
Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*,
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Anne Norton and the “Straussian” Cabal: How *Not* to Write a Book

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I. INTRODUCTION

Professor Norton, as the title of her book suggests, claims that there is a connection between the political philosopher, Leo Strauss (d.1973), via some of his students, the “Straussians,” and what she considers the imperial foreign policy goals of the current Bush administration. “In this book, I will tell you how the teachings of Leo Strauss made their way from the quiet corners of classrooms...into the precincts of power and what became of them when they came there” (33). What became of them when they came there was a plan “to establish a new world order to rival Rome” (179) born of “an enthusiasm for empire.” (186). This is why, she says, we are currently at war in Iraq and Afghanistan (176).

At first glance, this would seem to be a doubtful proposition since none of those chiefly responsible for the Bush foreign policy—Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, George Tenet, George W. Bush—would ordinarily be considered “Straussians.” One opens this book, then, expecting Professor Norton to connect the dots and make the case that seems to have captured the imaginations of so many Bush administration critics.

The author carefully avoids the usual kinds of evidence and argumentation that one would expect a university professor to use; and

instead, deploys a full array of gossipy tidbits, innuendo, *ad hominem* attacks, unattributed quotes, anecdotes, insults, crude psychologizing and the like. The sloppiness of its argumentation is reflected in the way the book is written: it is riddled with embarrassing typos, grammatical blunders, and syntactical lapses.

In the end, this book is so insubstantial that it only intermittently rises to the level of caricature, and in that sense, it falls short even of Shadia Drury's work on Strauss and the Straussians. It is not just a "missed opportunity," as another reviewer would have it, but its weaknesses are so obvious, its failures so comprehensive, that it inadvertently calls into question the whole enterprise. Not only are dots not connected, but the dots themselves become increasingly indistinct until many simply fade into the background.

The book might still be useful, however, as a kind of negative example. Such an approach raises a number of questions. What would a compelling case for Straussian influence look like? What issues need to be addressed to make such a case? Can they be addressed at all? If there is no case, then why do so many people want to believe in a myth of Straussian influence? What is gained by asserting the existence of a secret group acting behind the scenes when one can directly criticize the actions and actors themselves?

II. DEFINITIONS

The book starts off reasonably enough by asking a basic question contained in the first chapter title: what is a Straussian? Initially, Professor Norton seems to suggest that a "Straussian" is someone who studied under Strauss or one of his students. This is a problem since the author herself studied under Joseph Cropsey, whom she designates a Straussian, yet, like Paul Wolfowitz, she eschews the label. Other "Straussians" such as Harvey Mansfield never studied under Strauss or his students.

Early on she says that she will distinguish between disciples of Strauss, those who call themselves "Straussians," and political theorists interested in Strauss's work (6–7). This distinction is not maintained in the rest of the book perhaps with good reason since its application in specific cases is not helpful. Does Harvey Mansfield call himself a Straussian? Is he a disciple or a theorist interested in Strauss's work? What about Catherine Zuckert? Or Stanley Rosen? Or Laurence Lampert? Or Harry Jaffa? She says that she will refer to such people as "Straussians" because that is how they refer to themselves. No effort is made to support this claim, and in fact, some of those she refers to as "Straussians" do not refer to themselves as "Straussians."

A further refinement suggests that those in the first group, the disciples, have moved into government service, while the latter group, the theorists, have remained in the academy. This distinction quickly collapses. Leon Kass, one of Professor Norton's teachers at the University of Chicago, is now chairman of President Bush's Council on Bioethics. Is Leon Kass a disciple or an academic? Is Allan Bloom, who never held a government position, a disciple or an academic? What about Harry Jaffa? The very examples that Professor Norton uses to support her argument undermine the distinction that she makes in trying to identify those she is criticizing. In a way, it does not matter. This distinction disappears from the rest of the book.

We also get a quick and superficial primer on the differences between East Coast and West Coast "Straussians" (7–8). The latter, it seems, are more zealous in their political activism, but even this distinction quickly breaks down. We are told that Mansfield, a Harvard professor, belongs in the East Coast camp, yet he is also described as a "conservative activist" (7).

