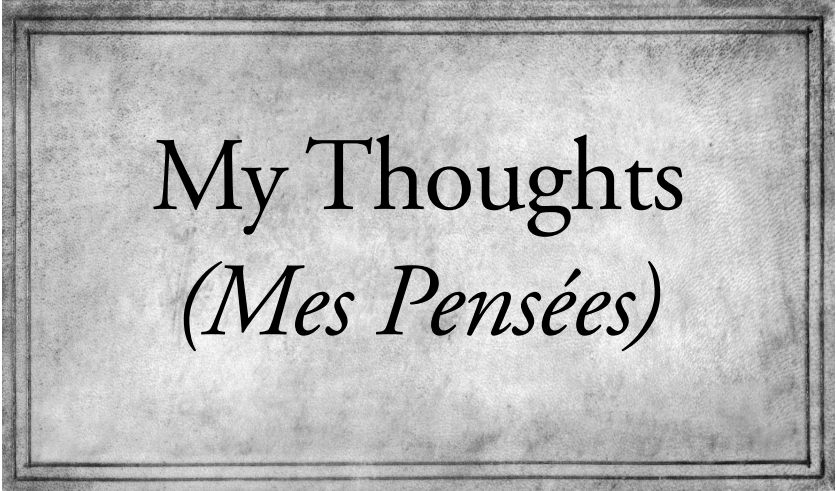


*My Thoughts*





Charles-Louis de Secondat,  
Baron of La Brède and of Montesquieu

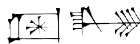


My Thoughts  
*(Mes Pensées)*

Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron of La Brède and of  
MONTESQUIEU

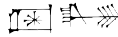
TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND WITH  
AN INTRODUCTION BY

Henry C. Clark



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## *Introduction*

CHARLES-LOUIS DE SECONDAT, Baron of La Brède and of Montesquieu (1689–1755), was born into a noble family in southwestern France. After an early education at home and with the village schoolmaster, he was sent away to Juilly, an Oratorian school in Meaux, just outside of Paris, at the age of eleven. Returning to Bordeaux for legal studies, he seems again to have been in Paris for four years, from 1709 until 1713, to gain legal experience. In 1713, at the death of his father, he went back to Bordeaux and in 1715 married the well-to-do Huguenot Jeanne de Lartigue, with whom he would have a son, Jean-Baptiste (1716), and two daughters, Marie-Catherine (1717) and Marie-Josèphe-Denise (1727). When his uncle (also named Jean-Baptiste) died in 1716, Montesquieu inherited most of his fortune, including his office as president in the Parlement of Bordeaux, a magistracy possessing both judicial and administrative authority.

At about the same time (April 1716), he became a member of the provincial Academy of Bordeaux, where he conducted and observed scientific experiments, read and discussed essays on history and philosophy, and generally became an active member of the region's intellectual life. In 1721 he published anonymously in Amsterdam the first of the three major works by which he is known today. He called *Persian Letters* “a sort of novel” and once described its principle of coherence as “a secret and, in some respects, hitherto unknown chain.”<sup>1</sup> Using the literary device of the guileless foreign visitors, Montesquieu presented a wide-ranging and candid discussion of religion, politics, economics, history, manners, and morals. While the narrative structure did much to shape the French Enlightenment method of indirection that would later be developed by Voltaire and Diderot, *Persian Letters* was anchored by the story of Roxana, the Persian wife who struggles with the conflict between her desire to love her despotic and self-deluded master, Usbek, and her natural liberty.

1. *The Persian Letters*, trans. George R. Healy (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 4.

The spectacular success of this work—it went through several printings in its first year—made its author a sought-after companion in the salons of Paris, where he spent much time in the 1720s. He had the unusual experience of being elected to the French Academy (1727) mainly on the strength of a work that many found both light and of dubious orthodoxy. At the end of the decade, he traveled throughout Europe, including to Holland, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Hungary, Austria, and, notably, to England, where he spent a year and a half, becoming friends with Alexander Pope, the Tory leader Viscount Bolingbroke, and many others. It was then (1729–31) that he read the English political press, attended debates in Parliament, and otherwise became more familiar with the English political and constitutional system that he would one day do so much to define.

