



## Searching for 'Moderate Enlightenment': From Leo Strauss to J. G. A. Pocock

Nicholas Mithen

**To cite this article:** Nicholas Mithen (27 Feb 2024): Searching for 'Moderate Enlightenment': From Leo Strauss to J. G. A. Pocock, History of European Ideas, DOI: [10.1080/01916599.2024.2319392](https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2024.2319392)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2024.2319392>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 27 Feb 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 87



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Searching for 'Moderate Enlightenment': From Leo Strauss to J. G. A. Pocock

Nicholas Mithen<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of Hull, Kingston upon Hull, UK; <sup>b</sup>School of History, Classics and Archaeology, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

## ABSTRACT

The meaning of 'moderate enlightenment' has been monopolised by Jonathan Israel. In this guise, 'moderate enlightenment' is built atop a compromise between authority and innovation, between reason and revelation, and amounts to an intellectually subordinate counterpart to the Radical Enlightenment. This 'negative' definition obstructs serious interpretation of what 'moderate enlightenment' can mean. This essay progresses instead an enquiry into a 'positive' definition of 'moderate enlightenment' – an enlightenment defined by moderation. It does so by surveying key lineaments within a century of historiography on the enlightenment, from the 1920s to the present. It focuses on the contributions to that historiography by two titanic figures of twentieth-century scholarship and political thought: Leo Strauss and J.G.A. Pocock. Strauss and Pocock are shown to have advanced equally substantive, if fundamentally distinct, concepts of 'moderate enlightenment'. Searching for 'moderate enlightenment', aided by Strauss and Pocock, raises new vistas in both eighteenth century intellectual history and twentieth century historiography – and the pertinence of both for the history of political thought. It also brings into question the political-philosophical substance of the 'moderation' which underpins a positively defined 'moderate enlightenment'.

## KEYWORDS

Moderate enlightenment; moderation; enlightenment; historiography; Leo Strauss; J.G.A. Pocock

## 1. Introduction

The meaning of 'moderate enlightenment' has been monopolised by Jonathan Israel. Monopolised unintentionally, it should be added, because since his turn to the enlightenment in the late 1990s, proposing a coherent 'moderate enlightenment' has been far from Israel's concern. It has been the 'Radical Enlightenment' – capitalised, Spinozist, democratic, secular – which has been Israel's moving object. The 'moderate mainstream', the nebulous category into which Israel's 'moderate enlightenment' slides, sought to accommodate elements of this radical agenda without precipitating the collapse of the *ancien regime*.<sup>1</sup> Israel's 'moderate enlightenment' is built atop a compromise: between authority and innovation, between tradition and modernity, between reason and revelation. It is a compromise for which Israel does not conceal his distaste.

It is this *negative* definition of moderate enlightenment – an enlightenment which is 'not radical' – which abounds in contemporary historiography. 'Radical enlightenment' preceded Israel, has transcended his formulation, and matured into a productive, contested historiographical category.<sup>2</sup>

**CONTACT** Nicholas Mithen  nick.mithen@gmail.com  University of Hull, Kingston upon Hull, UK

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Conversely, no study has taken the moderate enlightenment seriously. No study has sought to pose a *positive* definition of moderate enlightenment: an enlightenment defined by moderation.

This article seeks to progress this enquiry. It does so not by contributing to the study of moderate enlightenment as an eighteenth-century historical formation but rather by reconsidering ‘moderate enlightenment’ as a twentieth-century historiographical category. Writing at the turn of the millennium, Israel was not the first to write of a ‘moderate enlightenment’; nor was he the first to conceive of an enlightenment characterised as moderate. Descending into the earlier historiographical landscape allows a genealogy of a moderate enlightenment to come into view. This genealogy offers a new lens through which to take stock of a century of historiography of enlightenment.<sup>3</sup>

If the most basic objective here is to move beyond Israel’s ‘moderate mainstream’, his account of the ‘moderate enlightenment’ nonetheless identifies the place to begin. Israel has recounted his recovery of radical enlightenment against three historiographical tendencies: firstly, against the postmodern critique of the ‘Enlightenment Project’; secondly, against the methodological reduction of enlightenment studies to a species of social history; and thirdly against the homogenisation of enlightenment into a single coherent political-philosophical movement. This last was, in Israel’s view, the mid-century model of Ernst Cassirer and Peter Gay. For Israel, the Cassirer-Gay enlightenment of the *philosophes* represented in fact only one side of the enlightenment, the moderate camp. It was to complement their *implicitly moderate* enlightenment that Israel’s *explicitly radical* enlightenment needed to be uncovered.<sup>4</sup>

In Israel’s judgement, Gay and Cassirer should have listened to a fellow German-Jewish émigré to the United States: Leo Strauss.<sup>5</sup> In his writings on enlightenment from the early 1930s Strauss saw, as Israel later was to see, the Janus face of enlightenment, its radical and moderate strains. Israel has projected onto Strauss the dominance of his own Spinozist Radical Enlightenment. He has also read into Strauss his relegation of moderate enlightenment to ‘a category of thought that is inherently debased and feeble philosophically’, and its protagonists to ‘little more than misguided camp-followers unwittingly serving the cause of the radicals’.<sup>6</sup>

This represents a simplification of Strauss’s position. Strauss was, by 1930, at least equally animated by what he then termed ‘the problem of that moderate (i.e. non atheistic) enlightenment’.<sup>7</sup> Strauss’s ‘moderate enlightenment’ is not that of Israel. To make sense of what Strauss meant by ‘moderate enlightenment’ we need to trace the thread of his early work.

## 2. Leo Strauss’s two moderate enlightenments

In 1925 a twenty-six-year-old Leo Strauss remarked of ‘certain clever minds ... [who] have of late been speaking of the shallowness of the Enlightenment’.<sup>8</sup> Germany in the 1920s witnessed a problematization of the enlightenment and its legacy. That decade had seen the culmination of the ‘resurgence of theology’, a return to religious experience against rationalist idealism born of the eighteenth century, guided by luminaries such as Franz Rosenzweig and Karl Barth.<sup>9</sup> This drew upon one legacy of the Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen. Cohen’s Neo-Kantian thought was taken in a different direction by Ernst Cassirer, whose philosophy of ‘symbolic forms’ sought to reground idealism in a new epistemology.<sup>10</sup> Against both tendencies – the former chastising enlightenment; the latter seeking to revalidate it – arose the school of phenomenology, inherited and then repurposed by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger’s encounter with Cassirer at Davos in 1929 has been memorialised as signifying the essential cleavage within continental philosophy.<sup>11</sup> It might also be seen as signifying the birth of modern discourse on Enlightenment.<sup>12</sup> The years immediately after the Davos encounter saw Heidegger extend his turn against enlightened rationalism, and Cassirer pen his influential *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*.<sup>13</sup>

If Germany in the 1920s was pregnant with a modern discourse on enlightenment, then Strauss was there at the birth. Cassirer had been Strauss’s *doktorvater*, supervising his 1920 dissertation, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der philosophischen Lehre Fr. H Jacobis*, on the *pantheismusstreit*, the conflict over the legacy of Lessing and the degree and nature of his Spinozism. But Strauss was no disciple of

Cassirer. In the early 1920s he had been attracted to Zionism, and a species of religious ‘experientialism’.<sup>14</sup> He also fell under the spell of Heidegger, studying with him in Freiburg. Strauss consistently, in his later life, recognised Heidegger as ‘the only great thinker of our time’.<sup>15</sup> While he diverged from Heidegger’s political philosophy, like Heidegger Strauss progressed a critique of the Enlightenment. It was within this critique, as it staged between 1929 and 1935, that Strauss’s ‘moderate enlightenment’ took form.

Prior to 1929 Strauss had written and thought about enlightenment: *Aufklärung* appears in his thesis. There, however, enlightenment serves principally as stage for a set of philosophical and theological questions, rather than as a concept in and of itself. *Aufklärung* as problem begins to emerge more clearly in Strauss’s work on Spinoza himself. In an early essay Strauss characterised Spinoza’s biblical criticism as signifying ‘the honesty and the sincerity ... (of) the Enlightenment’, a departure from the theological treatment of scripture.<sup>16</sup> That essay caught the attention of Julius Guttman, who in 1925 hired Strauss as a researcher at his *Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The next three years saw Strauss labour on the body of work which would become *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, belatedly published in 1930.

Strauss’s *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion* contains a substantive concept of enlightenment. Enlightenment raised an ‘age of freedom’ against an ‘age of prejudice’ born of post-Reformation Christianity. The goal of enlightenment was social tranquillity, achieved by a discrediting of traditional religion. Central to this discrediting was a reconceptualization of scripture, but for Strauss enlightened biblical criticism progressed by two paths: the first developed internally to revealed religion, as a refinement of biblical philology; the second was wholly atheistic, inspired by an Epicurean heritage.<sup>17</sup> It is this latter mode of biblical criticism which is Spinoza’s, and so Strauss’s, object of study. Nonetheless both critiques are proper to the enlightenment: the Spinozist, neo-Epicurean mode of biblical criticism was aligned with the ‘scientific intention’; this marked it out from the mode proper to a ‘popular Enlightenment’ which was essentially Christian-reformist, defined not by a dismissal of the Christian deity, but by a recasting of God as benevolent rather than terrible.<sup>18</sup>

Something like ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ wings of enlightenment are dimly visible here: the former atheistic; the latter Socinian, or deist, a ‘popular’ religious departure from tradition. In the one-page preface to the work Strauss makes a single reference to a Spinozist ‘radical Enlightenment’. In reality, however, the ‘problem’ Strauss was grappling with here did not present itself as the ‘problem of the enlightenment’; nor was ‘enlightenment’, at that point, presented through a dialectical radical-moderate lens.<sup>19</sup> Both of these features emerge in Strauss’s writing from the early 1930s.

As his Spinoza book was being published, Strauss began refashioning it into an enquiry into the ‘question of the correct approach to interpreting the Enlightenment’.<sup>20</sup> Writing to the Kant scholar Gerhard Krüger in early 1930, Strauss lamented at his having been ‘forced ... to remain silent about certain things in the work’, principal among them ‘the question of the Enlightenment’ and Strauss’s ‘atheistic presupposition’ about it. He later beseeched Krüger to lay bare in a review ‘the actual intention of the book’.<sup>21</sup> Krüger obliged, writing ‘in this learned, specialized historical investigation, there is concealed a fundamental philosophical discussion of the problem of the Enlightenment’.<sup>22</sup>

By the early 1930s, however, the ‘question of the Enlightenment’ presented itself to Strauss less as a *philosophical*-theological question – the kinds of questions he was asking in the early 1920s – and more as a *political*-theological question.

The ‘victory of Enlightenment’ – what Strauss now framed as the ‘core of my reflections’ – was, in his judgement, both shallow and hollow. Shallow because it failed to penetrate society. While enlightenment’s refined philology and critique of miracles discredited revelation and empowered reason, it ‘only succeeded in securing itself, i.e. the *already* enlightened human being, against miracles’.<sup>23</sup> Enlighteners failed to convert the unenlightened away from religion; they consolidated reason against revelation but did so on rationalist and, ironically, prejudiced grounds. Enlightenment’s ‘victory’ was hollow because, while it aimed at societal tranquility in an age of religious conflict, enlightenment’s intellectual universalism led to its opposite. By discrediting revelation, enlightenment shattered the traditional mechanisms for the preservation of political order.

Strauss probed this shattering through an enquiry into the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, first from Berlin and then, supported by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, from Paris. The published fruit of this period was Strauss's 1936 *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*, printed while Strauss was in exile in England, and the long chapter on Hobbes in Strauss's 1953 *Natural Right and History*. Enlightenment features sparsely in both works. Enlightenment is prominent, however, in Strauss's Hobbes manuscripts from the early 1930s.

An 'outline' of a work on Hobbes' political thought, composed between 1931 and 1932, contains a section on 'The Enlightenment'.<sup>24</sup> Enlightenment is here defined as a force which works by 'removing what restrains the *natural mechanism*: that is, the false opinion of the tradition, the prejudices'. Hobbes, 'the democrat and antitheoretician', prescribed the *Leviathan* as the necessary political response to secure peace in the state of 'universal enlightenment', what Strauss terms 'that presupposition of (radical) enlightenment'.<sup>25</sup>

Hobbes' presupposition of 'radical enlightenment' is restated in another manuscript work Strauss completed in 1933, a study of Hobbes' critique of religion, intended to hold the subtitle 'a contribution to understanding the enlightenment'. Here the binary of, on the one hand, an enlightenment internal to the horizon of religion, and, on the other, an atheistic enlightenment – the binary suggested in Strauss's work on Spinoza, but absent from his Hobbes 'outline' – recurs. The former is defined as the 'emphatic ranking of the merciful benevolence of God over his power his honor, and his punitive anger' and Strauss here takes the step, untaken in his Spinoza work, of labelling this as 'the moderate enlightenment'.<sup>26</sup> Against this 'moderate enlightenment' and its refashioning of God arose Hobbes' enlightenment, predicated upon a 'tacit rejection of the concept of God' in so far as it equated God with 'absolute power'.<sup>27</sup>

If Spinoza-Hobbes now constituted the core of Strauss's 'radical enlightenment', he continued to refine his category of 'moderate enlightenment' through the essays he wrote between 1932 and 1937 to introduce each volume of the complete works of Moses Mendelssohn. In his 1932 essay on Mendelssohn's *Phaedon*, the definition of 'the entire enlightenment' as a recasting of God as benevolent, rather than terrible, is restated. This goes hand in hand with a move towards 'refinement' and 'softening', and what he in 1936 called a theological 'sentimentality'.<sup>28</sup> There too the universalism of enlightenment recurs – a 'popular philosophy' resistive to the 'splitting up the human race into the "wise" and the "multitude"'. But whereas Hobbes' 'radical' thought progressed on rationalist presuppositions, Mendelssohn's, for Strauss, bound together sentimentality and civility, a benevolent God and natural religion, in a 'theistic enlightenment'.<sup>29</sup> Following Lessing, Mendelssohn set forth a "purified" Spinozism, which was, after all, 'distinguished from the credo of the moderate enlightenment by only a subtlety'.<sup>30</sup>

Through the early 1930s, then, Strauss constructed a (Hobbesian) radical enlightenment pitched against a ('Mendelssohnian') moderate enlightenment through a survey of the history of political philosophy in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. Those categories, – and moderate enlightenment in particular – attained their full meaning, however, through a parallel strain of Strauss's early thought: his turn towards medieval Jewish thought, and ultimately, towards Plato.