In the end, Professor Norton does not make a formal definition and instead relies on a website and a note in another book for lists of "Straussians" (see *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime*, xiv). This, of course, is a doubtful procedure since it is not clear that those so identified accept the label. In any case, those listed as being in government service are all underlings in a vast federal bureaucracy, or act in purely advisory capacities. None is in a position to determine a policy outcome. The list of "Straussian" teachers at the website (Straussian.net) includes some who do not accept the label.

By the end of her first chapter, Professor Norton has given us a doubtful list of Whos, and an equally doubtful list of Wheres, but the one thing she has not given us, the one thing we most need, is the What. The failure to provide a meaningful definition of what a "Straussian" is, or at least a meaningful discussion of the difficulties of such a definition, fatally undermines her "Straussian" influence claim.

The question that must be answered then is this: what are the intellectual commitments that "Straussians" share? What do Eve Adler, Harvey Mansfield, Zalmay Khalilzad, Catherine Zuckert, Allan Bloom, Ronna Burger, Leo Strauss, Francis Fukuyama, Susan Orr, William Galston, Nasser Behnegar and Harry Jaffa agree on? This question is never asked and therefore never answered. Any serious effort to connect Leo Strauss and the "Straussians" to the Bush administration foreign policy must answer this question. If no

answer is possible, then no connection exists.

By the end of the book, it seems clear that for Professor Norton, a “Straussian” is someone “I don’t like” (99). The label becomes a kind of empty vessel into which she pours her various hatreds and resentments. The basic illogic of the book seems to go something like this: I don’t like “Straussians”; I don’t like [fill in the blank]; therefore, “Straussians” are [fill in the blank]. In a general sense, the blank is always filled with “conservative,” and for Professor Norton, who often deals in broad stereotypes, “conservative” means racist, sexist and elitist. Though vaguely aware that there are “Straussians” associated with the left, such as William Galston or George Anastaplo (18–19), she never allows such a fact to get in the way of her broad-brush stereotype. “Straussians,” she says plainly, “are conservative” (161).

Another question that is never asked and never answered is: what is Strauss’s teaching? How do we get from Strauss’s lengthy discussion of Thrasymachus in *The City and Man* to the Project for a New American Century and the invasion of Iraq? From time to time, Professor Norton asserts that there is a distinction to be made between Strauss and his students, but she never really says what that difference amounts to. In fact, she never offers a clear account of Strauss’s thinking, or that of any of his students, so we simply cannot say how his students deviated from their teacher. But even if she had given such an account, she would undermine her claim. If the “Straussians” reject basic elements of Strauss’s thinking, then the connection between Leo Strauss and the Bush administration foreign policy cannot be maintained.

A compelling case for the influence of Leo Strauss and the “Straussians” must give a serious account of Strauss’s thinking and that of his more influential students; and it must provide a meaningful definition of “Straussian.” Without such an account, and without such a definition, there is no basis to evaluate the claim of Strauss’s influence or that of his students. Otherwise, we cannot know who they are and what they think, and we cannot determine how their intellectual commitments might predispose them toward particular policies.

III. CALUMNIES

Ms. Norton has sustained engagements with the works of three of Strauss’s students, Allan Bloom (47–73), Carnes Lord (64, 130–40, 208) and Leon Kass (75–90). Given what she says early on about the influence of Harry Jaffa and Harvey Mansfield, one would expect her to engage their thinking as well. Jaffa has written two well received books on Lincoln, and

published many essays and articles that reveal his views on the nature of the American regime. Mansfield has written on the meaning of the First Amendment, an interpretive essay on Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, among other books, articles and essays some of which also deal with the nature of the American regime. His book, *Taming the Prince*, which Norton does not mention, would seem to offer an obvious comparison and contrast with Carnes Lord's book, *The Modern Prince*.

