority over it and the artist, he approaches it in such a [spirit](#) that he cannot receive any artistic impression from it at all. The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art. The spectator is to be receptive. He is to be the violin on which the master is to play. And the more completely he can suppress his own silly views, his own foolish prejudices, his own absurd ideas of what Art should be, or should not be, the more likely he is to [understand](#) and appreciate the work of art in question. This is, of course, quite obvious in the case of the vulgar theatre-going public of English men and women. But it is equally [true](#) of what are called educated people. For an educated person's ideas of Art are drawn naturally from what Art has been, whereas the new work of art is

beautiful by [being](#) what Art has never been; and to measure it by the standard of the past is to measure it by a standard on the rejection of which its [real](#) perfection depends. A temperament capable of receiving, through an imaginative medium, and under imaginative [conditions](#), new and beautiful impressions, is the only temperament that can appreciate a work of art. And [true](#) as this is in the case of the appreciation of sculpture and painting, it is still more [true](#) of the appreciation of such arts as the drama. For a picture and a statue are not at war with Time. They take no count of its succession. In one moment their unity may be apprehended. In the case of literature it is different. Time must be traversed before the unity of [effect](#) is realised. And so, in the drama, there may occur in the first act of the play something whose [real](#) artistic value may not be evident to the spectator till the third or fourth act is reached. Is the silly fellow to get [angry](#) and call out, and disturb the play, and annoy the artists? No. The honest man is to sit [quietly](#), and [know](#) the delightful [emotions](#) of wonder, curiosity, and suspense. He is not to go to the play to lose a vulgar temper. He is to go to the play to realise an artistic temperament. He is to go to the play to gain an artistic temperament. He is not the arbiter of the work of art. He is one who is admitted to contemplate the work of art, and, if the work be fine, to forget in its contemplation and the egotism that mars him - the egotism of his ignorance, or the egotism of his information. This point about the drama is hardly, I [think](#), sufficiently recognised. I can quite [understand](#) that were 'Macbeth' produced for the first time before a modern London audience, many of the people present would strongly and vigorously [object](#) to the introduction of the witches in the first act, with their grotesque phrases and their ridiculous words. But when the play is over one realises that the

laughter of the witches in 'Macbeth' is as terrible as the laughter of madness in 'Lear,' more terrible than the laughter of Iago in the tragedy of the Moor. No spectator of art needs a more perfect mood of receptivity than the spectator of a play. The moment he seeks to exercise authority he becomes the avowed enemy of Art and of [himself](#). Art does not [mind](#). It is he who suffers.

With the novel it is the same thing. Popular authority and the recognition of popular authority are fatal. Thackeray's 'Esmond' is a beautiful work of art because he wrote it to please [himself](#). In his other novels, in 'Pendennis,' in 'Philip,' in 'Vanity Fair' even, at times, he is too [conscious](#) of the public, and spoils his work by appealing directly to the sympathies of the public, or by directly mocking at them. A [true](#) artist takes no notice whatever of the public. The public are to him non-existent. He has no poppied or honeyed cakes through which to give the monster sleep or sustenance. He leaves that to the popular novelist. One incomparable novelist we have now in England, Mr George Meredith. There are better artists in France, but France has no one whose view of life is so large, so varied, so imaginatively [true](#). There are tellers of stories in Russia who have a more vivid sense of what [pain](#) in fiction may be. But to him belongs philosophy in fiction. His people not merely live, but they live in [thought](#). One can [see](#) them from myriad points of view. They are suggestive. There is [soul](#) in them and around them. They are interpretative and symbolic. And he who made them, those wonderful quickly-moving figures, made them for his own [pleasure](#), and has never asked the public what they wanted, has never cared to [know](#) what they wanted, has never allowed the public to dictate to him or [influence](#) him in any way but has gone on intensifying his own personality, and producing his own individual work. At



