



# On Modern Origins: Essays in Early Modern Philosophy (Applications of Political Theory)

By Richard Kennington



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Richard Kennington (1921-1999), a professor for many years at Pennsylvania State University and the Catholic University of America, was renowned for his insight in reading and teaching early modern philosophy. Although he published articles and spoke widely, never before have his writings been collected in a book. *On Modern Origins* deftly shows how modern thinkers assessed the errors of the classical tradition and established in its place a philosophy that fuses a new meaning of nature and of theory with humanitarian goals. This volume is an essential source for scholars seeking to understand the contemporary significance of the dawning of the modern era.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Superbly practicing the art of reading, Richard Kennington uncovers the founding arguments of the early modern philosophers. His explications of the thought of Bacon and Descartes on the relations between method, experiential starting-points, and the final purposes of inquiry, are sans pareil for depth and subtlety. Kennington's work builds on insights of Heidegger, Leo Strauss, and Jacob Klein concerning the origins and intent of the modern project of mastering nature, but his reflection on this theme is more thorough and in the end more satisfying than any previous account. (Richard Velkley, Catholic University of America)

While some scholars have examined the origins of modern natural science and others have examined the origins of modern political philosophy, Kennington masterfully combines the two in his profound study of the philosophic accounts underlying "the mastery of nature." *On Modern Origins* is indispensable for understanding the origins of the modern world. (Jan H. Blits)

Mixing extraordinary learning with the most acute philosophical penetration, Kennington shows how the philosophers at the origins of modernity were concerned with something still more fundamental than either the purely theoretical question of knowledge or the practical question of the mastery of nature. Kennington articulates this deeper stratum of modern philosophy, in which it seeks to reconcile its understanding of the true with its understanding of the good, in its conscious opposition but also in its sometimes unintentional kinship with ancient philosophy. *On Modern Origins* is at once scrupulously careful in its interpretation and profoundly philosophical in its own right. It is a remarkable book in which one encounters a mind of rare quality. (Michael Davis, philosopher, Sarah Lawrence College)

Useful in several respects. First, it contains illuminating interpretations of certain key passages in the writings of the philosophers under consideration...The book is exemplary, moreover, in showing us how to read these philosophers...Finally, this collection of essays is useful for the questions it provokes. (*Review of Metaphysics*)

Indispensable. (*Reconsiderations, Winter 2008*)

*On Modern Origins* is several books at once: an original, subtle, erudite, unclassifiable interpretation of the beginnings of modern philosophy; at a reflective level, a meditation on what it means to investigate the origins of philosophical positions; and an argument for reconsidering canonical assumptions about the order and priority of texts in the modern philosophical tradition. This is a very important contribution not only to our understanding of the figures discussed, but to our sense of what it could mean that philosophy might "begin again" in modernity. (Robert Pippin)

#### About the Author

Pamela Kraus teaches at St. John's College, Annapolis. Frank Hunt teaches at St. John's College, Santa Fe.

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**Bruce Jones:**

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