



# Contentment in Contention

*Beverley Southgate*

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## **Contentment in Contention** Beverley Southgate

Whether to accept or to challenge conventional notions of 'reality' and 'common-sense' is a question that has been debated since antiquity. Do we contentedly accept the 'cages' or constraints seemingly imposed by the human condition, as well as by the intellectual frameworks of science, language, history, and ethics? Or do we aspire to escape and transcend them in an endless quest for something preferable – some indefinable 'sublime'?

Beverley Southgate explores both traditions, identifying two seemingly distinct 'classes of men', variously exemplified by such thinkers as Aristotle and Plato, Bentham and Coleridge, Tolstoy and Nietzsche. Having its starting point in intellectual history, his investigation crosses disciplinary boundaries, drawing on evidence and ideas from philosophers, psychologists, theologians, novelists, poets, and artists. With its recommendation of continuing tension or (in Emerson's terminology) 'oscillation' between acceptance and aspiration, and its positive agenda for the humanities of a 'duty of discontent', this work has important practical implications for politics and education.

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