



The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays

By Isaiah Berlin

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The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays By Isaiah Berlin Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #430007 in Books
- Published on: 2000-08-02
- Released on: 2000-08-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 209.30" h x 47.37" w x 5.48" l, 1.40 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 704 pages

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Editorial Review

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"Only barbarians are not curious about where they come from, how they came to be where they are, where they appear to be going, whether they wish to go there, and if so, why, and if not, why not." So wrote Isaiah Berlin in "The Pursuit of the Ideal," the semiautobiographical essay that commences *The Proper Study of Mankind*, the intellectual equivalent of a "greatest hits" collection. Born in Riga, Latvia, in 1909, Berlin left the Soviet Union for England 12 years later. After being educated at St. Paul's and Oxford, he would go on to become one of the 20th century's most vigorous--and eclectic--political philosophers until his death in 1997.

The Proper Study of Mankind shows the full range of Berlin's work and the breadth of his interests. In "The Originality of Machiavelli," after summing up what others have thought of the author of *The Prince*, Berlin launches into his own thoughtful analysis, concluding that Machiavelli's most significant contribution to philosophy was "his de facto recognition that ends equally ultimate, equally sacred, may contradict each other, that entire systems of value may come into collision without possibility of rational arbitration, and that this happens not merely in exceptional circumstances, as a result of abnormality or accident or error ... but ... as part of the normal human situation." This concept of pluralism is the undercurrent that flows through much of Berlin's writing on the history of ideas, whether he addresses opposition to the French Enlightenment or considers Tolstoy's theory of history. Other treats to be found in this collection include the autobiographical "Conversations with Akhmatova and Pasternak" and what might be considered "intellectual profiles" of Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt. This book is highly recommended for any reader interested in modern philosophy; one can only hope that it will inspire some to delve into more of Berlin's work. --Ron Hogan

From Library Journal

Oxford professor, philosopher, and historian of ideas, the late Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909-97) was also one of the finest English essayists in the 20th century. This retrospective collection of 17 of his best essays surveys his entire career as a thinker, including his work in political philosophy and the philosophy of history, his thoughts on the Enlightenment, Vico, and Machiavelli, and his passion for Russian literature. Reprinted are such seminal essays as "Two Concepts Liberty" and "The Hedgehog and the Fox," as well as his reflections on Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt. Edited by scholars Hardy and Hausheer, who also provides an introduction, and with a foreword by Noel Annan, this book also includes a helpful bibliography. A fitting epitaph for a man passionately and eloquently devoted to ideas. A Thomas L. Cooksey, Armstrong Atlantic State Univ., Savannah, GA
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Review

"Berlin . . . addresses his essays to the general reader, and he speaks with such infectious energy that he sweeps us up and carries us with him into territory that had seemed inaccessible. He becomes everyman's guide to everything exciting in the history of ideas." ?Robert Darnton, *The New York Review of Books*

"No one makes more sense of the intellectual chaos of the modern world, no one has more searching perceptions of the need and the limits of human judgment, no one embodies more realistically and intrepidly the hope of human reason." ?Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Washington Post Book World*

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