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Intellectual Origins of the French Enlightenment (Princeton Legacy Library)

Ira O. Wade

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With the same sense of historical responsibility and veracity he has exemplified in his studies on Voltaire, Ira O. Wade turns now to Voltaire's milieu and begins an account of the French Enlightenment which will explain its genesis, its nature and coherence, and its diffusion in the modern world. To understand the movement of ideas that produced the spirit of the Enlightenment, Mr. Wade identifies and examines the people, events, and rich development of philosophy in the Renaissance and seventeenth century. He considers, in turn, the challenges of the Renaissance and the responses of its leading writers (Rabelais, Bacon, and Montaigne); Baroque thought (Descartes, Hobbes, Pascal, the Freethinkers); and Classicism (Moliere, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, Newton). Mr. Wade begins his discussion by examining the critical literature on the Enlightenment and concludes with a theoretical chapter, "The Making of a Spirit." As the history of an intellectual culture, his study makes vivid the power of thought in the making of a civilization.

Originally published in 1971.

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