



Lives of the Mind: The Use and Abuse of Intelligence from Hegel to Wodehouse

Roger Kimball

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“In the faculty of writing nonsense,” the English critic Walter Bagehot once observed, “stupidity is no match for genius.” In *Lives of the Mind*, Roger Kimball, one of the best of our cultural critics, offers a lively and penetrating study of genius?and pseudo-genius?at work and investigates the use and abuse of intelligence. When does a love of ideas become a dangerous infatuation? What antidotes are there for the silliness of unanchored intellect? Drawing on figures as various as Plutarch and Hegel, Kierkegaard and P. G. Wodehouse, Elias Canetti and Anthony Trollope, Bagehot and Wittgenstein and Sybille Bedford, Mr. Kimball provides a sharply observed tour of Western intellectual and artistic aspiration. He shows what happens when intellect trumps common sense, and how an affirmation of shared values and ordinary reality can rescue us from the temptations of the higher stupidity. Part cautionary tale, part literary celebration, *Lives of the Mind* is a witty, deeply engaging guide for the perplexed. The *New York Times Book Review* has called Mr. Kimball “a scathing critic but one whose tirades are usually justified....His intellectual rigor is refreshing.” And Gertrude Himmelfarb has written: “His essays reflect a steadiness of mind, a coherence, conviction, and passion that make him one of the most candid and perceptive critics of American culture.”

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