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Review of Self and Soul by Mark Edmundson

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PHILOSOPHY

Edmundson, Mark. *Self and Soul: A Defense of Ideals*. Harvard Univ. Sept. 2015. 304p. bibliog. index.

Edmundson (English, Univ. of Virginia;

Why Football Matters) here contends our culture has abandoned its ideals and we are worse off for it. Comprised of six chapters—the first three on ancient ideals, the last three on threats to ideals—and book-ended by a short introduction and conclusion, Edmundson's narrative claims that we've become practical, materialistic, and skeptical and that few of us live up to ideals, such as those represented by Homer's Achilles, who sought greatness, and Hector, who sought to serve. But if we are truly as he says then it seems we live up to a different Homeric ideal—that of Odysseus, cunning, persevering, and determined. The author blames today's economic, environmental, and social problems on our failure to live up to the principles of greatness, sacrifice, and compassion, but he offers no substantive argument for this. Ironically, though, we do strive to be like Achilles—to be great—but for many, their Achilles' heel is the unwavering assumption that they are already great and need not change.

VERDICT Because of the aforementioned flaws, this title is not recommended.—
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