It was also now that Montesquieu seems to have conceived the idea of writing what would become the second of his major works, namely, the *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline*. Published anonymously in Amsterdam in 1734 and revised for a 1748 edition, *Considerations* was one of the most influential interpretive studies of Roman history. The book is less a narrative history than an attempt, not unlike Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, to isolate analytically the factors conducive to Roman success and failure. Montesquieu saw Rome as an agrarian power, not a commercial one, and laid great emphasis upon conquest as the leitmotif of Roman experience. His explanation for Roman decline went beyond the standard narrative of the corruption of moral and civic virtue by Oriental luxury. Instead he provided the kind of deliberately complex, multilayered analysis—embracing laws, institutions, manners, and morals, even the intellectual influences of Epicureanism and Christianity—that he would develop further in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). It seems that Montesquieu conceived of his famous chapter on the English constitution (*Laws*, II.6) as a twenty-fifth and final chapter in the *Considerations*—an idea he abandoned, apparently, when he witnessed the censorship in 1733 of Voltaire's *Philosophical Letters*, a work that criticized France by praising England. That chapter was going to underscore the fundamental difference Montesquieu saw between ancient and modern liberty. Where ancient liberty in its Roman guise hinged upon virtue and conquest, modern liberty rested more on commerce, communication, information, and the arts of peace. The contrast between conquest

and commerce, like that between ancients and moderns, would become a recurrent theme in his writings.

*The Spirit of the Laws* turned the author from a moderately important figure into one of the founders of modern thought. Exercising an influence often described as diffuse rather than focused, Montesquieu's magnum opus has been detected at the birth of sociology, comparative legal studies, and, indeed, any social science involving the cross-cultural analysis of some or all of the factors isolated by the author at the beginning of his study—namely, the “physical aspect of the country,” the “way of life of the people,” the “degree of liberty that the constitution can sustain,” the people's “religion,” “inclinations,” “wealth,” “number,” “commerce,” and “mores and manners,” and the relationships among the laws themselves.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most important avenues of his influence concerned constitutional theory; the principles of checks-and-balances and separation of powers are the best-known examples. According to one study, the American founders turned to Montesquieu more often than to any other source—four times as frequently as the second-most-cited figure (John Locke). But at the local level, too, his influence in areas such as criminal-justice reform was pervasive and fundamental. In France as well as in America, Montesquieu's work had a more authoritative status in constitutional discussion throughout 1789 than that of Voltaire, Rousseau, Mably, or any other important figure.<sup>3</sup> More broadly, he had a formative influence on the Scottish Enlightenment through his friendship with David Hume and in the writings of Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and others. Even in China, he was one of a handful of Western figures—along with Mill, Spencer, Thomas Huxley, Jevons, and Adam Smith—who were translated into Chinese by Yan Fu in the first decade of the twentieth century in hopes of liberalizing and modernizing that vast country. In sum, there is no disputing Montesquieu's central and durable place in enlightenment thought.

The work translated here, which Montesquieu called *Mes Pensées*, is a

2. *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne Cohler, Basia Miller, and Harold Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), I.3, 9.