Strauss was already working on medieval Jewish thought in the mid-1920s.<sup>31</sup> As that decade came to an end – and in part, he suggested to Krüger, as a means to satiate his employers desire for 'any old works of erudition' with a Jewish flavour – he began to work on medieval Jewish thought more comprehensively.<sup>32</sup> As he did so Strauss 'realized that this work can't be carried out so mindlessly, simply because the subject matter is too exciting'. Exciting, he continued, precisely because 'it deals with the problem of that moderate (i.e. non-atheistic) Enlightenment about which I learned quite a few things from your own work on Kant':

Looked at superficially the situation in the Jewish-Arabic Middle Ages is similar to that of the eighteenth century: prevalence of belief in providence, or belief in a benevolent god over belief in a God who calls one to account, and therefore belief in the sufficiency of reason.<sup>33</sup>

Strauss's work which followed this statement – culminating in his 1935 *Philosophy and Law* – pulled apart this 'superficial' resemblance. It did so by identifying two 'moderate enlightenments'. The first

was modern and Christian, of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, in conflict with the Hobbesian-Spinozist radical enlightenment. The second was medieval, present in both Jewish and Arabic thought. The latter was, 'superficially', the 'precursor and model' for the former.<sup>34</sup> In reality, however, the two were substantively different.

The former 'moderate enlightenment' – whose clearest articulation appears in the introduction to *Philosophy and Law* – proceeded by offering a series of 'harmonizations between the "modern world-view" and the Bible', akin to those offered by Mendelssohn.<sup>35</sup> This attempted 'harmonization' between reason and revelation was discredited by the mocking critique of radical enlightenment. And yet, in Strauss's judgement, the compromise it represented – its 'attempt to "mediate" between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy' – was not discarded but rather 'internalized' in a 'post-enlightenment synthesis'.<sup>36</sup> This synthesis culminated in the figure of Nietzsche, who was for Strauss at once 'the last Enlightener' and 'the completion of Enlightenment'.<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche was, for Strauss, testament to Enlightenment's 'complete entanglement in the tradition': he still, essentially, thought within the plane of 'secularized Christianity'.<sup>38</sup>

That plane – the legacy of the modern moderate enlightenment, a betrayal of the radical enlightenment – was transcended only by Heidegger. But Heidegger's complete dissolution of tradition did not, in Strauss's judgement, represent grounds for political-philosophical order. After Heidegger's *deconstruction*, Strauss asserted, 'we stand in the world completely without authority, completely without orientation ... we really must begin *entirely* from the beginning'.<sup>39</sup> This meant, for Strauss, 'the recovery of philosophizing in its natural difficulty, of natural philosophizing, that is, of Greek philosophy'.<sup>40</sup>

It was the retention of Greek, Platonic philosophy, and its insulation from Christian natural law, that attracted Strauss to the 'other' moderate enlightenment, the "moderate" rationalism' of Maimonides. The medieval enlightenment of Maimonides was 'moderate' not in the modern sense of attempting to resolve the conflict between reason and revelation – that is, in the sense of being 'un-radical' – but rather in the ancient sense of attempting to mitigate the risk of societal disruption posed by the schism between politics and religion. 'In the eighteenth century' Strauss wrote to Krüger, developing his hypothesis, 'the "moral law" is developed as natural right that requires the supplement of a positive, civil law.' By contrast, he continued, 'for Jews and Arabs, the positive law is at once political and "ecclesiastical" law. The positive law of Moses or Mohammed is the *one* binding norm'.<sup>41</sup> The essays which make up *Philosophy and Law* expanded upon the significance of this difference, through close studies of the Islamic philosopher Farabi (870–950) and the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1138–1204). For both, the wise man should philosophise freely in private, unfettered by restriction, superstition or tradition. And yet, 'in case of a conflict between philosophy and the literal sense of the law' the political philosopher is required 'to interpret the literal sense; and to keep the interpretation secret from all the unqualified'.<sup>42</sup> Philosophy was thus rendered *esoteric*.

The core responsibility of the philosopher-legislator of Maimonides' moderate enlightenment – 'the duty of *keeping secret* from the unqualified multitude the rationally known truth' – proceeds 'in contrast to the Enlightenment proper, that is, the modern Enlightenment' and its dictum of universal reason.<sup>43</sup> The intellectual self-restraint of Maimonides' enlightenment, for Strauss, safeguarded political stability; the modern enlightenment, even if well-intentioned, could only end in disarray.

Maimonides and Farabi's medieval 'enlightenment' – typified by its 'moderate rationalism' – showed Strauss the way back to Plato.<sup>44</sup> The 'quarrel between orthodoxy and Enlightenment' which drove Strauss's early work, including *Philosophy and Law*, had opened up another quarrel, 'the quarrel between the ancients and moderns'.<sup>45</sup> This latter quarrel contained the former, and defined Strauss's mature political philosophy, and his legacy.

Strauss grappled with this transition in late 1932, as he worked on his Hobbes project in Paris. He drafted and redrafted a letter to Krüger in which he concluded 'one must therefore ask: who is right, the ancients or the newer ones? The *querelle des anciens et des modernes* must be repeated'.<sup>46</sup> This turn to antiquity was in part precipitated by political events. Strauss's Paris years coincided with the ascent of Hitler to Chancellor in Germany. National Socialism was, in Strauss's view, a reaction to



the crisis of modernity, but it offered ‘solutions that are no less “modern” and hence in principle have to lead to the same negative result’. ‘We are therefore inclined’ Strauss added to Krüger ‘to try solutions that are in principle unmodern, i.e. concretely: old solutions’.<sup>47</sup>

In 1932 this meant, for Strauss, the Platonic enlightenment of Maimonides, with its ‘moderate rationalism’ administered esoterically by societal elites. But after relocating to England in late 1933, the language of enlightenment – moderate, radical or otherwise – begins to recede from Strauss’s writings. Writing to his friend Jacob Klein in May 1935 Strauss asks ‘*where* is Maimonides’ enlightenment supposed to lead us now?’.<sup>48</sup> Strauss answer was twofold: intellectually, back to Plato and the ancients; and in his own biography, onwards to the ‘New World’. By 1937 Strauss had secured a lectureship at the New School in New York, moving onwards to Chicago in 1949.

This migration led Strauss away from ‘enlightenment’, an analytical category which he left behind in continental Europe. But if, after 1935, Strauss wrote seldom of ‘enlightenment’, and not again, to my knowledge, of a ‘moderate enlightenment’, he wrote with increasing regularity of ‘moderation’.

In 1948 Strauss published a new edition of Xenophon’s *Hiero* with a series of commentary essays, collectively titled ‘On Tyranny’. One of Strauss’s innovations in *On Tyranny* was to draw out the connection between Xenophon and Machiavelli. Machiavelli, for Strauss, ‘imitated’ Xenophon in divorcing political calculations from moral concerns. The Florentine departed from Xenophon, however, in publicising his disregard for moral norms; in dismissing morality ‘by speech’ as well as ‘in deed’. This Machiavellian intervention served, for Strauss, to ‘separate “moderation” (prudence) from “wisdom” (insight)’.<sup>49</sup>

This union of wisdom and moderation in antiquity, exemplified in Plato, but also demonstrated by Xenophon, and their severance in modernity, initiated by Machiavelli, became central to Strauss’s political-philosophical and historical schema from the late 1940s. Machiavelli initiated the first of three ‘waves of modernity’, laying the ground work for Hobbes and Spinoza, for Rousseau and Nietzsche, and ultimately Heidegger.<sup>50</sup> Strauss repeated this formula in a 1952 reprint of his 1936 Hobbes monograph, stating that he had not appreciated the primacy of Machiavelli because he was ‘not sufficiently attentive to the question whether wisdom can be divorced from moderation’.<sup>51</sup> Heideggerian thought, in Strauss’s judgement, proceeded through the hypocritical feigning of ‘wisdom and moderation’ while at the same time submitting to ‘the verdict of the least wise and least moderate part of his nation while it was in its least wise and least moderate mood’.<sup>52</sup> Machiavelli, Strauss wrote in 1958, ‘breaks with the Great Tradition and initiates the Enlightenment’.<sup>53</sup> Enlightenment now, for Strauss, is synonymous with modernity, and amounts to what one commentator has recognised as ‘the entrenchment of immoderation’.<sup>54</sup>

The only viable path in this condition, for Strauss, was to return to classical political philosophy. In Greek thought ‘moderation’ was the ‘virtue controlling the philosopher’s speech’. It was moderation which preventing them from indulging in speculation or advocating for revolution. The philosopher sought instead a ‘harmony between the excellence of man and the excellence of the citizen, or between wisdom and law-abidingness’.<sup>55</sup> Reuniting wisdom with moderation within a political-intellectual elite was Strauss’s abiding political-philosophical agenda. This found its most complete form in his 1964 *The City and Man*, a paean to Greek thought and its contemporary relevance. There Plato’s republic is framed as ‘an act of moderation, of self-control’,<sup>56</sup> while Thucydides championed a ‘Spartan moderation’ which ‘guarantees against insolent pride in success’.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, for the Greek tradition, as too for Strauss himself, ‘depravation is, above all, the destruction of moderation’.<sup>58</sup>

### 3. Recasting enlightenment in American scholarship, 1950–1975

Strauss’s implicit condemnation of enlightenment was common currency in the United States after the Second World War. Today the best-known mid-century critique of the enlightenment is Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, completed with the two authors in exile in California in 1947. But that work was originally published in German, in a small print run,

and only appearing in English in 1972. At that point its reception built upon a 'home-grown' American tradition of condemning enlightenment rationalism and universalism, landmarks of which include Carl Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (1932), Charles Frankel's *The Faith of Reason* (1942), Jacob Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952) and Lester Crocker's *An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought* (1959). These works shared a conviction that the political-philosophical ills of modernity in the West were the products of the intellectual culture of eighteenth-century Europe.

By the 1950s, however, this gloomy, presentist account of the utopian-rationalist enlightenment was beginning to be challenged. In part this challenge was incubated by a changing American academic landscape. Ira Katznelson has written of what he calls a 'political studies enlightenment', typified by figures such as Hannah Arendt and Karl Polanyi, who sought to 'secure a realistic version of Enlightenment' while also asking 'not just whether Enlightenment should define modernity, but which Enlightenment we should wish to have'.<sup>59</sup> On the one hand, this reflected an academic movement concerned with empowering social science, and for whom a fixation on enlightenment, and the accompanying discourse of the 'age of the crisis of man', was an obstruction.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, its protagonists were morally and politically committed to securing an enlightenment which could aid in the re-grounding of a 'more capable political liberalism'.<sup>61</sup>

Parallel to this emerged a historiographical revision of Enlightenment, whose standout figure is Peter Gay. The 1965 English edition of Strauss's *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, translating that sole reference in its preface to 'radical Enlightenment' into English for the first time, was bracketed by the publication of two works by Gay: in 1964 his collection of essays, *The Party of Humanity* and in 1966 the first part of his *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism*. Gay – like Strauss a German émigré, but who arrived in the United States aged only eighteen – had, by the early 1950s had begun working on eighteenth century French thought, on Rousseau, and on the enlightenment. An early essay, 'The Enlightenment in the history of political theory', published first in 1954, expanded in his 1964 collection, set the tone for a recovery of enlightenment from 'the so-called "New Conservatives"'.<sup>62</sup> His *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* lay down a far more comprehensive account of the enlightenment as a historical phenomenon than those offered by Becker, Talmon and Crocker, whom he criticised.<sup>63</sup>

Gay's was not an apolitical formula, but one aligned with a measured scholarly liberalism, setting 'the historical' and 'the political' several levels removed from one another. This was an approach which Gay shared with the English historian, active in the United States in the late 1940s through to the late 1950s, Alfred Cobban.<sup>64</sup> It was also an approach modelled, in intention if not method, on Cassirer, whose 1931 *Philosophy of the Enlightenment* was published in English in 1951. The heights of Enlightenment, in Gay's treatment, were shaped not principally by formal philosophy, but by criticism, and he attributed this formulation above all to Cassirer.<sup>65</sup>

Gay's enlightenment, and his depiction of that of Cobban and Cassirer, was moderate by suggestion.<sup>66</sup> Taking issue with views from the political right and political left, Gay's enlightenment was, first and foremost, anti-radical: 'it was precisely the character of the Enlightenment' he wrote *not* to be 'impelled to extremes. As sturdy disciples of classical antiquity ... the *philosophes* took extreme care to avoid extremes. The philosophy of practical pragmatism – reasonable pride, moderate reform, sensible expectations – was good enough for them'.<sup>67</sup> The 'moderation' of the Enlightenment *philosophes* was rooted in what Gay, like Cobban, termed their humanity. This humanity was the device through which they managed the 'paradox' which they lived, of being 'at war with the society of which they were part'.<sup>68</sup> As the eighteenth century progressed the *philosophes* *did*, Gay recognised, become radicalised. This constituted, however, a distortion of their archetypal form, and a betrayal of enlightenment. Enlightenment remained embodied, for Gay, in Voltaire, the measured critic, far from the political revolutionary.

