



The Lessons of History
by Will and Ariel Durant
Simon and Schuster, 1968

Purpose of Book

The Lessons of History evolved out of a second reading of *The Story of Civilization*, Will and Ariel Durants' renowned ten volume historical account of history from earliest civilization to the Age of Napoleon. From this second reading, the Durants "made note of events and comments that might illuminate present affairs, future probabilities, the nature of man, and the conduct of states." The Durants needed only 102 pages to accomplish their objective.

Hesitations About Their Pursuit

The Durants ponder the following questions about their life-long studies:

1. What is the utility of our studies?
2. Has our work been a mere recounting of the rise and fall of nations and ideas?
3. Have we learned more about human nature than the average, unread man?
4. Has history provided any illumination of our present condition?
5. Has history provided any guidance for our judgments and policies?
6. Is there any guard against the rebuffs of surprise or the vicissitudes of change?
7. Have you found such regularities in the sequence of past events that you can predict the future actions of mankind or the fate of states?
8. Is it possible that history teaches us nothing?

To these questions the authors admit that:

- ◆ "a multitude of doubts assail our enterprise".
- ◆ "that our knowledge of any past event is always incomplete, probably inaccurate, beclouded by ambivalent evidence and biased historians, and perhaps distorted by our own patriotic and religious partisanship." "Even the historian who thinks to rise above partiality for his country, race, creed or class betrays his secret predilection in his choice of materials, and in the nuances of his adjectives."
- ◆ The authors do not answer these questions here.

History and the Earth

- ◆ History reveals that man is always trying to overcome the obstacles imposed by geological and climatic forces: when man builds a city, a tornado destroys it; when confronted with intolerable heat, man counters with air conditioning; when faced with a desert, man attempts to irrigate it.



Figure 1: 1923 Earthquake Kills 300,000 Japanese, Wounds 500,000

- ◆ “The influence of geographic factors diminishes as technology grows.”
- ◆ “When sea power finally gives place to air power in transport and war, we shall have seen one of the basic revolutions in

history.” Air transport provides a more direct route between source and destination than sea transport. As always, such a transformation will produce winners and losers. Countries with massive land area, such as Russia, China, and Brazil, should benefit greatly. Countries relying on income-producing sea transportation, such as England, will experience an abatement in this industry.

- ◆ “Man, not earth, makes civilization.”

Biology and History

Biological lesson #1: life is competition.

- ◆ Churches compete, cities and states compete, countries compete, ethnic groups compete and, in the process, different alliances evolve.

Biological lesson #2: life is selection.

- ◆ The authors issue a sober reminder that nature cares very little for man's declaration of independence: "we are all born unfree and unequal subject to our physical and psychological heredity, and to the customs and traditions of our group; diversely endowed in health and strength, in mental capacity and qualities of character." "Inequality is not only natural and inborn, it grows with the complexity of civilization. Hereditary inequalities breed social and artificial inequalities: every invention or discovery is made or seized by the exceptional individual, and makes the strong stronger, the weak relatively weaker..."
- ◆ "...freedom and equality are sworn and everlasting enemies, and when one prevails the other dies. Leave men free, and their natural inequalities will multiply almost geometrically, as in England and America in the nineteenth century under laissez-faire. To check the growth of inequality, liberty must be sacrificed, as in Russia after 1917. Even when repressed, inequality grows; only the man who is below the average in economic ability desires equality; those who are conscious of superior ability desire freedom; and in the end superior ability has its way." "A society in which all potential abilities are allowed to develop and function will have a survival advantage in the competition of groups. This competition becomes more severe as the destruction of distance intensifies the confrontation of states."



Biological lesson #3: Quantity is a prerequisite to the selection of quality

- ◆ Nature cares not that a high birth rate has usually accompanied a culturally low civilization, and a low birth rate a culturally high civilization. The authors issue a stern reminder that nature "is more interested in the species than the individual."