Ms. Norton has published a book on the antebellum South, *Alternative Americas: A Reading of Antebellum Political Culture*, so one would think she would have some basis to intelligently engage the writings of Jaffa and Mansfield that deal with a similar era in American history. One suspects that she avoids any serious commentary on these thinkers since they disagree in quite fundamental ways and this might undermine her "Straussian"-conservative stereotype.

Ms. Norton's least likely target is her former teacher at the University of Chicago, and current chair of President Bush's Council on Bioethics, Leon Kass. As far as I can tell, Kass has not written on the nature of the American regime or on foreign policy. His work does not seem directly relevant to Ms. Norton's claim. Her discussion of Kass, however, is introduced by one of the few substantive things she has to say about Strauss's thinking: "In most of his writings, Strauss is careful to present nature not as the realm of certainty, of 'pure and whole knowledge,' but as the unexplored, uncharted territory of a 'pure and whole questioning.' Nature was not the site of certainty, nature was the realm of the unknown, the inchoate, of that which might be known but was not yet [sic]. Nature was a riddle: a place of possibilities, a place of questions. Nature was a beginning, a resource, out of which people and worlds could be fashioned" (75).

It is certainly possible that I do not know Strauss's writings as thoroughly as Ms. Norton, but I have read several and I cannot think of a single place where Strauss says anything remotely like this. Quoted phrases are integrated into these statements, but there are no citations, so we cannot evaluate their accuracy or context. The last sentence seems closer to the views of Machiavelli and modern political thought and is thus likely at odds with Strauss's own thinking. Just before this passage, she had acknowledged that Strauss may in fact understand nature as a site of certainty, but she makes no effort to support her preferred reading. At a later point, she offers a brief account of a statement made by Strauss to Kojève that distinguishes between a first and second natures (121). It is unclear whether this is a faithful

paraphrase or Norton's own interpretation of Strauss. Earlier she had attributed this view to Socrates, Rousseau and "other philosophers" (76–77). Is this account meant to somehow reconcile the other two? Norton makes no argument one way or the other. She has at least three interpretations of Strauss: in one, nature is a site of certainty; in another, it is a site of uncertainty; and, in the third, it is somehow a little of both. She invokes whichever seems to fit the rhetorical purposes of the moment in her narrative. On balance, she seems to favor the second, least likely interpretation, but no argument is ever developed to support it.

Ms. Norton's preferred claim about Strauss's view of nature, at this point in her narrative, is an attempt to try and distinguish Strauss from some of his students for whom, so she claims, nature is the "realm of certain and self-evident truths" (76). The use of "self-evident" reminds one of Thomas Jefferson who, on this reading, would have to be considered a proto-"Straussian" (see 118–120). Norton does not name these "Straussians" and does not quote from any source to support her opinion. The discussion moves on to Leon Kass, and we assume the criticism applies to him, but Norton does not say so directly.

By Ms. Norton's own account, she was seduced out of the Straussian orbit by reading the "mostly male" postmodern theorists Lacan, Foucault and Derrida (99–100). This shift is on display here as she attributes a postmodern sense of "nature" to Strauss by way of criticizing his students for retaining some sort of absolutist sense of nature. Notions of certainty and self-evident truths are bugaboos to those with a postmodern sensibility. "Nature, in this form," Norton asserts, "authorizes totalitarianism" (87). Notice that even if we grant that Norton is right about Strauss's view of nature, and that of his students, her argument is still undermined. If Kass disagrees with Strauss on so fundamental a matter as the nature of nature then in what sense is he a "Straussian"? What is the connection then between Strauss and Bush administration policies?

