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Laughing at Logoi: Laughter, Persuasion, and Glaucon’s Courage

Leighton Moore
Student, Harvard Law School

"Socrates was a buffoon who got himself taken seriously; what really happened there?"
Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols

I. INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche means to shock, but his question is the right one. We know little of Socrates until we know whether to laugh at him or to take him seriously. Aristo-phanes, for one, saw his comic potential. And, although it is easier to ridicule the basket-dweller of The Clouds than the beautified Socrates of Plato, even in the dialogues Socrates was often taken lightly, sometimes by his most sympa-thetic interlocutors. Socratic ironies provoke three of the four occurrences of laughter in the Republic (337a, 398c, 451b); and, surprisingly, the person in that dialogue who appears the most predisposed to find Socratic speeches comical is Glaucon (see, e.g., 445a–b, 456d), Socrates’ companion to the Piraeus and the most willing and able respondent to his questioning.¹ This case deserves a second look. For the young Glaucon the problem of Socrates appears as an immediate form of the question how best to live; and despite the seriousness with which he takes that question, in the course of pursuing it he laughs twice, as much as all other characters combined, responding each time to some more or less ironic Socratic utterance (398c, 451b). In each case, Glaucon’s laughter implicitly ques-tions Socrates’ seriousness, although in each case it remains unclear whether Glaucon hears Socrates’ ironies as serious speeches inviting ridicule or as jokes inviting responses in kind.

The ambiguity of Glaucon’s laughs reflects possibilities of meaning more fully realized in the Republic’s other instances of laughter: Cephalus’ laugh at a friendly joke (331d), and Thrasymachus’ derisive guffaw at Socrates’ ironic plea for pity (337a). The perceptions behind these laughs differ in a way to which Plato calls attention more explicitly elsewhere. At Symposium 189b, Aristophanes (no mean expert as to how speeches might produce laughter) says

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he does not fear “saying something laughable” (ti geloion eipēs), which a comedian ought to do, but would not wish his speech to be “ridiculous” (katagelāsta). Gelōios is simply “laughable”; kata-, which signifies something’s being or going down, here adds the nuance of contempt or belittling. Aristophanes’ remark suggests that even a comic speech has a serious side which must be taken seriously if the speaker’s intention is to be properly honored, hence his careful distinction between the different laughs which mark the poet’s success or failure at the serious task of speaking comically. The alternative he omits is to provoke laughter by failing (or, more precisely, by being judged to fail) in the serious attempt to speak seriously. Callicles, in the Gorgias, claims that such laughter is the appropriate response to philosophy itself, at least when practiced by older men in place of politics (484e–485c).

Like Callicles’ remonstrance, Thrasymachus’ scornful laugh expresses his judgment that some aspect of Socratic philosophy is unworthy of being taken seriously. I identify this as an instance of “phthonic” laughter (cf. Philebus 48a–50b) which expresses a certain malice toward its object. Cephalus hints that in his youth, he laughed in this way at tales of the afterworld (330d–e). The laugh he utters in the Republic is of the second kind, however: it reflects a perception that the speech at which he laughs realizes the speaker’s primary intention to please by causing laughter (i.e., a perception that the speech is a successful gelotopoios or joke). I will call such laughter “philic.” The ambiguity of Glaucos’s laughs suggests both types of response: an interpreter must judge whether each laugh indicates ridicule of a failure of seriousness, appreciation of a comic success, or some blend of the two. Thus, to discover what Glaucos’s laughs can tell us, it proves helpful to inquire how they may be foreshadowed by the earlier laughs of Cephalus and Thrasy-machus.

Those other figures represent variations on the Republic’s thematic question: the meaning and desirability of the just life. Cephalus, the wealthy metic, and Thrasymachus, the traveling rhetorician, have resolved this question for themselves in ways that involve partial independence from the city’s common life. The ambitious Glaucos envisions a form of independence seemingly more complete: observe his fantasy of the Lydian ring. Yet by the dialogue’s end, all of these abstract and partial images are replaced with a concrete though ironically inflected depiction of philosophic freedom, and the question of justice is accordingly transformed. The inquiry Glaucos begins into the choiceworthiness of the just life develops into two dialectically interwoven lines of thought: who in the city can claim to live best, and what rule of life in common with others should such a person have? Thrasy-machus and Cephalus, like the image of philosopher-kings and, for that matter, Socrates himself, stand for answers whose shortcomings raise these questions anew.

Glaucos’s laughs link him thematically with Cephalus and Thrasy-machus; in doing so they reveal some of the deeper issues facing, not him alone, but also the philosophic reader. In what follows, I interpret the dramatic use of laughter
in the *Republic* as a device for drawing attention to a character’s perception of the seriousness of Socrates’ philosophic *logos*. Socratic talk, by its ironic form as well as by its paradoxical content, presents an interlocutor with a sometimes difficult question concerning whether and how to take Socrates seriously (see, e.g., *Gorgias* 481b–c). To respond to that question with laughter may imply either that Socrates must be joking, or that he has a ridiculous way of being serious. And a given person’s judgment of a Socratic speech in this respect must be informed by that person’s own preconceived opinion of the serious aims one might have in view when speaking and inquiring about the just. Although Cephalus and Thrasymachus have decided this question in favor of goods pertaining to lower parts of the soul, Glaucion’s younger, more persuadable soul is already strongly inclined to take philosophic virtue as an end in itself. For Glaucion, the question of what it means to take a given Socratic speech seriously is a concrete instantiation of the question of philosophy, its nature and its worth. To understand his laughter in light of that question is the aim of the following interpretation.2

II. LAUGHTER AND GLAUCON’S COURAGE

When, at the end of Book I, Socrates has won the allegiance of Polemarchus and has bested Thrasymachus, he has not yet shown that the just life is the most choiceworthy in itself as well as for acquiring the external goods with which those two interlocutors are concerned. Glaucion asks to be truly, not just seemingly, persuaded (357a–b), a request which conflicts strikingly and suggestively with his later laughter at two Socratic speeches not obviously uttered in jest.

The form of that request indicates that Glaucion’s willingness to be persuaded is perhaps too complete: although he clearly does not yet grasp how justice could secure his happiness, he lets the dialogue’s continuation rest on Socrates’ (not just his own) desire that the company be truly persuaded. Thus he at first appears willing to be persuaded not to be persuaded, if that is what Socrates wants. Indeed, when Socrates later claims that his opinions about the Good itself are beyond the scope of their discussion, Glaucion’s insistence on hearing them soon yields to Socrates’ partial payment in the form of an image, with an unendorsed promissory note for the balance of the argument (506b–507a). Both Glaucion’s strong desire to hear Socrates’ opinions and his deference to Socrates’ judgment indicate that he knows his own wisdom does not yet suffice for the proper ordering of his soul. His awareness of that lack, manifest in his desire truly to desire the just, animates the entire dialogue. In making his request for true persuasion, Glaucion is asking Socrates to help him see his way clear to desiring a good that does not yet feel wholly like a good.3

Socrates prefaces his narration of Glaucion’s request by informing his audience that “Glaucion is always most courageous in everything. . . .” The strange
but strong implication, that asking to be persuaded might illustrate courage of a superlative order, is not explained. As this remark is the first mention of courage in the Republic, the careful reader should give it weight and should ask how it might bear on the discussion to follow. And not only that: since the claim belongs to the direct, not to the imitative part of Socrates’ narration, it is uttered on the day of that narration itself and not on the “yesterday” of the dialogue narrated (327a). Hence one should also ask how the earlier remark may already be colored by the later discussion of courage, in which our narrator took part “yesterday.”

Yet the link to that discussion seems at first only to complicate the interpretation. A guardian is said to be courageous when “his spirited part preserves, through pains and pleasures, what has been proclaimed by the speeches about that which is terrible and that which is not” (442c). Persuasion presumably involves either a change in an opinion or the strengthening or weakening of one’s attachment to it. Since Glaucon’s being persuaded of the choiceworthiness of justice must also affect his opinions about what is fearful (see, e.g., 361e–362a), his request would appear to betray a deficiency of courage of the guardians’ sort. He could only be persuaded for the better if his opinions were either unlawful or weakly held. The guardians do not possess the only, nor even the highest form of courage, however: theirs is “political courage,” a term which leaves room for both lower and higher forms, as there are lives both lower and higher than the political. Socrates mentions that a “still finer treatment” of the virtue is possible, though he does not give it (430c). These observations suggest that some higher form of courage, some courage requisite to the philosophic life, appears in Glaucon’s eagerness to be truly (which turns out to mean philosophically) persuaded to choose justice. As such courage would be best revealed in the drama of a philosophic conversation, it is in Socrates’ narrative that one must look for the actions that give it content.

Glaucon’s pursuit of persuasion is marked, at least, by a dogged endurance and a sanguine spirit. Repeatedly he holds Socrates to the philosophic quest, even when Socrates resists or warns of danger (450a–451b, 506b–d). When Socrates moves to escape, Glaucon (sometimes with help, sometimes without) prods him back toward a full praising of justice. This reaction is natural enough: after all, it was at Glaucon’s urging that the dialogue originally moved beyond the definition and defense of justice to its praise. What requires explanation is that Socrates’ evasions often appear to Glaucon as occasions for comedy. Each of his laughs occurs at a point when Socrates is trying to get out of the dialogue. He first laughs when Socrates, having extensively discussed poetry with Adeimantus, seemingly proposes to skip over “the matter of song and melody” (398c). Later, when Socrates moves to hand over the whole discussion of justice in the city in speech to the younger men, Glaucon accuses him of “talking nonsense” (427d). And Glaucon laughs for the second and last time as he ridicules Socrates’ unwillingness to give a full account of the community of women and children
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(451b). From the repeated juxtaposition of Glaucon's comic moments with his persistence in the philosophic inquiry he boldly began, it appears that his laughs and his peculiar courage are supposed to be mutually illuminating.

An overview of the discussions of laughter in the dialogue supports this association and helps clarify somewhat the general relation of laughter to courage. The first mention of laughter comes from Cephalus, who testifies that he and others who once laughed scornfully (katageloien) at tales of the afterworld, do so no longer now that old age has intensified their fear of death. Laughter here flows from an incomplete form of courage, a heedless bravado toward spiritual dangers, which, being a function of youthful desire, declines with the body. Later, in the discussion of courage with Adeimantus, Socrates suggests that such scornful laughter would be the young guardians' appropriate reaction on hearing poets' tales portray gods as vulnerable to mortal griefs (388d). Yet he immediately qualifies this apparent approval of laughter. Leaving off his usual questioning, he flatly asserts that the guardians "shouldn't be lovers of laughter. . . . For when a man lets himself go and laughs mightily, he also seeks a mighty change to accompany his condition" (388e). The nature of this "mighty change" is not explained, nor is the detrimental effect the guardians' love of laughter would have on their courage. Remaining in assertoric mode, Socrates proceeds to expunge the passage from the Odyssey which describes the gods' "unquenchable laughter" at the impotent Hephaistos (389a). The explicit discussion of laughter in the Republic acknowledges its relation to courage, but generally associates laughter rather with some deficit of that virtue than with its full realization.

With the foregoing remarks in mind, the interpretive inquiry may be refined somewhat, for the central question now appears to be whether Glaucon's laughter may suggest an imperfection in his courage, an incompleteness which somehow illuminates his desire for true persuasion. And to answer this question it is necessary to situate Glaucon's laughs in the context of his character as well as within the constellation of Platonic insights which alone can illuminate the Republic's drama.

The closest Plato comes to having Socrates articulate a theory of laughter is in the Philebus.4 There Socrates explains to Protarchus that the nature of the laughable (to geloion) is a show of pretentious self-ignorance in another who is too weak to take revenge upon the laugh: Our response to the comic spectacle is a mixture of pleasure and pain: pain at another's evil (at least to the extent that we feel friendship toward him), but pleasure in our perception of his self-ignorance. This combination of pleasure and pain at the evils of others Socrates calls "envy" (phthonos, see 49d). Strangely, Socrates says that since perceiving the evils of our enemies does not give rise to envy, our pleasure in such evils is not unjust. Of primary importance here is that laughter implies certain judgments about the person laughed at, both in himself and in relation to the one laughing. In himself, we think, the comic character suffers from a deficiency of wisdom; in relation to us, we see him as neither fully a friend nor fully an
enemy. Socrates suggests but does not develop the conclusion that the judgments and passions implicit in such laughter raise the question of justice.

Though the Philebus account seems able to cast some light on the meanings of dramatic laughter in the Republic, its relevance requires careful consideration even aside from the scholarly pitfalls involved in applying the doctrines of “later” to the interpretation of “earlier” dialogues. The Socrates of the Philebus presents his brief account of the laughable in order to articulate “the disposition of our soul in comedies” (48a). But comedy presents only one possible context of laughter, one in which particular forms of weakness and unwisdom are objectified in dramatic characters whose unreality, the utmost extreme of weakness, invites the audience to vent its malice with impunity. The limited purpose of Socrates’ explanation probably accounts for its failure to capture the nuance of Socrates’ own gentle jest and laugh at Crito’s underestimation of the soul’s freedom (Phaedo 115c), and for its apparent deviation from the Republic’s identification of the truly laughable with the bad (452d–e, 457a–b; cf. Gorgias 509a–b). Still, the Philebus account describes one motive for laughter which may be useful for interpreting laughter in a Platonic dialogue: to the extent that it is directed toward someone’s seriousness, a laugh may suggest a malicious pleasure in perceiving another’s failure of wisdom. This is the variety of laughter I earlier called “phthonic,” and I will refer to it in that way to indicate its treatment in the Philebus. It should be noted that to perceive a failure of wisdom implies to that extent one’s own at least potentially greater wisdom. Hence it appears that a character who perceives another’s (or, possibly, his own) lack of wisdom is in a position to judge himself superior to that deficiency, though he will not necessarily do so. And if the deficiency belongs to another, then this sense of superiority should extend to that other, at least as far as the failure of wisdom is thought to extend.

Now clearly the phthonic cannot be the only form of laughter. Aristophanes’ distinction from the Symposium suggests another kind, a kind that one who takes honor seriously might intend to produce. Unlike the butt of phthonic laughter, neither the comic poet nor the actors would dream of taking revenge against a laughing audience, as long as the laughter was of the right sort and at the right times. To the extent that a laugh honors a speaker’s successfully realized intention to be comical, it is neither malicious nor superior but what one might call “philic.” To laugh with someone’s joke reveals both a certain like-mindedness as to the subject matter and a willingness to cooperate in the convention of joking for the sake of mutual pleasure. Yet it must be kept in mind that the butt of the joke (where there is one) is, as such, excluded from that cooperation and that pleasure. Such exclusion is presumably what Aristophanes wished to avoid.

On this account, laughter, whether philic or phthonic, should come easily to such a nature as Glacon’s. The evidence of Glacon’s disposition throughout the dialogue confirms both his seriousness about pleasure and his devotion to
the forms of pleasure which most deserve seriousness. Glaucon loves feasts (372d), music (398e), victory in battle (368a, 548d), youths with noble souls (402d), and philosophic speeches (450b): spiritual meanings, sensuously embodied. Strauss is not wholly unfair in claiming that the young man "cannot distinguish between his desire for dinner and his desire for virtue" (p. 95). Hence Glaucon remains perfectly in character when, in the discussion of the Good, he is tempted to assert that pleasure is the source of knowledge and truth (509a). In light of these facts, and especially in the context of his quest for philosophical persuasion, it is quite natural that Plato would make Glaucon laugh, whether to express a sense of superiority over some lack of wisdom, or to indicate his delight in some surprising like-mindedness shared with friends. Glaucon takes great pleasure in his own excellence and in the company of those who are capable of recognizing it, and he wants to see the meaning of that pleasure expressed in sensuous form.

Yet while Glaucon's laughter thus may express the vigor of his yearning for the noble, the fact remains that this yearning bursts forth in an inarticulate, indeliberate way. The temptation to joke and to laugh is a temptation to judge quickly, perhaps hastily, and perhaps without even realizing that a judgment has been made. As already noted, Aristophanes is aware that the comedian risks making himself ridiculous in the course of seeking to show his wisdom about human eros. A laugh, like a joke, may be wise or foolish depending upon whether what provokes laughter should instead have been taken seriously. As I argue more fully below, Glaucon's laughs reveal his pleasure and confidence in philosophic inquiry, but also his imperfect appreciation of its attendant ironies. His courage, as realized in that inquiry, preserves the "lawful opinion" that the private good of philosophy and the public good of piety can be reliably incorporated into a harmonious order of rule—preserves that opinion, even when Socrates himself is suggesting otherwise. And whether Glaucon's courage is complete depends upon whether he should, instead, have been persuaded.

III. CEPHALUS

Cephalus introduces the possibility that a serious speech about the human good might be rejected with the sensuous immediacy of a laugh, when he recounts how in his youth he scoffed (katagelan) at the muthoi concerning Hades and its punishments (330d). Yet whatever iconoclastic boldness such laughter betokened is gone. Cephalus now dreads death's surrender to judgment and consoles himself with poets' flattery. He and Glaucon, though paired by laughter and by the love of pleasure, are sharply contrasted with respect to courage. The warlike Glaucon is distinguished by valor in battle (368a); moneymakers like Cephalus, as Socrates later points out, would rather be defeated than risk their wealth (555a). And if the willingness to be persuaded shows a higher form
of courage, Cephalus appears to lack it. His laugh occurs as he is abandoning
the discussion, having been disquieted by Socrates' abrasive and disrespectful
interrogation and choosing to sacrifice his position rather than to lose his hoard
of self-satisfaction.

Cephalus laughs while fleeing the risk of being shamed by the younger Socrates. The old man's wisdom, while not entirely unsound, is all anecdotes and
poetry. Although he has no well-grounded, universal account to give, he has just
been indulging his vanity by instructing the philosopher. Potential embarrassment
makes for one threat to his serenity, but the more serious one is the possibility
that a philosophic discussion of justice might confirm the "suspicion and terror"
to which he has just admitted, namely that he has done some unwitting injustice
and has reason to fear the afterlife. No longer able to dismiss the tales of Hades' punishments, Cephalus is now unable to take his fears lightly, but must calm
them with that "sweet hope" of which he so vehemently praises Pindar's eulogy
(331a). The threat to this sentiment posed by the question 'What is justice?' motivates his abrupt departure "toward the sacred things (pros ta hiera)" (331d).

By leaving, Cephalus hopes to preserve the simple notion of justice he feels
he has more or less satisfied in his life. Under this notion, the horizon of justice
is limited to fair dealing among men: truth-telling and paying one's debts. Any
wrongs may be redressed by paying damages to the injured party and sacrific-
ing some property to the gods (331b). Cephallean justice, then, concerns itself
with maintaining preexisting forms of interaction that smooth the peaceful ac-
quisition and enjoyment of the goods of private life. Reliance on these conven-
tions makes possible the qualified independence from community that property
can bring, but leaves Cephalus unpracticed at determining for himself what his
life is worth in the broader scheme. His mundane interpretation of the just
man's self-sufficiency as freedom from debt serves as an unexamined paradigm
for the more spiritual rewards that preoccupy him now. Supported by no more
than a metaphor, his complacency is too easily threatened by the insistent per-
fecionism of Socratic definition (331c–d). Perhaps he senses that there might
be, in his past or present, faults of truth-telling for which he will not know how
to make good the damage.

But a threat to his complacency would not by itself make Cephalus laugh.
He laughs when Polemarchus, preparing to make good his father's default on
the argument, quips: "Am I not the heir of what belongs to you?" (331d). Besides being witty, the joke is comforting in several ways. Simply by being a
jest, it soothes the gadfly's sting by suggesting that the conversation really is, as
Cephalus had supposed it was, only a matter of "the desires and pleasures that
have to do with speeches" (328d). It removes the indebtedness from the favor
by making it seem that Cephalus is conferring a bequest on his son, rather than
getting bailed out of an uncomfortable situation. And it eases Cephalus' worry,
by reminding him of his ability to do justice as he understands it. The old man
is surprised and relieved to think that his Delphic duty of self-knowledge may
be handed down like the family fortune. His son’s learning, wit, and filial gratitude make that thought a pleasant one, as does the contrasting prospect of Socratic refutation. Cephalus has cause enough to rest in the assumption that his definition was better than it seemed, considering that Polemarchus not only backs it with poetic authority but also seems to have taken his own stand within its actually indefensible boundaries.

His horizons having been restored, Cephalus laughs. In contrast with Glaucon’s laughs, which coincide with his urging Socrates ahead in the inquiry, Cephalus’ laugh accompanies his departure to look after the sacrifices. The move toward piety here necessitates quite literally turning one’s back on theoretical inquiry. Cephalus laughs, not before leaving, as some translations suggest, but “at the same time” (hama). This modifier invites the reader to associate Cephalus’ laugh with the hasty departure that Polemarchus is attempting to smooth. The old man laughingly abandons philosophy for the pleasure of religious consolation, and his laugh, like his exit, suggests that he will not be persuaded to change or even to question his understanding of the just. In laughing, Cephalus dismisses dialectic by placing it on a level with lyrics and witticisms; in departing, he buries the inarticulate skepticism of his youth and elevates above philosophy the city’s myths.

Yet the Republic, with its setting of private hospitality, represents the city’s fear as absence, its scorn as bemusement, its pious rejection of philosophy as a celebration of the holy. Like that of Athens, Cephalus’ courage for philosophy fails because to be persuaded of his own ignorance would leave him uncertain how his cosmic ledger stands. But he is no Athenian juror: he fears to judge, because he fears to be judged. Whereas Athens first laughed at Socrates and then took him seriously, Cephalus neither quite laughs at him nor quite takes him seriously. His laugh is an indirect dismissal of philosophy, but also a parting benediction: his relation to the philosophic logos is benevolent, ignorant, self-satisfied. Although he cannot be its governing principle or even a participant, under his auspices the deeper inquiry unfolds.

IV. THRASYMACHUS

No one would call Thrasyymachus pious or fearful. His contempt for received opinions on justice could not be more open, and he laughs to scorn Socrates’ hesitance to take a stand and defend an opinion on the just (337a, 336c). Thrasyymachus himself, of course, has a highly unconventional opinion which he feels quite able to defend against all comers. Yet while his independence from the political community is more pronounced than that of Cephalus, it remains abstract and partial. Although one doubts that the rhetorician in his old age will be duped by poets’ tales, the very resistance to persuasion which preserves
him from Cephalus’ fate nevertheless circumscribes his potential for true self-sufficiency.

Not just Thrasymachus but the rhetorician as such goes cloaked in a certain abstraction from the community’s dialectical life. Qua citizen, he might be persuaded; qua rhetorician, he is concerned with arguments purely for their effect on others. To speak like Thrasymachus himself, one may say that the rhetorician is not a rhetorician at the moment when he is being persuaded, in the respect of his being persuaded. To be persuaded (peithesthai) is to obey; it may be said, then, in Greek at least, that the rhetorician as such obeys no one. Nor does his persuasive speech necessarily reflect more than apparent concern for the public interest, since the rhetorician argues for money (337d) and need not even remain in the place where the consequences of his persuasion are felt (344d–e). Thrasymachus himself is introduced by his local epithet, which serves to emphasize his non-Athenian origins (328b). Yet the viability of this abstraction in practice depends upon the public dialectical life in common. The rhetorician’s art appears as part of that life only because communities call forth from their members a level of spiritual complexity higher than the naked pursuit of selfish interest: Political rhetoric exists, after all, to persuade public deliberative bodies that the group interest of which they have the keeping requires the same course of action the advocate recommends for reasons of his own.⁵

At a more mundane level, rhetoricians rely for their supper on the wealth that only complex economies can generate. Thrasymachus, who appears in the dialogue as Cephalus’ guest, is no exception. But even money is not merely an instrument: for Thrasymachus at least, it is primarily a symbol of honor and victory. He requires money from Socrates only for a penalty, for “thanks” as he says. The convention he proposes suggests that, like any sophist, he desires that his wisdom should be measured in money, for the sophist depends on the dialectical community not just to eat, or even merely to practice his art, but more importantly, to ascertain his own value through a quantifiable form of reputation. Thrasymachus in particular is deeply concerned for reputation; he wishes very much to speak so that he can impress the young men, especially Glaucon, whose yearning for the logos Socrates repeatedly invokes in persuading Thrasymachus to deliver his account of the just (338a, see also 345b, 347e–348b). Accordingly, once the symbolic gesture of submitting to punishment is agreed upon, he does not even fix an amount (337d–338a). Thrasymachus, like Cephalus, gratifies his spiritual needs by attaching symbolic significance to the instruments of bodily necessity. He imagines the reward of wisdom to be the kind of recognition that can be adequately represented by a transfer of property—notably, the same kind Cephalus pays to the gods. Bewitched more by honor than by gain, the sophist still ultimately depends on external sources for assurance that his life is good (cf. 582a–c). Thrasymachus’ independence is illusory,
if true self-sufficiency would require that one's knowledge suffice for one's own benediction.

While Cephalus viewed *logoi* as a source of pleasure and consolation, Thrasymachus sees them chiefly as a means of gratifying the love of victory. This concern for dialectical hegemony makes it difficult to abandon a position once taken. To be persuaded is to be bested, damaged (341a–b). This difficulty is all the more acute for Thrasymachus, who has a personal stake in his thesis (338a, 349a). Besides wanting to defeat any claim Socrates might make to a greater knowledge of the best life, Thrasymachus also wishes to display the worldly insights he has been well positioned to obtain at first hand. As he takes pains to point out, he does not go around making suppositions about the human desire to be master; rather, he knows it well (345e). In fact he shares it in his own way and believes that Socrates does too (341a–b). And the mastery Thrasymachus has achieved through precise speech and tough-minded observation gives him a feeling of superior wisdom which prompts him to ridicule Socrates' ironic self-effacement (337a, 338b).

Although Thrasymachus' rhetorical prowess and his inside knowledge of things political provide him the confidence to enter the lists with Socrates, a boldness Cephalus lacks, the rhetorician's marked unwillingness to be identified with the position he argues stands in sharp contrast to Glaucon's express desire to be guided by the *logos* (349a). His readiness for controversy accordingly differs from Glaucon's courage for philosophy. Socrates calls attention to Thrasymachus' hunger for victory and inability to be persuaded when he compares the man to a wild beast (336b), to a wolf (336d), and to a lion (341c; cf. 588e–89a). It is Glaucon who later points out that the boldness of wild beasts is not the same as the courage of the guardians (430b), who are signified throughout the dialogue by those equally spirited, though domesticable animals, the dog and the horse. The difference lies in the ability of spiritedness to obey (be persuaded by) reason. Unable to be persuaded, the rhetorician can risk nothing more than shame. The seductive power of reason is lost on him: his life will not be changed. Faced with a compelling argument in praise of justice, he blushes that he cannot get the better of it (350c–d).

In bringing Thrasymachus to that telling blush, Socrates is concerned to help Glaucon see that the unreformed desire for victory is not a true guide to the self-sufficiency he seeks. As opposed to the verbal combat of the rhetorician, the philosopher's dialectic affords a kind of victory compatible with being persuaded (348a–b). In fact, by radicalizing the susceptibility of persuasion, it makes for an ironic detachment from opinion as such, which supplies the kernel of truth in the plea of Socratic ignorance Thrasymachus laughingly dismisses. It is consistent Socratic doctrine that to be delivered of false beliefs is the wise man's wish, not his fear. Whatever being "truly persuaded" should turn out to mean in the context of Socratic philosophy, as long as the desire for it marks a
person as “most courageous,” then Thrasymachus’ courage, like Cephalus’, must remain incomplete. The desire to have a definite set of opinions prevail at all costs, whether spurred by the fear of death or of defeat, can form no part of the highest courage.

V. GLAUCON

I have suggested that each of Glaucon’s two laughs is ambiguous between a more philic or Cephalean and a more phthonic or Thrasymachean perception of the Socratic speech at which he laughs. At this point it should be somewhat clearer what such an ambiguity would signify. Cephalus and Thrasymachus share a sense that speech about justice, to be serious, must ultimately serve private ends; they differ only as to the nature of those ends. Whereas Cephalus, now that his desire for pleasure has become less bodily, finds himself wishing to be flattered and consoled by the publicly approved opinions about justice, the spirited Thrasymachus transcends such opinions to the extent of scornful rejection, honoring above all his own experience. And whereas Cephalus’ laugh reasserts his challenged assumption that philosophic speech must be somehow a part of the cooperative pursuit of pleasure, Thrasymachus’ laugh underscores his view that it must instead be part of the competitive pursuit of honor. Each, then, by laughing, expresses a prejudice about the ways in which a speech may be serious; and their respective opinions on this point grow out of different views on the more general question of what aims may command a person’s seriousness. Glaucon’s laughs will also be seen to reveal his natural, youthful desires for pleasure and honor, as well as his assumption that the goods of philosophy will somehow resemble the goods he already knows and wants. Yet they also indicate that he takes the pursuit of philosophic persuasion more seriously than these external goods and that his commitment to them is capable of being mitigated or even transfigured by philosophy. As their very ambiguity suggests, Glaucon’s laughs reflect, not rigid habits of judgment formed over the course of a life, but rather a complicated mixture of possible ways of understanding philosophy’s seriousness, a mixture whose equilibrium the youthful Glaucon has not yet established.

