Interpretation
A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Winter 1991-92 Volume 19 Number 2

117  Kenneth Dorter  Freedom and Constraints in Prometheus Bound

137  Joseph Cropsey  Virtue and Knowledge: On Plato’s Protagoras

157  Michael Davis  Politics and Poetry: Aristotle’s Politics, Books VII and VIII

169  Marie A. Martin  Misunderstanding and Understanding Hume’s Moral Philosophy: An Essay on Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy, by Nicholas Capaldi

185  Hugh Gillis  Translator  Kojève-Fessard Documents

201  Glenn N. Schram  The Place of Leo Strauss in a Liberal Education

Book Review

217  Will Morrisey  Questions Concerning the Law of Nature, by John Locke
Interpretation

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Postage outside U.S.: Canada $4.50 extra;
• elsewhere $5.40 extra by surface mail (8 weeks or longer) or $11.00 by air.

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Composition by Eastern Graphics, Binghamton, N.Y. 13901
Printed and bound by Wickersham Printing Co., Lancaster, PA 17603

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*Book Review*

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ISSN 0020-9635
“Cypris, you are no god. You are something stronger than a god if that can be”
—Euripides. 

When we think of Prometheus, stretched out above us, his arms spread apart and nailed down, a gaping wound in his side, it is hard not to think of this god, who sacrificed himself to save humankind from divine punishment, in terms that are alien to Aeschylus’ conception. Every age has reinterpreted the myth in accordance with its own values, a renewal that is not only inevitable but—in accordance with the implications of Aeschylus’ treatment of the story—demanded by the implications of the myth itself. Nevertheless, this has the disadvantage that Aeschylus’ own penetrating account is not read carefully enough.

Later ages treat the myth as simple allegory, the terms of which are constantly rewritten: martyrdom versus tyranny, enlightenment versus ignorance, the heroic creative individual versus paternalistic conformity. Today we might easily treat it ironically. The techne given to us for our survival becomes the eventual instrument of our technological self-destruction: Zeus merely turns Prometheus’ treachery into “the cunning of reason”; Prometheus’ gift converges with Zeus’ counter-gift of Pandora. None of these uses of the myth as a cultural archetype is inappropriate. But the ease by which we make the story into a symbol of what we already know closes our ears to Aeschylus’ voice and our minds to the subtlety and insight of his thought. In Aeschylus’ hands the myth is less about the relationship between oppression and heroism than about the relationship between will and nature, less about domination and resistance than about freedom and fate. The details of his play have more to teach us than the seductive simplicity of its archetypes.

In the middle of the play the following exchange occurs:

**PROMETHEUS:** Craft is far weaker than necessity.
**CHORUS:** Who then is the steersman of necessity?
**PROMETHEUS:** The triple-formed Fates and the remembering Furies.
**CHORUS:** Is Zeus weaker than these?
**PROMETHEUS:** Yes, for he, too, cannot escape what is smote. (514–18)

This notion of necessity and fate is rarely mentioned in reflections on Prometheus. It is not a *deus ex machina*, but rather the key to Aeschylus’ un-
derstanding of the relationship between Prometheus and Zeus. Ultimately the meaning of their antagonism points beyond themselves and beyond human beings.

1

Unnoticed beside the portrayal of Zeus as cruel and tyrannical is the fact that in less obvious ways Prometheus too is portrayed in a not entirely flattering light. In the case of Zeus the negativity is straightforward. Gone is the story of Epimetheus’ slow-witted bungling which neglected to reserve any instrument of survival for humankind. Gone too is the deception by which Prometheus tricked Zeus into choosing bones and fat instead of meat as the sacrificial portion of the gods, and thereby infuriated Zeus against humanity. Instead of bungling and humiliation we are given a deliberately murderous Zeus:

As soon as he ascended to the throne that was his father’s, straightaway he assigned to the several gods their several privileges and portioned out the power, but to the unhappy breed of mankind he gave no heed, intending to blot the race out and create a new. (230–35)

On the most obvious level it may have been Aeschylus’ intention to reflect on the rule of Pisistratus, who was tyrant from 561–527, two years before Aeschylus’ birth—or, more likely, that of his son Hippias who continued the tyranny for the next sixteen years—but Aeschylus gives the theme a universality that makes its immediate referent comparatively unimportant.

The negative elements in the characterization of Prometheus, on the other hand, are not only less straightforward, but are easier to miss because our sympathy for his situation leads us to look at him less critically than he may deserve. In Aeschylus’ presentation he is no mere victim or martyr. That quality is not absent, to be sure, as the chorus’ response to his courage witnesses. In the central choral ode immediately preceding the entrance of Io, they rebuke him for his foolhardy defiance of Zeus and sing of the importance of honoring Zeus’ rule (526–60). After Io’s departure they again counsel obedience, saying, “Wise are the worshippers of Adrasteia” (936). But immediately after this Hermes arrives, and the chorus, after watching Prometheus stand up to Hermes’ threats in the name of Zeus, abandon their prudent docility. When Hermes sends them away for their own safety they reply, with their final speech: “How can you bid us practice baseness? We will bear along with him what we must bear. I have learned to hate all traitors: there is no disease I spit on more than treachery” (1063–70).

But if martyrdom is an element in Prometheus’ character, it is woven together with less attractive traits. When Hermes says to him, “No one could bear you in success” (979), we might be inclined to dismiss this as the prejudiced
Freedom and Constraints in Prometheus Bound · 119

view of an enemy. But the sentiment was already anticipated by his friend and would-be ally, Oceanus: “this is what you pay, Prometheus, for that tongue of yours which talked so high and haughty” (320–21). It is easy enough to judge for ourselves, since Aeschylus gives us ample evidence. We might set aside, as understandable in the circumstances, Prometheus’ insulting manner toward Hermes, when at the end of the play the latter arrives to convey Zeus’ threats, and complains that “You mock me like a child” (985). But his treatment of Hermes is only an extreme form of his treatment of others generally.

Wherever he himself has power over others he lords it over them. With his cousins, the Oceanids, he is at least cordial, but it is always clear that he is the star and they his audience. His very powerlessness, and their answering pity, is used as a means of holding sway over them. They come in answer to his opening words: “Bright light and swift-winged winds, springs of the rivers, numberless, laughter of the sea’s waves, earth, mother of all, and the all-seeing circle of the sun: I call upon you to see what I, a god, suffer at the hands of gods” (88–92). After the Oceanids arrive and, having heard his story, express their sorrow for him, he advises: “But do not sorrow for my present suffering; alight on earth and hear what is to come, that you may know the whole complete: I beg you alight and join your sorrow with mine” (273–77). Their relationship will consist primarily of Prometheus’ explanations and complaints and the Oceanids’ sympathy and praise. When the Oceanids say, “My heart is pained,” Prometheus replies, “Yes, to my friends I am pitiable to see” (247–78). His final words, like his opening ones, are: “O Sky that circling brings the light to all, you see me, how I suffer, how unjustly” (1092–93). The tactic of working on his visitors’ pity is deliberate, Aeschylus shows us. He has Prometheus advise Io, “To make wail and lament for one’s ill fortune, when one will win a tear from the audience is well worthwhile” (637–79). In the absence of power, he uses his weakness to control his relationship with his cousins.

The one character in the play toward whom he is in a formally subordinate position, the well-meaning Oceanus, who is his paternal grandfather and maternal uncle, he will not allow to be present. Oceanus’ first words are:

I come on a long journey . . . to visit you . . . My heart is sore for your misfortunes; you know that. I think that it is kinship makes me feel them so. Besides, apart from kinship, there is no one I hold in higher estimation . . . Tell me how I can help you, and you will never say that you have any friend more loyal to you than Oceanus. (286–99)

It is a touching speech, but it puts Prometheus in his debt, and Prometheus replies with anger:

What do I see? Have you, too, come to gape in wonder at this great display, my torture? . . . Was it to feast your eyes upon
In fact Oceanus has no intention of standing clear of danger, but wants to intercede with Zeus on Prometheus' behalf. Prometheus will not allow it, however:

**OCEANUS:** Tell me, what danger do you see for me in loyalty to you, and courage therein?

**PROMETHEUS:** I see only useless effort and a silly good nature.

**OCEANUS:** Suffer me then to be sick of this sickness, for it is a profitable thing, if one is wise, to seem foolish.

**PROMETHEUS:** This shall seem to be my fault.

**OCEANUS:** Clearly your words send me home again.

**PROMETHEUS:** Yes, lest your doings for me bring you enmity. (383–90)

This last speech puts Prometheus' behavior in a nobler light, but we must question the purity of the sentiment, for he expresses no such worries for Oceanus' daughters. When he invites them to join him he already knows the torments that will thereby be inflicted on them at the end of the play—"I have known all before exactly (skethrōs), all that shall be" (101–2). His first words to Oceanus showed an annoyance which he only gradually tames into the appearance of solicitude. By sending him away for his own safety, Prometheus manages to transform Oceanus' generosity toward him into a generosity of his own toward Oceanus, a reversal of his position of subordination into one of superiority.

If he dominates the Oceanids through pity and rises above Oceanus by an inversion of generosity, his condescension shows its unadulterated form in his relationship to Io, the one figure in the play who is his complete inferior. He vaunts his superiority over her in at least three ways. First, by teasing her (and the chorus of Oceanids) into begging him for information about himself and about her fate. He will later admit that he welcomes such questions: "If anything of this is still obscure or difficult ask me again and learn clearly: I have more leisure than I wish" (816–18). But when Io asks why he is being punished he becomes coy and hesitant:

**PROMETHEUS:** I have just this moment ceased from the lamentable tale of my sorrows.

**IO:** Will you then grant me this favor?

**PROMETHEUS:** Say what you are asking for: I will tell you all.

**IO:** Tell who it was that nailed you to the cliff.

**PROMETHEUS:** The plan was the plan of Zeus, and the hand the hand of Hephaestos.

**IO:** And what was the offense of which this is the punishment?
Prometheus: It is enough that I have told you a clear story so far.
Io: In addition, then, indicate to me what date shall be the limit of my wanderings.
Prometheus: Better for you not to know this than know it.
Io: I beg you, do not hide from me what I must endure.
Prometheus: It is not that I grudge you this favor.
Io: Why then delay to tell me all?
Prometheus: It is no grudging, but I hesitate to break your spirit.
Io: Do not have more thought for me than pleases me myself.
Prometheus: Since you are so eager, I must speak. (613-30)

Io: Your prophesy has now passed the limits of understanding.
Prometheus: Then also do not seek to learn your trials.
Io: Do not offer me a boon and then withhold it.
Prometheus: I offer you then one of two stories. . . Choose that I tell you clearly either what remains for you or the one that shall deliver me.
Chorus: Grant her one and grant me the other
Prometheus: Since you have so much eagerness I will not refuse. . . (775-86)

The disingenuous disclaimer, that he cannot bring himself to tell Io what awaits her lest he break her spirit, would itself be enough to break one’s spirit—like a fortune teller who gasps in horror at her crystal ball and says, “I’d better not tell you this; I don’t want to upset you.” In fact Prometheus takes evident delight in encouraging and savoring Io’s terror at what awaits her. “You groan too soon,” he tells the chorus with regard to Io’s fate, “you are full of fear too soon: wait till you hear besides what is to be” (696-97). And to Io herself: “Are you crying and lamenting: what will you do when you hear of the evils to come?” (743-44).

Third, not only does he seem to enjoy and encourage her anguish, but he denies her the sympathy which he himself so openly values, and which he had himself encouraged her to solicit (637-39). When she takes his advice, and wails and laments that she might as well throw herself from a cliff if the future holds such suffering for her, she has reason to expect some sympathy from him. What he says to her is, “You would ill bear my trials, then, for whom fate reserves no death” (752-53).

II

Why is Prometheus portrayed so ambiguously? On one hand as humanity’s benefactor, martyred by the tyrant who would have destroyed us. On the other, ungracious toward his seniors, shamelessly self-pitying before his peers, insensitive and condescending toward the helpless? One reason (another will be suggested later) is that the characterization discourages us from viewing him simply and exclusively as a martyr, or as “the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the
best and noblest ends” (Shelley, Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*). Prometheus’ arrogance suggests to us not merely a victim of injustice, but a regal victim of injustice, one who sees himself as the equal of any king and who can “hold court” in even the most adverse circumstances. The play depicts a contest between near-equals which will end, not with Zeus’ overthrow but nevertheless with his compromise.

Prometheus’ near-equality with Zeus lies not merely in his secret knowledge of Zeus’ vulnerability, but in a range of forces which Prometheus represents, opposite in kind to those controlled by Zeus. The polarity is signalled in the first scene. Prometheus “gave honors to man beyond what was just [pera dikēs]”, remarks Hephaestus at line 30. But a little later he adds, “No one, save Prometheus, can justly [endikōs] blame me” (63). There is an implicit contrast between rival standards of justice. Each will be seen to have a different basis. Unlike the Oresteia, however, the contrast will not be between folk and civic justice, but between justice grounded in nature and justice imposed by force.

Prometheus’ opening words invoked the elements—aether, air, water, earth, fire: “Bright light [aither] and swift-winged winds, springs of the rivers, numberless laughter of the sea’s waves, earth, mother of all, and the all-seeing circle of the sun.” Throughout the play he is associated with the natural elements. He is the fire-bearer whose only immortal visitors are Ocean and the Oceanids. Although his mother is Themis (justice) he twice addresses her as Earth (Gaia, who was Zeus’ mother), and insists: “Themis, Gaia, she is but one although her names are many” (211). But according to Hesiod Themis was Gaia’s daughter (*Theogony* 132–35). This is part of a general contrast between Prometheus and Zeus as the representatives and champions of the natural and arbitrary powers respectively. Unlike Prometheus, Zeus is nowhere in the play associated with nature gods, but rather with the untraditional gods, Strength (Kratos) and Force (Bia), and with Hermes, the instrument of his commands. The contrast is strengthened by connecting Prometheus with the female element (the Oceanids, Io, his mother and grandmother—Oceanus is dismissed) and Zeus with the male. Their relationship as counterparts is reflected in the fact that “most of the characteristics attributed to Zeus by Prometheus are also attributed to Prometheus himself by the Chorus or by other characters in the play.”

Zeus’ realm is that of the arbitrary. “Zeus alone is truly free” (50). “New are the customs by which Zeus rules, customs that have no law to them” (149–50). “His justice is a thing he keeps by his own standard” (189–90), “a despot’s private laws” (404). But force begets isolation. “This is a sickness rooted and inherent in the nature of a tyranny: that he that holds it does not trust his friends” (226–67). If Prometheus is bound in a sense that is the antithesis to Zeus’ freedom, he is also bound in a different sense that is the antithesis to Zeus’ isolation. Where the tyrant forges the bonds of unfreedom, nature forges the bonds of kinship. The mistrust of Zeus inspired by power is answered by
the loyalty to Prometheus inspired by kinship. Hephaestus’ first speech contains the words, “I have not the heart to bind by force a god who is my kin. . . . Yet there is constraint upon me” (14–16). “Our kinship has strange power,” he adds later (39). Not a word about feelings of kinship and loyalty toward his father, Zeus. Oceanus says in his opening speech, “My heart is sore for your misfortunes. . . . I think it is kinship makes me feel them so” (290–91). He is Prometheus’ paternal grandfather and maternal uncle. But he is Zeus’ brother and seems to feel no fraternal loyalty toward Zeus’ position in the dispute. When the Oceanids say at the end, “I have learned to hate all traitors: there is no disease I spit on more than treachery” (1068–70), it is ironically not Prometheus’ treachery toward Zeus that they have in mind. They are denouncing instead the possibility of betraying their loyalty to Prometheus, when Hermes advises them to flee.

III

The weapons made available to Prometheus by his ties to nature are of two kinds, the first implying Zeus’ weakness, the second Prometheus’ strength. In a general way the limitation of Zeus’ power by nature itself is at the very heart of the contest between Zeus and Prometheus. When Zeus “portioned out the power, . . . to the unhappy breed of mankind he gave no heed, intending to blot the race out and create a new. Against these plans none stood save I” (230–36). But how can the comparatively meager gifts which Prometheus bestowed upon humankind enable us to withstand the destructive powers of Zeus? If he wishes to blot us out, how can rudimentary techne protect us? His powers evidently are limited to those conferred upon him by nature. To blot us out means, for Zeus, to refuse to rescue us from our helplessness against the inhospitality of our environment: severity of weather, scarcity of food, predations of animals. Annihilatory “miracles” of a supernatural order are beyond his powers.7

Zeus’ limitation by nature goes beyond the fact of nature’s setting limits to his powers; he cannot overcome a potentially fatal weakness in his own nature. One deity, Aphrodite, will prove too strong even for Zeus. Love will provide the means both for Prometheus’ deliverance “against Zeus’ will” (771),8 and for Zeus’ own downfall, as Prometheus reveals in his final speech to Io (823–76). Zeus’ love for Io, and Hera’s jealous love of Zeus, were the beginning of Io’s ordeal. When Zeus heals her with a gentle touch, the encounter will impregnate her with Epaphus. After five generations the line is about to be wiped out, as fifty women flee to Argos from the incestuous advances of their kin. God (theos) forbids this union and the women murder the men in bed. But Zeus’ plan (if the god was Zeus) is crucially compromised: “one among these girls shall love (himêros) beguile from killing her bedfellow . . . and from her seed
shall spring a man renowned for archery, and he shall set me free.” The advent of Heracles thus depends on two cited acts of love overmastering prudence. Even Zeus, who hears this prediction, will be unable to resist healing his beloved Io, as the unnamed maiden (Hypermnestra) will later be overcome by love for her incestuous pursuer. Beyond that, Zeus will succumb to a third, uncited, instance of imprudent lust. Not only will his passion for Io lead to his fathering of Heracles’ ancestor Epaphos, but his subsequent passion for another mortal, Alcmeone, will father Heracles himself.

In describing the incest-murders, Prometheus says, “Even so may love come, too, upon my enemies”—drawing the connection between the means of his deliverance and the means of Zeus’ downfall: “He shall make a marriage that shall hurt him. . . . She shall bear him a son mightier than his father” (764–68). Prometheus’ power over Zeus resides in his knowledge, to be revealed in exchange for his freedom, that the goddess of whom this is fated is Thetis. Knowledge of this is Prometheus’ greatest strength, as Zeus’ extramarital lust is his greatest vulnerability. As his name, Forethought, implies, Prometheus’ strength lies not only in the knowledge of Zeus’ danger, but in his intelligence and knowledge generally. Zeus, on the other hand, is empty-minded (kenophrôn; 762). If arbitrary force seeks to impose its will without regard for what we might call the natural order, intelligence is its contrary, bringing about success by discerning and acting upon the possibilities offered by the nature of things. Consequently, just as nature is ultimately stronger than arbitrary force, so too is intelligence. “Not by strength or overmastering force the fates allowed the conquerors to conquer but by guile (dolôi) only” (214–15). Zeus’ rule can be broken only by “a device of subtlety” (palama; 166–67). It may be true that Thetis is destined to bear a son mightier than his father, but his might is not the only factor: Zeus “shall need me . . . to show the new plan (bouleum’) whereby he may be spoiled of his throne and his power” (170–72).

Implicit in all this is a cyclical view of history. Whenever the reins of power change hands it must be the work of intelligence rather than brute force. Kronos deposed Uranos not because he was stronger but because of Gaia’s plan that he castrate Uranos during intercourse. But once in power Kronos abandoned subtlety in favor of brute force:

When first the gods began their angry quarrel . . .
I then with the best counsel tried to win
the Titans, son of Uranos and Earth,
but failed. They would have none of crafty schemes
and in their savage arrogance of spirit
thought they would lord it easily by force
. . . [It seemed best
to take my mother and join Zeus’ side:
he was as willing as we were:
thanks to my plans the dark receptacle
of Tartarus conceals the ancient Kronos. (201–22)

Now Zeus, too, becomes reluctant to favor Forethought, and resorts to mere brutality. It is a universal pattern: “Every ruler is harsh whose rule is new,” says Hephaestus (35). History appears as a series of cycles, a perennial polarity between intelligence and force. Only the intelligence that recognizes the possibilities inherent in the nature of things can create something new. Brute force is merely repressive, prolonging what has been accomplished but bringing nothing truly new into being. The first immediately passes over into the second in order to perpetuate itself as long as possible. The second withers into an empty shell that falls before a resurgence of the first, whether in the form of a revolution (Kronos against Uranos, Zeus against Kronos) or a renewal, such as would occur if Zeus accepts Prometheus as an ally against the phantom heavenly counterpart of Achilles.9 The philosophical accuracy of Aeschylus’ presentation is evident from our own experience, not only in politics but in all forms of human creativity. The creative rebels in the arts and sciences in turn become the intolerant conservatives and reactionaries once they triumph. This is perhaps another reason that even in the character of Prometheus the seeds of megalomania are made evident, not only in his treatment of his enemies (Hermes, Zeus) but also in that of his friends (Oceanus, the Oceanids, Io). We sense that were Prometheus himself ever to hold power his yoke would not be light, and that Hermes’ prediction, “No one could bear you in success,” is not unfounded. The inseparability of the natures of Prometheus and Zeus is especially evident in two passages, one of which assimilates Zeus to Prometheus, the other Prometheus to Zeus. In the middle of the play Prometheus refers to Zeus’ power as “techne” (514), the term everywhere else associated with Prometheus himself; and in recounting his gifts to humanity Prometheus reveals that he pursued the repressive strategy of Zeus rather than his own tendency toward enlightenment: Forethought took away our foresight (of doom) and replaced it with blindness (blind hope) (250–2).10

IV

The interplay between the natural and the arbitrary, between intelligence and force, is only one side of Aeschylus’ complex play of forces. An interpretation of the story of how Prometheus rescued mortals is also implicitly an interpretation of the nature of humanity. As has just been noted, Prometheus mentions two gifts which he bestowed on human beings. (1) “I caused mortals to cease foreseeing doom. I placed in them blind hopes” (Tuphlas . . . elpidas; 250–52). (2) “Besides this I gave them fire . . . and from it they shall learn many crafts” (254–56).

It is unclear what is meant by “foreseeing doom.” In the version of the myth
which Socrates recounts in the *Gorgias*, mortals knew in advance the moment when they would die (523d), and the present passage is often interpreted in that light. But if that were what is meant here, why would the cure be “blind hopes,” rather than a simple erasure of foreknowledge, as it is in the *Gorgias* (d–e)? Doom (*moron*) may refer to death, but in the present context that seems to mean not the moment of death but the fact of death. “Foreseeing doom” would then refer to something like despair at our finitude and ephemerality. (Humans are called *ephēmeroi* [creatures of a day, ephemeral] at 83, 255, 547.) But perhaps not only to that.

Later Prometheus mentions a third gift:

I found mortals witless (*nēpios*) and gave them the use of their wits (*ennous*) and made them masters of their minds (*phrenon*) . . . Humans at first had eyes but saw to no purpose; they had ears but did not hear. Like the shapes of dreams they dragged through their long lives and handled all things in bewilderment and confusion. (443–49)

Prometheus teaches them to build houses rather than live in caves. He teaches them about seasons and the planting of crops; about astronomy and the measurement of time; calculation and writing; the harnessing of farm animals and of horses for the carriages of the rich; the building of ships (450–68). When the chorus compares him to a doctor who cannot heal himself, Prometheus replies that the greatest gift he gave to humans was medicine. He also taught us the arts of divination and of sacrifice, and revealed the mineral riches of the earth (476–503). The powers he has given to humans are the powers of nature and understanding, not the powers of force. The arts are a kind of knowledge, not a kind of coercion. Only in the references to gold and silver, and to the privileged rich in their carriages (“the crowning pride of the rich person’s luxury”) do we perhaps hear intimations of a politics that may involve artificial values, a reappearance at the human level of the transition from creativity to repression. These intimations become fully explicit when Prometheus tells Io of the three races she will encounter in her future travels. Keep away from the Scythians, he tells her: “they are an armed people, armed with the bow that strikes from far away.” And beware of “the Chalybes who work with iron,” “for they are not gentle, nor people whom a stranger dare approach.” She must go to “the Amazons, the race of women who hate men” (709–24). Prometheus has only just given human beings the crafts, but by the time Io makes this future journey—in the vicinity of the river Violence (*Hubristēs*)—they will already have been turned to the service of warfare. This double edge of techne was adumbrated in the opening scene, as we witnessed the champion of techne being punished by means of the techne (47) of Hephaestus.11

In pre-Promethean days there was no history—neither progress nor cycles—merely a dreamlike marginal existence. We cannot doubt that post-Promethean existence is for us an improvement, since the alternative was annihilation. But
the interplay between creativity and repression appears as much among mortals as among gods. The life of the gods is an alternation between the violence of repression and the violence of rebellion, and we can already see the emergence of the former among mortals, making the latter inevitable in its wake. The beneficiaries of Prometheus’ guile, whether divine or human, will discover that its power, like all power, is power that corrupts. But from that corruption will emerge renewed life, like the Phoenix, that other symbol of fire. If the Prometheus story is a political myth, in Aeschylus’ hands it is not a myth of liberation but of the pendulum. Perhaps this is why one techne that Prometheus never gives to humanity is that of politics (cf. Conacher, p. 51). There are no definitive liberations but only renewals, and renewals need not be liberating for anyone but their instigator. Kronos was no better than Uranos; Zeus is here no better than Kronos. There is no reason to expect more from a son of Zeus and Thetis, or, for that matter, from Prometheus himself should he ever achieve such power. Aeschylus’ characterization makes this all too clear.

What attitude toward life does this recommend? Judging by the hate-filled world that Io will travel through, the lives of all of us might be symbolized by Prometheus’ description of Io’s future as “A wintry sea of agony and ruin.” Io replies,

What good is life to me then? Why do I not throw myself at once from some rough crag, to strike the ground and win a quittance of all my troubles? It would be better to die once for all than suffer all one’s days. (747–51)

But she does not do so. She seems to believe that life will somehow be worth living after all. Perhaps she illustrates what Prometheus means by saying that he stopped us from foreseeing doom by placing in us blind hopes. Despite the pain and apparent futility of life, and the repetitive cycles of political disillusionment with liberators turned oppressors, we continue to hope that it is somehow worth while. The evidence is against it—hope must be blind.

What would it take to vindicate these hopes, hopes that may be blind without being false? Is the answer to be found in a here-and-now commitment which, by focusing only on what is at hand, learns to live without reliance on hope—a life such as was advocated by Epicurus in the ancient world, or one such as Camus advocated in ours? Is it to be found in the epochal events of historical renewal, however ephemeral, a historicism which locates meaning within the conditions and values that spawn a particular historical culture in its finite span? Or in some form of transcendence, perhaps in the contemplation of the eternity of the pattern of fate which remains constant through all these cycles, or, deeper still, perhaps in the underlying ground of that pattern and of everything else that exists? The remaining plays of the trilogy (Prometheus Unbound and Prometheus the Firebearer) are lost, and, with them, Aeschylus’ answers. On the basis of his only surviving trilogy, the Oresteia, it is tempting to conclude that Aeschylus may have finally portrayed a breaking of the old
cyclical patterns, an ultimate reconciliation of the perennial dichotomies.\textsuperscript{13} It can be taken as a foreshadowing of this that the chorus tells Prometheus, “I am of good hope that once freed of these bonds you will be no less in power than Zeus.” But the reply is ambiguous: “Not yet has fate . . . determined these things to be thus” (508–12).

\textbf{V}

There are tensions in the play which make such a solution questionable, for one of the most powerful forces in the play is never brought into the equation. It is a force that is given several names here, and which corresponds to our generalized concept of “love.” At the beginning of the play Kratos (Strength) twice identifies Prometheus’ “flaw” as his love of humanity (\textit{philanthrōpou} 11, 28). Prometheus later concurs, attributing his suffering to his “excessive love of mortals” (\textit{tēn lian philotēta brotōn}; 122)—the adjective an apparent acknowledgement of error. The chorus uses neither \textit{philia} nor \textit{philōtēs} but \textit{sebomai}, “revere”: “you revered mortals too much” (544). Just as Zeus’ love for Io and later for Thetis will cause him to act against self-interest, Prometheus’ love (philia) for humanity causes him to go too far, to forget himself, to betray his own nature. “The gods named you wrongly when they called you Forethought,” Kratos tells him; “you yourself need Forethought to extricate yourself from this contrivance” (85–87). “Know yourself,” Oceanos feels compelled to advise him (311). Prometheus himself, who earlier boasted of complete foreknowledge (101–2), seems to have deceived himself about the future consequence of his actions, and even to regret them now:

\begin{quote}
Willingly, willingly, I erred\textsuperscript{14} nor will deny it.
In helping humanity I brought my troubles on me;
but yet I did not think that with such tortures
I should be wasted on these airy cliffs. (269–71)
\end{quote}

In Zeus’ case the terms used for love are eros (\textit{ēroti}; 591), desire (\textit{himeros}; 649, cf. 865), Cypris (650, 864—an epithet of Aphrodite), longing (\textit{pothos}; 654), marriage (\textit{gamos}; 648, 738, 764). This variety of terms and connotations creates a bridge between the weaknesses exhibited by Zeus and Prometheus. They converge within the cluster of meanings from eros to philia. Philia, Prometheus’ weakness, can in fact have erotic connotations. In Homer, Euripides, Herodotus, and Aristophanes there are places where \textit{phileō} seems virtually equivalent to \textit{erō} (see Liddell-Scott-Jones, \textit{phileō}, paragraph 3; it is also a common term for “to kiss”). My point is not that Prometheus’ philia for humanity had anything erotic about it, but that one can conceive of the range between philia and eros as a single continuum. Our own awareness of a continuity from friendship to romance to eros was not unknown to the Greeks, even though they had no distinct word for the middle term. Plato speaks of how
friendship may become transformed into passion, and Aristotle of how eros may become transformed into friendship. No Greek term is as general as our "love," and this may partly explain the variety of Aeschylus' terminology in these passages. Zeus' love for Io is not mere lust, for in the end he confines his impregnation of her to a gentle healing touch (848–49). And while there is no indication that Prometheus' feelings for humankind are anything other than chaste, the chorus juxtaposes their chastisement of his excessive regard for humans with their recollection of his courtship of Hesione, whom he also won with gifts (544–60).

