

Absent Minds

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A richly textured work of history and a powerful contribution to contemporary cultural debate, *Absent Minds* provides the first full-length account of 'the question of intellectuals' in twentieth-century Britain - have such figures ever existed, have they always been more prominent or influential elsewhere, and are they on the point of becoming extinct today? Recovering neglected or misunderstood traditions of reflection and debate from the late nineteenth century through to the present, Stefan Collini challenges the familiar cliche that there are no 'real' intellectuals in Britain. The book offers a persuasive analysis of the concept of 'the intellectual' and an extensive comparative account of how this question has been seen in the USA, France, and elsewhere in Europe. There are detailed discussions of influential or revealing figures such as Julien Benda, T. S. Eliot, George Orwell, and Edward Said, as well as trenchant critiques of current assumptions about the impact of specialization and celebrity. Throughout, attention is paid to the multiple senses of the term 'intellectuals' and to the great diversity of relevant genres and media through which they have communicated their ideas, from pamphlets and periodical essays to public lectures and radio talks. Elegantly written and rigorously argued, *Absent Minds* is a major, long-awaited work by a leading intellectual historian and cultural commentator, ranging across the conventional divides between academic disciplines and combining insightful portraits of individuals with sharp-edged cultural analysis.

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