



# The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy

*Catherine H. Zuckert, Michael P. Zuckert*

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Is Leo Strauss truly an intellectual forebear of neoconservatism and a powerful force in shaping Bush administration foreign policy? *The Truth about Leo Strauss* puts this question to rest, revealing for the first time how the popular media came to perpetuate such an oversimplified view of such a complex and wide-ranging philosopher. More important, it corrects our perception of Strauss, providing the best general introduction available to the political thought of this misunderstood figure.

Catherine and Michael Zuckert—both former students of Strauss—guide readers here to a nuanced understanding of how Strauss's political thought fits into his broader philosophy. Challenging the ideas that Strauss was an inflexible conservative who followed in the footsteps of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Carl Schmitt, the Zuckerts contend that Strauss's signature idea was the need for a return to the ancients. This idea, they show, stemmed from Strauss's belief that modern thought, with its relativism and nihilism, undermines healthy politics and even the possibility of real philosophy. Identifying this view as one of Strauss's three core propositions—America is modern, modernity is bad, and America is good—they conclude that Strauss was a sober defender of liberal democracy, aware of both its strengths and its weaknesses.

The Zuckerts finish, appropriately, by examining the varied work of Strauss's numerous students and followers, revealing the origins—rooted in the tensions within his own thought—of their split into opposing camps. Balanced and accessible, *The Truth about Leo Strauss* is a must-read for anyone who wants to more fully comprehend this enigmatic philosopher and his much-disputed legacy.

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