If Zeus and Prometheus are both made vulnerable by the power of Aphrodite, she appears as a third, almost unacknowledged force together with Zeus and Prometheus (the three of whom foreshadow Plato's tripartite soul: desire, ambition, reason). Born from the foam of Uranos' semen-filled genitals plunging into the sea, when he was castrated by Kronos during intercourse with Gaia, Aphrodite also symbolizes one of the major themes of the play: the rising up of the son against the "father" of the gods.

The earlier simple opposition between Prometheus and Zeus, as representative of nature and will, must now be refined. Aphrodite no longer can be subsumed within the power of Prometheus, even though she augmented his power by limiting that of Zeus, for it turns out that she undermines Prometheus' power as well. If Zeus and Prometheus represent the alternative forms of self-assertion—brute force and intellect—Aphrodite represents their mutual antithesis, obsession with an other. The obsession may be described as the being concerned about another person to an extent that threatens our intrinsic concern about our self. "Being concerned about" does not necessarily have altruistic implications. It refers as much to Zeus' selfish obsession with Io as to his (perhaps penitent) curing of her. The fact that such love is self-effacing in the sense of "other directed" does not make it benevolent. Self-sacrifice can go together with injustice to others as easily as self-destructive behavior can go with destructive behavior toward others. We may neglect our own best interests without replacing them with someone else's. Zeus' love for Thetis may lead him to assaults on her similar to those on Io, even though they would be destructive to himself since she will bear a son mightier than his father. What is constant in love is the preoccupation with an other, at the price of diminished attentiveness to self-interest. It is a secondary matter whether the preoccupation turns out to be beneficial or harmful, or whether the jeopardy to our self-interest becomes actual damage. Against all reason, intelligence, and forethought, Prometheus puts the needs of humanity before his own well being. Against what is needed to maintain his control over Prometheus, Zeus will put the needs of Io before his own.

To our post-Socratic, Christianized ears it seems paradoxical to regard altruism as a negative form, an irrationality and self-betrayal. Nevertheless, except for the mortal Io (613), no one in the play praises Prometheus for his sacrifice,
and even she seems to contemplate the edge of a cliff with more gratitude than she does Prometheus. The others cannot understand why he would make such a sacrifice for those who can do nothing for him. "What drop of your suffering can mortals spare you?" asks Kratos (83–84). The chorus of Oceanids agree: "Do you not see how you have erred?" (261–62); "Do not benefit mortals beyond what is appropriate, uncaring about your own misfortune" (507–8); "Kindness that cannot be required, tell me, where is the help in that, my friend? What succor in creatures of a day?" (545–47). Prometheus himself admits that he went too far (lian: 122). In passion we are passive, permitting the interests of others to act upon us. In the play's world of power politics, a love by which we allow others power over us (whether pity, lust, or simply tenderness) becomes a dangerous and irrational weakness. It is the same ground that gives rise to Thrasymachus' contemptuous dismissal of justice as a foolish and servile concern with what is good for others (Republic 1.343c).

From our Socratic heritage we are accustomed to thinking that reason leads to altruism, but in the world of Prometheus Bound is no justice-itself, no Idea of the good, by the contemplation of which we might overcome the standpoint of individuality. There is only the self and the other, mediated in one way by kinship, in another by love. The play ends with the visit of Hermes as Zeus' emissary. Hermes is not only the messenger of the gods, but also the god who "sanctifies" lying, cheating, and stealing. We will not find in this world the same presuppositions as in ours about the relationship among altruism, rationality, and holiness. Justice here means, primarily, self-interested obedience to Zeus the king, tempered only by the weaker obligations of kinship. The latter are quickly sacrificed if they come into too open a conflict with the former, as the examples of Hephaestus and Oceanus show. Only the chorus ultimately embraces familial loyalty against fear of the tyrant, but even this choice is not completely "irrational," for they are "of good hope that once freed of these bonds you will be no less in power than Zeus" (508–10). Reason or intelligence here means achieving one's ends by the power of thought rather than by brute force. It does not render comprehensible the sacrifice of one's own ends. That is simply irrational, error (hēmартες: 262) or unreason (ανοτας: 1079). If we think of justice as altruism, the possibility of justice resides here not in the power of thought (as in Plato) but in the power of irrational love, not Prometheus but Aphrodite. This possibility of justice coexists, however, with very different possibilities.

In her extreme form Aphrodite, the irrational, may become the madness of passion. Zeus' indiscretions are not committed with "Olympian" serenity: "Zeus is stricken with lust for you," Io is told in recurring night visions; "he is afire to consummate the union of Cypris with you" (649–51). Io's punishment at the hand of Hera, and with the connivance of Zeus himself (663–72), whom she resisted, echoes the kind of passionate frenzy that Zeus must have experienced in his obsession with her. By means of "the gadfly, the ghost of
earth-born Argos” (567–68), she is driven to a madness suggestive of erotic possession:

Eleleu, eleleu
   It creeps on me again, the twitching spasm,
   the mind-destroying madness, burning me up
   and the gadfly’s sting goads me on—
   steel point by no fire tempered—
   and my heart in its fear knocks on my breast.
There’s a dazing whirl in my eyes as I run
   out of my course by the madness driven,
   the crazy frenzy; my tongue ungoverned
   babbles, the words in a muddy flow strike
   on the waves of the mischief I hate, strike wild
   without aim or sense. (877–86)

VI

Aphrodite, the irrational, may be described in the same terms as the gadfly, who “comes even from within the depths to hound me” (573). Her subterranean nature is echoed by the play itself, where her presence is always felt without her ever being seen or even mentioned, except when her epithet Cypris is used to refer to sexual love. But her power is the power that has brought Prometheus, Zeus, and even Io all to their fate.

The reconciliation between Zeus and Prometheus that one anticipates in the final play of the trilogy would be a reconciliation of self-interest. Zeus would perhaps share his power equally with Prometheus, wedding intelligence to force, and neutralizing the antithesis whose tension gave rise to the cycles of power that preceded him and now threaten him. He would benefit by having an impregnable rule; Prometheus would benefit by being recognised as Zeus’ virtual equal; and the rest of the gods would benefit by having enlightened rulers. The class warfare between repressive force and creative intelligence would be sublated into perpetual amity.

But what will happen when next Zeus becomes inflamed with passion, or Prometheus with pity (oiktoi: 241)? Or when they are inflamed by hatred, which is counterpart to love as Ares is consort to Aphrodite. “Why are you pitying in vain?” Kratos asks Hephaistos. “Why is it that you do not hate (stugeis) a god whom the gods hate most of all (echthiston) since it was your honor that he betrayed to mortals?” (36–8). Io “set Zeus’ heart on fire with love and now she is . . . driven by Hera’s hate (stugeîtos)” (590-92). Prometheus is filled with hatred (echthos, stugnos: 975ff.) for his enemies. And even the gentle and compassionate chorus has “learned to hate (misein) all traitors” (1068). Throughout the play, and especially near the end, are references to hatred which balance those to love. Many of the instances have nothing to do with the
enmity between Prometheus and Zeus and would not be dispelled by its conciliation. The races of humans that Io will pass through are already full of hatred. Salmydessos, “the rocky jaw of the sea,” hates sailors (echthroxenos nautai: 727). The Gorgons hate mortals (brotostugeis: 799). Io hates (stugnēs: 886) the waves of ruin that wash over her. The power of Aphrodite is inseparable from that of her illegitimate consort, Ares, god of war, her counterpart in passion.

We may find an image of the indestructibility of passion in the continuous nocturnal regeneration of Prometheus’ liver—the seat of the passions, as the Greeks believed—after it is daily devoured by Zeus’ eagle. A still more vivid image is contained in a remarkable reminiscence by Prometheus, which at first seems merely a colorful but irrelevant digression (353–74). Along with Typho and Zeus, Hephaestus is mentioned in it. He has been absent since the first scene, but his role in the drama is a provocative one. Strictly speaking, his presence was not necessary at all, since Strength and Force (Kratos and Bia) could have nailed Prometheus to the cliff without his help. But he is a kind of double of Prometheus, a god who works through ingenuity and craft rather than through force, who, although crippled, defeated by means of guile the powerful warrior god Ares (cf. Odyssey 8.266ff.); and who, like Prometheus, is prone to pity (14ff.). The two of them, Prometheus and Hephaestus, used to spend their time together, Hephaestus tells us (39). There is even an alternate tradition according to which not Prometheus the potter, but Hephaestus the smith, gave techne to humanity. Hephaestus is similar to Prometheus, but not in the matter of defiance. Hephaestus is a conciliatory version of Prometheus—he is a creator god without hubris. It was Hephaestus who recognised the justice of both sides: both Prometheus’ injustice toward Zeus (pera dikēs: 30) and Zeus’ injustice toward Prometheus (endikōs mempsaito: 63). He may be seen as a personification of the possibility of rapprochement between Prometheus and Zeus. If we interpret Hephaestus in this way, then the combined force of Zeus and Hephaestus against the subterranean power of Aphrodite passion would give us some idea of how much stability we might expect from a Zeus-Prometheus alliance of force and reason.

The central character in Prometheus’ reminiscence is the subterranean monster Typho, about whom Hesiod writes:

But when Zeus had driven the Titans from heaven, huge Earth bore the youngest child Typho of the love of Tartarus [the deepest Underworld], by the aid of golden Aphrodite. Strength was with his hands in all that he did and the feet of the strong god were untiring. From his shoulders grew an hundred heads of a snake, a fearful dragon, with dark, flickering tongues, and from under the brows of his eyes in his marvellous heads flashed fire, and fire burned from his heads as he glared. And there were voices in all his dreadful heads which uttered every kind of sound unspeakable. . . And truly a thing past help would have happened on that day, and he would have come to reign over mortals and immortals, had not the father of men and gods been quick to perceive it. . . And through the two of them heat took hold on the dark-blue sea, through the thunder and lightning, and
Freedom and Constraints in Prometheus Bound • 133

through the fire from the monster, and the scorching winds and blazing thunderbolt. . . . But when Zeus had conquered him [by burning him with the thunderbolt] and lashed him with strokes, Typho was hurled down, a maimed wreck, so that the huge earth groaned. . . . And in the bitterness of his anger Zeus cast him into wide Tartarus. (Theogony 820–68)

Prometheus has seen the destroyed Typho and pitied him (his fatal passion). He recalls Typho’s failed assault on Zeus, and adds:

. . . now a sprawling mass
useless he lies, hard by the narrow seaway
pressed down beneath the roots of Aetna: high
above him on the mountain peak the smith
Hephaestos works at the anvil. Yet one day
there shall burst out rivers of fire, devouring
with savage jaws the fertile, level plains
of Sicily of the fair fruits; such boiling wrath
with weapons of fire-breathing surf, a fiery
unapproachable torrent shall Typho vomit,
though Zeus’ lightning left him but a cinder. (365–74) 20

Sitting on their mountaintops, Zeus plying his rule and Hephaestus his ingenuity, will eventually be undermined by the primitive raging passion buried beneath them. There is no reason to believe that having Prometheus rather than Hephaestus for his ally would put Zeus in a more secure position. But “not by strength or overmastering force the fates allowed the conquerors to conquer but by guile only” (214–15). Passion alone can never triumph entirely over reason and discipline, although it may subvert their stability and alliance. But if Prometheus’ pity for Typho gets the better of him, with whom will he ally himself this time?

However much the Prometheia may seem to be a trilogy about Enlightenment ideals, about the triumph of sweetness and light over harshness and ignorance, it continually evokes the autonomy and power of the irrational. Just as the tenuous perfection of Plato’s rational “rule of the best” will quickly become destabilized by the irrationality of eros and desire (Republic Books 8 and 9, beginning with 545d ff.), so too the seeds of the destruction of any utopian view that might be put forward in Prometheus the Firebearer are already visible in Prometheus Bound. Driven by unenlightenable passions, by primordial irrationality, the wheel of creative insight and brutal repression cannot stand still for long. To expect otherwise is blind hope.

NOTES

1. Hippolytus 359-60. This translation, and most of those from Prometheus Bound, are by David Grene. Occasionally I modify his translation or use my own.
2. Even in Plato's day there was a variety of versions of the Prometheus myth (Second Letter 311b). For a sweeping history of the way it was transformed by later ages, see Hans Blumenberg, Work on Myth, translated by R.M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), especially Parts III-V.

In the present interpretation I shall assume that Prometheus Bound was written by Aeschylus. For a discussion of the evidence for and against the play's authenticity, see D.J. Conacher, Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound: A Literary Commentary (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), Appendix 1. More recently C.J. Herington has reaffirmed his earlier book-length defense of its authenticity (The Author of 'Prometheus Bound' [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970]) in Aeschylus (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 160 ff.

3. Here Prometheus simply says, "I taught of the smoothness of the vitals and what color they should have to please the gods . . . . It was I who burned thighs wrapped in fat and the long shank bone and set mortals on the road to this murky craft" (493–98). The implication is that the sacrificial portions were determined by what gives the gods pleasure, rather than by a trick.

4. Prometheus' mother, Themis, was, like Oceanus, an offspring of Uranos and Gaia. His father, Iapetus, was the offspring of Oceanus and Oceanus' sister Tethys.

5. In a four element scheme aither—the fiery element of the sky—would be assimilated to fire, and the sun would repeat the fire element in another form, or else be treated as a separate deity. However, sometimes aether was treated as a fifth element, intermediate between air and fire. This might be the most natural, although not the usual, way to read the present passage.


7. Once humanity has been given techne in general, the latter becomes self-sustaining. Conacher notices that the order in which Prometheus' gifts are mentioned "suggests an evolutionary sequence, as if each new art were discovered in response to the new needs of a higher level of civilization, once the needs at the lower, more pressing level had been met. Such a sequence . . . is normally descriptive of man's own ingenuity in meeting each new challenge" (p. 49; cf. p. 83).

8. This is a significant departure from Hesiod, who emphasizes that Heracles' deliverance of Prometheus was "not without the will of Olympian Zeus who reigns on high, that the glory of Heracles the Theban-born might be yet greater than it was before" (Theogony 529–31, Evelyn-White translation; in some later passages I modify his translation slightly). Moreover, in Hesiod the deliverance refers only to the slaying of the eagle. Aeschylus here seems to be the first to make Heracles release Prometheus from his chains (cf. Conacher, p. 19).

9. Achilles is the son to whom Thetis gave birth when she married the mortal Peleus. Had she married Zeus, the son destined to be stronger than his father would have been Zeus' son.

10. For these two examples I am indebted to Rebecca Comay and Sam Ajzenstat respectively. Because of the dynamic reciprocity between guile and force, the fact that "neither Zeus nor Prometheus has exclusive claims on the two attributes" does not prove that an allegorical interpretation is misguided, as Conacher argues (p. 41). Conacher is surely right to resist the reduction of so subtle and complex a play to allegory alone, but there is an important allegorical dimension to it.

11. The irony is reinforced in more specific ways: "Prometheus is bound for and with his own device, the yoke; he is the victim of his own disposition; punished for having taught the healing art to men he is himself sick of a rebellious hatred for the gods." (Barbara Hughes Fowler, "The Imagery of the 'Prometheus Bound,'" American Journal of Philology, 78 [1957], 173–84, p. 183).

12. Cf. Blumenberg: "Where [humanity] needs and uses fire, where he attributes part of his technical skill and his capacity for culture to it, there arises, as with other things, the suspicion that it would eventually after all have to use itself up, become weaker, degenerate, and require renewal.

This cycle, too, is seen in the perspective of an organic background metaphor: Fire has its vegetative periodicity, its world seasons. How impressive is the idea of fire's self-creation is shown by the worldwide distribution of cults of fire renewal" (p. 300).

13. Some 64 lines of Prometheus Unbound remain in fragments, from which one can see that its subject was the freeing of Prometheus by Heracles. Virtually nothing remains of Prometheus the Firebearer, not even the complete certainty of its having existed, although not many critics seriously doubt this.
The possibility of a reconciliation of the dichotomies may explain the prominence of medical imagery, for Greek medicine was often conceived in terms of reconciliation of opposites (see Fowler). Related to this is the theme of "limit," which is pointed out by Hogan (p. 276).

14. ἰκὼν ἰκὼν ἑμαρτόν. Grene's "I knew when I transgressed" softens it too much.

15. Plato, Phaedrus, 255a–c; Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 8.4.1157a6–16. The symmetry is not surprising. For the unerotic Aristotle, eros is an inferior species of friendship, based only on mutual utility. For the less sober Plato, on the other hand, eros is the most potent form of friendship.

16. Since Aphrodite, in her epithet Cypris, is the only divine name among the various terms for love that have been used (erōti, at 591, functions as a simple noun rather than the name of a god), I shall use her name synecdochally for the whole range of terms.

17. Prometheus’ obsession with humanity is called sebēi (544), translated above as "revere," but having connotations as strong as "be in awe of" and "worship".

18. In the wake of the more recent anatomical misconception which ascribes this function to the heart, some modern versions of the story (such as Shelley’s) make the heart rather than the liver the object of the eagle’s feast.

According to Aeschylus Prometheus Unbound (fragment 193 [Nauck], line 10) the eagle comes only every third day. The present passage could be made consistent with that by taking panēmeros (1024) in the sense of "all day" instead of "daily," but the fragment survives only in a (possibly unreliable) Latin translation in Cicero. Whether the fragment is accurate or not, Aeschylus’ audience would at this point probably assume the ritual to be a daily one, since Hesiod tells us that "by night the liver grew as much again every way as the long winged bird devoured in the whole day" (Theogony 523–25).

19. Cf. the “Homeric” Hymn to Hephaestus: “Sing, clear-voiced Muse, of Hephaestos famed for inventions. With bright-eyed Athene he taught people glorious crafts throughout the world, people who before used to dwell in caves in the mountains like wild beasts. But now that they have learned crafts through Hephaestos the famed worker, easily they live a peaceful life in their own houses the whole year round. Be gracious, Hephaestos, and grant me success and prosperity” (Evelyn-White translation, slightly modified). Also cf. Plato’s Statesman 274c: We were given "fire by Prometheus, the arts by Hephaestos and his co-artisan [Athena].”

20. In a variant of Hesiod’s version, Zeus buries Typho under mount Aetna instead of throwing him into Tartarus.
Virtue and Knowledge: On Plato’s *Protagoras*

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Given the dialectical character of the Platonic writings individually, it is not surprising that the Platonic corpus as a whole consists as largely as it does of engagements with one or another alternative to the understandings of Plato/Socrates. It belongs to the genius of Plato that he constructed a universe out of elements that exist in a condition of mutual (dialectical) tension, in a tacit, however limited, concession to the cosmology of Stress. Expecting always the triumphant Socratic finale, even if in the form of aporia and achieved through never so many baited deferences, we come nevertheless to appreciate the seriousness with which Plato scanned the world of available wisdom, and the care that he took to draw from Parmenides, for example, what that thinker kept in reserve against a rigid theory of Ideas, and from Protagoras, that chanticleer sophist, the wisdom that might lie in his version of the adage Virtue is Knowledge. Plato’s sifting of Protagoras runs through *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*, the former dialogue addressing the climactic question of the coming to be of good and evil among men, the latter the companion question, What is knowledge. If virtue is knowledge, as Socrates must forever insist, then why is virtue not transmissible just as knowledge is transmissible in the act of teaching? And if virtue cannot be somehow “taught,” what becomes of the moral pedagogy by which the best political constitution stands or falls? *Protagoras* on the bringing of good among men (if not by teaching, then how?) is a spacious portal into the Platonic edifice.

The dialogue is made to begin with an encounter between Socrates and “a friend,” a chance meeting that occasions Socrates’ recounting a discussion from which he has just departed. Since the dialogue itself, i.e., that very discussion, ended with Socrates remarking that he is already late for some business elsewhere, the fact that he is “now” volunteering to repeat the entire proceedings makes it as clear to us as it needs to be that, if he had indeed any affairs elsewhere, they must have been the opposite of pressing. His approach to Protagoras had been at the instance of another, but the impulse to leave him seems to have been more entirely his own. We may speculate that at the time when

This essay was prepared with the generous help of the Earhart Foundation, and is part of a forthcoming book on Plato.

Socrates terminated it with the fabrication of another demand on his attention, the conversation had been squeezed dry of further benefit or interest.

As Socrates tells the story, he goes to Protagoras, who is visiting Athens, because a self-centered young bumbler named Hippocrates wishes to attach himself to Protagoras as a pupil and considers that an introduction by Socrates would be helpful in gaining him admission to the Protagorean circle. With a patience that thrives best in fiction, Socrates allows himself to be awakened by Hippocrates so long in advance of dawn that the young man has to feel his way around the bed in order to find a place to seat himself. Declaring to Socrates, of all people, that Protagoras was the only wise man, and that he, Hippocrates, aspired to be wise in the same mode, he gives Socrates an opening for some inquiry into the mercenary ways of the sophists. Of course he cannot do this without referring to the sophists as such and by that name. The revelation to Hippocrates that he would end by standing before the Greeks as a sophist raises a blush on his face that can be seen by the light of the barely breaking dawn. More passes as they make their way toward Protagoras, Socrates alerting the youth to the spiritual perils of trusting himself to poorly understood mentors. The wind of disparagement continues to blow against the sophists as the two reach the door of Callias’s house, where Protagoras is lodging. Their knock is answered by an emasculated servant whose deprivation in no way inhibits the expression of his contempt for the sophists he takes Socrates and Hippocrates to be. Apparently, and as will soon be confirmed when the conversation develops indoors, contempt for the sophists is rife in Greece; and as we have seen at the door, it extends to the lowest of the low. That Protagoras acquired the subtitle “Sophists: Accusatory” is understandable, ultimately misleading though that indication will prove to be. We may well wonder why those virtuosi of rhetoric did not engender a better opinion of themselves in the world; whether their obloquy is not the unavoidable fate of those whose concern for the truth of their arguments seems subordinated to cleverness or advantage. But it would be well for us to reserve judgment on the sophists, for as will soon appear, so far as Protagoras is representative of them while being perhaps the best among them, their principles do not seem outrageous or absurd.

Having gained access to Callias’s house, Socrates and Hippocrates come upon a telling scene: Protagoras in ambulatory discourse followed by a coterie of acolytes who form up behind him in twin columns, part before him as he reverses direction, and fall in astern once more, ears straining. The sophists Hippias and Prodicus are described in their respective peculiar postures, enlightening sundry adherents. If there is anything serious about the sophists, Plato will introduce it gradually.

Now it is time for Socrates to proceed with the introduction of the hopeful Hippocrates to Protagoras. Since it is the purpose of Hippocrates to advance
himself in Athenian life by deploying what he will learn from Protagoras, the latter is grateful for Socrates' delicacy in leaving it up to him whether he will hear Hippocrates' application in private or before the company: local citizenries do not always take kindly to the interference of a foreigner who claims a power to teach their young the arts of ambition. Evidently, Protagoras is alert to the danger of appearing to corrupt the young, even if the appearance attaches unjustly to an effort to improve them. It is out of vanity, Socrates suspects, that Protagoras now prefers that the proceedings go on before the whole company. In the course of declaring his preference for an open interview, Protagoras makes an important observation on the history of the sophists: they comprise an ancient esoteric order whose members include some of the most famous men of Greece: poets, seers, athletes, musicians, and many more—all of them teachers. Homer and Hesiod themselves, and Simonides, were of the number. All sought to conceal their sophistry. They hoodwinked the vulgar, of course, but could not conceal their purpose from the powerful classes. He, Protagoras, alone proclaims his sophistry from the housetops, not claiming for himself any superior honesty but doing so out of unwillingness to bear the humiliation of being caught in a deception he knows is bound to fail. This admitted calculation deserves the reader's respectful attention; the "consequentialist" principle that underlies it will play an important part in the moral doctrine that Socrates will later develop.

What suspect practice is it that Protagoras confesses to perpetrating as a sophist, and in which he by indirection implicates the entire brotherhood? Nothing less than "educating men" (*Protagoras* 317B). Why does this philanthropic impulse generate universal revulsion? Because it is a private usurpation of a public prerogative? Because it is done for gain? Because it is artful, using and communicating a profane sorcery? Every one of these possibilities is disposed of in what follows. Protagoras will argue persuasively that men are endowed but not sufficiently endowed with the arts of sociality, in which they do indeed need further cultivation. He charges no fixed fee for his instruction but permits his pupils to pay him whatever they declare on oath to be the value to them of his teaching. (And why should sophistry not get the benefit of the distinction of the teaching art and the moneymaking art?) Finally, Protagoras has exactly renounced secrecy and displayed himself before the Greeks for what he is. We know where our sympathies are supposed to lie, but we are less certain, at the moment, of their ground.

Socrates would like Protagoras to tell Hippocrates what the association the latter is seeking would do for him. The general answer is that it would improve him. Socrates wonders how. Protagoras now (perhaps one should say again) distinguishes himself from the herd of sophists, who do no better than purvey the usual arts—arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music—while he teaches how best to manage one's household and how to be most effective, in speech and deed, in the affairs of the city: in brief, "the political art, and making men
good citizens” (Socrates’ formulation, 319A). To this claim Socrates enters a famous demurrer: virtue is not teachable. He has seen on many occasions that, when the issue is a technical one, the knowledge of trained experts is respected in the Assembly, which defers to skilful people who can be trusted to have learned an art. In matters calling for political judgment, however, there is no recognized art in which a man can become an acknowledged expert through technical training, i.e., through undergoing a course of formal instruction, without which he is unqualified to pronounce or advise. In principle, anyone can be wise in the affairs of the city. It is as if Socrates is saying that political judgment is something like a natural gift, had by some and not by others, possessed without being acquired; and a “training” in it would be a transaction presided over by a fraud and practiced on the dim. The likelihood of this is supported by the manifest inability of even those most gifted with political judgment, or other virtues, to impart their endowment to the ones nearest and dearest to them. This is as true in the private realm as in the public. Within the home, Pericles was unable either himself to teach or even to find another who could teach the goodness he valued most to the beings he cherished most. The matter is simply not subject to pedagogy. Plainly stated, this argument traces moral character, and judgment as well, to a source that is not man, perhaps nature, perhaps something else, but in any event a power that conveys gifts to patient humanity. It is to this position that Protagoras must address himself. He will do so through one of Plato’s magnificent reconstructions of Protagorean doctrine, beginning at 320C (another is in Theaetetus 165E–168C).

Protagoras’s response will be guided by his immediate understanding that the unspoken premise of Socrates’ antipaiideutic etiology of virtue is the proposition that the universe is of a certain kind, made or containing or perhaps ruled by What-Endows. We know that Protagoras understands this because he begins his lengthy statement with a zoogonic myth that traces us all, and therewith the status of our virtues, back to the gods.

There was a time, he says, when gods were but the mortal kind was not. The gods made the animals and then charged Prometheus and Epimetheus, the prospective and the retrospective, to assign them their powers. Epimetheus distributes the powers so that each kind will possess means of preserving itself against annihilation by its natural predators. “Balance” (epanison) or “compensation” is the principle at work. Unity permeates and supervenes over aggressive multiplicity. Epimetheus seems to have stumbled on a working model of the One and the Many in the shape of the animal kingdom. It was left to Prometheus to see to the needs of man, whom Epimetheus had somehow overlooked. Prometheus provides for mankind by stealing, on their behalf, fire and the arts from the gods, who apparently would not willingly succor mankind, of whom they had washed their hands from the beginning.

Who, by the way, are Epimetheus and Prometheus, retrospect and prospect? Gods they are not; godlike powers they seem to be. Whose backward-looking
and forward-looking powers are they then if not man's himself? In the fable that Plato's Protagoras is spinning, Epimetheus is man's looking around himself and observing the manner of the coming to be and passing away of the living things, the compensatory balance of consumption and being consumed that comprises a bestial cycle from which forethought alone can liberate him. What the gods will not bestow on him to this end he will rape them of, and he will never cease to consider how far in this world his wellbeing must be his own farseeing care.

Protagoras now speaks of man as sharing in the divine, referring of course to the art and fire obtained from heaven through a force and fraud; and by virtue of this participation he became reverent of his own close kin aloft, setting up altars to them and making icons of them. We observe that without the contraband arts the human beings would have been both unable to honor the mean and myopic Olympians with works of art and also unmoved to do so, since the possession of arts encourages introspective man to see a god. As Plato fashions this skillful projection of Protagoras, the persistent tendency of the great sophist to link humanity to divinity through techne becomes clearer, and if we bear in mind that in the background of the discussion is the ever-present issue of teachability, more exactly the teachability of virtue, we can envision an important victory for Protagoras if he can produce the concurrence of divinity-qua-excellence and teachable art-qua-excellence. His pedagogy would then pass divinity from man to man, perfecting the philanthropy of Prometheus.

Protagoras continues. For all his art and worship, man still lived a solitary and dangerous life. His predators were the beasts, not his fellow human beings, and he found that his preservation depended on his joining together with his fellow men in order to deal with the brutes. According to Protagoras, men had been losing the war (polemos) with the beasts because humanity lacked "the political art, a part of which is (the art of) war." Now the remedy of association for defense produced a new disorder: in their novel proximity, the humans replaced the beasts as the source of danger to life, and the primitive society threatened to dissolve in mutual injury because men lacked the "political art." Plato will not imply any criticism of Protagoras as being inconsistent in saying that the political art is at the same time the art of war and the ground of peace. The assimilation of the warmaking art to the political condition is in the spirit of Socrates' own thought as set forth at the beginning of the Timaeus where he calls for an account of the exploits of the best city in its most characteristic activity, which is war in speech and deed. That peace is impossible without politics and politics is impossible without war seems to have been as evident to Protagoras as it was to Socrates.

