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Interpretation

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Heidegger and Strauss:
Temporality, Religion and Political Philosophy

LAURENCE BERNs
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I

At St. John's College with its almost all-required curriculum all students read a great deal of philosophy, all original texts: Plato, Aristotle, Anselm, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and others. A number of students, not the best, come to believe that they know what philosophy is. To my great joy, the penultimate reading of their four years has become Heidegger's What is that—Philosophy? (The last reading is Plato's Phaedrus.) In that little work Heidegger, partly through an examination of the origins of philosophy, makes it perfectly clear that we do not know what philosophy is; that to talk about philosophy is not to enter into philosophy, to philosophize; that like religion philosophy must enter into our very being, if we are to enter into it. It is not some method that can be turned on and off like a light switch; it is a way to be traveled, a way of living and searching, an extravagant searching for the governing sources of things.

We study Heidegger for the same reason that we study anyone whom we take seriously: we think that we might learn something important from him. To take a philosopher seriously does not mean to accept what he or she says. Any decent teacher of philosophy classes knows that the best students are those who argue with you, those whose concern for the truth or falsity of what you say far outweighs any concern they might have for good grades or recommendations. We study Heidegger especially because we think that through him we may be able to understand better the deepest tendencies of modern philosophy as a whole.

Heidegger understands that the foundations of modern philosophy were not laid down in a vacuum; that they were laid down in explicit and conscious opposition to ancient philosophy, especially the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and to the synthesis of classical philosophy and biblical religion known as


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scholasticism. To understand the foundations of modern philosophy requires understanding what those philosophers thought they were rejecting and what they were rejecting; the two might not be the same. This does not mean the merely historical task of listing contrasting doctrines. If the job is to be done philosophically, each of the positions must be understood as those taking them understood themselves, in their own terms. Heidegger's long and deep wrestlings with Greek texts are not displays of erudition, they are necessary for the clarification of his own thinking.

So then it turns out that in order to understand modern philosophy one is obliged to understand classical philosophy in its own terms. The classical philosophers appear to have thought that they uncovered some fundamental truths. If they are to be understood in their own terms, is one not obliged to be open minded about those claims to truth, to take them seriously? Silly man, I seem to hear, don't we all know that ancient philosophy rested on a thoroughly refuted conception of nature, refuted by modern natural science? The technological marvels we see around us every day, better than any argument, confirm the understanding of nature they rest upon, the nature of modern mathematical and experimental science. True, my interlocutor might admit, in the study of human things, the realms of justice, beauty, human aspiration, philosophy itself, the success of modern science is not so conspicuous, but nevertheless it is really very difficult for a modern man or woman to take classical philosophy seriously.

Leo Strauss addressed himself in many ways to the obstacles modern men have in taking classical philosophy seriously:

The modern students of classical philosophy are modern men, and hence they almost inevitably approach classical philosophy from a modern point of view. Only if the study of classical philosophy were accompanied by constant and relentless reflection on the modern principles, and hence by liberation from the naive acceptance of those principles, could there be any prospect of an adequate understanding of classical philosophy by modern men.

The serious study of classical and modern philosophy, then, must accompany one another.

Strauss's formula, it seems to me, can also be applied to the objection from modern science. Study of the classics of modern natural science and careful reflection on its principles (as the mathematics and laboratory science program of St. John's College attempts to do) should be part of, or prerequisite to any serious philosophy program. There is no other way for most of us, it seems to me, to liberate ourselves from a naive acceptance of the authority of those principles. Modern science reveals itself to be a field of fascinating hypotheses, ingenious experiments and many very open questions. Such a study leads to deeper appreciation of the truths it has discovered, at the same time that it refutes its early founders' claims to universality. Let us assume that modern
physics has provided us with a mathematically clear and distinct account of its subject matter, but this apparently has been accomplished by simply ignoring everything that cannot be made to fit into such an account, ignoring anything that cannot be mathematicized. The more comprehensive classical account, say of Aristotle, bases itself on principles like act and potency or form and material that are constitutive principles throughout all nature, including human nature and ethical and political life. The mathematically clear and distinct account would then be one part of the more comprehensive, true and adequate account. Strauss evidently had something like this in mind when he spoke of "the true universal science into which modern science will have to be integrated eventually."4

It is striking that thoughtful physicists, like Heisenberg and John Wheeler, when trying to make sense of quantum theory fall into Aristotelian language. The theory, since it is primarily statistical and probabilistic, is spoken of in terms of potentiality, the experimental measurements in terms of actuality. Listen to Wheeler interpreting Bohr’s complementarity thesis: "The laws of physics tell us only what may happen. Actual measurement tells us what is happening (or what did happen). . . . Measurement [is] the act of turning potentiality into actuality. . . ."5

II

Both Strauss and Heidegger agree with the ancients that all theorizing, all science and philosophy, begins from and therefore is a modification of what is naturally and primordially given to human experience, that is, prescientific and prephilosophic experience, what Husserl calls the "life-world." (Human experience includes what is said about what is experienced.) Thinking that wants to get at the roots or foundations of human cognition, that is, philosophic thinking, then is obliged to make a careful, accurate description and analysis of that prescientific articulation of things. (Heidegger’s technical term for such analysis is existential analytic.) This poses a special problem for our times when so much of ordinary experience itself is shaped and dominated by science. It also provides another motive for the serious study of ancient texts.

Heidegger criticizes all previous attempts to articulate the meaning and structure of the given, the life-world: they have all failed to reach the primordially given, the *pragmata*, the fundamental objects of human concern. This failure, to put it in non-Heideggerian terms, is the failure to articulate the fundamental attitude of religiosity permeating the perspective of the life-world. A christianized anthropology is used by Heidegger to articulate the structures of human existence. The foundations of morality are discussed in terms of conscience, guilt and fallenness; history, *Geschichte*, is connected to *Geschick*, what has been sent; objects of thought "at the end of philosophy" give themselves to
thinking that opens itself in grateful acceptance. Karl Löwith, a deep student and personal acquaintance of Heidegger, put it as follows:

But what lies obscurely at the basis of everything Heidegger ever said, and induces many to become attentive and listen is something unsaid: The religious motive, which has surely separated itself from Christian belief, but just in its dogmatically uncommitted indeterminateness appeals the more to those who are no longer believing Christians, but still would like to be religious.

Strauss, too, was most attentive to the religious element of the prescientific or prephilosophic understanding of the world. The differences between Strauss and the ancients, on the one hand, and Heidegger, on the other, about how that religious element is to be understood are fundamental.

Strauss devoted himself primarily, but not only, to what he called political philosophy, even more particularly to “Platonic Political Philosophy.” The word “political” in political philosophy is fruitfully ambiguous. It can designate politics as the subject matter of political philosophy. The highest, but by no means the only, object of political philosophy from that point of view is the good, the just, the best society. The word “political” in political philosophy can also refer to a manner of treatment of philosophy as a whole, to politic philosophizing. This less manifest meaning requires some explanation.

Differences between individual human beings go far beyond the differences between individuals of any other species, and at the same time, as Aristotle notes, human beings are more political and more social than members of any other animal species. This tension between radical individuality and sociality, the need for unified communal action and life requires a forceful political center. One can by force drive animals together in herds. But for human beings this kind of imposition of social unity is always hateful and earns the hated name of tyranny. Human beings look for something better; they want to act in ways that they can believe are right. For society to exist decently, with a modicum of freedom, the sanctification of norms is required, both to provide individuals with sufficient moral strength to make the sacrifices required for overcoming radical selfishness as well as for overcoming external enemies. The sanctifications required to keep society decently free have, from philosophy’s point of view, the cognitive status of opinions. Philosophy, as the ascent from opinion to knowledge, calls into question all opinions, even the best opinions, as insufficient knowledge. The canons of philosophic and scientific evidence, therefore, tend to dissolve the moral commitments society requires by calling the cognitive status of their supports into question. Is philosophy then inherently subversive? Not necessarily, if in their public speech and writing the philosophers learn to mute whatever might tend to weaken the sources of human decency and freedom. What seems to be required is an art that can liberate those capable of it
from unsubstantiated opinion and at the same time support and strengthen the
morality that makes for good citizenship.

This is what I was referring to earlier as politic philosophizing, the other
meaning of "political" in political philosophy. If some such art, as Strauss has
argued, characterized most of philosophy prior to Kant, prior to the so-called
Enlightenment, in order to understand such philosophizing the serious student
must have recourse to the implications of his teachers’ philosophic rhetoric.

Classical political philosophy, then, in Strauss’s view consisting of ethics and
politics, is that branch of philosophy that is devoted to the articulation and
understanding of the prephilosophic or prescientific point of view and the nego-
tiation of the tensions constituting it. The fundamental tension constituting the
prephilosophic perspective is the tension between the demands of piety and the
divination of an impersonal, intelligible nature that leads to philosophy and sci-
ence. Political philosophy, so understood, articulates the fundamental tension,
not only by its study of the straightforward questions of ethics and politics, but
also by the study of the origins of philosophy, the quarrel between the poets
and the philosophers, the questions of the possibility of philosophy as a way of
life, the religious life, the principles of revealed religion. A number of Strauss’s
early writings were devoted to exposing the pretensions of the so-called Enlight-
enment’s alleged refutation of revealed religion. His mature view, if I under-
stand it, is that revealed religion and rational science and philosophy are mutu-
ally irrefutable. This mutual irrefutability, he suggests, may be the secret of the
vitality of Western civilization.

For Strauss, with Aristotle, philosophy came into the world by separating
itself from religion. Heidegger rejects this account of the origin of philosophy
as a Platonic-Aristotelian prejudice. Opposing faith and science he regards as a
“fall of thinking.” Religious mythos and philosophic logos “became separated
and opposed only there where neither mythos nor logos could maintain their
original essential presence. This happened already with Plato.” It would not be
academically appropriate to defend religiosity as such. Heidegger’s religiosity
comes through what Strauss refers to as his radical historicism.

Following Hegel and Nietzsche, for Heidegger, all thought is bound and con-
trolled by temporality, by History, by how Being reveals itself mysteriously
to each thinker’s own time. Are the political consequences of such a position
philosophically relevant? All transcendent, i.e., transhistorical, ethical and politi-
cal principles that could support or induce moderation and a critical stand to-
ward the given goals of one’s own historical situation are disparaged as “un-
timely” or superficial. Can this have nothing to do with Heidegger’s albeit
temporary infatuation with National Socialism?

For Strauss, following Plato and Aristotle, what makes it possible for us to
have access to transhistorical, to permanent natural principles, if it is possible,
is the power called intellect, the activity called intellection. Bacon, Descartes,
Hobbes, Locke, Hume and Kant are said to have refuted that possibility. Heidegger, if he accepts it at all, boxes it within temporality. For us who do not know enough to be either dogmatists or sceptics about the matter, the question is open.

NOTES

1. The illusion of these students is matched by the general practice in academia of members of philosophy departments who call each other “philosophers,” as if one could become an artist by becoming a member of an art department.

Was ist das—die Philosophie? a lecture given in Cerisy-la-Salle, Normandy, August, 1955, to introduce a discussion, as Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?

2. That it is a whole is certainly an arguable and questionable assumption.


6. “Existence” translates Dasein, literally “being-there.”


Cf. Leo Strauss, “German Nihilism,” a lecture delivered February 26, 1941, Interpretation, 26, no. 3 (1999): 364, see also p. 362. “I do not see how those can resist the voice of that siren [Nihilism] who expect the answer to the first and last question from ‘History,’ from the future as such; who mistake analysis of the present or past or future for philosophy . . . who are not guided by a known and stable standard: . . . 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 . . . .”
John Rawls and Liberal Neutrality

TIM HURLEY
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[I]t is an inevitable mark of what the late Sir Edwin Hoskyns used to call the ‘tyranny of liberalism’ that the liberal is not only convinced that he is right; he is also convinced that other people secretly agree with him—how could they do otherwise?—and are only restrained from saying so by unworthy motives arising from worldly prudence, material interest, and so forth.

C.H. Smyth

This essay addresses two different justifications of liberal neutrality about the good in the thought of John Rawls. The distinction between these justifications for neutrality can be understood in terms of the familiar contrast between the right and the good, where the right concerns how we should act (including what justice demands of us) and the good concerns what ends are valuable, or more generally what constitutes a choiceworthy human life.

Each justification is of a sort that has been put forth many times. Thus the first justification, concerning the good, resembles one articulated by Kurt Baier, who says that

[a] modern belief is that there is no such thing as the absolutely best life—that no single pattern will suit everybody, that people often find that they have made a mistake in their first choice, that people’s tastes can change along the way, and that no one can tell reliably what life style a given person will find fulfilling.

This justifies neutrality about the good by positing that the good is very broad, that it is based on desire, and that it is not much constrained by a human nature that defines specific ends suitable for humans as such. Then at least tolerance of a broad array of human practices seems to follow naturally; normally it is wrong to ban something that is good.

The other justification concerns the right. Whatever the breadth of the good, this view holds, we have a duty not to reason from the badness, if any, of certain practices. We are, that is, to be neutral in a stronger sense than in the argument above. We are to be neutral both between various human ends and concerning the question of how broad the good is. It is just that we have a duty to allow persons to go their own way, even if that way is mistaken.

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The first sort of justification appears in *A Theory of Justice*, more in the form of an assumption than an argument, the latter sort in *Political Liberalism*. The neutrality, such as it is, of *Theory* depends upon a crucial assumption about the human good. In *Political Liberalism* similar conclusions are supported by an argument about the right. My contention is that a difficulty in *Theory*—that its assumption about the good is controversial but unsupported—could at least partly be remedied by the argument concerning the right in *Political Liberalism*. But the argument in *Political Liberalism* in its turn fails, leaving a serious hole in Rawls's view.

Inevitably this essay also has another theme. Though the nature of Rawls's neutrality changes over time, there is one very striking common thread in his work—his provincialism. *Theory* articulates what follows on a distinctly liberal account of the human good, while asserting that that account has virtually universal support. *Political Liberalism* divides political actors into the reasonable and the unreasonable, with garden-variety conservatives, and others who do not in any interesting sense reject the essentials of democracy, often turning out to be unreasonable or worse. Rawls's work, early and late, exhibits little awareness that there are serious-minded persons who in fundamental respects disagree with him. In his early work this is a problem; in his later work it is fatal.

1. NEUTRALITY IN A *THEORY OF JUSTICE*

1.1 The Role of Goodness as Rationality in A Theory of Justice

The account of the good that operates explicitly in the original position is the primary goods. The most crucial primary goods for political purposes are "rights and liberties, opportunities and powers, income and wealth" (*TJ*, p. 92), as well as "perhaps the most important primary good" (p. 440), self-respect. These are conceived of principally not as good in themselves but as all-purpose means useful in the pursuit of many different life-plans (p. 93). Without the primary goods the parties in the original position would lack all motivation; they would not prefer life over death, freedom over slavery, so the primary goods are essential if the original position is to work.

The parties are so constituted that they simply prefer more primary goods for themselves, but here in the real world we must ask: Why are the primary goods good? This is a complex question, but the main answer is that the primary goods are "based on" (*TJ*, p. x) goodness as rationality, Rawls's account of the good in Part Three of *Theory*. So it is necessary briefly to examine goodness as rationality.

Goodness as rationality provides Rawls's "thin" theory of the good, that as-
pect of the good known before the principles of justice are chosen. From this account of the good we can see that the primary goods in fact promote the good of all rational persons and so all rational persons will desire them.

In general under goodness as rationality a thing is good if it is rational to desire it (*TJ*, pp. 399, 403–4). Applied specifically to life-plans, goodness as rationality has two parts, the principles of rational choice and deliberative rationality (p. 408). The first takes our general aims and by applying certain rational principles (e.g., that more effective means are to be preferred over less effective [pp. 411–13]) generates a class of rational life-plans. Then deliberative rationality helps select from among this class. Most important at this stage is that Rawls hypothetically grants the agent full knowledge of relevant facts including the consequences of his choices, and his good is defined as the plan that would be chosen with such knowledge (pp. 417, 421). Of course, some religious believers would say that any rational person with full information about the consequences of his choices would adopt their faith because he would know that rejecting the faith would merit eternal damnation. Rawls of course does not mean this; presumably “full” information is restricted to terrestrial matters, or it is simply assumed that no rejection of a true faith could have such consequences.

Goodness as rationality is an account of the good based on desire. “To put it briefly, the good is the satisfaction of rational desire” (p. 93). Taking *Theory* as a whole, the good of a person is conceived of in terms of what that person desires, constrained in several ways. First, the good must be rational as described above. Second, one should follow the “Aristotelian Principle,” which holds that the exercise of developed capacities is enjoyed, and enjoyed more the more developed and complex the capacity (p. 426). The significance of the Aristotelian Principle in directly constraining the good is doubtful, however; it functions most prominently in Rawls’s argument as to why the sense of justice (the desire to act on his two principles of justice) is part of a person’s good (see p. 571, sec. 79). Third, the good is constrained by the principles of right chosen in the original position (p. 31). Finally, Rawls argues extensively that the sense of justice is itself part of the human good (secs. 79, 86). He recognizes that for some this might not be the case—but “their nature is their misfortune” (p. 576).

Several things are initially striking about goodness as rationality. First, the restrictions on the objects of desire that define a person’s good are all either formal (deliberative rationality, the Aristotelian Principle) or derived from the account of the right (the restraints deriving from the two principles, the good of the sense of justice). Beyond these there are no restrictions on the ends that constitute the good of humans as such.

Second, goodness as rationality is neutral in a sense. It spells out no particular conception of the good as the correct one because it is neutral between aims. But it is not neutral in that it assumes, essentially without argument, a version of the idea that the good is the desired. Some views of the good are essentially
based on desire; they take the desires persons in fact have, perhaps with some modest modifications, as establishing persons’ real good. Other views work from, say, an account of human nature that fixes certain ends as appropriate for humans as such, and to which their desires must conform if the human good is to be achieved. Goodness as rationality places Rawls in the former camp. Thus, its neutrality is at the same level as that of J. S. Mill—neutral between particular desires but not between those views that assert, and those that deny, that the desired is the good. Thomas Nagel has aptly summed up goodness as rationality as holding that “the best that can be wished for someone is the unimpeded pursuit of his own path, provided it does not interfere with the rights of others.”

Third, and surprisingly, Rawls gives no indication that he sees goodness as rationality as seriously controversial. He has a remarkable footnote in which he claims that “there is wide agreement, with many variations, on an account of the good along these lines” (TI, p. 400 n.2), citing as parties to that agreement Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Sidgwick, and a number of others. But any appearance of such agreement is spurious. For instance, as Alasdair MacIntyre says, “[a]n Aristotelian theory of the virtues . . . presuppose[s] a crucial distinction between what any particular individual at any particular time takes to be good for him and what is really good for him as a man.”

Someone might object here that goodness as rationality truly is not controversial because it is merely formal, a framework for understanding the good, and thus acceptable to virtually everyone. It might be argued that to say, as Rawls does, that the good is the object of rational desire is like saying that justice is giving each his due. No one disagrees with such notions, it might be argued; persons simply differ about what is “rational” or what a person is “due.” To this I would make three replies. First, we have seen that Rawls does give an account of “rational” desires. What emerges is that the desires that count as rational are restricted only in very limited ways. This makes goodness as rationality neutral across a very broad range of desires. Far from rendering goodness as rationality acceptable to everyone, it is precisely this neutrality that makes it controversial. Second, as we have seen, it is from goodness as rationality that the primary goods are derived. But if goodness as rationality were truly formal it could not produce such a substantive (though still open-ended) account of the good. Third, as we will see below, the account of the primary goods needs goodness as rationality, or something like it, if serious objections are to be avoided. So if Rawls had not put forth goodness as rationality in the controversial form I have described then we would have to invent it for him. And this ability to work back from the primary goods to an understanding of goodness as rationality as controversial further supports my interpretation.

A final thing to note about goodness as rationality is that Theory appears to assume that it is the true account of the good. As Rawls says, goodness as rationality tells us a person’s “real good” (p. 417).
1.2 Three Questions

I want now to turn to three questions the answers to which reveal how Theory needs goodness as rationality, or something like it, in order to avoid difficulties that would at least render the book radically incomplete. These difficulties re-emerge when the central argument of Political Liberalism fails.

1.2.1 Why Are Conceptions of the Good Eliminated from the Original Position? In the original position, the parties' conceptions of the good, the specific ends they will pursue in the real world, are hidden behind the veil of ignorance (TJ, p. 12). Now the veil is designed to eliminate knowledge of arbitrary contingencies that tend to produce bias (pp. 12, 136–37). It would be natural to object to Rawls that one's own account of the good is not an arbitrary contingency but an objectively true insight into human nature, and that therefore it should be known to the parties in the original position. But this objection appears to be misplaced, given Rawls's assumption about the good. Rawls assumes that the good is the object of rational desire and is thus very broad. The conceptions of the good excluded from the original position are simply those specific ends, from among all the objects of desire, that individuals will be inclined to pursue in the real world. To admit those into the original position would produce both bias and hopeless deadlock. So given goodness as rationality Rawls makes good his claim to exclude from the original position only inappropriate knowledge of the good. The parties in effect act on the assumption that goodness as rationality is correct, so to tell them about their specific ends would simply allow them to favor their own idiosyncrasies. Once this is understood, one's initial puzzlement at Rawls's rather cursory treatment of the question of the exclusion of conceptions of the good from the original position (see p. 12) evaporates.

1.2.2 Why Is Self-Respect Good? Self-respect (or self-esteem), "perhaps the most important primary good" (TJ, p. 440), occupies a peculiarly prominent place in Rawls's thought. Rawls regards the securing of self-respect as an important political goal. Self-respect has two parts.

First of all . . . it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of the good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions. (TJ, p. 440).

I want to focus on the first part of self-respect, and in particular on its involving a belief, or as Rawls puts it, a "secure conviction," that one's life-plan has value. The preconditions for securing self-respect include the availability, for each individual, of a community wherein his endeavors are appreciated and esteemed.
"[U]nless our endeavors are appreciated by our associates it is impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile . . . " (p. 441). The Rawlsian citizen is sensitive to public opinion and unable to resist strong, general condemnation of his way of life. "[The parties'] self-respect and their confidence in the value of their own system of ends cannot withstand the indifference much less the contempt of others" (p. 338).