Although Glaucon is described as an erotic man (474d), his desire is not coarse and bodily, but carries him into the realm of more spiritual gratifications. Accordingly, just as Cephalus’ mortal disquiet and Thrasymachus’ love of honor are manifest in their attachment to gain, Glaucon’s contrasting readiness to part with money (337d) and his contempt for its pursuit (337d, 347b) symbolize his philosophic potential and his disregard for bodily necessity. In the dialogues, the image of money inevitably evokes the paltry sum of silver Socrates offers the Athenians in half-mocking assessment of the value of his own physical existence. As Strauss notes, one of the many parallels between
the *Republic* and the *Apology* is that in each, Socrates must offer to pay a fine if his speeches do not convince (p. 77). Whereas Plato and the others betoken their friendship toward Socrates’ person by putting up money to save him from death, Glaucon’s offer to risk his money is a gesture of friendship toward the philosophic logos. By putting up a stake, Glaucon declares himself Socrates’ ally, expresses his disdain for Thrasymachus’ ignoble emphasis on money, and simultaneously, in effect, hires a sophist by giving Thrasymachus the incentive without which he will not speak.

Glaucon makes his one-sided bet, not so much to save Socrates from any disgrace, as in order to hear the dialectical agôn. Although his act echoes the motifs of friendship, loyalty, and defense of one’s own, whose interrelationship was introduced through Polemarchus, it also reveals an eagerness particular to Glaucon, whom Socrates (qua narrator) mentions by name as having begged Thrasymachus to speak (338a). It is Glaucon who later so avidly wishes to see Thrasymachus persuaded (348a), and when the rhetorician is ultimately brought to shame, it will be Glaucon to whom his “giving up” proves unacceptable (357a). The young man wants to see Thrasymachean tyranny exposed in order to persuade himself that its promise of erotic liberation is hollow. Socrates achieves this by presenting the proper ordering of the soul, not as a chore imposed by necessity, as the younger Cephalus thought, nor as a confidence game played upon the weak and unwitting, as Thrasymachus holds, but rather as an enticing possibility of wholeness which no life but the philosopher’s can truly offer. This vision of completion charms Glaucon’s erotic soul and inspires his loyalty; yet it remains worth asking whether Socratic philosophy can ultimately offer closure of a kind the young son of Ariston, attuned to the more immediate consummations of love and violence, might recognize. How well does he understand Socratic irony? Does he know, as Aristophanes, Callicles, Cephalus, and Thrasymachus thought they knew, whether and how to take Socrates seriously?

At least to the extent that courage is needed in facing up to the knowledge of ignorance, it appears that the limitations observed in Cephalus and Thrasymachus will not hinder Glaucon. Evidence to this effect is provided by the young man’s first laugh, which nevertheless also betrays a telling misapprehension of Socrates’ speech. Socrates’ discussion with Adeimantus concerning the content and style of the city’s poetry has fulfilled their expectation that the account of education would prove “quite long” (376d); having arrived at the question of the instruments, modes and rhythms of performance, however, Socrates suggests that “everyone” could discover them, now that it is clear what sort of speeches they must accompany. Glaucon responds to this ironic exaggeration by laughing out and adding a full-fledged jest of his own: “I run the risk of not being included in everyone,” he says (398c).

This predominantly philic response places Glaucon’s courage for philosophy in favorable contrast with that of either Cephalus or Thrasymachus. While
Cephalus’ laugh was associated with his fear of death, Glaucon laughs out loud at the recognition that Socrates has made him a nonentity by implication. And whereas Cephalus abandoned the discussion rather than have his ignorance exposed, Glaucon laughingly interrupts in order to expose his: he immediately follows his laugh by openly confessing ignorance and provoking Socrates to help him cure it. Though he shows that he does not fear being thought less than fully wise, perhaps his interruption shows that he does fear being left to think his way through these questions without a Socratic teaching at his side. But quickly he sees that he need not fear: Socrates is willing to indulge him, and Glaucon himself has, as he says, “a suspicion” of how things must be (398c). What he actually has is more than that: with respect to harmonic mode at least, he possesses a certain expertise to which Socrates repeatedly defers (398e–399c). But in contrast with Thrasymachus, whose expertise in political rhetoric contributes to his feeling of superiority over Socrates, Glaucon, not unlike Socrates himself (Apology 20d–23b), claims to be distinguished only in point of perplexity. If everyone can figure this out, he laughs, then I must be nobody.

Glaucon’s jest responds in kind to Socrates’ ironic exaggeration: after all, it simply cannot be true that “everyone” could deduce from a sketchy poetics the relation between the soul’s proper ordering and its sensuous pleasure in harmony and rhythm. Yet in judging that Socrates’ assertion invites such a response, Glaucon may be laughing off not just its purposely distorted form, but also its serious content. That Socrates is at least partly serious is suggested a bit later, when he gets Glaucon to agree that the body’s care need not be discussed in detail, as long as the intellect is properly instructed (403d–e; cf. 591d for the agathology of musical education to which Glaucon is ultimately persuaded). Socrates himself has not troubled even to learn the modes (399a), although Glaucon knows them well (398e–399c); the young man has spent substantial time acquiring a kind of knowledge to which Socrates is about to give exactly no time in a discussion of the best education. But Glaucon is right to insist. Musical matters are no merely intellectual exercise; rather, they end in the love of the noble or beautiful (to kalon) (403c). When Socrates suggests that the secrets of rhythm and harmony are easily revealed to all, whether or not they share Glaucon’s theoretical talent and intuitive sense of the beautifully noble, Glaucon’s surprise probably derives not just from an initiate’s greater appreciation of the technical difficulties such questions contain but also from his inchoate assurance that to think them through contributes in some way to the soul’s ennoblement. Could the study of music’s sensuous elements be in any way unworthy of the serious attention it requires? Only by assuming the negative could Glaucon infer, as he apparently does, that Socrates is merely bantering.

Doubts about Socratic seriousness resurface in Glaucon’s second laugh (451b), whose more phthonic tone suggests Thrasymachean spiritedness rather than Cephalic jocundity. It occurs as Glaucon, again, is urging Socrates to finish his account of the regime. This time Socrates exhibits greater unwilling-
ness, because he feels the discussion approaching the part of the logos most strongly at odds with received opinion: the idea of philosophic rule (473e). Allan Bloom rightly comments that book five is "an implicit attack on all existing cities and their most sacred laws," calling to mind the attack of the Seven Against Thebes (p. 458, n. 6). Socrates’ verbal prostration before Adrasteia is meant to remind Glaucon of the gods’ vengeance upon the seven (451a). His obeisance may be ironic, but his reference is not idle. Socrates’ execution may be seen as revenge, on behalf of the gods, for a hubristic attack on a city. Only because philosophy questions the basis of the city can it promise a self-sufficient life beyond the political; yet that very questioning endangers the earnest devotion to piety or to honor which could otherwise give shape to a life in common with others (538d–e). In leading his friends onto this most dangerous and slippery ground (though it be the slippery ground of the path out of the cave) Socrates is aware that he leads them into all the dangers of the conflict between philosophy and the city, including exile and death, but more importantly, error concerning the noble, the good, and the just (451a). Inadvertently to deceive one’s friends in such matters, Socrates provocatively claims, is a greater crime than manslaughter.

Glaucon responds with a laugh, objecting that "if we are affected in some discordant way by the argument, we’ll release you like a man who is guiltless of murder and you won’t be our deceiver" (451b). With this comic response, Glaucon confidently rejects the possibility that the philosophic persuasion he has been so eagerly seeking could involve a real risk to his soul. Yet at the same time, his choice of words suggests uncertainty as to the nature of such risks, an uncertainty which ought to check his self-assurance. As a further indication of misplaced confidence, his suggestion that he and the others could release Socrates of a deceiver’s guilt presupposes a lucidity incompatible with being deceived at all.

Glaucon echoes Thrasymachus by laughingly negating the serious side of a Socratic assertion, while alloying himself with the sophist in insisting that Socrates continue (450a–c). Even his admonition to "be bold and speak" recalls Thrasymachus’ similar criticisms of Socratic evasiveness (451b; cf. 337a, 338b). Moreover, Glaucon’s own boldness, like Thrasymachus’, implies a belief that good judgment will protect him from any danger Socratic logos might present. The confidence underlying Glaucon’s laugh, though, derives not from a feeling of contempt for some impotent challenge Socrates presents, but from a belief that even if a philosophic logos could be harmful, the appearance of discord would keep Glaucon forewarned. Socrates’ speech itself, of course, calls such a belief into question at a general, indeed at a metaphysical level; and as for Glaucon more particularly, suffice it to note that his intuitive response to Socrates’ setting the good even beyond being is the only event in the dialogue that Socrates, as narrator, calls laughable (509c).

Glaucon’s youthful boldness toward the risks of philosophy also recalls the
young Cephalus’ brash dismissal of the myths of Hades. When formerly pos-

sessed by that “savage master,” sexual desire (329c), Cephalus laughed down
the tales of otherworldly punishments awaiting the unjust; now Glaucon, enjoy-
ing a more spiritual pleasure in philosophic discussion, laughs off all the dan-
gers of the inquiry which will ultimately set the practice of death and dying to
rule over the living. Glaucon’s second laugh springs from the pleasurable antic-
ipation of theoretically transgressing the city’s doctrines, supported by his con-
fident but highly questionable trust that those doctrines may be adequately
replaced by Socrates’ teachings and Glaucon’s own intuitions.

As opposed to Cephalus’ demotic piety, then, the attitude revealed in Glaucon’s
second laugh may be described as a form of piety turned toward philosophy. Glaucon is introduced as having accompanied Socrates to the Piraeus “to pray to
the goddess; and, at the same time [hama] . . . to observe [theasasthai] . . .” (327a).
The conflicting desires to give homage to the gods and also to theorize detachedly
about human nomoi coexist uneasily in that description, as later when Cephalus
must turn away from theory to concern himself with “the sacred things.” Socrates’
own piety bears, of course, a clouded reputation due to the mode of his theorizing.
Consistent with the Apology, though, the Socrates of the Republic gives a religious
tone to his philosophic inquiry into justice, a tone which apparently resonates with
Glaucon. In acquiescing to Glaucon’s request for true persuasion, Socrates ex-
plains: “I can’t not help out. For I’m afraid it might be impious to be here when
justice is being spoken badly of and give up and not bring help while I am still
breathing and able to make a sound” (368b–c). Immediately upon hearing this
remark, Glaucon, whose request for persuasion initially turned on Socrates’ desire
to persuade, is mentioned by name as among those begging Socrates to continue
the argument (368c). It becomes obvious that the rhetoric of philosophical piety
has made an impression on Glaucon when, considerably later, the city in speech
has been founded. Socrates is trying, Cephaluslike, to hand off the search for
justice to the younger men, when Glaucon breaks into the discussion to remind
him: “You promised you would look for it because it’s not holy for you not to bring
help to justice in every way in your power” (427d–e). Still later, Socrates invokes
the specter of blasphemy to chasten Glaucon for wanting to suggest that pleasure,
rather than the good, might be the source of knowledge and truth (509a; cf. 329c).
Socrates seems to perceive and to trade on Glaucon’s willingness to understand
philosophic inquiry as a divinely ordained pursuit.

Yet whether piety and philosophy may ever be brought into a harmonious
coexistence is among the most fundamental and problematic of the questions
raised by the Republic. While the complexities of that question need not and
cannot be explored here, it should be noted that those very complexities are
obscured by Glaucon’s laughing dismissal of the dangers of the battle between
philosophy and civic opinion. Elsewhere, too, he reveals a certain naivete as to
the tension between philosophy and political community. His very request to be
truly persuaded suggests an assumption that whatever dangers philosophy en-
tails are mitigated by its potential to replace error with truth. And he seems tempted to attribute such persuadability not just to his own unusually pliable soul but to human spiritedness in general. For example, his earnest assertion that the wise, like the brave or the wealthy, are "honored by many" (582c), smacks of dramatic irony in light of the Republic's many allusions to the Apology, not to mention its own teachings on the public reception philosophic wisdom may expect (cf. 488a–489a, 516e–517a). Perhaps even more tellingly, it later appears that he believes anyone would put the city's meager offerings behind him, if only presented with the right philosophic arguments (608b). Like his second laugh, these statements illustrate his underestimation of the tensions his own pursuit of philosophic virtue will involve: an underestimation probably fostered by his serious desire for the more noble forms of pleasure, which comprehends his pleasure in philosophy.

Insofar as Glaucon's laughs illuminate his courage, they do so by revealing how his desire for philosophic persuasion affects his judgments about what is fearful. He is willing to laugh off his own ignorance, not in order to rest with it like Cephalus, but to bring his perplexity unashamedly out into the open. A bold self-reliance and philosophy's apparent promise of a victory over ignorance underwrite his first, confident laugh. Later, at a point when traditional institutions are being not just purged but radically altered, the same promise forms a plausible basis for his willingness to transgress received opinion. But Glaucon's confidence in philosophic inquiry seems to exceed that of Socrates himself; thus, when Socrates (with some irony) abases himself to avoid divine retribution for taking risks with his friends' souls, Glaucon's laughing response is dismissive of any danger. Like the guardians, for whom Socrates earlier recommended derisive laughter as a preserver of courage against unworthy and impious speeches, Glaucon here resists persuasion by spiritedly preserving a certain opinion about the divine things: namely, the opinion that philosophic examination of the city's foundational assumptions is not to be feared. Yet the inarticulateness of his response suggests he cannot even adequately envision, much less remedy, the dangers to which Socrates alludes. In the absence of understanding, he is left to rely on appearances. As the guardians need the founders, Glaucon needs Socrates.

VI. CONCLUSION

Plato places Glaucon in an interesting nexus of relations when he makes him respond to a Socratic speech with a laugh. The most philosophic of Socrates' interlocutors in the Republic, by laughing Glaucon shows his kinship with the least philosophic (Cephalus), as well as with Socrates' principal rival, a theorist of the political things who contemptuously rejects the Socratic mode of theorizing (Thrasymachus). The character who wished to be persuaded that the just
man's happiness is secure, he resists persuasion at a point where the philosopher's justice and happiness risk conflict with the citizen's. The "most courageous in everything," he betrays a certain brashness when he laughs off dangers that Socrates, at least, takes seriously (although he braves them, too) namely, the dangers of the conflict between philosophic inquiry and politically acceptable opinion.

Like the laughs of Cephalus and Thrasy machus, Glaucon's laughs reveal that he holds certain habitual opinions about what is serious and desirable, opinions made persuasive to him by the pleasures to which he is naturally drawn, opinions threatened in some way by a Socratic speech. Yet unlike either of the older men, Glaucon is unashamed to admit ignorance and is keen to examine his opinions and reform his desires by the light of Socratic philosophy; so keen that when Socrates himself suggests a threat to that unconventional project, Glaucon dismisses that threat with a laugh and a joke. The goodness and honor of philosophy thus appear, not as philosophic questions, nor even as a philosophic answer, but as a prejudice inarticulately affirmed and preserved by Glaucon's intuitions. Although the full philosophic practice of virtue would surely require more, Glaucon's piety toward philosophy grounds a laughing courage without which that practice might never be realized.

NOTES


2. I am not aware of another study with the same purpose. One commentator who has briefly noted Glaucon's laughter as a dramatic detail worthy of philosophic interpretation is Leo Strauss, The City and Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 100.

3. I agree much more closely with Strauss's view, that Glaucon begins the dialogue as a "well-wisher of justice," than with the judgment of Nalin Ranasinghe, that what Glaucon "truly desired" was "the totally unjust life, perfectly disguised as the totally just life." To the extent that Glaucon truly desires any one thing, that thing is somehow to harmonize the conflicting yearnings that underlie his ambition; this is why he is both in danger of choosing tyranny, yet also persuadable toward philosophic virtue. See Ranasinghe, "Deceit, Desire, and the Dialectic: Plato's Republic Revisited," Interpretation 21, no. 3 (1994): 309–32.


5. Strauss appreciates this point, though he makes different matter of it than I do (p. 80).
Desire, Science, and Polity:
Francis Bacon’s Account of Eros

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Ours may well be the “age of Bacon.” Francis Bacon anticipated the emergence of newly potent science; he also foresaw its immense prospects to affect political life. Bacon called himself the herald of this new era, rather than a protagonist. Nevertheless, he discerned many crucial features of modern science even before its flowering. His writings remain the best glass in which the enigmatic birth of modern science may be contemplated, though events far outstripped his anticipations. Although he shared with Machiavelli a determination to grasp political realities, Bacon expected that reality itself would be transformed through the activities of science, including new constellations of human desire and polity. Accordingly, Bacon’s political philosophy gauged not only the outward social effects of technological innovation but also the inner effects of science on the souls of the scientists. He thus placed the question of eros at the center of his inquiry, for the scientific quest touches the wellsprings of desire in the scientists and, through them, affects political life at large.

When Rousseau described Bacon as “perhaps the greatest of philosophers,” he particularly had in mind Bacon’s vision of a new and enlightened social order. In this view, Bacon’s program of enlightenment was sweeping and yet moderate, assuaging human desire without turbulent upheavals. Later readings, however, have depicted scientific puissance leading to a radical unleashing of eros. For instance, Jerry Weinberger’s detailed analysis of Bacon’s New Atlantis led him to conclude that “the true depth” of that work lies in “the grotesque possibilities of excessive desire.” In this view, Bacon is fundamentally (if secretly) the teacher of a transgressive eros. Laurence Lampert emphasized a Nietzschan account of Bacon covertly inflaming the desire for a “holy war” of science against religion. These writers have raised many important questions but tend to treat Bacon’s direct statements as a screen hiding darker teachings. A more straightforward reading leads to a rather different account. While acknowledging the possibilities of excess, Bacon’s larger concern is that scientific self-chastening may lead to diminishing eros. He discerns a new eros, purified and heightened but not unleashed, for science points to a reshaping of desire.

In this paper I discuss the ways in which the souls of the scientists are deeply affected by their struggles with nature. This arduous wrestling of the scientist

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with nature is a mutual encounter that tests both to the utmost but is not torturous. Bacon turned to ancient myths for images to describe this struggle. His Cupid avoids sexual passion; his Pan avoids promiscuity. The wounded seeker, like Oedipus, is able to solve the great riddle precisely through his halting slowness. Bacon’s treatments of Prometheus, Vulcan, and Dionysus amplify his critique of ordinary passion and emphasize the danger of the rape of wisdom through unbridled eros; he connects radical erotic deviations with certain kinds of technological developments that lust after practical power. In contrast, Bacon uses the stories of Solomon, Ulysses, and Orpheus to evoke a new eros that is ardent yet not self-destructive. Bacon purifies the scientists’ desires by intensifying them in a new direction. In his modern myth, The New Atlantis, Bacon weighs the sweetness of scientific searching against the claims of conjugal love and indicates ways in which they may conflict, to the extent that human fertility may dangerously decline. Nevertheless, his larger vision anticipates the possibility—even the necessity—of harmony between them. The welfare of the polity lies in the balance between the old eros and the new.

AN EGG LAID BY NIGHT

While admitting that love is a god, Bacon treats it as “the natural motion of the atom” (6.729), rather than as human passion. His new way of thinking about eros is “more severe, sober and settled” and requires the redirection of the erotic imagination. Pan, “the universal frame of things, or Nature,” was not really engendered from “a promiscuous intercourse between Penelope and all her suitors” (6.707; 6.320), though the world “is sprung from the Divine Word, though the medium of confused matter.” Pan had few amours; “the world therefore can have no loves, nor any want (being content with itself) unless it be of discourse.” Pan is faithful to his wife, Echo, as “the true philosophy which echoes most faithfully the voice of the world itself . . .” (6.714). Bacon emphasizes that “a philosopher should always be reminding himself that Cupid has no parents” (OFB 6.201; 5.463), meaning that atomic attraction is derived from “experimental faith,” not “common notions.”

By contemplating Cupid as parentless, “an egg laid by Night,” Bacon erases the erotic ancestry of Eros and intentionally discourages fruitless speculation. The primal desire of atoms “is effective in uniting bodies” and yet was not produced by bodies uniting. If so, the natural philosopher should reconceive eros so that attraction is prior to the bodies attracted. As Charles Whitney has noted, “the Baconian scientist must sacrifice the ordinary uses of his sense, intellect, and imagination in order to remain open to as-yet-unknown insights.” Those who “make up their minds before trying anything out, when they come to particular facts abuse their minds and the facts, and wretchedly squander and torture both . . .” (OFB 6.247; 5.488). So in order to perform “the office of a
true priest of the sense” (4.26) the desires of scientists must be scourged of the common human “knowledge drenched in flesh and blood”; they must feed on austere manna and achieve chastity against seductive appearances. Bacon warns “every student of nature . . . that whatever his mind seizes and dwells upon with peculiar satisfaction is to be held in suspicion” (4.60), for the mind is “like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture, if it be not delivered and reduced” (3.394–95). This corruption of the “false appearances imposed upon us by every man’s own individual nature and custom” Bacon called the Idol of the Cave, as if Plato’s cave had become for him an abysmal cavern whose walls were curving and distorting mirrors in which shadows no longer faithfully follow their originals (3.396) and eyes are corrupted with shadows.5

THE LIMPING SEEKER

Cupid is parentless, and the scientist stands in a singular relation to his parents. Bacon treats the Sphinx as a symbol of science, who “being the wonder of the ignorant and unskilful, may be not absurdly called a monster,” meaning a marvel or prodigy in contemporary usage.6 Despite certain human features, this creature is multiform and more than human. Its womanly beauty of voice and face connects it to the Sirens, whose alluring song Bacon will treat as a figure of Pleasure. Rather than tormenting with overwhelming pleasure, the Sphinx seizes its victims with painful questions.

Claws, sharp and hooked, are ascribed to it with great elegance, because the axioms and arguments of science penetrate and hold fast the mind, so that it has no means of evasion or escape; a point which the sacred philosopher also noted: The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails driven deep in. (Ecclesiastes 12:11)

The sharp claws are a menacing image of the agonizing fascination, literally “fastening,” of scientific questions in the minds of the scientists. Practical science is not distant and impersonal awareness but intensely vivid, even painful, realization.

Bacon is also aware of the pleasures that accompany scientific fascination. The Sphinx received her store of “hard questions and riddles” from the Muses in which “there is probably no cruelty” as long as they remain with the Muses. Bacon thus distinguishes a preliminary stage in which “the object of meditation and inquiry is merely to know.” This stage is the pure pursuit of scientific questions apart from any question of application. In this phase of its inquiry “the understanding is not oppressed or straitened by it, but is free to wander and to expatiate, and finds in the very uncertainty of conclusion and variety of choice a certain pleasure and delight.” But “when they pass from the Muses to Sphinx, that is from contemplation to practice, whereby there is necessity for present action, choice, and decision, then they begin to be painful and cruel.”
This is the stage of practical application of pure research, especially when reasons of state require immediate action.

Bacon also notes that Augustus Caesar used a Sphinx for his seal, since Augustus too had solved “a great many new riddles concerning the nature of man” in his political life which, had he left them unsolved, “he would have many times have been in imminent danger of destruction.” Augustus was a second Oedipus who saved Rome from the sphinxlike peril of the interregnum, grasped the new secret of political power, and forged the Empire. The scientist who solves the Sphinx’s riddle is “born for empire,” as Bacon puts it, an empire not only over nature but also over man. In Bacon’s account, the scientist is not an unpolitical servant, meekly delivering his discoveries to his masters, but takes responsibility himself. But those who wield such power should be prepared and purified. Not only do the claws of the Sphinx “penetrate and hold fast the mind” but also her questions “strangely torment and worry the mind, pulling it first this way and then that, and fairly tearing it to pieces” (6.756–757). This tearing ravages the scientist even as it forms part of the solution, for the riddles pose a mortal threat, as well as an immense prize: “distraction and laceration of mind, if you fail to solve them; if you succeed, a kingdom” (6.757). Bacon notes that the Sphinx not only distracts and lacerates but “if the wretched captives could not at once solve and interpret the same, as they stood hesitating and confused she cruelly tore them to pieces” (6.756). This dismemberment is mirrored by the “tearing to pieces” of the mind of the scientist as he struggles with the riddle.

Oedipus can enter into the full laceration of the riddle because of his own condition. Bacon reminds us that Oedipus was “a man of wisdom and penetration, but lame from wounds in his feet.” Rather than crippling disabilities, these wounds are the very means through which Oedipus finds the solution to the riddle (see Briggs, pp. 13–14, 161, 174). Bacon emphasizes that “the Sphinx was subdued by a lame man with club feet; for men generally proceed too fast and in too great a hurry to the solution of the Sphinx’s riddle” (6.757–58). Although Bacon does not specify the origin of this wound, the ancient sources concur in identifying it as the result of Oedipus’ father piercing his ankles in an attempt to kill him and avoid the prophecy of parricide and incest. To exposure Laius added the uncommon cruelty of the transfixion of the infant’s feet, presumably to decrease the chance that he might survive; Oedipus’ name records his pierced, swollen feet (Oidipous). The Sphinx’s riddle touches those feet, and Bacon says Oedipus answers “readily.” Oedipus, more than any other man, had to count on his feet, from the one agonizing pierced-together limb, and then, painfully, to the four on which most of us begin to crawl and the two on which we walk. Here Bacon departs from the ancient sources (Edmunds, p. 12). After the stage of three legs with which those sources conclude Bacon adds a final four-footed stage, which he identifies as “extreme age and decrepitude” that “sinks into a quadruped again and keeps his bed” (6.756). The word again
signals that the completed cycle of life verges into rebirth. Perhaps the “true sons of science,” Oedipus’ spiritual heirs, will in their greater wisdom avoid the tragic crisis that overwhelmed their ancestor. Bacon’s Oedipus is triumphant; his wound allows him to approach the Sphinx so slowly and warily that he can overcome her; science succeeds because wounded in its beginnings. Indeed, the greatest scientists have often been the slowest thinkers, including Newton and Einstein.9

Bacon may also have intended a reflection on the extraordinary destinies of certain lame people, particularly King James and his own brother Antony. Francis considered Antony’s mind to be more “active and able” than his own, despite Antony’s “impotent feet.” The new science mirrors Antony’s combination of lameness and penetration. Francis also judged himself weakened by health (4.102) but understood, with his brother and Oedipus, the paradoxical advantage of deformity. In his essay “Of Deformity” Bacon remarks that such a person has “a perpetual spur in himself to rescue and deliver himself from scorn” (6.480–81). The deformed are exempt from envy, but those whom nature has mangled tend to seek their revenge on her. A few escape this “necessity in the frame of his body . . . by the sun of discipline and virtue” and avoid being inwardly twisted. They are “extreme bold” and “sometimes they prove excellent persons,” among which Bacon includes Socrates; their deformity helps them as they contend with it. Oedipus “readily” recognize himself in the Sphinx’s riddle, because he of all people does not fit it. Having begun with only one “leg” Oedipus can grasp a truth hidden to all others by overfamiliarity; he is one of those rare exceptions among the deformed who have turned away from revenge. Here Oedipus differs from those great politiques moved by “not ambition for some good, but revenge against their ill-condition . . . . Theirs is a passion for revenge against the death that nature will deal them . . . .” as Robert Faulkner puts it.10 Oedipus’ wound is a path to a new kind of knowledge. It turns profound disability into a source of new insight. Bacon specifies that Oedipus killed the Sphinx; in the ancient sources she kills herself (Edmunds, p. 12). The impulse to have “revenge of nature” has turned to the eradication of human suffering. The Sphinx threatens all men with her riddle, unless it is solved. The specter of death stands at the gate of every city. By killing the Sphinx, Oedipus transforms vengeance into an ennobling attack on the monstrous riddles that afflict men.

THE SCHOOL OF PROMETHEUS

In his retelling of the story of Prometheus, Bacon goes beyond the case of the individual seeker to describe the successive generations of scientists. By the “school of Prometheus” Bacon means those who by relentless investigation
seek to expand the benefits of Providence to men. But while they work so arduously

they stint themselves of many pleasures and of the various agreeableness of life, and cross their genius, and (what is far worse) torment and wear themselves away with cares and solicitude and inward fears. For being bound to the column of Necessity, they are troubled with innumerable thoughts (which because of their flightiness are represented by the eagle), thoughts which pick and gnaw and corrode the liver. (6.751–752)

There is a symmetry between their vexation of Nature and the inward suffering of the scientists. Only Hercules, signifying fortitude and constancy of mind, can come to save them from their torments. Bacon also emphasizes what he calls "the last crime of Prometheus, the attempt upon the chastity of Minerva," which he interprets as "trying to bring the divine wisdom itself under the dominion of sense and reason: from which attempt inevitably follows laceration of the mind and vexation without end or rest." In Bacon's recounting, it was this crime more than any other that moved Jupiter to send the vulture to gnaw Prometheus. This crime was not a deviation but an integral expression of Prometheus' nature, the natural continuation of his bold plan to bring divine secrets to men. Perhaps the divine fire could not be brought to men without exciting inordinate desire for wisdom. Yet Bacon cautions that "men must soberly and modestly distinguish between things divine and human, between the oracles of sense and of faith; unless they mean to have at once a heretical religion and a fabulous philosophy." A certain chastity is required if science is not to be contaminated with "fable" or if religion is not to become heretical. Bacon toys with the "wonderful correspondence with the mysteries of the Christian faith" and the story of Prometheus. He goes as far as to indicate that, in this enticing reading, Hercules would represent "an image of God the Word hastening in the frail vessel of the flesh to redeem the human race." But at this point Bacon stops himself "from all license of speculation in this kind, lest peradventure I bring strange fire to the altar of the Lord." Strange fire: unlike Prometheus, Bacon hesitates to kindle an illicit fire even in reconciling science with Christian belief. By consciously restraining himself he shows both the continuing power of the Promethean temptation and his wilful avoidance of it.