To avert the self-destruction of our kind, Zeus consents to share political wisdom with the human beings. On what terms? Hermes is to convey to all men, not to some few who would be the experts or artisans of political art, the justice and conscientiousness that are at the core of the political art. The words
used are *dike* and *aidos*, the former with its accompanying meaning of righteousness and the latter a complex amalgam of respect and susceptibility to shame or disgrace. Everyone, in principle, participates in the political virtues; Protagoras seems to envision a democratic foundation for human existence. He does not make this into a formula for prescribing a regime as best or most natural, and he immediately makes provision for the capital punishment of those who are incapable of sharing in the decencies of common life. It is easy for us to see that if Protagoras had devised a god who had endowed all men with equal political virtue for the sake of human preservation in society, the sophist would have left little enough for himself to do as a teacher of political virtue. Conversely, the justification of a pedagogy in political virtue inevitably implicates the dispensing god in the gross imperfection of the human kind in which such a large residue of room for correction persists. Protagoras's myth is a standing demonstration that the image of a god who is chary of sharing with mankind his wisdom of good and evil is available outside the limits of revelation.

Protagoras considers himself to have explained why the assembled citizens will listen to anyone regardless of his profession if he discourses sensibly on matters governed by political virtue (*politikes aretes*) (323A1): the very existence of cities testifies to the distribution of the social disposition among men, in effect to the (almost) universal presence of it in the human kind. The observable practice of mankind is an index to profound truth.

It is obvious to us, and it immediately proves to be at least as obvious to Protagoras, that in making this argument he is a step away from arguing himself out of an honest occupation as a teacher of political virtue. Who would need a human provider where a divine one has gone before? Again, Protagoras takes his demonstration from the common practice of mankind. Whereas we blame no one for his ugliness or deformity, because these are seen to be truly involuntary, we blame injustice because we attribute it to the malefactor himself, and we punish it not to retribute it upon the guilty but to deter a repetition—and to deter is to train. As we are all imbued with sociality, so we all know it to be a thing acquired by learning. All that the reader of this myth need do to purge it of gross contradiction is to eliminate a supposition that the imbuing is the effect of the action of any teacher or imbuer who is not human. We are all sociable because we all teach one another sociability. Of course, some do it better than others. The very best teacher of virtue might be struck by the notion that he does for man what nothing else in the cosmos does. Protagoras will in fact go so far as to claim to be, himself, the best of all men at making others noble and good (328B).

Protagoras claims to have shown Socrates how it comes about that the Athenians in assembly listen willingly to any man of any occupation if he address them on civic matters in a sensible way, and Protagoras can claim to have done so through an argument that turns on the teachability of virtue. Abandoning
myth for straight speech (logos), he will turn next to Socrates' second point, which is that the good men have so much trouble and so little success when they seek means to have their very own sons made virtuous, a fact that Socrates adduces as evidence that virtue cannot be taught. Protagoras insists that the whole weight of the human environment comprises an unremitting pressure on a youngster from the beginning of his life, forming him in the mold of the virtues. His parents, his teachers of music and of gymnastic, and eventually the city itself through its laws, all are ceaselessly prompting him to virtue throughout his entire life, by coercion where admonition and persuasion fail. Protagoras does not neglect to consider why the relentless moral pressure of humanity upon itself can fail. Men, whose lives should follow the paradigm of virtue everywhere recommended to them, behave instead according to a model of their very own (326D1). What could explain this willfulness? The same cause that explains why a master flautist's son, taught by his father, need not prove to be a master flautist: the element of natural aptitude. As it were, our greater or less inclination to virtue is by nature, but virtue itself is by instruction and habituation. This foreshadowing of Aristotle is presented by Protagoras in the medium of rational discourse rather than myth, as he has declared, and we see the sign of that transition when he renders his final account of the distribution and cultivation of the civil virtues in the language of natural aptitude where previously he had spoken in terms of endowment by gods.

We must remind ourselves that it was out of a similar premise, namely, that the virtues are ours by reason of an endowment of some origin, perhaps nature, that Socrates appeared to argue to their incommunicability by teaching. To this point, the issue between Socrates and the great sophist appears to be this: the two agreeing that it is hard to know what makes, or how to make, a human being good, and agreeing further that the aptitude for virtue is largely by "endowment," which of them makes the stronger argument—the one who maintains that the virtues are not teachable or the one who argues that they are? It might be well to recall that this long exposition by Protagoras was prompted in large part by Socrates' requiring Protagoras to say in what way his instruction "makes men better." We are in a position to formulate his response thus: Protagoras helps to make his young pupils more sociable, to foster whatever natural inclination they have toward justice and the other virtues that make a man a good associate in the city. In brief, Protagoras makes, or at least aims to make, of young men good citizens, even if ambitious ones. By the end of his life, Socrates' doings as a whole will appear to his fellow citizens as a career of making the young into bad or skeptical citizens. The sophist appears in the honorable light, shed upon him by Plato, of one whose concern it is to civilize the human animal, that amazing being with so much capacity for good and evil, so much in need of his fellows if he is to live a fruitful life and so prone to abuse them if he believes he can do so with impunity. Not for a single moment unmindful of these truths, nor inclined to dispute them, Socrates looks so far
beyond them that he could appear to neglect and in the end despise them, and this notwithstanding that he is made the propounder of the true and good city. The engagement between the sophist and the philosopher gives us an occasion for wondering whether in a country like Athens the philosopher must choose between being mocked as a fantast or reviled as a felon.

Now (328D) Socrates begins his rejoinder. Politely but pointedly likening Protagoras’s flow of speech to a book in its deafness and muteness in regard to questions, Socrates makes an issue, and not for the last time, of the difference between the presentation of argument in sustained speech and the exchange of questions and answers succinctly put. His reason for introducing this issue must be inferred from what follows, for no reason is given. Socrates declares himself to need clarification on one small point alone: are all those various virtues to which Protagoras had referred one single thing with many names, or are they rather parts of some one single thing? However the question will be pursued, its bearing on the disjunction of long speeches and short answers seems clear enough: this matter should have been taken up and disposed of early in Protagoras’s discourse, and if it had been, the discourse would have taken a different, better direction. Reasoning and speech should not be allowed to proceed without continuous confirmation of the steps being taken, one by one, lest the whole inquiry prove in need of redoing. If this explains the introduction by Socrates of what looks like a cavil about methods, then it serves less to protect him from the blame he would deserve as a petulant quibbler and more to indicate that everything Protagoras had maintained stands or falls by the answer to the crucial question, namely, Is virtue one or many, which would have been raised near the outset if there had been an opportunity to raise it.

In response, Protagoras maintains that the virtues are parts of virtue, as the facial features are parts of the face. Socrates presses toward the assimilation of the virtues to one another. To make his point, Socrates extracts the admission that there is such a thing as justice itself, holiness (hosiotes) itself, etcetera, and that, for example, justice is itself just. We would be easier in our minds if we could intervene at this point and ask how justice can be just without “participating” in some entity called justice, i.e., without “participating” in itself, whatever that might mean. We suspect that Plato’s Parmenides, if he had been present, would have sensed Socrates’ injection of the Idea of Justice here and would have reminded him of certain difficulties he once experienced when called on to be precise when speaking of “participation” in an “Idea” (Parmenides 131B); but Plato’s Protagoras—and presumably the real Protagoras—is not oriented to the problems of the Ideas. Nor does he object when Socrates, taking high moral ground, asks, “Could holiness be not-just and therefore unjust?” (331A), as if it were impossible for anything (for example a bird) to be “not-just” without being “unjust.” Protagoras does balk, however, at the notion that whenever two things have anything in common they must have everything in common and be the same. He goes so far as to say that it is not at all just to speak like that (331E). Should he have taxed Socrates with “injustice?”
Socrates moves off on another tack which will help to reveal his larger purpose. Having failed to obtain Protagoras’s agreement to the unity of the virtues in Virtue, he will now argue the unity of the virtues in Wisdom. His key proposition is that to behave wrongly is to behave unwisely (332B). This granted, everything else falls into place: Since the violation of every virtue is a folly, each and all the virtues have one and the same single opposite; and having but one opposite, all the virtues are united through that common opposite, which is folly; and folly too itself has but one opposite, which would be called wisdom or, as we now see, virtue. Thus, all the virtues have collapsed into the opposite of their opposite, and the virtues are united in Wisdom, which is what was to be demonstrated. By this conclusion, the virtues cannot be “parts” of something in which they participate to form a whole, as the eyes, nose, mouth, and ears, each with its peculiar function, are parts of a face. Of course, Protagoras is not entirely pleased.

Summarizing the state of the question (333B), Socrates makes explicit that discretion (sophrosyne) and wisdom are the same, and justice and holiness are almost (schedon) the same. We have no clue to the reason for the “almost,” but if we must devise one, it might develop around the thought that nothing can disturb the identity of two virtues except their failure to share fully the same opposite, namely, folly. We would want to hesitate at length before deciding which, as between justice and holiness, by failing to contradict folly participates in it to whatever microscopic degree. Unable to resolve this sensitive difficulty by ourselves, we go on to note the next step in Socrates’ argument which does appear to bear somewhat on the vexing issue. Socrates inquires whether a man acting unjustly is, in his injustice, being discreet, practicing a moderation (sophrosyne). Protagoras says that he would be ashamed to agree to that, although the multitude among men say it. Protagoras does not take advantage of this opportunity to point out how this widespread turpitude increases the need for universal moral instruction of the kind he provides, and Socrates simply consents to take the deplorable popular view rather than any belief of Protagoras’s as his target. Socrates explains his purposes in proceeding as he does: Mostly he wishes to try the argument; concomitantly, though, himself the questioner and his respondent will also be tried (333C). As it seems, the reader is expected to draw conclusions about Protagoras and Socrates as well as about truth, as the argument unfolds, which it will now do in the direction of clarifying the meaning of something being “good for” as a preparation for clarifying the meaning of “good.” The drift of the developing thought is uncovered when Socrates moves rapidly (333D) to connect acting temperately (sophronein) with acting prudently (phronein) and advancing thence to prudent injustice, by the practice of which a man might do well, which is a location for profiting. Now who could deny that the good things are those that are profitable (ophelima) to men? Ergo, it is prudent (i.e., right because prudence is a virtue) to do what is profitable, because to do the profitable means to obtain the things that are good. Protagoras, seeing what he has been inveigled into granting, exhibits an
irritability in which Socrates perceives a dislike for further questioning. Desiring nevertheless to push on, he asks in a way meant to be mollifying whether Protagoras means by those profitable things things that are profitable to no one or things that are profitable in no way at all, and whether things like that could be called "good." Lurking in the question is the insinuated answer that virtues, for example intelligent prevision of the Promethean kind, might bring satisfactions not comprehended in the pious dictum that virtue is its own reward. Suspicions greatly aroused, Protagoras reacts with a speech long enough to leave no doubt that he has renounced the passivity of the mere respondent. He vents his view that "good" is a complicated thing, different things are good for different beings under different conditions, and what is good for this part of man may be bad for that, etcetera. Socrates confesses to having such a bad memory that he cannot remember what a paragraph is about by the time the speaker has reached the end of it. Answers must be short. Protagoras's rejoinder to this absurdity is an implicit application of his offending speech: Short speeches are to your liking and are good for you; long ones or short ones may suit me better; and who is to say, you or I, what is good (presumably advantageous) for me. Socrates' response shows no sign of recognizing the question of "good" as it is buried in Protagoras's rejoinder. Instead, he lays it down that the conversation will proceed on his terms or not at all since he has no aptitude for long speeches—an assertion belied by his conduct on innumerable occasions, including his Apology, and soon to be belied in the present dialogue itself. What can the reader conclude except that, just as Protagoras had implied, men can contend as their respective "goods" can conflict; and that when they do so, the one who succeeds in facing down his opponent will prevail. That insight, which draws on a wisdom only too widely distributed, informs the action of Socrates, who simply threatens to leave. He has an engagement anyhow and really ought to go right now. (Not only does he not go, once he has got his way, but as we all know, he has time to repeat the whole affair verbatim before attending to his urgent engagement.)

Auditors protest the imminent breakup of the meeting and take sides. Callias, their host, thinks it would be just if each speaker spoke as he wished. Alcibiades weighs in, aggressively of course, on behalf of Socrates. Critias favors cooperation over aggression. Prodicus contributes a paragraph of hair-splitting and sententiousness. Others, unnamed, expose themselves by approving Prodicus. Hippias spreads himself through a farrago of ruminations on nature and convention, the unmatched wisdom of the present company, and the vulgarity of squabbling, leading through notable byways of orotundity to a proposal that a chairman be appointed to moderate the proceedings. Applauded by all, the suggestion is vetoed by Socrates, who does not want Protagoras regulated by someone inferior to that sage and cannot imagine anyone superior to him. The entire scene, which emphasizes the iricn but blurry disposition of the sophists, must have brought enjoyment to many places in educated
Greece of Plato's day. More, though, than a witty pastiche of the foibles of eminent sophists, it illustrates the limits of mutual accommodation where, the parties differing over "good," clash consequently over what is good for each respectively.

Agreement is indeed reached, but it largely favors the preference of Socrates: over Protagoras's great misliking, they will proceed by the method of question and answer, but taking turns, Protagoras to be first to ask, and then Socrates will put the questions, to which Protagoras is bound to answer briefly.

Protagoras's proemium to his questioning (338E) marks the beginning of a long section of the dialogue which at first sight appears to lead the discussion in vagrant directions. The sophist announces that, in his view, the greatest part of a man's education is to be skillful (deinon) about poems, or poetry. If this is to be believed, then Protagoras's teaching of goodness proceeds through the interpretation of poetic texts like the one in which he hopes now to enmesh Socrates, namely, a piece by Simonides with which Socrates proves to be familiar, perhaps to the disappointment of Protagoras. Protagoras quotes, in effect, that it is hard to become good. Then he quotes Simonides, again in effect, as saying that Pittacus was wrong when he declared that it is hard to be good. The double negative puts Simonides in the position of maintaining both that it is hard to become good and it is not hard to be good. Protagoras prepares to gloat over Socrates from whom he has just extracted praise for the poem so marred by manifest contradiction. After a certain amount of business, Socrates drives home the difference between being and becoming, in general and in its relevance first to the consistency of the poem and then in its bearing on the matter of goodness: it is the becoming good that is hard, not the being. By this point, it has been made clear to us that the introduction by Protagoras of the poetic theme did not constitute a simple derailment of the dialogue qua inquiry into the goodness of the human beings, although it is true that a shift of emphasis has taken place: the teaching or making good of the human beings has at least for the moment given way to their being or becoming good. Whether the obvious relation between the difficulty of making someone good and the difficulty of becoming good will emerge we cannot yet foresee. In any case, Protagoras was apparently mindful enough of the central issue when he projected his assault on Socrates through the medium of poetry, although he seems to have underestimated his interlocutor's education in the epic literature. He surely did not anticipate the ease with which Socrates would humiliate his hermeneutic by proving that the poet had not in fact contradicted himself.

Protagoras is far from ready to admit defeat. Now (340E) he accuses Socrates of making things worse than ever when he denies that it is exceedingly hard to be virtuous. Socrates turns to Prodicus, the accomplished microscopist of meanings, to confirm that "hard," in the dialect of Simonides, meant "bad." Thus the true complaint of Simonides against Pittacus was that Pittacus, in saying that to be good was hard, meant in fact that to be good was bad. This
profoundly repulsive sentiment is saved from absolute obloquy by our recollection that good, at least in the understanding of Socrates, runs together with advantage or "good for." Thus to be virtuous or good might arguably be bad if being "good" brought losses and pain, which are not good for any human being although they might be overborne by the virtue that is its own incomparable reward (as Socrates is obliged to maintain in the Republic). It might go without saying that Socrates is not disposed to advertise any association of his own with the odious notion he has fobbed off on Pittacus, however much it might resonate with the peculiar "consequentialism" he himself will eventually promote.

Protagoras has his own no-nonsense way of clearing up the problem of the badness of goodness: when Simonides said hard he meant hard, not bad. Far from rejoining that what is hard is, as such, bad, Socrates soothes Protagoras by agreeing with him, calling "good is bad" a joke, and supporting him by quoting Simonides' next verse, "Only god might have this privilege," that is, of possessing goodness. Granting that Simonides was not a mischief-maker who meant to depreciate the qualities of god, what was his true intention? Socrates volunteers to elucidate, and proceeds to do so in a speech that is many times longer than the one of Protagoras's that had brought him to his feet with the threat to leave. In passing, we wonder if his dedication to the method of crisp exchanges is more a matter of tactics in the circumstances than fidelity to some profoundly held heuristic principle. We wonder, in other words, whether he reveals in his doing that what is truly good must chime with a (good) purpose, or be "good for" the one who does well. We hesitate to draw a general conclusion that a good end justifies means of various kinds, but a situation dominated by polemic, such as the present one in which Protagoras seeks to outdo Simonides, Simonides seeks to overturn Pittacus, Protagoras and Socrates are striving to put one another down, and Sparta is said to master everyone, is a plausible setting for thoughts about prevailing.

Socrates' lecture begins (342A) in a comic vein, and light-years from the subject. Philosophy, he says, is most deeply and widely rooted in Crete and Lacedaemon, where sophists are more plentiful than anywhere else. (This trampling the distinction between philosophy and sophistry can be taken as a sign that he is enjoying himself.) The cunning Dorians, jealous of the wisdom by which they predominate in Greece, conceal their sapience behind a facade of militarism that they decorate with a muscular stupidity widely imitated by dupes elsewhere who dress in the athletic Spartan fashion and sport the cauliflower ears that advertise a vigorous regimen. The Spartans, too successful in their duplicity, see encroachment on the privacy of their communion with their sophists because their city is overrun by foreign mimics. Laws are made to restrict immigrant strangers and to inhibit the travel abroad of their own young. Self-satisfaction is at such a peak that even women are puffed up about their education in Crete and Sparta, and the heights of philosophy reached in the latter city may be discerned by anyone who converses with the simplest deni-
zens and reflects on the wisdom latent in the sententiousness of their speech. In Sparta it is known that verbal parsimony is the index of good education. Spartan peasants fire off maxims like shot from a sling (wrapping the terse in the military). The sages of Greece were patent laconizers who spoke in saws: “Know thyself.” “Nothing in excess.” And so on. (The unsettling thought intrudes itself that “Knowledge is Virtue” has a certain punch to it.) Socrates at last heaves into sight of the subject: Pittacus, an authentic sage, scored a hit with his “Hard to be good,” and Simonides sang to make a name for himself by overthrowing Pittacus: “Hard to be good” is wrong; “Becoming good is hard” is the line. How did Simonides argue for his purpose? To show this, Socrates composes a discourse addressed by Simonides to Pittacus (343E). Pittacus having said, it is hard to be good, Simonides objects: what is true is that it is hard to become good. It is hard but possible to become good; it is not hard but impossible to be, i.e., remain good, except for god—as you yourself, Pittacus, say. And, Pittacus, you say in support of your belief (no man can remain good) that no man can withstand overwhelming mishap that besets him to compromise his virtue. Since you speak of overwhelming mishap, you must have in mind those men to whom “overwhelming” properly applies, men of such exceptional goodness that if they are to change at all—and their being overwhelmed means the alteration of their state—their change must be to bad. They are balanced on a cusp of virtue, they can only fall, and fall they inevitably must.

What, Pittacus, supports any man in his goodness, such as it is? The answer is, the good man’s doing is favored and well done, and a bad man is one whose doing is ill done. These verses are so close to tautology that they demand to be rescued by interpretation. What is this decisive “well-doing?” The answer is “learning” (mathesis). What “well-doing” (eupragia) makes a good doctor? Learning or studying the cure of the sick. And what would make a bad doctor? Arguing that only a doctor who is a good doctor could be made a bad doctor, the pertinent ill-doing would be some kind of stripping away (sterethenai) of knowledge. Attractive as the surmise may be that this entire performance of Socrates’ is nothing but a bravura travesty on the sophists performed in their garb, it is yet to be noted that he interjects in the course of his interpretation of the poem themes of his own that he undoubtedly adopts in his own name, such as this present one that goodness is knowledge, and the immediately following one, that no one does evil willingly. He brings the matter into order by summarizing Simonides’ intent: There is no simply remaining good, but becoming good or bad is indeed possible. Then Socrates turns to a passage of the poem where he must anatomize the text delicately in order to make it come right. Simonides wrote words that could be read either “I praise willingly everyone who does no wickedness” or “I praise everyone who does no wickedness willingly.” Socrates says that the poet means the former: he must mean the former, because no one does wickedness willingly. The poet writes that even the gods
do not fight against necessity. We are expected, perhaps by Simonides but
certainly by Socrates, to conclude that mortals must surely give way to it, and
their wicked doings are the sign of their subjection to it. This attribution of our
wickedness to overwhelming necessity offers us a balm which we soon
realize we might have to pay heavily: if our vice arises out of a necessity that
could appear to exculpate, how can we explain our virtue without compromis-
ing either reason (only wickedness, not goodness is dictated by necessity!) or
freedom? The difficulty seems to have occurred to Socrates; the ingenuity with
which he addresses it can only be admired. He maintains (345E–346B) on
behalf of Simonides that a fine and good man (*kalos kagathos*), a thoroughly
decent man, will often contrive his own necessity. If his parents or his country
happen to fail him, he will force himself (literally, necessitate himself) to praise
and love his own. That is, the real harm they may have done him will not
constitute the “necessity” that would lead him into wickedness, but his decency
will form an opposing “necessity” that will lead him into goodness and that we
would call freedom. Socrates gives an example: Simonides knew that he had
often praised and eulogized some tyrant not willingly but under necessity.1 We
presume that Simonides is apologizing for a deed he is not proud of, i.e.,
pointing to the necessity that is exogenous, rather than illustrating the autocom-
pulsion of a decent man requiring himself to swallow his resentment of injury
done him by his nearest, and replace it with praise and love.

The wrong that we do do out of necessity, never willingly; but much that
presents itself in such a way that we might excuse ourselves by calling it neces-
sity is not of the overwhelming kind but is rather opposable by a “necessity”
that we can generate out of our own decency. This preserves the power of
necessity, but when is necessity irresistible and when resistible? Is it a matter of
recognition, of knowledge: there is a simply irresistible necessity and it be-
hooves us to acknowledge it? Simonides’ behavior toward the tyrants shows us
wherein this truism is problematic, for it was not literally impossible for him to
defy the tyrants, to blame and not eulogize them. It would have been easy for
him to do so. What would have been anything but easy would have been the
consequences. Has Socrates not led us to the conclusion that we denominate an
outer pressure a necessity, and we accede to it, when we foresee and reject the
consequences of resisting it, while we necessitate ourselves to resist an inde-
cency when, or even because, the anticipated pains of behaving well are ac-
ceptable? What must a human being know then if he is to make his way
through the thickets of being and becoming good? Is it the absolute nature of
Necessity and its modes; or the good or bad consequences of his actions? How
much the Socratic formula that Knowledge is Virtue has been enriched through
Socrates’ exposition of the poem suggests to us that his interpretation of the ode
was considerably more than a mocking demonstration that he can outdo the
sophists at their own game.

To this point, we have been presented with two accounts of man’s ascent to
or falling away from virtue. One turns on knowledge and is exemplified by the good doctor's mathesis and his forgetting; the other turns, to begin with, on volition and necessity, but the diurement of necessity between external and internal lets necessity be replaced by considerations of consequences, which is to say, knowledge, such as it is, of the future. What men do "willingly" they do out of that self-imposed necessity that is governed by foresight, the Prometheusian excellence. A listener who had been present with Socrates when this conversation took place and not only at its present repetition (i.e., the reader who has already read to the end of the dialogue and is now reading it for the second time) will know how well the rest of the discourse will agree with this deduction from Socrates' gloss on Simonides.

Socrates would like to resume the exchange with Protagoras, but without further use of texts, even poetic ones, for it is impossible to question them about their meaning, as to which the hermeneuts, inevitably differing, will argue endlessly. Serious people would rely on their own minds and powers, preferring to test the truth and themselves in direct exchange of speech. The reader of such words must pause to wonder whether the author of them is not admonishing him to put down the book he is holding in his hands and to seek out instead some companionable interlocutors with whom, testing one another and the truth about the being and becoming of good, he might profit more than by continuing to speculate on the inscrutable intention of his present author. Something, perhaps our waking to the difference between the attributive speaker of those words and the ostensive recorder of them in writing, keeps us at our reading. At worst, we will have been induced to think.

Protagoras, importuned by all, resigns himself reluctantly to a resumption of the questioning (348C). Socrates opens by flattering him so fulsomely that only a desperate egotist could miss the odor of sarcasm. Then the still lingering question: wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, piety (hosiotes)—are these five words for one thing, or is there some distinct being with its own power that underlies each of these words and distinguishes them all from each other? You, Protagoras, answered that the virtues differ from one another, being parts in the sense that the parts of the face are parts of a whole which none of them resembles. Do you still think so? Protagoras continues to believe that the virtues are parts of virtue, but he singles out courage from the rest because people lacking the other four virtues are often very courageous. If we are in doubt about the reason for resurrecting this question after it had apparently been put satisfactorily to rest long before, our uncertainties will now be removed. Socrates will push forward from the earlier unification of the virtues by their reduction to knowledge to an intimation of the nature of that knowledge—a question that agitates the Theaetetus, that other "Protagorean" dialogue, as well as the present one. By the time Socrates has accomplished his purpose, Plato will have integrated the discussion of virtue and its teachability into his conception of the human condition.
The thread of the argument that begins (349D) with Protagoras's distinguishing courage from other virtues is as follows. Virtue and all its parts are very good things and belong to the possessors of knowledge. The courageous, as distinct from the merely rash, possess a knowledge (e.g., horsemanship) that is in fact a skill or art. If the courageous are wise and the rash are mad, then the wise are courageous. Protagoras objects (350C et seq.) that the knowledgeable virtuous being better at their function than their ignorant semblables does not translate into the identity of wisdom and virtue: Other causes are at work. He declares that courage, the virtue proper, comes to be in men by nature and the good nurturing of souls, whereas its inferior facsimile, rashness, comes to be out of art (techne, which is a knowledge) or anger or frenzy. To this apt recitation of the sophist's paideutic creed Socrates makes answer by changing the subject. What is "living well" (eu zen) if not living pleasantly and not painfully? Causing Protagoras to react against the implication that pleasure is the good, Plato gives himself the occasion to elaborate the far-reaching hedonism of Socrates, which starts with the innocuous thought that pleasant is good. Even so modest a proposition as that pleasure is better than pain would serve as a beginning.

That Socrates' hedonism is not of the garden variety is indicated by his opening question to Protagoras (352A): How is it with you about knowledge? Is it supreme in governing actions or is it, as most people think, pushed aside by anger, pleasure, pain, and often by fear? Protagoras is for the hegemony of reason, enabling Socrates then to ask what could be meant by anyone's being overcome by pleasure. Reason rules, yet it does not. How so? Well, everyone would admit that people sometimes seek pleasure in acts that they know to be wicked. Wherein lies the wickedness? Not in the pleasure of the act but in the ill of its consequences, which ill always comes down to pain. Also, what appears to us now as painful, like exertion or surgery, is good in the event, which is pleasant. Nothing is wrong with pleasure except that or when it produces a pain greater than itself. Socrates apologizes for being at such length over what look like banalities, but when he says that his entire demonstration turns on this point (354E), we do well to take him at his word. In fact, the structure of the argument as a whole is now virtually in place.

Knowledge is indeed decisive for good, for living well, for justly living by a truth that we cannot escape, namely, that living pleasantly is sweet and good. Why not agree with Protagoras, so far as what he means is that our natural inclinations are the soil in which our virtues grow. But what precisely is the crucial knowledge? It is the knowledge of the relative quantities of present pleasures and pains against the quantities of the future pains and pleasures that might be their respective consequences. The sovereign knowledge, the basis for our doing well, for us human beings the salvation of life, is the art of measure, of measurement, of comparing amounts—the art or knowledge of commensuration (metrike; 356D et seq.).
Socrates says (357B) that they will consider this art or science another time; and so one must. For the present, Socrates is willing to settle the earlier question about the overwhelming of knowledge by pleasure by remarking that it is indeed "ignorance," the defect of knowledge, that leads men into evil: They fail to commensurate the present and the future. They do not willingly choose evil over virtue, they unwittingly choose the lesser pleasure or the greater pain. They do this under the influence of false opinion and being deceived (ep-seusthai)) about very important things. To seek evil and avoid good would, if a man were not deluded, be as it seems to contravene human nature (358C–D). Now Socrates can begin his exploitation of the point made by Protagoras long ago, the assertion that courage, a distinguishable part of virtue, can be present when all the others are absent—a thought that in turn grew out of Socrates' fascination with the unity or multiplicity of virtue. It will help us greatly to understand the dialogue as a whole if we make explicit the chain of reasonings from beginning to end, not only for the obvious reason but more with a view to seeing the work as an example of successful human prevision, the preparation and setting in place of elements conducing in their order to a culmination foreseen from afar. This might exemplify the only envisioning of future in which a human being can have perfect confidence. It happens to be a future, in fact the only future, that he alone controls.

Socrates brings up fear (phobos) and dread (deos): It is anticipation of bad or evil (kakos). Will anyone voluntarily pursue the dreadful, which is the same as the evil? What about the man who possesses courage, which Protagoras long ago said is a virtue distinguishable from the others and capable of being present where all the others are absent? The brave man could not possibly seek evil, i.e., the anticipated dreadful, for he is a man of virtue. While coward and brave are alike in facing what they can, it happens, as Protagoras points out, that the brave face death in battle and the cowardly do not. Protagoras's unspoken premise is that death is an evil. Socrates would be caught if it were true that a virtuous man knowingly, not deluded or impressed by false opinion, sought evil. Socrates saves himself by introducing "the noble" (kalon). Facing death in war is noble, thus good, thus wittingly choiceworthy. Though the courageous and the cowardly may both know fear, the brave fears virtuously and the coward basely. According to conclusions reached earlier, this means that the courageous fears knowingly and the coward ignorantly. Knowingly and ignorantly of what? Of the truly dreadful. What has been proved is that courage, not unlike but exactly like all the virtues, is wisdom. Protagoras resigns from the discussion.