This cosseting community essential for self-respect is itself secured by following Rawlsian justice:

[A]s citizens, we are to reject the standard of perfection as a political principle, and for the purposes of justice avoid any assessment of the relative value of one another's way of life. . . . Thus what is necessary is that there should be for each person at least one community of shared interests to which he belongs and where he finds his endeavors confirmed by his associates. And for the most part this assurance is sufficient whenever in public life citizens respect one another's ends and adjudicate their political claims in ways that also support their self-esteem. It is precisely this background condition that is maintained by the principles of justice. The parties in the original position do not adopt the principle of perfection, for rejecting this criterion prepares the way to recognize the good of all activities that fulfill the Aristotelian Principle (and are compatible with the principles of justice). This democracy in judging one another's ends is the foundation of self-respect in a well-ordered society. (TJ, p. 442). By negative implication, departure from this "democracy in judging one another's ends" would undermine persons' self-respect, and it is not hard to see one way it would happen. Rawls has assumed a citizen almost painfully sensitive to disapproval. If the law itself were to embody the assumption that a given way of life was unworthy, and still more if it were actively to discourage or suppress that way of life, this powerful political condemnation would undermine belief in the goodness of that way of life. You can legislate morality.

Self-respect, like other primary goods, is a means to the pursuit of our good. With it we can pursue our life-plans with vigor. "Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them. All desire and activity becomes empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism" (TJ, p. 440). Rawls's principles of justice are a precondition for self-respect, which in turn is a precondition for achieving our good. Those in the original position would avoid undermining self-respect "at almost any cost . . . " (p. 440).

It may at first seem strange that Rawls gives so central a place to self-respect, a good that might seem to have little political significance. But Rawls's treatment of self-respect in fact reflects considerable psychological insight. The account of self-respect and its place in political society stresses a theme as old as Plato and appears to answer a standard critique of the liberal citizen. Plato famously divided the soul into three parts, the rational, the appetitive, and the
thymotic or spirited (see Republic, 435e–441c). The thymotic is the seat of impulses both ennobling and dangerous. Included here are courage, a desire for recognition of one’s superiority—and self-respect. These features of human nature are ennobling, because they raise humans above the level of mere mundane desire. A common critique of the liberal citizen is that he is contemptible because his soul is dominated by the appetite part, especially its acquisitive aspect, and reason understood as nothing but calculation of how to achieve one’s aims. He is all appetite and rational calculation, no spiritedness (see Fukuyama, p. 160). To this Rawls can reply by pointing to his account of self-respect. To demand self-respect is to demand recognition of the worth of one’s ends (identified by Rawls with one’s worth as a person [ TJ, p. 440]). It is to insist that one’s dignity be respected by others. This is one of the higher human aspirations. Self-respect in some sense of the term is an important good. Although Rawls must be wrong to suggest that it is “impossible” to continue to value one’s ends in the face of hostile public opinion, it is difficult, and even for those who can do it, enduring such hostility is painful. Of course, the desire for recognition of one’s worth must be tempered by Rawls’s egalitarianism. Desire for recognition of one’s superiority must be relegated to the private sphere, including a carefully circumscribed arena of permissible economic competition.

Self-respect, as I mentioned above, involves a belief that one’s life-plan has value, that one’s ends (objects of desire) are worth pursuing. If this belief is a good, then self-respect can be good, otherwise not. And surely the belief is good if true, but bad if false. Here is a crucial point at which goodness as rationality provides support for the primary goods. Goodness as rationality is a version of the idea that the good is the desired. So if goodness as rationality is correct, then the life-plan that a Rawlsian citizen desires to pursue will in fact be good, so long as it is consistent with the principles of justice and satisfies the rather lenient requirements of goodness as rationality. Then the belief that such a life-plan is good will be true. Then that belief will be good, and self-respect, insofar as it consists of that belief, will be a good. To lose self-respect—to lose the conviction that the objects of our desire are good—will then be an unqualified evil, depriving us of both a necessary precondition for the vigorous pursuit of a good life-plan and of a true belief.

If goodness as rationality is correct. For the picture changes radically if we reject Rawls’s close connection between the good and the desired, that is, if we reject goodness as rationality. Then the objects of some permissible desires in a Rawlsian society will not be good, and the belief that they are will be false. And so self-respect, consisting in part of that belief, will sometimes be an evil.

It may seem odd that self-respect could be an evil and its loss a benefit. But goodness as rationality is not obviously correct, and if it is wrong then there are many cases where to prefer self-respect to its loss is to prefer the ignorant pursuit of evil over the awareness that one’s life-plan, or some part of it, in truth lacks value. This awareness may sometimes be painful, even (as Rawls
says) enervating, but it is surely preferable to the alternative. And so one of Rawls’s goods turns out to be quite possibly an evil. Indeed, some might find an objection to liberal society in its tendency to promote the false sense of the goodness of many life-plans lacking, at least in part, in real value. If shame is, as Rawls says, “the feeling that someone has when he experiences an injury to his self-respect or suffers a blow to his self-esteem” (TJ, p. 442), some will find the Rawlsian citizen shameless.

And of course Rawls cannot countenance the securing of self-respect by the promotion of false belief. “[S]uch devices as Plato’s Noble Lie . . . are ruled out” (TJ, p. 454 n.1) in justice as fairness. Goodness as rationality must be true, so that the belief partly constituting self-respect will be true and hence its promotion legitimate in a well-ordered society. Rawls needs goodness as rationality as the true account of the good.

1.2.3 Why Is Freedom Good? In both Theory and Rawls’s later work, liberty is a primary good (TJ, p. 92; PL, p. 181), and this, along with other features of the original position, leads the parties to choose principles of justice that guarantee “the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.” (TJ, p. 302. This theory is later modified. See Political Liberalism, p. 5.) So Kant’s great purported failure—that from an account of the right neutral between ends few prohibitions will flow—becomes contemporary liberalism’s great triumph. Rawls takes the goodness of liberty to be rather obvious (see TJ, pp. 92, 396), and given goodness as rationality it seems that it is. For freedom clearly is a means to the pursuit of the desired, and if one’s desires define one’s real good, then freedom unequivocally promotes one’s good. But matters may be more complicated if we question goodness as rationality.

If goodness as rationality were false then it would be possible both that many things permissibly pursued in liberal society were in fact bad and that the law could in principle do people good by directing them onto paths other than the ones they would pursue when unimpeded. This would be true because the paths people would pursue when unimpeded no longer necessarily would reflect their true good. Now as the original position stands such considerations cannot occur to the parties: their situation and motivations model goodness as rationality. But once goodness as rationality is questioned there is no obvious reason that the original position should model it. Assuming instead an account of the good drawing a sharper distinction between the good and the desired would require certain changes, if the original position remained a useful device at all. The parties, knowing at least that their unimpeded choices might go wrong, would face a far more complex question concerning freedom. What would they want the community to do if they were pursuing evil? The answer is by no means obvious, and of course could vary considerably depending on circumstances. But at least we can say that their decision would not be biased, because they
still would not know their own aims—would not know, that is, whether they themselves, once in the real world, would be inclined to pursue the good or not. Nor would this information introduce dissension into the original position. The parties would be clones just as before, only now with different information.

There is something else the parties should know, too, once goodness as rationality was rejected, something which seems to follow from Rawls’s own thought once goodness as rationality is excised: the educative effect of the law. Rawls posits a citizen whose beliefs about the good are exquisitely sensitive to the surrounding social and legal order. Rawls’s assumption that political principles can affect self-respect understood in his sense provides the perfect opening for morals legislation designed to improve persons’ awareness of their own good. Rawls says that “unless our endeavors are appreciated by our associates it is impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile” (TJ, p. 441). This is a sentiment dear to morals legislators everywhere. If Rawls is right that political principles can undermine self-respect, including the belief that one’s aims are good, then law could confer a positive benefit by causing more persons to believe the truth about the good. Those in the original position would have to be aware of this if only because Rawls grants them general knowledge of how society operates (TJ, pp. 137–38), and so they would have to know that in a liberal society their chances of true belief about the good and desire for it could be lower than in a political society informed by the full, true account of the good. And in affecting their beliefs and desires the nonliberal society would be promoting their good, because true belief and desire for things in fact good would surely themselves be good and would lead people to the good.

Experience reinforces the sense that law affects moral judgment. Robert P. George has argued that since the civil rights era it cannot be argued that “you can’t legislate morality,” if by that is meant that law cannot cause citizens to alter moral judgments.12 The court decisions and legislation of that time were surely among the causes of the development of a strong public consensus in favor of racial equality. Both sides in the battle over homosexual rights are well aware of this, which is one reason that legal issues concerning homosexuality which are not otherwise of earthshattering consequence stir such passions. Michael Hardwick of Bowers v. Hardwick (478 U.S. 186 [1986]) had to file suit to challenge the constitutionality of the antisodomy statute because the authorities in Georgia followed the practice, virtually universal in America, of not prosecuting private, consensual homosexual activity between adults. But the holding denying a constitutional right to homosexual activity remains deeply controversial, in part because of implicit awareness of the Constitution’s moral authority in American culture. Law is a powerful, authoritative cultural symbol, and the fight is for control of it. Rawls is acutely aware of the regime’s effect on moral attitudes, and apparently would not be bothered by the knowledge that justice as fairness would tend to produce citizens who believed that the life one
chose was good for one, and that what they themselves were inclined to pursue was good, but this could only be because of the implicit moral indifferentism of goodness as rationality. Take away that unsupported assumption and a tension between the real good and the primary goods appears starkly.

1.3 Rawls and Utilitarians on the Relation Between the Right and the Good

One implication of this understanding of Rawls’s assumptions about the human good is that one must be very careful in interpreting the idea that for Rawls the right is prior to the good, whereas for utilitarians the good is prior to the right. This does not mean that Rawls chooses principles of justice with less reference to the good than do utilitarians. Goodness as rationality assumes that the good is the object of rational desire, and so do the utilitarians. Theory starts from utilitarian assumptions about the good while trying to avoid utilitarian problems. Hence the primary goods allow better interpersonal comparisons of well-being, and the maximin rule and resulting difference principle, the priority of liberty, and the requirement that life-plans conform to the principles of justice protect the individual from having her basic life-prospects destroyed for some greater good. It is this softening of the hard edge of utilitarianism that most clearly distinguishes Theory. In no interesting sense is Rawls’s early work any more neutral about the good than is utilitarianism.

The problem in Theory, then, should be clear. Goodness as rationality is of course controversial, and it is crucial to the project. But although Rawls elaborates it at great length in Part Three, nowhere does he argue for it. He does not even acknowledge that it is controversial. The remainder of this essay investigates whether anything in Political Liberalism can fill this hole.

2. NEUTRALITY IN POLITICAL LIBERALISM

2.1 Stability in A Theory of Justice

After 1971 Rawls appears to have become increasingly concerned with the problem of stability, a topic he had already addressed at great length in the latter part of Theory (chaps. 8–9). The exposition of justice as fairness proceeds in two stages. The first concerns the original position and the principles of justice that would be chosen there. The second tests these principles to determine whether they will be stable. The stability of the system is assured if departures from its equilibrium state generate sufficient countervailing forces to restore
equilibrium (TJ, p. 457). In the account in Theory, tendencies to instability are of two sorts. First is the tendency of persons to become free riders, to attempt to derive the benefit from a cooperative undertaking without making a full contribution to sustaining it. Second is the tendency of persons not to do their fair share if they fear or perceive that others are not doing theirs (p. 336). Clearly, the first sort of tendency would contribute to the second, and eliminating the first would tend to eliminate the second. Crucial to maintaining stability is the sense of justice, the effective desire to act on the principles of justice chosen in the original position (p. 458). A political system should be stable if citizens have a strong and enduring sense of justice, and so Rawls devotes considerable effort in Theory to showing how the sense of justice corresponding to his principles could be developed in an individual, and how it is in fact part of an individual’s good.

Perhaps it is not, on reflection, so surprising that Rawls is greatly concerned with stability, a subject that for most political philosophers figures much less prominently. He has, one might say, neither the highest good nor the most fearsome evil to motivate loyalty to his regime. His political society does not promise that it will promote a determinate set of ends constitutive of human perfection. Nor can he, with Hobbes, call on the strongly felt passion to avoid violent death. His political society will provide security, of course, but he wants a much broader consensus than that necessary for such a limited purpose. Rawls’s citizen must adhere to principles more extensive than that commanding the simple obedience necessary to satisfy the most basic and reliable passions, but not extensive enough to promote human perfection. If the ancients built a shining city on a hill, and the moderns “built on low but solid ground,” Rawls’s citizen is camped uneasily on the hillside. With neither high inspiration nor abject terror to move him, the danger is that his response to his political society will be tepid at best. This problem is especially acute given the account of the good that operates in the original position. If a person outside the original position simply regarded his good as the primary goods (plus his more specific ends to which the primary goods are means) then a sharp conflict would emerge between the pursuit of justice and the pursuit of his good. He would see his good as consisting in more wealth, self-respect, and so on for himself. Only by happenstance would he see his good as tied up with that of his fellows—only, that is, if his particular ends happened to be altruistic. Justice could easily come to be seen as something merely onerous, and stability would be imperiled. Hence the need for an extensive treatment of the citizen’s motives for upholding Rawls’s political society.

The two main strands in Rawls’s account of stability are a psychology designed to make believable the development of citizens’ loyalty to the two principles and an axiology designed to show that the sense of justice is (normally) part of a citizen’s good. The psychology, much indebted to Piaget and Kohlberg,
takes the growing citizen through stages of moral development (TJ, secs. 70–72). At each stage the citizen perceives others acting justly toward him and develops loyalty toward persons and rules that promote his good. This psychological tendency helps explain why citizens generally would support the two principles, which assure equal liberty and which, in the economic sphere, improve the lot of all (where improvement is measured from a baseline of equality [TJ, p. 80]). Rawls contrasts justice as fairness here with utilitarianism, which may require the interests of some to be sacrificed for the greater good, rendering less plausible the development of its corresponding sense of justice (pp. 499–502). The second, axiological strand of the account tries to show that a normal person would see the sense of justice as part of his good. We pay a heavy psychological price for the deception our acts of injustice entail; injustice is likely to harm those we care about; the Aristotelian Principle shows that the complex activity of life in a well-ordered society is part of our good; and acting justly expresses our desire to be free and equal rational beings (TJ, pp. 570–72). Thus, even from the standpoint of the thin theory (that account of the good known to us before we choose principles of justice), the sense of justice is part of our good (TJ, sec. 86). Justice as fairness is “as stable as one could hope for” (TJ, p. 399).

This sketch does not exhaust the diverse props Rawls uses to shore up the stability of his political society. For instance, he has an account of why justice as fairness would not tend to generate unacceptable levels of destabilizing envy (TJ, secs. 80–81), and of how civil disobedience can restore equilibrium to a system that has drifted into injustice (p. 383). But what is striking throughout is what is conspicuous by its absence. Recall the two sources of instability that Rawls does mention, free riding and the perception that others are not doing their share. What is not mentioned is a third powerful source of instability, namely, principled objection to the principles of justice when those principles violate one’s deepest convictions. And it appears to have been this omission that concerned Rawls in the years after 1971 and led him to try to develop a framework for resolving political disputes that no reasonable person could reject. It is, then, to that project that we must turn.

2.2 Stability in Political Liberalism

In crafting a revised account of stability the basic problem is pluralism. A modern democracy is characterized by an irreducible plurality of comprehensive doctrines, which are much broader bodies of belief than the accounts of the good that they generate (see PL, p. 59). Rawls believes this pluralism to be a simple historical fact that can be expected to remain true indefinitely (PL, p. xvi), and in this, at least, he seems to be correct. Rawls takes it that no political
doctrine can be stable in such a society unless it can appeal to all the “reasonable” comprehensive doctrines likely to be present there (PL, p. 10). Among comprehensive doctrines are such “comprehensive” liberalisms as those of Kant and Mill, which are burdened with controversial accounts of things such as the good and autonomy and which are not accepted by all reasonable persons. And the liberalism of Theory is itself comprehensive (PL, p. xvi), so that it cannot serve as a stable basis for politics in a pluralistic society.

An essential part of Rawls’s later project is an argument, which all reasonable persons are supposed to accept, designed to clear the political landscape of views not appropriately “political.” This argument does not settle most political issues; rather it establishes the terms in which political positions must be justified if they are to be acceptable. Within the framework thus established political disagreement still will take place, but those debates will be resolved in terms all reasonable persons can accept, albeit sometimes reluctantly. All reasonable persons will accept those resolutions because they will be justified in terms of political, not comprehensive, values. Exclusively religious values or disputed sexual moralities will be excluded; women’s equality or the separation of church and state will not. So the line between reasonable and unreasonable defines who is entitled to a political system she can accept and who is not. And the problem of stability becomes that of finding a consensus among the reasonable while keeping the unreasonable at bay, hopefully a manageable undertaking. There are certain complications. Thus, the prohibition on the political use of comprehensive doctrines applies only to fundamental issues, to “matters of constitutional essentials and basic justice” (PL, p. 224). And it is permissible to offer parallel, comprehensive justifications for a policy supported also by the best balance of political values.17 I comment on these briefly below, but in the main they should not much affect the argument.

Justice as fairness as articulated in Theory is comprehensive and hence not suited for the political world. It must be recast, and Rawls spends considerable space in Political Liberalism on this effort. The makeover at times seems quite superficial, however. In particular, the primary goods and goodness as rationality are carried over essentially unchanged, now carefully labeled “for political purposes only.” But if utilitarianism is comprehensive, then why are not these utilitarian concepts comprehensive too? Rawls’s argument as to why the primary goods are still to function as our public measure of the good proceeds by elimination. No other account can serve for political purposes, so the primary goods will serve as an overlap between permissible conceptions of the good (PL, pp. 179–80). That no other account is acceptable is established by the first part of the later project, what we might call the ground-clearing argument. So we must consider whether that argument, if successful, will support the primary goods and thus fill the hole we earlier identified in Rawls’s view, and we must consider whether that argument is in fact successful.
Disagreement in the world is sometimes reasonable, sometimes unreasonable. These two kinds of disagreement have different sources. Rawls mentions a number of sources of reasonable disagreement, without claiming to have established an exhaustive list. Among them are that evidence may be conflicting, complex, or hard to evaluate, that we may differ as to the weight to be assigned to evidence, that our concepts may be vague, requiring judgment in their application, and that our thinking is influenced by our experiences and backgrounds (PL, pp. 56–57). These sources of reasonable disagreement are the burdens of judgment (p. 55); they are why agreement often is difficult or impossible between reasonable persons. But some disagreement is less benign in origin. The “sources of unreasonable disagreement” are “prejudice and bias, self- and group interest, blindness and willfulness” (p. 58; elsewhere he adds “irrationality and stupidity”). The sources of unreasonable disagreement divide into two broad categories. The first (including prejudice, bias, and self- and group interest) has a moral flavor, in each case involving the unjustifiable favoring or disfavoring of a group or individual. The other category (including blindness, willfulness, irrationality, and stupidity) is more epistemological, though with moral overtones. The term ‘unreasonable’ perfectly captures this mix of moral and epistemological error.

Reasonable persons recognize that it is because of the burdens of judgment, not because of the sources of unreasonable disagreement, that society cannot unite behind one comprehensive doctrine (PL, pp. 54, 60). And so Rawls puts forth an argument that is supposed to convince all reasonable persons and the conclusion of which is that an acceptable theory of justice must be neutral between comprehensive doctrines and thus between the conceptions of the good that they generate. Distilling Rawls’s reasoning we get the following:

1. Disagreements between comprehensive doctrines normally are reasonable, that is, they arise because of the burdens of judgment.
2. No person should have imposed on him political arrangements justified by a comprehensive doctrine he reasonably can reject; and therefore
3. No person should have imposed on him political arrangements justified by reference to any particular comprehensive doctrine (see PL, pp. 62, 137, 217).

The essential idea is that reasonable persons, when they find themselves in disagreement with other reasonable persons, abstract if they can from the area of disagreement to something more general upon which they can base a consensus (in Rawls’s case an “overlapping consensus”). In the political realm the area of disagreement is that of comprehensive doctrines and the area of consensus is
the shared assumptions of a constitutional democracy which, suitably construed and arranged, yield an appropriately political understanding of justice.

There are three things to note about this argument. First, it needs the second premise, which holds that comprehensive doctrines should not be imposed on those who reasonably reject them. Argument direct from the burdens of judgment to the conclusion would be a blatant non sequitur. Rawls must bridge this gap with a premise concerning the wrongfulness of imposing certain sorts of policies on persons who reasonably reject them. And as we shall see, this creates difficulties.

Second, for Rawls’s later project to work, both the state’s acts of coercion and its failures to coerce must be acceptable to all reasonable persons. Otherwise the overlapping consensus and the account of stability will be imperiled. If reasonable persons can reject the state’s refusal to prohibit some practice, then there will be endless strife between them and those who reject such a prohibition. This is no doubt one reason why even comprehensive liberalisms, which presumably would favor no illegitimate coercion, must be recast for political purposes.

Finally, the argument from the burdens of judgment appears at first glance to provide implicit grounds for accepting something like goodness as rationality for political purposes. The argument provides a political basis for something like goodness as rationality by requiring us, in our political activities, to accept the equal goodness of all reasonable accounts of the good. As individuals we each assume that some account of the good, derived from a comprehensive doctrine, is true or at least reasonable. But by the argument from the burdens of judgment we cannot for political purposes assume otherwise about other reasonable accounts of the good. Thus we must for political purposes affirm the goodness of all reasonable conceptions of the good. This indifferentism is exactly what goodness as rationality asserts, and it supports both the goodness of self-respect and freedom and the exclusion of any particular conception of the good from the original position. And thus Rawls might have, after all, a justification for assuming that both goodness as rationality and what flows from it are correct for political purposes. Although we may believe in our hearts that others’ comprehensive doctrines are largely false and the things they hold good not always so, we cannot assert this for political purposes and use it as a basis for political arrangements because reasonable persons would object. Thus the democratic attitude toward ends, an attitude embodied in goodness as rationality, seems to receive an effective, appropriately political, basis.