first none came to him. That did not matter. Then the few came to him. That did not change him. The many have come now. He is still the same. He is an incomparable novelist. With the decorative arts it is not different. The public clung with [really](#) pathetic tenacity to what I believe were the direct traditions of the Great Exhibition of international vulgarity, traditions that were so appalling that the houses in which people lived were only fit for blind people to live in. Beautiful things began to be made, beautiful colours came from the dyer's hand, beautiful patterns from the artist's brain, and the use of beautiful things and their value and importance were set forth. The public were [really](#) very indignant. They lost their temper. They said silly things. No one [minded](#). No one was a whit the worse. No one [accepted](#) the authority of public opinion. And now it is almost impossible to enter any modern house without [seeing](#) some recognition of [good taste](#), some recognition of the value of lovely surroundings, some sign of appreciation of beauty. In fact, people's houses are, as a rule, quite charming nowadays. People have been to a very great extent civilised. It is only fair to [state](#), however, that the extraordinary success of the revolution in house-decoration and furniture and the like has not [really](#) been due to the majority of the public developing a very fine [taste](#) in such matters. It has been chiefly due to the fact that the craftsmen of things so appreciated the [pleasure](#) of making what was beautiful, and [woke](#) to such a vivid [consciousness](#) of the hideousness and vulgarity of what the public had previously wanted, that they simply starved the public out. It would be quite impossible at the present moment to furnish a room as rooms were furnished a few years ago, without going for everything to an auction of second-hand furniture from some third-rate lodging-house. The things are no longer made.

However they may [object](#) to it, people must nowadays have something charming in their surroundings. Fortunately for them, their assumption of authority in these art-matters came to entire grief.

It is evident, then, that all authority in such things is bad. People sometimes inquire what [form](#) of government is most suitable for an artist to live under. To this question there is only one answer. The [form](#) of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all. Authority over him and his art is ridiculous. It has been stated that under despotisms artists have produced lovely work. This is not quite so. Artists have visited despots, not as subjects to be tyrannised over, but as wandering wonder-makers, as fascinating vagrant personalities, to be entertained and charmed and suffered to be at peace, and allowed to create. There is this to be said in favour of the despot, that he, [being](#) an individual, may have culture, while the mob, [being](#) a monster, has none. One who is an Emperor and King may stoop down to pick up a brush for a painter, but when the democracy stoops down it is merely to throw mud. And yet the democracy have not so far to stoop as the emperor. In fact, when they want to throw mud they have not to stoop at all. But there is no necessity to separate the monarch from the mob; all authority is equally bad.

There are three kinds of despots. There is the despot who tyrannises over the body. There is the despot who tyrannises over the [soul](#). There is the despot who tyrannises over the [soul](#) and body alike. The first is called the Prince. The second is called the Pope. The third is called the People. The Prince may be cultivated. Many Princes have been. Yet in the Prince there is danger. One [thinks](#) of Dante at the [bitter](#) feast in Verona, of Tasso in Ferrara's madman's cell. It is better for the artist not to live with Princes. The Pope may be

cultivated. Many Popes have been; the bad Popes have been. The bad Popes loved Beauty, almost as passionately, nay, with as much passion as the good Popes hated Thought. To the wickedness of the Papacy humanity owes much. The goodness of the Papacy owes a terrible debt to humanity. Yet, though the Vatican has kept the rhetoric of its thunders, and lost the rod of its lightning, it is better for the artist not to live with Popes. It was a Pope who said of Cellini to a conclave of Cardinals that common laws and common authority were not made for men such as he; but it was a Pope who thrust Cellini into prison, and kept him there till he sickened with rage, and created unreal visions for himself, and saw the gilded sun enter his room, and grew so enamoured of it that he sought to escape, and crept out from tower to tower, and falling through dizzy air at dawn, maimed himself, and was by a vine-dresser covered with vine leaves, and carried in a cart to one who, loving beautiful things, had care of him. There is danger in Popes. And as for the People, what of them and their authority? Perhaps of them and their authority one has spoken enough. Their authority is a thing blind, deaf, hideous, grotesque, tragic, amusing, serious, and obscene. It is impossible for the artist to live with the People. All despots bribe. The people bribe and brutalise. Who told them to exercise authority? They were made to live, to listen, and to love. Someone has done them a great wrong. They have marred themselves by imitation of their inferiors. They have taken the sceptre of the Prince. How should they use it? They have taken the triple tiara of the Pope. How should they carry its burden? They are as a clown whose heart is broken. They are as a priest whose soul is not yet born. Let all who love Beauty pity them. Though they themselves