Israel has characterised Gay's enlightenment as moderate *avant la lettre*.<sup>69</sup> There is something to this. More significantly, however, Gay's account marked the waning of the hermeneutic paradigm within which Enlightenment was understood as a civilizational, and hence political-philosophical,



concept first, and a historical category second, if at all. From the latter 1960s historians began to dissect 'Enlightenment', viewing it less through the lens of the 'crisis of modernity'. This shift is symbolised by Franco Venturi's Trevelyan Lectures, published in 1970 under the title *Utopia and Reform*. In the introduction Venturi railed against the seizure of enlightenment by a 'Germanic nostalgia for the *Ur*', the domain of 'intelligent conservatives'.<sup>70</sup> Gay, for Venturi, was significant for at once criticising this tendency in others and yet still partaking in himself: his interpretation of enlightenment retained an 'insistent search for origins, for the recovery of the past'; his scholarship still amounted to 'new branches grafted on to an old and glorious trunk'.<sup>71</sup>

Venturi's declaration was important for signalling an intent to emerge from a civilizational mode of addressing the history of enlightenment. In his wake, a more analytical historiography of enlightenment began to emerge, and with it a new taxonomy of enlightenments. It was at this juncture that an avowedly 'moderate enlightenment' reared its head.

Henry F. May's 1976 *The Enlightenment in America* was the first work in the English language to codify a 'moderate enlightenment'. May saw a 'moderate enlightenment' as one of several strains whose consecutive influence he traced on the intellectual culture of the United States between the early eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The 'moderate enlightenment' was, in May's treatment, an English affair which 'preached balance, order and religious compromise, and was dominant in England from the time of Newton and Locke until about the middle of the eighteenth century'.<sup>72</sup> This movement, built upon a proclivity for compromise and consensus, was influential in the construction of an American political and intellectual space in the first half of the eighteenth century, and was instrumental in shaping the American constitution – the 'greatest monument of the Moderate Enlightenment in any country'.<sup>73</sup>

By that point, however, in May's judgment, the philosophy of the 'moderate enlightenment' had been infected by the 'sceptical enlightenment', a continental European formation, and then its politics was usurped by a transatlantic 'revolutionary enlightenment'. The institutions of American politics were relics of a now exhausted intellectual culture ill-suited for the 'expansive and rapidly changing society' which was emerging from the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>74</sup> In response the 'moderate enlightenment', with its solutions of compromise and balance, went on the defensive. 'When this happened' May asserted 'it was no longer moderate', but instead became folded into a species of conservatism. Political conservatism was, then, a distortion of the spirit of ordered compromise central to 'moderate enlightenment'. The latter passages of *The Enlightenment in America* trace the remnants of 'moderate enlightenment' in early nineteenth century America. They worked to salvage the legacy of Locke and Montesquieu but, May laments, 'the political institutions of the Moderate Enlightenment have survived better than the spirit of balance and compromise which they originally embodied'.<sup>75</sup>

The fortress of moderate enlightenment, in May's model, was assailed on one side by the sceptical-revolutionary formation internal to enlightenment and, on the other, by Christian revivalists, and their tendency towards enthusiasm and fanaticism. The moderate enlightenment had brokered the tension between reason and revelation – or, more simply, in May's language, between enlightenment and Christianity. As the moderate enlightenment foundered, that tension broke out, and has shaped American society ever since.<sup>76</sup>

May presented his taxonomy of enlightenments as emerging *ex nihilo*,<sup>77</sup> they – including his conception of 'moderate enlightenment' – have had little influence.<sup>78</sup> This was not the case for another American scholar, whose turn to enlightenment reinvented the field: Margaret Jacob. Jacob's 1981 *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* established her as the godmother of 'radical enlightenment', a conjunction she has recently claimed to be 'my creation'.<sup>79</sup> It is striking, however, how cautiously she uses that category in her 1981 monograph. In the introduction to *The Radical Enlightenment* Jacob probes 'that anachronistic term "radical" which when "applied to the Enlightenment raises queries'. The first of these queries – 'who were the moderates?' – is answered in straightforward terms: moderate enlighteners, whether *philosophes* like Voltaire or 'liberal churchmen' were defendants of an 'Enlightened monarch'.<sup>80</sup> By contrast, radical enlighteners were first and foremost republicans.

By binding radical enlightenment to republicanism and moderate enlightenment to the defence of monarchy, Jacob could depict both as ‘intellectual heirs of the mid-century English Revolution’.<sup>81</sup> Their extension across continental Europe flowed, then, from England. Their political differences were forged into what Jacob calls ‘social ideologies’ via a second seventeenth century revolution: the Scientific Revolution. Radical Enlightenment, in Jacob’s model, owed its coherence to the reinterpretation of Renaissance pantheistic materialism culminating in Spinoza. Moderate Enlightenment, in opposition to this, was wed to the mechanical vision of nature perfected by Newton in England, which found its continental mirror in Leibniz.<sup>82</sup>

Rooting both enlightenments in ‘social ideologies’ enabled Jacob to perceive a dialectical enlightenment which neither Gay nor May had seen. Their models were – for Gay implicitly, for May explicitly – based on an evolution, or a degradation, of an initially ‘moderate’ enlightenment into one which became ‘radical’, leading to revolution. Jacob, by contrast, proposed that the radical-materialist-pantheistic and moderate-Newtonian enlightenments developed side-by-side from the mid-seventeenth century; she even goes as far as to suggest that the latter, moderate, strain formed in reaction to the former, radical, one.<sup>83</sup> Her study progresses as a social history of ideas, to demonstrate the gradual appearance in the public sphere of a strand of radicalism which had been forged and incubated within underground, clandestine networks of radicals.

If the Enlightenment, as presented by Jacob in 1981, proceeded both logically and chronologically from radical to moderate, it’s striking that her own scholarship moved in the opposite direction. Six years before her *Radical Enlightenment* Jacob had already provided a monograph-length account of what she would later call ‘moderate enlightenment’, in her 1975 *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720*. This work provided the basis for the third chapter of her 1981 *Radical Enlightenment*, a chapter pre-empted by the remark that ‘radicals can only be such in juxtaposition to less extreme prescriptions for ordering and explaining the world’.<sup>84</sup> In short, Jacob arrived at enlightened radicalism through a study of moderate enlightenment.

Re-reading Jacob’s *The Newtonians and the English Revolution*, however, it is the absence, even exclusion, of enlightenment which is striking. That work is framed as a study in the history of science, proposing the – then somewhat provocative – thesis that modern science developed in the seventeenth century in dialogue with evolving religious ideas, and that this nexus underpinned new social and economic systems as they emerged in the early eighteenth century. The Newtonians, latitudinarians, and liberal protestants were squarely external to enlightenment. Jacob writes in her introduction: ‘lest we imagine them to be Enlightenment men – as so many historians perilously have done with Newton – we must keep in mind that their assumptions about the meaning of history, and therefore politics, were profoundly Christian’.<sup>85</sup>

If enlightenment is absent, moderation is centre stage. The ideals of ‘acquisitiveness and self-interest’ could take root in commercial society only under the aegis of ‘latitudinarian moderation’. Jacob writes:

Desire could never be satisfied; only moderation in the pursuit of interest could control desire and thereby ensure social stability. The basis for latitudinarian moderation, whether in politics or religion, lay in the belief that self-interest could be tamed and yet fulfilled, that interest had its reward. Making moderation work required a particular notion of the deity and his relationship to creation.<sup>86</sup>

It was among the opponents of these moderates – among free-thinkers and atheists – that Jacob saw ‘the origins of the Enlightenment’, adding ‘that subject will require another book’.<sup>87</sup> She hands over to ‘students of the enlightenment’ the task of ‘rethink[ing] the role of Newtonianism in eighteenth century thought, and also to take a new look at the freethinking tradition that begins and ends, roughly, with Toland and D’Holbach’.<sup>88</sup> It’s clear that in 1975 Jacob does not consider herself to be engaged in this enquiry.

Between the publication of her 1975 and 1981 works, then, Jacob became a ‘student of enlightenment’ – or rather, she expanded her idea of Enlightenment to accommodate *both* the evolution of the ‘moderate’ religious Newtonian synthesis *and* that ‘radical’ freethinking tradition. This

enlargement of enlightenment can be mapped in two articles: her 1977 'Newtonianism and the Origins of the Enlightenment: A Reassessment' and her 1979 'Newtonian Science and the Radical Enlightenment'.

In the first of these, Jacob recast the 'social ideology' of Newtonianism, and its emphasis upon 'social order, political harmony and liberal, but orthodox, Christianity', as 'one of the pillars upon which rested that intellectual stance most commonly described as the Enlightenment'.<sup>89</sup> She also explicitly categorised the Newtonian enlightenment as 'an assault, and as a vast holding operation, against the most characteristic and dangerous doctrines of the early enlightenment'.<sup>90</sup> In the second article Jacob restates this dichotomy of 'modes of enlightenment' – unmistakably the nexus of a radical-moderate framework – and roots its discovery in her methodological stance and its departure from that of Cassirer. Historians should, in Jacob's judgement, 'simply abandon Cassirer's methodology', his 'philosophical account' of enlightenment.<sup>91</sup> Jacob advocates instead for a descent into a social history of ideas, an account of the clandestine undercurrent of radical enlightenment.

Jacob's methodology, and her dialectical enlightenment, is informed, she states, by an eclectic group of theorists: Marx, Gramsci, Mannheim, Weber, Lukacs, Goldmann, Geertz, as well as the historical scholarship of Venturi and Caroline Robbins.<sup>92</sup> She has recently cited a specific influence: J. G. A. Pocock.<sup>93</sup> It is to Pocock's work that we can turn to further the search for a moderate enlightenment.

#### 4. Moderation in J. G. A. Pocock's enlightenment

1975, the year that saw Jacob's *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720* appear, also saw the publication of Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment*. That book concluded in the United States, the new Republic at once an heir to the 'Machiavellian' civic humanist lineage and an exhaustion of that tradition.<sup>94</sup> Several years before that work's publication, however, Pocock had already directed his interests elsewhere. Writing to Quentin Skinner in 1973, Pocock noted his emerging interest in an alternative path out of the Republican tradition, identified in the closing passages of *The Machiavellian Moment*, which would assess 'how British thought diverged from American and from Augustan neoclassicism, in the half-century following the American Revolution'.<sup>95</sup> 'But' he added to Skinner, 'I haven't tried to get that into the book'.<sup>96</sup>

The alternative to which Pocock was turning was enlightenment. Many years later Pocock acknowledged as such: in 2016 he noted that, after *The Machiavellian Moment*,

my subsequent work, down to the moment at which I am writing, has been concerned with the perceived consequences of this transformation and how it gave birth to what may be termed Enlightenment, in more than one of the many sense in which that word can be used.<sup>97</sup>

In *The Machiavellian Moment* itself there is little mention made of enlightenment. The pathway Pocock treads from *The Machiavellian Moment* to the study of enlightenment is mapped out in an essay published in 1980, delivered as a lecture at UCLA in 1975: 'Post-puritan England and the problem of the Enlightenment'.<sup>98</sup>

That essay takes as its point of departure an enquiry into 'the relations between England and the Enlightenment'.<sup>99</sup> So doing it poses an explicit revision of Pocock's own position in *The Machiavellian Moment*. There, in chapter fourteen, Pocock had presented the 'self-secularizing tendency' inherent to Socinian, post-Puritan thought in Restoration England as 'too modern to need an Enlightenment'. Enlightenment for pre-1975 Pocock, was a simpler affair, the business of *philosophes* residing in lands where 'absolute monarchy and Tridentine Catholicism were realities and not bogeys' concerned with 'fighting to liberate secular history from the authority of the sacred books.' The dichotomy between Whigs and Tories emerging in England in the early eighteenth century was something else entirely, both inheriting and transcending the 'Machiavellian Moment'. It made Enlightenment appear a rather small-minded, continental, eighteenth-century affair.<sup>100</sup>

Underpinning this face-off between English modernity and continental Europe lay Franco Venturi's enlightenment. Venturi's construction of enlightenment excluded England all together on the basis that it lacked *philosophes*.<sup>101</sup> Pocock's 1980 essay unravelled this stance. It did so not by finding English *philosophes*, but rather, as Jacob herself was to do, by expanding Enlightenment: 'If there was an Enlightenment in England', Pocock stated 'it is an enlightenment *sans philosophes*'.<sup>102</sup>