From the sidelines we notice that Socrates’ argument depends heavily if not absolutely on the power of the noble, clearly good, to outweigh death, clearly or unclearly bad. Unwelcome thoughts disturb us. What if “noble” translates into civic reputation and the arguments that make death perhaps not an evil have an origin in the good of the city? How much of an evil is a bad reputation
when measured against the good of survival? The art or science of comparative quantities, the knowledge of commensuration, saves us only when the quantities to be compared can be known. If the commensuration of quantities that can at least be guessed at poses difficulties, how insuperable must those be when there is no way in the world to estimate that future which must be discounted to the present if men are "knowingly" to commensurate present pleasures and future pains. How is an earthly life of pleasure (very knowable) to be measured against a Dreadful Future, something that a truly courageous man would rather die than confront, when that future is itself unknowable by us? If it be said that that future is not at all unknowable by us, it has been revealed to us by the poets, Socrates would tell us to be reasonable, to think for ourselves rather than construe the poets or other writers, whose works cannot be subjected to questioning and whose meaning will never come clear through interpretation. If we discover some aspect of the future that must necessarily be forever dark to us, we have in that act reached the outer limit of morally relevant commensuration. We have reached the moral equivalent of $\pi$, the symbol of the irrational in the universe. Just in passing, we may note that where something so important to virtue as the status of the deepest future must remain uncertain for us, the fact that virtue is knowledge confirms Protagoras in his view that virtue belongs to the class of teachables but refutes his claim that it is simply teachable. The science of commensuration is teachable, but it fails when it ignores that its objects include the incommensurable. Geometry reconciles itself to the presence of the irrational within its boundaries; sophistry has not seen far enough to do so. Perhaps it is the sophists' naive confidence in reason, speech, persuasion that distinguishes them from the philosophers, whose claim is only to love wisdom, to prize the wisdom that sheds light on the limits of wisdom, and not to possess it, surely not to convey it on demand.

It would be supreme folly to conclude that if a transcendental basis for virtue has not been certified by the universe, a valid immanent one is unavailable. If living and commodious living and the pursuit of wisdom in peace depend on the flourishing of cities, why disparage as merely conventional the orders and rules that nourish the polities? And why revolt against the science of commensuration because it teaches us not everything, only almost everything? When Socrates injects the noble into the consideration of courage and makes it a counterweight to the dreadfulness of death, he wisely refrains from perturbing the discussion with high-flying reflections on the infusion of the rational universe with particles of incommensurability. Rather, he allows its full weight to the system of rewards and punishments, of scanning present and future, of deeds and their stochastic consequences, of what we might call in the end a rational hedonism in the service of goodness. If it serves goodness, why complain that it is hedonism? Is it thinkable that Socrates was a greater benefactor of the city than the rationalist who claimed to raise the human beings to a higher level of civility than the one on which nature left them?
The two interlocutors prepare to part. Socrates notes the confusion of their positions, he denying that virtue is teachable but proving that it is knowledge, Protagoras insisting that it is teachable but denying that it is knowledge. Aporia reigns and will continue to do so unless we pursue our inquiry to answer the question, what is virtue? While we stumble, we are victims of the heedlessness of Epimetheus who left us short of resources. I, says Socrates, prefer the Prometheus of the myth. I profit by him, looking ahead (promethoumenos) with a view to my whole life when I am engaged in these things. Has he weighed his philosophizing and his death and made the choice of a courageous man? Is not courage the characteristic philosophic virtue, and spiritedness the indispensable philosophic temper, considering that something about our future, on earth and wherever else, is and must necessarily be dark?

The two men exchange goodnatured civilities, and Socrates departs on the wings of a small myth.

NOTES

1. Cf. the place of Simonides in Xenophon’s On Tyranny.
2. A repetition of the well-known critique of writing in Phaedrus.
Politics and Poetry: Aristotle’s Politics, Books VII and VIII

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There is customarily something odd about the constitution of Aristotle’s writings, the full fifth of the Nicomachean Ethics devoted to friendship (Books VIII–IX), for example, and the unaccountably long discussion of the elements of language in the Poetics (Chapters 20–21). Book VII of the Politics prepares us for the importance of education to the best political regime. Still, we do not expect the extended treatment of music and poetry in Book VIII. As usual there is a reason, but it is not on the surface of it obvious.

I

Book VII begins with the following claim:

Concerning the best regime, it is necessary for him who intends to make the appropriate inquiry first to determine what is the life most to be chosen. For while this is unclear, the best regime is also necessarily unclear. For it is appropriate that those governing themselves (being governed—politeuomenous) best (arista) given what exists for them, fare best (do the best things—arista prattein), if something does not happen contrary to reason. (1323a14–19)

On the surface it all looks fairly straightforward. Since the best regime is for the sake of the best way of life, one cannot possibly know what regime is best without determining what life is best. However Aristotle’s way of making the claim reveals a problem. If politeuomenous is in the middle voice it means something like governing themselves; if passive, it means being governed. There is a related ambiguity in the expression arista prattein which can be rendered as either faring best or acting best—doing the best things. To fare well means to be satisfied with one’s life; to do good things need not mean that at all. Governing oneself well has to do with knowing what one is doing; being governed well implies nothing of the sort.

I am grateful to the Earhart Foundation for a grant for the summer of 1986, during which the first version of this essay was written.
If we glance back at the structure of Books I–VI of the *Politics* this ambiguity becomes clearer. Books I–III culminate in the account of all encompassing kingship, *pambsileia*. The best regime is the rule of the best. Rule by the wisest is clearly best insofar as it results in each citizen doing what is best for himself and for the whole city. Such a ruler, says Aristotle, is like the father of a family. However, precisely for this reason such rule is not really political. The *pambasileus* rules; the citizens are ruled. But the middle sense of the verb *politeuomai* has disappeared. To do the best things is not to fare well if one is thereby reduced to the status of a permanent child. Books IV–VI thus have as their underlying theme the tension between freedom and order. The following question therefore governs the final two books of the *Politics*: To what extent can faring best be reconciled with doing the best things?

Aristotle first asks “what life (bios) is so to speak (hōs epein) most to be chosen by all,” and then indicates that much of what he will say about the best living (zōē) has already been said in what he calls here his external speeches (exōterikoi logos). Aristotle’s “so to speak” might well be rendered “so as to speak.” The task is to use what has been said about living (zoe) in speeches which look at things from without in order to give an account which is adequate to our experience from within. The goal is not only “living” but living so as to speak—self-conscious living, or life (bios). This interpretation of Aristotle's intent admittedly involves translating what are obviously secondary meanings as though they were primary. The justice of this exigetical zeal is supported by the argument which follows, however.

If there are three sorts of beings, those external, those in the body and those in the soul, it is clear that all three are required for faring well (1323a23ff.). No matter how wealthy or attractive, a person in constant fear of death would live an unenviable life. Accordingly, courage is one of the goods of the soul without which nothing else can be altogether good. The virtues are necessary conditions for getting and keeping those external goods which are thought to contribute to happiness and so are good in the sense of being useful (chrēsimon).

This external account “through deeds” (dia tōn ergōn) according to which virtues are good makes them seem necessary to a further end. Aristotle now introduces a second argument rooted not in deeds (erga) but in logos. External things are good only insofar as they are good for something—ultimately for some soul. The sign of this is that they have limits. There is no such thing as too much internal satisfaction with a good, but there is certainly such a thing as too much food. The good as the useful is therefore limited by that for which it is useful. Only that which is good for its own sake is without limit. Such a good is not useful but kalon—beautiful or noble. It is internal goods which are unlimited. And yet

generally it is clear, as we will assert, that the best disposition of each thing toward others with respect to preeminence follows the difference which it has received from the things of which we assert these themselves to be the dispositions. So that
Now, if goods of soul, means to stand is soul "himself necessity and had direction; it is preserved. Further, these things by nature are chosen for the sake of the soul, and all those who think well ought to choose them, but not soul for the sake of them. (1323b13–21)

Now, if the body is to the soul as the goods of the body are to the goods of the soul, and if the goods of the body are, as tools, necessarily limited, while the goods of the soul are unlimited, then it follows that the soul is unlimited. The soul is not a tool and so has no function external to itself. It cannot be understood as directed toward anything outside itself. This seems to be what Aristotle means by calling its goods kalon. But is this the human soul?

Virtue was first understood to be good in the sense of useful, then in the sense of kalon. Aristotle now cites as an example the god for whom there is no necessity and so no external goods whatsoever, and who is therefore happy and blessed “himself on account of himself.” A god, for whom there is no distinction between the good as useful and the kalon, is never an instrument. Aristotle had claimed that the soul was more honorable “both simply and to us.” “To us” must mean “to soul.” Soul serves both as subject—that for whom things are good—and as object—that which is good. To the extent that these two are identical, the good as useful will be the same as the good as kalon. But to the extent that what is good for soul is external, the two will be different, and soul will be good for something. Human beings differ from gods insofar as for us virtue must be understood as double, as means to external goods which are then in turn necessary for internal satisfaction. Virtue is a composition of the kalon on the one hand, and the chresimon (or, when understood in the proper way, the agathon) on the other. The virtuous man is the kalos k’agathos. This doubleness is signaled by the city itself in which men are the purpose or end of the regime; it is for the sake of their happiness, their faring best, while at the same time, as citizens who perform functions in the city, they are the means to that end—as tools they do the best things. In the best regime these two must be one. The activity which preserves the city must somehow be that for which the city is preserved. This is of course easier to say than to do.

II

If the virtuous citizen is an instrument, his purpose is something like the happiness of the city as a whole. Aristotle is therefore forced to ask what the relation is between the happiness of the individual and the happiness of the city as a whole. He seems to finesse the issue.

Whether the same happiness must be asserted to be both of each single human being and of the city or not the same remains to say. But even this is apparent. For all would agree that it is the same. For whoever posit living well in wealth
concerning one person, these will also call the whole city blessed if it be wealthy, and whoever especially honor the tyrannical life, these would assert the city ruling the most men to be the happiest. And if someone allows the one man [to be happy] on account of virtue, he will also assert the more excellent (spoudaioteran) city to be the most happy. (1324a5–13)

All, of course, do not agree on what is good for the city; they rather agree that what they think good for themselves is also good for the city. What is the case in all cities is that something is honored. But even this is not to overcome the tension between the happiness of the individual and that of the city. To pursue wealth as good is not the same as to wish to be honored for one’s wealth. Only the latter requires a city in which wealth is celebrated. But to the extent that such a city pursues wealth itself, its citizens may have to subordinate their own pursuit of wealth and so sacrifice their own good as they understand it. Imperialism can be expensive. A citizen might donate a ship to the navy and be honored for doing something kalon, where the kalon has to do with supporting the city’s overall purpose, its pursuit of wealth. But he would be in fact sacrificing his own wealth. Even when the city and man are understood to have a good in common, it is therefore not self-evident that the two goods will not conflict.

The real issue, however, is not the pursuit of wealth but philosophy. The life of contemplation seems to stand as the model for the inner life par excellence—the life virtually independent because it requires so little from without. Consequently Aristotle says two inquiries must be made: (1) whether the life most to be chosen is political or that of a stranger released (apolelumenos) from the political community and (2) what regime is best regardless of whether life in the political community is best for all or only for some. He justifies the second question as following from what we have intentionally chosen (proeiremetha), i.e., political thought and contemplation. He then specifies that the alternative to the political or active life is the life released (apoleleumenos) from everything external, such as a contemplative life which some assert to be the only philosophic life. These are the two ways of life intentionally chosen (proairoumenoi) by those most ambitious with regard to virtue. We need to notice in passing that Aristotle has stipulated his own intentional choice as a sort of hybrid of the two—political philosophy.

If political virtue is instrumental virtue, the danger is that the city in the name of which it is instrumental will also come to be understood as instrumental. The man with instrumental virtue exerts himself solely for the sake of what is external to him. When the same understanding of virtue guides the city, it will define itself by its ability to extend its rule over others; the city will become the imperialistic city, the city at war. Aristotle’s examples suggest that this is the truth of all actual cities. The doubleness of virtue can then be understood according to the following proportion: the internal : external :: philosophical : political :: nonimperialistic : imperialistic. As the best city must combine
two sorts of virtue, the internal and external, it looks as though it has to combine elements of this proportion which are not obviously compatible. The best city needs political virtue but must be nonimperialistic. Put somewhat differently, its citizens must practice political virtue, but it must itself be modeled on philosophy.

Just as the city devoted to wealth need not contain wealthy men, the city modeled on philosophy need not contain any philosophers. In fact it looks as though it would be hard for it to contain useful parts which were themselves altogether independent of the larger whole. Nevertheless philosophy serves as the model for what Aristotle calls autotelic action:

But it is not necessary that the active [life] be in relation to others, as some consider, nor that thinking alone to be active which comes to be from acting for the sake of the things which will result, but much more contemplations (theōrias) and thoughts (dianoëseis) which have their ends within themselves (autoteleis) and are for the sake of themselves. (1325b17–22)

The contemplative life is not passive but active in the highest sense. Its action is not externally directed, however; it is instead characterized by internal motion. The city based on it will therefore be active and at the same time self-contained. Accordingly, Aristotle likens these two, the contemplative life and the best city, to the cosmos; all three are kalon. Needless to say, just as it is hard to place the autotelic contemplative within the autotelic city, it is hard to understand either of them in their relation to the autotelic cosmos. How is it possible for a whole to be made up of parts which are at the same time perfect wholes in their own right? Aristotle’s response to this question begins to emerge in his treatment of the parts of the best regime in the remainder of Book VII.

III

The best regime may be autotelic, but, as the regime of a city, it would have to confront certain necessities of nature. It would have to be situated in a place, have a certain size and have a certain number of citizens each of a particular age, sex and character. And of course there are tasks that have to be performed for any city to survive, and yet more for it to survive well. Aristotle acknowledges that the best regime must have equipment (1325b29) which, as equipment, is not a product of the regime but must be present by hypothesis. It is “what one would pray for,” what is external to the regime and makes it possible.

The number of parts of the city without which it cannot exist are related to the number of necessary tasks (erga). Aristotle mentions six such tasks: sustenance, arts for the production of tools, arms for both internal order and external
defense, wealth, care for the divine and judgment with regard to the advantageous and the just. It looks as though the parts of the city will follow accordingly: farmers, artisans, soldiers, the rich, priests and deliberators. Instead Aristotle excludes artisans from citizenship on the grounds that their way of life is incompatible with virtue, which is after all the goal of the regime (1328b25ff.). And he not only excludes farmers on the grounds that their lives lack the leisure necessary for citizenship but indicates that what we pray for is that they will be slaves (1330a26–27). The remaining four tasks are in fact fulfilled by the same people, albeit at different times of their lives. Those who own property are citizens. When young they are soldiers, in middle age they are deliberators, and as old men priests. Throughout the Politics, but especially in Books IV–VI, the most difficult problem has been what to do with the lower class, the dēmos. Here in Book VII Aristotle solves the problem by praying them away. Those men absolutely necessary to the polis because they produce its sustenance and its tools, who make its life possible, have been transformed into tools. The dems seems to be the limit on the combination of virtue as means with virtue as end in itself. Good farmers don’t make good men.

Aristotle, of course, knows how problematic this all is. When he suggests that freedom be held out as a reward for slaves (1330a30ff.), he tacitly admits that these cannot be the same as the slaves he previously argued to be so by nature. However, slavery for any but these is unjust, and so the best regime would seem to require either unjust slavery, and so imperfection in its deliberative element, or an ineducable dems, and so ignobility in its citizen body generally. Aristotle’s “solution” here is obviously no solution at all. The dems represents an insurmountable obstacle to the coincidence of virtue as an end with virtue as means. But abolishing it in speech allows Aristotle to address those features of political life in which such a coincidence is possible.

What sort of citizen does the best regime require? People who rule themselves cannot be too malleable, but neither can they be too stubborn. Accordingly Aristotle describes their natures as the proper mix of thinking and art with spirit (thumos). The polis as we have seen is a combination of order and freedom. Aristotle then goes on to say that in Europe men have an excess of thumos in relation to thought, while in Asia the disproportion is reversed. But “the race of the Greeks, just as it is in the middle with respect to places, so it participates in both . . . and the tribes of Greeks also have the same difference in relation to one another” (1327b29–34). Thus a difference in soul—an internal difference—is explained in terms of geography. Locate a city on the map, and you can read off the character of its citizen body. Later, and perhaps somewhat more plausibly, he does something similar in terms of age (1329a15–16, 1332b36–39). The old are by nature more suitable to rule than the young.

What all of this means becomes clearer when Aristotle discusses the physical characteristics of the best city. It must be both near the sea, since it does need external trade, and away from the sea, since it is to be to the greatest
extent possible autotelic. This double demand will be physically satisfied by establishing a port area separated off from the city proper (1327a30–39). Later Aristotle does something similar with respect to ownership of the land (1330a9–20). Reflecting the split between the whole and its parts, Aristotle divides the land first into a common part and privately owned parts. The common part is then divided into a part which treats the city's needs as a whole—i.e., the part concerned with meeting needs of services to the gods—and a part which serves the public needs insofar as they are used by citizens severally—i.e., providing for common messes. Each privately owned part is then also divided in two, with a part near the center of the city and a part on the periphery. The goal is to make each citizen reproduce in himself the external differences in the city which might lead to differing assessments of the good of the whole. Everyone is simultaneously from upstate and downstate.

Perhaps most revealing is Aristotle's description of where the city should be located. For purposes of health and defense, it is to be on a slope. The locations of fortified places will vary depending on the regime. Monarchy and oligarchy fortify a height—an acropolis—democracy occupies level places, and aristocracy has a number of strong places. As to walls, Aristotle is quite clear: You need them. While there is something to the oldfashioned view that it is more kalon to defend the city with men, a city with walls can always choose to ignore them, but a city without walls cannot suddenly choose to have them when it is outnumbered. Walls are an artifice fulfilling Aristotle's earlier "prayer" that the city be located in a place easy of exit but difficult of access. He adds that these walls "must be cared for in order that with respect to the city they may hold suitably both in relation to order (or ornament—kosmon) and in relation to the needs of war" (1331a12–14). That walls are to be both ornamental and useful points to the most striking thing about the physical ordering (diakosmeô—1331a23) of the best city. The houses given over to the gods and those where the rulers have common meals are highest on the slope of this city, although significantly not on the top. Their location has a double justification. It "is sufficiently conspicuous both in relation to the position of virtue and in relation to being more fortified than the neighboring parts of the city" (1331a28–31). Farther down the hill is what is called a free market, which is purged of all merchandise and purged as well of all the nonfree members of the city—artisans and farmers. It is where free men are at leisure, whereas the commercial market further down the slope is the place where necessities are dealt with.

Now this external arrangement of things on a slope is interesting because it corresponds perfectly to the internal hierarchy of the city itself. This is a city in which the higher things are really higher and in which necessities are simultaneously adornments. Aristotle excludes the demos as most recalcitrant to this sort of coincidence and then transforms the city into a place where nothing is accidental. It becomes a poem in which the parts seem at first as haphazard as
the events of real life but in the end fit together like a book. Aristotle has made a city in which all things external and bodily—geography, age, place, property, even the walls of the city—are really images for other things. To be sure, body and externality are present, but they have lost their defining features as limits on the autotelic character of political life. They are like the bodies in books—Oedipus' swollen feet or Ahab's missing leg. As all the details of the city are now meaningful, no private good or preference could be irrelevant. That is, when all difference is of generalizable significance, the split between the public and the private disappears. This city, where nothing occurs contrary to reason (paralogon—1323a19), where necessities are ornaments, is the city that one would pray for.

Now it is only in a political order of this sort that the distinction between the good as useful and the good as kalon can be overcome. If my ownership of land is not only necessary for the existence of the city but structured in such a way that it is symbolic of the very being of the city, then owning it is not only a means to an end; it somehow embodies the end to which it is a means. When the walls of the city are not only necessary for protection but are also an image of that which they are protecting, then building them is not simply a means to an end but a celebration of the end itself. When I open my eyes and see not only where things are, but in seeing where they are see also what they are, then the objects around me become not only things utilized by the city, but the city itself.

Aristotle is not the first to have seen this point. In Plato's Laws the Athenian Stranger proposes the following response to the poets who wish to be admitted to the regime being founded:

Best of strangers, we ourselves to the greatest extent possible are the poets of a tragedy at once the most beautiful and best. At least all our regime has put together an imitation of the most beautiful and best life which we say really to be the truest tragedy. (817b)

The best political order requires men in two ways; as ends their virtue is kalon, as means it is chresimon. To succeed completely the best regime would have to make this double virtue one. The same activity would have to be both for itself and for some external or exoteric end. The exoteric becomes esoteric when it becomes symbolic. The best regime therefore must be a poem, making meaningful what is dictated by necessity but is otherwise meaningless. When in the Poetics (1451b5–11) Aristotle remarks that poetry is something more philosophic than history, he means that, while both seem to deal with particular events, this is something of an illusion in poetry, the very being of which is to make generally significant what is on the face of it particular and insignificant. Only in a regime which is like a poem can the tension between the good of the part and the good of the whole be resolved. To the extent that it is possible not only to serve the whole but in the very same action to embody the whole one serves, it will be possible for the man who does the best things to fare the best.
By articulating what is beautiful or noble within the sphere of the necessary, poetry makes political life possible. Poetic education is therefore the necessary feature of political life. Accordingly, Aristotle considers it in some detail in the final book of the Politics.

IV

By arguing that the pursuit of the necessities of life can in the best regime be made coincident with the pursuit of the kalon, Book VII seems to lead to the happy conclusion that political virtue which is a means to an end can be reconciled with that virtue which is an end in itself—philosophical virtue. The good life and the means to the good life consist in the same activity. Book VIII, less sanguine, seems to argue that esoteric philosophic virtue depends on exoteric political virtue. If Book VII tells us that building the city’s walls can be satisfying for its own sake, Book VIII tells us that poetry and music cannot be understood other than as reflections on building walls. If the city itself were the perfect poem, then poetry would not need to be taught within the city.

The argument about education concerns first of all whether it is education of thinking or of character, and secondly whether it should be directed at the useful, at virtue or at what Aristotle calls here extraordinary or odd things (ta peritta). It looks as though education of character means education to virtue. Education of thinking clearly has to do with the useful, as Aristotle’s subsequent account indicates. At ta peritta we are left to wonder. The sequel makes clear that while of course one has to learn certain things for the sake of other things, and so education will of necessity be to some extent concerned with the useful, its ultimate goal is virtue understood as autotelic activity. On the level of the individual Aristotle gives that activity the name scholē, leisure. Education to the useful is permissible only to the extent that it is not at cross purposes with the primary goal of education, virtue. Hence the young are not to be educated in anything which will make them vulgar (banauson). Aristotle then says that he means by a banausic or vulgar deed or art “whatever renders either the body, soul, or thinking of the free useless with respect to the uses and actions of virtue” (1337b8–12). This warning against the useful goes so far as to include the “free sciences” when they become too concerned with precision. Leisure is to be the goal of education, because virtuous, i.e., autotelic, action is the goal of the best regime. Music, the model for such action, is good because it is useless.

Aristotle’s examples of what he has in mind are quite odd, however. He quotes two passages from the Odyssey. In the first, the swineherd Eumaeus is defending Odysseus who, disguised as a beggar, is sitting at table with the suitors and listening to a singer. Odysseus of course is in the midst of planning to kill them. This musical activity of free men at leisure is in fact a disguise for
utilitarian activity of a rather brutal kind. In the second quotation Odysseus himself speaks. He is at a banquet at the house of Alcinous in Phaeacia; the song he praises, which has constituted their leisure, is an account of the Trojan War. Is that what leisure consists in, listening to songs about war? In both of these instances leisure proves parasitical upon lack of leisure. Contrary to initial appearances, it is leisure, scholé, which is the negation of lack of leisure, ascholia. Music, which was introduced as free and kalon and which is now distinguished even from political activity, requires the slavish and ugly to be what it is. This is perhaps more manifest in epic poetry, but, if Aristotle is correct about the manner in which musical mode can render human mood—about the way music provides a direct representation of what is in the soul—it is clear that the beauty of a musical representation of, for example, anger would require the existence of anger and so of things to get angry about. What is done for its own sake seems always to consist in a reflection on what is done for the sake of something else. The reflection may be autotelic, but it exists only as a sort of supervention on action which is heterotelic. Those fare best (arista prattein), and so are happy, who in leisure reflect apparently selfconsciously on doing the best things (arista prattein) in the face of adversity.

In Book VII this problem repeatedly takes the form of the question whether education in music requires that one learn to play an instrument. That is, is it important that one become an instrument for one’s own leisure activity? On the one hand, to play an instrument means to acknowledge necessity. On the other hand, something like acknowledging necessity is a condition for understanding and appreciating music. To ask how much one should play then amounts to asking how much one should acknowledge necessity. In the midst of asking this question Aristotle introduces a second issue:

At the same time, children should (dei) have some pastime, and the rattle of Archytus, which they give to children in order that, using it, they will break none of the things of the household, [should] be considered to have come to be beautifully. (1340b26–29)

This rattle (invented by a philosopher) is given to children so they won’t break the things of the household. That is, music keeps us from breaking up the home. It substitutes simulated motion for real motion. The sentence itself is revealing. The necessity for children to have some pastime and the necessity to consider this pastime to have come to be beautifully are expressed by one and the same word, dei. They are quite literally the same necessity. It is because thinking and moving, while admittedly different, are governed by the same necessity that music and poetry can have such power. The education of Book VIII is double; it may either be directed toward the useful or the kalon, but, like the virtuous actions of Book VII, it is nevertheless one education.

The power of music and poetry, on which the city depends, is their capacity
to appeal to men in a twofold way. Our actions must simultaneously be understood as autotelic and as directed toward external goods. That the exoteric admits of being read esoterically provides a problematic unity to this dyad. Still, there remains a difficulty. Aristotle had begun Book VIII with the suggestion that there are three competing understandings of the purpose of education; virtue, the useful and ta peritta—the odd or outstanding things. The expression is used sparingly but in interesting ways in the Politics. It appears twice in Book II, once referring admiringly to the speeches of Socrates (1265a12) and once not so admiringly to the way of life of Hippodamus, the first man to give an account of the best regime (1267b22). It comes up again in Book VIII in the discussion of how to avoid vulgarity in education. Aristotle indicates that the young should not toil too long at those works which are wondrous and outstanding or odd (ta thaumasia kai peritta). There seem then to be connections on the one hand between philosophy and ta peritta and on the other between banausic, or vulgar, and ta peritta. Aristotle nudges us to a conclusion by saying that it is vulgar to master sciences completely as it is to master instruments and then referring us to the philosophers for precise speech (akribologia) about which musical modes have which effects (1341b26ff). Philosophy is vulgar.

The best political order is one where the good man is happy and is a good citizen. He can fulfill his function as part while reaping his satisfaction as a whole. For that to be possible, the distinction between virtue as a means and virtue as an end in itself must be slurred. Music, and finally poetry, accomplish that end. They are also suited to lots of other ends, however, and can corrupt as easily as educate. Consequently in the best regime they need to be regulated. There would have to be someone aware of the symbolic import of the location of the free agora in order for it not to be relocated for apparently sensible and utilitarian reasons. (One might say the same of the Electoral College.) But to be aware of this symbolism is no longer to be enchanted by it in the same way. The last book of the Politics is notable for having introduced censorship without having described how the censors are to be educated. Aristotle began Book VII by saying what the actions of the legislator must be, but never does he indicate that these are actions which the legislator does for their own sake. The education of the legislators would require a reflection on the connection between the useful and the kalon which, in revealing the utility of the kalon for the city, would (to stretch a point) render it ugly.

The coincidence of the autotelic and the useful, of the philosophic and the political, in Book VII is therefore something of a myth. We knew that already, given the prayerful disposal of the demos in the best regime. But there is a third sort of education mentioned in Book VIII. Education directed toward ta peritta is on the surface of it akin to education directed at vulgar utility. At the same time, as a reflection on the relation between the useful and the kalon, it is both useful (necessary for censorship) and autotelic and so in its way kalon. At one point in Book VIII Aristotle calls what he is doing a prelude to the tune (endo-
simos—1339a13) of the speeches that will follow. He thereby indicates the "musical" character of his own work. The true coincidence of the useful and the kalon is not a philosophical politics, but perhaps it is political philosophy. If the relation between the useful and the kalon is the same as the relation between the external and the internal, the exoteric and the esoteric, this would go a long way toward accounting for Aristotle's mode of writing in the Politics.

NOTES


2. It looks as though there is a suppressed standard of utility here, perhaps what is useful for the regime.

3. With the exception of the quotation about the Cyclops in Book I, all of the previous quotations from Homer in the Politics are from the Iliad, the poem about war. Predictably enough the quotations here are from the Odyssey, the peace poem.

4. This may have something to do with the increased frequency with which Aristotle uses double negations to describe what he is doing in Book VIII, e.g. 1337b5,16,20; 1339a27; 1340b22.
Misunderstanding and Understanding Hume’s Moral Philosophy:
An Essay on *Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy*,
by Nicholas Capaldi

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As Socrates pointed out long ago, people do not seek the truth if they believe that they already possess it. This insight of Socrates provides an answer to an important question regarding the moral sentiment theory of the Scottish Moralists, for this theory seems to capture whatever insights are contained in Kantianism, Utilitarianism, Aristotelianism, or any of their various contemporary permutations, yet it avoids the sorts of problems commonly associated with all versions of these theories. Thus, the question is, why is it that moral sentiment theory is never considered a serious contender in the contemporary moral arena?

