



Putting Liberalism in Its Place

Paul W. Kahn

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In this wide-ranging interdisciplinary work, Paul W. Kahn argues that political order is founded not on contract but on sacrifice. Because liberalism is blind to sacrifice, it is unable to explain how the modern state has brought us to both the rule of law and the edge of nuclear annihilation. We can understand this modern condition only by recognizing that any political community, even a liberal one, is bound together by faith, love, and identity.

Putting Liberalism in Its Place draws on philosophy, cultural theory, American constitutional law, religious and literary studies, and political psychology to advance political theory. It makes original contributions in all these fields. Not since Charles Taylor's *The Sources of the Self* has there been such an ambitious and sweeping examination of the deep structure of the modern conception of the self.

Kahn shows that only when we move beyond liberalism's categories of reason and interest to a Judeo-Christian concept of love can we comprehend the modern self. Love is the foundation of a world of objective meaning, one form of which is the political community. Arguing from these insights, Kahn offers a new reading of the liberalism/communitarian debate, a genealogy of American liberalism, an exploration of the romantic and the pornographic, a new theory of the will, and a refoundation of political theory on the possibility of sacrifice.

Approaching politics from the perspective of sacrifice allows us to understand the character of twentieth-century politics, which combined progress in the rule of law with massive slaughter for the state. Equally important, this work speaks to the most important political conflicts in the world today. It explains why American response to September 11 has taken the form of war, and why, for the most part, Europeans have been reluctant to follow the Americans in their pursuit of a violent, sacrificial politics. Kahn shows us that the United States has maintained a vibrant politics of modernity, while Europe is moving into a postmodern form of the political that has turned away from the idea of sacrifice. Together with its companion volume, *Out of Eden*, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place* finally answers Clifford Geertz's call for a political theology of modernity.

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