- ◆ The authors recount the predictions of Malthus, who wrote that the number of mouths should not exceed the ability to feed them but they add that the technological advances of agriculture and contraception appear to refute Malthus. Nonetheless, the authors conclude: “ideally parentage should be a privilege of health, not a by-product of sexual agitation.”
- ◆ **Economic and political power can be gained through an abundance of breeding.** “In the United States the lower birth rate of the Anglo-Saxon has lessened their economic and political power; and the higher birth rate of Roman Catholic families suggests that by the year 2000 the Roman Catholic Church will be the dominant force in national as well as in municipal or state governments.” “So the birth rate, like war, may determine the fate of theologies; just as the defeat of the Moslems at Tours (732) kept France and Spain from replacing the Bible with the Koran, so the superior organization, discipline, morality, fidelity, and fertility of Catholics may cancel the Protestant Reformation and the French Enlightenment.”

Race and History

- ◆ The rise, success, and fall of a civilization depend upon the inherent quality of the race.
- ◆ “The degeneration of a civilization is what the word itself indicates—a falling away from the genus, stock, or race.” “Usually this comes through intermarriage of the vigorous race with those whom it has conquered. Hence, the superiority of the whites in the United States and Canada (who did not intermarry with the Indians) to the whites in Latin America (who did).”
- ◆ Only those who are themselves the product of such enfeebling mixtures talk of the equality of races, or think that “all men are brothers.”



- ◆ “All strong characters and people are race conscious, and are instinctively averse to marriage outside their own racial group.”
- ◆ Weaknesses in race theory become obvious when scholars of each race remind us of their civilization’s contributions.
- ◆ The author also cites that the ancient cultures of Egypt, Greece, and Rome were evidently the product of geographical opportunity and economic and political development rather than of racial constitution...
- ◆ “...from Western Europe came the civilization of North and South America. In the third and following centuries of our era various Celtic, Teutonic, or Asiatic tribes laid Italy waste and destroyed the classic cultures. The South creates the civilizations, the North conquers them, ruins them, borrows from them, spreads them: this is one summary of history.”
- ◆ “Attempts to relate civilization to race by measuring the relation of brain to face or weight have shed little light on the problem.”
- ◆ “If the Negroes of Africa have produced no great civilization it is probably because climatic and geographical conditions frustrated them; would any of the white “races” have done better in those environments? It is remarkable how many American Negroes have risen to high places in the profession, arts, and letters in the last one hundred years despite a thousand social circles.”
- ◆ “It is not the race that makes the civilization, it is the civilization that makes the people: circumstances geographical, economic, and political create a culture, and the culture creates a human type.” “An American does not make his race, his race makes him.”
- ◆ “Racial antipathies have some roots in ethnic origin, but they are also generated, perhaps predominately, by differences of acquired culture--of language, dress, habits, morals, or religion.”

Character and History

- ◆ Our most basic tendencies are instincts.
- ◆ Human beings are normally equipped by “nature” (heredity) with six positive and six negative instincts, each functions to preserve the individual, the group, or the species. Each instinct generates habits and is accompanied by feelings.