She gives several good examples of the way she assimilates, without any evidence, her conservative stereotype to "Straussians." For example, she says, "Nature speaks to the Straussians in the dulcet sounds of mid-twentieth-century popular culture. Nature says that marriage (and what could nature know of marriage?) is between a man and a women [sic], and sex is for procreation" (77). This is the beginning of a discussion about marriage that goes on in this fashion for several pages. We assume these views apply to Kass, but she never quite says so and supplies no quotes from Kass on this

issue. She has taken a facile version of a conservative view of marriage and simply attributed it to “Straussians” in general. She also did not notice that Andrew Sullivan is listed as a “Straussian” on the website she mentions. Sullivan, by Norton’s criteria, would have to be considered a “Straussian,” yet he is one of the best-known advocates in the country for gay marriage. She quotes Hadley Arkes on nature and marriage (84), but is Arkes a “Straussian”? She asserts that he is, but how are we to know? She goes on to slay the conservative stick figure that she sketches out, but the reader is left wondering what any of this has to do with the purported subject of her book.

At least Carnes Lord’s book, *The Modern Prince*, seems apposite to her subject. Her reading of Lord’s book, however, is so perverse that to call it a caricature would be misleading since it in no way resembles what Lord actually says. The purpose of Lord’s book, as the final chapter heading suggests—“Saving Democracy From the Barbarians”—is to give advice to democratic leaders on how they might best defend democratic institutions in a dangerous world. Through a bizarre series of intellectual contortions, Norton claims that the purpose of the book is exactly opposite: to overthrow the Constitution and establish martial law (134 and *passim*). The possibility that we might learn something useful about leadership from Lee Kuan Yew or other non-democratic leaders never seems to occur to Norton. She simply makes the leap that any praise for a non-democratic leader means that Lord supports overthrowing democratic institutions in favor of authoritarian rule. The one thing simply does not follow from the other, but this is typical of the sort of non sequitur that Norton often deploys.

As with Kass, Norton attempts to separate Strauss from Lord by noting Strauss’s famous judgment that Machiavelli was a “teacher of evil” (131). According to Norton, “*The Modern Prince* is modeled on Machiavelli’s famous (or perhaps infamous) work *The Prince*” (131). This, despite the title of Lord’s book, may not be true, but the faulty implication seems to be that if Machiavelli is a ‘teacher of evil’ and if Lord modeled his book on Machiavelli’s book, then Lord is a ‘teacher of evil’ as well. But we return to the same two problems that came up in Norton’s analysis of Kass. If Lord disagrees with Strauss on such a significant figure as Machiavelli, then in what sense is he a “Straussian”? How does this example support the claim for Strauss’s influence on the Bush administration foreign policy? We also might ask exactly what the point is of her perverse reading of Lord’s book. If we suspend disbelief and take her reading seriously then one would have to conclude that “Straussians” are likely to support authoritarian regimes.

Yet, the criticism of the Bush policy in Iraq is that it removed a human rights abusing tyrant out of an overly optimistic notion that a democratic regime could take his place. If she had read Lord's book in light of its obvious meaning, her claim might have been strengthened. As it is, another dot becomes a blurry smear.

The third figure on Norton's hit list is Allan Bloom, whose book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, became an unlikely bestseller. There are those who claim that its publication marks the beginning of the so-called 'culture wars.' In a very broad sense, Norton's book is modeled on Bloom's in that it is part memoir, and part cultural and political commentary. Bloom's book, no matter how idiosyncratic, has many virtues: it is always thought provoking, it is beautifully written, and it is cogently argued. In that sense, Norton's book could not be more different.

Norton had tried, however unsuccessfully, to distinguish Strauss from Kass on "nature," and Strauss from Lord on Machiavelli, but as far as I can tell, she does not distinguish Strauss from Bloom. Are we to assume that there is greater continuity between Strauss and his student in this case than in the other cases? She had all but called Kass a sexist, and Lord both a sexist and a racist (64–65, 133), but in Bloom she has hit a kind of trifecta, for Bloom, on Norton's account, is a racist, a sexist and an elitist. He is a racist because he opposed the takeover of Cornell University by student thugs threatening violence against administrators and faculty. He is a sexist because he preferred men as erotic partners. He is an elitist because he thought universities ought to have standards. There is always something amusing about an elite criticizing elitism. Norton is a professor at an elite institution, the University of Pennsylvania. "I taught in the Ivy League then," Norton reminds us referring to the year Bloom's book was published, 1987, "as I do now" (70). She is quick to criticize the appointment of Peter Lawler and Diana Schaub to President Bush's Council on Bioethics because they come from "minor academic institutions" (90).

