

I am very sympathetic to Minter's project in this clearly written book. He is right that debates between anthropocentrists and ecocentrists often generate more heat than light. The recovery of American intellectual forebears who eschew such debates can offer a constructive alternative; Mumford is an especially rich and underappreciated source of insight. And Minter's attention to philosophical pragmatism is salient, both for its critique of the "quest for certainty" and its attention to civic engagement and democratic community. To be sure, however, the book is not without faults. The most notable are tied to these same attractive qualities.

First, an important part of Minter's criticism is directed against the quest for intellectual purity and absolute foundations, an argument that he repeats throughout the book. He does so because he takes this quest to be central for both academic environmental philosophers *and* environmental activists (e.g., pp. 184–86). Yet he makes little effort to demonstrate its ubiquity among the latter. Certainly, a bias toward wilderness can be found among both. Yet it would seem easy to characterize the ideas of, say, many Sierra Club or Greenpeace members in the same approving terms that Minter applies to Wes Jackson: "an interesting and idiosyncratic hodgepodge of normative principles and arguments" (p. 166).

Second, the author has a tendency to be overly generous in his readings, thereby failing to address the limitations of his chosen thinkers. This is problematic because those he looks to as models often failed to achieve their own ambitions for social and environmental change. By more often excusing than critically examining these failures, he limits our ability to learn from them. For example, in his chapter on horticulturist and rural reformer Liberty Hyde Bailey, Minter offers an extended and enthusiastic account of Bailey's role in the progressive-era Country Life Commission devoted to "rural uplift" (p. 20). Yet the commission's recommendations fell on deaf ears in Washington. In the final sentences of the section, Minter cites—without comment—a historian who attributes the commission's failures to "their fundamental inability to understand the values and needs of rural people . . . [who] were actively resistant to the changes" (p. 26). It is to the author's credit that he included this comment, yet there is little indication that he has integrated such troubling criticism into his analysis.

Third, the role played by philosophical pragmatism in Minter's intellectual history seems less direct than he often suggests. Certainly his thinkers evoke a pragmatic sensibility, and he joins a growing number who argue for the value of this sensibility to contemporary environmental thinking. But he often tries to go further, discussing John Dewey and others at some length, suggesting that they were key influences. Here the connections appear tenuous. Moreover, it is not clear that they are necessary. The value of the ideas of Bailey, Mumford, MacKaye, and

Leopold ultimately must stand—or fall—on their own. Working to establish a pedigree that links them to Dewey and others seems, well . . . not very pragmatic.

To environmentalists, as Minter notes, Leopold is by far the most familiar of his four. He is also commonly associated with the anthropocentric–ecocentric divide. Thus, Minter's normative argument rests heavily upon his ability to offer a fresh interpretation of this pivotal thinker. To a significant degree, he succeeds. Leopold emerges not as a one-note defender of the intrinsic value of nature but as a public intellectual with a well-stocked rhetorical toolbox, willing to draw upon diverse arguments to encourage needed behavioral changes. As the author puts it, Leopold acted upon a belief that "what were properly seen as moral ends (e.g., the intrinsic value of nature) could also be employed as critical means to realize further goals, such as land health, that serve a range of human and nonhuman needs" (p. 144).

In sum, Minter has successfully excavated several thinkers who deserve greater consideration by environmentalists. He has also added his well-informed voice to the growing chorus urging what he calls a "third way." Yet his account may suggest more than he explicitly acknowledges here. For if he is right that even Leopold—the "father of environmental ethics" (p. 115)—does not fit the historical role in which he is frequently cast, perhaps the "first" and "second" ways are more a product of contemporary imagination than a coherent intellectual heritage. If so, then the civic environmentalism that Minter advances would not be a third way, but the recovery of a valuable but neglected insight already integral to environmental thought.

**Leo Strauss: An Introduction to His Thought and Intellectual Legacy.** By Thomas Pangle. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. 200p. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

**Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism.** By Steven B. Smith. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 268p. \$32.50 cloth, \$18.00 paper.