Pocock's revision of Venturi's Enlightenment was rooted in his reading of Hugh Trevor Roper. In 1967 Trevor Roper had published an essay titled 'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment'. Here Trevor-Roper posed that it was not the secularisation of the Calvinist tradition which had forged modernity in eighteenth century Europe but rather a compilation of non-conformist sects gathered under an 'Erasmian' banner.<sup>103</sup> Pocock extended, and in the process transformed, this interpretation by properly grounding it in theology. Pocock's basic narrative traced the emergent dominance from the Restoration of a clerical class of latitudinarians who 'could uphold both a rational religion, in which the apostolic and the prophetic were alike reduced in role, and the need for authority in church, state and cosmos.' This movement campaigned tirelessly against fanaticism and enthusiasm. While its exponents 'could find it to their purpose to act as patrons of the New Philosophy', they opposed the anti-clerical causes of Hobbes, Harrington and Spinoza, viewing their 'political theology' and 'radical eschatology' as invitation to atheism.<sup>104</sup> If, Pocock suggests, we 'define the Enlightenment as the replacement of prophecy by rationality', then in England this supported rather than subverted clerical authority. It was, in essence, a 'clerical enlightenment' which gave legitimacy to the 'combination of moderation with authoritarianism' which 'puts us on the highroad towards the Anglicanism of the Whig ascendancy'.<sup>105</sup>

This 'combination of moderation with authoritarianism' could be reclassified as 'an Enlightenment of the Establishment', now placed in conflict with 'an Enlightenment of the *philosophe* underground'.<sup>106</sup> From the political-theological fallout from the English Revolution was formed the dialectical enlightenment taken up by Jacob.<sup>107</sup>

From Pocock's perspective, the binary structure of an enlightenment 'promoted as much conservatively, by the clergy of a legally established Church, as radically, by deists no longer Christian but representing the secularization of elements in revolutionary Puritanism' allowed him counter Venturi's exclusion of England from Enlightenment.<sup>108</sup> It also allowed him to begin expanding beyond England: doyens of the Scottish Enlightenment could now be viewed as 'North Britons, children of the Union of 1707'.<sup>109</sup> This British intellectual-historical formation might be probed, Pocock suggested, 'with relative indifference as to whether we use the word *Enlightenment* or not'.<sup>110</sup> Pocock himself, however, did not remain indifferent to enlightenment. Instead, he settled on his protagonist through which to proceed with enlightenment's excavation: Edward Gibbon.

Gibbon featured only fleetingly in *The Machiavellian Moment*, as a participant in that moment's waning.<sup>111</sup> It was at a 1976 conference in Rome that Pocock saw how Gibbon's life and work could harbour the scholarly project he foresaw in 1973. He sketched out in two essays in 1976 and 1977 how Gibbon could act as bridge between the civic humanist tradition of *The Machiavellian Moment* and Enlightenment.<sup>112</sup> The 'world view' of the 'late enlightenment' which Gibbon represented was 'heavily committed to the scepticism and pessimism latent in the civic-humanist tradition'.<sup>113</sup> Gibbon had adjoined this tradition to a newly conceived 'historical sociology', inherited from mid-eighteenth-century Scotland. Proceeding through this conjunction, the politics of this enlightenment was concerned with the consequences of the jettisoning of republican civic-humanist virtues within the new political sociology of commercial monarchic empires.<sup>114</sup>

The republican preservation of virtue was the principal bulwark against the vices of superstition, fanaticism, enthusiasm, and the dissolution of civil society. After the waning of republican virtue, the enlightenment took up the case against enthusiasm anew, but did so on different terms. Its protagonists everywhere dreaded 'the union of Mosaic revelation with Platonic metaphysics' because that union tended to foster religious fanaticism and intellectual extremism.<sup>115</sup> But whereas this dread led Venturi's *philosophe* enlightenment to an aversion to Christianity *tout court*, another path lay open: that of a 'reasonable Christianity', 'the rule of an undogmatic clergy over

congregations who no longer know or much care what they are meant to believe'.<sup>116</sup> This was the path advocated by Gibbon, and by the mainstream, public face of Enlightenment in Britain.

In these pieces from the mid-1970s Pocock writes of 'the Enlightenment', confidently and consistently with the definite article, even as he also suggests its bifurcation. From the early 1980s he began experimenting with how to categorise his newly founded Anglo-Scottish appendage to this broader historiographical concept. It constituted, he wrote in a lecture published in 1985, but delivered in 1981, a 'Magisterial Enlightenment ... a surprisingly clerical affair, owing quite as much to prelates as to *philosophes*: to English latitudinarians and Scottish Moderates in their unending warfare against antinomianism and enthusiasm'.<sup>117</sup> In Restoration England this 'Magisterial Enlightenment' faced off against both a Tory bloc and a 'Radical Enlightenment', now distilled by Jacob.<sup>118</sup> This 'Magisterial Enlightenment' was animated by a latitudinarian religious impulse which coalesced into an ideal of 'politeness ... capable of being employed against Puritan, Tory, and republican alike and of making them look curiously similar'.<sup>119</sup>

In this essay Pocock comes close to identifying his formation as a 'Whig Enlightenment': enlightenment in England overlapped, he recognised, with the 'ruling order' of a 'Whig regime'. And yet the very point of this long lecture, delivered in honour of Caroline Robbins, was, in Pocock's words, to come to terms with 'the fragmentation of our concept of Whiggism'. As he sought out a political demarcator for his variant of enlightenment Pocock might at this point have opted for a *liberal* enlightenment – and one recent commentator has indeed asserted Pocock's enlightenment to be of a liberal ilk.<sup>120</sup> Pocock had reservations about what that conjunction would imply.<sup>121</sup> Instead, as the 1980s progresses Pocock's 'clerical', 'whiggish', 'Magisterial' – almost liberal – enlightenment comes to be cast as 'Conservative Enlightenment'.

'Conservative Enlightenment' appears first in the title of a 1985 essay Pocock published in a *festschrift* for Franco Venturi.<sup>122</sup> Here Pocock summarised once again his model for drawing together post-puritan clerical culture and commercial society, framing enlightenment in England as the "slow but steady transformation of Anglicanism into a civil religion" which sanctioned the "subordination of the political, as well as the sacred, to the social" proceeding through the "media of politeness ... "commerce", "conversation" and "intercourse"". <sup>123</sup> He acknowledges his association with "the research of Margaret C Jacob", and invokes her dichotomy between a:

Magisterial Enlightenment, rational and socially conservative in that it saw itself as operating through reason and the established institutions of society, and a Radical Enlightenment, illuminist in that it saw spirit and matter as one and reason as the *anima mundi*, socially subversive (within limits) in its unwillingness to subject the world's soul to the world's authorities.<sup>124</sup>

But Pocock also settles upon a flaw in Jacob's dialectic: its over-reliance upon the English revolution as the formative moment in the birth of European enlightenment, and implicitly, its under-commitment to the theological dynamics at play. 'There exists, I believe, a way of enlarging Margaret Jacob's hypothesis', by better rooting the 'Magisterial Enlightenment' in its theology, its move to 'emphasise the humanity of the Son and to enclose the operations of the Spirit within the reasonable disciplines of society'.<sup>125</sup> This recognition allowed what could be termed the 'confessionalisation' of Jacob's Newtonian-latitudinarian composite, and its integration into what Pocock could now see as a 'Protestant Enlightenment which took shape among Dutch, Swiss and émigré Huguenot clergy', a European, rather than narrowly British, construct which 'might also be called an Arminian Enlightenment', even if its key figure, for Pocock at least, remains Gibbon.

Alongside Gibbon was Edmund Burke.<sup>126</sup> But Burke, for Pocock, held a bifrontal relationship with enlightenment, his thought at once 'reversing the main current of Enlightenment thinking' while also 'insisting on the foundations of the Whig order as it had been since its inception'. Pocock worked extensively on Burke through the 1980s, editing a new edition of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1987. Pocock's turn towards 'conservatism', following his turn towards enlightenment, came with clear parameters. As he enlarged enlightenment in the late 1970s Pocock dedicated a 1977 lecture, delivered at Arizona State University, to distinguishing between British and



American strains of conservatism. Making sense of the ‘varieties of conservatism’ was not, Pocock stated, as simplistic as ‘contrasting the aristocratic traditionalism of Edmund Burke with the dynamic messianism of Walt Whitman,’<sup>127</sup> Conservatism, if it is to have meaning, in Pocock’s view, cannot just refer to ‘anyone who wants to conserve anything’, and, moreover, in a barb at its American usage, ‘there is nothing particular conservative about industrial individualism itself’.<sup>128</sup> British conservatism was equated with ‘philosophical conservatism’, and extended ‘from Edmund Burke to Michael Oakeshott’.

Part of what Pocock, a Cambridge-educated New Zealander in Baltimore, was doing in the 1980s when he dubbed his enlightenment conservative was disaggregating an American conservatism from an alternative British variety. But Pocock was also making a case for this British heritage in the context of what he saw as its imminent incorporation into a European project.<sup>129</sup> Britain’s accession to the European Community from the mid-1970s meant, in Pocock’s eyes, that the ‘concept of “Europe” ... is in danger of fetishization’, and the qualitative distinction between the British and European experience of modernity – a difference which Pocock, living ‘under the historic necessity of being British but not European’, could see with special clarity<sup>130</sup> – was prone to being overlooked. Pocock, historiographer before historian, was less interested in situating Britain’s past alongside Europe’s than in understanding – as he later termed it – why ‘English history was to explain itself by itself, not by constructing a history of Europe that would include itself’.<sup>131</sup> The key to making sense of this specificity appeared to Pocock in the 1980s to lie in making sense of ‘conservative enlightenment’.

This is further clarified in a 1989 lecture, ‘Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: The American and French Cases in British Perspective’. Pocock condenses his narrative of the origins of enlightenment as ‘a series of programmes for strengthening civil sovereignty and putting an end to the wars of religion’.<sup>132</sup> Enlightenment was not about ‘emancipation from tradition or from previous modes of social power’, but rather about ‘the protection of sovereign authority and personal security against religious fanaticism and civil war’.<sup>133</sup> Within this broad definition he pulls out his conservative strand, even going so far as to refer to this as ‘genuine enlightenment’:

Enlightenment in protestant cultures had a conservative face, because it was directed against sect as well as Pope in the movement away from the wars of religion. It had a variety of *viae mediae* to follow, and as a result was concerned with modernity as well as stability ... Enlightenment in this sense encouraged certain self-limitations of the human mind, in respect of both ancient virtue and ancient speculation; and while there was a dynamic and progressive element to this, because there were Baconian and Lockean beliefs that a mind which limited itself to method was capable of conquering and controlling new areas of nature, there was at the same time a sober and sceptical belief that a mind which so limited itself would not make undue claims against authority.<sup>134</sup>

This enlightenment sparred with a radical, or as Pocock at one point refers to it, a ‘dissenting enlightenment’, but the conservative strain inevitably became dominant in protestant countries because it found itself on the side of both church and state authorities. This enlightenment found its ‘culminating proposal’ in the Burkean view that ‘history is too complex for anyone to manage’. This, Pocock added, ‘remains the hope of Enlightenment’. ‘The problem of virtue – of what becomes of the human personality in history – we leave’ he concluded ‘to be pursued along a *via media*. That remains the Western vision of things, and it seems to work’.<sup>135</sup>

The conservative formulation of the 1980s marks the high point of Pocock’s flirtation with a normative enlightenment. Through the 1990s and 2000s the rhetoric of evasiveness – ‘a deliberate lack of precision’ – sets in.<sup>136</sup> The normative protestant-clerical-conservative enlightenment hatched in the preceding two decades persists but is increasingly concealed beneath rubric of a ‘family of enlightenments’ and an aversion to Enlightenment ‘with the definite article’.<sup>137</sup> ‘It is unsafe’, Pocock wrote in 1989, ‘to write and think of “the” Enlightenment as a single process following a single course, and better to suppose a number of Enlightenments arising in different places’.<sup>138</sup> Much of Pocock’s later writings on enlightenment extend this assertion. ‘To this writer’, Pocock declared



in 2008, 'the specificity of "Enlightenment" is better displayed in its plurality than in its unity; there is more, and richer, Enlightenment if there are many and diverse Enlightenments than if it is reduced to a single process'.<sup>139</sup>

This shift indelibly marks Pocock's *Barbarism and Religion*, published in six volumes between 1999 and 2015. That work has been rightly praised for its richness and ambition, a 'scholarly tour-de-force'.<sup>140</sup> It has also been criticised – often by the same reviewers – for its opacity, its indulgence, and its sheer length.<sup>141</sup> The intellectual contexts to Gibbons' *Decline and Fall* depicted by Pocock are unmistakably those formed through Pocock's enlargement of enlightenment between 1975 and 1989. But the account of enlightenment in the first volume of *Barbarism and Religion* feels comparably limited, 'abstractly limned', a triangulation around Gibbon to demonstrate enlightenment's plurality.<sup>142</sup> In the second volume *Barbarism and Religion* becomes a tracing of the discursive 'enlightened narrative' produced by eighteenth century historians. The dismantling of 'The Enlightenment', through various means, is a principle objective of *Barbarism and Religion*.<sup>143</sup> It is not Pocock's agenda to display more than an implied inclination towards one or several of the species of enlightenment in which Gibbon might be seen to partake. He no longer aims at a distillation of 'the Western vision of things', as he had a decade earlier.