The answer has to do with what philosophers believe they know about moral sentiment theory, which, in most cases, amounts to what they believe they know about Hume’s version of it. A good deal of what most philosophers believe they know—indeed, what they believe “everyone knows” about Hume’s moral theory—is simply false. Thus, any attempts on the part of contemporary proponents of the moral sentiment theory to discuss or debate its merits become, instead, attempts to disabuse the audience of their various misconceptions about it. Nor are these misconceptions minor. For example, anyone who “knows” that Hume was some sort of emotivist, or that Hume thought that one cannot deduce an ‘ought’ from and ‘is,’ or that Hume believed that there is a ‘fact-value gap,’ is in the grip of misconceptions on the order of, say, “knowing” that Plato was a relativist or that Kant was a consequentialist.

It seems clear that, before contemporary philosophers can be persuaded to consider seriously whether or not moral sentiment theory might be true, they must first be convinced that they do not really know much of what they thought they knew about moral sentiment theory in general or Hume’s theory in particular. It is, then, a delight to discover that someone has taken on this task. In his book, *Hume’s Place in Moral Philosophy*, Nicholas Capaldi takes on the received views, offering the most systematic and thorough critique of them to date.

Of course, Capaldi does much more than criticize the received views of Hume’s moral philosophy. He also offers a historically and contextually sensi-
tive analysis of all the major aspects of Hume’s moral theory. Capaldi begins by examining the views of Hume’s predecessors, showing how they determined the central questions involved in the moral debate of Hume’s time. He explains Hume’s theory of moral judgment, emphasizing the importance of the distinction between moral sentiments and moral judgments. He offers a thoughtful account of Hume’s much misunderstood theory of moral obligation and its relation to the moral debate of the time. Finally, he examines Hume’s theory of the passions and explains its importance both for understanding Hume’s conception of the self and for understanding the development of his theory of sympathy from the initial Treatise account to the final version found in the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.

Yet, one thing that is evident throughout the discussion of each of these aspects of Hume’s theory is that Capaldi is waging a constant battle against tenaciously persistent and pervasive misunderstandings of Hume. What this reveals is that the Socratic task of exposing ignorance, if not first in the order of importance, must be first in the order of dialectic. For this reason I shall concentrate primarily on this negative, Socratic aspect of Capaldi’s book.

HUME’S PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT

Capaldi makes clear that the most fundamental problem with standard interpretations of Hume’s moral philosophy is their lack of attention to context, or, as he calls it, their “textual and historical myopia.” Given the evidence of blindness at every conceivable level, this is an apt description. What makes Capaldi’s critique so devastating is that it reveals just how profound the contextual myopia of Humean interpretation has been. It shows how a number of the most widely accepted interpretations of Hume’s moral theory ignore the context of paragraphs in which passages occur, ignore the context of the sections in which passages occur, ignore the context of the historical debate to which Hume was contributing, ignore the context of Hume’s overall moral theory, and, finally, ignore the context of Hume’s general philosophical project. What makes Capaldi’s own interpretation so powerful is his careful attention to all of these contexts in his delineation of Hume’s moral theory.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the care he takes in providing an adequate philosophical framework for interpreting his moral views. This is crucial because the major and most fundamental source of misconceptions about Hume’s views is a misunderstanding of Hume’s overall philosophical project. Since its inception in the nineteenth century, the most general framework for interpreting Hume’s thought has been the “rationalist-empiricist” distinction. This is not a helpful distinction for understanding Hume’s philosophical project. First, it forces us to conceive of Hume’s philosophical project as primarily epistemological, whereas Hume himself conceived of it as essentially moral.
And, second, it obscures the crucial fact that Hume’s critique of philosophical thought was not directed merely against what has now come to be identified as rationalism, but against the traditional conception of the nature of philosophical thinking that motivated the ‘empiricist’ thought of Locke and Berkeley as well. Hume was not an empiricist, he was a skeptic; and his skepticism was not a result of ‘following empiricist principles to their logical conclusions.’ His skepticism was the result of his recognition of the incoherences inherent in the traditional perspective of philosophical thinking.

Capaldi provides a far superior framework for understanding Hume’s philosophical project, viz., the framework of Hume’s ‘Copernican Revolution.’ Hume’s revolutionary move was to suggest a radical shift of perspective in philosophical thinking. Capaldi calls this a shift between the ‘I Think’ and the ‘We Do’ perspective. The traditional philosophical perspective, carried over into modern philosophy by Descartes, is, Capaldi points out, the ‘I Think’ perspective, or “the perspective of the egocentric, outside, disengaged observer” (p. 22). From this point of view, the task of philosophy is “to scrutinize our thought process in the hope of uncovering principles of rationality which could be applied to directing our actions” (p. 23). The task of philosophy so conceived is to test both thought and action, including all social practices and institutions, against the theoretical standards discovered by ‘philosophical thought.’ Hume’s project was to show that this traditional perspective did not and could not produce any coherent standards, because reason, conceived in this way, was both self-destructive and inherently incoherent.

Hume, on the other hand, adopted the ‘We Do’ perspective, which, Capaldi says, “viewed human beings fundamentally as agents, as doers, immersed in both a physical world and a social world along with other agents” (p. 23). Rather than testing all thought and action according to theoretical standards, Hume reversed the procedure by testing all theoretical principles by the standards implicit in our actual thought and practice. Even some of the more thoughtful and context-sensitive of interpreters have missed Hume’s essential move here. For instance, Norman Kemp Smith realized that Hume’s project was not an irrationalist attack on reason per se, yet he mistakenly took Hume’s fundamental criticism of the traditional conception of reason to be the psychological claim that we are constitutionally incapable of conforming to the theoretical standards of reason as traditionally conceived.

But while Hume certainly did believe this was true, it was not the basis of his criticism. What Hume attempted to illustrate was that if we thoroughly and consistently adhered to the standards produced by the ‘I Think’ perspective, “there would be an end at once of all action, as well as the chief part of speculation.” Any method that is supposed to produce standards of thought and action, which, when consistently applied, undermines all thought and action is radically misconceived. Hume’s psychological point is not the criticism, but rather, the explanation of why proponents of the traditional perspective, in fact,
do not suffer from a complete paralysis of thought and action. The answer to this is psychological. ‘Nature,’ in the form of psychological mechanisms, prevents them from consistent adherence to their own theoretical principles. Hume’s suggestion that we be on guard whenever there is “any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without meaning or idea” (EHU, p. 22, emphasis added), reflects his recognition that the “jargon, which has so long taken possession of metaphysical reasonings” (EHU, p. 21) is all too often merely a maneuver that allows philosophers to escape the consistent application and inevitable implications of their own theoretical principles.

Thus, Capaldi’s framework provides a more specific answer to what is wrong with attempts to understand Hume within the ‘rationalist-empiricist’ framework. To do so is to view Hume’s philosophical project as simply another move within the ‘I Think’ perspective rather than as an utter rejection of that perspective. An excellent illustration of just how thoroughly this sort of error distorts Hume’s thought can be found in Anglo-American Positivism. Despite its claim to Humean paternity, positivism was actually a perfect example of the sort of philosophical perspective that Hume rejected.

The essence of positivist theory was a theoretically derived theory of meaning, which was used as a standard for testing all thought and action. What was for Hume simply a practical method for clarifying suspicious philosophical terms became, for positivists, a standard for evaluating the meaning of all discourse. As critics were soon to point out, the positivist agenda, consistently applied, would not only relegate all moral, social, and political discourse to the noncognitive realm, but would totally undermine the very practice of science in whose name positivism was advanced.

But in addition to being an example of the sort of philosophical perspective Hume himself rejected, positivism is also an example of how the misunderstanding of Hume’s philosophical project can lead to an almost perversely distorted conception of his moral theory. Indeed, as Capaldi makes clear, the two major prevailing misconceptions of Hume’s moral thought are the legacy of positivist misinterpretation of Hume’s project. The misconceptions are (1) that Hume’s theory is a form of subjectivism, and (2) that Hume believed that there is a fact-value gap, as is evidenced by his claim that an ‘ought’ cannot be derived from an ‘is.’ I shall examine each of these in turn.

SUBJECTIVISM VS. INTERSUBJECTIVISM

The subjectivism attributed to Hume is generally believed to be one of two sorts. (It is even sometimes claimed that Hume, being either confused or inconsistent, held both.) The first sort is emotivism, the noncognitivist view that moral pronouncements simply express the evaluator's feelings or sentiments. Such expressions are neither true nor false and, thus, there is really no such
thing as moral judgment at all. To say that something is virtuous is simply to express one’s positive attitude or sentiments toward it.

The second sort of subjectivism is less extreme. It holds that moral pronouncements report the feelings or attitudes of the evaluator. Inasmuch as such reports are either true or false, it is not a form of noncognitivism, but it is still entirely subjectivist in the sense that all that is being reported is the feelings of the evaluator. On this view, to say that something is virtuous is to report one’s positive feeling towards it. Capaldi traces the development of these readings of Hume in great detail and carefully examines the passages in Hume which are generally claimed to support such readings. What this reveals is that the smallest attention to context not only shows that these passages do not support the subjectivist reading, but also provides overwhelming evidence against such readings.

The early emotivists, Ayer and Stevenson, can at least be given this much credit: They never attributed emotivism to Hume. On the other hand, both claimed “inspiration” from Hume, and Capaldi points out that Stevenson even went so far as to claim that “Hume has most nearly asked the questions that here concern us, and has most nearly reached a conclusion that the present writer can accept.” The implication is that Hume was groping around for the emotivist solution and that, if he had merely been a bit more consistent or less confused, he would have discovered it. But if one looks to the moral debate of Hume’s time, a debate revolving around the moral egoism advanced by Hobbes and Mandeville, the moral rationalism of Clarke and Wollaston, and the moral sentiment theory first articulated by Shaftesbury and developed and elaborated by Hutcheson, it becomes clear that the questions that concerned Hume were, for the most part, not even remotely related to the questions that concerned Stevenson. Hume was interested in the nature of moral distinctions (what it is that makes something virtuous or vicious), in the nature of moral apprehension (how we come to know such moral distinctions), and in the nature of moral motivation (how we distinguish moral from nonmoral motivation). These were not the concerns of the emotivists. Furthermore, if one looks at Hume’s actual text, it is clear that the answers he gives to his own questions are not at all close to Stevenson’s answers to his questions. For Hume not only makes continual reference to moral judgments and clearly treats them as true or false, he also refers to specific moral qualities, and claims that the question of whether or not any given object has such qualities concerns a “plain matter of fact” (EHU, p. 289).

Although later emotivists and their critics did attribute emotivism to Hume, Stevenson attributed the second sort of subjectivism to Hume. On this interpretation, Hume is supposedly claiming that moral pronouncements report the sentiments of the evaluator. Although this interpretation at least acknowledges Hume’s frequent reference to moral judgments and his claims that such judgments are true or false, it can be maintained only by a highly selective reading
of Hume’s texts. It completely ignores the numerous passages where Hume explicitly denies that moral judgments refer to the personal sentiments of the evaluator. Likewise it ignores those passages where Hume claims that we can make correct moral judgments even when our personal sentiments are completely contrary to such judgments.

The only explanation of the degree of distortion evident in these subjectivist interpretations is that their advocates approached Hume with a set of preconceptions about what his moral views must (or at least should) have been. And the source of these preconceptions can be traced directly to the general misunderstanding of Hume’s philosophical project.

What exactly was Hume’s view? Capaldi suggests the term “intersubjectivist,” and this is an appropriate description. The sense of “intersubjective” can be clarified by considering Hume’s analogy to primary and secondary qualities (an analogy Hume adopts from Hutcheson). By Hutcheson’s and Hume’s time it had become common to interpret this distinction in a somewhat different manner than had Locke. Primary qualities were qualities of objects that existed “in the objects” and independently of human perception. Secondary qualities were “in the mind,” and thus their existence was dependent on human perception. In Hume’s language, secondary qualities were “impressions.”

Consider our color perceptions and color judgments. Color distinctions are, in Hume’s terminology, founded upon or determined by impressions. While impressions are obviously neither true nor false, it does not follow that our color judgments are neither true nor false. Nor does it follow that in judging that something is red, we are merely reporting our subjective impression. Instead we suppose that physical objects are so constituted that, viewed under certain standard conditions, they will produce the impression of red in normally sighted human beings. If I view an object under these standard conditions, I can use my impression as a basis for the judgment that the object is red. But, even in this case, I am not reporting my impression; I am using my impression as evidence for the judgment. My judgment is true when the object is, in fact, so constituted that it produces the impression of red in normally sighted human beings who view it under the appropriate conditions. It is false when the object is not so constituted. Our language reflects this distinction between reports of subjective experience and judgments of fact about the qualities of the object. When we wish to report our subjective experience we say that the object looks or appears red. When we wish to make a claim about the nature of the object, we say that it is red.

The same relationship holds between moral sentiments (impressions) and moral judgments. Certain objects such as actions or characters are so constituted that, under certain standard conditions, they produce certain sentiments (approbation or disapprobation) in normal human beings. If I view or consider, say, a person’s character under these standard conditions, I can use my sentiment as a basis for the judgment that he is virtuous. But, as in the case of color
judgments, I am not reporting my own sentiment, but rather, using my sentiment as evidence for the judgment about the nature of the person’s character. To say that someone is virtuous is to say that he has certain sorts of causal properties, that he has qualities that, under standard conditions, produce a sentiment of approbation in human beings. The question of whether or not someone possesses these qualities is, according to Hume, “a plain matter of fact.”

The standard condition necessary for the production of the sentiments of moral approbation or disapprobation is an impartial point of view.

Beloved, every particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others; and ‘tis impossible we cou’d ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his peculiar point of view. In order, therefore, to prevent those continual contradictions, and arrive at a more stable judgment of things, we fix on some steady and general points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation.4

Although this general point of view is impartial, it is not ideal in the sense of unrealizable. It is the view that all of us naturally have whenever we observe the actions or character of someone who has no particular relation to ourselves, for instance, when we observe a stranger engaged in some benevolent action towards another stranger or some cruelty inflicted on the people of a distant age or nation.

Hume not only considers the questions of which qualities produce moral sentiments and what objects have such qualities to be questions concerning plain matters of fact, he also considers the question of whether or not one has a moral obligation to be a plain matter of fact.

How can this be reconciled with what everyone ‘knows’ Hume said about the ‘fact-value’ gap and the impossibility of deducing an ‘ought’ statement from an ‘is’ statement? The answer reveals the second fundamental misconception at the heart of the received view of Hume’s moral philosophy. It is to this misconception that I now turn.

OBLIGATION AND THE ‘IS-OUGHT’ PASSAGE

Capaldi argues, quite correctly, that Hume never raises any question whatsoever about the nature or status of the inference between factual or ‘is’ statements and moral or ‘ought’ statements. The usual shock with which this claim is received is a good indication of how little regard has been paid to the line of argument Hume is pursuing in the section containing the so-called ‘is-ought’ passage. And this lack of attention to the context of the passage is a further
indication of how little regard has been paid to the nature of the moral debate that Hume was addressing in that section. Before the ‘is-ought’ passage can be understood, one must first understand its context.

As I mentioned earlier, the contending views in the debate of Hume’s time were moral egoism, moral rationalism, and moral sentiment theory. Although Hutcheson must be credited with being the first to work out the moral sentiment theory in a systematic manner, he was at his best when criticizing rival theories. Hume’s recognition of Hutcheson’s genius in this regard is evidenced by his adopting all of Hutcheson’s major criticisms of egoism and rationalism.

Hutcheson and Hume agreed that the moral egoists were correct in their recognition that both the nature of moral distinctions and the nature of moral motivation could only be explained by appeal to sentiments. The problem with egoism was not in its form of explanation, but in the content. It misidentified the sentiment. The “selfish system” founders on its radically misconceived notion of human nature. Hutcheson, Hume, and later Adam Smith all adamantly denied that human beings are motivated only, or even primarily, by self-interest. The selfish thesis is so contrary to the evidence of everyday experience that it can only be maintained by the most intricate, subtle and, ultimately, fallacious turns of argument, and by twisting the meaning of words beyond recognition. In addition, egoism renders all judgments regarding the actions and characters of historical agents and people in distant nations totally unintelligible. Finally, egoism reduces all morality to prudence and, in doing so, collapses the distinction between the moral and nonmoral realm. This, the moral sentiment theorists argue, eliminates morality altogether.

The second group of opponents in the debate of Hume’s time were the moral rationalists. A number of somewhat different theories come under this heading, but what was common to them all was the view that moral distinctions consist in certain sorts of truths which are discoverable by reason alone. Hutcheson and Hume concentrated on two dominant versions. Both versions considered virtue to consist in conformity to truths, but they differed in their analyses of the nature of these truths. The first version held that the source of moral distinctions were demonstrable moral relations. Virtue consisted in conformity to these relations. This was the view of Samuel Clarke. The second version was Wollaston’s view that virtue consisted in signification of truth in actions. Actions that signify things as they truly are, are virtuous; those that signify things as they are not, are vicious.

The section of the Treatise containing the ‘is-ought’ passage is devoted to the criticism of moral rationalism in general and Clarke’s and Wollaston’s versions in particular. Capaldi’s treatment of this section contains many strengths, yet it does have a few shortcomings. Its strengths include his recognition that Hume, like Hutcheson before him, was rejecting a certain account of the nature of moral obligation and offering a different account in its stead; his analysis of the content and grammar of the ‘is-ought’ passage, showing how both are at
odds with the traditional interpretation of that passage; and his detailed examination of every major variation in the traditional interpretation, along with careful rebuttals of each. These aspects of Capaldi’s account provide overwhelming evidence for his negative claim that Hume never raised the ‘is-ought’ question. From the perspective of the negative Socratic task, Capaldi’s criticism of the received views on Hume’s theory of obligation, particularly in relation to the ‘is-ought’ passage, is one of the major strengths of his book. His blow to the received view is simply devastating.

The shortcomings of his account, although they in no way detract either from the strength of his negative thesis or from his positive account of Hume’s theory of obligation, do detract from his actual interpretation of the ‘is-ought’ passage. Even though Capaldi deserves much credit for examining the passage in a far broader context than any other commentator, his context is still not broad enough. While he recognizes that Hume and Hutcheson share the same concern, he does not examine enough of Hutcheson’s work to reveal the fundamental nature of that concern. In fact, in the section containing the ‘is-ought’ passage, Hume repeats every one of Hutcheson’s major arguments against moral rationalism, including Hutcheson’s most fundamental criticism. As I will argue below, it is this fundamental criticism, first advanced by Hutcheson and repeated by Hume throughout the section, that Hume is addressing in his summary ‘is-ought’ paragraph. To show this will require a brief look at Hutcheson’s criticisms of moral rationalism.

First, Hutcheson argues that moral rationalism cannot account for moral motivation. The mere knowledge of any truth cannot motivate anyone to action; it is only when this knowledge is accompanied by some sentiment or desire that we are moved to act. But, quite apart from this consideration, the moral rationalists are completely incapable of giving any explanation of what makes something virtuous or vicious that does not either reduce to egoism, reduce to moral sentiment theory, or beg the question.

Hutcheson argues that, before one can appeal to the morality of an action as the motive to perform it, one must be able to give some independent account of what makes it morally good. What sort of accounts do the moral rationalists give? Some claim that it is an end proposed by the Deity. But why, Hutcheson asks, do we approve God’s ends? Because, they say, God only wills what is best. But, Hutcheson points out, if one means naturally best, i.e., conducive to our own or others’ interest, then the position either reduces to egoism or admits that it is a benevolent sentiment that makes something morally good and not conformity to truth. If, on the other hand, one means morally best, then the answer begs the question, saying no more than what makes it morally good is that it is morally good.

Another common way the rationalists answered the question of what makes something morally good was to appeal to duty or obligation. After describing Clarke’s view that virtue consists in conformity to relations, Hutcheson notes:
‘Tis asserted, that God who knows all these relations, &c. does guide his actions by them, since he has no wrong affection (the word ‘wrong’ should have been first explained); And that in like manner these relations &c. ought (another unlucky word in morals) to determine the choice of all rationalists. (I, p. 246)

Hutcheson’s point, both about the use of the term ‘wrong’ and of the term ‘ought,’ is that they beg the question. Clarke is supposed to be explaining what makes something morally good or evil, but to refer to it being wrong or obligatory in the explanation is to presuppose the very thing being explained.

Hutcheson attacks Wollaston’s view that virtue consists in signification of truth on exactly the same grounds:

One of Mr. Woolaston’s illustrations that significance of falsehood is the idea of moral evil, ends in this, ‘tis acting a lye. What then? Should he not first have shewn what was moral evil, and that every lye was such. (I, p. 271)

Nor does Hutcheson leave any doubt about the nature of his criticism.

One may see that he has some other idea of moral good, previously to this significance of truth, by his introducing, in the very explication of it, words presupposing the ideas of morality previously known: such as ‘right,’ ‘obligation,’ ‘lye’. . . . (I, p. 269)

Throughout his discussion of the moral rationalists Hutcheson continually points out that the question-begging character of their attempts to explain the nature of moral distinctions is particularly evident in their appeal to moral obligation or duty. To appeal to duty or obligation in explaining what makes something morally good is simply to say that what makes something morally good is its moral goodness. This is no explanation at all.

On the other hand, Hutcheson claimed that there was no problem of explaining moral distinctions and, thus, moral obligation, once one acknowledges the existence of moral sentiments. By ‘obligation’ one can mean that an action is necessary to obtain happiness to the agent; this is the prudential ‘ought’ and it “presupposes selfish affections, and the senses of private happiness.” Or one can mean “that every spectator, or he himself upon reflection, must approve his action, and disapprove his omitting it” (I, p. 229). This is the moral ‘ought,’ and it presupposes moral sentiments.

Hume begins the section containing the ‘is-ought’ passage, which is titled “Moral Distinctions not deriv’d from Reason,” by repeating the main argument of his Book II discussion of motivation. Like Hutcheson, Hume argues that reason discovers truth, but can never, in itself, motivate us to act. Only passions or sentiments can motivate actions. Thus, rationalism cannot account for moral motivation. Hume next examines the specific theories of Clarke and Wollaston, beginning with Wollaston. He first repeats a number of Hutcheson’s
points about the absurd implications of Wollaston’s views, e.g., that it makes the morality or immorality of an action depend on the sagacity of the observers instead of the intentions of the agent, and it implies that all virtues are equally virtuous and all vices equally vicious. Hume then turns to Hutcheson’s most devastating criticism. After examining a number of attempts to escape the absurd implications of Wollaston’s view, Hume points out that,

We may easily observe, that in all those arguments there is an evident reasoning in a circle. A person who takes possession of another’s goods, and uses them as his own, in a manner declares them to be his own; and this falsehood is the source of the immorality. . . . But is property, or right, or obligation, intelligible without an antecedent morality? (T, p. 462n)

Like Hutcheson, Hume recognizes that Wollaston’s attempts to explain what makes something virtuous or vicious inevitably beg the question. For, even supposing that immorality is derived from the ‘falsehood’ represented in action, Wollaston cannot give “any plausible reason, why such a falsehood is immoral” (T, p. 462n).

Hume next turns to Clarke’s moral relations theory. Clarke had claimed that moral distinctions are based on demonstrable moral relations, what he called “ eternal and immutable fitnesses and unfitnesses of things.” In his criticism of Clarke, Hutcheson had pointed out that the supposed relations must be ones that hold only between rational agents, and that any of the usual senses of ‘fitness’ would seem to hold between things like numbers, sentences, inanimate objects, and so on. Hume adds his own twist to the argument by introducing his theory of relations. The only demonstrable relations, according to Hume, are resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportion in quantity or number. But all these relations are applicable “not only to an irrational, but also to an inanimate object” (T, p. 464). Hume then challenges the moral relations theorist to specify a relation that applies only to rational agents and that is a demonstrable relation discoverable by reason alone. Capaldi offers an excellent, detailed analysis of this aspect of Hume’s argument, showing both how it decisively proves there could be no such relations, and at the same time proves that even if such relations could be shown to exist, the rationalists could never demonstrate their effect on the will.

But it is important to note that Hume does not end his criticism of the moral relations view here. He pursues the matter a step further by indicating the sort of problems encountered when trying to explain what makes a given relation a moral relation. Why is it that the relation involved in incest is immoral in humans, but not in animals? If the answer is because animals do not have sufficient reason to discover its immorality, yet “man, being endow’d with that faculty, which ought to restrain him to his duty, the same action becomes criminal,” then, Hume claims, “I would reply, that this is evidently arguing in a circle” (T, p. 467). Like Wollaston’s, Clarke’s attempt to explain the nature
of moral distinctions, what makes something moral or immoral, begs the question.

It is at this point that Hume concludes with the 'is-ought' passage. According to Capaldi, the passage is directed at the moral relations view and, more specifically, at Clarke. Capaldi takes Hume's main thrust against Clarke to be his inability to specify any demonstrable relation that holds only between rational agents. The point Hume is making in the 'is-ought' passage, according to Capaldi, is that neither can Clarke deduce the supposed moral relations represented by the moral 'ought' from the four demonstrable relations of science. The problem is not how or whether one can deduce the moral 'ought' from a factual 'is,' but how one can deduce the moral relation represented by 'ought' from these other relations which, Hume points out, "are entirely different from it" (T, p. 469).

This interpretation is certainly plausible. Not only would it make sense for Hume to be making this sort of point here, but, unlike the traditional interpretation, the claim Capaldi attributes to Hume is consistent with Hume's overall moral theory. And, as Capaldi points out, the actual grammar of the passage argues more favorably for his interpretation than for the received interpretation.

Yet I think there is an even more plausible interpretation. When Hume begins the passage with, "in every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked," I believe he really is referring to every system he has discussed so far and not merely to Clarke's moral relations view. Wollaston's version does not involve moral relations, and thus the criticism Capaldi supposes Hume to be making in the passage would not apply to every system Hume has "met with." As further evidence for his interpretation Capaldi points out that Clarke actually argues in the manner Hume describes in the passage, viz., establishing the being of God, referring to the affairs of men, and then turning to our obligations. But, in fact, both Clarke and Wollaston argue in this manner. I believe that Hume's point is that all the moral rationalists' attempts to explain the nature of moral distinctions beg the question because they employ terms that presuppose the very thing being explained.

When Clarke answers the questions of what makes these relations morally good by claiming that God, who has no 'wrong' affection, guides His actions by them, and thus they 'ought' to guide our actions, he has, in effect, merely said that what makes them morally good is that they are morally good. Likewise, when Wollaston attempts to explain what makes the signification of falsehood morally evil by claiming that God, our benefactor, has given us reason to know the truth and we are signifying the 'lie' that we are not 'obliged' to know the truth, he has merely said that what makes it morally wrong is that it is morally wrong.

Finally, while Capaldi correctly denies that Hume is discussing the nature or status of the inference from factual to moral statements, he does believe that Hume is concerned with an 'inference,' viz., the inference from the four
demonstrable relations of science to a supposed moral relation represented by ‘ought.’ But Hume is not discussing any sort of inference whatsoever. He is using the term ‘deduction’ in a very common eighteenth-century sense that has nothing to do with inference. To deduce something in this sense is to explain it by reference to its source. It is a sense used by Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Adam Smith, as well as by Hume in a number of other places. All use ‘deduce’ in this sense when referring to the moral egoists’ explanation of the source of moral distinctions. For instance, Hume refers to the egoists’ “deduction of morals from self-love” (EHU, p. 215), and Smith describes the egoists as “those who are fond of deducing all our sentiments from certain refinements of self-love.”

Once it is recognized that Hume is criticizing the form of explanation employed by the moral rationalists, it becomes clear just how absurd it is to suppose that Hume is suggesting there is any ‘fact-value’ gap or that there is some problem with deducing moral statements from factual statements. For Hume is not complaining that the moral rationalists explain ‘oughts’ by using ‘is’s,’ but exactly the opposite. His criticism is that they are attempting to explain ‘oughts’ or moral terms by using ‘oughts’ or other moral terms, and this begs the question.

CONCLUSION

I have already explained why I have concentrated on the negative aspect of Capaldi’s task. But I would like to conclude by briefly relating this negative aspect to the positive aspects of his account. Capaldi’s recognition of Hume’s radical shift in philosophical perspective reveals a number of traditional blind spots imposed by a misunderstanding of Hume’s philosophical project. I have discussed these in the specific area of Hume’s moral theory. But there are other, more general, areas affected as well. For instance, the treatment of Hume’s theory of meaning as a form of reductive empiricism (often referred to as Hume’s following empiricism to its logical conclusion) is a natural result of the assumption that Hume is simply making a new move within the traditional philosophical framework. By rejecting this assumption, Capaldi is able to give a sensitive and accurate account of Hume’s view on meaning.

The same is true of Hume’s account of the self. The assumption that Hume is working within the ‘I Think’ perspective has led the vast majority of Hume commentators to take his Treatise, Book I, discussion of the self as his full account, in spite of Hume’s explicit claim that this account is directed toward only one aspect of the self. In Book I Hume is rejecting the view of the self as a simple, atomistic Cartesian ego. The self is not essentially a “thinking thing.” Capaldi shows that it is only in Book II, “Of the Passions,” that Hume reveals
his full account of the self. The self is both thought and passion, mind and body. We come to have a concept of self, indeed, we come to be selves, only through social interaction. In treating man as a social being Hume is doing more than insisting that he always be considered in a social context. He is insisting that all selves are essentially and irreducibly social.

The implications of this view are momentous, both for moral philosophy and for social and political philosophy. In moral philosophy it quite obviously undermines the egoistic systems of Hobbes and his followers. But it likewise undermines the Kantian conception of a person. If moral agents are so solely in virtue of their rationality, i.e., if they are essentially thinking things, then no human being is a moral agent. Utilitarianism fares no better. The notion of society as comprised of distinct, individualistic entities performing a hedonic calculus involving the ‘self-interest’ of each discrete self is radically misconceived.

In social and political philosophy the Humean conception of self undermines the foundation of all social contract theory for the same reason that it undermines Utilitarianism. The view of society as composed of atomistic individuals contracting together to realize their “self-interests” is based on the same profoundly flawed conception of a self. Contemporary Rawlsian versions of contract theory are equally misguided. As Hume points out, “ourself, independent of the perception of every other object, is in reality nothing . . .” (T, p. 340). Take away our concrete relations to the world and others, and one takes away all selves. There could be nothing behind the ‘veil of ignorance’ except bundles of perceptions—very questionable arbitrators of social or political legitimacy!

