



# The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent: Selected Essays

*Lionel Trilling*

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## The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent: Selected Essays Lionel Trilling

Bringing together the thoughts of one of American literature's sharpest cultural critics, this compendium will open the eyes of a whole new audience to the work of Lionel Trilling. Trilling was a strenuous thinker who was proud to think "too much." As an intellectual he did not spare his own kind, and though he did not consider himself a rationalist, he was grounded in the world.

This collection features 32 of Trilling's essays on a range of topics, from Jane Austen to George Orwell and from the Kinsey Report to *Lolita*. Also included are Trilling's seminal essays "Art and Neurosis" and "Manners, Morals, and the Novel." Many of the pieces made their initial appearances in periodicals such as *The Partisan Review* and *Commentary*; most were later reprinted in essay collections. This new gathering of his writings demonstrates again Trilling's patient, thorough style. Considering "the problems of life"—in art, literature, culture, and intellectual life—was, to him, a vital occupation, even if he did not expect to get anything as simple or encouraging as "answers." The intellectual journey was the true goal.

No matter the subject, Trilling's arguments come together easily, as if constructing complicated defenses and attacks were singularly simple for his well-honed mind. The more he wrote on a subject and the more intricate his reasoning, the more clear that subject became; his elaboration is all function and no filler. Wrestling with Trilling's challenging work still yields rewards today, his ideas speaking to issues that transcend decades and even centuries.

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