It is striking that, while in an Afterword to a 2016 edition of *The Machiavellian Moment* Pocock could recognise how from 1975 his entire intellectual agenda shifted to the problem of enlightenment, in a retrospective essay of the following year, surveying with greater purpose the narrative arc of his wider oeuvre, the term 'enlightenment' is not mentioned once.<sup>144</sup> Did Pocock outgrow his enlightenment, as he outgrew the 'Machiavellian Moment'?

Perhaps. More properly, Pocock's enlightenment shed its normativity.<sup>145</sup> As it did so, his tolerance for a bifurcated enlightenment diminished. Pocock could still, in 2003, 'applaud Israel's account of a 'Radical Enlightenment' spreading across Europe, and his demonstration that there was a 'Moderate Enlightenment' running counter to it'.<sup>146</sup> He could still see the merits of the dialectical model which he himself had helped produce in the 1970s. By 2016, however, Pocock had joined the ranks of Israel's critics.<sup>147</sup> 'Radical Enlightenment', Pocock then stated, comes in variants of 'radical deism', 'radical skepticism' and 'radical atheism', all which need differentiation. The decision by enlightenment thinkers to 'hold back and descend no further' down the 'slippery slopes beginning with the departure from Nicene orthodoxy ... cannot be usefully grouped under the single heading of Moderate Enlightenment'. Most non-radical Enlightenments 'appear moderate indeed, whether or not they mean to opposed themselves to it [a Radical Enlightenment]'. And yet this, Pocock claims, is irrelevant to his own schema 'since neither Gibbon nor the present writer says anything direct or indirect about it [moderate enlightenment]'.<sup>148</sup>

Pocock never overtly endorses a 'moderate enlightenment'. That he has nothing 'direct or indirect' to say about it, I am less sure. Pocock recognises, occasionally applauds, and, as we have seen, aided the gestation of, a 'moderate enlightenment'. Moreover, he relates his Anglo-Protestant enlightenment to moderatism, moderates, to the *via media*, to an aversion to enthusiasm, and to an absence of that 'intimate dialectic between opposites' which defined enlightenment in the rest of Europe.<sup>149</sup> If one were to lay a broad 'moderate enlightenment' atop Pocock's schema it can unite the strains which he pursues, or has been seen to pursue: Arminian Enlightenment, Protestant Enlightenment, Anglican Enlightenment, Magisterial Enlightenment, Liberal Enlightenment, Whig Enlightenment, Conservative Enlightenment. The enlightenment Pocock drew to the surface is one committed to the problem of civility in a post-virtuous, commercial society. It is an enlightenment concerned with the legacy of pre-modern Republican virtue within modern vice-ridden monarchies and empires. It takes critical aim at extremism in thought and action, the resource of enthusiasts, radicals, fanatics, revolutionaries and ideologues. It yearns for stability over conflict. At root it is epistemologically modest, instinctively sceptical, averse to dogmatism. It is an enlightenment which 'defended history against philosophy' without comforting itself with tradition.<sup>150</sup> It is, assuredly, an enlightenment underpinned by moderation.

## 5. Conclusion

In shedding enlightenment's normativity Pocock was, uncharacteristically, swimming with the tide. At the waning of the twentieth century the movement which had, since the 1960s, led to a recalibration of enlightenment studies as at once a historical and political-philosophical endeavour had exhausted itself.<sup>151</sup> The more nuanced inter-relation between thought and action advocated by the social history of ideas had, it seemed, with regards enlightenment, come at the cost of an inclination to arrive at substantive political-philosophical conclusions.

It was, of course, in reaction against this landscape that Israel turned to 'Radical Enlightenment', recovering and repurposing the radical-moderate dialectic explicated by Jacob, rooted in Pocock, first pitched by Strauss. Israel's approach has been hugely influential, but more beyond than within the community of serious historians of the enlightenment, by whom he has been roundly condemned. His 'Radical Enlightenment' has been successful on its own terms: the ever-burgeoning market among university lecturers for recovering the roots of political-philosophical radicalism has ensured that his construct has been incorporated widely, if not always faithfully. Israel was not alone in reanimating enlightenment studies: the first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed a renewed focus among historians on enlightenment and its pertinence for the present, such that one commentator could reflect on the 'return of the enlightenment' and view the historical enlightenment in 'robust health'.<sup>152</sup> That judgement, made in 2010, now seems premature. If, in the decade after 2000, it 'seemed as if Enlightenment historians had appointed themselves the guardians of "modernity"', the ten years which were to follow have seen a diminishing appetite among serious historians for overtly political-philosophical interpretations of the enlightenment.<sup>153</sup> Israel's scholarly oeuvre appears increasingly as a crude departure from the discipline within which he ostensibly resides. This is one context, at least, in which a normative – that is, political-philosophically constituted – *moderate* enlightenment has lacked recent theorists.

Where the moderate credentials of enlightenment *have* been invoked is in scholarship seeking rapprochement between religion and enlightenment, within a broader landscape of reconciling religion and modernity. The most creative of this work – emerging in the first years of the new millennium – has reconceptualised enlightenment as emerging from, and in a sense remaining within, a Christian horizon. It implies not only a Christianisation of enlightenment but a de-secularisation of modernity.<sup>154</sup>

These works have expanded knowledge of the intellectual and religious culture of early modern Europe.<sup>155</sup> They have widened enlightenment's net. So doing, however, they threaten to dilute rather than enrich enlightenment's meaning. They risk reproducing, and thus reducing, a radical/moderate binary: Israel's radical enlightenment is turned into a straw man, against which moderate enlightenment is conflated with religious enlightenment.<sup>156</sup> This conflation obscures more than it reveals. Once the secular nature of enlightenment is no longer assumed, it is unclear what 'religious enlightenment' is supposed to mean, or what use it serves for understanding the meaning of 'moderate enlightenment', or for that matter, 'enlightenment' in its broadest sense.

How to proceed? I would like to suggest that we instead search for moderate enlightenment – and 'moderate enlightenment's historiography' – within a substantive political-philosophical history of moderation. That is, that we respond to Israel on his own terms. Just as Israel has composed a *positive* history of radical enlightenment which both inhabits and defines a political philosophy of radicalism, so too we might write a *positive* history of moderate enlightenment, more confident in stating both its intellectual inheritance and its pertinence in the present. Such an approach may be condemned on the same terms as the more simplistic criticism targeted as Israel. On the other hand, it may advance historians' collective, polyphonic excavation of 'enlightenment' while, in a separate key, undergirding a political-philosophical tradition of moderation.

To make a precise contribution here to such an endeavour, I will place in direct dialogue the two figures whose 'moderate enlightenments' have featured most prominently in this essay: Leo Strauss and J.G.A. Pocock.

As historians of ideas Strauss and Pocock inhabit opposing methodological camps. Moreover, their methodological differences reflect ideological divergence.<sup>157</sup> Both saw the problem of modernity as to do with the treatment of the past in the present. Both were, ultimately, concerned with the legacy of historicism. And both turned to early modern thought to understand that problem. But their solutions were incompatible. Pocock's could never have sanctioned the nostalgia informing the Straussian 'return' to Greek philosophy. For his part, Strauss could never have overcome his disdain for the liberal-conservative *via media* for which Pocock has evasively advocated.<sup>158</sup>

If both Strauss and Pocock could be classified as political-philosophical 'moderates' they were moderates of different strains, just as the 'moderate enlightenments' for which they can be seen as advocating were fundamentally different.<sup>159</sup> Grounds for a rapprochement between their strains of intellectual moderation, and their respective 'moderate enlightenments', may be found in Strauss's wartime writings.

In 1941, four years after arriving in the United States, Strauss delivered a lecture in New York on German Nihilism. The nihilist strand in German thought, to which Strauss attributed National Socialism, was, he suggested – and here he followed Nietzsche closely – incubated through an appeal to a 'pre-modern ideal'. This appeal was conceived of in direct opposition to the 'modern ideal', fostered in the philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the enlightenment. Nineteenth-century German philosophers, Strauss recounted, initially sought a synthesis between the modern and the pre-modern, but abandoned this conjunction when it led them to, or was enveloped by, positivism. At this point the German tradition of philosophising turned comprehensively to the ideals of pre-modernity, a turn which found its intellectual apogee in Heidegger and its political manifestation in Hitler.<sup>160</sup>

Strauss too, of course, was a product of German thought, a participant in this turn to a 'pre-modern ideal'. But, he asserted, he could insulate his philosophical enquiry from adverse political consequences. He did so through a reappraisal of the modern moderate enlightenment.

The 'modern ideal', the Enlightenment, is, for Strauss, 'Western', as distinct from German. Fundamentally it was *English*, rooted in 'the English mechanist interpretation of nature [Newton]'.<sup>161</sup> Here Strauss cites Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*:

What one calls the modern ideas of the ideas of the 18th century, or even the French ideas, that ideal, in a word, against which the German spirit stood with profound disgust – it is of *English* origin, there can be doubt about that. The French have merely been the imitators and actors of those ideas.<sup>162</sup>

It was in England in the eighteenth century that the mechanistic Newtonian philosophy transmogrified into an overhauled ethics tantamount to a 'debasement of morality' and an ascent of 'enlightened self-interest'.<sup>163</sup>

Strauss endorses Nietzsche's interpretation, and his critique of these modern ideals. He then, however, adds straight away, and as a conclusion to the lecture which is worth citing at length:

He (Nietzsche) forgets however to add that the English almost always had the very un-German prudence and *moderation* not to throw out the baby with the bath, i.e. the prudence to conceive of the modern ideals as a reasonable adaption of the old and eternal ideal of decency, of rule of law, and of that liberty which is not license, to changed circumstances. This ... muddling through, this crossing the bridge when one comes to it, may have done some harm to the radicalism of English thought; but it proved to be a blessing to English life; the English never indulged in those radical breaks with traditions which played such a role on the continent. Whatever may be wrong with the peculiarly modern ideal: the very Englishmen who originated it, were at the same time versed in the classical tradition, and the English always kept in store a substantial amount of the necessary counter-poison. While the English originated the modern ideal – the pre-modern ideal, the classical ideal of humanity, was nowhere better preserved than in Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>164</sup>

Strauss here is proposing a cohabitation, if not a reconciliation, between the modern and the pre-modern. The 'prudence and moderation' of the English system – its anti-radicalism, pragmatism and capacity for 'muddling through' – preserved inherited traditions in social life. But it also safeguarded the preservation of *the* tradition – 'the pre-modern ideal, the classical ideal of humanity',

the union of wisdom and moderation, modernity's 'counter-poison' – in the ivory tower of the English academy.

In other words: the *modern* political philosophy of moderation – the clerical-whig, liberal-conservative moderation animated by Pocock, born archetypally in Restoration England, concentrated at Oxford and Cambridge, and, of course, there experienced by Strauss during his exile in England in 1935–37 – uniquely allowed the intellectual cultivation and preservation of the *pre-modern* political philosophy of moderation – the Spartan-Platonic classical-aristocratic moderation, married to Socratic wisdom, which, for Strauss, was the only honourable end of the good life and liberal education – without lurching towards fascism, as had happened in Germany. This equation informed the pervasive objective of Strauss's mature political thought: 'the necessary endeavour to found an aristocracy within democratic mass society'.<sup>165</sup>

On these terms, just as Strauss might be recast not as a closet fascist or anti-democrat but as a critical friend of liberal democracy, so too he might be viewed as a critical friend of Pocock's moderate species of enlightenment.<sup>166</sup> This tacitly raises the prospect of a wider – or, better, a looser – concept of moderation, variously forged and preserved by enlightenment, which could encompass both men's thought. Strauss's death in 1973 – the very year that Pocock began his turn to enlightenment – makes the substantiation of such a hypothesis, and such a concept, the task of political-theoretical speculation, and of intellectual history.

## Notes

1. The conflation of 'moderate enlightenment' with a 'moderate mainstream' appears in the preface and introduction of Israel's 2001 *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), v–vii, 9–11, and recurs throughout. Greater emphasis upon a philosophically coherent moderate enlightenments appears in the 2006 *Enlightenment Contested* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), but still there it slips into a 'moderate mainstream'.
2. Of the essays collected in *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment*, ed. Steffen Ducheyne (London: Routledge, 2017), and *Les lumières radicales et le politique. Études critiques sur les travaux de Jonathan Israel*, ed. Marta Garcia-Alonso (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017), not all accept, and some explicitly dispute, Israel's version of radical enlightenment.
3. It makes, therefore, a modest contribution to a growing historiographical literature led by, to name a few, James Schmidt (as editor, *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); essays collected on <https://persistentenlightenment.com>) John Robertson (*The Case for The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); 'Enlightenment and Modernity, Historians and Philosophers', *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 8 (2020): 278–321) Antoine Lilti (*L'Héritage des Lumières: Ambivalences de la modernité* (Paris: EHESS, Gallimard-Seuil, 2019)) Annelien De Dijn ('The Politics of Enlightenment: From Peter Gay to Jonathan Israel', *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 758–805) Vincenzo Ferrone (*The Enlightenment: History of an Idea* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015)) as well as Israel, see fn. 5.
4. 'Poststructuralist and Postcolonialist Criticism of the 'Moderate Enlightenment' is Partly Justified (But not its criticism of the entire enlightenment', in *What is Left of the Enlightenment?*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hans Reill (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 17–43; 'Radical Enlightenment' – Peripheral, substantial, or the main face of the trans-atlantic enlightenments (1650–1850)', *Diametros* 40 (2014): 73–98; 'Radical Enlightenment: A Game-changing Concept', in *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment*, 2017, 15–47; Israel, 'Les "lumières radicales" comme théorie générale de la modernité démocratique séculière, et ses critiques', in *Les lumières radicales et le politique. Études critiques sur les travaux de Jonathan Israel*, 387–436.
5. Israel was alerted to Strauss's account of the enlightenment by the Danish scholar Fredrik Stjernfelt's 2013 lecture 'The emergence of the 'radical enlightenment' in humanist scholarship', published as 'Radical Enlightenment'. Aspects of the history of a term', in *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment* (2017). Israel then deepened Stjernfelt's insight: Israel, 'Leo Strauss and the Radical Enlightenment' in *Reading between the Lines: Leo Strauss and the History of Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Winfried Schröder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), p. 9–29 and Israel, 'Les "lumières radicales" comme théorie générale de la modernité démocratique séculière, et ses critiques'.
6. Israel, 'Leo Strauss and the Radical Enlightenment', 11.
7. Strauss to Krüger, Letter 4, 3 March 1930, in *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence. Returning to Plato through Kant*, ed. Susan Meld Shell (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 18.

