

The Robert Bellah Reader



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Perhaps best known for his co-authored bestselling books "Habits of the Heart" and "The Good Society", Robert N. Bellah is a truly visionary leader in the social study of religion. For more than four decades, he has examined the role of religion in modern and pre-modern societies, attempting to discern how religious meaning is formed and how it shapes ethical and political practices. "The Robert Bellah Reader" brings together twenty-eight of Bellah's seminal essays. While the essays span a period of more than forty years, nearly half of them were written in the past decade, many in the past few years. The Reader is organized around four central concerns. It seeks to place modernity in theoretical and historical perspective, drawing from major figures in social science, historical and contemporary, from Aristotle and Rousseau through Durkheim and Weber to Habermas and Mary Douglas. It takes the United States to be in some respects the type-case of modernity and in others the most atypical of modern

societies, analyzing its common faith in individual freedom and democratic self-government, and its persistent paradoxes of inequality, exclusion, and empire. The Reader is also concerned to test the axiomatic modern assumption that rational cognition and moral evaluation, fact and value, are absolutely divided, arguing instead that they overlap and interact much more than conventional wisdom in the university today usually admits. Finally, it criticizes modernity's affirmation that faith and knowledge stand even more utterly at odds, arguing instead that their overlap and interaction, obvious in every pre-modern society, animate the modern world as well. Through such critical and constructive inquiry this Reader probes many of our deepest social and cultural quandaries, quandaries that put modernity itself, with all its immense achievements, at mortal risk. Through the practical self-understanding such inquiry spurs, Bellah shows how we may share responsibility for the world we have made and seek to heal it.

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