**The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy.** By Catherine and Michael Zuckert. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 320p. \$32.50. DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707070946

— George Kateb, *Princeton University*

I think that the biggest obstacle standing in the way of non-Straussians who wish to approach the work of Leo Strauss and render justice to his quite remarkable achievement is comprised of his followers and disciples, especially those who claim to derive their inspiration from him for their intellectual work in public policy or their active involvement in its administration. Almost all of them are unmistakably conservative, indeed, sometimes reactionary; typically hawkish and empire-minded in foreign affairs;

and generally disposed to discipline the waywardness of the masses. I must emphasize that the obstacle I have in mind is not posed by Straussians who work in political theory; from them, non-Straussians will often learn or at least gain the benefits of a bracing encounter. The talent of Strauss is not polemical, despite his numerous comments on his times. We non-Straussians should minimize these comments so that we may separate Strauss from his sympathizers who figure in public life, whether in office or behind the scenes or in the public press. To be sure, thinkers bear some responsibility for what their devoted activist admirers make of them. But Strauss is vastly more than his topicality; and his value will survive the accidents of politics that have permitted a few to write about public affairs and act in public life under his direct or indirect tutelage.

A great claim—a claim for Strauss's greatness—is made by the authors of these books. In their minds, this claim justifies writing their books. Yet the books are initially defensive, not about Strauss's worth but about the charges that have been leveled against him by people in the entertainment world or on the fringes of politics. Catherine and Michael Zuckert, especially, repeatedly express worry about the attacks made by an actor (Tim Robbins) and by a chronic and mercurial activist (Lyndon LaRouche). To score easy victories over them, however, is really not to win anything. When, however, the Zuckerts take on the well-known and often perceptive critique of Shadia Drury, the discussion becomes serious and absorbing. With characteristic open-mindedness, they allow the truth of some of Drury's contentions concerning the affinity between Strauss and Nietzsche—much less so on the alleged affinity between him and Machiavelli. The dispute with Drury reaches some part of the way into the standing of Strauss, but not to the heart of the matter. In any case, the question as to whether Strauss is great can be answered only by time. Of course the same must be said for such renowned contemporaries of his as John Rawls, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Michael Oakeshott, Karl Popper, and Isaiah Berlin. Who will last and on what terms? We cannot say.

In the meantime, here are three commendable books; each deserves a careful and patient reading; all of them show an exhaustive knowledge of Strauss's abundant writings. Although some of the same quotations from Strauss and some of the same themes necessarily appear in all three, each book has a distinctive tone or voice, a distinctive intellectual personality. Thomas Pangle is terse and impassioned; Steven Smith is calm, subtle, and capacious; and the Zuckerts are immensely resourceful. Reading one of these books certainly does not make reading the other two redundant. Anyone interested in Strauss will want to read them all. What fellow Straussians make of them must of course matter little to non-Straussians, including myself. But we should notice something anomalous about the

enterprise. The books are perforce addressed to non-Straussians because committed Straussians do not (or should not) need them. Straussians do not need defenses of Strauss and might not want their own understanding of him compromised by other Straussians. After all, there are no disciples of, say, Arendt or Foucault in the same way in which there are Straussians. (There are Rawlsians, but they have far fewer prejudiced enemies.) Hence, there is not the same kind of antagonism surrounding other figures: no two camps, no strife between disciples and enemies. The three books are therefore unlike other works of sustained scholarly inquiry into the thought of a major political theorist, precisely because they are works of apology in the original sense of the word.

I believe that if we anticipate future judgment and regard Strauss as great, his claim to greatness would lie, in my judgment, in the way he reads a text, and not because of any of his general ideas. What is more, he is great in the way he reads texts not because of rules of interpretation (including the esoteric–exoteric distinction) that he sets down or that can be inferred from his practice. Ultimately, non-Straussians will decide the issue of Strauss's claim. They must not be put off by the feeling that Strauss's general ideas are not as compelling as his advocates believe or by the opinion that his rules of interpretation do not have the power to unlock or uncover that is imputed to them. Strauss is a great reader in spite of his rules. He revivifies what he touches; his studies pass beyond the merely interesting or fascinating; he almost re-creates what he interprets. I think that this gift is sufficient to place him in the company of the other renowned political theorists whom I have mentioned.