2.4 The Inadequacy of the Ground-Clearing Argument

But the ground-clearing argument cannot do the work that Rawls wants it to do. Let us first note one remarkable implication of the argument and of Rawls’s
assumption that all reasonable persons will accept it, an implication that can be stated in various ways. It assumes a vast difference between the degree of reasonable disagreement possible on questions of the good as opposed to questions of the right. Disagreement about the good (and more generally about comprehensive doctrines) is generally reasonable. But disagreement with Rawls’s framework for resolving questions of justice (an aspect of the right) demonstrates unreasonableness. Ethics is hard, politics is easy. A criterion of reasonableness so easily satisfied that it requires the most devout religious believer to grant the reasonableness of the atheist (and vice versa) is too strict to be met by nonliberals. Rawls achieves civility of discourse among those who accept political liberalism at the cost of insulting any who do not. ‘Unreasonable’ may not seem to rank very high on the scale of invective, but in Rawls’s prose, which almost never raises its voice, it is a serious charge indeed. Rawls holds that persons who in fundamental respects disagree with his views on justice are moved to that disagreement by bias, prejudice, self- or group interest, willfulness, blindness, irrationality, or stupidity—never by principled grounds for dissent.

Rawls cannot accept any less skewed account of the reasonable than this. The central argument of Political Liberalism needs to be acceptable to all reasonable persons. Without this there can be no overlapping consensus of the reasonable comprehensive doctrines in society, and so the account of justice and of stability will be imperiled. But there are ample grounds for at least reasonable rejection of Rawls’s view.

For Rawls, reason unites us and reason divides us. In the political realm an overlapping consensus is “acceptable to [citizens’] common human reason” (PL, p. 137), but a plurality of reasonable comprehensive doctrines is “the natural outcome of the activities of human reason under enduring free institutions” (PL, p. xxiv). Reason is strong enough to produce agreement on Rawlsianism (though not specifically on justice as fairness [PL, p. 226]), but not strong enough to produce agreement on the true comprehensive doctrine, if any. Rawls says to reason: this far and no further, but some will prefer a different stopping point. At least three stances opposed to Rawls’s are possible here. First, one can deny that rejection of the true comprehensive doctrine is reasonable, deny, that is, that such disagreement arises from the burdens of judgment and thus deny the first premise. Second, one can deny that reasonable disagreement with the true comprehensive doctrine entails that policy cannot be set in light of the truth, which is to deny the second premise. Finally, one can simply be more lenient than Rawls on the question of what a person reasonably can believe, and hold therefore that rejection of at least one premise is at least reasonable. In that case Rawls’s later project cannot obtain the agreement of all reasonable persons, and so loses much of its point. The right stance is that rejection of either premise is at least reasonable, and that rejection of the second is correct.
2.4.1 Rejecting the First Premise. Rawls makes a number of comments revealing his easygoing attitude toward rejection of even the true comprehensive doctrine, particularly in religious matters. Rawls says early on that pluralism among comprehensive doctrines is not a “disaster” (\textit{PL}, p. xxiv). Later he goes much further: “. . . the fact of reasonable pluralism is not an unfortunate condition of human life” (p. 37). It is not hard to see why this is so for Rawls once we understand that we are not to believe that rejection of the faith could have any unfortunate consequences:

Perhaps the doctrine of free faith developed because it is difficult, if not impossible, to believe in the damnation of those with whom we have, with trust and confidence, long and fruitfully cooperated in maintaining a just society. (\textit{PL}, p. xxv)

The real implication of this is religious indifferentism, and not merely for political purposes. For if one believes that one faith is in any sense the best, then no matter how forgiving one is of unbelievers, one is likely to regard their unbelief on matters of such fundamental importance as at least “unfortunate.” But for adherents of political liberalism it is not so regarded. As for the idea that long and fruitful cooperation banishes thoughts of damnation, many would differ. Martin Luther, in his early years, felt daily his own unworthiness and was haunted by a sense of his own likely damnation. It nearly drove him to despair.\textsuperscript{19} He surely would have had no difficulty believing in the damnation of Rawlsian citizens, even had he cooperated with them.

Even today there are those who insist on seeing the rejection of what they regard as the true faith as a very serious matter indeed, and as not at all reasonable. David Smolin asserts that

The problem, from a Christian perspective, is not that the non-Christian cannot sufficiently understand Christian doctrines, but that the non-Christian will not accept them. The barrier to becoming Christian is primarily ethical and stems from the sinful human nature, which refuses to submit to God.

In support Smolin cites John Frame, who calls rejection of Christianity “stupid,” thereby evincing a virtually Rawlsian attitude toward fundamental dissent.\textsuperscript{20} There simply are many who will refuse to see the rejection of their comprehensive doctrines as benignly as Rawls insists that they should.

Comprehensive doctrines often generate their own assessments of those who refuse to accept them. They generate their own accounts of what is and is not reasonable disagreement. As in the cases of Smolin and Frame, these accounts of reasonableness will sometimes clash with that offered by Rawls. Since Rawls offers virtually no argument as to why we should regard rejection of the truth so leniently, he leaves adherents of such comprehensive doctrines with no reason to
adjust their views to his. Rawls therefore is in no position to say, as he does, that they are unreasonable. Adherents of such doctrines may agree with Rawls that pluralism is likely to continue in some form, but they will lament that fact. They will be unwilling to bring their doctrines under the umbrella of political liberalism, except perhaps on an ad hoc basis, as a tactical or peacekeeping maneuver. As for Rawls’s notion that religious views are no more inappropriate for the resolution of political questions than are other comprehensive doctrines, they are likely to take that hint in directions Rawls would not intend (see “Public Reason Revisited,” p. 780).

2.4.2 Rejecting the Second Premise. The second ground for rejecting Rawls’s central argument relies on a straightforward rejection of the idea that persons are entitled to political arrangements the justification of which they could not reasonably reject. Where rejection of the first premise of Rawls’s argument is reasonable, rejection of the second is in fact correct. Rawls’s idea here is an extreme overextension, not of the doctrine of religious toleration, but of something like the doctrine of conscientious refusal. The claims of the innocently erroneous conscience do have some weight; it may even be, as many have thought, that one has a moral obligation to follow the dictates of one’s own erroneously formed conscience. And there are circumstances in which political society should respect a person’s right to an exemption from an otherwise valid legal requirement because that person conscientiously rejects the basis of that requirement. Of course such cases are quite rare, military conscription being the only obvious example. But Rawls appears to take something very like this principle (with ‘reasonable’ substituted for ‘conscientious’) and to turn it into a central concept in a theory of justice. Surely, though, we do not ordinarily believe that a person’s reasonable but erroneous rejection of the justification of a law entitles that person even to a personal exemption from it, much less a wholesale repeal. Once the true comprehensive doctrine, on its own terms, has given conscience its due, that should be enough. Of course, widespread reasonable, or even unreasonable, objection to a policy might be a pragmatic reason for not enacting it, but that is another matter.

This objection derives greater force from Rawls’s implicit admission that the full use of human reason might allow us to settle on a single comprehensive doctrine. Rawls does not say that there are only two categories of acceptable beliefs, those that will be accepted by all persons who are reasonable (in his sense) and those that are accepted on blind faith. There is, or at least may be, an intermediate category of beliefs that can be established by the full use of human reason and in that sense will be accepted by all reasonable persons, but the rejection of which does not show one to be biased, stupid, or whatever (and thus unreasonable as Rawls understands the term). Such propositions cannot be established “by the resources of a reasonable political conception of justice” (PL, p. 135 n.2) because such a conception has available to it only those proposi-
tions available to persons who are reasonable in Rawls's weak sense (see also *PL*, p. 60 n.13).

But once we see this, it is natural to conclude that political policy should be set in light of all that human reason can tell us, and that citizens should be held responsible for the full use of human reason necessary to allow them to grasp the truth. The truth should be followed because it is in fact true and can be seen to be such by the full use of human reason. Merely reasonable disagreement with the law is not enough to justify voiding it when the full resources of human reason support it.

2.4.3 *An Objection and a Reply.* I have argued that Rawls's second premise is false and that the first can be denied by reasonable persons. One consequence of this is that his view is in a sense self-defeating. If the reasonable is the legitimate, and if contrary to what Rawls believes it is reasonable to use comprehensive doctrines in resolving even fundamental political questions, then Rawls must accept the legitimacy of such use or redefine legitimacy. The burdens of judgment must be applied to political liberalism itself. When they are, Rawls's project collapses.

To all of this it would be natural to reply by pointing to the limited nature of Rawls's later project. He does not seek to resolve all political questions without reference to comprehensive doctrines; in fact he wants us to resolve only a few that way, and those only the most fundamental. It is only on "matters of constitutional essentials and basic justice" (*PL*, p. 224) that we are not to invoke our comprehensive doctrines. And on those matters all reasonable people can agree, at least as to the sort of values that are relevant. On other questions citizens and legislators may reason from their comprehensive doctrines. And Rawls's framework for resolving political issues does not decide those issues; it merely lays down the terms of reasonable political argument (see "Public Reason Revisited," pp. 794–97). All reasonable parts of the political spectrum still will be able to argue, so long as they do so in reasonable terms. So Rawls is excluding only comprehensive doctrines like those "that would suppress, if they could, liberty of conscience and freedom of thought" (*PL*, p. 64). He is asserting simply that "reasonable persons will think it is unreasonable to use political power, should they possess it, to repress comprehensive views that are not unreasonable, though different from their own" (p. 60). Thus the hope for a political society the fundamentals of which no reasonable person can reject is not futile. But in fact Rawls goes a great deal further than platitudes, and when he does, he asserts things that reasonable persons can reject, and rigs political debate in favor of the Left.

Rawls himself seems ambivalent about the scope of his project, as can be seen from his different accounts of who his cultural opponents are. Sometimes he mentions autocrats and dictators (see "Public Reason Revisited," p. 806). But at other times the enemy is Mother Teresa. This is clear from the most character-
istic expression of the intellectual personality animating Rawls’s later work, the footnote on abortion in the first edition of Political Liberalism (pp. 243–44 n.32). Far from an anomaly, this footnote sums up the whole book. Rawls’s position is a mix of the trimester approach of Roe v. Wade (410 U.S. 113 [1973]) and the currently fashionable argument from women’s equality. Any reasonable weighting of the relevant values, he says, yields at least the right to abortion in the first trimester. A standard prolife position (banning abortion except in the cases of rape, incest, and, he presumably meant to add, threats to the mother’s life or health) is not merely unreasonable, it is “cruel and oppressive” (PL, pp. 243–44 n.32). Thus all persons not prone to cruelty and oppression will agree to permit first trimester abortions. In an implicit reference to Catholicism and other cruel and oppressive comprehensive doctrines that oppose abortion, Rawls is quick to suggest that those holding to comprehensive doctrines which have cruel and oppressive views on abortion can still be good citizens if they abandon those doctrines’ cruel and oppressive aspects.

Rawls later softened his language on abortion, issuing a sort of quasi-retraction. But a problem that runs so deep cannot be solved by cosmetic changes. Rawls in fact is in a dilemma created by his own idea of dividing the political world into the reasonable and the unreasonable. If this distinction is to do much interesting work it must have some bite, in which case Rawls must insult opponents and undermine the very civility he claims to value. On the other hand, if too many turn out to be reasonable, then Rawls will exclude too little from the political sphere, and his view will be unimpressively bland. Rawls chooses the first horn of the dilemma. His later view may be unique in the history of political thought in that it takes the practice of insulting the cultural opposition, heretofore merely an enjoyable pastime, and turns it into an act with philosophic and political significance.

Rawls makes it pellucidly clear which parts of the political spectrum he respects and which he does not. Socialism is a serious option, he tells us (PL, pp. 7–8 n.7), and “[a]mong our most basic problems are those of race, ethnicity, and gender” (PL, p. xxviii). But Rawls’s respectful nods toward the socialists and the race-ethnicity-gender theorists are unlikely to be matched in the case of cultural or economic conservatives. The later Rawls studiously avoids talk of truth, but from the gravitational influence it seems to exert on the zone of reasonableness, we can be sure that it is firmly on the Left.

The abortion footnote is the tip of a large iceberg. Many people end up unreasonable. Rawls’s latest view is that it is acceptable to articulate a political position in terms of comprehensive values, so long as the position is supported by the best weight of political values and an argument based on such values is offered “in due course” (“Public Reason Revisited,” p. 776; Political Liberalism [paperback edition], pp. li–lii). Then persons will be unreasonable if they offer positions that they do not believe to be supported by such a purely political weighting. Examples of unreasonable positions could include:
1. Opposition to legalization of physician-assisted suicide on the ground that acting directly against the good of human life is immoral;
2. Opposition to legal recognition of homosexual marriage because of a religious conception of marriage, or because of a belief that homosexuality is immoral, or because of similar comprehensive beliefs;
3. Opposition to legalization of polygamy on comprehensive grounds;\(^25\)
4. Opposition to legalization of pornography on the ground that it is intrinsically degrading and immoral;
5. Opposition to legalized cloning as a means of human reproduction, on the ground that it violates the natural order.

Again, these positions are only unreasonable because offered without appropriately political collateral support. On some issues it will be possible for nonliberals to offer reasonable arguments for their positions. Thus a fairly strong political argument against assisted suicide can be offered based on the fear that vulnerable persons will be railroaded into killing themselves. On some issues, however, there will be no convincing political arguments, or by far the most convincing arguments will be comprehensive. Thus, on the question of cloning the most convincing arguments are likely to call on a deepseated revulsion against the unnaturalness of the practice that is likely when articulated to be seen to rest on comprehensive grounds. Further, the allowance of parallel comprehensive arguments is not as generous as it sounds. For if the political argument is convincing on its own, the comprehensive argument is not needed, and if the political argument is not convincing, the comprehensive argument presumably may not be used, at least to support prohibitions. And of course, some positions held by nonliberals could turn out to be inherently unreasonable, unsupportable by any reasonable weighting of political values, as Rawls at one point says about opposition to abortion. One might mention here too libertarianism, presumably unreasonable for lack of reciprocity (see \textit{PL} [paperback edition], p. lviii). All of this would leave a large number of people unreasonable, and it must be recognized that many of them cannot plausibly be regarded as enemies of democracy. Rawls's later project is quite ambitious.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Rawls's neutrality begins modestly, in \textit{Theory}, with the unsupported assumption that the good is the object of rational desire. This renders his view largely neutral between desires but nonneutral on the disputed question whether the good should be so regarded. It also leaves a hole in his view, since Rawls's account of the good is not supported and is crucial to the entire project in \textit{Theory}. I have considered the central argument of \textit{Political Liberalism} as a possible remedy for that defect. That argument issues in a neutrality between
comprehensive doctrines that appear to require much the same neutrality between ends that was required by the account of the good in Theory. When that argument in its turn fails, Rawls’s neutralism can be seen to lack support.

In tracing the history of Rawls’s neutrality this essay unavoidably also traces the growth of his liberal provincialism. The assumption in Theory that the good is the desired may make the book unconvincing to anyone who accepts an account of the good based on a different understanding of human nature, but there is nothing terribly wrong with articulating what follows on certain assumptions without defending those assumptions. The only drawback to Rawls’s attempt to improve on utilitarianism is that the book sometimes shows little tendency to offer arguments on points where utilitarians are likely to agree with it.26

Thomas Nagel gently suggested that the account of the good in Theory was offered “without a sense of its controversial character” (“Rawls on Justice,” p. 228). Rawls apparently never took the hint. Political Liberalism is much more provincial than its precursor, indeed fatally so. The problem is that Rawls moves from articulating the assumptions of a particular camp to declaring what all reasonable persons must accept. Such a project must exhibit the broadest sensitivity to the range of serious possible answers to serious philosophical and political questions. Instead Rawls emerges as a partisan in our culture wars. His neutrality between comprehensive doctrines is precisely of the sort embraced by the liberal side of our cultural divide and rejected by the conservative side.

The abortion footnote reveals clearly his attitude toward his cultural opponents. Brought into political discourse, the epithet “unreasonable” (not to mention “cruel and oppressive”) would serve not to promote consensus but to heighten animosity. Too many on all parts of the political spectrum have disdain for the convictions of others, but only Rawls gives such an attitude an explicit and central role in a system of thought.

When Rawls, seeking common ground, proposes that all accept a neutrality that is precisely what provokes the fiercest disagreement, and proceeds to insult those who will not accept it, one is tempted to look for some suggestion of irony, for an esoteric teaching, for a hint that he is in on his own joke. But Rawls is the most earnest of writers. He is deadly serious when he proposes as articles of peace in our culture wars something that is in fact a weapon in them.27

NOTES

4. "[W]e need what I have called the thin theory of the good to explain the rational preference for primary goods . . .," *Theory*, p. 397.

5. Literally this might not be entirely accurate. Someone might find his good in part in overcoming certain desires deemed unworthy, and Rawls would grant that he was right about his good. So it might be more accurate to say that for Rawls the good is what one will pursue when unimpeded (subject, as always, to the mentioned restrictions). But this complication should not affect the argument.


10. "It is very easy to see that many immoral and trivial non-moral maxims are vindicated by Kant’s test quite as convincingly—in some cases more convincingly—than the moral maxims which Kant aspires to uphold." MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 45–46.

11. The original position "models" a number of things, such as fair conditions of social cooperation (*Political Liberalism*, pp. 25–26), restrictions on reasons for favoring political conceptions (p. 26), and Rawls's conception of the person (p. 304). What this appears to mean is that the original position represents these things in a coherent way that allows us to see their implications and to connect them with Rawls’s principles of justice.


13. On the priority of the right to the good in Rawls and of the good to the right in utilitarianism, see, e.g., *Theory*, p. 31; Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 1–10. Sandel is well aware that Rawls’s account of the good is essentially utilitarian. See *Limits*, p. 166.


15. This latter point was suggested to me by David Lewis Schaeffer, *Justice or Tyranny?: A Critique of John Rawls' Theory of Justice* (Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1979), chap. 4, especially pp. 73–76.


I will assume that positions persons adopt (or the justifications they use) are either reasonable or unreasonable. It should be noted that at one point Rawls suggests that there may be another category, that of the not reasonable but not unreasonable. See John Rawls, "The Law of Peoples," in Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley, eds., *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 41–82, at 63 n.28. This should not affect the argument, because this category is introduced in the context of applying Rawls's view internationally, and on the domestic scene Rawls generally seems to assume that one is either reasonable or unreasonable.


21. By conscientious refusal I mean the noncompliance with a legal requirement on grounds of conscientiously held principle. For Rawls's discussion, see Theory, sec. 56.


22. See Planned Parenthood v. Casey, 505 U.S. 833, 856 (1992): "The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives."

23. "However, a comprehensive doctrine is not as such unreasonable because it leads to an unreasonable conclusion in one or even in several cases. It may still be reasonable most of the time." Political Liberalism, p. 244 n.32.


26. John Robinson originally pointed out to me that Theory essentially offers an improved version of utilitarianism.

27. This way of putting this idea was suggested to me by Smolin, "Regulating Conflict," p. 1074: "If neutrality is an instrument of war, rather than a compact of peace, which way lies peace?"
Discussion

Darwinian Natural Right?

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE BASIC CLAIM AND BROAD TERRAIN

Can Aristotle and Darwin be combined on terms acceptable to both? According to Larry Arnhart’s Darwinian Natural Right, they can. The intention of the book derives in significant part from Strauss’s well known remark on modern natural science in the Introduction to Natural Right and History:

Natural right in its classic form is connected with a teleological view of the universe. All natural beings have a natural end, a natural destiny, which determines what kind of operation is good for them. In the case of man, reason is required for discerning these operations: reason determines what is by nature right with ultimate regard to man’s natural end. The teleological view of the universe, of which the teleological view of man forms a part, would seem to have been destroyed by modern natural science. From the point of view of Aristotle—and who could dare to claim to be a better judge in this matter than Aristotle?—the issue between the mechanical and the teleological conception of the universe is decided by the manner in which the problem of the heavens, the heavenly bodies, and their motion is solved [Phys. 196a25 ff., 199a3–5]. Now in this respect, which from Aristotle’s own point of view was the decisive one, the issue seems to have been decided in favor of the non-teleological conception of the universe. . . . This means that people were forced to accept a fundamental, typically modern, dualism of a nonteleological natural science and a teleological science of man. . . . The fundamental dilemma, in whose grip we are, is caused by the victory of modern natural science.2

By reconciling Darwinian biology with natural teleology and Aristotelian ethics, Arnhart aims to provide the solution to the problem Strauss raises. Does he succeed? Is it possible to add to Darwinism an account of a specifically human, natural end (involving reason) that is not just a means to universal reproductive success? Conventional opinion would say, no, the only natural end recognized by Darwinian science is reproductive fitness in the local environment. This one end is common to all organisms and is not specifically human. Species are thus differentiated only by the means they have acquired fortuitously through natural selection. According to Darwin himself, “there is no funda-
mental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties... the difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree not of kind." But anyone who reads the opening chapters of The Descent of Man will be struck by just how much Darwin does say about the human difference in terms of our moral and intellectual capacities. (See especially pp. 104-5 on "the immense [difference] between the mind of the lowest man and that of the highest animal.") In view of this, one cannot but wonder what, in Darwin's own mind, was the difference between a difference of degree and a difference of kind? That is, how did Darwin understand the degree-kind distinction in his account of human status? This is a question for Darwin scholars which Arnhart does not attempt to answer. Based on existing scholarship, this much can safely be said: the biblical doctrine of special creation, and not the Aristotelian account of uncreated natural kinds and ends, was the main target in Darwin's theory of common descent by natural selection, and thus of his degree-kind distinction. A human species differing in kind from other natural species would, in Darwin's mind, require a different, supernatural principle of origin, i.e., Genesis 1:26, and this was, for Darwin, to be rejected (see Mayr, p. 99). But Aristotle offers no teaching on divine creation; on the contrary, his god is not a maker but pure thought thinking itself at the peak of a universe of eternal species (Metaphysics 1072b15-22, 1074b15-5a11; 1033b5-8, 1043b17). From this Aristotelian, nonbiblical perspective, a difference in kind would refer not to origins but to ends: the species in question would have an end unlike that of others. Perhaps there is room then, surprisingly, for an Aristotelian addition to the house of Darwinian science, although it would be an Aristotel stripped of the doctrine of the eternity of the living species while retaining the teleology of natural kinds after their evolutionary emergence (and before their possible extinction) (Physics 193b7-19, 194a33, Metaphysics 1015a12, Nicomachean Ethics 1176a3-9, 1178a5-6). This is Arnhart's basic claim (see especially DNR, pp. 232-48). But, in the spirit of Darwin, he holds that his new synthesis is compatible with the notion that the human difference is one of degree not kind. Would Aristotle agree? Arnhart thinks so, but this is problematic.