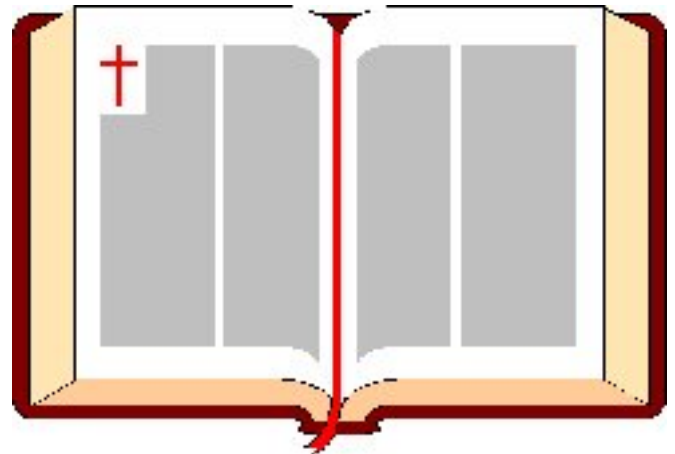
Instincts		Habits		Feelings	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Action	Sleep	Play	Rest	Buoyancy	Fatigue
		Work	Sloth	Energy	Inertia
		Curiosity	Indifference	Eagerness	Boredom
		Manipulation	Hesitation	Wonder	Doubt
		Thought	Dreaming	Absorption	Vacuity
		Innovation	Imitation	Resolution	Acceptance
		Art	Disorder	Aesthetic feeling	Confusion
Fight	Flight	Approach	Retreat	Courage	Anxiety
		Competition	Cooperation	Rivalry	Friendliness
		Pugnacity	Timidity	Anger	Fear
		Mastery	Submission	Pride	Humility
Acquisition	Avoidance	Eating	Rejection	Hunger	Disgust
		Hoarding	Spending	Greed	Prodigality
		Property	Poverty	Possessiveness	Insecurity
Association	Privacy	Communication	Solitude	Sociability	Secretiveness
		Seek approval	Fear disapproval	Vanity	Shyness
		Generosity	Selfishness	Kindliness	Hostility
Mating	Refusal	Sexual activity	Sexual aversion	Sexual fantasy	Sexual neurosis
		Courtship	Blushing	Sexual love	Modesty
Parent care	Dependence	Homemaking	Filial rebellion	Parental love	Filial resentment

- ◆ Known history shows little alteration in the conduct of mankind.
- ◆ “As submissive natures unite with masterful individuals to make the order and operation of a society, so the imitative majority follows the innovating minority...” “History in the large is the conflict of minorities; the majority applauds the victor and supplies the human material of social experiment.”
- ◆ Man’s intellect has been a vital force in history, but it has also been destructive. Most new ideas will probably be inferior to the traditional responses that they propose to replace. No one man, however brilliant or well-informed, can possess such a fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or institutions of his society, for these are the wisdom of generations enduring centuries of experiment.

- ◆ New ideas should be heard, but they must withstand objection and opposition before being allowed to enter the human race.

Morals and History

- ◆ Morals are the rules by which a society exhorts its members to behavior consistent with its order, security, and growth.
- ◆ Moral codes differ because they adjust themselves to historical and environmental conditions. As we moved from a hunting-based society to an agricultural-based society, bravery gave way to industriousness. “Children were economic assets; birth control was made immoral.” “Monogamy was demanded by the approximate numerical equality of the sexes.” Then came the Industrial Revolution and people moved to the cities, which provided a larger and more diversified social environment, which ultimately threatened monogamy. Education spawn doubts about religion.
- ◆ “... sin has flourished in every age. Even our generation has not yet rivaled the popularity of homosexuality in ancient Greece or Rome or Renaissance Italy.” “Montaigne tells us that in his time (1533-92) obscene literature found a steady market.” “We have noted the discovery of dice in the excavations near the site of Nineveh ...”
- ◆ History reveals that moral decay occurs rather leisurely (i.e. it takes a while). “Roman morals began to decay soon after the conquered Greeks passed into Italy (146 B.C.), but Rome continued to have great statesmen, philosophers, poets, and artists until the death of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 180).”
- ◆ “... Individualism will diminish in America and England as geographical protection ceases.”
- ◆ “Sexual license may cure itself through its own excess ... “



History and War



- ◆ **In the last 3,421 years of recorded history only 268 have seen no war.**
- ◆ Causes of war: acquisitiveness, pugnacity, pride, food, land, and dominance.
- ◆ In apologetic consolation war now promotes science and technology, whose deadly inventions, if they are not forgotten in

universal destitution and barbarism, may later enlarge the material achievements of peace.

- ◆ A long peace may fatally weaken the martial muscles of a nation.
- ◆ The author issues the typical communist alert. Then he argues that the best policy may be to break from historical precedent and live and let live. But the general warns against parting from history: man is a competitive animal and his states must be like himself, and that natural selection now operates on an international level. States will unite in basic co-operation only when they are in common attacked from without. That time has not yet arrived.

