



Russian Thinkers (Penguin Classics)

By Isaiah Berlin

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Required reading for fans of Tom Stoppard's *The Coast of Utopia*-the landmark investigation into Russian history and thought

Few, if any, English-language critics have written as perceptively as Isaiah Berlin about Russian thought and culture. *Russian Thinkers* is his unique meditation on the impact that Russia's outstanding writers and philosophers had on its culture. In addition to Tolstoy's philosophy of history, which he addresses in his most famous essay, "The Hedgehog and the Fox," Berlin considers the social and political circumstances that produced such men as Herzen, Bakunin, Turgenev, Belinsky, and others of the Russian intelligentsia, who made up, as Berlin describes, "the largest single Russian contribution to social change in the world."

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Among the seven essays collected in *Russian Thinkers* is perhaps Isaiah Berlin's most famous work, "The Hedgehog and the Fox," which begins with an ancient Greek proverb ("The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing") before taking on Leo Tolstoy's philosophy of history, showing how Tolstoy "was by nature a fox, but believed in being a hedgehog." The other half dozen pieces examine other Russian writers and philosophers, including Alexander Herzen, Ivan Turgenev, and Mikhail Bakunin--although the latter, Berlin says, "is not a serious thinker. There are no coherent ideas to be extracted from his writings of any period, only fire and imagination, violence and poetry, and an ungovernable desire for strong sensations." Few, if any, English-language critics have written as perceptibly about Russian thought and culture as the Latvian-born Berlin, and the history covered in *Russian Thinkers* is a unique elaboration of Berlin's theses concerning the impact of ideas upon culture.

Review

"Isaiah Berlin is an author without whom I could not have written these plays."

-Tom Stoppard, in *The Coast of Utopia* program

About the Author

Isaiah Berlin, O.M., C.B.E., first President of Wolfson College, Oxford, from 1966 to 1975, is a Fellow of All Souls. He was a Fellow of New College from 1938 to 1950 and Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford from 1957 to 1967. He served as President of the British Academy of Arts and Letters. He holds honorary degrees from the universities of Brandeis, Cambridge, Columbia, East Anglia, Glasgow, Harvard, Hull, Jerusalem, Liverpool, London and Tel Aviv. Sir Isaiah's work covers a wide variety of subjects, but most of his work has appeared in periodicals and symposia. *Russian Thinkers* is the first of four volumes edited by Henry Hardy which bring together for the first time all of Isaiah Berlin's major essays (excluding those already published in *Four Essays on Liberty* and *Vico and Herder*). Isaiah Berlin's other contributions to Russian studies include his translation of Ivan Turgenev's *First Love* (available from Penguin) and his Introduction to Alexander Herzen's memoirs, *My Past and Thoughts*. Sir Isaiah was awarded the Jerusalem Prize in 1979 for the expression in his writings of the idea of the freedom of the individual in society.

Users Review

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Andrew Fogarty:

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