For purposes of this review, let us grant that the human species came into being by descent from temporal origins common to all living things. That is, let us remove the degree-kind question from the domain of past, unseen origins to that of present, conspicuous phenomena. This would surely be Aristotle's approach. The question is then, do we now (in the period of recorded human history) differ in degree or kind from other species? Is there "a meaningful barrier between humans and animals" or not? Unfortunately, the question cannot be decided by any scientific method. For, despite the amazing similarities between us and various other animals revealed by ethologists and sociobiologists, differences always remain. It is finally a matter of one's own judgment—we could call it one's theoretical phronesis—whether the differences constitute "a
meaningful barrier.” In my judgment, they do, and I argue in the following that Aristotle and Strauss hold the same view. This presents a problem for Arnhart’s proposed synthesis of Aristotle and Darwin, but good judgment presupposes deliberation based on our shared study of evidence and reasoning. Thus we must step back and survey an unusually broad and diverse terrain.

To assess Arnhart’s claim requires an examination of his argument in light of both Aristotle’s and Strauss’s understanding of the problem of natural science. This is not a simple matter. Darwinian Natural Right is remarkably broad yet richly detailed in its coverage of Darwin’s writings, the history of philosophy, and recent sociobiology. It involves Arnhart’s own interpretations of Aristotle and Darwin, thematic treatments of Hobbes and Hume, and important usage of the Bible, Augustine, and Aquinas. I believe, moreover, that Strauss’s understanding of the philosophic problem posed by modern natural science, namely, species-neutrality, is not adequately expressed in the Introduction to Natural Right and History, the text most often cited on this point. An assessment of Arnhart’s endeavor thus requires not only careful analysis of the complex argument of Darwinian Natural Right, but also a substantive review of Strauss’s statements on natural science. To facilitate the latter, eleven such statements are listed chronologically as an appendix to this essay. Citations are to the Appendix. In the following, I will focus on the issues I take to be most important. I conclude that, in light of Strauss’s account and my reading of Aristotle, Arnhart does not succeed in reconciling Aristotle and Darwin, thus does not succeed in overcoming the problematic dualism of natural science and political or Socratic philosophy. But Arnhart has provided us with a serious piece of work, containing nuances, distinctions, and ambiguities that might well ground alternative evaluations. Interested readers should supplement my verdict with their own study of Darwinian Natural Right, and of the writings of Leon Kass on Darwin, nature, science and ethics. In any case, a balanced review must respect the fact that Arnhart’s purpose is not simply philosophical, it is also strongly polemical.

2. A POLEMICAL INTENTION

The cultural relativists teach that most things of any human importance are cultural constructs arising historically and contingently, like artifacts. Thus moral values are always relative to the culture in which they are found: particular values can be valid for some people some of the time, but never for all people all of the time. Therefore, there is no such thing as human nature in any normative sense, and no such thing as natural right. Furthermore, like artifacts, cultural constructs can be deconstructed and reconstructed, for the sake of liberation from constraints erroneously judged to be “natural.” Thus, utopian schemes and political agendas for the abolition of the family or the revision of marriage
and parent-child relations recur. To appreciate how far one can go in the direction of relativism and constructivism, consider the following two quotations:

It has thus become increasingly apparent that physical 'reality,' no less than social 'reality,' is at bottom a social and linguistic construct; that scientific 'knowledge,' far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies and power relations of the culture that produced it: that . . . the discourse of the scientific community . . . cannot assert a privileged epistemological status with respect to counterhegemonic narratives emanating from dissident or marginalized communities. . . the π of Euclid and the G of Newton, formerly thought to be constant and universal, are now perceived in their ineluctable historicity . . .

All departments of nature below the level of mankind are exempt both from disease and from treatment. . . Outside the significances that man voluntarily attaches to certain conditions, there are no illnesses or diseases in nature.

The first is from the notorious spoof by the physicist Alan Sokal. A high school science student could see the humor. It is stark testimony to the intellectual capacity and moral disposition of the editors of Social Text, a house organ of postmodern “cultural studies,” that Sokal’s joke was taken seriously and published. The second quotation is not a joke, but it should be. The author is claiming, absurdly, that physical health is a socially constructed, culturally relative standard.7

It is an unfortunate but unavoidable fact that such attitudes and opinions retain considerable influence on the humanities side of the American academic house. Arnhart’s work is directed against the cultural relativists in this intellectual conflict. As such, Darwinian Natural Right is a valuable weapon.

In light of his polemical intention, we can specify the meaning of Arnhart’s frequently repeated and crucial phrase, rooted in the biological (DNR, pp. 13, 66, 69, 113, also 56–57, on the nervous system). To say that a human behavior X is rooted in the biological means that our biological nature limits the variability of X, so that X cannot be an object of unlimited transformation by human will, as would be an artifact or a piece of clay. Principal examples discussed by Arnhart are relations between parent and child (chapter 5) and relations between men and women (chapter 6). As Arnhart makes clear, the fact that human desires for mating and family life are rooted in our biology as an evolutionary genetic inheritance does not mean that our actions and emotions in relation to parents, children, and the opposite sex are determined by our genes, leaving no room for social learning, habituation, and deliberate choice. It does mean that our “natural propensities limit and direct cultures” such that radical projects for the abolition of the traditional family, the “liberation” of women from attachment to their children, the open-ended transformation of individual and society will lead by nature to frustration and destruction, not emancipation and fulfillment.8 This
understanding of the biological rootedness of the desires involved in human moral and social behavior defines Arnhart's ethical naturalism in opposition to both reductionist determinism and radical relativist freedom.

But in spite of its value in the pervasive polemic of our time, *Darwinian Natural Right* must be addressed to the extent possible on the plane of disinterested philosophy. The magnitude of its claim, and the fundamental character of the problems on which this claim impinges, require no less.

3. SIX PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

*Darwinian Natural Right* prompts reflection on major philosophical issues, issues emblematic of Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche. Let me list them in historical order and in a preliminary way, and then try to explicate them as they arise in my analysis of Arnhart, Strauss, and Aristotle.

1. The relation between ends and origins in living things and human societies: Which is ontologically prior, the process of development (becoming) or the end product (being)? (Aristotle, *Physics* 193b17–19, *Metaphysics* 1015a12, *Politics* 1252b29–34.)
2. The meaning of 'species' as product of the evolutionary process: Is it a natural norm for the guidance of human choice, or a contingent collection of genes malleable to human will through future genetic science? (Bacon, *New Organon*, I.129, II. 1–5.)
3. The relation between the apparent objects of the human actions and passions, and their real causes: Are the consciously apprehended objects of my emotions and my choices the genuine causes of those emotions and choices? Or is, for example, my desire in fact produced by causes of which I have no conscious awareness (which are thus accessible only to special methods of science)? And do I really know the reason for my choice, or is my choice a result of some sort of hidden-hand causation (again, accessible only to special methods of science)? (Descartes, *Treatise on Man*, Adam-Tannery XI, 130–31, *Passions of the Soul*, aa. 25–27.)
5. The value of truth: Is it good or bad for life; in Darwinian terms, Is it good or bad for human reproductive success? (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Aphorism I)

All of these are related in one way or another to the abiding question, introduced above, of:
6. Man's place in nature: Is the human species simply a part of the natural universe, differing from other living species only in degree but not in kind, or does the human in some way transcend, or stand out from, the rest of nature?

As noted, Arnhart denies that man transcends nature. The human is a distinct species, thus possessing distinctive or species-specific features. We could say the same about cats and dogs. But unlike cats and dogs, unlike all nonhuman animals, human beings possess language and therewith remarkable possibilities. Nevertheless, Arnhart insists that human behavior is rooted in the biological in such a way that it is a mistake to take man as "supra-animal."9 Rather, the difference between humans and other animals is one of complexity, thus one of degree, not kind (DNR, pp. 21, 25, 37, 52, 53, 66–67, 68). Arnhart attributes this position and the resulting ethical naturalism, first to Aristotle, then to Hume and Darwin (DNR, pp. 5, 19, 69). It is crucial to decide whether Arnhart's ethical naturalism is Aristotle's. I believe it is not, and that, for Aristotle, man is indeed set apart from the rest of nature in a way that makes him uniquely problematic. My interpretation (itself debatable) turns on the unlimited character of certain human desires and on the double meaning of human nature in Aristotle. These two meanings are: (1) human nature as intrinsic principles (form and matter) constitutive of every human substance (Physics 192b9–3b19, De Anima 414a30–b19), and (2) human nature as that in virtue of which we are distinctively directed in relation to the noble (to kalon) by nature.10 Nature in the first sense is found in things that occur always or for the most part (Physics 192b9–35, 196b10–17, 198b34–9a2); nature as the noble is instantiated only rarely (Nicomachean Ethics 1099a12–15, 1109a25–30, 1115b12, 1127a28–30). Despite its rarity, and the obscurity of its mode of being, the existence of the noble is a necessary part of Aristotle's ethics, for the nature that measures human excellence—the virtues above and beyond physical strength and health—is not biological nature.

We must begin with Strauss's understanding of the key philosophical problem attendant to modern natural science, namely, its commitment to species-neutral principles of explanation. I argue that Arnhart falls short in his awareness of this problem, despite his clear superiority to the reductionism of many scientists. (See note 12 below for the distinction between reductionism and species-neutrality.) I then turn to what seem to me to be distortions of Aristotle resulting from Arnhart's attempt to reconcile Aristotle with Hume and Darwin in a new ethical-naturalist synthesis. Briefly put, I believe that Arnhart overemphasizes the first or biological sense (above) of human nature in Aristotle, to the exclusion of the second sense, man as directed by the noble, and all that this implies. (By my count, the word "noble" appears only once in Darwinian Natural Right, and that in a quotation from Darwin: p. 144.) In thus "overbiologizing" the human, Arnhart fails to render theoria, virtue and (especially) vice, the
noble and (especially) the base in a way that accords with the phenomena and that Aristotle would accept. I am not qualified to assess Arnhart's interpretation of Darwin, beyond noting that it was a pleasure to read it and learn more about the Newton of biology (see especially DNR, pp. 232–35). Similarly, his interpretation of Hume on the natural moral sense is beyond my competence. I omit discussion of Arnhart's treatment of religion since the purely philosophic critique must come first.

4. STRAUSS ON NATURAL SCIENCE: SPECIFIC DIFFERENCE VS. SPECIES NEUTRALITY

Consider the following statement from The City and Man:

This question ['what is the polis?'], and all questions of this kind [namely, what is . . .?], were raised by Socrates who for this reason became the founder of political philosophy.

The 'what is' questions point to 'essences', to 'essential' differences—to the fact that the whole consists of parts which are heterogeneous, not merely sensibly (like fire, air, water, and earth) but noetically: to understand the whole means to understand the 'What' of each of these parts, of these classes of beings, and how they are linked with one another. Such understanding cannot be the reduction of one heterogeneous class to others or to any cause or causes other than the class itself; the class, or the class character, is the cause par excellence. Socrates conceived of his turn to the 'what is' questions as a turn, or a return, to sanity, to 'common sense': while the roots of the whole [in the distant past] are hidden, the whole manifestly consists [in the present] of heterogeneous parts. (Appendix, quotation 9)

For example, we perceive ourselves and certain other beings, like cats and dogs, as animals in contradistinction to plants and nonliving things. And in contradistinction to the other animals, we experience ourselves as possessing thought, speech, and choice in action (Nicomachean Ethics 1139a18). It is common sense to think that the intelligible (noetic) causes and principles of these obviously different kinds of things should be correspondingly different. For if not, if what makes me tick is basically the same as what makes a plant tick, then my thought and choice aren't genuine causes of motion in me—an utterly paradoxical (against common opinion) notion. Were such a thing the case, then what appear to me to be the causes of some of my most important choices—the uniquely human goods at which I consciously aim—are the real causes of my action. My consciousness of deliberate choice in view of a good would then be some sort of odd epiphenomenon, like foam on waves: a side effect exerting no causal agency in the motion of the wave. Then, only a scientific specialist could tell me what's moving me, since I have no conscious awareness of my genuine motives. This is problem 3, above, the problem of hidden-hand causation, even
in the things closest to us, our own passions and purposes. It is severe because, as Arnhart beautifully puts it, "[h]uman beings, unlike any other animals, cannot live unless they believe they know why they live [and die]" (DNR, p. 266. See also Metaphysics 1020b24–25.). Are we, or our children, supposed to face death in battle just so the hand of natural selection (and deselection) can somehow spread the human gene pool? ("[G]roups can be the evolutionary ‘vehicles’ for genes as the evolutionary ‘replicators’," DNR, p. 77.) Don’t justice and the noble have to be real and irreducible to mere biological interest (Nicomachean Ethics 1099a10–11, 1115b12–13)? And if competitive selection for reproductive fitness is the only genuine first principle of human behavior, then isn’t the mass rape of women of opposing ethnicity a good Darwinian military tactic, since (in those conservative Balkan societies) it keeps them from having enemy babies? Don’t injustice and the base have to be irreducibly real if we are to have a reason to resist crimes against humanity?··

Therefore, for the sake of commonsensical trust in the rough reliability of our cognitive apparatus in its ordinary, prescientific employment, let us say, with Aristotle, that the nutritive, the sensitive, and the rational souls are the principles—formal causes—responsible for the essentially heterogeneous being and operation of plants, animals, and, most importantly, humans. And let us say, with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Strauss, that the admiration of human excellence is indicative of "phenomena that form a class by themselves" (Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 129. Appendix, quotation 2). In spite of the fundamental difference between Plato and Aristotle on the status of form, we can continue to use Aristotle to explicate what Strauss means in the above and following statements (Plato Republic 507b, Phaedo 100b ff.; Aristotle, Physics 193b5).

Aristotle begins the Parts of Animals by asking whether we should study each species separately or should first focus on attributes common to many species (639a15–b8). Such properties cut across the natural kinds indifferently—respiration belongs as much to dogs as to cats—and we can thus call them species-neutral. (The term ‘species-neutral’ is opposed to the somewhat clumsy but accepted term ‘species-specific,’ e.g. barking in dogs and meowing in cats.) In Darwinian biology, for example, "[t]he struggle for existence inevitably follows from the high geometrical ratio of increase which is common to all organic beings" (The Origin of Species, p. 432). Since there are many properties common in this sense, it seems inefficient to study each species in turn, repeating for each the account of, e.g., the heart, the brain, sleep, respiration. But, as if to indicate what is at stake, Aristotle turns immediately to the primacy of the final cause, for the end of each species cannot be understood in species-neutral terms. Most importantly, as just emphasized, if all we consider are properties common to the human and the nonhuman, e.g., mass, charge, nuclei, electrons, metabolism, replication, there won’t be any room left in our account for thought and choice as constitutive of our specifically human end. Yet, paradoxically,
this is what modern natural science (with notable exceptions) has consistently
done or tried to do since its seventeenth-century origins, beginning with the
programmatic generalization of Newton's theory of universal gravitation. Look
at Spinoza's paradigmatic formulation of the early modern intention to under-
stand nature in terms that are common to (apparently) distinct species, the pro-
gram for the interpretation of nature in species-neutral terms:

That which is common to all [bodies] ... and which is equally in a part and in the
whole [e.g., Cartesian extension, Newtonian mass], does not constitute the essence
[the Aristotelian natural species; Meta. 1030a12] of any particular thing ... Those
things which are common to all ... cannot be conceived except adequately. (Spi-
noza, Ethics, II. 37-38)

Less succinct but equally significant formulations of the same paradoxical idea
occur in Bacon, Descartes, and Newton. The search for species-neutral prin-
ciples with which to oppose and replace the Scholastic-Aristotelian forms and
ends—conceived very inadequately according to the early moderns in spite of
their conspicuousness in sense perception—is integral to the meaning of method
in early modern philosophy (see note 5).

Modern science's intention to produce species-neutral explanations of what
at first appear to be distinct and unrelated classes of effects is partly warranted
by its spectacular successes in particular cases (e.g., gravitation, thermodynam-
ics, electromagnetism) for three and a half centuries. These successes destroy
the comprehensiveness of the premodern science of Aristotle. This surprising,
species-neutral type of intelligibility was unanticipated by Aristotle, whose "spe-
cies-specific" physics requires correspondingly different matter for different forms. But in view of the problem of human self-understanding, of the specifi-
cally human desire to understand that causes science itself, species-neutral sci-
ence cannot be comprehensive either. It cannot claim to be an adequate account
of the whole—including the scientist—without failing the test of self-reference.
This, however, is a philosophic, not scientific, critique. Left to its own devices,
natural science denies or neglects specific differences. Thus, no account of the
human on its own specific terms can count as scientific, while the pervasive
attempt to be scientific in the study of human things accordingly distorts our
own self-understanding. Giving each (the human and the nonhuman) its due
leads to a problematic dualism of natural sciences versus the humanities. Thus
we have no unified science of the whole. In view of the following statement, I
believe that this is what Strauss understands as the first and most conspicuous
philosophic problem attendant to modern natural science:

[I]f we take modern natural science, modern non-teleological natural science, and
try to apply it to human affairs we do not achieve a solution. This leads, in effect to
a distortion of the understanding of human things. The key point is this—and this
has in effect nothing to do with teleology, at least not with teleology as ordinarily understood—modern natural science, if it is left entirely to itself, and not influenced by other considerations, implies the denial of essential differences. The most popular example of that is the theory of evolution. There is no essential difference between man and the brutes because man has developed out of the brutes and there are cases of men, either today or in the remote past, who are closer to some living or extinct apes than these men are to other men. . . . The denial of essential differences—and this implies the understanding of what we popularly surely would call the higher, namely man, to the lower: to understand man as much in terms of the brutish as possible; of the human in terms of the sub-human; of the rational in terms of the sub-rational. . . . Seeing that fact, that the approach which is peculiar to modern natural science leads to a distortion of the human phenomena, the most convenient thing to do is to speak of a dualism of the sciences: the sciences of nature and the sciences of man as man. . . . So this dualism of sciences is a convenient practical solution. . . . But—and here I agree with the positivists—there is a need for an ultimate unity of science. So this dualism of science can be accepted only as provisionally indispensable. But this comprehensive science is today only a pious wish; and therefore one cannot say more than it is to be desired. (Appendix, quotation 7)

Strauss does not explain in detail how or why natural science became in the seventeenth century, and remains for the most part today, species-neutral in its results and intention.14 For this the study of early modern philosophy in relation to the preceding, Scholastic-Aristotelian tradition is indispensable. It is clear, however, that, for Strauss, Darwinian biology fits the pattern and exemplifies the problem at least as well as classical, nonteleological physics. Note that, as Strauss says, teleology per se is not the issue, for Darwinian science obviously affirms the reality of a telos. It is the universal end at which all organic populations aim, namely, survival and reproductive success (in some combination that may involve tradeoffs). The point, for Strauss, is that Darwinian teleology, as common to all species, cannot specify the distinctively human, any more than mass in Newtonian physics can specify any kind of body, precisely because mass is common to all bodies regardless of their kind. Quotations 6 through 10, appended to this review, express the same idea. The related problem of technology—mentioned by Strauss in quotations 1 and 11—consists in the familiar fact that species-neutral principles usually convey not only intelligibility across distinct kinds, e.g., terrestrial and celestial, natural and artificial, but also manipulability, e.g., controlled space flight.15 Is genetic science species-neutral in this sense? At present, it seems to be, to a troubling extent, and this defines problem 2, above. But I have gotten ahead of the story.

5. STRAUSS AGAINST NATURAL SCIENCE: PRIMACY OF BEING OVER BECOMING

In the two statements, above, Strauss asserts the significance of essential heterogeneity and its rejection by our tradition of natural science. Both state-

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ments, however, point explicitly to another, related issue of at least equal importance: the possibly problematic, even mysterious, relation between the historical origins of a thing—"the roots of the whole are hidden"—and its present nature. This is problem 1, on the above list, concerning principles of becoming in relation to principles of being. Once we have problem 1 in view, the three issues of being-becoming, species-neutrality, and the degree-kind distinction can be tied together.

Strauss states the matter in general terms:

If 'to be' is 'to be something', the being of a thing, or the nature of a thing, is primarily its What, its 'shape' or 'form' or 'character', as distinguished in particular from that out of which it has come into being. The thing itself, the completed thing, cannot be understood as a product of the process leading up to it, but, on the contrary, the process cannot be understood except in the light of the completed thing or of the end of the process. (Appendix, quotation 3)

This says that something might develop, originate, come to be, in a certain process, but that, either the process by itself is unintelligible, or the intelligible principles of the process aren't the same as the principles of the final product. It says, furthermore, that the principles of the completed product are superior to those of the process, or that a genetic account cannot attain to the adequacy of the eidetic account. Is it possible that the higher could arise from the lower somehow without being reducible to the lower? Could natural species—or at least the human species—be like that? I believe that Socrates, Plato, and Strauss are distinctly aware of one form or another of this possibility. In Plato-Socrates, it seems to be the point of Phaedo 96e–7b: twoness—a type of intelligible form—cannot be accounted for by the combination and separation of matter in space, i.e., by efficient and material causality. As for Strauss, consider the following statement:

Let us look at the specific grounds on which it is claimed that Aristotle's political philosophy has been refuted. The most common reason is that modern natural science, or modern cosmology, having refuted Aristotelian cosmology (e.g., by demonstrating 'evolution'), has therewith refuted the principle or the basis of Aristotelian political philosophy. Aristotle took for granted the permanence of the species, and we 'know' that the species are not permanent. But even granting that evolution is an established fact, that man has come into being out of another species, man is still essentially different from non-man. The fact of essential differences—the fact that there are 'forms'—has in no way been refuted by evolutionism. The starting point of Aristotle, as well as of Plato, is that the whole consists of heterogeneous beings; that there is a noetic heterogeneity of beings, this common sensible notion on which we fall back all the time and this has in no way been refuted... However far the defeat of Aristotle's cosmology may extend, it does not go to the length of having destroyed the evidence of the concept of essential differences... (Appendix, quotation 10)
Strauss even says that not only Plato but also Aristotle, in spite of his doctrine of the eternity of the living species, is compatible with the evolutionary emergence of an irreducible, human-specific difference. How can this be, if Aristotle denies evolution?

