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Toward the conclusion of a lecture on Martin Heidegger, Leo Strauss makes the somewhat surprising suggestion that Western philosophy might have something to learn from the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps the West has come to a blind alley, Strauss suggests, and if so, perhaps it needs to turn to the East for rejuvenation, for an attempt to transcend the division between Europe and Asia. Such an attempt at uniting mankind, Strauss suggests, would most easily begin with that part of the East which is closest to the West, which is, in an important sense, already an intimate part of the West: the Hebrew Bible. Philosophy, for its own purposes, must turn to the Hebrew texts.

More would need to be said to explain and assess this suggestion. But even without such clarification, it already hints at a “methodological” warning. To learn things for Western philosophy from the Bible (or for that matter, vice versa), one must recognize that each is the fount of a tradition. As much as these traditions have interacted, both, precisely by their character as traditions, tend to lose contact with the vitality of their respective founts. For Strauss’s suggested “meeting” to take place, then, we would need to recover the fresh insights that animated these traditions at their origins. We would also need to identify something like a neutral location

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for this meeting, a foundation on which both Hebrew and Greek thinking—and by implication, the various traditions which grow out of them—can be adequately addressed and assessed. At a minimum, this means that background presuppositions, concepts, and terms which only make sense in one context ought not to be imposed without justification on another. Thus it is not only unfair to object that Greek philosophical texts are, e.g., animated by an inadequate grasp of the relation of halakhah and aggadah—unfair, since, in the Greek context, nomos and muthos (the closest translations) obviously do not function in the way assumed in this classic Hebrew pair—but worse than unfair, it is unproductive and interferes with allowing the Greek voices to speak without, as it were, imposing on them a Semitic accent. Conversely, it is often counterproductive to presume that we understand the sense, aim, and contents of philosophy, and thereupon, to examine how these do or do not relate to the classic Hebrew texts.

Based on this, the joint foundation suggested here, and the guiding theme for the rest of this essay, is wisdom and its pursuit. Speaking concretely, we will focus especially on the manner in which these are characterized in Proverbs and in the speech attributed to Diotima in Plato’s Symposium. 2

The meaning of philosophy, in its literal sense, is perfectly clear: love of wisdom. The philosopher is thus not the sophos simply, the wise one, but rather the one who aims at wisdom, who seeks wisdom. 3 In this original sense, then, philosophia is a characterization of an acting, living person; it is a goal or orientation. If we assume that there is always awareness to match this goal orientation, then we can expand philosophia to include the passions or affections that go with wanting or craving wisdom. Mostly this is appropriate, but we should remember that bacteria, for example, can be “acidophilic” without any awareness of, or craving or passion for, low pH; it is simply a condition in which they prosper.

Looking beyond such literal etymology, we get a glimpse (although probably no more than that) of the richer meanings of philosophia when it was originally associated with the name of Pythagoras:

Sosicrates in his Successions of Philosophers says that, when Leon the tyrant of Phlius asked [Pythagoras] who he was, he said, “A

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3 For the assertion attributed to Pythagoras that only the god is sophos, see Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent Philosophers 1.12.
Philosophia and the Love of Wisdom

philosopher.” He compared life to the Great Games, where some went to compete, others for business, but the best as spectators; for similarly, in life the hunting of those who have grown up with slavish natures is for fame and gain, while that of the philosopher is for truth.4

The lover of wisdom is contrasted with the lover of fame and the lover of money; the point is that the love of wisdom is a goal potentially of such magnitude and significance that it can structure one’s entire life, and that the philosopher properly so called is the one for whom this aim is not an occasional or passing fancy, but the defining, overarching orientation.5

Philosophy is thus, at minimum, a specific goal orientation. We can probably expand that to include both the typical activities that aim at this goal and the feelings that go with them. Ultimately, philosophy is an entire way of life, an all-encompassing aim which in some sense explains one’s life.

There is thus in-principle agreement as to what philosophy, in its original sense, actually is. Obviously there is much room for disagreement among philosophers so understood. They can disagree as to what constitutes wisdom, and they can dispute how one should go about living so as best to find that for which one seeks. But such disputes are inherently intramural in character; they are based on a prior agreement as to what philosophy itself really is.

There is little doubt that the modern terms—English “philosophy” and its cognates—need not and in general do not conform to this classical usage. One is today free to “have a” philosophy, or to “study” philosophy, or to “do” philosophy. One can even claim that one is a philosopher while actually being primarily concerned with one’s fame or professional reputation. But all of these modern locutions can be easily rephrased in classical terms. Instead of “having” a philosophy, one might just conclude that some particular set of speeches expresses wisdom. Instead of “studying” philosophy one could merely spend one’s time studying some book or issue because one sought to gain wisdom thereby. Instead of “doing” philosophy one could just, well, pursue wisdom.

4 Diogenes Laertius, Lives 8.8. All translations are my own. A longer version of this story is offered by Cicero in Tusculan Disputations 3.8–9. Both of these accounts are, of course, very late in comparison with the events they claim to report.

5 Many have seen in this passage an ur-form of the tripartition of the soul that appears in several of Plato’s dialogues.
It emerges from this that wisdom enjoys a certain priority with respect to philosophy. If the notion of wisdom were vacuous, this would make the activity aiming at it, and a fortiori the way of life revolving around its pursuit, “vain and empty.” An account of philosophy which avoids a consideration of wisdom is likely to be equally vacuous.

Perhaps less obvious, but of great consequence, is the role of love. Of course, Plato (and others both before and after) suggests that love is the principle of all things. But a lover of wisdom, if bent on self-reflection and on “knowing oneself,” would likely recognize that in any account of philosophy, love also shares some kind of priority. The philosopher, as noted, is not simply the wise man, but rather the one for whom wisdom is a goal, a beloved. The question then arises whether wisdom is not exactly “have-able,” but is inevitably always sought, always loved.

3

The Hebrew conception of the love of wisdom and its seeking can perhaps best be approached through a consideration of the figure of Solomon. Solomon is, no doubt, Hebrew culture’s paradigm figure of the lover of wisdom—hence, strictly, the philosopher—but he is a problematic one, in a variety of different respects. Offered by God the choice of whatever he would, he asks for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (1 Kings 3:9; 2 Chron. 1:10). Indeed, wisdom is in the end Solomon’s definition and epitaph (1 Kings 11:41).

Solomon’s wisdom is literally legendary—both within the people of Israel, and eventually among all the nations (1 Kings 3:28, 5:14, 10:7, 24; 2 Chron. 9:5–7, 23). But this is part of the problem. This legendary atmosphere is so thick that it blocks almost any other access to the figure of Solomon, to what makes him and his love of wisdom “tick.”

A useful contrast is the figure of David, to whom so much legend is attached by later traditions. The “real” David—the king whose “flesh and blood” are presented by the texts—is in no danger of being blocked out by all the subsequent overinnocent hagiography. The biblical narrators give us too clear a view of a pious, calculating, passionate musician, schemer, and conqueror for any amount of legend to obscure him. He can bear any amount of legendary accretions without being lost.

Solomon, on the other hand, is nearly impossible to extract from the realm of the mythic. First, he is the builder of the Temple, the central
expression of Jewish cult and the aim of perennial spiritual longing. This very role is legendary enough, but even in this function (as in so many others) he is something of an addendum to David’s religious feelings and experiences. David wants to build a Temple, and then Solomon comes along as the executive fulfiller of this plan.

In other ways, too, Solomon is wrapped in the mythic by fulfilling what is, in a sense, somebody else’s dream. He is the focus of some of the most supercharged expressions in the Hebrew Bible:

Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea in number, eating, drinking and happy. (1 Kings 4:20)

Judah and Israel dwelt securely, each man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. (5:5)

The blessings first promised to Abraham, and then to the whole people, seem here at last fulfilled. In short, Solomon is not and cannot be his own man, for he belongs to the Bible’s entire historical narrative. If we add in the ships returning every three years from sailing over the Red Sea to Ophir (wherever that is) and the visit of the queen of Sheba (wherever that is), the mythic tone as a whole becomes unavoidable.

We can note a structural reason for which this legendary atmosphere is in some sense necessary. At the risk of much simplification, we can suggest that the overall plot structure of the Hebrew Bible has the shape of a single peak flanked by two valleys: Solomon’s united kingdom is the high point, while the two low points are slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon. Obviously there are many smaller ups and downs along the way, but the redemption from Egypt is truly momentous precisely because it initiates a rising momentum that only comes to its fruition and fulfillment with the reign of Solomon. Similarly, the Babylonian destruction and exile are the conclusion of a long trajectory of overall decay (despite many temporary reversals, such as during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah). The return under Ezra and Nehemiah is sotto voce, precisely because it does not lead to, or even promise, a Solomonic peak.

But if this is right, then Solomon must contain within him both the fruition of all previous hopes and the seeds of all future ruin. Indeed, he is not only the builder of the Temple and the fulfiller of the covenantal promises; he is also the paradigm of kingly corruption. Solomon violates systematically each of the limitations on the king prescribed in Deuteronomy—which prohibitions give the impression of having been formulated
with him in mind (or vice versa; cf. Deut. 17:16–17 and 1 Kings 10:26–11:3). Idolatry and the division of the kingdoms soon follow, and all subsequent kings are left to play a game which is, in tone and often in substance, “on defense.”

As the summation of all previous success and the origin of all subsequent failure, Solomon and his wisdom cannot but be shrouded in some degree of mystery. Put another way, at this balance point, at which, for a moment, all that there is to be achieved in the concrete realm already has been achieved—power, wealth, magnificence—the one open avenue remaining is in some other direction. We can call that wisdom, but its direct relation to the issues which drive the main biblical narrative must remain something of a mystery.⁶

Without pretending to dispel the mystery, we can perhaps merely look more closely at it. Biblical sources for understanding Solomon’s wisdom are of two kinds. We have a few wispy hints in Kings and Chronicles, and we have the texts that have come down with some kind of association with Solomon: Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs. The main topic of the rest of this essay is Proverbs, and in particular the presentation of the love of wisdom in its first nine chapters. First, however, let us briefly remark on these other sources.

In 1 Kings, we are offered a few (narrow) windows into the character of Solomonic wisdom. First, we have simply the words used for describing it. Wisdom is presented as judgment of right and wrong, good and bad (3:9); as proverb (mashal, 5:12), as song (shir), and as riddles (ḥidot, 10:1). What we can note here is that all of these have a public character. The songs and parables seem to be recognized literary genres for dispensing thoughts and insight (the distinction seems likely that between suggestive narratives and rhythmic aphorisms). The social function of wise judgment is clear, while the riddles, though we have no examples of them, must be some kind of public performance whereby the queen of Sheba can “test” Solomon’s wisdom. Superficially, then, the wisdom we see here plays some kind of role in public discourse. It is not a form of silent contemplation or intuition; at a minimum, it possesses some measure of insertion into human society.

The second window that Kings offers into Solomon’s wisdom is the famous judgment of the two women and the one baby (3:16–28). We will recall that each woman claims the baby as her own and that when Solomon calls for a sword to divide the child between them, one woman demurs, and so he names her the true mother. The wisdom on display here is the kind that sees the hidden, in particular, that reveals that which is hidden in the human heart. After reading the story, we too can appreciate the human truth in the situation; the wisdom attributed to Solomon is his ability to uncover this hidden truth. This is not what one might call a theoretical wisdom, but rather the practical wisdom that is the core of righteous judgment. Solomon is the ideal king because his human wisdom underpins the justice of his judgments.

A third glimpse offered in Kings gives a different picture of Solomon’s wisdom. Instead of human wisdom, sitting in judgment on affairs of the heart, Solomon’s wisdom is said to be that of the plants and the animals: “From the cedar which is in Lebanon to the hyssop which sprouts from the wall,” as well as the animals, birds, fish, and insects (5:13). The wisdom pictured in the biblical text (as opposed to later interpretive traditions) shows no concern with the practical matters of society and justice; we might call it wisdom of the Creation, though of course we know nothing of the content or purpose of this wisdom. Still the rhetoric here points to no ordering in the Creation, no sense of justice or hierarchy; Solomon’s wisdom knows all comprehensively and indiscriminately.

So we can summarize the mystery of Solomon’s wisdom as portrayed in Kings: it is both human wisdom and non- or transhuman wisdom. It is concerned with society and justice and also concerned with other matters. In Greek terms, it can be called both social (politikê) and—with great hesitation—natural (phusikê).

Lastly, connecting with our initial theme, we can also note a rhetorical claim in Kings: Solomon’s wisdom is greater than that of the East and of the Egyptians (5:10). Since such Greeks as Herodotus and Plato suggest without apparent irony that Greek wisdom is due, in its origins, to Egypt, it is not too much of a stretch to read this as the claim that Solomon exceeded in

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7 Though the Hebrew ‘al is here ambiguous, for present purposes it is irrelevant whether Solomon should be taken to speak “of” these creatures or “with” them.

8 Or is it that, perhaps, Solomon knows each thing justly, that is, equally? The text only points to creatures of days three, five, and six in the Genesis account. Eloquent in their absence are the nonliving things of land, sea, and sky, as well as the celestial beings; the text does not indicate that Solomon’s wisdom encompasses them.
wisdom both the East and the West. Israel, on this account, is a part neither of Europe (and Africa) nor of Asia. It has a wisdom of its own, which is then spread to all the peoples (5:14).

As thin as this picture inevitably is, there is still something to be found by comparing it with what we found in the Greek sources. We will note that Solomon is not merely a lover of money—though he surely amasses much—nor even a lover of fame—though again, he gains much. He is a lover of wisdom, but he is not merely that, either. He is, first and foremost, king.9 In the first instance, his wisdom (like his wealth and fame) is incorporated, and hence subordinated, to his royal office. At a later stage, however, his concern with plants and animals seems to transcend his political function, without, it appears, negating it. The philosopher-king, which for Plato seemed an obvious absurdity open to ridicule and contempt, seems in Solomon to be an actualized, if still enigmatic, reality.10

This picture, though useful for articulating a general sense of Hebrew philosophia, is short on details. As we move beyond Kings, Ecclesiastes is, for our purposes, the easiest. It is clear that the love of wisdom and the search for it are a major, indeed essential theme of this text. But beyond noting this fact, Ecclesiastes simply cannot be treated briefly. We will perforce pass it by for another occasion.

The Song of Songs, for present purposes, has one important contribution to make to an understanding of the love of wisdom. Its theme is the love of woman and man, and so the various textual parallels we find between Proverbs and the Song of Songs remind us of the passionate aspect, the loving aspect, of philosophy, of the love of wisdom. One example of this is a construction used for love that does not find its mark: “Then they will call me and I will not answer, they will seek me [yeshaharuneni] and not find me” (Proverbs 1:28); compare to “I sought him [bikashtiv] but could not find him, I called him but he did not answer” (Song 5:6). Needless to say, both texts also address the complexities and difficulties associated with love. But the dramatic situations of the two texts are quite different, and so the parallel does not extend to the details. More of this matter later.

9 Comparable structures of “one above three” can be found at Jeremiah 9:22–23 and Mishnah Abot 4:17.

10 We may note here the later interpretation that his kingship at some point lapsed and the dispute as to whether it was restored. Cf. Babylonian Talmud Gittin 68b.
Let us now turn to the text of Proverbs, the first block of which is introduced with the heading: “Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel.”

4

Prophets such as Hosea, Isaiah, and Ezekiel describe the relationship of Israel and God as a passionate and marital affair between a man and woman. All the love and tenderness we associate with such romance, as well as the jealousy, bitterness, anger, and tears—all of it comes out in the course of the by no means simple love affair between the masculine figure of God and the feminine figure of Israel. The metaphor of the divine romance is such a biblical fixture that it is easy to understand the traditional tendency to interpret the Song of Songs through just this allegory.

The first nine chapters of Proverbs present a novel sex-reversal of this biblical metaphor. The addressee is not the collective of Israel, personified as feminine, but an individual, personified as a young man. The speaker is sometimes a wise elder, like Solomon himself, sometimes a parent, sometimes even the voice of Wisdom. But Wisdom, Hokhmah, is presented as feminine. In the Prophetic texts the main issue is the fidelity of the human, the wayward woman, to her (divine) husband rather than her idolatrous “lovers.” So, too, in Proverbs, the central issue is the devotion of the wayward human (male) to the right woman, to Wisdom, rather than to the “foreign” woman. The young man is exhorted to pursue Wisdom, for with her, things all turn out well; and to avoid entanglements with the alien woman, for she will lead him to his doom. Choose the right woman, and all will be well; choose the wrong one, and you will die, sooner rather than later.

This picture, though formally parallel to the Prophetic picture of the romance with the divine, is in substance quite different. There, the human figure is bound to the divine by previous arrangement, the covenant being compared to the bonds of marriage. Infidelity reflects inconstancy in one’s own actions and hence character—“Then, you said you’d be mine forever, but now…”—and primarily brings about results due to the other party’s actions and character: divine anger, forbearance, wrath, punishment, and promised reconciliation. By contrast, the situation in Proverbs is precisely prior to any fundamental undertaking on the part of the human figure. The young man owes Wisdom nothing; it is she, instead, who makes promises.

The parallel of 2:12–15 (masculine) with 2:16–19 (feminine) shows that the emphasis on the femininity of Wisdom is a choice rather than a linguistic necessity.
In a sense, the “power” advantage enjoyed by the masculine figure has been shifted from the divine to the human. The young human is never warned to fear Wisdom’s anger or punishment. Wisdom’s power is “soft” in that she can only exhort, and in the last instance, the only punishment she can mete out is that of her absence. Presumably, the threat of living with the wrong woman is more than enough.

So Wisdom is presented as the right woman to pursue. On a superficial level, let us note that this message skirts near to tautology. Choose in accordance with wisdom, that is, choose properly, and things will work out well; choose badly and the consequences are bad. True, but not very meaningful. Even this does, however, tell us something about the theme at issue here: choice, primarily individual choice, looked at from the perspective of consequences.

To make this point a little bit less vacuous, we may note the one extended example our text offers of foolish choice which is not embedded in the metaphor of love (1:10–19):

My son: If sins tempt you, do not give in.
If they say to you: “Let us set a bloody ambush, lie in wait for some innocent;
Like Sheol we will swallow them alive, and the naïve like the grave.
All rich property we will find, with booty our houses we will fill.
Cast your lot among us, we will all have one purse.”
My son, go not with them, turn back your feet from their roads.
For their feet run toward evil, and they race to spill blood;
For they cast their net for nothing, in the face of all the winged;
And they set ambush for their own blood, and lie in wait for their own death.
Thus are the ways of all plunderers of plunder; they take their master’s life.

Thievery and brigandage are tempting; one just plans a little with one’s mates, finds some unsuspecting victim, and then “gets paid.” It’s so easy to get rich quick. But, of course, it doesn’t really work out that way; in the end, one is merely planning one’s own demise. And this is why sin (ḥet) is also an error, a mistake, a bad choice, an example of foolishness. Yet at first, such foolishness is tempting, seductive. On this basic level, it makes some sense to use sexual symbols to represent the problem of wise choice.

There is more to it. Perhaps the most consequential choice that any individual will ever really make is the choice of a spouse. Whether it is looked at from the perspective of an evolutionary psychologist, of the most
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starry-eyed romantic, or of the most cold-blooded social analyst, it is a truth universally acknowledged that, in the long run, little else matters than the choice of a partner. So then, is wisdom like choosing the right woman? Or is wisdom simply choosing the right woman? Though we may grant the literal reading, it is the metaphorical use which is of greatest interest here.\footnote{Perhaps the clearest indication that the text is primarily concerned with the metaphorical sense, and not just the literal, is the expansive warning against falling in with the wrong woman (7:26): “For she has cast down many victims and all those she has killed are mighty.”}

Let us draw out more of the details and implications of our picture. Perhaps the most important characterization of wisdom and its love in Proverbs is that it is worthwhile, not merely or primarily for itself, but especially for its consequences. Here is Wisdom’s culminating “sales pitch” (8.14–21):

> I have counsel and resources. I am sense; I, fortitude.
> By me do kings reign, and peers establish right.
> By me do rulers rule, and noble are all judges of right.
> I love those who love me, and those who seek me, will find me.
> Wealth and honor are with me, great property and righteousness.
> Better are my fruits than karats and gold, and my produce than choice silver.
> On the path of righteousness will I walk, within the ways of justice.
> To provide my lovers with stuff and their store-houses I will fill.

Good things come to those who choose wisdom: wealth, health, honor, long life, success, power, justice. The list of goods goes on and on, and this is indeed a powerful argument in favor of choosing wisdom. Conversely, choosing the wrong woman leads to death and destruction (e.g., 5:5; 7:22–23).

This simple laying out of consequences makes the issue so starkly clear that it cannot be the whole story. If all the good things were simply on the side of Wisdom, she would have no need to plead her case. But of course the problem is that the foreign woman—we may call her Folly, but the text does not\footnote{The text’s “wrong” woman is called many things: strange woman (ishah zarah, 2:16); foreigner (nokhriah); woman of evil (eshet ra’, 6:23); whore (ishah zonah, 6:26); neighbor’s wife (eshet re’ehu, 6:29); hard-hearted (netzurat lev, 7:10); woman of folly (eshet kesilut, 9:13).}—has a case of her own to make (7:13–21):

> And she grasps him and kisses him, impudently she speaks to him.
> “I need to offer a roast; indeed, today I fulfilled that vow.
> So I have come out toward you, and seeking you I have found you.
> My boudoir is lined with linens, padded with the best of Egypt;
> My bed is perfumed, fragranced with myrrh and cinnamon.
Come let us wallow in lust until morning, let us indulge in love.
For the man is not in his house, he has gone on a trip far away,
He took his bag of silver, and will not come home until the
new moon.”
She deflects him with her appeal; with her smooth lips she
corrupts him.

The other woman, apparently, has her own bundle of goods to offer: the sensory pleasures of food, perfume, luxury, and sex. Her arts are those of seduction: she speaks slickly, and ruthlessly uses her beauty and fluttering eyelids (5:25). She is the paradigm femme fatale.

The attraction of the foreign woman is not only in her sensory appeal or “beauty,” but also in her speech. She is a good rhetorician: “For honey drips from the lips of the foreign woman, and her palate is as smooth as oil” (5:3).\(^\text{14}\) Though she grasps her “prey” before talking to him, it is through accepting her speech that the young man comes to ruin.

What is the ruin that the foreign woman brings? Importantly, it comes, not at the beginning, but at the end (aharitah, 5:4). Sometimes the foreign woman is presented as married to some other man; it is he who will eventually catch up with and punish bitterly the erring youngster (6:32–35). But not always; the young man, seduced, “comes like an ox to slaughter,” but we are not always told who the butcher is (7:22). This “not knowing” is itself actually the essence of the problem (4:18–19):

But the path of the righteous is like lit glow, going on in light until full day.
The way of the wicked is like darkness, they do not know on what they will stumble.

In a sense, we could say that the entire discussion takes place on a background metaphysical (or meta-ethical) assumption of poverty or danger; if one does not know of a way for things to work out well, one can assume that somehow, somewhere, things will go wrong. Ignorance and evil thus go easily together, and the mere fact that one does not know how things are going to go with the foreign—i.e., unknown—woman is enough to suppose that things will find a way to turn out badly.

Some last points of comparison before looking for preliminary conclusions. Folly, we have noted, speaks smoothly, confidently, and unselshconsciously; this is part of the seductive power of her appeal. Wisdom

\(^{14}\) The figure of lips dripping honey is of course applied to the bride in Song of Songs (4:11).
speaks differently. In the first instance, she speaks publicly, not whispering to a boy on whom she already has her hands. Moreover, she speaks self-consciously, critically aware that not all things said are true (8:1–13):

Will not Wisdom call, Reason give her voice?
On top of heights by the road, at the home of paths she stands;
By the gates, at the mouth of the city, at the opening entry she sounds forth.
“To you, men, I call, my voice to all humanity.
Learn naïfs finesse, and fools learn sense.
Listen for I speak nobly, and my lips open with straight talk;
For my palate pronounces truth, and wickedness my tongue abhors.
In rightness are all the words of my mouth, none among them is twisted or stuck.
All of them are clear to the understanding and straight for those who know.
Take my message and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold;
For Wisdom is better than pearls and no goods can be compared to her.
I, Wisdom, have dwelt in guile, and have found knowledge of plots.
Fear of God is hating evil, pride, and vanity; evil paths and slippery lips I hate.”

Put simply, Wisdom knows about Folly and the differences between the two women; the converse seems not to be true.

Next, we may note the powerful shadow cast on our texts by the concluding chapter of Proverbs, the praise of the competent wife in chapter 31. Clearly meant as some commentary on the sections with which we have been dealing, these verses praise the good house-mistress, the woman who organizes well her home and business. She is prosperous in her many ventures, succeeds in both retail and investment, gets up early and prepares her children and staff for whatever may come, and all praise her devotion and foresight. Though praise of the good wife is certainly not inappropriate for Proverbs, it makes best sense to understand this as relating to the woman who is Wisdom, especially in contrast to the alien woman.

Beyond the many details, one main point stands out: Wisdom is the woman who is marriageable, who will make a man satisfied and confident in his own home, and well respected and integrated into society. In the long run, things with her work out well (31:25): “She is dressed in power and glory; she it is who laughs in the end.” Folly is unmarriageable, either because she is already wed to another, or simply because she is too fickle, and
in any event dangerous. The bottom-line praise of Wisdom is that cleaving to her is comparable to prosperous, dignified, and successful wedded life.

Lastly, Wisdom has something to offer which is of a different character than straightforward “rewards and punishments”: harmony with the divine creation. Wisdom is the tool with which God created the world, and man’s partaking of wisdom is, in some sense, partaking of the divine (3:19–20; 8:22–31). This is what one might call the trans-ethical significance of wisdom, and choosing wisdom leads not only to blessedness from God, but to a special “life” or “happiness” (8:32–35).

Let us summarize our findings so far. Wisdom is worthy of pursuit, not Folly. But how is one to tell the two apart? Both promise rewards, so how can the young man know the right woman from the wrong? We have found the following criteria for knowing wisdom from folly:

1. She is public, not private. She speaks to all, not just to the one.
2. She is critical and self-aware; she calls for reflection on what she says.
3. She offers long-term rewards, not immediate gratification.
4. She does not, in particular, offer sensory pleasures.
5. She can be counted on not just for the long-term, but for the open-ended future.

Put together, we have what one might call an epistemological canon; wisdom is she who shows herself not immediately, privately, or impetuously, but over the long run and open-ended future, in a public, critical, and nonsensuous context.

With this as our initial foray into Hebraic conceptions of \textit{philo-sophia}, let us now turn to a Greek view.

5

On the matter of loving wisdom, how to approach it, and what it amounts to, quite probably the most influential text in the Greek tradition is Plato’s dialogue \textit{Symposium}. This text requires a careful and delicate interpretation of at least the order we have devoted to the biblical texts, but this is not the occasion for such. Since we will focus on some aspects of Diotima’s famous speech, it will suffice to name just a few qualifications that are necessary for treating this text at all.

This dialogue can be broken into roughly eight sections: an introduction, six speeches in praise of \textit{Erōs}, and then a speech by Alcibiades
in praise of Socrates. In the introduction, Apollodorus informs his friend
that the speeches he will relate he heard from Aristodemus, who heard them
himself decades earlier as part of the celebrations when one Agathon won a
poetic competition. The fourth speech in the series is given by none other
than the comic poet Aristophanes, and the sixth speech is given by Socrates,
who recounts things he claims to have learned decades earlier in his youth
from a wise woman named Diotima. This convoluted setting and careful
positioning and embedding of the speeches raises many questions. At a very
minimum, it gives many opportunities for “plausible deniability” and sug-
gests contextual qualification on top of qualification. Whatever we think we
take Diotima or Socrates (or Plato) to be asserting is clearly meant to be taken
as true only under very specific qualifications. What these might be, we need
not here spell out, as long as we are aware of how very extensive and intricate
they must be.

But with all the qualifications, Diotima makes three com-
paratively clear claims. First, love is, in principle, what drives everyone. We
only call a particular subset of people “lovers” or “in love,” but actually what-
ever anyone pursues is pursued, at bottom, because of a love of something
(205d). The big differences among people turn on what it is with which they
are in love—be it fame, wealth, knowledge, or what have you (we have already
seen this line of thought attributed to Pythagoras). What do these “lovers” all
have in common? They want something good, they want it to be theirs, and
they want it, at least in principle, forever (206a).

Second, this love, if it is graced also with harmony and
beauty, gives birth (206c–d). If one is pregnant of body, and the parts of the
body are in beautiful harmony, then the body gives birth to another like it;
this is a kind of immortality, the kind of coming close to the divine which
is appropriate for the mortal body. For the soul, “giving birth” means giv-
ing rise to the proper attitudes, actions, laws, and behaviors in another soul.
Narrowly, this can mean the pursuit of fame and celebrity, or more broadly
speaking, it can mean the desire to be an educator—including the educator of
an entire polity through poetry or legislation (209a–e).

Lastly, all love, which is for whatever is fine and beautiful,
is inherently unified. In particular, this means that there is the possibility of
something like an ascent, connecting the lowest love to highest; from the love
of a particular beautiful body, to an appreciation of beautiful bodies in gen-
eral; then to a love of the beautiful in the soul and its actions and expressions,
and to the beautiful things to be learned and understood; and eventually to
the Beautiful itself, unmingle with any particular thing (211c). Contact with this, the true Beauty, not only makes life ultimately worthy and pleasant, but also allows the lover to give birth to true excellence, and makes him as near to immortal as a human can be (212a). Only philosophy makes this possible, and this is indeed its apotheosis.

Let this serve as a summary—admittedly ham-fisted—of a “Platonic” view of love and its connection to wisdom, hence, *philo-sophia*.

6

The most evident point of contact and contrast between the conception of Proverbs and that of Diotima, which is ultimately connected to many other issues, focuses on the matter of beauty. In Proverbs, pursuit of beauty is not a stepping stone on the way to the highest, divine wisdom; it is the beginning of the way to destruction. Beauty, and all the immediate sensory pleasures like it, is precisely the principle of the short-term enticements with which Folly lures men to their doom: “Grace is a lie and beauty fleeting” (31:30).

Obviously, Diotima would surely concede that on the crassest level, the love of beauty need not have any connection with wisdom or any higher thing. Two points, however, would immediately present themselves. On the one hand, even the most base pursuit of sexual gratification does, nevertheless, point beyond itself toward the propagation of the species; indeed, it points, in principle, toward immortality. Second, and related, the Greek *kalon* means not only beautiful but fine, well put together, so that the association of beauty with harmony, with well fitting and the good is not spurious or gratuitous.

By contrast, Diotima might have harsh words for the appeals in Proverbs. Such careful calculation of the long-term, looking ahead to probable outcomes, is exactly the opposite of love. Love is, to some degree, mad. It is precisely when we see a lover doing ridiculous or extreme, even self-destructive things that we know, precisely then, that this person is in love. Choosing Wisdom over Folly, though it may be couched as a metaphor with sexual thematics, is really little more than an accounting game. Wisdom’s advice amounts to little more than the abandonment of love—which suggests that Proverbs does not truly know *philosophia*; all it offers is calculated careerism, be it sexual or intellectual.
Solomon’s reply on behalf of wisdom would also be two-fold. On the one hand, even Diotima admits that a certain cooling and even detachment of love is needed for the lover of beautiful bodies to become reoriented to the higher things which have a connection with wisdom and knowledge. Maybe the madness of love is still preserved, but maybe not; that depends on a rather schematic, even dogmatic assertion of continuity throughout the entire “ladder” of love. The precise sense of this unity seems to be unacceptable in Proverbs. Love of wisdom may be analogous to or structurally parallel to love of a woman; but sexual love is not simply homogeneous with or fundamentally the same as the love of wisdom. In Proverbs, the analogy holds between two genuinely different things (whose similarity may be in need of further articulation). Diotima, Solomon would complain, has unhappily collapsed analogy into homogeneity. Indeed, her emphasis on love as procreation seems to fall prey to some of the same mistakes of which she is accusing Solomon.\footnote{While progeny are not denied to the “good wife,” it is striking—especially in the larger biblical context—how absent the promise of children is from Wisdom’s appeals.}

On the other hand, Solomon wants to remind us of the importance of regularization and agreement. Diotima’s lover may reach no satisfaction, because he may meet with no reciprocation. By contrast, the essence of wisdom in love is finding the point of mutuality and agreement, which ultimately expresses itself in covenant and matrimony. Solomon indeed does not praise the passionate, insane love of woman or of wisdom, or accept it as paradigmatic. But Wisdom, he suggests, is not only a flirt; she can be wooed and won (5:15–19):

\begin{quote}
    Drink water from your cistern, and fluid from within your well.
    Your springs will spout forth, streams of water in the streets.
    But they are only for you, and with you there are no strangers.
    May your source be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth.
    A deer of loving and a doe of grace, her breasts will slake you at all times, in her love you will linger always.
\end{quote}

Diotima’s lover must overcome the “slavish” or base attachment to a particular body, and in doing so gives up the possibility of mutuality and love in marriage. No wonder that madness becomes, on her account, an essential aspect of love, necessarily unrequited.

These exchanges indicate some of the differences between the two positions, but do not yet get to the root of the dispute. Before turning to where this root might lie, let us note some important common ground.
On both accounts, the love of wisdom, while rooted in the human world, is also a vehicle whereby man transcends the merely human. Through pursuing wisdom, man comes into contact with the world in its totality, its order and structure, and the ultimate grounds from which it springs. *Philosophia* leads the human toward the divine. The reverse is also true. On both accounts, the structure of society, at its best, depends on the wisdom of its rulers and legislators. Wisdom and its pursuit, then, are for both something of an *axis mundi*; all of reality is connected by *philosophia*, and in some sense revolves around it.

7

With such agreement as to the decisive role of the love of wisdom, the issue of its actual character becomes all the more acute. It seems that there is no room for reconciliation between a picture in which all love is homogeneous and beauty is connected to good, and one in which the femininity of Wisdom must remain an analogy and beauty plays the role of destroyer. Indeed, on even the most basic level, doubt arises if there is even enough common ground for dispute; after all, the love which may be most important on Diotima’s account is the love of a man for a young boy, not for a woman.

To get to what may be the root of the dispute, let us recapitulate the Solomonic critique of beauty. The problem with beauty is that it is immediate, in two senses. Beauty is primarily sensory, meaning that it confronts one without intermediaries. Though some have claimed to see in this direct contact the assurance of something infallible, genuinely real, the critiques of sense experience are at least as compelling. More important, however, is the “subjective” correlate of such immediacy; it overrides the “subject” in favor of the “object.” Again, some have seen in this “objectivity” a decisive superiority. But the Solomonic stress is on the price paid; whatever one may get through the senses, one risks giving up one’s self. Looking at the beautiful beloved, one gets “carried away.”

16 Though our Solomonic text is critical of the seductive appeal of the beautiful woman, it is not strictly true that it rejects beauty. Actually, Wisdom is frequently cited as a source of beauty, but understood as an ornament for the young man who chooses to pursue her rather than Folly (4:7–9):

First point of wisdom: acquire wisdom, and in all your acquisitions, acquire sense.

Ornament her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you as you embrace her.

She will give your head an accompaniment of grace, and with a crown of glory will she armor you. Perhaps this is another point of agreement and dispute: the relevant beauty is that of the *male*, not the female. But the question is whether this beauty is the origin of the movement that leads to wisdom or instead an outcome of this movement.
Beauty is also immediate in a temporal sense. On the most superficial level, the problem with beauty is simply that it doesn’t last; here today, gone tomorrow. The pleasures of the seductive woman are real, but fleeting. In the end, she will be other than what she appears now. Beauty, even where it has no inherent “down side” for the long term, simply does not offer anything for the future.

Here, it seems, we come to the nub of the issue. The immediate reality of the fine, well-formed, and harmoniously beautiful is connected, on Diotima’s account, to eternity and immortality. While Wisdom offers health, long days, and just plain life, she never offers eternity or immortality. On her telling, even the world as a whole does not have eternity through her; it was, through her, created; even Wisdom herself, as “gotten” by God, seems not to be eternal.17 What Wisdom offers is not the eternal now in which one can bask in the radiance of a Beauty which is itself by itself. What she offers is the future, an open-ended but still finite range of time in which one can plan and act, and taste, later, from the fruits of one’s labor (6:6–9):

Go to the ant, lazy; see her ways and wise up;
For she has no commander, officer, or governor.
In the summer she prepares her bread, storing at harvest her food.
Lazy, how long will you lie there, when will you get up from your sleep?

Here then, may be the point of contact as well as dispute. For Solomon, the essence of wisdom is the future, and the love of wisdom is love of the temporal. In this perspective, beauty is at best null, and usually seductive and destructive. For Diotima, it is the moment, the now in which one catches a glimpse of what does not change and can be always, that beauty opens up. Loving it, pursuing it, and eventually finding the root reality behind that momentary beauty brings one outside the realm of time into the eternal.

The issue, it seems, is the open future versus the eternal present. It would be unfair to assimilate this dispute to Bergson’s durée or to Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysics of presence, though it is also clear that these twentieth-century matters are very relevant. Indeed, Strauss’s suggestion that the Bible may have some significance for philosophy is closely related to the Heideggerian critique. Still, it may be that putting both positions onto the scale of time may make it possible both to see the differences more clearly, and also to see possible room for integration. It is not obvious

17 The Septuagint translation of konani as etikte at 8:22 seems to have made possible the “begotten logos” of Christological fame.
that the eternal present and the open future do not undermine one another, but neither is it obvious that they do not complement one another. Indeed, it seems that there may be more than one way in which they can be interwoven. The matter of what such a loom might look like has already been raised by Husserl—but not, to my knowledge, brought to any decisive conclusion.

Aside from offering these further directions for consideration, does this inquiry offer any “take home” conclusions? At a minimum, if the dialogues imagined here seem to be meaningful, they suggest how the “meeting” proposed by Strauss can occur. Native Hebrew speakers can converse with speakers of unaccented Greek about issues of mutual concern; the “space” in which such dialogue can occur has, however, a particular quality. More specifically, however, we also find that the in-principle compatibility of eternity and openness hides some built-in tensions: if one were to come to know something about that which is eternally, precisely this would point to something no longer open in any possible future. That is, as the love of wisdom understood in Diotima’s sense “progresses” into wisdom itself, so, and to that extent, it undermines the foundation of Solomonic wisdom. Reversely, as long as philosophia remains precisely that, ḥokhma retains its room to maneuver. Secure and final knowledge of that which is eternally is thus the bane of both philosophia and Solomonic wisdom.

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18 Some of these necessary qualities are discussed in Jacob Howland, Plato and the Talmud (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
In the summer of 1787, the delegates to the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia to design a constitution that was intended to put into motion those principles of constitutional government that had been enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. As Madison later wrote in the Federalist, the principles of the Constitution were derived from “the transcendent law of nature and nature’s God, which declares that the safety and happiness of society are the objects at which all political institutions aim and to which all such institutions must be sacrificed.” Everyone of course would have recognized this passage as a paraphrase of the Declaration of Independence. Madison aptly noted that the Declaration posits the “safety and happiness of society” as the end and purpose of government. This is the central of three explicit references to the Declaration in the Federalist and it is mentioned in the central number of the eighty-five papers. The first reference recounts “the transcendent and precious right of the people to ‘abolish or alter their governments as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.’” This reference to the Declaration is the only one in the Federalist that has a footnote giving as the source the “Declaration of Independence.” This is curious since the quoted portion is inaccurate: the words “alter” and “abolish” have been transposed, and the citation seems designed to call attention to this transposition. The object of the Convention, Madison seems to say, was to “abolish” rather than to “alter” the Articles of


2 Federalist, No. 40, 252.
Confederation. The third reference, penned by Hamilton, also invoked the right of revolution, “that fundamental principle of republican government which admits the right of the people to alter or abolish the established Constitution whenever they find it inconsistent with their happiness.” Hamilton also clearly implies that the purpose of government is the “happiness” of the people. Thus it seems evident that the two principal authors of the *Federalist* believed that the Declaration posited the “safety and happiness of the people” as the end and purpose of government.

This analysis would seem to belie the argument of those who claim that the “Declaration unequivocally asserts that the purpose of government is the securing of rights, and only the securing of rights.” Madison seems insistent, however, that the purpose of government as understood by “the leaders of the Revolution” was the security of “private rights and public happiness.” As Madison clearly indicates here, the protection of private rights is a necessary but not sufficient condition for securing public happiness. Madison undoubtedly had this distinction in mind when he wrote that “justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society. It ever has

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3 In *Federalist*, No. 40, Madison answers the charge that the Convention had exceeded its authority in proposing a new constitution when it had been charged with “the sole and express purpose of revising the articles of Confederation [to] render the federal Constitution adequate to the exigencies of government and the preservation of the Union” (No. 40, 247–48). Madison, however, argued that the instructions to the Convention were contradictory: no revision of the Articles could make them adequate precisely because the principles upon which the Articles rested were defective. As Hamilton remarked in No. 15, the Articles had created “the political monster of an imperium in imperio,” which “cannot be amended otherwise than by an alteration in the first principles and main pillars of the fabric” (No. 15, 108). It would be of little avail for the “safety and happiness” (No. 40, 253) of the people to build a new structure on a defective foundation, since the new superstructure would partake of the deficiencies of the foundation itself. Madison argued that a sound principle of legal construction required those who were faced with contradictory commands to choose the most important. Obviously it was more important to have a constitution that was adequate to meet the exigencies facing the Union than one that was inadequate but adhered strictly to the command that the Articles be revised. In any case, Madison concluded, since “the plan to be framed and proposed was to be submitted to the people themselves, the disapprobation of this supreme authority would destroy it forever; its approbation blot out antecedent errors and irregularities” (No. 40, 253; emphasis original). In submitting the proposed constitution directly to the people, the Convention also subverted its charge to present the revisions to Congress who would, upon approval, submit them to the State legislatures. A unanimous concurrence of the State legislatures was required under the Articles for ratification. In No. 40, Madison states that “the establishment of a government adequate to the national happiness was the end at which [the Articles of Confederation] themselves originally aimed, and to which they ought, as insufficient means, to have been sacrificed” (249). In other words, Madison clearly intimates that the Constitution itself resulted from an act of revolution appealing to the supreme authority of the people!

4 *Federalist*, No. 78, 469.