3. For the American scene, see Donald S. Lutz, “The Relative Importance of European Writers in Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” *American Political Science Review* 189 (1984): 189–97. For the French situation, see Renato Galliani, “La Fortune de Montesquieu en 1789: un sondage” [Montesquieu's fortunes in 1789: a poll], in *Etudes sur Montesquieu*, ed. R. Galliani and F. Loirette (Paris: Lettres modernes, 1981), 31–47.



long series of handwritten notes that the author began compiling in bound notebooks around 1720—either in his own hand or with the help of private secretaries—and assiduously maintained until his death, with the idea of eventually working most of them into published form (*pensée* 1). Some contemporaries knew he was keeping such a collection, and a few of the entries found their way into print during the eighteenth century. But generally this treasure trove did not come to light until the twentieth century (see “A Note on the Text”). The *pensées* shed much light on the Montesquieu corpus. Sometimes they enable students of Montesquieu to trace the development of specific ideas over time. At other times, they directly illuminate the meaning of his published texts. And although some of the material will seem either familiar to those knowledgeable about his career or extraneous to the substance of his thought, the overall effect of the *pensées* is to offer a cornucopia of thought-provoking reflections on every conceivable topic.

Montesquieu warns at the beginning of the collection that he will not “answer for all the thoughts that are here” (*pensée* 3). This necessary precaution imposes a certain interpretive restraint, reminding us of the unfinished state of many of the entries and of the seriousness with which the author took the publication process. But the disclaimer also has varying applicability. Some of the items ended up being incorporated verbatim into his published works, especially *Laws*. Others are referred to elsewhere in the collection, indicating at least a certain level of authorial satisfaction. At the other end of the spectrum, some entries are signaled by Montesquieu himself for their inadequacy, with deletions or marginal notes of rejection. Between these two poles, there are some *pensées* that are reasonably straightforward and others so obscure and so lacking in context that it is difficult to know what to do with them. Specialists have struggled to find an adequate characterization of the project as a whole, describing it variously as an “intellectual laboratory,” a “writing crossroads,” or a “portfolio of portfolios.”<sup>4</sup> The reader can expect to find in this volume tools and materials in every stage of the production process.

In *pensée* 1525, Montesquieu offers another observation that affects the way the reader approaches the collection. Discussing the art of printing

4. The preface and essays by Carole Dornier and Carole Volpilhac-Augier in *Revue Montesquieu* 7 (2003–4) offer these characterizations.

and its effect on the writing of history, he observes that “princes have made of this art the principal object of their administration; the censors they have set up direct all pens. In the past, one could speak the truth but did not speak it; today, one would like to speak it but cannot.” Throughout his career, Montesquieu had his own encounters with the French censorship apparatus, and one value of the *pensées* is the opportunity to sample some of the author’s more unvarnished thinking, especially on topics such as religion and current politics where the censors would have been particularly vigilant.

Montesquieu was a fussy editor of his own writings, one who left far more unfinished works than finished. Indeed it is difficult not to detect a note of personal defensiveness in *pensée* 1950, where he states that “An author who writes much regards himself as a giant and views those who write little as pygmies.” Montesquieu wrote much, but he published little—only a handful of substantial titles in his lifetime. In *pensée* 1631a, at the beginning of the third and final manuscript notebook of the *pensées*, he summarizes some of the wide variety of abortive projects covered in that notebook alone.

One of these unpublished works is a *History of Jealousy*, a work that evidently would have combined his interests as an observer of manners and morals with the critical approach to history that he would make famous in *Laws*. In this case, only deleted fragments are left to us (see especially *pensées* 483–509). In *Treatise on Duties*, on the other hand, what we seem to have are mostly polished sections of a work that Montesquieu abandoned before seeing it through to the press (see especially *pensées* 1251–61, 1263, and 1265–80). Of avowedly Ciceronian inspiration, the work resembles the *De Officiis* in its application of moral principles to the civic world. But it also provides suggestive reflections on the differences between ancients and moderns.

As a historian Montesquieu wanted to go far beyond his Roman foray in *Considerations*. In the very long *pensée* 1302, he provides an outline for a sweeping history of France. In other entries he occasionally elaborates on some of the historical questions preoccupying his contemporaries. In *pensée* 1184, for example, he comments on Boulainvilliers’s own history of France, and in *pensée* 1962 he offers an extended critique of Voltaire’s use of historical evidence in the contemporary controversy over Richelieu’s *Political Testament*.