8. Leo Strauss, *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings, 1921–1932*, ed. Michael Zank (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 125–6.
9. Samuel Moyn, 'From Experience to Law: Leo Strauss and the Weimar Crisis of the Philosophy of Religion', *History of European Ideas* 33 (2007): 174–194.
10. Johnson Kent Wright, "'A Bright Clear Mirror": Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*', in *What's Left of Enlightenment?: A Postmodern Question*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hans Reill (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 71–101.
11. Peter Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2010).
12. As suggested in Vincenzo Ferrone, *The Enlightenment. History of an Idea* (2015), 43–47. On pre-1920s use of the term 'Enlightenment'/'Aufklärung' see James Schmidt, 'Tracking 'the Enlightenment' across the Nineteenth Century', *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference on the History of Concepts, Bilbao* (2013), 33–41.
13. Peter Gordon, 'Neo-Kantianism and the Politics of Enlightenment', *The Philosophical Forum* 39, no. 2 (2008): 223–238. Robert B. Wokler, 'Ernst Cassirer's Enlightenment: An Exchange with Bruce Mazlish', in Robert Wokler, *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment, and Their Legacies*, ed. Bryan Garsten (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 233–243. Johnson Kent Wright, "'A Bright Clear Mirror": Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*', in *What's Left of Enlightenment?: A Postmodern Question*, 71–101. See also James Schmidt, 'Cassirer on Enlightenment', <https://persistentenlightenment.com/2015/01/08/cassirerencyclopedia2/>.
14. Samuel Moyn, 'From Experience to Law: Leo Strauss and the Weimar Crisis of the Philosophy of Religion'.
15. Leo Strauss, 'Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism', *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 29.
16. Strauss, 'Cohen's Analysis of Spinoza's bible Science', in *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings, 1921–1932*, 140–171, 159.
17. Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 50–51. These two critiques are presented in condensed form in Strauss's 1926 essay 'On the bible science of Spinoza and his precursors', in *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings, 1921–1932*, 173–196, 186.
18. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 210.
19. In this respect I disagree with David Janssens, who frames Spinoza's dissertation and early Jewish writings as dealing directly with 'the problem of the enlightenment'. Janssens, 'The Problem of the Enlightenment: Strauss, Jacobi and the Pantheism Controversy', *The Review of Metaphysics* 56, no. 3 (2003): 605–631, repeated in his *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 77–90. Another of Strauss's recent biographers, Yves Tanguay, sees Strauss's 'break with the Enlightenment' as occurring only from 1928, and so after the completion of the Spinoza manuscript: Daniel Tanguay, *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 108.
20. Strauss to Krüger, 28 Nov 1929, letter 2, *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence*, 14.
21. Strauss to Krüger, 9 Jan 1930, letter 3, *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence*, 15.
22. Gerhard Krüger, 'Review of Leo Strauss's *Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaften*', *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 5/6 (1988): 173–175, 173. The review originally appeared in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, vol. 51 (December 20 1931), 2407–2412.
23. Strauss to Krüger, 9 Jan 1930, letter 3, *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence*, 16.
24. Leo Strauss, *Hobbes' Critique of Religion and Related Writings*, ed. Gabriel Bartlett and Svetoazar Minkov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 151–158.
25. *Ibid.*, 154–6. Italics in the original.
26. *Ibid.*, 68–9, 115. Italics in the original.
27. *Ibid.*, 115.
28. Strauss, 'Introduction to Phaedon' [1932], in Leo Strauss, *Leo Strauss on Moses Mendelssohn*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 29–49, 35–6.
29. Strauss, 'Introduction to Mendelssohn's Morning Hours and to To the Friends of Lessing' [1937/1974], in *Leo Strauss on Moses Mendelssohn*, 49–145, 128.
30. *Ibid.*, 97.
31. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 147–191.
32. Strauss to Krüger, 3 March 1930, letter 4, *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence*, 18–19, 18.
33. *Ibid.*, 18.
34. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessors* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 39.
35. *Ibid.*, 22.
36. *Ibid.*, 37; 27–8.
37. Strauss, 'Religious Situation of the Present' [1930], in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe and Richard Ruderman (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 225–235, 234.
38. Strauss to Krüger, letter 3, 7 January 1930; Strauss to Krüger, letter 25a (unsent draft), 12 December 1932, *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence*, 47.

39. Strauss, 'The Religious Situation of the Present', 235.
40. Strauss, 'The Intellectual Situation of the Present', in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, 237–253, 249.
41. Strauss to Krüger, letter 4, 3 March 1930, *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence*, 18–19.
42. Strauss, *Philosophy and Law*, 85.
43. *Ibid.*, 102.
44. This is, explicitly, the conclusion of the final essay in *Philosophy and Law* – that Maimonides is essentially a Platonist, 127–133.
45. The title of the first full chapter in *Philosophy and Law* reads as 'The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns in the Philosophy of Judaism: Notes on Julius Guttman, *The Philosophy of Judaism*', 41–79.
46. Strauss to Krüger, Letter 25a (unsent draft), 12 Dec 1932, *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence*, 47.
47. Strauss to Krüger, Letter 31 (unsent draft), 22 July 1933, *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence*, 63.
48. Strauss to Klein, 6 May 1935, Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Heinrich Meier (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2001), 538, cited in Heinrich Meier, 'How Strauss became Strauss' in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, 13–32, 20.
49. Strauss, *On Tyranny* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013) [1948], 56.
50. Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953) [1950], 253.
51. Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and its Genesis* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1952), xx.
52. Strauss, 'What is Political Philosophy' in *What is Political Philosophy? and other studies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973) [1957], 27.
53. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 173.
54. Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy & American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 66–67.
55. Strauss, 'What is Political Philosophy' in *What is Political Philosophy*, 32.
56. Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Randall McNally & co., 1964), 64.
57. *Ibid.*, 149.
58. *Ibid.*, 147.
59. Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 2. On parallel currents: Nicolas Guilhot, *After the Enlightenment: Political Realism and International Relations in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Michael C Williams, 'In the Beginning: The IR Enlightenment and the Ends of IR Theory', *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 647–665.
60. Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
61. Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment*, 4.
62. Annelien De Dijn, 'The Politics of Enlightenment: From Peter Gay to Jonathan Israel', *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 785–805, 789, fn. 8.
63. Peter Gay, 'The Seven Prisoners in the Bastille: History in the Age of Counter-Cliché', *The Yale Review* (1960–61), no. 3.
64. Cobban delivered a lecture series in Harvard in 1957–58 which he would turn into *In Search of Humanity: The Role of the Enlightenment in Modern History* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1960) which was published by George Braziller in New York in 1960. See Malcolm Crook, Pamela Pilbeam, T. J. A. Le Goff, John Harvey, 'Forum: The Legacy of Alfred Cobban', *French History* 34, no. 4 (2020): 512–560.
65. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 130–131. Gay had, in 1954, translated and written a foreword for the English edition of Cassirer's *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1954). He then wrote the preface to the 2009 edition of Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
66. Peter Gay, 'Man in the Middle: Review of Alfred Cobban; A History of Modern France', *New York Review of Books* (March 17, 1966).
67. Gay, *The Party of Humanity: Studies in the French Enlightenment* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964), 284.
68. Gay, *The Party of Humanity: Studies in the French Enlightenment*, 119. De Dijn has recently chastised Gay for his depiction of enlightenment thinkers as proto-liberals who supported the status quo: 'The Politics of Enlightenment', 790–791.
69. See above fn. 5.
70. Venturi, *Utopia and Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 3.
71. *Ibid.*, 5.
72. Henry F. May, *Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), xvi.
73. *Ibid.*, 100.
74. *Ibid.*, 101.



75. *Ibid.*, 360.
76. On May's Enlightenment see John M. Dixon, 'Henry F May and the Revival of the American Enlightenment: Problems and Possibilities for Intellectual and Social History', *William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2014): 255–280.
77. May states in his introduction: 'since I could find no set of distinctions ready to hand, I have been forced to develop my own', *Enlightenment in America*, xvi.
78. His taxonomical approach received criticism from an American academy in thrall to a new social history of ideas: for instance, Joyce Appleby, 'Review: Henry F. May. The Enlightenment in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976', *American Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (June 1977): 722–23.
79. Margaret C. Jacob, *The Secular Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.
80. Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London; Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1981), 20.
81. *Ibid.*, 20.
82. In recent articles Jacob has sought to distinguish her Radical Enlightenment from that of Israel's, on the grounds that his represents a 'simplification of the way intellectual influence and human agency work – an idealist rendering that also effaces the political'. In the same breath, she also recognised that 'aspects of my own youthful thinking are in need of a reformulation', Jacob, 'How Radical was the Enlightenment? What Do We mean by Radical?', *Diametros*, no. 40 (2014): 99–114, 104; Jacob's formulation in 1981 was close to Israel's, declaring that Spinozist 'pantheistic materialism ... is the philosophical link that runs through European radicalism from the English Revolution to the French Revolution', *The Radical Enlightenment*, 49. Jacob's bitterness towards Israel is more apparent in Jacob, 'The Radical Enlightenment and Freemasonry: Where are We Now?', *Philosophica* 88 (2013): 13–29.
83. 'The Newtonian enlightenment did not spawn a radical foil; if anything, the relationship could be said to have been reversed', Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment*, 96.
84. *Ibid.*, 86.
85. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019) [1975], 19–20. In 1975 Jacob is still operating on the terms latent in her 1969 article, 'John Toland and the Newtonian Ideology'. There Jacob staged a face-off between John Toland and the Newtonian Ideology, on the premise that the former's thought constituted 'one of the links in what was an international circulation of clandestine works during the early stages of the European Enlightenment'. The Newtonian ideology was, by contrast, well beyond the limits of enlightenment. Jacob, 'John Toland and the Newtonian Ideology', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32, no. 1 (1969): 307–331, 327.
86. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution*, 57.
87. *Ibid.*, 205.
88. *Ibid.*, 272.
89. Margaret C. Jacob, 'Newtonianism and the Origins of the Enlightenment: A reassessment', *Enlightenment Studies* 11 (1977): 1–25.
90. *Ibid.*, 6.
91. Margaret C. Jacob, 'Newtonian Science and the Radical Enlightenment', *Vistas in Astronomy* 22 (1979): 545–555, 546.
92. *Ibid.*, 547.
93. 'The ideal of applying this dialectical approach to the Enlightenment crystalized in conversations J. G. A. Pocock', Jacob, 'How Radical was the Enlightenment? What do we mean by Radical?', *Diametros* no. 40 (2014): 99–114, 101; see also Martin Mulsow's description of how Jacob, during 'ein Mittagessens-Gespräch mit John Pococke wurden dann der Begriff „radical Enlightenment“ für diese gruppe geboren', contrasted with 'den moderaten oder christlich-konservativen Aufklären, dem, was sie das 'newtonian Enlightenment' nennt'. Mulsow attributes this insight to 'mündliche information von Margaret Jacob', see Mulsow, 'Radikalaufklärung, moderate Aufklärung und die Dynamik der Moderne' in *Radikalaufklärung*, ed. Jonathan Israel and Martin Mulsow (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 203–235, fn. 18.
94. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 462.
95. *Ibid.*, 548.
96. Cited in Richard Whatmore, 'Introduction' to J.G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), xix–xx.
97. *Ibid.*, 569.
98. J.G.A. Pocock, 'Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment' in *Culture and Politics: From Puritanism to Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 91–112.
99. *Ibid.*, 91.
100. *The Machiavellian Moment*, 477.
101. On Venturi: John Robertson, 'Franco Venturi's Enlightenment', *Past & Present* 137, no. 1 (1992): 183–206; the essays collected in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2005), especially Anna Maria Rao,

