

# **The Function of Criticism at the Present Time**

by **Matthew Arnold**

SUB CODE: 20UEN6CC13

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# Biography

- Matthew Arnold (24 December 1822 – 15 April 1888) was a British poet and cultural critic who worked as an inspector of schools. He was the son of Thomas Arnold, the famed headmaster of Rugby School, and brother to both Tom Arnold, literary professor, and William Delafield Arnold, novelist and colonial administrator. Matthew Arnold has been characterized as a sage writer, a type of writer who chastises and instructs the reader on contemporary social issues.



- What is the duty of criticism?

To be perpetually dissatisfied with these works, while they perpetually fall short of a high and perfect ideal.

- Criticism must maintain its **independence of practical spirit** and its **aim**. Even with well-meant efforts of the practical spirit must express dissatisfaction, if in the sphere of the ideal they seem impoverishing and limiting.

- It must **not hurry** on to the goal because of its practical importance.
- It must **be patient**, and know how to wait; and **flexible**, and know to attach itself to things and how to withdraw from them.
- It must be apt **to study and praise elements** that for the fullness of spiritual perfection are wanted, even though they belong to a power which in the practical sphere may be maleficent.
- It must be apt **to discern the spiritual shortcomings or illusions of powers** that in the practical sphere may be beneficent.

- Criticism must take where **politics** and **religion** are concerned.
- Criticism should **adopt toward things in general**; on its **right tone** and **temper of mind**.
- What should criticism most seek?  
Its course is determined for it by the idea--
  - \*which is the law of its being
  - \*a distinguished endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.



- The English critic of literature, therefore, must dwell much on **foreign thought**, and **with particular heed on any part of it**, which, while significant and fruitful in itself, is for any reason specially likely to escape him.
- **Judging** is often spoken of as the critic's one business; but the judgment which almost **insensibly** forms itself in **a fair and clear mind**, along with fresh knowledge, is the valuable one; and thus knowledge, and ever fresh knowledge, must be the critic's great concern for himself.
- Communicating fresh knowledge, and letting his **own judgment** pass along with it.

- Sometimes, for the sake of establishing an author's place in literature, and his relation to a central standard.
- Criticism may have to deal with a subject-matter so familiar that fresh knowledge is out of the question, and then it must be all judgment; an enunciation and detailed application of principles.
  - \*Never to let oneself become abstract, always to retain an intimate and lively consciousness of the truth of what one is saying, and, the moment this fails us , to be sure that something is wrong.
  - \*It's the criticism that we expect you to address yourself.

- *A disinterested Endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.*
- After all, the criticism I am really concerned with is a criticism which regards Europe as being, for intellectual and spiritual purposes, one great confederation, bound to a joint action and working to a common result; and whose members have, for their proper outfit, a knowledge of Greek, Roman, and Eastern antiquity, and of one another.



- Having the sense of creative activity is the great happiness and the great proof being alive, and it is not denied to criticism to have it.
- Criticism must be **sincere, simple, flexible, ardent** ever widening its knowledge.
- The true life of literature; there is the **promised land**, towards which criticism can only beckon. The promised land it will not be ours to enter; but to **have desired to enter it**.

Thank you