Religion and History



- ◆ Napoleon once remarked that religion had kept the poor from murdering the rich.
- ◆ The authors write, “**...fear first made the gods...**”
- ◆ Does history support a belief in God?
 - “**... history remains a natural selection of the fittest in a struggle wherein goodness receives no favors, misfortunes abound, and the final test is to survive.**”
 - “Nature and history do not agree with our conceptions of good and bad; they define good as that which survives, and bad as that which goes under...”
- ◆ Other causes diminishes the power of religion:
 - the growing awareness of man’s minuscule place in the cosmos
 - the Protest Reformation, which originally defended private judgment
 - the emergence of a multitude of Protestant sects and conflicting theologies
 - criticism of the Bible
 - the Protestant exposure of Catholic miracles
 - the deistic exposure of Bible miracles
 - general exposure of frauds, inquisitions, massacres
 - the bold advance of skeptical scholar
 - the attack of the French Enlightenment upon Christianity
 - the triumphs of scientific technology, promising man omnipotence
- ◆ “ ... Christianity lent a hand against itself by developing in many Christians a moral sense that could no longer stomach the vengeful God of the traditional theology.”
- ◆ “Catholicism survives because it appeals to imagination, hope, and the senses; because its mythology consoles and brightens the lives of the poor; and because the commanded fertility of the faithful slowly regains the lands lost to the Reformation.”
- ◆ “Generally religion and puritanism prevail in periods when the laws are feeble and morals must bear the burden of maintaining social order; skepticism and paganism (other factors being equal) progress as the rising power of law and government permits the decline of the church, the family, and morality without basically endangering the stability of the state.”

- ◆ “There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion. France, the United States, and some other nations have divorced their governments from all churches, but they have had the help of religion in keeping social order.”

Economics and History

- ◆ “...economic ambition, not the face of Helen, launched a thousand ships on Illium; those subtle Greeks knew how to cover naked economic truth with the fig leaf of a phrase.”
- ◆ This is no denying that many historical events have been motivated by economic interest:
 - The Crusades and the wars of Rome with Persia were attempts of the West to capture trade routes to the East.
 - The discovery of America was a result of the failure of the crusades.
- ◆ Likewise many historical events have been motivated by noneconomic interest:
 - The poems of Keats
 - Religious fervor in Moslem armies
 - Nationalistic ardor in Hitler’s troops and Japan’s kamikazes



- ◆ “The concentration of wealth is a natural result of this concentration of ability, and regularly recurs in history.” “In progressive societies the concentration may reach a point where the strength of number in the many poor rivals the strength of ability in the few rich; then the unstable equilibrium generates a critical situation, which history has diversely met by legislation redistributing wealth or by revolution distributing poverty.”
- ◆ Redistribution of wealth sometimes occurs in a violent way, such as during the French Revolution and sometimes it occurs more subtly with the devaluation of currency or inflation.
- ◆ “We conclude that the concentration of wealth is natural and inevitable, and is periodically alleviated by violent or peaceable partial redistribution.”

