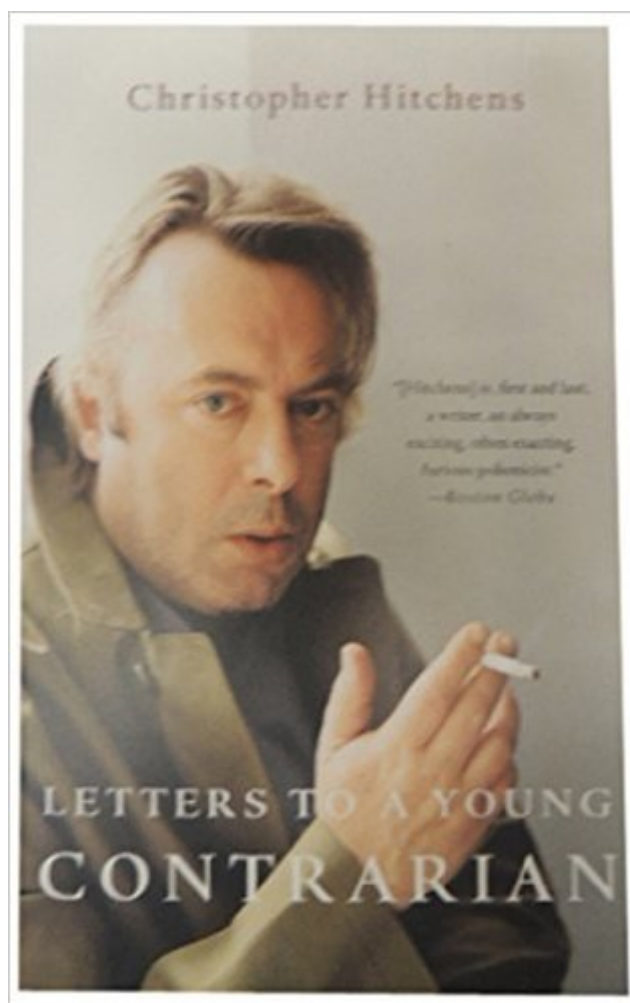


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Letters To A Young Contrarian (Art Of Mentoring (Paperback))



Synopsis

In the book that he was born to write, provocateur and best-selling author Christopher Hitchens inspires future generations of radicals, gadflies, mavericks, rebels, angry young (wo)men, and dissidents. Who better to speak to that person who finds him or herself in a contrarian position than Hitchens, who has made a career of disagreeing in profound and entertaining ways. This book explores the entire range of "contrary positions"-from noble dissident to gratuitous pain in the butt. In an age of overly polite debate bending over backward to reach a happy consensus within an increasingly centrist political dialogue, Hitchens pointedly pitches himself in contrast. He bemoans the loss of the skills of dialectical thinking evident in contemporary society. He understands the importance of disagreement-to personal integrity, to informed discussion, to true progress-heck, to democracy itself. Epigrammatic, spunky, witty, in your face, timeless and timely, this book is everything you would expect from a mentoring contrarian.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's easy to forget sometimes, based on the flair and panache he exudes on the television screen, just how educated Christopher Hitchens actually is. In this book, you'll be treated to a lifetime's worth of insight and scholarship as he provides the reader with some of the best citations you'll ever come across, including, "Here I stand I can do no other" by Martin Luther. Hitchens is a contrarian but these Letters will appeal to anyone as they are the celebration of the mind via reason. When he

first heard "the personal is political," he knew it was poison and he rails against the emotional approach to deciding issues in these pages. I am very glad he did. I couldn't help but think what I've thought about him so many times, "This is such a brave man." Regardless of what one believes regarding his arguments and positions, the author always puts forth sound rationale for why he thinks the way he does. His critique of conformists is absolutely precious and I would be only too happy to give this book to any young person. It's an education in itself.

Two criticisms of this book have been 1. it does not address practical topics of today's politics and 2. Hitchens has a large ego and wants to be Gore Vidal. What is truly inspiring about this book is that it is not an argument on current affairs. You can get this from a newspaper. I find Hitchens fascinating because he is one of the few writers who courageously tries to change how you think and not just your opinion on an issue. In fact Hitchens states that "how" and not "what" you think is what is truly important. As for point number 2 regarding Gore Vidal and the author's ego I have no idea where this comment comes from in fact the Hitchens is self-deprecating in several parts of the book. I have read the book three times now and to me it is a concise and powerful argument for why we need people who are what Hitchens calls "apart" (think differently). In fact my favorite part of the book is a discussion around the folly in trying to create consensus. You always need a cadre of strong viewpoints to reach a good decision. When reading some reviews I wonder if readers have read the book or have simply pigeonholed Hitchens' work and want to discredit him. I would highly recommend this book who sincerely wants to change how they think but people like this are few. As Hitchens points out many of our institutions, particularly religious institutions actually ask that you "check your intellect at the door" and listen to the wise person or book of wisdom. This subtle imposed ignorance keeps the masses in a haze but sufficiently free to do the bidding of its leaders, however, harmful they may be. I see a great service that Hitchens offers us which is the constant questioning of the existence of any large institution in the world whether it be government, religious, or business.

This is a simple and elegant series of letters written to a hypothetical student. Only a cynic could fail to admire and value Christopher Hitchens' "Letters to a Young Contrarian". This short book contains all the advice a student of twenty-first century society should want or need. We get a marvelously unadulterated dose of the author's hortative aesthetics. Every letter is marked with a characteristic polish that creates a pedagogical elegance. The book is written as a series of letters which are timely and timeless. I bought this book as a gift for a young writer and journalist. I read it

before giving it as a gift. I am very pleased with it as a gift and hope that the advice falls on fertile soil. I am also very pleased with the book as advice for my own personal causes. These letters continue to be a priceless source of insight and wisdom as the student continues to evolve as an activist. We can all see ourselves in these wonderful words and we can witness what we aspire to be. These letters fill the reader with hope. There is hope that society can evolve to a rational enlightenment. Hope is alive and we are not doomed to repeat all the follies of history. What impressed me so much was the incredible precision and care in each of the letters. The commitment to explore the unconventional and contrary positions is a commitment to personal integrity. This commitment is a social contract that is a prerequisite to democracy and to civilization. The author's choice of examples and counter examples clearly illustrate his intention to inspire the next generation of social thinkers. I highly recommend this book to every person who wants to become an agent of change. It will probably be more useful to aspiring journalists, scientists, mathematicians and writers. People who simply enjoy the wonder of reasoned inquiry will delight in the book also. The advice can hardly be paraphrased with any justice to the subject in a short review. For the most part, the author gives advice about being eternally vigilant and persistent in the face of unrelenting opposition. There is no limit to human anti-intellectualism so there must be no limit to reason. Patiently embrace the struggle and make it your own. Understand that the sources of irrationality and prejudice are petty, private, archaic and primeval urges. All of these things he discusses with incredible wisdom and lucidity. The author centers, assures and illuminates the student. What a delight this book turned out to be. Buy a copy of this book for every young person you care about. They can read it again and again to gain insight and create a purposeful life. Some young people will cynically dismiss the relevance of the message, but no one who reads it can miss the message. Life on autopilot, accepting standards and norms without reason, is to life without human purpose. Even the most cynical alive person can give pause to enjoy this wonderful collection of sweepingly thought provoking letters. The author says to "Do justice, and let the skies fall." This leads to a calling of confrontation, argument, and troublemaking. The author advocates a life of being perpetually at odds with the mainstream. "Humanity is very much in debt to such people." I highly recommend this book.

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