love not Beauty, yet let them [pity themselves](#). Who taught them the trick of tyranny?

There are many other things that one might point out. One might point out how the Renaissance was great, because it sought to solve no social problem, and busied itself not about such things, but suffered the individual to develop freely, beautifully, and naturally, and so had great and individual artists, and great and individual men. One might point out how Louis XIV., by creating the modern [state](#), destroyed the individualism of the artist, and made things monstrous in their monotony of repetition, and contemptible in their conformity to rule, and destroyed throughout all France all those fine freedoms of expression that had made tradition new in beauty, and new modes one with antique [form](#). But the past is of no importance. The present is of no importance. It is with the future that we have to deal. For the past is what man should not have been. The present is what man ought not to be. The future is what artists are.

It will, of course, be said that such a scheme as is set forth here is quite unpractical, and goes against human nature. This is perfectly [true](#). It is unpractical, and it goes against human nature. This is why it is worth carrying out, and that is why one proposes it. For what is a practical scheme? A practical scheme is either a scheme that is already in [existence](#), or a scheme that could be carried out under [existing conditions](#). But it is exactly the [existing conditions](#) that one [objects](#) to; and any scheme that could [accept](#) these [conditions](#) is wrong and foolish. The [conditions](#) will be done away with, and human nature will change. The only thing that one [really knows](#) about human nature is that it changes. Change is the one quality we can predicate of it. The systems that fail are those that rely on the permanency of human nature, and

not on its [growth](#) and development. The error of Louis XIV. was that he [thought](#) human nature would always be the same. The result of his error was the French Revolution. It was an admirable result. All the results of the mistakes of governments are quite admirable.

It is to be noted also that Individualism does not come to man with any sickly cant about duty, which merely means doing what other people want because they want it; or any hideous cant about self-sacrifice, which is merely a survival of savage mutilation. In fact, it does not come to man with any claims upon him at all. It comes naturally and inevitably out of man. It is the point to which all development tends. It is the differentiation to which all organisms [grow](#). It is the perfection that is inherent in every mode of life, and towards which every mode of life quickens. And so Individualism exercises no compulsion over man. On the contrary, it says to man that he should suffer no compulsion to be exercised over him. It does not try to force people to be [good](#). It [knows](#) that people are [good](#) when they are let [alone](#). Man will develop Individualism out of [himself](#). Man is now so developing Individualism. To ask whether Individualism is practical is like asking whether Evolution is practical. Evolution is the law of life, and there is no evolution except towards Individualism. Where this tendency is not expressed, it is a case of artificially-arrested [growth](#), or of disease, or of death.

Individualism will also be unselfish and unaffected. It has been pointed out that one of the results of the extraordinary tyranny of authority is that words are absolutely distorted from their proper and simple meaning, and are used to express the obverse of their right signification. What is [true](#) about Art is [true](#) about Life. A man is called affected, nowadays, if he dresses as he likes to dress. But in doing that he is acting in a