Her opinions on Kass and Lord seem substantive by comparison to her opinions on Bloom. She goes on for several pages, but not a single claim made in *The Closing of the American Mind*, not a single argument, is ever refuted. Instead, she invents an *ad hominem* smear that seems to be largely a product of her own imagination. In a remarkable display of homophobia, she describes Bloom's "queenly manner," and reports rumors of "houseboys in sexual servitude," "homosexual rites and rituals," "orgiastic toga parties" and "perverse practices" (62).

She gives us accounts of Bloom's desires and fears (67–70), but what could Anne Norton know of Allan Bloom's desires and fears? For example, according to Norton, Bloom desires "a world without women," so that the world that remains "is a world of men, and a world of homoerotic if not homosexual desire" (67). She goes on in this manner for several pages, but it should go without saying at this point in the review, that no evidence is adduced to support any of it. One has to wonder if Norton is not in some way projecting her own fears and desires onto her former teacher. Bloom's homoerotic inclinations, it seems, rendered him immune to the "evil eye of sexual rejection" (63). Norton has affectionate recollections of others of her teachers at Chicago, Cropsey and Lerner, for example, whose "soft white hands" she could accept. She has nothing kind to say about Bloom. Not all rejections are sexual.

Those of us who are suspicious of the political posture of postmodern thinking and wonder if the 'anything goes' ethos conceals a desire for power though violence, will not be reassured on reading Norton's book. Her account of the events at Cornell romanticizes student gangs who sought to seize through brute force, and the threat of force, what they could not win through persuasion. She supports this kind of activity yet criticizes "Straussian" truth squads for asking professors difficult questions in class. I will leave it to others to examine whether such truth squads ever actually existed, and if so, whether such activities were unique to "Straussians." Norton seems to be saying that an entire university can be violently seized, lives threatened, and property damaged or destroyed, on the basis of a political agenda she approves of, but a professor ought not be asked difficult questions in class.

Dr. Norton's analysis culminates in an account that would locate the source of Bloom's racist, sexist and elitist views in resentment that flows from being a Jew and a homosexual granted entrée into elite society. Once there, she suggests, he sought to prevent other outsiders from gaining similar entrée (68–73). This diagnosis amounts to little more than name-calling on stilts. Unable to address the substance of Bloom's arguments in *The Closing of the American Mind*, Norton falls back on psychobabble to try to discredit him. Precisely what any of this has to do with the Bush administration foreign policy remains unclear.

If one is going to try to argue for Strauss's influence on the Bush administration foreign policy, it makes sense to discuss in detail the work of some of his better-known students or colleagues who claim his influence. Harry Jaffa, Harvey Mansfield, and Thomas Pangle have published on the nature of the American regime and have had something to say about U.S.

foreign policy. Any serious account of this subject must address these thinkers. Such an account will not be easy since these are subtle and learned scholars who often disagree on fundamental matters. Anne Norton, on the evidence of this book, is not up to the task. A careful analysis by a thoughtful scholar might find a common thread that leads back to Strauss, and perhaps forward to figures like Carnes Lord or Abram Shulsky. If one were interested in domestic policy then Allan Bloom and Leon Kass might provide the starting point for a similar thread.

IV. BIGOTRIES

The claim of “Straussian” influence has been asserted in many quarters, but it has recently been forcefully expressed by Lyndon LaRouche and his followers. The claim ought to be taken on its merits and not simply dismissed by its association with LaRouche. Still, as the title of LaRouche’s tract, *Children of Satan*, indicates, as well as the frequent use of the word “cabal,” there is at times a trace, intended or not, of Jew-hatred in the claim.