6 *Federalist*, No. 14, 104.
been and ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit."7 Liberty is the means to justice, and justice is the end of both civil society and government. Justice seems to be, on this account, nothing less than the security of “private rights and public happiness,” where private rights are always understood as subordinate to public happiness.

During a particularly contentious session of the Virginia ratifying convention, Madison remarked that “professions of attachment to the public good, and comparisons of parties, ought not to govern or influence us now. We ought…to examine the constitution on its own merits solely: we are to enquire whether it will promote the public happiness: its aptitude to produce this desirable object, ought to be the exclusive subject of our present researches.”8 Security of private rights thus appears to be only a part of the calculus; the other and—if we are to credit Madison—the more important part, is public happiness. Public happiness cannot be understood as simply the aggregate of private rights; it also includes the civic obligations that form the basis for friendship which in turn is the basis for citizenship. Madison’s argument here is reminiscent of Aristotle’s argument in the first book of the Politics that the polis is established for the sake of mere life but continues for the sake of the good life, i.e., for the sake of human happiness.

Harry Jaffa comments on the ends of government contemplated in the Declaration of Independence:

After speaking of our unalienable rights, to secure which governments are instituted, the Declaration of Independence goes on to say that “whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.” Notice that in the second institution, or reinstitution of government, “rights” become “ends.” And these ends are now said to be “Safety” and “Happiness,” the alpha and omega of political life in Aristotle’s Politics.

In a statement that is not entirely hyperbolic, Jaffa asserts that “in one form or another, this metamorphosis of Lockean ‘rights’ into Aristotelian ‘ends’ (or vice versa) recurs in many of the documents of the Founding.”9 Minds of

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7 Federalist, No. 51, 324.
a peculiar structure—those who believe (purportedly following the philosopher Leo Strauss) that there is an impenetrable wall separating the thought of ancients and moderns—might object, however, to Jaffa’s attempt to identify Aristotelian elements in the Declaration of Independence, to say nothing of his conflation of Aristotle and Locke.\footnote{See, e.g., Catherine and Michael Zuckert, The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 31: Strauss “radicalized a commonplace distinction between ancients and moderns. With the emergence of modern philosophy, Strauss believed, there had occurred a cataclysmic break with the older philosophy, a break of such magnitude that all that came after was simply a working out of the implications of that break. In the Stausian frame, the difference between ancients and moderns became decisive: Strauss sided with the ancients and traced the ills of modern philosophy and many of the ills of modern politics to that break with ancient philosophy and the consequences of that break.” It is doubtful, however, that the distinction between ancients and moderns was ever “decisive” for Strauss, except in a rhetorical sense. The crucial division in philosophy for Strauss was between reason and revelation. See, e.g., Leo Strauss, “Reason and Revelation” (1948), in Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem, by Heinrich Meier, trans. Marcus Brainard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177: “A philosophy which believes that it can refute the possibility of revelation—and a philosophy which does not believe that: this is the real meaning of the querelle des anciens et des modernes.”}

In his later years Jefferson often reflected on the purpose of the Declaration. In a letter to James Mease in 1825, Jefferson characterized the Declaration as “the genuine effusion of the soul of our country at that time.”\footnote{Thomas Jefferson to Dr. James Mease, September 26, 1825, in The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Modern Library, 1944), 722.} And in one of his most famous letters he recounted that

the object of the Declaration of Independence was not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind. All its authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, &c.\footnote{Jefferson to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825, in Jefferson: Writings, ed. M. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 1501.}
Jefferson’s primary concern was the history of politics, not the history of philosophy; he undoubtedly understood Locke’s natural law as a reflection or adaptation of Aristotle. What Jefferson may have understood—or divined—was that after the advent of Christianity natural right had to appear in the guise of natural law, and that egalitarian natural right was the only form of natural right available to statesmen given the “theological-political predicament” posed by Christianity. As a *phronimos*, Jefferson would have been free to pick and choose (or combine) political elements that were useful and beneficial without any consciousness of the fact that natural right—and thereby the political prudence that animates statesmanship—had purportedly been undermined in the history of political philosophy by Machiavelli and his epigones. Jefferson and the American founders seemed to be wholly unaware of the fact that every post-Machiavellian regime was inevitably a wholly “modern” or “Machiavellian” regime governed only by the dictates of necessity; or to say nearly the same thing, that “Machiavellianism” had succeeded in banishing prudence from the universe of political discourse. But even Locke—one of Machiavelli’s supposed epigones—seemed to have breached the impenetrable wall between ancients and moderns when, in a passage that could have been addressed to statesmen, he remarked that

> truth is always the same; time alters it not, nor is it the better or worse for being of ancient or modern tradition.…There is no occasion on this account to oppose the ancients and the moderns to one another, or to be squeamish on either side. He that wisely conducts his mind in the pursuit of knowledge will gather what lights, and get what helps he can, from either of them, from whom they are best to be had, without adoring the errors or rejecting the truths which he may find mingled in them.13

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It is clear that Jefferson and the founders did not read Locke the way Leo Strauss read Locke. One close observer of Strauss’s work comments that “there is no evidence that the founding generation understood Locke in anything other than the conventional way, and considerable evidence pointing in the opposite direction.”14 In fact, there is no evidence that anyone had read Locke with the skill, innovation, and penetration of Strauss,

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including the most insightful philosophers. Strauss discovered an esoteric Locke buried deep in his writings, a Locke who was radically modern, and doing his part to extend the philosophic project initiated by Machiavelli. Strauss calls Locke “the most famous and the most influential of all modern natural rights teachers” and remarks that his influence stems from the fact that he makes “it particularly difficult for us to recognize how modern he is or how much he deviates from the natural right tradition. He was an eminently prudent man, and he reaped the reward of superior prudence: he was listened to by many people, and he wielded an extraordinarily great influence on men of affairs and on a large body of opinion.” The result of Locke’s “superior prudence” is that “we are then apparently confronted with an unbroken tradition of perfect respectability that stretches from Socrates to Locke.” It is only deep below the surface that Strauss discovered a Lockean natural right that is “fundamentally different.”¹⁵ To say nothing of other considerations, it is doubtful that Strauss attributed Locke’s “superior prudence” simply to his “greater caution.”

The exoteric Locke did provide a politically salutary doctrine—laws of nature were derived from reason and supported by revelation; sovereignty could be safely lodged in the people and government derived from the consent of the governed rather than the divine right of kings. Regular elections, separation of powers, and representation were the essentials of constitutional government and the ultimate check on government was the right of revolution, the ultimate expression of the people’s sovereignty. These first principles would provide solid support for constitutional government and the rule of law. If we are to understand the founders as they understood themselves, then we must understand Locke as they understood him, not as he was understood by Strauss.

Professors Catherine and Michael Zuckert object to this line of argument because it “seems to derogate from the honor due to the founders…[that] they were not intelligent enough to grasp the real Locke and were saved from falling into dark modernity only by their stupidity (to put it harshly).” It is difficult to know how serious the Zuckerts are here—they almost seem to be merely jesting. If the founders had penetrated to the deepest levels of Locke’s esotericism and still adopted him as “America’s philosopher” then it is difficult to see how they deserve to be honored for deliberately putting America on the path to historicism, relativism, and nihilism under the

guise that they were adhering to the “transcendent principles” of the “Laws of Nature and Nature’s God.”

Surely the founders were philosophic statesmen, open to philosophy and guided by the “elementary books of public right,” but it would be difficult to argue that they were philosophers in their own right. Why does it dishonor the founders to suggest that they did not read Locke with the penetration of Leo Strauss when no one else had ever read Locke with the same care and precision, including, as far as we know, the most accomplished political philosophers? But, according to the Zuckerts, even if the founders understood only the exoteric Locke they would have been dragged “across into modern politics” because the exoteric Locke is inevitably accompanied by the substance of the esoteric Locke. You can’t have one without the other and the esoteric Locke will always prove more powerful that the exoteric Locke. And, the Zuckerts conclude, “this is what Strauss believed Locke succeeded in doing.”

It is true that Strauss presents Locke as a radically modern thinker:

Locke’s teaching on property, and therewith his whole political philosophy, are revolutionary not only with regard to the biblical tradition but with regard to the philosophic tradition as well. Through the shift of emphasis from natural duties or obligations to natural rights, the individual, the ego, had become the center and origin of the moral world, since man—as distinguished from man’s end—had become that center or origin.

The American founders, of course, made Locke’s “teaching on property” the foundation of constitutional government. What is more, protections for the natural right to property provided a common ground for rich and poor that was not available in the classical world. The idea of rights or natural rights, understood as claims or reservations against government, was unknown to classical political philosophy. Aristotle’s mixed regime, a combination of oligarchy and democracy, was a regime in which the interests of the rich and

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18 Zuckert and Zuckert, Truth about Leo Strauss, 249.

19 Strauss, Natural Right and History, 248.
poor served to check one another. There was no notion, however, that rich and poor would ever share a common interest. But the right to property supplied such a common interest and could be supported equally by rich and poor. Thus the foundations for republican government anchored in the right of property might hold the prospect of avoiding the kinds of class antagonisms that plagued ancient regimes. Aristotle had argued that a mixed regime with a large middle class would be the most stable because the middle class would be neither rich nor poor and would serve as a kind of buffer between the two antagonistic classes. A large middle class, of course, would have been a rarity in the ancient world simply because of widespread scarcity. The way of the world was a few wealthy and the many poor. But with a system of private property and the “emancipation of acquisition,” all justified in the name of the common good (every private acquisition in a scheme of capital accumulation increases the store of goods available for public consumption), wealth could be produced at a rate hitherto unknown. This increase in abundance makes it possible to have large, middle-class democracies in which the protection of the right to property, considered as the most comprehensive right, will be “the first object of government.” Constitutional government understood as limited government and the rule of law all proceed from Locke’s “teaching on property.”

What is more, in constitutional government of the kind inspired by Locke and fully endorsed by the founders justice could be more securely grounded in nature! As Strauss writes in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern*:

> It is a demand of justice that there should be a reasonable correspondence between the social hierarchy and the natural hierarchy. The lack of such a correspondence in the old scheme was defended by the fundamental fact of scarcity. With the increasing abundance it became increasingly possible to see and to admit the element of hypocrisy which had entered into the traditional notion of aristocracy; the existing aristocracies proved to be oligarchies, rather than aristocracies. In other words it became increasingly easy to argue from the premise that natural inequality has very little to do with social inequality, that practically or politically speaking one may safely assume that all men are by nature equal, that all men have the same natural rights, provided one uses this rule of thumb as the major premise for reaching the conclusion that everyone should be given the same opportunity as everyone else: natural inequality has its rightful place in the use, nonuse, or abuse of opportunity in the race as distinguished from at
Thus the Lockean system, adopted and adapted by the founders, made it possible to improve on the ancient models from the point of view of distributive justice or natural right. In the world of Aristotle, aristocracies were almost always thinly disguised oligarchies. Pseudoaristocracy could now be replaced by genuine aristocracy because the increase in abundance that resulted from the “emancipation of acquisition” made possible a system of distributive justice based on “equal opportunity,” where natural talents rather than class or caste would be the basis for advancement. Strauss quoted Jefferson’s 1813 letter to John Adams with evident approval: “That form of government is the best, which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of [the] natural aristoi into offices of the government.” Strauss comments that Jefferson’s statement reflected classical political philosophy’s answer to the best political order, the “claim to rule which is based on merit, on human excellence, on ‘virtue.’” The sentence preceding the one quoted by Strauss is no less remarkable: “the natural aristocracy,” Jefferson wrote, “I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed, it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society.” The existence of the natural aristoi is thus proof for Jefferson that “creation” has designed man for the social or political state! Man is by nature a political animal, and the best regime by nature is aristocracy. And since it is evident that “virtue and talent” have been “by nature...scattered with equal hand through all its conditions,” a system of equal opportunity allowing virtue and talent to rise from all classes would be most consistent with “natural right.”

For Jefferson, the existence of the natural aristoi was no less a self-evident truth than the fact that “all men are created equal.” It is evident that inequalities exist among human beings by nature. In addition to

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21 Leo Strauss, What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 86. Jefferson’s sentence in the original letter to Adams is posed as a question. The fact that Strauss changed Jefferson’s question to a declarative statement would seem to indicate that he adopted it as a statement of his own.

22 Jefferson to John Adams, October 12, 1813, in Jefferson: Writings, 1306.

inequalities in strength and beauty, there are a host of inequalities in regard
to intelligence, potential for virtue, and social capacity, to mention only some.
What natural equality meant for Locke, Jefferson, and the founders was that
by nature there are no inequalities—however measured—that makes anyone
by nature the ruler over anyone else. As Jefferson noted: “Because Sir Isaac
Newton was superior to others in understanding, he was not therefore lord
of the person or property of others.”24 Thus, “the just powers of government”
must be derived from “the consent of the governed,” and directed to securing
the “Safety and Happiness” of those who consent to be governed. The deep-
est problem of democratic or republican statesmanship is how to reconcile
wisdom and consent.

Strauss writes that “according to the classics, the best way
of meeting these two entirely different requirements—that for wisdom and
that for consent or for freedom—would be that a wise legislator frame a code
which the citizen body, duly persuaded, freely adopts. That code, which is,
as it were, the embodiment of wisdom, must be as little subject to alteration
as possible; the rule of law is to take the place of the rule of men, however
wise.”25 Strauss was certainly aware that his description here of the classi-
cal solution is almost a description of the manner in which the American
Constitution was framed and adopted, with one important difference: in the
place of an “individual citizen of preeminent wisdom and approved integrity,”
Americans entrusted the framing of the organic law to a deliberative body,
a “select body of citizens, from whose common deliberations more wisdom,
as well as more safety,” might be expected.26 What this deliberative body

25 Strauss, Natural Right and History, 141.
26 Federalist, No. 38, 231, 233. Madison wrote that “Solon, according to Plutarch, was in a manner
compelled by the universal suffrage of his fellow-citizens to take upon him the sole and absolute
power of new-modeling the constitution.” And in recounting some of the “difficulties with which…
celebrated reformers had to contend, as well as of the expedients which they were obliged to employ
in order to carry their reforms into effect,” Madison notes that “Solon…confessed that he had not
given to his countrymen the government best suited to their happiness, but most tolerable to their
prejudices.” (Madison engaged in some hyperbole here since Plutarch actually says Solon gave the
Athenians the best laws they would receive [prosedexanto]). This actually had been a subject of debate
at the Constitutional Convention: Pierce Butler observed that “we must follow the example of Solon
who gave the Athenians not the best Gov[ernmen]t he could devise; but the best they would receive.”
Madison, however, joined by Alexander Hamilton, James Wilson, and Edmund Randolph, argued that
“we ought to consider what was right & necessary in itself for the attainment of a proper Governm[en]t.
A plan adjusted to this idea will recommend itself.” Immediately following Madison’s statement
Elbridge Gerry protested that “it was necessary to consider what the people would approve. This had
been the policy of all Legislators.” Considering the fact that the members of the Convention were
forced to compromise on crucial issues, most importantly on the issue of slavery, deliberative bodies
seem to be no less subject to the necessity of “expedients” and “temporizing policies” than ancient
produced was constitutional government which embodied the rule of law as its fundamental principle. The framers also believed that the constitutional scheme adopted in 1789 would provide “most effectually for a pure selection of [the] natural aristoi into offices of the government,” those “whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations.” An extensive republic of the kind contemplated by the new Constitution would be “most favorable to the election of proper guardians of the public weal.” Yet as prudent statesmen the framers knew that experience had demonstrated the utility of “auxiliary precautions” in the event that patriotism and love of justice failed as a sufficient motive to serve the “public weal.” These “auxiliary precautions”—the separation of powers—in which “ambition would be made to counteract ambition” could supply “the defect of better motives” when better motives were unavailing. Ambition would engage “the love of fame, the ruling passion of the noblest minds” in the war, not only to prevent tyrannical government, but to produce good government as well. Good government is government that pursues justice and serves the public weal—or public happiness. Lest we be too quick to conclude with some ingenious commentators that these “auxiliary precautions” were intended to render wisdom and prudence superfluous, we must heed Madison’s admonition that republican government presupposes the existence of virtue among its citizens in a higher degree than any other form of government.

Madison challenged the American people to reject the proposed constitution if they found that it was not “strictly republican.” “It is evident,” Madison wrote, “that no other form would be reconcilable with the genius of the people of America; with the fundamental principles of the Revolution; or with that honorable determination which animates every

lawgivers. (The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787, ed. Max Farrand [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966], 1:125 [Butler]; 1:215, 528–29 [Madison]; 1:215 [Gerry]; 1:253 [Wilson]; 1:366, 474 [Hamilton]; 1:372 [Randolph].) Madison’s claim that deliberative bodies produce “more wisdom” might be true, but prudence or practical wisdom will always play the crucial role in “the sphere of all human things as such” or in the application of natural right. During the ratification debate, Madison conceded that even “the most rational government will not find it a superfluous advantage to have the prejudices of the community on its side” (Federalist, No. 49, 315). Even if Madison believed that “the improvement made by America on the ancient mode” was significant, he nevertheless noted “the hazards and difficulties incident to such experiments, and of the great imprudence of unnecessarily multiplying them” (Federalist, No. 38, 233).

27 Federalist, No. 10, 82.
28 Federalist, No. 51, 322.
29 Federalist, No. 72, 437.
30 Federalist, No. 55, 346.
votary of freedom to rest all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self-government.”31 The “fundamental principles of the Revolution” of course are those adumbrated in the Declaration of Independence. In republican government the consent of the governed is the active agency, not only in the formation of the “just powers” of government, but in its operation as well. Every election is considered a periodic renewal of the consent of the people. The genius of the American people—its habits, manners, and faculties—incline them to republican government. An essential part of this “genius” which animates the “whole system” is “the vigilant and manly spirit which actuates the people of America—a spirit which nourishes freedom, and in return is nourished by it.”32 The experiment in self-government, of course, presupposes in the people sufficient virtue for self-government. Madison says that “the aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust.” And the “characteristic policy of republican government...for obtaining” such rulers is the “elective mode.”33 And while we can be certain that Madison did not believe that every republican citizen had the requisite wisdom and virtue to serve in constitutional offices, the bulk of the citizens possessing the genius of the Americans could judge the qualifications of those that did. And it is upon this prudential truth that the Constitution holds out the prospect elevating the natural aristoi—or a close approximation—to positions of rule. Without sufficient virtue—republican virtue—in the people, the experiment in self government will fail, regardless of the institutions discovered by the “new science” of politics designed to “supply the defects of better motives.” “Auxiliary precautions” are crucial to the practice of constitutional government; but they are not a substitute for republican virtue.

Scarcity in the ancient world prevented the actualization of the best regime by nature; “emancipation of acquisitiveness” was the necessary precondition of actualizing a regime that could adopt equal opportunity as its principle of distributive justice.34 Thus, the best regime of classical political philosophy became realizable only on the ground of a radically

31 Federalist, No. 39, 240.
32 Federalist, No. 57, 353.
33 Federalist, No. 57, 350–51.
34 Strauss, Natural Right and History, 148.
transformed notion of the right to property and a scheme of constitutional government designed to protect the right to property. Even though the right to private property is wholly modern—and the “emancipation of acquisitiveness” wholly alien to classical political philosophy—it is impossible not to see, as Strauss did, the influence of Aristotelian natural right at work in the creation of the regime of equal opportunity. Indeed, Strauss himself indulged in a rare bit of advocacy when he remarked that “wisdom requires unhesitating loyalty to a decent constitution and even to the cause of constitutionalism.”

Surely he was not unaware of the connection between Locke, the American founding, and constitutionalism.

What is more, Locke’s revolutionary teaching “with regard to the biblical tradition” eventuated in a more tolerant Christianity, no small matter for a generation of statesmen for whom the wars of religion were more than a distant memory. Both Madison’s “Memorial and Remonstrance” and Jefferson’s “Statute on Religious Liberty,” the two greatest American documents arguing for religious liberty and the separation of church and state, owed their principal arguments to Locke’s “Letter on Toleration,” to say nothing of his *Reasonableness of Christianity*. All of these developments have had the most salutary influence on American politics and constitutional development. The framers were acutely aware that constitutional government would be impossible without free exercise of religion and the separation of church and state. Sectarian disputes are politically irresolvable. Constitutional government requires majority rule, and minority acquiescence in the decisions of the majority. At the same time, the majority must rule in a manner consistent with the rights of the minority. If religious questions are a part of ordinary politics, the minority will never be able to acquiesce in the decisions of the majority, for no religious minority would ever abandon or compromise its religious scruples based merely on the vote of a majority. The founders of America, however, did not confront such religious issues because, based on Locke’s work, the theological-political predicament in America had been settled, at least on a moral and political level—that is, on the only level in which it is possible to solve the question of reason and revelation. On the highest level, the question of what perfects or completes human life, reason or revelation, seems impossible to resolve. Reason is incapable of refuting the possibility of revelation and revelation cannot deny the possibility of reason. But on the moral and political level, reason and revelation can agree,

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36 See Leo Strauss, “Progress or Return?,” in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas...
it was Locke who prepared the ground for that agreement in America which took the form of the “Laws of Nature and Nature’s God.” American preachers regularly cited the “great Mr. Lock” in their sermons and urged the biblical duty of resisting tyranny. Preachers also urged the legitimacy of compact as the rightful ground of civil society as well as the duty of government to protect natural and God-given rights.

A remarkable election-day sermon was delivered by the Reverend Samuel West in Boston in 1776 entitled “On the Right to Rebel Against Governors.” The “nature and design of civil government,” West remarks, is found in “Mr. Locke.”37 What is perhaps most important, however, is what the Reverend West learned from Locke about the theological-political question: “A revelation,” West avers, “pretending to be from God, that contradicts any part of natural law, ought immediately to be rejected as an imposture; for the Deity cannot make a law contrary to the law of nature without acting contrary to himself,—a thing in the strictest sense impossible, for that which implies contradiction is not an object of the divine power.… The doctrine of non-resistance and unlimited passive obedience to the worst of tyrants could never have found credit among mankind had the voice of reason been harkened to for a guide, because such a doctrine would immediately have been discerned to be contrary to natural law.”38 Thus, “whatever right reason

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requires as necessary to be done is as much the will and law of God as though it were enjoined us by an immediate revelation from heaven, or commanded in the sacred Scriptures.” 39 The Reverend West concludes: “we see that both reason and revelation perfectly agree in pointing out the nature, end, and design of government.” 40 Those ends are the promotion of the “welfare and happiness of the community,” and the “design of government” derives from the “most sacred” character of social compact and rests on representative constitutional government. 41 Reverend West’s election-day sermon was not atypical of the sermons of the day; such sentiments were expressed in many sermons throughout the period and Locke dominated the pulpit no less than he dominated legislative halls and constitutional conventions. Thus a remarkable Providence seemed to have guided the American experiment in republican government in the form of a dispensation—largely orchestrated by “the great Mr. Lock”—from theological-political disputes that would have rendered impossible any attempt to establish constitutional government. Strauss was a refugee from Nazi Germany; surely he was not unaware that George Washington was almost certainly the first non-Jewish head of state to address Jews as fellow citizens. 42

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But will all these salutary Lockean influences be eventually undermined by the esoteric Locke, especially the radical “ego” and “the self-creating self” that serves as the foundation for the right to property? As Michael Zuckert describes it: “If the ‘great foundation of property’ is labor, then Locke is suggesting that the person is himself the product of transforming and appropriating labor. Human making, not divine making, is the primary moral fact. The chapter on property leads up to the suggestion that human beings are self-owners because they are the makers of their selves and

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41 Ibid., 431, 417.

they own what they make.”\textsuperscript{43} For Zuckert, the “self-creating self” inevitably becomes the self-destructive self. Can a system that emphasizes the private right to property sustain “public happiness”? Insofar as the common good is merely an incidental byproduct of individual selfishness or egotism, won’t the illusion of the common good ultimately collapse into a frenzy of sheer self-aggrandizement in which the “pursuit of happiness” is understood in purely idiosyncratic terms as a right to anything that serves pleasure, however illusory the pleasure may be? After all, Strauss’s final judgment on Locke’s teaching seems to be that “Locke is a hedonist.”\textsuperscript{44} For the Zuckerts and like-minded commentators, it is impossible that the founders of America could have escaped or even mitigated these low origins.

Professor Steven B. Smith writes that in \textit{Natural Right and History} “Strauss accepted the view, less popular today than it once was, that Lockean ideas formed the theoretical foundation of the new American republic. It is not an exaggeration to say that Strauss’s judgment on Locke \textit{is} his judgment on America.” But what Strauss reveals—in “an irony” that could not have escaped his “attentive readers”—is that “Hobbes, not Locke, was the true founder of America.”\textsuperscript{45} In Strauss’s interpretation, Locke presents merely a “sugar-coating” for “the harsh, even unpalatable teachings of Hobbes….It was Locke’s genius to have provided a kind of placebo effect that disguised an otherwise bitter pill.”\textsuperscript{46} In this regard, the Zuckerts are in full agreement.\textsuperscript{47} It is certain, however, that the founders did not read Locke as a more palatable stand-in for Hobbes. While invariably praising Locke, what little the founders said about Hobbes was uniformly critical. Alexander Hamilton, for example, wrote in his early polemic “The Farmer Refuted” that his opponent could easily be mistaken for a disciple of Hobbes. “He held, as you do,” Hamilton wrote, “that [man in the state of nature] was perfectly free from all restraint of \textit{law} and \textit{government}. Moral obligation, according to him, is derived from the introduction of civil society; and there is no virtue, but what is purely artificial, the mere contrivance of politicians, for the maintenance of social intercourse. But the reason he run into this absurd and impious doctrine, was, that he disbelieved the existence of an intelligent

\textsuperscript{43} Michael Zuckert, \textit{Natural Rights and the New Republicanism}, 278.

\textsuperscript{44} Strauss, \textit{Natural Right and History}, 249.


\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Zuckert and Zuckert, \textit{Truth about Leo Strauss}, 251.
superintending principle, who is the governor, and will be the final judge of the universe.” What follows is an account of the obligatory character of the “laws of nature” and the rational pursuit of happiness. Although Hamilton relies principally upon quotations from Blackstone, the main outlines of his argument are plainly derived from Locke whom he opposes to Hobbes.⁴⁸

In a similar vein, Jefferson, who rarely mentioned Hobbes, wrote in a letter to Francis W. Gilmer, dated June 7, 1816, that “the principles of Hobbes” are a “humiliation to human nature; that the sense of justice and injustice is not derived from our natural organization, but founded on convention only.”⁴⁹ This passage reminds of a more famous statement that Jefferson wrote in a letter to Thomas Law on June 13, 1814: “The Creator would indeed have been a bungling artist, had he intended man for a social animal, without planting in him social dispositions.”⁵⁰ Critics will surely point out that this statement accords more with Aristotle than it does with Locke; but considering the fact that Locke insists that the obligations of the law of nature are binding in the state of nature, one could easily conclude that obligations exist by nature and therefore human being are by nature political or social. This is precisely how a reading of Locke easily leads to Aristotle and this is precisely how the founders were led to Aristotle—as the exoteric Locke undoubtedly intended.

Professor Smith suggests that there are some indications—however slight—that Strauss might not have regarded the American founding as radically modern, that the founders might have been saved from “the theoretical radicalism of Lockean principles” by “Locke’s own prudence [which] to some degree successfully disguised the nature of [his] radicalism by emphasizing his links with the past. America thus remained something of a theoretical anomaly protected by its Lockean origins from the gusts of later modernity.”⁵¹ Does this mean that the exoteric Locke might have saved the American founders from the esoteric Locke? Smith even indicates that Strauss’s citation of the Declaration of Independence at the beginning of Natural Right and History may have been an “overt teaching” suggesting “a recovery of the possibility of natural right….The book sets out a kind of

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⁵⁰ Jefferson to Thomas Law, June 13, 1814, in Jefferson: Writings, 1337.
⁵¹ Smith, Reading Leo Strauss, 172–73.
Irredentist strategy for reappropriating an earlier phase of modernity as a prophylactic against the corrosive effects of Rousseau, Marx, and Nietzsche. Indeed,” Smith proceeds, “Natural Right and History is nothing if not an invitation to American readers to take seriously their political founding and the philosophic ideas that gave rise to it. The American founding represented the first wave of modernity in the fullness of its theoretical vigor and self-confidence. It is necessary to recover some of that confidence today through the critique of historicism.”

It turns out, however, that Strauss’s “invitation” at the beginning of Natural Right and History was undermined by his “deeper teaching,” which demonstrates “that such efforts at reappropriation either are doomed to failure or result in fateful concessions to modernity regarding the role of rights, commerce, and technology.” Thus for Smith, as for the Zuckerts, the headlong slide into radical modernity seems fated by events beyond the control of any practically wise statesmen. Such analysis, however, deftly ignores Strauss’s insistence that a theoretical crisis does not necessarily lead to a practical crisis. From the Aristotelian point of view, theoretical wisdom is clearly superior to practical wisdom, but prudence or practical wisdom does not depend on theoretical wisdom. “Within its sphere,” Strauss notes, “the sphere of all human things as such, prudence is supreme. The sphere ruled by prudence is closed since the principles of prudence—the ends in the light of which prudence guides man—are known independently of theoretical science.” Strauss could not be more emphatic—for Aristotle prudence is supreme in the sphere of politics, in “the sphere of all human things as such.” This may be the reason that Aristotle made natural right a constituent part of political right. And, Aristotle argued, while natural right had everywhere the same force or power (or dynamic) it is everywhere changeable. One might say that natural right exists squarely within the realm of prudence, “the sphere of the human things” or the political things. Surely the whole thrust of Natural Right and History was to demonstrate that natural right is always a potential of the human political condition—wherever political life exists natural right is potentially available if prudent statesmen or “enlightened statesmen” are present. It is impossible to believe that Strauss could have accepted moder-

52 Ibid., 173.
53 Ibid.
55 Strauss, City and Man, 25.
We cannot reasonably expect that a fresh understanding of classical political philosophy will supply us with recipes for today’s use. For the relative success of modern political philosophy has brought into being a kind of society wholly unknown to the classics, a kind of society to which the classical principles as stated and elaborated by the classics are not immediately applicable. Only we living today can possibly find a solution to the problems of today. But an adequate understanding of the principles as elaborated by the classics may be the indispensable starting point for an adequate analysis, to be achieved by us, of present-day society in its peculiar character, and for the wise application, to be achieved by us, of these principles to our tasks.56

An analysis “to be achieved by us” and a “wise application, to be achieved by us” is a description of Aristotelian natural right—classical wisdom applied to different political circumstances, even circumstances that may not have been in the contemplation of the classics. The repetition of the phrase “to be achieved by us” is striking. Classical prudence is available “for us” and is applicable to our situation as it is more or less applicable to all political situations. Modernity has not altered this enduring legacy from classical political philosophy. And, if we are to follow Strauss on this point, in Aristotelian natural right “there is no fundamental disproportion between natural right and the requirements of political society, or there is no essential need for the dilution of natural right.”57 The American founders, of course, had to make concessions to modernity given the peculiarity of the theological-political predicament they faced. Egalitarian natural right was recognized as a possible form of natural right by the classics, but was not the preferred form. But for the American founders, equality was the only access to nature or natural right available to them. It may be true that a certain view of natural right looks upon the requirement of consent as a fatal compromise with wisdom, as establishing “a right of unwisdom, i.e., an irrational, if inevitable, right.”58 Natural right would, of course, be impossible in modernity without this fatal “dilution.” Yet from Aristotle’s point of view this “dilution” would be consistent with natural right understood as part of political right or justice. According to Strauss, Aristotle understands “justice as everyone

56 Ibid., 11.
57 Strauss, Natural Right and History, 156.
58 Ibid., 152.
knows it and as it is understood in political life.” Aristotle does not deny, of course,

the tension between the requirements of philosophy and those of the city; he knows that the simply best regime belongs to an entirely different epoch than fully developed philosophy. But he implies that the intermediate stages of that process, while not absolutely consistent, are sufficiently consistent for all practical purposes...the justice which may be available in the cities appears to be perfect justice and unquestionably good; there is no need for the dilution of natural right. Aristotle says, then, simply that natural right is a part of political right.59

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Strauss rarely mentioned the Declaration of Independence in his works; his most extensive discussion, although brief, occurs quite unexpectedly in the “Plato” chapter in The City and Man: “When the signers of the Declaration of Independence say: ‘we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor,’ they mean that they are resolved to forsake their lives and fortunes, but to maintain their honor: honor shines most clearly when everything else is sacrificed for its sake, including life, the matter of the first natural right mentioned in the Declaration of Independence. While honor or justice presupposes life and both are meant to serve life, they are nevertheless higher in rank than life.”60 Here Strauss clearly indicates that the framers of the Declaration of Independence ranked the goods of the soul higher than the goods of the body by their willingness to sacrifice the natural right to life and property to “honor or justice.”61 This means, of course, that the framers were not Hobbians! And if Smith and the Zuckerts are correct—as they surely are—in saying that Strauss’s interpretation in Natural Right and History exposes Locke to be essentially (if secretly) a Hobbian, then by parity of reasoning the Locke of Natural Right and History cannot be the Locke of the American founding. The writers of the Declaration, unlike Hobbes and Locke, were not “political hedonists.”62 From this passage in The City and

59 Ibid., 156–57; 191.

60 Strauss, City and Man, 89. Besides the opening paragraph of Natural Right and History, this is the only other direct reference I know of in the Strauss corpus; see Persecution and the Art of Writing (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 30 (lines 24–26).

61 Strauss includes in a footnote a citation to Cicero’s De finibus 3.20–22. This passage provides a discussion of the relation of honor and justice in the context of a Stoic critique of Epicureanism.

62 Strauss, Natural Right and History, 169 (Hobbes is “the creator of political hedonism”); 249 (“Locke is a hedonist”).
Man it is impossible to conclude that Strauss believed that “Hobbes…was the true founder of America.”

It seems clear that Strauss’s interpretation of Locke in *Natural Right and History* exaggerates his “radical modernity” for purely rhetorical purposes. Professor Thomas West, an intelligent interpreter of Strauss’s thought, has recently written that

Strauss’s lifelong agenda was to restore philosophy in the modern world. Since recent versions of modern philosophy had led to the reigning positivism and historicism, both of which deny the possibility of philosophy (in the sense of ascending from opinion to knowledge), Strauss seems to have decided that the philosophers most likely to appeal to modern readers were the Greek classics….Strauss therefore wanted to instill in his readers, as their first reaction to his work, a moral revulsion against modernity, so that they would be more open to the attractions of classical political philosophy.…

By exaggerating Locke’s hostility to nature, it was rhetorically easier for Strauss to situate him on the slippery slope leading from Machiavelli, who abandoned virtue as the end of politics, to Heidegger, who embraced radical historicism and Hitler. In order to give his readers an incentive to return to the classics, Strauss had to exaggerate the continuity within the history of modern philosophy in order to show, or rather to suggest, how the entire modern philosophic enterprise led to historicism and political irresponsibility.63

Once Strauss’s “Locke” is read in this light—in the light of Strauss’s overall rhetorical purposes—then it is utterly impossible to maintain that the founders read Locke with the same purpose that Strauss did. The way is now cleared for any serious reader to understand the founders as they understood themselves.

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In *Natural Right and History*, Strauss casually remarked that his interpretation of Locke on the crucial question of natural law “stands in shocking contrast to what is generally thought to be his doctrine, and especially the doctrine of the Second Treatise.”64 For Locke, the desire for happiness—the pursuit of happiness—is innate in men. And for Strauss, the pursuit of happiness is merely the desire for comfortable self-preservation, an

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64 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 220.
extension of the right to life. And while there are no innate principles of natural law, the desire for happiness in Locke is an “innate practical principle” which never ceases to operate on human desire. It has, therefore, according to Strauss, “the character of an absolute right, of a natural right. There is, then,” Strauss concludes, “an innate natural right, while there is no innate natural duty.” It is an absolute natural right because it operates by necessity, in the same way that the fear of violent death drives men by natural necessity. The pursuit of happiness is, of course, subordinate to the right to life, because the desire for self-preservation is “the first and strongest desire God planted in men.”

Strauss therefore concluded that “Locke is a hedonist.” The reason is that Locke seems to deny that it is possible to guide human life by considerations of a sumnum bonum. Strauss cites a passage from An Essay Concerning Human Understanding where Locke seems to make the dogmatic assertion that

the philosophers of old did in vain inquire, whether sumnum bonum consisted in riches, or bodily delights, or virtue or contemplation? And they might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best relish were to be found in apples, plums, or nuts; and have divided themselves into sects upon it….Though all men’s desires tend to happiness, yet they are not moved by the same object. Men may choose different things, and yet all choose right, supposing them only like a company of poor insects, whereof some are bees, delighted with flowers and their sweetness; and other beetles, delighted with other kinds of viands; which having enjoyed for a season, they should cease to be, and exist no more for ever.

In short, then, “the greatest happiness consists in the having those things which produce the greatest pleasure; and in the absence of those which cause any disturbance, any pain.” But is there no distinction between the pleasures? Is it simply a matter of taste? Remarkably, Locke qualifies the statement by saying “if there be no prospect beyond the grave, the inference is certainly right.”

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65 Ibid., 226–27.
66 Ibid., 227; 228n92; 236; 280; 297.
67 Ibid., 249.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
In a passage barely three paragraphs preceding the one just quoted, Locke notes that since “the highest perfection of intellectual nature, lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness; so the care of ourselves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our liberty.” In the very next paragraph after the one quoted at length above Locke refers to the “wrong measures of good and evil” that inform choices, and which violate “the eternal law and nature of things,” and choices that “really and truly make for...happiness.” Finally, Locke asks, “since men are always constant, and in earnest” in the pursuit of happiness, “the question still remains, how men come often to prefer the worse to the better.” The conclusion, Locke implies, is inescapable: the “necessity of preferring and pursuing true happiness as our greatest good.” So it appears here and in other places in the Essay that there is a *summum bonum* which is “true happiness.”

Some three hundred pages later Locke speaks of “rational creatures” following “the direction of nature...to search out their *summum bonum.*” Professor West concludes that “Locke’s teaching on the *summum bonum* might be acceptable to an Aristotle or a Plato, if explained in the following way: Each person has his or her own ‘palate,’ talents, and disposition, and is therefore fundamentally limited in life choices likely to be beneficial to himself [or herself]. For that reason, the philosophic life cannot be the *summum bonum*, the highest good, for everyone. Only by considering a person’s nature, the range of passions and tastes, intellectual strengths and weaknesses, can a rational path to happiness for each person be found.” This would, I say, represent something of a “lowering of the horizons” on Locke’s part which may or may not be acceptable to Plato or Aristotle, but was made necessary by the fact that Locke faced a political-theological dilemma that was unknown to the ancients. The doctrine of individual salvation, the heart of Christianity, was utterly foreign to the ancient city—as was the idea of a universal Deity. Modern philosophy’s complaint against the classics was that the standards of the best way of life they articulated were unrealistic (even utopian) and out of the reach of the bulk of mankind. Christianity made the ultimate perfection or goal of life available to every believer. The immortality that was reserved in classical philosophy to a few philosophers was available

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71 Ibid., II.xxi.56.
72 Ibid., II.xxi.51.
73 Ibid., IV.xii.11.
in the Christian world to all believers. As West correctly observes, Locke has put “perfection” within the reach of every individual according to his individual talents and abilities. But, of course, the *summum bonum* for most men will be supplied by the “law of morality Jesus Christ hath given us in the New Testament...by revelation. We have from him a full and sufficient rule for our direction, and conformable to that of reason.”75 Because “the greatest part cannot know, and therefore they must believe,” “the instruction of the people were best still to be left to the precepts and principles of the gospel.” And of course the “precepts and principles of the gospel” point to eternal felicity in the next life as the *summum bonum*. “The philosophers,” Locke notes, “indeed showed the beauty of virtue; they set her off so, as drew men’s eyes and approbation to her; but leaving her unendowed, very few were willing to espouse her.” But with the “principles of the gospel” as its endowment, virtue now is visibly the most enriching purchase, and by much the best bargain. That she is the perfection and excellency of our nature, that she is herself a reward and will recommend our names to future ages, is not all that can now be said of her. It is not strange that the learned heathens satisfied not many with such airy commendations. It has another relish and efficacy to persuade men: that if they live well here, they shall be happy hereafter....The view of heaven and hell will cast a slight upon the short pleasures and pains of this present state, and give attractions and encouragements to virtue, which reason and interest and the care of ourselves cannot but allow and prefer. Upon this foundation, and upon this only, morality stands firm and will defy all competition.76

Locke was fully aware, however, that the ultimate question of the *summum bonum* could not be so easily dismissed. The excellence of the highest human type necessarily suggests a single standard of human excellence to which all human beings should aspire. Those who fall short of the highest standard, of course, have not reached the peak of human excellence simply because they have achieved all or most of their individual potential. Locke noted in the *Essay*, Epistle to the Reader, in plain and unequivocal terms that contemplation is the highest pleasure as it engages “the most elevated faculty of the soul, so it is employed with a greater, and more constant delight, than any of the others.” This statement is hardly that of a rank hedonist—but it is not unworthy of Aristotle’s discussion of the contemplative life in the


76 Ibid., 185 (§245).
Nicomachean Ethics. Clearly there is in Locke a hierarchy of pleasures—contemplation being the highest—reserved for a very few who are capable of a “sort of hawking and hunting” after truth “wherein the very pursuit makes a great part of the pleasure.”

In his First Inaugural Speech, delivered in New York, April 30, 1789, George Washington remarked that

there is no truth more thoroughly established, than that there exists in the economy and course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness; between duty and advantage; between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy, and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity: Since we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained.

This statement delineating the natural connection between virtue and happiness is, of course, purely Aristotelian. Thus Washington (and Madison, who wrote the speech) understood the “pursuit of happiness” to mean the pursuit of virtue! And this surely encapsulates Madison’s statement in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, noted above, when he argued that “political happiness” is the end of government and should be the architectonic guide for political deliberations.

