



The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity in Montesquieu's "Spirit of the Laws"

Thomas L. Pangle

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The *Spirit of the Laws*—Montesquieu’s huge, complex, and enormously influential work—is considered one of the central texts of the Enlightenment, laying the foundation for the liberally democratic political regimes that were to embody its values. In his penetrating analysis, Thomas L. Pangle brilliantly argues that the inherently theological project of Enlightenment liberalism is made more clearly—and more consequentially— in *Spirit* than in any other work.

In a probing and careful reading, Pangle shows how Montesquieu believed that rationalism, through the influence of liberal institutions and the spread of commercial culture, would secularize human affairs. At the same time, Pangle uncovers Montesquieu’s views about the origins of humanity’s religious impulse and his confidence that political and economic security would make people less likely to sacrifice worldly well-being for otherworldly hopes. With the interest in the theological aspects of political theory and practice showing no signs of diminishing, this book is a timely and insightful contribution to one of the key achievements of Enlightenment thought.

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