If Promethean striving is not bridled it may spend its strength fathering chimaeras, alluring but empty visions that are mocking images of true religion but lack power to help men. This restless striving finds its proper object in unraveling Nature's secrets, which Bacon treats as protected by a cipher. Its solution requires all the care not just of a few rare minds but rather a succession of many workers all arranged in what Bacon calls a "machine," a highly articulated organization which requires many persons of varying capacities to penetrate the code. This vast collective undertaking Bacon calls the "games of Pro-
metheus,” recalling the legendary torch races that honored the fire-bringing Titan. The solitary, limping heroes of the school of Prometheus prepare the way for the waves of runners that follow them. In this relay race “the victory may no longer depend upon the unsteady and wavering torch of each single man; but competition, emulation, and good fortune be brought to aid” (6.753). Their cooperative effort also harnesses the individual envies, desires, and appetites of the participants together to redirect individual passions from private to public objects.\(^\text{12}\)

Bacon means by this plan to render the scientists fit to conquer nature through the humility and fidelity with which they obey her. Only those whose sensibilities have been disciplined are capable of breaking the code; the very process of breaking the code involves so much humiliation and painful trial that the decoding itself chastens and prepares the decoders. Because of this safeguard, which Bacon ascribes to the secretiveness of God and Nature, any attempt to use brute force to penetrate the secret not only will fail but may recoil disastrously, for “force maketh Nature more violent in the return” (6.469). If so, Bacon has amended the story of Prometheus. He has restored hope to humanity, not the “blind hope” that Prometheus imparts in Aeschylus’ play.\(^\text{13}\) Scientific hope relies on “a true and legitimate marriage between the empirical and the rational faculty,” rather than on the rape of Minerva.

**THE CHILDREN OF VULCAN**

The god Vulcan is a central figure in several of the myths which Bacon uses to epitomize the desires that animate science. As the founder of metalurgy and alchemy, Vulcan is the source from which these archetypical sciences emerge. The original possessor of fire, it is from Vulcan that Prometheus stole this primal “help of helps and means of means”; without this titanic theft men would have had no chance of touching such godlike power. Vulcan is also linked with the wounded seer Oedipus since he, too, walks limpingly with a stick and is thus also three-footed; Vulcan also had been lamed by his father. The constellation of Vulcan and Oedipus discloses the new eros of the limping scientist, an eros that also conditions his religiosity. There is a connection between Hephaistos’ celebrated skill as artificer and his lameness, as if one were the price of the other.\(^\text{14}\) His disfigurement is also significant in his role as the cuckolded husband of Aphrodite.

Both Athena and Hephaistos emerge not from sexual intercourse but from self-generative processes within Zeus and Hera, yielding in each case an offspring of opposite sex to the parent. Hephaistos had few children, compared to the other gods. Instead, he crafts automata and self-moving tripods (see *Iliad* 18:418–20, 376–77). After Prometheus gave fire to men, Jupiter ordered Vulcan “to make a fair and lovely woman.” Pandora represents “pleasure and sensual appetite,” the
fountainhead of “infinite mischief upon the minds, the bodies, and the fortunes of men” both personally and politically (6.751). On another occasion Vulcan’s desire was aroused by the goddess of wisdom, whom he attempted to force when she refused his advances. He was not successful even in rape but

in the struggle which followed his seed was scattered on the ground; from which was born Ericthonius, a man well made and handsome in the upper parts of the body, but with thighs and legs like an eel, thin and deformed: he, from consciousness of this deformity, first invented chariots, whereby he might shew off the fine part of his body and hide the mean. (6.736)

Bacon interprets this assault as an image of scientific artifice, symbolized by Vulcan, attempting “by much vexing of bodies to force Nature to its will and conquer and subdue her,” just as Prometheus had attempted to rape Minerva. In the struggle “there fall out by the way certain imperfect births and lame works, specious to look at but weak and halting in use,” which imposters falsely parade to the world “with a great deal of false show in setting forth, and carry them about as in triumph.” Their deformities are hidden by the chariot, but Bacon knows them to be lame. He identifies such things “among chemical productions, and among mechanical subtleties and novelties” whose contrivers are too intent on spectacular results “to recover themselves from the errors of their way.” These are like the golden apples that beguile the Prometheus runners to “stop in their undertakings half way, and forsake the course, and turn aside like Atalanta after profit and commodity” rather than pursuing inquiries until they yield full illumination (6.744).

Bacon regards such specious discoveries more as deviant eros than failures of scientific deduction: Minerva cannot be raped. The followers of Vulcan “rather struggle with Nature than woo her embraces with due observance and attention” (6.736). Their eros is discordant and harsh; they ignore the rightful wooing of Nature, treating her as a slave to slake their desires. The result is lame, like the parent, showing again that his lameness is not accidental but expresses his innate erotic tendency. Yet Vulcan’s seed has generative power; Ericthonius invents the chariot, an estimable advance, though prompted by vanity and self-concealment. Ericthonius also became one of the first kings of Athens, instituted the Panathenaic Festival, and is among those due sovereign honors as conditores imperiorum, founders of states (6.505–6). Half handsome and imposing, half thin and deformed. Ericthonius is like Athens, where “wise men did propose, and fools did dispose” (7.158). In his unpublished writings Bacon pointedly calls the Greeks mere boys, chatterboxes who are “too immature to breed.” Their erotic immaturity and impotence leads to mere words, “inept in dispute and empty of results.” In contrast, Bacon calls on his sons of science not to touch nature “only with the tips of their fingers,” as these ancients did, but rather to “so mingle themselves into her being as to attain either
contemplative truth or works of utility.” This is emphatically a vision of “a chaste, holy, and legal wedlock” with “things themselves,” from which will emerge “a blessed race of Heroes or Supermen who will overcome the immeasurable helplessness and poverty of the human race.”

THE CRITIQUE OF DESIRE

Bacon intensifies his polemic against passion in his account of “Dionysus; or Desire.” Out of “the appetite and aspiration for apparent good” there emerge noxious and unsuppressible desires that lodge in the soul even in its embryonic stage and finally prick and pain it until “its resolutions and actions labor and limp with it” (6.741). Such desires also take the form of consuming fire, as Dionysus’ mother Semele was scorched to death by Jupiter. Even the king of gods limped as he carried the unborn Dionysus sewn in his thigh, sharing with Oedipus and Vulcan this portentous deformity. Jupiter’s maternity is connected to Dionysus’ sexual ambiguity, “for every passion of the more vehement kind is as it were of doubtful sex, for it has at once the force of the man and the weakness of the woman.” In Bacon’s version, the career of Dionysus is a crescendo of unremitting evil, for desire “never rests satisfied with what it has, but goes on and on with infinite insatiable appetite panting after new triumphs, cruel, savage, and pitiless towards everything that stands in its way.” Bacon even condemns Dionysus taking up Ariadne after she had been abandoned by Theseus as an “especially noble” testimony indicting desire. Bacon depicts Ariadne not as an innocent victim of Theseus’ ambitions, but as simply “cast off, tried, and upon trial rejected with disgust.” Desire habitually pays “court to things cast off,” to the leavings of “honor or fortune or love or glory or knowledge, or what it will.” Passions never die, for when they seem extinguished, “give them matter and occasion, they rise up again.”

The climax of this insatiable career is the tearing of Orpheus by the Mae­nads, or of Pentheus by the frenzied Bacchantes. The “curious inquisition and salutary and free admonition” administered by Orpheus and Pentheus “are alike hateful and intolerable to an overpowering passion.” Bacon underlines its religious significance: “every insane passion grows rank in depraved religions.” Rampant passion finally leads to superstitious rejection of true religion and true science. This climactic accusation seems to be a final revelation of the inimical relation between passion and science, except that a quiet anticlimax undercuts it. Bacchus was often confused with Jupiter himself, which Bacon takes to mean that “lurking passion or hidden lust” might lead to “deeds of high distinction and desert” which are practically indistinguishable from those which come “from virtue and right reason and magnanimity.” If indeed the results are “not easily distinguished,” the wellsprings of desire are motive forces whose power Bacon cannot neglect or discount.
Bacon does not merely give a puritanical rebuke, he is aware of the danger he shares with the censorious Pentheus. Bacon is also aware of radical problems that afflict the school of Prometheus. The eagle of anxiety gnaws their livers, leaving them perturbed and afraid (6.751). What, then, is the advantage in the life of the forethoughtful scientist if he is constantly ravaged by care? Bacon's reply is guarded; he refers to the coming of Hercules, "that is, fortitude and constancy of mind," to rescue Prometheus. This fortitude, "being prepared for all events and equal to any fortune, foresees without fear, enjoys without fastidiousness, and bears without impatience." In rehabilitating pleasure Bacon emphasizes that the acquisition of scientific knowledge should make us happy and fearless, not care-worn and anxious. Without an enlarged capacity for pleasure the scientists' sensibilities might be too constricted to achieve true largeness of spirit. His example is Solomon, the wisest of kings whose collection of natural history Bacon holds up as a model for King James. As John Briggs observes, "the extended analogy between James and Solomon would have been a deeply probing model for a scholarly king known for indulgence in pleasure, for his pious reputation, and his willingness to insist upon the divine right of kings" (Francis Bacon, p. 40). Besides his prescient scientific activities Solomon was also the great lover who enjoyed physically his many loves; his knowledge rested on his rich experience. Bacon notes that Solomon enumerates and relishes his pleasures but also professes that "Likewise my wisdom remained with me" (6.764); his Solomon does not worship false gods. The scientists must remain open to the heights of pleasure not only so that their sensibilities not become constricted but also for a strictly scientific reason: they must not neglect to explore the phenomena of pleasure out of fastidiousness or fear of pollution. In the alluring or the disgusting as well as in the indifferent may lie crucial discoveries which they cannot shrink from investigating.

THE SONG OF THE SIRENS

The imagery in Bacon's account of "The Sirens; or Pleasure" emphasizes the possible dangers of this project. The various adventures of the crew, Ulysses, and Orpheus warn about initiation and preparation, and show a hierarchy of worthiness. The Sirens' song was so powerful that "the examples of other men's calamities, however clear and conspicuous, have little effect in deterring men from the corruptions of pleasure." Men "of ordinary and plebeian cast," like Ulysses' crew, had better stop their ears if they cannot master such temptations. Even "minds of loftier order" must venture cautiously "into the midst of pleasure." Like Ulysses, they should "fortify themselves with constancy of resolution" and behold pleasures "as lookers on rather than followers," bound by their wilful resolution as if to the mast of their ship. Their wary restraint limits
them to the role of those who hold themselves back from the full “foolishness
and madness of pleasure.”

Although Ulysses relied on remedies drawn from philosophy, Orpheus’ rem-
edy is best since Orpheus

by singing and sounding forth the praises of the gods confounded the voices of the
Sirens and put them aside: for meditations upon things divine excel the pleasure of
the sense, not in power only, but also in sweetness.

Despite Bacon’s strictures against mixing religious and scientific matters, he
calls for scientists to imitate Orpheus in raising their discourse to the exaltation
of the divine mysteries (see Briggs, Francis Bacon, pp. 1–2, 134–36). The
ravishing sweetness of knowing the secret causes behind Nature enables the
scientists to withstand the Sirens, who try to rival the Muses by replacing philo-
osophical beauties by mere titillation. The triumph of Orpheus over the Sirens
recapitulates the victory the Muses enjoyed over them in their singing contest.
Orpheus reclaims pleasure for a musical science which can enchant and exalt
the spirits of men not by denying their passions but by raising them to a higher
key. Bacon seems to envisage something like the rapture that Einstein experi-
enced in his intense struggle to learn “God’s thoughts.” For its adepts, such
visionary theorizing may be more fascinating and pleasant than the sweets of
common human life.

Bacon does not neglect Orpheus’ troubling adventure in the underworld.
Orpheus had virtually succeeded in bringing Euridice back to the earth when
his impatience overcame him and he turned around to gaze at her. Bacon inter-
prets this as “curious and premature meddling,” as if an impatient scientist were
to disturb a crucial experiment when it is on the brink of succeeding. Here a
fateful experiment is under way. “Restoring the dead body to life” is the climax
of “the restitution and renovation of things corruptible.” (This is emphasized by
Paterson in “Bacon’s Myth of Orpheus.”) In the course of the experiment Or-
pheus turns “averse from the sight of women.” After Euridice’s second death
Orpheus emerges as a benign political figure who “teaches the peoples to as-
semble and unite and take upon them the yoke of laws and submit to authority,
and forget their ungoverned appetites, in listening and conforming to precepts
and discipline” (6.722). In contrast, Ovid’s Orpheus introduces a new form of
eros in the form of pederasty. Bacon’s Orpheus is a teacher of rational political
science whose eros is suffused with “the love of virtue and equity and peace.”
This rational Orpheus turns towards the defeat of mortality through a transfor-
mation of political life that requires a new eros.

Bacon directs our sympathy to Orpheus and away from the maddened Thra-
cian women who slay him. He implies the superiority of his new eros, for “it is
wisely added in the story, that Orpheus was averse from women and from
marriage; for the sweets of marriage and the dearness of children commonly
draw men away from performing great and lofty services to the commonwealth; being content to be perpetuated in their race and stock, and not in their deeds.”17 The Thracian women condemn Orpheus’ rejection of woman and family. Their anger stems from Bacchus himself, who as personified Desire has been attacked at the deepest level. In contrast, Bacon’s Orpheus enchant the world to a new height of peace. Wild beasts, “putting off their several natures,” forget their quarrels and ferocity, “no longer driven by the stings and furies of lust, no longer caring to satisfy their hunger or to hunt their prey.”

Orpheus is able to touch these feelings of love and virtuous action without stirring discordant desires because of his “sorrowful mood,” which, Bacon notes, “well becomes” philosophy after it failed in its first attempt to conquer death. As wild beasts and men give over their savage desires for conflict, a purified realm of feeling, dominated by scientific concerns, banishes war and strife. Orpheus cannot withstand the “hoarse and hideous blast” that the women blow on their horn. “The bond of that order and good fellowship” that Orpheus had enjoyed with his animals is broken and “confusion began again.” The Thracian women tear the singer to pieces and scatter his limbs about the fields. Their rejected desires overwhelm Bacon’s dream of a new eros. Although Orpheus has failed again, we are invited to take up his lyre. As with Prometheus, Bacon’s vision shifts from individuals to whole nations of seekers who will in relays carry the torch.

Bacon embodies his hope in the Muses’ sacred river Helicon, who “in grief and indignation buried his waters under the earth, to reappear elsewhere.” In Bacon’s cyclical vision, kingdoms flourish, then sink under “seditions and wars” to desolation and barbarism, leaving letters and philosophy “so torn in pieces that no traces of them can be found but a few fragments, scattered here and there like planks from a shipwreck.” In the next cycle the waters will issue forth again “perhaps among other nations, and not in the places where they were before.” Bacon looks toward a scientific utopia that will harmonize desire and science. There, the rising tides may carry Orpheus’ hopes to completion.

THE NEW EROS AND THE NEW ATLANTIS

Bacon’s *New Atlantis* includes remarkably extended passages on erotic matters. There are near every town “Adam and Eve’s pools” in which a friend of the prospective bride and another friend of the prospective groom are permitted to see the bride and groom separately bathe naked before the marriage is contracted. Joabin, a wise Jew “excellently seen in the laws and customs of that nation,” says that the friends might be able to discern “hidden defects” in their respective bodies, which might render them erotically repulsive or perhaps infertile. These pools would overstep the boundaries of shame that prohibit such disclosures outside Eden, as White has emphasized in *Peace Among the Wil-
laws (p. 184). Bacon alludes to Thomas More's *Utopia* [1515] or Plato's *Laws* (772a), who have their prospective pairs view *each other* naked.18 However, as Joabin notes, the Bensalemites "think it a scorn to give a refusal after so familiar knowledge" and therefore have chosen scrutiny by proxy. These practices are accompanied by a mandatory waiting period of one month between first meeting and marriage, as well as by moderate strictures regarding marriage against parental consent. This suggests that these customs are designed to control and moderate eros, and to render it subservient to parental and social supervision; the viewing gives the friends power that they could abuse, vetoing a marriage so that they themselves can enjoy the persons whom they have seen (see Weinberger, "Introduction," p. xxvii).

When Bacon advises "every student of nature" that "whatever his mind seizes and dwells upon with peculiar satisfaction is to be held in suspicion . . . " (4.60) he means to chasten overfondness for some pet idea; the habitual practice of self-denying doubt is a crucial guarantee of the honesty of the scientist. In contrast, the alchemists "grow old and die in the embraces of their illusion," as if their grand designs were deceitful jades.19 Yet eros does not necessarily wane if it is suppressed, however, but may well become more furtive and stronger. At Adam's and Eve's pools the eyes of friends guard erotic choice not through puritanical repression but judicious exposure. Joabin insists that Bensalem is "the virgin of the world," the most chaste nation, "free from all pollution or foulness" and thus immune to the immense possibilities of abuse. It is hard to discern which came first, the "chaste minds of this people" which Joabin extols, or the scientific stance that both presumes and enforces such mental chastity.

Atlantean science includes erotic matters. They test "all sorts of beasts and birds . . . that thereby we may take light what may be wrought upon the body of man," including alterations of growth and how to "make them more fruitful and bearing than their kind is; and contrariwise barren and not generative" (3.159). Bacon foresees that the "mechanical arts" that Daedalus supplied to Pasiphaë "to satisfy her passion for the bull" will produce "instruments of lust, and also instruments of death," both of which could shake the world (6.735). Such alterations of erotic pleasure could set men adrift from their traditional customs, yet the Atlanteans are conservative. Though their science was already established when they received the gospels, they follow the precepts of revealed religion. Their devotion to science is tinged with religious awe. The Father of Salomon's House has the presence of a great prelate blessing the crowd; the priest seems a humble assistant of the scientific hierarchy. (This is noted by both Faulkner, p. 245, and Leary, pp. 246–47.) Reason has brought peace; there is no sign of religious strife and Joabin, a Jew, is honored and reconciled to the Christian polity. The king has quietly ceded to Salomon's House control over the vital secrets their science discloses.30

The new eros expresses the needs of science. Although the scientist cannot
keep a "mistress" among theories, he needs to maintain a fervent love of science to sustain him through many trials and disappointments. Since he acts as a member of a vast machine his scientific eros needs to be attached to institutions, to the whole company of Promethean racers all pursuing their ardent quest. It is scarcely surprising that such a demanding commitment might, in most men, leave not much eros left over for private conjugal life. As with Orpheus, the perishable love of women may conflict with a pious, ecstatic science.

THE FEAST OF THE FAMILY

Yet the new eros can harmonize with the old. The narrator is "much affected" by the "Feast of the Family; for that (methought) I had never heard of a solemnity wherein nature did so much preside" (3.151). In this custom the father of a family with thirty living descendants receives stylized homage from his family and even from the king, who acknowledges the father as his debtor on account of his extensive progeny. This father sits on a raised dais like a monarch and eats alone, joined only by a son "if he hap to be of Salomon's House." The mother is installed out of sight "in a loft above on the right hand of the chair, with a privy door, and a carved window of glass, leaded with gold and blue" (3.148–49), but only if she bore the whole lineage. The female birth-giver is hidden, but her place of honor is above the masculine progenitor. 21

The various kinds of eros are revealed by their children. Alchemists die in fruitless embraces, but the true scientist is rich in living offspring. White suggests that the thirty descendants "stand for the 'stirps of inventions' that come from the marriage of mind and the universe." (p. 177). Yet this Feast honors all numerous families, reserving some extra dignity for those of rank and particularly those of Salomon's House. Clearly there is some danger that population might languish and Atlantis lack sufficient inhabitants, particularly since it is economically self-sufficient. The narrator asks "whether they kept marriage well; and whether they were tied to one wife? For that where population is so much affected, and as with them it seemed to be, there is commonly permission of plurality of wives" (3.152). In the usage of Bacon's time, "affected" implies "desired, aimed at" and "population" means "populating a country." (These are the glosses of Vickers, pp. 795–96.) Thus the narrator expected that polygamy would be permitted since the island was underpopulated.

The reasons for this are unspecified. The habitable area is not excessive, since the island is no bigger than England and France put together, "five thousand six hundred miles in circuit, and of rare fertility of soil in the greatest part thereof..." so that food is plentiful (3.144). The climate is mild; "scarlet oranges" grow there. The mysterious pills that heal the sailors indicate medicine far more advanced than in Europe. Nor does one expect infant
mortality to trouble a society which prepares "Water of Paradise, being, by that we do to it, made very sovereign for health, and prolongation of life" (3.158). The Bensalemites have acquired control over fertility and sensual pleasure. There has been peace for nineteen hundred years, during which Bensalem has been isolated.22

The only remaining explanation for the underpopulation is some alteration of eros so deep that it cannot be remedied by augmenting fertility or heightening sexual pleasure. Although only a few are Fathers, Salomon's House must employ many others in its multifarious enterprises. Bacon implies that Bensalem as a whole is deeply affected by its central project. Evidently families are less numerous, even though scientific fruitfulness is exemplary. The inference is that so much eros goes into the Atlanteans' scientific projects that sexual desire wanes and families shrink. Both the Bensalemites and the Europeans face the same problem, for different reasons: a diminution of the birth rate, accompanied by a deterioration in familial life. In the case of Europe this is the result of excessive eros channeled to debauchery (3.152), while in Bensalem eros is absorbed by the chaste raptures of science. The institution of Adam's and Eve's pools would be inconceivable in Europe, which Joabin depicts as a "furnace" of "unlawful lust" which "if you give it any vent, it will rage."23

This is also deeply connected with the peacefulness of Bensalem, whose name means "Son of Peace." Like Bacon himself, the islanders abhor war and have found ways of living together in concord. It seems, then, that this peaceful disposition has been cultivated and also their erotic life has been tamed. And now, Joabin and the Father of Salomon's House are permitting these great secrets, so long hidden, to be transmitted to the world. The Atlanteans seem confident that Europe will embrace the scientific miracles of Bensalem, which will conquer the world peacefully. Clearly they run a great risk, for even with their technical prowess it is not certain that they could withstand all-out attack from a greedy and corrupt Europe. At this point Bacon's fiction breaks off and it is unclear whether he regarded the work as finished or even finishable. The question remains whether human nature will be able to be tamed so that the powerful secrets of Atlantis will prove to be a blessing or a curse.

CONCLUSION: THE FLIGHT OF ICARUS

Although the Father of Salomon's House disclosed unheard-of wonders, he did not explain how they were accomplished. These alluring possibilities inflame desires that might otherwise be overchastrated. The story of Icarus teaches that excess is "bad and mischievous," but insufficient desire poses a greater risk "because in excess there is something of magnanimity,—something, like the flight of a bird, that holds kindred with heaven; whereas defect creeps on the ground like a reptile" (6.754). Yet those untouched by scientific light can still grasp its fruits.
Bacon notes acidly that "when the Sphinx was subdued, her body was laid on the back of an ass: for there is nothing so subtle and abstruse, but when it is once thoroughly understood and published to the world, even a dull wit can carry it" (6.757). Once revealed, scientific secrets become banal, their powers open to corrupt rulers. Bacon surely knew from his own failures with King James how difficult it would be to guard scientific powers from political abuse. Scientists must take political responsibility to oversee the use of their discoveries.

Bacon's political vision turns on new possibilities of desire. Even after a few days in Bensalem the sailors are enraptured with this new world, "as was enough to make us forget all that was dear to us in our own countries" (3.147). Their exhilaration shows how deeply the new eros has moved them, and how much Bacon hoped we would be moved in turn. Desire must be both chastened and heightened, avoiding paradox because this double motion reflects the complex repercussion of the new science on human sensibility. In turn, the polity also must reconcile scientific fruitfulness with shrinking families. To do this, Bacon relies on what is most revered and "natural" to moderate the disorienting effects of altering nature. He also anticipates an alliance with Christian humanism, which shares the tenets of redemptive suffering and a new kind of love. But though Bacon indicts the crimes of Daedalus he cannot escape the dangers of Icarus. The pressing needs of suffering humanity call for these risky measures, but they are more than desperate gambles. In the end Icarus is "kindred with heaven"; those who watch his wavering flight taste a strange exaltation. As Bacon notes, "there is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion." Moved by beauty along with hope and charity the polity may take to heart a new science that "passeth understanding."

NOTES


3. Contrary to an old commonplace, Bacon did not consider that this struggle required the "torture of nature"; see my essay "Wrestling with Proteus: Francis Bacon and the 'Torture' of

4. Bacon reinterpreted the myth of Cupid in a lengthy fragment, De Principiis atque originibus (5.461–500), expanding ‘Cupid, or the Atom’ in De sapientia veterum (1609; 6.729–31). The De principiis is included in the new Oxford edition, Francis Bacon, Philosophical Studies c. 1611–c. 1619, ed. Graham Rees (Oxford: 1996), vol. 6, pp. 196–267, cited as OFB with the volume and page number. Following the ancient division of two Cupids, “one is said to have been the most ancient, the other the youngest of the gods,” Bacon concentrates on the elder (OFB 6.197; 5.461), who gives the “general appetite of conjunction and procreation; Cupid, her son, applies the appetite to an individual object” (6.731). This redirection of the imagination (OFB 6.197; 5.461) is required by Democritean philosophy, “which, because it cut rather more sharply and deeply into nature and stood well apart from common notions, was treated as childish by the vulgar herd” (OFB 6.205; 5.465).


6. This usage is clarified by Lemmi, Classic Deities, p. 145.


10. Sir Anthony Weldon noted that King James’s “legs were very weak, having had (as was thought) some foul play in his youth, or rather before he was born, that he was not able to stand at seven years of age, that weakness made him ever leaning on other men’s shoulders... .” See David Harris Willson, King James VI and I (New York: 1967), p. 16.

As John Briggs has written, “It is the maimed hero Oedipus whose life best presages Bacon’s history. There is a pin through Bacon’s ankles too: the disinheriting death of his father, Antony, the brother he seems to have loved more than he could any friend, carried the visible sign of their hobbling, which Francis in fact wished were visibly his, saying it would signify and excuse the exclusively contemplative vocation he sometimes yearned for to prove the new learning’s mettle.” See Briggs’s biographical essay on Bacon, to appear in the new edition of the Dictionary of National Biography, in which is also to be found Wotton’s characterization of Antony’s “impotent feet” (present edition, 1.799b).

Bacon notes that the deformed are “for the most part (as the Scripture saith) void of natural affection [Romans 1.31]; and so they have their revenge of nature.” The issue of parricide emerges
also in regard to Socrates’ relentless quest for truth; see Sophist 241d. Robert K. Faulkner, Francis Bacon and the Project of Progress (Lanham, MD: 1993), p. 101.

11. See John Briggs’s essay on “Bacon’s Science and Religion” in The Cambridge Companion to Bacon, pp. 172–99. See also Timothy Paterson, “Bacon’s Myth of Orpheus” and “On the Role of Christianity in the Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon,” Polity, 29, no. 3 (1987): 419–42; on another occasion I hope to discuss the widely held view that Bacon was not really a Christian. In contrast, Lampert argues (Nietzsche, p. 110) that “Prometheus’s crime is Bacon’s crime,” ignoring that Bacon expressly refrains from such excesses.


13. Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, l. 252. Already in his early writings Bacon had been extremely critical of “earthly hope”; see the Meditationes Sacrae (1597; 7.247–48).

14. See Iliad 1.591–93. Alternatively, Hephaistos may have been lame from birth (liad 18.396–97). Common to both accounts is the displeasure of his parents. Hephaistos’ lameness passed down to his son Palaimonios (Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica, ll. 202–3). Hephaistos’ epithet Amphiguëëis connotes “lame in both legs” and “skilled with both hands.”

15. According to Hesiod, Hephaistos had no father; he was born from Hera alone, out of her “resentment and jealousy” after Athena was born from Zeus alone (Theogony 927–29). Hephaistos was the midwife of Athena in Pindar, Olymian 7.35–37. See Timothy Gantz, Early Greek Myth (Baltimore: 1993), pp. 74–78, and Mircea Eliade, The Forge and the Crucible (New York: 1962), pp. 149–52. In Hesiod the figure of Pandora is parasitic and malign (Theogony 10.617). For Bacon, women entice men to “think only of what is pleasant at the time.”

16. Vulcan here may be considered a self-fertilizing father, parallel to his mother Hera, or perhaps he really has intercourse with his ancestress Earth, from whom Erichthonius is said to be born (“semen in terram effudisse”). The quotations are from the unpublished works translated in Farrington, The Philosophy of Francis Bacon (Liverpool: 1964), pp. 83, 109, 85, 72. The (childless) Bacon’s address to this imaginary son brings to mind his dictum that “the best works . . . have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men” (6.391); see below.

17. The essay “Of Marriage and the Single Life” derogates married life in comparison with the “great works” only really possible to the unmarried persons who do not have “hostages to fortune” (6.391–92).


