Herbert Read

Anarchist Poet and Art Historian

(1893 - 1968)

**Description:** He was the chief interpreter of modern art movements in Great Britain for much of the 20th century and his influence reached into many fields. He is best described as a philosophic anarchist. (From: William Leedem Bio)

**Tags:** historian, poet, literary critic, philosopher, anarchist, english, professor, speaker.

**Quotes:**

"Man is everywhere still in chains. The motive of his activity remains economic, and this economic motive inevitably leads to the social inequalities from which he had hoped to escape." (From: "The Philosophy of Anarchism," by Herbert Read, First published September 1940, by Freedom Press, Printed in Great Britain, by Express Printers, London.)

"...anarchism... for what is 'without ruler,' the literal meaning of the word, is not necessarily 'without order,' the meaning often loosely ascribed to it." (From: "The Philosophy of Anarchism," by Herbert Read, First published September 1940, by Freedom Press, Printed in Great Britain, by Express Printers, London.)

"What is our measure of progress? ... it is only in the degree that the slave is emancipated and the personality differentiated that we can speak of progress... Progress is measured by richness and intensity of experience --- by a wider and deeper apprehension of the significance and scope of human existence." (From: "The Philosophy of Anarchism," by Herbert Read, First published September 1940, by Freedom Press, Printed in Great Britain, by Express Printers, London.)

"The worth of a civilization or a culture is not valued in the terms of its material wealth or military power, but by the
quality and achievements of its representative individuals --- its philosophers, its poets and its artists." (From : "The Philosophy of Anarchism," by Herbert Read, First published September 1940, by Freedom Press, Printed in Great Britain, by Express Printers, London.)

"At certain periods in the history of the world a society has become conscious of its personalities: it would perhaps be truer to say that it has established social and economic conditions which permit the free development of the personality." (From : "The Philosophy of Anarchism," by Herbert Read, First published September 1940, by Freedom Press, Printed in Great Britain, by Express Printers, London.)

"...the institutions of religion and politics are captured by an individual or a class and turned against the group which they were designed to benefit." (From : "The Philosophy of Anarchism," by Herbert Read, First published September 1940, by Freedom Press, Printed in Great Britain, by Express Printers, London.)

"...the law imposed by the State is not necessarily the natural or just law; that there exist principles of justice which are superior to these man-made laws-principles of equality and fairness inherent in the natural order of the universe." (From : "The Philosophy of Anarchism," by Herbert Read, First published September 1940, by Freedom Press, Printed in Great Britain, by Express Printers, London.)

"The tendency of modern socialism is to establish a vast system of statutory law against which there no longer exists a plea in equity. The object of anarchism, on the other hand, is to extend the principle of equity until it altogether supersedes statutory law." (From : "The Philosophy of Anarchism," by Herbert Read, First published September 1940, by Freedom Press, Printed in Great Britain, by Express Printers, London.)

"Once you make subsistence and not profit the motive for association and mutual aid, there is everything to he said for local control, individual initiative and absolute equality." (From :
"Crime is a symptom of social illness-of poverty, inequality and restriction." (From: "The Philosophy of Anarchism," by Herbert Read, First published September 1940, by Freedom Press, Printed in Great Britain, by Express Printers, London.)

Biography:

Herbert Read 1

"The laws of Nature are physical laws: they can be grouped under such general terms as rhythm, proportion, balance, precision, economy, etc."

- Sir Herbert Edward Read

From Francis Berry, "Herbert Read," Writers and their Work, No. 45, London: Longmans, Green & Co. for The British Council and the National Book League, 1953, p. 10:

"Herbert Read was born near Kirby-Moorside, Yorkshire, in 1893. He was the son of a farmer. He was educated at Crossley's School, Halifax, and the University of Leeds. For three years he fought in the First World War as an Infantry Officer, won the Military Cross in 1917, and membership of the Distinguished Service Order in 1918. After the war he entered the Civil Service, first in the employ of the Treasury, and then that of the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was as an Assistant Keeper at the Museum that he acquired his professional knowledge of ceramics and stained glass. He left the service of the Museum in 1931, in order to occupy, two years, the Chair of Fine Art in the University of Edinburgh. Thereafter he became the editor of the Burlington Magazine, from 1933-1939. Since then he has been successively literary adviser and director of a famous publishing firm [Routledge]. In recent years he has come to undertake a good deal of committee work for such bodies as the British Council and the Arts Council. He was instrumental in founding the Institute of Contemporary Arts, of which he has been president. In 1932, he received the honorary degree of Litt.D. from the University of Leeds. He was
horoured with a knighthood in 1953."

**Editor: William W. Leedom**, Pitzer student

Sir Herbert Edward Read was born December 4th, 1893 in Yorkshire England. He also died in Yorkshire England in 1968, but the contributions he made in those seventy years to literature, art, and political philosophy were immeasurable. He was the chief interpreter of modern art movements in Great Britain for much of the 20th century and his influence reached into many fields. He is best described as a philosophic anarchist. Read became disenchanted with the world around him after an idyllic childhood growing up on a farm in Yorkshire. His early life is described in later works such as *The Innocent Eye* and an autobiographical work *The Contrary Experiences*. This disenchantment was brought about by his three years of service as a infantry officer during World War I. The contrast between the horrors of war and his childhood appear in many of his later books such as *Naked Warriors* and *Collected Poems*. He was a great influence in a new group of poets which arose in the 1940s known as the "new apocalypse," poets who reacted to the political and quiet poetry of the decade before. Read had attended the University of Leeds before the war and after it went to work first at a museum in London and then at the University of Edinburgh. In the late 1930s he became the editor of the *Burlington Magazine*. Such artists and sculptors as Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, and Ben Nicholson were greatly influenced by Read during this period. He helped them establish their work while at the same time continuing writing, teaching, and work in publishing while living in London. He was rewarded in 1953 when he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. Read contributed a great many ideas to the field of art and poetry. He was the first to make the distinction between organic and abstract form. He was a firm believer in the organic, which took shape to meet the needs of a certain form instead of abstract which was imposed on something. More on Read's theories are explained in the commentary section, but suffice it to say that Read's influence in art and political philosophy were significant.


**Works:**
Author of Ambush (December 31, 1969)
Author of Naked Warrior (November 30, 1918)
Author of Eclogues (December 31, 1969)
Author of Freedom: Is It A Crime? (March 31, 1945)
Author of Kropotkin: The Master, Meet Kropotkin (December 31, 1969)
Author of The Philosophy of Anarchism (November 30, 1939)
Author of Reason and Romanticism (December 31, 1969)
Author of Herbert Read on Godwin (December 31, 1969)
Author of Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism (November 30, 1948)
Author of The Paradox of Anarchism (November 30, 1940)
Author of William Godwin (December 31, 1969)

Chronology:

December 04, 1893: Herbert Read's Birth Day.
June 12, 1968: Herbert Read's Death Day.

Links:

• Anarchy Archives: Herbert Read Archive
  http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/read/read.html
• Anarchist Library: Herbert Read
  https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/herbert-read
• Wikipedia: Herbert Read
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Read

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