Montesquieu had planned a separate study of the long and important reign of Louis XIV (*pensée* 1306), who occupied the throne during all of his own formative years (he was twenty-six when the Sun King died). But of equal interest, perhaps, is his ill-fated history of the rather neglected French king Louis XI (r. 1461–83), to whom he appears to have attributed special significance. The remarkable story of how that manuscript seems to have been lost is told at *pensée* 1302, note 14, below. But in *pensée* 1302 itself, he begins his lengthy account of the Spider King’s reign with a ringing remark, “The death of Charles VII [in 1461] was the last day of French liberty.” Such a comment, so tantalizing for understanding Montesquieu’s view of liberty and of France, foreshadows Tocqueville’s later reflection that the middle of the fifteenth century saw “the period of transition from feudal freedom to absolute government.”<sup>5</sup>

Montesquieu’s general definitions of liberty are well known from books 11 and 12 of *The Spirit of the Laws*, but the *pensées* offer revealing insights into their evolution. For the concept of liberty is one of those that can be traced throughout the present volume. From his rather wry and skeptical treatment in *pensée* 32, an early entry, through his piecemeal development of the metaphor of the fish caught in the fishnet (*pensées* 434, 597, 828, 874, and 943), through his entry at *pensée* 751 entitled “Liberty”—which may be an early source of his famous definition of English constitutional liberty—Montesquieu’s engagement with the contested and ill-defined concept of liberty was variegated and persistent. Sometimes he found a clever salon-like witticism or a lapidary formula to express his views, as at *pensées* 577, 783, 784, and 1574. But in *pensée* 884, entitled “Political Liberty,” he expressly distinguishes his view from that of the “orators and poets,” indicating a preference for the more analytical approach for which he is known. In *pensée* 907, indeed, he refers to his evolving ideas as “my system on liberty.” He also offers interesting perspectives on the origins, consequences, or prospects for liberty throughout the volume—for example, in *pensées* 1630, 1735, and 1780, and in his important letter to the Englishman William Domville on the prospects for English liberty at *pensée* 1960.

More specifically redolent of Tocqueville’s later enterprise is Montesquieu’s discussion of the office of intendant, the royal agent given broad

5. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, ed. and intro. François Furet and Françoise Mélonio, trans. Alan S. Kahan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 2001), 1:368.

powers to implement the king's will at the local level. Tocqueville would make the intendant a focal point of his sustained critique of centralization in the Old Regime French monarchy. Montesquieu, who never discusses the intendant in his published works and mentions that figure only in passing in his correspondence (usually with reference to specific individuals), presents some more-pointed general remarks about them here (at *pensées* 977, 1353, 1572, 1835, 1840, 1846, 1898, 2066, and 2099).

Relatedly, the question of whether Montesquieu had a normative preference for republics or monarchies has occurred to many readers of *The Persian Letters*, the *Considerations*, and *The Spirit of the Laws*, and the *pensées* again provide numerous insights on this question—see *pensées* 769, 1208, 1494, 1760, 1854, and 1891 for some examples. After the upheavals of the Napoleonic wars, Madame de Staël would look back upon the eighteenth century and cite with approval what she called the “science of liberty” that it had developed; the present volume shows perhaps the leading “scientist of liberty” at work in his workshop.<sup>6</sup>

Other frequent topics of Montesquieu's attention are economics and finance. Although he died just a couple of years before political economy was launched with the emergence of the Physiocrats, his numerous treatments in *Persian Letters* and *Considerations*, and especially his chapters 20–23 in *The Spirit of the Laws*, had a powerful influence on economic and financial discussion throughout the century. In the *pensées*, his remarks are sometimes in the vein of observations about current events (for example, *pensées* 17, 153, 169, and 249), sometimes they have a more normative or theoretical bent (see *pensées* 45, 146, 161, 178, and 246 for some samples), and on still other occasions he makes broad historical observations informed by his economic views (*pensées* 77, 86, 113, and 245 for a few examples). Montesquieu saw the “spirit of commerce” as distinctive of modernity and of modern liberty, an approach illuminated at numerous points in the *pensées*.

