



Flesh in the Age of Reason: The Modern Foundations of Body and Soul

Roy Porter

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How did we come to a modern understanding of our bodies and souls? What were the breakthroughs that allowed human beings to see themselves in a new light? Starting with the revolutionary ideas of the Renaissance that challenged the sense of the body as a corrupt vessel for the soul, Roy Porter goes on to chart how - through figures as diverse as Locke, Swift, Johnson and Gibbon - ideas about medicine, politics and religion fundamentally changed notions of self. He shows how the body moved centre stage in the 18th century, writing on the ways in which men and women flaunted, decorated, tanned and dieted themselves: activities that we find familiar but that a Puritan divine would have considered Satanic. Porter also explores how, at the end of the century, the human soul took on a new significance in the works of Godwin, Blane and Byron.

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