It is more than probable that the source for this notable statement in Washington’s speech was Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding: “For God,” Locke says,

having, by an inseparable connection, joined virtue and public happiness together; and made the practice thereof, necessary to the preservation of society, and visibly beneficial to all, with whom the virtuous man has to do; it is no wonder, that everyone should, not only

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77 See Nicomachean Ethics X.7.
78 Locke, Essay, Epistle to the Reader; see West, “The Ground of Locke’s Law of Nature,” 34.
80 The editors of the Madison papers note a singular set of events that transpired after Washington presented his address. “Having composed the inaugural, [Madison] drew up in turn the address of the House of Representatives in reply to the president (5 May 1789), the president’s reply to the House address (8 May), and for good measure the president’s reply to the Senate address (18 May).” The editors laconically note: “Thus in the opening series of formal exchanges between the president and Congress, JM was in dialogue with himself” (ibid., 12:120–21).
allow, but recommend, and magnify those rules to others, from whose observance of them, he is sure to reap advantage to himself.81

Madison, if not Washington, was well acquainted with Locke’s Essay and this passage would have readily sprung to mind as setting an appropriate tone for “the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the Republican model of Government, [that] are justly considered as deep[ly], perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.”82 It is easy to see how these two enlightened statesmen who were concerned with the political things as such were led by the pressure of events to an understanding of Aristotelian natural right through a reading of Locke.

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In an uncharacteristic understatement, Harry Jaffa has recently written that “nothing is more important for understanding Strauss than the place of the Declaration of Independence in the beginning of Natural Right and History.” Strauss began by remarking that it is proper for more reasons than the most obvious that I should open this series of Charles R. Walgreen Lectures by quoting a passage from the Declaration of Independence. The passage has frequently been quoted, but, by its weight and its elevation, it is made immune to the degrading effects of the excessive familiarity which breeds contempt and of misuse which breeds disgust.

Strauss continued, quoting the first sentence of the second paragraph of the Declaration:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Strauss comments:

The nation dedicated to this proposition has now become, no doubt partly as a consequence of this dedication, the most powerful and prosperous of the nations of the earth.

He then ends with two questions:

Does this nation in its maturity still cherish the faith in which it was conceived and raised? Does it still hold those “truths to be self-evident”?  

81 Locke, Essay, I.iii.6.  
Jaffa notes that when Strauss delivered the original version of the Walgreen lectures in 1949 he began with a medieval quotation about Aristotle (Solet Aristoteles quaerere pugnam). When the lectures were published in 1953 as *Natural Right and History*, the quote about Aristotle had been replaced by the above quoted passages. Jaffa modestly contends that his own early work on Lincoln had influenced Strauss to make the fateful change, substituting the Declaration for Aristotle (or a quote about Aristotle). I am inclined to believe Jaffa may have in fact influenced the change. What Jaffa points out, however, is Strauss’s startling message hiding in plain sight: immediately after quoting the Declaration, Strauss uses the language of Lincoln’s Gettysburg address without attribution, thereby adopting Lincoln’s language as his own and linking Lincoln and the Declaration. Strauss may have been suggesting, as Jaffa remarks, “that the fate of the Declaration of Independence was an authentic representation of the fate of Natural Right.”

In *Crisis of the House Divided* (1959), Jaffa had accepted Strauss’s interpretation of Locke in *Natural Right and History*, arguing that Lincoln had introduced Aristotelian elements into the regime as a corrective to its “Lockean” origins. Strauss made it clear that it was Lincoln’s Declaration that he referred to at the beginning of the Walgreen lectures—the Lincoln who had corrected Locke! Jaffa, however, has changed his mind about Lincoln’s role: the Aristotelian elements that he once believed Lincoln had used to refound the regime he now believes were already present in the founding. Jaffa’s volte-face is, I believe, due to a deeper understanding of the “theological-political predicament.” He is now less inclined to speak of the Declaration as “wholly a document of the rationalistic tradition” or of the necessity of “a synthesis of elements which in Jefferson remained antagonistic.” Indeed, Jaffa wrote in *Crisis* that the “deepest root for Jefferson’s generation” was “Lockean”; it was “preeminently a requirement of enlightened self-interest” which taught “the security of the rights of the self-regarding, egotistical individual.” Thus, Jaffa concludes, “the doctrine of universal rights in the Declaration in the Revolutionary generation can be traced to the egotistic quality of these rights in the Lockean formulation,” and that it was left for

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83 Jaffa, *Crisis of the Strauss Divided*, 13, 46, 58.


85 Ibid., 326.
Lincoln to give “a greater consistency and dignity to the position of the signers than was theirs originally.”

In *Crisis* Jaffa had engaged in some significant, and at times persuasively eloquent, rhetorical exaggerations of his own in order to magnify the importance of the role Lincoln played in elevating the regime to new and higher ground. In *New Birth of Freedom* (2000) Jaffa argues that Lincoln perpetuated the regime and preserved its founding principles through its greatest crisis. In other words, Lincoln did not understand the founders better than they understood themselves; rather he understood them precisely as they understood themselves. Those Aristotelian elements that Jaffa once thought were supplied by Lincoln were always in the founding, like the purloined letter, in plain sight but difficult to see. The phrase “safety and happiness” has always described the *telos* of government in the Declaration. Reading the Declaration as if it were another outpost in the battle between ancients and moderns or that it was a document of pure “political hedonism,” designed solely to protect the rights of “self-regarding, egotistical individuals,” made it almost impossible to see what was always there! The question that remains unresolved is whether the Lincoln of *Crisis* who understood the founders better than they understood themselves is the authentic Lincoln, or whether a new interpretation befitting Lincoln’s newly discovered role is required.

In *New Birth of Freedom* Jaffa enters a new universe. Happiness and the pursuit of happiness are no longer understood by the revolutionary generation as the idiosyncratic preferences of the self-regarding individual, but as “the objective good, and therefore the rational good, at which all the laws and institutions aim. This is assumed by Jefferson…no less than by Aristotle, as it was by American public opinion of the Revolutionary generation.” No longer is the doctrine of the Declaration understood as purely “rationalistic”; rather, Jaffa writes,

> implicit in the natural rights doctrine of the Declaration of Independence is the rule laid down in the New Testament: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” As Jesus’ admonition is addressed to all humanity, present and future, it presupposes necessarily, and as a self-evident truth, “that all men are created equal.”

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86 Ibid., 324.
88 Ibid., 49.
One last example should suffice to illustrate our point: “Jefferson’s Lockean understanding of property—above all, his understanding that personal freedom, personal property, constitutional government, and the rule of law all originate in the natural right to own one’s self—was inherited directly by Lincoln and was the rock upon which his biblical house was built.”

What Strauss would have thought of Jaffa’s volte-face cannot be known with any certainty. In the fiftieth-anniversary edition of *Crisis*, Jaffa describes *A New Birth of Freedom* as “a far more intricate and complicated work” than *Crisis*. *New Birth* is the kind of work, Jaffa proclaims, that “would have challenged Strauss in the way he best liked to be challenged.” Certainly *New Birth of Freedom* is an “intricate and complicated work,” but this hardly accounts for the thematic differences between the two works. Jaffa seems curiously reluctant, unlike Strauss, to acknowledge his “second sailing.” If Strauss was willing to accept Lincoln as the enlightened statesman who introduced Aristotelian natural right into the American regime, there is no intrinsic reason why he would have been unwilling to accept the interpretation that the founders—instead of Lincoln—were the *phronimoi* who grounded the American regime in natural right. The most extensive passage on the Declaration ever written by Strauss appears in *The City and Man* and was quoted above. That passage, I believe, is proof that Strauss did not believe that Hobbes or a Hobbian Locke was the inspiration for the Declaration. He may therefore have believed, along with Jaffa, that the Declaration itself represented an authentic expression of the principles of classical natural right.

*Natural Right and History* demonstrated that the only alternative to natural right in the modern world is positivism or historicism that eventuates in nihilism: “The contemporary rejection of natural right leads to nihilism—nay, it is identical with nihilism.” But, of course, we are bound to heed the warning that the need for natural right does not guarantee the existence of natural right! The backdrop of Strauss’s work was the crisis of the West. Jaffa’s work has centered on the crisis of America. I believe, however, that Strauss would have agreed that the crisis of America is identical with the crisis of the West and that somehow the fate of the Declaration will ultimately

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89 Ibid., 24.
81 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 5, 18.
82 Ibid., 6, 75.
determine the fate of the West. The Civil War was fought to restore the Declaration to its rightful place as the “sheet anchor” of American republicanism against its detractors who claimed it to be a “self-evident lie.” The nation succeeded—Lincoln succeeded. But Americans were soon thereafter deprived of the fruits of victory by the onrushing tide of historicism and positivism that inundated the country in the postwar years. This tide originated in continental thinkers and became known as Progressivism. Progressivism, of course, denied the relevance of the Declaration of Independence and the very idea of natural right. The decline of America—its headlong slide into relativism and nihilism—was due not to its adherence to the Lockean principles embodied in the Declaration, but to the rejection of those principles by “second wave” modernity, beginning with Rousseau.

In Rousseau, nature was replaced by an almost unlimited potential for perfectibility, a potential that was actuated by “the chance combination of several foreign causes.” In other words, nature had been replaced by history. What Hobbes and Locke could still call human nature became in Rousseau only the epiphenomenal result of humanity’s reaction to historical circumstances—to blind fate. And the most fateful development in man’s historical evolution was the establishment of private property. Without the creation of the right to property there would have been no desire to acquire beyond the need to acquire, no desire to profit at the expense of others, and no desire for the recognition and power that accrues to the unequal possession of property. “All these evils,” Rousseau says, “are the first effect of property and the inseparable consequence of nascent inequality.”

who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say this is mine and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared by someone who, uprooting the stakes or filling in the ditch, had shouted to his fellow men: Beware of listening to this impostor, you are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all and the earth to no one! But it is very likely that by then things had already come to the point where they could no longer remain as they were.


94 Ibid., 156.

95 Ibid., 142.
The idea of property, Rousseau says, could not have been conceived all at once but depended on “many prior ideas which could only have arisen successively.” A sort of property existed in the development of families, but the idea of property became inevitable only after the division of labor. And, once “property was introduced,” “equality disappeared.” Natural inequalities in the state of nature were barely noticeable and of little advantage, but once the division of labor and property were introduced “the stronger did more work; the cleverer turned his [inequality] to better advantage; the more ingenious found ways to shorten his labor….Thus does natural inequality imperceptibly manifest itself along with contrived inequality.”

Thus, having arrived at “this last stage of the state of nature,” man made a choice which was perhaps inevitable, but not fated. There was no philosopher there to uproot the stakes and warn against this fraud perpetrated against humanity. Philosophy itself did not exist at the time since philosophy is the product of civil society; it belongs to a later epoch. In this “last stage of the state of nature,” human faculties occupied “a golden mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our vanity, and must have been the happiest and most durable epoch.” This was the state that was “best for man” and was abandoned “only by some fatal accident, which for the common good ought never to have happened.” This last stage was the “veritable prime of the world; and that all subsequent progress has been in appearance so many steps toward the perfection of the individual, and in fact toward the decrepitude of the species.”

Rousseau quotes “the axiom of the wise Locke, where there is no property, there is no injury.” Whereas Locke saw the right to prop-

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96 Ibid.

97 Ibid., 154–55.

98 Ibid., 150–51.

99 Ibid., 151.

100 Ibid., 150. The quotation is from the Essay, IV. iii.18. In a note, Roger Masters points out that Rousseau substitutes “injury” where Locke had said “injustice.” In the French translation used by Rousseau, the word is *d’injustice*. (Prof. Hilail Gildin reminds me that *d’injure* can mean “contrary to right, or that which is contrary to justice.”) See also John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1996), 82 (§110). In 1792 Madison published anonymously in the *National Gazette* a devastating critique of Rousseau’s *Project for Perpetual Peace*. Rousseau is identified as one of the “visionary philosophers” whose “project...was as preposterous as it was impotent” (*Papers of James Madison*, 14:206–7; see also Madison to Thomas Jefferson, October 24, 1787, in *Papers*, 10:212). Rousseau is almost certainly among the “Theoretic politicians” criticized by Madison in *Federalist*, No. 10, 81. Jefferson may have been somewhat more sympathetic to Rousseau as evidenced by several passages in the *Notes on the State of Virginia* (a work that Jefferson never intended for publication) that clearly rely on the *Second Treatise*, but where
property as a right of nature—even the comprehensive natural right—Rousseau maintained that “the right of property is only conventional and of human institution.” Rousseau viewed property and the inevitable inequality that followed in its wake as the ultimate corruptor of the human species. The only benefit to be derived from mankind’s blind choice to accept the idea of property was the perfection of “a few great cosmopolitan souls,” of philosophers like himself who are the greatest adornments of the civilizations spawned by the right to property. This, of course, was not a small or insignificant benefit in Rousseau’s eyes. What set the human soul on its fateful journey from its almost unlimited potential for perfectibility to its “decrepitude” was not something intrinsic to the human soul, but merely the accretions that resulted from “chance combinations” of history.

For Rousseau the events of history are merely random. It was left for Hegel to find reason in history in the form of the historical dialectic. And it was Hegel and his epigones, both left and right, who came to dominate post–Civil War America. Progressivism sought, above all, to undermine the principles of the American founding. Insofar as those principles were said to be an expression of “human nature,” or derived from “the laws of nature and nature’s God,” they could only be self-willed delusions, since the idea of a permanent nature had been exposed as false by historicism and scientific evolution, both of which had their origins in Rousseau. The “self-evident truths” of one era “seem but nonsense in another” and “such for the most part is the fate which has overtaken the sublime truths enshrined in the Declaration of Independence.” This is the judgment of Carl Becker, a leading Progressive historian, in his book *The Declaration of Independence*, published in 1922. The “sublime truths” of the Declaration were inspiring in their day, but they have no application to any other era—they were merely the byproduct of the most powerful forces of the day and “could not survive the harsh realities of the modern world.” Each era has to construct “truth” for itself. Thus, “to ask whether the natural rights philosophy of the Declaration of Independence is true or false is essentially a meaningless question.” The final insight into the truth of history is that all truth is relative to the historical conditions that

Rousseau is not mentioned. No evidence of Rousseau, however, appears in any of Jefferson’s public documents and Rousseau is rarely mentioned in Jefferson’s private correspondence.

101 Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 168.

102 Ibid., 160.

produced it—except, presumably, this final historical insight, which is good for all historical eras and presumably needs no explanation as to why it is the only “truth” that remains exempt. But, of course, if it is meaningless to ask whether the principles of the Declaration are true or not, it is also meaningless to ask whether freedom is preferable to slavery or whether constitutional government is superior to tyranny. These are merely value questions and reason cannot arbitrate between conflicting values or value systems. Nature or natural right has been expelled from the universe of the Progressives and replaced by “historical consciousness”—but the very terms in which natural right has been expelled would seem to stand as testimony to the fact that the possibility of natural right itself is sempiternal. In fact, the American founding seems to have stood against the storms of modernity, sheltered by its still intelligible attachment to classical natural right.
Spinoza’s Subversive Textbook

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In the final essay of Persecution and the Art of Writing,1 Leo Strauss exemplifies his famous (or infamous) thesis of the “exoteric” character of much pre-Kantian philosophy in a close reading of Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise (TPT). He suggests there is a “reasonable presumption” that Spinoza writes exoterically not only in the TPT but also in the Ethics, since in the unfinished Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (TEI) he lays down the rule ad captum vulgi loqui (“to speak according to the understanding of the multitude”) “without any qualification” (186). In a sadly neglected paper, Strauss’s student Richard Kennington develops this suggestion.2 Kennington argues that both the geometric form of the Ethics and its order of exposition are in striking discrepancy with the methodological statements of Spinoza’s two published works, Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy (DPP) and the TPT. The Preface to DPP outlines Descartes’s distinction between the “geometric” or “synthetic” method of presentation and the “analytic” method, and does not dispute Descartes’s claim that the former is unsuited to philosophical writings. The TPT teaches that philosophy must begin, not with God and his attributes (as in the Ethics), but with an empirical investigation of what is most universal in nature. Kennington contends that the “geometric” teaching of the Ethics, which treats all things as finite modes of the divine substance,


is merely exoteric, and that the work’s esoteric teaching is a form of atheistic
naturalism grounded in sense-experience.

If Spinoza adhered unwaveringly to the rule *ad captum vulgi loqui*, as Strauss suggests, then it seems a “reasonable presumption” that *DPP* too is written exoterically. Moreover, despite its intimation that geometrical presentation is unsuited to philosophical writings, *DPP* is itself written geometrically. If Kennington is right to regard the geometric form of the *Ethics* as evidence of its exoteric character, we surely have all the more reason to regard the geometric form of *DPP* as evidence of its exoteric character.

*DPP*, the only work that Spinoza published under his own name, has received little attention from scholars. The chief reason for this is the widespread assumption that the work is no more than a geometric exposition of another philosopher’s thought, which can tell us little or nothing about Spinoza’s own thought. Some have questioned this assumption. Edwin Curley, for instance, notes that there is “a good deal of thinly veiled criticism in Spinoza’s exposition” as well as much that is “simply independent of Descartes.” Jonathan Israel goes further, arguing that Spinoza’s startling departures from Descartes in what is ostensibly a mere textbook of Cartesianism reflect “a deliberate strategy designed to subvert Descartes’s ideas, a complex procedure intended to advance Spinoza’s own philosophical priorities covertly.” Though Israel is no Straussian, one is tempted to say that he treats *DPP* as an exoteric text. However, he does not attempt a close reading of it. My purpose in this paper is to offer such a reading, taking the work of Strauss and Kennington as my point of departure.

Like Kennington, I attach much weight to what is said in Lodewejik Meyer’s Preface to *DPP*, a procedure that some might regard as unsound. Kennington comments that many have discounted the import of the Preface because it is not by Spinoza and he points out that we know from letter 15 that Spinoza asked Meyer to make detailed alterations to it. It is reasonable to assume that the published Preface contains nothing to which Spinoza would have objected. For Kennington’s purposes this defense is sufficient, since his only interest in the Preface is its discussion of philosophic method. However, on my reading the Preface emerges as a subtle and carefully

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constructed piece of exoteric writing, whose inner meaning must be grasped if the rest of DPP is to be adequately understood. This interpretation is only credible on the assumption that Spinoza not only reviewed Meyer’s text but oversaw its original composition in detail.

There is, in fact, strong evidence in favor of this assumption. In a letter to Oldenburg (letter 13), Spinoza relates the circumstances leading to the publication of DPP. He informs Oldenburg that he made it a condition of allowing his friends to publish the work that “one of them, in my presence, would provide it with a more elegant style and add a short Preface warning Readers that I did not acknowledge all the opinions contained in this treatise as my own” (207, emphasis added). He adds that one of his friends (clearly Meyer) “has promised to do all this and that is why I stayed for a while in Amsterdam.” Thus it appears that Meyer wrote the Preface at Spinoza’s request and, more importantly, in his presence—that is, one may infer, under his supervision. This appears to be confirmed in one of Spinoza’s letters to Willem von Bleijenbergh (letter 27), in which he talks openly of “those things I had [Meyer] put in the Preface” (395). Presumably he instructed Meyer regarding the essential features of the Preface and left him to fill in the details at his leisure. Having done so, Meyer sent Spinoza a finished draft for review prior to publication.

**Meyer’s Preface**

At the beginning of his Preface, Meyer states that “the best and surest Method of seeking and teaching the truth in the Sciences is that of the Mathematicians, who demonstrate their Conclusions from Definitions, Postulates, and Axioms” (224–25). Here he treats as unimportant the distinction between methods of discovery (“seeking”) and methods of presentation (“teaching”). The method of the mathematicians is the best because “a certain and firm knowledge of anything unknown can only be derived from things known certainly beforehand” and these things “must be laid down at the start, as a stable foundation on which to build the whole edifice of human knowledge.” Mathematicians proceed in precisely this way, moving deductively from things clearly understood and certainly known (definitions, axioms, and postulates) to things previously unknown.

Meyer deplores the fact that practitioners of the other sciences tend not to use the mathematical method, with the result that “none

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6 In what follows, parenthetical references are to *Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. Curley, vol. 1.
of the things they produce are demonstrated by conclusive reasonings.” By contrast, he praises Descartes, “that brightest star of our age,” for having successfully uncovered “firm foundations for Philosophy, foundations on which a great many truths can be built, with Mathematical order and certainty, as he himself really demonstrated” (226). He admits, however, that though Descartes’s philosophical writings contain a mathematical “order of demonstration,” they do not begin with definitions, postulates, and axioms from which propositions can then be validly deduced. He refers to Descartes’s comments about method in the Second Replies, where Descartes calls his method of demonstration the “analytic” method and distinguishes it from the “synthetic” method. Meyer quotes from his description of these contrasting methods. The analytic method “shows the true way by which the thing was discovered, methodically, and as it were a priori.” Meyer remarks that Descartes regarded analysis as “the true and best way of teaching.” The synthetic method “uses a long series of definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems, and problems, so that if a reader denies one of the consequences, the presentation shows him that it is contained immediately in the antecedents, and so forces his assent from him, no matter how stubborn and contrary he may be.”

It is instructive to examine the original context of these comments. They are in response to a request at the end of the Second Objections that Descartes set out the entire argument of the Meditations geometrically, “starting from a number of definitions, postulates and axioms.” Descartes begins by distinguishing between the “order” (ordo) and the “method” (ratio) of the “geometrical manner of writing.” The order consists simply in the fact that the “items which are put forward first must be known entirely without the aid of what comes later; and the remaining items must be arranged in such a way that their demonstration depends solely on what has gone before.” Descartes insists that he “did try to follow this order very carefully in my Meditations,” and one may assume that he tried to do the same thing in his other philosophical writings. Analysis and synthesis, on the other hand, are different species of geometric “demonstration.”

Meyer’s claim near the beginning of the Preface that certain knowledge of anything unknown must be derived from things “known certainly beforehand” and “laid down at the start” concerns what Descartes

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8 AT VII 155; Philosophical Writings, 2:110.
calls geometric order, not geometric demonstration, or method. Meyer’s remark that Descartes’s writings do contain a mathematical “order,” despite not being demonstrated geometrically, indicates that he recognizes the distinction. Since geometric order does not require synthetic presentation, Meyer can have no Cartesian reason for demanding that philosophers should use the geometric method. On the contrary, as he acknowledges, Descartes favored the analytic method of presentation. Significantly, Meyer does not mention Descartes’s reasons for preferring the analytic method, although, as I will discuss shortly, they are clearly set out in the Second Replies. Nor, on the other hand, does he indicate any disagreement with Descartes’s preference.

I noted earlier that Meyer does not initially distinguish between methods of discovery and methods of presentation. In the Second Replies, Descartes’s immediate concern is with methods of presentation. However, after describing analysis and synthesis, he says: “It was synthesis alone that the ancient geometers usually employed in their writings. But in my view this was not because they were utterly ignorant of analysis, but because they had such a high regard for it that they kept it to themselves like a sacred mystery.” ⁹ This passage clearly indicates that analysis, for Descartes, is both a method of presentation and a method of discovery. According to him, the ancient geometers discovered truths of geometry analytically but chose to present these truths synthetically. It would seem that synthesis, on the other hand, is primarily or solely a method of presentation, not of discovery. Following the passage just cited, Descartes states that synthesis may be “very suitable to deploy in geometry,” but only “as a follow-up to analysis.”

Meyer does not refer to these statements, but he is plainly aware of them. After citing Descartes’s characterization of analysis and synthesis, he remarks that although both analytic and synthetic demonstrations afford “a certainty which is placed beyond any risk of doubt,” still they are “not equally useful and convenient for everyone” (226). This is because “most men are completely unskilled in the Mathematical sciences, and quite ignorant, both of the Synthetic Method, in which they have been written, and of the Analytic, by which they have been discovered” (emphases added). Not only does Meyer acknowledge Descartes’s insistence on the priority of analysis over synthesis; he tacitly endorses Descartes’s view.

The fact that most people are “completely unskilled” in both analysis and synthesis lends no support to Meyer’s contention that the

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⁹ AT VII 156; Philosophical Writings, 2:111.
two methods are not equally “useful and convenient for everyone.” It rather implies that, for most people, neither method of presentation is of any use. Meyer says that, on account of their ignorance of both methods, many people “have been led, either by a blind impulse, or by the authority of someone else, to enlist as followers of Descartes” and have “only impressed his opinions and doctrines on their memory,” without comprehending the reasoning behind these doctrines (227). “To bring these people some assistance,” Meyer continues, “I have often wished that someone who was skilled both in the Analytic and the Synthetic order [ordinis], and possessed a thorough knowledge of Descartes’ writings and Philosophy, would be willing to take on this work, to render in the Synthetic order what Descartes wrote in the Analytic, and to demonstrate it in the manner familiar to the geometricians.” He has still not explained how people who are “completely unskilled” in analysis and synthesis could profit from reading a work presented in either form. Nor has he given any reason why the synthetic method of presentation should be more “useful and convenient” than the analytic. His explanation for seeking a synthetic exposition of Descartes’s philosophy is a tissue of non sequiturs.

This explanation appears stranger still when one considers Descartes’s own remarks in the Second Replies, of which Meyer must be aware, about the use of synthesis in philosophical writings. As noted above, Descartes allows that synthesis may be “very suitable to deploy in geometry.” He goes on to say, however, that synthetic presentation is not suitable in metaphysics. Whereas in geometry, the “primary notions”—axioms and postulates—are readily accepted by anyone, since they accord with the use of our senses,” in metaphysics “there is nothing which causes so much effort as making our perception of the primary notions clear and distinct.” This is because the primary notions of metaphysics “conflict with many preconceived opinions derived from the senses” and require that one concentrate hard and withdraw one’s mind from “corporeal things.” If these notions were “put forward in isolation,” i.e., offered as axioms or postulates, they could “easily be denied by those who like to contradict just for the sake of it.”

Descartes states that he would not wish to have anything to do with readers who are unwilling to join him “in meditating and giving the subject attentive consideration,” and that the style of writing he selected—the analytic—was one which he thought would be “most capable of generating

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10 Spinoza Opera, ed. C. Gebhardt, vol. 1 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925), 129.
11 AT VII 156, 157; Philosophical Writings, 2:111.
such attention.”¹² Readers who unthinkingly accept an author’s arguments because of the author’s reputation or for some other irrational motive are precisely those who would derive the least benefit from a synthetic presentation, on Descartes’s view. Meyer has given no reason to disagree with this view. Yet it is these same readers that Meyer identifies as the intended audience of a synthetic exposition of Descartes’s philosophy.

It is striking that when he describes his longstanding wish that someone would present Descartes’s philosophy synthetically, Meyer refers, not once but twice, to analytic and synthetic “order.” In doing so he confuses geometric order (beginning with what is certainly known and using it to demonstrate what follows), which in itself is neither analytic nor synthetic, with geometric method (which is either analytic or synthetic). We might be prepared to dismiss this conflation of order and method as mere clumsiness. But there is reason to think that it may be deliberate. As noted above, his statement that Descartes’s writings contain a mathematical “order” even though they are not demonstrated geometrically shows that he is aware of this distinction. Moreover, he says that he has often wished that someone would “render in the Synthetic order what Descartes wrote in the Analytic, and...demonstrate it in the manner familiar to the geometers.” Thus, in one and the same sentence he confuses geometric order and geometric method, while yet apparently affirming the distinction between “order” and “manner” (method) of demonstration.

At the beginning of his Preface Meyer praises the “method of the mathematicians” and talks at length of geometric demonstration; only later does he make it clear that the chief virtue of the mathematical method is not its use of geometric demonstration as such but its order. He indicates Descartes’s preference for the analytic method of presentation in philosophical writings and does not dispute this preference. He expresses his wish for a synthetic presentation of Descartes’s philosophy so as to assist precisely those people for whom, in Descartes’s view, a synthetic presentation could be of no use. He gives an argument for the usefulness of such a presentation that is patently fallacious. He conflates geometric order and geometric method, despite his clear awareness of the distinction. Taken together, these facts prompt the suspicion that his explanation for seeking a synthetic presentation of Descartes’s philosophy is not meant seriously.

¹² AT VII 157, 158; Philosophical Writings, 2:112.
Having provided this explanation, he states that he was “very pleased” to learn that Spinoza had dictated to a pupil a synthetic exposition of the whole of part II and some of part III of Descartes’s *Principles*, “along with some of the principal and more difficult questions which are disputed in Metaphysics, and had not yet been resolved by Descartes” (227). Meyer claims that, “in response to the entreaties and demands of his friends,” Spinoza agreed to allow this synthetic exposition to be published and, at Meyer’s request, rendered the first part of the *Principles* synthetically as well, for the sake of completeness. Meyer says nothing about Spinoza’s own reasons for teaching his pupil a synthetic presentation of the *Principles* and he gives the impression that it was only under pressure that Spinoza agreed to let this presentation be published.

Spinoza himself gives no reason for the use of the synthetic method in the course of his exposition. However, the Prolegomenon to part I contains subtle hints to the reader that the reason has nothing to do with the superiority of synthetic to analytic presentation. The Prolegomenon gives a succinct summary of Descartes’s arguments regarding hyperbolic doubt, the *cogito*, and clear and distinct ideas. Significantly, it is written analytically, not synthetically. In the opening paragraph Spinoza explains: “We would have reduced even all these things to Mathematical order, if we had not judged that the prolixity required by such a presentation would prevent them from being understood as they ought to be. For they should all be seen in a single act of contemplation, as in a picture” (231). Here Spinoza speaks of “Mathematical order” when he clearly means “synthetic presentation.” It is difficult to believe that this can be accidental. In Meyer’s Preface it is explicitly stated that Descartes’s writings already contain a “mathematical order,” implying that there is no need for Spinoza or anyone else to “reduce” the things treated in them to “mathematical order.” We might suppose that Spinoza and Meyer disagreed about the sense of the expression “mathematical order.” But if so, why did Spinoza, on reviewing the Preface, not demand that Meyer remove or modify this statement so as to avoid inconsistency in the published work? In any case, the apparent confusion of geometric (mathematical) “order” with geometric (synthetic) “method” is also present in the Preface, as noted above.

The request to Descartes in the *Second Objections* that he compose a geometrical presentation of the argument of the *Meditations* is justified as follows: “it would enable you to fill the mind of each reader so that he could see everything as it were at a single glance.” Descartes quotes
the words “as it were at a single glance” in his response, without comment.13 Spinoza’s phrase “in a single act of contemplation” is strikingly similar. But whereas the author of the *Objections* believes that it is synthetic presentation which makes such comprehension possible, Spinoza argues that, in fact, synthetic presentation makes it difficult or impossible. By implication, it is analytic presentation that truly allows things to be seen “as it were at a single glance.” Spinoza thus attacks the assumption underlying the request made to Descartes for a synthetic exposition of his arguments. It is worth noting too that his remark about the “prolixity” that a synthetic presentation of the material covered in the Prolegomenon would require reflects Descartes’s own view. Shortly before his brief synthetic exposition of the arguments proving the existence of God and the distinction between soul and body, Descartes cautions his readers: “I do not intend to include as much material as I put in the *Meditations*, for if I did so I should have to go on much longer than I did there.”14

Both Meyer and Spinoza implicitly accept Descartes’s insistence on the priority of analysis and the superiority of analytic to synthetic presentation. Meyer offers an obviously spurious defense for the synthetic presentation of *DPP* in his Preface and Spinoza provides none at all in the body of the work. We may conclude that the true reason for the mode of presentation is purposefully left unstated.

Meyer notes that Spinoza has “carried over, word for word, almost all the things which Descartes put in Geometrical order” in the *Second Replies* (228). He remarks that Spinoza “quite frequently departs from Descartes,” not only in the ordering and explication of the axioms but even in some of the proofs of the propositions, though Meyer assures the reader that this is not because Spinoza “wished to correct that most distinguished Man” (228–29). Rather, it suited “the order he had already taken up.” For the same reason Spinoza has also “been forced to demonstrate quite a number of things which Descartes asserted without any demonstration, *and to add others which he completely omitted*” (emphasis added). Meyer does not say just what has “forced” Spinoza to add things to his exposition that Descartes “completely omitted.” It is at least questionable whether he can plausibly claim that Spinoza’s different ordering and supposedly more thorough demonstration of Descartes’s doctrines do not involve a “correction” of Descartes,

13 AT VII 128, 155; *Philosophical Writings*, 2:92, 110.

14 AT VII 159; *Philosophical Writings*, 2:113.
particularly since he is said to have gone to the trouble of adding completely new doctrines.

Meyer goes on to say that, both in the exposition proper and also in the Metaphysical Thoughts, Spinoza “has only set out the opinions of Descartes and their demonstrations, insofar as these are found in his writings, or are such as ought to be deduced validly from the foundations he laid” (emphasis added). If the things added by Spinoza follow from Descartes’s premises, this might seem to justify the claim that Spinoza did not wish to correct Descartes by including them, though it still does not explain the necessity for their inclusion. Meyer claims that Spinoza “considered himself obliged not to depart a hair’s breadth from Descartes’ opinion” and accordingly warns readers not to imagine that Spinoza “is teaching here either his own opinions, or only those which he approves of” (229). Yet in the very next sentence he states: “Though [Spinoza] judges that some of the doctrines are true, and admits that he has added some of his own, nevertheless there are many that he rejects as false” (emphasis added). It is not credible that Meyer (or Spinoza) could have been unaware of the blatant contradiction between these two sentences, whose juxtaposition makes it all the more obvious.15

Meyer then gives an example of a doctrine with which Spinoza disagrees, commenting in passing that it is “only one of many” such examples. It is Descartes’s teaching about the will, treated both in part I of the exposition proper and in the Metaphysical Thoughts. Unlike Descartes, Spinoza does not believe that the will is distinct from the intellect; nor does he accept that it is free (229–30). Meyer adds that Spinoza is also speaking “only on behalf of Descartes” whenever he says “that this or that surpasses the human understanding,” since Spinoza actually believes that such things “can not only be conceived clearly and distinctly, but also explained very satisfactorily” (230).

Although Spinoza does not accept Descartes’s doctrine about the will, nonetheless it “seems to be proved with sufficient diligence and preparation” (229). This brings into stark relief the chief defect of the synthetic manner of demonstration, which is that valid demonstrations can yield false or questionable conclusions if their premises (the axioms and postulates) are false or questionable. As Descartes himself makes clear, the superiority of

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15 Israel remarks that it would be “exceedingly strange” for Spinoza to write “firmly against his own convictions” simply out of loyalty to Descartes (“Spinoza as an Expounder,” 43). However, he seems not to recognize that Meyer’s statements are not merely “strange,” but flatly inconsistent. Meyer both denies and affirms that Spinoza in some places teaches “his own opinions.”
analysis to synthesis lies precisely in the fact that analysis critically examines and seeks to justify the “primary notions” that synthesis can only take for granted as premises for demonstration. Of course, analysis is not an infallible method of discovery or of demonstration. Spinoza evidently believes that at least some of the results of Descartes’s own analytic investigations are erroneous. In fact, according to the penultimate paragraph of Meyer’s Preface he believes that the fundamentals of Descartes’s philosophy are unsound. In his view the human intellect must be guided along “a different path from that which Descartes opened up and made smooth,” because the “foundations of the sciences brought to light by Descartes, and the things he built on them, do not suffice to disentangle and solve all the very difficult problems that occur in Metaphysics” (230).

Meyer has previously claimed that Descartes “uncovered firm foundations for Philosophy...on which a great many truths can be built”; now he states that, according to Spinoza, these foundations and the things built on them are inadequate. He voices no disagreement with Spinoza, and he adds: “Different foundations are required, if we wish our intellect to rise to that pinnacle of knowledge.” This pregnant but tantalizing statement naturally prompts the reader to wonder what these “different foundations” might be and why Meyer neither elaborates on the point nor promises any elaboration from Spinoza. His silence is particularly striking in view of what he says in the final paragraph of the Preface: “we wish our Readers to know that all the things treated here are published with no purpose except that of searching out and propagating the truth, and rousing men to strive for a true and genuine Philosophy.”

As long as one is still “searching out” truth, one is not yet in a position to teach it to others or to “propagate” it. The first part of the description of the book’s purpose suggests that Spinoza wishes to take the reader on a journey of discovery, which will finally lead him to perceive the truth. In this way the truth will be “propagated.” But the second part of the description plainly implies that the book will not leave the reader in possession of truth, or at least, not of the whole truth; rather, it will “rouse” him to “strive for a true and genuine Philosophy.” Moreover, synthesis is not a method of discovery. A synthetic presentation of results presupposes that the work of discovery (analysis) has already been undertaken. It thus seems impossible that DPP, written synthetically, could present a process of “searching out” truth.

Meyer has already made it clear that Spinoza does not regard as true all of the things he demonstrates synthetically. If his purpose is not so
much to seek out or propagate truth as to rouse people to seek it out for themselves, this raises a further question. Just how can a synthetic demonstration of a mixture of true and false results prompt a reader to seek the truth for himself when, on the face of it, he can only guess at which doctrines are supposed to be false and which true? Apart from warning that Spinoza does not agree with Descartes that certain things surpass the human understanding, Meyer has mentioned only one doctrine that Spinoza regards as false and has stressed that it is “one of many.” Even if the reader were aware of which other doctrines are supposed to be false, it is unclear how this could be of much pedagogic value in the absence of reasoned explanations by Spinoza for his belief in their falsity.

Meyer’s statement of the book’s purpose makes little sense except on the supposition that Spinoza engages in covert, critical analysis of the doctrines he purports to demonstrate synthetically. This supposition is highly plausible, since it also makes possible a satisfactory explanation of the other anomalies in the Preface. In light of all that has been said, we have cause to suspect that Spinoza and Meyer do not wish to be completely open about their true purposes in publishing DPP, although it is not yet clear why this might be. They agree with Descartes that analysis is a better method for presenting philosophical doctrines than synthesis, yet the work is written synthetically and Meyer’s explanation for the fact is plainly inadequate. Meyer begins by saying that Descartes established firm foundations for philosophy, yet he ends by saying that new foundations are needed. He admits that Spinoza regards many of Descartes’s doctrines as false, despite the fact he has apparently proved them with “sufficient diligence and preparation,” yet this flies in the face of the earlier claim that synthesis, like analysis, demonstrates things with a “certainty which is placed beyond any risk of doubt.” He asserts that Spinoza did not wish to depart “a hair’s breadth” from Descartes’s opinions, notwithstanding his disagreement with many of them, but in the very same paragraph he states that Spinoza has added doctrines of his own. All of these contradictions become comprehensible on the assumption that DPP contains a concealed analytic critique of Descartes beneath its synthetic exterior.16

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16 Strauss and Kennington both argue that Descartes himself wrote exoterically. Strauss even suggests that Descartes’s exoteric writing may have been a model for Spinoza’s own manner of writing (“How to Study,” 182; cf. Kennington, “Analytic and Synthetic Methods,” 215–16). If correct, this suggestion raises many questions, which I cannot discuss here. I will say only this: Spinoza apparently takes Descartes at his word in DPP. This does not necessarily mean that he personally believed that Descartes meant everything he said. It would perhaps be fair to say that the target of his critique is not Descartes’s private opinions, whatever these might have been, but “Cartesianism”—the surface
The concluding sentences of the Preface seem to hint that this is indeed the case. Meyer warns readers that if they are to profit from reading the book, they must “insert in their place certain things which have been omitted, and...correct accurately the Typographical errors which have crept in” (emphasis added). The words I have italicized would be superfluous if Meyer were only concerned with “typographical errors.” The Preface’s last sentence also seems suspicious: “For some of [the typographical errors] could be an obstacle to a correct perception of the Author’s intention, and the force of the Demonstration, as anyone who inspects them will easily see.” It seems unlikely, though not impossible, that mere typographical errors could lead to serious misunderstanding of an author’s meaning. But one would expect Meyer to take the trouble to say what these errors are if they really are significant enough to be potentially misleading. If “typographical error” is code for “deliberate mistake,” and Meyer’s real meaning when he warns readers to “correct” typographical errors is that they should read between the lines when they encounter such “mistakes,” this would explain his silence regarding the details of these “typographical errors.” It would also account for his enigmatic request that readers “insert in their place certain things which have been omitted.”

There is extratextual evidence from Spinoza’s correspondence that DPP is written exoterically. Meyer alludes briefly to the fact that Spinoza originally composed both the geometric exposition of the second part of the Principles and the Metaphysical Thoughts for a pupil. In the letter to Oldenburg cited above Spinoza confirms this, saying that he dictated the works to a certain young man “to whom I did not want to teach my own opinions openly” (207). Note that he does not say that he wants to refrain altogether from teaching his opinions to the unnamed young man (probably Casearius); he merely wishes not to teach him them openly. He would have no reason to mention this fact unless his desire to teach the pupil his opinions in veiled form were relevant to his decision to dictate to him the two works. It is not unreasonable to infer that the geometric exposition of part II (and the incomplete exposition of part III) of the Principles and the Metaphysical Thoughts contain a disguised Spinozist critique of Cartesian doctrines. There is no indication that the published version of these works differs significantly from what Spinoza dictated to his pupil. Since he obviously intended the geometric exposition of part I of the Principles to complement what he had doctrines of Descartes’s published writings, which the “followers of Descartes” referred to in Meyer’s Preface accept. The extent to which this critique is also relevant to Descartes’s private views needs investigation, but this is beyond the scope of the present paper.
previously composed for his pupil, it is highly likely that the former represents an extension of the concealed critique of Descartes woven into the latter. The whole work, then, would constitute an exercise in exoteric pedagogy. If this argumentation is correct, it follows that Spinoza believed he had reason to be just as cautious when addressing the public as when teaching his pupil.

Spinoza's motivation for writing exoterically cannot be gauged until one has uncovered the esoteric teaching of DPP. Let us turn then to the text itself.

Radical Doubt, the Cogito, and the Foundations of the Sciences

In the Prolegomenon to part I Spinoza undertakes to explain how Descartes “called all things into doubt, discovered the true principles of the Sciences, and extricated himself from the difficulties of his doubts” (232). He gives a fairly accurate summary of Descartes’s grounds for doubting everything except his own existence and for concluding that “I think, therefore I am” is both the foundation for all the sciences and the measure of all other truths. It is important to note that he follows the Principles rather than the Meditations in citing as the most significant reason for doubt the hypothesis that God (not an evil demon) may be a deceiver. Having thus completed the first two components of his undertaking, he begins his account of how Descartes “extricated himself from the difficulties of his doubts”: “Finally, in order to become certain of the things he had called in doubt and to remove all doubt, Descartes proceeded to inquire into the nature of the most perfect Being, and whether such a Being existed. For when he discovers that there is a most perfect being...with whose nature being a deceiver is incompatible, then that reason for doubting which he had because he was ignorant of his cause will be removed” (235).

