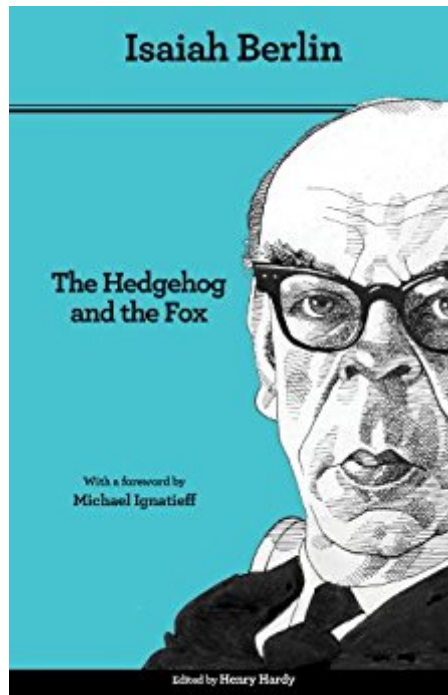




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The Hedgehog And The Fox: An Essay On Tolstoy's View Of History



Synopsis

"The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." This ancient Greek aphorism, preserved in a fragment from the poet Archilochus, describes the central thesis of Isaiah Berlin's masterly essay on Leo Tolstoy and the philosophy of history, the subject of the epilogue to *War and Peace*. Although there have been many interpretations of the adage, Berlin uses it to mark a fundamental distinction between human beings who are fascinated by the infinite variety of things and those who relate everything to a central, all-embracing system. Applied to Tolstoy, the saying illuminates a paradox that helps explain his philosophy of history: Tolstoy was a fox, but believed in being a hedgehog. One of Berlin's most celebrated works, this extraordinary essay offers profound insights about Tolstoy, historical understanding, and human psychology. This new edition features a revised text that supplants all previous versions, English translations of the many passages in foreign languages, a new foreword in which Berlin biographer Michael Ignatieff explains the enduring appeal of Berlin's essay, and a new appendix that provides rich context, including excerpts from reviews and Berlin's letters, as well as a startling new interpretation of Archilochus's epigram.

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Customer Reviews

I read this essay originally around 20 years ago for a Russian Intellectual History class. This essay summarizes many of the anxieties of the time - it is, like the title says, An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History. It was a quick read (~1.5 hours) but might seem a lot longer if you are not familiar with the topics and people like Proudhon, Belinsky, Herzen, The Decemberists etc....The brief summary is that he thinks Tolstoy is a fox who has respect and wishes he could make himself into a hedgehog. The other review is hysterical. Did The Onion write that?The appendix has some good material both by Berlin and reviewers.

The title essay is one of the most important pieces of furniture in the mental drawing room of the 21st century mind. It is not that it is without caveat, but it's sweeping premise has probably been used by lots of writers in the 20th century, and the reputed difference between the hedgehog and the fox goes back to pre-Christian times from a Greek poet.

This 144 page book--actually, long essay--cost \$10.00 in this paperback version.I don't object to paying for major work no matter what the length (for example Namier on 1848 or Pares on Charles III), but as a criticism of VOUNA I MIR this is far from indispensable. It could have been easily incorporated into another book with other of Berlin's political essays on Russian authors to make a volume of 300 pages or so for about \$5 more.Berlin has a reputation that isn't confirmed by his writings. Perhaps he was a brilliant lecturer, but most of what he wrote is less than profound, though I don't deny it's usually solid stuff. I just object to paying more money than is necessary for such little reward from a single book.

Who will dare to review The Master of English wit and prose? Not I, a mere reporter. Still, I feel kinship because he was born in Riga and laced his witty political observations with musical references. Actually met him at the home of Arthur Schlesinger Jr. during the Kennedy Administration. Can't remember the date though.Basso di Cornetto

A brilliant and intense discussion of Tolstoy and his work. Wonderfully concise and intellectually challenging. For any student of Tolstoy or philosophy in general, this is a fascinating work.

service good; okay

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