No doubt Aristotle's doctrine of species permanence removes the problem of emergence (a mysterious gap between principles of historical becoming and principles of present being) from center stage in his physics. But look at the following remark, not about natural species in general, but about the human, in the *Politics*:

... while coming into being for the sake of living, [the city] exists for the sake of living well. Every city, therefore, exists by nature, if such also are the first partnerships. For the city is their end, and nature is an end: what each thing is—for example, a human being, a horse, or a household—when its coming into being is complete is, we assert, the nature of that thing. ... The city is thus prior by nature to the household and to each of us... there is in everyone by nature an impulse toward this sort of partnership. And yet the one who first constituted [a city] is responsible for the greatest of goods. (*Politics* 1252b 29–53a31)

The human species, as a class of biological form-matter substances, may be eternal (*De Anima* 415a24–b8), but it seems that the political community that fulfils our specifically social and rational nature is not: there was a first founder. Furthermore, the first city evidently did not develop like an oak from an acorn; it did not come into being in a manner analogous to nature in the biological sense, namely, by the (for the most part) automatic in-form-ation of matter. The first founder did not just "cultivate" largely biological potentials. Otherwise why would the first founder be "responsible for the greatest of goods" and thus praiseworthy? It seems then that, for Aristotle, there is a sense of human nature beyond the biological. It has to do, of course, with virtue and vice, the noble by nature and the base, with our own arduous efforts in action and—obscurely but essentially—with philosophy. These manifest our suprabiological nature, as discussed in section 10, below.

Finally, and to the main point of the present section, the principle of the city's genesis, or becoming, is different from the principle of its being. The principle of coming into being is mere life or survival, common to all animals, thus species-neutral in the sense described above (*History of Animals* 589a3–5). The principle of its being is good life, which is specifically human, and in fact accessible only to adult humans. And Aristotle makes clear, that, just as Strauss says. "the process [which is driven by survival needs] cannot be understood except in the light of the completed thing or of the end of the process [the flourishing city]." In general, in such cases of evolutionary emergence, the process must be understood "in the light of" the product; that is, the product cannot be understood as a merely chance or *per accidens* effect of the process, with the
process regarded (mistakenly) as more basic and intelligible than the (allegedly) incidental product. In this sense, the product is ontologically prior to the process—ontologically but not chronologically. And so something could begin through a difference of degree and end up different in kind, with specific characteristics irreducible to the species-neutral principles of origin. (In spite of its polemical spirit, this is virtually the conclusion of Gould’s brief but very interesting “The Human Difference,” cited in note 4.)

All of this is asserted or implied by Plato and Aristotle, and reported by Strauss, in spite of the imposing question of what exactly happens at the transition from the lower principles of becoming to the completed form or eidos with its higher responsibility and intelligibility! In the face of modern science’s commitment to mastery, the notion of emergent properties that cannot be adequately understood in terms of simpler antecedent parts and conditions is hard to swallow; it smacks of mystery. Thus science displays strong preference for genetic as opposed to eidetic accounts of things. In the typical pattern of genetic explanation, the general principles of origin, e.g., common biological survival needs, are neutral to the specific, particular character of the product, e.g., distinctively human excellence, which character is then attributed to chance. Isn’t this the pattern of Darwinian explanation? Hans Jonas crystalizes the issue.

Consider: is the following crucial statement by Jonas (1) Darwinian, (2) non-Darwinian but compatible with Darwin, or (3) anti-Darwinian?

It is one of the paradoxes of life that it employs means [adaptations] which modify the end [originally survival and/or reproductive fitness] and themselves become part of it. The feeling animal strives to preserve itself as a feeling, not just a metabolizing entity . . . the perceiving animal strives to preserve itself as a perceiving entity . . . .

Finally, the animal of truth and praxis (Nicomachean Ethics 1139a18) thinks and chooses not just to survive, but to find the truth and perform well in action, even regardless of survival or reproductive fitness (look at Socrates). In general, “[s]ome functions may have come into being for one reason but persist for different ones, acquiring, once here, so to speak, a life of their own.”

The answer to the question above determines whether there can be a synthesis of Darwin and Aristotle or not. Answers 1 and 2 permit it, answer 3 excludes it. Did Darwin himself ever say that, at some point or phase in the history of life, his great principles of random variation and natural selection must yield to essential heterogeneity? That is, did Darwin ever say that what originates as a mere survival tool becomes (somehow) something more by entering into and constituting that for the sake of which the organism thereafter survives? If he did, then we have answer 1. Or perhaps he said or implied that his principles are not ultimately comprehensive and exclusive, but only partial, i.e., that other principles of living things might also be needed alongside his own, without
specifying what they might be. If so, then we have answer 2. On the other hand, if Darwin and Darwinism hold that random variation and natural selection for survival and reproductive fitness are the exclusively adequate principles of all living things, then we have answer 3. We have then "the present orthodoxy in sociobiology [which] treats our sociality as but a fancy mechanism geared to the sole end of the survival of the human gene pool" (Kass, Toward a More Natural Science, p. 315). Now the mere survival of the human gene pool is not noble, does not prompt our admiration, and cannot inspire moral virtue. So we confront an exceedingly important question on the meaning of Darwinian science in relation to classical natural right. Arnhart provides some help, but not enough. Let us take human mind or intellect as the adaptation originally arising as a tool of gene projection. The human capacity for deliberate choice will be addressed below in my critique of Arnhart's Aristotle.

6. THE DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND

The last section of Darwinian Natural Right is titled "The Desire to Understand." Indeed, "[a]lthough other animals have some awareness of their surroundings, we seem to be the only beings with fully conscious self-awareness and the capacity to reflect on the meaning of things" (DNR, p. 267). Arnhart then says that,

while these mental capacities evolved originally because of their practical benefits for human survival and reproduction [species-neutral principle of becoming], these capacities allow modern human beings in civilized societies to assume a theoretical attitude in seeking understanding for its own sake [specific principle of being]. . . . we can see in some other animals the tendency to curiosity or playful exploration that is the natural root of the human desire to understand. . . . [but] [u]nlike other animals, human beings seek to understand the causes or principles of sensory experience. . . . The philosophic life is the peak of this development, as a few people find the quest for theoretical understanding to be the highest life for a human being (Meta 980a27–983a23). (DNR, p. 268; emphasis added)

Mind is not only survival tool but also truth seeker. Scientists must grant this if they are to give a consistent account of their own doings. The striking claim for philosophic life as "the peak of this development" is in the spirit of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. But is it Darwinian or compatible with Darwin, or is it, rather, incompatible with Darwin and anti-Darwinian? Let us begin with mind as truth seeker and the test of self-reference.

If the Darwinians say mind is only a survival tool, they contradict their own credibility as (potentially) truthful speakers, because their own published accounts would then be aimed only at getting their genes into future generations,
a practical agenda for which falsehood might be just as efficacious as truth about reality. Arnhart, therefore, gets Darwin past the test of self-reference that many scientists and all proponents of scientism fail. It is not clear, however, whether Darwin himself was fully aware of the general problem, i.e., the pitfalls of applying a one-sided explanation of things to one’s own act of explaining. It is clear from Darwinian Natural Right (pp. 269–72) as well as The Descent of Man that Darwin was concerned to show how his theory might plausibly illuminate the deep problem of the historical origins of the human mind. Accordingly, Darwin says that, after natural selection had fashioned preliminary cognitive capacities, “man would naturally crave to understand what was passing around him, and would have vaguely speculated on his own existence” (DNR, p. 270; Descent of Man, p. 65). Obviously his own existence is related to the existence of many other things, biological and astronomical, and so we move from a natural craving to understand the local environment to a natural craving to understand the universe, thus, for example, “to formulate scientific theories of the natural origins of life” (DNR, p. 270). Darwin’s science—in fact his whole life—can only be understood as a product of pure theoretical, not practical desire, for we have no idea how or whether Darwinian science, if true, will confer a reproductive advantage either on humanity or on Darwinian scientists. This leads to problem 5, a Darwinian version of Nietzsche’s radical question on the value of truth for life. For now, let us stick with the present line of analysis, which is on the way to problem 4, on the status of philosophy, essential or accidental.

7. ON ESSENTIAL AND ACCIDENTAL CAUSATION

How can Darwinian natural selection be understood to produce a natural desire to understand for its own sake, rather than for the sake of reproductive fitness? Can this effect—intellectual eros for the truth—be understood to follow per se or essentially from the cause, natural selection? On grounds of natural selection alone, the answer must be, no: this effect proceeded only per accidens or incidentally from the cause. So how can it be said that philosophic life is the peak of evolutionary development? If a builder builds a house in which some squirrels happen to make a nest in the chimney, would he say the squirrels’ nest is the peak of his building career? He could say it is the peak only if he aims not only at building houses but also at the conservation of squirrels (assuming they had no place else to live), an additional rule of his life besides carpentry. But then carpentry would not be the comprehensive, but only a partial, principle of his activity. Similarly: on Darwinian grounds alone, unless Darwin grants that his theory is partial and not comprehensive of the organic, philosophy can only be incidental to life, not essential, and not the peak. This is problem 4. It is clear that, for Plato and Aristotle, philosophy is not incidental, but is both the
highest human life and necessary for the success of political regimes generally. Therefore, unless Darwinism is willing to concede its own partiality, it is only on Socratic (Platonic, Aristotelian) grounds that philosophic life can be the peak.

8. COSMOLOGY: NATURE, TRUTH, LIFE, AND WILL

Perhaps we can avoid this controversy over squirrels, chimneys, and peaks. Why do truth seeking and reproductive fitness have to be separated and made by intricate arguments into some sort of problem? Why can’t mind be both survival tool and truth seeker compatibly? Can’t we walk and chew gum at the same time? Since Arnhart does not regard the status of philosophy as a problem for his synthesis of Aristotle and Darwin, I can only conjecture that this is his view. It is not an implausible one, but we must carry the inquiry further.

Why can we walk and chew gum at the same time? Because the functions and supporting structures of the whole living human body enable simultaneous eating and locomotion. If these functions mutually interfered in any serious way, nature would have done something in vain, or in Darwinian terms, something maladaptive and subject to deselection. What is evident to sense in the case of walking and chewing gum is not at all evident in the case of truth and life: unlike the heterogeneous parts of the body, e.g., mouth and foot, we cannot see the unity of the heterogeneous parts of the whole—biological and astronomical, sensible and intelligible—that would show the harmony of truth and life. In Republic 6 we get a sketch of this harmony as “divined” by Socrates (505e1) in the idea of the good and the image of the sun (504d–9c. See also Hasso, Final Causality, pp. 2–3). There the good is (1) principle of knowledge, (2) cause of solar motion somehow and thus of the conservation of living things, (3) ultimate telos, and (4) ground of being. But Socrates’ account is more of an unfinished mosaic than a finished painting. The four great characteristics of the good are not explicitly unified, and, in keeping with Socrates’ second sailing, Plato seems famously to deny the possibility of a science of nature. It is Aristotle who tries to put the pieces of Socrates’ sketch or puzzle together in his comprehensive teleology—the union of his science of nature and theory of knowledge by means of natural form culminating in the pure actuality of the first unmoved mover. As noted, modern natural science has refuted the comprehensiveness of this account. But however incomplete, poetic, or conjectural they may be, and whether successful or not, these cosmic teleologies of Plato and Aristotle convey a fundamental idea: the whole is beneficial, and not hostile or indifferent to us human beings. On grounds of this belief, it makes very good sense to hold that truth and life are compatible and even mutually supportive (for example, Nicomachean Ethics 1178a5–8). So of course the pursuit of scientific truth by men like Darwin would be compatible with, or even good for, the reproductive
fitness of the human species. Otherwise, the cosmos would be hostile or indifferent to us.

But if any philosophic notion attends the conception of modernity and modern science in major thinkers from Machiavelli through Nietzsche, including Darwin, it is that the whole is not beneficent. The universe, falsely regarded with wonder and reverence by the Greeks and Medievals, is in reality "an indifferent and largely homogeneous otherness, in part edible, in part dangerous" (Leon Kass, in The Ethics of Human Cloning, p. 28).

Here is Nietzsche, with his customary moderation:

‘According to nature’ you want to live? O you noble Stoics, what deceptive words these are! Imagine a being like nature, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; imagine indifference itself as a power—how could you live according to this indifference? (Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 9)

In the face of this, it is human will and human creativity—in one form or another—that counts (see Appendix, quotation 11). And it seems that we have two forms of willful creativity: an early modern, Baconian-Cartesian, and a later, Nietzschean-Heideggerian form. The Baconian-Cartesian form is most conspicuously exemplified today in the unsettling implications of genetic science, as discussed in section 9, below. In the Nietzschean-Heideggerian form, powerful poetry is ultimate. My present point is that, according to this account, truth could be deleterious to life (Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorisms 1–23). In particular, the scientific truth of Darwin’s theory could be bad for reproductive fitness, because it destroys our inspiring beliefs. According to Arnhart, “Darwinian theorists can explain the Mosaic law as promoting the reproductive interests of the Jews” (DNR, p. 259). Did Moses and his people understand themselves in this way? Would it have worked if they did? We don’t have to be Nietzscheans to see that the answer to these questions is, no. In view, then, of the cosmological or cosmo-theological question, we cannot assume a simple harmony between scientific truth and reproductive success. This is problem 5. Let us consider the other form of the modern exaltation of human will and creativity, Baconian-Cartesian mastery of nature, in its latest incarnation: genetic science.

9. UNNATURAL SELECTION: REMAKING EDEN

The cosmological or cosmo-theological question is, How is the whole disposed—through the community of its parts, biological and astronomical, sensible and intelligible—toward us, the human part? In the words of Hans Jonas, “[w]hat has neither will nor wisdom and is indifferent to itself solicits no re-
spect” (Philosophical Essays, p. 70). This characterizes the denigration of nature in the early modern cosmology of indifference. Arnhart wants to argue, however, that, in contrast to earlier notions based on classical physics, Darwinian nature is not indifferent to itself, and thus possesses a kind of wisdom by which we can take our bearings. For our evolutionary-genetic inheritance grounds and limits, through the nervous system, for example, some of our deepest desires and satisfactions, pleasures, and pains in life. This is the rule of all animal species, including the social animals, among which ourselves (DNR, pp. 56–57). The assumption is that what has become so deeply embedded through natural selection is robust and cannot be altered without dysfunctional consequences, in our case, unhappiness. This is the basis of Arnhart’s ethical-naturalist opposition to the cultural relativists and radical constructivists.

But is Arnhart’s assumption true? He calls it into question himself, although indirectly. He does this in replying to the following objection to Darwinian ethical naturalism: as a product of evolution, our species is only contingent and temporary, and so why claim that what conforms to our specific nature is good? Arnhart replies that the contingency and temporality of the human species is no argument against the normative character of human nature as long as it exists. This is a plausible answer, assuming a certain stability to the products of natural selection. But then he uses an example that points to the Baconian-Cartesian problem in his own claim: “If a huge meteorite were to collide with the earth tomorrow and kill us all, wouldn’t we still have to say it was good while it lasted [a few hundred thousand years]?” (DNR, p. 238). This answer may be acceptable for cats and dogs, but not for “the will of certain men using reason” (Descartes, Discourse on Method, pp. 26–27). We (or some of us, the scientists) know the laws of gravitational motion. Because they are species-neutral, they permit the controlled alteration of trajectories of bodies moved under gravitational force, if we can just deliver the needed impulse at the right time. (Hassing, Final Causality, pp. 230–37). (Recent Hollywood movies have expounded on how to do this with the killer asteroid.) As Bacon says, “we cannot command nature except by obeying her (New Organon, I, 129). If genetic science is species-neutral, then why can’t we also “obey” the genetic code, the rules of gene expression, etc., to command alterations in our genetic hardware, and begin to modify our “natural” desires according to our own designs? Natural selection may have shaped some of our basic propensities, but it didn’t constrain our wishes and imagination, and maybe our genetic hardware isn’t all that hard. The biological rootedness of the desires whereby Arnhart defines our humanity might then be quite malleable.

The title of this section, above, is composed of the titles of two recent books.26 The four words are self-explanatory. “Self-evolution” is on the horizon. The genetic code is universal in the species-neutral sense, and recombinant DNA techniques mean that, once the human genome is mapped, we can begin to modify a person’s genetic inheritance—and thus the genetic makeup of future
generations—as we wish. Until now the hand of natural selection has worked by chance, without intention, without foresight. But now, in the liberating light of genetic science, we (or some of us) can begin to steer the evolution of our species willfully. Radical claims for the possibility of changing human nature would thus find their greatest support from the very science that Arnhart wants to use against them. Or is all this mere science fiction in my overwrought imagination? Will future research in the serious sciences of molecular biology and complex systems (rather than science journalism) reveal essential limits to our ability to alter organisms? Will human cloning, not to mention chimeras—the genetic mixing of previously distinct species—turn out not to be a realistic possibility after all? Unfortunately, Arnhart does not discuss this issue, problem 2 on the opening list. It is not simply a problem for Arnhart but, it presently seems, for the whole of humanity. What becomes of the human specific difference, and Strauss’s phenomena that form a class by themselves, if the physical bases of human mental and emotional capacities admit unlimited tinkering and transformation? What are the implications of “engineering the engineer”? To argue against experiments of this type, don’t we need a transbiological conception of our humanity?

Do human will and intellect possess objects not of our own making and not subject to our future creative powers—objects by which to measure our humanity? Plato’s Good, the noble. Aristotle’s Intellect betoken ancient attempts to make coherent sense of the belief that, “the good man orders himself in relation to the whole, and the wicked one orders the whole in relation to himself.” This seems to require an account of the whole—however conjectural or problematic—in which man is not the highest being. We are back to the shaky game of cosmic teleology—shaky but, I suspect, unavoidable if we are to defend the notion that we have ends prior to choice whereby to limit our transcendent powers of domination. The cosmological question needs to be kept open and respected, but Arnhart considers it closed and rejects it (DNR, pp. 236, 242, 245). In light of problem 2, I fear he throws the baby out with the bathwater.

10. ARISTOTLE ON THE HUMAN TRANSCENDENCE OF BIOLOGICAL NATURE

As previously discussed, the principle of becoming of the polis is life, the principle of its being is good life. The former is clearly and strongly rooted in our common animal biology and as such it issues in forms of social cooperation with the inner force of powerful desires for food, shelter, safety, and sexual intercourse. But these are not “the greatest of goods” (Politics, 1253a31). Their accomplishment is not praiseworthy, does not prompt that “admiration of human excellence” that, for Strauss, exemplifies “phenomena which are simply irreducible to their conditions” (Appendix, quotation 4). But the higher principle of
being—good life, eudaimonia, eupraxia, the realization of moral and intellectual excellence—does not operate with the same force as the principle of becoming. This is clear from Aristotle’s statements showing the indifference of biological nature to human virtue. On grounds of our biology alone, including our sociobiology, human communities can turn out well or badly: “The virtues . . . are engendered in us neither by nature nor against nature; nature gives us the capacity to receive them, and [they are] brought to perfection by habit”—or to destruction. Habituation can be good or bad, as we can obviously see. Biological nature will not save us: “we do not become good or bad by nature.”

Otherwise there would be no need for teachers, trainers—and founders (Nicomachean Ethics 1103b7–14).

Arnhart shows that habituation and social learning are not specifically human but occur in other species as well. This is a major theme of sociobiology and, as Arnhart makes clear, something that would not surprise Aristotle. But the existence of habituation, social learning and culture, even “technology” in other animal species is not the point. Would Aristotle say that the first founder of chimpanzee society was responsible for the greatest of chimpanzee goods? Why are the first human founders responsible for the greatest of human goods? Is it not because of the unique obstacles they must have overcome? For

just as man is the best of animals when completed, when separated from law and adjudication he is the worst of all. For injustice is harshest when it is furnished with arms; and man is born naturally possessing arms for prudence and virtue which are nevertheless very susceptible to being used for their opposites. This is why, without virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage. . . . (Politics 1253a 32–36)

Hobbes would surely agree that without law, man is bestial. Would not Aristotle and Hobbes both agree, despite their great disagreement over natural sociality and rationality, that only man among the animals can be bestial? In assessing human status in relation to nature, we should not ignore man’s transcendent badness. Despite his upbeat, hortatory approach in the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle is aware of the problem. Thus, for Aristotle, the whole is beneficent with respect to ends in the sense that being virtuous and being happy are reliably linked. But with respect to origins, nature is not so good: becoming virtuous (and then staying that way) is an arduous task, harder than Arnhart’s ethical naturalism, and Hume and Darwin’s moral-sense theory, would suggest. Perhaps we could formulate the problem in the following way: Beginning with our biological nature, we humans are necessitated to use force and techne. Whatever the similarities to other species in this respect, we are comparing mountains to molehills, for we humans end up using force and techne to an immensely greater extent than any other species—against the rest of nature and against other human beings, because there is no equally natural limit to our use of force and
**techne.** That is: there are no biological limits to the desires and fears that drive us to the use of compulsion and artifice to get safety and satisfaction. As stated above, Aristotle did not know of the technological mastery of nature, but he saw clearly the problem of force or the warlike domination of some men by others, not to mention tyranny itself. He also saw clearly the unlimited character of our desire for money (Politics 1257b24–8a13).\(^{31}\) I believe that Aristotle’s striking reference to “the highest causation” at Nicomachean Ethics 1099b23 has something to do with this overall problem—the problem of our distinctive unlimitedness and its destructive potential—and the role of philosophy in solving or ameliorating it. It is not plausible that “Aristotle’s position . . . would support the recent revival of Darwinian social theory by rooting political science in biological science” (DNR, p. 51).

11. CONCLUSION

When we look at the evils of life, is the difference between the human and the other animal species one of degree or kind? Consider the data of the twentieth century: world wars, totalitarianism, genocide, most recently ethnic cleansing, also family disintegration, and violence against women and children, rising at century’s end. Darwin could not have known, and thus we can perhaps forgive his naive, childlike, nineteenth-century belief in progress.\(^{32}\) Today, many Darwinians (who do know) try to maintain that none of these evils is specifically human, that all exist in the behavior of various animal species as precursors to the human (DNR, p. 28, 53, 55, 58, 60, 63, 66). A recent DiscoveryNews television program announced (during a break in reporting on atrocities in Kosovo) that the roots of genocide may have been found: a group of chimpanzees has been observed lying in wait for another group, which they then attacked and killed. But is this really anything like what the Nazis did, or what Stalin did, or Pol Pot? Do other animals, however aggressive their intraspecific encounters, really have Yugoslavias? Moreover, to call such enormities “tragic conflicts” or “moral tragedies” seems woefully inadequate.\(^{33}\) Arnhart might say that it is the influence of Augustine that affects my thinking (DNR, p. 147). I claim it is CNN and the newspapers.