One would expect Spinoza to explain next how Descartes investigated the nature of the most perfect being and discovered that this being exists, but he does not. He does not even state that Descartes did discover that the most perfect being exists. He continues: “Hence neither Mathematical truths nor any of those that seem most evident to him can be at all suspected.” Then he discusses Descartes’s theory of error. He thus gives the impression that he has already described Descartes’s investigation into the nature of the most perfect being and his proof of this being’s existence, despite the fact that he has not said a word about either.
After offering his purportedly complete account of how Descartes “extricated himself from the difficulties of his doubts,” Spinoza concludes the Prolegomenon by discussing an objection to Descartes’s epistemological project that appears in the Second Objections. According to Descartes, God’s existence is not self-evident and nothing can be known for certain until one discovers that he exists and is not a deceiver. But since the proof of his existence therefore rests on uncertain premises, this proof must fail and all hope of achieving certainty about anything must vanish. Spinoza presents Descartes’s response to this objection, in which he rejects the doctrine imputed to him in the Second Objections that nothing can be known for certain prior to discovering that there exists a God who does not deceive. Descartes insists that as long as we attend to what we perceive clearly and distinctly we can be certain of its truth, even if we do not yet know whether God exists and, if he does, whether he is a deceiver. Thus, by attending to the clear and distinct premises from which the existence of a nondeceiving God is to be demonstrated, we may conclude with certainty that such a God exists.17

Spinoza remarks that “this answer does not satisfy some people.” Undoubtedly, Descartes seems guilty of a serious inconsistency. He certainly does say in some places that when one is ignorant as to whether God exists and is a deceiver, the possibility that a deceiving God does exist must render everything uncertain, even what is perceived clearly and distinctly. Spinoza offers an alternative response to the objection, which suggests that he too is not satisfied with Descartes’s response. Since we must infer that we exist even if we suppose that an all-powerful deceiving God exists, it follows that “I am thinking, I exist” cannot be doubted. However, everything else can be doubted, including mathematical demonstrations, as long as we lack a “clear and distinct concept of God that makes us affirm that he is supremely veracious, just as the idea we have of a Triangle compels us to infer that its three angles are equal to two right angles” (237). This “clear and distinct” concept of God is a “true idea” of God. Once we have “discovered” it, we will be unable to doubt anything that we perceive clearly and distinctly, “even though we still doubt whether the author of our nature deceives us in all things” (238). Spinoza concludes: “We can be certain of nothing—not, indeed, so long as we are ignorant of God’s existence (for I have not spoken of this)—but as long as we do not have a clear and distinct idea of him” (emphasis added). However, two paragraphs later he claims that “provided we have such an idea (as I have

17 Collected Works, 1:236. Cf. AT VII 140; Philosophical Writings, 2:100.
just shown abundantly), we will be able to doubt neither his existence, nor any Mathematical truth” (emphases added).

Even if one ignores Spinoza’s inconsistency regarding the relation between having an idea of God and knowing that he exists, his response to the objection made against Descartes is very problematic. He claims that if we attend to the true idea of God, it will “compel us to affirm that he is supremely veracious, and the author and continual conserver of our nature” (237, emphasis added). But his whole point is supposed to be that we can form a “true idea” of God, even though we still “doubt whether the author of our nature deceives us in all things.” Since the true idea of God also “compels” us to affirm that he is the “author of our nature” it is plainly absurd to say that we could simultaneously affirm that he is “supremely veracious” while still doubting whether he “deceives us in all things.” Furthermore, even if mere attention to the true idea of God did indeed suffice to remove all doubt, two pressing questions would remain unanswered. First, how do we know that this is a true idea of God? Second, how do we acquire it? Spinoza does not answer either question. He does not even attempt to justify the claim that a “true” idea of God must affirm that he is supremely veracious and the author of our nature. Nor does he explain how a person can “discover” this idea; he merely states that this idea will suffice to remove all doubt “however we have acquired it” (238).

There is reason to think that the incoherencies and weaknesses of Spinoza’s response are not accidental. We should recall that when he explains how Descartes freed himself from doubt he alludes to Descartes’s investigation into the nature and existence of the most perfect being but, surprisingly, provides no account of it. But he also gives the impression that he has provided an account of it. Now, in responding to the argument from the Second Objections, he omits any account of how we are to acquire a true idea of God, and he claims to have “shown abundantly” that having such an idea will compel us to affirm that God exists, while simultaneously emphasizing that he has “not spoken” of God’s existence. Are these striking similarities accidental? And is it likely that Spinoza could have been so consistently thoughtless when dealing with a matter of such importance? It is more plausible to suppose that his apparent blunders are deliberate and are intended to indicate his belief that Descartes’s investigation into the nature and existence of the most perfect being was inadequate on both counts.

Spinoza’s response to the objection made against Descartes is severely flawed, and it is reasonable to think that he himself recognized
this. Since he apparently regards Descartes’s own response as unsatisfactory but offers nothing better, we may infer that he regards the objection as sound. In other words, he agrees with the authors of the Second Objections that Descartes is unable to “extricate himself from the difficulties of his doubts.” By countenancing the possibility that he is constantly deceived by an all-powerful God, Descartes renders doubtful even those things that he perceives most clearly and distinctly and, consequently, is unable to make any genuine progress in the search for knowledge. This alone would explain why Spinoza believes that the foundations for the sciences laid down by Descartes are inadequate. However, it seems clear from all that has been said that he has other major criticisms of Descartes’s epistemology, chiefly relating to his proofs for the existence of God. It is therefore appropriate to consider now his presentation of these proofs.

Descartes’s Proofs for the Existence of God

Spinoza uses Descartes’s own geometric presentation of his three proofs for God’s existence from the Second Replies. The first (IP5) is the ontological argument, according to which God must exist because necessary existence is contained in his very concept. By ID8, God is the “substance which we understand to be through itself supremely perfect, and in which we conceive nothing which involves any defect or limitation of perfection” (240). This definition of God follows Descartes’s wording, except that Spinoza has added “through itself.” It must be noted that he says nothing about how Descartes arrived at this definition, just as he fails to explain in the Prolegomenon how one may discover the “true idea” of God. The Cartesian definition is laid down without defense or explanation.

In his presentation of the ontological proof, Spinoza omits a brief remark that Descartes appends to his demonstration and adds a scholium of his own, but his wording of the proposition and its demonstration is virtually identical to Descartes’s. The key to the demonstration is Descartes’s AX, which, in Spinoza’s presentation, is A6. Descartes’s wording of this axiom is: “Existence is contained in the idea or concept of every single thing. …Possible or contingent existence is contained in the concept of a limited thing, whereas necessary and perfect existence is contained in the concept of a supremely perfect being.” Spinoza’s wording is somewhat different,

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18 Spinoza offers this same argument as a solution to the problem of God’s possibly being a deceiver in the TEI, but again does not explain how we can acquire an idea of God (Collected Works, 1:35).
19 AT VII 166; Philosophical Writings, 2:117.
though he is basically faithful to Descartes's meaning. There are two changes worthy of note. Where Descartes writes “necessary and perfect existence,” Spinoza simply writes “necessary existence” (243). Then, after saying that necessary existence is contained in the concept of a supremely perfect being, he explains in parentheses: “for otherwise he would be conceived as imperfect, contrary to what is supposed to be conceived.” By omitting Descartes’s undefended coupling of “necessary” and “perfect” and by offering a manifestly question-begging defense of the assumption that perfection implies necessary existence—which is, of course, a crucial premise of Descartes’s version of the ontological argument—Spinoza draws attention to the questionable nature of this assumption.

If the connection between supreme perfection and necessary existence were axiomatic, there would be no need to demonstrate it. But Spinoza does offer a demonstration of it, in L1 after IP7. The fact that he does so is confirmation that, despite A6, he does not regard the connection as axiomatic. Moreover, the demonstration of this lemma is seriously flawed.

L1 states that the more perfect a thing is by its own nature “the greater and more necessary is the existence it involves” and, conversely, the more necessary a thing’s existence is by nature, the more perfect it is (251). The demonstration cites A6 to prove that existence is contained in the concept of everything and then continues: “Let A be a thing that has ten degrees of perfection. I say that its concept involves more existence than it would if it were supposed to contain only five degrees of perfection. For since we can affirm no existence of nothing (see P45), then the more we take away its perfection in thought, and so the more we conceive it as participating in nothing, the more possibility of existence we also deny it” (emphases added). The link between degrees of existence and degrees of perfection is here simply asserted (“I say that…”), not defended. The unexplained shift from “more existence” to “more possibility of existence” is striking, since the lemma speaks of “greater and more necessary existence,” thereby affirming the distinction between degrees of existence and degrees of modality of existence. Furthermore, Spinoza here apparently loses sight of the distinction drawn in A6 between possibility and necessity. The lemma speaks of degrees of necessity but the demonstration here speaks of degrees of possibility, and it seems clear that the two are not the same. Spinoza states: “Hence, if we should conceive [a thing’s] degrees of perfection to be diminished infinitely to zero, it will contain no existence, or absolutely impossible existence.” This statement presupposes the previous conflation of “existence” and “possibility of existence,” and if one
were to substitute “necessity” for “possibility,” it would appear much more dubious. While it makes some sense to suppose that a thing with no degree of possibility is on that account impossible, it is at least questionable whether a thing with no degree of necessity is therefore impossible. The statement also seems patently inconsistent with A6, which asserts that possible or necessary existence is contained in the concept of everything.

Spinoza concludes: “On the other hand, if we increase its degree [of perfection] infinitely, we shall conceive it as involving existence in the highest degree, and therefore as involving supremely necessary existence.” Here he does distinguish between existence and its modality, but in doing so he only underscores his failure to prove—or even to assert explicitly—that a greater degree of existence involves a greater degree of necessity. Here too he speaks, as he should, of “necessary” existence but, again, the fact that the argument leading to this conclusion refers to degrees of possibility of existence seriously compromises this part of the conclusion. Just as a zero degree of necessity is not obviously the same as impossibility, so too, an infinite degree of possibility does not obviously amount to necessity.

Having supposedly proved the first part of LI, Spinoza states: “And the second thing proposed for demonstration follows clearly from the fact that these two things [necessary existence and perfection] cannot be separated in any way (as is sufficiently established by A6, and by this whole first part)” (emphasis added). The words I have italicized indicate that it follows from A6 alone that (supreme) perfection implies (absolutely) necessary existence and vice versa, and the second part of the axiom certainly does seem to imply this. The comment in parentheses also indicates that both the first and the second parts of the claim made in LI are implicit in A6. Spinoza thus underlines the fact that LI should be superfluous and that its demonstration seeks to prove something that is putatively axiomatic.

Spinoza undercuts Descartes’s ontological proof for God’s existence by covertly indicating to the reader his belief that the key assumption on which this proof depends is not axiomatic but itself stands in need of proof. Since the proof he offers for the assumption is shot through with undefended assertions, logical fallacies, and outright contradictions, we may conclude that it is not intended to be convincing and that Spinoza in fact regards the assumption as indefensible. Consequently, in his view, the ontological proof for God’s existence must fail.20

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20 Why does he undercut the ontological proof in precisely this way? Why does he take the trouble to
Descartes's second proof argues from the mere fact of our having an idea of God to his existence. As with the ontological proof, Spinoza's presentation (IP6) follows Descartes's own almost word for word. The “objective reality” of an idea requires a cause in which the same reality is contained, formally or eminently. But we have an idea of God, that is, of a “substance which we understand to be through itself supremely perfect.” The objective reality of this idea is not contained in us, because an infinite substance has more reality than a finite one; nor can it be contained in any other thing except God (given the definition of God). God is therefore the cause of this idea, and he exists.21

Spinoza notes, correctly, that there is a suppressed premise in this proof. Descartes appeals to AVI (Spinoza’s A4) to prove that the objective reality of the idea of God is not in us. This axiom states that there are different degrees of reality, that a substance has more reality than a mode and that an infinite substance has more than a finite one. Spinoza supplies the link between this axiom and the premise it is supposed to prove: “[Descartes] supposes that everyone knows that he is not an infinite substance—i.e., supremely intelligent, powerful etc.” He adds that Descartes is entitled to suppose this because “he who knows that he thinks, knows also that he has doubts about many things and does not understand everything clearly and distinctly” (247).

The chief weakness of this proof lies in its second premise, the claim that we do have an idea of God. If the proof is to work, it must be true that we have (or can form) a clear and distinct conception that corresponds to Descartes's definition of God. One could argue, as Hobbes does in the Third Objections,22 that this definition corresponds to no clear and distinct conception. It is therefore not surprising that immediately after presenting Descartes's proof, Spinoza considers people who “deny that they have any idea of God” (IP6S). He asks rhetorically how one could make any idea present an elaborate pseudodemonstration of its key assumption? I suspect the answer has to do with what is perhaps the strangest feature of this pseudodemonstration: its treatment of possibility and necessity as matters of degree. Offhand, one would think that a thing is simply possible (hence either existent or nonexistent), simply impossible (hence nonexistent), or simply necessary (hence existent). Certainly this seems to be Descartes's assumption. On the other hand, perfection, which the ontological proof associates with necessity, does seem to be a matter of degree. As we shall see below, this fact is of fundamental importance for Spinoza's critique of the Cartesian proofs for God's existence. It may well be the key to understanding why he speaks in the (pseudo)demonstration of L1 of “degrees” of possibility and necessity. But I am not presently in a position to say more than this.

21 Collected Works, 1:247. Cf. AT VII 167; Philosophical Writings, 2:118.
22 AT VII 179–80; Philosophical Writings, 2:126–27.
known except by “propounding its definition and explaining its attributes,” and he comments that since he has done this in the case of God, he has no reason to take seriously people who deny that they have any idea of God “merely because they can form no image of him in their brain.”

The dismissive, even contemptuous tone of this passage serves to distract attention from the fact that Spinoza has not fulfilled the requirements that, he implies, are necessary and sufficient for making an idea known. He has provided a definition of God, but he has not explained God’s attributes. To be sure, in the Prolegomenon he has asserted that once we have discovered the idea of God, this idea will compel us to affirm that God is supremely veracious and the author and continual conserver of our nature. But, as previously discussed, he has offered no argument in support of this assertion and he has not explained how we are supposed to “discover” this idea of God. Moreover, God’s supreme veracity and his creative power are not his only attributes. Prior to IP6S, the sole explicit reference to God’s “attributes” is in the scholium appended to the presentation of the ontological argument. There Spinoza states that “almost all that knowledge of God’s attributes through which we are led to the love of him…depends on this alone: that existence pertains to the nature of God” (246). This implies that knowledge of God’s attributes is posterior to knowledge of his (necessary) existence. But the whole point of IP6S is that knowledge of God’s attributes is a condition of our having the idea of God and that God’s existence may be inferred from the fact that we have this idea. In other words, IP6S makes knowledge of God’s attributes prior to knowledge of his existence.

Descartes claims, of course, that God’s necessary existence is one of his attributes and follows directly from his definition, but we already have evidence that Spinoza rejects this claim. Moreover, he does not explain how knowledge of God’s other attributes would follow from knowledge of his necessary existence, even if one were to accept Descartes’s claim. He demonstrates God’s other attributes—his perfect understanding (IP9), his uniqueness (IP11), his absolute creative power (IP7L2C and IP12), his supreme veracity (IP13), and so on—after his presentation of Descartes’s three proofs for God’s existence. Only four of these demonstrations—of God’s uniqueness, creative power, immutability (IP18), and eternity (IP19)—have as a premise his necessary existence, and none is demonstrated on this basis alone.

Spinoza clearly implies that Descartes’s second proof of God’s existence presupposes an explanation of his attributes. It follows that this proof, too, must fail, unless it is possible to explain God’s attributes
prior to demonstrating his existence. Since Spinoza explains God’s attributes only after (ostensibly) demonstrating his existence, we may conclude that he regards this proof as, at best, inconclusive. The final sentence of IP6S contains a hint that this is the conclusion he wishes the reader to draw. He states: “we must note that it also follows clearly from D8 that there cannot be more than one God, as we clearly demonstrate in P11 and in our Appendix, II, ii.” There is no particular reason for him to speak here about God’s uniqueness and since he refers the reader to later passages where he treats this subject thoroughly, this statement would appear to be unnecessary. However, the very fact of its seeming inappropriateness serves to prompt the reader to look more closely. Given the context, what is noteworthy about this statement is its claim that one of God’s attributes (his uniqueness) can be deduced from his definition alone. Clearly, from Spinoza’s point of view, Descartes’s second proof of God’s existence might work if it were possible to deduce God’s attributes directly from his definition. The claim that at least one of his attributes can be so deduced therefore seems to offer a ray of hope for would-be defenders of this proof. But if we examine the passages in which Spinoza claims to carry out this deduction, it is obvious that, in fact, he does nothing of the sort. IP11 and Metaphysical Thoughts II, chapter II do indeed offer demonstrations of God’s uniqueness. However, contrary to what is said in IP6S, IP11 does not refer to D8 at all and the passage from the Metaphysical Thoughts relies not only on D8 but also on the previous demonstration (IP9) of God’s supreme understanding, which in turn relies on IP7 (the third proof of God’s existence) and its corollary (254–55; 318–19).

Descartes’s third proof infers God’s existence from the fact that “we ourselves who have an idea of him exist.” Spinoza openly criticizes Descartes’s demonstration of this proposition. The demonstration begins by stating that if we had the power of preserving ourselves, we would also have the power of giving ourselves the perfections which we lack, since these are attributes of a substance, while we are substances. Descartes here appeals to two axioms (Axioms VIII and IX) which Spinoza does not include in his list

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23 Descartes implies that God’s uniqueness is one of his “attributes” in the fifth Meditation (AT VII 68; Philosophical Writings, 2:47). That Spinoza too considers it an “attribute” of God seems clear from the fact that in part II, chapter II of the Metaphysical Thoughts he apparently collapses the notions of “uniqueness” and “unity” and later explicitly calls God’s “unity” an “attribute” (Collected Works, 1:318–19; 340). However, the passage added to this chapter from the Balling Dutch translation states that the proof of God’s uniqueness “does not explain God’s Unity” (319). Nonetheless, this chapter, like the others in part II, is devoted to demonstrating one of God’s “attributes” (315), and since it discusses God’s uniqueness only, it still seems reasonable to infer that Spinoza considers uniqueness an “attribute.”
of axioms. AVIII states: “Whatever can bring about a greater or more difficult thing can also bring about a lesser thing,” and AIX states: “It is a greater thing to create or preserve a substance than to create or preserve the attributes or properties of that substance.”

Spinoza objects to the first axiom that its meaning is unclear. Nothing, he argues, “is said to be easy or difficult absolutely, but only in relation to a cause” (248). He illustrates this with the example of a spider’s web, which the spider weaves easily but human beings could weave “only with the greatest difficulty.” He admits that the labor required to bring about certain effects can be quantified, as “a force which can lift 50 pounds will be able to lift 25 pounds twice as easily,” but he comments that if Descartes had cases of this sort in mind, the axiom is not absolutely true. More importantly, on this interpretation Descartes cannot use the axiom to prove what he wishes to prove. By AVII (Spinoza’s A5), if a thinking thing knows any perfections which it lacks “it will straightaway give itself these perfections, if they are in its power.” Since we are aware of perfections which we lack, we do not have the power to give ourselves these perfections. Therefore, Descartes concludes, we do not have the power of preserving ourselves. Spinoza correctly notes that this argument presupposes that what can bring about the greater can bring about the lesser simultaneously. But this is clearly not true in all cases of the kind just described. A force that can lift no more than fifty pounds can certainly lift twenty-five pounds, but it cannot lift seventy-five pounds. Similarly, “the powers I expend in preserving myself could bring about many other things far more easily, if I did not require them for preserving myself” (248).

A short while later Spinoza again raises the question of what Descartes understands by “easy” and “difficult.” He says he cannot believe that by “difficult” Descartes means “impossible” and, by “easy,” “what implies no contradiction” (249). He cites a passage from the third Meditation which nonetheless suggests (he says) that Descartes does mean this. In this passage Descartes says that it was far more difficult for him to “emerge from nothing” than to acquire knowledge. Spinoza thus implies that it is impossible for a substance to emerge from nothing and that Descartes recognized this. In the next paragraph he expands on this theme, claiming that “there is nothing in common between the possible and the impossible, or between the intelligible...

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24 AT VII 166; Philosophical Writings, 2:117.
26 AT VII 48; Philosophical Writings, 2:33.
and the unintelligible, just as there is nothing in common between something and nothing; and power does not agree with impossibilities any more than creation and generation do with nonexistent things” (249). He then says that since one can only compare different things and ascertain their relations if one has a clear and distinct concept of each of them, it is false that “if someone can do the impossible, he should also be able to do what is possible.”

Spinoza concludes that, given the content of the second axiom (AIX), Descartes must mean “more perfect” when he says “greater and more difficult,” and “more imperfect” when he says “easier.” But Spinoza remarks that this is also “very obscure” and he insists, reasonably, that his previous objection remains valid even on this interpretation of the axiom (249–50).

Spinoza also objects to AIX. He states: “I do not know whether it is a greater work to create (or preserve) a substance than to create (or preserve) attributes. To speak more clearly and Philosophically, I do not know whether a substance does not require its whole power and essence, by which it perhaps preserves itself, for preserving its attributes” (248–49). This statement is noteworthy. The first sentence mentions both creation and preservation, and it could be taken to refer to creation (or preservation) through an external cause or to self-creation (or self-preservation). The second sentence mentions self-preservation only, yet Spinoza claims that here he is speaking “more clearly and philosophically” than in the first sentence. This seems to suggest that it is “more philosophical” (i.e., more accurate) to speak of preservation than of creation, and to speak of self-preservation than preservation through an external cause. Importantly, this is also the only place where Spinoza unambiguously countenances the possibility that substances other than God (like us) preserve themselves. In other passages where he speaks of these substances preserving themselves, such as that quoted above (“the powers I expend in preserving myself could bring about many other things” etc.), he appears to be speaking hypothetically and merely for the sake of argument. As previously noted, Descartes wishes to use Axioms VII, VIII, and IX to prove that we, who possess the idea of God, cannot preserve ourselves. This is a crucial premise of his third proof for God’s existence. The suggestion that “perhaps” we do preserve ourselves is thus highly significant.

Spinoza has not yet finished his attack on AIX. He argues that since attributes are distinguished “only by reason” from the substance in which they inhere, Descartes cannot wish to claim that it is greater to create or preserve a substance than to create or preserve its attributes. Such a claim
would be nonsensical (250). On the other hand, AIX cannot be taken to mean that it is greater to create or preserve a substance than to create or preserve the attributes of some other substance (that is, given what has already been said, to create or preserve the other substance). Not only is this contrary to Descartes’s wording; if he did mean this the axiom would be obviously false, since it would depend entirely on the specific nature of the substances in question whether the power required to create or preserve one of them were greater than that required to preserve the other. Spinoza concludes that by “attributes,” Descartes can only mean “the qualities that the substance itself contains eminently (as, this or that thought in the mind, which I clearly perceive to be lacking to me), but not those another substance contains eminently (as, this or that motion in extension; for such perfections are not perfections for me, a thinking thing, and so are not lacking to me)” (251). But, if this is his meaning, Descartes “cannot in any way infer from this axiom the conclusion he wants to demonstrate; i.e., that if I preserve myself, I also have the power of giving myself all the perfections that I clearly find to pertain to a supremely perfect being.”

Here Spinoza again relies not on the geometric exposition in the Second Replies but on the treatment of the same argument in the third Meditation, where Descartes does indeed conclude that “if I derived my existence from myself…I should have given myself all the perfections of which I have any idea, and thus I should myself be God.” In the Second Replies, as noted above, he merely concludes that if we had the power of preserving ourselves we would be able to give ourselves the perfections which we lack. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that for him this amounts to saying that we would be able to give ourselves all the perfections of which we have any idea. The doctrine that certain perfections of which we have an idea are not perfections “for us” and that we therefore do not “lack” them is Spinoza’s, not Descartes’s.

After criticizing the first step in Descartes’s demonstration of his third proof for God’s existence, Spinoza undertakes to provide his own demonstration. This demonstration relies on two lemmas not taken from Descartes. Earlier I discussed the first lemma (“The more perfect a thing is by its own nature, the greater and more necessary is the existence it involves” etc.) in connection with the ontological proof, and I argued that Spinoza clearly intends its demonstration to be inadequate. The second lemma states: “The

27 AT VII 48; Philosophical Writings, 2:33.
nature of him who has the power of conserving himself involves necessary existence” (252). The demonstration cites A10 to prove that a person who has the power to preserve himself also has the power to create himself, meaning that his existence does not depend on any external cause. Since, then, “his own nature alone will be a sufficient cause of his existing,” it follows that he must exist necessarily, not possibly. If he only existed possibly it would not follow from the fact that he exists at one time that he would also exist at a later time, yet clearly a person whose very nature is the sufficient cause of his existence must exist both now and at all times.

A10 (Descartes’s Axiom II) states that no less a cause is needed for preserving a thing than for first producing it. In his commentary on this axiom Spinoza also speaks of a thing needing the same “power” to persevere in existing as it needed to begin existing (253). Clearly this axiom is only meaningful in cases where it is possible to measure and compare the power of different causes, as manifested in their effects. But Spinoza’s chief criticism of Descartes’s AVIII is that it is not clear what is meant by effects that are “greater, or more difficult” than others. For the same reason he has criticized AIX on the grounds that it is not obvious whether it is indeed “greater” to create or preserve a substance than to create or preserve attributes. It is significant that when he cites AIX he omits the following: “it is not a greater thing to create something than to preserve it, as has already been said.”28 The words I have italicized are obviously an allusion to AII (Spinoza’s A10). The omitted statement thus makes it clear that Spinoza’s charge of ambiguity or meaninglessness applies as much to A10 as it does to Descartes’s axioms VIII and IX.

This alone would fatally compromise the demonstration of L2. But there is an even graver problem. Spinoza has stated that one cannot compare the power required to do something that is possible with the power required to do the impossible, and he has made it clear that, in his view, it is impossible for a thing to “emerge from nothing.” As previously noted, the context of these claims is a discussion of a passage in the third Meditation. In this passage, Descartes is seeking to determine the source of his existence, and when he speaks of “emerging from nothing,” he is referring to the possibility that he might have “derived my existence from myself” (33). In other words, he is referring to self-creation. It follows that, for Spinoza, there cannot be any comparison between the power required to preserve oneself and that

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28 AT VII 166; Philosophical Writings, 2:117, emphasis added.
required to create oneself, since the former is possible but the latter impossible. This means that, regardless of the meaning of A10, he cannot argue that if a person has the power to preserve himself he also has the power to create himself. The demonstration of L2 is as much a failure as that of L1.

Spinoza’s alternative demonstration of Descartes’s third proof for God’s existence argues that if I had the power to preserve myself I would exist necessarily (by L2). Since, according to the corollary of L1, that whose nature involves necessary existence is God (252), I would therefore be God. But I am aware of imperfections in myself and so cannot be God; therefore I do not preserve myself. I must instead be preserved by another being whose nature does involve necessary existence. If it did not, it too could not preserve itself and thus would require some other cause of its existence, so that either there would be an infinite regress or the regress would terminate in a being whose nature involves necessary existence. (Spinoza simplifies this step in the argument but the point is clear.) Since necessary existence pertains only to the nature of God, he must exist, since I exist. It is already clear that this demonstration cannot be conclusive, since its key premises (L1 and its corollary, and L2) have not been adequately demonstrated.

After his own demonstration, Descartes presents as a corollary of the third proof the proposition that God “created the heavens and the earth and everything in them” and that he “can bring about everything which we clearly perceive in a way exactly corresponding to our perception of it.”29 He demonstrates this as follows: according to the third proof of God’s existence, there must exist a being who possesses, formally or eminently, all the perfections of which we have any idea. (This is presumably supposed to follow from the fact that there must exist a supremely perfect being.) But we have the idea of a power so great that “the possessor of this power, and he alone, created the heavens and the earth and is capable of producing everything that I understand to be possible.” Spinoza appends a slightly modified version of this corollary and its demonstration. He omits the claim that God created the heavens and the earth, restricting himself to the weaker claim that God is powerful enough to have done so (252–53). He thus tacitly criticizes Descartes for inferring from the fact that God could have created the heavens and the earth that he actually did so. This is a fair criticism, but on its own it is not a major one. If the premises of Descartes’s third proof of God’s existence

29 AT VII 169; Philosophical Writings, 2:119.
could be defended, it would follow that everything that exists depends on God for its existence and must have been created by him.

Descartes’s claim that we have the idea of a power great enough to have created everything that exists is no more than an assertion. He provides no argument for it and it does not obviously follow from any of his axioms. Since Spinoza has argued that it is inconceivable and thus impossible that a thing should emerge out of nothing, he would regard as absurd the doctrine that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. To be sure, Descartes does not explicitly state that God created all that exists “out of nothing.” Nonetheless, it seems clear that this is his meaning. Hence, Spinoza must in fact reject the proposition that we have an idea of a power so great that it can create everything that we clearly perceive, as we perceive it.

Up to this point, Spinoza has given grounds for questioning the validity of Descartes’s arguments for God’s existence. He has drawn attention to undefended assumptions in the first two proofs and he has openly argued that the third proof rests on premises whose meaning is unclear and whose truth is at least questionable, whatever their meaning. However, he has offered few positive reasons for rejecting Descartes’s conclusions, apart from arguing, in effect, that creation out of nothing is impossible and suggesting that self-preservation may be possible. Clearly the reader has a right to expect more. I will now argue that Spinoza does indeed provide substantial positive grounds for rejecting Descartes’s conclusions.

As noted earlier, the success or failure of the second proof for God’s existence hinges on the question whether we truly possess or are capable of forming a clear and distinct concept of God corresponding to D8, and there is reason to think that Spinoza believes the answer is no. This is of particular significance given that the other proofs obviously presuppose that the answer is yes. According to D8 God is a “supremely perfect” substance. A8 (Descartes’s AIV) speaks of “reality or perfection” and in the second note to L1 Spinoza states that by “perfection” he means only “reality, or being” (252). A supremely perfect being, then, is in some sense a supremely “real” being. This is, of course, the thought expressed in the medieval description of God as ens realissimum. It presupposes the claim made in Descartes’s AVI (Spinoza’s A4) that there are “different degrees of reality, or being.” This axiom asserts that a substance has more reality than a mode, and an infinite substance more than a finite one. Spinoza elsewhere describes God as an “infinite” substance (e.g., P6S), as does Descartes (e.g., AT VII 45). It seems to follow that God is “infinite” in the sense that he is infinitely perfect, or
infinitely real. Spinoza makes this clear in the demonstration of L1, the only place where he draws any explicit link between perfection and infinity. There he implies that God is a being with infinite degrees of “perfection.”

Can Spinoza meaningfully speak of “infinite” degrees of perfection? It is only in the second part of DPP that he specifically discusses infinity. IID4 defines “indefinite” as “that whose limits (if it has any) cannot be discovered by the human intellect” (263). This definition is based upon Principles I, 26, where Descartes argues that the word “indefinite” is more accurate than “infinite” when treating of things “in which we observe no limits.” However, in Principles I, 27, he argues that it is appropriate to use the word “infinite” when speaking of God for, in the case of God alone, “not only do we fail to recognize any limits in any respect, but our understanding positively tells us that there are none.” 30 Significantly, Spinoza makes no mention of this argument. Later in part II of DPP, he notes that the dispute about atoms depends largely on arguments about the infinite and he states: “To all these questions [about the infinite] Descartes replies that we must not reject the things that fall under our intellect and therefore that we conceive clearly and distinctly, because of others that exceed our intellect, or grasp, and that we therefore perceive only quite inadequately” (269). Since the infinite is beyond human comprehension, Descartes “considers those things in which we do not perceive any limits—like the extension of the world, or the divisibility of parts of matter—as indefinite.” He then refers the reader to Principles I, 26. Here again he neglects to mention Descartes’s distinction between the “infinite” nature of God and the “indefinite” nature of other things in which we perceive no limits.

The only place where Spinoza thematically treats of God’s infinity is in the Metaphysical Thoughts, part II, chapter III (“Of God’s Immensity”). He begins: “We have explained previously that no being can be conceived as finite and imperfect, that is, as participating in nothing, unless we first attend to the perfect and infinite being, i.e., to God” (319). In fact, he has not explained this anywhere in the Metaphysical Thoughts or in the geometric exposition of the Principles. He is alluding to a passage in the third Meditation according to which “my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself.” Descartes defends this assertion by asking rhetorically: “For how could I understand that I doubted or desired—that is, lacked something—and that I was not

wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison?”31 An important corollary of this claim is that God’s infinity is not a quantitative notion, because its idea does not depend upon conceiving an infinite (quantitative) increase in some finite thing.

By falsely claiming to have explained this argument, Spinoza invites the reader to examine whether what he says elsewhere serves rather to undermine it. His discussion of Descartes’s AIX strongly suggests that he would reject it, since he there states that the perfections of another substance (such as God) are not perfections “for me,” which means that I do not “lack” them. This implies that Descartes is wrong to argue that my perception of the things I lack arises from a comparison of my own nature with that of a being who, qua infinite, possesses these things. Spinoza’s discussion of the nature of error in IP15S seems to confirm that he would reject this argument. Following Descartes, he claims that “all the modes of thinking we have are perfect, insofar as they are considered in themselves alone” (259). Since “perfection” means “reality,” the sense of this statement is that none of our modes of thinking, considered in itself, lacks anything which “belongs to [its] nature.” Error is only an imperfection because when we err we “deprive ourselves of the best freedom.” Our free will allows us the option of assenting only to things that we perceive clearly and distinctly, and insofar as we voluntarily choose instead to assent to things we do not perceive clearly and distinctly, we are culpable and hence imperfect. This is sound Cartesian doctrine, but we know from Meyer’s Preface that Spinoza does not agree with it, since he does not believe that the will is free. It follows that he has no reason to agree with Descartes that error is an “imperfection” and that perception of God’s infinity is in some way prior to perception of the finite. This in turn implies that he need not treat God’s infinity as a nonquantitative notion.

The expression “participating in nothing” in the above-cited passage from chapter III of the Metaphysical Thoughts is taken from the fourth Meditation, where Descartes describes himself as “intermedi ate between God and nothingness” and imperfect precisely insofar as he “participate[s] in nothingness or non-being.”32 The only other place that Spinoza uses the expression in DPP is the demonstration of L1 (see above). But in this demonstration he does not start from the idea of a supremely perfect

31 AT VII 45–46; Philosophical Writings, 2:31.
32 AT VII 54; Philosophical Writings, 2:38.
being and proceed to consider finite things. Rather, he begins by considering finite things and their degrees of perfection (or reality), and then generates the idea of a supremely perfect being by increasing the degrees of perfection possessed by such things to infinity. He thus implies that we construct the idea of an infinite being on the basis of a prior idea of a finite one, contrary to what is asserted in the third Meditation and in “Of God’s Immensity.”

In the third Meditation Descartes states that his idea of God, an infinite being, is clear and distinct despite the fact that “I do not grasp the infinite.” Spinoza cites his observation that what is clearly and distinctly conceived must not be rejected because other things, including the nature of the infinite, surpass the human understanding, in the context of discussing the infinite (or indefinite) extension and divisibility of space, but this observation evidently applies equally to the idea of God’s infinity. Meyer has warned that in places where Spinoza speaks of things that are beyond the human intellect, he is only speaking on behalf of Descartes. It must then be assumed that Spinoza believes it possible to understand both the indefinite extension and divisibility of space and the infinite nature of God. Since the alleged impossibility of grasping the infinite is Descartes’s reason for using the word “indefinite” rather than “infinite” (in the case of created things), it is also safe to assume that Spinoza did not see any necessity for using the former term rather than the latter. If he nonetheless accepts Descartes’s distinction between the indefinite and the infinite, despite his silence about it, one would expect him to explain God’s infinity and how it differs from indefiniteness. The fact that he generates an infinitely perfect being in the demonstration of L1 simply by adding degrees of perfection to a finitely perfect being makes such an explanation imperative since, in “Of God’s Immensity,” he explicitly denies that one may ascribe quantity of any kind to God (319).

However, no such explanation is forthcoming. In “Of God’s Immensity” he maintains his silence about Descartes’s distinction between the infinite and the indefinite and he fails to provide an informative account of God’s infinity. He warns the reader not to confuse God’s “infinity” with his “immensity” and he discusses in some detail the different senses in which God may and may not be called “immense.” He states that God is to be called absolutely infinite, “insofar as he really consists of infinite perfection,” which is little more than a question-begging tautology. He also says that God’s infinity, “in spite of what the term suggests, is something most positive,” because

33 AT VII 46; Philosophical Writings, 2:32.
“we call him infinite insofar as we are attending to his essence, or supreme perfection.” Once again, this tells us hardly anything.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Spinoza rejects Descartes’s distinction between the indefiniteness of created beings and the infinity of God. The idea of God’s infinity is generated by starting with the idea of a finite thing with x degrees of perfection and imagining these degrees to be increased infinitely. It is as much a quantitative notion as any other kind of infinity, and is to be comprehended in the same manner.

Spinoza does not discuss in detail how one can comprehend the infinite, but he touches on the subject when discussing Zeno’s arguments against the existence of motion in IIP6S. According to the first of these arguments, if there were such a thing as local motion, “the motion of a body moving circularly with the greatest speed, would not differ from rest” (270–71), which is absurd. Zeno is said to have explained this with the example of a circle ABC moving around its center. Point A moves around the circle through C and B in a certain time, at a certain speed. If the speed were doubled, the time in which it would move through C and B would be halved, and if the former were doubled again the latter would be halved again and so on. Now “if we conceive this speed to be increased to infinity and the time diminished to a moment, then when point A is at that greatest speed it will be at every moment, or continuously, in the place from which it began to be moved; so it will always remain in the same place.” Spinoza comments that this argument “is more an argument against the greatest speed of motion than against motion itself.” In fact, “we can never conceive a motion so fast that we do not at the same time conceive a faster one,” and the “concept of a motion so slow that there cannot be a slower one also implies a contradiction,” as does that of a “time so short that there cannot be a shorter one.” Spinoza claims that this is self-evident if we attend to our clear and distinct perceptions. He also appeals to the analogous case of the infinite divisibility of matter, which, following Descartes, he has proved in IIP6.

L1 speaks of an infinite increase that leads to some highest degree and of an infinite decrease that leads to zero. The discussion of Zeno’s paradoxes appears to imply that for Spinoza, neither is in fact conceivable. If an infinite increase in perfection is indeed possible, there can be no such thing as a being so perfect that there could not be one more perfect. A “supremely perfect being,” like the “greatest speed of motion,” is a contradiction in terms.
It is possible that Spinoza’s whole purpose in including a discussion of paradoxes of motion is to communicate his views about infinity, which entail that the Cartesian definition of God is self-contradictory. The attribution to Zeno of the argument concerning the greatest speed should arouse suspicion in any case, since this argument is not mentioned in any ancient source of Zeno’s views, and contemporary scholarship has been unable to find any other source for it. Spinoza may simply have invented the argument himself and ascribed it to Zeno so as to intimate to readers familiar with the ancient sources that his denial that an infinite increase leads to some maximum, though presented as a response to Zeno, is in fact designed to serve another purpose entirely.

The argument that a supremely perfect being is inconceivable might well be taken to entail that such a being is impossible, which would be a positive reason for denying that God exists. Spinoza nowhere says in so many words that an inconceivable thing is ipso facto impossible, but his discussion of the possible and the impossible in IP7S strongly suggests that this is his view. In any case, the argument entails that Descartes’s first and third proofs for God’s existence are not only inconclusive but incoherent, and it destroys the second proof. DPP is, then, a textbook of atheism. It should therefore not surprise us that it is written exoterically.

Suppose that a would-be Cartesian were to challenge Spinoza to explain why he rejects the distinction between the “indefiniteness” of created beings and the “infinity” of God. Spinoza seems compelled to claim that the alleged idea of God’s (nonquantitative) “infinite” perfection is a confused fantasy. But can he prove this? Spinoza might respond to this challenge by pointing out that, according to Descartes, we alight on the idea of God’s infinite perfection when we reflect on our own imperfection, which we could only recognize by implicit comparison with the divine perfection. This presupposes that God’s perfection is somehow commensurate with our own, lesser perfection. If it were not, the comparison would be impossible and we could not recognize our own (relative) imperfection. Indeed, there would be no sense in our calling ourselves “imperfect” or “less perfect.” However, if the comparison is possible, then God’s “infinite” perfection must, after all, be a quantitative notion; God must be infinitely more perfect than we are. (He would not, consequently, be “immense,” i.e., incommensurate with any other

34 See the editor’s note at Collected Works, 270n27.
being.) In short, the would-be Cartesian needs a quantitative notion of divine perfection.

Conclusion

I have sought to show, on the basis of a close reading of selected key passages, that DPP is not the anodyne summary of Cartesianism that it purports to be. Drawing on the work of Strauss and Kennington, I have argued that it is rather a disguised anti-Cartesian polemic. Non-Straussian commentators such as Curley and Israel are right to suspect Spinoza of seeking covertly to attack Descartes, despite his protestations of scrupulous fidelity to “that brightest star of our age.” However, these commentators underestimate the radical and thoroughgoing character of his attack. He intimates “between the lines” that Cartesian hyperbolic doubt is self-defeating and that Descartes’s proofs for the existence of God fail. He even suggests that the very notion of a supremely perfect being is self-contradictory and confused. His polemical target is then not merely Cartesian epistemology, but theism in general.

I have not attempted anything like a complete interpretation of DPP. If my approach to the text is broadly sound, much interpretative work remains to be done. In particular, the Metaphysical Thoughts, to which I have referred only cursorily, calls for extensive analysis, since (except for the Prolegomenon) this is the only part of the work that openly professes to be more than mere exposition of Cartesianism. Moreover, I have barely touched on the problem of situating my reading of DPP within an overarching interpretation of Spinoza’s oeuvre as a whole. It should at least be clear, I hope, that this text does not deserve the neglect it has all too often suffered.