19. From the unpublished Thoughts and Conclusions in Farrington, Philosophy of Francis Bacon, p. 73.

20. This preoccupation with generating new species runs throughout Bacon’s project, “for it is no small gain if by the application of violence we can communicate to bodies fixed and permanent natures” (4.236–37). In notes appended to the New Atlantis and entitled “Magnalia Naturae” Bacon includes among important topics that need to be pursued: “Versions of bodies onto other bodies. Making of new species. Transplanting of one species into another” (3.167). In this list Bacon also tersely notes “Deceptions of the senses. Greater pleasures of the senses. The altering of complexities, and fatness and leanness.”

The scene of presumed revelation might have been a noble lie staged by pious but deceptive scientists, except that they expressly “do hate all impostures and lies; insomuch as we have severely
forbidden it to all our fellows, under pain of ignominy and fines, that they do not shew any natural work or thing, adorned or swelling; but only pure as it is, and without any affectation of strange-
ness" (3.164). See David Renaker, "A Miracle of Engineering: the Conversion of Bensalem in
Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis," Studies in Philology 87 (1990): 181–93; the issue is also discussed
by Faulkner, Francis Bacon, pp. 245–54.

See Julian Martin, Francis Bacon, The State, and the Reform of Natural Philosophy (Cam-
bridge, Eng.: 1992), pp. 134–40, which emphasizes the enhancement of the powers of the Crown as
Bacon’s paramount intent; however, the way Salomon’s House restricts the access of the King to
dangerous scientific discoveries suggests that the King is not, finally, supreme. There is also no hint
in Bacon’s text that ordinary imperialism is the goal of Salomon’s House, contrary to Martin (p.
135). On the contrary, the way the Father seems to anticipate the reception of the secrets of Ben-
salem in Europe is not through Atlantean political domination but a more cosmopolitan influence of
science above and beyond established political institutions, reflecting the situation in Bensalem
itself.

21. John Archer notes that “the mother, though excluded from the open display of power, is in
the same position in relation to her family that Bensalem is to the rest of the world”; Sovereignty
and Intelligence (Stanford: 1993), p. 148. See also Sharon Achinstein, “How to Be a Progressive
Without Looking Like One: History and Knowledge in Bacon’s New Atlantis,” Chio 17, no. 3
(1988): 249–64 at n. 10. In Bacon’s account of Cupid God both lays the cosmic egg and hatches it;
the maternal form of Chaos is absent. See Whitney, “Cupid Hatched by Night.”

22. W. M. S. Russell noted that Bacon anticipated Malthus’ connection of population and re-
sources; one infers that he would have been all the more aware that Bensalem should not have
suffered underpopulation. See W. M. S. Russell, “The Origins of Social Biology,” Biology and
also notes that the word “population” in this sense is used for the first time in English in Bacon’s
essay Of the True Greatnesse of Kingdomes and Estates (1612; 6.447).

About three thousand years earlier the great warrior-king Altabin was punished by “Divine
Revenge,” and the Old Atlantis was destroyed by flood. After that deluge, there is no indication of
any war or civil strife since the time of King Solamona, “the lawgiver of our nation,” about 1900
years before.

23. I diverge from Weinberger, who argues that the Bensalemite institution of the pools “exac-
erbates the possibilities of adultery and cuckoldry” (see note 2 above). Here Joabin shows that he is
very different from the Biblical Joab, the murderous helper of King David’s illicit passions. Wein-
berger argues that Joabin, like his namesake, also stands for “excessive desires”; however, Bacon
may use the similarity in their names to indicate a profound difference between them. See “Science
and Rule in Bacon’s Utopia.”

24. In parting the Father gives a lavish bounty to the European strangers, which Weinberger
treats as “unstable” and sinister (“Science and Rule in Bacon’s Utopia,” p. 884), since the Ben-
salemites consider “double payment” an excess (3.132). Instead, I take this as demonstration of the
lavishness the Atlanteans cultivate among their guarded desires, and which they would instill in the
Europeans, through gratitude.

Bacon significantly interposes “The Flight of Icarus; also Scylla and Charybdis; or the Middle
Way” midway between his treatments of “Prometheus; or the State of Man” and “Sphinx; or Sci-
ence” in De sapientia veterum. He notes that “it is on the side of excess that the young commonly
sin, as the old on the side of defect,” so that moderation in politics is “questionable and to be used
with caution and judgment.” Bacon, with Bruno, held that the moderns in general are “older” than
the ancients, because more experienced; see the unpublished Thoughts and Conclusions in Farris-
tong, Philosophy of Francis Bacon, p. 83.

Bacon wrote the New Atlantis after his disgrace and surely had few illusions left about the
harshness of political realities, even though he did not stop trying to regain the king’s ear; see

25. Unlike Freud, Bacon sees more possibilities for the erotic life than unsatisfying sublima-
I agree with Lampert that Bacon meant to pacify sectarian strife, but not that he meant to seize possession of the Temple in an anti-Christian spirit (*Nietzsche*, pp. 68–70). Lampert seems to ignore those aspects of Christian teaching that Bacon valued (unlike Machiavelli) and did not wish to subvert; see note 11. See Bacon's treatment of Daedalus, "a man of the greatest genius but of very bad character" (6.734). Lampert emphasizes the envious nature of the scientist-Daedalus in *Nietzsche*, pp. 34–39.
German Nihilism

Leo Strauss

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The following lecture by Leo Strauss was delivered, according to internal textual evidence, on February 26, 1941, in the General Seminar of the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science of the New School for Social Research in New York. The text will prove to be of particular interest both for students of Leo Strauss's thought and for those more generally interested in the intellectual climate of prewar Germany. For the former, the lecture presents itself as one of the rare occasions on which Professor Strauss suspended his customary reticence and directly addressed an important contemporary issue. For the latter, it offers an interesting and compelling outlook on the intellectual currents of one of this century's key periods. Finally, both audiences will find that Professor Strauss combines his philosophical rigor and perspicacity with firsthand knowledge of the problem under discussion. As "a young Jew, born and raised in Germany," he was without doubt well acquainted with the phenomenon of German nihilism, the influence it exerted in postwar and prewar Germany, its key representatives and its historical origins.

The basis of this edition is a typewritten manuscript which can be found in the Leo Strauss Papers (Box 8, Folder 15) at the Regenstein Library of The University of Chicago. The manuscript consists of twenty-five mostly typewritten pages. It bears many corrections and additions, some of them inserted by typewriter, some by hand. In preparing the text, we have systematically incorporated the changes and additions made by Professor Strauss so that the present edition might faithfully reflect his actual presentation. We note the few instances in which we have edited for readability. We have also taken the liberty of correcting, without comment, a few misspellings in the typescript. At some points in the text Professor Strauss made a more substantial addition in handwriting: these are mentioned in the text, with a short comment. In some cases the handwriting was difficult to read or altogether illegible: this is indicated

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between parentheses in the text, as well as in the notes. Certain words were underlined by Professor Strauss, some by typewriter, some by hand: in the present edition these have been italicized. With a view to restricting the number of notes, single words which were either added or underlined by hand are indicated in the text with an asterisk immediately following the word. Words from languages other than English have been italicized by the editors. Finally, we have added some additional information concerning names, sources and dates in the notes.

As the reader will remark, the present edition begins with two different tables of contents. The first of these is part of the original typescript, while the second was found on a handwritten sheet attached to the typescript. The latter, however, provides a more accurate synopsis of the contents of the lecture as it is presented. For this reason, we have chosen to include it directly after the original table of contents.

We are grateful to Professor Jenny Strauss Clay and Professor Joseph Cropsey for their generous help in deciphering Professor Strauss's handwriting. Professor Cropsey, Leo Strauss's literary executor, has also generously given permission for this publication.
German Nihilism

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General Seminar: Experiences of the Second World War

February 26, 1941

German Nihilism—Leo Strauss

I. The questions: (a) What is nihilism? (b) How far can nihilism be said to be a specifically German phenomenon?

II. German nihilism is a phenomenon much broader than National Socialism. It can be described provisionally as the passionate reaction of a certain type of young atheist to the communist ideal.

III. The nihilism of the young and the positivism of the old.

IV. The nihilistic meaning of the term "wave of the future."

V. Nihilism is defined as the rejection of the principles of civilization as such.

VI. German nihilism rejects the principles of civilization as such in favor of war and of warlike ideals.

VII. German nihilism is a radicalized form of German militarism.

VIII. One of the roots of German militarism is moralism.

IX. The present Anglo-German war is a war about principles.

German Nihilism

1. The questions: What is nihilism? And how far can nihilism be said to be a specifically German phenomenon?

2. German nihilism is the genus, of which National socialism is the best-known species.
I. The ultimate, non-nihilistic motive underlying German nihilism.

3. The inseparable connection of morality and the closed society: the moral protest against the principle of modern civilisation.

II. The situation in which that non-nihilistic motive led to nihilism.

4. German nihilism is the reaction of a certain type of young atheist to the communist ideal or prediction.

5. On the affinity of youth to nihilism, and the nihilistic consequences of the emancipation of youth.

6. On the affinity of progressivism to nihilism: progressivism leaves the aim undefined; it therefore opposes an indefinite No to the given order.

III. What is nihilism? And how far can nihilism be said to be specifically German?

7. Nihilism is the rejection of the principles of civilisation as such. Civilisation is the conscious culture of human reason, i.e. science and morals.

8. Nihilism in the sense defined is characteristic of present day Germany rather than of any other country.

9. German nihilism rejects the principles of civilisation as such in favor of war and the warlike virtues.

10. German nihilism is therefore akin to German militarism.

11. German nihilism is a radicalized form of German militarism, and that radicalization is due to the victory of the romantic opinion concerning the modern development as a whole.

12. German nihilism is related to the reaction to the modern ideal which is characteristic of German idealist philosophy: morality of self-sacrifice and self-denial vs. morality of self-interest; courage is the only unambiguously non-utilitarian virtue.

13. German idealism, while opposing Western philosophy, claimed to be a synthesis of the modern ideal with the pre-modern ideal; that synthesis did not work; the influence of German idealism made the acceptance of the modern ideal impossible; the Germans had to fall back on the pre-modern ideal: that is to say, on the pre-modern ideal as interpreted by German idealism, i.e., as interpreted in a polemical intention against the enlightenment; and therefore: on a modern distortion of the pre-modern ideal.

14. The modern ideal is of English origin: the German tradition is a tradition of criticism of the modern ideal. While the English found a working amalgamation of the modern ideal with the classical ideal, the Germans overemphasized the break in the tradition so much that they were ultimately led from the rejection of modern civilisation to the rejection of the principle of civilisation as such, i.e., to nihilism. The English gentlemen as an imperial nation vs. the German Herren as a nation of provincial, resentful fanatics.
GERMAN NIHILISM.
LECTURE TO BE DELIVERED ON FEBRUARY, 26, 1941.

1. What is nihilism? And how far can nihilism be said to be a specifically German phenomenon? I am not able to answer these questions; I can merely try to elaborate* them a little. For the phenomenon which I am going to discuss, is much too complex, and much too little explored, to permit of an adequate description within the short time at my disposal. I cannot do more than to scratch its surface.

2. When we hear at the present time the expression "German nihilism," most of us naturally think at once of National Socialism. It must however be understood from the outset that National Socialism is only the most famous* form of German nihilism—its lowest, most provincial, most unenlightened and most dishonourable form. It is probable that its very vulgarity accounts for its great, if appalling, successes. These successes may be followed by failures, and ultimately by complete defeat. Yet the defeat of National Socialism will not necessarily mean the end of German nihilism. For that nihilism has deeper roots than the preachings of Hitler, Germany's defeat in the World War and all that.

To explain German nihilism, I propose to proceed in the following way. I shall first explain the ultimate motive which is underlying German nihilism; this motive is not in itself nihilistic. I shall then describe the situation in which that non-nihilistic motive led to nihilistic aspirations. Finally, I shall attempt to give such a definition of nihilism as is not assailable from the point of view of the non-nihilistic motive in question, and on the basis of that definition,¹ to describe German nihilism somewhat more fully.

3. Nihilism might mean: velle nihil, to will the nothing, the destruction of everything, including oneself, and therefore primarily the will to self-destruction. I am told that there are human beings who have such strange desires. I do not believe, however, that such a desire is the ultimate motive of German nihilism. Not only does the unarmed eye not notice any unambiguous signs of a will to self*-destruction. But even if such a desire were demonstrated* to be the ultimate motive, we still should be at a loss to understand why that desire took on the form, not of the mood called fin de siècle or of alcoholism, but of militarism. To explain German nihilism in terms of mental diseases, is even less advisable than it is to explain in such terms the desire of a cornered gangster to bump off together with himself a couple of cops and the fellow who double-crossed him; not being a Stoic, I could not call that* desire a morbid desire.²

The fact of the matter is that German nihilism is not absolute nihilism, desire for the destruction of everything including oneself, but a desire for the destruction of something specific:* of modern civilisation. That, if I may say so, limited nihilism becomes an almost* absolute nihilism only for this reason: because the negation of modern civilisation, the No, is not guided, or accompanied, by any clear positive conception.
German nihilism desires the destruction of modern civilisation as far as modern civilisation has a moral meaning. As everyone knows, it does not object so much to modern technical* devices. That moral meaning of modern civilisation to which the German nihilists object, is expressed in formulations such as these: to relieve man's estate; or: to safeguard the rights of man; or: the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number. What is the motive underlying the protest against modern civilisation, against the spirit of the West*, and in particular of the Anglo-Saxon* West?

The answer must be: it is a moral protest. That protest proceeds from the conviction that the internationalism inherent in modern civilisation, or, more precisely, that the establishment of a perfectly open society which is as it were the goal of modern civilisation, and therefore all aspirations directed toward that goal, are irreconcilable with the basic demands of moral life. That protest proceeds from the conviction that the root of all moral life is essentially and therefore eternally the closed society; from the conviction that the open society is bound to be, if not immoral, at least amoral: the meeting ground of seekers of pleasure, of gain, of irresponsible power, indeed of any kind of irresponsibility and lack of seriousness.  

Moral life, it is asserted, means serious life. Seriousness, and the ceremonial of seriousness—the flag and the oath to the flag,—are the distinctive features of the closed society, of the society which by its very nature, is constantly confronted with, and basically oriented toward, the Ernstfall, the serious moment, M-day, war. Only life in such a tense atmosphere, only a life which is based on constant awareness of the sacrifices* to which it owes its existence, and of the necessity, the duty of sacrifice of life and all worldly goods, is truly human: the sublime is unknown to the open society.* The societies of the West which claim to aspire toward the open society, actually are closed societies in a state of disintegration: their moral value, their respectability, depends entirely on their still being closed societies.

Let us pursue this argument a little further. The open society, it is asserted, is actually impossible. Its possibility is not proved at all by what is called the progress* toward the open society. For that progress is largely fictitious or merely verbal. Certain basic facts of human nature which have been honestly recognized by earlier generations who used to call a spade a spade, are at the present time verbally denied, superficially covered over by fictions legal and others, e.g., by the belief that one can abolish war by pacts not backed by military forces punishing him who breaks the pact, or by calling ministries of war* ministries of defence,* or by calling punishment sanctions, or by calling capital punishment das höchste Strafmass. The open society is morally inferior to the closed society also* because the former is based on hypocrisy.

The conviction underlying the protest against modern civilisation has basically nothing to do with bellicism, with love of war; nor with nationalism: for there were closed societies which were not nations; it has indeed something to
do with what is called the sovereign state, insofar as the sovereign state offers
the best modern example of a closed society in the sense indicated. The conviction
I am trying to describe, is not, to repeat, in its origin a love of war: it is rather a love of morality, a sense of responsibility for endangered morality. The historians in our midst know that conviction, or passion, from Glaukon's, Plato’s brother’s, passionate protest against the city of pigs, in the name of noble virtue. They know it, above all, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's passionate protest against the easy-going and somewhat rotten civilisation of the century of taste, and from Friedrich Nietzsche's passionate protest against the easy-going and somewhat rotten civilisation of the century of industry. It was the same passion—let there be no mistake about that—which turned, if in a much more passionate and infinitely less intelligent form, against the alleged or real corruption of post-war Germany: against “the subhuman beings of the big cities (die Untermenschen der Grossstadt),” against “cultural bolshevism (Kulturbolsche-
wismus),” etc. That passion, or conviction is then not in itself nihilistic, as is shown by the examples of Plato and Rousseau, if examples are needed at all. (One may even wonder whether it was not a sound demand, remembering, e.g., the decision of the Oxford students not to fight for king and country and some more recent facts.) While not being nihilistic in itself, and perhaps even not entirely unsound, that conviction led however to nihilism in post-war Germany owing to a number of circumstances. Of those circumstances, I shall mention in the survey which follows, only those which, to my mind, have not been sufficiently emphasized in the discussions of this seminar nor in the literature on the subject.6

4. One would have to possess a gift which I totally lack, the gift of a lyrical reporter, in order to give those of you who have not lived for many years in post-war Germany, an adequate* idea of the emotions underlying German nihil-
ism.7 Let me tentatively define nihilism as the desire to destroy the present
world and its potentialities, a desire not accompanied by any clear conception of what one wants to put in its place. And let us try to understand how such a desire could develop.

No one could be satisfied with the post-war world. German liberal democ-

racy of all descriptions seemed to many people to be absolutely unable to cope
with the difficulties with which Germany was confronted. This created a pro-
found prejudice, or confirmed a profound prejudice already in existence, against
liberal democracy as such. Two articulate alternatives to liberal democracy were
open. One was simple reaction, as expressed by the Crown Prince Ruprecht of
Bavaria in about these terms: “Some people say that the wheel of history cannot
be turned back. This is an error.” The other alternative was more interesting.
The older ones in our midst still remember the time when certain people as-

serted that the conflicts inherent in the present situation would necessarily lead
to a revolution, accompanying or following another World War—a rising of the
proletariat and of the proletarianized strata of society which would usher in the
withering away of the State, the classless society, the abolition of all exploitation and injustice, the era of final peace. It was this prospect at least as much as the desperate present, which led to nihilism. The prospect of a pacified planet, without rulers and ruled, of a planetary society devoted to production and consumption only, to the production and consumption of spiritual as well as material merchandise, was positively horrifying to quite a few very intelligent and very decent, if very young, Germans. They did not object to that prospect because they were worrying about their own economic and social position; for certainly in that respect they had no longer anything to lose. Nor did they object to it for religious reasons; for, as one of their spokesmen (E. Jünger) said, they knew* that they were the* sons and grandsons and great-grandsons of godless men. What they hated, was the very prospect of a world in which everyone would be happy and satisfied, in which everyone would have his little pleasure by day and his little pleasure by night, a world in which no great heart could beat and no great soul could breathe, a world without real, unmetaphoric, sacrifice, i.e. a world without blood, sweat, and tears. What to the communists appeared to be the fulfilment of the dream of mankind, appeared to those young Germans as the greatest debasement of humanity, as the coming of the end of humanity, as the arrival of the latest man. They did not really know, and thus they were unable to express in a tolerably clear language, what they desired to put in the place of the present world and its allegedly necessary future or sequel: the only thing of which they were absolutely certain was that the present world and all the potentialities of the present world as such, must be destroyed in order to prevent the otherwise necessary coming of the communist final order: literally anything, the nothing.* the chaos, the jungle, the Wild West, the Hobbian state of nature, seemed to them infinitely better than the communist-anarchist-pacifist future. Their Yes was inarticulate—they were unable to say more than: No! This No proved however sufficient as the preface to action, to the action of destruction. This is the phenomenon which occurs to me first whenever I hear the expression German nihilism.

It is hardly necessary to point out the fallacy committed by the young men in question. They simply took over the communist thesis that the proletarian revolution and proletarian dictatorship is necessary, if civilisation is not to perish. But they insisted rather more than the communists on the conditional character of the communist prediction (if civilisation is not to perish). That condition left room for choice: they chose what according to the communists was the only alternative to communism. In other words: they admitted that all rational argument was in favour of communism; but they opposed to that apparently invincible argument what they called "irrational decision." Unfortunately, all rational argument they knew of, was historical argument, or more precisely: statements about the probable future, predictions, which were based on analysis of the past, and above all, of the present. For that modern astrology, predicting social
science, had taken hold of a very large part of the academic youth. I have emphasized before that the nihilists were young people.\(^9\)

5. One or the other modern pedagogue would perhaps feel that not everything was bad in that nihilism. For, he might argue, it is not unnatural that the intelligent section of a young generation should be dissatisfied with what they are told to believe by the older generation, and that they should have a strong desire for a new word, for a word expressing their longings, and, considering that moderation is not a virtue of youth, for an extreme word. Moreover, he would conceivably say, it is not unnatural that the young people, being constitutionally unable to discover that new word, are unable to express in articulate language more than the negation of the aspirations of the older generation. A lover of paradoxes might be tempted to assert an essential affinity of youth to nihilism. I should be the last to deny the juvenile character of that specific nihilism which I have tried to describe. But I must disagree with the modern pedagogue all the more in so far as I am convinced that about the most dangerous thing for these young men was precisely what is called progressive education: they rather needed old-fashioned teachers, such old-fashioned teachers of course as would be undogmatic enough to understand the aspirations of their pupils. Unfortunately, the belief in old-fashioned teaching declined considerably in post-war Germany. The inroads which William II had made on the old and noble educational system founded by great liberals of the early 19th century, were not discontinued, but rather enlarged by the Republic. To this one may add the influence of the political emancipation of youth, the fact frequently referred to as the children’s vote. Nor ought we to forget that some of the young nihilists who refused to undergo severe intellectual discipline,\(^*\) were sons or younger brothers of men and women who had undergone what may be described as the emotional discipline of the youth movement, of a movement which preached the emancipation of youth. Our century has once been called the century of the child: in Germany it proved to be the age of the adolescent. Needless to say that not in all cases was\(^*\) the natural progress from adolescence to senility ever interrupted by a period however short of maturity. The decline of reverence for old age found its most telling expression in Hitler’s shameless reference to the imminent death of the aged President Hindenburg.

I have alluded to the fact that the young nihilists were atheists. Broadly speaking, prior to the World War, atheism was a preserve of the radical left, just as throughout history atheism had been connected with philosophic materialism. German philosophy was predominantly idealistic, and the German idealists were theists or pantheists. Schopenhauer was, to my knowledge, the first non-materialist and conservative German philosopher who openly professed his atheism. But Schopenhauer’s influence fades into insignificance, if compared with that of Nietzsche. Nietzsche asserted that the atheist assumption is not only reconcilable with, but indispensable for, a radical anti-democratic, anti-socialist, and anti-pacifist policy: according to him, even the communist creed is only a
secularized form of theism, of the belief in providence. There is no other philosopher whose influence on postwar German thought is comparable to that of Nietzsche, of the atheist Nietzsche. I cannot dwell on this important point, since I am not a theologian. A gentleman who is much more versed in theology than I am—Professor Carl Mayer of the Graduate Faculty—will certainly devote to this aspect of German nihilism all the attention it requires in an article to be published in Social Research.\textsuperscript{10}

The adolescents I am speaking of, were in need of teachers who could explain to them in articulate language the positive, and not merely destructive, meaning of their aspirations. They believed to have found such teachers in that group of professors and writers who knowingly or ignorantly paved the way for Hitler (Spengler, Moeller van den Bruck, Carl Schmitt, [illegible], Ernst Jünger, Heidegger). If we want to understand the singular success, not of Hitler, but of these writers, we must cast a quick glance at their opponents who were at the same time the opponents of the young nihilists. Those opponents committed frequently a grave mistake. They believed to have refuted the No by refuting the Yes, i.e. the inconsistent, if not silly, positive assertions of the young men. But one cannot refute what one has not thoroughly understood. And many opponents did not even try to understand the ardent passion underlying the negation of the present world and its potentialities. As a consequence, the very refutations confirmed the nihilists in their belief; all these refutations seemed to beg the question; most of the refutations seemed to consist of \textit{pueris decantata}, of repetitions of things which the young people knew already by heart. Those young men had come to doubt seriously, and not merely methodically or methodologically, the \textit{principles*} of modern civilisation; the great authorities of that civilisation did no longer impress them; it was evident that only such opponents would have been listened to who knew that doubt from their own experience, who through years of hard and independent thinking had overcome it. Many opponents did not meet that condition. They had been brought up in the belief in the principles of modern civilisation; and a belief in which one is brought up, is apt to degenerate into \textit{prejudice*}. Consequently, the attitude of the opponents of the young nihilists tended to become \textit{apologetic}. Thus it came to pass that the most ardent upholders of the principle of progress, of an essentially \textit{aggressive} principle, were compelled to take a defensive stand; and, in the realm of the mind, taking a defensive stand looks like admitting defeat. The ideas of modern civilisation appeared to the \textit{young} generation to be the \textit{old} ideas; thus the adherents of the ideal of progress were in the awkward position that they had to resist, in the manner of \textit{conservateurs}, what in the meantime has been called the wave of the future. They made the impression of being loaded with the heavy burden of a tradition hoary with age and somewhat dusty, whereas the young nihilists, not hampered by any tradition, had complete freedom of movement—and in the wars of the mind no less than in real wars, freedom of action spells victory. The opponents of the young nihilists had all the advantages,
but likewise all the disabilities, of the intellectually propertied class confronted by the intellectual proletarian, the sceptic. The situation of modern civilisation in general, and of its backbone, which is modern science, both natural and civil in particular, appeared to be comparable to that of scholasticism shortly before the emergence of the new science of the 17th century: the technical perfection of the methods and terminology of the old school, communism included, appeared to be a strong argument against the old school. For technical perfection is apt to hide the basic problems. Or, if you wish, the bird of the goddess of wisdom starts its flight only* when the sun is setting. It was certainly characteristic of German post-war thought that the output of technical terms, at no time negligible in Germany, reached astronomic proportions. The only answer which could have impressed the young nihilists, had to be given in non-technical language. Only one answer was given which was adequate and which would have impressed the young nihilists if they had heard it. It was not however given by a German and it was given in the year 1940 only. Those young men who refused to believe that the period following the jump into liberty, following the communist world revolution, would be the finest hour of mankind in general and of Germany in particular, would have been impressed as much as we were, by what Winston Churchill said after the defeat in Flanders about Britain’s finest hour. For one of their greatest teachers had taught them to see in Cannæ the greatest moment in the life of that glory which was ancient* Rome.11

6. I have tried to circumscribe the intellectual and moral situation in which a nihilism emerged which was not in all cases base in its origin. Moreover, I take it for granted that not everything to which the young nihilists objected, was unobjectionable, and that not every writer or speaker whom they despised, was respectable. Let us beware of a sense of solidarity which is not limited by discretion. And let us not forget that the highest duty of the scholar, truthfulness or justice, acknowledges no limits. Let us then not hesitate to look for one moment at the phenomenon which I called nihilism, from the point of view of the nihilists themselves. “Nihilism,” they would say, is a slogan used by those who do not understand the new, who see merely the rejection of their cherished ideals, the destruction of their spiritual property, who judge the new by its first words and deeds, which are, of necessity, a caricature rather than an adequate expression. How can a reasonable man expect an adequate expression of the ideal of a new epoch at its beginning, considering that the owl of Minerva starts its flight when the sun is setting? The Nazis? Hitler? The less is said about him, the better. He will soon be forgotten. He is merely the rather contemptible tool of “History”: the midwife who assists at the birth of the new epoch, of a new spirit; and a midwife usually understands nothing of the genius at whose birth she assists; she is not even supposed to be a competent gynaecologist. A new reality is in the making; it is transforming the whole world; in the meantime there is: nothing, but—a fertile nothing. The Nazis are as unsubstantial as clouds; the sky is hidden at present by those* clouds which announce a devas-
tating storm, but at the same time the long-needed rain which will bring new life to the dried up soil; and (here I am almost quoting) do not lose hope; what appears to you the end of the world, is merely the end of an epoch, of the epoch which began in 1517 or so. —I frankly confess, I do not see how those can resist the voice of that siren who expect the answer to the first and the last question from “History,” from the future as such;* who mistake analysis of the present or past or future for philosophy; who believe in a progress toward a goal which is itself progressive and therefore undefinable; who are not guided by a known and stable standard: by a standard which is stable and not changeable, and which is known and not merely believed. In other words, the lack of resistance to nihilism seems to be due ultimately to the depreciation and the contempt of reason, which is one and unchangeable or it is not, and of science. For if reason is changeable, it is dependent on those forces which cause its changes; it is a servant or slave of the emotions; and it will be hard to make a distinction which is not arbitrary, between noble and base emotions, once one has denied the rulership of reason. A German who could boast of a life-long intimate intercourse with the superhuman father of all nihilism, has informed us as* reliably, as we were ever informed by any inspired author, that the originator of all nihilism admitted: “Just despise reason and science, the very highest power of man, and I have got you completely.”12

7. I had to condense a number of recollections of what I have heard, seen, and read while I was living in Germany, into the foregoing fragmentary remarks, because I had to convey an impression of an irrational movement and of the frequently irrational reactions to it, rather than a reasoned argument. I have now, however, reached the point where I can venture to submit a definition of nihilism. I do this not without trepidation. Not because the definition which I am going to suggest, does not live up to the requirements of an orderly* definition (for I know that sins of that kind are the ones which are more easily forgiven); nor because it is in any way novel, but for precisely the opposite reason.13 It will seem to most of you that it is a commonplace and that it consists of commonplaces. The only thing which I can say to justify myself, is this: I expected to find a definition of nihilism as a matter of course in Mr. Rauschning’s well-known book. Only my failure to discover such a definition in that book, gives me the courage to indulge in what you will consider a triviality, if a necessary triviality.

