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0521844177 - The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century

Jerrold Seigel

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## THE IDEA OF THE SELF

What is the self? This question has preoccupied people in many times and places, but nowhere more than in the modern West, where it has spawned debates that still resound today. Jerrold Seigel here provides an original and penetrating narrative of how major Western European thinkers and writers have confronted the self since the time of Descartes, Leibniz, and Locke. From an approach that is at once theoretical and contextual, he examines the way figures in Britain, France, and Germany have understood whether and how far individuals can achieve coherence and consistency in the face of the inner tensions and external pressures that threaten to divide or overwhelm them. He makes clear that recent “post-modernist” accounts of the self belong firmly to the tradition of Western thinking they have sought to supersede, and provides an open-ended and persuasive alternative to claims that the modern self is typically egocentric or disengaged.

JERROLD SEIGEL is William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of History at New York University. His previous books include *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830–1930* (1986) and *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation and the Self in Modern Culture* (1995).

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