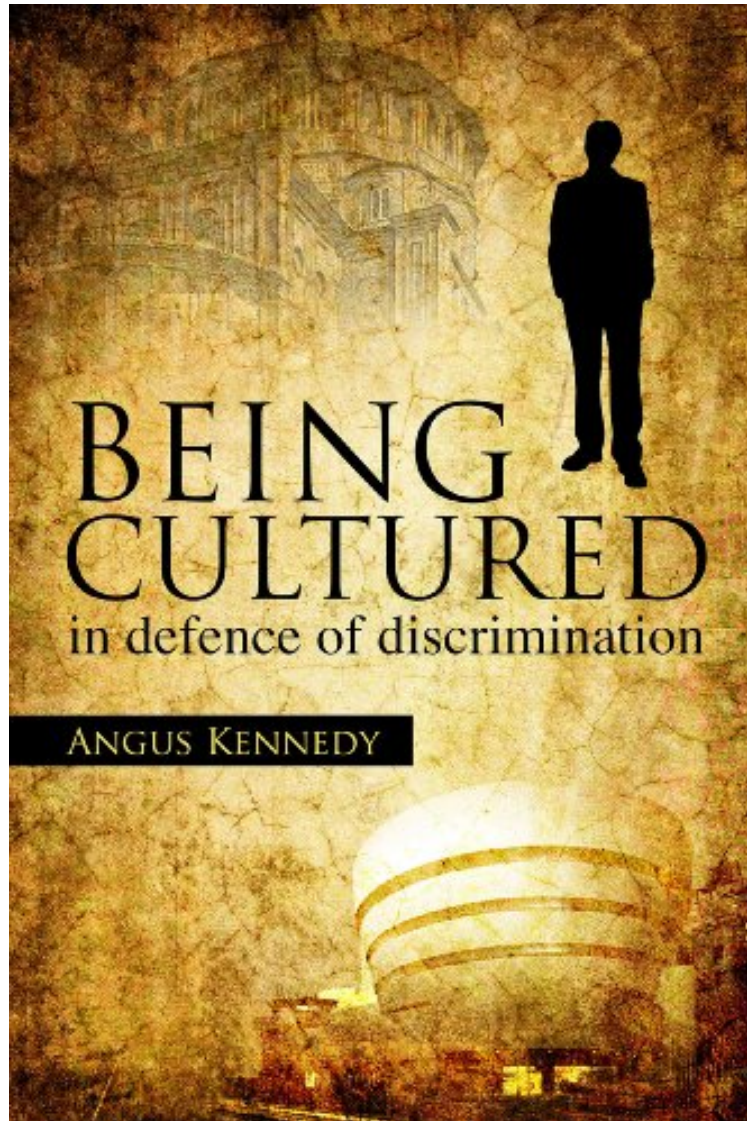


Being Cultured: 19 (Societas)

Angus Kennedy

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Angus Kennedy : Being Cultured: 19 (Societas) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Being Cultured: 19 (Societas):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Value of the Arts from a Reactionary StandpointBy Dr. Laurence RawOccasionally a book comes along that is so gloriously wrong-headed in its arguments, it is a pleasure to read.Writing from a conservative standpoint, Angus Kennedy argues that the arts in Britain have suffered from a general malaise known as egalitarianism; better defined as the desire to make "high" culture accessible to everyone. This has been achieved through various strategies including planning exhibitions where historical continuity has been sacrificed in favor of a more eclectic approach to display; of providing exhibitions in hitherto depressed areas as a

