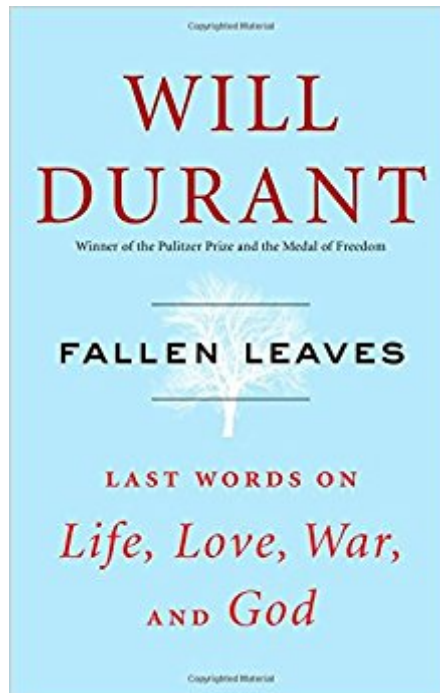




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Fallen Leaves: Last Words On Life, Love, War, And God



Synopsis

Praised as a “revelatory” book by The Wall Street Journal, this is the last and most personal work of Pulitzer Prize-winning author and historian Will Durant, discovered thirty-two years after his death. The culmination of Will Durant’s sixty-plus years spent researching the philosophies, religions, arts, sciences, and civilizations from across the world, *Fallen Leaves* is the distilled wisdom of one of the world’s greatest minds, a man with a renowned talent for rendering the insights of the past accessible. Over the course of Durant’s career he received numerous letters from “curious readers who have challenged me to speak my mind on the timeless questions of human life and fate.” With *Fallen Leaves*, his final book, he at last accepted their challenge. In twenty-two short chapters, Durant addresses everything from youth and old age to religion, morals, sex, war, politics, and art. *Fallen Leaves* is “a thought-provoking array of opinions” (Publishers Weekly), offering elegant prose, deep insights, and Durant’s revealing conclusions about the perennial problems and greatest joys we face as a species. In Durant’s singular voice, here is a message of insight for everyone who has ever sought meaning in life or the counsel of a learned friend while navigating life’s journey.

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Customer Reviews

"Fallen Leaves is in some ways a slight book. But it is also a revelatory one. Most of Durant’s work is about the thoughts and actions of others. *Fallen Leaves* is very much about the thoughts of Will

Durant concerning "well, almost everything. You'll find short essays on childhood, old age, death, war, politics, capitalism, art, sex, God and morality. ... Above all, *Fallen Leaves* is a portrait of a sensibility. ... Durant was a remarkable specimen of that nearly extinct species, a civilized liberal of wide learning and even wider sympathy for the fundamentals of human aspiration." (*The Wall Street Journal*) "Short but persuasive commentaries on a diversity of topics from a respected scholar of humanity." (*Kirkus Reviews*) "Some passages, such as his observations on youth and middle age, are personal and specific, while others, such as his ruminations on the existence of God, border on philosophy. . . . [And others] still carry a beneficial sting, such as his thoughts on war and nationalism and his plea for racial harmony (Durant's civil rights advocacy dated back to 1914). . . . a thought-provoking array of opinions." (*Publishers Weekly*) "Some of his musings are provocative, even outrageous "this is a work that demands we think, and it is a worthy conclusion to a long and distinguished career." (*Booklist*) "The book serves as a distillation of wisdom from a distinguished scholar, rendered in elegant prose." (*The New Criterion*)

Will Durant (1885–1981) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize (1968) and the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1977). He spent more than fifty years writing his critically acclaimed eleven-volume series, *The Story of Civilization* (the later volumes written in conjunction with his wife, Ariel). A champion of human rights issues, such as the brotherhood of man and social reform, long before such issues were popular, Durant's writing still educates and entertains readers around the world.