One of the standard tropes of contemporary Jew-hatred, next to Holocaust denial, is to call Jews “Nazis.” This, of course, is nonsensical, but let us take a look at LaRouche’s version of the “Straussian” cabal claim: “Speaking in terms of epistemology, the ‘genetically’ Nazi-like ideology of a Strauss, was that of a figure whose own writings like those of his underling Allan Bloom, recall those of Nazi philosopher, Martin Heidegger, who influenced Strauss” (“Insanity as Geometry: Rumsfeld as ‘Strangelove II’”). This basic assertion is repeated in slight variations over and over again as if mere repetition of the words “Nazi” and “Strauss” in the same sentence will somehow establish a connection. Here is another version: “The point of the pamphlet...was the fact that a so-called ‘neo-conservative’ network...organized around the influence of Professor Leo Strauss—a follower of the Nazi existentialist Martin Heidegger, Nazi legal figure Carl Schmitt, and Hegelian Alexander Kojeve—are the core of the current pro-war faction inside the current Bush administration’s Defense and State Departments...” (“LaRouche Replies to Bartley Column”). At a campaign speech, LaRouche made his views clear: “What we did, is, we brought Nazi thinkers—I mean, Leo Strauss was a Jew. But he was a Nazi Jew!” (“Fight Fascism the Way Franklin Roosevelt Did”).

It is perhaps best to allow LaRouche’s statements to stand without further comment, but I think it useful to view the “Straussian” influence claim in its purest form. This then leads to another question: is

Jew-hatred a necessary part of the myth of “Straussian” influence? One has to wonder whether the claim of a “Straussian” cabal, like the claim of anti-Zionism, is just a new way to provide politically correct cover for old-fashioned Jew-hatred.

Norton is more circumspect than LaRouche but there is, nevertheless, a similar network of associations at play: “Leo Strauss entered the American academy from a particular place... Among the most important figures in this intellectual company are Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Carl Schmitt.... They [Strauss and Arendt] were German Jews, educated in the German universities of the 1920s and 1930s” (35). A few pages later, she emphasizes that Strauss and Arendt, had both “regarded Heidegger as a philosopher of unquestioned brilliance” (37). Norton reports a rumor that Arendt rejected Strauss, “because he had initially admired Hitler” (38). “Leo Strauss,” she says, “joined Carl Schmitt and Alexandre Kojève in their critique of liberalism and liberal institutions” (109). She also tells us that Schmitt “was to become the leading jurist of the Third Reich. Before that he wrote a letter recommending Leo Strauss for the fellowship that would enable him to make his way out of Germany....” (38–39).

Norton’s version of the cabal thesis works through innuendo. Strauss had written a brief review of an early draft of one of Schmitt’s books and Schmitt in turn had recommended Strauss for a fellowship. Schmitt, like Heidegger, went on to join the Nazi party, therefore, Norton seems to be suggesting, Strauss must also have been a Nazi sympathizer or at least a rightwing sympathizer. We expect this sort of thing from LaRouche, but not from an Ivy League professor. Of course, if one takes Schmitt’s Nazi sympathies seriously, then the idea that he would help a Jew get out of Germany seems improbable. Schmitt, it is worth pointing out, has arguably been more influential on the left than on the right (see *Telos* 109, Fall 1996). Norton is less judgmental than LaRouche when it comes to Heidegger, the intellectual godfather of the postmodern movement, and the decisive influence on her own intellectual heroes.

Norton goes on to give facile accounts of Schmitt’s concept of ‘the political’ and Arendt’s distinction between public and private. She vaguely suggests that Strauss accepted these views, but never establishes this by reference to any of his works. A comparison between the thinking of Strauss and Arendt would make for a fascinating discussion. But whenever Norton has a choice between gossip and substance, she opts for gossip (37–42).

For Norton, Strauss, at times seems to be a sort of rightwing intellectual, at other times, a natural rights absolutist (75 and 120ff.), but most of the time, as we saw earlier, she seems to want to suggest a fuzzy postmodern Strauss. The first view is on display in the central chapter of her book. Her comparison of Strauss's work to that of the intellectual forefather of contemporary Islamic fascist movements, Sayyid Qutb, is so strained and ridiculous that in the end it is simply laughable (110–15). Laughable, that is, until one remembers that Strauss, a German Jew, left his country as it was being taken over by a fascist movement similarly guided by Jew-hatred.

