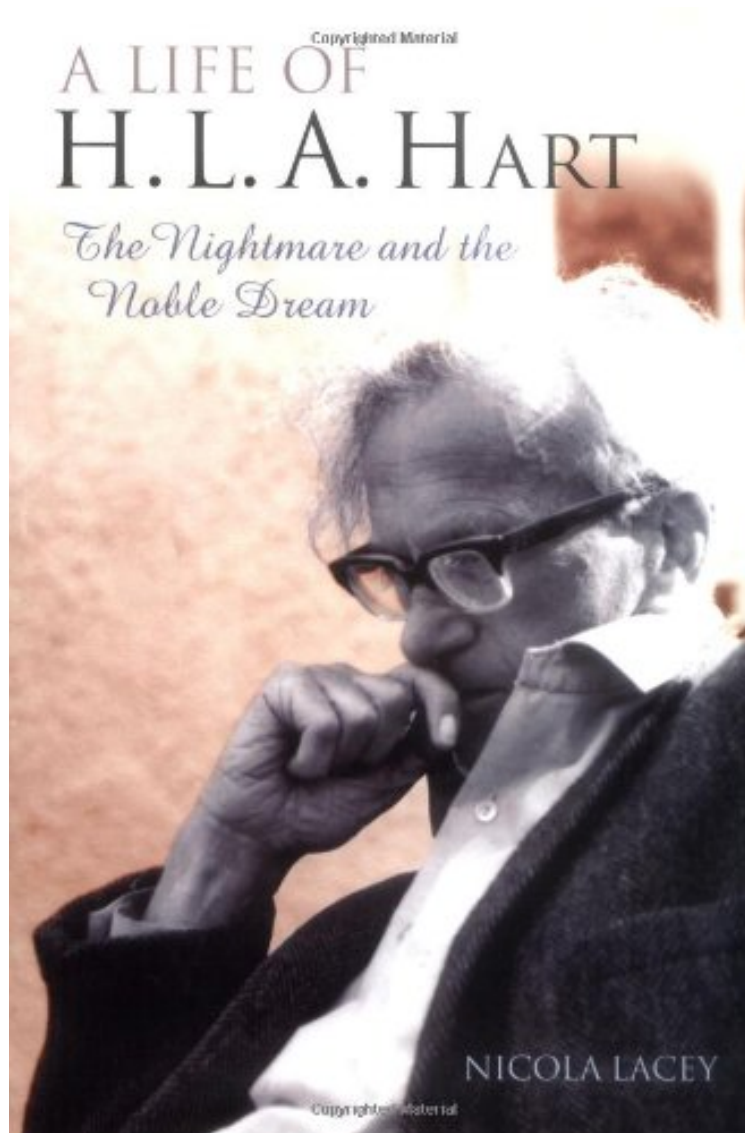


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A Life of H. L. A. Hart: The Nightmare and the Noble Dream

Nicola Lacey

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Nicola Lacey : A Life of H. L. A. Hart: The Nightmare and the Noble Dream before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Life of H. L. A. Hart: The Nightmare and the Noble Dream:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Fear and (Self) Loathing in OxfordBy not meH.L.A. Hart was the greatest legal philosopher of the 20th century. For readers interested in jurisprudence, just about anything written by him or about him is worth reading. "A Life of H.L.A Hart" definitely falls into this category.The book draws on Hart's

copious letters, diaries, and notebooks to reconstruct his life in intimate detail. We learn about his anxieties, his homosexuality, and his tortured marriage. We read about his cluttered offices and his love of literature and nature. We learn about his Jewish "outsider" background and his need to be accepted in Oxford's stuffy conservative society. We read excerpts from letters written during his travels in Europe, New Zealand, the U.S., and India. We learn that he was ambivalent about fatherhood yet devoted to his children, especially to his autistic youngest son. We even learn how media allegations that Hart's wife spied for the Soviet Union in the 1930s and '40s brought on a late-life nervous breakdown that was treated with electro-shock therapy. Hart seems to have led a life of perpetual torment. In spite of his intellectual prowess, academic success, and great capacity for friendship, he was riddled with self-doubt and insecurity. And even though he loved his wife, their marriage was a lifelong source of heartache and sexual frustration (for both of them). If a successful biography opens a window on the inner emotional life of its subject, then "A Life of H.L.A. Hart" is a major success. But while the book teaches us much about Hart the man, it leaves Hart the thinker and lawyer strangely underdeveloped. In particular, it tells us little about the technical content of Hart's legal philosophy, which revolutionized jurisprudence and influenced an entire generation of younger legal philosophers including Ronald Dworkin, Joseph Raz and John Finnis. Similarly, we learn little about Hart's non-Oxford professional life. He worked as a London barrister and served with MI5 before joining Oxford's faculty in mid-life, and later served on official bodies such as the monopolies commission. These experiences are given short shrift even though they are interesting in their own right and surely shaped Hart's view of law and policy. Bottomline: I loved "A Life of H.L.A. Hart." It's a psychological page-turner, and I devoured much of it on a long plane flight. But then I've read "The Concept of Law" (Hart's masterwork) four times and was able to fill in the intellectual gaps in "Life." Unfortunately, the author apparently was content to mine the trove of Hart's personal papers without doing broader research into the events and circumstances of his life and career. I'm not sure whether anyone not already a fan of Hart would get more than 100 pages into this book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant first biography By Hande ZI agree entirely with the previous reviewers that this was a well written and informative biography of a very humble, very private intellectual. If not for N Lacey, the legion of Hart followers who do not know him personally would guess that he was not only brilliant, but also a kind and wonderful human being. Now, thanks to the book, there can be little doubt that he was indeed so. However, I suspect that the third line from the top of page 349 might be incomplete. It seems to be an editorial oversight that should be rectified in reprints or a second edition. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Three Stars By M. Bernardez One copy was perfect the other wasn't.