I was enthralled when I found out a new Will Durant book was coming out. I am only halfway through. This has some of the most beautiful writing in the English language I've ever read. It's poetry and brilliance. This isn't a review based on his personal views (many of which I personally find compelling and well-thought), but his prose. Will Durant was an incredible writer and any aspiring writer could learn much from studying his form.

Never mind the profundity of its content, this book is worth reading for the quality and beauty of Durant's prose alone. It is of the highest order and such a joy to read. Keep your dictionary and history books handy. If you know the meaning of every word and understand every analogy, you're a learned person indeed.

Some of the material is repetitious, but there is always profit in reading Will Durant, one of the great

prose stylists of 20th century America. Probably the most surprising aspect of the book, which is a series of essays, is how accurately he described how the wheel of history turns equally for all great powers, and now turns for America: the business and military powers rising and rising, and eventually joining forces to strangle debate and turn it to favor their interests; and how the news media, far from criticizing and correcting, plays right along. He even describes how sex is employed to sell products and tickets and services. It's amazing that all of this was evident to him back in the late 60s, when he apparently wrote the essays.

Anyone who doesn't read Durant is missing the best part of an education. He doesn't preach, he doesn't warn, he doesn't scare. He tells it like it is and lets the reader draw his own conclusions. One of the best historical writers who's ever lived on this planet!!

I've read most of Will and Ariel Durant's books, and this is one of my favorites. Finished when Will Durant was some 95 years of age, he had been working on this short book for over 30 years. In his many books, he avoided the temptation to editorialize or give his opinion on the history and philosophy he was describing. So here is the little gem where he gives his take on war, religion, love, sex, women, marriage etc etc. This book should be required reading for everyone.

There are many gems of wisdom to appreciate in this little book, but in this short review (and with the risk of oversimplifying) I wanted to touch critically on two of his major themes: religion and government. Whereas in all his long life he was never able to bring himself to the belief that religion is true, he does believe it is necessary to teach this lie to those too much less intelligent than Durant, to try to make them behave themselves. This, of course, is very cynical. It is on these terms that he supports the Catholic Church, and desires its moral power over society to increase. He does also say that he wants it to be a more liberal Catholic Church than it has been in the past, but judging by history, wouldn't one discern that once it has power that it will do what it wants? I find his stance very disappointing. In this he mirrors Plato of course, who wanted to subdue the masses of society with benevolent myths, but Durant has the benefit of perspective. We know what the Catholic Church did to those who sought to advance humanity, once it has the power of the masses behind it. Here Durant is archaic, a throwback, and it is quite a shame. Rather than trying to trick people into being moral, we should strive to tell them the truth, for only in knowing the truth can they actually be moral. Teaching them a sham morality will only exacerbate foolishness and lead to a chaos of unintended consequences. His views on government parallel his views on religion. Given

human nature as he sees it, he finds it impractical to do the right thing, and so embraces an increase in the power of the status quo while making the quiet but futile appeal for it to be kinder and gentler. But again, what have we ever seen happen in history as national governments (and Durant himself favors a one-world government) aggregate more and more power? Tyranny over the individual has been the predictable result. In this and unlike his views on religion where he mirrors the archaic ideal, here Durant mirrors the modern ideal. He is a liberal in the modern sense, he is not a classical liberal who was the idealist that believed that reason and liberty led to the improvement of mankind. *Fallen Leaves* is a good book, but I'm disappointed about where his long life of experience and thinking led him on these two very important matters. Our culture desperately needs more sincerity, not more trickery. And to solve the problem of barbarism, it needs more appeal to rational principles, an increase in the heart and soul of civility -- rationality -- not political hacks that pander to barbarism. If you've not read Durant's *Story of Philosophy*, *Transition*, and *Philosophy and the Social Problem", I'd recommend reading these before *Fallen Leaves*.

I would recommend this book to everyone from 15 to 100 years of age. Every sentence is loaded with wisdom. If our Presidential candidates and the voters listened carefully to what Will Durant has to say we would understand what makes a nation great and would then act accordingly. Reading this book gives one hope and the motivation to live up to one's full potential.

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