Socialism and History

- ◆ The mechanics of capitalism have proven to be the most effective system: Capitalist gathers the savings of the people, finances the mechanizations of industry, and distributes the goods according to demand (not government decree).
- ◆ In spite of capitalism's merits, history resounds with protests and revolts against the abuses of industrial mastery, price manipulation, business chicanery, and irresponsible wealth.
- ◆ There have been numerous attempts at implementing socialism:
 - In Egypt under the Ptolemies (323 B.C. - 30 B.C.) The revenue of this system made the Ptolemaic the richest state of the time. Eventually, the pharaohs took to expensive wars; debauchery ensued; taxes increased; incentive dwindled
 - In Rome under Diocletian, socialism was made possible by arousing fear that the barbarians were at the gate; the state economy became a war economy. Eventually the task of controlling men in economic detail proved too much for Diocletian's expanding, expensive, and corrupt bureaucracy.
 - China has had several attempts at state socialism. Each doomed due to high taxes, government corruption, and faltering economy due to burdensome military build-up.
- ◆ The Incas (in Peru) experienced the longest regime of socialism—from the 13th century until 1533.
- ◆ The Russian Revolution of 1917 succeeded because the Czarist government had been defeated and disgraced by war and bad mgmt. The Revolution took a communist form because the new state was challenged by internal disorder and external attack—the people reacted as any nation will under siege—it put aside all individual freedom until order and security could be restored. Here too Communism was a war economy. It survives through continued fear of war. Given a generation of peace it would have presumably eroded by the very nature of man.
- ◆ The fear of capitalism has compelled socialism to widen freedom, and the fear of socialism has compelled capitalism to increase equality.



Is Progress Real?

- ◆ Our comforts and conveniences may have weakened our stamina and our moral fiber.
- ◆ We have bettered the conditions of life for skilled workmen and the middle class but we have allowed our cities to fester with ghettos and slums.
- ◆ We have immensely developed transportation but often at the expense of pollution.
- ◆ We have multiplied a hundred times our ability to learn and report the events of the day and the planet, but at times we envy our ancestors, whose peace was only gently disturbed by the news of their village.
- ◆ Have our laws offered the criminal too much protection against society and the state?
- ◆ We are emancipated from theology, but have we developed a moral code to keep us from debasing our civilization into greed, crime, promiscuity?
- ◆ Has all the progress of philosophy since Descartes been a mistake through its failure to recognize the role of myth in the consolation and control of man? He that increases knowledge increases sorrow, and in much wisdom is much grief.
- ◆ If we define progress as the increase in happiness then its case is lost almost immediately. Our capacity for fretting is endless. We always find an excuse for being miserable.
- ◆ What about defining progress as increasing control of the environment by life. Holds for the lowest organisms as well as for man.
- ◆ We should not demand that progress be continuous or universal. There are retrogressions. We may presume that at almost any time in history some nations were progressing and some were declining. We should not compare the work of one land and time with the winnowed best of all the collected past. Our problem is whether the average man has increased his ability to control the conditions of his life.
- ◆ Longevity in European and American whites has tripled in the last three centuries.
- ◆ Famine has been all but eliminated.



- ◆ If education is the transmission of civilization, we are unquestionably progressing. We have raised the level and average of knowledge beyond any age in history.
- ◆ The historian will not mourn because he can see no meaning in human existence except that which man puts into it; let it be our pride that we ourselves may put meaning into our lives, and sometimes a significance that transcends death. If a man is fortunate he will, before he dies, gather up as much as he can of his civilized heritage and transmit it to his children.

Government and History

- ◆ The first condition of freedom is its limitation. Make freedom absolute and it dies in chaos. Thus, the prime task of government is to establish order.
- ◆ Power naturally converges to a center, for it is ineffective when divided.
- ◆ International govt. will eventually develop as commerce expands internationally.
- ◆ Monarchy seems to be the most natural kind of government, since it applies to the group like the authority of the father in a family. Monarchy also has the greater prevalence and duration in history.
- ◆ After the breakdown of Roman democracy in the class wars of the Gracchi, Marius, and Caesar, Augustus organized, under what in effect was monarchical rule, the greatest achievement in the history of statesmanship. (30 B.C. to A.D. 180)
- ◆ After Augustus, monarchy disgraced itself under Caligula, Nero, and Domitian; but then came Nerva, Trajan, Hardrian, Antonius Pius, and Marcus Aurelius. According to Gibbon, the period during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous.
- ◆ But the author concludes monarchies have brought mankind as much evil as good. When it is hereditary it is likely to be more prolific of stupidity, nepotism, irresponsibility, and extravagance than of nobility or statesmanship.



