

or present the familiar from an unfamiliar angle, is a worthwhile project unto itself. This is likely less than what Coats hopes to achieve, but it is a valuable result all the same.

Coats ultimately declines the chance to deeply explore (exegetically and/or analytically) the aspects of Oakeshott's work that support his characterization of it. This is largely due to the conception of the book as a collection of self-contained occasional papers and book chapters that happen to share a common theme (though some share it more clearly or robustly than others), rather than as a sustained development of that theme across interwoven, building chapters. If Coats is correct that Oakeshott's decades of work is animated by a central but often neglected or mischaracterized theme, one could reasonably expect that a detailed, deliberate excavation thereof would generously repay the effort.

There is also another sense in which the book misses an opportunity. Coats begins, perhaps understandably, from the unambiguous but implicit notion that Oakeshott is *correct* about the poetic character of experiential reality, and Coats explores some of what follows from this. He does not elucidate or explore the *justification* of this view, and he does not say as much as one might hope about its implications for philosophy or (especially) political thought (beyond some fairly well-worn lines about the supposed folly of what Oakeshott called "rationalism"). Accordingly, and despite Coats's suggestion in the introduction that the book ought to appeal to a general audience, it seems in fact to be best suited not merely to readers familiar with Oakeshott's work but to those already quite well-disposed towards Oakeshott's conclusions. Within this group, Coats no doubt recharacterizes and reinvigorates familiar themes, but it is less apparent what this collection of essays might offer readers less familiar with or favorable to Oakeshott.

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David McIlwain: *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment*. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. Pp xii, 222.)

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This book is an intellectual history of the thought of two seminal twentieth-century political philosophers, Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss. Its

general approach is “historical.” That is, it proceeds (without any discussion of its own methodology) by reviewing a vast and diverse secondary literature on the two thinkers, and then trying to resolve differences by way of detailed contextual (scholarly and world-historical) investigation of primary texts by Oakeshott and Strauss, written before and after World War II. The author David McIlwain has a talent for redescribing philosophic ideas in historical language and paradigms (e.g., “Renaissance,” “Enlightenment”), and for the most part, he is able to employ this expository strategy without blurring essential philosophic distinctions.

The book’s general argument is that in spite of their differences, Oakeshott and Strauss had both stared into the Nietzschean and Heideggerian existential abyss of nothingness and finality, yet found it fertile enough to retain and refashion some of the traditional Western Greek and biblical inheritance without a transcendental grounding, divine or otherwise. Said differently, both thinkers tried in different ways, on different themes, to moderate the extremes of modern iconoclastic and reductionist thought, by reminding it of the moral foundations of its (often) utilitarian beliefs.

In expounding this thesis, and defending both thinkers from extreme interpretations, McIlwain explores various aspects of the life and thought of each, including Strauss’s favorable impression of the stability and moderation of British prewar political culture as Strauss first encountered it during his time at London and Cambridge (when he may have met Oakeshott through the Barker circle); the importance for both Oakeshott and Strauss of classically grounded liberal education as one of the mainstays of Western civilization; Strauss’s evolving relationship with the thought of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Kojève, illustrating Strauss’s capacity to contemplate nihilist and millennialist thought without surrendering to the temptations of either; Oakeshott’s views on the importance of historical Christianity in grounding Western conceptions of civility, understood as moral practices of “watery fidelity” among individuals whose final destinies are unique and mysterious; and for both thinkers, the continued importance of the *tensions* between the biblical and classical inheritances as the animating center of Western civilization, including the issue of creation *ex nihilo* of, and in, time by a willful deity versus the eternity of a cosmos completed in a deity of pure intellect.

An area of disagreement between Oakeshott and Strauss that McIlwain explores in detail concerns Hobbes’s place in the formation of “modernity” and the “modern project.” This issue is worthy of comment given the related themes it brings together. It is laid out as a series of responses between Strauss and Oakeshott regarding the renewed significance of Hobbes (especially in the light of Carl Schmitt’s interpretations), beginning with Oakeshott’s review of Strauss’s 1936 book on Hobbes. To sum up McIlwain’s depiction of this decades-long exchange, we may describe their respective positions by 1960 as the view that Hobbes was an “atheistic technologist” and a founder of modernity and the bourgeois and scientific enterprise of mastering the planet’s resources for the goals of commodious living

and perpetual peace (Strauss), and the view that Hobbes (in contrast to Bacon and Descartes) had no such single-minded utilitarian purpose but rather was best understood as one of the last of the Scholastic nominalists, who may have even died in “fear of hellfire” (Oakeshott). In addressing these differences, McIlwain analyzes literature by both Oakeshottian and Straussian scholars. His general assessment of the conflicting interpretations is roughly that Hobbes’s *Leviathan* is a sufficiently great and complex work that it can accommodate *both* interpretations: Strauss’s view of Hobbes as the founder of a bourgeois project aimed at exploiting world resources for utility and convenience, *and* Oakeshott’s view, which reserved a role in Hobbes’ vision for rare Montaignian individuals as the daring first contractors necessary to get the whole project started and nudge it away from its baser instincts over time.

