



The Enduring Importance of Leo Strauss

Laurence Lampert

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The Enduring Importance of Leo Strauss takes on the crucial task of separating what is truly important in the work of Leo Strauss from the ephemeral politics associated with his school. Laurence Lampert focuses on exotericism: the use of artful rhetoric to simultaneously communicate a socially responsible message to the public at large and a more radical message of philosophic truth to a smaller, more intellectually inclined audience. Largely forgotten after the Enlightenment, exotericism, he shows, deeply informed Strauss both as a reader and as a philosophic writer—indeed, Lampert argues, Strauss learned from the finest practitioners of exoteric writing how to become one himself.

Examining some of Strauss's most important books and essays through this exoteric lens, Lampert reevaluates not only Strauss but the philosophers—from Plato to Halevi to Nietzsche—with whom Strauss most deeply engaged. Ultimately Lampert shows that Strauss's famous distinction between ancient and modern thinkers is primarily rhetorical, one of the great examples of Strauss's exoteric craft. Celebrating Strauss's achievements while recognizing one main shortcoming—unlike Nietzsche, he failed to appreciate the ramifications of modern natural science for philosophy and its public presentation—Lampert illuminates Strauss as having even greater philosophic importance than we have thought before.

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