I shall then say: Nihilism is the rejection of the principles of civilisation as such. A nihilist is then a man who knows the principles of civilisation, if only in a superficial way. A merely uncivilised man, a savage, is not a nihilist. This is the difference between Ariovistus, the Teutonic chieftain whom Caesar defeated, and Hitler who otherwise have the characteristic qualities of the perfect barbarian (arrogance and cruelty) in common. The Roman soldier who disturbed the circles of Archimedes, was not a nihilist, but just a soldier. I said civilisation, and not: culture. For I have noticed that many nihilists are great
lovers of culture, as distinguished from, and opposed to, civilisation. Besides, the term *culture* leaves it undetermined what the thing is which is to be cultivated (blood and soil or the mind), whereas the term civilisation designates at once the process of making man a citizen, and not a slave; an inhabitant of cities, and not a rustic; a lover of peace, and not of war; a polite being, and not a ruffian. A tribal community may possess a culture, i.e. produce, and enjoy, hymns, songs, ornament of their clothes, of their weapons and pottery, dances,* fairy tales and what not; it cannot however be civilised. I wonder whether* the fact that Western man lost much of his former pride, a quiet and becoming pride, of his being civilised, is not at the bottom of the present lack of resistance to nihilism.

I shall try to be somewhat more precise. By civilisation, we understand the conscious culture of humanity, i.e. of that which makes a human being a human being, i.e. the conscious* culture of reason. Human reason is active, above all, in two ways: as regulating human conduct, and as attempting to understand whatever can be understood by man; as practical reason, and as theoretical reason. The pillars of civilisation are therefore morals and science, and both united. For science without morals degenerates into cynicism, and thus destroys the basis of the scientific effort itself; and morals without science degenerates into superstition and thus is apt to become fanatic cruelty. Science is the attempt to understand the universe and man; it is therefore identical with philosophy; it is not necessarily identical with modern* science. By morals, we understand the rules of decent and noble conduct, as a reasonable man would understand them; those rules are by their nature applicable to any human being, although we may allow for the possibility that not all human beings have an equal natural aptitude for decent and noble conduct. Even the most violent sceptic cannot help from time to time despising, or at least excusing, this or that action and this or that man; a complete analysis of what is implied in such an action of despising, or even excusing, would lead to that well-known view of morals which I sketched. For our present purpose it will suffice if I illustrate decent and noble conduct by the remark that it is equally remote from inability to inflict physical or other pain as from deriving pleasure from inflicting pain. Or by the other remark that decent and noble conduct has to do, not so much with the natural *aim* of man, as with the *means* toward that aim: the view that the end sanctifies the means, is a tolerably complete expression* of immoralism.

I deliberately excluded "art" from the definition of civilisation. Hitler, the best-known champion of nihilism, is famous for his love of art and is even an artist himself. But I never heard that he had anything to do with search for truth or with any attempt to instill the seeds of virtue into the souls of his subjects. I am confirmed in this prejudice concerning "art" by the observation that the founding fathers of civilisation who taught us what science is and what morals are, did not know the term art as it is in use since about 180 years, nor the term, and the discipline, aesthetics which is of equally recent origin. This is not to
deny, but rather to assert, that there are close relations between science and morals on the one hand, and poetry and the other imitative arts on the other; but those relations are bound to be misunderstood, to the detriment of both science and morals as well as of poetry, if science and morals are not considered the pillars of civilisation.16

The definition which I suggested, has another implication, or advantage, which I must make explicit.17 I tentatively defined, at the beginning, nihilism as the desire to destroy the present civilisation, modern civilisation. By my second definition I intended to make clear that one cannot call the most radical critic of modern civilisation as such, a nihilist.

Civilisation is the conscious culture of reason. This means that civilisation is not identical with human life or human existence. There were, and there are, many human beings who do not partake of civilisation. Civilisation has a natural basis which it finds, which it does not create, on which it is dependent, and on which it has only a very limited influence. Conquest of nature, if not taken as a highly poetic overstatement, is a nonsensical expression. The natural basis of civilisation shows itself for instance in the fact that all civilised communities as well as uncivilised ones are in need of armed force which they must use against their enemies from without and against the criminals within.

8. I presume, it is not necessary to prove that nihilism in the sense defined is dominant in Germany, and that nihilism characterizes at present Germany more than any other country. Japan, e.g., cannot be as nihilistic as Germany, because Japan has been much less civilised in the sense defined than was Germany. If nihilism is the rejection of the principles of civilisation as such, and if civilisation is based on recognition of the fact that the subject of civilisation is man as man, every interpretation of science and morals in terms of races, or of nations, or of cultures, is strictly speaking nihilistic. Whoever accepts the idea of a Nordic or German or Faustic science, e.g., rejects eo ipso the idea of science. Different "cultures" may have produced different types of "science"; but only one of them can be true, can be science.18 The nihilist implication of the nationalist interpretation of science in particular can be described somewhat differently in the following terms. Civilisation is inseparable from learning, from the desire to learn from anyone who can teach us something worthwhile. The nationalist interpretation of science or philosophy implies that we cannot really learn anything worthwhile from people who do not belong to our nation or our culture. The few Greeks whom we usually have in mind when we speak of the Greeks, were distinguished from the barbarians, so to speak exclusively by their willingness to learn—even from barbarians; whereas the barbarian, the non-Greek barbarian as well as the Greek barbarian, believes that all his questions are solved by, or on the basis of, his ancestral tradition. Naturally, a man who would limit himself to asserting that one nation may have a greater aptitude to understanding phenomena of a certain type than other nations, would not be a
nihilist: not the accidental fate of science or morals, but its essential intention is decisive for the definition of civilisation and therewith of nihilism.

9. The nihilists in general, and the German nihilists in particular reject the principles of civilisation as such. The question arises, in favor of what do the German nihilists reject those principles? I shall try to answer that question to begin with on the basis of Mr. Rauschning's book. This will give me an opportunity to elucidate somewhat more the foregoing definition of nihilism.

Mr. Rauschning has called the foreign and domestic policy of the Nazis "the revolution of nihilism." This means: it is not, as it claims to be, "a new order in the making," but "the wasteful and destructive exploitation of irreplaceable resources, material, mental, and moral, accumulated through generations of fruitful labor" (xi). This would mean that N.S. is nihilistic in its effect, but it does not necessarily mean that it is nihilistic in its intention. What Rauschning says in this passage quoted about the Nazis, might conceivably be* said of the Communist revolution as well. And yet, one cannot call communism a nihilist movement. If the communist revolution is nihilist, it is so in its consequences, but not in its intention. This reminds me of another remark of Rauschning's: he identifies nihilism with the "destruction of all traditional spiritual standards" (xii). What I object to, is the use of the term traditional* in the definition of nihilism. It is evident that not all traditional spiritual standards are, by their nature, beyond criticism and even rejection: we seek what is good, and not what we have inherited, to quote Aristotle. In other words, I believe it is dangerous, if the opponents of National Socialism withdraw to a mere conservatism which defines its ultimate goal by a specific tradition.* The temptation to fall back from an unimpressive present on an impressive past—and every past is as such impressive—is very great indeed. We ought not, however, cede to that temptation, if for no other reason, at least for this that the Western tradition is not so homogeneous as it may appear as long as one is engaged in polemics or in apologetics. To mention one example out of many: the great tradition of which Voltaire is a representative, is hard to reconcile with the tradition of which Bellarmine is a representative, even if both traditions should be equally hostile to National Socialism.* Besides, I wish, Mr. Rauschning had not spoken of spiritual standards; this savours of the view that materialism is essentially nihilistic; I believe that materialism is an error, but I have only to recall the names of Democritus and Hobbes in order to realize that materialism is not essentially nihilistic. Not to mention the fact that a certain anti-materialism or idealism is at the bottom of German nihilism.

Rauschning operates on somewhat safer ground when he stresses the Nazis' lack of any settled aims. He understands then by German nihilism the "permanent revolution of sheer destruction" for the sake of destruction, a "revolution for its own sake" (248). He stresses the "aimlessness" of the Nazis; he says that they have no program except action; that they replace doctrine by tactics (75); he calls their revolution "a revolution without a doctrine" (55); he speaks of the "total
rejection" by the Nazis "of any sort of doctrine" (56). This appears to be an exaggeration. For elsewhere Rauschning says: "One thing National Socialism is not: a doctrine or philosophy. Yet it has a philosophy." (23). Or: "the fight against Judaism, while it is beyond question a central element not only in material considerations, but in those of cultural policy, is part of the party doctrine" (22).21

Their anti-Jewish policy does seem to be taken seriously by the Nazis. But even if it were true, that no single point of the original party program or party doctrine had a more than provisional and tactical meaning, we still should be at a loss to understand a party, a government, a State—not merely without a program or doctrine—but without any aims. For it seems hard to conceive how any human being can act without having an aim. John Dillinger probably had no program, but he doubtless had an aim. In other words: Rauschning has not considered carefully enough the difference between program and aim. If he defines nihilism as a political movement without aims, then he defines a non-entity; if he defines nihilism as a political movement without a program or doctrine, then he would have to call all opportunists nihilists, which would be too uncharitable to be true.22

As a matter of fact, Rauschning does not always deny that the Nazis have aims: "a permanent revolution of sheer destruction by means of which a dictatorship of brute force maintains itself in power" (xtf.). Here, Rauschning states the aim of the Nazis: that aim is their power; they do not destroy in order to destroy, but in order to maintain themselves in power.23 Now, to keep themselves in power, they depend, to a certain extent, on their ability to make their subjects, the Germans, happy, on their ability to satisfy the needs of the Germans. This means, as matters stand, that, in order to maintain themselves in power, they must embark upon a policy of aggression, a policy directed toward world-domination.

Rauschning corrects his remark about the aimlessness of the Nazis by saying "the German aims are indefinite to-day only because they are infinite" (275). Their "goal" is "the world-wide totalitarian empire" (58). They have not only aims, their aims form even a hierarchy leading up to a principal aim: "the principal aim, the redistribution of the world" (229). German nihilism, as described by Rauschning, is then the aspiration to world-dominion exercised by the Germans who are dominated in their turn by a German élite; that aspiration becomes nihilistic, because it uses any means to achieve its end and thus destroys everything which makes life worth living for any decent or intelligent being. However low an opinion we may have of the Nazis, I am inclined to believe that they desire German world-dominion not merely as a means for keeping themselves in power, but that they derive, so to speak, a disinterested pleasure from the prospect of that glamorous goal "Germany ruling the world." I should even go one step further and say that the Nazis probably derive a disinterested pleasure from the aspect of those human qualities which enable nations to conquer. I am certain that the Nazis consider any pilot of a bomber or
any submarine commander absolutely superior in human dignity to any traveling salesman or to any physician or to the representative of any other relatively peaceful occupation. For, a German nihilist much more intelligent and much more educated than Hitler himself has stated: "What kind of minds are those who do not even know this much that no mind can be more profound and more knowing than that of any soldier who fell anywhere at the Somme or in Flanders? This is the standard of which we are in need." ("Was aber sind das für Geister, die noch nicht einmal wissen, dass kein Geist tiefer und wissender sein kann als der jedes beliebigen Soldaten, der irgendwo an der Somme oder in Flandern fiel? Dies ist der Massstab, dessen wir bedürftig sind." Jünger, Der Arbeiter, 201.)

24 The admiration of the warrior as a type, the unconditional preference given to the warrior as warrior, is however not only genuine in German nihilism: it is even its distinctive feature. Our question: in favor of what does German nihilism reject the principles of civilisation as such must therefore be answered by the statement: that it rejects those principles in favor of the military virtues. This is what Mr. Rauschning must have had in mind when speaking of "heroic nihilism"(21).

War is a destructive business. And if war is considered more noble than peace, if war, and not peace, is considered the aim, the aim is for all practical purposes nothing other than destruction. There is reason for believing that the business of destroying, and killing, and torturing is a source of an almost disinterested pleasure to the Nazis as such, that they derive a genuine pleasure from the aspect of the strong and ruthless who subjugate, exploit, and torture the weak and helpless.

10. German nihilism rejects then the principles of civilisation as such in favor of war and conquest, in favor of the warlike virtues. German nihilism is therefore akin to German militarism. This compels us to raise the question what militarism is. Militarism can be identified as the view expressed by the older Moltke in these terms: "Eternal peace is a dream, and not even a beautiful one." To believe that eternal peace is a dream, is not militarism, but perhaps plain commonsense; it is at any rate not bound up with a particular moral taste. But to believe that eternal peace is not a beautiful dream, is tantamount to believing that war is something desirable in itself; and to believe that war is something desirable in itself, betrays a cruel, inhuman disposition. The view that war is good in itself, implies the rejection of the distinction between just and unjust wars, between wars of defence and wars of aggression. It is ultimately irreconcilable with the very idea of a law of nations.

11. German nihilism is akin to German militarism, but it is not identical* with it. Militarism always made at least the attempt* to reconcile the ideal of war with Kultur; nihilism however* is based on the assumption that Kultur is finished. Militarism always recognized that the virtues of peace are of equal dignity, or almost equal dignity, with the virtues of war. When denying that the rules of decency cannot be applied to foreign policy, it never denied the validity
potential of those rules as regards home policy or private life. It never asserted that science is essentially national; it merely asserted that the Germans happen to be the teachers of the lesser breeds. German nihilism on the other hand asserts that the military virtues, and in particular courage as the ability to bear any physical pain, the virtue of the red Indian, is the only virtue left (see Jünger’s essay on pain in Blätter und Steine). The only virtue left: the implication is that we live in an age of decline, of the decline of the West, in an age of civilisation as distinguished from, and opposed to culture; or in an age of mechanic society as distinguished from, and opposed to, organic community. In that condition of debasement, only the most elementary virtue, the first virtue, that virtue with which man and human society stands and falls, is capable to grow. Or, to express the same view somewhat differently: in an age of utter corruption, the only remedy possible is to destroy the edifice of corruption—“das System”—and to return to the uncorrupted and incorruptible origin, to the condition of potential,* and not actual, culture or civilisation: the characteristic virtue of that stage of merely potential* culture or civilisation, of the state of nature, is courage and nothing else. German nihilism is then a radicalized form of German militarism, and that radicalization is due to the fact that during the last generation the romantic judgment about the whole modern development, and therefore in particular about the present, has become much more generally accepted than it ever was even in 19th century Germany.*27 By romantic judgment, I understand a judgment which is guided by the opinion that an absolutely superior order of human things existed during some period of the recorded past.

12. However great the difference between German militarism and German nihilism may be: the kinship of the two aspirations is obvious. German militarism is the father of German nihilism. A thorough understanding of German nihilism would therefore require a thorough understanding of German militarism. Why has Germany such a particular aptitude for militarism? A few, extremely sketchy remarks must here suffice.

To explain German militarism, it is not sufficient to refer to the fact that German civilisation is considerably younger than the civilisation of the Western nations, that Germany is therefore perceptibly nearer to barbarism than are the Western countries. For the civilisation of the Slavonic nations is still younger than that of the Germans, and the Slavonic nations do not appear to be as militaristic as are* the Germans. To discover the root of German militarism, it might be wiser to disregard the prehistory* of German civilisation, and to look at the history of German civilisation itself. Germany reached the hey-day of her letters and her thought during the period from 1760 to 1830; i.e. after the elaboration of the ideal of modern civilisation had been finished almost completely, and while a revision of that ideal, or a reaction to that ideal, took place. The ideal of modern civilisation is of English and French origin; it is not of German origin. What the meaning of that ideal is, is, of course, a highly controversial question. If I am not greatly mistaken, one can define the tendency of the intellectual development
which as it were exploded in the French Revolution, in the following terms: to lower the moral standards, the moral claims, which previously had been made by all responsible teachers, but to take better care than those earlier teachers had done, for the putting into practice, into political and legal practice, of the rules of human conduct. The way in which this was most effectually achieved, was the identification of morality with an attitude of claiming one's rights, or with enlightened self-interest, or the reduction of honesty to the best policy; or the solution of the conflict between common interest and private interest by means of industry and trade. (The two most famous philosophers: Descartes, his générosité, and no justice, no duties; Locke: where there is no property, there is no justice.) Against that debasement of morality, and against the concomitant decline of a truly philosophic spirit, the thought of Germany stood up, to the lasting honour of Germany. It was however precisely this reaction to the spirit of the 17th and 18th century which laid the foundation for German militarism as far as it is an intellectual phenomenon. Opposing the identification of the morally good with the object of enlightened self-interest however enlightened, the German philosophers insisted on the difference* between the morally good and self-interest, between the honestum and the* utile; they insisted on self-sacrifice* and self-denial;* they insisted on it so much, that they were apt to forget the natural aim of man which is happiness; happiness and utility as well as commonsense (Verständigkeit) became almost bad names in German philosophy. Now, the difference between the noble and the useful, between duty and self-interest is most visible in the case of one virtue, courage, military virtue: the consummation of the actions of every other virtue is, or may be, rewarded; it actually pays to be just, temperate, urbane, munificent etc.; the consummation of the actions of courage, i.e. death on the field of honour, death for one's country, is never rewarded: it is the flower of self-sacrifice.28 Courage is the only unambiguously unutilitarian virtue. In defending menaced morality, i.e. non-mercenary morality, the German philosophers were tempted to overstress the dignity of military virtue, and in very important cases, in the cases of Fichte, Hegel, and Nietzsche, they succumbed to that temptation. In this and in various other ways, German philosophy created a peculiarly German tradition of contempt for commonsense and the aims of human life, as they are visualized by commonsense.

However deep the difference between German philosophy and the philosophy of the Western countries may be: German philosophy ultimately conceived of itself as a synthesis of the pre-modern ideal and the ideal of the modern period. That synthesis did not work: in the 2nd half of the 19th century, it was overrun by Western positivism, the natural child of the enlightenment. Germany had been educated by her philosophers in contempt of Western philosophy (Je méprise Locke, is a saying of Schelling's); she now observed that the synthesis effected by her philosophers, of the pre-modern ideal and the modern ideal did not work; she saw no way out except to purify German thought completely from the influence of the ideas of modern civilisation, and to return to the pre-
modern ideal. National Socialism is the most famous, because the most vulgar, example of such a return to a pre-modern ideal. On its highest level, it was a return to what may be called the pre-literary stage of philosophy, pre-socratic philosophy. On all levels, the pre-modern ideal was not a real pre-modern ideal, but a pre-modern ideal as interpreted* by the German idealists, i.e. interpreted with a polemic intention against the philosophy of the 17th and 18th century, and therefore distorted.29

Of all German philosophers, and indeed of all philosophers, none exercised a greater influence on post-war Germany, none was more responsible for the emergence of German nihilism, than was Nietzsche. The relation of Nietzsche to the German Nazi* revolution is comparable to the relation of Rousseau to the French revolution. That is to say: by interpreting Nietzsche in the light of the German revolution, one is very unjust to Nietzsche, but one is not absolutely unjust. It may not be amiss to quote one or the other passage from Beyond Good and Evil, which are related to our subject: “That is no philosophic race, these Englishmen. Bacon represents an attack on the philosophic spirit as such. Hobbes, Hume and Locke are a degradation and debasement of the very concept of “philosopher” for more than a century. Against Hume, Kant stood up and stood out. It was Locke, of whom Schelling was entitled* to say Je méprise Locke. In the fight against English mechanist interpretation of nature [Newton], Hegel and Schopenhauer and Goethe were unanimous.” “That what one calls the modern ideas, or the ideas of the 18th century, or even the French ideas, that ideal, in a word, against which the German spirit stood up with profound disgust—it is of English origin, there can be no doubt about that. The French have merely been the imitators and actors of those ideas, besides their best soldiers, and also, unfortunately, their first and most complete victims.” (aph. 252 f.) I believe that Nietzsche is substantially correct in asserting that the* German tradition is very critical of the ideals of modern civilisation, and those ideals are of English origin. He forgets however to add that the English almost always had the very un-German prudence and moderation not to throw out the baby with the bath, i.e. the prudence to conceive of the modern ideals as a reasonable adaptation of the old and eternal ideal of decency, of rule of law, and of that liberty which is not license, to changed circumstances. This taking things easy, this muddling through, this crossing the bridge when one comes to it, may have done some harm to the radicalism of English thought; but it proved to be a blessing to English life; the English never indulged in those radical breaks with traditions which played such a role on the continent. Whatever may be wrong with the peculiarly modern ideal: the very Englishmen who originated it, were at the same time versed in the classical tradition, and the English always kept in store a substantial amount of the necessary counter-poison. While the English originated the modern ideal—the pre-modern ideal, the classical ideal of humanity, was no where better preserved than in Oxford and Cambridge.30
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[Editors’ note: following this, the sentence “Whatever may be the outcome of this war, it are the English, and not the Germans, who deserve to have an empire” has been crossed out. A “+” sign above it refers to a handwritten paragraph at the bottom of the page, indicating it should be inserted as a replacement at this point in the text.]

The present Anglo-German war is then of symbolic significance. In defending modern civilisation against German nihilism, the English are defending the eternal principles of civilisation. No one can tell what will be the outcome of this war. But this much is clear beyond any doubt: by choosing Hitler for their leader in the crucial moment, in which the question of who is to exercise military rule became the order of the day, the Germans ceased to have any rightful claim to be more than a provincial nation; it is the English, and not the Germans, who deserve to be, and to remain, an imperial nation: [Editors’ note: at this point the handwritten insertion ends, and the typescript continues] for only the English, and not the Germans, have understood that in order to exercise imperial rule, regere imperio populos, one must have learned for a very long time to spare the vanquished and to crush the arrogant: parcere subjectis et debellare superbos.31

NOTES

1. The typescript reads “and to describe, on the basis of that definition”: a handwritten sign indicates the order should be reversed.

2. The typescript reads “I could not call that desire morbid.” The words “a” before the word “morbid” and the word “desire” following it have been added by hand.


4. Preceding “Moral life” is a sentence beginning with a few illegible handwritten words and continuing in typewriting with “the typical representation of the open society is believed to be Hollywood.” Both the handwritten words and the typewritten sentence have been crossed out.

   The words “—the flag and the oath to the flag—” have been inserted by hand.

   Comma after “existence” inserted by hand.

5. The words “., it is asserted,” have been inserted by hand.

   Above the word “recognized,” the word “faced” has been added by hand, possibly as an alternative.

   The typescript reads “generations who called a spade a spade.” The words “used to” have been inserted by hand, while the last two letters of “called” have been crossed out.

   “e.g.” added by hand to replace “i.e.” which has been crossed out.

   At the end of the sentence, the words “or by calling capital punishment Strafmass” have been added by hand.

6. After “inssofar as the sovereign state” the typescript includes “[. . .]., the perfect society which does not have a superior, [. . .],” which has been crossed out.

   “offers’ replaces “is,” which has been crossed out.

   “the best modern example,” added by hand, replaces “the only important contemporary example,” which has been crossed out.

   In the typescript, “endangered morality” is followed by the sentence “If there should be a cynic
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in our midst, he probably would call that love of morality an unhappy or unrequited love,” which has been bracketed and crossed out by hand.

The typescript reads “But the historians [ . . . ] “But” has been crossed out, while the “I” in “the” has been capitalized by hand.

Commas after “conviction,” “passion,” and “city of pigs” inserted by hand.

For Glaukon’s protest, see Republic, 372c–d; see also Leo Strauss, The City and Man (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1964), pp. 93–96.

In the typescript, “It was the same passion” is preceded by “The same passion turned,” which has been crossed out.

Comma after “less intelligent form” inserted by hand.

Quotation marks have been added by hand around “the subhuman . . . Grossstadt” and “cultural bolshevism (Kulturbolischevismus).”

The passage “as is shown by the examples of Plato and Rousseau, if examples are needed at all” has been added by hand at the bottom of the typescript, with a sign indicating it should be inserted at this point.

“was” added by hand to replace “is,” which has been crossed out.

“a sound demand” was added by hand to replace “basically sound,” which has been crossed out.

Parentheses around “One . . . facts” have been added by hand.

In the typescript, “sound” has been crossed out and replaced, by hand, by “not entirely un-

sound.”

Page 5 of the typescript carries the title “German Nihilism,” followed by two paragraphs which largely repeat the first two paragraphs above. Both the title and the two paragraphs have been crossed out. Presumably, this is where a first draft of the typescript began. Professor Strauss probably added the first four pages later on: after the two deleted paragraphs, the text continues with a paragraph marked “4,” suggesting that he intended to skip the original beginning and continue the lecture at this point. With a view to completeness, the editors have included the two paragraphs below:

German Nihilism

1. (crossed out) What is nihilism? And how far can nihilism be said to be a specifically German phenomenon? I shall try—not indeed to answer these questions, but to elaborate them a little. For the phenomenon with which I have to deal, is much too complex to permit of an adequate description within the short time at my disposal. I cannot do more than to scratch the surface. I thank in advance the discussion speakers who will, no doubt, help me and the passive part of the audience toward greater clarity about a phenomenon which is so important to all of us.

2. (crossed out) When we hear at the present time the expression “German nihilism,” most of us naturally think at once of National Socialism. It must however be understood from the outset that National Socialism is only one form of German nihilism—its lowest, most provincial, most unintelli-
gent and most dishonourable form. It is probably its very lowness which accounts for its great, if appalling, successes. These successes may be followed by failures and ultimately by complete defeat. Yet the defeat of National Socialism will not necessarily mean the end of German nihilism. For that nihilism has deeper roots than the preachings of Hitler, Germany’s defeat in the (“First” crossed out) World War and all that.


“emotions” added by hand to replace the word “feelings,” which has been crossed out. Under-

lining added by hand.

8. The typescript has “backward,” with the latter part crossed out.

Above “interesting,” the word “alluring” has been added by hand, possibly as an alternative.

“the withering away of the State,” has been inserted by hand.

“spiritual” has been added by hand to replace “material,” which has been crossed out.

“material” has been added by hand to replace “spiritual,” which has been crossed out.

“Wir aber stehen mitten im Experiment; wir treiben Dinge, die durch keine Erfahrung begründet sind. Söhne, Enkel und Urenkel von Gottlosen, denen selbst der Zweifel verdächtig geworden ist, marschieren wir durch Landschaften, die das Leben mit höheren und tieferen Temperaturen bedrohen.” Ernst Jünger, Der Arbeiter; Herrschaft und Gestalt (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlaganstalt,
1932), pp. 193–94; Werke: Essays II (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1963), Bd. 6, p. 214). ["We, however, stand in the middle of the experiment; we are attempting things that have no foundation in experience. Sons, grandsons and great-grandsons of godless men, to whom even doubt has become suspect, we march through landscapes that threaten life with higher and lower temperatures" (our translation).]

Above "latest," the word "last" has been added by hand, possibly as an alternative.
Comma after "clear language" added by hand.
"the" before "potentialities" added to replace "its" which has been crossed out.
The words "-anarchist-pacifist" have been inserted by hand.
9. The underlining of the first "if" has been crossed-out.
Colon after "in other words" inserted by hand.
"they admitted" inserted by hand.

After "all rational argument" the typescript continues "[. . . ] they knew of, i.e. all historical argument, i.e. all statements, based on analysis of the previous development and of the present situation, about the probable future [. . .]." This part of the sentence has been crossed out. It recurs, with some modifications, in the next sentence.
"was," after "all rational argument" added by hand, replaces "were," which has been crossed out.

The words "For that modern," together with the previous sentence, have been inserted in the typescript by hand.
The sentence reading "astrology [. . .] academic youth" has been inserted by hand at the bottom of the page, with a sign indicating it should be inserted at this point in the text.
This last sentence has been inserted by hand at the bottom of the page, with a "+-" sign indicating it should be added to the previous sentence.
10. "S" added by hand to replace "3."
"un-" added by hand to "able" after "constitutional."
"as" inserted by hand to replace "who," which has been crossed out.
The section reading "of the political [. . .] the fact" has been added by hand to replace the section "on the results of the elections, of what was," which has been crossed out.
"children's vote" has been added by hand to replace "suffrage of children," which has been crossed out.
"not in all" added by hand to replace "in some," which has been crossed out.
"ever" added by hand after "senility" to replace "was never," which has been crossed out.
"however short" inserted by hand.
The long passage, "I have [. . .] Social Research," has been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a sign indicating it should be inserted after "Hindenburg."
"asserted" added by hand to replace "showed," which has been crossed out.
"more" is a surmise of the editors, as the word is difficult to read.
11. Illegible word following "Schmitt" added by hand above the line.
The typescript reads "Juenger," but as Professor Strauss uses "Jünger" further on, the editors have changed the spelling throughout.
"seemed" replaces "seems," of which the last letter has been crossed out.
The words "consist of pueris decanata, of" have been added and underlined by hand, to replace "be," which has been crossed out.
The typescript reads "principles" before "of progress": the "s" has been crossed out.
The sentence reading "For technical perfection [. . .]. Or, if you wish," has been added by hand to replace the single word "For," which has been crossed out.
"The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk." (Hegel, Philosophy of Right [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975], p. 13.)
"after the defeat in Flanders" is a typewritten insertion.
"Their Finest Hour" (a speech delivered first by Winston S. Churchill to the House of Commons and then broadcast, June 18, 1940), in Into Battle (London: Cassell and Company, 1943), pp. 225–34.