- ◆ Most governments have been oligarchies, rule by minorities:
 - by birth as in aristocracies; modern aristocracies have decayed because of careless hedonism; the masses revolted and democracy took its turn
 - by religious organizations as in theocracies
 - by wealth in democracies
- ◆ Does history justify revolution?
 - The author concludes that the results achieved by revolution would have come without it through the gradual compulsion of economic developments. America would have become the dominant factor in the English-speaking world without any revolution.
 - Revolutions do more to destroy wealth than to redistribute it. The natural inequality of men soon re-creates an inequality of possessions and privileges, and raises to power a new minority with essentially the same instincts as in the old.
- ◆ In strictest terms, democracy has existed only in modern times since up to then too many people were excluded from the franchise.
- ◆ Plato's reaction (in his *Republic*) to democracy:
 - Chaos of class violence, cultural decadence, moral degeneration;
 - "The democrats contemptuously rejected temperance as unmanliness ... "
 - "The citizens chafe impatiently at the least touch of authority ... "
 - "The excessive increase of anything causes a reaction in the opposite direction; ... dictatorship naturally arises out of democracy, and the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery out of the most extreme form of liberty."
- ◆ Plato's hostile analysis of Athenian democracy was approaching confirmation by history:
 - the gap between the rich and poor widened
 - **the poor schemed to despoil the rich by legislation, taxation, and revolution**
 - **the rich organized themselves for protection against poor**
 - Class bitterness divided Greece and made an easy entry for Phillip of Macedon, in 338 B.C., to conquer Greece. Many rich Greeks welcomed his arrival as a preference to the revolution. Athenian democracy disappeared under Macedonian dictatorship.

- ◆ Plato's reduction of political evolution to a sequence of monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, and dictatorship was witnessed in the history of Rome:
 - During the 3rd and 2nd centuries before Christ a Roman oligarchy organized a disciplined army and conquered and exploited the world. The gov't. became rich and corrupt.
 - Roman aristocrats engaged Pompey to maintain their ascendancy; the commoners cast their lot with Caesar; Caesar won
 - Caesar established a popular dictatorship
 - Aristocrats killed Caesar and accepted the dictatorship of Augustus, Caesar's stepson
 - Democracy ended, monarchy was restored
- ◆ New challenges to America's democracy:
 - Economic freedom, even in the middle classes, becomes more exceptional, making political freedom a consolatory pretense. And this does come about through the perversity of the rich, but because every advance in the complexity of the economy puts an added premium upon superior ability, and intensifies concentration of wealth and political power.
 - Democracy is the most demanding form of gov't., since it requires the widest spread of intelligence. **Education has spread, but intelligence is perpetually retarded by the fertility of the simple. Ignorance is easily manipulated by interior as well as exterior forces.**
- ◆ Democracy has done less harm than any other form of government, allowing science and enterprise to grow, regardless of class. " ... though men can not be equal, their access to education and opportunity can be more nearly equal."
- ◆ Yet the author warns, "if our economy of freedom fails to distribute wealth as ably as it has created it, the road to dictatorship will be open to any man who can persuasively promise security to all; and a martial government, under whatever charming phrases, will engulf the democratic world."

Growth and Decay

- ◆ Tension between rulers and ruled might raise intellectual and emotional activity above the daily drift of primitives, resulting in positive change.
- ◆ Growth could come from any challenging change in the surroundings, such as external invasion or a continuing shortage of rain, which could be met by military improvements or construction of irrigation canals. Any challenge successfully met, if it does not exhaust the victor, raises the temper and level of a nation and makes it abler to meet further challenges.
- ◆ Decay can result when political or intellectual leaders fail to meet the challenges, such as:
 - inadequate rainfall
 - incompetent or improvident use of the soil
 - burdensome taxes
 - foreign markets lost to more enterprising competition
 - excess of imports over exports
 - concentration of wealth may start class or race war
 - concentration of population and poverty in the great cities may compel a govt to choose between enfeebling the economy with a dole or run the risk of riot and revolution
 - as education spreads, theology lose credence, life becomes increasingly secular; may be a sufficient moral code is maintained; people become increasingly disenfranchised from their country and lose the zeal to fight for it (honor is lost)
- ◆ Although the picture may appear gloomy, the author reminds us that civilizations do not quite die completely. Civilizations remain in literature, art, etc and, thus, in our memories. This selective survival of creative minds is the most real and beneficent of immortalities.