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Readers of this journal will undoubtedly be familiar with the biblical scholarship of Robert Sacks. His commentaries on the Book of Genesis and the Book of Job first appeared in *Interpretation* before being published as books in their own right (in 1990 and 1999, respectively).1 In his distinguished career as a teacher and scholar at St. John’s College for more than five decades, Sacks has dedicated much of his work to a noble cause: restoring the Bible as a worthy source of Western civilization. The project is rooted in the belief that the well-being of the West depends on two sources, reason and revelation. As he writes in his introduction to the commentary on Job:

> We of the Western tradition have the blessing and the curse of finding ourselves heir to two quite different ways of life and hence to two quite different ways of thought. Although they sit uneasily together, the struggle between them has formed much of the life behind the growth of both our daily language and of our highest contemplations. They are, then, the foundation of both our deepest insights and our deep-

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It is difficult to say which part of this statement would meet with greater skepticism among contemporary intellectuals. Many would undoubtedly reject both philosophy and revelation as offering profound guidance to living well.

Indeed, the arguments against the Bible as a source of wisdom are so well established that they themselves form a kind of tradition. One of the most formidable attacks on revelation, for example, Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*), was published in 1670. If modern readers tend to view the Bible as a corrupt text, not “worth studying as closely as the works of great philosophers or poets,” this impression is likely the result of Spinoza’s critique of the Bible. In the *TTP*, Spinoza claims to have proved conclusively that scripture is “faulty, truncated, adulterated, not consistent with itself, that we have only fragments of it, and, finally, that the transcript of God’s compact that he compacted with the Jews has perished.”

One reason Spinoza’s argument is so persuasive is that he builds his critique of scripture on his impeccable knowledge of Hebrew grammar. The importance of grammar in Spinoza’s analysis is evident not only in the *TTP*, where he presents a minitreatise on grammar beginning in chapter 7, but also in the fact that he continued to study and write on grammar throughout his life. He had already completed thirty-two chapters of a work entitled *Compendium grammatices linguæ Hebraeæ*, when he passed away prematurely at age forty-four. The unfinished work was published posthumously by his friends in 1677, but provides us a clear sense of the importance of grammar to his overall project. The primary reason that Spinoza devotes so much effort to Hebrew grammar is that it is a prerequisite for a method that will provide “a full and certain knowledge” of scripture. In his account, the Bible presents an unfinished compilation of sources that was arranged so hastily that textual errors and variant readings crop up repeatedly in the manuscripts. Despite the later efforts of the Masoretes between the fifth and tenth centuries to resolve these problems, variant readings and grammatical irregularities remain. The real problem, for Spinoza, with this

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2 Sacks, *Book of Job with Commentary*, ix.
5 Ibid., 91.
situation gradually becomes clear in his treatise, namely, that the debate over the meaning invites endless speculation and quarrels among readers:

we see almost everyone passing off his own comments as God’s word and eager for nothing else but compelling others, under the pretext of religion, to think as he does. We see Theologians often worried over how they could twist their own fantasies and wishes out of Scripture and fortify them with divine authority, and not doing anything with less misgiving and more rashness than interpreting the Scriptures.⁶

The uncertainty of scripture’s literal meaning owing to its corruption encourages superstition and quarreling and obscures the simple, salutary teaching of caritas which is essential to salvation and political stability. The TTP initiates a broad theological project to limit speculation over the meaning of scripture. Spinoza develops a hermeneutic that considers scripture’s claims mere reflections of the cultural background and prejudices of its authors. But the central element of this hermeneutic is a systematic grasp of Hebrew grammar which effectively forecloses speculation about the literal meaning of scripture.

Because Spinoza assigns Hebrew grammar such a prominent role in his theological-political project, he is tempted to ignore or downplay ambiguities and grammatical irregularities in ancient Hebrew.⁷ He presents ancient Hebrew as having a clear-cut, systematic, formal grammar. Some scholars have claimed that his tendency to exaggerate the grammatical clarity of Hebrew results from his prior philosophical commitments. According to Michael Morgan, Spinoza’s grammar “is guided...by his commitment to a priori reasoning akin to that found in geometry—or, in this case, in Latin, viewed by him as reflecting a pure, a priori structure.”⁸ More likely, though, Spinoza simply wished to discourage theological speculation on the literal meaning of scripture, and so constructed a Hebrew grammar “in an artificial manner, [with] certain rules to the Hebrew Language that are to all appearances borrowed from Latin.”⁹

In sharp contrast to Spinoza’s efforts to limit the meaning of biblical Hebrew, Sacks attempts to extend the grammatical structure of

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⁶ Ibid., 83.
Hebrew historically to include the ancient Semitic languages, from Akkadian to Ugaritic. According to Sacks, “the Semitic languages form a much more closely interrelated group than do the Indo-European languages. It would be appropriate to think of the Semitic languages as comparable to the Romance languages in terms of their proximity” (3). Many of these languages are more ancient than Hebrew, and preserve more ancient forms of grammar and meaning. As such, they offer valuable clues to the origins and development of Hebrew.

But Sacks extends the scope of Hebrew grammar in an even more fundamental way. Traditional or formal grammars view the structure and rules of language as abstract, given facts. This is a sensible approach when the objective is the acquisition of language. Speculating on the development of language or relation of grammar to the thoughts of past generations might distract a student from the task of learning the rudiments of a language. But the unavoidable consequence of those introductory grammars is that they leave the student with the impression that Hebrew presents a permanent set of grammatical forms that express a fixed conceptual world. Sacks laments this situation and compares formal grammar to a child who has lost the ability to decipher meaning in art: “imagine a child born into the world in which abstract art had so taken over the field that the child would no longer be aware of the possibility of representational art. Like those islanders who, we are told, cannot recognize a picture as a picture, the child might find Rembrandt’s self-portrait a beautiful and well-balanced combination of colors—no more and no less” (2). Formal grammar is particularly inadequate for the study of biblical Hebrew because it ignores its development and so limits its meaning in artificial ways. In the case of Spinoza at least, the formal character of his Hebrew grammar was the product of a conscious effort to resolve a theological-political problem. Formal grammar, to the contrary, is characterized by its forgetfulness of the origins and meaning of beautiful forms. It accomplishes the same thing as Spinoza’s grammar by inuring us to the ancestral thoughts embedded in language (cf. 30).

Sacks’s intentional grammar does not ignore the formal rules, but rather focuses on their development in relation to the people who sought language to express logos. In offering a definition of a noun, for example, Sacks does not merely provide a synonym. An example of this sort of analysis—in fact, the example which inspired Sacks to pursue this non-traditional approach to grammar—is the participle of the verb “to speak,” medaber. A formal grammar would simply define the word as an established
fact. But Sacks’s teacher once pointed out to him that it is likely a construct from the Hebrew words *mi* and *dabar*; that is, literally *medaber* means “he who speaks.” Once we recognize that words have histories that reflect the intentions and thoughts of their speakers, the study of grammar becomes an investigation into the development of thought itself. This approach to grammar, which invites us “to rethink the position of the person who possessed the verb and needed the noun,” opens up a new path for biblical study (3).

Sacks concedes that the title of his book, *Beginning Biblical Hebrew*, is a bit misleading. If the reader expects an introduction to formal grammar, he may be a bit perplexed by the organization of the work. Topics that would appear at the beginning of a traditional grammar appear later in Sacks’s work. For example, the ordinal numbers are not introduced until chapter 13; prepositions are not covered until chapter 19. In addition, although there is a brief introduction to some grammatical rules, the book is devoted to a careful reading of a single chapter (chapter 21) of the First Book of Samuel. The reason for these idiosyncrasies is that Sacks intends to introduce readers to an intentional approach to grammar, a subject that cannot be taught directly but must be observed: “Intentional grammar is not and cannot become a subject matter. It cannot be taught; a book can do no more than invite the reader to participate in the activity” (3).

One reason that Sacks’s approach to language cannot be taught is that it lacks a single, concrete method for arriving at linguistic certainty, nor can we arrive at a clear account of the origins of language. And “if we do not know where language begins,” Sacks asks, “how shall we know where we should begin?” If various languages shared elements of a common grammatical structure or vocabulary, then we could point to its natural origins and craft a method, like Euclid, with precise definitions, postulates, and axioms (1). But while language points at times to a common origin, the profound grammatical differences between languages frustrate our quest for quasimathematical certainty. What is worse, the pursuit of such certainty comes at the cost of destroying or ignoring the very phenomena we are trying to capture. The conceptual world behind language and our awareness of such history “imperceptibly shade off into the vaguely remembered and the dimly seen.” In light of this terrain, Sacks says, “we have no other choice than to try to make the thoughts and the half-dead expressions that inhabit the morgue of our minds live again—not because they are true, but because they remain a part of us and yet are only intelligible in their living state” (171). The evidence
for the thoughts of the ancients oftentimes is no more than a “scrap” that jogs “some reminiscence” of *logos* (164).

Although intentional grammar is more elusive than formal grammar, Sacks takes great pains as a teacher to gently guide his readers. He outlines the scholarly controversies over the development of Hebrew grammar, recommends further reading, and even offers helpful tips for using a lexicon (145). He encourages readers in the light of formidable difficulties and reassures them to keep searching even in unpromising terrain. In considering whether prepositions emerged from nouns or verbs, he observes: “Even if it should prove impossible to recoup those ancient thoughts which still remain part of us, such scraps as these may help a little to jog some reminiscence of what it meant to participate in the passage from noun to preposition and the dawning of a new way of thought” (163–64). At the end of this passage, Sacks tells his readers that he has done his best to begin the investigation, “to think the transition through.”

More fundamentally, Sacks repeatedly reminds us that we can never be certain of the origins of language, and so must always approach it with wonder. *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* is an introduction in the sense that it urges us to return to the beginnings, to wonder about the origins of grammatical structures and the meaning of words. In his discussion of the word *nefesh*, for example, Sacks resists telling us the traditional definition of “soul.” Instead he shares the relevant data: the Akkadian origins of the word, the diverse meanings of the term in ancient Hebrew, its various uses in the Bible. The point is to invite readers to ponder the original concept that Hebrews sought to convey. His conclusion is simply an invitation to think: “I hesitate to offer a definition of the word *nefesh*, but will instead leave you to the dictionaries and to your own reflections” (82).

These few examples suffice to indicate that Sacks’s objective concerns more than supplementing the defects of modern linguistics. Intentional grammar aims at rediscovering ancient thought buried in modern grammar, and the first step is scrutinizing “our own speech and our present ways of thinking” (171). In his discussion of the preposition “of,” Sacks observes that it is natural for us to simply accept prepositions as a natural part of our grammar and as entirely consistent with our experience in the world. But prepositions “are arrived at by human thought. That means that an act of human thought lies within our own daily speech and modes of thinking which we ourselves have never thought. To that extent we lack self-understanding. It is this situation that makes it necessary for us to go back
with such care in order to get a clearer glimpse of ourselves, and of the things that we thoughtfully take for granted” (70).

Language provides us a handy set of concepts for organizing the world that we tend to accept without further scrutiny. We have inherited prepositions, but we can appropriate them only “by thinking through the gap between its present formality and those antique feelings which were its progenitors” (122). Sacks’s suggestion is that in order to examine ourselves honestly, we need to excavate the thought behind our concepts, to rediscover “the archaic process of thinking” (86). Intentional grammar in this sense is a prerequisite not only for studying revelation, but also for philosophy.

Whereas Spinoza’s method closes off scripture as a source of wisdom, Sacks’s method has the very opposite effect. Consider the example of the notational accents, or ta’amim, which appear above and below letters in scripture. These markings do not appear to operate according to fixed rules. Nor is it clear whether their function is to indicate tone or grammar. Are they intended to signify pitch, emotional states, inflections, attitudes? Are they primarily musical or grammatical markers? Because they elude fixed rules of usage, Spinoza urges us to abandon the attempt to find meaning in them, by suggesting instead that they have become hopelessly corrupted over time. He also rejects the idea that everything in scripture has meaning, let alone infinitely many profound meanings. Sacks suggests an alternative: it may be the case that the ta’amim have become corrupt, but we cannot determine this until we make an investigation. In one of the most striking sections of his book, he sets out to discover their purpose in a Socratic spirit: “the secret of such investigations is to be as naïve as possible and not to fear spelling out the obvious” (102). His investigation leads him to reflect upon the relation of language and music, and the differences between Western and biblical musical notation and grammar. Despite his findings, however, he does not rule out the possibility that Spinoza may have been right; instead, he urges us to carry on the investigation.

Sacks does not venerate the ancients simply because of their age, nor does he take progress for granted and assume the superiority of the moderns. Rather, he seeks to clarify the difference because we have inherited the ancient world in our language. If we wish to know ourselves, and ultimately the truth of things, we cannot avoid exploring the history of logos despite the fact that it is deeply hidden in language. When he explores

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10 Spinoza, Theologico-Political Treatise, 140.
the Hebrew term for “time,” Sacks notes how the word evolved from the notion of a special occasion to the more modern notion of magnitude, that is, the view of time we have inherited: “This new concept of time as a magnitude, like other keystones of the modern world, has buried itself within our consciousness and now masquerades as part of our nature; but it was not always so” (144).

Sacks’s approach to grammar will remind readers of his approach to the biblical text, particularly his rejection of method as a starting point. This is hardly an accident; in fact, his grammar predates the study of revelation. He admits that “the bulk” of Beginning Biblical Hebrew was written nearly forty years ago (171). The search for linguistic intentionality is an essential part of his approach to scripture. Both approaches cannot be considered “methods” because they are characterized by their awareness that we do not yet know the nature of revelation. Sacks’s approach to both grammar and scripture is characterized by this openness:

Of recent times it has become the custom to preface any work of this nature with a discourse concerning Methods of Interpretation, and yet it is difficult to see how that can be done. To do so would presuppose that we already know how to read the book before we begin. Unfortunately that is untrue. Each book has its own way about it, and generally we begin to learn how to read a book by stumbling around in it for a very long time until we find our way. Otherwise we risk the danger of reading the book by a method foreign to the intent of the author.11

In the case of revelation, Sacks urges to proceed with caution. In the absence of a method, we cannot be sure whether we are discovering something real or imagining it to be so. Even as we start to uncover a sense of the whole, this is only a “minor guarantee” that we have discovered something about the origins, or the intentions of the author.

In fact, Sacks’s interpretation of the Hebrew Bible does point us toward a central theme, namely, God’s attempt to guide men toward the highest good despite the ongoing resistance of creation, both earth and man, to this education. Sacks describes this education in terms of lifting human desires toward the good as “the New Way.”12 But the story is hardly straightforward and does not proceed in a linear fashion. As one reader explains, “the

11 Sacks, Commentary on the Book of Genesis, ii.
book of Genesis tells the story of this lifting, but only by constant references backward upon itself and forward to other incidents in the history of Israel. The constant interweaving of past, present, and future, and the constant forgetting and remembering that such weaving creates, are the material of Genesis, which cannot be understood apart from the other books. Sacks’s analysis of Hebrew grammar points us to striking insights into subjects as diverse as causality, intellect, plurality, will, personal identity, and time. It is hard to deny that Sacks is on to something, even though it is difficult to verify his findings with quasi-mathematical certainty. In fact, the virtue of Sacks’s method is that its conscious openness to any and all difficulties encountered in the quest to discover meaning ennobles that quest by allowing readers to avoid dogmatic claims to knowledge and to return again and again to the text.

We began with Sacks’s observation that reason and revelation are the dual sources of Western civilization, and like Jacob and Esau, “they sit uneasily together.” This uneasiness is hard to deny, yet also easy to exaggerate. In his efforts to promote political stability, for example, Spinoza suggests that reason and revelation will have nothing to do with each other. Efforts to reconcile them lead invariably to the assertion of the superiority of one over the other. He notes in chapter 15 of the TTP that such efforts usually lead to either dogmatic belief, which rejects reason altogether, or dogmatic rationalism, which always attempts to subordinate revelation to reason. Spinoza suggests, therefore, that the two be permanently separated. But this means that revelation can make no claims to the truth, and that reason must sometimes defer to revelation despite the absence of truth. Both options are unattractive. The achievement of Robert Sacks is to suggest an alternative which, though not an ultimate solution, allows the two protagonists to sit—albeit uneasily—together. As we have seen, his critical innovation is a method that allows one to approach scripture as a serious guide to a flourishing life without succumbing to dogmatic belief. This solution may have been suggested to him by one of his teachers, Leo Strauss, who pointed out:

If orthodoxy claims to know that the Bible is divinely revealed, that every word of the Bible is divinely inspired, that Moses was the writer of the Pentateuch, that the miracles recorded in the Bible have happened and similar things, Spinoza has refuted orthodoxy. But the case

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is entirely different if orthodoxy limits itself to asserting that it believes
the aforementioned things, i.e., that they cannot claim to possess the
binding power peculiar to the known. For all assertions of orthodoxy
rest on the irrefutable premise that the omnipotent God whose will is
unfathomable, whose ways are not our ways, who has decided to dwell
in the thick darkness, may exist.¹⁵

Through his commentaries on the Bible and his *Beginning Biblical Hebrew*,
Sacks offers us an alternative to the dogmatic acceptance of revelation, a
position that inevitably undermines reason. He helps us to see that the quest
for understanding revelation involves reason and can never abandon it. In
doing so, Sacks’s approach contributes significantly to the reinvigoration of
revelation as a noble source of Western civilization.

Tyranny in recent times has presented students of philosophy and history with a new problem: in an age of Enlightenment, when reason, security, and prosperity were thought to be advancing ineluctably against their opposites, modern man has subjected himself to systematic persecutions and slaughters on an unprecedented scale, while the very sciences said to guarantee our progress have long since taught us, à la Thomas Hobbes, that tyranny is merely a disapproving word concocted by those “discontented” under a given regime. How can one account for—and thus effectively oppose—the evils we have witnessed, when their very source is said to be a figment of the imagination? Responding to this stark failure of modern thought, figures such as Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin sought to revive interest in the contemporary relevance of the classical political philosophy whose rejection underlay those intellectual, moral, and political revolutions apparently responsible for leading us to this dead end. The success of their efforts to reopen the Western mind can be measured in part by the scope, quality, and influence of their own work and of that inspired by their teaching.

Drawing on much of this vast literature, including his own considerable contributions to it, Waller Newell aims in this volume—and in its projected sequel—at a systematic study of the history of tyranny, from ancient to modern times, in both its theoretical and practical manifestations. In particular, Newell attempts to clarify how and why Machiavelli and his progeny chose to break from classical and Christian understandings of the
goals and limits of politics, as well as to assess what light classical and modern ideas can shed on tyranny as we know it today, especially in its totalitarian forms. At the outset, Newell expresses agreement with Strauss’s view that the ancients remain our best guide to the problem of tyranny (a position he qualifies by his conclusion), and with Voegelin’s contention that modern thought, in addition to reversing key features of classical thought, is also essentially “apocalyptic,” or deeply shaped by its adoption (with drastic adaptations) of certain Christian doctrines. Newell proceeds to devote one chapter to the classical and modern ontologies of statesmanship and tyranny, one each to the development of this theme in Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon, one to Machiavelli’s reading of Xenophon, and one chapter each to Machiavelli’s *Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*. He concludes with an extended discussion of applications (often accompanied by various simplifications) of Machiavelli in subsequent early modern thought, and a brief discussion of the relative merits of classical and modern thought for understanding our present political world. (Late modern thought, from Rousseau to Heidegger, will be the subject of his next volume.)

Newell’s discussion of the ancients focuses on their attempts to connect the order of passions (*eros* and *thumos*) and reason in the human soul to order in the polis and the cosmos. Though he finds important differences among these Socratic minds, Newell characterizes all three as attempting to harmonize passion with reason in the pursuit of an objective good, and thus to moderate the passions through devotion to philosophic and political virtues. In each of them, however, Newell sees and explores a certain degree of openness to a less limited and even “tyrannical” mode of rule, one that would employ unmitigated force to secure the conditions for virtuous living. In Xenophon’s *Education of Cyrus*, Newell even finds a sympathetic exploration of the possibility of a cosmopolitan, meritocratic empire employing reason in the service of a passion for honor on the part of the ruler and for wealth on the part of subjects. Nonetheless, all three Socratics have reservations about this employment of tyranny—though in this reader’s view those reservations might be more extensive than Newell allows. In any case, Newell notes that at no point does their thought—or even that of the pre-Socratics, some of whom openly endorsed tyranny—arrive at the radical position later taken by Machiavelli.

What is unique about Machiavelli, Newell argues, is not his promotion of tyranny per se, but rather the grounds on which he justifies it. All thought prior to Machiavelli was founded on the idea of nature as a source
and guide of the good life for human beings. Whether counseling a life of lawless aggression, private withdrawal, or conformity to positive law (as did the various Sophists), or seeking to embody natural right in the intellectual and moral virtues and in the laws of the city (as did the Socratics), all of the ancients saw nature as primary and definitive for man. Only with Machiavelli do we find the notion that nature itself—personified as Fortuna: all that which is outside of our control—is not to be embodied but to be conquered by human virtue. For Machiavelli, Newell explains, the virtuous prince stands at the head of society not because he possesses wisdom, the counsel of the wise, or even a superlative instinct for natural greatness. Rather, the prince is first precisely because, recognizing the radical indifference of nature to man and of man to nature, he is able to conquer nature in himself and in others, and is thus prepared to lead society in the mastery of Fortune in all its guises.

Though it may seem like Machiavelli is liberating Platonic eros and thumos from the governance of reason, Newell stresses, there is an important sense in which this is not so. Realizing that for the ancients eros and thumos themselves point to the question of the good, and thereby open the door for Socratic dialectic and the limits it would impose on political action, Machiavelli attempts to close that door and lock it by making the passions themselves part of the Fortune that is to be conquered. Although the prince must harness his own desires as well as his people’s, Machiavelli’s rejection of the idea of the good and teaching that success itself is the only measure of human conduct means that passion itself—like the misfortunes that furnish the greatest leaders with opportunities to assert their own supremacy—is yet another part of nature to be used or not used according to the mode that is most expedient for the consolidation of power. Although Machiavelli assumes that the prince desires glory, and the people property, security, and pleasure, Newell insists that Machiavelli’s recipe for political success requires the prince’s pursuit of glory to remain “cold” and the people’s enjoyment of life to be curbed by strong laws. For Machiavelli, our passions always render us susceptible to a belief in “imaginary republics,” and so we must give in to them only selectively and methodically, while always being prepared to reject them in the name of cruel necessity. In an important sense, then, we might say that Machiavelli counsels the exploitation of oneself as well as others for the sake of building and maintaining the strength of political society.

The core teaching of Machiavelli, then, is that political society, if it is to be virtuous in his sense of the word, must remain forever poised between two worlds: between nature or Fortune, which is to be used,
mastered, and even imitated (e.g., by creating a crisis in order to “rescue” one’s people from it), but which always remains as an object of further conquest; and a mysterious place outside of nature, from which nature or Fortune may be opposed. This applies not only to Machiavelli’s princes, but also to his republics, which, though seemingly based on the classical notion of the mixed regime, actually modify this concept as radically as his princes modify the classical notion of monarchy. Rather than seeking to check the folly of factions, bring out the fractions of wisdom in their divergent views, and unite the various classes of society in a closer approximation of the genuine common good—as did classical political science—Machiavelli’s republican theory embraces and even promotes the conflict of faction, folly and all, while seeking to channel it towards the political success of the regime: a sort of common good that neither conforms to the wishes of any one faction nor requires any faction to rise above its selfish desires. Though a Machiavellian republic will succeed at amassing great amounts of power and wealth, therefore, it will also perpetually check and limit the enjoyment of these things by any of its members, lest the enervation of success undermine the struggle fueling the mechanism by which it was achieved in the first place. Nonetheless, Newell concludes, Machiavelli anticipates that every regime, no matter how virtuous, will eventually be undermined by its own mastery of Fortune; this, he finds, is the most significant sense in which Machiavelli admits that nature continues to impose limits on the ambitions of human beings.

In lesser but still significant detail, Newell also traces the connections between Machiavelli and his more immediate predecessors and successors. Looking back, Newell argues, Machiavelli’s notion of standing outside of nature in order to master it is derived (however inimically) from the Christian belief in a God transcending nature; and is developed (though sometimes in narrow or destructive forms) in such modern theories and practices as liberalism, technology, bureaucracy, and (with qualifications) totalitarianism. Regarding Christianity, Newell contends that, despite the classical theologians’ many points of agreement with the Socratic perspective, the notion of a Creator-God is inescapably “anti-nature,” and therefore provides a precedent for Machiavelli’s declaration of war on Fortune—including, ironically, the very God who allegedly inspired this maneuver! Regarding Machiavelli’s successors, Newell tends to divide them into representatives of modernity’s darker and healthier sides. The basis on which he makes such judgments and the precise degree to which he credits (or blames) Machiavelli for these aspects of our present condition is not as clear as it might be. The worst manifestations of modernity—among which Newell counts the will to
power, abuses of technology, and faceless bureaucracy, as well as totalitarianism—seem to presuppose either a narrowing of Machiavelli (as with Hobbes and Bacon) or the addition of an enflaming element (such as Rousseauian sentimentalism about the recovery of original goodness). Yet key aspects of each of these problems can be traced to Machiavelli’s own denaturing of politics in the name of an amoral and depersonalized consolidation of power.

Bearing in mind that Newell’s study of tyranny is still incomplete, what are we to think of his accomplishment thus far? Though much of what he argues will be familiar to those steeped in these philosophers and issues, Newell’s interweaving of innumerable ideas and events is bound to be stimulating and instructive for any reader. The present reviewer especially appreciates his analysis of the connections and disconnections between Socratic and Machiavellian psychology, and his treatment of unifying themes in the *Prince* and *Discourses*. This book is also especially helpful in raising very poignantly a host of questions regarding the merits and flaws in Machiavelli’s ideas, both in themselves and in comparison to the philosophic alternatives available before, during, and after Machiavelli’s day. It is not always as helpful, however, in the way it pursues or frames some of those questions.

While it is interesting to note ways in which Machiavelli toys with Christian doctrine in the presentation of his own teaching, for instance, and vital to understand the effect of biblical faith on medieval Europe’s understanding of classical political philosophy, the significance of Machiavelli’s rejection of Christian orthodoxy and the philosophical-theological syntheses it produced cannot be determined without serious attention to the contours of the body of thought from which he was departing (if perhaps with a few spoils in hand). Yet Newell’s treatment of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas is far from illuminating, relying as it does on a set of familiar accusations against the implications of their faith, while ignoring or mischaracterizing their painstaking responses to those charges. Briefly put, Newell argues that Christianity depicts a world whose Creator stands outside of it and therefore against it, able to annihilate it at any moment; a world in which nature, politics, and virtue are formless, base, and utterly meaningless without supernatural intervention; a world in which political life and civic virtue are props for religion at best, and at worst nothing but a cover for collective brigandage.

In response, one might note that little if anything in Christian literature surpasses the contempt for political life sometimes expressed by Socratic philosophers: the likening of political society to the shadowy
realm of the dead, for example (Plato, *Republic* 516d); the depiction of real-world statesmanship as a pseudo-Herculean effort to decapitate the Hydra (426e); or the more prosaic but equally grave admission that politics is always an unleisured activity (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics* 1177b). While noting that Augustine exposes the injustices of Rome, which Cicero had concealed, Newell does not discuss the open irony with which Cicero chose to present Rome as a just society, or the significance of Cicero’s characterization of his own politic approach as a departure from the mode of Plato’s Socrates (*Republic* 2.22). In brief, Newell does not help us to measure precisely how and why Augustine drew upon or departed from his predecessors in the crucial matter of representing the necessary gulf between perfect justice (or the other classical virtues) and the achievements of real political societies.

Furthermore, while it is true that the Christian God is believed to stand outside of nature, a fair reading of Augustine and Aquinas cannot support the idea that for them the Creator stands against nature. In fact, both hold quite the opposite. Though God was under no compulsion to create the world we know, they hold, and though the world cannot exist without God’s ongoing creation of it, these facts do not render the order of things as we understand it arbitrary or uncertain. Newell believes that the notion of creation ex nihilo undermines the rationality of the world by denying the “preexistent ratio, form, mind, or good” which, for the classics, renders nature intelligible. In fact, Aquinas claims that such a preexistent ratio exists from all eternity—for God himself is the ratio of his creation, which he can but does not annihilate precisely because it is a product of his eternal reason and will. Far from creating formless matter and then imposing a whimsical structure upon it, as Newell contends, the Christian God creates matter and form simultaneously, a fact of which we can be confident because we know matter and form to be inseparable, and because their inseparability is one characteristic among many of an intelligible, natural order which, so far from being subject to change “any or every nanosecond,” is itself an expression—partial but real—of the unchanging essence of its Creator.

As Plato’s Socrates noted, the sovereignty of logos—whether human or divine—is itself inseparable from the idea of the Good (*Phaedo* 97c–99d). For Augustine and Aquinas, the origin of creatures in divine logos thus guarantees their essential goodness. Evil, on their account, can only be understood as a departure on the part of creatures from the rational order reflected in nature itself. So far is Augustine’s doctrine of the fall from a quasi-Manichean belief in the utter corruption of nature that he emphatically
affirms the essential goodness of Satan himself. So far from breaking Diotima’s ladder of love by obliterating the goodness of nature—including the passions, the virtues, and the common good of political society—divine logos establishes it; and the faith that participates in the death and resurrection of Christ—the Logos made flesh—so far from “crucifying” nature in the sense Newell implies, is meant to redeem it, to heal and elevate it, to make it possible for man to become blessed (makarios) by the repossession of his soul (psuche), and thereby restored to fullness of life (zoon). What is good in nature remains good; what is corrupt in nature can be renewed; and what is beyond nature builds on what is good and what is renewed in nature itself. As Newell admits at key points in his analysis, Socratic and traditional Christian thought, despite their relative distinctions, stand united in their opposition to Machiavelli’s specific innovations regarding virtue and political life.

These reflections raise another question about which Newell is likewise negligent: that of the soundness of Machiavelli’s thought. Though Newell stresses the significance of Machiavelli’s antinatural stance, and though he indicates at times that Machiavelli does admit limits to human virtue conceived of as the capacity to conquer nature, Newell says very little about what precisely it could mean for natural beings to stand outside of nature, or whether and to what extent such an idea can be defended philosophically or even distinguished from mere madness. On a related point, though Newell acknowledges the intrinsic orientation of human passions and reason to an objective order of the good in classical thought, he seems to accept without argument Machiavelli’s dismissal of this connection, and hence the possibility of “cold” but strong and sustainable desires. If, as the ancients hold, the sovereignty of reason within the soul means that every passion, argument, action, and choice aims at some good, Machiavelli’s elimination of the good as a category of thought would seem to render reason itself aimless, thereby vitiating any political science built upon it. Nor is it evident how substituting the word “success” for “the good” can rescue us from this dilemma. Machiavelli’s own reliance upon regular patterns in the passions of men, even if they are to be manipulated and never finally satisfied; his fears that these passions cannot ultimately be restrained from seeking higher forms of satisfaction than material prosperity and political glory can offer, even if he believes these higher forms are always imaginary; and the continued reliance of history’s more sober Machiavellian statesmen upon major categories of classical thought—all documented by Newell—would seem to invite incisive questions about the plausibility and self-consistency of Machiavelli’s key claims.
Are peoples and princes really “happy,” as Machiavelli promises, with what has been described as “the joyless pursuit of joy,” and with the honor of temporary victories in an admittedly meaningless struggle? Are the excesses of late modernity—even or precisely when they depart from the coolness with which Machiavelli advised us to conquer Fortune—possibly related to shortcomings in the grounds of that very advice? Faced with the possibility that Machiavelli’s philosophy represents a falling away from classical wisdom, Newell asks whether nature could “be lost for so much of human history, including to its greatest minds.” Yet the problems one can see already in Machiavelli when one interrogates him from the perspective of earlier minds may correspond very closely to those problems—both flagrant and subtle—that become increasingly manifest in many among the greats of late modern and contemporary thought and practice. For those willing to take up these questions, further adventure awaits, including the possibility of yet deeper insights into the nature and origins of tyranny in all of its forms, especially in those contemporary forms Newell so rightly deplores.

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No one in the public square worries that immigration policy lies outside the moral reach of government, as would regulation of personal religious faith. It is assumed that states may tighten or relax immigration rules as they see fit, and correspondingly that individuals’ desires to move from country to country do not demand the utmost political deference. Christopher Wellman and Phillip Cole put this assumption to the question in their new book. *Debating the Ethics of Immigration* lays out contrasting answers to a fundamental question: what gives states the right to shut the door on potential immigrants, since citizens and foreigners are morally equal? In the book’s first half, Wellman argues that the right to free association permits states to exclude some or all immigrants; if so, immigration is a legitimate topic for public discussion. In the latter half, Cole counters that moral equality requires open borders, implying that states have no right to exclude immigrants or even to discuss doing so. The debate is left open, so the reader must judge the winner for herself. Both cases are compelling, but an ambiguity at the point of departure makes it hard to gauge the better argument. Wellman and Cole differ on how to justify or refute a “right to exclude,” so they end up answering subtly different questions. Nonetheless, the book excels in depth and breadth. The authors explore the moral roots of immigration policy in relation to questions of legitimacy, membership, and universalism. Along the way they engage nearly all the major positions in immigration ethics, making the book a fine introduction for the lay reader.
The book presents two visions of immigration based on the same liberal dramatis personae: a world of rights-bearing individuals. Both authors recognize that prevailing opinion about immigration affirms qualified sovereignty for states. In this commonsense view, states can generally do as they like, but also have some duties to those outside their borders, especially the most vulnerable. Wellman and Cole aim to settle the apparent inconsistency in this view: do liberal states have the right to keep outsiders out, or do their duties to outsiders foreclose exclusion?

Wellman argues in favor of the prevailing immigration regime, broadly speaking, in which every country has a right to set its own policy. He contends that all legitimate states have a right to self-determination, of which control over immigration is an important part. Wellman understands those states to be legitimate that respect human rights, so individual rights remain at the core of his conception. Given the liberal premise that only persons (not groups) ultimately matter, the crux of the argument is to show how individual rights concatenate into rights of the state. The traditional defense would appeal to the “consent of the governed,” but Wellman rejects this as a fiction. He argues instead that a state is entitled to self-determination out of respect for its individual members, “as a consequence of their collective achievement of maintaining a political institution that adequately protects the human rights of all” (25). Rightful control over immigration is contingent only on the legitimacy of a state. For many of his allotted pages, Wellman considers various claims of distributive justice that might require a state to welcome outsiders. In the process he offers a review of current thought on immigration ethics. He takes the claims of global justice seriously, but concludes that states need not pay their debts “in the currency of open borders” (77). In principle, states are never morally required to admit immigrants because they can always discharge duties of justice in other ways. Wellman concludes that legitimate states have a right to exclude any immigrants they wish, provided that they respect basic human rights.

In the latter half of the book, Cole argues vehemently against unilateral immigration controls. He tries to show that one cannot coherently affirm the equality of all persons while permitting states to exclude those who want or need to enter. Rich countries, of course, have a history of accepting “the institutions that give us what we want, and we will not sacrifice what

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1 Wellman does maintain that a state could acquire an obligation to admit immigrants by some prior action of its own, as in the situation of long-term guest workers (133–42), but this obligation could be avoided by not admitting the guest workers in the first place.
we want in the face of...global poverty and other inequalities” (311). Cole pushes on many different fronts to make his case, tackling universalism, ethical symmetry, deontology, and the historical experience of immigration. The reader is hard-pressed at times to say which arguments are meant to be decisive, and which peripheral. One central strand concerns the arbitrary nature of membership in a state. National boundaries are morally suspect because “any such boundary must inevitably clash with the moral equality of persons” (178). One can only justify differing treatment of insiders and outsiders if everyone in question has chosen to be in or out; otherwise borders are occasions of injustice. Cole also argues that the right to exit a country, affirmed by the UN and nearly everyone else, is perfectly useless without the right, or at least the opportunity, to enter some other country. He concludes that a liberal world cannot accept nations as moral communities unless they renounce exclusion and open themselves to free international movement for all. On the practical level, Cole advocates multilateral global or regional control of immigration, which will prevent states from denying individuals’ right to migrate. He brushes aside arguments from nations’ economic or cultural interest as so many “consequentialist concerns,” which have no place in an argument about rights. On the whole, Cole aims at victory by default: if the case for national immigration control fails, the liberal must revert to equal treatment for all, wherever they may be.

The book intends to present a debate, but Wellman and Cole choose not to engage in point-by-point rebuttal, leaving one with the sense that they might not be addressing the same question. According to the thrust of Cole’s reasoning, if it is wrong to exclude immigrants, there can be no right to do so. In focusing on exclusion, he speaks to the content of an immigration policy, irrespective of the agent that enacts it. It would be just as wrong, on this view, for the UN to restrict international movement as for a single nation to bar immigrants. Wellman begins from the other end of the question, arguing that states enjoy “moral dominion” (26) over immigration policy simply in virtue of their legitimacy. Their rightful agency is not dependent upon enacting policy with any particular content, such as nonexclusionary policy. So there are two questions lurking within the “right to exclude”; one concerns “Who decides?” and the other “What to decide?” Wellman addresses “Who decides?” but Cole focuses on “What to decide?” and this leads them to talk past one another. But this does not suggest incoherence so much as

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2 Wellman defends his position by arguing that it is always potentially permissible for a state to exclude immigrants. Given the view of rights in play, he needs to make this case, but it is not the reason why states should enjoy dominion in the first place.
tacit agreement on a certain conception of rights as a moral category. In this conception, a right implies an untrammeled free space of action, only morally limited by other rights. Granting a right ends the ethical discussion—in the sense that a grouchy neighbor might say, “I’m well within my rights, so leave me alone!” Such a conception of rights makes sense of moral alternatives whereby a single nation either enjoys total discretion, as Wellman argues, or no prerogative at all, as with Cole. Another conceivable option would be rights with limited discretion; one might say a state had the right to set its immigration policy but was required to admit one refugee for every ten immigrants. Both authors seem to hold that this would not conform to the very notion of a right, because such limitations would shift the locus of control from the state to whoever judges whether the policy complies. With any via media firmly closed, the remaining grants of discretion are all or nothing.

This conception of rights also explains how the authors can answer different questions and yet disagree. In most cases, if one party asks a “Who?” question, and an interlocutor gives an answer framed as a “What?” one would infer miscommunication, not disagreement. But Wellman and Cole tie agency and content so closely together that their respective arguments focusing on one aspect imply positions on the other. Wellman’s claim that states have a right to decide immigration matters implies moral indifference between policy alternatives; conversely, Cole’s assertion that exclusion is wrong is tantamount to denying states the right to decide. This stark conception of rights helps to explain the debate between Wellman and Cole, but it does not comport well with the commonsense opinion about immigration, in which sovereignty brings certain duties in its train. Measured against the commonsense view, the positions of Wellman and Cole both seem “radical and uncompromising” (165), because they insist on linking the agency and content dimensions of immigration policy so tightly. On the common view, it is one thing to ask who gets to decide, and quite another to discuss what policies that agent ought to enact. Both are live moral issues. It is logically possible for Wellman and Cole both to be right if one poses the two questions separately, as I will do briefly in what follows.

On the question of “Who decides?”—who may rightfully set immigration policy—Wellman is arguing a somewhat counterintuitive position. He agrees that the individual rights-bearer is the focus of immigration

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3 Cole is not claiming that states may not decide how to man their border posts, or what visa forms to use, or other fairly trivial matters. What he denies is a right to set an overall policy that directly limits or excludes numbers of intending immigrants.
ethics, yet he argues for state prerogative. Given the liberal premise that
groups as such do not count morally, it requires a substantive argument to
justify that a particular collection of individuals, gathered into a state, should
acquire special rights against other individuals. Cole has a far simpler task
in defending the equal rights of nonmembers against any group rights. The
main premise that he needs, that individual rights are the focus of immi-
ration, has been readily granted by his opponent. Wellman must find an
argument from individual rights to the moral status of the nation. He invokes
equal respect for persons, a prime liberal value, to ground a claim that there
is something like an individual right to state sovereignty, i.e., that I am per-
sonally entitled not just to free speech and worship, but also the deference
of foreign powers to certain decisions of the government under which I live.
This unusual claim is a weak link in Wellman's argument, since he does not
presume that citizens support their regime. It is hard to see how political dis-
sidents, for instance, could be individually respected by privileging a regime
they despise. More likely they would consider interference a mark of respect
for their views. Respect for individuals cannot bear the load that Wellman
puts on it in justifying the group rights of states. Wellman needs such an
account so that he can invoke freedom of association on behalf of the coer-
cive, nonvoluntary associations that states are. If arguments for group rights
fail, as Cole claims they must, one is left with only individual rights, which
favor a more cosmopolitan immigration regime.

The moral value of nations is hard to extract from the liberal
premises that Wellman employs, yet it is a value that no thinker concerned
with lived experience can toss aside lightly. Even Cole, in the final analysis,
affirms nations as potentially good, if consented to under an open immigra-
tion regime. Yet this would not explain why a liberal should regard nations,
or any political group, as good and morally significant. Wellman is onto a
more promising explanation of this important value when he calls the legiti-
mate state a “collective achievement.” A society that upholds human rights
is constituted by social action in carrying out law, if not in making it, and
a legitimate regime necessarily figures to some large degree in the flourish-
ing of its members, even when they do not consent to it. Focusing on the
actual participation of members might provide a stronger link between the
moral status of individuals and that of groups than does the slippery notion
of respect. If respect is due in this instance, it would be due to persons not
qua isolated individuals but qua members of a social group that has achieved
a complex good intrinsically related to each of them. An account in this vein
could put the moral standing of nations on firmer liberal ground by a closer
link to individual moral personality. It would also bring Wellman’s theory more in line with both the commonsense view of immigration and the tradition of liberal political philosophy, which affirm the political community as morally meaningful. To claim that nations have moral standing is not to grant a “right to exclude,” but such a claim does tell against a thoroughgoing cosmopolitanism and keeps a key human concern in plain view. I judge that Wellman’s approach to the question of agency is more promising both politically and normatively, but that future discussion will need to clarify the foundational arguments for this view.