*Mes Pensées* also contains candid observations on topics such as life at court, the reign of Louis XIV and of the Regency after his death, or the place of women in modern societies. The art of the aphorist was highly valued in the social circles that Montesquieu frequented, especially in Paris,

6. See Germaine de Staël, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, ed. and trans. Aurelian Craiutu (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008), 682.

and his attempt to cultivate that art is on prominent display throughout the collection. Moral-psychological topics such as happiness, jealousy, vengeance, boredom, and courtship are frequent preoccupations. One moment he is offering alternative Persian letters; another, he is providing further ruminations about the challenge posed by Hobbes's and Spinoza's moral anthropology. And throughout, he presents wide-ranging strategic reflections on European power politics, past and present.

One of the noteworthy topics on which he expresses unusually frank views is religion, especially in its political dimension. The role of the Jesuits as royal advisors and mobilizers of Catholic opinion, to take one prominent example, was a durable feature of French life from the Counter-Reformation into the eighteenth century. The Society of Jesus became increasingly controversial as the century wore on, however, until they were expelled from one Catholic realm after another (Portugal, France, Spain, Naples, the Duchy of Parma, Austria, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) in the two decades after Montesquieu's death. His comments on the Jesuits can be traced in this volume (see, for example, *pensées* 11, 55, 104, 180, 293, 394, 395, 453, 482, 544, 581, 715, 728, 730, 1038, 1223, 1301, 1302 n. 52, and 1959). Readers can also follow his thoughts about the bull *Unigenitus*, a papal edict of 1713 that began as a declaration of heresy against certain French Jansenists (that is, austere Augustinian critics of Jesuit laxity and royal pomp) but soon triggered a recurring dispute involving the Church hierarchy, the Jansenist-led parliamentary magistrates, and the Crown. This imbroglio lasted through Montesquieu's lifetime and beyond (see especially *pensées* 55, 215, 273, 426, 437, 764, 914, 1226, 2158, 2164, and 2247).

As is often the case with compendia of this sort, however, the true pleasure of reading it is the pleasure of discovery. Not unlike the more famous eponymous work by the seventeenth-century mathematician and religious thinker Blaise Pascal (1623–62), which Montesquieu owned, Montesquieu's *Mes Pensées* often features paradoxical or unexpected observations about the condition of man in the world and in society that provide rich food for thought—not only for the author, as was its intention, but now for the reader as well. The Baron of La Brède was an inveterate observer of all around him, and this volume presents an essential window onto his energetic and creative mind, one of the formative minds of the eighteenth century and of the modern world.

## *A Note on the Text*

THE *PENSÉES*, a set of three bound handwritten notebooks, were not published in the author's lifetime. Thus, except for those individual entries that were eventually published—often appearing in the notebooks with indications that they had already been “put in the *Romans*” or “put in the *Laws*”—we have no conclusive knowledge of the author's intentions at a given point in the text. Nor do we know exactly when they were written. The reader can assume that the *pensées* appear in at least roughly chronological order, beginning in the early 1720s and continuing to the end of the author's life. On occasion, Montesquieu dates an entry himself (see *pensées* 17, 141, 873, 1226, 1962, 1965, 1967, 2048, 2158, and 2164), which usefully lights the reader's way, although it does not resolve all dating problems (cf. *pensées* 17 and 141, for example).

In addition to the chronological uncertainties, there are at least three other features of the manuscript with which any editor has to contend. First, for more than three decades the text underwent significant revisions under several pens. Although much progress has been made in identifying or at least distinguishing among the different hands, and even situating them approximately in time, there are still many passages of unidentified hand and uncertain purpose.