"History" added by hand to replace "the world mind," which has been crossed out.

"who" after "midwife" added by hand to replace "which," which has been crossed out.

The "H" in "History" has been capitalized by hand.

The sentence "For if reason" has been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a "+" sign indicating it should be inserted at this point in the text, with "reason" added by hand, to replace "it," which has been crossed out.

"the very highest power of man," has been inserted by hand.


13. "7." inserted by hand to replace "5."

In the typescript, "a" has been changed to "an" before "orderly."

The words "for I know [. .] forgiven" have been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a "+" sign indicating it should be inserted at this point in the text. Parentheses have been inserted by the editors for reasons of clarity.


Commas preceding and following the words "and enjoy" have been added by hand.

15. The typescript reads "[man]'s place in the universe," which has been crossed out in favor of "the universe and man."

"from time to time" is a typewritten insertion.

Semi-colon after "this or that man" inserted by hand.

In the typescript, "inability" is followed by "to bear, and," which has been crossed out.

"or other" is a typewritten insertion.

16. In the typescript, "with" is followed by the word "disinterested," which has been crossed out.

Commas after "discipline" and "assert" inserted by hand.

17. Comma after "advantage" inserted by hand.

18. "8." inserted by hand to replace "6."

The sentence reading "Japan . . . Germany" has been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a sign indicating where it should be inserted in the text.

"or" added by hand to replace "and," which has been crossed out, before both "of nations' and "of cultures."

The sentence reading "Different cultures . . . science" has been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a sign indicating where it should be inserted in the text.

19. "9." inserted by hand to replace "7."


20. "and even rejection" has been inserted by hand.


"—and every past is as such impressive—" has been inserted by hand.

"Bellarmine" has been added by hand to replace "Bossuet," which has been crossed out.

21. Comma after "Judaism" added by the editors in conformity with the text of Rauschning.

22. The typescript reads "had probably": a handwritten sign indicates that the order should be reversed.

The typescript reads "had doubtless": a handwritten sign indicates that the order should be reversed.

John Dillinger (1902–34) was a famous American bank robber in the twenties and thirties.

"a political movement without" has been added by hand to replace the words "lack of," which have been crossed out.
"non-entity" has been added by hand to replace "chimaera," which has been crossed out.
a political movement without” has been added by hand to replace “lack of,” which has been crossed out.
“would have” has been added by hand to replace “had,” which has been crossed out.
Comma inserted by hand after “destroy.”
23. “:” has been added after “aims” by the editors for reasons of clarity.
Comma inserted by hand after “destroy.”
24. “form” has been added by typewriter to replace “have,” which has been crossed out.
The typescript continues after “salesman” with “with the possible exception of their foreign minister,” which has been crossed out.
Comma after “For” inserted by hand.
“even” is a typewritten insertion.
“Das” instead of “Dies” in the German text (see Ernst Jünger, Der Arbeiter, 1932, p. 201; Werke, Bd. 6, 1963, p. 221).
25. The typescript has “destruction,” after “the business of” with the latter part crossed out and corrected by hand.
26. “Der ewige Friede ist ein Traum, und nicht einmal ein schöner, und der Krieg ein Glied in Gottes Weltsordnung. In ihm entfalten sich die edelsten Tugenden des Menschen, Muth und Entschluss, Pflichttreue und Opferwilligkeit mit Einsetzung des Lebens. Ohne den Krieg würde die Welt im Materialismus versumpfen.” (“Permanent peace is a dream, and not even a beautiful one, and war is a law of God’s order in the world, by which the noblest virtues of man, courage and self-denial, loyalty and self-sacrifice, even to the point of death, are developed. Without war the world would deteriorate into materialism.”) Letter to Dr. J. K. Bluntschi, 11 December 1880, in Field-Marshals Count Helmuth von Moltke as a Correspondent, trans. Mary Herms (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893), p. 272. German text: Helmuth von Moltke, Gesammelte Schriften und Denkwürdigkeiten (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1892), Bd. 5, p. 194.
27. “made” replaces the word “recognized,” which has been crossed out.
"—das System—" has been inserted by hand.
28. Comma after “To explain German militarism” inserted by hand.
"militarism." in “To discover the root of “ is a typewritten insertion, replacing the word “civilisation,” which has been crossed out.
"the history of” has been inserted by hand.
Semi-colon after “best policy” inserted by hand.
In the typescript only the parenthesis at the end of “The two most famous …” is printed. The lapidary style of the sentence, however, suggests that Professor Strauss intended this to be an aside remark. For this reason, the editors have added the opening parenthesis. Above the words “The two most famous,” there is a sign referring to a handwritten note at the bottom of the page, reading “Cf. also More’s “hedonistic” utopia ≠ Plato’s austere Republic.”
In the typescript, “honour of Germany” is followed by a sentence which has been crossed out entirely: “But the way in which this reaction was effected, was too much determined by the polemic attitude against the enlightenment.”
“the object of enlightened” has been inserted by hand.
“as well as commonsense (Verständigkeit)” has been inserted by hand.
In the margin of the typescript, next to the sentence “Opposing philosophy” there is a sign referring to a handwritten note at the bottom of the page, reading “An amusing example in Grote’s History of Greece, vol. 8, Everyman, p. 342, n. 1.” The editors were unable to trace the reference to Grote’s History of Greece.
Before “flower,” the word “fine” has been crossed out.
29. “modern” before “civilisation” has been added by typewriter to replace “Western,” which has been crossed out.
Before “real,” the word “return” has been crossed out in the typescript.
“interpreted” after “i.e.” has been inserted by typewriter.
Interpretation

The words “and therefore distorted” have been added by hand.

30. The words “It may [. . .] from” have been inserted by hand to replace “In his,” which has been crossed out.

The words “[. . .] subject” have been inserted by hand, to replace “we read,” which has been crossed out.

Brackets around “Newton” have been added by hand.

“in a word” has been added by hand, to replace “therefore,” which has been crossed out.

Commas have been added by the editors.

“stood up” has been inserted by hand to replace “arose,” which has been crossed out.

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil, 252–53.*

Above the word “radicalism,” the word “profoundness” has been added by hand, possibly as an alternative.

“—” has been inserted by hand, to replace a comma.

In the typescript, “the” before “classical” is followed by “ideal of,” which has been crossed out.

31. Following “doubt:” the sentence “it are the English, and not the Germans, who deserve to be an imperial nation” has been crossed out.

“populos” has been inserted by hand. See Virgil, *Aeneid, VI, 851.*

The words “to spare the vanquished and to crush the arrogant” have been added by hand beneath the text with a sign. See Virgil, *Aeneid, VI, 853.* After “*superbos*” the following handwritten words have been crossed out: “*; not the way of Ariovistus, but only the way of Caesar and Augustus is the road to empire.*"
Tractatus Liquorico-Philosophicus,
by Sigmund Steinkopf

JOSEPH J. CARPINO

Interpretation is publishing this work in honor and memory of Professor Joseph J. Carpino (1930–1998). He is already known to readers of this journal as an able author and translator. His gift for humorous philosophical parody has also been long known to the circle of his friends. With the publication of this work, that delightful gift will now become known to the readers of this journal as well.

Hilail Gildin, Editor

1.* A drunk is anyone who has been drinking.
1.1 A drunk is the sum-total of drinks, not of alcohol.
1.11 The drunk is determined by the drinks, and by their all having been swallowed.
1.12 For the totality of drinks determines what kind of drinking has been going on and also what the hangover will be like.
1.13 The drinks in the nervous system are the drunk.
1.2 The drunk dissolves into drinks.
1.21 An individual can be drinking—or hung over while everything else remains the same.

2. Having been drinking—drinks—makes for a state of intoxication.
2.01 Intoxication (drunkenness) is an assimilation of booze (alcohol).
2.011 It is essential to alcohol that it be a possible cause of intoxication.
2.012 In life nothing is accidental: if alcohol can result in intoxication, the possibility of intoxication must be ascribed to the alcohol itself.
2.0121 It would be most peculiar if it turned out that intoxication could result from alcohol that remains still in the bottle.

If alcohol can produce a state of intoxication, this possibility must be in it from the beginning.
Interpretation

2.0123 If I know about booze I also know about all its possible production of intoxication.

(Every one of these possibilities must be part of the nature of the booze.)

There are no new ways of getting drunk.

2.01231 If I am to know what to expect from a bottle of booze, I need not know the brand but I must know its alcoholic content.

2.0124 If all booze is present, then at the same time all possible states of intoxication are also present.

2.014 Booze contains the possibility of all inebriation.

2.0141 The possibility of its producing a state of intoxication is the essence of booze.

2.02 Booze is straight liquor.

2.0201 All discussion of mixed drinks can be resolved into a listing of what went into them.

2.021 Booze makes the drunk what he is. That is why they cannot be separated.

2.0271 Booze is what remains the same in drinking; how much and how fast is what is different.

2.0272 How much booze and how fast is what produces drunkenness.

2.03 In intoxication drinks follow one another like links of a chain.

2.04 The totality of actual inebriation constitutes the drunk.

2.05 The sum-total of separate intoxications also determines the number of hangovers.

2.051 Continuous intoxication, a binge, therefore gives the illusion of fewer hangovers.

2.06 Actual intoxication and subsequent hangovers is the reality.

(Drinking is pleasant and hangovers are painful.)

2.062 From the pleasure of drunkenness it is impossible to infer the pain of a hangover.

2.0621 Also vice versa.

2.063 The sum-total of liquor is the drunk.

2.1 We choose drinks for ourselves.

2.101 As in “What’ll you have?”

2.12 A “choice” is for a kind of liquor.

2.121 But when someone else is buying we’ll drink whatever he’s pouring. After all:

2.141 A drink is a drink.
2.1511 That is how a thirst is attached to liquor; it reaches right out to it.

2.221 What the need for a drink indicates is a time.

2.2211 Some times are better than others for drinking.

2.2212 When the liquor stores are closed is the worst.

2.225 There are no needs that can satisfy themselves.

3. The vital need for a drink is a thirst.

3.01 The totality of satisfied thirsts is the need of the drunk.

3.02 A thirst implies the potability of the beverage for which it is the thirst. What is thirst-worthy is potable too.

3.021 Not everything that is potable is worth drinking. Drinks that come in coconuts, with leaves hanging out of them, are to be avoided. (They won’t kill you, but they’re embarrassing.)

3.022 Water is potable, but as Fields pointed out, fish make love in it.

3.0221 Sometimes people make love in water, but not heavy drinkers.

3.031 It used to be said that a good bartender can make any drink you can name—the reason being that you can’t ask for a nameless drink.

3.04 If a thirst could quench itself it would be a thirst that found its satisfaction in the mere objective potability of alcohol.

3.05 A self-quenching thirst is a desire not to drink, and it can be actualized only in the continued anguish of sobriety (without even a shot, now and then, to relieve it).

3.14 What constitutes a slug or a shot is that it is an element (a “part”) standing in a determinate relation to others of the same.

A slug or a shot is a drink.

3.1401 When a shot is “knocked back,” never touching the tongue, it is the sign of serious drinking. Especially when the drinker is standing.

3.1402 When a shot is a “part,” as in a martini, it is never alone and can also be the beginning of some serious drinking.

Especially when the martini is “up.”

3.14021 Martinis with ice in them are, like scotch with ginger ale, a profanation. A martini must have “known” the ice, but it may not cohabitate with it.

3.14022 Even so, you can get drunk on them, so be careful.
3.15 The formula, by the way, for "a good martini" (as in "tee martoonis please") is a matter of some controversy. Originally probably two parts of gin (G) to one of vermouth (V)—a ratio preserved in the standard manhattan (SM)—it has become "classically" 3G + V or 4G + V.

3.151 There are those, however, who feel that the vermouth should stand optimally in an asymptotic relationship to the gin, approaching but never quite achieving presence in the glass.

They argue as follows:

The primal formula should be expressed *not* as 2G + V, as is commonly supposed, but as \( \frac{2G}{V} \), the vermouth in fact diluting the gin, making it taste like wine. (The same argument applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the addition of an olive, with its brine.)

Thus, they say, the proper formula for a martini is:

\[
M = nG + \frac{V}{n},
\]

with goodness approaching greatness as \( n \) increases indefinitely.

3.152 This, however, is a fallacy. The error becomes apparent when we approach the relationship intuitively and, as it were, concretely.

\[
G \quad \text{-----------} \quad G
\]

\[
\quad \text{v}
\]

\[
M = \frac{G}{V}
\]

This representation allows for an indeterminate but *finite* addition of more G's inserted *within the limits* set by the vermouth—which, after all, defines the martini and distinguishes it from gin on the rocks (G|G) or straight gin (G|G).

3.153 It will be noted that in addition to being essential for tradition, an olive can be extremely useful for keeping tally (on the principle that when the olives have filled the glass it's time to taper off).

3.1531 The lemon peel in a so-called dry martini would work the same, but the little pearl onions in a gibson require a lot of arithmetic.

3.2 In a mixed drink the thirst is articulated in such a way that the component "parts" correspond to the complexities of the thirst.
3.2011  By such an accounting, scotch and soda is a mixed drink.

3.323   In everyday language it frequently happens that the same word has different meanings.

Thus the word “alcohol” means booze; but it also figures as a coolant, as in “alcohol rub,” as well as a solvent, as in shellac. These usages must not be confused: we do not speak of a booze rub.

(In the proposition “Gin is gin”—where the first word stands for “bar gin” and the last for an effect—these words have only different meanings; they are the same thing.)

3.3231  What is essential to booze (grain alcohol) can be expressed in the formula for ethanol: $C_2H_5OH$ (also known as $CH_3CH_2OH$).

This must not be confused with wood alcohol or methanol ($CH_3OH$), however similar their symbolic representations may seem.

3.3232  Methanol is readily oxidized to produce formaldehyde ($2CH_3OH + O_2 \rightarrow 2CH_2O + 2H_2O$), which is why drunks are sometimes referred to as “pickled.”

3.3233  The differences among these alcohols are crucial. Wood alcohol, for example, must never be swallowed.

3.324   In that way the most fundamental illnesses are easily produced (the detoxification wards of hospitals are full of them).

3.34   A mixed drink is made up of essential and accidental components.

Accidental components are those entailed in the particular way in which the slug or shot is disguised. Essential components are those without which the mixed drink could not achieve its purpose.

3.341  So what is essential to a mixed drink is what all mixed drinks have in common.

And similarly, in general, what is essential to a glass is that it’s a place to put the mixture.

3.3411  Glasses, in other words, are essential for holding a mixed drink.

3.3412  But without alcohol, it’s all just fruit punch.

4.  A social drink is drinking from a glass with others.

4.001  The totality of such drinking from a glass is a party.

4.002  Men possess the ability to have a party with almost anybody, so long as booze is present.

Parties every day are what the heavy drinker wants, but the human organism can’t take it.

It is not humanly possible to gather immediately from it what the purpose of the party was.
Most of the excuses and objections to be found in discussions of drinking are not false but irrelevant. Consequently we cannot answer objections of this kind but can only establish that they are irrelevant. Most of the excuses and objections of people who talk about drinking arise from their failure to understand the dynamics of a party.

(They belong to the same class as the question whether food is more or less enjoyable than sex.)

And it is not surprising that the deepest analyses of drinking are in fact not analyses at all.

An excuse is a thirst for liquor.
An excuse is an occasion for liquor to be drunk.

People drink to lose consciousness.

This is what was implied in Fields's insistence that "I only drink to steady my nerves," with its corollary that "Sometimes my nerves get so steady I can't even move."

But a total loss of consciousness is at best sleep and at worst a coma. Sleep can be desired and is even a reason for drinking. A coma is very dangerous and the result of severe miscalculation.

Another form of loss of consciousness is the hiatus, which is also very dangerous and also the result of miscalculation. The hiatus is a portion of time (and presumably of drinking) for which there is no record in the memory banks.

This is not to be confused with not wanting to remember, a common component of hangovers (of which more later).

In the hiatus one lives, moves, and breathes (with some difficulty) and even responds to stimuli—some guys can even drive home!—with no awareness of what's going on. That's bad. What then is good about the loss of consciousness which is sought in drinking?

What the drinker seeks is loss of self-consciousness, an unawareness of the self as an object.

Look at drunks. They are monadic consciousesses, totally absorbed in the playing out of their perceptions and volitions with no regard for their own perceivability.

This of course is what the Athenian Stranger refers to in Book I of the Laws (649), but it has epistemological implications beneath the political. The drinker is a living solipsist, and analysis of the drunk is a discussion of the soul as monad.

Leibniz himself was probably never drunk in his life, but that's his problem. Besides, it makes his testimony all the more useful.
In vino veritas is another half-truth.

Or rather, a complex of truths. The thing which is revealed in drunkenness is the thrust of the soul naked, its inner entelechy untrammelled by considerations of objectivity. This much is obvious—again, as per Laws I. And it is the reason why we say, "Some guys just shouldn’t drink." But there is also a truth within the drunk.

The soul is a something which interacts with the other, and among these others are the residues and debris, within us, of prior interactions. (Thus the temptation, working back in the series of accretions, to speak of the soul at birth as a tabula rasa.) But in drunkenness the soul is freed of this baggage and is able to flit about among its perceptions without the harness of the past. Or so it seems.

There are of course other modalities of disengagement from the baggage of the past and the limitations of the present. Any violent passion will do it (and they are sometimes chosen for that very reason) and dreaming is perhaps its purest form, with sleep the least expensive intoxicant.

But in dreams the soul is hidden. We cannot observe them and the dreamer is a member of them. And when he later remembers them it is always in terms of a nondreaming system of objectivities.

There is also poetry. Poetic "inspiration" also entails a disengagement from the given, from the brutish objectivities of life and the received formalities of language itself. But poetic inspiration can produce a result—the poem— independent of itself. The mauldering of drunks is shrivelled in the light of day.

In any case, drunkenness is pure monadic consciousness—or the closest we can come to it with still some hope of getting out. It is the working out of the will’s intentionalities without the limitations of anything extrinsic.

That is why booze is so helpful at parties. Windowless monads don’t impinge on one another, and the sociability of social drinking is grounded precisely in the isolated character of the drinking consciousness. Inebriation is a chosen madness, a temporary idiocy, and the successful party a careful Bedlam within the walls of time.

Two things emerge clearly.

First, drunkenness is of the soul. Only animated things get drunk. Mud and sand do not get drunk and neither does nous. People get drunk and maybe animals, but not machines.

And second: Time is the basic dimension of verification.
For what is a hangover but the realization that it is the same organism this morning which said all those stupid things last night?

And if you can’t remember what you said, be assured it was stupid.

Indeed, if an a priori thought is a thought whose possibility ensures its truth, there is no greater self-evidence than the hiatus.

The hangover, in short, is the revelation of our being through change, and its anguish a paradigm of the temporal character of verification. (Cf. the throbbing in the temples.)

Machines can mimic verification, and nous (or logic) has no need of it. But we have verification imposed on us by having to take the responsibility now for what “seemed like a good idea” then. Thus $S$ is $P$ is true if and only if $S$ is still $P$.

Truth, in short, is a function of living through change, not of comparing a this (thought, inside) with a that (thing, out there). Drunks do that all the time, and there is no truth in them.

One of the reasons for this—or manifestations of it—is the timelessness of drunken consciousness. Drinking makes the time pass more quickly (as cigarettes punctuate it) precisely because its moments, in the free spontaneous flow of monadic consciousness, are not connected. That is the consciousness which we seek to lose, the connectedness of the web of objective change. (See 4.13 and 1.21 above.) The rest is secondary.

Drunkenness breaks the bonds of memory and perception. This is what it has in common with poetic insight, this disengagement. But its “creativity” is illusory; its bond-breaking only negative. The next day there is nothing; poetic inspiration might result in something new.

The solipsism then of drunkenness refutes itself. Or rather: if solipsism were “true,” drunkenness would be indistinguishable from sobriety. Or better yet: if we make the rules (solipsism), why change them only for the sake of a hangover?

And if nominalism (or empiricism) provided an adequate epistemology, why are drunks so foolish? Is there in alcohol a principle of dissociation of ideas?

And if men were but instances of the logos, mere embodiments of nous (à la Stoicism or Descartes), why would they choose to be mad for a time?

An evening of drinking is a time-function of individual drinks. (An individual drink is a time-function of itself.)
5.01 Individual drinks are the atomic time-cancellings (Aufhebungen) of an evening of drinking.

5.1 Time-cancellings can be arranged in series.
That is the foundation of the theory of controlled drinking.

5.101 "Controlled drinking" proceeds on the assumption that time-consciousness remains the same while drinking, and that you'll have time to taper off. Thus:
\[ T T T T = \text{the whole evening.} \]
\[ D D D D = \text{continuous consumption.} \]
\[ D T D T = \text{controlled drinking.} \]
Unfortunately what usually happens is:
\[ D T D D \text{ or } D T D T D D D \ldots \text{ etc.,} \]
because time-consciousness is the primary and essential casualty of drinking. (Cf. 4.13 ff.)

5.102 Sometimes eating \((F)\) or coffee \((C)\) gives the illusion of control, but that is not to be relied on:
\[ D T D F D D F C d D \ldots \text{ etc. (A cordial after dinner.)} \]

5.103 The truth of the matter is that "controlled drinking" means simply little or no drinking. Sobriety is therefore a hard thing indeed, and promises a long night.
\[ S = D + T + T + T + F + C, \text{ or better still, } = T! \ldots + F + C. \]

5.125 The symbolic representation of inebriation \((I)\) is in fact more complicated than the above concatenation (in 5.101) of drinks \((D)\) would imply. Other factors are involved besides the total quantity of booze consumed. Time itself is a consideration, along with body size and an intrinsically variable moment, the fear \((f)\) of seeming to be drunk.

5.126 A preliminary formula, therefore, by which to represent a predictable level of intoxication would be as follows:
\[ I = s^n (t) - f, \text{ the number of shots swallowed } (s) \text{ in a given period of time } (t) \text{ minus the fear } (f) \text{ of seeming to be drunk } (I). \]
(Body size remains something of a constant and therefore factors out.)

5.127 Unfortunately \(f\) varies inversely with the number of shots swallowed, and if \(s\) is too great for the \(t\) involved, paralysis and unconsciousness will supervene, making \(f\) inoperative. This happens usually only to the young and inexperienced and can be very dangerous.

5.1271 On the other hand, \(f\) also varies inversely with the level of \(I\) of the other people \((O.P.)\) with whom one is drinking. (These equa-
Interpretations apply only to "social drinking." Solitary drinking is solely medicinal and has no epistemological implications to speak of.) Thus:

\[ f = I \, (O.P.), \text{ and by substitution, } I = s^n \, (t - I \, (O.P.)) \]

which is circular, of course, but it shows why it's more fun to drink with other drinkers.

5.128 As a matter of fact, we might lay it down as a general rule: Never drink except alone or with other drinkers. (Unless, of course, somebody has to drive.)

5.129 Essential to drinking, unfortunately, is the subsequent hangover.

5.135 There is no possible way of making an inference from the jollity of an evening of drinking to the pain of the next day's hangover. (Cf. 2.062.)

5.136 There is no thought sequence that can contain both conditions.

5.1361 We cannot imagine the pain of tomorrow morning in the midst of tonight's hilarity. Belief in the connection is abstention.

5.16 There is some correlation between the total amount of alcohol consumed (B) and the size of the hangover; thus:

\[ H \propto B, \]

with some modification in terms of the time spent sleeping it off. But by far the greatest single factor contributing to the pain of a hangover (\( pH \)) is the effort of trying to forget the stupid things (\( \sigma \theta \)) you said the night before. Thus:

\[ pH = B + \sigma \theta \ldots, \text{ or, more precisely, } pH = B \, (\sigma \theta), \]

or even \( pH = (\sigma \theta)^B \ldots, \) since the more you drink the more stupid things you're likely to say.

5.161 Not being able to remember what you've said is no help at all (as per 4.152 above). In its purity the hiatus constitutes the worst kind of hangover, the abyss of time lost, of self surrendered to the memories of others.

6. The basic constituent of booze is alcohol \([C_2H_5OH]\).

This is the basic constituent of a drink.

6.001 What this means is that no matter how you dress it up it's all a matter of proof: \( \exists\ (B)\).

6.0012 There is some difference between alcoholic beverages resulting from fermentation and those resulting from distillation, but this is of interest only to connoisseurs and the like, and is besides completely extrinsic to the intoxication process itself.
As a matter of fact all these fancy additives (like grape juice and wood smoke) do is to provide congeners, an important contributing factor in the production of a hangover.

Did you ever get drunk on wine, for example? Or champagne? It's expensive and a lot of fun, but warra head the next morning!

The important thing is to try to keep track of how much you've had to drink.

One method for figuring out whether or not you're drunk is by the method of counting.

Unfortunately after a few drinks we tend to forget and even to fudge a bit, so the tally can be represented concretely with shot glasses (or whatever) overturned on the bar (if the bartender will let you).

Thus a proof of intoxication would be as follows:

\[\Omega + \Omega + \Omega + \Omega = \text{a solid buzz} (= Bz)\]
\[= Bz + \Omega + \Omega + \Omega + \Omega = \text{weaving and incoherence} (= Wi)\]
\[= Wi + \Omega + \Omega + ? = \text{paralysis} (= P)\]
\[= P + \Omega' = N + 1. \text{ Q.E.D.}\]

Of course if you've thrown up on the rug you know you've had too much.

And that you're not in a bar.

At this point the analysis has ceased to be functional: anyone who has been reading this as a substitute for actual drinking is probably still sober. (He must, so to speak, forget he ever read it.)

He must dig beneath talk about drinking, and then he will see the soul for what it is.

When we can no longer speak coherently, we must stop drinking.

NOTE

* The decimal numbers assigned to the several propositions indicate their sequential interrelationships (thus 2.1 comes after 2.0 and so forth) or the insertion of something out of sequence. In no case is numbering to be construed as an index of objective importance.
Book Reviews

David Bolotin, An Approach to Aristotle’s Physics: With Particular Attention to the Role of His Manner of Writing (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), vii + 156 pp., $44.50 cloth, $14.95 paper.

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David Bolotin’s extraordinary book opens a new way back to Aristotle’s physics, a physics that Bolotin takes seriously as a genuine alternative to modern natural science. Unlike the authors of some other recent attempts to understand Aristotle’s physics sympathetically, Bolotin demands that we entertain the possibility that Aristotle’s teaching is true without requiring us to check reason (even one honed by modern natural science) at the door. Specifically, Bolotin argues that a number of doctrines conventionally associated with Aristotle and which Aristotle himself explicitly asserts, e.g., that species are eternal, that many if not most natural motions tend toward pregiven ends, and that the earth is at rest at the center of the cosmos, are not his considered views but concessions to popular opinion meant, in part, to protect natural science as an enterprise from the dangerous political situation in which it found itself. The conventional view of Aristotle’s natural science, in this account, was deliberately set in place as a compromise between the true findings of natural science and certain “religious or quasi-religious hopes” about the human situation that are indispensable to ordinary political life.

Bolotin makes his case through a series of ingeniously and carefully elaborated studies meant to reveal a double level of argument. One of these levels is flawed yet devoted to establishing some popularly (and humanly) attractive claim, e.g., that human beings have always existed and will always exist, that at least some natural motions are directed by causes oriented toward what is best, that the earth whose stability we feel beneath our feet is as it seems. The other emerges as genuinely according to reason and, at the same time, more austere and less comforting in what it reveals about the human situation, including the extent to which genuine knowledge of nature is possible.

The view of genuine natural science that emerges from a study that is, by its own admission, only a first step, has a certain superficial similarity with the teachings of Kant, who also famously urged the finitude of human reason. Both Bolotin’s Aristotle and Kant deny that man can know the ultimate causes of the beings, and both insist that natural science is limited (albeit for different reasons

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and in different ways) by the boundaries of human perception. But these superficial similarities make the obvious differences all the more striking. For Kant, the finitude of human reason is expressed in the well-known claim that we know “appearances” but not things “as they are in themselves.” For Aristotle as revealed by Bolotin, by way of contrast, there is no disjunction between “the beings as we perceive them” and “the beings themselves,” inasmuch as the former is that which by the latter we properly mean (p. 150). To demand more of science is, if I understand Bolotin correctly, to express hopes and fears more properly addressed by political philosophy, where religious and moral claims that support those hopes and fears can be adequately examined. That is, a physics limited to the perceptible (hence unable to speak authoritatively about natural beings beyond the range of the perceptible) is not only all we can have, but all that is required, given that prior study, for such an inquiry to count as knowledge of the beings themselves. Kant’s opinion to the contrary arises, in part, from his view that knowledge of the beings themselves would be knowledge of them “in themselves” or independent of the conditions of space and time that inform human knowledge of the world. This view is linked, in turn, to his denial that the order or necessity characteristic of nature as an object of science can be given through perception, which can register that something exists, but not, as, it is alleged, a genuine science of nature requires, that “if something exists something else necessarily exists or is canceled.” Bolotin’s study advances the suggestion that the sort of necessity or certitude that Kant and other modern philosophers associate with and demand of science has less to do with the genuine requirements of reason than with certain unacknowledged moral and religious ghosts, threats posed by an omnipotent god or gods who will be what they will be, for, as both Kant and Jacobi, following Hume, acknowledged, a mode of inquiry that does not grasp in its necessity the order of nature as a whole cannot rule out the possibility of miracles. The primary reason for Aristotle’s exoteric teaching thus lies in showing what would have to be the case for natural science to vindicate the possibility of science on its own (p. 152). Whereas Aristotle, in order “to vindicate the possibility of natural science against the claims of theology,” turns to political philosophy, Kant, in an effort “to protect faith” by “limiting reason,” asks “how science is possible,” an exercise that takes for granted what Aristotle seeks to establish. This very brief and inadequate reflection on the significance of Bolotin’s study for students of later philosophic and scientific thought is meant to suggest the richness and promise of his project, not only for a better understanding of Aristotle, but also for the light it sheds on the difficulties facing the study of nature as such.