If we reconstruct Wellman’s and Cole’s views on “What to decide?”—the content of immigration policy—in isolation from the question of “Who decides?” we will find their answers surprisingly similar. Cole argues for open borders, so that the vulnerable will not be unjustly deprived of their rights. Wellman also argues for policies that respect human rights for all. If he vigorously denies that this entails open immigration, it is because the requirement to respect or promote rights comes in disjunctive form: either via immigration policy or by equivalent other means. The two positions differ mainly in that Cole folds in the right to migration as a basic right, while Wellman does not. Otherwise, the content of the right policy looks identical: that which respects human rights. This should come as no surprise, since the protagonist of both theories is the rights bearer, and immigration policy is largely instrumental to her rights. Wellman obviously considers immigration benefits to be fungible with other kinds of help, such as material aid to beleaguered peoples, in meeting the demands of global justice. At least in theory, various types of aid could have the same rights value. Cole does not agree to such equivalence; he thinks history makes a good case that exclusive immigration policies are never adequately compensated for elsewhere. For both thinkers, however, the central goal is ensuring basic rights and the just immigration regime is one that effectively furthers, or at least does not confound, these rights. The debate comes down to whether open immigration is absolutely necessary to ensuring basic rights, or is required only in the absence of other measures. Wellman and Cole advance compelling cases on both sides of this narrower question.

Wellman and Cole have done a real service by exploring the foundations of immigration ethics. Their disagreement points up not only the range of positions within liberal thought on immigration, but also the range of questions that must be asked. The question of who gets to decide immigration policy receives little public attention because the answer is presumed to
be “the states that already regulate it.” One of the signal achievements of the book is to pose this question afresh, as one worthy of philosophical attention. In considering it, both Wellman and Cole bring out the complex reality that the ethical ramifications of immigration policies do not stop at national borders. This marks real progress over a debate in which the moral existence of states is simply assumed. As to the implications of this broader horizon, the book moves both sides of the debate forward in providing arguments for and against the prerogative of states. The dual-viewpoint format will be useful for students, although the differing foci of Wellman’s and Cole’s portions make one wish for some direct, point-counterpoint exchange. Without it, their shared conception of rights leads to particularly stark positions—ascribing to states either unfettered discretion or no prerogative at all in immigration policy. Neither alternative is likely to convince those who reject Wellman and Cole’s version of liberal rights, or who doubt the usefulness of rights language in discussing immigration. Even for such, however, the positions presented help to clarify logical extremes between which future conversation can move.
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Catherine and Michael Zuckert contributed an article to an early issue of this journal. “‘And In Its Wake We Followed’: The Political Wisdom of Mark Twain” displayed some of the most noteworthy characteristics of their life together: philosophic friendship and an interest in the ways in which political philosophy “ancient and modern” can clarify our understanding of the American regime. In the decades that have followed, Catherine Zuckert has concentrated her attention on the ancients, Michael Zuckert on the moderns, and each has kept America in mind. They have never forgotten the terms and conditions of their philosophizing, or what they owe to a country which offers shelter to philosophers.

This *festschrift* reflects the Zuckerts’ philosophic concerns. Carefully edited by Ann and Lee Ward, who rightly identify natural right as the principal theme of the Zuckers’ thought, the volume consists of four sections on four topics: ancient or classical political philosophy; modern political theory; American political thought; politics and literature. The suggestion that philosophy, theory, thought, and literature are distinct kinds of intellectual activity and that natural right might be discerned in each of those activities animates the volume in a manner consistent with the scholarship of
the Zuckerts and also that of their teacher, Leo Strauss, in whose wake they have followed.

Titled “Classical Natural Right,” part 1 features five essays. These present an illuminating conversation among Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine. At the end of his life Strauss had turned to consideration of Xenophon’s writings; in her graceful, instructive essay, “Virtue and Self-Control in Xenophon’s Political Thought,” Lorraine Smith Pangle picks up where Strauss left off. “Socrates is famous for his radical claim that knowledge is the necessary and sufficient cause of virtue” (15). Aristotle “develop[s] a moderate, nuanced version” of that claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (15). But Pangle has doubts about the achievability of a central Aristotelian virtue, moderation, about the likelihood of making “knowledge and desire converge perfectly on what is in every way best.” “I myself have never met such a person,” she notes (16).

This being so, one may need to turn to stronger moral stuff than moderation—namely, self-control or *enkrateia*. On this topic Xenophon is the master, diverging from Aristotle by “giving the central place to self-control as the foundation of Socratic virtue, as if even the best soul never ceases to be rife with contrary impulses that must be vigilantly opposed” (17). Even the philosopher’s knowledge remains incomplete and therefore not entirely convincing to us at all times. Further, Xenophon (his military background showing?) worries not only about immoderate appetites but immoderate spiritedness—hubris and madness. For Xenophon’s Socrates, then, self-control “is in some ways deeper and more fundamental than moderation,” the “indispensable basis rather than the consequence of wisdom” (18). Without such austerity, the supremely ambitious souls who are the most likely candidates for the philosophic life—young men like Critias and Alcibiades, those “two spectacular failures of Socratic education” (19)—will veer off course once they depart from Socrates’s mesmerizing presence. Such souls love dialectic not as a way to discover truth but as a path to victory and to popularity; their version of “the political” interferes with philosophizing. Unhinged from convention, and especially from law and from piety, they go very wrong indeed. Xenophon concludes that one must train the soul just as one must train the body if one wants to maintain the soul’s health. Indeed, physical fitness itself, “mastery of the body,” stands as “the essential foundation for the excellence of the soul” (29).1

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1 See George Anastaplo on the habits of exercise of his philosophic friend Harry V. Jaffa, in George Anastaplo, *The Artist as Thinker: From Shakespeare to Joyce* (Chicago: Swallow, 1983), 477; in this
How can our necessarily incomplete, all-too-human knowledge enable us to know that we are advancing in knowledge—know ourselves better? Virtue is knowledge, but a knowledge “as much experiential as conceptual, and much more active than static”; virtue is a knowledge possessed the way you possess physical fitness and not the way you possess a statue (21). “Knowledge, then, is sovereign in the soul in this strange sense, that when fully present it will prevail, but that without the right disposition and habits insight itself can disappear, and what appeared good before can cease to appear good at all”—as it did when Critias and Alcibiades drifted away from Socrates. “For there is a natural tendency to slip back into thoughtlessness and confusion if one fails to keep striving for clarity” (22). To embark rightly upon the philosophic odyssey and then to stay on course, one needs “both the knowledge that Hermes’ root gives” and “the self-control to resist Circe’s erotic charms” (23). “Our higher and more austere pleasures and interests are forever in danger of being swamped by coarser and easier ones, unless the latter are vigilantly kept in check” (27).

Xenophon doubts that the Aristotelian gentleman can sustain his genial course. “The life that finds a satisfying place for art and history and music and family and wealth and travel and movies and gold and skiing and philosophy, too, may be in the end an illusion” (30–31). Correspondingly, the life of philosophic intoxication, “pursuing with gusto the fine points of logic or physics and pleasantly forgetting to remember that [one] must die” ultimately gets in the way of the philosophic life as surely as “the distraction that takes the form of frenetic pleasure seeking or empire building” (31). The Socratic philosopher, always mindful of death, of his body’s mortality, nonetheless remains calm in that mindfulness. Thus Xenophon can explain Socrates’s courting of the Athenian jury’s condemnation: “If Socrates’ important pleasures are all of the best sort, the pleasure of reaching ever new heights of insight, of handling interlocutors masterfully, of hard exertion and the perception of constant progress, then an old age of relaxation and gradual decline will never, for him, constitute a life worth having” (33). Such a man must be rare; “the complete virtue that is summed up in Socratic moderation remains beyond the reach even of most of Socrates’ most ardent followers” (33). Pangle does not, however, say that she has never met such a person—owing perhaps to having the example of Mister Pangle so often before her. We will turn to his contribution to this volume in due course, in search for further evidence of this possibility.

matter, at least, Jaffa looks Xenophontic, Anastaplo Aristotelian.
Pangle shows us why Xenophon’s Socrates, while not simply accepting the gods of the city as the underlying reality of all that is, nonetheless respects the piety that takes its law-abiding morality from the poets’ accounts of them. For the majority of us, fear of the gods is the beginning of the practical or proverbial wisdom we need for lives of decent citizenship; more, it is a salutary companion throughout our lives, keeping us on the straight and narrow path without making us succumb to the fear of merely human beings who would be tyrannical, unfatherly. The Socrates we meet in Plato’s *Euthyphro* also addresses the matter of piety. Coeditor Ann Ward remarks in her essay that such “postmodern” writers as Richard Rorty and Milan Kundera deny not only the piety of the city but the claim that human beings have any “access to unconditional moral truth” (37). For such thinkers (as for Nietzsche, from whom so much “postmodernism” derives), we have only relative or perspectival truths. While eschewing any claim to direct access to the wisdom of the gods, Plato’s Socrates equally eschews the rejection of the rational quest for justice and the other virtues.

Zealous young Euthyphro wants to prosecute his father for allowing a hired laborer who had murdered one of his fellows to die in a ditch while awaiting an authoritative religious judgment from the local priests on what to do with the man. This negligent homicide—manslaughter by pious dithering—violated the divine law Euthyphro’s father was attempting to uphold. Euthyphro thus acts in the name of piety. He rates the imperatives of the gods above loyalty to his family—even as Jesus of Nazareth would require, in bringing not peace but the sword to family ties. Euthyphro is a moral absolutist, in contrast with his father, who had been a sort of moral relativist, in effect if not necessarily in conviction. In the *Euthyphro* Socrates attempts to slow the boy down by getting him to think more seriously about what we really know respecting the gods and their commands.

The family depends upon the body—sexual reproduction, birth, and immediate nurture and protection of the infant. Euthyphro “disregards the bodily connections between parent and child that normally give the father authority over the son; he expresses a belief in a radical individualism that facilitates the prosecution of wrongdoers even if they are parents” (39). In effect, Euthyphro believes himself morally superior to his father to such a degree that he may prosecute him as a man less pious and less just than Euthyphro. Euthyphro therefore assumes that he understands what piety and justice are.
Socrates zeroes in on Euthyphro’s implied claim to piety. Socrates moderates Euthyphro’s zeal first by asking him what piety actually means. When Euthyphro tries to define piety by pointing to the way Zeus punished his own father, Kronos, Socrates notes that this is no definition of piety, only a supposed example of it. To Euthyphro’s next attempt—piety is what’s dear to the gods—Socrates notes that the gods disagree; after all, Kronos was a god, and he did not consent to being killed by his son. Euthyphro tries again: piety is what all the gods love. Socrates then gets to the key question, “Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?” If the former, then the idea of piety and the ideas generally are paramount to the will of the gods; if the latter, then “piety is a particular, subjective standard, dependent on the wills of the gods,” albeit their unanimous agreement (44). Socrates points to the tension “between the love of the good and the love of one’s own”; if piety is an idea, then one needs to define it as such, but if it is the will of the gods then “what the gods really love is their own will” (44). Euthyphro confusedly wants to hold both alternatives at once. This has the effect of making him hesitate about going ahead with prosecuting his father—a radical action aiming at an irretrievable action, which would sever the obligation to love one’s own while asserting absolute certainty about the idea of piety. Socrates shows Euthyphro that while the hesitation of Euthyphro’s father had deadly and therefore impious consequences, too much zealotry might also have equally deadly and impious consequences. Socrates persuades Euthyphro that Euthyphro needs more knowledge of the gods in order to act piously.

Euthyphro finally attempts to define piety as a set of actions: tending the gods through sacrifice and prayer. He further claims that such acts preserve families and cities. But obviously the prosecution of his father does not preserve his family and thus in principle fails to uphold his city. This consequence shames Euthyphro because the moral foundation of his accusation was piety. He must admit that morality and piety are not simply “spiritual”—to invoke an idea not yet exactly in use in our sense. The physical connections family entails themselves involve us in moral obligations, beginning with the debt we owe to parents who engendered, protected, and nurtured us before we could fend for ourselves. There is something that might be called natural right. There is of course another tension here: the polis or political community, the “city,” “which regards both fathers and sons as equal citizens and treats criminals equally regardless of their familial status, applies universal standards of justice equally to all” (46). The city both depends upon the families which compose it and reaches inside those
families to enforce equality before its law among individuals. The city acts a bit like a super-Euthyphro, and recalling that the gods are objects of worship in a civil or political religion makes this analogy even more evident. One might then say that the philosopher, Socrates, argues for natural right even as Euthyphro argues for the claims of the city, the polis. This tension between the family’s self-rule and the rule of the city—codependent human needs—can be ameliorated or mediated but never obviated. If so, then political life, precisely at its crucial nexus of the relations between the family and the city, requires moderation and not unthinking piety or zealotry which, if unrestrained, would destroy the natural foundation indispensable for the city’s genesis and sustenance and also violate the natural right the city should sustain. For Socrates, as we know, a more thoughtful life points to philosophy or the love of wisdom, which “engages with and confronts the potential groundlessness of life not simply by seeking to discover and love the gods but also by seeking to discover and love the ideas or the nature of things” (47). The relation between the philosopher and the city also turns out to be rather vexed, as the life of Socrates supremely illustrates.

Pangle and Ward burnish two sides of the Socratic coin—the human need for pious discipline of our unruly passions and the equally urgent human need to resist making piety itself an unruly passion for ruling. The Socratic coin as a whole, the philosophic life, can find itself declared illegal tender in the city in which philosophic dialogues occur. In the third or central essay of part 1, Kevin M. Cherry returns our attention to Aristotle’s proposed answer to these political-philosophic dilemmas by considering Aristotle’s critique of Plato’s *Laws*. To resolve the crisis described by Xenophon and Plato, do we need to recur to the very Aristotle who seemed, at first sight, perhaps not stern enough, too gentlemanly for the harsh reality of human unruliness? Who has the best formulation of “classical natural right”?

Cherry suggests (contra Strauss and Thomas L. Pangle) that Aristotle does not equate the Athenian Stranger with Socrates, that “there is a difference between Socrates and the Athenian, a difference that is as philosophic as it is political” (51). Unlike Socrates, and like Xenophon (whom he resembles in sternness), the Stranger has indeed been a foreigner in many places, making himself an observer not only of regimes (one needed not stray far from Athens to witness a variety of them) but also of peoples. Such observations lend themselves to the comparisons needed to distinguish nature from convention. He shares with Aristotle an esteem for the *philosophic* benefits of political experience. But he departs from Aristotle in the
degree of his esteem for piety, going so far as to invoke “a myth about the age of Kronos”—that ill-fated father—to justify the rule of law and to assert the gods’ providential care for human beings (52). Although (perhaps because) he regards “the conflict between the various kinds of rule [as] ultimately irreconcilable,” he recommends the mixed regime as the best possible, concurring with Aristotle on the latter point (52). Aristotle hints that the founding of such a regime may prove “less formidable” than the Athenian Stranger believes, however (54). Nature as Aristotle understands it is not as harsh as the Stranger (and Xenophon) contend; the potentially tense, even murderous difference between the generations, for example, can be managed by sending the strong, ambitious young citizens off to military service, “which enables them to acquire the necessary experience of being ruled as well as some familiarity with the advantageous and just, before they become rulers” (54).

In the Stranger’s judgment, factions threaten the mixed regime more than Aristotle thinks they do; the Stranger has recourse not only to strict piety but to the institutional device of the Nocturnal Council. Intellect or nous can rule the city but only under cover of darkness, as it were. The light of reason might draw dangerous attention to the vulnerable human beings in whom it shines brightest. The intractable factions of even the relatively moderate mixed regime need stronger stuff than the practical wisdom of the ordinary citizens who comprise them. The city needs philosophers, ruling surreptitiously, who not only investigate the nature of virtue but also engage in science—specifically, astronomy or the study of beings held to be divine. The Stranger wants the philosopher-rulers to acquire that precise knowledge of the gods Euthyphro lacked and that Socrates may doubt that anyone can have. Cherry recalls Catherine Zuckert’s skepticism about such a research agenda for rulers.² Aristotle too doubts “whether either of these inquiries is necessary or useful for statesmen”; “making people virtuous might not require philosophic knowledge of the virtues” (55) and as for the stars, the fault lies not in them but in ourselves. Theoretical wisdom or sophia does not get us very far in politics, being remotely relevant to its proper concerns and moreover a bad intellectual model: too precise for government work. Philosophers will mislead themselves by their own light if they do not focus it carefully. “Popular views about the soul” suffice “for guiding legislators in their effort to guide citizens to virtue” (56) and, for that matter, to guide parents in ruling the household. The Stranger wants the statesmen of

² Citing Catherine Zuckert, Plato’s Philosophers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 143–46.
the Nocturnal Council to study the heavens precisely because the unruliness of human passions makes the certainties of science appealing as a potential armature for firm rule, but Aristotle questions whether such knowledge is really as precise as it seems. “Due to their distance from us, our knowledge of the heavenly bodies is, and must remain, uncertain”—a matter of probability, only (57); Aristotle would have looked through Galileo’s telescope, but it is far from certain that he would have abandoned this basic point even then, inasmuch as increased precision may only serve to open new vistas of wonder and perplexity. You cannot rule wisely with theoretical wisdom alone, and nature has provided human beings with parents whose natural right inheres in their prudential care for us when we needed it.

The Athenian Stranger regards nature as largely indifferent to human beings; if anything, more evil than good comes at us from it. Hence the need for recourse to myths about the gods and their care for us. Aristotle (with Plato’s Socrates) regards nature as more hospitable to man and therefore as more loveable and therefore as more conducive to the cohesiveness of human societies. His celebrated Unmoved Mover—the core of nature that “moves other things not by moving itself but by being an object of desire and thought”—does not care for us (59). But we care for it or, more precisely, we desire it and that is enough. “The stability of these things leads to stability throughout the universe,” and this stability, this “regularity of nature, combined with the human ability to deliberate, enables us to make use of what is found in nature for the sake of our self-preservation” and potentially our happiness (60). Strauss puts it this way: “By becoming aware of the dignity of the mind, we realize the true ground of the dignity of man and therewith the goodness of the world, whether we understand it as created or uncreated, which is the home of man because it is the home of the human mind.”

Aristotle inclines to think the Platonic or at least the Athenian Stranger’s understanding of the relation between philosophy and politics too clear-cut or perhaps too direct. “For Aristotle philosophy does serve a purpose in politics,” but only as political philosophy, that is, “the study of what is just, what is equal in the context of the political” (60). As children, we perforce pay attention to our parents, whose marriage consists of a rule different from that which they exercise over us, and different still from that which they exercise over household slaves. They rule and are ruled by one another, reciprocally. As we grow up, we learn political rule by their example.

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of reasonable, talk-it-out ruling of the household—preparing us for friendship, which prepares us for citizenship and even for the life of philosophizing insofar as that life requires dialectic, reasonable conversation among friends. Philosophy can survive in the city, influencing if not ruling it (openly, as in the *Republic*, secretly, as in the *Laws*). It can do so because nonphilosophers do have partially true opinions about such matters as justice, even if they can have no competent knowledge of astrophysics. “Political philosophy need not be the exclusive preserve of a few” (61). In his version of the mixed regime, Aristotle points not merely to the more or less irreconcilable economic bases of class struggle but to the differing but to some extent reconcilable differences of the opinions about justice typically seen in the several classes. There is no need for the Nocturnal Council because a political philosopher can gain a hearing in the public square by “showing each group the partial truth about their opinions as well as the partial truth about their opponents’ opinions” (61), thereby strengthening a mixed regime. Such a conception of the philosophic life will prove better for the city and safer for the philosopher than a secret council that studies the heavens and mythologizes about providence. The Athenian Stranger is no Socrates, in Aristotle’s view; he is Socrates without the “zetetic character” of Socratic philosophizing (62). Or to put it more exactly in accordance with Cherry’s account, the Athenian Stranger confines Socratic zeteticism or inquiry to the secret investigations of the Nocturnal Council, whereas Aristotle, like Socrates, judges that philosophy can and must enter into dialogue with the philosopher’s fellow citizens, if this can be done in a “polite” or “politic” way. This points to Aristotle’s distinction between theoretical wisdom or *sophia* and practical wisdom or *phronesis*.

With a defense of Aristotle established at the core of part 1, Aristotle makes his way more grandly into the Wards’ public square in the fourth essay, by Mary P. Nichols. One might, after all, question the philosophic and scholarly merit of the *festschrift* as a literary genre. Wouldn’t such illuminating but very wide-ranging essays as these best be published in books that explicitly address the topics at hand? For example, why would we not be served better by the publication of part 1 as a separate volume of essays on classical political philosophy? Nichols answers such questions in her title, “Both Friends and Truth Are Dear.” If philosophizing, and especially Socratic philosophizing, inquires by means of dialogue, by means of testing opinion in open discussion, then friendship of a certain sort aids us in our quest for the wisdom we seek. If friendship and the quest for truth are in this sense inseparable, a *festschrift* in honor of such friendship, a book showing how such friendship is “done,” may prove as instructive as a collection of essays more narrowly conceived. And in
fact this *festschrift*, like many long-standing friendships, has a theme as well, albeit a very broad one: what then is the relationship of friendship to the truth about natural right and political philosophy?

Nichols takes her title from the famous remark of Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: although truth and friends are both dear, a philosopher must honor truth most of all. He specifically refers to his friends who introduced the ideas or forms into philosophy—Plato first among these. “Aristotle’s rejection of Plato’s ideas here, I argue, is in fact demanded by friendship and the good for human beings” because the Platonic–Socratic argument for the community of wives, children, and property “reduce[s] individuals to the class of which they are members”; yet “without the diversity of goods for which human beings strive and without the distinct contributions made by members of a community, there is no politics in Aristotle’s sense”—namely, reciprocity of rule, “ruling and being ruled,” the characteristic feature of the relationship between husband and wife, that is, of human beings of different sexes (69). By contrast, an “ideational” approach to politics tends to “confuse political science with mathematics” and thus to miss the differentiation of inquiry that the many, differing subjects of inquiry require (71). For Aristotle (and for the Bible) knowing the Pythagorean theory is not the same as knowing your wife. Loving “the good” is admirable, but one needs “to explain the good in a way that does not undermine our experience of what is dear, of what we love” (73). Notice how this argument reprises the dilemma of knowledge in the *Euthyphro*. Socrates moderates Euthyphro by urging him to consider the idea of the good, not only the will of the gods; Aristotle argues that sometimes the reverse is also true, that one needs to moderate or balance one’s love of the ideas with love of persons—especially if those persons are human, more readily known to us than gods.

Aristotle’s inquiries into ethics and politics themselves exemplify “a kind of political art” (*NE* 1094b11) in the sense that, despite the form in which they are given (the treatise not the dialogue), they invite the student to contribute to inquiry, to further the inquiry “on their own.” When Thomas Jefferson cited Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, and Sidney as the sources of the Declaration of Independence, Aristotle would have understood this to be an instance both of being ruled and of ruling—that is, an adaptation of philosophic principles to a new circumstance in political practice, not a slavish imitation of those principles taken as if by dictation. The very nature of the ethical virtues requires such an approach, for while the virtues “are not contrary to nature” they do not imprint themselves upon us; they require
habituation and thought, mixed together over time to form character (75). “Once our habits take hold and impart character, we can make choices and voluntarily act in conformity with who we are” (76), and this may include a certain independence from family and from city (normally without going so far as Euthyphro). Nichols effectively concurs with Cherry in observing Aristotle’s departure from his friend Plato with respect to the relationship of sophia, “the most precise knowledge of the most exalted things, which exist of necessity and could not be otherwise,” to phronesis or prudence, which “deliberates about the just, the noble, and the good, those things for which we act which do not exist of necessity” (77). Sophia is not self-sufficient, as it seems to be for Plato’s Socrates; prudence serves it “as medicine serves health,” and all of us need to take our medicine because none of us remains perenni-
ally healthy. While prudence serves sophia, prudence is what actually rules the just political community, not sophia. There are no philosopher-kings in Aristotle. In Aristotle self-sufficiency means “lacking in none of the goods that constitute happiness, including parents, wife, children, friends, and fellow citizens” (77). Self-sufficiency is not for “loners.”

Friendship requires self-restraint—respecting one’s friend, ruling and being ruled, reciprocity. “Friends see themselves in each other… not only because they are alike, and share in the same activities, but because they themselves play a part in their friend’s becoming good”; “we see our goodness in the deeds of our friend” (78). Friendship “finds its clearest expression in the relation between a man and a woman in marriage,” a “sharing in the rule appropriate to each” (79). If Aristotle were to answer Xenophon, he might say that the right kind of friendships will ameliorate the incompleteness of our knowledge; our friend supplements what we know with what she knows, what we think with what she thinks. On the more strictly moral side of the ledger, in friendship we find not only justice but equity—that is, an adjustment of the general precept to the particular person and circumstance. “Like Aristotle’s political science itself, equity does not insist on too much precision where justice is concerned” (79). Equity makes sense in friendship and particularly in marriage because men and women differ, grieving and rejoicing in different ways. “The different inclinations that Aristotle attributes to men and women are both necessary for friendship” (80–81). If marriage anchors the family and the family anchors the city, then the Politics must follow the Ethics, by nature. Because friendships of a certain sort can actually make people worse—as when we select companions who confirm our prejudices instead of making us think, ones who gin us up for misbehavior
instead of genially moderating our spiritedness—the vigilance of the political community may be indispensable to the task of strengthening our character.

Human intellect is both necessary and dangerous to the city. Although statesmen gain indispensable political experience, and are therefore unlikely to follow “intellectuals” into the clouds, “they cannot give an account of what they do and thereby teach it to others” (82). But the intellectuals or sophists for their part have no experience in politics; their heads remain in those clouds. Plato’s sharp contrast between the realm of ideas and the realm of practice reinforces this impasse, Aristotle contends. But if human beings are political animals then their capacity for rule by means of deliberation and of speech must give them a middle ground for thinking not only about ideas but about actions. Reason or thought governed by the principle of noncontradiction might well “work” in practice as well as in theory, although it must recognize the difference between practice and theory in order to think clearly about either. “Aristotle takes Socrates’ turn to the human things one step further—from the speeches or dialogues through which Socrates makes his inquiries with others to the deeds of politics, which he intends to influence” (86). Political animals need political philosophy both in order to know themselves by the light reason shines on their nature and to preserve themselves in the polis; they need the help of a philosophic way of life or regime that wisely coordinates theoretical wisdom with practical needs. Theoretical wisdom discovers these needs by observing and by thinking about the many regimes.

But what of piety, which Xenophon and the Athenian Stranger applaud, and Socrates moderates? The accounts of Aristotle seem to have moved us some distance from it, toward nature and its unmoved but moving core. But what if the ancient philosophers did not know God and therefore did not understand the origin of nature? Alternatively, what if General Xenophon is right to regard human spiritedness as very recalcitrant stuff indeed, often stronger than even citizens’ friendships can overcome? To address these questions, Augustine writes of a new “republic,” the City of God. The Zuckerts teach at Notre Dame, where such matters can never be entirely obscured, as their colleague Mary M. Keys reminds us in the concluding essay on classical natural right.

The God of the Bible requires a virtue not conspicuous among the ancients generally: humility (anav in the Hebrew). Augustine’s “new account of natural right” elevates humility to an eminent place precisely because it requires piety toward one Creator-God, not a squabbling
raft of superhuman meddlers. Humility contrasts with pride—overweening, spirited love of one’s own; specifically, humility contrasts with the pride of imperial Rome and with political grandeur generally, which in fact prove “intrinsically enslaving and enfeebling” (98). Humility numbers among the natural virtues because it recognizes human beings as beings created by the only omniscient and omnipotent personal God; conversely, pride ranks as unnatural or vicious because it consists of “a mere creature’s individual or collective usurpation of the place of God” (98). The natural rightness of humility intensifies when this creature recognizes the divine right of humility, and God’s exercise of that right, “the astounding humility of God, known to an extent through nature and most perfectly through revelation” as seen in the life and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth (98). Paradoxically, the Bible teaches that to be humble is to be Godlike, inasmuch as God himself accepted the humiliation of the cross at the hands of prideful Rome. To humble oneself before this God is to accept a new citizenship in a new empire, namely, the City of God, whose ruler’s status as the omnipotent and all-wise Creator puts him in a position to tyrannize but whose goodness (including his humility) brings him not to ruin but to redeem us, even after our repeated and willful deviations from the way of life of his city.

Augustine seeks “to persuade those who do not yet accept Scripture’s authority of the excellence of humility,” and thereby to induce them to immigrate to the City of God, even as we remain in our lifetimes citizens or subjects in human cities. “Since this is so…Augustine must consider humility to have a foothold, a foundation in human nature, notwithstanding its fallen state” (99). Here Keys may or may not be right, inasmuch as part of God’s humility is his grace, and it is that which seems to turn (for example) the prideful and spirited Paul of Tarsus to him, joltingly. Put differently, Augustine might understand his attempt at persuasion to be workable only if assisted by the work of the Holy Spirit in the mind of the reader. Be this as it may, Keys identifies “the natural epistemic foothold for Augustine’s case for humility” to be misery, “the misery of pride,” which “reach[es] its pinnacle when it claims divine honors and attributes in the service of its insatiable ‘lust for mastery’ (libido dominandi)” (99). Nature teaches the human soul that its love for mastery brings it not happiness or satisfaction but insecurity and frustration. And it can teach this lesson to many souls at once, through the course of events, as when warlike Rome itself lost its empire to the peoples it had long dismissed as barbarians. Although the great imperial poet Virgil had urged his fellow-citizens to spare the humble and subdue the proud, Augustine sees in this only a usurpation of “a task of judgment that only
God can rightly and equitably fulfill” (100). Rome recognized humility as a virtue and pride as a vice but then proudly imagined that it could uphold the virtue and defeat the vice by its own unaided efforts—or perhaps aided by false gods or demons. In so attempting, it partook of the very vice its most revered poet condemned. Even the height of “Roman moral rectitude and civic harmony”—achieved during “the period between the second and final Punic Wars”—resulted not from genuine natural right but from “fear of foreign invasion”; it evaporated after the destruction of Carthage removed the threat (101). Just as Socratic natural right comes to light in the natural rule of parents over children—their provision for them—so biblical right comes to light in the provision or providence of God. Fear or deep respect for him is therefore the beginning of practical wisdom.

Pride acts rather as excessive philosophic abstraction acts in Plato according to Aristotle. It severs familial bonds, inclining men toward ruling in a masterly not a political manner. But God is the only just master of man (102–3).

The closest analogue to humility in classical political thought is moderation. Augustine contrasts the prideful man with the humble man. Keys acutely observes that “Augustine inverts Socrates’ dialogic methodology in Plato’s Republic, arguing that virtues and their relation to happiness are easier to identify in a human being’s life than in a political society; so he crafts two human beings in speech” instead of one regime in speech (103). This reorientation from the political to the individual suggests two important points: first, that if the personal and unitary biblical God and not nature is the prime mover and indeed creator of all we see around us, then the Bible accentuates individuality as distinct from the natural species; second, if the one fully just regime is the city of that personal and unitary Creator-God, far superior to even his best creation, then this city of active, creative speech exists not as an “ideal type” unrealizable in the world as it exists, but as a city that exists in literal truth, albeit only as captive and stranger in the dimension of reality that we see around us. Like Socrates’s city, it will never exist in this world, except in circles of friends within this world; it will only exist fully when a new heaven and a new earth are created.

The two human beings or types Augustine presents are the moderate and happy person and the wealthy and feverish person. These have their political equivalents in the City of God and the city of man, or Rome. In classical terms, Roman imperialism instances the “immoderate love of dominion”—amounting to what Augustine famously described as a great
robbery. It was the false gods or demons worshiped by Rome who stoked this immoderation; one might add that Zeus killed his father while Jesus obeyed his Father. This means that in God’s city, God’s creation, nature, coincides with obedience to God, and that philosophy and civic piety cohere in a way Socrates correctly did not see in the civil theology of the polis, with its many gods. At the same time, what would come to be called utopianism is avoided at least insofar as the City of God only exists by God’s own intervention, and will only become universal thanks to his efforts, not ours.

The more sophisticated poets and philosophers of Rome disbelieved the myth of Zeus but substituted pantheism for him—an improvement but not much of one, inasmuch as it failed to purge the Romans of their libido dominandi. The Roman intellectual Varro failed to see that “the true God is not a soul, but the maker and establisher of the soul,” the Creator-God (107). “Had Varro achieved this final philosophic step, a true ethics of humility beginning from the willing recognition of one’s own, one’s polity’s, and all human beings’ creaturely status vis-à-vis the divine Creator would have been within his reach and perhaps within all of Rome’s as well” (107). But of course this is the rub: is seeing the Creator-God really a philosophic step, or is it an insight vouchsafed by the Holy Spirit, for which philosophy can at best be only propaedeutic?

Keys spells out some additional implications of accepting humility as a virtue in the sight of the Creator-God. As “the creatures of an infinitely wise and omnipotent Being,” human beings enjoy their own freedom to make moral choices and humbly to open or proudly to close their souls to the possibility of such a God. “Augustine implies that human dignity and humility can and must go hand in hand if humans are to achieve full self-knowledge and strive for true justice, and that in their virtuous forms neither of these human attributes is independent of the Creator’s providence” (108). Rome, which was not built in a day, was built in partnership with God; in failing to understand the character of that partnership by failing to know (and actually killing) God-as-Jesus, the Romans “fell victim by degrees to their own pride, making themselves individually or collectively into self-sufficient gods to whose praise their actions were directed” and ruining “the very freedom Rome had begun by seeking to preserve” (109), a freedom and concurrent responsibility God implanted in them when he created them. Humility would have preserved Roman republicanism by opening the Romans to “a love of rightful equality among humans, to recognition of true merits in others, to willing service, personal and public, on behalf of
others, and to extension of one’s natural familial affection and care to include the poor and abandoned of society”—in sum, to make “Roman-ness” into a virtue “embodying at its core what is right according to human nature” (110), the nature of a being created in the image of God but nonetheless created, and therefore not God.

In considering part 1 of the book, we find that it forms a circle, moving from the moral sternness of Xenophon in the face of the power of human desires and human spiritedness to the loving sternness of Augustine’s Creator-God in the face of that power. In between these two austere but attractive alternatives we find the sober cheer of Aristotle, who commends moderation rather than austerity as the moral foundation of citizenship and of the philosophic life, with political philosophy as the link between them. In all of these thinkers, human beings do have access to unconditional moral truth, but the paths differ. All do affirm the need for mindfulness of the body, for rule of the passions, for a thoughtful piety but one that demands no more precision in such matters than is possible. In political life, several recommend the mixed regime as the best way of life because it best conduces to the human benefits of ruling and being ruled, reciprocally, by deliberating together. Inasmuch as Catherine Zuckert has concentrated her attention on Plato in both his original and “postmodern” manifestations, at least some of her philosophic friends beckon her to consider still further Aristotle’s insights into classical natural right as well.4

Part 1 also beckons readers to consider the challenge that the biblical God issues to the politics and to the political philosophy of the ancients. By his revelation, the God of the Bible gives us knowledge of himself; while this knowledge is neither comprehensive nor always precise, he does present it as sufficient for citizenship in his city, his regime. Augustine describes that city as captive and stranger in the earthly city. But what if citizens of the City of God somehow—perhaps providentially—gained control of one or more of the cities of man? Would they rule those cities humbly? Or would their worldly success spur their pride, get the better of their humility, and make their piety into a sort of Bible-based Euthyphroism? Would their humility instead make them into biblically oriented versions of Euthyphro’s

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father, waiting too long for a Messiah and his judgment, fatally neglecting justice in the here-and-now, and thus inviting ruin rather than redemption? Beginning with Machiavelli, modern political philosophers leveled all of these charges against Christians. This brings the book from the terrain of Catherine Zuckert to that of Michael Zuckert, the terrain Strauss calls “modernity.”

The editors have arranged the five essays of part 2 to parallel those of part 1. David Lewis Schaefer, author of the best commentary on Montaigne that I know of, begins with a careful analysis of Book I, chapters 15–16 of the *Essays*, showing among other things that Montaigne’s understanding of virtue designedly falls far short of the Xenophontic austerity Lorraine Pangle described in the first essay of part 1, to say nothing of Augustinian piety. Schaefer leads his readers to see that in these chapters, “beneath a rambling exterior concerned largely with military matters,” Montaigne mounts his own sort of assault, “a philosophic challenge to conventional views of moral responsibility and hence also to the Christian doctrine of free will” that comports with Montaigne’s “broader project of lowering the moral standards against which human beings are judged, in the spirit of Machiavelli’s *Prince*” (119).

The theme of the two essays is the contrast between courage and cowardice. Chapter 15 teaches that valor has limits, that one must not stubbornly maintain a military position in violation of “the laws of war.” The commander gets his people killed if he does that. Chapter 16 addresses the opposite theme, cowardice, arguing that the proper punishment for it is not death but shame, inasmuch as cowardice is involuntary. It turns out that the “rules” of war and of peace rest on the rules or laws of nature, but that natural law as manifested in human beings is not a rule of reason but a set of “pre-rational instincts, notably the instinct of self-preservation,” known “through feeling rather than reason” (122). Like the classical natural-rights philosophers, Montaigne considers the question of “the knowability of moral or prudential rules” but concludes, against Aristotle, that there can be an excess of a virtue. Montaigne does not think that we can “determine the precise course of action on a particular occasion”—a point Aristotle himself would scarcely deny—but he worries that even the broader standard of prudential reasoning that Aristotle defends will exceed the capacities of most people (122–23). Further, the

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Christian-Augustinian transformation of classical philosophy—leading to the “frenzy” of martyrdom and the zealotry of persecutors—has deranged even the shaky Aristotelian standard. The lower and more solid ground of pleasure and pain—of bodily sensation—serves as the only plausible remedy for the Christian combination of piety and self-asserted holiness with the cruelty of Alexander the Great. Machiavelli’s centaur, the man-animal, endangers himself and others far less than the Christian man-god (124).

Still further, the natural standard itself is as inadequate for Montaigne as it is for Machiavelli. Nature has imprinted many errors in us, particularly the inclination to sacrifice the present for some imagined future. Plato’s Socrates calls the desires foolish and inconsistent counselors; Montaigne broadens this to include all of human nature. We are not so much political animals as self-contradictory ones. But instead of pointing to the original sin of man as the reason for our need of divine grace, Montaigne argues that “if nature fills us with erroneous tendencies rather than rules of reason, how far can we be held accountable for departing from the path of virtue?” (125). Rather than making us guilty before God, our follies and vices exculpate us even from blaming one another very much. “Montaigne implies that the very notion of holding people responsible for ‘willing’ to do evil is an incoherent one”—a point Socrates had also raised. But once again, Montaigne takes an old thought in a new direction. In his most obviously challenging essay, the “Apology of Raymond Sebond,” Montaigne rehearses the Socratic line, arguing that “if vice is truly the result of ignorance, then the only appropriate ‘punishment’ that it merits would presumably be an education that remedies the ignorance” (127); but the classical education along Socratic lines has proved itself worse than useless. The classical philosophers delayed education in ethics too long. Instead of commending Aristotelian habituation in virtue prior to such education, Montaigne commends the task of popular enlightenment based upon the principle of what Tocqueville later calls “self-interest rightly understood” (129). This is neither the sort of enlightenment concealed within the Nocturnal Council nor that seen in Aristotelian political philosophy. It is a noticeably lower form of prudential reasoning which can enter the mind of a child and stay. Utility in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain replaces prudence in the pursuit of the good conceived as the fulfillment of the nature of a rational and political animal, to say nothing of the good conceived as the City of God.

Coeditor Lee Ward’s essay on another philosopher in the Machiavellian line, Benedict Spinoza, stands second in the line of the articles
on the moderns, even as Ann Ward’s essay on Plato stands second among the articles on the ancients. There are other parallels. Just as Ann Ward writes on the dangers of overzealous religiosity, Lee Ward writes on chapters 17 and 18 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, in which “Spinoza presents his fullest analysis of the intersection of religion and politics,” particularly the regime of theocracy which Euthyphro none-too-thoughtfully espouses with respect to the gods acknowledged in his city.

The regime in question for Spinoza is the Israelite republic. As in ancient Athens, the Israelite regime exhibited connections between democracy and theocracy; theocracy, Spinoza argues, has unexpectedly democratic foundations. Spinoza, a democrat, criticizes theocracy for departing “from the democratic standard of excellence”—a surprising critique indeed, reversing the usual assumption that God judges the people, not the other way around (133). Ward lays out the radicalism of this reversal: Spinoza “contrasts the theocratic perspective, which places the human relation to the divine as the central organizing principle of reality with the philosophical or scientific approach to the study of nature, which he identifies as natural right.” Although rooted in democracy because accepted by the people, theocracy has taken a deviant turn, becoming “the most narcissistic and in a sense most unnatural regime because it encourages a false idea about the moral significance of the distinctly human in nature” (133–34).

The Hebrew republic took a wrong turn because its institutions, represented as having been given by God, separated the priests from the military leaders, who then struggled for supremacy. Contra the classics, the mixed regime is no balanced, no stably just regime; in the end there will be no compromising the question, “Who rules?” And the most stable rule can rest only upon the greatest number ruling in its own name. Theocracy obscures this truth by its very claim that the laws came from God, which contradicts the (modern) democratic claim that the laws came from human agreement or the “social contract.” To divinize what is really the rule of the human majority is to subordinate the political community to “mass prejudice,” legally enforced (135). But such pseudo-divinized prejudice interferes with the free scientific inquiry which alone can bring democrats to understand nature better. To this end, Spinoza “offer[s] a rigorously naturalistic account of scriptural interpretation,” presenting prophecy as “primarily a product of vivid imagination rather than the superinduction of divine reason” (135). Imagination is no exclusive property of ancient Israelites; all nations have had their prophets. What is more, these imaginings have the
effect of dividing and ruling the actual elements of the regime—in this case the priests and the military leaders—leaving both ineffectual, as Machiavelli more than suggests. Ward puts it wryly: “God rules theocracy almost by default as no other political or religious actors can govern on their own” (137). According to Spinoza, the biblical God is the prophets’ way of playing divide-and-rule. This is so at least in part because democracy requires rule by consent, whereas theocracy requires rule by habituation, by rituals. If habit no longer has rational content (as it does in Aristotle), then the dichotomy between theocracy and democracy, between priests and military leaders, cannot be resolved. Hence the mixed regime, which depends on exactly that Aristotelian sense of the latent rational content of opinion and of habit, must fail. The Spinozistic elevation of democracy requires a lowering of one’s estimate of the intellectual and moral capacities of the demos. “Enlightenment” is now possible, but only the modest light generated by the fire of human passions will burn consistently—stoked, to be sure, by the fuel of scientific inquiry, now freed from a superstitious and therefore suspicious citizenry, which it appeases and even pleases with the gadgets that take the place of worry beads.