Second, a few of the manuscript markings are ambiguous. What strikes one reader as a deletion might strike another as an intercalation. In rather more cases, what seems to one reader like a later addition might seem to another like part of the original text. Montesquieu was fastidious about expressing his published thoughts with precision, and this disposition accounts for his notebooks' being festooned with editorial markings. Although the meaning of most of the entries is clear enough, there are many points of doubt throughout.

Third, there are numerous errors in the manuscript, ensuring that fidelity to the text will sometimes conflict with fidelity to the author's intentions. These errors span the spectrum from incorrect spelling (less fixed

in the eighteenth century than now), to mangled syntax, to missing or repeated words. In most cases, the probable intention is discernible; in a few cases, there is more than one plausible interpretation. But this Liberty Fund volume does not pretend to be a critical edition. Instead, the preference here has been to err on the side of readability by selecting the most probable rendering, indicating possible alternatives only where there was a material difference in meaning between them. Likewise, punctuation has been modernized, although the reader will find some terms capitalized that would not be in a modern text.

The base text for this edition is *Montesquieu: Pensées, Le Spicilège*, edited by Louis Desgraves for the Robert Laffont press in 1991. His edition has the virtues of being the most recent available and of containing the lifetime's knowledge of one of the world's leading Montesquieu specialists. A number of adjustments have been made to the Desgraves text for the present edition. First, whereas Desgraves used square brackets to indicate both deletions from and later additions to Montesquieu's text, signaling only the deletions in his notes, the present edition uses square brackets for deletions and curly brackets for additions. Second, Montesquieu frequently began an entry one way, crossed it out, and started over. Whereas Desgraves reproduced most of these cross-outs where legible (indicating them with the phrase "first version"), the present edition, again for readability's sake, reproduces only those cross-outs that represent a substantive change. In those cases, I insert punctuation suitable to the final text likely intended by Montesquieu. Finally, the present edition incorporates textual corrections contained in the transcription work supervised by Carole Dornier.

As for the footnotes, the 155 pages of endnotes contained in the 1991 Desgraves edition, which are often adapted and elaborated from Henri Barckhausen's notes in the original 1899–1901 edition,<sup>1</sup> furnish an invaluable resource for students of Montesquieu and form the base text for the notes contained here. Again, however, several adaptations have been made in the presentation of those notes. While maintaining all of Desgraves's references to Montesquieu's published works to which a given entry is related, I have condensed significantly the quotations Desgraves used to illustrate such relationships. I have streamlined the primary and secondary literature

1. *Pensées et fragments inédits de Montesquieu*, ed. Henri Barckhausen, published by Baron Gaston de Montesquieu (Bordeaux: Gounouilhou, 1899–1901), 1:510–38 and 2:535–82.

referred to in Desgraves's notes and have added cross-references for the reader's convenience. I have contributed some identifying or illustrative notes where it seemed appropriate and have added notes concerning points of translation as well. Whenever a new note appears, for whatever reason, it has been distinguished from the Desgraves notes by use of the present editor's initials (HC). In addition, I have translated foreign-language titles of works that Montesquieu refers to in text or in notes where cognates did not make the translation obvious.

There is a select bibliography at the end of this volume. The most common abbreviations used in the notes are as follows:

Adam	Montesquieu. <i>Lettres persanes</i> [Persian letters]. Edited by Antoine Adam. Geneva: Droz, 1954.
Allen	Montesquieu. <i>The Personal and the Political: Three Fables by Montesquieu</i> . Translation and commentary by W. B. Allen. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2008.
Brèthe	Montesquieu. <i>De l'Esprit des lois</i> . Edited by Jean Brèthe de La Gressaye. 4 vols. Paris: Belles Lettres, 1950–61.
<i>Catalog</i>	Louis Desgraves, ed. <i>Catalogue de la bibliothèque de Montesquieu</i> [Catalogue of Montesquieu's library]. Geneva: Droz, 1954.
<i>Considerations</i>	Montesquieu. <i>Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline</i> . Translated by David Lowenthal. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999.
<i>DAF</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française</i> [Dictionary of the French Academy]. 1694, 1762, 1798, and 1835 editions.
Derathé	Montesquieu. <i>De l'Esprit des lois</i> . Edited by Robert Derathé. 2 vols. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1973. A notes and variants edition.
Dodds	Muriel Dodds. <i>Les Récits de voyages, sources de "l'Esprit des lois" de Montesquieu</i> . Paris: Champion, 1929.
<i>Encyclopédie</i>	<i>Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société des gens de</i>



