

our time and what they demand from engaged intellectuals who hope to make a difference in the world, this is a first-rate contribution and a passionate plea for cosmopolitanism. Students and scholars of comparative political theory will find much food for thought in this provocative, rich, and thoughtful volume.

Leo Strauss and the Conservative Movement in America: A Critical Appraisal. By Paul Edward Gottfried. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 194p. \$90.00. doi:10.1017/S1537592713000327

— Timothy Fuller, *Colorado College*

Readers interested in the character of American conservatism and in the debates over the role of Leo Strauss and his students in the conservative movement will want to read this book. Paul Gottfried here adds another chapter to his previously published analyses of conservatism in America, characteristically situating the analysis in the larger context of modern intellectual history.

The book has two broad concerns. Gottfried's first aim is to understand Strauss's thought by engaging his writings comprehensively, and by reviewing the expanding range of commentaries on Strauss and the "Straussians." Gottfried has substantial disagreements with Strauss, but he shows understanding of the arguments he opposes. He invites a dialogue with Strauss's advocates, whom he thinks should be more willing to engage and, without pulling his punches, avoids strident attacks on Strauss which do not advance careful thinking. Gottfried has strong opinions but he is also a careful scholar.

His second aim is to criticize from the perspective of the old right, from the angle of that traditional conservatism which distinguishes itself from libertarians and neo-conservatives. Gottfried regrets that this perspective is neglected in contemporary debates. He sees that it is marginal given the prevailing character of American politics, but he also thinks that its proponents have important things to say; they deserve a hearing among those who pursue serious thought in detachment from the felt urgencies of the politics of the moment. He says, "I myself am sympathetic to the outcast group in question and shall admit to having a professional interest in their critical assessments" (p. 72). Thus the book is both about Strauss and about contemporary American conservatism. Gottfried connects them in his strong critique of Neoconservatism; in practical politics, he argues, Strauss's thought lends support to the neoconservative persuasion. "From the standpoint of the older republicanism, Lincoln, FDR, and other Straussian heroes were dangerous centralizers and levellers. . . . [I]t is the Straussian concept of liberal democracy, with its succession of world-historical warrior-leaders, that has come to reshape the establishment Right" (p. 111). And "The Straussians have pulled off an equally

enterprising feat by assuming a certain right-wing style without expressing a right-wing worldview" (p. 115).

Contrary to what is widely believed, "Strauss became an American thinker, indeed an American booster, despite his German past" (p. 7). At the same time, Strauss retained a "profound preoccupation with his Jewishness" which "runs through Strauss's life, and it is evident well before Strauss was forced to flee from Nazi tyranny" (p. 19). Gottfried thinks that Strauss was not "conservative" or "traditionalist." Rather, he became a Zionist and later a "Cold War liberal" and knew that these did not imply a return to or renewal of some classical and ancient political alternative. Gottfried convincingly rejects the allegation that Strauss was secretly a Nazi or Fascist. He argues that Strauss's early regard for Nietzsche's diagnosis of modernity did not lead him to support the German nationalist right. One can separate Nietzsche's diagnosis of the dangers of modernity from whatever prescriptions for them he may have entertained. "Strauss was fascinated by what he considered to be dangerous" (p. 148).

Gottfried's Strauss is not nostalgic for antiquity but sympathetic in the 1930s to the center left in Germany. Once in America, Strauss embraced liberal democracy while distinguishing what he thought its better from its worse tendencies: "[N]either Strauss nor his disciples have expressed any desire to restore an ancient political society" (p. 56). In fact, "they indicate a strenuous effort to make the ancient Greek thinkers look like forerunners of the present age" (p. 57). His criticism of the modern liberal order was from within as a friendly critic who clearly defended the West. Gottfried takes seriously Strauss's critique of Nietzsche, Weber, and Heidegger, and of relativism and nihilism. Thus Strauss gained a popular following in the Cold War period beyond his considerable accomplishments as a scholar. What is really at stake is different and competing conceptions of the right order for us moderns. "Neither Strauss nor his disciples, contrary to what their critics on the left and their adulators on the right may choose to believe, belong to the 'right,' except in their defense of Israel" (pp. 69–70).

Gottfried then turns to a critique of Strauss's prodigious scholarship. Strauss is well known for his critique of historicism in the course of defending "natural right." As Gottfried sees it, what this really meant was that Strauss "opposed not historically based thinking but the rejection of a permanent human nature and the primacy of Reason" (p. 42). Gottfried defends the traditionalist regard for custom and inherited practice, and defends Edmund Burke against Strauss's attack on Burke at the end of *Natural Right and History* (1953). Gottfried also warns Christians, especially Catholics, that Strauss's defense of Reason proclaimed a dichotomy between "political philosophy" and "political theology" and elevated Reason over Revelation. Strauss distanced himself from the traditional justifications for liberal democracy—for instance

in the Protestant Christian tradition—in favor of a more abstract “Platonic” foundation. This is a particular Plato whose references to the religious character of philosophy are taken to be defensive camouflage. Here Gottfried is close to the alternative interpretation of Plato offered by Eric Voegelin (see pp. 73–87). For a thousand years, “Platonism and theology were inseparable for both Plato’s pagan and Christian proponents. Why should Strauss’s reading be assigned more credence than what Plato’s students and their students believed they had learned from their teacher?” (p. 135, fn. 8).