means of bringing people together and forging a community spirit. Alternatively arts curators have sponsored schemes to take fine art, theater and other forms direct to the people, especially in depressed areas. Such strategies, in Kennedy's view are wrong, as they are inspired by the notion that "art" per se has to be perceived as "good" or beneficial for everyone, and hence warrants state involvement. Often arts policies are deliberately imposed on people to little or no effect, other than to improve statistics and thereby justify continued government funding. In the end art itself becomes debased, as it simply becomes a vehicle by which apparatchiks can account for their existence at the heart of Britain's cultural policy. Kennedy's arguments reveal an astonishing ignorance of British history. In the post-1945 era the Arts Council was created with the specific purpose of rendering fine arts accessible to others by taking them round the country on tours. While some experiments undoubtedly failed, this policy brought theater to communities which had never seen live shows before, and thereby stimulated a renewed interest in drama as an art form. The subsidized theater also provided an outlet for new and innovative writing; without it, there might never have been that flowering of British drama that characterized the "Angry Young Man" movement of the late Fifties and early Sixties. Subsidized theater also fulfilled a valuable morale-boosting function during World War Two, when luminaries such as Sybil Thorndike and Moira Hess toured some of the most bomb-damaged parts of the country, often at great personal risk to themselves. Basically Kennedy has an intellectual bee in his bonnet and wants to voice his opinions against it. He resents the idea of pluralism; that each person might have their own judgement that differs from someone else's, thereby producing cultural relativism. This he dismisses as a strategy of "the Left" (whoever they might be) to deconstruct the value of the arts as arts and thereby permit the untalented to flourish in their chosen fields. Kennedy would prefer the restoration of "high" cultural values, where there is an accepted historical canon of work - theater, art, music, and the like - that everyone accepts as "great," and derives profit from it. He also argues for the idea of discrimination; that some educated people will always be able to understand a great work of "art" better than their less educated colleagues. The fact that such values are inherently class-based seems to elude him. He would rather consider the arts as an elite phenomenon that requires effort to be understood; the kind of effort obtained through a privileged education and access to the best exhibitions in the metropolis. The idea of taking art to the people is anathema to him, as it is an example of the "nanny state" trying to suppress individual self-determination. The book is also exclusively Brit-focused. Kennedy reveals little if no knowledge of how the arts work in other countries - in Europe, the Middle East, or Asia. If he had expanded his research, perhaps he would not have come to such ludicrous conclusions.

Today culture is everywhere as maybe never before. We read culture reviews, watch culture shows, live in Cities of Culture, and witness the Cultural Olympiad. Government, museums and arts councils worry that we are not getting enough culture and shape policy around notions of art and culture for all. Access and inclusion are in. Difficulty and exclusivity out. In "Being Cultured: in defence of discrimination" Angus Kennedy asks if this explosion of culture, and the breaking down of distinctions between high and low culture, has emancipated us or left us adrift without cultural moorings. Is it true that all cultures are equal? Is cultural diversity a good thing? Is it unacceptably elitist to insist on the highest standards of judgment? To argue that some cultural works stand the test of time and some don't? Can anyone dare to call themselves cultured anymore? Might it even be the case that culture no longer actually means anything much to us? That our nervousness about exercising discrimination and good taste - the erosion of cultural authority - might have left us with a culture that may be open to all, but lacking in depth? This provocative book strikes a blow for discrimination in culture and argues that there is a responsibility on each of us as individuals to always be becoming more cultured beings: our best selves. Kennedy revisits the tradition - from Cicero to Kant, Arnold to Arendt - of autonomy in culture: both in the sense of its intrinsic value and how it rests on our individual freedom - quite apart from state and society - to discriminate and judge. A freedom, without which, we risk a widening culture of consensus and conformity. But which is the constitutive element of a world in common.

"Being Cultured is a strongly argued and clear account of what culture is, why it matters and why it is now under threat. Angus Kennedy lays bare the connection between culture and discrimination, in ways that leave the cultural shibboleths of our time in ruins. This is a book that ought to be read by all students of the humanities as well as the politicians, bureaucrats and impresarios who are responsible for cultural policy and who seem to have lost all sense of why and how there could be such a thing or what would be achieved by it."--Roger Scruton (01/06/2014)"Arts administrators everywhere, and everyone at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, should have the courage to read this wise and monitory book and take on board seriously what Kennedy has to say..."--Geoff Ward"Arts" (06/19/2014)"Throughout this book Angus Kennedy carefully diagnoses the flaws of contemporary British culture."--Donald Lee"The Art Newspaper" (07/01/2014)". "Being Cultured is in large part necessary and heartening. Readers will find themselves in agreement with many of Kennedy's conclusions..."--Alexander Adams"The Jackdaw" (05/20/2014)". "Being Cultured is in large part necessary and heartening. Readers will find themselves in agreement with many of Kennedy's conclusions..."--Alexander Adams"The Jackdaw" (05/20/2014)"There is much to be commended in Kennedy's Leavisite belief in the morality of art, and this book will certainly have its acolytes not least

for its uncompromising stance."--Toby Lichtig "Times Literary Supplement ""About the AuthorAngus Kennedy is head of external relations at the Institute of Ideas and founder of its educational initiative, The Academy. He has a degree in Classics from Christ Church and lives in Sussex.