In fairness, we must look at his general ideas. The three books dwell on them and rest Strauss's claim to greatness on them. Pangle (p. 26) and Smith (pp. 4–10) itemize these ideas, which turn out to be clusters, and which change somewhat, as they must, in the formulation as the arguments of either Strauss or his commentators unfold. The ideas are also interconnected. And they all stem from a conservative sensibility; indeed, from an occasionally reactionary one. Our authors do not hesitate to call Strauss a conservative, even if they attribute to Strauss an everyday moderation.

For the sake of convenience, I will deal with Strauss's general ideas in this order: The first idea is that there is a crisis of modernity; the second is that there is a need for absolutes to come to terms with the crisis; and the third is that philosophy is inherently subversive, but if it is to meet the need for absolutes—and it alone can meet this need—it must learn again to discipline itself as it once did in the past. There are complexities in each idea and some surprising twists. But I doubt that for all their interest, these ideas can bear the weight that Pangle puts on them: namely, to establish the claim that Strauss's "thought grows into the future rivaled by very few of his twentieth

century contemporaries” or that it creates “the powerful undertow that can be quietly exercised by authentic philosophical reflection” (p. 1). Much less is it believable that Strauss ranks with Martin Heidegger as a philosopher, as the Zuckerts suggest (pp. 91–102). It is wise to attend to what Strauss says about himself in an essay, dating from the 1950s. After calling Heidegger “the only great thinker in our time,” he says about himself: “I know that I am only a scholar. . . . The scholar is radically dependent on the work of great thinkers” (“An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism” in Thomas L. Pangle, ed., *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 1989, 27–46, at 29).

*The crisis of modernity.* The story that Strauss tells about modernity has a number of strands and is to a noticeable degree Heideggerian, even though Strauss’s attempted way out of the crisis is not. One strand is that the crisis is occasioned by the explosive growth of modern technology, which removes humanity from what is natural to an unprecedented degree. Another strand is the spread in popularized form of Enlightenment ideas, which become ideologies, and further remove humanity from “the natural world,” which is, in Strauss’s words, quoted by Pangle, “radically pre-scientific or pre-philosophic” (*Leo Strauss*, p. 39). Another strand is relativism, spread by logical positivism and especially by the dissemination of an awareness of constant historical change in beliefs and practices. Relativism is the contention by intellectuals and others that all moral and perhaps metaphysical judgment can be tied only to the standards of one’s time and place and can therefore have no timeless validity. Strauss himself devoted a curiously uninflamed essay called “Relativism” to indicate his anxiety (in Pangle, ed., 13–26). Pangle’s first main chapter (of four) in the book under review is given to the theme of Strauss’s confrontation with relativism, and Smith (pp. 167–68) and the Zuckerts (pp. 72–73) also take it up. Yet another strand is the presence in modern times of what Strauss and our authors refer to as tyranny. And last, we could mention America, as the embodiment and evangelist of modernity, and what Strauss made of it. The Zuckerts summarize Strauss’s view of America in what they call a syllogism: Modernity is bad. America is modern. America is good (p. 38). They give us a whole chapter (pp. 58–79) on the perplexities intrinsic to Strauss’s efforts to condemn modernity and abstain from attacking America, and have to conclude that ambiguities remain and that Strauss’s great source of hope was America’s pre-Enlightenment religiousness (pp. 78–79).