Spinoza’s nature has no telos. Natural right is coterminous with power, the “right” of big fish to eat smaller fish. Spinoza’s God is nothing but fish-eat-fish nature. “Democracy, then, is the most natural, and hence most God-like regime because at least in principle it most fully collects the power of all the individuals in society.” Society as a whole is the biggest fish there is—except when one such fish confronts a bigger fish, a more powerful political society, in the ocean of the world (138). Natural right “is really just the cumulative effect of natural equality and self-interest” of these agglomerated individuals that form societies; a political society that “secure[s] the loyalty of the subjects or citizens” will more likely win the battle of survival in the world-ocean (139). The Israelite theocracy failed because it did not unite behind this single legitimizing principle but instead attempted to combine government by consent with divine law, the rule of priests with the rule of the people, who then needed the military chiefs and eventually a king to secure their self-preservation in the real world. Moses was not a Machiavellian founder; he was insufficiently Machiavellian (151n5). He was a “legislator-priest, not a military commander,” who “made a serious error by allowing the supreme command position to assume an ad hoc character after his death” (142). Israel had no real prince, although pious Jews and Christians believe otherwise. “God would not have instituted theocracy as it came to be if he had wished the Hebrew ‘state to last longer.’ God at heart is not a theocrat!”
After all, if he is really the whole of natural mechanisms, why would he be a theocrat in the Mosaic sense? Democracy can secure the loyalty of its subjects or citizens by the means of free scientific inquiry, the new theology of the new, Spinozistic god, which will satisfy the passions of those subjects or citizens with ever-increasing efficiency.

This means that divine law has an “essentially historical character”—it comes and it goes—whereas natural right is eternal, as uncreated nature must be. The very eternality and stability of nature make it “in principle accessible to unassisted reason” in a way that protean divine law can never be. Natural law can truly rule because it is universal. It needs no human belief to support it (e.g., revelation) and no human action to support it (e.g., religious ceremonies). It requires only that we know it in order to achieve “true liberty” (which means rational cognizance of natural necessity). It gives human beings as such, and not only Israelites, the rock-solid foundation for self-preservation. Moses was a failed Machiavellian because he hoped to found his nation’s regime on an “essentially unscientific” basis. “Unlike democracy, which humbles human pretensions to supersede or seek exemption from natural right, theocracy is a celebration of human pride or vanity which places the whole of nature in an entirely unscientific way at the service of human identity formation through a people’s relation to a providential deity.” Far from being an instance of wise civil religion or of Augustinian humility, “theocracy is a ‘song of myself’ casting nature and the divine in purely supporting roles” (145). Moses lacked not only scientific or theoretical wisdom, he also lacked practical wisdom, producing a defective morality. If God is mechanistic nature, then God cannot issue commandments, only impersonal laws that are really nothing more than blind regularities. Human consent must be consistent with these laws. If a given political community fails to understand them, its members have the natural right to break the social contract and form a new one that more closely adheres to the natural right. At some point in the course of human events, “pious devotion to holy writ” likely will interfere with this natural right to revolution. Men must retain for themselves the “intellectual freedom, especially freedom of thought and speech,” that enables them to perceive the natural law and act accordingly if their conventions come to obscure it or impede its operation (147). “Freedom is the central organizing principle of Spinoza’s account of the true purpose of the state, and the ‘free state,’ which he associates unmistakably with democracy, enjoys ‘laws founded on sound reason’” (148).
The morally right thing to do, then, is to “privatize” religion, allow it freedom in the hearts and minds of individuals but no civic status. Otherwise, the state that is intended to preserve us will fall prey to uncompromising factions centered on competing and indeed irresolvable religious imaginings. “Far from being the progenitor of modern liberalism, the Hebrew theocracy stands as Spinoza’s exemplar of the root causes of the kind of speculative controversy and theological conflict that so badly marred the Christian states of his time” (150). Hobbes’s attempt to make such a religion into a civic religion must fail because such a religion is in principle unnatural and therefore uncivil in the long run. In this Spinoza also departs from Machiavelli, even while concurring with the Machiavellian and Hobbesian understanding of nature as nonteleological and material.

Although they run parallel with respect to their principal themes, the *Euthyphro* and the *Theological-Political Treatise* differ quite strikingly in their treatment of those themes. Both Plato’s Socrates and Spinoza redirect the pious to consideration of nature but Socrates finds in the physical fact of the father-son relationship a moral obligation of the son to the father that must be heeded if the city is to survive. Spinoza finds in nature only a moral obligation of individuals to survive, sometimes at the expense of the weak. This moral individualism plays out politically in Spinoza’s commendation of democracy, the rule of the many who are strongest—a commendation Socrates has every reason to think might not turn out well for individual philosophers, despite Spinoza’s evident esteem for intellectual freedom. But could democracy reform itself, find a way to reconcile its majoritarianism with its need for philosophy? The central essay in part 2 concerns criminal procedures as understood by Montesquieu, procedures that might prevent the trial of some future Socrates or at least produce an outcome less disgraceful to popular rule. Vickie B. Sullivan’s essay parallels the central essay of part 1, inasmuch as both address the question of the rule of law in its relation to the philosopher and the city.

Montesquieu had his own troubles with the political authorities of his day, although these were not democratic or republican. *The Spirit of the Laws* soon found itself condemned as Spinozistic and deistic, eventually winding up on the Papal Index of Forbidden Books (154). More massively, and more obviously than Montaigne and Spinoza, Montesquieu looks at the problem of civic and intellectual liberty as manifested in Machiavelli’s *stato*—the political community that combines centrally organized rule of the ancient polis with some of the size of the ancient empire. Montesquieu concurs with
the judgment of Montaigne on the importance of the criminal procedure, “the most important knowledge for human beings to acquire” (154). For criminal procedure “contributes directly to political liberty,” that “tranquility of spirit which comes from the opinion each one has of his security” (154). This shows the difference between political liberty in the modern state (personal security from threats by fellow-citizens and foreigners) and political liberty in the polis (participation in ruling, in the regime). As one looks at the world nearly three centuries after the publication of Montesquieu’s book, we see numerous instances of the ways in which the lack of such procedure, the arbitrary deprivation of one’s property, liberty, and life, sharply impede human flourishing. Religiosity evidently does not help, inasmuch as “human beings can be inexpressively cruel when dispensing criminal judgments” even as they profess the tenets of Protestantism or Catholicism. Such Euthyphro-nian, pious cruelty has no warrant, inasmuch as human beings can see only acts, not thoughts. In Montesquieu’s time, “tribunals in Europe [had] failed to maintain this fundamental distinction” but had instead imported “the purposes and methods of the Christian God into human tribunals” (155). By an extraordinary coincidence, Sullivan’s essay has thirty-three paragraphs, a number of some significance in the life of Jesus.

Book 24, chapter 13—the latter the symbolic number of atheism—“contains Montesquieu’s fundamental assessment of Christianity” (157). “Christianity is a seeker of justice, in his estimation, but not of human justice”; “Montesquieu describes Christianity as weaving a web from which there is no escape, not even within the solitude of the believer’s mind” (158–59). Consequently, “every thought is actionable” by God (159). But God has so ordained that we have an attorney in his court, no less than his Son, “a great mediator between the judge and the criminal” (159). Christianity judges sternly and it does so down to the most intimate detail of our lives and thoughts, but it also offers forgiveness. Human courts simply cannot “get at” the thoughts of the human beings that come before them. In the seventeenth or central paragraph of the essay, Sullivan lists Montesquieu’s “four general categories of crimes”: crimes against religion, against mores, against tranquility, and against citizens’ security. Only the latter “would call for the application of the strongest punishments including the death penalty” (162). A speech crime against religion—heresy openly espoused, for example—should only be punished by depriving the offender of the earthly

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benefits of the City of God, such as church membership. “Sacrilege is not a criminal matter” (163). It might be noticed that Montesquieu’s understanding of criminal procedure, if enacted in the thirty-third year of Jesus’s life, would have prevented his crucifixion. One might also notice that this would have prevented his sacrifice for the salvation of souls. Be this as it may, “God’s vengeance must be left to God, Montesquieu teaches” (163), and assuredly not to Machiavelli’s state.

Montesquieu pays particular attention to charges of magic. How can one defend oneself against the charge—still being made when Montesquieu wrote—that he is a magician? Suspicion trumps evidence in such cases. Montesquieu condemns the “biblical approach to thwarting conspiracy” as seen in the Deuteronomic injunction to families to stone their kin who entice them secretly to betray God (166–67). This of course implicates not only Christians but the ancient Israelites, and exactly parallels the intentions of Euthyphro. No religious barrier to such practices exists; only a reform of criminal procedures themselves can stop them. Montesquieu was not slow to make the same charge against his own accusers, who also “succumbed to the temptation to assume the powers of his divine exemplar and to read thoughts”—a dangerous power to leave in human hands (168).

The modern liberalism of Montaigne and Montesquieu proved effective against religious persecution of heterodox thought and speech by modern states. But does that liberalism go too far in subordinating the spirited elements of the human soul to a nonsoulful conception of the soul itself? In privatizing piety and bridling spiritedness, does it make human beings conceive of themselves as lower than they really are? Does psychological materialism miss something about our nature and lead to a debasement of human life, private and public? Hegel seems to have thought so, as did many philosophers, clergymen, and poets of the decades following the Enlightenment. Jeffrey Church’s essay, “Personhood and Ethical Commercial Life: Hegel’s Transformation of Locke,” addresses these questions.

The position of Church’s essay parallels that of Mary P. Nichols’s essay on Aristotelian ethics. Nichols addressed Aristotle’s critique of Plato; Church addresses G. W. F. Hegel’s critique of John Locke, the philosopher Michael Zuckert has attended to most extensively in his scholarly writings. Aristotle wants Plato to come down to earth, a bit; Hegel wants Locke to rise to what he takes to be a higher plane. Both Aristotle and Hegel seek an ethical framework for political life that is neither too high nor too low, but the frameworks they offer may differ more radically than Church suggests.
Church begins by presenting us with another trial of sorts, or at least another set of accusations—those aimed by “Marxists, communitarians, and multiculturalists” against Locke (174). Locke’s accusers charge him with insufficient egalitarianism and excessive individualism; he is no social democrat. While not going so far as contending that Locke marches in solidarity with Keir Hardie or Norman Thomas, Church endorses Michael Zuckert’s insistence that Locke took full cognizance of “the social interactions and political conditions necessary for the shaping of rights-bearing citizens” (174). He rightly identifies Hegel as “the intellectual source of many of these criticisms” of Locke and of early modern liberalism generally, very much including the variants devised by Montaigne, Spinoza, and Montesquieu (175). In Church’s estimation, Hegel’s own debt to Locke is much more substantial than is generally acknowledged, but there is a “crucial difference” in their conceptions of “the nature of the human good”; in Hegel’s view, Locke “fails to grasp the inescapably ethical and political nature of the self and civil society” (175). Church intends to deploy Hegel in his own “moderate critique of Locke’s natural rights liberalism,” a phrase alluding to Zuckert’s scholarship (175).

As Zuckert and Nathan Tarcov have argued, Locke “understands full well that as an empirical matter of fact human beings fail to be rational agents if they do not live within the right social and political conditions, with the right sort of education, family life, strong government, stable rule of law, and welfare” (176). For his part, Hegel “appropriates and transforms” some of Locke’s arguments, although Church acknowledges that Hegel actually knew the political philosophy of Locke (as distinguished from his epistemological magnum opus, the Essay concerning Human Understanding) less well than he knew the writings of Locke’s critics, Rousseau, Fichte, and Adam Smith (177, 190n4). Hegel follows Locke in four steps of Locke’s argument. He agrees that human beings differ from animals because humans possess reason and reflect, enabling them to achieve self-consciousness. This rational self-consciousness distinguishes us “from the rest of nature in that we are (in principle) free from natural determinations,” judging our experience “within a certain normative framework” rather than simply following our instincts (177–78). “Each human being is a ‘person’ in the sense that each of us is an ‘I,’ a subject detachable from every empirical experience, perception, desire, belief” (178). This is the basis of our “abstract” or individual rights, and while there might be some question as to whether the Locke

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“I” is quite so detachable from *empeiria* as Church says, that self is at least recognizable at this level of Hegel’s version of right.

Second, “this ‘I’ is no passive ego receiving deliverances from an external world” but an active force in its own right, “both in thought and action, always already bridging the gap between subject and object,” mixing its labor, and that of the body it partially directs, with external nature. “Labor is that archetypal human activity that transforms the structure of nature such that it comes to resemble the human laborer and serve his needs” (178–79). While both Locke and Hegel “envision education as a kind of shaping of the natural soul to form a more rational, human product,” Hegel “extends this notion to encompass human thought itself in that human beings first approach the world as a place impenetrable to thought and fearsome” but over time develop “human civilization” that understands the world by grasping it and reshaping it (179). It might be added that this is straight out of Machiavelli, who famously elevates the sense of touch over the senses of sight and of hearing. This leads to the third, moral, feature of Lockean and Hegelian thought, the claim “that the product of our labor is something we are entitled to by natural right” because the human will, as distinct from the wills of animals, “pursues and sets its own ends” (179). By setting our own ends for ourselves, unlike thoughtless animals (and apparently without the commands of a Creator-God) “when we labor on nature…we gain an exclusive right to our own product” (179). As Zuckert puts it, “Human making, not divine making, is the primary moral fact”; we own and to some considerable extent “make” ourselves (180). “Locke argues that the unified identity of a human self over time is not due to some inner kernel of an immortal soul within me but rather is posited by the self that shapes a unified, coherent identity out of one’s memory of the past and one’s intended plans for the future” (180).

Hegel departs from Locke most clearly in the fourth segment of his argument. Privately or individually held property rights are not enough. “For Hegel, subjectivity must be externalized because it is only in an external and public, shared world that anything takes on value or meaning, including my own identity, my projects and purposes” (181). This is the well-known Hegelian concept of recognition, which stems not only from positing a right to my property but from “negating”—that is, differentiating my identity from that of others and then compelling them to acknowledge

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that identity as equal to their own. Property “serves as the external expression of my identity, the basis on which I can posit my allegiance with and difference from others” (181). This process of affirming and negating itself develops human self-consciousness, as in Hegel’s “dialectic” of master and slave (181–82). All of these dialectical interactions between human beings and external nature, between one human being and others, constitute what Hegel calls civil society. The need for certain virtues to sustain human societies has proved a vexed one, as we recall from Pangle on Xenophon and Schaefer on Montaigne. “For the early modern theorists from Machiavelli through Locke, we moderns should not rely on such virtue as it requires tremendous sacrifice of individual liberty and hence is unduly demanding and rather rare” (182).

Hegel concurs, arguing with Locke and Smith that on the level of civil society the “subjective selfishness” of everyone “turns into a contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else”; markets do more than morals can to justify the ways of God to man (183).

Hegel’s general concurrence with Locke ends there, “though it is not clear what Hegel’s criticism of Locke is, since Hegel does not single him out for criticism in his writings” (183). Church does point to Hegel’s criticism of empiricism as a likely source of disagreement, but he does not see any evident connection between that and Locke’s political philosophy. Further, “Locke does appeal to a priori moral considerations based on the structure of the human person” (183). Church rather finds a “fundamental difference” between the two philosophers in their differing conceptions of “the human good” (183). Locke’s rejection of the Aristotelian sumnum bonum leaves him with a highly individualist picture of human striving: “Each self has a different notion of happiness depending on the confluence of experiences and the manner of the self’s positing of what is salient to its felicity and misery” (184). That is not enough for Hegel because it leaves reason as merely instrumental to a material/empirical conception of happiness; for Locke, “individuals can be better assured of pleasure and a closer approximation of happiness if they can learn better self-control” (185). But for Hegel nature is not distinctively human precisely because it is material, whereas human beings aim not merely at happiness in this sense but at freedom—“activity in accordance with substantive rational ends” (185). Freedom means freedom from such material, animalistic ends, to move beyond “selfishness” conceived in the Lockean manner—that is, in a manner not worthy of a fully human “self.” Mere happiness may find satisfaction in civil society, in the marketplace, but left to itself civil society “expands selfish desires beyond our capacity to fulfill them” and “dehumanizes and mechanizes labor” while undermining “local
communities as the source of esteem and recognition” (186). To be human, we need something beyond civil society.

This is the modern state. The associations seen in civil society need to be tied to this larger entity in order to overcome the selfishness of the individuals who compose them. Hegelian liberalism requires statism to develop the distinctively human capacity for self-sacrifice—whether in peaceful associations subordinated to the state or in wars conducted by the state—that alone dialectically transcends the material self that Montaigne, Locke, and their philosophic allies opposed to irrationally self-sacrificing religion.

Church’s analysis goes far toward understanding the distinction between “modern liberalism old and new,” but not far enough. It misses the ontological gulf between Locke and Hegel that Strauss saw so clearly, the difference between natural right, classical and modern, and historicism on the one hand, and the difference between Hegel’s Absolute Spirit, the unfolding of which is “history,” and the Holy Spirit of the Bible, on the other. The Holy Spirit comports with the Creator-God; he is a person, and he is fundamentally separate from created beings. He is providential; he guides the course of events without being “in” them. The Absolute Spirit is immanent in all matter, all energy, and all events. Inhering in all matter, it works itself free of matter by dint of human work and above all self-conscious human thought. This working-free of the immanent Absolute Spirit is the source of right, moral and political. It justifies the existence of the modern state and assures its liberality—its freedom—as it unfolds in time. The Straussian who gives the clearest account of this dimension of Hegel is Stanley Rosen. 9 His account of Hegelian metaphysics—Hegel’s epistemology and ontology—proves as important to understanding Hegel, and to understanding the difference between natural right and historical right, as a lucid account of Aristotelian teleology, such as that offered by Nichols.

Strauss appears in the very next essay, an illuminating comparison of Strauss and Pope John Paul II by Walter Nicgorski. Just as Keys had presented a Christian answer to classical natural right in the arguments of Augustine, so Nicgorski (another Notre Dame colleague of the Zuckerts) points us to a Christian response to natural right as presented by perhaps its foremost recent exponents. Considering the Straussian theme of the life of philosophy as distinguished from the life of piety, humble belief, obedient

love, Nicgorski acknowledges the Zuckerts’ demonstration in their book on Strauss\textsuperscript{10} that for him the choice of that way of life was no Nietzschean or quasi-Nietzschean “arbitrary act of the will” or “act of faith” but a carefully qualified or “hedged” act of reason (196). If, as Strauss does say, philosophy cannot refute revelation any more than revelation can refute philosophy, the choice of the philosophic way of life informed by classical philosophy is an act of humility in its own right, that is, an acknowledgment of “the evident fact” of the philosopher’s ignorance of the ground of being and his ardent \textit{and} rational \textit{and} humble desire to engage in a “quest for knowledge of the most important things” (197). Absent the intervention of the Holy—separate from us, nonimmanent—Spirit, what can a serious person do other than attend seriously to the light nature has given us?

Strauss’s critique of historicism, of absolute moments and spirits, rests squarely on this insight and this humility. Strauss urges us to maintain the distinction between reason and revelation because the historicist attempt to blend the two is only another example of a “synthesis” (to use Hegel’s terminology) that really masks “the triumph of one over the other, for the servility of philosophy to Revelation or vice versa” (198). The “fundamental tension” between these two “ways of life”—these two intellectual regimes, if you will—“does not preclude a substantial agreement on morality when the reason at issue is classical rationalism and the Revelation is biblical religion” (198). Both classical natural right and biblical revelation oppose the hubris of historicist synthesis, with its march-of-God, divinized-human State leading us on.

John Paul II offers “an apparent alternative to Strauss’s way” of viewing the matter in his 1999 essay \textit{Fides et Ratio}. “John Paul openly defends a ministerial or handmaid (\textit{ancilla}) role for philosophy”; while faith and reason may function as “two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth” (as John Paul puts it), the unseen guidance of the soul’s flight comes from the Holy Spirit more than it does from nature, although this in no way denigrates nature or precludes it from giving the soul some landmarks along the way (199). Nor should this obscure that “both Strauss and John Paul explicitly defend the opening to transcendent objectivity against the confining claims of historicism” (200)—politically confining, perhaps, because they can too easily lead to the tyranny Strauss opposed in

\footnote{Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert, \textit{The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).}
his correspondence with Kojève. This dystopian prospect may stand behind Strauss’s contention that the tension or conflict between the philosophic and the pious ways of life have proved “vital” to the West, so long as that conflict is governed by a civil spirit. The philosopher who remains open to the challenge of theology and the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy (as Strauss phrases it) can learn from one another while avoiding the hubristic claim of having achieved wisdom and divinity instead of merely loving them (202). First and foremost, they can learn a salutary sense of the limitations of human strivings, however ardent. “It is here appropriate to be reminded that Strauss’s title for his important and relatively late essay on our topic is ‘Jerusalem and Athens,’ not ‘Jerusalem or Athens’” (203). To the question raised near the beginning of this review—why classical “philosophy” but modern “theory”?—Nicgorski replies, “Revelation’s purifying critique of reason keeps it humble and above all from overextending its claims, the claims so characteristic of modern philosophy,” while “within the commitment of faith, reason continues to work and to exalt the human person.” Reason not only assists such faith—clarifying its ideas—“but also calls upon reason to understand more deeply its objects” (205). In adorning us to love God and neighbor, Jesus of Nazareth holds both truth and friends dear while linking these loves to the laws of God.

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But can such a relation between those who reason and those who believe—one that does not deny that those who believe also reason and that those who reason also see their reasoning’s limits—find a home in a political regime? The American founders thought so and set out to prove it. The essays of part 3 address their regime, a perennial theme of the Zuckerts’ writings. Part 3 contains six essays, so there is no central one, but the first essay, by Peter Augustine Lawler, happens to be the central essay of the collection as a whole. This proves an apt element of the book’s design, inasmuch as Lawler delivers a characteristically sharp-eyed and provocative performance that picks up all of the major themes addressed so far while making an argument that diverges sharply from that of the Zuckerts. Because Lawler stands on the “faith” side of the Straussian partnership, not so much the “philosophy” side, both the essay and its placement display the friendly and dialogic liberalism the Zuckerts have commended and practiced. The essay is also mighty entertaining: Lawler moves America from Locke and Protestant Christianity at the beginning to

Roman Catholicism toward the end in a deft way that might leave an unwary reader wondering, “What just happened, here?” Professor Lawler is one sly old Georgia possum—that’s what happened. And he has an argument that deserves attention from thoughtful students of the American founding.

The essayists so far have emphasized the turn to individualism in modern political theory. This turns out to be an oddly impersonal individualism, centered on instincts and questioning classical and religious assertions of human moral responsibility. Lawler begins by asserting that “the Lockean conception of personal identity is unsustainable without some positive help from truthfully Christian conceptions of who we are and what we’re supposed to do” (211). In Michael Zuckert’s view, Lawler recalls, Locke argues for a conception of “secular, universalistic, and individualistic” natural rights which “can be known only by a few” as secular (212). The rest of us will rest easy in some form of liberal Christianity, as enunciated in America by the “Lockean Puritans” of the colonial and founding periods or by their descendants, now increasingly remote from purity. Zuckert “recommends those preachers to us, in effect, for following the example of Locke himself, for reconfiguring biblical doctrine in light of what we can know about ourselves through unassisted reason”—most importantly, natural rights. Such beliefs are salutary if not entirely true, inasmuch as “religious impulses and their theological articulation add nothing real to what we are” (212). This makes Christianity not so much a prophetic as a civil religion in America—a religion that supports the regime and no longer sees itself as captive and stranger in it. “But Locke, Zuckert observes, never really solved the problem that natural civil theology is somewhat of an oxymoron” (213). That is, Lawler’s Zuckert maintains that Locke makes Americans “think of themselves less as either citizens or creatures,” “grateful to God or country or as part of wholes beyond themselves,” and more as individuals setting out to improve their human condition. Americans are rather like the Montaignian individuals later described by Tocqueville (213). Their religion, neither fully civil nor especially pious, is likely to incline toward pantheism, as indeed the Transcendentalists did, Ralph Waldo Emerson in the lead. It might be added that the Hegelianism from which the Progressives’ brand of historicism was developed can itself be conceived as a sort of rationalist pantheism; and that Emerson, along with his British counterpart Thomas Carlyle, was instrumental in bringing German philosophic notions to the English-speaking peoples. Be that as it may, “Zuckert dissents from Tocqueville’s view that we Americans owe anything fundamental or deeply true to the Puritans” (214), who, in Zuckert’s formulation, were not really Christian insofar as they were liberal.
Here Lawler demurs. In one respect, he takes the stance among the moderns that Xenophon (or perhaps the Athenian Stranger) takes among the ancients: human beings need stronger stuff, including some sense of providential divinity, in order to form political communities. This is so, in Lawler’s judgment, quite apart from the desperate human need for the truth of salvation. Tocqueville, Lawler observes, saw not only that Christianity introduced the idea of human equality or universalism into the world in a universalizing or evangelical (“Catholic”) manner, but also that it introduced the idea of the value individual liberty, based upon free will. On this he quotes Zuckert quoting Thomas L. Pangle—no religious zealot—as saying that the idea of the sanctity of all individual human beings as such comes from the Bible and not from philosophy classical or modern.

The question seems to be this: if you posit an eternal and impersonal nature as the foundation of all being, how do you derive persons from that? The Lockean (and Cartesian and Montaignian) individual cannot plausibly explain his own origins. How did an impersonal nature somehow work itself up into the Zuckerts, the Pangles, Lawler—into any of us? Only the Creator-God can make persons because the Creator-God (being holy, not immanent) first creates a cosmos where there was nothing and then takes a part of it, forms it into what we recognize as the human shape, and “divinizes” this being by breathing life into it, transforming an “it” into a “him” (216). Thus the ultimate reality of the Bible is the divine individual who endows one of his creatures with an individuality in the image of himself. This creature is not divinized in the sense of being endowed with the omniscience and omnipotence of his Creator; but he was nonetheless a person, endowed with free will and was, moreover (when victimized by the lying serpent, and about to be made the slave of that demon), redeemed by the Christ and saved for eternal life—itself an act expressive of God’s gracious free will. “We are no longer defined by our merely biological natures, because our nature is now to be both human and divine” (216). This latter formulation may be too exclusively Christian, inasmuch as all those who take the Bible to be true understand the creation of Adam or man as an act of God’s grace and love. But there is no doubt that the mission of the Christ on earth, as he himself combined humanity and divinity in his being, reaffirmed the fundamental “personality” and “individuality” of humanity, as distinct from impersonal nature.12

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12 We see this exclusiveness also in Lawler’s essay “American Nominalism and Our Need for the Science of Theology” (First Principles: ISI Web Journal, March 28, 2008), where Judaism is never mentioned. Lawler gives evidence of defending but also extending the doctrine of Catholic personalism,
Locke wants to replace the loving, salvific, and providential God with “a more reasonable faith in the unprecedented historical future” that can be framed by human beings at work—a “faith in what I can do for myself in a world basically indifferent to my personal being” (217). In the spirit of this labor theory of value, Lockean America is “progressive” not in the historicist sense of the Progressives but in the sense that Americans want to advance the modern project of conquering nature for the relief of man’s estate or condition. While historicists subordinate man not to an impersonal nature but to an impersonal Absolute Spirit (or an Absolute Material Dialectic, as in Marxism or in the proponents of “race theory”), Lockean Americans want to insist on their “unique and irreplaceable” personality and the rights inherent in their persons against the actions of governments and against the impersonal technocrats who occupy the offices of the modern state’s bureaucracy (217–18).

This makes Locke a friend of Christianity in his political practice because he rightly attributes to Christianity the principle of separating religion from secular government. That separation recognizes institutionally the spiritual fact that Christian religion “can’t be reduced to natural theology—or a way of expressing the impersonal truth about nature discovered by the philosophers” (219). Such religion understands us as “more than merely or even essentially a citizen or part of nature” (219). “But neither Aristotelians nor Darwinians”—nor Lockeans insofar as they orient themselves toward nature—“can…make sense of the freedom from political/divine law that we all believe human beings to possess. Freedom from political/divine law must be for personal/divine law, for beings who are in some sense created in the image of a personal God” (220, emphasis added). An Augustinian Christianity might envision a best-practicable Christian government in which the secular government subordinated itself to the church, but that would be the opposite of a civil religion ministerial to the secular government, serving the impersonal principles of that government. It is seen in the writings of two recent popes: John Paul II and Benedict XVI—citing, in the latter article, Benedict’s Regensburg lecture, his encyclical on love (Deus Caritas Est), and his essay “Truth and Freedom,” published in The Essential Pope Benedict XVI (New York: HarperCollins, 2007). John Paul’s personalism focuses on morality, arguing that the personality of human beings, derived from their creation by a personal God, implies (in a sort of Christianizing of Kant) that human beings must be treated as ends, not as means. Benedict’s personalism focuses on the social dimension of personality—the relations human beings have with one another and with their Creator. Lawler extends this doctrine by making it an argument for the existence of God himself, reasoning backward from the self-evident truth that all of us (including scientists) conceive of ourselves as persons, whatever scientists may say to the contrary. And that this requires us to wonder how our individuality or personhood came about.
much more feasible that a properly constituted political community would (more modestly) keep the peace and protect religious liberty. Under those circumstances, “the Christian is called to do his duty to his country—without the solace of sharing in its civil religious illusions” (220). The Christian needs to do this because he acknowledges that each human person has a measure of sin in him, and we are morally responsible for the government of that sin in ourselves and in others.

Lawler then goes on to argue in a way that strikes me as mistaken, or perhaps not expressed in the right way. He writes that for Christianity and for Locke, personal liberty trumps even political liberty, and that for both Christians and for Locke “the form of government...is not to be confused with some Platonic ‘regime.’ The personal Christian alien—in his apolitical, cosmopolitan detachment—is not so different from the Lockean person” (220). This formulation won’t do because, as Augustine phrases it, the Christian lives in the City of God. This city is not truly cosmopolitan—not yet—because it has yet fully to conquer the City of Man, still ruled by Satan and by human beings, whose minds Satan has veiled from their own sinfulness. The personal liberty of the Christian is coterminous with his citizenship in that city or, as Lawler himself affirms, the laws of the personal God. It is a mistake to put the term “regime” in scare quotes (as Lawler does consistently throughout the essay) because the City of God does indeed have a regime in the full Aristotelian and Platonic sense of the word: it has a ruler; it has a politeuma or ruling body on earth and in heaven; and it has a way of life. The regime is a kingship, very much of the sort that would occur if a god were to come down to earth and justly rule us; the king saves us from the tyrant, Satan, who runs his own regime for now.13 Christian freedom means freedom from Satan’s regime but it is very far from being regime free. The confusion on this point often arises from the fact that the regime of God rules an autarchic community that differs from the polis or city-state, the feudal state, and the modern state—that is, from other, humanly autarchic communities. The City of God most resembles an empire, especially in its universalism in principle and its conquering ways in practice, but of course it is primarily a spiritual rather than a secular empire, aiming at spiritual less than physical conquests, albeit with the aid of secular institutions as seen in, among other things, catholic churches Roman and Orthodox, and evangelical Protestantism. It is, to appropriate Thomas Jefferson’s fine phrase, an empire of liberty—of liberty

13 See David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section III, Part II (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 24; it should be needless to say that Hume immediately dismisses such claims as fanatical.
from Satan’s regimes, so often seen in varying degrees in the City of Man; but in regime terms, it is a monarchic empire and not a republican one. It even has some elements of a political regime in Aristotle’s strict sense, inasmuch as God’s prophets have at times talked back to God, and God has sometimes changed his mind in response to their arguments.

Turning now to America, Lawler regards it “at its best” as “a kind of genuine compromise between wholly Lockean and Christian (meaning Puritan, Calvinist, Augustinian, and/or Protestant) views of who we are” (222). He points to Tocqueville’s analysis of the American North and South—the one colonized by “meddlesome political idealists,” the other colonized by “vulgarly self-indulgent, morally indifferent pirates” (223). Both shared one dimension of the Lockean, indeed modern-philosophic individualism that lends itself to entering the social contract “only for his personal convenience”—a formulation Lawler rightly attributes to the Catholic writer Orestes Brownson, not so much Tocqueville or Locke (224). “It’s the individualism or emotional solitude that is the product of that Lockeanism [as described and perhaps caricatured by Brownson] that paves the way to the soft despotism [described by Tocqueville] feared more than any Puritan excess” (224). Similarly, in the spiritual dimension religion inclined unintentionally toward pantheism, the opposite of individualism. Precisely insofar as they were idealists, inclined toward abstract principles of government and insufficiently attuned to the personalism of true Christianity, “the Puritans weren’t Christian enough!” (224). “The Puritans’ tyrannical idealism came from being inconsistently Christian; their dead-serious political utopianism came from attributing to the state what was properly the job of the church” (224). What America needed, Tocqueville argued, and Lawler agrees, was something between the uncivilized criminality of the Southerners and the sin-criminalizing Puritans. This combination, this “spirit of compromise,” may be seen in the Declaration of Independence (225).

“The Lockean theoretical core of the Declaration is all about inalienable rights and not about the personal God of the Bible,” but “thanks to the insistence of members of Congress who were more under the influence of Christian Calvinism than Jefferson and Franklin, God also became, near the Declaration’s end, providential and judgmental, or present-tense and personal” (225). References to God as a provident judge were inserted at the insistence of the non-Lockean and Christian majority of Congress. Here Lawler has recourse to the Catholic writers R. L. Bruckberger (whose Images of America he describes as “probably the most nuanced or balanced judgment
on the significance of our Declaration”) and John Courtney Murray in his We Hold These Truths (226). “The combination of American Lockeanism and American Puritanism/Calvinism” — the latter not Lockeanized but genuine — “produced something like an accidental” — but should a Catholic not say providential? — “American Thomism” (226). With that somewhat Puckish sally, Lawler then concludes, with Tocqueville, that the personality of God, not the impersonality of nature, is what truly “supports the equal right to freedom all human beings have,” uniting “the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of Locke, while both Locke and Jesus distance religious idealism from the requirements of good government” — namely, securing our unalienable rights but not defining them, a task already performed by God when he created us (226). “But it’s still the idealism” — better, the personalist spirituality? — “of Jesus that turns equality into more than a principle of calculation of self-interested consent,” an “undeniable moral proposition” — here glancing at Lincoln? — “that leads us to do good even at the risk of our lives” (226) as witnesses to God’s truth and not to abstract principles of an impersonal nature. Thinking perhaps of Strauss and the Strausians who follow him in concentrating their attention on texts more than the historical contexts in which texts appear, Lawler adds, “Our respect for texts is really our respect for authors and readers, for persons singularly open to the mystery of being, especially our own being” (231). The “natural rights republic” described and commended by Michael Zuckert turns out to be a better thing than nature alone can justify (233).14 Not reason versus revelation but the personal versus the impersonal are the relevant antinomies, Lawler maintains.

14 Here it is important to emphasize that the American founders were much more likely to consult political philosophers and other writers who combined natural-rights doctrines with Protestant Christianity. See, for example, Michael Zuckert’s illuminating chapters on Hugo Grotius in Natural Rights and the New Republicanism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 97–149. And, given Zuckert’s demonstration that Locke and the founders were not Grotians, one should also consider the way in which Locke himself presents himself as a trustworthy Protestant Christian. See Harry V. Jaffa, A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 24, 111–12, 417, 427; among other points, Jaffa sharply distinguishes Locke’s understanding of human nature from that of Rousseau. For an understanding of Locke that differs significantly from those of Zuckert and of Lawler, see Thomas G. West, “The Ground of Locke’s Law of Nature,” Social Philosophy and Policy 29, no. 2 (2012): 1–50. For the same author’s assessment of Zuckert’s view, see “Nature and Happiness in Locke,” Claremont Review of Books 4, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 54–57; for his assessment of Lawler’s view, see “Locke’s Neglected Teaching on Morality and the Family,” Society 50, no. 5 (2013): 472–76. Contra Lawler and Zuckert, West argues (greatly elaborating on Jaffa) that Locke is much closer to Aristotle than to the moderns. Indeed, in light of the sterner views of Xenophon seen in this volume, one might even say that West’s Locke shares some of the moral iron of the old philosopher-general. It is important to notice that Lawler’s argument about the impersonality of Lockeanism would carry over to an Aristotelian Locke as well, inasmuch as Aristotle’s “god” — pure thought thinking itself — asserts the existence of no Creator-Thinker.
This is indeed a fine and friendly (indeed charitable) challenge to Zuckert and to his understanding of the American regime. It depends upon an analysis of the Declaration of Independence that seems to me a touch too dichotomous. Yes, the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God find their literary formulation in books of philosophic inquiry not the Bible, where we meet the providential and judging personal God, on those occasions when we do not meet him in our life outside books. But recall that in the supposedly Lockean (in Lawler’s secularized or atheistic sense of Lockeanism) body of the Declaration we are told that it is self-evident that all men are created equal in their rights to live, to live at liberty from tyrants, and to pursue their happiness. Laws of nature do not create; they generate. Only a Creator-God creates; the passage from Locke which Jefferson evidently consulted calls men creatures. That such a Creator exists is self-evident only to those whose Holy Spirit has told them so, whether they are Christians or not. At best, as Lawler argues, our self-evident personality may reasonably incline to explain ourself as a creature of a personal God.

The self-evident equality of rights (with which the self-evident Creator has endowed some of his creatures) is a different matter from the character of the Creator. Equality is self-evident not because God has told his creatures about it but because we recognize ourselves as individual members of a certain “kind” or (to use philosophic language) “species.” The logos with which we are endowed expresses the reality that personal nouns (Zuckert, Pangle, Lawler) instance examples of common nouns (human being, citizen). This enables the compromise or common agreement between the pious and the philosophic seen in the American founding and among the founders. This is not a conceptual problem for the pious, because the Creator creates personal and impersonal beings alike and creates man in his image. This means at least two things: the ability to abstract from particulars, and the right to rule other species. God endowed man with the ability not to create the kinds of creatures he sees but to recognize those kinds in the specimens God has created. This does not erase the Platonic-Socratic question of the relation between God and the ideas God has, as might be seen in the very language about man created in the image of God. Lawler contends that we are created “as whole rational and erotic beings; not just thought but love is divine.”

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15 Lawler, “American Nominalism.” Here Lawler runs into a problem that may be of his own making. He understands God’s love—and therefore man’s love, too—as “erotic”; he therefore wonders, “How can it be that such a God is erotic or animated by a passionate sense of incompleteness?” But God’s love isn’t erotic; it is agapic. That is, it isn’t needy but gracious—condescending in the sense still in use
the classical philosophers, who contemplate Socrates—who managed both to be the type of the philosopher and irreducibly himself—while holding both truth and friends to be dear, than it is for the modern philosopher-theorists. Various theories have been proposed to solve this problem; whether Lawler is right in his confidence that none of them really can make sense in principle is well beyond the capacities of your reviewer in his Augustinian humility.

Perhaps in keeping with the American combination of individuality with civility, the remainder of the essayists in part 3 consider American statesmen, those who have best exemplified those traits among us. One matter not yet fully addressed in the volume but raised by Church and Lawler concerns the degree to which the moderns generally and the Americans specifically should be classed as advocates of a “politics of progress,” and what this means in terms of the distinction between modern natural right and historicism. Jean Yarbrough’s essay on Thomas Jefferson has the merit of making the strongest possible case for Jefferson as a progressive in the historicist sense before rejecting that case. In doing so, she illuminates this important distinction, pertinent especially to those who follow in the wake of Strauss.

While living in France, Jefferson read Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot’s 1750 lecture *Philosophical Review of the Successive Advances of the Human Mind*. Turgot identifies three stages of civilization (hunting, pastoral, and agricultural), and “viewed this movement from one stage to another in terms of progress and perfectibility”—and inevitable progress at that—“spurred largely by natural causes, with only a thin religious veneer” (236). Jefferson himself saw these stages of human development in North America, with the American Indians of the Rocky Mountains as the hunters, the American frontiersmen as pastoralists, and the Atlantic seaboard as

by Jane Austen. God lovingly—that is, charitably, graciously—wills the best for his creation, including the creatures within it that he has created (out of nothing) and formed (out of clay or dust) to be most like himself. What is seen in agape but not in eros is the right to rule: the good ruler wants the best for the ruled. To be created and formed in God’s “image”—*tzelem Elohim*—is to be capable of naming the kinds or species of plants and animals—i.e., to recognize their forms, the ideas of them, in the many specimens or particulars; to be created and formed in God’s image is also to be capable of ruling that creation, under God; finally, to be created and formed in God’s image implies sociality and generativity—“Male and female he created them”—the basis for the family, which itself becomes the basis of tribes and of political societies. Recall that this parallels Socrates’s argument in the *Euthyphro*. To take Lawler’s insights and to correct two of them—by seeing that the Christian is not “apolitical” or “cosmopolitan” but a citizen of two regimes (the City of God and his own earthly city) and by changing “eros” for “agape”—one makes Lawler’s claims more coherent and no less rational.
the home of the farmers. This is not historicism, however; progress rather comes from human nature fulfilling itself in time. In some contrast to this, Condorcet’s *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, published in 1795, takes Rousseau’s refusal to set a limit to human perfectibility in at least a protohistoricist direction, adumbrating ten stages of human history that were to culminate in a sort of end of history in the near future featuring “the true perfection of mankind” (238). Both of the French thinkers reject biblical providence; whereas Rousseau resists notions of progress, Condorcet replaces providence with a more or less historicized account of natural human development.

Jefferson concurred with Condorcet’s belief that the human mind “is perfectible to a degree of which we cannot as yet form any conception” (239). Not only what we now call the “hard” sciences but also religion and politics will see substantial progress. Human perfectibility, while not infinite, was indefinite—hard to measure in advance. As his remarks on his proposed curriculum for the University of Virginia indicate, he hoped to “engraft ‘a new man on the native stock’” (243). But the notion of engrafting, taken from Jefferson’s beloved science of agronomy, suggests that perfectibility remains in the realm of nature. While Jefferson famously rejected reverence for the ancestral, he never endorsed, or even noticed, Hegel’s notion of the Absolute Spirit, and even more famously deplored the European statism that Hegel took to be the instantiation of that Spirit. The actual Progressives who became prominent in American political life a century after Jefferson’s presidency—Herbert Croly is Yarbrough’s prime example—did indeed embrace historicism in its Hegelian-statist form, reproving Jefferson for his “suspicion of national power, combined with his attachment to equal rights,” which “encouraged excessive individualism, mediocrity, and drift” rather than progress (248). “Even John Dewey, one of the few Progressives who admired Jefferson, regarded his attachment to natural rights as essentially outmoded” (248). Progressivism “would have required [Jefferson] to sacrifice his belief in natural rights, the one permanent principle on his political horizon” (249).