With the exception of his (Socratic) treatment of human slavery and its universal injustice, Arnhart’s Darwinian account of human conflict is disappointing for its rather bleak particularism. “The natural sociality of human beings expresses itself as a love of one’s own” (DNR, p. 146). To a great extent it does—for better and for worse—but is love of one’s own ultimate? For Aristotle, the city transcends the family (Politics 1253a19–29), and the city opens the possibility of philosophy and the disinterested love of truth (Nicomachean Ethics 1096a14–18) needed for impartial justice (Nicomachean Ethics 1132a22). But
in Arnhart, it seems that the "natural self-love and tribalism of human beings" is ultimate, and thus between kinship groups, war is the fundamental situation: "human survival requires that human beings fight for their group against competing groups." Accordingly, "[t]hroughout human history, justice has meant helping one's friends and harming one's enemies" (DNR, p. 75). Is this the view of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle?

For Arnhart, following Darwin and Hume, the fundamental state of war can be ameliorated "as human beings are united into ever larger communities, [for] their natural sympathy and benevolence can to some extent embrace all members of the human species" (DNR, p. 75). But for Aristotle, although there can be love of justice (Nicomachean Ethics 1099a11), justice is unlike the other moral virtues in that it is not itself an emotion or feeling; specifically, it is not a mean on a spectrum of emotion, e.g., fear and confidence in the case of courage (Nicomachean Ethics 1107b1-4, 1129a7-10). It involves knowledge of proportion in merit and desert, crime and punishment, and would thus seem to be the most theoretical of the moral virtues (Nicomachean Ethics 1130b30-34a16). All of this concerns the essential status of philosophy in Aristotle and its role in overcoming our partiality, in contrast to its incidental status in Darwin and Arnhart.

The source of Arnhart's particularism, the ultimacy of love of one's own, is his insistence on the priority of the biological over the political and the philosophical. According to Arnhart, the mother-child bond, and the resulting family, constitute the sole source of human sociality. "[A]ll social cooperation ultimately arises as an extension of the natural impulses to sexual coupling and parental care of the young" (DNR, pp. 52-53). Thus, in its motivating attachments, the political community is reduced to an extension of the family. Arnhart attributes this view not only to Darwin but also to Aristotle: "Aristotle refers repeatedly to maternal love for children as the model for, and natural origin of, all forms of love, friendship, and affiliative behavior" (DNR, p. 101, emphasis is added; see also pp. 72 and 89). No less than eight references to the Nicomachean Ethics are given in support of this claim (1155a16-29, 1157a12, 1159a27-37, 1161b16-28, 1162a16-28, 1166a1-10, 1168a8, 1168a19-27). But, as far as I can see, a careful reading of these texts (taken either individually or all together) does not support Arnhart's interpretation. There is no doubt that the parent-child bond is extremely important for Aristotle's understanding of human sociality, "for man is by nature a pairing being even more than a political being, inasmuch as the family is prior [in time] and more necessary than the state" (Nicomachean Ethics 1162a17-18). And there is no doubt that Arnhart has interpreted this correctly to a large extent—but not completely. For Aristotle, the noble and the truth transcend one's own. The polis, the philosophical student-teacher relation, and philosophical friendship are not reducible to, and not simply an extension of, the family, for they aim at activities and ends that transcend the family's achievements (Nicomachean Ethics 1096a14-18, 1151b19-20,
1164b2–6). This is the meaning of the ontological priority of the *polis* over the family, of the end over the origin (*Politics* 1252b30–33, 1253a19–20).

The love of mother for child is the strongest in nature, but for that reason, also the most partial: What mother can perceive her child as bad? Arnhart fails to give sufficient weight to the distorting effects of love of one's own, and the obstacle it presents for our openness to truth, thus to philosophy and to justice (*Rhetoric* 1356a15, 1377b31–78a2). This enables him to say, following Darwin, that "[t]he human sense of vengeance—the desire to get even—is the earliest and deepest expression of the human sense of justice (*DNR*, p. 79, emphasis added. *The Descent of Man*, p. 67). But how much is even? Vengeance leads equally to dreadful injustice and is the main impediment to rule of law in large areas of the world, e.g., the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia, to name some of the currently most visible.

According to Arnhart, "natural science—and particularly biology—has become the authoritative source for knowledge about human nature" (*DNR*, p. 126). According to Strauss, "the approach which is peculiar to modern natural science leads to a distortion of the human phenomena" (Appendix, quotation 7). Strauss is still right and, despite its virtues, *Darwinian Natural Right* shows why.

**APPENDIX**

**STRAUSS ON MODERN NATURAL SCIENCE**

1

To retain his power, [the Universal and Final Tyrant] will be forced to suppress every activity which might lead people into doubt of the essential soundness of the universal and homogeneous state: he must suppress philosophy as an attempt to corrupt the young. In particular he must in the interest of the homogeneity of his universal state forbid every teaching, every suggestion, that there are politically relevant natural differences among men which cannot be abolished or neutralized by progressing scientific technology. He must command his biologists to prove that every human being has, or will acquire, the capacity of becoming a philosopher or tyrant... Thanks to the conquest of nature and to the completely unabashed substitution of suspicion and terror for law, the Universal and Final Tyrant has at his disposal practically unlimited means for ferreting out, and for extinguishing, the most modest efforts in the direction of thought. Kojève would seem to be right although for the wrong reason: the coming of the universal and homogeneous state will be the end of philosophy on earth. ("Restatement on Xenophon's *Hieros*" in *On Tyranny* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968], p. 226, also in *What Is Political Phi-*
Natural right in its classic form is connected with a teleological view of the universe. All natural beings have a natural end, a natural destiny, which determines what kind of operation is good for them. In the case of man, reason is required for discerning these operations: reason determines what is by nature right with ultimate regard to man’s natural end. The teleological view of the universe, of which the teleological view of man forms a part, would seem to have been destroyed by modern natural science. From the point of view of Aristotle—and who could dare to claim to be a better judge in this matter than Aristotle?—the issue between the mechanical and the teleological conception of the universe is decided by the manner in which the problem of the heavens, the heavenly bodies, and their motion is solved [Phys. 196a25 ff., 199a3–5]. Now in this respect, which from Aristotle’s own point of view was the decisive one, the issue seems to have been decided in favor of the non-teleological conception of the universe... This means that people were forced to accept a fundamental, typically modern, dualism of a nonteleological natural science and a teleological science of man. ... The fundamental dilemma, in whose grip we are, is caused by the victory of modern natural science. (Natural Right and History [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953], pp. 7–8)
hypotheses lead to the assertion that all admiration is, at best, a kind of telescoped calculation of benefits for ourselves. They are the outcome of a materialistic or crypto-materialistic view, which forces its holders to understand the higher as nothing but the effect of the lower, or which prevents them from considering the possibility that there are phenomena which are simply irreducible to their conditions, that there are phenomena that form a class by themselves. (*Natural Right and History*, pp. 128–29) 1950

5

The failure of the predominant philosophic tradition could be traced directly to the difficulty with which every teleological physics is beset... (*Natural Right and History*, p. 172) 1950

6

Whatever the significance of modern natural science may be, it cannot affect our understanding of what is human in man. To understand man in the light of the whole means for modern natural science to understand man in the light of the sub-human. But in that light man as man is wholly unintelligible. Classical political philosophy viewed man in a different light. It was originated by Socrates. And Socrates was so far from being committed to a specific cosmology that his knowledge was knowledge of ignorance. Knowledge of ignorance is not ignorance. It is knowledge of the elusive character of the truth, of the whole. Socrates, then, viewed man in the light of the mysterious character of the whole. . . . The knowledge which we possess is characterized by a fundamental dualism which has never been overcome. At one pole we find knowledge of homogeneity: above all in arithmetic, but also in the other branches of mathematics, and derivatively in all productive arts or crafts [see especially Newton, *Principia*, Preface of 1686]. At the opposite pole we find knowledge of heterogeneity, and in particular of heterogeneous ends . . . . Men are therefore constantly tempted to force the issue by imposing unity on the phenomena, by absolutizing either knowledge of homogeneity [as unity of species-neutral science] or knowledge of ends. (*What Is Political Philosophy?* pp. 38–40) 1955

7

[I]f we take modern natural science, modern non-teleological natural science, and try to apply it to human affairs we do not achieve a solution. This leads, in effect, to a distortion of the understanding of human things. The key point is
this—and this has in itself nothing to do with teleology, at least not with teleology as ordinarily understood—modern natural science, if it is left entirely to itself, and not influenced by other considerations, implies the denial of essential differences. The most popular example of that is the theory of evolution. There is no essential difference between man and the brutes because man has developed out of the brutes and there are cases of men, either today or in the remote past, who are closer to some living or extinct apes than these men are to other men. . . . The denial of essential differences—and this implies the understanding of what we popularly surely would call the higher, namely man, to the lower: to understand man as much in terms of the brutish as possible; of the human in terms of the sub-human; of the rational in terms of the sub-rational. . . . Seeing that fact, that the approach which is peculiar to modern natural science leads to a distortion of the human phenomena, the most convenient thing to do is to speak of a dualism of the sciences: the sciences of nature and the sciences of man as man. . . . So this dualism of sciences is a convenient practical solution. . . . But—and here I agree with the positivists—there is a need for an ultimate unity of science. So this dualism of science can be accepted only as provisionally indispensable. But this comprehensive science is today only a pious wish; and therefore one cannot say more than it is to be desired. ("Lectures on Natural Right," University of Chicago; quoted with permission of the Estate of Leo Strauss) 1962

according to the Aristotelian view, man is a being sui generis, with a dignity of his own: man is the rational and political animal. Man is the only being which can be concerned with self-respect; man can respect himself because he can despise himself; he is . . . the only being possessing a sense of shame. . . . The presupposition of all this is that man is radically distinguished from nonman, from brutes as well as from gods. . . . This presupposition points to a more fundamental presupposition according to which the whole consists of essentially different parts. The new political science on the other hand is based on the fundamental premise that there are no essential or irreducible differences: there are only differences of degree between men and brutes or between men and robots. In other words, according to the new political, or the universal science of which the new political science is a part, to understand a thing means to understand it in terms of its genesis or its conditions and hence, humanly speaking, to understand the higher in terms of the lower: the human in terms of the subhuman, the rational in terms of the subrational, the political in terms of the subpolitical. ("An Epilogue," in Herbert J. Storing, ed., Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics [New York:
This question ['what is the polis?'], and all questions of this kind [namely, what is . . . ?], were raised by Socrates who for this reason became the founder of political philosophy.

The 'what is' questions point to 'essences', to 'essential' differences—to the fact that the whole consists of parts which are heterogeneous, not merely sensibly (like fire, air, water, and earth) but noetically: to understand the whole means to understand the 'What' of each of these parts, of these classes of beings, and how they are linked with one another. Such understanding cannot be the reduction of one heterogeneous class to others or to any cause or causes other than the class itself; the class, or the class character, is the cause par excellence. Socrates conceived of his turn to the 'what is' questions as a turn, or a return, to 'common sense': while the roots of the whole are hidden, the whole manifestly consists of heterogeneous parts. (The City and Man [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964], p. 19)

Let us look at the specific grounds on which it is claimed that Aristotle's political philosophy has been refuted. The most common reason is that modern natural science, or modern cosmology, having refuted Aristotelian cosmology (e.g., by demonstrating 'evolution'), has therewith refuted the principle or the basis of Aristotelian political philosophy. Aristotle took for granted the permanence of the species, and we 'know' that the species are not permanent. But even granting that evolution is an established fact, that man has come into being out of another species, man is still essentially different from non-man. The fact of essential differences—the fact that there are 'forms'—has in no way been refuted by evolutionism. The starting point of Aristotle, as well as of Plato, is that the whole consists of heterogeneous beings; that there is a noetic heterogeneity of beings, this common sensible notion on which we fall back all the time and this has in no way been refuted. [Strauss presents the example of opium, the subject of Moliere's notorious joke against formal causes. The joke is not so good: opium has specific properties that its uncombined elements do not have.] What is true of opium is true of man [irreducibility to simpler antecedent parts]. . . . It is, then, the notion of essence, of essential difference, which distinguishes the Aristotelian and the Platonic teaching from that of the characteristically modern philosophy, and especially modern science. . . . However far
the defeat of Aristotle’s cosmology may extend, it does not go to the length of having destroyed the evidence of the concept of essential differences and, therefore, of essences. ("The Crisis of Political Philosophy," in Harold Spaeth, ed., The Predicament of Modern Politics, pp. 92–93, reprinted as “Political Philosophy and the Crisis of Our Time,” in George J. Graham and George W. Carey, eds., The Post-Behavioral Era [New York: David McKay, 1972], p. 230)

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In order to do justice to the change effected by Machiavelli, one must consider two great changes which occurred after his time but which were in harmony with his spirit. The first is the revolution in natural science, i.e., the emergence of modern natural science. The rejection of final causes (and therewith also of the concept of chance) destroyed the theoretical basis of classical political philosophy. The new natural science differs from the various forms of the older one not only because of its new understanding of nature but also and especially because of its new understanding of science: knowledge is no longer understood as fundamentally receptive; the initiative in understanding is with man, not with the cosmic order; in seeking knowledge man calls nature before the tribunal of his reason: he ‘puts nature to the question’ (Bacon); knowing is a kind of making; human understanding prescribes nature its laws; man’s power is infinitely greater than was hitherto believed; not only can man transform corrupt human matter into incorrupt human matter, or conquer chance—all truth and meaning originate in man; they are not inherent in a cosmic order which exists independently of man’s activity. Correspondingly, poetry is no longer understood as inspired imitation or reproduction but as creativity. The purpose of science is reinterpreted: propter potentiam, for the relief of man’s estate, for the conquest of nature, for the maximum control, the systematic control of the natural conditions of human life. Conquest of nature implies that nature is the enemy, a chaos to be reduced to order; everything good is due to man’s labor rather than to nature’s gift: nature supplies only the almost worthless materials. ("The Three Waves of Modernity,” in Hilail Gildin, ed., Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975], pp. 87–88. I have been unable to find the year in which Strauss wrote the essay.)

NOTES

2. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 7–8, given in the Appendix to the present essay, quotation 2. See DNR, pp. 1, 3–4, and 238.


8. DNR, p. 124. A remarkable example of sociobiology appeared on the CBS television program *60 Minutes II*, July 20, 1999. Bob Simon reported on young male elephants in a South African national park that were killing rhinoceroses and behaving disruptively in a manner completely out of character. It was discovered that the fathers of these young elephants had been killed in a controlled ecological program. The fatherless juveniles had formed gangs and begun attacking and killing the rhinoceroses. Park authorities then transported adult male elephants into the area to interact with the delinquent juveniles, who subsequently stopped their aberrant, violent behavior. Note, however, that the delinquent elephants were killing animals of another species, not each other. Thus, there is a striking similarity to the human, and a striking difference.


10. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1099a6–15, 1115b12–13. Arnhart knows that nature has “many different meanings” (DNR, p. 36), but he omits discussion of the noble (fine, beautiful) by nature.

11. Arnhart’s longest chapter is about slavery and its universal injustice (DNR, chap. 7). But his argument seems far more Socratic than Darwinian: every known justification of slavery both affirms and denies the humanity of the slave, and is thus self-contradictory. Concerning the rest of humanity’s conflicts and resulting gross injustices, Arnhart remains faithful to Darwin (as Arnhart interprets him), with results discussed in the conclusion, section 11, of this review.


For Aristotle on the primacy of the final cause, see *PA* 639b9–40a12; *NE* 1176a3–9, 1178a5–9. For this reason, species-neutrality is a major weapon in the early modern attack on Aristotelian teleology. See Hassing, *Final Causality*, pp. 26–43 and 230–37.

On consideration of common properties only, see *NE* 1097b22–8a20, 1139a19. Species-neutrality is a wider and more fundamental term than reductionism. The behavior of a whole, e.g., a clock, can sometimes be derived from the motions and properties of its parts, e.g., gears and springs. In
such cases one says that the whole is reducible to the parts, and the corresponding explanation is called reductionist in the material or ontological sense. (There are other senses of reductionism in philosophy of science, such as theory reductionism, in which the terms of a higher level theory, e.g., thermodynamics, are translated down to the terms of a lower level theory, e.g., statistical mechanics.) The preface to Newton’s *Principia* announces a program of universal (material) reductionism: all whole bodies in nature, of whatever species, are assumed to be aggregates of subsensible particles interacting by forces that are mathematically analogous to the gravitational force law. Newton’s reductionist program is clearly species-neutral because his (hypothetical and yet to be discovered) forces and particles are supposed to be common to many species of sensible bodies. Darwinian biology, in contrast to Newtonian physics, makes no claim to material reductionism: whole organisms may well be irreducible to their parts, as Aristotle taught (see Arnhart’s antireductionist account at DNR, pp. 239–40). But Darwinian biology is species-neutral because the fundamental principles of random mutation and adaptive selection for reproductive fitness are taken to apply in the same way or univocally to all living populations from single cells to humans. In fundamental contrast, Aristotle’s principles of form and matter do not apply univocally to all species, but only analogically—a major theme in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. See especially *Meta*. 1070b18–20.


13. *Phys.*, 194b9, *Meta.*, 1069b25–27. This is an important part of the doctrine of hylomorphism. See note 12, above, on the analogy of Aristotelian form and matter. It should be remembered that classical physics suffered its own huge defeat with the discovery that it could not account for the stability of matter. The quantum physics of atomic structure, thus of the chemical species, is in certain respects like Aristotle’s physics of irreducible substances.


16. The scientific version of the problem can be found in current discussions of “emergence,” i.e., physico-chemical phenomena in which a system acquires in its temporal evolution properties that must be taken on their own terms, taken as primary and irreducible, because they cannot be adequately understood in terms of simpler antecedent parts.

17. The intelligibility of the process depends on that of the product; see Aristotle *Meta*. 1051b2.

18. *NE* 1111b7–10, also *Phys*. 197b1–8; furthermore, good life requires the support of the highest or best causation (*NE* 1099b20–25), if it is not to arise merely by chance. Remarkably, Aristotle does not say what this causation is.

19. For example, John Horgan, *The End of Science* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996), p. 192: “Emergence . . . is a hoary idea, related to holism, vitalism, and other antireductionist creeds that date back to the last century at least. Certainly Darwin did not think that natural selection could be derived from Newtonian mechanics.” As described in note 12, above, and assuming Horgan is right about Darwin, Darwinism would then be nonreductionist but species-neutral.


Republic 473d, NE 1152b1–4, 1178a5–8. For Plato and Aristotle, philosophy plays a central role in ordering our conflicting desires. Arnhart obviously recognizes the problem: "To live well, we must perceive what it is we truly desire, we must order our often conflicting desires into a coherent pattern" (DNR, pp. 23–24). But, perhaps in keeping with Darwinian commitments, Arnhart is silent about philosophy's role in defining that pattern.

24. The main problem discussed in "The Desire to Understand" (DNR, pp. 267–75) is, in keeping with Darwin's own concerns, whether the origin of the human mind requires a special act of creation.

25. Note also Strauss's remark (Appendix, quotation 6) that, "Socrates was so far from being committed to a specific cosmology that his knowledge was knowledge of ignorance."


27. Kass, Toward a More Natural Science, p. 8. See Strauss's reply to Kojève (Appendix, quotation 1) on the possibility of the destruction of philosophy in the universal and homogeneous state by means of "the conquest of nature" in the form of biological technology.

28. The quotation is from Rousseau, Emile, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 292. Compare Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, ed. George Heffernan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 158–59: "it is the will alone, or the freedom of choice, which I know by experience as being so great in me that I might apprehend an idea of no greater faculty—so much so that it be above all [the will] by reason of which I understand that I bear in some way the image and likeness of God. For although the will, or the freedom of choice, be without comparison greater in God than in me, both by reason of the cognition and the power that are joined to it . . . and by reason of the object, because it extends itself to more things [], it still does not seem greater [than mine], regarded formally and precisely in itself."

At NE 1141a16–b4, Aristotle says that man is not the highest being. This statement occurs in the account of wisdom as certain knowledge of the highest things (1141a20, 1141b4), the account of wisdom as perfect and complete. The context conveys the impression that Aristotle holds that we can know with the certainty of complete wisdom (nous plus episteme) that man is not the highest being. Aristotle thus obscures the aporetic character of the inquiry into ultimate principles and the zetetic character of philosophy or love of wisdom not fully possessed. This does not mean, however, that his account of cosmic teleology (in Phys. 8 and Meta. 12) is simply "for matters of expediency" (Meta. 1074b6). I believe that more is at stake.

29. "The virtues . . . habit" is found at NE 1103a24–6. The following lines, 1103a27–b2, contrast both virtue and art with what is acquired through realization of a biological potential, e.g., seeing, hearing.

"We do not become good or bad by nature" is at NE 1106a10. In fitting Aristotle to the moral-sense tradition, Arnhart identifies (DNR, p. 72) the moral passions of Hume and Darwin with the natural virtues in Aristotle (NE 1144b4), while underlaying the superiority of Aristotelian virtue "in the strict sense" to natural virtue. For Aristotle, natural virtue is to true virtue as cleverness is to prudence; see NE 1144b1–21. Arnhart, accordingly, underplays the difficulties in converting
natural virtue to true virtue. True virtue requires both good habituation and prudence, as Arnhart notes, but, I believe, as Arnhart does not, that Aristotelian prudence in turn involves an essential relation to philosophy. Finally, in making Aristotle a moral-sense thinker, Arnhart ignores the distinction between moral weakness (akrasia) and genuine vice. Arnhart says that the “common human experience of being mistaken about our desires and then regretting our mistakes confirms the reality of our basic desires as a part of our nature that cannot be willfully disregarded” (DNR, p. 23). This experience of moral weakness is indeed common, but there remains an uncommon, hard core of humanity that does wrong on principle and without regret. See NE 1146a31-5, 1146b21-4, 1150a19-23, 1150a31, 1150b29-32, 1151a7-28 for the distinction between vice and moral weakness. For Arnhart, it seems that the Aristotelian category of vice is replaced by the modern category of psychopathology (DNR, chap. 8).

30. Darwimans claim that technology is not specifically human because other animals possess it in the precursor form of tool use: “[I]n some chimpanzee communities [but not others], mothers teach their children how to crack nuts using stones ...” (DNR, p. 57). “Chimps ... strip leaves off twigs, and then use the naked sticks for extracting termites out of nests” (Gould, “The Human Difference”). But are these examples anything like human technology, e.g., electromagnetic, genetic, nuclear? Does the “technology” of other animal species have the potential to alter their own nature?

31. See Politics 1324a5-5a16, on nine regimes whose laws aim at domination. This occurs after Aristotle raises the crucial question of the philosophic versus the political way of life. See also NE 1177b6-12.