This story of the crisis of modernity is told *mutatis mutandis* by many other conservatives. If there is novelty in Strauss’s version, it consists in two very questionable features. The first is that the totalitarianism of Hitler and Stalin was simply tyranny, enhanced by modern technology. I think that Smith takes a misstep when he chides Arendt, Popper, and Raymond Aron for failing to grasp the fundamental problem of tyranny by not returning to

ancient tyrannies (pp. 132–33). But if Arendt taught her readers anything, it is that modern totalitarianism, especially Hitler’s system, is a novel form of government, without historical antecedents. For her, totalitarianism is not explained by a will to power for the sake of the pleasures of domination and its spoils, but instead by a historical mission to rid the whole world of Jews and other races or (in Stalin’s case) all classes that stood in the way of a tremendous pattern of egalitarian leveling. The historical mission permitted the use of inconceivable terror that sought extermination or enslavement of whole peoples, even when, especially when, they offered no threat. The fault of these peoples was not their actions but their biological or ascribed cultural identities. Ancient tyranny or the classical theoretical treatment of tyranny provides almost no help in deciphering the aims of Hitler or Stalin, even though perhaps a few techniques of rule resemble ancient tyrannical devices. If Strauss thought that Xenophon’s treatise on Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse in the fifth century B.C., could help us encompass modern totalitarianism, then he was profoundly wrong.

The other novel but dubious feature of Strauss’s story of modernity is found in his notion of the unique modern pit (or cave) beneath the cave that every society as society is and must remain. All three authors discuss this conceit present in Strauss’s essay on Spinoza (pp. 154–57) in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952). Strauss’s claim, endorsed in all three books (Pangle, 66–67; Smith, 94–95; Zuckerts, 149) is that the combination of science and historicist philosophy have dug a pit beneath the cave and thus removed humanity even further from the possibility of a natural way of life that is decent in itself and is also a precondition for the ascent by a few to the reality outside and above the cave. Modern humanity is unnaturally enveloped in manufactured pseudophilosophy, in ideology, which is so successful in its seductive power that almost none of us are able to measure our loss, whether that loss is measured by the distance between us and a natural—that is, a prescientific, pre-Enlightenment, prehypertrophied technological—way of life, or by the distance between most who claim to be philosophers and their access to the fundamental, but definitively unanswerable, problems of philosophy, which revolve around what Strauss often calls “the whole,” and the whence and whither of the whole (Strauss on Heidegger in Pangle, ed., 36).

I find the very idea of a pit beneath the cave implausible. No society is natural; every society is constituted by practices and mores that are as unnatural as the next society’s. Every society is enveloped in one or another kind of pseudophilosophy: Why did Plato rail against the sophists and poets as much as he did; why, indeed, did he use the metaphor of the cave, to begin with, unless he wanted to call attention to the unreality of manufactured common opinion that is held in thrall to shadows cast on the

cave's wall by puppeteers manipulating objects that are imitations of imitations?

*The need for absolutes.* All three authors share Strauss's worry over relativism and support his apparent wish to restore the classical doctrine of natural right, which they understand as a set of absolute moral prescriptions that would enable free societies to defend their liberties against the onslaught of unfree societies without hesitations about whether they were doing the proper thing in assuming their own rightness and superiority. The trouble is that Strauss says in his own voice in a passage not cited by any of our authors: "The only universally valid standard is the hierarchy of ends. This standard is sufficient for passing judgment on the level of nobility of individuals and groups and of actions and institutions. But it is insufficient for guiding our actions" (*Natural Right and History* 1953, 163). Strauss is fully aware that rules for action can be subject to pressures that lead to their violation. How can his intricate and inconclusive account of natural right allay the crisis of modernity by offering imperative moral guidance? In fact, the absolutes are only partly moral, if they are moral at all; they point to what exists above morality, whether it is the aesthetic or the aristocratic or the philosophical.

The problem of the usefulness of natural right is aggravated by the skepticism attributed to Strauss by our authors. Pangle spends a section of Chapter 1 (pp. 32–42) on trying to show a genuine difference between relativism and Strauss's adherence to "zetetic" skepticism, a skepticism that searches but is never entitled to assert that it has found what it searched for. I do not think that Pangle succeeds in his attempt, any more than Smith does. Zetetic skepticism is just a fancy evasive term for a high-minded relativism. And Smith (p. 101) turns the knife when he quotes Strauss's words from *On Tyranny* (1963, 1991), that "the sectarian is born" whenever the certainty of a solution overpowers awareness of a fundamental philosophical problem.