Finally, Capaldi’s recognition of Hume’s shift in perspective gives him the basis for developing Hume’s conception of how one can (and, just as important, how one cannot) achieve philosophical understanding of the social world. Capaldi argues that, on a Humean view, “social practice is an intersubjectively shared framework of norms within which we interpret what we are doing” (p. 284). The social world composed of these practices cannot be understood either by the sort of reductivism found in physical science or by the appeal to hidden, underlying structure that pervades much of social science. They cannot explain the social world because they either do not account for meaning or they arbitrarily impose some alien meaning on practice. For Hume the task of the social philosopher is “explication,” which Capaldi describes as the attempt to clarify “our ordinary understanding of our practice in the hope of extracting . . . a set of norms which can be used to guide future practice” (p. 282). Social understanding and social criticism must take place within the intersubjectively shared framework of norms that determine the meaning of what we do. “Explication seeks to mediate practice from within practice itself” (p. 282). And, as Capaldi argues, this is ultimately the only conceptually coherent way to understand social and political reality.
NOTES

1. Nicholas Capaldi, *Hume's Place in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989). The page numbers of all quotations from this book are placed in the text.


3. The quotation is from C.L. Stevenson’s *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale Press, 1944). It is cited by Capaldi on page 141.


5. The arguments discussed below are from Francis Hutcheson’s *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, in *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (New York: Garland, 1971). This is a facsimile of the 1728 edition. In all quotations from this work, I have eliminated antiquated capitalizations and italics and substituted the modern convention of using single quotes to indicate the use-mention distinction in place of the brackets used for that purpose in the original text. Further references to the *Illustrations* are made in the text, abbreviated *I* and followed by the page number.

6. This sense is described in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary*. It is worth noting that the full title of Johnson’s Dictionary is *A Dictionary of the English Language in which the Words are Deduced from their Originals, Illustrated in their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers*. This is certainly a noninferential use of ‘deduce.’


THREE LETTERS FROM ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE TO GASTON FESSARD


Certainly, I am not overly familiar with ancient paganism. But everything I know about it leads me to believe that it is impossible to recognize myself in the man those pagans described. It doesn’t matter much—perhaps—that I do not believe in the gods of Olympus. But it does—I believe—matter a great deal that my atheism is not reduced to the negation of their existence. And therefore—which is particularly important on the plane where our discussion takes place—I do not believe in the essential difference between Master and Slave, between citizens and non-citizens, “Greek” and “Barbarian.” Generally speaking, I do not believe that man is, that I myself am, determined once and for all—like any “other thing”—by my “innate” nature, i.e., by my place in the natural Cosmos, by my position in the City, for the simple reason that I do
not believe that I live in a Cosmos, [and] that there is no longer a City where one could really live. All of this leads me then to believe that I am not a pagan; not only because I do not want to be one, but also—and even above all—because it is humanly impossible for a European of the twentieth century and—I am firmly convinced of this—of any century to come.

Be that as it may, each time in your book (Gaston Fessard, *Pax Nostra: Examen de conscience internationale* [Paris: Grasset, 1936]. Translator’s note.) Judeo-Christianity is opposed to paganism, I take the side of the former, without a moment’s hesitation. Even in their theological, indeed mythological form, the Judeo-Christian ideas of “mortal sin,” of “conversion,” of absolute perfection (“be perfect as your Father is perfect”), seem to me nearer to a true anthropology than the notion of a “Platonic idea” of human being, than Aristotle’s affirmation that man is not the most perfect being in the (natural) Cosmos. In short, I would like you to agree with me when I say that I am not a pagan. And I would like to obtain the same agreement on the other point, on the point of my “non-Judaism.”

I mean by “Judaism” what—if I am not mistaken—you yourself mean, i.e., what a St. Paul had in mind in his Epistle to the Romans, for example. It is the anti-pagan Judaism, such as existed before the Christian era—such as continues to exist in the minds of certain Jews—outside of its “Aufhebung” in Christianity. It is above all else the “Weltanschauung” based on the idea of the “election” of the people of Israel, an idea which made a Halevy say that there is no general term to designate both Jew and Goy (that “Goy” being something essentially different than the “barbarian” of the pagans).

Well, that Judaism is as foreign to me as Greco-Roman paganism (although as “aufgehoben” in me as the latter). In any case, in parting company with Christianity, it is not to that Judaism that I fall back into: I deny Christ not because I deny the incarnation of Yahweh, but because I deny Yahweh himself. On other matters, the prohibitions of eating, circumcision, etc.—all that is for me only barbaric practices. The names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are only insignificant names for me. And as for the fundamental idea of the “election” of a people, of the exclusive humanity of a race, I could never accept it... .

Vanves, June 19, 1939

2.

Dear Father,

Thank you for having thought of me again by sending me your last book (Gaston Fessard, *Épreuve de force* [Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1939]. Translator’s note.). I have just finished it. I wouldn’t say that I read it with pleasure, for the
feelings it raises are of a completely different sort. But I can say that reading it is comforting. Indeed, as long as books of this sort are written, published and read in France, all is not yet lost.

I do not need to tell you that I subscribe without reservation to the political aspect of your book:—you know that. As for its metaphysical “superstructure,” you also know that we don’t agree. However, it seems to me that your book realizes the very idea of the “extended hand” that you rejected in theory. As for me, I think that two lines moving in different directions can intersect at a precise point and I believe for us “Munich” is precisely such a point.

If you are staying in Paris the month of July, I would be very happy to meet with you (for the moment I’m too busy).

Thanks again, and, dear father, my respectful and profound sympathy.

Kojève

Vanves, June 26, 1956

3.

Dear Father,

Thank you very much for kindly sending me your last book (Gaston Fessard, La dialectique des exercices spirituels de saint Ignace de Loyola, Volume 1: Liberté, Temps, Grâce [Paris: Aubier, 1956]. Translator’s note.). I started reading it yesterday, it interests me greatly.

Having seen the annexed diagrams, I have to admit I’ve been beaten—badly!

Speaking seriously, your book comes at just the right time for me. As a matter of fact, I am now immersed (thanks to an illness! . . . me too, you see) in trinitarian theology. I have understood for a long time that that theology realizes the only progress ontology has made since Plato. But until recently I have underestimated the importance of the theology of the Holy Spirit. Certainly it has been treated as a poor relation by (nonheretical!) theologians. True, they nevertheless do say some very important things, although for the most part only implicitly, about it. Now I feel your book will explain many of these implications. For the “circular system”, is nonetheless—essentially—the Spirit (which proceeds from the Father AND the Son, of course, contrary to what the Eastern Fathers, who, in this matter, could never get beyond Plato-Plotinus, think).

Very cordially and respectfully yours,

Kojève
II. ALEXANDER KOJÈVE, REVIEW OF TWO BOOKS BY G. FESSARD


It is impossible to submit Father Fessard’s last two books to an examination that is the least bit detailed without going beyond the limits of a book review. And yet this very sincere and at the same time extremely adept attempt to exploit for Catholicism the philosophic effort realized by Hegel and Marx and thus to facilitate for the “Hegelian” and the “Marxist”—which means in fact, “modern man” more or less conscious of himself—access to the Catholic faith and the Church—that attempt requires an in-depth criticism on the part of anyone who sees it in only a misunderstanding and a dissimulation of the actual situation.

Of course it is not up to me to discuss Father Fessard’s ideas from the perspective of dogmatics: they are “orthodox” since they are published. I can only speak of them from the “Hegelian” and “Marxist,” or, to come to the point, atheist perspective. For, as Father Fessard has seen and shown very well, it is in the *theism-atheism* problem that the center of gravity of the *philosophical* discussion of the questions raised in these books is situated.

What I object to in *Pax Nostra* is the fact that the central problem, instead of being discussed seriously, is presented as resolved. In transposing Hegel’s historical schema, Father Fessard presents (Catholic) Christianity as the *synthesis* of the pagan thesis and Jewish *antithesis*, and infers from that that any attempt to “go beyond” Christianity in fact leads to a relapse into either the “pagan” attitude of subordination to Nature and to the empirical given in general, or the “Jewish” attitude of eternal and sterile negation. Now all of Hegel’s effort, integrally accepted on this point by Marx, tends to prove that the pagan *thesis* and the Judeo-Christian (or “bourgeois”) *antithesis* can and must be *aufgehoben*, i.e., done away with [suprîmées] insofar as they are unilateral and “false” but conserved insofar as they are true and essential, in and by the post-Christain, or what means the same thing, postrevolutionary *synthesis*, which is essentially atheist and areligious. Father Fessard appeals to the fact that the “idea” or “ideal” of that *synthesis* announced by Marx and Hegel originates in—and implies—the “idea-ideal” revealed in and by Christianity—and he concludes that it is only a development of the Christian *synthesis*, which is essentially theist and religious. Now that reasoning, which is certainly *not* “dialectical,” does not seem to me to be conclusive. For by starting from the principle that an idea which implies and presupposes another cannot “go beyond” it, one could just as well “reduce” to “paganism” or to “Judaism,” or to the simple “sum” of both, Christianity itself, which, doubtless, results in denying, here too, that *creative* act of man which “dialectic” precisely wants to explain.
Certainly, if the Christian God exists, Father Fessard is right, and it is useless to attempt to go beyond Christianity. And the man who believes in God only has to ask himself if the “dialectic” still has a meaning for him. But Hegel and Marx, in developing their “dialectic” and in positing the historical schema which results from it, begin precisely with the impossibility for them and for “modern” man, of admitting that God’s existence. And all their effort has the aim of replacing in that new man by that “new” man, the God who has already been killed in them and by them.

To convince “modern” man of Pax Nostra’s historical schema, the existence of the God in whom he no longer believes must be proven, and proven by other arguments than the familiar ones which he no longer finds satisfactory. And that is what Father Fessard sets out to do in La main tendue.

We find two arguments here, but the first is far from new. It is the argument—and in my opinion, the only philosophically discussable argument—already found in Plato (cf. for example Gorgias 23:467 ff.) and which Father Fessard presents in the following terms: “Whoever says progress says being better. But the comparison of the better to the less good requires a reference to the end of progress or to perfection. When there is no end, no perfection, there is no possibility of discerning between the better and the less good and, consequently, no possibility of progress” (p. 122). That that way of seeing things really leads to theism is vouched for by Plato and the history of philosophy. But that same history of philosophy teaches us that things can be seen differently. According to Hegel, for example, to speak only of him, “progress” is brought about not by the Platonic-Aristotelian tendency towards a real and given good, which in fact means in the end—towards the Good or towards God, but by the negation of the given real. That negation is only determined by that “nonperfect” given and by the will to not accept it as given. As for the “better,” it is better simply because being the negation of the “less good”—it implies and presupposes it, without coinciding with it, and the “less good” is only less good because it is deniable—and really denied because it gives way to the “better” created by the same negation. According to that “Hegelian” conception, man—to take a “Socratic,” indeed, banal example—did not need to have the “idea” of central heating to build the first stove and to see that that stove is more valuable than a wood fire; similarly it is not necessary to have enjoyed “perfect health” and know what it is, to notice that a toothache is “less good” than a cold. And—to reply above all to Plato-Socrates in the Gorgias—man does not always get up to do something “good” or “better”; often he gets up just because he cannot or does not want to remain seated, whether because that position has become physically unbearable or “simply” boring.

In my opinion, Hegel’s “atheist” interpretation is at least as suggestive as Plato’s “theist” interpretation. And if one is content to reproduce the “Platonic” interpretation without wanting to or being able to add anything to it, it would perhaps also be worth while to reproduce the contrary interpretation—partic-
ularly when one is familiar with it. For when one reasons, does one not want to end up with a conscious and free assent, made with a full understanding of the issue?

But Father Fessard is not content with reproducing the "Platonic" reasoning. In his second argument he modifies it, modernizes it, even makes it very "modern," since it is essentially existential. That second reasoning is as follows: "To be at the same time true and real, the process of history must have a meaning and consequently an end" (p. 161). In other words, in the end God must exist if human history and my place in it can have a meaning; and I must believe in God if that history and my place in it are to have meaning for me.

I believe that much can be granted to Father Fessard: If history (in its entirety) must have a meaning, recourse must be made not only to the God-Good of Plato, but also to the God-Mediator, to the God-Man of the Christians. Only, who says and who has proven that history must have a meaning—or, more exactly, that it actually has one? Certainly I, like every man, have wished it had one. But is that "desire" what Father Fessard wanted to discuss? And is it something that can be discussed rationally or philosophically?

It seems to me that Father Fessard addresses my reason. Now, in the first place, that reason of mine can, indirectly, force me to oppose my own "desire for meaning." It can make me see that the history which already has a meaning, a meaning different from—and independent of—any that I impose on it here and now, is not my history, but rather the history of that meaning as such. I will then see that it is not me, but that "meaning" which has a history, its history—a history which I perhaps "realize," but which I do not create. And, having seen that, I can see that if in accepting that consequence, perhaps I border on "heresy," I certainly do not satisfy my pride, i.e., precisely the "desire" whose satisfaction is supposed to compensate, in the "New Man," for the loss of advantages which the "meaning" of the "Christian synthesis" and its "true and real" history offered him. Reason can therefore reveal that there is within me a "desire" which—enlightened by reason—is opposed to the "desire for meaning," by not accepting what reason reveals as the necessary conditions for the satisfaction of the latter. And if Father Fessard, by reasoning, appeals to one of those "desires," how can he prevent Hegel and Marx from reasoning by appealing to the other?

But—and this is more important—it is not up to reason to choose between the two desires, to decide for or against the unreasonable restlessness of pride or the circumspect tranquility of humility; nor to proclaim as true what is supposed to make the man who is the partisan of one of these "desires" happy. Reason, to possess man, does not need to promote his happiness nor presuppose him unhappy; unhappy—or blessed, it will be equally accessible to him. And that is why, incidentally, philosophy can, far better than religion, support men's efforts to make themselves happy in their own fashion by believing they can do without all philosophy or religion. It doesn't matter much to reason that
the man in whom—and for whom—historical existence no longer has “meaning” can or can not be happy. Generally, it is not up to reason—at least “philosophical” reason—to work in the pay of man’s desires. It is there only to show him what he is and where he is. Now, has Father Fessard really shown to man by his reason that—for him—history really has a meaning?

I don’t think so. Father Fessard has simply noted the psychological fact that man when he wants to think himself happy, blessed, thinks himself—even when his name is Hegel or Marx—as participating in a “history” which has a definitive and “absolute” “meaning.” And he has perhaps shown that man must believe in a God-Man if he wants to believe in such a meaning in history. In other words, he has at the very most shown that the idea of a (definitive and “absolute”) goal of history—and consequently my action within it—necessarily implies, even for a Hegel or a Marx, a more or less Judeo-Christian myth. And he can, I believe, be granted that. But the misfortune is that a myth which knows itself to be a myth is no longer a “myth,” but more or less a “fable,” conventional or not. And the misfortune of “modern” man that Hegel and Marx had in view, having been more or less modern men themselves, is due precisely to the aptitude for recognizing myths as such, and consequently in the incapacity of producing and conserving them as myths which are believed. To show to that man, by an “existential” interpretation, that Christianity is a requirement of a desire inherent in human nature which it alone can satisfy—is to affirm or awaken in him the suspicion that Christianity, even in its “Hegelian” or “Marxist” transposition, is only a myth, or an “ideology,” fundamentally sexual, social or something else. Generally, it is imprudent to repair something with a tool which was forged—perhaps without its author’s knowledge—only for its destruction. In addition, the type of analyses Father Fessard has undertaken could easily have the effect of making “modern” man still less “Christian” than orthodox “Hegelians” and “Marxists.”

As for his interpretation of the hand extended by the Communist atheist to the believing Catholic, I am in perfect agreement with what seems to be the substance of Father Fessard’s thought. Between atheist and theist the hand cannot be offered from equal to equal. If the one extends his hand to the other—and does it without ulterior motives, as Father Fessard would want—he extends it in the manner the master extends his hand to the student, in order to help him better understand the world in which he lives and to see himself more clearly. And, moreover, to take Plato’s word for it (who on this point, I think, can serve as an authority), a dialogue in the strong and proper sense of the term can only take place under those conditions.

The question then is to know which of the two must play the role of the master here. And I would reply as the good “Hegelian” that I am: the one who can play it, the one who will succeed in imposing himself as “master,” whether by the superiority of his reasoning, or by extra-rational reasons, which are reduced in the end to the success of his actions. That is why I started by saying
that Father Fessard’s books demanded an in-depth critique on the part of those who see in his truth only a—very beautiful—myth.

As for the “extra-rational reasons,” there is certainly no question of discussing them here. I would like to finish, however, by saying a few words about them.

Father Fessard tells us that Christianity, at least Catholicism, does not in the least exclude the ideal of socialist happiness, simply adding to it some supplementary attractions which are, moreover, essential. Let’s admit that. He adds that the ideal can be formed only on the basis of the Christian anthropology which—as such, and from the beginning of its appearance—is coupled with an appropriate theology whose rudiments are found in the Bible and in the Gospels. And, on that point, he is certainly right. Finally, he tells us it is only in and by—or at the very least with the participation of the Church that that idea can one day be effectively and fully realized. Let’s suppose as much. But then how can one explain that all the approximations of that realization, all the “forty-hour work weeks” realized successively in the course of history, have generally been realized thanks to men who, far from being docile sons of the Church, preferred for the most part to conserve the Christian anthropology and all its practical consequences, while rejecting more or less completely the theology the Church attaches to it? And how do we understand that a “socialist party” which at the same time calls itself “Christian”—and which is Christian, since it remains recognized as such by the Church—tends almost always to act, when it can, as the party of that name recently acted in Austria?

I am content to pose these questions. And I know that in themselves they are not yet objections to what Father Fessard says. But—and this is where I would like to finish—must these questions not be answered before one claims the role of master, called to explain to “Marxists” how they must set about realizing their master’s idea?

III. ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE, CHRISTIANITY AND COMMUNISM

Gaston Fessard, France, prends garde de perdre ta liberté! Éd. du témoignage Chrétiens, 1946, 318 pages.

This book is a Catholic critique directed against Communism and the French Communist Party. It can be divided in two parts which are unequal in size—and value. One part is a critical analysis of the metaphysical content of Communist doctrine. That content is reduced by M. Fessard first to Marx’s, then to Hegel’s dialectic. This part displays as it were a knowledge and understanding that is never found among the adherents of the criticized doctrine; if he had wanted, the author would certainly have been, by far, the best Marxist theoretician in France. The other part, comprising nine-tenths of the book, is what is called “a piece of anticommunist propaganda,” with all the characteristics of the genre.
The part of the book which is not propaganda would doubtless deserve a
detailed discussion, but such a discussion would lead us too far. Moreover, a
response to M. Fessard’s outlook is implicitly contained in a study to appear in
this journal. (Alexandre Kojève, “Hegel, Marx et le Christianisme” (critique of
Henri Niël’s De la médiation dans la philosophie de Hegel, Critique 3–4, pp.
339–65. Kojève’s note. English translation by Hilail Gildin in Interpretation 1,
o. 1 (1970), 21–42.) I will be content therefore to indicate here that any
attempt to exploit for Christianity’s benefit the Hegelian discovery of the dia-
lectic necessarily encounters the fact that dialectic is bound up with finitude,
which is revealed to man under the aspect of death. To the extent that Chris-
tians accept the idea of the death of God (i.e., his humanity, his historicity),
they can have the impression of being able to use the Hegelian dialectical de-
scriptions and to take advantage of their indisputable explanatory value. But
they implicitly deny all dialectic (i.e., the decisive, definitive, and irreducible
value of historical action) as soon as they admit the resurrection. Now to deny
the resurrection of a God who dies is to deny his divinity as such. For if, by an
abuse of language, it is still possible to call “God” a being whose existence is a
becoming, it is obvious that that term does not apply to a being who dies in the
proper sense of that term. The notion of a Christian or theological dialectic is a
contradiction in itself, and that contradiction is not “dialectical”: it is simply a
lack of rigorous thinking.

As a work of propaganda, M. Fessard’s book would require, of course, a
counter book of the same order, which would have the goal of “neutralizing” it.
It would have to respond point by point, trying to remove from M. Fessard’s
criticisms—even the pertinent ones—their persuasive value. Here, within the
framework of an “objective” study, I must be content with making a few gen-
eral remarks.

I would like to show at the outset that it is very much a work of propaganda,
in the sense that the assumed effect of the argument on the reader is more
important than the adequation of the argument with reality. Thus, after having
shown in a truly convincing fashion that Communist doctrine is fundamentally
atheist, M. Fessard does not leave it at that. For a believer, that is sufficient to
reveal the irreparably erroneous character of a doctrine, and therefore the per-
nicious nature of every action or manifestation which follows from it. But M.
Fessard probably presumes, and quite rightly, that for modern man, even if he
believes he is a believer, the crime of atheism no longer provokes the horror
that it should if it really were a crime and which it in actual fact provoked for
centuries. Also it is not so much as atheists that he denounces the Communists
to his fellow citizens, but as bad Frenchmen and wicked and dangerous people
in general who can jeopardize the tranquility and personal security (called on
this occasion “freedom”—in the singular or plural) of fathers of families, of
unionized or nonunionized workers, etc. . . . and—last but not least—of intel-
lectuals of all types.
This denunciation is made, moreover, in conformity with the proven and classic methods of good works of propaganda. One says the truth, nothing but the truth, but not the whole truth. Thus, in passing off an isolated aspect of reality for an adequate description of that reality, one disfigures it profoundly without having "invented" anything.

With a number of (pertinent) arguments and (authentic) documents to support him, M. Fessard demonstrates, for example, that the Communists are bad Frenchmen because they would subordinate French politics to Soviet politics (which he has the tendency to identify, this time without very convincing arguments, with Russian or Slavic politics). But he forgets to mention that exactly the same reproach can be made by his Communist adversaries. For what is actually opposed, and what can reasonably be opposed to Communist politics is not an authentically and exclusively French politics (whose anachronistic character is apparent to anyone as soon as they have tried to apply it). To the invitation to follow the tracks of the USSR one only opposes in fact the counsel to sail in the Anglo-Saxon wake. And one is inspired, in both cases, not by patriotic motives, but by the desire (admitted or not) of either radically transforming or maintaining in its essentials a given social and economic order. Thus M. Fessard’s analysis would come closer to reality, but only by becoming infinitely less effective from the perspective which concerns him, if he had said what in his capacity as a well-informed Hegelian he cannot ignore, namely that in our age of Empires a "national" or nationalist politics is no longer possible, since nations themselves have ceased to exist politically (i.e., militarily) as isolated entities.

This is why moreover M. Fessard resorts to the supplementary argument of "freedom." If it were not a work of propaganda, one would be surprised that its Catholic author is so keen on nationalism and liberalism. For a Catholic must know that the essential Christian values are, if not "internationalist," at least inter- or trans-national and that they could be realized only in circumstances of which the least that can be said is that the impediments to freedom of conduct and expression were not entirely suppressed. But it is natural and legitimate, if one wants to convince people, to highlight suspect or secondary values, if they are regarded as primordial by those being addressed, even if their outlook is not derived from the authentic source of all truth.

However, and this again is natural and legitimate, the very person of the author can impede the effect of his propaganda. Without a doubt, everyone is aware that many modern Catholics are sincerely "liberals." And one could even explain it as one can explain liberalism in general, by a certain lack of faith, or more exactly by the fact that Catholics can no longer accept integrally and without reservation all the traditional verbal expressions of their belief. But even if they actually go so far as renouncing, more or less openly, certain antiliberal practices from the glorious past of their Church (which it would, nevertheless, be easy and even necessary to justify), nothing has yet proved
that they are capable of establishing and maintaining liberalism if hostile, external forces did not require them to do so. It is not surprising then, since we are talking about freedom, if others think that, despite their numerous and perhaps overly lengthy detours, the Communists might one day arrive at the final destination that Catholics would never reach, if—by some miracle—they were left alone.

In a work of propaganda, it is perfectly legitimate to make use of certain devices, while at the same time reproaching one’s adversaries for using them. While simplifying to the extreme the nascent Communist reality, M. Fessard therefore has the right to reproach Communist polemicists with disfiguring Catholic reality: they do not take into account the possibilities that reality implies, but which have not yet been able to emerge during the course of what has been, after all, a rather long development. Without a doubt in a work of propaganda one would have the right to reproach him in the same manner. But in an objective study we must be content with noting the characteristics which allow us to classify as propaganda a book by an author who has elsewhere published some remarkable works of a very different genre.

Those same features are found everywhere and in all ages. M. Fessard’s book resembles not only the writings of his co-religionists, but also those of his Communist adversaries. Anti-Communist Catholic literature thus reveals an undeniable and pleasing kinship with the anti-Catholic literature of the Enlightenment. In both cases, one relentlessly collects the greatest possible number of absurd or appalling features, immediately verifiable and accessible to everyone, features that belong to the surface and only meagerly contribute to characterizing the profound essence of the phenomenon. Thus works of propaganda are necessarily and, as it were, by definition, superficial; they should not be used to judge others or the realities that they have in view.

IV. GASTON FESSARD, TWO INTERPRETERS OF HEGEL’S PHENOMENOLOGY: JEAN HYPPOLITE AND ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE

Hegel is decidedly the toast of France. Last year, Father Niel published a book on Mediation in Hegel’s Philosophy, which we said, in these pages (Etudes, September 1946, p. 292. Fessard’s note.), constitutes a good general introduction to the study of that author. He now provides us with a translation of Hegel’s Lectures on the Proofs of God’s Existence (translation with an Introduction and notes by Henri Niel [Paris: Aubier, 1947]. Fessard’s note.) which has arrived at just the right moment. For two works, one by J. Hyppolite, the other by A. Kojève, have recently resurrected the problem of Hegel’s atheism or theism, raising at the same time the question of the meaning of the whole of his philosophy. Dedicated to the elucidation of the Phenomenology of Spirit, these two books are essential for the reader who has already become acquainted
with the whole of the Hegelian oeuvre by Father Niel, but for very different reasons, which we must make more precise.

When he published his translation of the Phenomenology in 1939 and 1941, M. Hyppolite announced that he was preparing a general commentary on that work which already contains in germ the whole of the Hegelian system. The quality of that translation, which we praised at the time it came out (Construire, VIII, p. 222. Fessard’s note.), made all Hegelians impatiently await its appearance. They have not been disappointed, first by attending the brilliant defense where it was presented as a doctoral thesis, then by immersing themselves in the six hundred pages of Genesis and Structure of the Phenomenology of Spirit (Paris: Aubier, 1947. Fessard’s note.). M. Hyppolite declared to his examiners that it was his intention to write a “good scholarly work.” By adding the word “very” to good, both its excellence and its limits are qualified more exactly. At the price of some twenty years labor, M. Hyppolite penetrated the mysteries of one of the most difficult texts in the history of philosophy. By the clarity, probity, and rigor of his thought, his book is recommended from now on to anyone wanting to tackle Hegel directly. Until now, the Phenomenology stood at the threshold of the system as an almost inaccessible peak, approachable only to those rare mountaineers having at their disposal unusual lung capacity and even more exceptional leisure time. Now by his translation and thesis, M. Hyppolite has forged, if not a highway—dialectical terrain goes against that and contains, we believe, too many sharp surprises for anyone who wants to cross it by car—at least a mule trail, well marked with road signs which make climbing it at least ten times easier, in terms of both strength and time, for the mountaineer. M. Hyppolite cannot be praised or thanked enough for his achievement. Given the intrinsic value of Hegel’s philosophy and the role which his dialectic plays at the center of the most serious problems of our time, it must be hoped that the path forged will invite numerous philosophers and even—if not more so—theologians to climb it.

In truth, once they arrive at the summit or perhaps already en route, either group might feel a bit disappointed. For despite or rather even because of its excellence, Genesis and Structure of the Phenomenology has its limits: those of a “scholarly work.” How does the summit of absolute knowledge link up with those in the Logic or the Encyclopedia? What exactly is the nature of Time that Hegel identifies with the Concept? To what extent does he succeed, as he claims, in “comprehending history”? Speculative mysticism or atheist humanism, what is, in the last analysis, Hegel’s fundamental thought and its value? On all these questions, M. Hyppolite is content to gather the opposed elements. But since he is afraid of influencing his reader, he leaves him every time before a question mark. Scrupulous professor, impartial historian, he refuses to choose between left and right Hegelians and leaves the decision up to us.

The deficiencies, but also the merits, of a such an approach are acutely felt after encountering the Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (Lectures on the
"Phenomenology of Spirit," given from 1933 to 1939 at L’Ecole des hautes Études, collected and edited by Raymond Queneau, Paris: Gallimard, 1947. Fessard’s note.). For M. Kojève’s work, also an explanation of the Phenomenology of Spirit, is the complete antithesis of a “good scholarly work”: First of all by its presentation, where the disparate nature of the material gathered, the confusion of the lecture form, hardly favors the understanding of a text which is, moreover, teeming with repetitions and obscurities and does not even exclude certain mistakes. But above all, it is by its author’s resolute option in favor of a Hegel who is perfectly and consciously an atheist. The extreme intelligence and the rigorous logic with which M. Kojève defends his point of view will quickly make one forget the drawbacks in presentation, however. The most difficult texts of the Phenomenology, for example on the identity of Time and the Concept, that M. Hyppolite cited without prejudging their ultimate meaning are here taken as the center of the entire interpretation and are clarified by the light they shed on the whole. Basing himself on Husserl and even more on Heidegger, M. Kojève makes the Master-Slave dialectic the essential part of the entire Phenomenology, and, after having explained that man’s radical finitude alone allows us to understand history, he does not hesitate to see in Hegel someone who consciously “identified himself with Christ,” but in order to reveal to humanity, along with the inanity of Christianity, the inexorable nothingness to which it is condemned.

