

What Is Honor?

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WHAT IS HONOR? A QUESTION OF MORAL IMPERATIVES ALEXANDER WELSH

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What is honour? Has its meaning changed since ancient times? Is it an outmoded notion? Does it still have the power to direct our behaviour? In this provocative book Alexander Welsh considers the history and meaning of honour and dismisses the idea that we live in a culture that has discarded it. He notes that we have other words, such as respect, self-respect, and personal identity, that show we do indeed care deeply about its meaning. Honour is, he argues, a continuing process of respect that motivates or constrains members of a peer group, and its dictates still function as moral imperatives. Surprisingly little systematic study of the history of honour in Western culture has been attempted. Offering a welcome remedy, Welsh provides a genealogy of approaches to the subject, mining some of the most influential texts of the Western tradition. He rereads with fascinating results the works of Aristotle, Cicero, Shakespeare, Mandeville, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kant, Adam Smith, and others. With a sharp focus on the intersection of honour and ethics in both literature and philosophy, Welsh invites new and constructive debate on a topic of vital interest.

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