



Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity

By Charles Taylor

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Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity By Charles Taylor

In this extensive inquiry into the sources of modern selfhood, Charles Taylor demonstrates just how rich and precious those resources are. The modern turn to subjectivity, with its attendant rejection of an objective order of reason, has led--it seems to many--to *mere* subjectivism at the mildest and to sheer nihilism at the worst. Many critics believe that the modern order has no moral backbone and has proved corrosive to all that might foster human good. Taylor rejects this view. He argues that, properly understood, our modern notion of the self provides a framework that more than compensates for the abandonment of substantive notions of rationality.

The major insight of *Sources of the Self* is that modern subjectivity, in all its epistemological, aesthetic, and political ramifications, has its roots in ideas of human good. After first arguing that contemporary philosophers have ignored how self and good connect, the author defines the modern identity by describing its genesis. His effort to uncover and map our moral sources leads to novel interpretations of most of the figures and movements in the modern tradition. Taylor shows that the modern turn inward is not disastrous but is in fact the result of our long efforts to define and reach the good. At the heart of this definition he finds what he calls the affirmation of ordinary life, a value which has decisively if not completely replaced an older conception of reason as connected to a hierarchy based on birth and wealth. In telling the story of a revolution whose proponents have been Augustine, Montaigne, Luther, and a host of others, Taylor's goal is in part to make sure we do not lose sight of their goal and endanger all that has been achieved. *Sources of the Self* provides a decisive defense of the modern order and a sharp rebuff to its critics.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This book is primarily a historical account of the modernist protest against the disengaged and instrumental modes of thought and action that arose when theistically grounded morality crumbled, but that themselves focused too little upon our inner life, i.e., our powers of creative imagination and the substantive goods of ordinary life, which Taylor alleges give meaning to human life. Associating each ideology with a particular conception of our identity as selves, he defends the modern view, keeping in mind that self-realization must recognize that some things are important beyond the self. Taylor rambles somewhat and often talks about "the good," as though human beings were fungible in their capacities for appreciation and action; but the wealth of illustrative material and frequent insights are thought-provoking. For scholarly collections.

- Robert Hoffman, York Coll., CUNY

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Review

Taylor has taken on the most delicate and exacting of philosophical questions, the question of who we are and how we should live...and he has made this an adventure of self-discovery for his reader. To have accomplished so much is an important philosophical achievement. (*New Republic*)

Sources of the Self is in every sense a large book: in length and in the range of what it covers, but above all in the generosity and breadth of its sympathies and its interest in humanity...Few books on such large subjects are so engaging. (Bernard Williams *New York Review of Books*)

A magnificent account, full, fair, well read, well written, complicated and high spirited--a credit, one might say, to the modern self that is capable of plumbing the depths of its own heritage in such a generous way. (Jeremy Waldron *Times Literary Supplement*)

Surely one of the most important philosophical works of the last quarter of a century. (Jerome Bruner)

For sociologists, there is no more important philosopher writing in the world today than Charles Taylor. (Alan Wolfe *Contemporary Sociology*)

Undoubtedly one of the most significant works in moral philosophy and the history of ideas to appear in recent decades. (Frances S. Adeney *Theology Today*)

From the Back Cover

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