How will the sociobiologists deal with this one? Do any other animals have money and go crazy over it as we do?

32. For example, Descent of Man, p. 104: “Looking to future generations, there is no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow weaker, and we may expect that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance. In this case the struggle between our higher and lower impulses will be less severe, and virtue will be triumphant.”

33. DNR, pp. 81, 149. Recall Strauss, On Tyranny, p. 21: “when we were brought face to face with tyranny—with a kind of tyranny that surpassed the boldest imagination of the most powerful thinkers of the past—our political science failed to recognize it.”

34. DNR, p. 260. So, besides slavery, are there any other universal injustices? Are we right or wrong to speak of crimes against humanity and go after their perpetrators?

35. For example, 116lb16-28 says that friendships between relatives, not all friendships, derive from the parent-child bond.
Book Reviews

Gary Rosen, American Compact: James Madison and the Problem of Founding (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1999), xii + 237 pp., $29.95.

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Let us, as citizens of a great republic, proudly and honorably determine “to rest all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self-government.” Let us then honestly, if humbly and paradoxically, admit that “there are subjects to which the capacities of the bulk of mankind are unequal,” and that designing a good constitution is one of them (p. vii). What then? James Madison had answers to this question that are worth contemplating. Gary Rosen ferrets them out, arranges them cogently, and puts them in illuminating historical and philosophical context.

If students of James Madison have agreed about anything over the past century, it is that Madison disagreed with himself. Historians, Madison biographers, and students of the founding with widely different views of other important matters join in concluding, with some of his contemporaries, that Madison’s political thinking underwent, as Rosen says, a “radical transformation,” a “metamorphosis,” and that in the end the Father of the Constitution was “hopelessly inconsistent.” The purpose of Rosen’s book is to correct this respectful error, to demonstrate Madison’s lifelong consistency both in practice and in theory, and thus “to rehabilitate Madison as a constitutional thinker and a statesman.” To accomplish this, Rosen undertakes to demonstrate that Madison’s statesmanship was guided by a profoundly original understanding of “the root idea of his political thought: the social compact” (pp. 1–3).

Madison’s contribution to social compact theory lay primarily in his understanding of what Rosen calls the “political right of nature.” The political right of nature involves the “notion, implicit in the social compact as it had come down to the founding generation, . . . that a sovereign people, having resolved to escape the state of nature, was capable on its own of forming a government adequate to that end” (p. 7). Rosen considers this “the most problematic assumption of prior accounts of the social compact” (p. 81). “For Madison, the political right of nature represented the social compact’s defining moment” (p. 14). Madison recognized, as great social compact theorists like Hobbes and Locke had failed adequately to do, that the people were not capable themselves of exercising this right effectively. Possessing the natural right to establish government, the people lack the deliberative capacity, the prudence, to establish good govern-
ment. The consent of the people, though a necessary foundation of legitimate government, is an instrument inadequate to secure the safety and happiness for the sake of which people enter into government in the first place. The people are not founders, and founding is necessary to accomplish the ends for which they naturally and reasonably leave the state of nature. Madison therefore, as a member of a people engaged in the complex act of exercising the political right of nature, sought and found a place not yet discovered in social compact thinking for founding and for founders: for a modern, republican, architectonic prudence not altogether unlike the classic understanding of phronesis first articulated by Aristotle.

In the years leading up to and following the constitutional convention of 1787, Madison came to see clearly and understand the implications of a fundamental distinction between the mass of his countrymen whose consent was the source of legitimate government and a wise few on whose prudence the best hopes of the people for liberty and justice decisively depended (pp. 71, 81). Much of Rosen’s interpretation revolves around this epochal moment in American history when the people exercised their right to alter or abolish the forms of government to which they had become accustomed (in this case, the Articles of Confederation) and to institute new government on such principles and in such form as to them seemed “most likely to effect their safety and happiness.” Rosen shows how Madison, during this “Critical Period,” came to understand and to shape the interplay of the many motives and influences animating his fellow citizens: the natural desire for safety or security, various civilized interests that had grown up in American civil society, the self-assertive pride of both individuals and states. Madison’s statesmanship relied upon accident and force to complement reflection and choice as he attempted, with founding prudence, to harmonize wisdom and consent in the establishment of a new constitution.

Many of those who devote their time to trying to explain the American founding have thought it fruitful to place the founders in different respects and in varying degrees in relation to ancient or modern political thought. Indeed, this is a tradition begun by the founders themselves. Rosen contributes to this tradition with an analysis of Madison’s understanding of “prudence,” an understanding that has an “affinity with Aristotle,” and “[a]t the very least . . . is a departure from the broad principles of Hobbes and Locke” (p. 88). With Aristotle, Madison regarded prudence as a virtue of the practical intellect which, at its full height, is the uncommon or rare political judgment of great political men. Madison also “seems to have held [with Aristotle] that ‘a man cannot be prudent if he is not good’” (p. 84). Thus Madisonian prudence seems to be at home in the classical world of statesmen and citizens, morality and politics. The “key proposition of [Hobbes’s] teaching,” on the other hand, was that “‘Prudence is but Experience; which equall time, equally bestows on all men, in those things they equally apply themselves unto’” (p. 91). Prudence is thus reduced to universally competent instrumental calculation in the service of mere self-
preservation. It is Madison’s republicanism that raises the sights of his prudence above this mere necessitous calculation “toward the achievement of a certain kind of human dignity” (p. 100). This republican dignity grows from liberal roots, to be sure. It arises from “a certain proud self-reliance, a jealous and irascible attachment to the rights of nature.” But the potential dignity of the attachment to and assertion of our natural rights is completely “suppressed” in Hobbes’s account of the compelling passions leading to the social compact; it becomes at least “visible” in Locke’s idea of a right of revolution, but it is more fully expressed in the “vigilant and manly spirit” that, as Madison saw in America, both “nourishes freedom” and is “nourished by it” (p. 117).

Two other great modern thinkers, Hume and Rousseau, anticipated Madison in recognizing the deficiencies in Hobbes’s and Locke’s accounts of the social compact, but their responses to these deficiencies were themselves deficient in part because in different ways they “rejected reason as the ordering principle of the soul” (p. 96). Madison, in contrast, “believed himself and his counterparts to be capable of rational praxis” (p. 97). Furthermore, Madison “did at times allude to a certain order of the soul that republican institutions produced” (p. 118). In this order, “Reason manifested itself... not in [mere] problem solving or calculation but in character, as a kind of self-control and independence” (p. 119). Here, in a way characteristic of classical political thought, republican constitutional forms foster a “human virtue... correspond[ing] to the authoritative opinions of a regime” (p. 119). “Madisonian founding” in the end is “best seen in Aristotelian terms” (p. 99).

The great pivot of Madison’s inconsistency, in the widely shared view of generations of scholars, is his mystifying shift in the 1790s from broad construction and nationalism to strict construction and states rights, from prudential provision against majority tyranny to organizing a united ruling majority: in brief, from Federalist to Republican, from Hamilton to Jefferson (pp. 142–43; 158). The inconsistency appears to resurface during Madison’s presidency when he reverses himself on the question of the constitutionality of a national bank (Madison had unsuccessfully opposed a national bank as unconstitutional when first put forward by Hamilton in the 1790s) (p. 169). The inconsistency seems to descend into confusion when, less than a year after recognizing the constitutionality of the Bank of the United States, Madison vetoes a bill for funding internal improvements apparently on his old strict-constructionist grounds (pp. 169–70).

What appears inconsistency in Madison’s long career, Rosen argues, is a profoundly consistent effort, amid different challenges, to secure enduring conditions for fulfilling the ends of the American social compact. These conditions were threatened by proud and exaggerated claims on behalf of the few whose prudence was essential to the goodness of the new constitution (Hamilton), and by proud and exaggerated claims on behalf of the people whose consent was essential to the legitimacy of the constitution (Jefferson). The harmony of prudence and consent in the moment of the American founding was made possible
in part by a combination of rare or miraculous accidents that ought not to be relied upon in ordinary times. The blessings of this harmony were best secured and perpetuated by inculcating among the people at large a reverence for the forms of the new constitution and requiring of the most ambitious and talented few a prudential deference to these forms (pp. 128, 137–38). By developing an authoritative constitutional tradition rooted in an original kind of “originalism,” Madison hoped to perpetuate both the consent and the prudence that were inseparably and necessarily combined in the successful exercise of the political right of nature that was the American founding (pp. 157–77).

Rosen does not claim to be the first to argue for Madison’s consistency. He acknowledges, for example, the recent success of historian Lance Banning in showing the consistency between Madison the Federalist and Madison the co-founder of the Republican Party. But Banning’s account does not extend to the period of Madison’s presidency, and, more important, his analysis is founded on the “thoroughly mistaken premise” of the “ideological school” (Gordon Wood, J. G. A. Pocock, et al.) that “Liberalism” is “utterly indifferent to public things” or to virtue. Rosen’s analysis, by contrast, conforms to a “growing literature that seeks to restore natural-rights liberalism to the preeminence it once enjoyed in interpretations of the American founding.” According to this view, the founders “were perfectly capable of integrating the seemingly incompatible domains of civic virtue and natural rights” (p. 5).

Rosen’s concern to correct the ideological or “republican hypothesis” school’s error seems to lead Rosen himself into certain difficulties. He rightly wants to show that, contrary to the republican hypothesis school’s account, the American revolutionaries and founders did not “find the opposition between virtue and rights nearly so absolute as do most defenders of this hypothesis” (p. 55). To show how Madison, in particular, understood the relation between virtue and rights—to show how “republicanism” and “liberalism” are blended in his thought—Rosen, among other things, offers reflections on the following three interesting passages from Madison’s public and private writings.

No instance has heretofore occurred, nor can any instance be expected hereafter to occur, in which the unadulterated forms of Republican Government can pretend to so fair an opportunity of justifying themselves by their fruits. In this view the Citizens of the U.S. are responsible for the greatest trust ever confided to a Political Society. If justice, good faith, honor, gratitude & all the other Qualities which enable the character of a nation, and fulfil the ends of Government, be the fruits of our establishments, the cause of liberty will acquire a dignity and lustre, which it has never yet enjoyed; and an example will be set which can not but have the most favorable influence on the rights of mankind. If on the other side, our Governments should be unfortunately blotted with the reverse of these cardinal and essential Virtues, the great cause which we have engaged to vindicate, will be dishonored & betrayed; the last & fairest experiment in favor of the rights of human nature will be turned against them; and their patrons and friends exposed to be insulted & silenced
by the votaries of Tyranny and Usurpation. (P. 55; from Address to the States, 26 April, 1783)

Were the pictures which have been drawn by the political jealousy of some among us, faithful likenesses of the human character, the inference would be that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government; and that nothing less than the chains of despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another. (P. 56; Federalist 55 [cited as 56 in Rosen])

There is no maxim in my opinion which is more liable to be misapplied, and which therefore more needs elucidation than the current one that the interest of the majority is the political standard of right and wrong. Taking the word “Interest” as synonomous with “Ultimate happiness,” in which sense it is qualified with every necessary moral ingredient, the proposition is no doubt true. But taking it in the popular sense, as referring to immediate augmentation of property and wealth, nothing can be more false. In the latter sense it would be the interest of the majority in every community to despoil & enslave the minority of individuals; and in a federal community to make a similar sacrifice of a minority of the component States. (P. 68; letter to James Monroe, 5 October, 1786)

Rosen is right in saying that, “[f]or Madison, the ‘cardinal and essential Virtues’ were perfectly compatible with a regime based on ‘the rights of mankind’” (p. 55). He is right to point out that these virtues were in one respect a necessary means to securing the ends of the rights of mankind. He may even be right that Madison considered the rights of mankind “precedent in every respect” to such cardinal and essential virtues; that Madison thought American government promotes such virtues “only incidentally, as fit instruments of policy” (p. 56); that Madison agreed with Hobbes that “virtue corresponds to no natural inclination” (p. 57); and that the “final cause” of the founders’ statesmanship was mere preservation of the body (pp. 29, 113). But, as to the last few claims, he goes wrong insofar as he depends on these passages to prove them. To draw such conclusions he must read these passages in a strained way, to say the least.

Of Madison’s Address to the States, Rosen writes:

Thus, as he writes in his address, justice and the other virtues are the “fruits” of governments established within the ambit of “the cause of liberty.” Their true worth, however pleasing they may be to the eye, lies in their being “Qualities” that “fulfill the ends of government.” They are not to be cultivated simply for their own sake. American government might require certain virtues, but it promotes them only incidentally, as fit instruments of policy. (P. 56)

The more natural reading of the Address, it seems to me, is to understand Madison to be speaking of virtues not “only” as “incidental” or as “instruments,” but as ends. In this passage, the virtues are to be cultivated as much for their own sake as is republican government, which could not be justified if it did not
produce certain results, or bear certain "fruits." These virtues lend not only "luster" but "dignity" to the cause of liberty. The friends of liberty and the rights of human nature will be "silenced" if their experiments, rather than bearing these fruits, bear their opposites. If liberty and the rights of mankind do not produce these results, or achieve these ends, they will not only be less pleasing to the eye: there will be nothing to say on their behalf. Where freedom produces baseness and all manner of vice, despotism may be justified. Madison could hardly be more explicit: these virtues "fulfill the ends of government." Now it is true that they are not to be cultivated "simply" for their own sake. They are among those goods (like health) that are ends in themselves and conditions for other goods. Similarly we choose liberty because it is a good in itself and because it is a necessary condition for virtue. These virtues, as Madison might say, both nourish freedom and are nourished by it.

Certainly the passage from Federalist 55 speaks of virtue as a means to the ends of self-government. But it is hard to reconcile Rosen’s suggestion that for Madison “virtue corresponds to no natural inclination” with this passage, in which Madison refers to “faithful likenesses of the human character” as those which portray the human character as capable of enough virtue for self-government. If the virtues necessary for self-government are essential parts of the "human character," are they not intrinsic to human nature? Is not this Madisonian thought less at home with Hobbes than with Aristotle, who holds that nature, while not providing us with virtue, equips us to acquire it through habit (Ethics 1103a14–25)?

In the letter to Monroe, Madison recognizes “ultimate happiness” as the true measure of “interest,” but Rosen is inclined not to hear the loud echo here of the teleological language of Aristotle. Rosen chooses to reduce "ultimate happiness" to an impartial respect for others’ rights (p. 69). Whatever he may say about Madison’s republicanism and about the intrinsic dignity of politics in Madison’s thinking, Rosen presents Madison’s and the other founders’ statesmanship as “ultimately aimed at self-preservation” (p. 113; emphasis added; also see pp. 24, 29, 117). It may be possible that in this passage Madison meant no more by “ultimate happiness” than a disposition suited to preservation of bodily existence, but is that the most plausible reading? Such a reading seems more to descend from Rosen’s thesis about Madison’s liberalism than to arise from a natural reading of Madison’s words in context. The phrase “ultimate happiness,” as used here, more plausibly suggests as the true measure of a man’s interest the finis ultimus of full moral and intellectual development.

It may be that Madison’s few brief paeans to virtue are difficult to reconcile with his many famous and extended paeans to freedom and rights and his famous concessions to or reliance on self-interest. But if they cannot be reconciled without such strained readings as Rosen offers for these passages, they are perhaps better left in undisturbed tension.

On the other hand, maybe Madison is even more Aristotelian than Rosen
wants to give him credit for. In developing his idea of the political right of nature, Rosen argues that “[t]he ‘motive of self-preservation, while strong enough to lead human beings to associate, is not so unrelenting as to keep them from considering various means for escaping their predicament.’ ‘Civil society arises from necessity but attempts to transcend it’” (p. 34; emphasis added). But Rosen is reluctant to consider that this very relenting quality of the motive of self-preservation may enable human beings to consider other natural ends that must be neglected so long as the struggle for survival consumes all one’s energies and attention. How different must it be to say that “civil society arises from necessity but attempts to transcend it,” and to say that, “while coming into being for the sake of living, [the city] exists for the sake of living well” (n. 61, p. 192)?

However capable Madison and his fellow founders were of “integrating . . . seemingly incompatible domains” of thought, their heirs and successors have not always found it easy to preserve or reconstruct the reasoning by which they accomplished this. In making the case for the consistency of Madison’s statesmanship, Rosen recovers or discovers grounds in Madison’s thinking for integrating domains widely held to be in various ways incompatible: social compact theory and the idea of founding, ancient and modern political thought, the current academic categories of “liberalism” and “republicanism,” and even the thought of Madison’s great contemporaries Hamilton and Jefferson. Most to his point, Rosen discovers grounds on which Madison can integrate what have seemed to so many for so long to be the incompatible domains of his own thought and practice. Whatever questions may still remain about the ultimate ground of Madison’s theoretical and practical consistency, Rosen has ably come to the defense of Madison’s own self-assessment, made late in his long life:

There were few, if any, of my contemporaries, through the long period and varied scenes of my political life, to whom a mutability of opinion was less applicable, on the great constitutional questions which have agitated the public mind. (1831; p. 143)

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What do you think about death? *Do* you think about death? What *should* you think about death?

I am as timid a soul as the next, but in my better moments I know that questions such as these should be a regular part of a thoughtful human life and of a liberal education worth its salt (and its $15–25 thousand per annum price tag). Consider a great books course focused on them. The Bible, Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament, would tell us about death’s entrance into human life and its defeat by Christ’s death and resurrection. Socrates in the *Apologety* would apply, in a superhuman way, the rationalist’s criterion to death: if we do not know what death is, and thus whether it is a good or an evil, our fear of death is strictly speaking irrational and should not be indulged. Or, in a more commonsensical vein, Aristotle describes the debilitating effects of cowardice in the human soul and on human agency; courage, headed by a rational recognition of threatening evils within a wider vision of human nature’s and life’s goods, helps to achieve the proper conjunction in one’s soul of the attachment to life—sweet life—and the aspiration to a good life.

Machiavelli much later taught spirited resistance to death’s necessity by extolling the ambition to acquire and to expand one’s state, both political and “cranial,” i.e., in, and over, men’s minds. Hobbes took another tack, to put it mildly: let us all save our skins as long as possible, by rational art and the construction of a new peace-gaered condition. Pascal, about the same time as Hobbes, saw most human activities (not to mention modern, i.e., Cartesian and Montaignian, philosophy) as pathetic, self-forgetting efforts at divertissement. And Heidegger used an analysis of Being towards Death (or one’s own Nothingness) to call individuals from their fallen existence as mass men.

As the foregoing survey reminds us, the topic is so daunting and takes on it so varied that guidance in these dark matters is precious. Peter Augustine Lawler is one such guide. As is the case with every self-conscious thinker today, he knows that for us almost all issues, death included, come to light within the framework provided by something called modernity. He also knows that modernity itself is a contested topic, especially (but not solely) by so-called postmoderns. Accordingly, he lets the issue of human mortality, as emblematic of our nature and limits, surface in the interstices of these two combatants.

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The relatively conventional character that this might lend to Lawler’s reflections is very quickly belied, however. According to Lawler, neither modern thought nor fashionable postmodernism gets death or self-conscious mortality or human being right. He advocates something he wittily calls “postmodernism rightly understood.” Its proponents are respectable, but not fashionable thinkers and writers such as Solzhenitsyn and Havel, and closer to home Walker Percy, the writer of wonderfully zany novels (and, Lawler instructs us, of penetrating philosophical essays), and the late “populist” historian and social critic, Christopher Lasch. An odd grouping, to be sure! As Lawler indicates at the very beginning of his book, he looked for “signs” (p. 1) and thinkers outside of the modern—fashionably postmodern constellation of debate and dogmas in search of men who might have a clearer view of man, the thinking reed.

Lawler is a dialectical thinker and writer. He begins with what is first for us as citizens and thoughtful observers of the world scene, “the revolution of 1989” (p. 15). Pierre Manent has called the collapse of most Communist regimes and the discrediting of Marxism-Leninism “the arche of our contemporary scene.” Two interpretations lead the way in explicating the significance of this event. The dissidents Solzhenitsyn and Havel maintain that Communist ideocracy was the culmination of modern man’s hubristic endeavor to deify himself. Its assault on human nature and the latter’s vindication against the totalitarian enemy of man should chasten slightly less arrogant Western modern men. The task before contemporary, i.e., posttotalitarian, mankind is gigantic, spiritual “repentance” and “renewal” according to Solzhenitsyn, an “existential revolution” in the distinctively human domain of “consciousness and conscience” in Havel’s view. We late modern men and women must “ascend” from the premises and spiritual horizon of modernity if we truly are to reap the bitter harvest of the Communist episode.

Francis Fukuyama provided another reading. His was the most recent claim that modernity is true, that it reveals the truth about man and that it is unimpeachably successful. Marxist-Leninist hypermodernity, rather than discrediting liberal democratic capitalism, vindicates it. Man’s adventure in history has reached its unsurpassable culmination . . . with us. Lawler points out that despite this hugely flattering claim Fukuyama “convinced virtually nobody” (p. 16). Alexander Kojève explains why and instructs Fukuyama in the true meaning of History’s end in Lawler’s first chapter, “Francis Fukuyama versus the End of History.”

The disagreement between the two Hegelians is not of merely sectarian, or academic, interest in Lawler’s view. Before he artfully constructs a debate between the two over the proper meaning of the end of History, he links the debate and the issue of History’s end to two bigger topics: the general character of modern philosophy, of “modern or systematic rationalism,” and the fundamental premises of our “free, individualistic, secular society” (pp. 15–16). In an apparently extreme, but really quite precise formulation, Lawler affirms that “modern
rationalism” aims to make man God, to replace the Christian Deity with a mankind possessing the traits of omniscience and omnipotence, of unfathomable freedom and world-creating power formerly ascribed to the transcendent Being (p. 17). In so promising and projecting, modern thought aimed to eradicate “the mysteries of Being” and of the human soul, along with the “misery” and “alienation” that heretofore had characterized human life (thus giving other-worldly hopes, and their religious custodians, distracting purchase on men). To make conceptual room for this awesome task mankind had to be seen fundamentally as freedom, free from God’s rule and Nature’s determination and directives, free to make himself and his home as he sees fit. This fundamental emancipatory premise was articulated by, or required, a characteristically modern “radical distinction” between mechanical Nature and a naturally inexplicable human freedom; modern thought as a whole is based on an “ontological dualism” (p. 6). History then becomes the domain of mankind’s self-realization, both socially and cognitively.