*Philosophy is inherently subversive and must learn to discipline itself.* The subversion consists in the way in which relentless and untiring philosophical inquiry unsettles all convictions and thereby threatens to erode people's unquestioning obedience and loyalty. The safety and cohesion of the polity are always in jeopardy from genuine philosophy, not only from adversarial pseudophilosophy. The model of discipline is not censorship but self-censorship, which takes the form of esotericism. This is a subject that Strauss has made famous, an irony not lost on any of our authors. In fact, the Zuckerts devote a whole, quite brilliant chapter to the subject and nicely call it "The Man Who Gave Away the Secrets: On Esotericism" (chap. 4). Historically, thinkers have feared persecution and feared, at least as much, their power to unsettle convictions and thus weaken the social bond. Of course, we can say that the power of philosophy may have been

wildly exaggerated by elitist paranoia or clerical shock or philosophers' bloated self-importance, while the many simply did not care what philosophers said and were content to let philosophy alone until artificially aroused into persecution. (Hobbes should be our guide on this issue.) Yet there is no doubt that Strauss has caught a tendency that had largely escaped attention, even though some of the rules of interpretation he contrived to alert his readers to the phenomenon seem particularly unhelpful when applied to nonesoteric writers. Now and then, thinkers have given exoteric prominence to opinions that they saw through but that they thought served the good of the established order, and then either withheld or obscured the opinions they truly held—that is, if they held any. Strauss's emblematic thinkers are Maimonides and Al-Farabi. But does esotericism have any salience before or after the medieval period, when the appetite of elites for persecution was especially strong? Did Strauss himself practice esotericism?

So far as I can tell, the major import of Strauss's doctrine of esotericism, apart from the medieval period, is the present and future. I mean that Strauss was a thinker through whose mind every idea passed, from the most radical to the most reactionary, and who nevertheless sought to give prominence in his work to ideas that would serve to defend the established order in the West. He gave special prominence to the idea of natural right as a weapon against relativism, and the casual reader is supposed to come away with the belief that Strauss was absolutely sure of the correctness of this idea. Then, too, Strauss would have us think rather absurdly that scientific inquiry has no less arbitrariness and willfulness than divine revelation; that one must choose one or another, and why not choose "pleasing and otherwise satisfying myths" over science (on Heidegger in Pangle, ed., 33)? This is the core of the "theologico-political problem" for the present and future: Philosophy should decide to leave religious pieties undisturbed. The result is better for the established order.

Smith says that Strauss follows a "double strategy," teaches a "double truth": outward fidelity [to Judaism] and an esoteric commitment to philosophy (which is inherently impious) (p. 82). (It is amazing that Strauss never gives sustained attention to the New Testament.) The complication is that if Strauss practiced esotericism, it was halfhearted. He makes it almost clear that he did not accept the validity of revelation or the content of natural right. A self-disciplined philosopher would have to be a lot more cautious than Strauss (and our authors). If he had something to hide, it would be that he hated mass democracy and the mass culture that accompanies and sustains it and that he hated himself for hating it. Who could hate him for that?

Strauss was an idea-intoxicated man, and his careful readers are the better for it. Indeed, nonconservatives, and therefore non-Straussians, are best served by his

intoxication. You have to struggle, however, to see how intellectually radical he is. That is one way of sustaining his claim to attention and perhaps to greatness. Pick up any work by Strauss—except perhaps for, *pace* Pangle, the interminable and uneventful *Socrates and Aristophanes* (1966)—and you find an uncanny ability to get under the skin of the text. Strauss can impersonate any idea or attitude or perspective. He has the beautiful severity of detachment. Pangle is eloquent on this power (p. 45). On any given text, Strauss is able to lose himself in the flow of thought and provide the revelation of unsurpassed insight.