Author Will Durant

From Wikipedia (abridged)

- ◆ William James Durant (11/5/1885 – 11/7/ 1981) was a prolific American writer, historian, and philosopher.
- ◆ He is best known for *The Story of Civilization*, 11 volumes written in collaboration with his wife Ariel and published between 1935 and 1975.
- ◆ Noted for *The Story of Philosophy*, written in 1926. Will and Ariel Durant were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction in 1968 and Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1977.
- ◆ Durant was born in North Adams, Mass. of French-Canadian parents Joseph Durant and Mary Allard, who had been part of the Quebec emigration to the U. S.
- ◆ In 1900, Durant was educated by the Jesuits in St. Peter's Preparatory School and, later, Saint Peter's College in Jersey City, NJ.
- ◆ In 1905, he began experimenting with socialist philosophy but after WWI he began recognizing that a "lust for power" underlay all forms of political behavior. Even before the war, his interest in Spinoza made little room Bakunin. From then on, writes Rubin, "his retention of a model of selfhood predicated on discipline made him unsympathetic to anarchist injunctions to 'be yourself'".
- ◆ He graduated in 1907. He worked as a reporter for Arthur Brisbane's New York Evening Journal for ten dollars a week. In 1907, he began teaching Latin, French, English and geometry at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey. Durant was also made librarian at the college.
- ◆ In 1911 he left the seminary. He became the principal of Ferrer Modern School, an advanced school intended to educate the working-classes; he also taught there. At the Modern School, he fell in love with and married a pupil, 13 years his junior, Chaya (Ida) Kaufman, whom he later nicknamed "Ariel". The Durants had one daughter, Ethel, and adopted a son, Louis.
- ◆ In 1913, he resigned his post as teacher. To support themselves, he began lecturing in a Presbyterian church for five- and ten-dollar fees; the material for these lectures became the starting point for *The Story of Civilization*.



- ◆ On the decline and rebuilding of civilizations, Will Durant saw the decline of a civilization as a culmination of strife between religion and secular intellectualism, thus toppling the precarious institutions of convention and morality:
 - "Hence a certain tension between religion and society marks the higher stages of every civilization. Religion begins by offering magical aid to harassed and bewildered men; it culminates by giving to a people that unity of morals and belief which seems so favorable to statesmanship and art; it ends by fighting suicidally in the lost cause of the past. For as knowledge grows or alters continually, it clashes with mythology and theology, which change with geological leisureliness. Priestly control of arts and letters is then felt as a galling shackle or hateful barrier, and intellectual history takes on the character of a "conflict between science and religion." Institutions which were at first in the hands of the clergy, like law and punishment, education and morals, marriage and divorce, tend to escape from ecclesiastical control, and become secular, perhaps profane. The intellectual classes abandon the ancient theology and-after some hesitation- the moral code allied with it; literature and philosophy become anticlerical. The movement of liberation rises to an exuberant worship of reason, and falls to a paralyzing disillusionment with every dogma and every idea. Conduct, deprived of its religious supports, deteriorates into epicurean chaos; and life itself, shorn of consoling faith, becomes a burden alike to conscious poverty and to weary wealth. In the end a society and its religion tend to fall together, like body and soul, in a harmonious death. Meanwhile among the oppressed another myth arises, gives new form to human hope, new courage to human effort, and after centuries of chaos builds another civilization."
- ◆ More than twenty years after his death, Durant's quote of "A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within" appeared as the opening graphic of Mel Gibson's 2006 film Apocalypto.
- ◆ In an article in 1927, he wrote his thoughts about reconciling religion and Darwinism. An excerpt from the article:

"As to harmonizing the theory of evolution with the Biblical account of creation, I do not believe it can be done, and I do not see why it should be. The story of Genesis is beautiful, and profoundly significant as symbolism: there is no good reason to torture it into conformity with modern theory."