In that perspective, where Hegel becomes not only a Feurbachian and Marxist, but also a Heidegerrian before the fact, it is undeniable that a large part of the Phenomenology and above all the influence of Hegelianism are explained and clarified far better than they ever have been before. Moreover, M. Kojève raises the most passionate problems concerning the relations between history and truth.

Yet, all these merits are reversed when they are contrasted with the value of the impartial reserve to which M. Hyppolite confines himself. Let’s say nothing about the fundamental absurdities M. Kojève is led to by his intrepid logic, bringing Hegel and Marxism along with him. The Communist “intellectuals,” who could benefit so much from this book, will have to take a stand vis-a-vis the truths it establishes, and it will be very interesting to see their reaction in this regard. But will he be forgiven the notes on pages 388 and 435, where the inhumanity of the “end of history” they wish for is revealed? Let’s leave Marxism aside and stay at the level of Hegel interpretation. At what cost can M. Kojève sustain his thesis of a consciously atheist Hegel convinced of man’s radical finitude? At the price of qualifying Hegel’s monism as a prejudice (p. 38)! On the condition of completely opposing natural and historical time in Hegel! On condition of discounting his vitalism, of completely ignoring the Philosophy of Nature and even ignoring the same elements which are found in the Phenomenology. The “embarrassing part” of Hegelianism, it is said. I wish it were so; but things are not so simple. After the treatment he received from
M. Kojève, Hegel would have doubtless felt he was being mutilated. Let’s not talk about atheism: we are content to refer to the *Proofs of God’s Existence*, translated by Father Niel and to the reaction of the Marxists! As for the dialectic, which, according to M. Kojève is only possible on the hypothesis of the finitude of man, since Hegel says: “The essence of every finite being is to abolish itself . . . ,” is it necessary to recall that abolish (aufheben) also means in Hegel’s language to conserve and transcend? So that that citation says rather the complete opposite of M. Kojève’s interpretation, Hegel moreover adding in twenty different places: “It is the very nature of the finite to go beyond itself, to deny its negation and become infinite . . .” (*Logik*, ed. Lasson, I, p. 126. Fessard’s note.)

We hope to return on another occasion and at greater length to a book and to ideas which merit much more than such a summary discussion. For both the book and the ideas are called to exert a profound influence. Or rather they exert it now and are already spread around in more than one book or review. For don’t forget: the Lectures which make up this book were given before the war, over a period of five years. Before a very limited audience, it is true, but one met there besides Raymond Queneau, their present editor, A. Koyré, E. Weill, Raymond Aron, Georges Bataille, P. Klossowsky, Georges Polin, Marjolin, M. Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, without mentioning some others who were less diligent, such as André Breton. It would be sufficient to go back to the books, theses, review and journal articles written by the names just cited, to recognize to what an extent the authors have been, in diverse ways, influenced by the lectures heard at the Hautes Études. Having had the advantage of being one of M. Kojève’s faithful listeners, we know what can be gained from a dialogue with such rigorous thinking. It is why we do not hesitate to recommend his book strongly to believing philosophers and especially to theologians who are preoccupied with the relations of truth and history. Approaching it, after having studied M. Hyppolite’s, they will see in what terms a demanding mind poses problems today and will quickly understand that the sole recourse to the intemporality of the truth is not enough to resolve that problem; moreover, it does not, to tell the truth, even touch upon the essential point. They will realize, then, to what an extent the Master-Slave dialectic is a necessary and effective instrument for “understanding history”; after which certain among them will be less astonished that Marxism had, by a simple inversion of that dialectic, engendered Nazism and that the parallels of Communism and Nazism, and not the pseudo-opposition of Communism and Capitalism,6 must be recognized as the solid point of departure for anyone who wishes to steer himself according to the “meaning of history.” And if they do not want to despair of the world and of man, they will then be invited to seek what is truly the source of that famous dialectic, and to ask if there are not other dialectics, anterior and superior, which are as, or even more, necessary for understanding history and illuminating its meaning. Among them, how will they not quickly discover that the
Pauline dialectic of Pagan and Jew has a completely different value to lead man to “identify himself with Christ”? In short, after having courageously attended M. Kojève’s school, they will be, as we are, convinced that Marxism and Hegelianism, interpreted by the most intelligent of atheists, will not only be offered to a critique which easily reveals their fundamental errors, but will also open for them the most magnificent way to restoring a full actuality to both the historic and eternal truths of Christianity.

NOTES

1. The German words Aufhebung and aufgehauen in Hegel involve a threefold movement whereby an object is negated, conserved and elevated. (Translator’s note.)

2. This review was originally intended to be published in Recherches philosophiques. After the demise of that journal, the review was entrusted by Kojève to Fessard. Kojève also gave Fessard permission to publish it along with a response if the occasion ever arose. With the advent of the Second World War publication became impossible, and the review remained unpublished until 1985. (Translator’s note.)

3. On this subject see the writings of Pierre Bayle or Anatole France’s Puits de Sainte-Claire. (Kojève’s note.)

4. In an article entitled “Was Hegel a Marxist?”, signed A.A., the Revue internationale, no. 12, January 1947, already strongly reacted against M. Kojève’s “neo or pseudo-marxist existential” interpretation of Hegel. “If it is true that Hegel was already a ‘Marxist,’ all the criticisms directed against Hegel by Marx lose their meaning.” Nothing is more correct. M. Kojève should also expect that, like A.A., the Marxists, to preserve Marx’s originality, will become ardent defenders of Hegel’s “theism,” much more ardent than a Catholic philosopher will need to be. Nothing surprising in this contrast. It is always the “punishment of the dialectic,” which as Engels states crushes those who scorn it because they ignore it. (Fessard’s note.)

5. “The end of history is the death of Man properly speaking. After that death there remains: 1. living bodies having a human form but deprived of spirit, that is to say of time or creative power; 2. a Spirit which empirically exists, in the form of an inorganic, nonliving reality, as a Book which, not being animal life, no longer has anything to do with time” (p. 388). And on p. 431 M. Kojève tells us that in the Classless Society, where “Man remains alive in harmony with Nature,” Philosophy will have disappeared—which is logical since there is no longer a creative Spirit—but that “the rest can be preserved indefinitely: art, love, play, etc.; in short, everything that makes Man happy.” What could love and art be for beings deprived of spirit, not only in Hegel’s view, but in themselves, if not the art of a bee or the love of an ape? For having, in the pulpit of Notre Dame, spoken of Communist man as an “animal barely superior to the gorilla or chimpanzee,” Father Panici found himself called a “slanderer” by R. Garaudy. He is well avenged by M. Kojève! But the latter must expect not only the objections of the “Trotskyites” of the Revue internationale, but also the anathemas of the “orthodox thinkers” of Pensée, to say nothing of Pravda’s “condemnations.” (Fessard’s note.)

6. Let’s recall that capitalism is in no way a Weltanschauung and that consequently it is vain to try to find between it and Communism a dialectic analogous to that between Communism and Nazism. That reminder is necessary since there are still Christians who justify entering the Communist party, or at least echoing its propaganda and glorifying its ideal, by thinking it the mortal enemy of capitalism, alone capable of defeating it. Once that root of atheism is cut, Marxist man will find himself Christian again—an illusion which is derived from a true fact but interprets it badly. For it is true that while capitalism, because of its injustices, leads to Communism, it does not produce it, precisely because it is not an ideology. The true origin of Marxism is rather liberalism and its revolutionary ideal, which having freed man and society from Christianity, has been incapable of bridling the excesses of the appetite for gain and the will to power. So that little by
little, a capitalist “state of things” is born, against which Marxism rebelled and which continues to nourish Communism. But Communism, inheritor of revolutionary anti-Christianity, which developed into systematic atheism, is much less capable of suppressing capitalism than of aggravating to the extreme the exploitation of man by man. It could only succeed and, in actuality, succeeded only by “generalizing” as Marx said, “the relationship of private property,” and creating a state capitalism which being necessarily national, changes into imperialism. “Negation of personality, of culture, of civilization,” such are, according to Marx himself, the signs by which “coarse communism” can be recognized (*Oeuvres philosophiques*, trans. Molitar, vol. VI, pp. 20–21). To those who do not close their eyes to reality, it is enough to denounce the falsehood of the Marxist ideal and Communist propaganda, even when it evokes the claimed effectiveness of its dialectic against capitalism. (Fessard’s note.)
The Place of Leo Strauss in a Liberal Education

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It is appropriate that we inquire into the place which Leo Strauss ought to assume in a liberal education, for he gave more thought to the subject of liberal education than did any other major political thinker of the twentieth century. Though his views on the subject may be disagreeable to some egalitarians, I do not propose to criticize them, for I share them. Strauss’s account of the nature of liberal education poses no problem. But a problem is posed by the question of whether his own work should be included in a liberal education. The question has arisen because of the critique of his work by Shadia B. Drury, who maintains that he was a hedonistic proponent of the views of Thrasymachus, Machiavelli, and Nietzsche and that he radically deprecated morality. I shall begin with an account of Strauss’s views on liberal education, of why I share them, and of related matters; I shall then examine Professor Drury’s critique with a view to answering the question of whether Strauss’s work should be part of a liberal education.

“Liberal education,” Strauss says, “is the necessary endeavor to found an aristocracy within democratic mass society” (LAM, p. 5 [IPP, pp. 314–15]). Aristocracy means rule by “the best” in the sense of those who are most virtuous; but since, according to Strauss, “virtue seems to require wisdom” we may assume him to mean by aristocracy rule by the virtuous and wise (LAM, p. 4 [IPP, p. 313]. cf. NRH, p. 140). Since he speaks of “aristocracy within democratic mass society,” and since democracy means rule by the people, he cannot have in mind a pure aristocracy. He must be thinking of some combination of aristocracy and democracy—either a system in which the aristocrats and the people each have their own house of the legislature, or, what he more likely has in mind, given his predominantly American readership, a system in which an elite marked by virtue and wisdom makes available some of its members for popular election to public office or for appointment to such office by the people’s representatives.

Long before reading Strauss on liberal education, I argued for the creation of an American elite of this kind in view of two facts. First, the United States finds itself in a grave spiritual crisis which threatens its survival as a free people. Ever since I began to hold this view, the prospect of the country’s being taken over by a homegrown tyranny has been greater than that of its takeover by a foreign power, and today the difference in likelihood of the two events is

greater than ever, owing not only to recent events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe but also to the continued growth at home of the kinds of spiritual and social disorder which enable would-be tyrants to get control of their own countries. Second, the crisis can, in my judgment, be overcome only through a spiritual renaissance among the agents of cultural formation—governmental officials, teachers, persons in the mass media, and clergymen. The elite ought, in my view, to be trained for all these professions.

Let me anticipate my conclusion by saying that for as long as I have contemplated these matters I have thought about the philosophical and theological works which should be included in the education of future American leaders. Looming large in these considerations has been the fact that the middle of the twentieth century was the time of a great flowering of political thought in this country, owing to Americans' need to come to terms with the immense spiritual, social, and political disorder of the century. One result was six masterful books originally presented as lectures under the auspices of the Charles R. Walgreen Foundation at the University of Chicago. The books are: two analyses of the spirit of modern times and how it developed, Strauss's *Natural Right and History* and Eric Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics*; two defenses of democracy from a neo-Thomist perspective, Jacques Maritain's *Man and the State* and Yves R. Simon's *Philosophy of Democratic Government*; and two realistic assessments of foreign affairs, Hans J. Morgenthau's *In Defense of the National Interest* and George F. Kennan's *American Diplomacy 1900–1950*.6

All six of these books should, in my opinion, help constitute the philosophical and theological component of the education of a new American elite. To them should be added: (1) Reinhold Niebuhr's works on democracy and realism from a neo-orthodox Protestant perspective, dating from the same period and having the same motivation as the Walgreen lectures; (2) certain classics of ancient and medieval thought, namely, Plato's *Republic* and, if possible, his *Gorgias* and *Laws*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and excerpts from his *Politics*, selections from St. Augustine's *City of God*, and St. Thomas Aquinas's *Treatise on Law*; (3) Strauss's and Voegelin's commentaries on Plato's *Republic* in *The City and Man* and Vol. 3 of *Order and History*, respectively, about which more will be said below; and (4) the classics of modern liberal thought, on the condition that an attempt be made to separate their truth from their error.7

As for Strauss himself on liberal education, instead of the term *elite* he uses the somewhat more prudent *gentlemen*: he calls the products of a liberal education gentlemen (*LAM*, pp. 6, 11 [*IPP*, pp. 316, 324]). He says that gentlemen differ from their inferiors by the fact that they regard virtue as an end in itself and not simply as a means to some other end (*LAM*, p. 12 [*IPP*, p. 326]). They are marked by character and taste (*LAM*, p. 11 [*IPP*, p. 324]). Ideally, they set the tone of society (*LAM*, p. 13 [*IPP*, p. 327]). The ultimate justification of their rule is that their virtue is a reflection of the virtue of philosophers (*LAM*,
p. 14 [IPP, p. 328]). But they are not the same as philosophers; they regard certain questions as settled, whereas philosophers are constantly re-examining even the most important questions (LAM, pp. 13–14 [IPP, pp. 328–29]). The end of philosophy, at least ancient philosophy, is “disinterested contemplation of the eternal” (LAM, pp. 19–20 [IPP, p. 337]).

But Professor Drury greatly overestimates the gap which Strauss holds to separate gentlemen from philosophers and the “contempt” with which he as a philosopher views gentlemen.\textsuperscript{9} Even if she were right, there would be no reason to disparage rule by gentlemen as Strauss conceives of them, though one might question his role in their education, especially if his works are as full as she says they are of challenges to the accepted answers to questions about good and evil which gentlemen regard as settled.

I have already anticipated my conclusion by saying that Natural Right and History and the chapter on Plato’s Republic in The City and Man should be incorporated into the education of a new American elite. This advice could not stand, however, if what Professor Drury says is true, for her critique of these two works is the centerpiece of her critique of Strauss. The heart of her book is her Chapters 4 and 5; the heart of her Chapter 4 is its critique of Strauss’s chapter on the Republic; and her Chapter 5 is devoted primarily to Natural Right and History. If what she says in these two chapters proves to be wrong, the charges of Machiavellism and Nietzscheanism which she makes later in her book will more or less take care of themselves. I propose then to concentrate on her critique of the two works of Strauss’s which I have singled out for their pedagogical value. But first I wish to explain why, of all Strauss’s works, I have singled them out in this way.

Strauss’s most important message, in my view, is that of the contrast between ancient and modern political thought. I think that his treatment of modern thought is too harsh when it comes to Locke, but that on the whole his contrast of ancients and moderns is necessary to understanding the current plight of Western civilization. It is also fascinating, for he treats the history of political thought like a story of good and evil. His contrast of ancient and modern thought can be found in its most abbreviated form in his article “On Natural Law,”\textsuperscript{8} in more extended form in his essay “What Is Political Philosophy?” (WIPP, Chapter 1 [IPP, pp. 2–57]), and in most extended form in Natural Right and History. I do not mean to say that the shorter works are mere summaries of the book, for they are not. But for as full an account as possible one must go to the book.

Strauss was without doubt a brilliant philosopher, but I believe Voegelin to have been greater, chiefly because Voegelin was alive to the spiritual dimension of ancient political thought as Strauss was not, and because Voegelin had a surer sense of the spiritual disorder at the base of modern political thought. The difference is revealed in their conceptions of philosophy. Equating philosophy with specifically ancient philosophy, Voegelin says that “philosophy by defini-
tion has its center in the experiences of transcendence," or, in theological language, experiences of God. Strauss gives several definitions, of which the following is typical: "Philosophy, as quest for wisdom, is quest for universal knowledge, for knowledge of the whole." He adds, "Philosophy is essentially not possession of the truth, but quest for the truth" (WIPP, p. 11 [IPP, pp. 4–5]. See also LAM, pp. 6, 13 [IPP, pp. 316, 327]).

The same difference can be shown by another point. In his Republic, Plato speaks of the psyche, or soul, as consisting of three parts—reason, spiritedness, and appetite. He considers the soul to be well ordered when reason is in the ascendancy, with spiritedness serving as its obedient servant and ally against appetite (441e). Professor Drury writes:

Strauss does not take Plato’s conception of the tripartite psyche very seriously. He believes that Plato was not describing the nature of the human psyche, but the different kinds of men in the world: the lovers of knowledge (the philosophers), the lovers of honor and reputation (the gentlemen and statesmen), and the lovers of pleasure (the vulgar). (P. 198)

This statement cannot stand in the face of Strauss’s article “On Natural Law” (SPPP, p. 138) and his chapter on Plato’s Republic. But it is true that Voegelin places greater emphasis than Strauss on the order of the psyche and, what is especially important, that Voegelin conceives of the psyche as being ordered by attunement to transcendent reality, whereas Strauss does not.

On a more mundane level, Voegelin has a more profound sense of Athenian decline in the age of Thucydides and Plato, and of the parallels between the decline of Athens and that of the contemporary West. For all these reasons, I think Voegelin the greater philosopher. My understanding of the spiritual crisis of America and where it may lead is based largely on Voegelin’s work, and in particular on The New Science of Politics and the chapter on Plato’s Republic in the third volume of Order and History. I confess that much of the appeal of Natural Right and History and the chapter on the Republic in The City and Man is as a supplement and contrast to the two corresponding works by Voegelin.

While I am not a Straussian, I am not a Voegelinian either, although I have been influenced more by Voegelin and Niebuhr than by anybody else. I am a Christian and a liberal democrat. I am unenthusiastic about Professor Drury’s book for several reasons. The less important are that it has too many runon sentences, that it is an instance of the iconoclasm of which there is far too much in the world today, and that it is what Voegelin would call a positivistic history of ideas (notice the title, The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss), albeit one with a liberal bias. More important is the fact that the book is unfair to Strauss, as I hope to show by comparing its quotations with what he actually says.

At the outset we noted that, according to Professor Drury, Strauss was a hedonistic proponent of the views of Thrasymachus, Machiavelli, and Nietzsche, and he radically deprecated morality. Later we established that her allegations of Machiavellism and Nietzscheanism are relatively unimportant. We are
left, therefore, with the charges of hedonistic Thrasy-macheanism and radical deprecation of morality. Professor Drury makes the first charge in her discussion of Strauss’s chapter on Plato’s Republic and the second charge in her analysis of Natural Right and History. We shall begin with her discussion of the chapter on the Republic.

In my judgment, the most shocking of the views which Professor Drury ascribes to Strauss in this discussion are the following: (1) of the antagonists Thrasy-machus and Socrates, Thrasy-machus has the better argument about justice; (2) Socrates does not hold justice to be “the natural order of the human psyche or any such fiction”; (3) “the only natural good” is the benefit of oneself as opposed to others; and (4) philosophy understood as a kind of eros, and not justice, is choiceworthy for its own sake. Taken together, these views add up to hedonistic Thrasy-macheanism.

Professor Drury ascribes the first three views to Strauss on two successive pages (pp. 76–77). I plan to quote directly the ascription and the context in which it occurs and then to examine each alleged view separately, showing in each instance how she distorts what he actually says. This procedure may be considered exemplary for any future analysis of her treatment of his work. Superscript numbers in the quoted matter are in her text. It should be kept in mind that in the Republic Thrasy-machus avers that “the just is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger,” particularly the established government (338c–339a). Here, then, is what she says:

The originality of Strauss’s interpretation of Plato’s Republic rests in his claim that Socrates does not refute Thrasy-machus; on the contrary, Thrasy-machus’s principle “remains victorious.” Nor does Socrates deny Polymarchus’s view that justice consists in benefiting friends and harming enemies. Nor does he prove that the morally just life is the happy life or that justice benefits the just man, or that justice (in the moral sense) is a good that is choiceworthy for its own sake. Such orthodox views about the Republic are fictions inherited from Christian Neoplatonism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

. . . [W]hereas Thrasy-machus is depicted as a “wild beast,” Socrates is naïve and “innocent.” But this does not fool Strauss. It certainly did not fool Thrasy-machus. He knew that Socrates was a “dissembler, a man who pretends to be ignorant while in fact he knows things very well.” Far from being naïve and innocent, Socrates is “clever and tricky.”

Strauss admires the “cleverness with which Socrates argued badly on purpose,” in order to show Thrasy-machus that he is right, but not going about things the right way. Strauss explains that Thrasy-machus’s realization of this is the only thing that could have made him willing to listen silently to Socrates. Strauss insists that Thrasy-machus is “tamed” by Socrates, but he is not “refuted.”

According to Strauss, Thrasy-machus’s view of justice is far from “savage”; on the contrary, it is “highly respectable.”
Strauss contends that the Republic substantiates the view that justice is a fabrication, a product of art, or of human convention. Contrary to popular belief, Socrates found nothing natural about justice. It is not the natural order of the human psyche or any such fiction. Justice . . . inevitably conflicts with everyone's inclination to prefer their [sic] own benefit, which is "the only natural good."  

The first four paragraphs of this quotation all relate to Professor Drury's assertion that, according to Strauss, Thrasymachus makes a better argument about justice than Socrates. Strauss does indeed say, as she maintains in the first paragraph of the quotation, that Thrasymachus's principle "remains victorious" (CM, p. 84). There is also some truth in her assertion in the third paragraph that Strauss does not hold Thrasymachus to be "refuted" by Socrates. But Strauss speaks of the victory and nonrefutation of Thrasymachus as occurring only in the exchange between Thrasymachus and Socrates in the first book of the Republic. Strauss nowhere denies that in the Republic as a whole Socrates refutes Thrasymachus. Professor Drury clearly conveys the impression that Strauss makes this denial, and her reference to the first book of the Republic immediately before the quoted matter does not alter this fact. When, for example, at the end of the first paragraph she speaks of Strauss as rejecting "orthodox views about the Republic . . . inherited from Christian Neoplatonism," she is speaking of views about Socrates's performance in the Republic as a whole.

Several other points should be made about Strauss's true views on the relative merits of the arguments of Socrates and Thrasymachus. The list of Socrates's beliefs about justice which Professor Drury, in the first paragraph, says remain unproved by Socrates in the eyes of Strauss, are not even mentioned on the page which she cites in her Note 107. To be sure, Strauss says on this page that Socrates considers his proof of the general "goodness of justice" to be "radically inadequate," but Strauss is referring to but one short proof; at the bottom of the page he writes that "we cannot yet say with definiteness that justice is good." Similarly, Professor Drury is wide of the mark in Paragraph 4. On the page which she cites, not Thrasymachus's view of justice, but an opinion of which it is the consequence, is said to be "not only not manifestly savage but even highly respectable." The opinion is the commonplace one that justice consists in obeying the law (CM, p. 75).

Moreover, Professor Drury overlooks a passage on one of the very pages cited in her Note 114 in which Strauss explicitly states that, in the Republic as a whole, Socrates wins his argument with Thrasymachus. Strauss writes: "One might say that he [Thrasymachus] is Plato's version of the Unjust Speech in contrast to Socrates as his version of the Just Speech, with the understanding that whereas in the Clouds the Unjust Speech is victorious in speech, in the Republic the Just Speech is victorious in speech." The reference to the Clouds, a play by Aristophanes, need not concern us. The important point is that Strauss terms Socrates victorious.
In fairness it must be said that on the same page there is a passage that one might well wish were not there. Although the passage could be read as supporting her position, Professor Drury fails to quote it. It reads: "Plato makes it very easy for us to loathe Thrasymachus: for all ordinary purposes we ought to loathe people who act and speak like Thrasymachus and never to imitate their deeds and never to act according to their speeches. But there are other purposes to be considered" (CM, p. 74). One might well wish that at the very least Strauss had explained what those other purposes are.

If Professor Drury distorts Strauss's meaning about the quality of Socrates's argument, she also augments this distortion by misleading the reader about Strauss's interpretation of Socrates's intention. At issue are the second and third paragraphs. We shall begin with the second. None of the terms applied to Socrates is to be found on the single page cited in her Notes 108, 109, and 110; all the terms can, however, be found two pages later (CM, p. 77). Professor Drury makes it sound as if Plato, in Strauss's interpretation, depicts Socrates as "innocent," whereas in fact Strauss says that Socrates considers himself "innocent." More importantly, she makes it seem as if Strauss himself applies, or at least may apply, the terms "dissembler, a man who pretends," etc., and "clever and tricky" to Socrates, whereas in fact Strauss says that Socrates has these traits in the eyes of Thrasymachus. She makes especially unclear the source of the view of Socrates as "clever and tricky."

Then, at the beginning of the third paragraph, she plainly says that "Strauss admires the 'cleverness with which Socrates argued badly on purpose.' " Apart from the question of any possible admiration, Strauss's text is unclear whether such cleverness is ascribed to Socrates by Strauss himself or by Thrasymachus (CM, p. 84). But even if Strauss himself holds the problematic view, he reveals a perfectly innocent reason on the next page, where he writes, "What Socrates does in the Thrasymachus section would be inexcusable if he had not done it in order to provoke the passionate reaction of Glaucon . . ." (CM, p. 85). Strauss thinks that, if Socrates argues badly on purpose, he does so to further the development of the dialogue, not to convey a hidden meaning to Thrasymachus, as Professor Drury maintains later in the third paragraph. The upshot of our analysis of the second and third paragraphs is that, contrary to her suggestion, Strauss does not regard Socrates as a tricky dissembler who argues badly in order to tell Thrasymachus that he secretly agrees with him.

We come now to the fifth paragraph and Professor Drury's assertion that, according to Strauss, Socrates does not hold justice to be "the natural order of the human psyche or any such fiction," and "the only natural good" is one's own benefit. Professor Drury derives what she says about justice as a natural order from the first sentence of the paragraph, where she maintains that, in the opinion of Strauss, the Republic teaches justice to be a product, not of nature, but of art or convention. She bases this sentence in turn on three pages which she cites in her Note 117. The first two are in Strauss's chapter on the Republic, and the third is in Natural Right and History. On the first of the three pages
one can indeed find the idea that "justice arose" out of laws made by the majority; i.e., out of convention (CM, p. 87). Strauss, however, attributes the idea not to Socrates but to Glaucon, who expresses it as part of a case which he makes against justice in order to persuade Socrates to make a strong case for it. The only reference to justice on the second page occurs in a discussion of the rulers of the best city. For them, Strauss says, justice "as dedication to the common good is neither art nor eros; it does not appear to be choiceworthy for its own sake" (CM, p. 102). Why it is not art I do not know. It is not eros presumably because the love of the rulers for the city is friendly (philia), not erotic (eros). It does not seem choiceworthy for its own sake presumably because the rulers identify (correctly, we may assume) the good of the city with their own good (412d). Whatever else this obscure passage means, it does not mean that in Strauss's view Socrates regards justice as conventional rather than natural.

The page in Natural Right and History is part of a discussion of what Strauss calls "conventionalism," which does indeed think justice to be a product of convention, not nature (NRH, p. 106). But this idea is not one which conventionalism shares with Strauss's Socrates, as Professor Drury herself comes very close to saying elsewhere. So much then for the ultimate bases of her denial of the fact that in Strauss's mind Socrates regards justice as the natural order of the soul. Strauss affirms this fact both in his article "On Natural Law" (SPPP, p. 138) and elsewhere in Natural Right and History (p. 127).

Professor Drury's charge that Strauss deems "the only natural good" to be one's own benefit can be dealt with quite briefly, for it rests on the citation of a single page. On that page occurs this sentence: "Glaucon thus rejoins Thrasymachus in holding that the good life is the tyrannical life, the exploitation, more or less concealed, of society or convention for one's own benefit alone, i.e. for the only natural good" (CM, p. 88). But Strauss here is not expressing the controverted idea as his own; he is ascribing it to Glaucon and Thrasymachus. We thus conclude our analysis of the extended quotation of Professor Drury and of what she says in it about three of the four "most shocking" views which she attributes to Strauss in her discussion of his chapter on the Republic. We may now proceed to the fourth view, which is that philosophy understood as a kind of eros, and not justice, is choiceworthy for its own sake.

Professor Drury plainly ascribes this view to Strauss when she writes of "the philosopher" with whom she holds Strauss to identify, "The only thing he considers choiceworthy for its own sake is the philosophic eros or the pleasures of contemplation, friendship and conversation" (Drury, p. 81). If philosophy is the only thing choiceworthy for its own sake, justice cannot be such a thing. In this context she accuses Strauss of hedonism. She makes an explicit charge of hedonism on the basis of a questionable interpretation of several pages in Strauss's On Tyranny. But an implicit charge of hedonism is contained in her assertion that Strauss considers philosophy as eros to be the only end in itself.
In support of this assertion she cites two pages where Strauss does indeed speak of philosophy as eros. But he speaks of philosophic eros as "quest for knowledge of the idea of the good" (CM, p. 112). Such a quest cannot be equated with what Voegelinian Platonists call "the erotic longing for God," but neither is it the same as "contemplation, friendship and conversation." Moreover, while Strauss goes on to speak of the idea of the good as "higher than the idea of justice" (CM, p. 112), this fact does not mean that he denies the status of justice as an end in itself.

Later Professor Drury maintains that for Strauss there is such a thing as "philosophical justice" (pp. 84–85). Such justice is not, however, the natural order of the soul. "Philosophical justice is indistinguishable from the hedonistic or erotic life of the philosopher" (p. 85). She goes on to repeat her charge that for Strauss philosophy ("or philosophical justice") is the only good choiceworthy for its own sake (p. 85). As evidence for these assertions she cites several more pages, not only in Strauss’s chapter on the Republic but also in On Tyranny and Strauss’s The Argument and the Action of Plato’s Laws; but the sources fail to support her case. So as not to tax the patience of the reader and exceed the bounds of an article, I shall not examine each citation in writing, as I have generally done up until now; I shall deal with only the passage that is most germane, even though it is not in the work with which we are at the moment primarily concerned, the chapter on the Republic.