perfectly natural manner. Affectation, in such matters, consists in dressing according to the views of one's neighbour, whose views, as they are the views of the majority, will probably be extremely stupid. Or a man is called [selfish](#) if he lives in the manner that seems to him most suitable for the full realisation of his own personality; if, in fact, the primary aim of his life is self-development. But this is the way in which everyone should live. [Selfishness](#) is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live. And unselfishness is letting other people's lives [alone](#), not interfering with them. [Selfishness](#) always aims at creating around it an [absolute](#) uniformity of type. Unselfishness recognises infinite variety of type as a delightful thing, [accepts](#) it, acquiesces in it, [enjoys](#) it. It is not [selfish](#) to [think](#) for oneself. A man who does not [think](#) for [himself](#) does not [think](#) at all. It is grossly [selfish](#) to require of ones neighbour that he should [think](#) in the same way, and hold the same opinions. Why should he? If he can [think](#), he will probably [think](#) differently. If he cannot [think](#), it is monstrous to require [thought](#) of any kind from him. A red rose is not [selfish](#) because it wants to be a red rose. It would be horribly [selfish](#) if it wanted all the other flowers in the garden to be both red and roses. Under Individualism people will be quite natural and absolutely unselfish, and will [know](#) the meanings of the words, and realize them in their free, beautiful lives. Nor will men be egotistic as they are now. For the egotist is he who makes claims upon others, and the Individualist will not [desire](#) to do that. It will not give him [pleasure](#). When man has realised Individualism, he will also realise sympathy and exercise it freely and spontaneously. Up to the present man has hardly cultivated sympathy at all. He has merely sympathy with [pain](#), and sympathy with [pain](#) is not the highest [form](#) of

sympathy. All sympathy is fine, but sympathy with suffering is the least fine mode. It is tainted with egotism. It is apt to become morbid. There is in it a certain element of terror for our own safety. We become afraid that we [ourselves](#) might be as the leper or as the blind, and that no man would have care of us. It is curiously [limiting](#), too. One should sympathise with the entirety of life, not with life's sores and maladies merely, but with life's [joy](#) and beauty and energy and health and freedom. The wider sympathy is, of course, the more difficult. It requires more unselfishness. Anybody can sympathise with the sufferings of a friend, but it requires a very fine nature – it requires, in fact, the nature of a [true](#) Individualist – to sympathise with a friend's success. In the modern stress of competition and struggle for place, such sympathy is naturally rare, and is also very much stifled by the immoral ideal of uniformity of type and conformity to rule which is so prevalent everywhere, and is perhaps most obnoxious in England.

Sympathy with [pain](#) there will, of course, always be. It is one of the first instincts of man. The animals which are individual, the higher animals, that is to say, share it with us. But it must be [remembered](#) that while sympathy with [joy](#) intensifies the sum of [joy](#) in the world, sympathy with [pain](#) does not [really](#) diminish the amount of [pain](#). It may make man better able to endure evil, but the evil remains. Sympathy with consumption does not cure consumption; that is what Science does. And when Socialism has solved the problem of poverty, and Science solved the problem of disease, the area of the sentimentalists will be lessened, and the sympathy of man will be large, healthy, and spontaneous. Man will have [joy](#) in the contemplation of the [joyous](#) life of others. For it is through [joy](#) that the Individualism of the future will develop itself. Christ made no attempt to reconstruct

society, and consequently the Individualism that he preached to man could be realised only through [pain](#) or in solitude. The ideals that we owe to Christ are the ideals of the man who abandons society entirely, or of the man who resists society absolutely. But man is naturally social. Even the Thebaid became peopled at last. And though the cenobite realises his personality, it is often an impoverished personality that he so realises. Upon the other hand, the terrible [truth](#) that [pain](#) is a mode through which man may realise [himself](#) exercises a wonderful fascination over the world. Shallow speakers and shallow thinkers in pulpits and on platforms often talk about the world's worship of [pleasure](#), and whine against it. But it is rarely in the world's history that its ideal has been one of [joy](#) and beauty. The worship of [pain](#) has far more often dominated the world. Mediaevalism, with its saints and martyrs, its love of [self-torture](#), its wild passion for wounding itself, its gashing with knives, and its whipping with rods - Mediaevalism is [real](#) Christianity, and the mediaeval Christ is the [real](#) Christ. When the Renaissance dawned upon the world, and brought with it the new ideals of the beauty of life and the [joy](#) of living, men could not [understand](#) Christ. Even Art shows us that. The painters of the Renaissance drew Christ as a little boy playing with another boy in a palace or a garden, or lying back in his mother's arms, smiling at her, or at a flower, or at a bright bird; or as a [noble](#), stately figure moving [nobly](#) through the world; or as a wonderful figure rising in a sort of [ecstasy](#) from death to life. Even when they drew him crucified they drew him as a beautiful God on whom evil men had inflicted suffering. But he did not preoccupy them much. What delighted them was to paint the men and women whom they admired, and to show the loveliness of this lovely earth. They painted many



