



## Affirming: Letters 1975-1997

*Isaiah Berlin*

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**Affirming: Letters 1975-1997** Isaiah Berlin

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In this final volume, Isaiah Berlin enters a profoundly interesting last phase in his life. He is as prolific a correspondent as ever, but the publication of new essay collections produces a striking change in tone, as readers seek clarification of his ideas. Many of these letters throw substantive new light on his thought, and deal with issues of overriding importance to today's world. Berlin dwells on pluralism of values and cultures, political liberalism, the defense of democracy, and the challenge posed by fundamentalism. But there is also a generous leavening of gossip to close friends, reflections on music, the arts, and artists, as well as a Shakespearean fascination with the variety of humankind. He reacts, as always, to world events: the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians; the fall of Communism; the Falklands, Gulf, and Bosnian wars; and he observes the leading players on the world stage—Reagan, Thatcher, Begin, Sadat, Shamir, Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Clinton, and Khomeini; especially illuminating is the contrast he draws between Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov. He declines a peerage, wins the Agnelli Prize for ethics, campaigns against the "carbuncle" proposed by the National Gallery, helps run Covent Garden, talks at length to his biographer, and works with his editor on new volumes of his writings. *Affirming* is the crowning achievement both of Berlin's epistolary life and of the acclaimed edition of his letters that began publication 11 years ago.

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