Strauss’s outlook opposes neither the growth of government in the modern welfare state nor the aggressive projection of American power to remake the world. It is an open question how far Strauss cared for customary constitutional restraints on political power. “According to Strauss, only a reunion of philosophy and politics in pursuit of Justice could help the modern West reverse its path toward nihilism” (p. 50); “Strauss generally viewed revealed religion, from classical Greece onward, as extraneous and occasionally harmful to the philosophical enterprise” (p. 51). Gottfried thinks that Strauss’s critique of modern rationalism went only so far; in fact, “[Strauss’s] thinking about the Greeks indicates (to this reader) a modern rationalist perspective in his understanding of Greek philosophy” (p. 52).

Gottfried concludes that Straussians are “clannish and defensive,” “not engaged in open dialectic as much as they are battling Evil”; nevertheless, they have achieved “limited good” (pp. 154–7). They have enriched the study of politics and of the history of political thought and have defended a humanistic approach to that study. Yet, Gottfried insists, the Straussian aim is ultimately practical: “to reshape a national party . . . to design a prodemocratic foreign policy” (p. 170). Except to the old Right, this might sound like praise. Gottfried’s Strauss turns out to be a more or less mainstream liberal. This densely argued book adds to the debate over Strauss and his legacy by its comprehensive assessment and its argumentative stance. It is worth serious reflection.

Pragmatist Politics: Making the Case for Liberal Democracy. By John McGowan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 264p. \$75.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

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— Patti Tamara Lenard, *University of Ottawa*

Although John McGowan does not present it this way, *Pragmatist Politics* has two distinctive projects. One offers a revitalized account of pragmatist politics, so that it is better able to cope with contemporary political challenges. The second offers an account of liberal democracy’s ethos, which can serve to underpin the transformative politics McGowan believes should be adopted by the American Left in its attempt to rejuvenate collective political

life in the United States. Both are motivated by frustration at the American Left’s inability to find a “story” that will capture the hearts and souls of Americans in ways that might encourage political action toward remedying contemporary ills, and both are timely and critically important.

American social and political life is riddled with egregious inequalities, which effectively deny millions of Americans genuine access to the political sphere. Whereas a democracy truly committed to being inclusive—as recommended by the pragmatist political tradition—will find ways to reduce or eliminate inequalities that prevent citizens from accessing the public sphere on fair terms, American democracy is teeming with inequalities—the result of a “ruthless capitalism” that characterizes contemporary America—that erode the sense of community and cooperation on which genuine liberal democracy rests (p. 174). Without a remedy for these inequalities, the liberal democratic ethos that McGowan seeks will struggle to emerge.

The *blame* for liberal democracy’s struggles can be jointly apportioned between the American Right and the American Left. The American Right has been successful in constructing the conditions under which the “public sphere has been emptied and the public treasury plundered by the most privileged,” who in turn have “abdicated all responsibility for the general welfare while avoiding all participation in the commons” (p. 173). But the American Left has failed, also. It has failed to step into the fracas, to take up effectively the banner on behalf of those who are doing less well as a result of the Right’s successes. The American Right has “has eaten the left’s lunch over the past fifty years” (p. 178), which is especially frustrating because the Left knows the policies that must be pursued to protect the inclusivity that pragmatism advocates—“vigorous state regulation and progressive, redistributive tax policies” (p. 178)—but it has failed to offer an account of why Americans should endorse these policies. Says McGowan, the liberal Left “has not made a persuasive case for its vision of the good society” (p. 179); to do so it must offer citizens “plausible visions of an alternative future, visions that can inspire fearful (and rightfully so) citizens to demand more” (p. 50).

Pragmatism, properly reinterpreted, can provide the tools for underpinning a revitalized leftist politics that might be able to capture the imagination of disenfranchised American citizens. Over the course of the book, McGowan highlights three features of the pragmatist tradition that require emphasis in any revitalized political movement: 1) Individuals are necessarily social beings, who define themselves in relation to others (pp. 3, 14) and who form goals and purposes in relation to the communities in which they live (p. 84). 2) Political (and other) progress is possible and desirable, but not certain (p. 60), even as perfection is a pipe dream. 3) Communication across difference is *the* democratic objective. Communication is central to democracy because “it is the basis for our acknowledge-