The fundamental weaknesses of Norton's book reach a kind of climax in its final chapters. Here is one of Norton's more ludicrous statements: "At school, Straussian students told me that Arabs were dirty, they were animals, they were vermin. Now I read Straussian books and articles, in editorials and postings on websites, that Arabs are violent, they are barbarous, they are enemies of civilization, they are Nazis" (210–11). One expects a list of the books, articles, etc., that make this claim, but none ensues. All we get is a tepid quote from Jaffa that the Palestinian Authority, not Arabs in general, is a gangster regime, "like the Nazis." She does go on a bit about the book by Richard Perle and David Frum (*An End to Evil: How to Win the War Against Terror*), but Perle and Frum are not "Straussians" by any reasonable definition. Certainly neither calls himself a "Straussian." At a minimum, then, we expect an anecdote from her student days that might go something like this: "I was in class one day, and Lerner was going on about Farabi, when suddenly this Straussian student leans over and says, 'those Arabs sure are vermin!'" But, alas, Norton cannot even muster an anecdote. What is clear is that the denigrating language that Norton attributes, with no evidence, to "Straussians" vis-à-vis Arabs, is precisely the same language ("dirty," "animals," "vermin") that was, and continues to be used by European and Middle Eastern Jew-haters.

By the end of Norton's book, the claim of "Straussian" influence has a familiar if troubling ring. A secret cabal lead by men with names like Wolfowitz and Shulsky, bound together by perverse practices, is covertly guiding U.S. foreign and domestic policy in an effort to create a world empire.

Those who wish to make a compelling case for "Straussian" influence must be unusually sensitive to the possibility that the claim is merely a disguise for a re-emergent Jew-hatred. It may well be that a trace of such hatred is a necessary component of the claim regardless of the particular intentions of the person who makes it.

V. CONCLUSION

Much as Norton had diagnosed Bloom as a self-hating gay Jew racist with a serious case of status anxiety, an unfriendly critic, using her approach, might well diagnose Norton as a Jew-hating homophobic Ivy League snob with a serious case of castration anxiety. But this is just a way to don intellectual and moral pretensions while avoiding the difficult work of reading and criticizing a serious scholar's work. No reasonable person would accept such accusations, and would likely consider the person who made them a charlatan.

In the case of Norton's book, however, there is no substance, no serious scholarly work. Some may find her recollections from her student days evoke a certain nostalgia, and others may find her various asides and digressions of interest, but the main claim of her book is supported by exactly nothing.

It might be possible to claim that this book is intended for a popular audience so the usual standards of scholarship do not apply. I decided to look at how Professor Norton's scholarly books had been received. This is from a review of her book on the culture of the antebellum South: "The documentation that is provided is irregular, incomplete, and often inaccurate. No sources are given for a number of anecdotes and quotations, and what are represented as direct quotes are often, in truth, paraphrasings" (Jan Lewis, *The American Historical Review* 92:1274). One would expect that a book written for professional peers would have appropriate scholarly documentation. That does not seem to be the case here, so one must be concerned by a lack of proper documentation in a book intended for a popular audience where the standards are not as exacting.

When I looked at other reviews there was a clear pattern. Those who share Norton's postmodern sympathies use adjectives like, "impressionistic," "heterogeneous," "aphoristic," "unorthodox." Those who are being honest use expressions like, "unstructured," "perplexing," "distorted clichés," "willfully blinkered," and "jargon-laden." Much the same could be said of the book currently under review with one exception.

In her book on Strauss and the "Straussians," Norton has let her postmodern jargon fall by the wayside at the cost of revealing her serious limitations as a scholar and critic. It is not a pretty sight. Perhaps she was wise to leave the "Straussian" orbit.