- 'Enlightenment and Reform: An Overview of Culture and Politics in Enlightenment Italy', 142–167; and Giuseppe Ricuperati, 'The Enlightenment and the Church in the Work of Franco Venturi: the Fertile Legacy of a Civil Religion', 168–182.
102. Pocock, 'Post-puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment', 93.
  103. Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Religious Origins of Enlightenment', printed in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 193–236; on Trevor Roper see John Robertson, 'Hugh Trevor Roper, Intellectual History and "The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment"', *The English Historical Review* 124, no. 511 (2009): 1389–1421.
  104. Pocock, 'Post-puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment', 100.
  105. *Ibid.*, 103, 101.
  106. *Ibid.*, 104; extended on p. 105.
  107. The introduction to Jacob's 1981 *Radical Enlightenment* credits her realisation that the enlightenment could, and should, be seen as originating in the English revolution, in part, to her engagement with Pocock, fn., p. 22, citing Pocock's lecture, 'Post-puritan England and the problem of the enlightenment', delivered in October 1975 at the William Andrews Clark library. She also recognises the pregnancy of Pocock's formula in *The Machiavellian Moment* in her 1979 'Newtonian science and the Radical Enlightenment', 547, fn. 17. Pocock, for his part, cites Jacob's 1977 article in 'Post-puritan England and the problem of the Enlightenment', 103, 101. See also above fn. 94.
  108. *Ibid.*, 105–6
  109. *Ibid.*, 107–8. Richard Bourke has mapped Pocock's formative role in the emergence of 'The New British History', also dated to 1973 and the publication of his 'British history: a plea for a new subject', *Journal of Modern History* 47 (1975): 601–624, but without reflecting upon the coinciding of this turn with Pocock's enlightenment 'turn'. Bourke, 'Pocock and the Presuppositions of the New British History', *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 2 (2010): 747–770.
  110. Pocock, 'Post-puritan England and the problem of the Enlightenment', 108.
  111. Gibbon is grouped with Harrington, Montesquieu and Jefferson as 'civic humanists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whose thought in this and other regards was based on premises entirely Machiavellian', Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 211.
  112. Pocock, 'Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian', *Daedalus* 105, no. 3 (1976): 153–169; 'Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and the world view of the late Enlightenment', *Eighteenth Century Studies* 10, no. 3 (1977): 287–303.
  113. Pocock, 'Between Machiavellian and Hume', 155.
  114. Pocock, 'Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and the World View of the Late Enlightenment', 291.
  115. *Ibid.*, 299.
  116. *Ibid.*, 301.
  117. Pocock, 'The Varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: A History of Ideology and Discourse', in Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 215–310, 220.
  118. Jacob's *Radical Enlightenment* is invoked in 'The Varieties of Whiggism', 291.
  119. *Ibid.*, 236.
  120. James Alexander, 'Radical, Sceptical and Liberal Enlightenment', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 14, no. 2 (2020): 257–283.
  121. In his essay on whiggism Pocock adds as an aside a note on the problems of the term liberal, as, after its original eighteenth century reference to 'one who advocated a religion of free enquiry and speculation, and for this reason held religious freedom to entail an equality of civil rights ... other meanings attached themselves with varying degrees of rapidity'. 'It was long' Pocock added 'before the word "liberalism" took on the full range of political meanings, and longer still before it took on the full range of economic meanings, with which we now burden it' in Pocock, 'The varieties of Whiggism', 287. Elsewhere Pocock notes his concerns about an over-estimation of the 'liberal' composition of the British eighteenth century, 'The Machiavellian Moment Revisited: A study in history and ideology', *The Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 1 (1981): 49–72, 69–71. On Pocock on liberalism, but without reference to 'enlightenment', see David Craig, 'Republicanism versus Liberalism: Towards a Pre-history', *Intellectual History Review* 33, no. 1 (2023): 101–130.
  122. Pocock, 'Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England', In *L'età dei lumi: Studi storici sul settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, ed. R. J. Ajello et al., vol. 1 (Jovene: Naples, 1985), 523–562.
  123. *Ibid.*, 534–5.
  124. *Ibid.*, 548–9.
  125. *Ibid.*, 550.
  126. *Ibid.*, 530, 553.
  127. Pocock, 'The Varieties of Conservatism: British and American', public lecture delivered at Arizona State University, April 13, 1977, now digitised as 'Intellectual History in a Thousand Manuscripts', item 15: <https://intellectualhistory.net/thousand-manuscripts-blog/7oj1b4oi7lw094st86warrwc64tttv>, pp. 1–2.
  128. *Ibid.*, 1.

129. 'there has to be a conservative option because there is a socialist option; but the future of the options depends on their being an autonomous future for Britain itself, which at the moment seems doubtful', *ibid.*, 24.
130. Pocock, 'Clergy and Commerce', 530, fn. 10.
131. Pocock, 'Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment', *History of Political Thought* 20, no. 1 (1999): 125–139, 137.
132. Pocock, 'Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: The American and French cases in British perspective', *Government and Opposition* 24, no. 1 (1989): 81–105, 84.
133. *Ibid.*, 83.
134. *Ibid.*, 91.
135. *Ibid.*, 105.
136. Pocock, 'The Re-Description of Enlightenment', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 125 (2004): 101–117, 114.
137. For instance in a two-part 1994 article titled 'Political Thought in the English-speaking Atlantic, 1760–1790', in *The Varieties of British Political Thought: 1500–1800*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock, Gordon J. Schochet and Lois Schwoerer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 246–318; Pocock, 'Enthusiasm: the Antiself of Enlightenment', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (1997): 7–28; Pocock, 'Enlightenment and Counter-enlightenment, Revolution and Counter-revolution; a Eurosceptical Enquiry', *History of Political Thought* 20, no. 1 (1999): 125–139.
138. Pocock 'Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions', 96.
139. Pocock, 'Historiography and Enlightenment: A View of their History', *Modern Intellectual History* 5, no. 1 (2008): 83–96, 94–5.
140. Richard Wolin, 'J. G. A. Pocock's "Barbarism and Religion": an Introduction', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77, no. 1 (2016): 99–106, 106.
141. Donald Kelley, 'Review of J.G.A. Pocock. *Barbarism and Religion*. Vol. 3, *The First Decline and Fall*.' *Renaissance Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2004): 1065–1066; Peter N. Miller, 'Review of J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volumes I and II*', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 33, no. 1 (2001): 120–122.
142. A point made in a balanced review by Brian Young, 'The Enlightenments of J.G.A. Pocock', *History of European Ideas* 25, no. 4 (1999): 208–216, see especially pp. 209–211: 'Pocock's description of England's enlightenment is, then, rather abstractly limned (especially in comparison with the arguments he has elucidated to its arguments elsewhere)', 210.
143. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume I: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 'If there is a single target of my criticism it is the concept of "The Enlightenment", as a unified phenomenon with a single history and definition', p. 9.
144. Pocock, 'Afterword', *The Machiavellian Moment*, 2016; Pocock, 'From *The Ancient Constitution* to *Barbarism and Religion*; *The Machiavellian Moment*, the history of political thought and the history of historiography', *History of European Ideas* 43, no. 2 (2017): 129–146.
145. John Robertson has argued that there is a concealed normativity to Pocock's enlightenment: John Robertson, 'John Pocock's Histories of Political Thought', *Storia della storiografia* 75, no. 1 (2019): 11–46, 31, 40.
146. Pocock, 'The Re-Description of Enlightenment', 107, fn. 14.
147. Pocock, 'Response and Commentary', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77, no. 1 (2016): 157–171.
148. *Ibid.*, 169.
149. Pocock, 'Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment', 134. To cite but a few examples: Burke was a 'defender of Enlightenment in its Montesquieuan form in Europe and its Anglican and Moderate forms in Britain', Pocock, 'Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 1, 7–28, 27. The centrality of 'religious moderatism' and 'moderate theology' to the 'conservative enlightenment', Pocock, 'Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions', 97 and Pocock, 'Clergy and Commerce', 558; Anglican/Whig Enlightenment proceeds through a 'combination of moderation with authoritarianism', Pocock, 'Post-puritan England and the problem of the Enlightenment', 101; politics in enlightened commercial society becomes recast as 'moderating... human passions and interests through their conversion into "manners"', Pocock, 'Afterword', *The Machiavellian Moment*, 570. 'Clerical enlightenment', 'Scottish Enlightenment' and 'The Moderates' are gently conflated into a 'Moderate Enlightenment' whose character is 'clerical, Whig, political, and polite' in Pocock, 'Review of *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* by Richard B. Sher', *The Journal of Modern History* 58, no. 4 (1986): 912–914.
150. Pocock, 'Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment', 132.
151. Elegantly stated in Giuseppe Giarrizzo, 'Enlightenment: The Parabola of an Idea', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141, no. 4 (1997): 436–453.
152. Karen O'Brien, 'The Return of the Enlightenment', *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (2010): 1426–1435, 1426. On the post 1990s return of 'Enlightenment' among historians, and its conflation by them with 'modernity', see Robertson, 'Enlightenment and Modernity, Historians and Philosophers'.
153. Robertson, 'Enlightenment and Modernity', 305; Ferrone's call for a reunification of a historical enlightenment with a political-philosophical enlightenment is an outlier: *The Enlightenment. History of an Idea*, 2015.
154. Signified by a 2003 special issue of *The American Historical Review* titled 'God and the Enlightenment': see in particular Jonathan Sheehan, 'Enlightenment, Religion and the Enigma of Secularization', *American*

- Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (2003): 1061–1080; Dale Van Kley, ‘Christianity as Casualty and Chrysalis of Modernity: The Problem of Dechristianization in the French Revolution’, *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 4 (2003): 1081–1104; a few years before these, see the useful review essay by Robert Sullivan, ‘Rethinking Christianity in Enlightened Europe’, *Eighteenth Century Studies* 34, no. 2 (2001): 298–309; with a different approach, but some shared conclusions, J.C.D. Clark, ‘Providence, Predestination and Progress: Or, did the Enlightenment Fail?’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003): 559–589.
155. Four pre-2014 works neatly reviewed in Simon Grote, ‘Religion and Enlightenment’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75, no. 1 (2014): 137–160; more recently: *Let there be Enlightenment: The Religious and Mystical Sources of Rationality*, ed. Anton Matytsin and Dan Edelstein (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2018); various works by Jeffrey Burson (*The Culture of Enlightening: Abbe Claude Yvon and the Entangled Emergence of the Enlightenment* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2019); *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: A Transnational History*, with Ulrich Lehner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014)) and Ulrich Lehner (*The Catholic Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)). With a very different angle: Thomas Wallnig, *Enlightened Monks* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
  156. Sorkin, for instance, defines, against Israel’s radical enlightenment, an internally heterogenous yet sufficiently coherent ‘religious enlightenment’ whose core features were ‘a conscious search for a middle way between extremes’ and, as in William Waburton, a ‘heroic moderation’, David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 11.
  157. Rafael Major, ‘The Cambridge School and Leo Strauss: Texts and Context of American Political Science’, *Political Research Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2005): 477–485; John G. Gunnell, ‘The Myth of Tradition’, *The American Political Science Review* 72, no. 1 (1978): 122–134, and, in defence of Strauss, Nathan Tarcov, ‘Philosophy & History: Tradition and Interpretation in the Work of Leo Strauss’, *Polity* 16, no. 1 (1983): 5–29. These works, facing off Strauss against Pocock, contain two oversights. Firstly, they methodologically conflate Pocock with Quentin Skinner’s ‘Cambridge School’, and Skinner was overtly critical of Strauss’s approach – ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53, 21. Secondly, they conflate Pocock’s scathing critique of Strauss’s followers – mostly explicitly Harvey Mansfield and Allan Bloom – with a direct critique of Strauss himself: Pocock, ‘Prophet and Inquisitor: Or, a Church Built upon Bayonets Cannot Stand: A Comment on Mansfield’s “Strauss’s Machiavelli”’, *Political Theory* 3, no. 4 (1975): 385–401. While he does criticise Strauss’s methodology, there is a hesitancy around Pocock’s comments on Strauss. I am inclined to take seriously Pocock’s treatment of Strauss as a curiosity: that Strauss’s *Thoughts on Machiavelli* was ‘marvellously perceptive in some ways, as well as marvellously wrong-headed in others’, and later that he assesses the work ‘with sceptical friendliness and real admiration’, in ‘Prophet and Inquisitor’, 385–6, 399; and then, in 1987, Pocock refers to ‘the strange history of the late Leo Strauss and the powerful school he founded’ noting, as if it were a *desideratum*, in a footnote that ‘no independent study of Strauss’ career yet exists’, ‘Between Gog and Magog: The Republican Thesis and the Ideologia Americana’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, no. 2 (1987): 325–346, 330, fn. 15.
  158. When writing on the ‘politics of the historical profession’ Pocock writes ‘it is possible that all historical narrative, all written historiography, is by its nature conservative-liberal in its intention and effect; it insists that there are always more or less durable conditions in human life, always some possibility of changing them, always limitations to the extent to which this can be done, always unexpected outcomes of the attempt to do so’, Pocock, ‘Quentin Skinner: The History of Politics and the Politics of History’, *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3 (2004): 532–550, 549.
  159. Strauss’s political moderation has recently been grouped with Oakeshott’s in David McIlwain, *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). McIlwain’s account tends to overlook the vast differences between Oakeshott and Strauss’s species of ‘political moderation’, a term he uses at length.
  160. Leo Strauss, ‘German Nihilism’, printed in *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (1999): 353–378, 371.
  161. *Ibid.*, 372.
  162. Strauss, ‘German Nihilism’, 372, quoted from Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), §253, p. 145.
  163. Strauss, ‘German Nihilism’, 371.
  164. *Ibid.*, 372. My italics.
  165. Strauss, ‘Liberal Education and Responsibility’, 10.
  166. Reviewing these perceptions of Strauss, see Catherine H. Zuckert and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1–20.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

Research for this article received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research programme (project id: 842070).

