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THE CAPTIVE MIND BY CSELAW MILOSZ PDF

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Most helpful customer reviews

153 of 161 people found the following review helpful.

The Devil's Arguments, In His Own Language

By R. W. Rasband

In the forward to this remarkable book Milosz writes that he wants to give the totalitarian point of view "in his own words, from his own point of view." The result is this ambitious, fascinating tour of the human mind twisted by the lies of the culture that surrounds it. It's a schizophrenic place that resembles the scarier novels of the noir writer Jim Thompson. There's nothing solid to cling to; everything dissolves into fear and loathing. Milosz turns his poetical gifts to the case studies of several Polish intellectuals who became entangled with the Communist party. Milosz doesn't name them but one is clearly Tadeusz Borowski, the author of the Holocaust short story collection "This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen." The title of that book in Polish was "The Stony World", which reflected how Borowski, an Auschwitz survivor, came to see the world--as dominated by force, without effective moral constraint. Milosz depicts Borowski as a man who sought shelter under the protection of the strongest earthly power available--the Communists--but was unable finally to justify the price of that loyalty (he committed suicide.) What keeps someone from succumbing to "Ketman" (the two-facedness that Orwell called "double-think?") Milosz implies the answer is religious faith, which allows one to trust in an objective truth beyond the lies and terror of the stony world (he was a devout Catholic.) This book is a must read for anyone who wants to keep the world from stealing his soul.

82 of 92 people found the following review helpful.

Communist Intellectual is an Oxymoron.

By Jon L Albee

Never have I read a more vivid and convincing thesis defending the virtues of intellectual freedom. Though frequently difficult to read--the author (or the translator) shifts frequently from first to second to third person (and back again) in mid paragraph--the work is central to understanding not only the intellectual seductiveness of the "rule of philosophy" but, more importantly and generally, the dangers of intellectual conformity. Milosz's dissection of intellectuals' attraction to leftist social systems becomes a defense of open society in both the intellectual and general communities. We come to understand most fundamentally the concept of intellectual freedom, and how the elimination of it becomes the ultimate goal of authoritarian leftist politics... despite claims otherwise.

Many intellectuals believe that their interests are best served by socialism or communism. Milosz explains why they are frequently fooled into believing this, and why many of the very components of socialism and communism that intellectuals most covet--freedom from vulgar market forces and important roles in the administration of society--are the very forces that strip them of their liberty. He illustrates this process with four character examples.

Though written in the throes of the Cold War, this work could not be more timely. And though it is written as

an attack on Communism (with a big "C") and is rife with often knee-jerk anti-Russian rhetoric, it's arguments can be easily applied to all forms of totalitarianism, both left and right. Mostly, Milosz is attempting to defend the chaotic human condition from ideological molding and, considering contemporary encroachments of politics, government, and religion into the lives of human beings, this book is as valid and important today as it was in 1953. Not to be missed.

52 of 58 people found the following review helpful.

Required reading in the 20'th century

By A Customer

"It was only toward the middle of the twentieth century that the inhabitants of many European countries came, in general unpleasantly, to the realization that their fate could be influenced directly by intricate and abstruse books of philosophy". That's how this book begins, and it captures Milosz's major theme: the vast difference between "abstruse books of philosophy" and real human beings. In a series of connected essays, he studies that difference, and the ways in which people respond when they're forced to deny it. Most of the essays tell the stories of writers that Milosz knew in Warsaw before the war, and the different routes they took to becoming instruments of communist propaganda. Of the other essays, the one most powerful to an American reader is "Looking to the West", which starts with Milosz being asked whether Americans are really stupid. The writing is beautiful and vivid. I highly recommend this book to anybody who dislikes the oversimplifications of ideology. I recommend it even more highly to anybody who doesn't.

See all 43 customer reviews...

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