A scholarly note is worth making in the context of the book’s treatment of this controversy. On the question whether Hobbes is better understood as the author of a new tradition or as the continuation of late medieval British voluntarism and nominalism, medieval scholar André de Muralt’s *L’Enjeu de la philosophie médiévale* (Brill, 1991) adds some illumination. Muralt argues that our “contemporary intellectual situation” begins between 1250 and 1350 with Scotus and Ockham and their equation (“univocity”) of divine and human indeterminate “willing” separated from a *telos* of the good, together with their view of government as merely a check on human power, à la later liberalism. Muralt’s view here supports Oakeshott on the point that Ockham, not Hobbes, was the initiator of this viewpoint; and it supports Strauss on the view that late medieval voluntarism/nominalism was not Augustinian since human willing for Augustine was still directed toward “the good” and was not equivalent to a divine creative will directed towards nothing but itself, as in later medieval voluntarist accounts (Islamic, Jewish, and Christian).

To emphasize, as McIlwain does, the similarities (excepting the case of Hobbes) between Oakeshott and Strauss in the interest of fostering political moderation is both possible and, in the face of a world-wide and technologically driven millennialism, fitting. But one must also, if one is to see things clearly, be aware of the profound differences between the two thinkers, something the author cannot easily and summarily make explicit given his choice of a historical and literary narrative. Strauss was very critical of the idea of the “creative” or “poetic” as a source of what he called “modern darkness,” defining it in his critique of Collingwood as a confused conflation of the theoretical, practical, and productive lives (which Strauss thought Plato had managed to keep separated). Oakeshott by contrast saw the genesis of modern war and moral imbalance in the Enlightenment’s overestimation of the capacity and power of rational intellect to control all subject matter. Moreover, Strauss was explicitly critical of (especially non-Aristotelian) Christianity not only for the morally and politically corrosive effects of its otherworldly perfectionist morality, but for the philosophic effects of the symbolism of the incarnate *logos* in dethroning the contemplative life. Could this be one reason Strauss

and his students are largely silent on the Roman and Ciceronian criticism of Plato for elevating the contemplative over the active life, not wanting to conflate it with the later Protestant and bourgeois cultural view, which might lessen the rhetorical force of Strauss's critique of modernity? Oakeshott, by contrast, cultivated the late medieval Christian insight that in a created (as opposed to a crafted) object such as an individual human being, essence and accident are inseparable and require the historical perspective to account for itself, as in Oakeshott's "theorizing of contingency." In an imagined better world, with their mutual adversaries contained, these profound differences between Oakeshott and Strauss would have to be sorted out in deciding what to conserve and refurbish in the Western cultural inheritance.

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Susan Meld Shell, ed.: *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence: Returning to Plato through Kant*. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pp. xii, 237.)

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This volume contains the first translation from German into English of the extant correspondence between Leo Strauss and Gerhard Krüger. The translation by Jerome Veith, Anna Schmidt, and Susan M. Shell is clear, accurate, and a pleasure to read. It comes with an introduction that puts the correspondence in historical context and seven interpretive essays. Also included are explanatory notes and a translation of Krüger's 1931 review of Strauss's first book, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*. Finally, the reader will find here a translation of Strauss's 1964 German preface to his *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, where he famously declares that since the publication of the Spinoza book in 1930, "the theological-political problem has remained the theme of my investigations" (228).

When the editor of Leo Strauss's *Gesammelte Schriften (GS)*, Heinrich Meier, published the Strauss-Krüger correspondence in 2001, it attracted little attention in the English-speaking world. Yet this correspondence is of exceptional philosophic interest, not least for scholars who wish to study the "change of orientation" that Strauss, by his own admission, underwent during the 1930s. For almost all the letters included in this volume date back to the important period between 1930 and 1935. (The correspondence between the two men,