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Leo Strauss began his introductory essay on "How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*" (1948) by raising the issue of the motivation or "reasons" that ought to prompt the study of this seventeenth-century work. For Strauss the importance of the book lies in its consideration and treatment of "the most fundamental issue—the issue raised by the conflicting claims of philosophy and revelation." The *Treatise* is "the classic document of the 'rationalist' or 'secularist' attack on the belief in revelation." For reasons left unspecified, Strauss claims that "the issue discussed" in Spinoza's book "is again approaching the center of attention" (in large part, one might add, because of Strauss's own efforts). A reconsideration of this work, once thought definitive and now ignored, is in order. Strauss's motivation for reading was of the highest order. Early on in his book, Steven Smith reveals that he wrote his book on Spinoza and the *Theologico-Political Treatise* "from a combination of personal and academic reasons." What these reasons are can be inferred from the various audiences he addresses.

His principal audience, the one closest to his heart, is "modern Jews," those who cannot adhere to a traditional or orthodox view, and practice, of the Torah, the original source of Jewish identity. More specifically he writes to those modern Jews who consider themselves "emancipated" or "liberated individuals." This group has reason, or rationalism, as their "star and compass" and liberalism as their secular creed, with toleration (of Difference or the Other) as its moral lodestar. Spinoza, in Smith's account, was the first modern Jew, and emancipated Jews are his intended progeny. Smith's book thus aims to be a contribution to contemporary Jewish self-awareness, especially insofar as the contemporary options of political Zionism and assimilation in the bosom of liberal societies originally were articulated and advocated by Spinoza. "And if he [Spinoza] was an advocate of a religiously tolerant liberal state as one solution to the Jewish Question, he was also a founder, perhaps the founder, of political Zionism" (p. xvi).

In a book almost exclusively devoted to exposition rather than critique or evaluation, Smith does allow himself to raise the poignant question, What is the downside to Spinoza's oft-accepted proposal to Jews to become modern Jewish men and women, individuals liberated from the authority of Jewish Law? That there is a negative side he indicates somewhat darkly by terming the proposal a "Faustian bargain" (p. 21). At the end of his book he reveals his worry that such a bargain is "at the cost of what [is] specific to Judaism" (pp. 204–5).
Smith also wants to speak to “contemporary liberals.” Many of them have been surprised and taken aback by recent resurgences of sometimes vociferous expressions of religious belief and sentiment at home and abroad. They cherished their own dogmatic belief that the modern (i.e., liberal) solution to the problem posed to the political order by insistent religious belief, the “sacred liberal separation of church and state” (p. 151), definitively settled this great question, both on the plane of thought and, especially, of action. Smith claims that the conceptual architects of the modern disposition, in contrast, knew that their settlement was not so definitive (pp. 2, 6). Contemporary liberals thus would do well to return to the founding arguments of the liberal, religiously tolerant regime. Chief among these are Locke’s *Letter on Toleration*—and Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670).

What Smith expects liberals to learn is a somewhat open question. On one hand, he asserts—plausibly in my view, but without explanation or argument—that all solutions to “the theological-political problem,” in its most general form, whether religion should rule politics, or vice versa, are defective or imperfect (p. 2). On the other, he nowhere suggests that a rereading (or first consideration) of these historically and politically influential arguments will do anything other than confirm liberals in their original belief in the superiority of the liberal solution. Most likely he hopes that a more thoughtful adherence to this cardinal tenet of liberalism will be the result, one that is more sympathetic and accommodating to religious belief and believers. In any event he himself asserts that the proposition “that liberalism has provided the only decent solution to the theologico-political problem is defensible” (p. 203), and in his own name he professes his belief that “the liberal solution to the Jewish Question, despite its manifest imperfections, is, I believe—echoing Winston Churchill—the worst solution except for all the alternatives” (pp. 204–5).

The liberal solution to which Smith subscribes is the classical liberal view, premised on the dignity of the individual and the value of personal autonomy of thought, conviction, and action. This allegiance, he rightly points out, puts him in conflict with today’s multicultural liberalism, or the politics of group identity. He deftly employs Spinoza, who strove mightily to liberate the individual from oppressive and conformist religious group-identities, to show the tyrannical darkside of multiculturalist politics and the relative superiority of respecting the individual as such (pp. 200–205).

There is a wider group to which contemporary liberals belong: we modern men and women. According to Smith Enlightenment “modernity” is essentially secular (and progressive and rationalistic) in its orientation and intent (pp. ix, 2, 86–88). As a necessary exercise in attaining “self-understanding” (p. 6) of ourselves, our chief institutions, and leading opinions, a return to and reconsideration of the modern political philosophers who intellectually conceived and advocated our regimes of liberty—and us qua moderns—is in order. Smith here would launch us into deep and dark waters. Widespread today is a loss of the founding
“faith,” confidence, and “optimism” connected with liberal modernity; Habermas is right to assert that liberalism and liberal societies are experiencing a deep crisis of legitimacy, one connected with the privatization of religion and the lack of credible “intellectual resources” to articulate our common life. Our search for self-knowledge thus occurs during a troubled time.

Here, too, what light Smith expects us to find when we consider our intellectual progenitors is somewhat unclear. In fact, Smith himself indicates two fundamental reservations he has with the founding thoughts of modernity as originally conceived. A genuine liberal, he states, has genuine “appreciation” for the variety of ethical and religious beliefs and ways of life; the founders of liberal modernity, he asserts, did not (pp. 4, 6). Unfortunately, Smith does not tell us what the grounds of this respect are. I for one do not see why diversity as such is respectable, nor how one can respect particular beliefs and modes of living without judging them in the light of some universal standard that some or most may fail to live up to. More seriously, the founders of liberal modernity whom Smith considers all attempted to divest religion of its “transcendent and other-worldly” characteristics; they aimed to tame the biblical religions and to deflect their adherents from aspirations to a “world-to-come” to primarily mundane considerations and endeavors. “Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, and Kant, to name just the most famous, helped establish the genre of political writing called secular theology ... the fundamental questions of the genre concerned the world ad seculum rather than individual salvation and divine truth” (p. 2). Smith, on the contrary, judges this aim both unfeasible and undesirable (cf. pp. 202–3 with 205). And with respect to Judaism in particular, at the very end of his book he asserts boldly that “the spiritual core of Judaism remains a belief in the reality of a supernatural revelation. The fundamental Jewish experience in history was the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai. ... To the extent that the liberal Enlightenment urges the abolition of a particular providence, it will always be at odds with Judaism” (p. 205). Liberal modernity’s deep secularism is false to the biblical religions, even “revealed religion as such” (p. 105), and to man. Modern man, Smith intimates, should repent of his intellectual and public denials of human desires for transcendence and the religions that provide objects and shape to them.

More academically, Smith does expect another group to be changed in its prevenient opinions about Spinoza. This is a group of Spinoza scholars, especially some in philosophy departments. In Smith’s judgment, the understanding and presentation of Spinoza as a philosopher tout court, a metaphysician who considered all things sub specie aeternitatis (Spinoza’s own phrase, to be sure!), has unduly privileged his Ethics over his other writings, especially his Theologico-Political Treatise, and left an unbalanced and misleading portrait of Spinoza’s concerns and thought. Smith resists this bias. In his view Spinoza was a Jewish thinker and author (in a sense to be explained) and his “central” or “core” book, the one most in keeping with and revealing of his intent, is the Treatise.
Spinoza’s central question or concern, according to Smith, was quite literally “the theological-political problem” of his day. And Spinoza, says Smith, made “the Jewish Question,” Jews and Judaism, central to its resolution, by asking what Jews (and Christians and political society) must become in order to lay claim to the title of enlightened and by drawing from Jewish sources and employing Jewish lessons in his answer to the problem.

Essential to the resolution of the theological-political problem is a new kind of social-political order, the “free republic,” a democratic and liberal order. Spinoza, Smith affirms, was the first philosopher to advocate democracy not merely as a legitimate or tolerable form of government, but as the best form. Smith thinks that Spinoza’s arguments for, and advocacy of, a version of liberal democracy, have been underappreciated—“The Treatise ought to be considered a classic of modern liberal democratic theory” (p. 25)—and political theorists would do well to study Spinoza’s thought on these matters, at least to set straight the historical record and to give him his “due.”

The reader, no doubt, will notice the rather wimpy claim, giving Spinoza’s democratic theory its due. For all the importance Smith attributes to Spinoza’s advocacy of and arguments for liberal democracy, he studiously avoids endorsing any of Spinoza’s key claims. Smith does not want to be associated with Spinoza’s natural-right doctrine of “might makes right”: it is even more “ruthless” and “immoralistic” than Hobbes’s. He observes Spinoza’s oscillation between “fear and hope” in the ruling capacities of the democratic “multitude” without venturing a concuring or dissenting judgment on the essential character of the demos; and he knows that Spinoza’s arguments for liberty of conscience and thought are based on versions of nature and Scripture he himself calls into question. At the end, one wonders if Smith would endorse or propose today any Spinozistic argument concerning any liberal democratic institution or principle. He certainly has fundamental reservations about the core of Spinoza’s new society: the emancipated, i.e., deracinated, abstract, individual, as well as the civil theology that Spinoza crafted to serve as the religious-moral glue of the society (p. 116). And he keeps his distance from Spinoza’s position that justice is what the majority says it is (pp. 131, 133).

Be that as it may, Smith’s Spinoza is “first and foremost” “a political theorist,” “one of the founders of modern political philosophy.” As such he was “someone who thought long and deeply about the fundamental problems of political life.” These problems may be summed up, or their core “might be called the theological-political problem” or “predicament.” In its most general form, this reduces to the vital question, Should religion rule politics, or vice versa? Spinoza, however, confronted this question in its post-Christian, post-Reformation, form, i.e., in the seventeenth-century situation of the fragmentation of Christian doctrine and the proliferation of ecclesial communities and attendant civil strife. Thus the problem becomes essentially one of the proper “relation between church and state, theology and politics.” (Smith does an espe-
cially fine job of articulating the specifics of the Dutch situation: monarchical versus republican factions or parties, established Calvinist clergy versus dissenting sects and "colleges," pro- and anti-Cartesian schools, and showing how this configuration of various audiences helped to shape Spinoza's rhetoric and teaching in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*.)

Nonetheless, according to Smith, Spinoza's thought and teaching, while they perforce did touch upon Christian belief and Christian ecclesial communities, were principally Jewish. In Smith's mind Spinoza above all was concerned with "the Jewish Question . . . the main theme of Spinoza's reflections from very early on" (p. xii). "Spinoza put Jewish concerns and problems at the forefront of his thought" (p. xiii). By this he means that Spinoza personally was most concerned to reshape Judaism and Jewish identity along new rationalistic and secular lines and to show that this new Jewish individual would have a rightful, humanly satisfying, place in a new liberal democratic political order devoted to "freedom in its various dimensions" (p. 25). "The commercial republic of Amsterdam" is exhibit A for Spinoza, "where the effects of liberty are on display for all to see" (ibid.). In order to construct this new liberal home for Jews (and Christians) Spinoza, says Smith, drew substantially from Hebrew Scripture and its account of the Jewish commonwealth and Jewish history. The Hebrew Scripture's emphasis on Law and the latter's emphasis on external behavior ("its orthopractic character," p. 23) were models and inspiration, affirms Smith, following Joel Schwartz, for Spinoza's construction of the liberal state which enacts laws equally governing all religious groups and which concern only behavior, not ideas or opinions or beliefs. In this account Spinoza is doubly a Jewish thinker: Jews' condition and security in the dawning modern age are his central concern and the Jewish Scripture and polity provide him historical examples and political lessons from which he derives his political teaching about the liberal democratic state.

Smith, however, did not convince me with his characterization of Spinoza as a Jewish thinker. He asserts, but provides no evidence, that Spinoza's primary concern in the *Treatise* was the secular salvation of Jews by transforming them and their religion. I have no clue as to Spinoza's disposition towards his fellow Jews, but the clear implication of the work is that Spinoza, the philosopher, wanted to transform Jews and Christians alike and to contribute to the widespread establishment of liberal polities that would protect and foster liberty in all its forms, especially Spinoza's favorite, *libertas philosophandi*. And as for Spinoza's purported reliance on Jewish sources for his doctrine, Smith's own equivocation on this score begins in his "Introduction." "Liberal government and institutions derived, in Spinoza's view, from Jewish sources": this is the hard-or-direct-continuity thesis. Yet, in the next sentence, "For Spinoza, Judaism served perhaps as a basis for liberalism . . . because it was a body of law." "Perhaps" and "a basis": why the hesitation, why the qualification? He continues: "The priority of law in Jewish ethics made it ideally suited to serve
liberal ends, even while liberal ends required that it be divested of its transcendent and revealed status.” Jewish Law now is a means, a shorn means, pressed into the service of other “ends,” themselves derived from and justified by other sources (p. xiii). These sources are not far to seek: “the account of natural right and the social contract, which provides the groundwork for Spinoza’s political theory proper” (p. xv). (Later Smith asserts, “There is no basis whatsoever in either the Jewish or Christian theological traditions for any of these,” p. 122.) In short, Jewish Law is at most a secondary model or source for Spinoza, one that must be tailored to requirements dictated by nature and reason.

We will have to wait until we consider Smith’s treatment of the last four chapters of the Treatise before we can conclude the question of Spinoza’s debt to or use of Jewish Scripture and models. We will see that Spinoza’s appeal to things Jewish and his use of them at the end of his work is principally dictated by the use his opponents, Dutch Calvinist clergy, made of Hebrew Scripture and its account of the Jewish Commonwealth and his need to counteract them, rather than by any particular lesson Spinoza uniquely drew from the Hebrew Bible. Strauss, I think, has it about right: in other circumstances, say, in fifth-century B.C. Athens, or seventeenth-century Turkey, Spinoza would have dispensed with this scriptural appeal.

As I wondered why Smith would write a book about a man and his thought with which he so little agrees, two “reasons” loomed largest. Smith wants to show modern Jews the thought of the man who contributed the most to the construction of their secular, hyperliberal identity. He clearly is dissatisfied with this result, yet he remains oddly reticent about helping his Jewish readers to come to grips with the fundamental issues of Torah, Judaism, and philosophy that a conscientious reconsideration of traditional versus modern Jewish identity requires. I will put in my two cents in these matters in a moment. In any event, let’s call this Smith’s “personal” reason for writing.

His “academic” one concerns his view of his discipline, “political theory.” I am afraid of being too harsh, but I find Smith’s presentation of the character and tasks of political theory to be inadequate. Smith the theorist wants to “tell a story,” the “larger story” of Judaism, Jews, and liberalism as a doctrine and as the leading vector of the course of modern political history. Clearly Spinoza is central to this story; he wrote its first chapter. Of course this is a worthwhile focus, and not just for Jews. But there is a matter of proportion. “Perhaps the greatest benefit to be obtained from a recovery of the Treatise is that it would compel us to reconsider many of our standard genealogies of liberalism” (p. 22). “The greatest benefit”? Political theorists, it appears, are above all interested in telling stories, reconstructing genealogies. What about seeking the truth about politics? Or the truth about arguments concerning political principles or fundamentals? Certainly this was Spinoza’s ultimate view of political theory. Smith does a wonderful job of placing Spinoza in several intellectual contexts:
first with Maimonides; then Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Descartes; finally the seventeenth-century Dutch scene. But what we are given is comparison and, usually, contrast, but no evaluation, or even much guidance towards judgment. Assuming that this is not Smith’s full view of political theory, I would have liked a few words about its additional elements.

The general intent of his book is stated by Spinoza himself in his “lengthy subtitle”: “piety” (or “true religion” or “Theology”) allows, even endorses “freedom of philosophizing,” and the “state” itself, sovereign political authority, likewise should allow freedom of thought and speech, as well as religious belief. Not to do so is detrimental to both piety and civil peace. Spinoza’s topics are grand: religious belief (and practice); freedom of thought, including philosophizing; and the authority and limits of sovereignty or civil authority; and he has discerned their proper natures and rightful conjunction. Positive goods: civil peace, true religion, and free minds, are the promised results of his teaching—and its implementation.

How he executes his design, what his arguments are to these conclusions, accordingly are the commentator’s first task. Smith initially, and most broadly, divides Spinoza’s text into two main parts: the first part, chapters 1–15, considers “theological matters broadly conceived” (p. 119) and consists in “biblical exegesis.” Its chief results are (1) to separate sharply the status of scriptural teachings from philosophical claims: the former are not candidates for truth or falsity (although Spinoza makes clear his view that they, by and large, are false); they are “meaningful,” i.e., they are understandings of and claims about God, man, and the world that emanate from, and are accommodated to, the rationally very limited capacities of “vulgar” “imaginations.” The chief belief or “prejudice” of this form of mind is that the world is teleologically ordered by a superintendent deity who cares for individual human fates, as well as those of nations (pp. 29–30). Philosophy, on the other hand, seeks and knows the lawful, necessary causes of the Whole and thus of the human mind. Given that Scripture is the work of vividly imaginative prophets, not rational philosophers, there is no identifiable speculative content to Scripture that its adherents must accept; in fact Scripture leaves open the widest latitude to the naturally varied individual minds to determine for themselves the tenets, and their meaning, about God, man, and miracles, to which they subscribe.

On the other hand, (2) Spinoza does maintain that there is a “theological” teaching consistently and universally taught by all the prophets and apostles: a “universal faith” or “religion,” essentially a moral teaching, whose chief injunctions are “justice and charity” understood in an unprecedented manner as universal tolerance of others’ religious convictions and “obedience” to the laws of the sovereign state.

In short, “true religion” or “piety,” according to Spinoza, both leaves great room for freedom of thought and its expression concerning its subject matters
of God, world, and man, and requires its practitioners to respect others' conscientious beliefs, whether religious or philosophical, and enjoins upon them wholehearted subordination to the secular civil authorities.

These results flow, says Spinoza, from the correct method of reading Scripture. It is here that the expositor should be most alert. "Spinoza," avers Smith, "is keenly aware that the Treatise stands or falls on the viability of the method that he proposes therein for the interpretation of Scripture" (p. 59). This issue is even more important given Smith's claim that Spinoza's "critique of Scripture" is fundamental to, and paradigmatic for, the Enlightenment as a whole. "Spinoza gives uncompromising expression to the Enlightenment's critique of Scripture in its most radical form" (p. 10; cf. p. 13). What Smith indicates ("Only after discrediting the claims of prophecy and revelation can Spinoza present a new set of purely secular or rational principles on which to ground the democratic-republican state," p. 89), but does not sufficiently stress, is the following: for any autonomous politics to be well grounded, the alternative authority, in this case scriptural religion, must be addressed and refuted. Otherwise, autonomous politics have an Achilles heel: they are based on a pettio principii that must plague conscientious reason and leave an opening to believers aware of this crux.

I distill Smith's clear, accurate, and helpful presentation of Spinoza's method into two formulas: Scripture must be interpreted "solely from Scripture" itself (Spinoza's own version of sola Scriptura) and "Interpretatio naturae as the Principle of Spinoza's Biblical Hermeneutics." A word about the first, then a few more about the second.

Leo Strauss made the decisive observation concerning the first principle: nowhere in Scripture itself is the principle of sola Scriptura asserted; this principle is itself extra-biblical. Moreover, as both Strauss and Smith note, Spinoza himself does not constantly adhere to it.

Smith does make clear that Spinoza's "historical philology," "historical criticism," or "historico-genetic method" (pp. 56–57) finally is rooted in the latter principle. "Spinoza's use of nature as a model for interpreting Scripture is the basis for his later statement that "all knowledge of Scripture must be sought only from Scripture itself". Spinoza's principle of reading Scripture according to Scripture is emblematic of his attempt to secularize or naturalize the text" (p. 63).

The official version of the interpretation of Nature principle is that it provides the model for how to approach and to read Scripture: one collects the data of the texts, then organizes them into their most general teachings and principles, as well as identifying the more particular or idiosyncratic teachings of the individual books, prophets, and authors. Again, one must note that using a philosophical approach to Nature as the model for scriptural interpretation is an importation; one can and must wonder about its warrant or legitimacy.

There is more involved in this principle and its application to Scripture, though. I mention two instances. Spinoza invokes his own understanding of the
natural order to interpret the miraculous events or reports of Scripture. Miracles are unexpected natural occurrences that tend to the advantage of someone (p. 33). It is but a vulgar prejudice to see, or to think that there is, a real distinction between God’s supernatural power and Nature’s infinite power and therefore that the natural order and its laws can be, and have been, interfered with by divine agency.

Likewise, Spinoza’s reading of prophetic utterances is wholly naturalistic; it is the application of a rationalistic framework, concerning both the natural order and human psychology, that is brought to bear on the text, not derived from it. “Statements like ‘God spoke to a prophet’ and ‘God commanded a prophet’ are to be explicated by a series of natural causes, including the prophet’s own mental state and emotional disposition” (p. 91).

An extra-biblical, philosophical model of knowledge; an extra-biblical, philosophical doctrine of the Whole or Deus sive Natura; an extra-biblical, naturalistic psychology or anthropology: the implication is clear. Spinoza’s reading of Scripture is utterly prejudiced; he, we know not how or with what justification, has arrived, independently of Scripture, at a view of the Whole and man’s nature and proper place therein. Then on the basis of this view he turns to Scripture, to decode its utterances and to bend them to ends he has arrived at and justified from other sources. One is not being uncharitable in detecting a Procrustean bed that Scripture is made to lie in. In any event, two questions of the utmost importance thus emerge. First, what is the legitimacy of Spinoza’s own criterion, his philosophy? Until one engages and determines this question, its application to Scripture and the results it generates are merely hypothetical. One could give, for example, a Platonic or a Kantian reading with equal warrant until one evaluates the soundness or truth of the philosophies. This task in turn presupposes an exact, philosophical reconstruction of the philosophy in question. On this score Smith is competent, but inadequate. He presents Spinoza’s philosophy in a series of summaries, of conclusions and claims, of affinities and differences with other thinkers, Maimonides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Descartes especially, but he doesn’t consider Spinoza’s philosophy philosophically.

Strauss, again, made the decisive initial suggestion concerning Spinoza’s "real starting point," "his concealed atheistic principles." These principles are arrived at, averred Strauss, by philosophical "analysis" (rather than "synthesis"). Strauss invited his readers "to see whether there are not anywhere in Spinoza’s writings indications, however subtle, of a strictly atheistic beginning or approach" ("How to Study . . . ," p. 189). Richard Kennington took up Strauss’s invitation in his "Analytic and Synthetic Methods in Spinoza’s Ethics." There he shows that the Ethics has two beginnings: the merely asserted, stipulated definitions of the very beginning of the book and a second, somewhat hidden, one in book 2. The latter focuses on Spinoza’s physics, which begin with a scientized version of prescientific experience of natural bodies (not natu-
ral kinds). Kennington, in turn, points to the late David Lachterman’s work on Spinoza’s physics as a further, complementary treatment of this truly basic Spinozistic line of inquiry (see his “The Physics of Spinoza’s Ethics” and “Laying Down the Law: The Theological-Political Matrix of Spinoza’s Physics”). In my judgment they show the highly questionable character, even untenability, of Spinoza’s physics and thus call into question the cogency of Spinoza’s naturalistic reading of Scripture. In any event, these readers of Spinoza try to take philosophically the measure of Spinoza’s standard, the step Smith points to but does not take.

Yet, in some sense, even this rational or philosophic consideration of the Spinozistic philosophy would be inadequate. Its validity is not secure until it confronts its religious rivals. As part of this confrontation, before the reader can judge of the validity of Spinoza’s “reading” of Scripture through the lens of his philosophy, he must consider Scripture, its means of communication, its teachings, on its own terms. This, of course, is a herculean task. But the task of interpreting Spinoza, the task of reconsidering the soundness of autonomous, liberal politics, the task of judging the legitimacy of a merely secular Judaism or Jewish identity—all tasks Smith assumes and to which he calls his various readers—inexorably require this. Smith does us a service by pointing us to their urgency and providing a clear enough roadmap through Spinoza’s reworking of Scripture. But he stops short of the most important and difficult tasks.

Since I do not want to be accused of what I impute to Smith, let me indicate what I believe to be the most promising path to take in this regard. Many contemporary scholars prescind from the orthodox view of Scripture as merely divinely inspired, yet reject the Spinozistic assumption that Torah is a more or less incoherent compilation of various men’s imaginative outpourings. These scholars—as diverse as Umberto Cassuto, Leo Strauss, Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, Leon Kass, Robert Sacks, and Devora Steinmetz, among many others—discern exquisite literary art in the Bible and find its modes of communication worthy of the highest human intelligence. In their commentaries they provide guidance for the perplexed modern Jew (and others) that restores Scripture to a place of intelligibility and credibility unimaginable after Spinoza’s assault. Where this line of inquiry might lead is anyone’s guess, but it has the advantage of taking Spinoza’s biblical criticism seriously enough to reconsider its target and to raise again the questions, What is Scripture and how should it be read?

The second part of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is the last five chapters. Their overriding purpose, according to Smith, is to demonstrate one main proposition: that religious bodies (especially clerically ruled ones) must be subordinate, strictly subordinate, to civil authority. In this second part Spinoza continues and concludes his defanging and domestication of biblical religions by arguing on various grounds that the state must be sovereign over religion. This sovereignty primarily extends to external behavior and cult; individual belief and its verbal or
written expression ought to be free from control. The sovereign state also should recognize its need for widespread tolerant religious belief among the citizenry, so the "universal faith" should receive some sort of official sanction. This faith, in turn, maintains that "patriotism" or performing one's "civic duty" or "obedience" to the state's laws is "the correct worship of God" (p. 153). Smith finds this to be "perhaps the most remarkable piece of secularization in the entire work."

Smith subdivides this part in terms of the grounds upon which Spinoza makes the case for political superiority to religious bodies. Chapter 16 presents the "theoretical," naturalistic case.

Then "in the final chapters of the Treatise [17–20] Spinoza turns from the problem of the optima Respublica and the best way of life to the real world of politics and history" (p. 145). This history, in the first instance, is "the political history of the Bible" ("significantly mediated by . . . Tacitus and the Roman historians"); the "real world" politics are those of seventeenth-century Holland. The two interact: "In the final chapters of the Treatise Spinoza reads the current Dutch debates over church and state back into Hebrew Scripture." The Calvinists must be shown that Israel was at its best when religious and political authority were one (with Moses) and that its decline began with the establishment of the Levites, a separate sacerdotal order that assumed moral superiority and authority over rulers and people alike and ceaselessly agitated the body politic. That this lesson of Jewish history (if such it be) concerning spiritual and temporal authority is not the sole preserve of Jewish insight or sources is indicated by Spinoza's concomitant survey and analysis of historical Christianity, beginning with its initial appearance as a private sect in the Roman Empire, then the subsequent development of "Christian states"; chapters of this history are also said to be illustrative, even paradigmatic. For example, "Spinoza draws also on the recent history of the conflict between the German emperors and the pope, which he says will be a "paradigm" for all" (p. 155). Christian history would suffice for making his case according to Spinoza, if his immediate opponents did not appeal to the example and authority of the Hebrew polity and the Jewish prophets.

Christian history not only exhibits the necessity of subordinating spiritual authorities to the secular, it also has produced a precious, exemplary fruit: Amsterdam. Smith ends his consideration of Spinoza's argument with a summary report of the latter's preference for "the modern commercial republic." "The commercial republic was not exactly a creation of Spinoza's, but he saw in this model of society a more humane and practical alternative to the two great alternatives under whose dispensation European civilization had previously labored, namely, the regimes of civic and Christian virtue" (p. 163). In this judgment Spinoza follows the lead of his philosophic mentor, Descartes. "I retired here [Holland], to a country where the long duration of the war had caused such orders to be established, that the armies maintained there seemed to serve only to allow one to enjoy the fruits of peace with so much more security, and where
among the mass of a very active great people, one more concerned with its own affairs than curious about those of the other, without lacking any of the commodities that are in the most visited cities, I was able to live as solitary and retired as in the most remote deserts" (*Discourse*, Pt. 3, ad finem). Spinoza, however, as Smith shows, was more concerned to articulate the character of this tolerant regime and citizenry.

In assessing Smith's achievement, I would venture the following. In a way very compatible with but more accessible than Strauss, Smith exposes the main lines of Spinoza's "biblical criticism" and "exegetis" for our inspection. He differs from Strauss in choosing to leave his reader there, although he notes from time to time a few of the fundamental differences between orthodox interpretations of Scripture and Spinoza's dual reading of Scripture as "ancient prejudices" and as a universal, liberal faith.