H.L.A. Hart was the pre-eminent legal philosopher of the twentieth century. As a scholar he single-handedly reinvented the philosophy of law and revolutionized our understanding of law as a social institution. Hart's approach to legal philosophy was at once disarmingly simple and breathtakingly ambitious, combining the insights of the Utilitarian tradition and the new linguistic philosophy of J.L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein. He sought to elucidate a concept of law that would be of relevance to all forms of law, wherever or whenever they arose. This book is both an intellectual and a psychological biography, following his life from modest origins as the son of Jewish tailor parents in Yorkshire to worldwide fame as the most influential English-speaking legal theorist of the post-War era. It traces his successive metamorphoses; from Yorkshire schoolboy to Oxford scholar, successful barrister, intelligence officer, philosopher, and, finally, Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford. Nicola Lacey draws upon Hart's previously unpublished diaries and letters to reveal a complex interior life. Outwardly successful, Hart was in fact tormented by doubts about his intellectual abilities, his sexual identity and his capacity to form close relationships. Her biography also sheds fascinating light on the origins of his ideas, and assesses his overall contribution to the philosophy of law. Above all, it is a chronicle of a life which made an impact far greater than many of us realize.

[Lacey's] biography of the greatest legal philosopher since Jeremy Bentham is worthy of its illustrious subject. It is an excellent, gripping piece of work that sheds valuable light on the life of Hart and the lives of many of his contemporaries... An abundance of fascinating material in Lacey's book... One of the many virtues of Lacey's book is that it enhances one's respect for the greatness of Hart's philosophical work by revealing adroitly the emotional turmoil that Hart underwent in so many of his personal and intellectual endeavours... Lacey deserves considerable credit for highlighting the magnitude of Hart's achievements by setting them in the context of his troubled life. Lacey paints a rich and valuable picture of postwar Oxford, displaying an insider's sensitivity to the quiet viciousness of academic politics. Jonathan Derbyshire, FT Magazine, 11-12 Feb 2006 Lacey has done a superb job. A highly readable narrative. Valuable achievement London of Books A book which brilliantly relates Hart's personal life to his academic achievements. Lacey has a remarkable ability to explain both the intellectual issues, his ideas about them, and the objections that have been raised by his views. TLS BY unravelling a life the intensity and gravity of which no one, not even his wife and colleagues, had imagined... Lacey's biography sheds new light on the origins and the depth of Hart's work... A life of H.L.A. Hart is a concise and extremely well organized biography in spite of being a very rich and full one... In spite of its dense content, the biography's prose is clear and fluent throughout, in a style of which Hart would have approved, and this makes it extremely enjoyable to read. Samantha Besson, German Law Journal in retrospect of

what she found in Hart's diaries, she seemed the perfect person to take on his biography... she tried to "bring alive on the page the complicated, very human man whom so many readers of his academic work think of as impersonal icon." "Samantha Besson, German Law Journal`This fascinating and touching biography's secret lies in a unique intergenerational encounter that turned into a rich, albeit posthumous, human relationship between one of the twentieth century's most brilliant legal philosophers and a younger fellow jurist who is most probably one of the most perceptive feminist legal theorists of her generation.' Samantha Besson, German Law Journal` And the wonderful thing is Professor Lacey never sells Hart's ideas short, never underestimates the content of his work both as a jurist and as a public intellectual even while she brings his family, his circle of friends, and his personality to life. We end up learning as much about secondary rules in the law as we learn about wartime espionage and the lucid prose of this biography makes them both into an enjoyable and profitable experience.' Jeremy Waldron, Maurice and Hilda Friedman Professor of Law and Director of the Center for Law and Philosophy, Columbia University

About the Author Nicola Lacey is Professor of Criminal Law and Legal Theory at the London School of Economics and Adjunct Professor of Social and Political Theory at the Research School of Social Sciences of the Australian National University. She is a Fellow of the British Academy.