## Bibliography

- Ajello, R. J. et al. (ed.), *L'eta dei lumi: Studi storici sul settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi*, ed. R. J. Ajello et al., vol. 1 (Jovene: Naples, 1985).
- Alexander, James, 'Radical, Sceptical and Liberal Enlightenment', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, vol. 14, issue 2 (2020) pp. 257–283.
- Appleby, Joyce, 'Review: Henry F. May. The Enlightenment in America', *American Historical Review*, vol. 82, issue 3 (June 1977) pp. 722–23.
- Baker, Keith Michael and Reill, Peter Hans (ed.), *What's Left of Enlightenment?. A Postmodern Question* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).
- Bourke, Richard, 'Pocock and the Presuppositions of the New British History', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 53, no. 2 (2010), pp. 747–770.
- Burson, Jeffrey and Lehner, Ulrich (ed.), *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: A Transnational History* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).
- Burson, Jeffrey, *The Culture of Enlightening: Abbé Claude Yvon and the Entangled Emergence of the Enlightenment* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2019).
- Cassirer, Ernst, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
- Cassirer, Ernst, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1954).
- Catherine H. Zuckert and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- Clark, J.C.D., 'Providence, Predestination and Progress: Or, did the Enlightenment Fail?', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2003), pp. 559–589.
- Cobban, Alfred, *In Search of Humanity: The Role of the Enlightenment in Modern History* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1960).
- Craig, David, 'Republicanism versus liberalism: towards a pre-history', *Intellectual History Review*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2023), pp. 101–130.
- Crook, Malcolm, Pilbeam, Pamela, Le Goff, T. J. A., Harvey, John, 'Forum: The Legacy of Alfred Cobban', *French History*, vol 34, no. 4 (2020), pp. 512–560.
- De Dijn, Annelien, 'The Politics of Enlightenment: From Peter Gay to Jonathan Israel', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 55, no. 3 (2012), pp. 785–805.
- Dixon, John M., 'Henry F May and the Revival of the American Enlightenment: Problems and Possibilities for Intellectual and Social History', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 71, no. 2 (2014), 255–280.
- Ducheyne, Steffen, ed., *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- Ferrone, Vincenzo, *The Enlightenment: History of an Idea* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).
- Garcia-Alonso, Marta (ed.), *Les lumières radicales et le politique. Études critiques sur les travaux de Jonathan Israel* (Paris: Honore Champion, 2017).
- Gay, Peter, 'Man in the Middle: Review of Alfred Cobban; A History of Modern France', *New York Review of Books* (March 17, 1966).
- Gay, Peter, 'The Seven Prisoners in the Bastille: History in the Age of Counter-Cliché', *The Yale Review*, no. 3, (1960–61).
- Gay, Peter, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).
- Gay, Peter, *The Party of Humanity: Studies in the French Enlightenment* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964).
- Giarrizzo, Giuseppe, 'Enlightenment: The Parabola of an Idea', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 141, no. 4 (1997), pp. 436–453.
- Gordon, Peter, 'Neo-Kantianism and the Politics of Enlightenment', *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. 39, no. 2, (2008), pp. 223–238.
- Gordon, Peter, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
- Greif, Mark, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Grote, Simon, 'Religion and Enlightenment', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 75, no. 1 (2014), pp. 137–160.
- Guilhot, Nicolas, *After the Enlightenment: Political Realism and International Relations in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- Gunnell, John G., 'The Myth of Tradition', *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 72, no. 1 (1978), pp. 122–134.
- Israel, Jonathan and Mulsow, Martin (ed.), *Radikalaufklärung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014).

- Israel, Jonathan, “‘Radical Enlightenment’ – Peripheral, substantial, or the main face of the trans-atlantic enlightenments (1650–1850)”, *Diametros*, vol. 40 (2014), pp. 73–98.
- Israel, Jonathan, *Enlightenment Contested* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- Israel, Jonathan, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Jacob, Margaret C., ‘How Radical was the Enlightenment? What do we mean by Radical?’, *Diametros*, no. 40 (2014), pp. 99–114.
- Jacob, Margaret C., ‘John Toland and the Newtonian Ideology’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 32, issue 1 (1969), pp. 307–331.
- Jacob, Margaret C., ‘Newtonian Science and the Radical Enlightenment’, *Vistas in Astronomy*, vol. 22 (1979), pp. 545–555.
- Jacob, Margaret C., ‘Newtonianism and the origins of the Enlightenment: A reassessment’, *Enlightenment Studies*, vol. 11 (1977), pp. 1–25.
- Jacob, Margaret C., ‘The Radical Enlightenment and Freemasonry: Where are we now?’, *Philosophica*, vol. 88 (2013), pp. 13–29.
- Jacob, Margaret C., *The Newtonians and the English Revolution* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).
- Jacob, Margaret C., *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London; Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1981).
- Jacob, Margaret C., *The Secular Enlightenment* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).
- Janssens, David, ‘The Problem of the Enlightenment: Strauss, Jacobi and the Pantheism Controversy’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 56, no. 3 (2003), pp. 605–631.
- Janssens, David, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).
- Katznelson, Ira, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
- Kelley, Donald, ‘Review of J.G.A. Pocock. *Barbarism and Religion*. Vol. 3, *The First Decline and Fall*.’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 3 (2004), pp. 1065–1066.
- Krüger, Gerhard, ‘Review of Leo Strauss’ *Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaften*’, *Independent Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 5/6 (1988), pp. 173–175.
- Lehner, Ulrich, *The Catholic Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Heinrich Meier (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2001).
- Lilti, Antoine, *L’Héritage des lumières: Ambivalences de la modernité* (Paris: EHESS, Gallimard-Seuil, 2019).
- Major, Rafael, ‘The Cambridge School and Leo Strauss: Texts and Context of American Political Science’, *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 3 (2005), pp. 477–485.
- Matytsin, Anton and Edelstein, Dan (ed.), *Let there be Enlightenment: The Religious and Mystical Sources of Rationality*, (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 2018).
- May, Henry F., *Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).
- McIlwain, David, *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
- Miller, Peter N., ‘Review of J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volumes I and II*’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2001), pp. 120–122.
- Moyn, Samuel, ‘From experience to law: Leo Strauss an the Weimar crisis of the philosophy of religion’, *History of European Ideas*, vol. 33 (2007), pp. 174–194.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- O’Brien, Karen, ‘The Return of the Enlightenment’, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 115, no. 5 (2010), pp. 1426–1435.
- Pangle, Thomas (ed.), *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
- Pocock, J. G. A., ‘Between Gog and Magog: The Republican Thesis and the Ideologia Americana’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 48, no. 2 (1987), pp. 325–346.
- Pocock, J. G. A., ‘Between Machiavelli and Hume: Gibbon as Civic Humanist and Philosophical Historian’, *Daedalus*, vol. 105, no. 3 (1976), pp. 153–169.
- Pocock, J. G. A., ‘Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: The American and French cases in British perspective’, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 24, issue 1 (1989), pp. 81–105.
- Pocock, J. G. A., ‘Enlightenment and counter-enlightenment, revolution and counter-revolution; a Eurosceptical Enquiry’, *History of Political Thought*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1999), pp. 125–139.
- Pocock, J. G. A., ‘Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment’ *History of Political Thought* vol. 20, no. 1 (1999), pp. 125–139.
- Pocock, J. G. A., ‘Enthusiasm: the Antiself of Enlightenment’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 1 (1997), pp. 7–28.
- Pocock, J. G. A., ‘From *The Ancient Constitution* to *Barbarism and Religion*; *The Machiavellian Moment*, the history of political thought and the history of historiography’, *History of European Ideas*, vol. 43, issue 2 (2017), pp. 129–146.



- Pocock, J. G. A., 'Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and the world view of the late Enlightenment', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1977), pp. 287–303.
- Pocock, J. G. A., 'Historiography and enlightenment: a view of their history', *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 5, no. 1, (2008), pp. 83–96, p. 94–5.
- Pocock, J. G. A., 'Prophet and Inquisitor: Or, a Church Built upon Bayonets Cannot Stand: A Comment on Mansfield's "Strauss's Machiavelli"', *Political Theory*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1975), pp. 385–401.
- Pocock, J. G. A., 'Quentin Skinner: The History of Politics and the Politics of History', *Common Knowledge*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2004), pp. 532–550.
- Pocock, J. G. A., 'Response and Commentary', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 77, no. 1 (2016), pp. 157–171.
- Pocock, J. G. A., 'Review of *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* by Richard B. Sher', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 58, no. 4 (1986), pp. 912–914.
- Pocock, J. G. A., 'The Re-Description of Enlightenment', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 125 (2004), pp. 101–117.
- Pocock, J. G. A., 'The varieties of conservatism: British and American', (April 13, 1977), *Intellectual History in a Thousand Manuscripts*, item 15: <https://intellectualhistory.net/thousand-manuscripts-blog/7oj1b4oi7lw094st86warrwc64tttv>.
- Pocock, J. G. A., *The Machiavellian Moment Revisited: A study in history and ideology*, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 53, no. 1 (1981), pp. 49–72.
- Pocock, J. G. A., *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- Pocock, J. G. A., *Barbarism and Religion, Volume I: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Pocock, J. G. A., *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).
- Pocock, J. G. A., Schochet, Gordon J. and Schwoerer, Lois (ed.), *The Varieties of British Political Thought: 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- Rao, Anna Maria, 'Enlightenment and reform: an overview of culture and politics in Enlightenment Italy', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 10, issue 2 (2005), pp. 142–167.
- Ricuperati, Giuseppe, 'The Enlightenment and the church in the work of Franco Venturi: the fertile legacy of a civil religion', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 10, issue 2 (2005), pp. 168–182.
- Robertson, John 'Enlightenment and Modernity, Historians and Philosophers', *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity*, vol. 8 (2020) pp. 278–321.
- Robertson, John, 'Franco Venturi's Enlightenment', *Past & Present*, vol. 137, issue 1 (1992), pp. 183–206.
- Robertson, John, 'Hugh Trevor Roper, intellectual history and 'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment'', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 124, no. 511 (2009), pp. 1389–1421.
- Robertson, John, 'John Pocock's Histories of Political Thought', *Storia della storiografia*, vol. 75, no. 1 (2019), pp. 11–46.
- Robertson, John, *The Case for The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- Schmidt, James (ed.), *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
- Schmidt, James, 'Tracking 'the Enlightenment' across the Nineteenth Century', *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference on the History of Concepts, Bilbao* (2013), pp. 33–41.
- Schröder, Winfried (ed.), *Reading between the lines: Leo Strauss and the History of Early Philosophy*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).
- Sheehan, Jonathan, 'Enlightenment, Religion and the Enigma of Secularization', *American Historical Review*, vol. 108, no. 4 (2003), pp. 1061–1080.
- Shell, Susan Meld (ed.), *The Strauss-Krüger Correspondence. Returning to Plato through Kant* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
- Skinner, Quentin, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1969), pp. 3–53.
- Sorkin, David, *The Religious Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
- Strauss, Leo 'German Nihilism', *Interpretation*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1999), pp. 353–378.
- Strauss, Leo, *Hobbes' Critique of Religion and Related Writings*, ed. Gabriel Bartlett and Svetozar Minkov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- Strauss, Leo, *Leo Strauss on Moses Mendelssohn*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
- Strauss, Leo, *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings, 1921–1932*, Michael Zank (ed.) (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002).
- Strauss, Leo, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953).
- Strauss, Leo, *On Tyranny* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013).
- Strauss, Leo, *Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessor* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).
- Strauss, Leo, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).
- Strauss, Leo, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Randall McNally & co., 1964).

- Strauss, Leo, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and its Genesis* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1952).
- Strauss, Leo, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958).
- Strauss, Leo, *What is Political Philosophy? And other studies* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1973).
- Sullivan, Robert, 'Rethinking Christianity in Enlightened Europe', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2001), pp. 298–309.
- Tanguay, Daniel, *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).
- Tarcov, Nathan, 'Philosophy & History: Tradition and Interpretation in the Work of Leo Strauss', *Polity*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1983), pp. 5–29.
- Trevor-Roper, Hugh, *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (London: Macmillan, 1972).
- Van Kley, Dale, 'Christianity as Casualty and Chrysalis of Modernity: The Problem of Dechristianization in the French Revolution', *The American Historical Review*, volume 108, issue 4 (2003), pp. 1081–1104.
- Venturi, Franco, *Utopia and Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
- Wallnig, Thomas, *Enlightened Monks* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
- Williams, Michael C, 'In the beginning: The IR enlightenment and the ends of IR theory', in *European Journal of International Relations* 19, 3 (2013), 647–665.
- Wokler, Robert, *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment, and Their Legacies*, Bryan Garsten (ed.) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- Wolin, Richard, 'J. G. A. Pocock's "Barbarism and Religion": an Introduction', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 77, no. 1 (2016), pp. 99–106.
- Yaffe, Martin D. and Ruderman, Richard (ed.), *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- Young, Brian, 'The Enlightenments of J.G.A. Pocock' *History of European Ideas*, vol. 25, no. 4 (1999), pp. 208–216.
- Zagorin, Perez, ed., *Culture and Politics: From Puritanism to Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980).
- Zuckert, Catherine and Zuckert, Michael (eds), *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy & American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).