



Pliny's Defense of Empire (Routledge Innovations in Political Theory)

Thomas R. Laehn

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Despite perennial interest in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, the world's first encyclopedia, as a record of the prodigious, the quotidian, and the useful in Rome in the first century AD, for centuries Pliny has been derided as little more than an inept compiler of facts and marvels intellectually incapable of formulating a cogent argument supported through the selective marshaling of his materials.

In *Pliny's Defense of Empire*, Laehn offers a radical reinterpretation of the architecture of Pliny's encyclopedia, exposing fundamental errors in the inherited understanding of the text traceable to its initial reception in ancient Rome. Recognition of the text's true structure reveals that Pliny's encyclopedia is in fact a first-rate work of political philosophy constituting an apology for Roman imperial expansionism grounded in a sophisticated account of human nature. Correcting the accreted errors and prejudices of nearly 2,000 years of faulty Plinian scholarship, Laehn critically examines one of the most persuasive apologies for the Roman Empire ever written and succeeds in rehabilitating the Elder Pliny as one of the world's greatest political thinkers.

An excellent resource and a must read for scholars in political theory, philosophy, and classical studies.

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