**The Heart of Judgment: Practical Wisdom, Neuroscience, and Narrative.** By Leslie Paul Thiele. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 334p. \$80.00.  
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— Peter J. Steinberger, *Reed College*

Paul Thiele asks the right question: How should we think about political judgment and, more generally, practical wisdom, understood as an intellectual faculty or virtue that is different from, or at least irreducible to, faculties of logical or scientific reasoning but that remains, nonetheless, a decidedly rational mode of thought in its own right? Such a question defines, arguably, the project of the sixth book of the *Nichomachean Ethics*. And Aristotle's failure to provide there a fully satisfying account of the nature of *phronesis*—something different from *sophia* on the one hand, from a merely nonrational knack on the other—establishes the problematic for virtually all subsequent approaches to judgment.

In addressing this problem, hence in attempting to solve the mystery of judgment, Thiele's strategy is to deploy the vast resources of contemporary neuroscience. Roughly: we can understand how the judging mind operates if we can understand how the mind in general operates. In some substantial sense, then, the problem of judgment is to be understood as a scientific problem, rather than a philosophical one.

It is, I think, virtually inevitable that someone would write such a book; at this point, any effort to get clear about one or another manner of thinking is surely apt to consider, and would be at least tempted to exploit, the extraordinary and frequently stunning findings of the new science of cognition. But if such a book pretty much had to be written, it is also the case that Thiele has written it well. This is an interesting and worthy effort that suggests an earnest, hard-fought engagement with the materials of cognitive science and psychobiology—relying primarily (though, it must be said, not especially critically) on some of the less technical, more speculative, hence more controversial works of major figures in the field—and an equally earnest effort to bring those materials to bear on venerable issues of political theory. As such, it is a welcome addition to the literature.

To examine judgment from the perspective of cognitive science is inevitably to embrace a kind of physicalism. Thus, Thiele considers a set of standard themes in the literature on judgment—the importance of experience, the role of unconscious or tacit knowledge, the function of emotion—and in each case the phenomenon in question is reduced to a complex set of physical processes internal to the brain. For example, to learn from experience is really to undergo a kind of “brain mapping” driven by the “electrochemical activity” of synapses and involving “neural relays” that “chart the history of the individual” and that compose, as such, the “neural inventory of the individual's life” (p. 77). When analyzed in this way, the kind of experience that we expect of a good judge seems hardly different from the learned behavior that we find in animals. Thiele is sometimes explicit about this: “Twain observes that a cat is smart enough to learn from the experience of sitting on a hot stove never to do so again” (p. 109); and while he—Thiele—immediately notes that “we expect more of humans” than we do of cats, his account suggests, at best, a difference of degree rather than kind. Similarly, his account of the dependence of judgment on nonreflective, instinctual, unconscious mental process rooted in one or another “distinct brain region” (p. 127)—the hypothalamus, the hippocampus, the amygdala, and so on—again suggests a reductionist approach that would make it difficult to distinguish human behavior from that of nonhuman animals. To be sure, the author seeks to resist any such suggestion, insisting on the importance of “reflection and deliberation” (e.g., p. 119). But this insistence seems to lack conviction; for whereas the role of physical processes is outlined in great detail, the role of conscious reflection is merely asserted, never analyzed; and the assertion itself, though made more than once (cf. pp. 105–6), seems half-hearted at best, as, for example, when he suggests that, from the perspective of practical judgment, “[a]s often as not, the less conscious the activity the better” (p. 141).

Can this—the physical morphology and operation of the brain—really be what we have in mind when we say of an individual that he or she is a person of good judgment? Surely we wouldn't want to say (except perhaps metaphorically) that a dog is judicious, that a mouse possesses the virtue of prudence, that one frog has more common sense than another. Yet time and again, and despite repeated protests to the contrary, Thiele's account seems to conceive of human mental activity as merely a more complex configuration of purely physical processes that allow us to adapt to our environments much as animals adapt to theirs. Is this kind of adaptation really what we are referring to when we talk about moral insight, practical wisdom, and good judgment?

Again, Thiele acknowledges that the physical processes of judgment must be “supplemented” by reflection and deliberation (p. 105). But are not those things—good