The issue between Fukuyama and Kojève is, What are the ultimate consequences of the working out, and thinking through, of this dichotomy? At the end of this development will mankind come into its own? Has it in fact already done so? The benign Fukuyaman version of the end entails widespread recognition of man’s essential freedom from God and Nature and justified pride at contemplating what he has now successfully wrought, a satisfying home, the true City of Man to replace the imaginary City of God. Do the story’s end and meaning, however, lie elsewhere? Kojève thought so.

In my simplified rendition, Lawler reconstructs Kojève’s alternative account around two distinctively human features, man’s rational freedom understood in the emphatic modern sense and his awareness of his contingency and mortality, of all that is implied in his thoroughly historical character. The end of history in its penultimate stage sees man in social orders that mirror his core as freedom and affirm that his humanity is wholly his doing. So far so good. Fukuyama goes this far. But there is a worm in the apple.

Concomitant with man’s realization of his freedom is his ever more acute awareness of the natural and divine groundlessness of his existence, of the disorder he introduces into the cosmos and himself, and most importantly and depressingly his recognition that he—both as individual and as a species—will be extinguished. Man is radically historical or temporal, therefore there is no eternity for him, in either personal or species immortality. The penultimate stage of History sees these two recognitions contend, with the latter the deeper and the increasingly dominant one. Pragmatic pride gives way to existential despair.

Kojève then takes the next step in his “wonderfully consistent Hegelianism” (p. 22). The true end of History must be, by choice or development or a combination of both, the return to mankind’s prehistorical condition as described by Rousseau, one devoid of all distinctively human qualities, especially the awareness of and futile resistance to eventual death, both one’s own and mankind’s.
Wisdom about mankind's nonhuman but contented original condition and then his historical, that is, "misery-producing," development characterizes the penultimate stage; its final stage is "the death of man" as being or existing distinct from Nature, primarily by decapitating him and reducing him to an "unself-conscious playful animal" (pp. 28—29). The end of man's historical existence must entail the eradication of man's humanity.

Lawler dissents from this conclusion and the rationalism that produces it. They are "pretentious and misanthropic" (p. 15). Man is and will be the self-conscious mortal, a mixture of grandeur and misery who knows enough about the world and himself to live and to die well, but part of whose knowledge includes awareness of the mysterious character of Being and the human soul and haunting awareness of "intractable" limits to human power exemplified in the necessity of death (p. 2).

Remarkably, modernity's old foe knew this about man, too. Lawler claims that Christianity, in Pascal's phrase, "knows man." It should receive a renewed, respectful hearing from all those who have discovered, or rediscovered, for themselves these ancient truths.

Richard Rorty, however, is not one of these chastened modern men. Since Lawler considers him "America's leading professor of philosophy" (p. 41), he must be given a hearing. Rorty, the contemporary atheist and pragmatist professor of philosophy, concurs with Kojeve's view that man is "contingent or historical all the way down" and turns his considerable self-conscious intellect to the project of making the classless, contented society a reality. According to him man is the evolutionary culture being, or, more precisely, the linguistic being. Language, an accidental acquisition, an evolutionary tool for survival with no capacity to grasp reality beyond human making, determines human experiences of "the human" (sic) (pp. 45, 47, 58). Rorty's project, Lawler amply shows, is essentially "sentimental, linguistic therapy" (pp. 49—50): change words, or change their meaning, and our self-image and the very experience of self will change. "Death" (and the metaphysical "musings" to which it gives rise) is the chief culprit and, therefore, the chief object of redefinition. The lodestar of the therapy, Rorty is candid enough to admit, is Hobbesian: Don't be cruel. We must free men from the fear of death and the various forms of cruelty it engenders. Since our awareness of our mortality continually pricks us and prompts us to such death-defying follies as religious belief and practice and great passionate love, self-conscious mortality as the root of cruelty must be "talked to death," ignored or drugged or redescribed out of sight and mind. We must become merely "clever animals" for the sake of our peace of mind.

Allan Bloom, unwittingly, provides Rorty evidence that his project is feasible, that last men are beginning to appear. Bloom describes his students as "nice," as thin-and-flat souls without concern for eternity, without longing for a love that defies death. Bloom calls them the first "thoroughly historicized generation" (pp. 64—65). He recoils from this scene, but this evidence points in the
direction of the truth of the modern view of man as that thoroughly flexible being. Happily Bloom also provides counter evidence, and Lawler is glad to find him in self-contradiction (pp. 71–72). The children who are the most representative of modernity’s detachment from other human beings and “the natural order,” sons and daughters of divorced parents who have been assured by their parents and reassured by their parents’ hired therapists that divorce is okay, even good for all concerned, resent tremendously this affront to love and vows. In their disappointment and rage they are the antipodes to apathetic, nice youth. Within the thoroughly historicized lurks some of old-fashioned nature.

In this way and others, there is evidence, and other interpretations of the evidence, that cuts in a different direction from Rorty and Kojève’s view of the impending overcoming of humanity’s wracked yet inspiring existence. Walker Percy and Christopher Lasch are invoked to speak for the other side. Percy makes a two-part case. In his novels he depicts and unveils that beneath a nice surface modern men and women are still human, i.e., anxious, even loony or deranged by their more and less conscious awareness that time is running out on them, because the human mortal is not lord and master of existence and time. Like a good Socratic, or practitioner of “the polyphonic novel” (Bakhtin’s fine phrase), Percy depicts inhuman, anti-human—“scientific,” therapeutic—responses to mortality and anxiety and their counterparts, humane ones. The latter, as befits a Socratic and Catholic author for whom man is essentially homo viator, even on the way, are never completely successful—what would it mean to be on top of death, of one’s mortality?—but they provide a representative and respectable range of responses to human mortality.

Percy also, and in his own judgment more fundamentally, makes a case for the naturalness of human speech and its capacity to communicate truth, especially truth about the soul, from individual to individual and from author to reader. Percy’s ambition was to develop a “semiotics” or “genuinely scientific” view of man as the naturally linguistic animal, one that acknowledges and brings together modern evolutionary data, Peircian semiotics, and premodern doctrines, chiefly Thomistic realism and Judeo-Christian beliefs (pp. 77–91). Eclectic, but not necessarily incoherent, this view is the theoretical core of Lawler’s book, and his reconstruction of it enables the reader to judge for himself its plausibility and cogency. Percy’s Catholic-Socratic openness to truth about mortal man from various quarters and his personal, even idiosyncratic, synthesis is a proximate model and inspiration for Lawler’s own search for truth about man, the self-conscious mortal, in these late modern times.

Percy is of particular interest and help to those of us, citizens and political scientists, who are concerned about the moral political health of American democracy. Percy focused upon the expert-layman distinction and division so characteristic of American social and political life today (pp. 91–96). He noted that “laymen tend to surrender their personal sovereignty, their own judgments about their personal experiences, to the scientists’ allegedly impersonal authority” (p.
92). Percy’s reason for this is modern or Cartesian science’s great successes in creating a humanly hospitable environment and its promise to deliver more. Laymen judge, erroneously, that it is reasonable to continue to be subject to scientific experts’ rule. Tocqueville chimes in that democratic individualism makes democratic men and women susceptible to the tyranny of public opinion and, notes Lawler, “democratic public opinion [has a] growing tendency to be expressed in the language of impersonal or deterministic science [because . . . ] in Tocqueville’s words, ‘metaphysics and theology . . . slowly lose ground’” (pp. 93–94). In the increasingly naked public square, science’s purportedly neutral, objective discourse has sole right of speech. Unfortunately, much of this science distorts evidence, denies what we know, and debilitates us as human beings and citizens. (Christopher Lasch devoted a good deal of his effort to showing that “therapeutic science” self-consciously replaces man as a morally responsible individual with the view that he is a psychosomatic organism capable at best of healthy adjustment to his environment. The therapeutic distinction, healthy-sick, replaces the moral one of good-bad [p. 157]. Genuine democratic citizenship and a vigorous personal existence become increasingly difficult in the face of such an authoritatively presented view.)

Lawler counters by affirming with Percy that “the true source of personal sovereignty and so of individual rights” is “the reality of the [personal] experience of authenticity or truthful, undiverted self-consciousness that language makes possible and [which] is the foundation of the dignity of the human individual” (p. 96). Percy’s “New Science” of man and Lawler’s exposition of it aim to validate such experience and to incorporate it into a genuine science. This science, in turn, can help revitalize American democracy and our commitment to the rule of law. The latter presuppose individual accountability and the possibility of deliberative processes that eventuate in laws furthering the public weal.

Another maverick or highly individualistic explorer-thinker was Christopher Lasch, so Lawler is drawn to him. Lasch was the biggest discovery for me in this book. His “class analysis” focuses on the comparison and contrast, and misanthropic unilateral relationship (top to bottom), between two classes, the cognitive elite and the populace (pp. 157–58). His insight is to explore and to evaluate the two in terms of their souls and especially in terms of their awareness of and responses to, you guessed it, their mortality. The latter are much closer to truth about mortality than the former.

The contemporary cognitive elite has pushed the capitalist division of labor between mental and physical labor to an extreme. Cut off by their work from their own bodies, they live in “virtual reality.” (Rejoining their bodies at the health club does not allow them to reconnect with the wisdom of the flesh; they rather see the spa as an essential element of the contemporary death-denying El Dorado.) Surveying from above and afar the other noncognitive workers in the postindustrial, information age, they cannot but see them primarily in terms of body (since mind is theirs). Modern-day compassionate pastors of this benighted
flock, they tend to reduce public morality to the compassionate care of the “suffering” and “disadvantaged.” This care aims above all to make the somatic existence of the others as easy, comfortable, pleasurable and long as is technologically possible. And, to be sure, they are to have the “self-esteem” that comes from any and all “identities” they may possess or create, save those that formerly and currently enjoy hegemonic sway. To achieve this goal of self-respecting minority identities, earned dignity and universal standards of excellence have to be dismissed (pp. 158–61). All this, of course, requires an assault on all the traditions, of religion, morality, sexual roles and practices, et cetera, that have as their common denominator the thoughts that the soul is higher than the body and that the soul’s chief work consists in helping individuals to lead their mortal existences in the light of this and other hierarchies.

Lasch, an intellectual who lived and died well, was unstinting in his unmasking of the illusions and disdainful “compassion,” of the deeply antidemocratic attitudes, characteristic of the therapeutic elites. His unravelling of the cocoon environment and psychic malfunctioning of many of my peers struck me with revelatory force. Lawler’s discussion of Lasch’s “last five books” made me go out and buy them. You will, too.

Lawler’s topics and reflections cause him to recur constantly to one great nemesis, “modern rationalism” in most of its forms, of which Cartesian technological science and contemporary psychoanalytic therapy are two. These deny fundamental, albeit mysterious, truths about man, truths that the unlettered know, or at least have more immediate access to than their sophisticated fellow citizens. The fateful division of the world into res cogitans and res extensa; the therapeutic reduction of man to the well-or-poorly adjusted animal; man as self-creator, as the “person” with “autonomy” and “choice” grand enough to encompass his self-identity and the life or death of nascent life: these and other articulations of man, Being, and the world guide and misguide us throughout our public and semi-public lives. Lawler’s hope is that they have not thoroughly permeated our intimate lives, that the truths about man the individual with conscience and responsibility, the thoughtful mortal who accepts his mortality and other limits with courage and grace, remain fairly intact among the populace and, perhaps, not inaccessible to the well-educated, well-positioned leaders of our society.

It is nearly impossible to deny the ascendancy of “science” in our time and in our public, semipublic, and even private lives. We turn on the electric lights, open our Scientific American or other journal, and read that the American Psychiatric Association has ruled that because homosexuality is not a “disorder,” therapies “to cure” it should not receive its—science’s—approbation. “Studies show ...” begin so many public and partisan pronouncements. And so on.

Lawler therefore has his grip on one of the deep constitutive features of our common and individual lives. His reflections on it, both expositions and criticisms, are regularly illuminating, often cogent.
Yet he perhaps yields too much to his opponent in one of its first and basic forms, modern natural science, Baconian-Cartesian in inspiration, materialistic and evolutionary in content. As far as I can tell, Lawler and Percy agree that modern science has nonhuman Nature about right, it just misses Man, the very special natural being. I do not think the first concession needs to be made. With it, talk of “soul” in connection with man becomes odder, more difficult to render intelligible, than need be. Let me sketch two steps that I would take to bolster Lawler’s generally strong argument.

Hans Jonas and Leon Kass have made the best case I know for “form,” “substantial form” or “soul,” as being a rational requirement in order to articulate and to account for what we see and observe about organic life throughout Nature. In the former’s The Phenomenon of Life (Harper & Row, 1966) and the latter’s work, especially his book The Hungry Soul (Free Press, 1994), the two show that the fundamental vital activity, metabolism, the transformation of outside other into oneself as energy and substance, cannot be understood without “powers” inherent in a recognizable “principle of being” traditionally and best called “form.” The basic activity that all life’s forms engage in, eating to stay alive, involves three “great powers,” discriminating “awareness” of the edible other within the world; “appetite” or “felt need” for replenishment; and “action,” the interaction with the other and the world to incorporate suitable others into oneself.

Chapter 1 of The Hungry Soul, “The Primacy of Form,” concludes that not only does form exist as a necessary factor in accounting for vital activity and being, but that as such it has a certain “independence” from and “supremacy” over the particular material components it organizes and activates at any particular time during its lifespan. From the beginning organic life is “transcendent,” both of its immediate materials and its here and now existence. Man, of course, extends and intensifies this organic “openness” to the world. But openness is characteristic of life and only a formal dimension can account for this trait.

The reader will want to consider for himself Kass’s and Jonas’s arguments. But for Lawler’s purposes, such a rehabilitation of the scientific and philosophical credibility of “form” makes human psychic life, while quite special and distinctive, not quite as anomalous a feature of the natural world as modern science might claim, or he seems to think. Soul talk of the traditional sort he favors thus gains contemporary rational credibility.

With “soul” recognized as an intellectually necessary category, some of the old psychologists may appear more interesting and relevant than they have for centuries. Lawler and Percy advocate a reconsideration of Thomas Aquinas. So do I. In my experience, most political scientist Straussian readers of Thomas only are familiar with his natural law doctrine and his famous Question One of the Summa theologiae on “sacred doctrine.” This is a pity, I think. I find his anthropology, his rational psychology and doctrine of man’s moral and rational development and perfection, rather more cogent and illuminating. Aquinas’s
arguments for the rational soul, its various kinds (five "genera" to be precise) of powers, their hierarchical order, the two sorts of passions—concupiscible and irascible (six of the former, five of the latter)—his arguments for freedom of the will, his analyses of particular virtues, psychic types or conditions, and the like, continue to be of a most impressive sort. Percy and Lawler accept or merely report Aquinas’s general view that man is a free and responsible being because he is rational. While this intuition is commonsensical and the foundation of genuine democracy, Aquinas gives several arguments for it and unravels many of its consequences and implications. A return to them is an intellectual treat of the first order. As an appetizer or entree to Aquinas’s feast of considerations, let me recommend David Gallagher’s reconstruction of Thomas’s arguments for “the will as the rational appetite” in the October, 1991, issue of The Journal of the History of Philosophy.

Percy and Lawler’s “twentieth-century Thomism,” their advocacy of “a sort of Thomistic realism,” should also encourage a revisiting of the original Thomistic mind and its thinking about that special in-between being, man, who is “intellectual and free in will and possessing power over himself" (intellectuale et arbitrio liberum et per se potestativum) (Prologue to Summa Theologiae I–II). As such he is “the image of God,” not God Almighty.

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In this lively account of students, teachers, and administrators in the contemporary multicultural world of higher education, Peter Sacks points unerringly to the low aspirations of students and even lower expectations of teachers and administrators. Teachers bewildered by the vacant stares of vapid, uninterested students will gain from Sacks’s account some notion of why so many students deem it not necessary to do more than show up for class, and that only occasionally, while still expecting—and, unfortunately, receiving—increasingly better grades. Worse, such teachers will find anecdotal confirmation of their suspicions that administrators are well aware of how students’ abilities have actually declined yet resist allowing teachers’ grades to reflect that reality. For Sacks, the all-pervasive student evaluations of courses and the pusillanimous accession of teachers as well as administrators to the judgments set forth therein are the ultimate causes of student apathy, not to mention the tendency among students, teachers, and administrators to prize entertainment over substance, which is so evident now as multimedia teaching theaters replace class- and seminar rooms in colleges and universities.

Peter Sacks is a pseudonym adopted by the author, an accomplished journalist, prompted for personal reasons to abandon the newsroom for the community college classroom. Once he found that the only way he could keep his new position was to lower his standards semester after semester—that is, to move a step farther from the newsroom by making his classroom a sort of playroom—he decided to report on his experience. The narrative is consciously journalistic, even to a fault, insofar as Sacks resorts excessively to anecdotes to tell his tale. It is a tale of grade inflation and coddling of inept students, of faculty review committees content to please deans, who themselves think only of enrollment figures, the items by which government funding agencies decide how highly to rank the institution, and of teachers who bow to such practices even while detesting and railing against them.

But the book is more than a cautionary tale and of interest to teachers everywhere, not just to those in community colleges. The first part of its two parts provides an account of what the new postmodern classroom is like, and the second attempts an analysis of what has occasioned the new practices and lowered expectations. The book’s strength derives from the author’s ability to por-
tray accurately and vividly what occurs in the classroom even as he admits to having become precisely the kind of entertainer cum teacher whose appearance he deplores, this as a means of succeeding in an enterprise he views as fatally flawed. Still, his claim that anonymity permits him greater candor notwithstanding, one wonders whether such a mask is not unduly conducive to overstatement.

The first part of the book rings all too true. The second part, the attempt to ferret out the reasons for the changes in popular assumptions that have facilitated or called forth the changes depicted in Part One, is less compelling. To some extent, this is due to the author's conscious presentation of himself as a journalist willing to depict things as they are on the surface and to rely primarily upon evidence from magazine articles, newspaper stories, and television shows in order to explain how and why postmodernism, which for him is ultimately the culprit in this saga, has come about. His reliance on such sources certainly allows him to capture accurately what postmodernism is in popular thought and how it appears. He clearly identifies, for example, the assumptions of the postmodern consumer and points unerringly to the way in which students have internalized such assumptions in their approach to education.

To explain why things are, however, it is not sufficient to identify the way they are. Nor does knowing the way things are now, without being aware of why they are that way, allow one to meet the challenges that advocates of postmodernism set before advocates of traditional practices. The "why" so eludes the author that he ultimately falls victim to many of the assumptions he would like to oppose. Although he seeks to attenuate his suggestion that "education as we've known it might no longer be relevant for a postmodern age" (p. 174) by reiterating that he is merely a journalist and not "an educational policy expert nor a postmodern scholar," the suggestion must be judged on its merits. On those grounds, it is evident that traditional education is to be judged no longer relevant only if things are somehow fundamentally different or if everything is now miraculously new. But that is in no way the case.

The author falls prey to this postmodernist claim of novelty because he is, admittedly, not well schooled in the history of ideas. Thus, taking a cue from Jean-François Lyotard, he urges that the postmodern classroom "be simply a space for teams of students to work with raw materials of learning" (p. 175). He does so insofar as he is persuaded by Lyotard's claim that "the question (overt or implied) now asked by the professional student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no longer 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?'." Although the author, qua journalist, may be unaware of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his famous formulation in the Emile or on Education, first published in 1761, that all education should address the question "à quoi bon cela?" (what good is that?), Lyotard has no valid excuse for such ignorance. Consequently, his phrase, borrowed wittingly or not from Rousseau, cannot be a root of post-
modernism, unless the latter is now to be understood as developed by Rousseau, Dewey, and Piaget.

We do live in an age where learning is facilitated by technology, especially by access to information via the internet and other forms of electronic dissemination of information. But it does not follow from the fact that everyone now has access to such information that students can “take control of their own learning, without the intermediary of the institution or the professor” (p. 177). Or it does not follow therefrom, unless there is nothing one ought to learn and no proper way for anything to be learned, that is, unless knowledge has become less important than imagination (see pp. 179–80).

Another instance of the author having ultimately become enmeshed in the snares of the very doctrine he wishes to combat is his failure to see that the fundamental issue centers on there being (a) knowledge human beings seek to communicate to one another as opposed to information to be shared and (b) a need to learn how to acquire such knowledge as well as to gain confidence in its soundness versus imagining new ways of manipulating information. To teach is not the same as to serve as a guide in information-gathering, and teachers are certainly not equivalent to “information-gathering tools.” Nor is information-gathering in any way the same thing as learning how to learn. The former is merely what the name implies, getting facts and ideas together in some kind of bundle. Once gathered, it is still necessary for the gatherer or the gatherer’s helpers to know how to make sense of what has been gathered. Acquisition of this limited—it is tempting to say paltry—kind of knowledge is the least of the tasks of education.

Nonetheless, as noted, the strength of the book lies in its vivid description of the classrooms teachers encounter. The author has identified the attitudes that frustrate teachers and those students, becoming ever less numerous, who still desire to learn and not merely to acquire the certification offered by the system. Equally sound are his three suggestions of ways institutions can battle the trend toward grade inflation and thus the underlying notions of consumerism and entitlement that students have acquired (pp. 181–82 and also pp. 182–86). The suggestions are uncomplicated and, given the very tools so vaunted in modern institutions of learning, disarmingly easy to adapt. First, a published record or transcript of a student’s grades should be accompanied by an indication of the average grade in the class and of its size. Second, there should be restrictions on the final date for students being allowed to withdraw from classes without the withdrawal being noted on the student’s transcript. Finally, there should be some institutionwide policy or stipulation concerning grade distribution for courses, that is, about the percentage of any class that may receive an A, not to mention a D or an F, and about what the class average should be. The author, referring to what is common practice in law schools, suggests that it be a C or B minus. They prevail as well, he might have added, in professional schools.
Peter Sacks, whoever he may be, has written a thoughtful, provocative book that intelligently addresses many of the questions now faced by college and university teachers. His description of apathy and sheer ignorance in the classroom and his account of what goes on behind the scenes in the administrative echelons are masterful. It is a pity that his attempt to think through the postmodern framework and to reform the classroom so as to meet its challenges succumbs to the tendencies he first wished to combat. Still, his final practical suggestions on how to reduce grade inflation somewhat redeem those theoretical errors. Given the whole argument of the book, however, it is simply inexcusable that the author and publisher have allowed so many typographical and grammatical errors as well as infelicitous formulations to be printed.
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