Secondly, Smith is clearly sympathetic to liberal politics' focus on and protection of the individual and his autonomy; he thus is somewhat sympathetic to Spinoza's aim to liberate individuals from their communally imposed "theological-political identities." He is also clearly hesitant to endorse the product and price of this emancipation, the deracinated or autonomous individual, however. Smith, it appears to me, expresses the situation of many of us today. Living after the doctrinal acids of liberalism have loosened the bonds of authoritative traditions in social and political life, we recoil from the dissolution it works in our souls. Thus we hyperfree men and women, without desiring a return to premodern arrangements, attempt to reconsider and, if we so choose, to reconnect with the premodern authorities that once commanded our lives. These latter remain standing today, chastened but beckoning, remarkably speaking to felt needs we experience in our late modern discontents.

CHRISTOPHER FLANNERY
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You and I have been sent into life, at a time when the greatest lawgivers of antiquity would have wished to have lived.

John Adams

Many great and good men sufficiently qualified for any task they should undertake, may ever be found, whose ambition would aspire to nothing beyond a seat in Congress, a gubernatorial or a presidential chair; but such belong not to the family of the lion, or the tribe of the eagle. What! think you these places would satisfy an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Napoleon? Never!

Abraham Lincoln

The character of a Legislator has in all ages been held above that of hero. Lycurgus and Solon are ranked higher than Alexander or Caesar.

John Adams

It is difficult today to understand, and therefore duly to honor, the great political men of America's past. Several causes conspire to create this difficulty. Greatness, politics, America, the past, and even men are suspect categories or objects of derision to many of our most privileged and vocal sophisticateds. For some of these elites, admiration for what is admirable smacks of "elitism," and elitism would be a sin, if they believed in God. As it is, elitism is practically a crime and certainly a social disease. For others, relativism reduces any notion of greatness to a value, that is to say, nothing. And then, so privatized has our conception of ourselves become that our political nature is, so to speak, erased from the picture, and with it any possible idea of political greatness. Political history is no longer merely replaced by social and economic history; it has been reduced to gender, racial, and ethnic studies: Goodbye politics, goodbye Man. Alongside all this, a vague but nearly irresistible notion of Progress teaches us that in a decisive respect—and with no effort on our part!—we are superior to all who have come before; they were so dreadfully reactionary. These obstacles to understanding the most wise and noble political men in our history not only prevent us from giving honor where honor is due, they prevent us from understanding the full dimensions of American politics, which must remain obscure or distorted so long as its peaks are not visible.

C. Bradley Thompson has set out to recover a view of the greatness of John Adams. To the extent that he succeeds, he does us the service of illuminating the heights and thereby bringing into focus the nature of American politics.

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Thompson identifies two specific obstacles to our understanding Adams's greatness; both obstacles, as it turns out, were erected at least in part a generation ago by the influential historian Bernard Bailyn (p. xv). The obstacles are methods adopted by Bailyn and subsequently by other scholars for explaining, or explaining away, Adams's political thought. The methods will be familiar to readers of modern professional historians. The one explains Adams's thought as a byproduct of certain nonrational inner forces, the other as a byproduct of various external influences. The one Thompson calls a "psychoanalytical" approach, the other is generally known as the "ideological" school. The psychoanalytical approach leads a recent biographer to study Adams's most ambitious political treatise as "a reflection of his disordered personality" (p. xvi). The ideological approach leads typically to explaining Adams's political thought as a reflection of the social and cultural contexts within which he lived: Massachusetts, Puritanism, the eighteenth century. Neither of these approaches, whatever else it may accomplish, can shed any light on the most important claim Adams made for his own thought, that he had discovered the "infallible truth" about the greatest political questions (p. xix).

Thompson takes Adams's claim seriously, and to examine its merits he proposes a different methodology. He does not propose to abandon the historians' concern with the psychological or social context of Adams's thought for the exegete's unadulterated concern with the text of Adams's political writings. Instead, he proposes, in effect, to be a better psychologist and historian than his predecessors; he proposes to be a better contextualist. The context within which he proposes to study Adams's thought is not that of subconscious urges within or the discourse of the time without. Thompson aims to understand this thought in the context most important to Adams himself, namely, its "philosophical context" (p. xviii). This is the context of Adams's own internal and external observations, his lifelong self-examination, experience, reflection, and study. In particular, the most decisive context for Adams's thought is his "confrontation with the Western political and philosophical tradition" (p. 92). Reestablishing this context is one of the important accomplishments Thompson claims for his book. "Unless I am mistaken," he writes, "no account of Adams's political thought has ever seriously taken into account his confrontation with Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, or Rousseau" (p. 298 n.9). To examine Adams's confrontation with the great minds of the Western tradition, Thompson charmingly proposes to place him in the most relevant surroundings by "returning him to his library" (p. xviii).

Thompson tells us that Adams's political philosophy pivots on a distinction between what he called "principles of liberty" (related to questions of political right) and "principles of political architecture" (related to constitutional design). The actual "historical development of Adams's political thought," from revolution making to constitution making, parallels this theoretical distinction (p. ix), and Thompson accordingly divides his study of Adams into two parts. The first
part (chapters 1–4) concentrates on Adams's early development and his role as a revolutionary statesman in the 1760s and 1770s. In this part, Thompson draws upon Adams's diaries and early correspondence for insights into the young man's remarkably self-conscious preparation for greatness. Of Adams's formal public writings, Thompson considers primarily two in this part of his book: "A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law" (1765), which was Adams's "first major political essay"; and his "Novanglus" essays (1775), which Thompson, challenging scholarly consensus, praises as "a comprehensive study of the constitutional relationship between the center of the British empire and its colonial peripheries" (pp. 36, 66, 294 n.2). Part two (chapters 5–12) concentrates on Adams as lawgiver and teacher of lawgivers. Here Thompson offers an extended discussion of A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America (1787) and the so-called Discourses on Davila (1790–1791), with some backward glances at Thoughts on Government (1776).

In his study of Adams's early years, Thompson takes issue with a long-established view that Adams's thought was essentially Puritan or Calvinist. Far from it, says Thompson; even in his early twenties, when young Adams was energetically seeking the truth about the nature of things, he was convinced not by the local pieties of Braintree but by the philosophic arguments of John Locke. Adams "consciously repudiated the orthodoxies of New England Puritanism" (p. 5). His understanding of nature and human nature drew heavily on Bacon and Newton, and most especially on Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding. In thinking about moral questions in these early years, Adams "had little if any need for theology" (p. 17). He relied confidently on unaided reason to understand "the proper business of Mankind in this life," and reason led him, among other things, to reject doctrines of salvation by grace alone and original sin (p. 18). "In the end," Thompson concludes, "the religion of John Adams was little more, but certainly not less, than a religion of civic morality" (p. 23). In treating these subjects as he does throughout his book, Thompson is apparently not writing for an audience of citizens.

Thompson distinguishes his account of Adams's revolutionary statesmanship from the errors of the progressive and ideological schools, which reduced the American Revolution to an exercise in propaganda or a fit of paranoia (p. 44). "For John Adams, the controversy with Great Britain was, from beginning to end, constitutional," and what was true for Adams was true for the Revolution as a whole (p. 66). Once Adams determined that lesser measures were insufficient for restoring the colonists' constitutional rights (around 1774), he became a revolutionary republican directly appealing to the "revolution principles" of human equality, natural rights, and natural law (pp. 61–62, 86). These, wrote Adams, were the principles of "Aristotle and Plato, of Livy and Cicero, and Sydney and Harrington and Locke." They were "the principles of nature and eternal reason" (p. 62).
The American Revolution and American revolutionaries claimed fidelity, and insisted upon fidelity, to these principles of nature and eternal reason. The great tragedy of John Adams's political career came when he was convicted in the court of public opinion of infidelity to these principles, of infidelity to the American Revolution. Adams was first indicted on the charge of being anti-republican, or harboring "conservative" reservations about the American Revolution, upon publication of his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* in 1787. Adams himself expected the *Defence* to be unpopular, and the accusation that he was proposing aristocracy or monarchy in this treatise has continued until our day (pp. 91, 298 n.3). But, contrary to the common view of historians, Thompson maintains that the *Defence* by itself "rather than diminishing Adams's public reputation... greatly enhanced it" among his immediate contemporaries. Adams was convicted of betraying the Revolution, of being a "defender of aristocracy and monarchy," not because of his *Defence* but because of two episodes occurring between 1789 and 1791. In the first, he took the lead in advocating "regal sounding" titles for the new office of President of the United States: "His Highness," "His Most benign Highness," "His Majesty the President" (p. 266). Such titles soon became ridiculed in republican America, and Adams was ridiculed along with them as "His Rotundity" and "Duke of Braintree." Although Thompson gamely shows the sound reasoning behind Adams's advocacy of these pretentious titles, he admits that Adams's prudence failed him here (p. 268).

Following the titles fiasco, Adams published anonymously what was, in effect, the fourth volume of his *Defence*, a series of essays appearing in John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States* between April 28, 1790, and April 27, 1791, called *Discourses on Davila* (p. 269). These essays were written to warn Americans and advise Frenchmen about the French Revolution. Just as the series was concluding, in April, 1791, Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* appeared, with a famously unauthorized preface by Thomas Jefferson recommending Paine's work as an antidote to certain "political heresies." The heresies were quickly understood by all to be the supposed aristocratic and monarchical sentiments contained in the *Discourses on Davila*. A national uproar followed, after which "John Adams was never able to shake off the charge that he was an intellectual traitor to the cause of republicanism" (p. 271). "In our time, historians have rarely differed from his [contemporary] partisan opponents" (p. 91). Thompson acknowledges that it was a failure of Adams's own rhetoric that his purposes could be so successfully misrepresented in his own time by political enemies. But Thompson also bitterly resents Jefferson for his dishonorable role in calling into question Adams's fidelity to the Revolution that owed so much to him. Much of the second part of Thompson's book is devoted to demonstrating how, why, and to what extent Adams always remained true to the cause of the American Revolution.

That the scope and substance of Adams's thinking could be so misunder-
stood may have been due initially to his own imprudence, a failure of his rhetoric, and deliberate partisan misrepresentation. Misunderstanding of Adams has endured, however, in part because of a failure of scholars to recognize the different levels on which Adams wrote, the different purposes he intended to serve, and the different audiences he intended to address in his various writings and often in a single writing. Among the different levels, purposes, and audiences that Thompson calls to our attention: Adams sometimes appealed to sentiment to prepare the way for ideas; he might, for example, arouse the “spirit of liberty” on behalf of the “principles of liberty”; he descended to history so that he might draw his reader up to reason; in a single writing or in several, he might write for patriotic citizens of Massachusetts, thoughtful citizens of America, free citizens of Europe or European absolute monarchs, enlightened citizens generally, citizen-statesmen, enlightened statesmen, ambitious and philosophical students, student-lawgivers, American and European constitution makers, and present and future lawgivers. That Adams’s thought and intentions should continue to be underestimated or misunderstood for two hundred years is also a failure of historians’ imaginations. It is an understandable failure, because greatness in any form is not readily grasped by ordinary minds. But to begin to understand John Adams, we must be able to imagine ambition beyond even the astounding ambition warned against in Lincoln’s Lyceum Address—and capacities to match the ambition (pp. xvii–xix, 52–55, 240–42, 258).

Thompson demonstrates, beyond question, that from his earliest to his latest days, John Adams was driven by vaulting ambition, ambition which, anticipating Lincoln, aimed above the family of the lion and the tribe of the eagle. From the early time that he fixed upon what he regarded as the highest manly aspiration, he strove with all that was in him to be a lawgiver and a teacher of lawgivers. Adams’s steadiness of purpose and the demanding regimen of study he undertook to equip himself for this high calling do exhibit, as Thompson says, “a kind of resolute determination that almost boggles modern sensibilities.” This determination is all the more remarkable in light of Adams’s keen awareness that fulfillment of his aspirations depended decisively on the gift of fortune. It was part of his genius to recognize that rare gift when it was proffered and to be prepared to accept it (pp. 42–43, 159, 311 n.28, 229–33).

To make himself a lawgiver and a teacher of lawgivers, John Adams thought it necessary to undertake the broadest and deepest inquiries. It was necessary to go to the root of things, to consider for himself “what kind of beings men are,” to “unravel the secret springs” of human action, to fathom the “constitution of the human mind” (pp. 148–49). In the course of his studies, Adams became “America’s finest eighteenth-century student of the political sciences” (p. xiii). He studied ancient and modern history extensively and was indebted to many of the great political thinkers of antiquity and modernity. But Thompson is emphatic that Adams was when all is said and done his own man. He was, perhaps above all other things, fiercely independent. He accepted and rejected argu-
ments from ancients and moderns alike according to his own independent judgment, and he synthesized what he did accept into what Thompson regards as often original, highly sophisticated, and significant teachings.

One finds in his writings, for example, “an important and original reformulation of the modern natural-law teaching” (p. 156). In arriving at this reformulation, Adams departed most decisively from Hobbes and Locke in concluding that the primary datum of human nature is the desire for a reputation for benevolence (pp. 154–55). This desire Adams called “spectemur agendo,” which means literally “Let us be seen in action.” This passion is “the great leading passion of the soul.” “[T]he history of mankind is little more than a narration of its operation and effects” (pp. 155–56). The natural primacy of this passion meant to Adams that man is by nature social.

When we take into account the clues that Adams, himself, gives us, which have previously gone unnoticed by scholars, “we are introduced to an intellectual world entirely different from the one used by scholars to explain Adams’s thought, not to mention that of the founding period in general.” In this different world, we see, for example, that “Adams attempted to synthesize ancient and modern thought in a way that brings into question the views of those scholars who see the founding period from the perspective of either classical republicanism or Lockean liberalism” (pp. 308–9 n.23).

Thompson occasionally draws comparisons between the quality of Adams’s thought and the thought of others traditionally ranked among the sages. These comparisons are one measure of Thompson’s estimation of Adams’s greatness. Adams is, for example, typically associated with the idea of a mixed regime, but Thompson maintains that in this as in many other respects Adams is usually misunderstood and underestimated. “[H]is theory of the mixed constitution [is] unique in the history of political thought.” Though he learned about categories and cycles of regimes from “Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero, and their modern students, Machiavelli and Harrington,” he rose above their “rather simplistic teaching” on these matters. Not content to “repeat the shallow and rather timeworn formulas of the classics,” Adams developed his own “deeper, more philosophical” understanding of mixed and balanced government (pp. 217–18). “A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America may very well be the most important reformulation of the mixed and balanced government since Aristotle’s Politics” (p. 228). It does not distort Thompson’s rhetoric to say that, compared with the seriousness of purpose of Adams’s Defence, he views the Federalist as “political propaganda” “pander[ing]” to the low passions of the multitude (pp. viii, 259).

Those who can may judge for themselves whether Adams illuminated the secret springs of human nature and the mysteries of state with a light as bright and penetrating as that cast by his most illustrious predecessors and contemporaries. We are indebted to C. Bradley Thompson for making a convincing case that, if philosophy begins in wonder, profitable inquiries in political philosophy
and in the nature of American politics might begin in wondering anew about John Adams.

NOTES


2. Lincoln continues, “Towerings genius disdains a beaten path. It seeks regions hitherto unexplored. It sees no distinction in adding story to story, upon the monuments of fame, erected to the memory of others. It denies that it is glory enough to serve under any chief. It scorns to tread in the footsteps of any predecessor, however illustrious. It thirsts and burns for distinction; and, if possible, it will have it, whether at the expense of emancipating slaves, or enslaving freemen. Is it unreasonable then to expect, that some man possessed of the loftiest genius, coupled with ambition sufficient to push it to its utmost stretch, will at some time, spring up among us?” Abraham Lincoln, The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions: Address to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, January 27, 1838. Founder’s Library. The 19th Century Speeches, Letters and Writings of Abraham Lincoln, http://www.founding.com/.

3. Adams continues, “The most profound and sublime genius, the most extensive information and the vastest views have been always considered as indispensable. A consummate master of Science and literature, a long experience in affairs of government, travel through all the known world were among the ancients thought little enough for a founder of laws.” Thompson, p. 231.

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Among its many virtues Robert Goldwin’s *From Parchment to Power* brings to its readers a keen sense of the ironies surrounding a bill of rights. Perhaps the chief irony is this: although public opinion polls show that Americans on the whole deem the Bill of Rights the most valuable part of the Constitution, those who drafted it were far from this view. The Constitutional Convention turned to consider the Bill of Rights only very late in its long summer days’ work and then resoundingly rejected adding one to their draft constitution by a vote of ten states to none. The failure of the Convention to include a Bill of Rights then became one of the chief arrows in the Anti-Federalist quiver of anti-Constitution arguments during the battle over ratification. As Goldwin recounts, the Constitution won ratification only because a formula was worked out in important states where Anti-Federalist sentiment was strong (especially Massachusetts, Virginia, and New York) whereby the Constitution would be ratified with the “expectation” that it would be quickly amended. The state conventions obligingly included suggested amendments along with their certificates of ratification.

The ultimate result of this campaign for amendments, of course, was the Bill of Rights, but Congress showed no more enthusiasm for adopting it than the Constitutional Convention had. This brings us to the second of the great ironies: the Anti-Federalists, the men who pressed hardest for amendments, who decried loudest the absence of a Bill of Rights, opposed the amendments, both in Congress and the States. Goldwin makes quite clear, moreover, that the Bill of Rights would most likely never have been adopted (or not in that era) if not for the relentless pressure of the great James Madison, and this points to the third great irony: Madison, the man almost solely responsible for the Bill of Rights, had himself been one of the major Federalist opponents of including one in the first place.

Goldwin not only leads us to see these ironies, and thus stirs us to think afresh about the Bill of Rights, but he also allows us to understand how these ironies came to be. As he concedes, his book is not based on any striking new discoveries of fact resulting from Herculean struggles in Augean archives. It is mostly a reinterpretation of mostly well-known facts and documents, but he puts it all together so as to tell the most satisfying version yet of the making of the Bill of Rights. Goldwin tells his story lucidly, engagingly, even leisurely. The leisureli-
ness is perhaps its most endearing quality, for it allows him the space and pace for a rewarding ruminativeness. Indeed, among the best features of the book are three sets of "reflections" that close off the book's three sections.

In rerendering the story of the Bill of Rights Goldwin dissents, more or less, from the three predominating themes in the standard literature. He does not follow the "civil liberties mafia," who teach that the Bill of Rights is indeed the most meaningful part of the Constitutional system and who cheer on the judiciary in their effort to apply, extend, and add to the rights protected in the amendments. He takes too seriously the original position of the Federalists—that a Bill of Rights is unnecessary and perhaps even dangerous—for that. Yet he does not go over to the side of the "antirights-talkers," who seem to see the Bill of Rights as a big mistake. Goldwin takes too seriously Madison's sponsorship and arguments for the Bill of Rights for that. Finally, he dissents from the "cynics," who argue not so much against the intrinsic value of the Bill of Rights, but who find the lowest political motives for Madison's conversion to the project, and (given Madison's crucial role) for the ultimate willingness of the Federalists, who controlled the first Congress, to adopt the amendments. In rejecting these three paths of interpretation Goldwin is not alone with his machete in the jungle hacking out an altogether new path. Rather, he here follows work already done by Herbert Storing (in his well-known 1978 essay), Jack Rakove (in his *Original Meanings*), and Lance Banning (in his *Sacred Fire of Liberty*). Yet Goldwin adds much to these earlier accounts, even Storing's, which he claims to follow most closely.

Goldwin not only makes the Federalist reservations about the Bill of Rights very plausible, but following Storing's lead, he shows quite clearly that most of the sound and fury about the amendments was not really about the sort of amendments that ultimately became the Bill of Rights at all. Those at the convention who refused to sign the Constitution (like Elbridge Gerry), and those in the states who did not want to ratify it (like Patrick Henry), were more concerned about structural elements of the new Constitution than about its lack of a bill of rights, that is, a statement of general principles and reservations of specific popular rights. Anti-Federalist leaders were rather much in agreement with Madison and his Federalist allies when they snubbed the Bill of Rights as "mere parchment barriers." It is testimony to the sophistication in political science on the part of most participants in these debates that they saw structures as most important for determining political outcomes, rather than high-minded proclamations. Thus the Anti-Federalists were far more interested in curbing the new government's independent judiciary, its dangerous openness to standing armies, than they were in proclaiming the inviolability of the freedom of the press or speech.

Madison and his Federalist allies were quite definitely opposed to all changes of that sort. Indeed, the Anti-Federalist structural amendments would, in Madison's opinion, undo the great advance in the design of federations he had discovered and which was, for the most part, embedded in the new order. That advance
consisted most critically in the insight that federations could never succeed if they operated in the old federal way of one level of government (the general or federal government) operating on the units at the other level (the member states). The federation government needed to operate in the “national” manner, directly in relation to its human citizens. The federal character of the whole is maintained via the division of responsibility and authority between the different levels. The Anti-Federalists were surprisingly open to accepting Madison’s innovation, but, as Machiavelli might say, they were dangerously given to halfway measures. They feared to trust the new system and wanted to build back in safeguards reminiscent of the old federal mode of operation; that is, they wanted to have more potential intervention and presence of the states in the operation of the general government.

Madison and his friends were adamantly opposed to all such changes, but they also at first resisted the less challenging notion that reservations of a bill-of-right type ought to be added to the Constitution. Here the concern was rather different, however. Goldwin brings out well why Madison thought a bill of rights in the proper sense superfluous at best. Madison was just as much concerned with securing rights as the Anti-Federalists (here Goldwin deviates, perhaps, from Storing), but the argument was about how to do so. Madison believed, famously, that the extended republic, coupled with the internal structure—separation of powers, etc.—would serve as the most effective means of securing rights. Those devices make a Bill of Rights superfluous.

Moreover, Madison believed, even if the Constitution did not in itself serve to secure rights, a Bill of Rights would be particularly ineffective. Goldwin skillfully highlights Madison’s analysis, a particularly striking example of Madison’s astuteness as a political analyst. The problem is not merely that bills of rights are generally “parchment barriers,” but that in republics they are doubly so. In a system of nonmajority rule, a declaration of rights can have efficacy as a rallying point for the naturally stronger element of the community, the majority, against the depredations of king and aristocrats. But when the majority wields effective power, and is itself the source of depredations of rights, then a bill of rights has no purchase on the situation. Goldwin, in other words, brings out very clearly (against lingering Beardianism, if there is any) that Madison’s skepticism about a bill of rights derives from the depth of his commitment to majority rule.

Despite his misgivings, Madison turned round and led the charge for a bill of rights, and did so in the face of resistance, opposition, even intransigence from both his Federalist allies and Anti-Federalist opponents. A fairly standard account holds that Madison’s hand was forced by his constituents. His political enemies in the Virginia legislature had kept him out of the Senate, and in order to win a seat in the House (against his formidable opponent James Monroe, an Anti-Federalist), Madison had to pledge himself to supporting a bill of rights. Goldwin’s stance toward this standard account is very like that of Lance Ban-
ning in his recent excellent study of Madison: "The problem with the standard story... is that it has been served up so commonly in such a heavy sauce of modern disillusionment with politicians that much of the authentic flavor has been lost" (Sacred Fire of Liberty, p. 280). For one thing, says Banning, Madison's standing in Virginia "had never been that seriously at risk" (p. 280). Goldwin, like Storing and Banning, tells a more subtle story, part of it very political indeed, of Madison's shift. Madison recognized that unease about the Constitution had two focal points—the structural concerns of Henry and others, and the concern about a declaration or bill of rights on the other. He recognized, further, that the former concern was more particularly that of Anti-Federalist leaders, while the latter was more a worry of the common people. Madison thought to "divide and conquer"—provide amendments of the rights-securing sort to reconcile the people to the Constitution and thus as a way of winning them away from the Anti-Federal leaders who would do violence to the structure.

The Bill of Rights can thus do real good, win the hearts and minds of the public, and not do any real harm. Goldwin concedes this is political, but it is statesmanship of the highest sort. It distinguishes Madison not only from the Henrys and the Lees, who would disfigure the "beautiful" (Madison's term) Constitution, but also from other Federalists, who believed they had won and were under no obligation to make concessions to their opponents, especially in view of the very large majority they held in Congress.

Goldwin argues, moreover, that Madison may well have come to see the Bill of Rights not as a (superfluous) completion to the institutional structure, but as a useful supplement to it. For in the latter's discussions of the extended republic he had spoken of a "will independent of society" as a possible solution to the problem of majority tyranny. Such a will in the forms heretofore known, non-responsible officers, like kings and nobles, were unreliable and lacked democratic legitimacy, but, Goldwin wonders, might not the people itself, attached in an essential way to their (and everyone's) rights as proclaimed in a Bill of Rights act the part of the "will independent of society?"

In probably the most interesting and original element of the book, Goldwin takes that last point and extends it beyond what Madison and the others seem to have seen. Goldwin is impressed with how successful the Bill of Rights proved to be in reconciling the people to the Constitution. "There must be in [the amendments] something that spoke with remarkable persuasiveness to the American mind and heart" (p 177). Following a hint in Storing, he suggests that the Bill of Rights might be seen as the "people's article"; the people are mentioned in the Preamble, but thereafter they are ushered offstage to make room for the legislative, the executive, the judiciary, the states—the official organs of governance. But with the Bill of Rights the people make a grand reappearance. Just as the other parts of the Constitution grant powers and thereby recognize the legislative, etc., so the Bill of Rights reserves and affirms the rights and thereby recognizes the people. And therein the people recognizes itself in the Constitution—"bone of
my bone, flesh of my flesh,"—guardian of our rights and liberties. Not only, Goldwin maintains, does the Bill of Rights recognize the people as a constituent part of the political order, but it supplies a "portrait" of this particular people, through the rights affirmed and the popular qualities implied. "The people portrayed in the Bill of Rights are religious, tolerant, public spirited, self-sufficient, jealous of their rights and respectful of the rights of others, and responsibly conscious that they are the 'fountain of all power' and therefore must use that power with prudent restraint" (p. 183). It is a portrait this people, or any people, could be proud of, and even if it is a bit idealizing—then and certainly now—it still can and does serve as a standard to be held as a mirror of aspiration before the sovereign people, to remind them of what they must be to deserve their sovereignty. Goldwin thus concludes with a great deal of enthusiasm for the Bill of Rights, more even than Madison at his most enthusiastic.

Despite all these many virtues, there are still some questions and doubts to be raised about Goldwin's account. His focus away from all concerns related to federalism is one area, where I, for one, have doubts. Federalism was a pervasive issue and Goldwin most often passes it over or gives it only glancing attention. Federalism played a much larger role, for example, in the failure of the Federalists to attach a Bill of Rights to the Constitution in the first place. One aspect of this is treated only slightly by Goldwin: the very widespread argument by the Federalists that since this new Constitution establishes a government of limited powers only, and since concerns about bills of rights have not been delegated to it, there is no need to reserve these rights against it. If Congress has no power to legislate on religion, there is no need to tell it not to do so. Indeed, Madison and others said, it might be pernicious to do so in that the reservation of the rights not included in the purview of the delegated powers could well lead to the inference that government has powers beyond the enumerated ones.

More significantly, I think, the fact that the new Constitution was understood to be the Constitution of a federation contributed mightily to the impression a Bill of Rights was unnecessary and inappropriate. Even though the new system operated in the national manner, it was still a federation, that is, a union of pre-existing and in some sense more primary states. These were the fundamental units to which the main business of securing rights was entrusted, and these were the units in which it made the most sense to declare the grounding principles of the social contract, natural rights, and so on. We need to appreciate more than we do now that even in the eyes of Madison, the United States was a derivative and secondary, although still important, entity.

Perhaps more surprisingly, Goldwin almost entirely omits from his narrative the amendment Madison proposed and which he thought the most valuable of the lot. "No state shall infringe the equal rights of conscience, nor the freedom of speech, or the press, nor of the right of trial by jury in criminal cases." The House accepted that amendment, but true to Madison's fears of an institution
constituted as the Senate was, the latter killed this protection of rights in the states. To appreciate fully Madison's commitment to this proposal one would need to reconnect his extended-republic argument with his proposal for a veto power over state legislation. Goldwin, however, does not enter this range of issue at all.

Finally, and, from the perspective of today, most curiously, Goldwin hardly notices—and I mean hardly notices—a point that Jefferson emphasized in his correspondence with Madison about a bill of rights, and that Madison built up to as the most signal contribution a bill of rights could make (why it needn't be a mere "parchment barrier" even in a republic): "If they are incorporated into the Constitution, independent tribunals of justice will consider themselves in a particular manner the guardians of these rights. They will be an impenetrable bulwark against every assumption of power in the legislative or executive. They will be naturally led to resist every encroachment upon rights expressly stipulated for in the constitution by the declaration of rights." Madison clearly looks to judicial review as a, or even the main mechanism by which the Bill of Rights will be rendered effective and good. Goldwin finds its effectiveness and goodness elsewhere. What he adds to our usual obsession with judicial enforcement is all to the good, but he has worried too much, perhaps, about giving aid and comfort to the civil-liberties mafia and worried too much, perhaps about offending the antirights-talkers. The Supreme Court is a legitimate part of the story, and Goldwin's fine book would be yet finer if it were part of his version of the story too.
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