Moving from the natural-rights principles of the Declaration of Independence to the formal regime of the United States Constitution, David Nichols credits Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania with a crucial role in the framing of the institutions that secure Americans’ natural rights. Morris did so in part because he exhibited the prudence Aristotle commends in citizens and in statesmen above all, knowing how to shift with the currents of the debates at the Constitutional Convention, remaining flexible on
details while “always [keeping] his ultimate goals in mind, changing positions on particular issues in light of how those decisions would shift into a larger whole” (254). That larger whole or purpose consisted of “an effective, and essentially popular, national government” to replace the ineffectual federalism of the Articles of Confederation, which in his judgment had failed to secure those rights (256). Although he did not want to do away with the states, Morris did expect the federal government to be the principal guarantor of popular rights. He unsuccessfully opposed giving state legislatures the power to appoint US senators.

Although Morris admired the mixed regime seen from Xenophon’s writings to the Great Britain of his own day, he not only saw but applauded America’s lack of hereditary monarchy and hereditary aristocracy, “essential elements” of that regime (256). He did intend to secure the rights of property and often referred to the upper social and economic echelons of American life as aristocratic, but he never believed that any class enjoyed a special title to rule. He expected oligarchy to lodge itself in the legislature—a prescient insight—but “hoped that the office of the presidency would be a crucial check on this tendency,” holding the union together both by defending it against internal and external threats, and by checking and balancing “the interests of the wealthy” in the Congress (257). And even this oligarchy would hold wealth derived primarily from fluid commercial activity, not from the land ownership derived from the view that in Morris’s view tends to maintain the same wealthy families in control of a political society for generations at a time.

The president, the only official who “could speak for the nation as a whole,” animated by that love of fame so dear to the philosopher David Hume and to Alexander Hamilton, would provide the United States with a nonmonarchic antidote to the Parliamentary oligarchies seen in Great Britain and soon to be seen in the United States (265). “In removing the election of the president from the hands of the legislature and placing it in the hands of popular election, Morris achieved his most significant victory at the Convention” (267).

Crucial to understanding Morris’s liberalism was his argument against slavery. He took issue with one of Rousseau’s most memorable definitions of liberty: the freedom enjoyed by men in “the savage state” (268). Civilized liberty requires property, property “based on the enjoyment of the fruits of one’s labor rather than the protection of inherited property” (268)—property as conceived by Locke. “Morris believed”—with James Madison, it might be added—“that the closest thing to a traditional aristocracy in the United States was to be found in the plantation slavery of the South,” where
the right to enjoy the fruits of one’s labor was so emphatically denied to the African slaves. On the floor of the Constitutional Convention, he did not hesitate publicly to denounce slavery as “a nefarious institution,” “the curse of heaven on the states where it prevails,” and “the most prominent feature in the aristocratic countenance of the proposed Constitution,” inasmuch as “the vassalage of the poor has ever been the favorite offspring of Aristocracy” (269). “It is liberal individualism rather than aristocracy or a defense of [landed] property that is the guiding principle of Morris’s political thought” (270). At the same time, Morris did eschew the extreme individualism based on personal property rights seen in Benthamites, who anticipated the formulations of the libertarians of later centuries. Such “citizens of the world, as they call themselves,” are not to be trusted; “economic calculation is no substitute for a love of one’s own country,” which “must supplement rational self-interest as the basis for politics” (270). Rational-choice calculation of narrowly economic utilitarianism cannot even support the material prosperity it prizes because “the free market he was championing required the support of a powerful government” (270) that extended republicanism over a large territory which would make that free market big enough to generate substantial wealth. Accordingly, whereas the Constitution’s Preamble as originally drafted began “We the people of the states…” and went on to list each one, Morris’s draft, the final one, begins “We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union…” “He makes it clear that the Constitution creates a government of the people, not of the states, and moreover emphasizes that we are already one nation” (271)—a point not lost on Abraham Lincoln in the desperate years of the 1850s and 1860s. And beyond Lincoln, anticipating the controversies of our own time, Morris “would remind conservatives that the national government has played an indispensable role in protecting the rights of individuals, just as he would remind liberals that the greatest conflict in human history has not been between property rights and human rights but between tyranny and freedom” (273).

While part 3 has no one central essay, the two essays at its center—Nichols’s on Morris and David Alvis’s “The Presidency and the Constitutional Convention of 1787”—form a pair both with respect to friendship and to truth, inasmuch as Nichols was Alvis’s teacher at Fordham University and both essays bring new insights to certain dimensions of the framing of the US Constitution and its framers. In this they parallel the central essays of parts 1 and 2—essays on Plato’s Laws and Montesquieu’s The Spirit of the Laws—the latter obviously consulted by the framers. Both examine the place of the presidency, the office in the constitutional union that most affords
scope for statesmanship in the most conspicuous manner. Thus while the center of part 3 is bicephalous, it focuses on the constitutional branch that is most nearly “one,” and does so in two minds working in the complementary way that both philosophic and religious life beckon us to. Alvis intends to show how the framers sought “to make the practice of democratic principles compatible with the doctrine of natural rights” via that office (278). The president is in one sense alone, but in fact he too has friends and teachers—the framers and his constitutionally elected predecessors.

Commentators now often think of the Electoral College as an arcane institution, somehow obsolete and undemocratic, but Alvis elaborates on Nichols’s remark that it actually was intended to bring the presidency closer to the sovereign people by removing the president’s selection from the legislature. Under the Articles of Confederation, there was no separate executive branch, executive powers being exercised by committees of Congress. By contrast, delegate Roger Sherman of Connecticut favored a “weak and dependent executive” in the new government, an institution identical to the executives seen in the existing state constitutions. Understandably so: “Sherman probably still held the strong antipathy of the revolutionary generation to anything that smacked of monarchy” (283). Edmund Randolph of Virginia wanted an independently elected but still weak executive—weak because plural, an executive committee or cabinet. Nichols observes that Morris helped James Wilson of Pennsylvania to win approval for what we got: a strong, unitary, and independent executive. An American executive branch must comport with the regime, because “in republican government strength and independence could be legitimated only by popular election” (286).

Although Madison’s argument for the extended republic is well known, the president’s function in securing the national union is sometimes neglected. Alvis points to Morris’s insistence that only a vigorous president could “utilize the extent of the country rather than be hindered by it” (289). Not only could the executive use the size of the American territory and population to suppress local rebellions and repel foreign invasions, but he could also use his veto power to prevent the enactment of legislation that favored one part of the country over another, whether a region or a class—particularly, he remarked, “legislative tyranny against the Great & the wealthy” (290). Although Alvis may go too far in saying that a strong, popularly elected executive “could serve the positive function of supplying leadership for the government as a whole” (290)—this more closely resembles Woodrow Wilson’s notions, not James Wilson’s—he is right to praise the
framers for “arriv[ing] at something genuinely new in the history of man-
kind: a solution to the modern ‘desideratum’ of finding a government both
capable of controlling the governed and capable of controlling itself” (293).
The rights we share equally as individual human beings find their institu-
tional support in the framers’ invention of prudence: an office for one person
but not one person alone—one person working sometimes in collaboration
with the other elected branch of government, sometimes in opposition to it.
If not intended as a platform for cutting-edge-of-history leadership, it does
provide a platform for statesmanship.

As the founders and Tocqueville and Americans generally
have known, we find our statesmen not only in public offices but in the self-
governing civil associations that American liberty encourages. The next essay
takes up the theme of friendship, seen in Mary P. Nichols’s essay, with the
theme of modernity’s need for such an account of civic life, seen in Church’s
essay. It might be said that the civil-social aspect of the American regime
aims to solve the problem posed by its (semi)philosophic core; a problem that
Hegelian historicism does not solve. Diana J. Schaub discovers the practi-
cal wisdom of an outstanding example of such civic statesmanship exercised
by a man effectively denied national elective office because his natural and
civil rights were unofficially but effectively contravened. Booker T. Wash-
nington concentrated his statesmanlike character on pursuing a long and
distinguished career as an educator and orator, modeling his speeches on
those of Lincoln, whose Gettysburg Address he especially esteemed. Those
familiar with Schaub’s scholarship know that she is at her best with a text in
front of her, and the text she chooses among Washington’s is his “Address on
Abraham Lincoln,” delivered to the Republican Club of New York in 1909.
The circumstances surrounding the address were troublesome; antiblack race
riots had occurred in Lincoln’s home town of Springfield, Illinois, several
months earlier. Washington saw from this that liberating slaves in the South
might be thought a fine thing to do but living with freemen in the North
could bring out the worst in whites.

Washington knew that Lincoln himself had considered
the challenge mob violence poses to republican self-government in his 1838
“Address to the Young Men’s Lyceum” in Springfield. He follows Lincoln in
commending law-abidingness to all Americans, pointing to the patience
and self-control that underlie the lawful spirit. Schaub remarks that in com-
mending the law-abiding virtues Lincoln pointed to the example of George
Washington, whose name “the fatherless Booker had chosen…as his surname
when he first attended school” (306). In a way, Abraham Lincoln and Booker T. Washington both chose the father of their country as their own father.

Schaub presents an outline of Washington’s address, showing how carefully crafted it is as it moves from the prayer of a slave to oaths of freedom via meditations on American citizenship, on what that citizenship means to all human beings, and on Lincoln as the great example of it. To Washington, the murdered Lincoln remained alive to this day, influencing “American civilization” with still-read words and remembered, words and deeds that invite us to exercise the virtue he exhibited respecting George Washington: gratitude. Lincoln was grateful to George Washington for his modeling of the same virtue Lincoln modeled for Booker T. Washington, the “inner freedom” that makes “outer freedom” or physical freedom civil instead of violent. Such “spiritual freedom is ever vigilant, denying malice entrance” (309). Such malice might be occasioned by resentment at Southerners who started the Civil War, or by white bigots who had proven themselves unworthy of Lincoln’s legacy, indeed unworthy of their own fathers, many of whom had fought in the Union armies. Schaub emphasizes this latter point: “Despite the misrepresentations of those who labeled him an ‘accommodationist,’ [Washington] was a statesman of considerable moral audacity,” “extending sympathy to whites from a position of moral superiority over them.” “It is for the white,” he writes, “to save himself from his degradation that I plead” (310). In his emphasis on self-control Washington resembles Xenophon; in his agapic good-will he resembles Augustine.

Washington’s statesmanlike ambition had still greater breadth. Appealing, as Lincoln had done, to the universal character of the argument of the Declaration of Independence, Washington asserts that in vindicating the principles of equal rights for all men, Lincoln “reestablished the dignity of man as man” (311). Washington seldom used the word “equality” himself—in his day it signified civic not natural equality, a step that white America for the most part was morally unready to take with respect to their black fellow-citizens. But Washington deployed Lincoln’s example as a way of preparing the minds of whites for exactly that step. “Lincoln’s and Washington’s respective strategies might be understood as an instance of rhetorical chiasmus: the white statesman appealed to *natural equality* in order to further the ultimate aim of *physical liberty* for the slaves, whereas the black statesman appealed to *spiritual liberty* in order to further the ultimate and unstated aim of *civic equality*” (311–12). To this moral virtue Washington characteristically added an intellectual one, the enlightenment of the soul. “He who goes
through life with his eyes closed against all that is good in another race is weakened and circumscribed,” Washington said, adding, “The world is fast learning that one man cannot hold another man down in the ditch without remaining down in the ditch with him” (312). Like Lincoln and George Washington before him, Booker T. Washington never neglected to associate moral right with “elevated self-interest” (312). His speech on Lincoln moves “from Lincoln’s statesmanship to his saintliness (or in more Aristotelian terms, from Lincoln as a good citizen/ruler to Lincoln as a good man)” (313).

Looking at both the physically freed former slaves and their descendants but also at the millions around the world who had not yet been physically freed at all, Washington observed that freedom “in the broadest and highest sense, has never been a bequest; it has been a conquest” (314). In this he picks up Hegel’s theme of battling to the death for recognition, but without espousing Hegel’s historicism, which conceals its own threats to freedom. For this not only patience but also courage are the needed virtues— principally moral courage. Such conquest over one’s own fears and then over one’s enemies can occur because, paradoxically, “a soul sovereign over itself can subordinate self to others.” It can avail itself of something Hegel prizes—self-sacrifice—while ignoring Hegelian ontology. Such self-sacrifice may be seen above all not in war but in teaching, in readying the young of each race for civic freedom and equality (314). This spiritual self-sacrifice most emphatically includes Southern whites, namely, those like Robert E. Lee and John B. Gordon who acquiesced in battlefield defeat with a magnanimity that matched that of Lincoln in his moments of victory. In this, Schaub observes, “Washington throws down the gauntlet”—a gesture not to be despised by Southern aristocrats—“challenging the proponents of white pride to be chivalrous and to disdain fear” and accusing “the vicious breed of white supremacists of cowardice” (315). The respectable or proud pity of Washington outfaces the pitiless, weak pride of the bigots.

Although grateful to Lincoln, Washington (like Lincoln) never expected gratitude toward himself. Faced with derision by racist whites and also by black intellectuals like W. E. B. DuBois, Washington expressed his own more measured and prudent form of racial pride in noting that unlike whites, American blacks have never betrayed their country. They have kept true to the fraternal spirit of the citizen while standing up for their natural rights as human beings. American blacks “have it in their power”—their own power, not a power granted to them—“to manifest the highest possibilities of citizenship and humanity” (319). Schaub ends with the hope that in time
Washington too will be recognized by all Americans for his statesmanship and moral virtue.

Moral virtue was the central concern of Theodore Roosevelt as man and citizen—a point Kirk Emmert sees more clearly than almost any other student of politics and of statesmanship. Roosevelt’s literary output may have exceeded Booker T. Washington’s and, like Washington, he regarded writing as an indispensable tool of statecraft in the republican regime; in his essay on the much-controverted question of the relation between Roosevelt’s statesmanship and American constitutionalism, Emmert remarks that “his books promote the political understanding and moral character that, he argues, are the necessary foundation of a healthy constitutional democracy” (322–23). As Lawler might predict, he wrote about individuals, and Emmert considers his biographies of Oliver Cromwell, Thomas Hart Benton, and Gouverneur Morris. Then as now, people read biographies much more readily than they do treatises; such books enabled Roosevelt better to address “thoughtful citizens by presenting specific opportunities to illustrate the complex nature of statesmanship and its problematic existence in a popular government,” showing them “the moral and intellectual excellence and failings” of eminent statesmen “embedded in their political context” (323). “Repeatedly, Roosevelt stresses the moral qualities of the leaders he discusses, in particular, their courage, moderation, and public-spiritedness” (323).

Of these three, Roosevelt most admires Morris. Morris began as the overspirited man that Cromwell and Benton remained throughout their lives, but as a witness to the French Revolution he saw firsthand the dangers of such excess. Roosevelt also compares Cromwell’s 1648 revolution unfavorably to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, observing that the revolutionaries of 1688 had learned from the bad examples of 1648 the virtues of prudence, moderation, and the spirit of compromise, rejecting utopianism and founding a regime that could endure in the real world. Such men as Cromwell and Benton exhibit the virtues not so much of the civilized man as of the frontiersman: warlike and brave, they remain good examples, to some degree, to the somewhat effete types who inhabit long-settled lands—for

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16 For the best scholarly monograph on Roosevelt’s political thought, see Jean Yarbrough, *Theodore Roosevelt and the American Political Tradition* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012). Yarbrough attempts to make the theoretical grounding of Roosevelt’s thought coherent by reading his late turn toward historicism/Progressivism as the culmination of a lifelong intellectual trajectory. For a contrary view, which sees the only true consistency in Roosevelt’s thought on the moral level, see Will Morrisey, *The Dilemma of Progressivism: How Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson Reshaped the American Regime of Self-Government* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).
example, Roosevelt’s own Manhattan of the late nineteenth century. Such readers will find in these portraits nourishment “to sustain and reawaken spiritedness in the American soul” (327). This will remain necessary because Roosevelt knows that the frontier is still out there, to be seen not so much in Texas or the Badlands but in the collisions between the ever more powerful nation-states, now fortified with mass armies wielding weapons of unprecedented range and deadliness. Right will need enforcement by might, and might itself requires a sort of righteousness or virtue to be sustained (335). “Adapting successfully to the world as it is should be understood as an energizing opportunity, not a regretful, perhaps even degrading necessity” (327–28). In wartime, under conditions of popular rule, stoicism only goes so far. Senator Benton understood that, and Roosevelt admires him for it. “Perhaps the tension between assertive courage and moderation cannot be overcome, but it is reduced by Roosevelt’s explicit effort to limit his support for national expansion to the unique historical circumstances present in mid-nineteenth-century America: no clear individual or national titles to a vast expanse of largely unpopulated or unsettled land” (328)—the argument Locke had made two centuries earlier.

Roosevelt finds prudence necessary above all in the act of founding a new regime. Cromwell and the Puritans had “excellent” moral principles, but in attempting to irrigate a society with them in undiluted form they fell short of the Christian and Aristotelian moral standard of prudence. Morris and the American founders did not fall short of that standard. Abstractly considered, they would have done well to require the abolition of slavery, but “if the Abolitionists had carried the day, the Constitution would not have been ratified, Lincoln would not have been elected, and slavery would have been perpetuated” (330). Passions, self-righteousness, but above all “an extreme form of reason itself”—“abstract, speculative reason”—threaten any genuinely moral political action (331). Like Burke and Tocqueville, Roosevelt saw this threat in the secular French Revolution as well as the Christianly-intended Puritan Revolution in England. Like them, he sees that the Puritan and French revolutionaries lacked the practical wisdom often gained by political experience. Further, Emmert gently suggests, “might the school of political experience teach that while common sense is indispensable, it is not sufficient, that the statesman needs some kind of political wisdom or more general knowledge to supplement common sense?” (331). For that, Roosevelt recommends the study of “political forms”—“constitutional understanding in the broader sense” (333). “Roosevelt’s account of statesmanship has general
application—all statesmen must be courageous and have good judgment—but his discussion is also constitution- or regime-specific” (334).

Prudential statesmanship in behalf of republicanism requires a sober assessment of a nation’s existing fitness for self-government, “fitness” being defined as “enlightenment, common sense, and morality” (336). And even a people fit for self-government will seldom find statesmen who exhibit the highest character. In Roosevelt’s judgment, the United States had seen only two such men: Washington and Lincoln. In holding them up for the consideration of his fellow-citizens, and also by asking his countrymen to think seriously about such worthy if lesser figures as Cromwell, Morris, and Benton, Roosevelt offered a political education to self-governing Americans, each generation of whom must learn from such examples. “Roosevelt’s biographies are meant to assist the American people to identify and elevate” statesmen worthy of a self-governing people (340). Paralleling the final essays of parts 1 and 2, Emmert shows that the moral principles laid down in the Bible need not issue in the political fanaticism of religious or pretended-religious bigotry. Religio-political extremism can be controlled without jettisoning moral seriousness.

The essays in this section on the American regime thus elaborate on a (thus far) successful attempt to find a political solution to the perennial questions raised in the sections on classical and modern political philosophy: the relationship of Creator to creation (including the rights endowed to the human species within that creation by that Creator); the tension, which can be vivifying, not destructive, between Jerusalem and Athens; the conflict between natural right and historicism; the relationship of philosophy as the love of wisdom, the quest for truth, to the need for philosophic friendships and indeed of all human beings for friendships as seen in the families and civil associations we form. The capacity of the American regime to balance these several goods cannot fail to impress a candid world. But it is also evident that in Roosevelt we see a man who consistently champions a set of classical and biblical moral principles on philosophic and religious foundations that include many sometimes contradictory elements. The making of a regime implies a certain art—the architectonic art, as Aristotle teaches. This art needs the guidance of principles and/or persons. It is to the mastermakers, the poets, that the book now turns.
Histories show statesmen adjusting principles to practice; so do the other literary genres. Along with philosophy and history, poetry (understood broadly to include plays and novels) can inquire into politics in a statesmanlike and sometimes even a philosophic way. Arlene W. Saxonhouse begins part 4 with the essay “Euripides’ Democratic Critique of Democratic Athens”—a title suggesting that the most effective criticisms of a given regime may well come from those sympathetic to its principles, those who call upon their fellow-citizens to live up to the virtues they share with their friends. Recalling that the first essays of parts 1, 2, and 3 concerned Christianity and if, as Tocqueville argues, Christianity brought the principle of equality back into the world, an essay on ancient Athenian democracy will show us a regime foreshadowing Christian civilization.

If Christianity requires care for the poor, democracy means that the poor take care of themselves. Euripides democratized tragedy by bringing the poor onstage and making aristocrats seem no better than commoners—a move at least as controversial in ancient Athens as it was in 1950s America, when Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* appeared. Aristophanes has thoughtful fun with this in the *Frogs*, in which Dionysus judges a debate between Aeschylus and Euripides as they compete for the position of the tragedian’s chair in Hades (348). Euripides claims to have been the civic educator of the Athenian democracy, teaching the people “to think, to see, to understand”—not to mention “to scheme” and “to see the bad in others” (350). Only then could they hold their own in political competition with the oligarchs, especially by refusing to be spellbound by the oligarchs’ lofty self-conceptions. “Euripides presents men as they are, not as they ought to be” (353). Such a bringing down to earth of “the few” affirms the democratic regime’s “principle of equality” (353), a principle with both a moral and a realistic dimension. Democrats contend that the poor are just as good as the rich; they also contend that the rich are made of the same human stuff as the poor, feeling the same sentiments, thinking the same thoughts. Euripides is Hemingway to Aeschylus’s F. Scott Fitzgerald; the rich are different from you and me only because they have more money.

Euripides “forces his audience to confront the challenges of democratic equality” by showing them that even egalitarians need to distinguish between “the high and the low” (354). Equality, egalitarians should understand, has limits. For example, in the *Electra* “Euripides dismantles the aristocratic world of wealth and the bloodlines of those ‘shining bright enough’ where wives kill their husbands and kings cruelly abuse the
children of their wives” (355). Electra sees that a humble farmer exhibits a character nearer to that of the gods than does any of the gentlefolk. But this means that democrats must acknowledge the merit of such character—the worship-worthiness of gods—and also must learn to discern it in a regime dedicated to the proposition that one cannot use external markings (of dress, of domicile) to identify fellow citizens worthy of trust. Even the aristocrats who understand this point in principle—Electra herself, Orestes—“still find themselves attached to, indeed bound by, the old symbols” (357). Democracy is much harder than it looks, both for the aristocrats and oligarchs who must adjust to it and for the democrats who find themselves charged with the new responsibility of self-government. This does indeed recall Tocqueville’s paradoxical reminder that democratizing Christianity is a precious legacy of aristocratic regimes, when men would accept a revelation ‘from on high’ without the corrosive egalitarian spirit that can bedevil democracies, turning them to pantheism in religion and to soft despotism in politics.

Moreover, there will always be those like Eteocles in the <i>Phoenician Women</i>. Eteocles calls “doing injustice beautiful,” appealing to inequality not by the way of moralizing he despises but by valorizing his own tyrannical ambitions (359). The proto-Machiavellian call to see men as they are may inspire such souls to see themselves as they are: insatiably ambitious, eager to reject all moral principles said to come down from “on high” in order to aggrandize themselves. The tribe of the lion and the eagle conjured by Lincoln have an insatiable appetite for democratic sheep and their lambs. Euripides thus “uncovers some of the unpleasant consequences and inherent contradictions that surface with the rejection of the heroic past”—consequences also seen in Alcibiades and similar men who appear in both Plato’s philosophic dialogues and Thucydides’s history, rejecting equality and nobility. “Euripides’ plays do not answer these challenges, but through the power of his works he forces us to confront difficult truths about our politics,” a politics that attempts “to incorporate principles of equality” (359). Alcibiades anticipates Tocqueville’s nemesis, the eagle Napoleon.

The next essayist considers one of the most notorious examples of such a man, one who rose to power atop the dead bodies of what Montesquieu would later call aristocratic republicans. Timothy Spiekerman discusses <i>Julius Caesar</i>, Shakespeare’s portrayal of the conspiracy whereby republican aristocrats Brutus and Cassius assassinated the assassin of Roman republicanism but failed to restore the old regime, the republic. Spiekerman recommends thinking of the conspiracy in an antihistoricist way: what if it had succeeded?
This opens up the possibility that the republican regime itself might return, and perhaps that every regime is a permanent possibility, something to be watched for, prepared for or guarded against, as circumstances change.

The circumstances in Rome included a populace greedy for ever more wealth and imperial expansion and a set of military leaders with political ambitions backed by soldiers loyal to their leaders and not to the regime—a political condition seen in many times and places. Shakespeare’s “account of the republic’s demise shares more of the ambiguity and nuance of Plutarch than the decisive clarity of Machiavelli” (364)—more of classical prudence than of modern theory. Although critical of the fickle and turbulent Roman people, whose republican virtues have faltered, Shakespeare does not necessarily give them up as politically hopeless. Rather, he blames the republican conspirators for three mistakes: not killing Antony along with Caesar, allowing a public funeral for Caesar (“with Marc Antony as the featured speaker!”), and botching the timing of engagement on the Philippi battlefield (366). The causes of these mistakes are Brutus’s moral delicacy and intellectualism and, “most important,” the superstition of both Brutus and Cassius. The noble Brutus lends moral stature to the conspiracy; Cassius lends prudence, but Antony is the one who gets the corrupt people to lend him their ears, and he had to be stopped from doing that, for the conspirators to succeed. Brutus fails because he underestimates Antony’s rhetorical and military skills, and also because “no one contemplates killing Octavius, who proves to be the most dangerous and effective politician in Rome” (367). From these misjudgments, to the suicides of Cassius and of Brutus, the conspirators’ “failure is in some sense self-inflicted” (369). Shakespeare differs from his predecessor, Euripides, in wanting not only to educate “the many” but also to educate “the few” with respect to defending “the many” in a republican regime.

Charles de Gaulle once described a Roman Stoic as “superstitious, like all atheists.” And so Spiekerman sees both the conspirators and their victim: “Caesar, Brutus, and Cassius share an interesting quality: all are highly rational men who eventually become superstitious” (370). The conspirators associate reason with republicanism and unreason with “tyrannical ambition,” but “this neat formula does not hold up” as the conspirators “succumb to superstition” and Octavius “will prove a model of cool rationality” (371). The “modern” character in Shakespeare whom the conspirators most resemble is Hamlet; they “think too much” (376) and their guilty consciences

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make hesitators if not cowards of them. Had Brutus “cared less about reading philosophy deep into the night, he might not have fallen asleep and dreamed that Caesar was haunting him” (377). Men of action who speculate too intensely about “providence or cosmic necessity”—either one—may miss their chance (378). They resemble the apolitical pre-Socratic philosopher who stumbled into a ditch; even a slave-girl knows better. Not only does Shakespeare propose no Nocturnal Council, he “seems to want us to question the power of providence or fate” (379). In addition, he raises doubts about the legitimacy of the absolute monarchies seen in the Europe of his own time. “By subtly comparing Caesar’s death to Christ’s, adding ten wounds to the twenty-three reported by Plutarch and so alluding to Christ’s age at his death,” Shakespeare may not only suggest that the spirit of Caesar will live on, as Christ’s did, but that “the supernatural powers which legitimate absolute monarchy in modern Europe” may be “dependent on beliefs that are subject to doubt” (379). Shakespeare’s critique of fumbling republicans implies no praise of self-deluded monarchs.

To doubt such beliefs and to ridicule such delusions very much forms the core of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* as read by Thomas L. Pangle in the central essay of part 4. To doubt such beliefs under the Spanish regime of Cervantes’s time could bring difficulties to the author of such a book; accordingly, Cervantes calls himself the “father” of the book in the sense that he compiled it; the supposed actual author is an Arab historian—or is he a “Mohammedan philosopher”?—whose work has been translated into Spanish (386). What is more, the “historian” criticizes his two main characters, “the crazy knight,” Don Quixote, and “his babbling squire,” Sancho Panza (386–87). Expertly peeling back these various fatherhoods and identities, Pangle leads us to see that the “philosopher” in question must be an Averroist, that is, one who denies that God created the universe, affirming instead that we live in an “eternally cyclical universe” (387). But why, Pangle asks, would such a philosopher expend effort and care telling the tale of a madman in order to parody the books of chivalry on which the madman models his funny life? “What is it that the books of chivalry represent?” (388).

“In the vision by which Don Quixote guides his life,” Pangle explains, “there is a continuum from the books of chivalry back to both classical antiquity and, above all, the Bible, conceived as itself the preeminent and original book of chivalry (with Catholicism considered part of this chivalry)” (389). Just as Saints Paul, George, Martin, and James were great spiritual warriors, so Don Quixote conceives of himself as a great physical warrior,
although Sancho—Jeeves to the Don’s Bertie—“gratifies his master by judging that Don Quixote ‘would make a better preacher than a knight-errant’” (389). According to Don Quixote, the universal peace on earth promised in the New Testament can only occur through conquest of the earth “by Christian men of war” such as himself (390). Thus the undoing of force in the City of Man “requires the most extreme use of force”—the project of “Christian imperialism” upon which Spain had embarked (390). To see this might induce one to abandon such imperialism as fantastic, but it only pricks the Don ever forward. “Don Quixote is a noble, intelligent, highly imaginative and articulate but fanatically moralistic and pious gentleman who has become inebriated to the point of insanity by the idea of devoting his life to the imperial religious heroism and chaste love he finds commanded by sacred Scripture tinctured by classical moral philosophy” (390). At one level, then, Cervantes slyly undermines the great political project of the greatest modern state of his time, in which he happened to reside.

More radically, and more dangerously, Don Quixote consists of “a preposterously exaggerated but safely revealing representation of how the great monotheistic religions, taken together, appear to ‘a philosopher’” (391). Most especially, the philosopher will wonder at the pious belief “in all-encompassing particular providence” (391). He will contrast such providence with Fortuna, “viewed as heaven’s rival,” Pangle observes, in a citation that happens to be listed in the seventh of his thirteen footnotes (391). In answer to the biblical assertion of the existence of a personal Creator-God, “Cervantes depicts or explores, in comic and unforgettable fashion, what it means to try to live conceiving of reality after having jettisoned, in the name of belief in divine omnipotence, the notion of natural necessity” (392). What it means is an epistemological infinite regress: the more often the Creator-God intervenes in his world through his providence, the more unreal his creation becomes; Quixote “sees the given world as in large part a cover for a dramatically mysterious reality in which superhuman agents engage in a struggle of good and evil, into which are drawn the saints and religious heroes” (392). Quixote’s lady-love, Dulcinea, “the supreme test” of his faith-based understanding of the world and his place in it, the “divinity to whom [he] offers prayers and from whom he experiences intimate inspiration,” may be described by Sancho as a “coarse peasant girl” whom he’s known for years, but to Quixote this only means that Sancho is the victim of enchantment “that makes her appear so” (392).
Underlining the parallel not so much to Mary but to Jesus himself, Pangle writes, “Don Quixote cannot unwaveringly maintain this faith in the independent status and unchanging essence of the incarnate divinity. Precisely because divinity as Dulcinea is so intimately involved with his human existence and suffering, Don Quixote is driven to conceiving of his divine Dulcinea as having been in herself, at least temporarily, ‘enchanted, offended, changed, altered, transformed’ by his wizard-enemies; Don Quixote is driven to conceive of his divinity as having undergone a degradation from which she herself actually suffers” (393–94). And even Quixote’s seemingly bottomless well of belief runs dry on occasion, as when he “confesses” that Dulcinea’s divinity is a product of his imagination; “the ‘fiery light of faith’ manifests itself as sometimes flickering” (394).

Who can Cervantes hold up against such an antic being? In a speech tinctured with enough commonsense realism to make Pangle suspect Cervantes himself may take it seriously, Quixote praises a way of life different from his own, “the life of the judge devoted not to war (or to Quixotic ‘peace’) but to justice,” exemplified by an actual judge in the Spanish colony of Mexico who briefly turns up in the book. “Could Cervantes be inviting us to imagine, as exemplary of true manly virtue, a well-orchestrated synthesis of Sancho and Don Quixote, elevating the former and bringing down to earth the latter—a ruler who combined legislative and judicial common sense with warrior courage and a nonfanatic capacity for devotion to ruling?” (397). And the synthesizer? “In the prologue to the second volume Cervantes identifies himself as, not a warrior-ruler, but a warrior-poet” (397). Cervantes conceives of Don Quixote as a sort of therapeutic countertoxin to the hallucinogenic Bible and its derivative chivalric substances. Against Lawler’s argument, then, Pangle would wonder how—if the ultimate reality is an omniscient, omnipotent Person who cares providentially about each of us—we humans could possibly distinguish the genuine revelations and other interventions of our Creator from our own imaginings, especially those spurred perhaps by our all-too-human follies and passions. If we do not stick with the reasonable inductions and deductions from what our inner Sancho knows, will we not mistake congenial and elevating delusions for the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and rampage through the world as fools and knaves in consequence? Sancho too is a sort of conscience. Logos with a capital L must heed logos with a small l. Lawler might argue in reply that this is exactly what reason great and small both do by starting with the human person and reasoning from there, avoiding world-conquering imperial quests in the calm conviction that God already owns and rules the world he created. Once Lawler sees
that this is a regime animated by agape and not a cosmopolitanism ruled by eros his argument will also confound Machiavelli’s opposite complaint—that Christianity fails by being insufficiently political.

Edith Wharton’s gentry-class New Yorkers of the 1870s inhabit a decidedly down-to-earth place but are no less constrained in thought and behavior—under the regime of the US Constitution, no less—than Inquisition-era Spaniards. Or, as she puts it, their customs rule them as despotically as “the inscrutable totem terrors that had ruled the destinies of [their] forefathers thousands of years ago” (402). Christine Dunn Henderson of the Liberty Fund undoubtedly has managed her share of seminars for academics, so the power of social convention can scarcely have been lost on her, and she shows every evidence of being well attuned to the much higher society described in The Age of Innocence—which is anything but academic or Edenic. The “ill-fated love” of the socialites Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska animates a story of “desire thwarted by the protagonists’ loyalty and sense of duty to the moral codes of their society.” In Wharton’s New York, where ingrained conventions “interact with change and with character” (400–401), aristocratic social convention leads her protagonists in a direction resolutely un-Quixotic but hardly less deluded.

“Regimes...are most stable when laws and mores reinforce one another,” but as Tocqueville had argued a few decades before Wharton’s time, and as Wharton also sees, mores exert “greater power [than laws] when laws and mores conflict” (401). Legally, America may be the land of liberty, but socially—not so. At least in its upper classes, mores have become a second nature—so much so that silent hints rule even more surely than speech, and indeed make speech unnecessary for the enforcement of mores (402). The “embodiment of New York convention” is Newland’s wife, May, who “proves remarkably—even stubbornly—content with the world exactly as she knows it,” and remains largely untouched by emotion, ideas, and even experience (405). Niceness is her byword, shared by all those of her class. “She is a construct,” but “not a self-construct,” not a self-made woman; “she is a creation of society” (405). Creationism thrives in gentry-class New York, but it is a thoroughly human creationism, and one that needs no creative Word to call it into being.

May’s husband, Mr. Newland, “something of an intellectual who is interested in what lies beyond his narrow world,” has grown a bit restless in this milieu (411). The arrival of Ellen from Europe—today the frisson can only be imagined—“provides him with a concrete object for many of his vague feelings or yearnings” (411). Wharton is too much the realist to
let him break free, and in due course Ellen is packed off to the Continent where her outré personality will cause less of a stir. Nonetheless, Wharton also hints—again, Tocqueville-like—that “the mores of New York’s aristocracy are not exempt from gradual modification” (413). Something called the Metropolitan Opera House is planned for the far northerly reaches of Manhattan—the forties—and indeed “the dominance of English surnames over the older Dutch ones...reminds us of change’s inevitability” (413). More important, the democratizing mores of the larger society are even now seeping into this bastion of old-regime Old-Worldism in the New World. We learn that a young lady of dubious parentage will—a couple of decades later, to be sure—find welcome in the New York of her time on the grounds that she would be “pretty, amusing, and accomplished” (413). Upon reflection, it is reasonable to wonder if the new New York will be better than the old one. Convention seems either to honor itself—aristocratic social privilege, custom for custom’s sake—or to honor nature in its more frivolous and superficial aspects—nature as perceived by democrats. What’s needed is a set of aristocrats who understand what republicanism needs, but no sufficiently thoughtful and steadfast souls seem to be there—except perhaps Wharton herself. Despite living at the same time in the same country, Miss Wharton and Booker T. Washington do not often get compared (much less paired), but each sought to educate the next generation.

The book’s final essay moves us from the gradual erosion of real-world conventions toward attempts (one is tempted to call them secular-Quixotic) to sweep all existing conventions aside in another, determinedly revolutionary form of human creationism. Michael Davis understands Tom Stoppard’s trilogy of plays, The Coast of Utopia, as a (yes) playful and philosophical treatment of “philosophy, political and otherwise” (420–21). Stoppard brings reality to utopia’s coast by bringing real Russian utopians of the nineteenth century—Bakunin, Belinsky, Herzen—to his stage. The dreaming Herzen conjures the self-described discoverer of scientific socialism, Karl Marx, claiming that at the end of History “at last the unity and rationality of history’s purpose will be clear to everyone,” that all seemingly “vicious, mean, and ugly” actions and things “will be understood as a part of a higher reality, a superior morality against which resistance is irrational” (421).

One problem with these dreams is that the dreamer forgets himself, again rather like the philosopher who fell into a ditch while gazing at the heavens. But the circumstances differ: the old philosopher was comical, the butt of a slave-girl’s laughter, while the theorizing of modern utopians
brings on “despotic tyranny” (426). Stoppard’s somewhat foolish but sane hero, Herzen, disputes Marx’s vision, saying, “history has no culmination! There is always as much in front as behind. There is no libretto. History knocks at a thousand gates at every moment, and the gatekeeper is chance” (427). But Stoppard draws Herzen realistically, that is, as a man who sees utopia for what it is but cannot quite give it up, returning to it like a drunk to his cozy neighborhood tavern. “Stoppard recognizes that the grandest attempt to articulate this sort of knowledge of the whole”—the whole of the course of events, said to unfold like a logical syllogism—“began with Kant and extended through the tradition of German Idealism and especially Hegel” (429). Their historicism, a secular and putatively rationalist form of providentialism, led its dupes into the tragicomic, monstrous tyrannies of the century to come—to the worst dystopias. Although each of the philosophers in this line attempted to account for the human “self” within History, each remained “curiously blind to the self,” with its quirks and swerves (429)—its individuality, as Lawler calls it. In attempting to find comprehensive laws for Being-as-Time, they failed to do what Socrates had commended and Pangle does recommend: “acknowledge our ignorance” (429). “Stoppard’s affection for his utopians is nothing less than his affection for humanity, for a certain dreaming—idealizing—is at the core of us and places us forever just off the coast of utopia” (430). Stoppard’s utopians forget their own humanity, but Stoppard never does, and never lets his audiences forget it.

The poiēsis or making of these poets consists not only of making plays and novels but of the formation of certain kinds of citizens. Euripides and Shakespeare consider the kinds of citizens that “the many” might be made into—from a howling mob susceptible to tyranny to a politeuma of thoughtful and friendly republicans. They teach that the various regimes that might arise upon an egalitarian social foundation are not evergreen—once founded, always green—but vulnerable. They are nonetheless perennial—dormant, seemingly dead, but capable of returning when conditions improve. The egalitarian and liberty-loving religion or spiritual regime of Christianity accentuates the need for doctrinal certainty among citizens, putting a certain kind of pressure upon political philosophers who, as philosophers, often must feel satisfied with loving wisdom without much certainty respecting their attainment of it. But, at least in Pangle’s hands, Don Quixote illustrates the difficulties Christianity itself confronts respecting certainty. Does my certainty as a Christian make me a madman impervious to contrary evidence? Am I only certain in the depths of error? Pangle attempts to do for Christians what Socrates does for Euthyphro, although, as Lawler
demonstrates, the very character of the biblical God puts up much more resistance to such a putative therapeutic.

The combination of Christian creationism and Christian egalitarianism issues in a pair of homely twins: the more or less mindless (unspoken, silently enforced) conservatism seen in Wharton’s aristocrats and the political radicalism and subphilosophic intellectualism seen in Stoppard’s utopians. The poets thus understand democracy in America as benefited by a prudent republicanism that democrats sustain only with difficulty, and to which aristocrats (who seldom read Tocqueville, at least in Wharton’s New York) can offer no real guidance, only a sort of dumb, rear-guard resistance. These twin human “creationisms” offer no substitute for the divine creationism they imitate so badly. This provides a continued opening for something between conservatism (so understood) and radicalism—namely, liberalism classical and modern, each understood as finding a reasonable accommodation between philosophy and theology in the “natural rights republic.”

What we have here is a festschrift as “exceptional” as the American regime itself—a festschrift that is also a book. The overarching or architectonic theme of the book—natural right and political philosophy—leads the reader into thinking about the kinds of regimes that might sustain the relationship between those two elements in this world. Politically, liberalism gives citizens in the large, centralized modern states an opportunity for self-government—for politics in the Aristotelian sense of ruling and being ruled—that would otherwise be lost with the disappearance of the polis. When animated by a doctrine of natural rights, as in Locke, liberalism also provides civic space for the cross-cutting regime of the City of God, variously interpreted. Pious citizens of various confessional stripes, along with the less pious, may follow their convictions insofar as those comport with natural rights and the civil rights that prudential statesmen assert and defend within a carefully designed framework of ruling institutions. This, too, fosters politics or reciprocal rule and a way of life hospitable to reasoning. Intellectually, that civic life affords an unprecedented degree of freedom of thought. Under the liberal dispensation, both Socrates and Jesus would undoubtedly find the martyrdom they sought, but they would need to be martyred in some other way than they were, inasmuch as liberalism rightly understood makes us understand that both friendship and truth are dear—and indeed sometimes dearly bought, when in need of defense from their enemies.
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