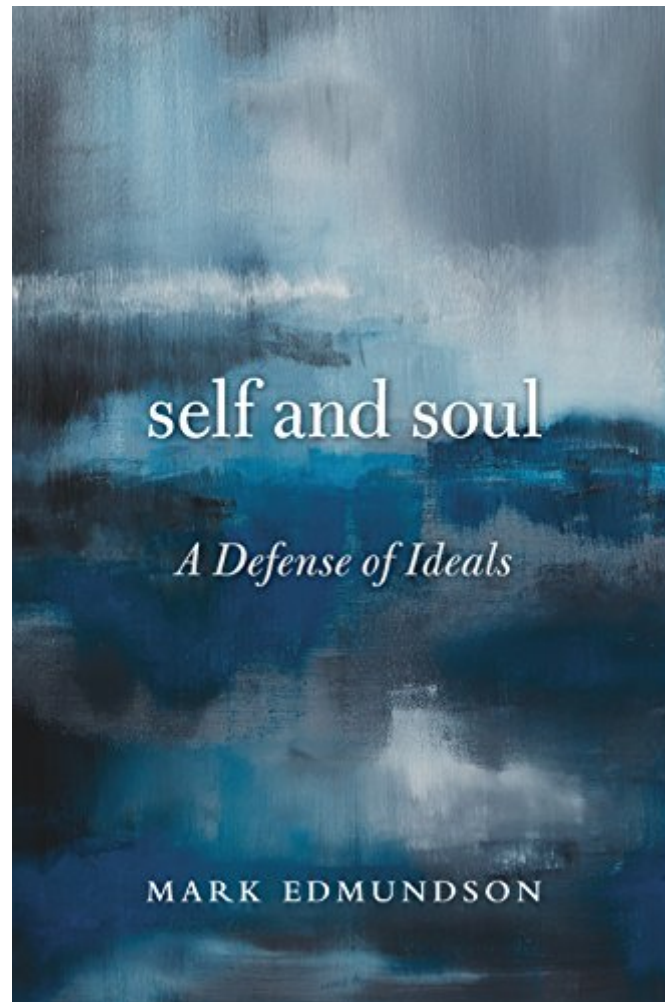


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Self And Soul: A Defense Of Ideals



Synopsis

In a culture of the Self that has become progressively more skeptical and materialistic, we spare little thought for the great ideals—courage, contemplation, and compassion—that once gave life meaning. Here, Mark Edmundson makes an impassioned attempt to defend the value of these ancient ideals and to resurrect Soul in the modern world.

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Customer Reviews

Recently, Academic Questions asked me to pick one book that would make a better “common reading” for incoming college freshmen than the texts commonly assigned. Then, I chose William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*, but if I were asked today, it would be Mark Edmundson’s *Self and Soul*. Why? For one, it’s wildly subversive, ripping off the K-12 straitjacket incoming freshmen still wear. Later, *Self and Soul* can act as a tonic and antitoxin for numb university students suffering from the curricular mishmash of multiculturalism, anti-colonialism, social justice, sustainability, rampant materialism, and political correctness. Professor Edmundson has written a fierce book, at times an angry book, and most of all, a dangerous book. It threatens all the academic shibboleths. The vocabulary alone will shock most students. “It, like, talks all about having a soul?”

And being heroic? And Truth? Isn't 'Truth' a violation of the campus speech code?" Probably. All the more enticing for the budding scholar. Edmundson reminds me of Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, and the protagonist's conception of Jesus: "Later he saw Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark where he might be walking on the water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown." That's what Edmundson is doing—beckoning, no, daring his readers to join Achilles, Plato, Christ, and other rebels who risk seeking more out of life, who seek the higher satisfactions of the Soul. We all know the immediate satisfaction of our appetites. Today, our culture asks, what else is there? Well, the subtitle of *Self and Soul* is *A Defense of Ideals*. Nothing needs defending more than ideals.

What would an educational system do with a true genius today; a Shelley, an Emerson, a Roebling, a Tesla, a Roosevelt? They would be either tossed out of High School or put on medication before they were in Middle School because these men saw the world in a different, idealistic, way. The cauldron of romantic liquid metal that ran aplenty in all significant fields during the American Age of Progress in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has been all but put out. Mark Edmundson shows us why. With clean logic and systematic examples he explains in detail which ancient thinkers challenged us to be greater, and which modern thinkers believe greatness to be an illusion—that way to happiness is a cozy, half asleep, road where success is represented by meek conformity; comfortable, safe, and entertained. Deep down, humans crave genuine purpose and aspirational visions now more than ever; our vicarious, droned-out digital lives online aren't working. We need a renaissance where wisdom, virtue, courage, and reason reign once again. The robotic media cultivates more and more a soulless wasteland of corruption, ironic gaggle, overinflated bureaucracy—where lack of ethics rule. We promote diversity instead of unity, missing out in a shared, unified, glory. We've lost nearly all aesthetic objectivity which provides the fundamental basis for timeless human achievement. We lack the ability to look another human being dead square in the eye. We can't focus. We worship the rote recycling of thought with the advent algorithms, instead of the genesis of new thought through the triumph of the imagination.

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