- ◆ In 1917, working on a doctorate in philosophy, Will Durant wrote his first book, *Philosophy and the Social Problem*. He discussed the idea that philosophy had not grown because it avoided the actual problems of society. He received his doctorate in 1917. He was also an instructor at Columbia.
- ◆ *The Story of Philosophy* originated as a series of Little Blue Books (educational pamphlets aimed at workers) and was so popular it was republished in 1926 by Simon & Schuster as a hardcover book and became a bestseller, giving the Durants the financial independence that would allow them to travel the world several times and spend four decades writing *The Story of Civilization*. He left teaching and began work on the eleven volume *Story of Civilization*. Will drafted a civil rights "Declaration of Interdependence" in the early 1940s, nearly a full decade before the Brown decision (see *Brown v. Board of Education*) ignited the Civil Rights Movement. This Declaration was introduced into the Congressional Record on October 1, 1945.
- ◆ The Durants strove throughout *The Story of Civilization* to create what they called "integral history". They opposed this to the "specialization" of history, an anticipatory rejection of what some have called the "cult of the expert." Their goal was to write a "biography" of a civilization, in this case, the West, including not just the usual wars, politics and biography of greatness and villainy, but also the culture, art, philosophy, religion, and the rise of mass communication." *The Story of Civilization* is the most successful historiographical series in history. It has been said that the series "put Simon and Schuster on the map" as a publishing house.
- ◆ *The Story of Civilization* is also noteworthy because of the excellence of its writing style, and contains numerous apothegms worthy of the Roman and Renaissance authors Durant admired.
- ◆ For *Rousseau and Revolution*, (1967), the 10th volume of *The Story of Civilization*, they were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for literature; later followed one of the two highest awards granted by the United States government to civilians, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, by President Ford in 1977.
- ◆ They followed *Rousseau and Revolution* with a slender volume of observations called *The Lessons of History*; which was both synopsis of the series as well as analysis. They went on to publish a final volume, their 11th, *The Age of Napoleon* in 1975. They also left behind notes for a twelfth volume, *The Age of Darwin*, and an outline for a thirteenth, *The Age of Einstein*, which would have taken *The Story of Civilization* through to 1945.

- ◆ Two posthumous works by Durant have been published in recent years, *The Greatest Minds and Ideas of All Time* (2002) and *Heroes of History: A Brief History of Civilization from Ancient Times to the Dawn of the Modern Age* (2001).
- ◆ The Durants also shared a love story as remarkable as their scholarship; they detail this in *Dual Autobiography*. After Will went into the hospital, Ariel stopped eating. Will died after he heard that Ariel had died. They died within two weeks of each other in 1981 (she on October 25 and he on November 7). Though their daughter, Ethel, and grandchildren strove to keep the death of his Ariel from the ailing Will, he learned of it on the evening news, and he himself died at the age of 96. He was buried beside his wife in Westwood Village Memorial Park Cemetery in Los Angeles.
- ◆ In 1933, he published *Tragedy of Russia: Impressions from a Brief Visit* and soon after, *The Lesson of Russia*.

Commentary

◆ Infonomics

What a blessing for the reader that Will Durant lived before the onslaught of political correction. What blessing indeed, because Durant offers some assessment that today would demand his censure. Even with his liberties, Durant presents his candor in the most delicate way without sacrificing truth.

If wisdom was sold by the pound, this book would have few merits but wisdom comes from years of study conjoined with experience and manifested with a writing style that promotes easy reading. I betray myself but not truth when I say that I concur with almost all Durant's thoughts.

In a world lacking in wisdom, candor and concern, Durant satisfies our want for the same.

Commentary Open to Purchasers

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