All first-rate criticism first defines what we are confronting, the late, great jazz critic Whitney Balliett once wrote. By that measure, the essays of Christopher Hitchens are in the first tier. For nearly four decades, Hitchens has been telling us, in pitch-perfect prose, what we confront when we grapple with first principles—the principles of reason and tolerance and skepticism that define and inform the foundations of our civilization—principles that, to endure, must be defended anew by every generation.

A short list of the greatest living conversationalists in English, said The Economist, would probably have to include Christopher Hitchens, Sir Patrick Leigh-Fermor, and Sir Tom Stoppard. Great brilliance, fantastic powers of recall, and quick wit are clearly valuable in sustaining conversation at these cosmic levels. Charm may be helpful, too. Hitchens— who staunchly declines all offers of knighthood—hereby invites you to take a seat at a democratic conversation, to be engaged, and to be reasoned with. His knowledge is formidable, an encyclopedic treasure, and yet one has the feeling, reading him, of hearing a person thinking out loud, following the inexorable logic of his thought, wherever it might lead, unafraid to expose fraudulence, denounce injustice, and excoriate hypocrisy. Legions of readers, admirers and detractors alike, have learned to read Hitchens with something approaching awe at his felicity of language, the oxygen in every sentence, the enviable wit and his readiness, even eagerness, to fight a foe or mount the ramparts.
Here, he supplies fresh perceptions of such figures as varied as Charles Dickens, Karl Marx, Rebecca West, George Orwell, J.G. Ballard, and Philip Larkin are matched in brilliance by his pungent discussions and intrepid observations, gathered from a lifetime of traveling and reporting from such destinations as Iran, China, and Pakistan.

Hitchenss directness, elegance, lightly carried erudition, critical and psychological insight, humor, and sympathy-applied as they are here to a dazzling variety of subjects-all set a standard for the essayist that has rarely been matched in our time. What emerges from this indispensable volume is an intellectual self-portrait of a writer with an exemplary steadiness of purpose and a love affair with the delights and seductions of the English language, a man anchored in a profound and humane vision of the human longing for reason and justice.

My Personal Review:
I should begin by admitting that I just received this book today; however, as a longtime fan of Hitchs work, Ive already read the majority of these essays, so I feel confident in writing this review now.

I pre-ordered this book months ago, but until today I didnt know which of his essays would be included. Im absolutely thrilled by the final product. To begin with, its massive - at nearly 800 pages, its larger than god Is Not Great and Hitch-22 combined. The essays are sorted into 6 sections, and Ill cover each of them in some detail below.

All American focuses on the history, policies, and distinguished figures of the United States. It appears to be sorted chronologically; beginning with essays on Jefferson and Franklin, continuing through subjects like John Brown and Lincoln, JFK, John Updike, and Gore Vidal, and then closing with essays on modern issues like capital punishment and atheism in the modern military.

Eclectic Affinities includes Hitchens best essays on notable literary figures. There are about 30 essays here, covering everything from Karl Marx, to Graham Greene, to George Orwell, to JK Rowling.

Amusements, Annoyances, and Disappointments is relatively short, with only 8 essays. However, these are some of Hitchs most famous and
controversial personal remarks, including the infamous Why Women Arent Funny and his charming New Commandments.

Offshore Accounts primarily deals with modern political conflicts. It includes his experience with waterboarding, his admiration for Kurdistan, and his encyclopedic knowledge of current politics. This is probably the most notable section of the book, and also one of the longest.

Legacies of Totalitarianism takes us back to earlier conflicts, focusing especially on the first half of the last century. The essays here are mostly based on specific people, and the legacies that endured long after they did.

Words Worth covers Hitchens essays on language and culture. The earlier sections focused on Hitch as a political essayist, but this section closes the book with Hitch as a charming raconteur. More than the other sections, it allows Hitch to be more personal and candid, and that allows his inimitable writing style and witty humor to take center stage.

Over the past several years, Hitchens has been famous primarily for his antitheism. But as powerful and important as that is, I think it tends to downplay just how broad his career has been. I actually consider this book a great companion piece to his memoirs. As you look over the comprehensive nature of the combined essays, you cant help but admire the life Hitchens has led. As he puts it, he burned the candle at both ends, and it gave a lovely light. This book, almost as much as Hitch-22, is evidence of that.

My one small disappointment is that the book focuses almost exclusively on essays written relatively recently. Im guessing this has a lot to do with copyright entanglements, but I would like to have seen more of his older works. His recent essays are all easily available online, and I was hoping for a bit more from past archives. Having said that, I can also see the benefit of relying on the recent works, as they give a very fresh, updated look at the world. In fact, this book has instantly become my go to recommendation for people saying they want to be more involved in current events. Its long enough to be comprehensive, but the essay format allows it to be concise as well. And even though most of this material is available free online, its definitely worth owning this archive of his most notable short works. I love the structure and layout of the essays, and the index is marvelous. Its a wonderful book for any fan of Christopher Hitchens, as well as anyone interested in politics, history, and culture.

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Arguably: Essays by Christopher Hitchens by Christopher Hitchens - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!