religious pictures - in fact, they painted far too many, and the monotony of type and motive is wearisome, and was bad for art. It was the result of the authority of the public in art- matters, and is to be deplored. But their [soul](#) was not in the subject. Raphael was a great artist when he painted his portrait of the Pope. When he painted his Madonnas and infant Christs, he is not a great artist at all. Christ had no message for the Renaissance, which was wonderful because it brought an ideal at variance with his, and to find the presentation of the [real](#) Christ we must go to mediaeval art. There he is one maimed and marred; one who is not comely to look on, because Beauty is a [joy](#); one who is not in fair raiment, because that may be a [joy](#) also: he is a beggar who has a marvellous [soul](#); he is a leper whose [soul](#) is divine; he needs neither property nor health; he is a God realizing his perfection through [pain](#).

The evolution of man is slow. The injustice of men is great. It was necessary that [pain](#) should be put forward as a mode of self-realisation. Even now, in some places in the world, the message of Christ is necessary. No one who lived in modern Russia could possibly realise his perfection except by [pain](#). A few Russian artists have realised [themselves](#) in Art; in a fiction that is mediaeval in [character](#), because its dominant note is the realisation of men through suffering. But for those who are not artists, and to whom there is no mode of life but the actual life of fact, [pain](#) is the only door to perfection. A Russian who lives [happily](#) under the present system of government in Russia must either believe that man has no [soul](#), or that, if he has, it is not worth developing. A Nihilist who rejects all authority, because he [knows](#) authority to be evil, and welcomes all [pain](#), because through that he realises his personality, is a [real](#) Christian. To him the Christian ideal is a [true](#) thing.

And yet, Christ did not revolt against authority. He [accepted](#) the imperial authority of the Roman Empire and paid tribute. He endured the ecclesiastical authority of the Jewish Church, and would not repel its violence by any violence of his own. He had, as I said before, no scheme for the reconstruction of society. But the modern world has schemes. It proposes to do away with poverty and the suffering that it entails. It [desires](#) to get rid of [pain](#), and the suffering that [pain](#) entails. It trusts to Socialism and to Science as its methods. What it aims at is an Individualism expressing itself through [joy](#). This Individualism will be larger, fuller, lovelier than any Individualism has ever been. [Pain](#) is not the [ultimate](#) mode of perfection. It is merely provisional and a protest. It has reference to wrong, unhealthy, unjust surroundings. When the wrong, and the disease, and the injustice are removed, it will have no further place. It will have done its work. It was a great work, but it is almost over. Its sphere lessens every day.

Nor will man miss it. For what man has sought for is, indeed, neither [pain](#) nor [pleasure](#), but simply Life. Man has sought to live intensely, fully, perfectly. When he can do so without exercising restraint on others, or suffering it ever, and his activities are all [pleasurable](#) to him, he will be saner, healthier, more civilised, more [himself](#). [Pleasure](#) is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When man is [happy](#), he is in harmony with [himself](#) and his environment. The new Individualism, for whose service Socialism, whether it wills it or not, is working, will be perfect harmony. It will be what the Greeks sought for, but could not, except in [Thought](#), realise completely, because they had slaves, and fed them; it will be what the Renaissance sought for, but could not realize completely except in Art, because they had slaves, and starved them. It will be complete, and

through it each man will [attain](#) to his perfection. The new Individualism is the new Hellenism.

The End

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