- lettres* [Encyclopedia, or critical dictionary of the sciences, arts and trades, by a Society of men of letters]. Edited by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert. 17 vols. Paris: Briasson et al., 1751–67.
- Furetière Antoine Furetière. *Dictionnaire universel contenant generalement tous les mots françois tant vieux que modernes et les Termes de toutes les sciences et des arts* [Universal dictionary, containing generally all French words, old and new, and terms from all the sciences and arts]. 3 vols. The Hague: Leers, 1690.
- Laws* Montesquieu. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Translated and edited by Anne Cohler, Basia Miller, and Harold Stone. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- OC* Montesquieu. *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*. Edited by André Masson. 3 vols. Paris: Nagel, 1950–55.
- OCVolt* Montesquieu. *Œuvres complètes de Montesquieu*. Edited by Jean Ehrard, Catherine Volpilhac-Augier et al. 22 vols. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation and Société Montesquieu, 1998–2010.
- PL* Montesquieu. *The Persian Letters*. Translated by George R. Healy. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999. Letter numbers in roman, pages in arabic.
- Shackleton Robert Shackleton. “La Genèse de *l'Esprit des lois*” [The genesis of *The Spirit of the Laws*]. *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 52 (1952): 425–38. Reprinted in *Essays on Montesquieu and on the Enlightenment*, edited by David Gilson and Martin Smith, 49–63. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1988.
- Spicilège* Montesquieu. *Le Spicilège*. In *Pensées, Le Spicilège*, edited by Louis Desgraves. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1991. Numbered by entry, not by page.
- Vernière Montesquieu. *Lettres Persanes*. Edited by Paul Vernière. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1960.

## *Translator's Note*

THE STYLE OF *MES PENSÉES*, especially in the early part of the collection, often featured a Latinate syntax with long sentences and complex participial phrases. With reluctance, I have mostly abandoned this syntax, instead opting for a somewhat simpler construction that would more likely be accessible to the kind of readership Montesquieu sought in his lifetime. For in the language of his age, his intended audience was clearly *mondain* (worldly) rather than strictly *érudit* (learned). Otherwise I have attempted a translation that is as close to the tone and literal meaning of the text as possible. Where two renderings of a passage seemed about equally plausible, this is indicated in the footnotes. It should also be noted that on some occasions where Montesquieu seems to be writing down a passage from memory, the translation is presented from the correct text rather than from the author's faulty memory.

One pitfall for the Montesquieu translator is distinguishing between the descriptive and the normative. As an inveterate comparativist, Montesquieu was concerned both to describe in detail the objects of his capacious observation and to detect general similarities or differences between them—some of which were intended to have normative force, but not all. The ambiguities in the French verb *devoir* have sometimes made it difficult to tell these two voices apart, for *devoir* can mean “ought,” “should,” or “must,” but it can also mean “is supposed to” or “is bound to,” as in “All men are bound to die” (Littré). In these instances, the translator is perform an interpreter. Montesquieu was rather careful about making normative commitments, so this translation attempts to be careful about attributing them to him.

The text contains a number of terms and concepts that pose particular translation problems. Instead of deciding upon a single rendering of any given term and adhering to it throughout, I have taken my cue from the context, following in this regard Montesquieu himself, who notes that a word like *esprit* will mean different things in English, depending on the

circumstances (*pensées* 685, 1160, and 1682). Since the *Pensées* cover a full gamut of topics, the problematic terms are also eclectic in scope. A number of recurring words raised special difficulties:

*admirer; admiration.* More likely “to marvel,” “to feel wonder at,” rather than “to regard with approval.”

