CIVILITY AND SUBVERSION

The book provides a sophisticated alternative to existing accounts of the role of the intellectual in modern democracy. Arguing that society suffers from a systemic deliberation deficit, Jeffrey Goldfarb explores the potential of the intellectual as democratic agent, at once civilizing political contestation and subverting complacent consensus. The sentimental leftist view of the intellectual as guardian of democracy and the demonizing rightist view of the intellectual as obstructor of progress are both shown to be inadequate. Instead, intellectuals are portrayed as special kinds of “strangers” who pay careful attention to their critical faculties, uniquely equipping them to address the most pressing issues of today. Professor Goldfarb deploys classical and contemporary social theory to analyze a diverse set of intellectuals in action, from Socrates in fifth-century Athens to Malcolm X and Toni Morrison in twentieth-century America, and, drawing on personal acquaintance, the political dissidents in communist and post-communist Central Europe.

Jeffrey C. Goldfarb is Professor of Sociology and Co-Chair of the Committee for Democratic Studies at the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research in New York City. He is the author of numerous essays and scholarly articles as well as six books, including After the Fall (1992), Beyond Glasnost (1989), and On Cultural Freedom (1982). In addition to his scholarly work on cultural and intellectual life, he has been actively involved in democratic movements in Eastern and Central Europe, particularly Poland, since before the fall of communism. He was co-founder, along with Adam Michnik, of an international clandestine network of oppositional intellectuals, the Democracy Seminar. He draws on this first-hand experience in Civility and Subversion.
CIVILITY AND SUBVERSION

The Intellectual in Democratic Society

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In memory of my father

Benjamin Goldfarb, 1915–1997
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Some years ago, in the preface to my book The Cynical Society, I acknowledged my debt to my father, a private intellectual, for what he taught me about politics. Here, I dedicate this work to his memory, with a sense of loss, and with profound appreciation for what he taught me about living a meaningful life.