In On Tyranny Strauss (1) attributes to Socrates the idea that wisdom is the highest good, (2) identifies wisdom with "the philosopher," and (3) refers to "the specific pleasures of the wise, such as, for example, friendly discussion" (OT, pp. 87–88). But even if we accept Professor Drury’s assumption that Strauss’s Socrates speaks for Strauss, this passage fails to prove that Strauss has a hedonistic conception of philosophy (pleasure can be a byproduct of it rather than its essence) or that he considers pleasure to be the highest good (wisdom is obviously not the same as pleasure). If we assume that Strauss’s Socrates speaks for Strauss, the passage does prove that Strauss regards philosophy as wisdom more highly than justice, even justice as the natural order of the soul, but this proposition is quite uncontroversial. For justice can still be an end in itself without being the highest good; i.e., wisdom and justice can both be ends in themselves, even though wisdom ranks higher.

In another work with which we are not at the moment primarily concerned, Natural Right and History, Strauss clearly rejects hedonism. He says of "classic natural right," with which he plainly identifies, that it rejects "conventionalism" and with it the identification of the good with the pleasant. He writes, "The thesis of the classics is that the good is essentially different from the pleasant, that the good is more fundamental than the pleasant" (NRH, p. 126). We may therefore conclude not only that Professor Drury fails to show that Strauss holds philosophy as a kind of eros, and not justice, to be choiceworthy for its own sake, but also that independent evidence exists against Strauss’s holding this view.
Before we leave the chapter on the *Republic*, an attempt should be made to dispel possible confusion arising from the facts that the *Republic* speaks of two kinds of justice and that Strauss does not consider participation in the second kind to be choiceworthy for its own sake. It is true that the *Republic* teaches justice to be the natural order of the soul. More particularly, it teaches that the soul is just when each of its three parts performs its function well. But it also teaches that there is a parallel between the soul and the city, so that the city is just when each of its three classes performs well the function which it is best suited to perform (441d. Cf. *CM*, pp. 108–9). As a result, everybody makes his proper contribution to the common good.

Strauss repeatedly questions (1) the parallel (because it is based on an “abstraction from *eros*”) (*CM*, pp. 109, 111, 138) and, more importantly, (2) the status of participation in the second kind of justice as choiceworthy for its own sake from the standpoint of the individual faced with the question of whether to do his duty to his city. Moreover, Strauss repeats his questionings on the last page of the chapter, where they are especially obvious. I point all this out in order to prevent the reader from being surprised by what Strauss in fact does say.

Turning to Professor Drury’s critique of *Natural Right and History*, we find that she makes two major charges there. The first is that Strauss identifies with a version of “classic natural right” which knows no rules of morality for guiding governmental officials; it knows only a hierarchy of ends to be wisely pursued, any one of which may be the chief object of pursuit owing to the circumstances of the situation at hand (Drury, pp. 98–103, esp. p. 101; cf. *NRH*, pp. 157–63). Although she quotes Strauss as saying that “there are no valid rules of action” when in fact he says that “there are no *universally* valid rules of action” (Drury p. 101; *NRH*, p. 162, emphasis added), I think the charge to be largely true. I also think this version of “classic natural right” to be mistaken, for I identify with the version which does know universally valid rules, Thomistic natural law. But I do not think Strauss’s version to be indefensible or outrageous, especially since he tempers it in ways which Professor Drury overlooks. He implies universal rules when he writes:

Natural right must be mutable in order to be able to cope with the inventiveness of wickedness. (*NRH*, p. 161)

The true statesman in the Aristotelian sense takes his bearings by the normal situation and by what is normally right, and he reluctantly deviates from what is normally right only in order to save the cause of justice and humanity itself. (*NRH*, p. 162)

Consequently, I do not think Professor Drury’s first major charge to be very serious.

Her second major charge, however, is quite serious. It is that Strauss radi-
cally deprecates morality, however conceived. Moreover, she bases this charge in part on the two most problematic passages in *Natural Right and History*. If the book can survive this charge, therefore, it can survive anything. If we assume that the book and the chapter on the *Republic* are Strauss's pedagogically most significant works, and thus the only works of his that many students are likely to read, a defense of the book ought to be based primarily on these two works. But first let us examine the charge. It is contained in two paragraphs, which I shall quote complete with superscript numbers:

For Strauss, moral virtue stands in relation to intellectual virtue as the city stands in relation to the philosopher, one is a means, the other the end\(^6\). . . . Moral virtue is therefore not a noble way of life desirable for its own sake. . .

Strauss's view implies a radical deprecation of morality.\(^6\) In the course of his exchange with Jacob Klein, Strauss admits that in his scheme of things morality does not enjoy a particularly high status.\(^6\) Indeed, for Strauss, as for his Aristotle, "intellectual perfection" is not only "higher in dignity" than moral perfection, it "does not require moral virtue."\(^6\) This means that intellectual excellence can be attained by one who does not bother with morality or the "vulgar virtue."\(^6\)

Strass's contempt for the morally virtuous man takes on extreme proportions when he describes the just or moral man who is not also a philosopher as a "mutilated human being!"\(^6\) (Drury, p. 105)

Before we examine the evidence that Professor Drury musters to support these assertions, let us look at some counter evidence. In the chapter on the *Republic*, Strauss repeatedly says that "the philosopher," whom he presumably considers to possess "intellectual perfection," is a just man—indeed, the only just man (*CM*, pp. 115, 127, 135). We may assume him to mean that the philosopher possesses the first kind of justice, so that his reason is in control of his spiritedness and appetite, making him a moral person. Thus, whatever their precise relationship, "intellectual perfection" and morality go together.

As for *Natural Right and History*, Strauss says in it that "classic natural right," with which our analysis has shown him to identify, considers man to be "so constituted that he cannot achieve the perfection of his nature without the coercion of his 'lower impulses.' " This language is Professor Drury's own paraphrase (Drury, p. 93). As evidence she might have quoted, but did not quote, these statements from Strauss's elucidation of the tenets of "classic natural right": "The good life is . . . the life that flows from a well-ordered or healthy soul" (*NRH*, p. 127), which is "incomparably the most admirable human phenomenon" (p. 128); and the perfection of man's nature "includes the social virtue par excellence, justice" (p. 129).

Finally, let us look at a sentence from a third work, Strauss's *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*: "The philosopher is the man who dedicates his life to the quest for knowledge of the good, of the idea of the good; what we would call moral virtue is only the condition or by-product of that quest" (p. 172). While Strauss here clearly ranks philosophy higher than morality, he
nonetheless describes philosophy as a quest for knowledge of the good; and he sees philosophy and morality as going together, not necessarily in a means-end relationship (morality may be a by-product of philosophy). The sentence thus puts Strauss’s conception of the relationship between philosophy and morality into a perspective somewhat different from that afforded by Professor Drury.

Of the pages that she cites in support of her assertions, I have examined all and found most to be more or less beside the point. The cited pages, however, contain two passages that are potentially quite devastating. Again to stay within the bounds of an article, I shall deal with only these two passages, both of which are in Natural Right and History, and a third in whose light they should be seen. In her Notes Right and History, and a third in whose light they should be seen. In her Notes 61, 65, and 66, Professor Drury cites inter alia a page where this passage appears:

If striving for knowledge of the eternal truth is the ultimate end of man, justice and moral virtue in general can be fully legitimated only by the fact that they are required for the sake of that ultimate end or that they are conditions of the philosophic life. From this point of view the man who is merely just or moral without being a philosopher appears as a mutilated human being. . . . It . . . becomes a question whether . . . what Aristotle calls moral virtue is not, in fact, merely political or vulgar virtue. (NRH, p. 151)

The following passage occurs on the pages cited in Professor Drury’s Note 64:

The natural law which is knowable to the unassisted human mind and which prescribes chiefly actions in the strict sense is related to, or founded upon, the natural end of man; that end is twofold: moral perfection and intellectual perfection; intellectual perfection is higher in dignity than moral perfection; but intellectual perfection or wisdom, as unassisted human reason knows it, does not require moral virtue."

In the following analysis these two passages will be referred to as “the first passage” and “the second passage,” respectively.

Let us begin by reading the first passage very carefully and recognizing that in it Strauss says that “moral virtue in general can be fully legitimated” (emphasis added) only as a means to the end of philosophy: it can thus be partially legitimated as choiceworthy for its own sake. Consequently, Professor Drury’s first paragraph stands largely refuted. In the second passage Strauss says that “moral perfection” and “intellectual perfection” are both components of the natural end of man: whatever their relationship may be in other respects, therefore, in one respect they are equal. Here we find some evidence against the radical deprecation of morality to which Professor Drury refers in her second paragraph.

Any further exegesis of the two passages must take place in the light of a
third passage, which occurs in Strauss’s chapter on Aristotle’s *Politics* in *The City and Man*. I was led to the passage by another of Professor Drury’s citations, but it works against rather than for her case. It reads:

In order to grasp the ground of Aristotle’s procedure, one must start from the facts that according to him the highest end of man by nature is theoretical understanding or philosophy and this perfection does not require moral virtue as moral virtue, *i.e.* just and noble deeds as choiceworthy for their own sake. It goes without saying that man’s highest end cannot be achieved without actions resembling moral actions proper, but the actions in question are intended by the philosopher as mere means toward his end. For Plato, what Aristotle calls moral virtue is a kind of halfway house between political or vulgar virtue which is in the service of bodily well-being (of self-preservation or peace) and genuine virtue which, to say the least, animates only the philosophers as philosophers.  

Here Strauss uses the term “moral virtue” in a restricted sense: he uses it to refer to just and noble deeds that are choiceworthy for their own sake. Again contrary to Professor Drury’s first paragraph, he does not deny that “moral virtue” is choiceworthy for its own sake; it is so by definition. What he denies is that philosophy requires “moral virtue” as such. He goes on to say that philosophy depends on what for practical purposes is the same as “moral virtue”; *i.e.*, just and noble deeds, but just and noble deeds committed, not as ends in themselves, but as means to philosophy.

In the light of this fact three changes occur: (1) the second passage becomes quite innocent, (2) Professor Drury becomes misleading when she says in her second paragraph that for Strauss “intellectual perfection” does not require “moral virtue,” and (3) she becomes downright wrong when she says in the next sentence that for Strauss “intellectual excellence can be attained by one who does not bother with morality.” As for her attribution to Strauss in the same sentence of an equation of morality with “vulgar virtue,” it should be clear from both the first and the third passage that Strauss regards “vulgar virtue” as but one kind of morality, and as a not very vulgar kind at that. Whether “moral virtue” is reducible to “vulgar virtue,” as Strauss suggests it may be in the first passage, is indeed questionable, but the suggestion is no grave cause for offense.

We have yet to deal with three of Professor Drury’s assertions, all in her second paragraph—her summary assertion that “Strauss’s view implies a radical deprecation of morality,” her assertion that Strauss admits to not regarding morality particularly highly, and her assertion that he portrays the moral but unphilosophical man as a “mutilated human being.” In view, not only of all that has just been said about the quality of her evidence, but also of some counter evidence, the summary allegation cannot stand, and Strauss’s admission is not very important. His use in the first passage of the term “mutilated human being” in the way which Professor Drury describes is indeed unfortu-
nate, but it is insufficient cause for keeping *Natural Right and History* out of the hands of impressionable undergraduates. It is true that to save the book I have had to rely heavily on a passage from Strauss’s pedagogically rather insignificant chapter on Aristotle’s *Politics*, but teachers could easily bring the passage into classroom discussions of *Natural Right and History*.

I thus conclude that both *Natural Right and History* and Strauss’s chapter on the *Republic* should be incorporated into a liberal education intended to endow a gentlemanly elite with the wherewithal to initiate a spiritual renaissance in this country. In reaching this conclusion I have dealt rather severely with Professor Drury’s book, but I hope to have dealt more fairly with it than she has dealt with Strauss’s work. It should be added that one cannot help learning from somebody who has read as extensively as she in the works of Strauss and his students, and that she has an engaging style.

I have said nothing about her belief that Strauss was an esoteric writer, even though she elaborates on it at great length,20 because I am not convinced that it is true. Strauss wrote with an economy of expression rather than expanding on points at length; he was not so careful as he should have been to distinguish clearly between his own views and those of the participants in dialogues which he was analyzing; he did not always say everything that was on his mind; his prose is at times obscure; he was an elitist; and he did not believe in religion or identify with conventional morality. But not even all this taken together adds up to a state of things in which he said one thing to a small group of philosophical initiates and something else to gentlemen and any members of the common people who might happen upon his work.

Although he despaired, as I do not, of reconciling reason and revelation, he made a powerful case not just for revelation but for a literal interpretation of it.21 Moreover, the version of “classic natural right” with which he identified is not so vacuous as Professor Drury would have us believe, and he did not consider himself above morality. In short, he is not a dangerous writer, though one might regret his failure to temper his elitism by urging upon elites a religiously grounded humility.

### NOTES

1. The following abbreviations will be used in citing books written or edited by Strauss:


Strauss’s views on liberal education are contained in LAM, Chapters 1 and 2 (IPP, pp. 311–45). For a detailed analysis of these writings, see Walter Nicgorski, “Leo Strauss and Liberal Education,” Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy, 13, No. 2 (May 1985), 233–50.

2. Strauss considers these systems or variations thereon in LAM, pp. 12, 15, 18 (IPP, pp. 326, 330, 335–36).


7. For an example of such an attempt, see my “John Stuart Mill and Pornography,” The Cresset, 49, No. 5 (March 1986), 24–25.


11. CM, p. 109. A shorter version of Strauss’s chapter on Plato’s Republic can be found in the chapter on Plato which Strauss wrote for HPP (IPP, pp. 167–245).

12. It should be pointed out, however, that in the only actual use of the word refuted on the five pages to which Professor Drury refers in her Note 114 Strauss speaks of Thrasymachus as being refuted, rather than as not refuted, at one point in the Republic (CM, p. 83). This fact, while relatively unimportant in itself, is indicative of the care with which Professor Drury quotes Strauss.

13. CM, p. 83. Emphasis added. Cf. what Strauss says later (CM, p. 129): “By the end of the seventh book justice has come to sight fully. Socrates has performed the duty laid upon him by
Glaucnon and Adeimantus to show that justice is choiceworthy for its own sake, regardless of its consequences, and therefore that it is unqualifiedly preferable to injustice."

14. _CM_, p. 74. This passage patently contradicts Professor Drury’s assertion later in her book, with reference to her Chapter 4, which we are now examining, that for Strauss “the ‘Just Speech’ cannot be required to give a rational account of itself without being destroyed by the ‘Unjust Speech’” (Drury, p. 180).

15. Drury, p. 93; note the last paragraph on “classic natural right,” which Professor Drury describes as “Socratic” (p. 90).

16. _CM_, pp. 128, 138; see also _CM_, p. 102. Just as the first kind of justice is not the same as what Professor Drury calls “philosophical justice,” so the second kind, contrary to what one might expect, is not the same as what she calls “political justice.” The concepts of philosophical and political justice are the creations, not of Strauss in his chapter on the _Republic_ (as Professor Drury would have us believe), but mainly of Professor Drury herself. See Drury, pp. 80, 84–85; but also see _OT_, p. 94.

17. _NRH_, pp. 163–64. Professor Drury quotes the last five words of this passage (“does not require moral virtue”) three times in her conclusion (pp. 198, 200, 201). It is, therefore, all the more important that the meaning of the words be explained.

18. _CM_, pp. 26–27. On the distinction between “vulgar virtue” and genuine virtue, see also _NRH_, p. 121.

19. The admission occurs in “A Giving of Accounts: Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss,” an exchange published in _The College_ of St. John’s College, Annapolis, MD, 22, No. 1 (April 1970), 4, cited in Professor Drury’s Note 63. This exchange adds little or nothing to what we already know from the passages just examined. The key passage in the exchange is this statement by Strauss: “That the philosophic life, especially as Plato and Aristotle understood it, is not possible without self-control and a few other virtues almost goes without saying. If a man is habitually drunk, and so on, how can he think? But the question is, if these virtues are understood only as subservient to philosophy and for its sake, then that is no longer a moral understanding of the virtues.”

20. Drury, Preface and Chapters 1, 2, and 10, especially p. 191. Professor Drury also thinks that Strauss interprets Plato as an esoteric writer. She writes, “...Strauss believes that Plato uses Thrasymachus as his mouthpiece” (p. 26). I hope that the foregoing study disproves this assertion.

Book Review


Will Morrisey

Locke begins this work by restating the argument the Apostle Paul makes for the existence of God: “Since god shows himself everywhere present to us and, as it were, forces himself upon men’s eyes, as much now in the constant course of nature as in the once frequent testimony of miracles, I believe there will be no one, who recognizes that either some rational account of our life is necessary or that there exists something deserving the name of either virtue or vice, who will not conclude for himself that god exists” (p. 95). Locke ends the work in an equally firm moral tone: “the rightness of an action does not depend upon interest, but interest follows from rectitude” (p. 251). The beginning and end of the *Questions* dovetail with the teachings of Christian natural law, a fact many scholars today will take to confirm their belief that Locke reflected the reigning orthodoxy of his time. In his substantial introduction to this new edition of the *Questions*, the late Robert H. Horwitz observes that Locke deals systematically with the issue of natural law nowhere in his published writings (p. 1). The *Questions* shows how carefully Locke thought about natural law during his tenure as senior censor of moral philosophy at Christ Church College, Oxford, in the 1663–64 term. Locke evidently prepared the manuscript around that time, prior to his participation in formal scholarly disputations with his advanced students (pp. 29–30). Nor did Locke put his manuscript aside and forget it. As late as 1681–82 he had it copied by hand and corrected it. But he never published the work, resisting the importunities of at least one friend who kept and studied it during Locke’s exile in Holland. Upon his return Locke took pains to conceal the manuscript among his papers, succeeding so well that it was not discovered and published for some two and a half centuries.

Locke’s supreme self-possession and prudence come out very clearly in Horwitz’s introduction, an exemplary specimen of biographical criticism. While urging readers “to concentrate their attention solely on the difficult task of understanding Locke’s reflections on the law of nature in precisely the form in which Locke has left them to us,” Horwitz makes this easier to do by provid-

ing not only an account of the circumstances surrounding the manuscript’s composition and subsequent history, but also a picture of Locke’s habits of mind as reflected in actions. The philosopher actively participated in the political events of late seventeenth-century England, in which Protestants and Catholics struggled for control of the monarchy. Locke, “a man who never took lightly, either in theory or in practice, the indispensable good of life, liberty, and property” (p. 40), and who may have witnessed “the last major public book burning” at Oxford shortly before his six-year exile (the heretical works of Thomas Hobbes were consigned to the flames), survived even as other prominent Whigs such as Algernon Sidney served prison sentences and even died for their convictions (pp. 9,29). Locke “took great pains to conceal authorship of many of his most important—and potentially most controversial—works from the time they were written and published [anonymously] until a few weeks before his death” (p. 2,n.2). Even in his own library catalogue he did not classify his Two Treatises or his Letters concerning Toleration under his own name.

This caution extended to the manner in which Locke wrote his manuscripts. After the publication of his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, “Locke’s contemporaries, immersed as they were in every aspect of the Christian natural law teaching, perceived an important and critical ambiguity in Locke’s position on these matters,” particularly a reluctance to “identify the Bible simply as the revealed word of God” (pp. 21–22). Some contemporaries found this reluctance profoundly unsettling; others, whom Horwitz calls “Locke’s helpers,” eagerly supplied, or urged Locke to supply, the decisively pious supplements. He never quite did so. These contemporary disputes have continued into our own time, as Horwitz shows in his discussion of the editorial work done by Wolfgang von Leyden, the scholar who discovered Locke’s manuscript in the 1940s and published it in 1954 under the title Essays on the Law of Nature. This title misidentifies the genre. These are not essays; some sections consist only of a question and a one-word answer. Just as important, von Leyden invariably ascribes a pious meaning to Locke’s answers, overlooking the “pervasive tension between two or more opposed understandings of the law of nature” found in the text (p. 61) as well as the “manifold contradictions” that force attentive readers to think the problems through for themselves (p. 61, n.138). As co-editor Diskin Clay observes, Locke speaks in a “Christian” voice, a “pagan” voice and, sotto voce, in the accents of Hobbes, Grotius, and Descartes (p. 80) The Christian and pagan voices speak of natural law but must express different conceptions of the origins of the natural law. The ‘modern’ voices do not speak of nature in the same sense at all.

The Questions consist of eleven questions and answers. In the first answer Locke affirms the existence of “a rule of conduct or law of nature,” whereby “all creatures in their obedience to [god’s] will have their own proper laws governing their birth and life” (p. 95). The law of nature differs from natural
right, which does not command; the law of nature is "the command of the
divine will, knowable by the light of nature" (p. 101). The light of nature,
human reason, interprets but does not make the law of nature—"unless we are
willing to diminish the dignity of the supreme lawmaker" (p. 101) and make
man a self-legislator. As evidence of these assertions Locke argues that some
"principles of conduct" are recognized universally, and universality points to
nature, as distinguished from the heterogeneous, even contradictory realm of
conventional laws. Locke concedes that most people do not recognize 'univer-
sally recognized' laws of nature. The many are governed by "the onrush of
their feelings and bad habits"; "we must not consult the majority of mankind,
but the sounder and more perceptive part" (p. 111). Unfortunately, sound and
perceptive thinkers do not agree, either. Locke doesn't bat an eye: This dis-
agreement only "strengthens [the conclusion] that a law of this kind exists,
since concerning this very law all contend so fiercely" (p. 111). As further
evidence, Locke also cites conscience, the argument from design, and what
might be termed the argument from society: Society "seems to rest" upon a
fixed political regime and the keeping of covenants; these "foundations" would
"collapse" absent a law of nature, with supreme political power enjoying su-
preme licence (as in Hobbes) and citizens observing no deference (p. 115).
Finally, "without the law of nature there would be no virtue or vice"; "man
[would be] the supreme judge of his own actions (p. 117). The discovery of
conventionality of the law of nature would result in the concept of man as his
own judge, legislator, and executioner.

The thirteen paragraphs of the second section, affirming that the law of
nature is knowable by the light of nature, define the light of nature not as
"inscribed on tablets in our breasts" to be read by an "inner light"—conscience,
in short—but as the "right use" of unaided natural faculties (p. 119). The "very
origin of knowledge" is not even natural reason, which "does nothing unless
something has been established and agreed to beforehand" (p. 121). The three
natural means of knowledge are "inscription," "tradition," and "sense." Inscript-
on, the claim that the human mind has the law of nature "graven" upon it (p.
123), was rejected earlier and will be rejected again in Question IV. Tradition,
based upon "faith," is "not a primary and certain means of knowing the law of
nature," because there are many and contradictory traditions, and each must
finally trace itself back to some source, the reliability of which cannot be
judged by tradition. All our knowledge of the law of nature derives from sense.
"Good, rich veins of gold and silver lie hidden in the bowels of the earth"; by
natural means alone we must work to "dig them out." Even then, "some we see
toil to no avail," as "only a few... are guided by reason in the concerns of their
daily life" (p. 135). Locke thus challenges his young scholars to exercise their
natural powers, and only their natural powers, to investigate the claims made
for the law of nature.

Under the circumstances it seems bold to declare, as Locke does, that the
existence of "a law of nature" has been "proved" (p. 139). A careful reader might conclude that a law of nature's existence has not been disproved. Returning to the issue of conscience, Locke claims that reason, "the discursive faculty of the soul," "directs sense, and arranges and orders the images of things derived from the senses, and forms [and] derives from this source other new images" (pp. 155,157; italics added). Law presupposes a legislator, a "superior power" to which one is "rightfully subject"; since "every conception of the mind, as of the body, always comes from some pre-existent matter" (p. 157; italics added), it appears that the legislator of the law of nature is matter, "the machine of this world" which, Locke hastens to add, "could not have been formed by chance and accident" but only by "some powerful and wise creator of all these things" (p. 161). Man could not have "produce[d] himself" because "man does not find in himself all those perfections of which his mind can conceive" such as immortality (p. 161); that is, had man produced himself he would have done a better job and would not have been "hostile and inimical to himself" (pp. 161–63). Is "god," then, hostile and inimical to man? Locke does not go so far, asking piously, "Who, indeed, will say, that clay is not subject to the potter's will and that the pot cannot be destroyed by the same hand that shaped it" (p. 167). Obviously, this argument would equally apply to a human potter. Could Locke prefer a self-recreating 'modern' man who will not botch the job out of ignorance of the true nature of things?

Be that as it may, the sixth, central section tersely denies the Aristotelian claim that mankind should orient itself by its own telos or "natural inclination" (p. 169). The seventh and longest section denies that the law of nature can be known "from the consensus of mankind" (p. 173). The voices of the people are not the voice of god or, if they are, then god's voice contradicts itself. Consensus has no natural character, being only a compact (p. 175). As Locke shows, enthusiastically and with many examples, no universal consensus exists. Even self-preservation is overridden in some societies. Drawing upon a breadth of anthropological knowledge that would be noteworthy even today, and must have been nearly unique in his own day, Locke observes that human societies

... disagree on even the most fundamental principles, and god and the immortality of the soul are called into doubt. These, although they are not practical propositions or laws of nature, must, nevertheless, be necessarily assumed for the existence of the law of nature, for there can exist no law without a legislator and law will have no force if without punishment. (P. 193)

Further, agreement about the gods (polytheism) "was of no help whatsoever in the proper formation of morals," as polytheists are "atheists under another name" (p. 195). (It is noteworthy, perhaps, that Locke himself more than once refers to "the gods" in this work.) Further, monotheism is not necessarily morally sound, as seen in the example (telling for Locke's Christian audience) of
Judaism. Further still, philosophers also disagree about the highest good (p. 197). Even Christian monotheists disagree; Locke reminds his largely Protestant audience of Catholicism (p. 197). Finally, mere agreement, even universal agreement, cannot prove the soundness of a moral principle, opinion, or action (p. 199). This section devastates any claim to base natural law on its putative universal recognition. This is perhaps the one rigorously empirical and logical section of the work, i.e., the one most thoroughly consistent with Locke's definition of "the light of nature."

In answer to the eighth question, Locke affirms that the law of nature binds men. He refers to "God" instead of "god" or "the gods" only in this section. "[W]e are bound by God, who is best and greatest, because he wills" as our creator and preserver (pp. 205, 207, 211). God authored and published the law of nature. To deny this would be to "overturn at one blow all government among men, [all] authority, rank, and society" (p. 213). One is tempted to consider whether the law of nature derives, then, not from some sort of universal opinion or 'conscience' but from the necessities of society itself. Insofar as men need society, they have the duty to uphold the law of society's 'nature.' This law, Locke now confesses (in contradiction to his own assertion in Question 1), is not binding on brutes. Locke can say this now because he has arrived at a human-social definition of the law of nature in this very section in which he most visibly affirms its 'divine' origin. Man's obligation to obey this law seems perpetual and universal, even if his recognition is perpetually clouded and partial. But perhaps not: "[O]ne can rightly doubt that the law of nature is binding upon the human race as a whole" (p. 217), for to assert the rightfully binding character of the law of nature would be to exercise a sort of tyranny: "What cruelty, even that of Sicily, was so great that it would will its subjects to observe a law which it would at the same time conceal from them and to show themselves obedient to a will that they could not know?" (p. 219). Locke speaks of nature, but makes the reader think of God and God's priests.

Such objections, Locke hastens to claim, are "not decisive" (p. 219). The "bonds" of the law of nature are "eternal and coeval with the human race" (p. 219); "the obligation of this law never changes, although the times and circumstances of the actions by which our obedience is defined might change" (p. 221). By "eternal and coeval with the human race," Locke refers to such overt actions as public worship of divinity, comforting an afflicted neighbor, relief of someone in trouble, and charity for the hungry; "to these we are not bound forever but only at a certain time and in a certain manner" (p. 223). Some overt actions, such as stealing, murder, "and other things of this kind" (p. 221), are always prohibited. Such inward dispositions as reverence for and fear of divinity, sense of duty toward one's parents, and love of neighbor, are likewise universally binding. The law of nature "depends not on a will that is fluid and changeable"—human or divine—"but on the eternal order of things." That is, "there follows from the constitution of man at birth some definite duties he
must perform” (p. 229). Conflicting opinions with respect to these duties arise either from men’s seduction “by long established habits or the examples [they discover] at home” or from passions (p. 229). The argument from design cited at the beginning of the Questions as evidence of god’s existence gradually metamorphoses into an argument for a law of nature as evidenced in man’s existence and constitution and the necessities derived therefrom. This constitution has a degree of malleability, as seen in the rarity of those who deduce their duties rationally from human nature, and from the latitudinarian character of the duties Locke deduces rationally from human nature, as well as from the nearly chaotic diversity of human societies.

In the final section Locke denies that “the private interest of each individual constitute[s] the foundation of the law of nature” (p. 235). This is an opinion of “great iniquity” (p. 237). Of course, Locke immediately notes, private interest does not oppose “the common right of man” (p. 237). Indeed, “the law of nature is the greatest defense of the private property of the individual” (p. 239). Locke would deny only that the individual is “free to judge by himself what would be of advantage to himself as the occasion arises”; then again, “no one can be a fair and just assessor of what is good for another” (p. 239). Locke leaves to each individual the task of judging for himself according to a standard that one may not apply to others. He concludes that obedience to the law of nature brings happiness—peace, concord, friendship, freedom from fear of unjust punishments, security, possession of our own property. Self-interest “is not a foundation of law or a basis of obligation, but the consequence of obedience” (p. 251). He then writes that “present advantage” is not the criterion of rectitude, that “interest follows from rectitude” (p. 251; italics added). Rectitude itself comes rather from “god” or from the social necessity that arises from human natural necessity.

This edition of the Questions should prove a permanent contribution to Locke scholarship. In addition to Horwitz’s valuable introduction, it includes a succinct, useful discussion of the manuscripts by Jenny Strauss Clay, the complete Latin text, and facing-page translation in English with helpful notes that build on von Leyden’s earlier work. Because any outstanding work of Locke scholarship simultaneously contributes to the study of political philosophy, we are doubly in the editors’ debt.
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