

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910819735503321
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Titolo	Smiling through the cultural catastrophe : toward the revival of higher education // Jeffrey Hart
Pubbl/distr/stampa	New Haven, : Yale University Press, c2001
ISBN	1-281-73066-1 9786611730666 0-300-13052-X
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (1 online resource (xii, 271 p.))
Disciplina	370.11/2
Soggetti	Education, Humanistic Civilization - Study and teaching
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Bibliographic Level Mode of Issuance: Monograph
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	Machine generated contents note: PART ONE: THE GREAT NARRATIVE -- CHAPTER ONE Athens and Jerusalem 3 -- CHAPTER TWO Athens: The Heroic Phase 14 -- CHAPTER THREE Moses as Epic Hero 35 -- CHAPTERFOUR Socrates and Jesus: Internalizing the Heroic 73 -- CHAPTER FIVE Paul: Universal Synthesis 105 -- PART TWO: EXPLORATIONS -- CHAPTER SIX Augustine Chooses Jerusalem 127 -- CHAPTER SEVEN Dante, Rome (Athens), Jerusalem, and Amor 138 -- CHAPTER EIGHT Hamlet's Great Song 169 -- CHAPTER NINE The Indispensable Enlightenment: Moliere and -- Voltaire 187 -- CHAPTER TEN Hamlet in St. Petersburg, Faust in Great Neck: -- Dostoyevsky and Scott Fitzgerald 207 -- AFTERWORD Today and Tomorrow 241 -- Notes 251 -- Index 263.
Sommario/riassunto	Although the essential books of Western civilization are no longer central in our courses or in our thoughts, they retain their ability to energize us intellectually, says Jeffrey Hart in this powerful book. He now presents a guide to some of these literary works, tracing the main currents of Western culture for all who wish to understand the roots of their civilization and the basis for its achievements. Hart focuses on the productive tension between the classical and biblical strains in our civilization--between a life based on cognition and one based on faith

and piety. He begins with the Iliad and Exodus, linking Achilles and Moses as Bronze Age heroic figures. Closely analyzing texts and illuminating them in unexpected ways, he moves on to Socrates and Jesus, who "internalized the heroic," continues with Paul and Augustine and their Christian synthesis, addresses Dante, Shakespeare (Hamlet), Molière, and Voltaire, and concludes with the novel as represented by Crime and Punishment and The Great Gatsby. Hart maintains that the dialectical tensions suggested by this survey account for the restlessness and singular achievements of the West and that the essential books can provide the substance and energy currently missed by both students and educated readers.
