



Public Vision, Private Lives: Rousseau, Religion, and 21st-Century Democracy

Mark S. Cladis

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Mark S. Cladis pinpoints the origins of contemporary notions of the public and private and their relationship to religion in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His thesis cuts across many fields and issues-philosophy of religion, women's studies, democratic theory, modern European history, American culture, social justice, privacy laws, and notions of solitude and community-and wholly reconsiders the political, cultural, and legal nature of modernity in relation to religion.

Turning to Rousseau's Garden, its inhabitants, the Solitaires, and the question of restoration and redemption that preoccupied much of Rousseau's thought, Cladis examines how Rousseau addressed the tension between the joys and moral obligations of social engagement and the desire for solitude. He was caught between two possibilities: active involvement in the creation of an enlightened and humane society or extrication from social entanglements in favor of cultivating a spiritual interior life. Yet Rousseau did not view this conflict as a desperate division. Rather, for him it was a moral struggle to be endured by those who had fallen from the Garden.

For this edition Cladis has added a substantive introduction that discusses the role of religion in contemporary democratic societies, particularly in American public life. Cladis proposes four models of thinking about religion in public and champions what he calls spiritual democracy-a dynamic, culturally specific, and progressive democracy. Cladis argues that spiritual democracy refers not only to a society's legal codes and principles but also to its democratic culture and symbols and its daily practices and institutions. It encompasses the nation's character, diverse identities, and a distinctivel exchange between the nation's public vision and citizens' complex, private lives.

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