*bel esprit; beaux esprits.* Usually a “polite and well-adorned mind,” but often used ironically and disparagingly. In the latter cases, it is not always clear whether Montesquieu means to disparage the content of the mind or the elegant manner of its presentation, so sometimes I have gone with “dandy” and other times with “know-it-all.”

*climat.* Usually translated as “climate,” but where the meaning seems to be a place where the weather occurs rather than merely the weather itself, “clime” has sometimes been used.

*dégout; dégouter.* Although “disgust” is the closest literal equivalent, that is too strong a word for what Montesquieu generally has in mind, so I have usually resorted to terms such as “distaste,” “aversion,” or being “put off.”

*disais.* Montesquieu begins a sizeable number of entries with *je disais* or its third-person equivalents. This imperfect indicative would normally suggest “I was saying” or “I used to say.” But the context rarely seemed to fit these phrases, so I have generally settled for “I said.”

*droit.* What is right or just. Often translated here as “law,” as in “divine law,” “civil law,” “natural law,” “canon law,” “the law of nations,” and the like. Sometimes it means a moral or legal claim, in which case I have translated it as “right.” Also used for taxes, tariffs, or duties, as in *le droit d'entrée* (“the import duty”).

*esprit.* Philosophically, this notoriously multivalent word can mean spirit (vs. matter) or mind (vs. body). But in Montesquieu's text, the difficult decision has more often hinged on social qualities (“wit,” conversational prowess) vs. intellectual qualities (being “intelligent” or “smart”). At *pensées* 1160 and, especially, 1682, Montesquieu defines the term, gently chiding his fellow Frenchmen along the way while explaining why it is so problematic (see also *pensées* 685 and 686). Sometimes, it has seemed prudent to leave the term untranslated (*pensées* 213, 1062, 1122, 1145, 1160, 1218, 1370, 1426, and 2239).

*état.* Politically, the “regime” or “government” and usually capitalized here,

although at one point (*pensée* 1546), in discussing the Venetian republic, Montesquieu expressly equates the “state” with the collectivity of subjects, so “state” does not mark a distinction between government and governed as clearly as it might later on. Often, too, the term has a social meaning, in which case it has been translated as “status” or “condition.”

*fable*. Normally translated as “myth” except when the context suggests “fable.”

*génie*. Since “genius” often has a strong, almost transcendent inflection in modern usage that it lacked in the eighteenth century, I have only rarely resorted to it, instead preferring terms like “talent” or “character” that retain the more mundanely descriptive function of the original (despite its etymology).

*les grands*. Ambiguous because *grand* can mean both “large” and qualitatively “great.” I have reluctantly adopted the term “grandees” for most instances despite its slightly archaic flavor, though on occasion I have gone with “the great nobles” or even “the great” where the context dictated.

*honnête*. Can mean “honest,” “honorable,” or even “good,” depending on the context.

*industrie*. Generally a moral rather than strictly economic category in this period, meaning “dexterity,” “ingenuity,” “industriousness,” “resourcefulness,” and the like. On rare occasions (*pensées* 181 and 639, for example), Montesquieu applies the term specifically to artisans, but even then it is not clear that this moral dimension is entirely absent. Rarely does it apply to manufacturing as a sector (see *pensées* 281, 291, 323, 1650, 1801, and 1960 for possible or partial exceptions), and never to factory industry.

*liberté*. Generally I have used “liberty,” except where the specific context seemed to make “freedom” more advisable.

*mœurs*. Notorious for its coverage of the English terms “manners,” “customs,” and “morals,” this word has been translated “mores”—which evokes them all—unless the context clearly indicates a more conclusive alternative.

*pays; patrie*. *Pays* is a general term that can refer to any distinct territory, whether city or region or province or nation. *Patrie* can also refer to these geographically diverse entities in the eighteenth century, but since